

POLITY PRODUCED AND COMMUNITY CONSUMED

Negotiating Political Centralization Through Ritual in the Lower Rio Verde Valley, Oaxaca
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In this chapter, we explore the intersection of economic and ritual action in the negotiation of status and political authority during the Terminal Formative period (150 B.C.-A.D. 250) in the lower Rio Verde Valley of Oaxaca, Mexico. The Terminal Formative in the lower Rio Verde was distinguished by several hallmarks of political centralization, including increased social inequality, monumental architecture, a five-tiered settlement hierarchy, and the growth of a regional political center. Despite these indications of growing hierarchy, material expressions of elite status were restrained. Instead, practices at both the local and regional levels entailed the persistent materialization of social relations as corporate, embedded in place, and "egalitarian" (sensu Blanton 1998:151) in nature.¹ We argue that the material ambiguity of elite status and regional authority indicates ongoing tension between elites and commoners and between local and regional political formations. We view the Terminal Formative polity as a contested and negotiated process rather than a seamless and homogenous whole. Political centralization, therefore, was not simply a result of domination engendered by expanding elite control of economic and symbolic production. Instead, status and authority were defined through transactions in which various social groups had a voice (Kovacevich, Chapter 3).

Although the negotiation of political centralization occurred through a wide range of practices, we focus here on two: the consumption of socially valued goods in interred offerings and the construction of monumental

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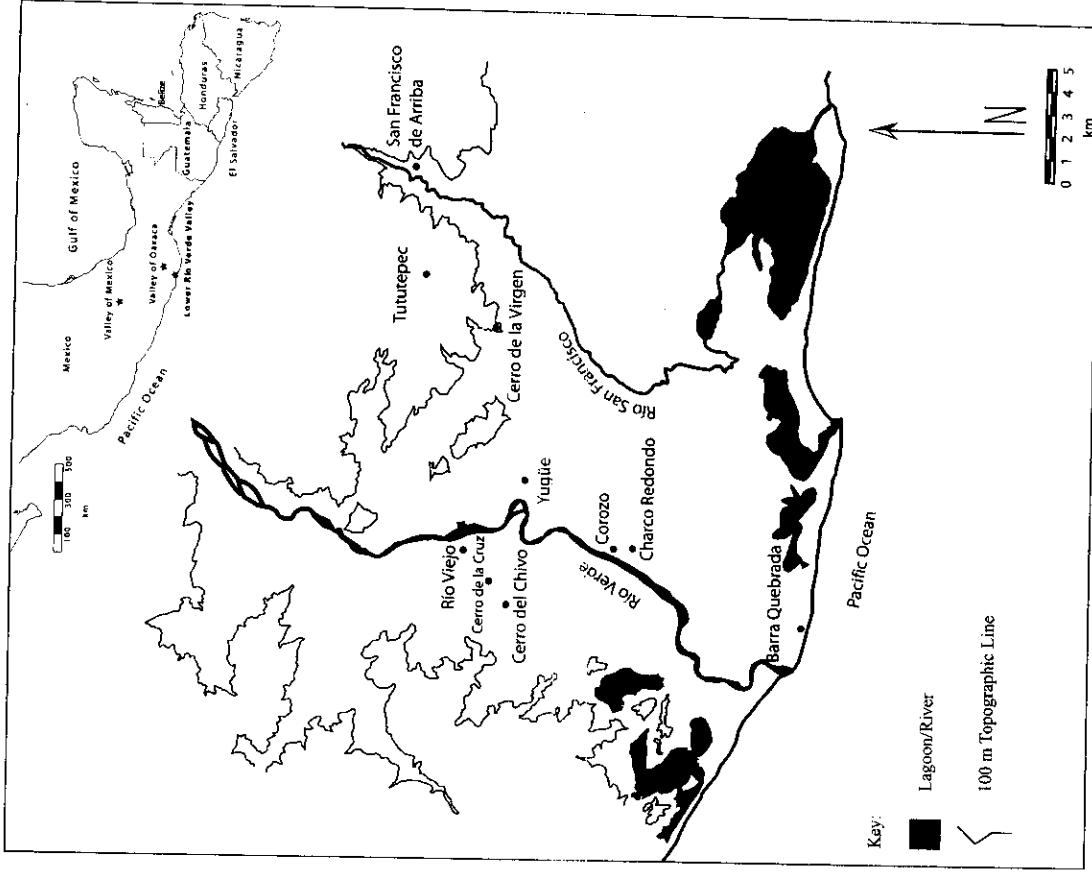
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architecture. Viewed from a top-down perspective, both consumption and production are often treated as a means by which elites co-opted resources to achieve their own ends. As components of ritual economy, however, these practices are revealed to have constituted corporate identities that crosscut relations of status (Davis-Salazar, Chapter 7). During the Terminal Formative period, the intersection of consumption and production with ritual practice transformed "economic" action into statements of corporate affiliation. Employed in mortuary ceremony and caching, social valuables were not only status markers but also collective offerings that defined socially meaningful places and reiterated local histories (Davis-Salazar, Chapter 7; Foias, Chapter 6). Labor, when applied to monumental building projects, materialized political authority as a scaled-up local community embedded in the regional landscape. Although their roles would have differed in each instance, elites and commoners alike were involved in the materialization of meaningful social groups through ritual economic action.

We thus see Terminal Formative political relations, in part, as an outgrowth of the creation and persistence of social identities. Drawing on social identity literature within archaeology (e.g., Curet 1996; Janusek 2004; Jones 1997; A. Joyce 2000; Lightfoot et al. 1998; Meskell 2001; Schortman and Nakamura 1991; Schortman et al. 2001; Yaeger 2000) and the social sciences more generally (e.g., Barth 2000; Cohen 2000; Duszak 2002; Escobar 2004; Jenkins 1996; Sokefeld 1999), we assert that preexisting notions of community identity in the lower Verde provided one framework by which Terminal Formative people negotiated larger sociopolitical conditions. Ritual economy was central to this process, since collective acts of consumption and production served both to reiterate local identities and to create regional ones.

THE LOWER RÍO VERDE VALLEY

The lower Río Verde Valley is located in the Mixteca de la Costa region of the western Pacific coast of Oaxaca (Figure 8.1). Most Pre-Columbian peoples there probably spoke Chatino before the influx of Mixtecs in the Postclassic period, A.D. 800 to 1522 (Table 8.1; A. Joyce and Winter 1989; Urcid and Joyce 2001). The environment of the lower Verde would have provided ancient inhabitants with a number of valuable economic resources. To the north and west, the valley is bordered by the piedmont zone of the Sierra Madre Occidental. The steep, wooded hills of this zone were home to various species of plants and animals, including deer and iguana. The valley floor is divided by the Río Verde, which is one of the largest rivers on Mesoamerica's Pacific coast (Tamayo 1964). The river's floodplain is extremely fertile, making it one of the most agriculturally productive regions in the state today, just as it would have been for much of the Pre-Columbian period (Rodrigo Álvarez



8.1. The lower Río Verde Valley and sites mentioned in the text.

1983). Ethnohistoric documents indicate that in addition to staple foods, specialty crops, such as cotton and cacao, were grown in the lower Verde prior to the arrival of the Spanish. Marine, estuarine, and riverine resources were also available to the region's Pre-Columbian inhabitants. Such resources

Table 8.1. Lower Río Verde Valley ceramic chronology

Time Period	Ceramic Phase	Dates
Late Postclassic	Yucudzaa	A.D. 1100-1500
Early Postclassic	Yugüe	A.D. 800-1100
Late Classic	Yuta Tiyoo	A.D. 500-800
Early Classic	Coyuche	A.D. 250-500
Late Terminal Formative	Chacahua	A.D. 100-250
Early Terminal Formative	Miniyua	150 B.C.-A.D. 100
Late Formative	Minizundo	400-150 B.C.
Middle Formative	Charco	700-400 B.C.

would have included salt, various species of fish and shellfish, as well as larger animals, such as sea turtles, stingrays, and crocodiles.

During the Precolumbian period, the lower Río Verde Valley was home to a series of regional polities of varying scale and degree of political centralization (A. Joyce n.d., 1991b, 1993, 1994, 2005, 2006; Workinger 2002). Evidence suggests the existence of two subregional polities by the Late Formative period (400-150 B.C.). A three-tiered settlement hierarchy existed in the region at this time, with two large sites at Charco Redondo (70 ha) and San Francisco de Arriba (94.5 ha). Although local or regional political administration remains hypothetical, evidence suggests modest status inequality both within and between sites. The Terminal Formative marked the first period of regional political centralization in the lower Verde. The regional social landscape was dominated by the 225 ha site of Río Viejo. A 20 ha, second-order center in the Late Formative, Río Viejo became by far the largest site in a five-tiered settlement hierarchy by the early Terminal Formative Miniyua phase (150 B.C.-A.D. 100).² The development of Río Viejo as a political center is demonstrated by the site's impressive size and by several large building projects undertaken there during the Terminal Formative. There is evidence in the form of mortuary offerings, cached objects, and domestic architecture that status inequality was well developed by this time (Barber 2005; A. Joyce 1991a; A. Joyce, Winter et al. 1998; Workinger 2002). A number of social valuables appear for the first time in mortuary and cached offerings, including greenstone, hematite, rock crystal, and elaborately decorated portable objects (Barber 2005; Barber and Joyce 2004; Barber et al. n.d.; A. Joyce 1991a; Workinger 2002). A late Terminal Formative elite residence at Cerro de la Virgen included several elaborate architectural features, such as a masonry stairway, vertical slab masonry retaining walls, a large enclosed patio (13 m by 13 m), and physical proximity to a ceremonial complex (Barber 2005).

The Terminal Formative polity was followed by 250 years of regional decentralization, during which the scale of political centralization was

greatly reduced (A. Joyce n.d., 2003, 2006). The regional settlement hierarchy declined from five to four levels. Early Classic Río Viejo occupied only 33 percent of its Terminal Formative area, shrinking from 225 ha to 75 ha. At least seven other sites in the valley were of similar size at this time. Several other large, Terminal Formative floodplain sites with mounded architecture declined significantly in size or were abandoned as settlement shifted from the floodplain to the piedmont. The largest monumental construction in the region, the Río Viejo acropolis, fell into disuse until it was reoccupied during the Late Classic period (A.D. 500-800).

CONSUMPTION AND LOCAL COMMUNITY IDENTITY

We argue that social tension during the Terminal Formative derived, in part, from the persistent significance of the local community as a modality of social identity. Formative period communities in the lower Verde were actively constituted collectivities grounded in local histories and places. By the Late Formative, local community identities were being constituted through practices such as mortuary ceremony and feasting. These actions were repeated in and around supra-domestic ceremonial structures. The spatial contexts of these actions bound groups of people to the landscape by imbuing space with meaning (Davis-Salazar, Chapter 7; Hendon 2000; Watanabe 1990). The repetitive use of meaningful places referenced local histories and grounded communities in a corporate past (Bell 1992; Connerton 1989; Hendon 2000; Kertzer 1988). The shared pasts and places created through Late Formative community ritual retained their meaning into the Terminal Formative despite increasing local and regional status inequality and regional political centralization. Indeed, the persistence of local community identity through the entirety of the Terminal Formative polity suggests that locally shared histories and places retained considerable relevance for people regardless of status.

LATE FORMATIVE PERIOD COMMUNITIES

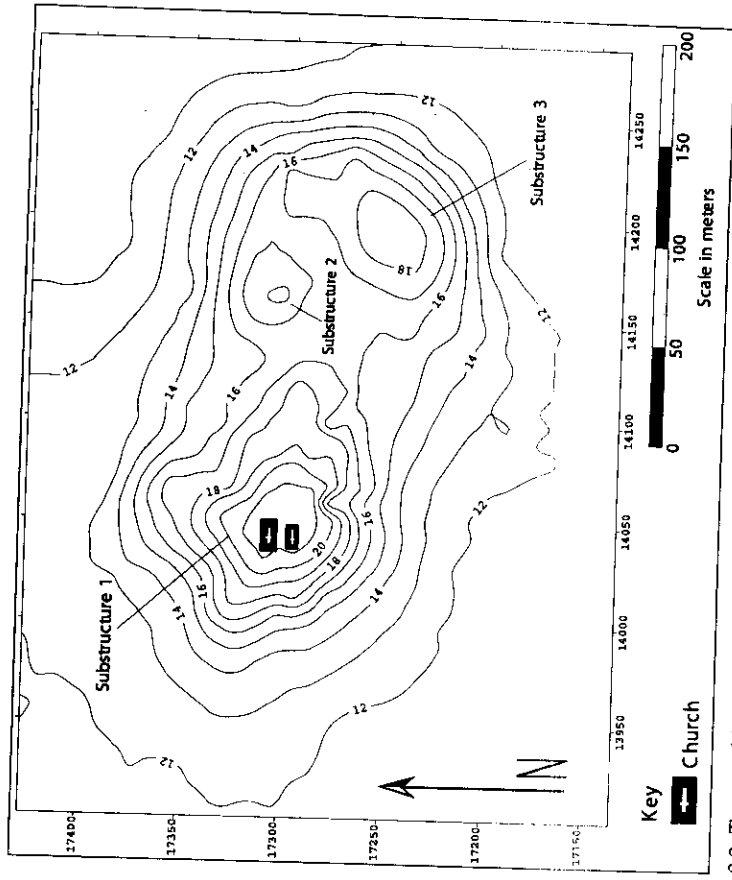
In the Late Formative, local community identity was constituted through a variety of practices, particularly the use of cemeteries and feasting (Barber and Joyce 2003; A. Joyce 1991a). At the 1.5 ha site of Cerro de la Cruz, for instance, Arthur Joyce (1991a, 1991b, 1994) uncovered a public building (Structure 1) associated with a flagstone patio and a set of freestanding storage rooms. Renovated at least four times, Structure 1 was the most architecturally elaborate structure uncovered during excavations at the site. During the last two building phases, forty-one adults were interred along

Structure 1's foundation walls and beneath the floor, and an additional seventeen burials were found in the surrounding area (A. Joyce 1994:158). All but six of these burials were adolescent or adult. None of the interments contained funerary offerings, and many had been disturbed by subsequent burials. Interment beneath or near Structure 1 was an ongoing activity, and Arthur Joyce (1991a) estimates that there were from six to twenty-one separate burial events. In addition, a very large hearth was recovered in the building's patio associated with Structure 1. This hearth consisted of a 3 m² pit of up to 0.4 m in depth (A. Joyce 1991a:187). Similar large burn features have been recovered from Late Formative contexts at Río Viejo (A. Joyce 1991a:361) and Yugüe (Barber 2003) and contained the charred remains of comestible plants, animals, and estuarine shellfish (Barber 2003; Fernandez 2004; A. Joyce 1991a).

The evidence from Cerro de la Cruz and other sites indicates that the local community was already a meaningful social group by the Late Formative in the lower Río Verde Valley. At Cerro de la Cruz, public spaces provided a locus for practices that would have defined and maintained community relations. Public spaces are documented for the site of San Francisco de Arriba and possibly Río Viejo at this time as well (A. Joyce 1991a; Workinger 2002). Burial and feasting in and around Structure 1 at Cerro de la Cruz would have created opportunities for supra-domestic interaction tied to specific geographical space. The large hearth associated with Structure 1, as well as those from Río Viejo and Yugüe, provides evidence that large-scale food preparation and consumption likely were undertaken across the region. In all cases, feasting was a corporate, but local, phenomenon. These features accentuate the confluence of people, place, history, and corporate social practices so characteristic of community identity in Mesoamerica (Monaghan 1995; Watanabe 1992; Wells, Chapter 2; Yaeger and Canuto 2000).

TERMINAL FORMATIVE PERIOD COMMUNITIES

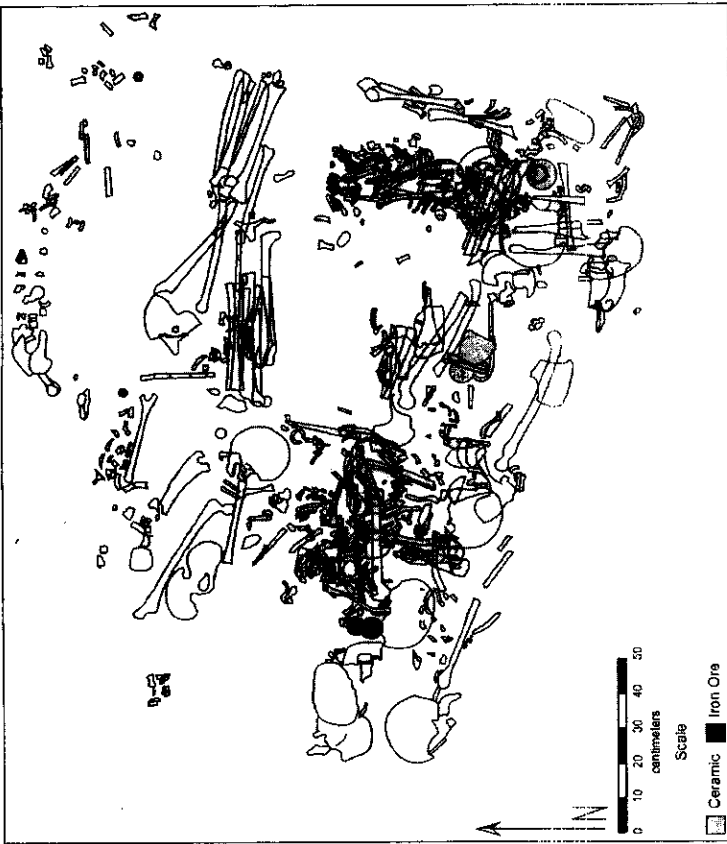
Feasting and mortuary ritual continued into the Terminal Formative, demonstrating the continued significance of local community identity. Increasing status inequality was nevertheless present, as evidenced by mortuary offerings, caches, domestic architecture, and monumental architecture. A series of features from a community ritual structure (Substructure 1) at the 10 ha site of Yugüe included food preparation areas, middens, several caches, and a late Terminal Formative (A.D. 100–250) community cemetery. This cemetery contained the remains of at least forty individuals in an excavated area of less than 7 m². Only three adults were fully articulated; others had clearly been disturbed by the placement of later burials (Barber 2005).³ As with the Cerro de la Cruz cemetery (A. Joyce 1991a, 1991b, 1994), the



8.2. Topographic map of the Yugüe platform mound.

evidence strongly indicates ongoing interment over a period of time rather than a single mass burial event. Beyond these particulars, however, the late Terminal Formative cemetery at Yugüe manifests several significant changes over the earlier pattern. Individuals of both sexes and all ages, from neonate to elderly adult, were represented in the Yugüe cemetery. More importantly, a number of mortuary offerings were present within the cemetery in association with both adults and juveniles.

Although most of the offerings were relatively modest — ceramic vessels and a few greenstone or shell beads — one individual was interred with two particularly unique and valuable items. A late adolescent male, aged 17 to 19 (A. Mayes, personal communication, 2005), B14-I16, was interred wearing an iron-ore pectoral and holding an elaborately incised bone flute in his left hand (Figure 8.3). The pectoral consisted of a single piece of polished iron ore, probably hematite (R. Mueller, personal communication, 2005), that was approximately 6.5 cm in diameter. The iron ore disk had been attached to an unpainted plaster backing. The flute was an end-blown aerophone



8.3. Late Terminal Formative cemetery at Yugüe.

carved from the left femur of a deer. The interior of the bone's shaft had been hollowed out to allow for the passage of air from the distal to the proximal end of the bone. The entire exterior surface of the bone was incised to depict a skeletal male in profile speaking or exhaling toward the bell of the instrument (Barber et al. n.d.). The Yugüe flute is the only object of its kind in Terminal Formative Mesoamerica and is the most elaborate example of Pre-Columbian portable art from the lower Verde region.

Based on several lines of evidence, we believe B14-I16 represents the interment of a high-status individual. In a regional burial sample that now numbers in the hundreds, the offerings from B14-I16 are by far the most elaborate. In addition, iron ore mirrors symbolized leadership and elite status across Mesoamerica for most of the Pre-Columbian period (Coe 1972; Miller and Martin 2004; Saunders 1988; Schele and Miller 1986). The lack of an iron ore source in the lower Verde region, combined with the extreme scarcity of plaster, suggests that the pectoral was imported to the region as

a finished object (Barber 2005). The mirror thus indicates that B14-I16 had links to the long-distance exchange networks so important to Mesoamerican elites. Beyond grave offerings, the individual represented in B14-I16 may have been up to 1.83 m tall (A. Mayes, personal communication, 2005). Although stature estimates are not available for the Terminal Formative population in the lower Verde, average male height was closer to 1.6 m in several published studies of Pre-Columbian Mesoamerican populations (Haviland 1967; Newman 1963; Wilkinson and Norelli 1981).

The intense and repetitive use of community ceremonial space at Yugüe is mirrored by finds at San Francisco de Arriba, where Andrew Workinger (2002:185-214) recovered five late Terminal Formative ritual deposits interred at the summit of that site's largest public building (Substructure 1-2). Like Substructure 1 at Yugüe, Substructure 1-2 was remodeled several times and caches were associated with several different iterations of the building. Most of the offerings consisted of coarsely made ceramic vases and jars similar to contemporary offering vessels from Yugüe (Barber 2005; Workinger 2002). The most elaborate offering, Cache 99F-F36, contained objects that could clearly be identified as socially valued goods. This offering contained 356 greenstone beads, 27 rock crystal beads, 109 beads of an unidentified stone, 2 greenstone bird-head pendants, 2 rock crystal pendants, fragments of iron ore, 9 locally produced miniature gray ware jars, and disarticulated animal bone. This offering contained the largest excavated aggregation of greenstone beads for the entire Pre-Columbian period in the region.

The archaeological materials from Yugüe and San Francisco de Arriba demonstrate the persistence of local community identities during the Terminal Formative polity. The repetitive and ongoing nature of burials and caches reveals a long history of activities designed to focus "memory and practice within a particular spatial framework. . . . Their presence informs a locale with meaning" (Hendon 2000:47). Both Substructure 1 at Yugüe and Substructure 1-2 at San Francisco de Arriba were locales with local meaning. In the case of Substructure 1 at Yugüe, the presence of several generations of community dead would have served to "fuse local affinities and generational continuity to the very landscape itself" (Watanabe 1990:139). The corporate "body" of Yugüe inhabited Substructure 1, and the activities undertaken there would have referenced community history while reaffirming community affiliation in the present. The socially valued goods from Yugüe and San Francisco de Arriba indicate that community encompassed both horizontal and vertical social relations. The importance of the local community is perhaps best expressed by the individual represented in B14-I16, who retained possession of several socially valued objects in death but was interred in a corporate setting. This individual, although obviously of high status, was defined as a community member in death.

MONUMENTAL CONSTRUCTION AND THE REGIONAL POLITY

Although supra-community political organization probably existed by the Late Formative in the form of modest subregional political entities, the scale of political authority and status inequality expanded dramatically in the Terminal Formative. The development of regionally centralized political authority would have created new demands on the valley's populace and incorporated people in larger-scale social formations. We suggest that a social identity tied to regional political authority may have been defined in a manner similar to that of local communities: as a quasi-egalitarian collectivity based on shared associations with socially meaningful places. We do not mean to suggest that we envision a polity lacking in political or social hierarchy. Instead, drawing on Richard Blanton's (1998) work, we argue that there were real and perceived restrictions on the development of exclusive and individualized authority. The distinctions between elite and commoner, ruler and ruled, were not emphasized in public action (e.g., Wells, Chapter 2).

The Terminal Formative is characterized by monumental construction throughout the region. Like the ceremonial structures of the Late Formative, monumental structures were socially meaningful places that linked collectivities to the landscape. Most, if not all, of these building projects would have required mobilization of labor beyond the local community. The largest monumental project, the construction of the Río Viejo acropolis, would have entailed enormous labor investment over a number of years. Taken together, Terminal Formative monuments represent a regional program of place-making that sometimes overlapped with—and sometimes superseded—locally constituted places.

The socially meaningful places created in the Terminal Formative differed considerably from the relatively modest community structures of the Late Formative. There are perhaps three confirmed Late Formative structures in the lower Río Verde Valley that could be considered monumental: Platform 1 at San Francisco de Arriba, Mound 9-Structure 4 at Río Viejo, and a mound at Charco Redondo (Gillespie 1987; A. Joyce 1991a, 1999a; Workinger 2002). Platform 1 at San Francisco de Arriba is the largest of these to have been excavated (Workinger 2002). In its final iteration, Platform 1 was 100 m² in area. During the Late Formative, more than 5 m of fill had been set into place during several construction episodes. The largest, single construction episode included the placement of up to 1 m of rubble fill. Platform 1 supported three substructures, at least two of which had Late Formative components. Workinger (2002:190–192) believes that one substructure supported an elite residence and another, a public building.

In contrast, monumental construction has been documented for at least eight sites on the floodplain and two in the foothills during the Terminal

Formative (Barber 2005; A. Joyce 1991a, 1999a, 2005, 2006; Workinger 2002). The only attribute shared by Terminal Formative monuments was their large size. In all other aspects these structures manifest a remarkable diversity, varying in construction technique and material, shape, height, and post-construction use. Monumental constructions at most of these sites consisted of huge solitary earthen mounds that supported both domestic and ceremonial structures. The earthen platform at Yügüe exemplifies these "mixed-use" monuments. The Yügüe platform was built immediately above Late Formative occupation at the site. In its final iteration, the platform measured approximately 300 m by 200 m at its base and rose to a height of at least 10 m above the floodplain (Barber 2003, 2005; A. Joyce 1999a). Total volume for the platform is estimated at between 94,000 and 100,000 m³, depending on the height and shape of underlying bedrock (M. Levine, personal communication, 2004).⁴ Except for two ceremonial structures at the summit of the platform, the entire mound appears to have been used for residential architecture. Another monumental, mixed-use or ceremonial platform was built during the early Terminal Formative at the regional center of Río Viejo. The early Terminal Formative component of Mound 9-Structure 4 was a low, rectangular platform about 200 m by 125 m that rose approximately 7.5 m above the floodplain (A. Joyce 1991a, 1999b). Because it has not been completely sampled, the Terminal Formative extent of Structure 4 is unclear. Stratigraphic testing, however, has shown that Structure 4, like the Yügüe platform, was built directly above Late Formative occupation at the site.

Terminal Formative monumental architecture also included the ceremonial acropoli common to many areas of Mesoamerica at this time (A. Joyce 2004; Sharer 1994; Sugiyama 1993). In the lower Verde, these formal ceremonial spaces incorporated open plazas, high mounds supporting superstructures of ceremonial use, and elite residential architecture (Barber 2005; A. Joyce n.d., 1991a, 1999a, 2003, 2005, 2006; A. Joyce, Bustamente et al. 2001; Levine et al. 2004; Workinger 2002). Terminal Formative acropoli of this kind are documented for three sites in the lower Verde. The largest and most elaborate in the region was the Río Viejo acropolis (Mound 1) that was built in the late Terminal Formative.⁵ Mound 1 was a 5 m-high platform approximately 350 m by 200 m in area; it supported two 15 m-high substructures, five smaller structures, a plaza, and a sunken patio. The total volume for Mound 1 is nearly 400,000 m³, making it one of the largest Precolumbian structures in Oaxaca (Levine et al. 2004). Because the entire acropolis has not yet been sampled, it is unclear what proportion of Mound 1 was built in the Terminal Formative, but excavations have shown that at least the eastern substructure of the acropolis (Mound 1-Structure 2) was built in the late Terminal Formative.

When complete, Mound 1-Structure 2 at Río Viejo would have been a stepped platform supporting at least one adobe superstructure (A. Joyce n.d., 2003, 2005). Arthur Joyce's excavations at the summit of Structure 2 revealed poorly preserved wall segments made of hard-fired adobe blocks. Fragments of faced stucco and a painted adobe block were found in association with the walls (A. Joyce 2006; Levine et al. 2004). The stucco represents the only known use of this material for architectural purposes during the entire Pre-Columbian period in the lower Verde; however, the location, architectural elaboration, and lack of domestic debris indicate that the superstructure was a public building (A. Joyce 2006). Like Substructure 1 at Yugie and Structure 1-2 at San Francisco de Arriba, the summit of Mound 1-Structure 2 at Río Viejo was probably a site of ritual practices.

Mound 1-Structure 2 was not only the largest architectural undertaking of the Terminal Formative, but it was also the most elaborately engineered. Stratigraphic evidence and micromorphology reveal that Structure 2 was built using a mix of large, unfired adobe blocks, a mortar-like fill, and undifferentiated fill (A. Joyce 2006; Levine et al. 2004). The adobe blocks were produced by pouring clay and silt slurry into a mold. Once dry, blocks were placed into a silty and calcareous mortar-like fill that bound the blocks together. Excavators were able to identify at least four distinct construction units within which block size, composition, and color were consistent and among which these characteristics differed.

Structure 2, and any associated portions of Mound 1, most likely would have required the mobilization of labor at a regional level. If labor was provided annually during the two months at the height of the dry season when the agricultural cycle was at its ebb, it would have taken 5,000 people nearly six years to complete (Levine et al. 2004).⁶ Marc Levine and colleagues (2004) have also hypothesized that the lack of standardization among the block and mortar construction units indicates the involvement of multiple work parties, reaffirming the likelihood that labor was mobilized at a large scale. Furthermore, the block and mortar construction technique was particularly time-consuming. Other monumental constructions from the Terminal Formative were built using undifferentiated fill set behind clay or stone retaining walls (Barber 2005; Gillespie 1987; A. Joyce 1991a; Workinger 2002) or, rarely, rubble (Barber 2005; Workinger 2002:171). Considerable care and additional labor went into the construction of Mound 1 compared with other mounds in the region.

Constructing monumental architecture would have constituted meaningful social groups in a number of ways. The practice of construction is inherently corporate. It brought together people at local, subregional, and even regional scales to perform coordinated action (Bernardini 2004; Davis-Salazar, Chapter 7; Hodder 1994; A. Joyce n.d., 2004, 2006; Pauketat and

Alt 2003; Pauketat and Emerson 1999). Once built, monumental architecture also represented "visually omnipresent and stable points of reference" (R. Joyce 2004:23; see also R. Joyce and Hendon 2000). The act of construction was embodied in the finished product and in a highly permanent manner given that these monuments have endured for 2,000 years or more. Thus, the collectivities involved in constructing monuments achieved material permanence. Further, collectivities materialized in this way would have been re-created through subsequent use and renovation of monumental spaces (e.g., Dillehay 2004; A. Joyce n.d., 2006; Pauketat 2000; Pauketat and Alt 2003). The dramatic public ceremonies organized and led by nobles in ceremonial precincts would have created powerful psychological forces that bound people together at a regional level, tying commoners to the rulers and symbols of political authority. Monumentality was certainly an aspect of place-making in the Terminal Formative.

DISCUSSION

At both the local and regional levels, public social practices during the Terminal Formative polity consistently materialized social relations as corporate and "egalitarian." Drawing on the historical relevance of the local community, Terminal Formative people constituted identities that stressed shared local histories and places while de-emphasizing status inequality. If we view social relations as the outcome and source of human action (e.g., Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1979), then the diurnity of a corporate ethos during the Terminal Formative polity must be viewed as the result of knowledgeable actors defining and re-creating the conditions of their existence. Terminal Formative definitions of both local and regional identities thus did not result from the inevitable unfolding of history but rather existed as the informed — albeit imperfectly — decisions and actions through which people created their social worlds. In the changing social climate of political centralization, all people would have adapted shared understandings of social relations to redefine their lived experiences and incorporate changing circumstances (Sahlins 1985).

As we discussed previously, these circumstances included increased status inequality and larger-scale political formations. Local elites probably were involved increasingly in external social, political, and economic networks. These new, external opportunities to create or augment status may have drawn elites away from local communities. Participation in such networks would have engaged elites in social interactions that excluded commoners and defined an elite identity that transcended the local community and even the regional polity (A. Joyce 1996). External networks would have included regional political authority. Elites may have participated in

regional political formations to a greater extent than commoners, since status and political authority were often linked in ancient complex societies (see, e.g., Chase and Chase 1992). As the labor demands of monument construction at Río Viejo demonstrate, however, commoners also participated in social networks created through regional political authority. Regional political formations would have strained local social networks by drawing in community members unevenly; involvement would have varied based on age, gender, kinship ties, and so on. Increased status inequality and regional political authority created a variety of new opportunities, demands, and problems with which *all* local community members would have engaged.⁷ They would have done so, and indeed could only have done so, through preexisting notions of the world (Sahlins 1985:145). Ritual economy was central to this process. In the examples discussed here, status inequality and regional authority were transformed into expressions of a traditional corporate ethos through the consumption of socially valued goods in interred offerings and the construction of monumental architecture.

The interred offerings of Yugüe and San Francisco de Arriba demonstrate how status inequality was incorporated into and became a central element of local community identities. The contents of B14-I16 from Yugüe and Cache 99F-F36 at San Francisco de Arriba included "socially valued goods" (Spielmann 2002). These objects were made from imported raw materials, required special knowledge to produce, and were of particular beauty or rarity. Objects with such characteristics were exchanged through elite-dominated long-distance exchange networks and were central to the development and maintenance of status inequality in Precolumbian Mesoamerica by at least the Middle Formative period (1200–400 B.C.; e.g., Davis-Salazar, Chapter 7; Grove and Gillespie 1992; Hirth 1984). Distance and raw material were only part of what infused such objects with value. Precolumbian and ethnohistoric evidence suggests that social valuables, particularly greenstone, were perceived as embodying the beauty and purity of elites (Houston and Taube 2000; Taube 2004). Precolumbian Mesoamerican social valuables were innately high status.

The consumption of socially valued goods in community ritual transformed these objects from preciosities creating and demonstrating high status into "inalienable objects" (Hendon 2000; Mills 2004) that materialized corporate identities. Both B14-I16 and Cache 99F-F36 were interred in locations of repetitive use in the Terminal Formative. The location of the valued objects in these deposits therefore was remembered and referenced in subsequent activity. In the case of B9-I9, special care was taken to preserve the integrity of this individual's remains. At least six burials were placed above and around B14-I16, but this individual was not disturbed or disarticulated by later activity. Only two other individuals of the forty plus that

were buried in the cemetery were left equally undisturbed. Cache 99F-F36 was also situated in an area that saw subsequent offerings. A cache of thirty-two vessels was placed above and around Cache 99F-F36 but did not disturb the earlier cache (Workinger 2002). Julia Hendon (2000:49) observes that "this sort of religiously charged storage does remove [valued objects] from exchange . . . [but] not out of circulation, they are inalienable." Referenced in ensuing community ritual, B14-I16 and 99F-F36 became objects of local, *collective* memory that transcended status groupings (see Connerton 1989; Hendon 2000; R. Joyce 2003; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003). The intersection of socially valued goods with ritual converted status inequality from a potentially divisive phenomenon into a fundamental element of local corporate social relations. Elites became pivotal community members, because they provided the valuable objects through which collective pasts were generated and commemorated.

Regional political authority was materialized in reference to local community identity through the creation of socially significant places. Building ceremonial centers like the Río Viejo acropolis with voluntary labor would have materialized corporate action as well as political authority. The Río Viejo acropolis may have represented a scaled-up version of the socially meaningful places referenced and employed in the creation and maintenance of local community identities. A number of local communities, including Yugüe and San Francisco de Arriba, were materialized, in part, through monumental architecture in the Terminal Formative. The mixed-use mounds at Yugüe and early Terminal Formative Río Viejo fixed local communities on the landscape and provided an impressive focus for corporate relations.

The Río Viejo acropolis would have afforded a similar focus but for a regional social group. Collective experience at Río Viejo, beginning with construction and extending through the use-life of Structure 2, was materialized through monumentality. Monumental architecture embedded regional political authority in place, creating a permanent and highly visible focus for collectivities tied to that authority. In the ritualized context of monument construction, labor became a practice of affiliation that connected regional populations with the physically and morally preeminent forces of regional political authority. Political authority thus was materialized as scaled-up community.

CONCLUSIONS

As elements of ritual economy, consumption of preciosities and monument construction materialized more than high status and regional authority. They were also acts that constituted social relations in terms of preexisting notions of corporate identity. We suggest that the persistence of the central

tenets of local community identity indicates ongoing negotiation during the Terminal Formative polity. Elites at Río Viejo, affiliated with centralized political authority, may have struggled to engage followers in the practices of regional political formations. In so doing, they would have drawn both local elites and commoners away from traditional sites of social interaction. Río Viejo elites may have leveraged a priori notions of community identity to legitimize such a shift by materializing the polity as a scaled-up community (see Kus and Raharijaona 2000; Pauketat and Alt 2003). Local elites were involved in supra-community social networks tied to status and regional political authority. Both processes were inimical to traditional local social relations. By drawing on the very practices that had traditionally defined community identity, local elites may have naturalized their elevated status as a fundamental element of that local identity. In addition, by emphasizing their importance in communities, local elites may have sought to retain political authority independent of the regional polity.

We believe that the persistence of community identities was more than elites' savvy manipulation of tradition to obfuscate inequality and hierarchy. There was certainly an ideological (in the Marxist sense) component to Terminal Formative ritual economy, whereby elites sought to create consensus by drawing on deep-seated concepts of the social order to naturalize their elevated social position. We suggest, however, that commoners also worked to restrain and channel elite practice (see also Kovacevich, Chapter 3). Action is never unconstrained (Giddens 1979), and commoner action would have shaped Terminal Formative status and authority. Even more important, shared understandings of community identity were not simply tools exploited to further political and economic ends. As Anthony Cohen (2000:5, emphasis original) observes, we must acknowledge "the commitment made by individuals and . . . groups to views of themselves which . . . they do *not* regard as 'negotiable.'" Most Terminal Formative communities — including Río Viejo, Yügüe, and San Francisco de Arriba — had been occupied for several hundred years prior to the development of the regional polity. Terminal Formative local identities had a deep historical basis that almost certainly was recognized and shared by all people, regardless of status.

Ironically, the active maintenance of local community identities may have undermined regional stability in the long term. The late Terminal Formative ended with a sudden and radical decentralization of the lower Verde's regional polity. Many Formative period sites, including Yügüe, were completely abandoned. The Río Viejo acropolis fell into disuse, and the ceremonial building at the summit of Structure 2 was burned (whether intentionally is unclear). The practice of communal burial was discontinued, and the construction of major architectural monuments largely ended.

The notion of ritual economy, which emphasizes the materialization of meaning through economic action, has enabled us to address the dynamic and negotiated nature of political centralization. We have shown that consumption and production were part of ongoing interactions in the lower Verde from which both local and regional social groups emerged. The Terminal Formative polity, like all ancient polities, must be considered a process that was produced and reproduced through the actions of its people. Rather than viewing polities as static and bounded, archaeologists should bear in mind the diverse interests and dispositions that people brought to bear when creating and transforming the complex political formations of Precolumbian Mesoamerica.

NOTES

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1. Following Richard Blanton (1998:151), we see "egalitarian" social relations in the lower Verde polity as "any behavior that aims to establish and uphold restriction on the exercise of exclusionary power."

2. Late Formative Río Viejo actually consisted of three small, disarticulated sites. The largest of these was 20 ha; the others were 4 ha and 1 ha.

3. The three articulated individuals were all adults. Two were female: one aged 20 to 25, the other 35 to 40. Neither individual had grave offerings or dental deformation that indicated they might have been of high status. The elder female may have been buried with the third articulated individual, the young male with elaborate grave goods discussed in the text.

4. The Yügüe mound was built over a low outcropping of bedrock, as evidenced by several large boulders emerging from the flanks of the mound. Based on evidence from wells and archaeological excavation, the depth of fill varies considerably across the mound. The topography of the underlying bedrock is not well understood at this time, making it difficult to ascertain how much of the mound core is fill and how much is bedrock.

5. The possibility exists that an early Terminal Formative structure was subsumed by the very large late Terminal Formative architecture at Río Viejo's

acropolis. Excavations have not penetrated the deepest sections of the acropolis; however, there were few redeposited early Terminal Formative sherds in excavated contexts at the acropolis, suggesting to us that there was no substantial occupation in this area of the site until the late Terminal Formative.

6. This estimate assumes that the entire acropolis was built during the late Terminal Formative using the construction techniques employed on Structure 2.

7. Although neither of these phenomena was new since modest status inequality and supra-local political authority existed prior to the Terminal Formative period, their scale increased exponentially after 150 B.C.

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MATERIAL DIMENSIONS OF AZTEC RELIGION AND RITUAL

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And the array [of *Teteo innan*] was as follows: there was liquid rubber on her lips . . . she had cotton flowers. . . . She had a ball with palm strips. She had a shell-covered skirt, called a star-skirt. . . . Eagle feathers were strewn over her shift. . . . Her golden shield was perforated in the center. She carried a bird foot. . . . She carried a broom. (Sahagún 1950-1982, 1:16; Figure 9.1)

The high priest, in full dress for the rite, then came forth with tall feathers in his headdress, his arms covered with golden bands from which hung large, shining green and blue feathers. Carrying in his hand the great knife of black [obsidian] . . . he went to be seated in a place especially arranged for him. (Durán 1994:171)

Amongst these temples there is one . . . whose great size and magnificence no human tongue can describe . . . all round inside this wall there are very elegant quarters with very large rooms and corridors where their priests live . . . all the stonework inside the chapels where they keep their idols is in high relief, with figures and little houses, and the woodwork is likewise of relief and painted with monsters and other figures and designs. (Cortés 1986:105-106)

These little snippets, taken from various codices, point to an impressive economic investment in ritual on the part of the Postclassic peoples of central Mexico. Indeed, as recorded in the early sixteenth century, religious ceremonies in the Aztec (or Triple Alliance) domain were flamboyant

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