

Domestic Ritual at Aztec Provincial Sites in Morelos

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Aztec commoners carried out a variety of ritual activities inside and around their homes. Some of these practices resembled the state-sponsored, public religion of the imperial capital Tenochtitlan in their paraphernalia and themes, suggesting continuities between domestic and public or state religion. People burned incense in their homes, for example, using long-handled censers identical to those used by professional priests in public ceremonies in Tenochtitlan and elsewhere. Other domestic rituals, however, appear to have been quite distinctive, with little relationship to Aztec public religion. These involved the use of ceramic figurines, a type of object rarely if ever employed in public ceremonies. Rituals using figurines remain very poorly understood, but available evidence suggests that they may have focused on fertility, curing, and divination at the family level, employing concepts and practices only distantly related to state or public religion. The ritual use of ceramic figurines in domestic settings was a manifestation of an ancient Mesoamerican tradition that flourished largely outside of the control of the state.

In this chapter these contrasting patterns of domestic ritual are examined through an investigation of artifacts and features from Aztec period houses at sites in Morelos, Mexico. These data suggest the complexity of Aztec religion as practiced at the household level and provide a glimpse of a shadowy cultural realm largely invisible in the written record of Aztec society.

Approaches to Domestic Ritual in Agrarian States

Aztec society stands out among the other Mesoamerican societies dealt with in the book by its larger scale and its

greater level of social complexity. Although some distinction between domestic and public ritual can be made for all Mesoamerican societies from Early Formative times onward, during Aztec times this distinction took on additional ramifications. Domestic rituals must be contextualized both in relation to state rituals—at the local city-state level and imperial levels—and in relation to the ancient great tradition of Mesoamerican religion. Before examining the data at hand, some of these complexities are explored: the relationship between the great and little traditions and the relationship between domestic ritual and the state.

The great and little traditions

The concepts of great and little traditions provide a useful starting point for the analysis of Aztec domestic ritual. Because of misunderstandings of these concepts by many modern scholars,¹ a brief historical review of their development may be useful. The terms *great* and *little traditions* were first used by anthropologists at the University of Chicago in the mid-1950s to examine the relationships between peasant-village cultures and the dominant "high" culture of their encompassing civilizations (Marriott 1955; Redfield 1956; Singer 1959a, see Singer 1976:243–248). Robert Redfield contributed the most generalized account of this concept, and his name tends to be associated with it today. In his words,

In a civilization there is a great tradition of the reflective few, and there is a little tradition of the largely unreflective many. The great tradition is cultivated in schools or temples; the little tradition works itself out and keeps itself going in the lives of the unlettered in their village communities. (Redfield 1956:41–42)

The great/little tradition concept developed out of Redfield's earlier folk/urban continuum model (Redfield 1941; see Redfield 1953 for an intermediate formulation), and as such it is subject to many of the criticisms leveled at the earlier, now-discredited model (Lewis 1951:432–440; Lewis 1970; Sandstrom 1991:32–34). For example, few scholars today would agree with Redfield that all change originates in the literate great tradition (or in cities) and flows to the little tradition (or folk culture); that "folk societies" are homogeneous; or that among peasants the little tradition is "taken for granted and not submitted to much scrutiny or considered refinement and improvement" (Redfield 1956:42).

Redfield's colleagues did not share his simplistic dichotomy of dynamic, educated elites versus passive, ignorant peasants. Milton Singer, for example, stated,

The real structure of tradition, in any civilization or part thereof, is an immensely intricate system of relationships between the levels or components of tradition, which we enormously oversimplify by referring to as "high" and "low" or "great" and "little." (Singer 1959b:xi)

Singer and McKim Marriott used the great/little tradition concept in a more narrow sense than Redfield. For them, it served as a descriptive device to help organize ethnographic research and analysis on complex civilizations such as India (Marriott 1955; Singer 1959a). Its value lay in its focus on religious diversity and on the nature of interaction between different social levels of religious practice (Glazier 1997; Saler 1993:34–40). This usage has continued up to the present by anthropologists studying religion in complex societies from Sri Lanka to Mesoamerica (for example, Glazier 1997; Gossen and Leventhal 1993; Holland 1979; Leslie 1960; Obeyesekere 1963; O'Connor 1997; Southwold 1982).²

Marriott's (1955) description of Hindu rituals in the village of Kisha Garhi in Uttar Pradesh, India, provides a sense of the complexity of interactions between the religions of a great and little tradition, and his account has implications for our understanding of Aztec domestic ritual. Marriott compares the deities and festivals of the village with the great tradition, which he defines as "the literate religious tradition, embodied in or derived from Sanskrit works which have a universal spread in all parts of India" (1955:191). Approximately 90 deities are worshipped in the village. Of these, only thirty are known from the Sanskrit sources; the rest are limited to the village, to the region, or to one or more castes.

Of nineteen major annual festivals celebrated in the

village, eight are universal festivals celebrated throughout Hindu India, four are local festivals with no Sanskrit counterparts, and seven have only a very loose correspondence to Sanskrit festivals. The festival of lights is an example of the latter category. Although villagers set out lamps as specified in the great tradition festival, they also partake in a series of other rituals involving incense, deity images, and various activities that have no counterpart in the Sanskrit festival of lights. Marriott points out that the great tradition festivals celebrated in the village represent only a small fraction of the total number of known Sanskrit festivals. Although most village festivals do incorporate elements of great tradition rituals, these elements have been adapted and modified to suit local custom. Marriott concludes that "a part of village religion thus remains conceptually separable [from the great tradition], both for the people who live in Kisha Garhi and for the outside analyst" (1955:196).

This example suggests some of the complexities of the relationships and interactions between local village religions and the more formalized religions of the great traditions in agrarian states. We should expect to find in Aztec villages and provincial cities some combination of religious elements that duplicate the public religion of Tenochtitlan; distinctive local elements that have no counterparts in Aztec public religion; and elements that are modified or transformed versions of public religion. There is no *a priori* reason to assume that local religion was simply a watered-down version of Aztec public religion (as some writers have suggested), nor that public religion was simply a state-sponsored elaboration of local or domestic religion.

State ideology and domestic ritual

The great/little tradition model provides a framework for examining Aztec domestic ritual within the larger cultural context of Postclassic Mesoamerica, but it does not deal explicitly with the relationship between domestic ritual and state practices and ideology. The dominant ideology thesis, however, does address this relationship. According to this model, the rulers of states promote a legitimizing ideology that is widely accepted by their subjects, and the acceptance and internalization of this dominant ideology is a major form of social control in such societies (Abercrombie et al. 1980).

Elizabeth Brumfiel (1996) has used Aztec figurines from hinterland sites in the Basin of Mexico to examine issues related to the dominant ideology thesis, particularly those related to women's roles and statuses. She em-

loys measures such as the ratio of male to female figurines and the ratio of standing to kneeling poses (in female figurines and stone sculptures) to attempt to monitor the acceptance or rejection of elements of state ideology (such as a view of women as submissive) by commoner households. Although these are important issues, it seems unlikely to me that simple ratios of figurine types would reflect state ideology in any straightforward way. Blanton et al. make a similar claim for the role of figurines at Classic period Teotihuacan, suggesting that mold-made figurines were used by the state for "reinforcing [state] concepts of corporate and earthly renewal" (1996:13). Manzanilla (chapter 5) suggests—without any supporting evidence—that the Teotihuacan state somehow intervened in domestic ritual to control behavior.

The dominant ideology thesis is a model at a very high level of abstraction, difficult if not impossible to evaluate reliably with archaeological data on domestic ritual. At a somewhat lower level of abstraction, however, we can approach related issues such as the relationship between domestic ritual and state ritual. As in the case of the great and little traditions, the situation can be quite complex, with domestic and state rituals each influencing the other through systems of interpenetrating knowledge (for example, Beard et al. 1998:313–363; Kus and Raharijaona 2000). In an ethnographic example, Bloch (1987) shows how a key royal ritual in Madagascar was constructed as a deliberate elaboration of fundamental forms of domestic ritual behavior ("ordinary rituals of blessing"). He argues that "royal symbolism is, I believe, constructed out of non-royal symbolism, both logically and probably also historically" (1987:271) and that royal rituals are "transformations" of nonroyal rituals. However, once the royal ritual was developed, aspects of it were imposed upon the king's subjects, who were required to replicate specific ritual activities in their homes.

I suggest below that a similar situation held for the Aztec New Fire Ceremony: the Mexica kings of Tenochtitlan appropriated an ancient and widespread ritual, gave it imperial trappings and symbolism, and then turned around and tried to impose the imperial version of the ceremony on their subjects (Elson and Smith 2001). A fascinating example of the second half of this dialectic—the imposition of imperial ritual on subjects—is described by McMullen (1987) from the official ritual code of the Chinese Tang dynasty: "In this division of the code there were also prescriptions for certain of the important rites to be conducted at the local level throughout the empire, in humbler versions of their grand imperial counterparts"

(McMullen 1987:194). Flannery (1999) also provides examples of the appropriation of popular symbols by emergent kings to construct new configurations of state ideology out of widespread practices. I now explore how some of this complexity in state-level ritual systems was manifest in Aztec period central Mexico.

Social Variation in Aztec Ritual

Classification of rituals

As suggested above, rituals and cults in agrarian civilizations such as the Aztec can be quite complex, both socially and conceptually. For purposes of presentation I use two dichotomies—public/private and state/popular—to categorize some of the social variation in Aztec ritual.³ Public rituals are those that take place in open, public settings, whereas private rituals are those conducted out of public view, whether in homes, temples or other buildings, in the countryside, caves, or other isolated areas, or else secretly at night. State rituals are sponsored and promoted by the state, whatever their spatial scale or social context, whereas popular rituals either originate with the people or else enjoy widespread participation and support among nonelite sectors of society. In practice, popular rituals often have complex interactions with state-sponsored rituals, and it is not always easy to distinguish them empirically. It should be emphasized that these are analytical dichotomies for purposes of classification and analysis; they should not be reified or given undue significance as empirical realities. Nevertheless, the combination of the two dichotomies produces the following four-part classification of Aztec rituals (see Brundage 1985, Durán 1967, v.1; León-Portilla 1993; López Luján 1994; Nicholson 1971; Sahagún 1950–82):

- (1) *Public state rituals.* These were the most spectacular Aztec ceremonies, and they are the ones most thoroughly described in the works of the chroniclers and in the codices. They include political rites such as coronations, state funerals, and temple dedications; many components of the eighteen monthly festivals described by Sahagún, Durán, and others; and a variety of other celebrations conducted in capital towns and cities. Many public state rituals, including the monthly festivals, were complex and lengthy affairs that were celebrated by many social groups—from the Mexica emperor down to peasants and slaves—and in many places, from the Templo Mayor of

Tenochtitlan to peoples' homes (as, for example, when priests entered homes for rites of purification during some of the monthly ceremonies). Many rituals celebrated by Aztec priests at temples fall into this category. Public state rituals usually focused on themes of agricultural fertility, cosmic warfare, and debt payment to the gods. This category of ritual can be considered the Aztec great tradition.

- (2) *Private state rituals.* This category includes the penitential rites that kings underwent as part of their inauguration sequence and rituals that priests celebrated alone, often at night. Specific actions included autosacrifice, fasting, and prayer. Far less is known about this kind of ritual, which can also be included under the label of great tradition.
- (3) *Public popular rituals.* These rituals include public celebrations of agricultural success and other rituals of fertility and renewal such as the public components of the New Fire ceremony. Although this category is useful analytically, it must be kept in mind that it is difficult to separate state and popular rituals in public settings. Graulich (1999) argues, for example, that the elaborate celebrations of the eighteen monthly festivals in Tenochtitlan were ancient popular celebrations that the Mexica rulers adapted or transformed for imperial purposes (see also Graulich 1997, 2000). It is possible that public popular rituals outside of the imperial capital were more firmly separated from rituals sponsored by local kings. As in Marriott's study of the Indian village mentioned above, people adopted parts of state public ceremony for their own use, and the state incorporated elements of popular religion into its public celebrations. Public popular rituals are one of the two major categories making up the Aztec little tradition (or traditions).
- (4) *Private popular rituals.* This category includes a wide diversity of activities conducted in and around people's homes and in the countryside emphasizing curing, fertility, orderliness, divination, supplication, and other themes that concerned the individual and the family. These are the activities that I call "domestic ritual," and they are the second component of the little tradition of Aztec religion.

This simplified four-type classification does not exhaust the important social variation in Aztec ritual. The political and social hierarchy must be considered (How similar were state rituals in Tenochtitlan to state rituals in

subject city-state centers? How did popular rituals differ in rural and urban settings? Were domestic rituals the same in elite and commoner homes?). The historical context also is of great import (Graulich 1997, 1999, 2000). Furthermore, different types of ritual have varying social implications. For example, Bell's (1997) six categories—rites of passage; calendrical rites; rites of exchange and communion; rites of affliction; feasting, fasting and festivals; and political rites—have differing social contexts and significance. Documentary accounts of rituals conducted by commoner women at Tenochtitlan illustrate some of this complexity.

Women and ritual in Tenochtitlan

Louise Burkhart suggests that to the Mexica, "the home, although shared by men and women, was symbolically constructed as female space" (1997:28). She cautions, however, against applying the Western notion of a strict domestic/public distinction and its automatic association with a female/male dichotomy (see Comaroff 1987; Joyce 1993). In terms of rituals, men and women both conducted various rites within the home, and men and women both participated in public rituals, popular as well as state-sponsored, and in the roles of lay participants as well as professional priests (Brundage 1985; Burkhart 1997; Nicholson 1971). Nevertheless, documentary sources from Tenochtitlan emphasize the role of women in conducting domestic rituals, and they suggest important parallels and linkages between those rituals and various wider domains in Aztec society.

Sweeping was one of the major elements of domestic ritual. Women swept their home and surrounding areas often, both to clean up and to restore order to the world. The act of sweeping linked women's ritual to larger religious domains; gods often swept, and it was a major component of priests' rituals at temples. Burkhart notes:

Just as the housewife had to be constantly vigilant to maintain cleanliness and order, so did the priests in their temples. Much Mexica temple ritual functioned as a kind of cosmic housekeeping: the priests guarded the temple fires, made offerings, prayed, and cleaned, female priests and attendants also spun and wove clothing for the deities and cooked their offerings of food. (1997:32)

Women also conducted a series of other rituals. Sahagún lists the following religious activities that were carried out by women, either at home or at the temples: offerings of food, capes, and other items; burning incense;

bloodletting, and sweeping (1997:69–75; see also Brown 1983). These rituals by lay women paralleled the actions of Aztec priests, and in some of the monthly ceremonies the same offerings were made in both home and temple. In Durán's description of the seventeenth monthly ceremony, Tititl, for example, he states, "All this food and drink was offered up in the temples, and each person offered the same in his domestic shrine" (Durán 1971:463; 1967, v.1:289). Some of the religious themes that characterized both public state rituals and private popular rituals were agricultural fertility, worship of fire, and the maintenance of cosmic order (Brumfiel 2001; Brundage 1985; Burkhardt 1989, 1997).

These documentary accounts provide a glimpse of some of the ritual activities conducted in people's homes in Tenochtitlan. Unfortunately, they probably leave out many other rituals that were unknown to Sahagún and the other friars. Burkhardt notes that the friars rarely entered an Aztec house, and as a result, "women's domestic life was a subject about which the early friars had little knowledge and much fear" (1997:27; see also Clendinnen 1991:54–55; Silverblatt 1988). The only documentary account that contains anything like direct observations of domestic rituals—Ruiz de Alarcón's *Treatise on Superstitions*—was compiled a century after the Spanish conquest.⁴ Ruiz de Alarcón traveled around Guerrero and Morelos in the early 1600s stamping out idolatry. It is remarkable that a century after the Spanish conquest, he found people still conducting pagan ceremonial rites, invoking Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl with elaborate Nahuatl metaphors and making offerings of incense, tobacco, flowers, and human blood (Ruiz de Alarcón 1982). The Spanish conquerors and clergy were quick to put an end to Aztec public religion, with its sacrifices and offerings of blood, but their ignorance and avoidance of the domestic realm allowed traditional rituals to continue, at least in the rural areas of Guerrero and Morelos. Christianity was added to the religious repertoire of the Nahua peoples, and the existence of a vigorous tradition of "idolatry" in this area (and elsewhere) did not necessarily imply a rejection of or opposition to the new Spanish faith (Burkhardt 1989, 1997).

Excavations at Aztec Provincial Sites in Morelos

My excavations at the Aztec provincial sites of Yautepec, Cuexcomate, and Capilco (in the modern Mexican state of Morelos) yielded a variety of ritual objects from domestic middens and from a temple, and these materials shed light on the nature of Aztec domestic ritual. Capilco

and Cuexcomate, rural sites located close to the Epiclassic urban center of Xochicalco in western Morelos, were excavated together in 1986 by Cynthia Heath-Smith and myself. Capilco was a small village settlement with a few ground-level houses, and Cuexcomate was a larger town settlement with a public plaza surrounded by a small temple-pyramid, an elite residential compound, and another civic structure that may have been a priests' residence. These excavations are described in Smith (1992, 1993) and Smith and Heath-Smith (1994).

We were able to refine the Postclassic chronology to include three identifiable ceramic phases for the Middle and Late Postclassic periods (Smith and Doershuk 1991). The Temazcalli phase corresponds to the Middle Postclassic period, abbreviated here as MPC (circa AD 1150–1350), a time of city-state growth and demographic and economic expansion. The Early Cuauhnahuac phase (AD 1350–1440) covers the first half of the Late Postclassic period, abbreviated here as LPC-A, a time of continuing expansion and prosperity before the formation of the Mexica empire. The Late Cuauhnahuac phase (1440–1550), after western Morelos was incorporated into the empire, was a time of economic contraction in the area; this period is referred to here as LPC-B.

Yautepec was a major urban center in north-central Morelos whose king ruled over several smaller city-states in the Yautepec Valley. In 1993 we excavated Postclassic contexts at this site, which lies beneath the modern town of Yautepec. We uncovered architecture and associated middens at seven houses, including one large elite compound, five small commoner houses, and one intermediate structure. We also excavated a series of rich Postclassic middens whose associated houses were not located, owing to our limited testing or to their destruction (Smith et al. 1999). The chronology at Yautepec paralleled the chronology at the rural sites: the Pochtla phase dates to the MPC period, the Atlan phase to the LPC-A period, and the Molotla phase to the LPC-B period (Hare and Smith 1996).

These three sites present a cross-section of settlement types in Aztec period Morelos: a village of fewer than one hundred inhabitants (Capilco); a rural town of some eight hundred inhabitants with an elite group, a temple, and other civic architecture (Cuexcomate); and a city-state capital of fifteen thousand inhabitants with major craft industries and a large royal palace (Yautepec). One interesting finding of the excavations was a basic similarity in the domestic artifact assemblages of all three sites—a similarity that also extends to other Postclassic

sites in Morelos (Smith 2002) and that includes most of the ritual items described below. The types of deposits encountered were also similar among the sites: none of the houses had intact deposits of *de facto* or primary refuse (Schiffer 1987) on their floors; the structures had been abandoned gradually, and the people had removed most of the contents of the houses. A few burials were located at each of the sites, and a small number of caches of ceramic vessels were recovered at Cuexcomate and Capilco. As a result, almost all of the ritual artifacts described below come from middens associated with residential structures.

These sites, and most of the area of Morelos, were part of the Aztec culture of central Mexico. Morelos was inhabited by two Nahuatl ethnic groups, the Tlahuica and the Xochimilca (Maldonado 1990). These peoples shared many cultural traits with the Nahuatl speakers of the Basin of Mexico, for example, in the types of ceramics made and used throughout this area. Although each region produced its own ceramics, with local pastes and distinctive regional polychrome styles, the basic inventory of domestic vessel forms was fairly consistent throughout Aztec central Mexico (Smith 2002, ND). This cultural similarity throughout central Mexico originated in the common ethnic origin of the Aztec peoples as migrants from the north, and it was maintained for several centuries through intensive networks of communication, including the spread of ideas and concepts, the movements of peoples, and processes of commercial exchange (Smith 1996). Exchange processes were particularly active throughout Morelos, and every domestic artifact inventory documented in Postclassic Morelos (including these sites and numerous others described in Smith 2002) include a large number of imported items.

Objects Used in Domestic Ritual

The primary archaeological methods for the analysis of ancient rituals focus on context (see chapter 1). Objects found in contexts such as temples, shrines, altars, burials, and special offerings often can be interpreted as having ritual functions (Flannery 1976; Marcus 1996; Renfrew 1994; Whitehouse 1996). Unfortunately, the remains of popular or private rituals—particularly those conducted within the confines of the house or houseyard—may not be deposited in special contexts. In some cases these objects may be thrown out with the trash to end up in domestic middens along with the remains of meals and other household activities. Such behavior makes the archaeological identification of ritual objects difficult, or

in some cases, impossible (witness the argument over whether figurines at Teotihuacan were ritual objects or toys in chapter 6).

For the objects used in Aztec domestic ritual, we are fortunate to have information from sixteenth-century painted codices and written records that aid in their identification. The Postclassic peoples of Morelos used a number of ceramic objects in domestic rituals. These items have been recovered in almost every excavated Postclassic domestic midden. They include long-handled censers, scored censers, figurines, and a variety of small objects such as whistles, bells, and pipes. Some of these items—long-handled censers and crude censers—were also used in public ceremonies, whereas others—figurines and small objects—appear to have been limited to household contexts. Most of the ritual items described below fall into Whitehouse's (1996) category of "objects used in rites," although some may have been used as "amulets" (see discussion in chapter 1). I begin my discussion of ritual items with censers.

Censers

Each day women awoke early with a smiling heart and placed their offering to the gods on an altar in the courtyard of their house. On the altar was a round brazier (*brasero*) with burning coal and there the woman offered incense to the same fire kept in honor of the god, and/or in honor of the sun and the other gods. She also placed on the altar a clay vessel (*vaso*) with feet, filled it with clean water, and added flour of maize or *tlauilli* and also offered this to the gods. She then took some coals in a vessel like a frying pan but of clay, and holding this by the handle, threw incense onto the coals. And then she raised her hand with the brazier to the four directions. She also placed [on the altar] some vessels with food and later cleaned the vessels. To this offering they said, "Tlatlatchipahuacihuatl," which means "the beautiful woman, the earth." It should be noted that with this offering to the sun, to fire, to the earth, and to the other gods, they believed that they would have a good day, and that the sun would follow its course well and illuminate the earth, and by this bear fruit and maintain life. (Motolinía 1996:433)

This passage from Motolinía, one of the most complete descriptions of an Aztec domestic rite, includes two types of censer. The "vessel like a frying pan" is a long-handled censer; its use by women in the home is illustrated by Sahagún (1950-82, Bk. 6; Fig. 1e), who includes a fragment of a speech to a young noblewoman, "especially do not neglect the offering of incense, for thus our lord is petitioned" (1950-82, Bk. 6:95). The round brazier in the above quotation is probably the basin-type censer within

Table 9.1 Frequencies of ritual objects in domestic deposits (% of total sherds)

Period/Site	CENSERS					Total sherds
	Long-hand	Scored	Crude	Figurines	Small objects	
Middle Postclassic						
Capilco	1.4	—	0.2	—	—	2,555
Yautepec	0.4	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.01	26,751
Late Postclassic, A						
Capilco	1.5	—	P	P	0.04	14,789
Cuexcomate	2.4	—	0.5	P	0.01	11,757
Yautepec	0.4	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.01	68,663
Late Postclassic, B						
Capilco	1.0	—	0.1	0.1	1.00	16,151
Cuexcomate	1.1	—	0.2	0.1	0.03	47,391
Yautepec	0.4	P	0.1	0.2	0.09	198,048
Early Colonial						
Yautepec	0.4	0.1	0.1	0.3	—	7,586

Note: Data are from Smith 2001; "P" indicates categories that are present at a level of less than 0.05%

the crude censers category described below.

LONG-HANDLED CENSERS

In the Aztec codices, priests are frequently depicted burning copal incense in long-handled censers (figure 9.1; these are only a few of the numerous images of the censers in the codices). This image is so common and standardized that in many cases it may have been an icon for magico-religious activity rather than a depiction of incense offerings in a specific setting. The Nahuatl term for these censers was *ilemailt* (fire hand). They are mentioned frequently in the works of Sahagún and Durán when they describe activities of priests during various rituals. These objects were a common form of offering at temples and other public religious contexts. For example, numerous long-handled censers were recovered in excavations at the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan; these objects and their symbolism (focusing on fire and serpents) are discussed by Selser (1990–98); more recent findings at the Templo Mayor are described by López Luján (1994). An offering of these censers was excavated along with a series of mass burials and offerings in the ballcourt at Coatetelco in Morelos (Arana 1984); these objects are described and illustrated in Smith (2002; see figure 9.2a). It is clear that the long-handled censer, used by professional priests, was an important component of Aztec public religion. That this form was also used in rituals in caves is shown by an offering of several such censers recently discovered in a cave in the northern part of the Municipio of Tepoztlan, Morelos (Broda and Maldonado 1996; de Vega and Pelz 1996).

Long-handled censers are also found in domestic contexts in Morelos, where they are the most abundant cat-

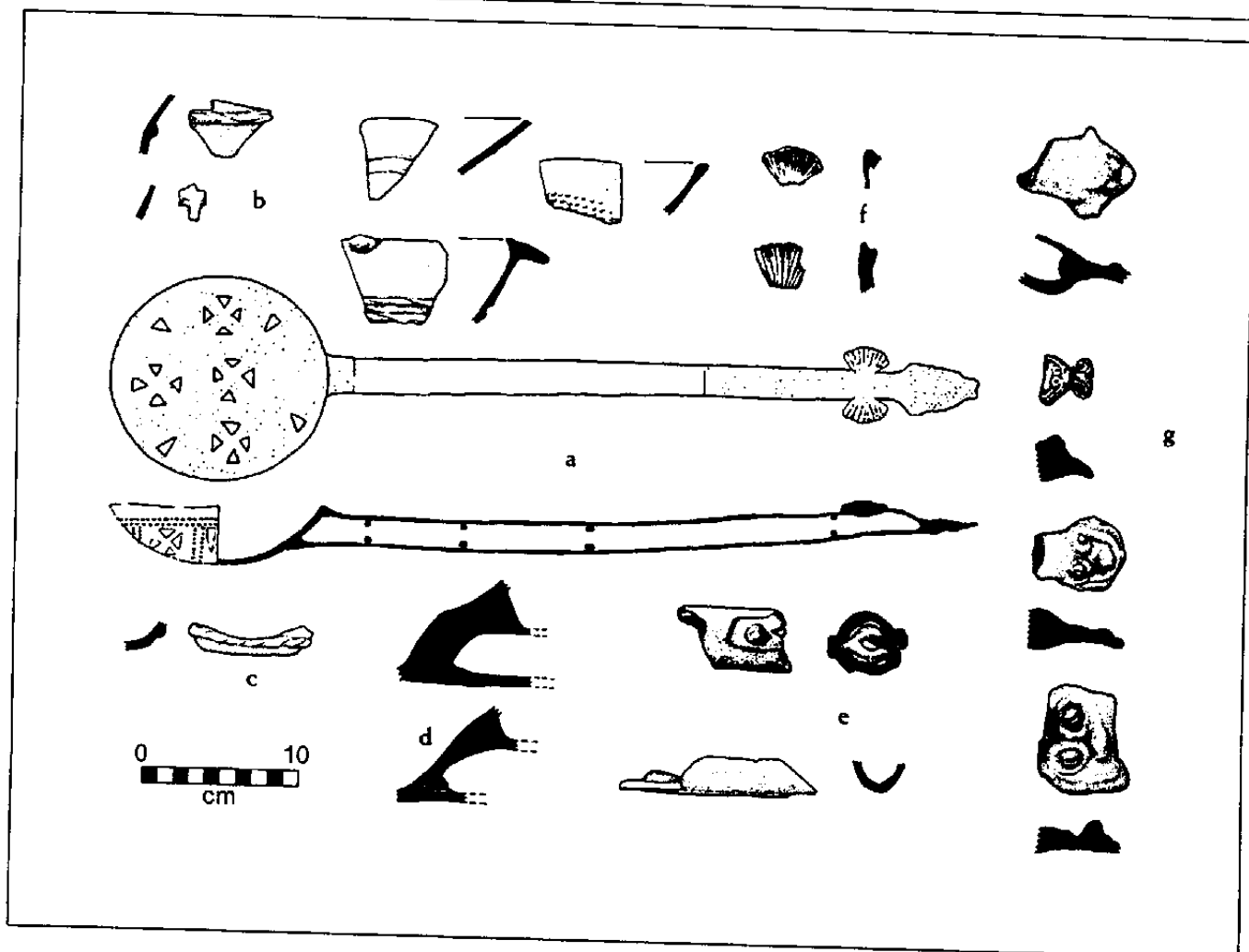
egory of ritual object in all time periods (table 9.1). They occur in highly fragmentary pieces in household middens along with other domestic ceramics. No offerings of censers have been found in domestic areas, and censer sherds, like other vessel sherds in middens, can never be refitted into whole objects. In other words, censers were used in domestic settings, where they broke and were tossed into the trash along with fractured cookpots, broken obsidian blades, and turkey bones. The use of these censers in the home is mentioned and depicted far less frequently than is their public use by priests (figure 9.1e; see quotation from Motolinía above).

Figure 9.2 shows censer sherds recovered from domestic middens at Yautepec. Long-handled censers consist of a shallow bowl connected to a long, hollow tube that was used as a handle. The hollow handles contained small ceramic balls to make a rattling sound, although none of the excavated examples were intact; these rattles are found on intact long-handled censers from offerings (figure 9.2a) and are described in Sahagún (1950–82, Bk. 2:151). A portion of the tube is sometimes painted red, and there is often a coat of white lime plaster on all or part of the vessel. The bowls often have triangular perforations or cut-outs in groups of four; these features are shown on many of the censers depicted in the codices (for example, figure 9.1b, d). The exterior of the bowl is also frequently decorated with multiple small circular and linear projections, leading to the common type name of "Texcoco molded/filleted" for these sherds. The ends of the handles are typically modeled into serpent heads, either hollow or solid (figure 9.2h); this trait is commonly depicted in the codices (figure 9.1a, b). There is often a fan element that resembles a bowtie (probably a replica

9.1 Depictions of long-handled censers from the Aztec codices: a, priest with censer and maguety thorn for autosacrifice (Codex Magliabechiano 1983, F.87); b, deity Cipactonal with priestly paraphernalia, including a censer (Codex Borbonicus 1974, 21); c, priest using censer in a Tlaloc ceremony (Sahagún 1950-82, Bk. 6, Fig. 10); d, novice priest with paraphernalia (Codex Mendoza 1992, F.63r); e, woman offering incense at home (Sahagún 1950-82, Bk. 7, Fig. 18). Tracings by Benjamin Karis



9.2 Long-handled censers from excavations in Morelos: a, complete censer excavated at Coatelco (Arana 1984, Smith 2001). b-g, sherds excavated at Yauhtepec. b, rims and bodies, c, base fragment, d, handle junctions, e, cylindrical handles (note ceramic spacer), f, "bow-tie" elements, g, serpent beads. The whole censer, a, is drawn at a smaller scale than the sherds; it is 84 cm in length. Illustration by Benjamin Karis



of the *amacuexpalli*, a pleated paper fan ornament found on many deities) toward the end of the handle (figure 9. 2g). None of the censers from Morelos have the highly complex modeling and painted decoration exhibited on some examples from excavations in Tenochtitlan (Seler 1990: 98). The fire, serpents, and rattles of long-handled censers were symbols of rain, lightning, clouds, and heavenly fire.

Long-handled censers are abundant throughout the Basin of Mexico (Charlton et al. 1991; O'Neill 1962; Parsons 1966; Séjourné 1983; Tolstoy 1958) and Morelos (Smith 2002). Evidence for their manufacture—in the form of punctate concave molds for producing the circular elements—is common at Otumba (Charlton, Nichols, and Otis Charlton 1991), and we recovered several of these molds at Yautepec and Cuexcomate in Morelos. Although the pastes have not been subjected to characterization yet, it is likely that the majority of the long-handled censers in Morelos were produced locally. The similarity of censers in the Basin of Mexico and Morelos is part of the basic similarity in the Middle and Late Postclassic ceramic vessel forms of the two areas. Although censers of the type "Texcoco molded/filleted" have been assigned a Late Postclassic date (Sanders, Parsons, and Santley 1979), this type begins in the Middle Postclassic period in Morelos (Smith 2002), long before the formation of the Aztec empire; thus its occurrence in provincial areas cannot be attributed to imperial imposition or influence. The use of long-handled censers continued into the Colonial period, judging by their presence in a late sixteenth-century midden excavated at Yautepec (table 9.1).

SCORED CENSERS

Scored censers are an enigmatic vessel form found in small numbers at Yautepec but not Cuexcomate or Capilco (table 9.1). These are crude vessels covered with rough, deep incisions, typically in cross-hatched patterns. Many vessels have large horizontal flanges, and some have basket-type strap handles. None of the Yautepec sherds are large enough to get a sense of the shape of the entire vessel, but they correspond to scored censers reported from sites in the Basin of Mexico. Parsons (1966:250–252) calls this type "cross-hatched ware," and O'Neill (1962:152–154) calls it "rough and rough scored." Séjourné (1970:Fig. 39; 1983:Fig. 119) illustrates some sherds and partial vessels. I am unaware of any depictions or descriptions of these vessels in the codices or chroniclers. They occur in domestic middens at Yautepec

and in a temple deposit at Teopanzolco (see below). My interpretation of these vessels as censers follows Séjourné's (1970) suggestion, but this hypothesis has little empirical support. If it does hold up, the distribution of these censers suggests regional differences in ritual items within Morelos.

CRUDE CENSERS

The ceramic category *crude censer*, as used at sites in Morelos, includes two, possibly three, different kinds of vessels, thus limiting its usefulness for functional interpretation. These are thick sherds with a very coarse buff-colored paste. Their surfaces are usually unfinished and rough, and the coarse paste erodes very easily. Some examples are covered with a thick coat of white lime plaster. Most sherds are too small to reconstruct vessel forms with any confidence, although some larger examples conform to one of two general forms known from whole vessels elsewhere: large braziers and basin-type censers.

Large braziers. Large braziers are tall composite vessels (often over 1 m in height) used for fires or for offerings of incense. Complete examples have been recovered at temple sites such as the Templo Mayor and Teopanzolco, and the common interpretation is that they were used to keep fires burning at temples, as described in the documentary sources (López Luján 1994; Seler 1990–1998). Sherds from these vessels are found in very small numbers in domestic middens in Morelos. They can be identified by the triangular flanges, the horizontal rows of circular appliqué elements, and the distinctive paste and surface finish. Although sherds in the crude censer category are consistently found in every house deposit, those that can be matched to large braziers are quite rare. Based on this rarity, my guess is that people did not have large braziers of this sort in their homes but may have gathered sherds from broken braziers from public contexts to bring home, perhaps as powerful amulets.

Basin-type censers. Basin-type censers are urns that were presumably used to burn incense. Apart from Motolinía's quotation (see above), there is little information in the codices or written records on the functions of these objects. Decorated urns were used as censers in many Mesoamerican cultures, however (Caso and Bernal 1952; Deal 1982). Only a small number of sherds from domestic contexts can be confidently matched to this form, recognizable examples of which are more common in temple deposits in Morelos (see below). Many examples from Morelos are undecorated, although a common variant has

a row of appliqué decoration on the exterior surface just below the rim (these are particularly common at the Tepozteco temple), and some examples have geometric stamped or modeled decoration.

Possible cooking braziers. Most sherds of the crude censer category recovered in domestic settings cannot be assigned to either of the two above categories because they are too small and eroded. Although their paste and surface finish matches these categories, it is possible that these sherds pertain to an entirely different kind of vessel—the cooking brazier. We uncovered no clear examples of hearths at the excavated sites, and the use of portable ceramic braziers would not be unexpected. I am uncomfortable in interpreting the crude censer sherds as cooking braziers, however, in the absence of whole vessels for comparative purposes. We have little information about what Aztec cooking braziers may have looked like, and until we do, I prefer to leave the functional interpretation of the crude censer category open. In temple deposits, there are larger sherds, many or most of which can be classified as large braziers or basin-type censers. But for now, the crude censers from domestic middens remain an enigmatic category, not particularly useful for studies of domestic ritual.

Ceramic figurines

Some [people] have these little baskets inside boxes for greater safekeeping, especially when they keep some small idol to which they attribute an increase in their wealth. If they credit it with an increase in maize, wheat, and other grains, they keep it inside the granaries... To each of these idols was attributed an effect, such as increasing the sown land, the estate, and so forth. (Ruiz de Alarcón 1982:71-72)

Figurines, called idols by Ruiz de Alarcón and other chroniclers, are small ceramic objects fashioned into images of people, gods, animals, plants, and temples. Although figurines are one of the most common types of ritual artifact at Mesoamerican sites from the Formative period onward, their uses, meanings, and significance remain poorly understood. The greatest recent advances in Mesoamerican figurine research have been for the Formative period, when figurines may have been used for domestic rituals that focused on fertility, curing, and perhaps ancestor veneration (Cyphers 1993; Joyce 2000:19–53; Lesure 1997; Marcus 1996, 1998). For the Aztec period, one might think that the availability of pictorial and text sources on religion and iconography would lead to a good understanding of the functions and significance of figurines, but that has not been the case. In fact, reliance upon these sources may have held back

our understanding of Aztec figurines. Scholars have been slow to acknowledge the distinctiveness of domestic ritual and as a result many have insisted on interpreting figurines in light of the specific gods of the great tradition as presented in the codices. When we free figurines from the interpretive constraints of the Aztec great tradition, it becomes clear that they functioned in the context of a distinctive domestic religion only distantly related to the public religion of Tenochtitlan.

AZTEC FIGURINES FROM MORELOS HOUSES

The excavations at Cuexcomate, Capilco, and Yautepec yielded more than two thousand figurines, mostly partial and fragmentary. Jan Olson, Elizabeth DiPippo, and I classified these artifacts with two cross-cutting typologies, forming what we called groups and types. We also recorded a series of attributes for each artifact, including elements such as skirt type, body part, position, hollow versus solid, and so forth (Olson, Smith, and DiPippo 1999). Analyses of these data are incomplete, but some preliminary results can be presented here.

Groups. Groups were defined using paste and overall form to determine the place of origin of figurines. The largest category by far are objects that resemble Aztec figurines from the Basin of Mexico (an example of the cultural similarity between these areas noted above) but were composed of one of several local pastes from Morelos. Several molds for producing these figurines were found at Yautepec. At least one group was produced in western Morelos, probably near Cuexcomate and Capilco, but specific production sites for these and most other figurines have yet to be identified. Examples of the western Morelos group at Yautepec were probably imported from sites in that area.

Two groups of distinctive figurine forms are found only at Yautepec: tiny black human and animal figures and a group of distinctive flat anthropomorphic figures. Yet another group, consisting of objects made of Aztec orange paste, were probably traded to Morelos from the Basin of Mexico. A final group consists of figurines made with a very fine, nonlocal buff paste; these are probably from the western Basin of Mexico (this interpretation is based upon the predominance of this paste in the figurines from George Vaillant's excavations at Nonoalco; these collections are curated in the American Museum of Natural History in New York City). In sum, our classification by groups suggests three broad categories for the Morelos figurines: Aztec figurines imported from the Basin of Mexico, locally produced versions of standard Az-

Table 9.2 Frequencies of figurine types in domestic contexts (% of total phased figurines)

Period/Site	Female	Male	Human	Puppet	Animal	Crude	Temple	Rattle	Frag.	N
Middle Postclassic										
Capilco	17	17	17	33	-	17	-	-	-	6
Yautepec	25	4	33	4	11	6	-	9	9	85
Late Postclassic, A										
Capilco	20	16	20	8	8	4	-	6	18	50
Cuexcomate	20	17	17	7	10	0	-	8	22	60
Yautepec	29	8	28	1	9	2	-	11	13	291
Late Postclassic, B										
Capilco	21	13	27	6	9	1	-	10	12	77
Cuexcomate	13	17	19	11	10	1	-	8	21	226
Yautepec	28	11	24	2	12	1	1	10	10	1115
Early Colonial										
Yautepec	12	27	15	4	15	-	-	8	19	26

Note: These are aggregate data are from all well-phased domestic contexts.

tec figurine forms, and unique local forms.

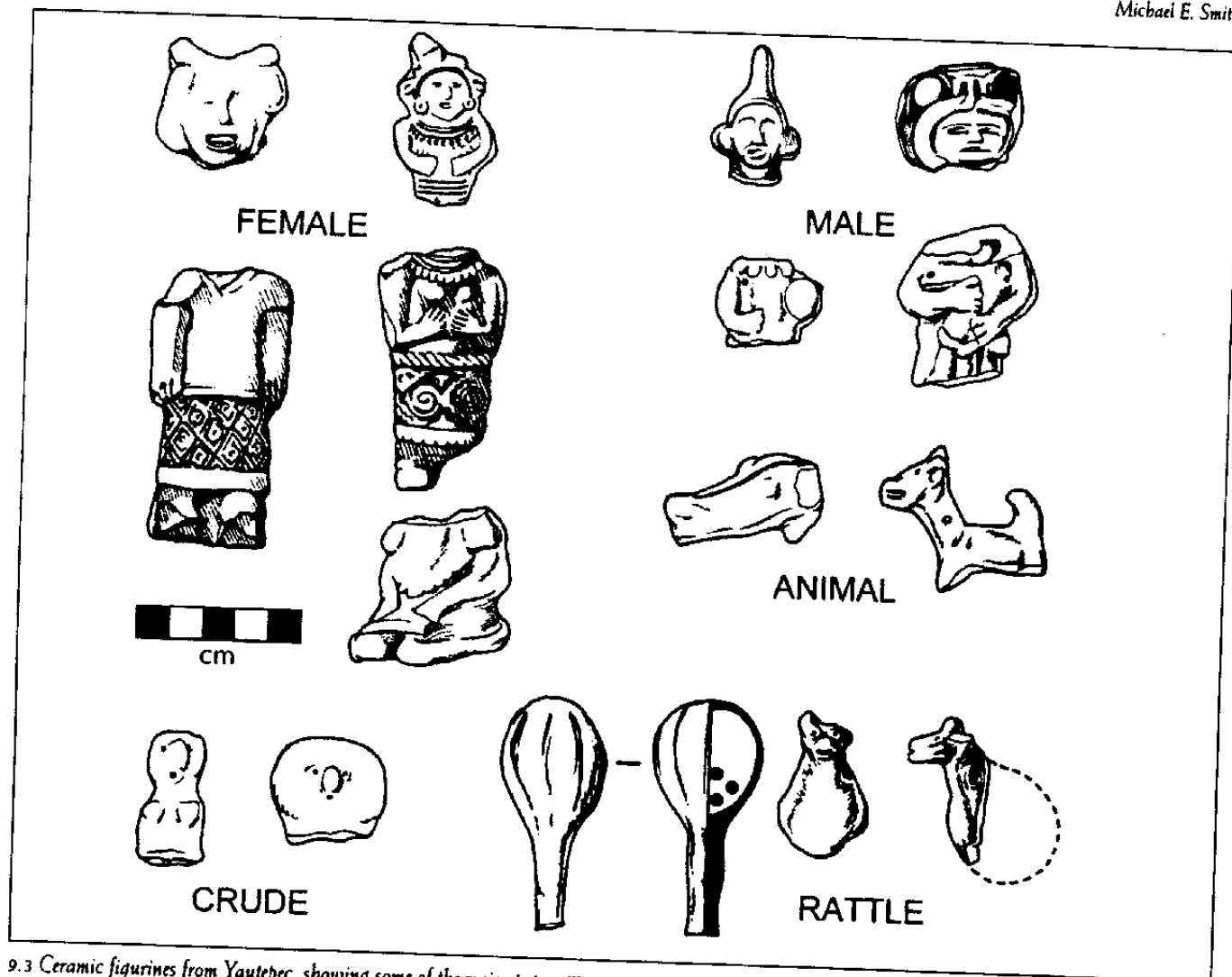
Types. Our classification by type attempts to identify the nature of the image portrayed by each figurine. The major types are listed in table 9.2 with their frequencies by site and time period. Key examples are illustrated in figure 9.3. Gender was judged by clothing, hairstyles and headdresses, and the presence or absence of breasts. Many *females* have bare breasts, and others wear a *quechquemiltl* (triangular tunic) or another form of tunic. The two-pronged hairstyle of married Aztec women is another good indicator of gender. *Males* can be identified by their breechcloths, the absence of breasts, and several key headdresses and other attributes, some of which relate to warfare. We were conservative in attributing gender to the fragmentary figurines, resulting in a large number of examples of unclassified humans (the *human* type). *Puppets* were identified based upon an example published in González Rul (1988); most of these pieces are thin appendages.

The *animal* category includes both plants and animals. Possums are the most common animal depicted; these were identified based upon research by Guilliem (1997). Dogs, monkeys, and birds are also common. The *crude* type describes crude, hand-modeled solid cylindrical forms with simple punctate facial features. Brumfiel and Hodge (1996:432-433) illustrate similar figurines from Xaltocan, calling them "mud men." The *temple* type are small models of pyramid-temples. Well-known from the Basin of Mexico (Wardle 1910), this form in Morelos is found only in LPC-B contexts at Yautepec. *Rattles* have a round hollow chamber that originally held several small ceramic balls, and one of several varieties of handles, in-

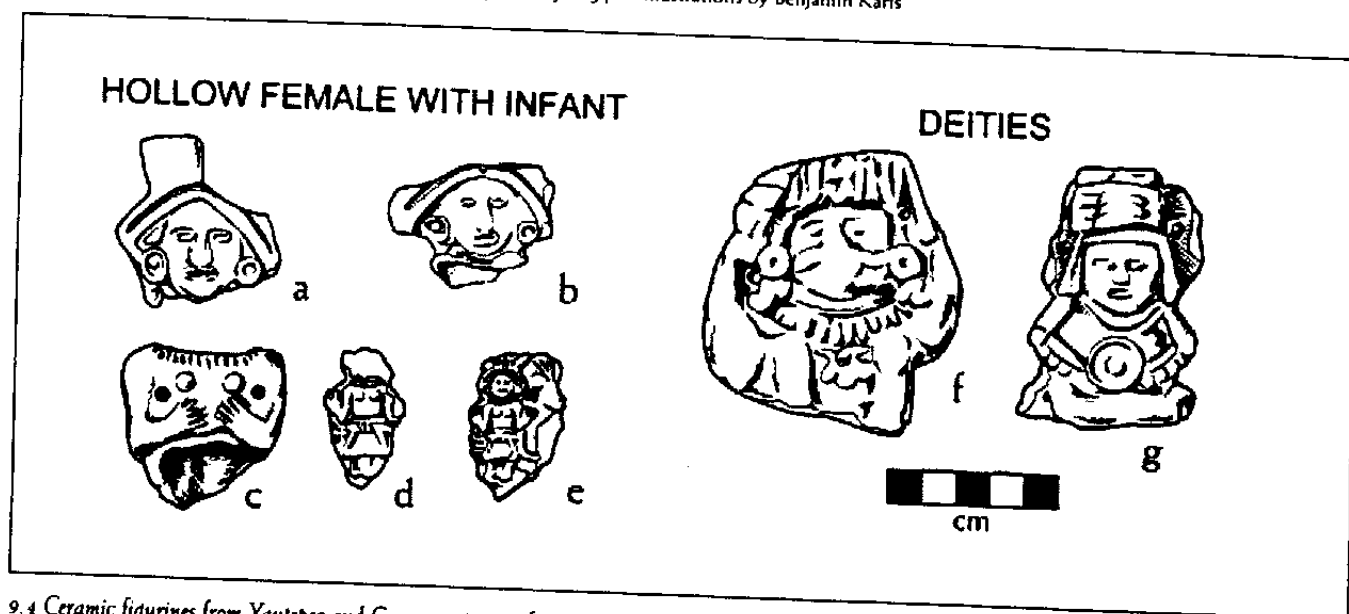
cluding twisted cylinders and stylized animal heads. The *fragment* category includes pieces too small to classify by type.

Observations. The vast majority of the ceramic figurines at these sites are anthropomorphic (table 9.2). Female figures outnumber males in all contexts except LPC-B at Cuexcomate. Similar to Brumfiel's (1996) figurine data from the Basin of Mexico, most female figurines are in a standing position, although kneeling and sitting positions are also present (figure 9.3e). The hollow, standing female form with rattles, one of the most commonly illustrated types in the Basin of Mexico, is rare but consistently present in Morelos, comprising between 5 and 10% of the female figurines (figure 9.4, a-e); these should not be confused with the rattle type (figure 9.3, l-m), which describes small rattles not in human form. Women holding tiny human figures are not uncommon. Most of the small figures are miniature adult women (for example, they have breasts, adult skirts, and the married hairstyle). Although these might represent female infants, the adult sexual features suggest that these tiny images were more likely intended to represent tiny adult women, or in other words, female figurines (figure 9.4, d-e). If this interpretation is valid, it points to the use of figurines (female ones, at least) by women.

Some of the male figurines hold a circular object that may be a shield or a drum (figure 9.3h). There are a few males with military themes at Yautepec; these include a jaguar knight (figure 9.3i), an eagle knight, and a miniature male captive, whose hands are bound behind the back. Most of the anthropomorphic figurines have two small perforations under the arms. These were probably



9.3 Ceramic figurines from Yautepec, showing some of the major types. Illustrations by Benjamin Karis



9.4 Ceramic figurines from Yautepec and Cuexcomate: a-e, fragments of hollow standing females holding infants or idols, f-g, likely deities. Illustrations by Benjamin Karis

used to suspend the figurines, either on necklaces or in trees, as described in documentary sources (see below).

Interpretations of Aztec figurines

Figurines and idols. The Aztec ethnohistoric record is notable for the paucity of clear references to ceramic figurines. In their concern to eliminate idolatry, the Spanish friars made fairly frequent reference to "idols," but it appears that this term covered a variety of types of images (Brumfiel 1996; Brundage 1985:67–71; Heyden 1996; Millian 1981). When discussing temples, the authors of the *Relaciones Geográficas* of 1579–1581 often noted the presence of stone and wood idols (Acuña 1984–1987; Smith 1992:331), and in other contexts stone and wood idols are mentioned without information on their location or context. Anthropomorphic stone sculptures were a major art form in Tenochtitlan, and many examples have survived (Baquedano 1984; Solís 1982); not surprisingly, many fewer wood idols are known today (Nicholson and Berger 1968; Saville 1925). Idols made of amaranth dough are also mentioned in people's homes (for example, Sahagún 1950–82, Bk. 12:51–52; Ruiz de Alarcón 1982:75), and idols of copal resin have been recovered from public contexts in Tenochtitlan (Leonardo López Luján, personal communication).

In a few passages, Sahagún and Durán mention the presence of idols in homes (see Brumfiel 1996:147; Millian 1981:43–46). Because of their ignorance of the domestic setting and women's affairs (see above), the friars probably had little firsthand knowledge of ceramic figurines, and they may have confused these small objects with the large stone and wood statues that stood in temples and other public contexts. Sahagún's illustration of the discarding of household possessions for the New Fire ceremony (figure 9.5) shows a person tossing out a rather large idol with a sinister-looking facial expression, and the accompanying text suggests that people had "statues, hewn in either wood or stone" (Sahagún 1950–82, Bk. 7:25) in their homes. Such statues have not been found by archaeologists in domestic contexts, in contrast to ceramic figurines, which are prominent in virtually all domestic middens.

A few sources specifically suggest that domestic idols were small objects, and these probably refer to ceramic figurines. Durán (1967, I:248) mentions household altars upon which people put "*figuras de ídolo*" (which Horcasitas and Heyden translate as "figurine"—Durán 1971:420). Ruiz de Alarcón uses the term *ídol* for images kept in the house, usually without any indication of the size or nature of these images. In one case, however, he mentions



9.5 Sahagún's illustration of the discarding of household possessions for a New Fire ceremony. Sahagún 1950–82, Bk. 7:Fig. 19. Reproduced courtesy of the University of Utah Press

that when idolators were caught with their idols, they would sometimes quickly put them in their mouth and swallow them, preferring to endure the discomfort rather than turning them over to the priest (Ruiz de Alarcón 1982:89–90).

Deities, people, or something else? Most published studies of Aztec figurines assume that all or most of the anthropomorphic examples were gods or goddesses of the great tradition as depicted in the codices and described by the chroniclers (Barlow 1990; Guillemin 1997; Heyden 1996; Parsons 1972; Pasztory 1983; Seler 1990–98). These scholars devote considerable effort to the identification of the deities, which is rarely straightforward. In contrast, Millian (1981) suggests that although some figurines did indeed represent identifiable deities, most human images were meant to be people, not gods or goddesses.

Because of their changing and multiple natures, Aztec deities are notoriously difficult to identify, even when many attributes are shown. For example, the leading modern scholars of Aztec iconography cannot even agree on the identity of the central image on the Aztec calendar stone, with Tlaltecuhli and Tonatiuh each having partisans (Graulich 1992a; Klein 1977; Navarrete and Heyden 1974; Nicholson 1993; Solís 2000; Townsend 1979). Returning to Aztec figurines, consider the standing, hollow rattle of a female, often holding a child (figure 9.4, a–c), a common form in the Basin of Mexico and

Morelos. Eduard Seler (1990-98) interpreted this image as the deity Cihuacoatl, but Robert Barlow (1990) disagreed and interpreted it as Xochiquetzal (an identification also favored by Michel Graulich—personal communication, 2000). If Seler and Barlow, perhaps the most influential Aztec specialists of the twentieth century, cannot agree on the deity classification of one of the most common forms of figurine, I am hesitant to join this effort of desperately searching for deities. In general, the conceptions of deity in Mesoamerica were complex not only among the Aztecs but also, as recent research shows, in Classic and Postclassic Maya religion (Gillespie and Joyce 1998, Tate 1999, Vail 2000).

These two interpretations of figurines—identifiable deities or mortal humans—are not the only two possibilities, however. It is entirely possible that many figurines were powerful images that did not correspond to readily identifiable gods as known from the great tradition sources. They could have been local or regional deities (as in the Hindu example described in the introduction); idiosyncratic deities of individual households or curers; or perhaps anthropomorphic images that were transformed into powerful objects through a ritual or through the application of clothing (much like the Mexica *ixiptla*, or deity impersonators). Another possibility is that anthropomorphic figurines depicted revered ancestors (as proposed by Marcus [1998] for Formative Zapotec figurines), but the lack of ancestor veneration at the household level in Aztec society (see discussion below) argues against this interpretation.

Some figurines do clearly portray known gods and goddesses. For example, figurine YF-666 from Yautepec (figure 9.4f) exhibits a buccal mask and cut conch-shell pectoral, two of the most common attributes of the god Ehecatl/Quetzalcoatl, and YF-1371 (figure 9.4g) is a common kneeling female deity with attributes of Xochiquetzal and Chalchiuhtlicue, associated by Millian (1981:66–70) with a general theme of fertility. These examples suggest that when figurine makers wanted to depict a deity, they could do so easily. If so, then why would they produce so many figurines without obvious deity attributes, unless these were not meant to be formal deities at all? Many of the unprovenienced whole figurines in museum and private collections, which are the examples most commonly illustrated in art books and general accounts, do have multiple attributes that allow the identification of particular gods and goddesses. The less elaborate figurines—probably not meant to represent specific gods—are less commonly illustrated in such ac-

counts, but they occur at a much higher frequency in archaeological figurine assemblages. For these reasons, I resist the temptation to try to classify all or most of the anthropomorphic figurines as individually known gods or goddesses. They were more likely spirits or minor supernatural beings that did not have codified names and descriptions in the ethnohistoric literature, similar to the spirits invoked using cut-paper figurines (called *ejecatl*) by modern Nahua peoples in Veracruz (see discussion below). It is also possible that some figurines may have been viewed as nondivine humans.

Figurines and domestic ritual

Figurines were probably used in a variety of locations for a variety of purposes. Some of these were away from the home. Durán (1971:419), for example, mentions figurines hung from trees over agricultural fields, presumably to bring fertility. Ruiz de Alarcón describes idols placed at passes and crossroads in the countryside that people petitioned for a number of things: "that the deity whom they believe resides there be favorable to them, or that nothing bad happen to them on the voyage they are making, or to have a good harvest, or for similar things" (1982:70). Given the abundance of ceramic figurines in domestic middens, however, it is likely that the home was the major location for rituals that used these objects.

According to Ruiz de Alarcón (1982:72), idols (figurines) were typically stored in and around the house (see his quotation above). He also states that these idols were inherited and that individual idols had separate domains of action: "increasing the sown land, the estate, and so forth" (1982:72). Among these themes, health and fertility were particularly prominent. Several documentary descriptions of "idols" mention their use in curing ceremonies (for example, Sahagún 1950-82, Bk. 1:48), and Durán describes the wearing of necklaces hung with figurines ("*figuras de ídolo*") by children to protect them from illness and misfortune (1971:420). Many curing ceremonies were done in the home by curers,⁵ who could be of either gender (Clendinnen 1991:175–205; Ortiz de Montellano 1990:165–188). Sandstrom (2001) provides ethnographic examples from modern Mesoamerica of curing ceremonies in domestic contexts, and DeBoer (1998) describes a parallel ethnographic case of the use of figurines for curing among the Chachi people of northwest Ecuador.

Of the various deities that can be identified in the corpus of Aztec figurines, most related in some way to fertility, that is, human health/fertility/reproduction or agricultural fertility. Millian lists the following deities as repre-



9.6 Four types of small ceramic objects recovered in household excavations at Cuexcomate and Capilco. Top left, pipes; top right, tiny models of vessels; bottom left, bells; bottom right, whistles. Smith 1996:90. Reproduced with permission

sented among ceramic figurines—Xochiquetzal, Chalchiuhtlicue, Quetzalcoatl, Xochipilli/Macuixochitl, and Xolotl—and concludes that this collection suggests “a strong orientation toward use in human reproduction” (1981:47). In her analysis of figurine iconography, Millian discusses the overlapping of diagnostic criteria among deities and the difficulties of making firm identifications. For many of the figurines traditionally classified as Xochiquetzal (for example, figure 9.4, a-e, g), she suggests that rather than simply assuming that these all represent Xochiquetzal, “it is probably prudent to recognize traits that associate these images with fertility and to generally classify it [them] as a ‘fertility group’ theme” (Millian 1981:70).

A number of attributes of the Morelos figurine assemblages are consistent with this hypothesized emphasis on fertility and curing. The predominance of female figures may suggest an association with reproduction, a realm in which midwives and other women played an important role. The likely portrayal of female figurines in the arms of women may point to a role for these hollow female figurines as surrogates for such midwives and curers. The presence of possums as the most abundant animal also fits with the fertility theme because of a strong association between possums and fertility/reproduction in Aztec thought (López Austin 1993).⁶ Rattles (*chicahuaztli*) were employed in many Aztec rituals of agricultural fertility (for example, Durán 1971:174, 207; Sahagún 1950-82, Bk. 2:46-59), and these objects form a prominent part of the figurine assemblages in all periods. Furthermore, other

items used in domestic ritual, including hollow-rattle female figurines and long-handled censers, also had rattle balls to make a rattling sound.

Figurines in public contexts

There were few uses for figurines in Aztec public religion. The offerings at the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan contain no ceramic figurines (López Luján 1994), in contrast to the many other diverse ritual objects. Although offerings of ceramic vessels are common in association with burials and building dedications, such deposits almost never contain figurines. One of the few instances of ceramic figurines in a public state context is a series of buried offerings in front of the circular Temple R in Tlatelolco (Guillien 1997). Among the 2050 objects in these offerings were 57 figurines. The majority are female, in both standing and kneeling positions, and of both the solid and hollow-rattle types. Only a few are male and several are animals, including a painted, hollow possum with a baby possum riding on top. The themes of the figurines and other objects in this deposit center around fertility and renewal, in line with the likely dedication of this circular temple to Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl (Graulich 1992b).

Other small objects possibly used in rituals

A variety of small ceramic objects found in some domestic middens may have had ritual uses. These include pipes, bells, whistles, and tiny models of ceramic vessels (figure 9.6). The pipes were probably used for

smoking tobacco (Porter 1948), which was used in a number of Aztec rituals; in fact, tobacco was one of the major ritual items described (and decried) by Ruiz de Alarcón (1982) a century after the Spanish conquest. The tiny bells are similar in size and shape to West Mexican copper/bronze bells, whose use was expanding throughout the Aztec empire in the Late Postclassic period (Hosler 1994). The ceramic bells first occur in the MPC period, whereas copper/bronze items (including bells) do not occur at Yauhtepec until the LPC-A period. The evidence that Hosler (1994:235–240) assembles on the role of bells in Aztec ritual probably pertains to ceramic bells as well as copper/bronze objects. There has been less research on whistles, but it seems likely that they too were used in rituals (Martí 1969). The uses of the tiny ceramic vessels are unknown; I informally call them "toys." If ceramic figurines were used to enact specific scenes from people's lives (as parts of rituals), perhaps these little objects were props in such scenes. Stamps are another small ceramic object that may have had a use in rituals (these are not pictured in figure 9.5). Most stamps have geometric designs, with animals and plants also represented (Enciso 1953, 1971). They may have been used for decorating the body for ceremonies and/or for decorating textiles (Alcina Franch 1958, 1996).

The small ceramic objects described above occur in very low frequencies. Whereas every house had at least one long-handled censer and most had figurines and crude censers, the small objects occurred in lower frequencies in smaller numbers of excavated houses (the reason their frequencies are shown to an additional decimal place in table 9.1). Nevertheless, some or all of these items were probably used in rituals in the home.

Burials

The burial of the dead is a ritual practice cross-culturally, and the practice of burials in domestic settings suggests that these features were expressions of household-level ritual. Six burials were excavated at Capilco and three at Cuexcomate (table 9.3). Preservation was not good, but it was possible to assign general age categories. Two striking characteristics of this set of burials stand out: the small number of burials, and the absence of adults. The burials were located either under the house floor or within 1 or 2 m of the house in an exterior midden area. Although we excavated or tested over sixty structures at the two sites, only nine burials were found. I believe that we excavated a large enough sample of houses to rule out adult burial as a common feature in domestic areas. In the

Yauhtepec excavations, we did recover several adult burials (Wilkinson 1998), but most were concentrated around a single structure. The data from that site fit with the general pattern of few adult burials in domestic areas at Aztec period sites in Morelos.

These sites are not unusual in their small number of burials; overall, very few burials have been recovered at Aztec archaeological sites. Documentary sources suggest that cremation and subsequent burial of the remains was a common form of treatment of the dead among the Mexica nobility of Tenochtitlan (for example, Nagao 1985:37–42; Sahagún 1950–1982, Bk. 3:41–43). Most modern authors have generalized from these accounts to conclude that cremation was a regular practice among all sectors of society (for example, Evans 1988:35; Harvey 1981; Nagao 1985:38), although Brundage (1985:193–194) suggests that only rulers and nobles were cremated and most other people were buried without cremation (see also Ragot 2000). When we look beyond the Mexica-centered chroniclers, however, the only evidence of cremation outside of royal or noble contexts in Tenochtitlan is a series of elite burials in the Tehuacan Valley.

The account published by Gómez de Orozco (1945), a copy of text from the Codex Tudela, describes three categories of burials—nobles, merchants, and commoners—but does not mention cremation. According to this source, nobles were buried with sacrificed slaves and cooking utensils, and many other goods were also placed with the body in a chambered tomb located in the patio of the residence. Merchants were buried with valuable trade goods (precious stones, feathers, gold, jaguar pelts) and food (see also Codex Magliabechiano 1983:f.68r), whereas commoners were accompanied by mantas and food, including bowls of meat, tortillas, beans, *chia* (*Salvia hispanica*), and greens (Gómez de Orozco 1945:57–58). The *Relaciones Geográficas* from northeast Guerrero also mention differential burial practices for nobles and commoners and also omit any mention of cremation. Among the few published archaeological cases of Aztec burials, cremations are reported only from Coxcatlan Viejo in the Tehuacan Valley (Sisson 1974:31, 37) and the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan (Matos 1988; Román and López Luján 1999), whereas direct interments are known from Cihuatecpan and site Xo-Az-46 in the Basin of Mexico (Evans 1988; Parsons et al. 1982) and from Coatetelco and Xochicalco in Morelos (Arana 1984; Hirth 2000; Smith 2002). These data suggest that the lack of burials at Aztec sites cannot be explained by invoking cremation as a regular practice. The remains of cremations are typically

Table 9.3 Burials at Cuexcomate and Capilco

No.	Individuals	Position	Goods	Location	Phase
Capilco					
1-1	1 infant	sitting	4 vessels	under housefloor	LPC-B
1-2	1 child	sitting	1 vessel	under housefloor	LPC-B
1-3	1 infant	flexed?	none	midden area	?
1-4	1 youth	sitting	none	midden area	?
1-5	1 child	sitting	none	midden area	?
1-6A	1 infant	sitting	2 vessels	midden area	?
1-6B	1 infant	flexed	4 vessels, 1 bell	midden area	?
1-6C	1 youth	sitting	4 vessels	midden area	?
Cuexcomate					
2-1	1 child	flexed	1 vessel	under patio	LPC-B
2-2	1 infant	flexed	1 vessel	under housefloor	LPC-B
2-3	1 infant	sitting	none	under ritual dump	LPC-B

Note: Data are from Smith (1992); Infant = under 2 years of age, child = 2–6 years of age, youth = 6–14 years of age

Table 9.4. Frequencies of ritual objects in temple deposits (% of total sherds)

Site and Period	CENSERS		Crude	Figurines	Small Objects	Total no. sherds
	Long-hand	Scored				
Middle Postclassic						
Teopanzolco	0.4	P	4.0	-	-	7,075
Tepozteco	1.0	-	12.4	-	-	890
Late Postclassic, A						
Cuexcomate	3.0	-	1.0	P	-	2,859
Late Postclassic, B						
Cuexcomate	2.8	-	0.8	P	-	1,199

Note: Data from Smith (2001); "P" indicates categories that are present at a level of less than .05%.

buried in ceramic containers (for example, Lagunas 1997; Román and López Luján 1999), and these are quite rare at Aztec sites. A more likely explanation is that the Aztecs used cemeteries for most adult burials, with nobles sometimes buried in public structures (as at Tenochtitlan, Coatetelco, and Coxcatlan Viejo) and children sometimes buried in and around the house.

Two possible Aztec cemeteries have been found in test-pitting operations conducted with other objectives, but they were not excavated sufficiently to determine the number or extent of the burials. At the site of Xo-Az-46 in the *chinampa* area of the southern Basin of Mexico, Parsons et al. (1982:108–109) found three burials inside a raised platform, with a fourth burial at a lower level. At the Epiclassic site of Xochicalco in Morelos, Kenneth Hirth (2000) excavated a possible cemetery area in Terrace 85 dating to Middle and Late Postclassic times.

Three burials were found in an area without Postclassic architecture, all with multiple ceramic vessels (these vessels and the burials are described in Smith 2002). It is likely that people living in the small Postclassic settlements at the edges of the ancient ruins of Xochicalco (such as Temazcal, adjacent to terrace 85, and possibly Capilco, located several kilometers away) used a portion of the Epiclassic site for burials. This occurrence is not unique; the Epiclassic monumental centers of Teotenango and San Miguel Ixtapan in the western State of Mexico were both settings for multiple intrusive Postclassic burials (with extensive offerings) long after they were abandoned as urban centers (Piña Chán 1975; Rodríguez and García 1996; Tommasi 1978). The lack of adult burials in Aztec domestic settings differs from many Mesoamerican societies and does not support a model of ancestor veneration (see discussion below).

9.7 Rock pile at Cuexcomate before excavation (unit 245)



The New Fire Ceremony at Cuexcomate

One of the more enigmatic kinds of feature excavated at Cuexcomate was the rock pile. These features, found only in patio groups, appear on the surface as piles or concentrations of large stones (figure 9.7). Five of the twenty-five patio groups at Cuexcomate had one or more rock piles, the small farmstead site 3 had one, and none were present at Capilco. These features consist of an extremely dense layer of broken artifacts deposited in a shallow pit and then covered by the layer of rocks visible at ground surface. Four of the seven rock piles that were tested also had caches or offerings of ceramic bowls under the broken artifact layer. The rock piles had the highest artifact densities of any deposits excavated at these sites and, compared to domestic middens, the ceramic vessel fragments were much larger and could often be reassembled into whole or partial vessels (ceramic vessels in domestic middens were highly fragmentary, and sherds could rarely be fit together within a given midden). The broken artifact layers never exhibited internal stratification, again in contrast to domestic middens, which were always stratified.

These attributes of rock piles indicate that they were special deposits. First, a shallow pit was excavated, followed in some cases by placement of a cache of ceramic bowls (and in one case a burial). Next, large numbers of still-usable ceramic and obsidian domestic objects were thrown into the pit. Finally, the deposit was covered with

a layer of rocks. These features, which I term *ritual dumps*, were clearly the result of some kind of ritual, probably celebrated by the members of patio groups in common. My initial hypothesis, that ritual dumps were created during the celebration of the Aztec New Fire Ceremony, finds support in the reanalysis of similar dumps excavated in the 1930s by George Vaillant at Chiconautla and Nonoalco (Elson and Smith 2001). The New Fire Ceremony, a ritual that took place upon completion of each calendar round of fifty-two years, had important symbolic connotations relating to a number of fundamental themes in Aztec state religion, including the creation and destruction of the world, the role of human sacrifice in maintaining the sun and the world, and the importance of fire in both public and domestic symbolism (see Brundage 1985:35–39).

The specific portion of the elaborate New Fire celebration that relates to ritual dumps is the destruction and discard of household possessions that accompanied the ceremony. According to Sahagún:

First they put out fires everywhere in the country around. And the statues, hewn in either wood or stone, kept in each man's home and regarded as gods, were all cast into the water. Also (were) these (cast away)—the pestles and the three hearth stones (upon which the cooking pots rested); and everywhere there was much sweeping—there was sweeping very clean. Rubbish was thrown out; none lay in any of the houses. [1950-82, Bk. 7:25]

This passage was depicted by Sahagún's artists in figure 9.5. A similar brief account in the *Codex Tudela* emphasized the destruction of cooking pots (Gómez de Orozco 1945:62).

The written sources do not mention what happened to the items after they were broken and tossed out. It does not seem unreasonable, however, to infer that those ritually broken domestic goods might have been deposited in a special place rather than simply tossed out with the regular trash.⁷ If so, the contents of the excavated ritual dumps represent precisely the kind of deposit that would be produced from the behavior described by Sahagún. Once the new fire was lit, in the Basin of Mexico, the world was spared from destruction for another fifty-two years. In the words of Sahagún, "when this took place, everyone renewed his clothing and all the household goods" (Sahagún 1950-82, Bk.7:31; New Fire ceremonies must have been eagerly awaited by merchants and artisans).

Research described elsewhere (Elson and Smith 2001) shows that the New Fire Ceremony was an ancient and widespread ritual in northern Mesoamerica, long predating Aztec civilization. Upon the growth of the Triple Alliance, however, the Mexica kings appropriated the popular ceremony and gave it the trappings of cosmic renewal and imperial authority. When the central imperial new fire was drilled to start a new calendric cycle, the fire was distributed by runners—under the king's supervision and permission—from the Templo Mayor to all parts of the empire, where people used it to rekindle their hearths and begin life anew. This controlled distribution of the new fire was one component of Mexica imperial ideology that signaled cosmic favor and political domination.

Rituals at Provincial Temples

A brief consideration of the ritual artifacts associated with temples in Morelos and other areas helps put the evidence for domestic ritual into perspective. Nicholson (1971:431–433) lists the following activities that took place at Aztec temples: offerings to the gods, human and animal sacrifice, autosacrifice by priests, incense burning, dance, song, and various processional activities. These were carried out by professional priests with some participation by rulers or other people. Brundage (1985:119–125) lists the following ritual objects used in these activities: flint knives, conch-shell trumpets, mirrors, rubber, paper, staves or scepters, and human skin. To these must be added ritual objects of the sort recovered archaeologically in Mesoamerica and likely to have been used in Aztec temples: ceramic censers; drums,

flutes, and other musical instruments; masks and other costume components; and the tools of autosacrifice—obsidian bloodletters, stingray spines, and other items (Flannery 1976; see also the other chapters in this volume). Temples also contained deity images of stone, wood, and ceramic, and sometimes mural paintings. The major offerings made at Aztec temples (apart from hearts and human blood) were food, drink (especially *pulque*), flowers, rubber-spattered paper, clothing, and incense (Nicholson 1971:431, 1990).

These are very generalized accounts that do not differentiate rituals at the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan from rituals at other political capitals or rituals at small provincial temples. There is only limited documentary information on provincial rituals. The *Relaciones Geográficas* from Morelos and adjacent areas, for example, suggest that most communities had a central temple tended by one or two professional priests who supervised the offerings. Artifactual remains from three excavated Aztec period temples in Morelos provide more specific information that can be compared with the household remains discussed above. Test trenches at the small temple-pyramid at Cuexcomate revealed the presence of middens along the north and south walls, covered by layers of construction collapse. These middens had high densities of artifacts and a high diversity of artifact types, quite unlike temple fill or deposits of construction collapse. Ceramic food preparation and serving vessels in the temple midden are probably the remains of offerings brought to the temple, and/or of the food prepared by or for priests. The use of domestic, utilitarian ceramic vessels during rituals is a common practice in modern Mesoamerican cultures (Deal 1998; McGee 1990, 1998), and the presence of such vessels in a temple midden is not surprising.

Most of the same ritual objects found in domestic middens also were found at Aztec temples in Morelos, but their relative frequencies were quite different. Table 9.4 presents the frequencies of these items at three temples. The artifacts from Teopanzolco are from the fill in structure 2, a platform located immediately behind (east of) the large twin-stair main pyramid at the site. The Tepozteco material is from fill in the platform of the famed Tepozteco pyramid on the cliffs above Tepoztlan. Both structures were excavated by Jorge Angulo (1976) in the 1970s, and the ceramics and sites are described in Smith (2002). Platform fill is obviously less than ideal for functional analysis, but it is likely that most of the material in the fill came from close to these structures (a test pit near the Tepozteco temple had a similar ceramic as-

semblages—see Smith 2002). The ceramics from the Cuexcomate temple are from the temple middens described above.

The temple deposits have much higher frequencies of censers than do the domestic deposits. At Cuexcomate the long-handled censers stand out (their frequencies are more than two standard deviations above the means for the site), whereas crude censers are far more common at Teopanzolco and Tepozteco. These were major MPC cult centers with monumental architecture, and the high numbers of large censers is not surprising. At Teopanzolco, large braziers predominate, whereas the basin-type censer is most common at Tepozteco (Smith 2002). A few small figurine fragments do occur in the Cuexcomate temple midden but at a much lower frequency than in the domestic deposits.

Aztec Domestic Ritual in Perspective

What is the significance of Aztec domestic ritual within the historical context of Mesoamerican religions and cultures? To consider this question, I first turn to a modern ethnographic parallel—perhaps even a survival—of Aztec practices, and then look at the wider context of the information presented above using the great tradition/little tradition framework.

A modern parallel

Most discussion of continuities between modern Indian religion and pre-Hispanic religion focus on widely shared basic cosmological concepts (for example, Gossen 1996). Here I wish to take a different approach and point out some highly specific parallels between domestic rituals at Aztec sites and in modern Nahua villages in the Huasteca area of northern Veracruz. In the latter area Alan Sandstrom has encountered a series of domestic rituals strikingly similar to those described above (Sandstrom 1991; Sandstrom and Sandstrom 1986). As in most areas of modern Mesoamerica, people have altars in their homes upon which they place ritual items and offerings. A common object on these altars is a goblet-shaped ceramic censer (with cut-out holes) for burning copal incense. Censers are often accompanied by offerings of numerous anthropomorphic cut-paper figures that are also used by shamans in public ceremonies.

Sandstrom and Sandstrom (1986) divide the cut-paper figures into four categories: disease-causing spirits (called *ejecatl*) used in curing; seed spirits devoted to crop fertility; witness and guardian spirits that intervene between humans and more powerful spirits; and altar adornments.

Although some of these paper spirit figures have names, they are not highly elaborated gods or goddesses with individual personalities or a basis in myth. Instead, they represent more generalized spirits that are invoked for specific purposes, such as curing a specific ailment, strengthening the seed corn before planting, feeding specific spirits of the dead, or protecting the water supply. The uses and meanings of these modern Nahua cut-paper figures resemble the inferred uses and meaning of Aztec ceramic figurines, and they may in fact represent some kind of historical continuity with the Aztec objects. Alan Sandstrom (1999) has also pointed out additional similarities between modern Nahua rituals and their Aztec antecedents as known from archaeology and ethnohistory. Ritual performances today sometimes include the use of whistles and bells, the burial of infants near the house and adults in a cemetery outside the village, the inclusion of possessions with burials, the replacement of domestic ceramic wares at a special ceremony each year, and the storage of domestic ritual objects in special boxes. Although additional documentary (and perhaps archaeological) research is needed to fully evaluate the extent of specific historical continuity between Aztec domestic ritual and the modern Nahua rituals of the Huasteca area, the similarities are striking.

The absence of ancestor veneration

A number of the authors of chapters in this volume join other scholars in arguing that ancestor veneration was an important component of domestic ritual in many ancient Mesoamerican societies. McAnany (1995) discusses a common Mesoamerican pattern in which adults were buried under the house floor or in the patio. She shows that in the Maya lowlands at least, this practice of "living with the ancestors" was part of a complex of beliefs and practices associated with the veneration of ancestors (see also Middleton et al. 1998; Miller 1996) and argues that this complex was related to systems of land tenure and property rights. In another example, Marcus (1998) links figurines to ancestor veneration in Formative Oaxaca partly on the basis of their occurrence in burials and in an arranged scene in a domestic cache. The data presented above suggest that the Aztecs did not practice ancestor veneration in the way McAnany, Marcus, and others have shown for other Mesoamerican societies. Burials are rarely found in domestic contexts, they never have figurines as offerings, and arranged figurine scenes are not present.

The lack of support for a model of active ancestor ven-

eration in the domestic rituals of Aztec period Morelos is not surprising, however, given our knowledge of Aztec kinship, social stratification, and land tenure. Nahuatl-language documents from early colonial Morelos reveal that nobles controlled most of the land and that commoners gained access to land, not through inheritance and family channels, but through their personal ties to nobles and their membership in *calpolli* organizations (Carrasco 1976; Hare 2001; Lockhart 1992). The Aztec kinship system was an ego-centered, bilateral system quite different from kinship systems based upon lineage and ancestors (Kellogg 1986:105; McCaa 1999). In spite of statements in Sahagún and other chroniclers that elders were treated with great respect, McCaa (1999) points out that in the Morelos census documents (for example, Cline 1993)—actual descriptions of behavior rather than normative accounts of ideal values—elders were not treated with much respect. For example, a common census entry for an elderly woman is "here is just a little old woman," hardly the attitude one would expect if descent and ancestors were of great importance in the domestic realm. Genealogy and descent were of great importance for the legitimization of Aztec kings, but royal concern with ancestors was quite a different phenomenon from domestic ancestor veneration of the type described for certain other Mesoamerican societies.

The great and little traditions of Mesoamerica

Our understanding of Aztec domestic ritual remains sketchy and very incomplete. Documentary sources contain clues, but their usefulness is limited by the friars' ignorance of the domestic setting. Most of the archaeological data presented here pertain to artifacts from midden deposits that provide little direct information on the specific setting or nature of their uses. Nevertheless, some patterns can be discerned in the data at hand. Censers and figurines, the two most common types of ritual object in domestic settings, may represent distinct aspects or realms of domestic ritual, one with close ties to public religion and one limited to the domestic sphere.

Professional priests at the Templo Mayor burned incense in the same types of censer that the poorest provincial peasants used in their homes. Although the shared use of the objects does not necessarily imply shared beliefs and meanings, the ubiquity of the long-handled censer suggests some degree of unity among Aztec ritual practices at all levels. The burning of copal incense served to sanctify places and actions, whether these were

sacrifices on a tall pyramid, secret ceremonies in caves or domestic rituals of divination and curing. Because the manufacture and use of long-handled censers began long before the rise of the Aztec empire, there is little reason to associate these objects with official state policies or actions. A similar interpretation can be given to the New Fire ceremony. In spite of the appropriation of this ritual by the Mexica king to use as part of an imperial ideology of domination, its occurrence in provincial areas most likely signals performance of an ancient popular ritual not under the control of the state.

Figurines, on the other hand, pertained almost exclusively to the domestic realm. The plethora of great tradition deities worshiped in Aztec public religion is poorly represented in the corpus of figurines, and those that are present relate to themes of reproductive fertility, illness, and curing. Figurines were probably used by women and men within the home for a variety of rituals concerning childbirth and illness, agricultural fertility, divination, and other matters of significance to family members. Although health and fertility were themes of great interest to the state, with consequent public expression (Klein 2000; López Austin 1988), their manifestation through the medium of ceramic figurines was strictly a domestic phenomenon. It is very likely that domestic rites using figurines also involved the burning of incense, and the two artifact categories—figurines and long-handled censers—may have formed part of a single complex of domestic ritual objects. Similarly, Aztec burials in domestic settings—rare as they are—are another example of continuity with an ancient Mesoamerican tradition. The little tradition of domestic ritual—incorporating elements of both popular and great tradition practices and beliefs—was deep and widespread in Aztec culture. Figurines are ubiquitous at Aztec residential sites, and this kind of ritual continued for over a century after the Spanish conquest in the areas visited by Ruiz de Alarcón (1982).

The Aztec peoples participated in a Mesoamerican tradition of domestic ritual—involving figurines, censers, and burials—that dates back to the Early Formative period at least (Borhegyi 1956; Cyphers 1993; Marcus 1998), and these practices seem to have flourished outside of the control of the state (contra chapter 5). The continuity of these rituals of the little tradition, from Early Formative times through the Aztecs and up to the ethnographic present in areas of Mexico, is remarkable. The very nature of the available documentary accounts—descriptions by Christian priests—has kept this religious realm largely invisible, but now archaeological excavation is starting to

provide some clues to its nature. Censers and figurines were important components of domestic rituals, but these need to be interpreted in light of their context, use, and significance in the domestic realm and not solely in terms of the categories of the Aztec great tradition. Although Aztec public religion—with its dramatic sacrificial rituals atop pyramids and colorful processions through the streets—captured the attention of early Spanish observers at the expense of domestic religion, we should not let it dominate our modern views of Aztec religious experience. For the bulk of the population, the rituals and beliefs of the little tradition, guarded within the home and the patio, were probably of greater import in their daily lives than the distant state-sponsored ceremonies.

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Notes

1. Conversations with colleagues suggest to me that many people confuse Redfield's great/little tradition model (Redfield 1956) with his earlier folk/urban continuum model (Redfield 1941), although they deal with different phenomena. Also, several recent discussions of the great and little tradition concepts (for example, Glazier 1997:9,

Gossen and Leventhal 1993:186) cite the wrong books by Robert Redfield.

2. Other scholars have introduced concepts to deal with phenomena related to the great and little traditions of religious expression in complex societies. Leach (1968), for example, discusses the distinction between philosophical religion—religion as described in sacred texts and promulgated by philosophers and experts—and practical religion—religious principles that guide the behavior of ordinary people. Leach notes that the former "is often greatly preoccupied with the life hereafter; practical religion is concerned with the life here and now" (1968:1). Within the discipline of European religious history, the notion of "popular religion" has received considerable attention (for example, Christian 1981; Davis 1974; Le Roy Ladurie 1978; Thomas 1971). These and other authors examine the similarities and differences between regionally distinctive folk or popular religious traditions and the official religion of the Catholic church, and they explore the interactions between the two realms. The domestic rituals described in this chapter can be classified as examples of practical religion (Leach) and popular religion (European history) that formed part of an Aztec religious little tradition.
3. I thank Leonardo López Luján for suggesting this approach.
4. The account of Ruiz de Alarcón, one of the few Spanish descriptions of Aztec domestic religion, is a particularly rich source of information. Although some of his testimonies were elicited through force (he would storm into a peasant house and demand that its owner hand over the pagan idol that neighbors said was hidden in a jar under the bed), many people apparently opened up and allowed him to record lengthy chants and invocations. It seems clear, however, that Ruiz de Alarcón was only able to uncover certain kinds of sacred objects and pagan rituals, leaving much of the content of domestic religion undescribed.
5. The themes of curing, health, and human fertility were not by any means limited to the domestic sphere in Aztec society. Klein (2000) has identified a number of architectural platforms in public locations at Aztec sites that were associated with rituals or activities concerning female health and fertility, and Graulich (1992b) explores this theme in relation to temples dedicated to Quetzalcoatl/Ehecatl.
6. Sahagún (1950-82, Bk. 3:156), for example, notes that a possum's tail was one ingredient of a drink used to induce labor in women (see also Ruiz de Alarcón 1982:221, 283). A number of the possum figurines have baby animals on their backs, a further reinforcement of the fertility/reproduction theme (Graulich 1992b).
7. Broken domestic implements are viewed as having supernatural power in some Maya societies (Gary Gossen 1999). For example, at the modern Chamula festival of games, potsherds were viewed as symbolic tribute and used as tokens of admission to a mountaintop shrine for a public ritual (Gossen 1986b:246).