

Artifact Distributions of Str. 758

Substantial *in situ* artifact deposits were not found within Str. 758, but traces of activities were revealed. Miscellaneous ceramic sherds (Figure 9-63) and net-weights were primarily encountered to the west of the bench, in the back room. Concentrations of chert debitage/flakes were found in the back room and south of the rectangular masonry feature. A chert core was found with the latter. Non-image censer sherds were weakly concentrated between the bench and rectangular masonry feature (Figure 9-64). They were also found behind (to the west of) the residence. A single quartz crystal was also encountered on the rectangular feature. This feature seems to correspond with the similar construction in Str. 732. A complete ceramic mold used to create faces of small effigy censers was discovered in the back room of the structure. The reverse side of the mold was decorated with the incised depiction of a human skull. A similar object was encountered in Str. 732. Both of the molds demonstrate that censers were made in domestic contexts, but no image censer sherds were found in Str. 758. Furthermore, censer production areas are yet to be discerned. All other artifacts were distributed across the surface without clearly discernible patterns.

The lack of *in situ* domestic artifacts such as complete ceramic vessels, manos, and metates suggests the building was not rapidly abandoned. Alternatively, the occupants may have simply been able to carry most of their possessions with them.

Residences Discussion

The five residences and four associated buildings excavated at Zacpetén were selected to sample a variety of residential locations, sizes, and group types. Despite

these possible indicators of social variation, the residences had many shared characteristics in regard to both form and artifact distributions; however, there were also differences between the buildings that seem correlated with social status (Table 9-1).

The Zacpetén Residential Template

The basic shape of all five excavated houses at Zacpetén was a tandem structure on a low building platform. In the front of each structure was a bench that was L-shaped in three structures and straight in the other two. The three structures with L-shaped benches had an interior masonry wall lining the rear of the bench dividing the building into a front room and a back room. It is assumed that the two other buildings had perishable interior walls. The benches and floors of the front rooms in all residences with L-shaped benches and one of the structures with a straight bench were covered with plaster, while the back room had a dirt floor. The other structure with a straight bench did not appear to have a plastered front room. In three of the residences, a small masonry rectangle stood opposite the bench with the door between the front room and back room standing between the two features. In the two cases where the masonry rectangle was not present, the interior wall continued dividing the side of the residence without a bench. Two structures had a feature constructed of two or three metates embedded into the floor in the center of the back room. All structures, regardless of their size or quality, had certain basic shared features, but variation exists and appears related to social status.

When the various architectural features of each house are tabulated and the houses are arranged according to the internal area of the residence, a clear pattern is evident (Table 9-1). The largest two houses, Strs. 719 and 747, have all of the features mentioned above, except the masonry rectangle. Str. 732 has the rectangular rectangle,

but lacks the metate feature and the continued interior wall. The remaining two structures, Strs. 664 and 758 have the rectangular feature, but lack interior or any other sort of masonry walls, and have simpler straight benches. Str. 758 also lacks a plastered front room. While the area of residential space might not always be a good indicator of social status, it certainly correlates with the presence and absence of specific features.

Str. 719 is by far the largest and most elaborate residence and its bench is painted, a quality noted of elite houses in the Colonial Period (Landa 1941: 85-87). Such houses were described as having a wall dividing the house "lengthwise." The front room was covered with plaster and used as a social area and sleeping place for guests and the occupants slept in the back room and. The houses of elites were better constructed and built by communal labor. The plastered front rooms of such houses were elaborately painted. Elite houses in Colonial period Petén were similarly described. The house of Ajaw Kan Ek' had an plastered anteroom for the reception of visitors on the front of his house (Jones 1998: 71).

Str. 719 is partially constructed of soft cut limestone from Classic period constructions, some of which is incorporated into dividers in the bench. Its domestic group also has elaborate ceremonial buildings. People of higher status seem to have been able to fulfill the majority of their residential construction goals; therefore, higher status residences were the most complete representations of the archetypical residence. However, this does not explain the presence of the low rectangular platform in the smaller and less well constructed dwellings. These might have been shrines similar to Str. 720 in Domestic Group 719 and also seem to match the placement of masonry tables in open halls. As will be mentioned in Chapter 10, Strs. 720 and 721, ceremonial

buildings associated with Str. 719, seem to correspond with god houses and statue shrines of public temple assemblages.

Patterns in Residential Activity Areas

Residences at Zacpetén were the locations of various activities ranging from everyday tasks to the performance of ritual. While occupants were from a range of social classes, several repeated patterns were discerned in the excavations of residences at Zacpetén. Occasional variance from patterned behaviors was found and the recognized patterns were very general; hence, one should not interpret patterned behavior as strictly involuntary. Instead, the patterns were likely the result of an orderly and predictable existence. The presence of variance suggests innovation, resistance, or forgotten knowledge, all parts of the process through which habitual behaviors change through time. The present section will focus on repeated patterns rather than deviations in order to illuminate structured domestic practices at Zacpetén, but one must keep in mind that structured behaviors can change.

The front rooms of all five residences excavated at Zacpetén were relatively clean of artifacts involved in subsistence and production. The fact that these areas were generally covered by stucco indicates a greater amount of energy invested in their physical appearance. Effort had obviously been made to make these areas more visually appealing. Furthermore, refuse on the plastered surface must have been easier to discern than in the back room and the smooth plaster was easier to sweep than the dirt floor of the back room because small objects are not as easily lodged in the floor. The presence of cut soft limestone borrowed from Classic period constructions in the front room, but not in the back room of Str. 719 attests to the visual importance of this area.

In three of the five excavated residences, the primary activity evident in the front room was the use of censers in domestic ceremonial areas. Strs. 719, 732, and 758 all had evidence of such activities, in the form of non-image censers in the front room close to the door leading to the back room. Furthermore, interior shrines lay in the front rooms of Strs. 732 and 719 and low masonry rectangles rested near the door opposite the bench in Strs. 664, 732, and 758, the latter two associated with non-image censer sherds. These seem to have defined some sort of ritual space, perhaps shrines similar to Str. 720. On the other hand, the long end of L-shaped benches at Mayapán usually extended across the entire front room with a break allowing entrance into the back room (see Smith 1962: Figure 2-8), while in two elite residences at Zacpetén (Strs. 719 and 747), the bench ended at the entrance to the back room. It is possible that the masonry rectangles in smaller residences were vestigial, though enlarged and displaced, remnants of the features at Mayapán. While Str. 719 did not have such a feature, numerous non-image censers and other artifacts rested upon the interior wall in the parallel location. Str. 719 also had an *in situ* Kulut Modeled image censer and tapir mandible in the interior shrine of its front room, but no such objects were found in any of the other residences.

Since the front room was open, the ritual activities that occurred in this area were visible to the outside. The benches in all the front rooms imply sitting and their sizes suggest the presence of more than one individual; hence socializing. As mentioned, the use of the front room of the house as a social area is described in historical documents. The majority of the ritual activities, as primarily evidenced by censer use, within the residence occurred in the front room public space near the entrance into the back room.

The back room appears to have been the place of domestic production and the

family living space. In all five residences, non-censer ceramics were concentrated within the back room against the interior wall. Most lithic artifacts, manos and metates, miscellaneous bone and shell, and net weights were also found in the back room; however, they were concentrated in various areas. Of course, these objects were also found in refuse areas outside the residence, but within it they were usually contained within the back room.

All household groups contained numerous small chert and obsidian corner notched projectile points. This is partly the result of the surface-clearing field strategy, which produced a total of 393 such points. However, while household excavations involved only 25% of the total number of 1 x 1 m units, they produced 51% (N=202) of the total number of points. In Strs 719, 732, and possibly 747, most points were found in the back room, but in Str. 664, almost all were located on the patio. Given their size, these artifacts were likely used as arrow points. Such points could have been used in warfare, but it seems likely that most points found in domestic contexts were used in hunting rather than home invasion.

The back room was family space hidden from outside view and the place of domestic activities. The front room was open, the space of visitations and ritual activities. The Northern Lacandon ritualize social interactions in the domestic structure with visitors remaining near the entrance and hosts with their backs turned toward to guests. In tandem structures at Zacpetén, a similar behavior is evident, but in this case, an intermediate social area, the front room, is placed between the outside world and domestic space. The doorway from public space to domestic space is clearly the focus of ritual activity. Of course, here the ritual activity is religious rather than social; however,

the overlapping of social boundaries and supernatural boundaries is a common occurrence. The front room was not purely public space as it is likely that one must have first gained permission before passing into the household patio or plaza as is often the case in houses throughout the world. There appear to be various levels of access to the center of domestic space. If the pattern follows that of the Lacandon, it is doubtful that anyone other than family members would have entered the back room of the residence.

If one can generalize that the majority of maize grinding was conducted by females and the majority of lithic production or hunting was conducted by males, then the back room was both a female and male space. No evidence suggests the front room was predominantly associated with either gender. Domestic and public spaces within the residence were not divided into female and male spaces. Among the modern Maya of Oxkutzcab, the kitchen, which is usually in a separate structure, is primarily female space and the field is male space. Furthermore, boundaries of domestic space and fields are maintained by females and males, respectively, by sweeping or working in general (Hanks 1990: 329-364). If modern Maya gender roles can be projected into the past, kitchens were primarily female spaces and fields were male spaces. Neither of these gender-specific spaces was discerned in the residential excavations at Zacpetén.

Residences at Zacpetén follow that same basic front room/ back room pattern as Mayapán (Smith 1962: 230-231), but differ as well. While C-shaped benches are common at the latter site (see Smith 1962: Figures 2-10), none were found at Zacpetén. Residences at Mayapán sometimes have more than one chamber in the back “room,” but no such internal divisions were found at Zacpetén. Furthermore, many residences had “shrine rooms” as one of the divisions in the back “room” (Smith 1962: 191-202);

however, shrines at Zacpetén are located in the front room. The residential oratorios at Mayapán tend to have benches (Smith 1962: Fig 11), but Str. 721 does not. Domestic groups at the Yucatecan site often have more than one domestic structure, perhaps indicating extended families (Smith 1962: 206), but all of the excavated groups at Zacpetén lacked additional residences; therefore, the occupants might have followed a neolocal pattern. Domestic groups at Mayapán are defined by boundary walls (Bullard 1952; 1954), but those at Zacpetén are defined by patio borders.

Burials were commonly found in Mayapán domestic groups (Smith 232-255), but were rare in those of Zacpetén and cist burials were completely absent. It is possible that the “rarity” of burials resulted from patterning that was inadequately sampled. While numerous test units were placed into the residences, only three encountered burials and all three were found to the “right” (to the west if it faced south and to the east if it faced north) of the residence. The two groups that did not follow the patterning were not tested in the area to the “right” of the residence. The sampling was conducted to encounter Mayapán-like patterning (axial burials), which was not present in any residence. While a sample of three is certainly insufficient to clearly define burial patterns, it strongly suggests the possibility that burials tended to be located to the right of the residence.

All residences excavated at Zacpetén were tandem structures with a front and back room. Ritual performances occurred in the front room of the residence and in special ceremonial buildings. Group 719 differed from the other excavated groups as it had a god house and was the only domestic group with in situ god pots. As mentioned below, this group bears strong similarity to the two civic-ceremonial groups. The walls of the back room of residences enclosed a variety of both male and female domestic

activity areas. The size of residences corresponds well with the addition of certain architectural features and both were likely correlated with social status.