

OBISIDIAN SOURCE FREQUENCIES AS A SOCIAL ATTRIBUTE AT SAN FELIPE AZTATAN, MEXICO

Daniel Pierce

Dr. Todd VanPool, Thesis Supervisor

ABSTRACT

This research uses a combination of color sorting and XRF geochemical sourcing to identify patterns in volcanic sources of obsidian artifacts at post-classic San Felipe Aztatan in Nayarit, Mexico. Despite nearby sources being easily accessible, more sophisticated lithic reduction techniques seem to have been used only for more distant sources. With no substantial qualitative differences between obsidian sources, purely social factors likely resulted in the temporal and spatial distributions patterns at San Felipe Aztatan. I argue that the restricted access to distant sources, such as Pachuca, created elevated value of obsidian blades and thus created, maintained and legitimated elite identities. Within the site, the limited area in which Pachuca obsidian is found may indicate an area of elite residence or elite activity, while its limited temporal distribution may reflect the peak of trade and influence of the Aztatlan tradition before the expanding Tarascan Empire.

This research has greater application for sites within the Aztatlan tradition. If obsidian source can be utilized to identify social stratification, we may be able to understand the spatial and social organization of specific sites as well as the complex dynamic trading relationships between sites.