Prehistory and Human Ecology of the Valley of Oaxaca

Kent V. Flannery and Joyce Marcus
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Jadeite statue placed below the floor of Structure 35, a temple of the Monte Albán II period (painting by John Klausmeyer).
Prehistory and Human Ecology of the Valley of Oaxaca

Excavations at San José Mogote 2
The Cognitive Archaeology

by
Kent V. Flannery
Joyce Marcus

with contributions by
Chris L. Moser
Ronald Spores
Dudley M. Varner
Judith Francis Zeitlin
Robert N. Zeitlin

Ann Arbor, Michigan
2015
dedicated to
the memory of
Chris L. Moser
1942–2003
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Acknowledgments

San José Mogote is a Formative archaeological site in the northern, or Etla, district of the Valley of Oaxaca. It was our privilege to excavate there for 15 years, from 1966 through 1980. We spent another twenty years, from 1981 through 2001, analyzing our discoveries. Our plan was to publish the results in three volumes, the first of which would cover the 35–40 Formative residences we recovered. That volume, Excavations at San José Mogote 1: The Household Archaeology, appeared in 2005.

In this, the second volume, we report on the 35–40 temples, men’s houses, shrines, and ritual features discovered at San José Mogote. All that now remains is to publish the burials and tombs, which numbered more than 70.

Our best estimate is that the cognitive archaeology reported in this volume accounts for $200,000 worth of research. As we remarked in our 2005 volume, “that sounds like a lot of money, but spread out over 15 years of field work, it averages out to less than $14,000 per field season.”

The acknowledgments section of our household archaeology volume filled three pages (Flannery and Marcus 2005: xxi–xxiii). This volume’s acknowledgments will be shorter, since so many of the people who helped us were already thanked in San José Mogote 1. All the work reported here was supported by four grants from the National Science Foundation: GS-1616 (1967), GS-2121 (1968), GS-42568 (1974), and BNS-7805829 (1978). We made each grant last longer than expected by being as frugal as possible.

Permission to excavate was granted by Mexico’s Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH). We thank former INAH Directors Ignacio Bernal, José Luis Lorenzo, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, Ángel García Cook, Joaquín García Bárcena, and Eduardo Matos Mocetxuma. The encouragement of our Mexican colleagues Linda Manzanilla, Teresa Rojas Rabiela, Mari Carmen Serra Puche, Ernesto González Licón, Lourdes Márquez Morfín, and Leonardo López Luján was greatly appreciated.

The staff of the INAH Regional Center in Oaxaca extended us every courtesy and made working in Oaxaca a delight. We are especially grateful to Manuel Esparza, María de los Angeles Romero Frizzi, Nelly Robles, Arturo Oliveros, Alejandro de Ávila, Roberto Zárate, Raúl Matadamas, and Enrique Fernández Dávila for their support.

At the village of San José Mogote, Heliodoro Jiménez and his extended family virtually let us turn their home into our field headquarters. We are eternally grateful to Heliodoro and Delfina, Armando and Isaac, Carlos and Rafaela, and all their hospitable relatives and in-laws. We felt great affection for our archaeological workmen at San José Mogote, and agree with veteran trowelman Irán Matadamas, who recently affirmed that those 15 years of excavation were la época dorada . . . los mejores años de nuestra vida.

Equally treasured were the days, weeks, and months spent with the graduate students who worked on various aspects of our University of Michigan project. Chris L. Moser, Susan Lees, Michael and Anne Kirkby, Silvia Maranca, Richard J. Orlandini, Suzanne K. Fish, Kathryn Blair Vaughn, Andrew Nickelhoff, William J. Parry, Jane C. Wheeler, Judith Smith, Suzanne Harris, Virginia Popper, Katherine M. Moore, Karen Mudar, Sonia Guillén, and Eloise Baker all contributed to our success.

Four archaeological colleagues excavated parts of the site for us and wrote chapters for this volume. Ronald Spores excavated Mound 3, Dudley Varner excavated Mound 8, Judith and Robert Zeitlin excavated Mound 9, and Chris Moser excavated the ballcourt. We dedicate this volume to Moser, who joined our project in 1966 and ran our photo lab for 10 years. Chris was taken from us prematurely while serving as Curator of Anthropology for the Riverside Municipal Museum in California.

In addition to the colleagues who wrote chapters for this volume, we were visited in the field by Frank Hole, Henry T. Wright, Richard I. Ford, James Schoenwetter, Joseph W. Hopkins, Richard
G. Wilkinson, and John W. Rick, all of whom stayed long enough to excavate ritual buildings or features. We appreciate their help. In addition, David C. Grove, the late Christine Niederberger, and the late Gareth W. Lowe helped us to identify foreign pottery types among our elite burial offerings. Jaime Awe immediately saw similarities between our Structure 31 and the circular “performance platforms” he was finding in Belize. We also acknowledge our project’s two godfathers: the late Richard “Scotty” MacNeish and John Paddock.

We learned a great deal from neighboring archaeological projects in the Valley of Oaxaca. The work of Charles Spencer and Elsa Redmond at San Martín Tilcajete has provided us with data on the origins of the two-room temple and the temple precinct. Robert D. Drennan (at Fábrica San José) and Marcus C. Winter (at Tierras Largas) helped to firm up our horizon markers for the crucial Rosario phase. Denise C. Hodges determined the age and sex of all our burials. Michael Whalen (at Tomaltepec), Christina Elson (at Cerro Tilcajete), and Ronald K. Faulseit (at Cerro Danush) contributed important data on ritual at other Oaxaca sites. The monumental settlement pattern data assembled by Stephen A. Kowalewski, Gary M. Feinman, Laura Finsten, Richard E. Blanton, and Linda M. Nicholas helped us to put San José Mogote in its regional context.

This volume probably relies more heavily on illustrations than it does on text, and we are grateful to our talented artists and photographers. Two University of Michigan artists, John Klausmeyer and Kay Clahassey, executed hundreds of line drawings. David West Reynolds did many of the three-dimensional building reconstructions. Charles M. Hastings, John Clark, S. O. Kim, Eric Rupley, and David Mackres printed and enlarged hundreds of our field photographs. Most of our negatives were developed in the field by Chris Moser, whose photographic skills overcame our lack of a genuine darkroom.

Finally, we want to express our special thanks to the late José Luis Lorenzo for the advice he gave us during the period when he was in charge of INAH. Lorenzo visited us in the field just after our excavation of Structure 13 on Mound 1. In those days, an informal protocol directed excavators to consolidate any building with a stucco floor, no matter how little remained of it.

Lorenzo looked with disbelief at the unimpressive remnant of Structure 13, all dutifully repaired and consolidated with cement. “Do you really think that tourists will come to see that pathetic little patch of stucco floor?” he asked us. “And will you come back every 10 years, to keep repairing it as it erodes away?”

We told Lorenzo that nothing would please us more than to remove Structure 13 and continue downward, since our preliminary step trench (Appendix A) already showed that there were several earlier temples below it.

“Photograph it, draw it, remove it, and keep going down,” said Lorenzo. “You’ve heard about taking a site back to its origins, right?”

Thank you, José Luis. Thank you for telling us to keep on digging, which enabled us to find Structures 35, 36, and 37. Without it, we would never have discovered that Monte Albán II temples were replaced every 52 years. An invaluable 50-cm statue of Motagua jadeite and a scene of noble Zapotec metamorphosis would still lie buried. Without your advice, we would never have found that our earliest Monte Albán II temple columns were baldcypress trees. Without you we would never have found Structure 37, our final Rosario phase temple, with its roof supported by posts set on volcanic tuff bases and its plus-sign-shaped masonry platform.

Lorenzo knew that we were concerned with Zapotec origins, and that one never gets back to the origins if he always consolidates the remnants of the final stage. He also knew that no one wanted to keep coming back for decades to repair a pathetic patch of stucco floor. Without his wisdom and authoritative advice, we would know much less than we do about the cognitive archaeology of the Zapotec state.