

## CHAPTER ONE

### WEST MEXICO COALESCED

This study is founded on two premises: first, that no region in Mesoamerica can be understood in isolation, and second, that Central Mesoamerica had a sequence of rise and fall of state level polities, which during periods of upswing in state development correlated with an increase in the geographical scale of interregional communication and integration. Broad-scale interaction interconnected many regions through links with polities of different levels of complexity, in some cases involving core–periphery relations. However, at no time did any state level polity control Mesoamerica through conquest, or colonization.

Integration had considerable effects, stimulating changes and transformations in the societies which were part of this interaction process. When state level societies faced disintegration and demise, the long-distance interregional relationships loosened and frayed. The resulting retrenchment significantly reduced interpolity interaction to a regionalized scale. The present study will focus on the interregional interaction of two state level polities, Teotihuacan and Tula, and the links they formed with West Mexico during their rise as powerful core states in central highland Mexico.

The span of 200–1200 CE in highland Mesoamerica can be seen as a sequence of centralization and decentralization of sociopolitical power, which has been deemed a characteristic of world systems (e.g., Blanton et al. 1996; Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997: 206–210; Gills and Frank 1992: 678; Marcus 1998: 71–74, fig. 3.4; Price 1977: 210). Between 200 and 550 CE,

the state of Teotihuacan established connections with most of the regions of Mesoamerica. From 550/600 to 900 CE, following the disintegration of Teotihuacan, all regions of Mesoamerica underwent a readjustment in the scale of interregional interaction. Between 900 and 1200 CE, the state of Tula sustained significant long-distance interregional interaction again, integrating numerous regions of Mesoamerica. The temporal scope covered here addresses the problem of discerning patterns in the archaeological record indicative of core–periphery relations between the pre-Columbian core states of Central Mexico, Teotihuacan and Tula, and West Mexico.

This will take us to the complex problem of the characterization and extent of core–periphery relations during the Early Classic (300–550 CE) and Early Postclassic (900–1200 CE) periods. This will allow a preliminary comparison of world-system manifestation between the two periods in question, which ultimately can shed light on the nature of relationships forged by these state level polities beyond the Valley of Mexico.

The term Mesoamerica, defined as a pre-Columbian culture area, is consistently ascribed to the territory that includes a portion of northern Mexico, all of Central and southern Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize, as well as parts of Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Costa Rica. Since the 1980s, archaeological research has advanced significantly in defining the mosaic of distinctive regional cultural developments of what is known as West Mexico (see Figure 3.2), the territory extending from the Valley of Toluca – adjacent to the Valley of Mexico – through the states of Michoacan, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Nayarit, Sinaloa, Aguascalientes, and Zacatecas, in Mexico widely referred to as *El Occidente* (the West). However, research into the complex problem of how West Mexico was integrated with other segments of this extensive culture area is notably uncommon.

To date, studies (Filini 2004; Hernández 2016; Jadot 2016; Michelet and Pereira 2009) have concentrated on sites located on the eastern fringe of West Mexico where material evidence indicative of contacts and exchange with neighboring Central Mexico has been identified. This has led researchers to consider those contacts within this particular zone of West Mexico. Hence, research has been constrained to a regional scale of inquiry, while studies that attempt to understand broader-scale interregional relationships of social change and cultural development further west of Michoacan are lacking. In essence, a major problem persisted: How was West Mexico tied to the rest of Mesoamerica?

Integrating localized studies into a broader geographical scale, the present analysis addresses the problem of interregional interaction drawing on world-systems analysis, specifically the comparative world-systems approach (Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997). An analysis is undertaken with the objective of detecting and explaining the emergence of world-system sociopolitical

relations in West Mexico, the boundaries of interaction networks, and changes in interregional network configurations from 200 to 1200 CE.

The root questions of this study are situated in the research problems I confronted during three decades of fieldwork at three of the major archaeological sites of the state of Zacatecas, Mexico: Alta Vista, La Quemada, and Cerro del Teul. All three sites were contemporaries during the Epiclassic period (600–900 CE), an aspect that initially came to the forefront during the years that I spent investigating the site of La Quemada (e.g., Jimenez 1989; Jimenez and Darling 2000).

Prior to the Epiclassic period, the site of Cerro Chapin, 7 km south of the ceremonial center of Alta Vista, in the vicinity of present-day Chalchihuites, Zacatecas, manifests evidence of a vague association with Teotihuacan – 600 km to the southeast – in the form of pecked cross petroglyphs commonly found in Teotihuacan and its surroundings (Aveni, Hartung, and Kelley 1982; Headrick 2007: 116–117). The problem relating to the nature of contacts between Alta Vista and Teotihuacan was a subject of constant discussions I had with the late J. Charles Kelley for over a decade, and daily in the early 1990s during excavations in Alta Vista. In the absence of evidence for direct exchange with Teotihuacan, these discussions gyrated around the significance of certain architectural patterns reminiscent of Teotihuacan found in Alta Vista. Emphatically, how and when had the elaborate Teotihuacan related pecked cross petroglyphs arrived at Cerro Chapin? These essentially brought to the forefront a fundamental research problem concerning how West Mexico had integrated into the rest of Early Classic period Mesoamerica (see Chapter 4).

Meanwhile, in the southern extreme of Zacatecas, Cerro del Teul survived both La Quemada and Alta Vista into the Early Postclassic period, experiencing a highpoint, which correlated with contacts between Cerro del Teul and networks on the Pacific Coast and central Jalisco. Thus, it became evident that the ceremonial centers at Alta Vista, La Quemada, and Cerro del Teul, and their hinterlands, had formed part of large-scale historical processes linked to the larger realms of both West and Central Mexico at different times. But how were they integrated and what was the nature of their interaction with their contemporaries? Why did Cerro del Teul's occupation continue into the Postclassic period while Alta Vista and La Quemada faced their demise at the end of the Epiclassic period?

Hence, problems addressed here are: Can processes of core–periphery relations and social changes that affected these sites in distinct manners and times across considerable distances in West Mexico be perceivable in the archaeological record? Is the evidence of these relationships readily observed, or are they manifest in discrete material remains and/or patterns?

Can world-systems analysis assist to detect and explain observed patterns in the material record? And ultimately, are archaeological data relevant to understanding long-term change? In essence, this study aims at defining the spatial interregional networks of the world system that articulated West Mexico with states in Central Mexico during the Early Classic and Early Postclassic periods.

For theoretical frameworks of macroscale approaches such as world-systems analysis to assist in explaining the archaeological record, these need to be able to articulate with observed material culture at the regional level of analysis. With these criteria in mind, the present study builds on the comparative world-systems approach outlined by Chase-Dunn and Hall (1997) and applies that analytical lens in an initial regional study for Mesoamerica. One of the virtues of this approach for archaeological application resides in the definition of four nested interaction networks that compose a world system.

Chase-Dunn and Hall have advanced a conceptual framework that permits a coherent evaluation of material evidence patterning to detect interaction networks of relevance. Their model enables archaeology to operationalize, test, and potentially approach, in world-systems analysis, the study of a precapitalist past – an issue Immanuel Wallerstein did not intend in his original formulation of the analytical framework (Wallerstein 1974, 1980), which focused on sixteenth-century Europe. The present study addresses the empirical problem of what kinds of evidence in the archaeological record are suitable diagnostics for these networks, confronting Early Classic and Early Postclassic West Mexico as cases.

While West Mexico remains archaeologically the most under-researched region in Mesoamerica (Beekman 2010: 41; Gorenstein and Foster 2000: 8), the emerging patterns described here constitute the first broad-scale network systems defined between Central and West Mexico. The model produced will allow projections, predictions, and testable assumptions of diagnostic components within the material culture that one can expect to find in excavations at any site within the modeled networks, thus making it possible to correlate the temporal and spatial system in which one is excavating, an essential starting point for most research. Present and future studies will be able to define even more complex patterns and questions about the local context of change and the larger Mesoamerican realm in which all sites interacted.

One of the most compelling and contended problems in Mesoamerican archaeology to date is to understand the relationship between social change and the continuous transformations of interregional integration in Mesoamerica, from the Early Formative period (2000–1000 BCE) through the Late Postclassic moment of contact with Europeans in 1519 CE. Like all the subareas of Mesoamerica, West Mexico has its trajectory regarding this

quandary. Starting with Isabel Kelly's pioneering study *Ceramic Provinces of Northwest Mexico* (1948) to the recently edited volume *Greater Mesoamerica: The Archaeology of West and Northwest Mexico* (Foster and Gorenstein 2000), the archaeology of West Mexico has passed through distinct stages in the generation of data and production of knowledge for what is one of the most ecologically diverse subareas of Mesoamerica.

Yet a perusal of West Mexican archaeology shows a generational advance roughly every fifteen years. As part of the first generation of pioneering Mesoamericanists in West Mexico, Ekholm (1942), Kelly (1938, 1939, 1945a, 1945b, 1947, 1948, 1980), Lister (1949, 1955; Lister and Howard 1955), and Sauer and Brand (1932) made distant correlations to Central Mexico with considerable unknown territory in between. These initial observations were to be expected as this early generation associated material correlates with the few known sites in Central Mexico. These horizontal correlations remained constant during the next four decades as the *tierra incógnita* of West Mexico became increasingly studied and its archaeology elaborated upon by the first wave of *Occidentalistas* (a term for archaeologists studying West Mexico) during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

During this time span, J. Charles Kelley (1971, 1974, 1986) and Clement Meighan (1976b; Meighan and Foote 1968) would be constant instigators of a macroregional perspective connecting West Mexico mainly to Central Mesoamerica, but also to some extent to the American Southwest, proposing the existence of trade routes, traveling merchants, and migrations.

By the mid-1990s, with the addition of an influx of a new generation of researchers, marked strides were made in the definition of regional chronologies, together with in-depth studies on the diverse lake basins and extensive Pacific Coast that make up significant stretches of the territory of West Mexico (e.g., Arnauld, Carot, and Fauvet-Berthelot 1993; Carot 2001; Filini 2004; Pollard 2000; Valdez, Schöndube, and Emphoux 2005). At the time, Helen Pollard observed, "perhaps greater significance in the long run is that regional research is no longer driven primarily by the need to understand *central* Mexican prehistory, but by the challenge of understanding the dynamics of cultural change in *west* Mexico itself" (Pollard 1997: 370; emphasis in original). In the new millennium, the archaeology of West Mexico has undergone an about-face, presently enthralled by its own core regions and their complexity. Few researchers have picked up on Pollard's concluding comment on the need to retain a macroscale perspective, and in particular a world-systems perspective (Pollard 1997: 371).

At present, *Occidentalistas* are yet to produce an update on Foster and Gorenstein (2000). One reason is that the archaeology of West Mexico is presently in a generational transition period, between the overt Mesoamericanist

generation of Kelly, Kelley, and Meighan, among others, who perceived West Mexico as a subregion tied to macroregional processes of Mesoamerica, and the more recent locally focused generation, including Cabrero (1989, 2005, 2010), Carot (2001), Mountjoy (1989, 1990, 1995, 2000), Pollard (1993, 2000, 2008), and Weigand (1985, 1992, 1996, 2000), among others, whose research has been critical in establishing a more extensive database for understanding local developments throughout West Mexico. However, the present transition is complicated because it entails substantial internal/external inquiries.

On one hand, within West Mexico it requires, among other issues, a reexamination of what is commonly known as the Teuchitlan tradition (Weigand 1985, 2000), a hallmark of West Mexican archaeology. The revision in question pertains to the spatiotemporal dimensions of the unique and widespread monumental circular architectural pattern centered in highland Jalisco, which for decades was proposed and widely accepted as an expanding core state development dating from 300 BCE to 900 CE (e.g., Beekman 1996a, 1996b; Weigand 1985, 2000). However, chronological data and revision, together with intersite analysis in the core area, indicate that the Teuchitlan culture developed between 200 BCE and 400 CE as a complex chiefdom (Jimenez and Darling 2000; López Mestas 2011; Trujillo 2015). The comprehensive downsizing of this regional development requires research to understand the significance of the presence of its unique architectural pattern in sites beyond the core area (see Chapter 3).

Outwards, it has become clear that “understanding the dynamics of cultural change in *west* Mexico itself” (Pollard 1997: 370, emphasis in original) is not possible without analyses at multiple scales, including the larger scale of interregional connections with the immediate area to the east: Central Mexico. The present study focuses primarily on the inquiry into West Mexico’s external ties; but in doing so it will also contribute insights addressing the dilemma pertaining to sociopolitical change in the Teuchitlan region.

Also, this study aims to show the necessity and coherence of a distinct analytical approach between earlier macroregional (Kelley 2000) and more recent regional perspectives (Beekman 2010). The integration of these into a multiscale approach of region (a network of polities in a geographically defined area that share a material culture), macroregion (diverse interacting regions), and world system (a political and economic system that incorporates a number of interacting regions composed of numerous regional cultural systems), permits a more balanced middle ground in which to examine the dynamics of West Mexico in its diverse articulations with the rest of Mesoamerica.

Comparing the case of West Mexico with studies of interregional interaction between other parts of Mesoamerica serves as a starting point for

identifying some problems discussed in this book. The example of the analyses of relations between the Maya and Central Mexico in Early Classic Teotihuacan and Early Postclassic Tula are both relevant. The surge in Maya studies during the last three decades has produced an about-face in previous perceptions of central Mexican “influence” that subordinated the Maya, with the latter characterized as passive receptors (Braswell 2003a; Kowalski and Kristan-Graham 2011; cf. Kidder, Jennings, and Shook 1946; Sanders and Michels 1977).

For the Early Classic period, the present characterization of this interaction suggests a two-way relationship between distant regions exchanging ideas and goods (e.g., Taube 2003). Compared to the conventions of state apparatus of Teotihuacan, Mayan elites present evidence of their interaction with Teotihuacan. Within long-distance trade networks, the regal nature of contacts (Marcus 2003; Taube 2003: 312) stimulated, on the part of some Mayan elites, a selective integration of Central Mexican symbols and religious components into localized idioms, together with the manifestation of long-distance contacts as legitimizing strategies in a subarea which was substantially more competitive in power relations among neighboring peer-polities (e.g., Braswell 2003a; Demarest and Foias 1993).

In pinpointing the focus in this research area at present, Braswell concludes, “we should seek explanatory frameworks that emphasize local innovations yet underscore the complexity of interaction” (2003a: 40). An equally noteworthy aspect, to be taken into consideration in this specific case of interregional interaction that is pertinent to other subareas, relates to the evidence for the changing nature of Teotihuacan’s internal power structure (Manzanilla 2009), and how this might be reflected in the core state’s relations abroad (Marcus 2003). Both of these aspects will play into the problem of discerning the nature of core–periphery relations between Teotihuacan and West Mexico.

The situation described previously on the interaction between Teotihuacan and the Maya contrasts significantly with the proposals for West Mexico regarding the impact, or “influence,” of Teotihuacan on the region to the west. As will be examined in greater detail further, acknowledged material evidence related to Teotihuacan has been distinguished for the region of northern Michoacan (Filini 2004; Michelet and Pereira 2009; Pollard 1997), yet the data have not so far sustained any argument for domination by Teotihuacan. This situation, at first sight, seems perplexing when considering the 200 km that separate Michoacan’s Cuitzeo Basin and Teotihuacan, in contrast to the 1,000 km between Teotihuacan and the major Early Classic Maya city at Tikal, Guatemala, as one example.

However, it has been pointed out that there exists a vast territory between Teotihuacan and the Maya lowlands (Cowgill 2003; Marcus 2003), which

requires integrative models that take into consideration that, “Instead of a simple dyadic model relationship with Teotihuacan, the Maya had a much wider network of direct and indirect contacts” (Marcus 2003: 355).

Conversely, the proximity for evidence of connections to Teotihuacan in West Mexico strongly suggests that a distinct process was operating that bound these neighboring subareas. In contrast to Teotihuacan’s complex interaction and ties to regions south of the Valley of Mexico with contemporary regional capitals like Cholula (Plunket and Uruñuela 1998) and Monte Alban (Winter, Martinez, and Peeler 1998), in West Mexico at 200/250 CE sociopolitical complexity does not compare with the aforementioned polities (Darras and Faugère 2010; Pollard 2000: 62–63). This contrast may have contributed to a different characterization of the world-system relations.

In contrast to the current view that the networks integrating Teotihuacan and Michoacan did not extend beyond western Michoacan (Gómez Chávez and Spence 2012; Michelet and Pereira 2009), it will be shown here that Michoacan played a semiperipheral position in a world system that extended much further than previously acknowledged. This study addresses this contrast and considers the factors that may have played into a distinct core–periphery relationship between Teotihuacan and West Mexico.

The question pertaining to interactions between Early Postclassic period Tula in Central Mexico and Chichen Itza in northern Yucatan has likewise seen a marked change from the previous prevalence of interpretations that sustained a Tula-Toltec conquest and domination of Chichen Itza (Kowalski and Kristan-Graham 2011). Knowledge on the nature of the contact has advanced substantially, suggesting institutional ties in the realms of religion and trade (Bey and Ringle 2011: 333). The issue of interaction between Tula and Chichen Itza shows the difficulties of understanding cultural exchange within a short time span. Again, as described before, the intervening territory of over 1,100 km between highland Central Mexico and the northern Maya lowlands of the Yucatan Peninsula plays into the difficulties in understanding this problem.

A fundamental constraint resides in the lack of interregional studies that could propose how this intervening expanse articulated with both Central Mexico and the Yucatan Peninsula. In Mesoamerican archaeology, there are very few detailed studies concerning the nature and facets of Tula’s presence beyond Central Mexico (Bey and Ringle 2011; Healan 2012). The present study will contribute to filling this void by examining the question of Tula’s exterior presence in West Mexico. Tula was considerably closer in distance to West Mexico, yet, as seen in the case of Teotihuacan, Tula has not been associated with material culture that sustains any argument that proposes direct control in West Mexico.

However, evidence suggesting some form of connection with Tula, mainly due to the presence of Plumbate ceramics and elaborate figurines,



has consistently been highlighted since the 1950s (Lister 1949, 1955). This research will examine, from a world-systems perspective, the material evidence for interregional interaction networks between Tula and the Pacific Coast of West Mexico.

A limitation of the present study, which is macroregional in scope, is that in some regions and periods we are still very limited in data. At present, a significantly greater amount of data pertaining to the Early Postclassic period exists in comparison to the existing lacunae in a number of zones related to the Early Classic and Late Formative periods. For the latter, we are still very limited in our understanding of basic issues such as architecture, settlement patterns, and social complexity. This factor will limit the depth of interpretation for the Early Classic period, while the material evidence for interaction networks for the Early Postclassic period will permit a number of proposals for interpretation.

#### OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

The present analysis has been structured to take the reader along an extensive spatiotemporal trek. A balance between analytical framework and material culture has been sought in order not to bog the reader down in extensive description. The initial outline of the problems to be covered in this study has been defined previously. Since many issues this study deals with have been previously pondered by researchers throughout recent decades, considerable efforts are made to contextualize the course of the pertinent intellectual inquiries on which this study builds. Their ideas are the giants who gave this study a different vantage point.

Chapter 2 begins with a review of the conditions in Mesoamerican archaeology, which brought about the initial application of world-systems theory (WST) to issues concerning macroregional interaction, together with the impediments that would foster its reformulation for its further use in contexts prior to the sixteenth century. The subsequent section introduces the comparative approach for a world-systems perspective that will be applied in the present study as a material culture model for the analysis of core–periphery relations during the Early Classic and Early Postclassic periods.

Chapter 3 offers two overviews, the first defining the physical setting of West Mexico focusing on the Mesa Central of Mexico and the Lerma-Santiago Basin. The second presents an approximation to the spatiotemporal context of cultural development in West Mexico at around 200 CE, the baseline from which this study departs. Chapters 3 and 5 present overviews of the intermediate phase between the periods of core–periphery relations examined in Chapters 4 and 6. Chapter 4 considers the Early Classic period

(250/300–550/600 CE), focusing on the cultural dynamics of Teotihuacan outside of the Basin of Mexico. The chapter commences with a review of the problems confronted by previous research on the matter of inter-regional interaction with Teotihuacan. This is relevant to the present study for considerations and insight made from the viewpoint of other regions where this issue has been examined. The second section of the chapter undertakes the review of material culture from the Valley of Mexico to West Mexico. The objective is to present the material correlates of the interaction networks that extended from the core state into a number of zones of West Mexico. The final section discusses the emerging material patterning and a number of issues related to the process of incorporation and the impact on West Mexico.

Chapter 5 covers the Epiclassic period (600–900 CE) in West Mexico. A regional overview is presented defining the spatial configuration of the local cultural spheres and the interregional networks that articulated much of this subarea following the transformation of the Mesoamerican world system at around 550/600 CE. The objective of this chapter is to integrate an updated summary of what is currently known of the diverse local spheres for this period. The spatial configuration and networks of this period are pertinent to the present study since they define the maximum extension of the northern frontier of West Mexico. Subsequently, this northern frontier zone undergoes extensive change at around 950/1000 CE resulting in the retraction of the territorial limits of this segment of Mesoamerica.

Likewise a review of four spheres between eastern West Mexico and Central Mexico are outlined for an updated discussion on the transition between the Epiclassic and Early Postclassic periods. Chapter 6 begins with the complex problem of how the core state of Tula interacted with West Mexico during the Early Postclassic period (900–1200 CE). The initial section examines previous research in West Mexico in which connections with Tula were observed. The review is pertinent here since this chapter reiterates, in considerable measure, key insights made on the part of previous researchers stemming from studies of a few sites in West Mexico at a time when data sets were scarce, as were also the conceptual frameworks concerning long-distance contacts.

The next section of this chapter reviews data sets starting from the region of Tula, and proceeding across West Mexico to the Pacific Coast, and subsequently to the American Southwest. The final section contains a discussion of the observed material patterning, and an interpretation of this patterning from a different perspective, for its correlation with interaction networks that linked Tula, West Mexico, and the Southwest.

Finally, Chapter 7 presents the definitions of material patterns of the nested networks observed in the course of analysis of the Mesoamerican world system in West Mexico during the span of a thousand years. This is followed by observations regarding world-system expansion in West Mexico. The setting of the semiperiphery is singled out in order to better scrutinize its role in the world system. Final observations and questions are presented from this study that are pertinent to future research. Upon closing this book, the reader will have an up-to-date exposure to the archaeology of Mesoamerica from the vantage point of West Mexico through the lens of WSA.