ARTICLES

Ritualizing a Nonroyal Building Termination at the Classic Maya Capital of Tamarindito, Guatemala

Markus Eberl, Sven Gronemeyer, and Claudia Marie Vela González

Classic Maya "killed" objects. They broke and dispersed ceramic vessels. After adding exotic artifacts, they burned everything, buried the deposit with marl, and tore down associated rooms or buildings. This complex set of interrelated activities has been classified as a termination ritual. Instead of accepting this as a natural category, we study how the Classic Maya strategically differentiated some practices from others. Our case study are the deposits in Structure 5PS-12, an eighth-century AD building at the outskirts of the royal capital of Tamarindito, Guatemala. Destroyed wall foundations and evenly distributed wall fall indicate that Structure 5PS-12 was dismantled. Complete tools and exotic artifacts are found within the wall fall and on the floor. Refitted ceramic sherds show that partial vessels were broken apart and scattered across the building. The combination and sequence of these practices reveal a deliberate strategy to distinguish some practices from others. Its practitioners may have witnessed a fire ceremony conducted by the divine rulers of Tamarindito in AD 762. Structure 5PS-12 attests to shared and possibly copied ritual procedures, whereas unique practices establish a local way of abandonment. The process of differentiation allows people to display but also question shared cultural frameworks. The Maya ritualized practices in a social discourse about appropriate norms and behaviors.

Keywords: ritualization, termination ritual, Classic Maya, Tamarindito

Los mayas del período Clásico "daban muerte" a los artefactos. En muchas ocasiones rompieron vasijas cerámicas y dispersaron sus fragmentos, incorporaron artefactos exóticos, quemaron todo y enterraron el depósito con marga. Además, las habitaciones o edificios asociados a estas actividades eran derribados. Este complejo conjunto de acciones ha sido clasificado como ritual de terminación. Lejos de aceptar esta categoría como única, estudiamos cómo los mayas del Clásico diferenciaban estratégicamente algunas prácticas de otras. Nuestro caso de estudio son los depósitos en la Estructura 5PS-12, un edificio del siglo ocho dC localizado en las afueras de la capital real de Tamarindito, Guatemala. Los cimientos destruidos y los muros colapsados de manera uniforme evidencian que dicha estructura fue desmantelada. Se encontraron herramientas enteras y artefactos exóticos en el piso y en el sector de los muros colapsados. El material cerámico recuperado muestra que las vasijas se rompieron y los tiestos se diseminaron por todo el edificio. La combinación y secuencia de estas prácticas revelan una estrategia deliberada con un propósito específico. Las personas responsables posiblemente fueron testigos de una ceremonia de fuego, llevada a cabo en el año 762 dC y dirigida por los gobernantes divinos de Tamarindito. La Estructura 5PS-12 evidencia procedimientos rituales compartidos, así como prácticas únicas de abandono. Esta diferenciación permitió a las personas mostrar y cuestionar marcos culturales compartidos. Ritualizaron las prácticas en un discurso social sobre apropiación de normas y comportamientos.

Palabras clave: ritualización, rituales de terminación, Clásico Maya, Tamarindito

The Classic Maya broke ceramic vessels apart and scattered them; they added exotic artifacts and burned everything before burying these ritual deposits in white marl. The palaces and temples, where the most elaborate versions of these events took place,

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were often intentionally damaged or torn down. This set of activities has been classified as a termination ritual. In analyzing ritual, Catherine Bell (1992:69–74) critiques how the categorization of practices as ritual creates the intellectual category that is then studied by itself. She promotes confronting the ritual act, asking "how ritual activities, in their doing, generate distinctions between what is or is not acceptable ritual" (80). As situational and strategic activities, rituals need to be understood in relation to other actions.

This perspective informs our study of deposits in a nonroyal residential group at the Classic Maya capital of Tamarindito, Department of Petén, Guatemala. Although some elements overlap with known termination rituals, others diverge. In this article, we discuss whether the deposit records a ritual and, in particular, a termination ritual. Previously, variations have been seen from a functional perspective. Here, the nonroyal context leads us to ask to what degree Classic Maya shared the sense of a termination ritual; that is, the underlying principle that generates and organizes ritual practices. We argue that this sense should not be assumed in a heterogeneous society whose members likely did not recognize themselves as Maya. Instead, we advance termination rituals as discursive processes that entangle practices, participants, and places.

Classic Maya Ritualization

Traditionally, rituals have been understood as material manifestations of religions and their associated beliefs, supernaturals, and myths. Scholars have challenged this understanding in recent decades (summarized in Fogelin 2007; Swenson 2015). It is difficult if not impossible to differentiate rituals from other types of action (Douglas 1966; Leach 1966; Moore and Myerhoff 1977). Practitioners often struggle to explain why they perform rituals: "what is clear and explicit about ritual is how to do it—rather than its meaning" (Lewis 1980:19). Correspondingly, theories of ritual have come to emphasize how ritualization transforms action (e.g., Bell 1992:74; Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994:3; Lewis 1980:19–22).

In the past several decades, complex midden-like deposits at various Maya sites have been identified as the outcome of termination rituals (Stanton et al. 2008; also Bradley 2005:57–64; Inomata and Webb 2003; LaMotta and Schiffer 1999:24; Schiffer 1985:29). Classic Maya termination rituals share burnt artifacts, intentionally damaged buildings, white marl covers, scattered pottery, rapidly deposited artifacts, dense artifact assemblages, and exotic artifacts (Stanton et al. 2008:237–238). The most elaborate and publicly visible examples come from elite contexts at Aguateca, Altun Ha, Cerros, Piedras Negras, and Yaxuna (Figure 1). Comparable deposits, however, have been found in non-elite contexts as well (Garber et al. 1998; Guderjan and Hanratty 2016; Houk 2016; Lamoureux-St-Hilaire et al. 2015; Lucero 2008). These archaeological cases resonate with ethnohistorical and ethnological practices (e.g., Mock, ed. 1998; Tozzer 1941:151–152). Archaeological contexts, ethnohistorical sources, and ethnoarchaeological analogies suggest that Classic Maya termination rituals "killed" an object, structure, person, or place (Stanton et al. 2008:235; also Mock 1998:6–11). The people who performed them did so intentionally, but "the *identity* of a ritualized act does not depend, as is the case with normal action, on the agent's intention in acting" (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994:89; emphasis in the original).

Rituals require differentiating practices, which may take many forms, as shown by variations among termination ritual deposits. For example, ceramic sherds could not be refitted in termination ritual deposits in the palace at Aguateca; instead, at least one whistle fragment matches one found in a building elsewhere (Inomata et al. 2001:297). These variations have been interpreted as different types of termination rituals (Lamoureux-St-Hilaire et al. 2015:553; Navarro-Farr et al. 2008:136, 142; Pagliaro et al. 2003:75). Desecration rituals relate to the destruction of buildings, whereas reverential termination rituals target ancestors. These functional distinctions accept termination rituals as a preexisting category. Bell critiques this approach. Informed by practice theory, she calls attention to ritualization or the ways "in which certain social actions strategically distinguish themselves in relation to other actions" (Bell 1992:74). Rituals are not universal, but rather contingent strategies of privileged differentiation.

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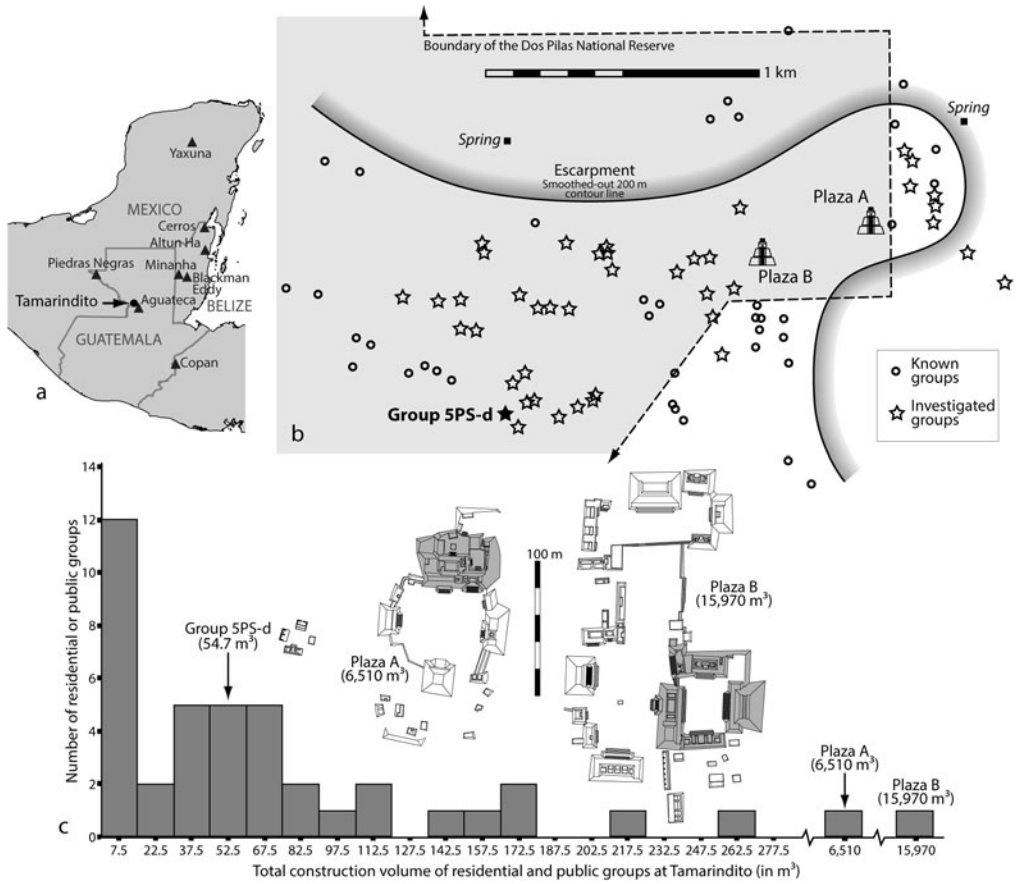

Figure 1. The royal capital of Tamarindito: (a) Map of the Maya Lowlands showing the site and selected sites with termination rituals; (b) site map showing the location of Group 5PS-d; (c) total construction volumes of investigated residential and public groups (note the discontinuous horizontal scale to accommodate Plaza A and B); maps of Group 5PS-d, Plaza A, and Plaza B are shown at the same scale to illustrate size differences; the royal palaces in Plaza A and B are grayed out. (Diagram and maps by Markus Eberl.)

Bell's definition implies culture-specific ways of ritualizing practices. For example, the Christian Eucharist differs from a regular meal (1992:90–91). Making this distinction requires knowledge about Western religion and customs. Labels like "Western" and "Classic Maya" suggest a shared cultural background. Nonetheless, scholars increasingly critique the assumption of homogeneous societies (for the Classic Maya, see Beyyette and LeCount 2017; Restall 2004). In a heterogeneous society, individuals should not be assumed to act uniformly. This possibility is absent in Bell's depersonalized definition of ritualization. To address agency, we reformulate Bell's definition and ask how Classic Maya distinguished termination rituals strategically from other practices.

To differentiate strategically, people require a frame of reference. For example, bone splinters sometimes appear in Maya termination ritual deposits. From a classificatory perspective, the presence of bones—interpreted as the remains of ancestors—distinguishes desecration from reverential termination rituals. From a ritualization perspective, the question becomes why the Classic Maya handled bones with special consideration. Maya rulers attributed life essences to bones and sometimes wore the skulls of their predecessors (e.g., Bird Jaguar III of Yaxchilan on La Pasadita Panel 2; Houston et al. 2006; Novotny 2014; Scherer 2015:96). Conversely, they destroyed bones to annihilate their life essence. In AD 710, Naranjo king K'ahk' Tiliw

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Chan Chaak conquered nearby Yaxha. He smashed the bones of Yax B'olon Chaak, an earlier ruler of Yaxha, and then scattered them on an island (Supplemental Figure 1a; cf. Houston 1993:109; McAnany 1998:288–289). Not content to kill the living, K'ahk' Tiliw Chan Chaak pulverized his enemy's past and basis for future rebuilding. At least for Classic Maya rulers, bones were culturally significant enough to differentiate practices.

In heterogeneous societies, members may not share the same practices, but they are aware of differences (Eberl 2014:327–329, 2017:162–169). Analysis of action "cannot be vested in the substantive intentions of a single, isolated actor, but rather can only be understood in the confluence of both first and third person views" (Smith 2001:166; see also Eberl 2017:39–41). Ritualization implies a metadiscussion about the set of practices that practitioners regard as relevant. The white marl layers of termination rituals exemplify this point. In 1635, Martín Tovilla was among the first Europeans to observe the Manche in the southeastern Peten before they were conquered (these Ch'ol-speaking Maya descended from the Classic Maya; Robertson et al. 2010:4). He compares highland K'iche' and lowland Manche mortuary practices:

> When someone died, they buried him clothed and conducted the same rituals as the Manche people, meaning that they offered him something to eat on top of his tomb and that they did not tear down his house but whitewashed it completely and diligently painted it with some histories of his past. When a [K'iche'] king died, they whitewashed all roads and palaces on the inside and outside, and they painted them with new histories [Scholes and Adams 1960:222; translation by authors].

The Manche burial customs extended beyond the tomb to the renovation of the dead person's residence. The verb *encalar*, which we translate as "to whitewash," refers both to "capping or covering something with lime" and to "whitening something with lime" (Real Academia Española 1963:2:426). The first meaning particularly resonates with the white marl caps observed in Classic Maya palaces and temples (Wagner 2006). The context of Tovilla's description makes it clear that by "someone" he means nobles and lords whose funerals occasioned an implicit discourse of proper and appropriate customs. Some practices like food offerings were widely shared, whereas others, such as the whitewashing of residences, were socially constricted.

The situatedness of practices makes cultural production an ongoing process, and ritualization requires a critical examination of synchronous and diachronous cultural continuities. Burnt artifacts are a common feature of termination ritual deposits. Classic Maya used fire on a daily basis for cooking, lighting, and other practices. They ritualized fire and associated artifacts such as torches and hearths (e.g., Grube 2000; Stuart 1998; Taube 1998, 2000, 2004a). Piedras Negras Ruler 4 died on November 28, 757, and was buried three days later (glyphs V4–V6 in Supplemental Figure 1b). One Tzolk'iin round later, or 260 days, torches were burned, presumably in or at the tomb (glyphs E7–F8 on Piedras Negras Stela 23). Twenty-four years after Ruler 4's death, his grave underwent *el naah,* or "house-censing" (glyphs V8–U10 in Supplemental Figure 1b). Comparable colonial and modern ceremonies involve fire and smoke (Stuart 1998:389–393). Ruler 4 was likely buried in Tomb 13 (Houston et al. 1998). Excavations show that Tomb 13 was reentered and its contents were burned (Houston et al. 1998:19). The discoloration pattern of the bones demonstrates that the firing occurred after the decay of soft tissues. The tomb reentry presumably corresponds to the house-censing mentioned on Panel 3. Maya elites employed the *el naah* and other fire rituals as powerful insignia of office (Fash et al. 2009; Grube 2000; Stuart 1998). Nevertheless, ethnohistorical and ethnological sources suggest a much wider use of fire rituals. In comparable ceremonies, a lit incense burner is placed in the entrance to a new building, and the smoke that enters signals its transformation into a home. Analogies like this help interpret material remains and reconstruct ancient practices, but they also imply continuity within the same culture and across time. Ritualization emphasizes what people do and thus requires asking whether all people act within the same cultural framework.

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The Maya Capital of Tamarindito

One of the prominent natural features of the southwestern Maya Lowlands is the escarpment, up to 70 m high, that traverses the Petexbatun region in an inverted L shape (Figure 1). The site of Tamarindito occupies the spot where the escarpment turns and offers spectacular views toward the north and east. It was occupied from about 300 BC to AD 1300 and served as the capital of the Foliated Scroll dynasty during the Classic period. Often fragmentary hieroglyphic texts attest to at least 12 divine rulers between AD 472 and 764 (Gronemeyer 2013:8–27; cf. Houston 1993). They intermarried with the royal dynasty of nearby Dos Pilas and Aguateca and acknowledged them as overlords during the eighth century.

Architecture, burials, and hieroglyphic texts identify Plazas A and B as ceremonial centers and as homes of elites. Plaza A sits on a leveled hilltop at the steepest edge of the escarpment, whereas Plaza B is on the less prominent but more spacious horst upland. Several dozen residential groups are dispersed across the hilly upland. Only a few are found in the sometimes marshy lowlands. The escarpment serves as a natural boundary in the north and the east. In the west, residential groups line up along the escarpment and thin out toward the site of Arroyo de Piedra. The southernmost residential groups are at the transition from the hilly escarpment to the flat upland.

Archaeological investigations first took place in the 1990s as part of the Petexbatun Regional Archaeological Project (Chinchilla 1993; Valdés 1997). They focused on Plazas A and B but also included nine residential groups near Plaza A. The first author initiated the Tamarindito Archaeological Project in 2009 and has directed with the third author seven field and laboratory seasons since then (Eberl and Vela González 2016). Tamarindito is nominally protected as part of the Dos Pilas National Reserve; yet, the scarcity of private land and weak protection of the reserve motivate farmers to invade the site illegally, cut down the forest, and plant crops. Since the 2000s, the loss of about 80% of the forest cover facilitated the systematic survey of Tamarindito. Ongoing looting made the documentation of its archaeological features a project priority.

Our topographic map extends over 1.5 km^2 and includes approximately 400 archaeological features. Only 10–15 cm of soil accumulated on ancient buildings since they were abandoned: this thin soil cover allows architectural details to be discerned through surface inspection and trowel probing (Levithol et al. 2016). We have studied 45 residential and public groups through test pits, the clearing of looted structures, and extensive excavations. These and earlier investigations cover about two-thirds of all groups at Tamarindito and enable a comprehensive understanding of the site.

The population of Tamarindito was diverse. Oxygen isotope studies of skeletal remains indicate that three out of four tested individuals likely grew up elsewhere and migrated to Tamarindito as adults (Tung et al. 2019). Construction volumes vary widely, with the royal palaces in Plazas A and B being by far the largest residential buildings (Figure 1c). They mirror a complex socioeconomic hierarchy that privileged Maya rulers and their families (for construction volume as a proxy of status, see Abrams 1994; Smith 1987).

Group 5PS-d

Among the extensively investigated groups is Group 5PS-d. Its four buildings surround a square plaza (Figure 2). Its total construction volume of 54.7 m^3 makes it a medium-sized residential group at Tamarindito (Figure 1c; Eberl and Vela González 2013). The southern building (Structure 5PS-14) has three rooms and, judging from similar buildings elsewhere, served as a residence (cf. Eberl 2014:236–237). A low building with two rooms (Structure 5PS-15) occupies the west side, and a square building (Structure 5PS-13) the east side. The northern building, Structure 5PS-12, has a peculiar shape and was selected for further investigations (see the later discussion).

After mapping the group, test pits were placed over superficial artifact concentrations in the northwest corner (sub-operations 37A and B in Figure 2). The excavation revealed a dense midden: 961 (37A) and 1,262 (37B) ceramic sherds per cubic meter. Test pit 37D into the eastern

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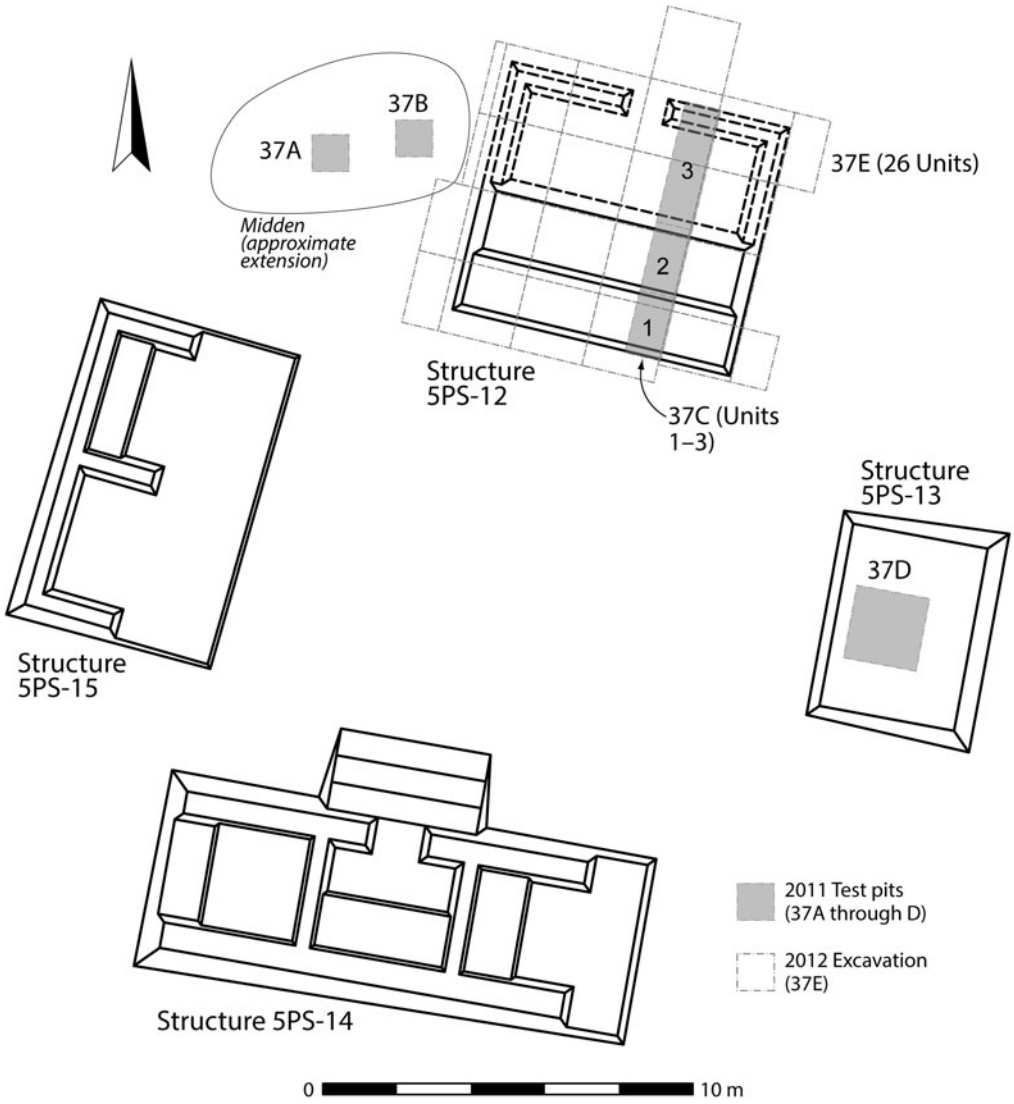

Figure 2. Map of Group 5PS-d, showing the locations of the Operation TM37 test pits and extensive excavation. (Map by Markus Eberl.)

building exposed several caches and secondary burials. Associated vessels include a seventh-century Saxche Orange Polychrome bowl, an eighth-century Palmar Orange Polychrome tripod plate, and a likely late eighth-century incised-punctated cylinder from the Infierno ceramic group (ceramic types after Foias and Bishop 2013; Inomata 2010). They date Structure 5PS-13 to the Late Classic (AD 600–830 in the Petexbatun region). The ritual deposits and skeletal remains, the location of the building on the east side of the group, and the square shape indicate that Structure 5PS-13 served as a shrine (cf. Eberl 2014:237). The dead in Group 5PS-d were likely honored there (cf. Becker 1999, 2003).

The inhabitants of Group 5PS-d belonged to the nonroyal residents at Tamarindito. More than 1 km separated them from Plaza B; they occupied the southwestern outskirts of the site (Figure 1). The construction volume of the group corresponds to 0.3% of that of Plaza B, which accentuates the lower status of its inhabitants (see the later discussion).

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Structure 5PS-12

During the survey of Group 5PS-d, the first author noted the unusual layout of its northern building. Surface details pointed to an annex north of a rectangular room with a bench (for mapping methods, see Eberl 2014:229; Levithol et al. 2016:14). After the 2011 survey, we investigated Structure 5PS-12 with a trench (TM 37C) across the entire building. The trench encountered the annex floor and revealed on its surface a large number of artifacts, including partial ceramic vessels and two obsidian cores. To contextualize these findings, Structure 5PS-12 was extensively excavated during the following field seasons by the second author (Figure 3), exposing the entire original surface. Units 6, 24, 25, and 26 were excavated down to bedrock to document earlier construction phases.

Wall fall covered the entire building evenly (Supplemental Figure 2). As the highest and most massive feature of the building, the south room bench was the reference point for the slow removal of wall fall and the exposure of the walls. The stones were embedded in a clayey matrix that originally may have held them together in lieu of mortar. Further excavation revealed the wall foundations on the west side of the building, whereas the ones on the east side were destroyed. In total, we removed 9.7 m^3 of wall fall. Given that the walls cover an area of 20 m^2, wall fall adds approximately 0.5 m to the remaining wall foundations. The walls of Structure 5PS-12 were originally about 1 m high and consisted of stone slabs and roughly shaped rocks. Its stone walls likely supported upper walls and a roof made of perishable materials (Supplemental Figure 3).

Structure 5PS-12 had two unconnected rooms that opened to the north and the south; its layout differs in this regard from the Postclassic tandem plan (Freidel 1981:315; Smith 1962:217, 266). The building had three construction phases (Figure 3). It originated as a H-shaped building with a south room that had small doorjambs and a rectangular bench. The annex was built at the same time because its wall stones are tenoned in the back wall of the bench. Its east side is destroyed, but we assume that it had a straight wall like the west side. During the second construction phase, the southern sidewalls were extended south and widened by burying the earlier doorjambs. Wings were added to the bench to give it a C shape. During the third construction phase, a floor was added on top of the earlier floor in the south room. The overall shape of the building remained the same.

In the south room, few artifacts were found in the wall fall or on the floors. It resembles similarly cleanly swept living spaces elsewhere (cf. Johnston and Gonlin 1998:160). The annex presented a different picture with artifacts mixed into the wall fall and littering its entire original surface. Dense artifact concentrations occurred, especially behind the south room bench (Supplemental Figure 4). Carbon specks were common on the annex floor, but we found no ash layer that would indicate extensive burning.

Artifacts from Structure 5PS-12

The artifact collection of Structure 5PS-12 is diverse and plentiful (Table 1). Almost 7,400 ceramic sherds were excavated. Of these, 40.7% were too eroded to be classified. Among the remaining sherds, 47.0% were unslipped, 26.5% were monochrome, and 25.7% were polychrome (Vela González, Díaz, Gronemeyer, Levithol, and Eberl 2016:97). None of the polychrome sherds are elaborately painted; their decoration consists mostly of simple linear and geometric motifs. Plain polychromes appear in all socioeconomic contexts throughout the Petexbatun region (Eberl 2014:321; see also LeCount 1999; Sheets 2000). About 300 sherds could be refitted into 19 partial ceramic vessels (Figure 4). Of these, 10 vessels are polychrome bowls, cylinders, and plates. Three jars and a Subin Red bowl are red-slipped vessels of the Tinaja group. The remaining five vessels—four jars and a Pedregal Modeled incense burner—belong to the unslipped Cambio Group (Figure 5). The unique shape and paste of the incense burner made it easy to identify matching sherds. Otherwise, the high degree of erosion made it difficult to refit sherds across different lots.

The reconstructible vessels differ from those found in rapidly abandoned buildings at Aguateca and Cerén (Inomata and Triadan 2014; Sheets 1992, 2002). In the latter cases, most vessels were complete, whereas all of the vessels

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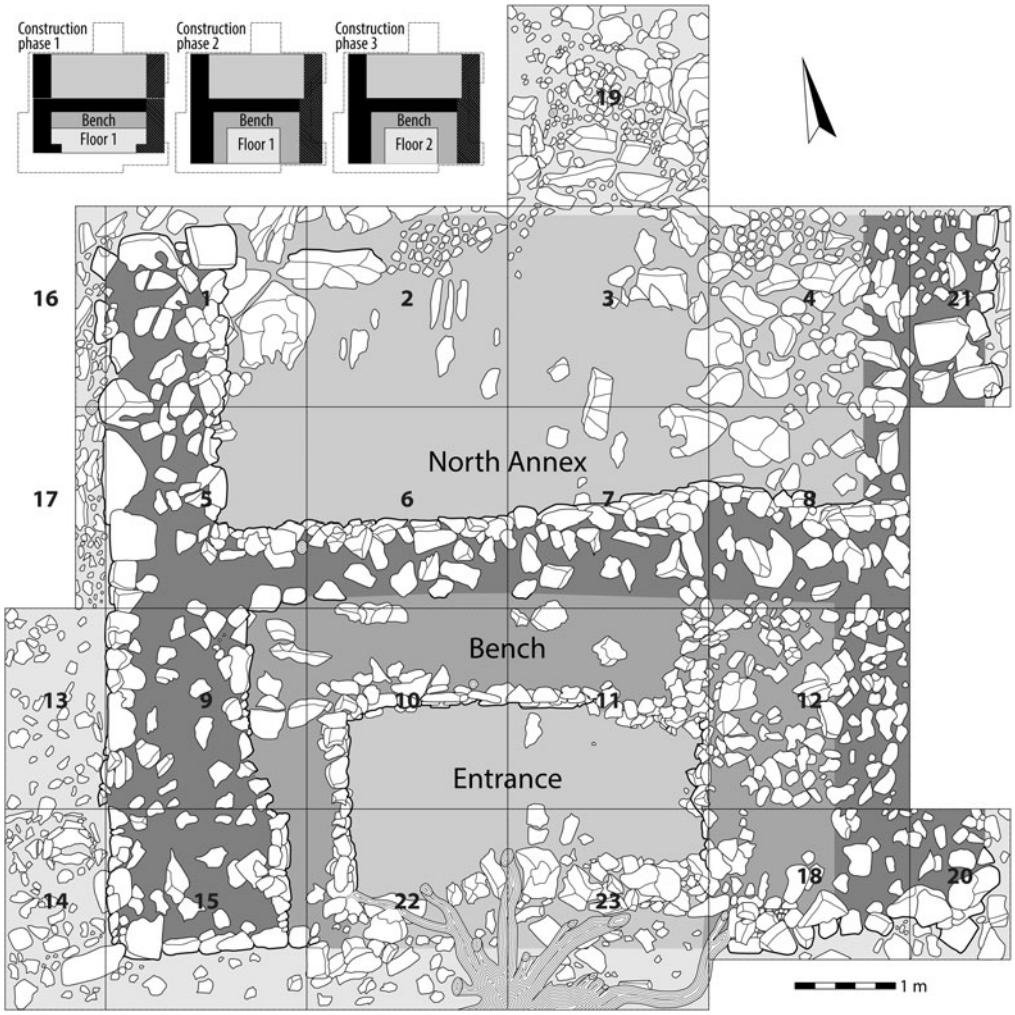

Figure 3. Structure 5PS-12 after extensive excavation. The exploratory trench TM37C and a higher degree of destruction obscure the eastern part of the building; the upper left insets show the three construction phases (not indicated are Units 24–26 that explore details of Units 9 and 10. (Plan based on a field drawing by Sven Gronemeyer.)

Table 1. Comparison of Artifact Assemblages from Structure 5PS-12 and Three Extensively Excavated Buildings at Tamarindito.

			Material groups		Sherds		Refitted sherds		Complete lithic tools	
	Excavated volume	Size (L × W in m)	Total no.	Density	Total no.	Density	Total no.	Density	Total no.	Density
Structure 5PS-12	17.9 m^3	8.5 × 7	10	0.6	7066	394.2	282	15.7	45	2.5
Structure 5SQ-1	5.9 m^3	10.5 × 4	6	1.0	360	60.6	4	0.7	7	1.2
Structure 5QR-8	4.6 m^3	6 × 4	3	0.7	140	30.6	0	0	1	0.2
Structure 5TQ-14	13.2 m^3	12 × 4	8	0.6	545	41.3	0	0	11	0.8

Note: Numbers refer only to surface, wall fall, and floor levels.

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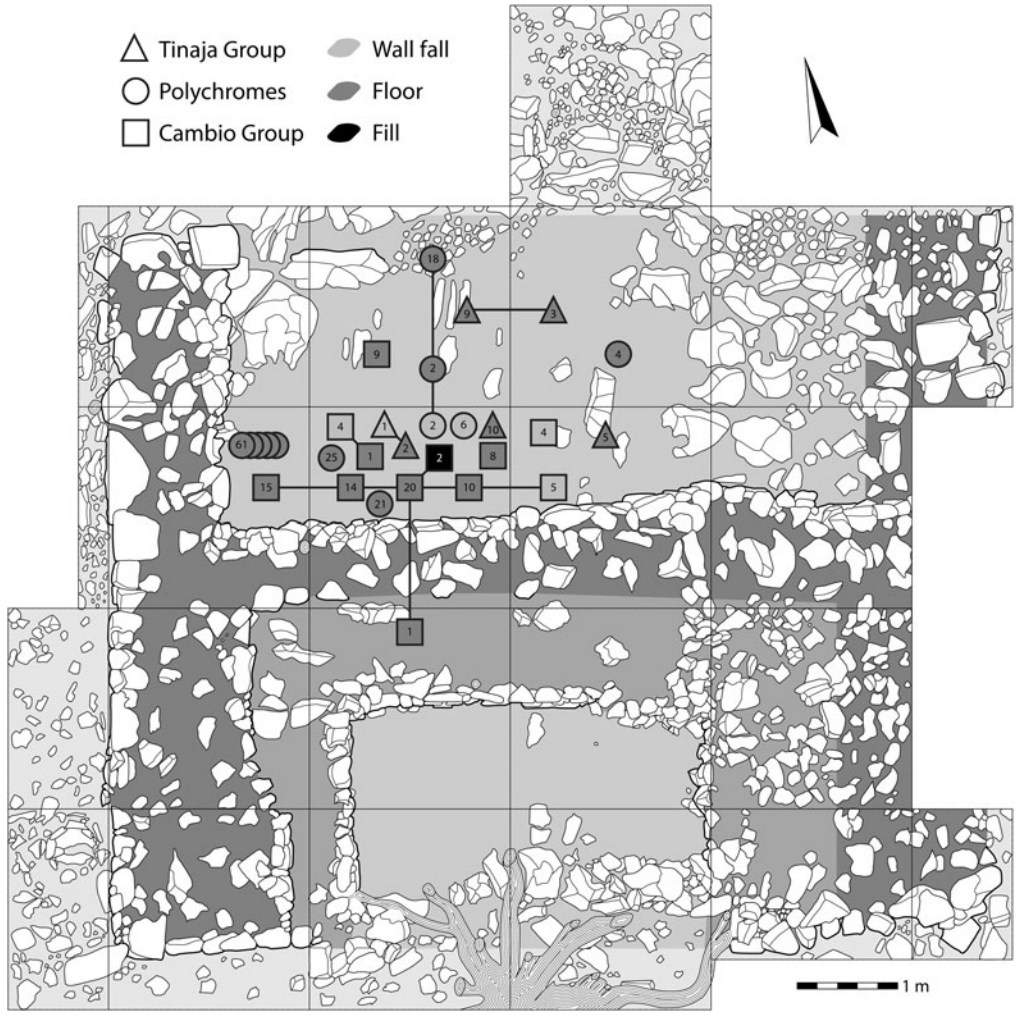

Figure 4. Refitted ceramic sherds from Tamarindito Structure 5PS-12. Lines connect sherds from the same vessel, and symbols appear at the approximate find location (annex units were divided into two or more horizontal lots for finer spatial control). Symbol numbers indicate the number of refitted sherds; gray tones identify the stratigraphic level; not shown are partial vessels from the 37C trench. (Diagram by Markus Eberl.)

from Structure 5PS-12 are partial and few if any seem to have been functional. For example, we were able to reconstruct only about one-third of the Pedregal Modeled incense burner (Figure 5).

Refitted sherds were often dispersed over a wide area; in the case of the incense burner, they were scattered over approximately 10 m^2. With one exception, they all come from the annex (Figure 4). In rapidly abandoned buildings at Aguateca, many ceramic vessels were stored above ground or hung in rafters, and they crashed to the floor when the building was burned down and its walls collapsed (Inomata and Triadan 2010). The bottom sherds of these vessels remained in close proximity, whereas body and rim sherds were scattered more widely. We failed to observe this distribution in the Structure 5PS-12 annex. Body, rim, and bottom sherds of the same vessel mingle randomly. Even sherds that were originally adjacent ended up in different places (indicated by dotted lines in Figure 5). Sherds of different sizes co-occur, and their distribution differs from the gradation—small sherds at the point of impact and larger sherds elsewhere—that would result from accidentally dropping a vessel (Evans and Barrera Hernandez

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Figure 5. Partially reconstructible Pedregal Modeled incense burner from Structure 5PS-12 annex. Labels identify the provenance of particular vessel parts; dotted lines separate adjoining vessel parts that were found in distinct lots; isolated sherds are omitted. (Photo by Markus Eberl.) (Color online)

2017). Individual fragments tend to be palm-sized. Thus, the reconstructible vessels were likely broken apart intentionally and their sherds spread throughout the building.

Refitted sherds link several stratigraphic levels. About two dozen sherds are from the wall fall, two are from the fill, and all the others are from the original floor of the annex. Incense burner sherds were found in all three levels. Two sherds from the fill likely slipped through the cracks of the coarse annex floor. In the case of three vessels, matching sherds occur both in the wall fall and on the annex floor. These linkages between the wall fall and floor indicate that the destruction of the annex walls of Structure 5PS-12 and the deposition of the associated artifacts occurred simultaneously.

The excavation produced numerous lithic tools, including 45 complete tools: 24 chert hammerstones, 6 manos, 4 quartz hammerstones, 5 chert scrapers, 3 chert bifaces, 2 greenstone polishing tools, and 1 chert chopper (Supplemental Figure 5). Twenty-four tools came from humus and wall fall, 16 tools are on the original floor, and 5 tools are from the bench and floor fills in the South Room. The distribution of these tools over Structure 5PS-12 varies by context. Although tools from humus and wall fall are found across the entire building, those from the floor are exclusively in the annex. The distribution of tools also differs from the annex-specific distribution of ceramic sherds. Among the tool fragments are a bark beater fragment and three sandstone fragments. The latter likely came from the same grinding stone before being broken apart and dispersed throughout the wall fall.

The collection from Structure 5PS-12 contains artifacts that are rare in nonroyal contexts

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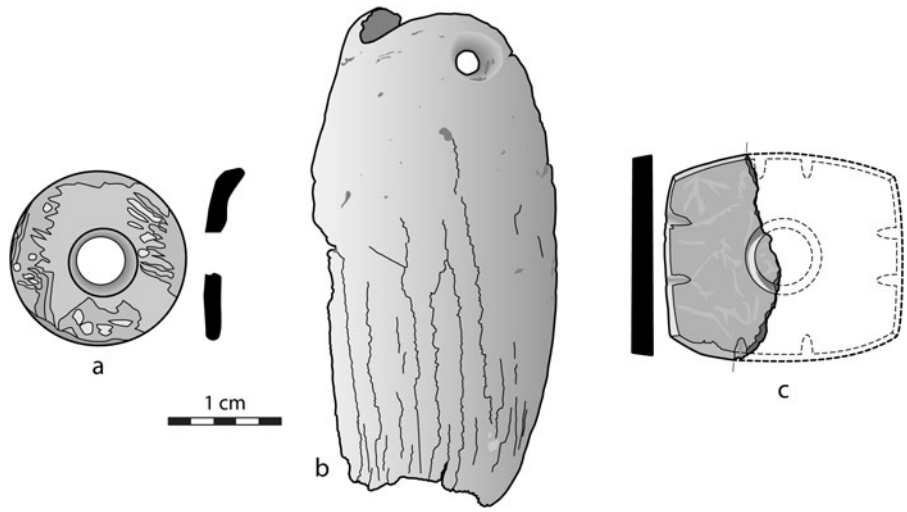

Figure 6. Shell and pyrite artifacts from the Structure 5PS-12 annex: (a) Marine shell ring, made of an unidentified species (TM37C-3-2-1, artifact number 167-1); (b) *Olivella* shell tinkler (TM37E-6-4-2, artifact number 276); (c) Pyrite plaque fragment shaped like the glyph T646 *nich* "flower" (TM37E-6-2-2, artifact number 116-1). (Drawings by Markus Eberl.)

at Tamarindito. These include a shell ring, three delicate shell fragments with nacre, and a univalve fragment with a hole (Figure 6a, 6b). Maya art shows the latter dangling from the belts of nobles. Eleven ceramic sherds come from drums, but none could be refitted. A fragmentary pyrite plaque has the shape of the glyph *nich* for "flower" (Figure 6c). It evokes Maya concepts of beauty and perfection to which Maya nobles claimed privileged access (Houston et al. 2006:154; Taube 2004b). A well-preserved sherd shows the head of a supernatural being, possibly the maize god (Figure 7a; compare to ceramic vessel K9124). Sixty-five figurines and figurine fragments include a monkey head, a complete owl whistle, and a complete bell clapper (Figure 7b, 7c; for figurines as part of termination rituals, see Halperin 2017). Some were used as musical instruments.

Finally, the excavation encountered 18 obsidian cores on the original floor of the annex and stashed behind the back wall of the bench. Sixteen cores were piled up in three rows (Figure 8). They may have been originally in a bundle made of organic materials. The cores measure between 6.7 cm and 8.3 cm in length (average of 7.5 cm), have diameters between 1.3 cm and 3.8 cm (average of 2.4 cm), and are between 28.8 and 112.8 grams (average of 52.6 grams) in mass. Their color and texture indicate that they come from the El Chayal source (cf. Braswell et al. 2000:272). Seven cores still preserve patches of original clast cortex. The large size of several patches impeded knappability and point to low-quality cores (Zachary Hruby and Hattula Moholy-Nagy, personal communication 2015). Although five are exhausted, the remaining cores have platforms that are still large enough for knapping prismatic blades. These obsidian cores are noteworthy because obsidian is a scarce and potentially elite-controlled resource in the Petexbatun region (Aoyama 2009; Eberl 2014:249–253).

Comparison with Known Termination Rituals

The extensive excavation of Tamarindito Structure 5PS-12 documented unique characteristics. First, the artifact collection from the building floor and wall fall is diverse and dense, with objects clustering on the annex floor. Second, the artifacts from the wall fall and floor include complete tools, valuable artifacts, and partial vessels. Third, several hundred ceramic sherds could be refitted into partial vessels. Their wide distribution across the annex suggests that the vessels were broken and spread apart. Fourth,

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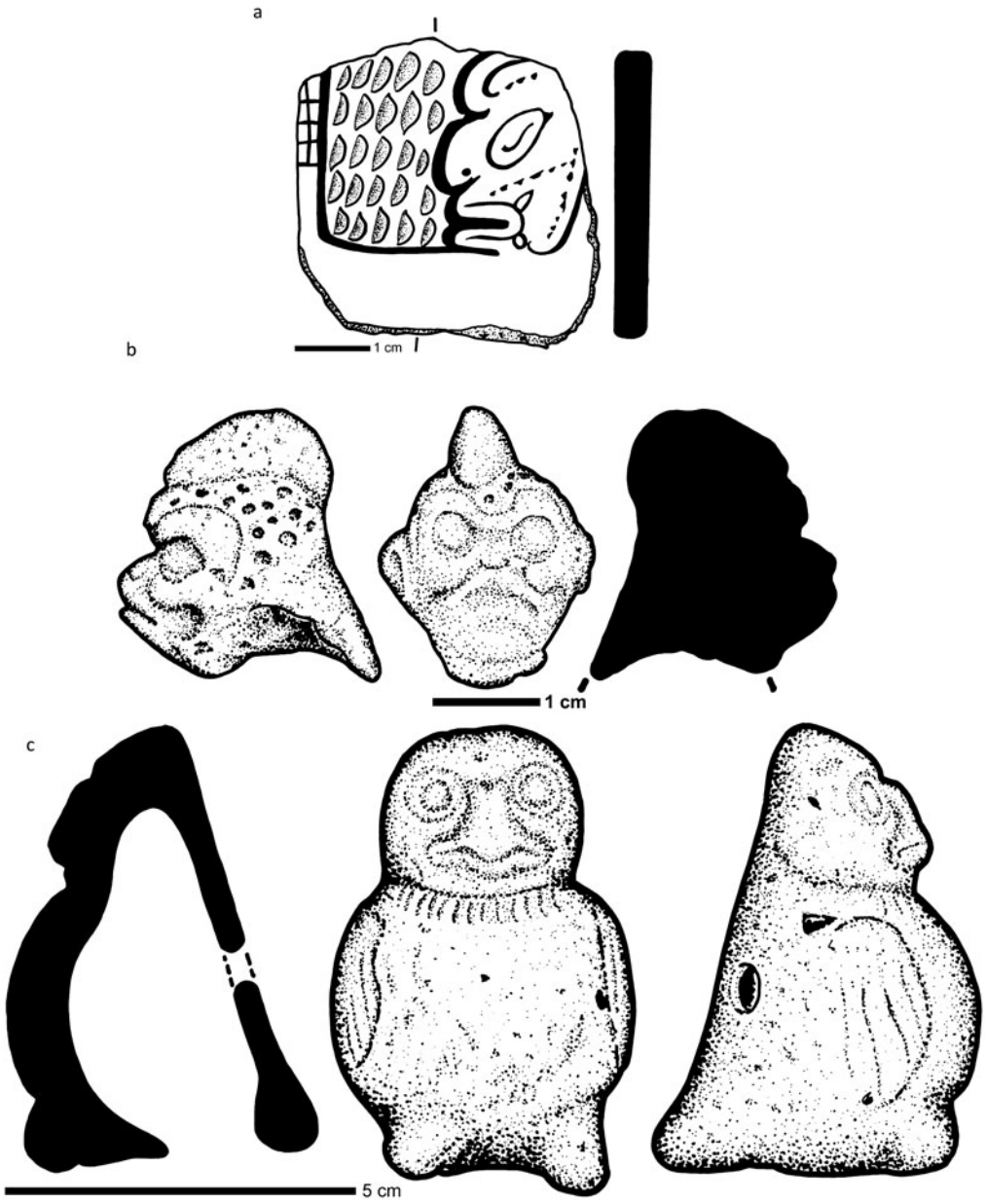

Figure 7. Ceramic artifacts from Structure the 5PS-12 annex: (a) Infierno group ceramic sherd (TM37E-6-3-2, artifact number 229); (b) figurine fragment of a monkey (TM37C-3-2-1, artifact number 168); (c) owl whistle (TM37E-2-2-2, artifact number 193). (Drawings by Markus Eberl.)

refits among wall fall and floor sherds show that the abandonment proceeded quickly and in an interlinked sequence. Fifth, the even wall fall distribution and partially destroyed wall foundations contrast with wall decay patterns in gradually abandoned buildings; for a similarly buried Postclassic building in the central Maya lowlands, see Pugh and colleagues (2016). The walls of the latter leave behind cone-shaped mounds that still hint at the original layout (Schiffer 1987:220–231). In contrast, Structure 5PS-12 was likely intentionally destroyed.

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Figure 8. Sixteen obsidian cores stashed in the Structure 5PS-12 annex behind the back wall of the bench. (Photo by Sven Gronemeyer.) (Color online)

Structure 5PS-12 differs from other extensively excavated buildings at Tamarindito (Table 1; for excavation details, see Eberl and Vela González 2016). All four buildings are comparable in size. Structures 5SQ-1 and 5QR-8 are in small and medium-sized residential groups, whereas Structure 5TQ-14 is in Plaza B. Structure 5PS-12 has an unusually diverse artifact collection with artifacts made from 10 different materials. Only Structure 5TQ-14 comes close with eight material groups, which likely reflect its location in Plaza B. The diversity of the other two structures is noticeably lower and closer to the 4.8 material groups observed in non-elite contexts elsewhere in the Petexbatun region (Eberl 2014:137). The sherd density of the collection from Structure 5PS-12 is almost seven times higher than the one in the next densest building and comparable to middens at Tamarindito. In contrast to the hundreds of sherds that could be refitted in the case of Structure 5PS-12, the other buildings contained none or only a handful. Although all buildings had a few complete lithic tools above their floors and in their wall fall, none match the 45 tools from Structure 5PS-12.

We consider various explanations for the abandonment of Structure 5PS-12. Differences from the three extensively excavated buildings at Tamarindito make gradual abandonment unlikely (Table 1). Alternatively, squatters or passersby may have reused the building and left the annex but not the South Room littered. This interpretation, however, does not explain the contrast between the two rooms. Modern and historic Maya prefer cleanly swept use spaces (Johnston and Gonlin 1998:160; see also Stanton et al. 2008). In addition, matching sherds from floor and wall fall levels suggest that the breaking of ceramic vessels coincided with the destruction of the building. A third explanation is rapid abandonment. Although it can account for complete tools and prestige artifacts, it fails to explain the even distribution of wall fall and the reconstructible but partial artifacts and ceramic vessels. One would also expect to find heavy items like grinding stones and large ceramic vessels, but not valuable items like obsidian cores that could have been carried away easily.

Fourth, we consider a termination ritual. Its characteristics in royal contexts are intense burning, intentional structural damage, white marl deposition, scattered pottery, rapid deposition, and dense deposits with exotic artifacts (Stanton et al. 2008:237–238). We observed most of these characteristics in Structure 5PS-12. Burning is limited to small specks of carbon, and a white marl cover is absent.[1] In addition, we hesitate to classify the artifact assemblage from Structure 5PS-12 as ceremonial because the objects either have complex use-lives (see Triadan 2007 for figurines) or are partial, as in the case of the incense burner (cf. Bradley 2005; Brady and Peterson 2008).

Contextualizing Structure 5PS-12

Ritualized action is not unintentional, but it is non-intentional in the sense that its identity does not depend on the agent's intention (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994:89). The activities encoded in Structure 5PS-12 deposits have to be understood in the context of contemporary norms and practices. Construction techniques, radiocarbon dating, and ceramic chronologies date the use of Structure 5PS-12 to the first half of the eighth century AD and its abandonment around AD 750 (Supplemental Text 1; Table 2). The deposits overlap with the main occupation in Plazas A and B and predate termination rituals in the Pasión Valley and the Maya Lowlands (cf. Bazy and Inomata 2017; Iannone et al. 2016; Inomata 1997). They are

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Table 2. Radiocarbon Dates from Tamarindito Structure 5PS-12.

Sample number	Material	Context	Radiocarbon age (BP)	2-Sigma calibrated	1-Sigma calibrated	$^{13}C/^{12}C$ ratio
AA100071	Carbonized nutshell	Original surface of the annex (TM37E-6-3-2)	1316 ± 40	AD 650–770 (100.0%)	AD 659–695 (62.0%) AD 700–710 (11.2%) AD 745–764 (26.8%)	−23.6
AA100072	Charcoal	Construction fill of the annex (TM37E-6-4-2)	1483 ± 40	AD 433–460 (4.6%) AD 466–489 (4.3%) AD 532–650 (91.1%)	AD 546–620 (100.0%)	−23.6

Note: Calibrated with Calib 7.1 using IntCal13 as a calibration curve (Reimer et al. 2013; Stuiver and Reimer 1993; Stuiver et al. 2015).

contemporary with the last flowering of the Tamarindito royal dynasty. In 761, King Chanal Bahlam expelled the last king of nearby Dos Pilas and initiated the balkanization of the Petexbatun region (Martin and Grube 2008:64–65). Among his royal gestures is a fire ritual that torched a Plaza B royal burial in 762 and was likely witnessed by the inhabitants of Tamarindito.

The inhabitants of Group 5PS-d were aware of contemporary practices. Although they occupied a modest residential group at the outskirts of Tamarindito, they reference the broader culture. The artifact collection from Structure 5PS-12 includes obsidian cores, a pyrite plaque, marine shell artifacts, and polychrome pottery. Some of these objects are decorated with motifs from Maya iconography and writing. Nonetheless, all these artifacts are fragmentary or of low quality or both. From our point of view, these characteristics of the collection from Structure 5PS-12 indicate limited access to luxury goods but not elite status (following criteria discussed in Chase and Chase 1992:3–7; Lohse and Valdez 2004). Petexbatun villagers enjoyed comparable access (Eberl 2014:325–327). The noteworthy artifacts concentrate in the annex of Structure 5PS-12; few comparable artifacts have been found elsewhere in Group 5PS-d. In the following, we argue that the inhabitants of Group 5PS-d employed their limited resources to contextualize and to differentiate their practices during the abandonment of Structure 5PS-12 (cf. Brumfiel 2011; Lohse 2007).

Maya Termination Rituals as a Differentiating Cultural Practice

Instead of accepting ritual as a natural category, we emphasize the ways in which people strategically differentiate rituals from other activities. Bell (1992:87) argues that ritual, like any other practice, "sees the problem it is intent upon; it does not see what it itself produces in the very operation of practice: it does not see the production process [that] constitutes the 'object.'" Yet her definition downplays practitioners and the situatedness of practices. People ritualize practices knowing which activities are possible and permissible. They observe other people and implicitly engage with the cultural framework that defines proper customs and behaviors. We apply this perspective to Tamarindito Structure 5PS-12 and Classic Maya termination rituals. We acknowledge that the label "Classic Maya" conceals an underlying heterogeneity: as a royal capital, Tamarindito was diverse and likely included people with a wide variety of cultural backgrounds (Figure 1c; Tung et al. 2019).

The artifactual and architectural evidence from Structure 5PS-12 and the northern annex in particular allow us to reconstruct a unique set of activities. People took at least 19 partial ceramic vessels, broke them into hand-sized pieces, and scattered them across the annex. They laid down complete figurines, tools, and obsidian cores. At the same time, they tore up the building and evenly dispersed the rocks of

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its wall foundations. Over the annex, they mixed in sherds from partial vessels while they scattered stone tools over the entire building.

People "do not necessarily provide an explanation in words of what they express, what they communicate or what they symboli[z]e by their rituals" (Lewis 1980:19). Yet, they know how to perform rituals by choosing right over wrong performance. Insights can be gained by comparing their behaviors. Some of the activities that happened in Structure 5PS-12 also took place elsewhere. For example, the sherds of a reconstructible ceramic vessel were thrown into the trash in Group 5QT-a (Vela González, Díaz, Gronemeyer, Levithol, Palomo et al. 2016:70–71), and complete artifacts have been found in other residential groups (Table 1). The distribution pattern of wall stones from Structure 5PS-12 echoes local mortuary practices. After inserting them into structure fills, people covered nonroyal burials and caches haphazardly with unshaped rocks and slabs (e.g., Vela González, Díaz, Gronemeyer, Levithol, and Eberl 2016:91; Vela González, Díaz, Gronemeyer, Levithol, Palomo et al. 2016:26, 54). What sets the abandonment of Structure 5PS-12 apart is the complex and interrelated sequence of events. This complex sequence differs from the handling of trash, preparation of food, or other behaviors attested in Group 5PS-d. The activities encoded in the Structure 5PS-12 deposits reveal a strategy of differentiation and likely followed constitutive rules.

Termination rituals call for the breaking and scattering of objects. In Structure 5PS-12, some artifacts were already fragmented (e.g., Figures 6b, 6c, 7a, and 7b), and the torn-down building was covered with wall stones instead of marl. These variations show that differences in wealth, status, and power influenced the way in which rituals were conducted. At the same time, they attest to a widely available ontology. Artifacts with recognizable imagery and of material value manifest shared norms (also Brumfiel 2011; Eberl 2014:325–329). Presumably public ceremonies like the AD 762 fire ritual acquainted the population of Tamarindito population with elite-sanctioned ways of doing (cf. Inomata 2006). Participants may not have ascribed the same meaning to these public ceremonies, but they saw how to perform them properly (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994:89).

People ritualize practices by distinguishing them from other practices. The act of differentiation requires reference actions. The inhabitants of Tamarindito set off rituals from their own daily practices and from ritual acts that they knew from public ceremonies. We argue that their ritualization involved a discursive process. The public character of elite performances and the lack of comparable ceremonies elsewhere at Tamarindito make royal termination rituals the reference point for Structure 5PS-12. The ritual at Structure 5PS-12 replicates four of six characteristics of termination rituals (Stanton et al. 2008:237–238): dense deposits with exotic artifacts, the breaking and scattering of pottery, rapid deposition, and structural damage to the building. Burning and a white marl cover, two aspects tied to the royal identity (Supplemental Figure 1), are not clearly present. Instead, the abandonment of Structure 5PS-12 includes unique practices. People scattered ceramic vessel fragments over the annex while scattering complete stone tools over the entire building. Like the piling of rocks and slabs over local burials, they dismantled and dispersed wall stones to bury the building. The materially encoded practices at Structure 5PS-12 are different from locally attested practices, and yet they reference, assimilate, and manipulate socially shared ways of doing. People ritualize practices by differentiating them not only from other activities but also from other people and their practices.

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Supplemental Text 1: Dating Structure 5PS-12.

Supplemental Figure 1. Postmortem rituals in Maya hieroglyphic inscriptions: (a) Glyphs F17–E21 from Naranjo Stela 23; (b) glyphs V4–U10 from Piedras Negras Panel 3.

Supplemental Figure 2. Even wall fall distribution over Structure 5PS-12 after the removal of humus.

Supplemental Figure 3. Three-dimensional reconstruction of the final construction phase of Structure 5PS-12, showing the south room with its C-shaped bench; here, the upper walls are assumed to be made of wattle and daub.

Supplemental Figure 4. Example for the dense floor deposits of the Structure 5PS-12 annex (unit 6).

Supplemental Figure 5. Distribution of complete stone tools made of chert, quartz, and greenstone over Structure 5PS-12.

Note

[1] Natural postdepositional processes may have affected the evidence for burning and a white marl cover in Structure 5PS-12. Unlike elite contexts where vaulted buildings and thick layers of wall fall protect artifact assemblages, this modest building had walls made of roughly shaped rocks and thin, loose wall fall. Rainwater filtered through, as the eroded slips and paints of polychrome shreds attest. It is unlikely, however, that it washed out a marl cover because we found no marl in bedrock crevices. In the absence of discolored limestone and artifacts, only carbon specks on the annex floor point to ancient burning.

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