

**WEALTH AND HIERARCHY
IN THE INTERMEDIATE AREA**

A Symposium at Dumbarton Oaks
10TH AND 11TH OCTOBER 1987

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The Pervasive Pejorative in Intermediate Area Studies

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INTRODUCTION

IN RETROSPECT, it is disappointing but not surprising that Intermediate Area societies often have fared poorly when scholars have compared their achievements with more complex societies in Mesoamerica and the Andean area. Architecturally, accomplishments in the Intermediate Area appear modest, when viewed from the top of Temple IV at Tikal, or from atop the fortress at Sacsahuaman. Demographically, Intermediate Area settlements are not characterized by densely settled urban areas. Agriculturally, intensive productive technologies such as *chinampas*, raised fields, elaborate irrigation schemes, and extensive terracing are largely absent. Religiously, the simpler system of using ancestor worship to influence the supernatural realm does not seem as impressive to scholars as the hierarchical and complex pantheons of the state religions, with their elaborate iconographic representations and transformations. The life-size (or smaller) sculptures of the human form in the Intermediate Area are no match for the immense stone carvings that are found in Olmec, Chavin, and later civilizations.

Mesoamerican long-distance trade routes, often extending farther than 1,000 km, were impressive for being able to transport tremendous amounts of utilitarian and exotic commodities. Andean llama caravans and specialized runner-messengers, traveling well-built roadways extending for hundreds of kilometers, are impressive as they interlink distant areas. The state-supported trade routes were a key component in developing an integrated economic network, often with state-run vertical monopolies controlling access to materials, to processing, and to redistribution. They have no direct analogue in the Intermediate Area. It is not surprising that the predominantly self-sufficient, small societies of the Intermediate Area have not attracted the same economically oriented research interest as the complex Mesoamerican or Andean economies under centralized authority.

The models used by archaeologists to explain culture change vary considerably, but most focus upon factors internal to, or external to, the society under scrutiny. Mesoamerican and Intermediate Area archaeology has gone through phases of explaining external influences, beginning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with a penchant for assuming that invasions and migrations were responsible for the spread of cultural characteristics. That shifted to diffusionism in the middle part of this century, to be replaced by an emphasis on internal development during the past three decades. It is only with the emergence of more sophisticated models of culture change and societal interaction, such as the peer polity model (Renfrew and Cherry 1986), that both internal and external factors are handled with some insight.

The principal objective of this chapter is to consider the different trajectories of culture change in the Intermediate Area and its environs, and explore the reasons for those differences. Intermediate Area societies achieved greater social stability than many of their neighbors. In contrast, so many Mesoamerican and Andean civilizations paid the price for rapid growth and expansion: conflict and collapse. Scholars too often have assumed that statehood is an inevitable result of culture change, given sufficient agricultural land. Intermediate Area societies call that assumption into question and force us to reconsider issues of development versus equilibrium.

Characterizations of the Intermediate Area

The Intermediate Area has often been characterized as being slower to develop, being isolated, being retarded, or being slow to adopt the characteristics of higher civilizations beyond its frontiers. Frequently, scholars implicitly deny innovativeness and volition to Intermediate Area societies, assuming that any complex characteristic found in the Intermediate Area must have been developed elsewhere. The following paragraphs sample the opinions of Intermediate Area scholars where external criteria were used to judge societies.

A relatively recent example is provided by Baudez (1970: 21), who notes that many Lower Central American societies were "organized in classes (chiefs and priests, warriors, ordinary people, and slaves), with a developed system of craft production based on a highly organized division of labor and regular commercial exchanges. Even so, however, they had the appearance of poor relations in comparison with the Mesoamerican and Andean civilizations." Baudez divides Central America into two zones, the northern being the "zone of Mesoamerican tradition," which itself is divisible into a northern and southern sector. The southern sector (primarily

Greater Nicoya) was a backward "frontier" area until Mesoamerican contacts were stronger. As Baudez (ibid: 220) states: "The situation changed radically in the ninth century. With the arrival of the Chorotega, followed later by the Nicarao, the sector entered a period of prosperity, which was reflected in a substantial increase in population, the development of craft production, the creation of distinctive styles in pottery and sculpture, and the extension of trading connections and cultural interchanges with other countries." The zone of "South American Tradition," although poorly known, does have some unifying characteristics, such as the theme of sacrifice by beheading, fancy carved stone "tables," metalworking, and a primary tradition in pottery emphasizing incised and applique decoration. Baudez (1986) uses terms such as *belatedness*, *marginality*, *less developed*, and *peripheral* to refer to less complex Intermediate Area societies just south of the Maya realm.

Scholars from the 1930s through the 1950s, including Kroeber, Kirchhoff, Lothrop, and Johnson, used a primarily diffusionist perspective and saw the Intermediate Area as inferior to its more sophisticated and developed neighbors. Kroeber (1930: 19) concluded that "Mexico and Peru, where they are alike, differ from the intervening regions not in possessing culture material that is lacking there, but in having carried the degree of its development farther." Thus, Mesoamerica and the Andean area represent "a finer form or more intensive organization or expression of the common Middle American material." To Kirchhoff (1952), Mesoamerica was an area of "superior cultivators" with high civilization, bordered by "inferior cultivators." Kirchhoff saw languages (Aztecoid, Macro-Otomanguean, and Macro-Mayan) as a major unifying factor that differentiated Mesoamerica from surrounding areas. And Lothrop (1966: 180) noted "Lower Central America has been regarded as a country cousin of the more publicized Mayan and Mexican areas to the north."

In this chapter, the term *Intermediate Area* refers to the culture area bordered by Mesoamerica on the northwest, the Andean (Peruvian) area to the south, and the Caribbean and Amazonian areas to the east and southeast (Willey 1971: 4). The term *Central America* refers to the current geopolitical borders including Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and I also include Panama. The term "Lower Central America" refers to Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama.

Johnson (1948a: 43) viewed Central America as the result of a series of diffusions from north and south. Central America's basic culture has a distinctly South American cast, and the region marks the northern limit of culture complexes that were probably derived from South America. The region has, however, been exposed to influences from the northern, that is, the Mesoamerican cultures. The continuing stream of cultural diffusion

from both the north and south has produced a strong overlay of foreign elements, which gives many local cultures a superficial similarity to those of neighboring regions.

Creamer and Haas (1985) note the diffusionary schools that have emphasized Olmec, Maya, Mexican, and South American characteristics, but they argue that "Central American groups developed local styles of metallurgy, distinctive ceramics, and elaborate funerary customs that cannot be traced to outside sources" (ibid: 741).

Stone (1972) places Lower Central America in a recipient role, with South America being the earlier dominant culture donor and Mesoamerica the later source of cultural influence. She sees "radiations of advanced esthetic and social developments" penetrating the area, which established a "complex and lasting relationship to Mesoamerica" (p. 1). This process of Mesoamericanization extended along the Pacific side of Central America from El Salvador to the Nicoya Peninsula, with some influence on the periphery of central Panama. Unfortunately, the concept of "influence" is a shallow one when it is presented without the mechanisms of how it occurred and the reasons why it occurred. Was this the acculturation that occurs during economic exchanges or during military-political expansions, the enforcement of a state religion on conquered peoples or by shamans in search of symbols of supernatural power, or through other expansionist modes? Were more complex societies emulated by less complex societies with newly emergent ranking who were in search of symbols and validation? Why were some characteristics adopted and others rejected? In what ways were the indigenous societies organized, and how did that affect acceptance or rejection of external innovation?

In Stone's volume *Pre-Columbian Man in Costa Rica* (1977), the country is viewed as an amalgam of influences from elsewhere. Cultures were things of shreds and patches. Thus, the "Pacific northwest part of Costa Rica has long been a meeting place for varied cultures." Olmec and later "merchantmen" from Mesoamerica were the carriers of cultural traits. Other characteristics were derived from South American sources.

Alternative Characterizations: The Intermediate Area

There is an alternative to the above perceptions of the Intermediate Area. We should neither avoid a comparative perspective nor ignore contacts between Intermediate Area societies and their neighbors to the north and south. Rather than emphasize the traits they did not develop, which contrast so strikingly with Mesoamerica and the Andes, I suggest it would be more worthwhile to consider a more relativistic approach that emphasizes the achievement of Intermediate Area societies within their own social, religious, political, economic, and environmental contexts.

I agree with most of Linares' (1979: 38) critical assessment of Lower Central American archaeology. She notes that "The archaeology of Lower Central America so far has not produced many interesting ideas or novel approaches. There has been too much miscellaneous description and not enough analytic thought. Too often the ancient peoples of the region have been regarded as 'backward,' pale country cousins of their more 'civilized' Mesoamerican contemporaries. As any anthropologist should know, these are meaningless labels. Lower Central American societies evolved their own successful and complex systems. The resources of the region supported peoples in considerable abundance." Unfortunately, I must agree with her that, as anthropologists, we have done poorly in what should be a disciplinary strength: the study of societies from within, to understand their values, structure, and achievements, and not judge them by external and inappropriate criteria.

Not only are there many unanswered questions in the prehistory of the Intermediate Area, there are at least as many unquestioned answers. It is easier to conceptualize unanswered questions than unquestioned answers. Too often we repeat the assumptions of the past, "explaining" these societies by reference to their acquired Mesoamerican or Andean characteristics, and avoid looking deeper to see their internal nature, their structure, and the reasons for change and stability. Occasionally, scholars have assumed, without question, that simpler societies would willingly develop into more complex societies, given the example and opportunity. Often, more complex is seen as inherently better. But Intermediate Area peoples were seen as not as innovative and able or willing to change as were their civilized neighbors; they were the passive recipients of innovations made elsewhere.

Given the frequency with which scholars are willing to place the Intermediate Area in an inferior status, as merely a recipient of traits from without, it is refreshing to see Willey's (1971: 277-278) characterization of the Intermediate Area as a particular cultural tradition. His twelve salient features have been presented by Lange in Chapter 1. Some of these will receive further consideration in later sections of this chapter.

Recently, scholars have employed innovative approaches to process and intersocietal interaction in the Intermediate Area. Abel-Vidor (1981) has proposed use of the interaction sphere concept in Greater Nicoya, which can explain differential acculturation where intergroup contact is intermittent and not overwhelming. Lange (1979) has proposed the use of the concept of the buffer zone as the area located between two frontiers. A variety of acculturative models are applied along the southeast frontier of the Maya (Urban and Schortman 1986). Other models could and probably should be applied, deriving from social science research in nonanthropological disciplines, including geography, economics, political science, and sociology. For instance, a sophisticated application of Wallerstein's "World

Systems" model (1974) to Mesoamerica and the Andes, with the Intermediate Area in between, may show promise, if employed as more than a jargonistic gloss for diffusionism. Blanton and Feinman (1984) have successfully applied the model to Mesoamerica. The "World Systems" model will have limitations in the Intermediate Area, as there were Intermediate Area societies well beyond that active periphery exploited for labor and basic materials.

INTERMEDIATE AREA ACHIEVEMENTS

I suggest that there are a number of specific achievements made by Intermediate Area societies. Each of them needs to be examined before they can be integrated into an attempt to understand this area's uniqueness. These involve the following characteristics, often in contrast with the two culture areas on either side: early emergence of an efficient agricultural adaptation and village life, the avoidance of the state, greater societal stability, smaller polities (both geographically and demographically), maintenance of egalitarian and simple ranked societies, significant artistic achievements in certain categories, more localized economic systems emphasizing independence, and adaptive systems based on diversity.

Sedentism and the Neolithic Village Tradition

One of the striking accomplishments of the Intermediate Area is the early establishment, in the third millennium B.C., and the long maintenance of an efficient Neolithic lifestyle in a number of locations. By *Neolithic* I mean sedentary village life, with pottery vessel production and the use of domesticated species of plants for at least some of the diet. The term *efficient* as used in this chapter emphasizes production per unit effort rather than production per unit area or production per unit of raw material.

These different indices of efficiency should be closely considered here, as they are a key part of this effort to characterize the Intermediate Area as unique, and not just a diluted, less impressive version of the states beyond its borders. For people living in state-level societies, the kind of index to subsistence efficiency that is most familiar is greater productivity per unit area. Thus the Iowa corn farmer, by investing more in equipment, herbicides, and fertilizer, is in the short run more efficiently using the same amount of land to produce more food; however, a price is paid to achieve greater efficiency per unit area. In preindustrial agriculture, greater productivity per unit area is achieved by greater labor investment, i.e., by working harder at weeding, slope control, water control, mulching, crop rotation, interplanting, or a variety of other techniques. In most cases, this is a reluctant evolutionary sequence, necessitated by population increases

in circumscribed environments (Carneiro 1970) or other stresses, resulting in a need to produce more per unit area. In short, the increased labor costs of greater production per unit area make traditional agriculturalists reluctant to intensify. A plausible reason underlying intensification in many cases was feeding more people from a finite amount of land, or the expansion of competitive adjoining societies. Certainly there could have been other reasons, such as the damage to productive areas by a natural disaster, the stresses of a drought, the difficulties posed by a plant pest that eliminated most of a species, and so on.

It is crucial to realize that the process of intensifying production per unit area is eminently reversible, and there are numerous cases where societies deliberately de-intensified their adaptation, given the opportunity. (The fact that we have numerous terms in English for intensification but few for de-intensification is indicative of the degree to which our society is growth oriented; here I use the term *extensification* as a synonym for de-intensification.)

An example of extensification is provided by Netting (1968), who notes the case of the Kofyar on the Jos Plateau of Nigeria. While neighboring peoples remained competitive and occasionally hostile, no agricultural production took place in the "no man's land" between tribal territories. However, with British colonialism and the suppression of hostilities, farmers willingly moved into that vacant land and willingly de-intensified their adaptive technology, thereby increasing their productivity *per unit effort* as the productivity per unit area declined compared with their earlier crowded plots. They were well aware of the trade-off relationships among labor investment, intensity of adaptation, and production per unit area. Other cases (Boserup 1965) illustrating extensification are known, including Anglo settlement of North America and Nicarao expansion into Nicaragua (Fowler n.d.).

Another index of efficiency is production of usable items from a given unit of material. Again, we are most familiar with efficiency in terms of getting more items per unit weight of raw material, and we certainly can see a clear evolutionary sequence in terms of productive efficiency in Mesoamerica. For instance, many of the innovations in full core-blade technology in obsidian, following its beginnings at about 3000 B.C., were to obtain more cutting edge from each core, and to develop better core preform shaping techniques that wasted less material. However, as with agrarian technology, there is another side to this index of efficiency, and that is in efficiency per unit effort. In that regard, if there is sufficient raw material available, a technique that does not expend large amounts of time to try to maximize cutting edge production/material is efficient in terms of effort expended. More specifically, numerous outcrops or alluvial deposits of workable stone are scattered throughout the Intermediate Area, including

chert, quartzite, basalt, andesite, and chalcedony, but rarely obsidian. Intermediate Area people frequently used a very informal core-flake technology to produce usable cutting edges. There were many errors made, and many cores had to be discarded "before their time," but the production of cutting edge relative to the effort expended was unexcelled. And, most importantly, the raw materials were available locally to individual households or villages and were processed by nonspecialists, thus avoiding long-distance traders, centralized economies, and control from without.

Here again, in terms of comparative lithic industries, the Mesoamerican-trained eye can be deceiving. Obsidian core-blade technology demands high precision, particularly in percussion macrocore shaping. The technology can produce impressively long, parallel-sided prismatic blades, a wide variety of secondarily manufactured products, and fine sets of uniformly shaped polyhedral cores. Blanks can be flaked into a variety of nicely shaped "eccentrics," projectile points, bloodletting implements, and other fancy items. What is pertinent here is to see behind the impressiveness of the products of the industry, to explore the cost to the individual to obtain them. We should not lose sight of the advantage of the informal cottage industry involving mundane cores and irregular flakes produced by heads of households in isolated Lower Central American villages—made from locally available rocks at little or no cost, without the need for specialist training. Even though there is a high error rate in flake production, meaning a high discard rate, usable cutting edges are produced with a minimum of effort and time expenditure and without necessitating surplus household production for exchange in a more centralized economy.

The Australian Aborigines illustrate these two different kinds of efficiencies, and how the same egalitarian society adjusts its behavior to varying circumstances. Gould (1980) describes the two very different approaches to lithic production within the same level of sociopolitical complexity, based on availability. In one case, large amounts of flakable material were available on the surface, and a crude block-on-block technique was used that was very wasteful of material. However, judged by production of cutting edge per unit *effort*, the technique was quite efficient. In the other case, people had to excavate to obtain usable material, and they used a more careful technique to produce more cutting edge per unit material: a percussion technique with hammerstones and prepared platforms. Thus people adjusted to a scarcity of material by investing more time to produce a higher reliability in output, both in the case of lithics and in agriculture. The time invested is the variable under human control, responding to perceived stresses and energy inputs. The suggested analogy is with the more informal Central American core-flake industry with available materials versus the long-distance imported obsidian for core-blade technology.

The Intermediate Area has long been recognized as having some of the

earliest sedentary communities in the entire New World. Willey (1971: 264 ff) aptly terms it the "Northwest South American Littoral Tradition." The early sites of Valdivia and Puerto Hormiga, followed by Barlovento and others, shared adaptations exploiting rich marine resources in the 3000–1500 B.C. time range. Great numbers of shellfish were collected, many shallow and some pelagic ocean species were obtained, deer were hunted, and quotidian *manos* and *metates* probably were used for some seed processing, although the unifunctional interpretation of *manos* and *metates* for maize processing is unwarranted, as ethnographic and ethnohistoric accounts indicate they were used for processing many other substances as well (Hummer 1983). Housing was pole-and-thatch or wattle-and-daub. Ceramics were relatively sophisticated, with forms dominated by *tecomates*, open bowls, and *ollas*. Decoration was predominantly by plastic means: incision, rocker stamping, excision, punctation, and appliqué.

Although some later sites, such as Rancho Peludo, Machalilla, and Monagrillo, showed a divergent ceramic decorative tradition emphasizing more painting, the adaptive emphasis continued to focus on marine or near-marine resources, supplemented by some terrestrial resources. Willey (1971: 275) views the 3000–1500 B.C. period as one of transition from fishing—and collecting to farming. However, that transition, at least in some areas of Middle America, was not completed during that millennium and a half. Indeed, it never was completed in the Arenal area of Costa Rica prior to the Spanish Conquest, if our data on C₃ and C₄ pathway plants are correct (Friedman and Gleason 1984), as the average maximum of maize in the diet was under 12 percent even in the Silencio Phase (A.D. 500–1200). Willey characterizes the Formative Period in the Intermediate Area (1500–500 B.C.) as witnessing the emergence of economies based on plant cultivation, but the Arenal area data indicate that there were exceptions where a primary reliance on abundant wild species continued at least to the Spanish Conquest.

Hoopes (this volume) reviews knowledge of coastal and inland adaptations in Lower Central America. He notes that the earliest ceramic-producing societies in Panama and Costa Rica did not inhabit coastal shellmounds, but rather were inhabiting inland areas, where they lived with mixed economies including horticulture and hunting and gathering. Unitary models of innovation and diffusion, be they from Mesoamerica, the Andes, the Amazon, or single areas within the Intermediate Area, cannot account for Formative patterns and variations as they are becoming known.

The Arenal Project has encountered the best-dated early ceramics in Costa Rica (Sheets 1984; Hoopes, this volume), dating to the Tronadora Phase (2000–500 B.C.). Apparently there was contemporary occupation in the Atlantic lowlands, but based on frequencies and distributions of comparable ceramics there seems to have been only a minimal occupation

of lowland Guanacaste at that time (Lange and Stone 1984). Pacific coastal shell resources were not exploited until the mid-first millennium, in contrast with Mexico and Guatemala to the northwest, and Colombia and Ecuador to the southeast.

The Arenal area may not be unusual in being an inland area of Lower Central America with an early sedentary occupation, as the Santa Maria Project in central Panama has found the earliest Monagrillo ceramics not in coastal shell midden sites, but in the inland Cueva de los Ladrones (Cooke 1984). Phytoliths associated with the ceramics indicate maize cultivation by 1500 B.C., similar to the Arenal Project results.

It now appears that the assumption that there was a single innovative locality in Middle America that was responsible for sedentism, agriculture, the village tradition, and/or ceramics is unwarranted. Rather, there were many cultural trajectories into sedentism, some based on abundance of locally available marine resources and others based on inland terrestrial sources of food. The earliest ceramics in the third millennium B.C. are sufficiently disparate that they appear to be more localized responses to the need for cooking and storage vessels rather than derivative and imitative emulations of a single source. The adoption of agriculture was more rapid and revolutionary in some areas of Middle America, but in others it remained an adjunct to a successful mixed economy emphasizing wild resources.

Avoidance of the State

State-level complex societies did not emerge in the Intermediate Area, in spite of the fact that it was surrounded on both sides by the greatest state societies the New World had ever known. Why? I think it was not because of some mental limitations, deep-seated psychological deficiencies, or cultural inferiorities. Rather, I would suggest that the state level of political organization would have been adopted only if necessary, in defense against aggression, to resolve chronic internal difficulties, or for adjudication of intrasocietal disputes owing to excessive population increase in circumscribed areas, or deriving from other stresses. States have elite and middle-level bureaucracies that need to be supported by the commoners; the need for taxation, surplus production, or labor owed to the state by each household increases as the society becomes more complex.

Thus the title to this section has been deliberately expressed in the active mode, to emphasize (and risk overemphasizing) that there are advantages to societies that can avoid statehood. Probably the most important factor is that the state was neither a necessary nor an inevitable result of cultural evolution in most of the Intermediate Area, given peer polity interactions, particularly the nature of population densities and distributions related to access to productive resources (i.e., lesser needs for adjudication of disputes),

lower levels of intersocietal conflict and conquest, lesser needs for defense, and abilities to maintain more self-sufficient sustained-yield adaptations. In addition to this inherent factor, I would suggest there must have been a mixture of fortuitous and deliberate factors in state avoidance, but the precise nature of that mixture is beyond our abilities to determine at present. Certainly one fortuitous factor is isolation and sheer distance from centers of power, and another is the general lack of highly valued resources that could have encouraged exploration, exploitation, and potential conquest. I suspect that there may have been deliberate components in some cases. I cannot view indigenous Intermediate Area peoples as ignorant of cultural events occurring around them, and long-distance travel has been documented, for instance, of Panamanian shamans in search of symbols of supernatural power (Helms 1976). Native peoples throughout Lower Central America are known for traveling long distances on foot during the early historic period (Daniel Janzen, personal communication, 1984), and the practice probably has a respectable antiquity.

Small Polities: Egalitarian and Simple Ranked Societies

Willey (1971) noted that Intermediate Area sociopolitical units were relatively small, ranging from single autonomous communities to petty territorial states. Recently, Creamer and Haas (1985) argued against the widespread opinion that chiefdoms were the most common form of prehistoric political organization in Lower Central America. Rather, they argue that tribes were common in many areas. They contrast the chiefdoms of central Panama with the tribes of the Gulf of Nicoya and note that some status differentiation can occur within tribal society, but the political nature of tribes is nonhierarchical. "The tribal system is . . . decentralized, and the higher status individuals are neither placed structurally in leadership roles nor assigned responsibility for making decisions for the group as a whole." In contrast, chiefdoms exhibit at least some centralization, such as power differentials or social status hierarchies, or possible economic centralization. At least some of the economy may be redistributive, but chiefs lack control over production and distribution/consumption of basic foodstuffs, firewood, and other local commodities.

Chiefs may exercise control over long-distance trade routes in needed and sumptuary goods and over local production by craft specialists of quotidian and elite status goods. Table 1 (Creamer and Haas 1985) is a useful compendium of key characteristics that can be used to compare with the archaeological evidence of a specific area to explore the level of sociopolitical development. For instance, I would say that, compared with the trajectory of culture change in the Arenal area, societies during the Tronadora and Tilaran Phases (2000–500 B.C., and A.D. 1200–1500

TABLE 1. AVERAGE DURATION OF PHASES IN SOUTHERN MESOAMERICAN AND INTERMEDIATE AREA SOCIETIES

Site Name	Occupancy (Yrs.)	Phases (No.)	Mean Duration
<i>Southern Mesoamerica</i>			
Chalchuapa	2700	10	270
Chiapa de Corzo	2700	15	180
Kaminaljuyu	2500	12	208
Barton Ramie	2400	9	266
La Victoria	1800	7	257
Altar de Sacrificios	1900	10	190
Seibal	1650	6	275
Quelepa	1300	3	433
<i>Intermediate Area</i>			
Costa Rica:			
Arenal	3500	4	875
Central Highlands	2500	4	625
Atlantic Drainage	2500	4	625
Diquis	2000	3	667
Culebra Bay	2300	8	287
Culebra Bay (extended)	(3500)	(8)	(438)

respectively) were clearly were no more complex than tribes. The only phases with the possibility of chiefdom status were Arenal and Silencio (500 B.C.—A.D. 500 and A.D. 500–1200, respectively), but I believe the bulk of the evidence for both phases weighs in heavily on the tribal side of the ledger. The slight, but detectable, differences in status indicated by differential grave goods in the Gulf of Nicoya (Creamer and Haas 1985) are of the same order of magnitude that we encountered during the Arenal and Silencio phases in the cordillera. Because all the graves with more elaborate treatment and grave goods were male, in cases where sex could be determined, it appears that status differentials may have been due to sex rather than ascribed or achieved social status.

Religion

The religious systems of Mesoamerica and the Andes contrast with those in the Intermediate Area in the degree of complexity of iconography and hierarchy. Religions are not hermetically sealed phenomena, as they affect, reflect, and respond to the social, political, and economic matrices within which they function. Intermediate Area societies share some basic religious characteristics with their neighbors, yet they lack the extraordinarily elaborate pantheons that developed to the north and the south. Ancestor worship apparently played a more central role in Intermediate Area religions, in contrast with the pantheons of deities among northern Mesoamerican civilizations. The Maya are an amalgam, with an elaborate pantheon yet a strong tradition of deification and worship of ancestors. This may be due

to their deep cultural roots in tropical Middle America, with the pantheon developing as part of an emerging complex society in closer interaction with peer polities in northern Mesoamerica.

Johnson (1948b) reviews the indigenous religions of Costa Rica and Panama, noting the emphasis on divination, curing, shamanism, and sorcery. Some groups had “an organized priesthood” and conducted calendrically scheduled sacrifice. He noted that some groups had “a well-developed theology,” which included “a Supreme Being and a multitude of lesser deities, both benevolent and malevolent.” Ceremonies such as the *chichería* of the Guaymi, involving many days of dancing, drinking, and singing, which often are dedicated to the ancestors in addition to being a social gathering, were important.

Writing about Costa Rican prehistoric religions in general, Ferrero (1981) notes the emphasis upon animistic beliefs of mountains, bodies of water, rocks, and other natural phenomena. He states that the aboriginal peoples had “well-developed ritual traditions, perhaps best exemplified in funerals.” Talamancan tribes believed in a principal deity called “Sibo,” who took the form of a raptor, probably a buzzard, and was a teacher of agriculture, song, and dance.

Fernández Guardia (1918), a Franciscan missionary, described Talamancan shamanism as follows: “there are three kinds of shamans among them; one class is called ‘capar,’ and they are the ones who speak with the devil and predict things to come; of these there are few, greatly respected. Others they call ‘jaguacs’; these manipulate small pebbles to tell fortunes, and apply medicines along with blowing, and incantations. A third class they call ‘isogros’; these are summoned for funerals, where they call the souls of the dead by singing, for ‘isogro’ means ‘singer.’”

Young (1971) describes rituals and rites of passage among the Guaymi of western Panama. The *balsería*, usually held in March on the Pacific slope, or in September on the Atlantic slope, would attract thousands of Guaymi, who would travel many tens or hundreds of kilometers to attend the three-day ceremonies. Prodigious amounts of food and *chicha* were consumed during the games, the dances, and other festivities. When it was finished, the area was littered with waste, perhaps not unlike the Silencio cemetery in northwestern Costa Rica (Sheets 1984). Significantly, Young notes that it was also “of importance to Ngawbe society as a whole . . . the function of *balsería* for periodic renewal of social interaction among dispersed people.” And, those who performed well in the ‘balsería’ rose in status and in power within their communities.

High Artistic/Aesthetic Achievement in Selected Categories

My working definition of aesthetics, for this paper, is the creation and appreciation of beauty in Pre-Columbian handcrafts. Thus, there are two

different components in exploring aesthetics in this chapter. One focuses on the artisan and creativity: the selection of materials and implements to work it, the process of creating the work of art, and implicitly includes the life history of the finished piece (involving curation, modification, exchange, caching, weathering, and other variables intervening between the object's creation and its discovery). The other component involves the appreciation of a work of art. The aesthetic response of the contemporary viewer may be quite different from the response of its creator and the probable varied responses of its prehistoric viewers. This second component involves cognition, cultural context (involving society, religion, kinship, politics, and a complex web of other factors), affect, and arousal and collative variables (Berlyne 1971).

High levels of aesthetic achievement are not unusual in relatively simple societies; here only a few examples are offered. The egalitarian Inuit of Alaska carve "realistic" images of animals or humans not by slavish reproduction of actual components or proportions, but by selectively emphasizing (exaggerating) forms or surfaces that are particularly significant. Their shamans wore masks with distorted features of spirits in trances. The animal, human, and mask-spirit sculptures are not intended to duplicate an object, but rather to portray the *idea* of the object.

The Walpiri of central Australia, another egalitarian band, have an artistic system based on geometric shapes that symbolize the impact that people have on their landscape (Munn 1964). Simple geometric motifs express metaphorical equations in their religious philosophy (Layton 1985: 43). They view life as tracking their ancestors, which they depict in their art. A wavy line depicts the Rainbow Snake as well as the watercourses created by him. Sexual imagery pervades the art.

I would argue that Northwest Coast Indians, although devoid of state-level civilizations, developed one of the New World's great indigenous artistic traditions. They lived largely in permanent settlements, adapted to a moderately high diversity and very high localized biomass of wild resources, and their society was organized into chiefdoms. In my opinion, the art shows extraordinary sensitivity to line thickness and form as artists explored figure-ground relationship and utilized cultural conventions such as split-image representations (Vastokas 1978).

Intermediate Area societies expended considerable time and effort in selected crafts, with resultant high achievement in artistic representations. There is no reason to expect that most of those achievements required particularly complex societies. I believe some of the highest artistic achievements of the Intermediate Area were in vesicular lava sculpture (e.g., the "flying-panel *metates*"), in certain other sculptures, in some ceramics, in the finest jades, and in goldwork. The elaborate *metate* sculptures are extraordinarily impressive; examples are presented by Graham

(1981). I consider these a *tour-de-force* in technical skill, as the shaping of large blocks of lava, often a phytic andesite or other obdurate material, into such open-work sculpture is exceptionally difficult. I believe that they rank toward the top of artistic achievements in Lower Central America, but they are not the technical or artistic equal of the finest of Mesoamerican stone sculpture. Other stone sculpture, such as the blocky tenoned or cylindrical shallow relief carvings (such as those illustrated by Richardson 1940), are much cruder. Willey (1971: 278) is charitable in noting their "common level of competent although not outstanding craftsmanship and a common bond of rather stiff or angular treatment of life forms."

Somewhat similarly, I believe that if one skims the very finest cream of the "jade" artifacts from Lower Central America, one can find pieces of high technical skill and significant artistic achievement. However, if one looks at a representative sample, the range is very great indeed, as it includes items that are awkward and tentative at best. The very finest of Intermediate Area ceramics compares favorably with the best ceramics produced in Mesoamerica and the Andes, both in technical skill and aesthetic appeal. Again, we must not forget the range of variation in all three of these domains. Most of the ceramics produced in prehistoric Costa Rica, for instance, are good, solid, utilitarian vessels that are sufficient for cooking, water storage, and food storage. They represent a basic utilitarian productive technology, and they make a negligible artistic contribution. Much was probably made within the family, for internal household use, although intracommunity reciprocal exchange in the absence of centralized economic authority is quite possible.

Goldwork, as Willey (1971: 277) noted, is a "prominent feature of the Intermediate Area tradition." He noted that goldwork was the closest the Intermediate Area came to an Andean "horizon style," and even that was not uniformly distributed but was restricted primarily to Colombia, Panama, and barely into Costa Rica (primarily in the Diquis and Linea Vieja areas). There is little argument that Intermediate Area goldwork requires significant technical skill. Most pieces show considerable artistic accomplishment and evoke significant aesthetic responses among contemporary viewers. The technical accomplishments are impressive, including lost wax casting, alloying (*tumbaga*), filigree decoration, and chemical bath selective depletion gilding. It seems unlikely that there was a "low end" goldworking that occurred without significant occupational specialization, because of its technical demands. That contrasts with other crafts, including stone sculpture, greenstone carving, chipped stone implement production, and ceramics, where there seems to have been a wide range of production, from specialist to semispecialist to amateur, with an attendant spectrum of technical expertise that often directly correlates with artistic-aesthetic achievement. It is in these industries with a wide range of skill that highly

biased samples can give very distorted pictures of functioning societies. The scholar who analyzes only the finest jades or ceramics and ignores the full range of an industry cannot accurately portray the nature of the society that produced and used those products.

Economic, Social, and Adaptational Stability

Reasons must be sought for the Intermediate Area's relative success in maintaining adaptive stability with lesser population density than in the two adjoining culture areas. Part of an answer may reside in Linares' suggestion (1979: 37) that "systems based on high species diversity but low biomass tend to stay generalized and stable for longer periods of time than systems based on more abundant but less diverse resources permitting intensive cropping." The adaptive trajectories in Mesoamerica and the Andean area are marked by progressively greater emphasis on caloric staples high in carbohydrates, which are suitable for intensification of production per unit area. Maize and beans in the former are paralleled by potatoes in the latter. Highland and/or arid Mesoamerica, as well as the Andes, are relatively species-poor, compared with the moist tropical forests of Middle America.

Harris (1973) argues that root-crop agriculture (vegeculture) is an inherently more stable system than seed-based agriculture. Seed-crop agriculture is more intensifiable, generally requires significant storage facilities, and has a greater tendency to cause environmental degradation and thus cause adaptive stresses, sometimes forcing people to move to new areas. Intensive seed-crop agriculture tends to involve greater soil exposure, resulting in accelerated soil erosion and solar oxidation of nitrogen, iron, and other chemicals.

According to Ferrero (1981), the prehistoric inhabitants of Costa Rica relied on a mixture of cultigens and wild species for their food, for medicines, clothing, dyes, material for house construction, implements, and other uses. The bulk of the diet was supplied by root and tree crops, with seed crops being of lesser importance. Root crops include yuca (manioc), *nampi*, and *tiquisque*, and prominent tree crops include *pejibaye* (peach palm), cacao, guayaba (guava), mamey, and many others. Many species of animals were hunted, and many kinds of fish and fowl were obtained.

In making longevity comparisons between simpler and more complex prehistoric societies in the New World, it appears that simpler societies tend to endure longer. On the most general level, we can see in Mesoamerica and the Andes the emergence, functioning, and decline of one state after another. In contrast, societies in adjoining culture areas seem to have maintained themselves for longer periods of time. As a general, qualitative observation, simpler societies do tend to last longer than more complex ones, but this is a characteristic that is difficult to quantify. Roughly, we can note an

approximate six-hundred-year time span for Olmec civilization, about the same for the Classic Maya, a century shorter for Teotihuacan, about a millennium for the Zapotecs in Oaxaca, less than three centuries for Tula (and the Toltecs?), and less than two centuries for the Aztecs. In South America, one can see similar durations of a few hundred years for many Andean states. And, as with Mesoamerica, their duration tends to decrease with greater size (area and population), greater competitiveness of peer politics, and with "lateness" in the sequence.

In contrast, many Intermediate Area societies can be traced for several centuries or millennia. For instance, cultural stability in the Arenal area reigned for more than three millennia, from at least 2000 B.C. until the Spanish Conquest. That does not mean that there were no changes, but it does mean that there was no conquest, no societal collapse, no immigration and indigenous replacement, or other drastic change that we can detect in the record over that large span of time. That stability was maintained in spite of the ten major explosive eruptions of the Arenal Volcano during the past three millennia.

We might be able roughly to quantify culture change within societies and compare rates of change as indices of social stability or instability. That is to use the cultural phases defined for various sites as indicators of stability or change and then compare societies. This assumes that phase durations can be used as comparative data. For instance, I suspect that Society A, with ten defined phases in a millennium, is undergoing more rapid culture change than Society B, with only three in the same time period, assuming that phase discriminations are made upon consistent criteria. Ceramicists in Mesoamerica and the Intermediate Area do use comparable typological and phase distinctions for their analyses, in part because many Intermediate Area ceramicists have also worked in Mesoamerica, or at least are familiar with the Mesoamerican literature, so I believe that the following tabulations and comparisons are methodologically feasible. The fact that more work has been done in Mesoamerica than in the Intermediate Area is a factor that needs to be recognized but one that should not obviate these considerations.

Using the chronological table in Sharer (1978, 3: 8), we can compute the average durations of cultural phases for various southern Mesoamerican sites (see Table 1). Lange and Norr's volume (1986) provides a useful source for Costa Rican phase durations. Data for Altar de Sacrificios and Seibal were obtained from Willey (1978: 4).

The Mesoamerican sites range from only 180 to 270 years for the average phase length. Quelepa probably should not be considered a Mesoamerican site, but neither is it a "pure" Intermediate Area site, as it is probably better considered a mixture of both. It may be significant that it is midway in mean phase length between these two groups. Mean durations in the Costa Rican site areas range from the 600s to the 800s, with the exception of

Culebra Bay. Even if one extended the beginnings of the Culebra sequence back in time, given modal similarities of the early Loma B ceramics with the Tronadora Phase ceramics, the mean is only 438 years. The Advanced Seminar on Lower Central American Archaeology held at the School of American Research in 1980 adopted a regional periodization; it subdivides 2,550 years of sedentary/ceramic-making societies into three phases (Lange and Stone 1984). That the mean period length turns out to be 850 years seems very appropriate in light of the above.

Henderson (1987), in his recent assessment of research along the southeastern fringe of Mesoamerica, observes that material culture change is slower in areas farther away from the central Maya area. He notes that "ceramic traditions along the southeastern fringe of Mesoamerica seem particularly prone to conservatism: many features of ceramic design appear to survive, typically with spotty distributions, long after they have gone out of fashion elsewhere."

One of the most important economic differences between the Intermediate Area and its adjoining culture areas is that societies in the former maintained a higher degree of economic independence. In both Mesoamerica and the Andes, what once were largely independent villages came under the economic influence of expansionistic states, either as consumers of products under state control, or as suppliers of labor or needed commodities such as surplus production or raw materials. In short, Wallerstein's "World Systems" model (1974) is appropriate for understanding the expansionism of Mesoamerican states, but it loses its utility deeper into the Intermediate Area. Once village economic autonomy is lost, it is difficult to regain. Intermediate Area societies had a more successful record of avoiding economies of dependency than their relatives to the north and south. The society dependent on external sources for needed commodities is subject to supply vagaries, as political and economic events beyond their sphere of control affect the flow of materials, products, and services.

This section relies upon a comparative and processual approach, noting the emergence of sedentary village life in areas of Costa Rica and El Salvador, and then contrasting their economic developmental trajectories. In northwestern Costa Rica, village economic autonomy was maintained throughout prehistory, in spite of variations in population densities, distributions, and contacts with outside societies (Sheets 1984). Only an occasional funerary item was "imported"; subsistence was from local sources, as were materials used for construction, and for making pottery as well as cutting and grinding tools. In contrast, Salvadoran villagers' dependency on externally supplied necessary commodities was well established by 1200 B.C., and dependency intensified until the Spanish Conquest. The autonomy of the prehistoric Salvadoran village was never reestablished.

Paleoindian and Archaic sites are known in Costa Rica, but their paucity

probably indicates low population densities, both in relative and absolute terms. The earliest known Formative village is the Tronadora Vieja site in the northwestern cordillera, dated to about 2000 B.C. Houses were of pole-and-thatch construction, with tamped-earth floors, small outbuildings, intravillage cemeteries, activity areas, sophisticated ceramics, a few groundstone tools, and a core-flake lithic industry, which provided basic cutting, scraping, and piercing implements. Maize and beans were cultivated, but the extraordinary abundance of wild species and their ease of collection and nonseasonality allowed for subsistence to focus on wild resources for more than three millennia, up to the Spanish Conquest. Virtually all resources utilized by these early villagers were locally available. The village can be viewed as an autonomous unit of production and consumption; exchanges taking place between villages probably were by mutual consent, with no outside coercion or tribute involved.

The time of maximum population density in the Costa Rican cordillera was in the first four centuries A.D. Villages were both larger and more common, but the basic adaptation and village and household autonomy were maintained. Graveyards were located on ridges above villages, where some status differences were expressed. It is possible that the differences in status were by *sex*. If so, this suggests that the society was still egalitarian, in that households maintained approximately equal status and power, but status was differential, by *sex*, within the household.

The millennium prior to the Conquest saw a population decline; the population per village apparently did not drop, but the number of villages decreased. Cemeteries were located on prominent ridges or mountaintops many kilometers distant from villages and apparently were the common foci for ritual activities involving a large number of villages. During the Silencio Phase (A.D. 500–1200), status apparently was sexually related; all higher-status burials we encountered were male in the G-150 cemetery, based on more robust supraorbital tori. Ritual, probably directed toward ancestor worship as a means to affect the supernatural realm, was a regional integrative mechanism. Some evidence for regional ritual integration is the network of footpaths radiating from the cemetery, and the abundance of ritual and food-related artifacts found at the cemetery (Sheets 1984). A few exotic commodities were buried with the dead, including a gold pendant (of Sibó?) from the Atlantic plains to the east, and Cabuyal Polychrome vessels from the lowlands of Guanacaste to the west.

The inherent conservatism in technology and adaptation in the Arenal area is striking, particularly when compared with Mesoamerica. This is a minimalist and very efficient Neolithic technology, centered upon a basic core-flake lithic production strategy, well-fired ceramics, a few wood-working implements, and the surprising persistence of stone cooking. All of these were in place by 2000 B.C., and many by 4000 B.C., and all

continued with remarkably little modification to the Spanish Conquest. All were achieved with locally available materials, avoiding the need for moderate or long-distance trade in necessary commodities, and thus avoiding the instabilities of dependency economics.

Although there are a few Olmec, Maya, and other Mesoamerican artifacts known from Costa Rica, they are quite rare when compared with the great numbers of pottery vessels and "jades" made in indigenous styles. Foreign objects often were iconographically misunderstood, as the jades were often cut in half and recarved to meet local aesthetic-iconographic standards. The maintenance of relatively low population densities in a tropical rain forest with abundant wild foods available year-round allowed for a remarkable 3,500-year record of village autonomy and cultural stability. They had knowledge of agriculture and of more complex societies to the north but were able to maintain their egalitarian system and engage in exchange between social segments only when mutually beneficial.

Given village autonomy and a generally egalitarian society in Costa Rica, it is possible to describe a "typical" site per phase. For reasons that follow, one cannot identify a single site as "typical" in El Salvador. The origins of sedentary village life in El Salvador remain unknown. It is possible that at about the same time as the Tronadora Vieja site, there were small autonomous villages in El Salvador. The earliest excavated sedentary site is Chalchuapa. Even at 1200 B.C., it was larger and more internally differentiated than any site at any time in the Cordillera de Tilaran of Costa Rica. Chalchuapa was a provisioning center and intermediate workshop functioning as a node on the Ixtepeque obsidian route, and along the route to the Motagua jade and greenstone source. Chalchuapa was dominated by the Olmec from about 1000 to 500 B.C. (Sharer 1978), and the site was characterized by large obsidian workshops, a central ritual zone dominated by a 23-m-high pyramid, and the chiefdom stage of political organization. As the Olmec influence waned, the Chalchuapa chiefdom emerged as an independent polity, developing its own iconography of prestige and power. From the Salvadoran village perspective, the differences among being dominated by the Olmec, by Xoconusco, or by another polity may not have been great, in that each outside polity would have required surplus production in exchange for the long-distance traded commodities. What foreign economic domination *did* contribute to El Salvador is instability in supplying those commodities, because of the vagaries of rapidly changing political, social, demographic, adaptive, and economic conditions.

An intensive survey and testing program in the Zapotitan Valley (Sheets 1983) divulged a multi-tier settlement hierarchy, ranging from hamlets and small villages to large villages, large villages with ritual precincts, secondary regional centers, and a primary regional center. As expected, the primary and secondary regional centers were controlling access to long-distance

traded commodities, such as obsidian. Surprisingly, however, they were not controlling the manufacture of usable implements. Most manufacture was performed at the consuming settlements by local residents. The frequency of hinge fractures increases in the smaller settlement types, which I interpret as diminishing lithic expertise and specialization. However, the striking exception is the hamlets, which consistently have a hinge fracture frequency of only 3 percent, on a par with the largest settlements. Apparently, they were below the threshold of being able to support even a part-time specialist and had to rely on an itinerant specialist from the major centers. The alternative, that hamlet residents traveled to major centers to obtain prismatic blades, is rejected because of the presence of exhausted polyhedral cores in hamlet trash. This seems to be another example of specialized goods and services being the most expensive for the rural poor, the sector of society least able to afford them.

Thus there is no "typical" site in El Salvador after 1200 B.C., for the system is based upon differentiation and on inequality in access to raw and processed materials within an exchange system regulated by a centralized authority. When Ocos and pre-Ocos horizon sites are well understood in the western corner of the country, that threshold likely will be pushed back a few hundred years.

In summary, Costa Rica is notable for relative stability in population, adaptation, economies, and societies for many millennia. This can be attributed, at least in part, to population control and the maintenance of village independence by reliance on local sources for subsistence, for construction, and for manufacture of vessels and cutting and grinding implements. In contrast, household and village autonomy in El Salvador was lost during the second millennium B.C., never to be reestablished. El Salvador, more representative of Mesoamerica, was characterized by (1) rapid population growth, (2) dramatic changes in settlement patterns and economic systems, (3) emergence, expansion, and collapse of aggressive chiefdoms and states, (4) variation in utilitarian supplies moving over long-distance trade routes, (5) adaptive uncertainties, (6) invasions, such as the Pipil invasion, and (7) rapid culture change and centralization of authority in the domains of economics, politics, and religion. The use of a comparative, processual perspective allows for a better understanding of the differences between the economic systems of Mesoamerica and the Intermediate Area.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the specific economic, cultural, religious, and political interrelationships between Intermediate Area societies and their Mesoamerican and Andean neighbors. There has been a moderate amount of study of Mesoamerican-Intermediate Area relationships and less study of Intermediate Area-Andean relationships. Within the Intermediate Area, there has been more study of relationships within Central America than there has been between Lower Central America

and northern South America. However, Helms (1976) notes the ceramic ties, the similarities in burial practices, and the exchange of high-status prestige items (particularly fine stonework and gold) between Colombia and Lower Central America.

Adaptive Systems Based on Diversity

The tropical rain forest is the most diverse ecosystem on earth, and it is becoming clear from archaeological and ethnohistoric sources that prehistoric inhabitants were often utilizing much of that diversity in their subsistence strategies. There is variation within the Middle American tropics, with some areas such as Arenal-Tilaran being particularly lush with abundant edible wild resources (Tosi 1980).

Fernández de Oviedo (1976) provided direct documentation of the wide variety of foods consumed by inhabitants in Nicoya in 1529. That, when combined with the archaeological evidence collected by Creamer (Creamer and Haas 1985), indicates the following were consumed: fish, shellfish, maize, beans, deer, tapir, rats, paca, armadillo, peccary, birds, toads, and other species.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND OBSERVATIONS

The Intermediate Area has long been obscured by the extensive shadows cast by the towering civilizations of Mesoamerica and the Andes. Too often it has been found wanting. Or, it has been presented as an amalgam of characteristics that diffused in from other, more innovative areas. At worst, diffusionist reasoning has been based on the flawed, mechanistic age-area hypothesis (Wissler 1923) that struggled to derive chronology from spatial distributions of traits. An alternative, a more relativistic or emic anthropological approach, is to study the area from the grass roots, to attempt to view the individual societies and the area in terms of internal functioning. That can avoid viewing and interpreting the area from the top of the Mesoamerican pyramid, with the resultant apologetic tone or pejorative perspective. Fortunately, archaeologists recently have been turning to more sophisticated, ethnographically or historically based models such as acculturation, frontier dynamics, interaction spheres, core-periphery models, world system approaches, or peer polity interaction models.

Two of the most important internally generated characteristics of the Intermediate Area are the early establishment and the remarkable persistence of the village tradition. It appears that this was not achieved in a single locality and then spread outward, but appears to have been a multifaceted phenomenon involving quite different niches, cultural traditions, and

adaptive strategies. Sedentism, or at least semisedentism, was established very early at a number of very productive marine-estuary locations where abundant wild resources existed. Recent research is indicating that there was a separate emergence of sedentism in inland environments of Lower Central America during the third millennium B.C., as exemplified by the Santa Maria Project in central Panama and the Arenal Project in northwestern Costa Rica. The latter is an example of early village sedentism apparently dependent largely on wild resources, with domesticated foods an adjunct. Agriculture evidently remained in a secondary subsistence status at these favored habitation localities. This suggests that agriculture, with the greater labor requirements, became the primary adaptive strategy only in more marginal environments where wild resources were insufficient.

This model might provide a partial explanation for the different sociopolitical trajectories followed in the Intermediate Area and its neighbors. In Mesoamerica and the Andes, there are considerable areas of contiguous arable land (e.g., hundreds to thousands of square kilometers) that can support agricultural expansion and intensification, whereas in the Intermediate Area prime agricultural lands are more restricted and isolated, and usually are in the range of a few dozen to a few hundred square kilometers. These limited areas place a clearly visible restraint to population growth; however, the comparisons of contiguous arable land areas do not in themselves explain the different societal trajectories, as population control was clearly more successful in the Intermediate Area than in Mesoamerica and the Andes. In Mesoamerica and the Andes, as agricultural production intensified and expanded under demographic pressures, there was sufficient productive capacity to sustain many thousands to millions of people in contiguous areas. Centralized authority emerged more rapidly in those areas of population growth and subsistence intensification, to adjudicate internal disputes as well as organize for defense and aggression and operate complex economies, more hierarchical religions, and stratified societies.

In contrast, the sedentary marine-adapted coastal villages or inland villages in the Intermediate Area continued to exploit their lush environments in relative isolation. Because most of their subsistence resources were wild, and generally nonintensifiable, pressures existed to control populations and maintain adaptive efficiencies (high production per unit *effort*) more than in areas where agriculture was burgeoning. The widespread dispersal of needed resources, such as vesicular lava for grinding tools, sufficiently isotropic materials for cutting tools, and clay for ceramics, assisted in the maintenance of economic independence. Egalitarian villages and simple ranked societies (small chiefdoms) were the rule, as the state level of development was largely avoided. Societies chose to emphasize high artistic achievement in selected crafts, including ceramics, stone sculpture, jades and related

greenstones, and gold. The best of those crafts compare favorably with artistic accomplishments in other New World culture areas, including the Northwest Coast, the Southwest, Mesoamerica, and the Andes.

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