
SPECIAL SECTION: RECENT RESEARCH AT CERRO PORTEZUELO

INTRODUCTION

George W. Brainerd began archaeological fieldwork at Cerro Portezuelo in 1954. To set the stage for this issue's Special Section we invite readers to pause and reflect on a few of the events of 1954, a normal year in the Cold War era. The first hydrogen bomb test was conducted near Bikini Atoll in the Pacific. The Viet Minh defeated the French in the battle of Dien Bien Phu and became the Viet Cong. On the home front the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that racially segregated schools were unconstitutional, Marilyn Monroe married and divorced Joe DiMaggio, and "On the Waterfront" starring Marlon Brando won the Academy Award for the Best Picture. In terms of technology, IBM introduced the Model B electric typewriter and the first color TV sets were sold in New York. To the dismay of every epicurian, it was the year of the world's first TV dinners. In cinema, Alfred Hitchcock directed the thriller "Rear Window," and as we look backward with the advantage of hindsight we can see that the material world changed significantly from when George Brainerd began his research at Cerro Portezuelo.

Consider also how the academic landscape in archaeology has shifted since Brainerd began his research. Radiocarbon dating was brand new (Libby 1952) and Gordon Willey (1953) had just ushered in an entirely new archaeological field methodology with *Prehistoric Settlement Patterns of the Virú Valley, Peru*. The hot topics in archaeological theory included the Spaulding-Ford debate on the nature of typology (Ford 1954; Spaulding 1953), Meggers's (1954) work on environmental determinism, and Rouse's (1954) publication on the concept of area co-tradition.

Research in highland Mexico in 1954 was focused on establishing regional chronological sequences. Richard MacNeish and David Kelley were working on a stratigraphic sequence of seven sequential complexes for Romero Cave in Tamaulipas. At Tula, Hidalgo, Jorge Acosta was directing excavations at the Palacio Quemado and Mound C. In the Basin of Mexico William J. Mayer-Oakes was conducting site surveys in the northern valley and excavating the site of El Risco along the shore of Lake Texcoco. Paul Tolstoy, then a graduate student at Columbia University, was beginning his survey of Classic and Postclassic period sites in the northern basin, directed mainly toward issues of chronological refinement (Tolstoy 1958); the antecedent to his research was the threefold Archaic-Classic-Postclassic sequence established by Boas, Gamio, Tozzer, Kroeber, Vaillant, and Linné.

Eric Wolf has described the intellectual milieu for central Mexican archaeology of the mid-1950s as largely materialistic. According to Wolf (1976:2–4), the work of Gordon Childe and

Karl Wittfogel was particularly influential in inspiring Pedro Armillas to develop his neoevolutionary approach which was modeled on the work of Julian Steward. Armillas's work in turn enabled scholars such as Sanders, Millon, Molins Fábrega, and Palerm to formulate and address problems of population, settlement, agriculture, and urbanism. All this initial research which began in the 1950s would mature and bear fruit in the following decade—all, that is, except for Brainerd's project which was cut short by his untimely death in 1956.

It seems apropos to quote from George Brainerd's obituary written by Harry Hoijer and Ralph L. Beals (1956):

Brainerd's basic research in ceramics and problems of chronology provided a framework for the study of culture change and its processes. Essentially he saw his work as contributing to the wider area of the social sciences as a whole. His shift from the Maya area to the Valley of Mexico arose in part from his conviction that the Toltec invasion of Yucatan initiated a major culture change. Less than a week before his death, Dr. Brainerd wrote: "My present work should set up a close archeological chronology on the rise of the Toltecs in the Valley of Mexico, and shed light on the events which led to the decline of the formal, urban Teotihuacan set-up, and the direction and nature of the influences which brought the Tula-Toltecs into power. . . . The problem might be stated as covering the nature of the rise of the Toltecs, and the means whereby they staged their very rapid cultural expansion over Meso-America. Evidence as to changes in social organization, with particular emphasis on religious-military conquest, should come out. Direct evidence on the nature of the introduction of Toltec religious symbolism, ceremonial architecture, and settlement pattern changes is becoming available."

Now, almost 60 years later, Deborah Nichols and George Cowgill have assembled a group of scholars to salvage the data from the Cerro Portezuelo project that have never been completely analyzed and reported on since its excavation. Their overarching purpose has diverged slightly (but not radically) from Brainerd's stated goals, as they take into account the results and trends of research on other Classic period hinterland sites and the recent surge in interest in Epiclassic and Postclassic city-state development in the Basin of Mexico. Their efforts have resulted in the papers found in this Special Section.

The papers clearly demonstrate that a systematic analysis of existing collections can contribute valuable information to understanding the pre-Hispanic past despite changes in both research

methodologies and theoretical questions. The reason for this is an unfortunate one: many of the basic questions in central Mexican archaeology still remain unanswered. The Basin of Mexico is widely recognized as a major center of complex society in ancient Mesoamerica. It was where the early state of Teotihuacan developed, and it was the center of the powerful Aztec empire at the Spanish Conquest. Unfortunately, the rapid growth of Mexico City from 3,000,000 persons in 1950 to 20,000,000 persons in 1995 has devastated archaeological sites in this region. Mexico City's urban sprawl now covers 35–40% of the basin (Gutiérrez 1998) and most remaining rural sites have been destroyed by deep chisel plowing (Parsons 1989). The ongoing destruction of archaeological sites within the Basin of Mexico makes existing collections from past scientific explorations irreplaceable and invaluable assets for framing and testing contemporary research questions. Cerro Portezuelo illustrates this by being one of the few large sites in the basin outside of Teotihuacan for which there are existing data to address basic research questions.

Ten contributions comprise this Special Section on Cerro Portezuelo. The introductory contribution by **Deborah Nichols, Hector Neff, and George Cowgill** provides an excellent chronological overview of Brainerd's research objectives. It discusses the new information on ceramic sourcing which is set within a contemporary overview of pre-Hispanic cultural development within the Basin of Mexico. **Frederic Hicks** was intimately involved in the early analysis of ceramic materials from Cerro Portezuelo after Brainerd's death. His contribution to the Special Section discusses the architecture, burials, and associated offerings uncovered from Classic through Late Postclassic period contexts during Brainerd's excavations.

The original focus of Brainerd's research was on pottery chronology and four studies in the Special Section address different questions using ceramic materials. The first of these is by **Sarah Clayton** who examines the relationship of Cerro Portezuelo and the site of Axotla to Teotihuacan using architectural, ceramic, and mortuary information. She concludes that although Cerro Portezuelo was a large regional site it does not share a close affinity with Teotihuacan in terms of the artifact assemblages associated with domestic ritual. This is followed by a study of Epiclassic and Early Postclassic ceramic production and consumption patterns at Cerro Portezuelo by **Destiny Crider**. Crider's study reveals significant changes in role that Cerro Portezuelo played as a regional center between the Epiclassic and Early Postclassic period.

George Cowgill focuses on the sharp cultural changes associated with the decline of Teotihuacan. He proposes a significant influx of population from west Mexico from A.D. 650–850 to account for changes in ceramic style and form over this period. **Christopher Garraty** examines ceramic patterning from the Middle Postclassic through the early Colonial period. He employs instrumental neutron activation analysis to examine the chemical composition of pottery from three chronological periods to model changes in the distribution of ceramics within regional market networks over time.

The four remaining contributions examine different aspects of the cerro Portezuelo material assemblage. **William Parry and Michael Glascock** employ energy dispersive x-ray fluorescence analysis to examine the sources of obsidian entering Cerro Portezuelo during the Classic and Postclassic periods. Although their sample comes from stratigraphically mixed contexts, they propose that Cerro Portezuelo was receiving obsidian blades from both the Ucareo and Pachuca sources during the Classic period. The next article by **Michael Spence, Christine White, and Fred Longstaffe** provides a bioanthropological analysis of 17 human skeletons excavated at Cerro Portezuelo. Oxygen-isotope analysis of these remains suggest limited population movement with the possibility of two migrants from outside the Basin of Mexico. **Wendy Teeter** provides an overview of the zooarchaeological remains from Cerro Portezuelo. Her analysis focuses mainly on remains from the Postclassic period and demonstrates that domestic households incorporated both wild and domesticated animals in their subsistence strategy. The final contribution to this Special Section is by **Martin Biskowski and Karen Watson**. While maize was a staple crop throughout Mesoamerica, their analysis of ground stone artifacts suggest a possible contraction of maize in favor of amaranth and other foods during the drier Epiclassic period.

As the contributions in this Special Section indicate, Cerro Portezuelo was an important site in the Basin of Mexico during the Classic and Epiclassic periods. Furthermore, it is one of the few large sites in the basin where research can still be conducted. We hope that this Special Section helps to stimulate archaeologists to frame contemporary research questions and carry them forward into the field both at Cerro Portezuelo and elsewhere.

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