The site of Naco has long been identified in the ethnohistoric and archaeological literature as a major political and population center that served as an entrepôt in interregional exchange (e.g., Chamberlain 1966; Strong, Kidder, and Paul 1938; Wonderley 1981). Direct investigation of the site prior to 1977, however, was limited to test excavations undertaken over the course of ten days in 1936, during which five constructions in Naco’s center were cleared to varying extents (Strong, Kidder, and Paul 1938: 27–34). Anthony Wonderley’s systematic mapping and excavation at Naco during 1977 and 1979 provided a far more comprehensive account of the settlement’s history of occupation, as well as the nature and extent of its Late Postclassic settlement (Wonderley 1981, 1985). In all, Wonderley excavated nine structures in the site core, five beyond that area, and four shallow middens (three outside the core and one within it) and conducted two additional tests away from architecture in Naco’s epicenter (Wonderley 1981). One additional probe was dug within a midden situated 1.3 km southeast of the architectural core along the west bank of the Rio Naco (Wonderley 1981). Based on this work, Wonderley identified three facets of Late Postclassic occupation at Naco and reconstructed changes in behavioral patterns within the settlement and the connections its residents enjoyed with
those living beyond the site’s boundaries. This report (1981), coupled with Wonderley’s later publications on the work (1985, 1986), defines current understandings of Naco’s place within the late prehistoric Mesoamerican world.

In brief, Wonderley argues that Naco was an indigenous settlement that, during what he defined as the middle facet of the Late Postclassic (AD 1250–1450), covered approximately 160 ha and was dominated by foreign interlopers—most likely Chol speakers—who originated at the base of the Yucatan peninsula. Bearing a “Mexicanized Maya” culture, these immigrants introduced new ceramic and architectural styles along with a locally unprecedented emphasis on the exploitation of riverine resources. The resulting synthesis of autochthonous and foreign elements resulted in a culture that differed markedly from its predecessors in the eponymous basin. The migrants were apparently attracted to the valley by its strategic location athwart one of the premier trade routes linking Mesoamerica to the west and north with Central America to the south and east. Once established as a commercial center, Naco grew rapidly to encompass 160 ha. Wonderley’s relatively large sample of excavated middle facet contexts did not reveal strong evidence of political centralization or hierarchy. Materials of all sorts, including elaborately decorated ceramics and imported obsidian blades, were widely distributed across the center, suggesting more or less equal access to valuables by all of the inhabitants. The concentration of larger-scale, elaborately decorated constructions around two neighboring plazas in the site core hints at the privileged command over labor some of those inhabitants enjoyed. Denizens of the site core may also have consumed greater quantities and varieties of meat than did their counterparts who lived beyond the epicenter. These political divisions might have correlated with ethnic distinctions. Material features associated with “Mexicanized” cultures, such as ground platform abrasions on obsidian blades, side-notched projectile points, and ceramic comales, seem to have been concentrated within the immediate vicinity of the site center. These political and ethnic distinctions, however, were muted.

The late facet (AD 1450–Conquest) possibly marked a shift in rulership with the arrival of a new cadre of foreign trader-warriors, this time from the Pacific Coast of Central America. The proposed change is signified by the appearance of new bichrome and polychrome ceramic types, the designs of which, Wonderley argues, are not outgrowths of indigenous Naco valley decorative traditions. Constructions raised now in the site core also reflect novel building styles, marked especially by the appearance of thick white plaster summit surfaces, construction fill composed of boulders, and platform facings made of stone slabs set horizontally and vertically. The form and location of an I-shaped ballcourt erected immediately off the southwest corner of the southwest principal plaza also resemble similar complexes associated with the
“Mexicanized” Maya of the Postclassic highlands and lowlands. The fact that three edifices in Naco’s architectural core show signs of burning at roughly this interval suggests that the transition from the middle to late facet occupation in central Naco may not have been entirely peaceful. This newly constituted polity was what the Spanish encountered in 1523, cursorily recorded, and rapidly destroyed.

Much additional research into Late Postclassic developments has taken place in the Naco valley and beyond since 1979. At the time Wonderley wrote, we had only a rudimentary grasp of the basin’s prehistory, let alone an understanding of the multifarious foreign transactions in which its denizens engaged at any point in the valley’s 2.5 millennia of prehispanic settlement. We will bring this newly acquired data to bear on Wonderley’s results in an attempt to make sense of his pioneering investigations within currently evolving interpretive frameworks. This reinterpretation is not meant as a criticism of the earlier work; in fact, Wonderley’s monograph (1981) provides an excellent basis for rethinking his discoveries. What we offer instead is a new perspective on developments at Roble phase Naco that contextualizes these events and patterns in processes revealed by research conducted since 1979 throughout the valley and Southeast Mesoamerica generally.

In pursuing this comparison, we will collapse behavioral and material patterns from middle and late facet Naco into one composite picture of the settlement dating to the Roble phase. There are several reasons for this strategy. First, according to Wonderley (1981), late facet Naco retained the same basic form and size as its immediate predecessor, with most changes attributed to this span relating to modifications made on several buildings in the site core and the addition of the ballcourt. Second, relatively few pure late facet contexts were sampled during the 1977 and 1979 investigations, with most information on activity structuring coming from studies of more common middle facet remains scattered across the center (Wonderley 1981). Wonderley felt confident using the middle facet data as bases for interpreting Late Postclassic behavioral patterning at Naco in general, and we follow his lead here. Finally, in our own investigations at Sites PVN 306 and PVN 144, we were unable to distinguish between middle and late facet occupations. It is our opinion, based on the enlarged database, that the shifts in architectural and ceramic styles used to define these intervals at Naco are relatively minor and do not describe temporally significant behavioral transformations applicable to the entire valley. For example, the bichrome and polychrome ceramics whose advent heralds the late facet at Naco comprise a very small proportion of the entire Naco assemblage and are found largely in the environs of the main plaza. As Wonderley argues (1981), these minority taxa may represent a functionally specific subcomplex of the Late Postclassic assemblage tied to events that transpired in the vicinity.
of Naco’s largest buildings. As we see it, however, their appearance cannot be restricted to a specific portion of that span. The same case can be made for the modes on utilitarian ceramics Wonderley advances as temporally diagnostic of the late facet. Without clear stratigraphic sequences, in short, it is not possible consistently and reliably to distinguish among facets within the thirteenth-through early-sixteenth-century occupation of the Naco valley.

ACTIVITY PATTERNING IN THE MAIN PLAZAS

By the mid-1970s, Roble phase Naco was almost completely submerged beneath the modern town of the same name. This growth has accelerated since then, and now nearly every part of the late prehistoric center has been incorporated into a modern house lot. Consequently, even the most substantial of the settlement’s Roble phase edifices have been damaged, and the many middens once identifiable from artifact scatters on ground surface have vanished. These modern modifications had greatly altered the appearance of prehistoric Naco by 1977 and almost completely obliterated it thirty years later. Comparing material and behavioral patterning at Naco with the patterns recorded at Sites PVN 144 and PVN 306, therefore, is difficult because in the 1970s, as well as now, Naco was not as well preserved as were the last two centers when they were investigated. Still, some sense of the overall arrangement of buildings and relations among activities can be inferred for Roble phase Naco.

Southwest Principal Plaza

As is the case with Sites PVN 144 and PVN 306, Naco is dominated by an architectural core defined by relatively substantial platforms that, in this case, bound two adjoining plazas set in a southwest-northeast line (figure 5.1). The southwest member of the dyad is largely open on the north and contains within its bounds Str. 4F-1 (figure 5.2; Strong, Kidder, and Paul’s Mound 6). At 4 m high, this edifice is at least twice the size of the next largest platform recorded at the center (Strong, Kidder, and Paul 1938: figure 3). As Wonderley notes, however, about half of the observed height was likely made up of tumbled stones from the superstructure, which had been removed prior to his investigations. The building itself was heavily damaged on its west side but was relatively well preserved on the east face as of 1979. Structure 4F-1 started off as a “plaster-coated earth column in the form of a wheel with eight cogs” (Wonderley 1981: 56). The building measured 4 m across, stood 1 m high, and had a featureless summit. Sets of two to three steps may have been located in each of the interstices between the cogs; this was the case in the two uncovered instances. The early column was renovated three or four times, culminating in
a circular, plaster-coated platform measuring 11.3 m across. A plaster-covered “skirt” slopes up to the platform’s edge, while a stone-faced circle with at least five stone “bastions,” or cogs, projecting out from it was raised atop the basal platform (Wonderley 1981). The surface of the circle between the bastions is battered back toward the summit. The circular superstructure was at least partly surfaced with stones and contained a 0.6-m-high plaster-coated bench. Traces of red, yellow, tan, and blue pigments recovered from the summit suggest that the single superstructure room was brightly painted. Steps mounted Str. 4F-1 on the north and the west.
Structure 4F-1 generally resembles Str. 306-19 found within Site PVN 306’s western principal plaza (WPP). This building was also characterized early in its history by eight arms projecting from a central core, a feature it retained with decreasing physical salience throughout its use-life. Structure 306-19’s final version was, like Str. 4F-1’s last stage, roughly circular, bordered by a plaster skirt that sloped up to the main body of the platform. The frequent and extensive use of plaster on Str. 306-19 also parallels the application of this
material on Str. 4F-1. Structure 306-17, on the south margin of the WPP, had a more straightforward circular form. It too, however, was framed in its final iteration by a basal sloping zone that rose toward the platform. Structures 306-17 and 306-19 are somewhat smaller than Str. 4F-1’s final version; the first two are 1.03 m and 0.8 m high and their platforms measure 8 m across and 9.9 m × 6.9 m, respectively. There are other differences as well. The Site PVN 306 examples apparently supported monuments, at least one of which was of carved stone, and neither evinced signs of the summit bench or painted superstructure surfaces seen in Str. 4F-1. Associated artifacts were sparse in all three cases, suggesting that any detritus generated in the course of activities pursued in and around the buildings was carefully cleared away.

Even allowing for the observed differences, there are enough formal similarities among the three edifices to suggest that they expressed similar concepts, most likely related to beliefs concerning Quetzalcoatl/Ehecatl (Wonderley 1981; see also chapter 8); were foci of public gatherings centered on open plazas located in the western portions of major site cores; and represented relatively significant investments of both skilled and unskilled labor in their construction. Structures 4F-1, 306-17, and 306-19, therefore, likely played similar roles in community religious events.

The six excavated buildings delimiting Naco’s southwest plaza (Strs. 4F-2/4, 4F-7, 4F-14, and 4F-16) are generally platforms with earthen (Strs. 4F-2, 4F-4) and cobble fills (Strs. 4F-3 and 4F-7) capped with plaster surfaces, at least some of which are painted red (Wonderley 1981). They stand 0.4–2 m tall, cover 5.5–165 m² basally, and lack clear evidence for formal superstructures. Although most of the edifices are square or rectangular, Str. 4F-4 on the northeast side of the plaza has a crescent shape, its concave face looking to the southwest. The plaza they define was apparently surfaced with earth and covers 1,020 m². Few artifacts of any sort were found during investigation of any of these buildings except for Strs. 4F-14 and 4F-16.

Excavation of Str. 4F-14 on the plaza’s southwest side revealed an artifact-rich deposit composed of dark-colored earth and measuring 5 m northeast-southwest and 0.34 m thick at its deepest point. The cultural material included in this lens was predominately composed of pottery sherds, many from decorated incense burners, and was burned; charcoal flecks were recorded throughout the deposit (Wonderley 1981). A possible rock pavement located on the northeast edge of the aforementioned stratum suggests to Wonderley that Str. 4F-14 was originally a surface-level building, possibly a community or men’s house (Wonderley 1981). While this interpretation remains plausible, we are struck by the similarity of Str. 4F-14 with Strs. 144-19 and 306-182, both of which turned out on excavation to be trash deposits containing high proportions of ceramic incense burners. In addition to the prevalence of incensarios,
all three collections lacked the otherwise ubiquitous *Pachychilus* sp. shells and were located on the western margins of relatively open plazas. We hypothesize, therefore, that Str. 4F-14 is yet another example of debris likely resulting from activities that occurred within the plaza on the western edge of which it was piled prior to removal.

Structure 4F-16 (Mound 9 in Strong and colleagues’ nomenclature) is a 0.5-m-high conical eminence measuring about 15 m across and situated on the southwest corner of the southwest plaza. Very limited excavations here by William Duncan Strong and his colleagues revealed an ashy black soil that yielded numerous artifacts along with “freshwater mussel shells” (Strong, Kidder, and Paul 1938: 32; see also the summary in Wonderley 1981: 38–40). The fragments of two presumably human skulls found here may have been from post-Conquest burials (Wonderley 1981). Wonderley interprets Str. 4F-16 as a perishable surface-level structure comparable to Str. 4F-14. We suggest instead that both Strs. 4F-14 and 4F-16 are trash deposits composed of debris produced during activities conducted in the southwest plaza. In this sense, Str. 4F-16’s location and general contents call to mind Str. 306-83. The latter, situated off the southwest corner of the WPP, was an extensive trash lens composed of large numbers of artifacts associated with faunal remains.

The general form and dimensions of Naco’s southwest main plaza closely resemble Site PVN 306’s WPP. In each case an extensive open area is bounded by substantial platforms that do not seem to have been residences. The latter interpretation is indicated by the structures’ open summits, lack of built-in domestic furniture, and general paucity of artifacts. The centerpiece of both plazas is an edifice with a circular basal platform above which rises a cogwheel construction, both elements heavily coated with plaster. These distinctive buildings are situated in the eastern portion of their respective plazas. While the central edifice(s) was kept scrupulously clean, something of the nature of the activities performed on and near it is suggested by artifact-rich trash deposits on the plazas’ west and southwest sides. The high proportion of pottery incense burners found in Strs. 4F-14 and 306-182 points to the importance of ritual in the gatherings hosted in the western plazas of Naco and Site PVN 306. The Str. 144-19, Unit 1 deposit seems functionally equivalent to these Naco and Site PVN 306 collections, although the former lies on the west edge of a residential patio. The general rarity of faunal remains associated with these incensarios—especially the notable absence of *Pachychilus* sp. shells, which are so common in most investigated middens—also characterizes Strs. 4F-14, 144-19 (Unit 1), and 306-182. In each case there seems to have been a shared commitment to segregate some debris associated with public religious observances from the detritus of meals, or at least of most forms of meat. Remnants of such
feasts were identified in the deposit glossed as Str. 4F-16, where numerous “plain potsherds” (Strong 1935: 58, quoted in Wonderley 1981) were found together with faunal remains. Structure 306-83 yielded comparable materials and in a similar position to that occupied by Str. 4F-16, that is, off the southwest corner of the WPP.

Apparently, in both Naco and Site PVN 306, large open spaces distinguished by unusual and elaborate architectural forms were venues for religious observances carried out in conjunction with large-scale feasting. The detritus generated by these activities was, to some extent, segregated prior to removal. Building sizes are somewhat greater at Naco than at Site PVN 306, and plaster seems to have been used more intensively on buildings in the former’s southwest plaza. Such variations might imply that those who commissioned Naco’s central constructions enjoyed greater control over labor than did their eastern neighbors. These differences were apparently not great.

Northeast Principal Plaza

Wonderley excavated two buildings, Strs. 4F-8 and 4F-9, on the northeast side of Naco’s northeast main plaza, a space encompassing 1,380 m$^2$ (1981). These platforms comprise two nested half circles open on the southwest, where they face into the plaza. They are 0.9–1.5 m high, encompass about 105 m$^2$ along their basal dimensions, and are composed of earth fill. Little is known of the platforms’ superstructures, although the penultimate version of Str. 4F-8 apparently consisted of “a rectangular building (1.9 × 5.9 m) with flanking red plaster patios and a western entrance” (1981: 84). Wonderley interprets at least this version of Str. 4F-8 as an “upper class” residence (1981: 84). It is difficult to establish the uses to which the platform’s final version and Str. 4F-9 were put, as their summits are featureless and most of the artifacts uncovered during their investigation came from fill. One possibility the excavator tentatively advances is that the last versions of Strs. 4F-9 and 4F-8 were large storage platforms analogous to those found at late prehistoric Cozumel (Wonderley 1981; see also Freidel and Sabloff 1984: 190–191).

Strong and his associates extensively cleared portions of Str. 4F-5 (Mound 1 in their system; Strong, Kidder, and Paul 1938: 32, 34; summarized in Wonderley 1981: 36–38). This earthen platform defined the southeast flank of the northeast plaza, covered approximately 204 m$^2$, and stood 1 m high. Structure 4F-5 was apparently capped with several contemporary plaster floors tinted a dark red. Superstructure walls were fashioned of bajareque, the surfaces of which seem to have been painted in varying colors, including red, yellow, and blue-gray. Large quantities of artifacts, including two pieces of European glazed wares, were recovered during summit clearing. While the picture is far
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from clear, a good case can be made that Str. 4F-5 served as a fairly elaborate residence for a house group.

Naco’s northeast plaza in some ways resembles Site PVN 306’s EPP. Both were bordered in part by relatively large and complexly embellished habitations. The case was made that those who lived around the EPP constituted a household, and the same was apparently the case for the residents of Str. 4F-5 and at least the early version of Str. 4F-8. Nevertheless, the extensive crescent-shaped constructions represented by late Str. 4F-8 and Str. 4F-9 have no clear parallels at any other known Naco valley site dating to the Roble phase or otherwise.

Architectural Excavations beyond the Principal Plazas

Wonderley (1981) excavated five buildings (Strs. 4F-11, 4D-2, 6F-3/4, 6F-5, and 6D-1) located outside Naco’s main plazas. Strong and his associates also partially cleared the ballcourt (Str. 4F-15) that lies directly off the southwest corner of the southwest plaza (1938: 33; summarized in Wonderley 1981: 40–41). Structures 6F-5 and 6D-1 were apparently not actual buildings but trash deposits that protruded slightly above ground surface. These will be considered in the discussion of the middens Wonderley investigated at Naco.

Structures 4F-11 and 4D-2 lie 50 m northwest and 100 m southwest of the main plazas, respectively. They are earthen platforms measuring 455 m² by 1.75 m high and 84 m² by 0.8 m high, in turn. Structure 4D-2’s functions could not be inferred from extant architectural features or the few artifacts found with it. The identification of two parallel channels, 0.42 m and 0.52 m wide, 0.2–0.23 m deep, and running at least 3.85 m long east-west on Str. 4F-11’s eastern summit, may point to the use of at least part of this building as a sweat bath (Wonderley 1981). No comparable features were recorded elsewhere in the contemporary Naco valley.

Structure 6F-3, lying 160 m northeast of the principal plazas, is a 1-m-high circular eminence that had a diameter of approximately 15 m (Wonderley 1981). This entity apparently consisted entirely of cultural debris that combined numerous artifacts with bones and snail shells (table 5.1). No architectural features were noted here. The deposit, in turn, covered an earthen-floored, surface-level building defined by foundations consisting of large, unshaped stones (Str. 6F-4). This earlier construction measured 2 m by at least 7.5 m and was apparently completely open on the north. Based on the organic material embedded in Str. 6F-4’s floor and the artifacts associated with the building, including several grinding implements, Wonderley argues that the edifice served as a residence (1981). In a very general sense, Str. 6F-4 resembles Str. 144-2; both are domiciles, built in similar ways, and open to the north.
Although Wonderley believes overlying Str. 6F-3 was a formal platform, we think it is more likely a trash deposit that accumulated above an abandoned building near the end of Naco’s prehispanic occupation.

It is hard to say how these constructions relate to other Roble phase Naco valley edifices located beyond site epicenters. The only examples with which to compare them are Strs. 306-86, 306-72, 306-78, 306-79, and 306-130 (see chapter 3). All but Strs. 306-72 and 306-78 in this set were arguably residences, a function Str. 6F-4 may have also served. Otherwise, Strs. 4D-2 and 4F-11 were seemingly special-purpose buildings that lacked clear signs of domestic activities. Structures 306-72 and 306-78, modest platforms lying south of Site PVN 306’s main group, might also fall in this category. They, like Str. 4D-2, also yielded very few artifacts, suggesting that whatever occurred around them generated relatively little debris; at least they were kept very clean. All we can say, however, is that buildings raised outside the Naco and Site PVN 306 main plazas served multiple poorly understood purposes, of which residence is but one possibility.

Information available on the ballcourt (Str. 4F-15) is derived solely from records provided by Strong and his colleagues (Strong, Kidder, and Paul 1938: 33; summarized in Wonderley 1981: 40–41). The alley is I-shaped, is oriented

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**Table 5.1 Density by excavated square meters of materials recovered from Roble phase contexts at Naco (after Wonderley 1981)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure/Operation (Op.)</th>
<th>Pottery Sherds</th>
<th>Chipped Obsidian</th>
<th>Shell/Bone</th>
<th>Ground Stone</th>
<th>Bajareque</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4F-14</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0/3g</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6D-1</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6F-3*</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>24g/3g</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 g.s., 0.3 chert flake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6F-5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>10.4g/0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Op. 63</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>663g/0.5g</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.3 sw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Op. 69</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>662g/78g</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Op. 72</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0/4g</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.2 chert flake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Op. 75</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>1,325g/13g</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.5 g.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Op. 76</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>980g/21g</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.3 chert flake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Op. 77</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>3,271g/21g</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.3 g.s.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These figures are estimates based on the inference that 8 m² were excavated in Str. 6F-3; material Wonderley associated with Str. 6F-4 is excluded in these computations.

Sufficient information from Strong and colleagues’ excavations at Str. 4F-16 was not available for inclusion in table 5.1.

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Key:
g.s.: grooved ceramic sphere; sw: spindle whorl
Activity Patterning at Roble Phase Naco

310 degrees, measures 27 m long by 10.15 m wide, and is bordered by vertically set stone slabs that rose 0.5–0.8 m above the earthen playing surface. These boundary walls were fronted by a 0.3-m-wide “coping” of horizontally laid stones and backed by what seems to have been stone fill. The full height of the platforms that define the ballcourt on the northeast and the southwest is unknown; they almost certainly rose higher than the 0.8 m represented by the walls delimiting the alley. The southeastern end zone was also bordered by vertically set stones, but without the “coping,” and covered 4.25 m northwest-southeast by 18.4 m northeast-southwest. The alley surfaces and walls were apparently not covered with plaster; nor were many artifacts recorded from excavations in this area.

To date, the Naco ballcourt is the only construction of this sort recorded from the Roble phase Naco valley. Its likely association with ritual implies that Naco’s late prehistoric denizens, or a segment of them, alone engaged in the relevant observances. The court’s modest dimensions, however, suggest that its importance in local religious observances was signaled more by its distinctive form and location adjoining the southwest plaza than by the grand scale on which it was constructed. Downplaying building size may have been one way to ensure that the architectural foci of religious activities, such as Str. 4F-15, did not overwhelm the rites conducted around them. The goal may have been to insinuate concepts associated with ballcourts and round structures within rites that embodied local premises rather than conducting the latter in the shadow of the former (see chapter 8).

Midden Excavations beyond the Principal Plazas

In addition to architecturally focused excavations, Wonderley investigated four middens, one (Operation 69) within 300 m of the main group and the remainder (Operations 75–77) outside that radius (1981). These trash deposits closely resemble those studied at Sites PVN 144 and PVN 306; that is, they consist of shallow (averaging 0.2 m thick) layers, in this case of brown sandy clay, that contain high densities of artifacts and faunal remains. The latter primarily consist of Pachychilus sp. shells. On the surface, these material scatters often appeared as slight (0.1–0.3 m high) mounds encompassing 2–3 × 5–6 m. Wonderley interprets these strata as middens, likely produced by people living in perishable constructions somewhere in the near vicinity, a view with which we heartily concur. The distribution and density of material recovered from the investigated deposits are presented in table 5.1.

As noted earlier, Strs. 6F-5 and 6D-1 seem to have been middens as well. The former is 140 m northeast of the site core and comprises a 0.44-m-thick brown clay covering an estimated 35 m² (Wonderley 1981). This deposit yield-
ed 303 sherds, 7 obsidian blades, 2 mano fragments, and 10.4 g of *Pachychilus* sp. shells. The absence of unambiguous architectural features here, coupled with the mix of artifacts and shells derived from the clay, suggests that Str. 6F-5 is yet another pile of detritus swept into a low mound (see also Strs. 4F-14, 4F-16, and 6F-3). A possibly comparable deposit is represented by Str. 6D-1, situated 330 m southeast of the main group (Wonderley 1981). Here, digging revealed a 0.05- to 0.15-m-thick earth level resting atop a 0.5-m-high rise in the underlying culturally sterile, gravel-rich red clay. No clear architectural features emerged in the course of this work, although 357 sherds and 2 obsidian blades were retrieved from the excavated soil. Once again, it appears that Str. 6D-1 is a debris lens containing artifacts associated with activities conducted somewhere in the immediate area.

In addition to these tests dug within Naco, Wonderley, in collaboration with Urban, excavated four 1 m$^2$ test pits about 1.3 km southeast of the main group (Operation 63; Wonderley 1981). These probes revealed a moderately extensive, if shallow (0.17 m thick), artifact-rich deposit on the west bank of the Naco River. Based on disparities in artifact contents between Operation 63 and the middens dug within the site proper, Wonderley believes the former qualifies as debris generated by special-purpose, non-domestic chores pursued outside Naco. This interpretation is suggested by the relatively low quantities of obsidian found in Operation 63 vis-à-vis their greater prevalence in most investigated Naco trash deposits, the relative paucity of Nolasco Bichrome vessels in the former collection, and the preponderance of jars among utilitarian types in Operation 63. It is our experience at Sites PVN 144 and PVN 306 that such differences fall within the range of variation attested to across middens investigated at these centers. We have therefore included Operation 63 in the discussion of activity patterning within and near Roble phase Naco.

Overall, the same set of artifacts appears in all of the investigated trash deposits, suggesting that all house group members residing beyond the main plazas in Naco engaged in comparable domestic tasks involving ceramic vessels, chipped stone tools, faunal remains, and, to a large extent, grinding stones. Variations in the frequencies of these items among the excavated middens were noted. As was the case at Sites PVN 144 and PVN 306, there are no clear correlations between the frequencies of different classes of material. For example, Operation 75 yielded the largest concentrations of pottery sherds and obsidian blades but not of faunal remains. The highest density of the latter is attested to in Operation 77, which has nearly one-third the density of ceramics and half that of obsidian blades seen in the former collection. It is unlikely, therefore, that variations in the density measures outlined in table 5.1 directly or simply reflect differences in the sizes of the house groups linked to each midden. Rather, they probably express inter–house group distinctions in the intensities
in which people living in different parts of the settlement engaged in essentially the same tasks, employing the same items of material culture.

Structures 6F-5 and 6D-1 may constitute something altogether different. Both deposits exhibit consistently low ceramic and chipped stone frequencies when compared with the other midden assemblages and stand out for their very low concentrations of faunal remains, especially shells of *Pachychilus* sp., which are otherwise very common in house group trash at Naco. Most likely, Strs. 6F-5 and 6D-1 consist of detritus generated by a limited array of domestic tasks that did not include processing meat to any great extent. Both deposits may also have accumulated over fairly short periods, thereby accounting for their relatively low densities of both ceramics and obsidian blades. Consequently, Strs. 6F-5 and 6D-1 do not seem to be residues from the full range of chores pursued in most house groups. They might not, in fact, be materials jettisoned from nearby residences but instead collections of garbage swept up in the course of cleaning general activity areas in the immediate vicinity.

**BEHAVIORAL AND MATERIAL SIMILARITIES AMONG ROBLE PHASE NACO VALLEY SITES**

As with Sites PVN 144 and PVN 306, Naco’s Roble phase population was apparently organized into numerous individual house groups and one household. The former occupied dwellings scattered across and beyond the settlement. Some of these domiciles were made completely of perishable materials (those associated with Str. 6F-3 and Operations 63, 69, and 75–77), while others had at least stone foundations (Str. 6F-4). No isolated residential platforms were identified among the investigated buildings, although they may simply not have been excavated. The one household at Naco, like its counterparts at Sites PVN 306 and PVN 144, occupied the most elaborately decorated and substantial domiciles known from the center (the northeast principal plaza). We will turn to the possible political significance of this pattern in chapter 6. The unusual form of Strs. 4F-8 and 4F-9 within the northeast plaza may tentatively suggest that substantial quantities of goods were stored here.

Relatively few artifacts were recovered from clear terminal debris contexts associated with residences in the northeast principal plaza. Some material that was possibly derived from this occupation was uncovered in Operation 72, a trench measuring 1.5 m x 3 m dug in the open area between Strs. 4F-8 and 4F-9 (Wonderley 1981). While the density of material recovered here does not match that of most Naco middens, artifacts were sufficiently diverse and plentiful as to suggest that they qualify as debris related to activities conducted in the near vicinity. These remains do point to the conduct of at least some
Activity patternning at Roble phase Naco

Prosaic chores that employed ceramic vessels and obsidian blades in the area. Uncertainty concerning the source of this debris, whether it comes from nearby Strs. 4F-8, 4F-9, or elsewhere, renders its interpretation problematic.

The excavated middens, on the other hand, contain a wide array of comparable material, pointing to the performance of much the same activities across house groups at the center and within the Naco valley generally. It is quite likely, therefore, that one factor that united members of different domestic webs within the larger Naco community was the repeated performance of basically the same tasks employing essentially the same materials by all residents of the center. Such mechanical solidarity (Durkheim 1984) was noted at Sites PVN 144 and PVN 306, where very similar ceramics, stone tools, and faunal remains were also found both in domestic middens and associated with substantial residences. All inhabitants of the Roble phase Naco valley, therefore, may have derived some sense of common identity from their oft-observed daily engagement in the same round of domestic chores completed using very familiar sets of materials.

Localized domestic nets were also enmeshed within wider bonds of loyalty that encompassed all of the Naco site's occupants. The southwest principal plaza was a venue where most, perhaps all, of the center's population gathered periodically to celebrate public rites enacted in the context of large-scale feasts. These observances focused on structures whose unusual forms set them apart from constructions associated with the mundane realm of domestic chores (Strs. 4F-1 and 4F-15). The rituals celebrated within the southwest principal plaza involved the same kinds of ladle incense burners employed in religious observances conducted in domestic circumstances. As at Sites PVN 306 and PVN 144, there does not appear to have been a suite of ritual gear used exclusively in public gatherings. The same case can be made for community-wide commensality; the food shared within domestic groups and the utensils on which it was served were employed on a grander scale in general convocations. We consider the political significance of these replications in chapter 8.

The same general activity patterns are noted at Naco and Sites PVN 306 and PVN 144. Similarities between the first two of these large centers are especially close. Both have comparably extensive western plazas that seemingly accommodated large numbers of people who gathered in them to conduct religious rites and share food using much the same sets of materials. Even more striking, the architectural foci of these activities have very similar forms; that is, round structures, sometimes supporting cogwheel constructions. Further, the debris generated by performances conducted within the western plazas was disposed of in much the same ways; incensario fragments were largely isolated from food remains in deposits on the patios' western flanks, whereas most of the more prosaic residues of feasting were tossed off the plazas' southwest
corners. It is highly likely, therefore, that very similar processes of network creation, reinforcement, and reproduction were employed in both Naco and Site PVN 306.

The case for Site PVN 144 is somewhat different. Here, there are no obvious special-purpose religious edifices; nor was a plaza set aside for public gatherings. Rites of network intensification instead took place within a space defined in part by substantial domestic buildings. Even here, however, there is good evidence for the enactment of settlement-wide affiliations through ritual and feasting, the debris from which is largely culled of food remains and concentrated on the west side of the plaza (Str. 144-19, Unit 1). Apparently, the same processes of network formation operated at centers of varied sizes, although their physical expressions accommodated differences in population size and leaders’ capacities to commission special-purpose constructions.

In all three investigated sites there is also a clear link between ritual foci and the residences of the only household recognized at each center. At Naco and Site PVN 306, the nexus of large-scale religious activity lies immediately west of the household, whereas at Site PVN 144 the household surrounds the plaza where public gatherings were convened. Such close juxtapositions of households and venues where community solidarity was enacted imply that participants in each center’s largest domestic web played significant roles in the rites of intensification conducted nearby (see chapter 8).

**Behavioral and Material Differences Among Roble Phase Naco Valley Sites**

In addition to the many behavioral and material parallels noted among the three investigated centers, there are several ways in which they differ. Each center has constructions with no known parallels at the others. The large crescent-shaped platforms, ballcourt, and possible sweatbath (Str. 4F-11) distinguish Naco’s large-scale building efforts, just as Strs. 144-5-2nd, 144-8, 144-18, 306-17, and the relatively large, isolated residences at Site PVN 306 set those settlements apart. More thorough excavation at the three sites may have eventually revealed functional and formal analogs for all of these edifices in each center. Although possible, we doubt this is the case. The Naco ballcourt, for example, has a singular form that is relatively easy to see from the surface, but nothing like it was recorded at the better-preserved Sites PVN 306 and PVN 144. It is therefore very likely that each center provided venues for certain behaviors that were not replicated at its near neighbors.

This is the case for activities that required specialized architectural forms. It may also have been true among individual house groups, although in this instance the differences are more subtly expressed. For example, the frequency of
Activity Patterning at Roble Phase Naco

Table 5.2 Density by excavated square meters of obsidian artifacts classified by general form at Roble phase Naco (after Wonderley 1981)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure/Operation (Op.)</th>
<th>Obsidian Blades</th>
<th>Obsidian Polyhedral Cores</th>
<th>Obsidian Flakes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4F-14</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6D-1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6F-3*</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6F-5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Op. 63</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Op. 69</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Op. 72</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Op. 75</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Op. 76</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Op. 77</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These figures are estimates based on the inference that 8 m² were excavated in Str. 6F-3; material Wonderley associated with Str. 6F-4 is excluded in these computations. Sufficient information from Strong and colleagues’ excavations at Str. 4F-16 was not available for inclusion in table 5.2.

Obsidian blades in Site PVN 306 and PVN 144 trash deposits is often greater than that attested to in Naco, reaching as many as 33 p/em² and 47 p/em², respectively. The latter figure is almost three times the highest measure of blade frequency obtained from Naco. Insofar as these results are not purely a result of sampling error, they suggest considerable variation in the intensities of blade use within and across all three settlements, with Naco’s residents somewhat less involved in such tasks than were their near neighbors to the northeast. These results are particularly interesting in that blade cores occur in higher frequencies in Naco middens than they do elsewhere in the Roble phase basin (table 5.2). This point is covered further in chapter 7. Suffice it to say for the present that loci of intense blade production were not necessarily areas of intense blade use. Rather, many of the blades made in certain house groups were seemingly intended for use elsewhere, with some of these consumers likely living outside the site where the tools were made.

Naco is also distinguished by a general paucity of obsidian and chert flakes, as well as the nuclei from which they were struck. As was mentioned in chapter 3, we did not recognize perlite as a distinct material category prior to 1992. Items glossed as “obsidian flakes” in collections analyzed before that date, therefore, would likely have been identified as perlite after it. Even bearing this point in mind, however, it is hard to escape the impression that obsidian blades not only dominated Naco’s late prehistoric lithic assemblage, but almost completely comprised it. Obsidian/perlite and chert flakes tend to be less common
than obsidian blades at Site PVN 144, where Str. 144-18 is the only exception to the pattern. At Site PVN 306, however, there are fifteen instances where flakes outnumber blades, including eleven buildings (Strs. 306-8, 306-20, 306-21, 306-72, 306-78, 306-79, 306-86, 306-124, 306-125, 306-130, and 306-174) and four middens (Str. 306-83, Operations 306AL/BQ, 306AX/BK, and 306BV). Blades may have been easier to obtain at Naco than elsewhere in the valley, where people supplemented these tools with simple flakes made using hard-hammer percussion. The latter interpretation is seemingly belied by the aforementioned high densities of obsidian blades in some Site PVN 144 and PVN 306 middens. Alternatively, flakes might have been employed for different purposes than blades, with the observed distribution reflecting more functional distinctions than those of access. In either case, Naco’s Roble phase denizens were neither making flake tools nor using them as much as were their compatriots at Sites PVN 144 and especially PVN 306.

Similarly, ceramic sherds are found in far greater densities within middens at Sites PVN 144 and PVN 306 than in Naco trash deposits. As was the case with obsidian blades, there is some overlap in these figures, and variations in frequency measures within sites are often as great as those between them. Nonetheless, it is potentially significant that the highest numbers were derived from sites outside Naco. Such discrepancies may reflect differences in the sizes of domestic groups that used specific trash deposits or, for the reasons cited earlier in this chapter and in chapters 3 and 4, variations in the intensities with which tasks that involved ceramic storage and serving vessels were pursued within different domestic webs. Unfortunately, the Naco data outlined by Wonderley do not contain figures on the relative proportions of jars and bowls. It is thus not possible to compare directly Wonderley’s findings with those obtained from Sites PVN 306 and PVN 144. We can therefore identify discrepancies in pottery densities but advance little further in understanding their roots in behavioral variation.

Figures for incensarios are not available for Naco; most of the recovered fragments are difficult to distinguish from Nolasco Bichrome bowls, and items from both functional classes were grouped together in the original analyses (Wonderley 1981). Wonderley does make reference to the general prevalence of incense burners in different deposits, especially where they are particularly common (e.g., Str. 4F-14), and these accounts provide a qualitative sense of censer distributions. It is important that many of the ladle censers recovered from Roble phase contexts at Naco were slipped white and painted with red designs identical to those appearing on Nolasco Bichrome bowls. Such decorated censers were not nearly as common at Sites PVN 144 and PVN 306; incense burners from the last two sites closely resemble Naco forms but are largely undecorated. Such distinctions may reflect significant differences in the
ways the occupants of the three settlements viewed incensarios and how they were incorporated into local belief systems.

Despite the considerable overlap in activities among the three sites, therefore, each differs to some extent in the presence of certain behaviors unique to a settlement, the intensities at which generally prevalent tasks were pursued, or both. The result is a complex mosaic of similarities and differences presumably resulting from variations in the extent to which members of different webs operating at domestic and site-wide scales engaged in unique or generally prevalent tasks. The overall impression is one of populations residing in distinct locales who, in the course of enacting the same basic cultural themes in mundane and exceptional circumstances, introduced some variations on those leitmotifs. The reasons underlying such differences relate to the ways networks were structured by the various agents who created and sustained these interconnections in pursuit of specific goals. We will return to these points in the succeeding chapters.