ORIGINS OF SOCIAL INEQUALITY

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I became an archaeologist because I began to wonder about the origins of social inequality. As an undergraduate anthropology major, I learned about people such as the Mbuti and the !Kung, and I was told that at one time in the past all humans had lived in such small, egalitarian groups. What events had led from societies where people lived as equals (or, at least, with only minor differences) to the opulent empires of the ancient world? How could a small group of elites seize and maintain control over a much larger group of people, the mass of commoners? How were these early systems of social inequality related to the divisions of rich and poor that characterize the modern world?

When I began graduate school in 1970 I found that many of my questions had already been answered. Many archaeologists believed that social inequality developed because it was beneficial: It helped humans adapt to environmental problems. In a system of social inequality, wealthy, powerful leaders could oversee the construction of large-scale irrigation projects and maintain stores of surplus food to feed the population in years of bad harvests. Rulers could sponsor trading expeditions to procure raw materials that were not locally available and repress warfare so that people could meet in markets to exchange their different wares. This was the theory, but I didn't buy it.

My knowledge of ancient civilizations was not extensive. At that point it came mostly from watching Cecil B. DeMille movies about the Biblical Near East and reading The Good Earth. But it did appear to me that the peasants of ancient Egypt or imperial China had to work a lot harder to survive than the Mbuti or the !Kung and lived a more precarious existence. So how could archaeologists say that social inequality was beneficial? My doubts made me want to test the theory. Testing the theory became the focus of my doctoral research in Mexico.

I chose to work in Mexico for a number of reasons. First, I had been to Mexico working on other archaeological projects, and I liked it a lot. In highland Mexico, the days are bright and warm, and the nights are cool. The patios of Mexican houses are filled with brilliant flowers and songbirds. The Mexican people are hard working, generous, and somehow manage to keep a sense of humor despite their poverty. Mexican markets are fascinating; Mexican food is wonderful; the Mexican landscape is breathtaking. Mexico is filled with street life and animal life, and it is never, ever boring.
Second, I wanted to use the extensive historical descriptions of the Aztecs of Mexico to supplement my archaeological research. Some of these descriptions were written by the European soldiers, priests, and administrators who ruled the Aztecs after Cortés’s victory in 1521. Others were written by the Aztec nobility who, having learned to write Nahuatl (the Aztec language), Spanish, or Latin (the language of the Catholic Church), recorded the native histories that had been passed down to them in memorized oral narratives and pictorial documents. These native histories have all the elements of good soap opera: vivid tales of heroism, betrayal, triumphs, and defeats, by members of the ruling class. They also supply information that can be used to interpret archaeological sites and artifacts.

Third, William T. Sanders and Barbara J. Price had just published *Mesoamerica: The Evolution of a Civilization.* This book used adaptationist theory to explain prehistoric Mexican cultures. Drawing upon eyewitness descriptions of the bustling, well-stocked market in Tlatelolco, at the Aztec capital, Sanders and Price argued that the Aztec state developed to prevent the disruption of the complex, highly efficient Aztec market system. The state mediated conflicts between buyers and sellers and prevented the outbreak of warfare within the marketing region. Thus, it promoted the exchange of goods among peasants growing different kinds of crops and craft specialists who produced knives, pots, mats, salt, and the other necessities of daily life. According to Sanders and Price, the intensification of specialization and exchange in the expanding Aztec empire enabled growing numbers of people to live in comfort and security.

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**Dissertation Research: The Aztec Economy**

Working with Jeffrey R. Parsons, my dissertation advisor at the University of Michigan, I developed a research proposal to test Sanders and Price’s model of the Aztec economy. I planned work at a site where people had at one time lived independent of the Aztecs but had later become part of the Aztec empire. I would
determine if there was evidence for greater specialization and exchange at the site once it joined the Aztec empire so that its economic system was no longer subject to disruption.

Parsons recommended that I work at Huexotla (Way-sho’-tla), a small village in the eastern Valley of Mexico. The native histories suggested that Huexotla had once been the most important town in the eastern Valley, a town with its own ruler, its own palace and temples, and presumably its own marketplace. In 1430 Huexotla became part of the Aztec empire. How had this affected Huexotla’s economy?

Parsons had visited Huexotla during his site survey of the eastern Valley of Mexico. He observed that while the center of ancient Huexotla lay under the modern village, the remains of much of the old town were exposed in the open fields south of the modern settlement. Here, the ground was littered with prehistoric debris: potsherds, obsidian tools and waste flakes, grinding stones, clay figurines, and occasional stone beads. In addition, isolated clusters of artifacts, marking individual houses, were scattered up the slopes east of Huexotla for a distance of five kilometers. While these artifacts had been disturbed somewhat by plowing and erosion, most had simply lain on the surface of the ground for the past five hundred years, a source of interest to local farmers, but otherwise left alone.

I planned to pick up surface artifacts in all areas of the site. Then artifacts from the areas of the site occupied when Huexotla was an independent center could be compared with artifacts from the areas of the site occupied when Huexotla was part of the Aztec empire. If Sanders and Price were correct, there should be more evidence of craft specialization and exchange in the parts of the site occupied when Huexotla was part of the Aztec empire.

Parsons informed local representatives of the Mexican National Institute of Anthropology and History that I would be working at the site. Then he delivered my husband and me to the nearby town of Texcoco. We took a room at the local Hotel Castillo, and Parsons drove off, leaving us on our own.

A word about my husband, Vince. Vince is a high school math teacher who has always supported my work in Mexico. The first summer we worked at Huexotla, Vince volunteered to be half my crew (I was the other half, except for weekends when we were joined by Jill Appel, who worked the rest of the week at another dig in the valley). Later in my career, Vince stayed home
with our son while I went off to supervise other projects. I’ve tried to pay him back. One year, I quit smoking. Another year, I didn’t object when he got rid of the TV. But I’ve always felt incredibly lucky to have a husband who cared enough about me to promote my career instead of obstructing it.

The first problem we ran into was getting to Huexotla. We knew that a bus ran from Texcoco to Huexotla, and the Hotel Castillo was right next to the bus station (as we were constantly reminded by the exhaust fumes, the roar of unmuffled engines, and the loud buzz of the dispatcher’s button that filtered into our room). But which bus was headed for Huexotla? Each bus had a destination named on its banner, but we soon discovered that the named destination was not necessarily where the bus was going. It was best always to ask the driver, we learned, and to stop each bus until the right one came along.

The second problem was organizing the work. Huexotla was big. The first five days, we did nothing but walk the site, trying to find out where it ended and what its artifact distributions looked like. I was completely overwhelmed. But slowly, I began to devise a plan for taking collections in a systematic way. First, I traced an aerophoto of the site, showing the boundaries of modern fields, onto a piece of graph paper. Then, because the site was too big to collect in its entirety, I chose one randomly selected square out of each block of one hundred squares on the graph paper to serve as my sample. Then, guided by the graph paper map and the boundaries of modern fields, I located my sample collection units on the ground.

When we finally got started the work was a lot of fun. It consisted of picking up artifacts from five-meter-square collection areas and taking the collections back to Texcoco to be washed (in our hotel room) and stored for further analysis. The days were bright and sunny (until the rains began in the mid-afternoon). The Mexican countryside was rich and green because it was summer. We worked in cornfields and bean fields studded with large, drooping Pirú trees. Usually a donkey, staked out to pasture, was braying in the distance, and we could hear roosters crowing in the village. Some mornings we could look all the way across the Valley of Mexico and see Mexico City nestled at the foot of steep, dark volcanic cones.

The artifacts were interesting. Almost half of the pottery at Huexotla was decorated. The most common type had black
designs painted on the smooth, natural orange surface of the dish or bowl. Highly complex curvilinear designs typified vessels from the period of Huexotla’s independence; simple series of lines and dots following the circumference of the vessel wall distinguished pots dating to the time of the Aztec empire. Red wares were also common. These were simple rounded bowls covered with highly polished, cherry-red paint. The red paint might be covered with designs in black and white (from the period of independence), or black only (usually dating to the Aztec empire).

Some artifacts could clearly be linked to specific economic activities. For example, cylindrical chunks of obsidian (volcanic glass) with vertical flake scars were the cores from which sharp, parallel-sided blades had been removed (an obsidian blade was the Swiss army knife of Aztec peasant households). Perforated ceramic disks were the weights for spindles used in spinning thread (for weaving cloth). Trapezoidal slabs of basalt posed something of a puzzle until further library research suggested that they were the blades of scrapers used to clean the fibers of maguey leaves (the maguey is a long leafed cactus similar to yucca). These fibers were woven into cloth or twisted into rope. Turtle-shaped chunks of obsidian were scrapers used to hollow out the stalks of maguey plants so that their sweet sap could be drawn off for processing into syrup, sugar, or beer (pulque).

Vince and I worked for two summers in the field, making 1,380 collections (a grant from the National Science Foundation enabled the size of the field crew to grow to four during the second summer). We spent a third summer recording the contents of each collection—counting the artifacts of each particular type. At the end of this analysis, some aspects of Huexotla’s economy had become fairly clear.

The data suggested that there hadn’t been many full-time specialists in ancient Huexotla. Obsidian cores were evenly dispersed around the site, as were spindle whorls. Evidently, peasant households made their own tools and wove their own cloth rather than depending on outside specialists. Scrapers to clean maguey fibers and scrapers to hollow out maguey stalks were most frequent on the eastern slopes of Huexotla where soils were thin and maize cultivation was somewhat difficult. But both kinds of scrapers were found in other parts of the settlement as well, suggesting that most of Huexotla’s peasants cultivated some maguey plants. There were no large dumps of misfired pots that would have indi-
cated specialized ceramic producers. There were no concentrations of figurine molds resulting from specialized figurine workshops. Thus, the internal economy of Huexotla seemed fairly simple, not a situation that seemed to require the presence of a ruling elite.

The ancient Huexotlans had obtained goods from outsiders. Many of the tools were made from obsidian, but there are no obsidian outcrops at Huexotla. Thus, obsidian had to come from elsewhere. Also, some spindle whorls were made in a style that seemed foreign to the Huexotla region. And salt, indicated by the presence of Fabric-Marked pottery (a rough-surfaced, porous ceramic type associated with salt-producing facilities at other sites), must have come from elsewhere in the valley. Some of these goods were present in parts of the site that were occupied when Huexotla was independent, suggesting that a regional market system operated reasonably well even without a regional state to prevent its disruption.

Some kinds of imported goods, but not all of them, were more common in parts of the site occupied when Huexotla was part of the Aztec empire, and this seemed to support Sanders and Price’s theory that the Aztec state promoted regional exchange. For example, the frequency of salt and green obsidian from Pachuca increased at Huexotla during the period of Aztec rule. However, the frequency of other imported goods, such as gray obsidian from Otumba, declined. According to historical documents, salt was produced near Tenochtitlan, and obsidian from Pachuca (but not Otumba) was collected by the Aztecs as tribute. Thus, products that were in some way connected with the Aztec capital became more available at Huexotla while products that had no such connection did not. This suggested that Aztec rule was associated only with the intensification of exchange between the Aztec capital and hinterland communities and not with the intensification of the exchange among all hinterland communities, as Sanders and Price had predicted.

Production at Huexotla also changed under Aztec rule. People at Huexotla produced more maguey-sap by-products (there were more obsidian scrapers and more jars for boiling sap in the areas of the site occupied when Huexotla was part of the empire) and less cloth (fewer spindle whorls were used during imperial times). In my view, both of these changes could be understood as consequences of expanded urban-rural exchange.

The Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan, had a population of 250,000 at
the time of Spanish conquest (in its time, it was one of the ten largest cities in the world). It contained a large number of non-food-producing specialists who assisted the ruler in governing the empire. This group included high-ranking lords and nobles, army officers, tribute stewards, religious functionaries, skilled artisans, palace guards, entertainers, and domestics. Support of this population depended upon the collection and distribution of tribute cloth. According to Aztec tribute lists, cloth was an item of tribute paid to the Aztec ruler by all subject provinces, and according to historical documents, the ruler distributed this cloth to reward all those who served him. The individuals who received this cloth took at least a part of it to the urban market to exchange for food, such as the maguey syrup, sugar, and beer produced by Huexotla’s peasants. This gave peasants the opportunity to acquire cloth for their own clothing and for their tribute payments without having to weave it (a very laborious task). This would explain why people at Huexotla began to produce more maguey sap products and less cloth.

I concluded from my dissertation research that the Aztec state did not arise to facilitate exchange between specialists of diverse types. Some exchange between specialists had occurred prior to Aztec rule, without the presence of a unifying state. Under the Aztecs, only the exchange of tribute for food between urban and rural populations increased significantly; other exchanges, between groups of rural specialists, were not much affected. Thus, the growth of the Aztec state did stimulate market exchange, but this exchange was geared to providing food to the political elites who lived in the city, not to enhancing the rural producers’ standard of living.

The published results of my dissertation research drew mixed reactions. Archaeologists who firmly believed that social inequality was a form of human adaptation to the problems of survival thought that there were errors in my research methods. They were critical of my having used surface collections (as opposed to less disturbed excavation data), and they thought that I had taken too small a sample (only 1 percent of some parts of the site). Some regarded Huexotla as an atypical or inappropriate research site. Archaeologists who had their own doubts about the contribution of social inequality to human survival were intrigued by my results, especially the suggestion that political organization had influenced Aztec economic structure.
Since my dissertation, I have carried out field work at two other sites: Xico (She’-co) in the southern Valley of Mexico and Xaltocan (Shal-to’-can) in the northern Valley. Surface collecting these two sites confirmed much of what I had found at Huexotla: little evidence of full-time craft specialization, a modest increase in the use of goods procured at the Tenochtitlan market coinciding with the expansion of the Aztec empire, and some indications of intensified food production. These results have helped to confirm the results of the Huexotla research. At the same time, there are important differences among these sites. Xico was located in a prime agricultural area, and yet, with less decorated pottery and less obsidian, it was impoverished compared to Huexotla. Xaltocan, on an island surrounded by a shallow lake and swamp, relied more on aquatic resources such as birds and fish and less on agriculture. Differences among Valley of Mexico settlements during the Aztec period are also evident when Huexotla, Xico, and Xaltocan are compared with other sites investigated by my colleagues Tom Charlton, Susan Evans, Deborah Nichols, and Michael Smith.7

My most exciting “discoveries” have not been rich tombs or extraordinary artifacts that I uncovered in the field. Instead, my “discoveries” have been detecting patterns in the artifact data that suggest what people were doing during Aztec times and why they did what they did. The questions that have most concerned me are how Aztec rulers constructed their power and how women’s lives changed as they became part of the Aztec empire. I have also tried to discover the best way for archaeologists to communicate with the general public. The first two questions grew from my interaction with other archaeologists. The last question resulted from my confrontation with the modern inhabitants of Xaltocan.

**Political Processes in Aztec Mexico**

In 1983 Timothy Earle, an Andean archaeologist at UCLA, invited me to join a group that was examining the relationship of specialization and exchange to the development of complex
societies. Obviously, my work at Huexotla had given me some expertise in this area. But at Huexotla, I had studied only utilitarian crafts; Earle was interested in both utilitarian and elite crafts. He proposed that the two had played different roles in the development of social inequality.

The historical descriptions of Aztec culture indicated that Earle’s proposal was correct. Aztec rulers had very little direct influence on utilitarian craft production. But they did commission many works of art, to serve as furnishings for state-sponsored ceremonial activity and to distribute as gifts to loyal allies and subjects. These pieces of art communicated a world view that infused Aztec warfare and conquest with cosmic significance; they also enabled the Aztec ruler to maintain his image as an able and generous leader. The historical documents suggested that elite craft goods played an ideological role in Aztec culture: they provided an assessment of people (the ruler as an able and generous leader) and events (warfare and conquest as a part of the cosmic order) that solidified the Aztec king’s political power.8

I was able to use aspects of the Huexotla data to test the idea that art and ritual were used to construct political power in the Valley of Mexico. In late pre-Hispanic Mexico, art and ritual were tied to feasting, and feasting can be gauged archaeologically using the decorated bowls, dishes, and plates that I had collected at Huexotla. When I was working on my dissertation, I had used these vessels simply as time markers; that is, their decorations helped me to separate areas of the site occupied before Huexotla became part of the Aztec empire from areas occupied later.

Now I returned to this pottery with a new perspective. If art, ritual, and feasting had helped to win political support, there should be more evidence of feasting during Huexotla’s era of political autonomy when Huexotla’s rulers were free to expand their power. Later, under Aztec rule, there should have been less feasting and coalition building because the political aspirations of Huexotla’s lords were more constrained (they were limited to carrying out the commands of the reigning Aztec ruler). This prediction turned out to be accurate. Collections from the earlier areas of Huexotla had more decorated pottery (more feasting, more alliance-building) than areas occupied later, when Huexotla was part of the empire.9
Investigating the role of art in Aztec society and documenting the relationship of feast-giving to political alliance building moved me closer to understanding the central mystery of emerging social inequality. I now think that social inequality develops as an ambitious leader implements strategies for building a coalition of followers larger than the following of any other individual or institution in society. In this way, a single, privileged minority can rule because it is the largest organized group in society. People excluded from rule may outnumber those in control, but because they are not organized, they cannot oppose those who are in control under ordinary circumstances. My interest in political organization and alliance-building continues.10

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WOMEN’S LIVES
IN AZTEC MEXICO

My interest in women’s lives developed from a conference organized by Joan Gero, an Andean archaeologist at the University of South Carolina, and Margaret Conkey, a paleolithic archaeologist at the University of California at Berkeley. The subject of this conference was “Women’s Production in Prehistory.” Again, my field work at Huexotla, Xico, and Xaltocan gave me some basis for addressing the topic. The surface collections from Huexotla, Xico, and Xaltocan contained evidence of both spinning and cooking; according to the historical documents, these were the primary occupations of Aztec women. Spindle whorls provided evidence of spinning; tortilla griddles (comals) and jars represented two different cooking techniques (toasting and boiling).

First, I looked to see if women had had to weave more cloth once their towns fell subject to the Aztec empire and its tribute collectors. As noted previously, at Valley of Mexico sites, spindle whorl frequencies actually declined; cloth production decreased as the production of food for market sale intensified. However, at sites outside the Valley of Mexico (in Morelos), spindle whorl frequencies were dramatically higher during the
period of imperial domination. Since distance prevented access to the market at the Aztec capital, women did not have the option of purchasing tribute cloth. So they, themselves, wove cloth to meet the Aztec demand for tribute.

Then, I looked to see if the different patterns of cloth procurement (market purchase versus local production) were paralleled by differences in food preparation techniques as women sought to adjust household labor to the demands of the state. Differences in food preparation were evident. At sites within the Valley of Mexico, there was a higher frequency of tortilla griddles, which is surprising since tortillas have to be shaped individually and therefore require more labor than one-pot gruels and stews cooked in jars. But tortillas have the advantage of being a dry, more portable food. Tortillas provided meals that could be carried off and eaten by family members who were tending fields, gathering raw materials, and marketing produce away from home. In Morelos, where there was less opportunity to market produce and where women wove cloth for tribute instead of purchasing it, women saved time and energy by preparing less labor-intensive, one-pot meals, such as the maize gruel atole. Sites in Morelos have a lower frequency of tortilla griddles and a higher frequency of jars.

There was, then, a great deal of variation in women’s activities in Central Mexico. Although most women were weavers and cooks, some wove more and some less, some cooked one way and some another. Women did not always engage in the same activities; they responded flexibly and strategically to the new circumstances created by Aztec domination. Archaeologists have tended to regard activities such as child care, fuel gathering, food preparation, and cleaning (activities we regard as women’s work) as very routinized and uninteresting. But these tasks can be organized in many different ways, depending upon ecological and political variables. Examining the organizational basis of “women’s work” is a new and exciting area of archaeological research.

Having studied one aspect of women’s lives in Aztec Mexico, I was asked to examine another aspect. I was invited to contribute to a session on gender representation in Mesoamerica organized by Veronica Kahn of the University of Illinois at Urbana and Geoffrey McCafferty of Brown University for the American Anthropological Association meeting in 1990.
Previous studies of women’s status in Aztec Mexico had suggested that as the Aztec empire grew, the Aztec state increasingly glorified militarism and masculinity. As a result, women lost status and power. I wanted to know how far this Aztec male-dominant ideology had spread. Had it been confined to the Aztec capital, or had it influenced hinterland communities such as Huexotla, Xico, and Xaltocan?

Again, I turned to the surface collections, this time to compare the depiction of women in the ceramic figurines from Huexotla, Xico, and Xaltocan with the depiction of women in the sculptures and manuscripts produced in Tenochtitlan. I found that the images of women in figurines and the art of Tenochtitlan showed almost no similarities.

For example, in Tenochtitlan, a monumental carving from the foot of the Aztec Great Temple presented an image of a goddess, Coyolxauhqui, cut to pieces by her brother, the war god Huitzilopochtli. In smaller sculptures, Aztec women were depicted in a kneeling pose, which emphasized women’s roles in weaving and food preparation (weaving and grinding corn were both performed in a kneeling position). In Aztec manuscripts, goddesses were sometimes depicted holding shields and staffs, as if power for women could only be obtained by assuming a male warrior role. In contrast, most ceramic figurines from Huexotla, Xico, and Xaltocan show women in a standing position. Often, the female figurines held one or two children, as if to emphasize women’s roles in reproduction.

Images of women with children are unknown in official Aztec art, and mutilated or masculinized women do not appear as figurines. Figurines in kneeling positions do occur, but they are rare. These differences in art are evidence of different views concerning women. Evidently, people in hinterland communities did not share the Aztec state’s ideas regarding women. The peasants in hinterland communities maintained their ability to formulate their own views and to communicate these views to others.

This study shows how archaeology can help reconstruct the ideas of common people whose thoughts and activities are rarely included in historical documents produced by the upper class.
This final facet of my research developed from my relations with the people of Xaltocan. On the first day of my work there in 1987, about sixty people gathered to ask me who I was and what I was doing in their town. Why should they let me gather their artifacts? It would clearly benefit me, but what would it do for them? I replied that Xaltocan had an illustrious history and that if I worked in Xaltocan, I could find out more about its history. Then I would tell them, and they could tell their children. The people of Xaltocan agreed to let me work, but they emphasized that I was to tell them what I found out from my studies.

Communicating my results to the community turned out to be very difficult. At first, I tried to meet my obligation by passing out translated copies of my professional papers. But people didn’t read them; the papers seemed to disappear without a trace. The papers weren’t really too technical, but they were too general. They dealt with theoretical issues like the relationship of craft specialization to social complexity, or the role of feasting in political coalition building. My papers were not unusual in this regard; most archaeologists study particular sites and prehistoric periods in order to formulate general theories about the factors that produced culture change in the human past.

In contrast, the people of Xaltocan wanted specific information about what had happened in their town. And they were hoping for information that would enhance their self-esteem. Although writing this kind of prehistory was just as difficult as any professional writing, I did manage to organize an exhibit and a twenty-four-page report on my research specifically aimed at the people of Xaltocan.

The exhibit emphasized the success of Xaltocan’s people in occupying their town continuously for nearly 1,200 years. It showed how the people of Xaltocan had created an artificial “island” for their town by bringing in soil to build foundation platforms for their houses, generation after generation. It
showed how the people of Xaltocan had learned to rely on the fish and waterfowl from the shallow lake and swamp that surrounded the town and how they had constructed a system of raised field agriculture in order to grow crops in the normally water-logged soil. The exhibit described the crafts, trade patterns, and religion of prehistoric Xaltocan using photographs and drawings of the artifacts and structures we had excavated.

This encounter changed my ideas about my obligations as an archaeologist. Prior to my encounter in Xaltocan, I believed that my obligations consisted of publishing my data and theories fully and accurately so that they could be used by other archaeologists and social scientists. My encounter in Xaltocan made me realize that I also have an obligation to make my research results available and relevant to the people whose past I study. Anything less would be an exercise in archaeological imperialism, that is, using a people’s artifacts and history to serve the needs and interests of a foreigner (me) instead of the local population.

The exhibit was very well received by the people of Xaltocan. Adding new information to the store of local history was as rewarding as any professional work I’ve done in archaeology. Instead of being a remote outsider, I found a place in the community.

**SUMMARY**

Over the years, the satisfactions I gain from archaeology have multiplied. Starting out, I was intensely interested in the artifacts themselves, and in the adventure of living and working in Mexico. More recently, I have been able to move away from topics of traditional interest in archaeology, such as craft specialization and exchange patterns, to deal with topics that are more central to my interests: the construction of social power and the status of women. As my research continues, I see more and more connections among my interests. For example, the changes that I detected in women’s work and women’s status under the Aztec state seem closely related to the strategies implemented by Aztec rulers to build and maintain their power. Also, the
design of my exhibit of archaeological research for the people of Xaltocan was related to what I had learned about political power. I designed the exhibit to emphasize self-help and problem-solving in Xaltocan’s past because I thought that this would encourage the people of Xaltocan to organize themselves to pursue their current political goals. As the connections among my research interests seem to grow, so too does my sense of connection to people. I have more of a sense of place in Xaltocan than I did at Xico or Huexotla, and I have begun to collaborate with Mexican archaeologists on several projects.

I never could have predicted how my career would turn out. In the beginning, I just liked archaeology, and I found it intensely interesting. I advanced in my career by taking on small-scale problems that seemed related to my central problem, the emergence of social inequality. A lifetime in Mexican archaeology has been the result.

I have benefitted tremendously from the generosity of other archaeologists who have shared their ideas and data with me and encouraged me to pursue my interests. I have also benefitted from the generosity, hard work, and trust of people in the Mexican towns where I have worked.

My next project is to write a general overview of the development of social inequality in Mexico. Of course, I hope that everything in the book turns out to be right. But it amuses me to think of the skeptical student out there who will read my book, and just know that I’ve gotten it wrong, and will set out on a lifetime of archaeological research to find her own answers.

NOTES

1. My skepticism was also rooted in my opposition to the Vietnam war. How could people say that states were beneficial when the government of South Vietnam seemed to have little interest in improving the lives of Vietnamese peasants? How could people say that states were beneficial when our own government seemed bent on supporting the corrupt South Vietnamese government no matter what the cost in American and Vietnamese lives?

3. The adaptationist theory proposes that humans use culture to adapt to their environments. It regards social institutions such as states and empires as the product of population-environment interaction. It suggests that social inequality helps human populations solve their problems of survival.


5. The dates of the various ceramic designs were established in previous excavations of other sites in the region.


11. Roger D. Mason, *Economic and Social Organization of an Aztec*

12. Ibid.


Suggested Readings


