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SPECIAL SECTION: OTUMBA AND ITS NEIGHBORS

INTRODUCTION

This issue's special section is the first of a two-part series on recent research conducted at the Aztec city-state of Otumba and the neighboring polities of Tepeapulco to the east and Teotihuacan to the west. Otumba is an extremely important site for the archaeological study of the Late Aztec period because, as Thomas H. Charlton, Deborah L. Nichols, and Cynthia L. Otis Charlton point out in their introduction, it is one of the few places in the Valley of Mexico where late pre-Columbian remains are not obscured by post-Hispanic occupation. Research directed by Charlton at Otumba began in the early 1960s and continued in the late 1980s under the direction of Charlton and Nichols, followed by laboratory and technical analyses of the archaeological materials as well as ecological and ethnohistoric studies. Charlton and his collaborators have amassed a prodigious amount of data, which allows them to address a wide range of issues revolving around the general question of the processes involved in the origins and development of the city-state in central Mexico during the Early and Middle Postclassic periods. They do so within a theoretical context that engages the two most prevalent general models proposed to account for the rise of Postclassic city-states in central Mexico. The first model, initially proposed by William T. Sanders and colleagues, builds on the concept of economic symbiosis and argues that the rise of the city-state in the Basin of Mexico was due primarily to the centralized role of the city-state in coordinating the production and distribution of foodstuffs and nonagricultural craft goods in the local economy, associated with an expanding population. The second model, developed by Elizabeth Brumfiel and based on her work at Huexotla and Xico, rejects the role of local economic symbiosis and craft specialization and, consequently, questions the centralized economic role of the city-state in developing the political complexity evident in the Basin of Mexico at the time of the Conquest.

Certainly one of the major contributions of the papers presented in this special section is that Charlton and his collaborators can argue convincingly that certain aspects of both of these general models appear to be correct at different times and in different places and that neither is correct in its totality. In other words, neither completely accounts for the observed developments in all their complexity. I would add that both models oversimplify the situation, or, perhaps more accurately, they "undercomplicate" the situation. As philosopher of science Abraham Kaplan (1964: 280–281) pointed out, all models by their very nature must oversimplify reality, and this common failing of model building becomes dangerous only when it follows the "principle of the drunkard's search."In the metaphorical version, the drunk searches for his lost keys beneath the lamp post because that is the the area most brightly lit. In the present example, Sanders and colleagues find that centralized control of the production and distribution of agricultural commodities and craft items played a crucial role in the rise of the polities of the Triple Alliance, especially Tenochtitlan. Brumfiel, however, finds that such factors are absent in the rise of Huexotla and Xico and that specialized craft production was minimal or nonexistent, emphasizing instead factors such as political competition among regional elites. In both models, the factors emphasized are the ones most obvious in the data of each researcher—they are, shall we say, the most brightly illuminated. The work conducted at Otumba helps us to avoid the "drunkard's search" because the data are voluminous and the analyses extensive, making it possible to perceive valid aspects of both models and to meld the most compelling factors into a single, more coherent model that suffers less from oversimplification.

In this first installment of papers on Otumba and its neighbors, **Thomas H. Charlton, Deborah L. Nichols, and Cynthia L. Otis Charlton** present an overview of the project and a summary of the results of their field research and analyses. **Deborah L. Nichols, Mary Jane McLaughlin, and Maura Benton** offer an intriguing treatment of regional specialization and production intensification of textiles, especially of maguey, at Otumba. **Martin Biskowski** contributes a study of the spatial distribution of manos and metates at Otumba that suggests a shift from household production to a more specialized system. **Hector Neff, Michael D. Glascock, Thomas H. Charlton, Cynthia Otis Charlton, and Deborah L. Nichols** provide new data on the provenience of obsidian and ceramic artifacts from Otumba. And finally, **Christopher Garraty** explores the nature of elite status as seen through his analyses of ceramics from Late Aztec Teotihuacan. To extend the metaphor, the search light is now cast over a much larger area.

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