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Pillars of the Community

Moche Ceremonial Architecture as Symbolic Household at
Huaca Colorada, Jequetepeque Valley, Peru

GILES SPENCE MORROW

The sacred might dwell at home. Given the pivotal place dwellings have in the human experience and the capacity of our houses to shelter both mundane tasks and complicated meanings, it is not surprising that people make their dwellings into sacred homes. What is surprising are the elaborate and diverse ways in which we do this.

JERRY D. MOORE (2012, 179)

This volume seeks to explore the variation of ancient domestic life on the north coast of Peru by focusing on the understudied aspects of quotidian routines through what has been described as “household archaeology” (Douglass and Gonlin 2012; Gillespie 2007; Nash 2009). In this chapter, an analysis of the ritual practices at the ceremonial center of Huaca Colorada in the Jequetepeque Valley permits a critical reassessment of conventional definitions of the house and “domestic” life. I consider at what scale the concept of “household” can be applied to the study of ancient lifeways, of which we have little more than temporally distant ethnographic comparisons to serve as conceptual foundations. Although the monumental architecture of the north coast of Peru is disproportionately overinvestigated, I argue in this chapter that there is value in approaching what we define as ceremonial structures from a household perspective, to reinterpret those spaces contained within monumental or “ritualized” architecture as symbolic houses and in direct relationship to more prosaic domestic contexts (Gillespie 2007). Questioning the assumed opposition of “house” and “temple” in the Moche context also serves to culturally

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contextualize the application of “commoner” and “elite” as heuristics to ancient Moche individuals and their spaces in a way that avoids the imposition of contemporary constructions of status, class, and privilege. Thus the use of these seemingly fundamental categories should not be applied without a critical examination of our definitions of the assumed relationships between elites and commoners within the ancient community under investigation.

In critiquing ahistorical models of elite-commoner interactions, it is still likely that there was some degree of resistance to centralized power among the Moche as based on contemporary analogies. However, it is equally possible that people’s relationship to differing institutions of authority defined positions in life and attachment to place that were accepted as such without coercion and aided by participation in ritualized activities. In other words, the self-identifications, dependencies, and obligations of different status groups—often glossed simplistically as elite or commoner—varied from culture to culture and must be contextualized within historically specific conceptual schemes and structures of practice. In her recent study of the conceptual dialogue between vernacular and monumental architecture in the Maya Lowlands during the Terminal Classic Period (800–950 CE), Christina Halperin (2017, 114) describes the mutual influence between each architectural category and the social statuses they reference, suggesting that commoner and elite architectural styles likely informed each other reciprocally. In light of this argument, an analysis of elite residential occupation and the possible “domestic” qualities of their monumental structures must be taken into consideration, paying attention to both the convergences and differences between high-status and commoner residential spaces. Although beyond the scope of the current discussion, such a comparison should include an examination of the types of foods that were served, materials produced, and the assumed roles that were performed by both elite and common participants within the greater community.

For instance, performing and assuming the responsibilities of an elite identity among the Moche may have amounted to accepting a death sentence. This is suggested by the discovery of portrait vessels of individually identifiable authority figures at Huacas de Moche depicted in other ceramics as captives ready for sacrifice later in life, likely after a generation of rule (Donnan 2004; Uceda Castillo 2001b). Assuming that “elite” leaders likely served as conduits of communication with the cosmos through the medium of sacrifice, they thus constituted a vital component of the larger social collective. Unlike, then, Feudal barons in Medieval Europe or members of parliament (but perhaps closer to idealized representations of Roman and Chinese emperors), Moche elites were viscerally committed to the continuity of the community as living stewards rather than simply as expropriating “lords.” If members of an elite household were perceived as deified ritual practitioners,
then it stands to reason that the lordly residence in question would be freighted with heightened symbolic meaning. This symbolism no doubt influenced conceptions of home, place, identity, and cosmos as part of an ongoing dialogue between vernacular and monumental expressions of these ideals. In other words, conceptions and experience of the quotidian—for different status groups—can only be properly understood in terms of their convergence or contradictions with different ideologies of life and emplacedness, including culturally specific notions of the home. As interlocutors between their community and cosmic, ontological others, the ceremonial arenas of Moche elites were likely perceived as the ultimate place of origins, becoming, and life itself. For many Moche, then, a sense of home, community, and well-being—qualities often ascribed to the private house in the modern context—may have been attributed more to the residences and ceremonial arenas of lordly ritual specialists than to the often transient and makeshift vernacular dwellings documented in certain regions of the Moche world, including the Jequetepeque Valley (see Duke, this volume). If Moche elites appear to have been invested with ensuring the well-being and continuity of the society of which they were a part, then such roles no doubt shaped conceptions and experiences of identity and “rootedness.”

In the following analysis I examine rituals of architectural renovation and sacrifice at Huaca Colorada in the Jequetepeque Valley of Peru not as exotic or aberrant rites but as fundamental to local constructions of (imagined) communities and identity (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Seasonal and cyclical rites of architectural construction appear to have reaffirmed bonds of community in relation to a specific sacred locale—in a way that seems to have created a large collective “home” defined here as a place of cooperation and belonging.

**SYMBOLIC AUTHORITY AND THE POWER OF THE HOUSE**

During the 1987 rescue excavations of the remains of a heavily looted Moche tomb at Huaca Rajada near Sipán in the Reque Valley, a remarkable copper scepter was discovered, unique in its form and manufacture. Decorated with an elaborately detailed architectural model of an open gable-roof structure, the building depicted was fringed on four sides by a portico embellished with sculpted war clubs, or porras (Alva and Donnan 1993, 48–49). There is little doubt that this singular artifact served as a rather unambiguous emblem of office. The associated grave goods further indicated that the original occupant held a privileged status in life, perhaps on par with that of the Señores de Sipán (Alva 1999, 26; 2012).

An unusual aspect of this particular architectural depiction is that its roof line was embellished with miniature metal heads bearing horn-like projections, a
The gable-roof architectural spaces depicted in the Sipán scepter and on numerous ceramic vessels are widely accepted as representations of architectural complexes that have been uncovered archaeologically on the summits of many huacas across the north coast of Peru (Shimada 1994; Wiersema 2010). With mounting evidence that these structures served both ceremonial and residential functions for elite members of Moche society, I argue that the visual shorthand of a simple open gable-roof structure was a highly charged symbol of the archetypical household and closely associated divine authority often shown seated beneath these iconic structures (Bourget 2003; Chapdelaine 2006; Chapdelaine et al. 2003; Franco et al. 1994, 2003; Wiersema 2010, 2015) (figure 6.1). In concert with the great wealth of iconographic depictions of what are assumed to represent religious activities found in Moche ceramics, excavation of the ceremonial complexes found atop adobe huacas across the North Coast supports the notion that these monuments served as the loci of elaborate ceremonial activities that may have mirrored domestic ideals or ideologies of home and territory (for an exploration of elite residences as archetypical households in the Andes, see Kolata's [1996] Weberian analysis of the Andean city) (Benson 2012; Bourget 2001, 2006, Donnan 1982; Hocquenghem 1987).

Recent research directed by Edward R. Swenson, Jorge Y. Chiguala, Francisco Seoane, and John P. Warner has investigated precisely such a structure at the summit of Huaca Colorada in the Jequetepeque Valley, excavations that have provided clear evidence of socially regenerative ritual performances centered on communal efforts of reconstruction (Swenson 2012, 2015, 2018a, 2018b). An analysis of the complex architectural biography of Huaca Colorada suggests that the structures at the peaks of huacas symbolized corporate affinity that embodied the connection between the wider community and a deified elite. This symbolic bond was reinforced physically through incorporative acts of construction as well as human and animal sacrifice linked to dedicatory and termination rites of architectonic renewal (Herva 2010; Spence Morrow 2018; Spence Morrow and Swenson 2018; Swenson
As a form of symbolic household reproduction, I argue that acts of construction and renovation would have extended kin-based ideologies of home and identity across generations through an embodied process of “cultural construction and contestation” (Pauketat and Alt 2005). These renovation histories clearly suggest that architectural renewal was fundamental to the ideological construction of society and likely tied to intertwined agricultural and cosmological cycles that connected social, religious, political, and environmental aspects of daily life (Prieto Burmester 2008). By housing the ruling elite at the peak of huaca structures, even if on a temporary, rotational, or...
purely symbolic basis, I suggest that the entire monument symbolized an idealized central house. Identification with a deified authority figure thus served to legitimize and incorporate individuals into their community through regular participation in feasting and ritualized public activities.

Claude Lévi-Strauss’s (1982) concept of the société à maison, or “house society,” refers to communities documented ethnographically that ascribe central importance to material and conceptual aspects of the house in expressing group identity and organizing social relations. A number of archaeologists have recently applied this perspective to their interpretations of past social organization (Beck 2007; Driessen 2010; Gillespie 2000a, 2000b; González-Ruibal 2006; Joyce and Gillespie 2000; Weismantel 2014). In a similar manner, I propose that the Moche conception of the domestic sphere may have incorporated and extended beyond our notion of the quotidian to align more closely to Lévi-Strauss’s (1982) conceptualization of the maison. Within his problematically reductive categorization, Lévi-Strauss defines the maison as “a corporate body holding an estate made up of both material and immaterial wealth, which perpetuates itself through the transmission of its name, its goods, and its titles down a real or imaginary line, considered legitimate as long as this continuity can express itself in the language of kinship or of affinity and, most often, of both” (Lévi-Strauss 1982, 174).

Following Susan D. Gillespie’s (2000a, 3) consideration of the material markers of house societies as inextricably linked to their temporal and spatial dimensions, a key function of the house is to “anchor people in space and to link them in time.” House societies as defined by Lévi-Strauss are self-defined and reproduced through particular narratives of history that often rely on architectural biographies. The built environment materializes social memory and generational continuity that transcends changes in familial alliances, household membership, or leadership structures. It is this sense of temporality that serves to “embody a collective memory about the past, a reference to origins that often forms a salient bond uniting house members” that seems to be expressed through the sequence of renovations that took place at Huaca Colorada, as outlined later in this chapter (Gillespie 2000a, 3). This social arrangement resembles both the exclusive household compounds documented at Huacas de Moche but also the numerous regional huacas that appear to have marked the territorial boundaries of urban and rural Moche communities (Lévi-Strauss 1982, 174; van Gijseghem 2001). By interpreting Moche social organization as comparable but certainly not identical to classic société à maisons, I argue that monumental huacas materialized membership within a larger community, extending a common identity across the sphere of Moche influence that negotiated situated notions of place within the landscape vital to each distinct community (Gillespie 2000a, 2000b).
MOCHE POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION

The Moche of the north coast of Peru most accurately refers to a political and religious ideological framework that persisted through much of the Andean Early Intermediate and Middle Horizon Periods (AD 100–800) (Bawden 1996; Quilter and Castillo Butters 2010; Shimada 1994; Uceda Castillo and Mujica 1994, 2003). Often considered to represent one of the earliest state polities in the Americas, Moche societies were defined by a highly stratified social structure (Bawden 1996; Billman 2002; Shimada 1994). The Moche iconographic corpus suggests that ideology and power were theocratic and linked to highly formalized ceremonies, usually focused on interactions between individuals of clearly elevated status who are often shown seated beneath a simple roofed structure (Hocquenghem 1987; Jackson 2008; Wiersema 2010). Elaborate narrative scenes depict distinct activities with a repeated cast of characters who are often participating in elaborate ritual events. With deceivingly self-explanatory titles such as the “Sacrifice Ceremony” (“Presentation Theme”) and the “Burial Theme,” there are clear indications that the known suite of Moche iconographic scenes was likely re-enacted by elite ritual practitioners who were subsequently buried in their regalia and accompanied by the same material symbols of their status depicted in the iconography (Alva and Donnan 1993; Golte 2009; Quilter 1997) (figure 6.2).

The interconnected and interdependent complex of art, architecture, and action that combined to form Moche religious ideology was “didactic, meant to impress upon their audience who was victorious and who was vanquished, who was the sacrificer and who was the victim, who was the ruler and who was the ruled” (Quilter 2001, 41). Defined by cycles of warfare, prisoner capture, and human sacrifice, the activities depicted likely served to legitimate religious authority; however, the relationship between Moche political theology and their cosmogonic myths is poorly understood and the subject of considerable debate (Alva and Donnan 1993; Bourget 2006; Donnan 1978; Golte 2009; Hill 1998; Swenson 2003). The iconographic and archaeological corpus strongly indicates, however, that the ritual control of human life, death, and regeneration was reciprocally balanced based on the notion that destruction enabled creation, a belief that applied as viscerally to the built environment as it did to human subjects (Bourget 2006; Swenson 2003, 2012).

With death as a liminal and necessary phase in the process of creation and becoming, the transformation of the human body or architectural space through sacrifice constituted a vital generative force of life, cosmos, time, authority, and ultimately the creation of “place” itself. This sacrificial ontology appears to have persisted across the Moche sphere, with repeated dedication and termination rites at Moche centers indicating that Moche conceptions of place clearly considered architectural spaces as vital, living entities in their own right (Swenson 2013, 2018b). Indeed, notions of
home, territory, and place specific to the Moche must take into account these central ideologies of life, creation, and death as interdependent modes of being deeply embedded in the landscape (Swenson 2011, 2012, 2018b).

Following this line of thought, the huaca form itself has often been interpreted as a mimetic simulation or miniaturization of the mountains that form the foothills of the Andes along the Pacific Coast, closely in keeping with the pan-Andean veneration of mountain peaks as both deified ancestors and the locus of supernatural and generative power (Bastien 1978; Bawden 1996; Kolata 1993; Swenson and Warner 2016; Uceda Castillo 2001a, 2001b). Exemplifying this multiscale symbolic tradition, Huaca de la Luna, located at the base of the coastal massif known as Cerro Blanco, served as the primary ceremonial center for the urban settlement in the toponymic Moche Valley (Bawden 1996). The ongoing excavations at the monumental complex of plazas, ramps, and platforms at this site have provided critical information for our interpretations of Moche religious and political ideology (Uceda Castillo 2001a, 2001b).

The walls that frame the large public plaza at the base of Huaca de la Luna are emblazoned with tiers of brightly painted high-relief adobe friezes depicting fanged deities, predatory animals, spiders, warriors, captured prisoners, and cosmic landscapes. The spatial arrangement of these friezes has been argued to present a distinct hierarchical relationship between the actors (Jackson 2008; Uceda Castillo 2001a). The enduring importance of these highly visible murals is clearly evident in the fact that multiple layers of similar decoration have been found below the latest surface, suggesting that the entire monument was renovated and renewed during construction cycles that carefully encased and reiterated the ideological messages presented by earlier phases. As such, Huaca de la Luna and perhaps all Moche huacas existed...
as living timepieces, chronotopic spaces that underlined the enduring yet dynamic ideals expressed through the monument (Bakhtin 1981; Spence Morrow 2018; Swenson 2012, 2018a, 2018b). Atop this sequence of friezes at Huaca de la Luna sits a series of elevated interior chambers and platforms that served as central stages for the sacrificial rituals performed within view of the substantial open plaza, public acts that no doubt underwrote the theocratic ideologies of Moche polities (Bourget 2001; Swenson 2012). As spaces specifically designed to present ritual acts and powerful symbols to gatherings of people from across a given territory, such ceremonial loci allowed members of a specific situated community to receive, consume, and incorporate the ideas those rituals and symbols represented in order to reify their connection as a group.

The ceremonial complex of Huaca de la Luna is thought to represent the foundational template that was replicated at the numerous satellite centers found in valleys north and south of the Moche Valley, most spectacularly at the Huaca Cao Viejo in the Chicama Valley where a nearly identical scalar version of the monument was constructed (Franco et al. 1994, 2003) (figure 6.3). In essence, the territorial expansion of Moche religious and political ideology can be interpreted as a mimetic process of reiterative reproduction at multiple scales centered on the symbolic replication of territory that no doubt implicated understandings and experiences of domestic space. As such, the connection between the natural and built environment was materialized through a repeated canon of symbolically charged combinations of visual art, architecture, and action. Although the similarities of this ideological complex suggest a degree of continuity across the region, recent investigations have questioned the existence of a territorial Moche State; it seems increasingly apparent that Moche political organization varied considerably from area to area, with each river drainage along the coast exhibiting unique variation on the central religious and political themes (Castillo Butters and Donnan 1994a, 1994b; Quilter 2002; Quilter and Castillo Butters 2010).

Inaugurated by social and environmental upheavals, the Late Moche (Moche V) Period (ca. AD 600–850) has left us with considerable evidence of major transformations in Moche society. During the transition from the Middle to Late Moche Periods (ca. AD 600–650), evidence from ice cores extracted from the Quelccaya glacier in south-central Peru indicates that a severe drought associated with El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO) events occurred between AD 593 and 594 (Shimada et al. 1991). In his work at Huaca de la Luna, Steve Bourget (2001, 91; 2016) has made a convincing argument that relates an apparent surge in sacrificial ceremonies at that site to increased social stress and instability related to drastic environmental changes. Under these pressures, the subsequent Late Moche Period was an era marked by massive demographic and ideological
restructuration that saw a diversification and popularization of Moche religious
culture in new territories across the region, including the Jequetepeque and
Lambayeque Valleys to the north (Dillehay and Kolata 2004a, 2004b; Swenson
2004). Current radiocarbon dates collected from the foundational phases of con-
struction of Huaca Colorada firmly situate the initial occupation of the site to
precisely this same transformative period (Swenson et al. 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015,
2017). Accordingly, the intensity and regularity of the phases of architectonic
renovation and renewal at Huaca Colorada over a relatively short period of time
(~100–150 years according to the current set of radiocarbon dates) may suggest a
population facing considerable stress that sought constant renegotiation and reaf-
firmation of the bonds of community through material acts of ritualized recon-
struction of a symbolic home.

HUACAS AS FOCI OF TERRITORY AND IDENTITY
As the Moche culture lacked a written language, it was through an inextricably linked
combination of iconography and architecture that the desired messages—including
those of home, territory, and emplacedness—were disseminated to the public.
The huaca form, or any highly visible monumental structure for that matter, was
intended to be emotionally evocative and physically arresting, and the original
builders’ desired impact is often felt to this day.

Although his primary research concern focuses on public architecture in the
ancient Andes, Jerry Moore (1996b) has discussed the clearly residential functions
of many Moche monumental structures, comparing known domestic assemblages
from Huaca de la Luna in the Moche Valley to Huaca Fortaleza at Pampa Grande.
In marked distinction to the enclosed and restricted elite residences at Pampa
Grande, he points to evidence that those areas interpreted as residential atop the earlier site of Huaca de la Luna were relatively accessible, a difference that is interpreted as an expression of the increased social stresses between commoners and elites on the north coast of Peru during the Late Moche Period. As noted by Donna J. Nash (2009) in her consideration of Izumi Shimada's work at Pampa Grande, if workshops were located in the residences of overseeing elites, the political economy of production would have differed from the family- and kin-managed production documented at Huacas de Moche. As this latter situation does not appear to be the case, Nash (2009) argues that Shimada successfully demonstrated that the administration of a central authority controlled production while not physically imbedded in household space. As will be suggested below, the position of the elite residential structure high atop Moche huacas may have served in a symbolic surveillance capacity, with the production districts as dedicated activity nodes that mimic functional spaces in an idealized household. In this way, the sites surrounding huacas such as those at Pampa Grande and Huaca Colorada would have operated as an extended corporate group, with the central huaca representing a macrocosmic house, a symbol of residence of which every member of the community was part and through which their social identity was forged.

The above discussion of the spatial interrelationship among residential, production, and ceremonial space demonstrates that the interpretation of public events and the architectural creation of public spaces must not be confined strictly to monuments and large plazas but need to take the entire settlement into consideration (see Chicoine et al., this volume; Ossa et al. 2017). In terms of Huaca Fortaleza, the overall orientation of the site as well as the organization of the residential and industrial compounds clearly puts the monumental structure as the focus of attention, visible from every area of the city. Although Huaca Colorada represents the central node of a much more compact settlement in comparison to Pampa Grande, the experience of staged performances of the huaca is worth reiterating. As will be discussed below, a series of public ceremonial platforms along the eastern facade of Huaca Colorada was intended to be seen from the enclosed plaza at the base of the structure.

Accepting that Moche huacas served as the ceremonial loci of ritual activity throughout their sphere of influence and across time, they join the continuum of Precolumbian cultures that focused arguably theocratic social order through the monumental lens of centrally placed ceremonial structures in both rural and urban contexts (Guengerich 2014; Halperin 2017; Millaire 2016; Swenson 2004, 2007, 2008). As the foci for communal actions of identity formation that cite elements of the quotidian, when domestic ideals are referenced in ceremonial structures, symbolic representations that cite these spaces serve as microcosmic depictions of a
particular worldview while macrocosmically reifying the household as encompassing
the larger community (Herva 2010). Numerous examples of miniature architectural models
have been documented in ancient funerary contexts cross-culturally, with many of these
remarkable miniatures condensing ideals of the physical dwelling as a sacred domestic
space. Indeed, these material depictions of vernacular and monumental households
served as the conceptual stages on which life was lived and identity continually
performed, even in death (Bradley 2003, 2005; Castillo Butters et al. 2011; Kirch 2000;

Similar to the miniature houses in funerary contexts in other cultures (and comparable
to two-dimensional depictions of such structure on Moche fineline ceramics),
three-dimensional models of the gable-roof elite residences were also of central
significance to the political theologies of Late Moche communities. Until recently,
the relationship between these very real architectural spaces and their depiction in
the Moche artistic corpus was assumed to have been quite straightforward, with
architectural components of these structures reduced to a simple descriptive
short-hand to clearly communicate the specific setting of ritual activity within painted
and modeled scenes. This line of thinking also extended to describe a particular
subset of looted Moche maquetas, relatively crudely fashioned and unfired ceramic
models of architectural compounds that were excavated in situ from the elaborate
burials found at the elite Moche funerary site of San José de Moro in the early 1990s
Following twenty-one years of excavation at this site, a collection of forty-four
such maquetas have been documented and conserved, with many of the tombs
containing numerous architectural models in a single context (Castillo Butters
2007; Castillo Butters et al. 2011). Made of friable unfired clay, the maquetas found
so far are all less than 50 cm square and are constructed and finished in much the
same way buildings of the period would have been: rectangular in plan and slipped
and painted with red, black, and white pigments (Castillo Butters et al. 1997, 127).
Three of the so-called Priestess burials for which San José de Moro is famous con-
tained maquetas that were seemingly locally made, perhaps even constructed within
the tomb itself during mortuary rituals of interment (Castillo Butters et al. 1997,
2011; Wiersema 2010).

Due to the overwhelming spatial similarity of one particular excavated maqueta
to a detailed map of a small huaca platform structure at the site of Portachuelo
de Charcape in the hinterland of the Jequetepeque Valley, Edward R. Swenson con-
vincingly suggested that the maquetas from the tombs at San José de Moro were
representations of real rather than imagined spaces (Castillo Butters et al. 1997;
Johnson 2011; McClelland 2010; Swenson 2004, 2008, 415–421) (figure 6.4).Charcape is an example of one of many relatively small ramped huaca-like structures
called *tablados* found throughout the Jequetepeque Valley, thought to represent scaled-down versions of the massive platform mounds found at Late Moche sites of more central importance, such as Huaca Colorada (Swenson 2004; Wiersema 2010). Given this correspondence, it seems that *maquetas* may have served as symbolic tomb substitutes for the full-scale *tablados* found in the hinterlands of the same valley, possibly as markers of community identity.

Suggesting that these models served as a substitute for the ritual architecture associated with the deceased would speak to the personal value and connection individuals likely held *vis-à-vis* ritually charged spaces. If this were the case, having a representation of the specific layout of the gable-roof complex of their home huaca may have served as an emblem of their affiliation. Considering that funerary traditions serve as a sort of theater for and about the living, the inclusion of architectural depictions in Moche burials highlights the importance of these spaces in the reification of community and territory identity. In comparing these models to the gable-roof structures at the summits of huacas, the visual shorthand of a simple roof becomes a charged symbol of a particular elite ritualized household that incorporated members of a specific community through ritual participation. Reinforced by ritual performances of social destruction and regeneration, the huaca stood as a marker of corporate affinity with an elite household, a symbol of identity uniting diverse communities into a single cooperative or ceremonial body. As such, the ritual performances assumed to have occurred within these structures likely underlined the continued legitimacy of both the leadership and the community as a whole. If social identity was in fact forged within these ceremonial spaces, acts
of renovation in these profoundly powerful places must have marked particularly charged liminal periods. These ceremonial construction efforts necessitated combined acts of destruction and renewal, involving communal labor efforts in the process of architectural renovation that must have been fundamental to the construction of Moche huacas.

ARCHITECTURAL RENOVATION AS SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

In Andean and Mesoamerican archaeological contexts, rituals of architectural renovation—either additive or reductive—materialized acts of both social and cosmic termination and dedication (Swenson 2015). Largely based on comparisons to the well-documented cosmological-temporal principles of destruction and regeneration linked to calendrical and agricultural cycles and dynastic succession that have been well established in ancient Mesoamerica, architectural renewal in Andean contexts is also considered to have involved highly ritualized acts (Friedel 1998; Hocquenghem 2008; Mock 1998; Prieto Burmester 2008). The sequence of construction phases at Moche huacas is fruitfully compared to Mesoamerican rites of architectural renovation and served in part to impart meaning to daily life for those who were involved in the construction and use of these spaces. Moche huacas were special places where quotidian acts of construction and communal consumption were elevated to community-making rituals that also metaphorically represented production and reproduction more generally (e.g., sexual, agricultural, artisanal). The intense efforts involved in reconstruction made and remade the archetypical house just as other rituals referenced the making and remaking of the cosmos and the agricultural resources so closely tied to the annual cycles on which the rhythms of such ceremonies were based.

The above-mentioned stepped ceremonial platforms, widely depicted in both two and three dimensions in Moche ceramic art, can now be understood in terms of these rituals of architectural termination and rededication (Castillo Butters 2011; Wiersema 2010, 2012, 2015). As discussed, the ubiquity of these representations strongly suggests the central importance of these structures in Moche religious ideology, a hypothesis corroborated by the archaeological investigation of the numerous monumental adobe brick huacas found across the the riverine landscapes of the north coast of Peru. Direct evidence of this architectural tradition is unquestionably present, as the remains of a highly remodeled and carefully curated room complex containing a stepped platform were recently excavated at Huaca Colorada in the southern Jequetepeque Valley. This structure has proved to be one of the closest physical analogs to the ritual platforms depicted in Moche iconographic representations (Swenson et al. 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2017).
HUACA COLORADA AS ANCESTRAL HOUSE

The largest Late Moche settlement on the southern bank of the Jequetepeque Valley, Huaca Colorada is located approximately 100 km north of the Huacas de Moche at the base of Cerro Cañoncillo in an arid region known as the Pampa de Mojucape (figure 6.5). Surrounded by a settlement covering approximately 2.4 hectares, Huaca Colorada is an elongated adobe brick platform structure built atop a modified sand dune; it measures approximately 390 m by 140 m and rises nearly 20 m at its highest point. Differentiated into three distinct sectors, the principal ceremonial precinct (Sector B) discussed in this chapter is located at the peak of the structure above and between two manufacturing and residential areas on the lower tiers situated to the north and south (figure 6.6). Serving as the ceremonial and political headquarters of a powerful polity, the principal religious constructions of the monumental core of Huaca Colorada consisted of nine daises or altars where both visible and secluded ritual performances would have taken place, all of which were ritually interred under floors or construction fill of each sequential renovation (Swenson et al. 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2017). Of the greatest antiquity among this architectural palimpsest of religious practice is a clearly curated and well-preserved sunken chamber containing a central stepped platform or dais that appears to have served as a stage for acts of ritual performance almost identical in form to those depicted in the iconography of Late Moche fineline ceramics (Swenson et al. 2010, 2011; Wiersema 2010) (figure 6.7).

This last phase of use was extraordinarily well preserved due to a clearly intentional termination episode that saw the entire chamber buried in upward of 120 m$^3$ of clean sand fill. This singular termination event encased and preserved two plaster-coated wooden pillars found rising from the platform that no doubt once supported a simple gable roof. Recent excavations that took place in 2014 and 2016 have further complicated the construction sequence of the platform chamber with the discovery of a considerably larger (~4.4 m × 2.2 m) two-step platform directly west of this secluded chamber but oriented in exactly the same north-facing direction as the private platform (figure 6.8). Unlike the platform chamber found in 2010, this newly discovered dais was located at the very eastern edge of the Huaca and was likely visible from the open plaza below that stretches eastward toward the later ruins of the site of Tecapa (figure 6.9). Excavation of this partially eroded secondary platform revealed that it was enlarged laterally at least once before being intentionally destroyed in an intense conflagration that collapsed the gable roof that covered it and sealed the surface of the entire eastern facade of the huaca. Ample evidence of the original roofing material was found among the burned rubble covering this platform, with the impressions of cane bound with twine preserved in remarkably thick (~15 cm) layers of painted clay that clearly covered the entire roof (figure 6.10).
**Figure 6.5.** Location of Huaca Colorada within the Jequetepeque Valley

**Figure 6.6.** Contour map of Huaca Colorada showing locations of 2009–2016 excavations
Considering the size of the platform, the clay-covered roof alone would have been of considerable weight, requiring the support of large wooden posts, the burned bases of which remained imbedded in the platform floor. Excavations immediately north of this burned platform uncovered two additional phases of construction in the form of two overlaid later platforms, both of which were associated with the interment of sacrificial victims (Spence Morrow and Swenson 2019; Swenson et al. 2015, 2017) (figure 6.8).

As this public eastern platform appears to have been built contemporaneous to the earliest phases of the more exclusive platform chamber in the west, it appears that both public and private performances would have been held on these two ritual stages (figure 6.9). The eastern public platform would have been visible to the entire extended community that could have gathered at the base of the huaca in what resembles a large open plaza and is bounded to the west by a high adobe wall, assumed to be associated with the later constructions in Tecapa (figure 6.11). Covering an area measuring approximately 80 m by 100 m, the 8,000 m² space bounded by this plaza could have easily hosted upward of 17,000 ritual participants.
**Figure 6.8.** Eastern Terrace platform of Huaca Colorada showing evidence of burning

**Figure 6.9.** Three-dimensional model of the relation of Eastern Terrace and Western Chamber platforms at Huaca Colorada
if the upper limit of Jerry D. Moore’s plaza occupation density constants are applied (Moore 1996b, 117; Ossa et al. 2017; see Inomata 2006 for similar occupation calculations for the plazas of Tikal, Copán, and Aguateca in Mesoamerica). This walled plaza likely had an earlier and enduring association with Huaca Colorada due to the presence of a considerable retaining wall that runs up across the huaca toward the east and contains and essentially defines the southern limit of Sector B. Although recent excavation and investigation of this wall did not conclusively determine its contemporaneity to the Late Moche construction phases, it appears to have controlled access to the Eastern Plaza, which would have served as the optimal place to observe particular acts that would have taken place on the public platform and later ritual constructions (Swenson et al. 2015) (see figure 6.11).

Later phases of use following the closure of the interior chamber and the sequence of overlaid interments of more visible platforms were clearly designed to maintain visual access to the eastern facade of the huaca. The latest platforms shifted orientation to face Cerro Cañoncillo and the plaza below, construction phases associated with the latest occupations during the post-Moche Transitional Period. There is a clear maintenance of the position of numerous wooden posts as a link to previous
phases, dynamically preserving fundamental elements of the original structure while allowing for new constructions that conserved certain architectural layouts as the structure was reproduced and renewed. With the construction of a sequence of floors that encapsulated the original north-facing public platform, it appears that there was a concerted effort to maintain the presence of this visible open space to the plaza below while subtly changing the architectural configuration. This constant renewal of the visible public platform is mirrored in the numerous reductions of the private platform in the west as will be discussed below, suggesting that the renovations of both public and private ceremonial spaces were not only reminiscent
of each other but also clearly synchronized. As mentioned, in the last phases of construction, a 90-degree shift in the orientation of the later public ceremonial platforms from north facing to east facing speaks to a fundamental change in the nature of associated activities, possibly related to a new focus on the occupation of Tecapa to the east (figure 6.12).

Following the initial discovery of the latest phase of the private western platform chamber in 2010, two further excavations in 2011 and 2012 defined at least seven distinct phases of renovation of the chamber. Each of these construction phases incrementally reduced the dimensions of the room laterally and vertically, compressing the layout of the original chamber while carefully maintaining and reiterating fundamental components of its spatial organization. These architectural renovations stand as clear evidence of a concerted effort to maintain some vestige of the original spatial orientation of this particular ritual setting while marking the passage of time and the renewal of social order for those involved in its construction and dedication. These reductions clearly define the use of this space as focused on the open gable-roof structure found atop the platform in the southern end of the chamber, with every stage of reduction entombing both the previous space within each of the new floors and walls that marked each phase. Each of these sequential spatial reductions of the private platform chamber at Huaca Colorada was also directly associated with clearly dedicatory acts of human and animal sacrifice (Spence Morrow 2018; Spence Morrow and Swenson 2019; Swenson et al. 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2017) (figure 6.13).
Excavation of construction fill that composed the penultimate reduction of the chamber uncovered one of these sacrificial burials, an individual who was rather unceremoniously sprawled across the area, seemingly tossed into the rubble while the space was being reduced (Swenson et al. 2012). Found directly beneath the body were the fragile remains of a large wooden post approximately 30 cm in diameter and nearly 2 m long, laid in the adobe rubble in an almost identical orientation and position as the individual itself. Considering their proximity, relative size, and orientation, this post and the sacrificial victim were clearly interred together in a single event that is suggestive of a symbolic linkage between acts of human and architectural sacrifice (figure 6.14). Atop this construction fill was a circular alignment of adobe bricks surrounding the remnants of a post under which a Spondylus shell had been placed—a common dedicatory offering in the construction of Moche architecture (Shimada 1994). This particular architectural element was reminiscent of a series of other adobe post emplacements found at Huaca Colorada in previous seasons. Constructed of levels of mortared adobe bricks arranged in roughly conical forms, these circular shafts tapered downward from approximately 1 m in diameter to 50 cm at their bases, cutting through numerous earlier floors. Often over 2 m deep, these well-like adobe structures were clearly associated with floors on the higher levels of the huaca east of the ceremonial chamber (Rucabado-Yong 2006) (figure 6.15).

The circular adobe bins were aligned and often associated with the remnants of large wooden posts, continually built up over time as new floors were added to the
huaca with each cycle of ceremonial reconstruction (Swenson et al. 2012). Once the western ceremonial chamber had been filled and abandoned in the latest periods of occupation, this higher, more visible eastern area became the focus for ceremonial activity. As mentioned earlier, the uppermost eastern facade of the huaca would have been covered by a veranda made from the alignment of posts, each with its own socket—allowing the huaca to change and grow while maintaining their original positions relative to the huaca, thus renewing space with vertical shifts rather than horizontal reductions (see figure 6.8). This clear desire to maintain the location of posts over time explicitly acknowledged and commemorated previous construction sequences. This ritualized building program created physical conduits through which an association with the past is maintained and where the recycling of the posts provided a continual connection to the earliest iteration of the structure and

Figure 6.14. Sacrificial victim (a) and associated ritualized post burial (b) and Spondylus shell offering (d) in context of post emplacement (c)
its ancestral inhabitants. As such, these posts may have held great importance as a kind of vital inherited architectural element that perdured between phases of construction, thereby linking and connecting present, past, and future communities for which this structure served as a powerful instrument of social reproduction. In line with this argument, the choice to bury one of these long-curated posts along with an attendant human sacrifice in the penultimate reduction of the private platform chamber materialized a particularly notable and no doubt powerful act of termination, perhaps even commemorating the fall of a preceding line of rulership and a shift to a new social order.

Parallels of sacrificial rituals that linked acts of architectural change and continuity through the symbolism of post emplacements are also evident in the excavations undertaken by Izumi Shimada at Huaca Loro and Huaca Lercanlech in the Lambayeque Valley during the later Sicán Period (ca. AD 900–1100) (Klaus and Shimada 2016). Investigations at these huacas have uncovered numerous similar columnar adobe post emplacement boxes or sockets that appear to have served the same function as those at Huca Colorada, suggesting both a symbolic and a functional extension of this particular architectural tradition, although significantly intensified in terms of the relation to sacrificial rites (Klaus and Shimada 2016; Shimada 1990). Within each of these later post sockets, along with small foundation offerings of copper and Spondylus shell, nearly half of all the post emplacements
excavated at these huacas contained sacrificial victims—some found blindfolded and physically bound to the remnant posts with rope, embracing the base of the column just below the floor level (Klaus and Shimada 2016).

Interestingly, the only comparable post emplacement structures contemporaneous to those at Huaca Colorada were found in the later occupation phases at Huaca Fortaleza in the Lambayeque Valley, where they were originally suggested to have served as storage containers before being independently interpreted as over-constructed post emplacements (Anders 1981; Day 1971, 1975; Haas 1985; Shimada 1994). With only two building phases, Huaca Fortaleza is not only one of the largest monumental structures attributed to the Moche culture but also by far the most quickly built, demanding an enormous and highly organized workforce (Shimada 1994, 179). Erected in an economic manner, the platforms were constructed using a “chamber-and-fill” method involving a honeycomb of rectangular walls filled with rubble, thereby reducing labor requirements and the overall amount of adobe needed for construction (Shimada 1994, 160). The platforms at this site were uniform in style and did not reveal the numerous construction phases that characterize most earlier Moche huacas of this monumental scale or even more modest sites such as Huaca Colorada, discussed above (Bawden 1996, 294). Huaca Fortaleza’s rapid construction speaks to urgency in its creation and possibly other social pressures. It might also point to distinct ideologies of space and time. Indeed, Huaca Fortaleza was rapidly founded as a new node of social reproduction from which a territorialized community of a clearly different constitution developed. Archaeologically, we rely on these specific construction episodes of monumental centers to help us punctuate and interrelate the complexity of the shifting social conditions of ancient societies across the north coast of Peru. The initiating factors that brought about the establishment of such new communities are an inextricable product of both social and environmental conditions these ancient populations faced. However, it is in the way these specific, situated communities created and shared ideals and identities as members of a collective and intergenerational “house” that we can appreciate the power of place as fundamental to the establishment of cooperation and belonging.

CONCLUSION

To move beyond the continued categorization of Moche huacas as purely ceremonial locales designed to express and continually reiterate centralized political ideologies, the form of nuanced and long-term investigation that has been undertaken at Huaca Colorada is of vital importance. The close analysis of the specific object biography of this curated religious space allowed us to document the materialized
rhythms of social reproduction—as a moral ideal—of a particular ancient community. By appreciating that this form of collaborative intergenerational construction project created and re-created the communities responsible for building them, we gain a valuable glimpse into Moche constructions of both the cosmological and the quotidian. Materially communicating ideals of domesticity centered on the house, these specific architectural spaces appear to have symbolically bonded both participant and religious practitioner and “commoner” and “elite” in a ritual setting that mimicked and celebrated domestic traditions. These structures were the central focus of their communities, spaces where individuals became incorporated into the social fabric of their society through a common understanding of place.

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