Ensoulment, Entrapment, and Political Centralization

A Comparative Study of Religion and Politics in Later Formative Oaxaca

by Arthur A. Joyce and Sarah B. Barber

In this article, we examine the interplay of religion and politics during the later Formative period of Mesoamerica through a comparison of two regions of southern Mexico: the lower Río Verde Valley and the Valley of Oaxaca. Archaeological evidence shows that these regions had dramatically different later Formative histories. In the lower Verde, we find that religion constrained changes that could have stabilized political centralization. A crucial aspect limiting the creation of multicommunity authority and identities was the physical entrapment of the bones of ancestors, offerings, and divine beings within public buildings in local communities. In contrast, in the Valley of Oaxaca, we find that religion fostered developments that would eventually give rise to a politically centralized polity, with its seat of government at the hilltop city of Monte Albán. Both regions show that religion was not necessarily a unifying factor in social change, as has often been assumed, but instead could be a crucible of tension and conflict through which political innovations were produced. This comparative study leads us to considerations of broader historical factors that contribute to understandings of when religion can be constraining or enabling of political change.

Archaeological research in Mesoamerica has typically examined religion as a mechanism for the integration of complex societies and the legitimation of political hierarchies. Integration and legitimation are often viewed as necessary elements of general cultural evolutionary processes that result in increased hierarchy and a greater scale of political control. The role of religion in these scenarios is secondary to what are considered ultimate causal factors driving the evolution of social complexity, such as warfare (e.g., Carneiro 1970; Spencer 2010), the control of key resources (e.g., Lucero 2006), and the obligations and influence gained by status-seeking aggrandizers (e.g., Clark and Blake 1994). An emphasis on the great tradition of elite religion has also limited consideration of the ways that political authority was negotiated and contested among diverse constituencies via religious idioms (Lohse 2007; McAnany 1995). Only recently

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have archaeologists begun to investigate the religious beliefs and practices of nonelites and to recognize religion as a social field through which power was negotiated and societies were transformed (e.g., Barber and Joyce 2007; Joyce 2000; McAnany 1995; Yaeger 2003; but see Coe 1981).

In this article, we use an approach based on theories of power, practice, and materiality to address the interplay of religion and politics during the later Formative period (700 BCE–250 CE) through a comparison of two regions in Oaxaca, Mexico: the lower Río Verde Valley on the Pacific coast and the highland Valley of Oaxaca (fig. 1; see also figs. A1–A28 in CA+ online supplement A). We argue that in both regions, religious belief, practice, and the material items and settings in which religion was enacted were crucial to the political changes of the period. Yet our two regions had dramatically divergent later Formative histories that point to different outcomes in relations between religion and political change. In the lower Verde, religion constrained political centralization. In contrast, in the Valley of Oaxaca, we find that religion fostered social changes that would eventually give rise to a centralized polity, with its political seat at the city of Monte Albán. Both regions also show that religion was not necessarily a unifying factor in social change, as has often been assumed, but instead could be a crucible of tension and conflict from which political innovations were derived.
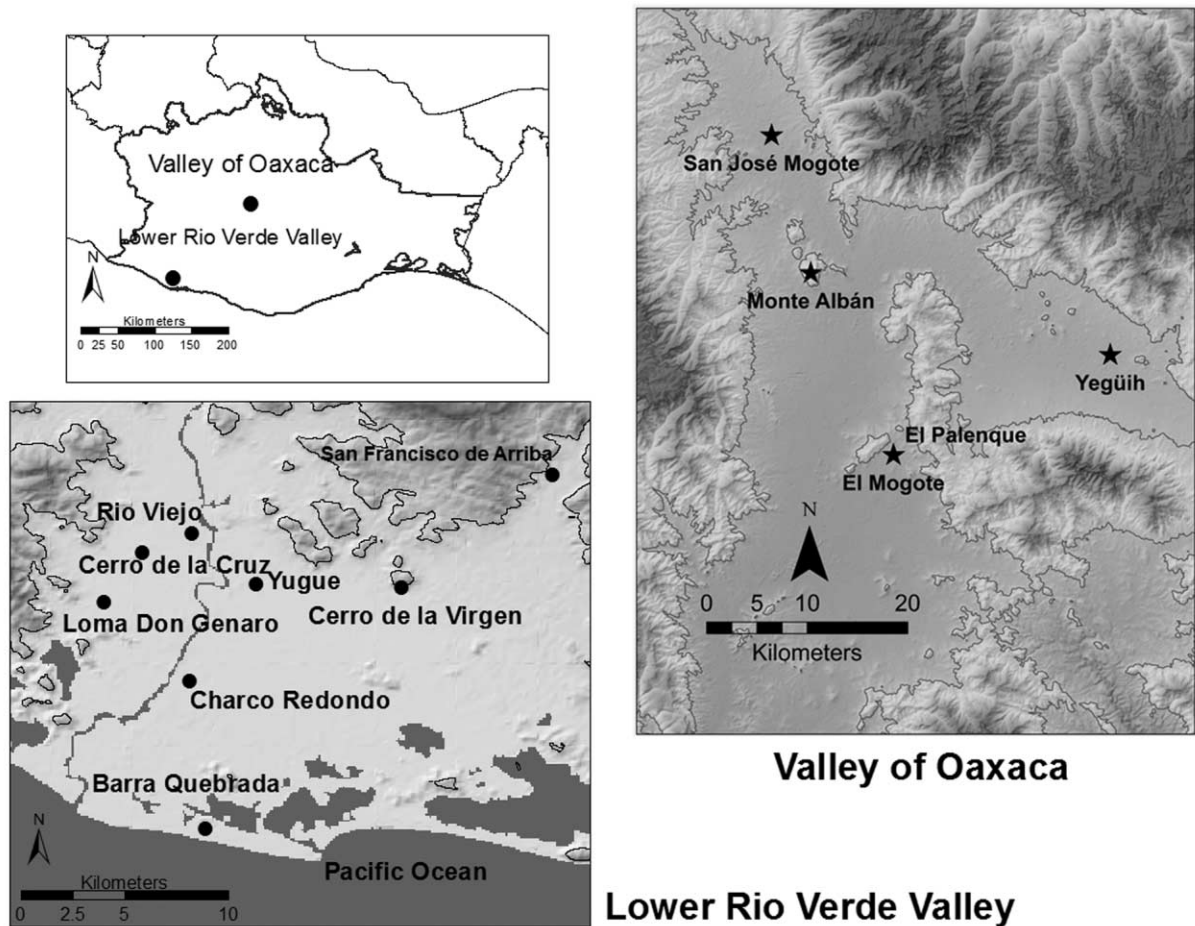
Figure 1. Map of the lower Río Verde Valley and the Valley of Oaxaca showing sites mentioned in the text. Drawing by Sarah Barber.

Although our focus is on religion and political organization, we consider the ways in which these factors were enmeshed with a broader array of social, economic, material, and ideological conditions. This comparative study leads us to considerations of broader historical factors that contribute to understandings of when religion can be constraining or enabling of political change. We begin our examination of later Formative Oaxaca through a discussion of the theoretical perspective through which we approach religion and politics.

Theorizing Religion and Politics

Our focus is on the involvement of religion in political change, but we take a more dynamic view of political processes consistent with the theories of power, practice, and materiality on which we draw (e.g., Giddens 1984; Hodder 2012; Olsen 2010; Pauketat 2012). Rather than treating religion as a set of social and material relations that arise to stabilize developing political hierarchies, we view religion as

a fundamental component of the complex negotiations—simultaneously social, material, and spiritual—from which early centralized polities developed (e.g., Barber, Workinger, and Joyce 2014; Joyce 2000). We define political centralization as the concentration of political authority in a set of ruling institutions that typically operate from one or a small number of urban or suburban settlements, usually referred to as political centers. In addition, centralization involves expansion in the scale and scope of political authority, as ruling institutions gain decision-making capacities over broad regions, large populations, and formerly locally administered social phenomena. Such expansion generated large-scale social identities through which people in multiple communities acknowledged shared social, economic, and political relationships. Participation in political relations, however, would have differed substantially among polity members.

Although our approach acknowledges the importance of religion in social change, we agree with many scholars that religion is a difficult concept to define (e.g., Fogelin 2007; Fowles 2013; Insoll 2004:6–7). We reject universal defini-

tions, instead asserting that religion must be addressed in particular historical and cultural settings. In prehispanic and early Colonial period Mesoamerica, religion involved a series of sacred propositions that delineated the relationship between people and the other-than-human and divine world of deities and ancestors (e.g., López Austin 1989; Sahagún 1950–1982). Yet religious belief, experience, and practice were enmeshed with most aspects of daily life, including agriculture (Monaghan 1990), trade and exchange (Foias 2007), domesticity (Plunket 2002), rubbish disposal (Hutson and Stanton 2007), politics (Joyce 2000), and identity (Hendon 2000). This entanglement of religion with other dimensions of social and material life can be linked to the relational ontologies of Native Americans (Viveiros de Castro 2004; Zedeño 2009), which blur the boundaries between the natural, cultural, material, and divine worlds in ways that contrast significantly from modern, Western worldviews. Therefore, we cannot effectively address prehispanic religion without considering the entangled and often diffuse networks of religious belief and practice as well as the places and things that both carried sacred meanings and were fundamental to religious practice.

In contrast to many archaeologists who dichotomize religion as either belief or ritual action (Fogelin 2007), we view religious belief, practice, and the material settings in which religion was enacted as inseparable (e.g., Bell 1992; Insoll 2004; Keane 2007; Pauketat 2012). Because religion was embedded within broader cultural logics in ancient Mesoamerica, belief informed and shaped action (Hutson and Stanton 2007). Religion must, therefore, be considered through networks of belief, practice, and the places and things that both carried and generated sacred meanings. Fortunately, Mesoamerica has a rich corpus of prehispanic texts and early colonial documents, most of which focus on aspects of political history and religion (e.g., Jansen and Pérez 2007; Sahagún 1950–1982). These documents can be used to develop analogies with which to infer meaning from the archaeological record (Wylie 1985).

Although we are interested in tracing the relationship between religion, identity, and political institutions and authority, we wish to avoid reifying these concepts by detailing their involvement with the material world and human-thing entanglements (Hodder 2012; Latour 2005; Olsen 2010; Pauketat 2012). Material things play an indispensable role in the constitution, stabilization, and transformation of social life and, hence, are inextricably caught up in the kind of political transitions we address here. In ancient Mesoamerica, complex societies were coproduced and given a degree of stability and persistence through the work of many things linked to religion, such as public plazas and buildings, inscribed surfaces, burials, bloodletters, divinities, and musical instruments (e.g., Barber and Olvera Sánchez 2012; Inomata 2006; Joyce 2009; Joyce et al. 1991; Love 1999). While many of these items represented social distinctions and the many institutions that were fundamental to the constitution of society, things
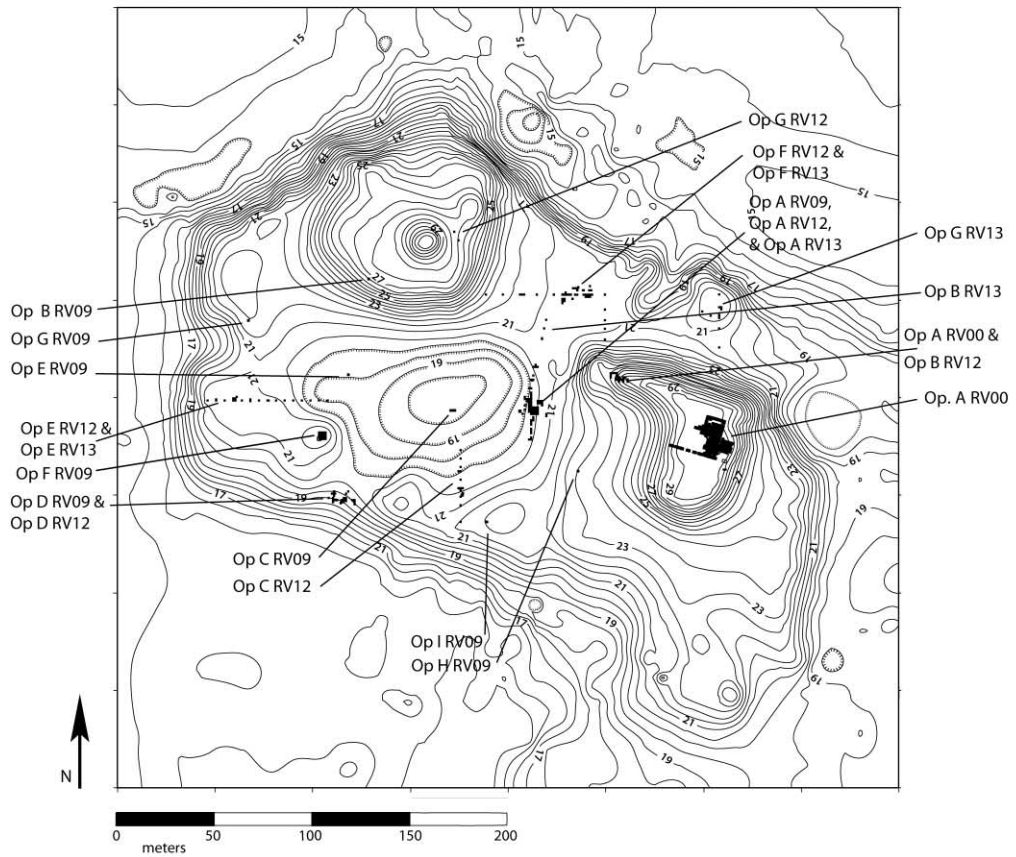
were more than simply reflections of a preexisting social reality. Instead, things coproduced society through their entanglements with people (Latour 2005). It is through such human-material enmeshment that larger-scale social identities defining ancient polities came to be, along with changes in the political institutions and authority structures that resulted in political centralization.

By terms like entanglement, enmeshment, assemblage, and network, we mean that social life derives from enabling and constraining relations among people and things (e.g., Hodder 2012; Latour 2005; Olsen 2010). In certain instances, people and things become so tightly intertwined that the possibilities for social change are severely limited unless there is a dramatic unraveling of these relations: a condition that Hodder (2012:103–104) terms entrapment. In contrast, entanglements can also foster creativity and innovation because things have spatial and temporal properties that make them unpredictable and unstable. Rather than assuming that early polities were highly integrated political formations, we explore how assemblages through which political authority and power were constituted may have been multiple, overlapping, and potentially in conflict. We begin by considering the development and collapse of an incipient regional polity in the lower Río Verde Valley on Oaxaca's Pacific coastal lowlands.

Río Viejo: Religion and the Entrapment of Political Authority

The lower Río Verde Valley consists of a broad coastal plain and surrounding piedmont where the Verde River meets the Pacific. By at least the Late Formative period (400–150 BCE), public buildings were central to the constitution of communities in the region (Joyce, Winter, and Mueller 1998). Communal practices associated with public buildings, including ritual feasting, cemetery burial, and collective labor projects, defined local groups consisting of multiple households and perhaps entire communities. The evidence for communal rituals and labor projects and the lack of indications of a strong social hierarchy suggests that authority was distributed and corporate and that local communities were an important modality of social identity at this time (Joyce 2010:181–186).

Political developments culminated during the Terminal Formative (150 BCE–250 CE) with the emergence of an urban center at Río Viejo that reached 225 ha (Joyce 2010:186–195, 2013). Increased inequality is evident in mortuary offerings, domestic architecture, ceremonial caches, and monumental buildings (Barber 2013; Joyce 2010:186–195; Joyce, Levine, and Barber 2013). During the Terminal Formative, collective labor projects and public rituals continued to be a focus of social identity (Barber, Workinger, and Joyce 2014). Monumental buildings were constructed at Río Viejo and at least nine other sites. The most impressive public building was the acropolis at Río Viejo (fig. 2), which was one of the largest

Op G RV12

Op F RV12 &
Op F RV13

Op A RV09,
Op A RV12,
& Op A RV13

Op G RV13

Op B RV13

Op A RV00 &
Op B RV12

Op. A RV00

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Op D RV09 &
Op D RV12

Op C RV09

Op C RV12

Op I RV09
Op H RV09

N

0   50   100   150   200
meters

(a)

(b)

Figure 2. Acropolis of Río Viejo: topographic map showing locations of excavations (*a*; after Joyce 2005, fig. 6) and photo (*b*; after Joyce, Winter, and Mueller 1998, lámina 4.5).

buildings ever constructed in prehispanic Oaxaca (Joyce, Levine, and Barber 2013).

At outlying sites such as Cerro de la Virgen, Yugüe, and San Francisco de Arriba, communal ceremonies associated with monumental public buildings and spaces continued and expanded in scale from the Late Formative, including mortuary rituals in cemeteries, feasting, and the ceremonial emplacement of communal offerings. For example, at Yugüe, feasting is indicated by cooking features and nondomestic middens (Barber 2013). Several ritual offerings were sequentially emplaced within a public building at Yugüe (Substructure 1), with the largest consisting of 50 cylindrical vessels (fig. 3a). Communal cemeteries have been excavated in public buildings at Yugüe and Charco Redondo (Barber et al. 2013). At San Francisco de Arriba, people left ritual caches in the fill of different building phases of the site's acropolis (Workinger 2002:185–214). The most impressive cache consisted of nearly 500 beads, mostly made of greenstone, along with greenstone and rock crystal pendants, fragments of iron ore, and locally produced miniature jars. At Cerro de la Virgen, evidence of both feasting and caching ceremonies were associated with the site's public plaza (Joyce et al. 2015). An offering along the northeast edge of the plaza there covered 62 m^2 and included 260 ceramic vessels placed in granite-slab compartments (fig. 3b).

Overall, the evidence from outlying sites in the lower Verde demonstrates that there was significant social and material investment in communal labor projects and ceremonies at public buildings during the Terminal Formative (Barber 2013; Joyce et al. 2015). As early as the Late Formative, if not before, public buildings at sites like Yugüe, San Francisco de Arriba, Cerro de la Virgen, Charco Redondo, and Cerro de la Cruz were focal nodes in entanglements involving communal labor, ritual feasting, ceremonial caches, and the bodies of the dead, through which local communities

(a)   (b)

Figure 3. Terminal Formative–period ritual offerings in public buildings: cache of cylindrical vessels at Yugüe (*a*; after Barber 2005, fig. 6.12) and part of the offering at Cerro de la Virgen showing ceramic vessels and vertical stone slabs (*b*; photo courtesy of Jeff Brzezinski).

were constituted. In order to contextualize these entanglements more fully, in the next section we explore the meaning of the things, people, and ideas that intersected on public buildings through a consideration of prehispanic religion and ontology.

Contextualizing Community through Religion and Ontology

Ancient Mesoamerican peoples, as well as many Native American groups in the present day, embraced a relational ontology that recognized the social and agential potential of human and other-than-human beings (e.g., Barber and Olvera Sánchez 2012; Zedeño 2009). Reality is viewed as an indivisible whole animated with a sacred life force manifested in the form of various deities and natural phenomena. This existential unity means that numerous other-than-human soul-bearing beings were of relevance to human affairs, such as earth, rain, maize, ancestors, mountains, animals, time, and, most importantly for our discussion, buildings.

In the case of Terminal Formative entanglements consisting of public buildings and the people and things assembled with them, another important aspect of indigenous ontologies is that animate beings go through a life cycle (Stross 1998). Like people, important transformations in the lives of many other-than-human animate beings were marked by ritual acts, and this is especially true of buildings (Mock 1998; Stanton, Brown, and Pagliaro 2008). Birth and death rites, usually conceptualized as rituals of ensoulment and termination, respectively, are carried out today in houses by many indigenous Mesoamerican groups, and archaeological evidence demonstrates that similar practices were carried out in the prehispanic past (Greenberg 1981:82–98; Mock 1998; Vogt 1969). Temples were considered Sacred Houses or God Houses in the prehispanic and early colonial period (Terraciano 2001:354) and were often associated with particular deities and divine forces. It is not surprising, therefore, that they were also a locus of rituals of ensoulment and termination often involving the emplacement of objects such as ceramic vessels, greenstone, and mosaic masks (Mock 1998). Another act sometimes associated with animate beings like public buildings is the act of "feeding," or giving sustenance, to maintain the animateness of things (Stross 1998:33). In practice, feeding and ensoulment may not be significantly different in that both contribute to maintaining or reactivating animacy. Monaghan (1995) argues that eating and feeding are fundamental practices through which social relationships are instantiated within the household and the community.

Taking this view of indigenous ontology into account, we argue that many of the communal ceremonies we have documented for the later Formative should be understood from the perspective of religious rituals designed to ensoul and sustain public buildings as animate beings and as community members. In this sense, offerings such as ceramic vessels and their contents acted as index objects (Zedeño 2009) that activated and contributed to the animacy of these buildings.
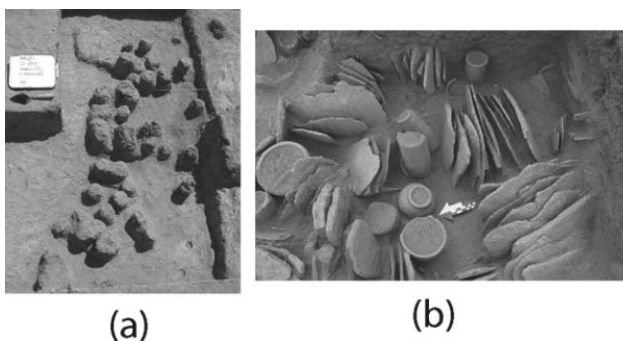
Several of the offerings we have discovered, including the large cache at San Francisco de Arriba, were emplaced during the initial construction or sequential remodeling of public buildings and may be considered the result of acts of ensoulment. Many of the most impressive caches found in public buildings, however, were sequentially emplaced over long periods of time independent of episodes of building remodeling. We interpret these offerings as acts of feeding and nurturing buildings and associated divinities (Barber 2005:215–216).

We view the cemeteries located in public buildings in the region much like the offerings. In the cemeteries at Cerro de la Cruz, Yugüe, and Charco Redondo, the interment of bodies occurred over a period of at least several generations (Barber et al. 2013; Joyce, Winter, and Mueller 1998:65). Indeed, caching and burial share a number of characteristics that have led Mesoamerican archaeologists to see parallels between the two ritual practices (Becker 1992; Hendon 2000). Considered in the context of animate buildings, the interment of the dead in public spaces may represent a sharing or transference of souls between different kinds of community members: the living, the dead, and other-than-human animate spaces. These spaces, therefore, were a kind of "morally charged" receptacle for the things buried there because they embodied and encapsulated the social ties constituting local communities (Hendon 2000:42, 46).

Through collective interment of human bodies and other things, local social relationships were laden with fundamental sacred principles. Acts of interment were also forms of sacrifice through which people negotiated their relationships with divinities and other universal forces. In Mesoamerican creation stories, the current world was the result of a sacred covenant between humans and the divine, often forged through warfare, whereby people petitioned deities for agricultural fertility and prosperity in return for sacrificial offerings (Hamann 2002; Joyce 2000; Monaghan 1990). As argued by Monaghan (1990), death itself was a sacrificial act through which people fed the divine, although it is possible that different forms of death (e.g., ritual killing versus a natural death) may have affected precisely how divinities interacted with the dead. The sacred covenant, therefore, establishes the fundamental relationship between people and the divine and creates relations of debt and merit between humans and the gods. Communal acts of sacrifice like burial and caching were cosmogenic in that they reenacted the cosmic creation and renewed the world.

Religion and the Constitution of Outlying Communities

Taking into account this view of indigenous ontology, we argue that the community in later Formative coastal Oaxaca was not simply a collection of humans but an entanglement of complex hybrid relations that was dependent on living people, ancestors, ensouled buildings, deities, and ceramic vessels, among varied other things. The assemblages of living people and things that constituted and distinguished community came together in public buildings. For example, the construction and use of public buildings created shared connections to a physical place on the landscape, which was viewed by pre-Columbian people as a living, divine being that required sustenance in the form of the dead and other items such as ceramic vessels. The interment of human bodies in public buildings in turn linked these structures to the households and families from which the deceased originated. The interment of locally made pottery linked public buildings to the varied producers and production loci of the vessels, while imported items like greenstone created ties to the people and places from which these things were obtained, some undoubtedly distant, powerful, and sacred. Feasts instantiated community in commensalism, creating bonds and obligations much like modern, indigenous fiestas do in Mesoamerica (Greenberg 1981; Monaghan 1995). In feasting, people shared in the sustenance provided by deities in return for acts of sacrifice as defined in the sacred covenant.

Time and history also came together in public buildings in ways that constituted community. For example, public buildings at Yugüe, Cerro de la Virgen, and San Francisco de Arriba were the product of hundreds of years of collective labor (Barber 2013; Workinger 2002). Even after their completion, public buildings made of earthen architecture required continuous physical maintenance in the face of the elements. Public buildings also required spiritual maintenance in the form of acts of feeding with the bodies of the dead and with offerings. The bones of ancestors and items interred as offerings exposed during subsequent ceremonies indexed collective rituals carried out in the past. These interred materials referenced the history of human devotion to the divine and its importance for renewing community and cosmos. Evidence that interred items were viewed during subsequent ceremonies is clear. All three of the later Formative cemeteries that have been investigated were characterized by frequent instances of later burials disturbing earlier ones (Barber et al. 2013; Joyce, Winter, and Mueller 1998:65), and there is evidence of the disturbance of earlier offerings by later ones in larger, sequential caches, such as those at Cerro de la Virgen, Yugüe, and the acropolis at San Francisco de Arriba (Barber, Workinger, and Joyce 2014; Joyce et al. 2015).

Overall, local communities were instantiated in collective labor projects and religious ceremonies focused on public buildings. Although the focus of community actions surely was not restricted entirely to public settings, we have found little evidence for other practices such as large-scale agricultural systems, regional markets, or craft specialization in supradomestic groups that would have brought communities together. Our evidence also suggests that while the kinds of entanglements that defined communities across the region were generally consistent, variation in building orientations, construction techniques, and types of objects used in caches indicates a pattern of regional idiosyncrasy in the specific

materials and practices through which community identity was constituted (Joyce et al. 2015).

Political Authority, Polity, and the Constraints of Community

Excavations in outlying communities indicate that the authority of local leaders during the Terminal Formative depended in part on specialized religious knowledge, abilities, and implements (Joyce 2010:192–193). For example, the most elaborate burial yet discovered in the region was that of an adolescent male from Yugüe who was interred wearing an iron-ore pectoral and holding an incised flute made from a deer femur (fig. 4). This individual enjoyed better health than others interred in the cemetery, and he did not engage in the kinds of repetitive physical labor that was typical of this population (Mayes and Barber 2008). These data indicate that this individual was likely a local elite and a ritual specialist with the ability to contact divinities and other animate beings (Barber and Olvera Sánchez 2012). A gray-ware vessel fragment from an offering in Substructure 2 at Yugüe depicts a regional variant of the Zapotec Xicani or the Mixtec Yahui, a high-status sacrificial specialist who wears a mask with a long, upturned snout. Evidence that elites had specialized ritual roles also comes from a cache in Structure 1 at Cerro de la Virgen, a small public building reached by a stairway ascending the low hilltop east of the plaza (Joyce et al. 2015), which included a stone mask depicting a rain deity and two miniature stone thrones (fig. 5). A high-status house excavated at Cerro de la Virgen was spatially associated with the site's ceremonial complex (Barber 2013:178–181).

The production of elite bodies, in part through adornment and prestigious objects, at Yugüe and the elaborate architecture and special setting of the high-status house at Cerro de la Virgen demonstrate the increasing visibility of high status among local elites. The interment of prestige goods in communal burials and offerings in public buildings, however, were practices that transformed hierarchy into expressions of traditional communal principles because these valued, animate things became collective resources (Barber, Workinger, and Joyce 2014). Likewise, the interment of elites in community cemeteries upon death simultaneously highlighted their difference from nonelites and their membership in a local collectivity. By obtaining the most powerful items through which communities met their obligations to the divine, local nobles would have become powerful actors within entanglements that constituted community. Nevertheless, it appears to us that political authority and expressions of high status were constrained by their dependence on the obligations of elites to their communities. Although the position of local elites seems to have been enhanced during the Terminal Formative, contradictions and tensions between community and authority were more acute at the regional level.

During the Terminal Formative, the construction of Río Viejo's massive acropolis required labor mobilized from beyond the city, suggesting that the influence of its rulers extended to surrounding settlements. The new ceremonial center consisted of a platform rising at least 6 m above the floodplain and supporting two large substructures (Structures 1 and 2, respectively), both of which stood at least 16 m high. The stratigraphy exposed by the excavations indicates that the acropolis was raised by a small number of massive fill deposits, likely emplaced over a relatively brief period of time (Joyce, Levine, and Barber 2013). The fill deposits revealed unexpectedly diverse and labor-intensive construction techniques, including unconsolidated basket loads of sediment, rammed earth, puddled adobe, and two types of fill utilizing adobe blocks. The variability in fill construction is mirrored in more formal architectural features, especially retaining walls, which were made from both adobe blocks and stone masonry. An adobe retaining wall exposed on the western end of the acropolis contained bricks made from three different clay sources that varied in shape and size and were emplaced both horizontally and vertically. We have found no architectural explanation for the diversity of construction techniques present on the acropolis. Instead, the variability in construction fill and retaining walls suggests to us that there were at least five distinct work groups involved in building the acropolis (e.g., Hastings and Moseley 1975). Although we have found similar construction techniques at public buildings in outlying sites, the diversity of techniques on the acropolis exceeds that of other sites. We argue that this diversity was the result of a labor pool drawn from multiple communities. Our estimated total volume for Mound 1 is 560,050 m³, which is about half the volume of the Sun Pyramid at Teotihuacan. Our conservative estimate of the volume of the Terminal Formative version of the acropolis is 455,050 m³ (Joyce, Levine, and Barber 2013:149–157). Estimates of the considerable labor needed to construct the acropolis indicate that those who organized its construction had at least short-term success in establishing alliances and gaining adherents from communities beyond Río Viejo.

Despite clear evidence for multicommunity labor, there are only limited indications that the power of the assembled humans, buildings, and spaces was sufficient to draw large numbers of people to Río Viejo after the acropolis was built. Despite four major field seasons, including the excavation of transects and block excavations throughout the acropolis (fig. 2), the only ceremonial practices that are clearly visible are those related to ritual feasting (Joyce et al. 2015). Excavations have revealed 10 nondomestic middens and a large earth oven, indicating an increase in the scale of feasting relative to those at public buildings in outlying communities. The two largest middens were found in pits more than 1.5 m deep, and one was more than 4 m in diameter. The size and contents of the middens—including ceramic assemblages, fauna, and macrobotanical remains—suggest that both large-scale and repeated food consumption was taking place on the acropolis and that the feasts were not restricted to the elite
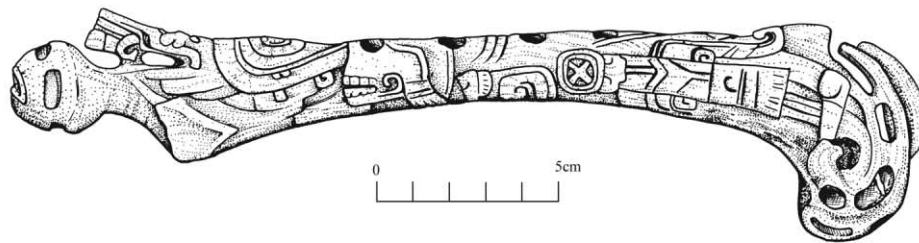
Figure 4. High-status burial from Yugüe: photo of burial (*top*; after Barber 2005, fig. 6.20) and drawing of carved bone flute found with the burial (*bottom*; from Barber and Olvera Sánchez 2012, fig. 6a, © Cambridge University Press, reprinted with permission).

(Lucido 2015). Refuse from the oven covered an area of at least 10 m in diameter and included burned rock and sherds used to retain heat. Despite its large size, it is unlikely that the oven was sufficient to cook all foods used in feasting. The Río Viejo middens also have a disproportionately low number of food preparation vessels compared to a contemporary nondomestic midden from Yugüe. It thus appears that prepared foods were being brought to the acropolis by people attending feasts.

Figure 5. Rain deity mask from an offering at Cerro de la Cruz. Photo courtesy of Jeff Brzezinski.

Ritual feasting would have drawn people away from ceremonial activities in their home communities. The increase in obligations of feast participants at both the local and regional level could have taxed people's abilities to generate surpluses and led to social tensions and conflicts, just as feasting can do in modern Mixtec communities in Oaxaca (Monaghan 1995:167–189).

The lack of human interments and offerings in the acropolis highlights a surprising difference between the acropolis and the public buildings we have examined at other sites. The ceremonial objects and human remains that fed and animated public buildings and that embedded history and community in place elsewhere in the region were not contained on the acropolis. These sacred objects were already entrapped within public buildings in local communities and could not simply be appropriated by the rulers of Río Viejo. The persistence and durability of things like monumental buildings, bones of ancestors, and offerings at outlying sites constrained the ability of the acropolis and its rulers to supersede the local community and become focal nodes in entanglements that could have created a regional polity. Another difference between the acropolis and public buildings at outlying sites is the absence of direct evidence for rulers and nonroyal nobility at Río Viejo's ceremonial center. We have yet to find a noble residence on the acropolis, and there are no stone monuments with the portraits of rulers or elaborate tombs at this time, as have been recorded in other regions of Mesoamerica. We have investigated at least one elaborate and spatially restricted ceremonial space on Structure 2 of the acropolis, access to which presumably indicated a degree of exclusivity and marked status distinctions (Joyce, Levine, and Barber 2013:142–147). Yet there are fewer direct indications of elites on the acropolis than at many of the public buildings we have excavated elsewhere in the region. Instead, we see evidence for regional political authority in the distribution of the population, in the coordination required to underwrite monument construction, and in the sponsorship of large-scale feasts and possibly other rituals on the acropolis.

The evidence from the lower Verde, therefore, suggests to us that religious belief and practice were central to the political changes of the later Formative. At this time, local authority and community identity were constituted through assemblages involving living people, ancestors, ensouled buildings, deities, and ceremonial offerings. By the Terminal Formative, people from different communities in the region participated in the construction and ritual use of the acropolis, and rulers of Río Viejo gained some degree of political influence over multiple communities. At the same time, the sacred and material obligations people had in their local communities to sustain divine beings in the form of public buildings plus their obligations to other people created through ritual feasting together countered incentives to establish ties to regional rulers and places. The acropolis at Río Viejo and the public buildings at outlying sites must have become sites of struggle and negotiation. Points of tension likely surrounded issues such as participation in ritual feasts, the means through which divine and ancestral forces were invoked; the centrality of regional rulers versus local communities in important ceremonies; and the power and in-

fluence of local leaders relative to regional elites. The result of these social tensions surrounding religion, community, and polity was that multicommunity links were impeded to the degree that Terminal Formative Río Viejo challenges the limits of what might be defined as a polity. A crucial aspect constraining the creation of multicommunity authority and identities was the physical entrapment of the bones of ancestors, offerings, and divine beings within public buildings in local communities. The entrapment of these sacred objects rigidly tied networks of people, ritual practices, belief, ancestry, and history to public buildings at local communities.

The collapse of the Río Viejo polity around 250 CE shows that Terminal Formative authority was indeed tenuous and short-lived (Joyce 2010:195–196). The archaeological record from that time indicates a dramatic unraveling of entanglements that were central to polity and community in the later Formative. Río Viejo declined in size, the acropolis was abandoned, construction of monumental buildings ceased, and a period of political fragmentation began.

Monte Albán: Religion as a Catalyst of Political Centralization

The Valley of Oaxaca is the largest highland valley in southern Mexico. Archaeological research shows that by the Late Formative, a centralized polity had emerged there, with its political seat at the city of Monte Albán (Joyce 2010; Marcus and Flannery 1996). As in the lower Verde, religion played an important role in initial political centralization in the Oaxaca Valley. Although public buildings afforded a point of reference through which local and multicommunity affiliations were defined, unlike in the lower Verde, they were also enmeshed in a broader process by which access to the sacred increasingly became mediated by polity rulers.

Religion and Community Prior to the Founding of Monte Albán

The origins of the region's first centralized polity can be traced to developments at the earlier site of San José Mogote. Although San José Mogote was the largest community in the valley during the Early Formative (1800–850 BCE), by the late Middle Formative (700–500 BCE), the site experienced a demographic decline, decreasing in size from 70 to 34 ha (Kowalewski et al. 1989:72–77). A possible cause for the decrease in population was competition for political influence among communities in the valley, which likely included some form of low-intensity warfare (Joyce 2000:77–78; Marcus and Flannery 1996:124–130). The Middle Formative ceremonial center at San José Mogote was located on a large platform built over a natural hill (Marcus and Flannery 1996:126–128). Known as Mound 1, the platform rose 15 m high and faced a large open plaza (fig. 6). On the summit of Mound 1, a number of public buildings were constructed, although access to ceremonies performed there would have

been restricted relative to those in the plaza below. Unlike public buildings in the lower Verde, those in the Oaxaca Valley were not locations of communal cemeteries. Instead, people were interred in their residences, which means that rituals designed to contact ancestors via their remains were spatially and conceptually disbursed—unlike the communal pattern seen in the lower Verde. The modest nature of the dedicatory offerings associated with Mound 1 suggests that rituals of ensoulment may have been restricted to a small number of participants in contrast to similar rituals in the lower Verde (Fernández 1996; Marcus and Flannery 1996: 127).

At about 600 BCE, events centered on Mound 1 accelerated social changes and contributed to the beginnings of hereditary status distinctions and perhaps, ultimately, the founding of Monte Albán (Joyce 2000). At this time, a temple on Mound 1 (Structure 28) was burned to the ground. Marcus and Flannery (1996:129) argue that the destruction of the building was the result of intercommunity conflict, which would indicate that the most restricted and religiously important part of the site was penetrated by a raiding party. Other causes such as a natural fire or the ritual closure of the structure cannot be eliminated, although burning does not seem to have been a routine practice in building termination rituals in the Oaxaca Valley. Since the temples on Mound 1 were undoubtedly important religious structures, the sudden destruction of Structure 28 could have triggered a crisis for the entire community by interfering with people's access to the divine. Following the destruction of the temple, major changes are evident in the use of Mound 1, probably initiated by the leading families in the community. We view the destruction of the temple as a moment that catalyzed the unraveling of religiously focused entanglements among community members, buildings, and the divine, which altered the relationship of religion to social status and political authority.

Immediately after the destruction of Structure 28, archaeological evidence shows that rather than rebuilding the temple, a series of architecturally elaborate high-status residences were constructed over the ruins (Flannery and Marcus 1983a). The orientation of buildings was shifted from 8° west of north to 3°–6° east of north, which would soon become the dominant orientation of public buildings at Monte Albán. In prehispanic Mesoamerica, there was a close association between site orientations and layouts, the movement of celestial bodies/deities, and conceptions of time. Another novel feature of these residences was the region's first formal stone masonry tombs, which shows that prominent people were now buried in special locations that differentiated them from nontomb interments (Fernández 1996; Marcus and Flannery 1996:133). We know from later times that the bones of ancestors buried in tombs were directly consulted by their living descendants through tomb-reopening ceremonies (Lind and Urcid 1983). Tombs made the bones of ancestors more durable and accessible than those of people

Figure 6. Mound 1 at San José Mogote. Photo by Arthur Joyce.

interred in the ground and created memory and history through repeated access for performance of tomb rituals. Tombs afforded the ancestors greater salience to the living both as divine beings and because their bones became accessible and potent ritual objects. Given the location of the residences atop the site's preeminent structure, its close association with public buildings, and the presence of the region's first stone masonry tombs as well as exotic religious objects (see below), we believe that Mound 1 was where San José Mogote's ruling family resided.

A potentially more significant object from Mound 1 is Monument 3 (Marcus and Flannery 1996:129–130), which was discovered in a corridor between two public buildings. Monument 3 depicts a naked sacrificial victim with eyes closed and with blood emanating from the trilobe heart glyph on his chest. The individual's calendrical name or the name of his captor is also shown. If the radiocarbon dates reported by Flannery and Marcus (2003) correctly date the monument, then it would belong to this period and represent the earliest evidence in Oaxaca for human sacrifice, writing, and calendrics (however see Cahn and Winter 1993).

The evidence from Mound 1 indicates the emergence of the first hereditary nobles in the region and reveals that status was strongly associated with religion (Blanton et al. 1999:45–46; Joyce 2010:125–128). After 600 BCE, elite identity and status were defined in part by the association that people of high status had with sacred buildings, which by this time may have been viewed as living, ensouled beings, based on subfloor offerings in Structure 28 (Marcus and Flannery 1996:127). Social distinction was thus created not only episodically during public ceremonies, as it had been in earlier eras, but instead continuously through the quotidian practices of dwelling. The discovery of ritual paraphernalia in the residence, including obsidian bloodletters and an anthropomorphic effigy brazier, along with evidence for new forms of religious practice such as tomb rituals and perhaps human sacrifice (Marcus and Flannery 1996:126–134) suggest that the inhabitants may have included ritual specialists. These are the first indications that through their roles as ritual specialists as well as through the sacred affordances of special religious implements, rulers were becoming mediators between people and the divine. Entanglements that defined the San José Mogote community were reordered such that elites, their houses, ancestors, and ritual items were more central to the networks through which the community and perhaps a broader polity were constituted.

San José Mogote, however, did not continue as a focal point in the innovations in religion and politics that were catalyzed by the destruction of the temple. At about 500 BCE, people from San José Mogote and nearby communities founded a new political and religious center at Monte Albán (Flannery and Marcus 1983b). The movement of people from their home communities to Monte Albán would have further unraveled entanglements involving people, land, ancestry, and history, opening up additional potential for change.

Religion and Political Centralization at Monte Albán

Monte Albán is located on several hills in the center of the Oaxaca Valley. Following its founding, the site rapidly grew into the region's largest community, reaching 442 ha, with an estimated population of 10,200–20,400 by the Late Formative (Blanton 1978:44). One of the earliest activities at the site was construction of the site's ceremonial center located on the Main Plaza precinct, which was an unprecedented labor project (fig. 7). The initial version of the ceremonial center consisted of the plaza, measuring roughly 300 × 150 m, along with the western row of buildings and much of the eastern half of the massive North Platform (Joyce 2010:133–134; Winter 2011:402–403). The scale, accessibility, openness, and symbolism of the Main Plaza indicate that it was constructed as an arena where thousands of people could have participated in public rituals. Many public buildings on the plaza were ensouled with offerings, including human burials and ceramic vessels, although most were modest in scale, suggesting restricted ceremonies similar to those at San José Mogote (Martínez López 2002:250–255). Since Monte Albán's Main Plaza was built on the top of an imposing mountain, it is likely that Zapotecs considered the entire ceremonial precinct as a sacred mountain of creation and sustenance.

The archaeological and iconographic (or, more accurately, semasiographic) evidence indicates that human and autosacrifice as well as ancestor veneration, divination, feasting, and ritual preparations for warfare were carried out on the plaza (Blanton et al. 1999:105–107; Joyce 2000; Urcid 2011; Urcid and Joyce 2014). The southern end of the plaza contained references to sacrifice, warfare, ancestors, and the underworld, as represented by two inscribed programs. The first was located in Building L-sub, which contained nearly 400 carved orthostats. Although these are traditionally interpreted as victims of human sacrifice (e.g., Marcus and Flannery 1996:151–154), Urcid (2011) has recently used pan-Mesoamerican contextual comparisons to reinterpret the program as a warrior sodality carrying out autosacrificial rituals to invoke the ancestors as oracular conduits in preparation for battle (fig. 8a–8d). The cornerstones of the program contained short hieroglyphic texts that refer to at least three rulers, their enthronements, genealogical statements, and the defeat and decapitation of an enemy (fig. 8e). The

second iconographic program consisted of approximately 50 finely incised slabs that may refer to revered ancestors (fig. 9a; Urcid and Joyce 2014:157–164). Their original location is not precisely known, although most were later reset consecutively in three construction phases of Building J. A possible cornerstone from the program (Monument J-41) depicts the only portrait of a ruler known for this period. He is shown performing human sacrifice through decapitation while dressed in the guise of the rain deity (fig. 9b). In contrast to depictions at the southern end of the plaza, a frieze on the North Platform (fig. 10) included graphic references to aquatic themes including shells, bands of flowing water, and rain (Urcid 1994:64–65). Although the upper section of the frieze was destroyed in antiquity, the remaining portion includes what Acosta (1965:816) described as serpentine imagery, which may represent Cocijo, the Zapotec rain deity (Orr 1994). The symbolism and spatial arrangement of architecture and iconography raises the possibility that during the Late Formative, the Main Plaza may have resembled ceremonial centers at other Mesoamerican cities where the cosmos was rotated onto the surface of the site such that north represented the celestial realm and south the earth or underworld (Joyce 2000). If this hypothesis is correct, cosmogenic ceremonies like human and autosacrifice would have been carried out in a place that encapsulated the Zapotec cosmos.

By the Late Formative, the Main Plaza was assembling a radically transformed imbroglio of people and divinities that far exceeded in reach and complexity anything seen earlier in the Oaxaca Valley. As a place of cosmic creation and renewal where the planes of earth, sky, and underworld intersected, the Main Plaza was an axis mundi and a powerful divine entity in its own right (Joyce 2009). In particular, the ritual innovation of human sacrifice was a potent means through which the sacred covenant was activated to petition divinities for fertility and prosperity on behalf of the community. Through calendrical and cosmogenic ceremonies, the Main Plaza would have also gathered cyclical notions of time and history with place that together were central to indigenous Mesoamerican worldviews (Broda and Báez-Jorge 2001; Hamann 2002). Ritual specialists who organized and led ceremonies on the plaza would likely have been equated with important actors in creation narratives, especially the rain deity (Sellen 2002). New religious beliefs and practices are indicted by the first occurrence of effigy vessels depicting deities like Cocijo, the Old God, and the Wide-Billed Bird.

The archaeological evidence raises the possibility that the founding and early development of Monte Albán was related to a new political and religious movement that began during the Middle Formative at San José Mogote. The impetus for this religious movement probably included political developments both local and macroregional. Innovations in religious belief and practice may have been one means through which people responded to the declining fortunes of San José Mogote. Similarities in the organization of ceremonial space,
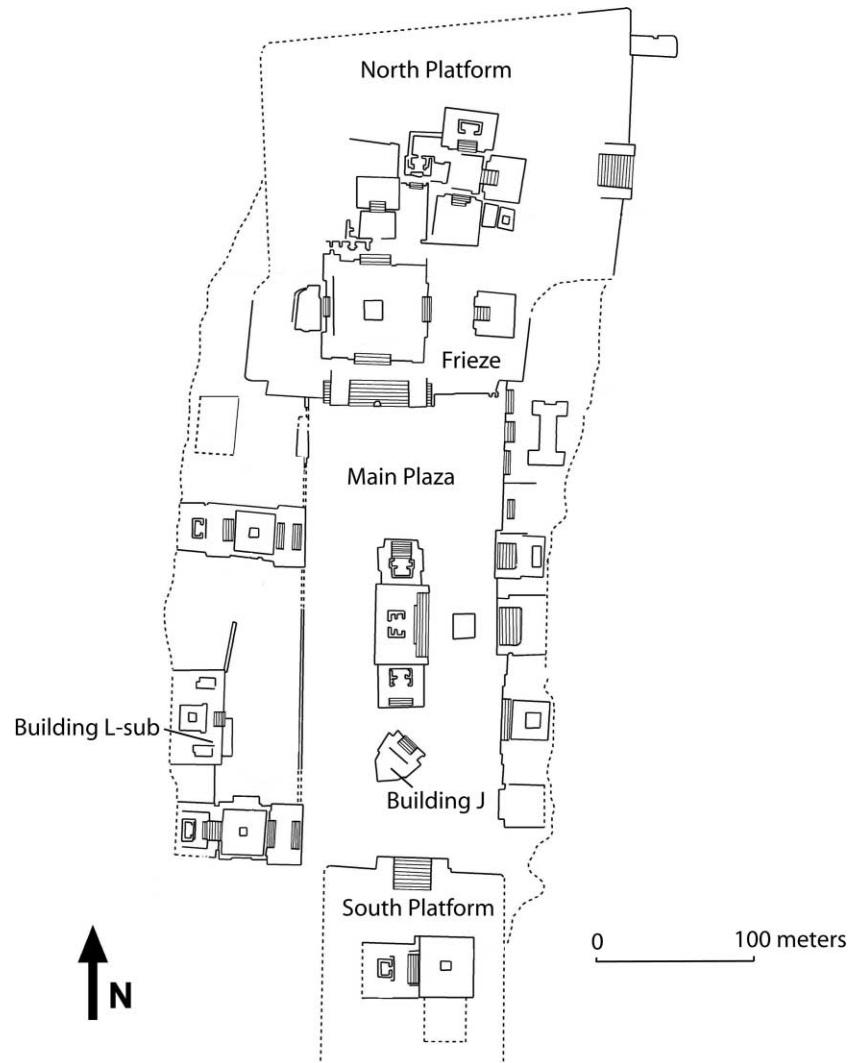
Figure 7. Main Plaza of Monte Albán showing locations of architectural features mentioned in the text (after Joyce 2000, fig. 7.4).

religious symbolism, and hieroglyphic writing suggest that people at Monte Albán appropriated religious ideas and practices from earlier political centers such as La Venta in the Gulf Coast, Chalcatzingo in Central Mexico, and Chiapa de Corzo in the Chiapas Central Depression (Clark 2001; Winter 2011:401–403). The decline of many of these political centers toward the end of the Middle Formative may have reshuffled far-reaching relationships involving the movement of goods, people, and ideas. The situation was fraught with potential for innovation because the unraveling of historically important social and material relations demanded management and stabilization. What resulted was a new city, founded on an uninhabited hilltop completely dissociated from earlier spatial and social relations. In this new and very compelling location for human-divine engagement, there was both physical and conceptual space to create novel institutions and large-scale social affiliations.

The social identities of people living in and around Monte Albán were no longer defined just by affiliations with their families and communities but were increasingly enmeshed with the political and religious actors, institutions, and implements at Monte Albán, especially its Main Plaza complex (Joyce 2010:141). Yet the networks that converged on the plaza do not seem to have extended throughout the Valley of Oaxaca as a whole. Differences in ceramic styles and monumental architecture suggest that the sites of El Mogote and Yegüih were centers of independent polities (Redmond and Spencer 2006:347–350). Evidence also indicates that Monte Albán periodically attacked El Mogote and the nearby site of El Palenque.

The Main Plaza was therefore a focal node in entanglements that brought together the inhabitants of the city, surrounding communities, and, to a lesser extent, significant places more distant in space and time. Religion was central
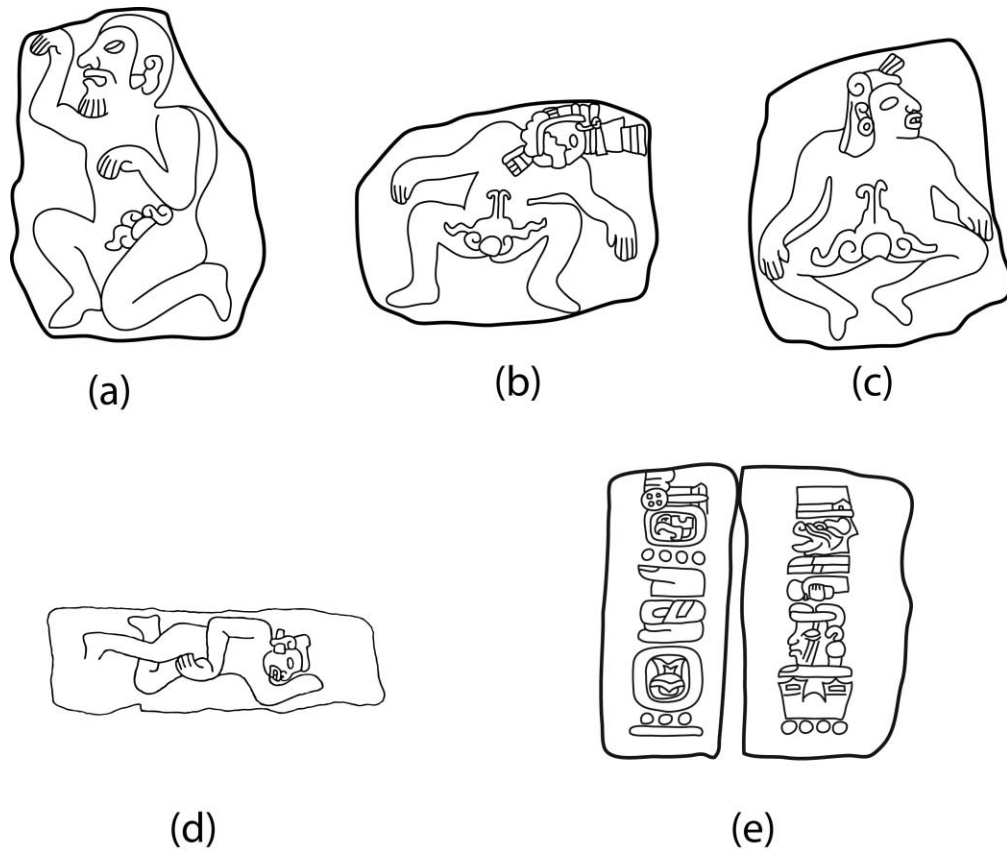
Figure 8. Carved stone monuments from Building L-sub (not to scale): elder with beard from the upper rank (*a*; after Joyce 2010, fig. 5.5*b*), rain god impersonator from the upper rank (*b*; after Joyce 2010, fig. 5.5*d*), young adult from the first rank in the lower row of Building L-sub (*c*; after Joyce 2010, fig. 5.5*c*), ancestor invoked through autosacrifice (*d*), cornerstones with hieroglyphic inscriptions (*e*; after Joyce 2010, fig. 5.5*f*). All redrawn with permission from Javier Urcid.

to these assemblages, although archaeologists have proposed other forms of engagement that may have brought together people from Monte Albán and nearby communities. For example, entanglements that linked surrounding communities to Monte Albán and its leaders may have also involved the mobilization of agricultural produce, tribute acquired through conquest, and the control of long-distance trade. Agricultural productivity at Monte Albán was probably insufficient to provision the city, necessitating the taxation of farmers in communities outside the city (Kowalewski et al. 1989:123–126). The scale of agricultural resources mobilized to provision the city and the degree to which elites controlled and benefited from such transactions remains unclear. Several archaeologists have argued that the rulers of Monte Albán mobilized large armies for military conquest (Redmond and Spencer 2006), although we view conflict at this time as much smaller in scale (Joyce 2014; Zeitlin and Joyce 1999). Although some resources were probably acquired by Monte Albán's rulers through the establishment of tributary relationships with conquered communities, the evidence for tribute extraction is minimal (e.g., Spencer 1982:246–250). Nobles had preferential

access to imported prestige goods such as nonlocal pottery and greenstone ornaments, which could have been used to establish debts and obligations with other elites in the valley (Winter 1984). The data do not suggest that rulers directly
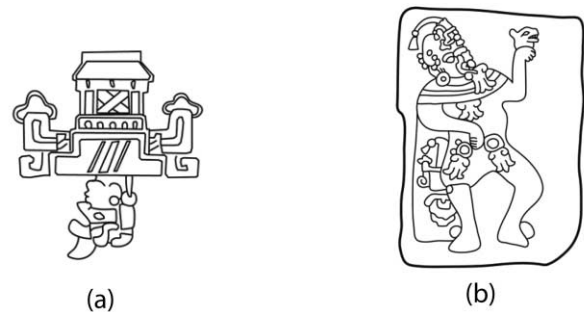

Figure 9. Carved stones reset in Building J: slab depicting possible revered ancestor (*a*; after Caso 1947, fig. 41) and Monument J-41 (*b*; after Joyce 2010, fig. 5.6*d*). Both redrawn with permission from Javier Urcid.

Figure 10. North Platform Frieze with rain and rain deity imagery (after Urcid 1994, fig. 7).

controlled key utilitarian resources such as land or the production of pottery and stone tools (Fargher 2007; Parry 1987:111; Whalen 1988).

Religion and the Negotiation of Political Authority

The changes in religion and politics during the early years of Monte Albán benefited the nobility and contributed to rising inequality and separation of noble and commoner identities (Joyce 2010:141–146). Archaeological evidence indicates, however, that both newer forms of hierarchical authority and more traditional forms of communal leadership vied for political influence (Joyce 2000, 2010:155–159; Urcid 2011; Urcid and Joyce 2014). For example, the Late Formative iconography and spatial organization of the Main Plaza downplayed the political authority and ritual role of rulers. Although nobles lived near the ceremonial precinct and directed public rituals, there were few overt representations of rulers, and there were no high-status residences directly facing the plaza. Other than the portrait on Monument J-41, rulers were represented solely in the hieroglyphic inscriptions on the cornerstones of the Building L-sub program, which were probably understandable only to the literate nobility. Instead of the authority of rulers, the plaza emphasized public buildings, public spaces, and cosmic symbolism, including images depicting sacrifice, divination, ancestors, deities, and warfare-related rituals. Communal authority was represented by members of the warrior sodality shown performing autosacrifice on Building L-sub, which Urcid (2011) argues were arranged according to age and achieved status, with higher-ranking members, including bearded elders and rain god impersonators, located on top of the platform and lower-status members placed in the lower levels close to the plaza surface (fig. 8*a*–8*c*). The Main Plaza, therefore, would have constrained the ability of rulers to monopolize religious and political authority.

The two potentially competing forms of authority—communal and noble—carried inherent contradictions and latent points of tension. Powerful nobles threatened the traditional authority of communal institutions, while the latter constrained the power of the nobility. Although only rulers were clearly associated with human sacrifice, commoners were shown performing autosacrifice and invoking ancestors. If the rain god impersonators from Building L-sub were nonnobles, as argued by Urcid (2011), then influential common-

ers, nobles, and rulers were able to embody the deity. In addition, while the most elaborate stone masonry tombs were restricted to the nobility, adobe tombs have been excavated in the residences of commoners (Joyce 2010:142–143). Prominent commoners, not just nobles, were therefore interred in ways that facilitated communication with the dead. These data suggest that the settings in which hereditary nobles and communal organizations negotiated and contested political authority probably included public rituals, tomb ceremonies, access to special ceremonial roles like rain god impersonator, and activities related to the preparation for and conduct of warfare.

By the Terminal Formative, however, the rulers of Monte Albán were increasingly gaining authority in the interrelated fields of religion, politics, and economics. The construction of the South Platform and the eastern row of buildings effectively closed off the plaza (Joyce 2004:205–207). The construction of the first high-status houses directly on the plaza and on the North Platform would have strengthened elite oversight of the ceremonial center (Barber and Joyce 2006:228–229). At the same time, the rulers of Monte Albán increasingly forged political and economic ties with other communities in the valley through coercion and the control of social valuables. The conquest of El Palenque suggests that Monte Albán's rulers used coercion to force communities into compliance (Redmond and Spencer 2006). Evidence indicates that the rulers of Monte Albán increasingly controlled the manufacture of social valuables like fancy creamware ceramics and shell ornaments that were used to create debts and obligations with people in outlying communities (Elson and Sherman 2007; Martínez López and Markens 2004). Both creamware ceramics and coercive force were also enmeshed with religion. Fancy creamwares often exhibited designs symbolizing the rain deity, and warfare was at least in part motivated by the need to obtain captives for human sacrifice.

By the end of the Terminal Formative, tensions between communal and hierarchical forms of authority may have erupted in a political upheaval at Monte Albán (Joyce 2010:155–159). At this time, both of the major iconographic programs on the Main Plaza were dismantled, and some monuments were defaced and buried under new buildings. Since these iconographic programs probably represented communal forms of leadership, their dismantling, and destruction may indicate the suppression of communal au-

thority. A temple on the North Platform was also burned (Winter 1994:15), and a wall for defense and/or monitoring of access was built around parts of the site (O'Brien et al. 1982:207). A building on the northwest corner of the Main Plaza may have served as a control point; the recovery of 27 projectile points there suggests that coercive force may have been involved (Martínez López and Markens 2004). By the Terminal Formative, the rulers of Monte Albán had expanded their influence beyond the central Oaxaca Valley through a combination of alliance, religious persuasion, and military conquest, although the nature and extent of their political control is unclear. By the Early Classic, more exclusionary and hierarchical forms of authority gained prominence over competing forms of leadership (Joyce 2010).

Conclusions

In this article, we have considered the role of religion in later-Formative-period political changes in the lower Verde and the Valley of Oaxaca. Rather than viewing religion as secondary to what are typically seen as causally primary economic and political factors, we argue that in both regions, religion was at the core of the entanglements through which community, polity, and political authority were negotiated, contested, and transformed. These entanglements were focused on public buildings and spaces and assembled people from different communities and varying statuses along with entities such as ancestors, deities, offerings, sacrificial victims, burials, and feasting foods. Yet these cases demonstrate dramatically divergent outcomes in the intersection of religion and politics deriving from culturally and historically contingent circumstances. We are not arguing that religion alone was the prime factor driving political centralization. The entanglements that we have considered in later Formative Oaxaca also included warfare; exchange, both local and interregional; alliance, tension, and conflict between political centers and outlying communities; labor mobilization and the production of resource surpluses; the control of craft production; and competing forms of political authority; among others. The point is that the networks in which religious belief, practice, and objects participated were far-reaching and central to the working out of political relationships.

In the lower Río Verde Valley, we argue that religion constrained innovations that might have led to greater political centralization. As early as the Late Formative, public buildings were a focal node in the networks that constituted communities. The construction of the acropolis engaged people from multiple communities in a large-scale collective works project and created the potential for reorganizing and expanding the scale of entanglements that could have stabilized a politically centralized polity. At the same time, the persistence and durability of the bones of ancestors and ceremonial offerings emplaced within public buildings at outlying sites created conditions of entrapment. People were

tightly bound to the remains of their ancestors and the offerings that they had ritually emplaced in public buildings. These ties were likely deep, emotional, and not easily superseded. The construction and use of the acropolis coupled with the physical entrapment of the bones of ancestors, offerings, and divine beings within public buildings at outlying communities created sites of tension and conflict between local and regional collectivities and authorities. The outcome was that the multicommunity links and centralized political authority that could have come to define a polity were fleeting and unstable. Río Viejo probably collapsed within only a few generations of its emergence as a political center.

In the Valley of Oaxaca, we also found that religion and especially public facilities were central to assemblages that constituted community and political authority. In contrast to the lower Verde, however, we find religion in the Oaxaca Valley was less constraining and instead fostered political change. This openness to innovation can be traced back to the assemblages that constituted community during the Middle Formative. People came together to build and participate in rituals in public settings like Mound 1 at San José Mogote, but there were fewer intimate and enduring material connections between people and these places relative to the lower Verde. In particular, in contrast to the lower Verde, the bones of ancestors were distributed in family residences rather than entrapped within public buildings, and rituals of ensoulment did not engage large numbers of people. The burning of the temple at San José Mogote and the broader crisis catalyzed an unraveling of religiously focused entanglements among community members, buildings, and the divine. These events were probably catalytic because they threatened and challenged existing relations among people and divinities (Joyce 2000, 2010:120–125).

The innovations that followed at San José Mogote included the appropriation of Mound 1 by community leaders, the interment of elites in tombs, the increasing role of elite ritual specialists as mediators between people and the divine, and the reorientation of the site to a new sacred axis. The result was that elites as well as their houses, ancestors, and ritual implements came to be more central to the entanglements that constituted the San José Mogote community. These innovations were also the means through which hereditary status was institutionalized for the first time, setting the stage for the emergence of powerful regional rulers (Blanton et al. 1999:46; Joyce 2010:110–117).

This process of innovation and reordering of entanglements continued and accelerated with the founding of Monte Albán. The Main Plaza was constructed and ensouled as an axis mundi and mountain of creation where public rituals could be performed that reenacted the cosmic creation. The plaza brought together people from Monte Albán and surrounding communities for the enactment of established ceremonies, such as ancestor veneration and feasting, along with new rituals such as human sacrifice. At the same time,

political and religious leadership were increasingly linked such that the entanglements constituting political authority and institutions, both communal and hierarchical, mediated between people and the divine. What resulted was a centralized polity, with Monte Albán as its political seat. Monte Albán provides a clear contrast to Río Viejo in that centralized political authority and multicommunity political relations and identities were far more tenuous in the lower Verde. Like at Río Viejo, however, newer forms of hierarchical authority at Monte Albán were in dynamic tension with more traditional forms of communal leadership. During the Late Formative, these tensions were successfully negotiated by downplaying the political authority and ritual role of hierarchical rulers, while foregrounding a regional political identity and communal forms of authority. By the Terminal Formative, the political, religious, and economic reach of the rulers of Monte Albán expanded through their increasing domination of the Main Plaza, military coercion, and the control of prestige goods. Another catalytic event seems to have occurred toward the end of the Terminal Formative when tensions between communal and hierarchical forms of authority erupted in conflict. Unlike at Río Viejo, hierarchical authority at Monte Albán triumphed.

More broadly, our analysis suggests new avenues of inquiry into the relationships between religion and political change in ancient societies. The reasons why religion could be so constraining in the lower Verde but leave openings for change in the Oaxaca Valley have to do with historically contingent factors involving the ensoulment of public buildings, the storage of the remains of ancestors, and the centrality of rulers in relation to the divine as well as the unfolding of catalytic events such as the burning of the temple at San José Mogote. Our case studies, however, provide some clues to the kinds of assemblages that may be more binding of political innovation. In the lower Verde, the most constraining factors in the creation of regional identities and authority appear to have been the salient material and divine connections between people and their local communities, taking the form of the remains of ancestors and offerings ritually emplaced in public buildings. The bones of ancestors and communal offerings in public buildings materially anchored social memories and collectivities in ways that were difficult, if not impossible, to unseat. In the Valley of Oaxaca, we do not see the same degree of enduring material connections between people and local places. At San José Mogote and Monte Albán, there were certainly material embodiments of community in the form of public facilities, but these were linked to people largely through periodic experiences such as the construction of monumental buildings or participation in public ceremonies. On the other hand, what may have made the events at San José Mogote so catalytic was the dramatic and unexpected destruction of the temple on Mound 1: a highly visible and seemingly durable material entity that was central to the entanglements that constituted community at the time. Finally, data from both regions demonstrates that religion could generate tension and conflict rather than the cohesion so often assumed in models of early complexity. Our results suggest that it may be productive in cases of early political centralization to consider whether religion is, in fact, a source of conflict to be overcome rather than a unifying ideology.

Acknowledgments

Comments

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In an original view on the role of religion in early societies of the Mesoamerican world, Joyce and Barber propose that religion can be a point of conflict and tension between members of a community and not necessarily a unifying factor in social and political change. In my opinion, the key to understanding why religion can play such a dual role is because the members of a community are involved in organizing annual festivals and ceremonies to different degrees. That is, even if community members share a belief system or agree with the spread of religion, there may be groups that feel excluded by low or no participation in collective ceremonies

or do not sufficiently identify with the spaces, objects, or forms of worship that express collective religious belief. In my view, the comparative study of these authors in late Formative Oaxaca meets these conditions.

Joyce and Barber point out that religion in the lower Río Verde Valley constrained the emergence of political centralization displayed in a durable polity because social union was more important than a division between nobility and the common people. In contrast, in the Valley of Oaxaca, religion fostered political change, manifested in the construction of elite buildings, the interment of elites in stone masonry tombs, and the increasing role of elite ritual specialists.

In my opinion, this article presents a very innovative analysis based on archaeological evidence that explains why the regions' histories diverged. Although I agree with the development of ideas presented throughout the text, I do have some doubts regarding the degree of community participation in the festivities and ceremonies at the acropolis of Río Viejo or in public spaces such as Yugüe or Cerro de la Virgen. Based on the considerations outlined above, I agree with Joyce and Barber that the elite of the lower Río Verde Valley had considerable power, but such authority was restricted, in part, by the will of ordinary people; in order to prevent widespread discontent, political centralization was created through practical and common symbols that helped bring people together, such as the physical entrapment of the bones of ancestors, offerings, and divine beings within public buildings in local communities or in the acropolis in Río Viejo.

However, I wonder what happened to those sectors of the community not involved in organizing festivities or ceremonies dedicated to the dead ancestors buried in public buildings. Did the whole community really identify with those objects, spaces, or symbols created by elites to share these common elements? Does the strategy employed by the elites truly avoid widespread discontent or rebellion? The fact that Río Viejo collapsed as a major center in Terminal Formative shows that elite strategies were not so convincing or effective at preventing widespread discontent. I think it is important to consider the involvement of other actors in social change that might not necessarily have participated in social or community ceremonies orchestrated by elite groups. If religion can become a crucible of tensions and conflicts enabling policy innovations, I think there is no better example of crisis than when the official cult does not meet the expectations of a society as a whole.

The deeds in lower Río Verde can better explain why the ceremonial center of Mound 1 at San José Mogote during the Middle Formative changed dramatically by becoming the residence of privileged groups who took control of authority. It seems clear that a section of the community that felt excluded from public ceremonies had the strength to become the first hereditary nobility of the region and built up the cult of their own family ancestors as the key point of the religion. In short, although the evidence in Río Verde brings to mind

a negotiation between elites and community groups, I think, after all, this was not very different from the situation at San José Mogote. In fact, the reaction of certain sectors facing times of crisis was what launched the changes in the central valleys and the null performance of elites in Río Viejo.

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Arthur Joyce's 30-year (and counting!) commitment to the lower Río Verde Valley and the work of dozens of students and professionals from multiple disciplines have made this valley one of Mexico's premier research venues. This work has advanced several anthropological themes, such as structuration, human ecology, and political economy. The current paper by Joyce and Barber advances discussions of how religion and the ontology of nonhuman beings influence historical processes. Joyce and Barber could not have written this paper without extensive excavations at the regional capital as well as several smaller centers, confirming once again the value of a truly long-term commitment to a small region. Rather than noting flaws, my comment asks questions for subsequent research. In particular, I focus on the first two terms of Joyce and Barber's title: ensoulment and entrapment.

Regarding entrapment, Joyce and Barber provide an exciting example of how the deep intertwining of people and things creates an inertia that resists social change. Their example contains a welcome insight about matter and time. The materials of the past—local monuments suffused with the bones of the community—swell into the present, disrupting the success of the regional polity at Río Viejo (Olsen 2010:119–120). People had the option of realigning with the regional polity—bundled burials in Mesoamerica suggest a precedent for exhuming one's ancestors and moving them elsewhere—but they chose to keep themselves locally rooted. I agree that points of tension existed between rulers who wanted to strengthen subjects' ties with the regional center and people who felt strong entanglements with their own local monuments. At the same time, the construction of the Río Viejo acropolis—one of the largest structures ever built in Oaxaca—suggests that at some point, people extricated themselves from their local entrapments long enough to construct an unprecedentedly massive monument. Does this suggest that after the Río Viejo acropolis was built, it may have been appropriated in ways that the people who labored to build it did not intend (cf. McAnany 2010, chapter 5; Pauketat 2000), perhaps making their local monuments seem more attractive once again? Does the capacity of religion as a constraint, as a trap, wax and wane and wax again over time?

I invite the reader to look at entrapment quite physically, which is to look at the bulkiness and durability of the public monuments that both manifest and entrap the community. Gell (1996) has argued that traps are models of their designers as well as their victims. As an example, the Anga of New Guinea, as reported by Pierre Lemmonier (cited in Gell 1996), build eel-shaped eel traps that are much more sturdy than necessary because the Anga see the eel as extremely powerful. The trap models the eel as well as the Anga's perceptions of the eel. Do burial mounds as traps also model their designers and victims? The people buried in mounds were likely perceived as people of renown and thus buried in a mound that was overbuilt: mounds outlast the community that used them, often surviving thousands of years. The mounds persevere in a way that people do not. Does the way in which mounds were purposefully overbuilt model for us the esteem in which the community held its dead and the desire to memorialize them across time?

Regarding ensoulment, I would like to know more about souls and animacy. Joyce and Barber state that religious offerings "ensoul and sustain public buildings as animate beings and as community members." What was a soul in ancient Oaxaca? Citing birth rites, feedings, and death rites performed for buildings, Joyce and Barber conclude that buildings have life cycles. Since buildings are alive, they are also animate, which Joyce and Barber gloss elsewhere as having a "sacred life force." Across indigenous Mesoamerica, having a soul often involves a connection with a spirit animal, and having a destiny is determined in part by the omens of one's day of birth (Gossen 1994). Did buildings have a soul in this sense? Can a building be animate without having this kind of soul? In other words, are some animate entities drastically different from others? Are nonhuman animate beings symmetrical to humans? Do they have the same powers? How does a Zapotec or Mixtec or Chatino sense of animacy differ from Amazonian (Descola 2013) or Scandinavian (Ingold 2000:89–110) genres of animacy? I struggle with similar questions in the Maya area (see also Houston 2013:75–77) and look forward to working with the authors as we face these themes in future forums.

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Joyce and Barber make an important contribution through this article. I strongly agree with their central proposal that religion was not only a unifying factor in social process but also a field of tension and conflict. The different social trajectories of the lower Río Verde Valley and the Valley of Oaxaca present fascinating examples through which to explore this issue.

At the same time, I think that some aspects of the conceptualization of religion may deserve further discussion. As the authors note, a universal definition of religion is impossible, but we still need to recognize that processes of social integration and division are conditioned by the common characteristic that religions of various cultural traditions share, that is, the general framework of standardization and normalization. What we call religion always demands certain levels of conformity to sets of ideas, narratives, and practices among its practitioners. This tendency toward standardization, however, does not preclude the existence of flexibilities, inconsistencies, and dissents, or of the coexistence of competing ideas and narratives. Integrative and divisive processes in society are affected significantly by this force of standardization and resistance to it, although the levels of conformity and inconsistency vary considerably from one historical context to another.

I also think that we need to critically evaluate a widely assumed commonality of religion, that is, the notion of the "sacred." Joyce and Barber view the sacred as the core of Oaxacan religion, which becomes "entangled" with and related to other social domains. I am concerned with this emphasis on the sacred, as this conceptualization is an important issue when we try to understand related social processes. Joyce and Barber are correct in stressing the diffused nature of Mesoamerican religions, permeating through daily lives and mundane practices. But if subtle utterances and practices during the mundane course of daily life are significant components of Mesoamerican religions, we probably need to question the very notion of sacredness that is privileged above other domains of indigenous experiences and practices. We also need to question the assumption that the consciously understood sacred propositions motivated and explained religious practices. As many scholars have pointed out, these assumptions may have been strongly influenced by our own experience in the modern world, particularly by the explanatory form of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition. As Talal Asad and others have argued, even within this tradition, the perception of compartmentalized sets of sacred propositions dictating religious practices and experiences may have been a modern phenomenon.

Among various other religious traditions of the world, which may be loosely characterized as polytheic or animistic, the opposition between the sacred and the mundane may be considerably fuzzier, and the force of fixed narratives to shape religious practices may be far weaker. For example, most of my Q'eqchi' Maya workers could not explain specific meanings of their Deer Dances and told me that they do them because that is the way they have always done. This does not mean the absence of privileged narratives that explain the ritual, which may be held by certain members of the society. In this regard, we need to be cautious in projecting the modern ethnographically observed patterns to the prehispanic period. By this, I do not intend to de-emphasize certain continuities in Mesoamerican religious ideas. We,

however, need to consider the possibility that the degrees of internalization of these religious ideas by diverse social members during the prehispanic period may have been quite different from those after the Spanish conquest, when a stark opposition to Christianity and the colonial regime forced indigenous agents to consciously commit themselves to certain versions of religious propositions. We need to consider the possibility that meanings of religious acts in prehispanic Mesoamerica may have been highly fluid, diverse, incoherent, and polysemic. I do agree that different narratives and practices in the lower Río Verde Valley and the Valley of Oaxaca that Joyce and Barber discuss are important factors affecting the divergent trajectories of these regions. But at the same time, I suspect that the degree and way of standardization and the coexisting diversity and incoherence within individual communities may be equally important aspects that conditioned courses of social change. This nature of standardization and diversity deserves further inquiry.

I would like to add that the Terminal Formative was a time of significant social change not only in Oaxaca but also in other parts of Mesoamerica. At the onset of this period, Teotihuacan became a powerful center in central Mexico, and in southern Mesoamerica, many centers, including El Mirador, Kaminaljuyu, and Takalik Abaj, accelerated the process of political centralization. The end of the Terminal Formative was marked by political disintegration, as Joyce and Barber describe for the lower Río Verde Valley. While Teotihuacan and Monte Albán continued to prosper, many centers in southern Mesoamerica, such as El Mirador and Kaminaljuyu, collapsed. We need to examine whether shared religious or other social practices affected these patterns or whether external factors, such as climate change, played a more important role.

Our understanding of Mesoamerican religions is still limited, and their diverse aspects and their relations to social processes need to be further examined. This stimulating article by Joyce and Barber represents an important step in this regard and encourages us to explore this critical issue.

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Religious Practice in the Ancient Americas and the Ontological Turn

In this article, Joyce and Barber make the argument that long-standing religious practice in ancient Oaxaca, Mexico, both constrained and entailed particular social and political transformations during key moments in the histories of

coastal Oaxaca and the Valley of Oaxaca. Both regions have been well documented by long-term archaeological research and offer ample excavated archaeological contexts to provide evidentiary depth. The theoretical basis for the argument skillfully grafts together contemporary anthropological theories on relational ontologies, inscription, materiality, and residential burial, which allows the authors to explain processes of change in varying contexts. As such, Joyce and Barber present a model that could be applied to other places and other parts of the world. Importantly, religion plays a central role in both creating opportunities for action and limiting choices.

The archaeological data detailed in this article are derived from excavations undertaken by Joyce and Barber (and others) in coastal Oaxaca during the past three decades and then paired with reinterpretations of archaeological data from Valley of Oaxaca sites excavated by various archaeologists since the 1930s. The Valley of Oaxaca case study is an outgrowth of arguments that were first published in this journal by Joyce and Winter (1996), which Joyce has since elaborated (Joyce 2000, 2004; Urcid and Joyce 2014). In this argument, following a "crisis" and power vacuum at San José Mogote, Monte Albán elites established a new political capital at Monte Albán, which took advantage of Monte Albán's importance as a sacred place. They erected sculptural programs along an open plaza that emphasized communal religious practices, feasting, warfare, and sacrifice. Through time, communal participation eroded as Monte Albán nobles gained power within and beyond the valley.

In the current article, the Valley of Oaxaca phenomena are compared to those of the lower Río Verde to show how the religious institutions and sudden events in the Late Formative Valley of Oaxaca (and, specifically, at San Jose Mogoté) left room for a successful (elite) reinterpretation of religious practice with the settlement of Monte Albán. In the lower Verde, by contrast, religious rituals that had taken place in regional centers during the Late Formative (both feasts and mortuary rites) involved physical emplacement of things (bodies and offerings) in public spaces that made those places meaningful and powerful. Local nobles appear to have drawn their power from connections to these ritual spaces and the activities that produced them. Thus, when some nobles tried to shift focus to Río Viejo and build a cohesive polity with that site as its regional capital, the enterprise was unsuccessful. Ultimately, elites at Río Viejo were unable to overcome peoples' connections to ancestors whose worship and devotion was physically bound ("entrapped") to particular spatial contexts. According to Joyce and Barber, the inability of the new leaders to subvert divisive practices and bring people together at Río Viejo explains why the Río Viejo polity quickly collapsed. By comparison, the Monte Albán polity had greater longevity and success.

The comparison between the two regions is compelling. Nonetheless, I find it curious, and somewhat disconcerting, the degree to which the ultimate fate of these experiments in

early complexity—one successful, the other not—depended in large part on the kinds of religious rituals that were common in each region leading up to these moments. Residential burial and the emplacement of offerings in coastal Oaxaca set the stage for future possibilities, while the lack of similar practices in San José Mogote (and Late Formative Oaxaca, in general) gave elites more flexibility in rebranding religion. Were these experiments therefore decided before they even began? What might people (elites and nonelites alike) have done differently to effect different outcomes? Further, the degree to which the model works depends on the robusticity of contextual information from archaeological contexts. While the archaeological work in coastal Oaxaca is convincingly detailed within and across the region, I am less sure that we understand well what was happening at San José Mogote and other valley sites during this transition, in spite of the decades spent in search of answers. It remains frustratingly difficult to trace Monte Albán's earliest days and is challenging (if not impossible) to determine a detailed sequence of events using archaeological data from disparate contexts across the much larger Valley of Oaxaca.

The ontological turn that we are experiencing in archaeological theory (as in anthropology more widely) gives us the chance to bring religion and religious practices in the ancient Americas front and center as major factors with critical roles to play during times of transition. It is clear that the material practices associated with religious belief were entangled in multiple ways that both created and complicated political complexity—not just at Monte Albán and Río Viejo but also at sites across the Americas and, no doubt, in other parts of the ancient world.

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This article compares state formation in two well-known archaeological regions in Oaxaca state, the Valley of Oaxaca, and the lower Río Verde drainage. The comparison is of interest because the two groups, Zapotecs and Chatinos, are linguistically and culturally related. Despite these affinities, their histories followed divergent paths resulting in different potentials for urban life. I confine my remarks to two issues.

1. One of the striking aspects of the lower Río Verde tradition is the emphasis on communal burials, as revealed in Late and Terminal Formative communities such as Yugüe. Together with feasting and the construction of public places, these collective activities appear to have had the effect of muting the ambition of emerging elites and strengthening the sentiments of local identity. During the Terminal Formative, leaders of Río Viejo appropriated labor from sur-

rounding communities to build the enormous acropolis. Public buildings of a ritual nature, nondomestic middens, and a large oven (among other evidence) on the acropolis suggest to the authors that it served principally as a place for periodic regional communal feasting; attachments of villagers to their community appear to have limited population aggregation at Río Viejo. What appears to be absent from the Río Viejo inventory is any direct evidence—palaces, burials, or caches—of the ruling elite who ordered the acropolis's construction. Also, where are the houses and burials of Río Viejo's commoners? Although excavation is slow work and the acropolis and site are enormous, it is important to demonstrate proof of these elements of society. Without them, one cannot discard an alternate but unlikely scenario that Río Viejo was built by elites and their followers living in outlying communities, periodically assembling there for communal feasts.

2. The authors argue that rulers at Monte Albán acted as intermediaries between commoners and the supernatural realm. Perhaps treatment of this elite intermediary role could be expanded by (1) considering a long-enduring class of prehispanic imagery that directly expresses notions of political power and legitimacy at Monte Albán and other valley sites (this is the image of a lord or lady standing/sitting atop a platform) and (2) by incorporating aspects of contemporary Zapotec worldview from ethnographies (Barabas 2006; De la Cruz 2007; De la Fuente 1977; González Pérez 2013; Parsons 1936). Here I refer to the "Mountain of Sustenance," which the authors mention in passing. I (Markens 2014; Martínez López, Winter, and Markens 2014, chapter 1) argue that political power of rulers was based in part on control of symbolic resources stored in a Mountain of Sustenance. Although evidence for the model is derived from Classic period evidence, it may be applicable to the Middle Formative, where this representation of power appears at San José Mogote when the first palace for the center's rulers was constructed atop the main pyramid (Urcid 2009).

Zapotecs today hold widespread beliefs about prominent hills near the community, especially those that contain caves and a source of water. The most important beliefs for this discussion are twofold: (1) the hill is a storehouse of water, plants, and animals that sustain the community; and (2) the resources are the property of a supernatural being called the Dueño (Owner) who resides within the hill and whose permission must be sought before undertaking procurement activities.

Archaeologists argue that the Mountain of Sustenance was at times replicated in temple and residential architecture. This was the case for the Valley of Oaxaca, where palaces come to incorporate architectural elements normally associated with temples: pyramidal bases and broad staircases sometimes enclosed within balustrades. Examples include the residence of Tomb 103 at Monte Albán, the palace atop Structure 195 at Lambityeco, Mound 35 at Macuilxóchitl, and Mound A at Zaachila, among others. By the Classic, rul-

ers were buried in tombs in palaces or in temples adjacent to the palace, as in the case of the Palace of the Altars at Atzompa.

If in fact some palaces and temples were configured as a Mountain of Sustenance, then two logical proposals may be derived: (1) the tombs within a palace/temple are analogous to caves, and (2) the rulers buried in the tomb were in some way associated with the symbolic natural resources stored within. Rulers were therefore linked with what traditional peoples today call the Dueño, the supernatural being who owns the mountain's resources.

By the Early Classic, the image of a ruler seated/standing on a platform became a widespread, if not standard, representation for political authority in the valley and was materialized in various media. These include carved stones, such as the Lápida de Bazán, Stela MA-VGE-2, and Programs A and B at Monte Albán, among others, as well as effigy vessels (Caso and Bernal 1952, fig. 63; Sellen 2007, fig. 4.59, upper left). In fact, the spatial organization of the community often replicated the same representation of power: the ruler lived in his/her palace on or near the crest of a hill, and the commoners lived on the slopes or the valley floor below, as is the case for Macuilxóchitl, El Palmillo, Cerro de la Campana, Atzompa, and Monte Albán, among others. Although not unchanging through time and space, the Mountain of Sustenance is one example of what López Austin (2002) calls the "hard nucleus" of Mesoamerican tradition.

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As a nonarchaeologist, one of the things I always appreciate about the work of Art Joyce and Sarah Barber is the clear connections they draw between their arguments and the archaeological evidence they use. In this case, they try to make sense of changes in ancient Oaxaca by placing the public buildings constructed during the Formative period in the context of Native American ontology and go on to propose that religious processes might have played a role in political evolution. According to the authors, a central dynamic in the Formative is the tension between two kinds of authority: an ancient "traditional," or "communal," authority and a newer "noble," or "hierarchical," authority. These may exist side by side but are in a struggle/negotiation with one another for ascendancy. This struggle takes place and can be read in the layout, use, and iconography of public buildings and public spaces. When nobles are ascendant, one sees signs of social distinction, exclusion, and regional political centralization; when communal authority is ascendant, hierarchical distinctions are not evident, public spaces are open to

all, and independent, self-governing communities can be identified across the region. Since much of the motivation for creating public buildings and associated spaces is broadly religious, this means that historically contingent religious beliefs and practices that take place in these settings can enable or impede the ascendance of noble/hierarchical forms of authority. In the case of Monte Albán in the Valley of Oaxaca, it was the former, while in the case of the lower Río Verde region, it was the latter.

The juxtaposition of communal versus hierarchical authority reflects the long-term trend in the Formative, where egalitarian societies evolved into complex and hierarchical ones, and the case the authors make for interregional differences in religious practices is a good one. But the evidence presented based on their long-term and meticulous research on the Pacific Coast made me wonder whether they might want to explore in more depth the "communal" side of the equation. Instead of being the unchanging foil to the emerging noble authority, could it itself have undergone changes and become more complex in the Formative?

Río Viejo, the site Joyce and Barber excavated in the Río Verde region and which they compare to Monte Albán, is impressive. According to the evidence, its acropolis is a public space whose size dwarfed any in the region and was the largest built in Oaxaca at the time. Joyce and Barber have identified at least five different work groups in the construction of the acropolis, suggesting that it may have been built by rotating teams coming from surrounding communities. It lacks a visible elite presence; there are no elite residences and no monuments to rulers, and it generally lacks the burials, offerings, and other items found in the public buildings in surrounding settlements. At the same time, there is abundant evidence for large-scale feasting events and, interestingly, the consumption of food items prepared off-site and then brought to the acropolis. In the article, the lower Río Verde region is presented as an example of when the strength of local religious practices impedes political integration. Local public buildings continued to retain their religious significance and were not eclipsed by a central site. In some sense, then, the site of Río Viejo was a failure, especially when compared to Monte Albán. But what if the contrast between the Río Viejo acropolis and other public buildings in the region was the whole point? In other words, what if Río Viejo was designed so that it lacked markers that would indicate it belonged to a particular group? Could Río Viejo have been a kind of Oaxacan Onondaga, the meeting place of a confederation, and could, as in the case of the case of the Iroquois Confederacy, what we are seeing be a regional political integration where a central authority of the kind that existed in Monte Albán is absent? Joyce and Barber may have information that bears upon this. This does not necessarily contradict the contrasts the authors draw between Río Viejo and developments in Central Oaxaca. However, it appears that some critically important developments took place in Central Oaxaca before they occurred in the lower

Río Verde region. So a question that follows is whether the development of Río Viejo was at all related to what happened in Central Oaxaca. If it is true that there was some kind of confederation in the lower Río Verde region, could it have been a response to the political centralization that occurred in Central Oaxaca?

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Joyce and Barber's paper is an important step forward in an archaeological understanding of the historical relationships between religion and politics, particularly as those relationships played out in ancient Mesoamerica. The typical Mesoamerican narrative of the development of sociopolitical complexity lacks historical richness by focusing on human intentionality and organizational dynamics. Political-economic factors are commonly cited to explain the appearance and collapse of hierarchy and polity, as if societies, intrasocietal organizations, or strategizing human agents were the units of change (Flannery and Marcus 2012). From such vantage points, religion might have been manifest in isolatable events, roles, ideologies, or institutions, but it was somehow outside of social relationships.

As they turn away from such ordinary, outdated approaches, Joyce and Barber seek to understand how religion was ontologically inseparable from "other dimensions of social and material life." Especially key for making their own relational points are the notions of ensoulment and entrapment. These necessitate recognition of the potential animacy of nonhuman beings, things, substances, and phenomena (though the paper does not touch much on the latter) and the historical implications of said animacy. Of particular importance here are ensouled buildings and things. That buildings may be animate or agentic was and yet is commonly noted by indigenous Americans. That bones might contain the soulful essences of persons is likewise widespread.

Given this, Joyce and Barber's real contribution is in comparing the overlapping distributions of both buildings and things in space and through time in the lower Río Verde and Oaxaca Valleys. Specifically, the associations between ancestral bones and other offerings and central architecture might be alternately "tightly intertwined" or more loosely bundled. To be clear, from nonrelational points of view, the associations would not ordinarily be attributed causality but instead would be seen as representative of some unseen social process. However, Joyce and Barber understand the qualities of the entanglement to matter—specifically leading to historical divergence within the modern-day state of Oaxaca. That is, at the risk of greatly oversimplifying their case material, the density or distribution of the relations between

ensouled places/things and living people inhibited centralization in the Verde Valley, on the one hand, while it afforded greater centralization in the Valley of Oaxaca, on the other. The former remained something less than a state, lacking in clear elite authorities, while the latter was off to the races. The point here is not just that things can have agency to alter human history but that entire relational fields must be understood in order to locate the causal powers of history. These powers might centralize (Monte Albán), or they might resist centralization (Río Viejo).

One has to be impressed in either case with the richness of the data that Joyce and Barber muster here, drawing selectively on analogies that flesh out inferences otherwise contingent on contextual associations. Of course, I want to know more about the vital materials and agentic phenomena of the cases at hand (Bennett 2010; Deleuze and Guattari 1987)—what about that fire atop the pyramid at San José Mogote (e.g., Baltus and Baires 2012)? I want to know more about the macroregional, experiential (geopolitical and ecological) contingencies of these two cases. I am also keen for the authors, in the future, to open up a few categories in more relational terms: politics, belief, communities, elites, and even religion. They do begin to do this with community, which archaeologists should understand as a dimension of entangled relational fields (Pauketat 2008). Elites doubtless need to be similarly rethought as variably dense or distributed assemblages themselves. And religion, yet a useful concept, probably never had or has a "role" in anything. Rather, it is everything and everywhere. Joyce and Barber, of course, agree, and more importantly, they show us how this was so via a remarkably rich and robust archaeological case. That they do so makes Joyce and Barber's approach palatable to a wide audience, and, thus, their contribution is at once immediate and impactful. They are helping us all make a relational, ontological turn.

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Joyce and Barber present two case studies that demonstrate how the rise of political authority can become intricately tied to the relationship between community and divinity. Focusing on religion as both principle and practice, their comparative study highlights the significance of historically contingent processes in the formation of the Late Formative–period political institutions in two regions of Southern Mexico—the lower Río Verde Valley and the Valley of Oaxaca. Through a careful archaeological examination of the materiality of collective ritual and its role in shaping public space in both regions, the authors compellingly argue that the different ways in which communities engage and manipulate

religious postulates, liturgies, places, and objects often translate in contrasting responses to the rise of centralized political authority. A critical point in their analysis is the realization that people can manipulate religion to their own ends, whether individual or collective, but that there comes a time when the resulting entanglement may prevent them from moving forward to participate in the making of a new political order. Religion, Joyce and Barber claim, can bring unification or conflict; the key to reveal it is to delve deeply into how sacred postulates are actually interpreted in daily practice.

In my view, the authors hold three winning cards. To develop their dynamic view of religion in ancient Mesoamerica, Joyce and Barber first appeal to ontological principles that characterize native society and culture in the Americas, for which ethnographic and ethnohistorical documentation abounds. Native ontology is founded on the ability of humans to engage nonhuman persons, ancestors, and deities in powerful covenants or alliances that can be called upon, via the liturgical order, to achieve practical goals (Carroll, Nieves Zedeño, and Stoffle 2003). Second, the authors bring ontology to bear on the application of contemporary theory and interpretation of lower Río Verde's and Oaxaca's Late Formative archaeological record; following specifically the work of Ian Hodder (2012), they claim that participation in such covenants often results in the "entanglement" of people, objects, places, and other entities. And third, they successfully unpack material entanglements by maintaining a laser-sharp focus on the trajectories of ritual practice; this allows them to highlight the significance of historical contingency as an analytical tool for uncovering human agency, in this case, the power of communities and elites alike to manipulate religion in order to craft their political destiny.

In the reconstructed trajectory of lower Río Verde communities, liturgical protocols emphasized the collective covenant by "ensouling," or animating, public spaces through ancestor burials and ritual offerings. This alliance between community and divinity promoted certain forms of social interaction and leadership that initially discouraged the emergence of central political authority. Family, lineage, and labor relationships were embedded in, and constitutive of, the public space where the living and their objects came to mingle with their deities and their dead. In this case, local community leaders (often religious specialists) and commoners were as much part of the covenant as were individuals who increasingly highlighted their status and difference. Efforts made toward centralization, including the construction of a massive acropolis by a rising elite whose purpose was to extract communal labor under the guise of public ritual and to institute central political authority, eventually failed because leaders and followers valued local investment in collective entanglements more than centralization.

In contrast, Oaxaca's trajectory suggests to the authors that communities were more loosely connected to public ritual spaces or ancestor veneration than Río Verde's, leaving

space for politicians to increasingly mediate between religious principles and daily practices. As a result, covenants were co-opted and manipulated by the elite, who used them to promote centralized political authority and segregate commoners from investment in public ritual. Despite upheaval, Oaxacan elites were able to maintain their status and use religion for self-aggrandizement and political control, for example, by manipulating ancestor veneration through the construction of tombs and the abduction of technologies for the manufacture of special objects. The later erection of the Main Plaza in Monte Albán, however, once again reoriented the focus of the community-divinity covenant by furnishing an ontological axis mundi that naturalized central authority, justified the rulers' use of coercion and control of social valuables, and materialized local as well as overarching sacred postulates that were broadly shared across Mesoamerica.

In sum, Joyce and Barber's provocative article demonstrates that religion is central to the negotiation of social relationships within and between communities, through which diverse forms of political authority may be fostered and naturalized. Their arguments, however, leave the door open for questioning the extent to which entrapment explains (or defeats) political agency; socioeconomic factors (e.g., land ownership, labor relations, and social networks) must be brought into the discussion to gain a deeper understanding of challenges faced and opportunities gained or lost by the people of Río Verde and Oaxaca as a result of their political actions.

Reply

We wish to thank the commentators for their insightful and thoughtful input. Their comments have challenged us to clarify our arguments and to think about new directions in our ongoing research. We were particularly encouraged that most of them were supportive of our approach to ontology, materiality, and practice in examining the enmeshment of religion and politics in later Formative period Oaxaca.

Takeshi Inomata and Scott Hutson raise some important issues regarding our approach to prehispanic religion, notably how we employ concepts of the sacred and the soul. Inomata suggests that our use of the notion of sacredness causes us to fall into a kind of semiotic entrapment by relying on a Western binary that opposes sacred and mundane. We acknowledge the complications of using Western terms like sacredness. In our article, however, we strive to view this term and others from a relational perspective consistent with Native American ontologies.

Sacred, in this sense, is focused on the life force that animates all living things. Thus, everything that is alive can be considered sacred. As noted by ethnographers, ethno-

historians, and archaeologists, different beings manifest different kinds and degrees of this force, often referred to in the literature as soul, wind, or spirit (e.g., Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:181–185; López Austin 1988, 1989; Monaghan 1995:197–198; Stuart 1996:157). Building on Hutson's line of inquiry, we assert that having a soul, or being imbued with this life force, did not make an animate entity humanlike. Different animate beings had different capacities, requiring that people engage with the various ensouled, or sacred, aspects of their world in myriad ways (e.g., López Austin 1988:329–331). For example, sacred bundles assembled animate objects that, through ritualized practices, had the ability to manifest powerful ancestors or deities (Hermann Lejarazu 2008; Olivier 2007). Certain beings acted as index objects (Zedeño 2009) that could animate other beings, as we argue for offerings emplaced in public buildings in Formative period Oaxaca (also see Mock 1998). Others entities such as mirrors, flutes, human hearts, and images of deities had the ability to connect different realms of existence, allowing gods and ancestors to view and interact with the living, and vice versa (Barber and Olvera Sánchez 2012; López Austin 1989:123–124; Olivier 2003:240–265). The souls of humans and other beings, including deities, could be merged, as with Aztec "man-gods" and nagualism (Gutiérrez and Pye 2010; López Austin 1988:329–331). Masks and other forms of costuming, including the flayed skin of sacrificial victims, were objects that facilitated this process (Freidel, Schele and Parker 1993:260–265; López Austin 1988:378). Upon death, the vital essence of the Aztec man-god was dispersed to different destinations, including to the deity from which it originated, which also highlights the distributed nature of souls (López Austin 1988:329–331; see also Furst 1995).

Activating these abilities often involved ritualized practices (sensu Bell 1992), including special staging and knowledge, which assembled an array of animate beings that together had the potential to affect the world in powerful ways. Even seemingly mundane items like ceramic vessels, breath, or spit could in certain ritualized contexts act as index objects that animated other things like buildings, sacred bundles, and people (Stross 1998:32–35; Taube 2001; Zedeño 2009). Human action was not the sole source through which ensouled entities were assembled and activated. For example, Harrison-Buck (2012:73) argues that the deity Ehecatl Quetzalcoatl had animating properties in the form of wind and rain blowing through Maya circular shrines. Through ritualized practices and settings, relations among animate beings were negotiated and transformed, such as in the ritual animation of buildings (Harrison-Buck 2012; Mock 1998) and sacrificial acts that petitioned divinities for fertility and well-being (Joyce 2000). Likewise, ritualized practices were settings where distinctions among humans were negotiated and transformed in ways that were inherently political (López Austin 1989; Stockett 2007). Depending on factors such as specialized knowledge and experience, familial ties, and ancestry, people's relations with other animate beings

varied, and this generated the potential for the creation and transformation of social distinctions, including unequal ones.

The capacities of ensouled beings to transfer, transform, link, and concentrate vital forces was not an inherent property of individual objects or actions but was created through relations among diverse entities and the acts that assembled them. Therefore, much of human existence—from disposing of refuse to making pottery and working the fields—involved engagements with the sacred in the sense of this animating force. Yet certain acts, assemblages, entities, and phenomena had in their relationality more potent abilities than others to affect and manipulate this force. All aspects of life in prehispanic Mesoamerica thus involved a continuum of degrees of sacrality. By referring to the sacred character of some act (sacred ritual), assemblage (sacred bundle), or entity (sacred covenant), we are emphasizing relations with animating forces that appear to have been especially transformative or powerful rather than implying opposition to the mundane. These distinctions are challenging to infer archaeologically, but certainly the difference in offerings that we see among communities in the lower Verde region suggest variation in the nature of index objects. The centrality of community members in rituals involving the emplacement of offerings in the lower Verde, in contrast to more restricted participation in such ceremonies in the Valley of Oaxaca, also suggests variation in the place of humans in the relational fields through which other beings were ensouled and sustained.

While there may have been a degree of standardization in some ritualized practices, we agree with Inomata and Manuel Hermann that religion allows for inconsistency, flexibility, and alternative narratives. In fact, as mentioned by Stacie King, our article exemplifies this perspective (also see Barber and Joyce 2007; Joyce 2010; Joyce and Weller 2007; Joyce et al. 2015). As we discuss for the lower Verde, different communities exhibited variation in religious practices, including the form of offerings that ensouled and sustained animate buildings as well as the orientations of those buildings. We suspect that this variation in ritualized practices among communities was linked to differences in religious ideas and narratives. We argue that inconsistencies between local religious and community obligations and those associated with Río Viejo resulted in social tensions that ultimately triggered a period of politico-religious upheaval. Although we have much more to learn about political change at the end of the Formative period, the evidence does not preclude the possibility of some sort of conflict within the region, as suggested by Hermann. In the Valley of Oaxaca, we see religion as a major point of conflict and tension at Monte Albán, particularly surrounding the participation of emerging elites in relation to communal leaders, communal institutions, and commoners in rituals on the Main Plaza. In this case, the resulting tensions appear to have been actualized in some form of conflict at the end of the Formative

period. The outcome of this conflict was that the nobility were more tightly linked to sacred ceremonies, objects, spaces, and divinities assembled on the Main Plaza and beyond.

Indeed, it was in the subsequent Early Classic period that powerful rulers became central to the relational fields through which the Main Plaza was constituted as a Mountain of Creation, as discussed by Robert Markens. We agree with him that Monte Albán was such a place: the entities, spaces, things, and acts that entangled the Main Plaza with the cosmic creation and sustenance are highlighted in this article and elsewhere (Joyce 2000, 2004, 2009). We find that his comments provide a valuable epilogue to our paper, in that he describes the relationship of humans to this place of creation and sustenance as it unfolded after the Formative period. We find, however, that the relationship of humans to the Main Plaza of Monte Albán during the later Formative was different than the configuration in the Classic period described by Markens. As mentioned at the end of our article, it was not until the Early Classic period that traditional forms of communal authority diminished such that powerful rulers became central to the entanglements through which the Main Plaza was constituted as a Mountain of Creation.

John Monaghan, Timothy Pauketat, and Hermann ask whether the communities from which nobles and rulers emerged were more complex and mutable than we present here. They were, and we have elsewhere documented transformations in the assemblages of buildings, people, things, and animate beings that together constituted what we call local communities (Barber 2013; Barber and Joyce 2007; Joyce et al. 2015). For instance, inequality became increasingly entangled with communities between the Late and Terminal Formative periods in the lower Verde. There is some evidence that the age range of both living and dead people intertwined in community assemblages broadened to include children and even infants later in the Formative (Barber et al. 2013). We also suspect that there was differential engagement with communal ceremony within lower Verde communities (Barber 2005:290). However, we agree that more evidence is needed to understand the bundling that generated communities, particularly in the Valley of Oaxaca, as noted by King.

King also raises the question of whether variation in religious practices between the lower Verde and the Valley of Oaxaca may have decided Formative-period experiments in social complexity before they ever began. In terms of the formation of larger-scale and more hierarchical political formations in both regions, we emphasize the physical properties of the assemblages through which community and polity were constituted and their potential to be scaled up, appropriated, and controlled. We also emphasize historical contingency and unintended consequences that contributed to these divergent histories, such as the burning of Mound 1 at San José Mogote and probably the migration of thousands of people to both Monte Albán and Río Viejo. We believe that the confluence of historical process and contingency in both regions would have afforded a variety of potential, albeit distinct, outcomes but did not predestine any outcome in particular.

Hutson points out that people in the lower Verde region extracted themselves from local entanglements long enough to construct the massive acropolis at Río Viejo before conditions changed in ways that drew people back to their local communities. It may be that the construction of the acropolis—which appears to have been largely built in a single phase, unlike the incremental construction of public buildings at other sites—exacerbated tensions between local communities and the rulers and rituals at Río Viejo (Joyce, Levine, and Barber 2013). These may have worsened once it proved impossible to ensoul the acropolis in the same ways as other animate public buildings in the region. We therefore agree with Hutson that the lower Verde evidence suggests that the capacity of religion as a constraint can vary over time.

Both Monaghan and Markens propose alternative explanations for the acropolis. Monaghan suggests that its massive scale and rituals, coupled with the lack of direct evidence for rulers, might indicate that the acropolis was a place where a regional confederation converged. While we cannot discard such a scenario, indirect evidence, especially the scale of labor mobilization and the patterns of leadership and status seen elsewhere in the valley, leads us to argue that the raising of the acropolis was directed by rulers. Markens proposes that Río Viejo may have been a vacant ceremonial center where people within the region assembled for communal feasts. This interpretation is not supported by current evidence, since the site reached 225 ha during the Terminal Formative period. Much of that area consisted of residential and multiuse platforms supporting residences (Joyce 1999; Joyce, Winter, and Mueller 1998). We agree, however, that more information on contemporary contexts beyond the acropolis is needed. Ongoing research will target areas of the site where high-status and commoner residences may be found. Regardless of how the acropolis was built and used, whatever drew people there underwent a dramatic unraveling by CE 250 that transformed communal institutions, some of which appear to have continued into the Classic period (Paul, Stojanowski, and Butler 2013).

There is undoubtedly much more to investigate in terms of the intertwining of religion and politics in later Formative Oaxaca. The entanglements we highlight could be traced out to incorporate geopolitical contingencies, as proposed by Pauketat and Inomata (e.g., Joyce 2010, 2014; Mueller et al. 2013). María Nieves Zedeño rightly points out that incorporating other relational fields would enrich our understanding of Formative period political transformations at regional scales. We have considered elsewhere entanglements relating to land use and other forms of production (Joyce 2010; Joyce et al. 1991; Mueller et al. 2013). Needless to say, there is much more to be discovered and understood in both regions, and we look forward to collaborating, debating, and

engaging with our colleagues in understanding the prehispanic history of Oaxaca.

—Arthur A. Joyce and Sarah B. Barber

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