

Middle Formative Domestic Ritual at Chalcatzingo, Morelos

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The beginning of the Formative period in Mesoamerica is marked by the appearance of pottery in the archaeological record. Those initial pottery-using communities also provide some of the best early archaeological evidence of agriculture and sedentary life, developments that compelled new forms of social control and property rights over land, water, and labor (for example, Gossen 1996:292). The need to define and maintain relatively stable, probably multifamily social units over generations is witnessed in the archaeological record by the appearance of villages with substantial domestic architecture. That architecture should be considered as far more than mere shelters for households and their belongings. The house was a locus for the enactment of collective economic and ritual actions carried out by household members as a means to express their identity as a group, define intergroup roles and relationships, and distinguish their group from other households (Hendon 1999:98). If contemporary village life in central Mexico can be used as an interpretive guide, household membership was not based solely on the biology of kinship. It was continually enacted in practices confirming joint investment in a single shared food supply and by ritual references to common origins, often represented as group ancestors (for example, Sandstrom 2000; see also Vogt 1969:144). The veneration of ancestors or founders of the social group—as attested by mortuary ritual and the curation of heirlooms as signs of the household's origins and history—are practices that are closely tied to identity, property rights, and social status (Gossen 1996:292). As an important locus of ritual activities and also of deceased household members and their possessions, the house itself became a sanctified structure, a holy place (McAnany 1998), such that domestic ritual was

not substantively different from public ritual.

In this chapter we review and discuss the archaeological data from household contexts at Chalcatzingo that may serve to elucidate Middle Formative period domestic rituals at the site. Our review concludes with evidence suggesting that two structures at the site underwent a transformation from domestic house to religious shrine.

Chalcatzingo

Chalcatzingo, in the Amatzinac Valley of eastern Morelos, provides good archaeological evidence for aspects of domestic ritual and the sanctification of the house in the Middle Formative period. This site has become well known over the last fifty years for its Olmec-like stone monuments from the Middle Formative period. The carvings were associated with—and in some instances integrated into—the thriving settlement of houses, house gardens, and public architecture. Chalcatzingo was the chiefly center of the Amatzinac Valley, and it was also an active participant in long-distance exchange with centers in other regions, including the Basin of Mexico, Guerrero, Puebla, Oaxaca, and the Gulf coast (Grove 1987c, 1989; Grove et al. 1976:1209-1210; Hirth 1978).

A large-scale research project carried out at Chalcatzingo in the 1970s under the codirection of David Grove, Jorge Angulo, and Raul Arana (Grove 1984, 1987a) excavated many of its domestic structures, making Chalcatzingo the most extensively researched Middle Formative village site in the central highlands of Mexico. That research emphasized the study of domestic architecture, but the initial stages of the investigations also included stratigraphic excavations to ascertain the site's settlement history and ceramic chronology, because so

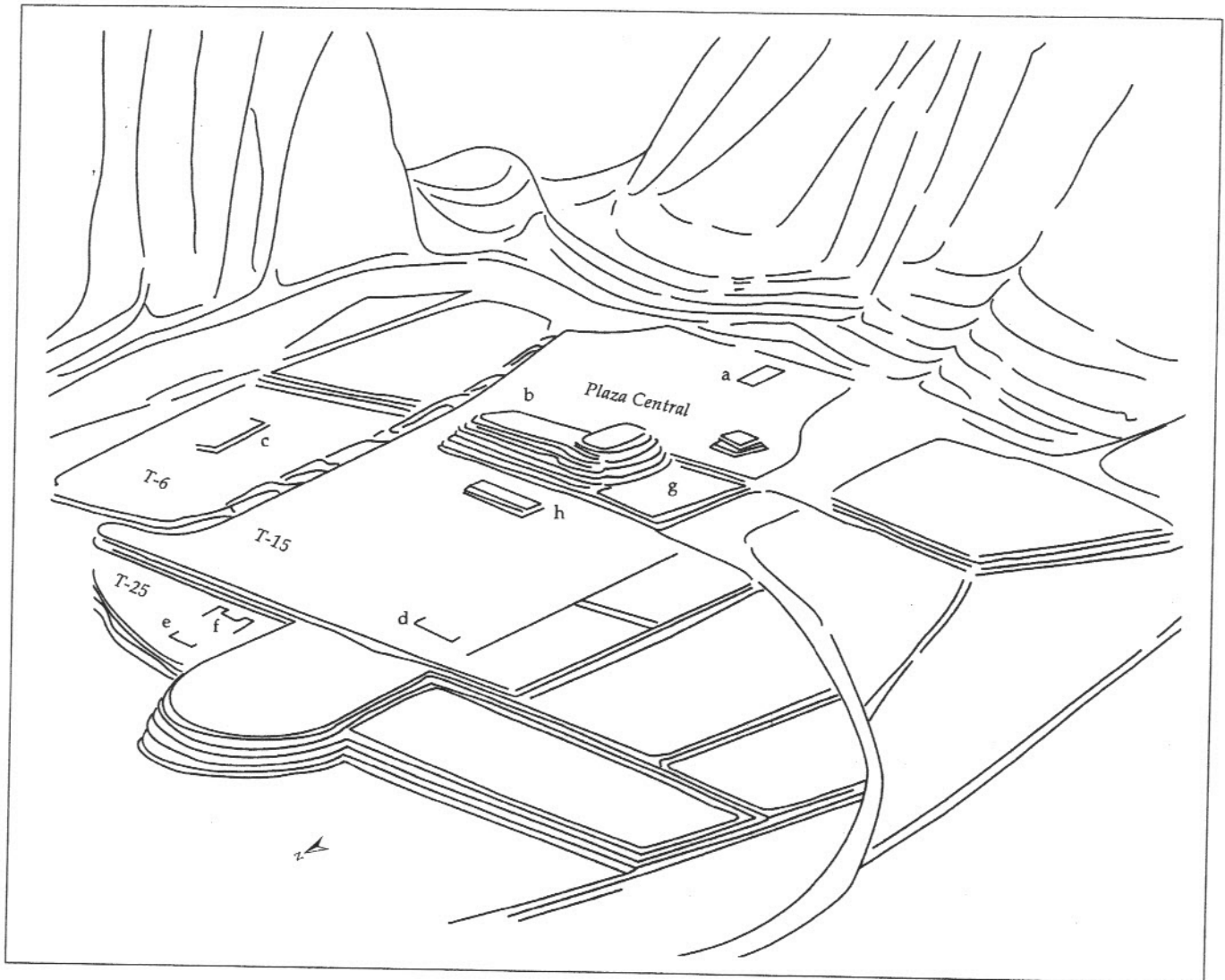


Figure 2.1 Schematic map of Chalcatzingo showing Formative period terraces and platforms: a, structure 1, Plaza Central; b, structure 4, Plaza Central; c, terrace 6, structure 1; d, terrace 15, structure 5; e, terrace 25, structure 2; f, Cantera phase sunken patio with tabletop altar, and Barranca phase terrace-25 structure 1; g, Classic period mounds and plaza; h, Classic period ballcourt

little was then known about the site. Those latter excavations served to define three major cultural phases of the Formative period: Amate (1500–1100 BC), Barranca (1100–700 BC), and Cantera (700–500 BC) (Cyphers and Grove 1987).

Chalcatzingo is situated at the base of two highly visible landmarks in eastern Morelos, the Cerro Delgado and the Cerro Chalcatzingo, conjoined hills that rise abruptly from the floor of the Amatzinac Valley. The natural hill slopes at the western base of those peaks were an attractive location for the site's earliest settlers, Amate phase farmers. There they found fertile soils for their

crops, a spring at the base of the hill for water, and a wide variety of wild flora and fauna in the various ecological zones of the *cerros* (hills) to provide them with an abundance of collectible foods. Even as early as the Amate phase, the settlement at Chalcatzingo seems to have been the valley's major village and chiefly center, a position it held to the end of the Middle Formative period. At that early date Chalcatzingo was already unique in the highlands for its "public" mound and platform architecture (Grove 1996:108, 111; Prindiville and Grove 1987:65, 78). Early in the following Barranca phase, after 1100 BC, the site's inhabitants extensively modified the natural hill slopes into a series of broad terraces with a series of cut-and-fill operations and that terracing remains a readily apparent feature of the landscape today (figure 2.1). The Barranca phase village extended across those terraces, as did the subsequent Cantera phase settlement (Prindiville and Grove 1987:79–80).

Archaeological and iconographic evidence indicate that Chalcatzingo's famed stone monumental art was carved and erected during the Cantera phase (for example, Grove 1987b:426, 1989:132–139), and the archaeological excavations of the Cantera phase village was a primary goal of the 1970s research. Those investigations were significantly aided by the fact that the forces of erosion and deposition on the site's many terraces seem to have maintained an equilibrium over the past 2500 years. Therefore, the terrace's ground surfaces today are in most cases the equivalent of their Cantera phase surfaces. Although vestiges of Cantera phase constructions should occur at the present surface level, the terraces have been plowed and planted extensively over the past century, so that most archaeological features in the upper 0 to 40 cm constituting the plow zone have been obscured or destroyed. On the other hand, because of that destruction, the locations of Cantera phase domestic structures on the terraces were relatively easy to identify by a distinctive surface concentration of Cantera phase white-ware potsherds (Prindiville and Grove 1987:66).

Evidence from surface concentrations of pottery, plus the project's extensive excavations, indicate that the Cantera phase village was a dispersed settlement, with just one domestic structure per terrace (Grove 1987b:421; Prindiville and Grove 1987:79–80). Dominating the dispersed village, near its center, was a massive 70-m-long Cantera phase earthen platform mound (Plaza Central [PC] structure 4), one of the very rare examples of public mound architecture in central Mexico before 500 BC (see figure 2.1).¹ Smaller Cantera phase rectangular platforms, each stone-faced and with in situ stelae, occur on terraces 6, 15, and 25 to the north of the earthen platform mound, PC structure 4 (Grove 1984:57–65; Prindiville and Grove 1987:63–66). Terrace 25 is also the location of a Cantera phase stone-walled sunken patio containing the only Gulf coast-style tabletop throne/altar known outside of the Olmec heartland (Fash 1987; Grove 1984:65–68, 1989:137–139).

The project's excavations of ten partial or complete Cantera phase domestic structures² revealed that they were large by Middle Formative period standards, with interior floor areas averaging slightly over 60 m². Their front walls had been constructed of wattle and daub, while the back and side walls were adobe brick (Prindiville and Grove 1987:66–71). Because of recent plowing, however, all that actually remained of most of those structures were their stone foundation walls, subfloor fill, and subfloor burials. It is to those data that

we therefore turn for evidence of domestic rituals at Chalcatzingo.

Domestic Ritual

The task of elucidating ritual activities strictly from a domestic structure's artifact content is both difficult and speculative at best, even when the interior living floor of a structure is intact and not destroyed by plowing and erosion, and most of the floors in the Chalcatzingo sample have been destroyed. However, we believe that at least three categories of data from the excavation of Chalcatzingo's Cantera phase houses are useful in elucidating domestic ritual, and we discuss each in turn: house subfloor burials, nonutilitarian artifacts from the house context, and the houses themselves.

Mortuary rituals

While mortuary ritual is not usually thought of as "domestic," the practice of burying a deceased person beneath the floor of his or her house was relatively common in pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica. In such instances the rituals accompanying those interments can be considered as within the realm of domestic ritual. Such burials reflect specific decisions made by the surviving kin and/or community members to inter the deceased within that structure rather than in some other, nondomestic location (for example, Joyce 1999:18). Julia Hendon (2000) observed that burials, together with buried caches and items placed in storage units, reflect practices that contribute to the construction of social memory within the household, further shaping its self-identity. Since the dead were likely transformed into ancestors as a result of mortuary rituals, including rites subsequent to the primary interment, burial within the house can also serve to maintain spatial contiguity between the living household members and their ancestors (Gillespie *ND*; McAnany 1995).

Subfloor graves were present in every Cantera phase domestic structure excavated at Chalcatzingo. Those graves exhibited great variability in terms of the labor associated with their preparation and also in the quantity and variety of artifacts found within them.³ Much of what has been published on the burials has considered their variability according to how it might reflect and elucidate Cantera phase social rankings (for example, Grove and Gillespie 1992; Merry de Morales 1987a), while less attention was given to information the burial data might provide on mortuary ritual. That neglect is perhaps understandable, for while the nonperishable objects placed

within and around graves probably represent a partial reflection of the mortuary ritual behavior, they are seldom very illuminating as to the nature of the actual rituals. One exception worth noting is the presence of white-ware double-loop handle censers (Merry de Morales 1987a:Fig. 8.1d) in approximately 10% of the graves. Those censers are significant because many exhibit charred interior bases, indicating that a substance such as copal incense had probably been burned in them as part of the mortuary ritual. It is additionally noteworthy that similar censer sherds were also recovered in the refuse deposits of every excavated Barranca and Cantera phase domestic structure, suggesting that incense burning in special censers was also a practice of nonmortuary domestic rituals as well.

One domestic structure, PC structure 1 (figure 2.1a), is unique for several reasons. Its subfloor area yielded 38 burials, the greatest number of burials occurring in any of Chalcatzingo's structures. It is also the only residence containing crypt graves constructed of stone slabs ($n=8$; Merry de Morales 1987a:95, 103; 1987b), and six apparently purposely "paired" sets of burials occur among its interments (1987a:104–107, Table 8.2). Crypt graves appear to be associated with high-rank individuals, and PC structure 1 has therefore been interpreted as the residence of the highest status family unit in the community, that of the village's leaders. They must have held their apical position for some time, indicating the presence of ascribed ranking (Grove 1987b:421; Grove and Gillespie 1992:192–193, 199; Merry de Morales 1987a:98). The presence of a statue head in the crypt of burial 3 (see below) within this house helps to validate that interpretation.

On the assumption that some domestic mortuary ritual behavior was carried out to maintain links with particular deceased persons as ancestors, we consider PC structure 1's burial pairs to be significant. No indications suggest that the individuals within paired graves had been interred at the same time. From the stratigraphic positioning of the graves, it is possible that the burials may have occurred years apart.⁴ If so, it indicates that the social memory of burial locations was important and conserved within the household group. It is noteworthy that two of the six paired sets of burials are crypt burial pairs; in fact, those pairs first called our attention to the phenomenon of pairing. The crypt of burial 3 (near the plow zone and damaged by plowing) was positioned directly above the crypt of burial 33, but at a right angle to it. Both crypts contained unique offerings that also link them as a pair: a stone statue head (monument 17) at the

feet of burial 3, and a greenstone were-jaguar figurine and a fragment of a jadeite bloodletter with burial 33 (Merry de Morales 1987a:103, Fig. 8.9). The inclusion of the statue head within burial 3's crypt led Grove (1981) to reconsider the then-current iconoclast-based theories relating to "monument mutilation" at Gulf coast Olmec sites (and at Chalcatzingo) and to posit instead that the decapitation of statues had more probably taken place upon the death of the individual portrayed in those monuments as part of the use life of this imagery. Burial 3 might therefore be the personage portrayed in monument 17, and the decapitation of his statue would probably have been part of the postmortem rituals carried out prior to the closing of the crypt.

The second crypt pair, burials 5 and 34, followed the pattern of the burial 3 and 33 pair, with the superimposed crypts set at right angles to each other. Interestingly, the bodies in both burials 5 and 34 were those of subadults. Only a gray-ware bowl occurred with burial 5, while burial 34 lacked any nonperishable offerings within the crypt but had two white double-loop handle censers on the exterior of the crypt, indicating that censuring continued after the capstones were placed over the crypt. The remaining four pairs (burials 10 and 27, 15 and 30, 19 and 32, and 21 and 31) were all direct (noncrypt) interments, and with the exception of a double-loop handle censer with burial 27, they provide little obvious data on mortuary ritual practice.

In sum, an extraordinary quality of PC structure 1 was materially marked by the continuity—over a significant period of time—of burials within this residence. The pairing of burials in particular indicates the importance of the remembered location of prior interments, as well as the linking of individuals in dyadic (if not larger) sets. In the conclusion to this chapter, we will return to consider the significance of such multiple burials in a single structure, home to a high-ranking family group, in terms of a likely transformation in its function.

General domestic rituals

For a consideration of the possible evidence of non-mortuary domestic rituals, we turn to the nonutilitarian artifacts that co-occur in almost every house context across the site. (The probable use of recognizably utilitarian artifacts in ritual actions cannot be considered here.) These objects present intriguing possibilities for a variety of ritual contexts, and many of them reflect widespread practices and beliefs. The large inventory of ceramic objects considered to have ritual functions

includes anthropomorphic and animal figurines, roller seals and flat stamps, whistles, ocarinas, and flutes; masks; and miniature vessels, decorated bars, and hollow spheres (for example, Grove 1987d:273–292, Tables 16.1–16.3). Among the lithic artifacts, polished greenstone “awl points,” well-made bifacial obsidian “needles,” and *pulidores* may have had ritual functions (Grove 1987d:291–292, Fig. 16.25; Thomson 1987:302–303, Figs. 17.12, 17.13). Here we limit our discussion to four of these artifact categories: ceramic figurines and masks, greenstone awl points, and obsidian needles.

Mesoamerican clay figurines have traditionally been viewed as cult objects (for example, Lee 1969:62–65), and figurines are thus one of the most obvious ritual artifact categories found in house contexts. Susan Gillespie’s (1987) analysis of the typological distribution of anthropomorphic figurines among the various residential structures at Chalcatzingo reveals a relatively homogeneous distribution, indicating that rituals which may have utilized specific figurine types were nonetheless common to all houses within the settlement.

We are able to deduce a common ritual practice and two ritual cult themes from Chalcatzingo’s figurine sample. The ritual practice is almost too obvious to mention but its significance too often goes unrecognized, namely, that the overwhelming majority of figurines recovered at sites of the Early and Middle Formative period in Mesoamerica, including Chalcatzingo, were purposely broken, usually by snapping their heads off in an act of decapitation. This practice is already evident in the earliest figurine assemblages known in Mesoamerica, the Barra and Locona phase figurines of the Chiapas coast (Blake et al. 1995:Fig. 7; Ceja Tenorio 1985: Fig. 45; John Clark, personal communication), suggesting it has antiquity beyond our present knowledge. It endured after the Formative period, and its near ubiquity across both space and time in Mesoamerica demonstrate that it was a fundamental ritual practice. In the Formative period this means of terminating the use life of anthropomorphic representations in clay was replicated when human images were later crafted in stone sculpture, although the latter practice is frequently misnamed “Olmec monument mutilation” (Grove 1981).

One cult theme has been suggested for Chalcatzingo figures by Ann Cyphers, based upon her detailed analysis of the large (more than 4000 fragments) Chalcatzingo figurine sample. Cyphers (1988, 1990, 1993) concluded that the majority of the site’s figurines were related to female life-cycle rituals. Her analysis also indicates that an-

thropomorphic figurines occur in domestic contexts at the site and within those contexts are found primarily in the food preparation area (that is, women’s work space).⁵

The most important figurine type at Cantera phase Chalcatzingo is the one designated C-8 in the Vaillant typology (Vaillant 1930:112). While C-8 figurines occur in minor numbers at other Middle Formative sites in central Mexico, they represent 41% of the total figurine sample recovered at Chalcatzingo (Grove 1987b:423). Unlike the rather generic quality of most figurines of the Middle Formative period, the facial features on C-8 figurines have a portrait-like aspect, and we have been able to define at least twenty different individuals in multiple occurrences in our sample. We believe that these figurines probably represent specific persons, most likely leaders or ancestral founders. They were probably used in ritual activities we once referred to as the “cult of the ruler” (Grove and Gillespie 1984; Gillespie 1987:269–270; Grove 1987b:423–426), although we now realize the greater likelihood that ancestors are portrayed in the imagery (Gillespie 1999). While at Chalcatzingo and Gulf coast Olmec sites this cult is also represented in stone portraiture restricted to the elites, we find it significant that at Chalcatzingo it is heavily represented by C-8 figurines in every excavated Cantera phase house in the settlement (Gillespie 1987:Figs. 15.3–15.10).

Zoomorphic figurines also occur primarily in house contexts, however, many of them had hollow bodies and apparently functioned as whistles and ocarinas. Nonanimal effigy whistles and ocarinas were also found predominantly in domestic contexts, suggesting that music was a component of domestic rituals.

A different artifact category clearly related to ritual activity is the ceramic mask. While such masks may certainly have been worn by participants in publicly witnessed community rituals, it is interesting to note that all of those found at Chalcatzingo come from domestic contexts (Grove 1987d:Table 16.2). Their presence in that context may simply be owing to their storage within a dwelling, but it may indicate that they functioned in both community and domestic rituals, possibly serving as the durable faces of household effigy figures made of more perishable materials. Donald Cordry, citing Fray Juan de Torquemada, observed that in the Late Postclassic period in central Mexico, the use of masks on “idols” was a common practice, and Cordry further suggested that some masks found in burials might have adorned “wooden idols” placed as burial furniture (1980:86).

It is significant that while the general appearances of



Figure 2.2 Clay mask of an "Old Man" with a small beard and two forehead tufts and lines and crease marks on the cheek (diameter: 16 cm)

the masks in the Chalcatzingo sample vary somewhat in eye form, ear treatment, and so forth, they all depict a fundamentally similar image of an old man—a face with a small beard and two tufts on the forehead and often lines forming creases in the cheek area (figure 2.2). The same image is also found among masks from Middle Formative (Zacatenco phase) Zohapilco (Niederberger 1976:Pl. 88, #1, 3) and Zacatenco (Vaillant 1930:Pl. 39, bottom row #1, 8) in the Basin of Mexico. The homogeneity of this image is intriguing, and importantly, the same face never appears in Chalcatzingo's extremely large figurine sample. In contrast to these Middle Formative objects, masks from the Early Formative period, as exemplified by those recovered at Tlatilco, are quite varied in their imagery (see, for example, Coe 1965:Figs. 161–169; García Moll et al. 1991:Burials 8, 22, 53, 57, 74; Piña Chán 1955:Pls. 19, 20, 27, 28). However, only a small number of the published masks from the Early Formative exhibit any attribute combinations similar to those of the masks from the Middle Formative in Chalcatzingo, such as forehead tufts (but singular in the Early Formative), beards, and cheek lines (Coe 1965:Fig. 162; García Moll et al. 1991:Burial 57; Piña Chán 1971:Fig. 20 a, b). The great individuality shown in the published Early Formative examples and the unusual homogeneity of the Middle Formative masks from Chalcatzingo and the Basin of

Mexico, if truly representative samples of masks and their changes over time, may signify an important ideological evolution toward a shared image. The attributes of that image suggest that it may be antecedent to the Late Formative development of recognizable Huehuetotl ("Old God") braziers in central Mexico (for example, at Cuicuilco, Piña Chán 1955:Figs. 23, 24), which were iconographically linked to similar forms in the later Classic and Postclassic periods.

Bloodletting or autosacrifice—the piercing or cutting of body parts to produce blood droplets as a sacrificial offering or ritual veneration—has been a popular topic of discussion among Mesoamerican scholars since the 1980s (for example, Joyce et al. 1991; Schele and Miller 1986). Despite its notable association with kingship rites (Schele and Miller 1986; Stuart 1988), autosacrifice seems to have been carried out by most members of pre-Hispanic societies, including in association with domestic ritual in a familial setting. A variety of objects is now commonly identified in archaeological assemblages as possibly having functioned as bloodletters, including stingray spines, greenstone awl points, obsidian needles, and shark's teeth (for example, Flannery 1976:341–344).

Within the Chalcatzingo inventory, two stingray spines were recovered in the excavations, but only one came from an unambiguous context—Barranca phase burial 107, interred within a large subsurface pit feature associated with a Barranca phase house on terrace 25 (figure 2.1, f; Fash 1987:86, Figs. 7.9–7.11). Greenstone awl points were also rare, with two recovered from the PC structure 1 house, one from the terrace 9A house, and one from the surface near the Barranca phase house on terrace 9B (Thomson 1987:302, Fig. 17.12). In contrast to this paucity of high-valued bloodletters, numerous small, finely bifacially flaked obsidian needles and some larger "lacerators" were recovered from nearly every domestic structure excavated (Grove 1987d:291–292, Fig. 16.25). While such objects could also have served mundane domestic tasks related to working leather or wood, it is equally probable that they functioned as bloodletters. Bloodletting could also have been carried out utilizing perishable implements, including cactus and *huizache* (*Acacia*) spines as shown in the Aztec *Codex Magliabecchiano* (Boone 1983:Folio 79r), as well as with the obsidian blades that are so common in household refuse.

Rituals of the domestic structure

Evidence exists for one further important dimension of domestic rites that should be obvious but is often

ignored, for it involves the actual house structure as an entity that was a focus of ritual action. At Chalcatzingo the significance of rituals devoted to the house itself became apparent from the clear evidence that domestic structures were periodically demolished, burned, and then rebuilt in the same location (Grove 1987b:422–423; Prindiville and Grove 1987:74–75). Primary indications for this repeated occurrence come from the structures' subfloor areas and consist of ash, burned daub fragments, and sections of earlier foundation walls. Houses were apparently partially dismantled, and reusable materials such as adobe bricks and roof beams were removed and saved, because burned adobes and large pieces of wood charcoal were generally not found. On the other hand, roof thatch, cane, and wattle-and-daub walls were burned. The renovation of a structure by dismantling and burning served pragmatic purposes; over time the cane, branches, and roof thatch deteriorate, and the walls and roof become infested with wasps, spiders, scorpions, and other vermin. Nevertheless, more than simple extermination was involved, for there is other ritual evidence associated with periodic house renewal, and the maintenance of the residence in exactly the same location must have been meaningful.

Ethnographic data elsewhere in Mesoamerica reveal that houses are considered to be living beings, often believed to have a "soul" or resident spirit. They must be ritually dedicated before they can be inhabited, continually nourished, cleansed of negative influences that could bring illness or misfortune to their inhabitants, and mourned when abandoned. In short, houses generally have a life-cycle parallel to that of the humans who co-occupy that space with them (Gillespie 2000c). Along these lines, archaeologists have begun to recognize evidence of "termination rituals," for instance, associated with Maya public architecture (for example, Garber 1983; Mock 1998b). Similar rituals apparently took place at Chalcatzingo (Grove 1987b:422–423). Notable among the ashy debris from the burning of the Chalcatzingo houses were tiny pieces of greenstone artifacts, primarily fragments of thin jadeite earspools, which seem to have been randomly scattered (see chapter 5). Greenstone was highly restricted at Chalcatzingo, yet these fragments (more than a hundred were recovered) occur within the subfloor ash at houses where there is no other archaeological evidence of greenstone use by that structure's inhabitants. People apparently scattered the greenstone fragments between the time of burning and the time of rebuilding as part of a ritual behavior associated with the

destruction and renewal of house structures (Grove 1987b:422–423).⁶ It is also likely that at least some of the potsherds that occur in the ashy subfloor context may not represent normal domestic trash but may instead have belonged to vessels broken during the same rituals.

Rebuilding the house in the same location is evidence of the association of individual household units with a specific locus in space. This was another important means for constructing and affirming their separate identities and their long-lived positions within the spatio-social network of the larger community. The longevity of house location also relates to the maintenance of social memory and ancestral ties that provide a unique history for each household. As Ruth Tringham (2000) observed for Neolithic Europe, the burning of a mud structure is as much an act of conservation as of destruction. The heat converts mudbrick and daub into an enduring material, which Neolithic householders took pains to incorporate into their new structures, to help ensure the continuity of the materiality of the house in its place, metaphorically associated with the continuity of the household that inhabited it.

From House to Shrine

In conclusion, domestic ritual framed by the sanctified house structure, served significant sociological functions of defining and preserving household identity and property, thereby facilitating its social reproduction, as well as the more obvious religious functions of maintaining prescribed relationships with the spirit world. Ancestors served as mediators in both respects, for ancestral origin was an important source of identity and legitimate rights to property, while ancestral spirits likely functioned as familiar intervenors with the more formidable cosmic forces.

We end this chapter with a hypothesis that we intend to test through new excavations at Chalcatzingo and through an extensive reanalysis of some of the 1970s data. We are intrigued by the possibility that at least two domestic structures at Chalcatzingo—the Cantera phase PC structure1 (figure 2.1, a) and the Barranca phase terrace 25 structure1 (figure 2.1, f)—actually underwent a transformation of function from houses to shrines. Patricia McNany (1998) has suggested such a phenomenon for the Maya, and Patrick Kirch (2000) has documented this transition in Polynesian archaeological contexts. In Kirch's interpretation, certain households were able to maintain a significant social presence over generations and thereby accumulate many burials within their resi-

dences, to the point where the houses became too sacred to live in. As repositories for ancestors and their spirits and also for heirloomed possessions, the dwellings became sanctified, functioning more as shrines for a burgeoning ancestral cult and serving as focus for a political network of related families, if not the entire community. Village leaders would have linked their authority to such structures, even if they no longer resided in them.

The 1970s Chalcatzingo research disclosed that three terraces in the northern site area had each been the location of Cantera phase stone-faced platform mounds—terrace 6 structure 1, terrace 15 structure 5, and terrace 25 structure 2 (figure 2.1 c,d,e; Fash 1987:92, Fig. 7.23; Grove and Cyphers 1987:35–36, 43–44, 48, Figs. 4.16, 4.27). Chalcatzingo's stone-faced platforms are unique within the archaeological record of the Middle Formative period in central Mexico. Furthermore, adjacent to each platform were one or more stelae depicting specific personages, perhaps Chalcatzingo's important leaders and ancestors (Grove 1984:57–62, 1987b:430–431, 1999:262–265). Because the upper surfaces of the platforms occur within the modern plow zone and have been destroyed, the 1970s excavations focused primarily on such basic concerns as their size and construction. While it seems likely that the platforms served as the substructures for elite domestic buildings (perhaps the residences of individuals depicted in the stelae or their descendants), that remains an unresolved question that we intend to investigate through new excavations.

As noted above, PC structure 1, at the extreme southern edge of the Cantera phase village, is the only excavated domestic structure with subfloor stone crypt graves. This observation is one of the reasons for the interpretation of PC structure 1 as the site's major elite residence, likely home to its rulers (for example, Grove 1987b:421–422; Merry de Morales 1987a:99). Our present suggestion that the stone-faced platforms in the northern site area were probably the location of elite residences does not negate the earlier interpretation but merely modifies it, for the northern platforms may postdate the PC structure 1 residence and signify a shift in location for the elites. That scenario may also help to explain why PC structure 1 has more than five times as many subfloor interments (38) as any of the other excavated Cantera phase domestic structures (each with 7 or fewer burials). Although the stratigraphic excavations of PC structure 1 indicate it had undergone several rebuildings and exhibited a great longevity (Grove and Cyphers 1987:27; Merry de Morales 1987a:Figs. 8.5–8.7), its age alone does

not account for the high number of burials, for most of the other excavated structures also seem to have had equal longevity. We hypothesize that the function of PC structure 1 may have gradually shifted from a domestic structure to a principal locus of ancestral rites and a halloved burial location for particular individuals, thus accounting for a large subfloor burial population even after the building was no longer habited. The house was transformed from domestic structure to shrine.

Although no other Cantera phase domestic structure matches the number of interments found within PC structure 1, a second large grouping of Cantera phase burials occurs on terrace 25, in the area of platform mounds in the northern area of the settlement (figure 2.1, f), a contrast with the southern location of the PC structures. Here sixteen Cantera phase burials were interred below the surface of a stone-walled sunken patio and also within the tabletop altar/throne situated against the patio's south wall. Two of those burials were stone crypt graves. The sunken patio is a Cantera phase construction, but it was built over the location of a Barranca phase domestic structure (terrace 25, structure 1). A small section of house floor, a large trash pit, and six burials remained from that Barranca phase dwelling (Fash 1987:85–91; Merry de Morales 1987b). This juxtaposition suggests that the Barranca phase structure was the residential focus of another important household, whose location became so sacred that it was transformed into a singular ritual space, into which even more of the ancestors were interred.

Finally, the spatial orientation along a north-south axis of what were likely two coeval multigenerational, high-ranked, extended family households fits within the orienting pattern of the site's constructed landscape (Grove 1999). That is, the households maintained their roles and identities within the larger community structure in part by the patterned placement of their domestic structures, reinforced by rituals focused on their dwellings and their ancestors in those locales. Altogether these data also illustrate the crucial role of house-based ritual in considering important questions about the nature and development of social and political organization of Middle Formative period in Chalcatzingo.

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Notes

1. Cantera phase PC structure 4 is the most recent of four identifiable building stages of the mound. Excavation data suggest that the earliest stage may date to the Amate phase (Grove and Cyphers 1987:29-30; Prindiville and Grove 1987:63, Fig. 6.2).
2. The ten structures are Plaza Central structure 1, terrace 4 structure 2, terrace-9A structure 1, terrace-11 structure 1, terrace-20 structure 1, terrace-23 structure 1, terrace-24 structure 1, terrace-27 structure 1, terrace-29 structure 1, and terrace S-39 (see Grove and Cyphers 1987:23-51). Figure 2.1 gives only the location of Plaza Central structure 1.
3. Data on each Chalcatzingo burial and its associated grave goods are presented in Merry de Morales (1987b) and therefore will not be individually cited in this chapter.
4. Because of the poor condition of most of the burials recovered, their gender could not be determined. While we suspect from the grave furniture that some burial pairs may have consisted of a male and a female (husband and wife?), we cannot prove that to be the case.
5. For detailed discussions of women's rituals during the Formative period, see Marcus (1998, 1999).
6. Among the contemporary Maya, the color green indicates that an object is "alive" and has a resident soul or animating force (Sosa 1989:137). It is possible that within the Chalcatzingo house renewal ceremony, the scattering of greenstone pieces, no matter how small, was a way of "enlivening" the house.