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# Women's Work

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## Images of Production and Reproduction in Pre-Hispanic Southern Central America

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by Rosemary A. Joyce

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What interests prompted the production of human images in the indigenous cultures of Central America? This question is explored here by counterposing three diverse yet interconnected traditions of human representation: those of the Classic Lowland Maya, the Honduran Uluá-Polychrome makers, and the Lower Central American cultures of Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Disjunctions in the contexts of use and disposal of human images demonstrate different selective gender stereotypes in these three traditions and indicate that the contrast between the household and the public arena is of varying concern. When these images are placed in local developmental chronologies it becomes apparent that the production of public representations of stereotyped male and female actions that are disjunctive (varying in media or in the contrasts selected for emphasis) is associated with episodes of intensification of social stratification. The production of human representations in these societies may be a means through which the negotiation of men's and women's social status took place during times of change.

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In 1982, while conducting excavations at the Terminal Classic site of Cerro Palenque, in Honduras's Uluá Valley (fig. 1), I encountered a pair of cached figurines in the central platform of a small residential group (Joyce 1991:48, 95-96, 107, 114-15). Both were fine, mold-made, hollow human figures. They had been buried, apparently standing upright, in small pits east and west of an exotic stone slab. The eastern figurine depicted a person dressed in a bird-feather costume with a bird-head helmet, holding a conch-shell horn. This figure wore ear spools and a rectangular bead collar above a bare chest. The lower portion was too eroded to reconstruct, but the lack of breasts indicated that the figure depicted was male. The paired western figurine was better preserved. It depicted a woman wearing an ankle-length skirt, ear spools, and rectangular plaque pendant. Her exposed chest was marked by clearly modeled breasts. Her left hand was raised, grasping her hair. On her head was balanced a two-handled, necked jar identical in proportions and profile to examples recovered in excavations in the group, forms probably used to contain liquids.

The pairing of these figurines suggested that they represented a duality, the interdependent members of the household which made its home in the residential group. Debris from around the central platform contained a suite of artifacts—censers, decorated jars, and obsidian blades—characteristic of apparent sites of ritual at Cerro Palenque. The artifacts and caches reinforced the identification of this central platform as a household shrine based on analogy with Maya sites such as Mayapan (Proskouriakoff 1962; Smith 1971:108-9). The placement of the figurines in this location indicated that they carried significant symbolic weight.

A consideration of Honduran figurines with similar themes and comparison with others in neighboring Classic Maya and Lower Central American societies allow me to suggest an interpretation of the nature of these figurines and the significance of their careful placement. In each of these areas, a subset of human figurines represents women actively engaged in the work that sustained the household. Differences in the precise nature of men's and women's contributions highlighted by human figures in different media illuminate the interplay of gender, labor, and social stratification in neighboring Classic Maya, Honduran, and Lower Central American societies. Production of human images, waxing and waning through time, may have been one response to tensions in social relations within households undergoing social stratification.

### Representation and Social Life

Treating the production of anthropomorphic images as a cultural means of responding to and shaping the conditions of social existence is a semiotic enterprise that requires confrontation of the nature of representation, the status of these particular representations as signs, and my approach to their interpretation. I attempt what



FIG. 1. Map showing places discussed. Regions are named in italics; specific sites are marked with black boxes. The Ulua Valley includes the sites Cerro Palenque, Travesia, Playa de los Muertos, Las Flores Bolsa, Santa Rita, and Santa Ana; the Comayagua Valley is the location of the walled hilltop site Tenampua. Only selected rivers are shown.

Sperber (1992:63) has called "an epidemiology of representations," which "is not about representations but about the process of their distribution." Sperber argues that representations begin as mental constructs which, when given material form, become public and in turn may be transformed into new mental representations by others who encounter them. The spread of each series of representations through social networks affects the spread of other representations. The beginning point of my analysis, then, is the stipulation that the anthropomorphic images I discuss are such representations.

These representations are iconic, suggesting aspects of human appearance and behavior through resemblance, and, as Michael Herzfeld (1992:68–69) notes, "iconic relations, . . . because they either 'look natural'

or can be 'naturalized,' are a good deal *more* labile [than symbols, 'arbitrary' signs], and lend themselves with particular ease to totalizing cultural ideologies." The careful selection of attributes for depiction in these images is less obvious because they appear to be chosen merely to establish resemblance. The selection of features to be incorporated in human images is a means by which stereotypes of natural or essential human behavior may be promulgated. In order to approach the relationships between the inaccessible mental constructs of makers and users of these human images and the public representations to which we do have access, I assume that no detail is simply natural or accidental, the selection of attributes being part of a dialogic process of construction of human identities.

In order to explicate some of the possible associations that these representations may crystallize, I treat each image as a distilled narrative, in Roland Barthes's (1977a:73) words a "pregnant moment": "In order to tell a story, the painter possesses only one moment . . . [the image] will be a hieroglyph in which can be read at a glance . . . the present, the past, and the future, i.e. the historical meaning of the represented gesture." In Barthes's analysis, single still images imply a sequence of actions preceding and following the depicted moment, and "all images are polysemous; they imply, underlying their signifiers, a 'floating chain' of signifieds, the reader able to choose some and ignore others" (1977c:38-39). The signs united in a narrative are bound in a relationship of "double implication: two terms presuppose one another," transforming chronological order to a logical binding "capable of integrating backwards and forwards movements" through the narrative (1977b:101, 120-22). These metonymic links, sequences of actions that lead up to and away from the image, rather than the metaphoric symbolism of the elements of each image, are the focus of my analysis (for the distinction, see Barthes 1977b:92-101; 1977c:48-51).

A multiplicity of possible narratives underlies each still image, and in Barthes's approach there are no grounds to privilege one reading beforehand (Olsen 1990). This multiplicity of possible narratives (or, to use Sperber's terms, of mental representations responding to the public representation) makes the human images I am investigating a medium for active constructions of social identity. In order to delimit the social significance of these representations, I undertake an analysis of what Herzfeld calls "metapatterns": "relations between relations" that "allow individual agents to organize the otherwise chaotic indeterminacies of social existence. *The recognition of a recurrent design is thus not simply an understanding of what is out there; it is a reading of a reading*" (1992:69, emphasis added).

No one of these images can be treated as having a unitary inherent meaning, but in contrast to others it may draw attention to specific dimensions of social differentiation. "At each level of social organization, the relations between insiders and outsiders are ordered according to topically distinctive principles, but they always remain predicated on the distinction between the inside and the outside of whatever social group is in question. This is *disemia*, a mode of organizing social knowledge *through cultural form*" (Herzfeld 1992:79). My analysis is an exploration of a particular instance of *disemia* evident in disjunctive gender imagery.

This exploration requires simultaneous attention to relations of similarity and relations of difference. I employ two scales of comparison which facilitate this exploration, one internal to individual societies, the other encompassing a series of linked societies extending across southern Central America. Locally, metapatterns are evident as "ordered sets of relationships" or recurrent combinations of patterns in multiple domains of cultural expression within a particular society (Herzfeld 1992:71). My analysis pinpoints gender complementar-

ity (in ritual action, in work, and in public representations) as a recurrent pattern. From the regional perspective, "we can compare cultural patterns that exist on a strictly local scale with further-flung patterns of essentially the same type" and "discover some correlations that would, after all, permit a degree of interpretation that does not depend upon verbal exegesis" (Herzfeld 1992:79). I suggest that topical emphases on the interplay of gender, productive labor, ritual, and warfare as aspects of the formation and maintenance of households and wider social networks are permissible interpretations of the relationships of gender imagery in different representations within and among these cultures.

### Gender Imagery in Honduran Ceramics

In the Ulua Valley of Honduras, ceramics were the preferred medium for depiction of the human form. The earliest images of human beings are Middle Formative figurines of the Playa de los Muertos culture (Agurcia 1978). Produced between 600 and 200 B.C., these solid, fine-paste, hard, lustrous-surfaced figurines were individually hand-modeled. Each, consequently, is almost unique. They usually depict female figures with little clothing and with clearly delineated sexual characteristics (fig. 2).<sup>1</sup> Several represent a woman and child. Playa figurines stand or sit cross-legged or with one knee drawn up. They may raise one hand to the head or hold a small pot on the knee (Strong, Kidder, and Paul 1938:pl.15). Playa figurines are distinguished by elaborate treatment of hair, bracelets, nose and ear ornaments, and collars. Belts supporting short aprons appear on some figurines. The individuality and great elaboration of the headdresses and ornaments suggests that these figurines may signify relatively specific, perhaps individual, social identities.

These early figurines are found within residential groups, either discarded in trash or, in a few instances, in burials under house floors (Popenoe 1934). On the basis of a review of the data on Middle Formative occupations across Honduras, I have suggested that such sub-floor burials embodied the social identity of the group, created as competition between households began to

1. My generalizations about Playa de los Muertos figurines and other figurines discussed below are based on my examination of the collections of the Peabody Museum (over 160 whole or partial figurines correspond to the types specifically discussed) and others I have excavated. Quantification of these generalizations would be meaningless, since there is no basis for arguing that any of these samples is statistically representative of a defined population. I define a range of variation within these traditions with the proviso that other samples may extend this range. Nursing infants, prominent breasts, the depiction of female genitalia, and lack of male genitalia are the features I use to characterize the biological sexual identity represented by these figurines. None of the Peabody Museum figurines has depictions of male genitalia, while several do depict female genitalia (both labia and breasts). Breasts are not shown on at least one Playa de Los Muertos figurine with labia, suggesting that breasts indicate something more than female biological sexuality although incidentally allowing that assignment.

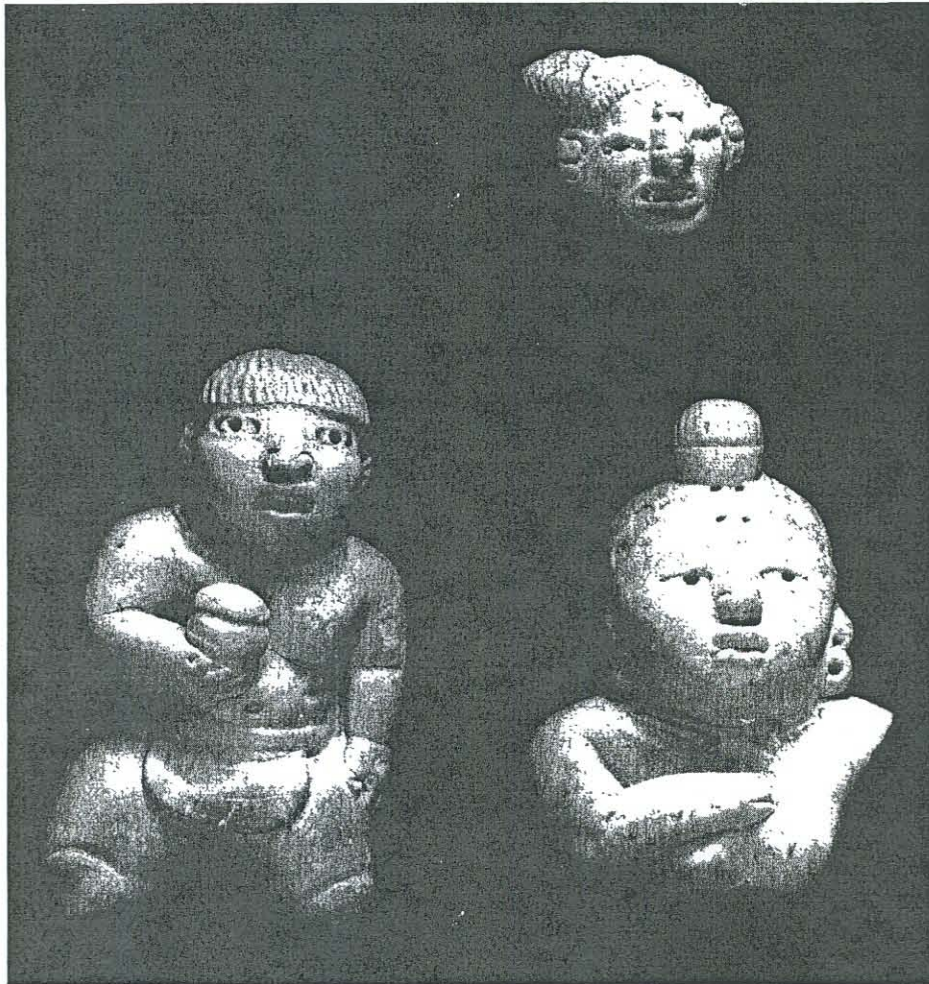


FIG. 2. Playa de los Muertos figurines, one holding a vessel (Peabody Museum, Harvard University, 36-97-20/4683, 4624, and 4623). Photograph by Hillel Burger, President and Fellows of Harvard University © 1993, all rights reserved.

fuel social stratification (Joyce 1992*d*). The production of figurines with elaborate individualistic ornamentation may have been a means for the creation of common bonds within the household and distinction from other households.

The production of figurines faded into insignificance during the succeeding Late Formative period, and only a few solid figurines derived from the Playa de los Muertos type have been encountered. Figurines were reintroduced, in an apparently independent tradition which I call "La Mora," at the beginning of the Late Classic, or Uluá Polychrome, period.<sup>2</sup> The first La Mora effigies

(e.g., Gordon 1898:pl. 9, *n*; Glass 1966:fig. 5*f*; Strong, Kidder, and Paul 1938: pl. 6*a*) were made during a time of great cultural change and are technologically similar to the new early Uluá Polychrome period ceramic vessels being introduced at the same time (pl. 1). Relatively large, hollow, and thin-walled, with a tempered fabric and well-polished brown to pink surfaces, these effigies sometimes have an orange slip or postfire blue, yellow,

2. Because this paper relates Honduras to both the neighboring Maya and Lower Central American cultures, terminologies relating to both areas are employed. "Late Classic" is the term borrowed from Maya archaeology applied to the entire span during which Honduran people made and used orange-slipped polychrome ceramics with cylinder forms. Most excavators agree that by A.D.

600 orange-slipped polychrome ceramics had become common in Honduran sites and that they persisted until after A.D. 850 (Hirth, Kennedy, and Cliff 1989, Joyce 1991, Urban and Schortman 1987). Baudez (1966), drawing on Lower Central American parallels, has suggested the term "Polychrome period" for the span A.D. 550–950 marked by the development of the Uluá polychromes. I use "Uluá Polychrome period" to refer to developments marked by changes in these polychromes, distinguishing between early, middle, and late episodes in their development, with maximal estimated dates of A.D. 400–650, 650–750, and 750–950 (Joyce 1992*b*).

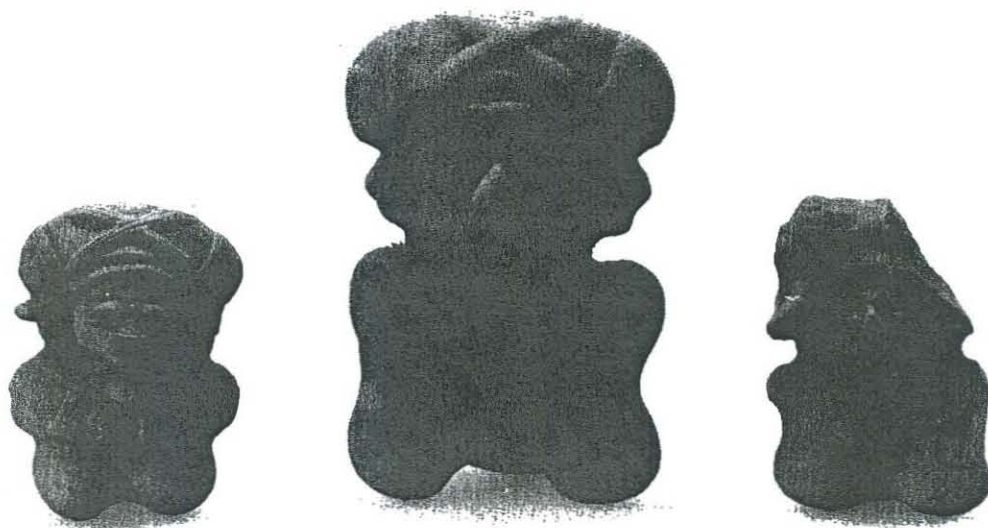


FIG. 3. Mold-made figurine whistles, female figures with *La Mora*-style costume and pose (Peabody Museum, Harvard University, 47-2-20/17359, 97-44-20/C1703, 38-45-20/5345). Photograph by Hillel Burger, President and Fellows of Harvard University © 1993, all rights reserved.

and red pigments.<sup>3</sup> Their orange-brown and multicolored surfaces resemble those of red-on-orange painted serving vessels and the polychrome ceramics that eventually replaced red-on-orange types. *La Mora* figurines are an alternative format within a unified production technology for the introduction of figural representation, the most striking innovation of the early phase of polychrome production in the Ulua Valley (Joyce 1992b).

These two kinds of ceramic figural representation present a significant thematic dichotomy associated with gender. The human images on the earliest Ulua polychromes are standing or seated figures in elaborate feathered costume (pl. 2a). Although their features are highly attenuated, they are demonstrably based on the human form and include clearly delineated hands and feet with five digits, fingernails, and toenails. These figures wear high feathered headdresses and may hold round and elongated feathered objects that, although not identifiable as specific icons, suggest ritual implements. Their costumes do not cover the chest, which lacks any indication of female sexual characteristics. *La Mora* figurines, in contrast, appear exclusively to represent females, signaled by their exposed breasts. They wear elaborate headdresses and ear, wrist, ankle, neck, and sometimes nose ornaments but are otherwise un-

clothed. These female figures are shown in a limited number of poses. Some hold infants on a knee or nursing at a breast. Others hold a bowl in which appliqué pellets stand for contents that resemble maize tamales in Maya images (see Taube 1989). One holds a hand to her hair or headdress in a gesture identical to the much later and technologically distinct female figurine from the cache at Cerro Palenque.

Beginning in the middle phase of polychrome production, while large *La Mora* effigies continued to be made, other figurines were produced using a new technology. Smaller molds and a much finer ceramic fabric were used to make small hollow figurines and figurine whistles. They include examples with headdresses like *La Mora* effigies, kneeling with hands on knees or holding a pot (Strong, Kidder, and Paul 1938:fig. 7i, 7s), but apparently not the woman with nursing child (fig. 3). A wider range of themes is introduced with these figurine whistles, including animals, humanoid figures carrying a pot or pack on the back (some with animal faces or masks), and the first identifiable males (fig. 4).<sup>4</sup>

3. At Santa Rita, *La Mora* effigies were found in levels that represent an early Ulua Polychrome occupation (Joyce 1987:291-96). *La Mora* effigies were present in early Ulua Polychrome contexts in my excavations at Travesia and those of Kevin Pope at CR 212 (personal communication, 1983). *La Mora* effigies in the Peabody collections were excavated at Santa Ana and Las Flores Bolsa in contexts representing the latest Ulua Polychrome. *La Mora* effigies disappear from each of these sites in the final Terminal Classic levels, when fine-paste ceramics replace Ulua polychromes (ca. A.D. 850-950).

4. Small mold-made figurine whistles representing males in the Peabody collections stem from levels at Santa Rita associated with the middle Ulua Polychrome (Joyce 1987:292-93) and intermediate levels at Santa Ana with similar ceramics. Male figurines were also found in upper levels at Santa Ana, from the late Ulua Polychrome. Figurines are classified as male on the basis of costumes incorporating loincloths and exposed chests lacking depictions of breasts. Animal imagery (feathered costumes, bird-head helmets, and conical hats with an animal head at the peak) is apparent on all well-preserved examples. The use of animal skin in male costume, contrasting with woven textiles in female costume, is also part of the systematic construction of gender distinctions in contemporary Maya imagery (Joyce 1992a). Figurines with a pot or pack on the back from middle Ulua Polychrome levels at Santa Rita and late



FIG. 4. Mold-made figurine whistles, male figures with loincloths and animal masks or hats (Peabody Museum, Harvard University, 97-44-20/C1666, 97-44-20/C1749, 39-8-20/6628). Photograph by Hillel Burger, President and Fellows of Harvard University © 1993, all rights reserved.

This new body of figurines is part of a general increase in diversity in ceramic assemblages along the Uluá River. Uluá polychromes themselves have distinctive local variants, with animals, especially monkeys, becoming prominent themes (Joyce 1992*b*; pl. 2*b*). Red-painted jars vary in form, fabric, and decorative motifs almost from site to site, in contrast with their virtual identity in earlier periods (Joyce 1987). Trade wares found at different sites signal distinctive external connections (Sheptak 1987, Joyce 1986).

At the same time, figurines remain the only medium in which females are depicted. The implicit gender complementarity evident in the early Uluá Polychrome—costumed male figures on vessels making gestures with exotic objects that may represent ritual, figurines representing women as mothers and as those responsible for providing food—is perpetuated with the increase in types of figurines during later phases. Polychrome cylinders continue to depict men engaged in what is now more clearly ritual: walking in processions holding staffs and musical instruments, gesturing toward a central icon topped by a bird, confronting an anthropomorphic figure emerging from a serpent (pl. 2*c*). Male figurines wear elaborate costumes, particularly headdresses, that link them to the figures on the pictorial ceramics. Gestures that associate women with production and reproduction in La Mora effigies are copied in some of the new figurines. The implication that these male and

female images represent complementary roles is emphasized by rare double figurines which depict a male and a female figure in one object (e.g., Stone 1957:fig. 56*D*).

The ceramics with human figural representations were used within the household as were the figurines in the Cerro Palenque cache. Uluá Polychrome bowls and dishes were common service ware. Polychrome cylinders, which feature the highest proportion of human figures, come from specialized household ceremonial contexts such as dedicatory caches, rituals, and perhaps burials (Joyce 1922*b*), and figurines, when not simply disposed of in general refuse, come from the same kinds of contexts. Ceramic depictions of the human figure, throughout their history in the Uluá Valley, are public representations within the household groups that make up these societies. A comparison with practices in neighboring Classic Maya and Lower Central American societies sheds light on the possible significance of these patterns.

#### Gender and Labor in Pre-Hispanic Maya Society

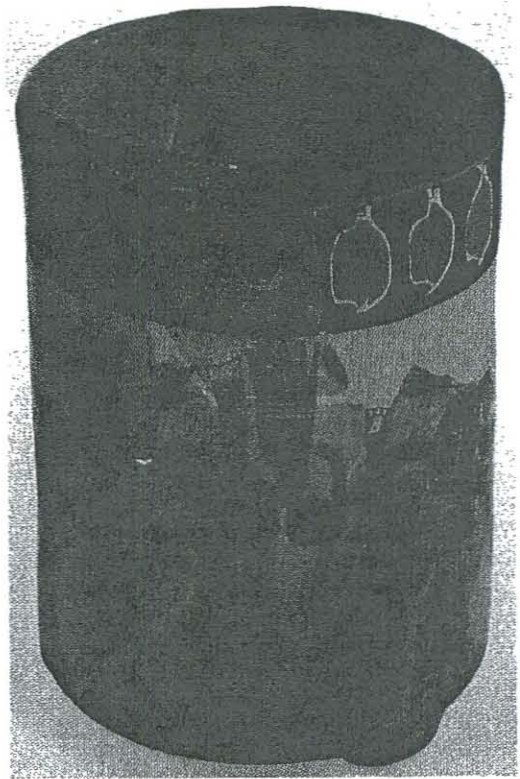
In the Classic Maya imagery of gender (Joyce 1992*c*) there is a dichotomy between monumental images and small-scale ceramic images of human figures.<sup>5</sup> Monu-

Uluá Polychrome levels at Santa Ana have simple tubular bodies without costume or anatomical details beyond the mold-made head. The prevalence of animal masks suggests that they may also represent males.

5. Hand-modeled figurines comparable to those from Playa de los Muertos appear in the Maya Lowlands in the Middle Preclassic period (ca. 900–300 B.C.) and decline in frequency in the Late Preclassic (Willey 1972:7–8, 13–14). Long after the appearance of monumental human images, hallmark of the beginning of the Early



PL. 1. La Mora effigy figures (Peabody Museum, Harvard University, 96-35-20/C1143, C1141, 97-44-20/C1814). left and right, kneeling female holding vessel; center, kneeling female with infant. Photograph by Hillel Burger, President and Fellows of Harvard University © 1993, all rights reserved.



PL. 2. Ulua Polychrome vessels (Peabody Museum, Harvard University, 39-8-20/6514, 37-129-20/5189, 97-44-29/C1880). Left, early cylinder with standing male figure with bare chest and kilt; right, bowl with monkey figure; top, late cylinder with procession of elaborately costumed male figures. Photographs by Hillel Burger, President and Fellows of Harvard University © 1993, all rights reserved.





PL. 3. Costa Rican ceramic figures (Peabody Museum, Harvard University, 976-32-20/24724, 43-21-20/14865, 73-6-20/7391, 977-4-20/25386, 48-61-20/18034). Left, seated male figure with mirror, Diquís region; right, top, females holding vessels and baby, Diquís region; bottom, female seated on bench, female with baby, Nicoya region. Photographs by Hillel Burger, President and Fellows of Harvard University © 1993, all rights reserved.

mental images, presumably commissioned by ruling elites, adorn palaces and public buildings as wall paintings, stuccoes, and carved stone panels and, as free-standing stone sculptures, mark the public spaces of Maya sites. Pottery vessels and figurines are less public media. Their production is likely to have involved more people and to have escaped central political control (see Beaudry 1984 for a discussion of decentralized production of polychrome ceramics in the Late Classic Copan Valley). They were sometimes used in burials and caches within residential groups, and most were disposed of in trash deposits created by the residents of these groups (Hammond 1975:371-74; Hendon 1991:909-10; Willey 1972:7-8, 1978:7-9).

Both monumental images and ceramic objects represent gender dichotomies related to labor, with different degrees of explicitness. In Classic Maya monumental images with paired male and female figures, most gestures can be made by either, but a few are specific to one gender. Males alone hold the lance, the weapon used in warfare (fig. 5*a*); females alone offer ceramic dishes or hold wrapped cloth bundles (fig. 5*b, c*). The elements of each image metaphorically relate elite status to ritual action (Schele and Miller 1986). They also metonymically imply sequences of actions that lead up to the moment pictured. While the surface topic is the enactment of ritual through the shared actions of men and women, unique gestures allow alternative readings. When male figures hold the shield and spear of warriors, their actions in warfare are condensed in the scene. When female figures hold cloth bundles and pottery dishes, their actions in food and cloth production are implied.

The ceramic dishes and cloth bundles held by women in monumental images embody the end point of sequences of production which transformed raw materials into culturally defined forms. Among the modern Maya of Zinacantan, Mexico, "male labour produces the raw materials, and female labour transforms them into objects of use and consumption" (Devereaux 1987:93). The work of women as spinners and weavers resulted in the cloth bundles held and elaborate robes worn by women in Classic Maya monuments. The ceramic bowls that contain ritual tools in monumental images are the vessel form depicted on pictorial ceramics as the container for round balls identified as corn tamales (Taube 1989). Women's labor grinding corn and preparing food is implied by this vessel form.

Gender imagery in painted ceramic vessels and molded figurines makes these associations explicit. A survey of Late Classic painted ceramic vessels from the

Maya area (Foncerrada de Molina and Lombardo de Ruiz 1979) illustrates numerous scenes with anthropomorphic figures engaged in identifiable actions. Most figures are males engaged in ritual dancing, warfare and capture of prisoners, ritualized deer hunting, and the reception of visitors in a throne room. Explicitly female figures are shown as attendants in reception scenes or engaging in sexual relations with supernatural beings. In a separate study of more than 200 Maya polychrome vases, the female figures pictured are described primarily as assisting male figures in rituals (Clarkson 1978). It is possible that the vessels in these surveys, stemming from elite burials and caches, represent a skewed sample with images determined by their political ceremonial use. A sherd from the site of Lubaantun, Belize (Hammond 1975:320, fig. 116*c*), depicting a woman grinding corn on a metate, testifies that women's quotidian activities were also represented in this medium.

Considerably more abundant imagery of women and their labor is represented by Classic Maya ceramic figurines. One subset of figurines from the western Maya Lowlands depicts women in poses parallel to those in monumental images (Conides 1984). Other figurines from both the eastern and the western Lowlands depict women producing food and textiles, fostering animals, and nurturing children. Weavers and spinners are noted particularly in the western Lowlands (e.g., Schele and Miller 1986:pl. 51). Images of women grinding corn and offering food in pots come from sites both east and west (fig. 6*a-c*; Clancy, Coggins, and Culbert 1985:65). Figurines from both areas depict women holding infants, a reference to their reproductive role (fig. 6*b*; cf. T. Joyce 1993: pl. 4, 8). Others hold small animals (fig. 6*c*; Clancy, Coggins, and Culbert 1985:159), recalling the significance in 16th-century Maya society of women's work raising animals for meat, important for ceremonial feasts, and birds for feathers used in textile production (Pohl and Feldman 1982). Accompanying these female figurines are others showing men enthroned, as deer hunters, as warriors, and as participants in ritual—the same activities evident in painted pottery (e.g., Hammond 1988:figs. 5.3, 6.3; Clancy, Coggins, and Culbert 1985:163, 179). The deer hunts shown are clearly ritualized (Pohl 1981), and men's most basic productive role in this agrarian society, as farmer, is unattested.

Large- and small-scale Classic Maya images of males present a consistent set of features representing men's public roles in ritual and political action. The pattern for images of females is more disjunctive. Ceramics represent women actively engaged in the production of textiles and foodstuffs. The same activities are implied by monumental stone images, but they are indicated more subtly through the metonymic links of the products offered by female figures engaged with male counterparts in ritual. The selection of these two aspects of women's labor for representation, however oblique, in monumental images testifies to the political importance of these productive activities in relations between ruling elites and the nonruling elite and commoner households that supported them. The exclusion of other attributes of

Classic (ca. A.D. 250), new traditions of mold-made ceramic figurine whistles were introduced in the Late Classic (ca. A.D. 600-930), contemporary with the florescence of polychrome painted ceramics with complex human imagery (Willey 1972:14). Ceramics with anthropomorphic images depicting both males and females, most interpreted as representations of supernaturals, continue to be produced in the northern Maya Lowlands throughout the Postclassic (Smith 1971), long after monumental human images had ceased to be produced in the aftermath of the political transformation labeled the Classic Maya collapse (ca. A.D. 800-1000).

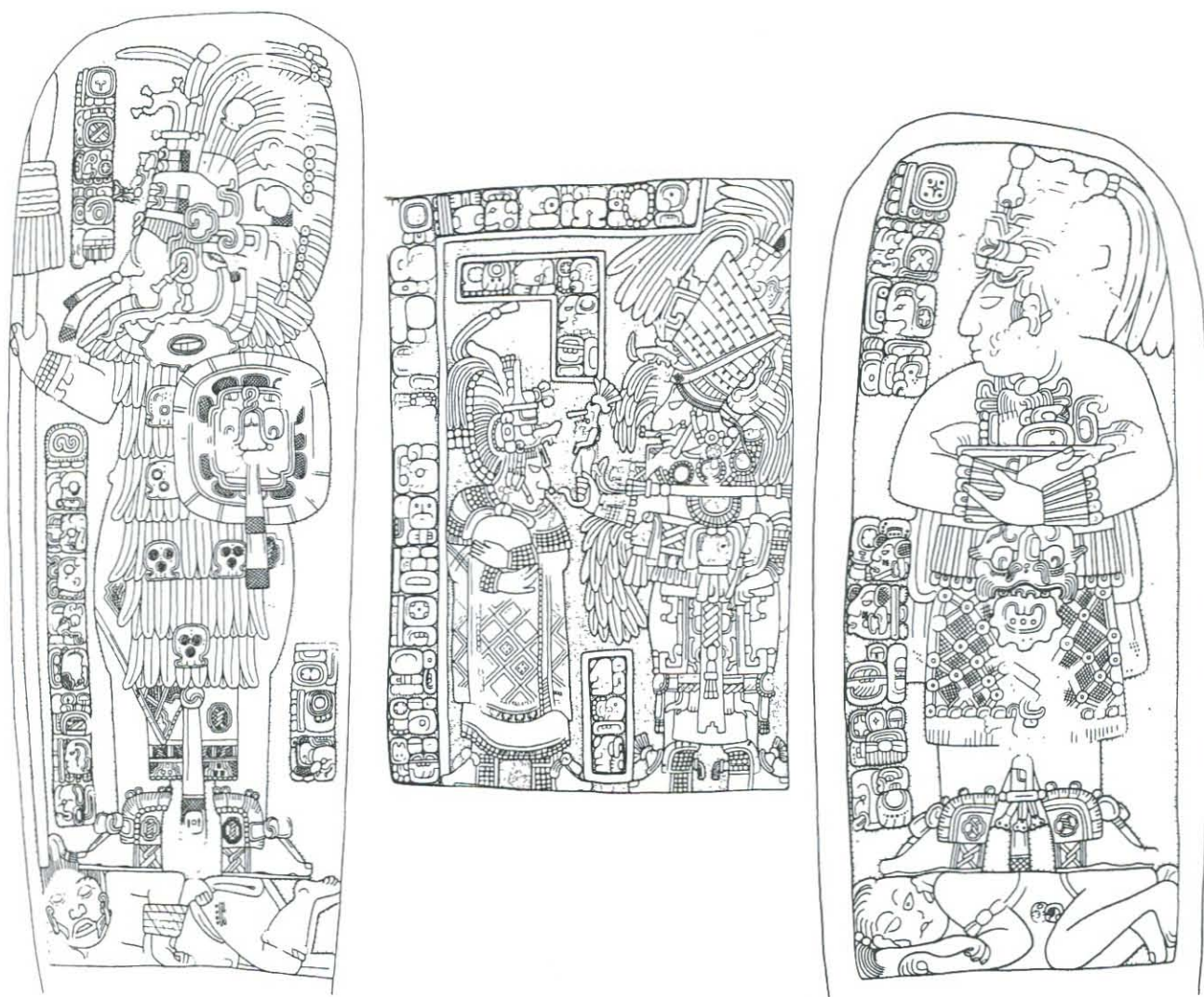


FIG. 5. Classic Maya monumental images. Left, man with lance and round shield, standing on prisoner (Naranjo Stela 21); center, woman holding a cloth bundle (Yaxchilan Lintel 32); right, woman holding a bowl (Naranjo Stela 24). Photographs by Hillel Burger; drawings from the Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions, published by the Peabody Museum, Harvard University, President and Fellows of Harvard University © 1993, all rights reserved.

small-scale images of women, notably references to reproduction, identifies a point of differentiation between ruling-elite interests and those of households.

This interplay between centralized authority and household interests in work and ritual is illuminated by accounts of 16th-century Yucatec Maya society provided by the Spanish priest Diego de Landa (Tozzer 1941). Landa stressed men's roles in warfare and ritual and described a range of productive activities for women essentially equivalent to those given material representation in Late Classic figurines. Women prepared food and raised animals within the household, notably birds whose feathers were used in weaving. They spun and wove and as curers were prominent in preparation for childbirth. Their participation in ritual varied between

the household and the temple. All ritual included feasting, implicitly based on the conjunction of men's agricultural labor and women's work in food preparation. Women's ritual role was to offer "presents of cotton stuffs, of food and drink and it was their duty to make the offerings of food and drink" (Tozzer 1941:128), actions implied by the unique gestures of female figures in Classic Maya monumental images. Women and men participated together in rituals which took place within the home (Tozzer 1941:154-55). Women's contribution to ritual was given public representation in the temple by a select group of older women, who danced holding bowls filled with offerings of food and bundles of special cloth that they wove (Tozzer 1941:143-47). If the age of these women is to be taken as an indication that they



FIG. 6. *Ceramic figurines from the Maya lowlands.* Top, woman grinding corn, Lubaantun, Belize (Hammond 1988:fig. 6.2); center, woman holding child and pot of tamales, Altar de Sacrificios, Guatemala (Willey 1972:fig. 34b); bottom, woman holding dog and ceramic vessel, Altar de Sacrificios, Guatemala (Willey 1972: fig. 34f).

were postmenopausal (as is commonly inferred), their selection may reflect an attempt to identify them with centralized political interests in place of the household interests that they might be expected to represent as mothers and wives.

Classic Maya ceramic images subtly represent women's role in reproduction and more directly women's productive labor in the stereotyped roles of weaver and cook at all levels of society (see Hendon 1991:902 for evidence of weaving in elite households at Copan). Monumental images indirectly represent

women's labor through the objects held by female figures in scenes of ritual action. Two different levels of the social construction of gender are embodied in these representations. Within the household the image of woman as mother, spinner, weaver, and cook is celebrated as counterpart in this unit of social production and reproduction to man as warrior and ritual practitioner. Monumental images subordinate depictions of female labor to participation in ritual sequences and avoid overt reference to female sexuality. Like ritual in the 16th-century Yucatec Maya temples, where participation was restricted to a select group of older women, Classic Maya monumental images were produced under centralized political control. They represent woman as complement to man in ritual and political action, as part of a single elite class with unitary interests.

### Gender Imagery, Labor, and Social Stratification

Classic Maya society presents two distinct sets of gender imagery, each emphasizing interdependence of male and female, in ceramics and monumental images. In contrast, in the contemporary Ulua Valley, ceramics are a single medium for human representation. Painted polychrome vessels, exotic in their inspiration, an eclectic synthesis of Maya conventions of representation with local technology, forms, and functions, are the material form for public representations of male figures engaged in ritual. As public representations of women, the large, hollow La Mora effigies are more traditional in technology and theme. Their use of orange slip and red paint links them to indigenous styles of decorated ceramics. Their depiction of naked females with elaborate head-dresses and jewelry recalls the Playa de los Muertos figurines of earlier epochs. All three of their poses—the woman with child, the kneeling woman holding a pot, and the woman with hand touching her hair—are shared with these earlier figurines.<sup>6</sup>

Late Classic ceramicists were exposed to the earlier figurine tradition through the recovery and curation of Playa figurines, presumably from deposits exposed by the active rivers. Stone (1941:70–71, 73–75, figs. 68, 74) reports parts of two Playa figurines from late Ulua Polychrome levels at Travesia. My own excavations at Travesia exposed evidence of human occupation from the entire Ulua Polychrome period but not Middle Formative levels that might be blamed for the accidental inclusion of these figurines in late deposits. I suggest

6. The vessels represented in La Mora effigies—handleless, round-sided, sometimes with a low, flaring neck or collar—are consistent in form with contemporary full-scale unslipped or red-slipped incised collared jars and orange-slipped, red-on-orange, or polychrome bowls (e.g., at Cerro Palenque [Joyce 1991:104–15] and Copan [Hendon 1991:898–904]). The exteriors, however, may be vertically grooved, and one has an incised squared step-fret. These images may be modeled on vertically grooved and geometrically incised serving vessels of earlier periods (e.g., Strong, Kidder, and Paul 1983:pl. 10; Popenoe 1934:fig. 2, 15; Gordon 1898:pl. 7h, q).

that the production of La Mora effigies was a conservative response to the social changes which led to the development of the Ulua Polychrome tradition at the same time. Where Ulua polychromes assert an identification with Maya culture through the depiction of costumed ritualists accompanied by texts, La Mora figurines assert an indigenous, and indeed a household-based, identity. The conflicting messages of these two kinds of human imagery develop in the context of competition within the Ulua Valley for differential social status. They reflect divergent interests within these societies as social stratification touched men's and women's lives in different ways.

A comparison with contemporary gender imagery in Lower Central America is illuminating.<sup>7</sup> Lower Central American societies are generally regarded as less stratified than Classic Maya and other Mesoamerican groups. More precisely, these societies continued to be actively involved in the negotiation of differential social status through to the 16th century (Snarskis 1981a:18), whereas Classic Maya society was in the later stages of institutionalization of social class distinctions. Honduran societies have usually been viewed through the lens of the Maya, with whom they were undoubtedly involved in significant interaction. But they were also in contact with Lower Central America, and in their internal social processes they may more closely approximate these southern neighbors.

From their earliest appearance, Lower Central American human representations differ in several ways from Maya and Honduran examples.<sup>8</sup> Both male and female figures with explicit genitalia are represented. There is no split between the ceramic media depicting males and females, with figurines and effigy vessels depicting males and females in unified decorative traditions. Male figures identified as shamans gaze into mirrors, sit or stand, are dressed in animal costumes or masks (pl. 3a). Female figures hold vessels and children (pl. 3b). While male and female actions are differentiated, both male and female figures are shown seated on benches that may represent perishable wooden or carved stone seats (pl. 3c), a mark of high social status (Snarskis 1981b:191; Graham 1981:118). Public representations of the human figure on objects used in the household group both in everyday life and in ritual do not reflect the divisions seen in Maya and Honduran human images.

Human figural representation in stone, continuing after ceramic human images decline, makes this point

even clearer.<sup>9</sup> Early stone sculpture was incorporated in elite burials, while later stone sculpture formed a permanent part of public spaces used for ceremony, and Graham (1981:131) argues that this indicates centralization—a shift from the marking of individuals (and, I would add, households) to the marking of more inclusive social groups. Multiple examples of a few stereotyped human poses characterize the late stone sculptural tradition (fig. 7). Male figures, interpreted as shamans, are seated with knees drawn up, sometimes holding a tube to the mouth (variously described as a cigar, flute, or sucking tube for curing [Snarskis 1981b:214]). Standing male figures hold a trophy head and axe (fig. 7a), the latter a form with archaeological examples with human-femur handles (Snarskis 1981b:211). Bound male prisoners are also depicted. Standing female figures grasp both breasts with their hands, a gesture that Graham (1981:130) identifies as symbolic of fertility. One pose is shared by males and females: standing, they hold in both hands objects, including rattles, that have been identified as ritual tools (Snarskis 1981b:217; fig. 7b, c). While the public role of warrior was represented as a male monopoly, the female role in reproduction seems to have been offered as a counterpart of comparable social significance, and both male and female participation in ritual is commemorated. Despite increasing social stratification, the public representation of a separate sphere of male action, warfare, does not replace the public representation of interdependence of men and women. Public representations of women's contribution to reproduction may have been an active response to the potential erosion of women's status that celebration of men's role in warfare could have fostered.

Honduran gender images tell a distinct story. Here, men with access to and knowledge of Maya culture created or commissioned images of ritual specialization on objects used within the household that left women out. La Mora effigies brought women's contribution back into the record of public representations, playing on traditional values and selecting for emphasis women's contribution to social continuity through food production and reproduction. Tension within these early Ulua Polychrome—using households about men's and women's statuses in a rapidly changing world may underlie the creation of these representations. Ulua Valley societies were, at this time, in the process of substantial central-

7. My discussion of Lower Central American human imagery is based on a review of published surveys of ceramics and stone sculpture (Snarskis 1981a, 1981b, 1982; Graham 1981; Abel-Vidor et al. 1987). Archaeologically, "Lower Central America" includes three distinct zones (see Snarskis 1981a): the Pacific Coast of Nicaragua and adjacent Costa Rica (Greater Nicoya), the Atlantic Coast and adjacent highlands (the Atlantic Watershed), and the southern Pacific Coast of Costa Rica (Diquís).

8. The development of human imagery in this area takes place from late Period IV (maximally 1000 B.C.—A.D. 500) to early Period VI (A.D. 1000–1550).

9. In the Nicoya region and the Atlantic Watershed during late Period IV, three related forms of stone sculpture develop that continue to be produced in Period V: small greenstone axes and ornaments, mace heads, and tripod metates with animal and anthropomorphic figures (Graham 1981:113–22). Graham argues that these items relate to warfare and agricultural production as bases of social authority. He suggests that the anthropomorphic figures on the metates, which have animal heads or masks and humanoid bodies with exposed male genitalia, are engaged in ritual sacrifice by decapitation of war captives. He sees the tradition of free-standing human figural sculpture that emerges in the Atlantic Watershed and Diquís in late Period V and continues in Period VI as originating in these metate figures.



FIG. 7. Costa Rican (Atlantic Watershed) stone figures (Peabody Museum, Harvard University). Left, standing male figure with trophy head and axe; center, standing female figure holding parrot and bowl; right, standing male figure holding rattles. Photographs by Hillel Burger, President and Fellows of Harvard University © 1993, all rights reserved.

ization (Henderson 1984, Pope 1985, Robinson 1989, Joyce 1991). Multiple centers with specialized public architecture recalling that of Maya sites developed, and the households associated with these centers had differential access to exotic resources such as obsidian, marine shell, and greenstone. Greater elaboration of some residential groups suggests that labor was also differentially available. The imagery of Ulua polychromes placed claims to affiliation with distant societies in constant view, creating an identity which transcended the individual household.

The explosion of diverse human imagery and of ceramic diversity in general in the later stages of the Ulua Polychrome period reflects the limited degree to which centralized political control was in fact achieved. Individual sites remained no larger than 200 to 300 structures until the unique development of Cerro Palenque, with almost 600 structures, in the Terminal Classic (Joyce 1991). The distance between these largest centers was often no more than 5–10 km. No evidence supports the domination of any substantial proportion of the valley by any one center. Instead, the Late Classic Ulua Valley appears to have remained divided among many competing centers, joined in networks of interaction given material symbolic representation in Ulua polychromes. The mechanism for connections between the centers may well have been common participation in ceremony, as the imagery of the polychromes and later male figurines suggests. Competition among centers may have relied on the same social networks and ceremonial occasions. Representation of warriors is limited

to the very latest Ulua polychromes associated with the walled hilltop site, Tenampua, in the Comayagua Valley. In the competitive networks of the Late Classic Ulua Valley, the contributions of households were apparently crucial, and women's labor was given recognition complementing that accorded men's participation in ritual.

The distinctive imagery of La Mora figurines, emphasizing female production and reproduction, became less pronounced as mold-made figurine whistles presented images of males and females in complementary action. The female figurine paired with its male counterpart at Cerro Palenque may represent female participation in ritual within the household group. The necked vessel carried by this figure is a form most often found at Cerro Palenque in association with evidence of ritual. Jars of this kind may have contained brewed beverages, such as the maize and manioc *chicha* of modern peoples of Lower Central America, consumed in ritual. The imagery of these figurines reinforces the identity of the household group as a unit cooperating in ritual and subsistence.

In highly stratified Maya society, ceramic images challenged any claim to centralized control by ruling elites with the reality of the potential economic self-sufficiency of the extended household (see Hendon 1991). Nonruling elites interested in asserting their own status celebrated the contributions women made to that goal. The weavers and spinners of Maya figurine traditions, so notably absent from the otherwise similar La Mora figurines of the Ulua Valley, embody a kind of

production with important political ramifications in Mesoamerican societies, (compare Brumfiel 1991). The importance of textile production is evident at Classic Maya sites like Copan in the diversity of artifact classes that represent this craft (Hendon 1991). No similar material representation of textile production is found in Ulua Valley sites. Perhaps most tellingly, while decorated ceramic spindle whorls were produced and used at Late Classic Copan, the few examples from the Ulua Valley were made after the collapse of Ulua Polychrome culture. These spindle whorls signify not only the craft itself but the attribution of sufficient importance to it for labor to be devoted to the production of permanent, elaborated tools. While Ulua Valley societies clearly made textiles, as is indicated by the presence of bone weaving tools, they apparently used perishable materials or the plain ceramic disks found at some sites for their whorls.

## Conclusion

In Classic Maya society, control of craft products produced within the household must have been a crucial aspect of the struggle for political power (compare Silverblatt 1988 for a review of ethnographic examples). Members of households had vested interests in acknowledging this contribution, given material form in ceramic images. Ruling elites, while including implicit references to household production through the incorporation in their images of products of women's labor, downplayed this distinction in favor of the cooperation in ritual of ruling elite men and women. In Lower Central America, the integrity of the household and men's and women's places within it were not at issue even as social stratification occurred. The practice of ritual, open to both male and female, was commemorated. While warfare was represented as a male monopoly, it was balanced by representations of women's reproductive potential. Competition between Lower Central American societies apparently never threatened the recognition of women's contributions in either the public or the domestic sector.

The Ulua Valley societies of the Ulua Polychrome period stand midway between those of the Maya Lowlands and Lower Central America. Competition for social status between neighboring communities was based in the first instance on affiliation with Maya partners, accomplished through exchange of material goods and embodied in ritual practice represented as a male prerogative. Women's recourse to traditional values was given material form by La Mora effigies modeled after earlier Playa de los Muertos figurines. The explicit recognition of women's contribution to the production and reproduction of the household resulted in the stabilization of their status and a more explicit celebration of complementarity in later Ulua Valley society.

In each of these societies public representations of human images were a medium for the negotiation of male and female status. Lower Central American stone sculp-

ture placed in the political arena unique public representations of male and female. In Maya society ceramic images responded to the monumental images of the ruling elite. In Sperber's (1992) terms, the spread of those public representations which are Classic Maya monumental images through the political-ceremonial networks of elites allowed the spread through nonruling and nonelite social networks of other representations given material form in small-scale ceramic images. The latter public representations in turn gave rise in Ulua Valley society to distinctive public representations of gender, work, and ritual through the development of polychrome ceramics and the La Mora effigies that balanced them. Here human representation eclectically incorporated traditional images of the female and exotic images of the male in a dialogue about difference and status.

## Comments

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This elegant paper shows that an archaeology of symbolism can be illuminating when it shakes off constraining interests in establishing types and defining styles. At the same time, it proves, once again, that nuanced chronology and subtle provenancing are indispensable.

Joyce realizes that the object of symbolic archaeology is not, or not only, a motif type or a stylistic convention but rather the mutual definition of motifs and conventions that she calls (following Sperber) an "epidemiology of representations" and also understands (implicitly following Bakhtin) as a "dialogic" relation (that is, a relation in which one "voice" addresses or responds to other "voices"). But an "epidemiology" is not an anthropology or a psychology, even though it might be regarded as a sociology, a statement about the distribution of certain properties in the social group. The formal description of motifs and conventions in a distribution must still be converted, somehow, into an analysis of their meaningful conversation. Here the problem is that Joyce, assuming meaningful conversation, also assumes a model of what it must be like that underwrites her account of the distribution in the first place but is not, in itself, defended. The meanings of the form of the distribution are certainly not inherent in style itself, which says nothing about the reasons for or possible cultural salience of morphological variations (see further Davis 1989); they derive, instead, from what art historians usually call the iconological context, which we can define, very roughly, as the contemporary rhetorical significance of form. Joyce makes at least two questionable, half-explicit assumptions about the rhetorical status of form: that the repetition of an earlier form (the Cerro Palenque figurines supposedly replicating the Playa de los Muertos figurines) is a basically conservative act of

legitimation, with "celebratory" potential, rather than (say) an ironic quotation of them and that a constant correlation or juxtaposition of forms is a "complementarity" rather than (say) a contest or mere redundancy. Because we are given no clear reason for preferring these interpretations, the *textuality* of motif and style remains slightly out of focus.

The reason seems to be that lingering structuralist ideas about the coherence of meaning and culture—chiefly the hypothesis that a conceptual system is an architecture of related binary pairs—elide the inflectional, rhetorical, and narrative differences that imply that a thought thought again is not the same thought (see further Davis 1992a, b). Although Joyce signals interest in structuralist reasoning (*vide* her references to Barthes and Herzfeld), it is possible that because we tend to construe *gender* as an irreducibly binary phenomenon (despite experiential and theoretical evidence to the contrary) Joyce tends to seek binary relations or "complementarities" in this domain of representation in the past. Thus her analysis of the writing of gender in later Ulua Valley society implicitly adopts the following formula:

A (traditional Ulua) male : B (traditional Ulua) female  
 + C (Maya) male : D (Maya) female  
 + E (lower Central American) male : F (lower Central American) female  
 = AC (later Ulua) male : BF (later Ulua) female.

Understanding this "structure" as an "epidemiology" or "dialog" has the undeniable virtue of requiring both synchronic and diachronic analysis; it shows that certain forms are written out or erased (D, E) and others written in or reproduced (C, B/F): later Ulua Valley image makers, Joyce argues, replicated elements of both Maya and lower Central American conceptual schemes for gender, synthesizing them with available indigenous tradition in responding to or actively constructing more contemporary possibilities, including the facts of social stratification and interaction with other groups. Archaeologists of the periods and areas in question will have to assess Joyce's social-historical hypotheses, that is, her explanation—which I do not find wholly convincing—for why A:B :: C:D :: E:F is written, in the later Ulua Valley, as AC:BF. But as far as I can see there is nothing in this process that requires it to be organized in the structuralists' sense, having something like the general form I have just given. Indeed, the very idea that there is a structure to the process at all (or, to use a closely related jargon, a "structural" operation) sits uneasily with the counterthrusting notion, implicitly accepted by Joyce, that cultural forms are inherently diverse and interactive (see further Davis n.d.). In classic structuralist reasoning, of course, lower-level pairs are mediated (in the "structuring" or "structural" operations) into a higher-level unity by way of intermediates that assimilate properties on both sides of the ratio sign(s); it is supposedly C:F that mediates A:B into AC:BF in the later Ulua Valley. But this imposed structure also forces other phenomena of writing into one or

another binary slot or ignores them altogether; writing differences in the material are being excluded by Joyce's method, among them the apparent marking of difference between Playa de los Muertos "female" figurines with labia only and figurines with labia and breasts, a possibly salient difference that Joyce remarks but does not pursue. If B, the traditional Ulua image of women, is already B', B'', and so on, then its later mediation in BF—in the paper, it appears as a smooth transformation—is actually far less complete, and far less stable, than Joyce lets on.

Joyce's provocative paper, then, sits in a halfway house between typology and hermeneutics, between iconography and iconology, between grammatical and rhetorical (or narratological) analysis, and between structuralist or "structural" and poststructuralist theories of culture. But sometimes a halfway house is the best place to be when we're on the move.

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Joyce has admirably presented an epidemiology of representations of humans from the southern Maya and borderlands. One aspect of her paper that interests me is that she indicates, as Karen Bruhns and I did at the 1992 Chacmool Conference in Calgary, that along the borders of Mesoamerica elements of the major Mesoamerican cultures were selected and combined with indigenous traditions to create distinctive independent national configurations; this selection and (frequently) modification blur the relationships between the major powers and the borderland nations.

Joyce notes that the borderlands' representations of women are apparently without class signifiers while the Classic Maya represent two classes of women, elite and workers. Maya elite women, like the ladies of Classical Athens shown on Attic vases, ideally spun, wove, and prepared food with their own hands, yet the clear depiction of lower-class women as well in Maya and Greek art suggests that in both societies elite women probably conspicuously occupied themselves with ornamental work while the bulk of textiles and food was produced by commoners. In the smaller nations of the borderlands, in contrast, the lack of representations of laboring women implies that labor was the lot of all women, a universal condition that did not require specification. Does the lack of representations of farmers imply that farming was the understood lot of all men except those represented as rulers, soldiers, dancers, and ritual practitioners?

In an epidemiology of representations, absence also signifies. I find it useful to think in terms of marked and unmarked classes, on the premise that representation may indicate that which is set apart (marked) from that which is accepted as unremarkable. Inferring the unmarked, the ordinary, in a society's eyes is as necessary



as describing the marked if we aim to understand human life in the past.

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Joyce's article provides important insights into the possible emic meanings of prehistoric Central American figural representations. Her discussion of material culture in the active voice, as part of symbolic structures motivating and channeling people's perceptions and actions, is particularly stimulating.

A major obstacle to advancing the symbolic approach Joyce advocates is the perennial difficulty of determining the congruence of reconstructed and original meanings. This problem is compounded by the recognition that symbols frequently have multiple meanings, as Joyce notes, and are most likely perceived differently by members of various social factions. Acknowledgment of complexity is no reason to surrender all hope of reconstructing prehistoric symbol systems. It should give us pause, however, before accepting interpretations which posit widespread, homogeneous meanings for any class of material items. There are good reasons for suspecting that there are levels of meaning underlying those provided in the article (Geertz 1973).

It is with these thoughts in mind that I would propose a "friendly amendment" to Joyce's formulation. She reconstructs a gender-based division of labor (limited to the Classic period?) found throughout lower Central America and southern Mesoamerica. Women are producers and reproducers within the household; men engage in public activities, specifically warfare, ritual, and diplomacy. She argues that the enshrinement of these distinctions in material form was part of strategies used by women to assert their importance vis-à-vis men and households to claim their economic autonomy vis-à-vis elites. This may well have been the case, but the story looks suspiciously incomplete. From surviving representations it appears that Classic-period southern Mesoamerican and lower Central American women were certainly instrumental in productive and reproductive processes on which all social members depended. This need not mean that their contributions were valued equally with those of men. In order to determine this central point, productive and reproductive activities must be situated within broader relations of production through which the goods women produced were distributed and consumed (Meillassoux 1981:9-10). Similarly, while women are crucial to the physical reproduction of any social group, it is important to know the sociopolitical forces encouraging or discouraging these biological processes and who comes to control the children resulting from them (Meillassoux 1981:72).

I am not sanguine that we currently have the data needed to address questions of political economy for Classic-period southern Mesoamerica. One positive outcome of articles such as this one is that they raise issues

previously ignored and direct us to gather the relevant information. Joyce's reconstruction suggests a hypothesis for further investigation. Southern Mesoamerican males in the Classic period apparently monopolized roles in the public arena, specifically warfare, ritual, and associations with distant, high-prestige realms. Men would, therefore, have monopolized what Giddens (1984:257-60) calls authoritative resources, the ability to organize and control relations of production and reproduction. Expansion and maintenance of power depend on a social faction's ability to control productive and reproductive processes through monopolies over these relations (Giddens 1984:261). Dominance in warfare would have given elite males especially a monopoly over coercive force to be used inter- and intrasocietally. Perhaps more important, lowland Maya, lower Ulua, and, less certainly, lower Central American ritual seems to have been largely under male control. It is in and through ritual that meaning systems are defined, that values are fixed and affirmed (Douglas and Isherwood 1979:65, 67). Those who control such systems can translate esoteric knowledge into political power by imposing their conceptual structures on a population (Bourdieu 1977:40, 160-71). It is at least possible, therefore, that women's productive and reproductive roles in the societies under study were carried out within a political economy dominated by and serving the needs of elite males. The depictions of gender-specific activities discussed by Joyce may be less a reflection of equality than an attempt to fix and objectify a very unequal division of labor. Acceptance of these symbols would have effectively excluded women from those arenas in which control over household production was exercised. The fact that the ceramic and monumental figural renditions discussed functioned in ritual contexts further implies that at least part of their meaning was imposed by the men who controlled ritual knowledge and performance.

This is not to say that households in general and women in particular fully accepted these prescribed meanings. Covert resistance to domination frequently involves subordinates in the reinterpretation of symbols in ways that meet their own needs (Gailey 1987, McGuire and Paynter 1991). The dominant ideology expressed through figural representations may have been more widely accepted by elite males than by the population-at-large (Beaudry, Cook, and Mrozowski 1991). I would suggest, however, that by trying to take the sociopolitical relations in which productive and reproductive processes are embedded into account we might better appreciate the polysemous character of the ancient symbols to which Joyce so perceptively directs our attention.

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Joyce should be commended for her attempt to understand the meaning of figurines from southeastern Mesoamerica, a data set too long ignored. Despite her worth-

while efforts, however, we have a number of problems with her analysis. First, the sample examined is small—an unspecified number of excavated examples and approximately 160 from the Peabody's collections. This sample seems overpowered by the theoretical apparatus brought to bear on it, and in the end her conclusion that "human representation eclectically incorporated traditional images of the female and exotic images of the male" appears simplistic and restrictive. "Meaning" at any point in time is multivalent, and meanings also change with time. In our experience, moreover, there is no dichotomy between male and female images but rather a continuum in representation and, presumably, their significance. To illustrate this point we would like to turn to our data from the Naco Valley of northwestern Honduras, approximately 50 km (straight-line distance) from Joyce's site of Cerro Palenque.

The Naco Classic-period sample consists of hollow and solid figurines as well as whistles (instruments producing a single tone) and ocarinas (those that make more than one tone). These categories are combined because similar, if not identical, faces, clothing, and postures are found in all three; therefore, when we refer to "figurines" below it should be understood that we mean ocarinas and whistles as well. The decorated or modeled portions of all Classic items are mold-made. To date we have analyzed 2,572 whole and partial specimens from excavation contexts and 70 whole or fragmentary molds. One of us (Bell) has developed a type-variety-mode classification for these materials based on 805 specimens; it has been tested against about 1,000 other items and refined on that basis. This work is the basis of our comments on form and representation. The excavation contexts from which we have recovered these materials include manufacturing areas, zones of probable domestic activities, and a few clearly ritual contexts (marked by deposits of ash, fragmentary and whole, burnt and unburnt *Spondylus* shell, incensarios, candeleros, cache bowls and cups, greenstone, sculpture fragments, imported pottery, and local wares from domestic and probable nondomestic types).

The Naco Valley sample, first, does not support a distinction between early La Mora-like large, hollow figurines and later, smaller, and more finely modeled items: both sorts are present as finished products and molds in Late and Terminal Classic contexts and appear to have begun in the Early Classic. Second, gender distinctions are often difficult to make. Bodies with breasts we regard as female, but the vulva is not represented. Torsos without breasts we regard as male; human male genitalia are found only on figures that are otherwise zoomorphic. Since a figurine's weakest point, structurally, is the head-body junction, our sample of whole figures is limited, but it seems to be the case that men and women wear the same jewelry—necklaces, pectorals, occasionally nose plugs, and earflares—and have similar hairstyles and headdresses. Faces, to our eyes, can rarely be categorized as male or female, and many of those that can appear to be representations of the Southeast's equivalent of the Maya Old Fire God. Third, few actual

activities are represented. Figurines stand, kneel, or, less commonly, sit. Arms are not always clearly portrayed but generally hang at the sides with hands pointing down or, for seated and kneeling figures, resting on the thighs. A few examples of one or both arms bent at the elbow with hands on hips exist, and there are figures with one arm raised to the head but nothing *carried* on the head. Tools and nonclothing accoutrements are rare. There is one effigy mano and metate without an attached figure. Perhaps a dozen female figures are shown with children, usually carried in the left arm and supported on the left hip. In addition, we have 26 examples of women carrying vessels, usually in the crook of the right arm. Male figures do not seem to carry anything. Fourth, while the carrying of children does seem to reinforce a domestic function, we argue that the vessels indicate ritual functions. The vessels are round with short vertical walls. Wall exteriors are usually decorated with incised lines apparently added after molding. Their upper surfaces are punctated or have small applied clay dots which themselves are sometimes punctated. Such dots are often interpreted as food, but given the punctations we believe that the vessels represent candeleros. No Naco ceramic taxon contains bowls of the shape carried by figurines, nor are Naco vessels incised in similar patterns. Candeleros, of which we have analyzed 467 to date, are of the proper configuration: generally round with short vertical to slightly out-slanted walls, solid save for the 1 to over 20 holes (usually 4–7) and often decorated with incised parallel lines, chevrons, and X's. Candelero holes show burning, and smoke marks are found above side vents. Candeleros are generally found in domestic contexts, and we interpret them as items of family-based ritual.

Finally, we wish to suggest that, rather than a dichotomy in status and role, figurines demonstrate a considerable overlap in male and female ritual functions and status (as marked by access to goods such as jewelry and fancy headdresses). There is a continuum in the Naco material from the clearly domestic—the small children—through apparent female-dominated domestic rituals involving candeleros to public activities involving women and men. Moreover, this continuum has other axes which incorporate supernatural beings (the Old Fire God and, possibly, a young deity similar to the Maya Maize God) and the animal world: in addition to the depictions of animals with human male genitalia, animals (felines, birds of many sorts, bats, dogs, reptiles, pisotes, and others) wear necklaces and pectorals, commonly have earflares, and sometimes have headdresses.

While there are a few other points which concern us—for example, is it appropriate to compare Early Classic La Mora figurines to Late Classic Maya sculptures such as the Yaxchilan lintels?—we will limit ourselves to the above comments. It is important to try to understand the "meaning" of the past, and no data category should be overlooked, but we must always bear in mind that "meaning" is fluid, can be conditioned by the nature of our sample, and is filtered through our modern perceptions.

## Reply

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Cambridge, Mass., U.S.A. 16 II 93

The comments on my paper suggest vividly both the largely untapped potential of the relatively abundant sources of imagery in the archaeological record, such as the figurines and painted pottery I discuss, and the wide range of issues that researchers will confront in examining these rich resources. As in all archaeological accounts, issues pertaining both to the creation of "data" through the recording of specific observations and to the interpretation of these observations as meaningful patterning must be addressed. Diversity of method and underlying theoretical assumptions in data production and of theory and methodological assumptions in interpretation combine to ensure that such discussions can only be open-ended.

I detect in most of the comments a straining to establish the universality of the proposed interpretations that goes far beyond my own goals. My selection of cases was emphatically not intended to exhaust either the observed range of gender imagery within any one tradition of representation (Davis's B, B', and B'') or the range of possibilities that might exist in other, undescribed cases in the wide area extending from the Maya Lowlands to Costa Rica. Thus I welcome Urban and Bell's preliminary presentation of their Naco Valley figurines. I am surprised by the degree of congruence in our results, given our divergent schemes of data collection and recording and the differences in archaeological context between the two samples. Unlike the Ulua Valley, with its multiple and, I argue, competing centers, the Naco Valley was dominated by a single large center, La Sierra, during the Late and Terminal Classic periods (Urban 1986). Thus the sociopolitical contexts of production of human imagery are quite different in the two areas. That production of figurines was local in both areas is established by the presence of figurine molds. Figurine production begins in the Ulua Valley in conjunction with the rise of a local painted ceramic tradition, the Ulua Polychrome, emphasizing human figures. In contrast, the Naco Valley participates in a distinctive painted ceramic tradition which, according to Urban and Schortman (1987:379-82), lacks depictions of the human figure. Despite these distinctive elements Urban and Bell describe patterns close to those I discerned in the Ulua Valley collections from the Peabody Museum and differ from me primarily over interpretations of the significance of patterns.

As did Urban and Bell, I found that jewelry and facial features did not allow assignment of gender, and therefore I limited my study to the 160 figurines (out of slightly fewer than 1,000 examples in the Peabody collections) with bodies complete enough for me to assign a gender identity and associate it with variation in other aspects of costume and pose. They report that of their

sample of 2,572 figurine fragments "perhaps a dozen" are females carrying children, while 26 carry vessels. They do not report the number of figurines that could be assigned male gender on the basis of the criteria I used in my study: the combination of an exposed chest without marked breasts and a loincloth. While the proportion of my sample that can be assigned a gender identity is thus apparently higher than in the Naco case, I suspect that this is misleading. My sample included both Middle Formative and Classic figurines, and it is clear from their presentation that Urban and Bell have no Formative-period examples (perhaps accounting for the absence of exposed female genitalia, which in my survey were found only on Formative-period figurines). Furthermore, the Peabody collections, gathered through many individual programs of investigation, undoubtedly reflect collecting bias toward whole or reconstructable figurines and a reduction in the overall number of fragments by the reassembly of shattered figurines. This aided my analysis, which required figurines complete enough to assess the presence of the features I cite as distinguishing male and female images. For the same reason, I did not review or count individual figurine body fragments curated as nondiagnostic, e.g., lacking identifiable imagery. Adding these would no doubt further reduce the proportion of the collection that represented the kinds of images I discuss in my paper.

It is crucial to note, however, that my discussion rests not on frequency of figurines or fragments (and there is much room for debate about how to enumerate these objects) but on the understanding that the images they carry are particular kinds of public representations. The incorporation of images on objects provides grounds for describing the contexts of their production, use, and disposal, and therefore Urban and Bell's classification of musical instruments is of great interest. But the images must be treated as significant in their own right. Each public representation gives concrete form to a private representation and, by objectifying it, makes it a subject of social discourse.

The interaction between images in different media in such details as costume and action provides the possibility of a diversity of responses by both modern analysts and ancient users. As I argue for Classic Maya monumental images of women, any gesture (holding a cloth bundle or an open ceramic bowl) can evoke multiple associations. In this case both the actions of production that are metonymically implied by these objects and the actions of ritual which the texts accompanying the images describe are among the simultaneous subjects for private representations that could have been spawned by the public representation. I argue for the figurines from Cerro Palenque that a gesture which depicts, on its face, an everyday task (carrying a two-handled jar) could equally have invoked the participation of women in ritual complementary to that of men, topically evoked by the depiction of a feather-costumed male holding a whistle. To this interpretation Urban and Bell's data offer not a contradiction but a separate strand of contextually plausible private representation that might be evi-

dent to a Naco Valley observer, again presenting women as participants in public action within the household.

The suggestion that the small vessels held by Naco Valley figurines represent the *candelerero* form does not have the same force for my Ulua Valley sample, since the formal similarity that Urban and Bell cite is absent (Ulua Valley *candeleros* are cylindrical, not globular). Nor can it be applied to the many Lowland Maya figurines from sites as disparate as Lubaantun and Altar de Sacrificios, where again the kinds of vessels held are different and *candeleros* are not used. The interpretation of the contents of the vessels in the Maya corpus as food may be strengthened by images such as that on a figurine from Lubaantun (T. Joyce 1933:plate 4, 8), in which a child's hand is shown gripping one of the round items in the bowl held by the main figure. I have argued for strong connections between Lowland Maya and Ulua Valley society, particularly influencing the production of Ulua Polychromes (Joyce 1986, 1987, 1988, 1992b). Since they are produced in conjunction with Ulua Polychromes, I argue that the figurines I discuss may well draw on the wider range of associations, both with food production and ritual, that I outline for Maya images. But more generally, the significance of the vessels held by women (and apparently in the Naco Valley, as in the Ulua Valley and Maya Lowlands, only by women) is the way they mark these images, singling them out for distinctive comment.

I borrow here Kehoe's use of "marked" to underline my assumption that any representation, no matter how modest the medium and how infrequent the precise image (a standard for consideration that would never be applied to monumental images), is worthy of comment because it was itself a kind of comment. Davis's claim that I cannot provide grounds to choose between different emotional stances that these images might evidence, ranging from the "celebratory" to the ironic, is accurate. In order to choose between these and other alternatives I would have to privilege one point of view (presumably the intent of the maker) in a way which would undercut the open-ended possibilities that I assume and that Davis insists on. I do not even presume that these images could not be *simultaneously* ironic and celebratory. Indeed, if they were created, as I suggest, as part of dialogues within Ulua Valley society as the centralization of control of production, distribution, and external relations was contested, then for different individuals and groups their emotional content may well have included elements of both these apparent poles. My argument is, however, that the creation of these images inevitably opens up the possibility that positive value was being created and associated with a female gender identity.

In general, the commentators seem to resist reading the paper as an open-ended exploration. Urban and Bell clearly interpret it as a universal claim, as I think do Schortman and Davis as well. Kehoe, who has stressed in recent work the importance of resisting "dominant discourse" about gender (Kehoe 1992), is the understandable exception. She makes a trenchant point about the need to distinguish between the ideologically celebrated

labor of elite women and the unmarked, and unremarked, work of nonelites. In other places I have stressed the way in which Classic Maya monumental images deemphasize distinctions between male and female in favor of the construction of a common elite identity (Joyce 1992a, c). One of the analytic advantages of an examination of the less stratified Ulua Valley case is the opportunity to examine how, in the absence of such clearly asserted class distinctions, other kinds of factionalism give rise to different kinds of gender imagery.

Both Davis and Kehoe see in my discussion of three neighboring societies an implicit argument that the intermediate culture (that of the Ulua Valley) drew from the imagery of its neighbors to produce a new synthesis. I acknowledge this part of my argument, but I do not see this eclectic borrowing as being systematic in the way Davis suspects. I am taken by the elegant structural analysis that he derives from my paper, although I do not recognize my argument in this form. Davis's binaristic impression almost certainly stems, as he notes, from the suspect ease with which gender can be presented as a dichotomy despite its multiplicity (which I both mention here and discuss in other writing). In order to present a full accounting of the diversity of images of gender in any one of these societies, I would certainly return to my observation of difference among marked female images and would also consider the large numbers of gender-ambiguous images in each area. But my point of departure in this paper for both Ulua Valley and Lowland Maya cases is images which are paired. This unfortunately leads Davis to assume a binary nature for the concept of complementarity. In fact I use complementarity to denote an alternative to hierarchy as a mode of social relations, with both potentially incorporating unlimited numbers of individuals or categories. Where complementarity operates, differences are presented as necessary and interdependent rather than as successive incomplete and encompassed variants of a higher-order, more complete, more highly valued whole (see Devereaux 1987, Harris 1978, Hoskins 1990, Schlegel 1977, Silverblatt 1987). In examining the evidence for human differentiation, which extends far beyond the stereotyped adult male and female images I discuss, I wish to avoid the automatic assignment to variation of hierarchical value.

Schortman summarizes concisely the interpretation of difference as relative value proposed by Meillassoux, who argued that women's limitation to a domestic context placed them under the control of men with greater access to a contrasting public context. As Silverblatt (1988:44) notes, "Meillassoux has been roundly criticized for the speculative nature of his work, his blindness to women's roles in production, his uncritical acceptance of Lévi-Straussian models of woman exchange, and his evolutionary and functionalist bents" (see also Yanagisako and Collier 1987:20-25). The conflation of my use of "household" with a domestic sphere, posed as an antithesis to a public sphere in which ritual is enacted, is also evident in Urban and Bell's reading of

my paper. Schortman credits me with arguing that it is women who create the images of complementarity I discuss, although in fact I leave this issue open. This entirely natural assumption follows from the tendency in the ethnographic literature cited to treat women as a single, natural category in opposition to the equally natural category of men. In my own work, I draw on other recent ethnographic studies which question the domestic/public dichotomy and the assumption that it can be projected onto a dichotomous female/male division (see Comaroff 1987). I present here a selective overview of this alternative literature, offered, as Schortman's comments are, as a hypothesis for further research.

I view the players in the contest to advance interests represented by the production and dissemination of human images as not solely individuals but also social groups composed of men and women (my "households") who stand to gain and lose together (compare Boone 1990:213-16; Linnekin 1990:75-154; McKinnon 1991:84-106; Weiner 1976). The figurines and Uluva Polychromes which depict men as ritualists were produced and consumed within the space occupied by the members of the household. But households cannot be reduced to a "private" or "domestic" sphere. As the locus of a wide range of individual and group action resulting in the formation of social and economic alliances, households were public places, sites of ceremonies that we detect archaeologically (such as mortuary rites) and others that we have not yet tried to detect (such as the negotiation of marriage). Within the household, the images I discuss represent distinctive actions and statuses. But these differences are not inherently associated with relative value, insofar as they are represented in the same media and occur in the same contexts.

Following Adams (1975:165-74), I argue that differentiation will always serve as a basis for ranking but ranking is not identical to the creation of differential power relations or hierarchy. Adams describes ranking as an imposition of order on a set of objects recognized as like in kind by distributing them along an arbitrary dimension of differentiation. Ranking is the principle which gives rise both to what Adams labels "coordinate" relations (my "complementarity") and under certain circumstances to what he calls "centralization"—differential power relations. The assignment of relative value to any ranking is thus separate from differentiation and ranking itself. In attempting to determine how complementarity and hierarchy (products in Adams's view of coordination and centralization) or other ways to assign relative value to difference worked in practice, archaeologists must more fully use material remains. Images may indicate, not only in their content but in the timing of their introduction and change, the existence of public comment on persons and groups. As Munn (1986:96-97, 101-102) argues, it is through comment and evaluation that value is created and associated with individuals and groups.

We can attend to the topics of past discourse even when our ability to translate them is limited. We can identify the situations within which public representa-

tions were created and used. Having identified these topics as present, we can (and should) examine our interpretations of the nonrepresentational material record to see whether these subjects are considered and to contemplate whether our interpretations are at least consistent with the public representations which have survived. As Weiner (1992:2) has said, "the acceptance of gender ideologies fundamental to capitalist systems introduced other formidable problems for anthropological theory. Analytical dichotomies, such as stasis/change, nature/culture, and domestic/public, always identified women with the supposedly negative side. . . . Women, though physically present, were seen but ignored as active participants in their own right." Attention to the imagery of gender will, I hope, correct this tendency we inherit as anthropological archaeologists to project a universal system of values derived from Euro-American society on the past.

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