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# Children, apprenticeship and pedagogy: Domestic crafting and obsidian core production at the Zaragoza-Oyameles source area in Puebla, Mexico



Charles L.F. Knight

University of Vermont Consulting Archaeology Program, 111 Delehanty Hall, 180 Colchester Ave, Burlington, VT 05405, United States

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## ABSTRACT

The role of novices, which often are children, in domestic craft production and the replication of crafting knowledge is a topic that is often ignored in archaeological discussions of domestic economies. However, ethnographic and ethnohistoric examples repeatedly indicate that children played a number of roles in household economies. The presence of novice obsidian core production was identified in a domestic habitation context at the Zaragoza-Oyameles obsidian source area in eastern Puebla, Mexico. Miniaturized polyhedral cores were found along side standard-sized macrocores and polyhedral cores, and all stages of core reduction debitage at a large, domestic core manufacturing site. This, coupled with evidence from experimental core replication and ethnographic examples, suggests that these miniature cores represent the detritus of craft learning. The presence of domestic core production and the role of craft learning are then contextualized within the regional economy centered on the nearby city of Cantona.

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## 1. Introduction

Domestic craft production was a significant component of pre-Hispanic economies throughout Mesoamerica (Feinman, 1999; Feinman and Nicholas, 2011; Hirth, 2006a:275, 2009 [ed]). Crafting was a way for households to meet many of their own consumer needs, as well as to produce a surplus of goods beneficial to the household. How domestic craft goods were incorporated into these economies has been the focus of much research (Hirth, 2006b, 2011). For instance, work on the procurement and distribution of craft goods, such as through state-controlled distribution or via marketplaces, itinerant merchants or direct access (Brumfiel and Earle, 1987; Clark and Blake, 1994; Hirth, 2006c, 2012:409; Hirth and Pilsbury, 2013; Hirth et al., 2006a; Stark and Garraty, 2010), as well as on the nature of gender-specific craft activities in the household (Brumfiel, 1991, 1996, 2001; Costin, 1996; Gero, 1991) have expanded our understanding of the nature of household crafting, as well as household consumption. Curiously, one aspect of crafting that has yet to receive equal attention is how crafting was replicated in the household. In other words, how was crafting knowledge transferred from masters to novices, and what role did that transfer have in the invention of new techniques and technologies?

Implicit in the concept of knowledge transfer within a household is the relationship between parents and their children; knowledge is passed on from parent to child. Yet children have typically been left out of any and all archaeological reconstructions, let alone those focused on household economies. Coşkun (2015:4) has outlined several reasons why children have been invisible to archaeological investigation. These include: assumptions about the lack of children's materiality; not recognizing a socioeconomic role of children; gender and cultural biases; accepted stereotypes of what constitutes childhood; and a lack of interdisciplinary involvement in the topic. As the title suggests, my aim is to investigate the pedagogical nature of obsidian procurement and initial stages of core production at the major quarry complex of Zaragoza-Oyameles in eastern Puebla, Mexico where I believe novice learning in polyhedral core production occurred (Fig. 1). The topic is investigated in pre-Hispanic contexts of domestic crafting, focusing on the manner of novice learning and/or apprenticeship involving children.

Tehrani and Riede (2008) have presented a definition of crafting pedagogy as the transmission of crafting knowledge between masters and novices that goes beyond linguistic instruction. Their approach focuses on the "social context of learning" (Minar and Crown, 2001:372), which recognizes the concept of "scaffolding". Scaffolding, as developed in psychology and articulated by Greenfield (1984), and evident in many ethnographic examples (Crown, 2014:78), is viewed as an important component in the

E-mail address: [cknight@uvm.edu](mailto:cknight@uvm.edu)

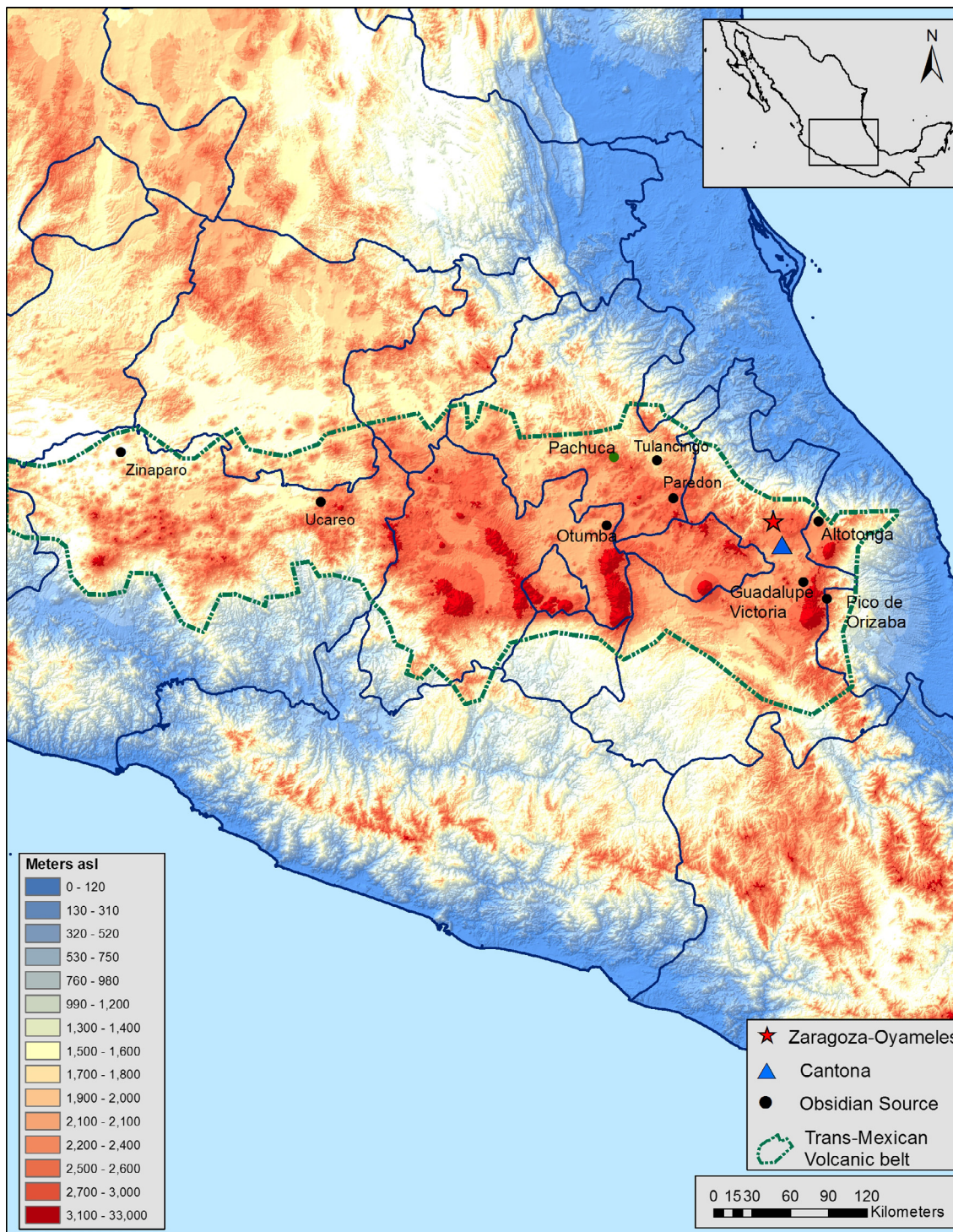


Fig. 1. Location of Zaragoza-Oyameles obsidian source in relation to other major obsidian sources in central Mexico and the TMVB.

transmission of craft skills, and is defined as the guided, hands-on assistance between masters and novices in a feedback loop of teaching and learning (Sofaer, 2015:80–81). However, it “involves little linguistic instruction, but occurs through a mixture of demonstration, collaboration and, when necessary, the correction of mistakes” (Tehrani and Riede, 2008:320–321). Thus, scaffolding connects a master and a novice directly in the learning process. Stout (2002:702–703) has recorded such learning in the form of apprenticeship among modern Langda stone adze makers in Irian Jaya where adze making and teaching is a group activity.

Stout (2002:703) states that “discussion, observation, demonstration, and even direct assistance” are typical of the master-novice craft learning relationship. This direct master-novice connection, which often occurs between an adult and child, results in strong craft traditions that remain very conservative and change little in technique and style over generations (Crown, 2001:464; Greenfield, 2000; Joyce, 2000). Greenfield’s (2000) study of Zinacantec weavers in 1970, and then again in 1991, charted a transition from highly scaffolded learning between mothers and daughters, to a situation twenty years later where very little

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