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Fashioning Society: The Use of Facial Adornments for Social Identification in Late Postclassic Tlaxcallan, Mexico

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FASHIONING SOCIETY: THE USE OF FACIAL ADORNMENTS FOR
SOCIAL IDENTIFICATION IN LATE POSTCLASSIC TLAXCALLAN,
MEXICO

by:

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ABSTRACT

In pre-Hispanic Central Mexico, communities frequently practiced various forms of embodying social identity through the use of facial adornments. Ornaments were placed in the ears, nose, and lips to materialize aspects of both self and collective identity. Important characteristics, such as age, gender, status, kinship, and ethnicity can be better understood through analysis of facial ornaments recovered from archaeological sites. Recent research at the Late Postclassic (AD 1420-1521) city of Tlaxcallan has provided insight into how facial ornamentation varied within the central highlands of Mexico. Typological analysis of ornaments and figurines recovered at Tlaxcallan and comparative examinations between Tlaxcalteca and Aztec historical documents has provided evidence to support varying embodiment practices between these groups. Despite their shared Nahua identity and close proximity, the Tlaxcalteca and the Aztecs chose to emphasize significantly different aspects of identity within their own social hierarchies. The persistent conflict and varying political organization between these communities is reflected in their embodiment practices. Thus, these objects have the potential to reveal how larger sociopolitical interactions can affect local collective identities. Through this comparative analysis, I demonstrate how the Tlaxcalteca and the Aztecs identified aspects of social identity through analysis of facial ornamentation.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Research on facial adornment practices have been important for understanding concepts of identity in pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica (Carballo et al. 2014). The Late Postclassic (1420-1521 CE) Nahua, an indigenous Mexican group of Nahuatl speakers, are especially significant and unique to this research because of the extensive archaeological collections and widespread availability of written documentation from both before and after Spanish contact in Central Mexico (Figure 1; Lopez Lujan 2011). Among these groups, the face was an important aspect of individual and cultural identity and was closely associated with an individual's wisdom (Leo-Portilla 1992). Thus, ornaments that were worn on the face were good indicators of varying aspects of identity within the Nahua community.

Two notable Nahua groups that resided in central Mexico during the Postclassic, the Aztecs and the Tlaxcalteca, frequently battled one another over control of the Puebla-Tlaxcala region (Figure 1). Their similar Nahua roots suggest that these groups shared many cultural practices, including facial ornamentation. However, new archaeological evidence from Tlaxcallan suggests that facial ornamentation practices varied between these Central Mexican groups. Since facial ornamentation is closely tied to identity, the differences in embodiment, or the differences in the presentation of self, will reflect aspects of larger sociopolitical interactions.



Figure 1: Location of the Valley of Mexico and the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley.

This thesis analyzes the embodiment of social identity for the Tlaxcalteca of Central Mexico during the Late Postclassic period. It focuses on facial ornamentation and how it relates to age, gender, ethnicity, and status within the city of Tlaxcallan while also drawing comparisons with the Aztecs. I argue that facial adornment practices differed between the Aztec and the Tlaxcalteca despite their shared Nahua identity. The ongoing conflict between the groups and their varying political organizations indicate that facial ornamentation was used as a tool to

create a sense of belonging among the Tlaxcalteca and differentiate themselves from neighboring Aztecs, thereby showing how bodies and identities become politicized.

Theoretical approaches to social identity have been used in anthropology and sociology to better understand how individuals and societies define themselves. According to Jenkins (1996: 4), social identity can be defined as “the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities.” The processes through which both individual and collective identities are created are similar in that they are defined and redefined through social interactions. Some of the most common categories of social identity include kinship, status, age, ethnicity, and gender, all of which can be materialized through the human body in a multitude of ways (Jenkins 1996).

Some researchers believe that material culture can be used as an extension of the body as a way to present oneself in relation to social and physical landscape (Fisher and Loren 2003). The concept of embodying social identity through material culture gives researchers the ability to analyze aspects of social identity through its physical manifestation in the archaeological record. Characteristics, such as gender, can be performed by an individual and the resulting materials left behind, such as depictions or ornaments, can be analyzed to understand social relations, politics, and the persistence of these practices (Lesure 2005). Although individual identity is seen as personal, it is influenced and shaped by the landscape in which it resides (Fisher and Loren 2003; 225). Performances of identity, and the contexts in which they are performed, are used as tools by groups to create a sense of belonging within a community (Jenkins 1996). By establishing a sense of sameness among a group and a sense of disparity with other groups, collective identities are created, reproduced, and reshaped.

The interplay between individual identity and collective identity, defined by Jenkins (1996: 20) as the *internal-external dialectic of identification*, explains the entanglement between self-image and public image. According to Jenkins (1996: 20), the *internal-external dialectic of identification* explains the “self” as “an ongoing and, in practice simultaneous, synthesis of (internal) self-definition and the (external) definitions of oneself offered by others.” It is also in defining one’s group that the identity of the “other” is created. Collective identities are deeply rooted in both politics and power. They can be used in power relations both within a society and among interacting societies (Jenkins 1996). When the mutual recognition of similarities within a group has occurred, then the mutual recognition of the differences between groups has also been created. Thus, the “other” is produced from those differences and can be used strategically as a political tool for warfare or alliances. The identity of the self, collective, and the other are significant in understanding the complexities of social identity for a group of people.

Among the Nahua, the face was an important canvas to present identity and facial ornaments were used as an extension of the body to display different aspects of identity. Researchers can analyze these objects to understand performances of gender, age, sex, status, kinship, or ethnicity, as well as social relations within a community and their larger political relations. Both the internal and external definitions of the Nahua were performed through the use of facial ornaments and can be used to help archaeologists define aspects of the self and associated collective identity. It is the theory of social identity and embodiment that creates the foundation for this research into the association between facial adornment practices and social identity. The comparative analysis of two adversarial communities, the Aztec and the

Tlaxcalteca, with a shared historical and ethnic background provides a unique look at how politics can help shape collective identities in Late Postclassic Central Mexico.

Little research has been done on facial ornamentation in this region. Carballo and colleagues (2014) focused specifically on household identity but only during the Formative period. Their data was derived from styles of ceramic vessels and various types of body adornments. Although this research is helpful in providing a methodology for understanding identity through the archaeological record, its concentration on the Formative period does not give us insight into the cultural practices of the Late Postclassic. In another example, Justyna Olko (2014) provided translations from a variety of codices and written documentation by the Spanish during the time of contact in order to explain the various ways that elite Nahuas visually signified their social rankings from the Postclassic period through Spanish contact. This work is helpful in understanding the different ways that elite individuals materialized their identity, but it does not elaborate on the social signifiers of non-elite individuals.

The analysis begins with Chapter Two, which discusses background information on the history and conflict of the Central Mexican Highlands during the Late Postclassic and reviews previous research on facial ornamentation in this region. Chapter Three provides a review of archaeological investigations currently being conducted at the site of Tlaxcallan. Also, it explains the current dataset used for this research and the methods used for analysis. Chapter Four further discusses the dataset and compares the archaeological record with written documents and depictions of facial ornamentation in both the Aztec region and within Tlaxcallan. This chapter also includes a typological and spatial analysis of the dataset. Chapter Five presents a discussion

of the results before transitioning into Chapter Six, which provides the final conclusions and possibilities for future research.

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND

The Central Highlands: Valley of Mexico and the Puebla-Tlaxcala Region

The Valley of Mexico is a large basin surrounded by high mountain ranges and volcanoes located within the heart of Mexico in the central highlands (see figure 1). Some of these volcanic ranges can reach 500-2000 meters from their base and create natural corridors that are utilized for both trade and travel (Carballo and Pluckhahn 2007). Prior to Spanish contact, the valley was an internal drainage basin stretching roughly 7000 km² that fed into several interconnected lakes (Blanton et al. 1993). The most central lake, Lake Texcoco, was the area that would one day become home to the Aztecs and, eventually, modern day Mexico City. It was an important source for raw materials, food, and agriculture for the communities that lived there (Blanton et al. 1993). Moreover, the area was surrounded by significant obsidian sources due to nearby volcanic activity, including the Pachuca and Otumba sources. Obsidian was a highly valued raw material for creating both utilitarian and non-utilitarian objects, thus these sources were very important for the people of prehispanic Mesoamerica (Blanton et al. 1993).

Nahuatl Speakers in Central Mexico

During the Preclassic period (2000 BCE – 250 CE), the first Nahuatl-speaking groups migrated into Central Mexico from the north and encountered other societies already settled in this area (Lopez Lujan 2011). Although each Nahua group migrated into Central Mexico at different times, they continued to share the same language and cultural practices as one another (Leon-Portilla 1992). Eventually three main Nahua polities were established in the Valley of Mexico: Azcapotzalco to the west, Texcoco to the east, and Colhuacan to the south (Lopez Lujan

2011). The last of the Nahuatl-speaking groups to migrate to Central Mexico, known as the Mexica, settled on a small island in the middle of Lake Texcoco, which would later come to be known as the city of Tenochtitlan (Leon-Portilla 1992). By 1430, the Mexica, also known as the Aztecs, constructed a multi-state organization that consisted of Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, and Tlacopan (Lopez Lujan 2011). The *excan tlatoloyan*, or Triple Alliance, thrived on extensive trade networks, military expansion, and control of foreign states and their key resources in areas as far south as Chiapas (Carballo and Pluckhahn 2007; Fargher et al. 2010a; Lopez Lujan 2011).

About 100 km east, the Puebla-Tlaxcala region shared similar cultural and geographic characteristics with the Valley of Mexico. The Tlaxcaltecas had already settled in this region prior to the Aztec's arrival in the Valley of Mexico and both groups are considered two of the famous seven Nahua tribes who originated from the mythical place of caves, known as Chicomoztoc (Leon-Portilla 1992). Although they shared many similarities, the two groups were fierce enemies and participated in frequent warfare known as the "Flowery Wars" from the mid-1450's until Spanish arrival in 1519 CE (Leon-Portilla 1992). The persistent resistance to Aztec domination became a defining feature of Tlaxcallan's sociopolitical landscape.

The Puebla-Tlaxcala region was surrounded by both mountains and volcanic ranges but did not have an extensive lake system like the Valley of Mexico. Referred to by Carballo and Pluckhahn (2007) as the Tlaxcala corridor, this valley lies north of the ancient city of Tlaxcallan and is a natural passageway for travel and trade from Central Mexico to regions in Eastern and Southern Mexico (Carballo and Pluckhahn 2007). To the west lies the Alpucó Canyon, another corridor best known as the possible point of entry for Cortez to Tlaxcallan (Carballo and Pluckhahn 2007). The city was built on a series of hilltops and hillsides. and was the capital of a

late Postclassic confederacy that covered a large part of the modern Mexican state of Tlaxcala (Fargher 2006, Fargher et al. 2010b). The archaeological site covers an area of 4.5 km² with domestic and public architecture covering 3 km² and an estimated peak population of 22,500 to 48,000 people (Fargher et al 2010b).

Tlaxcallan is unique to this region in that its urban architecture does not include palaces or pyramids; instead the city is comprised of large open plazas and residential terraces that suggest little social stratification (Fargher et al. 2010a). According to Fargher and colleagues (2010a), a government complex, Tizatlan, was also located about 1km outside the city's limits but still contained no indication of elite structures (Figure 2). Considering that the Tlaxcalteca were aware of surrounding sociopolitical structures, it appears that the Nahuatl who settled here intentionally differentiated themselves from their Aztec neighbors when constructing their city.

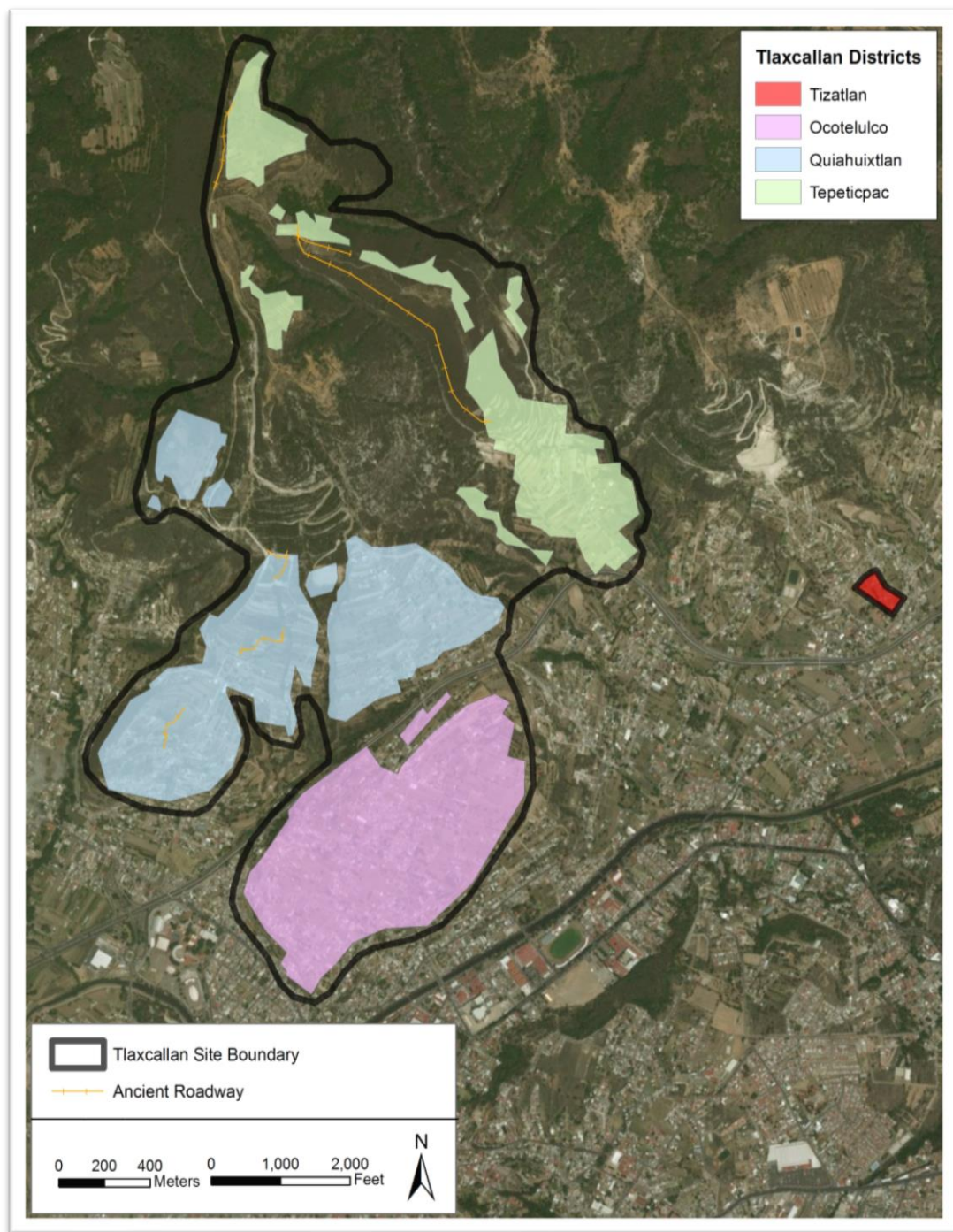


Figure 2: Map of Tlaxcallan's urban center. After Fargher et al. 2011: 317.

Late Postclassic Political Interaction

By the Late Postclassic, the Aztec Triple Alliance began the process of military expansion in an attempt to control the Valley of Mexico and its surrounding areas in order to accumulate tributary benefits, natural resources, and key markets (Lopez Lujan 2011). They were very successful in gaining control over vast regions of Mexico (Figure 3). There were, however, several regions that avoided imperial domination. Tlaxcallan, specifically, was notorious for resisting incorporation through extensive warfare and Otomí refugees from Aztec conquered regions are thought to have played a key role in its military defense (Fargher 2010a). Although the Aztec waged war on many communities, Tlaxcallan was located in close proximity to their capital at Tenochtitlan and was surrounded by many of their tributaries. Thus, the opportunities for engaging in battle were abundant and some of the Tlaxcalteca eventually became renowned for their skills in warfare (Duran 1994: 447).

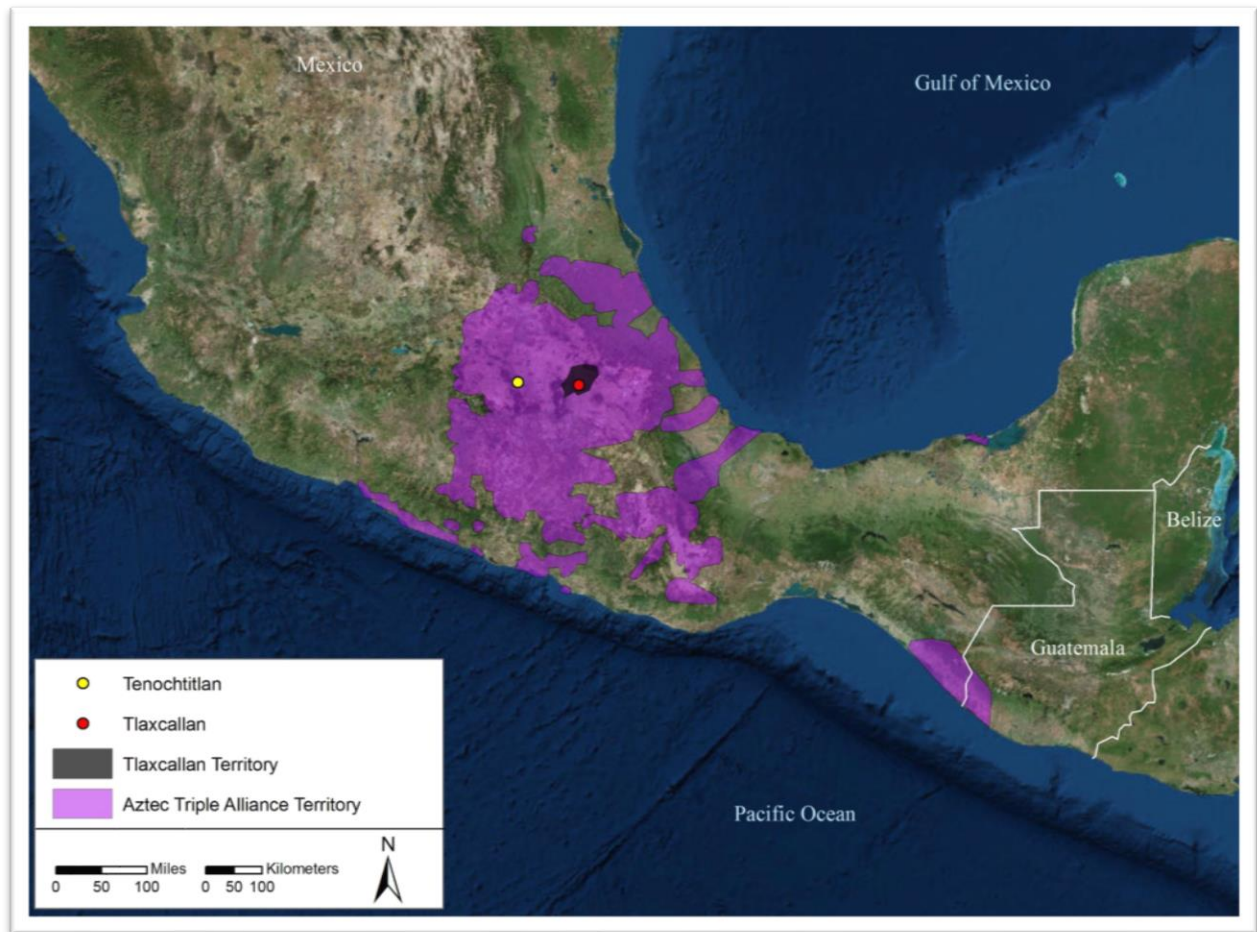


Figure 3: Map of the Aztec Triple Alliance territory and Tlaxcallan in 1519 C.E. After Fargher et al. 2010: 228

Unfortunately, this conflict resulted in isolating Tlaxcallan from Aztec trade routes and potentially disrupting their own trade networks (Fargher et al. 2010a). Although volcanoes surround Tlaxcallan, obsidian sources were not available within their territory and a majority of their obsidian was procured from sources closer to the Valley of Mexico (Millhauser et al. 2015). As previously mentioned, obsidian was highly valued in Mesoamerica and how it was procured outside of the Aztec's extensive exchange spheres is significant in understanding the ways in which the Tlaxcalteca functioned without giving in to imperial domination. Similarly, many

other utilitarian and non-utilitarian objects in the archaeological record would reflect the adjustment in trade routes. Prestigious goods, such as gold or green stone, were especially affected by this blockade because they were often distributed from the main center of imperial power to local rulers (Olko 2014: 24). Thus, it is assumed that the Tlaxcalteca had more limited access to certain resources than the territories under Aztec control.

One specific type of prestigious good that could have largely been affected by this blockade was facial jewelry. Nahua often expressed their status, wealth, ethnicity, or age through adorning their ears, lips, and nose, sometimes with highly valued materials such as gold, copper, turquoise, green stone, and obsidian (Olko 2014). Considering the significance of these objects in social identification practices, adorning the face would have continued to persist regardless of the blockade. Although there is some evidence of facial adornment practices in pre- and post-Hispanic records, they have yet to be analyzed in the Late Postclassic archaeological record at Tlaxcallan.

Facial Adornment

Piercing of the body was incorporated into many rituals in Mesoamerica and piercing the face itself was very significant in Nahua culture as it was closely associated with an individual's wisdom (Leon-Portilla 1992). According to the Florentine Codex, which describes Aztec practices, children as young as 4 years old had their ears and/or lip pierced for the later use of ornaments in a ceremony known as *Izcalli* (Joyce 2000; Sahagun 1954, bk. 2). Among these groups, the face and its associated adornments were an important aspect of individual and cultural identity.

Ear Ornaments

Based on figurines and written records, ear ornaments were utilized by individuals of all status levels in central Mexico (Joyce 2000; Sahagun 1954; Vaillant 1931). The piercing was continually stretched throughout life, although the nuances involved in this process are still unknown. In general, the older the individual was then the larger the ear ornaments they possessed, but the specific age increments and the associated ornament size are not well understood.

Although ear ornamentation was practiced by individuals throughout the community, status differentiation was determined based on the material that the object was constructed out of and its decorative characteristics. Commoners were restricted to more perishable materials, such as wood, plant material, or bone but they also had access to ceramic and stone (Carballo et al. 2014). The overall quality and décor was much less elaborate than that used by elites. Evidence from Aztec burials and Spanish documentation have shown that elites had access to very elaborate ear ornaments made from materials such as gold, green obsidian, green stone, and copper (Olko 2014). It is also briefly mentioned in the Florentine Codex that noble women wore “amber ear plugs; white crystal ear plugs; golden ear plugs; white obsidian ear plugs” (Sahagun 1954, bk. 8).

Lip Ornaments

Another facial ornament that was heavily associated with status was the lip plug. Aztec children were grouped into two different schools, the *telpochcalli*, or secular school, and the *calmecac*, a religious school (Joyce 2000). Those who were assigned to the *telpochcalli* had their

lips pierced; however, a lip plug was not inserted until a boy's achievements in warfare (Calnek 1988; Joyce 2000). According to Fray Diego Duran (1994: 233-4), the Aztecs established a "military marketplace," meaning that great warriors would receive various valuable objects, including lip and ear ornaments, as a compensation for their heroic acts. The Tlaxcalteca were also known to adorn their warriors and nobles with various types of lip ornaments (Camargo and Chavero 2015).

Lip plugs are also known to have been associated with specific ethnicities in Central Mexico. Specifically, they are frequently mentioned in regards to the Otomí and the Tlaxcalteca. According to Sahagun (1954, bk.10: 177-178), "The lip plugs of the [Otomí] rulers were green stone lip plugs, or sea shell lip plugs, or gold lip plugs... The lip plugs of all the [other] people were of rock crystal, obsidian, or smoky stone." Elizabeth Brumfiel and colleagues (1994) also make an argument for the association between rod-shaped lip plugs and the Otomí at Xaltocan. Likewise, the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, a post-conquest manuscript, depicts curved lip plugs frequently worn by Tlaxcallan warriors (Figures 4 and 5; Olko 2014). This information indicates that it is likely that Tlaxcallan has a much higher rate of lip plug use, especially curved and rod-shaped lip plugs, due to their influx of Otomí immigrants and the constant need for warriors to battle against the Aztec empire.



Figure 4: Depiction of a male warrior with a curved lip plug from the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*. After Olko 2014: 79.



Figure 5: Depiction of male warriors with curved lip plugs and ear ornaments from the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*. After Olko 2014: 79.

Nose Ornaments

The final category of facial ornaments are related to the nose. These ornaments appear to be frequently associated with rituals, especially those in which the likeness of a god or goddess is replicated. Sahagun (1954, bk. 9) mentions the use of gold nose ornaments with the likeness of Totec, the god of goldworkers, and Chiconauí itzcuintli (also referred to as Papaloxauí or Tlappapalo), the goddess of lapidaries. There are also frequent depictions of Nahua rulers with nose ornaments made of turquoise or gold (Olko 2014). The Florentine Codex also mentions the ceremonial piercing of the nose of young rulers and lords during *Izcalli* (Sahagun 1954, bk. 2). Its strong connection with royalty and the likeness of gods makes nose ornaments highly valuable and most likely the most rare due to their restriction to high nobles and priests. This rarity is also highly likely for Tlaxcallan since it is believed that the city functioned without a ruler-centered form of government, thus nose ornaments would have been rare and likely only functioned for special ritual purposes (Fargher et al. 2010a).

Summary

The act of puncturing the face for decoration is significant since this practice was not done anywhere else on the body. Its incorporation into communal rites of passage, such as the *Izcalli* ceremony, and the purposeful delay of ornamentation until adulthood indicates that this practice was an important aspect of becoming part of the Nahua community. Its close association with status, gender, age, and ethnicity makes it an excellent subject for understanding how the Tlaxcaltecas embodied concepts of identity. Among the Nahua, there is a clear connection

between ear ornaments and age or status, lip ornaments and status or ethnicity, and nose ornaments with status or religious practices.

There are many written accounts and depictions of Tlaxcallan adornments during the Postclassic but the archaeological record has yet to be examined. By comparing the artifacts at Tlaxcallan with depictions of ornamentation through figurines or the codices and descriptions in written records, it is expected that we can develop a framework for understanding how the Tlaxcaltecas embodied their concepts of social identity. Based on our knowledge of Nahua adornment practices, I argue that these objects and the way they were used will differ between the Aztec and the Tlaxcalteca despite their shared Nahua identity. I believe that the conflict and variable political organization during the Postclassic created identifiable nuances in the embodiment of social identity through ornamentation.

CHAPTER 3: MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

Materials

The archaeological fieldwork for this research was completed in the Tlaxcala-Puebla Valley in the highlands of Central Mexico within the modern city of Tlaxcala, Mexico. The data for the project was collected during the 2015-2017 field seasons of the Tlaxcallan Archaeological Project and the 2012-2015 field seasons of the Tepeticpac Archaeological Project. These two projects were chosen because they are currently the only ongoing projects in the region. Both projects utilized systematic archaeological surveys and excavations which included several teams of archaeologists with a variety of specializations, including bioarchaeologists, GIS technicians, ceramicists and lithicists, and many local excavators (Fargher 2015).

The excavations were conducted near the Postclassic city's center and included the excavation of several structures and open plazas located on hilltops. These sites were once large domestic terraces that transitioned into agricultural terraces after Spanish contact and are still in use today by the local community. The Tlaxcallan Archaeological Project conducted research within the districts of Tepeticpac, Ocotelulco, and Quiahuixtlan (see figure 3). The Tepeticpac Archaeological Project focused solely on the district of Tepeticpac, thus, the remaining district of Tizatlan was not analyzed.

The sample used for this research included all identifiable facial ornaments from both projects and any figurines from the Tlaxcallan Archaeological Project that clearly showed representations of facial adornment use. Figurines from the Tepeticpac Archaeological Project

were not analyzed due to time restrictions and limited accessibility. A large portion (92%) of the sample was derived from terraces at Tepeticpac because of the extensive excavations occurring in this part of the site. Only three (6%) ornaments came from terraces at Quiahuixtlan and one (2%) ornament came from a terrace at Ocotelulco.

In total, there were fifty-one ornaments and twenty-nine figurines collected. Among the ornaments, twenty-one were categorized as ear ornaments (41%) and thirty were considered lip ornaments (59%). The construction materials consisted of ceramic (n=18, 35%), chalcedony (n=9, 18%), obsidian (n=19, 37%), copper (n=1, 2%), quartzite (n=1, 2%), limestone (n=1, 2%) and siltstone (n=2, 4%; Figure 6). The ceramic objects were described based on Munsell color and the obsidian was categorized into several distinct colors: cloudy-gray (sourced as possible Paredon origin), green (sourced as Pachuca origin), gray-banded, translucent-gray, and black. All of the chalcedony ranged from cream to light pink in color. Additionally, all objects were measured, weighed, and photographed. The objects that were least fragmented and represented a wide range of ornament types were also drawn to better convey their dimensions.

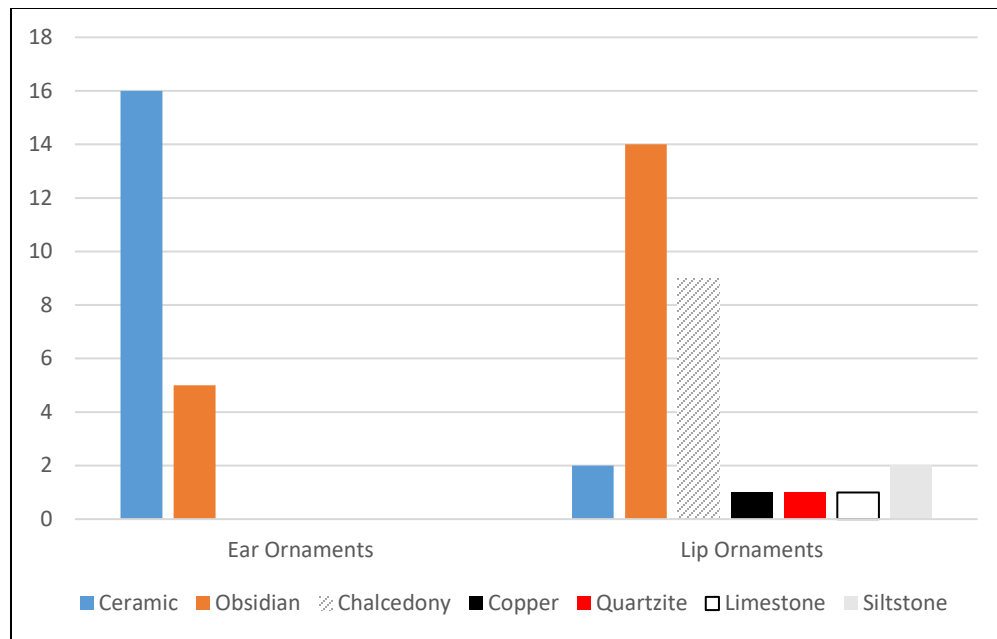


Figure 6: Distribution of construction material within the ornament sample.

Methods

The first step of the analysis was to organize the ear ornaments into a typology. Research on the differences between ornaments and spindle whorls was attempted due to their similarities in flare and spool formation. Fragmented pieces of spindle whorls and ear ornaments can appear to be very similar and a better understanding of their difference in form helps to determine the object's specific function. Previous research by Mary Parsons (1975) provided both images and descriptions of several types of spindle whorls found in the Valley of Mexico during the Late Postclassic, all of which resemble the ones found in Tlaxcallan. Once the ornaments were verified they were then categorized based on form. According to previous research conducted by Carballo and colleagues (2014: 465), ear ornaments were generally identified and categorized based on the following disc-like characteristics: “earplugs are solid (Figure 7); ear spools are

hollow or ring-like (Figure 8); and ear flares are ear spools that flare out significantly on the forward facing side”. For the purposes of this research, ear flares will be further recognized as any ear spool with a flare, regardless if it is on one side or both. The construction material, color, dimensions, and context were then recorded along with any information about special characteristics, such as incisions, burning, or polish.



Figure 7: Ceramic ear plug (Object 7, Table 1).

Source: Tlaxcallan Archaeological Project.



Figure 8: Ceramic ear flares with painted incisions (Object 11, Table1).

Source: Tepeticpac Archaeological Project.

Next, lip ornaments were categorized based on research done by Brumfiel et al. (1994). When compared to ear ornaments, lip plugs are more T-shaped and have two flares on one end to secure the ornament in the lip. Brumfiel et al. (1994) separates them into two specific categories: (1) rod-shaped (Figure 9) and (2) button-shaped (Figure 10). These categories are defined based on the length of the shaft that extends out from the lip, with button-shaped being shorter and closer to the lip and rod-shaped being longer and protruding further out from the lip. My research also differentiates two other categories of lip ornaments, the first being a curved lip plug (Figure 11) and the second being a lip spike (Figure 12). The lip spike has a very tapered end when compared to the lip rod. The construction material, color, dimensions, and context were also recorded along with any information about special characteristics, such as incisions, burning, or polish.



Figure 9: Quartzite rod-shaped lip plug with one fragmented flare (Object 27, Table 2).

Source: Tlaxcallan Archaeological Project.



Figure 10: Ceramic button-shaped lip plug with a fragmented flare (Object 20, Table 2).

Source: Tepeticpac Archaeological Project.



Figure 11: Chalcedony curved lip plug with missing distal end (Object 10, Table 2).

Source: Tepeticpac Archaeological Project.



Figure 12: Obsidian spiked lip plug with a tapered distal end and a fragmented flare (Object 4, Table 2).

Source: Tepeticpac Archaeological Project.

The final ornament analysis was reserved for nose jewelry but none were present within the archaeological record at Tlaxcallan and, thus, did not require any type of further categorization. Familiarization with the overall form and function of this type of ornament was gathered while researching other types of ornaments and the potential significance of this absence will be discussed later on in this research.

Construction material was noted due to the association between specific materials and social status. Items such as jade or turquoise are believed to have been reserved for high status individuals throughout Mesoamerica (Olko 2014). In addition, green obsidian is believed to have been controlled by the Aztec and, thus, could bring up questions regarding interaction between communities in the valley of Mexico and those in the Tlaxcala-Puebla region (Fargher et al. 2010a; Millhauser et al. 2015). Color, decoration, and overall dimensions were recorded to determine if significant patterns or preferences in style were utilized by the Tlaxcalteca. It is important to note that many of the artifacts were fragmented so some measurements were not available. Context was also noted in order to reveal any association between ornamentation and specific structures or burials.

Twenty-nine figurines from the Tlaxcallan Archaeological project were also analyzed to understand idealized representations of facial adornment use. Many of the figurines from this project were heavily fragmented and did not distinctly provide evidence of facial adornments or regions of the face that might contain them. The figurines that were selected were chosen because they did still contain evidence of the ear, nose, and lip along with other discernible features to assist in identifying status, gender, or age (Figure 13). These other discernable features were identified based on research done by Flora S. Kaplan (1958) and Justyna Olko

(2014). In their work, they both describe hairstyles, clothing, ornaments, and headdresses associated with specific gender, status, or age among the Nahua. Kaplan (1958) devised extensive typologies for Postclassic Central Mexican figurines at the sites of Chiconauhtla and Nonoalco in the Valley of Mexico. Olko (2014) provided translations of several colonial accounts, pre- and post-Contact Nahua codices from various regions across the central Mexican highlands. Additionally, ornaments on the figurines can then be categorized based on the previously mentioned typologies. The association between specific types of ornaments and social characteristics can then be understood within these idealized representations of individuals.

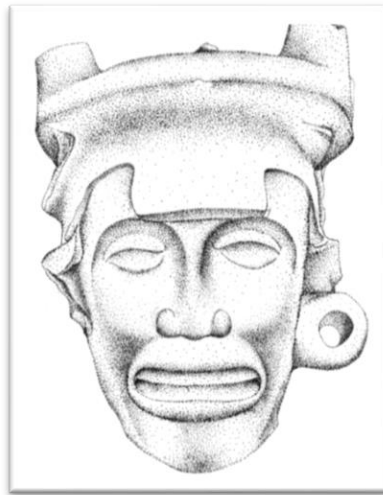


Figure 13: Illustration of a ceramic male figurine with headdress and ear spool. Illustration by Pedro Cahuautzi Hdez.

Source: Lane Fargher, personal communication 2016; Tlaxcallan Archaeological Project.

The final component to this analysis focuses on a variety of central Mexican codices and post-contact Spanish documentation of adornments for both the Tlaxcalteca and the Aztec. Justyna Olko (2014) provides detailed translations and descriptions of Aztec-related documents, such as the Codex Mendoza, the Florentine Codex, and the *Primeros Memoriales*. She also provides translations of Tlaxcalteca-related documents, including the Codex Huamantla, *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, and the *Lienzo de Tepeticpac*. These translations and descriptions, in conjunction with the associated imagery from the codices, yield information about specific facial adornment practices and their associated patterns of social identity, which can then be applied and compared to artifacts in the archaeological record at Tlaxcallan. Through this process, we are able to verify if the archaeological record reflects the information written in these documents. Also, by including information about the Aztecs, we can determine if there are similarities or differences in practices of materializing social identity between the two groups.

Based on the variable political organization between these two groups, I expect to see less differentiated access to presumably higher valued adornments, such as greenstone or turquoise, among the Tlaxcalteca. The warfare between the two regions is also assumed to have created a greater significance for warriors and, thus, I expect to see higher percentages of adornments associated with them, such as lip plugs. Additionally, Aztec restrictions on certain obsidian sources, such as Pachuca and Otumba, should have an effect on the types of obsidian used in constructing adornments. I argue that there will be differences in facial adornment practices between the people living in the Valley of Mexico and the Tlaxcalteca despite their shared Nahua identity due to conflict and contrasting political organization. This research can reveal the effects that greater geopolitical interactions have on collective social identities.

Limitations

Several limitations were present when conducting this analysis. One of the main concerns was that there was little evidence of facial adornments made out of organic material. Research has shown that in some Nahua groups, elites more frequently used adornments made from greenstone, turquoise, amber, or gold but non-elites were restricted to more perishable materials, such as bone, wood, or plant material (Carballo et al. 2014; Olko 2014). These perishable materials are believed to have been more easily accessible and widely used by the population, thus its absence from the archaeological record reflects either poor preservation or differences in accessibility between the Tlaxcalteca and the Aztecs.

Another issue in this analysis is the location of the samples. The artifacts collected for this research were excavated from the barrios of Tepeticpac, Quiahuixtlan, and Ocotelulco. There still remains the additional region of Tizatlan and the outer areas of Tlaxcallan as well. Therefore, this research is only representative of three out of four barrios. It is clear that additional data from these other regions will need to be collected before a more complete understanding of facial adornment use throughout the city can be understood. In addition, many of the terraces that were excavated have been used for agricultural purposes since Spanish contact. This continuous use and movement of soil has led to the disturbance of some of the primary contexts.

The final limitation lies within the use of figurines, codices, and Spanish accounts to determine patterns of facial adornment practices. Figurines are believed to only represent an idealized image of social constructs, therefore, the information that we gain from it is not representative of actual individuals and their lived experiences (Lesure 2005). In addition, some

of the codices and Spanish documentation were written after the Aztec and Tlaxcalteca were colonized. The information gathered from them are considered to be influenced by Spanish concepts and might not be an accurate representation of how adornments were utilized during the late Postclassic (Joyce 2000).

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS

Ear Ornaments

The results for this analysis showed a small variety of ear ornaments found at the site (Table 1). The ear ornament dataset (n=21) included ceramic spools (n=11, 52%), ceramic ear plugs (n=5, 24%), obsidian spools (n=4, 19%), and one obsidian plug (5%, Figure 14). Additionally, only five ornaments (24%) were highly decorated with incisions, paint, or indents on the face of the object. Lithic analysis was completed by researchers at the Tlaxcallan Archaeological Project. Among the obsidian ear ornaments, color identification indicated that two were originally from Pachuca (10%) and two were from El Paredon (10%). One final obsidian ornament had an unidentifiable source. It is important to note that many of the ear ornaments were fragmented, especially the obsidian, and none were found in a matching set. The objects were overwhelmingly found in Tepeticpac (n=19, 91%) but this is most likely due to the extensive excavations that have been conducted in this section of the site.

Table 1: List of Ear Ornaments from the Tlaxcallan and Tepeticpac Archaeological Projects.

Obj #	Style	Flare?	Material	Color	Area	Comments
1	Spool	Flared	Obsidian	Smoky Gray (Paredon)	Tepeticpac	Frag. Polished.
2	Spool	Flared	Obsidian	Green (Pachuca)	Tepeticpac	Frag. Ground.
3	Spool	Flared	Obsidian	Smoky Gray (Paredon)	Tepeticpac	Frag. Polished.
4	Spool	Unflared	Ceramic	N/A	Quiahuixtlan	Frag. Incised circular design.
5	Spool	Unflared	Ceramic	N/A	Tepeticpac	Frag. Incised circular design.
6	Spool	Flared	Ceramic	N/A	Tepeticpac	Ceramic insert and cardinal design.
7	Plug	Unflared	Ceramic	N/A	Ocotelulco	Possible incisions.
8	Spool	Flared	Ceramic	2.5Y 2.5/1	Tepeticpac	Frag. Slipped.
9	Spool	Flared	Ceramic	2.5Y 2.5/1	Tepeticpac	Frag. Slipped.
10	Spool	Flared	Ceramic	2.5Y 2.5/1	Tepeticpac	Frag. Slipped.
11	Spool	Flared	Ceramic	2.5Y 2.5/1	Tepeticpac	Slipped. Radial incisions. Blue paint.
12	Spool	N/A	Ceramic	2.5Y 2.5/1	Tepeticpac	Frag. Slipped.
13	Spool	Flared	Ceramic	2.5Y 3/1	Tepeticpac	Frag. Slipped.
14	Spool	Flared	Ceramic	2.5Y 2.5/1	Tepeticpac	Frag. Slipped.
15	Spool	Unflared	Ceramic	2.5Y 4/2	Tepeticpac	Slipped.
16	Spool	Flared	Obsidian	Banded Gray	Tepeticpac	Frag. Polished.
17	Plug	Unflared	Ceramic	7.5YR 6/4	Tepeticpac	Slipped.
18	Plug	Unflared	Ceramic	7.5YR 6/3	Tepeticpac	Slipped. Possible black paint.
19	Plug	Unflared	Ceramic	2.5Y 2.5/1	Tepeticpac	Slipped. Indents on front and back surface.
20	Plug	Unflared	Ceramic	2.5Y 5/1	Tepeticpac	Unslipped.
21	Plug	Flared	Obsidian	Green (Pachuca)	Tepeticpac	Frag. Polished and ground.

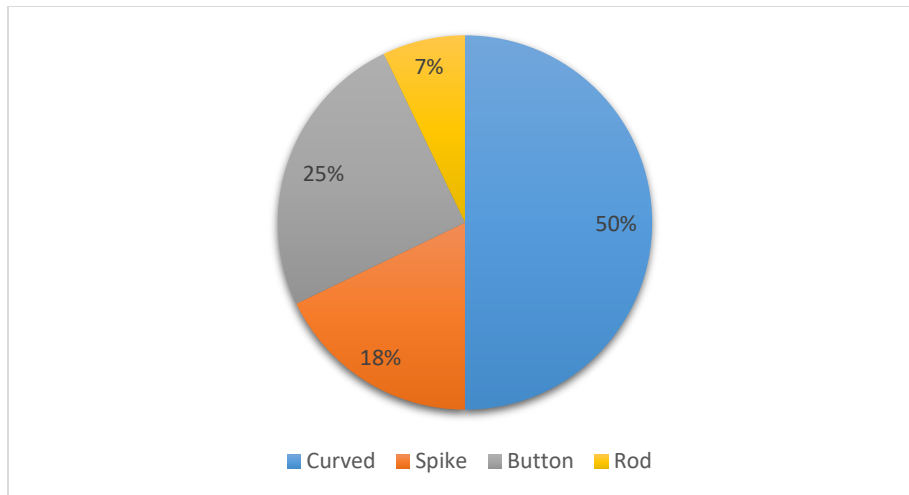


Figure 14: Pie chart of construction material and style types for ear ornaments at Tlaxcallan.

Among the figurines from the Tlaxcallan Archaeological Project, thirty-five showed representations of people wearing ear ornaments. Within this group, only thirteen figurines (37%) had clearly identifiable status, gender, or age characteristics based on headdresses, hairstyles, or specific anatomical features. The remainder were either unidentifiable or showed evidence of ornaments on zoomorphic or god-like figures. Only 31% (n=4) of the sample was female (Figure 15) and the remaining 69% (n=9) were male (Figure 16). One male figurine in particular had depictions of wrinkles around its mouth and eyes (Figure 17), indicating that the individual was old. There were eight (62%) figurines that had elite or warrior characteristics, all of them were male. These characteristics included headdresses and various headbands associated with male warriors or nobles. All of the ornaments portrayed in the figurines were very plain. Seven figurines had solid plugs (54%), six had spools (46%), and three (23%) appear to be flares with a protruding rounded center (Figure 18).



Figure 15: Female figurine with an ear plug.

Source: Tlaxcallan Archaeological Project



Figure 16: Male figurine with an ear ornament and customary Tlaxcallan twisted headband associated with male nobles and warriors.

Source: Tlaxcallan Archaeological Project.



Figure 17: Elderly male figurine with wrinkles and ear plugs.

Source: Tlaxcallan Archaeological Project.



Figure 18: Male figurine with a headdress and ear flare with a rounded center.

Source: Tlaxcallan Archaeological Project.

As previously mentioned, Nahua children had their ears pierced at a young age for the eventual use of ear ornaments. As the child grew, it is believed that these ornaments were gradually replaced with larger ones, but the specifics of these rituals are not fully understood. Although further analysis is needed to fully understand the association between age range and ear ornament size, a basic analysis was done to see if there is a possible correlation between age ranges and ear ornament preferences (Figure 19). Out of the 21 ornaments, only 18 were able to have their diameter measured due to heavy fragmenting. A large majority of the artifacts (n=9,

50%) measured between 9mm and 13mm, the widest ornaments ranged from 17mm to 34mm (n=5, 28%), and the smallest ranged from 4mm to 7mm (n=4, 22%). These groups can be labeled based on the smallest to largest groups as “young”, “average”, and “older.” The young group contained green obsidian and elaborately decorated ceramic. The average group had green obsidian, smoky gray obsidian, and elaborate ceramic. Only the older group had elaborately decorated ceramic. Assuming there is a gradual increase in diameter size with age, this analysis reveals that highly elaborate ceramic ear ornaments were utilized by all age ranges, but smoky gray and green obsidian were more likely to be used by younger individuals. There is a significantly higher gap between diameter sizes for the older group, with the differences in diameter ranging from 1mm to 7mm, but the average and young groups only had a difference of about 1mm to 2.5mm. This could indicate a significant change in ear adornment practices at the site in relation to either age or indicators of status. Further research into diameter size and individual age needs to be completed before any specific conclusions can be made.

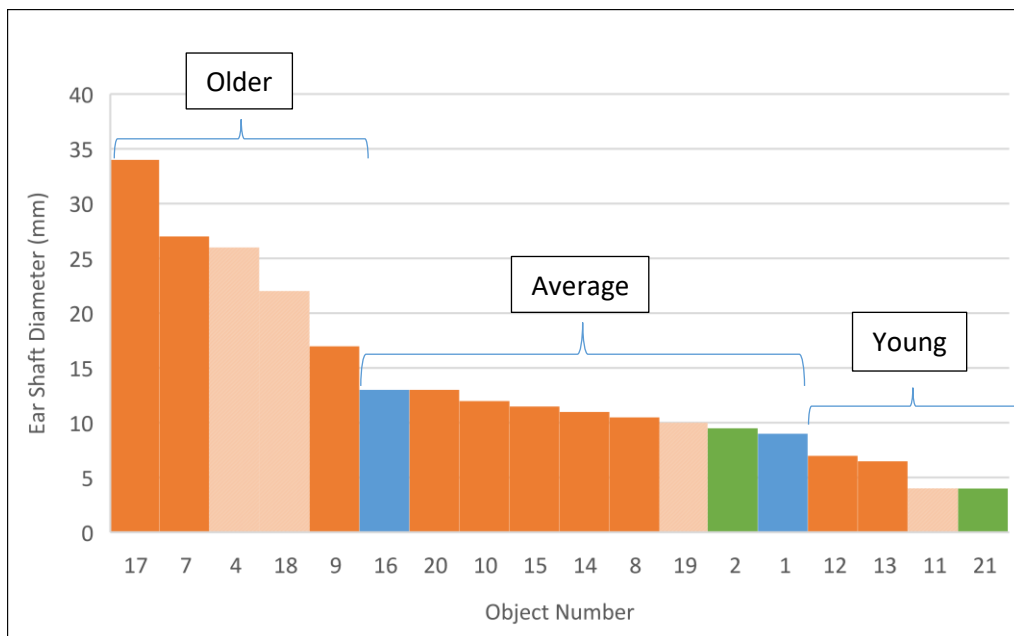


Figure 19: Histogram of diameter size for ear ornaments at Tlaxcallan.

Orange indicates ceramic, orange stripes indicate elaborate ceramic, blue indicates smoky gray obsidian, and green indicates green obsidian.

Based on written sources, the Aztecs constructed ear ornaments from materials such as wood, reed, maize stalks, shells, pottery, obsidian, amber, leather, greenstone, turquoise, silver, and gold. Many of these ornaments were attributed to specific social statuses, ethnicities, or genders. Among royalty, nobles, and high-ranking warriors, gold ear ornaments were given as prestigious gifts and were associated with coronation rites in Tenochtitlan (Olko 2014, 70). Additionally, the *Florentine Codex* lists gold, silver, amber, “white obsidian” and rock-crystal ear plugs as adornments worn by noblewomen (Sahagun 1954, bk. 8). According to Olko (2014, 73), greenstone ear ornaments are seen more in archaeological samples than textual references but are clearly associated with elite status based on burial goods. The *Florentine Codex* also

mentions that leather ear ornaments were given to brave warriors for their merits in warfare (Sahagun 1954, bk. 8). Obsidian was considered much less prestigious and was more frequently used by lesser nobles and commoners (Olko 2014). Other less prestigious material included reed, dried maize stalks, pottery, and wood, all of which were either attributed to foreign groups, such as the Otomi, or commoners (Olko 2014). Overall, ear ornamentation was a socially inclusive practice that was differentiated based on the various material used to create these objects and the degree of elaboration.

Lip Ornaments

Both projects uncovered a relatively large amount of lip ornaments, constituting 59% (n=30) of the total ornament collection (Table 2). Again, an overwhelming amount came from Tepeticpac due to the extensive excavations that have been conducted there. Almost half (n=14, 47%) of the lip ornaments are curved spikes and the remainders are either straight spikes (n=5, 16%), button plugs (n=7, 23%), rod plugs (n=2, 7%), or cannot be identified because they are too heavily fragmented (n=2, 7%; Figure 20). Obsidian is seen in 47% (n=14) of the lip ornaments and occupies all of the categories except for rod-shaped lip plugs. Chalcedony is the second largest with 30% (n=9) of the data set and is only seen in curved lip ornaments. The remaining ornaments consist of two ceramic lip plugs (7%), one quartzite lip rod (3%), one siltstone lip rod (3%), one siltstone curved lip plug (3%), one limestone curved lip plug (3%), and one copper button-shaped lip plug (3%) with an attachment for, possibly, a bell. One of the curved lip plugs is designed with three incisions on either side (Figure 21) and another has a crenellated-like

design on the surface (Figure 22). The remaining ornaments have no evidence of decoration (n=28, 93%).

Table 2: List of Lip Ornaments from the Tlaxcallan and Tepeticpac Archaeological Projects.

Obj #	Style	Curved?	Material	Color	Area	Comments
1	Spike	Curved	Siltstone	White	Tepeticpac	Frag. Incised. Polished.
2	Spike	Curved	Limestone	Cream	Tepeticpac	Frag. Ground.
3	Spike	Curved	Obsidian	Cloudy Gray	Tepeticpac	Frag. crenellated. Polished.
4	Spike	Curved	Obsidian	Cloudy Gray	Tepeticpac	Frag. Polished.
5	Spike	Curved	Obsidian	Cloudy Gray	Tepeticpac	Frag. Polished and ground.
6	Spike	Curved	Chalcedony	Cream	Tepeticpac	Frag. Polished.
7	Spike	Curved	Chalcedony	Cream	Tepeticpac	Frag. Preform.
8	Spike	Curved	Chalcedony	Cream	Tepeticpac	Frag. Polished.
9	Spike	Curved	Chalcedony	Cream	Tepeticpac	Frag. Ground.
10	Spike	Curved	Chalcedony	Cream	Tepeticpac	Frag. Polished.
11	Spike	Curved	Chalcedony	Cream	Tepeticpac	Frag. Polished.
12	Spike	Curved	Chalcedony	Cream	Tepeticpac	Frag. Ground.
13	Spike	Curved	Chalcedony	Cream	Tepeticpac	Frag. Ground.
14	Spike	Curved	Chalcedony	Cream	Tepeticpac	Frag. Polished.
15	Spike		Obsidian	Translucent Gray	Tepeticpac	Frag. Polished.
16	Spike		Obsidian	Cloudy Gray	Tepeticpac	Frag. Polished.
17	Spike		Obsidian	Cloudy Gray	Tepeticpac	Polished and ground.
18	Spike		Obsidian	Cloudy Gray	Tepeticpac	Polished.
19	Spike		Obsidian	Banded Gray	Tepeticpac	Polished. Ground.
20	Button		Ceramic	7.5YR 4/4	Tepeticpac	Very small. Burnished.
21	Button		Obsidian	Cloudy Gray	Tepeticpac	Polished. Ground.
22	Button		Obsidian	Cloudy Gray	Tepeticpac	Frag. Polished and ground.
23	Button		Copper	N/A	Tepeticpac	Attachment for bell.
24	Button		Obsidian	Banded Gray	Tepeticpac	Frag. Polished and ground.
25	Button		Obsidian	Banded Gray	Tepeticpac	Ground.
26	Button		Obsidian	Green	Tepeticpac	Ground. Rounded end.
27	Rod		Quartzite	Clear	Tepeticpac	Polished.
28	Rod		Siltstone	White	Quiahuixtlan	Frag. Polished. Burning.
29	N/A		Ceramic	7.5YR 4/2	Tepeticpac	Missing shaft. Some slip.
30	N/A		Obsidian	Banded Gray	Quiahuixtlan	Frag. Missing shaft.

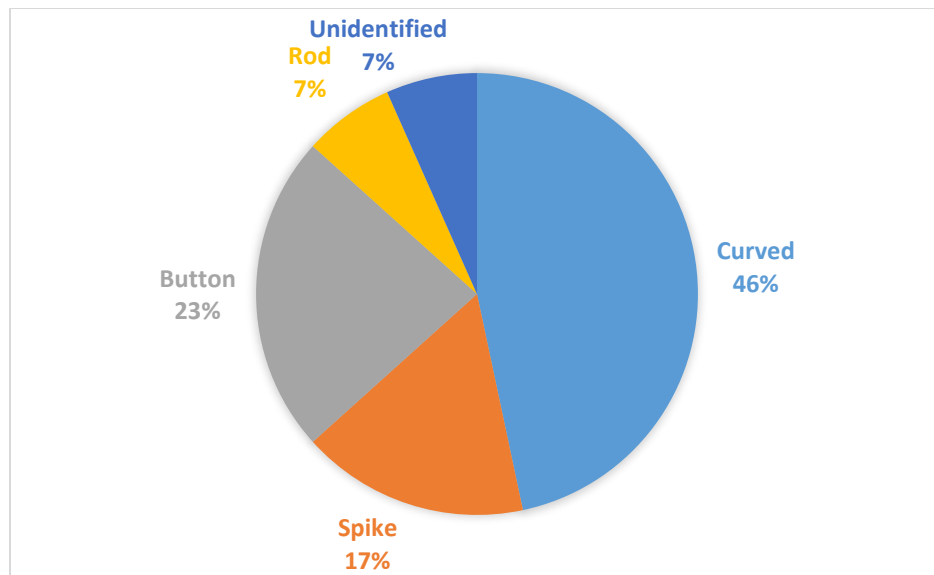


Figure 20: Pie chart of lip ornament styles recovered at Tlaxcallan.



Figure 21: Side view of a curved siltstone lip plug with incisions (Object 1, Table 2)

Source: Tepeticpac Archaeological Project.



Figure 22: Side view of a curved obsidian lip plug with crenulated-like design (Object 3, Table 2).

Source: Tepeticpac Archaeological Project.

One of the figurines from this sample contained possible evidence of lip ornamentation. The figurine depicted a male elite with large ear spools and what appears to be a protuberance from the bottom of the lip that closely resembles a curved lip plug (Figure 23). There are also many pre- and post-conquest textual references to lip ornamentation practices. Among the Nahua, gold and turquoise lip ornaments were frequently attributed to rulers, noblemen, merchants, and warriors (Olko 2014). Additionally, amber lip plugs were worn by Mexica merchants as recognition of valor and greenstone lip plugs were worn for the royal dance and given as gifts to brave warriors (Olko 2014). Obsidian lip plugs were much less prestigious and were reportedly associated with the Otomi people, along with shell and coral lip plugs (Brumfiel et al. 1994). Aztec warriors were known to occasionally wear curved lip plugs but this was more

associated with the Huastec people and Tlaxcallan warriors (Olko 2014, Camargo and Chavero 2015).



Figure 23: Male figurine with a large ear spool and possible lip plug

Source: Tlaxcallan Archaeological Project.

Nose Ornaments

Neither of the artifact collections from Tlaxcallan contained evidence of nose ornaments and the figurines did not have any depictions of these objects being worn. There are depictions in the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* of a Tlaxcallan warrior with a crescent-shaped nose ornament and an example of the ornament itself begin given as an offering to the Spaniards (Biblioteca Digital Mexicana). The remaining textual references are related to other Nahua groups and are attributed to their highest elites. *The Florentine Codex* mentions the ceremonial piercing of the nose for young rulers and lords during the Aztec celebration of *Izcalli* (Sahagun 1954, bk. 2). The two

most common types of nose ornaments are referred to as *yacamit* (“nose arrows”) and *yacapilolli* (“nose pendants”) and they are often constructed from gold or turquoise (Olko 2014). *The Florentine Codex* also has multiple mentions of nose ornaments associated with ritual representations of gods and goddesses, such as Totec, Xiuhteuctli, and Chiconauí itzcuintli (Sahagun 1954, bk. 9). Overall, nose ornaments are not attributed to commoners and the archaeological evidence, or lack thereof, for these artifacts at Tlaxcallan could reflect these patterns. However, no elite or high-ranking burials have been found at Tlaxcallan and further excavations are needed to determine the extent of nose ornamentation at this site.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The four main aspects of social identity that can be discussed from the dataset are gender, age, ethnicity, and status. Each is embodied and materialized in different ways among the Tlaxcalteca and can be viewed through the archaeological record by both the artifacts themselves and associated written documentation. As demonstrated among the Aztec and other Mesoamerican communities, facial ornamentation was an important practice that involved the whole community throughout most of their lives. The Tlaxcalteca followed in this tradition but created their own nuances to distinguish themselves as their own collectivity.

Gender

According to Jenkins (1996), gender is defined simultaneously at an individual and collective level. An individual's gender is largely externally defined by the collective but can be redefined at the individual level based on social experiences. Although the individual level may be difficult to distinguish in the archaeological record at Tlaxcallan, the collective level is easier to define based on certain patterns within a site. Evidence from figurines found in Tlaxcallan indicate that both men and women wore ear ornaments. There does not appear to be any distinct type restricted to either gender and all of the figurines depict very simplistic styles for both men and women. It does, however, appear that lip ornaments were utilized more by men than women. Both the written historical records and the figurines indicate that only men were allowed to wear these objects. Male warriors are seen in many post-Colonial depictions with various styles of lip ornaments, especially curved lip plugs.

Nose ornaments are linked to the male god *Tezcatlipoca* as seen in the murals in the region of Tizatlan (Caso 1927). Also, evidence from the “Texas Fragment” shows that nose ornaments were given as gifts to the Spaniards from Tlaxcallan nobles, supporting the idea that high-ranking men were allowed to have these ornaments (Biblioteca Digital Mexicana). No nose ornaments have been recovered at Tlaxcallan and future research is needed to determine the extent to which nose ornaments were used for social identity.

Age

Although there is no direct evidence to indicate that ceremonies similar to the Aztec *Izcalli* were celebrated in Tlaxcallan, the widespread use of ear ornamentation throughout the site and their various sizes in diameter indicates that these objects could have been incorporated into age-related rituals as a way to transition children into members of the community. According to Jenkins (1996: 58), children “identify themselves as they identify others and as they are themselves reciprocally identified.” Participating in ceremonial rituals similar to *Izcalli* are significant for collective and self-identification within a community and were very likely used in a similar fashion in Tlaxcallan. Additionally, one of the figurines found at the site represents an elderly individual with ear ornaments, indicating that these objects were worn throughout the majority of an individual’s life. Further research will need to be conducted to better understand age-related ornamentation practices but there is evidence to support that the Tlaxcalteca wore ear ornaments from childhood throughout late adulthood.

Status

As previously mentioned, the Tlaxcalteca were relatively egalitarian compared to the Aztecs (Fargher et al. 2010a). Evidence suggests that rather than a royal family, the governing elite consisted of nobles that were elected based on merit instead of familial ties (Fargher et al 2010a). During the frequent warfare of the Late Postclassic, success in battle was highly valued. Copious depictions of warriors in the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* show that they frequently adorned themselves with lip plugs, especially curved lip plugs, and the artifact assemblage further emphasizes this pattern. The embodiment of warrior status through lip ornaments was a visual signifier to the community about the individual's status and achievements.

In general, lip ornaments at the site had a much greater variety in style, a wider range of construction material, and more elaborate décor when compared to ear ornaments. According to Carballo et al. (2014), the expression of more elaborately decorated ornaments can coincide with conceptualizations of social status. Additionally, gradations of style have been shown to directly relate to gradations of value, which further supports that lip ornaments were likely utilized as status markers (Lesure 1999). Comparatively, ear ornaments lacked this variety in type, material, and décor, which suggests that these ornaments were less likely to be an indicator of status. The intentional plainness of the material and decoration of these ear ornaments could indicate conformity within the community. Depictions of nose ornaments at Tlaxcallan show that they were worn by gods or given as gifts to other high-ranking individuals. The lack of nose ornaments in the artifact assemblage and on figurines could support the idea that this object was a very restricted status marker but more research needs to be done before this can be confirmed.

Although evidence indicates that a relatively small degree of social stratification was present within the Tlaxcallan community, it was mostly limited to male warriors or nobles that achieved their status rather than solely through inheritance. The blatant emphasis on male warriors or nobles rather than other kinds of statuses hints at the importance that the community placed on success in warfare and political tactics. Based on the evidence presented, nobles and warriors were highly valued and had more access to facial adornments than others in Tlaxcallan. Additionally, the lack of facial ornaments associated with women reflects the limited participation that they had in warfare and politics. The materialization of status was significant for both the self and collective identity of the community as it created a way of empowering individuals and encouraging the collective goal of resisting Aztec control through warfare.

Ethnicity

The final aspect of social identity that can be discussed in this research is ethnicity, which this research closely relates language groups. According to Jenkins (1996), individuals must be able to successfully perform ethnic identity. Ethnicity is an aspect of social identity that assists in creating an “us” versus “them” dichotomy and usually requires some kind of actualization. Olko (2014) mentions that many terms for lip ornaments among the Nahua depend on ethnic affiliations and use, such as *nextecuiltentetl* (“the labret of the crazy ones”) associated with foreign Otomi-rank warriors. Additionally, associations between specific types of lip ornaments and certain ethnic groups, such as the Huastec and Otomi, indicate that these objects were frequently used to distinguish specific ethnic communities (Brumfiel et al. 1994, Olko 2014). Although other groups used various types of lip and ear ornaments, the high frequency of curved

labrets and equitable distribution of plain ear ornaments is a defining characteristic for the Tlaxcallan community. Also, the frequent use of non-prestigious material, such as obsidian and chalcedony, to create these objects emphasizes the lack of social stratification and is another unique indicator of how the Tlaxcalteca embodied their collective identity.

The Aztec

In contrast, the Aztecs utilized facial ornaments in vastly different ways. A much greater association between social hierarchy and types of facial ornaments existed within this society. For example, access to ornaments made of prestigious materials, such as gold or greenstone, or made with elaborate decoration were frequently utilized by Aztec elites or awarded as gifts to individuals of higher status (Olko 2014). Nose ornaments were closely associated with royalty or priests, especially during ceremonies honoring the gods. Non-prestigious materials, such as obsidian or ceramic, were frequently associated with commoners. In fact, many low ranking individuals are believed to have used organic material to construct facial ornaments, such as bone or plants, which would have deteriorated throughout time. The emphasis on elite versus non-elite status is prevalent in ear, nose, and lip ornaments regardless of gender or age.

The Aztecs did, however, share some similar ornamentation practices with the Tlaxcalteca. Both gender and age were embodied through facial ornamentation. Men, women, children, and the elderly wore ear ornaments. If the Tlaxcalteca celebrated *Izcalli* or other age-related rituals similar to the Aztecs, then its likely that diameter size in both communities could indicate preferences in specific types of ear ornaments throughout life. It is also important to note that the Aztec, especially elites, were buried with facial ornaments but burials at Tlaxcallan had

no facial ornaments. The Tlaxcallan Archaeological project provided evidence of one lip plug in a household context at Quiahuixtlan associated with ash or coal but the remaining were found in either fill, deposits relating to transitional phases, or disturbed sediment. The fact that the Tlaxcalteca did not include these object in burials or deposit them in other special contexts, could indicate that these objects were either reused or discarded in other ways.

Similar to the Tlaxcalteca, Aztec noble men and warriors frequently wore lip ornaments. The most significant distinction between any Aztec individual or group was the type of materials used or the type of décor used to construct their ornaments, emphasizing the significance that status and hierarchy played in this society. The Aztecs focused more on differentiating the social hierarchy between elites and commoners within their own community. On the other hand, the Tlaxcalteca emphasized the distinction between warriors and the rest of the community. The distinction of the male warrior when compared to other aspects of identity emphasizes the importance that success in warfare was for the community.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Social identity theory, when applied to archaeological contexts, can help researchers understand how individuals and communities utilized objects to embody different aspects of their own identity. Through the analysis of artifacts and historic documentation we are able to breakdown how material culture was used to embody age, gender, status, and ethnicity while also understanding how these concepts were used to create an “us” versus “other” mentality. Contrasting Tlaxcallan facial ornament practices with Aztec practices provides us with insight into why these practices were developed and maintained. According to Jenkins (1996), collective identities are inherently political. The deviation from Aztec facial ornamentation practices was a significant step towards defining Tlaxcallan group identity.

The high frequency of lip ornaments in Tlaxcallan reflects their ongoing struggle with warfare against the Aztecs and further emphasizes the frequency of warriors present at the site. The wide variety of material, style, and décor used to construct them also coincides with conceptualizations of social status. When compared to ear ornaments, the wide array of construction material used and the frequent presence of lip ornaments reflects the significance that this status had for the community. The continuous threat of Aztec subjugation was enough to transform this community into one that valued great warriors. Further excavation in other regions of Tlaxcallan need to be completed in order to better understand the distribution throughout the site since the majority of the dataset came from the region of Tepeticpac.

The general lack of prestigious material used to construct facial ornaments demonstrates that there was a much smaller degree of social hierarchy. Evidence from written sources, such as

letters written by Hernan Cortes, indicate that the markets at Tlaxcallan contained material thought to have been blocked by the Aztecs during this time (American Historical Association). Thus, although the Tlaxcalteca had access to prestigious materials, they purposefully limited its use for constructing facial ornaments. The lack of elaborate décor or various styles of ear ornaments at Tlaxcallan suggests that they were not indicators of status. Instead, ear ornamentation was inclusive of all individuals and preferences in style leaned towards materials and décor that their Aztec neighbors would associate with commoners. Although personal preference could have been somewhat flexible, as seen with the variety of styles among both ear and lip ornaments, it was likely that these choices were influenced to a certain degree by group conformity.

In contrast, the Aztecs placed a great emphasis on social hierarchies through elaborate facial insignia. Elites and royalty had greater access to prestigious materials and used them frequently to construct facial ornaments. They also held the power to distribute these valuable objects as gifts to other elites and warriors. Specific materials, such as obsidian, ceramic or biodegradable elements, were explicitly associated with commoners. The Tlaxcalteca are unique in their way of using facial ornamentation to focus on the significance of their warriors more than any other aspect of their community. Although both the Tlaxcalteca and the Aztecs come from Nahua origins, their collective identities varied greatly and each community had different, specific social systems that valued different roles more than others.

Future Directions

Several limitations are present in this analysis, which should be taken into consideration for future research. First, the majority of the dataset was collected from the district of Tepeticpac. A comparative analysis of the other three districts at Ocotelulco, Quiahuixtlan, and Tizatlan would provide a more thorough understanding of variation in facial ornaments at the site. Second, none of the artifacts from the site were found in burial contexts. Osteological research conducted in other regions around the world have been able to associate facial ornamentation use with specific individuals through burial analysis (Torres-Rouff 2003). Evidence of tooth wear on the lower incisors could help researchers better understand who wore these ornaments and how frequently they were worn. The analysis of burial contexts and associated facial ornaments could better develop our understanding of gender, age, and status embodiment in Tlaxcallan. Third, during the Late Postclassic the Aztec Triple Alliance disrupted Tlaxcallan trade routes, which could have potentially blocked access to prestigious material. Although some evidence suggests that the Tlaxcalteca had some access to these materials, further research should be conducted on other utilitarian and non-utilitarian goods to understand the degree of disruption that this blockade had on trade. If prestigious material was limited for other varieties of goods then this could create other implications for the types of materials used in creating facial ornaments. Continued excavations and research in this region will further develop our understanding of the social complexities and methods of embodiment that the Tlaxcalteca had during the Late Postclassic.

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