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CHAPTER ONE

COMMONER RITUAL, COMMONER IDEOLOGY

*(Sub-)Alternate Views of Social Complexity
in Prehispanic Mesoamerica*

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this volume is to elucidate the roles of commoners in ancient Mesoamerica as active ideological agents who participated in numerous ways in religious expression and ritual practice. The lacunae in understanding these roles is somewhat understandable given that ritual, religion, and ideology cut across multiple avenues of research, creating a challenge to scholars seeking to understand the different ways in which members of societies express shared belief systems. Given, however, that non-elites are frequently omitted from hypotheses or conclusions regarding ritual behavior and religious expression, at least in any capacity beyond being modeled as inert supplicants (a conclusion strongly rejected by most contributors to this volume, also see L. Brown 2000, 2004; Hutson 2002; A. Joyce and Winter 1996; Kunen et al. 2002; Mathews and Garber 2004; and Plunket 2002a), it is imperative that the challenge of foregrounding their

participation in these symbolic systems be taken up in a coherent and systematic fashion. At stake is a greater and probably more realistic understanding of how all individuals, elite and non-elite alike in Mesoamerica and far beyond, contributed to and participated in the regular (re-)constitution of social process.

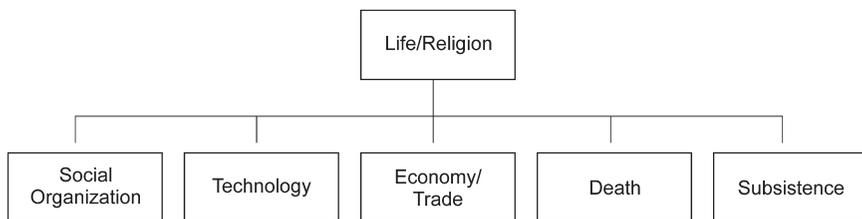
Selecting ritual and ideology from the perspective of commoners, with implications for larger social contexts and bundled factional relations, as topics of study is timely. A great deal of attention has been turned in recent years to understanding ritual and ideology within complex and so-called egalitarian societies (select cross-cultural examples include Bell 1992, 1997; Blanton et al. 1996; Demarest and Conrad 1992; DeMarrais et al. 1996; Dietler and Hayden 2001; Earle 1997; Insoll 2004; Marcus and Flannery 2004; Plunket 2002b; Rappaport 1999; and Wolf 1999). Many of these studies impel and are motivated by agency-centered examinations that increasingly seek to situate elements of deliberate action within a multivocalic and polythetic prehistoric past (e.g., Brumfiel 1992; Dobres and Robb 2000; Hendon and Joyce 2004; Hutson 2002; A. Joyce et al. 2001; A. Joyce and Winter 1996; Love 1999; Robin 2002; Sheets 2000). Just as with other recent advances in subject-centered anthropological archaeology, the effort to understand the ideo-ritual role(s) of commoners in complex societies should not be considered as “adding commoners and stirring.” As we question many of the underlying assumptions in research into these topics, serious and fundamental reworking of extant models of who controlled the past and by what means were resources—particularly of the “esoteric” type—allocated will be required. These issues lie at the very heart of organizational variation across all societies, past or present, complex or otherwise.

In this chapter, I seek to reconcile these frameworks, the study of ritual and ideology with agentive approaches to understanding motivated behavior, to advance our “common” understanding of how members of ancient societies, particularly those born or lived of non-elite standing, contended with the myriad tensions and forces that shaped their lives. Following chapters pursue a number of courses—some not necessarily in agreement with the ideas proposed here—to demonstrate aspects of ritual technology and ideological practice that are to be found in the material record of prehispanic Mesoamerican commoners. The data sets these chapters present are instrumental in helping renew and revise our view of many-stranded social relationships that hinged on unequal access to different kinds of goods, materials, resources, prestige, and perhaps ideas

and information (see Preface). My own approach derives from an effort to find alternatives to the Dominant Ideology Thesis, which I argue directly or indirectly shapes most of the current scholarship regarding ritual performance and ideological motivation. Implicated are James Scott's (1985, 1990) notions of a Hidden Transcript and Social Resistance. I explore recent conceptualizations of power and the application of Structuration Theory (following Giddens 1979, 1984) to revise our understanding of the cause-and-effect relationship between commoners and elites. The significance of ritual and generative meaning, two related forces that served to cohere as well as distinguish social constituencies, are viewed from the perspective of collective remembrances (following Halbwachs 1941, 1952 [Coser 1992]). The result is a dynamic model of the ritualization of ideologically charged recursive relationships not simply between elites and non-elites themselves but between the organizational rules and expectations that shaped the negotiated relations between those categories and the variability they contain (see Preface). It is critical to note that this effort is *not* intended to place ancient commoners on equal footing with elites but rather to build a framework for examining the actions of both, particularly for commoners and particularly with respect to ideologically motivated ritual behavior, from a balanced perspective that fairly considers the contributions of all social elements in the constituted past.

SITUATING RELIGION, RITUAL, AND IDEOLOGY

The terms *religion*, *ritual*, and *ideology* are difficult to define with precision, and the many different approaches to their study reflect the diverse theoretical landscape that is one of the strengths of anthropological archaeology. Not all chapters in this volume employ these terms in the same ways; these discrepancies reflect the state of research in our discipline and individual perceptions and usages. Defining religion in particular proves evasive and I defer to Timothy Insoll (2004:7) who notes: "In many respects it [religion] is indefinable, being concerned with thoughts, beliefs, actions and material, and how these things are weighted. The important point to make is that regardless of all the complexities of definition which have been attempted—we have to recognize that religion also includes the intangible, the irrational, and the indefinable." Insoll (2004:figure 2) questions whether the analytical separation of religion from other "tangible" aspects of culture is appropriate (also Lansing 1991:5–8) and advocates recentralizing the religious condition of humanity in our overall



1.1. A view of the place of religion in archaeological models of historic and prehistoric societies (redrawn from Insoll 2004:figure 2).

conceptualization of the past (Figure 1.1). In general terms, religion refers to the supernatural, mythological, and mundane; spans temporal scales from the past through the present and into the future; and can apply to both the individual and the collective. Religion almost always, however, refers to an element of experience, expectation, or reality that lies outside the immediate control of humans (see Winter et al., Chapter 7, for a detailed discussion of Zapotec religious beliefs). Archaeologists are charged with discerning how different members of societies participated in these shared belief systems—quite clearly no easy task.

Ritual has been more concretely addressed in archaeological research. Joyce Marcus (1999:70–71), after Kent Flannery (1976), proposes a useful framework for studying ritual behavior, urging examiners to consider three components: *content*, referring to the subject of the ritual; *locus of performance*, referring to the place where rituals were carried out; and the *performers* of ritual. These elements and others have been considered in ethnoarchaeological studies of ritual practice that hold further potential to guide archaeological inquiry (e.g., L. Brown 2004; Deal 1988). Some of the chapters in this volume, such as Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 9, follow these guidelines, making considerable headway in elucidating the potential diversity of ritual technologies that are to be found in Mesoamerica. Understanding the purposes and motivations for ritual, however, represents an added challenge to archaeological investigations of its material residues. Evon Vogt (1993:7–8) echoes Edmund Leach (1966) and Clifford Geertz (1965) in considering ritual as symbolic behavior in the sense that it most typically stores and conveys information. Elements of this definition with beneficial implications for the current collection of studies are ritual's *informative* aspects—that is, its content, meaning, and representation through use of symbols—and *communicative* aspects. Symbols can be material or performative and include figurines, carved monuments, oral

narratives and utterances, gestures, and even built space and landscapes (Robb 1998).

Like Vogt, Roy Rappaport sees ritual as a highly symbolic system of communication. Rappaport (1999:24), however, emphasizes ritual's active nature, defining it as "the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely decoded by the performers." This observation suggests that all audiences and congregations witnessing ritual performances have some at least partial awareness and comprehension of the messages being conveyed and may at times even be key participants. He also considers the place of ritual in the enculturation process, arguing that it be considered as a *structure*, "that is, a more or less enduring set of relations among a number of general but variable features" (Rappaport 1999:3). He views ritual as the performative generation of meaning and information from which belief systems spring or on which they are founded. Although we might view the relationship between the act and the belief as being like that of the chicken and the egg, his point is both clear and profound: the performance (including use of material symbols) of ritual should occupy a central place in study not just of belief systems but also of the constitution of relations and processes of enculturation based on sets of knowledge that are passed on or reaffirmed from person to person or from one generation to the next. Within this framework, two variables in particular are important for archaeological study: unpacking the information content of symbolic communications and discerning the role(s) played by individuals in a diverse population.

Scholars have often drawn a close, although not precise, correspondence between ideology and religion, with religious and artistic expression as the most common examples of symbolic behavior. "Ideotechnic" artifacts (following Binford 1962) have included figurines, carvings, symbols of "natural agencies," and other difficult-to-interpret items. Ideology, in the past often termed a *worldview*, has historically been approached as but one of many components or subsystems of larger human-environment systems. Ideology/religion served to provide meaning for the surrounding social, natural, and supernatural realms (Robb 1998:334–337) but was seen as impossible for contemporary scholars to fully comprehend. Its perceived inaccessibility reduced ideo-religious behavior to epiphenomenon status (see Flannery 1972)—that is, acknowledged to have been important but diminished in priority alongside more tangible elements of the past such as economics and subsistence (Demarest 1992:6–7). When considered at all, ritual and religious behavior (here synonymous with ideology-as-

worldview) was generally ascribed a functional role explaining order, coherence, and equilibrium among ancient social orders (Vayda 1968:x).

As the view of religion and its material expression—ritual—as shaping forces in human behavior has grown, ideology has become more widely perceived as not simply a shared belief system but rather communication-based strategies for maintaining the various social positions that archaeological subjects clearly held. Elites not only are believed to have manipulated meaning to underscore their paramount status but are often seen as the very source of ritual knowledge and overseers of most ceremonies. This position includes approaches that have been described as Marxist (e.g., Miller and Tilley 1984; Pearson 1982, 1984; Trigger 1991) and those that have not (e.g., Brumfiel 1998; Clark 1997; Demarest 1992; DeMarrais et al. 1996; Earle 1997; Freidel 1992; Inomata 2001; Peregrin 1991). One primary difference between these two positions is whether ideology (consisting of accessing and conveying esoteric information, conducting auspicious ceremonies, or maintaining contact with the divine) is viewed as naturalizing social distinction and unifying societies or serves to mask and obfuscate differences through deliberate intent, control, manipulation, and misinformation. Another significant difference is whether intentionality is attributed to the individual or the collective. David Freidel (1992), for example, argues for ideology as a unifying force in society, albeit one that is embedded primarily in and personified by rulers and exalted elites in their role as shamans facilitating intercommunication between the present and the Otherworld. In this usage ideological intent is manifest at the individual level for elites but on the collective level for non-elites.

In spite of these differences and at risk of oversimplification, I see these perspectives as comparable in terms of how our discipline has come to understand the roles of commoners. In both approaches, non-elites receive little attention as potential contributors in any meaningful sense to the maintenance of religious or social systems, institutions, and practices. Rather, non-elite involvement frequently is reduced to that of cultural dupes, or as “actors easily taken in by an ideology foisted upon them by the rich, famous, and powerful” (Clark 1996:52): ideology flows from or is maintained and manipulated by individual or small collectives of elites, whose names and identities are often known to archaeologists (in sharp contrast to the anonymous status of non-elites). In this sense it has mattered little whether commoners penetrate the layers of symbolic messaging; their involvement in these systems is rendered as mute, passive, or acquiescent. Although this conclusion is not universal among all

current scholars of ritual and ideology, it can be fairly said that research has historically concluded very little regarding commoners, omitting any explanation of commoners' participation or implying an understanding derived exclusively from the roles of elites. One of this volume's goals is to begin exploring alternative approaches to theorizing the ritual and ideological roles of non-elite subjects in the past.

In *Huitzilopochtli's Conquest*, Elizabeth Brumfiel (1998:3) has offered a definition of ideology that allows us to move beyond (although not altogether depart from) notions of control, domination, and resistance, describing ideology as "a system of values and ideas that promotes social behavior benefiting some classes or interest groups more than others." This definition is well suited to examining the motivated behaviors of commoners and other subgroups that compose complex societies without imposing preconceptions about who did what to whom by what sleights of hand or controls over other social institutions (also Emerson 1997; Gilman 1989:68). In my own usage, *ideology* pertains to symbolic communication between parties (individuals or collectives) in ritualized practices for the purpose of shaping social relations. Other behavioral arenas beyond ritual—economic, political, subsistence—can also be, and frequently are, subsumed under the ideologic. Not all rituals are ideologically motivated and not all ideological practices project political agendas. There is a significant overlap of these ideas, however, that reflects the motivated actions of individuals or groups seeking to establish or reaffirm their identities in the context of larger social tensions and relationships. These motivated actions—*ideological practices* in my terminology—can both emphasize and minimize social differences. Opening up our understanding of these actions and the message content that underlies them to include more than dynamics of social control and maintenance of hierarchy and political status quo remains the challenge for archaeologists concerned with illuminating commoners' roles in the constitution of social relationships. This approach will be explored in further detail later in this chapter.

THE DOMINANT IDEOLOGY THESIS AND BEYOND

The predominating view of commoner involvement in ritual and ideological practice that I have described above conforms, intentionally or not, rather closely to the expectations of the Dominant Ideology Thesis (DIT), which was derived from Marxist models that describe some of

the processes by which elites maintain control over society. As Nicholas Abercrombie and colleagues (1980) explain, in the DIT, beliefs are “materialized” by privileged members of society, often those with political, economic, and/or military power, who thereby control the message content of key symbols and social events to advance their own agendas. Followers remain largely unaware of the degree of their mystification and are generally incapable of any sort of self-awareness (without outside intervention) except in relation to their elite counterparts (see the subaltern historiographer Ranajit Guha’s [1999:18–19] discussion of commoner “negative consciousness”). As an example, this position is endorsed by Michael Shanks and Christopher Tilley (1992:130), who correlate ideology with maintaining relations of inequality and argue: “[I]deology does not refer to a body of ideas, views, beliefs, held by a group of people, but is an aspect of a limited practice, an aspect of relations of inequality. Ideological practice misrepresents contradictions in the interests of the dominant group.” Their position, that ideology is used to maintain inequality as elite actors mask imbalances manifest in material conditions, is a clear application of the DIT to the material and social past. When considering how the ritual and ideological status of commoners is treated, a careful reading of many current articles on this topic will reveal the degree to which some form of DIT serves as our discipline’s prevailing framework in shaping discussion of these issues either directly, as in the case of Shanks and Tilley, or otherwise. Implications range from the psychological effect of being “common” to the contributions of non-elites to the process of developing political and social complexity. Two examples illustrate and substantiate these points.

Concerning the impact of low rank on members of the Early Formative Olmec community of San Lorenzo, John Clark (1997:217) has suggested, “The principal means of governing the commoners was to reiterate through ritual drama and oratory the *naturalness of class differences and of the superiority of nobles* and their rights to rule as entailed in creation myths, and to inspire a *sense of awe, and perhaps fear, for royal power*” (emphasis added). Referring to public works at that site, Clark (1997:219) continues, “The obvious exercise of discipline and power in projects involving hundreds of people at one time and in one place *would have generated its own self-evident truths of royal right and might*, and periodic projects would have kept these truths in the public eye” (emphasis added). Bruce Trigger (1991:125) similarly reasons that “by participating in erecting monuments that glorify the power of the upper classes, peasant laborers *are made to*

acknowledge their subordinate status and their sense of their own inferiority is reinforced" (emphasis added). These statements, and the positions they reflect, hold extremely important implications for how the lived experiences of non-elites might be theorized by archaeologists. I do not suggest that processes of monumental constructions were not ideologically charged or that they did not underscore differences in rank or status in society, only that understanding the symbolic effects of public works on the daily lives of non-elites or considering how commoners might have experienced the fruits of their own efforts requires considerably broadening our theoretical perspectives. I discuss issues of monumental constructions and site planning and the question of whether builders were in reality alienated from their manual and material contributions in greater detail later.

In addition to understanding in fuller measure the daily psychological experiences of commoners, a second example illustrates the absence of non-elite contributions to the course of social development and the appearance and maintenance of systems of political complexity that were grounded largely in ideologically charged symbolic discourse:

The internal and external forces leading to the rise of the Maya states are now totally open to debate. Future interpretations will need complex scenarios that combine some weak economic pressures for internal management originating from demography and warfare, but stimulated by both external influences and the class interests of emerging shamanistic leaders. This last ideological element was clearly reflected in Late Preclassic symbolic systems, architectural features, and artifacts that were later associated with the doctrines of sacred power of the Classic-period kings. At . . . early centers, the images and iconography of power already display the ruler's role as "axis mundi," the personified axis of the universe. . . . As we shall see, this form of divine royal kingship would guide the volatile history of the lowland Maya for the next thousand years. (Demarest 2004:87-88)

One implication of these statements is that non-elites, estimated to consist of between 80 and 98 percent of ancient populations, were largely unimportant to the rise and development of complex societies in which elaborated belief systems played a key role. Such propositions can be considered shortsighted at best. At worst, they are at risk of arguing from negative evidence precisely what contributions were made from all quarters of diverse populations at the inception of social and political complexity while denying any meaningful interrelatedness between rulers and their constituencies.

BEYOND DOMINATION: RECURSIVE RELATIONS, STRUCTURATION, AND MEMORY TRACES

In a significant departure from views of elite-dominated ideological practice, Scott (1976, 1985, 1990) has examined the negotiation between commoners and non-commoners over meaning and value, likening the exchange to a transcript. The part of this dialogue, Scott argues, that occurs in public forums is rarely complete for fear of reprisals, and much of subalterns' (following Guha 1988) expressions of their real value systems are conducted in private or take place in political peripheries, constituting a Hidden Transcript. These private practices are among many possible forms of social resistance, although nearly all are covert, secretive, small-scale, and anonymously conducted. Application of these ideas in Mesoamerica (Hutson 2002; A. Joyce et al. 2001; Joyce and Weller, Chapter 6) reveals some of the ways non-elites responded to their perceived subordination and has been instrumental in populating the ancient landscape with individuals capable of deliberate and premeditated action in response to their social realities.

Ranjit Guha (1999:11) has elaborated on Scott's transcript model, arguing that "subordination can hardly be justified as an ideal and a norm without acknowledging the fact and possibility of insubordination, so that the affirmation of dominance in the ruling culture speaks eloquently too of its Other, that is, resistance." If we acknowledge the roles played by non-elites in dialogue over religious meaning and ideological discourse, a key issue to resolve is the ways that elite and commoner behaviors modify and shape their counterparts. Such a dialectic approach requires closely examining the internal structure of social relations that unite people simultaneously across many different spatial scales of organization. As Randall McGuire (2002:12) describes the dialectic, "The relations are made up of contradictions that bind individuals and groups with opposing and conflicting interests together, and because small changes in any part of this social whole will alter the structure of relations, this whole is always in flux." Although the question of how classes affected each other has long been posed by social scientists—the social historian E. P. Thompson's (1963) examination of English "crowds" and their relationships to landowners, shopkeepers, and the ruling aristocracy is but one example—it is rarely expounded on by archaeologists (but see A. Joyce et al. 2001). To understand the recursive nature of class relationships, I turn to elements of Anthony Giddens's Structuration Theory.

Giddens (1979:64) defines *structuring properties* as “rules and resources recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems.” These elements include “(a) knowledge—as memory traces—of ‘how things are to be done’ on the part of social actors; (b) social practices organized through the recursive mobilization of that knowledge; [and] (c) capabilities that the production of those practices presupposes.” Grounded in knowledge involving expectations of the future based on past experiences, structuring “rules” (which may be called on by all “competent” members of society) guide interaction between elites and non-elites around social values for how one is to be treated in both daily face-to-face associations and over longer periods. Did all commoners in all time periods universally accept the proposition of the elites’ divine right to rule? To what degree was participation in such an ideologically driven political system dependent on or reinforced by the availability of material goods and resources? Under what conditions might a given status quo come under scrutiny, be modified, or even be rejected altogether? The expectations of various classes (or of groups within a social stratum) and the knowledge that informs them are embodied or ritualized in symbolic acts, utterances, gestures, performances, and the like. Recent research (Robb 1998:338) argues that the meanings of important symbols (of both the material and behavioral sorts) are not fixed but are situationally contested, conditioned, modified, appropriated, and exploited by individuals and factions. These various factions are integrated simultaneously across different scales and along different axes of society through often competing interests over material and nonmaterial resources as they respond to social, political, and environmental conditions (Brumfiel 1992). I echo Giddens’s contention that most members of ancient societies were probably quite aware of this ongoing process and the significances behind the deployment of symbols and symbolic behavior. Giddens (1979:72) notes, “It is not a coincidence that the forms of social theory which have made little or no conceptual space for agents’ understanding of themselves, and of their social contexts, have tended greatly to exaggerate the impact of dominant symbol systems or ideologies upon those in subordinate classes.” In the case of complex societies consisting of elaborated and highly differentiated social roles, the kinds of expectations described previously are likely to undergo continual negotiation and formulation as rules of conduct are renewed over periods of time ranging from daily encounters to generations. Because of the context in which the Hidden Transcript took place and the recursive effects of commoner actions, including social resistance, on elite hegemonic strate-

gies, the kinds of residential-scale investigations reported in many of the chapters in this volume (also Plunket 2002b) are central in helping to balance our awareness of ideologically motivated ritual practices conducted in the past.

In light of the foregoing discussions, however, it is important to consider just how far concepts of Hidden Transcripts and social resistance can take our understanding of commoner-elite dialogue. Scholars who view the “theoretical hegemony” (M. Brown 1996:730) of resistance as imperiling more balanced and inclusive models of the past (Hutson 2002; Ortner 1995) have urged caution in the application of these ideas. One alternative for adding flesh and tissue to the domination-resistance framework is offered in the diversification of the concept of power. Robert Paynter and Randall McGuire (1991), following Giddens (1979, 1984) and Daniel Miller and Christopher Tilley (1984), discuss the heterogeneity of power as having a transformative capacity to constructively intervene or negotiate as well as to thwart or negate. Archaeology has seen an increased awareness of “empowered” prehistoric and historic agents, including enslaved peoples (Thomas 1998), women (Gero and Conkey 1991; Gilchrist 1999; R. Joyce 2000a; Sweely 1999), and other previously marginalized people (our own efforts in this volume might also be placed into this category; also Lohse and Valdez 2004). An expanded definition of power, draped over and conforming to a polythetic past, is easily blended with the concept of pluralistic ideologies when we consider that the content of symbolic communication is known to have varied depending on the targeted audience and the objective (see Gonlin [Chapter 4] and Gossen and Leventhal [1993] for discussion of the parallel concept of religious pluralism). Brumfiel (1998), for example, describes how Aztec lords enacted symbolic behavior of one sort when attempting to build factions and support among peer or sub-elites while conveying messages of domination to subordinates (also see DeMarrais et al. 1996; Urban et al. 2002). Some of the chapters in this volume consider commoner circumstances and explore the formation of peer group solidarity, maintenance of localized identities, and expressions of communally shared beliefs at the scale of the individual or intimate family group. These responses each convey “power to” (versus “power over”) in the transformative sense and have little to do with responding to elite-controlled ideological messaging.

Another alternative to binary approaches to ritual and ideological practice involves returning to Giddens’s (1979:64) definition of structural properties as “knowledge—as memory traces—of how things ‘are to be

done.” The study of collective memory, also called public or social memory (Hendon 2000; R. Joyce 2000b; Shackel 2001; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003), was pioneered by the Durkheim-influenced French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. Halbwachs’s conclusions are well suited to emphasizing organic aspects of social solidarity and continuity, apparently in contradistinction to more structural Marxist views on ideology and social relations. They can also be applied in an agency-oriented framework that allows scholars to understand commoner ritual and ideological behaviors in their own right as well as how they relate to larger, society-wide practices and discourses. The process of reconstituting the past centralizes questions such as what the past was like, whose recollection is valid, how it was experienced, and what it meant to different members of society (also see Van Dyke and Alcock 2003:2). Collective memory is held at both individual and group levels, although the former is contextualized into and framed by the latter. Halbwachs argued that “it is, of course[,] individuals who remember, not groups or institutions, but these individuals, being located in a specific group context, draw on that context to remember or recreate the past” (Coser 1992:23).

Two not necessarily exclusive forms of memory, historical and autobiographical memory, are outlined in Halbwachs’s work. Historical memory “reaches the social actor only through written records and other types of records, such as photography. But it can be kept alive through commemorations, festival enactments, and the like” (Coser 1992:23). In contrast, autobiographical memory “is memory of events that we have personally experienced in the past. . . . It stands to reason, however, that autobiographical memory tends to fade with time unless it is periodically reinforced through contact with persons with whom one shared the experiences in the past” (Coser 1992:24). Many examples of each kind of memory can be found across Mesoamerica, from ritual enactments that reference cosmic creation events, such as the ballgame, to construction of monumental buildings and commemorating ancient deeds or ancestors (e.g., McAnany 1995). In pursuing an archaeology of commoner ritual and ideological behavior, it is necessary to not exclusively link historical memory with the actions of elites. The community-wide *guelaguetza* celebrations of reciprocal service and gift-giving in Oaxaca (Cohen 1999) provide but one example of how historical memory, emphasizing unity and solidarity but not leveling economic or status differences, can be shared collectively. Another example of historical memory as organized on a communal basis comes from the recent report of ballcourts in non-urban settings (R. Joyce

and Hendon 2000; Walling et al. 2006), where they were apparently used without the direct involvement of ruling elites.

VARIATIONS ACROSS TIME AND SPACE IN MESOAMERICA

Brief perusals of the archaeological literature reveal significant differences in symbolic behavior and religious expression across Mesoamerica. At a low order of resolution, single-ruler polities found in the Eastern Lowlands seem fundamentally different from the corporate states of Central Mexico (Blanton et al. 1996). Clark (1997), for example, has argued that control over ritual and symbols of rulership and the divine, such as monolithic carved heads, thrones, and animal spirits, was a central element in the development and maintenance of inequality by ancient Olmec chiefs. This strategy appears quite different from that observed at Teotihuacan, where George Cowgill (1997:142) describes the ubiquity of composite censers in domestic contexts and their role in private rituals honoring the dead. These censers were mass-produced in a state-sponsored workshop near the Ciudadela, and their distribution may have served as a sort of state-regulated currency that played an instrumental role in the private expression of religious beliefs (see Barba et al., Chapter 3, and Manzanilla 2004 for additional treatment of domestic ritual at Teotihuacan).

A similar centralizing role could well have been served by the Post-classic Ehecatl/Quetzacoatl cult at Cholula in the Puebla Valley. Geoffrey McCafferty (Chapter 8) notes that images of the Wind God, identified as the patron deity of that community, are rarely reported in private, domestic contexts. Those living at or making pilgrimages to the site to participate in the *tecuhltli* ceremony granting divine authority to rulers and lineage heads were united by common identity, at least temporarily, despite differences in ethnicity or local religious custom (Pohl 1999:169–170). Although individual rulers of the Olmec chiefdoms and Maya polities appear to have been recognized and endowed with supernatural roles, Central Mexican society, at least as seen at Teotihuacan and Cholula, seems to have tended toward a corporate disposition (see Sugiyama 2004), a situation that surely had implications for the role of commoners in ritual behavior. Chapters 3 and 8, therefore, are central in balancing our understanding of the collective, corporate ideologies at Teotihuacan and Cholula and recognizing the scalar differences in ritual practice from the private domestic to the public polity.

Can these differences be ascribed to nonparallel evolutionary trajectories of different forms of complexity or to environmental variation between the Eastern Lowlands and Central Highlands? Or do they describe fundamental shifts in the basis of social, political, and ideological organization? Cowgill (1997:137) notes: "Whether or not impersonality and multiplicity were deliberately encouraged by state policy, they are themes that pervaded all classes and social sectors. No evidence of resistance or dissent has been recognized so far." Gabriela Uruñuela and Patricia Plunket (Chapter 2; also Plunket and Uruñuela 2002) make significant contributions to understanding the nature of Late Formative to Early Classic Central Mexican socioreligious constitution by examining ritual practice at the Formative period dispersed village of Tetimpa, one of many settlements whose inhabitants may have relocated to nearby urban centers such as Cholula or Teotihuacan after the eruption of the volcano Popocatepetl in the first century A.D. Studies like Uruñuela and Plunket's, as well as those in Chapters 3 and 8, are valuable in helping archaeologists understand fundamental differences between Central Mexico and the Eastern Lowlands by providing some historical context for the formation of urbanized, corporate centers and balancing our view of past religious life by adding household contexts to those from site centers. In this vein, research seeking out evidence for the kinds of "fear" and "awe" of royal power that Clark (1997) predicts in low-status households at San Lorenzo would seem critical for demonstrating more clearly and precisely the nature of social differentiation as it was expressed in ritual behavior in Early Formative societies. Without such balancing perspectives, conclusions about the effect of royal power on everyday constituencies seem premature.

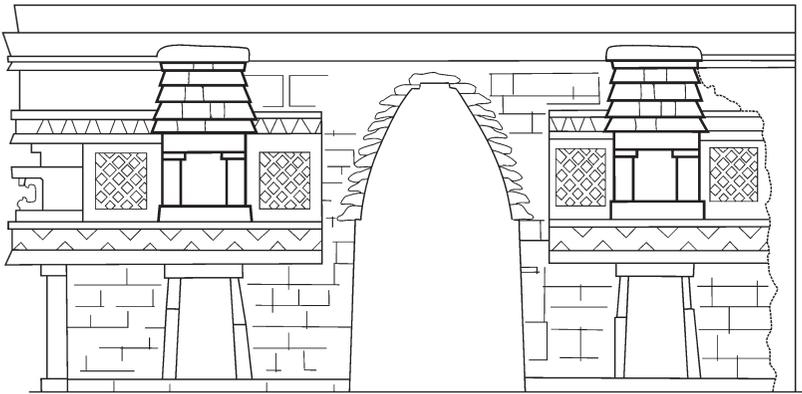
APPLYING THE FRAMEWORK: MONUMENTAL ARCHITECTURE, SYMBOLIC ANALYSES, AND BALANCED PERSPECTIVES

Monumental architecture provides one opportunity to consider these topics in developing an archaeology of commoner ritual and ideology. Monumental architecture is frequently identified as a means of expressing or maintaining power in society (Trigger 1991), whether that society is corporate and "faceless" or networked and centered on individual elite agents. Open plazas served as stages for public ritual events, as well as informal socializing and economic exchange via occasional markets (Hirth 1998; Smith 1999), and large buildings often provided mural space for

iconographic displays of elite messages regarding absolute power, perhaps even over life and death. Coordinating the labor required for their construction is argued to have further symbolized power and underscored status differences that began to develop as societies became increasingly complex, as discussed previously in this chapter.

Consequently, we can and should scrutinize the underlying, fundamental assumptions concerning the relationships among social labor, symbolic communication, and ideologies of power and domination or resistance. Regarding monumental architecture, these large constructions surely required coordinated labor from large numbers of people. Such efforts were probably more effective and efficient through some form of centralized management, and there is little doubt that laborers involved in these efforts must have recalled the tedious conditions under which those efforts took place. Stratigraphic sections, however, reveal that these monuments rarely appeared in a single event but were built in phases over a number of years or even centuries. Once established, they remained part of a highly symbolic and constantly evolving landscape representing collective efforts from multiple quarters. As part of community-wide historical memories (in the *Halbwachsian* sense) to which their own efforts and the efforts of their forbears contributed (making these constructions also part of multiple autobiographical histories), it is not likely that the generations of commoners who gave their time and labor experienced these constructions as entirely oppressive and subordinating (Hutson 2002:66). Moreover, the frequent integration of symbols intimately familiar to commoners, such as the thatched huts adorning numerous buildings across the Yucatán (Figure 1.2), into architectural veneers implies an effort by at least some building designers to appeal to commonly held ideas and shared values. No evidence indicates that these ideas and the ritual practices behind them were appropriated by elites. Rather, many of the monumental constructions that define urban zones appear to have been designed and positioned for public appreciation, understanding, and engagement.

These examples illustrate a number of salient points. First, multiple processes can be simultaneously involved in monumental constructions and other forms of community-scale symbolic behavior (Hutson 2002:65–66). Second, these processes may have changed through time across Mesoamerica (e.g., Urban and Schortman 1996). Third, monumental constructions may have been experienced differently by those who contributed their labor and other areas of expertise. Finally, we should be careful not to draw oversimplistic conclusions about relationships between elite



1.2. Thatched huts as decorative elements on public architecture. Structure 2 at Chicanná, Campeche, México, top, and the Arch at Labná, Yucatán, México, bottom (redrawn from Marquina 1951:figure 230).

control over ritual and cosmology, labor, and social power (see discussion by Saitta [1997]).

From the perspective of symbolic behavior and generated meaning, analyses of monumental site plans reveal how space was often designed and constructed to facilitate traffic and permit gatherings of large groups,

thereby embracing and encompassing populations at an experiential level (e.g., Ashmore 1991; Ashmore and Sabloff 2002), at least during certain periods (see Joyce and Weller, Chapter 6, for a discussion of changes in site access and implications for commoner-elite relations). Site plans often reveal deeply rooted religious beliefs that structured lived space and social action in ancient Mesoamerica. The quadripartition of space and of the World Tree uniting three planes of existence pervade Mesoamerican belief systems (Coggins 1980; Mathews and Garber 2004; Wagner 2000). According to ethnographic sources, four cardinal places together with a central element make up a quincuncial whole that is replicated at a number of different scales (Hanks 1990; Vogt 1969). In ancient times, the practice conditioned the layouts of certain monumental structures, at least at some site centers (Ashmore 1991; Ashmore and Sabloff 2002; Mathews and Garber 2004; Sugiyama 1993; Wagner 2000:290–291), and even political regions (Marcus 1993). In this sense, “reading” monumental or political landscapes provides a way for archaeologists to understand certain foundational themes of a particular society’s worldview.

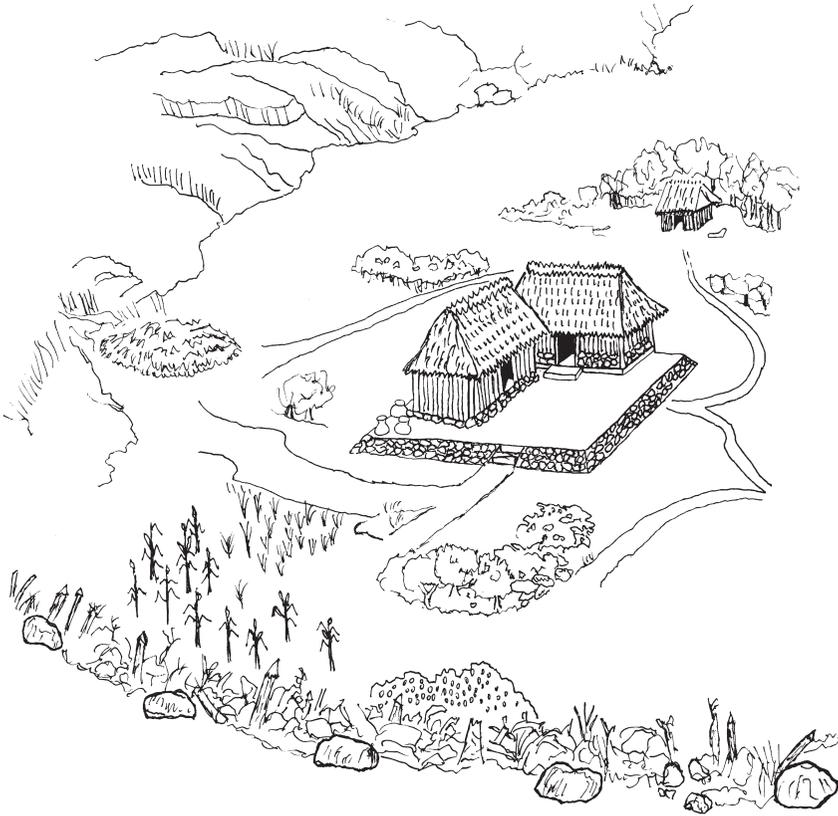
In the absence of complementary data from a variety of social contexts, knowledge of the cosmic order can easily be described as “esoteric” or “restricted” in access, supporting inferences of elite ideological hegemony. One of the earliest documented expressions of a quadripartitioned Mesoamerican universe, however, was actually recorded in Oaxaca at San José Mogote’s Household C3, dating to 1150–850 B.C. Shallow depressions, each painted a color corresponding to Zapotec notions of the four world corners, are believed to have been associated with women’s divination rituals (Marcus 1999:80). Additional color-specific symbolism at the domestic scale is reported by Cynthia Robin (2002), whose excavations at Chan Nòhol near Xunantunich, Belize, revealed a Late Classic cache of four colored river cobbles positioned at cardinal points around a greenstone celt on top of a small, capped chultun beneath a house floor. Directionality, color symbolism, and cardinality were clearly not the exclusive purview of elite ideologists but rather were symbolically charged beliefs that were broadly understood by all Mesoamericans.

Another example of how the analysis of household data balances our view of common (and commoner) ritual practice comes from Dos Hombres in northwestern Belize (see Figure 0.1). Work at two residential groups, Operations 19 and 25 (Lohse 2001), revealed evidence suggesting that during the Late Classic period (ca. A.D. 600–850; see Figure 0.2), the plans of some house lots were partly conditioned by principles of cardi-

nality, thereby mirroring practices noted in many site centers. With respect to the layouts of site plans discussed by Wendy Ashmore (1991), three key traits are relevant for recognizing cardinal patterning at the domestic level. First, each architectural unit that constituted a significant part of a site's plan, such as a plaza-focused cluster of buildings, provided a space for community members to come together to perform and share social functions. Analogs at the household level would be activity areas such as middens, gardens, and ancillary structures for kitchens or storage. Second, although components of the site may be representative of cardinal elements, the overall layout is often asymmetrical. Thus, a certain amount of geographic imprecision was acceptable to achieve a symbolically laden plan. Finally, all four cardinal places often are not discernable through mapping or excavation. Perhaps it is the case that certain components were left incomplete or were represented by natural features such as depressions for reservoirs or "vacant" terrain. Archaeologists working with household-scale data should maintain a similar degree of flexibility when attempting to interpret the oftentimes depauperate material records from residences that may have been inhabited only a generation or two.

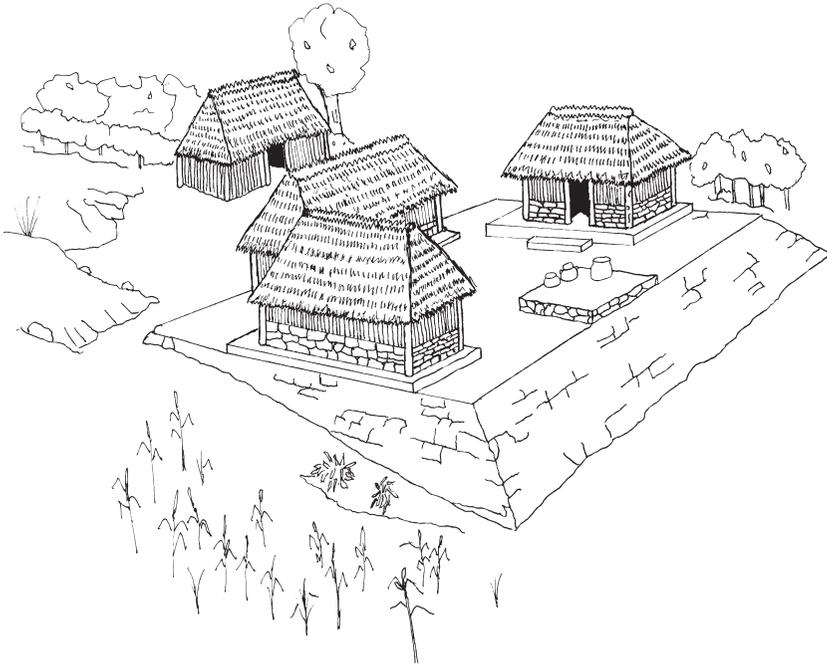
The Operation 19 house group at Dos Hombres consists of two domestic ruins on a low (less than one meter) basal platform. Evidence of patterned off-mound activities include a refuse midden approximately fifteen meters west of the platform, a series of boulders thirty meters to the south that is taken to represent the southern houselot boundary, and the surface find of a limestone metate approximately twenty meters north of the platform (Figure 1.3). Excavations adjacent to the metate recovered artifacts and fauna, including more than 100 freshwater *jute* shells, a food source for the ancient Maya, suggesting this area was associated with food processing. Although no artifacts were recovered to the south or east of the group, these vast expanses of vacant space could easily have been used for domestic gardening.¹ A small burial crypt was uncovered beneath the center of the northern building; profiles show that this crypt did not intrude through the plaster floor but was constructed at the same time as the platform. This modest burial feature and its stratigraphic relationships with the construction sequence of the platform and Structure 1 indicate the significance of having a dedicatory ritual deposit in the virtual center of this house group and surrounding yard before construction was completed.

The Operation 25 house group consists of three medium-sized (approximately five by eight meters) mounds and a much smaller, open construction on a moderate-size platform located at the base of a steep escarpment



1.3. Artist's reconstruction (looking northwest) of Operation 19 houselot, based on archaeological data recovered during excavations (garden to south and pathways are inferred), Dos Hombres, Belize (after drawing by William R. Bowman).

(Figure 1.4). Off-mound excavations to the south revealed an elaborate subsurface feature designed to regulate levels of soil moisture throughout the year, signaling the location of a kitchen garden (Lohse and Findlay 2000). Interpreted as a possible kitchen, a buried plaster floor with a circular cut containing burned carbon was exposed behind or west of the platform. Although no strong evidence of patterned activity was recovered north of the platform, the low mound on the east side of the platform seems to have been used as a storage area or perhaps a small domestic shrine, as this construction was covered with hundreds of fragments of large utilitarian storage jars. Excavations into the platform center yielded evidence of ritual behavior in the form of an enigmatic plaster "patch"



1.4. Artist's reconstruction (looking northwest) of Operation 25 houselot, based on archaeological data recovered during excavations, Dos Hombres, Belize (after drawing by William R. Bowman).

lying directly atop bedrock for which no functional interpretation can be given. As with the burial at Operation 19, it is significant that this plaster was deposited prior to the construction of the residential platform, clearly indicating that this central element was of importance to the ancient inhabitants of this group.

Based on these data, occupants of Operations 19 and 25 house groups seem to have structured their domestic spaces—including investing symbolic meaning in ritual deposits prior to residence construction—according to fundamental beliefs held across Mesoamerica about the order of the cosmos. I am not arguing that religious principles structured all houselots in the Maya area, but evidence suggests that some houselots were structured by these principles. Reasons why other households at Dos Hombres were not certainly warrants consideration. As with Household C3 at San José Mogote, beliefs expressed through the daily practice of structuring living space help demonstrate the richness of domestic ritual behavior as

well as the degree to which this knowledge permeated society. These examples, and also the case from Chan Nöohol, imply that *some* commoners had a deep and fundamental awareness of cosmological symbolism and were free to engage in certain practices such as rituals of divination or recreation. Such expressions have more to do with “power to” than “power over” and are crucial to balancing site-center or elite-focused data and for negating the idea that such esoteric ideas and information were under the exclusive purview of elites.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Concepts of collective memory and pluralistic definitions of power and ideology offer viable yet under-explored alternatives to the DIT and related models in explaining the role of ritual behavior and symbolic expression in complex societies. The examples I have offered do not speak of commoner empowerment *per se*, nor do they necessarily have anything to do with resistance. As do the following chapters, these examples amply demonstrate that there are no underlying, universal principles we can use to explain the dialogue between commoners and non-commoners with respect to religious beliefs and ideological messages of power, resistance, acquiescence, accommodation, or faction-building. Rather, these case studies show that ritual practice varied widely within each social stratum, depending on a number of factors, including the intended audience and the message content of that ritual. Further, we can see that many of these beliefs were actually shared between commoners and non-commoners, allowing us to move far beyond dualistic top-down or bottom-up models of negotiated ideology.

Because the public transcript between commoners and non-commoners over how and where ideas are expressed is not always complete as fossilized in the archaeological record, investigations conducted at the household level and in areas peripheral to political centers are absolutely critical to documenting the full nature of this dialogue. When identified by archaeologists, ritual behaviors of commoners in both household and larger community-wide contexts reveal a strong fluency with fundamental religious and symbolic information (Mathews and Garber 2004:56). These behaviors also imply flexibility in responding to different circumstances as well as engaging in and contributing to the ideological reconstitution of society from an active, agentive perspective. Important differences surely existed between rulers and other community members, but these

distinctions are most likely to be understood only through practice-based approaches that foreground structuring rules and symbolic communications between (and within) social factions, and that illustrate how diverse constituencies differentially participated in the regular reconstitution of those rules.

A balanced framework that considers evidence from multiple social contexts and employs expanded, pluralistic definitions of power and ideology based on shared common experiences and motivations—as well as unitary and distinguishing ones—reveals that different interests in society were negotiated daily within the context of deeply structured belief systems, yielding rich cultural diversity through time and across the geographic space of Mesoamerica. Archaeologists' ability to break down the ideological content of messages conveyed through materialized beliefs and ritual behavior in both elite and non-elite contexts means that it is no longer appropriate to speak of a "dominant" ideology or consider ideology solely as emanating from exalted individuals. Instead, we are positioned to consider how different ideologies and ritual practices were motivated by a host of altogether other ends.

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NOTE

1. William Doolittle (1992:82) reports that modern-day houselot gardens in northwestern Mexico are most frequently located to the south of houses. Even in the more southerly latitude of northwestern Belize, this location gives the advantage of more consistent sunlight exposure throughout the year.

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