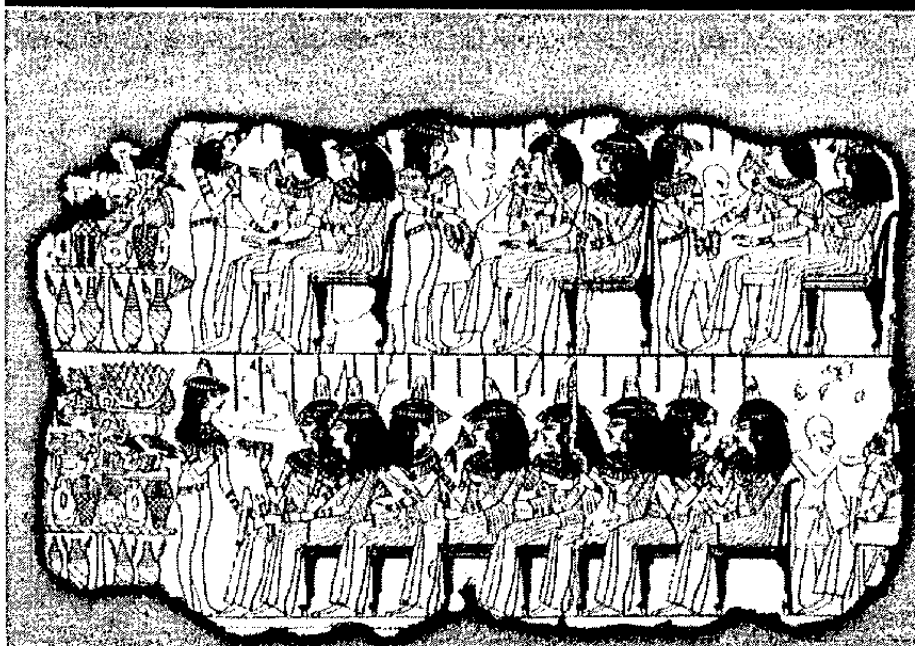


THE ARCHAEOLOGY AND POLITICS OF FOOD AND FEASTING IN EARLY STATES AND EMPIRES



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TAMARA L. BRAY

Chapter 9

Aztec Feasts, Rituals, and Markets

Political Uses of Ceramic Vessels in a Commercial Economy

MICHAEL E. SMITH, JENNIFER B. WHARTON,
AND JAN MARIE OLSON

Some of the most vivid written accounts of Aztec society describe exclusive gatherings where the emperor hosted other kings and nobles in elaborate ceremonies consisting of sumptuous meals, theatrical rituals, formal speeches, and luxury gift giving. These and other feasting events were important parts of Aztec political process. As in nearly all ancient complex societies, Aztec political feasts involved the use of a variety of distinctive ceramic serving vessels, allowing archaeologists to document aspects of ancient feasting. But unlike some of the societies described in this volume, neither the production nor the distribution of these feasting vessels appear to have been under the control of the state or the elite. Nearly all Aztec ceramic wares were manufactured by independent producers, and they were exchanged as commercial commodities in the marketplace.

The Aztec economy was the most highly commercialized economy of the ancient New World, and this had implications for the uses of ceramic vessels in political feasting. The Aztec economy consisted of two contrasting sectors: an open

MICHAEL E. SMITH AND JENNIFER B. WHARTON • Department of Anthropology, State University of New York, Albany, New York 12222. JAN MARIE OLSON • University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6G 2H4

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commercialized market sector, and a politically-controlled sector involving land, labor, and state finance. The market sector consisted of practices and institutions centered on a system of marketplaces found in virtually every town and city. Several forms of money were in regular circulation in these markets and at least two types of full-time entrepreneurial merchants could become quite wealthy from their trading expeditions. Most of these commercial activities were conducted outside of direct state control, and the overall volume of exchange was much higher than what the evidence suggests for the earlier civilizations of Mesoamerica (Smith and Berdan 2003). This dynamic and open market sector coexisted with a political sector that consisted of a system of city-states and an overarching empire. Within Aztec city-states, land and labor were under strict centralized political control. Nobles owned the land and rights to the labor of commoners, while kings extracted tribute from their subjects to finance both government institutions and the lavish lifestyle of the ruling elite.

Whereas the feasts of the nobility were associated with the political sector, the ceramic vessels employed in these feasts were obtained through the market sector. The Aztec state did not control the production, distribution, or consumption of ceramics. Even the fanciest and most valuable serving vessels were sold in the markets, available to commoners (Blanton 1996; Hodge and Minc 1990). As a result, the same types of elaborately-decorated polychrome vessels used at the highest level of imperial feasting could also be used for meals in commoner households. The one major exception to this pattern was a complex of distinctive ceramic vessels recovered in offerings at the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan. These objects, by far the most complex and elaborate of Aztec ceramics both aesthetically and symbolically, may have been manufactured under state control solely for placement in these offerings. These were the only true "state ceramics" in Aztec society, but they were not used for feasting or other kinds of activities by anyone outside of the Sacred Precinct of Tenochtitlan.

AZTEC POLITICS AND ECONOMICS

At the time of Spanish conquest in the early sixteenth century, Aztec central Mexico was divided into a mosaic of city-states, most of which were subject to the Triple Alliance empire centered at Tenochtitlan (Berdan et al. 1996; Smith 1996). Although the surviving documentary sources are heavily biased toward the empire and its capital, the *altepetl*, or city-state, was the most important polity for local administration and regional political and economic dynamics (Lockhart 1992; Smith 2000). As we discuss below, feasting played important roles at both the imperial and city-state levels, although documentary descriptions of the latter are far less abundant.

The Aztec population was divided into two social classes—nobility and commoners. The Aztec nobility, a hereditary group, owned the land and controlled city-state government. There was considerable variation in wealth and power among the Aztec nobility, based upon the political level of the city-state and the closeness of kinship ties to kings. The top nobility lived in large, sumptuous palaces, whereas the lowest nobles probably lived a life little different from many commoners. The nobility was endogamous and marriages that crossed city-state lines were the norm. The class interests of the Aztec nobility transcended city-state and imperial organization and nobles from independent polities cooperated with one another to preserve and promote their power and privileges. Elite-sponsored feasts of the type Dietler (1996) calls "diacritical feasts" were a primary mechanism for the interaction and cooperation of nobles from diverse city-states.

Most Aztec commoners were members of residential units called *calpolli*. In contrast to earlier views of the *calpolli* that suggested communal land ownership and kinship-based membership, more recent research on Nahuatl-language documents by Lockhart (1992), Carrasco (1976), and others, shows that nobles exerted control over the land and labor of the *calpolli*. The commoner class exhibited internal variation in wealth and power determined more by residence and tribute requirements than by kinship.

Everyone in Aztec society, except the Mexica emperor, paid tribute of some form. Tribute consisted of goods (agricultural and manufactured) and labor service. All commoners were subjects of a noble. Nobles paid tribute to their king, relying upon the labor of their commoner subjects to obtain or produce their tribute goods. Kings also paid tribute to other kings, either the rulers of more powerful polities, or else directly to the Aztec emperor.

The Aztec market sector—based upon commercial exchange—coexisted with the state control of land and tribute.¹ Almost every settlement, from the imperial capital to the smallest village, had a marketplace. Low-order markets met periodically (every five days in the Aztec calendar) and offered the basic necessities. Markets in city-state capitals might meet either periodically or daily, while the highest-order markets in large cities met daily. A diverse array of commodities were offered for sale in the markets (Berdan 1985; Hodge 1992; Smith 2003). Commercial exchanges were conducted using several forms of money. Individual cacao beans served for minor purchases, while cotton textiles of a standard size were used for larger purchases. Other forms of currency included gold dust and T-shaped copper "money axes" (Berdan et al. 2003; Hosler et al. 1990; Rojas 1998).

Several types of professional merchants worked out of the marketplaces (Berdan 1988; Rojas 1983). The famous *pochteca* (guild-organized long-distance traders) undertook lengthy and profitable expeditions, and often ran the major markets, where they served as judges. Less well documented were the regional merchants who undertook shorter journeys and often specialized in key commodities such as salt, cacao, and slaves (Berdan 1988). Finally, many sellers in the markets

were petty vendors, trading in craft goods and agricultural products produced by their family.

Both sectors of the Aztec economy—state-administered and market—expanded and intensified greatly in imperial times (A.D. 1428–1519). During this period the empire came to incorporate much of northern Mesoamerica, the power of the Mexica rulers grew, the capital city Tenochtitlan expanded, there was an acceleration of public rituals centered on the Templo Mayor, and there was an increasing abundance of imported luxury goods arriving in the capital through mechanisms of tribute and commerce. The role of ceramic vessels within this vibrant social and economic context is the subject of the present chapter.

AZTEC CERAMICS AND SOCIETY

A Functional Approach to Aztec Ceramic Vessels

Although archaeologists have been studying and publishing on Aztec ceramics for a century (Batres 1902; Boas and Gamio 1921), there are few studies that approach this material from a functional perspective. Brumfiel (1991) has used relative frequencies of cooking jars and tortilla griddles to investigate changing patterns of women's domestic activities in the Basin of Mexico, and Smith has used frequencies of different vessel forms to examine various household activities and conditions in Aztec-period Morelos (Olson 2001; Smith 1996, 2002; Smith and Heath-Smith 1994). In another important contribution, García Chávez et al. (1999) describe a form-based classification of Early and Late Aztec ceramics from Tenochtitlan. Most archaeologists, however, have used Aztec ceramics to date sites and to study production and exchange. Art historians, who have concentrated on whole ceramic vessels, have analyzed these using an aesthetic and symbolic framework, limiting their attention to a few outstanding individual pieces (e.g., Bonifaz Nuño and Robles 1981; Heyden 1987; Pasztory 1983).

To investigate the uses and sociopolitical significance of ceramic vessels, however, archaeologists must develop and apply methods of functional analysis (e.g., Henrickson and McDonald 1983; Lesure 1998; Smith 1985). This requires the use of classifications based upon form and the application of a variety of techniques of functional inference for vessel forms. We have begun to apply this kind of approach to the archaeological ceramics of Morelos (Olson 2001; Smith n.d.a, n.d.b) and to the study of ceramic vessels in the pictorial codices (Wharton 1999). But until there are more studies of Aztec ceramic collections from a functional (or at least form-based) perspective, our interpretations must remain somewhat provisional in character.

Smith (n.d.a, n.d.b) has proposed a form-based functional classification of Morelos Postclassic ceramics that consists of six major categories, each of which has numerous constituent functional types. The six categories are: **serving**

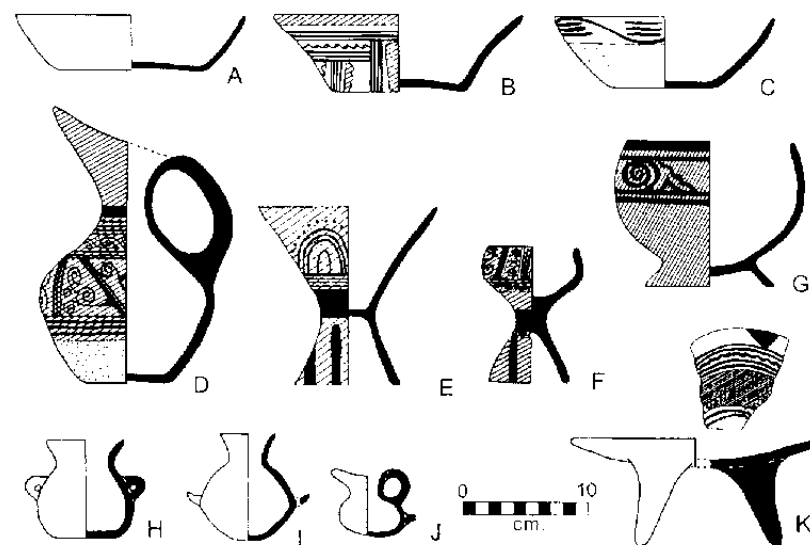


Figure 9.1. Aztec serving vessels from sites in Morelos. a–c) bowls; d) pitcher; e–f) cups; g) goblet; h–j) miniature vessels; k) tripod plate (from Smith n.d.b; drawings by Benjamin Karis).

vessels (bowls, plates, cups, pitchers, and miniature vessels); **kitchen vessels** (jars, griddles, basins, grinding bowls, and ladles); **ritual objects** (censers, figurines, sculptures, and a variety of small ceramic objects such as bells, whistles, and pipes); **production tools** (spindle whorls, spinning bowls, molds, and sherd scrapers); **other domestic items** (a catch-all category); and **special offering vessels** (various effigy vessels, polychrome bottles, and archaic vessels found only in buried offerings). In this paper we focus on serving vessels, and we employ the following subclasses of that category: drinking vessels (pitchers and several types of cups or goblets), bowls, tripod plates, and miniature vessels. Examples of these forms of serving vessels from Smith's excavations in Morelos are illustrated in Figure 9.1. These functional interpretations are based upon the physical attributes of the vessels, information in the ethnohistoric sources, and analogies with the traditional ceramics of modern Mesoamerica. Further elaboration of this form-based approach to the Aztec-period ceramics of Morelos can be found in two unpublished studies (Smith n.d.a, n.d.b).

The Absence of Aztec State and Elite Pottery

The high level of commercialization of the Aztec economy and the role of ceramic production and exchange within that economy produced a situation in which no specific class or style of ceramic vessels (with one exception, discussed below) were strongly linked to the state or to the elite class.

For purposes of our analysis, we define state pottery as ceramic vessels that are: (1) produced and/or exchanged under state control; and/or (2) distributed or consumed in contexts that advanced the political agenda of rulers or elites. The elaborate polychrome jars and other vessels distributed by the Inca state provide an example of state pottery. These vessels are common in the Cuzco area (Bauer 1999; Rowe 1944), but have a more limited distribution in provincial areas, where they are found at Inca administrative centers like Huánuco Pampa or Hatún Xauxa and in provincial towns and villages at the residences of local rulers (Bray, this volume; see also Malpass 1993; Morris and Thompson 1985). Although recent fieldwork has shown that Inca-style polychrome jars were manufactured in several places in the provinces far from Cuzco, the evidence suggests that production and distribution were both under state control (D'Altroy and Bishop 1990; Hayashida 1999). Morris's excavations at Huánuco Pampa, although only very incompletely published, suggest that Inca polychromes were used in state-sponsored feasts in which local rulers were wine and dined by Inca officials (Morris 1979, 1998; Morris and Thompson 1985).

There was no Aztec equivalent to Inca state pottery. The fanciest ceramics in general circulation—in terms of their elaborate polychrome decoration—were Cholula polychromes (Figure 9.2) (Lind 1994; McCafferty 1996a; Noguera 1954), the only type of serving ware the Mexica emperor Motecuhzoma would reportedly use for his meals (Díaz del Castillo 1963:226). These ceramics were manufactured in a variety of places in the Puebla/Tlaxcala region (Neff et al. 1994) and traded widely throughout central Mexico (Smith et al. 1999b). Their production was probably overseen by local nobles (Pohl 2003), and there is no evidence that the Aztec empire controlled, or even influenced, their production or distribution.

Several types of ceramic vessels manufactured in Tenochtitlan and other parts of the Aztec imperial core (the Basin of Mexico) are found in the imperial provinces, but all evidence points to their exchange through commercial channels rather than state-controlled networks. The most common type, Aztec III Black-on-Orange, was manufactured in a number of areas of the Basin of Mexico (Hodge et al. 1993), and provincial peoples obtained such wares from several distinct production centers (Smith et al. 1999b). The frequency of this ceramic type outside of the Basin exhibits an exponential fall-off curve with distance (Smith 1990), a pattern consistent with commercial exchange processes. This and other Basin of Mexico types (e.g., Texcoco fabric-marked salt vessels, Xochimilco polychrome jars, and Chalco polychrome plates) occur in both elite and commoner domestic contexts in Morelos, which is another indicator of the operation of market exchange (see below). Documentary sources list ceramic vessels among goods for sale in Aztec markets, and there is no indication in the written sources that ceramics were manufactured by attached specialists as was the case for luxury goods such as featherwork, lapidary products, and stone. There is a special category of ceramic

vessels, however, that can probably be considered Aztec state pottery—the highly elaborate vessels placed in offerings at the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan.

Elite Pottery: Excavations of Houses in Morelos

The modern Mexican state of Morelos, located immediately south of the Basin of Mexico, was the former home of two tributary provinces of the Aztec empire. Excavations at a number of sites in Morelos focusing on the houses of nobles and commoners provide evidence suggesting that "elite pottery" is not a valid category for Aztec central Mexico. Smith has excavated at the urban center of Yauhtepac in central Morelos, a city-state capital (Hare and Smith 1996; Smith et al. 1999a), and at the town of Cuexcomate and the village of Capilco—both in western Morelos (Smith 1992, 1993, 1994b). One of the principal questions guiding the research at these sites focused on the identification of the social and economic activities of elites and commoners.

In our research we have used clear and obvious distinctions in architectural size and quality to identify elite and commoner houses, and our ceramic data come from middens associated with both types of houses. While we have found evidence for social variation within the commoner and elite classes, for purposes of this paper we consider only the aggregate categories of elite and commoner to investigate the association of particular ceramic forms or types with social class (for further information, including discussion of intra-class variation, see Olson 2001).

Many discussions of ancient elites note the contrasting patterns of domestic artifacts which define them as a separate group of people participating in distinctive and often exclusive activities (for example, see the papers in Chase and Chase 1992; LeCount 1999). This implies privileged access to objects used for the display of status. In Morelos, however, Smith's residential excavations do not reveal any artifact categories with exclusive elite or commoner associations (Olson 2001; Smith 1999; Smith and Heath-Smith 1994). The fact that imported and high-value ceramics and other objects (including greenstone jewelry and bronze needles) were not limited to elite households suggests that these items were purchased through markets rather than through reciprocal exchange relationships between elites. Hirth (1998) argues that this lack of exclusive elite associations is a marker of the operation of markets, with the implication that elites did not monopolize or control the distribution of ceramics and other goods. Smith (1999) modified Hirth's general argument and presented data from sites in western Morelos that conform to the expectations of the market model (for ethnohistoric documentation of the prevalence of markets in Postclassic Morelos, see Smith 1994a; 1999; n.d.b). This same pattern is also found at Yauhtepac (Olson 2001).

Although there were some sumptuary rules in Aztec society,² commoners were not forbidden to purchase expensive and valuable items in the markets. For

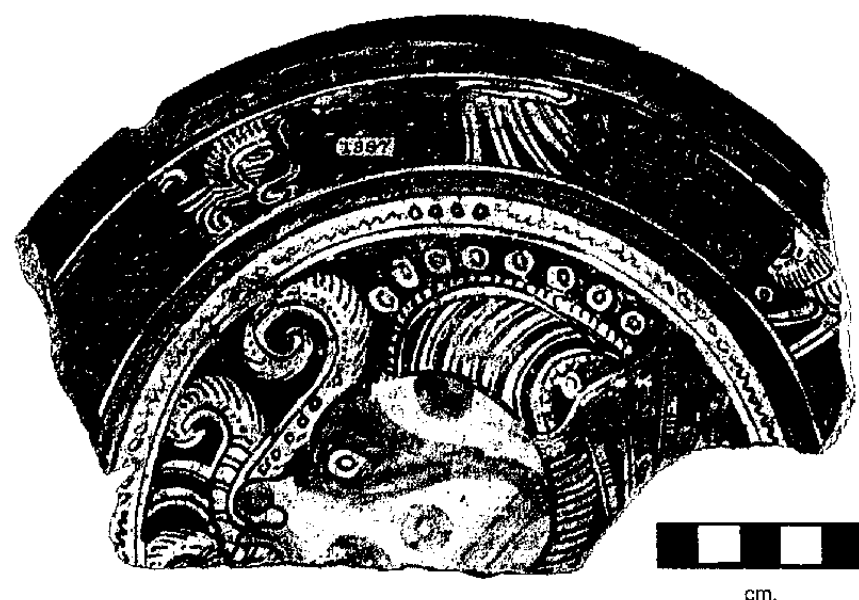


Figure 9.2. Choluta polychrome sherd. Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History (Catalog No. 30.0/6082) (photograph by Michael E. Smith).

example, the most elaborately-decorated ware at these sites—the imported Choluta polychromes (see Figure 9.2)—occurs in low frequencies in almost all excavated contexts, elite and commoner. Although commoners could and did purchase expensive items, their ability to obtain such goods was limited by their purchasing power. Olson (2001) has identified a number of individual ceramic types (mostly imported and decorated bowls) that show statistically significant differences in frequency between elite and commoner houses. In the general vessel categories under discussion here, the major differences between elites and commoners are that elite middens contain more serving vessels and fewer ritual objects than commoner middens (Table 9.1). There was little difference between elites and commoners in overall access to imported vessels. The data in Table 9.1 are provisional summaries based upon middens from the Atlán (A.D. 1300–1440) and Molotla (A.D. 1440–1550) phases. There is one elite residence in each phase (unit 512); the Atlán phase has eight commoner houses and the Molotla phase has five. More detailed data and analyses may be found in Olson (2001).

Although we initially expected that decorated vessels used to serve beverages—i.e., cups, goblets, and pitchers—would be more common in elite contexts, the Atlán phase showed the reverse pattern, and the Molotla phase witnessed only a minor predominance in elite contexts (Table 9.1). Only a few rare

Table 9.1. Elite/Commoner Comparisons of Vessel Types, Yautepec.

Category	Atlán phase		Molotla phase	
	Commoner	Elite	Commoner	Elite
Major Functional Classes (% of total ceramics)				
Serving Vessels	44.7	49.2	39.6	42.5
Kitchen Objects	37.3	39.6	35.2	45.2
Ritual Objects	8.7	5.7	10.0	5.2
Production Objects	4.4	3.1	6.8	3.8
Other Domestic Objects	4.0	2.1	6.7	1.5
Total Vessels and Objects	4,827	1,305	5,687	1,419
Serving Vessels (% of total serving)				
Cups and Pitchers	4.8	2.6	6.5	7.5
Bowls	93.4	96.5	90.2	90.7
Miniature vessels	1.8	0.9	3.3	1.8
Imports	19.6	19.7	15.3	15.5
Type B5 Polychrome bowls	0.6	2.2	0.0	0.3
Number of Serving Vessels	2188	644	2393	612

polychrome bowl types (types B5 and C4) showed elite associations. These are rare types of Tlahuica polychrome bowl with complex geometric decoration that may have been imported from eastern Morelos (Smith n.d.b). We do not believe, however, that these two types were used in feasting or other special elite events to any greater extent than other, more abundant, types of polychrome bowls. A methodological problem in the study of ancient feasting behavior comes into play here: it may be difficult or impossible to distinguish feasting behavior from regular consumption behavior from the intermingled remains of these activities in domestic middens. The main conclusion that we wish to emphasize from these observations is that there are no decorated or imported ceramic wares consistently associated with either elite or commoner residences.

AZTEC FEASTING

Documentary descriptions of Aztec society suggest that competitive feasting was an important part of political and social dynamics at all levels, from the integration of subordinate kings within the Aztec empire to celebrations marking life cycle events and other social occasions in commoner households. The Mexica emperors invited the kings of both subject and enemy states to elaborate celebratory events such as coronations, funerals, and temple dedications conducted in Tenochtitlan

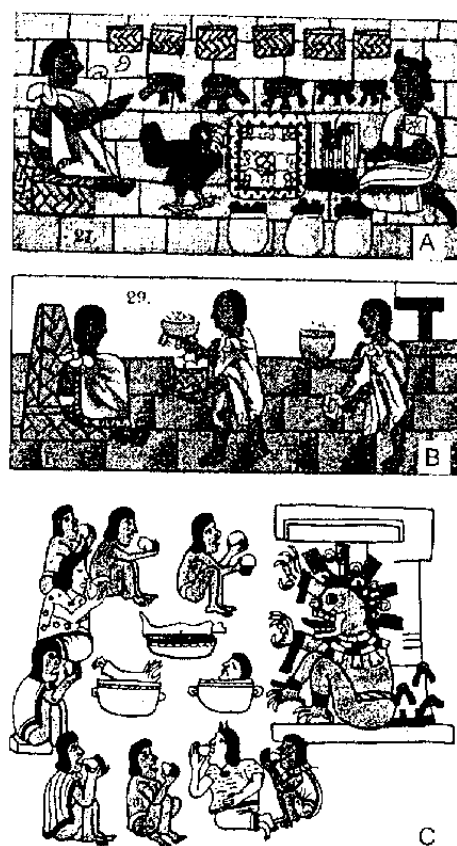


Figure 9.3. Aztec feasting scenes: a. preparation for a merchant's banquet (Sahagún 1950–82, Bk.9, plate 27); b. presentation of food at a banquet (Sahagún 1950–82, Bk.9, plate 29); c. ritual feast with human sacrifice and cannibalism before an image of the death god Mictlantecutli (Codex Magliabechiano 1983, p. 73).

out of public view (Figure 9.3a, b). As described in the works of Durán and the other chroniclers, these events included gift-giving, human sacrifices and other rituals, speeches, theatrical presentations, and the consumption of food and drink (Smith 1986). Brumfiel (1998) has shown that one of the purposes of these imperial celebrations was to engage the loyalty and support of the nobility of the Basin of Mexico for the imperial enterprise of Tenochtitlan. In this imperial endeavor, reciprocal gift giving was a key component (Zorita 1963:188–189). These events resemble the competitive Philippine feasts described by Junker (1999:313), with the difference that the resultant “community cohesion and social rank differentiation” in the Aztec feasts accrued to the high nobility alone rather than to the entire

community or polity. These events, with their emphasis on inequality between ruler and vassal lords, appear to pertain to Dietler's (1996:96–97) category of the “patron-role feast.”

Documentation of the nature and content of Aztec political dynamics at the city-state level is much less abundant compared to the imperial level (Hodge 1984, 1997; Lockhart 1992; Smith 2000). We are not familiar with sources that discuss the practice of political feasting by local kings, although this lack may derive from the nature of the available sources. Sahagún gives numerous examples of feasting in connection with commoner life-cycle events and special celebrations such as the sacrifice of an enemy soldier captured by a household member. Sahagún (1950–82:Bk.4:117–124) contrasts the elaborate etiquette, special foods, and sumptuousness of feasts among the nobility with the simpler, poorer feasts held by commoners, which suggests that the former can be categorized “diacritical feasts” in Dietler's (1996:98–99) scheme. The feasts hosted by city-state lords involved the use of exclusive cuisine and styles of consumption that create and reinforce distinctions in social status (see also Douglas and Isherwood 1979). In the Aztec case, these exclusive practices did not include the forms and types of ceramic vessels used, however.

Another type of social event resembling political feasts in some ways was the ritual feast. Although most “secular” feasts at all levels involved some sort of ritual activities, special meals on specific ceremonial occasions had a more strongly religious orientation than a political or social one. Beyond the simple offering of food and drink to the gods at temples and shrines, many ceremonies included specific consumption of food and drink at temples as a specified part of the celebration. For example, worship of Mictlantecutli and other death gods sometimes involved the consumption of human flesh in and around the temple (Figure 9.3c), and worship of the pulque deities included heavy consumption of that drink (Nicholson 1991; see Figure 9.4a). At these ritual feasts the gods, in their guises as sculptures or other sacra, were participants.

Nearly all documentary descriptions of Aztec feasts mention the consumption of *pulque* (or *octli*) and cacao. *Pulque* is a fermented beverage produced from the sap of the maguey plant. Although a number of early writers, particularly Sahagún (1950–82) and other missionaries, state that *pulque* was forbidden to all but the elderly, it seems clear from both pictorial and written sources that *pulque* was consumed quite often at Aztec rituals and feasts. This consumption went beyond the specific ceremonies dedicated to the pulque gods (Nicholson 1991). According to Patricia Anawalt (1993:34), “*pulque* was used in contexts the Aztecs regarded as legitimate far more often than Sahagún implies when in his proselytizing missionary mode. Indeed the ritual use of *pulque* may have been almost a commonplace event in Aztec society.”³ Cacao was also consumed in both rituals and feasts (Coe 1994; Coe and Coe 1996). Cacao drinks were made in several varieties, almost all of which had some kind of narcotic effect. Most discussions

of *pulque* and cacao use among the Aztecs stress their ritual use, iconography, and associations with myths and deities (e.g., Anawalt 1993; Coe 1994; Coe and Coe 1996; Gonçalves de Lima 1956; Nicholson 1991; Taube 1993). The study of the social contexts and implications of these drinks, however, is still in its infancy.

John Pohl (1998, 1999, 2003) has assembled information on Postclassic political feasting in the Mixteca-Puebla area, where elaborate polychrome vessels were used in conjunction with painted codices and murals to establish and maintain alliances among independent city-states. The mythological and social contexts of these feasting events—and the vessel assemblages employed (Lind 1994)—differ among the three linguistic groups of the Mixteca-Puebla area: the Zapotecs of Mitla and the Valley of Oaxaca, the Mixtecs of the Mixteca Alta, and the Eastern Nahuas of Puebla and Tlaxcala. It is uncertain whether the processes discussed by Pohl operated in the Western Nahua area (the Basin of Mexico and Morelos), however. There were major differences in social organization between the Eastern and Western Nahuas (Chance 2000; Lockhart 1992: 102–110), and the ceramic assemblages in the latter area differed from those of the Mixteca-Puebla area in several important ways, in particular the suite of vessel forms, including serving ware, was different; decorated ceramics were far less elaborately painted; and the complex, “Mixteca-Puebla style” polychromes (such as Cholula polychrome) were far less frequent in the Aztec heartland. Chalco polychrome, the only Mixteca-Puebla polychrome type manufactured in the Basin of Mexico (Neff et al. 1994; Séjourné 1983), constitutes a low-frequency decorated ware in most of the Aztec heartland, where simpler decorated styles like Aztec black-on-orange and redwares predominated.

Ceramics Used in Aztec Feasting

The most abundant source of information on ceramic vessels used in feasting contexts are the Aztec codices. Additional pictorial information can be found in the illustrations accompanying Spanish texts such as those of Fray Diego Durán (1967); in architectural murals and friezes such as those at Cholula (McCafferty 1996b), Tepotzlan (Nicholson 1991; Seler 1990–98b), and Tlaxcala (Pohl 1998); and in the iconography of artifacts such as the Bilimek *pulque* vessel (Taube 1993). Overall, these depictions tend to fall into one of three categories: 1) state-sponsored public religious ceremonies, 2) elite banquets hosted by the ruler, and 3) domestic celebrations. Based on supporting evidence from the ethnohistoric texts, all three categories of events included music, dancing, gift-giving, incense burning, drinking, and consuming an assortment of foods.

As pictured most often in the codices, festive events involved the consumption of alcoholic beverages, meat stews, tortillas and tamales, and cacao.

The choice of food and beverages was often dictated by the type of event being celebrated, as was the selection of appropriate serving vessels. Several varieties of food were restricted to either certain social classes—e.g., cacao and the elite—or specific celebrations—e.g., amaranth dough and various monthly feasts. Other foods were more commonplace within Aztec society, such as tamales and tortillas, but still played an important role in ceremonial activities by their very nature as a staple good (Coe 1994; Ortiz de Montellano 1990).

In the codices, food was depicted in a variety of serving vessels ranging from durable ceramic and stone to perishable basketry and gourds. For the most part, each type of food was associated with its own diagnostic vessel, which greatly facilitates the identification of foodstuffs in the iconography of the codices, murals, and sculpture and allows for the creation of functional typologies of vessels recovered archaeologically. Primary categories to be discussed below include *pulque* jars and bowls, cacao goblets and jars, shallow serving vessels, and tripod bowls.⁴

Pulque Jars and Bowls

In the codices, jars used for the preparation and serving of *pulque* were most often depicted as large, narrow-necked, double-handled, rounded-bottom ollas stabilized on what appear to be coiled rope stands. The most diagnostic characteristic that immediately identifies the vessel as a *pulque* container is the crescent shaped *yacametzli* symbol, representing the *pulque* god's nose ornament (Figures 9.4a, b) (Codex Magliabechiano 1983:85; Codex Mendoza 1992:f.61r; Códice Tudela 1980:70). It is unclear, however, how often the *yacametzli* symbol was actually applied to the vessel itself (either as an appliqué or painted decoration). Perhaps it was merely a method of identifying *pulque* jars in the codices. We know of only one such ceramic vessel with a painted *yacametzli* element, which is on display at the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City. Stone tripod vessels with vertical flanges known as “winged *pulque* vessels” also have large *yacametzli* elements similar to the depictions of such vessels in the Codex Mendoza (folios 46r, 65r); several of these are also on display at the Museo Nacional (see also Bankmann 1984:317).

In other codices, however, the *yacametzli* is not apparent, and *pulque* jars are distinguished from other ollas by a flowing concentration of dots representing *pulque* foam at the mouth of the jar (Figure 9.4a, b; cf., Sahagún 1950–82: Bk. I, pl. 42). This froth also appeared at the top of special forms of *pulque* serving vessels and bowls (Codex Mendoza, folios 61r, 70r), and occasionally spewing out of the mouth of the drinker (Codex Magliabecchiano, p. 85). Froth was also depicted foaming from the mouths of cacao serving vessels, but it usually appeared as mounded at the top of the vessel rather than overflowing the sides and can for the most part be clearly distinguished from the foam associated with *pulque* (cf., Codex Magliabecchiano, pp. 67, 68, 72).



Figure 9.4. Ceramic drinking vessels as depicted in the Aztec codices: a, ritual *pulque* feast with a *pulque* jar with the *yacametzli* symbol (out of which a *pulque* deity is drinking through a straw) and *pulque* drinking and serving bowls (Codex Magliabechiano 1983, p. 85); b, *pulque* jar and drinking bowl with the *yacametzli* symbol (Codex Mendoza 1992, folio 61r); c, cacao goblets with stirring sticks (Sahagún 1950–82, Bk.9, plate 24); d, cacao goblet (Codex Mendoza 1992, folio 68r).

Several specially shaped *pulque* vessels were reserved for ceremonial and ritual use. These included the “stone rabbit vessel” or *ometochtecomatl* depicted in the Florentine Codex (Sahagún 1950–82: Bk.4, plate 12), ceramic and stone winged *pulque* vessels of the same name, and the Bilimek *pulque* vessel. The rabbit vessel emphasized the close symbolic relationship among the moon, rabbits, and *pulque*, and was reserved for special celebrations on Two Rabbit, an important day in the 260-day calendar (Anawalt 1993; Nicholson 1991). The “two rabbit vessel” was also closely related to the winged *pulque* vessels depicted on cloaks in the Codex Mendoza (folios 46r, 52r, 65r; also Anawalt 1993) and found elsewhere archaeologically (Bankmann 1984). The imagery carved on the Bilimek vessel, which includes a representation of a winged *pulque* vessel collecting the liquid pouring from the breasts of the goddess Mayahuel, associated *pulque* with the souls of dead, sacrificed warriors, and the night sky (Taube 1993).

Pulque was usually drunk from small ceramic bowls with either round or flat bases (Figure 9.4a, b). As with the jars, these were most often depicted with irregular foam overflowing the rim of the vessel. Only occasionally and most often in Codex Mendoza (folios 61r, 65r, 71r) was the *yacametzli* symbol associated with the bowl. In other examples, the codices relied for the most part on the context of the situation to identify *pulque* bowls. During ritual occasions, celebrants were frequently depicted each with their own bowl sitting or cavorting around a centrally placed *pulque* jar (cf., Codex Magliabecchiano, p. 85; Codex Tudela, p. 70). A much earlier depiction of drinking bowls, presumably for *pulque*, is illustrated in the Bebedores mural at Cholula dating to the Early Classic (McCaflerty 1996a; 1996b). In the Codex Mendoza (folios 70r, 71r), the *pulque* bowl was used to convey drunkenness, particularly as a socially unacceptable behavior.

Ollas and bowls frequently appear in the codices in a variety of contexts not identified with *pulque* or drinking. Generally, these vessels are easily identified by the context, their lack of either the *yacametzli* symbol or characteristic foam, or by other contents. Sahagún makes mention of sacred cups which held chocolate, and special tortoise shell cups for the elderly (1950–82, Bk.8, p.28). Ollas were frequently depicted in tribute lists with a variety of contents other than *pulque* in the Codices Mendoza and Osuna (1947), and in situations of either food preparation or storage.

Cacao Goblets and Gourd Bowls

Along with the *pulque* jars and bowls, another readily identifiable vessel in the codices are cacao containers (Figure 9.4c, d). Most often they are depicted as high quality, decorated goblets with a characteristic froth at the mouth of the vessel that is distinguishable from *pulque* foam by its rounded shape (Figure 9.4d; cf. Codex Tudela, pp.55, 58, 59, Codex Magliabecchiano, pp. 67, 68, 72). Cacao bowls and goblets were frequently identified as being made of painted or varnished gourds (Sahagún 1950–82, Bk.8, p.40; Codex Mendoza, folios 68r, 47r, 39r), but could also be made of stone or ceramic (Berdan and Anawalt 1997:219; also Figures 9.1g and 9.9).⁵ Gourd vessels in general were polished, burnished, varnished, and painted. They appear in a variety of shapes and size to be used as drinking vessels, *atole* vessels, jars, and for drinking cacao (Sahagún 1950–82, Bk.10, p.78). The Florentine Codex frequently depicts goblet-shaped vessels in feasting scenarios, especially among merchants (Sahagún 1950–82, Bk.9, pl. 24), although the beverage may not always have been chocolate. (Figure 9.4c).

Serving Bowls

Apart from containing beverages, bowls were used to serve a variety of foods. The most frequent depictions of bowls show them filled with tamales, often held by individuals in a manner similar to *pulque* bowls at feasting events, or as a

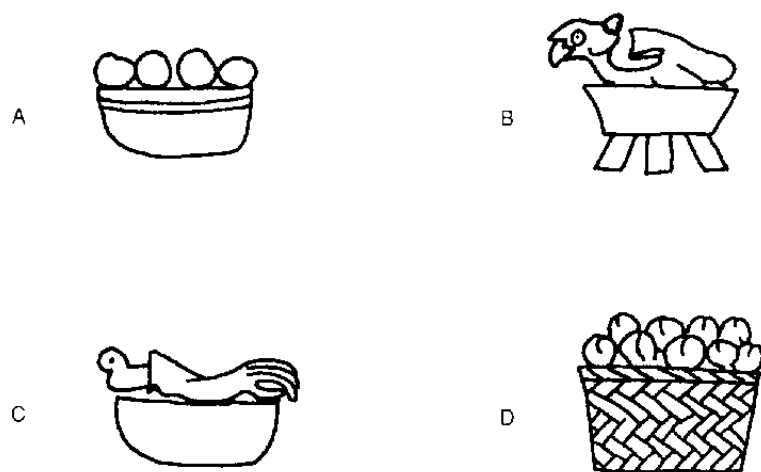


Figure 9.5. Ceramic serving vessels as depicted in the Aztec codices: a. serving bowl with tamales (*Codex Magliabecchiano* 1983, p.69); b. tripod serving bowl with cooked turkey (*Codex Mendoza* 1992, folio 68r); c. serving bowl with human flesh (*Codex Magliabecchiano* 1983, p.72); d. basket with tamales (*Codex Mendoza* 1992, folio 68r).

tribute item to either a god or dead king (Figure 9.5a; cf., *Codex Tudela*, pp.3, 58, 72, *Codex Magliabecchiano*, pp.69, 72, *Codex Michoacan* (1980), folios 20, 35; Durán 1971, pl. 12). Other food items depicted in bowls included maize kernels or ears, meat from wild game and fowl (Figure 9.5b), and human flesh (Figure 9.4c; cf., *Codex Huemantla*, *Codex Mendoza*, folios 61r, 68r; Durán 1971, pl. 8, 12; *Codex Ramírez*, pl. 26). These vessels could also be used as sauce bowls and stew containers (Berdan and Anawalt 1997:164), often with meat depicted prominently at the mouth of the vessel (Figure 9.5b; cf., *Codex Mendoza*, folios 61r, 68r).

The majority of the bowls are shallow with round bottoms and seldom decorated. Variations upon this basic portrayal include bowls with wide, flat bases; tripod and footed bowls and plates; and larger earthenware basins with handles. These types of vessels seem to have been widely available in the marketplace. The Florentine *Codex* offers the following description of these marketplace offerings "[there were] . . . bowls—wooden bowls, polished ones, reddish ones, offering bowls, merchant's bowls, white ones, black bowls; . . . sauce bowls—incised, sauce bowls which have been polished; frying sauce bowls, frying bowls" (Sahagún 1950–82: Bk.11, p.83). Sahagún also refers to "... flat cooking plates, and sauce vessels, and earthen cups, and everything [made of] earthenware." (1950–82: Bk.9, p.69). Other earthenware vessels described in the document include ollas, jugs, braziers, incense burners, and griddles used in the preparation of foods and feasting activities.

Standardization in serving wares did not follow any discernible pattern in the codices. The Florentine *Codex* depicts both tripod and shallow bowls for sale at market and in use for feasting, although it appears as though individual serving dishes or sauce bowls were mostly footed vessels. In most of the codices, tamales seem to have been served in shallow bowls, except in the *Xicotepec Codex* (Stresser-Péan 1995) and Durán (1967), while meat dishes, both human and game, tended to be served in tripod vessels, although this is by no means a consistent association.

Discussion of Aztec Feasting Vessels

The majority of the vessels depicted in feasting scenarios in the Aztec codices are related to the activities of drinking and serving food. With regard to form, the most common containers are *pulque* jars, round-bottomed bowls, shallow bowls, tripod-footed bowls, and goblets. Some of these vessel forms can be readily identified with known archaeological examples. For example, distinctive ring-based goblets from several Aztec sites (Figures 9.1g, 9.9) correspond closely to the cacao serving vessels in the codices. Unfortunately, most of the vessels in the codices lack distinguishing characteristics (beyond their shape) such as surface treatment or decoration to identify these wares as appropriate for elite use or at specific festal events. Archaeological serving vessels such as simple bowls or tripod plates (Figure 9.1a–c, k) could have been used in both feasts and everyday meals. Two of the most common and distinctive archaeological serving vessels—polished red pitchers and biconical cups (Figure 9.1d, e)—are only rarely depicted in the codices, making it difficult to determine whether these were used for *pulque*, cacao, or some other beverage.

The kinds of vessels shown in feasting activities in the Aztec codices are similar to feasting wares from other cultures. As suggested in other chapters in this volume, vessels used in feasting generally include some combination of high quality production and finish, intricate stylistic elaboration, religious or other meaningful iconography, evidence of foreign importation, an emphasis on serving-related forms, and an emphasis on drinking vessels (see also Arnold 1999; Dietler 1990, 1996; Gero 1992; Junker 1999; Reents-Budet 1998; Reents-Budet et al. 2000).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DEPOSITS OF WHOLE VESSELS

Because of the difficulty of identifying feasting events from the ceramics in domestic middens, the clearest archaeological evidence for Aztec feasting comes from special caches or offerings where collections of whole ceramic vessels were deposited. Most of the offerings that have been recorded to date seem to contain the remains of feasting activities, although the offerings at the Templo Mayor of

Tenochtitlan contain a very different kind of ceramic vessel. In this section we review the major published examples of ceramic vessel deposits from Aztec sites, starting with the Templo Mayor.

Imperial-Level Ritual: The Templo Mayor Offerings of Tenochtitlan

The offerings found at the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan are the most spectacular and well-known Aztec deposits ever excavated (López Luján 1994, 1998; Matos Moctezuma 1999). Heyden (1987) notes that these deposits contained fewer than 100 ceramic vessels and objects out of several thousand total items. Unfortunately, there is no published catalog or systematic study of the ceramics. We have reviewed existing publications on the Templo Mayor offerings (e.g., Batres 1979; Broda et al. 1987; Heyden 1987; López Luján 1994; Matos Moctezuma 1988; 1989; Nagao 1985; Román Berrelleza and López Luján 1999) and general books on Aztec art (Bonifaz Nuño and Robles 1981; Longhena 1998; Matos Moctezuma 1990; Pasztory 1983) to assemble a list of nearly 40 ceramic vessels that have been illustrated and described adequately for a basic functional classification. A classification of these vessels is provided in Table 9.2. These data are very incomplete, since they are heavily biased in favor of unusual and fine objects that are illustrated in publications. Nevertheless, they do give an idea of the vessel assemblages of the Templo Mayor offerings. Figure 9.6 illustrates a few of these vessels.

The striking thing about the Templo Mayor vessels, apart from their “extraordinary quality” (Heyden 1987:109), is that many are unique forms not found in other Aztec archaeological deposits (Leonardo López Luján has remarked

Table 9.2. Vessel Types in Templo Mayor Offerings

Category	#vessels	%
Censers:	22	31.9
Long-handled censers	12	17.4
Braziers	6	8.7
Effigy censers	4	5.8
Special Offering Vessels:	47	68.1
Tlaloc vases	3	4.3
Other effigy vessels	5	7.2
Polychrome bottles	3	4.3
Musical Instruments	7	10.1
Sculptures	26	37.7
Antiques	3	4.3
Total	69	100.0



Figure 9.6. Sketches of ceramic vessels from offerings at the Templo Mayor: a. Tlaloc jar (after Bonifaz and Robles 1981, pl. 54); b. effigy jar (after Bonifaz and Robles 1981, pl. 77); c. miniature effigy censer (after López Luján 1994:257); d. ceramic drum (Matos 1989:144) (drawings by Benjamin Karis).

on the absence of domestic ceramic forms in the Templo Mayor offerings; personal communication, 1999). Long-handled censers are the most common form. Compared to other such censers found at Aztec sites, the Templo Mayor examples tend to have much fancier polychrome painted and modeled decoration. The unique forms are the effigy censers and a variety of other special offering vessels. The various effigy vessels are particularly interesting. The lack of these forms in other Aztec deposits, coupled with their resemblance to forms common at the ancient cities of Teotihuacan, Tula, and Monte Alban, suggest that they were produced as part of the Mexico state program of invoking the art of past imperial cities and

cultures to promote their own legitimacy as imperial rulers (Umberger 1987, 1996). This interpretation is strengthened by the presence of a Thin-orange vessel from Classic-period Teotihuacan and an Early Postclassic plumbate jar (probably from Tula) in a burial at the Eagle Warriors House adjacent to the Templo Mayor (López Luján et al. 2000; Román Berrelleza and López Luján 1999). Other vessels in the Templo Mayor offerings include polychrome bottles with elaborate iconographic messages relating to sacrifice and fertility (Seler 1990–98a), and various unique and puzzling polychrome vessels.

This assemblage of special offering vessels may qualify as Aztec state pottery. Although we do not yet have data on their production characteristics apart from the heirloom Teotihuacan Thin-orange pot (see López Luján et al. 2000), it seems reasonable to suggest that they were produced under state direction, specifically for the Templo Mayor offerings. This interpretation is based on the symbolic importance of the Templo Mayor, the absence of such vessels at other sites and deposits, and their high aesthetic and technological quality. There is little evidence that any of these vessels were used in feasting.

Imperial-Level Feasting: The “Volador” Deposit

In 1937, Eduardo Noguera excavated an offering at the possible location of the volador ritual near the Templo Mayor. In the volador ceremony several individuals, whose feet were tied to long ropes wrapped around a tall pole, leapt off the pole to “fly” in circles as the ropes unwound. The offering consisted of approximately 1,000 ceramic vessels and a stone sculpture placed in a stone-lined chamber. The excavation was never published in detail, although three decades later Noguera (1968) published a brief account in which he speculated that the deposit derived from a ceremony marking the “New Fire” event that was celebrated every 52 years and accompanied by the breaking and discarding of household possessions. Most of the ceramics from this deposit are now curated in the Museo Nacional de Antropología; photos of 897 vessels have been published by Solís and Morales (1991). Additional vessels from the Volador deposit, now in the collections of the Field Museum of Natural History, are illustrated in McVicker (1992).

The composition of the Volador vessel assemblage resembles neither domestic ceramic assemblages nor the contents of archaeological deposits more securely linked to the New Fire ceremony (e.g., Elson and Smith 2001). In fact, this collection is notable for the predominance of serving vessels (96% of all vessels), the majority of which ($n = 542$) are polished redware drinking cups with flared walls (Figure 9.7a). Bi-level oval tripod plates produced in Aztec III black-on-orange ware (Figure 9.7d) are also common in the volador deposit. There are also a small number of highly elaborate white-based polychrome vessels, including three tall cups with modeled skulls (Figure 9.7b) and several large urns (Figure 9.7e). Two types of simple bowls with painted skull-and-crossbones designs are also

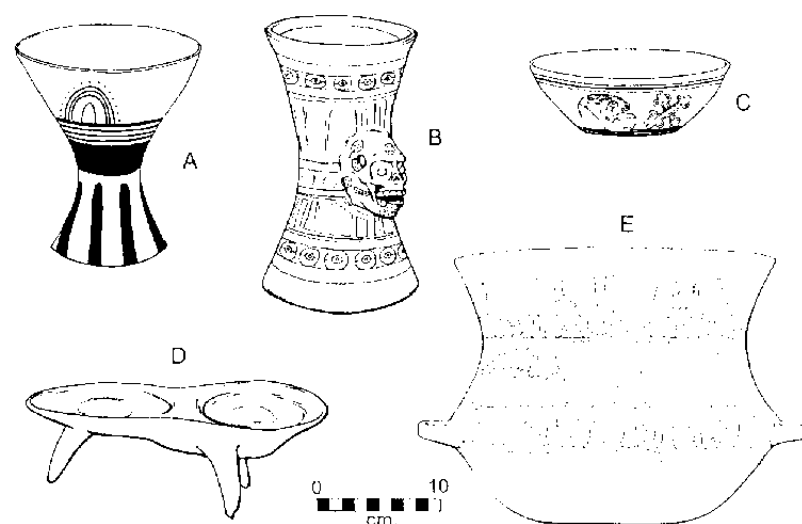


Figure 9.7. Sketches of ceramic vessels from the volador offering: a. flaring wall redware cup (after Solís and Morales 1991:175); b. tall white-based polychrome cup (after McVicker 1992:45); c. redware polychrome bowl (after Solís and Morales 1991:80); d. Aztec III black-on-orange bi-level tripod plate (after Solís and Morales 1991:26); e. white-based polychrome basin (after Solís and Morales 1991:292). (Drawings by Benjamin Karis).

present: polychromes on a red base (Figure 9.7c) and polychromes on a white base (Figure 9.8). The most likely functional interpretation of the volador vessels is that they were used in some kind of feasting event involving the drinking of *pulque*. The lack of pitchers is surprising, however. Finely-made polished redware pitchers are found with redware drinking cups in Aztec domestic middens. The Volador collection also contains some imported vessels, including a group of bowls from Morelos that may have been manufactured specifically for a Mexica patron and/or for the event with which this deposit is associated (Smith n.d.b), and an heirloom Classic-period cylindrical vessel.

The presence of skull imagery in the volador deposit points to some of the possible symbolic associations of Aztec feasting. In Aztec iconography, death images—particularly skulls and/or crossed long bones—were linked to themes of health, curing, fertility, and renewal. Images of bones often invoke the Tzitzimime, sky-dwelling creatures that had both malevolent and beneficial attributes, and/or the goddess Tlazolteotl (Durand-Forest 1988; Klein 2000; Pohl 1998; Taube 1993). *Pulque* also had iconographic associations with both death (particularly the souls of dead warriors) and agricultural fertility (Anawalt 1993; Nicholson 1991; Pohl 1998; Taube 1993). The presence of death imagery on the bowls in the Volador deposit suggests that these may have served as *pulque* vessels, and it suggests

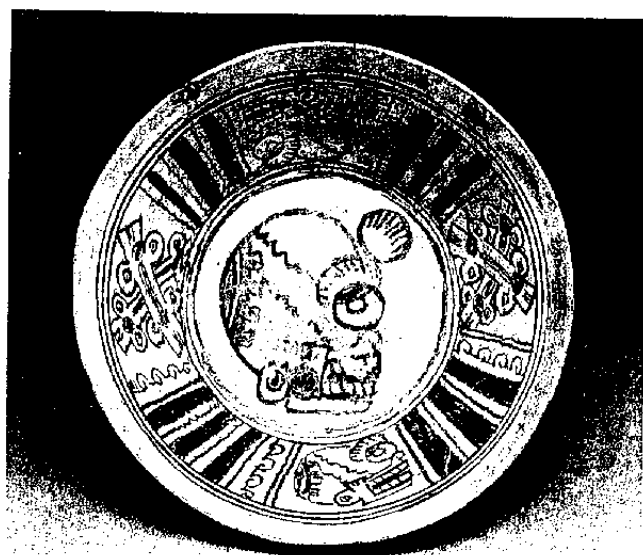


Figure 9.8. White-based polychrome bowl with skull-and-crossed-bones motif. Reproduced from McVicker (1992:54); used with permission of the Field Museum of Natural History (Catalog no. 240969).

fertility and renewal as two of the symbolic associations of *pulque* consumptions at feasts.

The original context of the Volador deposit was either inside the Sacred Precinct (south of the Templo Mayor), or within Motecuhzoma's palace (Susan T. Evans, personal communication, 1999) which is located next to the Sacred Precinct. Either of these contexts would suggest that the offering reflected an officially-sanctioned imperial event of some sort. We see little support for Noguera's association of this deposit with the New Fire ceremony, and there is no evidence linking it with the volador ceremony for which it is named; rather, it strongly appears to contain the remains of an episode of imperial feasting.

Provincial City-State Feasting: The Coatetelco Ballcourt Deposit

Coatetelco is a small Late Postclassic urban center in western Morelos excavated by Raúl Arana Alvarez (1984). Under the steps of a platform that formed one side of a ballcourt he found an offering of over 100 ceramic vessels. These and other ceramics from the site are described in Smith (n.d.b). Serving vessels predominate in this collection as well. The most abundant forms are incurving polished redware drinking cups (Figure 9.1f) and miniature vessels (Figure 9.1h-j).

The painted ceramics in this deposit—local Tlahuica polychrome and polished redwares of uncertain origin—do not have identifiable iconographic elements. A goblet probably used for drinking cacao (Figure 9.9) was found in a nearby burial at Coatetelco. The ballcourt deposit may reflect a public ceremony involving feasting at a minor provincial city-state center. The activities may have been sponsored by the local city-state king but they were almost certainly unrelated to imperial Aztec practices.

Other Vessel Deposits in Morelos

We also present data in Table 9.3 on 44 ceramic vessels from three Postclassic burials at Xochicalco (Hirth 2000), and 25 vessels from a series of intrusive Postclassic burials excavated at the predominantly Classic-period site of Las Pilas in eastern Morelos (Martínez Donjuan 1979). The vessels from these deposits are described in Smith (n.d.b). Four caches of ceramic vessels excavated at Cuexcomate comprise another context included in Table 9.3; two of the caches were located beneath ritual dumps and two were found under patio areas of residential patio groups (Smith 1992:251–53). Table 9.3 also includes information on Late Postclassic domestic ceramic inventories from Yauhtepc for purposes of comparison (the Yauhtepc data are mean frequencies for the Molotla phase, based on estimates of the minimum number of vessels in midden deposits).

Table 9.3. Vessel Types in Selected Contexts in Mexico City and Morelos
(% of All Vessels).

Category	Templo Mayor	Volador	Coatetelco Ballcourt	Xochicalco Burials	Las Pilas Burials	Cuexcomate Caches	Yauhtepc Domestic
Major Functional Classes (% of total ceramics)							
Serving Vessels	0	96	75	64	92	100	41
Kitchen Objects	0	2	2	14	4	0	38
Ritual Objects	32	1	9	0	0	0	9
Production Objects	0	0	13	23	0	0	6
Other Domestic Objects	0	0	1	0	4	0	6
Special Offering Vessels	68	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Vessels and Objects	69	897	164	44	25	10	7106
Serving Vessels (% of total serving)							
Cups and Pitchers	-	64	33	7	0	0	2
Bowls	-	15	13	82	96	90	90
Tripod plates	-	19	0	0	0	0	0
Miniature vessels	-	1	54	11	4	10	3
Number of Serving Vessels	0	862	123	15	23	0	3005

Comparison of Vessel Inventories

The vessel inventories reviewed above (Table 9.3) can be divided into four types of deposit. First, the Templo Mayor offerings stand out as unique in their emphasis on special offering vessels; the ritual objects also include unique pieces such as large ceramic sculptures of warriors. The second group, the two sets of burials and the Cuexcomate caches, share an emphasis on serving vessels, most of which are bowls. The burials also contain some kitchen vessels and, at Xochicalco, production tools (for spinning cotton), both of which provide a level of similarity with domestic deposits. Third, the Yauhtepec domestic deposits, not surprisingly, have a wide range of functional categories. Most of the serving vessels are bowls, but polished redware cups and pitchers are also a consistent, if rare, part of domestic ceramic inventories at all excavated Postclassic sites in Morelos, not just Yauhtepec. Finally, the volador and Coatetelco ballcourt deposits stand out with high frequencies of serving vessels, including large numbers of polished redware cups probably used for *pulque*.

The ceramics in the Volador and Coatetelco ballcourt deposits fit some attributes of the profile for feasting ware: well-made and elaborately decorated vessels with an emphasis on drinking vessels. The Volador deposit contains more of the feasting characteristics than Coatetelco: there are foreign imports, and there are fewer non-serving vessels; also, more than half of the serving items at Coatetelco are miniature vessels (mostly small jars and basins) whose use and significance are uncertain. The combination of ceramic "feasting attributes" and the public locations of the offerings suggest that these deposits derived from public, state-sanctioned feasting activity at the imperial and city-state levels. The caches of bowls at Cuexcomate, found in patio contexts, could be the remains of household-level feasting, since Sahagún (1950–82, Bk.9, pp.40–41) notes that organic remains from ritual offerings—perhaps the remains of feasts—were sometimes ritually burned and buried in domestic courtyards.

What is interesting about the specific vessels included in the Volador and Coatetelco ballcourt deposits is that nearly all are basic domestic forms. The flaring redware cups from the Volador deposit are a consistent, if low-frequency, part of domestic assemblages at most Aztec sites in Morelos and the Basin of Mexico, whereas the incurved cups from Coatetelco are commonly found in domestic deposits in western Morelos. Sherds from probable cacao cups (Figure 9.9) are a rare but consistent part of domestic inventories at Yauhtepec but not at Cuexcomate or Capilco, suggesting a possible association of these vessels with political centers. The bi-level tripod plates in the Volador deposit (Figure 9.7b) are rare in Morelos (Smith 2001, Table 1), but they are a basic part of domestic inventories at Aztec sites in the Basin of Mexico. There is no evidence that the production or exchange of any of these vessels were under the control of the empire or of local city-states. The Volador deposit does contain a few unusual non-domestic vessels—several large

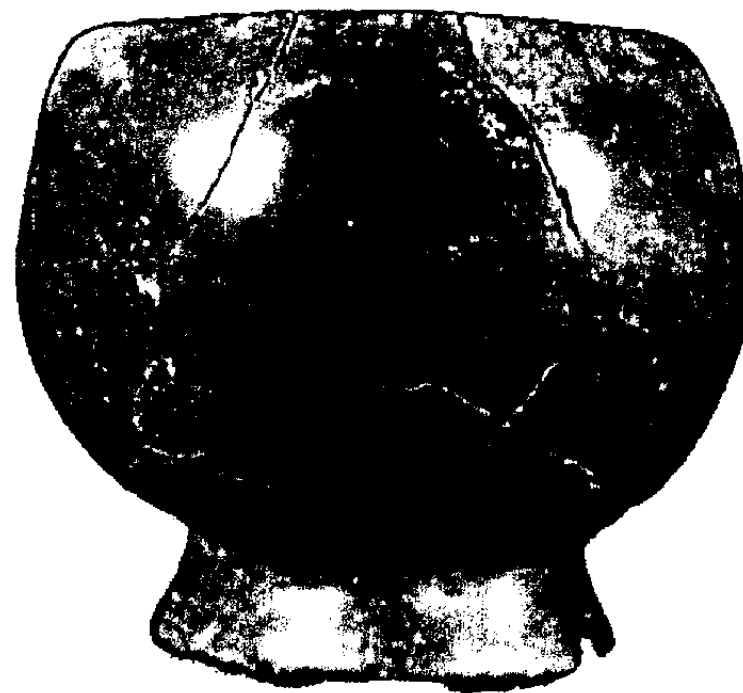


Figure 9.9. Polished redware goblet—probably for cacao—from a burial at Coatetelco (vessel CV-163 in Smith 2001; rim diameter 15.0 cm.) (photograph by Michael E. Smith).

polychrome basins (Figure 9.7c) and three tall polychrome goblets with modeled skulls (Figure 9.7d) —and these could have been linked to state control; they are rare or non-existent in domestic contexts. The imported Morelos polychrome bowls in this deposit are unique varieties not in common use in Morelos. They were probably not obtained through marketplace exchange but perhaps through state tribute channels.

DISCUSSION

The Ceramics Used in Aztec Feasting

Although feasting was an important activity in Aztec society at all levels, from the highest imperial elite down to the poorest peasant family, it has proved very difficult to identify in the archaeological record. The remains of elite and commoner feasts held in domestic settings at sites in Morelos are mixed in

with the remains of regular repetitive household consumption events and a host of other household activities. The strongest candidates for feasting deposits are the ceramic vessel offerings from the Volador and Coatetelco ballcourt deposits. Although the context of these offerings suggest that they pertain to imperial and city-state level activities, respectively, nearly all of the vessels are basic domestic Aztec ceramic forms. The frequencies of vessel types differ greatly from domestic deposits, of course, but the only non-domestic vessels are a few unusual polychrome basins and goblets in the Volador deposit. As research continues on the identification of vessel function based upon the codices and other information, our ability to identify feasting in contexts apart from whole vessel deposits will increase.

Ceramics and Politics in a Commercialized Economy

Apart from the unusual vessels in the Templo Mayor offerings, "state pottery" does not appear to have been a relevant category in Aztec society. Neither the Aztec empire nor its constituent city-states played much of a role in controlling the production or distribution of ceramic vessels. Similarly "elite pottery" is not a relevant category for the Aztecs. Elites and commoners used the same basic kinds of vessels in their homes. Elites had higher frequencies of serving vessels, and higher frequencies of key individual ceramic types—particularly imports and painted wares—as expected from comparative data (Smith 1987). But with the possible exception of two very rare polychrome types at Yauhtepec, no categories of ceramics or other objects show exclusive elite associations. Most elites were wealthy and may have had exclusive access to certain perishable luxury items such as the fanciest cotton clothing, feather art, and perhaps choice types of restricted food. But in the realm of the non-perishable goods recovered archaeologically—ceramics, obsidian, groundstone, needles and jewelry of copper/bronze, jewelry made from greenstone, rock crystal, shell and obsidian, and faunal remains—there are few if any exclusively elite items.

The Aztec data suggest a situation quite distinct from that found in several other early empires described in this volume, where "state pottery" and "elite pottery" seem to be useful concepts that are identifiable archaeologically. We have suggested that one of the primary reasons for the distinctiveness of the Aztec pattern is the extensive development of commercialized exchange and market behavior in the Aztec economy. As in other early states, Aztec elites and commoners alike engaged in a variety of feasting activities, and these accomplished important social goals at a number of levels, from the commoner household to the provincial city-state to the empire. But most of the ceramic vessels used in these feasts were purchased in the markets, not distributed by the state or by elites. As a result, feasting vessels did not stand out as a distinctive group of objects with state or elite associations.

Aztec feasting vessels were commodities (Appadurai 1986; Miller 1995; Smith 2003) bought and sold along with more mundane products like cooking pots, obsidian tools, and salt in the commercialized arena of the marketplace. In comparison with some early states, the commodification of Aztec feasting wares makes the archaeological identification of these vessels more difficult, and it changes the nature of the sociopolitical implications that can be drawn from the presence of feasting wares in particular archaeological contexts. Although feasting vessels at Aztec sites tell us less about the specific political and social strategies of the state, they nevertheless provide important insights into the intersection of politics, stratification, and the commercial sector of the economy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS. Fieldwork and analysis at Yauhtepec, Cuexcomate, and Capilco were funded by the National Science Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, Loyola University, the University at Albany (SUNY), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Smith and Wharton thank Christina Elson for help in examining George Vaillant's collections of Aztec domestic ceramics at the American Museum of Natural History, and we thank Melissa McCarron for help with graphics and the compilation of data on the Templo Mayor and Volador ceramics. We thank Tamara Bray, Elizabeth Brumfiel, Michael Dietler, Stephen Houston, Marilyn Masson, John Pohl, and Monica Smith for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

NOTES

- 1 Discussions of the Aztec economy are sometimes hindered by an assumption that "the economy" must have been either politically dominated or else open and commercial in orientation. This simplistic notion, one of the harmful legacies of Karl Polanyi's pervasive influence on studies of Mesoamerican economies (Chapman 1957; Polanyi et al. 1957), should be discarded. Our portrayal of two co-existing sectors classifies the Aztec economy with a number of other ancient (pre-capitalist) economies in which both commercial exchange and state control were important (e.g., Abu-Lughod 1989; Day 1987; Kuhn 1998; Storey 1999; Subrahmanyam 1994; Udovitch 1970).
- 2 Among the few explicit sumptuary rules described in historical sources (Durán 1994:209–210) are the following: that only the king and top advisor could wear sandals in the palace; that only nobles could inhabit multi-storied (or perhaps raised) residences; that specified items of jewelry and luxury clothing were restricted to certain status grades; and that only nobles could wear cotton garments. The prevalence of cotton production and textiles in Aztec central Mexico (Berdan 1987), however, casts doubt on the actual application of the latter proscription.
- 3 The following quote from Durán (1971) is probably closer to the truth than Sahagún's moralizing statements about *pulque*: "and there was an ancient law prohibiting anyone, under pain of death, to drink *pulque* unless he had children to restrain him and guide him [home from a feast] if he became intoxicated so that he would not fall into a river or a hole or have a mortal accident" (Durán 1971:309).
- 4 In addition to the ceramic vessels discussed here, basketry containers seem to have been widely used for serving non liquid food such as tamales, grain, and small game at feasting events or in presenting tribute to the gods or rulers (Figure 9.5d) (Codex Magliabechiano 1983:32, 67; Codex

- Mendoza 1992: f68r; Codex Ramírez 1979: fms. 18, 20; Codex Telleriano-Remensis 1995: f.29v; Codex Vaticanus 1979: f.72v; Códice Tudela 1980: 14, 60; Durán 1967: pl. 8; Sahagún 1950–82, Bk.9, p.35). The Florentine Codex described tamales as being served in baskets (Sahagún 1950–82, Bk.9, p.35) and this seems to have been the method for containing larger amounts of food from which celebrants or guests would select individual portions. The association between vessel forms in the codices and archaeological vessels is a topic of ongoing research by the authors, and only very preliminary suggestions are made in this paper.
- 5 In the Mixtec codices from Oaxaca, vessels for serving cacao differ in form from the Aztec examples. The Mixtec cacao vessels are small narrow-necked tripod containers (Coe and Coe 1996:95). These had distinctive eye-like decorative motifs on the body which have a similar counterpart in the Codex Borgia (1976).

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Part III

Concluding Remarks