Networks of Power

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In this chapter we review the evidence for differential control over labor among population segments who resided at Sites PVN 144, PVN 306, and Naco. Once again, we argue that people achieve political preeminence not as individuals but as parts of groups whose members are united in their pursuit of common goals. What we are looking for in the Naco valley’s late prehistoric archaeological record is evidence for those networks and some indication of how successful their participants were in achieving prominence or in undermining the pretensions of others. Chapters 7–9 take up the issue of what resources members of different webs employed in their political contests. For the moment, however, we are primarily concerned with describing any hierarchies that might have existed at Naco and Sites PVN 306 and PVN 144 during the fourteenth through early sixteenth centuries.

ARCHITECTURAL VARIATION

Taken together, four levels of architectural elaboration pertain to residences at Sites PVN 144, PVN 306, and Naco. At the uppermost end are the four domiciles identified in Site PVN 306’s eastern principal plaza (EPP) (Strs. 306-21,
306-123, 306-128, and 306-11), as well as Strs. 4F-5 and early 4F-8 on Naco's northeast principal plaza. What distinguishes the first four habitations is their size; they are all stone-faced, earthen platforms that stand 0.46–1.33 m tall. The constructions in question are also extensive by local standards, covering 63–184 m$^2$ (based on a combination of excavated data and surface indications). At Naco, Str. 4F-5 stood 1 m high and encompassed approximately 204 m$^2$; the dimensions of Str. 4F-8's penultimate version are not given in published reports. At least five of these buildings, and probably all six, required considerable labor to erect and would have stood out on the landscape as prominent reminders of their occupants' preeminence.

Within this grouping there may be a further division based on the input of additional labor used to fashion surfaces of stone, plaster, or both. Stone pavements top terraces or summits on Strs. 306-21, 306-123, and 306-128, while the tops of Strs. 306-21 and 4F-5 were capped with white plaster. Early Str. 4F-8 was also flanked by two "patios" coated with plaster. In the case of the two Naco buildings the plaster was painted red, and there are signs that the walls of Str. 4F-5's superstructure were decorated with hues of red, yellow, and blue-gray (Wonderley 1981). Apparently, those who resided in these edifices were able to command the large workforce needed to raise and maintain their domiciles along with the skilled labor, in some cases, to process and apply lime plaster to them.

On the more modest end of the continuum of residential buildings are Strs. 306-79, 306-86, and 306-130. These are 0.27- to 0.48-m-high earthen platforms or terraces that measure 71–400 m$^2$ (based on excavated finds and surface configurations) and are bounded by stone facings. They lack any signs of formalized stone or plaster pavements. Each of these edifices apparently stands alone; at least no other constructions of comparable sizes are found in their immediate vicinities.

Slightly further down on the architectural scale are Strs. 144-1, 144-2, and 6F-4. The first two edifices are sizable (encompassing at least 60–87 m$^2$) but were built directly on ancient ground surface. Structure 6F-4 was not completely cleared; its uncovered portion measures 15 m$^2$. Stone is used in these buildings, although not as facings. Instead, rock walls served as foundations for perishable upper constructions fashioned of sticks and clay daub. Additional steps were taken to prepare Str. 144-2 for use. Here, the earthen floor was fired—apparently to harden it—and then covered, at least in part, with white plaster. No such treatment was identified within Strs. 144-1 and 6F-4, suggesting a slight difference in these house groups' abilities to muster skilled labor for their respective constructions.

Only hints were found of the simplest constructions erected at Sites PVN 144, PVN 306, and Naco. These are the buildings made of perishable material that are inferred to have existed near the numerous middens that surround the
principal plazas. Their presence is indicated primarily by the pieces of burned daub found within the trash deposits. Given the absence of clear platforms in the immediate environs of the middens, we presume that those residing near them lived in structures set on ground surface. The general paucity of stones of any size in these deposits tentatively indicates that the *bajareque* walls did not rest on substantial footings but instead rose directly from ground level.

**POWER AND ARCHITECTURE**

Several inferences can be drawn from these observations. First, people who lived in the Roble phase Naco valley were divided by their ability to control the labor needed to fashion their domiciles (see also Pugh 2009: 187–188; Rosenswig and Masson 2002). A few could activate networks large enough to transport the earth and rocks used in raising extensive platforms of varying heights and to pave parts of their surfaces with stones, plaster, or both. Next on the scale are those who could marshal the labor to fashion more modest platforms with fewer architectural elaborations. The most common form of residences consisted of surface-level buildings.

Second, considerable variation is seen within the four categories of residence outlined here. Structures 306-21 and 4F-5, for example, are larger and more lavishly outfitted with stone or plaster floors than any other known Roble phase domicile. Structure 306-11, at 1.2 m tall, may be next in line, although excavations here were not sufficiently extensive to determine how the platform’s surfaces were floored. The three seemingly isolated domiciles at Site PVN 306 also diverge in their heights and overall dimensions. Finally, buildings erected on ground level ranged from fairly substantial examples with stone foundations and plastered floors to those in which perishable walls apparently rose directly from the ancient surface. In short, the proposed architectural categories based on platform height, extent, and decorative elaboration most likely demarcate a continuum in the amount of skilled and unskilled labor invested in their construction (Pugh 2009: 188). A larger excavated sample might reveal a more unbroken progression in measures for these variables.

Third, even allowing for such continuity, there are variations in the size and degree of elaboration of the residences that comprise one household. Structure 306-21, as noted, stands out on both measures within the EPP. The differences between Strs. 144-1 and 144-2 are more subtle, although the latter’s fired and plastered floors set it apart in labor investment from its near neighbor. Distinctions between Strs. 4F-5 and early 4F-8 are less obvious, but the first does appear to have been the larger of the pair. Insofar as power is reflected architecturally, those residing within the three known households may well have enjoyed different degrees of political prominence.
Fourth, distinctions in the magnitudes of labor investments along this continuum are not great in any absolute sense. Variations in the dimensions of Roble phase domiciles are real and bespeak house groups’ differing abilities to mobilize networks of supporters in construction projects. The political ranks this variation implies, however, were not apparently distinguished by major power differences, at least as these distinctions were conveyed by the sizes of domiciles that pertained to different house groups.

Fifth, architectural differences at Sites PVN 306, PVN 144, and Naco almost certainly reflect variations in the stability of residential patterns. The more labor devoted to constructing a house group’s residence, the more likely its members were to remain in that spot for a protracted span. The three construction stages reconstructed for Str. 306-21 provide the clearest example of such continuity. Unfortunately, digging was not pursued far enough in the other studied Site PVN 306 platforms to determine their building sequences. In addition, Strong and his colleagues’ report on their work at Str. 4F-5 is not sufficiently clear to indicate whether the building was the result of multiple construction efforts (Strong, Kidder, and Paul 1938: 32, 34; Wonderley 1981). At the other end of the scale are the surface-level edifices erected beyond the principal plazas. The shallowness of the trash deposits associated with them points to relatively short occupations in each locale. It appears, therefore, that the higher up the power hierarchy a house group was, the more prone it was to reside in one place for fairly long periods (see also Blanton 1994; Tourtellot 1988).

One likely reason for this residential stability is an equivalent commitment to those with whom the domestic space was shared (Blanton 1994; Tourtellot 1988). Investing in substantial domestic architecture rooted the inhabitants to a specific place and materialized their connections with those who lived in the immediate area. It is no accident, therefore, that the most impressive domestic constructions at Naco and Site PVN 306 are grouped around the EPP and the northeast principal plaza, respectively. These sizable edifices made tangible the devotion of each of their respective house groups to the household of which they were a part. Similarly, the largest known domiciles at Site PVN 144 adjoin each other on the north flank of that settlement’s principal plaza. Although they did not represent labor investments on the scale of the EPP and northeast principal plaza constructions, Strs. 144-1 and 144-2 were relatively large and elaborately outfitted by the standards of that site. The investment of such locally unprecedented effort in their erection embodied these house groups’ enduring connections to the household they comprised.

The fact that some individual house groups made comparable, if more physically muted, claims to place is suggested by the isolated platforms excavated at Site PVN 306. The networks to which their members belonged
are less clearly expressed than is the case for the households at Naco and Sites PVN 306 and PVN 144. They may have been foci of larger domestic webs whose other participants lived in more modest, less physically salient and permanent constructions. Such putative nets might then have been materialized through the residences of their most powerful members, with the remaining participants in the domestic network lacking the resources to raise comparable expressions of their presence and importance. Middens scattered in the vicinities of Strs. 306-79, 306-86, and 306-130 could point to the existence of the latter’s physically fleeting habitations. It is impossible at this point, however, to draw such connections with any confidence. The shallowness of trash deposits and the general absence of substantial residences outside the main plazas of the investigated sites indicate that most house groups at all three settlements were fairly mobile and did not enshrine their interconnections through substantial investments in constructions.

### Power, Networks, and Architecture

The networks through which power was obtained, conveyed, and defended at Roble phase Naco valley centers were instantiated and expressed in part through construction projects of varying scales (see also Pauketat and Alt 2003). At both settlements, prominent households mobilized the productive efforts of their respective webs to raise domiciles that were locally prominent in size and degree of elaboration. Based on the dimensions of these constructions, the labor pool drawn on for their erection almost certainly included those who lived outside the plaza they surround. It may have involved all residents of the site. By building large, members of the prominent household instituted projects in which all network participants cooperated (Joyce 2004; Pauketat and Alt 2003). Insofar as social webs come to life in the context of shared endeavors, the process of building substantial domiciles was crucial to the maintenance of webs focused on particular households. The tangible outcomes of these efforts would have also served as persistent reminders of the nets mobilized to build the edifices surrounding the principal plazas (Joyce 2004; Pauketat and Alt 2003; Trigger 1990). In process or finished, therefore, sizable domiciles grouped around plazas instantiated and reproduced the power of the households who commissioned and lived within them.

The networks centered on isolated residential platforms were likely smaller than those actualized in the construction of their counterparts within dominant households. The labor devoted to the erection of such domiciles as Strs. 306-79, 306-86, and 306-130 was relatively sizable and not replicated in other residences within the immediate area. Raising these edifices likely involved the contributions of more than their residents. Consequently, each of
these domestic platforms was the nexus for webs that included individuals who inhabited far less physically prominent dwellings. The fact that only one such residence could be built by members of these nets, combined with the relatively small sizes of the resulting constructions, point to the less powerful positions of their leaders vis-à-vis the occupants of the EPP and Naco’s northeast principal plaza. The absence of clear structure clustering in these cases may also suggest that Strs. 306-79, 306-86, and 306-130 were not parts of households in the same ways as those residing around the latter plazas and Site PVN 144’s patio. Instead, they may have exerted power through webs that reached directly out to individual houses located at varying distances from the main residence.

We know very little about the constructions raised by the majority of Roble phase Naco valley residents, save that they were fashioned using easily acquired materials, primarily wooden posts and clay. Such constructions, no matter how small, were unlikely to have been built by single individuals. Rather, their erection required mobilizing support among members of the immediate house network and possibly beyond. These buildings, no less than their much larger counterparts, were embodiments of the webs in which their occupants participated. The small sizes of the nets they materialized point to the restricted power the members exercised and highlight their relative difficulty in making tangible claims to specific portions of a settlement.

Those who lived in such relatively impermanent dwellings also contributed to the construction of the more sizable residences on the main plazas and, at Site PVN 306, of their isolated counterparts. In a sense, therefore, even individuals who resided in the most modest constructions were rooted to specific areas, those connections materialized in physically salient architecture. Such ties, however, were expressed in the dwellings of others who likely mediated relations between people and place.

There is no evidence that the house and household networks at Sites PVN 306, PVN 144, and Naco nested neatly within each other. Instead, we argue that competition among house groups for labor resulted in a situation wherein web loyalties frequently overlapped. For example, each site was dominated by a primary household whose members drew on considerable numbers of people to build their residences. Variations in the dimensions and elaborateness of these domiciles imply that there were power differences among a household’s constituent house groups. Each of these entities residing on the EPP, Naco’s northeast principal plaza, and Site PVN 144’s main plaza may have drawn on its own web for construction projects. Those who occupied the largest, most lavishly outfitted domiciles would therefore have commanded the most extensive net. In this way, a household might ultimately control the labor of all residents at a settlement but not through the operation of a single unified network. Instead, each prominent house group in a household could have
fashioned its own web of supporters, webs that might well have overlapped in membership.

Counterbalancing these competitive tendencies within households were the close spacing of the residences of their component house groups around principal plazas and their members’ common participation in a wide range of tasks. These patterned and regular interactions bespeak a shared identity and considerable cooperation. As such, intra-household power contests were probably suppressed, and their actions were coordinated to some degree. In fact, it may have been the ability to separate themselves from the rest of the community and to cooperate in securing labor that contributed to the political prominence of the household as a group. Still, it would be a mistake to impute too much unity of purpose and action to these domestic networks.

Webs focused on the isolated residential platforms at Site PVN 306 were, for whatever reasons, not integrated directly within the dominant households. Their members may have owed allegiance to those who resided around the EPP, but that connection did not give them access to residential space on that plaza. These house groups were therefore also probably contesting for labor among themselves and with members of the dominant household. Variations in the sizes of isolated residences hint at the differential success their occupants enjoyed in these contests. Nevertheless, the apparent inability of those residing in Strs. 306-79, 306-86, and 306-130 to forge their own households implies that they were at a competitive disadvantage in marshaling labor compared with the occupants of the EPP. For whatever reasons, they had not developed the means of ensuring coordination among other house groups in political projects, an obstacle paramount households at all three sites had overcome. From this perspective, Strs. 306-79, 306-86, and 306-130 were nodes within a site-wide political network in which power was concentrated at relatively low levels. They occupied a subordinate position within the net focused on the core domestic group that occupied the EPP. Still, the fact that those who lived on isolated residential platforms could achieve even a modicum of political preeminence hints at their active roles as competitors for power within a site-wide net.

The residents of perishable surface-level buildings were less favorably positioned within political webs. Each of these house groups was a focal point of its own network through which labor was marshaled to fashion domiciles among, presumably, other tasks. The relatively insubstantial character of these constructions bespeaks comparably small domestic webs with limited memberships. As such, these house groups appear to have been the most powerless of all social segments at Sites PVN 144, PVN 306, and Naco. Their political positions, however, may have been less disadvantageous than this assessment suggests. Members of even the smallest house group were also participants in
webs that included the most preeminent members of their community. After all, if labor was mobilized through networks, then those who committed their productive efforts to building projects must ultimately have been participants in the same web as those who commissioned these endeavors. There are many ways to structure relations within a network of unequals, varying in the degree to which distinctions among their members are clearly drawn. The evidence from Sites PVN 306, PVN 144, and Naco suggests that whereas such divisions were maintained, they were not marked.

As noted earlier, measures of architectural size and elaboration are fairly continuous across all three sites. Further, even the largest residences at the settlements are not massive in any absolute sense. These observations indicate that power, far from being concentrated in a few hands, was diffused among members of different house groups, and the amount of labor any one of these entities could command was limited. Hierarchical distinctions were therefore subtly conveyed and power was dispersed and widely contested in the investigated settlements.

This ongoing rivalry would have worked to the advantage of those whose labor was in such demand. They could potentially have shifted network allegiances based on the advantages offered by different contestants. The situation, of course, may not have been that fluid. At the very least, would-be elites commanding labor within webs would have had to take into account the sensibilities of those who might find the blandishments of rival claimants attractive. Excessive demands for work, or insufficient generosity in rewarding that effort, could have yielded disaffection by, and loss of support from, web participants (discussed later in this chapter). In a situation where other house groups were competing for adherents to their own nets, ensuring supporters’ consent and contentment would have been crucial.

We hypothesize, therefore, that political power was exercised and reproduced through the operation of hierarchically structured networks focused on specific house groups. The most successful of these entities were those that found ways of organizing within households whose members presumably pooled their efforts to guarantee some degree of persistent control over the actions of subordinates. Nevertheless, there was no unified, well-defined hierarchy within any one site by which power over labor was exercised. Instead, leaders of different house groups contended for adherents even within the paramount households. Consequently, the adherents of house groups who were the objects of this competition were able to play competing magnates against each other. How much freedom they enjoyed in choosing among web allegiances is unclear. The relatively small sizes of even the largest residences at Sites PVN 144, PVN 306, and Naco imply that demands on subordinates’ productive capacities were limited. Political relations in the investigated late prehistoric
Naco valley settlements, therefore, may well have been structured according to hierarchical principles. The inability of rival factions to resolve their claims on the labor of the majority, to institutionalize ranked access to those productive efforts, meant that the degree of inequality was limited.

**VALLEY-WIDE POWER NETWORKS**

Along with political divisions within Naco valley sites, there were marked differences in the power of their respective elites. The levels of support commanded by households at Site PVN 306 and Naco were greater than those exercised by the residents of Site PVN 144’s main plaza. Consequently, the webs focused on leaders at Naco and Site PVN 306 were almost certainly more extensive, involving more people, than those centered on Site PVN 144’s paramount household. It may be, in fact, that some of the labor invested in Naco and possibly Site PVN 306 constructions was drawn in part from Site PVN 144’s inhabitants, who occupied subordinate positions in webs operating out of the larger settlements.

Relations between residents of Naco and Site PVN 306 are less clear than those of either center with Site PVN 144. Naco is far larger than its northeast neighbor (160 ha as opposed to 35 ha). If area covered positively correlates with the number of people who occupied that space, then it appears that Naco’s rulers were more successful at attracting followers to their settlement (de Montmollin 1989; Roscoe 1993). The sizes and degrees of elaboration exhibited by large-scale buildings in the two settlements are, however, roughly equivalent. The magnates in both cases, therefore, seemingly mobilized labor within networks of about equal size and enjoyed comparable levels of success in fashioning political nets among the basin’s Roble phase populations. Naco’s paramount household apparently attracted more people to its settlement than did the leaders at Site PVN 306 but may not have been better able to command their labor than were potentates at the latter center.

It is also possible that what we defined as Sites PVN 306, PVN 144, and Naco were treated by their residents and Spaniards alike as parts of the same extensive community glossed with one name (Gasco and Berdan 2003). Several lines of evidence tentatively support such a view. First, the apparent physical isolation of these sites may be more apparent than real. It was difficult within the basin, as it is throughout southern Mesoamerica, to identify Roble phase settlement (Wonderley 1985: 267; see also Voorhies and Gasco 2004: 12–13). As noted in chapters 3 and 4, the most common signs of habitation dating to this span are artifact scatters that usually only appear on open ground in newly plowed fields. As these conditions rarely pertained when survey was carried out, it is highly likely that late prehistoric occupations are underrepresented
in our sample. In fact, the apparent nucleation of people around Naco may in part be a result of the disrupted nature of the terrain there, cleared as it was for housing and plowed for commercial cultivation. These remains might be part of a more extensive settlement within which population was more or less evenly distributed over the roughly 5 km separating Naco from Sites PVN 144 and PVN 306.

Second, no two of the sites are located more than 3 km from each other, and they all demonstrate strikingly similar material and behavioral patterns (chapters 5, 7, and 8). There is no doubt that their occupants were in close contact throughout the Roble phase and were organized in comparable ways in pursuit of analogous goals that employed identical elements of material culture. Such close similarities imply that the boundaries we drew in delimiting Sites PVN 144, PVN 306, and Naco were arbitrary and porous.

What we class as different sites, therefore, may simply represent three physically prominent nodes within a single settlement cluster, the residents of which participated in one overarching political network. Residents of Naco’s northeast principal plaza may have enjoyed a slight advantage in power contests, but the amount of labor they controlled through their networks was apparently little greater than that wielded by their contemporaries residing around Site PVN 306’s EPP. Just as power was diffused within sites, it was not clearly centralized across the broader Naco settlement zone. This entire area was apparently characterized, therefore, by ongoing, largely unresolved political competitions that involved people of different ranks, all of whom participated to some degree in the same cultural and economic webs.

How was the unity of this network maintained despite competition between the two dominant households that anchored opposite ends of the settlement cluster? We argued in chapter 2 that nets of any sort exist only to the extent that the ties uniting their members are enacted at least periodically. Close material and behavioral similarities throughout the Naco settlement zone strongly indicate that some degree of inter-site solidarity was maintained, but where and how such feelings were enlivened is far from clear.

One possible locale for performing such rites of intensification is Site PVN 144’s main plaza. It lies between the Naco and Site PVN 306 paramount households and contains the strongest candidates for buildings that acted as gathering places for influential community members (Strs. 144-8 and 144-18; Str. 306-20 may have served a similar set of purposes, although the evidence is less clear). The dimensions of the rooms that grace Strs. 144-8 and 144-18 and their elaborate decorations, including at least three stucco masks that bounded entrances to them, set these two edifices apart from other recorded contemporary buildings in the basin. No other residential compound includes facilities for hosting meetings of comparable sizes in similar grandeur. In ad-
dition, constructions devoted to processing (Str. 144-11) and possibly storing and cooking food (Str. 144-5-2nd) are recorded only on Site PVN 144’s main plaza. This area may have been devoted to a mix of activities, including residences for those of intermediate social status (Strs. 144-1 and 144-2) and hosting large-scale gatherings accompanied by feasts. The recovery of ritual paraphernalia from within the patio (Str. 144-19, Unit 1) and renderings of deities on Strs. 144-8 and 144-18 imply that these convocations and celebrations were conducted in a context that linked the sacred with the profane. Such assemblies also maintained status distinctions between those who gathered in lavishly decorated public buildings and the rest, who collected together within the neighboring plaza. Even as affiliations encompassing the entire settlement cluster were affirmed, divisions between leaders and the led were reproduced.

Site PVN 144, therefore, was a site for constructing unity within both a specific household and the broader settlement cluster of which it was a part. We return to these points in chapters 8 and 10.

**POWER AND VALUABLES**

There is very little evidence that those who commanded labor also enjoyed privileged access to valuable commodities (see also Masson 1999, 2000b: 178–179; Rice 1984; Voorhies and Gasco 2004: 182; but compare with Pugh 2002–2004). The latter are often identified in archaeological contexts using some combination of these factors: complexity of the manufacturing process, skills required to transform the relevant raw material into finished goods, and the object’s foreign origin (Feinman, Upham, and Lightfoot 1981; Helms 1979, 1988, 1992, 1993; Hirth 1993; Kenoyer 2000: 91–92; Smith 1987, 2003a: 118). Using these criteria, very few goods qualify as “valuable” in Roble phase Naco valley assemblages. The most common examples are imported obsidian cores and the blades knapped from them, along with white-slipped, red-painted ceramic vessels made within the valley (Nolasco and La Victoria Bichromes; see chapters 1 and 8). In both cases, the items in question are found far more commonly in the middens scattered around the principal plazas than within these elite precincts (see also Masson 2000b: 151–153; Smith 1994: 153; Smith and Smith 2000: 225). At Site PVN 306, densities of obsidian blades range from 0 to 0.6 p/em$^2$ among domiciles within the EPP, 0 to 0.4 p/em$^2$ across the isolated residential platforms, and 1.7 to 33 p/em$^2$ within the ten excavated middens (six of these yielded figures between 10 and 33 p/em$^2$). The same pattern holds at Site PVN 144, where blades are found at rates of 0.4–1.3 p/em$^2$ among the two residences on the main plaza and at densities of 8–47 p/em$^2$ in those middens that have relatively large analyzed collections. Approximately 2 blades were found per excavated m$^2$ in the one investigated
deposit arguably from a domestic context in Naco’s northeast principal plaza, whereas six of the eight excavated middens beyond the core had density figures of 3–16 p/em².

The distribution of red-on-white ceramics at Sites PVN 144, PVN 306, and Naco parallels the pattern noted for obsidian blades. Looking exclusively at domestic contexts, Site PVN 306’s EPP has the lowest proportion of these decorated taxa (0.003%; N=1,145). In fact, only Str. 306-123 yielded fragments of Nolasco and La Victoria Bichromes (they comprise 0.03% of the analyzed sample of 875 sherds retrieved from this edifice’s terminal debris contexts). No bichromes were found among the 270 studied sherds from Strs. 306-79, 306-86, and 306-130.

Turning to the next lowest rung in the architectural hierarchy, Nolasco/La Victoria Bichromes make up 3 percent (N=776) and 2 percent (N=574) of the analyzed ceramic collections from Strs. 144-1 and 144-2, respectively. As was the case with obsidian blades, however, decorated ceramics are more prevalent in the domestic trash deposits of both settlements. At Site PVN 306, fragments of red-on-white–painted vessels comprise 1–11 percent of the analyzed midden collections, with six of the investigated deposits having figures that fall between 6 and 7 percent. Overall, Nolasco/La Victoria Bichromes make up 7 percent of all analyzed sherds from domestic trash deposits here (N=7,587). Red-on-white–painted sherds comprise 2–8 percent of the ceramics from the five Site PVN 144 middens that were sufficiently analyzed to provide reliable results. In general, these bichromes comprise 5 percent of the 1,583 ceramic fragments studied from these contexts.

The frequency of elaborately decorated pottery vessels (table 6.1) in the middens located outside Naco’s main plazas is striking (Wonderley 1981). Figures here range from 7 to 21 percent, with six of the collections yielding proportions of elaborately decorated ceramics of 13–21 percent. These numbers greatly exceed the measures obtained from analogous contexts at Sites PVN 306 and PVN 144. Some of this discrepancy results from the inclusion of incense burners in the general Nolasco taxon at Naco. Still, insofar as the slipping and painting of these vessels heightened their value in the eyes of those who used them, the distribution noted earlier indicates that such esteemed items were easily available to members of the humblest house groups at Naco. The low proportion of elaborately decorated ceramics from Operation 72 in the northeast principal plaza (3%) matches the pattern noted at Sites PVN 306 and PVN 144, where the putative elite residences yielded lower proportions of elaborately decorated pottery than did their humbler counterparts. Once again, however, the order of magnitude is different, with far higher percentages of decorated containers in the Operation 72 collection than at either of the other investigated paramount households. Everywhere, however, valuable
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Table 6.1 Proportions of elaborately decorated ceramics by excavated Roble phase contexts at the Site of Naco (Wonderley 1981)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure/Operation (Op.)</th>
<th>Nolasco Bichromes</th>
<th>All Elaborately Decorated Ceramics</th>
<th>Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4F-14</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1,590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6D-1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6F-3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1,218</td>
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<tr>
<td>6F-5</td>
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<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Op. 63</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Op. 69</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>702</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Op. 72</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>235</td>
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<tr>
<td>Op. 76</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Op. 77</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>439</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ceramics somehow made their way into the hands of non-elite consumers in greater quantities than was the case for their presumed social betters.

The two most prevalent valuables, therefore, seemed to have flowed away from those with power and toward their humbler counterparts living in the most modest constructions at all three centers (see also Smith 1994: 153; Smith and Smith 2000: 226; cf. Pugh 2002–2004). The significance of this pattern is considered in chapters 7 and 8, where we argue that the widespread distribution of esteemed and eye-catching items was integral to elite political strategies. Blades and decorated pottery were among the resources leaders deployed to circumscribe their networks of supporters and motivate participation in the nets thus defined. It is important to bear in mind that however well these schemes worked to capture labor, they resulted in the extensive dispersal of valuables among the lowest-ranking members of the population resident at the three investigated centers. We cannot say how Roble phase Naco valley elites might have distinguished themselves from the rest of the population through the ostentatious display of such perishable materials as cloth and less ephemeral items such as jewelry that did not end up in trash deposits. What is clear is that the creation of hierarchy and concentration of power required the provision of considerable material inducements to those who bore the burden of supporting claimants to high status. Apparently, that weight was lightened by the regular dissemination of esteemed items.