



DOMESTIC RITUAL IN ANCIENT MESOAMERICA

Edited by Patricia Plunket

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The Cotsen Institute of Archaeology
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Living with the Ancestors and Offering to the Gods

Domestic Ritual at Teotihuacan

Linda Manzanilla

During the first six centuries AD, a vast multiethnic city emerged as one of the foremost polities of the Classic horizon. Teotihuacan was an anomaly: The lack of dynastic iconography and the emphasis on collectivity, on offices more than office-holders (Cowgill 1997:137), stresses the possibility that the administrative, political, and ritual authority of the city was a collective entity (Manzanilla 1998b, ND). This corporate rulership frequently was depicted in the mural art as processions of anonymous priests.

Millon has established that priests played a major role in the city, and he suggests that its integration could have been achieved through constant pilgrimage to temples and exchange sites, so that politics became sacralized (Millon 1988:109). A model of the Mesoamerican cosmos, Teotihuacan was the main pilgrimage center and holy city of the Mexican highlands (Manzanilla 1997) (figure 5.1).

In our reconstruction of the economic organization of the Teotihuacan priesthood (Manzanilla 1993a), we have proposed that the rulers who administered Teotihuacan created various redistributive networks to assure the maintenance of the bureaucracy as well as full-time state-sponsored craftsmen (figure 5.2). It is also possible that by ritualizing offerings, the rulers fostered centralized storage in order to maintain these redistributive networks (Manzanilla 1993a).

One of the hallmarks of Teotihuacan was the existence of multifamily dwellings, called apartment compounds (Millon 1973). Each apartment generally consisted of several rooms at slightly different levels, arranged around open spaces, while the compounds comprised various apartments joined by passages for circulation; they included domestic sanctuaries, and the entire complex was

enclosed by an exterior wall (figure 5.3). It is believed that these compounds were occupied by corporate groups sharing kinship, residence, and occupation.

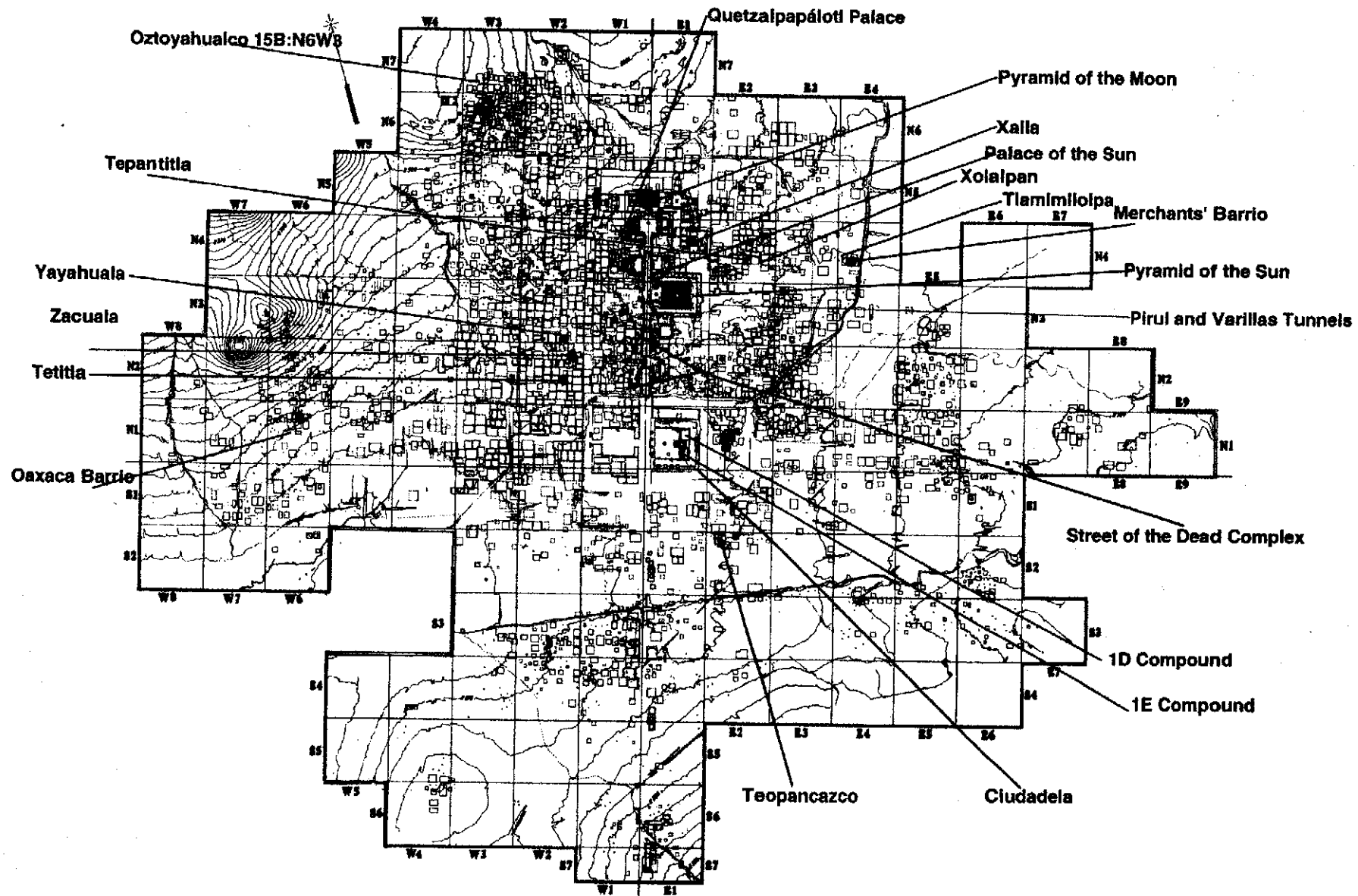
Many of the three-temple plazas found throughout the northern part of the ancient city may have been neighborhood centers for the cult and exchange activities of a number of specialized corporate groups living in surrounding apartment compounds. Other types of wards that did not involve three-temple complexes may be distinguished in the southern part of the city (Cabrera 1996).

We may envision domestic cult as the main low-level integrative device that the state had to integrate progressively larger social units such as household groups, barrios, districts, and finally the city itself. Domestic cult at Teotihuacan may be divided into three main categories: domestic ritual performed in courtyards, funerary cults, and abandonment rites. We will briefly review some of the elements of each of these.

Domestic Ritual in Courtyards

In Teotihuacan, domestic ritual is related particularly with the ritual courtyard of each household of each apartment compound (Manzanilla 1993b, Sanders 1966), which may involve a central altar, a small temple or sanctuary, and the adjacent rooms. Zacuala, Yayahuala, and Tepantitla had their temple structures set to the east of the main courtyard. At Zacuala (figure 5.3), the temple was substantial and consisted of a portico and two inner rooms; its roof was decorated with merlons (Séjourné 1966:118–126). At Yayahuala, the temple was large enough to be interpreted as a neighborhood temple (Séjourné 1966:213).

Elements related to domestic ritual, such as Tlaloc



5.1 Map of the city of Teotihuacan, with sites mentioned in the text. After Millon 1973

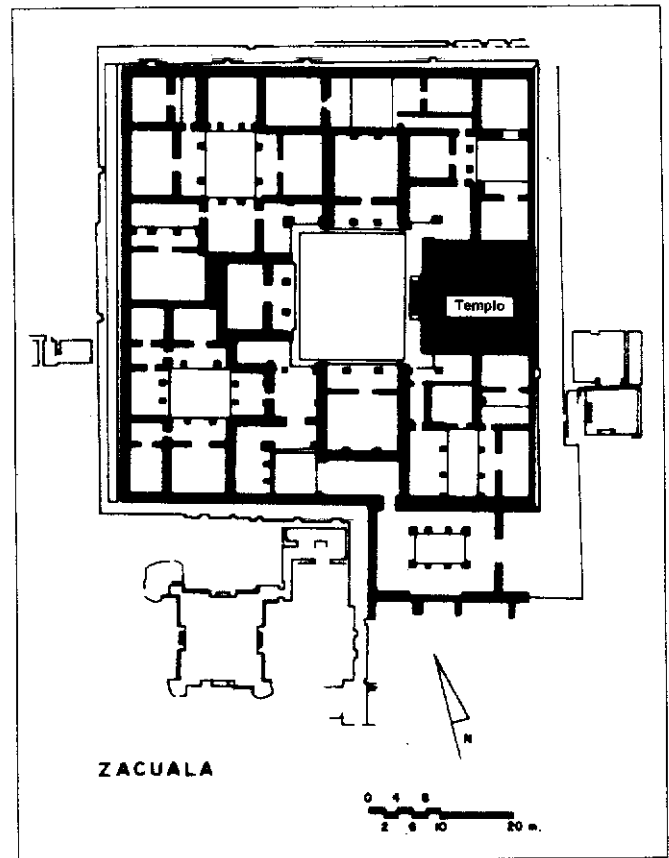


5.2 Mural painting from the Temple of Agriculture, showing urban ritual that may be recreated also at a domestic level. After Gamio 1922, I, Lám. 33

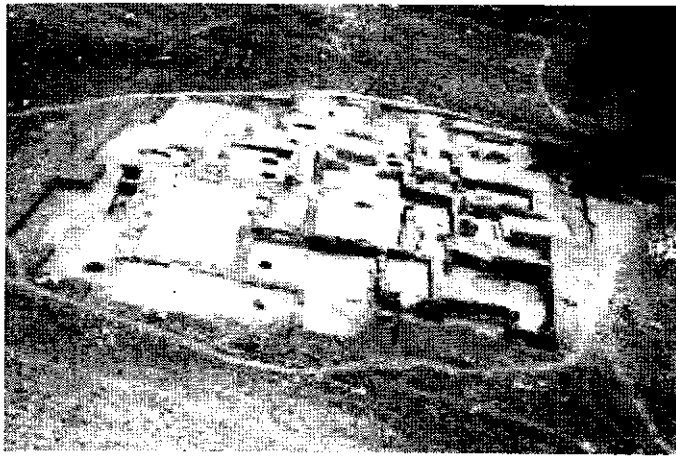
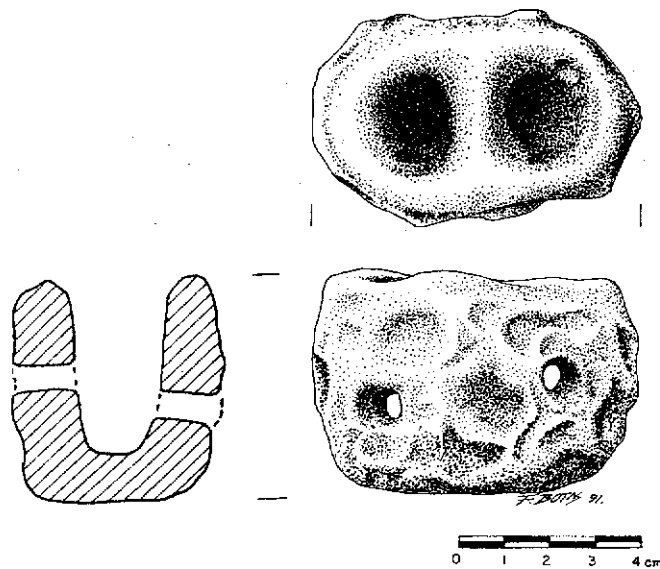
vases (associated with either burials or abandonment rites), Huehuateotl sculptures, theater censers, *talud-tablero* temple models, *candeleros* (figure 5.4), and other items, normally occur in the ritual courtyards or in the adjoining rooms, but they disappear from the archaeological record after the fall of the city (Cowgill 1997), a fact that strongly supports the idea that domestic ritual was deeply embedded within the state religion of Teotihuacan (see chapter 9).

To assess the components and spatial distribution of domestic ritual, as well as other activity areas in apartment compounds, we employed an interdisciplinary strategy that took into consideration chemical traces of activities on the plastered floors, paleobiological macroremains and microscopic evidence, architectural and funerary data, in addition to the distribution of artifacts and debris on floors of two compounds, Oztoyahualco 15B:N6W3 and Teopancazco 1NW:S2E2 (Barba et al. 1987; Manzanilla 1988-89; Manzanilla 1993b, 1996; Manzanilla and Barba 1990).

At Oztoyahualco (figure 5.5), a middle-class domestic



5.3 The residential compound of Zacuala. After Séjourné 1966



Top, 5.4 Candelero found at Ozttoyahualco 15B.N6W3. Manzanilla 1993b:Fig. 127. Reproduced with permission

Bottom, 5.5 View of excavations at the Ozttoyahualco apartment compound in the northwestern fringe of the city

compound on the northwestern fringe of the city, there was, in general, a clear functional differentiation among the various sectors of the structural complex. The southern sector was associated with refuse; areas for food preparation and consumption, as well as sleeping quarters, were set around the central portion of the compound; the eastern sector was rich in funerary and ritual components; the western sector was devoted to storage; and finally, the northwestern sector had the largest courtyard, probably the compound's meeting place.

As a result of our detailed mapping at Ozttoyahualco (figure 5.6, Manzanilla 1993b), we can suggest that one household in each compound was more active than the others in bonding the corporate group to the urban hierarchy. For Ozttoyahualco this appears to have been

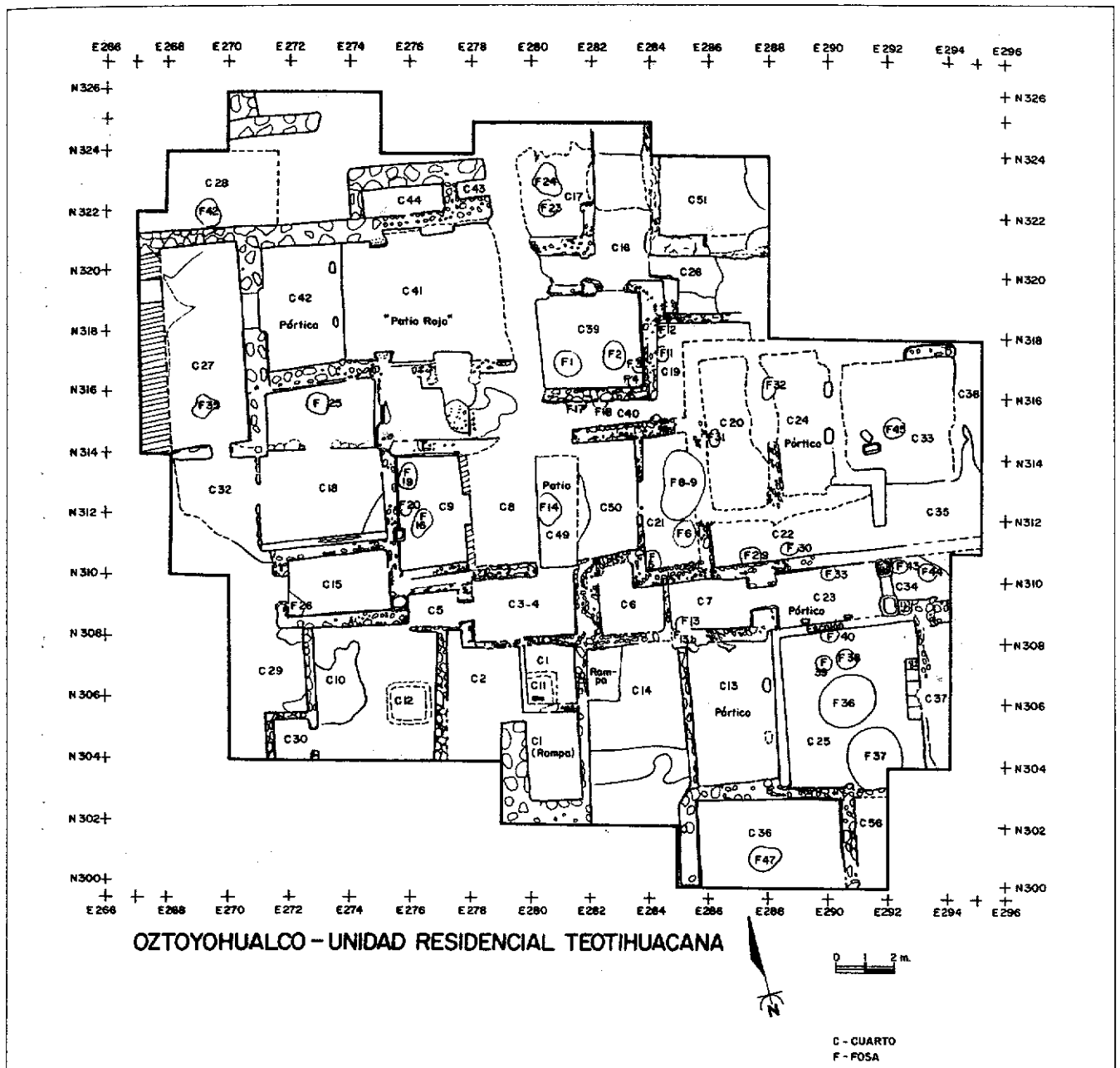
household 3, where the relation to Tlaloc, the state deity, is expressed by the presence of Tlaloc vases (figure 5.7), Tlaloc figurines, and Tlaloc depictions on handled covers (figure 5.8); this household also had the richest burials.

As Sanders (1966) noted for the Maquixco houses, in the Ozttoyahualco compound (figure 5.6) there were three ritual courtyards—C41, n. 25, and n. 33—each corresponding to an individual household; the largest of these, C41, probably also served as the gathering place for the compound group as a whole. It was designated the "Red Courtyard," because of the painted geometrical designs that ornamented its walls. This courtyard was the only one with a central altar in its earliest construction level. It had a sanctuary to the south (C57). To the north, two burned areas were detected by high pH and carbonate signatures, while to the south, the high phosphate anomalies perhaps resulted from the pouring of liquids in particular ceremonies (Ortiz and Barba 1993). We might suspect that the practice of pouring water together with seeds, a common depiction in Teotihuacan mural art, could have also been practiced in the ritual courtyards.

Some activity areas related to ritual preparation were detected around this main ritual courtyard. For example, in the corner of C9 (just to the south of the sanctuary C57), we found a concentration of fifty-eight obsidian prismatic blade fragments, a basalt percussor, and a limestone half sphere with radial cutmarks that probably resulted from the continuous cutting of rabbit and hare legs (figure 5.9) (Hernández 1993; Manzanilla 1993b).

The second ritual courtyard, n. 25, had evidence of a set of objects also found in other ritual courtyards: A sectional temple model (Manzanilla and Ortiz 1991), plaques from theater censers, three portrait figurines, two puppet figurines, candeleros, stone balls and hemispheres, a stucco polisher, and other artifacts, as well as portable stoves and indications of burning (Manzanilla 1993b:140–152). This courtyard had a sanctuary to the east (C37) that also contained fragments of puppet figurines.

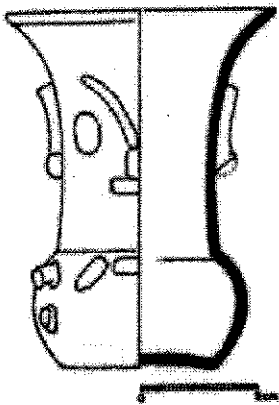
The third ritual courtyard, n. 33, had a complete portable basalt temple model crowned by a rabbit sculpture (figure 5.10), two puppet figurines, two candeleros, and two stucco polishers. In the southwestern corner, near the temple model, high phosphate and pH anomalies, together with the blackening of the stucco and the presence of three-pronged portable stoves, indicated burning as well as liquid pouring (Manzanilla 1993b:163–164). Near this courtyard, portico 24 and room 20 had high pH values indicating that certain ritual actions took place there (Ortiz and Barba 1993:637). The ritual use of fire,



5.6 Map of the Oztoyahualco apartment compound in the northwestern fringe of the city. Manzanilla 1993b. Reproduced with permission

evidenced by blackened floors and theater censers, had already been noted by Séjourné (1966:165) in courtyards at Zacuala, Yahualala, and Tetitla. At Oztoyahualco we documented numerous pits, particularly in the eastern half of the compound, which were used either for the burial of newborn babies (figure 5.11) or for the placement of offerings, often accompanied by flowers or *Gramineae* (for example, millet and maize). The northeastern household (n. 3) had most of the burials and also the greatest amount of foreign fauna.

Sanders (1966:138) has suggested that the rooms bordering ritual courtyards with altars at Maquixco may have served to store religious paraphernalia. Based on our data from Oztoyahualco, we propose that some of the preparation of ritual activities actually took place in these kinds of adjoining rooms. Theater censers were used profusely at the Xolalpan apartment compound, where they were found within the altar and in a western courtyard (Linné 1934:48), and at the Tlamimilolpa compound, where they were grouped around burial 4 and kept dismantled in



Top, 5.7 Tlaloc vase from room 51 at Oztoyahualco 15B:N6W3.

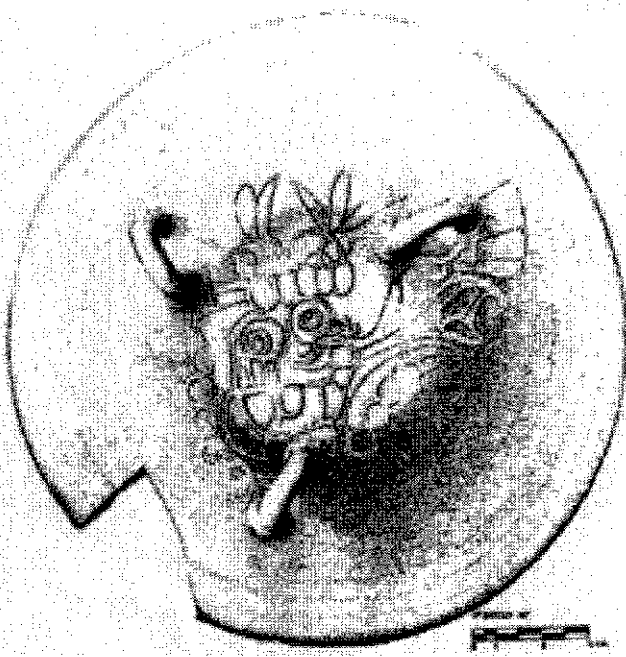
Manzanilla 1993b:Fig. 111. Reproduced with permission

Middle, 5.8 Handled cover from room 22 at Oztoyahualco 15B:N6W3 displaying a Tlaloc with the *amamalácotl* plant.

Manzanilla 1993b:Fig. 120. Reproduced with permission

Bottom, 5.9 Limestone half sphere from activity area 17 in room 9, Oztoyahualco 15B:N6W3.

Manzanilla 1993b:Fig. 393. Reproduced with permission



caches, ready for ritual use (Linné 1942:141). Decorated cylindrical tripod vessels, usually considered to be ritual in function, are common at Xolalpan and Tlamimilolpa, rare at Oztoyahualco, and recently two were found as part of a termination ritual dating to Late Tlamimilolpa/Early Xolalpan at Teopancazco (Manzanilla 1999, 2000).

Huehuetectl sculptures are often found in ritual courtyards (Linné 1934:48) or in the eastern rooms of apartment compounds (Manzanilla 1993b). At Teopancazco, a complete sculpture of the Fire God was found in a western inner room, thrown from its pedestal and lying face-down on the floor (figure 5.12) (Manzanilla 1998a).

Lineage gods were patrons of lines of descent, and above them probably stood neighborhood and occupational deities, gods of specific priestly groups, and state deities such as Tlaloc, patron of the city (López Austin 1989; Manzanilla 1993b). Tlaloc vases are often found in association with domestic cult either as grave goods, as can be seen at Oztoyahualco, Xolalpan, Tetitla, Zacuala Patios, and La Ventilla (Manzanilla 1993b; Sempowski 1987:126; Linné 1934:70), or as part of abandonment rites like the one recently documented at Teopancazco (Manzanilla 1998a).

The central altars of ritual courtyards often house important burials that include offerings of jadeite, slate, marine shells, miniature vases, and *floreros*, among other items (Sánchez 1989:373–375).

In sum, ritual courtyards in apartment compounds seem to be gathering places for one or all the households in the compound, and ritual actions appear to have been centered particularly around patron gods; ritual was one of the main integrating activities inside the compounds and promoted group cohesion and solidarity. Processional activities involved in the compound rituals may be traced by chemical analyses of stucco floors because liquids are spilled and burning takes place in portable theater censers, both of which leave characteristic signatures.



Top, 5.10 *Temple model surmounted by a rabbit patron god, courtyard 33, Oztoyahualco 15B:N6W3.*

Manzanilla 1993b:Fig. 384. Reproduced with permission

Middle, 5.11 *Neonate burial (n. 11), room 22, Oztoyahualco 15B:N6W3.*

Manzanilla 1993b:Fig. 81. Reproduced with permission

Bottom, 5.12 *Fire God (Huehuetotl) sculpture found in room 17 at Teopanacazco, lying face down as if purposely thrown from its pedestal.*

Manzanilla 1998a. Reproduced with permission

Funerary Rituals

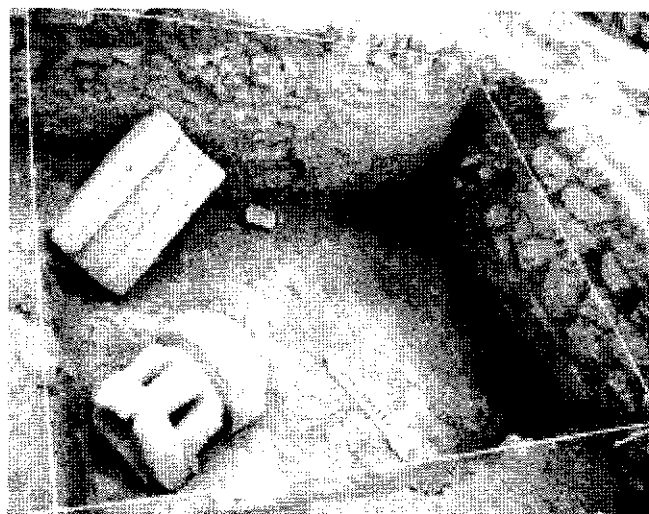
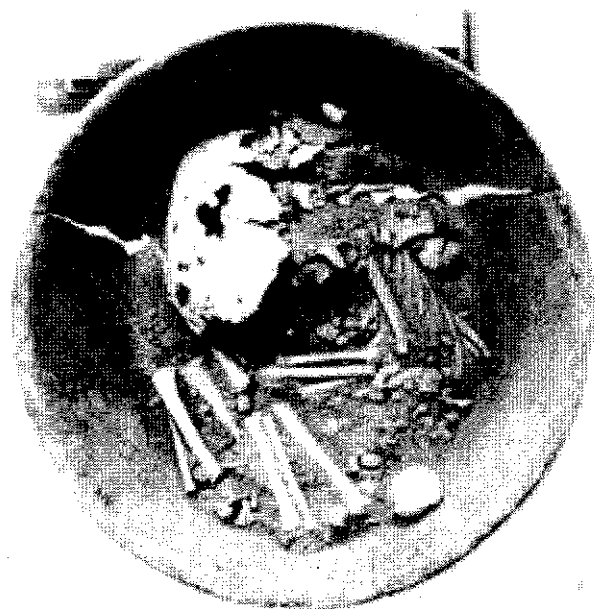
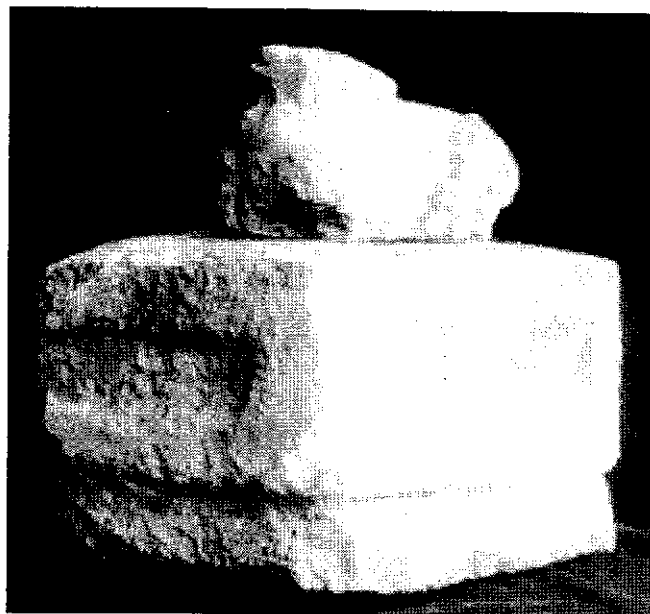
The existence of multiple kin and ethnic groups throughout the city's long period of occupation is evidenced by diverse burial patterns that can be broadly summarized as follows. Teotihuacan's local population buried their dead according to local canons: The deceased were placed in a seated or flexed position and buried in pits excavated into the apartment compound floors. The specific location of the burial as well as the funerary rites and associated offerings varied both within and between apartment compounds.

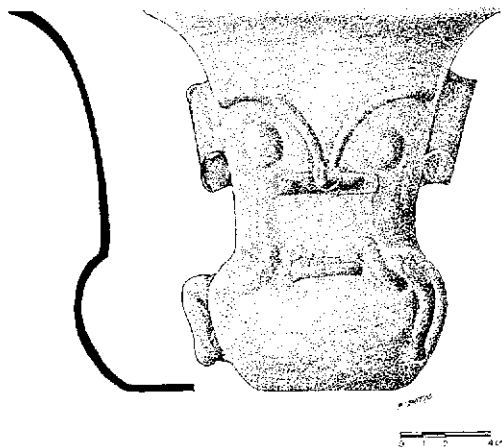
Foreigners were interred according to their specific cultural traditions although their burials often adopted some Teotihuacan practices. An example of this is found in the Oaxaca Barrio, Tlailotlacan, where burials are Zapotec in style, with regard to location, container, position, and funerary rites (notably the placement of the dead in an extended position, the prevalence of multiple burials, and the use of formal tombs), but include both Zapotec and Teotihuacan grave goods (see chapter 6).

Burials are common in Teotihuacan domestic contexts, revealing the likely existence of an ancestors' cult. With the exception of Tlajinga 33 and probably La Ventilla, however, the number of adults interred in each compound is too low, relative to the area of the compound, to account for most of its inhabitants (Sempowski 1992:30; see chapter 3).

Certain burials in each compound had very rich offerings. At Oztoyahualco, burial 8 was exceptional, for it contained an adult male in his twenties accompanied by a theater incense burner depicting a human male figure wearing an impressive headdress and the image of a huge stylized butterfly on his chest (Manzanilla and Carreón 1991) (figure 5.13). The funerary ritual involved the following actions:

- the incense burner appliqué was removed from the lid, and all were placed around the deceased within the grave;





Top, 5.13 Theater censer associated with burial 8 at Ozttoyahualco 15B:N6W3. Manzanilla 1993b, II:494. Reproduced with permission
 Middle, 5.15 Huehuetotl sculpture found at Teopanazco, room 17, as part of the abandonment rites. Illustration by Fernando Botas
 Bottom, 5.16 Tlaloc vase found at Teopanazco, room 25, as part of the abandonment rites. Illustration by Fernando Botas

- the chimney was deposited toward the west, with the lid and the butterfly priest to the east of the skull; and
- the appliquéd representations of plants and sustenance (ears of corn, squash, squash flowers, cotton, tamales, tortillas, and perhaps amaranth bread and pulque) were placed to the south, while the four-petaled flowers, roundels representing feathers, and mica disks were set to both the east and west.

At Xolalpan nearly all the burials were grouped in the southwestern section of the compound, while at Tlamimilolpa, they were concentrated in the central-southern section; at Tetitla, most burials were in the northeastern section, and at Ozttoyahualco, they were found primarily in the eastern sector.

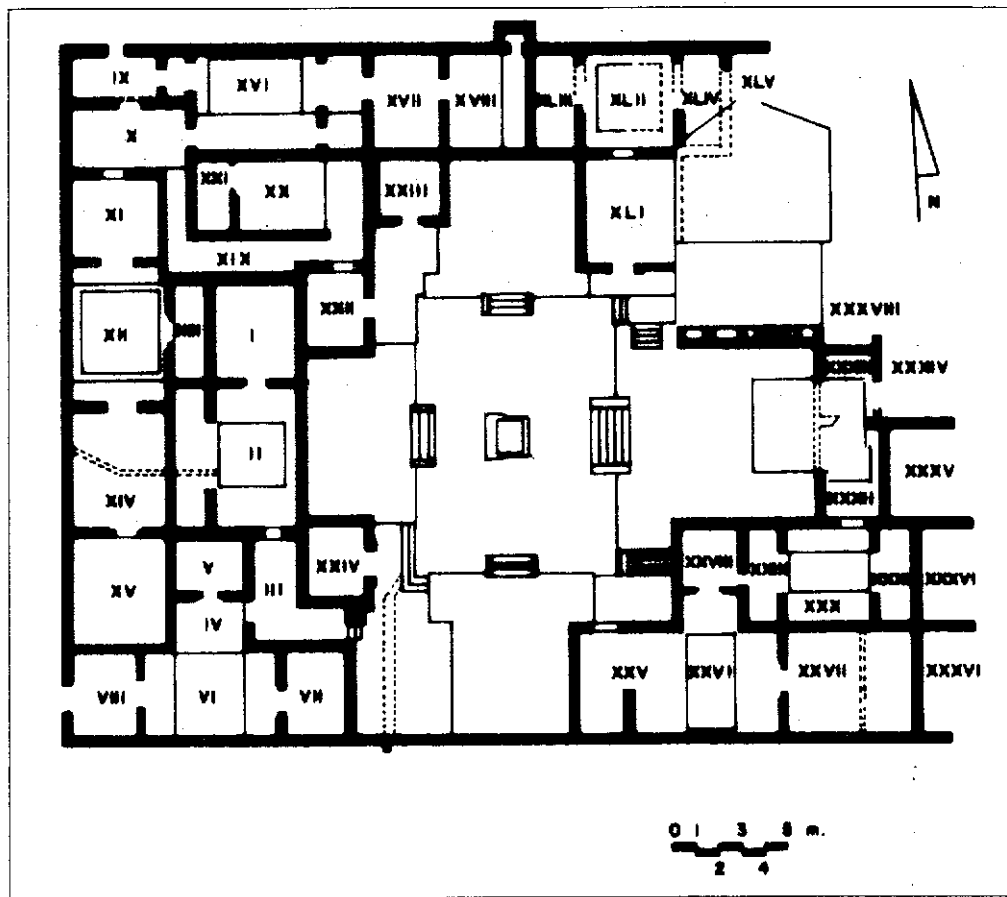
Other types of funerary rituals have been detected elsewhere. In burial 1 at Tetitla, Moore (1966:79) describes a rite that involved the throwing of earth together with miniature pots and plates. In burial 1 at Tlamimilolpa, Linné (1942:126-132) noted a cremated skeleton with stacked vases as well as other tripods that were "killed" and then tossed inside the grave, together with candeleros; obsidian instruments; miniature grinding stones; bone instruments; ornaments of bone, jade and slate, pyrite disks and objects; figurine heads, mats, textiles, and bark cloth; and censer plaques. A fire was then lit on top of the offerings.

Burial practices may have been markers of social identity, which would have been important in a huge multiethnic city such as Teotihuacan. Funerary patterns reflected social status based on descent, gender, age and/or occupation, and appear to mirror the hierarchical organization inside each apartment compound (Manzanilla 1996), as well as the external urban hierarchy (see Millon 1976).

Termination and Abandonment Rituals

Evidence of fire has been detected by Millon (1988:149-152) in nearly all monumental structures along the Street of the Dead (Teotihuacan's main north-south axis), and in the temples and associated public buildings throughout the rest of the city. Yet, of the 965 apartment compounds examined, only 45 (5%) showed clear evidence of burning. In general, burning was found in front of and on both sides of the staircases, and on top of the temple platforms (Millon 1988:150).

As part of the aforementioned events, many ritual elements were left on top of the last occupation floors in different parts of the city. Millon (1988:151) has noted the



5.14 Map of the apartment compound of Xolalpan. After Linné 1934

violent burning and destruction of the Puma Group, located on the east side of the Street of the Dead, where a green onyx sculpture was smashed and its fragments then scattered over the floor, an act that suggests a ritual component in the ravaging of the city (see chapter 2). In structure 1D, the northern palace of the Ciudadela, the remains of violent destruction have also been reported (Jarquín and Martínez 1982:103); these include shattered Tlaloc vases, Tlaloc disks, Huehuetotl burners, masks, theater censers, Olmec-style sculptures, obsidian eccentrics, jade beads, decorated slate plaques, zoomorphic sculptures, and concentrations of candeleros (one of these, in the central courtyard of structure 1D, consisted of 160 candeleros).

In apartment compounds, such as Xolalpan, situated northeast of the Pyramid of the Sun, Linné (1934:48) registered evidence of the destruction of the main central red altar (figure 5.14). The ritual objects related to this structure—ornamented cylindrical and circular plaques, greenstone plaques, theater censers, a Huehuetotl brazier, and other items—were found scattered between the altar and the staircase of the eastern platform.

The frequent finds of Huehuetotl braziers on the lat-

est occupation floors, as exemplified by the northern palace of the Ciudadela or the Xolalpan apartment compound, are reminiscent of what we have found at more peripheral apartment compounds, such as Oztoyahualco (Manzanilla 1993b:108), where fragments of similar braziers were found strewn on the floor of room 7. Shattered pottery vessels were also documented on top of the floors (Manzanilla 1993b:109, Figs. 61 and 62). At Teopanaczo, an apartment compound to the southeast of the Ciudadela, we found a complete Huehuetotl brazier lying face down just above the floor of room 17, as if it had been thrown down from a low pedestal, the carving on the anterior surface had been effaced (figure 5.15; see also figure 5.12). A Tlaloc vase was found smashed on top of room 25, the face of the god turned towards the floor (figure 5.16) (Manzanilla 1998a). It is interesting to note this same type of behavior in various different sectors of the city.

At Tlamimilolpa, another apartment compound, Linné (1942:115) describes "a systematic tearing down and breaking up of large and complicated 'incense burners' to form part of the filling on top of which the new floors were laid." This type of ritual action suggests that each

new construction stage was accompanied by termination and renewal rites (see chapter 6).

In our explorations at Oztoyahualco and Teopancazco, we have detected what seem to be the remains of abandonment ceremonies. At Teopancazco these involve concentrations of *candeleros*, "killed" vessels that include exceptional stucco-decorated tripods, three-prong ceramic burners, and other items (Manzanilla 1998a), while at Oztoyahualco they consisted of human mandibles deposited together with layers of ceramic pots and seashells, each layer separated by thrown earth (Manzanilla 1993b:101, Fig. 101). In both Teopancazco and Oztoyahualco we documented examples of killed stone vessels (Hernández 1993:447, Fig. 331).

Termination rituals were often practiced when apartment compounds were remodeled or abandoned. Various types of objects and human bones were buried as part of these ceremonies; yet, we believe that setting fire to some parts of the apartment compound also may have formed part of the ritual actions used to terminate domestic occupations in Teotihuacan. At Teopancazco, for example, only rooms C17 and C14, as well as porticoes C18 and C15, show evidence of intense fire (Manzanilla 1998a). Along the northeastern fringe of the main courtyard of this compound, a termination ritual was enacted upon the rebuilding of this courtyard during Early Xolalpan times (dated to AD 350 by ¹⁴C and archaeomagnetism). Many types of pottery were buried, and some of them were apparently killed; notable among these killed vessels were two complete large stucco-painted tripods (Manzanilla 2000). Other items included in the termination ritual offering were mica, slate, lithics, bone, shell, and greenstone.

Final Comment

Domestic ritual at Teotihuacan was an important means of promoting group cohesion and manifesting ethnic identity. As we have shown above, it can be identified in specific ritual courtyards of each household within the apartment compounds, in burial practices and funerary ceremonies, and in the termination rituals associated with rebuilding and abandonment.

Twenty years ago, Millon (1981:209) proposed that the apartment compounds were the result of state strategies devised to efficiently control Teotihuacan's enormous population by providing convenient units for administration, taxation, and labor recruitment. For Millon, the fact that the apartment compounds did not survive the collapse of the political system, suggested an "indivisible bond between the architectural unit, the social unit inhabiting it, and the character of the state that fostered it" (1981:210). An issue that needs to be more fully explored, is the nature of that "indivisible bond," the articulation between these social units and the political, economic, and ideological forces that produced them. As all of the authors in this volume have pointed out, ritual, whether it be domestic, popular, court, or state, is one of the most significant means of integrating social units. At Teotihuacan, pouring liquids, throwing seeds and fertility elements, burning gifts and incense, offering goods at courtyard altars and temples both within the apartment compounds as well as at other scales throughout the city, may have been one of the most important means of creating and maintaining social solidarity within a distinctly heterogeneous population.