The research project funded by the Stone Center Summer Field Research Grant was aimed at gaining an understanding of ceramic sequencing in the Valley of Oaxaca, Mexico, as the basis of comparison with a Zapotec diaspora site in the central Mexican state of Hidalgo. This site, El Tesoro, may be a colony or enclave of Zapotec people from the Valley of Oaxaca living far from their homeland and as such, any evaluation of the nature of this settlement would require a deep understanding of the similarities, differences, and variations between the homeland and colony. Thus, the proposed summer research was heavily focused on ceramic analysis within the Valley of Oaxaca.

I worked at the INAH Oaxaca laboratory facility at Cuilapan studying ceramics from a series of excavation in the 1970s and 1990s at Monte Alban. Monte Alban was the capital of the Classic-period Zapotec state and was the site from which the ceramic typology used in the central valleys was developed. These factors made the study of these materials crucial to an understanding of the type-variety system used in Oaxaca. In addition to the physical analysis, I worked alongside Dr. Marcus Winter and Cira Martinez Lopez, both of whom are expert in the Valley of Oaxaca ceramic typologies and co-authored a volume further refining the typologies used (Martinez Lopez et al 2000).
Initially, I intended to spend six weeks at the Cuilapan facility. I had anticipated spending as much time as possible with the ceramic collection. Unfortunately, due to a number of factors, including a smaller than anticipated quantity of artifacts, three weeks proved to be the sufficient amount of time necessary to analyze the materials available to me. The collection I analyzed at Cuilapan was mainly Classic-period pottery sherds. The time period I was particularly concerned with was the Early Classic, or Periods I-IIIA/Pitao through Nisa phases. This is the timing of the settlement and occupation of the Oaxaca Barrio at the central Mexican city of Teotihuacan (Rattray 1993). The Oaxaca Barrio, another Zapotec diaspora site, is well studied and understood and is likely related to the site of El Tesoro, thus the timing is likely similar (Crespo and Mastache 1981).

The types I was primarily focused on were greyware bowls, very typical Classic-period vessels from the Valley of Oaxaca that have been found at every diaspora site, including El Tesoro. My main goal was to gain an understanding of and familiarity with the type known as the G-12 bowl. According to the type definition, this conical bowl typically has a grey paste, achieved through oxidation-reduction during the firing process, a technology commonly used in the Valley of Oaxaca. Usually G-12s are burnished on the interior and sometimes on the exterior. There are double grooves incised or impressed around the inner rim and combed, incised designs on the interior base (Caso, Bernal, and Acosta 1967). The basal combing has proven to be temporally particular as shown through the microtypology developed by Spencer et al (2008). This microtypology indicates change through time of the type and style of the G-12 basal combing. This may prove useful in understanding the timing of the migration of people from the Valley of Oaxaca to the sites further north in central Mexico.
I also looked at G-35 bowls, which are very common during the Period II/IIIA transition or the Tani and Xoo phases. These also are commonly found at diaspora sites, and are somewhat temporally diagnostic, though they do continue rather late in the Valley of Oaxaca. These grey or cream conical bowls are burnished on the interior but left rough and unsmoothed on the exterior (Caso, Bernal, and Acosta 1967: 488). Oftentimes there is a wiped strip on the exterior rim, but the rest of the wall is left rough. Additionally, there are often differential burnish patterns on the interior base. In addition to the conical bowls, I also analyzed other utilitarian wares and some finer wares as well.

I created an attribute analysis database in order to have an objective means of evaluating the similarities and differences between the ceramics from the Valley of Oaxaca and those I would eventually analyze from the site of El Tesoro. I chose attributes common in pottery analysis, such as width at specific points on the sherd or vessel, base and opening diameters, and design elements (Rice 1987). Not only would this type of analysis give me a wealth of comparable data, but it also forces one to intimately understand small details about the pottery leading to an easy familiarity with the types.

After completion of my analysis of the Monte Alban ceramic collection, I traveled to Tula, Hidalgo to work in the INAH laboratory at the archaeological site of Tula. I would analyze the ceramic material from salvage excavations over the past few years (Gamboa 2006, 2009). These materials had been washed and sorted, but nothing more had been done. I used the attribute table I created for the Monte Alban ceramics to measure and record the same traits on the pottery. This will become the basis of statistical analyses that I will carry out in the following year in order to write a paper to be presented at the 2011 Society for American Archaeology Meetings in Sacramento.
This summer’s research will prove invaluable to the advancement of my academic goals and the furthering and eventual completion of my dissertation work in Anthropology. Without the generous grant from the Stone Center for Latin American Studies, this work would not have been possible. Future plans include survey and excavation at the site of El Tesoro as well as comparative analysis between El Tesoro and other diaspora sites in central Mexico.
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