

recovered in conjunction with the shell debris both in the middens surrounding the house and inside the residence.

At the same time, given the anomalous quantities of shell recovered in the contiguous area where we excavated part of a Classic period residence and adjacent external areas, it is clear that most of the shell ornaments prepared by the Ejutla craftworkers were not consumed by the householders themselves. Finished ornaments were a small fraction of the shell artifacts unearthed, and even the domestic tomb, associated with the excavated residence, contained only a single shell bead. The residents of this house cut and worked a suite of marine shell species, but finished ornaments made from most of those species were not found, which again seems to indicate that they were mostly distributed and consumed elsewhere.

The Ejutla craftworkers were specialists, producing in a residential context, but collectively they were not devoted full-time to making shell ornaments, as other crafts, including pottery, fired-clay figurine manufacture, and the working of stone were also evidenced in association with the excavated residence. Figurines made in Ejutla were consumed at other sites in that region (Carpenter and Feinman 1999; Feinman 1999). Farming and food preparation were also evidenced materially in the house that we studied (chapter 5). The practice of multiple craft production activities in association with a single domestic unit at the Ejutla site (Feinman 1999; Feinman and Nicholas 2007a) has recently been more widely recognized in prehispanic Mesoamerica as well as in other premodern economies (Brumfiel and Nichols 2009; De Lucia 2013; Hirth 2009a, 2009b, 2009c; Shimada 2007; Widmer 2009).

6.4. Broader Implications for Prehispanic Mesoamerican Economies

For the study of Mesoamerica, the dismantling of the monolithic, unilinear model of craft production and the decoupling of scale and intensity in regard to economic specialization, which was to a degree fostered by our findings in Ejutla (Feinman 1999; Feinman and Nicholas 2000), had revolutionary ramifications for how we think about ancient Mesoamerican economies and even premodern economies more generally. The recognition that almost all specialized craft production in prehispanic Mesoamerica, even late prehispanic metal working (Maldonado and Engelhorn-Zentrum 2009), was situated in domestic contexts holds even after several subsequent decades of intense fieldwork focused on many regions and eras of that macroregion's past. Furthermore, Mesoamerica is not the only premodern region where craft specialization of both utilitarian and prestige goods generally was situated in domestic contexts (e.g., Bernier 2010; Costin 2020).

The placement of most prehispanic Mesoamerican craft specialization in domestic contexts immediately casts doubt on the application of theoretical models (Marx

1971; Rosenswig and Cunningham 2017; cf. Feinman and Nicholas 2017) that uncritically extrapolated from other global regions and placed the control of most production in the hands of governors or principals (Feinman 1999; Feinman and Nicholas 2000, 2012). If hundreds or thousands of households across regions of prehispanic Mesoamerica produced goods for exchange, how could that production be centrally administered? Why do we lack any evidence of central storehouses for craft products? Given the realities of prehispanic Mesoamerican transport, the notion that weighty products, like ceramic jars or stone tools, were first confiscated by principals and then redistributed neither seems plausible, nor does it find a thread of empirical validation (Feinman et al. 1984; Feinman and Nicholas 2007b, 2012).

And yet, the realization that economic specialization in Mesoamerica was mostly centered in houses served to raise fundamental questions about the distribution and consumption of craft products. Markets, which impressed the Spanish invaders at the end of the late prehispanic Mesoamerican world (Feinman and Nicholas 2021), were generally diminished by anti-market frames (Cook 1968) that lessened their perceived importance and the temporal depth of their pre-Aztec presence in Mesoamerica. A plethora of recent studies have compiled multiple lines of evidence to document the importance and the diversity of precolonial Mesoamerican markets (e.g., Feinman and Garraty 2010; Feinman and Nicholas 2010; Garraty and Stark 2010; Masson and Freidel 2012; Shaw 2012). But Mesoamerican market systems were not just critical modes of exchange isolated to specific regions; rather, there is mounting indication that macroregional interconnections between local market networks extended across Mesoamerican regions long before the Aztec empire. Craft products and other goods were moved considerable distances across the macroregion over time (Blanton and Fargher 2012; Feinman and Nicholas 2020c; Feinman et al. 2022; Golitko and Feinman 2015; Hirth 2013). And the directionalities and volumes of Mesoamerican economic networks were variable over time and space (Blanton et al. 2005; Feinman et al. 2022); intensities and patterns of production and consumption were dynamic. Markets take different forms and roles in relation to governance in the political-economic contexts in which they are embedded (Feinman and Garraty 2010).

In general, when domestic consumption practices have been compared across settlements or regions, they tend not to be indicative of pooling or redistribution, but rather reflect other mechanisms of economic transfer, like marketplace exchange (Feinman and Nicholas 2010, 2012; Hirth 1998). More specifically, whereas a ceramic figurine made in Ejutla was exchanged to another settlement in the region (Carpenter and Feinman 1999; Feinman 1999; chapter 7), shell ornaments were likely moved longer distances, possibly even to Monte Albán (chapter 8), and mica from Ejutla traveled as far as Teotihuacan (Manzanilla et al. 2017; chapter 8). The findings from Ejutla underpinned a key step in eclipsing

the false market/no-market dichotomy (Wilk 1998, 469) for prehispanic Mesoamerican economies and premodern economies more generally (Feinman 2017).

6.5. The Fiscal Financing of Governance

The set of queries and debates prompted by the realization that most prehispanic Mesoamerican craft specialization was domestically situated also extended to the issue of how prehispanic governance was financed or funded. After all, if governors were not in control of basic production and distribution, as now seems to be the case, then what can we say about the fiscal undergirding of Mesoamerican polities? This is not an easy question to address archaeologically, but fortunately a comprehensive study, based largely on early conquest-era texts, has provided a perspective on the fiscal financing of the Aztec empire (Smith 2015).

Although, in the past, Mesoamerican archaeologists have, perhaps, been too liberal in their extrapolations of Aztec practices to earlier eras, the wide array of financial resources procured by Aztec governors and tax collectors do provide some research directions that are worth considering. Most Aztec revenue for fiscal financing was derived from tax assessments, including of labor, land, and for market participation (Smith 2015). Taxes for the Aztec often were paid in crafted goods, especially textiles. The Aztec fiscal regime was heavily reliant on the taxing of the local population, or what has been referred to as internal revenues (Blanton and Fargher 2008). A reliance on internal revenues aligns with the relatively collective mode of governance or distributed power arrangement of the Late Aztec polity (Smith 2015, 106; see also Blanton and Fargher 2008; Feinman and Carballo 2018). Like textiles, marine shell ornaments (especially less elaborate or heavily crafted shell ornaments) were a kind of bulk luxury good (Blanton and Fargher 2012; Blanton et al. 2005), valued, but not extremely rare, and also not a basic necessity, like food.

The occupants of the excavated house in Ejutla made bulk luxuries (simple shell ornaments), goods produced for communal and domestic rituals (ceramic figurines and whistles), and basic utilitarian objects, such as fired-clay tortilla griddles and incense burners. In contrast, elsewhere in Mesoamerica, craft specialists attached to (or members of) elaborate or palatial households produced rare, highly valued goods for elite adornment or exchange (Emery and Aoyama 2007; Inomata and Triadan 2014). For the Classic Maya, at least, such prestige goods may have had a more direct role in financing the power of rulers through gift exchanges and other means that fostered the transactional networks and personalized performances of the powerful/palace dwellers (e.g., Halperin and Foias 2010; McAnany 2008). The centralized control of the trade corridors in which these high-value goods and products passed also was fundamental to the fiscal support of polities with more personalized, autocratic rule (Feinman 2021; Feinman and Carballo 2018).

6.6. Following Archaeological Threads

In this chapter, we have contextualized the research foundation and questions that we brought to the Ejutla study in a wider theoretical context, and we discussed how our findings contributed to ongoing debates concerning craft specialization, markets, and premodern economies. Over the last 50–75 years, the cultural evolutionary frameworks advanced by Childe (1950), Fried (1967), Service (1962), and others have spurred a bountiful episode of archaeological research across the globe, including in Mesoamerica. While we must recognize the great contributions of these researchers and how their ideas and concepts fueled research, it is also time to delve into, trust, and synthesize the expanded record on the past that 50–75 years of question-oriented investigations have generated.

Although archaeologists will always need models and examples from contemporary and historically described behaviors to help make sense of our highly partial material record, it is also time to acknowledge that the past is not a simple reflection of the present—and, furthermore, that conjectural constructs drawn from selective readings of snippets of historical or contemporary behaviors may not be adequate models for what happened in a past that was less homogeneous than often presumed. Rather than projecting rigid categorical constructs back onto the past, we now have enough information collected systematically, thoroughly, and along many empirical dimensions to build our interpretations of the past following threads of archaeological data forward, rather than extrapolating back from the present, thereby ignoring what we actually have painstakingly learned about the past by studying its empirical and material remnants.