

Postclassic Ceramics from the Toluca Valley in US Museums: The Bauer and Blake Collections

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The Toluca Valley of central Mexico was the setting of a tradition of geometric polychrome ceramics during the Postclassic period. Although thousands of whole vessels from this area are now located in museum collections in Mexico, the United States and Europe, these polychromes remain poorly understood. There is no generally-accepted classification, and their spatial and temporal distributions are not known. The large museum collections can play an important role in advancing our understanding of this material. As a contribution toward this goal, this article describes the Bauer and Blake collections of whole Postclassic ceramic vessels from sites in the Toluca Valley. These collections currently reside in the American Museum of Natural History (New York, NY) and the National Museum of Natural History of the Smithsonian Institution (Washington, DC).

Previous Studies of Toluca Polychromes

The term "Matlatzinca" is often used as a label for the Postclassic polychrome ceramics of the Toluca Valley (Noguera 1975:165; Sodi Miranda 2000; Sodi Miranda and Herrera

Torres 1991). I prefer to avoid this label because the word "Matlatzinca" has too many meanings. On one hand, Matlatzinca is a language in the Oto-Manguean language family. Matlatzinca speakers were one of several Postclassic ethnolinguistic groups in the Toluca Valley in Postclassic times, along with speakers of Otomí, Mazahua, Nahuatl, and perhaps other languages as well (García Castro 1999; Quezada Ramírez 1972). It is not yet known whether different ethnic groups made and used different types of polychrome ceramics. The term "Mazlatzinco," on the other hand, was used as a toponym to refer to the Toluca Valley in Postclassic and Colonial times (e.g., García Castro 1999), and thus "Matlatzinca" or "Matlatzinca" can refer to any or all of the peoples living there, regardless of which language(s) they spoke. Because of this confusion I prefer to avoid labeling ceramic types with the term "Matlatzinca" until the regional distribution of peoples and ceramics are better established.

José García Payón (1941a) published the first study of these ceramics, based upon his excavations at Calixtlahuaca (García Payón 1936; García Payón 1941b; García Payón 1979). Unfortunately, his descriptions of the ceramics were



Fig. 1. Drawings of Postclassic polychrome vessels from Postclassic burials at Teotenango (after Tommasi 1974).

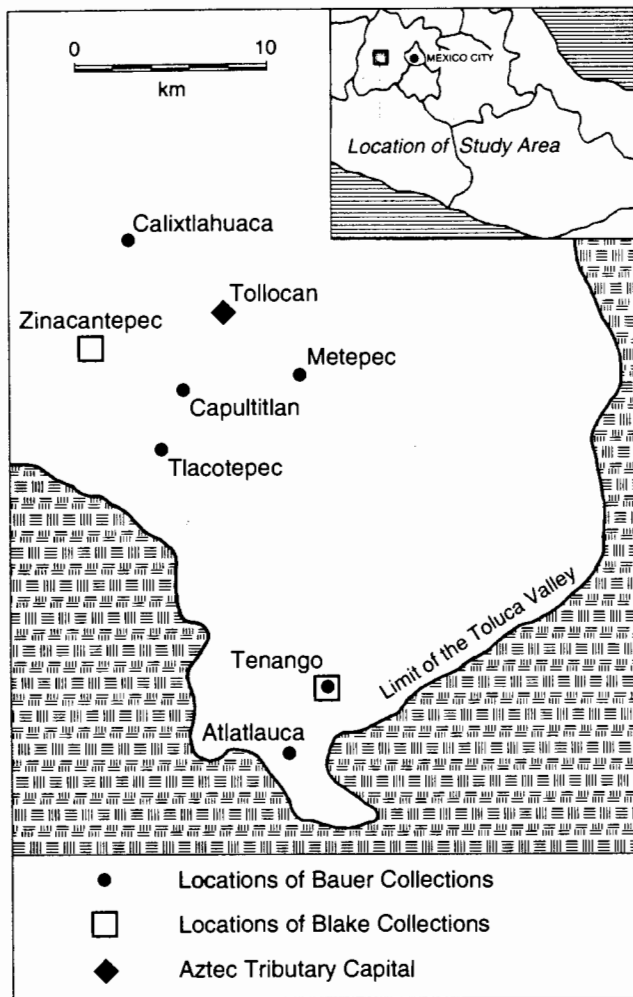


Fig. 2. Locations of the sites of origin for the ceramic vessels in the Bauer and Blake collections.

not precise and the illustrations in his article (1941) were reproduced very poorly; in fact it is almost impossible to see the decoration in his figures. Marquina (1964:láms. 67, 68) published clearer illustrations of some of these vessels. García Payón identified five ceramic groups (0, I, II, III, IV), each of which was composed of a number of individual types (e.g., IIA, IIB). His definitions of the types were brief and confusing.

García Payón claimed that his ceramic groups I–IV formed a chronological sequence. He also said that the major buildings at Calixtlahuaca each had four construction stages and that there were four overall chronological periods at the site. But since he did not provide any evidence for these claims they are difficult to evaluate. No subsequent scholar has been able to replicate García Payón's ceramic classification. Piña Chán's (1975) excavations at the Epiclassic monumental city of Teotenango uncovered a series of intrusive burials that contained several hundred Postclassic ceramic vessels among other offerings. Tommasi (1978) provided a very general 3-category classification of these vessels and published numerous excellent illustrations of vessel forms and decoration (Figure 1). In his discus-

sion of the chronology of Teotenango, Vargas Pacheco (1975) published a more detailed classification of the same vessels and also proposed a 3-phase ceramic chronology for the Postclassic period; the phases are named 3 viento, 4 fuego, and 5 muerte. Unfortunately, Vargas provided no empirical support for his chronology (no stratigraphic evidence, seriation, or carbon dates), which appears to be based upon the questionable notion that simpler designs must precede more complex designs. In fact it is likely that all of the Postclassic polychromes from Teotenango were contemporary, since they come from a single mass burial context. In the absence of supporting evidence, Vargas's chronology cannot be accepted. More recently Sodi Miranda and Herrera Torres (1991) published photos and brief descriptions of Toluca Valley ceramic vessels in the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City (see also Sodi Miranda 2000). They use Vargas's classification and his hypothetical phases to describe the vessels.

The Bauer and Blake Collections

William Bauer (also known as Guillermo Bauer and Wilhelm Bauer) was a physician in Mexico City in the late nineteenth century. A student of Eduard Seler, Bauer collected ancient ceramics and other objects from central Mexico, Oaxaca, and perhaps other areas of Mexico. His collection of Oaxaca ceramics in the Berlin Museum was published by Schuler-Schömig (1970), and König and Kröfges (2000) describe a collection of old photographs of Mexican objects donated to the Übersee-Museum by a Dr. Bauer-Thoma, probably the same person. In 1904 William Bauer sold a collection of several hundred Mexican antiquities to the American Museum of Natural History ("AMNH") in New York City. This collection included 213 ceramic vessels of the "Matlatzincan culture" from the Toluca Valley. Marshall Saville, Curator at the AMNH, worked out an agreement with William H. Holmes, Curator at the United States National Museum (now the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution; "SI"), to split the Toluca Valley collection between the two institutions. 113 vessels remained at the AMNH, and 100 were sent to the SI. Bauer visited both museums and provided Saville and Holmes with some information on the collections. Correspondence files at the two institutions include details of the transactions but little information about William. Bauer's Toluca ceramics come from six sites, shown in Figure 2.

Site	Bauer, AMNH	Bauer, SI	Blake, SI	Total
Calixtlahuaca	12	8		20
Metepec	10	11		21
Capotitlan	21	10		31
Tlacotepec	8	7		15
Tenango	62	45	12	109
Atlatlauca	9	7		16
Zinacantepec			5	5
Total	112	88	17	217

Note: These data include only Postclassic vessels. In addition to these vessels,
 – Metepec has 6 Classic vessels, Tenango has 2 Classic vessels, and
 – Tlacotepec has 1 Epiclassic vessel

Table 1. Number of vessels by site and collection.

code	Form Groups:	code	Decorative Groups:
1	Tripod plate	A	Plain
2	Tripod bowl	B	Redware
3	Molcajete	C	Red interior, white polychrome exterior
4	Bowl	D	White-based painted
5	Copa	E	Buff-based painted
6	Pitcher	G	Negative painting
7	Large jar	H	Local black-on-orange
8	Medium jar	I	Censers
9	Miniature jar	Y	Imported vessels
10	Miniature bowl	Z	Eroded and uncertain
11	Other form		

Table 2. Lists of form groups and decorative groups.

Wilson W. Blake was also an antiquarian in Mexico City at the end of the nineteenth century. He acquired a large collection of pre-Columbian objects from Father Fischer; this was "the famous Fischer Collection gathered by the present curate of the San Cosme Church – who was spiritual adviser to Maximilian and member of his cabinet during the Second Empire" (Blake 1886:289). A catalog of this collection, published by Blake (1886), included at least 25 ceramic vessels from the Toluca Valley. Blake sold the Fischer collection to the SI in 1886. Walsh (1997:127–129) discusses this transaction and provides some biographical and contextual information on Wilson Blake.

Sites and Collections

Three of the seven sites represented in these collections (Table 1) were popular sources of artifacts in the late nineteenth century and produced extensive ceramic collections in a number of museums. Calixtlahuaca was a major Postclassic site north of Toluca. Many vessels and other materials from García Payón's excavations at the site (see above) now reside in the Museo de Antropología in Toluca. The site of Tenango, origin of vessels in both the Bauer and Blake collections, may refer to the archaeological zone known as Teotenango, where Piña Chán (1975) excavated Postclassic burials with hundreds of Postclassic ceramic vessels (see above). Alternatively, the vessels purchased from Bauer and Blake may have come from the modern town of Tenango, which is situated on or near the Postclassic city of the same name.

Form Group	Decorative Group:										Total Vessels	
	A	B	C	D	E	G	H	I	Y	Z		
1	1	3	6	1	7							18
2	2	7		2	6	3	3		2			25
3	2	2			18	5	4		2			33
4	19	21			6							46
5		1			3							4
6	5	6		2	4		1					18
7	13	2			7							22
8	2				1							3
9	20	1		1	8							30
10	4										1	5
11	5	5						1	2			13
Total	73	48	6	6	60	8	8	1	6	1		217

Table 3. Vessels tallied by form group and decorative group.

Tlacotepec was the subject of intensive collecting around the turn of the nineteenth century by Frederick Starr, and Starr's collection at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago has nearly a thousand ceramic vessels (Lambertino-Urquizo *et al.* 1999; McVicker 1989). Metepec, Capotitlan, Atlatlauca, and Zinacantepec – the other towns represented in the Bauer and Blake collections – are all modern towns in the Toluca Valley with numerous Late Postclassic sites within their municipal borders. The incomplete nature of existing notes makes it impossible to locate the origin of the collected ceramics more precisely.

It should be emphasized that there is no documentation of exactly how Bauer or Fischer obtained these ceramic vessels in Mexico. They probably paid local farmers who were looting archaeological sites for profit, or perhaps they purchased the material from intermediaries who had in turn paid looters for the objects. This kind of collecting was rampant in the late nineteenth century (Trigger 1989; Walsh 1997), furnishing a large part of the collections of ancient objects in the major museums of the world. Many scholars are wary of studying looted antiquities because of the ethical and practical consequences; stolen objects gain legitimacy; the monetary value of stolen art increases; and such research can contribute, directly or indirectly, to the continuing destruction of sites and promotion of the market in stolen art (Messenger 1999; Wylie 1996). Nevertheless, museum collections that originated in looting over a century ago are in a different category from recently looted objects, and it is difficult to argue that study of such collections contributes to contemporary destruction of archaeological sites. There is much important information in these old museum collections, and their study not only contributes knowledge about ancient cultures, but can also provide information that allows the design of more effective and efficient programs of fieldwork and analytical research in the future.

In 2000 and 2001 I examined the Toluca Valley ceramic vessels from the Bauer and Blake collections in the SI and the AMNH. Of the original 213 Toluca Valley vessels purchased from Bauer, I located and examined 200 (Table 1). I am not sure how many Toluca vessels were included initially in the Blake purchase; I located and examined 17 at the SI. I spent several days at each museum. I assembled a catalog of the vessels; took digital images of all decorated and some undecorated vessels; constructed a provisional classification of the

ceramics; measured the vessels and recorded several attributes; and made several drawings of vessel forms. The digital images are posted on the web at: <http://www.albany.edu/~mesmith/tval/bauer/images/bauerindex.html>

In this article I provide a very brief description of these vessels that can serve as a starting point for further, more detailed study of the collections in the future.

The Ceramics

For descriptive purposes I classified each vessel into a form group and a decorative group (Table 2). I have begun to define more specific types for vessel form and decoration within these broad groups, but this research is ongoing and it would be premature to present my provisional classification here. Readers may view the pots on the web for more detailed information.

Vessel Form Groups

Some of the major vessel form groups are illustrated in Figure 3; frequencies are provided in Table 3. Tripod vessels – divided here into bowls, plates (shallower than bowls), and molcajetes (bowls with scored bases) – are quite abundant in these collections, and in other collections of Postclassic Toluca ceramics. Tripod plates and molcajetes usually have solid supports, whereas tripod bowls usually have hollow supports (Figure 3). Among the bowls simple hemispherical and conical shapes predominate. Copas are a rare category, whereas pitchers – with a diversity of specific shapes – are fairly common. Numerous jars are represented in these collections, of which miniature jars are the most abundant category (Figure 3). Overall the forms represented in the Bauer and Blake collections are very similar to those in other large collections of Toluca Valley Postclassic ceramics (García Payón 1941a; Sodi Miranda and Herrera Torres 1991; Tommasi de Magrelli 1978). Table 4 shows the distribution of form groups by site. Although some variation exists among the sites, the small sizes of the samples from each site and vagaries of collection biases prevent any firm conclusions about spatial patterns from these data.

Decorative Groups

I have used a very broad classification based upon painted decoration. Plain vessels, particularly bowls and jars, are the most common decorative group (Table 3). Redwares (Group B) are covered with a polished red surface, often painted with black and/or white designs. Some vessels resemble the Postclassic guinda or redware ceramics of the Basin of Mexico and Morelos (Séjourné 1970, 1983; Smith, 2000, 2001), whereas others are distinctive in form and decoration. Group C is a distinctive decorative type with a red interior, often decorated with black solid circles, and white-based polychrome decoration below the rim on the exterior surface.

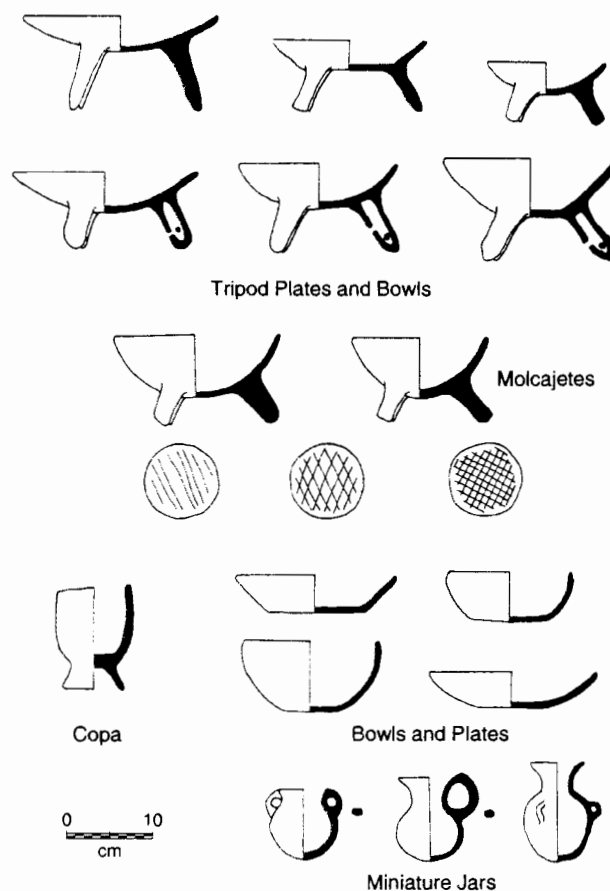


Fig. 3. Vessel forms for selected form groups.

Group D, White-based painted, consists of vessels painted in a red designs on a painted white background. Buff-based painted, Group E, is the most abundant of the decorative groups. Nearly all examples are painted in red designs on an unpainted (buff) background; a few white-on-buff vessels are also present. Negative painting is common; most examples have red-on-buff or red-on-white painting, over which gray smudged negative designs were created in a final firing of the vessels. Local black-on-orange vessels appear to be imitations of the well-known Aztec III black-on-orange type from the Basin of Mexico; chemical analyses of vessels of this type from Tlacotepec, reported in Lambertino-Urquiza *et al.* (1999), suggest strongly that they were Toluca Valley products, not imports from the Basin of Mexico. Identified imports in the Bauer and Blake collections (Group Y) include the types Aztec III black-on-orange and Cholula polychrome.

Site	Forms:											Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
Calixtlahuaca	5.0	15.0	5.0	30.0		5.0	5.0		5.0	10.0	20.0	20
Metepec				61.9		4.8			9.5	9.5	14.3	21
Capotitlan	12.9	3.2	16.1	22.6		9.7	35.5					31
Tlacotepec	20.0	20.0	13.3	6.7		6.7	20.0				13.3	15
Tenango	6.4	11.0	21.1	17.4	1.8	7.3	5.5	2.8	24.8	0.9	1.8	109
Atlatlauca	25.0	37.5	12.5			18.8	6.3					16
Zinacantepec					40.0	20.0					40.0	5
Total	18	25	33	46	4	18	22	3	30	5	13	217

Table 4. Frequencies of form groups by site (% of total Postclassic vessels).

Site	Decorative groups:										Total
	A	B	C	D	E	G	H	I	Y	Z	
Calixtlahuaca	45.0	15.0			25.0		10.0		5.0		20
Meteppec	28.6	61.9			4.8					4.8	21
Capotitlan	54.8	3.2	6.5	6.5	19.4	6.5	3.2				31
Tlacotepec	6.7	20.0	20.0		26.7	13.3	6.7	6.7			15
Tenango	34.9	18.3		2.8	34.9	2.8	2.8		3.7	0.9	109
Atlautla	12.5	31.3	6.3	6.3	25.0	6.3	6.3		6.3		16
Zinacantepec		60.0			40.0						5
Total	73	48	6	6	60	8	8	1	6	1	217

Table 5. Frequencies of decorative groups by site (% of total Postclassic vessels).

Table 5 presents the decorative groups by site. As in the case of Table 4, it is not possible to draw firm conclusions about regional patterning from these data.

Conclusions

The Bauer and Blake collections in the American Museum of Natural History and the Smithsonian Institution are important resources for research on the Postclassic peoples of the Toluca Valley of central Mexico. The Postclassic ceramics of this area remain poorly understood, without an acceptable chronology and without solid information on their geographical patterns or associations with known ethnic and language groups. I started my study of the Bauer and Blake collections hoping to find clear spatial associations for either vessel form or decoration. That is, I hoped to find certain vessel forms or decorative types associated with individual sites, or with regions (Figure 2). The data in Tables 4 and 5, however, do not show any clear spatial patterning. Although this is not a firm foundation for generalization (many more collections need to be studied), it does appear that a high degree of diversity in form and decoration characterizes the Postclassic ceramics of many parts of the Toluca Valley.

It is possible that a more refined analysis of decorative types within my larger decorative groups will permit the isolation of regional patterning within the Toluca Valley. Some of the variation in types and attributes of decoration and form is probably due to chronological change, and the construction of a chronology of these ceramics is a high priority for future research. The brief study reported here is the first step in a longer program of research on the Postclassic peoples of the Toluca Valley. Although the Bauer and Blake collections raise more questions than they answer, the ceramic vessels contribute in important ways to our growing understanding of the Postclassic archaeology of the Toluca Valley. Readers can view many of these vessels on my web site at: <http://www.albany.edu/~mesmith/tval/bauer/images/bauerindex.html>.

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RESUMEN: Este artículo presenta una descripción breve de colecciones de vasijas cerámicas Postclásicas del Valle de Toluca en el American Museum of Natural History y el Smithsonian Institution. Se analiza los orígenes de las colecciones en el siglo XIX y los estudios previos de la cerámica Postclásica de Toluca. El artículo presenta una introducción a la cerámica. Hay imágenes digitales de las vasijas en el sitio del Internet del autor. Estas colecciones, no publicadas previamente, proveen datos importantes sobre un área del centro de México todavía no bien conocido.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG: Der Beitrag ist eine kurze Beschreibung von Sammlungen postklassischer Keramikgefäße aus dem Tal von Toluca, die sich nun im American Museum for Natural History in New York und in der Smithsonian Institution befinden. Die Herkunft der im 19. Jahrhundert entstandenen Sammlungen wird diskutiert wie auch frühere Studien über die postklassische Keramik von Toluca. Der Beitrag analysiert die Keramiken im Kontext der Archäologie des Tals von Toluca. Die Keramiken selbst sind auf der Webseite des Autors erstmalig publiziert und stellen eine wichtige Informationsquelle für ein wenig bekanntes Gebiet des postklassischen Zentralmexiko dar.

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