

# Memory Work

## 9

### **Memorializing Place among Classic Maya Commoners**

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The southern lowland Mayas lived in a tropical setting where agriculture was rainfall dependent (Figure 9.1). The rainy and dry seasons, each about six months long, determined religious and agricultural cycles because seasonal rainfall vagaries required continual supplications to supernatural entities. We know this from royal iconographic and hieroglyphic records. However, all Mayas made supplications to supernatural forces, a fact Maya archaeologists are beginning to reveal. Mayas prayed and proffered offerings to ancestors, rain and maize gods, and other deities important in daily life at agricultural fields, near water sources, in public plazas, in caves, and in the home, as found today among traditional Mayas (for example, Vogt 1970, 1998). But it is in the home where the remnants of ceremonial life are most apparent, as was the case in prehispanic times.

Through ceremonial practices they conducted in the home, Classic Maya commoners (ca. 250–850 CE) created their place in the community, society, and history. Maya ceremonies revolved around life, death, and renewal, and were conducted by all Mayas, from royals to commoners. These domestic dedication, ancestor veneration, and termination rites leave telling material evidence. In fact, the depositional histories of Maya structures reflect the continuous flow of ceremonial behaviors that in the end comprise much of the structure itself (for example, Walker and



the interring of specific members of the community. The act of secreting away or destroying inalienable items transfers their social powers and transforms a location or a structure to a sacred or significant place (Chapman 2000a; Rowlands 1993). Interring the dead serves a similar purpose. Ancestor veneration, a worldwide phenomenon, is reflected in the burial of specific family members in the domestic sphere and/or the deposition of parts of the bodies of ancestors (for example, Geller 2004; McAnany 1995). The placement of corporeal remains thus takes on cultural significance to the living, and their ancestral history often embodies claims in the physical world (for example, land rights).

### CEREMONIAL PRACTICES

Ritual or ceremonial practices pervade all aspects of society and life (Leach 1966). It is thus ironic that scholars tend to conflate them with religious beliefs; they typically focus on the religious aspects of ceremonies rather than the ceremonial aspects of religion. Ceremonial practices are distinct from beliefs or ideologies in that they can be observed, whereas thought processes cannot. As a matter of fact, rites do not require participants to believe the same things to promote group feeling and solidarity (Kertzer 1988; Rappaport 1999:119–120; Robertson Smith 1956 [1894]:16–17). The important thing is to “make it look right” (Lee 2000:5). For example, Daniel B. Lee (2000), through his study of the Weaverland Conference Old World Mennonites of New York and Pennsylvania, demonstrates that they did not share common beliefs while participating in group rites because the action of rites transcends “the personal beliefs of individuals” (Lee 2000:1). For example, when asked about the significance of the “kiss of peace,” each person responded differently: “Our ancestors brought the kiss with him or her from Germany and Switzerland. We want to hold on to those traditions”; or, “The kiss was established by the early leaders of the church”; or, “It’s from the Bible. The disciples did it”; or, “I don’t know why we do it” (Lee 2000:4–5). Individual beliefs and feelings are irrelevant and are overridden by rules of engagement.

Ceremonies have multiple meanings (Cohen 1974:29, 36; Durkheim 1995 [1912]:390). While archaeologists cannot elucidate their multiple meanings or the beliefs surrounding them, we can reveal their material manifestations and significance, especially since they are conservative, whereas beliefs are not. Repetitive behaviors, ceremonial or otherwise, result in specific sequences of deposits in the archaeological record that reflect these actions (for example, Bradley 1990:10–14; Walker 1998, 2002). Consequently, strata, in addition to reflecting chronology, signify

sequences of (ceremonial) practices because “all acts of ancient worship have a material embodiment, which is not left to the choice of the worshipers but is limited by fixed roles” (Robertson Smith 1956 [1894]:84). We thus need to rid ourselves of the utilitarian/nonutilitarian dichotomy (Walker 1998, 2002) because we cannot assume the social value of items based on our functional classificatory schemes (Meskell 2004:41). By doing so, we can evaluate each piece of the past as imbued with social significance. A step in this direction, as several scholars have shown, is by taking into account the context of artifacts (for example, Meskell 2004:6; Richards and Thomas 1984; Walker 1998, 2002; Walker and Lucero 2000) as well as their arrangement (Pollard 2001, this volume) and association with other items (Douglas and Isherwood 1996 [1979]:49).

### **PRACTICE MAKES PLACE**

The lack of inscribed objects or written documents about commoner Maya life requires us to use alternative means to illuminate more mundane ceremonial deposits and their significance. Assessing context and depositional histories is critical toward this end (Richards and Thomas 1984; Walker 1998). The types of goods sacrificed have not changed for centuries, though their quality, quantity, and diversity distinguish commoner, elite, and royal offerings (Lucero 2003, 2006; for example, Garber et al. 1998). All Mayas offered the same kinds of items (for example, vessels, stone objects, shell), though commoner offerings were made with less “expensive” materials from less exotic places (for instance, more freshwater and land shell versus marine shell; see, for example, Garber et al. 1998; Lucero 2003, 2006). However, what we might describe as utilitarian, that is, widely available and inexpensive items, likely had immeasurable value to a person, family, or community (compare Weiner 1992).

I mention similarities and differences among commoner, elite, and royal deposits because of what they indicate in general about ceremonial practices. If emerging elites, and later rulers, replicated and expanded traditional domestic practices to promote political agendas, as I have argued elsewhere (Lucero 2003, 2006), then we should be able to apply some of what we have learned about the significance of royal ceremonies and offerings to ones performed by commoners. For example, Joyce (2000a, 2003b), based on inscribed items from noble and royal tombs, clearly demonstrates the importance of heirloom objects, since some were deposited 100 years after their inscribed date. The hieroglyphic record also is replete with information about dedication and other ceremonies, illuminating them in ways that would not be possible without the written

word (see, for example, Houston and Stuart 1996; Schele and Freidel 1990; Schele and Miller 1986; among others). Thus, if many royal practices are domestic ones writ large, perhaps it is possible to translate a similar significance for commoner practices. Ensoulment, the memorialization of ancestors and place, and deanimation thus take on greater importance as explanations for commoner practices.

In the ethnographic present, Mayas perform dedication ceremonies to animate new houses and other objects. The former include the caching of objects under house floors (for example, Vogt 1993). They conduct ancestor veneration rites to honor and thank ancestors, which involve keeping an ancestor's remains close to home and making offerings (for example, Vogt 1970). Some Maya groups call children and grandchildren *kexol*, or "replacements" (Schele and Miller 1986:266), signifying the continued connection of the living and the dead. Grave goods tell us much about the person and those who were left behind. For example, among the Zinacantecos of Chiapas, Vogt (1998:28) found that grave goods "are said to possess the soul of their owner." Part of the renewal ceremony consists of terminating the old, for the New Year, for example, or after the death of a family member, when life must begin anew. And since all objects have animate qualities, Mayas also perform termination ceremonies to deactivate or deanimate houses or objects (for example, Tozzer 1941:151), thus releasing their soul before renewal. Rites involve breaking objects, partially destroying houses, and burning incense (Mock 1998).

In the archaeological record, dedication caches are found beneath floors and typically consist of burned or unburned whole objects such as jade items, obsidian, ground stone, eccentrics, and ceramic vessels (some lip-to-lip) (Becker 1992; Coe 1959:77–78, 1965; for example, Chase and Chase 1998; Garber 1989:98; Guderjan 2004; Mock 1998). Mayas buried their dead, typically with grave goods, in the floors of houses, shrines, palaces, or temples (for example, Gillespie 2000; McAnany 1995:535). Commoners buried their dead in their homes, the wealthy built shrines to their ancestors (usually the eastern structure of their residential compound), and royals buried their own in temples. Termination deposits, found on floor surfaces, typically consist of broken and burned items (for example, ceramic vessels; Coe 1965; Garber 1986, 1989; for example, Rice 1999).

## MEMORY IN THE MAKING

The sacrifice of material objects, simple or ornate, was part of the process of the production of memory (Rowlands 1993). This is particularly

true of new items sacrificed and taken out of circulation forever. Throughout the Maya area, the material act of “making” embodied memory production, the end signified by the removal of objects from the living world that were burned, destroyed, or cached. Objects made expressly for ceremonial deposition were never animated and thus did not have to be terminated or killed. Goods people used in life, in contrast, had to be killed before deposition because of the forces they personified. In the former case, objects had no history; in the latter, they did. By terminating an item, the Mayas ended its history as an object for use in life and initiated its life history or afterlife history (see Walker, this volume) as a dedicatory (typically whole), termination (broken), or grave offering (whole or broken).

Mayas performed these rites for over a millennium. It is unlikely, however, that beliefs about social identity and meaning remained untouched in light of changing sociopolitical conditions, including the emergence and demise of semidivine kings, increasing numbers of people in any given area, and increased interregional interaction. In turn, conducting the “same” ceremonial practices through time only emphasized tradition in the face of change. People put all they had, both alive/animated and dead/terminated, back into their homes. Having fellow community members witness the material concentration of ceremonial acts served to socially emphasize and recognize the home, but not at the expense of the community. Participants publicly acknowledged these acts of creating memory (see Chesson 2001; Joyce 2001) and expected the same when it was their turn to bury the dead, terminate the old, and dedicate the new.

Tying together Maya ceremonial practices is death. Upon the death of certain individuals, family members had to start life anew, which meant conducting termination ceremonies for both the deceased (funerary practices) and the house (razed before rebuilding). The recently deceased, by their burial in the home, became ancestors and defined material place as social space (along with grave goods). Funerary practices reflect the fact that people were not interring the dead so much as creating an ancestor who would remain involved in the lives of the living (for example, Meskell 2001; Nielsen, this volume). Once such practices had been performed, the family was ready to begin living again, which was materialized in the building of a new home on top of the former home. They built it and dedicated it, literally over the recently created ancestor. Memory and place were thus created in the ceremonial cycle of dedication, ancestor veneration, and termination practices, commemorating both the living and the dead. Family and friends witnessed and participated in ceremonies and in doing so publicly notarized the family’s claims to land, status, identity, and/or other

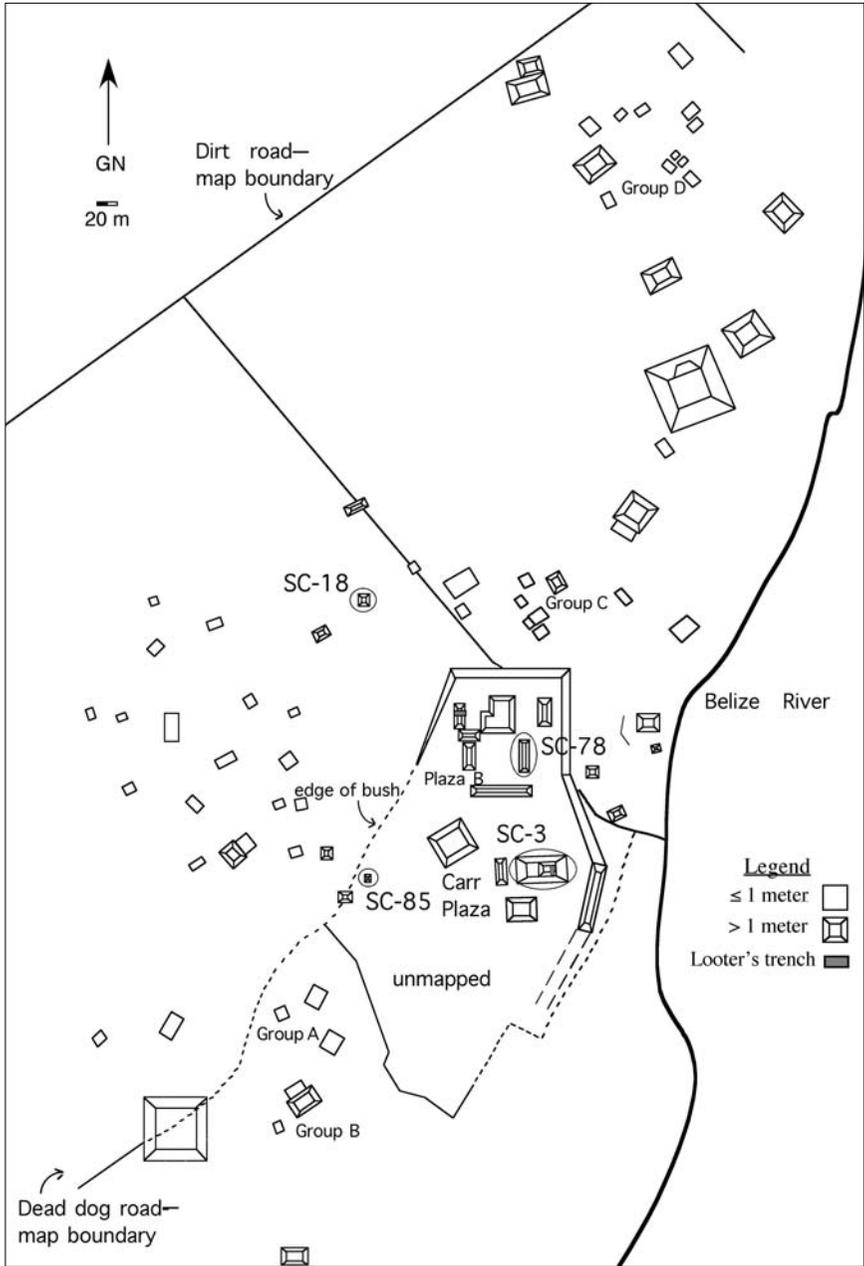
entitlements (Becker 1992; Gillespie 2001, 2002; McAnany 1998). Funerary rites in particular brought people together because of the need to acknowledge the loss of a community member. This collective rite was critical in the Maya lowlands, since most farmland and concomitant farmsteads were dispersed, and people needed ways to maintain family and community ties.

I will illustrate how ceremonial practices created a material record of memory production at the minor river center of Saturday Creek, Belize. While I focus on one site, it is important to note that the ceremonial histories described are similar to those at other Maya centers, small and large, and highlight how a large portion of all Maya construction depositional histories—commoner, elite, and royal—actually are the result of dedication, ancestor veneration, and termination practices.

### SATURDAY CREEK

Saturday Creek is along the Belize River on an extensive floodplain in central Belize on the eastern periphery of the southern Maya lowlands (see Figure 9.1). The Valley of Peace Archaeology (VOPA) project, which I directed under the aegis of the Institute of Archaeology, National Institute of Culture and History, Belize, mapped 79 structures within a .81-km<sup>2</sup> area bounded by roads (Lucero et al. 2004). Many mounds are shorter and more spread out than formerly because most of the site has been extensively plowed. Mayas lived at Saturday Creek from at least 900 BCE to 1500 CE (Conlon and Ehret 2002) in dispersed farmsteads consisting of solitary mounds and mound groups, or *plazuelas* (Figure 9.2). A ball court, temples up to about 10 m tall, and elite compounds comprise the site core.

Saturday Creek's former inhabitants included commoner farmers, part-time specialists (for example, potters), and elite or wealthy farmers. Surface collections and excavated materials indicate their relative wealth, not to mention long-distance contacts (for example, Pachuca obsidian from central Mexico, polished hematite items, jade, and marine shell; Lucero 1997, 2002). Saturday Creek also illustrates a community where inequality was based on wealth differences rather than political power per se (Lucero 2006). Inhabitants were not beholden to rulers, since there were none, and did not have to bother with tribute payments, rely on water or agricultural systems, build royal palaces, and expend energy on monumental public iconography; nor did they have a need for, or access to, inscriptions. Interestingly, their being surrounded by fertile alluvium and year-round water basically kept them free from political machinations. Wealthy members of the community, however, sponsored feasts and rites, organized the construction of the ball court and temples via community



**FIGURE 9.2**  
*Saturday Creek, showing excavated structures.*

and/or compensated labor, and fulfilled other patronal duties. The nearest major site is Yalbac, a medium-size center 18 km to the northwest, and Saturday Creek's occupants may have had some kind of relationship with its residents, not necessarily political.

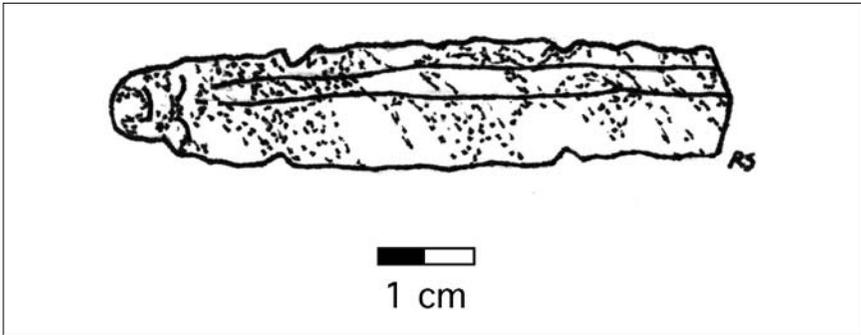
In 2001 we excavated two solitary mounds or commoner residences (SC-18 and SC-85), an eastern structure of an elite compound (SC-78), and a temple ball court (SC-3; Lucero 2002). We used the Harris Matrix method of recording natural strata to highlight depositional sequences (Harris 1989).

One commoner residence (SC-18) on prime alluvium has at least six construction phases consisting of thin plaster floors, cobble ballasts, and single- or double-course foundation walls for wattle-and-daub structures (Lucero and Brown 2002). Another commoner house (SC-85), found on more clayey soils, also has six major construction phases consisting of a series of thin plaster floors with less substantial ballasts, a cobble surface, earthen surfaces, and foundation walls (1–3 courses; Lucero et al. 2002b). Residents were less wealthy than their counterparts at SC-18, likely a result of their having lived surrounded by less productive soils. The Mayas lived at both residences from at least ca. 400 through 1150 CE.

The elite structure at Saturday Creek consists of a stepped platform with several relatively substantial domestic and specialized structures. Some structures have thick plaster floors, ballasts, and standing walls with cut-stone blocks, while others are of wattle and daub (Lucero et al. 2002a). The Mayas lived there from at least 600 BCE to 1500 CE. The noticeably lower density of artifacts compared to those at SC-18 and SC-85 indicates that fewer people lived here than at commoner houses and that some structures had specific functions (for example, kitchen, storeroom, work area, shrine, sweat bath). The temple sits on top of a platform, which comprises the eastern half of a ball court (Jeakle 2002; Jeakle et al. 2002). The excavation trench revealed several major construction phases, including steep, tiered walls and a platform with several construction phases and plastered steps. Excavated material dates from at least ca. 300 BC to 1500 CE.

Most of the deposits date to the Late Classic period (ca. 550–850 CE), when population was at its peak. Brief descriptions of elite deposits will highlight similarities with and differences between them and commoner deposits (for a more detailed discussion of ceremonial deposits, see Lucero 2006:86–102).

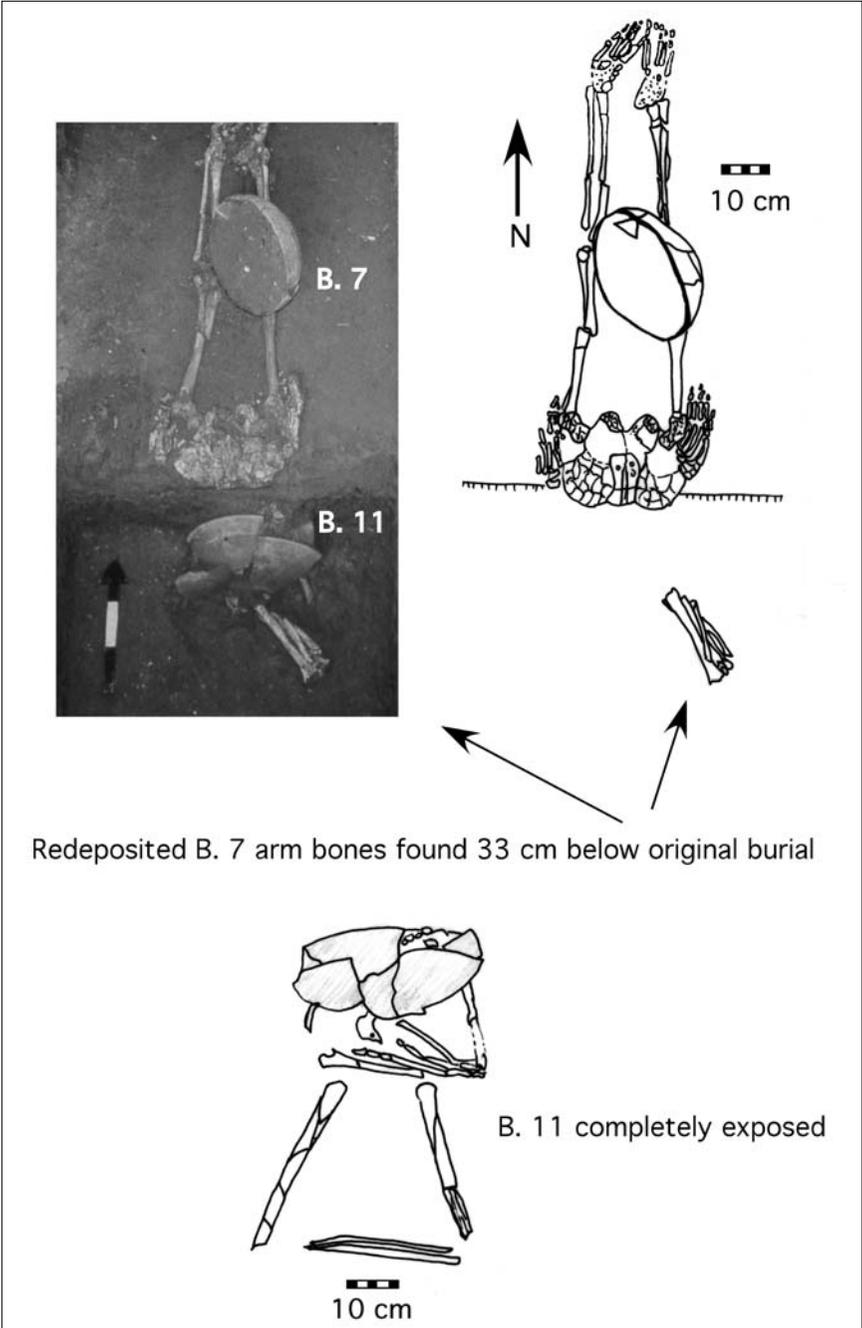
All four structures yielded dedication caches. Commoner offerings include notched and unnotched obsidian blades, mano and metate fragments, polished stone, bone needles, shaped bone, drilled marine shell

**FIGURE 9.3**

*A notched obsidian blade. Drawing by Rachel Saurman.*

and bone, chert cores, spindle whorls, a celt, a bark beater, marine shell, burned and unburned faunal remains, figurine fragments, ceramic disks, a few ceramic sherd concentrations, and a few small jade and hematite inlay or mosaic pieces (Lucero and Brown 2002; Lucero et al. 2002b; Figure 9.3). A ceramic concentration at SC-85, consisting only of layered body sherds, may include pieces of heirloom vessels, since their dates range from 300 BCE to 600 CE. Elite structures (SC-78, SC-3) yielded the same dedicatory items as commoner houses did, with the addition of more diverse and expensive goods, including speleothems from caves, coral, monkey finger bones, mica, vase sherds, and more jade items (Jeakle et al. 2002; Lucero et al. 2002a).

Eight Late Classic burials were recovered from the two commoner houses, four with grave goods (Piehl 2002; Sanchez and Chamberlain 2002), some of which I describe here. The three burials at one of the commoner houses (SC-18) all have grave goods, including an adult, likely female (Burial 7, ca. 20–30 years) interred sometime between ca. 700 and 750 CE with a bowl over her knees, an olla, and freshwater shell disk beads (Figure 9.4). A seated adult, perhaps male (Burial 11, unknown age), was interred slightly later (ca. 750 CE), facing south with an inverted dish over his skull. When the Mayas buried this individual, they had to dig through the woman's remains. As a result, her entire upper torso and skull were removed. Her long bones were placed in front of the seated adult, perhaps reiterating their family ties. We do not know what happened to the rest of her remains. Later, between ca. 800 and 900 CE, the Mayas buried another seated individual (Burial 2) slightly south of the earlier ones—a young adult (14–20 years, unknown sex) facing south with a large inverted dish over his/her skull, an olla near the right knee, a hammerstone next to the



**FIGURE 9-4**  
*Burials 7 and 11, SC-18.*

olla, an inverted plate over the left knee, and marine shell disk beads near the right ankle. The sole Late Classic burial (Burial 8) with obvious grave goods at the other commoner dwelling (SC-85), likely of an adult male (ca. 24–30 years), includes a dish near his skull; an olla near the chest; a mano fragment; marine shell; two heavily eroded, untempered, poorly fired vessels over the upper legs; a polished bone near the mandible; and other artifacts (for example, sherds dating from 300 BCE to 600 CE). The burials without grave goods include a bundle burial of an adolescent (Burial 3, ca. 10–12 years, sex unknown); an extended and prone adult female with filed incisors (Burial 1); an extended and prone child (Burial 4, ca. 4–6 years, sex unknown); and an extended, supine adult female (Burial 9, ca. 30–34 years).

Due to limited excavations at Saturday Creek elite structures, we did not locate any burials. However, elite burials from a comparable minor river center about 25 km from Saturday Creek, Barton Ramie, demonstrate that they are more ornate than commoner burials. For example, grave goods interred with an adult (Burial 3) at BR-260 (40 x 30 m, with four mounds up to 2 m high) included three vessels, three obsidian blades, three carved bones, a jaguar-shaped jade pendant, and a polished celt (Willey et al. 1965:267–270, 557).

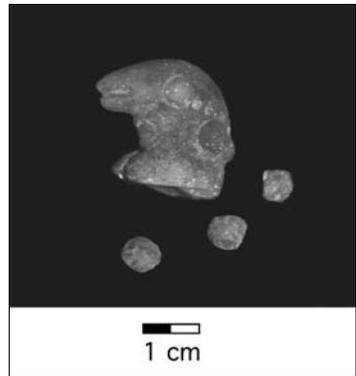
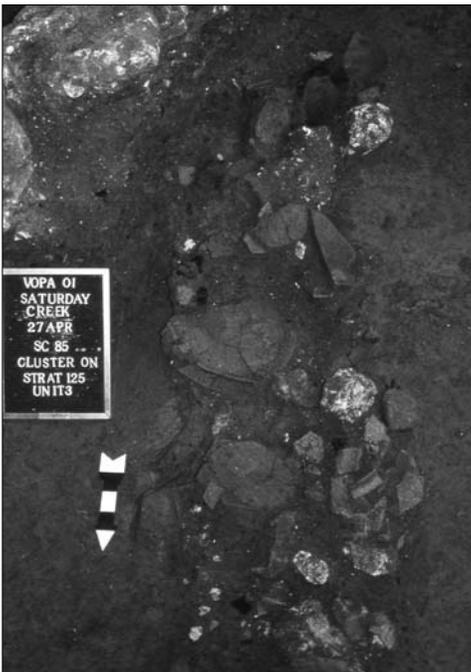
All four structures yielded termination deposits, which largely consist of smashed and burned vessels on surfaces. We exposed several sherd concentrations, mostly consisting of body sherds. For example, we recovered three layers of burned and smashed ceramics at one of the commoner houses (SC-18), the majority of which were body sherds (96 percent,  $n = 209$ ), and some of which date to 400–600 CE. The Mayas had placed them on top of a textile or mat of some sort, which had also been burned (Figure 9.5). In a later termination event at the same house, the Mayas smashed and burned three layers of ceramics, mostly body sherds (97 percent,  $n = 266$ ). In the same deposit we also found a complete but broken bowl, burned bone, and marine shells. Mayas conducted similar practices at the other commoner dwelling (SC-85) when they broke and burned several items such as ceramics, including a large, flat body sherd containing the long bones of a large mammal, likely deer. They also placed an undecorated miniature jar on a burned surface at ca. 600–700 CE. In what appears to be a major termination event, they burned and smashed ceramics consisting of 10 sherd concentrations with few rims, some of which were poorly fired (Figure 9.6). They also deposited a Colha-chert tool, a ceramic bird- or fish-figurine fragment, an obsidian blade, marine shell, shaped serpentine, and a metate fragment. Some of the sherds dated to ca. 250 CE and could represent heirloom objects.



**FIGURE 9.5**

*Termination deposit, SC-18. The stain of a burned mat or textile is visible in the lower photograph.*

The major difference between commoner and elite termination deposits is the kind of vessels smashed. At the solitary mounds, Mayas smashed plain or monochrome-slipped bowls, jars, and plates, and only a few polychrome vessels. The elite structure and temple also yielded more diverse items than



**FIGURE 9.6**

*Examples of termination deposits, SC-85. The lower photograph shows a deposit from an earlier level, east of the deposit in the upper photograph. Also, included is a photograph of a figurine fragment of a bird or fish.*

the commoner deposits, including drum vases, polychrome vessels, molded ceramic pieces, drilled and carved marine shell, powdered marl, burned plaster fragments, and human bone. For example, the Mayas at the elite structure (SC-78) burned an entire structure of wattle and daub sometime during the ninth century CE. One wall collapsed on a deposit of several burned and smashed decorated vessels (100 percent body sherds); a human ulna placed on top of a large and burned rimless plate; an incised, drilled marine shell pendant; and a drilled shell. At the foot of the temple (SC-3), the Mayas inverted a rimless and burned Platan Punctate plate on a burned surface (Jeakle 2002:56–57). This ceramic type was not found anywhere else at Saturday Creek (Conlon and Ehret 2002); Gifford et al. (1976:257) note that it was only found in burial contexts at Barton Ramie. In most cases, however, smashed-herd concentrations at all structures largely consist of body sherds with few or no rims.

## DISCUSSION

Commoner dedication practices at Saturday Creek included the caching of the same types of goods throughout the entire occupancy of the houses we excavated, over 600 years (ca. 400–1150 CE). Mayas conducted small-scale ceremonies for family and members of the community. Ceremonial events increase in scale at the elite building and the temple platform (for example, monkey finger bones and mica). For example, evidence from the ball court alley (faunal remains, decorated serving vessels) indicates feasting, likely sponsored by elites for all community members (Jeakle 2002; Jeakle et al. 2002). Evidence also suggests that all Mayas offered heirloom vessels, albeit broken ones. No matter whether they were purposely or accidentally broken, their significance lies in the role they played in maintaining “social continuity” in house and family identity (Gillespie 2001).

Commoner funerary practices at Saturday Creek did not change in over 600 years, indicating the importance of the cyclical re-creation of space and memory (McAnany 1995:161; for example, Geller 2004: 316–322).<sup>1</sup> The number of burials does not reflect all the people who lived in the home for all those centuries. Thus, it appears that only select people were buried in houses—that is, those selected to become ancestors. In general, males are more common at small residences in the Maya area (Sanchez and Piehl 2002; for example, Haviland 1997; McAnany et al. 1999).<sup>2</sup> The burials without grave goods are children and females, which may indicate a different ancestral status—a question that needs further addressing. Several burials are seated, which may indicate high status

within the family or community (McAnany 1998; Sanchez and Piehl 2002). Inverted vessels on a burned surface or over decedents' heads may indicate another way of deanimating ceramics and the deceased. While the burial patterns at Saturday Creek at first appear simple, they actually involve complex behaviors. For example, when residents at one of the commoner houses (SC-18) buried an adult between ca. 400 and 600 CE (Burial 5, sex unknown), they first dug a pit in which they burned and broke pottery and placed chert flakes (Lucero and Brown 2002). They then placed a deer antler in the center of the pit, followed by fill and the deceased person. More fill was added, followed by the burning and smashing of more vessels. Afterward, they placed mano and metate fragments and more ceramics near the body, then more dirt. Finally, they burned more items and placed vessels just south of the skull and burned the entire deposit again. Clearly, the creation of ancestors involved much ceremonial time and effort.

Termination practices also show little or no change over the centuries among Saturday Creek's commoners. Smashed and burned items, particularly plain and decorated ceramics, are common. In addition, the inclusion of older vessels as termination offerings suggests the sacrifice of heirlooms as ceremonial trash once they broke or were broken (for example, Walker 1995). Deposits often consist of three layers of burned and smashed, largely rimless vessels. The number three is one of the most significant numbers in Maya cosmology, perhaps reflecting the three major layers of the universe—the heavens, earth, and underworld (Sharer 1994:523; for example, Garber et al. 1998; compare Guderjan 2004). And based on a preliminary analysis of ceramic types and forms used in this layering practice, it appears that the Mayas often used Uaxactún unslipped jars for the top and/or bottom layers of 7 of the 18 ceramic sherd concentrations (unfortunately, not all the necessary information was recorded in 2001), as well as relatively rare ceramic types such as Vaca Falls Red jars, which are typically only manufactured as bowls and dishes (see Gifford et al. 1976:235, 275).

It is clear that fragmented or incomplete objects were significant and differed from complete, whole, or broken items. Depositing ceramics with few or no rims may have been a way to kill vessels in dedication and termination rites. Even if we had excavated associated middens, which we did not, and found the missing rims, we still need to explain why some vessels were broken and their pieces separated—whereupon some sherds/pieces became part of the structures' life history—while others did not. Perhaps Mayas threw rims in trash piles or used them for fill; whether or not they did, one would expect them to have discarded the entire vessel. The point

to keep in mind is that they separated out pieces of broken items, some for deposition in special deposits (sacred), and others elsewhere (profane). The separation of pieces from the same object is the critical fact.

What did they do with the rims, and what do the differences in their final resting places signify? Does each sherd represent the social significance of the entire vessel? If so, why use body rather than rim sherds? It is interesting to evaluate such deposits in light of Chapman's (2000a) research on Mesolithic and Neolithic Balkan artifact assemblages. He proposes that the life history of items typically continues long after they were purposely or accidentally broken and suggests that objects, as part of the enchainment process (creating relationships between people through objects), are purposefully broken, exchanged, and then, eventually, ceremoniously deposited "throughout the settlement and beyond" (Chapman 2000a:23).

Some *chultun* (chambers dug into the soft bedrock and used for dry storage) deposits include jar necks and rims without bodies (for example, Yax Caan, Belize), as do some cave deposits (Cameron Griffith, personal communication 2003). Alternatively, at Actun Tunichil Muknal, a large cave in western Belize, Moyes (2001:75) found that 39 percent of the sherds (278 out of 718) could not be refitted and suggests that "they were brought in as offerings in and of themselves." Caves, chultuns, and other openings in the earth are considered portals to the underworld, a place through which the dead must pass before emerging as ancestors (Schele and Freidel 1990). Thus, in certain situations and ceremonies fragmented objects were just as significant as the whole. Perhaps each family or community member received a piece of an item owned by a recently deceased relative or important individual (and soon-to-be ancestor). And the keeping and/or depositing of fragments signified their place in an individual's or family's life (history) and memory. However, the fact that ceramic fragments are more noticeable in dedication and termination deposits than in burials may suggest collective rather than individual ownership (see Mills 2004), further indicating their role in the establishment of place and family versus the commemoration of a person. In other words, the Mayas likely buried entire objects with the deceased, perhaps objects they owned, but used family objects in dedication and termination rites, whereby only parts were deposited and the remaining parceled out to family and community members who shared in the significance of particular items. What determined which objects' fragments were to have social and sacred power is a question for future study.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Mayas performed traditional rites for over a millennium throughout the Maya area, and they conducted them for family and members of the community to acknowledge a family's loss—and a new beginning. People interred the dead to create ancestors who remained involved in the lives of the living. Building and destroying houses thus relate to the life history of ancestors. The death of particular family members often represented the need for a new house, which meant the old one had to be destroyed and terminated after funerary rites, and a new one built and dedicated over the remains of the recently deceased. These behaviors are inextricably linked events that comprised a vital component of the construction process. One cannot separate such practices and construction events—they are one and the same. Memory and place were thus created in the ceremonial cycle of dedication, ancestor veneration, and termination practices. And the fact that the majority of structures throughout the southern Maya lowlands were continuously occupied for centuries suggests that they became, quoting Chapman (2000a:4), “a key element in the maintenance of cultural memory.”

Without written words with which to document their histories, commoners relied on mnemonic devices, especially since oral stories about individuals rarely go beyond a few generations (for example, Meskell 2001, 2004:62–63). Domestic ceremonial practices, by their materiality, solidify residents' membership in the household, family, and society. Mayas conducted ceremonies that involved offerings to make permanent and materialize the feelings, meanings, and intent of the rites. Depositional histories thus reflect not only ceremonial behavior, but also the lived lives of occupants. They reflect that houses were not just homes, but charged places embodying the living and the dead (compare Joyce 2001).

In conclusion, offerings established a sense of place through memorializing structures as homes through dedication, ancestor veneration, termination, and other practices. The depositional sequence of a structure thus embodies histories of the people who lived and died within its walls just as much as it chronicles building, razing, and rebuilding.

### Acknowledgments

I gratefully acknowledge the National Science Foundation for funding for the 2001 season at Saturday Creek (BCS #0004410) and the Institute of Archaeology, National Institute of Culture and History, Government of Belize, for their permission and support. I also want to thank Barbara Mills and Bill Walker for inviting me to participate in the SAR seminar and this volume, as well as Sandra Andrade for conducting the preliminary analysis on the sherd concentrations.

**Notes**

1. Evidence from other sites throughout the Maya lowlands demonstrates that these practices extend nearly a millennium before those found at Saturday Creek (for example, Cuello, Barton Ramie). I have no doubt that we would have found Preclassic burials with further excavations.

2. McAnany et al. (1999:132) note, however, that “smaller, thinner bones [of subadults and females] often deteriorate much more quickly, and thus their skeletons may be particularly fragmentary, especially if stored and moved for secondary interment.”