WEARING CULTURE
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DRESS AND REGALIA IN EARLY MESOAMERICA AND CENTRAL AMERICA

EDITED BY
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Contents

List of Figures vii
List of Tables xix
Preface xxi
Acknowledgments xlvii

Chapter 1. The Sitio Conte Cemetery in Ancient Panama: Where Lord 15 Wore His Ornaments in “Great Quantity” 1
Karen O’Day

Chapter 2. Barely There but Still Transcendent: Ancient Nicaraguan and Costa Rican Dress, Regalia, and Adornment, ca. 800 BCE–300 CE in Greater Nicoya 29
Laura Wingfield

Chapter 3. Ties That Bind: Cloth, Clothing, and Embodiment in Formative Honduras 61
Rosemary A. Joyce

Chapter 4. The Naked and the Ornamented: Embodiment and Fluid Identities in Early Formative Oaxaca 79
Jeffrey P. Blomster

Chapter 5. Aspects of Dress and Ornamentation in Coastal Oaxaca’s Formative Period 115
Guy David Hepp and Ivy A. Rieger

Chapter 6. Dressed Ears as Comeliness and Godliness 145
John E. Clark and Arlene Colman
Chapter 7. Unsexed Images, Gender-Neutral Costume, and Gender-Ambiguous Costume in Formative Period Gulf Coast Cultures 207

Billie J. A. Follensbee


Katherine A. Faust

Chapter 9. Making the Body Up and Over: Body Modification and Ornamentation in the Formative Huastecan Figurine Tradition of Loma Real, Tamaulipas 295

Sophie Marchegay

Chapter 10. Framed: The Textile Associations of Preclassic Geometric Bands 323

Caitlin Earley and Julia Guernsey

Chapter 11. Wrapped in the Clothing of the Sacred 351

Whitney Lytle and F. Kent Reilly III

Chapter 12. The Symbolic Vocabulary of Cloth and Garments in the San Bartolo Murals 373

Karon Winzenz

Chapter 13. Early Maya Dress and Adornment 411

Matthew G. Looper

Chapter 14. Conclusion: Undressing the Formative 447

John W. Hoopes

Index 479
1.1. Plan of Grave 5, Layer 2, Sitio Conte  
1.2. Illustration of Lord 15 wearing his ornament set  
1.3. Illustration of ornaments on Lord 15’s head and chest  
1.4. Illustration of the two Crocodile-Eagle figures on Cuff 143  
1.5. Illustration of the two Crocodile-Eagle figures on Greave 145  
2.1. Vessel in the form of a kneeling woman wearing a *tanga*  
2.2. Vessel in the form of a seated woman wearing a necklace and a *tanga*  
2.3. Vessel in the form of a kneeling, birthing woman wearing a diadem and a *tanga*  
2.4. Large vessel in the form of a seated ejaculating man  
2.5. Effigy of a seated human wearing a conical hat  
2.6. Effigy of a bearded kneeling man with two horns  
2.7. Vessel in the form of a seated woman with elaborate body decoration  
2.8. Large vessel depicting a standing crocodile-human  
2.9. Vessel in the form of a seated woman  
2.10. Vessel in the form of a seated pregnant woman with crossed legs and two horns (doe pedicels)  
2.11. Tripod vessel with appliqué in the form of a squatting human wearing a conical bird hat
2.12. Bridge-and-spout whistling (?) vessel in the form of a feline-human 36
2.13. Cup depicting harpy eagle–humans 37
2.15. Vessel depicting a standing armadillo–human 38
2.16. Effigy of a seated woman wearing a skullcap 38
2.17. Effigy of a kneeling man with two horns 39
2.18. Vessel in the form of a seated woman with one horn 40
2.19. Vessel in the form of a seated pregnant woman with hands on belly 41
2.20. Margarita Lázaro holding a mask she carved 42
2.21. Maleku wooden masks 42
2.22. Axe pendant in the form of an Olmecoid human 44
2.23. Axe pendant in the form of a bird–human 44
2.24. Macehead in the form of an owl’s head 45
2.25. Tripod metate depicting a crocodilian 45
2.26. Vessel in the form of a woman seated on a round stool 46
2.27. Effigy of a woman seated on a bench with two feline heads 46
2.28. Necklace found at El Viejo bei Sandinal, Nicoya Peninsula 47
2.29. Rosales Shaman 52
3.1. Map of the drainage of the Ulua River, northern Honduras, showing sites from which Playa de los Muertos tradition figurines have been recovered 62
3.2. Woven (cotton) veil, detail from figurine 66
3.3. Cape details from figurine 66
3.4. Skirt, detail from figurine 66
3.5. Possible shorts, detail from figurine 67
3.6. Woven waistband, detail from figurine 67
3.7. Multiple twined bands, details from figurine 68
3.8. Animal pelt apron, detail of figurine from San Juan Camalote 73
3.9. Skirt made of strips of material, possibly bark cloth, detail of figurine from Rio Pelo 73
4.1. Map of Oaxaca and adjacent regions of Mesoamerica with Formative sites from the text indicated 80
4.2. Nearly complete hollow clay “bust” figurine from Etlatongo, Cruz B 81
4.3. Early figurines from Etlatongo 86
4.4. Largely intact Cruz A female figurine from the earliest feature excavated at Etlatongo 88
4.5. Small Cruz A figurine from Etlatongo with a hole atop the head 88
4.6. Etlatongo male figurine heads with facial hair 89
4.7. Cruz B figurine from Etlatongo with braids and incised hair separated by a deep central part 90
4.8. Cruz B figurine heads from Etlatongo with pointed caps 91
4.9. Etlatongo Cruz B heads with elaborate headgear 92
4.10. Cruz B figurines from Etlatongo with unusual headgear 93
4.11. Cruz B figurines from Etlatongo with ear and/or nose ornaments 94
4.12. Two solid Olmec-style heads from Etlatongo, both with pupils indicated 95
4.13. Cruz B seated female figurine from Etlatongo, with detailed genitalia indicated 98
4.14. Cruz B ballplayer figurine from Etlatongo 101
4.15. Cruz B female figurines from Etlatongo wearing a high loincloth 102
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.16.</td>
<td>Cruz B roller stamp or <em>sello</em> from Etlatongo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.17.</td>
<td>Cruz B figurine from Etlatongo with contrasting prefired red painted zones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1.</td>
<td>Map of coastal Oaxaca showing most of the sites mentioned in the text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.</td>
<td>Feminine figurine fragment demonstrating specific attention paid to the head and hair as a probable marker of identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.</td>
<td>Female figurine from Early Formative La Consentida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4.</td>
<td>Figurine capable of wearing removable jewelry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.</td>
<td>Figurines with head adornment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6.</td>
<td>Figurines with earspools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7.</td>
<td>Female human/animal transformational figurine with skirt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8.</td>
<td>Feminine figurines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.9.</td>
<td>Body segmentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.10.</td>
<td>Nude female figurines from Early Formative La Consentida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1.</td>
<td>Types of ear ornaments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.</td>
<td>Examples of ear ornaments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.</td>
<td>Burial 9, the “sandstone cist tomb” from La Venta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4.</td>
<td>Earware on Olmec sculptures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5.</td>
<td>Representations of earware on early figurines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6.</td>
<td>Figurine heads from the Mazatan region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7.</td>
<td>Ocos phase (1500–1400 BCE) figurines from the Mazatan region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.8.</td>
<td>Cherla phase (1400–1300 BCE) figurines from the Mazatan region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.9.</td>
<td>Cuadros phase (1300–1200 BCE) figurines from the Mazatan region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.10.</td>
<td>Jocotal phase (1200–1000 BCE) figurines from the Mazatan region</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.11. Conchas phase (1000–800 BCE) figurines from the La Blanca region 164
6.12. Formative figurines from the Valley of Oaxaca 168
6.13. Formative figurines from the Valley of Mexico, listed by types 169
6.14. Jade ornaments found with La Venta burials 178
6.15. Representations of unusual earware 179
7.1. La Venta Figure 1, jade figurine of a woman 208
7.2. Cruz del Milagro Monument 1 208
7.3. La Venta Monument 1 209
7.4. Figurine of an old woman, from La Venta 211
7.5. Figurine of a woman wearing a low-slung pubic apron, from La Venta 212
7.6. Figurine of a woman wearing a low-slung pubic apron with both front and back pendant flaps, from La Venta 213
7.7. Figurine of a woman wearing a short, low-slung skirt and a cape, from San Lorenzo 214
7.8. Adolescent figurine with a slender body and rounded chest area, from San Lorenzo 214
7.9. Young child figurine wearing a pubic apron, from La Venta 215
7.10. Supine baby figurine with a pubic triangle, from La Venta 215
7.11. Crouching baby figurine, from La Venta 216
7.12. Dwarf figurine wearing a skirt 216
7.13. Tripod figurine of a man wearing a belt high on the torso 217
7.14. Figurine of a young woman wearing a wide belt at the natural waist 217
7.15. Large, hollow ceramic figure of a young woman with modest breasts, from La Venta 219
7.16. Headless large, hollow ceramic figure of a young woman displaying modest breasts with an incised W-shaped line underneath, from La Venta

7.17. Headless large, hollow figure of a baby boy with male genitalia, from La Venta

7.18. Hollow ceramic figure of a supine toddler girl with a tubby body, from La Venta

7.19. Jade figurine of a young girl, from La Venta Offering 1943-M

7.20. Jade figurine of a woman, Figure 9 from La Venta Offering 4

7.21. Jade figurine of a man, Figure 15 from La Venta Offering 4

7.22. Jade figurine that was changed from female to male by the addition of an incised loincloth, Figure 2 from La Venta Offering 3

7.23. Gender-ambiguous jade figurine of a baby, Figure 11 from La Venta Offering 1943-M

7.24. Jade figurine of a supernatural dwarf, Figure 1 from La Venta Offering 3

7.25. La Venta Stela 1

7.26. La Venta Monument 23

7.27. La Venta Stela 3

7.28. La Venta Stela 5

7.29. La Venta Altar 5, right side

7.30. La Venta Altar 5, front

7.31. La Venta Altar 5, left side

7.32. Las Limas Monument 1

7.33. La Venta Monument 19

7.34. La Venta Monument 31

7.35. San Lorenzo Monument 52

8.1. A comparison of Olmec and Huastec iconography and style
8.2. Olmec and Huastec anthropomorphic sculpture 257
8.3. The Young Lord, Middle Formative period serpentine statuette from the Pacific coast of Guatemala 259
8.4. The Huastec Youth, Postclassic sandstone sculpture from the site of Tamuin, San Luis Potosi 261
8.5. Sacrificial imagery depicted on Huastec sculptures and conch pectoral 264
8.6. The principle of inversion and the concept of supernatural travel inscribed upon the legs of the Huastec Youth 267
8.7. The Young Lord as an active being 270
8.8. Butterfly imagery in Huastec art 271
8.9. Fire drilling imagery and dimensionality in Huastec art 273
8.10. Solar brilliance and dimensionality in Postclassic Huastec art 274
8.11. Three views of a lenticular image depicting Christ with children in ancient and contemporary times 277
8.12. Polymorphic and bistable images 279
8.13. Bistable images with a directional component 284
9.1. Map of the Huasteca region 297
9.2. Unit 11, with multiple burials, Loma Real 298
9.3. Unit 1, Burial 19, with figurine offering (placed in each arm) and shell pendants in the neck, Loma Real 298
9.4. Tabular oblique cranial modification, Loma Real 301
9.5. Bulging-Eye type figurine showing tabular oblique cranial modification, Loma Real 302
9.6. Panuco B type figurine showing tabular erect cranial modification, Loma Real

9.7. Flat Rectangular-Eyed type figurine with tabular erect head shaping of the “bilobulada” variety, Loma Real

9.8. Huastec man with nose ornament and scarifications

9.9. Decoration of punctations on the head of a figurine from Loma Real

9.10. Loma Real figurines showing body scarifications of the incisions type

9.11. Female figurine with scarifications of circular bosses on the arms, Loma Real

9.12. Figurines showing body painting, Loma Real

9.13. Examples of complex spiral designs in body painting


9.15. Hollow type figurine showing partially shaved head and headband, Loma Real region (looted)

9.16. Female figurine wearing a loincloth, Loma Real

9.17. Circular pendants from Loma Real

9.18. Burial 6 with offering of clay figurines and shell ornaments, Unit 1, Loma Real

9.19. Female figurine from Loma Real showing tabular erect head shaping, “bilobulada” variety

10.1. Izapa Stela 4

10.2. La Venta Altar 4

10.3. Izapa stelae

10.4. Chiapa de Corzo stelae

10.5. La Mojarra Stela 1
10.6. Kaminaljuyú Stela 11 331
10.7. Izapa Stela 3 332
10.8. Izapa Altar 60 333
10.9. Tabbed “collar” designs identified by Quirarte 334
10.10. Limestone fragment from Chiapa de Corzo 335
10.11. Turtle shell from Cerro de las Mesas 335
10.12. Chiapa de Corzo Structure 36D 337
10.13. Terrace at Chalcatzingo 338
10.14. Façade from Teopantecuanitlan 339
11.1. Fleur-de-lis motif used as a royal emblem 352
11.2. Portrait of Louis XIV 353
11.3. Map of the Olmec site of La Venta 355
11.4. Illustration of Jasaw Chan K’awiil, Tikal Stela 16 356
11.5. Illustration of Yaxchilán Lintel 15 depicting Lady Wak Tun 356
11.6. Ceramic bird vessel from Tlatilco 358
11.7. Illustration of San Lorenzo Monument 15 358
11.8. Illustration of image on the Chalcatzingo Vase 359
11.9. Olmec jade maskette with knotted neck wrap 359
11.10. Detail from Maya Polychrome vessel 360
11.11. Illustration of bundle motifs on San Lorenzo Monument 4 361
11.12. La Venta Monument 77 with banding motifs on the belt and chest 361
11.13. Illustration of La Venta Monument 77, rear view 361
11.14. Illustration of Teopantecuanitlan Monolith 1 as an example of World Centering regalia 362
11.15. Illustration of Ritual Flight regalia as seen on celt 362
11.16. Illustration of greenstone figure from Puebla as an example of the Creation regalia set 363
11.17. Illustration of the Xoc figure carrying a bundled tablet from Chiapas, Mexico
11.18. Illustration of a celt from Arroyo Pesquero, Mexico
11.19. Example of the “Jester God” headdress motif
11.20. Example of the “Jester God” motif on the El Sitio celt
11.21. Drawing of the incising on the Seated Figure, Dumbarton Oaks Collection B-592
11.22. Detail of the two celts on the headdress of the Seated Figure
11.23. Detail of the rightmost celt on the headdress of the Seated Figure
11.24. Detail of the celt to the right of the mirror on the headdress of the Seated Figure
11.25. Illustration of Chalcatzingo Monument 21
12.1. Textile techniques on the San Bartolo murals
12.2. Dressing and accession scenes at San Bartolo
12.3. Cloth garments with *pars pro toto* breath-serpent signs
12.4. Formative period loincloths and panels with *pars pro toto* breath-serpent signs
12.5. Signs and emblems on Late Classic loincloth panels
12.6. Bundles, pouches, and perforators related to bloodletting
12.7. The “string” cape
12.8. Bound celts and woven bands
12.9. Emblematic cloth bands and bundles at San Bartolo
13.1. Cerros Structure 5C-2nd, detail of lower mask earflare assemblage
13.2. Formative figurine fragments
13.3. Bone earplug from Tikal, Late Formative 416
13.4. Engraved jadeite “clamshell” effigy pendant,
    provenience unknown, Late Formative 418
13.5. Beaked pendants 423
13.6. Tongue-shaped pendants 424
13.7. Reflective oblong plaques 425
13.8. Clay stamp (rollout), Altar de Sacrificios,
    Late Middle Formative 429
14.1. Human effigy vessel, Bagaces, Guanacaste,
    Costa Rica 459
Tables

7.1. Gender and age in Gulf Coast Olmec small-scale stone anthropomorphic sculptures 221
7.2. Gender-ambiguous images in Gulf Coast Olmec large-scale anthropomorphic relief sculptures 234
7.3. Gender-ambiguous images in Gulf Coast Olmec large-scale anthropomorphic sculptures in the round 235
7.4. Sex and gender, anthropomorphic Olmec large stone sculpture 238
13.1. Summary of early Maya dress 431
Costume, dress, outfit, jewelry, adornment, regalia, investiture—these words possibly conjure many and varied associations in the mind of the reader. But what was the significance of dressing and ornamenting people and objects, and of articles of regalia, for the peoples of precontact Meso- and Central America? This question lies at the heart of this volume, the outgrowth of the session entitled “Costume and Dress in Formative Period Mesoamerica and the Isthmo-Colombian Region,” held in 2010 at the annual meeting of the Society for American Archaeology, St. Louis, Missouri. Both the originating conference session and this publication have endeavored to approach the topic in a synthetic manner, uniting scholars who have either considered issues of Formative period costuming elsewhere or whose general interests intersect with the topic. One goal has been to create a platform for scholarly exchange and discourse that traverses regional specialization and schools of thought. In fact, most of the cultures included in this book (with the exception of the Maya) are typically left out of surveys of world dress (e.g., Pendergast 2004).

Moreover, while dress and regalia are investigated widely in the field, publication of results is dispersed or specialized. Therefore, the topic has yet to be treated synthetically, especially for the Formative period. Few studies focus on the cultural relationships between Mesoamerica and Central America (also known as the Isthmo-Colombian Zone or the Intermediate Zone, indicating Central America and the circum-Caribbean), despite the clear evidence of these connections. As the various chapters of this volume indicate, there was considerable formal and technological variation
in clothing and ornamentation throughout this area. Nevertheless, the early indigenous cultures of these regions shared numerous practices, attitudes, and aesthetic interests.

The chapters of this book use the term “Formative” to refer to a spectrum of time (approximately 1200 BCE to 300 CE) in both regions. Traditionally, scholars indicate this epoch by regionally specific nomenclature. While “Formative” is derived from Mesoamerican studies, often alternating for “Preclassic,” we believe it is effective for this book as a broad indicator of temporal and cultural development, in which certain cultural characteristics coalesced and became reflected in costuming practices. In some parts of the Isthmo-Colombian region, the era, during which traits identifiable with the Mesoamerican Formative are found, extends much later in time—to around 950 CE (refer to Chapters 1 and 2; see also the discussion in Chapter 14). It is during this profoundly significant era in both regions that we witness the emergence of civilization in the material and artistic records, as well as the earliest evidence for interaction between Meso- and Central America—the basis for our temporal and regional focus.

**TERMINOLOGY**

The wide range of cultural practices discussed by the authors prompts a brief consideration of terminology. The English language employs a number of terms to describe these practices, such as costume, clothing, dress, attire, regalia, or adornment, some of which may raise concerns in cross-cultural applications. Probably the most problematic of these would be “costume,” which some would see as having been trivialized by association with Halloween practices or other occasions of “dress-up,” as in the use of “costume jewelry” (see Eicher and Roach-Higgins 1992). Historically, however, this term is a loan from French, where it is associated with concepts of traditional or habitual attire (> costume “custom, habit; clothes, dress”; the English “custom” derives from the same term). In fact, nearly all the general terms for costume are French borrowings, including “attire” (> atirer “to equip, ready, prepare”), “garment” (> garnir “fit out, provide, adorn”), dress (> dresser, drecier “raise [oneself], arrange, straighten, direct”), and “adorn” (> aorner “to order, arrange, dispose, equip; adorn”). An important exception is “clothes,” originally the plural of “cloth,” a term of Germanic origin that referred to felted or woven material. Another is “regalia,” which has kingly connotations. Owing to the highly generalized meanings of many of these terms, we, as the editors of this volume, have elected not to dictate any specific terminology to the...
authors of individual chapters. In this preface we employ “dress” and “body art” interchangeably and inclusively.

A survey of Mesoamerican and Central American indigenous languages reveals a rich terminology for attire and adornment. As in English, some of these terms refer to dress in general, while others name specific types of garments or articles of status. In many Mesoamerican cultures woven fabric was a sign of culture and civilization; hence, terminology for attire was often closely related to that for textiles. For example, Mayan languages—which are better documented than most ancient Mesoamerican languages—have a large number of general terms for clothing that carry strong connotations of covering the body with fabrics. Some of these terms have limited distribution, such as Greater Kanjobalan *k’uul “blanket, jacket, fabric, clothes,” Eastern Mayan *tzó7ów “blanket, jacket, coat, something to protect oneself,” Huehuetenango *qap “fabric, clothes,” and K’ichean *atz’ib(aq) “clothes, fabric” (Kaufman 2003:1011, 1012, 1015). Two widespread Proto-Mayan terms for clothing are *b’ubq and *nooq’. The word *b’ubq, translated as “blanket, jacket, clothes, fabric, huipil,” refers specifically to the act of covering something, as attested in Yucatec b’úuk, which means both “clothes” and “roof [thatch]” (Bricker, Po’ot Yah, and Dzul de Po’ot 1998:37). A reflex of this term is known from the Classic Maya script, where it appears on a painted vase in the expression in-b’übék “my clothes” (K1398; see Kerr n.d.). In this case, the reference is to the hat and cloak of a god who has been stripped of his finery.

The other widely distributed term for clothing is Proto-Mayan *nooq’, which means “clothes, fabric” in Lowland languages but perhaps originally meant “cotton,” as reflected in Eastern Mayan languages (Kaufman 2003:1015–16). A second Proto-Mayan term, *q’uu7, usually means “nest,” but also “blanket, jacket, clothes” in some languages (Kaufman 2003:1013). A reflex of this term (k’u) is also documented in the ancient Maya script, but here it probably refers to a bird’s nest rather than clothing. It is worth mentioning that the Maya script preserves a number of additional terms for specific items of dress, including ko’haw “helmet,” pik “skirt,” pixol “hat/headdress,” tup-aj “earflare,” and ub-aj “necklace.” Historical linguistics suggests that several of these terms existed during the Formative period, the epoch covered in this volume.

THE SCHOLARLY STUDY OF DRESS
The central issue explored in this volume—the human body and its representation as a site of social identity as expressed in dress and adornment—has already attracted considerable scholarly attention in diverse fields (see Eicher...
The data is richest in more recent societies, constituting the lived experience of dressed and/or adorned individuals. In Mesoamerican and Central American archaeology, we must rely upon physical remains of jewelry and clothing, sometimes in association with skeletal remains (e.g., Chapters 1, 6, 13), as well as representational art, such as figurines or monuments (e.g., Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9). The early epoch covered in this book is dominated artistically by figurines, but there are also abundant artifacts that were once worn as ornaments. Indeed, some of the earliest deposits in ancient Mesoamerica consist of jewelry ornaments (Joyce 2001:20). As the chapters indicate, these artifacts and images provide rich yet controversial sets of data that are relevant to understanding body art.

Each of the chapters in this volume takes an approach to studying body art that is rooted in a particular history of scholarship. It is therefore useful to examine the conceptualization of and approaches to the study of body art, particularly as relates to the study of ancient Meso- and Central American societies. These studies lay the foundation for the current volume and provide the basis for future investigations, particularly in other periods and areas of ancient American body art.

It has been traditional in anthropology and cultural studies to analyze the various types of adornment as separate categories of “body supplements” versus “body modifications” (Eicher and Roach-Higgins 1992:8). Clothing, jewelry, and handheld objects such as staffs or musical instruments fall into the first category, while permanent or temporary marks on the body or the shaping of the body itself constitute the second category (Eicher and Roach-Higgins 1992:18). Many scholars of ancient Meso- and Central American dress focus on only one of these types. For example, there are several studies of loom-woven fabrics among the ancient Maya (Joyce 2001; Looper 2000; Morris 1985). Likewise, Anawalt’s (1981) major study of Postclassic Mesoamerican clothing emphasizes cloth body-covering garments.

More recent investigations, however, find that the traditional scholarly categories of dress type serve little purpose, prompting some scholars to propose more inclusive groupings under the rubrics of “adornment, body art, or dress” (see Eicher and Roach-Higgins 1992; Shukla 2008:3). One of the main justifications for this approach is through the observation that regardless of type, various items of dress serve a similar function, mediating between the individual and society (Eicher and Roach-Higgins 1992:13; Shukla 2008:389–90). Indeed, Rosemary Joyce (2008:40) refers to Preclassic Honduran beaded ornaments as “prosthetics” that were intended to modify and extend the body’s surface for social effect.
Although a wide array of dress types was used in early Mesoamerica and Central America, predominant among them are coiffure, hair removal, body paint, tattooing, jewelry made of shell or jadeite, clothing made of woven or nonwoven fabric (frequently cotton or maguey), headdresses (often feathered), and a variety of handheld objects (Anawalt 2001a). Metal adornments were used in Central America by the fifth century CE and became increasingly important in Mesoamerica over the course of the Postclassic (Hosler 2001:310; Sharer and Traxler 2006:576; see also Cooke et al. 2003:94–95). Because of widespread ideologies associated with the head (Houston, Stuart, and Taube 2006:60–61; López Austin 1988), this part of the body received considerable emphasis, including the use of nasal and ear piercings and ornamentation placed in the ears and nose, cranial modeling, dental modification (filing, inlays), hair styling/shaving, and ornamentation of the hair with jewelry (see Joyce 2003, 2007, 2008).

The three social contexts that are relevant for the analysis of material culture, including dress, are creation, communication, and consumption (Glassie 1999:41). Contexts of creation may emphasize either the manufacture of objects or materials or the assembly of individual clothing elements into ensembles (Shukla 2008:387). The traditional domain of art history, stylistic analysis, provides crucial insight into the creator’s society and the cultural domain for which the item of dress is intended. Thus, there are numerous contexts through which body art may be explored in the ancient Americas.

**VISUAL COMMUNICATION**

Both classic and more recent studies insist that dress styles communicate social information (Eicher and Roach-Higgins 1992; Shukla 2008:390; Wobst 1977). By evoking style, these studies emphasize the potential of clothing as a visual signifier—that is, a semiotic field that conveys relatively concrete symbolism (Bogatyrev 1971). The scholarly concept of clothing as a semiotic system is clearly rooted in notions that pervade popular culture (e.g., “blue collar” vs. “white collar”). In archaeology and art history such symbolism is thought to be readily accessible, as it is “read” from asymmetries or binary pairs that are revealed through structuralist pattern analysis (see Schwarz 1992). For instance, later ancient Mesoamerican clothing is structured according to a number of contrasting dyads, such as the loincloth versus skirt and huipil (male : female), cotton versus maguey (elite : commoner), animal hide versus woven fabric (barbarian : civilized), and clothed versus naked (dominant : subordinate; adult : youth) (Anawalt 2001a:339–43, 2001b:813; Boone 2000:47; Schele 1984:43).
The notion of identity usually serves as the concept through which scholars interpret the relation of individual instances of body art usage to social, political, religious, occupational, sexual, and personal contexts (Roach and Eicher 1965, 1979). Pravina Shukla (2008:405) points out that display and interpretation of dress implies a historical dimension, both individual and cultural. Although individual histories tend to be occluded in studies of non-Western visual culture, this is merely an artifact of documentation and scholarly bias. Individual histories are critical to the study of attire in any culture, given its physical association with individual bodies.

The classic ethnographic studies of the symbolism of dress find links to concepts of gender, sexuality, local identity, ethnicity, medicine, magic and protection, ancestors, spirits or other religious observance, morality, punishment/subjugation, warfare, exchange, and social class (Barnes and Eicher 1992; Eicher and Roach-Higgins 1992; Faris 1972; Gröning 1997; Mershen 1989; Roach and Eicher 1965, 1979; Schildkrout 2004; Schneider 1987:412–13; Strathern and Strathern 1971; Turner 1980). A number of these studies point to various dimensions of the status symbolism of body art and clothing, including reproductive or marriage status, initiation, and age-grades. Alfred Gell (1993) found that tattooing in Polynesia was inconsistently related to social class but was widely used to mark “existential” class, distinguishing humans from gods.

Several aspects of social identity and dress have been explored in archaeology as well (Sørensen 1997, 2000:132; Treherne 1995). In the ancient American context, the analysis of social identity expressed through dress has been uneven, with some aspects explored in detail and others virtually ignored. One major area of research has been gender, particularly with reference to later periods in Mesoamerican history (Anawalt 1981; Bruhns 1988; Follensbee 2009; Looper 2000; Reilly 2002; Tate 1992:70–84, 1999, 2002; Taylor 1992). It is sometimes assumed that biological sex differences “have a significant influence on social expectations of what constitutes maleness or femaleness as expressed through the materiality of objects” (Green 2007:285). Accordingly, correlations between sexed humans and particular classes of ornaments with which they are associated may be used to ascribe gender to these ornaments (see Joyce 2001:30–34). Joyce (1993, 1999, 2001, 2002) discusses an important aspect of gender identity—sexual availability, attractiveness or eroticism—in a consideration of the relationships between dress and the sexualization (or de-sexualization) of both males and females of various ages (see also Blomster 2009).

Much work has also been done relating aspects of dress to status, rank, or social class in ancient Mexico and Central America (Schele and Miller 1986:66–73). In Mesoamerica evidence for ranking through body art appears
in the earliest traditions through the increase in depicted and actual ornaments appearing in Late Archaic sites like Paso de la Amada (Lesure 1999). Richard Lesure (1999:217) associates these changes with the increasing importance of rank distinction (see also Brown 2007). Similarly, shell jewelry at the Preclassic Maya site of K’axob is linked to status (Isaza Aizpurúa and McAnany 1999). Other aspects of rank or status include the use of tattooing among the ancient Maya as a mark of (male) warrior status, associated with painful rites of passage, but also as a mark of thieves (Thompson 1946:19). In more complex societies like the Aztec, laws strictly regulated the material and design of garments in relation to social class and military rank (Anawalt 1981:27–30, 2001a, 2001b).

Scholars of ancient American art are also interested in the sacred or religious dimensions of body art, particularly its widespread use to indicate cosmological and mythological identities. Ceremonial attire is frequently believed to symbolize the vertical levels of the universe or various deities (Bassie-Sweet 2002; Baudet 2000; Freidel and Suhler 1995; Hoopes 2005; Houston and Stuart 1996; Schele and Miller 1986:68, 71–72, 77; Taube 1985; Young–Sánchez 2010). The tendency of ceremonial dress in ancient Mexico and Central America to facilitate supernatural contact has direct analogies in ethnographic cultures (e.g., Feeley-Harnik 1989).

In contrast to gender, status, and religious identity, other areas of body art symbolism remain virtually untouched by Precolumbian scholars. For example, numerous cross-cultural studies link dress to ethnicity (Eicher 1995; Schildkrout 2004:332; Schneider 1987:413; Wobst 1977). However, the discussion of ancient American dress in relation to ethnicity has been minimal (cf. Anawalt 1981). Many scholars also note the magical or amuletic functions of body art in both recent and ancient contexts throughout the world (Andrews 1994; Gell 1998:191; Mershen 1989; Schwarz 1979:25–26; Tannenbaum 1987). And yet Precolumbian art historians and archaeologists almost never address these aspects of dress in an extended manner.

Like scholars of dress in other areas, Mesoamericanists and Central Americanists display a distinct tendency to conceptualize dress primarily as a medium of display. These studies are thus tied to modern and postmodern notions of the body as a metaphor, in which culturally constructed meanings are inscribed upon the body (see Foucault 1977; Lévi-Strauss 1963; cf. Csordas 1996:12). In either perspective, the body is conceptualized as a screen or mirror that is acted upon by either an inner or outer agency.

In a dissenting view, several scholars note the extremely limited semiotic potential of dress. For example, if textiles are interpreted as “texts,” then why
is it so difficult to identify concrete symbolic content encoded in textile motifs (Schneider 1987:414–15)? In fact, Grant McCracken (1987) points out three major ways in which clothing differs from a linguistic code. First, it employs fixed signs that are most useful for semiotic repetition rather than rhetorical creativity. As he argues, dress “allows for the representation of cultural categories, principles and processes without at the same time encouraging their innovative manipulation” (McCracken 1987:120). Second, dress often obscures meaning: “The semiotic information of material culture appears typically to seep into consciousness around the edges of a central focus and more pressing concerns” (McCracken 1987:121). Thus, dress refers to cultural concepts, some controversial, in an indirect way by insinuating them into daily life through dress habits. Finally, in order to mark social diversity, dress frequently emphasizes variation rather than an invariant code (McCracken 1987:121).

Accordingly, some scholars of body art note that the body is not only a representation but is more fundamentally a presentational medium. For example, Schildkrout (2004:338) observes, “The body, as a canvas, is not only the site where culture is inscribed but also a place where the individual is defined and inserted into the cultural landscape.” Accordingly, we may supplement the structuralist/postmodern concept of the body and its adornment through a consideration of the body as a site of social processes. Scholars interested in the integration of dress into systems of exchange as well as more broadly conceived phenomenological approaches have elucidated these problems. 2

EXCHANGE

Cross-cultural studies point to numerous examples of the integration of clothing and ornament into systems of exchange, particularly in association with marriage, funerals, or sometimes as general currency (Bisson 1975; Green 2007:285–86; Schneider 1987:410–11). The association of dress with status or class seems closely related to a more general function, particularly of jewelry, as a means of storing wealth (Fernea 1965:33; see also Weiner 1989). Building on Marcel Mauss’s (1967) notion of the social histories embodied in gifts, David Graeber (1996:8–9) argues that the display of wealth implies a history of gifts given to a ruler. It therefore exercises an indirect power of persuasion, inspiring acts of homage toward the person who displays it (Graeber 1996:8–9).

In ancient Mexico and various parts of Central America, jadeite and shell beads and other ornaments, cloth (plain and decorated), featherwork, and copper and gold jewelry were forms of wealth that regulated societies both internally and externally and were particularly important in social interactions in ranked
societies (Anawalt 1981:29–30; Hirth and Hirth 1993; Joyce 1993:261–63; Quilter and Hoopes 2003; Reents-Budet 2006; Stuart 2006; Taube 2000). Interestingly, masks in Aztec society also had profound socioeconomic functions and were specifically associated with the extraction of tribute from subject peoples (Klein 1986). They validated the stratification of society through supernatural sanction and signaled the wearer’s control over the deity depicted. For the Aztecs, luxury items could be exchanged for subsistence goods (Brumfiel 1980). However, in other ranked societies, such as the Classic Maya, luxury items, mainly acquired through trade or tribute, were primarily displayed on the body or interred with the dead (Demarest 2004:160; Freidel, Reese-Taylor, and Mora-Marín 2002). If these items represented territorial claims, their display may have been intended to command subsistence support (see Earle 1987:69).

Various properties of jewelry and dress in ancient Mesoamerica seem to have contributed to their use as media of exchange. For example, cloth was often woven in standard widths, was fairly easy to store and transport, and was also suitable for display and gifting (see Murra 1962). Beads served as an ideal currency because they could be easily transformed back and forth from generic forms such as single strands to unique forms such as larger pieces that were displayed on the body (see Graeber 1996:13).

When not used as currency, wealth items were frequently conceived as heirlooms in ancient Mesoamerica (Gillespie 2001; Joyce 2000a). In the case of heirlooms, the histories of these objects become particularly salient. Their particularities bestow distinctiveness on the owner of the object, and its display is principally used to indicate social difference (Graeber 1996:6). Studies of Maya shell and jadeite ornaments note that many heirloom objects were also tribute items (Stuart 2006). The significance of such objects was thus bound up in their histories of movement and ownership by diverse persons, one of whom was sometimes commemorated through an inscription on the object itself. They are a good example of the likely role of much body art in the ancient Americas as inalienable possessions or “transcendent treasures” (Weiner 1992:3).

Some heirloom objects were believed to be inherited from the gods themselves and were thus particularly prestigious and sacred (Klein 1986:159, 2008). These concepts probably relate to the widespread belief that the acquisition of finely crafted items from distant locations confers upon these items a prestige or value tied to ancestors, gods, or heroes (see Helms 1993). The investiture of trade goods with cosmological or mythical value provides a crucial link between economics and aesthetics that is directly relevant to the goals of this volume.
The consideration of dress within the interconnected contexts of creation, distribution, display, and disposal, then, allows us to move beyond the simplistic notion of dress as symbol. Potentially, dress may engage diverse modes of signification; however, owing to its association with bodies, indexicality (the capacity of signifiers to point to a referent with which it is spatially coterminal) seems to be among the richest modes of signification that clothing may exploit (see also Gell 1998). Indeed, various studies have explored the indexical dimensions of costume, such as Mershen's (1989) examination of the life histories embodied in jewelry, encompassing the people who created and used it, or Webb Keane's (2004) exploration of the functions of clothing among historic Pacific Islands peoples, which suggests that it is through indexical and iconic qualities that clothing achieves social effectiveness.

In the Mesoamerican context, David Haskell (2012) provides a detailed model for the analysis of the indexicality of the production and exchange of Tarascan obsidian lip plugs. Again, drawing upon Mauss's model of gift exchange as a means of building intersubjective social networks, Haskell argues that the indexical processes of production and distribution of lip plugs served to extend the king's political authority to the Tarascan nobility. The display (“discursive framing”) of these objects was performed in various contexts, some of which were designed to unambiguously point to specific chains of intention.

**PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACHES**

The reconceptualization of dress as a material component of social process rather than a badge or similar social “inscription” is a question central to phenomenological theories of the “lived body” (see Merleau-Ponty 1976). The body as a subject in practice represents a potentially productive horizon for the interpretation of clothing, encompassing various domains. These include creation of dress items and ensembles, dressing and undressing, consumption as a site and process, the relationship between the physical body and adornment, the body in motion, and experiences of modification by the dressed/shaped person (Entwistle 2000; Steele 2001). An excellent example of how dress changes the body and the body changes dress is found among the Requibat Bedouin of northwest Africa, whose indigo-dyed clothing confers a blue tint to their skin (Cordwell 1979:73). Another is Umberto Eco’s (1986:192–94) discussion of the way in which tight jeans structure posture and movement and thereby constitute an “epidermic self-awareness.” Indeed, the consideration of the skin as a liminal sensate zone, rather than a neutral screen
for projection or inscription, suggests a new way of conceptualizing the role of
dress in mediating the subject and society (see Fleming 2001:84; Gell 1993:39;
that it is through bodily practices that symbols are made “concrete.” This is
important because it acknowledges that the values and associations of dress
are not predetermined but inculcated through bodily acts. As such, the acts of
making clothing, gifting it, destroying it, as well as dressing and undressing,
focalize routine and in the process create meaning.

If costume and body art represent a “second skin” through which individu-
als interface with society (Hansen 2004:372; see also Turner 1980), then these
myriad acts of adornment must be essential to the process of embodiment. For
example, the Warlpiri (aboriginal Australian) term *kuruwarri*, which includes
body art, connotes the visual traces of events that structure the relationship
between persons, ancestors, and the landscape (Biddle 2001:178). Thus, marks
on the skin allow women to extend the body to encompass the landscape as
well. Such acts of adornment create the body as a subject that is “necessary to
be” (see Csordas 1993, 1996).

Scholars have already commented on the way in which bodily experiences
structure the significance of body art in ancient Meso- and Central America.
A prime example is the ritual of nose piercing and the insertion of a turquoise
jewel, which various Postclassic Mesoamerican societies considered to be an
act of royal legitimation (see Blomster 2008:32). In this case, the ritual is a dual
act, involving the puncturing of the body, which is a rite of personal transfor-
mation, as well as the insertion of ornament, which functions as a status sym-
bol (see Schildkrout 2004:323). However, through its association with the body,
the jewel becomes a sign (index) of ritual. Indexical functions of jewelry also
come into play as jewelry is alternately attached to and removed from the body
(Joyce 2000b; see also Joyce 2007). Another example of the phrasing of sym-
bolic content as embodiment appears in Classic Maya art, where overlords
receive textiles and other items of regalia as tribute from men wearing white
capes and *Spondylus* shell necklaces (Houston, Stuart, and Taube 2006:244–47;
Reents-Budet 2006:114). This ritual “bundling” of the men’s bodies highlights
the role of clothing as a medium that explicitly communicates status rela-
tionships through the skilled labor embodied in luxury goods as well as the
performative act of court presentation. The embodied status of these offerings
also perhaps signifies the labor tax levied on the subordinate men’s factions.

The experiential focus of phenomenology also relates closely to technolo-
gies of production. The social and cultural analysis of production involves
the exploration of tools and methods, acquisition of materials, and the social
context of production, such as training or rituals associated with body art creation. Considerations of these issues are generally limited in studies of adornment, mostly focusing on textiles (see Shukla 2008:392). Likewise, in the ancient American context, production remains a relatively unexplored area of body art research, despite the evidence readily available through materials analysis.

Although technical knowledge has long been recognized as symbolic (Dobres and Hoffman 1994; Lemonnier 1992), the concept of technological style denotes the concretization of these attitudes in the physical qualities of crafted objects (Hosler 1994; Lechtman 1977). One of the most discussed dimensions of technological style in ancient Mesoamerica is the association of the structural elements of textile fabrics and the processes of spinning and weaving with aspects of cosmology, gender, and sexuality (Hendon 1997; Klein 1982; Looper 2006; McCafferty and McCafferty 1996; see also Schneider 1987:413; Schneider and Weiner 1989:9). In a rare discussion of this issue in the domain of ceramics, Joyce (2008) looks at the parallels between the structure and process of making of pottery figurines and the life and death cycles of the Formative period denizens of Honduras.

Because these processes are part of the lived experience of the subject, they pertain broadly to phenomenology. For example, Dorothy Hosler (1994) discusses the ideas embodied in West Mexican metal regalia, particularly bells, hair attachments, sheet-metal pieces worn as pendants and crowns, and large tweezers, also worn as pendants. The cultural values associated with these items were not symbolic abstractions but were inherent in the physical properties of metal ornaments, mainly associated with their colors and sounds. From Mexico to Colombia, many indigenous groups linked metallurgical processes with fertility (Falchetti 2003; Hosler 1994:230). By reframing the significance of dress in terms of material properties and technological processes, these studies move toward a theoretical rematerialization of dress and, by extension, the body.

**VOLUME OVERVIEW**

The chapters of this volume consider varied and wide-ranging aspects of dress and adornment among the Formative period cultures of ancient Mesoamerica and Central America. Subjects addressed by the contributors include the development of technologies, materials and methods of manufacture, non-fabric ornamentation (including cranial and dental modification, hairstyles, tattooing, body painting, jewelry, animal pelts, and plumage), reconstruction
of regalia sets as coherent entities, symbolic dimensions (such as implications for social status, gender, and ritual, and the dressing or bundling of objects), representational strategies, and clothing and adornment as evidence of socio-political exchange.

The book documents the elaborate practices of costume and adornment over a wide geographical swathe, from Panama, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua, northwest through Honduras, into the state of Oaxaca in Mexico and the Soconusco region of southern Mesoamerica, over to the Gulf Coast Olmec region (Olman), and finally into the Maya lowlands. The chapter organization reflects a desire on the part of the editors to invert traditional approaches that open with discussions of Mesoamerican art and archaeology, then leading to Central American. The chapters address how, why, where, what, and when articles of dress or adornment were worn. However, the authors are also mindful of human agency and personhood for the wearers and makers. Indeed, it is this revivification of these ancient peoples and their cultures that is the primary goal of this volume.

While many of the contributions to this volume focus on body art as marks of social and individual identity, many also consider how these meanings are embodied through ritual performance, exchange, and technologies of production. The first chapter, by Karen O’Day, sets the overall tone for the volume, emphasizing the personal dimension of dress and adornment as reflected in burials at Sitio Conte, Panama. The experimental articulation of dress elements (mainly metal ornaments) into ensembles calls attention to the embodied dimension of social identity. Chapter 2, by Laura Wingfield, explores the role of dress as a marker of religious and social status in early Nicoyan societies of Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Using ethnographic analogies, her study makes the case that body painting, hairstyles, headgear, pendants, and handheld objects shown in ceramic figurines expressed shamanic roles of the individuals depicted. Chapter 3, by Rosemary Joyce, frames a discussion in semiotic terms of the woven, twined, or braided textiles depicted on early figurines from the area of Playa de los Muertos, Honduras. She argues that the prominence of textile imagery on these figurines points to the processes of production and networks of exchange through which value was ascribed to actual textiles. In Chapter 4 Jeffrey Blomster analyzes Formative period figurines from Oaxaca as evidence for how their creators conceptualized the intersections of gender, sex, and status. Although these figurines “fix” identities in permanent representations of hairstyles, clothing, and ornaments, diverse social actors manipulated the pigmentation of the figurines as part of a continuing discourse on social identity. Chapter 5, by Guy David Hepp and
Ivy A. Rieger, returns to the topic of figurines and gender identity, this time in the context of Formative period coastal Oaxaca. The analysis of these figurines suggests that gender roles related to patterns of bodily ornamentation, but also that gendered adornment patterns did not correspond exclusively to dichotomous male and female biological sexes. Chapter 6, by John Clark and Arlene Colman, examines the meaning of one type of ornament, earspools and flares, across a number of cultures in Formative Mesoamerica. They find that the evidence favors interpreting these objects as having diverse symbolic references, including beautification, status, and superhuman sensation. In Chapter 7, on gender and costume in Olmec art, Billie Follensbee continues the discussion of gender versus sexual identity as reflected in body adornment. She observes that while some high-status elements of attire are often linked to sex, other items seem to be gender-neutral, gender-ambiguous, and mixed-gender and therefore have a variety of possible interpretations. Chapter 8, by Katherine Faust, compares the presentation of ornamentation in relation to the surface of the body in Olmec and Huastec art. She finds that the style and meanings of the bodily inscriptions adorning these figures are similarly structured, corresponding to shared psychologies of bodily perception. Preclassic Huastec body art traditions are the focus of Chapter 9, by Sophie Marchegay. Working with figurines excavated at the site of Loma Real, Tamaulipas, the author documents a wide range of modifications of the body, including cranial modeling, scarification, body painting, ornaments, headdresses, and jewelry. Chapter 10, by Caitlin Earley and Julia Guernsey, relates the use of geometric framing bands in Preclassic Mesoamerican art to textile technologies and costuming traditions. This study suggests the importance of the conceptual overlap between these mechanisms for delineating space and for wrapping objects or persons. Chapter 11, by Whitney Lytle and F. Kent Reilly, discusses the relationship between Olmec regalia and the ritualized process of bundling sacra. The close linkages between Olmec regalia and sacred maize bundles show how the process of wrapping in textiles establishes a metaphorical connection between kings and maize. Chapter 12, by Karon Winzenz, moves to the Maya area, discussing the symbolic dimensions of cloth shown in the murals of San Bartolo, Guatemala. Through a detailed examination of the fabric techniques and contexts of the garments depicted, she argues that cloth was sacralized through creation, symbolic elaboration, and ritual use. Chapter 13, by Matthew G. Looper, explores the correlations between dress and the body in Preclassic Lowland Maya representational art and burials. Finally, Chapter 14, by John Hoopes, summarizes and comments upon the contributions of the previous chapters and points toward areas for future investigation.
1. The best-documented native language of Mexico, Classical Nahuatl (spoken by the Nahua/Aztecs), has two main terms for clothing: *tzohtzomahtli* and *(tla)quēmitl*. The first of these, *tzohtzomahtli*, is often glossed as “rag” in colonial dictionaries (Molina 2001:154r; Siméon 2002:738). However, this term was also used in the eighteenth century with reference to a burial shroud in the form of a habit of the Virgen de la Merced in the Toluca Valley (Pizzigoni 2007:76). This probably reflects the more general meaning of the root of *tzohtzomahtli*, which is the reflexive/transitive verb *(i)tzom(a)*, “for something to get sewn; to sew something” (Karttunen 1983:101). The other Nahuatl term, *(tla)quēmitl*, is translated as “dress, clothes, cape” (Molina 2001:134r; Siméon 2002:422) and is based on the transitive verbal stem *quēm(i)*, meaning “to put on or wear clothes” (Karttunen 1983:208). Modern dialects of Nahuatl preserve similar terms with nearly identical meanings (e.g., Brewer and Brewer 1971:99; Key and Key 1953:214).

2. Crossley (1996) argues that the structuralist and poststructuralist conceptions of the body are complementary to the phenomenological approach.

3. The notion of “transcendent treasures” is directly attested in Nahuatl. A more specialized term for regalia in Nahuatl is *tlatqui-tl*, translated as “property, clothes” (Molina 2001:142r) and derived from the verb *(i)tqui* “to carry something, to govern people” (Karttunen 1983:108, 300). In *Primeros Memoriales*, *tlatquitl* refers to accoutrements or wearable assets (Sahagún 1997:260) and is often coupled with the term *tlauiz(tli)*, meaning “arms, insignia” (Molina 2001:145r).

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INTRODUCTION

According to current archaeological thinking, Sitio Conte was a regional meeting place for residents of Gran Coclé that accommodated various activities (Cooke et al. 2000:154; Isaza Aizpurúa 2007:80–85; Haller 2008:185, 191). During the period CE 750–950 (Cooke et al. 2003), the cemetery at Sitio Conte served at least two hundred Conteños, and Briggs (1989:73) calculated that adult men composed the majority of the deceased (72 percent). In a few tombs at Sitio Conte, the total number of body ornaments climbs into the thousands, which is separate from the ceramic vessels and other artifacts documented in a number of tombs. The amount of body ornaments directly associated with one specific person in a tomb varies widely from zero to dozens. The cemetery does indeed distinguish certain individuals as wealthy consumers of goods.

This chapter focuses on a man who the archaeologists directly associated with twenty-five items, the majority being body ornaments in gold alloy, stone, resin, and animal products. For reasons explained below, I call this man “Lord 15.” This study confirms one of the general observations made by Samuel Lothrop (1937:14), lead archaeologist of the Peabody Museum’s excavations and author of the two-volume site report: “Articles of personal adornment were worn in great quantity” at Sitio Conte.

I rely on all available archaeological data to examine Lord 15’s body ornaments. Lothrop’s (1937, 1942) site report contains the excavation data and object illustrations, as well as the first round of interpretation, for the Sitio Conte objects excavated by the Peabody
Museum. The report comprehensively lists the grave’s contents and illustrates Lord 15 and his ornaments in a ground plan (Figure 1.1). Aside from the report, I consulted the museum’s archives and object collections in person. Five items of Lord 15 transferred to the Brooklyn Museum were studied in photographs. Fortunately, my previous research about the ceramics at the cemetery also relied on these diverse data sources (O’Day 2003).

With these data, I refocus on the individual ornaments as the set they originally were: a group of pieces that contributed to a unified effect on Lord 15’s remains. Following excavation, the ornaments were separated from one another for accession into the museum collection. Likewise, the site report organized the description and analysis of the excavated material by function, media, and imagery rather than people’s sets. It is appropriate for the ornaments to be examined as a set since examples have been identified in other ancient American cultures. In addition to his ornament set, the archaeologists associated Lord 15 with a celt, shark tooth, ceramic incense burners, ceramic vessels, and multimedia mirrors. These items with the ornament set make up his mortuary ensemble. The ornament set is the primary focus in this chapter, although the other objects are related to the ornament set.

To visualize Lord 15’s reunited ornament set, this chapter presents four computer-rendered illustrations. No comparable representation of a specific Sitio Conte person exists. The precedents are in Andean studies: recent projects based upon excavations indisputably more sophisticated than those carried out at the Sitio Conte in the early twentieth century. Furthermore, the archaeologists who performed the Andean excavations were able to participate directly in the creation of the illustrations. Despite such enormous differences in collecting and representing the data sets, it is possible to construct illustrations that are faithful to the Sitio Conte archaeological record and also improve the ability to see the ornament set of a specific man. Only one person’s ornament set is reconstructed here, so it is hoped that more projects will be initiated in the wake of this one.

With Lord 15’s ornament set reunited, I attempt to redirect the conversation away from the well-documented role of ornaments in displaying a person’s rank and wealth in Gran Coclé societies (Briggs 1989; Helms 1979) and toward the set’s role in reconstituting Lord 15. To do so, I rely on Chris Fowler’s (2004) assessment of personhood in diverse archaeological contexts (especially mortuary ones), Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s (1998) discussion of Amerindian personhood, and Stone’s (2011) examination of Amerindian shamanic visionary experience in relation to ancient American art. Lord 15’s mortuary ensemble portrays an inclusive and enduring (after death) conception
of personhood much like Fowler describes: humans, nonhuman animals, and objects are people. Examples of each of these categories have a role in Lord 15’s mortuary ensemble. The capitalized names of nonhuman animals and objects in this chapter signal their personhood. In addition, I draw more conclusions
about the ornament set based upon Viveiros de Castro’s description of Amerindian ideas of how humans envision themselves and the other people in the universe, such as the nonhuman animals. Stone’s book provides many insights relevant to the imagery on specific ornaments, ranging from animal interactions and transformations in shamans’ trances to the creative ambiguity in artistic embodiments of shamans’ visionary experiences. In addition, Stone offers new ideas about well-known (but poorly interrogated) kinds of imagery, such as the so-called composite beings, double-headed creatures, independent human heads and eyes, and twisted patterns. In all, the archaeological database and variety of anthropological and art historical sources hopefully render an original contribution to Sitio Conte studies.

This also should be an important contribution to Isthmo-Colombian studies. Sitio Conte has occupied a central place in the scholarly conversation about this area, and its gold ornaments have exerted especially powerful influence since they constitute the largest collection of published archaeologically excavated (i.e., not looted) goldwork (Cooke et al. 2003:93; Quilter 2003:1). There is another way of looking at this situation (Quilter 2003:2): archaeologists have excavated goldwork at only a few other Gran Coclé sites (Cerro Juan Díaz and El Caño), so if one wishes to work with provenienced gold ornaments from this part of the Isthmo-Colombian area, then the Sitio Conte corpus has been one of few options. Despite the site’s perhaps disproportionate significance in Isthmo-Colombian studies and the overemphasis accorded its goldwork (Briggs 1993:158–60; Haller 2008:83), no Sitio Conte person has ever had his/her ornament set thoroughly investigated until now.

WHO WAS LORD 15?

Since many people were buried at the cemetery, I turned to Briggs (1989) to identify one man as my focus because his (ibid.:132) research about the Sitio Conte cemetery statistically demonstrated the role of costume/sumptuary items as the criterion for a person’s place in the hierarchical chiefdom system. I selected a person from Briggs’s cluster of highest-ranking graves: the old man in Grave 5 whose remains were numbered XV by the archaeologists (Lothrop 1937:230), hence his title “Lord 15” in this chapter. His wealth of costume/sumptuary items marked him as one of the adult men who experienced high rank (Briggs 1989:81).

Although fourteen other people were buried in the same grave, which was large, lavish, and complex (Lothrop 1937:227), the ornament set and mortuary ensemble are treated as Lord 15’s for two reasons. First, although relationships
between the remains of individual human beings and the objects in the graves can be uncertain (Cooke et al. 2003:122), the site report documents that the ornaments were found in proximity to Lord 15’s remains and some even maintained proper wear position despite the complex soil conditions and burial practices. Lothrop believes that the deceased were desiccated prior to burial because interment was limited to the short period (perhaps a four-month window) when floodwater from the Coclé River did not submerge the cemetery (Lothrop 1937:51; Hearne and Sharer 1992:9). Further, carbonized decay around Lord 15’s bones suggested that cotton mantles were wrapped around his flexed and ornamented remains (Lothrop 1937:23). His bundle was placed on a stool (Lothrop 1937:234). In the course of time, the roof and textile canopy collapsed and crushed him. A few ornaments even remained in their wear positions to some degree, such as his helmet and cuffs, and the rest were scattered to the north of his skull and arm bones. Subsequent researchers follow Lothrop’s lead, neither adding nor subtracting any ornaments originally assigned to Lord 15. The second reason to treat the ornament set as Lord 15’s is from ethnohistory: he was buried in a manner resembling Lord Parita, a native leader in Gran Coclé who died in 1519 and whose remains suffered a brutal ransacking at the hands of Gaspar de Espinosa’s second expedition. Gaspar de Espinosa described Lord Parita with a helmet, multiple necklaces, limb cuffs, chest plates and medals, and a belt with hanging bells (Lothrop 1937:7). We shall see shortly that Lord 15 wore a comparable ornament set.

LORD 15’S ORNAMENT SET

As suggested above, scant investigation of Sitio Conte ornament sets occurred prior to this project. Mary Helms (1979:86–87) proposed continuity between precolonial gold ornaments and the “golden clothing” of a Kuna celestial person/culture hero, although she proceeded in a way that envisioned the golden clothing on living chiefs, not deceased people. More recently, John Hoopes (2005:8) raised the possibility of “ritual costumes” at Sitio Conte, but his hypothesis was difficult to test because no one has given much thought to ornament sets. His comment partly inspired this project.

One drawing (Linares 1977:fig. 18) is the only precedent for illustration of Sitio Conte ornament sets because it arranges various types of ornaments archaeologically attested at the cemetery on a standing, robust, adult man. This drawing portrays no one in particular but rather displays the trends in ornamentation of the wealthiest men over several generations. It also glosses
over important differences. For example, the figure wears ear ornaments, which Lord 15 did not wear (see below). In addition, the drawing represents only ornaments, not other associated items that may be part of a person’s mortuary ensemble. While it was indisputably a significant step because it joined a human body with ornaments, the 1977 drawing is a generic one that mixes mortuary practices with living people and one that does not contend at all with significant differences between people.

In contrast to the 1977 drawing, the illustrations in this chapter focus on one specific person dressed with his particular ornament set (Figures 1.2–1.5). However, these illustrations raise a few issues of their own. First, they attempt to present Lord 15 in a manner consistent with the site report’s limited description; yet they also seek to render the ornament set clearly visible. For these reasons, Lord 15 sits on a stool, which reflects Lothrop’s (1937) conclusion as described above. The flat, white mantle draped over his shoulders is an effort to document Lothrop’s observation of one or more mantles around his remains and the possibility that the two disks were sewn to them, as discussed below. His eyes are closed, but his remains are not desiccated, flexed, wrapped, or tied because most of these conditions would render the ornament set less visible. For a similar reason, the arrangement of the ornaments is for illustration purposes only. For example, the nesting of the three pendants down his chest is undocumented. I would suspect that Lord 15 had very specific (yet also variable) wear positions for these pendants. Thus, the illustrations envision the ornament set on Lord 15, but the reader must keep in mind the full details of his mortuary circumstances.

**Helmet 142**

Lord 15 wore a gold hemispherical helmet that was found between his arms (Figure 1.1, no. 142) with skull fragments inside it (Lothrop 1937:133, 234). A row of holes is around the base, which Lothrop (1937:133) attributed to the suspension of dangles, although the archaeologists identified no artifact(s) in Grave 5 as such. The helmet’s soft, thin gold offered no protection for Lord 15, at least from physical contact (Figure 1.3); indeed the archaeologists found it severely crushed and bent. Hemispherical metal helmets were associated with only three other high-ranking people at the cemetery (Briggs 1989:table A-14). They are also archaeologically documented in Gran Darién (eastern Panama) and parts of Colombia (Lothrop 1937:137–39; Bray 1978:cat. nos. 31a, 112, 368, 369). The description of Chief Parita with a hemispherical helmet suggests that it was an enduring kind of head ornament in Gran Coclé (see Wingfield and Hoopes chapters in this volume).
Helmet 1429 is entirely covered with embossed imagery of a daedal nature that makes identification of the parts difficult (Lothrop 1937:figs. 107, 108). There are three repetitions of a full figure, which I consider here the “main figures” because they are the largest and their bodies form axes across the top and side planes of the helmet. The main figure on the top holds an upright standing position, whereas the two on the sides hold inverted standing positions. In other words, their heads are at the helmet’s edge with the aforementioned perforations, and their feet are closest to the main figure on the top. These three main figures share many features: two profile heads that when beheld together simultaneously also look like one frontal head (especially at the eyes); long, narrow, curled snouts with interior zigzag lines representing pointed teeth; large, round, concentric, open eyes, which recall those of a human shaman in a trance or nonhuman animals (Stone 2011:89–90); frontal torso with a trapezoidal shape in the center; raised arms; bent knees; and feet turned out to the sides. No characteristics confirm the sex.

In addition, unfurling to each side of each main figure, perhaps as an extension from the “knob” located at the main figure’s belt, is another figure. Thus, there are three main figures plus six subsidiary figures. The subsidiary figures consistently display a frontal face with two eyes, nose, oval mouth, pointed teeth, extended tongue, pair of claws growing from the head, and
torso. Again, their sex is ambiguous. Aside from that, each iteration of this subsidiary figure varies: some are inverted (those on the top of the helmet) and some are upright (those on the sides of the helmet); some have four limbs (sides) and others have three (top) because one rear leg turns into a serpentine line that culminates in the round, concentric “knob” located by the belt of the main figure.

The precise, axial, and repetitive formal organization of the nine total figures is countered by their extraordinary subject matter. Researchers have offered
various interpretations of their religious, social, and/or political identities; Lothrop (1937:123–25) called the main figure a double-headed humanized Crocodile God whereas Helms (1977:116–19) saw this figure as an iguana and affiliated it with a “sacred-secular authority” or “culture hero/deity” and later (2000:88) a figure named the “belted hunter.” Due to its combination of human and nonhuman animal parts and/or behaviors, Cooke (2004a:281; 2004b:121–24; 2011:140) maintains its shamanic properties and status as an icon of Gran Coclé’s most powerful social unit. It was indeed one of the most popular and enduring images in Gran Coclé metalwork and painted ceramics, and it participated in the Crocodile Man iconography of much of the Isthmo-Colombian area (Hoopes and Fonseca Zamora 2003:73–75). In this chapter, the main figure is named Crocodile-Human to keep the vocabulary consistent with most of the previous publications and to ensure that it is not confused with images of the reptile or human beings. Because they appear connected to the main figures, the subsidiary figures are treated in this chapter as the assistants (Stone 2011:61–62) of Crocodile-Human, but their identity is too ambiguous to justify a name.

Nose Clip 138

Lord 15’s cast nose ornament rested on Disk 147 in the grave (Figure 1.1, no. 138). The main unit is a wide semicircular band that clasped the nasal septum (Figure 1.3; Lothrop 1937:fig. 120a). Originally, three dangles hung from handles with suspension holes, and although these handles are still present, none of the dangles exists today. Two pairs of heads drop from the lower portion of the band: one pair is located in space behind the other. Each pair is linked by a narrow, limbless, serpentine band doubling as the body. This is the bicephalic crocodilian image produced throughout much of the Isthmo-Colombian area (Hoopes and Fonseca Zamora 2003:69–71). Although Stone emphasizes bicephalic snakes more than crocodilians, she identifies the two-headed condition as “one of the most diagnostic components of shamanic art in these regions” (2011:81). Because of the crocodilian snout, short serpentine body, and absence of limbs, this chapter refers to this figure as Bicephalic Crocodile-Snake to be as inclusive as possible.

Pendants 134, 137, and 140

According to Lothrop, the effigy pendants of the Sitio Conte cemetery “present more varieties and complexities than any other kind of artifact” (Lothrop
1937:164), and Lord 15’s three pendants could not prove him more right. All three were close together in Grave 5 (Figure 1.1, nos. 134, 137, and 140): Pendant 137 settled in an upside-down position while Pendant 134 remained upright, like Pendant 140. Each one was fabricated with one or more suspension loops so that it could hang on his chest from a cord (Figure 1.3).

Pendant 134, a cast object, is laden with anthropomorphic imagery. Two human beings (men?) standing on a bar (now missing) are the main figures. They possess large, bulging, round, “slit” eyes that have been known to signal a human being in a trance (Stone 2011:88–90). They also have disproportionately large ears. Both wear conical hats, collars, belts, loincloths, chest cords, and leg and ankle bands. They lean forward and drop their faces downward. They carry what Lothrop (1937:20) recognized as wooden clubs, although there is no way to corroborate his assertion. Each “club” has an inverted human head attached at the end opposite the club (one head is lost). Remarkably, the heads have the same eyes as the main figures. A bundle of three spears is in the other hand. The main figures have one bird attached to their belts and/or chest cords (Lothrop 1937:166; Cooke et al. 2003:130), which, like the subsidiary figures on Helmet 142, are treated as each main figure’s assistant. Between the two main figures, an inverted head on a cord dangles, and another item was at the top that could not be restored (Lothrop 1937:166); perhaps it was an upright head or a club.

A variety of scholarly literature has illuminated the main figures. Lothrop (1937:166) and Cooke et al. (2003:128–31) identified them as warriors. Mark Miller Graham (1996:249) would highlight their conical hats and staffs or paddles (more than war clubs) and thereby probably assign them to the merchant iconography in Isthmo-Colombian and Mesoamerican art. Hoopes (2007:461, 470) emphasizes their conical hats and multiple trophy heads that together signal dark shamans or sorcerers. Stone (2011:84) asks us to consider the idea that the human heads are vision heads instead of trophy heads, that is, embodiments of the shamanic visionary experience, much of which transpires in the head. Of course, these interpretations are compatible to a degree because shamans, warriors, and merchants partake in similar activities: traveling beyond ordinary and familiar locales, confronting dangerous people, and employing violence. Here the main figures are simply named Human with Assistant in this chapter, albeit with an array of telling attributes (heads, equipment).

Like Helmet 142 and Nose Clip 138, Pendant 134 likely maintained widespread regional recognition. Lothrop (1937:166) commented that similar two-figure pendants are recorded in Gran Chiriquí to the west and the province
of Barbacoas (southwestern Colombia). Bray (1992:45) asserted “pan-Isthmian connections” of the warrior pendants despite variation in details of anatomy and attributes. More recently, Hoopes (2007:462) pointed out that Pendant 134 resembles stone sculpture produced in Gran Chiriquí (eastern Costa Rica and western Panama). Be they shamans, warriors, and/or merchants, these aggressive, well-outfitted Humans were recognized across the Isthmo-Colombian area and even into Mesoamerica (Graham 1993).

Lothrop (1937:105, fig. 47) identified the main figure of Pendant 137, a cast and hammered pendant, as “Bat God” blended with “Crocodile God.” While the crocodile features remain elusive, there are indeed features resembling Neotropical bats, such as large ears, flattened triangular or leaflike nose, and sharp teeth (Kricher 1997:98–100). However, the figure stands straight and raises both hands in a distinctive gesture, lending it human qualities. Within the gesture, one digit touches the other six, which is not human. Large, round eyes bulge forward. In addition to its bipedal stance and the gesture, the figure displays a square or trapezoidal forehead, which recalls human effigy vessels excavated from Sitio Conte tombs (Lothrop 1942:figs. 201, 205, 206a–g). In addition, there are indications of a garment; a contour line runs across the knees, and the triangular shape dropping from the central cavity arguably doubles as a loincloth panel held in place by the visible band. Behind the canines, square teeth are visible. Together, the figure signals imbrications of human and nonhuman natures (Stone-Miller 2002:127; Stone-Miller 2004:49, 54; Stone 2011). A pair of scrolls flows from its mouth, as do more behind the head, waist, and feet.

Bat imagery combined with human imagery relates to a pattern of associations in the Isthmo-Colombian area. Hoopes and Fonseca Zamora (2003:75–76) and Looper (1996:110), working on material from different regions within the area, agree that the two together are affiliated with shamanism and supernatural communication. The theme of supernatural communication is worth pursuing more because it connects with the four round cavities in this pendant. The central one held a mirror, probably rendered with pieces of iron pyrite (Lothrop 1937:105). Smaller pieces, possibly of different material, fit in the three peripheral cavities and were attached by a cord through two holes in the bottom of each depression (Lothrop 1937:105). There is some evidence from the area, particularly from the time of conquest, that people living on the Caribbean coast wore mirrors around their necks rather than holding them (Ibarra 2003:385).

Notice also that each cavity frame is a twisted cord (recall the cords of Pendant 134). This arrangement appears repeatedly on Isthmo-Colombian
ornaments (Hearne and Sharer 1992:plates 43, 50; Bray 1992:fig. 3.11). The twisted cord may allude to a significant piece of cosmic equipment: the cord that serves as an axis mundi helping people enter other cosmological regions. For example, Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff (1988:27) documented the cord as a tool modern Yogis use to drop or climb into the realms of the cosmos above and below Earth. Stone (2011:14, 41, 122, 133) alerts us to a related possibility: the twisted cord resembles the entheogenic vines that grow in twisted form (Banisteriopsis). None of these associations is misplaced in Pendant 137: the connecting cord/vine frames mirrors of supernatural communication. The lord’s affiliation with cosmological communication strengthens because of the pair of handheld mirrors and incense burners among his mortuary ensemble, which are discussed below. All together, the components of this pendant suggest the provisional name Bat-Human-Mirror.

Pendant 140 comprises a sperm whale tooth, four gold overlays, and a cast headpiece (Lothrop 1937:figs. 47, 160a). Cooke (2004a:275) explains that such teeth were salvaged from stranded whales around Panama Bay and the Pearl Islands. Cooke (2011:152) also has summarized current, albeit limited, knowledge of tooth pendants in Gran Coclé ca. 700–1100, as well as tooth effigy pendants made from shell. Patricia Anawalt (1998:239–40) has observed that the pendant shaped like a whale tooth (be it the animal product itself or another medium) became a treasured regalia item in communities along the Pacific coast from Ecuador to western Mexico long before burial at Sitio Conte. Lord 15 participated in this tradition with Pendant 140 tailored to his particular Gran Coclé culture.

The tooth was carved to suggest the shape of a creature with four limbs, which were covered with the overlays, and the headpiece was positioned on one end. Altogether, a striking creature resulted that Lothrop (1937:173, 186) called a representation of the Bat God due to the upturned nose and large pointed ears. Next to the ears, two square metal dangles hung from handles. The rectangular facial contours suggest a human, as already discussed. The creature possesses round eyes that also bulge forward from the facial plane, which recall shamans’ eyes during a trance (Stone 2011:87–88). The identity of the sharp projections next to the nose is uncertain. Bicephalic Crocodile-Snake (recall Nose Clip 138) streams from the sides of the head and the corners of the mouth, which is open to display pointed teeth. Overall, Pendant 140 presents a challenging subject, but its materials and figural representations suggest a provisional description as Bat-Human-Whale with Bicephalic Crocodile-Snake Assistant.
Disks 147 and 148

The ground plan documents that one embossed disk was found partially overlapping the other one (Figure 1.1, nos. 147, 148). Disks 147 and 148 have no fewer than six holes each (although not in the same locations), suggesting they were sewn to fabric (Figure 1.3). One El Caño man was wrapped in fabric for burial, and inside the bundle he wore a pair of plaques sewn(?) to the back of his tunic and another pair sewn to the front (Williams 2012:74). The description of Lord Parita records plaques on his shoulders and chest. Lothrop (1937:14, 115) noted the ethnohistoric records of living people at the time of contact also sewing disks to mantles. Following these pieces of evidence, the disks possibly were set on Lord 15’s remains inside the bundle. It is not inconceivable that they were sewn in a vertical or horizontal arrangement to a tunic on his remains inside the bundle or even suspended by cords looped through some of the holes.

Both disks present the same main and subsidiary figures rendered by dadaal embossing (Lothrop 1937:91). The main figure bears a resemblance to that of Helmet 142, yet the disks’ main figure is single-headed and frontal with a hemispherical upper head and an oval jaw. Included within are rows of pointed teeth; a wide, round nose; round ears or ear ornaments with curved peaks; and large, round, concentric eyes staring blankly forward. Three rigid projections extend above its head. This main figure stands with bent legs, feet turned to the sides, and arms raised next to its ears. Its sex is uncertain. Also somewhat like the main figure of Helmet 142, the disks’ main figure has two creatures unfurling from “knobs” at its waist. These subsidiary figures bear a profile head with one concentric round eye with a horizontal line in the center, curled snout, pointed teeth, extended tongue, and one limb. The subsidiary figures seem to portray Crocodile. Due to their arrangement in relation to the main figure, they can be provisionally treated as the main figure’s assistants. As for the main figure, there are some human qualities, but plenty of ambiguity remains, warranting an open-ended name: Human with Crocodile Assistants.

Cuffs 143 and 144 and Greaves 145 and 146

Lord 15 was associated with one pair of cuffs to ornament his forearms and a pair of greaves for his calves (Figure 1.2). The archaeologists found Cuffs 143 and 144 actually around Lord 15’s radii and ulnae (Figure 1.1, nos. 143 and 144). Greaves 145 and 146 were not in proximity to the lord’s leg bones, but rested underneath his arms (Figure 1.1, nos. 145 and 146). Each item is a thin sheet
formed into a cylinder that is plain except for the embossed band of imagery at one end. They apparently could be secured in place around the limbs with cord through the holes at the corners of the sheets.

Each embossed band consists of two iterations of a creature that Lothrop (1937:116) identified as the crested crocodile with a bird perched on its tail (Figures 1.4, 1.5). Elsewhere in the site report he (1937:22–23) called them “property marks,” but there is no corroborating archaeological evidence, and Helms (1977:104) interpreted a similar image as an iguana. At first glance, it

Figure 1.4. Illustration of the two Crocodile–Eagle figures on Cuff 143. Artist Jian Luo.
might appear that the reptile and bird are two separate creatures, but they are connected because the bird’s tailfeather blends seamlessly into the crocodile’s tail. The crocodiles, which are in profile, display a curled snout with pointed teeth, round eye, a crest, and two limbs. The birds turn their heads to one side (profile), but their torsos and tailfeathers are frontal and they spread their wings out. Their legs and talons are visible. This is a pose of the eagle/águila or vulture pendants, which are documented in most parts of the Isthmo-Colombian area for long periods of time during antiquity, as well as the time
of contact and later (Ibarra 2003; Cooke 2011:150). Here this figure is called Crocodile-Eagle.

The pairs of Crocodile-Eagle on each ornament present challenging visual dynamics. On Cuff 143 (Figure 1.4), the Crocodiles look forward so that they stare at each other in the center of the band (snouts almost touch), while the Eagles look away from the center, one to its right and the other to its left. On Cuff 144 the Crocodiles also face each other at the center, but each Eagle looks to its left. The embossed bands on Greaves 145 and 146 are more consistent than the cuffs (Figure 1.5). The two Crocodiles at the center of the band look behind themselves and thus turn away from each other, and all of the Eagle heads turn either left or right so that they look away from the center, too. These subtleties would be nearly impossible to perceive when the ornaments were on the limbs of a deceased person.

**Bells 139 and 141**

Lord 15 was associated with three metal bells, which were actually spread apart in the grave (Figure 1.1, nos. 139 and 141). Bell 139 is intact (Lothrop 1937:fig. 74e), but Bell 141, which actually represents two bells in the ground plan, is a group of corroded fragments. One unprovenienced painted plate in the Conte ceramic style of Gran Coclé (ca. 700–1000 CE) portrays a figure wearing pairs of bells at the wrists and ankles (Cooke 2004b:123). Preliminary descriptions of the excavations at El Caño report a buried man with one bracelet of bells (Williams 2012:73). Recall that Chief Parita wore a belt from which hung bells (Lothrop 1937:46). From these admittedly meager gleanings, it is appropriate that Lord 15 was ornamented with bells in some manner, but it is impossible to ascertain from the records even an approximation of where and how he wore them, and thus they do not appear in this chapter’s illustrations.

Bell 139 has the typical components documented in Mesoamerica and the Isthmo-Colombian area: casting sprues, suspension loop, resonator, slit, and clapper (Paris 2008:49). In terms of shape, it resembles a type used in Mesoamerica and the Isthmo-Colombian area (Paris 2008:53), so it too transcended cultural and linguistic borders. Although effigy bells are documented at Sitio Conte, Bell 139 is plain except for metal bands around the top of the resonator.

**Overlays 135 and 136**

A pair of *tumbaga* overlays was located between the pendants and disks (Figure 1.1, nos. 135 and 136). They were possibly set over or wrapped around
whale teeth or resin items; recall the four overlays on the creature’s limbs in Pendant 140. However, there are reasons to consider other scenarios. First, neither teeth nor resins were recovered in Grave 5. In addition, Overlay 135 is essentially a plain cylinder with two holes near its opening, as if to suspend it or attach it to something. This feature, combined with the absence of related whale teeth or resins, which is documented in other Sitio Conte graves (Hearne and Sharer 1992:94), raises the possibility that these overlays were ornaments displayed in some manner. Due to this uncertainty, the overlays do not appear in this chapter’s illustrations, like the bells.

**No Ear Ornaments?**

Lord 15 conspicuously lacked this distinctive type of ornament. Indeed, it is the only costume/sumptuary item that he seems to have been missing. Absent ear ornaments are curious since they are ubiquitous throughout the Isthmo-Colombian area, as well as the entire ancient Americas for that matter, especially for adult men. At the cemetery they are documented (Lothrop 1937:147), some even located at the sides of skulls (Hearne and Sharer 1992:116). That said, the absence of ear ornaments was not unique to Lord 15; Briggs (1989:138) found certain costume/sumptuary objects isolated to the graves in the top-ranking clusters, but ear ornaments were not among them. An unlikely scenario is that three ear rods excavated from Layer 3 of Grave 5 were the lord’s. Perhaps Lord 15 wore ear ornaments fabricated in perishable materials. Or this situation was the result of the fact that ear ornaments just would not work well with the lord’s desiccated remains.

**LORD 15’S TOOLS AND EQUIPMENT**

Items in the immediate vicinity of Lord 15 that cannot be identified as ornaments in any sense should be included in his mortuary ensemble because they raise issues that resonate with the ornaments. As noted above, he had one stone celt (Figure 1.1, no. 108), a crucial agricultural tool documented in widely varying quantities in the Sitio Conte graves, not to mention an array of Isthmo-Colombian and Mesoamerican contexts. There was one fossil tooth (Figure 1.1, no. 122), perhaps from the giant shark, which Lothrop (1937:197) reports were usually associated with incense burners, and that is generally true in Lord 15’s burial, although the two kinds of equipment were not in great proximity. Lord 15 was associated with three miniature ceramic vessels and an effigy pedestal bowl (Figure 1.1, nos. 106, 107, 111, 121).
More striking are his pairs of incense burners and mirrors. Incense Burners 109 and 110 were near each other by one of Lord 15’s arms (Figure 1.1, nos. 109 and 110). Ceramic incense burners were hardly unprecedented, neither in the graves nor in Gran Coclé during various periods (Cooke 2004a:278). Lord 15 was also associated with two round sandstone mirror backs, each with one hole drilled in its center (Figure 1.1, nos. 132 and 133). These backs supported mirrors of a “mosaic of thin pyrite slabs attached by wax or gum” (Lothrop 1937:102). Lothrop (1937:105) asserted that mirror backs with one central hole were hand mirrors and never ornaments, yet Mirror 133 also had a pair of smaller holes at the edge of one side (Lothrop 1937:fig. 69e), which opens up more possibilities for suspension. Of course, the two mirrors recall the four mirrors embedded in Pendant 137. It is possible that Mirrors 132 and 133 were ornaments attached to his mantles or suspended on his remains. In all, incense burners and mirrors were a potent combination in ancient America. Smoke and reflective surfaces were (and continue to be) instruments crucial to a variety of activities, including divination and healing.12

**LORD 15, HIS ORNAMENT SET, MORTUARY ENSEMBLE, AND CONCEPTIONS OF PERSONHOOD AT SITIO CONTE**

Researchers of death and mortuary practices in various cultural contexts have asserted that they cause a “transformation of the person” and the treatment of the remains plays a role in the person’s reconstitution in the afterlife (Fowler 2004:100). Efforts toward reconstitution may be directed at any of the deceased’s aspects, including the corporeal, intellectual, sensory, social, and spiritual, to name only a few. If one just concentrates on bodily reconstitution for the present purposes, it is crucial to recall the condition of Lord 15’s remains. His corpse was, among other things, a bundle of failed senses, systems, and organs; its physical integrity was compromised by desiccation, if that indeed was one of the funerary practices as Lothrop hypothesized. Ultimately the archaeologists found only bones because the rest was destroyed by the soil and seasonal floodwater. It is worth keeping in mind that his buriers probably expected this outcome because opening graves to add/relocate people and objects is a documented practice at the cemetery, including even in Lord 15’s grave (Lothrop 1937:227).

The roles of dress and ornament in reconstitution of the deceased are amply documented in the ancient Americas, be they a greenstone mask placed on a Maya king or the clothing and ornaments provided to Inka mallki. It seems relevant to Lord 15’s reconstitution that the human effigy vessels in Sitio Conte
tombs portray living (eyes open) human beings with geometric patterns of painting, tattooing, or scarification on their faces, arms, legs, and/or torsos. Yet these effigies of living humans are rarely portrayed wearing ornaments and certainly not ones with complex figural representations like Lord 15’s (Lothrop 1942:figs. 123, 206; Briggs 1989:fig. 22). This contrasts other ceramic styles in the Isthmo-Colombian area representing living humans with ornaments (see Wingfield’s chapter in this volume). While it is dangerous to assume that the Sitio Conte effigies imitated the practices of living Contenños, this consistent difference suggests that multimedia ornament sets were deemed more appropriate for deceased human people rather than the living.

Thinking more about the role of ornament sets in reconstitution at the Sitio Conte cemetery, it is possible to make an apposite observation in accordance with the scholarly literature about gold and light in ancient American cultures: buried for eternity in the aphotic soil of Earth, Lord 15, laden with warm metals, was reconstituted as a bundle of light. In fact, this suggestion does not stray from existing ideas. Mary Helms (1979:86–87, 91–92) traces the evidence for the “golden clothing” worn by indigenous culture heroes, warriors, and leaders in the region from ancient to modern eras. She determined that golden clothing possessed the sun’s essence and signaled the wearer’s strength, intelligence, and judicious authority. In contrast, defeated enemies lost their golden clothing. Reconstituted, Lord 15 embodied her idea and related ones conceived by other scholars. For example, Nicholas Saunders’s study of an American Indian “aesthetic of brilliance” includes refulgent human beings as “wearing light” to harness energy (2003, 23). Most recently, Stone (2011:62) points out that light, brilliance, and luminosity denote the knowledge exchanged in shamanic visions, which recalls Helms’s observation about golden clothing and intelligence.

The archaeological and art historical evidence for the role of Lord 15’s ornament set and mortuary ensemble in his reconstitution connects with additional ideas about the roles of dress and ornaments for indigenous Americans in their attainment and maintenance of personhood. Specifically, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1998) provides comparison points for thinking about Lord 15’s reconstitution. Although he does not deal with ancient body ornaments specifically fabricated from gold and animal products, and his anthropological data are from modern Amazonia, I borrow some of his ideas to think about Lord 15’s ornament set and mortuary ensemble in relation to his reconstitution.

One of Viveiros de Castro’s many observations about the body is that the clothing humans wear is itself a body and thus it allows wearers “to activate the powers of a different body” (Viveiros de Castro 1998:482). Viveiros de
Castro provides a vivid example: a person changes into a wetsuit to function like a fish. In addition, he includes examples of the types of clothing he has in mind: feathers, colors, designs, and “other animal prostheses” (1998:480). The variety in his list is important for this chapter because both real animal parts and “designs” make up Lord 15’s ornament set. Viveiros de Castro (1998:482) describes such dress and ornament items as “instruments” and “equipment.” Although Lord 15 is deceased, and Viveiros de Castro emphasizes dress and ornament in relation to the personhood of the living, the deceased should not be excluded from his ideas because they tend to maintain their personhood, albeit greatly transformed; Fowler (2004) spends much time exploring the personhood of the dead. Keeping this in mind, Lord 15’s ornament set and mortuary ensemble may be interpreted as his new body, an instrument allowing him to activate certain capacities and perspectives.

It is possible to be more precise in this application of Viveiros de Castro’s ideas: the ornament set and mortuary ensemble seem to emphasize the reconstitution of Lord 15’s visual capacities. They functioned together as a seeing instrument to endow him with the perspectives of Bat–Human–Whale with Bicephalic Crocodile–Snake Assistant (Pendant 140), Bat–Human–Mirror (Pendant 137), Bicephalic Crocodile–Snake (Nose Clip 138), Crocodile–Eagle (Cuffs 143 and 144; Greaves 145 and 146), Crocodile–Human with Assistants (Helmet 140), Human with Assistant (Pendant 134), and Human with Crocodile Assistants (Disks 147 and 148). What does the person see if she/he can see what all these people can see? This is a question that Lord 15 could answer perhaps, and the implications of his situation are remarkable. Just take Pendant 140 as one example: Viveiros de Castro not only asks us to consider how and what Bat, Human, Crocodile, Snake, and Whale each uniquely sees while upside down, at night, underwater, during molting, etc., but he also alerts us to the possibility that this “composite” representation should be approached as a distinctive person with its own visual capacities and viewpoint: Bat–Human–Crocodile–Snake–Whale.

At this juncture, it may have become apparent that at least two fundamental notions about the universe and its inhabitants permeate this discussion. First, many different kinds of people (besides the humans) fill the universe, and this is because Amerindian concepts of personhood tend to be more inclusive than modern Western concepts: “Wherever there is a point of view there is a subject position” (Viveiros de Castro 1998:476), and therefore nonhuman animals, plants, substances, and objects (including “art” objects and their imagery) maintain personhood (Fowler 2004:119–26; Stone 2011:68). Thus, incense burners and mirrors are people with potential to possess and transfer their
capacities to other people. They can also transfer the capacities of images they bear (Stone 2011:53). While Amerindian personhood in mortuary contexts was not her primary research topic, Stone came across one implication of this conception of personhood while she investigated embodiments of the shamanic transformation experience: “within the overall logic of transformation such animal-shamans might turn into humans as their other selves” (Stone 2011:118). In other words, there is evidence in Amerindian shamanism of animal populations envisioned with their own shamans who change form. As one can imagine, this also sustains more dynamic personhood with change happening on the inside and outside of the body. The second notion is related to the first: a person’s vision is also dynamic. Few scholars have even attempted to document and describe this phenomenon, but one exception is again Stone’s (2011:35) examination of the “visionary sight” practiced by living shamans (opposed to “normal sight”). For example, she (2011:39, 41–42, 52, 56) points out repeatedly with a variety of examples that animals provide their perspectives when they appear in a human person’s visions and that a human’s transformation into a nonhuman animal during a vision is often accompanied by changes of perspective. The variety of people embodied in his ornament set and mortuary ensemble indicate that the reconstitution of Lord 15’s vision and perspective sought to increase their quality and range.

I also infer concern about reconstituting Lord 15’s visual capacities because most of his ornaments carry multiple heads, which possess eyes that are often oriented toward multiple directions. The greatest example is Helmet 142: eighteen large, round, and concentric eyes stare from the figures on the top, front, back, and sides. In fact, these eyes are the most discernible feature amid the swirling welter of curved lines. Further, the eyes even resemble the round “knobs” that seem to link the subsidiary figures to the main figures’ belts, thereby potentially conjuring three more pairs of eyes across the helmet. Only the quantity of limbs outnumbers that of the eyes. In a sense, reconstitution of Lord 15’s vision endowed him with “eyes in the back of his head,” among other locations. Lest one begin to wonder if this observation is excessive, Stone (2011:91) already concluded that “more eyes can be added to a range of images” in Central American and central Andean art embodying the shamanic visionary experience, and she identifies the navel-eye of a shaman on a Nasca vessel and the “supernumerary eyes” on a Moche visionary head (Stone 2011:153, 193–200). Finally, the represented people in Lord 15’s ornament set assume a spectrum of vantage points. Several look directly forward. On more than one ornament, Bicephalic Crocodile-Snake looks simultaneously in two opposite directions. Each Crocodile-Human on Helmet 142 looks in two opposite
directions and wears a belt linked to its assistants, who stare frontally with both eyes on the beholder. Crocodile-Eagle on Cuffs 143 and 144 and Greaves 145 and 146 is a panoply of perspectives. Like pairs of eyes, Incense Burners 109 and 110 and Mirrors 132 and 133 endowed the lord with their perspectives. Again, this conclusion does not stray from the existing scholarly literature that repeatedly confirms the abilities of these kinds of equipment to see the people and places outside the scope of a human person’s eyes.

CONCLUSION

There are indisputable limitations to archaeological reconstruction. For this project, modeling software engineers a reincarnation of Lord 15 that obviously would be out of place at the ancient cemetery; the illustration of Lord 15’s mantle, as noted above, alone proves this point. As experts have pointed out (Moser 2001), visual representations of archaeological knowledge wield the power of constructing knowledge, and this project has oscillated between its desire to present a persuasive illustration of an anonymous man primarily based on the archaeological record and its inescapable condition as one possible modern construction of him. There is no getting around this conundrum.

If this predicament is never forgotten, then the project can maintain its intellectual value for several reasons. First, Lord 15 emerges as a distinctive person buried at Sitio Conte. This alone contributes to Isthmo-Colombian studies because it improves upon the short tradition of generic representations of Conteños. Second, it advocates for more research of ornament sets in all of their internal variety and complexity as a way to balance the long tradition of selecting individual pieces and/or motifs. Third, Lord 15’s ornament set and mortuary ensemble are nothing less than a new body that reconstituted him with the visual capacities and perspectives of several other people. This emphasis on vision aligns with Stone’s (2011) documentation of the eminence of vision and shamanic visionary experiences in some Isthmo-Colombian societies and their art. Although I would not go so far as to hypothesize that Lord 15 was a shaman during his life based upon his funerary treatment (although the pairs of incense burners and mirrors make it tempting), I suspect that shamanism was a core part of the Gran Coclé communities. In addition, this aspect of the project connects with previous scholarship about the Sitio Conte cemetery that identified the role of the ceramic vessels in the deceased’s transformation (O’Day 2003:135) and also detected a preoccupation with vision, particularly visual access to the imagery on the vessels as programmed by the modes of vessel deposition and painting.
orientation in the graves (O’Day 2003:101–10). Fourth, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s ideas can assist projects about dress, ornaments, and regalia in other ancient American settings. Finally, this project shows that rank and wealth were not the only elements of personhood at Sitio Conte and therefore hopefully encourage future attention to the “full picture of personhood” (Fowler 2004:22) for the remaining Conteños.

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NOTES

1. Archaeologists employ the name “Gran Coclé” to refer to one of three “interaction spheres” of ancient Panama. Gran Coclé stretches from approximately Chitra in the west to Miraflores in the east. Archaeologists have identified human activity in this sphere by a variety of measures, including a pottery sequence, metallurgy record, and chiefdom organization. The pottery and gold testify to an enduring Gran Coclé “semiotic tradition.” See Cooke et al. 2000:154; Isaza Aizpurúa 2007:566.

2. This is later than the Formative period in Mesoamerica or the Initial period in Gran Coclé (cal CE 170–750). Thus, one may wonder about its inclusion in a book devoted to early periods of American antiquity. Keep in mind that only about fifteen sites in Panama have provided excavation data pertaining to jewelry from any period and, of these, Sitio Conte has been the prime example of metalwork in the political and social realms. For this reason, it is important to include it in the first volume to examine dress and body ornamentation in the Isthmo-Colombian area. Moreover, it is vital that the Sitio Conte data continue to be analyzed while new data are collected about other specific Gran Coclé sites and the settlement patterns in other Gran Coclé valleys before, during, and after burial at Sitio Conte. Finally, the Sitio Conte jewelry (especially the pieces fabricated with metal) may be understood as a formative “event” in the Gran Coclé tradition that exhibits features not documented (yet?) during the
Initial period. See Isaza Aizpurúa (2007) and Haller (2008) for recent discussions of
the cemetery’s goldwork in Gran Coclé’s history.

3. I refer to the people buried at the Sitio Conte cemetery as “Conteños,” as well the
living people who used the multipurpose site. Yet they all probably hailed from different communities throughout Gran Coclé.

4. The Peabody Museum of Harvard University and the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology excavated the cemetery. The Peabody Museum seasons were in 1930, 1931, and 1933, and the University Museum season occurred in 1940. The excavations are generally acknowledged as incomplete (there are probably more features to be excavated) and typical for the time in terms of archaeological methodology and priorities (before radiocarbon dating). That said, Hearne and Sharer (1992, 14–15) note the enduring value of the excavations to Pre Columbian studies as well as particular innovations in fieldwork applied by the University of Pennsylvania team.

5. In addition, the Peabody Museum’s website (http://www.peabody.harvard.edu) offers an online collection that includes most of the ornaments discussed in this chapter. A search will identify recent and historical photographs of the ornaments.

6. Five items went to the Brooklyn Museum (Incense Burner 110, Mirror Back 133, Overlay 136, Greave 146, and Disk 148).

7. The Isthmo-Colombian area stretches from eastern Honduras to Venezuela. Thus, Gran Coclé is one region of this large culture area. See Hoopes and Fonseca Zamora 2003:51–60.

8. It must be noted that Williams (2012) published an illustration of one of the El Caño chiefs wearing his ornament set as documented during the excavations led by Julia Mayo since 2005.

9. The number at the end of the designation for each ornament is the one that the archaeologists assigned to it during excavation. Although the museum accession number is important, I learned during my dissertation research that the field numbers relate better to the archaeological context. For example, each item’s field number is used in Lothrop’s unpublished field notes in the museum archives and ground plans published in the site report.

10. Note that the creature’s nose often leans away from the head, which is the opposite of Pendant 137.

11. Because Disk 148 was transferred to the Brooklyn Museum (accession number 33.448.12), a recent color photograph can be studied via the museum’s online collection: http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/36873/Plaque.

12. The scholarly literature about incense burners and mirrors in the Americas, past through present, is truly abundant. Miller and Taube (1993) provide an introduction to incense smoke and mirrors.
REFERENCES


INTRODUCTION

Early Nicoyans appear to have been barely adorned, sporting merely thongs, headdresses, maces, jewelry, and body art, but these were symbolically filled with messages of transcendence from this world to the next. Today early Nicoyan dress, regalia, and adornment can be seen in the remains from tombs dating to ca. 800 BCE–300 CE. These Formative period tombs of southwestern Nicaragua and northwestern Costa Rica (Greater Nicoya) include earthenware vessels, metates, maceheads, and jewelry. The vessels and metates depict humans scantily clad with what appear to be pubic coverings, woven headwear, horns, masks, jade jewels, shell necklaces, earspools, and body decoration. Body art designs painted on figural vessels spiral and swirl in visionary patterns, perhaps indicative of images seen in trance to the spirit realm. Also, most early Nicoyan figural vessels were sculpted in poses of meditation and transformation to animal-humans, further suggesting the representation of spiritualists. These tomb treasures and their imagery offer a view of a formative Greater Nicoya led by spiritual specialists who believed in a cyclical universe, one where new life constantly replaced old. This view of the world is reflected in the beliefs of today’s Chibchan groups in southern Costa Rica and western Panama, the Bribri, Cabécar, Boruca, and Guaimí, likely the distant kin of the inhabitants of Formative Greater Nicoya.

As may be inferred from ceramic effigies of females and males from early Greater Nicoya, the typical dress of the day consisted primarily of a pubic covering for females and no clothing for males (Figures 2.1–2.4). No early Nicoyan clothing remains have thus far been
uncovered in the archaeological record (Coe and Baudez 1961; Haberland 1986, 1961; Healy 1980; Lange 2006, 1971; Lange and Haberland 1992; Ryder 1986a, 1986b), as the tropical lowland climate of the region prohibits preservation of textiles (Coates 1997), although ancient spindle whorls for spinning fibers (presumably to be used in weavings) have been recovered for the Florescent period of 300–800 CE. There are written records, however, from the period of Spanish contact that detail a *tanga* (“thong”), a pubic covering worn by Chibchan-speaking women in northern Costa Rica: “The women wear an elaborately worked breech-clout, which is an apron about three spans wide on a single string, at the back; and this string being tightened, they bring the cloth between the legs, covering the privy parts, and insert the end beneath the string in front. All the remainder of their bodies is unclothed …” (Oviedo as cited in Lothrop 1926, 1:36–37; see also Wingfield 2009:100–101). This colonial description fits well with the images on ancient Nicoyan figural art of pubic
coverings (Figures 2.1–2.3). These tangas are sculpted (Figure 2.1) or painted (Figure 2.2) pubic triangles with lines emerging from each point of the triangle, two of which wrap around the waist and one through the intergluteal cleft; then all three lines meet at the figure’s back above the buttocks. The gathering of fabric around the waistband at front (as described by the Spanish, “insert the end beneath the string in front”) is more clearly evident in the sculpted version of the tanga (Figure 2.1).

One effigy vessel, in particular, stands out for the cursory treatment of its tanga: Figure 2.3 was painted with only the straps wrapping around the waist and running up the cleft. Instead of depicting a cloth pubic cover, the artist chose to sculpt enlarged genitalia ready for birthing. In at least one example, male virility was also clearly emphasized through the absence of a pubic covering and the presence of enlarged genitalia (Figure 2.4). Other effigies of what were likely men, based on the presence of facial hair, were sculpted with
abstract pubic regions (Figures 2.5, 2.6). Sixteenth-century Spanish accounts record penis-strings or breechcloths for Nicoyan and central Costa Rican men (or other clearly Mesoamerican clothing styles introduced into Greater Nicoya after 800 CE) (Oviedo as cited in Lothrop 1926, 1:36–37). However, neither penis-strings nor breechcloths nor any other clothing is clearly depicted in ancient Nicoyan male effigies.

Early Nicoyan adornment for the head could be as plain as a simple headband (Figures 2.1, 2.2, 2.7) or as elaborate as a projecting animal mask (Figure 2.8) or something in between (Figures 2.3, 2.4, 2.9–2.14). Exemplary of the simple headband, Figure 2.7 was designed with a modeled band running above the effigy’s forehead and under the vessel opening; the band is light brown instead of the vibrant red of the body of the figure. This band could represent a simple plain-weave band of cloth or of basketry fibers. Figure 2.9 wears a similar band, yet it is decorated with interlocking black and red steps above a row of alternating red rectangles and black squares. Similar geometric
headbands were carved on the heads of figures on the undersides of Formative Nicoyan metates (see Snarskis 1981:179, cat. no. 17). Ancient Nicoyan metate imagery depicts an array of feathers bursting from the headbands. No feathers have thus far been detected inside ancient Nicoyan effigy vessels, but Nicoyan figural art in stone suggests that headbands may have been topped with feathers. The wide openings of some ancient Nicoyan ceramic figural vessels may also suggest the flaring of feathers emerging from a woven band (Figures 2.2, 2.4, 2.12, 2.15). The nineteenth-century chieftain of the Bribri of southern Costa Rica, Antonio Saldaña, wore a crown of basketry fibers woven into nine alternating light and dark bands. Emerging from his crown were real feathers (Fernández Esquivel and González 1997; Quilter and Hoopes 2003:frontispiece). In the late twentieth-century Celia, an Emberá chieftain in Panama, wore a basketry crown of alternating cream and brown bands at top and bottom with a central motif of interlocking cream and brown steps; atop her crown were multicolor faux feathers (Snarskis 2000:34–45, figs. 22,
Could these modern examples of chieftains’ crowns be the descendents of earlier Macro-Chibchan regalia, such as Nicoyan feathered headdresses? Alternatively, some of this headband imagery may represent the lower portion of a small skullcap, once typical attire for Nicoyan native women in the twentieth century (March 1971) and common as decoration on Nicoyan effigies from the period following the Formative—the Florescent period of 300–800 CE (Figure 2.16; Guerrero Miranda and Solís Del Vecchio 1997:ill. 10c; Stone-Miller 2002:80–82, cat. no. 145). However, because the earliest Nicoyan effigies were most often figural vessels, the tops of the heads doubled as vessel openings and, thus, were not covered and could not be decorated as a cap.

The only headwear depicted in Formative Nicoyan figural art that appears to cover the head completely is the conical hat (Figures 2.5, 2.11), rare for early Greater Nicoya. These two conical hats were sculpted with smoothed clay, left plain yet burnished in Figure 2.5 but decorated with a long-beaked bird in Figure 2.11. Although the smooth clay surface of these hats does not suggest weaving, actual hats may have been woven, as much later Kogi cone-shaped hats were (see Hoopes and Fonseca Zamora 2003:66, fig. 2g). (The Kogi are also part of the Macro-Chibchan world [ibid.].)

Whether early Nicoyan headwear was a simple band, an elaborate basketry crown, or a cone-shaped hat, what was paramount was likely that the head was covered, for perceptions about the head are critical in indigenous cultures from the Macro-Chibchan world to Siberia, where visionary spiritualism...
involving trance and transformation into powerful animal alter-egos for otherworldly communication (shamanism) may have originated. The head is the locus of visionary power for spiritual leaders and its protection key to maintaining a balance of powers in the spirit world, for when the head is exposed, the spiritualist may be rendered incapable of communicating with the otherworld (Furst 1998; Stone 2011:76–85; Wingfield 2009:89–98).

Even though an uncovered head may signal lowered spiritual power, there are representations of uncovered heads in early Nicoyan art that are likely still spiritually potent: heads with horns or head protrusions (Figures 2.10, 2.17, 2.18). These “horns” are small bumps emerging either from the sides of the head (Figure 2.10), from both sides of the crown of the head (2.17), or from the forehead (2.18). The horns on these effigies are rounded (Figures 2.10, 2.18) or flattened (Figure 2.17) but not pointed like a tusk or full-grown antler. Rebecca Stone has suggested that the small, smooth, semicircular bumps of Figure 2.10 are similar to doe pedicels, which seem fitting given the hoof-hands on this effigy (Stone 2011:94–104). The bumps on the head of

Figure 2.10. Vessel in the form of a seated pregnant woman with crossed legs and two horns (doe pedicels), front and back views. Rosales Zoned Engraved, Rosales Variety, 32 × 26 × 18 cm; ex coll. William C. and Carol W. Thibadeau; © Michael C. Carlos Museum, Emory University (1991.4.344). Photos by Bruce M. White, 2008.
Figure 2.11. Tripod vessel with appliqué in the form of a squatting human wearing a conical bird hat. Santiago Appliqué, 67 cm h × 43.2 cm diam.; after an object in the collection of Jan and Frederick Mayer, Denver, Colorado (1601).


Figure 2.10 do not appear to be part of a hat or strapped to the head. Rather, they seem to be black hairbuns emerging from the figures’ black hair, similar to a hairstyle worn by a prominent Boruca woman in the mid-twentieth century (Stone 1975: fig. 7d). Unfortunately, Doris Stone, the anthropologist who photodocumented this Boruca woman, did not inquire about the significance of the hairdo, whether it represented doe pedicels or horns of any sort.

Even though Stone did not provide an explanation for this hairstyle, cross-cultural comparison of similar head decoration seems to link the bumps of the three early Nicoyan effigies (Figures 2.10, 2.17, 2.18) and the Boruca woman’s hairbuns to the practice of wearing “shaman’s horns” in indigenous cultures from Siberia to South America. Many such indigenous spiritual leaders wear or wore “horns” as a visual statement of their visionary power. Edward Curtis, famed photographer of nineteenth-century Native Americans, documented a Sioux “medicine man” (a spiritual specialist) who styled his hair
into a forward-projecting horn and was, in fact, known as “One Horn” (Furst 1998:180). Peter Furst interpreted curled, horn-shaped emanations seemingly strapped to the heads of ancient West Mexicans, as depicted in their ceramic effigies, as symbolic horns, possibly agave spikes (Furst 1998:183). Similarly, Mark Miller Graham believes many West Mexican effigies portray politico-religious leaders wearing conch shells strapped to their heads. Graham also asserts that Teotihuacano and Maya leaders of the same time period, Late Formative–Early Classic, wore similar conch shell/horn headwear as symbols of their high status in society (Graham 1998b). Lastly, Kent Reilly suggests that rounded copper “cups” with a swirling pattern, found in (later) Mississippian graves, were worn over twisted hairbuns as more permanent, shiny, highly visible head emanations or “horns” (Reilly 2004). Thus, these three early Nicoyan effigies with hairbun-horns (Figures 2.10, 2.17, 2.18) likely represent spiritualists who may have worn a certain hairstyle as a regular identifier of their horned animal alter-egos.
A more pronounced animal representation in head adornment can be seen in Figure 2.8. The figure on this large vessel could very well be one of the first depictions of the crocodilian character prevalent in ancient Costa Rican, Panamanian, and Colombian art, called the “crocodile deity” by John Hoopes and Oscar Fonseca Zamora and documented for the Florescent period and later (Hoopes 2006; Hoopes and Fonseca Zamora 2003). The character is often portrayed with a large protruding and grimacing mouth, an oversized curling snout, and a large projecting headdress, often with side flaps (Hoopes 2006; Hoopes and Fonseca Zamora 2003). Indeed, this early Nicoyan version (Figure 2.8) has the requisite features: the protruding mouth and curling snout appear to be part of a mask, perhaps attached to the projecting headdress. The black swathes flanking the figure’s face, outlined with clay appliqué ribbons, could represent feathers inserted into the headdress or possibly cloth flaps. Is
the standing figure represented here a human wearing a mask and feathered headdress, a supernatural being, or a person transforming into a supernatural being/animal alter-ego, or all of these at once? The distinction between human and animal is blurred in Nicoyan art, as it is in most art of ancient Central and South America (Stone 2011).

Other Nicoyan figural art pushes the boundaries of reality even further than that in Figure 2.8. The humans transforming into animals in Figures 2.12, 2.13, 2.14, 2.15 are more animal-humans than human-animals. There are but slight hints that these figures are not entirely animal. The feline in Figure 2.12 has human ears on the side of its head (as opposed to a big cat’s rounded ears atop its head). The harpy eagle-human of Figure 2.13 stands erect in a human pose and possibly wears a small skullcap, but its tufts, round bird eyes, beak and cere, prominent chest, wings, and talons overwhelm a human body. The rounded form of the vessel in Figure 2.14 mirrors a duck’s plump body, and the head of the duck is clearly sculpted in this vessel while its feathers are finely painted and incised; yet the figure wears a necklace, holds a bag in one arm, and has opposable thumbs (as seen on fully human effigies such as Figures 2.3, 2.19). Lastly, the armadillo-human of Figure 2.15 is upright in a human stance, but the head and hands are fully those of an armadillo. Are viewers to understand that these are humans wearing costumes or humans transformed into animals or both possibilities at once? Contemporary Chibchan peoples in Costa Rica carve and wear masks, as they profess their ancestors did (Figures 2.20, 2.21), with human faces enveloped by potent animals—jaguars, crocodiles, caimans, coral snakes, tropical birds (personal observation 2005–7; Solano Laclé, Cartín Quesada, and

**Figure 2.17. Effigy of a kneeling man with two horns. Rosales Zoned Engraved; after an object in the collection of Juan and Ligia Dada of Costa Rica and published as Ferrero 1977:292, ill. III–28, and as Snarskis 1981:179, cat. no. 8 (see Figure 2.6 above).**
Tosatti Franza 2005). Likely, viewers of early Nicoyan art were to read these animal-human images as figures wearing costumes while simultaneously feeling as if they were being overcome by and transforming into those animals in trance.

In a few examples, ancient Nicoyan figures do not wear headbands, horns, or masks but jewels around their heads. The artists of Figures 2.3, 2.4 chose different media to depict pendants draped across the forehead (compare to actual jade or green-colored stone pendants found in Costa Rican tombs beginning ca. 500 BCE [Graham 1998a; Guerrero Miranda 1998; Lange, ed. 1993]; see Figures 2.22, 2.23). Strong swathes of black paint within incised outlines form what are meant to be jade beads and pendants crowning the head of the birthing woman in Figure 2.3. Encircling the head of the ejaculating kyphotic man in Figure 2.4 is a ceramic coil bearing traces of original black paint; the coil acts as a strap that secures an axe blade modeled in clay, originally darker. The artists’ choice of black for jade perhaps was not merely due to the scarcity of color choices (red, cream/light brown, black, and white were typical of Formative Nicoyan ceramic art) (Lange et al. 1987). In a land dotted with volcanoes, which enriched the soil with dark ash, black likely symbolized fecundity, as did the green color of these precious stones. That these jewels

**Figure 2.18.** Vessel in the form of a seated woman with one horn, front and back views. *Rosales Zoned Engraved, Rosales Variety, 33 × 25.7 × 17.1 cm; after an object in the collection of Jan and Frederick R. Mayer of Denver, Colorado (1511).**
were carved in the form of axe blades used in clearing land for growing verdant plants and trees further links this adornment to fertility.

The abstract depiction of ceremonial axes on these Formative Nicoyan figures obscures whether the artists intended the axes to be rare “true jade” or more common green-colored stones, both shining in the light, glinting and hinting at spirits in the great beyond (Saunders 1998). Jade has become a general term for any green-colored stone, but “true jade” is the term for very rare, hard, reflective stones such as jadeite, nephrite, omphacite, chloromelanite, albite jadeite, and kosmochloric jadeite, while “social jade” encompasses more common, weaker, less brilliant stones such as serpentinite, slate, and quartz (Lange 2006:29; Lange 1993; William Size, personal communication, 2005). In Central America the only source for true jade was the Motagua Valley of Guatemala in Mesoamerica. For Nicoyans, then, true jade was a valuable trade item, acquired only by the wealthiest or those of the highest status in ancient Nicoyan society. Some true jade pieces found in Nicoya were carved in an Olmecoid style (see Figure 2.22; Graham 1998a), further referencing the distant nature of the source of the material and, therefore, its rarity and prestige. The majority of other early Nicoyan axe pendants were carved in the form of bird-humans (Figure 2.23). Also, the majority of ceremonial axe pendants found in Costa Rican tombs were made from social jade, often locally procured (Lange 2006:29; Lange, ed. 1993). Costa Rican ceremonial axes varied greatly in size, further suggesting a growing divide between higher
and lower status Nicoyans in the Formative period. The larger axes were more often made of a true jade stone, whether depicting Olmecoid or local figures (see Stone-Miller 2002:150, 151), while smaller axes and beads were more often carved from social jade and did not reflect a taste for Olmecoid imagery (see Stone-Miller 2002:159, 160). Thus, there was a visible distinction of status in true jade and social jade jewels in ancient Greater Nicoya. The large pendant depicted as headwear in Figure 2.4 was likely intended to be true jade, and while the pendants around the head of Figure 2.3 were not overly large, their number suggests wealth of the wearer and, therefore, true jade also. The large size of these effigies compared with others of this type (Wingfield 2009:432–78) suggests that the humans embodied in these vessels were of the highest status in ancient Nicoyan society. These two effigy vessels fully represented abundant human and agricultural fertility.

Green-colored stones were also used for another power symbol in ancient Greater Nicoya—the macehead (Figure 2.24). Maceheads were carved from imported and local stones into the heads of humans, owls, raptors, parrots,
bats, felines, crocodilians, serpents, monkeys, coyotes, and composite beings (De la Cruz 1981; William Size, personal communication, 2005; Stone-Miller 2002:144–45, cat. nos. 314–25). Each has a hole running vertically through the head, suggesting that it was mounted on a staff or club, although no staffs or clubs have been found archaeologically in Greater Nicoya, suggesting they were made of perishable materials such as wood or plant stalks (Christiane Clados, personal communication, 2005). Staffs were documented by the Spanish in sixteenth-century Greater Nicoya as exclusively for chiefs and their attendants (Oviedo as cited in Lothrop 1926, 1:49). Ancient Nicoyan maceheads show little sign of wear and were likely symbolic and ceremonial, as the jade axes were.

Similarly, Nicoyan metates found in Formative period graves (Figure 2.25) do not show excessive wear typical of daily use for grinding foodstuffs. Instead they may have been used ceremonially only once at interment or a few times in the life of the deceased for key rites. Their primary use may have been as chieftain’s or shaman’s stools or thrones. In Formative period Greater Nicoyan figural art there are no images of humans sitting atop stools, but there are several such images for the Florescent period (Figures 2.26, 2.27). In addition, Spanish accounts record Nicoyan chiefs seated atop small stools (Oviedo as cited in Lothrop 1926, 1:46, 47, 55, 56). Lastly, modern and contemporary Costa Rican Chibchans recall that powerful politico-religious leaders of the past sat on special benches or animal-headed stools (Blessing 1921:99–101; Stone 1975:fig. 7c1; Stone 1962:32–33). Their modern-day spiritualists still require a special stool or chair for rituals (Cervantes Gamboa 2003). Perhaps early Nicoyan metates acted as both thrones and ceremonial grinding stones for the powerful interred in high-status tombs.

Likewise, jade axes served two purposes: as ceremonial blades and as pendants worn not only around the head (Figures 2.3, 2.4) but also around the neck (Figures 2.2, 2.4, 2.9, 2.10) and arms (Figure 2.8). As pendants on necklaces, these axes were strung alongside jade beads. Some necklaces may also have included shell beads or pendants, although original fibers used to string beads and pendants together have not survived. A set of Spondylus shell pendants was found at El Viejo bei Sandinal on the Nicoya Peninsula in Costa Rica and is believed to have been strung in the manner seen in the drawing of Figure 2.28. Spondylus shell was a material perhaps equal in preciousness to green-colored stones in the minds of Greater Nicoyans. It too could be sourced locally or from afar. Spondylus shell is found off the coast of Greater Nicoya (Silvia Salgado, personal communication, 2007) and off the coast of Ecuador (Anawalt 1998). During the Formative period, Ecuadorian traders
may have stopped in Greater Nicoya regularly on their annual voyages north to West Mexico and traded *Spondylus* shell to early Nicoyans (Callaghan 2003; Wingfield 2009:35). The colors of the shell—from pale peach or vibrant orange to a rich red or a deep maroon—added to its appeal and high status for wearers. These colors are similar to later gold-copper alloy pendants worn by Costa Rican politico-religious leaders (Fernández Ésquível and González
While necklaces are more common than jeweled headdresses in early Nicoyan figural art, earspools are depicted even more frequently (Figures 2.1–2.4, 2.7, 2.9, 2.10, 2.18, 2.19). They can be solid circles painted at the lobes of the ears or sculpted, three-dimensional earspools, similar to those of ceramic or jade actually found in later tombs (Snarskis 1981:184, cat. no. 41; Stone-Miller 2002:78–79, cat. nos. 142, 144a,b). Earspools are hollow cylinders inserted into a hole in the earlobe, enlarged over time through the use of increasingly larger earspools. Generally, the smaller the earspool, the younger the wearer or the lower in status. Throughout the prehispanic Americas, earspools were a sign of prestige, the bigger the better. In South America Spaniards referred to Inka male warriors with large earspools as orejon (“big ear”) (Classen 1993:39). The circular form of the earspool may have been just one of the many circles used to decorate ancient Nicoyan bodies (Stone 2011:34–39) and draw attention to key physical features of spiritual prominence, such as the ear, site of auditory perception.
experience, a portal through which ritual song enters the mind and helps to transport the listener to another world (Cervantes Gamboa 2003).

Circles also featured greatly on early Nicoyan effigies as body art, likely painted on by hand (Figures 2.2, 2.4, 2.7, 2.10, 2.12, 2.18) (Wingfield 2009:195–201, 241–42, 764–86). Whether painted, incised, or both, circles can be found at key power points of the body—shoulders, elbows, wrists, chest, navel, knees, and ankles. These are spots of motion (joints) or of connection to the life force (the chest/breasts, seat of breath and mother’s milk, or the navel, the entry point for the umbilical cord). Often the early Nicoyan artist chose to replace a circle with a spiral at these key points (Figures 2.3, 2.4, 2.7, 2.8, 2.10, 2.14, 2.15, 2.18, 2.19). In addition, spirals emphasize shoulder blades and buttocks (Figures 2.10b, 2.18). Spirals emanate from the cross at the navel in Figure 2.7, suggesting flowing liquid or life force from this meeting place—a meeting of the two bars of the cross, likely representative of the four directions, and

**Figure 2.26. Vessel in the form of a woman seated on a round stool. Carrillo/Galo Polychrome, 450–600 CE, 32.7 × 26.7 × 22.9 cm; after an object in the collection of Jan and Frederick Mayer, Denver, Colorado (1852).**

**Figure 2.27. Effigy of a woman seated on a bench with two feline heads. Mora Polychrome, Guabal Variety, 800–1350 CE, 29.8 × 24.6 × 17.5 cm; after an object in the collection of Jan and Frederick Mayer, Denver, Colorado (1826).**
simultaneously the spot where a child was once connected to its mother, who
gave the offspring life (Stone-Miller 2002:70–74).

Nicoyan circles and spirals can be connected to shared Amerindian beliefs
about these symbols, with spirals signaling journey from the spirit world to
this world and vice-versa (Stone 2011:35–39; Stone 2007). A spiral is a two-
dimensional representation of a twisting road or tunnel, and it is one of the
first visions seen by spiritualists as they enter trance, their path to the spirit
world. Once in trance, a three-dimensional spiral is associated with a twisting
umbilical cord or birth canal, both of which help a seedling human make the
trip from the spirit realm to earth through nourishment or passageway, respec-
tively (Looper and Guernsey Kappelman 2001; Stross 1996; Weinstein 1999).
Then the infant enters this world through the round opening of the vagina.
Amerindian cultures often associate circles with the female (Furst 1998), and
the circles and spirals on these early Nicoyan figures, mostly fertile or pregnant
women, are likely intertwined with beliefs of spiritual journeys as analogous to
human births. The swirling, taillike designs also may have been affiliated with
the clans into which top Costa Rican Chibchan spiritual specialists and chiefs are born, the jaguar and monkey clans (Tillett 1988).

In contrast, most face painting on early Nicoyan figures consists of vertical lines running down or through the forehead, eyes, nose, cheeks, lips, and/or chin (Figures 2.3, 2.4, 2.7, 2.10, 2.19). Michael Snarskis suggested that these lines symbolize rain (but without explanation) (Snarskis 1981:178, cat. no. 2). Perhaps this reading is viable, considering that axes and metates, agricultural implements, are included in early Nicoyan tombs with these effigies, and rain certainly is crucial for maintaining Nicoyan agriculture.

Formative Nicoyan figural art portrays humans and animal–humans dressed and adorned from head to toe in minimal clothing, spiritually imbued headwear or hairstyles, fertility-filled jewelry, and body art symbolic of both spirituality and fertility. Although no indigenous groups today in southwestern Nicaragua or northwestern Costa Rica wear clothes, headdresses, jewelry, or body decorations exactly like those seen in the ancient art of the region, Chibchan groups of Costa Rica, Panama, and Colombia from colonial times to the present are recorded as having worn or as wearing dress, regalia, and adornment very similar to that seen in the early art of Greater Nicoya (as discussed above). Do the practices and beliefs of these later Chibchan groups further relate to ancient Nicoyan culture?

The belief in a cyclical universe where old begets new again and again is common among contemporary Chibchan peoples of southern Costa Rica in and around the Talamanca Mountains, specifically the Bribri, Cabécar, Boruca, and Guaimí. The Bribri are looked to by the other Talamancans for spiritual leadership because they have retained their traditions best. The Bribri hold that an elder must pass on to the spirit world in order for a new life to enter this world (Bozzoli de Wille 1982:147). They also compare the elder to a tall tree that must be felled. Its seed must then be planted so that a new tree may grow in its stead. The Bribri recall a spiritual specialist, the óköm (pl. óköpa) or burier, who oversees the “felling” of the deceased (Bozzoli de Wille 1982:163; Jara Murillo and García Segura 2003:138). He prepares the body for interment and performs burial rituals alongside the primary village-level spiritual specialist of the Bribri, an awa (pl. awapa). The awa also aids pregnant women at births as they bring new “seeds” to life in this world. Both buriers and mothers are seen as those who open the portal to the spirit world. The spirits of the awapa are believed to be capable of moving between both worlds to assist the spirits transitioning from birth to earth and from life to death. Awa also preside over healings, marriages, hunting, and other communal gatherings (Bozzoli de Wille 1975; Cervantes Gamboa 2003; Guevara-Berger 1993). In addition, in the
past a higher spiritualist, an uséköl (pl. usékölpa) or “dark shaman” oversaw other Bribri key transitions, such as the agricultural seasons and wars responsible for multiple deaths. These and other contemporary Macro-Chibchan spiritual specialists perform their roles often in trance, achieved through rituals filled with smoke, chanting, and bodily transformations from seated meditation to kneeling to rising into active healing as an animal alter-ego (Cervantes Gamboa 2003; Wingfield 2009:104–7). Lastly, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, chieftains, called reys and reinas (“kings” and “queens”), have been political representatives for Macro-Chibchan groups in Costa Rica and Panama. Some chieftains have relied on spiritual specialists to continue cultural traditions and maintain stability and fertility for their constituents, while at times also acting as healers themselves (Salazar S. 2002:54). Due to degradation of these indigenous cultures from colonial times to present, most of these roles have been subsumed into the position of awa for the Bribri and Cabecares or of a curandero/a (healer) for the Boruca, while the Guaimí merged their traditional spiritualist roles with that of priest in the contemporary religion of Mamachí (Bozzoli de Wille 1982, 1975; Salazar S. 2002:16, 136–39; Stone 1975, 1962).

The typical dress today of these spiritualists is Western clothing. However, there are some likely prehispanic items of regalia and practices of adornment still in use by certain Macro-Chibchan spiritual specialists. Also, certain animals are associated with each role. Bribri óköpa are known for carrying staffs and are associated with the armadillo, opossum, coati, raccoon, vulture, and macaw (Bozzoli de Wille 1982:156; Stone 1962:30; Wingfield 2009:136–38). Bribri pregnant women or mothers identify with felines (Bozzoli de Wille, 1982, 1975; Jara Murillo and García Segura 2003:49, 59, 74, 90, 128, 129, 181; Wingfield 2009:124–28). As with óköpa, Bribri awapa are known for carrying staffs and singing songs of staffs (Cervantes Gamboa 2003; Salazar S. 2002:44–51; Stone 1962:fig. 11c; Wingfield 2009:109, 110). Awapa are also accustomed to sitting on small four-legged stools with feline heads (see Stone 1975:fig. 7c1). In addition to felines, awapa are associated with deer (Blessing 1921:99–101) and birds (Jara Murillo and García Segura 2003:11–13). As with awapa, the usékölpa are remembered by elders today as carrying staffs, using stools for seats of authority, and carrying small bags with sacred stones (Salazar S. 2002:42, 43). The usékölpa are associated with felines, crocodilians, and serpents (Jara Murillo and García Segura 2003:xx, xxiv, 25, 118, 133, 206, 215, 223). These powerful dark shamans are not well remembered in Bribri culture because of their complete annihilation by the Costa Rican government and businesses (Salazar S. 2002:24), but an analysis of their practices by John Hoopes suggests that they were similar to the dark shamans of the Kogi/Tairona culture of Colombia.
(see his essay in this volume and Hoopes 2006). If Bribri *usékölpa* and Kogi/ Tairona dark shamans were kindred in spirit, perhaps they also were in dress, sharing a status marker in the conical hat.

Can characters akin to contemporary Chibchan spiritualists be discerned in the grave goods of early Greater Nicoya? The vessel in Figure 2.15 is painted with an image of an armadillo-human, suggesting an *óköm* (burier). While the original contents of the vessel have not been preserved (Snarskis 1981:179, cat. no. 10), similar vessels were found in the Nicoya Peninsula (Coe and Baudez 1961) containing human remains, likely making this vessel a funerary urn decorated with an image of a burier. Figures 2.3, 2.10, and 2.19 clearly represent pregnant women, while Figure 2.7 may depict a woman in the early stage of pregnancy. Recall that for Talamancans both buriers and pregnant women can open the door to the spirit world. The burier would metaphorically fell the human (with a ceremonial axe, which would also be entombed) and then physically prepare the body for burial, often defleshing the corpse and interring only bones, referred to as seeds by Talamancan peoples (Bozzoli de Wille 1982:145–46, 163). Then the effigy vessel of a pregnant woman would metaphorically aid in the rebirth of this now dead human as a new seed, a rejuvenated spirit, in the otherworld, ready to grow anew there.

Inside a grave, these two effigy types (burier and pregnant woman) might work together with an *awa* effigy to ensure the successful transition of the tree to seed, of old human body on this earth to new spirit in the otherworld. Figures 2.1–2.4, 2.7, 2.9, 2.10, 2.18, 2.19 are in various poses of meditation, with most seated or kneeling with hands on thighs or knees, while Figure 2.13 is standing and is almost fully transformed into a bird, an animal specifically associated with *awapa*. The *awa* would enter trance and transform into her or his animal self to be a spirit helper on the other side, guiding the new spirit in its journey and ridding the path of obstacles. Together, *óköpa*, mothers-to-be, and *awapa* worked for human and spiritual fertility.

The need for successful agricultural fertility is also evident in early Nicoyan tombs through the interment of ceremonial agricultural axes, ceremonial metates, and effigies of *usékölpa* (dark shamans responsible for successful planting and harvesting and for wars). Figures 2.5 and 2.11 wear conical hats, perhaps representative of these dark shamans, and Figures 2.12 and 2.8 depict humans almost fully transformed into the top predators of ancient Costa Rica, the jaguar and crocodile, alter-egos of *usékölpa*. At first, images of successful agricultural fertility may not seem important to the dead human in the tomb, but within Talamancan beliefs agricultural fertility is intertwined with human and spiritual renewal. The first humans were originally cacao beans
or maize kernels in the spirit world (Bozzoli de Wille 1982:145). Food and drink on the earth is the blood and “flesh” of the spirits, while human blood is chocolate to the spirits. The sun, in particular, must have human blood (chocolate) to continue its route over the earth and back under/through the spirit world to be reborn anew each day (Jara Murillo and García Segura 2003:42). Sacrifices of human life (deaths) are necessary not only for a new human life to come into being on earth but also for the spirits to be nourished. In turn, the spirits provide food for humans and, therefore, continued earthly human existence.

This complex of tomb treasures likely worked together, metaphorically intermingling, to assure the successful passage of the deceased to the next world, to transcend death and gain new life, to be reborn on the other side out of new seed. To achieve this transcendence, early Nicoyan burial objects called on the combined power of human, spiritual, and agricultural fertility. Representations of óköpa and mothers presided over human death and life. Awapa oversaw spiritual death and rebirth. Usékölpa and chieftains managed agricultural renewal and death en masse in war. The corpse embodied human death, yet metaphorically it was a tree felled by an óköm wielding an axe. The dead body was expected to transform into seed and grow again as a new tree in the spirit world, yet its seed may also have been metaphorically ground in the grave on a metate to be used as food for the spirits, so that they would ensure crops would grow on earth. Here human, spiritual, and agricultural fertility seem to circle and spiral in and out of each other. Similarly, the roles documented today for Talamancan groups seem to have been integrated in Formative Greater Nicoya.

After two thousand years, the specific roles of modern Talamancans cannot be identical to those practiced by Nicoyan peoples. Indeed, the Nicoyan effigies show fluidity of roles. For example, Figure 2.10 embodies a pregnant woman, yet she also has several attributes of an awa with a deer spirit double—budding horns on her head and hands transformed into hooves. She also wears ceremonial axes around her neck, associating her with wealth and power and óköpa. The man in Figure 2.4 wears a ceremonial agricultural axe around his forehead and (possibly) the flaring feathered basketry crown of later chieftains and usékölpa, while he sits in active meditation as he ejaculates, producing fertile human liquid to ensure for early Nicoyans successful human, spiritual, and agricultural fertility (see Figure 2.29 for an artist’s reconstruction of this figure and two attendants performing a fertility rite).

Early Nicoya was a landscape of small villages of fifty to one hundred persons (Lange 1971:129–32). In each village there may have been one or
two persons to perform the roles of all the spiritual specialists that eventually evolved in Costa Rica. These village leaders likely rose to prominence through merit or calling and were rewarded with high-status objects such as feathered crowns or conical hats, true jade jewels, finely carved maceheads and volcanic stone metates, and delicately sculpted earthenware effigy vessels. Other villagers of high status—but below the top leaders—may also have been buried with similar objects, while lower-status persons were likely sent to their tombs with smaller, cruder versions. The earthenware effigies may

Figure 2.29. Rosales Shaman. © Christiane Clados, 2005. Scene of a shamanic ritual to ensure fertility in early Greater Nicoya. The characters are loosely based on Rosales Zoned Engraved effigy vessels, while objects in the scene are more directly drawn from actual ancient artworks.
have represented specific leaders in a village, as each vessel was handmade in various locales throughout Greater Nicoya (Tillett 1988:24), but the image was not necessarily the person interred in the tomb. The spiritualist embodied in the effigy may have been called upon by the deceased as a guide to the other side (Stone 2011:100).

Although the tomb objects of Formative Greater Nicoya seem at first to offer few indications of dress, regalia, and adornment, closer examination leads to evidence from the ceramic effigies of dress (*tangas*) and adornment (head decoration, jade and shell jewelry, and body art). Accompanying the effigies are actual items of adornment (jade axes and beads, shell pendants and beads) and regalia (maceheads and metates). These early Nicoyan tomb treasures come together to present a picture of key spiritual actors working alone or together to transcend the earthly realm to ensure human, spiritual, and agricultural fertility for the continuation of the life cycle.

**NOTES**

1. The illustrations in this paper are a representative sample of early Nicoyan art; for more, see Wingfield 2009:174–205, 420–78, cat. nos. 1–47. Here figures are labeled male or female based on representation of genitalia, breasts, and/or facial hair, but the concept of gender is complicated and nuanced in Greater Nicoya (see Wingfield 2009:12–14, 20–22, 161–205).

2. Wiss Collection at the Natur-Historiches Gesellschaft, Nuremberg, Germany (W0806, W0844). See also Fernández Esquivel 2003; Wingfield 2009:9, 10, 48, 190, 394, 427.

3. A Macro-Chibchan culture for indigenous peoples of Honduras to Colombia is being documented through linguistics (Constenla Umaña 1992/1993, 1991, 1981; Lothrop 1926, 1:28–87), DNA (Melton 2004), visual analysis (Hoopes this volume, 2006, 2005; Hoopes and Fonseca Zamora 2003; Wingfield 2009, 2007), and archaeology (McCafferty and Steinbrenner 2005). Also, through art analysis and ethnohistoric and ethnographic examination, Lothrop (1926, 1:3–86), Tillett (1988), and Soto Méndez (2002, 2000, personal communication, 2006) have shown that ancient Nicoyan art can be interpreted through comparison to Chibchan beliefs and practices. Based on the work of these researchers, it is hypothesized that over 3,000 years ago people speaking a Chibchan language settled in northern Costa Rica; by the 1500s Nahuatl and Oto-Manguean languages (both Mexican in origin) were spoken in Greater Nicoya. Ethnohistorians, linguists, and archaeologists now agree that these latter were latecomers to the region, arriving only a few centuries before the Spanish invasion and mixing with and displacing many original Chibchan inhabitants, who moved east and
south farther into Costa Rica. The destruction of the European invasion caused even more northern Costa Rican Chibchan speakers to move to central and southern Costa Rica, where the Briíri, Cabécar, Boruca, and Guaimí live today.

4. A thorough study of Greater Nicoyan metates is needed; previous dissertations only touch on the topic (Graham 1985; Lingen 1986).

5. The long-standing connection between Siberian and Amerindian cultures has been observed not only by religious historian Mircea Eliade (1964 [1951]), who asserted that the ancestral home of Amerindian shamanism is Siberia, but also by scientists of the Genographic Project of the National Geographic Society and the top linguist of Chibchan cultures. According to DNA testing by the Genographic Project, the indigenous cultures of the Americas were settled at least 15,000–20,000 years ago by Siberians of the Altai region (Shreeve 2006). Linguist Adolfo Con- stenla Umaña analyzed three Guatuso (a Chibchan group of northern Costa Rica) tales of the marriages of animals, which he asserts originated in Siberia (1991:102).

6. While at the Denver Art Museum from 2004 to 2006, I examined in detail over 700 jade pendants and beads from Costa Rica and worked with geologist William (Bill) Size of Emory University on stone identification.

7. The use of materials acquired from afar as a way for leaders to show their power is documented by Mary Helms (1998).

8. Axe pendants were not as common in Nicaraguan Nicoya as they were in the Costa Rican sector (Healy 1980; McCafferty and Steinbrenner 2005).

9. See Renfrew 1994 for a methodology for focusing on measured, logical analysis to understand ancient thought; see Wingfield 2009 for use of this approach with Greater Nicoya, particularly chap. 3 (pp. 77–173).

10. Specific roles for over forty pieces of early Nicoyan figural art are suggested in Wingfield 2009:420–78, cat. nos. 1–47.

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INTRODUCTION: FROM FIGURINES TO CLOTHED FIGURES

Figurines from Honduras in the Playa de los Muertos style, mostly solid, all hand-modeled, depict a wealth of costume detail. In previous discussions, I have emphasized the ornamentation that makes the head and face of these figurines the focus of most of the available information, documenting regularities in ear ornaments, necklaces, and beading of cut and shaved hair (Joyce 2003, 2007b, 2008).

In a small number of these figurines, costume also includes features that evoke garments made of flexible materials: twined, woven, or otherwise constructed textiles. The rarity of these items in the collections I have recorded from Honduran archaeological excavations, the Middle American Research Institute, and Harvard’s Peabody Museum has made consideration of regularities difficult previously. My recent analysis of a large sample of figurines transferred from the Heye Foundation to the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, added to the previous samples, provides a stronger basis for analysis. This chapter is a first report of that analysis.

PLAYA DE LOS MUERTOS FIGURINES IN TIME AND SPACE

All of the figurines I am discussing come from the drainage of the Ulua River, on the Caribbean coast of Honduras (Figure 3.1). Based on associations with stratigraphy, carbon samples, and ceramics at Puerto Escondido, the examples I am discussing were made no earlier than ca. 1100 BCE and as late as ca. 100 CE.
The majority, and all those that meet the classic definition of Playa de los Muertos figurines, probably can be assigned dates between 900 and 200 BCE.

There are a few examples of early figurines, from Chotepe phase deposits dating between 1100 and 900 BCE at Puerto Escondido (Joyce 2007a; Joyce and Henderson 2001, 2007), or stylistically attributable to the same tradition, even if lacking precise provenience (Henderson 1992; Joyce 2008). Among these earliest figurines are examples that depict aprons or simply waistbands, shown as if composed of flexible or at times twined materials. These figurines imply that already in the Early Formative some textile technology was being employed at sites along the Ulua River, while leaving in question precisely what fibers and tools were in use.

Substantial assemblages of Playa de los Muertos tradition figurines from deposits dating after 900 BCE come both from the type site of Playa de los

Figure 3.1. Map of the drainage of the Ulua River, northern Honduras, showing sites from which Playa de los Muertos tradition figurines have been recovered. Drawing by author.
Muertos (Joyce 2001; Joyce, Hendon and Sheptak 2008) and from Puerto Escondido (Joyce 2007a; Joyce and Henderson 2001, 2007). Collections from significant research at Playa de los Muertos and nearby sites in the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Gordon 1898; Kennedy 1981; Popenoe 1934; Stone 1941; Strong, Kidder, and Paul 1938) are housed at the Peabody Museum of Harvard University, where I conducted an analysis of approximately one hundred examples as part of my initial definition of variability within the core Playa de los Muertos tradition (Joyce 2003). Subsequent analyses of figurine fragments I have excavated at the Puerto Escondido, Las Honduritas, and San Juan Camalote sites, and of figurines from the Rio Pelo site curated at the northern regional center of the Honduran Institute of Anthropology and History, support my initial definition of four classes of Middle Formative Playa de los Muertos figurines (Joyce 2008; Joyce, Hendon, and Sheptak 2008). It is figurines made during these centuries—from 900 to 200 BCE—that form the basis for my discussion of textiles in use and their social significance in Formative Honduras.


data missing

PLAYA DE LOS MUERTOS FIGURINES: SUBJECTS

Based on details of the figure and costume of the human subjects depicted on Playa de los Muertos tradition figurines, I defined three main classes and a fourth distinctive, if rare, class. I suggested the variability in costume correlates with the age of the represented subjects, in part based on details of the figurines and in part on comparison of ornamentation of figurines with contemporary human burials (Joyce 2000a, 2003).

Class 4, the most common group, consists of youthful figures, including those identifiable as babies carried in the arms of adults. These figures can have areas of shaved hair. They have the lowest frequency of ear ornaments, the highest proportion of necklaces, and universally are shown wearing anklets, a feature that closely parallels actual burials of children. A higher proportion of these figurines are shown in seated posture than in the collections as a whole. I interpreted these figurines as infants and children at early stages in a life course primarily marked by the development of different hair treatments.

Class 3 figurines, the second most common in my samples, are similar to Class 4, but are distinguished by the placement of beads threaded through long locks of hair. The figures almost universally wear bracelets and are commonly provided with ear ornaments and necklaces. A higher proportion was depicted in standing postures than in the collection as a whole. A fair number have a hand touching their face or hair. While not a defining feature of this
class, these gestures, along with the higher proportion shown standing and the highest incidence of body ornaments, suggests these figures may depict subjects engaged in ritual actions, perhaps dancing.

Much less common than these two groups are Class 1 figurines, with signs of age such as facial wrinkles or sunken cheeks. Class 1 figurines can have beaded tresses of hair like those of Class 3, but are distinguished by use of punctations between the nape and brow apparently representing closely cropped hair. All examples have ear ornaments, including the most complex examples recorded, many with pendants. Necklaces, bracelets, and ankle ornaments are all found in proportions similar to those in the collections as a whole.

A fourth, most uncommon but highly distinctive group, Class 2, includes figures similar to Class 3, but distinguished by the depiction of wide bands used to tie long hair into a topknot. These have a low frequency of ear ornaments, close to that seen in Class 4 figurines. Very few Class 2 figurines have any indication of a necklace. Most examples do not preserve the limbs, so the frequencies of bracelets or anklets are unknown. For the same reason, posture is uncertain in the majority of these figurines.

I compared the four classes I defined based on the Peabody Museum collection to those previously documented in Tulane University’s Middle American Research Institute (Agurcia Fasquelle 1977). With the exception of a much lower reported frequency of figurines that could be identified as members of Class 2 (Topknot), the same clusters of characteristics held in this second collection. The distinctions made also served to classify collections curated in Honduras, including those from my own excavations (Joyce 2008; Joyce, Hendon, and Sheptak 2008). Most recently, an examination of a previously undocumented collection, formerly in the Heye Foundation, now forming part of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) of the Smithsonian Institution, showed that the same four groups served to classify the subject matter of human figurines in Playa de los Muertos style. Together, these collections, making up a total of over 250 fragmentary figurines, form the basis for my examination of cloth and clothing in Formative Honduras.

TEXTILES AND TECHNIQUES

Few distinctive artifacts that could be used in spinning, weaving, or production of bark cloth have been reported from secure Formative period contexts in Honduras. At Puerto Escondido the end of a bone awl or needle, possibly a weaving tool, was recovered from fill in an Ocotillo phase (1400–1100 BCE) house floor. For the most part, identification of fibers and techniques used to
work them in the Honduran Formative period rests almost entirely on investigation of depictions of textiles on figurines.

The bands binding the hair on Class 2 (Topknot) figurines are always depicted as a flat strip, with no indication of variability in the surface. This led me to consider the possibility that the referent of these bands might have been either woven cotton cloth or bark cloth. Both materials were in use when the first Spanish reports were made of life in Caribbean coastal Honduras, and the Ulua Valley in particular was a source of cotton for coastal exchange (Henderson 1977). In a comparative review of textile production in Honduras, Julia Hendon (2010) notes that artifact evidence for spinning fibers is clear by the end of the Classic period, and the use of needles with relatively fine thread, likely for weaving design threads into brocade on backstrap looms, by the early Classic. Perishable forms of spindle whorls quite likely were in use long before we see the first fired clay examples. Bark beaters made in stone are noted throughout the Classic period.

In the Peabody collection, one miniature figurine was suggestive of woven (presumably cotton) cloth, leading me to interpret the bands around topknots as likely woven cotton as well. This figurine was similar to a second miniature figurine pendant excavated in Honduras. Both show a figure wearing a veil draped over the head. This unusual costume is repeated at full scale in one figurine from the NMAI collection (Figure 3.2). The larger scale allows for a more detailed examination of the garment. The draping of the veil reinforces the impression that we are seeing more flexible woven cloth rather than more rigid bark cloth. In addition, this larger example shows a fringe on the veil, a detail that again suggests the use of woven cloth. The NMAI collection also includes a second example of a similar rectangular swathe of cloth, here used as a cape, again draping in a way that suggests woven cloth rather than bark cloth (Figure 3.3).

The most common representation of what appear to be similar large pieces of woven cloth in the collections I have previously recorded were knee-length skirts. In the Peabody Museum collection, skirts were especially common on Class 4 figurines, where almost half of the recorded figurines wore a skirt or apron. In contrast, only slightly more than 25 percent of Class 3 figurines, and 5 percent of Class 1 figurines, wore skirts. Skirts are not uncommon in the NMAI collection (Figure 3.4). In one case, the depiction of the garment on the upper thighs suggests possible interpretation as a pair of shorts instead of a skirt (Figure 3.5).

These cloth garments are all consistent with backstrap loom weaving technology, and particularly with fine cotton cloth. With the exception of
indications of fringes, it is notable that the headbands, veils, capes, skirts, and possible shorts are all depicted without internal markings of any kind. If we are dealing with cotton cloth, then what we are looking at is presumably unmodified plain-weave cotton. While details of jewelry on these figurines are quite often touched up with white, yellow, or less commonly red post-fire pigment, no color has been detected on the areas representing these wide cloth pieces. Finally, at least in the samples at present recorded, woven cloth skirts are normally an attribute of seated figurines.

On a few figurines, narrow bands, most without internal detail that I tentatively identify as equivalent to larger pieces of cloth, are used as bands around the waist or under the arms of seated or standing figurines (Figure 3.6). An
example in the NMAI also illustrates the more common association of this site on the body with a second form of textile: twined work.

Twined textiles are especially common attributes of standing figures with complex shaved and beaded hair treatment that can be assigned to Class 3. Indicated with a variety of conventions, from punctation to diagonal parallel lines to very meticulous depictions of what appears to be finger weaving, these bands are normally narrower. They may include fringes, knotting, and at times attached beading. They are particularly likely to come in groups rather than as single items (Figure 3.7). Twined bands are repeatedly depicted as overlapping front or less commonly back aprons composed of plain rectangles like those I argue represent woven cloth.

The contrast between the incidence of these two kinds of cloth, with twined bands typical of figurine Class 3 and apparent plain weave of Classes 1 and 2, is not absolute. Combined with my previous analyses, in this paper I argue that Playa de los Muertos figurines record a use of culturally produced costume to transform youths into adults. Rather than a record of everyday clothing, here I interpret these representations of garments as ritual regalia.

THE SOCIAL LIFE OF CLOTH

Jane Schneider and Annette Weiner (1989:1) write that “throughout history, cloth has furthered the organization of social and political life.” This
observation frames my understanding of the significance of variability in represented textiles in early Honduras. The same authors continue,

... worn or displayed in an emblematic way, cloth can denote variations in age, sex, rank, status, and group affiliation. As much as cloth discloses it can conceal, however, homogenizing difference through uniforms or sackcloth, or superimposing disguised identities through costumes and masks. ... Complex moral and ethical issues of dominance and autonomy, opulence and poverty, continence and sexuality, find ready expression through cloth (Schneider and Weiner 1989:1–2).

It is young bodies in a process of transformation that are bound by the variety of twined and woven ties. These twined textiles especially cover the midbody, from waist to thighs, focusing interpretive attention on this area. I have previously argued that the use of similar woven cloth ties to bind the hair may be associated with the process of shaving sections of hair that culminates in the disciplined adult bodies represented by the majority of Playa de los Muertos figurines. The bodies in question must thus be seen as potentially reproductive bodies, subject to interests in control from other social actors.

The tendency for large pieces of plain, untwisted cloth to serve as garments for seated figures, which includes most figures with clear signs of age, suggests a different significance for cloth in these already transformed bodies. Here the fact that the lower body is often completely concealed by skirts or shorts,
and that even the upper body may be covered by capes and veils, leads me to consider possible connections with wrapping of valuables in fine plain cloth, both in Mesoamerica and beyond. This builds on a comment made to me over twenty years ago by Annette Weiner (personal communication, 1991), who suggested that enveloping cloth garments worn by women in Mesoamerican art made the women themselves a kind of sacred bundle (see also Earley and Guernsey, this volume; Lytle and Reilly, this volume).

So why select cloth as an attribute for depiction? Again, Schneider and Weiner (1989:2) provide some guidance: “another characteristic of cloth,” they write, “which enhances its social and political roles, is how readily its appearance and that of its constituent fibers can evoke ideas of connectedness or tying.” Here the selection of woven and twined textiles, rather than bark cloth, can be seen as emphasizing the intertwining of separate elements that together make up the social context for the ritual displays of the body that are the literal subject of these figurines. But as Schneider and Weiner (1989:3) further note, “equally important are the human actions that make cloth politically and socially salient.”

In relating figurines to the actions people carried out in life, I am engaging in visual semiotics to understand figurines in terms of the implied narratives that would have preceded the image presented and that might have unfolded after the represented moment. As I argued in my first published analysis of Playa de los Muertos figurines (Joyce 1993), this is what Roland Barthes (1977a:73) called 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” (Barthes 1977c:38–39). The signs united in a narrative are bound in a relationship of “double implication: two terms pre-suppose one another,” transforming chronological order to a logical binding “capable of integrating backwards and forwards movements” through the narrative (Barthes 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.

Viewed as a “pregnant moment,” the presentation of youthful subjects with twined ties wrapped around the hair and mid-body refer to preceding actions, the binding of bodies with complex ties, that may well have formed part of ritual performance.
As gifts, the presentation of such textiles would have established an expectation of return and instantiated ongoing social relations. “Participants in life-cycle celebrations,” Schneider and Weiner (1989:3) write, “frequently make of cloth a continuous thread, a binding tie between two kinship groups, or three and more generations.” The young adults who are the apparent subjects of Playa de los Muertos figurines, displaying twined textiles on their bodies, would by virtue of their age have been the focus of social relations between groups transacted through marriage exchanges (cf. Lesure 1997).

This is not to say that the events these figurines reference were solely of individual or familial importance. Weiner (1989:33) characterized “cloth as the agent through which kinship identities are translated into political authority” in small-scale societies of the Pacific, ethnographic analogs in similar scale to the villages of Formative period Honduras. Like the societies Weiner studied, I understand those of Middle Formative Honduras to have had ranked multigenerational families that held and transmitted property, including titles, allowing for wealth to be converted into differential social rank. Cloth, I have previously argued, was one medium central to such transformations of wealth into social rank difference in early Central American societies (Joyce 2000b). The display of older bodies swathed in sheets of finely woven cloth is consequently suggestive of the assumption of positions of social authority based on control of one kind of valuable.

While other media of wealth and value such as marine shell and jade were also in use in Middle Formative Honduras, incorporated in burials and in the debris from some households (Joyce, Hendon, and Sheptak 2008), the presence of depictions of possible shell or jade ornaments does not discriminate among the four major classes of Playa de los Muertos figurines. Different sites on the body are emphasized, with an apparent correlation of different bodily sites with age that is also seen in burials (Joyce 2003). Why is cloth treated differently?

THE MEANINGS OF TEXTILES

In the Samoan and Trobriand Islands societies that Weiner (1989) discussed, different fibers and techniques were used to produce large volumes of textiles that were exchanged during public ceremonies marking life-cycle events and political achievements. The skill, knowledge, and labor involved in making textiles is directly indexed by the appearance of the final products, so the exchanges of textiles are simultaneously displays of the manifest labor of members of the donor social group (see Hendon 2006). It is this indexical
quality of textiles, I argue, that made them especially apt to manifest the accumulation of social distinction in Middle Formative Honduran society.

“Indexical” here is an explicit reference to the semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce, which contrasts with the more familiar use in archaeology of a Saussurean framework of signification (Joyce 2007b). For Peirce, signs are not arbitrary and static, but rather emerge through the historical process of engagement in meaning-making. Signs can be differentiated by how they work. Some rely on iconicity (resemblance); it is this kind of signification that allows me to suggest that the clay sculptures I am analyzing would have been understood as images of human beings and that the raised bands on some of these could have been interpreted in the past, as I do in the present, as woven and twined textiles. But the same physical features also, simultaneously, lend themselves to understanding through the connections they have, indexically tracing connections between the object at hand and something else.

The techniques involved in making the twined and woven textiles represented in Playa de los Muertos figurines were specific bodies of skills and knowledge (Hendon 2006). Within small-scale communities, including members who actually made such things, the visual appearance of the small analogs would have indexically invoked assessments of the skill and labor required to make objects such as fine plain-weave cloth and complex twined textiles. Weiner (1989) argues that cloth, in part, assumes value in social ceremonies because of such indexical relationships. Through such indexical signification, cloth can point to shifts in control of productivity by group members associated with such life events as marriage and death.

I suggest that the Honduran Formative period displays of textiles implied by figurines can be understood as having the same potential to index the skill and work of those who produced the textiles actually displayed and exchanged in social ceremonies. The juxtaposition of these depictions with iconic signs of changes over the life course, in what appear to be primarily or even entirely female subjects, is suggestive in light of the later predominance in Mesoamerican societies of women as textile producers. Making manifest the potential of the person to contribute to the wealth of the social group, textiles displayed in the context of life-cycle rituals associated changes in social status with exchanges of social goods.

TEXTILE FRAGMENTS

It would not be appropriate to leave this discussion, preliminary in so many ways, without indicating where the fabric is not complete. So what is missing?
As I have previously noted, I have yet to record any clear examples of masculine figurines (Joyce 2003). The specific examples of costume described as “loincloths” by Doris Stone (1941) and Ricardo Agurcia Fasquelle (1977) actually appear to be aprons with fringes. Contemporary with the smaller fired-clay figurines of the Playa de los Muertos tradition, there are larger (close to life-size) stone sculptures in the round from the Middle Formative site Los Naranjos (Joyce and Henderson 2002). One of these clearly depicts a V-shaped covering supported by a narrow band at the waist, probably a loincloth, leading us to identify this as an image of a male figure. While the technology of production of this representation is different, the most likely technique to produce this costume item would, again, be weaving, particularly weaving of cotton cloth.

It would appear that in Middle Formative villages in Honduras multiple techniques were used to produce cloth and twined textiles that were significant in the transformation of youthful bodies into disciplined adult bodies in social ceremonies. That this was in fact a historically contingent process, and not simply universal or atemporal cultural practice, is suggested by a shift in the representation of costume and the practices it implied in the years following the Middle Formative production and use of figurines in the Playa de los Muertos style.

At the beginning of the Late Formative period, figurines stylistically similar to those of the earlier Playa de los Muertos tradition were produced, but smaller in scale and with much less variability in pose and ornamentation (Joyce 2008; Joyce, Hendon, and Sheptak 2008). At San Juan Camalote in the Cuyumapa Valley the only human figurine recovered from a deposit dating from 200–100 BCE is shown in standing position and wears an apron of irregular outline with internal details, suggesting an animal skin rather than the twined or woven cloth of earlier aprons and skirts (Figure 3.8).

Nor is this costume element unique to this figurine or even this site. At a second site contemporary with San Juan Camalote, Rio Pelo, I recorded a much larger excavated assemblage of figurines. Here a similar apron was suggested on multiple figurines by an irregular zone of punctation in the same area of the body. Most Rio Pelo figurines had no indication of clothing. So it is also noteworthy that a skirt portrayed on another of these figurines (Figure 3.9) is composed of long strips of material, producing a quite different appearance than the smooth surfaces of skirts on earlier Playa de los Muertos figurines. The composition of a skirt as an assemblage of strips suggests the use of bark cloth rather than woven cloth.

This shift in depicted clothing cannot be separated from other likely changes in the use of figurines that are implied by the more restricted range of
postures and variations in apparent age seen in the late stages of Honduran Formative figurine production. Rio Pelo–style figurines are notably smaller than the main group of Playa de los Muertos figurines (Joyce 2008). This continues a long-term trend of reducing the size of figurines, with those of the late Early Formative Chotepe phase being largest, the Middle Formative Playa de los Muertos group, including effigy vessels, equal in size to Chotepe phase figurines, but the solid hand-modeled figurines, which are most numerous, substantially smaller (Joyce 2003). At the same time and at the same sites, a group of figurines was made that replicated the range of characteristics notable in the main Playa de los Muertos style, but these figurines were about half the size. These miniature figurines were pierced for suspension and, in addition to human subjects, include all the examples of animals that I have recorded.

Based on these size differences, I have suggested that the Chotepe figurines could have been displayed in larger gatherings while still retaining the ability to have details seen and interpreted. The effigy vessels of the Playa de los Muertos tradition, of the same scale, retained the same capacity for interpretation and, by virtue of the movement from hand to hand implied in their functional form, might even have enhanced the ability of participants in social ceremonies to engage with them.

The contemporaneous full-size Playa de los Muertos figurines, with their small scale, three-dimensional modeling (contrasting with the frontal

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**Figure 3.8.** Animal pelt apron, detail of figurine from San Juan Camalote, Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia. Illustration courtesy of Kathryn Killacky.

**Figure 3.9.** Skirt made of strips of material, possibly bark cloth, detail of figurine from Rio Pelo, Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia. Illustration courtesy of Kathryn Killacky.
emphasis of Chotepe figurines), and wealth of detail, would have demanded handling to yield to full interpretation. Seen from a distance, these figurines would largely have been reduced to signifying postures: seated or standing. This multiplicity of levels of potential interpretation for full-scale Playa de los Muertos figurines is suggestive in the context of social life in which more distinctions among different groups of residents were clearly forming in such things as architectural construction (Joyce 2007a). Finally, the miniature figurine-pendants, including all the known animal images in Playa de los Muertos style, would have required extremely intimate contact for interpretation. Like the full-scale figurines, they are modeled on all surfaces and include a wealth of detail. Pierced for suspension through the neck, they would have been presented frontally to others and potentially perceived solely as “pendant,” while being known to the person wearing them as specific images. In their use they index a separation of self from others that can be related to the idea of display of the ornamented body. On another level, it can be argued, display of the ornamented body is the actual thematic subject of all these figurines.

The Rio Pelo figurines go further. Their normal size is equivalent to the Middle Formative miniatures, but I have recorded no examples with evidence of piercing for suspension. Appropriate to be handled and with no capacity for details to be discerned from any appreciable distance, these figurines for the most part dispense with the elaborate detailing of their earlier counterparts. What few details are represented thus become all the more interesting. In addition to the rare elements of costume already noted—the animal skin and possible bark cloth skirt—a certain number present hair in a topknot, but without any clear delineation of a wrapping band. Other details of hair or body ornaments are either absent or so greatly simplified that they cannot be clearly identified by us today. What is most evident in these figurines is their posture, standing or sitting, emphasized by the exaggerated size of the thighs and buttocks. Again, thinking of these in historical context from a Peircean perspective, we might regard these iconic figurines as serving as media for symbolic interpretation, in lieu of the indexical interpretation that Playa de los Muertos figurines of the Middle Formative enabled. From a Peircean perspective, symbolic signs are arbitrary only insofar as the connections of sign and meaning have become divorced from a history of interpretation and are conventional. In this way, we might consider the postures of the Formative period figurines as eventually coming to be completely conventional symbols, perhaps of age, status, or role, and of these social facts themselves becoming conventional in the course of Formative history.
CONCLUSION

While this study is still in the early stages, it suggests that we can explore the technologies implied by the depiction of costume in figurines, and the potential social significance of representation of costume, if we keep in mind that figurines have as their central representational topic the formation of human subjects. The depiction of items of costume is not simply a reflection of what people did, but what was significant to do. In life, multiple cloth production technologies were used to produce material appropriate for specific subject positions, and the adoption of specific materials as part of an embodied self literally made those selves. In visual culture, the selection of features for representation served as the medium for interpretation, which drew iconically, indexically, and symbolically on the experiences of human subjects and cannot be divorced from it.

The contrast between fine unmarked cloth and twisted, textured, tied bindings in the Playa de los Muertos figurines requires exploration in terms of ritualization of the youthful body, not merely or even primarily the female body. Shifts over time from bodies showing culturally transformed materials to those wearing the least processed skins and the products of processing bark may well be telling us less about what people wore than about what persons were as the village societies of the Middle Formative were being transformed into more hierarchical Classic societies.

That cloth was a medium both for the literal formation of social ties and political hierarchies, and for the metaphorical equation of social and political events with acts of creativity, made it appropriate to be included in figural representation. Indexing labor, skill, and social personhood, cloth constituted ties that bound the human subjects of Middle Formative Honduras to each other and to their histories.

REFERENCES


The Naked and the Ornamented
Embodiment and Fluid Identities in Early Formative Oaxaca

Jeffrey P. Blomster

INTRODUCTION

The body and its adornment are critical in the performance and construction of gender, status, identity, and group affiliation. Bodies are produced through cultural practices, through patterns of action and interaction among social agents. The body tracks and is a medium of social processes and political change. Social meaning is inscribed on the body, which has led to it being referring to as text, something that is performed—an activity rather than static identity (Butler 1993; Douglas 1970). Throughout prehispanic societies, bodies served as dynamic arenas of performance and negotiation, used as canvases to convey socially meaningful identities and actions. Identities were shaped and transformed through costume, appearance of the body, and performance of bodily actions. While Western notions of the body closely link it with individuals and individuality (the idea of a bounded, nondivisible person), Chris Fowler (2004:3) focuses on concepts of personhood linked with identities “that were highly contextual, and relational to specific events and interactions.” A relational perspective informs this essay.

Situated in the Mixteca Alta of highland Oaxaca, my analysis focuses on the Early Formative period, the era from the earliest permanent villages to the emergence of ranked or sociopolitical complex societies, a span of over 500 years (1400–850 BCE). The range of materials that can be employed in analyses that focus on embodiment varies throughout Early Formative Mesoamerica, ranging from actual bodies encountered in burials to exotic ornaments and paraphernalia less readily accessible to all members of society. In the case
of one society, the Gulf Coast Olmec of San Lorenzo, images of the body were also created in a very public medium: monumental stone sculptures, including one category that depicted only heads—the famed multi-ton colossal heads. One artifact type preserved at all early Mesoamerican villages that track emic concepts of bodies and identity is clay figurines.

I confine my primary analysis to the Early Formative, the Cruz A (1400–1150 BCE) and Cruz B (1150–900/850 BCE) phases at Etlatongo in the Nochixtlán Valley of the Mixteca Alta, and the contemporaneous phases (Tierras Largas and San José) encountered at sites in the Valley of Oaxaca (Figure 4.1). Several items associated with adornment that relate to concepts of embodiment have been found in Early Formative contexts at Etlatongo, such as small iron-ore mirror fragments, probable ceramic ear ornament sherds (from “eartubes”; see Chapter 6), and jadeite beads. In addition, implements for applying body adornment have been encountered (see below and also Chapter 5). Clear evidence of the production of shell ornaments has also been encountered from Cruz B contexts at Etlatongo, with only fragments of the finished products recovered. An Olmec-style mask fragment was recovered in a Cruz B context

![Map of Oaxaca and adjacent regions of Mesoamerica with Formative sites from the text indicated.](image-url)
(Blomster 2002:fig. 9, 2004:fig. 5.10), indicative of the kinds of costumes and transitory identities deployed at specific events and rituals.

Representations of the body, however, have been encountered in only one medium at Early Formative Etlatongo: ceramic figurines, which reveal patterns
in how the body is conceived and elaborated. In terms of bodies and their parts, partial representations can stand for the whole—a practice that flourished in Early Formative Mesoamerica (Blomster 2011), from Olmec colossal basalt heads (Coe and Diehl 1980; Pool 2007) to wooden bust figures from El Manati (Ortiz Ceballos et al. 1997). Excavations in both the Valley of Oaxaca and the Nochixtlán Valley have yielded small ceramic “bust” figures, such as a largely intact and hollow Cruz B example from Etlatongo, which exhibits only the upper portion of the chest and some widening around the shoulders for arms before terminating (Figure 4.2). With a concept of the person as dividual and partible (Fowler 2004), body parts probably had specific associations as well as serving as discrete aspects of personhood (Blomster 2011). In the epigraphy of the later Zapotec culture of Monte Albán and the Classic Maya, heads signified identity and could evoke the whole body; the Maya term ba(h) references both “self” and “head” (Houston and Stuart 1998:85).

EMBODIMENT, COSTUME, AND FIGURINES

I deploy Early Formative figurines from Etlatongo to explore the intersection of sex (as determined by primary and secondary sexual characteristics), gender, and social identity, inscribed on the body through ornamentation, beautification, and costume. Figurines, examples of emic self-imaging, at early village sites allow us to consider how humans reflexively created their understandings of embodiment. Through figurine bodies and, rarely at Etlatongo, their incised, appliquéd, and/or painted costumes, villagers communicated different aspects of social identity and rank. While much figurine scholarship has focused on sex and gender, other social roles and identities concerned ancient villagers that were not primarily linked with sex and gender, such as age differences (Joyce 2003). The link between sex and gender also remains problematic; biological sex may be strongly correlated with gender, but maintaining a critical perspective encourages examination of other, nonanatomical attributes of the figurine: costume, implements, and posture. In burials, material offerings may be better indicators of gender than human remains, as has been argued in an important reinterpretation of the bones from Monte Albán’s Tomb 7 as gender female (McCafferty and McCafferty 1994).

The body as a very physical entity is also a medium of expression, closely linked to the social system in which it is contextualized. Bodies and social identities are constructed through overlapping social and cultural practices, such as figurine production and use, and are monitored by society, although the degree and impact of this monitoring and dialectical interplay remains
debated (Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1984). There are important tensions in the meaning of the physical and social body and its dual role as symbol and agent (see Douglas 1970; Reisier and Koo 2004; Van Wolputte 2004). I acknowledge both the real existence of the physical body and its constituent parts as well as the social construction of bodies. Identities and persons, like bodies, are constituted through different social practices, interactions, and contexts. Fowler (2004:9) usefully contrasts individuality with dividuality, whereby a person is composite and multiauthored—concepts that are not mutually exclusive in one body or one identity. Costume, headdresses, and ornaments (and their placement) may further enhance the information conveyed by the body about social identity through beautification, but may also contest gender and other identities (Brumfiel 1996).

While I have argued elsewhere that it would be a mistake to ascribe only one role to figurines (Blomster 2009), they prove critical in narratives about negotiations of social identity and expressing relationships between individuals and social groups. Figurines appear in the archaeological record prior to complex sociopolitical structures and state-sanctioned religions and index identities beyond those that appear in later monumental art. Used in activities that occurred initially at a nonpublic and household level beyond the gaze of political authorities, they are most commonly found in household trash and infrequently as offerings and/or arranged in formal scenes. As the impact of societal monitoring and dialectical interplay remains debated in the social construction of the body, so does the amount of an object’s agency and thus the differential contextual and relational significance of figurines in social reproduction and social relations (see Bailey 2005; Gell 1998). In Early Formative Oaxaca, figurines occur at different size scales. Hollow figurines are larger and often modeled on all sides for display among a larger social group (Blomster 1998, 2009). In contrast, solid figurines are smaller and, in the Etlatongo sample, often not modeled on the back, and employed in more intimate settings and contexts than hollow figurines. Such different materialities as informed by scale suggest the different contexts and social practices of figurine use, reinforcing the variable roles these objects played in society (see also Chapter 3).

THE SAMPLE: ETLATONGO FIGURINES

Located between two rivers on some of the most fertile land in the Nochixtlán Valley, Etlatongo has yielded a corpus of Early Formative figurines found in test units and larger-scale robotage excavations, which have exposed portions
of houses and one possible public space (Blomster 2004, 2009). The Early Formative occupation of Etlatongo developed primarily during the Cruz B phase. Artifacts, both ceramic vessels and figurines, stylistically identifiable as Cruz A occur in early Cruz B contexts throughout the site, but no primary Cruz A occupation has yet been encountered at Etlatongo (Blomster 2004; Zárate Morán 1987). As the large Cruz A village of Yucuita, 10 km to the north, dramatically shrank in size (Winter 1984), Etlatongo grew to approximately 26 ha during the Cruz B phase and became the largest site documented in the Nochixtlán Valley. I provisionally interpret Etlatongo as a ranked society, the center of a small chiefdom in this part of the Nochixtlán Valley, comparable to San José Mogote in the Etla arm of the Valley of Oaxaca (Marcus and Flannery 1996). Additional excavation data, however, remain lacking from other Cruz B sites in the Nochixtlán Valley in order to further substantiate the degree of political organization in this region. Etlatongo continued to be occupied throughout the prehispanic era and was one of the extant Postclassic kingdoms encountered by the Spanish invaders.

At Etlatongo, figurine fragments were invariably encountered in middens, storage pits, above house surfaces, and in fill (Blomster 2004). One unusual Cruz B figurine context occurred in the southern edge of Etlatongo, where a disproportionate amount of solid figurines came from midden reutilized as platform fill to elevate the surface of a public area (Mound 1); figurine frequency from this context is over ten times greater than anywhere else at Etlatongo, and I suggest that used figurines, as spent ritual paraphernalia, were placed in the refuse deposited as platform fill for this probable area of public space (Blomster 2004:fig. 4.3). While some classes of figurines, such as Olmec-style hollow baby figurines (what I refer to as Group 1; see Blomster 1998, 2002), do appear restricted in a Cruz B society best characterized as along a continuum of sociopolitical differentiation, there appear to be no restrictions on the availability of most Early Formative solid figurines.

It is not clear if the Early Formative figurines at Etlatongo were made by every household. The similarity of certain figurine types between spatially discrete contexts suggests some possible part-time specialists. In the Valley of Oaxaca, Marcus Winter (1994, 2005) has suggested that some Tierras Largas phase figurines, due to their great similarity between sites such as Hacienda Blanca and Tierras Largas, may have been made by specialists at Hacienda Blanca. Comparable data suggesting regional specialization are not available to assess production issues for the Nochixtlán Valley.

I have selected a relatively small sample: solid ceramic figurines of humans that are from Cruz B contexts or are diagnostic Cruz B (as well as Cruz A) in
terms of style from adjacent contexts. Figurines from these phases are hand-modeled and usually fired brown, sometimes complemented with slip and/or red to orange paint. I have not included animal and bird images, which do not appear prior to Cruz B in the Nochixtlán Valley and the San José phase in the Valley of Oaxaca, except for an apparently nonhuman miniature mask (technically not a figurine) from a Tierras Largas phase context at San José Mogote (Marcus 1998:fig. 9.5). Thus, the sample consists primarily of heads and large body fragments as well as several temporally diagnostic limbs. Damaged and nondiagnostic heads and bodies are not employed, nor do I include the vast majority of limbs recovered from Cruz B contexts at Etlatongo. The Early Formative Etlatongo sample featured here includes 141 figurines: 80 heads and 75 body/limb fragments; 14 fragments have both heads and bodies. I organize my discussion on heads and then bodies, as they exhibit different information.

CLASSIFYING CRUZ A AND CRUZ B FIGURINES

The sample of 141 figurines includes both phases (Cruz A and Cruz B) of the Early Formative. Only twelve figurine heads, however, have elements that stylistically relate to Cruz A, such as the way the pupils are made with pinholes or pinpricks—a feature also exhibited for Tierras Largas phase figurines in the Valley of Oaxaca, along with thinly incised horizontal slit eyebrows and mouths that generally have parted lips that frame a shallow mouth, often with one or more pinholes (Marcus 1998; Winter 2005). Much attention is paid to the hair (see below). The presence of this many stylistically Cruz A figurines at Etlatongo is intriguing, due to the lack of primary Cruz A contexts at Etlatongo. Considering the few Cruz A figurines found at Yucuita (Winter 1984, 2005), their frequency at Etlatongo appears higher than expected, but on some of these figurines Cruz A features—such as pinhole eyes or mouths—are combined with more typical Cruz B traits, perhaps indicative of a subtype of transitional figurines during the initial years of the Cruz B phase. I classify only six of these twelve figurines from Etlatongo as predominantly Cruz A; the other six are early Cruz B, while retaining some Cruz A elements. Likewise, most of the six classified as Cruz A clearly come from close to the Cruz B transition. For example, Figure 4.3a has a Cruz B head shape (see below) and gouged eyes without pinpricks, but there is a Cruz A pinprick in the slightly open mouth and finely incised hair. In contrast, Figure 4.3b is primarily Cruz A in terms of a round head shape, pinpricks in the eyes and mouth, and finely detailed hair. It does exhibit, however, a thin raised area defining the eyes, which is more typical of Cruz B. Another probable early
Cruz B head features Cruz A pinpricks combined with later elements in the eyes and mouth, while a white, Cruz B–slip covers the small, rounded head. Without a larger published Cruz A sample from the Nochixtlán Valley, I compare the Etlatongo figurines to those from the Valley of Oaxaca. In addition to specific facial features, especially eyes and mouth, one clear difference between Cruz A/Tierras Largas figurines and those from the Cruz B/San José phase is head shape. Based on the illustrated Tierras Largas phase figurines from Hacienda Blanca, Tierras Largas, and San José Mogote (Marcus 1998; Winter 2005), the earlier heads are squatter and rounder than the more elongated Cruz B heads. Some Tierras Largas phase heads are roughly “V-shaped,” with the forehead being the widest part of the head. On Cruz B and San

**Figure 4.3.** Early figurines from Etlatongo: (a) early Cruz B, with some Cruz A features; (b) Cruz A, although the raised clay around the eye is more typical of Cruz B.
José phase heads, if a part of the head is wider than the rest, it occurs lower—around the cheeks. Cruz B figurine heads are more elongated in height and sometimes bulbous, approximating the kinds of tabular-erect cranial manipulation documented osteologically during the San José phase in the Valley of Oaxaca (Marcus and Flannery 1996:106), reflecting spatial and temporal differences in how heads themselves may have been modified—as living ornaments or regalia—to conform to and communicate different aesthetic visions in body beautification.

Cruz A figurines in the Etlatongo sample are marked by very sensitive attention to the hair, either through thin incised lines or punctations (Figure 4.3). Comparable to the contemporaneous Valley of Oaxaca, there does seem to be more of an emphasis on hairdos than headgear during Cruz A. Joyce Marcus (1998:47) notes some of her supposed male figurines from this phase wear tight-fitting “helmets” (although her identification of some Tierras Largas phase figurines as male remains problematic; see below). Especially elaborate hairdos are shown on two nearly intact Cruz A figurines reportedly from a cave in the Cavua Colorado, a deep gorge between Jaltepec and Tilantongo, south of Etlatongo (Byland and Pohl 1994:85; Winter 1984:fig. 9.4).

As noted above, differences between Cruz A and Cruz B eyes and mouths are also diagnostic (Blomster 2009; Marcus 1998; Winter 2005). Diverging from typical Cruz A phase features, the eyes are raised on five of the twelve Etlatongo figurines with some Cruz A features, a diagnostic feature for the proposed early Cruz B figurine subtype. One nearly complete figurine, excavated in the oldest Cruz B context at Etlatongo, exhibits typical Cruz A pin-prick eyes and mouth (Figure 4.4). The incised eyebrow, however, is arched and diagonal (as are those on the two Cruz A Cavua Colorado figurines), while Tierras Largas phase slit eyebrows are almost always horizontal. Hair is not indicated on the front of the figurine, perhaps mostly covered by a cap or cloth that is not clearly delineated; long hair, however, appears to be gathered on the back of its neck. It also one of the few figurines with primary sexual characteristics, with female genitalia indicated by an incision.

A small figurine with primarily Cruz A facial features but a more typical Cruz B hairdo or “buns” (see below) exhibits a hole for suspension atop the figurine, suggesting that this figurine could actually be worn, materializing the wearer’s relational social identity (Figure 4.5). The scale of this figurine is also intriguing; much smaller than its contemporaries, if worn it would be visible only to people close to its wearer—a pattern also observed in Honduras (Joyce 2009:413) in terms of different spatial contexts of potential engagement. There is little plastic detail invested on this figurine beside the very basic face, arms
that frame a bulbous body, and feet (no legs) that allow the figurine to stand on its own. Red paint, however, remains in clear bands along the arms, as well as more fragmentary on the face and upper body, and may have been more readily visible to observers than details of the figure’s physiognomy.

**HEADS, HEADGEAR, AND HAIRDOS**

Unless heads are attached to bodies, they are difficult to use in determining sex. Some heads, however, do show clear secondary sexual characteristics—facial hair. Two heads have clearly delineated beards or goatees; one of these heads combines Cruz A and Cruz B elements, indicating that it is probably the earliest clear depiction of a male in the Nochixtlán Valley (Figure 4.6a). A third head may also have a goatee, with several eroded lines on this heavily damaged feature possibly indicating hair. A fourth male head has a probable mustache, with red pigment on it (Figure 4.6b). Punctations on the side of the head may
mark either hair or scarification; otherwise, the top of the head appears shaved. A fifth head tentatively assigned as male is attached to the upper part of a flat chest. The figure appears to be bald, except for a Mohawk that extends from above the forehead to the back of the head. With a larger sample of heads attached to bodies, it may be possible to determine that at Cruz B Etlatongo, male heads were more likely to be tonsured. Sponge-like bumps, probably hair, on otherwise shaved heads may also be associated with male figurines. None of this small group of probable male heads wears headgear.

These features contrast with those for twelve heads assessed as female because they are attached to bodies that exhibit clear female secondary sexual characteristics. None of these female heads is shown bald, although I note there are Mesoamerican examples where bald women possessed an aesthetic and erotic allure—such as the bald female harem of the Maya underworld God L, shown on codex-style pots, including the Princeton Vase (Coe 1978:plate 1). The attraction of such hairless women extends beyond prehispanic Mesoamerica; aficionados of American blues music are familiar with the prototypical “bald-headed woman,” portrayed as both a seductress and trickster.
Of eleven female heads intact enough to examine the top of the head, ten have some kind of headgear. When hair is not completely obscured by headgear, it is often shown in clearly incised lines extending down the back of the head—if the back of the head is in any way modeled. In some cases, the hair is clearly shown as parted in the center, as in Figure 4.7, with an unusually deep groove demarcating the part. Most figurines in this tonsorial group have projections coming down the sides of the head; in some cases these are clearly indicated as braids through additional incisions or gouges.

Most of the female headgear consists of variations on snug caps or headbands of a rolled cloth coiled around the top of the head. Caps sometimes lie flat on the head, while other examples come to a mushroom-like point (Figure 4.8). I should note that in some cases, without good surface preservation of incised lines that represent hair, the “caps” could simply be a coiffure. In some examples, an otherwise plain cap has an appliquéd plain bun on top; while this may represent a tuft of hair, the lack of striations suggests it may actually
be a decorative fold of the cloth that forms the cap or an additional ornament applied to it.

Of the heads that cannot be classified by sex based on primary and secondary characteristics but are probably female, another common headgear is a cap and/or mass of undifferentiated hair from which emerge three disk-like shapes with grooves (Figure 4.9), what I call donut combs, which probably represent individual knotted tufts of hair—similar to what Marcus (1998:35) refers to as “Zulu knots” in the Valley of Oaxaca. If not for the deep grooves in these clay appliqués, I would also entertain the idea that they represent circular mirrors. In the example of Figure 4.9a, two of these small incised disks attach to the sides of the head, with a third larger—and longer—appliqué in between, which may represent a lock of hair.

Less common \( (n = 4) \) are turbans, a strip of cloth wrapped around the head. There are also combinations of caps and turbans as well as headbands and
Figure 4.9. Etlatongo Cruz B heads with elaborate headgear: (a) with two appliqué “donut combs” on the sides and long, probable lock of hair in the center; (b) with three appliqué “donut combs.”

caps. In one example (Figure 4.10a) an additional element has been added: an actual miniature obsidian blade. An unusual headgear, limited to two examples, resembles the wimple, or headgear, of a nun’s habit. It appears to be an extended cap, covering the top and sides of the head (Figure 4.10b).

A focus on ornamentation on Cruz B figurines correlates with the increased frequency of headgear compared with those from Cruz A. Ear and nose ornaments appear for the first time at Etlatongo on Cruz B figurines, although both of the complete Cruz A Cavua Colorado figurines have pierced ears (see above; Winter 1984). Pierced ears and ear ornaments, primarily earspools, are depicted on a majority of Tierras Largas phase figurines in the Valley of
Oaxaca (see Chapter 6), while nose ornaments are virtually absent (Marcus 1998:49; Winter 2005). Cruz B ear ornaments on Etlatongo figurines are much different from earspools, large, open-throat ornaments surrounded by a flare often associated with elevated status (see Chapter 6). The Etlatongo ear ornaments primarily correspond with what Clark and Colman (Chapter 6) define as an ear bead or ear disk, a small appliqué dot of clay, approximately 2 to 5 mm in diameter at Etlatongo, placed in the approximate area of the earlobe, or slightly below it, as if suspended from a piercing. Similar ear beads have been recorded on over half of the contemporaneous figurines in the Valley of Oaxaca (Marcus 1998:49); earspools, however, are rarely represented on San

Figure 4.10. Cruz B figurines from Etlatongo with unusual headgear: (a) a probable turban headdress with a small obsidian blade; (b) a wimple-like bonnet.
José Mogote figurines, with the best examples on the figurines that make up the arranged scene (Feature 63) found beneath the floor of House 16. A nose ornament is a small ball of clay usually wedged in between the base of the nose and the top of the mouth, representing a plug in the nasal septum.

Of eleven well-preserved female heads from the Etlatongo sample, five have small ear beads and/or nose ornaments. Only one female figurine head, wearing a turban, has earspools. None of the five probable male heads exhibits ear or nose ornaments. At least from the small Etlatongo figurine sample, it does appear that elements of beautification external to the body—jewelry—closely correlate with female figurines (Figure 4.11). Of the total seventy-six well-preserved heads for which ornaments can be determined as present or absent, thirty have ear and/or nose ornaments (twenty-eight have ear ornaments, nine have nose ornaments [Figure 4.11a], and seven have both ear and nose ornaments [Figure 4.11b,c]). Of the twenty-eight ear ornaments, all are ear beads except for three figurines with earspools, one of which is the white-slipped head classified above as early Cruz B due to its eyes and mouth. Several hollow figurine heads—not in this sample—from Etlatongo also have earspools.

Identity and affiliation are indicated in several other ways in these heads. Ten of the solid heads in the current sample exhibit imagery representative of the Olmec style; additional hollow figurines executed in this style were also found at Etlatongo (Blomster 1998, 2002, 2009). The heads themselves evince cranial manipulation, shaping of the head to approach an aesthetic ideal. All of the
solid Olmec-style heads with well-preserved surfaces show either a white or cream slip and/or well-executed burnishing. Unlike most Cruz B heads, the eyes usually have clearly indicated pupils (Figure 4.12). Two of the heads, both of which sport caps, wear ear ornaments; no nose ornaments are preserved. The heads are generally tonsured and/or have tight caps (Figure 4.12a) from which emerge buns or disks, which never have grooves or incising indicative of knotted hair. One bald or tonsured head, blackened from use, sports a “sponge” (tuft of hair?) on top (Figure 4.12b). Another head, with a clear trapezoidal, downturned Olmec-style mouth, does have well-defined hair but no headgear. Parted in the middle, the hair continues onto the back of the figurine’s head. Long hair is probably not enough to classify this head as female. With the one exception

**Figure 4.12.** Two solid Olmec-style heads from Etlatongo, both with pupils indicated: (a) well-preserved surface with slip, either tonsured or with tight cap and “bun”; (b) eroded, blackened surface with “sponge” atop head covered in red pigment.
of long hair and two heads with ear ornaments, the other seven Olmec-style heads exhibit traits more suggestive of “male” features, although only one head (with a moustache; Figure 4.6b) would clearly be classified as male.

A final way in which identity and affiliation is indicated on figurine heads is through incised symbols on the back of the head (see Blomster 2009:fig. 5.11). While some incised designs may relate to costume/headdress, there are clear examples of incised diamond shapes and, on the back of the head in Figure 4.6b, an early version of the Venus glyph. This head is unusual in that it also has incised design just below its right cheek, a jagged line or zig-zag. Several of the so-called Olmec hollow babies have complex iconography incised and/or painted on the back of the head (Blomster 2002, 2009).

**BODIES AND EMBODIMENT**

Figurine bodies provide more consistent information on sex and, with the limited presence of costume elements and ornamentation, potentially gender, social identity, and ideology. Unfortunately, Early Formative figurines in Oaxaca rarely show primary sexual characteristics. In a study of Tierras Largas phase figurines from Hacienda Blanca \((n = 599)\) and Tierras Largas \((n = 1,583)\), only two (or 0.09 percent) of this over 2,000 figurine fragment sample exhibit external female genitalia (King and Winter 1996; Winter 2005). Similar to Marcus’s (1998) study of Valley of Oaxaca figurines, secondary sexual characteristics were employed to determine sex; 80 percent of figurines from these sites appear to be female (King and Winter 1996), with no clear male figurines present. Marcus (1998) does see male figurines, but her identifications are problematic, based only on somewhat ambiguous secondary sexual characteristics and even contextual information and posture (see below).

Contemporaneous Gulf Coast Olmec monumental sculpture and figurines also display a lack of primary sexual characteristics. Scholars have long suggested that external genitalia may simply be absent on Early Formative figurines due to possible perishable costumes (Coe and Diehl 1980:260). While preservation at most Early Formative sites precludes discovering positive evidence for such costumes, the enviable conservation of Andean materials shows the possibilities, with miniature costumes found at the Late Intermediate site of Cerro Azul in Peru (Marcus 1987:figs. 21a, 22d) as well as clothed metal figures found with Inka human sacrifices, such as the “Ice Maiden” from the Andean peak of Ampato (Reinhard 2005). Miniature garments, the largest of which is 19 cm long, are known from the northern Mixteca, close to the boundary with Puebla, where six cotton female minigarments (huipiles and
quechquemitls) were found, associated with great quantities of bark paper (at least one of which exhibited a painted figure), supposedly in three different caves (Weitlaner Johnson 1966/1967). It remains unclear, however, if these garments are even prehispanic.

For villagers at Early Formative Etlatongo, it may simply be that what appear to be largely naked figurine bodies were not closely associated with primary sexual characteristics. Genitalia were not the only way in which Mesoamericans inscribed sex and gender differences. John Monaghan (2001:289) notes that among contemporary Mixtecs, rather than a focus on genitalia for materializing differences, the emphasis is an anal-genital pollution zone, which results from the sexual act. Among prehispanic Mixtecs illustrated in Postclassic codices, naked individuals often are shown without genitalia; when figures are clothed in the codices, gender is often consistent with costume. Nudity and genitalia must be decoupled in order to approach Mixtec understandings of sex and gender.

Of the total sample of seventy-five body fragments from Etlatongo, only seven (or 9 percent) show probable indicators of primary sex—in all cases, female. While this appears to be a higher frequency than for the King and Winter (1996) study noted above, their two bodies with genitalia derive from a sample ($n = 2,182$) of all figurine fragments. In contrast, the current study is more selective and does not include the hundreds of limb fragments excavated along with more intact bodies and heads. At Etlatongo, the amount of detail varies in genitalia representation. At the most basic level, there may be just a tiny hole indicating female genitalia. Slightly more involved is the marking of external genitalia by an incised line (which may be combined with a tiny hole, as in Figure 4.4). Incised lines around the pubic area, demarcating it from the upper thigh, may also indicate genitalia or a genital zone. Anatomically detailed representations of female genitalia are extremely rare. Figure 4.13 illustrates an unusually explicit example; the figurine is in a seated position, with legs spread wide to reveal this carefully crafted and incised feature. Other examples of genitalia are actually “hidden” underneath the figurine. Pregnancy also clearly distinguishes female images. Of the fifty-seven bodies for which the belly is intact, eight figurines (14 percent) appear to be pregnant, while an additional female figurine holds a child.

Because primary sexual characteristics are rarely shown for females and never for males, I follow the lead of scholars working on Valley of Oaxaca figurines and deploy secondary sexual characteristics, which prove remarkably consistent and generally covary on figurines, allowing even fragmentary figurines to be identified as female based often only on a small portion of the
torso. The easiest trait to recognize is breasts. At Etlatongo, these occur in various shapes—from large and round to less pronounced examples. In some figurines there has been little effort made in integrating the breasts with the torso, as if the breasts were actually added to sex and gender the figure as female. The waist often narrows, although not very dramatically, and widens at the hips. On many Cruz B female figurines, the waist connects with legs featuring massive thighs and narrow calves (Blomster 2009:fig. 5.5). The
juxtaposition between these massive legs and a relatively slender waist is striking. Female legs often exhibit great anatomical detail, although little effort is made in representing the arms. There also appears to be more attention paid to well-defined buttocks on female figurines, but the male figurine sample is too small for this to be a significant comparison.

Probable male figurines based on bodies are difficult to identify; there are only three in this sample of seventy-five bodies, compared with sixty-four that are almost surely female. In contrast to female bodies, male figurines generally have broad and flat to slightly modeled chests, without exaggerated thighs and bellies. Many unclassified flat chests—unattached to lower bodies—could be male, juvenile, or simply figurines whose gender identity was not linked with chest anatomy. Both arms and legs are relatively cylindrical, with little anatomical detail indicated, in contrast to the majority of Cruz B female legs.

Body position has been used in the Valley of Oaxaca to identify figurines as male and elite. While Marcus (1998:47–48) associates San José phase seated male figurines with tightly flexed male burials and ranked/elite status, this interpretation rests largely on a chiefly burial from Coclé, Panama (Marcus and Flannery 1996:99–100). There is not a consistent relationship between ranked status and Early Formative figurines and burials in a seated position (see also Blomster 2011; Winter 2005:49). Indeed, such a perspective, based on body position, has imposed a male identification on a San José phase seated figurine that is surely female, with clear breasts and large thighs (Marcus 1998:240, fig. 15.7:2). In an arranged scene of four figurines from San José Mogote Feature 63 (see Marcus 1998:fig. 13.11), three figurines with crossed arms, were interpreted as male subordinates arranged under the smaller seated male “in a position of authority” primarily on body position and context (Marcus 1998:177–78). I argue that all of the figurines, including the seated “elite” figure, display female secondary sexual characteristics: large thighs, breasts (with the seated figure having large nipples rather than clearly defined breasts), and pubic triangles.

**Costume and Ornamentation**

Body ornamentation, costume, and beautification provide additional insights to embodiment and social identity, modifying, enhancing, and further communicating the inscriptive aspect of bodies. While cloth manifested important social identities and relations (see Chapter 3), only rarely is it shown on Early Formative figurines from Etlatongo, where few figurines have costumes modeled, appliquéd, or incised in clay. Except for necklaces, incised or appliquéd costume elements—when present—usually occur on the torso, below
the chest. Of the fifty-nine bodies for which it can be determined, only seven (or 12 percent) have clearly defined costumes created through plastic crafting. While this seems frequent compared with Cheetham’s (2009:155) calculations for San Lorenzo (3 percent) and Cantón Corralito (2 percent), he excludes so-called “ballplayer” figures in these calculations and includes all fragments from these sites (578 from San Lorenzo, 840 from Cantón Corralito). None of the Elatongo figurines wear the appliquéd short and medium skirts identified at San Lorenzo and Cantón Corralito (Cheetham 2009:fig. 6.4), where figurines with such skirts are often seated, with legs wide apart. At Elatongo, appliquéd or incised costumes do not appear on seated figurines, which represent about 10 percent of this sample. At least one seated figurine was probably placed on a stool; the lower legs extend from the body at 90 degrees and bend again at 90 degrees at the knee.

One proposed male body fragment does display a distinct costume. The figure wears a thick neck ornament, and a wide belt covers most of its torso below the slightly modeled chest. Suspended from the neck ornament is a flat disk, a pectoral—perhaps an iron-ore mirror (Blomster 2012; see Figure 4.14). The surface finish, achieved primarily through scraping, is extremely rough, especially on the back. While some smoothing is evinced on the front of the figure, the projection that resembles a nipple on the figurine’s right pectoral appears to be a clay-covered inclusion that projects from the surface. This costume and the figurine’s posture are consistent with so-called Olmec-style ballplayer figurines, which depict males, at the contemporaneous sites of San Lorenzo and Cantón Corralito (Cheetham 2009:fig. 6.7; Coe and Diehl 1980:figs. 329, 331; Cyphers and Di Castro 2009:fig. 12). The costume is transformative in terms of rank and role and identifies its wearer as a ballplayer. For the discriminating viewer, details of the costume communicate other aspects of affiliation, and this Olmec-style outfit is different from contemporaneous ballplayer costumes from Central Mexican sites such as Tlapacoya (Blomster 2012; Coe 1965; Niederberger Betton 1987).

While several figurine fragments that cannot be sexed, but could be male, wear thin belts and loincloths, the only specific costume that could be linked with sex through secondary sexual characteristics occurs on female figurines (Figure 4.15). At least three female figurines, with narrow waists and large thighs, exhibit what I call a “high loincloth.” This is a composite costume, composed of a horizontal appliquéd clay band that encircles the body below the breasts. From the center of this band, below and roughly between the breasts, a thin vertical band of clay extends to cover the groin and in fact continues below the groin onto the buttocks and above on the back. Of the three relatively intact examples,
one has two additional appliqué bands that descend from a large appliqué clay disk on the horizontal band (Figure 4.15a). Two of the examples also have appliqué clay bands—perhaps ribbons?—placed lower on the leg, around the knee and another above the foot. The high loincloth is also evinced in contemporaneous Valley of Oaxaca figurines (Marcus 1998:fig. 14.32:7) but has not been documented at San Lorenzo (see Cheetham 2009; Coe and Diehl 1980). Several more

Figure 4.14. Cruz B ballplayer figurine from Etlatongo. What appears to be a nipple on the right chest is a projecting inclusion from this roughly finished surface.
intact figurines from the Valley of Oaxaca, interpreted as male, have loincloths of similar thickness (essentially a thin coil), but the horizontal band is placed lower on the body (see Marcus 1998:figs. 12.13:4, 14.19:1). The sample of costumed male figurine bodies from the Valley of Oaxaca is too small to determine if there are consistent differences between male and female loincloths. Indeed, the main difference—if any—may simply be the placement of the horizontal band. This suggests the problems in using costumes in classifying objects into dichotomous sex and gender categories (Follensbee 2006; see below).

Only one example—a leg with part of the hip/lower belly attached—has the kind of striated skirt, incised onto the leg and presumably over the lower belly and groin, that has been more frequently identified in the Valley of Oaxaca, where it has been interpreted as representing a costume made of plant fiber (Marcus 1998:fig. 8.21). Such skirts often, along with belts, support the belly of pregnant figurines, a pattern that is not present at Etlatongo. Other figurine legs—not included in this sample—exhibit ribbons and other ornaments around and below the knee.
PAINT AND PIGMENT: TEMPORARY AND FLUID IDENTITIES

The lack of plastic costume and appliquéd ornamentation may suggest an emphasis on the naked body in the Early Formative Nochixtlán Valley, albeit with the caveats that the figurine may not have been perceived as “naked” and perishable clothing may have existed. One surprise, however, with the Etlatongo figurine sample is just how many bodies have red paint and pigment—nearly 25 percent of the sample of 141 figurines. The application of pigment began with Early Formative figurines in Oaxaca. In the Valley of Oaxaca red paint was applied to two Hacienda Blanca figurines, both from the Tierras Largas phase, as if indicating a collar (King and Winter 1996). Two nearly intact Cruz A female figurines from Cavua Colorado have red paint applied on the heads (except for the noses) and the extremities, while the torsos are relatively free from paint except for around the navel on one and the groin on the other (Winter 1984:fig. 9.4). Figurines contemporaneous to those from Cruz B Etlatongo from across Mesoamerica also have red pigment. In two examples from Izapa, Chiapas, red pigment was painted on a body and thigh to form a probable Venus symbol (Ekholm 1989:fig. 1d,e).

At Etlatongo, pigment was added to figurines primarily in two different ways: (1) as part of a figurine’s creation, well-bounded zones were painted red; (2) a mineral, probably hematite, was loosely rubbed over an area after firing, perhaps as part of the figurine’s use. That actual human bodies may have been marked in this way is indicated by the discovery of a roller stamp or sello, still coated in red pigment (Figure 4.16), which comes from the earliest excavated feature at Etlatongo. This roller stamp has a design, less complex than some of those in collections from Central Mexican sites (Coe 1965; Field 1967) that would have produced a tattoo-like effect when applied to the body.

Applying red paint and pigment to the clay body, both during production and afterward during use, may be similar to tattooing, whereby beautification is inscribed on the body, communicating information on age, status, gender, and ethnicity. In Huastec art bodily iconography emphasized religious and cosmological content, and perhaps represents tattooing and inscription (Faust 2009). The two different ways in which red pigment was applied to Etlatongo figurines is indicative of substantially different practices, perhaps representing the difference between permanent tattoos and temporary and easily removed tattoos or body paint. A kneeling white-slipped Olmec-style male body (Blomster 2009:fig. 5.10) represents a third use of red, applied after firing as a thin wash in the shape of “trunks” over the groin and abdomen, as if it were being “dressed” for a particular ritual or activity.
Figurines painted in clearly bounded red zones represent a more fixed identity. Eight female figurines and two figurines for which sex/gender has not been determined have these zones, often occupying opposite body parts, such as on the left thigh and right shoulder (Figure 4.17), or as a series of adjacent bands—like stripes—on limbs. Other figurines—such as Figure 4.5—have one solid red band on a limb and, in this example, also on the feet and face. Except for the white-slipped male torso wearing red shorts (see above), no male figurines from Etlatongo exhibit red paint.

Pigment smeared over certain portions of the figurine represents a different process, one directed by the user of these objects. Smearing involved mineral-based pigments, primarily hematite, as well as charcoal/burned organic material. Hematite traces remain on figurines from both Cruz A and Cruz B. At Etlatongo it does not appear that any portion of the body was excluded as a potential site of the application of hematite. Pigment was applied to faces,
including around and below the mouth, and even in the hair and headdress. Of the sixty-five female figurine bodies for which it could be observed, eleven have red pigment rubbed onto body parts; this quantity is probably underrepresented due to erosion and postexcavation processing. Indeed, the female figurine in Figure 4.13 originally had charcoal smeared over its genitalia, but this material deteriorated rapidly and is barely in evidence in Figure 4.13. Only one male figurine—Figure 4.6b—has red pigment (on its moustache), although another probable male head does have remnants of yellow pigment. Ten figurines not classified as male or female also have traces of hematite, three of which are Olmec style, in which the pigment is rubbed onto the face and/or the headdress/coiffure. Rubbing hematite onto portions of the figurine could change the very nature of the body, sociality, and its use, both beautifying and potentially transforming identity and/or costume, and could be modified or rubbed off or modified as desired by the user. Indeed, the flexibility afforded such manipulations by having a body or canvas relatively free of specific anatomical details may contribute to the lack of clear sexual characteristics on so many Etlatongo figurines, in addition to situations in which sex and gender were not pivotal to the identity being displayed.

The addition of paint and pigment/hematite to these figurines reflects an ongoing creative process, and its placement on clay bodies is particularly significant, as it is through the body that “the world is read and enacted” (Bourdieu 1977:90), while at the same time adding symbols to the body cultivates it. Among the Yekuana of Venezuela, markings placed on a body is the only way it is recognized as human (Guss 1989); similarly, painted objects can be considered human. Paint on the body protects not only humans but every object manufactured by humans that receive paint; paint distinguishes the civilized from the wild (Guss 1989:63–64). Such markings beautify and transform bodies and are part of a performance of identity. Paint applied to these Etlatongo figurine bodies during production may have reflected societal norms about beautification and decoration.

Different concepts lay behind the smearing of pigment on a figurine during its active use. For the Aztecs, substances such as human blood as well as ritual costume activated the divine force within humans or objects. Both living human and sculptural deity impersonators are encompassed by the Nahuatl term *ixiptla* (Carrasco 1999; Townsend 1979), and similar images, *cuacu*, among the early Colonial Mixtecs, were bundled in cloths or mats and received human blood (Terraciano 2001:261). Such concepts may also loosely apply to these Early Formative figurines. In many groups throughout the Americas, differences between person and things, matter and meaning, and representation
and reality, did not have clear boundaries demarcated (Bray 2009). Figurines, as representations of miniature humans, exemplify Gell’s (1998) dictum that things are treated like persons—as targets for and sources of social agency. Rubbing pigment onto portions of the figurine included both activation and use during ritual, calling forth the vital force that is fundamental to Mixtec and Zapotec beliefs in an animate world and cosmos (Monaghan 2001). This action perhaps also allowed for temporally contingent negotiations of identity separate from whatever was signified in the initial crafting of the figurine.

Contemporaneous Valley of Oaxaca figurines also exhibit body paint and postproduction pigment, as do those from San Lorenzo, when surfaces are preserved (Coe and Diehl 1980:260). In addition, local bitumen or *chapopote* can be observed on San Lorenzo figurines, sometimes in roughly linear patterns; it also occurs on figurines from Cantón Corralito (coastal Chiapas), but less frequently. Cheetham (personal communication, 2010) notes that *chapopote* appears to be more frequently applied to ballplayer figurines at San Lorenzo. I suggest that this action both involves inscribing identity and also activating these figurines.

The frequency of bodies that have been modified by red pigment argues against extensive perishable clothing for the Early Formative Etlatongo figurines, comparable to the dressed figurines noted above from Peru. As Tamara Bray (2009) points out, Andean figures were viewed as people, activated through dressing, becoming targets for and sources of social agency. I suggest applying paint and pigment to these Etlatongo figurines at any stage in their production and use animated them. Applying postproduction pigment in clear patterns or designs signified a transformed identity. While Etlatongo Cruz B figurines were usually painted on torsos and limbs, the Cruz A Cavua Colorado figurines, as well as one Cruz A figurine from Etlatongo, also feature painted designs on their heads, including faces and hair. No part of the body was exempt from smearing pigment onto it.

**AFTER THE EARLY FORMATIVE AT ETLATONGO**

Representational trends that began in the Early Formative accelerated in the Middle and Late Formative periods throughout Oaxaca, when more attention was paid to costume and ornamentation to inscribe identity on ceramic figurines, and, beginning in the Late Formative, other new venues for figural representations are evident at the Zapotec city of Monte Albán: ceramic urns, effigy figures, and stone sculptures. Cruz C (850–700 BCE) figurines from Etlatongo feature eyes with large punched pupils or vertical slits, and hair is
more likely to be obscured by headdresses such as turbans. Large earspools become the most frequent type of ear ornament. Anatomy is generally less modeled than in Cruz B; instead, bodies feature more ornamentation. Cruz D (700–500 BCE) figurines have more elaborate hairstyles, with elaborate ornamentation (especially in the ears), while bodies become flattened on some types, with many displaying limited to no modeling. In the transition from Middle to Late Formative, Yucuita phase (500–300 BCE) figurines continue the de-emphasis on bodily anatomy. The Etlatongo sample, however, is too small to determine trends in costumes.

The shift to clothing and regalia climaxes after the Formative in the Classic period figurines in the Valley of Oaxaca, where at Monte Albán the body is often buried under layers of clothing, such as the quechquemitl, and ornamentation (Martínez López and Winter 1994), as well as in the Classic Mixteca Baja center of Cerro de las Minas, with flattened bodies largely obscured by elaborate costumes (Sánchez Santiago 2009). From the Early Formative through the Late Formative and to the Classic period, identity appears less tied with the body and biological traits than with costume and ornamentation, at the same time that society became more rigidly structured with social inequalities (Blomster 2009).

CONCLUSION

While many Etlatongo figurines are depicted largely naked, identities that tightly correlated primary biological characteristics with sexual distinctions were not emphasized. Secondary sexual characteristics appear to have both reflected sexual differences and provided one element in constructing gender identities. Beyond the Early Formative, even secondary sexual characteristics elicited less modeling and appear to have been less crucial in negotiating identities. Facial hair, for example, appears to vanish after Cruz B on Etlatongo figurines. From a Cruz A focus on hairdos, headgear becomes increasingly important in Cruz B, while at Etlatongo, ornamentation in the form of ear and nose ornaments became frequently deployed. Based on the small post–Cruz B figurine sample from Etlatongo, clothing and ornamentation become increasingly important signifiers of identity and rank.

As noted above, the lack of attention to genitalia on figurines tracks with observations from throughout Mesoamerican groups that primary sexual characteristics often are not the focus of gender differentiation and identity. Based on genitalia and/or secondary sexual characteristics, only eight figurines can be identified as possible biologically and potentially gendered
male and sixty-five are classified as female; sixty-eight cannot be confidently assigned into either category. Rather than calling these sixty-eight figurines androgynous, a term loaded with connotations and intentionality, “ambiguous” would be a better term; there may be subtle anatomical or other details that indicated sexual differences and/or gender distinctions. Indeed, shaved heads appear to track with males, with ear and nose ornaments more associated with females. Such gender and identity distinctions may be valid only for a very circumscribed area in time and space. Alternatively, sex and gender may simply not have been part of the identity communicated by many of these figurines, and efforts to categorize them as gendered or androgynous reflect our own preoccupations.

Indeed, what is especially interesting is the amount of variation within these basic gender categories, suggesting that other identities were much more salient to the creators and users of these figurines than sex and gender. Rather than simply reflecting physical reality, figurines shaped experiences, providing both discursive and recursive reference points in ongoing and dynamic negotiations of social identity among Formative actors (Lesure 2005:238). One figurine (Figure 4.5) was actually designed to be worn, physically communicating identity, but at such a small scale that intensive scrutiny would have been necessary.

The Early Formative Etlatongo figurine sample displays little plastic ornamentation or clothing; the figurines initially appear naked. However, thirty-five figurines—twenty of which are probably female, three probable males, and the remaining not classified by sex—exhibit either red paint applied in well-defined patterns during the production process or red pigment (hematite) or other materials rubbed over parts of the figurine after firing, potentially during its use. What might appear as a naked body may actually have been a tabula rasa—an arena on which gender, identity, and/or meaning could have been inscribed and modified. In the cases where red paint was applied in patterns during production, identities and social categories were conveyed by an artisan, who may not have been the user of the figurine. The addition of red pigment to figurines, probably in use contexts, suggests the fluid nature of these categories and how amenable they may have been to context and relational-based interpretation and manipulation, showing where object and user stood in a network of social relations (Gell 1998:123). The significance of these figurines, similar to that of their users, lay not so much in themselves but in the social contexts in which they were deployed. The pigment rubbed onto various portions of the figurine activated but also may have reflected contextually contingent identities more under the control of the figurine’s user.
The reality is, what is signified by red paint versus hematite applied through rubbing may be less bounded than their different applications suggest. In both cases, figurines enacted identities and animacy (Gell 1998). A similar phenomenon, reflecting the adoption and activation of transitory and fluid identities, may be evinced by the Cruz B Olmec-style mask from Etlatongo, which also exhibits red pigment (Blomster 2002:fig. 9).

I close with implications on how different media depict the human body. A relational approach highlights the importance of the contexts and agents involved with different objects. Even within the realm of clay objects, small solid figurines were enmeshed in radically different relations than larger hollow figurines. As I have discussed elsewhere (Blomster 1998, 2002, 2009), Etlatongo hollow figurines appear designed to be seen from all sides. Thus, the transfer of inferences about human imagery based on solid figurines to other media is complex and problematic. It is a particularly difficult proposition when considering differences between ceramic figurines and monumental stone sculpture. In Maya art Matthew G. Looper (2002) notes that the beaded net costume relates to a mixed gender identity, as it is worn by both the Maize God and Moon Goddess. As part of a larger costume ensemble worn by Maya kings, the beaded net costume imbues the king with male and female aspects of power and fertility. Such identities are assumed at specific times. The Etlatongo figurines show the ease with which such identities could be indicated and modified on figurines—through the application of red paint and pigment.

Thus, caution is necessary when assigning gender based on costume, and especially using those found on small clay figurines to both regender and resex stone monuments, such as has been done with some Olmec sculptures—for example, the “Prince” from Cruz del Milagro (Follensbee 2006). Despite some recent characterizations of it as “blocky” (ibid.:250), Olmec monumental art is naturalistic, with a focus on the human form (Cyphers 2004; de la Fuente 1992). The naturalism of Olmec sculpture suggests that issues of gender may have been conveyed primarily through the very physicality of these monuments. As noted above with Oaxaca figurines, sex may be difficult to determine; a similar problem appears in the study of the San Lorenzo clay figurines. While Follensbee (2006) analyzes them as primarily female, in his study of the San Lorenzo corpus Cheetham (2009:158) independently classifies 63 percent of the torsos as male. Both studies looked at features on figurines that are subjective and reached radically different conclusions, which reinforces the sense of caution that must be used with conclusions made about sex and gender from figurines. Such conclusions may not form an appropriate perspective from which to resex and regender monumental sculpture (Chapter 7).
Rather than sex on monumental art being trumped by gender determined through clothing on figurines, there may be different aspects of gender referenced on the same body or body part. Indeed, recognizing that some of these costumes are “gender neutral” (see Chapter 7) better reflects pan-Mesoamerican concepts. Gender and identity are fluid and relationally dependent; sculpture and figurines provide us with transient and static material referents of dynamic performed experiences.

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NOTES

1. General date ranges are presented in radiocarbon (uncalibrated) years. For calibrated ranges, compare Chapter 6 and Pool 2007:fig. 1.4.

2. See Chapter 6 for definitions and illustrations of the distinctions, utilized here, between different types of ear ornaments.

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INTRODUCTION

Perishable remnants of ancient dress and ornamentation are frequently lost in Mesoamerican archaeological assemblages. Taking this reality as a point of departure, numerous authors (Joyce 1998, 2000, 2002; Kellogg 2005; Marcus 1998) have interpreted iconographic depictions of bodily adornment as preserved in such materials as ceramic, stone, and codices to assess social interaction according to categories of gender, age, community or subcommunity affiliations, and social statuses that became increasingly hierarchically differentiated beginning in the Formative period. Our research continues this tradition of iconographic analysis regarding ancient Mesoamerican sociality. We focus on the Late and Terminal Formative period (ca. 450 BCE–250 CE), along with some evidence from Early and Middle Formative deposits (ca. 1900 BCE–450 CE) in coastal Oaxaca, Mexico. One of the basic assumptions of our research is that, while iconographic analysis may bias interpretations toward specific members of a social group, it nonetheless provides glimpses, sometimes our only glimpses, of how people in past societies dressed, adorned themselves, and interacted (see also Blomster, this volume).

Through our analysis of ceramic figurines, carved stone monuments, and burial offerings such as jewelry, we explore evidence for bodily adornment and modification as it related to social interaction in ancient coastal Oaxaca, Mexico. Though many factors of ancient social life may be explored through iconography, we are specifically interested here in the performance and societal constructions of gender as expressed by adornment and modification of actual
human bodies and in iconographic representation. We argue that variables of social differentiation such as gender were explicitly expressed in patterns of dress and ornamentation in Formative coastal Oaxaca, but not as strict determining factors for dichotomous masculinity and femininity. For example, elaborate hairstyles and pendants occur in identifiably gendered patterns. Earspools, however, transcend these boundaries, suggesting fluidity between constructions of gender. Our identification of patterns in Formative period iconography represents an attempt to infer actual aspects of past social life while considering the important qualification that artistic expression is not always directly representative of real-world practices.

While we do not assume direct correlations between artistic expressions and everyday life, we contend that representations of adornment, as seen on artifacts such as stelae, vessels, and figurines, do bear some relationship to actual styles of dress and bodily modification in the past. This relationship may at times be one of accurate representation and at other times be one of proscription of social ideals. We contend that assuming a degree of realism in depiction, at least as it relates to iconography of clothing, adornment, and body modification, is an appropriate method for inferring elements of social interaction and bodily comportment that might otherwise be impossible to study in ancient Mesoamerican societies. Such interpretation is especially useful for the material culture of Formative period Mesoamerica, which has left us little in the way of written records. We suggest that, in the absence of other lines of evidence, iconography may be cautiously “read” like a “text.”

THE BODY AND GENDER IN ANCIENT MESOAMERICA

Marcel Mauss (2007 [1935]:56) considered the body “man’s first and most natural instrument.” Because we agree that the body is the “interface between the individual and society,” we define adornment as an act of inscriptive and embodied performance that represents individuality or group affiliation, shared cultural values, sociopolitical status, age, and connections with the divine in both life and death (Schildkrout 2004). The Mesoamerican body exhibited a variety of cultural meanings through the display of material objects on its canvas. Various authors (Blomster 2009:120–21; Joyce 1998:156, 2000, 2003; Marcus 1998; Wolf 1959:57) have argued that ancient Mesoamericans conceived of the body as a raw material that could be molded in socially meaningful ways by augmentation of hairstyles, clothing, jewelry, and even the permanent alteration of skulls, ears, teeth, and skin. Following Butler (1993), Joyce (1998; this volume) in particular has argued that the human body and its gendered social
identities are not so much determined by biology as they are socially constructed entities forged out of a relatively plastic raw material. Taken with the caveat, suggested by authors such as Geller (2008), that both biology and culturally inscribed meanings shape human bodies and social identities, we may delicately proceed in attempting to reconstruct gendered identities in the past. Gender, however, must be kept conceptually distinct from both biological sex and sexuality in order to study its relationships with past social identity. In addition, researchers must remain cognizant of the dangers of attempting to read every aspect of past social life through a gendered lens, specifically one informed by overzealous adherence to strict dichotomies. As Donna Haraway (1988) suggested, gendered depictions in academic analysis often rely too heavily on binary oppositions between categories of “male” and “female.” Instead, Haraway (1988:581) argued that using human vision as an analytic lens could dispel this dialectic and reveal how differential knowledge is embodied within artistic representations of the human form. Therefore, using our “vision” and following authors such as Scott (1989) and Conkey (2001), we define gender as both a social interpretation of perceived biological difference and the performed identities that result. Gender may also shift throughout one’s life on the basis of interacting social variables, including broad modulations in social organization and the age of the individual in question (Joyce 2000:35–37).

Specific elements of dress or ornamentation may have been indicative of different gendered identities in ancient Mesoamerica. Scholars have become increasingly comfortable, however, with the notion that styles of adornment overlapped genders, that androgynous or neutral human forms were sometimes subjects of depiction, and even that gender may have been intentionally left unemphasized in certain circumstances (Blomster 2009; Follensbee, this volume; Joyce 2000). When the body is modified, it becomes both a subject and an agent that can be shaped by cultural forces but that also possesses the potential to subvert social norms (Reischer and Koo 2004). Ornamentation represented on the body, figurines, and stelae has been recorded at Mixtec and Zapotec sites in various regions of Oaxaca, and at Chatino and Mixtec sites on the Pacific coast throughout various time periods. The sites on which we focus here (Figure 5.1) were likely populated by the ancestors of the modern Chatino people, or what some linguists refer to as “Proto-Zapotecan” speakers (Arnaud Bustamante 2003; Barber 2005; Blomster 2004; Brockington 1969, 2001; Fernández Pardo 1993; Hepp 2009; Nicholas Hopkins, personal communication, 2007; Jorrín 1974; Joyce 2010; Marcus 1998; Urcid 1993; Urcid and Joyce 2001; Winter 1992).
Between the Middle Formative (ca. 850–450 BCE) and the Postclassic (ca. 900–1521 CE) periods, many Mesoamerican populations transitioned from the village-based sedentism introduced at the beginning of the Early Formative to a more integrated and hierarchical settlement system that included regional and local centers. These settlement transformations coincided with the establishment of a highly developed concept of public ritual space, an increase in monumental construction, more pronounced hierarchical social inequality,

Various regions of coastal Oaxaca, Mexico, underwent archaeological reconnaissance and excavation during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, largely under the supervision of the late Donald Brockington of the University of North Carolina (Ball and Brockington 1978; Brockington 1957, 1965, 1969, 2001). After a hiatus during much of the 1970s and 1980s, archaeological attention again turned to coastal Oaxaca, and especially to the lower Río Verde Valley on the western coast (Barber 2005; Barber and Joyce 2007; Goman et al. 2005; Hepp 2009; Joyce 1991a, 1991b, 1994, 2005, 2006, 2010, 2013; Joyce and Mueller 1997; Levine 2011; Levine, Joyce, and Glascock, 2011; Workinger 2002; Zeitlin and Joyce 1999). Since the mid-1980s, this recent phase of investigation has included extensive survey, excavation, and paleoenvironmental reconstruction at numerous sites in the lower Río Verde Valley (Joyce 2005, 2010). This research has allowed for significant strides in reconstructing the cultural history of this circum-coastal region of western Mesoamerica. The pattern emerging from this ongoing investigation is that the lower Río Verde region was likely sparsely populated before the Late Formative period, then underwent significant population increase contemporaneous with major depositional events of fertile topsoil eroded from the Oaxacan highlands and re-deposited on the coastal floodplain (Goman et al. 2005, 2013; Joyce and Mueller 1997). Though current research does not assume direct correlations between ancient environmental changes and dynamics of human social interaction, it is increasingly apparent that these largely anthropogenic depositional events, verified through paleoenvironmental analysis including coring in various ancient channels of the Río Verde itself, had significant implications for local communities.

COLLECTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

To analyze Formative period adornment, we compiled data on 117 discreet artifacts and artifact types from sixteen coastal Oaxacan sites (Figure 5.1). This data set is composed of nine examples of carved stone (including stelae, statuary, and pendants), eighty-seven ceramic figurines (Figures 5.2–5.10), three figurine types, two effigy vessels, stone beads (recovered by the hundreds in burials and in caches), ceramic earspools, shell pendant or sash burial offerings, shell and dog tooth necklaces, an iron ore pectoral mirror, and a single
instance of dental modification on human remains. Some of the items in the collection are fragmentary, only hinting at elements of ornamentation, while others display clothing, jewelry, and other accoutrements in meaningful ways. Of the ninety total figurines and figurine types, eighty-six were previously recorded by several researchers at ten sites on the Oaxacan coast, but have not yet been thoroughly described in light of evidence for adornment (Barber 2005; Barber and Hepp 2012; Brockington 2001; Hepp 2009; Hepp and Joyce 2013; Joyce 1991a, 1999; Joyce and Levine 2009). Though most of our sample dates to the Late and Terminal Formative periods, four figurines and one element of jewelry come from the initial Early Formative (ca. 1900–1500 BCE) site of La Consentida, which is currently under investigation and is beginning to provide evidence for the earliest sedentary occupation of the lower Río Verde Valley (Hepp 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; Figures 5.3, 5.10).
Figure 5.3. Female figurine from Early Formative La Consentida.

We analyzed three ceramic figurine “types” because early archaeological investigators of the Oaxacan coast (Brockington 1969, 2001; Brockington, Jorrín, and Long 1974; Brockington and Long 1974) frequently recorded small-scale objects such as figurines not in their absolute numbers but instead in typological categories organized according to patterns of common features that fall along dichotomous gendered definitions. Two of these types are described as “often female,” while the other is “often male” in representation (Brockington 2001). Where only heads were preserved, “feminine” and “masculine” are likely more appropriate designations, as direct evidence of biological sex would not be present in such cases. While we acknowledge that these figurine types complicate our analysis, we also believe that to overlook them would unnecessarily impoverish the collection of artifacts studied here. Therefore, we attempted to analyze them in as detailed a way as possible using these predetermined classifications. For the purposes of comparison and some statistical analyses in this chapter, then, we discuss each of these artifact types as if it were a single item, which is the most conservative estimate possible. Unfortunately, most of Brockington’s collections have been lost and exist today only as photographs and written records. If we could establish the actual numbers of artifacts represented by Brockington’s figurine types, it would almost certainly serve only to further emphasize some of
the conclusions we reach here, particularly regarding the predominance of feminine imagery and instances of bodily modification in small-scale inscriptive media. Comparative analyses and measures of statistical significance presented in this chapter may thus be considered conservative estimations.

Because gender is one of our primary concerns in this study, it is worth discussing how we identified it in iconographic representation. We considered articles of clothing, jewelry, or body modification to be “gendered” both when iconographically represented on artifacts with characteristics suggesting biological sex and when interred with human remains sexed through physical anthropological methods. In some cases, we then extrapolated these patterns of gendered adornment to figurine fragments lacking indications of biological sex (see Figure 5.2). In other cases (see Figure 5.5a), objects were too fragmentary for confident attributions of gender. We differentiate “female” from “feminine” representation, for example, on the basis of the presence or absence of secondary sexual characteristics. Primary sexual characteristics appear to be absent from the iconographic depictions in the collection. Among the sexed or gendered elements in the collection, feminine and female examples dominate the sample with thirty-four instances, compared to twenty for male or masculine-gendered representation, and a few examples of children buried with jewelry but whose sex could not be determined.

We recognize the subjective nature of our categorizations, but suggest that interpreting gender as related to bodily adornment is one of many informative avenues for studying ancient social interaction. We also recognize the significance of not adhering to a Western philosophy of two-gendered and two-sexed dichotomies (see Blomster 2009; Conkey and Gero 1997; Cyphers Guillén 1993; Geller 2008; Joyce 2000, 2002; Marcus 1998; Nanda 1999; Stephen 2002; Tedlock 2005; Whitehead 1981) but conclude that we find no clear indication of genders besides those we recognize as feminine, masculine, and undetermined. We agree with authors such as Nelson (1997:126) and Joyce (2000:35–37) that age and social status likely complicated gendered paradigms to produce multivalent and shifting identity throughout one’s life. In order to explore associations between different adornments and ancient social interaction, we now move to discussions of a few of the specific types of accoutrements we found meaningful in the collection.

**HEAD ADORNMENT**

Many elements of iconography from the Formative period emphasized the head and torso of the human body at the expense of limbs, which are often
represented in a simplified fashion (Blomster 2009:136–37; Figure 5.4). Fifty-six elements of the data set showed identifiable ornamentation of the head. Many examples of artifacts with head adornment included either headgear or hairstyles in isolation, or some combination of these elements. Headdresses, which we define as larger, more fan-shaped head accoutrements in contrast to the form-fitting caps or cloth strips we define as headgear, were less common though present on as many as eleven examples in the data set (Figure 5.5a). Hairstyles varied but appeared more carefully depicted on female and feminine artifacts than on male or masculine ones and were often combined with a type of headgear we identify as a strip of cloth tied about the head, perhaps decorated with shells and/or feathers (Figures 5.2, 5.5b).

Analyzing headgear according to sex and gender indicated some intriguing patterns. Feminine examples that bore head adornment were most common, which in part is due to the bias toward female and feminine representation in the collection in general. Feminine artifacts more frequently showed combinations of headgear and hairstyle, while masculine artifacts commonly bore depictions of one element in isolation, such as hairstyle, headgear, or a headdress. The overall sample of headgear is biased toward depictions of feminine characters, and we may thus infer an interest in women’s heads as a location on the body for marking identity by use of adornments.

We find that jewelry varied widely in Formative coastal Oaxaca and was often shared across identifiable sexes and genders. Among seventy-two cases of iconographically depicted or actual jewelry, we identified twenty-eight separate categories. Of those examples, earspools accounted for thirty instances, and this number increases when one includes figurines that likely wore removable jewelry (Figure 5.4). Though raw counts are complicated by ritual caches of hundreds of beads (Workinger 2002:192–94), we estimate that roughly half of the instances of jewelry in Formative coastal Oaxaca incorporated earspools. Although it is difficult to infer from a figurine what sort of jewelry might be represented, the few samples of actual earspools (recovered at the site of Yugué by Barber [2005] and also at Rio Viejo by Joyce [1991a]) indicate that ceramic spoons (sometimes called “napkin rings”) were most common (Figures 5.5, 5.6). Several other types of jewelry identified in the collection, including necklaces, ceramic beads, and pendants, were recovered in context with human burials. The earliest example, a single ceramic bead from the site of La Consentida, indicates the use of necklaces incorporating ceramic and possibly perishable beads during the Early Formative period. Other burials from Late and Terminal Formative contexts produced direct evidence of Formative period jewelry. Minizundo and Miniyua phase Late and Terminal Formative burials
from Cerro de la Cruz produced several burials from a high-status domestic context that bore jewelry fashioned from faunal remains, such as marine bivalves and canine teeth from dogs (Joyce 1991a:723, 756, 759, 770–71, 781).

Feminine imagery bearing earspools was the most frequent co-occurring type in the analysis, revealing tangible connections between conceptualizations of gender and specific kinds of jewelry during the Formative period (Figure 5.5b). Earpools also occurred on masculine artifacts in different combinations and on some images combining human and animal characteristics (Figure 5.6d). Pendants, unlike necklaces, occurred only on masculine or unidentified figurines, with several adult male burials, or in ritual caches. A shell sash and a mirror were recovered with adult male burials at Cerro de La Cruz and Yugüe, respectively (Barber 2005:186–88, 395; Joyce 1991a:756). Mirrors do not appear to have been exclusively masculine and were possibly represented on three feminine or female figurines. We found no evidence of pendants co-occurring with female or feminine representation.
Clothing

We differentiate clothing from jewelry in the collection for heuristic purposes rather than as an argument about meaningful indigenous categories. Elements of adornment that we identify as “clothing” tend to be iconographic indications of woven textiles. Several figurine fragments studied for this analysis bore indications of textiles, but could not be specifically identified in terms of sex or gender. Some artifacts, however, bore elements of clothing in what we identify as specific, gendered patterns. These representations of
clothing include a skirt and a triangular garment worn over the upper torso, which is similar in form to those identified in ethnographic contexts as a quechquemitl (Anawalt 1981:841, 844; see Figures 5.7, 5.8). Ethnographic analyses regarding clothing and adornment among modern indigenous peoples of the Americas generally identify skirts, huipiles, and quechquemitls as feminine dress (Brumfiel 2006; Guzmán Flores 2005; McCafferty and McCafferty 1994; Nájera-Ramírez et al. 2009; Sayer 1988). Although much more recent than the Formative period clothing discussed in this study, these ethnographic examples of gendered adornment provide continuity for our interpretation of some ancient garments as feminine.

Though ceramic malacates, or spindle weights, definitely occur in coastal deposits by the Postclassic period, it is likely that smoothed ceramic disks served as weaving implements by the Formative period, though this issue requires more research (Arthur Joyce, personal communication, 2009; Zárate Morán 1995). As more archaeological contexts are excavated in coastal Oaxaca
and as our understanding of the development of ancient textile production improves, archaeologists may more successfully employ material culture analyses to understand the way people in the past dressed themselves. One way to undertake such research may be to employ ethnographic analogies, though studies such as ours will need to grow to encompass more diachronic evidence in order to validate the use of many modern and historical inferences.

Clothing elements in the collection were diverse and accounted for twelve different categories when identified both in isolation and in different combinations. When discussed according to inferred categories of sex and gender, clothing demonstrates little in the way of discernible patterns. Though skirts and *quechquemitls* may be considered “feminine” while capes and breech cloths are often glossed as masculine based on ethnographic analogy, the low number of artifacts in each category suggests both that further research needs to be done on potentially gendered patterns of dress and that gendered

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**Figure 5.7.** Female human/animal transformational figurine with skirt, Late Formative Río Viejo.
overlap in bodily ornamentation was likely typical of Formative coastal Oaxacan society.

**BODY MODIFICATION**

One of the most intriguing results of our analysis was the high degree of body modification identified in the coastal Oaxacan sample. In corroboration with our previous discussion of jewelry, ear gauging was our most frequently identified evidence for modification of the body (Figures 5.5b, 5.6). This outcome is likely related to the ease of inferring ear gauging in comparison to other, less well preserved practices of body modification. We differentiate ear gauging from piercing as a process whereby plugs of increasing diameter are placed in pierced ears to expand the size of the hole over time. Plugs or spools in gauged ears may range from small glass plugs the size of a pencil eraser to huge stone or ceramic disks the size of a canning jar lid. Such gauging may be witnessed today in the boardroom, the classroom, the shopping mall, the Amazonian rain forest, or the African savannah (Turner 2007). In fact, the florescence in recent decades of what is known in North America as the “modern primitive” body modification movement has revived, at least in pastiche,
many of the prehispanic body modification practices found in our collection (Pitts 2003; Rosenblatt 1997). We consider earspools found in caches, figurines with earspools or with holes indicating they once wore removable jewelry, and effigy vessels depicting earspools as evidence for piercing and gauging. Other methods of permanent body modification that we identified included dental modification in mortuary remains, nose, lip, and cheek piercing or gauging represented on figurines, potential “buccal deformation,” or reshaping of the mouth on figurines, and several instances of probable tattooing represented on figurine faces and torsos. These forms of body modification seem not to have been restricted by sex or gender, although feminine characters with ear gauging were the most abundant type.

Several authors (e.g., Blomster 2009; Boone 1999; Joyce 1998; Klein 1994) have argued that the literal or figurative decapitation and segmentation of the human body was a common theme throughout ancient Mesoamerica. Adornments to individual parts of the body may emphasize the importance of those corporal elements in the “intercommunicative and active” social activities of the body (Lyon and Barbalet 1994:56). We find that the coastal Oaxacan iconographic collection generally supports these interpretations. Marking the body through tattooing, painting, scarification, or even the wearing of jewelry may have been avenues of individualizing body parts and segmenting the body (see Blomster 2009:136–37). As a permanent form of body modification, tattooing can be seen as a status-affirming or transformational practice that has the potential to indelibly alter the individual’s relationship with the world and with the society in which she or he lives (Rosenblatt 1997). Though differentiating between these practices in iconography is difficult, tattooing is our preferred interpretation in several cases due to the decorative motifs depicted.

Figure 5.9 demonstrates the segmentation of the body by probable tattooing using a variety of patterns separated by solid lines. Such a design would perhaps be less successfully executed by scarification, which is often practiced among ethnographically studied populations by the raising of patterns of bumps on the surface of the skin with a hook or nail (Bohannan 1956:120). Incisions and lines can also be made by use of a sharp implement such as an obsidian blade. Bohannan (1956:118) recorded ethnographic accounts in which different methods of marking the body were used either in conjunction or at different stages of life to produce designs with varying degrees of permanence and visibility. The practice of scarification can be the result of concerted artistic expression and/or of religious acts intended to create connections with the divine through physical pain or marking of the body, as in the case of the
ethnographically observed Lakota (Dakota) Sun Dance (Deloria 2009). One figurine in the collection we discuss here, recorded by Brockington (2001:21) at the site of Lagartero, may represent the combination of both tattooing and scarification to achieve a specific design (Figure 5.9c). Regarding body painting as a potential confounding factor for tattooing, we suspect that such temporary decoration might be better depicted on a figurine by ephemeral means such as painting (in agreement with likely removable clothes and jewelry worn by some of the artifacts we analyzed) rather than by permanent incisions into the artifact’s surface (Marcus 2009:45).

**Figure 5.9.** Body segmentation: (a) probable tattooing, La Guayavera; (b) probable tattooing, Lagartero; (c) Probable tattooing/scarification, Lagartero (redrawn from Brockington 2001:21).
THE NUDE HUMAN BODY

One way to put Formative period iconography of bodily adornment into perspective is to discuss what is not represented in this data set, namely depictions of the human body in the absence of decoration or augmentation by means of clothing or jewelry. Just as some ancient Mesoamerican artifacts appear to have worn removable jewelry (Figure 5.4), many may also have worn removable clothing (Marcus 2009:45). In the absence of direct evidence for this practice, however, one must infer patterns of depiction as precisely as possible with the materials at hand. In addition, the depiction of specific body parts such as belly buttons under areas that might have borne perishable cloth coverings reminds us that some bodies may be intentionally represented as nude. Also, because many elements of iconography studied here bear representations of clothing directly molded, carved, or applied, it appears that clothing was often a permanent rather than temporary element of depiction (Jeffrey Blomster, personal communication, 2010). With these important caveats about perishable clothing in mind, it seems safe to argue that the human body, both clothed and nude, was an important part of the symbolic lexicon of Formative Mesoamerica. Imagery of nude or barely clothed human bodies seems to have been particularly prevalent in earlier periods on the Oaxacan coast. At Early Formative period La Consentida, for instance, several figurines representing both adorned and unadorned human females were found near a group of human burials (Hepp 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; Figure 5.10). Though a few of the La Consentida figurines show bodies dressed in what might be called a loincloth (Figure 5.3), imagery of mostly nude female human bodies suggests that a central focus of Early Formative coastal concepts of the body revolved around female identity formation, or what might be termed feminine social roles.

Figurines depicting feminine and female imagery have been found in diverse contexts across early Mesoamerica and have, through decades of research, raised the question: why do the female figurines consistently outnumber the male figurines (Drennan 1976; Lesure 2011:2, 32–33, 76–79, 155; Wolf 1959)? Some researchers (Joyce 2000; Lesure 2011:155; Marcus 1998:3) have suggested that this demographic imbalance indicates an environment of gendered activity in ancient Mesoamerica. Women likely made most Formative period Mesoamerican figurines, according to this argument, and figurines (in addition to their other uses, such as in children’s games) were central to rituals carried out in private, domestic contexts. These domestic feminine rituals counterbalanced practices in the public arena of masculine ritual and symbolic discourse. Others (e.g., Cyphers Guillén 1993; Tedlock 2005) have proposed
a related argument in which women practicing midwifery or didactic ritual (intended to instruct audiences in proper progression through life history rites of passage) may have produced a material record biased toward female and feminine representation. Though we agree that the above interpretations should be included among the diverse canon of probable Formative period figurine uses, we are uncomfortable with both the public/private and masculine/feminine dichotomies such interpretations presuppose (see Blomster 2009:140).

Both highland and coastal Oaxacan archaeological contexts have demonstrated that figurines were ubiquitous in early Mesoamerican sites and thus not restricted to the “hidden” context of the domestic sphere (Blomster 2009:124; Drennan 1976; Hepp 2009). It therefore appears that, to the extent figurines were a domestic and potentially often feminine ritual item, the domestic sphere was patently public because it tied households together and produced a relatively consistent, rather than idiosyncratic, pattern of iconographic depiction and use for human imagery as exemplified by ceramic figurines. We also strongly suspect that it was not altogether uncommon for men to participate in activities involving figurines and other iconography of the

Figure 5.10. Nude female figurines from Early Formative La Consentida.
body. It is not known exactly why female and feminine figurines outnumber male and masculine examples in Formative period deposits, but it is increasingly apparent that figurines and other early iconography of the human body were part of a set of overlapping practices that likely included domestic ritual, ancestor remembrance, performative (even public) ritual, mimetic cooption of symbolic power, religious symbolism, life history commemoration, and perhaps children’s games. Figurines may also have been material symbols forming a commentary on social constructions of gender, age, and kinship (Blomster 2009; Follensbee 2009; Hepp 2009; Hepp and Joyce 2013; Joyce 2010:183, 2000; Lesure 2011:152–55; Marcus 1998; Winter 2002:69, 74).

CONCLUSION

Some authors (e.g., McCafferty et al. 1994:149) have argued that jewelry, at least as depicted in Postclassic codices, was not a good indicator of gender. Other researchers (e.g., Joyce 2000:30, 2002:82–83; Marcus 1998) have suggested that lip plugs, loincloths, and elaborate hairdos depicted on Mesoamerican figurines may indicate some gendered patterns of adornment. Carballo (2009) argued that ornaments such as eardrops, in addition to marking status, might have identified kinship, gender, and age. Other authors (Grove and Gillespie 2002; Plunket and Uruñuela 2002) have noted that head adornment may distinguish lineage founders in anthropomorphic figurines. In general, we conclude that overlap in adornment styles (such as ear gauging among both women and men) in the coastal Oaxacan Formative period collection precludes facile assessments of gender, though some patterns do exist. Stone pendants worn by men, an interest in feminine head adornment, and a bias toward feminine representation in general serve as examples. In addition, Rosemary Joyce’s (1998) discussion of the compartmentalized Mesoamerican body is supported by our analysis, at least as it relates to the delineated figurine torsos suggestive of tattooing, scarification, or body painting (Figure 5.9).

The composite approach we have adopted in this study, which has included the analysis of numerous types of artifacts, iconography, and mortuary data, permits the discussion of traditions of bodily adornment and modification as related to gender in Formative coastal Oaxaca. Another interpretation our results suggest relates to the social status of individuals depicted in Formative period iconography and perhaps the status of those who used artifacts such as figurines. Because decorative elements generally indicative of high status, including mirrors and headdresses (see Ashmore 2004:184–85; Blomster 2004:85, 186; Clark 1994:126; Heyden 1991:195; Saunders 2001), were present
in numerous media in the sample, it appears that the production and consumption of anthropomorphic iconography was a communal affair marked by permeable boundaries between domestic and public spheres, social classes, and gendered identities. We thus suggest that figurine use (and perhaps activities related to the other elements of iconography studied in this chapter) in Formative period coastal Oaxaca took place across the spectrum of status differentiation. This contradicts some models in which figurines have been viewed as predominantly private, domestic, feminine, and even commoner artifacts in contradistinction to the public, elite, and largely masculine nature of large-scale objects such as carved stone stelae (Joyce 2000; Marcus 1998, 2009; Taube and Taube 2009). In general, though some figurines representing nobility may have occurred in commoner households, the ubiquitous contexts of figurine recovery in Mesoamerican archaeological sites contradict an argument of status restriction regarding figurine use (Blomster 2009:123; Drennan 1976; Hepp 2009; Jorrín 1974).

In future research we hope to expand our inquiries to encompass evidence for coastal Oaxacan adornment in both earlier and later time periods. Such research would be informative for several reasons. First, archaeological remains from the Early Classic Coyuche and Late Classic Yuta Tiyoo phases have produced evidence from burials frequently containing more elements of adornment than those from the Formative (Christensen 1999:488; Joyce 2010:241, 246; Joyce et al. 1998). The comparison of such Classic period burials with those from the Formative period may help to promote understanding of the ways in which traditions of dress and adornment changed through time. Such comparisons may also suggest ways in which historical traditions were upheld despite broader social changes (Barber and Joyce 2007; Joyce 2005, 2010:196, 243). Second, Classic period stelae from coastal sites such as Río Viejo, Río Grande, and Nopala bear depictions of dress and adornment in a manner that promotes interpretation of full costumes rather than elements in isolation (Arnaud Bustamante 2003; Jorrín 1974; Urcid 1993; Urcid and Joyce 2001). Though a few of the Formative period artifacts bore similar sets of related adornment, having more such costumes at our interpretive disposal may illuminate patterns we have not identified thus far. Finally, expanding the collection to include evidence of Classic and Postclassic dress and ornamentation may permit more sound ethnographic inference regarding change and continuity in cultural practices than is possible with discussions of the Formative period alone (see Bartolomé and Barabas 1996). Such a temporal expansion of observations about Oaxacan dress would better allow us to explore the ways in which points of historical tension might have led to the active selection of
traditional or novel adornment practices as representative of identity, belief, and degrees of acquiescence or resistance by individuals or groups to atmospheres of cultural change. The data set from which we have developed our preliminary arguments is small but will grow as more investigation is undertaken in coastal Oaxaca. We feel that continuing to compile information on ancient dress, bodily modification, and adornment is a worthwhile goal of study.

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NOTE
1. The sample of anthropomorphic iconography bearing headgear is biased toward feminine representation: 62 percent of female and feminine images bear headgear, while 55 percent of masculine examples do so.

REFERENCES


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INTRODUCTION

The most abundant information for the history of clothing and costuming in Mesoamerica comes from human figurines and sculptures. As apparent in other chapters in this volume, rare is the early figurine showing even a stitch of clothing, and nearly as infrequent is the late figurine not wrapped in cloth. The same temporal disparity of exposed skin and exhibited textile characterizes coeval sculptures. Contradictory values toward dress and identity appear to be represented in early and late Mesoamerica, raising questions about the meanings of representations and the evolution of cultural attitudes from one era to the other. As evident in hundreds of published early figurines, well dressed was the nude Mesoamerican woman with coiffed hair, earspools, and body paint. Articles of clothing or covering for the earliest figurines appear restricted to specialists such as dancers, shamans, and ballplayers (see Coe 1965). For these hand-modeled clay images, costume and dress started with the head, to the relative inattention of the torso and limbs. For later images, clothing and jewelry appear to have conveyed information on roles and statuses.¹ As argued by others, sumptuary dress for Middle Formative kings and queens was rather standardized in representation and in deed, with primary symbols being jade earspools and bead belts (Joyce 1999:39). We propose that jade earspools and stringed jade and shell beads simultaneously served as accents to beauty, markers of exalted status and authority, and metaphors of divine connections. For Postclassic kings, earspools represented the ears and speech of gods—meanings likely going back to Formative times.
A detailed history of ear ornaments in Mesoamerica would require several books and hundreds of images, so full coverage is not feasible here. Within the doable, we restrict attention to the two millennia (2400–400 BCE) that witnessed the adoption of village life and the subsequent rise and demise of Olmec cities at San Lorenzo and La Venta. Data on early ear ornaments for most regions of Mesoamerica are either sparse or chronologically insecure. We restrict discussion, when possible, to items from dated and documented archaeological contexts—mostly from Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Tabasco. Our presentation begins with palpable objects, moves to portrayals, and ends with considerations of the meaning and significance of earpools at La Venta. Changes in Formative period costume, dress, and adornment corresponded to the emergence of classes, kings and queens, and gods. The spatial and temporal distribution of depictions of human ear ornaments and the ornaments suggest an evolution of earware from beautifying ephemera to durable symbols of royalty metonymic of divine speech and godliness. To track this development, it will be useful to establish first a descriptive language for ear ornaments and their representations.

**THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF EAR ORNAMENTS**

The current nomenclature for Mesoamerican ear ornaments muddles the functions and forms of different earware. We distinguish earpools from earplugs, eartubes, ear beads, and ear pendants. As illustrated in Figure 6.1a, the ideal form of an earpool was a hollow cylinder “with a trumpet-mouthed element” (Kidder et al. 1946:106). Basic attributes include the cylinder, the exterior flare, a back plate to secure the ornament in an earlobe, and sometimes a disk to cover the open throat or, alternatively, beads or pendants that emerge from the throat—presumably attached to the backing of the earpool assemblage (for different ways of mounting earpools, see Kidder et al. 1946:figs. 45, 143–47). “The edge of the backing rested against the mastoid, holding the ornament at right angles to the head, the flare in front” (Kidder et al. 1946:106). For some earpools, beads or pendants were suspended from exterior flares rather than emerging from their throats. For other earpools, the cylinder, flare, and backing were made as a single piece (Figure 6.1c; cf. Figure 13.3). Most early earpools were composite artifacts made of a mix of perishable and durable materials. Middle Formative composite earpools presumably had back plates of organic materials, with the stone part of individual ornaments being an exterior flare attached to its stem (Figures 6.1a, 6.2e). For others, flares and cylinders were separate pieces (Figure 6.1b).
A distinction worth making is between earspools and earplugs, two terms sometimes used to describe the same forms. For us, earplugs are solid cylinders that plug holes in earlobes; they may have been used to stretch these openings and train them for ornaments of larger size (see Hepp and Rieger, Chapter 5 on “ear gauging”). Some plugs have tiny perforations in their centers (see Lee 1969c:136, fig. 95a–k). Earplugs may be perforated, but they are not hollow. The earliest ear ornaments reported in Mesoamerica are hollow ceramic cylinders of fine clay known as “napkin ring” “ear spools” (Coe 1961:103) because of their resemblance to these modern items (Figure 6.2a). Payson Sheets (1978:53) describes the same forms, present in the earliest layers at Chalchuapa, El Salvador, as clay “rings.” We propose that these hollow cylinders or clay rings be called eartubes (Figures 6.1e, 6.2a) to differentiate them from earplugs, solid items of similar form (Figure 6.1d), and earspools, hollow cylinders with attached flares (Figure 6.1a). Eartubes lack flat flares, but they can have concave sides or straight sides that taper from one end to the other.
Figure 6.2. Examples of ear ornaments: (a) ceramic eartubes from Paso de la Amada (redrawn from Ceja Tenorio 1985:100, fig. 55a,b); (b) iron-ore disk ear ornaments found with Burial T3B1, Paso de la Amada; (c) fragment of an iron-ore earflare from Paso de la Amada (drawn from Ceja Tenorio 1985:105, fig. 58o); (d) wooden busts 18, 19, and 20 from El Manati, Veracruz, showing associated wooden earspools and nose ornaments (redrawn from Rodríguez and Ortiz 1997:87, fig. 3.9; Ortiz C. and Rodríguez 1999:235, fig. 8; Ortiz C. et al. 1997:78); (e) two sets of earspools from Cache 11, Mound 20, San Isidro (redrawn from Lowe 1998a:69, fig. 31; cf. Lowe 1981:245, fig. 13; Taube 2000:301, fig. 3).

(Figure 6.2a). Tubes, plugs, and spools fit into gauged openings in earlobes. In contrast, beads and pendants were suspended from pierced earlobes and did not require large holes (Figures 6.1f, 6.4b, 6.12). Ear ornaments were made from a variety of raw materials and in a range of sizes. Earspools of jade appear to have been the most prized in Formative times.

Archaeological evidence of ear ornaments comes from figurines, sculptures, murals, burials, and household artifacts. Depictions of humans show a variety of items in earlobes or suspended from them. Many of these objects may have been of perishable substances. Portrayals of bejeweled humans alert
archaeologists to items that may have served as ornaments. More concrete data come from human burials that show the presence of ornaments flanking skulls. In extreme cases, such as is characteristic of La Venta, unburned bone did not preserve, so the disposition of jewelry has been used to reconstruct the presence and positions of vanished bones and bodies.

The best evidence for the early use of ear ornaments in Mesoamerica comes from the Soconusco region of coastal Chiapas and Guatemala. Thousands of ceramic ear tubes of “napkin ring” form have been recovered. They first show up in Ocos phase deposits (1500–1400 BCE) and become abundant in Cherla phase deposits (1400–1300 BCE); see Figure 6.2a.² From Mound 1 at Paso de la Amada, Chiapas, Jorge Fausto Ceja Tenorio (1985:99, fig. 55a–e, table 20) reported 479 fragments of ear tubes recovered from three test pits but only 1 ceramic earplug (ibid.:101, fig. 56e) and 1 earplug made from a fish vertebra from the same units (ibid.:103, fig. 58e). From later and more extensive excavations in the same mound, Richard Lesure (1995, 1999:217) recovered 3,222 clay ear tube fragments. Less than 1 percent were ceramic ear plugs; as to worked fish vertebra, Lesure assumed these were beads rather than ear plugs (personal communication, 2011). Dee Green and Gareth Lowe (1967:31, fig. 41b) described a fish vertebra ear pool from Altamira, presumably from Jocotal phase contexts (1200–1000 BCE). Michael Coe (1961:108, fig. 59i) earlier reported earware made from fish vertebrae for La Victoria, Guatemala, that date to Conchas II times (ca. 800–700 BCE). Three are solid forms and fit our earplug category. The largest one, however, has a wide opening and slight flares and qualifies as an earspool. Coe (1961:104, fig. 60c) also illustrated a dozen ceramic ear plugs for Conchas II phase deposits.

Given their high frequency and ubiquity at the time, it is noteworthy that ceramic ear tubes have not been found with any Ocos or Cherla burials. Twenty-nine burials of this age have been recovered in the Mazatan region of coastal Chiapas; most lack nonperishable grave goods (Ardern 2003; Ceja Tenorio 1985; Clark 1994b). One exceptional Cherla burial (Burial TrBi) of an adult woman found in the main plaza at Paso de la Amada in 1995 had ear ornaments, the only early burial in the Soconusco so adorned. These were a pair of circular, polished iron-ore mirrors slightly smaller in diameter (1.98 cm) and thickness than a U.S. nickel (Ardern 2003:48–54, figs. 2.15, 2.21). These disks lack perforations, so they must have been affixed to perishable armatures (Figure 6.2b). They could have been earrings or disks glued over cylinders made of wood or cane, thus constituting covered-throat ears pools. Small iron-ore mirrors reached their peak frequency in Mazatan during Cherla times, along with ceramic ear tubes (see Cheetham 2010a;
Lesure 1995). They would have been a natural pairing for making composite earspools, but so far whole specimens of each have not been found together. Ceja Tenorio (1985:105, 108, fig. 58o) illustrates a “fragmented circle” or flat, curved arc of polished iron ore that was probably an earspool flare (see Figure 6.2c). These iron ornaments date to 1400–1300 BCE and are the earliest evidence for actual ear ornaments in a mortuary context so far reported in Mesoamerica.

For most regions of Mesoamerica, the oldest direct evidence of ear ornaments comes from burials and offerings rather than from household refuse. In Mazatan the earliest ear ornaments are ceramic eartubes and fish vertebra earplugs. Bone eartubes were probably also early (see Sheets 1978:48–49, figs. 5e, 8e). Roberto García Moll and others (1991:69) report pairs of bone earspools for two burials at Tlatilco in the Valley of Mexico. David Grove (1974:23, 26, 37, 48, fig. 11i) describes a ceramic earspool 5 cm in diameter found in a grave in Nexpa, Morelos, dating to 1250–1050 BCE. Even earlier earspools may have been made of wood or other organic materials. Wooden earspools have been recovered in an early setting with buried wooden sculptures at El Manatí (Figure 6.2d; Ortíz C. and Rodriguez 1999; Rodriguez and Ortíz 1997).

Michael Coe and Richard Diehl (1980:289, fig. 410) report one ceramic eartube from San Lorenzo that dates to the early Olmec occupation there (the 10 cm diameter reported for this artifact must be a misprint). The virtual absence of ceramic eartubes at San Lorenzo may be due to the delicacy of these thin ornaments vis-à-vis corrosive environmental conditions. Few original surfaces are preserved on even robust San Lorenzo sherds. A ceramic eartube made of San Lorenzo clay was found at Cantón Corralito in the Mazatan region, so there is no doubt they were available at San Lorenzo (David Cheetham, personal communication, 2011). Coe and Diehl (1980:241, fig. 243) illustrate three “labrets or waste plugs” of gray serpentine, which may be waste from drilling eartubes or earspools. At least one of these hollow-drill cores dates to San Lorenzo B times (1150–950 BCE).

Jade earspools became the primary finery for Classic period elites all across Mesoamerica, and so they are of special interest. Most early examples have been found in Middle Formative burials at La Venta (Figure 6.3) and Chiapa de Corzo. One fragment of an earspool in the Smithsonian collection is from La Venta (cat. no. A403618; the fragment can be viewed at http://anthropology.si.edu/olmec/cfml/artifacts/olmec_Detail.cfm?catbc=A403618-0), but its original provenience is not specified. William Rust (2008:1330, table 5.1.50) did not find any jade earspool fragments at La Venta, but he recovered eight
from secondary sites in the La Venta region that date to late La Venta times. The only known Early Formative examples of jade earspools have been found in the Mexican highlands at Tlatilco, San José Mogote, Chilpancingo, and El Opeño. None have been reported for San Lorenzo, and none have been found in Mazatan in Early Formative contexts. Representations of ear ornaments on sculptures and figurines from these different regions suggest that the distribution of jade earspools in the highlands, and their absence in the lowlands, may have been a real pattern marking cultural differences and not a sampling accident. The early Olmecs at San Lorenzo, for example, did not often portray earspools on their sculptures or figurines (Figures 6.4, 6.5).

Jade or jadelike earspools first show up in the Gulf Coast lowlands with elite burials at La Venta as early as 800–700 BCE. Two pairs of jade earspools were found in a contemporaneous cruciform offering, Cache 11, at San Isidro (Figure 6.2e; Lowe 1981, 1998a; Taube 2000:301, fig. 3). Earspools of the squarish set are exceptionally large and heavy and may have been too big to have been worn in the ears. These earspools show ample evidence of wear, tear, and age and must have been venerated heirlooms by 800 BCE. These ornaments are called earspools because of their form rather than any inferred function. Some “earspools” may have been too large to have been worn in the ears, such as the famous giant flare from Pomona, Belize (Coe 2011:108, fig. 55; Justeson et al. 1988; Schele and Miller 1986:90, plate 9; Sharer and Traxler 2006:270, fig. 6.28).
Figure 6.4. Earware on Olmec sculptures (redrawn from sources indicated): (a) ears and ornaments on San Lorenzo colossal heads (Cyphers 2004; Clewlow et al. 1967); (b) images from stone monuments from greater San Lorenzo (Coe and Diehl 1980:331, 338, 367; Cyphers 2004:73, 84, 155; Lowe 1998b:38); (c) ears and ornaments of La Venta colossal heads (Clewlow et al. 1967); (d) ears and ornaments from colossal heads from greater Tres Zapotes (Clewlow et al. 1967); (e) images from monuments from La Venta (personal photographs; Drucker 1952:plate 62; Drucker et al. 1959:plate 55).

Changing Representations of Earware

We distinguish between ear ornaments as things and representations of these ornaments on sculptures and figurines of humanlike images; we do not consider ear ornaments on figurines of animals or hybrid creatures. The distribution of ear ornament depictions of different sorts was decidedly skewed in Formative Mesoamerica. There were more stone sculptures at San Lorenzo
Figure 6.5. Representations of earware on early figurines (drawn from sources indicated): (a) ear beads on a Pilli figurine from Tlapacoya (Niederberger 1976:219, lám. 74:1), (b) earspools with tassels on a Pahuacan figurine from Tlapacoya (Niederberger 1976:227, lám. 82:1), (c) earspools with throat disks on a Pilli figurine from Tlapacoya (Niederberger 1976:221, lám. 76:2); (d) earspools on an “ivory” ceramic figurine from El Opeño, Michoacan (Oliveros 2004:67, imagen 1, fig. 14); (e) possible earplugs on a Tres Zapotes figurine (Weiant 1943:plates 3, 6); (f) ear beads or disks on a San José phase figurine from San José Mogote (Marcus 1998:168, fig. 12.24); (g) pierced ears on a Tierras Largas phase figurine from San José Mogote (Marcus 1998:150, fig. 12.5); (h) ear slot on a figurine from Chiapa de Corzo (redrawn from Lee 1969:11, fig. 1a); (i) ear tassels or feathers on a Jocotán phase stela from Ojo de Agua in the Mazatan region (Clark and Hodgson 2007–8:43, fig. 2); (j) eartubes or earspools on a figurine from Burial 8, Nexpa, Morelos (Marcus 1998:26, fig. 5.2; see Grove 1974:71, fig. 12j); (k) long eartubes with central disks on the “Prince” sculpture from the Cruz del Milagro sculpture (1.30 m high; see Benson and de la Fuente 1996:166–67).
at 1000 BCE than at all other contemporaneous Mesoamerican communities combined (see Cyphers 2004; cf. Clark et al. 2010). In contrast, modest highland villages at the time appear to have had more ceramic figurines per capita than San Lorenzo (see Coe and Diehl 1980). Whole figurines occur in burial contexts in the highlands but very rarely in the lowlands. Ceramic figurines in the Soconusco and Olman regions were deliberately broken as part of their use and function, so whole figurines are rare. Fragments recovered in household middens and fill many times are battered, with critical features obliterated. A persistent problem is that bodies cannot be matched to detached heads, leading to a host of controversies, including the identification of the sex, gender, or sexlessness of these humanoid images (see Blomster, Chapter 4; Follensbee, Chapter 7).

A well-published fact of Olmec sculpture is that the colossal heads all sport unique helmets and ear ornaments (Figure 6.4), indicating personalized attire or emblems of the individuals portrayed (Clark 2007; Coe 1972, 1981; Cyphers 2004; Diehl 2004; Grove 1981; Grove and Gillespie 1984, 2002; Pool 2007; Stirling 1955, 1965). Curiously, among the wide variety of ear ornaments depicted on the seventeen colossal heads, only two appear to be standard, open-throat earplugs. Some disks could be plaques over earplugs. Depictions of earplugs on ceramic figurines from San Lorenzo are also rare.6 Some of the differences in representations in stone and clay may be a simple function of the plasticity of these different media of expression. The giant heads show the ears pinned to the sides of heads, with each sculpture being a rounded form with few protrusions. Facial features are shown with fairly low relief, perhaps adding to the impression of flattened features. Carving projecting ears on colossal heads would have been a risky and laborious move. Ear ornaments are shown in plan view flat against the head. For ceramic and jade figurines, portrayed ears stick out from each side of the head (Figure 6.5). The ears on these small images are less realistic than the ones portrayed on colossal heads. In the tracking of the history of ear ornaments different artistic conventions in different media need to be factored in.

Ceramic figurines display a wider variety of ear ornaments than do sculptures, but this may relate to disparities in sample sizes and the greater number of regions represented in the figurine sample. In tracking patterns of earware in different regions, we distinguish among earplugs, eartubes, earplugs, ear beads, pendants, pierced ears, and slotted ears—ears with openings for ear ornaments but shown slack without them (Figures 6.4e, 6.12, 6.5h). Depending on preservation of details on individual specimens and the clarity of original depictions, it is not always certain what was being depicted. We interpret the
portrayals from a realistic rather than abstract point of view. Publications that show front and profile images of figurines are the most useful for understanding depictions (see Agrinier 2000). For example, Figure 6.5a shows what, frontally, looks like ear beads or disks with tassels, such as evident on some Olmec sculptures (Figure 6.4a). A side view of the same figurine head, however, clarifies that the possible tassels are tresses or hanks of hair not connected to the ear ornaments. Two views of another figurine (Figure 6.5b) show that the ornament was a disk with a tassel.

Sorting representations of ear disks from those of earspools can be difficult because earspools can have disks over open throats. An example of such an arrangement is illustrated in Figure 6.5c, which portrays a shaman/ballplayer figurine from highland Mexico (cf. Niederberger 1996:91, figs. 10, 11, 2000:179, fig. 6). Another problem is sorting representations of earplugs from those of ear beads. We have only seen two figurines that may realistically depict earplugs (Figure 6.5e). Differentiating among depictions of eartubes, earspools, and pierced ears can also be problematic (Figure 6.5e–h,j). In our analysis, we counted as pierced ears those representations which lacked any indication of ear ornaments around tiny holes in earlobes (Figure 6.5g). We assume that large round holes are for earspools or simplified depictions of them. We interpret large, rectangular or triangular openings as openings for earspools, earplugs, or eartubes (Figure 6.5h). The tiny holes in the lobes of some ceramic and jade figurines suggest that perishable ornaments may have been added to these objects (see note 1). Sorting depictions of eartubes from those of earspools depends on a clear portrayal of flares. Through time, ceramic figurines were shown with larger and larger earflares, something that accords well with the increased popularity of earspools in Middle and Late Formative times. Ear ornaments were also made of more durable and, presumably, more valuable materials—going from wood, bone, and clay to jade. By Postclassic times they were also being made of obsidian, rock crystal, and gold.

This abbreviated history of ear ornaments so far deals more with changes in form and materials than with the frequencies of these forms as represented in stone and ceramic sculptures. This is not a theoretically informed choice but a pragmatic accommodation to poor information. Good data on figurine frequencies for most regions are unavailable, but such information is critical for tracking shifting functions and meanings of earware. As a prelude to an assessment of the evolving meanings of ear ornaments in Mesoamerica, we look at changes in the uses and depictions of earware in the Soconusco, Olman, the Valley of Oaxaca, and the Valley of Mexico.
FIGURINES IN THE SOCONUSCO

Interpretations based on frequencies of different figurine forms are hampered by biased reporting. There is a tendency to publish the best-preserved specimens and/or representative specimens of the different types. We give more ample coverage here to the Soconusco Early to Middle Formative figurine sequence because it has hitherto been presented only a few objects at a time, and the full sequence lays the foundation for our argument.8

The small sample of Barra phase materials demonstrates that ceramic figurines were made at that time. One specimen (Figure 6.6q) is the most finely crafted figurine in the whole sequence (for a reconstruction of this figurine head, see Coe 2011:50, fig. 13). It is hollow, slipped, and burnished. This personage is shown with an elaborate ear pendant, perhaps of perishable material. The other known Barra figurine head may also have an ear pendant, but the depiction is less clear (Figure 6.6r). These two figurines are precursors of the large, hollow figurine tradition. Limb and torso fragments indicate small, solid figurines were also being made at this time.

The sample of Locona phase figurines is considerably larger, with more solid heads being found than bodies (Figure 6.6). The small, crude, heart-shaped heads are distinct. Few show ears or ear ornaments (see Lesure 1999:217, table 1). Of a sample of eighty heads from the Mazatan region currently in collections housed by the New World Archaeological Foundation in Chiapas, Mexico, forty-six heads lack obvious ears, twenty-six have long ears but no decoration, five show pierced ears, and three have ear spools (Figure 6.6j). Hollow figurines and/or slipped and burnished effigy pots appear to have been common in Locona times, but the fragments recovered of them are so small that only one artifact has been partially reconstructed—a 70 cm tall statuette of a nude female found at Mound 32, Paso de la Amada (Lesure 1999:214, 2011:104, fig. 44). Lesure estimates that most burnished and hollow human figurines or effigy vessels were 20–30 cm tall (Lesure 1999:214). Fragments show pierced ears but not ear ornaments (Lesure 1999:215, fig. 8, upper right). Two unusual effigy vessel fragments reveal evidence of masking, the earliest attested for Mesoamerica. A fragment from Aquiles Serdan shows a shell over the lower part of a face, and an example from Cuauhtémoc depicts an individual with a duckbill mask (Rosenswig 2010:209, fig. 6.15). Fragments of ceramic masks date at least to Ocos times. The tradition of making effigy vessels and large hollow figurines ceased by the end of the Locona phase, but the masking tradition continued. Some effigy vessels and large figurines may have been used well into Ocos times and thus account for the minor presence of polished figurine fragments in midden deposits of this phase (see Lesure 1999:216).
Figure 6.6. Figurine heads from the Mazatan region: (a–p) Locona phase (1700–1500 BCE) figurines; (q, r) Barra phase (1900–1700 BCE) figurines.
Figurine production in the Ocos phase elaborated the solid figurine tradition. Many Ocos figurines were portrayed with eartubes or earspools (Figure 6.7b,d,e,n); ceramic eartubes also appear in the archaeological record at this time, so the evidence of artifacts corroborates that of representations (Figure 6.2a; Lesure 1997:232). The same figurines portray nose beads and chest pendants. As mentioned, no ceramic eartubes have been recovered with Ocos burials. There are several classes of Ocos figurines, including animals (Ceja Tenorio 1985; Lesure 2000, 2011) and some unidentified creatures. Most human figurines depict nude and sometimes painted, standing young women without arms (Figure 6.7j). Other figurines depict older, obese individuals with masks of animals or fantastic beings (Figure 6.7a–c,m). Most of these figurines are shown seated, but standing examples are known. About half of the images have some form of chest covering. One of us has argued that these fat figurines represented male village leaders in shamanic garb (Clark 1991, 1994a, 1994b, 2004). Based on a larger population of figurines, Lesure (1997:213) proposed that females are also represented in the obese group (see also Rosenswig 2010:191, fig. 6.6) and that the costumes and masks “represented supernatural/mythological creatures” worn by “elders impersonating mythological creatures in community ceremonies.” In his interpretation, these were roles of social authority rather than of inherited political status.

The young standing female figurines are shown with elaborate hair and frequently with ear ornaments. In a sample of 127 figurine heads from Paso de la Amada, Lesure (1999:217, table 1) found that 28.6 percent of the Ocos and Cherla phase figurines have ear ornaments. Most probably depict eartubes, but some unambiguously portray earspools. Earspools are also shown on fat, masked figurines, but many have helmetlike hair that covered their ears. It is clear that earware crosscut both categories of represented humans, but in ways that suggest they were ornaments rather than markers of status.9

The figurine situation in the following Cherla phase blended something old with something new. Standing, nude female figurines with elaborate hair and ear ornaments continued in the local tradition, but the masked obese figurines were discontinued and replaced by San Lorenzo–style, seated figurines, both small solid forms and the large hollow “baby-face” figurines (Figure 6.8a,b). Some figurines from this phase combined the two styles, having Olmec lozenge-shaped, deformed heads with heavy jowls but traditional open eyes with punched pupils (Figure 6.8c). There is no serious doubt as to the origin of the intrusive style because some Cherla phase figurines have been identified, on the basis of their paste chemistry, as having been made in the San Lorenzo locale (see Blomster et al. 2005; Cheetham 2010a; Neff and Glascock 2002).
Commensurate with his hypothesis of Ocos obese masked figures as shaman chiefs, Clark interpreted this shift in figurine styles during Cherla times as the replacement of one image of leaders with another (Clark 1990, 1994b, 2004:210, fig. 18.3). The new figurines in Olmec style were burnished, slipped white, and depicted seated individuals with hands on knees (Clark and Pye 2000:235, fig.
29), a power pose similar to that of full-figure basalt sculptures from Olman, presumably representations of rulers (Figure 6.5k). Clark thought the new Olmec figurines only depicted seated males, but subsequent finds of clear female torsos disprove this hypothesis (see Cheetham 2009).

Of particular interest is the difference between competing figurine traditions on how to dress ears. As mentioned, ceramic eartubes enjoyed their peak popularity in Cherla times, and the female figurines reveal the ubiquity of these ornaments. In contrast, Olmec figurines lacked body ornaments or
elaborate hair. Many are shown bald or with tonsured hair, and others wear helmets or turbans (Cheetham 2009). Ears are elongate and stylized and rarely show evidence of jewelry. A few have ear beads or earrings, and others have small perforations that would have accommodated perishable ornaments. The absence of facial ornaments is shared by figurines from the San Lorenzo area (Cheetham 2009; Coe and Diehl 1980; Lowe 1989; Wendt 2010) and most Olmec jade figurines (see Drucker et al. 1959:plates 26, 30, 33–36). The same austere approach to facial jewelry characterizes early Olmec-style ceramic and jade figurines from all of Mesoamerica, as a perusal of any Mesoamerican art catalog or figurine monograph will show.10 We know only of one San Lorenzo phase figurine from San Lorenzo with an earspool.

The following Cuadros phase witnessed the complete eclipse of the local figurine tradition in the Mazatan region and its replacement with imported and adopted Olmec forms. The same features of Olmec-style figurines evident in Cherla times continued for another century (Figure 6.9). Depictions of eartubes and earspools became extremely rare. Equally noteworthy is the near absence of ceramic eartubes in the archaeological record. Some of the
few recovered could be “carry-ups.” The eartube fragments that likely date to Cuadros times are larger and longer than Cherla forms. Limited data from Aquiles Serdan show a 93 percent reduction in the use of “napkin ring” eartubes from Cherla to Cuadros times. This statistic is probably still an inflated estimate based on some mixed deposits. At Cantón Corralito, David Cheetham found eartube fragments only in Cuadros deposits that directly overlay Cherla deposits. For those Cuadros strata resting on sterile soil and not earlier refuse, no ceramic eartube fragments were found (personal communication, 2010). Cheetham makes a persuasive case that the use of ceramic eartubes ceased by Cuadros times. The Jocotal phase continued this ban; ceramic eartubes did not appear again until Conchas times (Coe 1961:103).

The Jocotal phase of Mazatan has been considered an Olmec occupation (Green and Lowe 1967; Lowe 1977, 1978, 1998b), but it was Olmec of a different sort. As apparent in ceramic figurines and pots, there was a tight relationship between the Mazatan and San Lorenzo regions during Cherla and Cuadros times. Cheetham argues for direct connections and that Cantón Corralito in the Mazatan region was a San Lorenzo colony by Cherla times (Cheetham 2006, 2009, 2010a, 2010b; Cheetham and Clark 2006). Such close ties waned by 1200 BCE, as evident in new ceramic and figurine traditions that aligned with those in the Valley of Mexico (see Clark and Hodgson, 2007/2008; Clark and Pye 2000). Mazatan figurines shed their polished white slips and returned to the rustic exteriors of smoothed, fire-reddened clay of earlier eras. Head shapes, facial features, hairstyles, and earware also changed, but long ears remained in vogue (Figure 6.10). Heads became more pear-shaped, with heavier jowls, and eyes returned to the pre-Cuadros look of open eyes with vertical-slit pupils or punched pupils (see Green and Lowe 1967:25, fig. 32; Lesure 2009:158–59, figs. 11.1, 11.2; Rosenswig 2010:195, fig. 6.8). Earspools are represented in the figurine population on round headed figurines, likely dating to the end of the Jocotal phase (Figure 6.10f,g). Ear beads and pendants are more common on the earlier, long-headed figurines (Figure 6.10a–e,i). A recently discovered stone sculpture from Mazatan dating to this time shows an adult male in profile. He has elaborate comb-like ear pendants that may represent feathers (Figure 6.5i; Hodgson et al. 2010). Viewed historically, the Cuadros and Jocotal phases in the Mazatan region were times of significant change in portrayed and recovered ear ornaments. Prior to this era, ear jewelry was abundant and appeared as recovered objects and on figurines. During the Olmec era these ornaments were avoided—at least not depicted on ceramic and jade figurines. Earspools came into vogue again with the figurine population in Conchas times.
Figure 6.10. Jocotal phase (1200–1000 BCE) figurines from the Mazatan region.
The best data for the Conchas phase, the beginning of the Middle Formative period, come from the La Blanca region of the western Guatemala coast (Arroyo 2002; Coe 1961; Love 2002; Lowe 1998b:41, fig. 9; Rosenswig 2010). During this time the Mazatan region was abandoned. La Blanca became the largest pyramid center in eastern Mesoamerica and a thriving place. As apparent in Figure 6.11, figurine styles and norms changed from Jocotal to Conchas times, with figurines becoming more round-headed and round-faced and with diagnostic big eyes with large punched pupils. Large, hollow figurines were made alongside small, solid forms. A variety of hairstyles and headgear were also depicted. A significant change in terms of our theme was the return of earspools. Most Conchas figurines are shown with them (Arroyo 2002). A parallel shift to round faces and earspools occurred in Olman (see Drucker 1952:plates 23–30; Follensbee, Chapter 7; Weiant 1943). Jade and jadellite earspools became more frequent in burials during this time. The popularity of earspools appears to have crowded out other forms of earware, at least as depicted on figurines and sculpture. In some of the burials at La Venta, some honored dead wore composite earspools that had pendants attached to their flares (see Drucker et al. 1959:168, fig. 44). These swings in the popularity of earspools corresponded to changes in their functions and meanings during Middle Formative times.

**Figure 6.11.** Conchas phase (1000–800 BCE) figurines from the La Blanca region (redrawn to scale from Arroyo 2002): (a) Type 8 (p. 218); (b) Type 7 (p. 217); (c–f) Type 3 (pp. 210–11).
FIGURAL REPRESENTATIONS IN OLMAN

Many salient facts of the artifact and representation records for Olman have been made in discussing Soconusco figurines. Shifts toward the disuse of ear ornaments in the Soconusco appear to have been promoted by San Lorenzo Olmecs. Regardless of one’s stand on claimed Olmec influence in Mesoamerica, it is clear that competent analyses of regional sequences, such as the Mazatan one, need to take into account happenings in Olman (see Cheetham 2009). Most early figurine traditions show connections to those of neighbors, and some traditions appear to have clashed or melded from time to time. Changes in traditions in many regions of Mesoamerica were concurrent (see below). Given the mischief apparently perpetrated by the San Lorenzo Olmecs on the rest of Mesoamerica (see Clark 1997, 2007; Clark and Hodgson, 2007/2008), the chronological imprecision of the Olman archaeological record remains a continuing tragedy. Ceramic and figurine sequences have yet to be established for key sites, and most of the stone sculpture cannot be pinned down temporally.

Given known deficiencies, we approached the Olman data with caution. Figure 6.4 summarizes and dichotomizes the Olmec sculpture record between early and late manifestations, meaning between San Lorenzo and La Venta/Tres Zapotes. San Lorenzo phase ceramic figurines differ from later forms; they have long heads and ears, slit eyes (sometimes with tiny pupils), and lack ear ornaments (Cheetham 2009; Coe and Diehl 1980; Lowe 1989; Pool et al. 2010; Weiant 1943). The earliest figurines at Tres Zapotes are of the “Morelos” type (Weiant 1943), now called the “Trapiche” type (Arnold and Follensbee 2001; Pool et al. 2010:99; see García Payón 1966), thought by some to originate in central Veracruz. These figurines are similar to some found in the Soconusco in Jocotol times and to Pilli figurines from the Valley of Mexico (following). They have not been reported for early San Lorenzo, but this may be a sampling or reporting problem.

As characteristic of figurines from other regions, Middle Formative figurines found at La Venta and Tres Zapotes have roundish heads and faces, eyes with punched pupils, and sometimes punched earspools (Drucker 1943; Weiant 1943). Relief sculptures at La Venta show elite individuals with elaborate headdresses and earspools (Figure 6.4d). Jade earspools and flats of composite earspools were recovered in nine of the ten elite burials exhumed in Complex A (Colman 2010), the ceremonial heart of this ancient city. Thus, the evidence from figurines, sculptures, and burials appears to be in substantial agreement on the increased popularity of earspools at La Venta.

In a sense the data for earlier San Lorenzo also concur in the paucity of earspools. No burials with grave goods have been reported for San Lorenzo,
and no “cached” goods that could have been associated with human remains, since dissolved, have been reported (cf. Figure 6.3). Based on the published sample, human ceramic figurines appear to have been infrequent. Other than a few ballplayer figurines (Cheetham 2009; Coe and Diehl 1980:269, figs. 331–35; Cyphers and Di Castro 2009:40, fig. 12) and a type called the “one-eyed god” (Coe and Diehl 1980:270, figs. 336, 337; see Cyphers and Di Castro 2009:41, fig. 13), the few figurines display stereotypic long heads and faces (Lowe 1989:40, fig. 4.4, 1998b:20, 41, cuadro 1, fig. 4.4). Few have ear ornaments, and fewer still have earspools. In contrast, the ten colossal heads from San Lorenzo have elaborate ear ornaments, but only one has obvious open-throat earspools (Figure 6.4a). Their elaborate and individualized ear gear appear to have been markers of status but not standardized badges of office.

Figural representations at San Lorenzo appear complementary in terms of ear ornaments. Most early Olmec figurines and masks lack ear ornaments, while many sculptures portray them. Two different categories of persons appear represented. The differences look like sumptuary rules appropriate to one class and denied other classes. This observation prompts the representation question: who or what was being portrayed in the different media? A related question: what did the presence or absence of ear ornaments mean? The colossal heads and the bulk of the stone sculptures (Figure 6.4) appear to depict elite individuals and supernaturals (Clark 2004; Coe and Diehl 1980; Cyphers 2004). Most early Olmec figurines portray humans with cranial deformation, a possible marker of privileged status but not necessarily of political authority. If the figurines depicted leaders, then ear ornaments were not a necessary symbol of it. If figurines represented the full social spectrum, or even the full elite sector, one would have to conclude that few people wore earspools.

In several regions of Mesoamerica there were vibrant traditions of ceramic figurines before the Olmecs came calling. San Lorenzo’s own early history remains poorly known, and only six figurine fragments have been reported for the pre-Olmec phases (Coe and Diehl 1980:261). The earliest ceramic vessels at San Lorenzo are similar to late Barra and early Locona pots from the Soconusco (Coe 1968:75; Coe and Diehl 1980:137) and thus suggest formative relations between peoples of these coastal regions as far back as 1800 BCE. By this time figurines were being made in the Soconusco. We see little evidence of Mazatan figurine styles at early San Lorenzo. By 1400 BCE ceramic solid and hollow figurines at San Lorenzo already had a style, technique, and look all their own, with key attributes being the burnished white skin, elongated, deformed heads, and narrow slit eyes. These figurines are so diagnostic they
are easily identified in other regions of Mesoamerica as imports or copies of them. Some of the cultural logics behind the novel forms also appear to have spread with the figurines (see Blomster 1998, 2002; Blomster et al. 2005), as is most apparent with the disruption and replacements in the Soconusco figurine sequence. Olmec figurines also had an impact on peoples of other regions, such as the Valley of Oaxaca and the Valley of Mexico.

FIGURINES IN THE VALLEY OF OAXACA

Jeffrey Blomster (Chapter 4) describes changes in figurine traditions for the Nochixtlan Valley and relates them to the sequence in the neighboring Valley of Oaxaca, summarized in Figure 6.12. The ceramic chronology for Oaxaca is less precise than those for San Lorenzo and the Soconusco and is divided into one strong, pre-Olmec phase (Tierras Largas, 1800–1350 BCE) and one lengthy phase for which there was significant Olmec influence (San José phase, 1350–950 BCE) (Flannery and Marcus 2005:459, 462). Tierras Largas phase figurines are small, solid images, mostly of nude standing women (Figure 6.12w–bb). Most of the creative effort went into elaborating features of the head and face, so some of the most elaborate hairdos are on figurines of this age (Marcus 1998:46; Winter 2005:39). Eyes are narrow with “pinhole” pupils (Marcus 1998:45). Tierras Largas phase figurines frequently have pierced ears or earspools (Figure 6.12x,aa,bb). Early Oaxaca figurines share features with Locona and Ocos figurines from the Soconusco and Nevada phase figurines from the Valley of Mexico (Figure 6.13).

Early San José phase figurines include long-headed, Olmec-style figurines with bald or tonsured heads (Figures 6.12k–n, 4.12). Figurines in the local tradition adopted this head form but promoted different eye treatments and ear ornaments. Earspools are rarely shown on San José figurines, but they are frequent on figurines from the subsequent Guadalupe phase (Figure 6.12a–f). How frequent clay human figurines were during any of these phases is a separate and unresolved question.

The best synchronic data on figurine distribution for a Mesoamerican community come from Kent Flannery and Joyce Marcus’s investigations at the village and eventual chiefly center of San José Mogote (see Flannery and Marcus 2005; Marcus 1989, 1998; Marcus and Flannery 1996). They illustrate figurines and artifacts associated with individual house floors. Of particular interest is the distribution of earspools. An old woman (Burial 18) buried beneath the floor of House 16–17 had three beads and two earspools of jade or greenstone (Marcus and Flannery 1996:104, fig. 105). One earspool was under her right
Figure 6.12. Formative figurines from the Valley of Oaxaca (redrawn from photographs in Marcus 1998). Guadalupe phase (950–700 BCE) figurines: (a) (p. 250), (b) (p. 263), (c) (p. 248), (d) (p. 263), (e) (p. 257), (f) (p. 257); late San José phase (1150–950 BCE) figurines: (g) (p. 133), (h) (p. 121), (i) (p. 101), (j) (p. 133), (o) (p. 211), (p) (p. 184); early San José phase (1350–1150 BCE) figurines: (k) (p. 117), (l) (p. 99), (m) (p. 134), (n) (p. 138), (q) (p. 132), (r) (p. 158), (s) (p. 135), (t) (p. 101), (u) (p. 158), (v) (p. 158); Tierras Largas phase (1800–1350 BCE) figurines: (w) (p. 26; Winter 2004:20), (x) (p. 129), (y) (p. 46), (z) (p. 91), (aa) (p. 134), (bb) (p. 202).
Figure 6.13. Formative figurines from the Valley of Mexico, listed by types (redrawn to scale from Niederberger 1976). Zacatenco phase (900–540 BCE) figurines: (a) C2 (p. 229); (b) C3d (p. 230); (c) C3 (p. 230); (d) C1 (p. 229); (e) C3d (p. 230); Manatitlán phase (1250–950 BCE) figurines: (f) Isla (p. 222); (g) D2 (p. 222); (h) D2 (p. 222); (i) Tenayo (p. 228); (j) D2 (p. 225); (k) Isla (p. 223); (l) D1 (p. 224); (m) D1 (p. 224); (n) D1 (p. 224); Ayotla phase (1500–1250 BCE) figurines: (o) Pilli (p. 221); (p) Pilli (p. 221); (q) Pilli (p. 221); (r) Pilli (p. 220); (s) Pilli (p. 219); Archaic period figurine: (t) (p. 240); unspecified Nevada phase (1800–1500 BCE) figurines: (u–w) (p. 218).
clavicle, and the other was in her mouth. Another earspool and a fragment of yet another were found on the floor of House 16–17 (Marcus and Flannery 1996:104; Flannery and Marcus 2005:98, 317–19, figs. 5.18f, 18.4g, 18.20a). The famous scene of one seated and three standing figurines came from an offering associated with this house complex (see Marcus 1998:182, fig. 13.11, 1999:85, fig. 14, 2009:42, fig. 2.12; Marcus and Flannery 1996:100, fig. 96). The three female figurines that kept their heads display earspools (Figure 6.12p); the headless female figurine was likely of the same style. What comes as a surprise in studying the figurines in Marcus’s (1998) monograph is that few other San José phase figurines wore such hardware (Figure 6.12j).

We studied published Oaxaca figurines to gauge the relative frequency of different ear ornaments. We considered illustrations independent of type labels. Given damage to some figurines and ambiguities in drawings and photographs, our observations cannot be taken as definitive, but they should be sufficiently accurate to expose robust trends. In sorting images of the Oaxaca figurines, we looked at four types of ear treatment: plain (no treatment), pierced, buttons, and earspools. The button-like fillets of clay attached to earlobes appear to represent suspended beads rather than earplugs. They are disk-shaped and overlap the lower part of earlobes or are suspended from the lower edges of earlobes. There is no evidence they realistically depicted earplugs that trespassed earlobes or distended them (see Figure 6.12 o,q–u), and no earplugs are reported from domestic refuse for this time period. Following an observation by Marcus (1998:45) that eye types are the most temporally diagnostic features, we sorted figurines by eye types to monitor temporal changes in the forms and frequencies of ear ornaments. Of thirty-four Tierras Largas phase figurines with eyes with pinhole pupils, six are indeterminate, three have plain ears, seventeen have pierced ears, and eight have earspools (Figure 6.12aa). For early San José phase figurines with slit eyes and grooved eyebrows (Figure 6.12q–v), three are indeterminate, eleven have plain ears, twenty-six display ear beads, and only one has earspools. For figurines in the San Lorenzo style, what Marcus (1998:99, 138) calls “tonsured caciques” and what Marcus Winter (2005:42) classifies as “Niyo” figurines, sixteen have plain ears and one has piercing ears (Figure 6.12k–n). These observations accord well with the patterns noted for Olman and Soconusco figurines of similar style (Figures 6.9, 6.13).

Most of the figurines illustrated by Marcus date to late San José times and are contemporaneous with Jocotal phase figurines (Soconusco) and Manatial phase figurines (Valley of Mexico). The Oaxaca figurines have “two-ploughing-stroke” eyes (Marcus 1998:221) (Figure 6.12g,h,o,p). Of 195 figurine
heads from the San José Mogote and Tierras Largas sites, we could not securely classify 18 specimens from their photographs. Of the others, 45 have plain ears, 127 have ear beads or disks, and 5 wear earspools. Three of those with earspools are from the offering associated with House 16–17, one of the others is a surface find (Marcus 1998:54, fig. 8.13), and the other is a small figurine found in an offering under the wall of House 2 (Marcus 1998:114, fig. 11.6). For Trapiche-like figurines with large eyes and punched pupils, also dating to late San José times, 5 have plain or unadorned ears, 5 have ear buttons, 1 has pierced ears, 4 have earspools (Figure 6.12j), and 2 are unidentified. In the subsequent Guadalupe phase, earspools were more frequently portrayed (Figure 6.12a–f). These frequency patterns of representation in Oaxaca parallel those from the Soconusco. Figurines with earspools were most prevalent before San Lorenzo Olmecs came on the scene. During the early Olmec era (early San José times, 1350–1150 BCE) only 1 of 41 figurines has what look like earspools. In late San José times 9 of 212 figurines do, so the relative percentage of depicted earspools increased only slightly. The well-publicized figurine scene from House 16–17 gives a false impression of the frequency of earspools for Oaxaca. These are the only figurines of this type with such elaborate earwear.

These observations counter Marcus’s (1998:49) claim that more “than half the San José phase figurines wear earspools.” The difference lies in definitions of earspools. More than half of the Oaxaca figurines had ear beads or disks (Figures 6.5f, 6.12 o,s,u), but they did not have earspools—meaning circular ornaments with open throats, expanding flares, and cylinders that pass through earlobes. Marcus’s generous category of “earspools” (apparently meaning “ear ornaments”), used to index the San José phase figurines, obscures the outstanding fact that earspool use at San José Mogote was rare, and the even more astonishing fact that almost all indicators of earspool use during the late San José phase—as monitored in burials, offerings, household artifacts, and representations on figurines—center on House 16–17. The two earspools found on the floor are from different sets. The breakage of the large earspool and the loss of the other indicate significant use and access to greenstone earflares.

This is the same household said to have been involved in the production of “mother-of-pearl ornaments” (Marcus and Flannery 1996:104). All these data indicate a household of elevated status, likely that of a village leader. This inference is supported by the artifact assemblage and the many special items included (see Flannery and Marcus 2005:chap. 18). An implication of the conjunction of earspool evidence is that the cached figurines portrayed individuals dressed like members of the House 16–17 household and, more specifically, likely depicted actual household members, either living or dead. This is to say,
the female figurines (Figure 6.12p) were not just generic props of household ritual. These inferences strengthen Marcus’s (1998, 1999, 2009) arguments for figurines as portrayed ancestors and of figurines as household productions. It is worth emphasizing that the earspools and their representations in House 16–17 with secure associations were with females (see note 11). The distinction between earspools and other ear ornaments was not random at San José Mogote. Earspools were rare; ear beads or disks were common. These data indicate that it might be worth the analytical effort to distinguish among types of earware.

FIGURINES IN THE VALLEY OF MEXICO

Formative figurines from the Valley of Mexico are the most famous in Mesoamerica but remain poorly understood because of how they were wrested from their archaeological slumbers. Many come from undocumented proveniences or a-stratigraphic ones—the fate of most artifacts from Tlatilco. George Vaillant’s (1930, 1931, 1935a, 1935b, 1936, 1937, 1941; Vaillant and Vaillant 1934) explorations at early lakeshore villages remain the major stratigraphic excavations, but it turns out his proposed seriation of figurines and pottery from these excavations got some things upside down (see Coe 1965; Niederberger 1976, 1987). Valley of Mexico figurine studies still have not recovered from four decades of reading the early record incorrectly. Christine Niederberger’s (1976, 1979) excavation at Tlapacoya, following up on investigations by Paul Tolstoy and Louise Paradis (1970), confirmed the temporal order of cultural materials, but her sample of figurines is small and compromised by thin and sloping strata. The order of figurine types illustrated in Figure 6.13 is based on Niederberger’s work (Niederberger 1976, 1987, 1996, 2000:172, table 1).

One colossal fact of the Valley of Mexico figurine record is that among their functions hand-modeled figurines served as grave goods, and this accounts for the preservation of large numbers of whole specimens (see Coe 1965). Some early burials had groups of figurines (Covarrubias 1950, 1957:23, fig. 5; García Moll et al. 1991; Marcus 2009; Piña Chan 1955, 1958, 1960). Most figurines portray nude, standing females, a tendency noticed for earlier figurines from Oaxaca and the Soconusco (Figures 6.5, 6.12). Also parallel is the attention accorded to hair, eyes, and ears. The earliest figurine found in Mexico (Figure 6.13t) dates to about 2500 BCE and came from the lakeshore site of Zohapilco, the Archaic period, pre-pottery component of Tlapacoya (Niederberger 1976, 1979). This armless figure has crudely punched eyes, a long nose, and slight
indications of breasts. Some of the earliest Formative figurines of the Nevada phase are nearly as simplistic and crude (Figure 6.13u,v). Early Formative figurines and pottery from Tlapacoya are similar to early Tierras Largas phase artifacts from Oaxaca. For the Valley of Mexico, early figurines have narrow eyes, roundish faces, and fancy hair (Figure 6.13w).

Olmec-style figurines appear as a foreign style during Ayotla times (1500–1250 BCE)—at the same time similar figurines showed up in Oaxaca and the Soconusco (see Winter 2005:51). Both hollow and solid forms were made. These “baby-face” images are claimed to be so abundant that some scholars argue the style originated in the highlands (for an assessment of these claims, see Blomster 1998, 2002). The style did not begin there, but once adopted it thrived for several centuries. One early observation made at Tlatilco (Manatial phase) is that Olmec and local-style figurines occurred side by side as burial goods and must have been contemporaneous (Covarrubias 1957; García Moll et al. 1991; Piña Chan 1958). Comingled styles of figurines are also evident in Oaxaca during the early San José phase and in the Soconusco during Cherla times. In the Soconusco the foreign style soon eclipsed traditional forms. In the valleys of Oaxaca and Mexico, Olmec-style figurines might not have dislodged local traditions.13 As apparent in Figures 6.5 and 6.13, elements of the Olmec figurine style were incorporated into the Valley of Mexico tradition in the Pilli and Isla types. A variety of ear ornaments is portrayed on these early figurines. Most figurines in pure Olmec style lack earware but are sometimes pierced or show features of the ears themselves. This includes the large, hollow, baby-face figurines (see Coe 1965; Reyna Robles 1971).

Two exceptions to this pattern are noteworthy. The large holes in the earlobes of the famous acrobat figurine from Tlatilco probably portray earspools (see Benson and de la Fuente 1996:189; Niederberger 1996).14 Another four examples of hollow acrobat or contortionist figurines attributed to Tlatilco have earpools (Caso and Gutierrez 1965:57–59; Coe 1965:60, fig. 75; Art Museum, Princeton University 1995:166; Solís 1998:42, fig. 50; Zehnder 1974:8). Four solid ceramic figurines of contortionists lack earpools, and one shows earpools (Caso and Gutierrez 1965:59; Niederberger 1987:453; three specimens in the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City), and two small stone figurines of acrobats also lack earpools (Art Museum, Princeton University 1995:168–69). As illustrated in Figure 6.5c, some of the heavily clothed, tall-headdress figurines of ballplayers, shamans, priests, or lords, thought to represent community leaders, are sometimes shown with earpools (see Bradley and Joralemon 1993; Clark 2004; Niederberger 1996, 2000). We have located thirty-five different specimens.15 Of these, twelve have earpools (34.3 percent).
Eight earspool sets have throat disks (Figure 6.5c), and four do not. Most of these figurines have human masks and towering, multilevel headdresses. It would appear that for the era of strongest Olmec influence (Ayotla phase) earspools were reserved for persons of special status.

Eartubes and ear beads are portrayed more commonly on Manatial phase figurines. Types D1 and D2 figurines are shown with eartubes or earspools (Figure 6.13g–j,l–m). Ear-spools of greenstone and bone have been found in two Tlatilco graves for this period, so stone ear-spools were present but infrequent (García Moll et al. 1991:69). Two fragments of stone ear-spools were also recovered from midden material at Tlatilco (Lorenzo 1965:49). As was the case for most of Mesoamerica, the relative frequency of ear-spool representations in highland Mexico increased during the Middle Formative (Figure 6.13a–e). A set of Formative jade ear-flares and separate ear cylinders is on display at the Cuicuilco Site museum. Better data for this era and the highland region come from Chalcatzingo (Grove 1984, 1987). Middle Formative elite burials with jade ear-spools have been found there (Merry de Morales 1987), and the contemporaneous figurines frequently had ear-spools (Cyphers 1993; Harlan 1987). The Chalcatzingo elite burials share general features with burials from Tabasco, Chiapas, and Honduras (Joyce 1999). By Middle Formative times, use of jade ear-spools appears to have become an elite and perhaps royal prerogative. What started as beauty aids appears to have morphed into symbols and badges of superior being.

**EARSPOLS AND RULERS AT LA VENTA**

Analyses of LaVenta data ought to include disclosures of the assumptions needed to define evidence and hold it together, so we start with ours for burial, sculptural, and figurine evidence. To begin, no burials have been absolutely verified at LaVenta, a full catalog of sculpture has not been published, good drawing and/or photographs are still lacking for most of the sculptures, and few figurines have been published. To date, no clear chronological distinctions have been made for LaVenta in anything but the building sequence in the northern part of the city, Complex A (Drucker et al. 1959), and some ceramics (Rust 2008). Consequently, LaVenta artifacts have been treated as all belonging to an undifferentiated Middle Formative mass. The more discriminating chronology we apply to LaVenta comes from our work in Chiapas (see Lowe 1989). Critical for the present study has been the separation of LaVenta offerings from burials (Colman 2010). In the primary reports burials are listed as offerings because no human bones were found (Drucker et al. 1959:162;
Gillespie 2008:130). Our working hypothesis is that the bones and teeth of burials failed to survive, meaning that some of the “offerings” are items that once accompanied human bodies. We considered the placement of the jade jewels of these burials to determine the disposition and size of the bodies that once bore these ornaments. The distribution of red hematite that once covered bodies, and of yellow clay caps placed above the bodies/hematite, was also taken into account in determining the original size of graves.16 Once identified, our principal effort has been to correlate grave goods (particularly facial jewelry) to representations of them in the artistic record.

Based on figurines and burial evidence, it is our impression that major social changes occurred in Mesoamerica about 900 BCE, near the time La Venta was founded. Our attempts to corroborate this impression have been resisted by unruly and inadequate data on nearly every front. From the perspective of figurine evidence, Early Formative San Lorenzo stood apart from its contemporaries in the parsimonious portrayal of ear ornaments. Early peoples in the Soconusco, Oaxaca, and maybe the Valley of Mexico made figurines with earspools. In contrast, the earliest figurines in the “Olmec” style reveal a virtual avoidance of earspools. Evidence from the colossal heads and other sculpture corroborate this pattern. Nine of the ten stand-alone heads from San Lorenzo have elaborate ornaments. Three have long, tapered, cylindrical elements, probably tubes; four have disks or pendants with curved tassels, possibly portraying feathers; and two have what look like earspools (Figure 6.4a). One set looks like mosaic, close-throat earspools (Head 2), and the other is a traditional portrayal of open-throat earspools (Head 10). Both sets of flares are squarish in outline rather than circular (cf. San Isidro earspools in Figure 6.2e). The same preference pattern in ear gear is evident on San Lorenzo human and grotesque sculptures (Figure 6.4b). Of twenty-eight sculpted representations (both in the round and bas relief) in Cyphers’s (2004) catalog, only four persons or entities (13.8 percent) are shown with obvious earspools. Ear beads, disks, and crenulated ear flaps are more frequent.

La Venta’s published stone monuments with human images provide twice as many representations. Of fifty-eight images, thirty-five are shown without ear ornaments (60.3 percent), and sixteen are shown with earspools (27.6 percent) (Figure 6.4e). About a third of these images with earspools depict supernaturals or gods, and the rest are realistic portrayals of adult humans. Of the four basalt colossal heads in standard style at La Venta, three have earspools, and one has a disk and tassel assemblage (Figure 6.4c). The three larger heads with truncated bodies, located at the southern end of the site, were carved from sandstone-conglomerate and are highly eroded and difficult to decipher.
None shows clear evidence of earspools (see González Lauck 2010:134, fig. 6.3). Interestingly, the three heads from greater Tres Zapotes all have long, tapered ear cylinders, a form represented at San Lorenzo (Figure 6.4d). The only two images with what we consider close-throat earspools appear on La Venta colossal heads. Unlike these earlier heads, the two portrait sculptures from La Venta (Figure 6.4c, i and 4) display elaborate cross and quincunx designs, symbols of cosmic centering (see Joralemon 1971:14, 30–31).

The clearest figurines with earspools in the La Venta site reports actually come from Tres Zapotes and are illustrated as representative of a type (Drucker 1952:plate 23), but the illustration conveys the impression that earspools were common on La Venta human figurines. The limited data from controlled excavations counter this impression. Drucker (1952:plates 34–41) published all the figurines found in “Stratitrenches” 1 and 3 by level. Of seventy-six heads, only six (7.9 percent) have earspools (color photographs of the seventy-six heads and associated body fragments are available at the Smithsonian’s website, http://anthropology.si.edu/olmec/cfml/artifacts/index.cfm; we compared published images with those online in making our assessment of earware). Heads with earspools occur in the middle levels of each trench. William Rust (2008:1227–28, table 5.1.1) found 141 figurine heads in his excavations at La Venta, and he describes 9 with earspools (6.4 percent), a frequency that supports Drucker’s report. Román Piña Chan (1989:44, 49, 50) illustrates 10 figurine heads from his 1958 excavations at La Venta, and none has earspools. His reconstruction of 24 figurine styles for La Venta does not illustrate any with earspools (ibid.: 44). Maria Tway (2004) describes 30 figurine heads found at excavations in nearby San Andrés island. Only 2 of these (6.7 percent) have earspools. By far, most figurine heads found by Drucker and Rust lack ear ornaments of any kind. Albeit limited, the data available indicate La Venta ceramic figurines rarely had ear ornaments. The same is true of jade figurines. Most have pierced ears instead of appended items (Drucker 1952:plates 46–51; Drucker et al. 1959:plates 26, 32–36). One exception, the famous jade figurine of a seated woman, shows her with a circular iron mirror on her chest and clearly defined earspools (Drucker 1952:plate 46; also Benson and de la Fuente 1996:216). This figurine is from a late burial and is one of the latest Olmec jade figurines, as evident in her round rather than elongated head. On stylistic grounds, we think the standing jade and serpentine figurines in the famous scene from Offering 4 (Benson and de la Fuente 1996:204) were heirlooms at the time of their burial (Clark and Colman, forthcoming). In summary, most of the hand-size images of humans at La Venta depict them without earspools whereas
this is a frequent depiction in monumental art, and most of the known burials have jade earspools.

When it comes to the ornaments themselves, more earspools have been found in burials at La Venta than at any other Formative site. These burials have been correlated with construction events, so it is possible to arrange them roughly in a chronological sequence and monitor changing practices of earspool use. Of ten identified burials, nine had jade earspools. For descriptive convenience, we have assigned sequential numbers to these burials (independent of their original offering numbers) according to their relative age, with Burial 1 being the oldest and dating to construction Phase I (for details, see Colman 2010). The ear ornaments associated with these burials are illustrated in Figure 6.14.

Burial 1, an adult, had a pair of what the excavators described as “imitation earspools made to be mounted on the retaining straps of some large ornamental headdress” (Drucker et al. 1959:173). This is a plausible explanation, but we propose they were part of actual earspools rather than imitations. They are the outer flares or flats of composite earspools and would have been attached to cylinders of perishable materials (Figure 6.14a). The famous eagle ornaments (Figure 6.14g) found in Burial 7 (below) are also flats for composite earspools (Figure 6.1b). The head of Burial 1 was framed by flanking flares and a circular jade diadem above the head and with a tubular bead above this diadem. The diadem is a maskette and likely predecessor of what evolved into images of the Maya jester god (Reilly 1999:31), a symbol of rulership (Fields 1990; Reilly 2005; Schele and Freidel 1990:115; Schele and Miller 1986:119).

Burial 2, dating to building Phase II, was the only one uncovered at the site without earspools. No drawings or photographs of the distribution of items from this burial are available. Two jade figurines of standing human males, about 6.5 cm high and with horizontal suspension holes through the backs of their necks, were found in this burial (Figure 6.14b). These figurines may have been ear pendants, perhaps worn in the manner shown on a multifaced sculpture from San Lorenzo (Figure 6.15a). If so, given the locations of suspension holes, the head of each figurine would have covered the lower ears of the person wearing them. Burial 2 also had an elaborate jade pendant of a crested crane-like bird, perhaps worn around the neck to complete the bird-and-humans triad.

There is much more to mortuary costumes, of course, than ear ornaments. As described for Burial 1, some individuals laid to rest at La Venta wore jade maskettes above their foreheads. Burial 3, a child interred in Phase III times, had a pair of earspools, a maskette, and a string of subspherical jade beads.
Figure 6.14. Jade ornaments found with La Venta burials (redrawn from Drucker et al. 1959 unless otherwise indicated): (a) earflares and maskette from Burial 1; (b) pendants from Burial 2; (c) earspools, maskette, and chest ornament from Burial 3; (d) earspool assemblages from Burial 4; (e) earspool assemblages from Burial 5; (f) earspool assemblage from Burial 6; (g) jade earflares and ceramic earspools from Burial 7 (drawn from Drucker 1952:plate 54); (h) earspools from Burial 8; (i) earspool assemblage from Burial 9 (drawn from photograph in Benson and de la Fuente 1996:244, no. 86); (j) earspool assemblage and chest ornament from Burial 10.
(Figure 6.14c). Taking bearings from the earspools, the maskette would have been above the head, perhaps in a headdress, and the string of jade beads, with especially large beads at both ends, could have been to fasten a Cape around the shoulders or a bead belt near the waist. In contrast to the maskette in Burial 1, that found in Burial 3 was discovered face down. One explanation for this is that it could have been a small mask attached to the back of an elaborate headdress, such as portrayed on Monument 44 (Figure 6.15b). A scalloped, circular flare was found in the probable neck area of Burial 3 and is similar to one worn by a personage carved on the side of a large throne at San Lorenzo (SL-14; Figure 6.4b). Burial 10 had a similar ornament in the same position (Figure 6.14c,j), and a similar piece was found with Burial 7 (Figure 6.14). It is
of interest that the famous ceramic figurines from San José Mogote also show circular flares around their necks (Figure 6.12p).

Burial 4, a child buried in Phase III times, had a pair of jade maskettes and a pair of jade jaguar canine pendants associated with the earspools (Figure 6.14d). The canine pendants, given their curvatures, were probably recarved from earspools (Clark and Colman, forthcoming). The maskettes may have been disks that covered the throats of the earspools, as shown on two of the La Venta colossal heads. If so, the wearer displayed the symbol of the central diadem on the ears—perhaps analogous to Burial 2 with the images of persons suspended from the ears. Monument 44 from La Venta portrays an individual with a large mask-and-feathers headdress, a small maskette behind the headdress, two maskettes appended to each ear, and four masks in the headdress band (Figure 6.15b). The small maskettes with the earspool assemblages may be similar to those shown on the ears of this sculpture. Large headdress masks worn above the face were probably made largely of perishable materials and would have left few archaeologically detectable traces.17

The other six burials at La Venta date to construction Phase IV, the last building phase in Complex A, but not the site. Burial 5, an adult, had an elaborate earspool assemblage, with two pendants attached to each flare (Figure 6.14e). One set was clamshell-shaped ornaments, and the other was curved, rodlike beads with bulbous ends, much like flower stamens. Burial 6 was the occupant of the sandstone sarcophagus carved to portray a crocodilian monster. This individual had a jade bloodletter, a jade figurine, and large, very thin earspools of different colors, each with a jade pendant in the shape of a jaguar fang (Figure 6.14f). These pendants are so thin as to be translucent.

Burial 7, in the basalt column tomb, is the most famous at La Venta and the one most investigators accept as a burial—actually a multiple burial of two or three children (Colman 2010). Offerings in this tomb included squarish, flat jades with incised eagles that Drucker (1952:plate 54) published as items of “unknown use.” They were obviously recarved from an older artifact that would have had the size and elongated rectangular shape of the flat-ended “canoe” Matthew Stirling discovered in the Cerro de las Mesas jade cache (Stirling 1941:300; see also Benson and de la Fuente 1996:258). A pair of blue-painted ceramic earspools was also found in this tomb and could have been the cylinders that the jade flares were once attached to, or they could have been a second pair of earspools (Figure 6.14g). Another scalloped, circular flare was found with this burial. No drawings or photographs are available for this burial, so we cannot ground inferences on coassociations of artifacts or their articulations with a human skeleton. Also found were a pair of small
obsidian disks that were probably the irises of a wooden mask (cf. Bachand and Lowe 2011). We would not be surprised if the pair of flat jade hands found in this tomb (Drucker 1952:plate 54b; also Benson and de la Fuente 1996:243) were also part of earspool assemblages.

Burial 8 was an assemblage of scattered artifacts in the fill of Mound A2, so the burial they were placed with may have been disturbed anciently. Two jade earspools (Figure 6.15h), one serpentine figurine fragment, and about thirty-four jade beads were found during excavation of the basalt tomb, and these are the artifacts we consider as mortuary goods of Burial 8. Drucker (1952:plate 56a,c) describes the earspools as being of “crystalline jade of rather poor quality.”

Burial 9 was interred in a sandstone crypt and may have been accompanied by four or more sacrificed retainers—as marked by the clusters of jade axes encircling the royal jewels of the central person (Figure 6.2; see Clark and Colman, forthcoming). The principal individual had a bead belt as well as the most famous earspools from Formative Mesoamerica. Each jade flare is incised with a tricephalous image of a central face of a “composite anthropomorph” (Pohorilenko 1996:126), shown in profile, and two backswep avian serpent heads (Figure 6.14i). As worn, the central images probably faced outward. Karl Taube (2001:108, 2010:87) argues that the inner edge of these earspools have a self-referential image of earspools with breath volutes, symbolizing breath coming from these portrayed earspools. Suspended from each earspool was a jade pendant carved in the shape of a mandible. Drucker (1952:162) interpreted these as representations of deer mandibles because each has a row of four tricuspid molars. Other jade spangles and beads in the burial portrayed birds and turtles, so the overall symbolism of the costume was complex.

Burial 10, of a child, was placed south of the sandstone crypt tomb on the site’s center line. As mentioned, this individual had a scalloped disk as a chest pendant and jade jaguar fang pendants suspended from earspools. These were accompanied by a set of tubular beads (Figure 6.14j). The modest earspools are of special interest. They do not match in color or material. Drucker (1952:161) mentions that one of them “consists of a separate flare and stem. The latter element is smaller in bore than the flare.” The presence of two jade pieces of a composite earspool at La Venta confirms the practice of making and using composite flares and supports the possibility that the earflares found in Burials 1 and 7 may have been parts of complex earspools.

The popularity of jade earspools with burials in the ceremonial complex at La Venta appears well represented on stone sculpture but not on ceramic figurines. Neither of these other data sets provides information on the frequency of earspool use through time. Drucker’s Stratitrench 1 was just west of
the main pyramid, and his Stratitrench 3 was at the southernmost tip of La Venta island, about 2 km from the central plaza (Drucker 1952:20–21). These could be construed as artifact samples from public and private domains, yet there is no significant difference in the number of figurine heads recovered per cubic meter of fill in these different trenches or in the percentage of figurines with earspools. The infrequent portrayal of earspools on figurines could signal privileged consumption of earspools at La Venta.

The longer perspective for Olman created by combining evidence from San Lorenzo, Tres Zapotes, and La Venta indicates that the wearing of some ear ornaments may have been an elite privilege. The different representations in stone and clay could support this conclusion under certain conditions—in particular, if one assumes (i) elites and commoners alike made ceramic figurines and (2) in their own images. Neither assumption is currently warranted for the Middle Formative period. Both assumptions are carryovers from interpretations of figurine production and use by Early Formative villagers—an era of presumed social egalitarianism. The evidence supports the view that the production and use of figurines shifted through time, with significant changes in the Middle Formative. What was represented on figurines surely changed as well, as evident in changing dress codes.

Limiting attention to dressed ears, the sequence for Mesoamerica’s Formative era was from a wide popularity of eartubes and earspools among early villagers (ca. 1800–1400 BCE), followed by a hiatus lasting several centuries marked by the popularity of Olmec-style figurines. The San Lorenzo Olmecs appear to have reserved elaborate ear ornaments for those of high station, as evident on their colossal portraits. By La Venta times, the variety of ear ornaments displayed in public had narrowed; most of them centered around earspools. We see the continuation of ornaments with tassels or feathers, as represented in jade pendants. Of particular interest is the addition of overt symbolism to earflares during La Venta times. Scholars may quarrel over specific meanings but not over the fact that these items carried another level of meaning. Two of the colossal heads have ear disks or close-throated earspools that display the “+” or “X” symbols of cosmological centering—symbols that occur on chest plaques and belt buckles on early statuary. Also displayed in the ears are depictions of humans and birds, with pendants representing jaguars and other creatures. Open-throat earspools show up on depictions of supernatural beings, in particular, on four of the seven stelae placed at the southern base of La Venta’s main pyramid (see González Lauck 2010:137, fig. 6.4).

To compress a complex history, earspools were first used as items of personal beautification. With the rise of cities and social stratification at San Lorenzo,
earspools and other ornaments appear to have been pressed into the service of the state as markers of elevated station, a signal reinforced by the general disappearance of these markers on ceramic figurines—images made by the population at large. Within the orbit of the San Lorenzo Olmecs’ ideational sway, there was a precipitous decline in the relative frequency of portrayals of earspools from 1300 to 1100 BCE. Earspools on ceramic figurines of this era in the Mexican highlands appear to have been restricted to portrayals of shaman leaders and contortionists. Shortly thereafter, however, portrayals of eartubes and earspools became popular in the Valley of Mexico and the Soconusco. At La Venta, jade earspools became a basic element of royal burial attire but were not often depicted on ceramic figurines. Presumably, jade earspools were part of royal dress in life as well—at least on special occasions. We see several more layers of symboling by this time. Jade earspools were not solitary symbols but were themselves outfitted and inscribed with markings of possible cosmic significance. Some of these symbols may have portrayed supernatural forces and gods. A more secure guess is that La Venta rulers dressed themselves with the same fittings and accoutrements they included in portraying gods.

**BUNDLING SOME LOOSE ENDS**

With the La Venta Olmecs, earspools became one of the most ubiquitous markers of royal dress in Mesoamerica, a status these objects maintained until the Spanish Conquest. The evolution of stone earspools during the Early Formative from wood, bone, and ceramic prototypes is clear enough. And minor changes in jade earspool assemblages in the Classic and Postclassic periods is well documented. Our principal interest in these objects concerns their meaning rather than their formal and material properties. Earspools are probably one of the best examples of Erwin Panofsky’s (1960) “principle of disjunction” in which old forms were “infused with new meanings” and old meanings clothed “with new forms” (George Kubler, in Reese 1985:407). Our principal claim is that a perdurable form, earspools, took on new meanings throughout the Formative era. To support this argument we need reliable information on context, artifact associations, frequencies of ear ornaments, and frequencies of representations of them through time and space. Most of our effort has gone into assembling data of different sorts to patch together a general sequence of ear ornaments and their depictions in early Mesoamerica. We proposed that earware began as beauty aids, evolved into symbols of kingship, and eventually became metonymic of divine hearing, communication, and speech. All these speculations require further confirmation.
The prevailing idea that early eartubes and earspools were personal beauty accessories rather than symbols of elevated rank is an unsubstantiated assertion based on default assumptions that early villagers were organized along egalitarian lines rather than in rank societies. Enforced egalitarianism was certainly not the case for Soconusco or Valley of Mexico societies after 1600 BCE (Clark and Cheetham 2002), and it may not even have been true for the proposed poster village of Mesoamerican egalitarianism in the Valley of Oaxaca (Flannery 1976) after 1500 BCE. Ubiquity is expected of objects equally available to all, and rarity for those associated with exclusive consumption (see Lesure and Blake 2002). Of course, symbols of status can also be beautifying, so these are not mutually exclusive options of social display. The real question is whether all persons desirous of wearing eartubes, earspools, and pendants were allowed to do so. The evidence of ear decorations on the majority of early human figurines suggests they could; the evidence from objects themselves is less supportive. In Mazatan about 70 percent of all ceramic eartube fragments for all time periods came from one Cherla phase mound at Paso de la Amada. This disparity in consumption looks like exercised privilege. Our review of evidence shows that Early Formative burials with ear ornaments of any kind are rare in Middle America. The few individuals endowed with ear ornaments are presumed to have had special status.

It is clear that the frequency of eartubes plummeted in Mazatan with the arrival in the region of San Lorenzo Olmecs in Cuadros times (Clark 2007). Figurines ceased to wear ear ornaments, and ceramic eartubes were no longer made. Similar patterns are evident in figurine populations in the valleys of Mexico and Oaxaca. For the last centuries of the Early Formative period eartube and earpool use significantly decreased or ceased, suggesting their nonuse or restricted use. These changing levels of consumption through time call attention to the more generous distribution of these items during the early village era. Data from San José Mogote indicate a complex semiotic system for ear decoration by late San José times among earspools, ear beads or disks, and undecorated ears. As far as we can tell, open-throat earspools had a restricted distribution from 1400 BCE onward, and they were always items held in high regard. Alternative earware, such as beads and disks, was popular at the end of the Early Formative.

We are not suggesting with these observations that the San Lorenzo Olmecs were uninterested in earspools or eartubes, or that Olmec indifference to decorated lobes caught hold in Mesoamerica. To the contrary, we propose that persons of influence in the San Lorenzo polity were so interested in ear ornaments they co-opted their use and promoted the discontinuance of such
items among those once privileged to wear them. They created an artificial scarcity and thereby elevated the symbolic importance of earspools. By San Lorenzo times, earspools appear to have become markers of class. Many other archaeological indicators support the inference that class societies existed by this time (Clark 2007). These more complex social arrangements impacted many issues of personal presentation, ornamentation, dress, status, and agency, as reflected in shifting practices of ear decoration.

Jade earspools as items of elite class consumption appear to have continued for the rest of Mesoamerican history. During the early Middle Formative period at La Venta, the symbolic load of jade earspools was bumped up another level to mark distinctions among individuals within the upper class. Three converging lines of evidence demonstrate that jade earspools were special objects. They show up in nearly all elite burials, and earspools are frequently depicted on stone monuments of elaborately dressed men, but appear only occasionally on ceramic figurines,9 the likely visual arts available for popular expression. We have not elaborated the argument here, but the burials at La Venta were of royal individuals probably of different ages and genders (Colman 2010). Jade earspools, bead belts, and jade pendants were standard items of their burial attire—and presumably symbols of their statuses in life. By 700 BCE such jewels had become international symbols of kingship, as seen by their distribution across Mesoamerica but exclusive deployment in individual capital centers. Many ceremonial centers had rulers or elite individuals who were buried in similar attire (Joyce 1999). Two sets of earspools interred with La Venta’s honored dead were inscribed with special avian and serpent symbols. Carved ear pendants may have served similar purposes for two older burials. These added layers of symbolism to earspools, however, are not the source of our conjecture that jade flares came to represent divine ears. We got this notion from Postclassic descriptions of rulers. Space precludes exposition of the history of earspool use from Olmec to Mexica times, but this later history of earware is relevant for tracking the evolving meanings of these objects in Formative times.

Viewing earspools as extensions of ears is not much of a stretch, and demonstrating the association of large jade earflares with rulers and their progeny (burials) and gods (sculptures) should also be clear. Designs displayed on La Venta earspools demonstrate that these items carried a special symbolic load (see Pohorilenko 2006:28). Earspool symbolism among the Classic Maya has been interpreted as representing passageways and even caves for divine exhalations (Houston et al. 2006:145; Houston and Taube 2000:271). Taube (2005:47) argues that this symbolism was already evident on the two earspools found
with Burial 9 at La Venta (Figure 6.14i). Mayan portrayals of serpents emerging from earspools is certainly also presaged by the two-headed avian serpents depicted on the earspools with Burial 9. For the Maya, Stephen Houston, David Stuart, and Karl Taube (2006:158) propose that flower-shaped jade earspools “expressed the refined and omniscient nature of elite hearing, or perhaps served to symbolically enrich or purify the sounds penetrating the regal head.”

Our forays into symbolism are less poetic and concern the obvious. We think earspools were understood to be associated with ears. Among their many symbolic and metaphorical meanings, jade earflares could have been seen as symbolic ears, or extensions of ears and their properties. Classic Maya earspools became much more elaborate than any found at La Venta, and they portrayed flowers or serpents emerging from the throats of earspools (Schmidt et al. 1998:558–59). Earspool throats may have been conduits, passageways, or portals. What was believed to have passed back and forth through these jade tunnels may have been historically specific. Our working hypothesis is that during Middle Formative times precious words were principal travelers. In full regalia, rulers had two sets of ears and thus amplified hearing. Exhalations that passed to and fro through these jade passageways and sound chambers concerned royal and divine speech. In this interpretation, the open throats of earspools were critical to their symbolism. It is worth mentioning that open-throat earspools and their depictions became more frequent through time at La Venta.

Our most controversial proposal is grounded in the notion that La Venta regents were viewed as “divine” kings (Clark 1997) and considered intermediaries between their subjects and their gods. Such beliefs were recorded for the Mexica and other Postclassic peoples. We propose that these notions of kingship began at La Venta about eighty generations earlier. For the Mexica, the king was gods’ eyes and ears and, consequently, their voice: “Our lord of the near, of the nigh, will make thee his face, will make thee his ears, will make thee his lips, will make thee his jaw. Thou wilt make declarations for him” (Sahagún 1969:76). In the same way that kings could represent gods, others could proxy for kings, and sense organs could synecdochically represent both, as apparent in the Mexica saying, Teix, Tenacaz (“One’s Eye, One’s Ear”): “This saying was said of the messenger of the ruler, or of the messenger of a lord, who somewhere delivered the word of the ruler. The messenger was told: ‘Although the very ruler could not come, it is thou who comest, thou who art the eye, the ear, the listener for the ruler, thou who are his spy’” (Sahagún 1969:245–46). To complete the inferential chain from godliness to mundane sense data, we propose that artifacts could symbolize sensual phenomena. For the Mexica
precious words were like jade beads. Jade beads and jade ear spools thus represented the scattering and gathering of precious words. For the late Olmecs, the many royal funerals celebrated at La Venta, and the jewels interred with royal bodies, began this sowing of precious jades and divine words.

Conditions of preservation at La Venta leave room for reasonable doubt as to who or what was represented by scattered jades, battered and defaced monuments, and broken figurines. Data from other regions with better preservation support the interpretation that the assemblages of jade artifacts we consider human burials really were such rather than symbolic burials or cenotaphs. Representations on stone sculptures depicted supernaturals wearing open-throat ear spools, probably gods and/or deified ancestors (shown as flying figurines or figures in throne niches). In contrast, the wide variety of faces, hairstyles, and headgear portrayed on ceramic figurines suggests they represented mortal members of La Venta society rather than gods. Few figurines are shown with ear spools. Based on an inventory of ceramic figurine torsos, women were disproportionately portrayed: about four times as often as men (Follensbee 2000, Chapter 7; Tway 2004)—the inverse of representations on stone monuments. In short, stone and ceramic depictions appear to have represented different segments of La Venta’s population, and earware appears to have played a part in marking distinctions between them. Ear spools appear to have been items of royal privilege that signaled their proximity to the divine.

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NOTES

1. There is an oft-mentioned possibility that figurines were clothed with real cloth rather than left nude (see Follensbee, Chapter 7; Marcus 2009:45; Winter 2005:51). As Jeffrey Blomster (Chapter 4) argues, the presence of body paint counters this notion (see also Lesure 1997:235). Some early figurines from the Valley of Mexico are depicted with skirts and wraps, so the absence of clothing on the majority looks intentional (see Covarrubias 1957:plate facing p. 14). Some early ceramic and jade figurines have perforated ears and could have been furnished with perishable ear ornaments (see Hepp and Rieger, Chapter 5). Marcus (1998:44) proposes that cloth strips could have
been threaded through the perforations of ear and head perforations of early Oaxaca figurines for decoration. Marcus Winter (2005:40) suggests that hair, feathers, or flowers could have been placed in these openings.

2. Gareth Lowe (1967:126) reported a ceramic eartube fragment from a Barra phase (1900–1700 BCE) deposit from Altamira, Chiapas. This early date for eartubes has not been confirmed by explorations at other Barra sites in the same Mazatan region. As Lowe admits, given its small size, the artifact he described may have been a “carry-down” from overlying deposits. It was small enough to get lost before field work was finished, so it was not illustrated and is not available for further study. A problem is that the Barra levels were not overlain by Ocos or Cherla deposits, so the “carry-down” hypothesis is not compelling. Ceramic eartubes may prove to be earlier than we currently can verify. For the moment, however, the best evidence is that clay eartubes were first made in Ocos times.

3. A jadeite earspool and iron-ore mirror were found in coassociation with Burial 154 at Tlatilco (García Moll et al. 1991:68–69).

4. Dating ceramic complexes in the Soconusco has always been a work in progress, with many refinements proposed over the years (Blake et al. 1995; Ceja Tenorio 1985:99–101, fig. 55a–c; Coe 1961:103–4, figs. 42d, 60a,b; Lesure 1999:217). The eartubes and mirrors that Ceja Tenorio (1985) reported from Mound 1 as Ocos objects date to the Cherla phase, a temporal division that postdates his research. The coastal chronology reported by Blake and others (1995) calculated time in radiocarbon years. This work has been superseded. The chronology we prefer reports calibrated radiocarbon years. The original phase order remains, but the absolute timing and lengths of phases have been modified in light of further research and more radiocarbon dates (for the current phases, see Clark 2007:14, fig. 2.3; Clark et al. 2010:2, fig. 1.1).

5. The following are greenstone earspools in burials and offerings outside of La Venta and Chiapas: 1. Los Naranjos, Honduras, Burial 2 (Baudez and Becquelin 1973:91, figs. 15, 17B, 145; Joyce 1999:40); 2. Los Mangales, Guatemala, Burial 6 (Sharer and Sedat 1987:137, fig. 4.8, plate 4.4c,d,e); 3. San José Mogote, Oaxaca, Burial 18 (Flannery and Marcus 2005:311, fig. 18.4; Marcus and Flannery 1996:101, 104, figs. 105, 106); 4. Chalcatzingo, Morelos, Burial 39 (Merry de Morales 1987:100–101, fig. 8.3); 5. Chalcatzingo, Morelos, Burial 40 (Merry de Morales 1987:100–101, fig. 8.4); 6. Chilpancingo, Guerrero, looted tomb (Carmona Macías 1989:72–75, figs. 147–53; Jiménez García et al. 1998; Reyna Robles 1989:67–68; 2002:257, fig. 4; Reyna Robles and Martínez Donjuán 1989:15, fig. 3); 7. El Opeño, Michoacán, ossuary (Oliveros 2004:plate 8).

6. This observation relates to the artifacts reported by Michael Coe and Richard Diehl (1980). Figurines from the much more extensive excavations by Ann Cyphers over the last twenty years have not been reported and are not available to us. In future San Lorenzo reports, the frequencies of figurines and the frequencies of different rep-
resentations will be of special interest. Our impression of frequencies will probably prove imprecise, but we doubt that the observations about the relative frequencies of figurines with earspools will. David Cheetham (2009, 2010a) recently examined all the figurines from Coe and Diehl’s excavations at San Lorenzo as part of his comparative analysis of early figurines. At our request, he checked his photographic record and found only one San Lorenzo figurine with an earspool (personal communication, 2010). Representations of earspools on early Olmec-style figurines at Cantón Corralito, in the Mazatan region of the Soconusco, are equally rare. The infrequency of depictions suggests a special function for earspools among the early Olmecs and also has implications for what figurines depicted.

7. Jean-Pierre Laporte (1971) in his codes for Tlatilco figurines represents several forms that would be earplugs under our restricted definition. We have not been able to locate any examples of figurines with these ornaments in the publications available to us. If depictions were more symbolic than realistic, the portrayals we classify as beads and disks could have represented earplugs.


9. If the masked figures of elders (both male and female) depicted shaman chiefs or clan ritual specialists, their status appears to have been specified by masks and costumes rather than earware. Lesure (1997:238) identified at least four stereotypic images or costumes. More are evident, but Lesure’s quartet are the most frequent. Some masks included erect animal ears (Lesure 1997:238, fig. 5); ears were covered in other costumes (Lesure 1997:239, fig. 6, top and bottom); and, earspools appear to have been an integral part of only one costume type (see Lesure 1997:239, fig. 6, middle row). Of forty-eight specimens of masked figurines in the Mazatan sample, ten have earspools. Six of these are from eight specimens of the “protruding” and punched forehead type, and the other four represent all other costume types. We are sympathetic to Lesure’s (1999:217) proposal that the increased emphasis during Ocos times on the treatment of figurine hair, faces, bodies, and ornaments related to beautification and the “construction of social identities” (see also Joyce 1992, 1998, 2003, 2007, Chapter 3).

10. No master catalog of legitimate Olmec objects is available that would allow one to calculate the relative frequencies of representations. For the moment, the best option is to determine statistics for the objects presented in individual art catalogs and publications. A review of The Olmec World: Ritual and Rulership (Princeton Art Museum, Princeton University 1995), Olmec Art of Ancient Mexico (Benson and de la Fuente 1996), The Jade Lords (González Calderón 1991), and Ceramica Olmeca (Feuchtwanger 1989) shows that very few early Olmec figurines (stone or ceramic), votive axes, or stone masks are shown with ear ornaments. The majority are shown with pierced earlobes.
11. The accidental history of archaeological investigations leads to paradoxes in which local types acquire foreign labels based on sequences of discovery. The “Morelos” type of Olmec-style figurines at Tres Zapotes (Weiant 1943) is such a case, being first reported in the excavations at Gualupita, Morelos (Vaillant and Vaillant 1934). The style of early Olmec figurines was first identified at highland sites, and this history continues to exert an influence on thinking. José García Payón (1966:128) proposed the local, Veracruz name “Trapiche” for the figurines found at Tres Zapotes and many other sites in Veracruz. This locative from central Veracruz has had the same adverse effect of suggesting that many Tres Zapotes figurines, or the style of these figurines, originated elsewhere. The history of this style needs to traced. Many of the figurines in the Soconusco, Oaxaca, and Mexico regions could be considered the “Trapiche” type. One of the “Morelos” figurines that Weiant identified as similar to Tres Zapotes forms is a quintessential Pilli figurine.

12. Marcus and Flannery (1996:99; Marcus 1998:182–83, 2009:42) identify the figurine in a seated “position of authority” and three standing figurines in “obeisance posture” as male. This identification is unsustainable because the three standing figurines are clearly female (see Blomster 2009:127, Chapter 4; Lesure 1997:244; Winter 2005:52), and the seated one probably is as well (Follensbee 2000:72n99). Winter (2005:52) suggests that the smaller, seated figurine of the scene could be of an adolescent girl.

13. Correlating figurine traditions from other regions of Mesoamerica with those from the Valley of Mexico is difficult because of lingering problems with incorrect seriation and the small sample for the master sequence at Tlapacoya. Given the chronological mess for Valley of Mexico figurines, the temptation is to match things formally or analogously rather than homologously or historically. Such analogies are the road to error, as one of us knows from frequent trips down this path. To give a specific instance, the “pretty lady” figurines from Mexico share many formal features with figurines of nude, standing females of Ocos and Cherla times. They share these same features with Tierras Largas phase figurines. But these three similar traditions, according to the best evidence, were not contemporaneous. The pretty ladies date to two or three centuries after the Ocos figurines and are not directly related to them historically. Inferences derived from placing them on the same early “village” horizon are simply wrong. There was an early Nevada phase tradition of nude, standing female figurines in the Valley of Mexico that was contemporaneous with Ocos and Tierras Largas figurines, but it is only represented at Tlapacoya by four crude figurines that account among them for three torsos and three heads (Niederberger 1976:218, lam. 73). The Pilli figurines of the following Ayotla phase do not obviously relate to these predecessors, but they do clearly relate to figurines from San Lorenzo. The pretty ladies of the following Manatial phase do not obviously derive stylistically from preceding Pilli or Isla figurines, so they lack verified local antecedents. It is not at all clear, therefore,
that a local figurine tradition persisted in the Valley of Mexico during the Ayotla phase, or whether a new “local” style was reinvented in Manatitlal times as a contrast to the Olmec-style figurines. Finding more figurines of this pre-Olmec era will clarify this situation. In either event, one thing that is clear in the “local” style is the prevalence of females portrayed with eartubes and sometimes earspools. Coeval figurines in the Valley of Oaxaca would be the late San José phase female figurines with two-plow-stroke eyes, and Jocotal phase figurines in the Soconusco of Trapiche-like form. For these figurines, depictions of eartubes and earspools were exceptionally rare. In terms of figurine depictions, then, the Valley of Mexico sequence differed significantly from those of its southern neighbors.

14. This famous figurine was found with Burial 154 at Tlatilco, a person buried with a set of jadeite and bone earspools. Three of the earspools were found at his waist, and one jadeite earspool and hematite mirror fragment were found near the right mastoid (García Moll et al. 1991:698–69, 135). If the figurine represented the buried person, the earspools would have been appropriate.

15. References to high-headdress figurines of this sample: (Bonifaz Nuño 1993:75; Bradley 1997; Bradley and Joralemon 1993; Coe 1965, 1968; Larralde de Sáenz 1986:88; Niederberger 1987; Ochoa Castillo 2004; Pratt and Gay 1979:fig. 78; Porter 1953:plate 5f; Reyna Robles 1971; Serra Puche 1993:66; Vaillant 1930:110, plate 16). Examples of these figurines are also shown in the National Museum of Anthropology and the Cuicuilco Site Museum, both in Mexico City.

16. Our proposals for distinguishing between graves of children and adults is based on the size of the grave. As discussed elsewhere (Clark and Colman, forthcoming), we assume primary, extended burials. Obviously, secondary burials can be bundled in smaller spaces. Burials also need not have included whole bodies. Burials of skulls is known, or bodies without them.

17. Burial 2, found at Los Naranjos, Honduras, is one that fits the Middle Formative pattern of burials with jade earspools and belts (Joyce 1999). The gigantic earspools (flare diameter 12 cm) with this burial were placed above his head and could have been part of a headdress or mask (see Baudez and Becquelin 1973:91, figs. 15, 17, 17B, 145). C. W. Weiant (1943:plate 25, 1) illustrates a figurine with earspools in the hair above the forehead. One implication of these instances of jade flare use is that the jade jewelry at La Venta we assumed framed faces in burial could instead have framed masks worn on their heads. Some could, of course, have been nonburial offerings of headdresses themselves, without a human companion. Early Maya depictions show earspools being worn on the upper arms and even strung together as necklaces (see Houston and Taube 2000:276; Schele and Miller 1986:119; Taube et al. 2010:66, fig. 43). A set of earspools with Tlatilco Burial 154 had a pair of bone earspools at his waist (García Moll et al. 1991:135), perhaps part of a belt.
18. Kent Reilly (2002:64, fig. 4.15a) illustrates these ornaments as facing downward (see also Taube 2010:87), and compares the U-shaped arrangement of the three heads so positioned to jaw motifs or the maws of the underworld. There are no photographs or detailed drawing of the tomb offerings to decide the matter. We suspect he was influenced by the elaborate five-piece “Ahaw Pectoral” with a similar image that would have faced downward when worn around the neck (Garza-Valdes 1991; Garza-Valdes and Stross 1992; Stross 1994). We think the likely orientation of the images on the earring was that illustrated in the original report, which we have reproduced here. The important point is that the meanings of designs on earrings were not solely self-contained but depended for much of their meaning on how they were worn, what they were worn with, and on what occasions.

19. Earrings depicted on sculpture and ceramic figurines need not have been of jade, but this is the most likely for the Middle Formative period.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past fifteen years, a good deal of my research has focused on isolating sexed, gendered, and age-related physical characteristics, clothing, and accoutrements in Formative period (1500 BCE–250 CE) Gulf Coast imagery and material culture (Follensbee 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006a, 2006b, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2010; Follensbee and Arnold 2001). The results of this research have been used to assess, and to reassess, conclusions about sex, gender, and age distinctions in Olmec art and archaeology, as well as to explore the possibly gendered and age-related roles that may be illustrated in Olmec and Olmec-related sculpture. One of the more interesting aspects of Olmec imagery that has been revealed as a result of this research, however, is the substantial presence of what appear to be intentionally sexually ambiguous, gender-ambiguous, and gender-neutral figures.

This research on sex and gender strongly supports the conclusion that, despite initial appearances, some Olmec images are overtly sexed and that some costume elements are strongly gendered, associated exclusively with male or with female depictions. Other bodily features portrayed in Olmec imagery, meanwhile, are sexually ambiguous, and a number of costume elements are gender-neutral, worn both by men and by women. Still other attire may be more strongly associated with one biological sex, but in certain, specific situations may appear on members of the opposite sex. Preliminary to establishing a full understanding of these distinctions in Olmec imagery is clarifying what constitutes clearly sexed and gendered Olmec imagery.
Previous to my dissertation research (Follensbee 2000b), no systematic study of sexed or gendered characteristics in Gulf Coast Olmec imagery had been undertaken, and gender representation was poorly understood in Olmec imagery. In most past analyses, gender determinations were made by summary assertion, generally assigned in an arbitrary and inconsistent manner. For example, small jade figurines that have fleshy, rounded chests and wear short skirts (Figure 7.1) were virtually always designated as female (see, e.g., Drucker 1952:154–55; Drucker et al. 1959:25–26); however, large stone sculptures with fleshy, rounded chests and short skirts (Figure 7.2) were summarily asserted to be male.
Such arbitrary assertions of sex or gender in Olmec imagery have often been based in *argumentum ad ignorantiam*—asserting a conclusion based on the absence of features rather than on the presence of features, which is a recognized logical fallacy (see Follensbee 2000b:9–18). However, even this method was applied in a one-sided manner: the absence of large, rounded female breasts and of overt female genitalia was assumed to indicate male sex, but the absence of facial hair and of any indication of male genitalia was not assumed to imply female sex. Fully ambiguous Olmec images that exhibit no clearly sexed or gendered characteristics, especially those that express power and leadership, were asserted a priori to be male. The huge, formidable colossal heads (Figure 7.3), for example, have been designated by many as exclusively male, although no physical characteristics such as facial hair are present to conclusively identify them as such (see, e.g., Coe 1972:5; de la Fuente 1992).

**Figure 7.3.** La Venta Monument 1 (drawing by the author after author’s photographs and Vela 1996:n.p.).
The pervasive confusion about sex and gender in Gulf Coast Olmec imagery is understandable, however, as large Olmec stone sculpture is notorious for its ambiguity of form. Most anthropomorphic figures are quite androgynous, with thick, blocky, stylized features; even figures with naturalistic faces often have what appear to be physically ambiguous bodies. And, while clothing tends to be scanty in large Olmec stone sculpture, full nudity is uncommon, and any indication of genitalia is extremely rare.

THE CERAMIC FIGURINES

Progress in solving this enigma has been possible through the study of the small, solid, handmade ceramic figurines, which are generally much more physically naturalistic than Olmec stone sculptures. The early archaeological explorations of the Gulf Coast Olmec sites of San Lorenzo, La Venta, and Tres Zapotes produced a total of 1,550 identifiably human, Formative period figurine fragments (see Coe and Diehl 1980; Drucker 1943, 1952; Drucker et al. 1959; Heizer et al. 1968; Piña Chan 1989; Weiand 1943); however, previous studies of these ceramic figurines focused heavily on the heads to create the primary figurine typologies. The systematic reanalysis of these figurines, taking into account detailed analyses of both the heads and bodies, has proven very useful in clarifying different aspects of other Olmec sculpture (Follensbee 2000b, 2009a).  

Although some variation of form exists among ceramic figurines of the different sites and time periods, in-depth study reveals that certain body and head features follow clear and consistent patterns. These patterns vary little among the three sites and are also consistent from the Early Formative (Initial Olmec phase, 1200 BCE) through the Late Formative period (Epi-Olmec phase, 100 CE). 5 Unfortunately, over 99 percent of the recovered figurine heads are separated from the bodies; while head features are helpful for determining advanced age (Figure 7.4) and some gendered traits, the figurine bodies are much more helpful in determining gender and age distinctions, and the consistency of the body forms provides that a useful classification system can be based first on close analysis of their physical features, and then on detailed examination of their garments and adornments (see Follensbee 2000b:26–89, 2009a:80–91).

As among other Olmec sculpture, pubic genitalia is extremely rare in the ceramic figurines, but the figurines differ from the other sculpture in that they plainly exhibit secondary sexual characteristics. Although secondary sexed characteristics cannot be relied upon individually as conclusive identifiers of
sex, they become much more reliable when they appear with other secondary sexed characteristics and with consistently gendered features such as clothing. Combinations of such sexed and gendered characteristics form clear and coherent patterns in these figurines, and the collective consideration of these features and patterns greatly reinforces the probability of accurately identifying sex and gender in the figurines.6

As has been noted by most previous scholars, the majority of Olmec small ceramic figurine bodies appear to portray young adult females (e.g., Drucker 1943:76–86; 1952:132–41; Weiant 1943:98–99). The most obviously sexed figurines

**Figure 7.4.** Figurine of an old woman, from La Venta (drawing by the author after Heizer et al. 1968:plate 8a).
are those with prominent female breasts. Some of these figurine bodies show women of advanced age, with stooped shoulders and flaccid, sagging breasts (Figure 7.4); others, with large, distended bellies and especially full breasts, are clearly meant to portray adult, pregnant females. Along with slender, non-pregnant figurines with similarly pronounced breasts, these figurines together display other consistent female physical characteristics, including pinched waists that start just below the breasts, lower torsos that slope out to flaring hips, and wide thighs that taper sharply to the lower legs (Figures 7.4, 7.5, 7.6, 7.7). These figures also often have shapely buttocks with pronounced cleavage, as well as a clearly indicated Y or triangle incised into the pubic area—a feature widely recognized by scholars as an almost universal form of sex indicator, appearing on female ceramic figurines throughout ancient Mesoamerica and on female ceramic figurines around the world.

An interesting aspect revealed by this study was that large breasts are actually an unusual trait among Olmec figurines. As noted by the early investigators (Drucker 1943:76–86, 1952:132–41; Weiant 1943:98–99), while many figurines are identifiably female because they illustrate a combination of the

Figure 7.5. Figurine of a woman wearing a low-slung pubic apron, from La Venta (drawing by the author after Piña Chan 1989:60).
other female bodily characteristics noted, they tend to have relatively subtle indications of breasts (Figures 7.4, 7.5, 7.6, 7.7, 7.8, 7.12, 7.14). Instead of large breasts, female chests are most often indicated by small, pointy protrusions, by a rounded undulation, or often simply by an edge or a line in a rounded W shape, under an only slightly modulated chest area. That breasts are represented this way on Olmec adult female figurines should not be surprising, however, as studies of provenienced Formative period figurines from other Mesoamerican cultural regions such as Central Mexico (e.g., Cyphers 1989; Vaillant and Vaillant 1934), the Oaxaca area, (e.g., Marcus 1998), the Mazatan region of coastal Chiapas (e.g., Lesure 1997), and the Maya area (e.g., Joyce 1993) attest that other Mesoamerican cultures frequently portrayed adult female breasts rather minimally on otherwise clearly sexed images of women, even completely obscuring breast features with clothing (see Follensbee 2000b:59–65; Joyce 1996:169). Rather than accentuated breasts, therefore, the aforementioned characteristics—the slender, pinched waist; the sloping torso and flaring hips; the wide, tapering limbs; the pubic Y or pubic triangle; and the rounded W-shaped line underneath the chest—are clearly the

**Figure 7.6.** Figurine of a woman wearing a low-slung pubic apron with both front and back pendant flaps, from La Venta (drawing by the author).
physical traits emphasized by the Olmec as primary indicators of female sex in the figurines.

The majority of provenienced Olmec ceramic figurines are nude, although most also have extended limbs that would have facilitated the addition of perishable garments (see Follensbee 2000b:77–85, 149–51). Nearly 17 percent wear some type of body garment, if only a simple belt or pubic covering, but only 7 percent of the figurines wear substantial molded-on garments; however, some of these garments show strongly gendered patterns.

The most common garment on female figurines is the loincloth apron, also known as a pubic apron—a free-hanging flap held on by a low-slung, hip-hugger belt that may be plain, braided, or beaded; sometimes there is also another free-hanging flap in the back (Figures 7.5, 7.6). Another common female garment is the skirt, which varies in length from very short to reaching below the knees (Figures 7.7, 7.8, 7.12), and like the pubic aprons, the tops of these skirts consistently sit well below the waist. This characteristic of lower-torso garments being low-slung on the hips appears to be exclusively, and perhaps diagnostically, female-gendered (see Follensbee 2000b:42–45; 2009a:84–85). Other apparently female-gendered costume elements include low-slung plain or beaded belts worn alone, as well as breast bands and earspools with pendant pieces.
The identification of these adult female-sexed physical characteristics and female-gendered costume elements has also revealed that some ceramic figurines with more ambiguous bodies in fact represent female children, adolescents, and dwarfs. Figurines that have more generalized, androgynous bodies and only slightly rounded chest areas, but that show flaring hips, pubic Y’s or triangles, and/or wear garments otherwise worn only by the female figurines, likely depict young adolescents (Figure 7.8). Likewise, small, tubby figurines with secondary female physical characteristics or garments likely represent infants and young children (Figures 7.9, 7.10, 7.11; see also Follensbee 2006a:254–55n13). Finally, some chunky figures with wide, pudgy torsos, stubby limbs, and large heads also have pronounced breasts and/or pinched waists and flaring hips, and they may wear skirts or pubic aprons; these combinations of female features together serve to identify them as relatively naturalistic adult female humans with achondroplasia, commonly called dwarfs (Figure 7.12).

About 4 percent of the total figurine assemblage contrasts markedly with the majority of the ceramic figurines. The bodies of these figurines are much more geometric, taking the form of cylinders or flat rectangles, or, in the case of tripod figures, they have smoothly light-bulb-shaped bodies to accommodate
a rear leg support (Figure 7.13). All of these invariably have completely smooth chests and torsos, with no undulations or demarcations. In addition to their significantly different bodies, these figures wear complex garments that are strongly consistent with male-gendered garments of later Mesoamerican cultures, such as the male loincloth and hipcloth. These male loincloths differ clearly from the Olmec female loincloth apron: while they may or may not have a pendant flap in front, male loincloths wrap securely underneath the groin and between the legs. The Olmec male loincloth is also worn with a wide or multilayered belt that is placed high on the torso, on the ribcage, which contrasts strongly with the typical placement of the female “hip-hugger” apron belt and low-slung skirt. Given the strong contrasts of their bodies and garments with those of the clearly female figurines, along with the strong correlation of their garments with later male-gendered garments, these figures likely represent Olmec male images. Unfortunately, the strong stylization of the bodies and the heavy clothing of these figures obscure any possible distinctions in body development, which obstructs identifications of different age groups among the male figurines.
Not all costume worn by the figurines is clearly gendered, however. Both male and female ceramic figurines may wear capes, vests, or tunics, as well as pectoral ornaments, necklaces or tied fillets around the neck, and earspools without pendant pieces. In very rare instances, an identifiably female figurine may wear a relatively wide, plain belt higher than usual on the torso, at the natural waist (Figure 7.14); while the typical placement for female lower-torso garments is slung low on the hips, apparently wide belts were worn in this manner by women in certain unusual circumstances. Such occurrences of wide belts on female figurines may indicate that the wide belt could be a signifier of a certain role or status; the rare placement of the belt higher on the torso on female figures suggests that this is not a typical female garment, and thus the female figure wearing such a garment may be assuming a certain status or role, or even a level of power, that is usually, but not exclusively, associated with men.

Surprisingly, no certain patterns of pose appear to be gendered among the ceramic figurine bodies. Some poses are more typical of certain age groups,
as elderly figurine bodies are usually seated, and baby figurines usually lie on
their backs with flexed legs or assume a crouched position. The other figu-
rine bodies, however, assume a plethora of different poses, with no gendered
distinctions and no further age distinctions. Clearly female ceramic figurines
even frequently assume a pose that previously has been postulated to signify a
position of “male authority”—seated with the legs crossed tailor-fashion (e.g.,

While the ceramic figurine heads are similarly stylized and do not have
clearly gendered facial features, they are distinctive in hairstyle or headdress.
The most common hairstyles frame the face with an inverted U shape; the top
of these hairstyles is squared or rounded, the surface is often vertically striated,
preumably to show straight hair, and central or side buns are frequently added.
Other common styles include coils of hair or ornamental headbands wrapped
around the head as well as shaven or closely cropped heads, often embellished
with central or side buns. Because the vast majority of the figurine bodies rep-
resent females, it is reasonable to surmise that most of the figurine heads are
also female; these common hairstyles, therefore, likely represent typical female
coiffures. This conclusion is confirmed by the more complete figurines, which
both sport representative hairstyles and have female body forms (Figures 7.4,
7.5, 7.12). Conversely, a small number of figurine heads sport beards, thus repre-
senting men; these correlate well with the small sample of male bodies. These
heads also wear large conical hats or crested headdresses that frame the face in
a square, which may represent male-gendered garb.

In addition to the small, solid ceramic figurines, fragments of large, hollow
ceramic figures were also recovered in the earlier archaeological explorations
of the Gulf Coast (e.g., Coe and Diehl 1980:figs. 292, 346; Drucker 1952:plates
33, 36). The survival of nearly complete figures of this type is rare, but a group
of five such sculptures from La Venta is displayed in Mexico City’s National
Museum of Anthropology and History (Figures 7.15, 7.16, 7.17, 7.18). Not only
do these large ceramic figures display the same stylizations as the small figu-
rines, but clear representations of genitalia on four of the five large figures
confirm the sexual identifications proposed in this analysis, as these genitalia
appear with the same combinations of secondary sexed features as seen on the
small ceramic figurines. Further, the strong correlations of the adult and juve-
nile body forms shown in the large ceramic figures with those proposed to dif-
ferentiate adults, infants, and children are also strongly supported. Together,
these data provide solid points of comparison useful for identifying the pri-
mary sexed features, gendered features and accoutrements, and age groups in
other forms of Olmec sculpture.
Figure 7.15. Large, hollow ceramic figure of a young woman with modest breasts, a pinched waist, flaring hips, a pubic Y, and a closely cropped, U-shaped hairline with buns, from La Venta (photograph by the author).

Figure 7.16. Headless large, hollow ceramic figure of a young woman displaying modest breasts with an incised W-shaped line underneath, a pinched waist, flaring hips, a pubic triangle, and female genitalia, from La Venta (photograph by the author).

Figure 7.17. Headless large, hollow figure of a baby boy with male genitalia and arms and legs drawn up in a crouch, from La Venta (drawing by the author).

Figure 7.18. Hollow ceramic figure of a supine toddler girl with a tubby body, pinched waist, pubic triangle, female genitalia, and a closely cropped, U-shaped hairline, one of a pair of twin figures, from La Venta (drawing by the author).
At least forty-two small-scale human images in stone have been collected in archaeological explorations of Gulf Coast Olmec sites (Table 7.1; see also Follensbee 2006a:91–95, table 4.2). While holes at the neck indicate that some of the figures may previously have served as pendants, all of the provenienced greenstone images were recovered from ritual deposits in elite graves or caches, and, in their final deposition, a number of the figures were arranged in tableaux to create what appear to be historical or ritual scenes (see Follensbee 2000b:90–152).

In contrast to the ceramic figurines, the majority of the small stone figurines are not naturalistic but are consistently stylized in the classic form known as the Olmec “baby-face,” a formulaic figure with a shaven head or very closely cropped, smooth hair; constricted, tabular-erect cranial modification; almond-shaped, puffy eyes; an exaggerated, frowning grimace; and a relatively flat, slender body (Figures 7.19, 7.20, 7.21). These strong, consistent stylizations render the “baby-faces” particularly androgynous, but identifying the sex of these figures is further complicated by the fact that many of them show evidence of modification subsequent to their original carving, with surface incision added and sometimes areas of the body smoothed. That some of these figures were later incised or recarved should not be surprising, as there is widespread acknowledgment among scholars that Olmec small stone and large stone sculptures were modified, recarved, and reused in antiquity (see Follensbee 2000b:148–49, 103–5; Drucker et al. 1959:161; Porter 1989, 1992).

Close study and comparison with the traits isolated from the ceramic figurines reveals that, at least in their final deposition, the vast majority of these figures were sexed or engendered as male or female (Table 7.1). The primary female-identifying imagery used on the “baby-faces” consists of the pubic Y or pubic triangle, chest delineation in the form of a well-rounded W shape and shapely buttocks with strong cleavage, and sometimes a hairline that frames the face in an inverted U shape (Figures 7.19, 7.20). As with the ceramic figurines, the primary male-identifying imagery takes the form of engendering garments rather than physical features, consisting either of a clearly rendered loincloth and belt worn on the natural waist or above, or an underwear-like garment. This sometimes appears along with lightly modeled pectoral delineation that varies from an incised, straight line to a wide, shallow, inverted U shape just under the chest area (Figure 7.21).

The crudeness of some added incision and surface carving on the figurines, juxtaposed with the fineness of the original carving, suggests that some “baby-faces” were made initially in an unsexed form, likely to be sexed or
Table 7.1 Gender and age in Gulf Coast Olmec small-scale stone anthropomorphic sculptures

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
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<td>Adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LV Mound A-2, Figure 2</td>
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<td>PF</td>
<td>Adult</td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
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Table 7.1—continued

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<td>DM</td>
<td>Adult</td>
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</table>


b DF = definitely female, PF = possibly female, DM = definitely male, PM = possibly male, GA = gender-neutral or gender-ambiguous, GAI = gender-ambiguous because incomplete, AR = gender-ambiguous because ruined/fragmentary.

engendered later as desired for specific situations and scenes, and that sometimes figures may have been changed from one sex/gender to another (Table 7.1). Most often these modifications consisted of the addition of a lightly carved or incised loincloth and belt to engender an unsexed figure as male. In the case of Figure 2 from La Venta Offering #3, however, it is clear that this male figure was originally sexed as female, as its crudely incised loincloth contradicts the sensitive, more three-dimensional original carving of a pubic Y or triangle, and the figure still retains a rounded, W-shaped line
defining the chest (Figure 7.22). Conversely, Figure 3 from Mound A-2, at the same site of La Venta, has a body that was smoothed off in irregular planes that contrast with the finely finished original surface on the rest of the figure, and an incised loincloth was added after these modifications (Drucker 1952:plate 47; Follensbee 2000b:103–5); this likely exemplifies a more rigorous attempt to “erase” the original form of the figure in order to engender it as male. While it is possible that the addition of male-gendered garments to the female-sexed Figure 2 might suggest a third-gender individual, the fact that other figures were more rigorously modified suggests that Figure 3

**Figure 7.19.** Jade figurine of a young girl, from La Venta Offering 1943–M (drawing by the author after Drucker 1952:plate 50a).

**Figure 7.20.** Jade figurine of a woman, Figure 9 from La Venta Offering 4 (drawing by the author after Benson and de la Fuente 1996:104).

**Figure 7.21.** Jade figurine of a man, Figure 15 from La Venta Offering 4 (drawing by the author after Drucker et al. 1959:plate 35).
instead represents a figure that was modified, but not as ambitiously, so that it might be used to portray a different character in a different tableau. This is supported by the fact that so many other figures were engendered from originally sexually ambiguous forms (Table 7.1).

The poses assumed by the “baby-face” figures, both male and female, take only a few variations. The possibly female Figure 12 from La Venta Offering 1943-G (Drucker 1952:plate 52) stands, and the possibly female figure from La Venta Structure A-1-e (Drucker et al. 1959:fig. 63) kneels, both with their hands to their abdomens. The possibly female Figure 2 from La Venta Mound A-2 (Drucker 1952:plates 46, 47) and a sexually ambiguous greenstone figure from El Manatí (Vela 1996:39) are seated, resting their hands on their thighs. And the female La Venta Offering 1943-M Figures 8 and 9 (Drucker 1952:plate 50)—the only two “baby-faces” with clearly childlike proportions—stand and hold their hands up like paws (Figure 7.19). The remaining twenty provenienced “baby-faces” take the most common “baby-face” pose of standing with slightly bent knees, legs apart in a V, and feet flat, and they hold their arms stiffly out from their sides, with elbows slightly bent (Figures 7.20, 7.21).

The scant clothing and the very open poses of most “baby-face” figures also suggest that they were adorned with separate, perishable garments and accoutrements—a hypothesis strongly supported by the fact that the figures often have drilled ear holes and occasionally have pierced nose septums, which are clearly meant for the addition of separate ornaments (see Follensbee 2000b:77–85, 90–152), as well as perhaps by their constricted upper crania, which would facilitate securing the addition of hairpieces or headresses. These additional garments likely served to further engender the figures, confirming their carved or incised sexed or gendered imagery, or possibly serving as another way to change the figure’s gender as needed for the figure’s use and reuse.
Of the few provenienced small stone anthropomorphic figures that do not take the form of “baby-faces,” four are incised images on small stone objects, seven are relatively naturalistic figures, and four take the distorted form of grotesques. The incised images and the naturalistic images tend to follow the gendered conventions of the ceramic figurines even more than do the “baby-face” images. The incised images include a standing figure with a pinched waist that suggests it may be female; a gender-ambiguous supernatural face; and two male-gendered figures that wear wide belts, high on the waist, and loincloths (Follensbee 2000b:139–44).

Among the naturalistic small stone images is the recently excavated San Lorenzo Monument 131 (see Cyphers 2004:210–12), which strongly resembles the dwarf-like large stone sculpture La Venta Monument 5 (Stirling 1945:plate 45a; see also Follensbee 2000b:336–38). Each of these images has a large head set directly upon a chunky, compact, kneeling body with stubby limbs, and each also wears the distinctive hairstyle that is a typically female coiffure among the ceramic figurines.

Two more naturalistic figures are a female-gendered, seated torso from La Venta Stratitrench 3 (Drucker 1952:fig. 45) and the famous La Venta Figure 1 from Mound A-2 (Drucker 1952:plate 46), a small jade image that is widely accepted as portraying a woman (e.g., Bernal 1969:72; Castro-Leal 1996:216; Drucker 1952:154–55), which is seated with legs crossed tailor-fashion (Figure 7.1). While a pinched waist was not emphasized in these two figures, they show other features that correlate well with the female-gendered traits of the ceramic figurines, including small, rounded breasts, slightly flaring hips, and shapely buttocks. In addition, La Venta Figure 1 has an inverted, U-shaped coiffure with vertical striations, and she wears a low-slung short skirt. Although she does not assume an open pose, and therefore would not have been adorned with additional garments other than possibly a cape, the figure wears earspools that are pierced through the center, possibly to accommodate additional pendant pieces, and she wears the added adornment of an actual mirror of specular hematite secured to her chest; these accoutrements suggest that this person or character held elite status in the Olmec culture.

The remaining four naturalistic small stone figures include the recently excavated San Lorenzo Monuments 99, 130, and 132 (Cyphers 2004:208–13) and Figure 11 from La Venta Offering 1943-M (Figure 7.23). These are relatively accurate images of young babies, with baby-like, corpulent bodies, relatively proportional limbs, and, when present, large heads (see Follensbee 2006a:258–59, 2008, 2009a; Tate and Bendersky 1999). Three of the figures have arms crossed over the chest and legs flexed into a crouch, similar to the poses of the
large and small ceramic depictions of babies, while the fourth is depicted as riding upon the back of a supernatural creature; all of these poses obscure the genital area, and there are no other clear indications of sex or gendered imagery. The figure from La Venta (Figure 7.23) has drilled holes in the ears for the addition of elite ear ornamentation, suggesting that this image may represent a child of elite status.

Of the four grotesque figures, the one recently recovered figurine from San Lorenzo, Monument 119 (Cyphers 2004:197–99), illustrates a pubic triangle and has infantile buttocks and body proportions as well as the crouched pose typical of the small ceramic baby figurines. The face has been removed, however, and the head has been carved or recarved with small figures and faces; the figure may thus represent a female infantile supernatural. Figure 1 from La Merced takes the form of a sexually ambiguous figural axe topped with a stylized, supernatural baby’s face (Rodríguez and Ortiz 2000:154, 158, 161), and Figure 7.10 from La Venta Offering 1943–M (Drucker 1952:plate 50) takes the form of an adult dwarf-like supernatural with an animalistic face, but a tubby, androgynous body and blank groin area; these two figures may represent intentionally unsexed supernatural creatures, or like the “baby-face” figures, they may have been engendered by added costume.

Figure 1 from La Venta Offering #3 (Figure 7.24), meanwhile, resembles a highly abstracted version of the “baby-face” figure, but with a greatly enlarged and distorted head and sexually ambiguous body. While the figure wears a hairstyle typical of the female coiffures on the ceramic figurines and has a deep buttock groove, it also wears an incised, multilayered and tasseled belt high on the waist in the manner of male-gendered garments—but no wrapped loincloth or loincloth apron. With the combination of the abstracted head, the androgynous body forms, the female hairstyle and buttock groove, and the addition of incised male-gendered costume, this creature may in its final form perhaps represent an intentionally ambiguous supernatural figure. Supernaturals that mix sexed and gendered imagery are well known in later Mesoamerican cultures (e.g., Caso 1958:8, 46–48; Looper 2001; Mendelson 1959:57–60); as explored by Looper, such mixed-gender representations may represent not a simple third gender, but a special “compound gender” that highlights both the differences and the similarities of males and females (Looper 2001:181–82).

THE LARGE STONE IMAGES

Of the 257 provenienced stone anthropomorphic images thus far recovered in Gulf Coast Olmec excavations and explorations, the vast majority
of them—215 in all—are represented in large-scale stone sculptures, which appear at virtually every Gulf Coast site (see Follensbee 2009a:tables 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6). Careful comparison reveals that, as with the small stone figures, the gender- and age-defining traits derived from the analyses of the ceramic figurines have clear correlations with the traits of the large stone anthropomorphic images. These correlations are generally consistent from the Early Formative through the Late Formative period as well as throughout the various Olmec centers. A particularly interesting revelation of this research, however, is that the Olmec emphasized different age- and gender-defining physical traits for different types of large stone sculpture (see Follensbee 2000b:437–49, 2009a).
In relief sculpture, the key diagnostic traits for identifying female sex are the pinched waist that begins high on the torso and the widely flaring hips and thighs (Figures 7.25, 7.27, 7.28), which may also taper funnel-style into slender ankles (Figure 7.27). Female figures also often have wide upper arms that taper to slender wrists (Figure 7.27, image 2, Figure 7.28, image 2, Figures 7.29, 7.31, front images) and hairstyles that frame the face with an inverted U, sometimes with locks of hair in front of the ears (Figure 7.25). As on the ceramic figurines and the small stone sculptures, female breasts are usually minimized when the figure is nude and are defined predominantly by a well-rounded W shape under the chest (Figure 7.25); breasts are obscured completely when clothing is worn (Figure 7.27, image 2). A female relief figure in profile will also often cover her bare chest with her arm in relief depictions, and in this case the chest will flare out above the arm, creating a marked discrepancy with the more slender outline of the torso below the arm and clearly suggesting breasts underneath (Figures 7.27, image 3, and Figure 7.28, images 2 and 4).

In contrast, Olmec sculptures in the round emphasize different imagery than the relief portrayals to indicate female sex and gender (Figure 7.2). As on the naturalistic small stone figures, the bodies of female large stone images are more uniform; they do not emphasize the pinched waist, but flare out gently at the hips. Likewise, female breasts are indicated on large-scale stone sculptures, but modestly, generally as small, rounded forms, sometimes underscored by a clear, incised line in the shape of a well-rounded W. Female figures may have shaven heads or closely cropped hairstyles that frame the face in an inverted U, sometimes with central or side buns.
Female figures in both the reliefs and sculptures in the round may wear low-slung loincloth aprons or low-slung, short skirts (Figures 7.25, 7.27, image 3), sometimes held up by a wide cloth belt or a belt consisting of several layers of rope, with or without rope tassels and/or a “belt buckle” ornament, worn on the lower torso (Figures 7.27, image 2, and Figure 7.28, image 2). As noted for the ceramic figurines, the wide belt may represent the insignia of a certain role or a level of high status that is usually worn by male figures, but in some instances may be worn by female figures. This costume element is actually more common as a female garment in large-scale sculpture than among the ceramic figurines—which would be logical, given that large-scale sculpture would generally portray individuals of high status and/or high office. Female figures may also wear breast bands, suspender-like garments, and tunics, as well as lower-face masks, pendant ear ornaments, and pendant ornaments on other parts of their bodies (Figure 7.27, images 2 and 3).

Likewise, male gender-defining traits are differently emphasized in Olmec large stone relief sculpture and sculpture in the round. As seen among the ceramic figurines, male figures in the reliefs may wear real or false beards, and they have straight-sided or smoothly pear-shaped bodies; they also nearly always have uniform or only gently tapering limbs (Figure 7.27). Similarly, bare male chests tend to be featureless in the reliefs, and only in very rare cases do squared, flat pectorals appear (Figures 7.29, 7.31, rear images; see also Follensbee 2000b:254–59).

Conversely, male sculptures in the round tend to be more sexually identifiable than are male relief images. As in the ceramic figurines, large stone male figures tend to have more geometric, straight-sided bodies; they may be adorned with pectoral ornaments that obscure their chests, and bare areas around these ornaments may appear featureless (see, e.g., Follensbee 2000b:292–93, 314–17). However, male sculptures in the round are most frequently portrayed as showing fleshy but flat pectoral muscles, usually with a straight-bottomed silhouette underneath the chest area (Figure 7.26).

In both the large stone reliefs and sculptures in the round, male figures wear garments that correspond to those on the ceramic male figurines. These garments include wide and/or multilayered belts, usually of cloth but occasionally of rope, with or without “belt buckle” ornaments and/or cloth tassels, worn at or above the natural waist (Figure 7.26); in some relief depictions, the belt may sag in front of a rounded midriff (Figure 7.27, image 6). Male figures also wear loincloths that clearly wrap underneath the groin, with or without a pendant flap; hipcloths (Figure 7.27, image 6, Figure 7.28, image 1,
Figure 7.29, rear image); or underwear-like garments. They might also wear real or false beards (Figure 7.27, image 1) and cone-shaped hats.

Some clothing on the large stone figures, however, is ungendered. Both male and female depictions, for example, wear knee bands, ankle bands, wrist bands, neck bands, pectoral ornaments, ear spools, footwear, capes, collars, and headdresses that range from simple headbands or helmets to those with elaborate superstructures. Although some poses in Olmec stone sculpture appear to be associated with a role or a certain level of status (see Follensbee 2000b:437–46; Schaffer 1986), no poses appear to be exclusively gendered or restricted to certain age groups; both male and female figures of many different ages assume a great variety of positions. 20

While most of the large-scale anthropomorphic images depict young adults, a substantial number of images illustrate aged individuals, adolescents, and
children. As on the ceramic figurines, aged figures are identifiable facially by their sunken, lined cheeks and, in male depictions, by their emphasized facial hair (Figure 7.27, image 1). Body features that indicate advanced age include sagging, somewhat flattened breasts and stooped postures, particularly in female depictions (Figure 7.28, image 2). Overall, a much larger percentage of large-scale stone images—about 9 percent—appears to represent elderly individuals than do other forms of sculpture, and all of these appear to be of elite status (see Follensbee 2006a, 2009a).

Adolescents and childlike images are also in evidence, with recent analysis showing that at least sixteen and as many as twenty-two of the anthropomorphic images in Olmec large-scale stone sculpture represent youths (Follensbee 2006a, 2009a). Adolescents are identifiable by their relatively large heads, youthful facial features, and, as in the ceramic figurines, bodies that tend to be either stocky and firm but only modestly developed or that are unusually slender and less developed than adult bodies (Figures 7.2, 7.32). Adolescents wear the same
types of garments as the adult figures, and they tend to wear more clearly gendered garments than adults—perhaps to clarify the nature of their more androgynous bodies.21

Although they are childlike in size, adult human dwarfs are distinguishable from children because, as in the ceramic and small stone figurines, they exhibit a combination of adult-sized torsos, enlarged heads, and chunky, stunted limbs. Children are generally depicted with enlarged heads but relatively naturalistic, childlike bodies and proportions (Follensbee 2006a:261–64, 2009a:107–9). Most of the children in large-scale sculpture take the form of a limp, lifeless baby that lies in the lap of an elite figure, presented to the viewer on outstretched forearms in the manner of an offering, and these likely represent child sacrifices (Figures 7.30, 7.32). The babies held by the elite figures in Los Idolos Monument 16 and Estero Rabón Monument 3, however, show a possibly different scene, as they are held in more upright positions and appear to be relatively lively.22 It is likely not coincidental that these two figures are also the only two babies who show possibly sexed imagery, with one child being male and one being female; the indication of sex and livelier figures suggests a more individual, personalized interpretation of these two children, while the depersonalization of the other children would be consistent with viewing them as sacrifices.

Only one of these babies, on Las Limas Monument 1, wears clothing (Figure 7.32): a wrapped loincloth that identifies him as male, along with a grimacing mask, headdress, belt, and pectoral that identify him as impersonating the
Olmec supernatural commonly known as the “were-jaguar,” a being said to combine the features of a human and a jaguar. Such a costume would also be consistent with sacrificial practices, as Mesoamerican human sacrifices were often dressed to impersonate the deities to whom they were being sacrificed. Four other child images, meanwhile, take the form of androgynous, naked toddlers, each being restrained by an elite adult on the throne known as La Venta Altar 5 (Figures 7.29, 7.31); as at least one child wears a headdress associated with the “were-jaguar” and as the image on the front of the monument shows an adult holding a limp child, these, too, likely represent children to be sacrificed (see Follensbee 2006a).

LARGE STONE SCULPTURE
With sexed and age-related physical features and gendered costume elements understood in large-scale Olmec sculpture, images that are unsexed, gender-neutral, and gender-ambiguous are also rendered identifiable (Tables 7.2, 7.3; see also Follensbee 2009a), and these images represent a surprising proportion of known Olmec anthropomorphic sculpture. While 16 percent of Olmec large stone sculpted anthropomorphic images are too ruined, fragmentary, or unfinished for the identification of sex or gender, of the remaining 181 provenienced images, as many as 60 images, or 28 percent of the total sample,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sculpture&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Principal Images&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Subordinate Images&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stelae and Other Flat-Faced Monuments</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Mon. 16</td>
<td>1 AR AA</td>
<td>1 GA AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Mon. 30</td>
<td>1 GAI AAS</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Mon. 56</td>
<td>1 PM Adult</td>
<td>1 GA AAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Mon. 58</td>
<td>1 GAI AAS</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TZ Stela C</td>
<td>1 GAI AAS</td>
<td>1 GAI AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LV Stela 2</td>
<td>1 GA Adult</td>
<td>6 DM Adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LV Stela 3</td>
<td>1 DF Adult, 1 PM Adult, 1 GA Adult</td>
<td>1 DF Adult, 3 DM Adults, 2 AR AA (+ 2 Zoomorphs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LV Mon. 19</td>
<td>1 GA Adult</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LM Stela&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1 GA Adult</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EV Stela&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1 GA Adult</td>
<td>1 PM Adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thrones (formerly thought to be altars)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Mon. 14</td>
<td>1 DM Adult</td>
<td>1 DF Adult, 1 AR AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Mon. 20</td>
<td>1 AR Adult?</td>
<td>1 AR Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LdZ Mon 13/SL Mon. 15&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1 AR AA</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LV Altar 2</td>
<td>1 AR Adult?</td>
<td>1 AR Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LV Altar 3</td>
<td>1 DM Adult</td>
<td>1 DF Adult, 1 DM Elderly Adult?, 1 PM Adult, 1 AR AAI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LV Altar 4</td>
<td>1 DM Adult</td>
<td>1 DM Adult, 1 AR AAI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LV Altar 5</td>
<td>1 DM Adult</td>
<td>1 DF Adult, 1 PF Adult, 2 DM Adults, 5 GA Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LV Altar 6</td>
<td>1 U Adult?</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LV Altar 7</td>
<td>1 PF Adult?</td>
<td>3 DF Adults, 1 PF Adult, 2 AR AAI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LdC Mon. with 2 Figures</td>
<td>2 AR AAI</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> EV = El Viejón, LdC = Laguna de los Cerros, LM = La Mojarra, LV = La Venta, SL = San Lorenzo, Mon. = Monument.

<sup>b</sup> DF = definitely female, PF = possibly female, DM = definitely male, PM = possibly male, GA = gender-neutral or gender-ambiguous, GAI = gender-ambiguous because incomplete, AR = gender-ambiguous because ruined/fragmentary, U = gender-ambiguous because unfinished, AA = age-ambiguous, AAI = age-ambiguous because incomplete, AAS = age-ambiguous supernatural.

<sup>c</sup> Although this monument may postdate the Gulf Coast Olmec, it has traditionally been included in studies of the Olmec, and it is included here in the interest of being as comprehensive as possible. Not included here is Tres Zapotes Monument C, which clearly reflects later, more ornate regional styles such as Izapa.

<sup>d</sup> Please note that the name of this sculpture has been changed in recent publications (Cyphers 2004); both names that have been used for this sculpture are provided.
appear to have been made intentionally sexually ambiguous, gender-ambiguous, or gender-neutral (Table 7.4).

In the case of the seventeen known colossal heads, while three heads can be shown to correlate tentatively with other, gendered figures, the heads themselves illustrate no clearly sexed or gendered features such as beards (Table 7.2; see also Follensbee 2000b:387–412, 2009a:105–6, table 4.6). Given that these are verisimilar portraits of powerful individuals, however, the necessity of identifying them by sex or gender was likely rendered moot.

Among the relief images (Table 7.2), the androgynous figures have generalized faces as well as generalized, sexually ambiguous bodies; they also tend to be posed in awkward positions, in which the limbs and garments appear to be placed specifically in order to obscure all possible sexed and gendered features. The clothing worn by these figures is likewise gender-ambiguous, consisting only of garments that are either unique or that are associated with both male and female images. Alternatively, the body and garments may be distorted in such a way that identifying the costume as male- or female-gendered is

Table 7.3 Gender-ambiguous images in Gulf Coast Olmec large-scale anthropomorphic sculptures in the round

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sculpturea</th>
<th>Principal Imagesb</th>
<th>Subordinate Imagesb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Colossal Heads</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Head 1</td>
<td>GAI Elderly Adult</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Head 2</td>
<td>GAI Elderly Adult</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Head 4</td>
<td>GAI Elderly Adult</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Head 5</td>
<td>GAI Adult</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Head 6</td>
<td>GAI Elderly Adult</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Head 7</td>
<td>GAI Elderly Adult</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Head 8</td>
<td>GAI Elderly Adult</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Head 9</td>
<td>GAI Elderly Adult</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Head 10</td>
<td>GAI Adult</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LV Mon. 2</td>
<td>GAI Elderly Adult</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LV Mon. 3</td>
<td>GAI Elderly Adult</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TZ Mon. A</td>
<td>GAI Elderly Adult</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TZ Mon. Q</td>
<td>GAI Elderly Adult</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RC Head 1c</td>
<td>GAI Elderly Adult</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*continued on next page*
### Table 7.3—continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sculpture&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Principal Images&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Subordinate Images&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SL Mon. 7</td>
<td>1 GA AAS</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Mon. 12</td>
<td>1 DM Adult</td>
<td>1 AR Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Mon. 24</td>
<td>1 AR Adult Supernatural?</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Mon. 26</td>
<td>1 GA Adult? Supernatural?</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Mon. 37</td>
<td>1 GA AAS</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Mon. 41</td>
<td>1 GA AAS</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Mon. 42</td>
<td>1 GA AA</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Mon. 52</td>
<td>1 GA AAS</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Mon. 77</td>
<td>1 GA AAS</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Mon. 90</td>
<td>1 GA AAS</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Mon. 103</td>
<td>1 GA AAS?</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Mon. 105</td>
<td>1 GAI AAS</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Mon. 107</td>
<td>1 GA Adult? Supernatural</td>
<td>1 DM Adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Mon. 108</td>
<td>1 GA AAS</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Mon. 123</td>
<td>1 GA AA</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Mon. 128</td>
<td>1 AR AAS</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Mon. 133</td>
<td>1 GAI AAS</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Catalogue #13-385</td>
<td>1 PF Adult</td>
<td>1 AR Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te Mon. 1</td>
<td>1 DM Adult</td>
<td>1 AR Adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te Mon. 2</td>
<td>1 GA AAS</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te Mon. 6/SL 27&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1 AR AA Supernatural?</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMe Mon. 1</td>
<td>1 GAI AAS</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LdZ Mon. 1/PN 1&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1 GA AAS</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LdZ Mon. 3</td>
<td>1 AR AAS, 1 AR AA Zoomorph?</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LdZ Mon. 5</td>
<td>1 GA Adult</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LdZ Mon. 7</td>
<td>1 GA AAS</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LdZ Mon. 12/SL Mon. 6&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1 AR Adult?</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LV Mon. 11</td>
<td>1 GA AAS</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LV Mon. 29</td>
<td>1 AR Adult</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LV Mon. 31</td>
<td>1 GA Adolescent?</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*continued on next page*
rendered virtually impossible. The figure on La Venta Monument 19, for example (Figure 7.33), wears a unique serpent headdress that envelops the head, along with gender-ambiguous garments of a cape, a collar, armbands, and leg bands. The figure’s left arm is twisted forward in an awkward position, obscuring both the chest and the front of the figure’s torso garment. The torso is very elongated and curved, obscuring whether the torso garment is
Table 7.4. Sex and gender, anthropomorphic Olmec large stone sculpture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Image</th>
<th>Ruined or Fragmentary/ Unfinished</th>
<th>Unsexed or Gender- Neutral or Ambiguous</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total Images</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal Images, Reliefs</td>
<td>7 / 1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13–19</td>
<td>8–12</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Images, Sculptures in the round</td>
<td>10 / 3</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>26–35</td>
<td>4–18</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Principal Images</td>
<td>17 / 4</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>39–54</td>
<td>12–30</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subordinate Images, Reliefs</td>
<td>9 / 0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16–18</td>
<td>11–15</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subordinate Images, Sculptures in the round</td>
<td>4 / 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0–1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Subordinate Images</td>
<td>13 / 0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19–21</td>
<td>11–16</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL IMAGES</td>
<td>30 / 4</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>58–75</td>
<td>23–46</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of TOTAL SAMPLE</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>27%–35</td>
<td>11%–21%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

the usually-male-gendered wide belt worn high on the waist along with a male-gendered wrapped loincloth with several pendant flaps or cloth tassels, or a female-gendered low-slung, hip-hugger belt with a pendant apron, or a female-gendered, low-slung short skirt with a “carwash” type fringe as seen on La Venta Stela 1 (Figure 7.25). The generalized faces along with the intentional and somewhat insistent asexuality and gender-ambiguity of such images suggests that these figures may not have represented specific individuals, but perhaps ungendered characters or roles that were fulfilled by different individuals—and that were not restricted by gender.

Interestingly, the only intentionally unsexed and gender-ambiguous relief images appearing on Olmec thrones are the baby figures that likely represent child sacrifices; all of the complete adult figures are sexed and/or gendered and detailed in features and in costume. Like the colossal heads, these adults likely represent specific individuals, but the children apparently represent anonymous, powerless pawns of religious or political ritual (Follensbee 2006a). The correlation of the specific depiction of the adults on the thrones and the heads may be even more meaningful given that scholars have postulated that thrones were recycled into colossal heads as memorial portraits (e.g., Porter 1989).

Among sculptures in the round, at least five images have slightly projecting but otherwise featureless chest areas and exposed but profoundly blank
groin areas, and are thus clearly meant to be androgynous (Figure 7:34). The open poses of these sculptures, however, suggest that, as was common in later Mesoamerican cultures, they were intended to be clothed with perishable garments. It is thus possible that—like some small stone images—such large stone figures were left intentionally ambiguous and anonymous, so that they could be engendered and personalized later with clothing and accoutrements to represent specific persons or characters. Most of the intentionally sexless, gender-ambiguous full-body figures, however, appear to reference sexless, genderless supernatural characters. San Lorenzo Monuments 7, 77, and 90 (Cyphers 2004:56–57, 142–55, 156–58), for example, represent heavily zoomorphic, supernatural jaguar figures with human limbs, androgynous forms, and blank groins, and they do not have open poses to accommodate additional garments other than perhaps a cape.

Other sculptures in the round are more anthropomorphic but exhibit stylized, chunky geometric body forms in combination with some zoomorphic or otherwise abstracted, supernatural features that render them age-ambiguous as well. These images may represent supernatural dwarfs, supernatural children, or simply squat, ageless anthropomorphic-zoomorphic supernatural beings. As with the small stone anthropomorphic-zoomorphic supernaturals, many of these beings appear to be rendered in an intentionally sexually ambiguous manner, as their groin areas are either obscured or left profoundly blank, and any costume they wear is gender-ambiguous. San Lorenzo Monument 52 (Figure 7:35), for example, illustrates a chunky anthropomorphic figure with a stylized, supernatural face. The figure’s lower body is abstracted into trapezoidal forms, with legs that flow into pyramidal feet and toes carved into the front; its hands rest on the knees and hang down with the fingers squared off evenly, perhaps to resemble square paws. No clothing but a possible belt or cape line is visible on the sides; the chest is obscured by a large, X-marked pectoral, and the figure’s pose completely obscures the genital area.

Comparison of San Lorenzo Monument 52 with the mask and garb worn by the baby figure on Las Limas Monument 1 (Figure 7:32) shows direct correlations, except for the fact that the Las Limas baby wears a wrapped male loincloth, illustrating that this particular supernatural is not always depicted as gender-ambiguous. Nevertheless, the majority of Olmec supernatural images tend to be rendered as sexless and wearing gender-neutral costume; among the thirty-eight large stone sculptures in the round of supernatural figures, for example, six images are too ruined to identify their sex or gender; only eight are gendered or possibly gendered; and twenty-four, or 63 percent of the identifiable images, are rendered intentionally as sexless and ungendered.
CONCLUSION

The results of this analysis indicate that, despite its initially androgynous and perhaps homogeneous appearance, Olmec sculpture may incorporate numerous clear cultural signifiers of sex, gender, age, and status; further, the identification of these traits clarifies that some figures are intentionally unsexed, wear only gender-neutral costume, and/or wear gender-ambiguous costume. The identification of unsexed, gender-neutral, and gender-ambiguous figures in Formative period Gulf Coast imagery, moreover, carries many important implications for our understanding of Olmec culture.

Clearly sexed or gendered male and female elite images suggest that status and power were not necessarily restricted by sex or gender in Olmec society, and the existence of specific elite costume that was worn by both sexes suggests that certain roles and status might have been assumed by either men or women. That some apparently symbolic, elite male-gendered garments might be adopted by elite, otherwise female-sexed/gendered figures suggests that the high status and elite roles signified by these costume elements were not strictly gendered and that power among the Olmec was perhaps more fluid than previously believed.
The identification of images designed intentionally to portray androgynous or mixed-sex/gender individuals suggests even more interesting possibilities. In the case of supernatural portrayals, unsexed, gender-neutral depictions suggest that these beings may have been conceptualized as being neither male nor female—that sex and gender were not important to the identity of these beings. Conversely, gender-ambiguous depictions that show both male and female traits or costume suggest that these supernaturals might assume either gender, might represent a third gender, or perhaps represent a compound gender by incorporating aspects of both genders at the same time. The fact that these portrayals make up the clear majority of Olmec supernatural images may also indicate that Olmec religion, at least, may have been relatively equitable in its roles for men and women.

In the case of nonsupernatural human portrayals, unsexed, gender-neutral, or gender-ambiguous depictions suggest that some depictions may not represent an individual, but instead an ongoing character, role, or general office that might be assumed by a man or a woman. Unfortunately, such equal-opportunity roles appear not to be limited to positions of high status and power but also to extend to positions of powerlessness, such as the role of child sacrifice.
As a whole, the results of this research suggest that personal agency, lineage, and/or tradition, rather than sex, gender, or age, were more likely the paramount factors for at least some roles and levels of status in the Olmec stratified religious and political hierarchies. Consequently, these studies overall carry strong implications for our understanding of Olmec ritual, social categorization, social stratification, and political organization.

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Figure 7.35. San Lorenzo Monument 52 (drawing by the author).
Coe and Director Richard Burger at Yale University (San Lorenzo); Christo-
pher Pool (Tres Zapotes), Philip Arnold (La Joya), Robert Kruger (San
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NOTES

1. This chapter is based in part on my doctoral dissertation research (Follensbee
2000b) and the subsequent updating and revisions of this research and my analyses
(e.g., Follensbee 2006a, 2009a). Adjustments have been made to these data as I have
incorporated newly discovered sculptures and as I have continued to refine my analy-
ses and the conclusions drawn from them.

2. As corroborated in a number of recent studies, all of these features are evident
in other Mesoamerican cultures (e.g., Joyce 1998; Looper 2001), which lends further
support to the validity of these conclusions.

3. In exploring gender, a number of studies explore considerations of a third gender or
multiple genders in Mesoamerican art and archaeology (e.g., Joyce 1998; Looper 2001;
Stockett 2005), which is a definitively important avenue of research. However, the lack
of any prior systematic study of biological sex and of gender in Olmec imagery neces-
sitates that these studies focus first on a dimorphic study of male and female biological
sex and then on the gendered imagery associated with each sex; only then may sexually
ambiguous features, gender-ambiguous costume, and gender-neutral costume be iden-
tified and the more subtle identifications of gender be explored and evaluated.

4. Subsequent to my main dissertation research, several figurine collections recov-
ered from surveys and excavations of Formative period Gulf Coasts sites were made
available for study (see Follensbee 2000b:58–59; Follensbee and Arnold 2001; and
Tway 2004). Analysis of these data strongly corroborate the conclusions of my dis-
sertation research.

5. For a cogent discussion of Olmec cultural continuity beyond the Terminal Olmec
phase, see Pool 2000:137–53. This consistency throughout the time span is especially
apparent in Drucker’s analyses, in which he creates very complex categories only
to acknowledge at the end of his analysis that the figurines were relatively homog-
eneous in their forms and patterns (Drucker 1943:76–86, 1952:132–41; see also Weiant
This is also clearly the case for the figurines excavated by Coe and Diehl at San Lorenzo (see Follensbee 2000b:32–33; Coe and Diehl 1980:259–79).

6. A recent study of Formative period figurines by Cheetham has directly challenged my analyses of the sex of San Lorenzo ceramic figurines (Cheetham 2009). It should be noted that Cheetham’s study relies solely upon the subjective evaluation of chest features to identify sex, asserting that a lack of prominent female breasts equates with the chest features being a portrayal of male pectoral muscles. That this is essentially argumentam ad ignorantiam notwithstanding, numerous scholars studying Mesoamerican figurines have noted that chests are the most ambiguous of the secondary sexed features on Formative period figurines (e.g., Vaillant and Vaillant 1934; Weiant 1943; Drucker 1943, 1952; Coe and Diehl 1980; Cyphers 1989; Marcus 1998; Lesure 1997; Joyce 1993), and this is corroborated in my research (Follensbee 2000b, 2009a); chest features thus cannot be taken in isolation to indicate either female or male sex. Not taken into account in Cheetham’s study are the many other bodily features and accoutrements that form consistent patterns in overtly female San Lorenzo figurines, including slender and/or pinched waists, flaring hips, pubic Y’s or triangles, shapely buttocks with pronounced cleavage, tapering limbs, and pubic aprons. (Cheetham’s study does concede that skirts are exclusively worn by female figurines at San Lorenzo [Cheetham 2009:155–56] but does not address the fact that this identification, juxtaposed with his illustration of a figurine with a short skirt and only a slightly rounded chest area, appears to contradict his assertion that figurines lacking blatantly female breast forms are depicting males with pectoral muscles [see Cheetham 2009:fig. 6.2; cf. Follensbee 2009a:fig. 4.5a].) Also not taken into account in his study is that some figurines may portray children or adolescents rather than adults, which renders the sole reliance on adult chest features even more inconclusive for sex identification. As illustrated in my systematic research of the physical characteristics of the figurines (Follensbee 2000b, 2009a), determinations of sex using chest features are only truly meaningful when analyzed in the context of other features that appear regularly on the figurines and the consistent patterns formed by all of these traits together.

7. Supporting the possibility that the ceramic figurines were clothed are ethnographic and ethnohistoric accounts, which strongly attest that later Mesoamerican cultures are well known for having clothed their ritual figurines (e.g., Bruce 1973:25–34; Sandstrom and Sandstrom 1986:35–267; Sandstrom 2009:269; Starr 1899:268; see also Follensbee 2000b:82–84).


9. For a more thorough explanation and analysis of these figures, see Follensbee 2000b:55–58, 2009a:89–91.
10. Please note that I continue to refine my analyses and the resulting tables and other compilations.


12. Another group of “baby-face” images is the group of thirty-seven wooden busts recovered from El Manati. While many of these figures are so abbreviated that they are sexually ambiguous, at least four have well-rounded chests and are immediately identifiable as female—as noted and named by those who recovered them (see Vela 1996:38–41; Ortiz Ceballos and Rodríguez 1997).

13. Female figures also often have a deep buttock groove, which correlates with the shapely, grooved buttocks of the naturalistic small stone figurines and of the ceramic figurines. The only exception to these female diagnostic features among the small stone “baby-face” figures is La Venta Figure 12 from Offering 1943-G (see Follensbee 2000b:112–15), which is atypical in many respects. The front of this figure is generally flat, and the figure’s closed stance and hands on the abdomen clearly do not follow the formulaic imagery of other Olmec “baby-face” figures. The chest is undefined, but it has other strongly female-gendered features, including a pinched waist, a pubic triangle, and a female coiffure; it is possible that this figure simply represents a young girl. Strangely, the body of Figure 12 appears to follow the conventions of relief sculpture more than that of small stone “baby-face” figures—perhaps the result of its very flat front surface.

14. Cyphers’s discussion of the small stone figures from San Lorenzo notes Tate and Bendersky’s 1999 study of possible human fetus figures in Olmec sculpture, but dismisses the identification of San Lorenzo Monuments 99, 119, 131, and 132 as possible infants or fetuses because the dwarf images illustrated in the Potrero Nuevo (a.k.a. Loma del Zapote) and San Lorenzo dwarf altars have similar proportions and because the figures squat (Cyphers 2004:166). (Cyphers does not consider the possibility that the figure in San Lorenzo Monument 130 may be a child or dwarf, despite its small and compact proportions.) Nevertheless, while the body forms of Monument 131 may be more consistent with dwarf-like body forms, and while dwarf figures such as those on the altars and La Venta Monument 5 are known to squat, what is not taken into consideration in Cyphers’s identification is that the body forms of Monuments 99 and 119 (and 130) closely resemble infant figures such as those held by San Lorenzo Monument 12 and Estero Rabón Monument 3, and that Monuments 99, 119, 130, and 132 are clearly childlike in other features; for example, the head of Monument 99 is baby-like in form rather than like the chunky, neckless, adult heads illustrated on the altars; the bodies of Monuments 99 and 132 are more elongated like toddlers and unlike the chunky bodies of dwarfs; and the buttocks of Monument 119 are specifically portrayed as infantile in form and not anatomically consistent with those of a dwarf. Further, as revealed in this study, Olmec ceramic baby figures commonly assume one of two poses: lying supine with legs flexed or with arms and legs drawn up into a crouch-like
position (Figures 7.11 and 7.17). As both small and large Gulf Coast stone sculptures are found arranged in scenes, it would not be unusual to translate a baby’s crouch into a squatting position so the figure could balance upright in a tableau, as shown in La Venta Offering 1943-M Figure 11 (Figure 7.23; see Follensbee 2006a, 2009a; Tate and Bendersky 1999).

15. This compilation of provenienced Formative period Gulf Coast anthropomorphic stone sculptures has been expanded from my previous compilations to include images that show any clearly human traits (e.g., San Lorenzo Monument 6 and Tenochtitlán Monument 2, predominantly feline figures that have clearly anthropomorphic limbs with human hands and/or feet; cf. Cyphers 2004), and also taken into consideration are two more gendered images recently reported from the Tres Zapotes region (Pool et al. 2010), for a total of twenty-three additional anthropomorphic images. (Images that incorporate any supernatural features have also been recategorized to recognize these aspects.) However, figures that are so fragmentary that their identification as anthropomorphic is very tenuous (e.g., San Lorenzo Monument 97) and figures that are zoomorphs or supernatural zoomorphs with no clearly human traits (e.g., San Lorenzo Monuments 9 and 21) have not been included in these compilations. Also not included is a gender-ambiguous anthropomorphic sculpture showing an Olmec-style human face, shoulders, and crossed arms, recarved into a hollow aqueduct lid, that was reportedly recovered from Nuevo Órgano near Laguna de los Cerros, as noted in Cyphers 2004:61.

16. Examples of female figures wearing wide belts include the main female figure in La Venta Stela 3; the elderly woman in La Venta Stela 5; the figure on the proper right side of Tres Zapotes Stela A; the figure on the proper left side of San Lorenzo Monument 14 (which also illustrates an incidence of an arm crossing the bare chest area and the chest flaring markedly above the arm, indicating full female breasts); the relief figure on the front of La Venta Altar 3; the relief figure on the proper right on the front of La Venta Altar 7, and Laguna de los Cerros Monument 6 (see Follensbee 2000b:186–277, 423–25; Follensbee 2009a). In addition, the female central figure in Tres Zapotes Stela D and likely female adolescent Loma del Zapote Monument 11 wear wide belts with tassels at the natural waist—an unusual belt, in an unusual position for female figures; both of these figures, however, are believed to represent individuals of a very high status and/or role.

17. A unique exception to this rule is the central male figure on La Venta Stela 5, which has tapering legs; however, these do not taper funnel-like, but as strange, angular, almost animalistic forms. The male figure to his proper right, meanwhile, has uniform limbs.

18. Facial hair is rare on sculptures in the round, but it appears on at least one figure believed to be Olmec (see Follensbee 2000b:381–84).
19. Leg bands were inadvertently omitted as a female garment in Follensbee 2009a (see also Follensbee 2000b:442).

20. In previous publications (Follensbee 2000b, 2009a), I have tentatively suggested that certain poses in Olmec imagery may be gendered. However, a full review of poses in all forms of Olmec sculpture suggests that these poses are, at most, gender-exclusive only within certain types of sculpture (such as reliefs)—and that a lack of corresponding examples of a pose by the opposite sex in any one type of sculpture is actually more likely just a matter of selective preservation. Therefore, I have modified my conclusions accordingly.

21. The adolescents depicted tend to suggest high-status positions. Confirming such interpretations are a number of archaeological finds of burials and offerings made in honor of juveniles uncovered at the Gulf Coast sites, which suggest that some subadults held elite status—some of them far too young to have earned this status through their own agency (see Follensbee 2006a:266–69).

22. As noted by Cyphers, San Lorenzo Monument 12’s baby shows more movement than the other baby figures held by adults (Cyphers 2004:67–69). While this figure does have the left arm flopped over the side of its head and one knee slightly up, this pose is not as clearly active as those of the two possibly sexed children, which are also both held in the more natural/nurturing way of holding a live child, with the head up. Part of the reason Monument 12’s pose appears more dynamic is likely due to the way that the adult’s right arm has the wrist sideways under the baby’s head, so that the head is lying propped up on the bony edge, and the left forearm of the adult pushes the baby’s left foot up, which creates the difference in height of the knees. Like the figures who apparently hold child sacrifices, the adult holds the child horizontally across the lap, and the left hand under the right leg is palm-up in the manner of an offering. Thus, this could still be showing a limp child and a possible child sacrifice. For further discussion on the representation of child sacrifice, see Follensbee 2000b:260–67, 2006a.

23. Discoveries of burned, cannibalized, and carved children’s bones (Cyphers 1997; Coe and Diehl 1980; Rodriguez and Ortiz 1994; Ortiz Ceballos and Rodriguez 1997) confirm that the Olmec very likely engaged in the practice of child sacrifice; see Follensbee 2006a:266–69.

24. La Venta Monument 8, previously unavailable for study, was recently placed back on display. Close inspection reveals that it has a blocky figure like Cruz del Milagro Monument 1, which—along with its very large head—suggests that it may represent an adolescent rather than an adult. The figure also wears a wide band of cloth low on the torso that extends down across the lap, forming a very short skirt, and although the figure is quite worn, a notable fleshiness is still visible at the sides of the chest. While the figure lacks any indication of the rounded, W-shaped line under the
chest (possibly worn away) and the fleshiness of the worn chest is not as pronounced as Cruz del Milagro Monument 1, this secondary sexed feature combined with the figure’s low-slung, short skirt suggests that this may possibly represent a young female supernatural. Accordingly, the categorization of this figure has been corrected as no longer being gender-ambiguous, and it is therefore not included in Table 7.3.

25. Although this monument is popularly called “Stela 1,” it is more likely a throne or memorial sculpture meant to lie on its back (see Follensbee 2000b:162–68).

26. Another possibility is that sex or gender could have been indicated or determined by context. For example, while the supernatural jaguar-human figure Loma del Zapote Monument 7 shows no sexed or gendered traits, it was paired with the very similar companion figure Loma del Zapote Monument 10, which is possibly female because of the clearly sculpted, rounded W-shaped chest showing between its front legs/arms. These figures may thus have served as a male-female pair of supernatural beings when they were grouped with Loma del Zapote Monuments 8 and 9 in the arrangement/scene in which they were found.

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INTRODUCTION
Although separated by time and space, the Formative Olmec and Postclassic Huastec cultures developed two of the major iconographic traditions in the Gulf Coast region of Mesoamerica. Notably, and of particular interest to this study, both of these cultures depicted human bodies as tattooed, scarified, or otherwise inscribed with abstract symbols in a unique manner when compared with the material productions of other Mesoamerican cultural groups. Thus, although the Olmec-style figure popularly known as “the Young Lord” or “Slim” and the Huastec sculpture known as “the Huastec Youth” (as translated from its popular Spanish name, “El Adolescente”), among several other examples, are the products of distinct aesthetic and ideological systems, they arguably share some important stylistic and conceptual features.

This chapter is a structural and comparative analysis of these two sculptures. As such, it is not solely concerned with what things mean (in this case the sculptures and the iconography adorning them), but also considers how things mean (see Brumfiel 2006; Panofsky 1955, 1967:chap. 1). By applying aesthetic and structural norms and understandings from the Olmec tradition to the Huastec tradition and vice-versa on an experimental scale, objects may be viewed with a fresh eye and perceived in new and unique ways. In particular, I consider three major aesthetic principles described by gestalt psychologists, which are characteristic of Olmec and Huastec representational canons. These include:

1. The principle of inversion and the inscription of action and context on the body
2. The principles of multiple perspectives and dimensionality
3. The incidence of directional, polyvalent symbols

In the course of exploring these modes of visual communication, several shared themes emerge. For example, both figures have cosmological associations, and both appear to bear the marks of having engaged in bloodletting as the gateway to a spiritual transformation or journey. Furthermore, it can be argued that both sculptures may have served as objects to compel the human gaze, eliciting a heightened contemplative or even meditative, trance-like state in those individuals who looked upon them. If this proposal has any merit, the embodied and cognitive experience brought on by the extended focus upon these and other similar artifacts can be said to parallel the concept of transformation written upon them.

Although this chapter highlights how meaning is made in structure and intent, and how it might have been read and otherwise absorbed from these objects, it is also necessary to explore some of the meanings of the iconography. In doing so, I realize that if certain structures and symbols appear to be parallel between the two traditions, one must not necessarily assume transference of underlying meanings through time and across space. It is possible to approach the two Mesoamerican iconographic styles in genealogical fashion, highlighting how the symbols and meanings of Formative period Olmec imagery are later echoed in Postclassic Huastec bodily iconography via linked Classic and Epiclassic imagery. Nonetheless, for this comparative analysis, my focus is not on genealogy but on exploring parallel ways of seeing that may have been pertinent to two separate, yet loosely connected cultural traditions.

OLMEC AND HUASTEC STYLE

In order to compare Olmec and Huastec style—and because Olmec and Huastec style are notoriously slippery concepts in Mesoamerican archaeological and art historical literature—it is helpful to define these terms as they are understood in this study. Although the northern portion of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec is considered the heartland of the Olmec archaeological culture and is often correspondingly considered to be the developmental locus of the Olmec style, the Olmec style is based upon a range of objects and motifs that were used by many cultures on a geographically dispersed scale during this early period of Mesoamerican history (1800–400 BCE; Coe 1965; Grove 1993:84; Lesure 2004; Reilly 1990).
In a similar fashion, “Huastec” is understood in this chapter as a highly distinctive style of art and iconography that characterized the northeastern Gulf Coast region of Mesoamerica (known as the Huasteca) during the Early through Late Postclassic periods (900–1521 CE; Ekholm 1944; Merino Carrión and García Cook 1987:61–68). The Postclassic nature of Huastec iconography has long been observed (see, e.g., Beyer 1933; Fewkes 1906), causing scholars to presume the Huasteca to have been an important crossroads and locus of trade in the final centuries preceding Spanish contact. Indeed the overarching Huastec style that united the disparate areas of the Huasteca during this time is itself most cogently understood as a regional variant of the Postclassic international style (Faust 2009; Richter 2004).¹

There are many ways in which the Olmec and Huastec artistic traditions may be characterized as radically different in terms of formal style (Figure 8.1). For example, engraved figures on Huastec triangular or semitrapezoidal conch shell pectorals are characterized by angular forms, skewed body proportions, and facial features that are, to the eye trained in Western artistic canons, caricature-like in quality—all hallmarks of Postclassic anthropomorphic representations (Pohl 2004:4). Subject and background are often nearly indistinguishable. Dispersed body parts intermingle with adornments, accoutrements, other creatures, and the contextualizing landscape or background. Many ceramic vessels that feature Huastec variants of the Postclassic international symbol sets are as densely populated as the shell pectorals, and the volumes that define the body parts of zoomorphic vessels, for example, often get lost amid the crowded imagery. In contrast, incised figures on Olmec-style celts are frequently carved in low relief and are surrounded by a field of negative space, which imparts a sense of volume and focuses the viewer’s attention on the figural representation. Similarly, the designs on Olmec–style vessels tend toward larger motifs that span the body of the pot, and—in contrast to the Huastec examples—the emphasis is on the volume, shine, and luster in many of the Olmec zoomorphic effigies.

At the same time, a consideration of these objects in light of the forthcoming discussion calls attention to their experiential aspect—the human response that each might elicit in the ways in which they guide the eye or the manner in which the viewer is stimulated or subdued when considering the imagery. It is in this capacity, I believe, that these objects “work” in similar fashion. Furthermore, a number of stylistic parallels are evident in Olmec and Huastec art. For example, the sculptural program of both cultures expresses an aesthetic that Beatriz de la Fuente (1996:41) has referred to as a homocentric vision, in which humans with stocky and rather undifferentiated bodies are
Figure 8.1. A comparison of Olmec and Huastec iconography and style: (a) Postclassic Huastec shell pectoral, Tanquian (?), San Luis Potosí, Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City; after author photograph; (b) Middle Formative jadeite celt, Guerrero (?), Dallas Museum of Art; after Benson and de la Fuente 1996:272; (c) Middle Formative jade celt, Chiapas (?), Museo de Antropología, Xalapa, Veracruz; after Benson and de la Fuente 1996:210; (d) Late Postclassic Tancol Polychrome vessel, provenience unknown, Museo Regional Huasteco, Ciudad Valles; after author photograph; (e) carved cream slip incised bowl, 1200–900 BCE, Las Bocas, Puebla, Indiana University Art Museum; after Princeton University Art Museum 1995:207, cat. no. 98; (f) carved blackware bowl, 1500–900 BCE, Las Bocas, Puebla, Zollman Collection; after Princeton University Art Museum 1995:210, cat. no. 103; (g) Late Postclassic Huastec black-on-white vessel, provenance unknown, Museo Regional Huasteco, Ciudad Valles; after author photograph; (h) Early Formative blackware ceramic vessel, Tlatilco, Mexico, Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City; after Benson and de la Fuente 1996:190.
rendered with exquisitely soft and naturalistic facial features, reflecting archetypal or ideal forms as much as they do portraits of specific individuals (Figure 8.2). Notable as well, artists and artisans in both of these cultures depicted human bodies as painted, tattooed, scarified, or otherwise inscribed with varyingly abstract and representational symbols (see, e.g., Blomster, 2009:136–37, this volume; Cheetham 2009; Hepp and Rieger, this volume; Joyce, this volume; Marchegay, this volume, Wingfield, this volume, for discussion of similar modes of body art during the Formative period). It is in this sense that the
Young Lord and the Huastec Youth share some important stylistic and conceptual features, despite the fact that they emerge from different social and historical contexts.

**THE YOUNG LORD AND THE HUASTEC YOUTH SCULPTURES**

The central focus in both sculptures is the human body and its contours as the canvas upon which tattoo-like imagery is inscribed. The dense, abstract, stamp-like relief carving that covers the Youth contrasts with the curvilinear and fluidly formed fine-line incisions and representational imagery adorning the body of the Young Lord. Yet both convey parallel messages, exhibit a shared logic of imagery arrangement, and inspire similar modes of engagement.

**The Young Lord**

The greenstone statue from the Pacific coast of Guatemala known as “the Young Lord” or “Slim,” for the compressed form, has rightly been highlighted as one of the most unique and finest examples of portable works of art in the Olmec style that reflects the mythical and political ideology underpinning Olmec rulership (Figure 8.3; Reilly 1991). Descriptions of the Young Lord’s form and posture imply that this aspect has contributed a great deal to interpretations of the statuette and underscores the importance of the formal qualities of the body for interpretations of meaning. The figure depicts a youthful male “standing” at attention in a symmetrical, rigid, frontal pose. Bending sharply upward at the elbows, the arms are fully attached to the body. Each forearm presses a scepter or bundle against the chest. The Young Lord exudes a sense of tightly bound stillness. The willowy body is slightly elongated and seems particularly compressed when viewed in profile, further emphasizing the lengthened sensation. Peter David Joralemon (1995:278) has described this form of the figure as “scepter-like” itself, as indicative of the power that the represented personage wields and as a contrast to the precise and naturalistic modeling of the clavicles, rib cage, knees, and shoulder blades.

Meaning communicated in the stance, shape, and form of the figure is amplified in the iconography that covers the body:

[T]he Young Lord is incised with images of the ceremonial and ritual practices through which he exercises his shamanic powers and demonstrates his right to rule. . . . The incisions on the head, arms, hands, scepters, and
Figure 8.3. The Young Lord, Middle Formative serpentine statuette from the Pacific coast of Guatemala; private collection, currently on loan to Princeton University Art Museum: (a) line drawing of the iconography adorning the figure’s body; after Princeton University Art Museum 1995:280; (b) four views of the Young Lord sculpture; after Princeton University Art Museum 1995:279; (c) the lines of the arms combined with the lines of the celt and bundle, which are held against the chest to form the skyband motif; (d) the lines of the celt and bundle together, which form the V-shaped cleft; conceptually the Lord’s upper body is a ripe ear of maize; (e) maize ear fetish on central axis of the Lord’s body; (f) the statuette as a maize ear fetish or bundle; (g) jade sculpture of an Olmec maize ear fetish, Peabody Museum, Harvard University; after Taube 2004a:fig. 13.
legs form a unified ideological program, and the head, torso, and lower body correspond to the three levels of the cosmos. The ruler is the *axis mundi*, the conduit between the earthly and supernatural realms, a charismatic being who integrates the levels of the cosmos. . . . The incisions represent the central ritual of the shamanic ruler in the terrestrial realm: bloodletting through human sacrifice, allowing access to the supernatural world, and the making of rain . . .” (Joralemon 1995:278).

The Huastec Youth

The sculpture known as the Huastec Youth, from the site of Tamuín, San Luis Potosí, is one of the most complex examples of Huastec sculpture in terms of the intricate surface treatment and the semiotic meanings of the iconography with which it is adorned (Figure 8.4; Trejo 1989, 2004; Richter 2004; Castro-Leal Espino 2009). Standing nearly 4 feet tall and hewn of stone, this sculpture similarly represents a youthful, unclothed male in an erect, fully frontal posture. The symmetry is only slightly broken by the differing positions of the forearms. The sculpture is a standard-bearer. Each hand is carved so that the tips of the thumb and fingers touch, forming a cylindrical hole into which the staffs of flags, standards, or possibly even spears could be inserted, serving as symbols of authority in much the same way as do the Lord’s accoutrements.2

The structure of the face, including the high cheekbones, well-formed brow ridge, and elongated head are naturalistic in form, and the clavicles, ankle, and wrist bones also possess a lifelike quality, as does the tight and slightly protruding curve of the abdominal area. These attributes contrast with the stylized proportions of other features including the flat, paddle-like feet. Similarly, the form of the legs—especially when perceived in profile—seems less intended to accurately depict physiognomy than to provide an ample and continuous space for the adorning iconography. The splayed form of an infant carved in low relief and supported within a *rebozo* or shawl (*akilab* in the Teenek language) clings to the back of the figure. The upturned head, contrastingly in high relief, rests flush against the center of the Youth’s back.

Although the eyes of the Youth may appear closed upon first glance for their soft curve and the play of light and shadow upon them, the incised upper eyelids imply that they are in fact wide open, perhaps meant to be indicative of a steady gaze. The lips are parted, revealing pointy, filed teeth (a key index of Huastec identity), and it is likely that the Youth is depicted in a state of oration (Rodríguez 1943:61).
Half of the body is densely covered in bas-relief carving of slightly varying depths, which represents one of the most remarkable and enigmatic features of this sculpture. This imagery is thought to be associated with Huastec ideals concerning cosmology, agricultural fertility, the plumed serpent, and the calendar (Richter 2004:3; e.g., Meade 1942:103–5; Rodríguez 1943; Trejo 1989, 2004). The Youth is interpreted as a representation of Quetzalcoatl as the god of the wind, the plumed serpent, and Venus, and as the divinity who bestowed knowledge of agriculture and the cultivation of maize upon people; the bundled infant has been identified as the sun, the infant representation of maize (Rodríguez 1943:81), and more recently an ancestor bundle (Headrick and Koontz 2006). Scholars also explore the ways in which this sculpture is a personified representation of the life cycle of maize (e.g., Castro-Leal Espino 2009; Trejo 1989).
PRINCIPLE I. INVERSION: NARRATIVE ACTION AND CONTEXT ON THE BODY

On a basic level, the Lord and the Youth are similar because symbols of the actions, the narrative contexts, and the cosmos they act within are etched into their bodies as an inversion of the more common manner of narrative representation, in which figures are depicted within broader contextualizing scenes, such as are found, for example, in codices, lintels, murals, stelae, and architectural programs.

The Young Lord: Sacrifice, Embodied Cosmos, and Supernatural Travel

As previously noted, the cosmological setting is believed to be inscribed on the body of the Young Lord. The iconography divides the figure horizontally into the three levels of the universe: the sky, the earth, and the supernatural realm as a watery world of creation (Reilly 1991; Princeton University Art Museum 1995:chap. 6). The masklike visage, with so-called flame, harpy eagle, emerald quetzal (Taube 2004a:126–27), or avian serpent eyebrows (cf. Taube 1995:91, fig. 11a), vertical “tear tracks” or sight lines below the eyes, and zoomorphic maw, corresponds with the celestial realm (Reilly 1991:154–55). According to Joralemon (1996b:213), the mask specifically represents the “Olmec bird monster, god of sun and sky.” The arms of the Young Lord symbolize the terrestrial level because they arguably depict his actions on the earthly plane. A bound sacrificial victim is portrayed on the right arm, and the left is adorned with an Olmec “flier”—a ritual performer interpreted as a reference to the lord himself, who has sacrificed the figure on the opposite arm. It is this blood sacrifice that facilitates communication with and control over the supernatural realm (Reilly 1991:155–57).

Emblazoned with two complex supernatural zoomorphs, the thighs correlate with the otherworldly realm. Certain symbols in particular, such as shells, water droplets, sprouting plants, the wing paw motif, skybands, and the fringed eye of the avian serpent, imply that between them these creatures traverse water, earth, and sky, and are thus generally symbolic of journey. Passage through the supernatural realm underscores the Young Lord’s shamanic capacity and his ability to travel to and from the spirit world, thus engendering rain and ensuring agricultural fertility (Reilly 1991:159–62).

In summary, the iconography compacts the concept of cosmos onto the body of the Young Lord and simultaneously refers to a series of contexts within which he participates and actions that he carries out. At the same
time, the zoomorphs depicted on the legs of the Young Lord are particularly compelling in their own right in consideration of the principle of inversion. The dual concepts of inversion and crocodilian/avian creatures as supernatural conduits are exemplified by a serpentine figurine depicting an anthropomorph (identified as a shaman) astride the back of a crocodile (Princeton University Art Museum 1995:185–86, fig. 64). The correspondence in formal and symbolic structure to the narrative on the body of the Lord is clearly evident.

At the other end of the scale, Reilly (1991:163–66, figs. 17, 18) has pointed out that the symbolic content and structural organization of the Young Lord is echoed in the series of carved monuments at Cerro Chalcatzingo. If the boulder carvings that constitute the Chalcatzingo monuments can be interpreted as a unified statement—as ritual actions dispersed through space, as Reilly suggests—then they manifest on a geographically monumental scale the same ideology of rulership that is inscribed on the Young Lord (Reilly 1991:163–66; Princeton University Art Museum 1995:282).

**The Huastec Youth: Sacrifice, Embodied Cosmos, and Supernatural Travel**

As does the Young Lord, the Huastec Youth carries upon his body key emblems of the sacrificial rites in which he participates as part of the charter for political legitimacy in the Postclassic Huastec world. Different cosmic levels are united and embodied in this sculpture as well, and the notion of supernatural travel is similarly centered upon the legs (in this case, upon the right leg).

Quadripartite rings encircling a central disk permeate specific zones within the entirety of the relief-carved region of the body (Figure 8.5a). On the Youth this emblem has been interpreted as a *chalchihuitl*, symbolic of jade or greenstone and a sign of preciousness (Rodríguez 1943:67; Meade 1982:9–10, 12). Adorning mat and throne imagery and used as an adjective for rulers in ethnohistorical references, jade symbolized kingship in ancient Mesoamerica, as did the plumed serpent, Quetzalcoatl (Taube 2003:295).

Kingship and *chalchihuitl* imagery is also closely related with solar iconography in ancient Mesoamerica. The quadripartite circle on the Youth can in fact be favorably compared with quincunx *chalchihuitl* symbols identified by Beyer (1965:215–20) on the Calendar Stone and other solar disks and by von Winning (1959:88, figs. 2, 3d) in the center of the solar disk depicted on an incised bone rattle from Culhuacan. In addition to signifying greenstone jewels, and in light of the importance of the *chalchihuitl* on the Postclassic
Figure 8.5. Sacrificial imagery depicted on Huastec sculptures and conch pectoral: (a) the piercing implement (thorn or dart) on the torso of the Huastec Youth is highlighted, as are the numerous quadripartite disks, symbolic of flowers, blood, and precious jewels; (b) Postclassic low-relief stela from Huilocintla, Veracruz; Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City; after Fewkes 1906:plate 29; (c) Postclassic shell pectoral, provenance unknown; Ethnographical Museum of Berlin; after Beyer 1933:fig. 37.
solar monuments, it is noteworthy that the disks on the Youth’s body also bear a striking resemblance to Postclassic Maya glyphic depictions of Kin, which denotes the sun with its quadripartite diagram of the cosmos or a four-petaled flower (e.g., Milbrath 1999:78–79, fig. 3.4d–i). Based on this and other iconographic data, the disks on the Youth’s body have also been interpreted as quatrefoil flowers, symbolic of fertility (Trejo 1989:75; Richter 2004:20–21) and suggestive of the terrestrial world as well as the flowery realm of the ancestors (e.g., Taube 2004b).

As chalchihuitl symbols, the disks permeating the Youth’s body likely resonate also with imagery that is interpreted as precious droplets of water. In many of the Postclassic codices, splashes and swirls of water are tipped with disks, interpreted both as water droplets and as chalchihuitl beads indicating the precious nature of the coursing water, as can be seen, for example, in the images depicting the patron and governing attributes of the fifth trecena in the Codex Borbonicus and the Tonalamatl Aubin (e.g., Boone 2003:figs. 27.15, 27.16). In addition, the chalchihuitl goggles of the Postclassic rain god Tlaloc, as represented on pages 20, 25, 65, and 67 of the Codex Borgia, are especially similar to the Youth’s markings due to the quadripartition of the eye ring. It goes without saying that Tlaloc is a premier Mesoamerican deity of rain and water, as is the plumed serpent. As water symbols, the disks on the Youth may symbolize the watery worlds of creation—the primordial ancestral realm encountered deep within mountain caves, cenotes, and the sea (e.g., Finamore and Houston 2010), but also the fructifying rains that were the prerogative of lords and kings. All of the preceding metaphorical allusions underscore the brilliant, lordly, potent nature of the Youth.

A piercing implement, perhaps a dart or a bone dagger—qualified also as a maguey spine by the pattern at the distal end of the device (cf. Seler 1990–98, 3:90, figs. 7–10)—appears to be thrust into the Youth’s body directly below the area between the wrist and knuckles of the right hand, likely indicating an act of autosacrificial piercing (and comparable to the Young Lord, to the Youth’s pious actions on the earthly plane). It is noteworthy too that the chalchihuitl or preciousness symbol, which appears throughout the carved area of the body, is also indexical of precious droplets of blood (von Winning 1959:92). On the famous Aztec Coyolxauhqui monument featuring this dismembered goddess, for example, chalchihuitl motifs tip blood spurs in order to underscore the precious nature of this bodily fluid (Nicholson 2001:77).

Thus, in addition to conflating the levels of the universe in the persona of the Youth and marking the figure as a precious and bejeweled being (as the greenstone from which the Lord is hewn likewise denotes it), the concept of
a body that has been pierced and bled in sacrifice is further highlighted by the combined imagery.

As the contexts and actions are depicted upon the body of the Huastec Youth, this figure represents an inversion of similar themes found in comparable Huastec narrative scenes. The Huilocintla monument now in the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City depicts a figure in profile whose body is marked in a manner similar to that of the Huastec Youth, and who is engaged in the act of piercing his tongue (Figure 8.5b). The legs of the protagonist are amply parted, suggesting that this sacrificial action begets or is conjoined with a ritual journey along the “road” of the blade-studded plumed serpent in the bottom register and framing the right (the viewer’s left) side of the panel. With its upturned snout and diminutive forearm, this serpent is also recognizable as a Huastec rendition of the Postclassic Xiuhcoatl fire serpent (Fewkes 1906:638–39; Jansen 1997:85; cf. Seler 1990–98, 3:88–89, fig. 1; Taube 2000a:284–87).

Some of the most elaborate narrative scenes known for the Huasteca occur on the carved shell gorgets. On many of these, similar episodes of sacrifice are intricately connected with notions of legitimacy and cosmic creation. These actions consistently take place within the frame of intertwined, road-like bodies of plumed serpents or above the cavernous mouths of other gaping-mawed, zoomorphic creatures or skeletal heads as loci of emergence and indices of supernatural passage. For instance, Karl Taube (2007) has pointed out that on one particularly detailed specimen in the collection of the British Museum, phallic blood sacrifice over an aquatic enclosure (identified as such by the presence of a fish) engenders the primordial rising of the sun, which ascends to its point at zenith along the bodies of the intertwined serpents within which the watery pool itself sets (Figure 8.5c). Clearly, the scene engraved upon this pectoral shares a structural similarity with that upon the Huilocintla monument. In both examples, the supernatural serpents are the infrastructural support, the path along which cosmic journey takes place.

In contrast to such narrative scenes, the Youth is a body upon which these broader storylines must be reduced to shorthand symbols and creatively placed upon key locations if parallel meanings are to be engendered. Thus it is little surprise, given the principle of inversion, that the concept of supernatural travel or transcendence via the plumed serpent (and other supernatural figures) is focused on the heavily inscribed right leg of the sculpture. Two large quatrefoil disks adorn the right thigh of the Youth (Figure 8.6a). Each is inset with a zoomorphic being in profile view, which closely resembles an avian creature—possibly an eagle—due to the sharply hooked beak and
the feathered crest (cf. Fuente and Gutiérrez Solana 1980:plates 354–57, 359a). The eagle is sometimes depicted as a messenger or “chariot” of Quetzalcoatl in Central Mexican codices, as can be seen on page 35 of the Codex Borgia (Figure 8.6b; Taube 1986:69). In line with the micro-scale rendition of the principle of inversion, the figure of Quetzalcoatl astride the eagle’s back (as depicted in the aforementioned document) corresponds structurally to the zoomorph within the portal-like quatrefoil disk atop the Youth’s leg, possibly implying that he is endowed with the power of celestial flight. At the same time, the two zoomorph heads on the thigh of the Youth closely resemble the heads of other celestial serpentine-avian creatures represented in the corpus
of Huastec sculptures (cf. Fuente and Gutiérrez Solana 1980:plates 285, 289a, 309) and has been interpreted as an image of the plumed serpent (Meade 1982; Richter 2004; Trejo 1989).

The lower leg is divided into three consecutive bands of imagery. The base of each band is demarcated by a row of disks encircling the leg. When the leg is viewed directly between the frontal and profile perspectives, the upward-facing snouts and heads of three additional zoomorphic figures, identified as crocodilians (Castro Leal Espino 2009:fig. 5), can be observed (Figure 8.6c). Each creature appears to arise from within one of the aforementioned partitions. Although these three figures seem to represent the same being, each is slightly different from the next. Somewhat similar to the two avian-serpentine creatures inset within the quatrefoil disks on the thigh (with which they share the toothy, beak-like snout), these creatures have snouts of varying lengths, greater numbers of teeth, and lack the feathered crest, among other morphological distinctions. With their elongated snouts, and placed as they are, stacked one atop the other, these figures emphasize the concept of vertical ascension along the length of the leg.

To summarize, in the absence of a circumscribing narrative framework, indexical markers of the context brand the leg and label the personage as one who is engaged within a particular action. More specifically, the message is that the Youth, as Quetzalcoatl, travels the supernatural path and cosmic road of the plumed serpent, conveying the infant sun upon his back. The transcendent nature of this road and of the Youth’s “journey” is further emphasized by the significance of the disks as simultaneous indices of water, flowers, blood sacrifice, precious chakibihuitl jewels, and shining stars, as noted above. The concept of supernatural communication and passage is focused on the right leg of the Huastec sculpture in much the same way as the crocodilian zoomorphs upon the legs of the Young Lord are thought to imply his transcendency through the different levels of the cosmos as a shamanic actor.

The formal organization of the zoomorphs upon the right leg is likely to have poetic value that contributes to the identification of the religious or political office of the Youth. In a recent treatise on the relationship between pictography and ceremonial speech of the precolonial Mixtec, Maarten E. R. G. N. Jansen and Gabina Aurora Pérez Jiménez (2010:53, 55–56) note:

Mesoamerican peoples in general used a ceremonial or reverential language characterized first and foremost by parallelisms and metaphors, both in ritualized speeches or prayers and in sacred narratives. . . . A special form of the parallelism is the difrasismo (hendiadys), which consists of a pair of nouns or verbs
the combination of which creates a new meaning, such as quevui cuiya “the year, the day”, i.e. “time”, or yuviu taya “the mat, the throne”, i.e. “the kingdom” or “the nation”.

Jansen and Pérez Jiménez go on to point out that similar examples of parallel constructions, represented visually by pairs of painted objects or figures, can be found in the precolonial codices. For example, in the Codex Vindobonensis the titles of the plumed serpent (also known as the Whirlwind and the main culture hero of the precolonial Mixtec) are listed via images that occur in parallel constructions that recall the structure of couplets (Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2010:56). The authors gloss one of the titles of this being as “Lord (who transforms into) eagle, Lord (who transforms into) fire-serpent . . .” and further note that “[t]he hendiadys iya yaha iya yahui,” literally “Lord Eagle, Lord Fire-Serpent,” was translated in the sixteenth century as “nigromancer”—that is, as “shaman” (ibid.:57). With the eagle and the plumed serpent motif (possibly in its Xiuhcoatl avatar) affixed to the right leg, the Youth may likewise be characterized as a priestly or shamanic being.

Static Object, Active Concept

The preceding discussion has exemplified some of the ways in which larger storylines and narrative actions are encoded upon the bodies of both of the seminal Formative and Postclassic sculptures under consideration. An embodied way of thinking and communicating context is further exemplified in the locations upon which imagery appears and in the creative ways in which iconography combines with the bends and contours of the body to highlight the concept of movement and action. For example, the figures on the arms of the Young Lord are understood to bend and unbend their knees if the Lord were to bend and unbend his arms at the elbows, underscoring the static object as one that is rather endowed with the capacity for motion. This aspect contributes to the physicality and performative part of identity implied in the objects (Figure 8.7). Such playful conventions in which movements of the body cause meaningful movements of the imagery depicted upon it are frequently considered as integral to tattoo as a cross-cultural form of art, and it is not surprising to find similar principles at work in the Huastec Youth sculpture.

One of the most prolific symbols in the Huastec iconographic corpus is a multipointed, double-outlined motif that is generally inset with two or more circular dots (Figure 8.8). Three spots characterize this design as it appears on the Youth (Figure 8.8a, far right, and c). One of the various interrelated
interpretations of this symbol in its diverse manifestations is insect, and more specifically, butterfly wing (Seler 1990–98, 6:237; Faust 2009:211–12, 214, 222). This idea is made particularly clear when the isolated motif is considered as parts of a group of motifs intended to be read as one composite symbol appearing upon particular objects and in particular locations, as is the case with a common category of vessels in the Postclassic Huastec black-on-white and black- or brown-on-buff types (Figure 8.8b).

This symbol, present in numerous locations on the body of the Youth, is most emphatically depicted on the reverse, rising up from the ankle and calf and expanding across the right buttocks in the largest of these forms. The motif also appears three times on the reverse of the right shoulder and four times on the reverse of the left. If the symbol is meaningful as “wing,” its location on the arms and leg imbue those bodily features with a sense of movement and
flight. The viewer understands that arms and legs bend and walk and work, but perhaps the addition of this motif is a more vigorous statement of the fact, despite the static nature of the object. Indeed, the lines that merge around one grouping of these symbols in particular, on the reverse of the left shoulder, are such that the wing seemingly flutters as the youth raises and lowers his arm in the viewer’s mind’s eye (Figure 8.8c), again underscoring a penchant for visual couplets—stating a similar concept with two different constructs, in this case, the equivalence of arms and wings.

**Figure 8.8. Butterfly imagery in Huastec art:** (a) variants of a prominent symbol in the corpus of Postclassic Huastec iconography occurring on both sculpture and ceramics, including black-on-white and related pottery types, figurines, and stamps; (b) Postclassic Huastec black-on-buff vessel with butterfly symbolism; Museo Regional Huasteco, Ciudad Valles; after author photograph; (c) detail of iconography on the back side of the Huastec Youth sculpture’s left shoulder; after author photograph.

**PRINCIPLE II. MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES AND DIMENSIONALITY**

Another formal quality of Olmec iconography and style that is also operational in certain examples of Huastec art is that of dimensionality and multiple
perspectives or horizons. In the most basic terms, this refers to the manner in which three-dimensional concepts, performances, and space are represented upon a two-dimensional picture plane. In Mesoamerican iconographic studies, possibly the best-known example of this “cut out and fold up” compositional principle is Reilly’s interpretation of the imagery on a jade celt from the site of Río Pesquero (Reilly 1995:32, 2007:41). A reorganization of the picture plane and the addition of shadows marking the ground beneath the anthropomorphic figure and the four maize symbols effectively highlights the central position of the “ruler” in a three-dimensional, four-cornered field, or more specifically, in “the five-pointed cosmogram” (Reilly 1995:39).

Dimensionality is an important attribute of Middle Formative period iconography, and it is equally characteristic of the Postclassic pictorial traditions. Observable in all four of the Maya codices (Reilly 1995:32–33:fig. 7b), this principle likewise appears in the Central Mexican manuscripts. A particularly well-known illustration of this concept is found in the Fejeváry Mayer Codex. The image on page 1 recto that depicts the Tonalpohualli (260-day calendar) in conjunction with the five world directions may be seen as a bird’s-eye view of a cut-apart and flattened representation of a three-dimensional pyramid (Klein 1975:80–81). Finding expression even beyond the traditional boundaries of Mesoamerica during this time, the principle of dimensionality and multiple perspectives can be observed in Mississippian period artworks and iconography of the American Southeast (Reilly 2007:41:fig. 3.1).

**Dimensional Representations in Postclassic Huastec Art**

In many instances Postclassic Huastec iconography is meaningful when conceptualized in dimensional terms. A triangular or rectangular form with a tapering base that frequently terminates in a disk or rounded tip is a common design component of the Postclassic Huastec symbol set (Figure 8.9b). Noting that these elements are consistently depicted with symbols that are identifiable as smoke volutes and sparks or flames—flames that double as the aforementioned wings—Eduard Seler (1990–98, 6:237–39) pointed out that these motifs can be interpreted as representations of fire drills. These drills are highly stylized, and they are usually divorced from a circumscribing narrative context. As such, it is helpful to consider the physical environment containing an object (any example of material culture adorned with these abstract symbols) as part and parcel of that object and the iconography thereon. Dimensionality informs the iconography and thus enhances meaning and experience of the object.
In much the same way that the conceptual reconfiguration of imagery on the Río Pesquero celt yields a more complete message, the application of dimensionality to the ceramic torso of a Postclassic Huastec figurine from the Tampico-Panuco area of Tamaulipas, inscribed with a fire drill symbol, permits the viewer to appreciate that this small figure is envisioned as a body laid out upon whose navel fire is drilled (Figure 8.9a; Faust 2009:214). Elsewhere I have explored some of the ways in which the various manifestations of this key motif have several interrelated interpretations, which include maguey spines and other bloodletting devices as implements that release bodily heat and blood (Faust 2009:229). On the Huastec Youth, these fire drill emblems represent the more angular, abstract, open, and indeed amorphous samples
within this symbol continuum (Figures 8.4, 8.10a). They are formed of pairs of two near-parallel vertical bands terminating in two considerably shorter near-parallel horizontal bands. In variants of Postclassic international-style art, this motif is thought to represent solar or astral brilliance (Taube 2010:165). A similar meaning is undoubtedly conveyed in at least some examples of Postclassic Huastec art as well. The composite fire drill–bloodletter–solar ray symbols that appear on the body of the Youth are nearly identical to those depicted upon a vessel reportedly from Tanquian, San Luis Potosí (Figure 8.10b). This symbol adorns the wide interior flange that serves as the solar disk framing an image of a figure identified as the sun god in the center of the plate (Cyphers

**Figure 8.10.** Solar brilliance and dimensionality in Postclassic Huastec art: (a) solar rays emanating from the body of the Huastec Youth; (b) polychrome plate from Tanquian, San Luis Potosí, with solar deity and rays; after Solís 2004:246.
The encircling rays on the broad lip of this plate are interspersed with depictions of maguey spines, flowers, and eagle (?) heads, imagery associated with the realm of the sun and the sacrifices made to this divine entity.

The proliferation of similar ray motifs on the body of the Huastec sculpture may likewise label him as a youthful sun deity, thus linking the figure with narratives of creation and political legitimation ceremonies. Consideration of how dimensionality and the circumscribing exterior space informs the sculpture triggers a more holistic understanding of the Youth as one who quite literally radiates boundless solar heat and brilliance (as his tonalli or life force) into the surrounding atmosphere. As the rays are synonymous with piercing and drilling implements, the added perspective of dimension lets us appreciate that these items are at once the inflicting agents of sacrifice as well as the resulting rays of light and might.

The principle of dimensionality calls for contemplation of both exterior and interior space. Accordingly, the stacked zoomorphs on the leg not only rise along but also ascend within the central column of the leg, literally passing through the encircling rings of floral, astral, and watery disks (Figure 8.6d). Rather than serving merely as tattoo or other surface treatment, these creatures can more accurately be understood as contained within the body of the Youth as an integral part of his being.4

PRINCIPLE III. POLYMORPHISM

The final iconographic principle considered in this study that was elaborated in Middle Formative period and Olmec art, and with a longevity expressed in subsequent Mesoamerican artistic traditions including that of the Postclassic Huastec, is broadly framed as polymorphism. Two manifestations of this principle (which I denote active and static polymorphism) are considered herein, although as will soon become apparent, these categories are rather arbitrary. Fluid and overlapping considerably, they are meant only to highlight the different sorts of cognitive interactions that take place when engaging with particular objects. Active polymorphism refers to meaning-making that results from the movement of an object or the viewer, one with respect to the other; and it also refers to the way in which a static object can be simultaneously imbued with a sense of movement. Static polymorphism refers to the manner in which a switch in the cognition of what the gaze takes in results in the production of a different image in the mind. The appreciation of such images does not require physical movement, nor does it necessarily require the eye to sweep across the
imagery, although there is often a strongly directional component or quality of the perceived image that is associated with this principle. Rather, this type of polymorphism requires the steady gaze to communicate an entirely different image to the mind, and so the shift takes place on a cognitive level alone.

**Active Polymorphism**

In active polymorphism some sort of physical movement of a person vis-à-vis an object (or vice-versa) permits the figure to be viewed from different angles, whereby distinctive symbols merge and materialize, thus altering or enhancing one’s perception of the ideas arrived at a moment earlier and ultimately permitting a broader range of meaning. Understanding is a product of what we see, the ways in which we see it, and the processes through which we arrive at those visions.

**Lenticular Images**

A contemporary example of how this principle works is perfectly illustrated by holographic lenticular two-phase imagery. Lenticular images combine two distinct images on a single surface, each of which can be seen when the composite picture is viewed from different angles. Each view of the lenticular image depicted in Figure 8.11 shows a different scene of Christ surrounded by children. Significant to the ensuing discussion are two points: (1) movement of object or viewer alters the picture and (2) a greater concept exists “betwixt and between” the two separate pictures, which is more than the sum of its parts. In this case, the larger vision is the eternal presence of Jesus, which is insinuated because the composite image is “showing Christ with children throughout the ages: from biblical times to the 1950s” (3Dstereo.com, n.d.; emphasis mine).

Although this example makes use of a technology that was obviously not employed in ancient Mesoamerica, a certain consistency nevertheless exists in the manner in which, in certain objects, the iconography is such that (1) movement alters image; (2) differing views or images are equally part of a larger indivisible whole; and thus (3) the combined statement speaks to a larger overarching concept. This idea that the whole is distinct from the sum of its constituent parts is the fundamental precept of Gestalt psychology (Rock and Palmer 1990:48).

**The Young Lord**

Those who have described the posture of the Lord have noted that the figure is static, frontal, symmetrical, still, elongated, stiff, and scepter-like.
Accurate as they are, these descriptions do not necessarily consider all of the lines present in the object as meaningful components of the design. When the statuette is pivoted and considered in profile or three-quarter view, a slight albeit notably different presence overtakes the object (Figure 8.3b). From these perspectives (I will explicitly discuss only the profile view for the sake of brevity), the wavelike curve of the vertical line that can be perceived in the form challenges the singularly static interpretation of the Young Lord's stance. Running from the locus of the skullcap (here considered the slight bulge in the back of the cap, directly below the towering element) downward over the contour that separates the ear from the face, the line continues across the chest and midriff. Reaching the groin area, the curve sweeps inward and across the thigh, ultimately reversing its angle in the area behind the knee and atop the calf muscle to continue its diagonal path through the lower leg and foot. The curve of this line suggests that the Lord is imbued with an undulating motion as a contrast and complement to his static self. With weighty thighs that might be described as tensed and ready for action, poised on diminutive feet, and with his elongated form, the Lord seems almost destabilized and can be imagined to rock back and forth in an undulating motion. In light of Gestalt theories that consider the disparate parts of a whole in a framework designed to account for a complete reading, active polymorphism simultaneously allows the Lord to be seen as static and as an active form.

Earlier it was noted that the two opposing anthropomorphic figures on the Lord’s body played a central role in triggering the idea of the movement of the
arms in the mind of the viewer. In consideration of the body as a whole, the form and imagery are symbiotic in function. The nearly parallel nature of the images on opposing sides arguably drives the observer to rotate the figure (or move some aspect of themselves, swaying or leaning back and forth, from side to side) in order to view, compare, and contrast the inscribed figures in order to appreciate the entirety of the scene. The concept of motion despite stillness embedded in the statue is engendered in the mind of the individual engaged in the contemplation of it. Not only is the idea of motion instilled, but also the corresponding bodily movements are summoned in the observer. The statuette thus becomes a model of and for particular actions and states of being.

The Huastec Youth

On a basic level, all of the iconographic symbols adorning the Youth are polymorphic given the nature of individual Huastec icons as imbued with multiple meanings in and of themselves (Castro-Leal Espino 2009). But at the same time, in order to discern particular messages, one must move the eye, scanning from one isolated symbol and larger grouping of elements to the next. In other instances, physical movement around the perimeter of the sculpture is required for a comprehensive view of composite emblems, which wrap around the body such that the sum of the parts is not evident from any one angle. Furthermore, symbols can be meaningfully grouped and interpreted in various ways.6

Let us recall the zoomorphic figures “upstreaming” along and within the right leg of the Youth. The viewer is compelled to consider these creatures together as a meaningful unit due in part to their close proximity and similarity. The tendency to perceive these figures as a unified entity is described by one of the organizational principles of Gestalt theory, which are the perceptual strategies used to identify, classify, and organize objects (Rock and Palmer 1990). The law of proximity, as proposed originally by Max Wertheimer, refers to the notion that objects positioned closely together are perceived as a group or meaningful unit, whereas the law of similarity poses that like objects are similarly grouped together in the cognition (Rock and Palmer 1990:49).

Although the three zoomorphic heads are recognized as similar creatures, minor differences can be noted among the forms, as suggested before. For instance, the lower figures are somewhat compressed when compared with the elongated snout of the creature upon the knee, which thus appears more crocodilian in form. This subtle differentiation within uniformity obliges the onlooker to move the eye up and down, from one figure to the next, searching for the discrepancies while considering the whole. But the gaze is directed along a horizontal as well as a vertical path. As described above, the leg is
divided into cylindrical cross-sections by the placement of a horizontal band below each row of quatrefoil disks. This convention creates a visual tension with the vertical column of serpent heads because it signals that the iconography in each of these subdivisions is likewise to be grouped together and read independently. In order to take in the imagery, the onlooker must move around the sculpture, considering the new bits of visual data that come into view while mentally suturing them together with the remembered images that have been passed by a moment ago. As will be shown, a rollout view of each of the three segments depicts two serpents encircling the leg, one passing in front of the other. The heads are depicted back to back, with the solar radiance/fire drill element shared between them. The quatrefoil disks constitute the underbellies, and the flame/wing symbols are the tails.
The serpent bands are highly abstract, nearly mirror images when divided vertically along the central axes (Figure 8.12b). For this reason, the picture makes more sense when perceived with the added dimension of depth—when one creature is envisioned superimposed atop the other (Figure 8.12c). From this vantage, it is immediately apparent that the serpents have just passed each other by, or are intertwined. Moreover, this serpent band is an ambiguous design that can be interpreted in more than one way through a cognitive manipulation that results in the reversal of which creature is in the foreground and which recedes into the background—which is interchangeable at the will of the viewer. Such patterns evoke multistable perception and create a visual tension that ensnares the viewer, causing the scene to flip-flop back and forth in the mind’s eye. Two well-known examples of visually ambiguous images include the Necker cube and the Jastrow duck-rabbit impression (Figure 8.12d–e). The pictures can be interpreted in two ways, yet each operates in a distinct manner—the Necker cube playing on a shift in the perspective of dimension, and the Jastrow figure on the interpretation of direction.

Variations of this intertwined-serpents pattern are replicated all over the engraved portion of the Youth’s body, and each construct communicates a slightly different idea that contributes to the larger concept. In the two bands of imagery on each shoulder, for example, the fiery winglike tail of one serpent (as Xiuhcoatl) is spaced behind the companion creature so that the intervening elements along the back are omitted, whereby the fiery tail of one figure literally becomes the scorching breath of the other (Figure 8.12a, upper left).7 When the sculpture is viewed from behind, the multipointed emblem near the triceps muscle area stands out as the largest, suggesting that this particular motif is significant in a more nuanced way than its counterparts (Figure 8.8c). Indeed, the outline of this wing/tail/breath element (previously described as a butterfly wing) merges with an equivalent motif emanating from the mouth of another serpent head depicted below the left scapula, thereby visually extending the reach of this second creature’s exhalation onto the left arm. Conceptually, then, were the Youth to move his arm, the exhalations and vocalizations of the zoomorph would be activated. In action and essence, the Huastec Youth is literally animated by the procreative breath essence of the plumed serpent and by the heated emissions of the fire serpent as one and the same being.

Ambiguous Figures and Directional Polymorphism

In this segment I will discuss other instances of polymorphic imagery commonly known as ambiguous, reversible, or bistable figures, which elicit
perceptual switches between alternative interpretations but which are fully visible from a single vantage point (Peterson et al. 1992). Both the Necker cube and the Jastrow duck-rabbit illustration are classic examples of such cognitive inversion illusions frequently cited by Gestalt theorists (Figure 8.12d,e). In order to see the distinct images, the shift that must take place is in the way of seeing, and the viewer must selectively see each of the constructs in turn. Bistable representations are often imbued with a directional quality such that the act of “reading” a symbol by moving the eyes from one fixed point to another (right to left and vice-versa; top to bottom and vice-versa) constructs different images with different meanings.

**Polymorphic Ways of Seeing the Young Lord**

The principle of polymorphism operates on a somewhat obscure level in the figure of the Young Lord. The formal composition of this sculpture incorporates some of the key symbols of Olmec-style iconography, including the crossed bands and diamond motif as emblems of the celestial realm as well as the vegetal cleft and maize ear fetish as the paramount Olmec symbols of agricultural fertility. The bisecting lines created by the relative position of the forearms and the bundle and scepter dominate the torso and organize the upper body into a crossed-bands motif, the premier Olmec symbol of the sky, associated with rain and thus agricultural fertility (Figure 8.3c; Joralemon 1996a:56). The diamond at the center of the Young Lord’s torso further affirms his connection to the celestial realm. Positioned at the midpoint of this lozenge, the slight indent of the sternum marks the location of the diaphragm, lungs, and chest as the epicenter of air and breath. The V-shaped cleft, together with the emergent ear of corn, is another predominant symbol in the Olmec iconographic corpus (Taube 2004a:42, figs. 11, 12). The celt or scepter and bundled object held in the crook of the Lord’s arms are arranged so that in the viewer’s mind’s eye, they may be perceived to form a V-shaped vegetal cleft, from which the head and chest of the Lord emerges as the mature ear of maize (Figure 8.3d).

Similar to the arms holding bundle and scepter, the tightly fitting cap and the belt assemblage are important features that contribute to symbolic meaning in a polymorphic capacity. The cap is crowned by a vertically projecting, two-tiered element. Identified as a stylized maize sign by Taube, this feature labels the Lord as the Olmec Maize God (2000b:306–7, fig. 10g). The belt assemblage consists of a rectangular loincloth suspended from a broad belt that is flanked by two smaller rectangular flaps—one sitting atop each hip.
The abdominal area is enclosed within an arrow-like triangular space framed by the forearms and the upper border of the belt assemblage. The resulting composite form created by the loincloth and the abdominal triangle closely resembles that of the maize ear fetish, with the loincloth as the shaft and the triangular enclosure as the bound maize (Figure 8.3e). In Olmec iconography the prototypical shape of the fetish includes a vertical shaft topped by a vari-form motif that tapers to a point and that is frequently edged with tick marks. This form represents a ritual item composed of a central maize cob around which feathers have been bound. The maize ear fetish likely served “[a]s a condensed symbol of the axis mundi” (Taube 2004a:126) and is often depicted in the outstretched hand of flying figures, arguably as an instrument of celestial or shamanic flight (ibid.:55n16).

With its two rectangular appendages flanking the central loincloth, the lower border of the Lord’s belt is shaped like a double-merlon motif (Reilly 1991:159), as is the upper border. According to Reilly (1991:157), this prominent Preclassic motif, along with the cleft, symbolizes the cavelike portal between the natural and supernatural realms: “[B]oth the double merlon and the cleft element function as symbolic entrances to the Olmec sacred mountain and the underworld that the mountain contains.” Taube (1995:89, 91; 2004a:35) has pointed out that the double merlon is an integral feature in many depictions of the maize ear fetish, rendered in the area where the shaft and the apical bundled feathery portion meet. In addition, he has argued that this symbol denotes the color green (Taube 1995:89). Depicted on the Lord’s midriff, the double merlon further underscores the equivalence of the belt assemblage (as a portal) with the green articulating stalk at the base of the tender ear of maize. A similar loincloth apron appears on another large Olmec jadeite figure, atop which an image of the maize ear fetish is engraved (Taube 2004a:fig. 32c). This correspondence suggests that the composite form of the belt and triangular enclosure, centered atop the loins of the Lord, is clearly an intentional representation of the maize fetish outline.

A second, more expansive reference to the maize fetish is replicated in the Lord’s body, encompassing the entirety of the form and even occupying the immediately surrounding space. The chest and head of this Maize God may be conceived to sprout from a V-shaped cleft (representing the husk) formed by the position of the scepter and the bundle as they are held against the body. When a contour line is drawn around the figure, the image of a mature maize ear emerging from a foliated vegetal cleft is all the more striking. It is also noteworthy that the organizational lines of the body are such that a series of crossed bands make up the entirety of the figure (Figure 8.3f). In this state this
object is quite similar to a large “fragmentary jadeite maize ear fetish [with] the partial head of the Olmec Maize God at the bottom” (Figure 8.3g; Taube 2004a:44, fig. 13). The broken-off portion at the apex of this object is likely the central cob emerging from the surrounding feathers (Taube 2004a:45).

Given the preceding discussion, the entire body of the Lord can be envisioned as a large example of this important ritual accoutrement—the lower body is the handle portion of the fetish, and the upper is the bound maize. Quite possibly this figure is one of the most complex representations of personified maize known thus far for the Middle Formative period. Taken together, the latent and manifest imagery that constitutes the Lord illustrates the Maize God as a mature being who literally pulls aside the enveloping husk as his own skin, opening and offering his body in sacrifice for the sustenance of humankind.

Polymorphic Ways of Seeing the Huastec Youth

The body of the Lord is a bistable image because one must gaze beyond the details of the inscribed iconography to see the outline and internal organization of the maize fetish. All images exist simultaneously, yet the viewer must selectively alternate between seeing one, and then the other, construct. In a related manner, the body of the Youth is replete with numerous bistable figures, some of which can have distinct interpretations depending on the direction in which they are read.

Three of the abstract, upward-facing serpent heads that emerge from quatrefoil disks are stacked in a column on the central panel of the torso and directly below the cupped hand, recalling the formation upon the Youth’s leg. The central creature is reproduced in Figure 8.13b. As was described before, the zoomorph appears to emerge from the floral quatrefoil disks. In structure, this image can readily be compared with those on one of the carved bones from Tomb 7 of Monte Alban (Caso 1969:fig. 177; Taube 2010:fig. 22c). Figure 8.13c depicts one panel of this artifact, on which an avian figure emerges from within an open flower that includes a circular quadripartite element. However, when the imagery on the Youth is read from top to bottom, each toothy serpent or Xiuhcoatl becomes the body of a descending butterfly. The eye of the creature is the only element that remains constant. The serpent snout is the butterfly thorax and abdomen; the composite solar ray / fire drill emanating from the serpent’s forehead is likewise perceivable as folded wings; pointed teeth are equally insect legs, and, finally, the spiral zoomorphic jaw (marking the back side of the serpent head, which emerges from the

MORE THAN SKIN DEEP
quatrefoil flower) is simultaneously a curled proboscis seeking nectar from within the same flowery disk. Nectaring butterflies are commonly depicted in Postclassic international-style art, but perhaps the most famous examples are found on the well-known Aztec monument depicting Xochipilli, the flower prince, as rendered in a trance-like state and sitting cross-legged atop a huehuetl, or drum (see Pohl and Lyons 2010:plate 17). The central floral pendant that appears on each of the four sides of the drum base is host to a finely carved nectaring butterfly, which can be compared to the examples on the Huastec sculpture (Figure 8.13a).

Thus far we have examined how certain principles elucidate various images on the body of the Youth. By combining these individual building blocks, additional nuances of the iconography come into focus. For example, combined polymorphism and dimensionality suggest that the body is replete with serpents emerging from myriad points of passage while it is simultaneously host to the numerous butterflies nectaring from its sweet essence. In addition,
the intertwined serpents *encircle* leg of the youth at the same time that they are an integral part of his being, rising upward *within* the lower leg to arrive at the center of the circular disks on the thigh, which represent the flowerly loci of emergence, through which they conceptually pass. With this vision in mind, we can compare the Youth with two other Huastec sculptures from Huilocintla, Veracruz. On the Huilocintla Panel in the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City, the protagonist, with tattoo-like markings recalling that of the Youth (the drill/ray and the flame/wing components) stands or walks upon the serpent’s back (Figure 8.14a). On the counterpart currently in the British Museum, intertwined serpents wrap around the figure’s legs (Figure 8.14b). On the Youth the serpents have completely merged with the host. In all three instances, the symbolism is clearly parallel.
CONCLUSION

The central focus of both the Olmec and the Huastec sculptures discussed herein is the unclothed human body and its contours as a canvas upon which tattoo-like imagery is inscribed. Although they differ in size, the argument has been that some of the most significant interactions to have taken place with both of these figures were likely those that occurred on a relatively private scale. It is in such contexts that I believe the bodies would be exposed for appreciation, study, reading, recitation, or other performed presentation of the iconography. The Lord and the Youth very likely had a trove of clothing and other ephemeral adornments with which they were once garbed and which doubtless held additional symbolic value. In such cases, they would have been uncloaked on certain occasions in order to be read, whereby the garments may be compared to the protective coverings of the ancient Mesoamerican sacred manuscripts.

Both sculptures convey equally complex messages pertaining to, among other things, the tenets of creation and rulership, in which the bodies of priestly kings and lords were symbolically and literally located at the center of the cosmogram as the center of the world. While scholarly attention has been focused on deciphering the iconographic information embodied in these objects, comparatively little is known about how people may have interacted with these figures. As a result, we have little understanding of how this factor contributes to meaning. An analysis that forefronts the ways in which objects may have been seen and experienced can reveal clues about how they might have been used and to what purpose.

A focal concern of this chapter has been to demonstrate some of the ways in which these statues are informed by Gestalt principles of style, including polymorphism, bistable imagery, multistable perception, directionality, and dimensionality. But what of the cognitive effects that may result from gazing upon such imagery? Why are such pictures so compelling, and what purposes might they have served? The inherently dynamic nature of such imagery focuses the viewer’s attention and simultaneously engenders disassociation from external stimuli. In this sense, both the Lord and the Youth can be compared to mandalas in their function, as objects for guiding contemplation or as condensed narratives. As David Morgan (2005:50) notes: “Optical vision can be used to embolden and intensify inner or imaginative vision. Images can serve as a kind of external scaffolding for concentrated inner experience, such as meditation. To this end, esoteric or Tantric forms of Buddhism make important use of mandalas, intricately designed diagrams that model the construction of vast universes of mental vision.”
Although there is a great deal of literature pertaining to the contemplative and even trance-like states in Mesoamerica via the ingestion of hallucinogens, music and dance, and the infliction of pain, less is known about the ways in which designs and visual principles aid in eliciting similar mental states with regard to the corpus of Mesoamerican art. The preceding discussion demonstrates, I believe, that these two sculptures may well have served as educational tools inscribed with esoteric knowledge. When initiates or young lords gazed upon these figures, they were gazing upon the mythology as well as idealized lordly bodies as maps for their own becoming.

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NOTES

1. The Postclassic international style is a widespread tradition that differs from earlier Mesoamerican styles of the Classic and Epiclassic periods. Characteristics of this style include “stiff lines and stocky proportions [as well as] its rendering of form, the quality of line, its figural proportions and positions, and its employment of images in shallow space” (Boone and Smith 2003:187).

2. Standard-bearers are standing or seated in-the-round sculptures of Toltec origin and style that characterize both Tula and Chichen Itza. Arguably intended to grasp ethnically or politically salient banners within their carved hands, this type of sculpture was incorporated into the artistic paradigms of subsequent Mesoamerican cultures, most notably that of the Aztec.

3. In Mesoamerican art and thought, the plumed serpent is envisioned as a “flowery road”—a “conduit for forces of life and fertility. . . . As an eastern being [that rises out of eastern sea], the plumed serpent is both the bringer of rain and the vehicle or path for the dawning sun” (Taube 2010:155–56).

4. In a 1940 publication, Charles Wisdom recorded a Chortí belief regarding the bodily relationship between sorcerers and their spirit alter egos. Whereas the spirit of the benevolent curer lives in the right leg, the spirit counterpart of the malevolent sorcerer is kept within the left (Wisdom 1940:428). These ethnographic data pertaining to the link among ritual specialists and their legs have been cited by Cecilia Klein (2001:235n104) and Joel Palka (2002:437), who offer additional ethnohistorical evidence for such a belief as part of larger discussions of Mesoamerican body ideology.
5. In something of a contrast to such descriptions, Carolyn Tate (1996) has included this statue in her analyses of Olmec-style portable sculptures known as Standing Figures, noting that it is indeed the largest example known thus far, standing slightly over two feet in height (ibid.:42). According to Tate, these figures are united in their slightly bent-knee pose, which in humans effects a straightening of the spine. She argues that the greenstone figures can be productively compared with similar stances assumed by practitioners of tai chi and hatha yoga: “The flexing of the knees to straighten the spine is a very specific position that in ancient China is the beginning of the Tai Chi exercise, a position of meditation and of union of the body with the cosmic axis . . . called Hun-Yuan Kung or ‘Beginning Posture’. . . . Assiduous practice of this pose teaches qualities of endurance, steadiness, contentment, and stillness. Within the discipline of Hatha Yoga, the goal of this practice is to align the body, mind, and spirit” (ibid.:427–29). Because the “discourse on the spiritual aspects of rulership among the Olmec . . . is framed in terms of shamanism,” Tate refers to this pose as the “shaman's stance” and suggests that it “represents an attempt to heighten spiritual awareness by linking body, sky, and earth” (ibid.:430).

6. Iconographers have long resolved the issue of how to see and read iconography covering three-dimensional objects in their entirety by reproducing the imagery in flat one-dimensional drawings or by creating rollout photographs or other types of digital scans in more recent years. Even though such methods are obviously unsurpassed for obtaining a clearer, more comprehensive view of the iconography, they also alter the way in which the object itself is experienced, which is the main point highlighted in this discussion.

7. This visual convention, wherein bodies are shared and the tail of one figure is simultaneously the breath of another, is similarly found in other Central Mexican depictions of these creatures. See, for example, the Xiuhcoatl serpents whose bodies form a structure identified as a “fiery turquoise enclosure” (Taube 2000a:316–17) on page 46 of the Codex Borgia.


10. Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is worth noting that there is an intricate link between butterflies, serpents (especially the Xiuhcoatl), astral phenomena such as comets and meteorites, and weapons of war, including spears and the atl-atl in ancient Mesoamerican belief. Taube (2004a) has considered this interrelated symbolism and iconography in detail.
REFERENCES


INTRODUCTION

By the time of the Spanish conquest of Mexico, the Huastec people living in the northeastern Gulf Coast region of Mesoamerica were renowned for their rich and complex manner of modifying, clothing, and ornamenting their bodies (Sahagún 1959–61:10:185). Permanent body modifications such as artificial cranial and dental modification, tattooing, and scarifications were commonplace and were frequently combined with temporary embellishments of painting the body and ornately coiffing the hair. Considering ethnohistorical sources and archaeological data, scholars have discussed some of the ways in which these practices were central to Huastec identity and social status (e.g., Faust 2009, this volume).

While there is a great diversity of iconographic materials including sculpture (de la Fuente and Solana 1980), vessels (Ramírez Castilla, Marchegay, and Florescano 2006), and murals (Zaragoza Ocaña 2003b) from the Late Postclassic period (1200–1521 CE) that highlight these modifications, costume, and adornment of the human body, comparable images of the Formative period (1500 BCE–200 CE) are more limited. Thus, for this early era of Mesoamerican prehistory, cultural practices such as artificial body modification and costume are most commonly approached through studies of clay figurines and—when possible—of human remains.

Formative figurines from the Huasteca (Ekholm 1944:435–59; Marchegay 2009:132–38) are most commonly portrayals of nude women that display intentional cranial modification, body painting (Ramírez Castilla, Marchegay, and Florescano 2006:40), and
sometimes scarifications. Representations of costume on figurines from this period are very rare: aside from the gear depicted on the ballplayer figurines, the most frequently shown garment is a simple bikini-like strap or a loincloth, respectively painted or appliquéd onto the crotch. Low-slung belts and short skirts that encircle the waist are also occasionally featured.

In order to approach a more comprehensive understanding of the bodily practices and representations of the people living in the northern Gulf Coast in Late Formative times, I compare the permanent and temporary body modifications, costume, and adornments on Late Formative clay figurines (which I believe to represent actual practices) with ornaments and human remains that have been uncovered in recent excavations at the site of Loma Real in southern Tamaulipas (Figure 9.1). More specifically, I am concerned with highlighting the important ways in which the primary contexts for these figurines and adornments result in more nuanced interpretations of Formative period Huastec social and cultural identity. I further consider the distinctive ways in which these plural identities are reflected in temporary versus permanent body modifications.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND: THE SITE OF LOMA REAL

The site of Loma Real, located in the Altamira harbor in southeastern Tamaulipas, Mexico, was surveyed and excavated by the Proyecto Salvamento Arqueológico Puerto de Altamira, along with thirteen other sites in the vicinity, over the course of a two-year period (2007–8). The survey area included all of the land encompassed by the industrial harbor of Altamira, which covers almost 10,000 ha. Seventy percent of this landscape is occupied by marshes, lagoons, industrial plants, harbor, and urban constructions, so it comprises an area where few and heavily destroyed archaeological remains have been found. The remaining 30 percent, however, is constituted by land parcels and fields that have neither been modified nor destroyed by urban development and thus contain a high potential for future archaeological investigation. These areas are concentrated around the present-day village of Lomas del Real, which lies to the north of the ancient site of Loma Real (also named Site 1 by the project). In other words, Loma Real is located within the southernmost portion of the unmolested lands, which are likely to contain many additional sites. Thirteen archaeological sites have been located in the harbor of Altamira. Permanent settlements, with mounds, are from the Late Preclassic period while those dating to Postclassic times seem to have been temporary settlements with no evidence of architecture or artificial modification of the natural environment.
The main site of Loma Real is located less than a mile from the seashore on a naturally occurring hilltop that rises 22 m above sea level. The site was discovered several years ago when it was severely damaged by the construction of a road in the middle of the hill, bisecting it so that more than 50 percent of the site was destroyed. Furthermore, much of the surface area of the hill was leveled by machines, destroying the original topography of the site, especially the mounds. Yet surprisingly, and despite the very severe damage levied upon
the site, there remains a high density of intact cultural deposits, the most noteworthy of which include human burials with offerings interred under the floors of houses (Figures 9.2, 9.3). A total of forty-three burials with fifty-four individuals was excavated and studied.2

Ceramic analysis and a stratigraphic excavation unit permitted a relative chronology to be established. The hilltop site of Loma Real was occupied by a settlement in the Tantuán I, II, and III periods (650 BCE–200 CE, see chronology table of the prehispanic Huasteca in García Cook and Merino Carrión 2004:fig. 10), with the main occupation belonging to the Tantuán II and III

Figure 9.2. Unit 11, with multiple burials, Loma Real, Late Tantuán I period (ca. 450–350 BCE). Excavation and photograph by Alfredo Vargas González.

Figure 9.3. Unit 1, Burial 19, with figurine offering (placed in each arm) and shell pendants in the neck, Loma Real, Tantuán II period (350–100 BCE). Excavation and photograph by Victor Hugo Valdovinos Pérez.
periods (350 BCE–200 CE). A minor and very limited occupation also occurred during the Postclassic period, as noted for the other sites within the project area.

At Loma Real, 1,465 clay figurines and figurine fragments were found in intact cultural deposits along with other archaeological materials, and an additional 699 examples were collected in destroyed areas throughout the site. Several whole figurines were recovered, some from primary contexts, particularly offerings accompanying human burials (Figures 9.3, 9.18). These show a great diversity and originality of styles and arguably reflect local notions of cultural identity based on manners of elaborating and adorning the body. Like other contemporary figurines from the Huasteca, those from Loma Real are not shown with clothing. Rather, artificial cranial modification, scarification, body painting, complex headdresses, and ornaments on these figures reflect what were likely to have been the preferred manners in which the people of Loma Real permanently and temporarily adorned their bodies.

PERMANENT BODY MODIFICATIONS

Permanent body modification (the deliberate alteration of the human body for nonmedical reasons, including religious, social, and aesthetic motives) has been practiced in the Americas since the Preceramic period. Artificial cranial modification, dental mutilation, and scarification were among the most common forms of permanent body modifications in Mesoamerica and were practiced in the Huasteca from Formative times to the Spanish Conquest.

Artificial Cranial Modification: Bodily Practice and Material Representation

Artificial cranial modification is one of the most ancient forms of permanently modifying the body. This practice was widespread in Mesoamerica and had become a common form of permanent body alteration by the Early Formative period, especially among the people living along the Gulf Coast (Romano Pacheco 1974, 1987). Modification of the cranium is achieved through the use or combination of cradleboards and other cephalic apparatuses such as boards, pads, and adjustable bindings that can be used to compress the skull of the neonate.

Since very few physical studies of human remains from the Huasteca have been carried out, and as these have only been performed on Classic and Postclassic burials (Romano Pacheco 1965), the practice of artificial head shaping in this region is mostly known for these periods. While these studies have
documented the presence of different kinds of cranial modifications, the predominance of the tabular varieties, and most notably the type denoted *tabular erect* (Tiesler and Romano Pacheco 2008:20), has also been pointed out. This evidence is all the more interesting in light of ethnohistorical sources suggesting that although the Totonac and Huastec people were neighbors during the Postclassic period, they did not share the same form of artificial cranial modification. Some scholars have interpreted this practice as possible evidence of ethnic identity. Walter Krieckeberg (1933:47), for example, referred to the Totonac as “flatheads,” while the Huastec people are described as “longheads,” similar to the Maya people.

Prior to the biocultural information obtained from the Loma Real excavations, evidence of this cultural practice in the Huastec region dating to Preclassic times had been identified in only two human burials (contemporaries to the Loma Real burials) from the Formative site of Altamirano (also known as Hv–24) in northern Veracruz (García Cook and Merino Carrión 1989, 2004). Thirty-four burials were explored at this site, dating from 1400 BCE to 150 BCE. The body of a decapitated fifty-year-old male, with tabular oblique modification and dating to 200 BCE, was found in Multiple Burial 13 (Merino Carrión and García Cook 1997:327). Further evidence of artificial cranial deformation was found in Secondary Individual Burial 38, dated to 50 BCE, but the type of modification is not known (Merino Carrión and García Cook 1997:329).

Based on the comparative analysis of Formative period clay Huastec figurines and Mesoamerican cranial modification, I have recently suggested that these figurines illustrate this practice: most of the Bulging-Eye type of figurines (Figures 9.4, 9.5, 9.14a, 9.14c) seem to specifically indicate the tabular oblique manner of shaping the head (Marchegay 2009:137). In 1944, when Gordon Ekholm published the foundational classification of clay figurines from the Huasteca (Ekholm 1944:435–59), he described the peculiar form of the head of the Bulging-Eye type but did not identify this feature as a representation of cranial modification: “Another characteristic, not common to all however, is the position of the head which is tilted so far back that the face is nearly at right angles to the vertical axis of the body” (Ekholm 1944:441).

Two types of intentional cranial modifications (tabular erect and tabular oblique) were identified in the skeletal remains of Loma Real. Tabular oblique cranial modification appears to be both the most frequent (Velasco González, Ramírez Castilla, and Serrano Sánchez 2011:69) and the most ancient variety (Figure 9.4), having been mainly detected in human remains dated to Tantuán II (350–100 BCE), which corresponds to the main period of site occupation.
In Multiple Burial 6, for example, a woman and a child identified as a female of seven to nine years in age both showed tabular oblique cranial deformation and were offered three Bulging-Eye type figurines (Figure 9.19). The second main cranial deformation, the tabular erect variety, was mainly detected in burials from Tantuán III levels (100 BCE–200 CE).

Comparative analysis of clay figurines and human burials at Loma Real suggests that similarities were drawn between artificial head shaping on figurines’ heads and human skulls. They both show the two main types of tabular cranial deformations, with a predominance of the tabular oblique formation, and they both present the same chronological evolution. Figurines showing tabular oblique cranial deformation, especially the Bulging-Eye (Figure 9.5) and the Cut-Featured types (Figure 9.12; Ekholm 1944:436–41) were found.
in all levels, from Tantuán I to Tantuán III (650 BCE–200 CE), but mainly appeared in Tantuán II levels (350–100 BCE). The tabular erect cranial modification can be seen on later figurines of different types, including the Panuco B (Figure 9.6; Ekholm 1944:442) and what we name the Hollow type (Figure 9.15), which both appeared toward the end of Late Formative (Tantuán III, 100 BCE–200 CE).

A variety of tabular erect cranial modification called “bilobulada” (Tiesler and Romano Pacheco 2008) is depicted on eight clay figurines from Loma Real, with the earliest examples dating to the Tantuán I period (650–350 BCE), such as seen in Figures 9.7 and 9.19. While evidence of this peculiar head shaping is yet to be detected in the Huasteca (or in Mesoamerica in general) in human remains prior to the Classic period, Formative examples of this type of cranial modification have been detected in South America. In Peru, for example, human remains and effigy vessels from the Paracas Cavernas culture, dated to 500 BCE, exhibit this modificatory trait (Yepez Vasquez and Arzapalo Marin 2007). If the Loma Real figurines are any indication, then it is likely that this type of cranial modification was practiced in Mesoamerica, at least in the northern part of the Gulf Coast, as early as the Preclassic period (Tantuán I, 650–350 BCE).
In summary, although biological investigations of human remains from the Formative Huasteca are only beginning, the evidence from Loma Real demonstrates that artificial cranial deformation, which was one of the main characteristics of Huastec body modification during the Classic and Postclassic periods, was practiced much earlier in that region, at least as early as Late Formative times. Analyses of the human remains and figurines from Loma Real confirm that people living and dying in close proximity to one another practiced the two major types of tabular cranial deformation (tabular oblique and tabular erect), as well as derivations of these types, as classified by physical anthropologists.

The practice of artificially reshaping the head to make it conform to certain social and cultural norms has traditionally been viewed as a means of expressing social status. Within this model, certain shapes such as the tabular oblique variety have sometimes been thought to indicate an elevated social
status (Romano Pacheco 1987). More recently, however, scholars explain head binding as a sign of cultural identity and a tradition associated with genealogy or lineage (Tiesler 1998:207). Investigations at Loma Real could not confirm any sign of high social status associated with cranial modification. While we are not yet able to make definitive statements about the significance of cranial modification at Loma Real, we can be certain that it underscores some important distinctions in permanently inscribed identities; the distinct types of head shaping may correspond to different lineages or ethnic groups, living in close proximity.

**Scarifications and Tattoos**  
Scarification and tattooing are other forms of permanent body modification practiced by many Mesoamerican and Native American cultures through time. During the Classic and Postclassic periods, iconography adorning anthropomorphic sculptures and effigy vessels from the Huasteca suggests that this bodily practice was widespread throughout the area. Moreover, ethnohistorical sources describe the people of the Huasteca as characterized by scarifications and tattoos. For example, in Book 9 of the Florentine Codex
(written by the Nahuatl informants of Fray Bernardino de Sahagún between approximately 1540 and 1585; see Sahagún 1959–61) a Huastec man is represented with scarifications or tattoos on the side of the chest and on the face, extending in a line from the outer corner of the eye down to the ear (Figure 9.8). Similar designs adorn the faces of Postclassic Huastec effigy vessels, suggesting that this marking was in fact an important cultural marker of certain cultural groups in the Huasteca (e.g., of such effigy vessels see Ramírez Castilla, Marchegay, and Florescano 2006:32; Stresser-Péan and Stresser-Péan 2005:figs. 133–35).

Clay figurines from Loma Real and other regions of the Huasteca suggest that scarification or tattooing was practiced in this area from Formative times. Some markings on figurines can suggest either scarifications, tattoos, or body painting. Scholars identify scarifications or tattoos on figurines as deliberate and organized incisions and in some cases punctations, and recognize body painting as painted designs on a figurine’s body.

Three kinds of scarification were identified in the Loma Real figurines: punctations, small incisions, and circular bosses. While there are no markings suggestive of scarification on the faces of figurines found at Loma Real thus far, on some examples a portion of the head was decorated with small circles, short incisions, and punctations that may represent scarifications (Figure 9.9). More specifically, since these motifs differ greatly from the parallel incised lines that usually denote hair in figurines from Loma Real (Figure 9.14a), it is likely that they correspond—at least in some cases—with incisions or
tattoos on a shaved part of the head. However, in other cultural areas, such punctations on figurines’ heads have been interpreted as “the substance of the hair,” as Joyce (1998:156) has suggested in reference to the well-known ceramic “Acrobat” figurine from Tlatilco. More rarely, circular incisions or punctations similar to those found on the heads of some of the figurines are also present on the chest and the arms.9

The incisions take the form of short lines and are either straight (Figure 9.10a) or curved (Figure 9.10b). They are concentrated on the upper part of the body where they occur in several major patterns. They cover the upper part of the chest, the shoulders, the arms, and the complete torso. Scarifications suggested by incisions on the legs are unusual.

Circular bosses on shoulders, arms, and legs of Mesoamerican figurines are usually understood as indices of scarification.10 In the Huasteca region, this kind of body modification can be seen on figurines from the Formative period and also on a unique sculpture from Tamtok, San Luis Potosí, which has been dated to the Late Formative period (400 BCE; see Gidwitz 2010). In Loma Real these circular scarifications appear mainly on figurines from the same period; both men and women, apparently young, show these scarifications (Figure 9.11).

Incisions and punctations on the skin represent the most ancient manners of body scarifications or tattoos found in the Loma Real figurine corpus, and they appear on figurines from the Tantuán I period (650–350 BCE). Meanwhile, circular bosses on shoulders mainly belong to a later period (Tantuán III, 100 BCE–200 CE). Thus, different types of scarifications depicted in figurines

Figure 9.9. Decoration of punctations on the head of a figurine from Loma Real, Tantuán II period (350–100 BCE); photograph by the author.
probably reflect distinct techniques of incising the skin, corresponding to an evolution of techniques and designs of body art.

TEMPORARY BODY ADORNMENT

Body adornments refer to the host of temporary embellishments that humans use to beautify themselves or otherwise express participation in social, cultural, political, and religious contexts. Wearing body paint and clothing, styling the hair, and the use of jewelry or other ornaments are among the most common forms of personal decoration. While evidence of ephemeral practices antedates that for fixed body modifications in the archaeological record, figurine assemblages (and other examples of material culture) underscore the creative ways in which temporary adornments often highlighted permanent modifications throughout the Americas. In the Huasteca today, certain hair-styles, garments, jewelry, and body painting continue to be important signals of community-based indigenous identity and ritual or festive contexts.

Body Painting

Archaeological materials, historical documents, and ethnographic sources show that body painting was a common and ancient practice among both men
and women in the Huasteca, as it was in other regions of Mesoamerica from Early Formative times. Based on the quantity of painted figurines unearthed at Loma Real, it is apparent that body painting was frequent at this site from its earliest period of occupation (Tantuán I, 650–350 BCE).

All of the figurine types found at Loma Real include examples that were painted, showing clear differences in the use of colors and in designs. Black and red were the most common colors used in the painted artifacts of the prehispanic Huastec region from Formative to Late Postclassic times. Some Loma Real figurines are simply painted red while others combine black and red (from orange to dark red) on different areas of the body to create a variety of designs. Thus far, only one example has been found that was painted white. The painting on these figurines is particularly concentrated on the legs, feet, arms, and hands, which are often covered either by red or black paint or are decorated by different patterns (Figure 9.12a); vertical and horizontal lines combining black and red are the most common designs. Although archaeological materials suggest that face painting was common during the Postclassic period in this region, the practice is less frequently seen in Formative materials. One exceptional figurine head showing red facial painting was found in Loma Real, suggesting that face painting was at least occasionally practiced in that period.

Notions of identity (including sex or gender) seem to be encoded in many of the figurines by virtue of the patterns with which they are embellished. In general, male figurines are painted with what may be considered the “simplest”

Figure 9.11. Female figurine with scarifications of circular bosses on the arms, Loma Real, Tantuán III period (100 BCE–200 CE); drawing by María de la Paz Villegas Guzmán.
designs, which consist of horizontal bands on the arms, legs, and feet (Figure 9.12b). Female figurines, in contrast, tend to present a more complex manner of body painting, with black spots accentuating the arms while various other geometric designs adorn the legs and, in rare instances, the back (Figure 9.12a; also see Chapters 4 and 5, this volume). The single most complex design in the Loma Real figurine assemblage appears on a fragment identified as part of a hip area or buttock (Figure 9.13a). Although the design is not completely preserved, the swirling black lines of differing widths clearly represented a combination of several spirals or volutes in its entirety. Thus far, I know of only one parallel to this fragmentary example. A complete figurine from Tamaulipas in the permanent exhibition of the Museo Amparo in Puebla, Mexico, is spectacularly painted (especially on the legs and hips) with a combination of volutes in an almost identical style (Figure 9.13b). Furthermore, the paste, manufacture, and painting of the Loma Real fragment corresponds to the same figurine type (Flat Rectangular-Eyed) and dates to the Tantuán I and II periods (650–100 BCE). It is also noteworthy that these Formative period design examples are very similar to the swirling painting that is characteristic of Postclassic black-on-white pottery from the Huasteca (Ramírez Castilla, Marchegay, and Florescano 2006:photo 39; Zaragoza Ocaña 2003a) and thus demonstrate that some iconographic patterns from the Postclassic Huastec culture may very well have had earlier precedents in the region.
A great variety of hairstyles and headdresses is another characteristic feature of the Formative period Loma Real figurines. Many figurines with intentionally deformed heads are rendered with a simple and loosely hanging hairstyle, parted in the middle (Bulging-Eye type, Figure 9.14a; Panuco A type, see Ekholm 1944:fig. 33a,b). This same style was often combined with a headband to hold the hair in place. Such headbands are often decorated and are commonly found in several of the figurine types (Bulging-Eye, Cut-Featured, Flat Rectangular-Eyed, Panuco B: Figure 9.6; Hollow: Figure 9.15). Another hairstyle, typical of the Bulging-Eye type figurines, seems to represent bunched strands of hair tied high upon the forehead (Figure 9.14c). Some elaborate hairdos are made of small circles or almond-shaped appliqués sometimes painted in red, which may represent various braids that have been piled up (Flat Rectangular-Eyed type: Figure 9.14b and Bulging-Eye type).

**Figure 9.13.** Examples of complex spiral designs in body painting: (a) fragment of a painted figurine from Loma Real, Tantuán II period (350–100 BCE); photograph by the author; (b) Flat Rectangular-Eyed type female figurine from the Huasteca, 14 × 4.7 × 4 cm; courtesy of Museo Amparo, Puebla, Mexico; photograph by Carlos Varillas.
The practice of tonsuring seemed to have been frequent at Loma Real, as it can be observed on many figurines of different types (Bulging-Eye, Panuco A, Flat Rectangular-Eyed, Hollow). Various figurines with intentionally deformed heads are rendered with hair that has been partially shaved. In these cases, the shaved areas of the head are combined with dense hair on other areas. The hair that is left is arranged in numerous different hairdos. For example, there are many instances in which most of the head is shaved (or bald) with only one, two, or three small bunches of hair left atop the head; other figurines show a shaved head with a unique, long bunch of hair hanging down the back of the head (Panuco A type, Figure 9.14d). A specific figurine type (the Cut-Featured type, Figure 9.12a) frequently shows a hairdo that is unique to this type. The head is rectangular in shape, and the hair is divided into four quadrants, which were often painted in black and red.
Ornaments and Clothing

The clay figurines from the Preclassic to Postclassic periods found in the Huasteca are often adorned with a circular pendant or a combination of various circular pendants. Such ornaments are frequently found represented in the figurines of Loma Real (Figure 9.16). These pendants could be manufactured from clay, shell (Figure 9.17a), and different kinds of stone, especially greenstone (Figure 9.17b).

Several individuals were buried with ornaments, mainly with shell jewelry (Burial 19, Figure 9.3). The archaeological evidence in Loma Real showed that different kinds of shell ornaments were manufactured at that site, with the most frequent being the small circular and flat beads, also found around the neck area of some skeletons. For example, the probable female child in Burial 6 was buried with shell jewelry, including a necklace of circular and flat beads as well as a bracelet made with triangular beads (Figure 9.18).
Two types of ear ornaments are commonly represented on figurines and are abundant in the archaeological record of Loma Real. These include tubular and solid circular earplugs and those constructed using one or more circular disks, hollowed in the center so as to create a flat ring shape (Figure 9.17). The outer rims of these shell disks are usually pierced with a small hole, whereby two or more of the perforated and pierced disks could be tied or bound together to create the circular “drop” style earrings seen on some figurines (Figure 9.19). While these disks clearly were used in the manufacture of shell jewelry, they likely were used to construct other items of regalia as well, such as necklaces.

While figurines at Loma Real are sometimes depicted with nose ornaments as part of their jewelry set, this kind of ornament has not been identified in the archaeological materials (Figures 9.14c and 9.15).

There is little evidence of clothing on Loma Real figurines and in the Formative Huastec figurines in general. The only garments occasionally depicted on both male and female figurines are a simple bikini-like strap or a loincloth. More rarely, female figurines show a low-slung belt and a short skirt (Figure 9.16), similar to other Formative figurines from the Olmec area.
Analyses of the figurines and other artifacts from Loma Real are ongoing. But it is already evident that these materials represent an important data set through which to address questions concerning social and cultural identity expressed in body modifications, painting, hairstyles, and personal adornments in a region for which so little is known, particularly with respect to the Preclassic period. One of my goals in this chapter has been to demonstrate some of the ways in which the permanent and the more ephemeral modes of “making up” and “making over” the human body communicate culture. More specifically, I have noted how permanent modifications likely spoke to the more stable or unchanging categories of cultural identity, whereas the temporary markings and embellishments—easily changed—reflect shifting and relational modes of being.

It is likely that cranial modification represented in the figurines underscored important distinctions in either lineage or ethnic groups or both. Clearly, the observation remains hypothetical, and one must be wary of the issues that

CONCLUSION

Figure 9.17. Circular pendants from Loma Real, Tantuán II period (350–100 CE); photographs by the author: (a) shell pendant; (b) greenstone pendant.

(Cheetham 2009:155–56; Follensbee 2009: 84–85, Chapter 7, this volume) and Tlatilco (Rieff Anawalt 2005:17, 19).
arise in using ethnohistorical and ethnographic data such as those cited above in assessment of such early, Formative period materials. Scarifications and tattoos might also have indicated such permanent identities. But at the same time, these markings as they appear on the figurines very clearly correspond to young adults (both males and females); thus, they may very well reflect a particular, possibly reproductive, stage of life. It is probable that such scarifications commemorated rites of passage or other life-cycle rituals. Also noteworthy is the fact that some scarification patterns are the same on both males and females, and so it would seem that they are not meant to draw distinctions in sex or gendered identities.

Body painting, in contrast, does differ depending on the sex of the figurine, with simpler painted lines adorning the representations of males, while more complex geometric patterns seem to be reserved for females. The fact that males and females have distinctive painting suggests the possibility that

Figure 9.18. Burial 6 with offering of clay figurines and shell ornaments, Unit 1, Loma Real, Tantuán II (350–100 BCE); excavation by Pamela Reza Martínez and Victor Hugo Valdovinos: (a) the child represented by Skeletal 1 (right) was wearing (b) a bracelet of triangular shell beads and (c) a necklace of flat and circular shell beads; drawing by María de la Paz Villegas Guzmán; photographs and study by Pamela Reza Martínez.
among the Formative period inhabitants of Loma Real, sex- or gender-based identities as expressed in body painting were relative and subject to change, being modified by contextual factors including age and status within the community, among others.

Although the thematic content of this chapter concerns body iconography, another theme centers on the key importance of archaeological context. While there are comparatively many Formative period figurines coming from the Huasteca and figurine fragments dispersed throughout numerous museum collections, there are a meager few for which corresponding archaeological data are known. At Loma Real the ability to link this variety of bodily

Figure 9.19. Female figurine from Loma Real showing tabular erect head shaping, “bilobulada” variety, with hair painted red; she wears circular “drop” style earrings, made of three pierced disks, maybe made of shell, like the one shown on Figure 9.17a; photographs by the author.
presentations and practices with stratigraphy, and even with intentional deposits in the form of offerings alongside human burials, permits us to consider a much broader range of questions than might be approached when considering materials without such contextualizing data, regardless of the quality of the example or its preservation. At the same time, continuing comparative analysis of the Loma Real corpus with other Formative Huastec figurines in unprovenienced collections will permit more accurate and nuanced assessments of specimens on a mutual scale. The comparison of the single finely painted fragment corresponding with a hip of a Flat Rectangular-Eyed type figurine (defined in accordance with the Ekholm classification) vis-à-vis the complete figurine in the Museo Amparo is a case in point par excellence.

Finally, I have repeatedly juxtaposed the Formative period trends in body modification and adornment with references to similar practices that were known from the Postclassic era because one of the long-time trends in Huastec scholarship has been to highlight representations of the body and Postclassic bodily practices primarily through cross-cultural analysis (Faust 2009 and Chapter 8, this volume). Although we cannot speak of a “Huastec culture” during the Formative period, the Loma Real figurines and other archaeological materials from this time suggest that certain manners of modifying and adorning the body (including cranial modification, scarification, body painting, and the use of certain types of ornaments), which were characteristic of the Postclassic Huasteca and recorded during the contact era, may well have ancient origins or antecedents within the region.

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NOTES

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2. All human remains from the Loma Real site were studied by physical anthropologist Jesús Ernesto Velasco González (Centro INAH Tamaulipas).

3. In Mesoamerica the earliest example of artificial cranial modification was found in the Texcal cave, in Valsequillo, Puebla, dated from 7000–4500 BCE (Romano Pacheco 1974:198).

4. Only one case of dental mutilation is known from Formative Huasteca, dated from 900–650 BCE (García Cook and Merino Carrión 2004:20).

5. This site was excavated by the Proyecto Arqueológico Huasteca by Ángel García Cook and Beatriz Leonor Merino Carrión from the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia of Mexico between 1978 and 1982.

6. Such comparative analysis of anthropomorphic figurines and human remains has been successfully carried out by Josefina Bautista Martínez (2004, 2005), who studied intentional cranial deformation on a large sample of figurines from different regions of Mesoamerica dating to the Formative, Classic, and Postclassic periods. Nevertheless, it was not possible to compare the evidence from Loma Real with her study of Preclassic figurines, since the majority of her Gulf Coast samples came from Cerro de las Mesas, Veracruz, and La Venta, Tabasco. Although some specimens from the Formative Huasteca were said to be considered in her study, the sample size and provenience was not specified.

7. For the description and typology of artificial cranial modifications used in Mesoamerica studies, see Dembo and Imbelloni (1938), Falkenburger (1938), Moss (1958), Romano Pacheco (1965), and Tiesler and Romano Pacheco (2008).

8. In the Huasteca region, see, for example, the female skeletal no. 4 from the Tierra Alta burial found in Tampico, Tamaulipas, dated from the Postclassic period (González Sobrino, Ramírez Castilla, and Serrano Sánchez 2004:50).

10. See, for example, Solís 1998:195, fig. 29, for a figurine from Colima state (West Mexico), shaft tomb tradition, Classic time, Comala period (200–600 CE).


12. The study of shell artifacts from Loma Real was done by Pamela Reza Martínez.

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INTRODUCTION

Scholars of the Mesoamerican Late Preclassic period (300 BCE–250 CE) are familiar with framing bands, consistent sets of symbols that often seem ubiquitous on sculpture, architecture, and ceramics. From the stucco façades recently unearthed at El Mirador, to the San Bartolo murals, to the finely worked basalt monuments of Kaminaljuyú, these bands serve to frame spaces and people (Clancy 1990). Often lumped under a general label of “skyband” or “framing band,” the elements of these frames appear in different arrangements and in markedly different artistic contexts, but they represent a cohesive shared symbolic vocabulary consisting of dots, bars, lines, and other shapes.

In this chapter we investigate framing bands and their associated geometric patterns as specific symbol sets, thinking about how different contexts can shed light on the meaning of these patterns for the peoples who made and saw them. Rather than “decode” the meaning of individual geometric shapes, we aim to pose questions about how these framing bands have been interpreted and how they may best be understood. We suggest that framing bands, found on both sculpture and architecture, are best thought of as devices that established or designated a specific type of space. As we will show, the geometric motifs on framing bands bear striking resemblance to textile patterns depicted sculpturally in the Preclassic and Classic periods (250 CE–900 CE), raising questions about the role of textiles as active agents in communicating ideas both within and between groups. We will examine the conceptual overlap between geometric motifs in sculpture, textiles, and architectural decoration in

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the Middle and Late Preclassic periods, arguing that the patterns common to these media work to establish specific types of space and identify certain types of people. Our study of Preclassic framing motifs suggests that textiles and textile-like patterns played a major role as communicative devices, underscoring the significance of costume as a symbolic and meaningful medium. The collective corpus of geometric motifs points to a rich symbolic vocabulary active in the Preclassic, a vocabulary whose meaning promises to enrich our understanding of this dynamic period.

**FRAMING BANDS, SKYBANDS, JAGUARS, AND SERPENTS**

Many Preclassic framing bands are grouped into a general label of skybands. Garth Norman (1976:23–26) described such bands at Izapa as “celestial or sky panels” because of their position on stelae and the appearance of “cloud scrolls and rain bands” on some examples. These bands are markers of celestial, sacred space. For example, on Izapa Stela 4, the Principal Bird Deity descends from a framing band consisting of diagonal bands flanking a U-shaped bracket and a pattern of pendant J-scrolls superimposed over horizontal bands (Figure 10.1). In this case, the band establishes the celestial nature of the bird’s original location, implying that by descending to the Izapan ruler, the celestial power of the bird is transferred. Norman also identified terrestrial bands, noting that they often contain distinct elements ranging from curling water scrolls, to short diagonal bands forming triangular shapes, to double merlon motifs, to name a few. In other cases, groundlines make use of the same set of symbols as upper skybands (Norman 1976:28–29). In these cases, we may presume that the action portrayed in the pictorial field above takes place in a celestial setting (Guernsey 2006b:92); an alternative explanation is that some symbols and patterns could be used in both celestial and terrestrial settings to designate a sacred space, a possibility to which we will later return.

Many of the individual elements in Late Preclassic framing bands appear, at first glance, to be related to motifs in Classic-period skybands. These connections are based largely on context; both Late Preclassic and Classic-period bands frame space in similar ways using a series of individual but repetitive symbols. If the context of many of these Late Preclassic framing bands indicates they carry celestial associations, however, we should also recognize the ambiguities of this category. Scholars often assume that framing bands from this period are simply early versions of Classic-period skybands. But Classic skybands include explicit symbols representing celestial or cosmological concepts, from the *k’in* sign for east, or sun, to the *ak’bal* sign, representing
night and darkness. Classic-period skybands also include Venus symbols and “shiner” motifs, identified by Stuart (2010) as markers of divine, bright, or sacred things, gods, and people. While many of these individual signs appear in Late Preclassic art, they are rarely used in framing bands, as Rebecca Lang (2004) points out in her analysis of the San Bartolo skyband. Thus while the elements that make up Late Preclassic framing bands are quite consistent, they are difficult to systematically connect to Classic-period skyband signs. This problematizes the idea that Late Preclassic framing bands are quintessentially the same as Classic ones—the same but earlier; it suggests that the geometric motifs we see on Late Preclassic framing bands may have carried alternative or additional meanings. This is not to suggest that there are no parallels between Late Preclassic and Classic-period skybands. In fact, this paper will point to several important connections between the two types. We mean
instead to point out that framing bands in the Late Preclassic make use of a specific set of symbols that must be analyzed on their own terms, within the historical framework of the Preclassic.

Some clues to the meaning of Preclassic framing elements come from studies of Olmec imagery. Norman (1976) traced the origins of Late Preclassic skybands at Izapa to Olmec imagery, particularly the sculptures of La Venta. Quirarte (1974, 1981) also suggested connections to Olmec art, noting that framing bands share several characteristics with the Olmec Dragon, as defined by Joralemon (1971, 1976). Joralemon’s Olmec Dragon represented a combination of animals and referenced aspects like water, rain, agricultural fertility, and maize (Joralemon 1976). Karl Taube (1995) later clarified the nature and representation of the Olmec Dragon, renaming it the Avian Serpent. Taube (1995:87) noted that the Olmec Avian Serpent merges the meaning of the snake and bird, “two creatures widely identified with the heavens in Mesoamerica.” According to Taube (1995:92), such sky serpents are integral aspects of Preclassic framing bands, both Olmec and Maya. Many Preclassic framing bands include the heads of such serpents; the abstract symbols making up other framing bands, like inverted U shapes and diagonal lines, may also reference the snake (Quirarte 1981). Quirarte (1981) noted, for instance, that the fangs of the serpent depicted on La Venta Altar 4 may be a paradigm for similar J-shaped patterns at Izapa (Figure 10.2). Scholars have also established connections between framing bands and jaguar imagery (Stirling 1943; Norman 1976; Quirarte 1976). Stirling (1943) was the first to suggest that the “sky panels” at Izapa represented the upper jaws of a jaguar. Quirarte (1973:16–17) agreed, but noted that the designs at Izapa were much more abstract; he followed Drucker (1952) in arguing that the panels include jaguar, avian, and serpent associations. These layered associations and multifaceted connections between framing bands and serpents, jaguars, and celestial imagery point to the wide range of meanings carried by the elements making up Preclassic framing bands.

GEOMETRIC PATTERNS ON PRECLASSIC SCULPTURE

One type of sculpture that complicates the straightforward identification of Late Preclassic skybands is sculpture that consists entirely of abstract patterns. Guernsey (2006a) highlighted four examples of this type of sculpture: Stelae 19 and 20 from Izapa and Stelae 3 and 4 from Chiapa de Corzo (Figures 10.3, 10.4). At Izapa, Norman (1976:121–22) described the motifs of Stelae 19 and 20 as celestial in nature, related to sky panels of other stelae, while Quirarte
(1973:17) compared the two motifs to loincloth assemblages depicted on other monuments and identified them as stylized “serpent tongues,” a possibility that Norman (1976:122) also suggested. By contrast, Guernsey (2006a:22) argued that Stelae 19 and 20 “may be better understood as monuments that have been rendered sculpturally to mimic stone stelae wrapped in horizontal bands of cloth”; she pointed to the knot in the center of Stela 19 as evidence that these stelae portrayed bound or bundled monuments. She related these Late Preclassic stelae with textile imagery to rituals of bundling documented during the Classic period in which stelae were wrapped in cloth to mark the passage of time (Stuart 1996:155). As Stuart (1996:156–57) described, beyond the temporal significance of these acts of wrapping, this ritual action was conceptually equivalent to the wrapping of a Classic Maya ruler into the Jester God headband of rulership; rulers and monuments could both be “bound” into their sacred roles. Guernsey’s interpretation parallels, to some degree, Taube’s suggestion that the Izapa stelae portray royal headbands and were thus intended to be understood, metaphorically, as faces (in Stuart 1996:165n16). Izapa Stelae 19 and 20 clearly point to the intriguing formal as well as conceptual overlap between serpent, skyband, and textile imagery as well as the important ramifications of these different associations.
Stelae 3 and 4 from Chiapa de Corzo are also made up of abstract patterns and again call our attention to the blurry line between textile and framing band in Late Preclassic art (Figure 10.4). Stylistically, these monuments are quite different: Stela 3, tall and narrow, is carved with a thin and sinuous line, while Stela 4, wide and short, is carved with block-like precision conforming to strict and narrow registers. Despite these variations in style, Earley (2008:86) observed that their patterns are nearly identical, which in and of itself provides an important clue to the significance of this design at Chiapa de Corzo. Its repeated occurrence on Stelae 3 and 4, as well as what may be fragmentary elements of similar patterns on the lower fragment of Stela 5 and on the groundline of Stela 6, led Earley (2008:91) to conclude that this design was specific, legible, and an integral part of the visual vocabulary of the site.

As mentioned previously, Guernsey (2006a:29–30) compared Stelae 3 and 4 from Chiapa de Corzo to Stelae 19 and 20 from Izapa and argued that, with their abstract geometric patterns, they represent additional examples of bundled stelae. However, these monuments lack several of the features of Stelae 19 and 20. First, there are no knots on these stelae, and their patterns do not
share the specific patterns of loincloth assemblages on Izapa monuments. Second, these stelae are much smaller than the monumental stones of Izapa. Stela 3 measures a scant 37 by 25 cm and is carved into thin limestone. David Stuart (personal communication, 2008) suggested that this “stela” may originally have been part of a much larger design, perhaps set into an interior wall, while John Clark (forthcoming) suggested that a similarly carved stela was set into an architectural façade. Based on its size and shape, the same may be true of Stela 4.

Both fragments were discovered in the fill of a small mound (Lowe 1962), so we lack context that would explain their function—but several possibilities stand out. First, these may be additional representations of textiles; as Guernsey (2006a) points out, this would be in keeping with other references to bundling at Chiapa de Corzo. Another possibility, however—one that is particularly intriguing if we consider these pieces to be part of larger compositions—is that they represent framing bands, stretched to fill the whole of the sculptural space (Earley 2008:87–88). The patterns on Stelae 3 and 4 resemble both skybands and terrestrial bands from other sites, from the paired

**Figure 10.5.** La Mojarra Stela 1. Drawing courtesy of George Stuart.
tabs extending from horizontal registers, familiar at San Bartolo, to an almost identical pattern of circles and vertical bands on the basal panel of La Mojarra Stela 1 (Figure 10.5). The patterns are strikingly similar, in fact, to the body of an Avian Serpent on a Preclassic Maya vessel illustrated by Taube (1995:fig. 12e), again pointing to the overlap between serpent and celestial themes.

If these monuments at Chiapa de Corzo do represent framing bands writ large, they also raise questions about rulership and performance. Framing bands in the Late Preclassic define the sculptural space around them as sacred, different, or otherworldly. When the entire sculpture is made up of framing elements, it could indicate that the space around the sculptures themselves was somehow special. These monuments, as Earley (2008:88–91) asserted, may have acted like framing bands, defining the physical space around them as sacred.

Without context it is impossible to prove whether Stelae 3 and 4 represent textiles or framing bands, but it is in this gray area that our real interest lies. The ambiguity presented by these stelae highlights the fact that textiles and framing bands share the same visual vocabulary in sculpture of the Late Preclassic period. This shared vocabulary appears in sculptural representations of textiles at sites from the Gulf Coast to the Pacific highlands. How do other examples of textiles in sculpture shine light on the conceptual overlap between the two genres?

TEXTILE REPRESENTATIONS ON LATE PRECLASSIC SCULPTURE

The archaeological record preserves no examples of Late Preclassic textiles. In light of this dearth of physical remains, archaeologists have relied on textile-associated implements to find traces of textile and textile manufacture in the archaeological and iconographic record (Berdan 1987; Brumfiel 1996, 2006; Chase et al. 2008; Follensbee 2008, this volume; Stark et al. 1998). Other scholars have used Postclassic manuscripts to determine the symbolic importance of textiles as well as their economic value in elite systems of production and exchange (Berdan 1987; Hamann 1997; Hicks 1994; McCafferty and McCafferty 2006; Pohl 1999; Reents-Budet 2006). Diverse sources and scholars agree that textiles played an important role in indigenous Mesoamerica, although, as Brumfiel (2006) qualified, any consideration of weaving should always be historically situated, as the motivations for—and significance and implications of—textile production changed throughout the history of ancient Mesoamerica in spite of important continuities (also see Stark et al. 1998). That said, textiles served social, economic, and political purposes as valuable objects of exchange; as indicators of economic viability, political power,
Another important source of information on Preclassic textiles is sculpture (Follensbee 2008; Looper 2006; Stark et al. 1998:9; see also Winzenz, this volume). In the Late Preclassic, monuments from Kaminaljuyú, Izapa, La Mojarra, and other sites display textile and costume elements that help to clarify the conceptual overlap between textiles and framing bands. We examine a few examples here.

One of the most prominent examples of textiles in monumental sculpture comes from Late Preclassic Kaminaljuyú. On Stela 11, a ruler wears a complex mask assemblage and carries implements in both hands (Figure 10.6). The Principal Bird Deity descends from above him, and incense burners are aflame at his feet. Most interesting to this study are two elements of his costume: the knotted band near his wrist and the loincloth descending from the mask assemblage at his waist. Both display a series of elements familiar from Late Preclassic framing bands, including diagonal lines, paired dots, and the U-bracket (Guernsey 2006a:29, 32). The pendant loincloth element is quite
similar to those from Izapa, while its stacked layers of dots, diagonal elements, and J-scrolls call to mind the layers of Stela 3 from Chiapa de Corzo. Stela 11 is only one of many hints of rich textile associations in the sculptural program of Kaminaljuyú. On an unpublished fragment in the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Guatemala City, as well as on Stela 10, a mat motif frames the central scene. Farther afield, the design appears in the Salamá Valley on a monument together with a row of volutes, as documented by Sharer and Sedat (1987:370). This stela may draw parallels to the Izapa and Chiapa de Corzo examples that are made up solely of geometric designs (Guernsey 2006a:30n12).

Another rich source of illustrations from the Late Preclassic period is Izapa. We have seen several examples of skybands at this site, but other stelae hint at the rich textiles that must once have been worn in the city. Perhaps the best example is Izapa Stela 4, often compared with Kaminaljuyú Stela 11 (Figure 10.1). Stela 4 shows a similar scene: a striding ruler with a complex mask assemblage. The Principal Bird Deity dangles from above, and the ruler carries two oddly shaped instruments; he also wears wings on his arms and a backrack made up of crossed elements and dangling feathers. His loincloth,
the only identifiable textile in addition to the knots on his arms and legs, depicts several elements familiar from Late Preclassic framing bands. There are at least three vertical registers in the loincloth, including one with diagonal bands and a second with paired tabs that extend into the third section. These elements echo the skyband above him, made up of a U bracket framed with diagonal bands, sitting atop a horizontal line with several hanging elements. Other monuments at Izapa, including Stela 3 and Altar 60, show a similar loincloth assemblage with a tripartite ending, interpreted by Quirarte (1973) as a bifurcated serpent tongue (Figures 10.7, 10.8).

Quirarte (1973, 2007) also identified a connection between certain terrestrial designs and “collars” that appear at Chiapa de Corzo, La Mojarra, and San Bartolo. The design consists of a downward-turning inward scroll with two tabs in the middle of the curved elements (Figure 10.9). His initial investigation (1973) compared the groundlines of Kaminaljuyú Stela 11 and Izapa Stela 4, among others, with the collar of figures on the carved bones at Chiapa de Corzo (Agrinier 1960). Since then, Quirarte found the same design on the headdress assemblage at La Mojarra as well as on the San Bartolo mural.
The design also appears on a small fragment from Chiapa de Corzo whose original context and function is unknown (Figure 10.10). The connection between framing band elements and these “collars,” as identified by Quirarte, presents another intriguing link between textile and framing patterns depicted in sculpture. Whether these collars were made of cloth is certainly open to question, but the connection between costuming and framing elements is clear. Much like framing bands established the context of stelae, collar elements may have conveyed specific information about the person, zoomorph, or god wearing them.
Framing bands and costume elements seem to have functioned in the same way, literally wrapping scenes, objects, and people in identifiable symbols and meanings. The turtle shell from Cerro de las Mesas, for example, features the head of a person in the center, wrapped by concentric layers of abstract framing elements, including merlon-like shapes and crossed bands that make up the body of a double-headed serpent (Figure 10.11). On the shell, the patterns familiar from framing bands and sculpturally depicted textiles literally surround an important personage, both wrapping him and serving as a kind of portal through which he emerges. In this sense, framing bands, as expressed in any medium, operate as important borders or, in some cases, as markers of a permeable boundary between discrete realms or spaces. Carlson (1988:279) noted of framing bands on Classic Maya ceramics, for instance, that “the placement of skybands around the rims of vases and on the inside or outside lips of plates and bowls is designed to create for the vessel a cosmological

**Figure 10.10.** Limestone fragment from Chiapa de Corzo. Drawing by Earley.

**Figure 10.11.** Turtle shell from Cerro de las Mesas. Drawing by Earley after Covarrubias (1947:105).
boundary.” The framing band demarcates space, but it does so by creating a distinction between one place or level and another.

TEXTILE REPRESENTATIONS ON PRECLASSIC ARCHITECTURE

Both carved textiles and framing bands rely on the same group of geometric motifs in Late Preclassic sculpture to frame, wrap, and characterize places, people, and scenes. Adding to this complexity is the presence of these motifs on Preclassic architectural façades. In the Maya region during the Late Preclassic, these motifs often took the form of horizontal bands with pendant J-scrolls (not unlike those on Izapa Stelae 19 and 20) above zoomorphic masks or visages, as if the zoomorphic creatures—and by extension, the temples themselves—were “wrapped” in textile-like headdresses. Several scholars (Freidel and Schele 1988; Stuart 1996, 1998; Taube 1998) linked these headdress motifs to the Maya Jester God headdress of rulership. As Stuart (1996:156–57) demonstrated, the act of wrapping the ruler into the Jester God crown of kingship literally, and figuratively, bound him to his divine office. By extension, architectural structures bound with similar motifs functioned like an extension of the king’s body, creating a monumental architectural statement of kingly authority and responsibility in the built environment (Guernsey 2006a; Houston 1998; Looper and Guernsey-Kappelman 2000; Taube 1998:463–66; Stuart 1996, 1998).

While these ideas have been explored in some detail with regard to Late Preclassic Maya architectural façades, there are interesting precedents for textile motifs whose patterning can also be linked to Preclassic framing bands on architecture from other regions as early as the Middle Preclassic. For example, John Clark (forthcoming:21) noted a decorative stonework façade dating to the Middle Preclassic (late Dili phase) at Chiapa de Corzo on the basal platform of Structure 36-D (Lowe 1962:57–59, fig. 37, plate 29h). The stonework pattern consists of round, water-worn river cobbles placed between horizontal sandstone slabs (Figure 10.12). Clark (forthcoming:21) suggested that this pattern mimics stone facings from La Venta. The patterning created at Chiapa de Corzo also compares with similar motifs on Stela 3 from the same site, in which circular forms are placed between repeating bands, and certainly lends some credence to the possibility, suggested by both John Clark and David Stuart, that some of the stelae at Chiapa de Corzo may have functioned as part of an architectural composition.

As Clark (forthcoming) further observed, this evidence from Chiapa de Corzo for framing bands on architecture may predate similar designs at
Middle Preclassic Chalcatzingo (Figure 10.13). There, on Terrace 25, a large U-shaped, low-walled patio space that incorporated a table-top altar was defined by a distinctive pattern of stonework consisting of faced stone blocks arranged so that an inverted V-shaped niche was created on either side of the central altar (Fash 1987:82, fig. 7.4). Each of the inverted V-shaped niches was framed by a rounded stone on either side. The inverted V-shaped niches at Chalcatzingo, interestingly, visually invert the V-shaped motifs seen frequently in a variety of Preclassic framing bands. Other inverted V-shaped designs appear in the corpus of Preclassic framing bands, as the basal bands of Izapa Stelae 5, 12, 26, and 60 and Miscellaneous Monument 2 demonstrate. The inverted V-shaped niches at Chalcatzingo also compare with a similar suite of motifs on Chiapa de Corzo Stela 3, in which circles appear between diagonal bands. A similar design is visible on Izapa Stela 18’s basal framing band, although in both of these cases the V shapes are not inverted. The presence of V-shaped motifs lining the low platform at Chalcatzingo provides an architectural counterpoint for the consistent association of inverted V-shaped motifs with basal or terrestrial bands.
Farther west, Giselle Canto Aguilar and Victor M. Castro Mendoza (2010) recently unearthed strikingly similar stonework patterns at the Middle Preclassic site of Zazacatla in Morelos, Mexico. They found that several building phases of Structure 1 made use of large, blue-gray limestone slabs stacked and leaned in patterns that created V-shaped and inverted V-shaped patterns similar to the diagonal elements of framing bands (Canto Aguilar and Castro Mendoza 2010:figs. 4.3, 4.5, 4.8, 4.9). Most remarkably, the diagonal stones of Structure 1-A served to frame four niches in which were placed small sculptures. Canto Aguilar and Castro Mendoza (2010:89) compared the stonework on Zazacatla Structure 1-A with a remarkably similar pattern on the platforms of Structures 2 and 3 at Teopantecuanitlan (Martínez Donjuán 1994:fig. 9.19) that features diagonal slabs creating a V-shaped design. Interestingly, as Martínez Donjuán (1994:160) observed, the V shapes are oriented alongside flat, stela-like stones that were integrated into the platform façade (Figure 10.14).

The evidence from Chiapa de Corzo, Chalcatzingo, Zazacatla, and Teopantecuanitlan is particularly evocative because it suggests that people used geometric patterns on buildings as well as sculpture to frame space in specific
ways, perhaps to denote the function and meaning of the architecture, the space surrounding it, or the actions that took place there. In the case of Zazacatla, Canto Aguilar and Castro Mendoza (2010:90–91) suggest that the sculptures placed within the niches in the façade of Structure 1-A represented mythical ancestors and that the ruler of Zazacatla would have made use of rituals atop the platform to perform his ability to “mediate among the three levels of the cosmos and to communicate with gods and ancestors” (ibid. :90). In this scenario, the pattern on the building would act as a boundary marker. Much like the serpent on the turtle shell from Cerro de las Mesas marked a distinction between spaces, the architectural framing elements of Structure 1-A marked the space atop the platform as different from the plaza and the buildings around it by using specific notations that may have communicated the platform’s meaning and function. Moreover, although geometric patterns and framing bands appear on numerous monuments and the murals of San Bartolo during the Preclassic period, these slightly earlier patterns were built directly into the building; the framing elements, in other words, were integral to the structure itself.

In light of this discussion, it is interesting to reconsider the numerous framing bands on stelae that consist of V-shaped diagonal bands, as in the
architecture noted above, with the frequent addition of merlon or double-merlon motifs (see, e.g., Chiapa de Corzo Stela 7, the Alvarado Stela, the Tepatlachco Stela, Izapa Stelae 5, 12, and 26, and Takalik Abaj Stela 12). Interestingly, the alternating left-leaning or right-leaning diagonal bands make it impossible to determine whether the configuration is V-shaped or inverted and suggest that, perhaps, this distinction was not important. In most cases, these bands occur in the groundline of the stela compositions, functioning much like the architectonic bands that wrapped around the basal layer of platforms or patio spaces, although accommodating some regional variation. Earley (2008:112–15) noted that the imagery located above these bands portrayed a variety of narrative scenes, all of which appear to be ritual in nature. Based on this, she suggested that this framing motif, like those found on Chiapa de Corzo Stelae 3 and 4, may have denoted a particular type of ritual space. Rather than viewing the double merlon specifically as a terrestrial marker (Quirarte 2007), Earley (2008:114) suggested instead that, in conjunction with these framing bands, it more generally designated a sacred space. This suggestion is particularly compelling given the sunken courtyard at Teopantecuanitlan, Guerrero, which was “framed” by two T-shaped monoliths that, together, created a double-merlon design.

THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CLOTH

The intriguing overlap between the motifs on structures found in the highlands of Chiapas and Central Mexico, the façades of the Maya lowlands, and Preclassic framing bands more generally warrants some consideration. In many of these examples, a strong case can be made that these motifs—whether J-scrolls, geometric motifs, or V-shaped patterns—share patterning with textile designs. This is not to say that there was necessarily a one-to-one correspondence between carved imagery and actual textiles; what is more significant is that the same symbolic repertoire was invoked by artists in both sculpture and architecture to demarcate the human, architectonic, and celestial domains.

These conceptual parallels are particularly interesting given the central role of textiles in Mesoamerican life. From ethnohistorical Central Mexican documents to modern-day ethnographic accounts, cloth, it appears, carries special communicative qualities. Prechtel and Carlsen, in their 1988 study, explained that cloth and the process of weaving metaphorically express cosmological views, status, and identity among the Maya of modern-day Santiago Atitlán (also see Christenson 2001, 2006). Weaving, explained Prechtel and Carlsen,
is a metaphor for birth: humans are woven into existence, while weavings are “born” (1988:126). “To the Tzutujil,” they explain, “the commonality demonstrated in the birth of humans, cloth, and sun is both obvious and fundamental” (Prechtel and Carlsen 1988:126). In a similar vein, Klein (1982) analyzed in detail the metaphors for weaving and woven cloth that permeate descriptions of the cosmos and creation by numerous Mesoamerican groups. As she described, both Maya and Aztec manuscripts depict the universe as bound or defined in filaments of cloth or cord, while numerous fertility and creation goddesses are weavers of textiles.

Beyond establishing the central role of cloth in the Maya world view, scholars have documented the communicative nature of specific symbols and patterns. Prechtel and Carlsen (1988), for instance, painstakingly deconstructed a garment worn by male cofradia members, called the x’ajoj zut, uncovering the layers of meaning woven into its pattern and design. Other scholars (Morris 1985) and even modern-day tourists will note, furthermore, that certain styles of clothing identify groups of people. At a glance, the informed observer will understand where a person is from and how that person fits into their community based on their clothing; yet the clothing also makes use of widely understood designs. This clothing is both specific and mutually intelligible, defining identity using a precise but accessible lingua franca of woven signs. Our sources on the importance of cloth are over a thousand years removed from the Preclassic period, but we argue there is reason to believe that cloth played a pivotal role in Preclassic society as well.

The wide geographic distribution of textile-like geometric motifs on architecture may hint at broadly shared notions of “bound” architecture and monuments, wrapped or covered in textile designs. As garments were “emblematic of socially constituted personae” (Stark et al. 1998:9), so too we suggest that the textile-like patterns on structures communicated a similar message of privilege by using patterns to demarcate specific types of space. Viewed in this light, however, these sculptures and architectural structures did more than reference elite privilege. They also served as structures of discipline that directly affected the movements of people through space and influenced the visual messages they received (see Love 1999, following Foucault 1977). The use of textile-like designs on architecture—a situation in which the carving “pretends to be something else” (Looper 2006:82)—also reveals a rich and “strategic intertextuality,” to borrow Looper’s term, “in which material culture symbols speak through each other” (see Hanks 1989, 2000).

Could it be, then, that the patterns or symbols we see on Preclassic framing bands and sculptural depictions of textiles were intelligible to certain people or
audiences? Like modern day huipiles, which express the identity of the wearer, the wearer’s homeland or social group, and, at the most fundamental level, the wearer’s world view, would textile imagery of the Preclassic have tapped into a similar vocabulary? How are we to interpret the geometric motifs we see in all of these contexts, and how might the same motifs on sculpture and architecture function differently? In particular, what parallels can we draw between the function and meaning of framing bands and textiles in wrapping, framing, and identifying places and people?

In a recent study, Nassos Papalexandrou (forthcoming) compared the architectural façades at Mitla, Oaxaca, with patterns on Greek Geometric pottery, studying how ideas can be expressed through seemingly abstract patterns. Papalexandrou drew from Alfred Gell (1998) to suggest that geometric patterns establish hierarchy by separating people who can “read” them from people who cannot; the legibility of patterns, in other words, would depend on one’s access to symbol systems. Papalexandrou also posited that the patterns on Greek vases could have had a performative function, something Pohl (1999) has suggested for the sculptured façades of Mitla. In this case, geometric patterns would act as cues for the remembrance or performance of larger narratives. In oral history traditions this type of memory aid is crucial to the retention and recitation of epic stories. While we do not suggest that Preclassic framing bands refer to a particular narrative, we think this idea of storytelling is useful in thinking about how symbols or patterned motifs can encode ideas and knowledge. The visual vocabulary shared by textiles, framing bands, and architectural façades could tap into both site-specific or more broadly shared cultural knowledge and narratives. Although we can note consistencies or points of departure in the patterning of specific motifs, the limited data sets make it difficult to discern how these patterns may have been “tweaked” by individuals to suit specific historical circumstances. It seems likely, however, because this suite of symbols is so consistent and repetitive that it expressed fundamental concepts to certain groups or types of people.

CONCLUSION

The vocabulary of framing bands, textiles, and architectural façades provides context and meaning, wrapping bodies, sculptures, and buildings in specific forms and ideas. Beyond simply denoting where action is happening, framing bands and their associated patterns established specific types of space. These bands also hint at the ways in which power was produced and maintained in the Preclassic period: the placement of framing bands on stone monuments...
and architectural façades in site centers suggests they played a role in structuring both the built environment and the paths of daily life. The shared repertoire of framing bands and sculpturally depicted textiles suggests this is a fruitful arena for further study, beyond the reach of this preliminary exploration. In particular, this discussion could be extended into other domains of material culture, investigating similar patterns on ceramics, figurines, and roller stamps, to name a few examples. We intend this paper to be a useful starting point for identifying points of convergence and continuity in the visual vocabulary of Preclassic Mesoamerica. The patterns on framing bands, architectural façades, and sculpturally depicted textiles hint at a rich symbolic vocabulary, one that was surely legible to Precolumbian peoples and one that we are only beginning to understand.

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NOTES

1. The Principal Bird Deity is an avian being that first appears in the Preclassic period as a signifier of royal power and authority (for more information, see Miller and Taube 1993; Schele and Miller 1986; Guernsey 2006b).

2. See, for example, Quirarte 1973; Schele and Miller 1986.

3. Takalik Abaj Altar 12 provides one exception to this rule, with a clearly defined framing band made up of symbols familiar from Classic period skybands.

4. We do not, in this paper, address the gendered significance of cloth production, as it exceeds the scope of this study. However, many scholars have addressed this topic at length. See, to name only a few examples, Brumfiel 2006; Hendon 1997; McCafferty and McCafferty 1991; and Looper 2006.

5. As Taube (1995:92) has noted, skybands also appear around the rim of Middle Preclassic bowls in the Olmec and Zapotec areas. This suggests that the concept of marking cosmological boundaries on ceramics is an early and widespread idea in Mesoamerica.
6. However, with regard to the Maya lowlands, Valdez et al. (2001) discovered a late Middle Preclassic or early Late Preclassic façade on Structure G-103-3rd at Río Azul that displays large, pendant J-scrolls. Also see Guernsey (2006a:31–33) for a discussion of this evidence.

7. See, for example, Izapa Stelae 1, 2, 3, 4 (celestial and basal bands), 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 and La Venta Altar 4.

8. In some cases in Maya art, signs or symbols can be inverted with no apparent change in meaning (Houston et al. 2006:145). Whether the same principle is working here is difficult to say, but it is worth noting that there is some danger in assuming that the inversion of a form necessarily signals a shift in meaning. Also see Canto Aguilar and Castro Mendoza (2010) for a discussion of the various contexts and associations of the “V” sign.

9. The double-merlon sign and the range of its signification have been addressed by a number of scholars. For discussions of this motif and the history of its various interpretations, see Grove 2000; Guernsey 2010; Martínez Donjuán 2010; and Reilly 1995.

REFERENCES


INTRODUCTION

Following the theme of this volume on the transcendent power of costume and adornment, we contribute an examination of regalia as a tool for communication within the Olmec political sphere. Olmec rulers used works of art as forms of politico-religious display (Reilly 1995; Furst 1995). Combining these influential social structures in art allowed for the ruler to display this duality as validation for his/her political position. Several scholars have specifically discussed the shamanic contents of Olmec art from interpretation of iconography and archaeological contexts of artifacts placed in tableaux1 (Furst 1995; Reilly 1995; Joralemon 1971). From these interpretations, the supernatural ability of transformation appears as a powerful theme within Olmec art. This theme was not only demonstrated in the iconographic subject matter but in the use and reuse of the raw material. The fact that thrones were modified into colossal heads is evidence for the transformative nature of monument construction itself (Cyphers 2004; Porter 1989). These monuments, like their Maya counterparts, were kept wrapped until viewed during ritual use (Reilly 2006; Stuart 1996). Through restriction of access, the act of wrapping or bundling the object enhances the perception of its sacredness.

Though social position as reflected in clothing is not a new concept, we hope to shed additional light on this by suggesting that the dressings themselves were transformative tools. Like the wrappings surrounding carved monuments, ritual regalia acts to separate the wearer from onlookers, establishing increased power.
We would like to draw attention to our method of comparison with Classic Maya monuments. This utilizes the process of upstreaming for iconographic interpretation.² We also would like to recognize that the Mid-
dle to Late Formative period Maya are con-
temporaneous with the Olmec. These cultures inspired one another artistically, as can be seen in the recently discovered San Bartolo murals (100 BCE), which show prominent Olmec influences (Taube et al. 2005).

Like artistic representations, clothing and regalia have also been used to communicate beliefs, political affiliations, and socioeconomic status (Wingfield, this volume; Joyce, this volume; Blomster, this volume; Hepp and Rieger, this volume; Winzenz, this volume; Looper 2003). Understanding the messages conveyed through regalia requires a literacy of the symbols and motifs relevant to the culture. The phenomenon of communication through clothing can be observed in cultures both ancient and modern. For instance, European monarchs wore elaborate articles of clothing to display their wealth and elite status. Undoubtedly, these rulers believed their right to rule was granted to them by access to specific aspects of the supernatural. Hocart claims that all kings are the representatives of gods (1927:7). “The king became a miracle worker. The ability to heal, visible evidence of each coronation’s supernatural nature, was first mentioned in twelfth-century texts” (Morgan 1967:29). These kings were seen as possessing divine or “miraculous” access to the supernatural. Through regalia obtained at coronations, kings were able to portray themselves visually as conduits between the natural and supernatural worlds.

In France the king was considered “the Sergeant of God,” the “king-priest,” or the “king magician” (Morgan 1967:29; Hocart 1927:40). This belief stemmed from the miracle baptism of Clovis, the founder and first king of France.³ Later, it is said, his wife was visited by an angel who announced that Clovis’s strength would increase if he displayed the fleur-de-lis as his royal emblem. Due to its origin, the royal emblem itself was considered godly (Morgan 1967:28–29). Louis XIV used the fleur-de-lis (Figure 11.1) as an abstract identifier of the semidivine status of France’s monarchs. The repetitive appearance of this symbolism on royal regalia (Figure 11.2) visually affirmed the wearer’s divine sanction. This was a clear message of Louis XIV’s high status to commoners and other royals alike.

Figure 11.1. Fleur-de-lis motif used as a royal emblem.
Figure 11.2. Portrait of Louis XIV, King of France, in royal costume. Note the use of repetitive fleur-de-lis motifs on the robe. 1701 Erich Lessing/ART RESOURCE, NY.
The rulers of ancient Mesoamerica also understood the “billboard” effect created by certain aspects of regalia advertizing the wearer’s supernatural prowess. The monuments of Native American cultures indicate that regalia was used as an ideal place for rulers to convey messages about themselves, their status, and their supernatural abilities. Certainly, many of the knots and ropes incorporated into Olmec regalia were an effort to identify the ruler as a being who was wrapped in the sacred. This is the same manner in which a ritual bundle was wrapped and contained the sacred objects that acted as keys to ritually unlock the portal to supernatural power (Guernsey and Reilly 2006; Reilly 2006).

In the following pages we first describe how regalia functions as a framing device acting similarly to framing bands by delineating space and creating a narrative (Earley and Guernsey, this volume). Then, in order to recognize the function of regalia as symbolic bundling, we discuss the key characteristics of sacred bundles within Formative period Mesoamerica. We will do so by examining three Formative period ritual regalia sets. In conclusion, we present a hypothesis that interprets bundles and bundle-like regalia as playing an important role within the Olmec rituals associated with maize agriculture.

**REGALIA AS A FRAMING DEVICE**

Artistic renderings called framing devices are often found surrounding ritual actions depicted in Mesoamerican art and iconography. Such framing devices separate scenes from one another while adding context and aiding in the viewer’s comprehension of the actions taking place. At times, the framing device acts as a locative, identifying in what realm the ritual action is taking place. For example, the skybands commonly found above or surrounding ritual scenes in Mesoamerican art act as locatives (Earley and Guernsey, this volume; Taube 1995:91–95).

As many authors have stated, ritual regalia identifies the ruler or ritual performer as sacred (O’Day, this volume; Reilly 1994; Schele 1995). This elaborate attire often incorporates large headdresses and backracks, creating a ritual space within the actual costume. With such additions, regalia and ritual clothing served as a visual separation between elite practitioners and other members of society who constituted the audience. Regalia also served to identify religious performers and practitioners not only as conduits of sacredness but as messengers to the divine, within ritual activities and space.

Mesoamerican elite expressed different degrees of sacredness through the delineation of space. As ritual space becomes increasingly sacred, it also
becomes more restricted. The contraction of space allows fewer people to access the rituals being performed. One example of this during the Formative period is found at the Olmec site of La Venta (Figure 11.3). The area where the general public could witness and/or participate in rituals (Complex B) was a relatively large plaza and, by its very size, allowed for many to view the proceedings. Proceeding north through Complex B toward the more restricted area of Complex A, areas of increasingly limited space were undoubtedly reserved.
Ritual regalia sets continue this pattern of restriction by creating a ritual space limited to a single individual. This observation illustrates that regalia encompasses a physical three-dimensional area of the most sacred space, accessible only to the most important members of society. Certainly, this is the type of space that is created by the headdress and backrack worn by the Maya king Jasaw Chan K’awiil on Tikal Stela 16 (Figure 11.4; Freidel and Guenter 2006:66). In this instance, the regalia literally and figuratively frames the individual, indicating both his ritual and, therefore, political importance.

A prominent political power expressed by Mesoamerican rulers is the ability to navigate between cosmic realms and communicate with gods and ancestors.
(Reilly 1994:132; Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993; Freidel and Schele 1990; Schele and Miller 1986; Eliade 1964:147). This ability was showcased through elaborate ritual regalia. As the clothing acts as a tool by sanctifying the wearer, it also acts as a framing device exemplifying this specific supernatural power of ancestral communication. For instance, Lady Wak Tun is shown communicating with an ancestor whom she has accessed from a smoky serpent through the act of ritual bloodletting on Yaxchilán Lintel 15 (Figure 11.5; Schele and Miller 1986:188). As discussed later in this chapter, Lady Wak Tun’s clothing is covered with a pattern that relates to Formative period bundle motifs. It is our belief that the purpose of these binding and bundle motifs on ritual regalia is twofold, in that it is both practical and symbolic. The motifs literally transform the individual into a sacred bundle while symbolically demonstrating the regalia as a framing device that surrounds the sacredness within its folds.

SACRED BUNDLES

As Guernsey and Reilly stated in the introduction to the edited volume Sacred Bundles, “The act of wrapping not only veiled objects, monuments, and individuals, but also enhanced their sacredness through their concealment” (2006:v). The fact that an object was bundled was indicative of its sacredness and thus ritual value. The most sacred of objects, from small portable items to monumental sculptures, were bundled or represented as bundles (Guernsey and Reilly 2006; Reese-Taylor et al. 2006; Miller and Taube 1993). This kept the objects hidden from view until they were unwrapped within the performance of sacred rituals. In order to identify the act of bundling we describe four motif categories: simple horizontal binding, binding in a crossed-bands pattern, binding with the use of knots, and binding with knots in groups of three.

Simple binding consists of multiple horizontal lines, sometimes appearing in a woven mat pattern. Often these lines are depicted in great detail as resembling rope. A small ceramic bird vessel from Tlatilco (Figure 11.6) displays the use of such simple binding.

Binding in a crossed-bands pattern appears as a Saint Andrew’s diagonal cross, as either plain lines or intertwined ropes, within a box. The base of San Lorenzo Monument 15 (Figure 11.7), though fragmented, depicts an individual seated in a way indicating that the monument was a throne (Reilly 2002; Grove 1973). This throne is itself bound in the crossed-bands motif.

We define knots as bindings prominently displaying basic ties or overhand knots. In the Maya example, a knot (seen in Figure 11.5) secures Lady Wak
Tun’s headdress on Yaxchilán Lintel 15. The pattern of knot binding in the sequence of three is particularly distinctive. Often the three ties appear at the sides of an object. This sequence of three knots is a motif worthy of note in itself, appearing in bundle imagery with great regularity (Reilly 2006). It emerges on small and monumental sculptures alike and in various media. Joralemon (1974) has previously identified the triple-knot motif as a signal for ritual bloodletting while Taube (2000) has connected it with fire ceremony.

An Olmec piece that displays a full array of bundle motifs is the Chalcatzingo Vase (Reilly 2006). The image on the vase (Figure 11.8) is not only topped by bound maize in which feathers take the place of vegetation (Taube 1995:88–89) but the bundle is also flanked by the previously discussed triple-knot motif. Close observation reveals that three knots also flank the central image—two tied and one opened (Reilly 2006, 1994). The center knot, depicted untied, reveals a masklike face inside the bundle (Reilly 2006:1, 1994). To illustrate this central item’s sacredness further and to inform the viewer that this was indeed a ritual object intended to be kept bundled, the artist surrounds it with even more bundle imagery. Below the profiled face are more crossed bands with the triple-knot pattern on either side as well as a knot at the back of the
head. All of these motifs can be found within regalia sets that symbolize this act of bundling and implied sacredness.

In a previous publication, Reilly has stated that each piece of a ritual practitioner’s regalia is a complex assemblage of symbolic information (1994:45). In turn, we have found examples of the bundle motif in each major piece of ritual regalia: for instance, belts, bindings on legs, neck wraps, headdresses, capes, or the appearance of three wraps on the body.

A small jade maskette depicts an individual with a knotted neck wrap (Figure 11.9). This neck wrap is similar to one worn around the neck of a jaguar participating in a sacrificial ceremony before a wrapped stela on a Maya Polychrome vessel (Figure 11.10; Guernsey 2006:29). The knotted band around the jaguar’s neck mimics the cloth band surrounding the stela on which it is
perched. The knotted neck wrap within this ritual context leads us to believe it is also a reference to sacred bundling.

Many images of regalia exhibit more than one bundle motif on numerous articles of clothing. A number of the Olmec colossal basalt heads have ropes incorporated into their headdresses. Certainly, the presence of these motifs is exhibited on San Lorenzo Monument 4 (Figure 11.11; Diehl 2004:112). In addition to the simple binding, indicated by the four ropes across the individual’s forehead, SLM 4 also has the bundle motif appearing as binding in the pattern of three ropes along the left side of the wearer’s face.

The individual depicted on La Venta Monument 77 (Figure 11.12) not only wears a belt consisting of simple binding with the crossband motif in the center, but there is a second set of boxed Saint Andrew’s crossed bands upon his chest. Across his back is draped a bundle-like cape (Figure 11.13) consisting of four horizontal ropes representing simple binding. Cleft maize seeds sprout from small crossbands sporadically along the ropes (Reilly 2006:17; Taube 1996). In the center of the cape, topped with a small cleft, is a tall pillar-like bundle. The cape itself has been interpreted as a bundled view of the anthropomorphic figure on the obverse side (Reilly 2006:16–18; Taube 1996). This literal depiction of a sacred individual wrapped within his own regalia leads us into the following section, in which we discuss how these motifs are used within Formative ritual dress.

**FORMATIVE PERIOD REGALIA SETS**

The use of the bundle motif is revealed through the examination of three major categories of Formative period ritual regalia sets: World Centering⁴ regalia, Ritual Flight⁵ regalia, and the World Tree⁶ or Creation regalia (Reilly 1994). These regalia sets frame the wearer within a ritual space, marking them a conduit to the supernatural world. When these regalia sets involve bundle
Figure 11.11. Illustration of bundle motifs on San Lorenzo Monument 4. Note the ropes and pattern of three bindings along the front and sides of the head. Redrawn by Eleazar Hernandez after Kevin Wilkerson.

Figure 11.12. La Venta Monument 77 with banding motifs on the belt and chest. Seated figure: from north of Great Pyramid, La Venta. ARTstor Collection Source: University of California, San Diego.

Figure 11.13. Illustration of La Venta Monument 77, rear view. Note the ropes across the back of the cape. Redrawn by Eleazar Hernandez after Kent Reilly.
imagery, the clothing frames the wearer as a sacred object intended to be “unwrapped” for that particular event.

World Centering regalia often includes bundled maize or vegetation appearing as either part of the headdress or in the form of a scepter (Fields 1982), like those held by the figure on Teopantecuanitlan Monolith 1 (Figure 11.14). The figure also wears a belt with crossbands and simple binding. The headdress mirrors this motif and displays maize elements. When the crossed bands appear on World Centering regalia sets, they represent the wearer as a sacred bundle and the “center of the sky and natural order” (Reilly 1994:156).

Our examination has found that the bundle motifs in the Ritual Flight regalia set most often appear as a belt or on the waist. Frequently, boxed crossed bands (Figure 11.15) appear upon the belted figure. The crossed bands are widely thought to represent the celestial realm (Reilly 1995:36; Taube 1995:88), but they also symbolize the binding of ritual bundles.

Reilly (1994) has previously suggested that the maize bundle, appearing on the loincloths of various Formative period figures wearing the Creation regalia set (Figure 11.16), is ancestral to the Maya World Tree. As Taube has stated (1996:50–54), the maize fetish may be a substitute for the World Tree.7 If the bundles are representative of the World Tree, the wearers present themselves as the axis mundi. Within this regalia, the wearer claims the most sacred of spaces, the center of the world.

**Bundling Within the Olmec Maize Cult**

As we have shown, there is strong evidence to suggest that bundle imagery was an important inclusion in ritual regalia; however, how is this imagery
incorporated within the broader spectrum of the Olmec belief system? Freidel (1996:7) offers insight to the Olmec world view by stating, “[T]he Olmec vision layered the cycle of maize, the cycle of human life, and the patterns of the wheeling stars upon each other in a dense description of elemental cause and effect.” As maize was a key component for aspects of Olmec life, it was also a key part of ritual regalia. As a sacred plant and a symbol of some of the most powerful Mesoamerican gods, maize itself was deified (Diehl 2004:87; Taube 1995; Reilly 1994). Therefore, it is no great wonder that the Olmec elite would wish to harness and identify themselves with this sacredness. To emphasize their connection with sacred maize, the ritual actors would combine the maize motif and its bundle wrapping with their regalia.

Maize symbolism, paired with the bundle motif, is most commonly found on headdresses and objects that are held or carried as part of ritual regalia. Diehl (2004:87) claims that maize symbolism appearing in headdresses indicates a maize god, once again illustrating a connection between bundles and maize. As Taube has stated (1995:88), bundles of quetzal feathers are a common part of maize deity clothing, symbolizing the leaves of growing maize plants. Other maize motifs associated with bundle symbolism include a cleft

**Figure 11.16.** Illustration of greenstone figure from Puebla as an example of the Creation regalia set. Unprovenienced. Redrawn by Eleazar Hernandez after Kent Reilly.
sprouting motif, tri-lobed maize elements (Taube 1996), and the previously discussed triple wraps or ties.

Often paired are the tri-lobed maize motif sprouting from a cleft and the three-wrap motif. On the Chalcatzingo Vase (Figure 11.8), for example, the tri-lobed maize motif is paired with a bundle motif below. These interconnected motifs are also present on the bundle-like object held by the Xoc figure in Figure 11.17. At the apex of the object is the tri-lobed maize motif.
Incorporated into the wrapping on the bundle are sprouting ears of corn (Taube 1996:75). The object appears to have been bound with the three-wrap motif, though the figure’s arm is likely covering the third tie (Reilly 2006:5). At the base of the bundled tablet, below the arm, is a knot. Although the figure is not wearing the maize bundle motif directly, the object is obviously a part of the regalia set as well as a clear focus of the performed ritual. It is important to note the resemblance of this bundle-like object and the image of the unwrapped bundle depicted on the Chalcatzingo Vase. It may be that the Xoc figure is carrying the wrapped equivalent to the unwrapped image on the vase (Reilly 2006).

Other images demonstrate the combination of maize and bundle motifs integrated into headdresses (Figures 11.18, 11.19, 11.20). The figure on the celt
from Arroyo Pesquero, Mexico (Figure 11.18), wears a headdress bundle with a sprouting cleft of vegetation. The vegetation is bound with simple binding secured by a knot at the back of the head. Also, the buccal mask worn by the individual is exceptionally similar to the mask enclosed within the bundle on the Chalcatzingo Vase (Reilly 2006), lending more evidence to the theory that the vase’s bundle encloses sacred vestiges of regalia only to be worn ceremonially. The masked face on Figure 11.19 and the Chalcatzingo Vase have distinct similarities with what Joralemon (1971) identified as God II. God II may have had strong associations with maize (Miller and Taube 1993:127; Joralemon 1971). What Fields (1982, 1991) termed the “Jester God” headdress (Figure 11.19) consists of binding with crossbands beneath a tri-lobed maize motif. Fields has suggested that the El Sitio celt (Figure 11.20) shows a prototypical “Jester God” headdress, later adopted and depicted on many Olmec figures (Fields 1991, 1982; Freidel 1990).

The Seated Figure (B-592) in the Dumbarton Oaks collection (Figure 11.21) is another example of the maize and bundle motif combination. The figure wears a belt with simple binding along the sides and crossed bands in the center. Binding appears on the figure’s legs in a pattern that combines the simple rope binding and crossed bands. The figure’s headdress is topped with the telltale tri-lobed maize motif, sprouting from a cleft head that greatly resembles the individual’s own face. Below the maize motif are four celts, flanking what likely represents a mirror. Taube (1996) has stated that these four celts are symbolic of the four cycles of maize. The two celts on the left side of the mirror (Figure 11.22) both display the bundle’s crossbands motif. At the bottom of the celt on the far right (Figure 11.23) is what could be a bundle of maize making up the mouth of a face. The celt directly to the right of the mirror (Figure 11.24) has diagonally wrapped markings similar to those displayed on the bound stela appearing on Chalcatzingo Monument 21 (Figure 11.25; Schele 1995:109). Chalcatzingo Monument 21 bears the image of a woman either wrapping or unwrapping a stela (Reilly 2006, 1994), again emphasizing the Olmec ritual compulsion to bundle all types of sacred objects. Reilly (2006:7) hypothesizes that a third wrap or tie would be visible at the apex of the stela had the monument been found intact. Chalcatzingo Monument 21 is a Formative period example of what Stuart (1996) identified as Classic Maya rituals involving the bundling of a stela. In sum, were the Dumbarton Oaks figurine representative of a genuine form of Olmec ritual dress, the wearer would be wrapping himself or herself in multiple levels of sacredness.
Figure 11.21. Drawing of the incising on the Seated Figure, Dumbarton Oaks Collection B-592. Note the bundle motifs on chest, legs, and headdress. Redrawn by Eleazar Hernandez after Karl Taube (2004:105–21).

Figure 11.22. Detail of the two celts, to the viewer’s left, on the headdress of the Dumbarton Oaks Figure. Drawing by Eleazar Hernandez.

Figure 11.23. Detail of the rightmost celt on the headdress of the Dumbarton Oaks Figure. Drawing by Eleazar Hernandez.

Figure 11.24. Detail of the celt to the right of the mirror on the headdress of the Dumbarton Oaks Figure. Drawing by Eleazar Hernandez.
CONCLUSION

Regalia proves itself to be a tool for connecting political power to the act of accessing the supernatural. Reflecting the old adage “the clothes make the man,” Formative period ritual performers link themselves to the sacredness embodied in the natural world through their ritual clothing. When ritual regalia is present, the wearer becomes a billboard on which the regalia expresses the individual’s ability to access that power which embodied, and thus animated, the sacredness of the cosmos. As the ritual performers wear images of sacred bundles, they are literally wrapped in sacredness, becoming a sacred bundle themselves. Just as a specific regalia set in some shamanic societies emphasizes a particular animal and gives the wearer that animal’s attributes (Lommel 1967:107), ritual regalia consisting of knots or ties transforms the wearer into an individual worthy of being bundled and all the sacredness that this entails. As ritual performers use bundle imagery to enhance their sacredness, they also combine it with the important maize motif to emphasize their connection within the natural and spiritual world. It is our contention that the binding of this sacred ritual performer creates further separation of the individual from not only the spectators but the other ritual participants as well.

NOTES

1. A tableau refers to the arrangement of props that, when viewed as a whole, relays a particular meaning or narrative—for example, Loma del Zapote Monuments 7, 8, and 9.
2. “Upstreaming” is defined as tracing symbolic connections from a culture’s regional descendents (Joralemon 1971).
3. Clovis was a barbarian king who became master of the Franks and who helped to defeat the Roman army. Though he worshipped pagan gods, he swore to convert to Christianity if he was successful in battle against the Roman emperor. True to his word, Clovis and many of his men were baptized after the victory. The ceremony was performed by Saint Rémi, the bishop of Reims. The baptism saw Clovis become the first Christian ruler of France while sealing the bond between France and the Christian church. Four centuries later, the archbishop of Reims, Hincmar, recounted the baptism as being miraculous, exaggerating in order to strengthen the church’s connections to the monarchy. Hincmar claimed that a white dove (the messenger of God) holding a phial of chrism descended to anoint Clovis during the ceremony. Thus began the belief in France that the coronation of a king was equal to a baptism or an appointment by god (Morgan 1967:27–30).

4. World Centering regalia is costuming that references the ruler as the axis mundi, or center of the cardinal directions. This position indicates the ruler’s ability to maintain the balance of the natural order (Reilly 1994).

5. Ritual Flight regalia is costuming that contains locative imagery of the sky realm. The celestial symbolism suggests that the ruler/wearer is the center of the sky (Reilly 1994).

6. World Tree regalia is costuming that indicates the ruler is acting as the “First Father” or raiser of the World Tree (Reilly 1994).

7. A maize fetish is a wrapped handheld bundle of maize stalks or feathers (often a substitute for maize vegetation). Maize fetishes are prominent in contemporary Puebla rituals and, as Taube has identified (1996:68–72), a prominent feature in Olmec art.

REFERENCES
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INTRODUCTION

The recently excavated murals of the Pinturas structure at the site of San Bartolo, Guatemala (ca. 100 BCE), have added substantial information about the early development of Maya cosmology and political ideology as well as the iconography through which they were expressed. The murals’ distinctive narrative format, their sequential scenes, and their use of color provide greater context in which to understand the symbolic and ritual functions of cloth and costume among the Late Formative Maya. Their stylistic sophistication speaks to a well-established iconographic and painting tradition (Saturno 2009). They expand the symbols and ideology of the Middle Formative Olmec, one that was shared by Late Formative communities of various ethnicities and would later be inherited by the Classic Maya (see Guernsey 2006).

The San Bartolo murals are discussed in two definitive studies published by the Boundary End Archaeology Research Center (formerly the Center for Ancient American Studies) and in several papers (Saturno et al. 2005a; Saturno et al. 2006; Saturno 2009). The interpretation of narrative scenes, the identification of individuals, and the numbers assigned to them are adopted from these studies; however, an “N” prefix is used to denote the north wall and a “W” for the west wall. The artist and scholar Heather Hurst produced all of the drawings and renderings used herein. A brief summary of the murals’ narrative content is found in the endnotes.

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the textile techniques represented in the San Bartolo murals and is followed by an examination of the concept of
clothing as the embodiment of life-essence that could be absorbed from deities who wore them. In turn, such garments could impart this vital essence to awaken deities, to enliven their effigies, or to transform ritual impersonators. Iconographic clues in the murals and related images indicate that the ancient Maya also regarded such garments and regalia as supernaturally charged and alive. Then two garment types are discussed at length, one the cloth pouches associated with bloodletting worn over loincloths, the other a “string” cape. And, finally, focusing on two motifs in the celestial register, symbolic representations of binding, bundling, and wrapping in the murals are discussed.

I focus on certain aspects of cloth and clothing that operate as symbolic subtexts whose meanings are often obscured by the functional aspects that we associate with them. As Matthew G. Looper (2006:81) has pointed out, technologies related to fabrics and textiles are “mode[s] of constructing meaning in a variety of cultural domains including religion and socio-political organization.” Thus even a simple woven band may embody ideological concepts well beyond itself. Weaving was practiced by ancient Maya women at all levels of society, and textiles crafted with complexity and virtuosity would have held an intrinsic value that was commonly understood. Likewise, the symbolic vocabulary of cloth would have had a common currency.

This study assumes that every aspect of clothing, adornment, and cloth depicted in the San Bartolo murals and elsewhere in the Late Formative period had symbolic valence. Garments in all cultures are emblematic by nature, denoting age, sex, status, wealth, and group affiliation. In Precolumbian cultures—and in nonindustrialized cultures worldwide—cloth and items fabricated from cloth were not just utilitarian. They were embedded with social, political, and cosmological symbolism often expressed by means of ritualized events, rites of passage, and performances (see Chapter 3, this volume; Schneider 1987; Weiner and Schneider 1989). The use of fine textiles in rituals is common throughout the world, but control over the political economy of cloth by elites is of particular interest in linking cloth to the ideology and institutions of rulership in ancient Mesoamerica.4

Helms (1993) argued persuasively that imported exotic materials as well as finely crafted objects took on a supernatural, even sacred, aura in the ancient Americas.5 She writes of the transformation that many preindustrial cultures attribute to skilled crafting—a process that invests the object with a magical, even supernatural character (Helms 1993:16–23). Fine crafting was facilitated by “the ritually defined manipulation of intangible forces aided by application of personal qualities and skills believed themselves derived from outside forces or beings” (Helms 1993:18). Finely crafted textiles also played a
major role in the ideological strategies of Mesoamerican rulers by supporting their claims of privileged access to the supernatural realm upon which their authority rested.

It is feasible that the ancient Maya regarded the weaving of exceptionally fine and intricately patterned cloth as a transformative act. Weaving had a religious significance in the Precolumbian era and may even have been considered as a sacrosanct activity by the ancient Maya, as is the case for some modern descendents (Altman and West 1992:26; Prechtel and Carlsen 1988). In highland Maya communities, female Catholic saints and aspects of the Virgin Mary are believed to be the original weavers as well as the teachers and patrons of weaving. Weavers, especially neophytes, pray to them to bless their endeavors (Morris 1987a:68, 116; Prechtel and Carlsen 1988; Tarn and Prechtel 1986). Furthermore, woven ritual garments may have been regarded as supernaturally charged by the ancient Maya. Since the San Bartolo murals depict rituals enacted by deities, an analogy can be drawn to the reverence held by some contemporary Maya groups toward the weavings used to clothe the statues of saints.

TEXTILE TECHNIQUES REPRESENTED AT SAN BARTOLO

Pollen cores from San Bartolo with a radiocarbon date range of 780–410 BCE contained maize, manioc, and cotton, all thought to be widely cultivated in the area (Garrison and Dunning 2009:538). Thus it is probable that the San Bartolo elite wore clothing of woven cotton by the time the murals were created. Given the detail in which garments are painted, it appears that finely woven cotton cloth had also been incorporated in the political ideology and economy.

Taylor (1992:514) argues that on Late Classic vases the painting medium itself obscures the distinction between designs created through brocading and designs applied with paint or dyes to plain cloth after it has been removed from the loom (although techniques such as tie-dye are easy to identify). However, many of the garments in the San Bartolo murals are carefully rendered, and I suggest that subtle changes in the way garments are represented were intended to denote different decorative techniques. The curved scale-like shapes, circles, and dots on the back loincloth panel worn by Chahk (N6) are lightly rendered, perhaps indicating a painted design (Figure 12.1a). Light dashed lines on skirts worn by three corn maidens attending the Maize God (N7, N10, N11) may indicate embroidery done with a running stitch (see Chapter 13, this volume). The very bold black band at the lower edge of one skirt appears to make a
deliberate distinction between a stitched pattern and a woven stripe on the same garment (Figure 12.1b). If this is the case, then highly contrasting stripes on the west wall’s garments may also indicate that they were done during the weaving process rather than applied later to the surface.

**Figure 12.1.** Textile techniques on the San Bartolo murals: (a) painted designs on loincloth, San Bartolo (N6); drawing by Heather Hurst, courtesy of the Boundary End Archaeology Research Center; (b) skirt with stitched pattern and dark-colored selvage, San Bartolo (N11); drawing by Heather Hurst, courtesy of the Boundary End Archaeology Research Center; (c) brocaded loincloth, San Bartolo (W21); drawing by Heather Hurst, courtesy of the Boundary End Archaeology Research Center; (d) complex inlaid brocade design on God L’s garment, detail of rollout photograph K5359 © Justin Kerr, www.mayavase.com, reprinted with permission; (e) detail of huipil, Yaxchilán Lintel 24, computer-generated drawing by Chris Style after Martin and Miller 2004:plate 49; (f) twining diagram, after James 1972:fig. 140; (g) diagram of inlaid brocade, after D’Harcourt 1962:fig. 24 (courtesy of University of Washington Press).
On the west wall a unique individual (W21), likely the deceased king, wears a loincloth apron pivoted toward the viewer as an indication of its importance as a carrier of meaning (Figure 12.1c). Its black and white design is also highly contrasting, and its geometric patterns are the natural outcome of the grid structure of weaving. Designs on cloth can be created with a variety of techniques, including tie-dye, batik, printing with rollers and flat stamps, and direct painting on the surface. As a former textile artist and teacher familiar with such techniques, I can say unequivocally that, of all of these, complex inlaid brocading—especially with a high thread count—is the most time-consuming.8 The highly refined skills required and the time-intensive demands of inlaid brocade made it the likely choice for garments used in royal ritual and public performance (Hendon 2006:361).9 In ancient Maya culture, where every female wove, including those of the elite class, everyone understood the time-intensive character of inlaid brocade.10

In contrast to the deities on the north wall, who wear simple garments of white cloth with modest striped bands or simple borders, the loincloth apron of the royal ancestor on the west wall is more complex, thus communicating his wealth and status. Likewise, on a vase that presents an assemblage of gods prior to the dawning of the new era, the enthroned God L wears an elaborate long cape while the lesser deities wear short striped capes (see K7750).11 As a metaphor for the stripping of his power and wealth, the forcible removal of his garments and regalia is the subject of three Late Classic vases, one with an elaborate garment whose pattern is most likely brocaded (Figure 12.1d).

The elite Maya’s use of brocading in ritual cloth and costume can be further illuminated by another comparison to the ancient Andean world view regarding fine crafting. Ritual efficacy was particularly powerful when objects were crafted with technical redundancy. Often the chosen method of crafting was not the simplest way to achieve the object’s appearance. In her discussion of the labor-intensive techniques that dominated Andean metallurgy, Lechtman (1984) suggests that such preferences may have been driven by a conceptual requirement for the internal structure of an object to match its outer appearance. Mary Frame (1986) extended this concept to complicated Andean textile techniques such as discontinuous warp or weft (as in tapestry) and layered cloth. Since inlaid brocaded patterns are created row by row as the weaving progresses, it is possible that the correspondence of surface and woven structure was highly valued by the ancient Maya as well.

The extraordinary huipil (or tunic) worn by Lady Xok on Yaxchilán Lintel 24 was likely woven using the inlaid brocade technique, also called supplemental weft brocade (Morris 1985:75).12 Rendered in highly detailed bas relief
(Figure 12.1e), the image hints at the important role of finely crafted textiles in projecting the unique persona and power of the queen. This image is not necessarily a faithful representation since there were limitations to what could be achieved in stone. The actual thread count for a fine textile would have been much higher than depicted. However, I suggest that this emphasis on the actual weave of the fabric is a deliberate reference to the most prestigious of techniques, that of brocading. Andrea Stone (personal communication, 2010) pointed out that the shallow relief used to depict the pattern of the huipil is an indicator that the designs were produced through inlaid brocade and weft-float techniques that created a slight relief on the cloth surface. A diagram from the definitive book on Andean textile techniques (D’Harcourt 1962) shows a cross section of a brocaded design illustrating the slight relief that characterizes this technique (Figure 12.1g).

The “string” cape worn by the ancestral ruler (W21) was probably constructed with a twining technique with exposed vertical fibers as the warp (Figure 12.1c). Like weaving, twining starts with a set of parallel warp threads held in tension. Paired flexible fibers are twisted around the warp from edge to edge to create a structure (Figure 12.1f). The cape’s vertical warp is spaced apart so that the leg beneath is partially visible. Wider black and white patterned bands are worked at intervals, and additional threads twisted for stability are placed between them. The careful attention to technical details by the painter implies that the cape is not only unique in its structure but in its significance and its relationship to rulership, which I discuss later.

CLOTHING AND LIFE-ESSENCE

San Bartolo presents the earliest known version of the dressing of the Maize God, a theme seen on several pictorial Classic period vases (Freidel et al. 1993; Quenon and LeFort 1997; Figure 12.2a). Twin individuals carry sacred bundles containing the garments and accoutrements of the Maize God and his principal wife, who wear minimal clothing (Saturno et al. 2005b:41). Three beautiful maidens are prepared to assist in dressing them in preparation for the Maize God’s resurrection. Brian Stross (1998) identified dressing as one of seven actions performed by the contemporary Maya of Tenejapa, Chiapas, to ritually animate or ensoul objects. Dressing saints’ statues and large crosses with huipiles, scarves, and cloth is a common ritual practice in traditional highland Maya communities in Guatemala as well. This practice illuminates the extraordinary emphasis on the contents of the bundle associated with each deity of the Palenque Triad on the central panel of the Temple
Figure 12.2. Dressing and accession scenes at San Bartolo: (a) Maize God dressing scene, north wall, San Bartolo; drawing by Heather Hurst, courtesy of the Boundary End Archaeology Research Center; (b) dressing scene on K1005, drawing by Linda Schele © David Schele, Linda Schele Drawing Collection, http://www.famsi.org, courtesy of the Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies; (c) accession of the Maize God, San Bartolo (W12, 13); drawing by Heather Hurst, courtesy of the Boundary End Archaeology Research Center; (d) accession of a king, San Bartolo (W21, W22); drawing by Heather Hurst, courtesy of the Boundary End Archaeology Research Center.
of the Inscriptions. Their headdresses, necklaces, headbands, and earflares may have been used to transform these deities into sentient beings, manifesting their presence during Period Ending rituals.17

From the perspective of the symbolic and ritual functions of textiles, the close relationship of garments, life-essence, and bundling is highly significant. In Mesoamerican and Maya thought, the clothing and adornments of a god appear to have absorbed and embodied his or her very life-force. The role of clothing in rebirthing permeates the dressing scenes on Late Classic Maya painted vessels where jade jewels and garments breathe life into this deity (see Quenon and Le Fort, 1997). K1005 (Figure 12.2b), one of the best-known examples, depicts the Headband Twins, the Classic version of the Hero Twins of the *Popol Vuh*. Yax Balam (Xbalanque) holds aloft a large offering bowl containing the sacred regalia and jewelry of the Maize God. Hunahpu (Jun Ajaw), sitting on a supernatural aquatic creature, carries a huge bundle labeled with *ikaatz*, “burden” or “bundle,” on his back. A rather dazed Maize God enters at right holding his hand to his head, perhaps signaling that, although his body has been resurrected from his skull and bones collected in the Underworld by his sons, he is not fully sentient.18 This suggests that he must be dressed in his own clothing and regalia that contain his unique essence before he is fully revived. According to David Freidel and Stanley Guenter, “The jewels placed on the reborn Maize God not only represent his status and identity, but also *actually contain his soul* embodied in his bones and jewels” (2006:62, italics mine). His individual essence is also contained in his garments, which, along with his jewels, are the agents of his resurrection.19

The final scene on San Bartolo’s west wall depicts a scaffold accession, likely in the physical realm, where a scantily dressed human ruler-elect cradles a sacred bundle that may hold his jade jewels (Figure 12.2d). The individual before the scaffold extends the royal headdress with the trefoil symbol, an emblematic sign for maize that is first seen in the art of the Middle Formative Olmec (Fields 1991). This scene mirrors the accession of the Maize God (Figure 12.2c) in which he receives the royal headdress from one of his manifestations, the avian Maize God (Taube et al. 2010). The accession of the earthly king and that of the Maize God, both taking place on scaffolds, frame the episode depicting the mythic life cycle of the Maize God. In the *Popol Vuh* version of this myth, Hun Hunahpu dies and is resurrected as the Maize God. Functioning as a visual couplet, the two coronation scenes suggest that the mortal ruler metaphorically dies, is reborn, and assumes a divine state comparable to that of the Maize God.20
CLOTHING AS ANIMATE: THE LOINCLOTH 
AND ITS APRON PANELS

Certain garments and adornments could bestow or restore vital essence to an entity and, in a reciprocal metaphor; are frequently depicted as if they themselves possess life-essence. In his seminal paper “The Symbolism of Jade in Ancient Maya Religion,” Karl Taube (2005) discussed jade objects as the material embodiment of the “vitalizing breath.” For the ancient Maya the earspool was especially significant as the container of life-essence. The iconic vocabulary for this concept includes jade earflares or beads, paired volutes representing breath, and moisture symbols in various forms. These motifs are either affixed to or emerge from entities and supernaturally charged objects. Since the Feathered Serpent also represents breath and wind, jade earspools, pectorals, and belt assemblages—as well as cloth garments—are frequently depicted in Classic period Maya art with personified heads related to this “breath-serpent” (Figure 12.3a). The breath-serpent is represented in a variety of styles from the fairly naturalistic, to the emblematic, to the pars pro toto idiom in which a single salient feature stands for the whole. These serpent signs are not intended to depict actual objects but are purely symbolic, functioning as semantic signs (Taube 2005:37). Significantly, these signs are also attached to loincloth aprons and panels, leg and arm bindings, and other regalia made of cloth. For example, on the Leiden celt from the Early Classic period, stylized breath-serpent heads mark almost every item of dress including the back flap of the ruler’s headdress, his loincloth, his leg bindings, his jade earflares, and a chain of jewels that passes behind his thighs (see Schele and Miller 1986:plate 33).

On several Late Formative images, loincloths, front aprons, and belt knots either turn into serpents or are marked with breath-serpent heads. Often referred to as personification heads, they denote that such garments are to be understood as living things. On the murals, the back loincloth flap of a kneeling male attendant (N8) transforms from cross-striped woven cloth to a snake tail, suggesting that the loincloth is a living entity (Figure 12.3b). A small figure on Takalik Abaj Altar 12 wears a loincloth that transforms into a serpent head with jade bead and breath volutes (Figure 12.3c). An early version of Chahk on Izapa Stela 1 wears a loincloth that transforms seamlessly into a tumpline at one end and a serpent head with symmetrical breath volutes on the other end (Figure 12.3d). The Dumbarton Oaks pectoral depicts a seated ruler whose loincloth has symmetrical breath volutes attached to the right edge (Figure 12.3e). It is also marked with a U-shaped sign that is part of a symbol set denoting shiny, resplendent, or precious entities and objects.
Figure 12.3. Cloth garments with pars pro toto breath-serpent signs: (a) Late Classic fragment, Pomona area, redrawn after Taube 2005:fig. 16f (original drawing by Ian Graham); (b) loincloth, San Bartolo (N8), detail of rendering by Heather Hurst, courtesy of the Boundary End Archaeological Research Center; (c) loincloth, detail of Takalik Abaj Altar 12, detail redrawn after original by James Porter; (d) loincloth, Izapa Stela 1, detail after drawing by Ayax Moreno, courtesy of the New World Archaeological Foundation; (e) Dumbarton Oaks pectoral, detail redrawn after Schele and Miller 1987:plate 32; (f) ruler’s staff with cloth bands, Kaminaljuyu Stela 11, detail of drawing by Ayax Moreno, courtesy of the New World Archaeology Foundation.
The cloth band tied to the ruler’s staff on Kaminaljuyú Stela 11 also carries the “U” sign, here used as a modifier signaling the precious or even sacred character of the cloth (Figure 12.3f). This symbol is seen frequently in the San Bartolo murals and will be discussed further.

The San Bartolo murals depict a singing and dancing dwarf-like figure (W10) wearing a duck-billed mask and a bird costume (Figure 12.4a). Serpent fangs are appended to the side of his rear loincloth flap, a *pars pro toto* sign denoting the breath-serpent that is also seen on the Chahk figure (W17) seated in the turtle-portal on the west wall (Figure 12.4b). Breath-serpent images from the Protoclassic period confirm this identification (Figure 12.4d,e). A Late Formative jade celt depicts a dancing ruler; his belt carries a jade bead with breath volutes, and double fangs are appended to his back panel (Figure 12.4c). Kaminaljuyú Stela 19 depicts Chahk with a loincloth knot transforming into a serpent; two fang symbols mark his belt and his leg bindings end in serpent heads (Figure 12.4f).

Another symbol identified by Schellhas as God C is actually a sign that denotes something precious, sacred, or holy (Taube 1992:30). The God C sign is the animate form of the so-called “mirror” sign, a glyph that may be read as LEM, “shine” or “flash” (Stuart 2010:292). Izapa Stela 4 (Figure 12.5a) depicts a loincloth apron with the God C sign, one that will become more common in the Late Classic. On monuments of the period, many loincloth panels carry a group of motifs that signify their animate character, including the God C sign, abbreviated breath-serpent signs (such as fret-noses and fangs), and cloth that curves and writhes as if alive (Figures 12.5b–d). The symbolic relationship between serpents and cloth bands may be operating here. The antecedent to this feature may be the bifurcated loincloth aprons seen on twin figures (N13, N14) at San Bartolo (see Figure 12.6a).

On Late Classic monuments, loincloth panels are depicted with animated cloth and signs denoting luminous or sacred qualities (such as breath volutes, motifs related to the breath-serpent, and the God C sign) that occur in various overlapping combinations. By applying structural analysis, a methodology that allows the iconographer “to seek underlying equivalencies of meaning in superficially diverse forms” (Stone 1983:11), it can be shown that these symbols are semantically equivalent as part of a substitution set. In three
FIGURE 12.4. Formative period loincloths and panels with pars pro toto breath-serpent signs: (a) dwarf’s loincloth (see circle), San Bartolo (W10); drawing by Heather Hurst, courtesy of the Boundary End Archaeological Research Center; (b) Chahk sitting in the turtle-portal, loincloth with serpent jaw and fangs, San Bartolo (W17); drawing by Heather Hurst, courtesy of the Boundary End Archaeological Research Center; (c) unprovenienced celt, redrawn after unpublished drawing by John Montgomery; (d) Avian Serpent with breath scrolls; drawing by author after vessel K2786, rollout photograph © Justin Kerr; (e) breath-serpent head, Leiden plaque, detail redrawn after Schele and Miller 1987:plate 33a; (f) Chahk wearing loincloth, belt, and leg bindings with serpent motifs, Kaminaljuyu Stela 19, detail after Guernsey 2005:fig. 3.15, courtesy of Julia Guernsey.
examples (Figure 12.5b–d) cloth bands that form the interlace motif have animated ends or terminate with the “sak” sign, perhaps denoting woven cloth. But on Aguateca Stela 1 and Yaxchilán Lintel 3, the God C sign and references to the breath-serpent are dropped, and only highly animated cloth
Figure 12.6. Bundles, pouches, and perforators related to bloodletting: (a) pouches on loincloth aprons, San Bartolo (N13, N14), detail of drawing by Heather Hurst after Saturno et al. 2005b, courtesy of the Boundary End Archaeology Research Center; (b) dancer with waist bundle and personified bloodletter, Altar de Sacrificios vase, detail drawn by author after Freidel et al. 1993:fig. 6.9; (c) way figure wearing blood-spotted bundle-pouch, detail of K1256, rollout photograph © Justin Kerr, redrawn by author after Freidel et al. 1993:fig. 6.7a; (d) Akan dancer with bloodied waist bundle, detail drawn by author after K2942, rollout photograph © Justin Kerr; (e) death god known as Akan with bloodied waist bundle, detail drawn by author after K1256, rollout photograph © Justin Kerr; (f) frontal view of bundle and personified bloodletter worn over loincloth, detail of Reitberg Stela, drawing courtesy of Matthew G. Looper; (g) waist bundle in frontal view, Tikal Altar 5, detail redrawn by author after Harrison 1999:fig. 80; (h) side view of pouch holding personified perforator, La Pasadita Lintel 2, detail redrawn by author after Tate 1992:fig. 38b (original drawing by Ian Graham); (i) side view of perforator bound with cloth and three knots superimposed over loincloth, Yaxchilán Stela 1, detail redrawn by author after Tate 1992:fig. 124b (original drawing by Ian Graham); (j) blood-spotted waist bundle with knife inserted into tied band, detail drawn by author after K5856, rollout photograph © Justin Kerr; (k) way figure in bloodletting dance carrying a bundle marked with glyphs denoting a medicinal remedy, K5844, rollout photograph © Justin Kerr, detail drawn after Schele 1998:fig. 17b.
bands remain, writhing as if alive (Figures 12.5e,f). I conclude that, within this range of overlapping substitution patterns, depictions of animated cloth could operate independently of other signs as indicators of the vital essence that certain garments possessed.26

CLOTH CONTAINERS FOR STINGRAY SPINES AND THEIR LATE CLASSIC ANALOGS

At San Bartolo the garments of twin figures (N13, N14) have circular disks with knots at their waists that appear to secure pouch-like shapes in front of the loincloth apron (Figure 12.6a). These pouches extend below the genital area and stingray spines protrude from their openings. As indicated by knotted cloth at their bases, the spines themselves may have been partly wrapped to prevent accidental cutting. There is no doubt that these cloth pouches are containers. On Late Classic Maya painted vessels a recurrent motif associated with genital bloodletting is a bloodied bundle or pouch attached to the loincloth apron or tied to the waistbands of practitioners. These bundles may have their iconic origin in the functional pouches that held perforators used to draw blood. The inverted “perforator god” on the loincloth aprons depicted on Copán Stelae A, B, and D rests near the genitals of the ruler. This icon or motif marked the small bags that likely held stingray spines and were worn on the belts of practitioners during bloodletting rituals, a practice that “accounts for the frequent presence of stingray spines around the pelvic areas of excavated skeletons” (Schele and Miller 1986:71, 171).

I propose that the descendents of the San Bartolo pouches are the ubiquitous, blood-splattered bundle forms depicted on Late Classic vessels where they are worn at the waist or are merged with loincloth aprons. Although there are many formal variations, they are typically secured to the waist with a knotted band (Figures 12.6b–e). On the famous Altar de Sacrificios vase, a dancer—either a way (pl. wayob) or a human transforming into a way—wears a waist bundle to which a personified perforator is affixed (Figure 12.6b).27 In Mesoamerican iconography, images appended to bags, containers, and bundles are frequently used as indicators of their contents. On another painted vessel, a reclining ritualist with a lower jaw reminiscent of Pax, black bound hair, and a kimi-marked loincloth holds a giant personified perforator while an actual, life-sized perforator or blade is tucked into the knotted band that attaches a bloodied bundle to his waist (Figure 12.6j). Like their Late Formative counterparts, such slipknots suggest that pouches or bundles could be removed and opened during rituals.
Some scholars have suggested that this circular motif depicts a rigid, donut-shaped cloth placed over the penis (Kerr, personal communication, 2007). In his description of Tikal Temple 3, Lintel 3, Looper (2009:138) refers to these shapes as cloth or paper “waist medallions,” a description that implies flatness. However, Reents-Budet (1994:272) refers to a similar motif as “a bulbous tie splattered with blood,” suggesting something padded and dimensional. The Reitberg Stela (Figure 12.6f) presents a frontal view of the personified perforator superimposed over a rounded shape that appears to be flat. However, as with one of the pouches at San Bartolo, the short lines on the outer edge of a waist bundle on Tikal Altar 5 represent the distortion of cloth when wrapped around padded objects (Figure 12.6g). On La Pasadita Lintel 2 (Figure 12.6h) the personified perforator motif is portrayed in profile, its top projecting from a pouch or bundle with the three knotted-bands emblem denoting bloodletting. On Yaxchilán Stela 1 the perforator is affixed as an indicator of the bundle’s contents (Figure 12.6i). The bundle-like forms in both images are bulky, suggesting that they likely carried perforators wrapped in layers of cloth.

Elsewhere I have argued that the bundles carrying perforators may also have held medicinal remedies and cloth strips used to treat the wounds sustained in ritual bloodletting (Winzenz 2008a, 2008b), as seen in Figure 12.6k, where a way dances with a bundle tied around his neck. The three canonical knots, a major emblem for bloodletting in the Late Classic, may have derived from the cloth strips used for binding up these wounds. If this is the case, we have yet another example to add to the symbolic vocabulary of cloth. The bloodied waist bundle enlarges the repertoire of sacred bundles of the ancient Maya. In dances following bloodletting, this bundle form is often the sole signifier of autosacrifice. Even if the bloodied waist bundles depicted on Classic vases are purely symbolic, which in many cases they may be, I suggest that the motif was likely derived from a functional counterpart that goes back to the Late Formative images at San Bartolo.

**THE “STRING” CAPE**

I return to the individual (W21) wearing the string cape discussed earlier (Figure 12.7a). He also wears a headdress related to the Principal Bird Deity (PBD), a deity that plays a prominent role in the supernatural validation of Late Formative rulers who are often dressed in his distinctive costume (see Guernsey 2006). I suggest that this is the deceased king who, recalled from the otherworld, transfers royal authority to his son. The black mark around his mouth is also seen on the large, Early Classic lidded bowl recently excavated...
Figure 12.7. The “string” cape: (a) ancestral figure, San Bartolo (W21), drawing by Heather Hurst, courtesy of the Boundary End Archaeology Research Center; (b) Becan vessel, drawing by author after Finamore and Houston 2010:plate 82; (c) detail of string cape, La Mojarra Stela 1, drawing courtesy of George Stuart; (d) Akan figures, details drawn by author after K5043, rollout photograph © Justin Kerr; (e, f) Akan figures, details drawn by author after K1490, rollout photograph © Justin Kerr; (g) Yaxchilán Stela 9, after Tate 1992:fig. 126, courtesy of Carolyn Tate; (h) string cape worn in bloodletting ritual, detail drawn by author after K2783, rollout photograph © Justin Kerr.
at Becan (Figure 12.7b) that depicts a mythic combat between three humans and a huge saurian monster or earth crocodile in which the humans are killed and eviscerated (Finamore and Houston 2010:251). The string cape recalls those depicted on many Late Classic vessels worn by Akan, formerly nicknamed “God A prime” (Grube 2004), or worn by impersonators of this death god (Figures 12.7d–f).

These Late Classic capes come in a wide variety of styles: sometimes full length, sometimes short, some with geometric designs, some with bone, eyeball, or shell motifs, and some made of torn cloth strips. But the common denominator is bold black-and-white patterning or stripes and, in most cases, elongated string fringes. As a death god, Akan is invariably associated with death and the underworld, with wayob and other supernaturals and with scenes depicting or implying sacrifice, often by decapitation. In a dressing scene on a painted vessel, two attendants wear black-and-white capes with a geometric pattern and wide-brimmed hats related to the Akan complex (Figure 12.7d). On the same vessel, two bundles, one opened to display a headdress and bar pectoral, confirm that garments and regalia were stored in bundles in the Classic period just as they were in the Late Formative (see Figure 12.9g). Looper (see Chapter 13, this volume) compares the string cape at San Bartolo to that worn by a ruler on La Mojarra Stela 1 from the same period (Figure 12.7c). Royal accession appears to have been conceptually connected with the symbolic death of a ruler prior to his coronation. The string cape may symbolize this concept, although how this translates into ritual action is unclear. Linking sacrifice, bloodletting, and symbolic death, the string or torn cloth cape is also found in scenes involving autosacrifice (Figures 12.7g–h).

The concept of a metaphoric death prior to royal investiture may also inform the accession scenes on the center panels of the interior sanctuaries of the Cross Group temples at Palenque. On all three tablets the mature, scantily dressed K’inich Kan Bahlam II receives the insignia of office from his younger version, then appears on the sanctuary jambs fully dressed as king. The smaller figure on the sanctuary tablets wears a twisted “stole” and knotted cloth resembling funerary bindings, features that led Schele and Freidel (1990:242) to identify the individual as K’inich Janaab Pakal I, his deceased father. These scenes may actually symbolize the death of the mortal K’inich Kan Bahlam II and his rebirth as a divine king. At the Temple of the Cross he is depicted on the left sanctuary jamb directly across from God L, the principal lord of the underworld, who was defeated and defrocked as a prelude to the rebirth of the Maize God. The scaffold accession stelae at Piedras Negras present a variation
on this theme where the sacrifice of another human substitutes for the metaphoric death of the ruler prior to his accession as king (Taube 1994:674).33

SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATIONS OF BINDING, WRAPPING, AND BUNDLING

Although the symbolism of celts has been discussed by a number of scholars (Guernsey 2006; Porter 1996; Taube 2005), a study of the cloth bindings associated with celts has not been pursued. This is another instance in which the functional aspects of cloth subvert its iconographic importance as a carrier of meaning. On the San Bartolo murals, a belt assemblage with triple celts is bound by what I believe to be woven cloth bands (Figure 12.8a). Attached to a tree at the rear of the scaffold supporting the Maize God, it is almost identical to that on a stela fragment from Kaminaljuyú (Figure 12.8b). The celtiform pendant worn by the Maize God on the north mural is also bound with a diagonal cloth band (Figure 12.8c). As on the Middle Formative Olmec-style rock carving at Xoc (Figure 12.8e), these cloth bindings carry double edge lines, which, I have argued earlier (Winzenz 2008a), are derived from the selvage of woven cloth and function as semantic markers to identify woven substances. On both handwoven and machine-woven cloth, selvages are the outer edges of the fabric where warp threads are either set closer together or are doubled, thus creating a slightly different appearance on each edge. Doubled selvage lines are also seen on the cloth band tying the bundle held by a newly enthroned ruler on the mural’s west wall (see Figure 12.9g).34 A wavy line, another marker for cloth, occurs on bound celts and on cloth bands in a headdress on Kaminaljuyú Stela 21 (Figure 12.8d).

Middle Formative Olmec art suggests that the bound celt motif is derived from two related ritual practices. First, emblematic maize motifs are often bound with horizontal or diagonal bands. The Rio Pesquero statuette presents four celtiform shapes on the headband; three carry crossed or diagonal bindings (Figure 12.8f). The metonymic relationship between jade celts and maize and the pan-Mesoamerican iconography that expresses this concept are discussed in depth by Taube (1996, 2005). The second practice is that of binding celts to the body, as seen on an Olmec-style jade scepter (Figure 12.8g).35 The binding of the body appears to overlap conceptually with the ritual binding of stelae and monuments in the Late Formative period (see Chapter 10, this volume; Guernsey 2006). It is feasible that binding the four limbs centered and ritually activated the body. It may also have been the equivalent of mapping the structure of the cosmos onto the human form.36
Figure 12.8. Bound celts and woven hands: (a) royal belt, San Bartolo, detail redrawn after Heather Hurst; (b) royal belt with three banded celts, Kaminaljuyú Stela 67, detail of drawing courtesy of Lucia Henderson; (c) bound celt pendant, Maize God, San Bartolo (N9); (d) costume element with effigy head and three bound celts, Kaminaljuyú Stela 21, redrawn by author after Taube 1996:fig. 12a (original drawing by James Porter); (e) ruler carrying small stela with cloth bindings, carved monument from Xoc, Chiapas, redrawn by author after Taube 2004:fig. 23b; (f) celts bound to forearms of supernatural being, Rio Pesquero statuette, detail after Taube 2004:fig. 48, courtesy of Karl Taube; (g) Olmec-style scepter, detail after Taube 2004:fig. 50c, courtesy of Karl Taube; (h) celts bound to limbs of Chahk, god of rain and lightning, detail of Izapa Stela 3, original drawing by Ayax Moreno, courtesy of the New World Archaeology Foundation; (i) earflare bound to the Maize God’s arm, San Bartolo (W12), redrawn after original by Heather Hurst; (j) earflare bound to a ruler’s arm, Dumbarton Oaks pectoral, redrawn after Schele and Miller 1987:fig. 32a.
Figure 12.9. Emblematic cloth bands and bundles at San Bartolo (a, b) celestial register, San Bartolo, west wall, far left and adjacent sections; (c) bundled celt, San Bartolo, left end of register; (d) banded bundle, San Bartolo, adjacent section; (e) deity bundle, San Bartolo, north wall (N13); (f) bone artifact from Chiapa de Corzo, detail drawn by author after Agrinier 1960:fig. 17b; (g) bundle held by a ruler, San Bartolo (W22); (h) bundle with diagonal band, detail drawn by author after K5738, rollout photograph © Justin Kerr; (i, j) floating feathered bundles with bands, details drawn by author after K8735 and K495, rollout photographs © Justin Kerr; (k) celestial register on Olmec-style bowl, Tlapacoya, Mexico, drawing by author after K6441, rollout photograph © Justin Kerr.
The celt-binding tradition continues into the Late Formative, as seen on Izapa Stela 3, where celts are bound to the body of Chahk (Figure 12.8h). Limb bindings are seen on almost every individual on the San Bartolo murals. Their forms vary greatly, and often bindings on arms are different from those on the ankles or shins of the same entity. In accession contexts, both the Maize God at San Bartolo and the seated ruler on the well-known Dumbarton Oaks pectoral have bell-shaped forms, the earflare in side view, bound to their forearms (Figures 12.8i,j). This kind of substitution appears to indicate that jade celts and jade earflares were semantically and symbolically equivalent for the ancient Maya. The disks bound to the limbs of twin figures carrying bundles (N13, N14) may be akin to jade earflares (see Figure 12.6a). Regardless of the type of binding or the shape of the jade, the common denominator is the cloth used on all four limbs. Occurring in this same spatial syntax, it is possible that even simple cloth bindings without jade could be semantically equivalent (see Figure 12.4c).

A ubiquitous motif on San Bartolo’s west wall is a diagonal yellow band that, with or without an infixed U-shape, marks the bodies of deities, supernaturally charged objects such as the birth gourd and world trees, and liminal locations or passageways such as the quatrefoil turtle-portal (see Figure 12.4b). In Classic Mayan, k’an means yellow and/or precious. Like bound celts, the double edge lines denote a woven cloth band. As previously noted, the infixed “U” is a Late Formative variant of the semantic marker that denotes shiny, precious, or sacred entities, locations, and objects (Stuart 2010). The U-shape is likely derived from the paired opened husks at the base of the mature maize ear (see Taube 1996:fig. 1). Comparing these bands with Kaminaljuyú Stela 11 (see Figure 12.3f), with its wrapped scepter tied with a cloth band, it is possible to assert that the U-shape is used to denote the precious character of the cloth band itself. Diagonal bands also wrap the ladder and accession scaffold supporting the human ruler (see Figure 12.2d). On the murals yellow bands are marked with dots, or with small or large black U-shapes, or have no markings at all. Such variations demonstrate that the yellow cloth band without additional signs could still retain its function as a marker for precious or sacred things.

Resembling celestial registers (skybands) on contemporaneous monuments (see Chapter 10, this volume), slanting yellow cloth bands with double-line selvages also appear in the celestial register on San Bartolo’s west wall (see arrows on Figures 12.9a–b). Lang (2004) has discussed the celestial register at San Bartolo in detail. I call attention here to the oval motif framed by four dots appearing on each end of the register (Figure 12.9c) as well as a smaller motif that occurs to the left of center (Figure 12.9d). Their shapes resemble
the oval bundle held by the ruler on the same wall (Figure 12.9g). In the celestial register the bundles are depicted with diagonal yellow cloth bands and are bordered by triangles flanked by curls. Having studied the range of artistic conventions used to portray bundles on Late Classic painted vessels (Winzenz 2008a), I consider these to be emblematic bundles. On painted vases bundles are often rendered with exterior rings or multiple concentric rings (Figure 12.9h), a schematic convention likely derived from the layers of cloth used to wrap and pad bundled objects.

The triangle with flanking curls projecting from the oval bundles in the celestial register is also seen on the celtiform shape at the back of the Maize God’s head (Figure 12.8a), on the brackets that frame the faces of Isthmian Maize Gods (Figure 12.9f), and on a belted loincloth from Kaminaljuyú (Figure 12.4f). Ancestral or deity bundles carried by two figures on San Bartolo’s north mural have cloth bands that terminate in triangular shapes (Figure 12.9e). These examples confirm that the triangle with flanking curls was used as a marker to denote cloth substances in Late Formative art. It is used to mark cloth on a few Early Classic monuments as well. The shape on the side of the Maize God’s head (see Figure 12.8c) has been interpreted as a maize cob with mirror markings (Saturno et al. 2005b:31). Taube’s paper on the Olmec Maize God (1996) identified three conventions for stylized representation of corn, one being “banded maize.” I suggest that this shape may actually be bundled or cloth-wrapped maize, possibly in the form of the quintessential symbol of green corn, a jade celt (see Chapters 10 and 11, this volume). On many Late Classic vases with the bird dancer theme, costume elements and jade ornaments (some marked with personification heads) float in a numinous space. This includes objects identified by Taube (2000:313) as feathered celts (Figure 12.9h,i). I suggest that these motifs are actually feathered bundles containing jade celts. The ritual bundling of sacred or precious objects is depicted on numerous vessels and monuments of the Classic period.

An engraved Olmec-style bowl from Middle Formative Tlapacoya portrays a celestial register marked with gum brackets and three knotted cloth bands that divide the pictorial space (Figure 12.9j). Endowed with energy or life-essence, the Olmec bundles hover or even fly in what is clearly a liminal, otherworldly space. One carries an “X” denoting binding, and another resembles the San Bartolo bundle containing the regalia of the Maize God (Figure 12.9e). The similarity to San Bartolo’s celestial band is striking in terms of format, the use of woven bands as spatial dividers, and the presence of bundles.

In the San Bartolo murals both the oval bundle forms and the yellow cloth band draw their symbolic resonance from ritual practices of binding, wrapping,
and bundling that are related to conceptual templates at the core of ancient Maya cosmology and mythology (see Guernsey and Reilly 2006). The quin-cunx structure of the cosmos was articulated in the *Popol Vuh* by actions of the creator couple who stretched out a cord to measure and establish its four corners, its four sides, and its center. This cosmic structure was replicated in Maya ritual practices, such as binding the human body, physically or symbolically establishing ritual space, addressing the four cardinal directions, and marking the four corners and center when establishing and planting maize fields. It is also seen in the weaving process, in which ceremonial wrapping cloths and garments were woven with four finished selvedges by traditional Maya women. In a weaving practice that may be disappearing, cloth woven for ritual purposes was not cut from the loom; rather the weaver continued inserting weft threads up to the very ends of the warp (O’Neale 1945). This process involved weaving with needles after the shed could no longer be opened, resulting in a less densely packed weft. Although these ends were generally tucked into the skirt, the four selvedges are symbolically significant (Kathryn Josserand, personal communication, 2004).

**CONCLUSION**

The San Bartolo murals are the earliest known narrative expressions of Maya mythology and cosmology, aspects of which survived in Maya culture for over 1,500 years. One of the constants throughout this history has been the symbolic resonance of clothing as well as the role of cloth in conceptual constructs involving binding and bundling.

For the ancient Maya, the clothing and regalia associated with deities both absorbed vital essence and imparted this essence to those who wore them. The role of clothing in ensouling and resurrecting permeates the Maize God myth. Through rituals of dressing and adornment, deities or their effigies could be manifested as sentient beings, an act that may have been regarded as a metaphorical rebirth. The concept that divine presence can be physically manifested through vestments informs the dressing of saints’ statues by the present-day Maya in the highlands of Guatemala and Mexico. These beliefs and practices involve transformative states in which cloth garments play a primary role.

This essay focused on the reciprocal concept, namely, that certain costume elements could embody and retain life-essence. At San Bartolo and throughout the long history of Maya art, this potential was denoted by a variety of emblems or markers (some easily identified, others less so) that were adopted from the symbolic complex associated with maize and jade as containers of
life-force. It is also feasible that the supernatural power of clothing and regalia was intensified through repeated ritual use.

The supernatural and animate character of ritual clothing is still an operational concept. Christenson (2006:238) cites the story recounted by an informant from Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala, about the tunics in the bundle of San Martín. During the Guatemalan civil war, when the army came to arrest the bundle’s keeper—the famed nab’eysil (shaman/diviner/curer) Francisco Sojuel—the tunics flew about, one transforming into a deer and another into a jaguar. Moreover, when the sacred bundle of San Martín is opened and his tunics are worn by the shaman who “dances the bundle,” all doors and windows in the cofradia house are locked so that the power contained in these sacred garments will not escape, thereby causing the destruction of the world (Christenson 2003:246n653, 2006:figs. 6–8).

That particular woven garments were viewed by the ancient Maya as living things is also supported by the present-day weavers of Santiago Atitlán. For them weaving is analogous to birthing, a concept that is embedded in their words for weaving tools, parts of the loom, and the weaving process itself (Prechtel and Carlsen 1988). The process of entering rows of weft is considered to be “feeding” the cloth as it grows row by row; a concept that is reflected in several highland languages (Looper, personal communication, 2010). The name for the rope that attaches the backstrap loom to a tree is synonymous with the umbilical cord. And in a wonderful reciprocal metaphor, textiles are born and humans are woven. This intimate relationship between being and woven cloth is already present in the San Bartolo murals.

The oval bundles and “simple” yellow bands on San Bartolo’s celestial band are examples of the symbolic potential of woven cloth. As visual metaphors for binding, tying, and bundling, they appear to be derived from actual ritual practice. For the ancient Maya these practices included the wrapping and binding of sacred objects, the binding of stelae and altars in Period Ending ceremonies (Stuart 1996), and the ritual centering and activation of the human body through the binding of four limbs. And, to this day, the physical demarcation of ritual space is expressed in a modern Yucatecan metaphor as “binding up” (Freidel et al. 1993:130).

For the ancient Maya, it appears that sacredness was an innate quality as well as one that could be bestowed upon objects through ritual action. It is possible that any object or substance, including cloth, could become sacred in this context. This quality was denoted by a variety of iconic features and attributes discussed in this chapter. The symbolism of garments and cloth in the San Bartolo murals (and in related images) often operates as a subtext that
is almost invisible to the Western sensibility in which machine-made cloth is commonplace and certainly not precious. We tend to think of any form of cloth as purely functional and often overlook its intrinsic symbolic potential. But for the Maya familiar with the cognitive framework in which such visual symbols were embedded, their meanings were self-evident. The symbolic vocabulary of cloth resonated widely precisely because its sources lay in the realm of everyday experience and in the knowledge of weaving, a craft that was practiced on every level of society.

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NOTES
1. The definitive sources on San Bartolo’s murals are The Murals of San Bartolo, El Petén, Guatemala. Part 1, The North Wall (Saturno et al. 2005b) and The Murals of San Bartolo, El Petén, Guatemala. Part 2, The West Wall (Taube et al. 2010). The entire north wall is illustrated with numbers in Figure 5 of the 2005 publication. The numbered drawing of the west wall is Figure 7 of the 2010 publication. Both publications have color inserts.

2. A brief summary of the episodes on these murals follows. The north wall is divided into two episodes beginning with the birth of five infants from a gourd-womb followed by an emergence scene in which a feathered serpent exits a cave in the sacred “flower mountain” associated with the otherworld. His body forms the road that carries the Maize God, his principal wife, three corn maidens, and three male attendants, including two that carry sacred bundles. The longer west wall mural contains two distinct episodes, including cosmic creation depicted as the raising of five directional world trees accompanied by sacrificial bloodletting. The mythic life cycle of the Maize God—from infancy to his mature state flanked by rain and water deities in a turtle-
portal and then his death and return to the watery Underworld—is considered to be a unit. Two scaffold accession scenes, one of the Maize God and another of a human ruler (likely on the earthly plane), flank the mythic Maize God cycle.

3. Included in what I call the “textile domain” are all techniques using a pliable linear element such as rope, yarn, thread, or naturally occurring flexible materials (vines, reeds, leaves, and grasses) to create pliable surfaces, forms, and structures. This includes weaving on a variety of looms, all basketry techniques, such as twining, plaiting, and netting, to name a few. I also include more elemental techniques such as lashing, binding, tying, and knotting used for a variety of purposes, including the building of structures.

4. As the tribute scenes painted on Late Classic Maya vessels attest, woven cotton was as prized as jade, quetzal feathers, and shells. In Mesoamerica finely woven cloth and garments became—both literally and symbolically—a means by which elites and rulers expressed their power, prestige, and wealth. As documented for the Aztecs of the contact period, Classic Maya rulers and elites probably controlled access to cotton fibers, to prized dyes, and to the human production of cloth, which was primarily, if not exclusively, done by females.

5. In her seminal book *Art and the Kingly Ideal: Art, Trade, and Power*, Mary Helms (1993) argued persuasively that preindustrial rulers and elites conflated the notions of a geographic “out there” with the temporal “beyond.” This transcendent realm of time and space was occupied by ancestors and supernatural beings. The superiority of elites and the charters of rulership were based on privileged contact with this realm.

6. In another parallel, Allen (1988:33–34) discussed the modern Quechua descendants of the Inca, who view crafting as a process in which *sami*, the universal animating spirit, is channeled by the maker into the crafted object. When inspired, the Quechua craftsman is said to be *samiyuq*, meaning that he or she possesses *sami*. A related phrase, *santuyuq*, means “possessing a saint,” suggesting that the skilled crafts-person actually embodies the saint credited with inventing a specific skill. Thus for the contemporary Quechua, crafting is still invested with an aura of the supernatural.

7. According to paleobotanical evidence, time factored plant evolution, and DNA studies, the ancestral varieties of the two cultigens of cotton specific to the western hemisphere were domesticated around 5500 BCE in Peru and Mesoamerica (Mejía de Rodas and Asturias de Barrios 2002). Mesoamerican cotton was first cultivated in the Soconusco area on the Pacific coast, where it diffused to other regions. This is the very area that witnessed the earliest development of social hierarchy in Mesoamerica (Clark 1991). The size and weight of spindle whorls used in the Late Formative period at Balberta on the Pacific coast indicates that cotton was being spun. This suggests that “the use and processing of cotton on a large scale [occurred] at a much earlier date than previously thought” and that spinning had reached a relatively sophisticated level (Arroyo 1993).
8. Brocading, also called inlaid brocade or supplementary weft brocade, is a technique in which additional colored yarns are inserted into selected areas of each row of warp according to a predetermined pattern.

9. It should be pointed out that not all scholars agree that inlaid brocade or supplementary weft was a dominant technique in the Classic period, to say nothing of the preceding period. Declaring that there is no archaeological evidence that inlaid brocade was used in this period, Looper (2000:6–10) argues for the dominance of painted designs in the Late Classic. However, given the paucity of surviving Precolumbian textile fragments of any kind, the absence of brocaded designs from the Classic period doesn’t mean that this technique was not used. Morris (1985, 1987a, 1987b) has always argued in favor of brocaded patterns in the Classic period, partially based on contemporary textiles in the highlands of Chiapas and Guatemala, where brocaded patterning is still dominant. Brumfiel (2006) includes brocading among the labor-intensive techniques used by elite Maya women in the Classic period. Brocading is listed as a prehispanic technique in publications of the Museo Ixchel, Antigua (see Asturias de Barrios and Fernández García [1993] and Asturias de Barrios [1985]), although the precise period is not stated. Moreover, had there been a strong textile painting tradition in the precontact era, more of it would have survived in contemporary practice.

10. See Hendon (1997), Bell (2002), and Brumfiel (2006) for discussions of elite Maya women and weaving.

11. “K” followed by a file number refers to the rollout photographs of vessels copyrighted by Justin Kerr. The source for all of the Kerr rollout photographs used in my chapter is Justin and Barbara Kerr’s electronic archive, Maya Vase Data Base, at www.mayavase.com.

12. See the color reproduction in Miller and Martin (2004:plate 49).

13. Baskets and containers are done on rigid parallel uprights, but wearables are twined on a flexible warp that must be held in tension on a frame or by weights.

14. Looper (Chapter 13, this volume) describes the cape as fibrous, suggesting that the vertical elements are not necessarily spun fiber. There appears to be some kind of relationship between grasslike fibers composing the neck collars seen on deities performing bloodletting on San Bartolo west wall and the knotted string pectorals and waist bands worn by Chahk as an executioner in Late Classic images.

15. For the Maize God dressing theme see Kerr vessels 626, 1271, 4358, 4479, 6298, 1202, 6979, and 7268.

16. See Christenson 2003, 2006; Vogt 1969; Freidel et al. 1993:252–53. The miniature clothing for the diminutive statue of Yaxper, an ancient goddess associated with weaving and cosmogenesis, is carried in a large bundle during ritual processions in which the figure of this “saint” is also carried (Allen Christenson, personal communication, 2008).
17. Stuart and Stuart (2008:167) speak of these rituals as a decorating of the effigies of the Triad gods with adornments and ritual clothing contained within the bundles dedicated to these gods, comparing them to the “dressing of the saints” ceremonies of more traditional Maya communities of the present day. Following Stross, I conclude that the practice of clothing effigies ritually activated them and endowed them with life-essence.

18. A seated female presenting a personified Spondylus shell to the Maize God has black face markings and long unkempt hair associated with “God A prime,” a death god. Another vase (see Kerr 6979) has two female attendants with the same attributes plus kimi (death) signs painted on their bodies. As the counterparts of the partially or totally nude female assistants in other examples of this scene, their presence suggests that the dressing ritual takes place on the liminal boundary between life and death.

19. The connection between garments and life-essence is also seen in the version of the Aztec myth of cosmogenesis at Teotihuacán recorded by Mendieta (1971:79–80), in which deity bundles were fashioned from the clothing and adornments of two gods who had sacrificed themselves through self-immolation as a prerequisite for the dawning of the new era. These deity bundles were more revered than images or “idols” of the gods. Much like the shroud of Turin, the clothing and adornments that came in contact with deities were likely viewed as having absorbed a god’s essence and were among the holiest of relics.


21. As with their descendents, the ancient Maya may have regarded serpents and cloth bands as analogs. On the carved bench of Copan Structure 11 the knotted serpents on an ik’ pectoral substitute for the cloth bands normally seen on pectorals (see Schele and Miller 1986:plate 36c). In the Late Postclassic codices, knotted serpents and skeined yarn in a figure eight are used interchangeably in the headdress of Goddess O, the aged goddess of weaving, childbirth, and curing (see Lee 1985:Dresden Codex 18–19a). Vestiges of this association still survive in terms for traditional traje in Guatemala where the xh’ap, a very long band wound around the head like a halo by the women of Santiago Atitlán, is said to represent the “rainbow serpent.” The women of Coban wear a headdress called t’upay, “coral serpent” (Montoya 2003:figs. 4.37, 4.40).

22. As Eduardo Douglas pointed out (personal communication, 2008), paper used extensively in Aztec ritual was considered a sacred substance in and of itself. In my master’s thesis on sacred bundles (Winzenz 2008a) I argued that the cloth used in Maya sacred bundles may have acquired a sacrosanct quality from the objects they protected.

23. Taube (personal communication, 2010) has suggested that the loincloths themselves may have had a shiny surface, possibly created with the lustrous fibers from the
flower pod of the ceiba tree (also known as cotton wool or kapok). These are too short to spin and must be combined with other fibers (Sharisse McCafferty, personal communication, 2010), but perhaps even a small amount of the ceiba fiber mixed with cotton could create sheen. Looper (personal communication, 2010) suggested that these loincloths may have been made of beaten bark cloth, with sizing used to create a shiny surface. However, this would not be consistent with the selvage lines and vertical borders with which they are depicted. That said, perhaps the God C sign should not be interpreted quite so literally.

24. There are many examples of the “God C apron,” worn in a variety of contexts, including Period Endings, the display of the Manikin Scepter, scattering rituals, and references to the ruler as warrior. Considerable variations in loincloths with the God C sign occur even at the same site, as exemplified by Piedras Negras Stelae 4 and 8.

25. The U-sign, so prevalent in the Late Formative, all but disappears in the Classic period.

26. It has been suggested that the animated cloth on this stela, when compared with other Yaxchilán monuments, might be explained on stylistic grounds. However, animated cloth bands are also found on monuments from other sites. Significantly, at Palenque woven cloth bands not only defy gravity but are also marked with the sign for shiny, which appears to qualify the cloth as luminous or sacred. For examples, see the cloth bands dangling from the personification head affixed to the loincloth of God L, Temple of the Cross (Schele and Miller 1986:fig. 11.6) and several cloth bands on the Temple XIV tablet (Schele and Miller 1986:fig. vii.2). In contexts where no motion is implied or depicted, cloth bands that are alive or enlivened are often seen on painted ceramics (see Kerr 9113, 896, 6997, 5001, 4929, and 5092, to list but a few).

27. Wayeb are supernatural, underworld creatures of malevolent character associated with death, disease, and rituals of transformation. Depicted frequently on Late Classic vases, the character or role of these creatures is not clearly understood (Looper 2009:134–35).

28. In his reconstruction rendering, artist Terry Rutledge (see Harrison 1999:139, figs. 80 and 81) clearly interpreted these short lines as indicators of a dimensional object rather than one that is flat.

29. The bundle is marked by the glyphs ek balam, the name of a shrub that is still used in present-day Yucatan to cauterize serious wounds (Winzenz 2008a:54112). Other Late Classic vessels depict upside-down bundles with cotton bolls and cloth strips falling out (see Kerr 8351 and 3395 respectively). These bundles associated with bloodletting could be considered as first aid kits.

30. At Palenque deceased rulers, recalled from the otherworld, are depicted as living beings participating in accession rituals in which they present the royal headdress and other insignia of office to the heir to the throne.
31. It should be noted that similar capes are worn by God L, the paramount lord of the Underworld, enthroned on the famous Princeton vase (Kerr 511) and on the Vase of the Eleven Gods (Kerr 7750). Perhaps it is not by chance that Akan supernaturals and God L wear similar capes since both are intimately associated with the Underworld.

32. Olivier (2003:81) describes a parallel concept in the four days of fasting and penance of the Aztec tlatoani prior to his accession. Sitting in a fetal position, he is wrapped from head to toe in a fasting cape and “mantas” decorated with crossed bones and skulls, perhaps the very garments that wrapped the sacred bundles representing Texcatlipoca and Huzilopochtli: “The clothing used by the future king illustrated his transformation into a sacred bundle but also expressed his passage inside the ground before his ‘rebirth’ as a sovereign.”

33. Taube discusses these scaffold stelae in the context of the contemporary Tz’utujil-Maya concept of k’ex, meaning “substitution,” as discussed by Carlsen and Prechtel (1991).

34. Cloth bands can also be marked by single or double center lines, by stripes ranging from simple to elaborate running parallel to the selvage, or by bands whose ends terminate in cross-stripes that run perpendicular to the selvage.

35. As Taube (1996) has indicated, the oval “mirror” signs that mark the bodies of deities are derived from the actual practice of binding celts to limbs. While the interior markings of these “mirror” signs vary considerably, I have always wondered why parallel lines were used since they are not the best choice for suggesting a shiny, reflective surface. It is possible that the diagonal bands seen on many variations of the “mirror sign” may be derived from the woven bands used to bind celts to the body.

36. As the San Bartolo murals attest, the binding of the four limbs is quite variable in both Olmec and Late Formative Maya images. In many images legs have different bindings than the arms, and in some images jade beads or earflares substitute for celts. It is not unusual for jade to be completely absent from these ritual bindings. A detailed study would be required to determine if these variations signal semantic differences or if they are substitutions with equivalent meaning.

37. Centuries later the same cloth wrappings (without U-shapes) appear on the scaffold-accession stelae at Piedras Negras (see Stela 11, Schele and Miller 1986:fig. 11.4).

38. To date I have been unable to view this manuscript. My iconographic interpretations have been arrived at independently.

39. The hollow-looking bundle on the mural (Figure 12.9c) resembles the Zapotec “glyph J” that has been identified as banded maize (Taube 1996:42).
REFERENCES


Dress and body adornment are widely recognized as a richly meaningful aspect of contemporary Maya culture (Schevill 1997). However, the Precolumbian roots of this tradition are difficult to document. Given the poor conditions of preservation of perishables such as textile fabrics in the Maya area, scholars mainly rely upon pictorial sources to study aspects of ancient Maya attire (Bruhns 1988; Joyce 2001:54–89; Looper 2000, 2009; Taylor 1992; cf. Lothrop 1992; Mahler 1965). The abundant relief sculpture, figurines, and pictorial pottery painting from the Classic and Postclassic periods have assured an emphasis on these epochs. In contrast, Formative dress is the subject of only a few brief essays that focus on the analysis of monumental art (Valdés 1990, 1993; Valdés and Fahsen 2007).

By comparing these images, scholars interpret dress as a vehicle of cultural and political identity over a wide geographical area by the Late Formative period (300 BCE–250 CE; Valdés 1993:40). Most salient is the recognition of painted stucco façades as a critical cultural and political symbol during the late Middle Formative (1000–300 BCE) and Late Formative periods at sites such as Cerros, Cival, Tikal, Uaxactun, and El Mirador (Estrada-Belli 2006; Freidel 1977, 1985; Hansen 2001; Valdés 1987, 1992a, 1992b, 1993:40). These façades frequently include colossal masks depicting deities, often wearing immense earflare assemblages identical in structure to those worn by rulers (Figure 13.1). Other façades as well as a few engraved luxury stone objects depict rulers and deities wearing royal headbands studded with jadeite diadem jewels that derive ultimately from the Olmec tradition (see Fields

13

Early Maya Dress
and Adornment

Matthew G. Looper
These examples underscore the role of dress—and particularly jadeite and *Spondylus* shell jewelry—in this context as a fundamental power symbol that lent supernatural legitimacy to the authority of the rulers who oversaw construction of these massive politico-religious monuments (Freidel, Reese-Taylor, and Mora-Marín 2002; Freidel and Schele 1988b).

The discovery in 2001 of the murals from the San Bartolo Pinturas structure, dated to 100 BCE, represents a new opportunity for evaluating dress in the Late Formative (see Winzenz, Chapter 12, this volume). With their extensive display of at least thirty anthropomorphic figures in dynamic action, the San Bartolo Pinturas murals more than doubled the number of intact human figures available for interpreting the development of dress and personal adornment during the Formative period. However, these images, together with other two-dimensional art, represent only a subset of the material relevant to the study of dress and adornment. Ceramic figurines, an important art form in the Formative Maya lowlands, also depict attire. Although these images focus preferentially on adornment of the head and face, they remain a critically important data set for understanding attire and body art in the Formative period.

Aspects of dress and adornment can also be inferred from material remains in durable materials such as stone, bone, and shell. Burials are particularly important historical indicators of adornment, as they contain numerous jewelry artifacts, including beaded necklaces and bracelets and various kinds of pendants, which appear in direct association with particular parts of the body. They also contain human remains (skulls and teeth) that give important evidence of permanent body art. The burials yield datable examples of dress and adornment that can be correlated statistically with a number of variables, including status, age, and sex (Krejci and Culbert 1995; Tiesler Blos 1998, 2001). Variations among sites are more difficult to evaluate, as the sample is skewed toward sites in Belize, and particularly toward Cuello, where hundreds of Formative burials have been excavated and published (Gerhardt 1988; Robin 1989). There are

![Figure 13.1. Cerros Structure 5G-2nd, detail of lower mask earflare assemblage. Drawing by author after Schele and Freidel (1990:fig. 3.12).](image)
additional limitations to the use of burial data in general. The most important of these is the factor of differential preservation, in that only select aspects of personal adornment survive in the archaeological record. For example, many aspects of body art, such as coiffure, are not preserved, nor are textiles to any significant extent. Burials provide only indirect evidence of other forms of body art, such as body painting or stamping. There are thus certain overlaps but also significant complementary information concerning body art, clothing, and adornment, which are accessible through representational art, including monuments and figurines, as compared with artifacts and burial goods.

This chapter outlines dress development during the Formative period, from 1200 BCE to 250 CE. The initial date of this epoch is associated with the earliest known evidence for dress. The terminal date is more arbitrary, and yet is linked to dramatic regional political and economic changes, including the abandonment, decline, or major alteration of numerous sites (see Estrada-Belli 2006:645; Hansen 1990; Reese-Taylor and Walker 2002:99–105). By correlating and contrasting the representations of dress and adornment in representational art with the large corpus of burial goods and remains that relate to bodily adornment, the internal structural patterns and general historical development of attire can be mapped. These observations help illuminate the history of the Maya area during this lengthy and important phase of cultural evolution. This study begins with figurines, most of which date to the Middle Formative, and continues with a discussion of monumental art and murals, nearly all of which date to the Late Formative period.

FIGURINES

Figurines provide a “baseline” for the development of dress and ornament, as they constitute the earliest corpus of human representations in the Maya area (Figure 13.2). Solid or hollow hand-modeled anthropomorphic figurines are found at various sites from the later Early to Late Formative, with peak production during the Middle Formative (Clark et al. 2000:468; Coe 1965; Estrada-Belli 2007:43; Garber, Brown, and Hartman 2002; Healy et al. 2004:114; Laporte and Fialko 1993; McSwain et al. 1991:177; Rands and Rands 1965;36; Ricketson and Ricketson 1937; Smith 1936, 1955; Willey 1972:8–12, fig. 3). While most lowland Maya figurines were found in domestic midden contexts, a well-preserved example came from a Middle Formative boy’s burial at Barton Creek, Belize (Willey 1965:222, 394).

Formative lowland Maya figurines are fairly uniform in style and change little over time. They depict the body in either a seated or standing posture.
Many show clear evidence of breasts, but other sexual diagnostics are rare (e.g., Thompson 1939:155, fig. 92h). The probably disproportionate representation of female individuals in figurines, combined with their emphasis on faces and heads, as well as the frequent separation of heads from bodies, make it impossible to correlate aspects of dress and adornment with sex.

Heads of figurines are often flattened, which Ricketson and Ricketson (1937:211) relate to the Maya practice of “fronto-occipital deformation” of the skull. In fact, this assertion is broadly supported by the data provided by burials. Throughout the Maya area, heads were subjected to tabular shaping, in which the frontal and occipital regions of the infant’s skull were compressed between boards (Robin 1989; Tiesler Blos 1998:171). Sometimes these techniques were combined with the use of circular bands (Tiesler Blos 2010:293). The earliest examples appear around 1000 BCE at sites such as Altar de Sacrificios, Cuello, and Tikal (Laporte and Fialko 1993:39; Pijoan Aguadé and Salas Cuesta 1984:244; Saul and Saul 1991:153–55). Tiesler Blos (2010:299) noted that over 77 percent of Formative Maya skulls examined showed artificial modification. There is no evidence linking the presence or form of cranial modification to social status (Krejci and Culbert 1995:105; Tiesler Blos 1998:207, 2010:291). The skeletal data, combined with the visual evidence from figurines, provide a glimpse of the importance of this practice to the Maya populace.

Dental modification (sometimes called “mutilation”) is also exhibited by skeletons of adolescents and adults widely across the Maya area beginning in the Middle Formative (Romero Molina 1984; Tiesler Blos 2001:67). These early examples often show two patterns: the filing of the upper and lower canines and incisors into points and the cutting of one or two notches into the biting edge of the teeth, resulting in serration (see Romero Molina 1970). Other

**Figure 13.2.** Formative figurine fragments: (a) head from Tikal, PNTM–076; drawing by author after Laporte and Fialko (1993:fig. 17a); (b, c) heads from Tikal, drawings by author after Coe (1965:fig. 8a); (d) head from Uaxactun; drawing by author after Ricketson and Ricketson (1937:plate 73b5).
techniques include inlay and pyrite incrustation, sometimes in combination with filing (Laporte and Fialko 1993:39; López Olivares 1997; Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:117–20, 142–43; Saul and Saul 1991:155). Dental modification is not as common as cranial modeling, but it is still frequent, appearing in about half of the examples if youths are excluded (43.48 percent overall; Tiesler Blos 2001:67). Like cranial modeling, dental modification is not associated with status, as reflected in burial practices (Krejci and Culbert 1995:105). Neither figurines nor monumental art provide enough detail to compare with the physical evidence of dental modification.

The figurines also provide little evidence of dress, as they generally depict the body nude. A few figurines include dress elements, including short skirts or wraps worn about the waist, some with tassel-like elements, loincloths, and possibly a tunic with a serrated motif (Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:plate 75g–j, 213, fig. 139e). Some figurines from Tikal show red paint around the mouth and applied in parallel lines along the body, legs, and arms (Laporte and Fialko 1995:fig. 5). Such a treatment is vaguely reminiscent of the body painting of females depicted on San Bartolo north (N7, N11, N12) as well as later Early Classic painted female imagery (e.g., Laporte 2000:fig. 17). Other figurines from Uaxactun (e.g., Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:plate 75a) and Tikal have incised grooves along the body, face, and limbs, which may also refer to body art such as scarifications or tattooing (Houston, Stuart, and Taube 2006:20; cf. Thompson 1946:24–25).

Because of their emphasis on the face and head, Formative Maya figurines do provide significant evidence of personal adornment, particularly hairstyles and ear ornaments (Figure 13.2a,b,c). Ear ornaments, in the form of small perforated plugs, are nearly universal throughout the entire figurine corpus, appearing on the earliest known figurines (Éstrada-Belli 2007:1). Analogous forms made of shell or clay appear as well in deposits at Uaxactun and Tikal (Hendon 1999:105–6; Laporte and Fialko 1993:43, fig. 24a; Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:117–20, 142–43). Bone earplugs were found in Late Formative burials and other deposits at Cerros and Tikal (Figure 13.3; Garber 1989:figs. 16k, 55; Moholy-Nagy 2008:fig. 213e–g). Increasing sophistication in earplug manufacture is attested by the Late Formative burial at Tikal (Burial 213), which included a pair of ear ornaments, reconstructed by William R. Coe as *Spondylus* shell rings with possible pyrite incrustation attached to shale disks that in turn were mounted on wooden plugs (Moholy-Nagy 2008:fig. 131c). Bone tubes found at Cuello were also possibly inserted into the earlobe (McSwain et al. 1991:181, fig. 8.29). All of these excavated examples have the form of pinched cylinders that would have fit into the perforated earlobe.
without the use of counterweights. The use of wood to make earplugs might explain the relative rarity of earplugs as artifacts compared with their frequent depiction in figurines. Perforated shell disks that perhaps served as throat plates for wooden ear ornaments appear from the Middle Formative onward (McSwain et al. 1991:187).

In addition to earplugs, several other elements of jewelry are depicted in figurines. These include necklaces, indicated by an incision or a thin coil of clay looped about the neck, sometimes with punctations suggestive of beads (Figure 13.2b; Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:213, fig. 139a,c,d, plates 74A4, 75B1, 75A). These correspond to the shell (sometimes combined with jade) bead necklaces found in contemporaneous burials (Coe 1990, 1:22, 2:231–32, 240; Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:120, 144). Simple punctations on the chest may also represent jewelry such as a pendant (McSwain et al. 1991:178, fig. 8.18c). Bracelets, which appear in some burials, are not clearly depicted in figurines, probably owing to a lack of emphasis on hands and feet in this medium. Beads are sometimes indicated dangling from the nasal septum, especially on figurines from Tikal (Figure 13.2a,c; Laporte and Fialko 1993:fig. 16a). These representations are difficult to correlate with burial goods; however, they correspond closely to the frequent occurrence of pendant nose beads common in Late Formative monumental art.

In several examples, one or a pair of smooth, disk-shaped objects appear on the upper forehead or on the crest of the head or attached to strips encircling the head (Figure 13.2c; Laporte and Fialko 1993:fig. 18b; Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:plate 74 A3, A4, C2; Willey 1972:10, fig. 3h). These disks may represent adornos, cut shell objects that are not pendants or beads, occasionally found near the head in male burials at K’axob and Barton Ramie (Isaza Aizpurúa and McAnany 1999:121; Willey 1965:123). The elaboration of one of the Barton Ramie adornos with pyrite mosaic suggests a possible symbolic association of these objects with mirrors, which appear in similar configurations elsewhere in early Mesoamerica (see Clark 1991:20–21). Unequivocal examples of adornos worn on the head or hair do not appear in Late Formative monumental art.
Great effort went into the delineation of hairstyles in figurines. These are quite diverse and are often clearly distinguished from headdresses only by their striations. As most of the figurines appear to be female, facial hair is uncommon (cf. Garber, Brown, and Hartman 2002:fig. 17). Unlike the representations of female hair from San Bartolo, which falls loosely over the shoulders and back, the figurines normally represent women’s hair as short in back. Coiffures are highly symmetrical, with topknots, center crests, center parting, and even the indication of wrapped braids in some cases (Figure 13.2b). Some figurines show the head wrapped in strips, suggestive of turban-like head wraps or tiaras, or perhaps gathered and wrapped hair, rendered without striations (Figure 13.2a; McSwain et al. 1991:177, 179, fig. 8.19). Zoomorphic headdresses occur on two figurines from Cuello and Uaxactun (Figure 13.2d; McSwain et al. 1991:177, 179, fig. 8.20; Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:212, fig. 138). Similar headdresses also appear in monumental art, such as the roughly contemporaneous Cahal Pech Stela 9 (see Awe and Grube 2001).

In summary, figurines from the Maya lowlands offer a glimpse at the dress and adornment of commoners during the Formative period. A comparison of figurines and burials points to the widespread practice of cranial modeling, earplugs (often perishable, sometimes ceramic, shell, bone, or stone), and the occasional use of shell necklaces and shell adornos worn in the hair or attached to a headband. Figurines also provide extensive evidence of perishable components of attire and body art. These include complex hairstyles, which emphasize individual beautification, the occasional use of red body paint around the mouth and in lines on the body, skirts and possibly loincloths, and, rarely, zoomorphic headdresses. The rare appearance of zoomorphic headdresses and other clear badges of authority in figurines suggests that these humble sculptures do not explicitly promote a cult of rulership (cf. Hammond 1989; Hansen 1992:73).

MONUMENTAL AND LUXURY ARTS

In contrast to figurines, stone sculpture, stucco façades, and mural painting suggest the attire of rulers. These images date to the Late Formative, with the exception of the Middle Formative Cahal Pech Stela 9. As pointed out by Valdés and Fahsen (2007:934), Late Formative figural art conveys a cohesive set of symbols that crosscuts medium and scale. In addition, these authors note the symbolic overlaps in figural art, regardless of whether the being depicted is a human, deity, or other supernatural. This thematic and emblematic crossover seems to be rooted in the sacred or transformational foundations
of Maya kingship, which spread rapidly through the lowlands and formed a key component of Late Formative artistic expression. Images that include anthropomorphic figures with significant detail to discern dress elements are listed in the appendix for this chapter. Because the symbolism of many of these clothing elements has been discussed by others (see Winzenz, Chapter 12, this volume), the emphasis here is upon the artifactual correlates of depicted dress.

**Headdresses and Hairstyles**

Beginning with the face and head—the most symbolically elaborated area of the body—a vast array of headdress iconography can be discerned. There are two basic types of headdresses: zoomorphic personification headdresses and headbands. Personification headdresses frame the face of the wearer within the mouth of an animal or deity, suggesting a transformational theme, as on Cahal Pech Stela 9 or the unprovenienced engraved pendant shown in Figure 13.4. Chin straps are often worn with these headdresses and may be personified, depicting the upper jaw, teeth, superorbital plate, and nostril of zoomorphic creatures. Long trailing headdress feathers, a common feature of the Classic period, are rarer in the Formative, appearing on San Bartolo W21 and the Tikal Burial 166 paintings.

Headbands are extremely diverse, ranging from simple strips to feathered or jeweled bands. One of the most commonly occurring headbands during this period is the “Jester God” crown, a symbol of kingship and royal accession (Schele 1974:49–50). Consisting of a fiber strip to which a number of ornaments are attached, this headdress is named after the large deity head with a foliated and beaded top located in a bracket worn over the forehead. Cleft elements flank the central motif, and beads adorn the lower edge of the headband. The Jester God headband sometimes appears in the context of royal accession, as on the Dumbarton Oaks pectoral and the San Bartolo murals and is prominent on stucco façades at Cerros and Uaxactun (Figure 13.4).
The artifactual correlates of headgear are difficult to detect, although the male from Burial 43 at K’ak’tob probably wore a beaded headband, and beads were found near the crania of other individuals (Isaza Aizpurúa and McAnany 1999:120). Schele and Freidel (1990:102) argue that the foliated and cleft elements of the Jester God headband are jadeite jewels, possibly corresponding to “bib-head pendants” or “bib-and-helmet pendants,” found mainly in Belize (Easby and Scott 1970:109, no. 71; Garber 1989:42–45; Hammond 1986:107; Pendergast 1981:41; Freidel and Suhler 1995; Thompson 1931:plate 37; Wilk, Pring, and Hammond 1985:389–90, fig. 5.15). Nevertheless, bib-head pendants have not been found in a clear headband context and are usually cached. In one case at Altun Ha, a group of six small bib-head pendants was part of a necklace (Pendergast 1990:264).

The discovery of the San Bartolo murals greatly expanded our understanding of other aspects of Late Formative adornment of the head, particularly hairstyles. Previously, few hairstyles were recognized, as in most monumental images the hair is largely obscured by the headdress. At San Bartolo most of the female figures have long locks that descend along the side of the face, falling over the shoulder and chest and down the back (N7, N10, N12). One female figure’s (N11) hair is gathered in two loose balls atop her head. The other prominent figures with long, loose hair in the murals are the young male deities on the west wall performing a sacrificial ritual (Saturno 2006:77).

**Jewelry**

Complementing their generally nude bodies, jewelry was a major focus of aesthetic attention in monumental and mural art, in contrast to figurines. Both the plastic arts and burials attest to the extensive use of ear ornaments, necklaces and pectorals, bracelets, belts, anklets, and other objects. There are some qualifications relating to the use of the information from burials, which reflect the relationship of the deceased to the living. To be precise, burials represent a form of bodily presentation specific to the funerary rite and do not necessarily conform to how people adorned themselves on daily occasions or for rituals during their lifetimes (see Barrett 1993:116; Parker Pearson 1993:203). Adornments from burials cannot therefore be assumed to be a direct reflection of the roles of the person with whom they are associated.

For example, as elsewhere in Mesoamerica, some of the richest deposits of jewelry offerings in the Formative are from infant and child burials (Hammond,
Clarke, and Robin 1991:356–58, 362; Isaza Aizpurúa and McAnany 1999:124; Robin 1989:102). One doubts that young children were so lavishly attired while they were alive. Joyce (1999:21) suggests that the general elaboration of juvenile burials in the Formative may reflect the desire to repair the social connections of allied families or other groups that were disrupted by the untimely death of children. Isaza Aizpurúa and McAnany (1999:124) believe that these burials represent the social investment of adults in children’s rites of passage. Jewelry in infant burials may even have served to recreate mythic narratives, as suggested by the San Bartolo north mural, in which four of the newborn infants have no jewelry, while the fifth, who springs from a gourd, wears an earflare, beaded belt, and helmet/headdress. Therefore, burials may represent a use of jewelry and other ornament that is specific to the dead or to certain classes of deceased persons. The following survey focuses on jewelry found in situ in burials, in positions suggestive of the means of attachment to the body.

Much Formative Maya jewelry found in burials is made of shell, including freshwater species, marine conch (Strombus spp. and Pleuroplaca gigantea) and Spondylus, and, to a lesser extent, jadeite, pottery, and bone (Hendon 1999:107; Isaza Aizpurúa and McAnany 1999:118; McSwain et al. 1991:181, fig. 8.25). The symbolic potential of shell and jadeite jewelry to the Maya may have been rooted at least in part in concepts of fertility, abundance, and vitality as well as notions of wealth and authority (Isaza Aizpurúa and McAnany 1999:118; Taube 2005). At Cuello, shell jewelry is found as early as the Swasey phase (1200–900 BCE), while jade and greenstone beads appear at several sites in the Middle Formative and become more common during the Late Formative (Hammond, Clarke, and Estrada Belli 1992:957–58; Kidder 1947:51–52; McSwain et al. 1991:183–85; Robin 1989:43; Taschek 1994:67). A survey by Krejci and Culbert (1995:106) found that 25 percent of Formative burials have shell, while 22 percent include jade. Neither of these features is itself a distinctive social marker, as access to jade and shell, often acquired through trade, cuts across age and sex boundaries (Hammond 1995:50).

By the Late Formative, there are several important shifts in shell and jade burial goods. First, at many sites like K’axob, as burial assemblages become more structured, shell artifacts in general are status markers (Isaza Aizpurúa and McAnany 1999). In particular, the proliferation of Spondylus jewelry in tomb assemblages during the Late Formative is linked to the rise of governmental structures in the Maya lowlands (Freidel, Reese-Taylor, and Mora-Marin 2002:43; Moholy-Nagy 1989:152–55). It is possible that strings of shell beads served as currency beginning in the Late Formative, owing to its extensive use and fairly standard bead sizes, although this hypothesis requires more study.
(see Preface). Also during this time, the type and quantity of jade offerings seem to indicate status, at least at Cuello (Hammond 1995:55; Krejci and Culbert 1995:103,106; Robin 1989:89). At K’axob status is conveyed through the quantity of shell jewelry in the Middle Formative, but by large, distinctive worked-shell ornaments in the Late Formative (Isaza Aizpurúa and McAnany 1999:124).

**The Earflare Assemblage**

One element of jewelry that receives maximum symbolic elaboration in the Late Formative is the earflare assemblage. These are depicted in a standardized manner in monumental art, murals, glyphs, censers, and stucco façades (Freidel and Schele 1988b:60; Pellecer Alecio 2006:fig. 7; Taube 1998:448, fig. 11). While some of the San Bartolo figures lack flares, nearly all royal portraits show the ear obscured by a large oval disk, occasionally inscribing four dots forming a square (Figure 13.4). Frequently, knots or knotted disks appear above and/or below the earflare. *Spondylus* shell pendants frequently hang below the flare (Figure 13.1; Freidel, Reese-Taylor, and Mora-Marín 2002:51–54). At the apex of the earflare assembly is sometimes a tab and loop motif, and a jawless serpent sometimes projects from the back or top of the earflare. In this context, the serpent represents the vital breath believed to be inherent in jadeite (see Taube 2005). The earflare assembly may have been one of the most salient markers of royal status during the Late Formative period.

Given the emphasis on jadeite earflares in monumental art, one would expect Formative burials to be rich in these objects. This is, however, not the case. Indeed, nearly all provenienced examples of jadeite earflares dating to the Late Formative were found in caches rather than burials (Garber 1989:41; Hammond 1974:fig. 7; Wilk, Pring, and Hammond 1985:390, fig. 5.15). One example from Caracol is circular with a stucco backing, and it has a central jadeite tube and a pearl terminus (Chase and Chase 1995:95–97). The other has four ogival, petal-shaped lobes and a central tube, corresponding to the four-part division of depicted earflares. The tube inserts and bead termini are rarely indicated in Formative representational art, the only clear example being the bead that dangles from the center of the earflare on San Bartolo N10. The Nohmul earflares, measuring 37 and 43 mm in diameter, have scalloped edges like the flares depicted on the Tikal Structure 5D–86 façade. Found with them was a flaring jadeite tubular bead, probably serving as the center element of one of the earflares. The huge (18 cm diameter) jadeite flare and its smaller shell and jadeite companions found in a Late Formative tomb at Pomona, Belize (Kidder and Ekholm 1951), were not directly associated with a deceased
person. Taube (2005:38) suggests that such giant flares were intended as the termini of ceremonial bars and were thus not a part of dress per se. Another large (10 cm diameter) Late Formative jadeite earflare was found in an eroded feature at Cerros (Garber 1989:14). The earliest provenienced jadeite earflares from a burial are from Altun Ha Tomb F-8/1, dating to 250–275 CE (2.85 and 3.05 cm diameter; Pendergast 1990:264, fig. 120).

There are several explanations for the discrepancy between the depiction of earflares in monumental art and their scarcity in burials. Perhaps the lack of jadeite earflares from burials is the result of extensive looting of Formative royal tombs in antiquity, as reported at Tikal and Wakna/Guíro (Clark et al. 2000:471; Hansen 1998:90–94; Laporte and Fialko 1993:36). It is also obvious that the plastic and graphic arts exaggerated both the size and abundance of ear ornaments in order to mark status hierarchies. Given the rarity of jadeite earflares until the Early Classic period, it is possible that these items were not often interred with the dead in the Formative period but were passed on to one’s descendents upon death and only later served as cache offerings. Such an interpretation is consistent with the profound associations between jade and ancestral breath among the ancient Maya (Taube 2005). A similar consideration of carved jades as precious heirlooms may also explain the absence of jades worn in royal crowns from Formative period Maya burials, despite their frequent representation in monumental art. As mentioned above, the only supposed diadem jades that exist from this period were found in caches rather than burials or as a necklace.

**Beaded Jewelry and Pendants**

Beaded jewelry in general is an extremely important component of Late Formative royal attire, depicted explicitly in monumental art and murals. In these images artists took special care in rendering bead types, which are often worn in long double-strand necklaces. Spherical, tubular, and barrel-shaped beads are clearly depicted in art as well as found archaeologically (Garber 1989:37–41, 51, 53, 64; Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:206, fig. 135). Shell and/or jadeite beaded necklaces were included as burial offerings for a wide segment of the population at numerous sites (Coe 1990, 1:22, 2:231–32, 240; Hammond, Clarke, and Estrada Belli 1992:957–58, 961; Isaza Aizpurú and McAnany 1999:120; Kidder 1947:50; Laporte and Fialko 1993:39; Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:120, 144; Robin 1989:196; Smith 1972:245).

Several figures are shown wearing necklaces with a pendant interspersed among the beads. One outstanding example from Uaxactun Structure H-Sub
10 wears a necklace of spherical beads combined with a single pendant representing a long-beaked creature, possibly a bird (Figure 13.5a). Similar beaked pendants are worn as part of a woman’s beaded belt at San Bartolo (Figure 13.5b). Interestingly, a jadeite example of a 2 cm beaked pendant was found in a Middle Formative burial at Altar de Sacrificios, placed in the mouth of an adult male (Figure 13.5c; Smith 1972:268). Even though considerably earlier in date than either the Uaxactun or San Bartolo images, the Altar de Sacrificios pendant does provide a material analog for the painted and carved representations.

Another pendant appearing in the San Bartolo mural is tongue-shaped, worn in combination with spherical beads in a necklace by a woman, N10 (Figure 13.6a). This image probably depicts a specific type of pendant cut from white marine shell and registered in burials and other deposits at Tikal (Figure 13.6b; Moholy-Nagy 2008:fig. 147a–d). The San Bartolo mural shows how this pendant could be worn, with the concave surface oriented outward. Some of the tongue-shaped pendants may also have served as earflare counterweights, as suggested by some two-dimensional art (e.g., Tikal Burial 166 mural, figure a). Other shell and bone pendants—many animal effigies—are found with frequency in Late Formative deposits (see Coe 1990, 2:219, 231–32, 240; Hammond 1999:fig. 2; Hammond, Clarke, and Estrada Belli 1992:961; Hansen 1990:fig. 130b, g; Isaza Aizpurúa and McAnany 1999:122–23, figs. 2a, b, 3; McSwain et al. 1991:fig. 8.42; Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:120, 142, plate 69a; Robin 1989:384; Smith 1972:259–60; Taschek 1994:14–15; Willey 1965:508).

**Figure 13.5.** Beaked pendants: (a) detail of stucco figure, Uaxactun Structure H-Sub 10a; drawing by author after Valdés (1989:fig. 12); (b) detail of belt of San Bartolo figure N10; drawing by author after rendering by Heather Hurst (Saturno, Taube, and Stuart 2005); (c) jadeite beaked pendant, cat. no. 99–8, Altar de Sacrificios, Middle Formative; drawing by author after Willey (1972:fig. 132b).
Jadeite effigy pendants are rarer, but they appear throughout the Formative (Andrews and Andrews 1980:39; Pendergast 1990:264, fig. 120; Potter 1982:118, fig. 11).

The reflective oval plaque pendant worn by the maize deity (N9) on San Bartolo north wall may correspond to a particular type of artifact known from early contexts (Figure 13.7a). In several burials from Belize, polished and perforated jadeite or mother of pearl oval pendants (some “clamshell” effigies) were worn as ornaments by people of various ages and both sexes at the end of the Formative and beginning of the Early Classic periods (Andrews and Andrews 1980:55; Mora-Marín 2001:156–59; Potter 1982:118, fig. 11; Schele and Miller 1986:plate 10; Taschek 1994:67–68; Willey 1965:123–24, 482). A large (16 cm) jadeite example was recovered from a royal burial at San Bartolo (Pellecer Alecio 2006:1028).

A related reflective pendant comes from a Middle Formative child’s burial at Cuello (Hammond, Clarke, and Estrada Belli 1992:959–60). This 6.4 × 2.7 cm blue jade “clamshell” pendant was found near the neck (Figure 13.7b). One side of this pendant was polished to a mirror finish, which was worn facing outward. The pendant has a T-shaped outline, a form later used as a glyph representing the term *ik’* “wind, breath.” An unprovenienced 18 cm Olmec “spoon” reused and inscribed by the Maya in the Late Formative probably had an identical function, having been drilled for horizontal suspension (Miller...
The Maya were apparently inspired to use “spoons” as pectorals by the practitioners of the late Olmec style, probably from the Guatemalan Pacific Slope (see Fields and Reents-Budet 2005:110, cat. no. 12). It is interesting that T-shaped mirror plaques are not depicted in Maya monumental art as neck pendants, but rather as pendants from belt assemblages, as on Nakbe Stela 1 (Figure 13.7c). Such objects would not have been easily interchangeable, as the perforations for the pendant were along the long edge, while those for the belt-pendant are shown on at least one narrow end.

One final class of pendant that appears in both monumental art and burials is worthy of special mention. This is the *Spondylus* pubic cover with a polished red interior, worn by the young female figure from San Bartolo, N12. The shell is suspended from a waistband, tied in back. Shell pubic covers are reported to have been worn by prepubescent girls in Yucatan during the early colonial period (Tozzer 1941:102). Formative period burials also sometimes preserve whole perforated *Spondylus* shells that had been ground or stripped.

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**Figure 13.7. Reflective oblong plaques:** (a) pendant of maize deity, San Bartolo, figure N9; drawing by author after rendering by Heather Hurst (Saturno, Taube, and Stuart 2005); (b) blue jade “clamshell” effigy pendant, Cuello, Middle Formative; drawing by author after Hammond (1999:fig. 1); (c) detail of belt assembly, Nakbe Stela 1, drawing by author after Hansen (2001:fig. 75).
of their white surface to reveal the red interior, similarly to the San Bartolo shell (see also Hansen 1990:fig. 130b,g, 201). These were found in positions appropriate to pubic covers at Cuello and K’axob (Hammond, Clarke, and Robin 1991:356; Isaza Aizpurúa and McAnany 1999:121–22; Robin 1989:102, 296). The correspondence of the San Bartolo image to contemporaneous burial practices is undeniable.

Other elements of beaded jewelry also closely parallel burial artifacts. Bracelets, in particular, are found on many monumental representations, the wrists encircled by one or more bands of spherical beads (Figure 13.4). Beaded bracelets appear frequently in burials at Cuello and K’axob (Hammond, Clarke, and Estrada Belli 1992:963; Hammond, Clarke, and Robin 1991:356, 359; Isaza Aizpurúa and McAnany 1999:120; McSwain et al. 1991:185; Robin 1989:196, 356, 377). Late Formative male and female burials at Tikal wore multistrand Spondylus bead bracelets on bone hasps (Coe 1965:1413–14; 1990, 2:231–32). A similar bone hasp of the same period was found in domestic debris at Cerros (Garber 1989:fig. 16a, 53) and seem to represent a more sophisticated technique of bracelet design compared with that of earlier times.

Like bracelets, beaded belts are registered in both monumental art and burials. Single-strand beaded belts are depicted occasionally in Late Formative monumental art. The most remarkable example is the belt worn by San Bartolo figure N10, in which spherical beads alternate with heads with beaded beaks (Figure 13.5b). No identical belt has yet been discovered in burials, although beaded belts are common at Cuello, where their use crosscuts age and sex (Hammond, Clarke, and Robin 1991:358; McSwain et al. 1991:185; Robin 1989:356; see also Isaza Aizpurúa and McAnany 1999:120; Pendergast 1982:183). The most elaborate belt is a multistrand creation made of hundreds of ground disk beads perhaps sewn to a fabric backing and found in a Middle Formative child’s grave (Hammond, Clarke, and Robin 1991:356–58, 362).

The Belt Assembly

A more common type of belt worn by Late Formative rulers in monumental art is a bulky assembly with at least one perforated disk on the side or front (Figure 13.4). The disks may correspond to bone and shell perforated disks found at various sites, though not from relevant burial contexts (Garber 1989:67–68, fig. 21h,i; McSwain et al. 1991:187). Other belts were fitted with a large front belt head from which hang tiers of knotted disks and pendant plaques with dangling tassels (Valdés 1990:27). The belt heads have various forms but are always zoomorphic, in contrast to the later Classic period.
anthropomorphic belt heads. This argues against the interpretation of certain objects such as the shell-inlaid fuchsite mask from Tikal Burial 85 as a belt head, despite the perforations in its chin area (Coe 1990, 2:219). Although in its final context the mask had been attached to a funerary bundle, the perforations on the upper corners of this mask imply that it could originally have been worn as a pectoral (Schele and Freidel 1990:135).

Perforated belt plaques are a common feature of Late Formative royal dress as depicted in monumental art. Usually the plaques are an elongated oval in shape, but in one case (Nakbe Stela 1) the plaques are lobed, possibly depicting “Olmec” heirloom “spoons,” as mentioned above. Perforated oval belt plaques appear in Early Classic tombs (e.g., Carrasco Vargas 1998:628; Laporte and Fialko 1995:figs. 27, 28); however, there are no excavated examples from Formative period burials, nor, in my opinion, are there any jadeite plaques perforated for vertical suspension and of indisputable Late Formative date and Maya manufacture. Hansen (1998:91–92) reports that the looter of the Late Formative Tomb 1 at Wakna recovered three large jadeite plaques, though these have disappeared. Clearly, jadeite plaques were exceedingly rare and for this reason may not appear in the archaeological record. Their presence on monuments may have been intended to impress the viewer with the extreme luxury of the rulers’ ornaments. In addition, given the Maya associations of jade plaques with the ancestor cult, plaques may have been handed down through generations of rulers, similar to jadeite earflares.

Another type of shell artifact that is difficult to interpret, as it is not often associated with a particular part of the body, is the *Oliva* shell “tinkler,” a perforated univalve. In the Late Classic, tinklers are attached to a belt in order to provide musical accompaniment to dance (Isaza Aizpurúa and McAnany 1999:124; Looper 2009:50). However, they are not depicted dangling from belts in Formative period art, nor are the tinklers clearly associated with the pelvic area in Formative burials (Coe 1990, 1:51; Isaza Aizpurúa and McAnany 1999:120; Pendergast 1982:188; Willey 1965:508). Their function as an element of dress thus remains uncertain.

Garments

Although the emphasis of Formative body art is clearly on the head and the display of jewelry, textile fabrics and pelts were also used to wrap the body in some cases. These include capes, sometimes with tassels or feathered edges, and loincloths for men. Loincloths sometimes have rectangular front ends and trailing bifurcated back ends with tassels. Made of textile
The stingray spines inserted in the loincloths worn by figures at San Bartolo may correspond to spines found in the pelvic area of Late Formative burials at Altar de Sacrificios and Kichpanha (Gibson, Shaw, and Finamore 1986:9; Smith 1972:259–60). In some cases, both male and female figures wear a short, tight-fitting skirt. For women, it is supported by a sash wrapped snugly around the waist. The skirt often seems to be a woven textile garment, the stitching indicated by delicate dotted marks. In other cases at San Bartolo, the skirt has jaguar pelt patterning.

Other elements of dress include wrist and ankle bands, upper armbands, and knee or calf bands (Figure 13.4). None of these zones of the body are commonly associated with jewelry in contemporaneous burials, suggesting that they were made of fabric. Many monuments show the wrists and ankles bound in fabric, tied with a knot, and sometimes a disk or simply an unadorned band. One figure from San Bartolo (W21) has legs wrapped in gaiters, from the ankles to just below the knees. Upper arms are also often wrapped in bands, sometimes with a couple of dangling beads (Figure 12.8i,j). Some of the armbands of the San Bartolo figures are dotted, suggestive of beads. Beaded arm and knee bands were found in Middle Formative burials at K’axob and Cuello (Hammond, Clarke, and Robin 1991:356; Isaza Aizpurúa and McAnany 1999:120).

Body Art

The San Bartolo murals provide crucial information about body painting, a key aspect of ancient Maya adornment that is not accessible through monumental art or registered directly in burials. In the murals, bodies are painted in a variety of ways, from face painting only, to uniform body painting, to lengthwise divisions of the body into variously colored patterned zones. Many of the specific patterns reference ritual identities, but these are incompletely understood. Female figures in the murals have particularly elaborate red body painting, including body edges, shoulder streaking, and facial bands and patches. Indirect evidence of body painting may exist in some burials. For example, a Late Formative burial of a young adult male at Cuello contained lumps of red ochre beside the body (Robin 1989:279). Although the style of the San Bartolo body painting does not reflect it, ochre or other pigments could have been applied using roller stamps or flat stamps, such as those recovered at Altar de Sacrificios, Cuello, Copan, K’axob, Uaxactun, and Tikal from 800 BCE onward (McAnany and López Varela 1999:fig. 5; McSwain et al. 1991:178–79,
Alternatively, roller or flat stamps could have been used to adorn fabrics (Hammond, Clarke, and Estrada Belli 1992:957–58; McSwain et al. 1991:179; Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:221). The designs produced by the roller stamps are varied, including circles inscribed in squares, disks with rays, guilloches, plaited motifs (“mat”), and even a hocker, preserved on a San Felix phase (600–200 BCE) stamp from Altar de Sacrificios (Figure 13.8; Willey 1972:94). These designs do not conform closely to the motifs depicted on textiles in contemporary representational art, though some correspond to Classic period textile designs (see Looper 2000:29).

A further inference may be drawn from the tradition of body art revealed by the San Bartolo murals. These images, as well as other Late Formative representations, emphasize sleek body contours and immaculate skin. Hair is visible only sprouting from the upper part of the head. This suggests that Late Formative Maya elites meticulously removed body and facial hair, either through shaving or plucking. Tweezers, made of bone handles and shell blades, are known from later Classic period deposits (Moholy-Nagy 2008:figs. 209, 210).

Costume Sets

So far I have considered only individual elements of attire and adornment, with an eye toward establishing the broad outlines of Formative Maya practices. However, it is clear, especially from the San Bartolo murals, that ritual attire was often worn in sets or ensembles (see O’Day, Chapter 1, this volume). This is clearly illustrated by the nearly twin N13 and N14, who wear similar headdresses, mouth covers, belts, aprons, wrist and ankle ornaments, body and face paint, and knotted cords as necklaces. The youthful males on the west wall also show coordinated body art, hairstyles, and jewelry, though their headdresses and the burdens strapped to their waists vary (Saturno, Stuart, and Taube 2005). Another figure at San Bartolo who wears a distinctive ensemble
is W21, the presenter of the royal headdress (see Figure 12.1c). As pointed out by Virginia Fields (personal communication, 2009), this figure’s avian headdress and twined cape are nearly identical to that worn by the figure on La Mojarra Stela 1, which postdates the murals by more than two centuries. Like the San Bartolo figure, the La Mojarra stela probably depicts a scene of presentation of ritual regalia during royal accession (Looper 2012).

CONCLUSION

A summary of the available information concerning dress and adornment during the Formative is presented in Table 13.1, ordered by source of data and general time period. This table points to several important conclusions concerning dress in the Formative Maya lowlands. First is the considerable detail concerning styles and structure of dress, but also the materials and methods of manufacture that can be inferred by combining three sets of data. The data from burials provide support for some, but not all, dress and adornment practices as registered in monuments and figurines. Some elements, such as shell bead necklaces, appear in all three formats, while others, such as ear ornaments, have distinctive manifestations in each medium. In some cases, particularly body and face paint that appears in Middle Formative figurines and Late Formative monuments, evidence from burials is indirect. In some cases, as in beaded arm, knee, and calf bands, the evidence from burials and monuments is complementary in the Middle and Late Formative, suggesting the strong likelihood that such bands will be found by future archaeologists in Late Formative burials.

Figurines and burials constitute partially overlapping sets of evidence for popular adornment during the Formative period. The sources elucidate each other and provide evidence for a fairly widespread aesthetic of bodily adornment, focusing on decoration of the face and head. One important distinction between burials and figurines is the universal indication of earplugs in figurines and their near absence in burials. An even more dramatic contrast exists, however, between figurines and burials on the one hand and monumental art on the other. This is expected, as monumental art shows a dramatic florescence during the Late Formative, at the same time that figurines suffer a decline. This supports the notion that figurines are part of a popular tradition and ideology that was weakened as elites came to monopolize representational art during the Late Formative period (Clark et al. 2000:469). The newly empowered royal courts of the Late Formative may have instituted systemic social changes that impacted the representation of the body for centuries.
### Table 13.1. Summary of early Maya dress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forms of Adornment</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>beads (jadeite, pottery, bone, shell; increasing use of jadeite and <em>Spondylus</em>), no clear association of style with gender/age</td>
<td>FIG, MON, BUR</td>
<td>MF–LF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>necklace (bone, shell, jadeite, single/multiple strands, disk/sphere/cylinder/tube shapes, combination of beads and pendants)</td>
<td>FIG, MON, BUR</td>
<td>MF–LF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>loincloth/apron, apron with attached stingray spine, male</td>
<td>FIG, MON, BUR?</td>
<td>MF–LF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hair removal, from body/face</td>
<td>FIG, MON</td>
<td>MF–LF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coiffure (gathered, topknot)</td>
<td>FIG, MON</td>
<td>MF–LF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skirt, tightly wrapped textile, male/female, female bound with sash</td>
<td>FIG, MON</td>
<td>MF–LF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>headdress, zoomorphic (perishable)</td>
<td>FIG, MON</td>
<td>MF–LF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nose beads</td>
<td>FIG, MON</td>
<td>MF–LF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>body, face paint, associated with ritual roles and identities</td>
<td>FIG, MON</td>
<td>MF–LF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adornos in hair or strap (shell, inlay)</td>
<td>FIG, BUR</td>
<td>MF–LF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>earplug (shell, ceramic, bone, stone incrustation, wood?)</td>
<td>FIG, BUR</td>
<td>MF–LF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cranial shaping (tabular)</td>
<td>FIG?, BUR</td>
<td>MF–LF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pectoral pendant, perforated shell, tongue shape (shell), effigy (bone, shell, jadeite), oval or clamshell shape (jadeite, shell), T-shaped mirror (jadeite)</td>
<td>MON, BUR</td>
<td>MF–LF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bracelet (shell, jadeite, inlay, sphere/disk/tube shape beads, single/multiple strands, hasps)</td>
<td>MON, BUR</td>
<td>MF–LF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>public cover for subadults (<em>Spondylus</em> valve)</td>
<td>MON, BUR</td>
<td>MF–LF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beaded belt (shell beads strung or sewn to fabric)</td>
<td>MON, BUR</td>
<td>MF–LF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beaded bands (shell beads sewn to fabric), for arm, knee, calf</td>
<td>MON, BUR</td>
<td>MF–LF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>earflare (jadeite, circular/lobed/scalloped shape) with jadeite tube insert, beaded terminus, fabric knot, pendant shell</td>
<td>MON, BUR (caches)</td>
<td>LF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jester God crown</td>
<td>MON, BUR? (cache)</td>
<td>LF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tinklers (Oliva shell) as necklace?</td>
<td>BUR</td>
<td>MF–LF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dental modification (filing, incrustation)</td>
<td>BUR</td>
<td>MF–LF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>human face “mask” (greenstone), possibly pendant</td>
<td>BUR</td>
<td>LF</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*continued on next page*
Table 13.1—continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forms of Adornment</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cape (fiber/feathered)</td>
<td>MON</td>
<td>LF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>massive belt (perishable framework, studded with shell or bone disks, leaves sometimes attached, perishable front belt head with tiers of knotted fabric disks, pendant jadeite plaques, occasional beaded strands behind legs)</td>
<td>MON</td>
<td>LF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bands for wrist, ankle, upper-arm, knee/calf (fabric)</td>
<td>MON</td>
<td>LF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coiffure (long) female/young male</td>
<td>MON</td>
<td>LF</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: MON = monuments (two-dimensional representational art); BUR = burials (evidence from burials and other material remains and artifacts); FIG = figurines; MF = Middle Formative; LF = Late Formative.

Given the scope and quality of the data, it is difficult to identify specific historical or geographical trends in personal adornment and clothing. Dress and adornment practices seem to have remained consistent over the lengthy epoch of the Middle to Late Formative. Nearly all of the elements of the dress/jewelry system are in place by the Middle Formative, with only a few major additions closely linked to the institution of kingship, including the Jester God headdress, jadeite earflares, greenstone pendant “masks,” and massive belts. Other elements attested only in the Late Formative include perishables: specific coiffures, capes, and bands for the limbs. More subtle trends in personal adornment can at present be assessed only at certain sites possessing enough dated burials, such as Cuello (Hammond 1995:50, 52, 55; Robin 1989:43, 89, 96, 97).

Considered as a whole, the evidence from Formative lowland Maya burials shows a remarkable degree of standardization in dress and adornment, though some types or styles of jewelry show more variation. These variations cannot always be attributed to chronological or geographical factors. For example, shell jewelry is common, often in the form of necklaces and bracelets. However, the quantity and form of beads may vary even during a single epoch and at the same site, as the data from Cuello indicate. This variation may result from the hypothesized use of shell bead necklaces as currency and their display as a statement of personal wealth. Other types of objects such as pendants are generally common, but vary in style. Such a pattern may be explained in terms of beautification, defined as an individuating process by which people mark their bodies or those of others as relatively desirable or “persuasive” (see Joyce 1999:19). This
can be seen most clearly in the use of distinctive pendants, many representing unique works of art. Some specific types of jewelry, such as stripped or ground *Spondylus* pubic covers or shields, are associated with particular age groups or sexes, thereby marking the collective beauty of certain subgroups.

In addition, the general consistency in Formative jewelry forms and materials, particularly the widespread use of shell bead necklaces and bracelets, as well as the practices of skull modeling and dental modification, can be viewed as markers of sociability. They embody aspects of visual culture that signal broad group identity at the same time that their details of scale, form, quantity, and manner of use may vary from person to person. Jewelry seems to fulfill a specific social function, however, through its standardization and “packaging” in necklace form as well as its removal from circulation in the context of burials. Through this process, the indices of beautification are lost to public display, resulting in the disintegration of individuality and the transformation of personal wealth into collective ancestral wealth (see Joyce 1999:19). Conversely, the passing of heirlooms such as jade jewels from person to person merges individuals into a collective person, increasingly identified with lineage and social class during this epoch. This process of amassing, circulating, and disposing of wealth prefigures the lavish displays and consumption of feathers, textiles, and shell and jadeite jewelry typical of Early Classic royal portraits, tombs, and caches.

APPENDIX

Early Maya monumental art and luxury objects depicting dress. Dates are Late Formative unless otherwise noted.

PROVENIENCED SCULPTURES

- Actuncan Stela 1 (Fahsen and Grube 2005:fig. 4)
- Bajo la Juventud Stela 1 (Fahsen and Grube 2005:fig. 2)
- Cahal Pech Stela 9 (Awe and Grube 2001; Cheetham 2004:136), before 400 BCE
- Calakmul Sub II-CI frieze (Carrasco Vargas 2005:fig. 4)
- Cival Stela 2 (Estrada-Belli et al. 2003; Estrada-Belli 2011:83), 300–200 BCE
- Cival Structure 1 temple, painted figures (Estrada-Belli et al. 2006:fig. 4; Estrada-Belli 2011:106–9), 220–170 BCE
- El Mirador Monument 18 (Chambers and Hansen 1996)
- El Mirador Stela 2 (Hansen 1991; Parsons 1986:fig. 186), 100–50 BCE
• El Mirador Stela 4 (unpublished drawing)
• El Mirador stucco frieze (unpublished photographs)
• Loltun cliff carving (Parsons 1986:78; Proskouriakoff 1950:fig. 38b), 50–100 CE
• Pomona shell pectoral (Kidder and Ekholm 1951:135, fig. 1g; Justeson, Norman, and Hammond 1988:104–5), 100–250 CE
• Nakbe Stela 1 (Hansen 2001:fig. 75), 500–200 BCE
• San Bartolo murals from Pinturas Sub-1, north wall (Saturno, Taube, and Stuart 2005); west wall (Saturno 2005; Saturno, Stuart, and Taube 2005; Taube and Saturno 2008; Taube et al. 2010), stuccoed block (Saturno et al. 2006:fig. 5), ca. 100 BCE
• San Bartolo Stela 5 (Taube et al. 2010:fig. 54b)
• Tikal Burial 166 wall paintings (Coe 1965:1410–12, 1990, 4:fig. 34), 50 BCE
• Tikal Burial 85 fuchsite mask (Coe 1990, 2:219; Fields and Reents-Budet 2005:111; Moholy-Nagy 2008:fig. 137a), 50 BCE–50 CE
• Tikal Miscellaneous Fragment 69 (Coe 1965:1418; Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:90; Parsons 1986:78), ca. 150 BCE
• Tikal Miscellaneous Stone 167 (Jones 2001)
• Tikal Structure 3D-Sub 10-1st painted figures, sides and rear (Coe 1990, 4:fig. 32; Parsons 1986:78); incised graffiti east wall interior inset; west exterior wall (Trik and Kampen 1983:fig. 83f,g), 1–50 CE
• Tikal Cache 209 jade pendant (90A-19/33) (Moholy-Nagy 2008:fig. 128b)
• Uaxactun Stela 10 (Parsons 1986:79; Proskouriakoff 1950:fig. 36e,f), 100–150 CE
• Uaxactun Sculpture 22 from south plaza (Valdés 1993:fig. 15)

UNPROVENIENCED SCULPTURES

• Antwerp Stela (Boot 2006)
• Flanged pectoral, Dumbarton Oaks (PC.B.538; Fields and Reents-Budet 2005:cat. no. 90), 100 BCE–100 CE
• Jadeite “clamshell” pendant (K763; Mora-Marín 2001:156–59)
• Jadeite “clamshell” pendant (Taube et al. 2010:fig. 37a)
• Stone “Divination” figure (Fields and Reents-Budet 2005:cat. no. 58)

STUCCO MASKS

• Cerros Structure 5C-2nd (Freidel 1977), 50 BCE
• Cerros Structure 29B, (Freidel 1985:fig. 7), 50 BCE
• Cival Structure 1-4th (Estrada-Belli 2006:65–66, fig. 8; Estrada-Belli 2011:104–5), 200–100 BCE
• El Mirador Structure 34 (Hansen 1990:119–20, fig. 65, 210), 150–1 BCE
• El Tigre, Campeche Platform Sub 1 (Vargas Pacheco and Delgado-Jacobo Mugarte 2000:fig. 6)
• Tikal Structure 5D-Sub 3 (Coe 1990, 2:251, 4:fig. 43)
• Tikal Structure 5D-22-6th-B (Coe 1990, 2:338, 4:fig. 60)
• Tikal Structure 5D-86 (Laporte and Fialko 1995:fig. 14)
• Uaxactun Structure H-Sub 4 (Valdés 1987:173, fig. 2)
• Uaxactun Structure H-Sub 5 (Valdés 1989:fig. 7)
• Uaxactun Structure H-Sub 10 (Valdés 1987:175, fig. 4)
• Uaxactun Structure H-Sub 12 (Valdés 1989:fig. 8)
• Uaxactun Structure E-VII-sub, masks 17 and 18 (Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:86, figs. 49, 50)

OBJECTS WITH GLYPHS DEPICTING DRESS
• Kendal axe (Schele and Miller 1986:227, plate 90)
• Kendal “clamshell” pendant (Schele and Miller 1986:plate 10)
• Kichpanha bone bloodletter (Gibson, Shaw, and Finamore 1986:9), 100 BCE–150 CE
• Pomona “earflare” (Justeson, Norman, and Hammond 1988; Kidder and Ekholm 1951:136, fig. 2), 100 BCE–100 CE

NOTE
1. Alternatively, the pendant worn by the San Bartolo Maize God may correspond to the beaded bar-shaped pendants known from the later Classic period (see Miller and Martin 2004:plates 48, 118).

REFERENCES


INTRODUCTION

“What did they look like?” is a question that captures the interest of scholars and the general public alike. “Why?” soon follows but is more difficult to answer. The authors in this volume address the oldest known archaeological evidence for how people wore costumes and ornaments in ancient Mexico and Central America, providing examples from the coasts and valleys of Veracruz and Oaxaca through Mexico, Guatemala, central Honduras, Costa Rica, and Panama in an exploration of costumes and the ways in which they established personhood and identity. Their goal is to reconstruct what people wore, how it made them look, and what we can learn from costume and adornment about modes of thought and belief during the Formative period. As Joyce (Chapter 3) points out, what people wore is “not simply a reflection of what people did, but what it was significant to do.” These studies contribute to a growing literature on the anthropology of the body and embodiment (Csordas 1990; Rautman 2000; Joyce 2005; Mascia-Lees 2011) and on the archaeology of agency, identity, and personhood (Dobres and Robb 2000; Meskell 2001; Fowler 2004), viewing bodies and their adornments as models for the persons who used them and exploring approaches for understanding both them and ourselves.

As extensions of the body, costume and adornment provide insights into how perception of the world is conditioned by the body, by how the body (and its extensions) are imagined to be, and by the people who make use of their body and its adornment in specific ways. What they wore reflected, conditioned, and
reinforced what it was significant for oneself and others to think and how thought was memorialized in material representation, both consciously and unconsciously. As Fowler (2004:7) has noted, “Persons are constituted, deconstituted, maintained and altered in social practices through life and after death,” and costumes of both the living and the dead make this clear. However, Fowler also emphasizes that people are “multiply authored” (ibid.:52). That multiplicity of authorship includes not only individuals in the past, but we as archaeologists interpreting and explaining the past. In writing about figurines, mortuary remains, monuments, and murals, we become coauthors of the personhood of people in the distant past.

Costume can be interpreted as a form of embodiment and as a way of establishing personhood. Strathern and Stewart (2011:389) note that embodiment “crucially intersects with personhood” and divide personhood into two aspects: “One relates to formal ideas and culturally established concepts: what we might call ideal conceptions. The other, however, relates to practice: what people actually do, how they negotiate actions in their lives. This latter part of personhood is the part that inter-relates most closely with embodiment.” Costumes represent an expression of how people see themselves as well as how and what they communicate with others. Detailed analysis of costumes and adornments of the Formative period can reveal not only patterns that were manifest at this early time period but ones that anticipated those that were to follow. Interpretation of patterns in costumes and adornment seeks not only to discover conceptions of past persons, but to understand how these objects were used by agents and actors in active processes of embodiment.

To what extent can costume and adornment, as known from scientifically documented archaeological contexts as well as well-known works of prehispanic artwork, be used to identify specific persons and aspects of personhood—identities, roles, and behaviors of individuals and groups of persons—in the distant past? Do costume and adornment help define a range of different categories of embodiment and personhood? Can costume and adornment reveal aspects of ancient cognition and how this was reified in various practices? A focus on critical evaluation of costume and regalia in the Formative addresses the oldest known archaeological evidence in Mexico and Central America. The chapters represent a wide variety of cultures within a broad geographic scope. Although Mesoamerica has been well defined since Kirchhoff (1943), the salient characteristics of the “Intermediate Area” remain poorly defined. Southern Central America and northwestern South America are now considered together as part of the Isthmo-Colombian Area (Hoopes and Fonseca Zamora 2003), itself a part of a larger Pan-Caribbean phenomenon (Hofman
et al. 2007; Hofman and Bright 2010; Siegel 2010). Costa Rica and Panama have been included in acknowledgment of this new paradigm, and the cultures discussed include the possibly Mixe-Zoquean–speaking Mokaya and Olmecs as well as those who spoke Mayan and Chibchan languages.

THE GOALS OF THE BOOK

The analysis ranges from discussions of common adornment of nonspecialists and individuals of apparent low status to the elaborate costumes of the elite, who often assumed the role of religious specialists. Costuming and adornment can range from wearing accessories such as earflares, lip plugs, bracelets, necklaces, and hair ornaments to the elaborate expressions in dress of complex symbol systems representing complex roles. “Costume” also includes body decoration and modification, explored in several chapters that note techniques such as cranial deformation, tattooing, and dental modification. As Blomster notes (Chapter 4), social meaning was inscribed on the human body, and Hepp and Rieger (Chapter 5) suggest that representations of human bodies and the associated iconography can be read like a text, asserting that, “the human body, both clothed and nude, was an important part of the symbolic lexicon of Formative Mesoamerica.” Looper (Chapter 13) emphasizes the way that costumes indicate “sociability,” indicating the identity of the larger group as well as that of the specific individual. All of these are affirmations that bodies and costumes were as media through which meaningful communications ensued. As with the invention and elaboration of writing, the invention of costume introduced a broad set of strategies for people to know and affect each other.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FORMATIVE PATTERNS

The term “Formative” can be used in either a chronological or a developmental sense. The “Formative stage” was initially defined on the basis of “the presence of maize and/or manioc agriculture and by the successful socioeconomic integration of such agriculture into well-established sedentary village life” (Willey and Phillips 1958:144). As Willey and Phillips explain, “The name ‘Formative,’ as we use it, implies the formation of the New World agricultural village pattern. At the same time, it carries with it the connotation that this pattern was basic to and formational toward later and more advanced developments” (ibid.:149). That is, the patterns of the Formative anticipate those that follow. The concept of Formative is problematic as defined and
operationalized in a culture history paradigm. For one thing, it is a broad category, both temporally and conceptually. It encompasses a wide range of societies of varying social complexity, from small fishing villages on the coasts of Oaxaca and Soconusco to the centralized polities of Olman and Maya territory. Considering small villages such as Paso de la Amada in the same category as San Bartolo, Izapa, and Sitio Conte may seem like a stretch, but all of these are considered to be Formative settlements on the basis of the importance of agriculture. Willey and Phillips identified as “Archaic” the historic cultures of the northwest coast of North America with their vibrant traditions of textiles, woodcarving, masks, and potlatches. Food production and the “potentialities for demographic increase” are what helped them to draw a dividing line; that is, “they were not Formative in the sense that they might go to a Classic stage” (Willey and Phillips 1958). In the sense they are used in this book, Formative patterns are “anticipatory” in that they were in most cases the foundations of “Classic” things yet to come. (Exceptions would be in southern Central America, where “Formative” is sporadically employed and “Classic” has not been used.) Most significantly, the Formative period in Mesoamerica and Central America is when changes in technology—especially in the manufacture of artifacts from a wide range of materials—accelerated rapidly. It was also one in which we find the earliest clear evidence for social differentiation and the emergence of wealth and hierarchy (Hoopes 1992). The most recent data presented come from the ninth century CE, at a time when Panama may be considered part of a “Formative” pattern of chiefly social organization similar to that of the Olmecs in Mesoamerica. According to Willey and Phillips (1958:172), for Coclé the “level of development . . . appears to correlate with that of the Formative cultures in Middle America and elsewhere.”

In a chronological sense, the term “Formative” (which corresponds to “Preclassic” especially in the Maya area) encompasses the Early (2500–1000 BCE), Middle (1000–300 BCE), and Late (300 BCE–CE 100/200) Formative periods in Mesoamerica. The Formative period begins with the emergence of craft technologies, specifically (but not strictly) characterized by the initial manufacture of pottery (Barnett and Hoopes 1995). With the introduction of this technology, ceramic figurines became a durable medium in which to portray the human form, dress, and adornment in many areas. In Mesoamerica the earliest known figurines appear around 2400 BCE (Clark and Colman, Chapter 6). Although forms of costume existed in earlier Paleoindian and Archaic periods, Formative technologies also included spinning, weaving, and other household industries that contributed to the creation and elaboration of costumes, regalia, and adornments. (In Colombia and Peru, it also included
the beginnings of gold metallurgy.) Both the manufacture and the use of these resulted in new roles, identities, and the use of varied technologies for extending embodiment into realms of costume and performance.

In general, the Formative data represent our initial record in Mexico and Central America of costume and clothing together with the people who wore them. There are earlier data for ornament manufacture, but not for how ornaments were worn. The Formative period in Mesoamerica and Central America is not when costumes first appeared, but rather when there are sufficient sources of information for us to say something about them. Costumes and ritual regalia were almost certainly used during these earlier periods. Paleolithic sites such as Blombos Cave in South Africa (Henshilwood et al. 2001) to Sunghir in Russia (Formicola 2007) prove that jewelry and adornments were a clear component of human material culture long before the beginning of the Formative period in Mesoamerica and Central America. People undoubtedly arrived in the Western hemisphere with well-developed technologies and traditions of clothing, but direct evidence is lacking. Likewise, spinning and weaving appear by at least 6000 BCE in South America and were probably in Mexico and Central America long before the beginning of the Early Formative.

The authors in this book make a concerted effort to identify the earliest representations of clothing, costume, and regalia in artifact form as well as in the iconography of figurines and other media. However, it is not comprehensive. Consideration of data earlier than 2400 BCE (Clark and Colman, Chapter 6) is absent. This is due in part to the absence of data. There are none yet for the Paleoindian period (ca. 18,000–10,000 BCE), when either direct or indirect evidence for either clothing or ornamentation is minimal and throughout the hemisphere. Data from the Archaic period are also extremely limited. Exceptions would include coastal Chiapas, where there is Preceramic evidence for shell beads and ornaments in the Chantuto culture of coastal Chiapas (Voorhies 2004) and Cerro Mangote, in central Panama, where ornaments dating to ca. 4000 BCE included a circular shell disk “pendant” with small drill holes for suspension and a single perforated shell bead (McGimsey 1956). O’Day (Chapter 1) discusses material from Sitio Conte in which Lord 15, a specific person who lived ca. CE 750–850, embodied the culmination of a form of communication through costume that had been initiated in the earlier phases of Tonosi/Cubítá (ca. CE 300–600, contemporaneous with the Classic period in Central Mexico or the Early Classic in the Maya area). His burial was so similar to Spanish descriptions of contact-era burial practices that Lothrop, placing it shortly before Spanish contact, mistakenly dated it almost
a thousand years too late, suggesting that “Formative” may have limited use as a chronological concept in southern Central America.

NATURE OF THE EVIDENCE

Costumes and regalia of the Formative include clothing ranging from pubic covers, loincloths, and aprons, to elaborate headbands, turbans, woven shawls, huipiles, and *quechquemitls*, to jewelry (beads, ear spools, lip plugs, necklaces, pendants, bracelets) and hairstyles. As noted by Joyce (Chapter 3), cloth was the most important medium in which social ties and political significance were represented, by commoners as well as nobility. It is remarkable how much can be said about clothing in the absence of direct evidence for cloth. Textiles are absent or poorly preserved throughout the region under discussion, making it essential to use indirect iconographic evidence in the form of figurines, stone sculpture, and mural paintings. These categories of data also provide valuable details about how objects were worn in ways that are not apparent even in the best-preserved mortuary assemblages.

The processes by which clothing, costumes, and adornments were made are considered only indirectly. The authors pay primary attention to the end products of clothing and ornament manufacture, not as much to the crafts used to produce them (an exception to this is Winzenz’s discussion of weaving at San Bartolo in Chapter 13). In many cases, such as the Maya lowlands, the direct evidence with which to address textile technology is sparse while the indirect iconographic evidence is particularly rich. In others, specific data on craft production technologies pertinent to costumes have not received significant attention. While the presence of durable objects such as spindle whorls and artifact preforms is helpful, an indirect approach such as used in this volume can provide additional details about early textile and adornment technology. Evidence for the production of items of dress and adornment can reveal changes in costumes and adornment over time. For example, techniques for working shell, bone, or hard tropical woods such as drilling, cutting, abrading, and even string-sawing were probably transferred to jade, adding the latter to the range of materials used for beads, pendants, and ear ornaments. Studies such as Chenault’s (1988, 1989) experimental approach to jadeworking in Costa Rica can help identify possible strategies for the manufacture of elite costume elements.

Most of the chapters also consider body modification (cf. DeMello 2011), including cranial deformation, dental mutilation, piercing, gauging, and tattooing. All authors comment on problems of preservation and the nature of
the evidence for clothing. For example, Joyce’s study of figurines from Playa de los Muertos, Honduras (Chapter 3) recovers the rich variety of Middle Formative textile manufacture in central Honduras in a fashion that has been impossible on the basis of direct evidence.

WHY COSTUMES WERE WORN (OR NOT)

It is obvious that costumes and adornments were often used for practical purposes, such as protecting the body, keeping hair out of one’s eyes, and carrying babies or other items (one of the most ancient uses for pieces of cloth). However, they were also forms of nonverbal communication. Costumes communicate with us even if we cannot confirm their messages. Blomster (Chapter 4) refers to figurines as a form of “emic self-imaging,” implying that they are analogous to a material medium with which to conduct ethnography. Clothing—or lack of it—communicated identity, including social status. As Clark and Colman (Chapter 6) demonstrate in the case of earflares, ornaments not only communicated status to others but also symbolized communication itself—whether with other human beings or with supernatural entities, including divinities.

In ritual contexts, costumes and adornment effected emically apparent transformation of humans into supernatural beings. Whether simple or elaborate, Formative costumes helped make manifest various supernatural identities and affirm their personhood, either through portraying or facilitating the embodiment of deities and mythological beings. A mural at Oxtotítlán Cave in Guerrero, Mexico (Grove 1970), for example, shows an individual wearing feathers on his arms in an elaborate bird costume with a beaked headdress, a theme repeated on Kaminaljuyú Stela 11 (Figure 10.6). O’Day and Wingfield (Chapters 1 and 2) comment on “crocodile people” who may have been similar to the therianthropic “bat people” that have been documented by Clemencia Plazas (2007). It is often difficult or impossible to distinguish between a person dressed in an animal costume and an adorned animal. This ambiguity may well reflect the original intention of the culture in which the costume was used, and the power of ambiguous personhood may have been an essential quality of supernaturals. As metaphors and substitutions were used in narratives about shamans, sorcerers, rulers, and deities—statements referring to the actions of a jaguar, eagle, or snake may be a veiled reference to the action of a person—costumes could serve as material expressions of these substitutions. A person dressed as a bird became a bird or bird deity in the context of a dance, a battle, or other ritual activity.
as emic equivalence trumped etic distinction. These practices may well date back into Archaic and even Paleoindian times—a fact hinted at by similar practices in Siberia and the Americas despite a lack of evidence for subsequent contact between them—but Clark and Colman (Chapter 6) note that a masked figure from Early Formative contexts at Paso de la Amada remains the earliest known masked figure in Mesoamerica.

Costumes were worn because, as noted by Lytle and Reilly (Chapter 11), “regalia literally and figuratively frames the individual.” It amplifies and extends the meanings of individual identity, including elements of lineage, authority, and power. This is especially clear when the identity of the individual is essential to definitions of both the personhood and embodiment of supernatural beings. At San Bartolo, for example, the Late Formative murals present stripped-down individuals in intimate settings that reveal private acts and emphasize individuality, even though the actors are mythological beings, such as the Maize God or Hunahpu (Taube et al. 2010). In other contexts, costumes carried their own significance, irrespective of who wore them. Kaminaljuyú Stela 11, for example, depicts a person so hidden within his costume that his individual identity is invisible, a personification of the therianthropic Principal Bird Deity so prominent on the west wall at San Bartolo (Taube et al. 2010). In the absence of inscriptions, not even the wearer’s name is known. Examples such as this can be interpreted as cases in which ornate “frames” overwhelm what is being framed, to the point of effacing identities that are subsumed to the symbolism and identity of the regalia. As with those worn by Hopi kachinas, some Formative costumes may have been considered to have lives of their own—or to represent physical embodiments of supernatural deities—carrying far more significance than the costumed. The costume is the embodiment of a metaphysical being, and a deity achieves personhood through its animation.

Costumes also placed conditions on the bodies of the individuals who wore them. They constrain the movement and condition the sensation of the wearer, serving as signals not only to others but to the people who wear them. Putting on costumes and adornments may have been exercises in mindfulness, changing the wearer’s consciousness from normal to supernormal ritual states. Training and practice are often required to wear elaborate costumes correctly, to learn the rules of how the costumes must be treated and cared for, and to be familiar with restrictions on handling and use. Costumes obligate the wearer to adopt new identities, subverting personal identity to the identity of the regalia and accepting new modalities of personhood. The wearer may honor the costume more than the costume honors the person within
it. Masked Mexican wrestlers, for example, represent continuity in aspects of the Precolumbian identities of boxers who concealed their faces with special headgear (Taube and Zender 2009). Popes and kings adopt new names, dress in traditional costumes, and often assume attitudes that reinforce continuity rather than individuality. What is worn as well as the costume as seen by observers affects the “infit” (the internal perceptions and emotions of the wearer), and these can be in harmony, discord, or somewhere in between.

ARTIFACT CLASSES

Willey and Phillips (1958:149) indicate that handmade figurines are a “hallmark” of the Formative, and several authors (Joyce, Chapter 3; Blomster, Chapter 4; Follensbee, Chapter 7; Marchegay, Chapter 9; and Looper, Chapter 13) undertake detailed studies of large and well-documented figurine sets, especially from controlled archaeological excavations. Figurines are a particularly rich source of data. Hepp and Rieger (Chapter 5) write that “figurines and other early iconography of the human body were part of a set of overlapping practices that likely included ancestor remembrance, performative (even public) ritual, mimetic cooption of symbolic power, religious symbolism, life history commemoration, and perhaps children’s games. Figurines may also have been material symbols forming a commentary on social constructions of gender, age, and kinship.” As Joyce notes (Chapter 3), figurines provide glimpses of individuals throughout the life cycle, from infancy and childhood to old age, but she emphasizes the multiple roles of figurines, including their recursive relationship with the creation of identity (cf. Joyce 2003).

All authors note a significant majority of females among Formative figurines identifiable with regard to physical sex characteristics. In the case of the Playa de los Muertos (Joyce, Chapter 3), not a single example has been identified as male. These patterns raise a number of significant questions. Did males make female representations in order to obtain their power and/or manipulate them? Did females make and use these to honor their own social roles? Were figurines made by or for different age classes? Can some of them be considered toys? Were others made by elderly midwives or healers for use on altars? These are questions that would benefit from cross-cultural ethnographic analysis, being mindful of the fact that Mattel’s Barbie doll—with her exaggerated breasts and legs—began as a sex fantasy toy for men (Oppenheimer 2009), yet were marketed as toys/tools for the enculturation of girls (and their mothers) imagining the social roles they were to play. As different as Formative
figurines and Barbie may seem, their functions in strategies of enculturation may have been similar if the former were used as models of embodiment (cf. Joyce 2003). Different constituencies can also use these objects at different times in the life histories of individual objects, some acquiring and others losing significance through use, modification, and breakage. The very complex history of dolls worldwide emphasizes that figurines may have a vast array of contexts, uses, and interpretations. We must be mindful of the fact that the appeal of our own interpretations to us is conditioned by our own historical and cultural context. A postmodern, multivocal approach would also seek interpretations from outside the academy, including the makers and users of figurines and dolls in a broader context.

In considering figurines, it is critical to bear in mind that these objects may have been dressed with textiles or other ornamentation themselves. Clothing a figurine may have been a method used to “animate” it, with the clothing considered to be as much—or perhaps more—of a “living thing” than the figurine itself (especially unclothed). Figurines themselves may have become actors in the sense of (as Joyce shows) models for living people. As Winzenz (Chapter 12) notes, woven garments may have emically contained a “life-essence” that could have been transferred to the person wearing them. The extension of personhood may have been extended to figurines and even other objects dressed by bundling (Lytle and Reilly, Chapter 11). Blomster (Chapter 4) and Follensbee (Chapter 7) both note that there have long been speculations that Early Formative figurines were decorated with perishable costumes (Coe and Diehl 1980:260). Focusing on a naked figure—even with an elaborate coiffure—may be like attempting to interpret Barbie without her wardrobe and accessories. Unfortunately, the direct evidence for the dressing of figurines with textiles and other ornaments is limited.

Ear Ornaments

Clark and Colman (Chapter 6) focus on ear ornaments represented on figurines, in other artwork, and as artifacts in mortuary assemblages and other contexts. They offer an excellent example of how the detailed analysis of a well-defined artifact class can be informative and revealing in a fashion similar to Harri Kettunen’s (2006) study of Maya nose ornaments, in which he also concludes that these ornaments convey special status, are associated with metaphysical essences, and communicate specific beliefs.

Earflares are well known from the Classic and Postclassic periods, but Formative examples anticipate later use. Their apparent continuity of meaning—
enduring for 3,000 years—is one of the longest in any of the world’s costume traditions. Earspools changed over time from personal ornaments to signals of high social status, representing “an evolution of earware from beautifying ephemera to durable symbols of royalty metonymic of divine speech and godliness” (Clark and Colman, Chapter 6). They may have never lost their original function—to represent status associated with the ear (whose function is listening), especially when made from jade (a substance associated with breath). What changed was the material (from raw materials such as bone, wood, or ceramic to fine jade), the workmanship (from everyday craft to skilled workmanship), the technological complexity (in terms of parts, mechanics, etc.), and the size (ultimately to exaggerated ornaments that could be worn only by those whose ears had been heavily gauged). Taube (2005) established that jade was associated with breath. Clark and Colman (Chapter 6) go further, associating jade with speech and hearing and asserting, “Jade beads and jade earspools . . . represented the scattering and gathering of precious words.” Most importantly, Clark and Colman conclude that earspools were symbolic ears. That is, rulers were identified as having “two sets of ears,” their natural organs and supernatural ones that “signaled their proximity to the divine” and gave them special powers of listening and hearing, including the ability to listen to voices of deities. This is a clear example of an extension of embodiment into elements of a costume that was perceived as becoming both enhancing and empowering, adding a new dimension to the personhood of the wearer by providing them with supernatural ability.

In Soconusco, status hierarchies are clear after 1600 BCE. The evidence from figurines suggests that all people could wear earspools but that from Early Formative times they were clear markers of social status. Clark and Colman (Chapter 6) make it clear that specific styles of ear ornaments, especially the use of open-throat earspools, were associated with high status from 1400 BCE on and that by 700 BCE jade earspools in particular were overt symbols of kingship. The fact that earspools are found from the eastern United States (where they appear in Hopewell contexts) to the Andes (where Inka royalty were known as orejones) suggests that certain embedded meanings identified by Clark and Colman were understood over an extraordinarily large geographic area.

Ornament Sets

The interpretation of “ornament sets” from mortuary assemblages is the closest we get in the archaeological record to complete costumes at the time of
burial (O’Day, Chapter 1). Although the burials at Sitio Conte are much later than other “Formative” materials, their analysis is parallel to consideration of Formative assemblages at La Venta, discussed by Clark and Colman (Chapter 6), and in Huasteca, as discussed by Marchegay (Chapter 9). O’Day focuses on Lord 15 and the costume in which he was dressed for posterity. Her detailed approach reconstitutes elements of a personality from the distant past, using archaeology to assign personhood to an individual who we can now add to a growing roster of specific high-status actors. Individuals on Moche fine-line ceramics dressed in costumes similar to those found in burials at Sipán (Donnan and McClelland 1999) offer hope of our identifying these persons by their costumes in various forms of media. We must now seek Lord 15 not only in burials but in the iconography of ceramics and goldwork, though we would be mistaken to anticipate realistic representations—ancient “realities” may have been very different from our own. A gold pectoral from Burial 11 at Sitio Conte (Hearne and Sharer 1992:plate 1) shows ear rods similar to those found in burials, gold-alloy poporos (lime containers) from the Treasure of the Quimbayas (Gamboa Hinestrosa 2002) that depict individuals wearing similar ornaments, and gold-alloy pendants from the Tairona region that depict what appears to be a person in costume (Looper 1996). However, in the cases of Sitio Conte and the Tairona, the persons depicted have therianthropic qualities that suggest metaphorical conventions for representing supernatural qualities.

An especially well-known human effigy vessel from northwestern Costa Rica (Figure 14.1) offers an example of an “ornament set” similar to those from Sitio Conte. This figure is shown wearing a quincunx of embossed gold disks arranged on his chest, shoulders, and knees. Careful examination reveals that he also has a vertically suspended celtiform pendant—probably made of jadeite—on his neck. Its small size suggests that the value of jade had been superseded by gold at the time of this figure’s manufacture. Like the figures at Sitio Conte, he is wearing emblems that symbolize a reptilian, probably crocodilian, identity. These include not only the double-headed figures (possibly jade bar pendants) on his flanks but the dentil design across the top of his head and body. A small crocodile figure on the back of the head (Figure 14.1b) confirms this therianthropic or transformative identity of a human who appears with the aspect of another creature or who has become or is becoming one in a metaphysical sense, a concept documented in Mesoamerican belief systems (Brinton 1894). The jewelry itself may have assisted—in a magical way—with effecting the symbolic transformation of shape-shifting. The predominance of crocodilians and “crocodile people” in the iconography of contemporary polychrome ceramics of both Greater Nicoya and central Panama at this time
suggests specific historical connections and shared belief systems that include crocodile and caiman imagery within a large context that extends from the southeastern United States into the Amazon. The presence of a large circular disk—presumably of cold-hammered gold with repoussé decoration—suggests similar identification of symbols (ones whose use extends south into northern Colombia and north into the Maya area, as evidenced by examples from the Sacred Cenote at Chichén Itzá).

As O’Day (Chapter 1) notes, reconstructions based on ornament sets are especially valuable for visualizing how people would have actually appeared in their ceremonial dress. Formative art of the Maya, for example, often exaggerates the size of ornaments, such as earspools and earflares, headdresses, and belt assemblages, relative to the size of the person. Reconstructions based on actual artifacts or projections of artifact size are especially helpful for visualizing Late Formative ajawob, such as the individual on Stela 11 from Kaminaljuyu. Digital reconstruction and animation can help make these objects come alive for a general public. These reconstructions should be informed and supervised to an
even greater extent by art historians and archaeologists, especially when consulting with high-budget films such as Mel Gibson’s *Apocalypto* (Hansen 2012).

**Cloth**

The use of cloth during the Formative is a major theme addressed by Joyce (Chapter 3), who details the many different ways in which cloth was used in headbands, headdresses, skirts, capes, and other clothing. Figurines indicate changing attitudes toward cloth with respect to workmanship and quality as craft production changes during the Formative period. Earley and Guernsey (Chapter 10), Lytle and Reilly (Chapter 11), and Winzenz (Chapter 12) also discuss cloth in Late Formative sculpture and murals. Textiles were used to adorn not only persons but also objects and sacred bundles. As Earley and Guernsey argue, textiles are a major motif in the creation of symbolic “frames” for actions depicted in monumental sculpture beginning in Formative contexts.

**The Body as Artifact**

The authors also present evidence for body modification through painting, piercing, gauging (of ears, noses, and lips), tattooing, scarification, and modification of the skulls and teeth of living individuals (sometimes termed “cranial deformation” and “dental mutilation,” phrases that reflect current negative connotations instead of what were probably emic Formative notions of what was good and/or beautiful). All of these methods were ways of making the human body into a cultural artifact. The absence of flesh from mortuary remains requires indirect evidence from ceramics and other artistic depictions—as well as the ornaments themselves—to substitute for direct observation of body modification. Direct evidence is available only from skulls and teeth. Mesoamerican lore is replete with metaphors of the earth as human body (Houston, Stuart, and Taube 2006), suggesting that body modification and perhaps even clothing served as analogies for the effects of human modification on the natural environment through clearing vegetation, plowing fields, or building reservoirs and canals. The human body, like the earth’s surface, was permanently shaped by human action. This created what Strathern and Stewart (2011) call a “personscape.” Permanent modification of head shape (cranial deformation) was undertaken shortly after birth to place an indelible stamp of ethnicity and/or social status (privilege but not necessarily authority)—one that could not be altered or misrepresented later in life. Marchegay (Chapter 9) discusses several different forms from Loma Real, where Huastec
cranial deformation appears as early as the Late Formative and is reflected in both dental data and figurines. Dental filing was identified as one of the “most common forms” of body modification in the Huasteca (also present in northwestern Costa Rica). A single example from the Middle Formative Huasteca (ca. 900–650 BCE) indicates an ancient precedent for a practice known from Postclassic contexts, such as the filed teeth on the well-known Huastec Youth statue (Faust, Chapter 8). Looper (Chapter 13) comments on specific patterns that produce points or serrations that evoke animal dentition, such as that of crocodiles and jaguars. It is not clear whether cranial modification sought to replicate the head shapes of jaguars or other animals, although this would have been consistent with other uses of costumes, masks, and body modification to communicate therianthropy. Dental modification and cranial deformation may have “animalized” the human head, creating new dimensions of personhood that combined human and animal characteristics.

Depictions of nudity varied widely across the areas and time periods under consideration. Figurines, in particular, frequently depicted unclothed human bodies. In Early Formative Oaxaca (Blomster, Chapter 4), the Maya area (Looper, Chapter 13), and the Huasteca (Marchegay, Chapter 9), most figurines had naked bodies. In northwestern Costa Rica (Wingfield, Chapter 2) both women and men were regularly represented with most of their bodies—including genitalia—exposed. However, nudity rarely meant depiction of a person totally naked of adornment. Hepp and Rieger’s detailed analysis of figurines from sites in the Gulf Coast and coastal Oaxaca (Chapter 5) demonstrates that there were few representations of completely unadorned bodies. Given the possibility of mixed-media representations combining textiles and jewelry with figurines, it is difficult to say whether figurines with naked bodies were regularly clothed or even whether body markings—such as those on the Young Lord (Faust, Chapter 8)—were commonly visible on living persons. However, even when figurines were nude, the use of body modification and ornaments placed a clear and visible stamp of culture on them as actors.

ADDRESSING GENDER

Clothing and ornamentation can provide significant insight into gender representation and identification. However, several authors consider the difficulty of addressing issues of gender, especially when sex is not explicitly represented, either because it is intentionally ambivalent or just not significant. While some figurines are clearly sexed with respect to genitalia, their masculine, feminine, or other gender may have been indicated not by the details of
the figurine but by added clothing. Costumes can signal gender, change gender, or render gender ambivalent or unrecognizable. Several authors comment on the likelihood of gender-neutral as well as gender-specific clothing, noting that one cannot assume the gender of the clothing corresponds to the biological sex of the person wearing it. Costumes may have been used to render intentional ambiguities of gender, either because it was not important (as in the qualities of a specific nongendered deity) or because gender ambiguity (a form of control or concealment of information) was itself a source of political or metaphysical power. Costumes may also have been used to accentuate and assert gender in ways more powerful than could be expressed by the physical body alone in ways that affected not only the observer but the wearer—sensations that are well understood by individuals seeking to emphasize masculinity or femininity as well as cross-dressers and those seeking to avoid strong gender identification.

Follensbee (Chapter 7) points to “intentionally sexually ambiguous, gender-ambiguous, and gender-neutral figures” in Olmec art. However, it is critical to be alert to subtleties. For example, modern Europeans often tease American tourists by noting that men and women “dress alike” (in t-shirts, khaki shorts, sandals, etc.), yet there are usually gender-specific elements (earrings, watch styles, etc.) that may be small but revealing. Gender can express itself weakly or strongly at different parts of the human life cycle. The gender of infants, for example, is frequently unemphasized, and it may be impossible to know whether male infants were differentiated from female infants in Olmec art. Prepubescent youths may also have been displayed with ambiguous gender. Blomster (Chapter 4) deals directly with the issue of sex “being trumped by gender determined through clothing,” pointing out that figurines could represent individuals in different gender roles. Follensbee (Chapter 7) notes that in Olmec hierarchies “personal agency, lineage, and/or tradition, rather than sex, gender, or age, were more likely the paramount factors for at least some roles and levels of status.” While there is a temptation to identify Olmec leadership as male, Follensbee points out that this is by no means clear—especially in the gender of the famous Olmec heads. Some elite costumes were apparently worn by both sexes, suggesting that roles may have been tied to specific genders despite the individuals wearing them. Like Elizabethan men playing female roles in Shakespearean plays, gender impersonation may have been an element of elite dress. However, images of Olmec elite do represent both males and females, and Follensbee concludes that each gender participated in roles of status and power within Olmec society. Follensbee suggests that some deities may have been considered as gender-neutral. That is, gender may have
been irrelevant when deities represented forces of nature or abstract concepts that defied gender classification. Alternatively, some deities may have assumed either or both genders. Clearly, the issue was complex, and Follensbee lays the groundwork for more detailed future analysis of these issues.

**RITUAL COSTUMES**

In an earlier article (Hoopes 2005), I wondered about the possibility of ritual costumes in “patterned forms” that continued to be worn for several generations and asked whether the individuals who were the focus of intense provisioning and mortuary commemoration at sites such as Sitio Conte may not have been identified as individual humans (recognized for their individual human identities), but personifications of specific deities who were invoked for the benefit of the community. What I had in mind were individuals whose identities transcended those of unique personhood, with actors becoming (etically) representations or (emically) embodiments of living deities. An example of this is the *kumari* of Nepal, a girl who personifies the “living goddess” Taleju (the Nepali name for Durga). She occupies this role as a virgin child until a serious illness, a major loss of blood from injury, or the onset of menses terminates her role. The *kumari* is dressed in special clothing and makeup and participates in rituals throughout the year. However, when a *kumari* retires, she returns to a normal life without special status and another girl takes her place (Shakya and Berry 2005). Each individual actor has a temporary role as an official personifier or avatar for an immortal deity.

Hopi kachinas present another example of supernatural personhood in which costumes and roles are much more significant than the individuals who wear them. The costumes, in fact, are (emically) the kachinas themselves (Secakuku 1995). For the Hopi, kachinas are understood not as men in costumes but deities. The spirit that resides in the costume is assisted in its animation by the dancer who wears it. The significance of the illusion is one that has survived in popular lore such as the prophecy reported by Frank Waters: “The end of all Hopi ceremonialism will come when a kachina removes his mask during a dance in the plaza before uninitiated children” (Waters and Fredericks 1963:408). (This is echoed in non-Native ceremonial contexts. For example, pains are taken at the University of Kansas to prevent the Jayhawk mascot costume from ever being seen incomplete or its wearer only partly dressed in public.) Costumed Cocijo impersonators in the Oaxaca Valley or Maya *ajawob* dressed as the young Maize God were not simply impersonators, but may have emically become the actual deity by wearing a costume with
“magical” qualities of transformation. Their individual identities may be effaced by the costume—especially when a mask is involved—especially if the duties of such a role required the surrender of individual decision-making authority to the will of what Feinman (2001) refers to as a corporate group. Alternatively, both identities may have been valued simultaneously, represented visually in “x-ray” imagery such as clear depictions of human faces behind masks. As Winzenz (Chapter 12) notes, quoting Freidel and Guenter (2006), jewels placed on the person representing the Maize God “actually contain his soul,” and the garments and jewelry become “agents of his resurrection.” Adornment changed the nature of the object that was adorned. A recent dissertation on residues of ritual activities on architecture at San Bartolo (Craig 2009) suggests that pyramids themselves may have been “dressed” with offerings for special occasions.

The appearance of a person in costume requires a change in attitude that is often accompanied by a suspension of disbelief and/or an assertion of belief, analogous to the way in which contemporary Christians present Santa Claus in the presence of small children, Mickey Mouse appears at Walt Disney World, clowns are granted special privileges (to tease and harass) at circuses, mascots appear at sporting events, and actors appear on the stage. When a person dons a therianthropic Mickey Mouse costume to walk the streets of Walt Disney World, for children, and theme park employees (who follow strict rules conditioning interaction), and many adults, Mickey is present. Individuals who wear the costume become the avatar of a supernatural or an imaginary being made real. It may be inappropriate to think of the costume or its elements as separate from the identity they are intended to represent. The costume facilitates embodiment and bestows personhood on an entity that is different from the actor, whether transformation into an avatar is partial or complete.

In a specific example, Wingfield notes that a large vessel (Figure 2.10) may be the earliest representation of a “crocodile person”—the “Crocodile God” mentioned in earlier literature by Lothrop, Bray, and others for the Isthmo-Colombian region. The curled, circular nose and the mouth with prominent teeth suggest this as a possibility. However, the figure may not be a deity but rather a therianthropic being, a “were-crocodile” parallel to Coe’s notion of a “were-jaguar.” Such beings may represent individuals in masks or costumes that represent their transformation and/or relationship (through spirit possession, for example) with the animal’s essence. Alternatively, they may be metaphorical representations of the embodiment of nonhuman qualities.
SHAMANISM AND STATUS

Wingfield (Chapter 2) discusses the importance of costume and body decoration for identifying powerful women whom she interprets as shamans and chieftains, suggesting that they correspond to ethnohistorically and ethno graphically documented statuses such as awá, usékar, or cacique. The iconographic data she cites are essential for exploring which roles were ancient and which may represent more recent adaptations to culture change. However, although chieftains could have the roles of healers, the identity of “shaman” usually did not imply political status. This backward projection of contemporaneous examples is problematic. In this type of analysis, we cannot know the emic perspective—how the people who made these figures saw them—we can only know the etic. We must be mindful of how our own perceptions shape interpretation, whether they prevent us from recognizing female healers (as has been a historical tendency) or whether they incline us to see them. Although there was occasional mention of female caciques, the actual power of women was not recognized or acknowledged by Spanish authorities. The usékars or high-ranking magical authorities among the Bribri of Costa Rica, described in the greatest detail by Bozzoli de Wille (2006), apparently disappeared in the 1930s (though there have been attempts to revive this office).

Wingfield’s claims of Chibchan matrilineality (and, just as significant, matrilocality) are ones that still remain to be supported by a detailed argument based on archaeological, ethnohistoric, and ethnographic evidence. Chibchan kinship systems, which tend to be matrilineal and matrilocal, may prove critical to understanding differences between patterns in the Isthmo-Colombian area and those of Mesoamerica and the central Andes, where patrilineal and patrilocal residence patterns predominated. It seems likely that gender roles were viewed differently by Chibchan-speaking populations than by Olmec, Maya, or other Mesoamerican ones. The Treasure of the Quimbayas (Gamboa Hinestrosa 2002) includes a beautiful gold helmet and an elaborate poporo with visually equivalent representations of both male and female figures. Does this represent gender equality in a social as well as an artistic context?

The chapters by Wingfield (Chapter 2), Clark and Colman (Chapter 6), Faust (Chapter 8), and Lytle and Reilly (Chapter 11) variously mention shamans, “shamanic chiefs,” and “shamanic” garb, beings, rulers, powers, themes, and societies. Wingfield, in particular, emphasizes the roles of shamans. The role of costumes for shamans has been a significant theme, as indicated by the attention Mircea Eliade (1964) devotes to detailed descriptions of shaman costumes and accessories. He emphasizes that Siberian shamans used
costumes to evoke the presence of spirits, noting, “The costume inspires the same feelings of fear and apprehension as any other object in which the ‘spirits’ reside (ibid.:147). That is, the costume itself is animate, impregnated with spirits. For Eliade, “The shaman’s costume itself constitutes a religious hierophany and cosmography; it discloses not only a sacred presence but also cosmic symbols and metaphysic itineraries. Properly studied, it reveals the system of shamanism as clearly as do the shamanic myths and techniques” (Eliade 1964:145).

Eliade’s interest in “shamanic flight” is reflected in his emphasis on zoomorphic costumes and the essential symbolism of birds for evoking a sense of shamanic flight. These were “indispensable to flight to other worlds” (ibid.:157). Eliade describes how colored ribbons were used by Siberian shamans to represent a covering of feathers or the notion of wings, which is also a common theme in Formative iconography (Guernsey 2006). Ribbons also can explicitly represent snakes, sometimes in huge quantities (Eliade 1964:152). Capes in Olmec art (Follensbee 2008) may have been used in a similar way, representing and evoking references to flight. Olmec capes may be ancestral to the “string capes” described by Winzenz (Chapter 12) for San Bartolo and Looper (Chapter 13) for La Mojarra, whose movement in dance would have been most similar to these “snakes.”

In the context of Formative world views characterized by nonbiomedical models for the origins of disease, costumes may have played a protective role in defense against magical threats such as witchcraft and sorcery that were mediated by shamans and other magic workers. The possible emic properties of objects such as talismans, charms, and magic for healing should be considered along with their etically apparent roles in reflecting, projecting, and defining identity and status. Shamans are, first and foremost, healers, but those who know the magical sources of diseases and how to cure them may also employ them to do harm (Hoopes 2007; Hoopes and Mora-Marín 2009). Continuities in the use of specific costumes, regalia, and ornaments from the Formative into later time periods—of which Clark and Colman’s work (Chapter 6) is just one example—may help to clarify specificity of different roles and strategies of “magical” actors.

Eliade’s comments about the regalia of a shaman are worth considering with respect to the costumes of high-ranking individuals who also played key roles in religion and ritual:

In itself, the costume represents a religious microcosm qualitatively different from the surrounding profane space. For one thing, it constitutes an almost
complete symbolic system; for another, its consecration has impregnated it with various spiritual forces and especially with “spirits.” By the mere feat of donning it—or manipulating the objects that deputize for it—the shaman transcends profane space and prepares to enter into contact with the spiritual world (1964:147).

However, it is critical to exercise caution in attempts to write Eliade’s interpretations into Formative contexts. Ethnographic literature of Mesoamerica and Central America is replete with descriptions of many different kinds of religious personnel and magic workers—as Wingfield notes—but the term “shaman” remains highly unspecific. Overly broad use of the term has been sharply critiqued in anthropology and in Mesoamerican art history (Kehoe 2000; Klein et al. 2002), raising serious questions about its utility in describing identity. Essentialized identifications of “shamans” are generally unsatisfying—even when accompanied by significant attention to gender and the occupation by women of roles for which the literature has been demonstrably biased toward men (Tedlock 2005). As Kehoe (2000) observes, identification of shamans is often a form of Othering—assigning identities of supposed antiquity or that fulfill contemporary Romantic expectations rather than seeking to apply terms and concepts that are less burdened with contemporary folklore and mythology on a global scale. Identifying “shamans” on the basis of costume remains problematic in Formative contexts.

THE YOUNG LORD AND THE HUASTEC YOUTH

Among the case studies in the interpretation of adorned bodies is Faust’s (Chapter 8) approach to the well-known Olmec “Young Lord” and “Huastec Youth,” two unique yet iconic sculptures that differ widely in temporal and spatial contexts. Faust’s approach is to see them as “objects to compel the human gaze,” also the objective of a good costume, and to consider the Gestalt “way of seeing” effect of body decoration. She argues that parallel approaches to human representation were at work. Both statues were decorated with intricate symbolism interpreted as body paint, tattooing, or scarification. In both the Olmec and Huastec examples, the designs are ones that depended upon the “personscape” (cf. Strathern and Stewart 2011)—the body as canvas. There was an intimate relationship between the decorated bodies and the decorations, together representing something more visually powerful than the sum of the parts. Faust explores how these two figures may represent parallel concepts even though they are separated widely in time, space, and cultural context.
The composition of the figures may carry a narrative content—a “text” to be read as implied by other figurines and human representations. Unfortunately, we do not know the reading order (if there was one), hence the suggestion of a Gestalt approach as noted by Faust with reference to optical illusions such as the Necker cube and the Jastrow duck-rabbit illustration. These figures may have served as a Precolumbian parallel to the “op art” of the 1960s, in which optical illusions and Day-Glo colors were used to effect cognitive shifts and induce trancelike states, especially to viewers under the influence of psychotropic substances. In a sense, the figures she discusses may have been an ancient form of psychedelic art, and she notes David Morgan’s (2005) identification of mandalas as images that “serve as a kind of external scaffolding for concentrated inner experience.” The effects that Faust sees in the Olmec statue of the Young Lord and the Huastec Youth evoke comparisons with another “visionary” style of Precolumbian art: that of the Chavín culture of the Andes (Rowe 1962). Chavín symbolism also makes use of inversion, multiple perspectives, directionality, and polyvalent symbols for what may have been similar kinds of visual experiences.

In Faust’s analysis, the decorated body becomes a vehicle for carrying a text encoded in symbols “read” according to principles of location and directionality. The content of the narrative is less clear than the fact that it exists. Faust associates designs on each with complex beliefs associated with maize and its life cycle. The Young Lord is an embodied microcosm—the universe reduced and imprinted on a single human body. However, the microcosm is not static but an abstract catalog of ritual actions, ones made by a ruler perpetuating cosmic order. The rigidity of the standing figures is in sharp contrast to the animated motion implied by their decoration—perhaps representing a stark contrast between external appearance and internal thought processes. If Faust is correct, some of this movement is idealized flight of the kind emphasized by Eliade.

Faust suggests that these figures were “educational tools inscribed with esoteric knowledge.” What we do not know is whether they were idealized archetypes or mythological images created from the artist’s imagination or attempts to capture representations of specific individuals (perhaps even as one of the former). If the latter case, the tattoos may have been accumulated over time rather than in the context of a single composition. Faust suggests, “When initiates or young lords gazed upon these figures, they were gazing upon the mythology as well as idealized lordly bodies as maps for their own becoming.” That is, the figurines had become models for their own behavior, a significance for figurines suggested by Joyce (Chapter 3). They may also have been gazing
upon mythical ancestors who had been specific agents of creation in the world these lords inhabited and sought to perpetuate. They may have been “bundled” in cloth that concealed the marks on the bodies, to be revealed as part of a ritual unveiling. Bundled figures as avatars survive in the form of San Simon or Maximón, revered patron of the Tzutujil Maya (Christenson 2001).

ROYAL POWER

Winzenz (Chapter 12) discusses the murals at San Bartolo (Saturno et al. 2005; Taube et al. 2010) in detail, emphasizing the central role of cloth in the lives of high-status individuals. This remarkable data set shows how Late Formative patterns were antecedents for Classic period behavior in clothing as well as binding, wrapping, and bundling and details such as the importance of woven bands, ties, and strings. Winzenz notes that weaving, in all of its parts, was probably viewed as a religious act of transformation (as likely were the crafts that produced figurines and jewelry as well). This process began with the planting, harvesting, and processing of fiber sources as well as their dyeing and ultimate use in brocading, “the most prestigious of techniques.”

Winzenz suggests textiles were identified as magical and that “supernaturally charged” woven garments may have been perceived to provide their wearers with special abilities. She examines clothing as “the embodiment of life-essence that could be absorbed from deities who wore them.” Divine presence was manifest in sacred vestments, such as are used today in dressing statues of saints. Drawing upon contemporary ethnography, Winzenz notes that weavers of Santiago Atitlán consider garments to be living things and refer to their textile production with birthing metaphors. The magic of the textiles was a power in the clothing separate and distinct from that of the wearers, and combining the two required higher intensity of preparation, reverence, and authority. As Winzenz notes, this power came both from the symbolic labor used to create the cloth and from the symbols that were literally woven into the fabric itself. Symbolic numbers—especially those associated with calendric importance—may have been integrated into the fabric as part of the weaver’s technique. That is, counts of warps, design elements, and knots may have contained as much cosmological substance as artistic motifs. As with the cloth represented at San Bartolo, this symbolic strategy was a different method for creating fabrics with “life-essence.” The murals suggest how the process of dressing in special regalia inhabited by spirits was itself a key part of the ritual.
BUNDLES AND FRAMES

The chapters by Lytle and Reilly (Chapter 11) and by Earley and Guernsey (Chapter 10) both address cloth and clothing in the context of bundling—wrapping and enclosing objects in cloth—a sacred act that was both protective and performative. Bundling recalls the nurturing act of swaddling an infant, while framing recalls the construction of a house (often with walls decorated with textiles). It was a method of dressing, enclosing, and securing. Placing cloth or textiles around an object—a tradition suggested by a visual “frame” as frequent on Formative carved monuments—created sacred spaces. Textiles as bundles or “frames” enclosed individuals, concealing while revealing, the bundle itself communicating messages about ritual power, hidden essences, and security. Objects were made sacred as they were “clothed” within symbolically and metaphysically charged textiles, and this form of clothing—and unclothing—became an element of performance. In the process, the materials became sacralized. Winzenz (Chapter 12) cites Mendieta regarding deity bundles revered with greater adoration than images of deities. She notes, “Much like the shroud of Turin, the clothing and adornments that came in contact with deities were likely viewed as having absorbed a god’s essence and were among the holiest of relics.” The “frame” itself could be created by just a few individuals witnessing a sacred act or an audience surrounding a dance ground or plaza, a hermeneutic layering on multiple scales.

Bundles of various kinds were part of elite regalia. Lytle and Reilly (Chapter 11) note the relation of bundling to maize symbolism, and specific costume elements associated with maize advertised connections to the supernatural—what Earley and Guernsey call the “billboard” effect (Chapter 10). At San Bartolo and elsewhere, the Maize God was a central deity while an ear of maize itself is a bundle, the kernels being enclosed and protected by husk. David Stuart’s identification of Classic rituals for bundling a stela (which for Lytle and Reilly evoke the imagery on the Early Formative Monument 21 at Chalcatzingo) suggests that an official “unveiling” or unwrapping (unbundling) may have been a part of the presentation of a finished stone monument. The uncovering and revealing, followed by the ritual concealing of figures and stelae, would have engaged both the memory and the imagination, fostering oral narratives that encouraged deeper levels of interpretation. (This process may be relevant to the figures discussed by Faust.) Consideration should also be given to the possible “unbundling” or undressing of a ritual performer in the process of a performance—a dramatic undressing that was followed by greater movement and exposure.
CONCLUSION

The main themes that run throughout the book are the concepts of costumes as both expressive and transformative. As Joyce (2005:152) notes, phenomenological approaches to embodiment are emphasizing “the production and experience of lived bodies, in which surface and interior are no longer separated.” Costumes have the power to externalize concepts and beliefs as well as to transform the experience of both the wearer and the observer. In so doing, costumes play a role in discourse—both implied and explicit—about issues of truth and reality. While this is especially apparent in costumes related to ideology, it is true of all transformations and extensions of the body through decoration and its use to make internal concepts manifest in external expressions. Costume, regalia, clothing, and adornment in Formative contexts help with addressing these issues as they change over time, as earlier traditions accumulated and were referenced in the context of a more sharply hierarchical society with more diverse social roles in the Classic and Postclassic periods and as the data available to us increase in both amount and complexity. Clothing was often a cumulative process, with some earlier “archaic” styles persisting along with increased variety and innovation as others diminished in frequency. A perspective from the Formative data is essential for the interpretation of later actors who conserved heirlooms, dressed themselves as revered ancestors, and represented themselves in regalia that continued to embody their pasts in their presents. Among the characteristics revealed are identities and strategies for the external representation of internal models that persist across thousands of years.

Costumes can have significant temporal and hermeneutic “layering.” For example, an item of jewelry or clothing may have been highly valued as an heirloom passed on for many generations, like the British crown jewels. An object could be a precious symbol even though it was not new, well made, or representative of expensive materials and workmanship. The English bride’s guidelines for lucky talismans, “Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue, and a silver sixpence in her shoe,” were as much a part of costume assembly as a new wedding dress. As Joyce (2005:150) notes, a central assumption in art historical and archaeological approaches to embodiment in cultures of the distant past is that social understandings—the complex negotiations and agreements concerning personhood, identity, power, and interpersonal relationships—were conducted within the idiom of material culture. Objects represented lived life experiences, an accumulation of many possible identities that were employed in dynamic interactions
among different persons—some internal, some external, some physical, and some metaphysical.

As a cautionary note, Fowler (2004:52) comments, “In studying prehistory it is vital to bear in mind that different concepts of personhood would have involved radically different underpinnings of and engagements with the material world to those we expect today.” We must be mindful of this as we attempt to contribute meaningful interpretations of gender, power, status, performance, and identity (including that of such entities as “deities,” “kings,” and “shamans”) to the construction of past persons, asking how our own constructions of personhood condition the range of explanations we employ. We must also be mindful of the way in which our own sense of the aesthetic may condition our selection of objects of analysis and our attention to them. Persons in the past became and remain embodied in the objects of our analysis, and our approaches—much as we strive for scholarly objectivity—will inevitably contain subjective responses to those ancient people in ongoing social relationships between the living and the dead.

NOTES

1. For example, one of the features of the Classic period in Mesoamerica is the appearance of polychrome pottery, but the term is not used this way in either Costa Rica or Panama. However, it is also defined by certain modes of architecture. The relative absence of architectural remains in central Panama may be one of the factors that has resulted in Sitio Conte being considered as “Formative” even though it has traits such as the extensive use of metallurgical technology that are not prominent in parts of Mesoamerica until the Postclassic period.

2. The concept of a female awá (pl. awápa) is somewhat supported by Laura Cervantes’s ethnography of the Bribri. Cervantes writes: “The Bribri admit to the possibility that women may become awápa shamans, however, this was not frequent and only postmenopausal women could become awápa. The last female awá (curing shaman) people remember in Talamanca lived in Amubre approximately sixty years ago. The exceptional case of an old woman being a curing shaman would be the only case in which a female would perform siwa’ki chants. In all other cases of siwa’ki events, the singers have to be men, or at least the leading part[s] of the song have to be done by a specialized male singer, as is the case of the sorbón dances” (Cervantes 2003:78).

3. The identification of the “altars” and monumental heads at La Venta as thrones raises the question of whether they were “dressed” in pelts, cloth, or other accoutrements to make them more comfortable as seats, which may have been a form of bundling.
REFERENCES


accession, 402(n30), 403(n32), 418; and metaphoric death, 390–91; scaffold, 379, 380, 403(n33, n37)
achondroplasia, 215. See also dwarfs
acroats, 173, 306
adolescents: in Olmec imagery, 215, 219, 230, 231–32, 244(n6), 247(n21); in Playa de los Muertos figurines, 63, 68, 72
adornment(s), 80, 120, 129, 380, 450, 464; gender construction and, 115–16, 117; head, 122–25; personhood of, 447–48; and social identity, xxiii–xxiv, 134–35
adornos, 416
adults, 218, 315. See also elders; females; males
aesthetics, homocentric, 255, 257
agave spikes, 37
age/age groups, 122, 218, 230, 231
agriculture, 49; fertility symbols, 50–51, 259, 261, 262
Aguateca, 385, 387
Akan, depictions of, 386, 389, 390, 403(n31)
Altamirano (Veracruz), 300
Altar de Sacrificios, 386, 387, 414, 428, 429
altars, 333, 343(n3); Olmec, 232, 233, 245(n14), 327, 472(n3)
Altun Ha, 419, 422
ambiguous figures. See androgyny
ancestors, 265, 389; communication with, 356–57
Andean art, 21, 106, 377, 378
animal–human forms, 35, 36, 38–40, 51, 127; Greater Nicoya, 38–40
animals, 21, 50, 54(n5), 423; as alter-egos, 36–37, 38, 49, 287(n4); and belt assemblies, 426–27; in Greater Nicoyan figural vessels, 38–40; on maceheads, 42–43; personhood of, 3, 4
animal skins, clothing from, 73, 74
anklets, 63, 64
aprons, 62, 73, 228, 229, 238, 452; pubic, 212, 213, 214, 215, 217. See also loincloth aprons
Aquiles Serdan, 156, 162
Archaic period, xxvii, 451, 454
armadillo, 49
armadillo-humans, in Greater Nicoya, 38, 39, 50
Arroyo Pesquero, celts from, 364, 366
autosacrifice, 356, 357, 388; Huastec imagery of, 264, 265–66; string capes and, 389, 390
avian images. See bird images
Avian Serpent, 384. See also plumed serpents; Quetzalcoatl, Huastec Youth as awapa, 48–49, 51, 472(n2)
awls, 64
axes: ceremonial, 41–42, 43; as fertility symbol, 50, 51; pendants carved as, 40–41, 44, 51, 54(n8)
axis mundi, 12, 282

Index
Page numbers in italics indicate illustrations.
Aztecs, xxvii, xxix, 105, 265, 287(n2), 401(n19, n22), 403(n32)
babies. See infants
“baby-face” figures, 245(n12); gender identity of, 220–26
Bagaces, effigy vessel from, 459
Bajos de Chila, hairstyles, 125
baldness, 89; in Olmec style figurines, 160, 161, 167
bands, 401(n21), 403(n34), 428, 469; as celestial registers, 394–95; hair, 64, 65; on Playa de los Muertos figurines, 66–67, 68; used in ritual binding, 391–94
Barbacoas, 11
bark cloth, 65, 73
Barra phase figurines, 156, 157, 188(n2)
Barton Creek, burials at, 413
Barton Ramie, shell ornaments from, 416
basketry, 33
Bat God, 11, 12
Bat-Human-Mirror, 12, 20
Bat-Human-Whale, 12, 20
bats, 11, 20
beaded nets, 109
beads, xxix, 80, 312, 422–23, 426, 428, 451; from coastal Oaxaca, 119, 123; ear, 93, 94, 146, 149, 153, 154, 155, 161, 162, 167, 174; jade, 43, 145; nose, 158, 416; Playa de los Muertos figurines, 63, 64, 67
Becan, vessels from, 389, 390
Belize, burials from, 412, 413
bells, xxxii, 16
belt assemblies, 426–27
belts, 313, 426; in bundle motifs, 360, 362, 366, associated with celts, 391–94; Olmec, 214, 228, 229, 238, 239, 246(n16), 281–82
benches, Greater Nicoyan, 43, 44
bib-head pendants, 419
Bicephalic Crocodile-Snakes, 9, 12, 20, 21
binding(s), 327, 357–58, 362, 366, 397, 469; associated with celts, 391–94; in San Bartolo imagery, 395–96; with twined and woven bands, 68, 72
bird images, 326, 383, 466; Greater Nicoyan, 37, 39; Huastec, 266–68; La Venta, 180, 181; transformation into, 453–54
birth, 47, 341
bistable images, 280–81; Huastec, 279, 283–85
bitumen (chapopote), 106
blood, 51, 105, 265–66
bloodletting, 265–66, 356, 357, 358; paraphernalia associated with, 386, 387–88, 402(n29); string cape associated with, 389, 390, 400(n14)
body, xxxiv, 79, 80, 108, 109, 110; as artifact, 460–61; as canvas, 105, 467–68; as clothing, 19–20; Early Formative displays of, 81–82; of Etlatongo figurines, 96–99; gender construction, 115–17; inscription of, xxxiv, 253, 257; modification of, 128–30; naked, 103, 107; personhood, 447–48; and social identity, 82–83; transformation of, 68–69
body art, xxiii, xxiv, 428–29. See also body paint/painting; scarification; tattooing
body modifications, xxiv, 449, 452; in coastal Oaxaca, 128–30; Huastec, 314–35. See also cranial modification; dental modification
body movement, 288(n15); on Young Lord sculpture, 269, 270, 277–78
body paint/painting, xxv, xxxiv, 105, 129, 295, 319(n11), 413, 415, 428–29, 467; on figurines, 103–6, 130, 145, 307–8, 309–10, 315–16, 415; and identity, 308–9
bone, 393, 420, 423; ear ornaments, 150, 174, 191(n17), 415
Boruca, 36, 42, 48, 49, 53–54(n3)
bracelets, 63, 412, 416; Huastec, 312, 314, 315
breast bands, on Olmec images, 214, 229
breasts, and gender/sex identity, 98, 212–14, 228
breath, jade and, 457
breath-serpent signs, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385
breechcloths, 32, 127
Bribri, 33, 53–54(n3), 465, 472(n2); dark shamans, 49–50; mortuary customs, 48–49
brocade, brocading, 376, 377–78, 400(n8, n9)
buccal deformation, coastal Oaxaca, 129
Bulging-Eye figurines, 300, 301, 302, 310
bundles, bundling, xxxi, 261, 351, 460, 469;
bloodletting, 386, 388, 402(n29); and celestial registers, 394–95; of human images, 105, 258, 259; maize, xxxiv, 360, 362–68, 395, 403(n39), 470; sacred, xxxiv, 69, 261, 354, 357–60, 378, 380, 393, 397, 400(n16).
401(n22); in San Bartolo imagery, 395–96; textile imagery and, 327, 356
burials, xxxiv, 63, 188(n15), 191(n14), 318(n8), 428, 432; coastal Oaxaca, 115, 119, 122, 123–24, 131; data from, 412–13, 430; dental and cranial modification, 414–15; figurines associated with, 63, 172; headbands associated with, 418, 419; jade in, 150, 164, 191(n17); jewelry in, 149, 153, 415–16, 419–21, 424, 426; La Venta, 176–82, 185, 186, 191(n16); Loma Real, 298, 300–304, 312–14, 315, 317; Olmec, 164, 165–66, 174–75; ornament sets in, 457–60; at San José Mogote, 167, 170; Valley of Mexico, 172, 174; butterfly imagery, 288(n10); on Huastec Youth, 270–71, 283, 284; buttocks, on Etlatongo figurines, 99; Cabécar, 48, 49, 53–54(n3); cacao beans, humans as, 50–51; caches, earspools in, 129; Cahal Pech, Stela 9, 417, 418; Calendar Stone, chalchihuitl symbols on, 263; Cantón Corralito, 100, 106, 150, 162, 188–89(n6); capes, 66, 127, 430; Olmec, 214, 239; on San Bartolo murals, 377, 378; “string,” 374, 388–91, 400(n14), 403(n31), 466; caps, 123; Etlatongo, 90–91; Nicoyan, 34, 38; Caracol, earflares from, 421; Catholicism, Mayan, 375; Cavua Colorado, Cruz A figurines from, 87, 92, 103; celestial registers, 326; bands as, 394–95. See also framing bands; Cela, headwear, 33–34; celts, 255, 256, 272; binding associated with, 391–94; breath-serpents on, 381, 383, 384; bundle motifs and, 364, 365–66, 367, 395; ceramics, 17, 119, 123, 166, 380, 464; bundling motifs on, 358, 359–60; framing bands on, 335–36, 343(n5); Huastec and Olmec, 255, 256; jewelry, 149, 154, 180, 420; Nicoyan figurual, 29–42, 50; Olmec figurines, 210–20; with supernaturals, 388, 390. See also effigy vessels; figurines; Cerro de la Virgen: flute from, 126; skirts at, 128; Cerro Juan Díaz, 4; Cerro Mangote, 451; Cerros, 411, 412, 415, 418; Chahk, 375, 383, 384, 392, 394; Chalcatzingo, 174, 188(n3), 263; Monument 21, 366, 368; stonework patterns at, 337, 338; Chalcatzingo Vase, bundle motifs on, 358–59, 364, 365, 366; chalchihuitl imagery, on Huastec Youth, 263, 265; Chalchuapa, ear ornaments from, 147; Chantuto culture, 451; charcoal, as pigment, 104; Chatino, 117; Cherla phase, ear ornaments, 149, 158–60, 162, 188(n2); Chiapa de Corzo, 326, 393; architecture, 336, 337; collage designs at, 333, 334; ear ornaments from, 147, 150, 153; geometric patterns, 328–29, 330, 332, 335, 340; Chiapas, 103, 174, 356, 364, 451; ear ornaments from, 146, 149, 188(n2); Chibchan speakers, 30, 43, 45, 53–54(n3), 449, 465; animal masks, 39–40; mortuary customs, 48–49; Chichen Itza, 287(n2), 459; chiefdoms, Nochixtlán Valley, 84; chieftains: Chibchan, 48; dress and regalia, 33–34; children: burials of, 122, 177, 179, 180, 181, 191(n16), 419–20, 424, 426; figurines of, 63, 97; Olmec depictions of, 218, 230, 231–32, 244(n6); sacrifice of, 232, 233, 238, 247(n22, n23). See also babies; Chilpancingo, earspools from, 151, 188(n5); chocolate, blood and, 51; Chotepe phase, figurine fragments, 62, 73; Circles, symbolism of, 45–47; Cival, 411; clans, Chibchan, 48; Classic Maya, 327, 352, 366, 373, 380; framing bands, 335–36; tribute, xxxi, 399(n4); Classic Period, 65, 134, 400(n9), 472(n1); skybands, 324–25; cloth, xxix, 46, 187–88(n1), 402(n26), 460, 469; brocaded, 376, 377; bundled, 395, 400(n22); cotton, 65, 72; life-essence of, 396–97; social
life of, 67–70; social significance of, 340–42, 374–75, 399(n4)
clothes, clothing, xxii, xxiv, xxxv(n1), 5, 61, 107, 145, 187–88(n1), 246(n16), 400(n16), 403(n31), 450–51, 469; as animate, 381–87; as body, 19–20; coastal Oaxacan figurines, 125–28; gender ambiguous, 235, 237–39; Huastec, 312, 313; life-essence/force in, 374, 380, 381–87, 396–97, 401(n19), 454, 471; male, 229–30; miniature, 96–97; in Olmec imagery, 230–32, 246(n16); perishable, 224, 244(n7), 456; removable, 244(n7), 286; of rulers, 427–28. See also by type
coatmounds, 49
Codex Borbonicus, 265
Codex Borgia, 265, 267
Codex Vindobonensis, 269
codices, Mayan, 272
collars, basketry, 33
Collins, 38, 459; dark shamans in, 49–50
communication: through regalia, 351, 352; visual, xxv–xxviii
Conchas phase, ear ornaments, 149, 162, 164
conch shells (Spondylus spp. and Pleuroplaca gigantea), 37, 255, 264, 420
Contortionists, Tlatilco figurines of, 173
Copán, 387, 428
cords, in Isthmo-Colombian pendants, 11–12
Costa Rica, xxiii, 29, 53–54(n3, n8), 449, 452, 461, 465; ceremonial axes, 41–42; effigy vessels from, 458, 459; Spanish period dress in, 30, 33
costume sets, 429–30
cotton, xxv, 5, 65–66, 72, 375, 399(n7)
Coyolxauhqui monument, blood symbology on, 265
craft specialists, 84, 399(n6); weaving, 374–75 cranial modification, xxv, xxxiv, 311, 449, 452, 460–61; in figurines, 87, 94–95, 414; Huastecan, 295, 299–304, 310; and lineage or ethnic identity, 314–15
creation, 265, 341; Greater Nicoyan, 50–51; Olmec iconography of, 262–63; regalia associated with, 360, 362, 363
Creation regalia, 360, 362, 363
Crocodile–Eagle figures, 14–16, 20, 22
Crocodile God, 9, 11, 464
Crocodile–Human figures, 9, 21–22, 464
Crocodile Man iconography, 9
Crocodilians, 9, 13, 14–16, 20, 180; Greater Nicoyan images of, 33, 38–39, 45, 50, 458–59; Huastec imagery of, 268, 278–79, 284
Cross Group (Palenque), 390
crowns, basketry, 33
Cruz A phase: in Etlatongo, 80, 84–85; figurines, 85, 88–92, 93, 103, 107
Cruz B phase: in Etlatongo, 80, 84–85, 94; figurines, 85–87, 89, 90, 91, 92–93, 98–99, 103, 107, 109
Cruz C phase, figurines, 106–7
Cruz de Milagro, sculptures from, 109, 153, 208, 247–48(n24), 257
Cruz D phase, figurines, 107
cuacu, 105
Cuadros phase artifacts, 161, 162, 184
Cuello, 414, 420, 426; burials from, 412, 426, 428, 432
cuffs, from Lord 15 burial, 13–16, 22; Cuicuilco, earflares from, 174
Culhuacan, bone rattle from, 263
cups, Mississippian copper, 37
Curtis, Edward, 36–37
cyclical universe, Greater Nicoyan, 20, 48–49
cylinder, ear, 146, 174, 176
dancers, 145
dark shamans, 49; agricultural fertility and, 50–51
death, 390, 401(n18)
decorative techniques, in San Bartolo textiles, 375–76
deer, 35, 49, 181
deities, 403(n35); dressing of, 378, 379, 380; as gender neutral, 462–63; and ritual garments, 374, 375; transformation into, 463–64
INDEX 483

dental modification, xxv, 414–15, 452; Huasteca, 318(n4), 461; coastal Oaxaca, 120, 129
dimensionalità, Olmec and Huastec art, 271–75
disks, 6, 13, 313; ear, 148, 149–50, 153, 154, 155, 170, 415, 416; Huastec iconography, 263, 265, 268
divine force, representation of, 105–6
domestic space, feminine ritual in, 131–33
donut combs, 91
dress, xxiii–xxxiv, 381, 411; of dark shamans, 49–50; early Maya, 430–33; Greater Nicoyan, 29–30
dressing, 106, 456, 472(n3); of Maize God, 378, 396; as ritual performance, 69, 378, 379, 470
duck-human images, Greater Nicoyan, 37, 39
Dumbarton Oaks figures, 394, 418; breath-volutes on, 381, 382; bundles on, 366, 367
dwarfs: Olmec depictions of, 215, 216, 226, 227, 232, 245(n14); San Bartolo depictions of, 383, 384
eagles, images of, 14–16, 180, 275
earflares, 146, 147, 151, 154–55, 170, 174, 392, 394, 412, 456–57; La Venta, 178, 185; rulership and, 421–22
ear gauges, 128–29, 148
Early Classic period, 134; supernatural images, 388, 390
Early Formative period, 121, 151, 256; costumes, 96–97; Etlatongo figurines, 83–85, 99, 108; in Oaxaca, 79, 80–81
Early Postclassic period, 255
ear ornaments/earware, 152, 153, 155, 175, 313, 456–57; archaeology of, 148–51; Etlatongo, 80, 92–93, 107; La Venta, 177–80; on Maya figurines, 415–16; nomenclature for, 146–48; Olmec, 154, 225, 226; Playa de los Muertos figurines, 63, 64; at Sitio Conte, 6, 17; Soconusco, 156–64; symbolism of, 145–46; Oaxacan, 167–68, 170–72
ear piercings, xxv, 92–93, 153, 154, 156, 161, 176, 189(n10)
ear plugs, 128, 146, 147, 149, 154, 155, 415, 416
earrings, 161, 316
ears, 187–88(n1); earpools as extensions of, 185–86
ear slots, representations of, 153, 154
earpools, 107, 146, 147, 148, 149, 164, 175, 188(n3, n5), 191(n14, n17), 192(n18), 457; coastal Oaxaca, 116, 119, 123, 124, 126, 128–29; as extensions of ears, 185–86; jade, 145, 150–51, 164, 176, 177, 178, 191(n17), 192(n19); La Venta, 165, 180, 181–82, 185; Mazatan, 156, 161, 162, 164, 189(n9); Olmec, 165, 166, 182–87, 214, 225; representations of, 153, 154, 155, 156, 161, 162; symbolism of, 45–46, 133, 145, 184–87; from Valley of Mexico, 173–74; from Valley of Oaxaca, 92–94, 167, 170, 171–72
ear tassels, representations of, 153, 155
earth crocodile, 390
eartubes, 146, 149, 150, 153, 154, 158, 160, 161, 174, 184, 188(n2); “napkin ring,” 147–48, 162
Ecuador, Spondylus shell trade, 43–44
effigy vessels, 37, 50, 73, 119, 156, 255, 305, 458, 459; Greater Nicoyan, 29–42; as personal representatives, 52–53; from Sitio Conte, 17–19
El Caño, 4, 13, 16
elders, depictions of, 64, 70, 158, 189(n9), 217, 218, 230, 231
elites, 222, 240, 375, 470; and ritual space, 354–56
El Manatí, 150, 224; wooden figures from, 82, 148, 245(n12)
El Mirador, 411
El Opeño, 151, 153, 188(n5), 318(n9), 319(n11)
El Sitio, Jester God images, 365, 366
El Viejo bei Sandinal, Spondylus shell from, 43, 47
Emberá, chieftain’s headwear, 33–34
embroidery, 375
enculturation, figurines and, 455–56
Espinoza, Gaspar de, 5
Estero Rabón, children and infants depicted at, 232, 245(n14)
ethnicity, xxvii; body modification and, 314–15
Etlatongo figurines: bodies, 96–97; Etlatongo figurines, 83–85, 99, 108; in Oaxaca, 79, 80–81
exchange: clothing and ornament in, xxviii–xxx; of textiles, 70–71
fabrics, xxiii, xxv; loom woven, xxiv, 65–66. See also cloth; textiles
façades: geometric, 336–40, 342, 344(n6); stucco masks on, 411–12, 417
face painting, 48, 308
Feathered Serpent, 381
feathers, featherwork, xxviii, 33
Fejérváry Mayer Codex, 272
feline-human figures, 36, 39, 46, 49
females, 158, 160, 190(n12), 455–56; coastal
Oaxacan depictions of, 120, 121, 127;
Etlatongo depictions of, 89–91, 97–99, 100–102, 104, 105, 108, 109; Greater Nicoyan
depictions of, 29, 30, 33, 34, 35–36, 41;
Huastec depictions of, 257, 309, 310, 315–16;
identification of, 212–14; Olmec depictions
of, 211–15, 218, 219, 225, 228–29, 231, 244(n6),
245(n13), 246(n16), 247–48(n24); rituals,
131–32; social status of, 240, 465. See also
pregnant women
femininity, 116; of coastal Oaxacan figures,
120, 121, 122, 126; head adornment, 123, 124; and
ritual, 131–32
fertility symbols, xxxii, 265, 287(n3), 341;
agricultural, 50–51, 259, 261, 262; Greater
Nicoyan, 41, 42, 45, 47
figural vessels, Greater Nicoyan, 29–42
figures: on axes, 41, 42; as educational tools,
468–69; Olmec stone, 220–26. See also
Huastec Youth; sculptures; Young Lord
figure
figurines, xxxiii, 71, 134, 145, 184, 188–89(n5,
n7), 412, 430, 468; “activation” of, 105–6;
androgyny of, 462–63; body characteristics,
96–99; body painting, 307–10; body modification,
128–30; clothing, 187–88(n1), 146; coastal Oaxaca, 115, 119, 120, 121–22, 123,
124, 125–33; cranial modification shown
in, 290–304; Cruz A, 87–88; Cruz B, 85–87; Cruz C, 106–7; costumes and ornamenta-
tion on, 99–102; dress and adornment on,
xxxiv, 413–14, 415–17; ear ornaments on, 153,
154–55; enculturation and, 455–56; from
Etlatongo, 80–81, 83–85; gender identity
and, xxxiv, 94, 97–99, 107–8, 210–11, 461–63;
gestures on, 63–64; head characteristics,
88–96; Huastec, 273, 295–96, 299–304,
314–15; from Loma Real, 299, 305–14; Olmec,
165–67, 189(n10); Olmec, 211–15; Olmec style,
94–96; paint and pigments used on, 103–5, 108–9; Playa de los
Muertos style, 61–63, 72–74; production
of, 82–83; with removable jewelry, 123, 124;
scarification and tattoos shown on, 305–7,
308; Soconusco, 156–64; uniformity of,
413–14; from Valley of Mexico, 169, 172–74;
from Valley of Oaxaca, 167–68, 170–72
finger weaving, 67
fire ceremony, triple-knot motif and, 358
fire drills, 272, 273–75
fire serpent, 266, 288(n7), 288(n10)
fishbone, ear ornaments, 149
flames, Huastec representation of, 272, 273–74
flares, circular, 179–80
Flat Rectangular-Eyed figurines, 304, 310, 317
fleur-de-lis motif, 352, 353
Florentine Codex, scarification or tattoos
shown in, 304–5
Florescent period, 34, 43
flowers, Huastec depictions, 265, 275, 283, 284
flutes, anthropomorphic, 126
Formative period/stage, xxii; chronology of,
450–51; concept of, 449–50
framing bands, 343(n5), 397, 470; geometric
motifs, xxxiv, 323–24; Late Preclassic,
324–26; on Preclassic architecture, 336–40,
343(n3); on Preclassic sculpture, 328–30,
332–36; role of, 342–43
framing devices, regalia as, 354–57
France, divine kingship in, 352
fringe, 67
funerary urns, Greater Nicoyan, 50

garments. See clothes, clothing
gauging, 129, 148, 452
genre/gender identity, xxvi, xxxiii, xxxiv, 72,
109, 110, 243(n3), 461–63, 465; body and,
116–17; body painting and, 308–9, 315–16;
coastal Oaxacan figurines, 122–25, 128–33;
clothing and, 125–28; Etlatongo figurines,
82, 87, 88, 94, 96, 97–99, 107–8; Greater
Nicoyan, 29–32, 53(n1); Olmec images, 207,
208–26, 228–39, 247(n20); performance and
social construction of, 115–16
genitalia, 96, 97, 107, 218, 219
gestures, 63–64
God C signs, 383, 385, 401–2(n23, n24)
God L, 89, 377, 390, 403(n31)
God II, 366
gods, 145; communication with, 356–57
gold alloy, 1, 44–45, 458
golden clothing, 5, 19
goldwork, xxviii, 439; from Sitio Conte, 4, 6–17
gorgets, Huastec shell, 266
Gran Chiriqui, anthropomorphic pendants from, 10–11
Gran Coclé societies, 2, 23–24(n1, n2, n7), 450; goldwork in, 4, 6–17; hemispherical metal helmets in, 6–9; shamanism in, 22–23
Gran Darién, 6
Greater Nicoya, 53(n1); circle and spiral symbols, 46–48; crocodilian images, 458–59; dress, 29–32; ear spools in, 45–46; gold-copper alloy in, 44–45; jade used in, 40–41; headwear, 32–35; maceheads in, 42–43; mortuary customs, 48–49; Spondylus shell in, 43–44
Greaves, from Lord 15 burial, 13–16
Green-colored stone/greenstone, 40, 41, 174, 188(n5), 256, 263, 265, 420; as mace heads, 42–43; Olmec style sculpture of, 258, 288(n5); San José Mogote burials, 167, 170
Guadalupe phase figurines, 167, 171
Guaimí, 48, 49, 53–54(n3)
Guatemala, 41, 149, 397; Olmec style sculptures from, 258–60. See also various sites
Guerrero, 256
Gulf Coast lowlands, 151; ceramic figurines, 210–19, 461; large stone images, 226–33; large stone sculptures, 233–39; sexed and gendered imagery, 207–8; stone figures, 220–26
Hacienda Blanca, 84, 86, 96, 103
Hair, xxv, 64, 87, 429; facial, 88, 89, 246(n18); shaved, 63, 68, 311
Hair attachments, xxxii; in Playa de los Muertos figurines, 63, 64, 65, 67
Hairstyles/hairdos, xxv, xxxiv, 33, 83, 107, 257, 336, 417, 429, 453; bundled images in, 45–47; coastal Oaxacan, 123, 125; Lady Wak Tun’s, 357–58; Maya rulers, 418–19; in San Bartolo murals, 380, 388; and social status, 133–34; Valley of Oaxaca figurines, 173, 174
Headgear, headwear, headgear, 161, 419, 455; coastal Oaxaca, 122–25, 133; Etlantongo, 90–96, 107; Greater Nicoyan, 32–41, 42; Soconusco figurines, 159, 160, 164
Heirloom items, xxix, 433
Helmet 142, 6; Crocodile-Human figures on, 7–9, 21–22
helmets, hemispherical metal, 6–9, 21–22
Hematite, 103, 104, 105, 109, 175
Hero Twins, 380
Hieroglyphs, images as, 69
Hollow type figurines, 302
Honduras, xxiv, xxxiii, 174; Playa de los Muertos style figurines, 61–63, 72; textiles, 64–67
Hoops, symbolism of, 45–47
Horns: in Nicoyan figural vessels, 32, 35–36, 39, 40, 51; shaman’s, 36–37
Huastec, Huasteca, 103; archaeology of, 296–99; bodily inscriptions, xxxiv, 295–96; body painting, 307–10; burials, 318(n8), 458; clothing and ornamentation, 312–14; cranial modification, 299–304, 314–15, 460–61; hairstyles, 310–12; scarification and tattooing, 304–7
Huastec Youth, 253, 258, 286, 461, 467–68; butterfly imagery on, 270–71; fire drill emblems on, 273–74; iconography of,
Huilocintla imagery, 264, 266, 285
human-animal forms, 127; Greater Nicoyan, 33, 35, 36, 37, 38–40, 44, 57; Sitio Conte, 9, 11, 12, 20
human images, 44; on Sitio Conte objects, 9–17, 18–19, 20
human sacrifice, 51, 247(n23); Olmec depictions of, 232, 233, 238, 247(n22)
Human with Assistants, 10, 20
Hunahpu, 454
Hun Hunahpu, 380
iconography, xxx, 9, 10, 288(n6), 373, 455; dimensionality and multiple perspectives, 271–75; gender construction through, 115–16; head and torso, 122–25; Huastec, 103, 295; Huastec and Olmec, 255–58; Huastec Youth, 260–61, 263–69; Lord 15 objects and ornaments, 20–22; polymorphism in, 275–85; shamanic, 22–23; Young Lord, 258–60, 262–63
incense burners: personhood of, 20–21; from Sitio Conte, 17, 18
incising, 96, 97
indexicality, xxx; of textiles, 70–71
infants, 63; Huastec depictions of, 260, 261; jewelry buried with, 419–20; Olmec depictions of, 96, 215, 216, 218, 219, 225–26, 227, 238, 245–46(n14), 247(n22); as sacrifices, 232, 233
Inka, 96
inscriptions, bodily, xxxiv, 253, 257. See also scarification; tattooing
Intermediate Zone. See Isthmo-Colombian Zone
inversion, 263, 344(n8), 468
iron-ore ornaments, 119, 140–50
Isla phase, 173, 190–91(n13)
Isthmo-Colombian Zone, xxi, xxii, 448–49, 465
Izapa, 103, 450; binding and celt images, 392, 394; framing bands, 324, 325; geometric patterns at, 326–30; loincloths depicted at, 383, 385; stelae, 322, 333, 334
jade, 42, 70, 145, 176, 187, 381, 383, 391, 421, 433, 452, 457, 458; carved as ax blades, 40–41, 43; ear ornaments, 150–51, 154, 164, 183, 191(n17), 192(n19); La Venta, 177, 178, 180, 181, 185, 208; maskettes, 359–60; Olmec stone figures, 223, 224, 227, 259; San José Mogote, 167, 170. See also green-colored stone/greenstone
jaguar clan, Chibchan, 48
jaguars, 50; and bundle motifs, 359–60; canine pendants, 180, 181; images of, 50, 239, 326, 461
Jasaw Chan K’awiil, 336
Jester God, 336, 432; headbands, 418–19; head-dress motif, 365, 366
jewelry, xxiv, xxv, xxviii, 29, 66, 94, 115, 133, 145, 380, 412, 416, 422–23, 450, 452; in burials, 149, 419–21; coastal Oaxacan, 123–24, 129; Huastec, 312–14, 315; in La Venta burials, 177, 179; social function of, 433, 471
jewels, in headwear, 40–41
Jocotz phase figurines, 162, 163, 164, 190–91(n13)
Jun Ajaw (Hunahpu). See Hunahpu (Jun Ajaw)
Kaminaljuyú, 394; binding and celt images at, 391, 392; stelae, 333, 334, 453, 454, 459; textiles and costumes depicted at, 333–32, 382, 382, 383, 384
K’axob, 416, 419, 426, 428
Kichpanha, 428
kingship, xxiv, 145, 185, 263, 336; accession, 390–91, 402(n30); divine, 186, 332; imagery of Maya, 417–18, 432
K’inich Janaab Pakal I, 390
K’inich Kan Bahlam II, 390
kinship, 70; body modification and, 314–15
INDEX 487

kneeling figures, Greater Nicoyan, 31, 32, 39
knots, knotting, 67, 354, 387, 407(n21), 421; in bundle motifs, 357–60, 365; Chalcatzingo Vase, 358, 359; with life-essence signs, 381, 383
Kogi, 34; dark shamans, 49–50
Kuna, 5

La Blanca region figurines, 164
labrets, serpentine, 150
La Consentida, 120, 123; figurines, 131, 132
Lady Wak Tun headdress, 357–58
Lagartero, 130
Lakota, 130
La Mojarra: capes from, 430, 466; collar designs from, 333, 334; stela 1, 329, 330, 389, 390
La Pasadita, perforator pouch from, 386, 388
Las Bocas ceramics, 256
Las Honduritas, 63
Las Limas, 239; were-jaguar depictions at, 232–33
Late Classic period, 134, 390; loincloth panels, 383, 385, 387; sting ray-spine pouches, 387–88
Late Formative Period, 119, 381, 412; coastal Oaxaca, 120, 123–24, 128; ear ornaments, 155, 415–16; jewelry, 420–21
Late Postclassic period, 255, 256
Late Preclassic period, textile imagery from, 324–26, 327, 330–40
La Venta, 146, 182, 187, 246(n16), 336, 472(n19); altar sculptures, 232, 237; body modification in, 314–15; bundle motifs, 360, 362; burials at, 174–75, 176–81, 186, 315, 458; figurines, 165, 182, 208, 210, 211, 212, 213, 215; jade from, 278, 208; jewelry from, 149, 150, 151, 164; ritual space at, 355–56; rulers at, 174–83, 185; sculptures, 152, 209, 230, 231, 237, 240, 241, 326; stone figures, 222, 223, 224, 225–26, 227
La Victoria (Guatemala) ear ornaments, 149
Lázaro, Margarita, 42
leaders/leadership, 170, 173, 240; Soconusco region portrayals of, 158, 159–60
legs, on Etlatongo figurines, 98–99, 102
Leiden celt, 381
Leiden plaque, breath-serpent image, 384
lenticular images, 276, 277
life-essence/life force: binding and, 391, 395; in clothing, 374, 380, 381–87, 396–97, 401(n19), 454
lip piercing and gauging, 396, 129
Locona phase figurines, 156, 157, 167
loincloth aprons, 377, 381, 383, 386, 428
loincloths, 72, 131, 332, 329, 362, 401–2(n23), 415, 427–28, 452; female and male, 100–102; life-essence signs on, 381, 382, 383–85; 387; Kaminaljuyú Stela 11, 332–33; on Olmec imagery, 216, 217, 222, 223, 224, 229–30, 238, 282; San Bartolo murals, 375, 376
Loma Real, xxxiv; archaeology of, 296–99; body painting, 307–70, 315–16; body presentation, 316–17; cranial modification seen in, 299–304, 460–61; hairstyles, 310–12; Late Formative figurines from, 304–7; ornaments and clothing, 312–14; tattooing and scarification at, 304–7
looms, backstrap, 65–66, 397
Lord 15: iconography associated with, 20–22; identity of, 4–5; ornaments worn by, 1, 6–17; tools and equipment of, 17–19
Los Idolos, 232
Los Naranjos, 72, 188(n5), 191(n7)
Louis XIV, 352, 353
macaw, 49
maceheads, 29, 42–43, 45
Machaquila stela with God C signs, 385
Macro-Chibchan culture, 34, 53–54(n3)
maguey: fabric from, xxv; spines from, 265, 275
maize, xxiv, 51, 261; in bundle motifs, 359, 360, 362, 391, 395, 470
maize cult, Olmec, 362–67
maize fetishes, 362, 369(n7), 470; Olmec, 259, 282–83
Maize God, 109, 375, 390, 398–99(n2), 401(n18), 454, 470; binding associated with, 391, 392, 394, 395; dressing of, 378, 379, 380, 396; jewelry worn by, 424, 425; transformation into, 463–64; Young Lord as, 281–83
Manati phase figurines, 174
mantles, Lord 15’s, 5, 6
marriage exchange, 70
Martin, San, 397
masculinity, 116, 122, 123, 127, 131–32
maskettes: bundled, 359; La Venta, 177, 178, 179, 180
masks, xxix, 42, 156, 174, 189(n9), 383, 427, 454, 455; bundle motifs in, 364, 366; Chibchan, 39–40; La Venta, 179, 181; Olmec-style, 80–81; stucco, 411–12, 434–35
Maximón (San Simon), bundling of, 469
Maya, xxiv, xxxiii, xxxiv, 37, 109, 272, 344(n8), 352, 362, 396, 400(n9), 401(n22); body art, 428–29; bundling/binding in, 327, 357–58, 397, 401(n22); costume sets, 429–30; dressing ritual, 378, 380; earspool symbolism, 185, 186; figurines, 413–17, 461; framing bands, 323–26; garments, 427–28; jewelry, 420–27; Olmec influence on, 411–12; sacredness, 397–98; sculptures, 433–34; stucco masks, 434–35; textiles, 330–40, 374–78; weaving symbolism, 340–41. See also various sites
Mazatan, 184; ear ornaments, 149–50, 153, 156–64, 162, 166, 188–89(n6); merchants, iconography of, 10
merlons: double, 282, 288(n8), 340, 344(n9); in architectural framing bands, 325, 340
metates: Greater Nicoyan, 43, 45; human figures on, 29, 33
Mexico, divine kingship, 186–87
Mexico, Valley of, 150; figurines styles from, 162, 165, 167, 169, 172–74, 187(n11), 190–91(n13)
Middle Formative period, 63, 145, 165, 256, 373; earpools, 146, 155, 186
Middle Preclassic period, 324, 336
miniature vessels, from Sitio Conte, 17–18
mirror plaques, T-shaped, 425
mirrors, 176, 124, 403(n15); iron-ore, 119, 149–50, 188(n3); personhood of, 20–21; pyrite-backed, 18, 100, 416; and social status, 133–34
Mississippian culture, 37, 272
Mitla, geometric façades, 342
Mixteca, miniature garments, 96–97
Mixteca Alta, 79–80, 105
Mixteca Baja, 107
Mixtecs, 97, 106, 117; ceremonial speech, 268–69
Moche ceramics, 458
Mokaya, 449
monkey clan, Chibchan, 48
Monte Albán, 82, 106, 107, 283
Moon Goddess, 109
mortuary practices, 21; Bribri, 48–49; La Venta, 176–78; Sitio Conte, 18–19
Motagua Valley, 41
multiple perspectives, in Olmec and Huastec imagery, 271–72
murals, xxxiv; costume sets on, 429–30, 453; San Bartolo, 352, 373, 375–77, 378, 379, 380, 382, 383, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394–96, 397, 398–99(n2), 400(n14), 403(n36), 415, 417, 418, 419, 454
Nakbe stela 1, 425
nakedness. See nudity
nasal piercings, xxv, xxxi
necklaces, 45, 47, 99, 335, 412, 416, 422–23; coastal Oaxacan, 119, 124, 123, 124; Playa de los Muertos figurines, 63, 64
neck wraps, as bundle motifs, 359–60
needles, from Ulua Valley sites, 64, 65
Nevada phase figurines, 173, 190(n13)
Nexpa figurine, 153
Nicaragua, xxxiii, 29, 54(n8)
Nicoyan societies, xxxiii, 29; dress, 29–32; headwear, 32–35
Nohchixtlán Valley, 80–81, 84
Nopala, 134
nose ornaments, 9, 94, 107, 129
nudity, 29, 97, 461; of figurines, 103, 107, 108, 131–33, 145, 190(n13), 295–96, 415, 456; on Olmec images, 214, 219, 228
Oaxaca, xxxiii, 84, 87, 146; coastal, 115, 118–35; Early Formative period, 79–81, 85, 103; Middle and Late Formative period figurines, 106–7; gender and social identities in, 82–83; figurines from, xxxiii, xxxiv, 173, 190(n11), 461; Mixteca Alta, 79–80
Oaxaca, Valley of, 450; figurines from, 85, 87, 92–93, 96, 101, 102, 167–68, 170–72, 173, 190–91(n13); pigmented figurines from, 103, 106
objects, personhood of, 3–4
Ocos phase, 156; ear ornaments, 149, 153, 159, 167, 188(n2)
offerings, xxxi, 150, 170; Olmec, 174–75, 232
INDEX 489

Ojo de Agua, ear ornaments at, 153
ókopa (buriers), 49, 50, 51
Oliva tinklers, 427
Olman (Olmec region), xxxiii, xxxiv, 146, 189(n10), 243–44(n5), 345(n5), 450; body imagery in, 80, 81–82; ear ornaments, 150–51, 152, 174–83
Olmec Avian Serpent (Olmec Dragon), 326
Olmecoid style: jade carved in, 41, 44; masks, 80–81
Olmecs, 225, 245(n13), 313, 326, 351, 449, 462, 466; “baby-face figures,” 220–24, 245(n12); binding imagery, 361, 394, 395; creation iconography, 262–63; female images, 217–15, 245(n13), 246(n16), 247–48(n24); figurines, 162, 165–66, 170–72, 217–18, 244(n6); hollow figurines, 218–19; iconography, 253–54, 257, 258–60; Maya and, 411–12; polymorphism, 275–78, 281–83
one-eyed god figurine, 166
opossum, 49
organic material, burned, 104
ornaments, xxiv, xxviii–xxix, xxxiv, 83, 107, 117; Etlatongo figurines, 94, 99–102; Huastec, 312–14; Lord 15’s, 5–17. See also jewelry; by type
ornament sets, in burials, 457–60
Otto–Manguean languages, 53–54(n3)
overlays, tumbaga, 16–17
Oxtotitlán Cave, 453
paint, on Etlatongo figurines, 103–6, 108–9
Palenque, 402(n26); accession imagery at, 390, 402(n30); Temple of the Inscriptions at, 378, 380
Palenque Triad, 378, 380
Paleoindian period, 450, 454
Panama, xxxiii, 449, 450, 451, 472(n1); crocodilian images in, 458–59; Sitio Conte cemetery, 1–23
Panama Bay, 12
Pan–Caribbean phenomenon, 448–49
Panuco B figurines, 302, 303, 310
Paracas Cavernas culture, 302
Parita, Lord/Chief, 5, 6, 13, 16
Paso de la Amada, xxvii, 450, 454; ear ornaments from, 148, 149, 156, 158
Peabody Museum, 1–2, 24(n4)
Pearl Islands, 12
pectoraux, 100, 255, 256, 458; Dumbarton Oaks, 381, 394, 419
Peirce, Charles Sanders, 71
pendants, 40, 43, 54(n8), 158, 412, 419, 422–23; coastal Oaxaca, 116, 119, 124; ear, 146, 147, 154, 156, 162, 185, 214, 421; effigy, 9–12; figurine, 65, 88; Huastec circular, 312, 313, 314; jade, 43, 180, 181, 428; oval/oblong plaque, 424, 425; Playa de los Muertos figurines, 64, 74; pubic cover, 425–26
penis strings, 32
perforators, depictions of, 386, 388
performance, 115, 455
perishable materials, 224; ear ornaments, 147, 148. See also cloth; textiles
personhood, xxxiii, 82, 472; costumes and, 454–55, 463; of objects, 3–4, 20–21
Peru, cranial modification, 302
pictography, and ceremonial speech, 268–69
piercing implements, on Huastec Youth, 265–66
piercings, 129, 452; ear, 92–93, 153, 154, 156, 161, 176, 189(n10)
pigmentation: of figurines, xxxiii, 103–6, 108–9, smeared, 104–5
Pilli phase, 155, 173, 190(n13)
plaques, 154, 427
Playa de los Muertos (Honduras), 69; figurines, 61–65, 71, 72–74; textiles, xxxii, 64–67
plumed serpents, 287(n1); Huastec imagery of, 265, 266, 269, 280, 283–84
political–religious leaders, 37
polymorphism: active, 276–80; active and static, 275–76; Young Lord and, 281–83
Pomona (Belize), earflares from, 151, 421–22
Popol Vuh, 380, 396
Postclassic period, 84, 145, 155, 255, 308; Huastec iconography, 255, 263, 265–69, 272–75; style and iconography, 256, 287(n1)
postures/poses: Playa de los Muertos style figurines, 72–73; Oaxacan figurines, 99, 100; Olmec imagery, 217–18, 247(n20); Young Lord figure, 258–60. See also seated figures

pouches: bloodletting, 374, 386; stingray-spine, 387–88

Preclassic period, 302; abstract sculpture, 326–30; architecture, 336–40; framing bands, 323–24; textile representations, 330–40

pregnant women: representations of, 31, 35–36, 41, 50, 51, 97, 102; spiritual journey of, 47, 48

preservation, of archaeological materials, 413, 452–53

“Prince” sculpture, 109, 153, 208

Principal Bird Deity, 331, 343(n1), 388, 454; on Izapa stelae band, 324, 332–33

Proto-Zapotecan speakers, 117

Puerta Escondido, 64; figurines from, 61–63

pyrite, 415; mirrors backed with, 18, 100, 416

quadripartite symbols, on Huastec Youth, 263, 265

quatrefoil flowers, Huastec depictions, 265, 275, 283

quechquemitl, 126, 127, 128, 452

queens, 145

Quetzalcoatl, Huastec Youth as, 261, 263, 267, 268. See also plumed serpents

Quirigua, breath-serpent signs, 452

rain, Huastec symbology of, 265

rebirth, symbols of, 50

red paint/pigment, 428; on figurines, 103, 104, 105, 106, 109

regalia, xxi, xxxi, xxxii, xxxiv, xxxv(n3), 12, 368, 448, 450, 452, 454, 470; as communication tool, 351, 352; of dark shamans, 49–50; Formative period sets of, 360, 362; as framing device, 354, 356–57; Olmec maize cult 363–67; of shamans, 466–67; supernatural communication and, 357, 374

Reitberg stela, 388

Rio Grande, 134

Rio Pelo site, figurines from, 63, 72, 73

Rio Pesquero, 272

Rio Viejo, 123, 134; figures from, 126, 127

rites of passage, children’s, 420

Ritual Flight regalia, 360, 362, 369(n5)

rituals, 374, 455; Bribri spiritualist, 48–49; costumes and, 463–64; dressing, 378, 396, 400(n16), 401(n17); feminine and masculine, 131–32

ritual space: binding of, 397; elite expression of, 354–56

roads, spirals as, 47

roller stamps (sello), 103, 104, 428–29

ropes, Olmec regalia, 354

rulers, rulership, 185, 327, 336, 412, 469; attire of Maya, 417–20; earspools and, 174, 181–87; jewelry and, 420–28; Olmec style representations of, 158, 159–60, 258–60, 263; sacred space, 354–56; and supernatural communication, 356–57; symbols of, 352–54, 432, 469

sacredness, xxvii, xxix, 366; cloth and, 397–98; elite expressions of, 354–56

sacrifice: Huastec imagery of, 263, 264, 265–66; human, 51, 181, 247(n23); Olmec depictions of, 232, 233, 238, 247(n22); and royal accession, 390–91

saints, dressing of, 375, 378, 396, 401(n17)

Salamá Valley, 332

Saldaña, Antonio, 33

San Andrés island, figurine heads, 176

San Bartolo murals, xxxiv, 352, 373–74, 398–99(n12), 400(n14), 403(n16), 412, 420, 450, 454; animate clothing in, 381, 382, 383, 386, body painting, 415, 428, 429; bundles and containers on, 388, 389, 390; collar designs at, 333–34; costume sets, 429–30; dressing scenes on, 378–80; framing bands at, 325, 330, 339, 394–95, 397; hairstyles 417; headdresses, 418; infants depicted in, 420; jewelry depicted at, 421, 423, 424, 425, 426; string capes in, 378, 466; textiles depicted on, 375–77; wrapping and bundling depicted on, 391, 392, 393, 395–96

San José Mogote, 84; ear ornaments from, 151, 153, 167, 170, 171–72, 184, 188(n5); figurines from, 85, 86, 93–94, 99
INDEX 491

San José phase, figurines, 86–87, 99, 167, 170–71, 173, 190–91(n13)
San Juan Camalote, figurines from, 63, 72
San Lorenzo, 106, 146, 247(n22); binding imagery from, 357, 358, 360, 166–67, 175; ear ornaments on, 155, 173; regalia of, 466–67; representations of, 158, 262, 269; Siberian, 465–66
sharks, fossil teeth from, 17
shaws, 452
shell, 12, 80, 266, 312, 415, 416; beads, 145, 416; coastal Oaxaca, 119, 124; jewelry of, xxv, xxix, 142, 420–21; and status, xxvii, 70
“shiner” motifs, 325
shorts, in Playa de los Muertos figurines, 65, 66, 67
signification, 3–4, 71
Sioux, “Horn” hair styles, 36–37
Sipán, 458
Sitio Conte (Panama), xxxiii, 23–24(n2), 450, 451, 458, 463, 472(n1); cemetery at, 5, 24(n3); Lord 15 artifacts from, 6–19, 21–22; Peabody Museum and, 1–2
skin, as liminal sensate zone, xxx–xxx
skirts, 100, 102, 208, 313; coastal Oaxaca, 126, 228; Olmec, 214, 228, 229, 238; in Playa de los Muertos figurines, 65, 66, 73
skullcaps, Nicoyan, 34, 38
skybands, Classic period, 324–25. See also framing bands
smearing, pigment, 104–5, 106
snakes. See serpents
social agency, 106
social identity, xxxiii, 69, 87, 188–89(n9); body and, 82–83; body adornment and, 307, 308–9; dress and adornment, xxiii–xxiv, 134–35; gendered, 116–17
social stratification, xxvi–xxvii, xxix, 342, 399(n7), 457; Olmec, 184–87
social structure, 184; of Nicoyan villages, 51–53
Soconusco, xxxiii, 188(n4), 399(n7), 450, 457; ear ornaments in, 149–50, 156–64; figurines from, 154, 173, 188–89(n6), 190(n11)
Sojuel, Francisco, 397
solar disks: chalchihuitl symbols on, 263, 265; Huastec imagery, 274–75
solar imagery, Huastec, 263, 265, 274
sorcerers, 10, 287(n4), 466
space: binding of, 397; ritual, 354–56, 470
speech, 145, 457; ceremonial, 268–69
spindle weights (malacates), coastal Oaxaca, 126–27
shamans, 43, 52, 397, 472(n2); dark, 49–51; depictions of, xxxiii, 10, 189(n9); ear ornaments on, 155, 173; regalia of, 466–67; representations of, 158, 262, 269; Siberian, 465–66
shams, shell, 124
scaffolds, accession, 379, 380, 390–91, 403(n33, n37)
scarification, xxxiv, 89, 253, 318(n9), 415, 417; on coastal Oaxacan figurines, 129–30; Huastec, 296, 304–7; abstract, 326–30; early Maya, 433–34; homocentric aesthetic, 255, 257; La Venta, 175–76; multiple perspectives on, 271–75; Olmec, 109, 152, 154, 155, 165, 226–40; Olmec style, 258–60; polymorphic imagery on, 275–85; sex and gender identity of, 208–10
seated figures, 99, 100, 176, 190(n12); Greater Nicoyan, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 38, 40, 41; Olmec style, 159–60, 176, 208; plain cloth on, 68–69
serpentine, 150
serpentine-avian creatures, Huastec representations of, 266–68
serpents, 9, 12, 20, 288(n10), 326, 330, 401(n21), 421; Huastec imagery of, 265, 266, 269, 280, 283–85
sex, 109, 117; costume and, 100–102; Huastec body painting, 308–9, 315–16; Oaxacan figurines, xxxiii, 82, 87, 88–89, 94, 96, 97–99, 108; of Olmec ceramic figurines, 210–20; of Olmec images, 207, 208–10; of Olmec stone figures, 220–26
shamanic flight, 466
shamanism, 4, 11, 19, 21, 54(n5), 145, 351, 453–54; Gran Coclé iconography, 22–23; hair “horns,” 36–37; head’s role in, 34–35; status and, 465–67; Young Lord iconography, 262, 263
spindle whorls, Greater Nicoyan, 30
spinning, xxxii, 65
spirals, symbolism of, 46–48
spirits, nourishment of, 51
spiritualists, spiritual specialists, 43, 47, 189(n9); Bribri, 48–49, 465; horn hairstyle of, 36–37
spirituality: head covering and, 34–36; horn hairstyle and, 36–37
spiritual journeys, spirals as, 47–48
Spondylus shell, 47, 412, 420; ear ornaments, 415, 421; Ecuadorian trade in, 43–44; pubic covers, 425–26, 433
staffs, 43, 49
stamps, stamping, 413, 428–29
status, xxvi, xxviii, xxxiii, 42, 99, 122, 190(n12), 240, 366, 387, 391, 392, 394; Olmec, 228, 231; textiles portrayed on, 331–32, 388, 390, 402(n26)
stingray spines, 428; pouches for, 387–88
stone monuments, 115, 134, 383, 391
Chalcatzingo, 366, 368; La Venta, 175–76, 179, 209, 210; Olmec, 209, 351, 360, 367; wrapping of, 351, 470
stools, 43, 44, 49, 100
supernatural communication/contact, 11, 399(n5, n6); dress and, xxvii, 374; rulers, 356–57, 472
supernatural travel, 288(n8); Huastec symbols of, 266, 267, 268; Olmec, 351
supernatural figures, 262, 388; Huastec, 266–68; Olmec depictions of, 226, 227, 232–33, 239, 240, 241, 242; representations of, 158, 226; transformation into, 453–54
symbolism, xxv–xxvii, xxxii, 41; of circles and hoops, 45–47; of divine kingship, 352–54; of ear spools, 185–87; maize, 363–67, 401(n39); textile, xxviii, 341–42, 469; of weaving, 340–41
symbol sets, 255, 323
Tabasco, 146, 174
tabular oblique cranial modification, 300–301, 303–4
Tairona, 458; dark shamans, 49–50
Takalik Abaj Altar 12, 343(n3), 381, 382
Talamancas, 50–51, 472(n2)
Tamaulipas: archaeology, 296–99; Huastec figures from, 257, 273, 296, 309
Tampico Panuco, figurine from, 273
Tamtok (San Luis Potosí), 306
Tamuín, 260
tangas, depictions of, 30, 31
Tanquian, artifacts from, 256, 274–75
Tantuan period, 309, 313, 315 cranial modification, 300–302, 303, 304; hairstyles, 311–12; scarification and tattoos, 306–7
tattooing, xxv, xxvii, 103, 253, 415, 452, 467; coastal Oaxaca, 129, 130; Huastecan, 269, 304–7
teeth: fossil shark, 17; sperm whale, 12
Temple of the Cross (Palenque), 390
Temple of the Inscriptions, Palenque Triad, 378, 380
Tenejapa, 378
Teopantecuchoan, 362; geometric stonework, 338, 339, 340
Teotihuacanos, 37, 401(n19)
Terminal Formative period, coastal Oaxaca, 120, 123–24, 126, 28
terrestrial bands. See framing bands
thrones, Olmec imagery on, 238, 248(n25)
Tierras Largas, 84; ear ornaments from, 153, 170; figurines, 85, 86, 96, 167, 171
Tierras Largas phase, 103, 167, 190(n13)
Tikal, 356, 386, 388, 411, 418, 422, 424, 426, 427, 428; ear ornaments, 415, 416; figurines from, 414, 415
tinklers, Oliva shell, 427
Tlaloc, 265
Yucuita, 84, 85, 107
Yugüe, 123, 125, 126
Zapotecs, 106, 117, 343(n5)
Zazacatla, stonework patterns at, 338, 339

Zohapilco, figurine from, 172–73
zoomorphs, 417; active polymorphism, 278–79; on belt assemblies, 426–27; Huastec, 262, 263, 266, 275, 278–79. See also animals
Zulu knots, 91