

## The Residential Complex

During the four summers (1990–93) of investigation in Ejutla, we excavated a contiguous area of 190 m<sup>2</sup> in the area of dense surface shell at the eastern edge of both the prehispanic site and the modern town. The excavation exposed a multiroom structure with rooms around an interior patio. The structure included a small subfloor tomb, kitchen area, and stone-lined drain. Domestic trash in and around the structure confirmed its residential character. Associated exterior space included several ash-filled pits, one of which was subsequently covered over by construction of the house; a midden area with high concentrations of cut shell mixed with domestic garbage; and the simple pit burial of a single individual (Figure 4.1). The middens and the pits contained high densities of ceramics, including numerous pottery objects and vessel wasters, defective figurine fragments, and molds that are indicative of ceramic production. These subsurface findings confirmed our surface observations that residents of this sector, or neighborhood, of the Ejutla site engaged in several different craft activities, most notably the working of marine shell. The fieldwork also specifically enabled us to associate multiple craft activities with one residential structure.

In this chapter, we describe physical details of the excavated house, the subfloor tomb, and the firing features, followed by a discussion of the ceramic chronology and <sup>14</sup>C dating of the excavated features and associated craft activities. In chapter 5, we present the artifact assemblages and other material remnants associated with the excavated house and tomb that support our interpretation that the structure was a domestic residence. These basic findings provide a foundation to discuss implications of the specialized production that we documented. These production activities were implemented in a domestic context, and the evidence for multiple kinds of craftwork in this residential context have important ramifications for how we contextualize the prehispanic economy of Oaxaca and beyond (chapter 6). Subsequent chapters focus on the specific craft activities associated with the residents of the house: ceramic production, including figurines (chapter 7), the crafting of shell ornaments (chapter 8), the working of stone into tools and lapidary objects (chapter 9), and the fashioning of animal bone into tools and other decorative pieces (chapter 9).

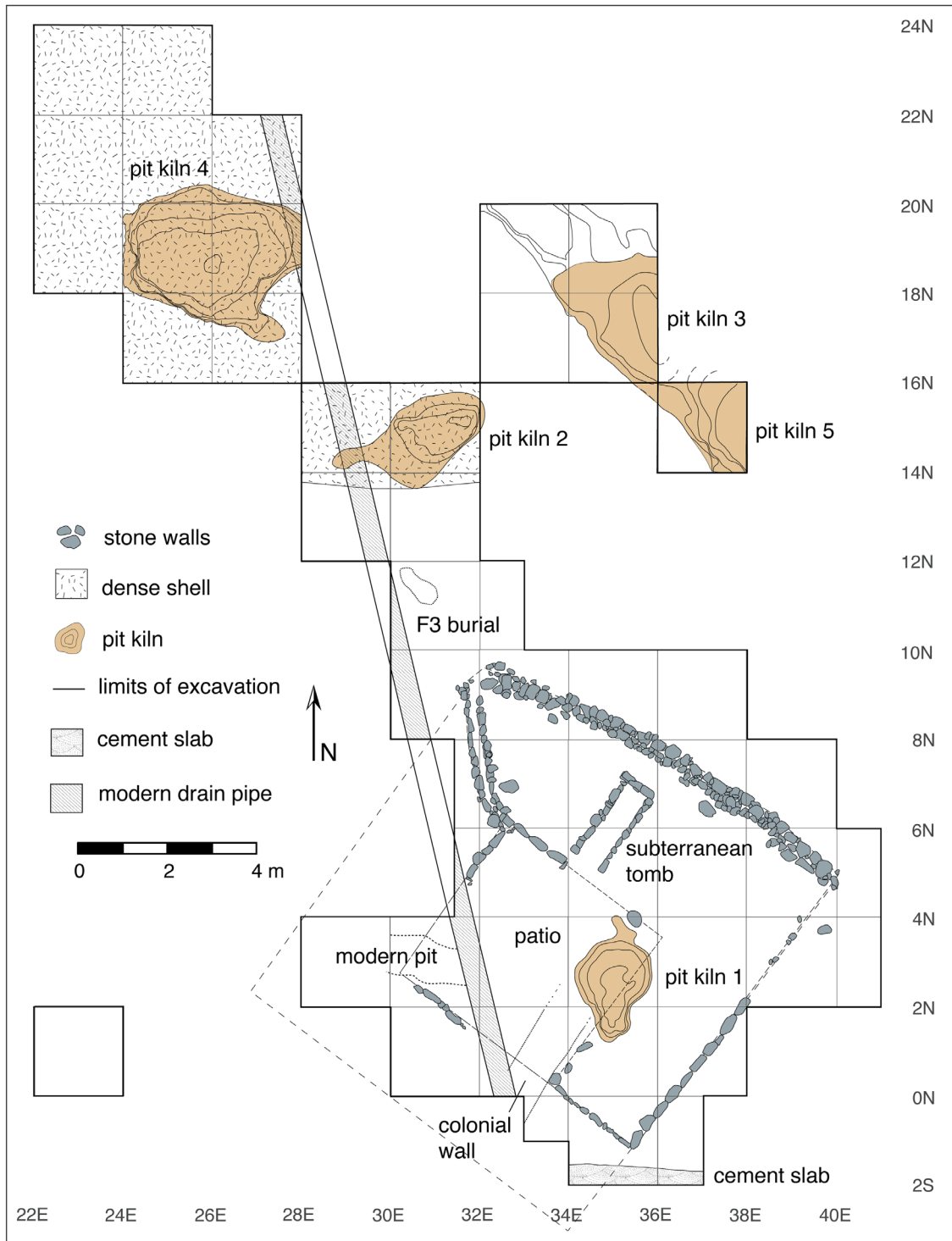
### 4.1. The Residential Structure

The prehispanic house that we excavated in Ejutla was defined by a foundation of stones that demarcated several rooms around a small patio (Figure 4.2). These basal stones

would have helped preserve the integrity of the walls from damage by water seepage (Barnard 2016). Outbuildings and other surface features of a modern house lot blocked us from expanding in all directions to confirm the full extent of the house (Figure 4.3), but we fully exposed the patio and the northern and eastern rooms (Figure 4.4). Areas to the west and south, where prehispanic rooms were likely situated, were partially destroyed by several post-occupation activities. The base of a colonial adobe wall had cut through part of the southern wall of the prehispanic patio, a modern pit had removed a section of the western patio wall, and a modern drainage pipe cut a north–south path through the western portions of the excavated area and further impacted the southern and western edges of the patio.

Partially preserved foundation walls of flattened and shaped rectangular stones defined the edges of the residence's small patio. The patio enclosed an area of 4.5 × 4.3 m and was oriented approximately 35° east of north. The best-preserved foundation walls were in the northwestern corner of the patio, where a stone-lined drain allowed water to flow from the patio to beyond the northwestern edge of the residential structure (Figure 4.5). Roughly shaped stones formed the sides of the drain, and smaller flat stones lined the bottom. A small room on the east side of the patio was approximately 2.5 × 4.3 m in size. A foundation of large, roughly formed rectangular stones formed the eastern, exterior wall of the room, while a line of much smaller and thinner rectangular stones marked the southern edge of the room (Figure 4.6). Although only a few foundation stones in the northern and western (interior) walls of the east room were preserved, they appear to have defined a small, covered living space that was entered from the patio. During the excavations we also uncovered an offering of two small, carved ceramic vases that had been placed outside the corner of the east room, most likely as part of a dedicatory ritual during construction of the house (Figure 4.7, see also Figure 4.2).

Centuries of plowing the agricultural fields around Ejutla had disturbed the prehispanic structure, and the uppermost floor(s) of the rooms around the patio and the walls above the stone foundations were not preserved, but some small flecks of plaster were present in levels where the top surfaces of the stone foundations first became visible. The lower and subfloors of the patio and the east room consisted of a mixture of earth and crushed bedrock. In subsequent investigations at El Palmillo, we excavated a series of houses on residential terraces (Feinman et al. 2001a, 2001b, 2002a). In these contexts,



**Figure 4.1.** Map of the excavated features at Ejutla, showing the extent of the dense midden north of the residential structure and the location of all five pit kilns.

on hillslopes far from town and never deeply plowed, the houses were far better preserved. Based on what we learned about domestic architecture at El Palmillo, the plaster flecks recovered in the upper excavated levels in Ejutla are most likely the remnants of thin plaster layers generally applied to domicile floors, and sometimes to adobe walls, or both.

The walled space on the north side of the patio was much larger than the east room, measuring approximately  $9.5 \times 3.2$  m. This northern area was only partially enclosed. The northern wall of this space was of very different character than the stone foundations of the patio and east room, which consisted of single lines of shaped rectangular stones. The wall defining the northern edge



**Figure 4.2. Map of the excavated house and associated features.**

of the structure was much more substantial, constructed of two parallel rows of much larger roughly shaped and unshaped stones and small boulders that were set deeper into the underlying fill (Figure 4.8). On the west, the stone wall abuts the northern end of the drain from the patio that passes through the room. On the east, the wall ends in line with the exterior foundation wall of the east room. These two walls did not connect, leaving the northern area open on the east. There was no evidence that foundation stones had been removed from this area.

A small stone-lined tomb on the north side of the patio divided the northern space roughly in half. In the western area, between the drain and the tomb, there was evidence of burning and the preparation of food, a possible kitchen area (see Figure 3.14). In the eastern half, there were several superimposed stone and sherd pavements that appear to have been work surfaces (see Figure 4.2). The larger one, approximately  $2 \times 2$  m, was roughly squared and abutted the northern edge of the east room (Figure 4.9). This pavement extended approximately 0.5 m beyond



**Figure 4.3.** Crew excavating the prehispanic structure surrounded by outbuildings in the modern house lot.



**Figure 4.4.** The patio and north and east rooms of the prehispanic structure.



Figure 4.5. The stone-lined drain in the northwest corner of the patio.



Figure 4.6. The stone foundations of the eastern and southern walls of the east room.

the end of the northern wall of the structure and the edge of the east room. The wall separating this pavement from the room to the south may have been perishable, as the only evidence of a wall here was a partial line of small stones perpendicular to the northern end of the exterior wall of the east room and in line with the northern edge of the patio. Next to the smaller pavement was a shallow pit that contained several large, thick pieces of mica that were stored as raw material (Figure 4.10).



Figure 4.7. Offering of two carved ceramic vases outside the southeastern corner of the east room.



**Figure 4.8.** The north wall of the residential complex (the orange flagging tape marks the corners of 2 × 2 m units).



**Figure 4.9.** Top of the ceramic and stone pavement in the eastern part of the north room.



**Figure 4.10.** Large sheets of mica in a small pit near the ceramic pavement in the north room of the structure.

Although rooms on the southern and western sides of the patio were not confirmed by the excavations, the small stones in the foundation of the southern wall of the east room are not substantial enough to have sustained a thick adobe wall, compared to the much larger, roughly shaped stones in the foundation of the exterior eastern wall (see Figure 4.6). The stones in the southern and western walls of the patio also are smaller than those in the exterior structure walls on the north and the east. In addition, there were many fewer ceramics and other debris beyond the southern and western edges of the patio than there were along the eastern and northern edges of the structure, where middens built up over time outside the walls of the house (Figure 4.11). The per-unit quantity of artifacts collected from the projected rooms on the southern and western sides of the patio were much more comparable to the interior areas of the house than to the exterior midden areas on the north and east. Based on these observations, we strongly suspect that there were rooms on the south and west sides of this complex that were destroyed by subsequent, post-use activities. If rooms on the southern



**Figure 4.11.** Broken *sahumador* (incense burner) and other trash on the north side of the residential complex.

and western sides of the patio were the same width (2.5 m) as the east room, then the total size of the house would have been approximately  $9.2 \times 10.3$  m.

The house plan that we propose would conform with the houses unearthed at other Classic period sites in the Valley of Oaxaca. These domestic residences generally had three or more rooms around a central patio (e.g., González Licón 2003; Marcus and Flannery 1996, 222; Winter 1974). The patios of the smaller houses that we excavated on the lower and middle terraces at El Palmillo and the Mitla Fortress were enclosed by rooms on three sides, with the fourth side open to the terrace retaining wall (Feinman and Nicholas 2009, 2011b). In the larger residences that we exposed near the top of El Palmillo and for the residence we excavated at Lambityeco, in an alluvial setting similar to Ejutla, the patios were enclosed by rooms on all four sides (Feinman and Nicholas 2009, 2019a; see also Lind and Urcid 2010). These comparative perspectives align with the ground plan that we have suggested for the excavated house at Ejutla.

Overall, inequality during the Classic period in the Valley of Oaxaca (as assessed based on comparative house sizes) was relatively muted compared to that in contemporaneous Classic period Maya Petén polities (Blanton et al. 1996; Feinman and Nicholas 2007c, 2012, 2016a, 2020a; Feinman et al. 2018a; Thompson et al. 2021). Nevertheless, status differences in Classic period Oaxaca were manifested in domestic architecture. For the 12 houses we excavated at El Palmillo, Lambityeco, and the Mitla Fortress (Feinman and Nicholas 2009, 2011b, 2019a), house size ranged in a gradient from 18 m<sup>2</sup> to 437 m<sup>2</sup>, with the median around 98 m<sup>2</sup>. The Ejutla residence, as estimated, was ~95–100 m<sup>2</sup>, and so near the median (Table 4.1) of this sample. The excavated house at Ejutla is most comparable in size to commoner residences at the Mitla Fortress and to houses situated on two mid-slope terraces at El Palmillo.

Compared to a broader sample of excavated Classic period houses from the Valley of Oaxaca that also includes Monte Albán (see Table 4.1; Feinman et al. 2018a, 273–74), the size of the Ejutla house is fairly typical of commoner residences of middle status. For this larger sample, we also compared patio sizes, as even in houses that are not completely excavated or preserved, it usually is possible to estimate the size of the patio. The patio in the Ejutla house was approximately 19.3 m<sup>2</sup>, well within the range of patio sizes for excavated houses in the larger sample, in which values ranged from 12 m<sup>2</sup> to almost 110 m<sup>2</sup> (with one outlier at Monte Albán that was almost 150 m<sup>2</sup>) (Feinman et al. 2018a, 273–74). In this sample, which skews toward larger houses, given the focus of prior excavations on elite contexts at Monte Albán (e.g., Bernal 1965; Robertson 1983), about a third of the patios were smaller than 20 m<sup>2</sup>. From a larger sample of patio sizes based on the surface survey of Monte Albán (Blanton 1978), roughly half of

Table 4.1. Size of patios and residences at excavated Classic period sites in the Valley of Oaxaca.

Site	Residence	Patio area (m <sup>2</sup> )	Size of residence (m <sup>2</sup> )
Ejutla*	–	19.3	95.0
El Palmillo*	T.1162	–	18.0
El Palmillo*	T.1163	20.3	86.3
El Palmillo*	T.1147/48	21.0	89.0
El Palmillo*	T.925	21.6	67.2
El Palmillo*	T.507	27.6	97.8
El Palmillo*	Str.35	46.2	224.8
El Palmillo*	T.335	97.3	285.0
El Palmillo*	P.11	108.8	437.0
Lambityeco*	M.165	19.3	100.0
Lambityeco	M.190	57.5	283.5
Lambityeco	M.195	73.9	460.0
Lambityeco	Golaba	20.2	–
Macuilxochitl	St.B, T.25	37.8	178.0
Macuilxochitl	St.C, T.25	49.7	325.0
Mitla Fortress*	T.56	28.0	89.6
Mitla Fortress*	T.57	36.0	130.6
Mitla Fortress*	T.276	23.0	94.4
Monte Albán	T.196	22.5	70.7
Monte Albán	La Presa	12.6	87.4
Monte Albán	T.194	36.0	94.1
Monte Albán	Carretera B	18.0	98.0
Monte Albán	Carretera C	12.0	105.0
Monte Albán	House 3	12.1	–
Monte Albán	Area L, Str.1	13.9	–
Monte Albán	Str.L (house)	31.4	233.1
Monte Albán	T.119/120	21.6	132.0
Monte Albán	System T.66	14.8	170.4
Monte Albán	Carretera A	19.4	176.0
Monte Albán	Est.C	25.0	216.0
Monte Albán	Pitayo	35.8	225.0
Monte Albán	Est.D	60.0	247.0
Monte Albán	Est.A'	42.0	261.0
Monte Albán	Est.A	36.0	324.0
Monte Albán	Bldg.104	92.0	414.0
Monte Albán	Este B	42.5	416.0
Monte Albán	Str.103	84.0	437.0
Monte Albán	Bldg.105	148.6	464.6
Monte Albán	Est.B	81.0	528.0
Monte Albán	Bldg.S	97.0	559.4

\* Residences excavated by Feinman and Nicholas. Data for the other houses: Lambityeco (Lind and Urcid 1983, 2010), Macuilxochitl (Faulseit 2013), and Monte Albán (Caso 1935, 1938; González Licón 2003; Marcus 2008; Winter 1974).

the patios were smaller than 20 m<sup>2</sup> (Feinman et al. 2018a, 273); in both samples, the Ejutla patio is in the middle of the size range. Based on these comparative samples for the Classic period Valley of Oaxaca, the craftworkers that occupied the excavated house in Ejutla were neither at the top nor the bottom tail of the axis of economic status.

#### 4.2. Subfloor Tomb

In the sample of Classic period houses that we excavated, the presence of a subterranean tomb, entered from the patio, also was more typical of houses at the mid or upper range of socioeconomic status. The subfloor tomb at Ejutla