
La Consentida: Settlement, Subsistence, and Social Organization in an Early Formative Mesoamerican Community. Guy David Hepp.

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The transition to sedentary villages and agriculture represents a fundamental change in human lifeways and society from demography to cosmology. Mesoamerica is a key world region in which to study this transition, but the number of investigated and well-reported sites spanning this change remains small. The Early Formative site of La Consentida with its early earthen platform offers a window on the shift from seasonal to permanent village settlement in the lower Río Verde Valley on the western coast of Mexico. The book presents findings from archaeological and laboratory investigations directed by the author to investigate the economic basis of sedentism and the beginnings of complex society. The detailed documentation makes this an important reference for the previously little-known Early Formative of coastal Oaxaca.

Sediment cores indicate that maize cultivation and land clearance began regionally during the Late Archaic. A regional archaeological survey led by Arthur Joyce discovered the site in 1986. Testing two years later yielded an unanticipated early radiocarbon date in the Early Formative. Hepp's subsequent investigations make La Consentida the earliest well-dated Formative site in coastal Oaxaca with some of the earliest ceramics, earthen mound architecture, and burials. The site's small size, 4.5 ha, is typical of Early Formative villages, but La Consentida is distinguished by the presence of a 5-m-high earthen platform.

The introductory chapter lays out the research program and dating of the Early Formative, Tlacuache phase (1950–1525 cal BC). Chapter 2 frames the book with a discussion of models of Early Formative settlement and subsistence and social organization and their causal interconnections. Especially valuable is Hepp's discussion of indices of sedentism. Archaeologists now have more information about early villages in different ecologies than was available when mid-twentieth-century processual models were proposed, and maize agriculture was seen as a precondition of sedentism in Mesoamerica. Early Formative economies were a mix of horticulture and foraging, depending on ecology and also social context. Sedentism, maize dependence, and social inequalities involved separate but interrelated processes. Assessing each requires multiple measures, and variable preservation often presents challenges at small Early Formative sites. Hepp favors aggrandizer and agency models. His extensive literature review is valuable but still retains some hints of dissertation flavoring.

Chapter 3 presents the La Consentida Archaeology Project (LCAP) that Hepp began in 2008, with surveys and pilot excavations the following year and more extensive excavations and laboratory studies in 2012 as part of his doctoral research. Radiocarbon dates and contexts are further detailed as background to the reconstruction of the

site's occupational history presented in chapter 4. Chapter 5 takes up the issue of the shift to sedentism, assessed with multiple lines of evidence. Hepp concludes that La Consentida was initially founded on a seasonal basis by people already using pottery, tecomate vessels, and multifunctional grinding tools. As the settlement became occupied year-round, villagers still had seasonal camps in different microzones. Construction of the platform began after a brief initial occupation, perhaps as a series of smaller mounds, and represents one of the earliest documented earthen mounds in Mexico, predating those in the Soconusco region. Hepp estimates the settlement's population of 45–112 people was large enough to provide the necessary labor. The settlement was abandoned by the Middle Formative, with later, unrelated occupations.

Chapter 6 tackles La Consentida's subsistence despite the limited recovery of microbotanical specimens. Advancements in starch grain, phytolith, and residue analysis perhaps could be applied in the future. Villagers drew on diverse resources and intensified maize cultivation to become more reliant on maize than Soconusco villagers but not as dependent as in later periods. Chapter 7 discusses evidence of increasing differentiation reflected in mortuary practices, although not necessarily heritable. Evidence of villagers' participation in multiple regional and interregional prestige goods exchange networks, a hallmark of this time, is reported in chapter 8. The book's final chapter returns to the theme of the transition to permanent villages, the increasing contribution of maize and other cultigens, and more-differentiated social roles and identities. Hepp concludes that "one could not have existed without the other" (p. 199). An appendix describes the excavated deposits and a second appendix details the Tlacuache ceramic assemblage, which Hepp argues was part of a larger red-on-buff pottery tradition.

The well-presented findings from La Consentida do not definitively resolve larger debates about the origins of sedentism and agriculture. Hepp correctly observes that the underinvestigation of the Late Archaic remains an impediment. This work importantly presents valuable primary data and approaches that advance our understanding of the multi-stranded development of village and agricultural lifeways in Mesoamerica.

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Maya Narrative Arts. Karen Bassie-Sweet and Nicholas A. Hopkins.
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Maya Narrative Arts argues that the intrinsic nature of Maya language and conceptual thought should be the foundation of any analysis of the culture's art and text. This ambitious book, however, is densely packed with copious information requiring extensive