TMP Insubstantial Structures – Background Information

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This GIS layer is a point file, named “Small Features”. It was digitized from a scanned version of TMP map, and points have been associated with collections in the DF9 database in most cases. This structure type is only digitized as a point file because it is represented by an arbitrary symbol (small squares) on the map, and the orientation and extent of most such structures is unknown. While Millon effectively says that the placement of the squares and the specific number of squares placed is arbitrary, we assume that it to some degree reflects the area(s) of highest artifact concentration (if one existed) within the collection tract.

The accompanying information from the database is in an Excel file, which can be joined to the shapefile based on the ID column in each file. In a fair number of cases, two or more structures in the GIS correspond to a single database record. There are also three pairs of cases where (listed in the “notes” column of the attributes) where it could not be determined which of a pair of database records corresponded to which a pair of points. These have currently been given arbitrary pairing assignments. In all three cases, the primary architectural and functional interpretations are the same for each pair, so it should make a difference for analyzing these categories. It many, however, matter for artifact-based analyses. There is one case, 32:N1W4, which does not appear to have a database record, for which the ID column is coded as -1.

The GIS layer called small features corresponds to a category referred to as category of insubstantial structures, which actually includes two types of structures, referred to here as low-status residences and outbuildings. The former were probably adobe or wattle and daub houses, and should be considered residential structures. The latter were probably served as outbuildings, animal pens, temporary covered work areas, etc, and should not be considered residential structures. Both are generally represented archaeologically as scatters of artifacts, often without any visible preserved architecture. It should be noted that the small red squares identified as “Modest or Insubstantial Structure” on the Millon map include localities belonging to both categories, which is why they are digitized as a single layer.

The TMP housing typology recorded two categories of information for each collection area: an “architectural interpretation,” which described what type of structure or other archaeological feature was present, and a “functional interpretation,” which provided the most probable use of that structure. Both typologies are temporally focused, with up to two possible interpretations of each type for each structure for each phase of the site’s history. There is a relatively high, but not total, overlap between categories in the two types of interpretation. (The current version only includes the Metepec-Xolalpan phase interpretations, since these correspond to the majority of the apartment compounds.)

For the insubstantial structures, most are either architectural “casa humildes” the majority of which are coded as functional “low status residences,” and architectural “occupation without durable structures,” most of which are coded as functionally “missing data”. There are also a handful of other, relatively rare categories. For analysis purposes, the easiest way to separate low status residences is to filter the layer for only those cases identified as “low status residences” as their primary Xolalpan-Metepec function.

More generally, the Electronic File Guide for the project states (p. 14-15):

“Some Teotihuacan-period sites were defined on the basis of concentrations of significant quantities of Teotihuacan-period ceramics in the absence of appreciable quantities of any of the signatures of substantial architecture described above. We have termed these "insubstantial structures." It is likely that many of these sites represent occupations in structures of adobe or more perishable materials, but others may represent material dumped from occupation sites elsewhere. In the "interpretations" sheets to be discussed below, and in contrast to the effort to infer actual dimensions and locations of all other kinds of structures, the little red rectangles for "insubstantial structures" are merely icons scattered about within the site, and their size and number are intended only to give an idea of the quantity of Teotihuacan-period materials, taking the total site size into account. Especially toward the periphery of the urban zone, boundaries of "insubstantial structure" sites tended to be defined in part on the basis of modern field boundaries. We discuss problems in interpreting "insubstantial structures" later. It should be noted that, both in terms of the numbers of sites and the quantities of ceramics and other materials collected from them, they constitute a very small proportion of the Teotihuacan total. Robertson (2012) is an important study of such structures.”