

Table 4.2. Subterranean tombs at four Classic period sites excavated by Feinman and Nicholas.

Site and residence	Tomb	Exterior length (m)	Exterior width (m)	Interior length (m)	Interior width (m)
Ejutla	shaped stone	2.25	1.00	2.00	0.60
Lambityeco M.165	shaped stone	2.12	1.00	1.90	0.60
El Palmillo T.1162	no tomb	–	–	–	–
El Palmillo T.1163	no tomb	–	–	–	–
El Palmillo T.1147/48	no tomb	–	–	–	–
El Palmillo T.925	shaped stone	1.95	0.97	1.70	0.45
El Palmillo T.507	shaped stone	2.16	1.07	1.70	0.65
El Palmillo T.335	masonry tomb	2.70	1.82	2.08	1.13
El Palmillo St.35	no tomb or burials	–	–	–	–
El Palmillo Pl.11	masonry tomb	2.65	1.72	2.30	1.00
Mitla Fortress T.56	no tomb	–	–	–	–
Mitla Fortress T.57	no tomb	–	–	–	–
Mitla Fortress T.276	no tomb	–	–	–	–



Figure 4.14. The stone walls of the tomb exposed during the 1992 excavations.

others, especially in the short north wall, were sustained by compact fill (see Figure 4.13).

Several layers of overlapping flat cut stones formed a threshold at the foot of the tomb (see Figure 4.16). Given the similarity of this mortuary feature to the small domestic tombs at El Palmillo, there should have been a stone closing the entrance of the tomb, but there was no door stone above the threshold, nor did we find any large stone in deposits near the tomb that could have served that purpose. It was likely removed post-occupation with many of the capstones. The individuals interred in the tomb and associated funerary remains are discussed in chapter 5.

There was only one other burial associated with the prehispanic structure. Just off the northwest corner of the structure was a simple pit burial containing one individual. There were no offerings interred with this individual. The



Figure 4.15. Stone marker in the patio wall and deposit of broken ceramics in front of the tomb entrance.

pit had been dug into the bedrock and eventually was covered with accumulating layers of midden deposits (see Figure 4.1).

#### 4.3. Ash-Filled Pits

Several meters north of the structure was a zone of four roughly oval pits that had been carved into the soft bedrock



Figure 4.16. The tomb threshold and large stone inside the tomb from the collapsed roof.

(see Figure 4.1). A fifth pit was under the house subfloor, superimposed by the floor of the house. These pits were filled with dense layers of ash and broken pottery, including high quantities of defective sherds (Figure 4.17, Figure 4.18), and are similar to semisubterranean features at other sites in Mesoamerica that have been identified as ceramic-firing features (e.g., Abascal 1975, 1976; Balkansky and Crossier 2009; Swezey 1975), including two features directly adjacent to a residential compound at Teotihuacan (Sheehy 1992, 755–56) and several circular firing features in domestic contexts at Monte Albán (Markens and Martínez López 2009, 140–41, figure 15a). Firing features at sites in Puebla-Tlaxcala that had been excavated into the underlying tepetate—a soil that hardens like bedrock upon exposure to the air (Nimlos 1989; Williams 1972)—are perhaps most similar to those at Ejutla (Balkansky et al. 1997). These firing features resemble the ‘pit kilns’ in the pottery-making literature in South Asia (Rye 1981; Rye and Evans 1976; Sinopoli 1991), a term that has been applied more broadly beyond South Asia (e.g., Heacock 1995; Rice 1987, 158). They do not have permanent superstructures like the two-chambered updraft kilns at Atzompa and Monte Albán (Payne 1982; Winter and Payne 1976). They also are very different in form and contents from the lime kilns documented at Monte Albán (Ortiz et al. 2021). Those features were constructed with cut blocks of limestone to line the sides of the kiln and flattened stones to form the base and were filled with layers of mud and fragments of lime instead of ceramics.

Three of the pit-firing features at Ejutla (pit kiln 1 in excavation unit 2n34e, pit kiln 2 in 14n30e, and pit kiln 4



Figure 4.17. Broken ceramic vessels in ash near the base of pit kiln 4 (level 17 of 18n24e).



Figure 4.18. All of the ceramics from one 10 cm level in pit kiln 4 (level 17 of 18n24e).

in 18n24e and adjacent units) were excavated completely (Figure 4.19, Figure 4.20, Figure 4.21). All three were slightly asymmetrical, with a narrowing of the bedrock depression at one end into what might have served as a stoke pit, or mouth, to add fuel and ventilate the larger chamber (see Figure 4.1). They varied in size, between 2 and 4 m across and 40 and 70 cm deep. The bases of all three pits were approximately 190 cm below the modern surface.

The basal levels of pit kiln 2 and pit kiln 4 consisted of almost pure ash, often mixed with large potsherds that may have served as spacers or other types of kiln furniture to shield the manufactured vessels from the fuel (Figure 4.22, Figure 4.23, see also Figure 4.17; Peterson 1984, 175). The deposits contained considerable quantities of charcoal, and the bedrock at the base of these features was burnt from repeated firing, accompanied by decomposing pieces of burnt bedrock (Figure 4.24, Figure 4.25).

The bedrock in two of the pit kilns appears to have been modified after initial use. Pit kiln 2 was dug to a second, deeper level while in use (see Figure 4.20). The other two features (pit kiln 3 in 16n34e and pit kiln 5 in 14n36e) were at the edge of the excavation block, and we were unable to excavate more than the western edges of both of them. They were much deeper than the other pit kilns, ~250–260 cm below the modern surface, and although they were only partially exposed, they appear to be two separate, sequential, and partially overlapping pit kilns (Figure 4.26). Pit kiln 5 was in use first (Figure 4.27, Figure 4.28) and then was replaced by pit kiln 3 (Figure 4.29). Both were filled with dark ashy soil, broken pottery, and fire-cracked rocks. These

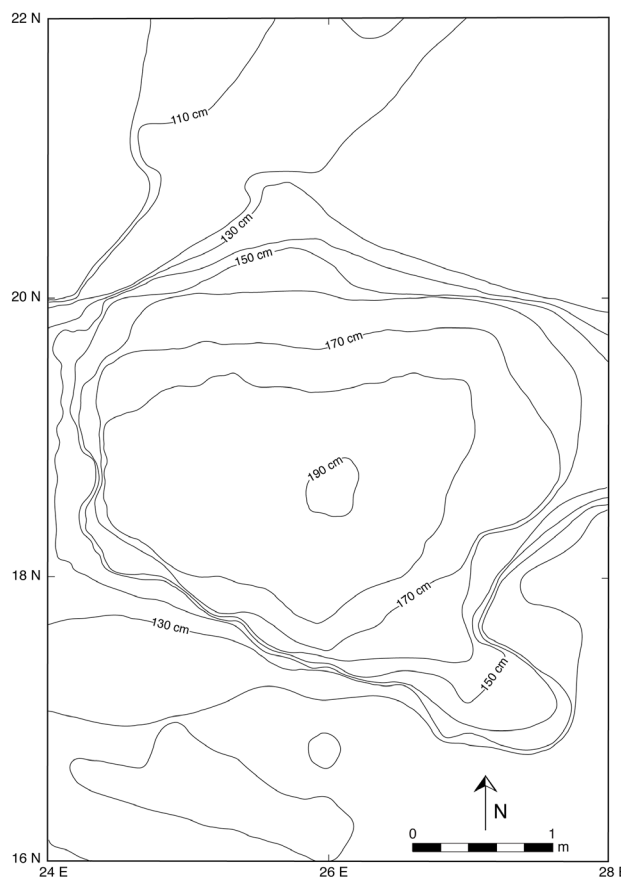


Figure 4.19. Drawing of pit kiln 4 (18n24e).

features were used repeatedly, as evidenced by a dense concentration of broken ceramics and heavy ash in a shallow depression in unit 18n32e just north of pit kiln

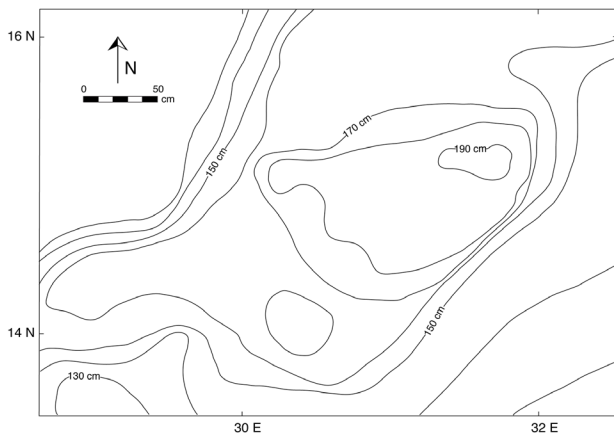


Figure 4.20. Drawing of pit kiln 2 (14n30e).

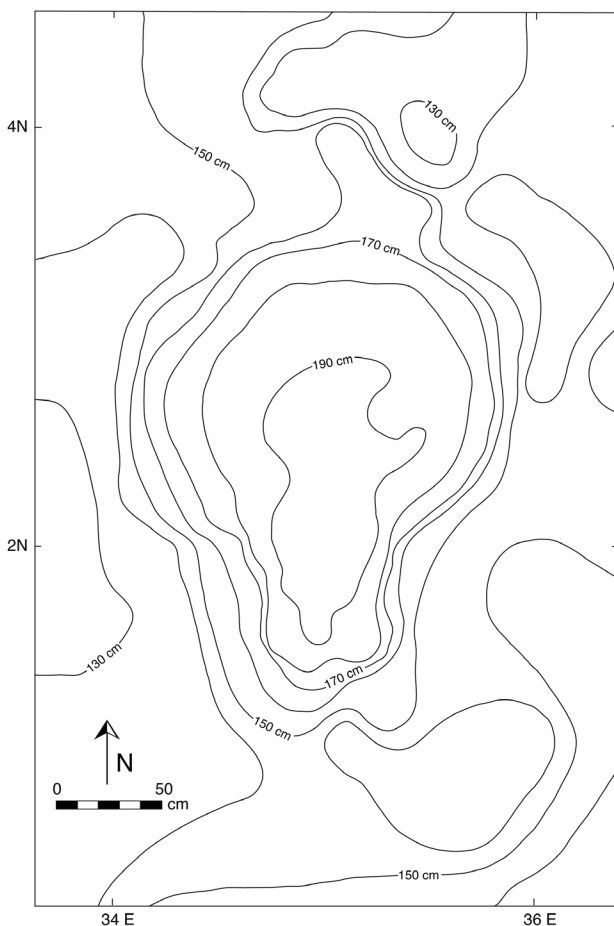


Figure 4.21. Drawing of pit kiln 1 (2n34e).

3 that appears to have been cleaned out of the pit kiln and deposited nearby in preparation for a new episode of firing (Figure 4.30).

The firing feature under the house floor varied in certain key respects from the pit kilns north of the structure (see Figure 4.21). In part, the feature below the house had a different use life, curtailed and truncated by construction of the residential structure, which sealed the pit and led



Figure 4.22. Large broken ceramic vessels and ash on the floor of pit kiln 4 (18n24e).

to better preservation. Other variations may relate to slight differences in design. Like the other firing pits, the subfloor feature was carved into the bedrock and contained high densities of ash, wasters, and potsherds. In contrast, though, the subfloor kiln had greater numbers of cobble-sized stones and unusually large pieces of charcoal (Figure 4.31). Many of the cobbles were spalled, covered in soot, and otherwise discolored from burning (Figure 4.32). Some of these stones had been purposefully placed into low spots in the bedrock, defining the edge of the pit-firing depression. This pit kiln also had the best-defined and most distinctive firepit (Figure 4.33). Although the subfloor kiln may have been more formally designed and possibly was built partly of stone, it may simply be better preserved, as construction of the house prevented further perturbation of the feature. In contrast, the other pit kilns appear to have been in use longer, either sequentially or simultaneously, and were subjected to more and greater post-use disturbances.

#### 4.4. Dense Midden with Shell and Other Craft and Utilitarian Debris

The densest midden deposits were in the northwestern part of the excavated area (the north block of units excavated in 1991), north of the structure, where we encountered high concentrations of cut marine shell, broken ceramic vessels, chipped stone tools and debris, and other domestic garbage overlaying pit kiln 4 in 18n24e and adjacent units (Figure 4.34). These dense deposits extended beyond the limits of our excavation to the north and west. The midden with shell debris spread south to pit kiln 2 in unit 14n30e, and although there was much broken pottery in the deposits above the pit kiln, the quantity of shell was lower there (Figure 4.35). Shell debris was very dispersed elsewhere, including in levels above the pit kilns to the east (16n34e [#3] and 14n36e [#5]) and in and above the preserved floors of the house and exterior middens. Shell debris was especially sparse in deposits under the house. A key point is that although these middens were laden with debris from craft activities, those materials were intermixed with