
7. The Altar and Associated Features

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In 1973, the observation of two dressed stones exposed in a plow furrow on T-25 led to one of the project's major discoveries, a large table-top altar (Mon. 22). While such altars are common at San Lorenzo and La Venta, they had never previously been found outside of the Gulf Coast. The altar sits on the south side of a low-walled patio area, and excavations there in 1973 uncovered seventeen human burials and one dog burial (Fig. 7.1). In 1974 the continued research unearthed another five burials, a tiny section of a Barranca phase house floor, and, on the north end of the terrace, a Middle Formative stone-faced platform with an associated stela base. The unusual configuration of the altar at the time of its discovery, its chronological placement, and its temporal and cultural relationships to the burials and the stone-faced platform are discussed in the following pages.

THE ALTAR EXCAVATIONS

Upon discovery that the two long, faced stones in the T-25 plow furrow contained several carved lines, the terrace was gridded and exploratory excavations begun. It quickly became apparent that other faced stones occurred in alignment with the original two, and together they formed a large rectangular-U shape. Only the outer face of the rectangular-U construction was cleared since it was this face which was carved.

When the excavations reached the bottom edges of the stones at approximately 25 cm below surface, no underlying construction was immediately evident. However, continued clearing disclosed that the feature did continue downward but that the underlying stones were inset approximately 8–15 cm. When fully exposed on its three sides, the complete stone construction proved to be a large low rectangle ca. 1 m tall, 1.4 m wide,

and 4.4 m long. It was built of two lower courses of large rectangular stone blocks, capped by a third course which overhung the lower courses creating the "table-top" effect. This construction forms a north-facing altar similar in form to those found at Gulf Coast Olmec sites. However, Gulf Coast altars are monolithic and tall, while this was shorter and created from about twenty large blocks.

Although the altar form was clearly visible after the initial clearing excavations, the front face—the area usually rich with iconography in Gulf Coast altars—was not. The altar's face was hidden by another group of eight large worked and faced rectangular stone blocks which had been placed to form a large rectangle covering about three-fourths of the altar's front (Fig. 7.2). These stones rested upon a well-made stone pavement which extended 1.3 m in front of the altar and 60 cm to each side. Apparently contemporaneous with the pavement is a rough stone wall construction which extended the west side of the altar to the pavement's edge (Fig. 7.3).

Although the altar's face was 75 percent hidden by the large stone blocks, some relief carving was visible. When these covering blocks were removed, the relief was revealed to be the eyes and eyebrows of an earth-monster supernatural (Fig. 7.4), a theme implicit in Gulf Coast altars but explicit here. The face is quite similar to the earth-monster "altar" painted above Oxtotitlan cave (Grove 1970a, 1970b, 1973). Lacking in Chalcatzingo's altar is the niche, the implied earth-monster mouth-cave.

Curiously, when exposed, the relief appeared incomplete. Some of the stone blocks making up the face were carved, but a few which should have been carved were blank. This is evident in the incomplete left eye of the earth-monster face, which lacks the lower section containing the eyeball. The solution to this

enigma did not appear until late in 1974, when the altar was being structurally reinforced with cement mortar between the major stones. At that time, the projecting ledge stone on the altar's east side was raised, exposing the top edge of the large slab which comprises most of the altar's side. The missing eye section was carved on the upper edge of this slab. We interpret this to mean that sometime during its history the altar had been disassembled and improperly reassembled. The incorrect rebuilding may have been purposeful or perhaps irrelevant to those directing that labor. The implications of this rebuilding are examined later.

The ledge stones forming the top of the altar ran only around its edge, and the top was not the solid pavement of stone which might be expected if this altar were duplicating the tops of Gulf Coast examples. Although difficult to demonstrate, it seems likely that a complete top pavement originally existed but was dismantled, forming the source of the large stone blocks used to hide the altar's face.

As the altar was cleared further and excavations were extended outward, it was discovered that the altar had been constructed (or reconstructed) at the south end of a sunken walled patio area (Fig. 7.4). Continued excavations uncovered human burials beneath the patio area and small caches of vessels along the patio's south edge and around the altar (Figs. 7.1, 7.5).

The patio's low walls are built of medium-sized, faced stone blocks arranged so that an inverted-V shaped niche was a major feature of the south (back) wall on each side of the altar (Figs. 7.4, 7.6). Rounded stones set to protrude at each side of these niches created eyes for these unusual earth-monster faces.

The altar is not centered along the south wall, at least as the south wall existed in its final form. The patio wall

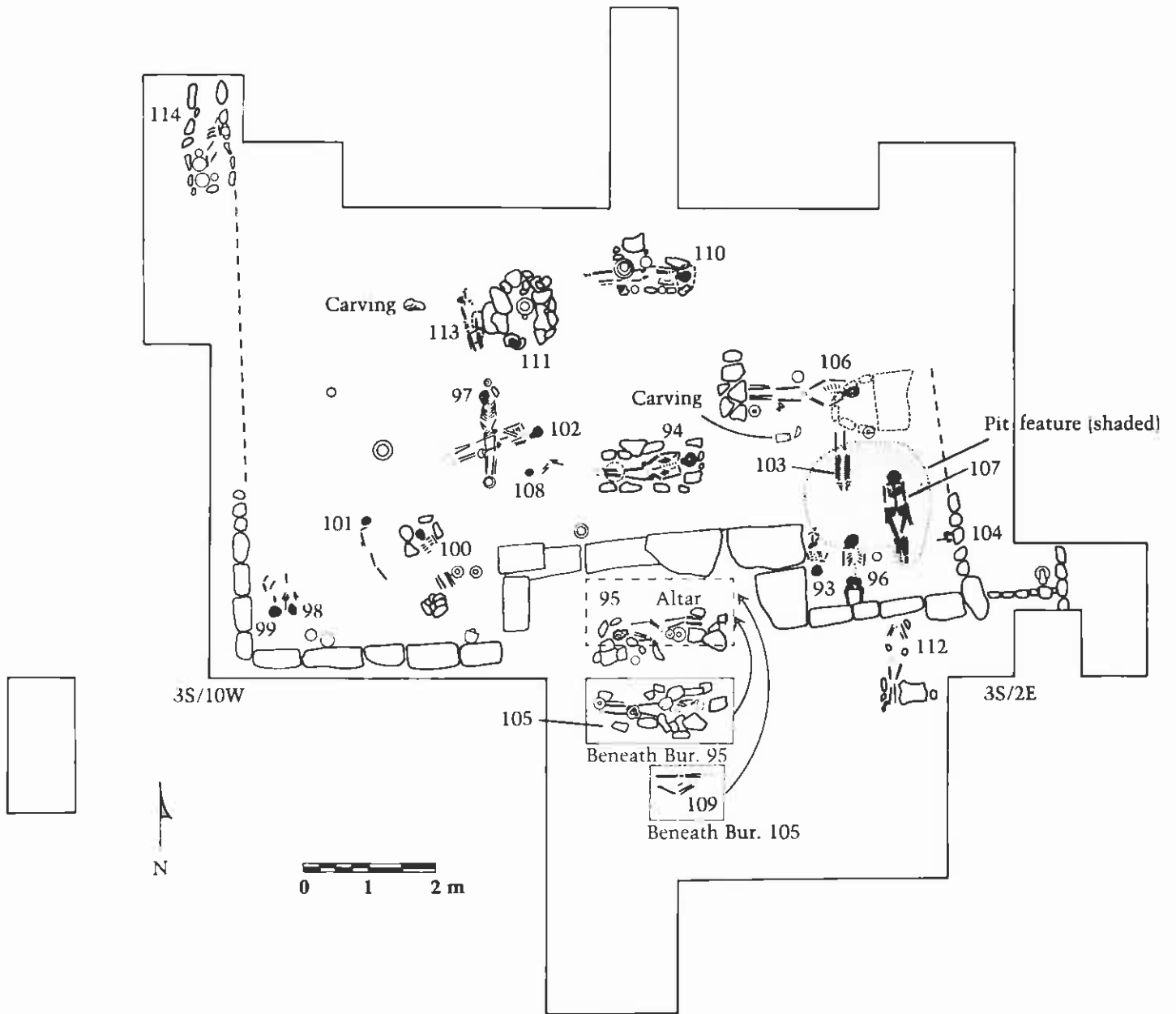


Figure 7.1. Plan map of T-25 altar excavations, showing burials 93–114.



Figure 7.2. Altar face hidden behind faced stones.



Figure 7.3. Extended wall lines, west end of altar.



Figure 7.5. Vessel cache at front of altar pavement.

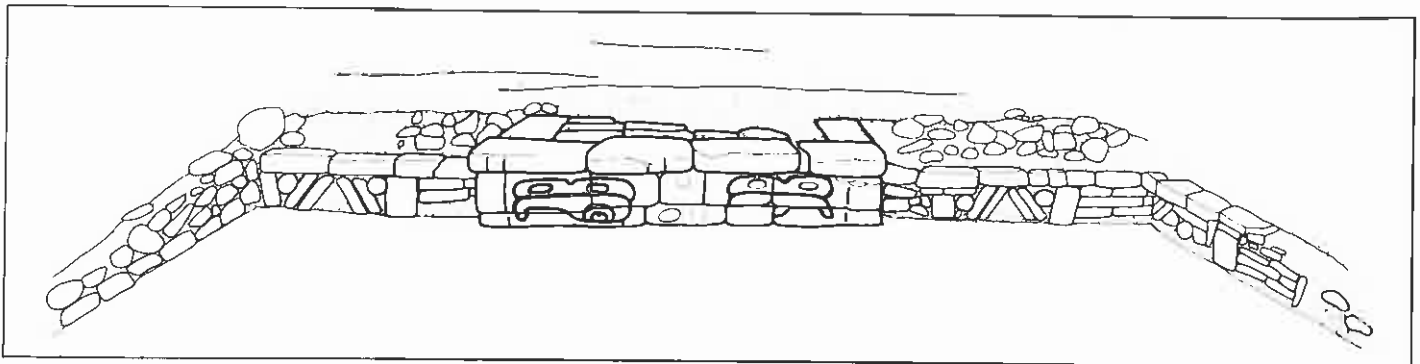


Figure 7.4. Altar and patio area showing altar face and patio wall niches.



Figure 7.6. Southwest corner of patio showing niche.

extending eastward from the rear of the altar is 2.3 m long, while the westward extension is 3.7 m long. This asymmetrical placement of the altar can be attributed to a rebuilding of the patio's eastern wall which moved it ca. 1.4 m closer to the altar.

There may have been four major building stages to the patio area. The bench-like south walls, with their inverted-V niches, are apparently part of the second building stage (Stage b). The evidence for the first stage (Stage a) rests with a long stone wall which runs ca. 70 cm behind (south of) the Stage b south wall and is at least as long as the Stage b south wall. This Stage a wall abuts the Barranca and Early Cantera subphase strata which were exposed when the sunken rectangular patio area was excavated in the sloping hillside. At the east end of the altar the wall rests upon stratigraphic Level VII (Fig. 7.7), thus predating the current position of the altar, which is built onto Level VI. Behind the altar, however, the wall is superficial and without great depth, and the natural stratigraphy of the cut is not completely hidden by the wall. It is here that a small section of a Barranca phase house floor (discussed below) is exposed. The lack of a complete Stage a wall behind the altar suggests that something—presumably the altar—may have stood in front of this wall.

The Stage b patio walls appear to have been built at the time the disassembled altar was rebuilt in its present configuration and location. At least two carved stones, apparently from the original altar, are incorporated into the western Stage b wall. Also within this same wall section, but largely destroyed, are the remains of another inverted-V niche.

It is impossible to estimate the dimensions of the Stage a patio, but the Stage b patio size can be hypothesized on the assumption that the south patio walls extending out from the back of the altar were of equal length (unlike today), or ca. 3.7 m each. These combine with the altar (ca. 4.2 m) for a patio width of 11.6 m. Interestingly, this reconstructed dimension is approximately three Cantera phase measurement modules (3.9 m; see Chapter 6), and the altar and each back wall roughly correspond to single module units.

Patio length is more difficult to ascertain. The present (Stage c) patio's side walls run north approximately 7 m and have been destroyed by erosion and plow-

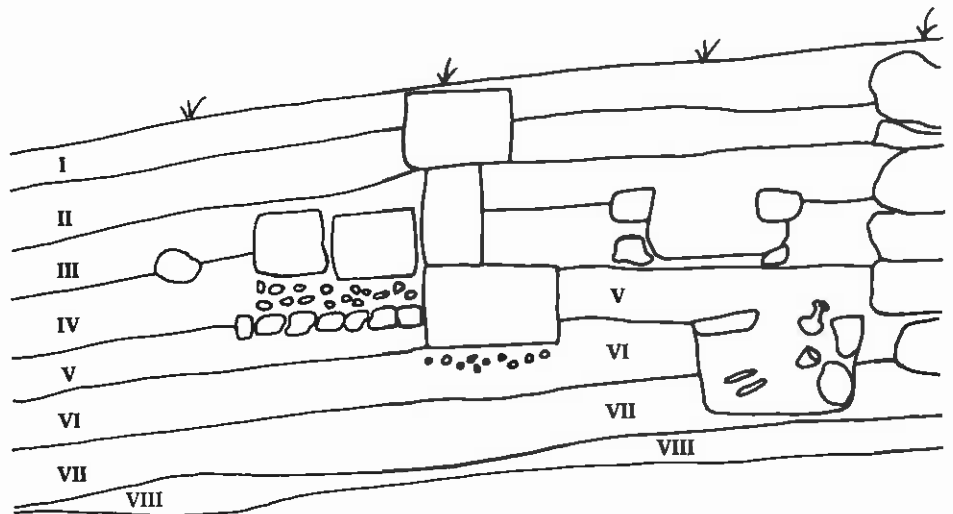


Figure 7.7. Profiles of stratigraphy in front of and behind the altar. Levels VIII–VI are Barranca phase and levels V–II are Cantera phase.

ing on the sloping terrace surface. However, a partially excavated fragmentary stone line running east-west 3.4 m north of the south Stage b walls (not shown on Fig. 7.1) may once have marked the northern extent of the patio. If this surmise is correct, the Stage b patio area was 39.4 m².

Stage c is simply an enlargement of the northern extent of the patio by another 3–4 m. This would have involved the destruction of the hypothesized Stage b northern wall mentioned above, and would account for its fragmentary remains. It would also imply that the east and west patio walls were lengthened. The northern limits of Stage c cannot be defined today because the patio blends into the plow zone due to the terrace's sloping surface.

Stage d is more complex. Apparently some time passed between the rebuilding of the altar (Stage b) and the act of covering the altar's face (part of Stage d). This is reflected in both the stratigraphy and the evidence that the table-top ledge was carefully replaced when the altar was rebuilt. Later, many of the top stones, including one ledge piece, were removed to use in covering the altar's face.

Prior to this, however, a stone pavement was laid in front of the rebuilt altar, and at the same time the altar's west side was extended by the construction of a stone wall. Eight large stone blocks were then set atop the pavement, apparently from the upper ledge, creating a

rectangular construction across the front of the altar (Fig. 7.2), which together with the altar formed essentially a two-step platform.

At some time following these events, the eastern wall of the patio was removed and replaced by a wall constructed of rough field stones (Fig. 7.8). This new wall was built 1.4 m nearer to the altar structure, thus creating the asymmetry in the patio's back (south) walls. At about the same time some crude stone walls of unknown function were built on the western side of the patio.

Chronology: Features and Burials

Although most of the stratigraphy on T-25 dates to the Cantera phase, these strata are underlain by shallow Barranca phase deposits which relate to an earlier occupation of the southern terrace area. Excavations south of the patio's back walls also unearthed several Barranca phase levels. During the excavations of the interior area of the altar (see below), a small fragment of a Barranca phase house floor was found in the south profile. This floor apparently represents the remains of the south edge of a Barranca phase house (T-25 Str. 1) which had been destroyed during the excavations of the sunken patio. Its location suggests that Burials 109 and 112 had been subfloor interments beneath that house.

A Barranca phase trash pit, intruded into *tepetate* and probably associated with the same house structure, is located



Figure 7.8. Eastern patio wall, construction Stage d.

1 m east of the altar at a depth of 0.7 m below the level of the altar base (Fig. 7.9). It is roughly circular, measuring 1.8 m in diameter at its widest point, and had been dug down slightly over 1 m into *tepetate*. Stratigraphy within the slightly bell-shaped pit was composed of five discernible levels (x–xiv) [Appendix B, SSU 16–19], all Barranca phase in date.

As mentioned below, the altar may have originally been constructed as early as the Barranca phase and subsequently moved and/or reassembled here in the Cantera phase. The construction of the altar at this location suggests that the Barranca phase house and related activities on T-25 might have been the determining factor for its location.

At least six burials apparently predate the construction of the patio area, and four of these are unquestionably Barranca phase. One of the four, Burial 113, consists only of the lower limbs of the skeleton and rests atop sterile soil. Burials 109 and 112, as mentioned, had probably been subfloor burials under the Barranca phase house. Burial 112 was adjacent to portions of a rough stone wall, possibly one of the foundation walls for the Barranca phase structure. This burial was in a supine position, the skeleton in a north-south orientation with the upper body to the north. The skull was lacking, and no definitely associated artifacts

were found. Burial 109, found at the base of the excavations conducted within the altar construction, lies atop *tepetate*. Although it is overlain by two Cantera phase burials clearly associated with the altar, the stratigraphy indicates that Burial 109 is Barranca phase and pre-altar. A tubular jade bead was found in association with this burial.

Burials 96, 103, and 107 all appear to be associated with the Barranca phase pit excavated into *tepetate* (Fig. 7.1). Burial 107, within the pit itself (Fig. 7.10), was associated with two mortuary offerings. One, a stingray spine (Fig. 7.11), is an imported object of undoubted ritual importance, and its presence suggests that this individual may have had a special status or position within the community. The other, an Amatzinac White cylindrical jar with a nearly flat base and fine-line incising around the outer rim (Fig. 7.12), had been placed by the right knee. Stratigraphy and the associated vessel indicate the burial is Late Barranca or transitional Barranca–Cantera phase.

Burials 96 and 103 are less securely datable to the Barranca phase. Burial 96 was interred in a face-down, extended position, its head resting over the edge of the pit. The lower limbs are overlain by the Stage b south wall, showing that it predates this wall. No burial furniture accompanied this interment, and it

is uncertain whether the obsidian blade found resting on the rib cage was deliberately placed with the body at the time of burial or was part of the fill laid over the burial. Burial 103 is disturbed and consists only of the lower limbs of an individual laid out in a supine position, with the feet extending over the edge of the pit.

The foundation stones of the rebuilt altar rest atop and slightly intrude into Level VI (Fig. 7.7). It is possible that the rebuilding actually began in the very lowest portions of Level V, and that the association with Level VI is intrusive for the purpose of laying a foundation. Both Levels IV and V, and their associated constructions, are Cantera subphase. This indicates that if the altar was originally carved and constructed at the same time as the Stage a patio walls, its creation can be dated to the early part of the Cantera phase. If the Stage a patio walls were constructed after the carving and dedication of the altar, the original monument may go back to the late Barranca subphase.

The stone block walls of the Chalcatzingo altar surround an interior earthen core which the excavations revealed to contain three burials. Burial 109, previously discussed, predates the reassembled form of the altar. Burial 105 was the first of two Cantera phase burials placed within the interior. The burial pit in which the individual was placed is intru-



Figure 7.9. Altar and patio showing position of trash pit.

sive from the lowermost portion of Level V, suggesting the possibility that Burial 105 was interred at the time of the altar's rebuilding.

The quality of the grave, its location within the altar, and the grave goods all indicate that the individual of Burial 105 was of high status. The burial occurred within a slab-lined and covered crypt (Figs. 7.13, 7.14). Seven vessels were placed as offerings. Two are Amatzinac White eccentric vessels in the form of what David Grove interprets as supernatural faces, with oval mouths on the side of the vessels and loop handles at the tops (Fig. 7.15a). One of these vessels occurred within the stone crypt together with an Amatzinac White bowl and a Peralta Orange punctate olla. It had incised pennant decoration on the back (Fig. 7.15b), a motif uncommon at Chalcatzingo but a marker for the late Middle Formative Rosario phase in the Valley of Oaxaca (Kent V. Flannery, personal communication to D. C. Grove). The other eccentric censer was placed within the rocks of the crypt which overlay the head of the burial.

A second burial (no. 93) almost certainly dates to the time of the re-erection of the altar. This, the burial of an infant lacking mortuary offerings, occurs at the altar's northeast corner (Fig. 7.16). It intrudes from Level V into Level VI. Al-



Figure 7.10. Trash pit; Burial 107 (within the pit) and legs of Burial 96.



Figure 7.11. Stingray spine found with Burial 107.

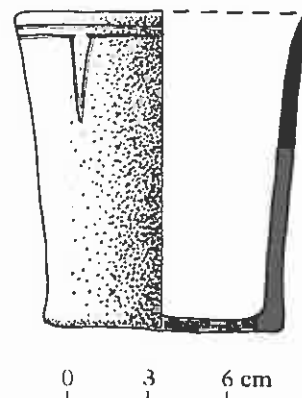


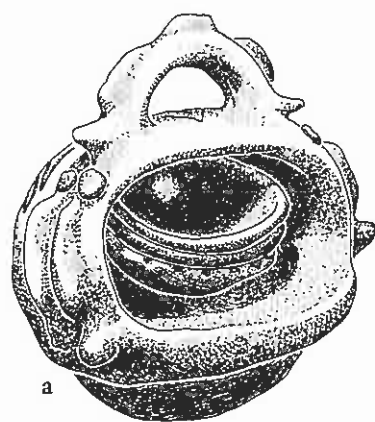
Figure 7.12. Amatzinac White vessel found with Burial 107.



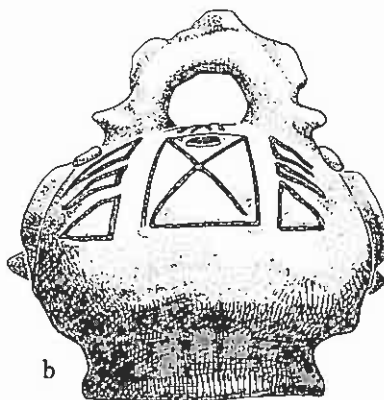
Figure 7.13. Stone crypt, Burial 105.



Figure 7.14. Burial 105, stone crypt cover removed.



a



b

Figure 7.15. Vessel 1 associated with Burial 105: *a*, front, showing smaller vessels inside mouth; *b*, rear, showing incised design.



Figure 7.16. Burial 93 (small child) at northeast corner of altar.



Figure 7.17. Burial 94 stone crypt.

though there is no skeletal evidence to indicate that this child was sacrificed, ethnohistoric accounts (e.g., Durán 1971: 157–159, 164–165, 425, 454, 466) tell of the sacrificing of children in rituals related to water and rain, fertility, and mountains. The location of Burial 93 at the altar's corner and its apparent contemporaneity with the altar's rebuilding suggest it was a child sacrifice.

Sometime after the altar was re-erected, its face was covered by stone blocks removed from its upper surface. The stone pavement on which the blocks covering the altar were placed had not been part of the rebuilt altar. As Figure 7.7 illustrates, the pavement, which also hid a portion of the altar's carved face, is associated with Level IV. It served as a foundation for the stones used to hide the altar's face, but its westward extent goes beyond those stones and includes a crude stone extension wall built onto the altar's western side (Fig. 7.3). Vessel offerings were found in front of and underlying the pavement (Fig. 7.5) in front of each eye of the altar's earth-monster face. Whether the pavement and crude east extension were a separate construction act somewhat earlier than the placement of the large stone blocks over the altar's face cannot be determined from the stratigraphy.

Burial 94 is located directly in front of the altar at the edge of the stone pavement, which slightly overlay it. The burial had been placed within a well-formed stone crypt (Fig. 7.17), the walls of which parallel the edge of the pavement and the altar's front face. The body, extended in a supine position with the head to the east (Fig. 7.18), had no associated ceramic offerings. The burial clearly intruded from Level IV, which indicates that it was deposited after the reassembly of the altar but before the placement of the stone pavement in front of the altar.

The stratigraphy within the rebuilt altar diverges from the stratigraphy of the patio and northern area beginning with Level IV. Inside the altar Level IV is a clayish soil mixed with stones. It is thicker than its corresponding number in front of the altar. Interior Level IV appears to be a fill layer which followed the placement of Burial 105 (probably interred at the time the altar was rebuilt). Intruding into the Level IV interior fill was Burial 95, placed in a stone crypt (Fig. 7.19). Included as burial offerings were two ceramic vessels: a ridge-necked Peralta Orange olla decorated with punc-



Figure 7.18. Burial 94 with crypt covering stones removed.



Figure 7.19. Burial 95, altar interior.

tations (Fig. 13.42) and a Tenango Brown olla. A jade bead was found with the skull. The crypt was then overlain with a compact grey soil (Level III). Differences in interior and exterior stratigraphy prohibit us from determining whether Burial 95 was deposited before or after the Stage d rebuilding of the patio and the covering of the altar's face. It may well be that the two events were related, just as the interment of Burial 105 and the rebuilding of the altar have been hypothesized to be related. The restructuring of the altar may have been brought about yet a second time by the death of an important person.

A number of other burials were also interred within the patio area following Stage d. The exact sequence in which these burials took place is difficult to ascertain, but their presence indicates that the patio area was utilized as a burial plot. Although we have no archaeological proof, it is possible that the burials within this restricted area belong to one particular Early Cantera subphase lineage or family. These burials are all described in Appendix C, and only a few salient points are mentioned here.

Burial 97 is an adult directly interred with three offering vessels. One of these, a Carrales Coarse Grey composite bowl, has fine-line geometric incising along the rim. This is unusual for Carrales Coarse Grey vessels; yet a similar vessel was found with Burial 110 nearby, suggesting that the two burials could be roughly contemporaneous. Burial 97 was underlain by Burial 102, and therefore postdates the latter. Burial 102 lacks ceramic offerings, and because the interment of Burial 97 disturbed the stratigraphy, Burial 102 cannot be securely dated. Neither skeleton was in a good state of preservation, and sex determination was not feasible. As pointed out in Chapter 8, there is some reason to believe that overlapping subfloor burials in PC Structure 1 are male-female pairs and possibly husband-wife burials. Such a possibility must be considered in the cases of paired burials within the patio area as well.

Burial 108 may also be part of the Burial 97 and Burial 102 group. This child burial was disturbed, possibly by the interment of Burial 97. A jade bead was found in the child's mouth.

Two pairs of child burials were located in the southwestern area of the patio. The remains of Burials 98 and 99 were found intermixed (Fig. 7.20), and were associated with one Laca bowl. Their prox-

imity to each other suggests that these children died at the same time and were buried together. Their apparently simultaneous deaths and placement near the southwest corner of the patio indicate that they may have been sacrificed. A second juvenile pair, Burials 100 and 101, were found nearer to the altar. Burial 101 lies just west of Burial 100 and had no associated offerings. Burial 100 had been placed within a partially stone-lined grave and had three associated Cantera phase vessels. It is interesting to note that a pair of child burials was also found at La Venta within the basalt column tomb (P. Drucker 1952:23–26).

Burial 106 is of interest because the individual received seven vessels as mortuary furniture. This quantity is exceeded, however, by Burial 110, a few meters further north, which was found within a partially stone-lined grave with eight vessels in association and a metate covering the skull area (Fig. 7.21). Among the vessel inventory of both Burials 106 and 110 are Amatzinac White censers with double-loop handles. These have burned, smudged areas on their interior bases which indicate that copal or some similar substance was burned in them, perhaps only at the time of burial. Burial 110 occurs just north of the remnants of the crude stone wall which may have marked the northern extent of the Stage b patio area.

Burial 111 is unique for the patio area, since it is a skull burial. The skull was placed atop the south end of a crude ring of stones (Fig. 7.22). Two Amatzinac White bowls and a small Atoyac Unslipped Polished I bowl filled with powdered hematite had been placed within the ring. The skull was in extremely poor condition and could not be analyzed to determine its sex. A fluted serpentine bead was found in the mouth.

Burial 114 is unusual because its well-made crypt partially cuts the northwest edge of the patio wall. Its placement indicates that it is the latest burial in the patio area. The remains were in extremely poor condition, consisting of a few bone slivers and four adult teeth.

In addition to a dog burial, a number of unusual artifacts were found during the altar area excavations. Whether some of these represent offerings or simply discarded objects is a matter of conjecture. Among them is a zoomorphic sculpture (Fig. 20.6) and a section of a cylindrical stone sculpture (Fig. 20.7).



Figure 7.20. Burials 98 and 99 in southwest corner of patio.



Figure 7.21. Burial 110.



Figure 7.22. Stone ring and vessels associated with skull Burial 111. Skull sits atop stone in lower left corner.

STRUCTURE 2 PLATFORM AND MONUMENT 23

The 1974 excavations approximately 30 m north of the altar uncovered a low Cantera phase platform (T-25 Str. 2) measuring about 21 m long, 6 m wide, and 50 cm high (Fig. 7.23). The platform was constructed of three to four courses of river cobbles and field stones. The base stones rest in Level III and indicate that this platform was built after the major activity in the altar-patio area. Some patio area burials (e.g., Burial 114) may be contemporaneous with the platform and could represent individuals who in life were associated with the activities, domestic or otherwise, related to the platform.

Two refuse dumps were found during the platform excavations. One existed within the interior of the platform, the other in a stone-lined pit adjoining the platform's west end (Fig. 7.23). These both contain Late Cantera subphase refuse and indicate that some domestic functions may have been associated with this structure. In addition, a stone stela (Mon. 23) originally stood in situ at the platform's southwest corner. At the time of our excavations, only the basal stub remained, and no traces of carving could be detected on the remnant portion (Fig. 7.24).

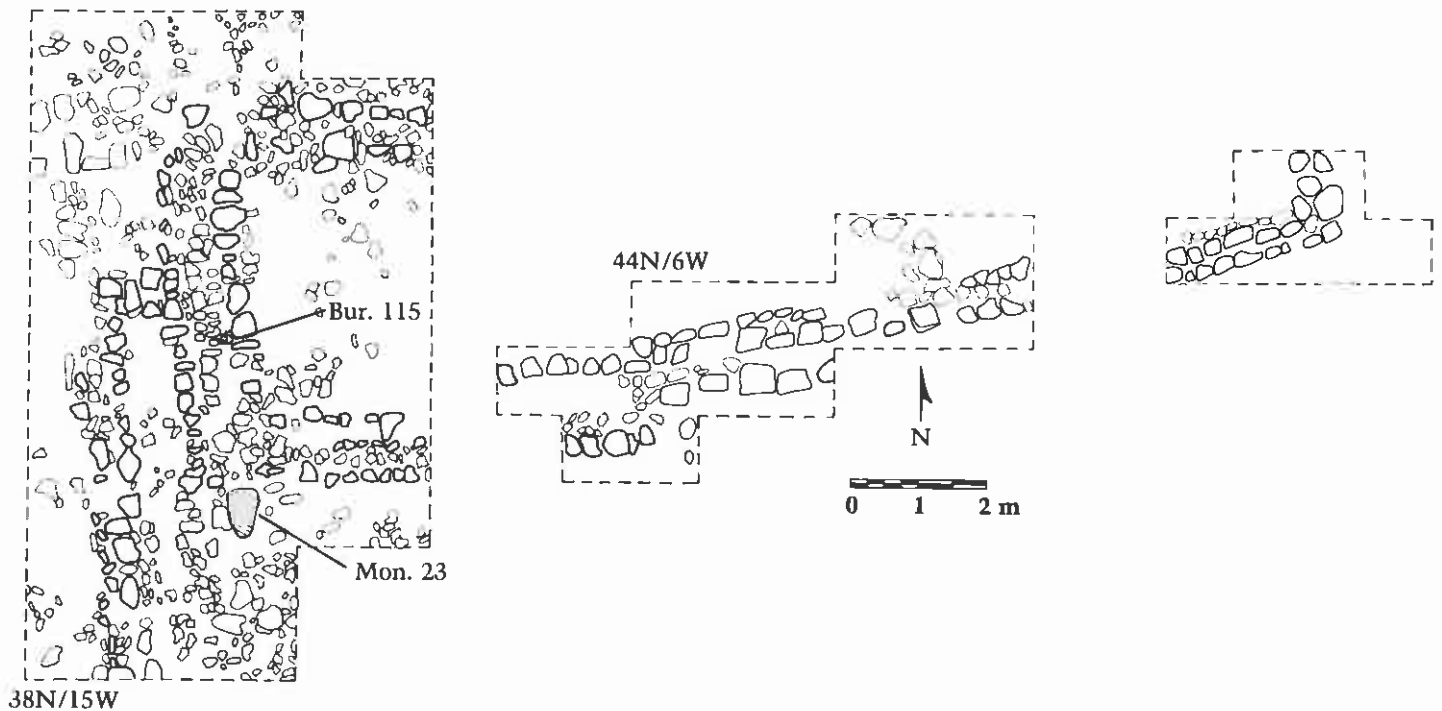


Figure 7.23. T-25 Structure 2; shaded area is stela base, Monument 23.

This northern area of T-25 apparently saw occasional reuse during the Classic period. A Classic period child burial (no. 115) intruded into the structure, and Classic period refuse occurred in the uppermost levels of this northern area.

COMMENTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The Chalcatzingo altar differs in several respects from its Gulf Coast counterparts. For instance, all known Gulf Coast altars are monolithic, and most depict a human figure seated within a niche in the altar's face. Chalcatzingo's altar lacks the niche and is constructed of twenty large stone blocks. Thus, this monument is not only unique in comparison with the Gulf Coast altars, but is unique as well for Chalcatzingo, where all other bas-reliefs were carved on monoliths (either free-standing or on the face of the Cerro Chalcatzingo).

While the monolithic altars, or blocks from which to carve them, were transported great distances to Gulf Coast centers, suitable large stones exist within 200 m of T-25 but were not utilized for the altar's construction. In fact, making the altar out of a number of large stones—all of which had to be shaped, dressed, assembled, and then carved—may have required more labor expenditure than simply carving one large boulder available nearby.

Unfortunately, attempts to compare the functions of Gulf Coast altars with those of the Chalcatzingo example are hampered by a paucity of published data on the former. With the exception of La Venta Altar 4 (Stirling 1943), the La Venta and San Lorenzo altars known today either were found repositioned or were not subjected to extensive horizontal excavations.

Grove (1973, 1981b) has suggested that one function of altars was that of a throne or "seat of power" for the ruler of an Olmec center. The iconography and particularly the altar's inset niche served to sanctify the ruler's divine origins as well as to link the ruler to the power of the underworld. Grove has also suggested (1981b) that a ruler's altar was mutilated and buried along with his other monuments at his death in order to neutralize the supernatural powers contained in these monuments and left uncontrolled by the ruler's death. It is important to remember therefore that the altar construction uncovered by our excavations represents an altar already dismantled



Figure 7.24. Monument 23 stela base in situ.

and rebuilt, and in that sense ritually neutralized.

Burials may have been associated with Gulf Coast altars. Matthew Stirling's excavations in front of La Venta Altar 4 (1943:55) uncovered a grouping of ninety-nine jade beads and one amethyst bead distributed in an arrangement suggesting that they had been worn as a necklace and bracelets by an individual buried in front of the altar. The quantity of jade indicates an important status for the buried person. Several burials are associated with Chalcatzingo's altar in a manner which may indicate a similar relationship. Burial 94 occurs directly in front of the altar. Like the La Venta burial, it lacks ceramic mortuary offerings. Burials 95 and 105 both were found within the altar's interior, an obvious area of special significance. Whether Burials 94, 95, and 105 represent deceased rulers and/or personages ritually related to the earth-monster cult symbolized in the al-

tar's iconography is conjecture at this point.

One major problem in dealing with the altar is that its final rebuilt form occurs in an unquestionable Cantera phase (700–500 BC) context. It is thus an anachronism, since the major Gulf Coast table-top altars may be Early Formative (1200–900 BC). Because Chalcatzingo's altar has clearly undergone at least one rebuilding, there is a possibility that it was originally made during the Barranca phase (1100–700 BC), a dating partially within the span of Gulf Coast altars.

The earliest evidence of occupation or use of T-25 is the Barranca phase structure, trash pit, and burials located on exactly the same area of the terrace as the altar. That the Barranca phase occupation may have been more than simple residential activity is suggested by the presence of a sting ray spine (an imported object of ritual importance) with Burial 107 and the association of a jade bead

with Burial 109. The facts that the altar sits in the locale of the Barranca phase structure and that Burial 109 underlies the altar may be coincidental but may also indicate a long-standing "sacred" importance for this location.

The Chalcatzingo altar is shorter than Gulf Coast altars and lacks the frontal niche. It is intriguing to speculate that perhaps the altar as originally built was taller through the addition of two or three lower courses of stones and did incorporate a niche. However, it is probable that the original altar was the same height and form as the re-erected altar. A niche would have been difficult to build within an altar constructed of horizontal stone blocks, and the large size of the altar's basal blocks indicates that they were intended as foundation stones. Niches do occur in the Stage b patio walls.

Although the time period of the altar's original construction is uncertain, it is probable that it was dismantled and certain that it was rebuilt during the Early Cantera subphase. It is possible that the re-erection was associated with and/or related to the placement of Burial 105 within the altar. Burial 95 also occurs within the altar and appears to correlate to the period when the altar was further modified by covering its carved face, an act possibly in response to the death of the personage of Burial 95.

It is important to reiterate that the Cantera phase burials within the patio area were not associated with the original altar. Some date to the re-erection of the altar, and the majority were buried in front of the highly modified structure. The structure and patio may have served as an ancestral shrine and a cemetery for the relatives of the individuals entombed within the altar.

It is certainly possible, but not demonstrated, that some of the individuals buried within the patio area had been associated in life with the Cantera phase platform structure and residence at the northern end of the terrace. We believe that this structure, like other stone platform structures associated with stelae at Chalcatzingo, was associated with one of the site's rulers. Excavations of the platform's subfloor area did not reveal any burials, indicating that they were probably interred elsewhere. The possibility exists that the platform and residence were located here due to descent ties expressed through the altar and the other activities on this terrace.

RESUMEN DEL CAPÍTULO 7

El altar de piedra (Monumento 22) construido con un patio hundido fué descubierta cuando surgieron del suelo, al paso del arado, dos piedras esculpidas en el campo T-25. El altar, de más de 4 metros de longitud, no es monolítico como los altares olmecas de la costa del Golfo, sino que está construido de dos niveles de piedras rectangulares rematadas por un nivel superior sobresaliente, el cual crea el efecto de cubierta de tabla.

Los ojos y cejas de un monstruo de la tierra sobrenatural, el cual es un tema olmeca común, se encuentran esculpidos en el frente del altar. Al realizar la excavación, esta parte esculpida se encontró cubierta en un 75 por ciento por grandes bloques de piedra colocados al frente de la cara del altar. Una vez expuesta, se vió que la cara no presentaba el gran nicho de otros altares olmecas, y que la cara esculpida estaba incompleta. En el transcurso de su historia, los bloques del altar deben haber sido desarmados y vueltos a armar en forma incorrecta. Más tarde la cara fué escondida con otros bloques de piedra.

El fechamiento de la construcción original del altar se desconoce. Se volvió a armar en el lugar que se encuentra ahora durante la subfase Cantera Temprana. Dado que los altares de la costa del Golfo aparentemente pertenecen todos al Formativo Temprano, el altar de Chalcatzingo pudo haber sido esculpido primero y después vuelto a construir en el lugar T-25.

El altar mira al norte hacia el área ocupada por un patio hundido rodeado de paredes. Las paredes del patio no son altas y están construidas de piezas de piedra, las que algunas veces presentan la forma de nichos triangulares. Sobresalen a los lados de los nichos, formando los ojos, unas piedras redondas, en tanto que los nichos mismos figuran las bocas de estos rostros de monstruos terrestres.

El patio fué construido en cuatro etapas, las cuales todas corresponden a la fase Cantera. Los depósitos de la fase Cantera se encuentran por encima de los estratos de la fase Barranca, y un pequeño fragmento de un piso de una casa de la fase Barranca fué descubierto detrás del altar. Se descubrieron veintitrés entierros durante las excavaciones. Dos de ellos provinieron del interior del altar, pero la mayoría habían sido ente-

rrados debajo de la superficie del patio. Unos cuantos entierros se pueden fechar en la fase Barranca y por lo tanto relacionarse con la casa de la fase Barranca. Varios entierros de niños de la fase Cantera pueden ser sacrificios de niños.

Las excavaciones del extremo norte de esta terraza permitieron descubrir una plataforma baja con una escultura de piedra asociada a una estela que se encontró rota. Esta plataforma pudo haber sido el cimiento de una residencia especial. El hecho de que esta plataforma se encuentre localizada al norte del altar puede indicar una relación de parentesco entre los individuos que hayan vivido sobre la plataforma y aquellas personas que se encuentran enterradas bajo el patio y dentro del altar.