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Feasting and Building an Urban Society at Cerro Jazmín, Oaxaca, Mexico

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ABSTRACT

Here we present new excavation data from the urban site of Cerro Jazmín, Oaxaca, Mexico. Based on a comparative analysis of ceramic, faunal, botanical, and architectural evidence collected from a prominent city sector and a contemporary residence, we argue that feasting took place in the Sunken Patio Sector in the Late and Terminal Formative periods. Feasting strategies in an earlier occupation of the city sector employed a largely exclusionary strategy, giving way to a more corporate strategy in a later occupation. We take the findings from the Sunken Patio feasting complex as evidence of the formalization of Cerro Jazmín’s urban, regional role as a site of civic-ceremonial activity. Participation in this meaningful act of food consumption may have served to cement communal ties in a nascent urban society.

Introduction

Urban societies developed in the Mixteca Alta region in the Late Formative period (300 B.C.). The urban development in this mountainous corner of Mesoamerica is marked by the establishment of several peer cities, including Cerro Jazmín. As they were built on hilltops, Mixtec cities required the modification of large tracts of sloped land, which were terraced to create areas for living and farming. The Cerro Jazmín Archaeological Project devoted two field seasons to mapping and surveying this settlement on the northwestern edge of the Nochixtlán Valley, followed by three seasons of excavation. One of the project’s objectives was to learn, through an investigation of the city’s layout and city sectors, about the activities that took place within the settlement, with a view to understanding the functions that Cerro Jazmín served for its people and the surrounding region.

Monica Smith’s (2006) triaxial approach to urbanism was employed to investigate the settlement’s urban activities and regional function. This approach considers three criteria when assessing a settlement: its demographic size; its internal specialization (the “Childean criterion”); and its regional function (or external specialization). We agree with scholars who find that, although urban centers vary in areal extent, population, and scale, ultimately cities must serve specialized functions for their populations and the broader region (Smith 2002, 2007, 2008: 6, 205, 2010; Smith 2006). In other words, while a city’s size and monumentality may vary, in all urban settlements, people must be able to engage in specialized ritual, political, social, and economic activities (Marcus and Sabloff 2008: 13).

A solely functional definition of urbanism is controversial in cases where settlements serve specialized regional functions but fall short of expected demographic scales (Smith 2008: 6, 205). We argue that the scale of a settlement must be evaluated in its context. Modern demographic scales surpass those seen in ancient cities, but that does not detract from the clear urban function of settlements like Monte Albán in Oaxaca. Cerro Jazmín was likewise urban. In the Late Formative period, the settlement extended for 86 ha, with an estimated population between 4800 and 9700 (Pérez Rodríguez et al. 2011). It contained several monumental areas built on top of massive terraces and platforms that required specialized engineering knowledge and a large, organized labor force. Also, as we will demonstrate, certain city sectors served specialized civic-ceremonial functions for the city itself and perhaps the region.

Scholars of urbanism agree that urban societies are invariably complex. We explore this variation through “dual processual theory,” a framework that outlines network and corporate forms of power and political organization (Blanton et al. 1996: 1–14). These political strategies are two ends of a continuum that can be employed simultaneously or consecutively.

In societies where network power strategies predominate, power collects around certain individuals: leaders who develop and maintain a position of authority. These individuals may cultivate power by accessing extralocal polities, allies, or ideologies through exchange and intermarriage; these connections grant leaders privileged access to restricted knowledge and power through association and alliance. Archaeologically, this networking strategy results in prestige-good systems of exchange and a focus on individuals whose names and actions loom large in the material record as “patrimonial rhetoric” (Blanton et al. 1996: 4).

In corporate strategies, power rests with privileged groups of individuals that operate under political structures that grant them exclusive agency. The power of the collective is based on the group’s perceived importance and their capacity to organize or bring together resources and production in a way that is understood to be advantageous or desirable. Blanton and colleagues (1996: 4) find that this form of political organization “involves the establishment and maintenance of a cognitive code that emphasizes a corporate solidarity.”
Corporate power strategies are manifested in activities aimed at solidifying a sense of community among those who are part of the collective; this is achieved through the construction of broadly accessible public works and through ritual and social engagement.

Also relevant in understanding why people first form a new urban society is collective action theory (Blanton and Fargher 2007, 2013). Scholars argue that cooperators engage in collective action when they trust that their participation will bring benefits for themselves and the group. As collectivities form complexities arise when individual, household, kin/corporate group, and community-wide interests are negotiated. This interplay is reflected in the institutions and practices that are newly minted to reinforce the social group (Carballo 2013). Reciprocity, reputation, retribution, and rewards are employed to promote cooperation and curtail competition. Cooperation and competition, however, are constantly occurring even in well-established societies. This negotiation is perhaps more salient in newly formed societies where social inequality is being institutionalized while at the same time communal practices, institutions, and built places are being established to create a community around a new city.

In the Cerro Jazmín project, we explore the sociopolitical strategies employed during the settlement’s initial urban emergence and investigate how these strategies shifted in the centuries that followed. Our work is informed by the work of our peers in other cases of initial urban development (Gaxiola 1984; Joyce 2010: 160–196; Plunket Nagoda 1983; Winter et al. 1991). In these case studies, we find that the sociopolitical strategies adopted to solidify new urban societies often straddle two competing needs: first, to establish the status and power of the new city and its rulers, and second, to foster solidarity and a communal ethos. A powerful tool to achieve these opposing objectives is feasting.

Feasting

Feasting is the act of sharing meals with others in a public setting and on a special occasion that differs from quotidian food consumption (Dietler 2001: 69; Klarich 2010). Feasts, however, come in a diverse array of forms and contexts. There is variation in the kinds of foods offered, their rarity, quality, and amounts. The forms of food preparation are meaningful and the amount of skill involved in the food preparation sends a message to commensals (dining companions). Those preparing the food may be informal or specialized cooks whose level of skill and knowledge in preparing foods in certain ways has been linked to the transformation of food into cuisine (Crown 2000; Klarich 2010). This shift speaks to the nature and exclusivity of the feast, as in the diacritical feasts described by Dietler (2001).

With whom do we feast and where? We can share the experience with members of our own community to cement ties (solidarity feasts), or with individuals who may be persuaded to become part of our group or city (alliance and cooperation feasts) (Hayden 2001: fig. 2.1). Feasting can take place in the hosts’ houses, in neutral places where fac-
tions can safely gather, in impromptu and unmodified locations, or in formalized and built facilities. Feasts may be used to engage and compete with our peers or enemies in a reluctant period of truce, alliance building, or in a moment of “sincere fiction of disinterested exchange” (Bourdieu 1990: 112). Feasts may also have broader political motives, including intimidation, emulation, alliance building, and trade.

Feasts have been theorized, functionally, as a way to take large amounts of food (a perishable commodity) and create social capital and indebtedness (a lasting commodity). The importance of ritual feasting also lies in providing people with moments of meaningful and heightened personal experience and intimate engagement with their peers, their rulers, and the supernatural. The provision of these powerful experiences may foster loyalty among recipients to a ruler, an ideology, or a city.

Both the intentional/explicit and underlying/implicit reasons behind feasting have been written about extensively (Dietler 2001; Hayden 2001; Hayden and Villeneuve 2011). The results of feasting—intended and unintended—can be complex, as global case studies illustrate (Clarke 2001; Junker and Niziolek 2010; Potter and Ortman 2004). Discussion centers on the role of feasts in creating community cohesion, empowering and differentiating the hosts, solidifying and inculcating asymmetrical power relationships, or creating spaces and interactions to drive sociopolitical change.

Dietler’s (2001) description of empowering, patron-role, and diacritical feasting modes provides a framework to think about the Cerro Jazmín data as follows. Both empowering and patron-role feasts take place on large, public scales where the aim is to engage with the most people, to gain and reify new power (empower), or to reproduce and maintain the established power structure (patron-role). In contrast, diacritical feasts are about style and exclusivity, not to engage the most people, but to establish who are the chosen few that will be elite peers. Diacritical feasts create social boundaries that support stratification. The foods served at a diacritical feast may be so rare that participants must develop certain tastes for these foods and learn how to consume them; the exclusivity of this process serves as an additional initiation into elite status. These feasting modes (above) are not exclusive or sequential, but may be engaged in simultaneously or contemporaneously depending on the situation.

Below, we discuss excavation results and associated radiocarbon dates for a sector of the Late-Terminal Formative city of Cerro Jazmín, arguing that the data point to two episodes and modes of feasting activity. Each episode, 50–120 years in length, provides unusually fine temporal resolution for investigating broader feasting patterns that speak to the sociopolitical strategies used to establish a nascent urban society.

Cerro Jazmín

The Mixteca Alta is a temperate and mountainous region that extends across western Oaxaca, eastern Guerrero, and southwestern Puebla (FIGURE 1) (Bernal 1965; Spores 1984). Regional surveys have demonstrated that the Mixtec urbanism developed after a long history of autonomous settlement that began in the Early Formative (Kowalewski et al. 2009: 287–290; Spores 1972). Mixtec cities were built on hilltops, requiring a monumental amount of land modification, terrace and platform construction, and sediment transportation. Mixtec urbanism also required the construction of farmland on steep slopes, through terracing and the movement of goods and people against the laws of least effort.

From the earliest excavations in the Mixteca Alta, a different urban pattern became clear, compared to the Valley of
Oaxaca where a single city (Monte Albán) developed (Acosta and Romero 1992; Caso et al. 1967; Spores 1972). In the Mixteca Alta several early cities developed, including Yucuita, Monte Negro, Huamelulpan, and Cerro Jazmín (FIGURE 1).

Caso (1961) and Gamio (1957) excavated monumental areas at Huamelulpan; these excavations were supplemented with further work by Winter (1976; Winter et al. 1977; Christensen and Winter 1997) and Gaxiola (1984:62–64; fig. 6.6), who identified a feasting midden at a high-status residence near the monumental sector west of the church. Another feasting midden, containing an undisclosed amount of burned animal and human bone, ceramics, and mica artifacts, was adjacent to a structure that flanks Plaza 1 in the monumental sector called Grupo Iglesia (Winter et al. 1991: 54), suggesting that feasting occurred also in public communal areas.

Yucuita was surveyed by Spores (1972) and mapped by Plunket Nagoda (1983). Later, Winter (1989) and Robles García (1988) excavated monumental and residential areas whose descriptions are helpful in identifying the material markers of residential occupations at a contemporary city like Cerro Jazmín. Feasting possibly occurred at Yucuita, but so far no evidence has been reported.

At Cerro Jazmín, we mapped an 86 ha Late Formative settlement. In 2011, we proposed that the city had diminished in the Terminal Formative period (Pérez Rodríguez et al. 2011), but recent radiocarbon dates revealed that ceramic materials previously thought to represent an Early Classic occupation (A.D. 300–500) date to the Terminal Formative (300 B.C. –A.D. 300). We now argue that Cerro Jazmín’s Late Formative occupation continued into the Terminal Formative and into the start of the Early Classic at which point the city was abandoned. Although the city was later reoccupied in the Postclassic period this later occupation is not the focus here.

**Methods**

Our excavations investigated the activities that took place in different city sectors. Here, we focus on the Sunken Patio Sector (FIGURE 2) and at times we discuss data from Terrace 131 (T131), a high-status Late-Terminal Formative residence, to illustrate the distinct nature of the Sunken Patio Sector.

The Sunken Patio Sector is located 80 m east of the hilltop and at the foot of an access way that leads to it (FIGURE 3). It is a prominent and restricted location near areas of ritual importance on the hilltop. The sector is distinctive for its two patios, defined to the east by Platforms 3 and 4 and topped by Structures 23 and 25 respectively. Below, we focus in particular on Patio 1 and Structure 23, which we argue constituted an integrated architectural complex where feasting took place.

T131 is located on the mid-to-upper northern slope of Cerro Jazmín in an area directly above and adjacent to one of the city’s main transit corridors. The terrace is well connected to the monumental sector called Tres Cerritos (three mounds). T131 has a good view of both Tres Cerritos and the open area to the west that contains the remains of monumental buildings later destroyed by plowing. T131 was a well-
connected and privileged location near one of the most important and accessible monumental and communal sectors of the city.

In both the Sunken Patio Sector and T131, we established 1 × 1 m grid squares to extend our excavations horizontally as needed. The aim was to open horizontally broad areas to understand their spatial compositions. At T131, we opened an area of 20 × 8 m. In the Sunken Patio Sector, however, we had to compromise areal coverage to target each of the two patios and three adjoining structures, excavating a total of 147 m² (FIGURE 3).

Radiocarbon dates from the Sunken Patio Sector revealed four occupation episodes. The earliest activity occurred between 261 ± 75 CAL B.C. and 251 ± 78 CAL B.C. (UGAMS# 15440 and 15448), when a small square construction was built on an area of what would later become Structure 23. Information about this episode is limited. Of the seven ceramic artifacts recovered from the interior of Feature Est.23–1, three were luxury-type fragments of greyware bowls. Associated macrobotanical remains included amaranth seeds (Amaranthaceae amaranthus). This cultivar was an important component of the Prehispanic diet and was often used in ritual celebrations (de Sahagún 2013: 40, 104, 422).

The second occupation, referred to hereafter as the “Earlier Occupation,” occurred between 147 ± 37 CAL B.C. and 100 ± 39 CAL B.C. (UGAMS# 15450, 15441, 15443, 15438, and 15442). During this time, a period of 29–123 years, Platforms 3 and 4 were constructed, delimiting the patios. One structure sat on top of each of the platforms and both structures were of adobe and bajareque (wattle and daub) with thatched roofs. No stucco floors were found. This Earlier Occupation and the one that followed are the focus below.

A layer of ash on Structures 23 and 25 covered the remains of the Earlier Occupation. The amount of ash and burnt debris of stone, adobe, and bajareque found suggest that these structures were intentionally burned either in a termination ritual or in an act of destruction. Above the ash layer sit the remains of the third occupation, referred to hereafter as the “Later Occupation,” which occurred between 14 ± 23 CAL B.C. and CAL A.D. 44 ± 24 (UGAMS# 15447, 15449, 15446). The communal food consumption first identified in the Earlier Occupation continued and intensified in the Later Occupation, which spanned between 12 to 105 years.

The final occupation occurred between CAL A.D. 135 ± 41 and CAL A.D. 353 ± 41, when a wall was added to Structure 25 and a cooking feature in Structure 23 was reused. Later, in CAL A.D. 353 ± 41, two infant burials with no offerings were interred on Structure 25.

At T131, radiocarbon dates place the occupation between 262 ± 76 CAL B.C. (AA105184) and CAL A.D. 273 ± 45 (AA 105191). Although the house had a long history of occupation, the midden Feature T131-6 is of particular interest. It is a discrete, and not so heavily altered, context, which informs us of the consumption patterns at a high-status household contemporary with the Earlier Occupation in the Sunken Patio Sector. The midden, adjacent to a platform on which the house was built, was dated to 109 ± 42 CAL B.C. (UGAMS# 22055).

Results

The Sunken Patio Sector excavations revealed a complex history of occupation. We dealt with this complexity, the resulting taphonomic processes, and the post-abandonment site use by including in our analysis only the stratigraphic contexts that best represented the activities that took place in this city sector during the Earlier and Later Occupations.
The Earlier Occupation (147 ± 37 CAL B.C. to 100 ± 39 CAL B.C.) was a time of construction during which the space of Patio 1 was formalized. Platform 3 and Structure 23 were built and so were the rock-lined circular features in Structure 23. Earlier Occupation evidence comes from the construction fill layers and lower walls of the structure and from depositional layers, some within the circular features that underlie the ash layer that separates the Earlier from the Later Occupation in Structure 23. On the structure, the materials retrieved above the ash layer but below the plowzone provide a baseline measure for the types of materials that were used and discarded in the Later Occupation, before the sector’s abandonment in the early Classic Period.

In Patio 1, two distinct strata represent accretional deposition directly on the patio’s dirt floor. The Earlier Occupation was represented by stratum III, which revealed a heavier artifact concentration on the western edge of the patio. Above, stratum II represented the Later Occupation, marked by the presence of a midden, Feature Patio 1–1 was on the north-northwestern edge of the patio. Radiocarbon results date the midden to CAL. A.D. 44 ± 24. Above this stratum was the plowzone.

**Cooking and storage facilities**

An important archaeological feasting marker is the presence of food preparation and storage facilities of unusual size or number (Hayden 2001: fig. 2.1). Klarich (2010) and others have explored the differences between cooking facilities meant for daily household consumption and facilities capable of large-volume cooking for feast preparation; their work informed our analysis (Joyce 2010; LeCount 2010).

In Structure 23, next to Patio 1, we found five rock-lined and ash-filled circular and semi-circular features between 0.5–2.0 m in diameter and up to a 1 m in depth (FIGURE 4). Next to Feature Est.23–1 was a rock-lined floor, 0.9 m², which would have been a useful surface for the placement of pots or freshly roasted meats coming out of the oven.
Figure 4. Plan view of the Structure 23 cooking features.
Associated faunal and botanical remains from the features point to their use as ovens and, later on, possibly storage.

Following the work of Klarich (2010), we compare the cooking facilities in Structure 23 with the house kitchen identified in T131. The T131 house included a small room, 2 × 2 m, which contained a bench-like rock feature with an ash layer on top in the eastern half of the room. The stone bench was a cooking surface used to support various fires and cooking vessels in a manner similar to that found in wood-fire kitchens in the Mixteca Alta today. At T131, the spatial distribution of vessels in a manner similar to that found in wood-fire kitchens was identified in T131. The T131 house included a small room, 2 × 2 m, where feasts can occur, Hayden lists mortuary or remote locations associated with high-status residences or central community spaces. In these prominent places, special facilities, temporary or permanent structures, can be erected to accommodate commensals or to display food or other material features of a feast.

We found no evidence of feasting facilities such as poles or scaffolding as mentioned by Hayden (2001); instead, we hypothesize that the location of the Sunken Patio itself could provide the needed facilities to accommodate participants and dramatically display food or other feast components. The Sunken Patios are at the base of the access way to the hilltop, a location ideally suited to showcasing processions going from the patios to the hilltop. The ritual importance of this city sector supports the work of Mesoamerican scholars who have noted the cosmological significance of sunken patios as charged places and entryways to the “earthly underworld” (Grove 1999: 265). Next to Patio 1, there was a formalized space for feast preparation, and the steps that connect Patio 1 and Structure 23 would have been a dramatic setting from which food servers could emerge with large serving vessels full of food for commensals waiting in Patio 1.

At Patio 1, we detected a distinct pattern of discard. Faunal and ceramic remains were concentrated in the northern and western edges of the patio. Other researchers have detected similar discard patterns associated with plazas where feasting took place (e.g., Winter et al. 1991; Carballo et al. 2014).

Feasting and disposal facilities

Feasting and refuse-discard facilities are notable for their special locations (Hayden 2001: fig. 2.1). Among the places where feasts can occur, Hayden lists mortuary or remote locations outside of habitation sites or areas associated with high-status residences or central community spaces. In these prominent places, special facilities, temporary or permanent structures, can be erected to accommodate commensals or to display food or other material features of a feast.

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Table 1. Faunal remains from the Sunken Patio Sector and house midden T131-6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family or Species</th>
<th>Earlier Occupation</th>
<th>Later Occupation</th>
<th>T131-6 Midden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canis sp.</td>
<td>Canis familiaris</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cervidae</td>
<td>Odocolus virginianus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suidae</td>
<td>Artiodactyla</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galliforme</td>
<td>Melagris gallopavo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leporidae</td>
<td>Lepus callotis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sylvilagus floridanus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peromyscus sp.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chelonian</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lepidocheys olivacea</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Food

Hayden (2001: fig. 2.1) discussed at length the archaeological signatures of the kinds and amounts of food that would have been served at feasts (Potter 2000). Similarly, in Twiss‘ (2008) article on the ceramic markers of feasting, food remains are extensively discussed. Both researchers note the significant presence of rare, labor-intensive, or special “recreational” plants, animals, and condiments, a larger-than-typical quantity of food remains, and evidence of waste resulting from the food’s preparation and consumption.

During the Earlier Occupation, Patio 1 and Structure 23 began to function as a civic-ceremonial feasting complex where animal remains were cooked, consumed, and discarded (Table 1). Faunal evidence reveals that the ancient commensals consumed dog and white-tailed deer meat, along with lesser quantities of cottontail rabbit, semi-aquatic turtle, and
various small mammals. Based on bone color, consistency, and condition, it appears that the meats were boiled or broiled (Botella et al. 2000; Pérez Roldán 2013). Notable among the remains at Patio 1 is the shell of a marine turtle, a rare animal in the highlands, and one that would have made a rare and memorable meal. Indeed, marine turtle is a traditional and now outlawed food that is still eaten on special occasions on the Oaxaca coast.

Flotation and paleobotanical studies of the contents of Feature Est.23–6 revealed the remains of epazote (Chenopodium sp.) and amaranth seeds. Both plants are currently eaten in the region and amaranth was often used in Prehispanic rituals (Warinner et al. 2012).

The Later Occupation showed a continuation in the faunal consumption pattern. The quantities of faunal remains deposited at Patio 1 increased in the Later Occupation. Dogs continued to be the most commonly eaten animal, followed by white-tailed deer. Despite the increased number of faunal remains, no species as exotic as the marine turtle was included. We did note, however, that Feature Est. 23–3 was rehabilitated and reused during this period, resulting in the deposition of peccary (tayassuid) remains inside the feature. Feature Est. 23–6 was also reused; amaranth (Amaranthaceae amaranthus) and verdolaga seeds (Portulaca oleracea) were found within (Pérez Rodríguez et al. 2013). Although the species offered for feasts in the Later Occupation were not as exotic as those eaten in the earlier period, the faunal and ceramic evidence suggest that both the quantity of food consumed and the number of commensals increased over time.

In analyzing the Sunken Patio faunal remains, we considered the faunal data from T131. Table 1 compares the quantity and diversity of species found in both contexts. From the house midden, we recovered nine boiled dog bones, and from the entire T131 operations, only 34 non-human faunal remains were recovered. The faunal evidence suggests that the T131 inhabitants had access to some animal protein, mainly dogs, with supplemental toads and turkeys, but in lesser quantities and fewer varieties than those consumed in the Sunken Patios.

Ceramic evidence

A high concentration of ceramic materials can be an important marker of feasting, particularly when these ceramic vessels are of the types used in food preparation and service (Hayden 2001: Table 2.1). Feasting sites typically display unusual numbers of large, high-quality serving vessels in areas of feasting, and notable numbers of large cooking vessels in feast preparation areas. To define “notable” ceramic evidence at Cerro Jazmín, we analyzed the Sunken Patio ceramics and compared them to the materials from the T131 residential midden. The house midden provided a seemingly undisturbed sample of the materials discarded during the house’s earlier occupation.

Although, theoretically, feasting involves a greater consumption and discard of a greater number of ceramics, artifact densities must be interpreted with two important factors in mind: the behavioral patterns that affect ceramic spatial distributions; and the different lengths of occupation of the analyzed sites. We took both these factors into consideration. We based our work exclusively on rim sherd counts, because they were indicative of vessel form and function.

Artifact distributions are affected by behavioral, taphonomic, and spatial land use patterns. To detect whether or not the Cerro Jazmín excavations contained unusual numbers or densities of ceramics as expected of a feasting site, we studied densities by excavated cubic meter. During Patio 1’s Earlier Occupation, the ceramic density of rim sherds at the edge of the patio (midden) was 147/m3, while the center of the patio had a density of only 27/m3; this suggests that most materials were discarded at the edge of the patio, while the center was kept clean. In the Later Occupation, Patio 1 had a midden on the northwest edge that contained 192 rims per m3, while the center of the patio showed a density of 94/m3. In contrast, the midden at T131-6 had an extremely high density of rims, 543.5/m3, however the volume of this midden was much smaller (table 2).

Perhaps the most fruitful avenue of analysis we pursued dealt with the densities and distributions of ceramics by form and function. We divided the ceramics by vessel form: jars, water jugs, comals (griddles), various styles of bowls, vessels, and others. When rims were large enough, we obtained diameter measurements and omitted from our analysis those rims that were classified as indeterminate in form. Based on form, we divided the ceramics into three functional categories: cooking/storage vessels, food-service vessels, and other (Carballo et al. 2014). Cooking and storage vessels included large coarse jars (especially those with signs of fire exposure), comals, and water jugs (cántaros), which could have been used for storage, transport, and the serving of liquids at the feasting site. Although coarse tan bowls could have been used for cooking, no artifacts that fit that category were identified. The food-service category included various styles of bowls used to display, serve, and consume the food and cylindrical vessels used to serve drinks. The “other” category included vessel forms like braziers, sahumerios (censers), and figurines.

We also identified ceramic types of greater value, which we classified as “luxury types.” Luxury types were made with more labor-intensive pastes, finishes, and vessel forms. Some examples are: fine tan-paste composite silhouette bowls with highly polished slips, some of which also had hollow round or mammiform supports; high-fired yellow ware conical bowls with channel-rim decorations; and gray-paste ceramics that were either made in the Valley of Oaxaca or produced locally to emulate Zapotec type G-12 and G-17 bowls (Cas o et al. 1967: 25–35). Luxury ceramics would have been more valuable than the other vessels, given the added materials, skills, and steps needed in their production and the significance of their styles and decorations, which were indices of broader regional ideologies and emergent asymmetrical power structures.

The ceramic data, along with architectural and faunal evidence, support the hypothesis that the Sunken Patio Sector was a feasting site beginning in the Earlier Occupation. We compared the Sunken Patio data with the T131 midden ceramics to gauge whether our findings were indeed notable and indicative of feasting. We compared the cooking-storage versus food-service vessel proportions from the T131 house with those identified in both occupations of the Sunken Patio Sector. Chi-square test results indicate that the ceramic assemblages in the Sunken Patio were significantly
different from those in the residential context \((X^2 = 5.40, df = 1, p < 0.025\) for the Earlier Occupation and \(X^2 = 8.09, df = 1, p < 0.005\) for the Later Occupation). The difference lies in the vessel types found. A significantly greater number of food-serving vessels were found at the patio-structure complex, suggesting that it was a site of high-volume food consumption.

A larger proportion of cooking versus food-serving vessels were found in the residential midden, as expected for a household. The vessel sizes in the house midden were also consistent with the vessels needed to cook for a household, instead of the larger vessels involved in feast preparation (Klarich 2010; LeCount 2010).

We propose that the ceramic forms and luxury-type distributions in Structure 23 were the result of this structure’s dual purpose—as a site of feast preparation and a more restricted area of elite food consumption. For the Earlier Occupation, the “patio-to-structure” ceramic assemblage proportions were slightly different. Patio 1 contained 5% more cooking/storage vessels than Structure 23, but jars were significantly bigger in the structure \((t = 9.44, df = 3, p < 0.01)\), as were comals \((t = 9.44, df = 3, p < 0.01)\).

Most serving bowls during the Earlier Occupation were medium sized (20–29 cm), but the frequency of larger bowls (30–39 cm) was greater in Patio 1 than in the other excavations in the Sunken Courtyard sector. Patio 1 had a much smaller proportion of luxury vessels in comparison with the entire city sector average \((X^2 = 10.50, df = 1, p < 0.002)\); meanwhile, the luxury vessel proportions from Structure 23 differed only minimally when compared to the entire sector average \((X^2 = 0.29, df = 1, p > 0.9)\). Among the luxury types, the most common were gray-paste serving bowls (G12 and G17 vessels).

No comals of the largest size category (>60 cm) and no large ollas (cooking pots) (>40 cm) were found in the T131 midden. The food-service vessels in the residential terrace were more uniform in size. These vessels were primarily in the second-to-smallest category, with 60% of them in the 20–29 cm diameter range. Luxury vessel proportions were similar to those found at the Sunken Patio, confirming that T131 was a high-status residence. Most of the luxury vessels in the T131 midden were graywares (G12 and G17); this pattern corresponds well with the preferred luxury types in the Earlier Occupation, which in turn fits with the earlier date of the residential midden. We discuss this temporal pattern in luxury ceramic distributions below.

After the burning episode, the Sunken Patios continued to be a site of suprabhousehold food consumption. The feasts in the Later Occupation, however, included more people: many more ceramics and far greater concentrations of food debris were deposited in a timespan similar to that of the previous occupation.

The average size of jars significantly increased in the Later Occupation \((t = 1.690, df = 78, p < 0.05)\), which may suggest that there were more commensals in this later time. The distribution of cooking vessels also changed. In the Later Occupation, more cooking vessels were found in Patio 1 than in Structure 23 \((X^2 = 12.36, df = 1, p < 0.001)\) and they were bigger on average. We hypothesize that the functional distinction between the patio and the structure shifted, marking a change in the use of space following the burning event. Whether or not the structure was destroyed or burned in a termination ceremony, it appears that after the fire, some cooking took place in the patio as more commensals were taking part in feasts.

The average serving bowl size slightly decreased in the Later Occupation and we found a notable change in vessel size distributions (Figure 5). In the Later Occupation, small bowls (<20 cm) were more common. This may have been the result of more feasting participants receiving slightly smaller portions of food.

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**Table 2.** Table shows ceramic quantities and densities for the Sunken Patio Sector and house midden T131-6. Ceramic data are shown according to functional categories in Structure 23, where feasts were prepared, in non-midden areas of Patio 1, where feasts were consumed and cleared, and on the edge (midden) of Patio 1, where feasting debris were deposited.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Earlier Occupation</th>
<th>Later Occupation</th>
<th>T131-6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strc. 23 Patio 1 Midden Total</td>
<td>Strc. 23 Patio 1 Midden Total</td>
<td>Midden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quantity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # of rim sherds</td>
<td>111 99 218 428</td>
<td>241 538 346 1125</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume excavated (m³)</td>
<td>4.12 3.57 1.48 9.17</td>
<td>7.33 5.71 1.8 14.84</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rim sherds/m³</td>
<td>26.9 27.7 147.3 46.7</td>
<td>32.9 94.2 192.2 75.8</td>
<td>543.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Forms</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jars</td>
<td>29 26% 16 16% 60 28% 105 25%</td>
<td>60 25% 132 25% 72 21% 264 23% 43 34%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comals</td>
<td>14 13% 14 14% 24 11% 52 12%</td>
<td>38 16% 47 9% 43 12% 128 11% 14 11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jugs</td>
<td>1 1% 4 4% 4 2% 9 2%</td>
<td>1 0% 8 1% 4 1% 13 1% 9 7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowls</td>
<td>48 43% 41 41% 104 48% 193 45%</td>
<td>107 44% 258 48% 173 50% 358 48% 43 34%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semihemispheric bowls</td>
<td>14 13% 16 16% 14 6% 44 10%</td>
<td>22 9% 52 10% 40 12% 114 10% 7 6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite silhouette bowls</td>
<td>1 1% 2 2% 4 2% 7 2%</td>
<td>5 2% 7 1% 3 1% 15 1% 2 2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vases</td>
<td>3 3% 2 2% 4 2% 9 2%</td>
<td>1 0% 5 1% 1 0% 7 1% 4 3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1 1% 4 4% 4 2% 9 2%</td>
<td>7 3% 29 5% 10 3% 46 4% 3 2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Luxury</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Tan vessels</td>
<td>5 8% 1 2% 23 18% 29 11%</td>
<td>7 5% 22 7% 19 9% 48 10% 4 7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G12/17 (gray)</td>
<td>9 14% 5 8% 16 13% 30 12%</td>
<td>20 15% 24 7% 22 10% 66 13% 17 30%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G21-like bowls (yellow)</td>
<td>7 11% 2 3% 7 6% 16 6%</td>
<td>4 3% 14 4% 10 5% 28 6% 2 4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollow supports</td>
<td>2 3% 3 2% 2 2% 6 2%</td>
<td>0 0% 4 1% 2 1% 6 1% 0 0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channeled rim (yellow) bowls</td>
<td>1 2% 2 3% 12 10% 15 6%</td>
<td>12 9% 51 16% 14 6% 77 16% 4 7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite silhouette bowls</td>
<td>1 2% 2 3% 4 3% 7 3%</td>
<td>5 4% 7 2% 3 1% 15 3% 2 4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average rim size (cm)</td>
<td>25.54 17 25.47 23.84 25.67 29.31 24.33 27.76 24.39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentage of luxury vessels with respect to serving vessels.
Luxury ceramics

In the Later Occupation, the number of luxury ceramics increased (from 130 to 240) and their distribution changed significantly. The percentage of luxury types found in Structure 33 decreased while the percentage found in Patio 1 increased. A chi-square test performed on the proportion of luxury wares in Structure 23 versus Patio 1 from the Earlier to Later Occupation revealed a statistically significant shift in the distribution of luxury materials from Structure 23 in the Earlier Occupation to Patio 1 in the Later Occupation ($X^2 = 17.95, df = 1, p < 0.001$).

The kinds of luxury ceramics used in the Later Occupation were also markedly different from those used earlier. In the Earlier Occupation, among the luxury ceramics recovered were 44 fragments of highly polished black or black-on-red slipped fine tanware serving vessels. These vessels are similar to the tripod and tetrapod hollow-support crema-paste serving vessels that Zapotec elites used at the time in the Valley of Oaxaca (Caso et al. 1967: 76, plate X; Elson and Sherman 2007). The frequency of these vessels decreased in the Later Occupation, as did another type that originated from or emulated Valley of Oaxaca ceramics (the G12 and G17 bowls) (Caso et al. 1967: 25–29, 34).

While the gray-paste luxury vessels came to be used less in the Later Occupation, use of another luxury ceramic type—high-fired yellow-paste (yellow ware) conical bowls, water jugs, and jars—increased (FIGURE 6). Yellow wares come in two varieties: a plain, softer-paste variety and a high-fired, hard-paste variety. Yellow wares generally have finer temper than tanwares and, in this case, the hard variety we recovered had a very fine and compact paste. In cross-section, yellow wares often have a dark tan or gray interior and a yellow-orangey exterior (7.5 YR 6/6 and 5/6) that is smoothed, but not polished. The yellow color is due to an oxidizing kiln environment, not slip or paint. Plain yellow wares may crumble when broken, while hard yellow wares snap and produce a high-pitched metal sound. Common hard yellow vessel forms include channel-rimmed conical bowls with flat or convex bottoms with incised decoration, cylindrical vases with exterior channel-rim decoration, restricted-neck jugs, and jars with vertical smoothing on the vessel neck.

Until recently, yellow-paste ceramics were placed in the Classic-period (Gaxiola 1984: 36–37; Spores 1972: 22, 52, 64; Winter 2006: 103), but at Cerro Jazmín we have documented their earlier existence. It is possible that these pastes and types correspond to the yellow-crema or orange-gray pastes mentioned by Gaxiola (1984: 34) and Winter at Huamelupan and Yucuita (Winter 2006: 97–99; Winter et al. 1991).

Even though, in Structure 23, the most frequent luxury vessels in the Later Occupation were still the Zapotec-styled gray-paste bowls, the amount of hard yellow ware increased in Structure 23 during this period, and yellow ware bowls were the most frequent luxury type in Patio 1. A chi-square test performed on the proportion of grayware luxury types versus yellow ware luxury vessels in the Earlier and Later Occupation revealed a statistically significant difference in the proportion of these two luxury types from one occupation to the next ($X^2 = 7.62, df = 1, p < 0.01$).

This change marks perhaps a shift between the Late and Terminal Formative occupations at Cerro Jazmín. While the Earlier Occupation ceramic collections point to a restricted use of luxury ceramics, with a preference for vessels similar to those used by the Valley of Oaxaca elites, by the Terminal Formative period, Cerro Jazmín inhabitants favored ceramic styles that were locally created or that were inspired...
by other Mesoamerican regions. These high-fired yellow-paste vessels were more widely distributed among the communal vessels that took part in the feasts at Patio 1. So far, our inquiries into the ceramic types of contemporary neighbors in the Mixteca Baja, Puebla-Tlaxcala, and the Basin of Mexico have revealed a later Early Classic-period introduction or emergence of yellow or orangewares in these areas (García Cook and Merino Carrión 2005: 635; Lesure et al. 2014: 221; MacNeish et al. 1970: 164; Winter 2006: 97, 103). We offer a preliminary interpretation that the shift towards yellow wares marks a change towards more local ceramic trends and manufacture. This shift is statistically significant and chronologically sensitive, thus offering an important contribution to the refinement of the Mixtec ceramic chronology.

This later preference for high-fired yellow ware conical bowls was also identified in another context: that of an offering found on top of a tomb in the western mound of the Tres Cerritos complex. The tomb offering was somehow missed during the looting event that targeted the tomb and its contents in the 1930s. Radiocarbon dating of the offering placed directly on top of the tomb’s rock-slab roof placed the materials at or after CAL A.D. 17 ± 36. The offering, assembled for a high-status individual interred in a stone tomb built inside the western mound, included 19 vessels, 14 of which were conical yellow ware bowls with channel rims; in nine cases, the bottoms of the vessels featured incised-line motifs (similar to G-21 decorations) (Caso et al. 1967: 62). The offering included parts of two small, fine tan-paste jars with highly polished black slip and a cylindrical fine-paste vase with bands of highly polished red slip and three quadripartite motifs painted in red. There were no associated gray vessels.

**Discussion**

In our analysis of Cerro Jazmín, we compared contemporary case studies from neighboring regions and nearby studies where feasting has been identified. There are interesting points of comparison and of departure concerning the contexts of feasting, the formalization of feasting spaces, perhaps in relation to urban function, and the use of supraregional food consumption as a tool for societal change or maintenance.

The Late Formative urban revolution that took place in the highlands also reached the Pacific Coast of Oaxaca, where scholars have found that this societal shift was marked by tensions between exclusionary (network) and corporate forms of power organization (Barber 2005; Barber et al. 2013; Joyce 1991). Coastal elites engaged in long-distance exchanges that linked them with the nobility of other parts of Mesoamerica, following an exclusionary power strategy that resulted in the procurement of exotic items. These socially valued goods, however, were used in community rituals and deposited in caches placed in public buildings at times of communal activity, including feasts.

These coastal communities also developed community-wide burial practices in which individuals of higher and lower status were interred in the same cemeteries, but in ways that still reflected their status. These strategic, leveling, and corporate strategies were meant to foster community integration even as inequality increased (Barber and Joyce 2007: 235; Joyce 2008: 227–228). Joyce (2010: 194) called it the “ritual transformation of inequality into an ideology of communalism.”

By the Terminal Formative, however, Joyce and Barber (2015) argue that the rural communities came together to build Rio Viejo, and there, feasting took place at the site’s acropolis. Unlike the previous feasting sites, no associated burials have been identified along with feasting at Rio Viejo. Perhaps those ancestral linkages remained in the originating earlier communities. The acropolis had a specially designated cooking facility, but its size was insufficient to cater to the large groups of people that feasted at Rio Viejo. Thus some food preparation still took place across the various satellite communities. Soon after these settlements collapsed, in some cases violently, at the start of the Classic period.

The feasting evidence at Cerro Jazmín’s Sunken Patio Sector, unlike evidence from contemporary feasting events reported on the Oaxaca Coast, was not associated with high status burials or any other funerary practices. Although future excavations may reveal formal burials in this sector, our excavations so far have not revealed any such practices associated with the two main feasting occupations. Whereas our coastal colleagues have found evidence of feasting as part of a status-leveling corporate strategy, at Cerro Jazmín, the Earliest Occupation employed a more exclusionary strategy (diacratic feasting) that became more corporate (patron-role) in the Later Occupation.

In the Earlier Occupation, fewer commensals were taking part in feasts. Within these feasts an even smaller number of people, an emergent elite, gathered on Structure 23 and consumed feasts in more exclusive luxury vessels whose style and origin linked local elites to the Valley of Oaxaca. The common people took part in these festivities from Patio 1, where more common serving vessels were deposited.

This emergent social inequality was probably fraught with tension, which may have led to the destruction or ritual termination/renewal of Structure 23. The idea that societal tension existed is also supported by the shift in the political strategy seen in feasting patterns. Feasting during the Later Occupation incorporated more commensals that were served valued, but locally available foods prepared in simpler ways—mostly boiled meat instead of broiled meats. Feasting as collective action serves as a redistribution and reward system. It promotes the hosts’ reputation and foments reciprocity among participants, which creates a broader arena of economic, social, and ideological interactions. Newly formed cities had to solidify their regional standing as specialized sites for such interactions.

In the Later Occupation, a larger number of luxury serving vessels were deposited in Patio 1, and the luxury ceramic styles that referenced the Zapotec elites decreased. Although these Zapotec graywares were still used by the elites in Structure 23 during this period, at the same time, the use of possibly locally made yellow ware ceramics increased and broadened among the Cerro Jazmín elites and feast commensals. No longer did the urban elites need to reference their power in relation to the Valley of Oaxaca elites.

Establishing a new way of life—an urban society on top of a prominent mountain at the edge of the largest valley in the Mixteca Alta—undoubtedly entailed political maneuvering. Within this political context, feasting would have been an important positioning strategy to solidify the collective belief in the city. As Cerro Jazmín became a specialized center of regional civic-ceremonial and economic activity, feasting became a recurrent activity near the hilltop, which in turn
warranted the formalization of space and the construction of feasting facilities.

In contrast, feasting evidence from non-urban settings, like the Middle Formative site of Cuauhtémoc on the Chiapas coast and the Late-Terminal Formative sites of La Laguna in Tlaxcala and Río Viejo on the Oaxaca Coast, reveals a different feasting pattern. At Cuauhtémoc, feasting took place at the elite Mound 2, while feast preparation took place across the entire settlement, in commoner houses where cooking vessels and stone implements were common (Rosenswig 2007). The food was then brought into a civic-ceremonial space, under the auspices of elites, for its consumption. A similar pattern of settlement-wide feast preparation and more centralized feast consumption was also identified at the Terminal Formative site of La Laguna (Carballo et al. 2014) and at Río Viejo (Joyce and Barber 2015).

Feasting at Cerro Jazmín, by contrast, occurred in a formal space in which specialized facilities were dedicated to routinely cooking for large numbers of people and hosting those commensals as they consumed the feast on their way to or from the hilltop. Our interpretation is that the Sunken Patio feasting complex is evidence of the formalization of Cerro Jazmín’s urban, regional role as a site of civic-ceremonial activity.

Cerro Jazmín came into existence when the regional environment was fraught with change. Urban polities were forming; Monte Albán was following a hierarchical political model that included territorial expansion by the Terminal Formative period. Much academic discussion has centered on two questions: first, whether or not the Zapotec expansion was a catalyst for political change in neighboring regions (Joyce 2003, 2008, 2014; Joyce et al. 2000, 2006; Sherman et al. 2010; Spencer et al. 2008).

For Cerro Jazmín, there is ample evidence of a local, continuous, and long-standing history of settlement and social development to accommodate the numbers of people and amount of construction evident from the Late Formative period (300–50 B.C.E.). Undoubtedly, the inhabitants of the Nochixtlán Valley were aware of what was happening in the Valley of Oaxaca, and this knowledge informed the political strategies of the Cerro Jazmín polity.

Conclusions

At Cerro Jazmín, feasting took place in the Sunken Patio Sector in the Late Formative period. During the Earlier Occupation, food preparation took place in the circular cooking features in Structure 23; food was consumed at Patio 1 and then discarded at the edge of the patio. Feasting may have been instituted to support and reinforce the emergent urban society and ultimately to establish the city as an important site for regional ritual-civic activity. The Sunken Patio Sector was strategically located at the base of a prominent hilltop on the northwestern edge of the Nochixtlán Valley, the largest span of flat land in the Mixteca Alta. Commensals may have feasted on their way to the hilltop, and participation in this meaningful act of suprahousehold food consumption may have served to cement communal ties in a nascent urban society.

The feasting activities continued in the Later Occupation after the ritual burning or destruction of Structure 23, but at this later time, feasts involved greater numbers of commensals who were served less diverse and less exotic foods in slightly smaller portions than before. As the feasting activity continued, however, the Cerro Jazmín elites and the commoner commensals were turning their focus away from the Valley of Oaxaca and instead were focusing on their own region and perhaps nearby regions to the north. This shift is indicated by the change in luxury ceramic styles used in feasting events. As Monte Albán entered a period of territorial expansion in the Terminal Formative, the elites and commoners at Cerro Jazmín focused inward, towards their own regional development, and adopted a more inclusionary corporate approach to feasting and to state management.

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