

SECTION D, SOCIAL SCIENCES

Recent Village Site Excavations in the Valley of Mexico

(A Progress Report)

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INTRODUCTION

1958 — In the summer of 1958 the University of Toronto sponsored our archeological field work at the site of "El Corral" near Santiago Ahuizotla on the western edge of present Mexico City in the Federal District. This work was done on the basis of studies earlier carried out at "El Risco" (Mayer-Oakes, 1959) and after the analysis of data from "El Corral" by Tolstoy (1958).

1960 — During the summer of 1960 the American Philosophical Society and the University of Oklahoma Stovall Museum jointly sponsored our work at the El Risco zone, the "Tulpetlac" and the "Tecoalapan" sites. All three of these are in the vicinity of Mexico City and on the western shores of the former Lake Texcoco. This work was largely determined by problems set forth in an earlier study of settlement patterns in the Valley of Mexico (Mayer-Oakes, 1960) and was concerned primarily with ecological factors in the development of cultures in the Valley of Mexico. It was also based on the necessity for alternative field problem choices. Originally we hoped to do an intensive archeological "community study" of El Risco. Housing and factory developments on the site since 1954 made it impossible to carry out significant studies. We thus located and worked the other two sites.

DESCRIPTION

The "El Corral" site was relocated in 1958 and excavated using the stratacut technique developed in earlier work at "El Risco". A study of materials gathered from this site was initiated at Toronto in 1958-59 and continued in 1960-61 at the University of Oklahoma Museum. There are no definitive statistics available yet on our ceramic analyses, but we do have preliminary information from a complete series of rough sorting classes as well as studies of the figurine fragments found in the excavation.

The work done in the late 1930's at this site by George C. Vaillant suggested that the site was entirely Classic in period and of a moderate depth, from six to eight feet below the present surface. Our single cut at this site apparently gives different information with the cultural material going back in time to the middle part of the Formative period and reaching a depth of 13 ft. below the surface.

Skeletal remains of four human burials were found in the cut but most were in a poor state of preservation. One exception to this was the complete young adult male found at the base of the excavation in a Tlatilco-type expanded base pit. Other pits of this type and the general nature of the figurine complex found in the lower levels suggest that the earliest part of the site is of Tlatilco (i.e., Middle Formative) age. We have carbon samples for radioactive carbon-14 dating and corn samples from the lower levels.

The "Tulpetlac" site is a small mound (7' diameter by 2' high) that was located during survey in the El Risco zone in the summer of 1960.

The general geographic context for this site is in the midst of a complex of large late *tlateles* (The man-made mounds described by Apenes, 1943). An irrigation ditch through the site and the surface produced a very few of the late Fabric-impressed ceramics along with some of the distinctive Classic period Thin Orange Ware. Our single strata-cut made at this site suggests an upper level mixture with late materials but otherwise an exclusively Classic period occupation for the site. Rough ceramic sorting is completed but few diagnostic ceramic classes have yet been analyzed. The Thin Orange, engraved and red-on-buff sherds are the most distinctive, but figurines and many of the vessel forms indicate that this site was occupied during much of the Classic period.

The "Tecoalapan" site was located by informants at a housing development through which bulldozers had excavated deep cuts. We made one strata-cut into the hillside at this site and excavated in one-foot levels. Surface materials and wall scrapings indicated a Classic period occupation. Potsherds and figurines obtained in the excavation do represent this period but also, in the lower levels of the site, a large sample from the earlier Formative epoch. Final statistics on our ceramic analysis are not yet complete but they support this general field observation. Interestingly enough, minor architectural features found in this strata-cut include two floors (apparently of Classic period occupation) and part of a dressed-stone wall.

INTERPRETATIONS

The general aims of our Valley of Mexico work in recent years have been: to add knowledge about the several kinds of ancient settlements which have not been noticed, observed, or excavated in the past; to increase the detailed knowledge of ceramic style complexes and developments associated with these little known types of settlements; specifically to find as many varieties of Classic occupations in the Valley of Mexico as possible. Tentative conclusions are as follows:

1. El Corral is part of a Classic sub-center, perhaps a large town site which has a long history going back into the Pre-classic or Formative period. In the Formative the site probably existed as a village or small town.
2. Tulpetlac is also a Classic site but is the simplest kind of settlement unit yet known from this period in the Valley of Mexico and perhaps represents the same sort of cottage industry salt-manufacturing locale as we interpret the El Risco site of the later Post-Classic period to be.
3. Tecoalapan is a Classic village or town with little ceremonial architecture, but in a location which relates it closely to the Formative cultures that existed at the same site and preceded the Classic village.

The mere existence of these three sites is an addition to our specific body of knowledge about occupation units in the pre-conquest Valley of Mexico human settlement patterns. The "Tulpetlac" site, enclosed by Post-Classic *tlateles*, is a most unusual kind of a new site, but all three suggest both a great variety and a significant time depth to the Classic occupation of the western side of the Lake. Vaillant's (1944) earlier ideas (which have been partly supported recently by Tolstoy, 1958) suggest that at the fall of Teotihuacan the Classic peoples moved to the western side of the Lake. The major Classic occupation of the western shore has thus been considered as late Classic. The facts gathered from our recent reconnaissance and excavation do not support this. We feel that the entire

Classic period is represented on the western side of Lake Texcoco and in a number of different kinds of occupation or settlement contexts. Ceramic materials from these sites will probably not fit into any of the previously published sequences since sites of these kinds have not previously been recorded or published. We do not expect that rural and suburban communities are going to match the major ceremonial zone and urban center in all, or perhaps even many, details.

Additional sites of related settlement types are needed in order to secure comparable data. All of the work here discussed and our recent interest in studying ancient societies of Mexico is based on what we are coming to think of as the "complex society approach" utilizing as a basic premise the idea of "relatable heterogeneity".

With this approach we expect that artifactual variety will sometimes represent intra-societal variations and not necessarily temporal differences. Factors such as settlement type, ecological function, geographic location and sub-cultural values take on real meaning to the archeologist as ways of interpreting this variation in artifact styles. When present typological studies of these three sites in the valley of Mexico are completed they will be used in the more general inquiry into the nature of this approach to studying ancient complex societies. Previous work by archeologists in many parts of the world, dealing with ancient complex societies, has been based too often on a rather limited and narrow point of view. It is largely a repetition of the archeological technique successfully used in studying simple societies. Our contention is that complex societies need to be examined very carefully to see if, in fact, this simple society approach does provide the maximum of effective results when dealing with complex ancient society and civilizations.

LITERATURE CITED

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