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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
RIVERSIDE

Journey to the East: Pilgrimage, Politics, and Gender  
in Postclassic Mexico

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Anthropology

by

Shankari Uilani Patel

December 2012

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Thomas Patterson, Chairperson

Dr. Wendy Ashmore

Dr. Christine Gailey

Dr. Karl Taube

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The Dissertation of Shankari Uilani Patel is approved:

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Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my parents who I imagine are probably debating its merits at a cosmic café located somewhere in the afterlife.

For my Fathers:

**Haji Akbar Rajabali Patel** whose stories of pilgrimage I could never forget

And

**Donald Keith Johnson** who supported me in all endeavors

And especially for my Mother:

**Virginia Mayhew Bailey** who danced to the beat of her own drummer and demolished traditional gender stereotypes in the process



ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Journey to the East: Pilgrimage, Politics and Gender  
in Postclassic Mexico

by

Shankari Uilani Patel

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Anthropology  
University of California, Riverside, December 2012  
Dr. Thomas C. Patterson, Chairperson

This dissertation explores the politics surrounding women's authority and power in the affairs of state governance and religion in ancient Mesoamerican societies. While the goal is to elucidate the political and social relations of pilgrimage practices in the Maya and Veracruz regions, this research notes that despite the abundant material evidence that points to women's leadership positions in the pilgrimage practices of the Postclassic period (A.D. 1000-1519), women remain absent from archaeological narratives. Using feminist and historical materialist methodologies it deconstructs archaeological stereotypes regarding the public vs. private spheres of ancient society, queries models of fertility that define women's social roles in terms of dependency, and interrogates narratives that link gender relations to nature where they are beyond critique. It utilizes archaeological, epigraphic, and iconographic sources to demonstrate that

women in the Classic period (A.D. 300-1000) participated in a multi-regional pilgrimage network that entitled them to some of the highest positions of political, religious and military power. This history is important for understanding the prominence of Postclassic priestesses. Research carried out at the British Museum focused on the Nepean Collection, the largest collection of artifacts from the Postclassic pilgrimage site of *Isla de Sacrificios* in Veracruz, Mexico. The analysis of figurines and spindle whorls found in this collection indicate a previously ignored feminine component to pilgrimage relations which is explained in terms of a larger regional history. Finally, this research reclaims and refashions the fertility narrative by demonstrating that ancient Mesoamerican women controlled their reproduction rights within the context of Postclassic pilgrimage practices.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

This research explores the politics surrounding pilgrimage and women in the affairs of governance, warfare and religion in Postclassic Mexico. Because pilgrimage practices cut across regional, ethnic, and political boundaries, this work focuses on the political and religious interactions between regions with a focus on Yucatan and Veracruz ritual sites.

From first contact, Spanish explorers have compared Yucatan's (Fig. 1.1) pre-conquest pilgrimage practices at Chichén Itzá, Izamal, and Cozumel as resembling those that drew pilgrims to Jerusalem, Mecca or Rome (Tozzer 1941: 109, 139, 140). Spanish friars called attention to the importance of Mesoamerican pilgrimage in part because of Christianity's experience and success in taking over pagan forms of pilgrimage in Europe. It is probably not a coincidence that Izamal became the locus on which to build a Franciscan monastery. Quintana Roo's east coast was described as a region dedicated to the worship of the Maya goddess Ix Chel, a deity of divination, medicine and childbirth (ibid, Tozzer 1941: 109). Birth imagery adorned the region's temples; most notably, sculptures of women in birthing positions accompanied shrines at sites across Cozumel. Ethnohistoric sources note that Maya women traveled to the island at least once in their lifetime regarding matters of reproduction (Diaz del Castillo 1932-33). Because of an abundance of female figurines and sculptures, Spanish explorers named the island north of Cozumel, Isla de Mujeres or Island of Women (ibid). Even colonial-period Spanish explorers, who rarely mentioned women in their correspondences, noted their prominent position as professional ritual practitioners and important officiates. The question

remains, then, why do archaeological discussions of Postclassic pilgrimage down-play women's participation in the religious and political practices of the region?

According to Spanish documents the small independent states comprising the Yucatan peninsula, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Caribbean coasts formed an economic unit during the Postclassic period. Not only did they share economic concerns but also a multiethnic art style known as the International style that has been linked to Postclassic pilgrimage practices connected to the feathered serpent cult (Ringle et. al 1998). Dissertation research focuses on the multiple social, cultural and material linkages that took the form of pilgrimage between these regions. The Gulf Coast of Veracruz extends 800 km along the Gulf of Mexico from its southern border on the margins of the Maya Lowlands to the swamps of western Tabasco and up to southern Tamaulipas in the north (Fig. 1.2). When the Spaniards arrived in the sixteenth century they found a diversity of social groups speaking Haustec, Pame, Totonac, Tephehua, Mixe, Zoque, and Nahuatl languages. The geography of Veracruz plays a critical role in shaping its history. It is uniquely accessible by water transportation. It has four hundred fifty miles of coastline and is traversed by numerous rivers. Its ecological richness included alluvial soils, the salt beds, rubber trees, bird marshes, and marine animals. The Isthmus of Tehuantepec joins the Veracruz coasts to the Pacific Coasts of Chiapas, Guatemala and fostered cultural exchanges between coastal regions (Goldstein 1987: 37). Classic period travelers from the Maya Lowlands would pass through the isthmian regions on their way into Teotihuacan and the Mexican Highlands.

During the Classic period the Veracruz coastal peoples produced thousands of clay sculptures and figurines. Clay figurines and statuary reflect a myriad of cults and religious practices. These figurines can be divided in various styles including the *sonrientes* (Smiling Face) excavated from sites like Remojadas and Loma de Los Carmona on the mainland opposite Isla de Sacrificios. At the nearby sanctuary site of El Zapotal numerous *sonrientes* were found associated with elite women burials in addition to a procession of life size statues of women in snake skirts that lined the entrance to the sanctuary (Gutierrez Solana and Hamilton 1977) indicating a prominent role for women in religious practices. Just prior to the Spanish conquest both the northern and southern Gulf Coasts designated the primary region for the cult of Tlazolteotl-Ixcuina, a goddess associated with textile production, medicine, childbirth and warfare. In what ways was the cult of Tlazolteotl-Ixcuina related to the feathered serpent cult and how were women involved in the Postclassic pilgrimage practices of the Veracruz region?

A reanalysis of the material culture, epigraphy, ethnohistory, and iconography of these two areas using feminist methodologies is long over due. The hypothesis that I start with is that the Postclassic period was a time of political fragmentation in which numerous Classic period polities became less centralized, thereby relaxing previous social and political hierarchies (Andrews 1984, Andrews et al. 2003). As state authority decreased, gender ideologies and hierarchies should change, providing women flexibility and movement in status and authority (Gailey and Patterson 1987). Some of the research questions this project addresses are: How did women contribute to the history of Postclassic Mexico? How did pilgrimage mediate political, religious, economic, and

social practices? Did the reorganization of Maya state structures affect women's economic, religious, social and political roles during the Postclassic? Finally, do material examples drawn from the fields of archaeology, iconography, epigraphy and ethnohistory, reflect women's social roles within the economic, political and religious institutions of Classic period society and in what ways were such social roles altered in the Postclassic period?

Most commonly, archaeologists use ethnohistorical and ethnographic descriptions of women's work to establish archaeological correlates. Given the bias of these sources, women's activities have been equated to household production. Thus women are defined by the artifacts associated with domestic and utilitarian affairs (such as weaving implements, cooking and storage vessels, food processing equipment, etc). While the above markers may reflect women's activities, they are less useful in examinations of women's religious and political participation unless such items are deposited in ritual contexts. In contrast, iconic imagery (e.g. public art) present enduring and overt symbolic expression for the privileging of certain behaviors and social traits. Joyce (1993, 1998, 2000, 2005:145-146), for example, suggests that iconic media not only reflected gender norms, but were the means in which gender was embodied, reproduced, and even contested. Material manifestations of deities, ancestors, and spirits both stem from and influence ancient gender practices by highlighting idealized social roles with which people reflect upon and embody in terms of their own identities (Joyce 2000, 2005). In this dissertation I explore Classic period monuments of women in order to

understand how gender ideologies changed in response to political decentralization in the Postclassic period.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the ancient Maya and Gulf Coast peoples became a source of public fascination in the U.S. and Europe. This demand to know more about these culture groups along with the relative geographic proximity of Yucatan Peninsula's and Veracruz coasts made coastal and island sites a focus for foreign museum expeditions. As a result, these 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century collections are comprised primarily of ceramic vessels, *incensarios*, figurines, sculptures, ceramic and stucco fragments taken from ritual shrines and settlements located along the coasts of Veracruz, Campeche, Tabasco, and Yucatan. By analyzing a museum collection from one of these regions, my research hopes to recover an unconsidered source of data regarding women's history as well as to provide an example of a pilgrimage assemblage which should provide significant insight into Postclassic ritual life and social practices.

### **Investigating the Past to Understand the Present**

The connection between our understanding of the past and the political present is frighteningly profound. Social scientists' experiences living in a capitalist society and economy influenced interpretations of the past including perceptions of gender subordination in ancient class based societies. This has influenced two anthropological explanations regarding gender inequality in the prevailing social order. One theory starts with the assumption that biology is destiny. This theory explains gender roles and social inequalities by reference to our primate heritage. The other theory defines gender

hierarchies through cultural universals assuming male dominance to have been with us since the beginning of our species (Coontz and Henderson 1986). Both theories cloak contemporary political perspectives that justify women's subordination in society by linking it to biology and thereby naturalizing it or by connecting it to the weight of history and contributing to a "women are subjugated in the present because they have always been subjugated" perspective (Gailey 1988: 39). These two theories result from a worldview whose key elements - competition and hierarchy - depict ancient societies from an industrial capitalist perspective. Included in this is a belief that such an order is necessary for survival, and that the human social relations of subordination are necessary and natural. This advocates for an inequality that although distasteful is thus an inevitable part of human nature. In this worldview, nature becomes an unconscious metaphor for industrial capitalist social relations (Sacks 1982). Yet precapitalist societies had completely different political, economic and religious structures.

I have three feminist goals for this dissertation. First, I hope that by providing analysis of Maya gender relations in the past I can make comparisons and point out differences between precapitalist patriarchal societies and contemporary examples of such societies. Second, my research attempts an intersectional approach to gender relations that rejects essentialism by being sensitive to temporal and regional differences. Finally, I seek to point out the importance of feminist archaeological narratives for resisting dominant culture paradigms shaped by biological determinism or cultural essentialism.

## **Feminist Archaeology is Anthropology**

One of the first problems confronting feminist anthropologists included the way in which women were represented in anthropological writings. Because of anthropology's history of examining marriage and kinship women had appeared in ethnographic accounts but their roles in society were either distorted through the bias of the male anthropologist, the informant, or the traditional bias of western culture. As heirs to a tradition that treated women as irrelevant to the production of culture, anthropologists soon realized that simply adding women to traditional anthropology did not resolve women's analytical invisibility. The task for feminist anthropology was resolving the conceptual and analytical inadequacies of the discipline. Theory is never neutral for it informs how we collect, interpret, and present data (Moore 1988: 2-4).

Feminism in the context of archaeology challenges the central tenet of North American archaeology which views the social and political contexts of its production as external to the process of inquiry (see Wylie 2002: 186).

Over the last one hundred years anthropology has sought to understand its colonial and imperialist beginnings (Patterson 2001) and to become aware of the unequal power relationship characterizing the anthropological interaction between those who study others and those who are studied (Asad 1973). Moore (1988) noted that anthropology had historically treated the problem of western cultural bias through the traditional concept of ethnocentrism effectively side-stepping accusations of racism. However, anthropologists have engaged in a contentious debate over the last century and half on issues related to race and racism. As Baker and Patterson (1994: 1) point out,



anthropological ideas about race both legitimated racism, underwrote the Jim Crow statutes, and validated the enactment of anti-immigration legislation while simultaneously combating racism through arguments for desegregation, informing the U.N. resolution concerning racial equality, and challenging claims that race was an essential biological category. Like it or not what anthropologists and archaeologists do has political ramifications.

Interest in the state is a concern for feminists<sup>1</sup> as well as anthropologists. State policies dictate economic and legal practices which directly affect how much control women and other marginalized groups have over their lives (Moore 1988: 128). Since World War II the transformation and expansion of the political sphere into all areas of one's personal and private life have been wide-ranging (Weedon 1999). State formation and decolonization has affected a majority of the world's population and archaeological questions about state formation reflect real concerns about relating social theory to actual examples of social transformation (Gailey and Patterson 1987: 1). Gailey (1985) has called for the need to critique anthropological theories of state formation that mirror contemporary political ideologies with negative consequences for women such as explaining institutional sexism as intrinsic to sex differences. Anthropologists who do not consider sexism universal or natural and who doubted the matriarchy gave way to patriarchy narrative had to look for theories that recognized the importance of history

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<sup>1</sup> Feminism in its minimalist form could be taken to mean awareness of women's oppression and exploitation at work, in the home and in society and the subsequent political action taken to change this situation. However, this implies that a unitary body of theory regarding women's interests exists which is not the case. Feminism recognizes and builds coalitions with multiple theoretical strands of analysis put forth by liberal feminists, socialist feminists, Marxist feminists, radical feminists, postmodern feminists, and feminists attuned to intersectional, post-colonial, and queer critiques.

(ibid: 77). Gender hierarchy as a historical process is connected to the processes of class and state formation (Gailey 1987: 6). The relations of power involved in such processes transform the cultural meanings regarding the differences between men and women. Archaeological investigations examining the emergence of gender hierarchy in precapitalist states remain an important arena for understanding why or if it is in fact true that when gender hierarchy occurs women are the dominated gender. Implicit in such an approach is also the question, “in what ways were the relations of dominance different in precapitalist societies?”

Throughout its history feminism has taken on the western hegemonic meaning behind women’s biological and anatomical differences from men that inform political policies of exclusion (Weedon 1999: 10). Feminist activism in the U.S. grew out of the civil rights movement and built upon the work of suffragists and women’s rights advocates that gave increased visibility to white middle-class feminist leaders (Kirk and Okazawa-Rey 2007). Feminists of color fought for and gained visibility and continued to take up the call put forth by The Combahee River Collective (1977) that for feminism to achieve equality for queer women of color all systems of oppression and inequality had to be abolished. Differences between women reminded researchers that there is no one universal women’s experience and more attention needed to be paid to the other systems of inequality (such as racism, classism, and heterosexism) that intertwine with gender and produce vastly different experiences of womanhood in modern society. The concept that women could have separate experiences of gender based on multiple systems of

positionality and oppression became an issue taken up by feminist archaeologists attuned to theoretical changes within feminist anthropology.

### Feminist Archaeology

Women from white upper and middle class backgrounds have always taken part in archaeology but there were also many of them who held lab positions or worked on projects run by their husbands (Hays Gilpin 2000) or other such jobs that characterized “archaeological housework” (Gero 1985). Because American archaeology had predominantly employed an ecosystem approach to past societies, the differences between any past human actors were obscured. The archaeologists attracted to ecosystem theories phrased their explanations through ecology and systems theory which effectively separated the study of society from the study of history eliminating the distinction between society and nature and relegating human society to another part of the natural world (Patterson 1986: 19). By focusing upon whole populations, and behavioral systems, ecosystem theorists neglected the aspects of social change resulting from social negotiation and diminished the visibility of gender, class, and faction (Brumfiel 1992). Conkey and Gero (1991: 7) noted that such approaches hindered feminist archaeology in terms of researchers being caught between the rapidly advancing literature in feminist theory and feminist anthropology on the one hand and the practice of archaeology on the other which consistently ignored critical social theory and continued to produce androcentric results. One of the reasons for this was the backlash against feminism in U.S. society.

During the eighties and nineties numerous U.S. mainstream publications published “feminism is dead” or “feminism has gone too far” articles on a regular basis (Faludi 1991, Jong 1998). Since Pat Robertson<sup>2</sup> once described feminism as a “socialist anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians,” it is no wonder that as a result of this some women distanced themselves from feminism by saying things like “women should have equal rights and equal pay but I am not a feminist” (Kirk and Okazawa-Rey 2007: 6). Unfortunately, perspectives reflective of the dominant culture backlash against feminism found their way into the conversation on gender and archaeology. In 1989, the University of Calgary chose gender as the focus of their Chacmool Conference attracting 100 speakers which was the largest turnout for that conference at that time. Many of the presenters distanced themselves from the term feminism or expressed ambivalence about the label in a survey administered by Alison Wylie (1997). What is more depressing is that in a decade when U.S. women are in even greater jeopardy of losing their reproductive freedom, only 4% of the 141 participants of the 2004 Chacmool Conference on Que(e)rying Archaeology’s abstracts included the word feminism (Geller 2009: 67). Despite such setbacks, a number of archaeologists realized that the feminist goal of promoting social equality was not in conflict with the discipline’s theoretical aim of an informed archaeology of gender (Brumfiel 2006: 31). Scholarship can not be severed from politics because most theorizing in the social sciences finds its origin in political stances (Shanks and Tilley 1987) or is supported by

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<sup>2</sup> “Equal Rights Initiative in Iowa Attacked” *Washington Post*, August 23, 1992.

benefactors with certain political and economic interests. Yet, feminist archaeology has the potential of being more than just politics because material evidence has a degree of independence from political or theoretical biases of the investigator (Brumfiel 2006: 32). However, investigating gender independent of feminism fails to address the complexity of women's experiences in prehistory and does nothing to counter contemporary accounts of gender essentialism in political rhetoric (Geller 2009).

Archaeologists inspired by third wave feminism have made significant contributions to understanding gender, age, and class in past societies. While gender may constitute a structuring principle, it is not always the central principle that shapes a person's identity in a given historical situation (ibid: 70). The use of queer theory in archaeological narratives has shown that our inherited western binaries of gender, sex differences, and sexual orientation are inadequate for capturing the complexity and fluidity of these categories in prehistoric societies (Ardren 2008, Blackmore 2011, Claassen 1992, Dowson 2000, Geller 2005, Stockett 2005, Voss 2000, 2006). Therefore, an intersectional approach is vital for understanding gender in precapitalist societies. Conkey (2005) also points out that intersectional approaches can address both feminist and indigenous concerns regarding political uses of the material record. One area of archaeology that has seen an increase in feminist analyses is within the field of Mesoamerican archaeology.

### Feminism in Mesoamerican Archaeology

Much of the early theorizing concerning Maya archaeology occurred from the eighteen nineties through the nineteen thirties in institutions like the Carnegie Institution

of Washington D.C. funded by rich U.S. businessmen who needed archaeologists to furnish narratives in line with their business interests. American society was rapidly industrializing during this time widening the economic gap between those who lived in wealth and those who lived in poverty. In order to avoid potential political threats by groups opposed to this arrangement, benefactor funded institutions offered alternative narratives to current arrangements of power by turning exploitive class relations into a natural division of labor. Thus these early archaeological narratives explained past Mesoamerican societies as ruled by culturally refined elites who were supported by illiterate commoners who relied on them to maintain the universe through religious sacrifice. Such models naturalized existing inequalities and provided perspectives of the material record as markers of social identity rather than the potential means to understand past oppressive social relations (Patterson 1999: 159). These early theories first formulated by the Carnegie Institution continue to circulate in the literature on Mesoamerican archaeology.

According to Pyburn (1998: 111), the symbolism of owning treasures from conquered nations has been a characteristic of ancient states like the Aztecs who looted Toltec sites or the Romans who decorated their homes with Greek statues. In a similar way, Maya artifacts are displayed in contemporary museums as material reflecting “high art” while the products that the contemporary Maya make are termed “crafts” and referred to as “folk art.” The goal is political in terms of making the comparison between modern society and ancient artists while emphasizing the gulf between modern Maya society and the achievements of their ancestors. Essentialist perspectives of past societies

continue to misrepresent history by offering up examples of early civilizations independently developing the same division of labor that justify current political realities that associate public space with men and private space with women (Pyburn 2004: 5). When the separation between the public and private spheres of life for women becomes naturalized, it ensures the control of women by men. The rubric of the right to privacy implies that men have the right to control their “private” families and that the community or government should not interfere. Thus the human rights of women in contemporary capitalist patriarchal societies are not protected in the home (Arditti 2009).

Joyce (2006) remarks on the difficulty archeologists’ face in countering androcentric views of complex societies that take for granted the domination of women by men and assume the relations of dominance to be the same in all times and places. However, despite such deterrents Joyce (ibid: 785-802) charts the tremendous inroads that have been made by feminist archaeologists working in Mesoamerica particularly in tearing down traditional views of the public/male vs. private/female space dichotomy. One of the earliest contributions to understanding women’s very public life in ancient Maya society was advanced by Tatiana Proskouriakoff (1960) who was first to identify that Maya glyphs on public monuments and stelaes pertained to dynastic histories. This changed the popular theory promoted at the time by Maya archaeologists that these inscriptions related to mainly calendrical and esoteric astronomical matters. Proskouriakoff (1963, 1964) identified elite women in Maya art at Piedras Negras and observed that like in other kingdoms of the ancient world, Maya women possessed significant political and social stature. Coggins’s (1975) dissertation on the art of Tikal

added to this framework noting that inscriptions at this site also featured prominent female personages engaged in political action. Marcus (1976, 1987, 1992, 2001) observed that women from more prominent sites were mentioned in the inscriptions at smaller sites and proposed that in the Classic Maya world daughters from politically important sites were integrated into dynasties of less important sites. The recognition that marital alliances were a part of regional politics opened the way for exploring differing class based experiences affecting the lives of women in ancient Maya society (Joyce 2006: 790).

Because of these pioneering efforts in questions concerning women's status authority the next generation of scholars could take for granted that women were significant political agents in Mesoamerican societies (ibid: 792). Joyce's (1992, 1993, 1996, 2000) analysis of gender furthered theoretical perspectives by using largely artistic and monumental data to understand how power and production were organized noting that Maya state polities utilized the concept of gender complementarity to assert idealized forms of gender onto its constituents. She pointed out that gender was not a biological given but rather a social category manipulated by the state (Ardren 2002). The point that women were not universally powerless in Mesoamerica was also strengthened by ethnohistorians (Burkhart 1989, 2001, Kellogg 1986, 1988, 1993, 1995a, 1995b; Schroeder et al. 1997) working with sixteenth century sources from colonial Mexico that demonstrated the vast transformations to gender relations regarding Aztec women who moved from independent actors who inherited power, prestige and wealth at the time of the conquest to positions of dependency and subordination during the early colonial



period (Joyce 2006: 792). Hendon (1991, 1999a, 1999b, 2002, 2006) argued that the household was not separate from economic and political activities and that the documentation of domestic labor included the documentation of political action (Joyce 2006: 793). Hendon (1997) also proposed that textile and food production in Maya society were important activities that defined identity and her work at Copan demonstrated that certain elite women labored intensively in the productive activities important to the state. McCafferty and McCafferty (1988, 1991) looked at multiple lines of evidence to draw attention to women's economic production in terms of spinning and weaving and the subsequent connection such activities played in the construction of an identity from which to negotiate relations of power. Brumfiel (1991, 1996a, 1996b, 1997) demonstrated the effects of the imperial expansion of the Aztec empire into hinterland settlements and how the reorganization of labor created increasing demands of time and labor on women and the ways they sought to resist such political policies.

Robin (2004) has argued that two categories of material evidence, representations of people and people's living spaces, remain important arenas for documenting diversity in Maya society. With new decipherments of Maya hieroglyphs and the developments of household and feminist archaeologies scholars had new methodologies which allowed for a greater understanding of the complexity of Maya society. Yet such perspectives seemed to have much to say about elite women in society and very little to report about the majority of women who made up ancient Maya society. Pyburn (1998) pointed out that when the living spaces pertaining to Maya commoners were actually analyzed it was very difficult to discern separate spheres of production for men, women, and children

(see also Robin 2002). Recent archaeological studies documenting archaeological diversity in terms of wealth and status at the commoner sites of Chan Nahool (Robin 1999, 2001, 2002, 2012) and the northeast neighborhood of Chan (Blackmore 2008, 2011, 2012) are important contributions to the field of feminist archaeology and provide the type of intersectional analyses needed to understand gender and class relations in ancient state societies.

### **A Historical Materialist Approach to Gender, Religion, and the State**

The question of women's subordination in society has been an aspect of research on state formation since Engels (1972) [1884] first pointed out that women's declining status did not derive from biological differences but rather emerged from structures within the socio-political historical realm. This work remains important because it relegated the origins of gender inequality to its proper place instead of justifying gender oppression as a natural byproduct of biology. Understanding why women are the dominated gender during the processes of state formation is one of the research goals of Marxist feminism. Marxist feminists question gender as an abstraction rather than a process. They highlight the differences between authority rooted in consensus versus power rooted in domination and they try to understand the "reduction of a personal identity to an ideology of innate determination" (Gailey 1985: 78).

Following Engels, Leacock (1972) pointed out that prior to the emergence of the state gender relations were egalitarian and complimentary and production was for use by the entire group. In early kin communal societies the division of labor between genders

was reciprocal meaning wives and children were not economically dependent upon their husbands as they are in patriarchal capitalist societies. Because of the equality inherent in these egalitarian economic arrangements, the distinction between a public realm of men's work and a private sphere for women's work did not exist. The community was a large collective household where both genders engaged in the work needed to produce goods for their livelihood (ibid: 33). However such communities were under constant threats by the states that surrounded them or at times engulfed them. Tribute extraction and commodity production transformed economic priorities and took the control of the products or labor away from the direct producers. When products were no longer shared equally by all of the community members the group ceased to exist (Leacock and Gailey 1992: 95, Patterson 2009: 95). Since, states emerge out of repression at home and conquest abroad (Diamond 1951), dissolution of kinship ties and gender inequality at home ensues when goods created for communal consumption became commodities for use in state exchange. In this manner the relations of production change as the institutions of the community become altered when the old mode of production is transformed into its new form (Patterson 2009: 96).

Gailey and Patterson's (1987, 1988) work clarified the steps and processes involved in state formation and gender subordination in precapitalist societies. Class based patterns of production, distribution, consumption, and cultural practices were exploitative in that they demanded labor and goods from subordinated classes and communities. Since some political strategies were more efficient than others, states tended to produce many different types of societies rather than just one type of

sociopolitical polity. In precapitalist states the producers were not fully separated from the means of production. Thus, class and state formation in these societies could be understood as the articulation and encapsulation of diverging communal and tributary modes of production. Class based social formations were tense and potentially explosive accommodations because the societies incorporated into the state did not share the same cultural forms of the ruling class. In addition communities of non-subject peoples on the frontiers of the state or beyond were affected by such processes in an indirect manner. Class and state formation could be seen as an uneven form of development because of the different priorities created when opposed spheres of production emerge (Gailey and Patterson 1988: 78). The reproduction of society contains the reproduction of class relations since necessary production included the goods and labor extracted from the kin communities by the tribute states. In tribute based states if commodity production emerged it was subordinate to tribute and subsistence production and it was limited to long distance trade. The products traded served elite consumption patterns rather than motives for profit or reinvestment (Kradler 1976, Patterson 2009).

Strong tribute states specified what they desired from the kin communal communities under their control while weak tributary states were not as successful. Strong tribute states created increasing stratification on the production relations of the surrounding societies. Weak tributary states were inconsistent in not always being able to enforce their demands for labor or products because the kin communities still managed to retain control over their members or goods. The extraction of tribute or labor was oppressive and the processes of class formation affected men and women differentially.

The dominant class in early civilizations was also not unified and different factions possessed goals that differed from other factions. Thus new cultural forms and practices were formed that disguised class relations and exploitation in an effort to deflect internal dissent. These ideologies often used “natural” categories like kinship, gender, rank, and community as a means of structuring the social relations of production. Since these ideologies drew on the symbols and rituals of dominant and subordinate groups they were not uniformly embraced by all subject peoples. If these ideological practices were shared then there would be no need to sponsor elaborate rituals, spectacles, or other forms of public indoctrination. The kin/civil conflict was expressed through legal codes opposed to customary actions and it played out through all social institutions (Diamond 1996 [1951], Gailey 1985: 74, 1987, Patterson 2003: 100-101, 2009).

One of the ways the kin/civil conflict manifested in ancient societies was through the social practices of religion. Marx and Engels analyzed the social aspects of religion in terms of alienation and class interests but rather than dismissing religion as it is commonly believed, they analyzed it from a materialist point of view in order to comprehend what made religion indispensable to human beings at specific stages in history. Religious cults played a contradictory role in early civilizations. While religious ideologies preserved social hierarchies, they also offered explanations for exploitation while simultaneously providing justifications for social change. Religion played a dual role in both sanctioning the power of the state and providing the means to oppose it (Patterson 2003: 129, 2009: 60, Trigger 1993: 85).

Religious systems as historical processes comprised the glue which cemented social relations in ancient societies (Rapp 2005: 306). They undergo profound transformations during periods of political, economic, and social change which are manifested in changes to gender ideologies. Silverblatt (1988) highlights the complex relationship between state religious ideologies and gender relations noting states define womanhood and women contribute to the definition of states. The religious system employed by the Inca utilized women to promote and justify changes to political and economic hierarchies through a relocation program that required conquered communities to send them their women to serve in temples, courts, or as wives for noblemen (Silverblatt 1987). Ortner (1978) illustrated the link between state formation, marriage practices and Christian religious ideologies in Europe that required the sexual purity of women but not of men. Working with second-century A.D. Gnostic texts, Torjesen (1993) determined that in certain early Christian sects God consisted of a male and female divinity, and the Holy Family comprised the mother, father and son. Religious offices were rotated and held by women who taught and preached within a non-hierarchical community (Rapp 2005: 306). Broton's (1982) reexamination of women's inscriptions found in ancient Jewish synagogues led her to conclude that women served as religious leaders during the Roman and Byzantine periods. Changes in cosmology and ideology in response to state relations can reveal much about the intersection of religion, gender, and class in ancient societies at different moments in history.

## **Outline of Dissertation Chapters**

In this first chapter I explored the information that indicated the prominent role of women within the context of Postclassic pilgrimage in Yucatan and Veracruz. I also pointed out the importance of feminist archaeological narratives for feminist anthropology and explored the historical materialist model regarding gender subordination and precapitalist societies while highlighting the potential ritual practices hold for understanding the politics of gender in ancient societies.

The second chapter of my dissertation covers Maya religion in Mesoamerica using a materialist Marxist ecology to explain the social relations between the Maya and the environment and the way such relations were ritualized through an examination of archaeological assemblages surrounding caches and burials. This section is important for understanding that ancient Mesoamericans did not experience the same alienation from nature that is present in capitalist societies. It also presents a materialist analysis of how views of nature were incorporated into political dialogues regarding the state, economy, and religion in nineteenth century Europe. It then explores how views regarding the “nature” of women in the Mesoamerican Preclassic period became incorporated into gender ideologies that emphasized biological reproduction over social reproduction.

The third chapter looks at how ideologies based on nature disguise the social relations of dominance. It examines the critiques of nature/women and culture/men dichotomy and picks apart models that confine women’s ritual to domestic contexts. It tries to address the following questions: How are women constrained by ideologies of gender and nature? In what ways are the relations of domination promoted through

religious ideologies? How did the blurring of natural and social categories in Mesoamerican societies factor into religious ideologies? In what ways were political metaphors regarding nature applied to social inequality in the Late Preclassic period?

The fourth chapter examines the dimensions of pilgrimage. It begins with a summary of pilgrimage studies and then scrutinizes previous models of pilgrimage in Mesoamerica. Since scholars mention that most Mesoamerican pilgrimage practices were focused on honoring the deities of water and fertility, defining exactly what researchers mean by fertility rituals is crucial for a feminist analysis. Through an exploration of feminist literature regarding ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean fertility rituals, this chapter critiques sexist reproductions of ancient society. It also discusses the contemporary goddess movement and how interpretations of archaeological data have been utilized to promote the myth of matriarchy in early human societies and why such a myth is bad for feminism. It closes with an examination of Van Gennep's (1960 [1909]) rites of passage and how such studies influenced scholars and prompted further investigations of women's rituals through theories of performance and practice.

The fifth chapter covers Classic period traditions of pilgrimage, politics, and gender in Mesoamerica through analysis of archaeological, epigraphic, and iconographic data. It looks at the "arrival of strangers" in the Maya lowlands and the role Teotihuacan played in Maya pilgrimage and politics. It reviews the evidence regarding royal women and pilgrimage practices in the Early Classic period through archaeological and epigraphic examples. It compares iconographic evidence regarding the role of the jade net costume in rituals related to Kaan or Snake religious specialists and examines Maya



monuments of women depicted as queens, warriors and priestesses in the Late Classic period. It demonstrates that women in the northern lowlands and along the Usumacinta River region held some of the highest positions of political, military, and religious authority in Classic Maya society.

The sixth chapter examines pilgrimage and the feathered serpent cult through a discussion of Chichén Itzá – one of three prominent Yucatan pilgrimage locales mentioned by sixteenth century friars. Research examines epigraphic evidence that privileged female descent in early parentage statements of prominent men at this site and examines the archaeological debate surrounding this city. It also describes the feathered serpent pilgrimage model put forth by Ringle and colleagues (1998) in light of Taube's (2004, 2006, 2010, 2011) argument linking the funerary Flower World/Mountain complex<sup>3</sup> to the cult of Quetzalcoatl. It also examines figurine traditions from Veracruz and considers the evidence that a version of the feathered serpent cult was an early Classic period phenomenon in this region.

The seventh chapter provides material examples of a pilgrimage assemblage through original research carried out at the British Museum. Research focused on the Nepean Collection, the largest collection of artifacts from the Postclassic pilgrimage site of *Isla de Sacrificios* in Veracruz, Mexico. The chapter begins with a review of

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<sup>3</sup> The Flower World/Mountain complex first delineated by Jane Hill (1992) and elaborated and applied to Mesoamerica by Taube (2010) designates a particular religious complex of artistic themes present in Mesoamerica and the American Southwest. Some of the spiritual themes associated with this artistic complex include a paradisaic solar realm expressed through motifs such as flowers, birds and polished stones or through representations of a flowery road utilized by sun as it crossed the heavens. In Postclassic Mesoamerica, this eschatological theme took the form of a flowery mountain located in the east where the honored dead were depicted as birds and butterflies and accompanied the sun on its journey from east to west across the sky.

archaeological investigations including sixteenth century Spanish first contact descriptions. It organizes evidence for funerary ritual associated with the feathered serpent cult and Flower World/Mountain complex as well as the materials that might indicate a feminine component to religious practices surrounding this cult. It then takes a critical look at the feathered serpent pilgrimage model and discusses whether or not this model works for the Veracruz region.

The eighth chapter takes a closer look at the reorganization of pilgrimage practices in Postclassic Yucatan and the linkages to ritual sites in Veracruz, Puebla and Oaxaca. The analysis of figurines and spindle whorls found in the Nepean collection suggests a previously ignored feminine component to pilgrimage relations at Isla de Sacrificios which is explained in terms of a larger regional history surrounding female labor and autonomy. This research also reclaims and refashions the fertility narrative by demonstrating that, unlike many women living in modern nation states, ancient Mesoamerican women controlled the political conversation regarding their own fertility and reproduction. The ninth chapter offers conclusions to research questions discussed previously and revisits the issue of state formation and gender subordination. Finally, it highlights how feminist archaeological methodologies remain vital for exploring alternative forms of gender relations in ancient societies.



Fig. 1.1: Map of the Yucatan (created by C. Blackmore).

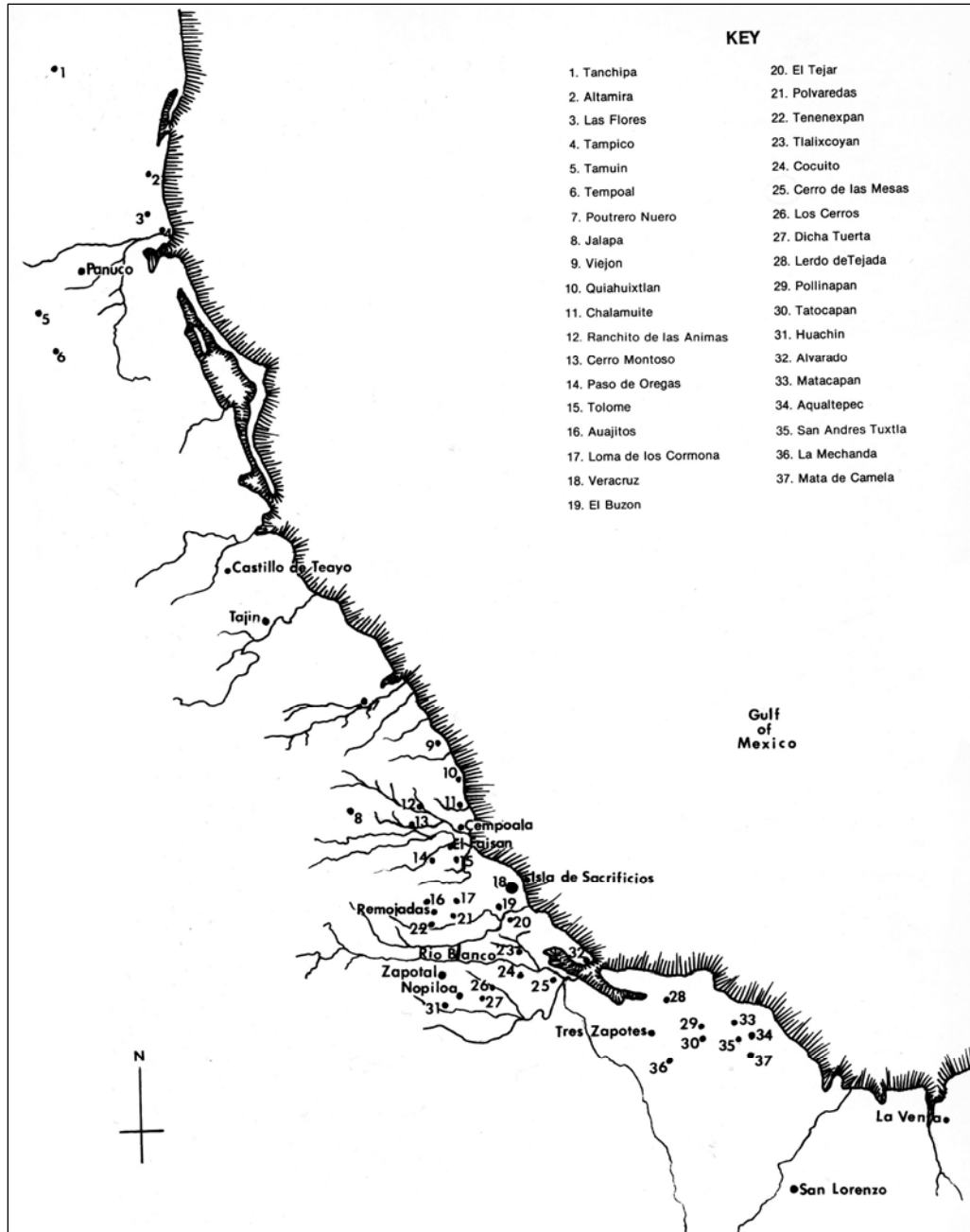


Figure 1.2: Map of Veracruz region and archaeological sites (from Wilkerson 1987: 11).

## Chapter 2: A Materialist Approach to Nature, Religion, and the State

Before we delve into the religion of Mesoamerica from an ecological materialist perspective it is important for me to define what it is that I mean by materialism. Materialism is a theory regarding the nature of life and society that arose at the beginning of Greek philosophy. It explains reality as dependent on nature and “matter” in the sense that there is a level of physical reality that is independent of and prior to thought. Bhaskar (1983) divides materialism into three categories (1) *ontological materialism* which asserts that the social depends on the biological (2) *epistemological materialism* that advocates for the independent existence and thus law-like nature of certain objects of scientific thought and (3) *practical materialism* that champions the primacy of human agency in the reproduction and transformation of society. It has often been associated with a scientific outlook diametrically opposed to religious teleological representations of reality. One of the questions that formed the basis of philosophical discussions of the Enlightenment was whether God created the world or whether the world had been in existence eternally. The philosophers who believed in the primacy of the spirit over nature and some form of world creation were idealists while the philosophers who regarded nature as existing prior to the spirit belonged to the school of materialism (Foster 2000, Engels 1941). Materialism was often associated with both sensationalism and empiricism and set in contrast to idealism and spiritualism.

While materialism has been critiqued as mechanistic, Karl Marx’s (1818 – 1883) materialism was not deterministic because he admired the work of the ancient Greek

philosopher Epicurus who was the subject of his doctoral thesis and often thought of as the inventor of empirical Natural Science. Marx chose to focus on Epicurean philosophy in order to understand how it prefigured the rise of materialism, humanism, and individualism which characterized themes important to the European Enlightenment (Foster 2000: 51).

Epicurus (341 – 271 BC) was an atomist and a follower of Democritus (460 – 370 BC) and therefore believed that the world consisted of atoms and the void but he did not believe as Democritus had that atoms were always controlled by natural laws. While atoms had weight and were continually falling downwards towards the center of the earth, every once and a while an atom would swerve from its path and collide with another atom. This implied that while human nature may be constrained by natural circumstances the swerve of the atom left the door open for a measure of contingency and thus a possibility free from determinism (Russell 2004[1946]: 235, Foster 2000: 52). Marx explored this distinction between Democritean and Epicurean physics noting that the real differences between the two were to be found in their underlying epistemological systems. Epicurus in contrast to Democritus found room in his system for both nature and society (Bailey 1928, Foster 2000: 55). As Farrington (1969: 148) pointed out Epicureanism was “not a purely mechanical system; it was the specific originality of Epicurus in the domain of physics to have defended freedom of the will in man as a product of evolution.” Lucretius (99 – 55 BC) a poet admirer of Epicurus who lived during the last days of the Roman Republic when anti-religious doctrines were in fashion, described the Epicurean swerve of the atom as the instrument freeing humanity from the

bonds of fate and liberating them from the fear of the Greek gods (Russell 2004[1946]: 236). Thus Epicureans believed that both the mind and body were united and that men and women were active agents in acquiring knowledge and creating their own happiness (Patterson 2009: 65). For Marx Epicurean philosophy represented Enlightenment values because it rejected teleological views of nature and recognized the role of reason in interpreting the world (Foster 2000: 59).<sup>1</sup>

According to Epicurus at death the atoms that comprised the human soul were dispersed and no longer capable of sensation because they were no longer connected to the human body. Marx noted that fundamental to Epicurean philosophy was the notion that sensuousness was a temporal and transitory process. As Foster (2000: 55) elaborates, “Mere perception through the senses is only possible because it expresses an active relation to nature – and indeed of nature to itself.” Because the experiences of the senses were fleeting the only way to understand the true form of the world of appearances was through time implying that nature as well as humanity had history.

### **Natural Theology and Political Economy**

The Enlightenment was not a unified body of ideas. On one end were the traditionalists who sought to demonstrate that existing aristocratic and ecclesiastic hierarchies were divinely inspired. At the other end of the spectrum were the radicals who argued that such hierarchies were human creations. In the middle the moderate

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<sup>1</sup> Many Christian theologians saw Epicurean philosophy as dangerous to the church and “reason” as Luther pointed out “was the Devil’s whore.”

Cartesians advocated for rationalism and empiricism. Most philosophical discussions centered on defining and exploring binaries such as human and animal, mind and body, male and female and the general categories of God, nature, and humanity (Patterson 2009: 10-11). While some philosophers of the sixteenth and seventeenth century focused on materialism and endeavored to break down the scholastic perspectives found in scriptures and Aristotelian philosophy, there was also an equally strong push by others to reestablish religion within an Enlightenment context combining nature, science, religion, the state, and the economy into a single narrative. Natural theology as postulated by parson<sup>2</sup> naturalists, who labored to establish God's existence through the study of nature, resurrected teleological views of society that were much more in line with the new system of landed property and industry that comprised early agrarian capitalism (Foster 2000: 81-104).

Parson naturalists like Reverend John Ray (1627 – 1705) were opposed to the materialism of the Greek atomists because such theories could not explain the ordered and clock-like structure of nature which was evidentiary of the existence of a Supreme Designer. Nor could they accept Descartes' (1596 – 1650) theory that God was only involved in the original act of creation and possibly the establishment of a few natural laws. William Paley (1743 - 1805) reached beyond the subjects of nature and theology to describe the intelligent design of the state and economy arguing that even if existing property relations seemed unfair they should be thought of as “the appointment of heaven.” Paley's early work argued that happiness increased when population increased

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<sup>2</sup> In the Anglican Church parsons were parish priests not attached to monastic orders.



and that God, the Supreme Proprietor, consented to the division of private property as long as public charity was upheld so that each person would have sufficient provision on which to live. Such views on population and the Christian obligation of the fortunate to the poor would change with the work of Thomas Malthus (1766 - 1834) who occupied the first British professorship of political economy and was a product of parsonic naturalism (ibid).

In 1798 Malthus published an anonymous work aimed at countering the ideas put forth by William Godwin (1756 – 1836) in England and the Marquis de Condorcet (1743 – 1794) in France who in response to the French Revolution optimistically asserted that unending human progress was possible. Malthus argued that this was not case because of the “natural” principles governing population. Human population, if unchecked, increased at a geometrical rate while existing food supplies only doubled at an arithmetical rate. Since population growth was unsustainable if it exceeded the growth of the food supply, God had implemented natural checks, usually defined as misery and vice, to maintain equilibrium between population and the means of subsistence. This ultimately provided a barrier to the indefinite improvement of society so cheerfully espoused by Godwin and Condorcet. The reason the Supreme Being intended for population to outstrip the food supply was that it awakened Christian virtues compelling one to further exertion in the form of human labor in order to obtain a means of subsistence. Therefore, human inequality was justified because if a uniform course of prosperity existed then it would only “degrade rather than exalt” the human character. It was best to adapt rather than to interfere with the “high purpose of creation.” Interfering

in the plight of the poor as in the case of the Poor Laws of England<sup>3</sup> would only bring disasters like famine or the lowering of the quality of life for the upper classes. The solution was to remove the rural poor from the land and turn them into proletarians (ibid: 88). As Foster (2000: 101) points out, “It is no wonder, then, that the English working class radicals generally looked on Malthusianism as their greatest enemy.”

Natural theologian Thomas Chalmers (1780 – 1847) was a professor of divinity at the University of Edinburgh and a Malthus disciple who defended natural theology from materialist and evolutionary “heresies” by arguing God was decidedly against such unnatural human interventions like the Poor Laws. Chalmers argued that the systems striving to ameliorate the conditions of poverty were clear violations of nature as they undermined land rents and the cultivation of the land. It was the poor themselves who were responsible for their own poverty. The “invisible hand of God” was to be found in the world of trade where self interest promoted the general good through the market. Marx and Engels critiqued the intrusion of natural theology and parsonic morality into the realm of political economy (ibid 103-104).

### **Natural History and Political Economy**

Malthus’ theory explained the population principle as universally valid in all times and places without regard to historical conditions. The parsonic religious conception of nature had been combined with the economic interests of bourgeois

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<sup>3</sup> The Poor Laws of England were enacted to provide Christian charity to the poor whose plight had been exasperated by the dissolution of monastic holdings which traditionally had been places of refuge for the destitute.

society. In order to justify the removal of the population from the land it had allowed for the exploitation of both nature and society (ibid: 106). As Engels (1964: 10) stated,

To make earth an object of huckstering – the earth which is our one and all, the first condition of our existence – was the last step toward making oneself an object of huckstering. It was and is to this very day an immorality surpassed only by the immorality of self-alienation. And the original appropriation – the monopolization of the earth by a few, the exclusion of the rest from that which is the condition of their life – yields nothing in immorality to the subsequent huckstering of the earth.

Marx did not separate out nature from human history by distinguishing between the physical and moral sides of human beings. For Marx there was not one universal fixed human nature but rather the essence of humanity could be discerned within “the ensemble of social relations” which changed over time. In addition, humanity was a part of nature and nature was thus an extension of the human body. This relationship between nature and human society was dialectical and historical since humans were simultaneously natural as well as social beings (Patterson 2009: 41). What distinguished human beings from other animals was their capacity to transform nature through the production process. Human beings’ historical relation to nature occurred through their means of subsistence. Nature was the direct means of supporting life and therefore “the object and tool” of human activity. According to Marx (1992: 328), “Man lives from nature, i.e. nature is his body, and he must maintain a continuing dialogue with it if he is not to die. To say that man’s physical and mental life is linked to nature simply means that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature.”

Marx also read the work of Ludwig Feuerbach (1804 - 1872) who used materialism to counter religious explanations of nature. Feuerbach thought nature should be explained as a reality in itself (that included humans and their sensuous experiences) and capable of its own self determination rather than explained as Hegel (1770 - 1831) had done in terms of an obstacle to the realization of the spirit. Because Descartes had separated out the conception of the human mind from the conception of nature, Feuerbach felt that this created a dualistic world in which essence (mind) was separated from existence. It was human beings' estrangement from nature that provided their ultimate obstacle to freedom. Speculative philosophy just like theology had explained reality starting with the ideal rather than the real which only alienated self consciousness and denied the world sensuous existence. Only through looking at things through their objective reality could humanity see past their prejudices (Foster 2000: 69).

While Feuerbach had resolved the contradiction in the Hegelian system by proposing "nature exists independently of all philosophy" (ibid: 111), Marx felt it was ahistorical and static because it lacked a concept of transformative praxis. Being was the same as essence and a contradiction between the two was not allowed. While dissolving religious alienation into material existence Feuerbach's philosophy lost sight of "real earthly alienation" (ibid). What was needed was a practical materialism. As Marx and Engels (1975: 58-59) asserted:

The essence of the freshwater fish is the water of a river. But the latter ceases to be the “essence” of the fish and is no longer a suitable medium of existence as soon as the river is made to serve industry, as soon as it is polluted by dyes and other waste products and navigated by steamboats, or as soon as its water is diverted into canals where simple drainage can deprive the fish of its medium of existence.

Thus the fish was alienated as a result of human practices and to resolve the contradictions between being and essence demanded a practical solution. Therefore the goal of any materialist philosophy must be to “grasp the significance of revolutionary, of practical-critical activity” (ibid: 6). Marx and Engels’ main point was “philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it” (Marx and Engels 1998: 571).

In combining a materialist conception of nature with a materialist conception of history, Marx employed the concept of “metabolism” to define the labor process as those actions that humanity undertakes when mediating, regulating, and controlling the symbiotic relationship between human beings and nature. As human beings confronted the materials of nature through labor they also changed those materials and were themselves changed by the process. In that way nature and human society were both part of the process of natural history. However, under capitalism an “irreparable rift” had occurred in the relations of production creating an antagonistic separation between town and country, increasing the polarization between the rich and the poor, and alienating human beings from nature. This allowed Marx to develop a theory of environmental degradation that anticipated present day concerns regarding the environment. At the heart of this critique was a critique of Malthus. Marx agreed with the economist David

Ricardo (1772 – 1823) that it was not the amount of grain that was the significant element determining an excess population living in poverty, but rather the amount of employment. Hence it was the social relations of production (rather than some natural law) that created the existence of paupers.

Building on the political economic theories of James Anderson (1739 – 1808) and Justus von Liebig (1803 – 1873) Marx noted that conditions of absolute fertility of the land postulated by Malthus and Ricardo did not exist. When the land failed to produce additional crops it was because of differences in the relative productivity of the soil and the failure to adopt sustainable agricultural practices. When the poor were forced off the land and moved to London, the countryside lost the human fertilizer that enriched the land while the town and the River Thames became increasingly polluted with human waste. The “rift” in the “metabolic interaction between man and the earth” robbed the soil in the countryside of its constituent elements and robbed the worker living in the city of her/his health (Foster 2000: 141-167).

An important part of Marx’s view of ecology within capitalism was that nature was not acknowledged for its contribution to the production process. As Foster (2000: 168) elaborates:

Indeed it was the contradiction between use value and exchange value engendered by capitalism that Marx considered to be one of the foremost contradictions of the entire dialectic of capital. Nature, which contributed to the production of use values, was just as much a source of wealth as labor – even though its contribution to wealth was neglected by the system.

In capitalist societies human beings not only became alienated from nature, when they viewed it as an object rather than a relation, they also became estranged from the products they produced, from one another, and their ability to realize their full human potential (Patterson 2009: 148-150).

### **An Ecological Materialist Perspective of Mesoamerican Religion**

I argue that approaching Maya religion from the standpoint of Marx's ecology offers a great deal of insight into Mesoamerican religion and its relationship to natural history. In precapitalist societies, the estrangement from nature is not as great; therefore, the utility of using this theory is based on two important avenues of research. First, fundamental to the traditions of Mesoamerican religion is its emphasis on the social and relational aspects between humanity and nature (Ortiz de Montellano 1989, Furst 1995, Carrasco 1995, Lopez Austin 1997, Arnold 1999, Taube 2004). Second, landscape approaches in archaeology have yielded a great deal of information regarding the politics, economics and belief systems found in Mesoamerican societies (Ashmore 2004, 2009). I start from the supposition that religion in Mesoamerica arose from 1) the acknowledgement of the metabolic relation between nature and humanity 2) the realization that nature was an equal partner in the production of use values 3) that because nature contributed to the production of material objects and was a member of the social community, it was due a means of sustenance and a certain portion of material objects drawn from humanity's production processes.

“We Eat the Gods, and the Gods Eat Us<sup>4</sup>”

As McAnany (2010: 60) points out, at the beginning of archaeological monographs, it is common practice to preface excavation reports with the “environment setting” in order to set the background for the cultural material that will be addressed. This is because the “give and take” interaction between humans and the environment was seen in western capitalist terms, where nature did the “giving” and humans did the “taking.” Phrases like “nature managed” and “resources extracted” indicated economic behavior and not ritual practice. However this archaeological approach changed through landscape studies which expanded and revolutionized archaeological analyses (ibid: 66) by advocating for a phenomenological approach that emphasized socio-symbolic dimensions of the landscape and highlighted the interrelationships between people and their natural/cultural worlds (Knapp and Ashmore 1999).

I want to discuss very briefly in non-historical terms Mesoamerican conceptions regarding the mutual relationship between humanity and nature taken from a variety of sources separated in time and space but indicative that this shared viewpoint regarding nature had material correlates. Mesoamerican conceptions of the celestial, terrestrial and underworld environments were intertwined with ideas regarding the geography of the human body. For the Classic Maya nature was a living and breathing social being whose natural features like mountains, caves, or bodies of water were represented artistically with faces or mouths and described as integral members of the social community (Brady and Ashmore 1999, Houston and Inomata 2009: 193, McAnany 2010). Both the

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<sup>4</sup> Carrasco (1995: 429) utilized this phrase to characterize ancient Mesoamerican religious views regarding humans’ relationship with the earth.



landscape and the human body were animated by the same vital forces important to the well being of the earth and to the humans who inhabited it. The physical landscape and the human body could be affected, transformed, and revitalized through the process of eating and digesting one another. Jaws, mouths, tongues, and eating gestures were the Mesoamerican visual metaphors used for feeding the earth and for the reciprocal nourishment humans expected in return (Carrasco 2000: 168, Knab 2004: 11). Our best references for understanding the philosophy behind the connections between the body, soul, and the natural environment come from the codices of Postclassic Central Mexico and from ethnohistoric and ethnographic examples.

The front piece of the Codex Fejervary-Mayer depicts this mutual relationship between space, time, and the human body (Fig. 2.1). At the center of the image stands Xiuhtecuhtli, the Aztec Fire God, receiving nourishment from the vital energies found in blood from the four corners of the cosmos. In the cardinal points are pairs of deities that along with Xiuhtecuhtli represent the Nine Lords of Night (thought to rule over the 9 levels of the underworld). Each of the directions is also associated with a tree and a bird. In the direction of east is a sundisk rising over a temple like structure. In the west is where Tlatecuhtli, the Earth deity swallows the sun through the mouth of a cave. Along the border of the image are a series of 20 dots in 13 intervals (corresponding to the 13 levels of the celestial realm) that add up to the 260 days that make up the ritual calendar. The 20 day glyphs are also arranged in relation to their corresponding intercardinal directions. Body parts at the intercardinal points are shown containing the vital food for the cosmos as blood flowing into the central space. In the east is the hand, the north the

foot, in the west the throat, and in the south the head (Arnold 1999: 61). Prayers recited at different parts of the social landscape addressed resident entities of the body and the cosmos simultaneously (ibid: 60).

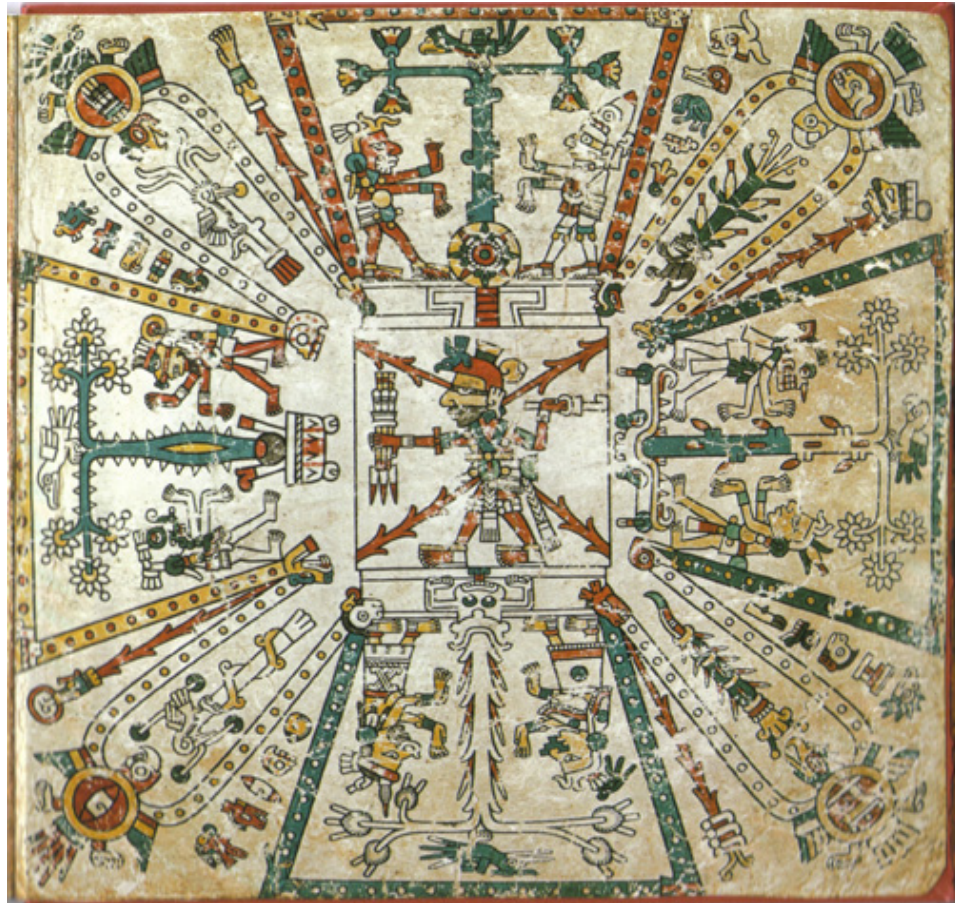


Fig. 2.1: First page of the Codex Fejérváry-Mayer (courtesy of FAMSI)

The cosmos was interpreted in terms of a corporeal framework that weaved together concepts of the earth, body, and soul. The three levels of the cosmos, the sky, the earth, and the underworld were linked to the three aspects of the soul<sup>5</sup> inhabiting the human body. (Knab 2004: 11). The three parts of the soul had to be kept in balance in order to maintain the health of the individual and the health of the social and physical community. Disease and death resulted from imbalances in the social community manifesting in parts of the soul tied to their celestial, terrestrial, and underground environments.

The human body, as a center for engagement with the world, was not just an ideological construct but rather one based within the material context of the landscape. Thus, the seven caves of Chicomoztoc were seen not only as openings into the underworld but also corresponded to the seven orifices of the individual human body: two eye sockets, two nasal passages, the mouth, the anus, and the navel (Arnold 1999: 55). The three aspects of the soul resided in corresponding locations within the human body as well as the cosmos (Ortiz de Montellano 1989). The aspect of the soul residing in the skull and corresponding to the celestial realm was the *tonalli*. It was the *tonalli* that could migrate to other living beings even when its human was still alive. The soul inhabiting the liver and linked to the terrestrial realm was known as the *ihiyotl* while the soul of the heart was the *yolia*. Humans, animals, and plants could not survive without the *yolia* and it was thought to turn into a bird upon death. For a grain of maize to be

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<sup>5</sup> Aristotle also explained the soul as containing three principles intrinsic to living matter in plants, animals and people. The soul was not separate from ones physical body and was an important ingredient for taking in nutrients and for reproducing. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century St. Augustine reduced the number of souls down to one that was completely separate from a person's body (Furst 1995: 5).

converted to active seed, it had to be united with its heart soul (*yolia*) through ritual involving reciprocal offerings. When a person died their soul was not extinguished it was just released back into the natural world (Furst 1995, Arnold 1999, Carrasco 2000, Knab 2004).

#### Caches, Foundation/Dedication Deposits, Votive Offerings

One of the ways that the use value of nature to production processes was acknowledged and recompensed in Mesoamerica was through the deliberate deposition of material objects in the form of caches and dedication deposits. According to Osborne (2004: 3) because artifacts from archaeological sites are often classified by object type rather than assemblage, these categories of artifacts have remained under-theorized. Caches are groups of related material objects that have been collected and intentionally buried. The types of objects found in caches can either be whole or partial luxury objects, utilitarian items, or corporeal material. While artifacts can end up in the archaeological record because they were discarded, lost, or included in the context of burial or cremation of the dead, caches or votive offerings are deliberately deposited as a “gift directed to an other-worldly power”(ibid). Gregory (1980, 1997) remarked that it does not make sense to study the gift exchanges between humans and then ignore the gifts given to supernatural powers. While caches are associated with the term “hoards” and occasionally linked to wealth accumulation in European archaeological contexts (Bradley 1996), their significance in Mesoamerica rests with their identification as ritual deposits. Such items can be found in the context of construction projects, deposited in

natural features found throughout the landscape, or placed at special buildings or altars constructed for such purposes.

Numerous instances exist for caches associated with construction projects and building dedication rituals in Mesoamerica (see Freidel and Schele 1989, Mock 1998, Hendon 2000, Lucero 2003). Coe (1959: 77) distinguished between dedicatory caches that were placed at the time of construction and intrusive caches deposited in-between construction phases. He also argued that artifacts that were smashed or broken and found on the ground or around structures and monuments were categorically different but still related to ritual in terms of “terminating” the animating quality of a structure or an item.

Some examples of caches that occur throughout Mesoamerican history in connection to religious buildings include Preclassic Oaxaca, at the site of San Jose Mogote, where Marcus and Flannery (1994:67-8) described several caches consisting of elaborate statues and beads made of jade included with ceramics deposited during the construction of the site’s main public temple structure. Estrada-Belli (2006: 59) described a cache of 5 water jars, 5 upright celts and 114 jade pebbles placed in a four level cruciform prior to the construction of the eastern buildings of Cival’s E-group in the Middle Preclassic. Caches in conjunction with religious buildings were still being deposited in the Postclassic as evidenced by the numerous caches found at Templo Mayor in Postclassic Tenochtitlan (Lopez Lujan 2005).

However, caches are not solely associated with temple structures. They also appear in the construction phases of both elite and commoner residential compounds (Garber et. al. 1998, Lucero 2003, Blackmore 2008). According to McAnany and Varela

(1999: 161) caches in residential structures at Kaxob began around 65 BC. One of the caches they described in a residential structure was arranged in a two-layered quadripartite configuration consisting of 4 small Sierra Red bowls deposited in conjunction with the faunal remains of deer and frogs and 108 pieces of microdebitage.

Some Mayanists see a connection between certain burials and caches (Kunen et. al 2002). In discussing Maya caches, particularly in relation to his work at Tikal, Becker (1993) found it useful to see certain human burials interred beneath the floors of ritual and domestic structures as indicative of a type of cache. He (1993: 67-68) argues that,

Perhaps the most important observation from the Maya realm is the lack of formal cemeteries which remove the dead from the realm of the living. The use of burials as caches (offerings) may reflect Maya cosmological concerns with using human remains to the feed the gods (or to impregnate) the earth in order bring forth renewed life and to continue the cycle of being (rather than to dispose of the unwanted corpse of the dead, as if a life had come to an end).

Caches in numerous sites throughout Mesoamerica have also been placed under platforms or found in the construction of staircases or deposited under stelae (Hruby 2007). In addition, caches can be found in association with occupational areas, such as the deposit of polychrome vessels found near the locus of pottery production at the Late Classic palace complex at Buenavista, Belize (Ball 1993) or the numerous caches of lithics and jade found in association with craft production areas in the Classic Maya southern lowlands (Houston and Inomata 2009: 186).

Caches are also found on mountain tops, deposited in caves and placed in bodies of water. Examples include the offerings discovered at Cerro El Manati (Ortiz and Rodriguez 1999) in Preclassic Olmec Veracruz, or the numerous artifacts and human

remains recovered from the cenote at Chichen Itza (Coggins 1992) or the deposition of items and corporeal material found in caves throughout Mesoamerica (Brady and Prufer 2005, Prufer and Brady 2005). The ubiquity of caches in all parts of the built and natural environment hints at the inadequacy of applying sacred/profane models to analyses of religion in ancient Mesoamerica,<sup>6</sup> and also indicates that elites as well as commoners shared similar conceptions regarding the mutual material relationship between nature and human society.

### **Nature, Religion and the State in the Early Preclassic**

The first goal in this section is to try to understand historically how a shared worldview regarding human/nature relations became an elite Maya religious ideology that played a role in the extraction of social labor or products and the ways that kin ordered communities may have resisted such demands. The second goal is to examine how cultural views regarding the nature of women can be reinterpreted by the state in terms of gender ideologies that lead to social oppression.

Mesoamerican social groups had been interacting with nature through the pursuit of game and the gathering of plants in Mesoamerica for thousands of years during the PaleoIndian period (10,000 – 3500 BC) with just a tool kit filled with stone projectile points and food processing implements (Sanchez 2001). Where class and state formation begins, according to archaeologists, is with the advent of agriculture sometime in the

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<sup>6</sup> It is also important to note that just because Mesoamerican culture groups shared a particular worldview regarding the connection between nature and society, or blurred the distinction between the built environment and the natural world, does not mean that their landscapes remained pristine or were not altered in a way that may have produced devastating environmental or ecological results (Ashmore 2004).

Archaic period (3500 – 2250 BC) when permanent villages were established. While the study of lake cores demonstrates that forest disturbance and maize phytoliths were present in Panama in 6000-5000 BC (Piperno 1989; Piperno and Pearsall 1993) and at the southern Gulf Coast of Mesoamerica around 5000 BC (Pope et. al. 2001), it was not until 3400 BC that the earliest evidence for cultivated maize and manioc appears in the Maya Lowlands (Pohl et. al. 1996). The Maya were initially resistant to the changes occurring around them, because while the Gulf Coast Olmecs were building large permanent settlements, producing ceramics and stone monuments, the communities that made up the northern and southern lowland Maya did not - rather they continued to employ a mixed subsistence strategy that relied on hunting and the gathering of marine and plant resources in conjunction with forms of agriculture until about 1100-800 BC<sup>7</sup>.

Because they were the last of the Mesoamerican social groups to settle into villages, adopt pottery, and practice agriculture full time, a number of theories have been proposed for such “cultural and social tardiness.” The most popular theory would please a parson naturalist. It argues that the advent of Maya civilization began with the adoption of full time agriculture and the production of pottery that was needed to meet the calorie requirement of an increasing population that had met its subsistence threshold (see Houston and Inomata 2009: 73-74). However, the advent of pottery did not signify inequality in the Maya lowlands. While this may have signaled a change in the relations of production, labor is still organized at the community level since the material record does not yet reflect a class structure based on exploitative social relations. Pre-Mamom

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<sup>7</sup> Pollen data from the Peten lakes and sediment data from Belize indicate the presence of maize agriculture in the Lowlands around 2500 BC which is 1500 years prior to the earliest known ceramics for that area. This made the popular theory of Highland to Lowland migration and colonization problematic (Estrada-Belli 2011: 33-38).



ceramics date to 1000 BC and remain the best archaeological evidence for inhabitants in the Maya Lowlands but it is slim evidence for status differentiation. These ceramics show up in deep contexts in bedrock pits or construction fill deposits below temples or plazas. The greatest similarity among the four Maya lowland Pre-Mamom stylistic ceramic groups are the motifs incised on the vessels' surfaces which also demonstrate wide-ranging cultural interactions and shared symbols sets across Mesoamerica (Estrada-Belli 2011: 39-42).

Perhaps in their travels or interactions with their neighbors the lowland Maya communities may have learned of the Olmec religious cult that materialized time and nature. A recurring theme in debates on the Preclassic Maya is the degree to which external influences from the Gulf Coast Olmec, Isthmian and Southeastern Mesoamerican cultures may have been responsible for development of social inequality in the Maya lowlands. Whether the Olmec civilization was the "mother culture" for the rest of the Maya area is a much debated and highly contested topic (see M. Coe 1965, Demerest 1989; Flannery and Marcus 1994; Grove 1996). However, according to Prudence Rice (2007) the basis for inequality in the Maya area does begin in the Middle Formative Olmec and Late Formative<sup>8</sup> Isthmian cultures at the first *Tollans* or pilgrimage centers that helped integrate Mesoamerica through a rotating geopolitical system based on the *may*. She argues that the ideology underwriting inequality was actually established in the Archaic period when daykeepers or shamans used their specialized knowledge of natural astronomical phenomenon as a basis for legitimizing power. The

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<sup>8</sup> Late Preclassic period

development of calendrical knowledge began first with detailed observations of lunar cycles. The new and waxing moon occurs over a period of 13 days which is followed by 7 days of a waning moon which taken together is the 20 days that make up the Maya month. The final nine days of the moon's cycle corresponds to the widespread Mesoamerican idea that the moon spends that time in the underworld. These periodicities inform conceptions regarding the 13 levels of the celestial realm and the 9 levels of the underworld realm found in Mesoamerican cosmological beliefs (Macri 2005). Rice speculates that the lunar calendar of 260 days was created first with the 365 day solar calendar being invented in tandem with increasing reliance on horticulture during the first half of the second millennium BC. In this model, inequality in Mesoamerican societies developed as shamans used this specialized calendrical knowledge to control time by predicting future astronomical events which secured their foundation for "directing" construction projects, "accumulating" wealth, and providing a model for the emergence of elites in the Maya lowlands (Rice 2007).

At the end of the Early Formative period, new spatial constructions emerged. Hendon (1999: 99) asserts that the best place to look for material that sheds light on understanding the transition from egalitarianism to social complexity or inequality is through Formative period households. She finds the introduction of some houses on raised platforms in the Middle Preclassic (700-600 BC) while other houses continued to be built on the ground level indicates emerging social differentiation. The variation in domestic architecture with some buildings clearly exhibiting a greater investment of energy together with the manipulation of symbolism signaled the consolidation of

political authority in the Late-Preclassic period (ibid 114). Earlier temple structures were less restrictive. Drennan (1983a, 1983b) noted that open areas at the site of Gheo-Shih and at the site of San Jose Mogote in Oaxaca were open spaces delineated from other residential areas by boundary walls. The open spaces of these early spatial constructions allowed for greater visibility and inclusion of community members in contrast to the later temple structures which restricted the numbers of participants and onlookers (Marcus 1989, Flannery and Marcus 1976). According to Hendon (1999: 117) the appearance of both temples, integrated into household structures along with the temples that formed a separate ceremonial complex, suggested that while emerging Maya elites may have sought to use such buildings to represent the community as a whole, the increasing spatial remoteness of these structures only led to a greater need among the rest of the Maya to emphasize ritual practices within their own households.

Part of new strategies for materializing time and nature also involved building monumental circular platforms and E-Groups (named after the E Group of structures at Uaxactun where these buildings were first discovered) around 700-600 BC. The “directors” of the circular platform construction projects extracted both food and labor from fellow community members perhaps by explaining that such buildings, the results of their efforts, would be communal in nature. Aimers et al. (2000) observed that the circular platforms found at Uaxactun and Cahal Pech were open-air platforms lacking superstructures but with ample space surrounding them which suggested that such configurations served as stages for public performances, where members of the entire

community aggregated. Yet the open space circular platforms at Uaxactun and other sites throughout the Maya lowlands were later replaced by the temple structures found in E-Groups.

An E-Group consists of a radial pyramidal building on the western side of a plaza and an elongated platform oriented along a north-south axis to the east (Houston and Inomata 2009: 84). The elongated platform usually has three structures on it<sup>9</sup> (Aveni et al. 2003). Blom (1924) recognized that this assemblage at Uaxactun was set to an east-west axis and that the three eastern structures on the elongated platform marked the position of the rising sun during the equinoxes and solstices and thus operated as a solar observatory. Ricketson (1928: 439-440) felt that the four structures taken together might be temples dedicated to the four seasons (corresponding to the four most important positions of the sun through the course of the solar year) but that their significance most likely was associated with geomancy<sup>10</sup>. Carlson (1981) also pointed out that structures

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<sup>9</sup> Although the E-Group is often considered a characteristic of the Maya lowlands McDonald (1983) points out that E Groups assemblages were the primary component in site planning at La Venta at the Olmec Gulf Coast, and San Isidro, Ocozocoautla, Chiapa de Corzo, Finca Acapulco, and La Libertad in the Chiapas Highlands, Tzutzuculi on the Chiapas Pacific Coast and Kaminaljuyu in the Maya Highlands.

<sup>10</sup> It is probably useful to unpack the term geomancy. Geomancy comes from the ancient Greek word, “*geomanteia*” or “foresight by earth,” which was a translation of the Arabic “*ilm al-raml*” or “science of the sand,” and it has a particular divinatory history in the Middle East which was popularized in Europe as scholars began to translate Arabic texts in the Middle Ages. During the 16<sup>th</sup> century the building arts of Feng Shui in China and Vaastu Shastra in India were subsumed under this term even though divination is not their main feature and each system varied widely in its practices. For the sake of comparison, let us look at the system of Vaastu Shastra, or the “science of construction” which focuses on humanity’s relationship to the natural and built environment. The main tenant of Vaastu Shastra, which was initially used for the placement of Hindu temples, is that a building or structure is both a public and private act and therefore it must be representative of the cosmos. Fundamental to this system of design is attention to directional alignments. According to this system the cosmos consists of five elements: fire, water, air, earth, and space. Each of the world directions is associated with an element either fire, water, air, and earth which converge at the center which is located at the heart of each structure (space). Because a structure must provide shelter for these elements there is a great deal of attention, particularly in the placement of temples, to consider a structure’s relationship to elemental, terrestrial and celestial features. Because of the

based on geomancy might explain the irregularities regarding solar alignments. Although numerous E-Groups exist throughout Mesoamerica they do not always align precisely to solar equinoxes or solstices. Coggins (1980: 731) noted that the importance of Uaxactun's radial pyramid Structure E-VII-sub might be the intentional archaeological representation of the *k'in* sign, the Yucatec word for "day" which also means "sun." The *k'in* sign often symbolized as a cross, calls to mind the four projecting staircases on each side of the radial structure and therefore may have acted as an ideal cosmogram like the quincunx, the *k'an* cross, and the *lamat* or Venus glyph that symbolize a four quartered universe. Pyramidal structures were often equated with metaphorical mountains (Marcus 1987, Brady and Ashmore 1999) particularly in the northern region of the Lowland Maya where mountains are not ubiquitous features of the landscape (Marcus 1987: 131, Schele and Freidel 1990: 427). Aimers and Rice (2006: 93) conclude that although E-Groups may not fit into our western notion of what constitutes an observatory, the consistency of this type of assemblage throughout a wide variety of Mesoamerican archaeological sites is significant and that most likely E-groups were theatres in which calendrical and solar rituals important to the entire group were enacted. Nevertheless, these prominent monumental structures gave them community wide significance and required new patterns of movement within the built environment creating new cultural formats for differential participation in ritual performances that ultimately impacted gender.

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multiple considerations found in the relationship between the built and natural environment, structures do not always match up perfectly to western ideas of astronomical or terrestrial alignments (Arya 2000.)

Formative figurine studies outside the Maya area have utilized ceramic figurines to provide evidence regarding gender relations. In her analysis of Formative figurines, Joyce (2000) suggested figurines not only record traditions of body beautification; they also reveal practices that have been intentionally left out of the monumental record. Early Formative figurines are assigned a sex identity because many of them depict nude or almost nude bodies. Although the figurines depict the presence of conventional male costumes, the traditional female costumes from later periods are conspicuously absent. Figurines depict bodies but they do so differentially revealing the intersections between gender, age and ritual status (ibid: 28).

From the one hundred and twenty Early Formative female figurines excavated from burials at Tlatilco, in the Valley of Mexico, sixty-six of them allowed for determination of sexual characteristics and clothing elements. While a majority of figurines were nude or partially nude over 30 percent represented sexually neutral or ambiguous sex characteristics. While generally classified female because of their lack of male genitalia, Joyce (ibid: 29) contends they represent aspects of gender identity that fall outside the boundaries or in-between the lines of a culturally marked gender binary.

Figurines are not uniform across Early Formative Mesoamerica but they do share an emphasis on nude bodies of sexually neutral and female forms. In her analysis of figurines from Playa de los Muertos in Honduras, Joyce found much more attention placed on depicting different age categories than on distinguishing biological sex characteristics. However, there was still a clear emphasis on depicting reproductive representations of female subjects. Figurines from Middle Formative Chalcatzingo also

appear to focus on reproductive stages of the female life cycle (Cyphers Guillen 1993). The body form, style of hair and ornamentation on the image combined to inscribe specific gestures as typical and “natural” of persons with particular sexual organs. Such views ultimately contributed to conceptions of gender in Formative Mesoamerica (Joyce 2000: 42). Monumental anthropomorphic images in contrast rarely depict nude figures and bodily difference is interpreted through costume and ornament. Unlike ceramic figurines, fewer images of women appear in Formative monumental sculpture. Monumental sculpture reflects political claims regarding differential status by excluding the images of other social actors and thereby inscribing gender into monumental time (ibid: 43-48).

To summarize, in the Maya lowlands at the beginning of the Middle Preclassic the E-Group plazas became the earliest monumental settings dedicated to concepts of nature and to the control of time. While offertory caches found in such structures may have served as community payments directed to the earth, monumental construction also restricted access to community wide participation at such events – a tension reflected by an increase in household ritual. Early Formative figurines and monumental sculpture outside the Maya area demonstrate the existence of competing gender ideologies and a focus on biological rather than social reproduction.

### **Chapter 3: Ideologies of Gender and Religion in the Late Preclassic Period**

One of the justifications for political domination has often followed arguments regarding the union of the body politic and the physiological or natural environment. The ancient Greeks used elaborate organic images of human society in order to depict the citizen, the city, and the cosmos as comprised of the same material. The body politic is sometimes illustrated as an organism, which is alive and part of a larger cosmic form. Equating the structure of human groups with forms found in nature is a powerful metaphoric tool used to depict domination based on difference as natural, given and therefore inescapable and even moral (Haraway 1991). When social facts are equated with natural facts, the social realm is given the same immutability that is often associated with nature (McLellan 1995: 56).

#### **Women and Nature**

The problem with the category women is that it is often thought of as an ahistorical and eternal facet of biology hidden within an implicit model of human nature. This is seen primarily in the term “reproduction” where the biological tasks of women are conflated with the overall process of social reproduction (Edholm et al. 1978).<sup>1</sup> Adding to this problem are anthropological views that universalize women by devaluing female

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<sup>1</sup> Because certain types of labor like domestic labor contribute to the replication of the labor force such activities are lumped into the term “reproduction” and are seen as separate from production processes. Therefore it is useful to delineate between biological reproduction which is not always biological (as seen in cases of fosterage or adoption), the reproduction of the labor force through domestic labor, and social reproduction which includes life crisis rites and other socially necessary customs that contribute to the reproduction of society as a whole (See Gailey 1985: 76).



roles (in assuming capitalistic relations to be the norm) and set them in contrast to male roles by equating men with the superior category of culture and associating women with the inferior realm of nature. These perceptions do a disservice to current day women's efforts to end their oppression. Such views of the past also distort female and male relations by discounting the role of history in ideological and structural changes affecting society. Therefore, even if women were documented as having a measure of autonomy in society, it is argued that they are still socially devalued because of their participation in the "natural" functions associated with birth and childcare (Leacock and Nash 1981). Biology essentially becomes a metaphor for social relations and wifehood or motherhood is then characterized as a relation of dependency (Sacks 1982: 5).

The androcentric traditions found in the contemporary west influenced anthropological contributions to this model. Levi-Strauss (1970) took female subordination to a be given by pointing out that the reciprocal bonds basic to marriage were not set up between men and women but rather between men and men who utilized women as economic objects of exchange (Leacock and Nash 1981).

Ortner (1974) following the work of Levi-Strauss (1970) and de Beauvoir (1952) assumed that the female-nature/male-culture dichotomy was universal by postulating that women's procreative and domestic activities precluded their other cultural contributions. In her view women were always viewed as being closer to nature than men who were equated with culture and deemed superior. Since her arguments were rooted in the psychoanalytical unconscious realm of the human mind, they were resistant to contradictory data. As Leacock and Nash (1981: 246) point out,

If the propositions cited above are to stand up, they must be reflected in symbolic clusterings associated with female and male terms in world wide ideological materials over recorded time. Yet artistic, mythological and religious materials from contrasting societies in different world areas negate the proposition that male as culture is universally conceived as superior to female as nature. Instead a cross cultural historically oriented ideological data indicates (1) that the linked derogation of women and nature is not characteristic of egalitarian societies; (2) that male assertiveness does not automatically flow from some preconceived archetypal source but is related to developing competition over social and economic prerogatives among men and between men and women in advanced horticultural societies; (3) that ideological trends foreshadowing the European ethos accompany the emergence of full-scale hierarchical organization in both eastern and western hemispheres; and (4) that the formulae regarding female nature as opposed to and inferior to culture, as stated above, are suspiciously European, and some respects of recent vintage.

Another myth that results from capitalist stereotypes is equating women with the more restrictive private domestic sphere in contrast to the more open and socially important public world of men. Archaeological data on ancient gender are commonly interpreted using nineteenth-century folk models of gender. Data is then offered to confirm the very models used to interpret them. These interpretations are problematic because they reify female/private and male/public spheres and male dominance in contemporary society by using ethnographic and ethnohistoric data to obscure historical change in gender systems which are then made to appear long-lived and unchanging (Brumfiel 2006a, Pyburn 2004, Tringham 1991). Such misconceptions drawn from ethnographic analogy are still common place in discussions within Mesoamerican archaeology. For instance in Marcus' (1999) discussion of men's and women's ritual in Oaxaca, we learn that in the Tierras Largas phase (1400 – 1150 BC) of San Mogote's

history, men's ritual took place in small public buildings believed to be the precursors to later Zapotec lineage houses that were analogous to ethnographic descriptions of Men's Houses in Melanesia. Female ritual predictably takes place in the home because of the evidence for male ritual in larger public structures. The artifacts found in public structures consisted of bloodletters and the residue of tobacco and jimson weed rather than items "traditionally" associated with women such as utilitarian or domestic artifacts. This interpretation is given despite the overwhelming evidence from later contexts that women in Oaxaca practiced bloodletting and imbibed hallucinogenic plants (see Boone 2000, Furst 1982).

### **Ideologies of Gender in Hierarchal Societies**

Discussions of ideology are essential undertakings because they question the validity of fundamental constructs and interrogate claims of objectivity. The definition of ideology originally denoted a beneficial science of ideas<sup>2</sup>. Yet the other critical side of its meaning came from Marx who associated it with the relations of domination. In the idealist vs. materialist philosophic conversations of the Enlightenment, ideology was connected with ideas and religion. In this view the "idea" or "God" comes first from which stems humans and material reality. Marx chose to look at ideology from a materialist perspective noting how religious institutions stripped humans of agency and presented an inverted view of the world - to see the movement from ideas to material reality instead of the other way around. Yet not all religious ideas are ideological. An

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<sup>2</sup> Recent discussions of ideology use the word ideology as a synonym for religion, worldview, belief system, and cosmology which detracts from the analytical potency of this concept (Trigger 2003: 410).

ideology becomes an ideology through discursive and nondiscursive practices that obscure the reality of social and economic relationships (Patterson 1992: 181). Disputes within the economic and social realm often occur in society because of two factors; (1) the split between mental and manual labor which implies an unequal distribution between both labor and its products (2) the interests of the individual no longer coincide with the interests of the community. Ideas are given their ideological force when utilized to hide disparities in social and economic power relations resulting from these factors. Because society contains conflicts of interests, these oppositions are usually covered over with ideologies that portray society as cohesive (McLellan 1995: 11-12). Yet, ideology does more than conceal, it often leads to political consciousness that is then linked to class interests (Patterson 1992). In early civilizations ideologies were often religious in nature (Trigger 2003: 410).

Gender ideologies are ideological ideas that figure into the construction of gender (which is historically, temporally and culturally variable) and shape social expectations of what gendered bodies should look like and how they should behave. Yet gender ideologies are also more than just ideas because they are constituted in material practices and governed by power relations (Weedon 1999: 146). Gender is a process and a relation rather than ahistorical or an unchanging fact of life (Conkey 2005, Scott 1996). It is both physical and social and oversimplified when reduced to a cultural construction in opposition to biological sex difference. The sex is to nature as gender is to culture metaphor does not reflect the reality of the interaction between nature and culture or demonstrate how a natural sex or a sexed nature is produced by culture in the first place

(Butler 1990: 7). When we study gender in hierarchal societies we are looking at the process of how people become culturally integrated into a two sex/gender system that is made to seem as though it exists on the grounds of nature (Boyarin 1998: 117, Gailey 1988: 32, Wittig 1992: 2). Through certain social institutions and processes gender becomes a hierarchal relation that is given meaning through institutionalized practices, everyday social interactions, and individual experiences.

Important to the debate regarding gender is sexuality and the means by which such concepts are intertwined in contemporary power relationships particularly the way gender is linked to the inevitability of heterosexuality. When the differences between men and women are reduced to a reproductive imperative as seen in sociobiological narratives of human behavior, the true interplay between nature and culture is obscured and available for political manipulation. Biological arguments devoted to different brain sizes or locating a gay gene have been employed by reform campaigners to argue that homosexuality is limited to a small portion of the population who pose no threat to the heterosexual majority. Yet such perspectives add to the taken-for-granted conceptions of heterosexuality as a natural uncontestable fact of human nature (Jackson 2008: 143) which has broader implications when influencing how archaeologists analyze such concepts in past societies. When we assume that either gender or sexuality is innate, we put such concepts beyond critique (ibid: 144).

An important component of material evidence that archaeologists use to evaluate gender in Mesoamerica includes human skeletal remains (Brumfiel 2006b: 31). When looking at human remains in burial or non-burial contexts one of the primary tasks of

bioarchaeologists is to determine sex. As Geller (2005: 598) points out determining sex from skeletal remains is not easy. Sex is actually quite complex as there is no either/or when it comes to sex only shades of difference (Fausto-Sterling 2000). Estimates of sex are often assigned to five categories which include ambiguous sex, female, probable female, male and probable male and demonstrate more of a continuum of sexual difference rather than reflecting a strict binary opposition between female and male. Compounding this issue are immature individuals that often populate the ambiguous sex category because of the difficulty involved in determining sex for certain age related changes that affect the human body. Sexing skeletons into male and female categories is ultimately a social decision (Claasen 1992, Geller 2005). Physical anthropologists conceive of sex differences as most convincing when based upon numerous traits that are presented in a statistical manner so that the researcher can say “60% of the traits are female and 40% are male and I’m going to label this body female” (Claasen 1992: 152-3). Despite such discrepancies in certainty as to what constitutes male or female remains, the association of grave goods and burial practices linked to sexed skeletons remain important entry points into understanding past gender systems (Brumfiel 2006: 37).<sup>3</sup>

Much of the recent theorizing regarding sex, gender, and sexuality in Mesoamerica has drawn on queer theory. Queer theory has questioned the routine ways to which heterosexuality has become normalized and has destabilized binary divisions between men and women and hetero- and homosexualities by pointing out that gender

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<sup>3</sup> Yet there is an uneasiness of researchers to gender poorly preserved remains based solely on grave goods that Ardren (2008) notes stems from a reluctance to project modern assumptions onto the past. However this uneasiness might also spring from an unwillingness to decouple gender from *expected* sex differences.

divisions and the heterosexual/homosexual divide are not fixed in nature. Yet more work is needed to detangle heterosexuality as an institution, practice, and identity particularly when discussing past societies where the link between sex differences and an institution of expected sexual practices is weak (Jackson 2008).<sup>4</sup> Mayanists have utilized queer theory to create a third category of gender analysis known as “the third gender” taken from ethnographic accounts of the “two-spirit” phenomenon among native North American communities. Looper (2002) describes a third gender classification in ancient Classic Maya society as a social position open to elite women-men and men-women who performed ceremonies associated with the opposite gender. While it is certainly true that a two gender system was not likely to be everywhere throughout all time (Conkey 2005: 53, Gailey 1988), by ascribing these individuals to a third gender category, several assumptions pass by unnoticed. First, there is the belief that a third gender implies a permanent state of identity. The second assumption involves the present day myth that homosexuality is linked in some way to gender identity.

The ethnographers who reported on third gender Native Americans originally used the derogative term *berdache* to describe this phenomenon. A *berdache* was a term applied to Arab boys who took the passive role in sexual relations with older men. Such observations about Native American gender identity are linked to sexual practices reflecting the contemporary day tendencies of researchers to conflate gender and sexuality. Gender and sexuality become further entangled in the concept of the Maya

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<sup>4</sup> As (Jackson 2008: 144) notes it is not a coincidence that our language of analysis is muddled. Sex and sexual can denote the division between male and female but it also refers to carnal and erotic activities. This is because at birth we are assigned one of two sexes on the basis of assumptions made about what our sex organs look like. Then we are expected to grow up and deploy our sex organs in the proper way by having sex with the opposite sex.

third gender when Looper (2002: 176) used Williams' (1986: 142-147) ethnographic account of Yucatec Maya *homosexuales*, who are described as androgynous males taking passive roles in their sexual relations with other men and thus seemed (from the informant's perspective) different from other men and women, as evidence to assign a third gender category to Classic Maya society. Epple (1998) argues that the concept of the third gender in contemporary ethnographies of Native American communities is not a useful category of analysis when discussing individuals who have been called either "berdache," "gay" or "two-spirits" by researchers working in this region. According to Epple (1998: 267),

Proponents of these categories often extricate traits from their contexts and perceive male and female as mutually opposed, absolute values. Many Navajos, however, describe traits as inseparable from the universe and view male and female as situational values.

As Geller (2005: 602) argues, the Maya third gender category is really an instance of "gender impersonation" not linked to either sex differences or sexual practices. Gender bending in the context of Maya ritual performances is a "short-lived role playing and not sustained enactment" (ibid: 603) indicating that Maya conceptualizations of gender were not fixed, immutable, or always predicated upon perceived sex differences. While the third gender as a concept may apply to other cultural situations (see Hollimon 1997), in the context of a hierarchal society that places an emphasis on a gender binary, focusing on a third category mystifies hierarchal relations by extracting such concepts away from their social and material origins. When queer theory renders binary divisions more permeable by adding more categories or recreating them in innovative or parodic forms,



the hierarchal social relations on which the original binaries were founded remains unanalyzed and conceals the structural inequalities that sustain them (Jackson 2008: 154).

Discussions of androgyny often inform religious debates regarding the gender binary and it would be mistake to separate androgynous categories from male and female relations particularly when such categories purport to reflect transcendent views of the binary. For example, one of the foundational thinkers of early Christianity was Philo, a Jewish philosopher from Alexandria, who articulated his concern regarding the two conflicting views of sexual difference to be found in Genesis. In the first story of creation in Genesis 1:26-28 and 5:1-2, humanity, which includes men and women, came into existence through the same divine creative act, however, in Genesis 2:7ff it is the male creature who embodies the original act of creation and from whose flesh female was created. Philo explained the contradiction by pointing out that the first creation act in Genesis applied to the first Adam who was a spiritual being whose noncorporeal existence could be interpreted as being both male and female. What constituted the “fall” was when humans became marked by sexual difference which characterized the details found in the second story of creation. In his view parity between men and women could exist as long women renounced that which made them female defined through heterosexuality and maternity. According to Philo, when women participated in the “destruction of sex” they were no longer women and became spiritual males who transcended gender. However, the rhetoric of transcendence and androgyny, in the

context of this historical moment, still reflects real social and material inequalities as expressed in the language of male dominance (Boyarin 1998).

### **Ideologies of Religion in the Late Preclassic**

Religion encompasses ideas, attitudes, social and material practices “directed toward that which is perceived to be of sacred value or of transforming power” (Livingston 2005:10). What is important about Livingston’s definition is the concept of perception for it allows us to investigate ideological ideas within religion while simultaneously acknowledging that religious views are often integral to the identity of individuals and to the communities they inhabit. How does a social order that benefits one group of people over another justify itself through religious ideologies that obscure the reality of social and economic relations?

First, economic and social inequality can be justified through certain versions of myths, cosmologies, or religious discourses<sup>5</sup> that promote and define difference. One way to delineate difference is through binary oppositions. In binary pairs the meaning of one thing is defined through what is opposite to it. Meaning is constructed through difference (Deal and Beal 2004: 22) and when one category is emphasized over another inequality is naturalized. Scholars in religious studies term cosmological binaries dualistic in defining the world as made up of two coequal or coeternal powers. Sometimes the universe is conceived as balanced by dual polar forces neither antithetical nor hostile to one another such as the origin of yin-yang principles found in early Taoism.

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<sup>5</sup> Religious discourses refer to liturgies, rituals, preaching, scriptures etc. (Deal and Beal 2004: 30).

However, when one power is associated with social traits more highly valued and then linked to gender such as an active male (yang) principle in opposition to the passive female (yin) principle, the rhetoric of two coequal powers masks real social and material differences.<sup>6</sup> In other religious traditions the appearance of the gods, seasons, mountains, oceans and humanity are all thought to have arisen from the union of primal opposites such as the sky and the earth. Yet again, when one category is privileged over another it is always given ideological force in relation to gender as seen in certain Indian and Greek myths where men were equated with the superior sky and women were equated with an inferior earth<sup>7</sup>.

Second, inequality can be masked through certain versions of myths, cosmologies, or religious discourses promoting sameness. Inequality can be established through analogy when one thing's sameness is emphasized to another thing. When God's sameness is equated to the sameness of all living things, religious scholars use the term pantheism to describe it. Pantheism is the idea that there is one divine being and that all animate creatures are merely different modes or appearances of that one being (ibid). When the social and supernatural realms are equated as one and the same, the material inequities of the social realm are often justified through divine analogy and positioned beyond critique. Third, inequality can be materialized and promoted through religious

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<sup>6</sup> In other religious traditions dual coequal powers are locked in an eternal conflict as seen in late expressions of Iranian Zoroastrianism (Livingston 2005: 175, 200).

<sup>7</sup> Another example is when religious discourses frame womanhood in terms of a binary like the good domestic woman in contrast to a dangerously attractive one as presented in the Book of Proverbs (Newsom 1989).

spatial practices. Space is never neutral. It is more than an external location that humans shape but rather space can be produced to act upon or influence the social lives that experience it (Lefebvre 1991).

Although religious ideologies subject individuals to the ideas of the ruling class, they are not fixed or unchanging as there are always logical inconsistencies or contradictions that allow the subject room to destabilize the ideological process (Althusser 1971). It has been argued that cosmologies answers one of humanity's persistent existential questions, "How did our world and its natural and social order come into being?" (Livingston 2005: 196). Cosmogonies account for the origin of the universe and address concerns of the natural and social realms while cosmologies provide the philosophical and mythic structures in which to understand such accounts. Myths concerning the cosmos can simultaneously promote, sustain, critique, or change the prevailing social order. Religious dialogues can support political claims of the upper classes who equate social hierarchies with those perceived in supernatural and natural settings in order to sanctify an unequal social order. Yet religious discussions can also be used by the lower classes to subvert ideologies used to promote inequality (Trigger 1993, 2003: 443). In this model the dominant ideology<sup>8</sup> proposed or appropriated by members of the dominant classes is not always shared by members of the subordinate classes.

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<sup>8</sup> The dominant ideology thesis, as utilized by non Marxists, maintains that the beliefs of the ruling classes are the beliefs of the subordinate classes. Yet, two versions of the dominant ideology thesis exist. The strong version, as promoted by Geertz (1980) claims that the ideas of the subordinate classes are experienced through the categories of the dominant group and are employed in anthropological discourse to promote homeostasis and integration as the basis for society. The weak version of the dominant ideology thesis points out that such beliefs do not foster social integration –but rather only inhibit a counter ideology from developing (Patterson 1986: 75-76).

What makes religion a dynamic and enduring social relation and practice is its ability to contain conflicting claims to power in society which are then utilized by social agents as models for social action.

### Religion in the Late Preclassic

Inequality in the Late Preclassic was reinforced ideologically through religious ritual and spatial practices emphasizing the sameness of the social and natural realms. In early civilizations the natural, supernatural, and social realms were not always clearly delineated (Trigger 2003: 442). Even when the natural and social realms were given boundaries, as is the case in our own society, blurring the lines between the natural and social realms is one means to domination. Maya civic centers were designed as microcosms that equated the center of elite civic architecture with the center of the universe. The symbolic manipulation of space through architecture places political and religious leaders in locales that reinforce differential authority (Ashmore 1991:199-200). Buildings were modeled after the natural environment in order to situate them as legitimate members of a natural/social spatial world (Ashmore 2004a, 2004b).

One of the most important organizing principles for demarking the similarities between the natural and social worlds was to partition them into four quarters and to draw attention to the directional places of power that intersected with the social universe. This spatial organization characterized the layout of caches, altars, buildings, tombs, *milpas*, plazas, villages, and ceremonial centers (Mathews and Garber 2004). Cardinal directions had political import. In the Preclassic rulers linked themselves with the east to west path of the sun while at certain Maya sites during the Classic period rulers put their portrait

stelae in the north to metaphorically link themselves to the heavens (Ashmore 1989, Ashmore 1995, Ashmore and Sabloff 2002). Power was further accentuated by aligning certain architectural assemblages with stars, planets, and entire constellations (Ashmore 2009) or by aligning structures to natural features like mountains, caves and the water filled *cenotes*, lakeshores and coastlines thought to mark the permeable boundary between the earth and the underworld (Ashmore 2003, Brady and Ashmore 1999). Many of the first carved human figures in monumental art sit or stand next to natural and architectural cave openings and many myths recorded in Mesoamerica involve ancestors who emerged from caves or trees. In that way both nature and humanity were linked to the physical features of the sky and earth that become the first metaphors for framing power (Benson 1985).

The everyday human realm was also tied to nature through celestial myths that linked events in the sky to events on the ground of human social importance (Aveni 1998). Observations of predictable regularities in the celestial bodies such as the sun and moon figured into sophisticated calendrical systems which emerged as early geopolitical devices (Rice 2007) during a time when social space was becoming highly segregated (Love 1999: 148). Astrology equated celestial to terrestrial phenomena drawing links between space, time and humanity. Planetary conjunctions and eclipses could be predicted with near scientific accuracy and rituals or political events could be timed to correlate with particular celestial conjunctions (Milbrath 1999).

The split between mental and manual labor solidified in the Late Preclassic period as knowledge associated with calendars and writing was restricted to a very small group

of high status specialists (Justesen and Matthews 1983). In the Maya lowlands, manual labor was recruited and mobilized to build large complex centers that included Triadic group structures built to the east of E-Groups, although at many sites they exist independently from such complexes. They typically follow the same east-west alignment as E-Groups but with the main structure usually facing west. Limited evidence of their function exists because many of these buildings have not been excavated but there is some consensus that they served a political/ritual function (Estrada-Belli 2011). The most cited examples are in the southern lowlands such as Nakbe (Eastern Group), El Mirador (Danta Group) and Yaxha (Northeast Acropolis) but many examples exist in the northern lowlands as well. Such constructions consisted of three upper buildings, interpreted as temples that supported steep pyramidal platforms. The three temples, or sometimes just the most eastern one, were elaborated with monumental sculpture. The images depicted in these sculptures consisted of a low-relief frieze on the upper half of the structure with designs painted on the outer walls. Large deity masks in the form of gigantic representations of zoomorphic beings were placed near the central stairways along the platform's terraces. Several studies interpret the rich imagery of masks and friezes as personified/animated terrestrial mountains, or celestial mountains associated with the sun or Venus (Freidel et al. 2002, Hanson 1991). Many of the zoomorphic examples of Maya Lowland pyramidal masks feature the Principle Bird Deity<sup>9</sup>, an avian/reptilian creature characterized by a long snout or down curving beak whose

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<sup>9</sup>Bardawil (1976) came up with the term "Principle Bird Deity" to distinguish it from other representations of avians found in Maya art. For an excellent iconographic history of the Principle Bird Deity see Guernsey (2006: 95-102).

corporeal form contains a unity of oppositions associated with day and night, life and death, sky and underworld, sun and moon (Parsons 1988). The Principle Bird Deity represents one of the first religious deities materialized through Maya monumental art and sculpture. Images of this deity appear in monumental form at sites in the Gulf coast, Maya lowlands, the Pacific piedmont and the Guatemalan highlands but vary in presentation. Late Preclassic highlanders preferred depicting this bird in the medium of stone sculpture, while the sculptured pyramid facades were the favored medium for Maya lowland sites (Estrada-Belli 2011, Freidel and Schele 1988).

One of the principle places where we see the religious justification for the sameness of rulers to the Principle Bird Deity is at the Late Preclassic site of Izapa, which lies above the Pacific coastal plain, or Soconusco region of Chiapas Mexico. Many scholars have looked to this site in order to understand how monumental sculpture can be made into an ideological tool when such objects are linked to the authority of certain individuals (Guernsey 2006: 119). Elites in the Pacific piedmont linked concepts of emerging rulership to the Principle Bird Deity. Archaeologists point out that in contrast to the sculpture portraiture of the early Middle Preclassic, Late Preclassic monuments in this area took on a narrative quality with individuals depicted on the stone monuments from Izapa, Kaminaljuyu, Takalik Abaj, and Zaculeu interpreted as rulers costumed as and performing functions associated with the Principle Bird Deity. A bird mask recovered from a royal burial in the Late Preclassic Tomb II at Kaminaljuyu Mound E-III-3 provides additional evidence that impersonating the Principle Bird Deity reinforced the office of rulership (Sharer and Traxler 2006).



When the interests of the individual no longer align with the interests of the community, religious ideologies are introduced that obscure the true nature of social and economic relationships by positing that disparities in wealth and suffering are naturally or supernaturally ordained. In the Maya lowlands, the same divine spark or *ku* or *chu* that all creatures possessed that may have in previous times served to remind people of their reciprocal social relations with nature and one another changed into a theodicy<sup>10</sup> for human sacrifice when economic and social relations were altered in the Late Preclassic. While the practice of bloodletting had deep temporal roots in Mesoamerica, increased incidents and images of human sacrifice occur much more frequently in Late Preclassic period. Explicit depictions of decapitation appear in monumental form as demonstrated on Izapa Stela 21 which sanctioned overt displays of violence and associated them with authority. Because many Late Preclassic centers show evidence for defensive structures and did not persist into the Classic period, archaeologists point out that the escalation of conflict and violence between centers and within polities formed an integral part of Late Preclassic life (Houston and Inomata 2009: 96-97) and indicate that early state structures were highly volatile phenomena.

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<sup>10</sup> The term theodicy which is Greek for “god” and “justice” was first introduced by Leibniz in his work, *Essais de Théodicé* in 1710. A theodicy is the legitimation of an ideology that seeks to explain why evil and suffering exist when God is good and powerful (Berger 1990 [1967]).

## Chapter 4: Pilgrimage and Politics—Rituals and Gender

*The Old World pilgrimage institutions – including Greco-Roman, Buddhist, Christian, and Moslem – are related as individual journeys in search of some personal favor, whether divine or human. But the pre-Columbian pilgrimages (here restricted to Mesoamerica) were related as collective endeavors for guaranteeing the continuity of the creation of the universe against catastrophic dissolution in an unstable world (Kubler 1985: 313).*

### **Pilgrimage and Politics**

Pilgrimage is difficult to define because it crosses theoretical and discipline boundaries and transverses the cultural categories of individual and society. Because it is an unbounded entity that transcends geographically confined groups, it challenges the compartmentalized analysis characteristic of the social sciences and forces scholars to take a multidisciplinary approach to this phenomenon (Preston 1992: 32). Separating out intention from meaning, metaphor, practice, experience, travel and politics for the purposes of academic discourse is an arduous task.

Pilgrimage is a transformative social and individual process encompassing travel to a culturally significant place, deity, object, or person (living or dead), the return journey home, and the portable objects exchanged along the way. Sacred journeys emphasize shared religious ideals and symbols that are simultaneously interwoven with social and individual experiences (Morinis 1992: 2). Not always site specific, pilgrimage can revolve around a journey to an important religious person or object that often changes locations. If pilgrimage sites are fixed in space they are not fixed in meaning. A myriad of social activities occur within pilgrimage such as religious rituals and rites of

circumambulation, organized travel, the trade of highly regarded material objects, sacrifices of time and labor, requests and offerings directed to sacred figures or personage, architecture, or physical features of the landscape. This behavior occurs in other contexts and spheres of life which is why pilgrimage is difficult to isolate as a discrete phenomenon. Additionally, in ancient societies where the boundaries between the sacred and the secular were not that far apart, pilgrimage also included an array of activities not usually considered religious; from sports to drama, to art and philosophy (Coleman and Elsner 1995).

Pilgrimage as an institutional form gains prominence and grows in magnitude in state societies<sup>1</sup> (Turner and Turner 1978: 1). In this historical context, pilgrimage tends to be arranged in a hierarchy of linked sites with some shrines being of greater or lesser importance than others (Bhardwaj 1973). Pilgrimage locales can be locally important, visited by a small number of people, to internationally significant, drawing a large amount of patrons from adjoining or foreign lands (Preston 1992: 33). In addition, pilgrimage sites can be visited by pilgrims year round or only at certain times of the year.

People travel to pilgrimage centers to seek solutions to problems that arise in the context of the human situation (Morinis 1992) leading many sites to become associated with miraculous cures or supernatural apparitions (Preston 1992). Pilgrimage officiates in response to requests from pilgrims make divine powers accessible to multiple social groups (often via access to sacred geography) than would otherwise be possible in

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<sup>1</sup> Sacred sites in complex societies vary in location. Two common pilgrimage site formations include 1) the fusion of the political center with the sacred center and 2) the ritual center that is politically separate from other polities. Such sites are often located outside the capital near the periphery of multiple social groups (Bakker 1992).

everyday or normal ritual contexts (Preston 1992, Coleman and Elsner 1995: 208, Stoddard and Morinis 1997). Pilgrimage as a process addresses multiple concerns because it is constantly overwritten with changing meanings based on individual desire and popular practice (Dubisch 1995: 43). Individuals feel empowered at pilgrimage centers because such places offer a means of influencing one's fate or future particularly when all other traditional methods have been exhausted. This includes making an individual journey for a cure to an untreatable health disorder, or asking assistance for the retrieval of a lost person or object to community requests to end a draught (Morinis and Crumrine 1991: 14-15).

Sacred centers are politically significant because they represent places where intra-cultural and inter-cultural interactions occur and can be spaces for historical change when the social actors who meet there encourage debate or collective action. When pilgrimage centers are identified with the state, monarchs or religious institutions endeavor to bring this sacred space under their control by upgrading existing religious structures or by establishing new ones designed to sanction distinct ideologies of domination and oppression (Bakker 1992: viii). State authorities can assert and legitimize the power of a certain faction of the elite by designating them as the true owners of certain pilgrimage shrines. Pilgrimage centers can reinforce the social and political status of non-elite individuals through materialized ideological programs that select natural features, culturally modified forms, symbols, architecture, and artifacts to convey the ideals of the state. When older sacred sites are taken over by the state it sends a powerful message of cultural dominance and legitimate succession (Bauer and Stanish 2001:17-

18). Despite the ideological intent to mask inequality by fostering a collective sense of belonging at these places, pilgrimage sites have the potential to be spaces for resistance and contestation rendering incompatible interpretations of the pilgrimage experience. These conflicts of religious interpretations, intertwined with political issues and spiritual concerns, demonstrate the effectiveness of pilgrimage for the expression of divergent social discourses (Eade and Sallnow 1991). These divergent discourses also have the potential for subverting the established social and political orders through discourses that challenge the authority of the ruler or the state through alternative or competing religious cults or icons (Bakker 1992, Turner 1974, Turner and Turner 1978).

In *Pre-Columbian Pilgrimages in Mesoamerica* (1985), Kubler wrestled with defining pilgrimage. Not only was he confronted with collapsing thousands of years of history into 4 pages, he also had to account for the diversity of pilgrimages practices across temporal, geographical and political boundaries. In addition, he needed to explain why human sacrifice occurred at pilgrimage sites and why some sites were located in remote regions such as mountains, caves, and springs. Defining pre-Columbian pilgrimage as a “collective endeavor” made sense since several colonial accounts do mention that during a crisis whole communities went on pilgrimage. Yet his main point regarding the collective nature of pilgrimage had more to do with explaining why bloodletting and human sacrifice were the main components of such practices. He (ibid: 313) describes it as, “every person was the Eucharist, the complete sacrificial offering on which the continuing life of the gods would depend.” However, since many of the colonial narratives concerning pilgrimage also state that a number of shrines were visited

by pilgrims seeking oracles and cures for health ailments, Kubler (ibid: 314) conceded that there were some exceptions to this rule and that perhaps only oracular shrines came the closest to approaching Old World conceptions of pilgrimage.

When dealing with why some pilgrimage sites were situated at hard to reach locations, Kubler (ibid: 315) turned to the literature on pilgrimage that primarily explored the individual dimension regarding sacred journeys asserting that a pilgrim's journey is enriched when confronted with difficult trials and threatening encounters. Such experiences transform the traveler – not the best example to use to support the thesis of “pilgrimage as a collective journey” unless we assume that everyone had the same experience. The collective Maya goal of “searching for continuity in an unstable world” could describe many individual pilgrimage goals in the Old World as well. Why did communities and individuals journey to pilgrimage sites in Mesoamerica? According to Kubler (ibid: 313-316) one of the main reasons for pilgrims to make such journeys was to propitiate water and fertility deities. Since many Postclassic Mesoamerican pilgrimage sites are dedicated to female goddesses associated with water and fertility, we need to discuss exactly what we mean by “fertility.”

## **Religious Rituals, Women and Power**

Because pilgrimage sites are associated with religious rites, it is important to look at how women's participation and authority in such activities was distorted by nineteenth century theories of ritual that still influence contemporary archaeological interpretations. The portrayal of women in discussions of fertility rituals and mother goddess cults has reproduced sexist understandings of the past.

Fundamental to the history of western civilization is that women are naturally different from men and that this difference is grounded in biology. From Darwin to contemporary sociobiology difference has been defined through women's and men's different reproductive roles. Motherhood as defining the primary role of woman's existence was central to nineteenth and early twentieth century scientific accounts of gender. Scientific theories of difference defined natural difference through empirical studies of bodies and brain sizes that assumed the white male to be the norm on which all others were measured. Women deviated from the norm in ways which made them fit for domesticity or motherhood and justified a range of social policies excluding them from suffrage, higher education, equal pay, and public life (Gailey 1988, Weedon 1999: 5-16). Therefore it is not surprising to find that in nineteenth and early twentieth century accounts of ancient religions, women's rituals are described as reproductive matters relating to fertility.

### Fertility Rituals

The study of ritual began with a debate concerning the origin of religion and culture which produced evolutionary, psychological, and sociological styles of

interpretation. At the heart of this early conversation was whether culture sprang from myth or ritual. The four schools of thought regarding this included the early theorists who raised the issue, the myth and ritual school which emphasized ritual, the phenomenologists who championed the role of myth and the psychoanalytical approach which borrowed from all these areas (Bell 1997: 3). In the myth and ritual school, some of the most influential and foundational figures for both anthropology and religious studies included Edward B. Tylor (1832-1917) and James George Frazer (1854-1941). Frazer and the subsequent members of the Cambridge school of classicists debated traits found in numerous examples of myths and rituals pulled from disparate areas. Frazer described a universal pattern behind vegetation or agricultural rituals that could be seen in a maternal divinity and a male son-consort, who dies and is resurrected, that came to be known as the Great Goddess and the Dying God. He argued that in agrarian societies of the ancient world agricultural cults utilized a type of imitative magic in their rituals relating to terrestrial fertility. In this scenario the king sleeps with a ritual prostitute who stands in for the fertility found in nature in order to spur the gods to mate so that the seasons important to agricultural production could be renewed (Ackerman 1991, Bell 1997, Pals 2006, Tzanetou 2007).

As Hackett (1989) argues fertility rites, particularly in the way they are described in the secondary literature of ancient Near East and Mediterranean religions, are really a euphemism for ritual sex or prostitution. Rituals relating to women were described in terms of nineteenth century conventions of gender that focused on reproductive attributes found in women's bodies such as fertility, maternity, sexual relations and menstrual



blood. Purity and pollution became the religious ideas primarily applied to women who must either deny their bodies or bring their dangerous sexuality under control. Women's roles in religion or society (i.e. wife, nun, or whore) were primarily depicted in relation to their sexual function in delineating which patriarchal institution had access to their sexuality (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974: 31). Scholars exaggerated the connection between fertility and female deities in the religions of the ancient Near East because fertility and mothering were aspects of women westerners found comforting and nonthreatening. Putting them into the category of fertility was one way of saying women were interchangeable in terms of always fulfilling the same role as mothers and dependent wives. Such misrepresentation reinforces the reduction of all women to the nature side of the nature/culture dichotomy (Hackett 1989:75) and perpetuates the myth that gender is ahistorical.

Archaeologists have often interpreted the presence of figurines in agricultural communities as evidence for fertility rituals assuming women's roles to be about motherhood rather than womanhood (Rice 1981). Figurines were given the same meaning despite the temporal period. Scholars have consistently described female figurines from Paleolithic (26,000-10,000 BC) southwestern Europe and the Neolithic (7000-3500 BC) Mediterranean area of southeastern Europe in terms of contemporary views of the female body as a sexual object which evokes an erotic or aesthetic ideal (Tringham and Conkey 1998). Late nineteenth and early twentieth century authors noted that large stomachs and pendulous breasts depicted pregnancy and thus signified fertility figurines for use in rituals relating to successful births that maintained an assumed

precarious population. Large stomachs or pendulous breasts on female figurines need not signify lactation or pregnancy and such inclusive conceptions of fertility associated with such representations have yet to be demonstrated or critically considered. Presenting a list of “exotically-charged body parts” reflects the contemporary appropriation of the female body as a masculine subject (ibid, Mack 1990) and the assumption that even in the Upper Paleolithic only parts of women were suitable for representation (Conkey 1991). As Tringham and Conkey (1998: 25) point out,

Most traditional authors assume that the depiction of biological and essential female traits meant that females in the Upper Paleolithic were themselves the objects not just of image-making but of social control and male desire; that their place and functions in Paleolithic society were biologically determined and determinative; and that women’s status was therefore less cultural and less central to the highly-valued arenas of artistic production, political control, and other domains of social and ritual power.

The contemporary attitude of women as sex objects has been read into the distant past by mixing the idea of the figurine as erotic and the figurine as depicting fertility which implicitly implies that a woman’s universal role in society is to fulfill male desires and to produce children (Nelson 1997: 157).

#### Questions of Power: Mother Goddesses

Questions concerning who held religious power in past were initially shaped by nineteenth century evolutionary and psychological models regarding gender and society. In 1861 Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815-1887) utilized Plutarch’s second century AD treatise on rituals relating to Isis and Osiris to argue that in the primitive past matriarchy,

the rule of the mother over the social institutions and over the family, constituted the first social structure that later evolved into civilized patriarchy. Both Lewis Henry Morgan (1818-1881) and E.B. Tylor contributed to the scholarly weight behind this theory. In Tylor's model of culture every society progressed from savagery through barbarism to civilization – a trait mirrored by the evolution from female irrationality to male rationality (Goodison and Morris 1998, Wood 1996). Engels (1972: 440 [1884]) drew upon Bachofen and Morgan to link the decline in women's power in society to the rise of patriarchal states that promoted the social and economic devaluation of domestic labor and restricted women to the household.

Investigating possible historical changes in women's subjugation can be contrasted with psychological interpretations arguing that women had been oppressed from the beginning of the earliest social formation (see Ortner 1974, Rubin 1975). In these theories, gender inequality is linked to differences found in the mind. Frazer's and Tylor's theory of religion privileged psychological and intellectual rather than social explanations for mythic beliefs and ritual practices. They drew on part of Robertson Smith's (1846-1894) work that pointed out ritual practitioners were not always aware of the reasons behind such practices which could be contrary to what the actors participating in the ritual believed. This insight was echoed in the work of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) who sought to construct the psychological development of the human race.

In Freud's theory of gender difference the presence or absence of the penis has different psychological effects on boys and girls. Once a girl realizes she lacks a penis, she becomes aware of the superiority of the male and the inferiority of the female through

mental processes (Freud 1975 [1931]:75) that determined her intellectual and moral differences from boys. As Weedon (1999:79) points out although Freud was influenced by sexist nineteenth century German interpretations of philosophy, biology, and medicine that grounded views of female inferiority in anatomical studies, his work moved away from biological determinism by arguing for the primacy of psychic constructs and the realm of the unconscious in the acquisition of gender. Like many of the myth and ritualists, Freud looked for a single ritual pattern that would serve as the key to unlocking the meaning of a wide variety of ancient and modern cultural activities. In Freud's theory of religion, the idea of the Oedipus complex and the need for a father image explained Judeo-Christian or monotheistic religions but were not as effective for investigating female representations of divinity or faiths that were not personal in character (Pals 2006: 78).

Frazer's compilation of mythical and ethnological material presented a maternal divinity known as the Great Goddess that Robert Briffault's *The Mothers* (1927) solidified as an early Mother Goddess or a Great Goddess that transcended political and geographic boundaries based on his interpretations of archaeological material from Greece, Malta and the North West European megaliths. Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) also gave the Great Mother transcendental status as an archetype predating and influencing human society. Psychotherapists influenced by Jung celebrated the "feminine principle" by linking the Great Goddess with elements such as the moon, mothering, intuition, instinct, mystery, and love again utilizing archaeological data to make their case. The idea of the an essential Great Mother goddess found its way into the

following publications such as Erich Neumann's *The Great Mother: an Analysis of the Archetype* (1955), O.G.S Crawford's, *the Eye Goddess* (1957) and E.O. James', *the Cult of the Mother Goddess* (1959). James Mellaart's publication of excavations at Catalhöyük in Turkey (1967) and Marija Gimbutas' publications on prehistoric European religion both gave authority to and stressed the importance of such a Goddess about the same time as the notion of a universal Goddess caught the attention of the contemporary women's movement (Goodison and Morris 1998: 8).

The Goddess movement in contemporary society is intertwined with interpretations of archaeological material mostly from Egypt, Greece, and the Near East which is then used to argue that in the distant past the worship of a Great Goddess was universally supplanted by male focused religions. The central hypothesis is that a peaceful, Goddess centered culture existed in many places. The Goddess is described as having three faces (virgin, matron, and crone) and serves a dual role as both creator/destroyer. Rituals dedicated to the Goddess tend to emphasize menstruation and maternity. The reign of the Goddess ends with the take over of matriarchal society by warlike Indo-European males in 3500 BC<sup>2</sup>. Goddess writers adapted nineteenth century mainstream scholarship but reversed the story so that positive values were given to female elements traditionally designated as "primitive" (ibid 9-12). It is not surprising

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<sup>2</sup> The myth of matriarchy's demise to make way for patriarchy had less of an impact on Mesoamerican scholarship but rises to the surface primarily in books targeting a public audience outside academia. One recent example is Douglas Peck's (2008) *Goddess of the Ancient Maya*. Peck argues, despite the temporal discrepancy between Paleolithic and Olmec culture, that representations of cleft mountains in the Olmec heartland resemble the European Paleolithic V-shaped cleft or inverted triangles that signify the cross-cultural and universal symbol for a female vagina. He (ibid: 5) concludes that the cleft mountain San Martin Pajapan volcano was considered the primal Mother Goddess by the Olmecs that later took personified form in the ancient Maya goddess Ix Chel and then precedes to chart how matriarchy became patriarchy through the Pre-Classic, Classic and Postclassic periods.

that contemporary women surrounded by popular myths (legitimized by certain strands of science) that promote the biological inevitability of gender inequality would find the Goddess movement intriguing if only for the notion that at least in one point of history, women held power and determined their own destinies. Yet as Eller (2000) points out an invented past does little to give women a future. The myth of ancient matriarchy, in addition to being ahistorical, reinforces certain contemporary gender stereotypes such as motherhood defining women's primary role in society. It appeals to universals by suggesting human societies all followed a single blueprint. It also limits women's options as if there were only one predetermined path for them to follow (Goodison and Morris 1998: 13).

### **Traditional Interpretations of Maya Women in Religion**

Scholarship regarding women and religion in Mesoamerica has tended to reproduce colonial and western perspectives regarding women's sexuality. J. Eric S. Thompson, the prominent Mayanist, integrated colonial and contemporary views of gender in his analysis of ancient Maya religion. He used six sources of evidence to support his views: 1) archaeological monuments and murals 2) pre-Columbian codices 3) colonial documents written by the Yucatec Maya 4) colonial documents written by the Spaniards 5) modern ethnological and ethnographic accounts of lowland and highland communities and 6) comparative data concerning the beliefs and practices of non-Mayas from other areas of Mesoamerica. Writing before the decipherment of Maya hieroglyphs, Thompson deemed archaeological material to be the least reliable of the six sources and

utilized colonial and modern accounts of religion to describe lowland Maya worship in the past. Thompson's discussion of women reflected western perspectives regarding the inherent impurity of women's bodies and the need to control women's sexuality. According to Thompson (1970: 184)

As among many people, the Maya regarded women as contaminated (the view that menstruation is ritually impure is world-wide). Normally, they were not allowed to attend ceremonies, and, as noted above, water which had been touched by a woman was no longer *zuhuy*.

The term *zuhuy* requires some discussion. *Zuhuy* is a Yucatec colonial word that translates as "to set apart" (Boot 1988) and "uncontaminated" (Houston et al. 2000) but was utilized by friars to signify a concept that was not important in Mesoamerican religions - "virginity" (Burkhart 1989, Hanks 2010). Although colonial documents are a major source for gender in pre-Columbian America, the fact that they were produced in a colonial context complicates their usage in reconstructing pre-Columbian ideas and practices (Burkhart 2001:87).

Language is not static and changed in response to friar attempts to inscribe Christianity into indigenous languages. The Christian discourse on gendered behavior focused on the control of women's sexuality (ibid: 88). Therefore we need to rethink colonial accounts, what role they played in Christian indoctrination, and how indigenous languages were changed as a result. Equating the lack of sexual experience with godliness or holiness is a western European Christian convention that did not apply to

Prehispanic priestesses or healers.<sup>3</sup> When young women are mentioned in the colonial accounts in the context of religion, they are described by reference to their sexual status as “virgins.” According to Thompson (1970:169)

There was an order of “vestal virgins,” who lived under a “mother superior” in a building alongside the temples. Their duties included tending the sacred fires in the temples. Death by arrows was their punishment for loss of chastity. There was a tradition that the building at Uxmal known as the Nunnery was their abode, but I much doubt that. Among the decorative elements of the façade are naked men with prominent genitals, a very rare feature in Maya art and hardly what one would expect on a building to house dedicated virgins.

This account refers to the colonial material from Lopez de Cogolludo (1867-68 [1688], lib. IV cap. II: 284) who relates the story of an exalted pre-Columbian woman known as *Zuhuy Kak* defined as “virginal fire” who lived in a convent and was the daughter of a king and the protector of small girls that were left in her care. However, Landa (Tozzer 1941:153) mentions *Zuhuy Kak* not as a historical woman but rather as a goddess associated with the new fire ceremonies and consulted in matters of healing. Lopez de Cogolludo’s (as translated in Blom 1983: 308) account states,

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<sup>3</sup> Even in colonial discourses such as Sahagun’s Florentine Codex, the descriptions of Aztec sexuality discussed issues of moderation and equanimity rather than permanent abstinence.



Close to the temple buildings, in some places, there are other buildings wherein lived some maidens, who were like nuns somewhat similar to the Vestal Virgins of the Romans. They had a Superior or Abbess, whom they called Ix Nacan Katun, “She Has Been Raised in War” because she guarded her virginity and that of those who were in her charge. If someone forced the chastity of a maiden while she was there, she was killed with arrows, though they could leave (the convent) to get married, if they had the permission of the high priest. They had a woman door-keeper to guard their retreat, and they tended the perpetual fires in the temples. If this fire went out, the one who failed to watch it was put to death. In Uxmal there is a great Patio with many separate rooms just like a convent, where maidens lived.

Blom<sup>4</sup> (ibid) speculates that Lopez de Cogolludo’s vestal virgins may have also been “the beautiful virgin maidens” that other colonial documents note were cast into the Sacred Cenote at Chichén Itzá. Historian Clendinnen (1982: 28) deduced from these accounts, that prior to Spanish contact women were excluded from public rituals except for prepubescent girls who were ritually sacrificed and the old women who “were safely past menopause”<sup>5</sup> and therefore allowed to dance before the idols. Hooton (1940: 272-280) who initially examined several of the skeletons from Chichén Itzá’s sacred well remarked, “All the individuals involved (or rather immersed) may have been virgins, but the osteological evidence does not permit a determination of this point.” Subsequent years of osteological analysis of the human sacrificial remains from the prominent structures, cenotes, and caves of Chichén Itzá demonstrate that contrary to colonial accounts males and children were the actual preferred victims (Beck and Sievert 2005:

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<sup>4</sup> Blom (1983: 308) relayed an anecdote from his experience as a professor that caused him to reconsider colonial accounts regarding the supposed virginity of these maidens. He went to great lengths in a lecture to describe the beauty of the Maya virgins thrown into the Sacred Cenote to only be silenced by a question from a student that he was unprepared to answer. The student asked, “Professor, how do you know that they were virgins?”

<sup>5</sup> Were they safely passed menopause because they didn’t bleed or because they presumably didn’t engage in sex?

291, Tiesler 2005: 356). What the colonial accounts are telling us is that women were present in public religious contexts. What the archaeology is telling us is that they were not the preferred sacrifice.

Even in more contemporary accounts of ancient Maya women that acknowledge the andocentric bias of the colonial documents, descriptions of women and religion reflect colonial concerns about controlling sexuality and reproduction. Vail and Stone (2002: 204) who recently analyzed colonial documents and Maya codices to understand gender relations in Postclassic Yucatecan society came to the following conclusion,

Our analysis suggests that Maya women were broadly divided into two categories according to an age-based dichotomy: premenopausal women, whose sexuality was seen as a threat to men and in need of control, and grandmotherly figures associated with the security of the home.

The authors contend that Postclassic Maya men promoted female stereotypes because they sought to control women's sexuality. The evidence that women's sexuality in premenopausal women was seen as a threat to men and in need of control comes from Thompson's (1930: 126-32) collection of Kekchi-Mopan tales that describe the Maya moon goddess as promiscuous and modern ethnographic accounts of Maya religious ceremonies where women were barred from entering sacred places such as temples or caves (see Stone 1988: 76-77). If a woman's sexuality was not controlled and if she rejected her role as mother then dangerous consequences were to be expected as seen in illustrations of the destructive old goddesses depicted in pre-Columbian art. As Vail and Stone (2002: 223) explain,

Another threatening stereotype of women's sexuality is transgressive, not in the sense of youthful promiscuity but, rather, stemming from the rejection of the values of the nurturing female role. Unlike the young and sexually attractive woman portrayed in the codices, this female figure is frightening in appearance and is usually endowed with bestial characteristics. She is the destructive side of the regenerative cycle of the earth. In pre-Hispanic Maya art she is often laden with death symbols, such as bones and eyeballs. In the codices she can be identified with Chak Chel, shown with her serpent head tie, clawed hands and feet, and costume of bones. Chak Chel in this guise bears a resemblance to the modern Tzotzil demon known as the "Charcoal Cruncher," a dead burnt thing, who is cold like a corpse and eats charcoal. Although she is female, she is sexually anomalous and is unable to successfully bear or raise children.

Such descriptions of Postclassic goddesses and the easy segue to modern demons reinforce colonial and contemporary political strategies to reduce women to their reproductive capacity and reveal the degree to which sexist understandings of the pre-Columbian past are continually reproduced. Archaeologists need to distinguish between colonial and contemporary narratives that seek to control women's sexuality and pre-Columbian political or state strategies that may have also included associating women with reproduction. As to the example given, death and serpent imagery in Postclassic Yucatan also delineated power (Furst 1982, Miller 2007) and zoomorphic attributes with implied malevolent potential were common to both male and female deities (see Taube 1992b) so it is quite possible that Postclassic representations of goddesses may have had nothing to do with men controlling women's sexuality.

## **Rites of Passage, Performance, and Practice**

One of the more influential interpretations regarding the role of men's and women's rituals in relation to the larger social group was the work of Arnold Van Gennep (1873-1957). Although sharing similar taxonomic concerns as Frazer, Van Gennep critiqued the Frazerian method of collecting brief ritual descriptions and analyzing them outside of their social context (Bell 1997: 35). Rites could only be understood in the context of their social and historical settings. He pointed out that an individual life was a series of passages. In ancient communities, progression from one stage of life into another was a community and individual matter accompanied by ceremonies that had similar beginnings and endings to them. Rites of passage consisted of special rituals surrounding individual life events such as birth, social puberty, marriage, parenthood, occupational specialization, illness and death. He also included in such ceremonies rituals surrounding seasonal changes and rites of territorial passage where changes in spatial location designated changes in identity. Such rites were actually a series of rituals performed in three stages that included the rites of separation, transition rites, and rites of incorporation. Some rituals went through this three stage process in relatively short period of time while in other rituals the stages were spread out over a much longer duration. In addition, some rituals emphasized one stage over others. Rites of separation were emphasized in funeral ceremonies<sup>6</sup>, rites of incorporation surrounded the act of marriage, and rites of transition played an important part in rituals surrounding

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<sup>6</sup> Van Gennep (1960: 146) expected the rites of separation in funeral ceremonies to be the most prominent stage of such rituals. To his surprise he found that most funerary rites emphasize the rites of incorporation as the most important stage of this ritual because of the desire of the living to properly situate relatives and loved ones into the land of the dead.

pregnancy, betrothal, and initiation. For Van Gennep the sacred was a relation since it “pivoted” as a person moved from one social status in society into another (Van Gennep 1960: 13). The complexities of male and female socialization, the social relations between family members, and the passing into old age were directly connected to the mechanisms offered by society to help individuals cope with change and to maintain the cultural notions of the social order (Bell 1997: 38, Kimball 1960: xvii).

Van Gennep’s rites of passage opened the door for studies concerning women’s participation in ritual processes crucial to the formation of individual identity. However, the universalism embedded in the three stage process described women’s rituals surrounding pregnancy and childbirth from a western male perspective that emphasized the inherent impurity and danger associated with female reproduction. Women’s rites of separation in such rituals involved placing a woman in a separate “hut” or house “either because she is considered impure and dangerous or because her very pregnancy places her physiologically and socially in an abnormal condition” (Van Gennep 1960: 41). Prejudices aside, Galloway (1997) points out that it is the same western discomfort with the issues of menstruation or pregnancy that has erased such topics from archaeological discourse hindering any search for “women’s houses” where these events may have taken place.

Max Gluckman’s (1911-1975) contribution to the study of ritual was his critique of Emile Durkheim’s (1858-1917) notion that ritual expressed only social solidarity and cohesion. Gluckman pointed out that social cohesion was rarely an easy endeavor. He (1963: 127) wrote, “Every social system is a field of tension, full of ambivalence, of

cooperation and contrasting struggle.” Therefore rituals do not automatically affirm social unity but rather express the social tensions that exist in the organization of social relations. Rituals affirmed unity despite structural conflicts. He described certain rites as “rituals of rebellion” where the normal rules of authority enforcing social order were overturned and the tensions in society exaggerated and acted out. Such rites provided a type of social catharsis that channeled conflict into therapeutic channels which restored social relationships (Bell 1997: 39).

Victor Turner (1920-1983) combined Van Gennep’s work on the structure of rites of passage and Gluckman’s theory on the ritualization of social conflict into a model of ritual that combined functional and structural approaches to religion. He described ritual as a “social drama” that helped to release the stresses and tensions caused by conflicts of interests that routinely found their way into society. Yet ritual did more than just affirm unity, it was the mechanism that recreated unity and the means by which the community constantly redefined itself. He borrowed Van Gennep’s structure of the rites of passage but emphasized the transitional phase and defined pilgrimage as dialectic process between the social order (structure) and the periods of disorder and liminality (antistructure) that he termed *communitas*. Pilgrimage rituals sanctioned inversions to the social order. Yet, it was through these disordered inversions that the original social order was maintained, legitimated and modified (Bell 1997, Turner 1957, 1974). Turner’s emphasis on the dramatization of ritual led him and other scholars of religion to study ritual in terms of performance.

Performance models draw attention to the non intellectual dimensions of ritual that are reflexive, more physical, sensual and emotive. Performance theories break down the boundaries between, ritual, theater, dance, drama, festivals, and healings in order to demonstrate that ritual participants actively modify and create culture through processes that are mental, physical, and bodily expressive. The dramatic quality of rituals does more than define roles it provokes an emotional response. Yet certain actors in society may have strategic advantages over other actors when it comes to constructing, performing, or subverting ritual. Therefore, ritual practices are reflective of the social relationships between authority and submission. Actors who possess the ability to manipulate rituals possess the power to shape identity in ways that may conform to social norms or in ways that break with that tradition (Bell 1997, 1998). Through ritual practices women may have felt empowered to act in ways that subverted the constraints imposed through social and historical processes. The next chapter looks at the specific social and historical processes associated with pilgrimage, rites of passage, and the royal women of the Classic Maya lowlands.

## **Chapter 5: Pilgrimage, Politics, and Gender in the Classic Period**

This chapter explores archaeological, epigraphic, and iconographic data regarding pilgrimage and gender in the Classic period (A.D. 300-900) in order to understand the history behind Epiclassic and Postclassic pilgrimage practices in the Maya lowlands. Monuments provide information concerning intra-polity political rituals among the Classic period monarchies found in the Maya region. One of the major turning points in the history of Maya archaeology was the decipherment of Maya hieroglyphs (Robin 2004). Tatiana Proskouriokoff (1960, 1961, 1963, 1964) changed the direction of Maya studies by pointing out that the hieroglyphs found on monumental stelae portrayed historical information regarding kings, queens and inter- and intra-site political matters. In the decades following, breakthroughs in deciphering Maya inscriptions have provided an enormous amount of information concerning Classic Maya political organization. While these texts contain intentional religious and political propaganda, when contrasted with excavation and settlement data they are useful for examining the intra-polity nature of Classic Maya political rituals (see Chase et al. 2009, Marcus 1992, Stuart 2005). In the following pages, I will examine the evidence from Maya monuments and archaeological sites regarding royal women and their leadership roles in regional political and ritual practices.



## **Teotihuacan and Mesoamerican Pilgrimage in the Early Classic Period**

Teotihuacan was an important *Tollan*<sup>1</sup> or pilgrimage center and the largest city in Central Mexico during the Early Classic (A.D. 100-600) period (Matos Moctezuma 1990). Unlike the monuments at several Late Preclassic isthmian sites where rulers interjected themselves between their subjects and the power of religious deities, Teotihuacan is noted for its absence of images and glyphs on monuments depicting or discussing rulers or figures in power (Pasztor 1998). Despite possessing a distinct writing system (see Taube 2000) Teotihuacan lacks evidence exalting particular ruling families at this site. The lack of ruler portraits and tombs is a stark contrast to the better known sites from the Olmec, Maya, and Aztec regions (Sugiyama 2005). Teotihuacan's reputation was that of an important pan-Mesoamerican pilgrimage site for conferring and legitimizing rulership in other regions (Heyden 1975, Boone 2000: 387).<sup>2</sup> As a multiethnic and cosmopolitan city, Teotihuacan supported residents and visitors from the Gulf Coast, Oaxaca, Michoacán and the Maya region (Taube 2003: 173). Ceramic evidence suggests that the Maya, particularly those who lived in the Peten, interacted through trade and ritual with Teotihuacan for much of the Early Classic period (Clayton 2005, Taube 2003).

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<sup>1</sup> Teotihuacan was one of the first *Tollans* in Central Mexico. Our understanding of the concept of *Tollan* comes from the contact era documents that relate Aztec descriptions of a primordial landscape known for its intellectual achievements and material wealth (Miller and Taube 1993: 170). Originally thought to denote the Toltec site of Tula, *Tollan* denotes any Mesoamerican settlement linked to political rituals and rulership (López Austin and López Luján 2000, Rice 2007: 194).

<sup>2</sup> Although corporate representations characterize Teotihuacan's ruling strata, various gradations of wealth were etched over a very large population (Evans 2008: 271).

As Blanton and colleagues (1996) have observed, at the end of the Preclassic era two parallel political traditions concerning Mesoamerican settlements emerged; one tradition that emphasized the representation of corporate traits associated with shared governance and one tradition based on a cult of individual rulers and exclusionary politics. Teotihuacan resembled the former designed to foster inclusiveness and corporate identity (De Lucia 2008). In the first century A.D. thousands of people may have been displaced by the eruption of the Popocatepetl volcano in the Basin of Mexico and chose to resettle in Teotihuacan (Seibe 2000, Uruñuela and Plunket 2007). Much of Teotihuacan's characteristic traits reflected traditions brought in by residents from other cities and communities. Some of these elements included artistic and stylistic traits indigenous to Tlapacoya, reverence for the Cuicuilco Fire God (Matos Moctezuma 1990), *talud-tablero* architecture, and volcano veneration common to the community of Tetimpa (Uruñuela and Plunket 2007). Researchers suggest that the state strategy of suppressing depictions of overt individuality was designed to gain widespread acceptance of corporate rule (Cowgill 1997, Pasztory 1997). Despite ideological intentions to project corporate concerns, recent investigations of the Teotihuacan apartment compounds indicate that class and ethnicity impacted gender inequality and that ethnic divisions were maintained throughout the site's occupation (Clayton 2011: 48).

Recent excavations at the Temple of the Feathered Serpent and at the Pyramid of the Moon reveal a significant shift in political and religious ideology in the third century resulting in an increase of state sponsored human sacrifice (Sugiyama and Cabrera Castro

2007).<sup>3</sup> The numerous sacrificial victims recovered from Temple of the Feathered Serpent included men and women dressed as warriors with necklaces of human maxillae and hands tied behind their backs indicating coerced participation. Sugiyama (2005) and Sugiyama and Cabrera Castro (2007) link the increase in human sacrifice to emerging conceptions regarding sacred rulership and warfare in Mesoamerica (ibid: 123).

Teotihuacan resembled a planned cosmological city. Its architects fashioned the settlement on a grid system, aligning structures to important features in the local topography, and constructing the two wide avenues that split the city into four quadrants. Using a standard measuring unit (0.83 meters) builders and laborers erected Teotihuacan's important monuments, the Pyramid of the Sun, the Pyramid of the Moon, and the Ciudadela with the Temple of the Feathered Serpent; all constructed with referents to Mesoamerica's 260 day ritual calendar. Each monument portrayed obvious correlations between calendrical and astronomical phenomenon in order to memorialize Teotihuacan's role in establishing Mesoamerican standards of time (Sugiyama 2005).

Most scholars agree that that Teotihuacan played a role in the Maya region, but disagree as to the specifics and impact of the interaction. Externalist arguments interpret Teotihuacan architecture, artifacts, symbols and personages in various Maya kingdoms as related to Central Mexican political or military domination while internalist models argue that Maya elites appropriated such foreign symbols for local political advantage (Braswell 2003).

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<sup>3</sup> The oxygen-isotope values of the sacrificial victims in the Old Temple of the Feathered Serpent indicated long-time residence in Teotihuacan prior to being sacrificed (Spence and Pereira 2007). Where as the oxygen-isotope values of the sacrificial victims found in the Pyramid of the Moon indicated residence elsewhere prior to their death and internment (White et al. 2007).

Taube (2003) advocates for a strong Maya presence at Teotihuacan. First, Maya style writing and art on murals in addition to Maya ceramics found at the site indicated Teotihuacan received high ranking individuals from the Maya region. Second, the two regions also shared similar eschatological concerns regarding a solar paradise called Flower Mountain located in the east, the region of the Maya. Because of the large amount of funeral offerings recovered in conjunction with murals depicting religious or symbolic events involving processions of warriors, deities and priests, researchers agree that a distinct cult of the dead operated at Teotihuacan (Berlo 1983, Kubler 1985, Matos Moctezuma 1990: 128, Taube 2004, 2006, 2011). Butterfly imagery, identified by its distinctive nose plaque, on the elaborate *incensarios* found in funerary contexts adds further evidence to the importance of mortuary rituals at this site (Headrick 2003). Taube (1998) points out that Teotihuacan *incensarios* resembled mortuary bundles at that critical moment of transformation into a butterfly soul with Flower Mountain in the background (Taube 2006). Depictions of Flower Mountain in the Preclassic Maya region often accompanied imagery related to serpents as pathways, a relation mirrored in the construction of the Temple of the Feathered Serpent in the central precinct of Teotihuacan. Taube (1992a: 59-61) noted two distinct representations of serpents on this structure embodying Quetzalcoatl and the War Serpent both important conduits associated with visions related to conjuring rituals (Taube 2003, 2004: 88).

Recent interpretations regarding the connection between the Maya region and Teotihuacan has focused on the Pyramid of the Sun<sup>4</sup> and its role as a place of emergence or an Origins House (Sload 2008). Fash and colleagues (2009) call attention to this structure's association with the constellation Pleiades and the implications that this pyramid was the site for an earlier version of the Aztec New Fire Ceremony, which took place after the completion of a cycle of 52 years (*tonalpoalli*<sup>5</sup>). Similarities in iconography between the Teotihuacan symbol of a twisted cord to designate fire found on the sculptures associated with the Adosada platform and the Maya glyph (T600) denoting the *Wite'Naah*<sup>6</sup> on Temple 16 at Copan indicates that the Pyramid of the Sun was the original *Wite'Naah* location of investiture rituals relating to Maya kingship (ibid: 221).<sup>7</sup> According to Fash and others (2009: 222) Maya kings traveled to Teotihuacan specifically "for rituals related to the installation of rulers and founding of new political

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<sup>4</sup> The Pyramid of the Sun faced west and was built over a cave, invoking beginnings and emergence mythologies (Taube 1986). The stream that was channeled through this cave and evidence of child sacrifices discovered in the pyramid may have associated this structure with the worship of the Storm God (Matos Moctezuma 1990).

<sup>5</sup> This is a Nahuatl term for the Mexican calendar glyph or year sign denoting the ritual calendar of 260 days (Miller and Taube 1993:172). New fire was given life every fifty two years upon completion of the Calendar Round. In Aztec traditions the Lord and Lady of Duality (Ometecuhtli and Ometecihuatl) sent the *tonalli* (part of the soul) into the body of an infant in much the same way that fire was created through drilling (Furst 1995: 64-65.)

<sup>6</sup> A place associated with the origin of royal dynasties and the city of Teotihuacan (Guenter and Freidel 2005: 75).

<sup>7</sup> There are two additional places involved in the Maya *Wite'Naah* narrative, *Jo' Noh Wits* and *Nikte'Wits*. *Jo'Noh Wits* refers to Five Great Mountains which Fash (2009) and colleagues point out designates the city of Teotihuacan. *Nikte'Wits* references Flower Mountain which Taube (2004) links to the Pyramid of the Feathered Serpent also at Teotihuacan.

orders.” Once at Teotihuacan rulers became “period-ending<sup>8</sup>” priests who also held important social and ritual roles in calendrical ceremonies (ibid: 220).

#### Teotihuacan and the *Entrada*

Drawing on Coggins (1975, 1979, 1983) work at Tikal and Proskouriakoff’s (1993) attention to the iconographic evidence that the death of one Tikal king and the accession of another might in some way be related to the arrival of strangers bearing Central Mexican weapons, Stuart (2000) strengthened the argument by pointing out the epigraphic evidence that links Teotihuacan to the Maya realm. As Braswell (2003: 23) notes Stuart focused on four individuals associated with Tikal: Spear-Thrower Owl, Chahk Tok Ich’aak, Siyaj K’ahk’<sup>9</sup>, and Yaax Nu’n Ahyiin and their relationship to this day in Tikal history - 11 Eb 15 Mak (January 16, A.D. 378). This important date was recorded on Stelae 5 and 22 at Uaxactun as well as on stelae and monuments at Tikal. The text from Tikal describes this date as marking the death of ruler Chahk Tok Ich’aak, the arrival of Siyah K’ahk’ who oversees or witnesses the accession less than a year later of an unrelated king at Tikal named Yaax Nu’n Ahyiin, the son of Spear-Thrower Owl, a supposed foreigner whose name glyph links him to Teotihuacan (Stuart 2000, Braswell 2003). While Stuart (2000) interprets this event as evidence of a Teotihuacan take over of Tikal with Siyah K’ahk’ acting as a Teotihuacano war chief, Braswell (2003: 25)

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<sup>8</sup> It is an intersection in the Maya calendar similar to decades, centuries and millennia. It is used as a shorthand system for linking a Calendar Round date with the Long Count notation without writing out the Long Count itself. At minimum the *k’in* and *winal* are at zero and the tun, *k’atun*, half-*k’atun*, quarter-*k’atun*, or three-quarter-*k’atun* ending is recorded. All period endings fall on the day *ajaw* (Montgomery 2002a: 105-106, 2002b: 21).

<sup>9</sup> Fire is Born

points to evidence that both Spear-Thrower Owl and Siyaj K'ahk' were *kooloomte'ob*<sup>10</sup> from different Maya sites who had visited Teotihuacan and received honorific titles since Schele and Freidel (1990: 156-157, 449-450) had indicated that Spear-Thrower Owl represented a specific Central Mexican war title. Laporte and Fialko (1990) argued that the arrival of Siyaj K'ahk' might actually be the return of Siyaj K'ahk' from a pilgrimage journey indicating that he might be a lord from a rival Tikal lineage opposed to Chahk Tok Ich'aak's reign. Since there is no epigraphic evidence that delineates Spear-Thrower Owl as a ruler of Teotihuacan or that Siyaj K'ahk' hailed from anywhere else other than Tikal (Braswell 2003: 26), the "arrival" event on 11 Eb 15 Mak may point to the importance of Maya pilgrimage to Teotihuacan and the use of such sites to either initiate or resolve political and dynastic disputes. A similar Teotihuacan connection to Copan at the foundation of a new lineage dynasty in the Maya region adds further evidence for this city's role in Maya pilgrimage and politics.

Altar Q at Copan is a retrospective monument that recalls 350 years of history concerning the foundation of a royal dynasty and the succession of 16 subsequent rulers. The text on altar Q describes that on September 5 A.D. 426 K'uk' Mo' Ajaw (Quetzal Macaw Lord) took the royal scepter (a snake-footed god *K'awiil*<sup>11</sup>), and received the title

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<sup>10</sup> *Kooloomte'* is a disputed term. Harrison (1999: 79) thought it might refer to a person of a higher rank than an *ajaw* (Lord). Guenter and Freidel (2005) see the term as denoting the concept of a "Supreme Warlord." However, Aldana (2007: 205) is less willing to define *kooloomte'* as associated with a higher rank than *ajaw*. Montgomery (2002a, 2002b) argues that we do not really know the meaning of *kooloomte'* but what we do know is that it was associated with political and religious power. *Kooloomte'ob* is the modern plural form of this term.

<sup>11</sup> *K'awiil* is the deification and personification of royal blood (see Aldana 2007).

*ochk'in koloomte'*<sup>12</sup> at the *Wite'Naah*<sup>13</sup> (Bell 2002, Fash et al 2009, Schele 1989, Stuart and Schele 1986) located at Teotihuacan (Sharer 2003a). The text continues that one hundred and fifty two days later Yaax K'uk' Mo' arrives at Copan (Martin and Grube 2008, Sharer 2003a, Stuart 2000). Excavations in the lowest tunnel levels of the Copan Acropolis revealed monumental complexes dating to the period of Yaax K'uk' Mo''s arrival at Copan. Underneath the Yune platform at the base of the temple of the Southern Group is the Hunal tomb thought to contain the remains of Yaax K'uk' Mo'. The Hunal tomb at Copan was a "*talud-tablero*" substructure with a masonry superstructure containing the remains of an elderly male believed to be Yaax K'uk' Mo'. Vessels associated with the tomb indicate that the occupant had ties to Kaminaljuyu, Tikal as well as Teotihuacan. Cut shell spangles similar to those found in headdresses of Teotihuacan warriors were found in two pieces, one near the cranium and one on the floor of the tomb. The remains were adorned with jade, one of which referenced a mat design, a sign of rulership. The isotope analysis done on the bones indicate the tomb's occupant grew up in the Peten (Bell 2002, Sharer 2003a).

Bell (2002) points out the important role that archaeology plays in recovering the histories of women not mentioned in the texts. She calls attention to the remains of a royal woman buried in the Margarita tomb at Copan. One of the first structures to be built over the Hunal tomb was the Yehnal structure dating from A.D. 437 - 445. Stucco relief panels of the Maya sun god flanked its western stairs. Covering this structure was a

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<sup>12</sup> *Koloomte'* of the West – a title thought to be linked with Teotihuacan (Martin 2003).

<sup>13</sup> A place associated with royal dynasties and the city of Teotihuacan (Guenter and Freidel 2005: 75).



much larger temple dubbed Margarita with an associated date of A.D. 445-460. Both temples reflect Maya architectural preferences. The western façade of the Margarita temple supported polychrome emblems spelling out the name of Yaax K'uk' Mo'. The Margarita temple was transformed into a tomb for a mature woman with the construction of the succeeding Chilan substructure. A vaulted passageway from the Chilan substructure allowed subsequent access to the tomb which included an upper offering chamber above the burial chamber. On the south side of the tomb was a stone monument, the Xucpi Stone, recording that the tomb had been dedicated by Kinich Popol Hol on the 30 of November 437. The text closes with the name of Yaax K'uk' Mo' and another person or title that might reference Siyaj K'ahk' (Sharer 2003a). The offerings found in association with the female occupant of this tomb surpassed the quantity and quality of objects found in the Hunal tomb. Not only was her upper body adorned with jade and shell but the entire deposit had been painted over with red cinnabar. Bell (2002: 97) described the funerary offerings.

Her adornments included sandals or anklets fashioned of shell plates and knee bands of large jade beads. Strands of tubular jade beads and rounded blue beads were laid on the slab along her right side, while over 9000 tiny jade beads (no more than one quarter of inch in diameter) were piled on top of a thick layer of cinnabar along her left side. Her upper body was adorned with seashells, an intricate jade belt, jade armbands and wristlets, an elaborated jade, shell, and pearl necklace. Her neck was encircled by a strand of ten large carved jade figures with symbols of elite status and rulership that may have spelled out her name and titles. These include a large head with what may be interpreted as a *na* sign (the feminine prefix), a figure with tri-lobed headband associated with rulership and accession, and a vulture head in profile, which is often used as logogram for *ahaw* or ruler in later texts.

Concentrations of worked bone needles and loom weights along with a green stained bone spatula were found on the floor near the eastern side of the tomb. It was speculated that the quantities of jade and the associated weaving kit suggest that the woman had been buried in the costume of the Classic period moon or maize goddess (ibid). The central deposit on the eastern side of the tomb contained two slate and pyrite mirrors wrapped in finely woven textiles. The mirrors contained fine-line Teotihuacano polychrome designs. The deposits on the western side of tomb comprised a small set of grinding stones, a miniature *mano* and *matate* with the remains of pigment (ibid: 99). Based on all the evidence from the tomb, researchers concluded that the occupant of the tomb was most likely the wife of the dynastic founder Yaax K'uk' Mo'. The strontium isotope ratio analysis of her bones indicated that she spent most of her life in Copan so it was reasoned that she must have been the daughter from a prominent local elite lineage group that Yaax K'uk' Mo' married into in order to consolidate his power base within the region (ibid). Bell (ibid: 104) points out that the Margarita tomb served as a focus for ritual for at least twenty years after the occupant had been placed in the chamber and that when taken in conjunction with the Hunal tomb, the entire complex "may be seen as an evolving dynastic shrine that draws on Maya conceptualizations of gender complementarity and resonates with reference to the mythic founders First Father and First Mother" (ibid).

Archaeology has the potential to shed light on social practices that might differ from stated ideals (Ashmore 2002: 232). It is through archaeology that we can test the veracity of historical inscriptions or interpretations based on iconography and gauge the

extent of actual political control (Chase et. al 2009: 182). However some scholars tend to interpret evidence associating women with war or governance as reflecting social roles of support rather than roles of direct participation (Reese-Taylor et al. 2009, Tate 1999). For example, Nielsen (2006) recently analyzed the iconography of the mirrors found in association with the queen from the Margarita tomb. He noted that the iconography on the mirrors linked the items to Teotihuacan. Mirror 1 (Fig. 5.1) had markings on it that resembled the Mexican Year Sign framed by a mountain and Mirror 2 (Fig. 5.2) contained an image of the War Serpent headdress worn by warrior figures in the murals from the apartment compounds of Tlacuilapaxcoo and Tepantitla at Teotihuacan. Nielsen speculates that Yaax K'uk' Mo' must have acquired the items during his visit to Teotihuacan and that the designs on the mirror represent his role as a high ranking military leader because mirrors were known to be a part of military attire. Then, when remembering context, Nielsen argues that the two mirrors were most likely gifts given by Yaax K'uk' Mo' to his wife either when he arrived at Copan or she inherited the mirrors after he had died (ibid: 7). The possibility that this royal queen from Copan may have made a trip to Teotihuacan herself is never even considered. While the isotope analysis of her bones indicates that she spent most of her life in Copan, it does not suggest she spent her entire life there.

The Margarita tomb is one of the richest burials of a woman ever discovered in the Maya region (Martin and Grube 2008) during a time of significant gender inequality at other Classic Maya polities, like Tikal which may have initiated the dynastic change at Copan (Sharer 2003b). Gender relations in the Maya region during the Early Classic

period (A.D. 300 – 600) were not uniform across time and space. Women were a marked linguistic category in the glyphs that comprised the Maya writing system (Hewitt 1999), but gender ideologies varied from region to region, over time and through class position. However, gender inequality in the Peten was only pronounced among the elite. At Tikal this manifested in the near absence of women from inscriptions and a shorter life expectancy for them in the Early Classic period (Haviland 1997: 1, 9). However the defaced Stela 23 depicting the portrait of Ix Yok'in (the Lady of Tikal), who acceded to the rank of *ajaw* in 511 at the age of six and is mentioned as an *ix k'alamte* (Reese-Taylor et al. 2009: 58) on several other stelae but later omitted as the primary ruler from the rulers list on a subsequent monument (Martin and Grube 2008: 38), should also remind us that epigraphic information is inherently political and can often serve as revisionist history.



Figure 5.1: Mirror 1 depicting the Mexican Year Sign found in the Margarita Tomb at Copan (drawing from Nielsen 2006: 3)



Figure 5.2: Mirror 2 depicting a figure wearing the War Serpent headdress found in the Margarita Tomb at Copan (drawing from Nielsen 2006: 5).

Dynastic “beginnings” or political takeovers in the Early Classic period at other sites in the Maya region did not always go well for royal women from local lineages. Tomb 2 at Early Classic Yaxuna contains the remains of twelve individuals believed to be the ruling lineage of the site (Freidel and Suhler 1998). All family members had been killed including several women, one who was pregnant, by a rival lineage from Oxkintok, a site linked to Teotihuacan (Ardren 2002). In addition, excavations at El Peru-Waka, uncovered a tomb dating from A.D. 350 to 400 with the remains of two women, one who was pregnant. Researchers suggest the two women were sacrificed as part of a lineage replacement prior to the arrival of Siyaj K’ahk’ who according to inscriptions at the site

arrived in A.D. 378<sup>14</sup> prior to the dynastic change at the site (Hardman 2008). These archaeological examples of murdered royal women from local lineages draw an intriguing contrast to the circumstances surrounding the queen from a local lineage at Copan.

Bell (2002) noted the possibility that the occupant of the Margarita tomb was wearing the beaded jade net skirt based on the large amount of jade beads found in her tomb. Proskouriakoff (1961) first noticed that on Maya monuments beaded jade net skirts seemed to be worn primarily by women and occasionally by men in certain ceremonial contexts. The jade net skirt denoted the attire worn by both the Maya Maize God (Fig. 5.3) and the Maya Moon Goddess (Fig. 5.4) (see Taube 1992b). The jade net skirt combined with the *xook* belt and *spondylus* medallion is particularly common to Maize God depictions (Taube 1985: 172). Taube (ibid: 175), Joyce (1992: 65, 1996) and Quenon and LeFort (1997) argued that the diamond pattern in the netting of the skirt alluded to the turtle carapace, a metaphor for the earth. The *xook* or shark belt worn over the jade net skirt refers to the powerful creature that patrols the watery underworld. Interestingly the Maize God is frequently depicted in association with women and watery locations (Taube 1985: 172). The *spondylus* medallion that is often fastened to the *xook* fish belt also adorns deities such as the Moon God/Goddess (Miller 1974: 154, Tate 2002, Taylor 1992: 522) and the Maize God/Goddess (Bassie-Sweet 2002, 2012, Looper 2002, 2009:161, Reilly 2002) in the Classic period.

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<sup>14</sup> Eight days prior to his arrival in Tikal



Figure 5.3: The Maize God/Moon Goddess composite figure with the lunar crescent in the background. Detail from an incised conch trumpet from the Early Classic period (drawing from Taube 1992b: 67).

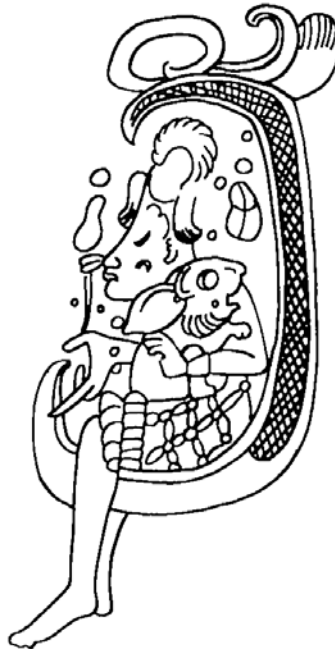


Figure 5.4: The Maya Moon Goddess/Maize God composite figure sitting in the lunar crescent (drawing from Taube 1992b: 67).

Researchers have commented on the fluidity and the merging of traits in regards to the gender of both the Classic period Maize God and Moon Goddess. Gender among these deities was not fixed and situational possibly because the appearances of maize and the moon change from day to day (Milbrath 1999) and/or because maize contains both male and female reproductive components. Scholars have also speculated that the jade net skirt symbolized an earlier conception of divinity that transcended or encompassed both genders (Joyce 2000: 81). Since deities, men, women, and dance practitioners appear on monuments wearing the jade net skirt it makes more sense to view this costume as an expression of religious affiliation associated with maize, water, earth, and the moon rather than a signification of gender in the Maya region.

The jade net overskirt and a version of the jade net collar were also costume elements of religious affiliation in Teotihuacan and they make an appearance on the 12 foot and 9 inches, 22 ton sculpture of a possible water goddess or composite priestess found at the foot of the Pyramid of the Moon at Teotihuacan (Fig. 5.5). She wears an upper body garment, the *quechquemilt*, which has been associated with religious positions occupied by Mesoamerican women and goddesses in later contexts. In the Late Postclassic period, skirts determined the names of Aztec goddesses (Klein 2000). Scholars named this statue Chalchiuhtlicue, “Jades-Her-Skirt,” after the Aztec goddess of water. But whether she represents an actual goddess or a corporate image of a priestess is an open question.<sup>15</sup> One of the first monuments of a queen wearing a jade net skirt,

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<sup>15</sup> Teotihuacan representations of divinity typically blurred human, terrestrial, celestial, insect and animal categories. The murals found in the apartment compounds at Teotihuacan often depict ritual impersonators that like many of the masks recovered from mortuary contexts emphasized anonymity and multiplicity (Pasztory 1998: 69).



collar, and jade *quechquemilt* in the Maya region was at El Zapote, a site with close affiliations with Tikal. On the backside of Stela 5 (Fig. 5.6), dating to 9.0.4.0.0 or A.D. 439, queen Ix Ayiin holds the same Mexican Year Sign framed by a mountain (see Fig. 5.1) symbol (see Tate 2012: 188-189) found on the mirror in the Copan queen's tomb.



Figure 5.5: Colossal sculpture of possible Water Goddess/composite priestess figure found near the Pyramid of the Moon at Teotihuacan, Mexico (drawing from Tate 2012: 188).

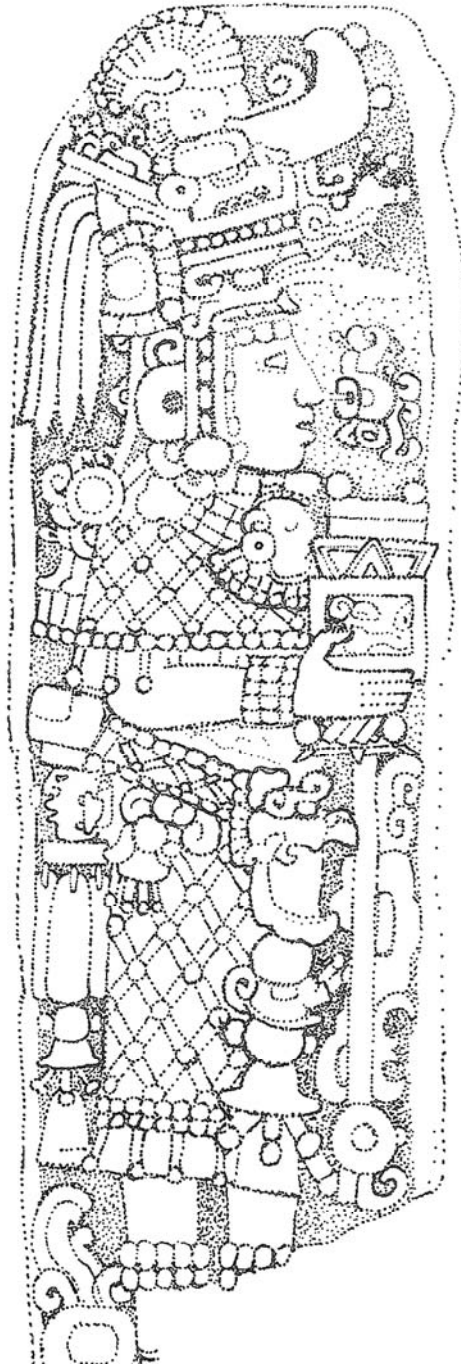


Figure 5.6: Stela 5 from El Zapote, Guatemala from A.D. 439; queen Ix Ayiin holds the Mexican Year Sign associated with the ritual calendar and Teotihuacan (drawing from Tate 2012: 189).

The reason for focusing on the tomb of the Copan queen is to call out the gendered nature of the discussion regarding Early Classic Maya and Teotihuacan political and ritual interaction. It would be a mistake to think that royal or elite women did not travel to Teotihuacan for similar rituals relating to warfare or rulership or that rituals surrounding Maize God impersonation were restricted to only male rulers. Gender complementarity, the idea that men and women share separate but equally important social roles in Maya society, is usually inferred publically through ritual references even if such images of ritual actions mask other aspects of gender domination in actual lived society. Joyce (2000: 81-83, 1993: 266) noted that the images on male-female paired monuments of royal women wearing the jade net skirt often hold the same items of power such as the double headed bar, shields, staffs, and Manikin Scepters that royal men do which emphasized their ritual equality and importance in maintaining the religious practices of the ruling lineage while simultaneously downplaying women's economic contributions to society in images on other monuments. The wealth accompanying the Copan queen is significant in that only the first woman of the Copan dynasty received such an ostentatious display of funerary veneration and offerings. The next time we see the jade beaded net skirt at Copan it is worn by the queen's male descendant.

A significant monument from the Late Classic period that links ritual representations of Maya royal women to an earlier political relationship with Teotihuacan is the retrospective Dallas Altar (Fig. 5.7). Erected to mark the celebration of an period ending date in A.D. 731, the glyphs on this monument record previous arrival events at

the site of Sak Nikte'<sup>16</sup> involving high ranking women employing the *Kaan*<sup>17</sup> emblem glyph. The figure on the viewers right is Ix Naah Ek' recorded as the first *ix kaloomte'* to arrive at Sak Nikte' in A.D. 520. She stands on a battle palanquin over a mountain motif and under the figure of the Underworld Jaguar War God while wearing the War Serpent headdress, *Waxaklajuun Ub'aah Kan*, or "Eighteen Heads of the Serpent" which are all symbols associated with warfare and the Temple of the Feathered Serpent at Teotihuacan (Freidel and Guenter 2003, Taube 1992a, 2006). According toLooper (2002) the jade beaded net skirt also linked queens to the Moon Goddess for purposes of war in the Late Classic period (A.D. 600-900). Late Classic retrospective monuments depicting earlier royal women associated with military paraphernalia, captives, and the title of *ix kaloomte'* becomes an extremely important political and religious statement for prominent male rulers to make concerning their female ancestors in the Maya Lowlands at the close of the Classic period.

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<sup>16</sup> Located near the confluence of the San Pedro Martir and Usumacinta Rivers; also known as La Corona or Site Q.

<sup>17</sup> Snake

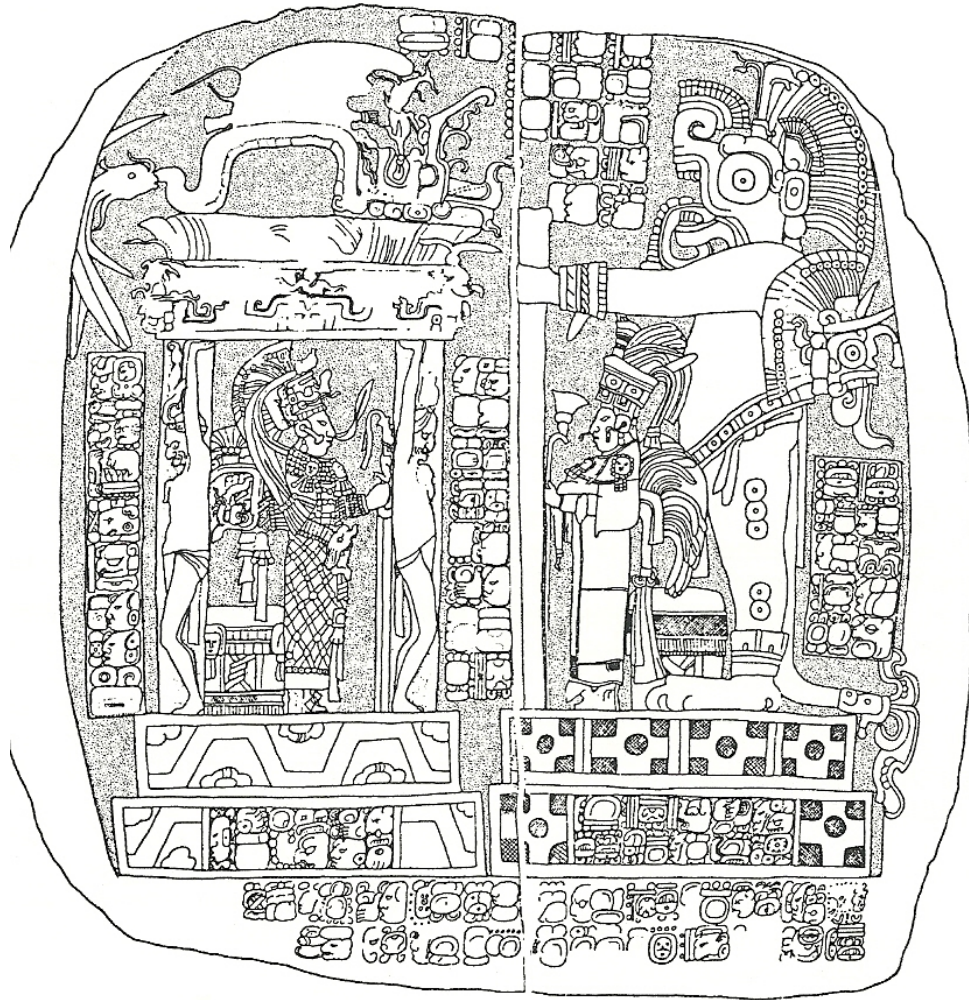


Figure 5.7: The Dallas Altar; a wall panel from Sak Nikte' (La Corona; Site Q) Guatemala depicting the arrival of the *Kaan* women on palanquins associated with Flower Mountain and Teotihuacan (drawing from Martin 2008: 1).

### **Politics and Gender in the Maya Lowlands during the Late Classic Period**

In *Women in Hellenistic Egypt*, Pomeroy (1984) noted the wide discrepancy in status and power between the lower statuses of elite Greek women in Classical Athens in relation to the higher statuses of elite women in Ptolemaic Egypt. One of the reasons for this difference is that Classical Athens was a democracy that had effectively excluded women from politics while Ptolemaic Egypt remained a monarchy, although with a Greek ruling lineage. In ancient monarchies queens participated in the traditionally male spheres of government and warfare in part because political legitimacy rested on both male *and female* kin relations. While religion had always been an arena in which Greek women wielded social power, it became an even more important sphere of activity in the Hellenistic period with the advent of ruler cults in which women participated as goddesses and priestesses (ibid: xviii). Royal women in the monarchies of the Late Classic Maya lowlands played similar roles in society but most prominently in matters relating to warfare and divination.

MacLeod (1990: 339-41) first deciphered the arrival glyph that was instrumental in understanding Siyaj K'ahk's arrival at Tikal by comparing glyphs linked to events surrounding the arrival of royal women to Late Classic lowland Maya centers. A number of Maya polities recorded arrival events associated with foreign women who brought significant political change to the polity they were marrying into (Stuart 2000: 479). Maya princesses tended to marry down in social status. Hypergamy, where the bride has a higher social status than the husband in marriage, cemented political and economic

alliances and improved the status of the bride's male relatives (Marcus 1976, Reese-Taylor et al 2009).

Marcus (1976) made three important points regarding the spatial and chronological patterns associated with women and monuments in the Maya lowlands. First, in the Peten only a few monuments with women were known for the Early Classic period. Second, at the beginning of the Late Classic period there were far more women commemorated on monuments outside the Peten but particularly in the northeast of the Yucatan peninsula (ibid: 162). Finally, near the end of the Late Classic period women often appeared alone rather than paired with male monuments both outside and within the Peten region. Marcus noticed that between A.D. 564-623 the examples of queens wearing the jade net skirt and holding ceremonial bars primarily occurred outside the Peten but most notably in the Northeastern lowlands at Tulum (Fig. 5.8), Ichpaatun, and Coba (ibid: 162). Reese-Taylor and colleagues (2009: 63) point out that after A.D. 623 the prominence and number of queens associated with warfare in public art increased. Since the earliest and most prolific representations of queens with military regalia, standing on top of captives, and depicted without corresponding male monuments occurred at sites like Coba and Calakmul, they (ibid: 62) consider the Northern lowlands to be the region where this behavior began and argue that during the seventh and early eighth centuries queens were as actively engaged in warfare as their male counterparts (ibid: 42). For example, Calakmul Stela 28 (Fig. 5.9) and Coba Stela 4 (Fig. 5.10) both celebrated the same period ending date of 9.9.10.0.0 (March 19, 623) and depicted the

earliest examples of Maya royal women standing on captured warriors. Ix Wak Chan<sup>18</sup> arrived at Naranjo from Dos Pilas in A.D. 682 and was an event important enough to record on Coba's Stela 1 as well as Naranjo's Stela 29. On Stela 24 (Fig. 5.11), which stood at the base of Naranjo's Structure C-7 opposite from Stela 22 that depicted her son, Ix Wak Chan is described as a *kaloomte*<sup>19</sup> and stands on a captive who is identified as Lord Kinichil Kab from Ucanal (Reese-Taylor et al 2009: 55). Stela 31 (Fig. 5.12) describes Ix Wak Chan as a *na bate*<sup>20</sup> (Hewitt 1999). Reese-Taylor and colleagues (ibid: 62) also point out that the appearance of warrior queen stelae, the proliferation of *ix kaloomte* titles, and representations of female war captives (see Ayala Falcón 2002, Reese-Taylor et al. 2009: 65) all seem to correspond to the appearance of the *Kaan* (Snake) emblem glyphs<sup>21</sup> at Calakmul.

Debate regarding the distinct role and significance of Maya emblem glyphs (see Berlin 1958, Proskouriakoff 1960: 471, Barthel 1968a, 1968b, Grube 2005, Graña-Behrens 2006, Kelley 1976: 215, and Mathews 1991) has surrounded the discussion regarding Classic Maya place names (Stuart 1993: 326, Stuart and Houston 1994: 5). Emblem glyphs were primarily royal titles consisting of three signs: a prefix, a superfix,

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<sup>18</sup> Lady Six Sky

<sup>19</sup> Hewitt (1999) discusses the significance of the omission of the marked female appellative phrase in reference to Ix Wak Chan at Naranjo.

<sup>20</sup> Woman warrior

<sup>21</sup> Female appellative phrases usually conclude with an emblem glyph. Emblem glyphs indicate a person's connection to a geographical/political polity and function in appellative phrases as royal titles (Mathews 1989).



and a variable “main sign” that was different from site to site but consistently depicted within each site’s inscriptions. Berlin (1958: 111) named them emblem glyphs because



Figure 5.8: Tulum Stela 1 (Photo courtesy of the British Museum).

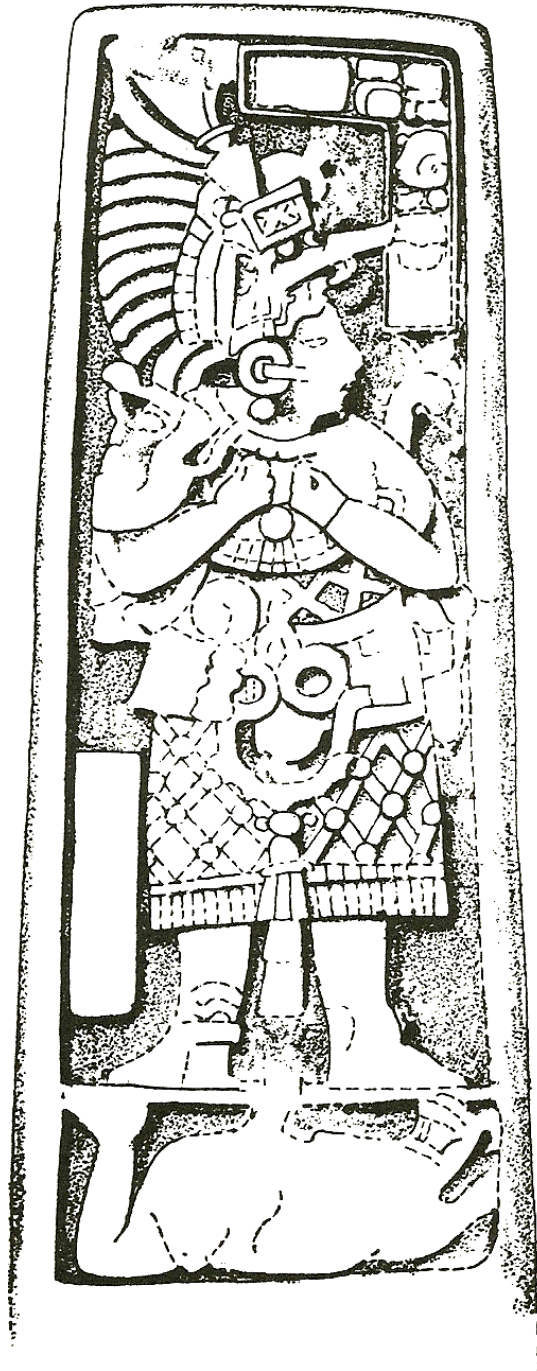


Figure 5.9: Calakmul Stela 28 portrays an example of a queen standing on a captive (drawing from Ruppert and Denison 1943: Plate 49: c).

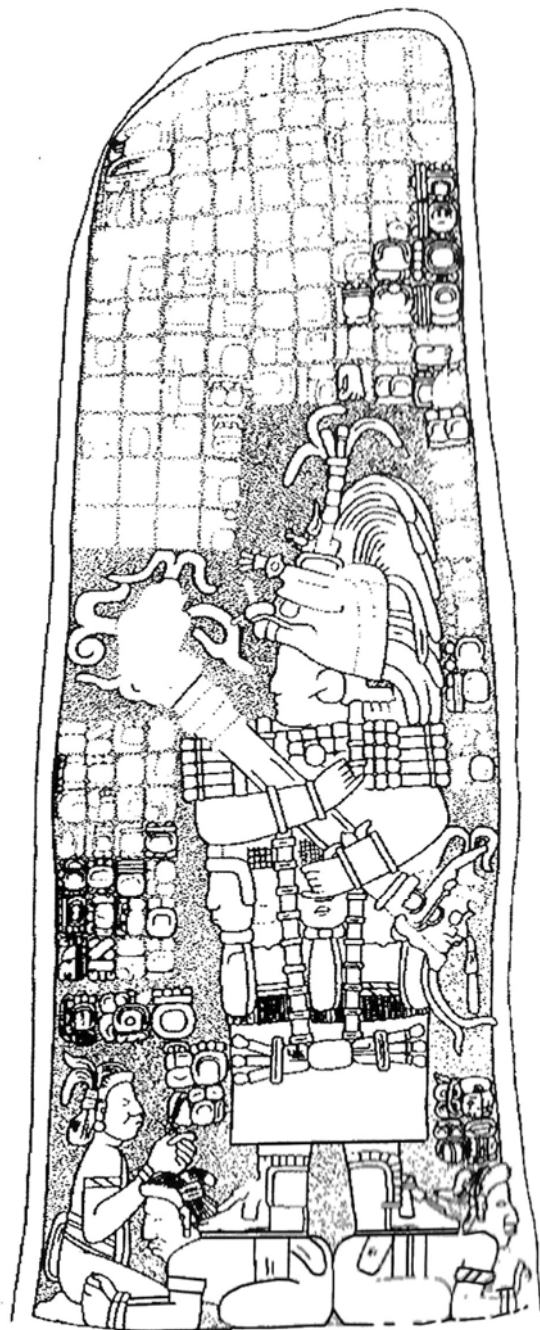


Figure 5.10: Coba Stela 4 dating to A.D. 623 depicts one of the earliest examples of a queen standing on multiple captives (drawing from Graham and von Euw 1997: 31)

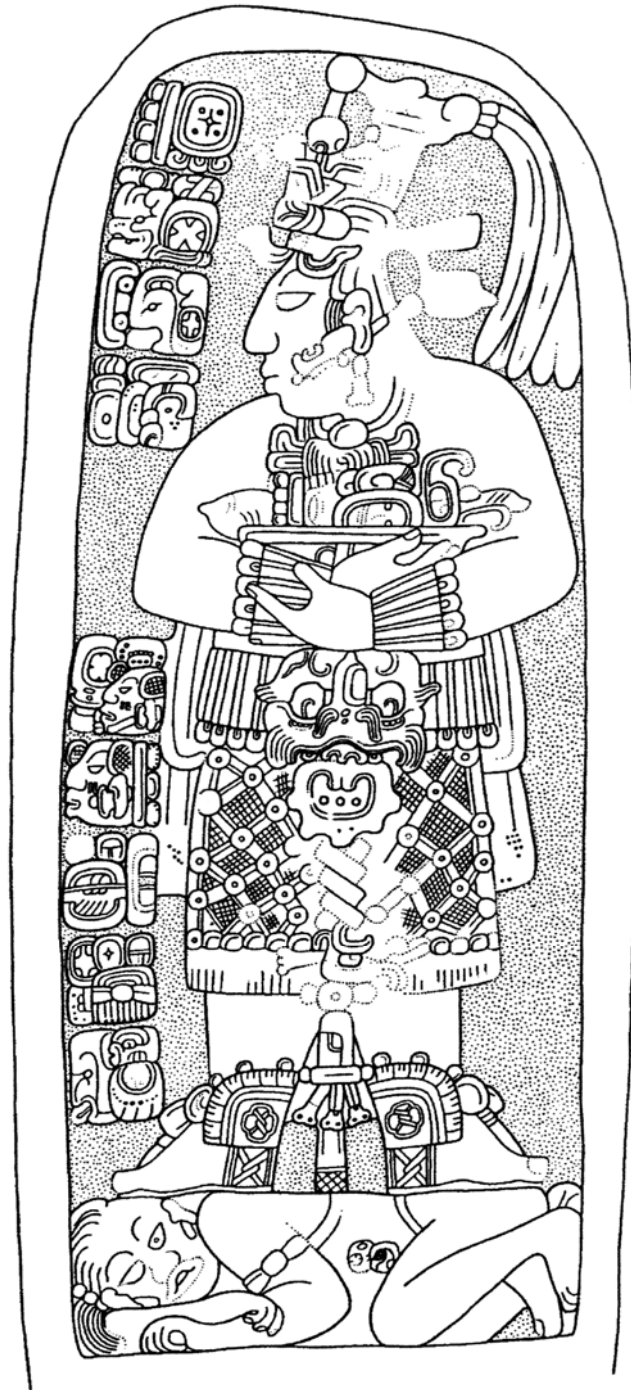


Figure 5.11: Ix Wak Chan wearing a headdress containing the Mexican Year Sign while standing on top of a captive is depicted on Stela 24 from Naranjo, Guatemala (drawing from Graham and von Euv 1975: 63)

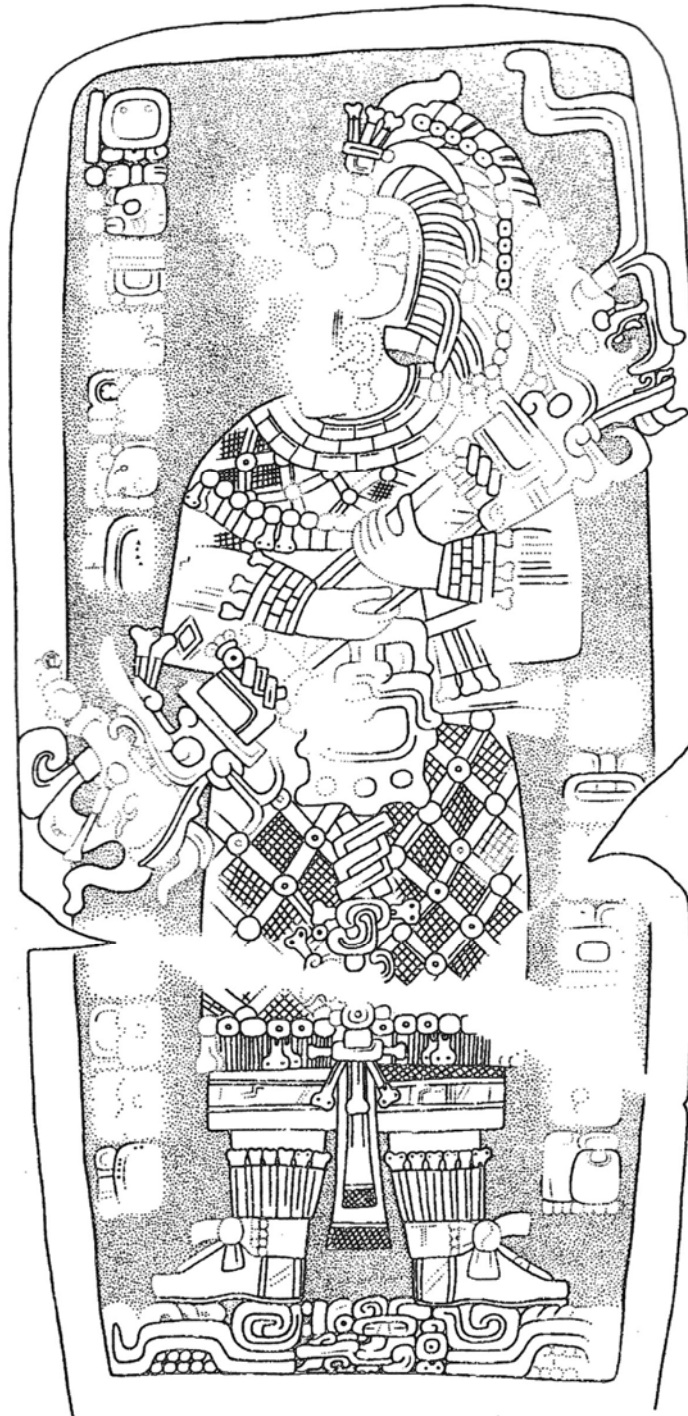


Figure 5.12: Ix Wak Chan depicted on Stela 31 from Naranjo, Guatemala (drawing from Graham 1978: 83).

they were emblematic of the site from which they were found (see Mathews 1991: 21-22). Proskouriakoff (1960) thought emblem glyphs referred to lineage or dynastic titles, while Barthel (1968ab) and Kelley (1976) argued that the main signs in such titles referred to place names. Mathews and Justeson (1984) clarified that emblem glyphs functioned primarily as titles of rulers and had some geographic association. Stuart and Houston (1994: 3) added to the discussion by pointing out that while some emblem glyphs may reference a place, they may actually refer to an unknown larger political unit which may incorporate more than one site. Therefore, they draw a distinction between emblem glyphs and Classic Maya place names which were a separate category of glyphs that functioned as toponymic signs denoting specific sites. This format accounted for the problematic emblem glyphs (see Houston 1986) that dropped the invariable *k'uhul* (holy) prefix (the water group T35 to T41) and in some cases the *ajaw* (lord) superfix. While the full form emblem glyph title was present at sites in Yucatan, unlike the southern lowland lords, Yucatan royalty preferred to use the aberrant emblem glyph format which omitted the holy and/or lord components of a title (Graña-Behrens 2006). One emblem glyph that appears in the full as well as aberrant format at numerous sites in Yucatan, Quintana Roo and Campeche is the *k'uhul Kaan ajaw* title.

Historically, the Kaan emblem or Snake glyph had been associated with the site of Calakmul (see Joyce 1976). Yet according to Martin and Grube (2008, see also Grube 2005: 90) the *Kaan* emblem glyph does not denote Calakmul before A.D. 630<sup>22</sup>. Prior to A.D. 630, the *Kaan* emblem glyph shows up also at Dzibanché, Yo'okop, El Resbalon,

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<sup>22</sup> They used a Bat emblem glyph at this time (Martin 2005).

Los Alacranes, and Pol Box in southern Quintana Roo (Esparza Olguín and Pérez Gutiérrez 2009: 10). In Late Classic period Yucatan, the *Kaan* emblem glyph is found at numerous sites and on portable objects (Graña-Behrens 2006: 110). It appears in association with different rulers on monuments and on artifacts such as jade pendants and vases. Because a number of jade pendants recovered from the island of Jaina exhibited this emblem glyph title, Garcia Campillo (1995:213-214) argued that *Kaan* designated the island site. Yet the *k'uhul Kaan ajaw* title also occurs on objects recovered from other parts of Yucatan such as Uaymil, Santa Rosa Xtampak, Xcalumkin, and Chichén Itzá (Graña-Behrens 2006: 110). Complicating the matter further are a series of “dynastic vases” listing the reign of a number of *k'uhul Kaan ajaw*, or the Holy Snake Lords. Because the reign of these rulers does not match a list of known rulers at Calakmul or at any other known site (see Marcus 1987), the vases are thought to be mythological or legendary (Martin and Grube 2008: 102). Yet, despite this legendary evidence, the presence of the Kaan emblem glyph at multiple sites in the Late Classic period has been used as evidence for the existence of two super states in the Classic period; one centered at Tikal (Mutul emblem) and the other centered at Calakmul (Kaan emblem). Yet as Chase and colleagues (2009: 180) note, the basis for this theory can be called into question since it rests entirely on epigraphic data surrounding the similarities found in the Kaan titles shared with multiple individuals at multiple sites. Recently, Savage (2007)<sup>23</sup> has proposed an alternative reading for the Kaan emblem glyph arguing that it may not refer to a dynastic political kingdom but rather represents a title associated with religious

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<sup>23</sup> Savage (2007: 3) analyzes the title phonetically as *kuhul ka-Kaan-ajaw* and notes a similarity between this title and the Postclassic name Kukulcan or Feathered Serpent.

specialists from a mythological or idealized place. Some of the duties associated with these religious specialists included divination, scattering and incensing, witnessing events, and rituals relating to the Mesoamerican ball game (ibid). Because the snake was such a powerful symbol of religious transformation (Miller and Taube 1993: 150), it is possible that rulers listed as *k'uhul Kaan ajaw*<sup>24</sup> on the dynastic vases may be referring to royalty who received religious titles.<sup>25</sup>

Royal women connected with the Kaan emblem glyph and/or the jade net skirt, *quechquemitl* and collar may be linked to religious practices and titles associated with an organized priesthood and pilgrimage network from which dynastic legitimacy originated. The inherited titles within this priesthood may have given royal women and men the authority to oversee ritual observances at other sites connected to this religious organization. For instance, a group of 5 glyphic blocks from Yo'okop in Quintana Roo uses a verbal construction for the name Sky Witness (a common name associated with the *k'uhul Kaan ajaw*)<sup>26</sup> that Wren and Nygard (2005: 172-173) read not as a name but rather as the verb to witness. The following glyph in the series referred to *ix kaloomte' Ix Ch'ak Kab*. The next glyph described Ix Ch'ak Kab as an *ajaw* of the watery realm. The last two glyphs denote the date she arrived to witness the period ending date on 9.8.0.0.0, or A.D. 593 (ibid: 174-175). The jade net skirt seems to be costume of religious

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<sup>24</sup> Holy (or divine) Snake Lord

<sup>25</sup> It is important to point out that this is a minority opinion. Epigraphers such as David Stuart, Stephen Houston, and Simon Martin believe that the Kaan emblem glyph refers to Calakmul. Although Grube (2005) would add that it only pertains to Calakmul from AD 630-730.

<sup>26</sup> Holy Snake Lords



affiliation because it is the attire worn by royal women found on Uxul's Stela 2 (Fig. 5.13) and Naachtún's Stela 18 (Fig. 5.14). This Stela depicts a queen standing on captive while wearing a mirror on her chest. Items such as mirrors were often associated with the social role of conjurer (Taube 1992c).

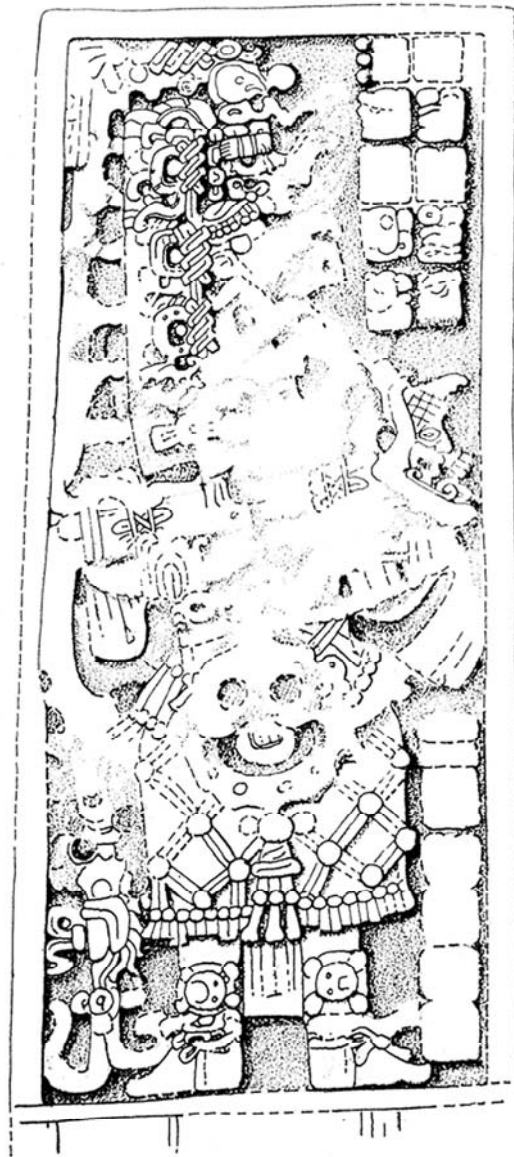


Figure 5.13: A queen in a jade net skirt on Stela 2 from Uxul, Mexico (from Ruppert and Denison 1943: Plate 58: a).



Figure 5.14: Stela 18 from Naachtún, Guatemala (redrawn from Reese-Taylor 2009: 56).

Ix Batz Ek' an *ix Kaan ajaw*<sup>27</sup> and the presumed mother of Sak Witzil B'aah (king K'an II) from Caracol was described on Stela 3 as “witnessing” the accession of her son. Archaeologists located her tomb which has an associated date of A.D. 634 and was discovered in the tallest structure at Caracol which is the largest pre-Columbian building in Belize (Guenter and Freidel 2005: 77). In a parentage statement on Yaxchilán<sup>28</sup> Stela 10, Yaxuun B'ahlam IV describes his mother Ix Uh Chan as an *ix Kaan ajaw*<sup>29</sup> who was also an *elk'in kaloomte*<sup>30</sup> and a *ix ajk'uhuun*.<sup>31</sup> Zender (2003) notes that glyphic titles such as *ajk'uhuun*, *yajawk'ahk'* and *ti'sakhuun* were all associated with an intra-polity priesthood in the Late Classic period comprised of royal and non-royal elites that included women. One example Zender provides of a non royal elite comes from a Late Classic monument from El Chorro, Guatemala which depicts Ix Sak Mo' B'ahlam (Fig. 5.15) in a jade net skirt performing an act of deity conjuration while the accompanying text describes her as an *ix ajk'uhuun*. Zender (2003: 358) points out that the long-lipped K'awiil headdresses that both Ix Uh Chan from Yaxchilan and Ix Sak Mo' B'ahlam wear connect them to divination associated with the office of priesthood. Savage (2007) argues that conjuring events occurring in conjunction with

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<sup>27</sup> Lady Snake Lord

<sup>28</sup> Located above the Usumacinta River

<sup>29</sup> Lady Snake Lord

<sup>30</sup> *Koloomte* ' of the East

<sup>31</sup> Heavenly Lady of the Books (see Montgomery 2002a: 210). This association between priestly duties and scribal arts, according to Zender (2003), adds credence to the reading of the title of *ajk'uhuun* as relating to a class of professional worshippers.

Vision Serpents<sup>32</sup> were one of the ritual practices connected with Late Classic religious specialists linked to the *Kaan* emblem glyph. At Yaxchilán Structure 23, a temple built to extol Ix K'ab'al Xook,<sup>33</sup> an *ix Kaan ajaw*<sup>34</sup> and an *ochk'in koolomte*,<sup>35</sup> contained a series of carved Lintels depicting Ix K'ab'al Xook engaged in a ritual related to bloodletting and divination. On Lintel 24 (Fig. 5.16) Ix K'ab'al Xook wears the jade net collar and a headdress containing the Mexican Year Sign with flower tassels. She pulls a thorn studded rope through her tongue while the king assists her by holding the torch that lights the scene on the day of his coronation. Lintel 25 (Fig. 5.17) depicts Ix K'ab'al Xook conjuring the War Vision Serpent.<sup>36</sup> For quite some time, it was assumed that the figure in the mouth of the War Vision Serpent was a warrior ancestor of her husband (See Schele and Miller 1986: 177 and 188). However, recent interpretations of the accompanying glyphs point out that the figure is actually the queen herself wearing a jade net collar and emerging with the *ko'haw*<sup>37</sup> war helmet, a shield, spear and the title, “Lady Heart of the *Wite'Naah*” (Guenter and Freidel 2005: 75).

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<sup>32</sup> Vision Serpents refer to the religious experiences associated with bloodletting and conjuring where visions, ancestors, gods, or spirits emerge from the jaws of a snake that usually originates from sacrificial offerings provided by the practitioner.

<sup>33</sup> Lady Shark Fin

<sup>34</sup> Lady Snake Lord

<sup>35</sup> *Koolomte*' of the West

<sup>36</sup> Vision serpents linked to warfare preparations.

<sup>37</sup> A war helmet made of a mosaic of shell plaques whose origins connect it to Teotihuacan. It is a variant of the War Serpent headdress (Stone and Zender 2011: 85).

The Lintels together record eight dates over a span of 45 years starting with the accession of Itz'naaj B'ahlam III in A.D. 681 and ending with the dedication of structure 23 in A.D. 726 (McAnany and Plank 2001).



Figure 5.15: Ix Sak Mo' B'ahlam, a non royal scribe/priestess from the site of El Chorro, Guatemala (drawing from Zender 2003: 625)



Figure 5.16: Ix K'ab'al Xook engaged in a bloodletting ritual on Lintel 24 from Yaxchilan, Mexico on exhibit at the British Museum. (Photo: S. Patel)



Figure 5.17: Lintel 25 from Yaxchilan depicts Ix K'ab'al Xook conjuring a War Vision Serpent on exhibit at the British Museum. (Photo: S. Patel)

A number of unprovenienced stelae found in U.S. museums and private collections depict royal women wearing the jade net skirt and holding ceremonial bars associated with either the K'awiil Vision Serpent or wearing the K'awiil headdress. The Chicago Art Institute Stela (Fig. 5.18) from 9.13.10.0.0 or A.D. 702 represents an *ix Kaan ahaw* wearing a jade net skirt, holding a ceremonial bar and wearing a K'awiil headdress (Palka and Buechler 2003). The San Francisco de Young Museum Stela (Fig. 5.19) portrays Ix Mutul, an *ix Kaan ajaw*,<sup>38</sup> in a jade net skirt conjuring a K'awiil Vision Serpent (Reese-Taylor et al 2009, Stone and Zender 2011: 158). Additionally, a stela (Fig. 5.20) from the Late Classic Mopoy (or Pomoy) polity depicts Ix Ook Ayiin in a jade net skirt wearing the K'awiil headdress (Stone and Zender 2011: 202). The Cleveland Stela (Fig. 5.21) which has recently been associated with the site of El Peru-Waka<sup>39</sup> and designated Stela 34, depicts Ix K'abel, an *ix Kaan ajaw, na bate*,<sup>40</sup> and a *ix koolomte'*, in a jade net skirt holding a shield and axe. Recently archaeologists located her tomb (dating between A.D. 650 and A.D. 750) and discovered large quantities of jade reminiscent of the amount of jade recovered from the Copan queen's tomb. The tomb was under the courtyard of the main palace and also contained a *huunal*<sup>41</sup> and the remnants of the mosaic *ko'haw*<sup>42</sup> war helmet suggesting to the researchers that this queen

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<sup>38</sup> Lady Snake Lord

<sup>39</sup> El Peru-Waka is located on the San Pedro Mártir River

<sup>40</sup> Female warrior

<sup>41</sup> Usually a jewel attached to the *ko'haw* war helmet

<sup>42</sup> A war helmet made of a mosaic of shell plaques whose origins connect it to Teotihuacan. It is a variant of the War Serpent headdress (Stone and Zender 2011: 85).



was a powerful warlord (Guenter and Freidel 2005, Hardman 2008). She is also depicted in jade bead wrist cuffs, collar, and necklace while holding God K on a Late Classic panel in the Cleveland Museum of Art (Fig. 5.22).

The presence of the beaded net jade skirt, *quechquemitl* and collar across numerous political and geographic boundaries in the Maya region requires an explanation. It seems to indicate that elite women and men participated in an international religious organization that linked Central Mexico with the Maya region through pilgrimage. It is probably not a coincidence that after the arrival of the Kaan lords at Palenque in A.D. 599 that Ix Yohl Ik'nal who ruled Palenque during these events is depicted on the sarcophagus of her descendant Janab Pakal I, wearing the jade net costume (Fig. 5.22). The Kaan lords arrived at Palenque again in A.D. 611 and the following year Muwaan Mat acceded to the throne. Since the title Muwaan Mat<sup>43</sup> is linked to the Maize God/Goddess, the gender of this ruler has been disputed however, on Janab Pakal I's sarcophagus which included prominent ancestors from Palenque Muwaan Mat is identified as Ix Sak K'uk, the mother of Janab Pakal I. Ix Sak K'uk (Fig. 5.23) is depicted on the Oval Palace Tablet in the jade net skirt presenting the *ko'haw* war helmet to her son (Guenter and Freidel 2005, Stone and Zender 2011: 85, Stuart and Stuart 2008). A Late Classic panel (Fig. 5.24) set into a doorway of a temple from the site of Xupa near Palenque also depicts a prominent woman in jade net attire (Miller and Martin 2004: 105).

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<sup>43</sup> A similar situation occurred in the early history of Tikal surrounding the 12<sup>th</sup> ruler, Unen Bahlam or Baby Jaguar whose gender is disputed based on this title's associations with Maize God/Goddess iconography (see Martin 2003).

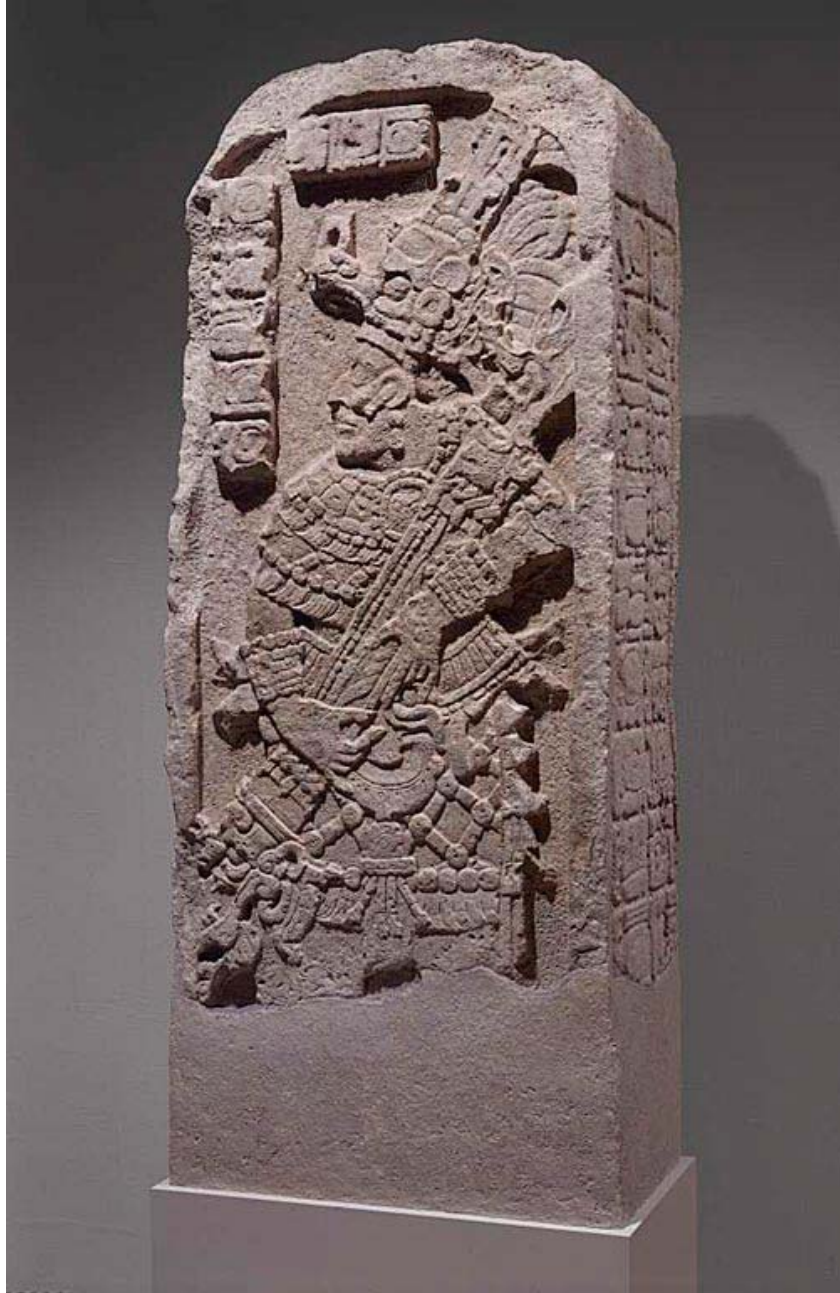


Figure 5.18: The Chicago Art Institute Stela dates to A.D. 702 and depicts a queen who is a Lady Snake Lord (Photo courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago).

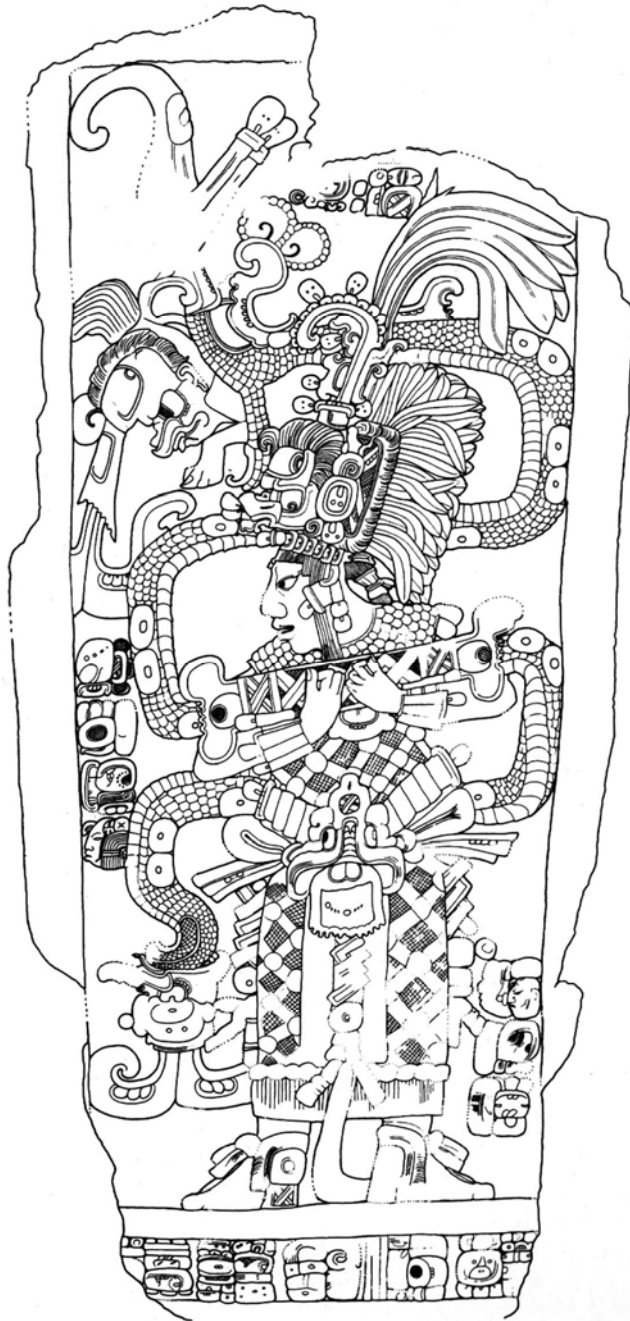


Figure 5.19: The San Francisco de Young Museum Stela depicts Ix Mutul in the act of conjuring (drawing from Stone and Zender 2011: 158).



Figure 5.20: Ix Ook Ayiin from the Late Classic Pomoy polity in Chiapas, Mexico (drawing by Grube in Houston and Inomata 2009: 147).

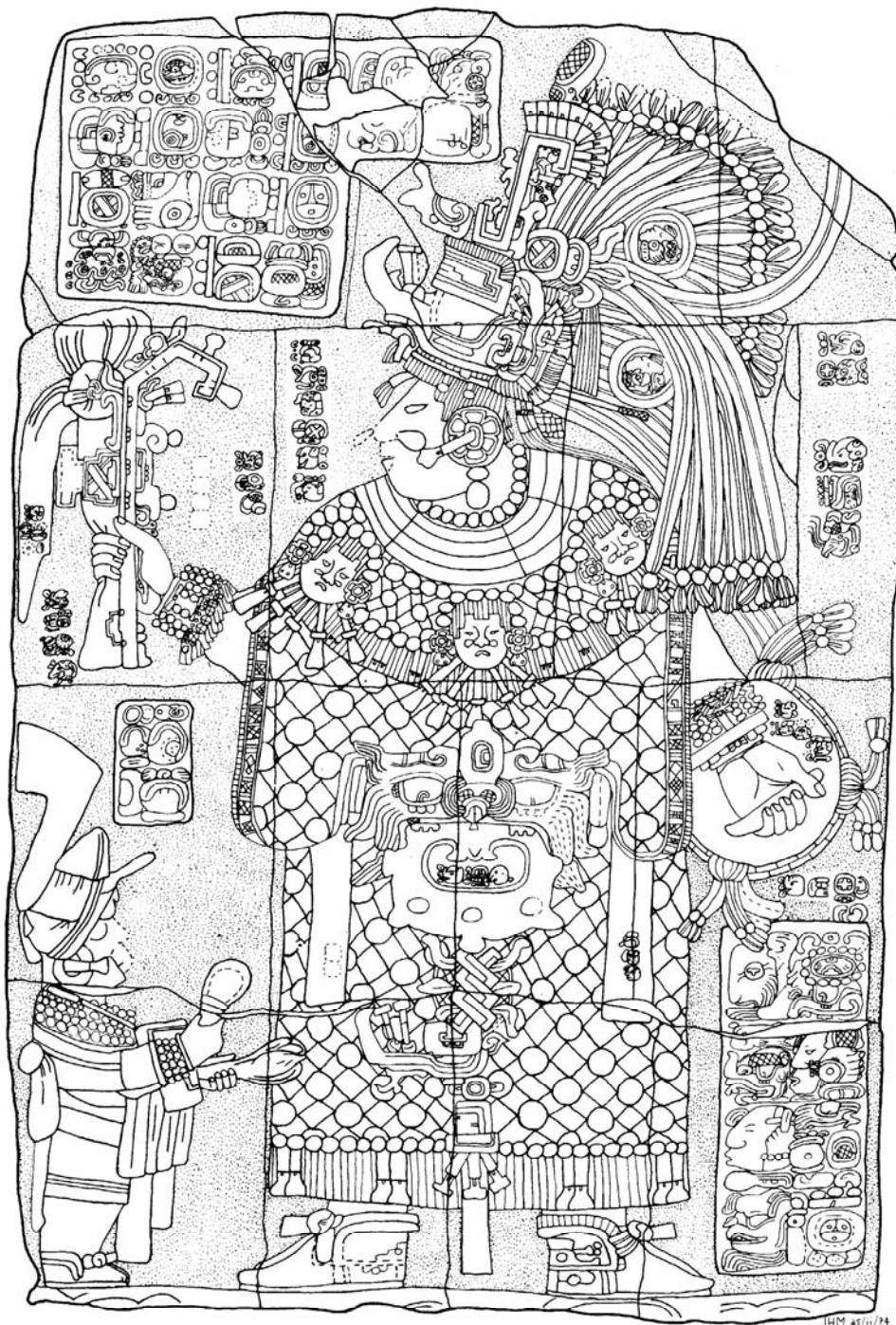


Figure 5.21: The Cleveland Stela 34 from El Peru-Waka, Guatemala depicts the Snake warrior queen Ix K'abel (from Miller 1974: 151).



Figure 5.22: Ix Ka'bel wearing jade wrist cuffs, collar, and necklace while holding God K (photo from Schele and Miller 1986: 85).



Figure 5.23: The sarcophagus portrait of Palenque, Mexico's queen Ix Yohl Ik'nal in jade net attire (drawing from Hewitt 1999: 254).



Figure 5.24: Oval Palace Tablet portrait of Ix Sak K'uk presenting the *ko'haw* war helmet to her son Janab Pakal I at Palenque, Mexico (drawing from Hewitt 1999: 255).



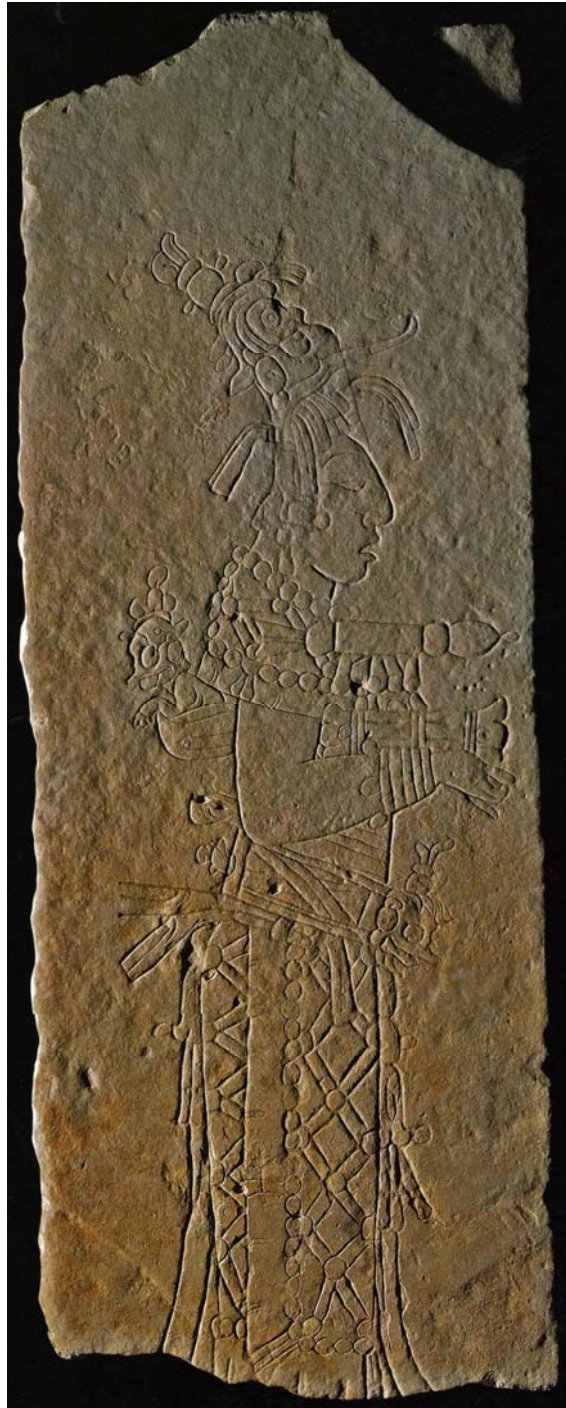


Figure 5.25: Originally set within a doorway of a temple this panel from Xupa, Mexico may depict a prominent woman from Palenque (photo in Miller and Martin 2004: 105).

Inscriptions found on a panel associated with the site of Piedras Negras, also describes the arrival of a *Kaan* lord in A.D. 685 to perform a ritual associated with the *ko'haw* war helmet belonging to Ruler 2. The same text reveals that the following year Ix K'atun Ajaw "arrives" and two days later Ruler 2 "enters the water" - a euphemistic phrase signaling death. According to Martin and Grube (2008: 145), although its significance is unknown the marriage of Ix K'atun and Yo'nal Ahk II (Ruler 2's son) was one the most celebrated marriages in Maya history. Her exalted status at Piedras Negras is reflected on the three monuments Stelae 1, 2, and 3. Stela 3 (Fig. 5.25) depicts the prominence of both Ix K'atun and her three year old daughter Ix Huntahn Ahk (ibid: 147). The Late Classic emphasis on the importance of the matriline at Piedras Negras is evident on Stela 40 (Fig. 5.26) from A.D. 746 which depicts Ruler 4 scattering incense into the tomb of his female ancestor who is shown with the distinctive jade net collar emerging from the offerings (ibid: 149).

Another Late Classic monument that emphasizes the importance of the matriline in the inheritance of *Kaan* religious titles is the Dallas Altar. As mentioned earlier the Dallas Altar depicts the celebration of the period ending date of A.D. 731 (see Fig. 5.7) by recalling the arrival events of three high ranking women affiliated with the *Kaan* or Snake emblem glyph. Only two of the three women were depicted on the panel. The figure on the viewer's right represents Ix Naah Ek' the first *kaloonte'* Snake woman to arrive at Sak Nikte' in A.D. 520 with the ritual and martial regalia that linked her to Teotihuacan. The third Snake woman to arrive in A.D. 721 was the *kaloonte'*, Ix Ti' and the figure depicted on the viewer's left. She wears a jade net skirt and stands underneath

a watery serpent that has been linked to the place of the Maize God's rebirth (Freidel and Guenter 2003: 2) that Taube (2004, 2006, 2011) points out is associated with Flower Mountain. Only one of the three women was married to a local lord; the other two women had Kaan lord husbands. This implies that Snake women had social roles outside of biological reproduction. In addition, the parentage statements found in the glyphic texts accompanying the Dallas Altar only list the names of the Snake women's mothers rather than the names of their fathers (Freidel and Guenter 2003: 2).<sup>44</sup>

Additional epigraphic information that might shed light on the nature of Classic period pilgrimage is Panel 3 from Cancuen. Composed of 160 glyphic blocks the panel describes a dynastic tale that spans from A.D. 652-799. It involves a Kaan lord who arrives in A.D. 652 to preside over an unknown event. On December 9, 656 the Kaan lord returns to oversee the accession of a Cancuen ruler. The text describes that on December 9, 656 the ruler of Cancuen arrives at Makan Witz. From here the ruler travels, accompanied by another Kaan lord, to a place described by four expressions in couplet form. The first two expressions are unclear but Finamore and Houston (2010: 201) translate the last two expressions as, "within inside the pool, the 3 turtle island, within/inside the heart of the turtle." Finamore and Houston (*ibid*) speculate that the Cancuen ruler went on a pilgrimage to the sea possibly to a site located near the eastern shores of the Caribbean.

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<sup>44</sup> Martin (2008) argues that it is problematic to view the Snake women as being married to Kaan lords outside the La Corona polity and problematic to have an isolated statement of female descent. His argument rests on equating an un-deciphered glyph (a human head framed by water lily vegetation) with T831 which might in his view allow for an unusual child-of-father statement. This would mean the Kaan lords were fathers rather than husbands and we could infer that the additional two Snake women were actually wives of the La Corona lords. That way the Dallas Altar would make more sense as "a record of exogamous marriage ties between a dominant polity and its subordinate spanning two centuries" (*ibid*: 8).



Figure 5.26: Bottom half of Piedras Negras' Stela 3 illustrating Ix K'atun and her three year old daughter Ix Huntahn Ahk (from Martin and Grube 2008: 147).

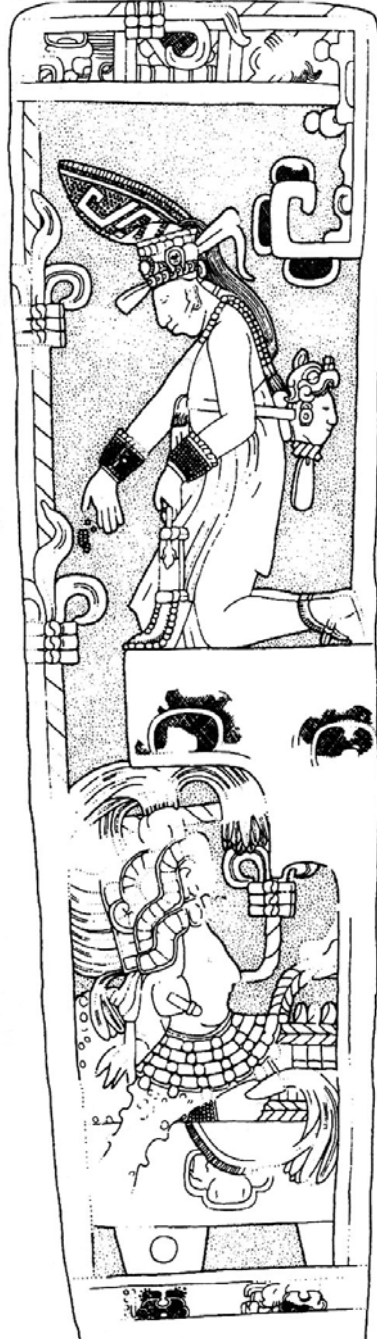


Figure 5.27: Stela 40 from Piedras Negras, Mexico depicting Ruler 4 scattering incense into the tomb of a female ancestor who is shown wearing the jade net collar (drawing from Martin and Grube 2008: 149).

## **Pilgrimage and Politics in the Late Classic Period**

The large number of prominent royal men and women associated with the Kaan emblem glyph title indicates that this important religious affiliation/place operated in a manner similar to or in conjunction with Teotihuacan and may have been its cooperative/competing equivalent in the Maya region. The religious journeys of royal men and women in epigraphic texts often occurred after the arrival of the Kaan lords. Some arrival events accompanied the death of the previous ruling leader or lineage or the ruling lineage underwent a conversion involving pilgrimage either to Teotihuacan or to an equivalent Maya site. This indicates that the militaristic “messianic vigor” often associated with the Epiclassic Quetzalcoatl Feathered Serpent Cult (i.e. Ringle et al. 1998) was actually a tradition that began much earlier in the Early Classic period (as acknowledged in Ringle 2004) and that this tradition also used the snake as a symbolic icon of religious importance. Royal women whose dynastic legitimacy rested on religious affiliation did more than just provide heirs; they wielded social and political power and were prominent actors in the affairs of religion, governance and warfare. In the Late Classic period the link to female ancestors associated with pilgrimage locales became an extremely important political statement for their descendants to make and a mechanism for contemporaneous elite women to acquire status and power. This would explain the overwhelming importance surrounding women and arrival events, why they became vital to dynastic conversations connected to warfare and wealth, and why religious journeys received monumental expression during ceremonies associated with calendrical period ending dates. Royal women in the Classic period gained a great deal

of prestige through titles received at pilgrimage sites but presumably lost the right to choose their marriage partners and the right to live within their natal communities.<sup>45</sup> Not all arrival events were linked to dynastic origins and may also relate to rituals involving witnessing or scattering<sup>46</sup> at calendrical events at sites linked through this pilgrimage network. Both lineage (see Stuart 2005) and rituals related to war increased in importance during the Late Classic period as warfare became the primary means for acquiring wealth and lineage became the primary means for inheriting it. Prominent religious centers were deeply involved in regional politics relating to warfare and dynastic succession and may have also retained warriors that fought on their behalf.<sup>47</sup> Rulers descended from the women who first participated (or were coerced to participate) in this pilgrimage cult inherited an intra-polity religious and commercial network that linked them to wider fields of economic and political power. The Kaan title seems to have given representational priority to the political and religious power of women (see Chase et al 2002, Haviland 1997, Reese-Taylor et al. 2009: 64-65) which favored royal and non-royal women living in the Northern lowlands and along the Usumacinta River drainage region where royal women, in situations not always of their choosing, acquired some of the highest positions of religious, political and military power in Classic Maya society.

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<sup>45</sup> Of course notable exceptions include the Copan and Palenque queens.

<sup>46</sup> Scattering events involved the sprinkling/scattering of either incense or blood.

<sup>47</sup> Two members of Palenque's royal court died when the Kaan lords arrived at Palenque in A.D. 611 (Stuart and Stuart 2008) indicating that some degree of martial force accompanied such arrivals.

## **Chapter 6: Pilgrimage, Politics and Gender in Yucatan and Veracruz**

In the Early Classic period the leaders of Teotihuacan acquired an enormous amount of wealth sanctioning the ideology of rulership and warfare in other parts of Mesoamerica and that wealth and surplus labor were put to use building one of the largest cities in the ancient world. Archaeological data in the form of Teotihuacan-style residential architecture as well as Mexican iconography on artifacts and in monumental contexts recovered from both Yucatan and the Veracruz regions indicate that pilgrimage relations and interactions with this Central Mexican city were far-reaching and complex. Teotihuacan influence can be discerned at the early Puuc centers in Yucatan such as Chac II and Oxkintok as well as at sites along the coastal plains such as Chunchucmil, Dzibilchaltun, and Xcambo. Teotihuacan imagery found at Early Classic eastern coastal sites such as Acanceh, and Xel-ha also indicate social and religious links between Yucatan and Central Mexico (Miller 1982, Smyth and Rogart 2004). As with other regions of Mesoamerica, the nature of interaction between Teotihuacan and Veracruz remains controversial with some archaeological interpretations arguing for Teotihuacan economic domination (Stantley 1989), while other archaeological narratives viewing stylistic similarities between regions as more indicative of local elite emulation (Stark and Curet 1994).

Teotihuacan's power and influence ceased abruptly at the close of the 7<sup>th</sup> century and this chapter explores the repercussions of such an event in the Yucatan and Veracruz regions. In the 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Snake royal title in Yucatan may have been



associated with Maya kings and queens who accompany other leaders and the elite on pilgrimage journeys, who had the religious authority to attest that the “proper” rituals were conducted through witnessing and scattering, who conjured deities and ancestors, and who performed the duties associated with the Mesoamerican ballgame. Yet in stark contrast to Teotihuacan as a primary religious center, we do not know if the main sign of the Kaan emblem glyph refers to a religious organization or an actual site let alone one of significant proportion. However, perhaps after the decline of Teotihuacan, the plans for such a city were in process because by the ninth century Chichén Itzá seems to be the primary place in Yucatan linked to pilgrimage and religious specialists.

### **Chichén Itzá**

Ever since Charnay (1885, 1887) and Seler (1898) first noticed that the architecture from Chichén Itzá in Yucatan resembled buildings at Tula in Hidalgo Central Mexico, the history of this city has been a point of archaeological contention. Although a number of models were proposed to account for similarities between Tula and Chichén Itzá, one of the most enduring explanations considered was the “migration, invasion, and conquest” model (See Cobos 2006: 175-177). This model proposed that warriors from Tula conquered and colonized Chichén Itzá and were responsible for the site’s apogee in the tenth and eleventh centuries during the Early Postclassic period (A.D. 900-1200). Scholars privileged sixteenth and seventeenth century ethnohistoric texts to argue that an exiled Toltec priest king named Ce Acatl Topiltzin-Quetzalcoatl left Tula, Hidalgo and migrated east with his followers to the Gulf Coast and then on to Yucatan

(Andrews and Robles Castellanos 1985). Since several colonial documents mentioned a conqueror that arrived at Chichén Itzá from the west by the name of K'uk'ulkan, a Mayan name for Quetzalcoatl or the Feathered Serpent, researchers felt they had sufficient proof to substantiate a Toltec invasion of this site. In addition, archaeologists divided the site into sequential and non-overlapping cultural phases reflective of this model. Old Chichén represented an earlier literate Maya culture characterized by Puuc architecture and Cehpech ceramics while New Chichén denoted Toltec architecture, which lacked hieroglyphic inscriptions, and supported Sotuta ceramics (See Ball 1979, Robles Castellanos 1990, Lincoln 1986, Tozzer 1941, 1957). This model also argued that Toltec domination included the distribution of Silho Fine Orange and Tohil Plumbate vessels to Chichén Itzá which were common items found at both sites (Cobos 2006: 180). However, data recovered from the last three decades of archaeological research contradicts this popular model.

Scholars such as Brinton (1887), Seler (1898, 1923), Kubler (1961), and Proskouriakoff (1950) had always questioned the Central Mexican direction of cultural influence regarding the relationship between Tula and Chichén Itzá by pointing to the evidence that many traits linked to Toltec domination actually had Maya precedents.<sup>1</sup> A model favoring “local development” emerged with Maldonado and Kurjack’s (1993) argument that architectural similarities between Chichén Itzá and Tula reflected contact rather than conflict particularly since many of the distinctive Toltec structures and

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<sup>1</sup> Despite the co-presence of Maya and Mexican elements at roughly the same time, Taube (1994) interprets the evidence as indicating Tula influenced the direction of Chichen Itza’s iconography because many elements of the city’s monumental imagery can be found in the iconography of Early Postclassic Tula and within the monuments of the Late Postclassic Aztec region.

artifacts seemed widespread in Mesoamerica prior to their appearance at Tula or Chichén Itzá. Additionally the point of origin for Tohil Plumbate and Silho Fine Orange ceramics had also been sourced to the Maya region of the Pacific coastal plains of Guatemala and the lower Usumacinta River region (Cobos 2006). The reanalysis of Chichén Itzá's ceramics not only indicated that Sotuta pottery reflected the work of Maya potters but that considerable overlap existed between the Cehpech and Sotuta ceramic spheres (Andrews V 1979, Andrews V and Sabloff 1986; Ball 1979, Lincoln 1986, Sabloff 1990). The final blow to the "migration, invasion, conquest" model came with subsequent revisions to the chronology of the northern Maya lowlands which pushed the apogee of Chichén Itzá back into the Terminal Classic (A.D. 800-1000) period prior to the apogee of Tula (Andrews et al. 2003, Cobos 2006, Cohodas 1989).

Another equally contentious topic concerning Chichén Itzá was the nature of its political system. Was it ruled by a *multepal* or joint council, a pair of high ranking lords, or did a central monarch assume power? Monuments with inscriptions and Tun Ajaw<sup>2</sup> dates at Chichén Itzá and the nearby sites of Yula and Halakal only covered a period of sixty years (possibly hundred and twenty years if we accept the later date for the *Osario*) with a majority of the inscriptions dating from A.D. 832 to 897<sup>3</sup>. However, the idea that the rulers of Chichén Itzá governed jointly began with Kelley's (1982) proposal that the

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<sup>2</sup> Time is measured through the "Yucatecan Method," (See Thompson 1937, 1950) which counts only the *Tun* and the *K'atun*. According to Graña-Behrens (2006: 107), "It shares the name and some features of the same day *Tzolk'in* in *Ajaw* but relies on distinctive additional glyphs and on a different syntax." One exception is Chichén Itzá's Initial Series Lintel which records a Long Count date (see Cobos 2007: 327).

<sup>3</sup> A disputed *Tun Ajaw* date reported on Structure 3C1, also known as the *Osario* or High Priest's grave, has been read as A.D. 998 (Thompson 1938, Graña-Behrens et al. 1999: 65), A.D. 842 (Schele and Freidel 1990: 500 n. 26), and A.D. 894 (Wagner 1995).

*y-itaaj* or the “serpent-segment” hieroglyph, found in association with Chichén Itzá nominal phrases, denoted a relational statement. In addition to this glyph, several historical individuals appeared in the inscriptions with names that were deciphered as K’ak’upakal K’awiil<sup>4</sup> and K’inil Kopol. Kelley (1982) pointed out that Landa in Tozzer (1941: 21, 24, 267) listed the name K’ak’upakal as an important personage associated with Chichén Itzá. He was mentioned in a number of colonial documents<sup>5</sup> as the conqueror of Izamal and the founder of the Postclassic city of Mayapan. In 1988 David Stuart circulated an unpublished letter proposing that the “serpent-segment” glyph might represent “sibling” particularly since Fr. Diego de Landa had mentioned that three brothers had ruled at Chichén Itzá and at Mayapan. The “sibling” glyph seemed to fit the situation perfectly and since the colonial documents had noted that the lords of Mayapan had shared power, the idea of a *multepal*<sup>6</sup> government at Chichén Itzá gained momentum (Grube and Krochock 2007: 220, see also Schele and Freidel 1990).

Yet, recent models regarding the political situation at Chichén Itzá argue against the establishment of a *multepal* government at this site. First, recent decipherments of the *y-itaaj* glyph reveal that it refers to a special title related to witnessing or overseeing certain events with other individuals (See Cobos 2007: 319, Houston et al. 2000: 335, Stuart 2000:483, Stuart et al. 1999: 196-198, Wren 1994). Since this definition of the *y-itaaj* glyph makes it clear that it does not define a consanguine relation in addition to the

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<sup>4</sup> Fire is the Shield of K’awiil

<sup>5</sup> *Relaciones de Citilcum y Cabiche, Kizil y Sitilpech, Tekantó y Tepakán, Motul, Izamal y Santa Maria* in Cobos (2007: 319-320).

<sup>6</sup> Joint rule

findings that many of the individual sibling sets as proposed by Schele and Freidel (1990) denoted deities rather than historical figures in recent epigraphic analyses (Grube and Krochock 2007), the *multepal* hypothesis has been largely discredited. Another popular model for Chichén Itzá's political configuration based largely on iconographic studies and ethnohistoric documents proposed a form of dual rulership at this site. Lincoln (1990) noted that two icons associated with a sun disk and a Feathered Serpent kept reappearing in the imagery at Chichén Itzá. Lincoln equated the newly deciphered name of K'ak'upakal to "Captain Sun Disk" (see also Miller 1977) and paired him with K'uk'ulkan from the colonial documents that he designated "Captain Serpent" and postulated that they ruled jointly in manner similar to the Aztec *Huey Tlatoani* and *Cihuacoatl* or the *Acquiach* and *Tlalquiach* known from Rojas (1927[1581]) account of the principle lords at Cholula. Recent arguments concerning the political nature of Chichén Itzá emphasize that K'ak'upakal is one of the few individuals of historical certitude in the inscriptions and that he must be the paramount ruler of this site (Garcia Campillo 2001, Kowalski 2007, and Grube and Krochock 2007) which would indicate Chichén Itzá employed a form of centralized rulership much more in common with the Late Classic Maya polities of the southern and northern lowlands and thus much more in line with a model of "local development."

## **A Model of Terminal Classic<sup>7</sup> and Postclassic Pilgrimage**

In response to the revised chronology of Chichén Itzá that positioned the site in relation to the Late-Terminal Classic centers of Yucatan, Ringle and colleagues (1998) proposed a pilgrimage based model to account for the similarities in architectural and art styles between Chichén Itzá, Tula and a network of related Epiclassic<sup>8</sup> centers in the Gulf Coast, Puebla and Morelos. This temporal period is often characterized as a period of political fragmentation (ibid: 183) brought about by the demise of Teotihuacan but it is also the period when many cultural traits were shared across political and ethnic boundaries. They (ibid: 184) proposed, “that a quite specific mechanism was responsible for these commonalities, the spread of a regional cult focused upon Quetzalcoatl/K’uk’ulkan in his aspect as Feathered Serpent, as Venus, as wind god, and as patron of merchants and leaders.” Yet in a later publication Ringle (2004: 214) noted that this cult began much earlier and could be discerned in the “arrival of strangers” to the Maya lowlands. What changed in the Epiclassic period was the proliferation of multiple centers claiming the role of a Tollan. According to Ringle (2004, 2009) one of the major roles for such sites was to serve as locations for rituals of investiture regarding kingly and elite authority. Ringle and colleagues (1998) put forth a pilgrimage model for the sharing of cultural traits across multiple sites in reaction to their dissatisfaction with models that

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<sup>7</sup> Mayanists do not agree on the events that transpired during the Terminal Classic period (A.D. 800-1000). One of the reasons why archaeologists assigned the final occupation Chichén Itzá to this temporal period is to emphasize the connections between events and circumstances occurring in the northern and southern lowlands.

<sup>8</sup> The temporal period under consideration (A.D. 700 – 950) is also known as the Late Classic and Terminal Classic.

explained such particularities of the archaeological record as “elite emulation” or arising from the result of trade and conquest. In addition they also wanted to account for the discrepancies and contradictions found in ethnohistoric documents. For example, Fr. Bartolomé de Las Casas (1967: Bk. 3, ch. 122) insisted that K’uk’ulkan, the historical personage, had travelled from Yucatan to Central Mexico where he was renamed Quetzalcoatl, in contrast to Fr. Juan de Torquemada (1975[1615]: Bk. 6, ch. 24) who argued that it was Quetzalcoatl who had first journeyed from Central Mexico to Yucatan (see Gillespie 2007: 90), Ringle and colleagues (1998: 189) felt these conflicting ethnohistoric reports would make much more sense if we interpreted Quetzalcoatl figures as different priests who served the same Quetzalcoatl cult.

In addition, the authors’ points out that a network of major shrines participated in this cult and that it cut across ethnic and political traditions and was the basis for Postclassic Toltec and International art styles found at numerous sites (Fig. 6.1). One of the cult’s main characteristics was its “aggressive militaristic proselytism” which could be corroborated in the native histories of the Mixtec. In addition, archaeological and iconographic evidence also indicated that the Feathered Serpent cult spread to sites in Veracruz, Puebla, Tlaxcala, and Morelos and may account for Maya art conventions and Feathered Serpent imagery found at sites to the north including Cacaxtla, Xochicalco, Cholula, Maltrata and El Tajin. Additional material correlates corresponding to this pilgrimage network complex consisted of 1) calendrical symbolism in architecture 2) friezes with interlocking scrolls and serpentine motifs 3) Venus imagery and War Serpent headdresses 4) Tlaloc imagery and use of the Mexican Year Sign 5) imagery related to

human sacrifice and the Mesoamerican ball game 6) the pairing of Feathered Serpent and solar imagery with rituals relating to water and/or pulque 7) a distinct *incensario* ceramic complex 8) a distinct ritual ceramic complex consisting of Peto Cream, Tohil Plumbate and Silho Fine Orange wares (ibid: 190-227) and 9) bird imagery and dances (Ringle 2004: 193). The only problem with this model is that it manages to erase the important role that women played in constructing and maintaining this cult.

One of the major problems with a feathered serpent pilgrimage model that uses the colonial “Quetzalcoatl” terminology is that it comes with a number of erroneous assumptions that occur when archaeological and ethnohistoric data are treated as dependent rather than independent sources of information (see Gillespie 2007: 88). The Spanish missionaries were fascinated by Mexican accounts of a priest king who was also a god who proselytized his return particularly when associations could be made between

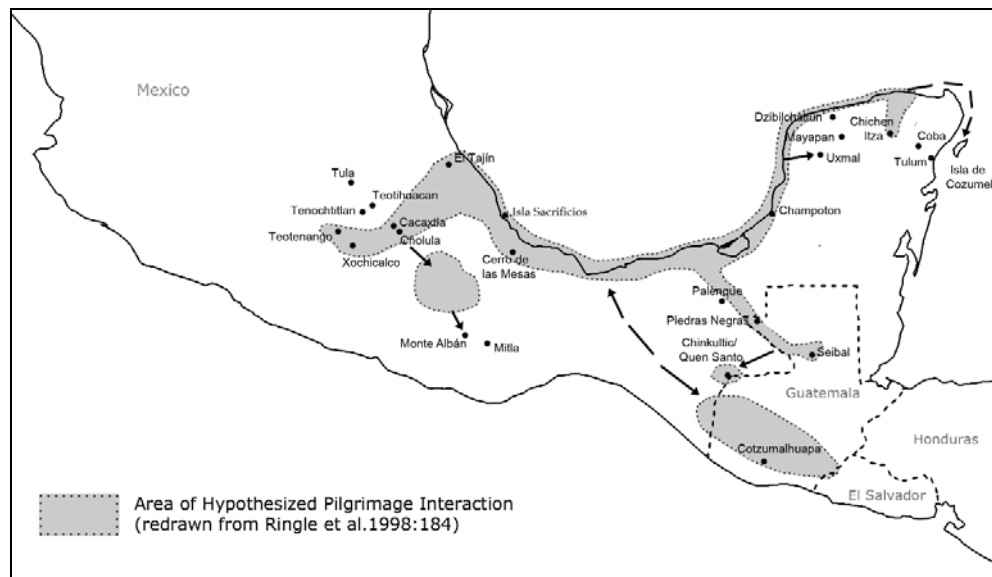


Figure 6.1: Map of Mesoamerican pilgrimage interaction in Epiclassic and Postclassic periods.



Quetzalcoatl, bearded white men, Cortes, and the arrival of the Spaniards. Some friars promoted the idea that Quetzalcoatl/K'uk'ulkan could be an early apostle of Christ so they took great care to assign white features to him (ibid: 90) and note his objections to human sacrifice. In colonial Spanish documents Quetzalcoatl is always thought to be an important historical male god personage rather than a deity or path providing access to one's ancestors and that colonial assumption has influenced subsequent archaeological arguments regarding Feathered Serpent pilgrimage as the primary domain of male kings and merchants.

### **Gender Relations and the Feathered Serpent Cult in the Terminal Classic**

At some point in the history of Maya studies the idea that women only gained visibility or power during times of crisis or transition became a popular narrative regarding gender relations. Schele and Miller (1986: 143) argued that the inclusion of women on “major monuments, stone lintels, Stelae and mural paintings must be noted but interpreted with caution,” while Fash (1991), Fox and Juteson (1986), Carmack, Gassco, and Gossen (1995) all assigned such representations to transitional times in state-level politics.<sup>9</sup> The implicit assumption in the Maya region is that women acquired power only as society was collapsing. Once the state reverted to a period of stability, men were back in charge. This viewpoint still survives in more recent publications regarding ancient Maya women. For example, in their discussion of the lives of Classic period Maya

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<sup>9</sup> The extent to which this view also derives from western biases found in Engels analysis of women and the state will be discussed in the final chapter.

women who were members of royal courts, Miller and Martin (2004: 94) imply that the appearance of women on late Classic Maya monuments was a brief phenomenon pertaining to the Classic period collapse,<sup>10</sup>

If the brief appearance of women in the spotlight reflects special social circumstance of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, then their disappearance just as surely indicates that a new epoch had been ushered in. With few exceptions, depictions of women disappear in the 9<sup>th</sup> century to be replaced by images of armed men (Plate 107).

Plate 107 contains a picture of a carved Stela from the Usumacinta River region that dates to AD 864. The central image is of a presumed warrior but he holds a folded book and wears shells associated with dance events. The text describes that this central character had died the previous year and was a *sajal*<sup>11</sup> for the ruler of Sak Tz'i'. The young scribe who dedicated the monument for the deceased also included his parentage statement which only mentioned his mother Ix K'ina' or Lady Sun Water (ibid: 191). What Miller and Martin (2004) leave out in their assessment regarding the "special social circumstance" pertaining to women in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> century is that the majority of readable inscriptions on Maya monuments date to this time frame raising the visibility of everyone who held noble titles (see Jackson 2005, Fig. 3.9). Despite the change in political and social relations in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, women did not disappear from public

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<sup>10</sup> One of the points of contention among Mayanists is whether the cessation of monumental dynastic construction that typically only benefits a small minority of the population actually constitutes a societal collapse (See McAnany and Gallareta Negrón 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Magnate (Houston and Inomata 2009). *Sajal* is a noble and sometimes non-noble title whose specific meaning is unknown but generally considered to be of subordinate rank (Montgomery 2002: 213).

media or office and I would argue in the pages to follow that their “appearance in the spotlight” continued into the Postclassic period.

### Maya Inscriptions at Chichén Itzá

There are a couple of points to be made regarding the inscriptions at Chichén Itzá. First, as Grube and Krochock (2007: 220) point out only a few of the nominal inscription phrases found at Chichén Itzá actually represent historical human beings. Second, the most significant historical inscriptions concerned parentage statements that privileged female descent (Krochock 2002). Two of the most mentioned individuals at Chichén Itzá in the inscriptions were K’ak’upakal K’awiil<sup>12</sup> and K’inil Kopol whose parentage statements demonstrate that they had inherited their titles and power from their mother Ix K’ayam<sup>13</sup> and their maternal grandmother<sup>14</sup> Ix “Penis<sup>15</sup>”-na (Grube and Krochock 2007: 222). Both K’inil Kopol and K’ak’upakal K’awiil inherited the *k’uhul* “Penis” title an important distinction associated with these individuals. The inscriptions demonstrate a different system of parentage statements from southern lowland conventions in deemphasizing paternal and stressing maternal descent (Grube 1994: 325-326; Krochock 2002; Grube and Krochock 2007: 222). As Grube and Krochock (2007: 223-224) explain,

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<sup>12</sup> Fire is the Shield of K’awiil

<sup>13</sup> Lady Singer

<sup>14</sup> According to sixteenth century colonial documents, the Maya of northern Yucatan reckoned lineage through double descent. Individuals inherited names from their fathers and their mothers. Yet in contrast to the Spanish system of descent where individuals inherit last names from both parents and the matronym is the patronym of the mother’s father, the matronym in the northern Maya system of descent was the matronym of the mother’s mother (Gillespie 1989, Krochock 2002, Restall 1997).

<sup>15</sup> The significance or meaning of the “Penis” main sign has eluded decipherment (Grube and Krochock 2007: 222).

The evidence for problems with political legitimacy of the male descendants can be found in the pattern of parentage statements in Chichén Itzá inscriptions. Here we find the mothers of individuals clearly named in the traditional Classic way with “child-of mother” and “mother of” expressions. The fathers, however are identified in more oblique ways such as with the *u kit* or “patron of” expression or simply by juxtaposition to the mother’s name, but not with the traditional “child-of-father” hieroglyphics. This suggests that for the purposes of political legitimacy, documenting descent through the female line is most important.

This could indicate that certain titles of religious lineage or elite authority in Terminal Classic period Yucatan could only be passed down through the matriline. Grube, Lacadena, and Martin (2003: II-4) point out the lack of “child of father” glyphs in parentage statements is characteristic of inscriptions in the Yucatan in general and propose that matrilineal descent may have been more important in this region.

The third point to be made regarding the inscriptions at Chichén Itzá is that there is a conscious move to establish an identity that is different from Southern lowland traditions first by turning away from earlier linguistic conventions by introducing linguistic forms closer to the Yucatec language rather than the Classic hieroglyphic language of Cholan origin (ibid: 215) and second, by focusing primarily on ritual activities (as opposed to dynastic activities) associated with building dedication, fire drillings, the conjuring of visions, and autosacrifice. Scholars see the epigraphic florescence of Chichén Itzá as the result of a single person rule rather than a long sequence of dynasts, which is a pattern that is found at other Terminal Classic sites such as Uxmal, Dzibilchaltun, and Seibal. Both Boot and Stuart (see Boot 2005) made clear that many of the inscriptions at Chichén Itzá refer to gods who were the possessors of ritual fires. While the relationship between the gods and the ritual fires is not entirely

clear, these entities were referred to by a title that was followed by *u k'aba'k'uh*, “is the name of the god” (ibid). On the Casa Colorada Glyph band one of the deities is referred to as *ya-Yax-u-k'u-K'UK'UM (?) k'a-wi-la* or “green is the feather of K'awiil.” A group of deities associated with the term *CHAN-na-la K'UH* or “sky god” included *YAX-HA'AL-la CHAAK-ki*, “Chaak is the First Rain” or “Chaak is the Blue Rain,” as well as the deity *cho-cho-yo-ko-pu-yu* that might signify an avian deity known by the enigmatic title, “The Intestines at the Foot of the Nighthawk.” However, the most mentioned supernatural addressed in the inscriptions concerning sky gods was *ya-YAX-pe?-che-ka-na* (Fig. 6.2) a serpent deity (Grube and Krochock 2007: 229-230). The first part of the serpent deity’s name has not been entirely deciphered. Besides the *yayax* or “green/blue” Grube and Krochock (ibid: 233) note that the glyph in question consists of a rabbit’s head whose reading as *pe* and the syllable *che* remains opaque. However they (ibid) speculate that this serpent deity may be related to the water lily serpent who was pictured as the head variant of the numeral 13 and was connected in some way to the serpent god of wind known by the Postclassic Central Mexican name, Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl (see Taube 1992b: 63).



Figure 6.2: *Yayax Pech Kan* (*ya-YAX-pe?-che-ka-na*) is the name of a serpent deity at Chichén Itzá (drawing from Grube and Krochock 2007: 232).

### Iconographic Themes at Chichén Itzá

Evidence that Classic period Snake religious specialists may have been associated with this site comes from architectural, sculptural, and iconographic contexts. Freidel (2000, 2007: 363) calls attention to the homophonic relationship between the glyphs *k'aan* (precious, the color yellow) *ka'an* (sky), *kaan* (snake and the number four), *k'aan* (cordage) and the iconography of snakes and twisted cords at Chichén Itzá and Uxmal. Freidel (2007: 364) describes the Castillo at Chichén Itzá with its serpent balustrades as a *kaan witz* (Snake Mountain) and a *k'aan witz* (Precious Mountain) arguing that such symbols reflected Maya religious views that had been around since the Late Preclassic and did not signal the adoption of Mexican Quetzalcoatl mythology. Yet Taube (personal communication) points out, that images of the feathered serpent at Chichén Itzá are iconographically more similar to depictions of the feathered serpent at Teotihuacan than they are to examples of the feathered serpent found in the Classic Maya region.

Iconographic evidence from Chichén Itzá suggests that Snake priests and priestesses wearing a variant of the jade net skirt and collar, conjured visions and participated in images of religious processions found at this site. A figure in a jade net skirt is seen reclining while conjuring a vision of a flowering landscape on the north wall of the North Temple of the Great Ball Court (Fig. 6.3). Another example is the priestess wearing a jade net skirt with a serpent vision like figure in the background on the Lower Temple of the Jaguars piers (Fig. 6.4). In addition to the jade net skirt, a skirt associated with crossed long bones appears on women figures depicted on the South Arch of the North Ballcourt Temple (Fig 6.5). An additional example includes the figure wearing a

crossed long bones skirt in association with the skull mask on the Lower Temple of the Jaguars north entrance column (Fig. 6.6). The skull mask may suggest a funerary component to ritual at this site.<sup>16</sup> One of the interior reliefs found on the Lower Temple of the Jaguars, which indicates the prominence of snake religious specialists at Chichén Itzá is the central female figure (Wren et al. 2001: 269) wearing a snake skirt and carrying war implements (Fig. 6.7).

One of the features of the Feathered Serpent Cult not accounted for in the pilgrimage model as explained by Ringle and colleagues (1998; see also Ringle 2004, 2009) but convincingly established by Taube (2004, 2010, 2011) is the Feathered Serpent's association with a solar warrior funerary cult linked to Flower Mountain. At Castillo Viejo<sup>17</sup> Chichén Itzá researchers recently discovered nine additional inscriptions on Castillo Viejo's west jamb in addition to the one that Proskouriakoff first discussed in a 1970 publication.<sup>18</sup> All ten texts from the pillars and jambs supporting this temple repeated the same phrase, "it is the image of the flowers of the ancestors"<sup>19</sup> of 12 (*lajchan*) *Ak'bal*, 'Bone-nose'<sup>20</sup>, ' *Ch'ajoom Ajaw*' and were written under images of flowering

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<sup>16</sup> See Stone (1999) and Wren et al. (2001) for alternative readings of these figures as Goddess O or Goddess O impersonators and Coggins (1984) argument that reclining figures in jade net skirts depict the Earth Goddess.

<sup>17</sup> This structure is associated with the Principal Group of the Southwest

<sup>18</sup> On Two Inscriptions at Chichén Itzá. *Papers of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University*, Vol. 61, Pt. V, No. 2. Monographs and Papers in Maya Archaeology, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology.

<sup>19</sup> While Schmidt et al (2008) reads *U ma-ma* or *u mam* as "grandfather," Stuart (2007: 14) demonstrated that *mam* most likely refers to the more generic reading of "ancestors."

<sup>20</sup> This glyph has eluded decipherment.

vines that supported bird imagery (Schmidt et al. 2008: 2-3). Here we see the use of a calendar day name<sup>21</sup>, followed by the title “Bone-nose<sup>22</sup>,” and another title *Ch’ajoom Ajaw* that designates a lord who scatters incense (ibid: 17)<sup>23</sup>. The east jamb from Castillo Viejo also included this phrase under imagery of flowering vines associated with quetzal feathers, birds and butterflies (Taube 2011: 15). Taube (2004: 83-86) points out that while Flower Mountain motifs can be seen in the Terminal Classic architectural facades of Chenes, Río Bec, and Puuc structures in the northern lowlands, the motifs at Chichén Itzá and Uxmal are not limited to just the mosaic facades. At these sites they also appear in association with warrior figures who may be the conjured dead (Fig. 6.8). One of the ways to recognize that the *witz*<sup>24</sup> head facade figures at Chichén Itzá denote Flower Mountain is that they wear a segmental headband with a large central flower on the brow (Fig. 6.9) which is similar to the headband worn by the Maya wind god (ibid: 73). In Classic period art the Maya wind god is often portrayed in relation to conjuring rituals involving music, dancing, singing, and the burning of incense (ibid: 78).

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<sup>21</sup> Although Maya examples exist, the common use of calendar day names was more characteristic of Mesoamericans living to north of the Maya. This example speaks to the social ties that the inhabitants of Chichén Itzá cultivated with non Maya groups to the north.

<sup>22</sup> Grube and Krochock (2007) speculate that the bone nose title might have something to do with the piercing of the septum ritual associated with rulers who visited Cholula.

<sup>23</sup> Both titles were also associated with K’ak’upakal K’awiil (Krochock 1989: Fig. 4).

<sup>24</sup> Mountain





Figure 6.3: A reclining figure in the act of conjuring wears the jade net costume on the north wall of the North Temple of the Great Ball Court of Chichén Itzá (drawing from Wren et al. 2001: 265).

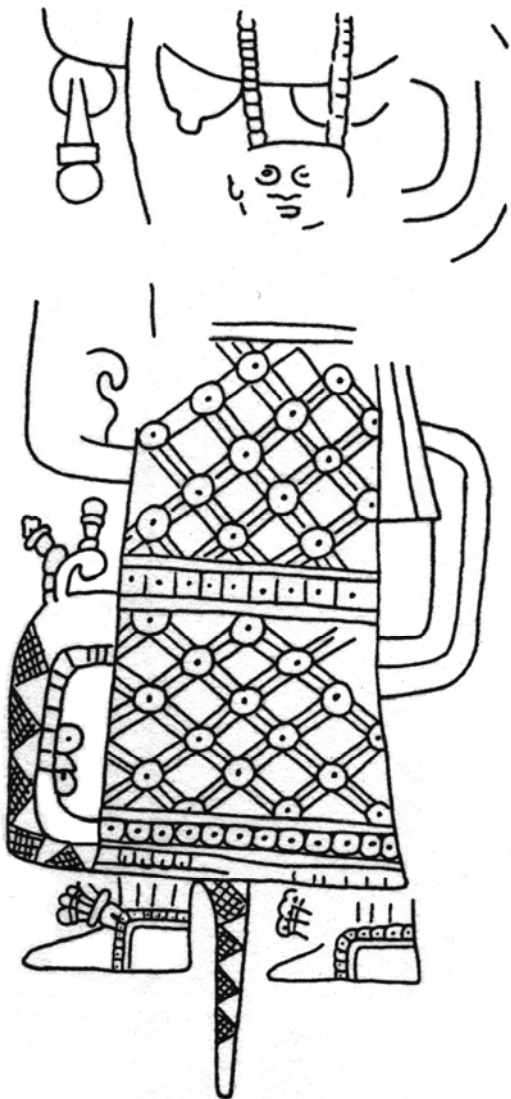


Figure 6.4: Figure with a jade net skirt framed by serpent imagery on the Lower Temple of the Jaguars pier at Chichén Itzá, Mexico (drawing from Stone 1999: 308).

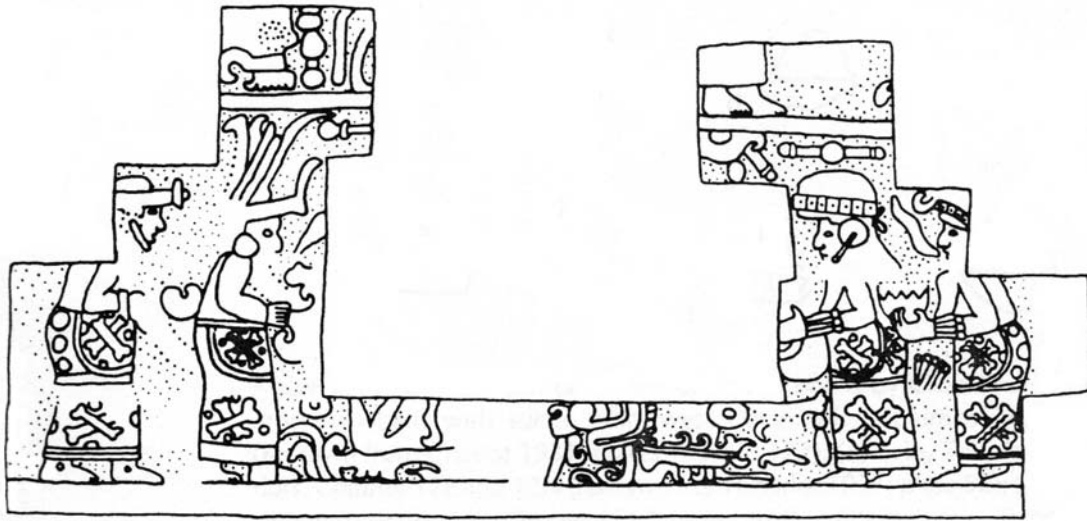


Figure 6.5: Women figures in crossed long bone skirts on the South Arch of the North Ballcourt Temple at Chichén Itzá, Mexico (drawing from Stone 1999: 310).



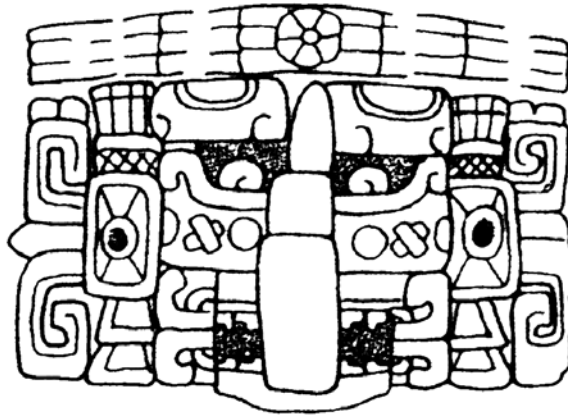
Figure 6.6: Figure with the crossed long bones and disk skirt with skull mask on the Lower Temple of the Jaguars north entrance column at Chichén Itzá, Mexico (drawing from Wren et al. 2001: 269).



Figure 6.7: Prominent figure wearing a snake skirt and carrying war implements from the interior relief of the Lower Temple of the Jaguars at Chichén Itzá, Mexico (drawing from Wren et al. 2001: 270).



Figure 6.8: A deceased warrior figure on top of Flower Mountain from the sculpted piers of Chichén Itzá, Mexico (drawing from Taube 2004: 87).



**Figure 6.9:** The *witz* (mountain) head façade figure denoting Flower Mountain (drawing from Taube 2004: 86).

### **Veracruz Pilgrimage Traditions**

There is a long history of interaction between the Maya, Isthmian and Veracruz peoples beginning with their mutual use of Long Count dates and written hieroglyphs on stelae and altars in the Late Preclassic period. The communities found in the wide geographic belt that Lee Parsons (1969) designated the Peripheral Coastal Lowlands shared iconography, ceramic and sculptural styles. Some of the prominent themes of Late Preclassic Isthmian cults such as imagery related to serpent-winged diving gods and ball court sacrifice increased in importance during the Classic period (Zeitlin 1993: 122). Archaeological investigations of Teotihuacan relations with the central and southern Gulf lowlands have tended to treat stylistic similarities between the regions in terms of Teotihuacan economic and political domination. However, Stark and Curet's (1994: 283) analysis of Classic period settlement patterns in the Mixtequilla a swampy region along the western edge of the lower Papaloapan Basin, found a great deal of continuity between

the Preclassic and Classic period communities which does not support the idea of Teotihuacan political domination. They (ibid: 281) believe the sharing of stylistic traits between regions reflects the borrowing of ideas and the exchange of goods that occur in a more indirect context such as one associated with pilgrimage.

Two archaeological sites that provide evidence that pilgrimage relations involved participating in a snake cult during the Classic period are Cerro de las Mesas and El Zapotal both located in the Mixtequilla. Only 4 km separates these two sites with the Rio Blanco<sup>25</sup> serving as their main thoroughfare (Wyllie 2008: 226). Early Classic period monuments from Cerro de Las Mesas reflect the blending of Teotihuacan, Isthmian and Maya religious traditions (See Miller 1991). Some of the monuments from this site reflect familiar themes associated with Snake religious specialists and a solar afterlife. On Stela 6 (Fig. 6.11) which dates to A.D. 468, a figure faces left wearing an elaborate headdress with a Vision Serpent like image of emerging jaws and a serpent tail that hangs down to the right of the headdress. The figure stands in front of solar motifs with foliage attributes. Another individual on the Early Classic period Stela 5 (Fig. 6.12) is shown atop a *witz* surface. Foliage, vines and a flower extend out from the base of the Stela in a manner similar to the floral base depicted on the monument (Fig. 5.20) portraying Ix Ook Ayiin from the Late Classic Pomoy polity in Chiapas, Mexico. After the fall of Teotihuacan, the Long Count dates were dropped from Stelae at Cerro de Las Mesas in favor of Short Count dates represented by Epi-Olmec day signs in a rectangular cartouche as seen on Stela 15 (Fig. 6.13). This monument like Stela 6 utilizes the disembodied

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<sup>25</sup> The Rio Blanco also lends its name to a Late Classic relief carved ceramics found throughout this region.

hand motif characteristic of earlier Olmec sites and demonstrates continuity with isthmian religious traditions. Stela 6's perspective emphasizes the hand in manner similar to the figure on Stela 1 from Late Classic period Cozumel, Mexico (Fig. 6.14).

Sculpture and figurines associated with the Mesoamerican ball game received significant emphasis in the Gulf Coast region. Stone *yokes* (objects worn around the waist by ballplayers) *hachas* (stone trophy heads in bird, animal, or human form) and *palmas* (fan shaped stone feathers) characterized stone sculptural traditions of Classic period Veracruz (Proskourikoff 1954). Because this site shared numerous iconographic parallels with Chichén Itzá, El Tajín has been linked to the Epiclassic Feathered Serpent Cult (Ringle et al 1998: 188, Ringle 2004). Three major sculptured programs associated with El Tajín include, the Mound of the Building Columns, the temple of the Pyramid of the Niches, and the bench reliefs from the South Ball Court. One of the largest single enclosed spaces at El Tajín included a covered courtyard (approx 11,100 square meters) known as the Mound of the Building Columns. Those who entered this complex did so through a portico supported by three columns of stacked drums carved with reliefs. Anyone who entered this complex would pass by the carved columns and note the processions of figures associated with rituals related to 13 Rabbit. Some researchers have identified 13 Rabbit as the primary ruler at this site (Tuggle 1968, Wilkerson 1984, Koontz 2008) while others (Kampen 1972: 42, Soto 1994) speculate that 13 Rabbit might have signified a title of ritual importance held by multiple individuals. However, what scholars do agree upon is that 13 Rabbit oversaw rituals that involved captives, deity

impersonators, and the presentation of feathers and beads among members of El Tajín's inner circle (Koontz 2008: 329).

Ball court ritual seems to be particularly important at El Tajín. Ellen Spinden (1933: 251) first noticed that imagery surrounding the South Ball Court sculptures seemed to depict an initiation of a warrior into a warrior cult. Since this first study, researchers have focused on explaining the iconographic narratives found on El Tajín's South Ball Court (Koontz 2005). Koontz (2009a: 261) pointed out that in Epiclassic Tajín iconography researchers can distinguish between humans and supernatural figures. Supernatural figures have a super-orbital plate just above the eye whereas human eyes are unadorned. On the southeast panel of the South Ball court (Fig. 6.15) is a central figure that is flanked by two individuals. A conjured figure (note the super-orbital plate over the eye) on the left is dressed in a jade net skirt and is seen emerging from a War Vision Serpent with implements of war in hand. The person to the right of the central figure wears a jade net collar and looks on while a skull figure emerges from a jar of liquid to the right of all the figures. On the south-central panel of the South Ball court (Fig. 6.16) a conjured entity (with the super-orbital plate over the eye) performs autosacrifice at a temple filled with water while a figure doubled in body and form looks down wearing a jade net skirt, a duck-bill mask and a segmental floral headband. Koontz (2009b: 57) describes this figure as "a human ritualist," since the super-orbital plate is lacking, channeling a deity associated with two toponyms: one connected to a Water Temple and other linked to a Flowering Mountain. On the north-central panel of the South Ball court (Fig. 6.17) this figure appears in the top frame overlooking three individuals associated



with the Water Temple and the Flowering Mountain. The central individual on the right may be a conjured ancestor because of the figure's connection to the vine stemming out from the Flowering Mountain. The conjured ancestor wears a jade net skirt, hat, and an *ecailacatzcozcatl* (wind shell pectoral) that during the Central Mexican Postclassic period is associated with the east.



Figure 6.10: Stela 6 from Cerro de Las Mesas, Mexico dates to A.D. 468 (drawing from Miller 1991: 30).

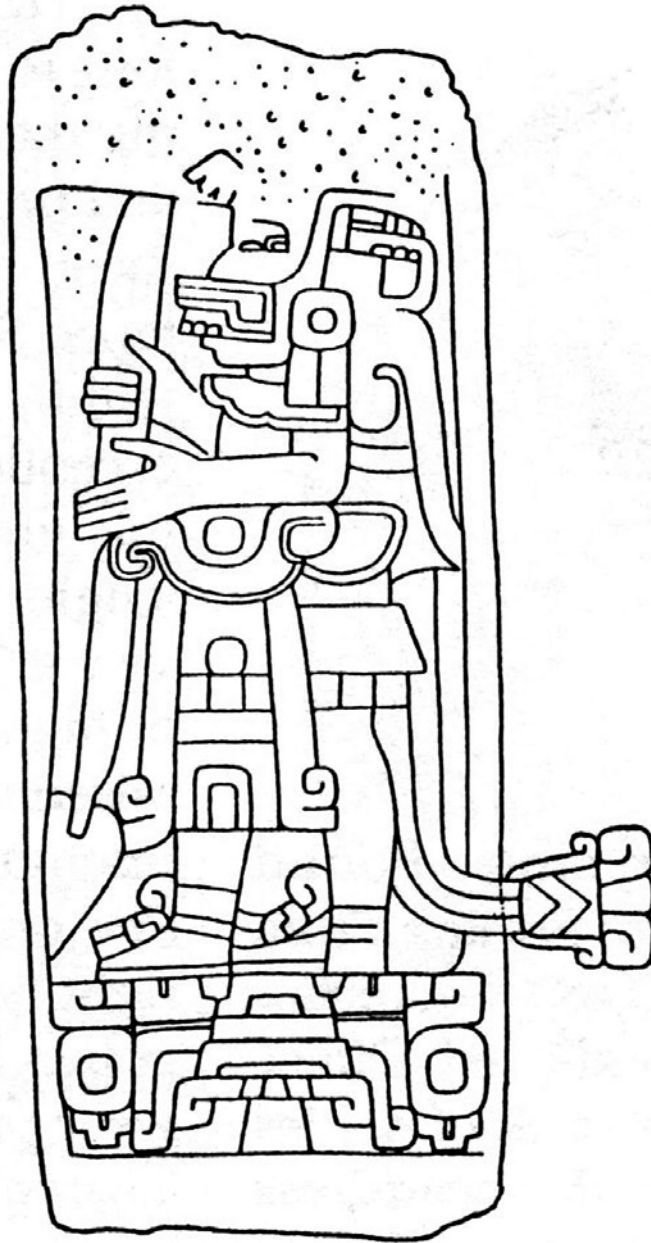


Figure 6.11: Stela 6 from Cerro de Las Mesas, Mexico dates to the Early Classic period (from Miller 1991: 32).



Figure 6.12: The Late Classic period Stela 15 from Cerro de Las Mesas, Mexico (drawing from Miller 1991: 32).



Figure 6.13: Cast of Stela 1 from Classic period Cozumel, Mexico (photo courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard).

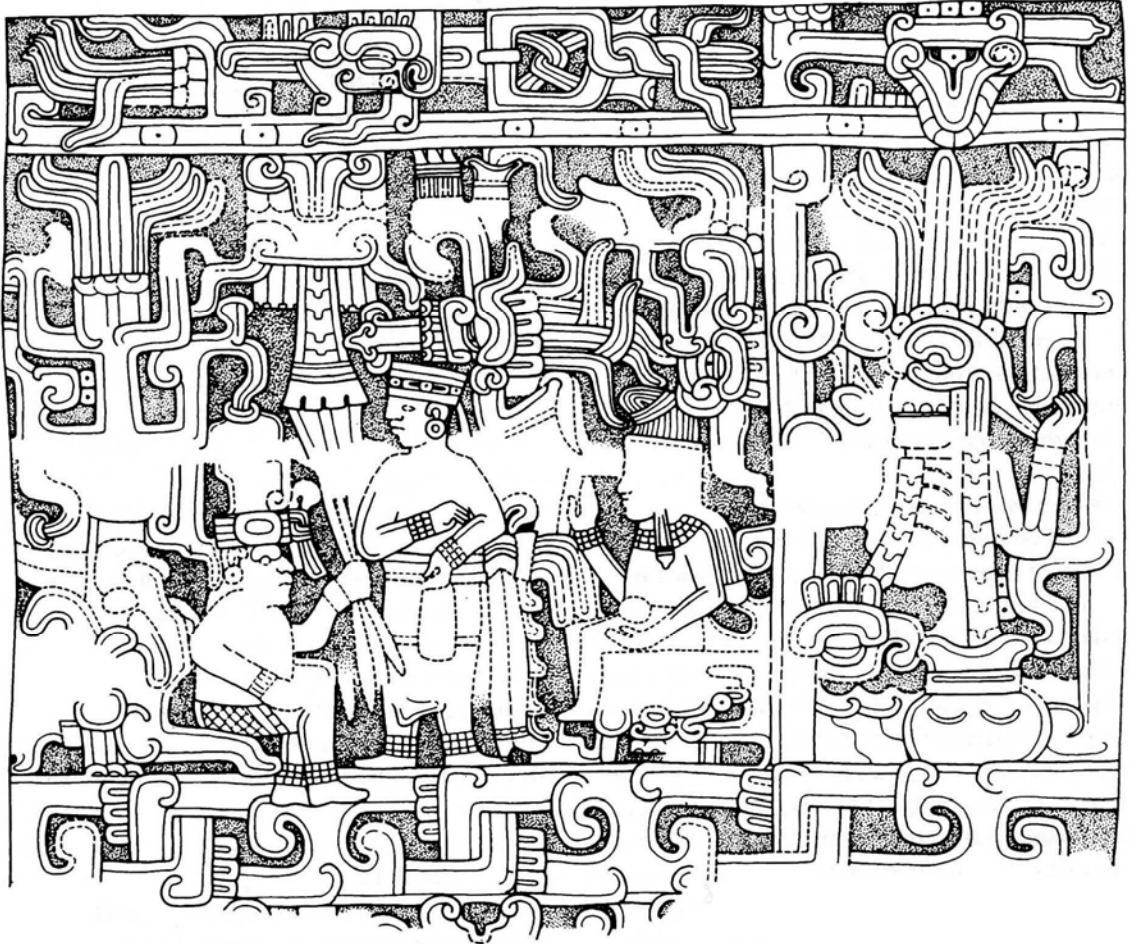


Figure 6.14: South-east panel of the South Ball Court of El Tajín, Mexico  
(from Koontz 2009a: 48).

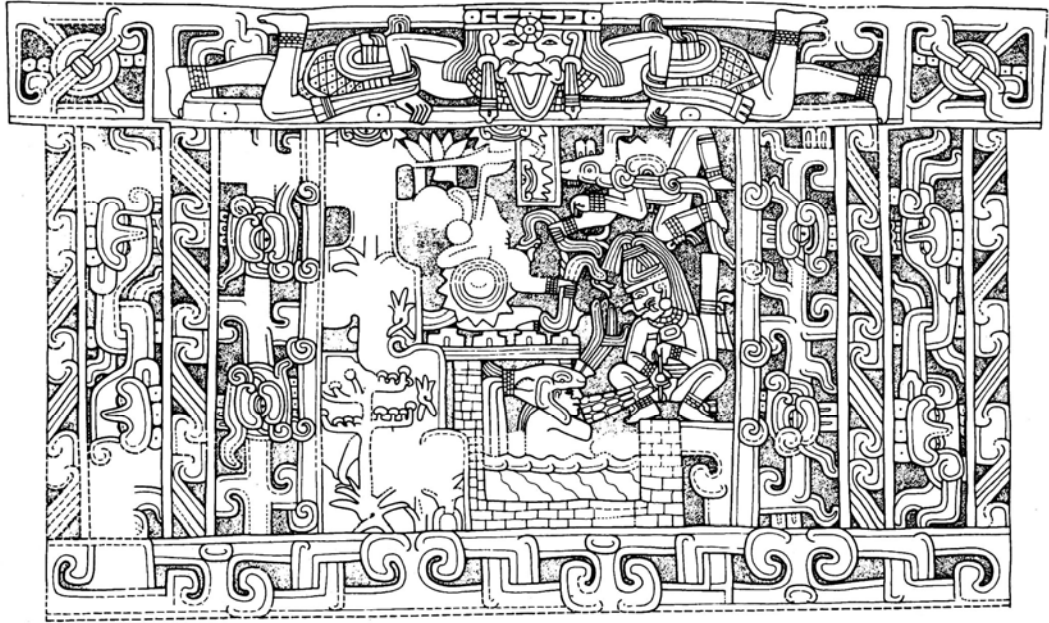


Figure 6.15: The south-central panel of the South Ball court of El Tajín, Mexico (drawing from Koontz 2009a: 55).

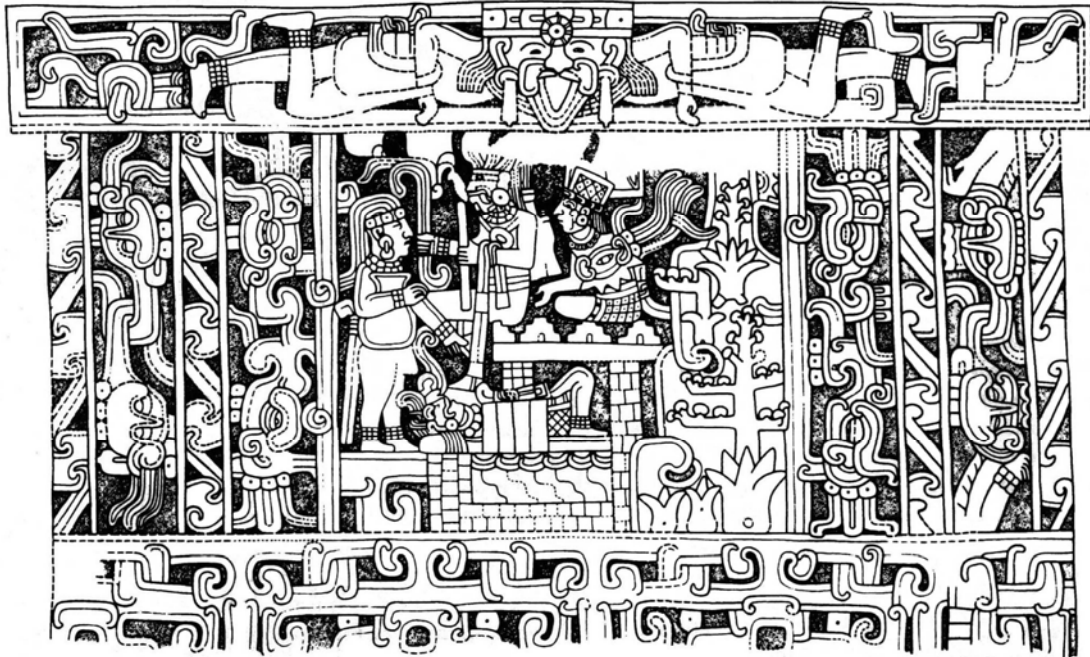


Figure 6.16: The north-central panel of the South Ballcourt from El Tajín, Mexico (drawing from Koontz 2009a: 56).

### Veracruz Figurine Traditions

Figurines from Veracruz reflect knowledge of multiple figurine and sculptural traditions from Central Mexico to the Maya region. During the Formative period, the Huastec of northern Veracruz produced figurines that were assembled from distinct parts. The faces were sharply triangular and often accented with a black asphalt/resin - a convention unique to this coastal region. Many of the figurines wore headdresses with avian characteristics. Male figurines had a headband of upright feathers and female figurines wore a projecting tripartite shape, the two lower prongs representing the bird

beak and an upper prong representing the crest Female figurines with tattoo motifs on their arms and abdomen were also common to this style. This figurine tradition was distinct from the Olmec figurine tradition in Formative period southern Veracruz. However, Olmec influence is evident on the early Lower Remojadas<sup>26</sup> figurines of south-central Veracruz which included nude figures with hollow limbs that were also similar to the northern Huastec traditions (ibid: 38). The Upper Remojadas figurines and sculptures (A.D. 150-500) had elaborate appliquéd costumes and headdresses with demonstrated similarities to the Teotihuacan figurine traditions such as the use of molds for constructing figurine heads. Many figurines had whistles and rattles incorporated into the tripod support or the hollow section of the body (ibid). Some of the iconographic elements of Upper Remojadas tradition included figurines with bird-serpent headdresses, figurines depicting the wearing of flayed skins, figurines wearing war serpent coyote-like headdresses, and female figurines dressed in the *quechquemiltl* and the diving bird headdress (Fig. 6.18). The diving bird headdress became more stylized over the course of the Classic period. The Early Classic Huastec diving bird headdress evolved from more bird like manifestations in the Early (Fig. 6.19) and Middle Classic period (Fig. 6.20) to a more stylized version resembling horns in the Late Classic period (Fig 6.21). Figurines also expressed prior Olmec concerns with movement in the use of wheeled toys, suspended figurines and figurines with articulated limbs (ibid: 38).

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<sup>26</sup> The Remojadas tradition is named after a small site in south-central Veracruz excavated by Medellín Zenil (1950, 1962) that produced large quantities of ceramic sculpture and figurines.



The fall of Teotihuacan only spurred closer social relations between Veracruz and Yucatan as reflected in their late Classic figurine traditions. Smiling Face figurines (Fig. 6.22) have been found in the central coast between Rio Cazonas in the north and Rio Papaloapan to the south (Medellín Zenil 1960, Wilkerson 1987). Originally called the Late Remojadas tradition, these figurines were split between two groups – the *caritas sonrientes* and the Nopiloa ceramic tradition. The Nopiloa Mayoid tradition (Fig. 6.23) is closely related to the figurines from Coastal Campeche and the Lower Usumacinta river region. Distinctive characteristics of these figurines include the upright arms or hands on hips, their smile or enigmatic expression that researchers point out may be a drug induced euphoria associated with *pulque* drinking rituals (Wilkerson 1987). During the Epiclassic a number of similarities between the Smiling Figurines and Maya figurines emerged, including the tendency to be found in mortuary contexts (Coe 1975). Figurine makers in Veracruz borrowed some aspects of Maya figurine traditions such as the elaborate and symbolic textile motifs (Fig. 6.24) characteristic of late Remojadas tradition but drew upon their own ceramic styles and technologies (Goldstein 1987), while figurines collected from mortuary contexts on Jaina Island in Campeche seem stylistically similar (in use of the hand and arm gestures) to the earlier Remojadas tradition (Corson 1976). As Goldstein (1987: 63) points out, many of the Smiling figurines portray musicians and/or are themselves whistles and rattles which associates such funerary figurines with music, dance and song. Smiling figurines found in archaeological context were often

paired with female clay sculptures known as the “woman warriors” because they depict women carrying shields, spears and wearing coyote war serpent like helmets (Goldstein 1987).



Figure 6.17: Veracruz female figurine standing on a litter wearing the *quechquemtl* and the diving bird headdress from A.D. 500-700 (photo from Goldstein 1987: 60).



Figure 6.18: Huastec diving bird headdresses found on figurines from the Early Classic period (drawing from Goldstein 1987: 39)



Figure 6.19: The Veracruz diving bird headdresses found on figurines of the Middle Classic period (drawing from Goldstein 1987: 39).



Figure 6.20: The Veracruz diving bird headdresses found on figurines of the Late Classic period (drawing from Goldstein 1987: 39).



Figure 6.21: An example of a Smiling Face (*Caritas Sonrientes*) figurine depicting a ritual performer from southern Veracruz from the Late Classic period (photo from Bourne 2012: 87).



Figure 6.22: Female figurine from the Veracruz Nopiloa ceramic tradition from A.D. 600-900 (photo from Goldstein 1987: 67).



Figure 6.23: Late Remojadas Smiling Face figurine from south central Veracruz reflecting the influence of Maya-like textile styles (photo from Goldstein 1987: 65).

### Funerary Ritual in the Late Classic Mixtequilla

Evidence that Snake priestesses held important social and religious roles related to funerary rituals is evident in the Late Classic period at El Zapotal in south-central Veracruz.<sup>27</sup> Because of this region's remoteness and untapped archaeological potential it has often been a magnet for illegal digging. In 1971 in response to a smuggling operation involving sculpture from El Zapotal excavations took place in the area that had been disturbed by looters known as Mound 2 (Wyllie 2010: 209-210). As Wyllie (2008:324) observed Mound 2 revealed an *in situ* funerary complex and assemblage that combined architectural features, mural paintings, sculpture, figurines, and ceramics to convey a narrative regarding a solar afterlife. Archaeologists following the direction of the looters tunnel at El Zapotal first came upon four life sized terracotta sculptures of women seated cross legged with snakes tied to their waist (Fig 6.25). Excavating further they discovered additional 19 life-sized standing terracotta sculptures of women with snakes tied to their waist, some with coyote headdresses (Fig 6.26), and one with a jade net collar. The sculptures were arranged in two parallel rows that formed a procession. In addition to the women, several sculptures depicting musicians were unearthed; one playing a drum and small rodent like figure shaking the maracas (Fig 6.27). Beneath the sculptures archaeologists recovered 82 skulls accompanying 200 primary burials of flexed skeletons with funerary offerings consisting of an assortment of *yokes*, *hachas*, *caritas sonrientes*,<sup>28</sup> the Nopiloa Mayoid clay figurines, and wheeled toys, in addition to

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<sup>27</sup> Unlike the Tajin area to the north which utilized a building tradition of cut stone masonry, south central Veracruz buildings were usually constructed of clay (Stark 1991, 2001).

<sup>28</sup> Smiling Face Complex of figurines

anthropomorphic and zoomorphic whistles. Additional excavations into the structure revealed nine earthen steps that lead toward a U shaped banquette consisting of wall murals and a larger than life skeletal figure resting on a 60-70 cm pyramidal platform in the center (Fig 6.28). All available space on the banquette walls had been painted with figures in procession surrounding two solar disks. Some of the figures included skeletal lords assisted by small figures, with upraised hands, wearing the same heron headdresses as seen on the *sonrientes* figurines. Other figurines wore the diving bird headdress characteristic of the Veracruz region (Fig. 6.29). Solar disks with bird imagery and female figures wearing the same trapezoidal crowns (Fig. 6.30), reminiscent of the Mexican Year Sign, worn by the life sized terracotta sculptures comprised the east and west walls. The mural panels that flanked the entrance to the inner sanctuary consisted of musicians with drums and gourd shaped maracas in addition to figures wearing headdresses with flowers protruding from the center. One of the figures possesses a lobster clawed hand very reminiscent of individuals engaged in drinking rituals on Late Classic Maya vases (K3027, K3264) and the lobster-clawed performer accompanying dancers and musicians at Bonampak, Room 1. In the inner sanctuary the Death figure is flanked by two females – one in the last stages of pregnancy and the other in a coyote war serpent headdress and a snake skirt (Fig. 6.31) (Torres Guzmán 2002, Gutierrez Solana and Hamilton 1977, Wilkerson 1987, Wyllie 2008, 2010). The pairing of the death deity with women wearing snake skirts and snake belts or with women who had died in childbirth indicate a Gulf Coast origin for Postclassic Aztec religious traditions regarding

several female supernaturals: Coatlicue (Serpents Her Skirt), Cihuacoatl (Woman Serpent), and the Cihuateteo (women who had died in childbirth).

Martial representations of both men and women remained integral to religious traditions of the Epiclassic and Terminal Classic periods in Yucatan and Veracruz. Idealized depictions of women as warriors as well as Snake religious specialists associated with Flower Mountain imagery and funerary ritual may have had a greater time depth and emphasis in the Veracruz region.



Figure 6.24: Life-sized terracotta female sculpture with snakes tied to the waist found at El Zapotal, Mexico (photo from Gutiérrez Solana and Hamilton 1977: figure 15).



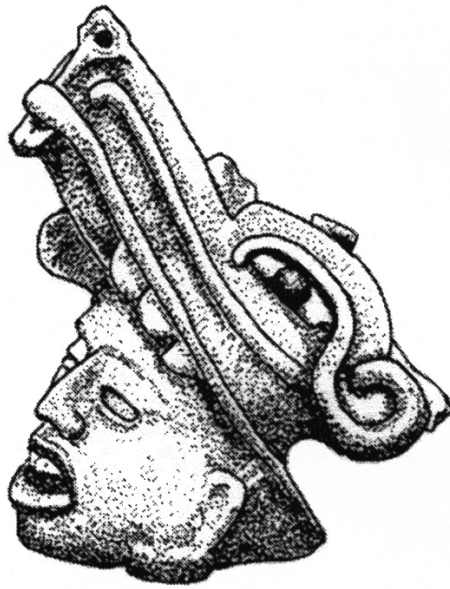


Figure 6.25 Terracotta head of figure wearing coyote headdress from El Zapotal, Mexico (drawing from Wyllie 2010: 218).

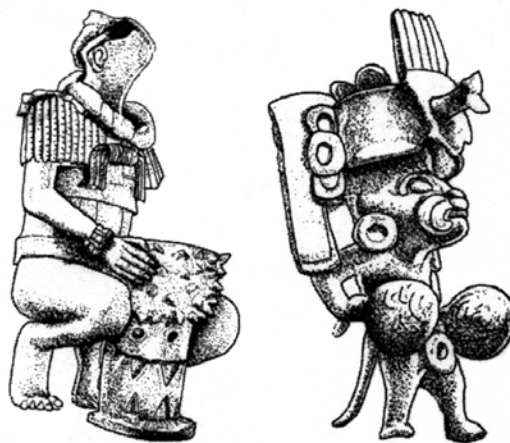


Figure 6.26: Terracotta sculpture delineating musicians that include a drummer and a rodent figure shaking maraca-like rattles from El Zapotal, Mexico (drawing from Wyllie 2010: 117).



Figure 6.27: Central Death figure found in the center of the U shaped banquette at El Zapotal, Mexico (photo from Gutiérrez Solana and Hamilton 1977: illustration 1).



Figure 6.28: The El Zapotal death figure with adjacent female figures (drawing from Wyllie 2010: 214).



Figure 6.29: Life-sized terracotta female sculpture wearing trapezoidal crowns reminiscent of the Mexican Year Sign (drawing from Wyllie 2010: 211).



Figure 6.30: Terracotta female figurine with variant of the diving bird headdress (photo from Gutiérrez Solana and Hamilton 1977: figure 37).

## Chapter 7: Investigating Pilgrimage, Politics, and Gender through the Nepean Collection from Isla de Sacrificios, Mexico

According to Spanish documents the small independent states comprising the Yucatan peninsula, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Caribbean coasts formed an economic unit during the Postclassic period (A.D. 1000 – 1519). Scholes' and Roys (1968 [1948]) analysis of early Spanish records<sup>1</sup> led them to conclude that the region of Acalan in Tabasco held a strategic position in this economic unit by facilitating trade between the Gulf and Caribbean coasts and across the Yucatan peninsula by virtue of controlling trade along Candelaria River and possibly the Usumacinta-San Pedro Martír drainages which flow into Laguna de Terminos (ibid: 48). The authors note that trade was made easier by the similarities in the languages spoken over this large area which included Yukatecan Maya the language of peninsula and the Chontal<sup>2</sup>, Chol, and Chorti dialects spoken from Laguna Tupilco in Tabasco to the Ulua River. The colonial Chontal text detailing the ancestry of Don Pablo Paxbolon describes that the original ancestor of the Acalan ruling

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<sup>1</sup> These early Spanish records were divided into three groups of sources. The first source included five *probanzas* from 1530-33 that were intended to support the claims of Francisco de Montejo that this region should be included in his government of Yucatan because they comprised a geographical, economic, and linguistic unit. The second group of documents pertained to a lawsuit, filed in 1569-1571, between Antón García the *encomendero* of Acalan-Tixchel and Feliciano Bravo, *escribano mayor de gobernación* in Yucatan regarding their dispute of Zapotitlan, where two groups of the Acalan Chontal, who had not been moved by colonial authorities, continued to reside. The third and most important source consisted of the Paxbolon-Maldonado Papers written between 1565 and 1628. This Chontal text described the “merits and services” of the direct descendant of the rulers of Acalan, Don Pablo Paxbolon and of his Spanish son-in-law, Francisco Maldonado and includes a history of Acalan-Tixchel from pre-conquest times to 1604 (Scholes and Roys 1968 [1948]: 7-8).

<sup>2</sup> Chontal is derived from an Aztec Nahuatl term *Chontalli* meaning foreigner. The Maya term for Chontal was Putun. Thompson (1970) proposed that the Putun Maya from this region constituted the Itza that conquered Yucatan. See Andrews (1984) for critiques regarding the Putun hypothesis.

family arrived from the island of Cozumel off the northeastern coast of Yucatan. From Cozumel, this ancestor came to Tenosique in the Usumacinta basin with a group of followers and took over the government which included establishing four regional temple sanctuaries aligned to the cardinal directions. Each sanctuary had its own “chief” and patron deity but the principle deity of the region was a goddess also revered on Cozumel (ibid: 57).

At the time of the Spanish conquest Cozumel Island served as pilgrimage center associated with the feathered serpent cult and several goddesses that included Ix Chel a goddess of divination, medicine and childbirth. According to Fr. Diego de Landa (in Tozzer 1941) pilgrims came from as far away as Tabasco and Campeche to visit the shrine of Ix Chel which housed an oracle that the pilgrims consulted. In addition, the island north of Cozumel, Isla de Mujeres, was also thought to have participated in this network because it had received its name from the Spaniards due to numerous feminine idols and sculptures found on it (Tozzer 1941: 9)<sup>3</sup>. Scholes and Roys (1968[1948]: 57) argued that Ix Chel was a popular deity among the Chontal not only because the site of Tixchel in Tabasco had been named after her but also because many towns on the Usumacinta River and in central Tabasco seemed to reflect the presence of a feminine cult. This included Ciuatopan (palace of the woman) on the Usumacinta, Ciuatan (the

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<sup>3</sup> The friars collected a large number of sculptures of women from Isla de Mujeres. The friars noted that the sculptures were clothed and their breasts were covered (see Tozzer 1941: 9). According to Spanish documents from 1561-1565 numerous feminine idols and sculptures were collected from this island to deter continued idolatry. As Scholes and Adams (1938: 324) relate “And this witness saw that on many days in succession a quantity of idols, which the said friars sent was brought, both in clay and wood, large and small which had faces of women and demons and deer and other forms; and it seems to him that the number of them which he saw together was so great that they could not be counted” (in Tozzer 1941: 9: n: 44).

place of the woman) in central Tabasco and Cuyo de las Damas on the Rio Chico, a branch of the Usumacinta River (ibid). Given the proximity between the region of Acalan and southern Veracruz, and the evidence that the Flower Mountain component of the feathered serpent cult had a longer history of interaction in Veracruz, examining evidence regarding female deities and ritual practices at Isla de Sacrificios seemed the logical next step for understanding the linkages between the feathered serpent cult in Yucatan and Veracruz during the Postclassic period.

### **Isla de Sacrificios**

One of the first scholars to investigate the history of Isla de Sacrificios, an island site off the coast of central Veracruz, was Zelia Nuttall. In her *American Anthropologist* publication, *the Island of Sacrifice*, Nuttall compiled some of the first eye witness accounts of the Spanish conquistadors and chaplains who had visited the island in the early sixteenth century. According to the chaplain Juan Diaz who was part of the fleet of Juan de Griljalva which predated the Cortes' expedition, the island, six miles in circumference, seemed uninhabited. They observed a number of large buildings – one which was circular, a structure resembling a detached arch, and evidence for human sacrifice which consisted of recent offerings all in various states of decay. A second hand account given by Gonzalo Fernando de Oviedo mentions that the Griljalva expedition explored the island by a series of roads lined with fruit trees and that some of the structures were surrounded by a series of walls. Bernal Diaz's account of this episode thirty years later recalls that the island received its name because of the human bodies

they encountered whose flesh had been torn out from their arms and thighs and whose blood lined the walls of the temples. Nuttall (1910: 268) seemed particularly intrigued by the free standing arch and the temple walls since Cozumel also had walls surrounding certain temples and a free standing arch that had been sketched by Holmes in 1898. As Nuttall (*ibid*: 269) observed, “It is an interesting fact that, in order to match in size and form of the ruins described, we must go to Yucatan’s ruined cities, via the island of Cozumel and not to the mainland adjoining the island.” In December of 1909 Nuttall accompanied by Mrs. H. P. Hamilton journeyed to Isla de Sacrificios with the intentions of investigating a portion of the island through excavations. Along the eastern shore Nuttall came across a massive wall running west to east with the remnants of a mural. Upon further excavation she found that the mural depicted a feathered serpent which convinced her that the wall and floor she uncovered belonged to a temple dedicated to Quetzalcoatl and that the island had been important to this cult.

In response to archaeological discoveries made by the Department of Forestry during the construction of a fish hatchery, Miguel Angel Fernandez and Wilfrido du Solier (Solier 1943) excavated a series of deteriorated stucco floors along the north and south coasts of the island. Under the floors they found of a series of burials in association with vessels of cherry on coffee ware, red ware, all forms of fine orange ware, cream ware, and polychrome and incised ware. Many of the vessels found in the lowest stratum of their excavations also included animal feet much like the middle and lower stratum vessels found at Cholula. Also included in the burials were mold made figurines which they inferred must have come from a later horizon. They concluded that Isla de

Sacrificios had never been inhabited since most of the material collected had come from caches and burials. They also pointed out that the island had been artificially enlarged from a small sand bank whose length and width had been extended through the deposition of volcanic rocks brought over from the mainland (ibid: 63). Alfonso Medellín Zenil (1955) also conducted salvage excavations at Isla de Sacrificios' because of severe erosion along the eastern coast (Fig. 7.1). Based on his excavations Medellín Zenil (ibid: 100) determined that while a small amount of material could be correlated with the Preclassic and Classic periods, the majority of archaeological material from Isla de Sacrificios reflects the era A.D. 900 - 1200 or the Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic periods with a decline in the deposition of material during the Late Postclassic period (A.D. 1200 -1519). Because of the numerous representations of Quetzalcoatl on funerary ceramics Medellín Zenil (ibid) concluded that the introduction of the feathered serpent cult prompted the increase in funerary and ceremonial ritual on the island.

While we know Isla de Sacrificios was still being utilized at the time of contact, is there any evidence for female deities and/or women's ritual associated with the feathered serpent cult? Nunez Ortega (1885) originally argued that Isla de Sacrificios and the mainland just opposite to it corresponded to Aztec descriptions of Chalchiuhtlicuecan the home of the water goddess, jades-her-skirt, Chalchiuhtlicue. Nuttall (1910: 268) disagreed with him because first the Spanish explorers had not described any human sculptures on the island, second Quetzalcoatl was a male deity, and third female



sculptures had already been associated with the Huastecs in northern Veracruz. However, more data has come to light since Nunez Ortega and Nuttall first debated this hypothesis.

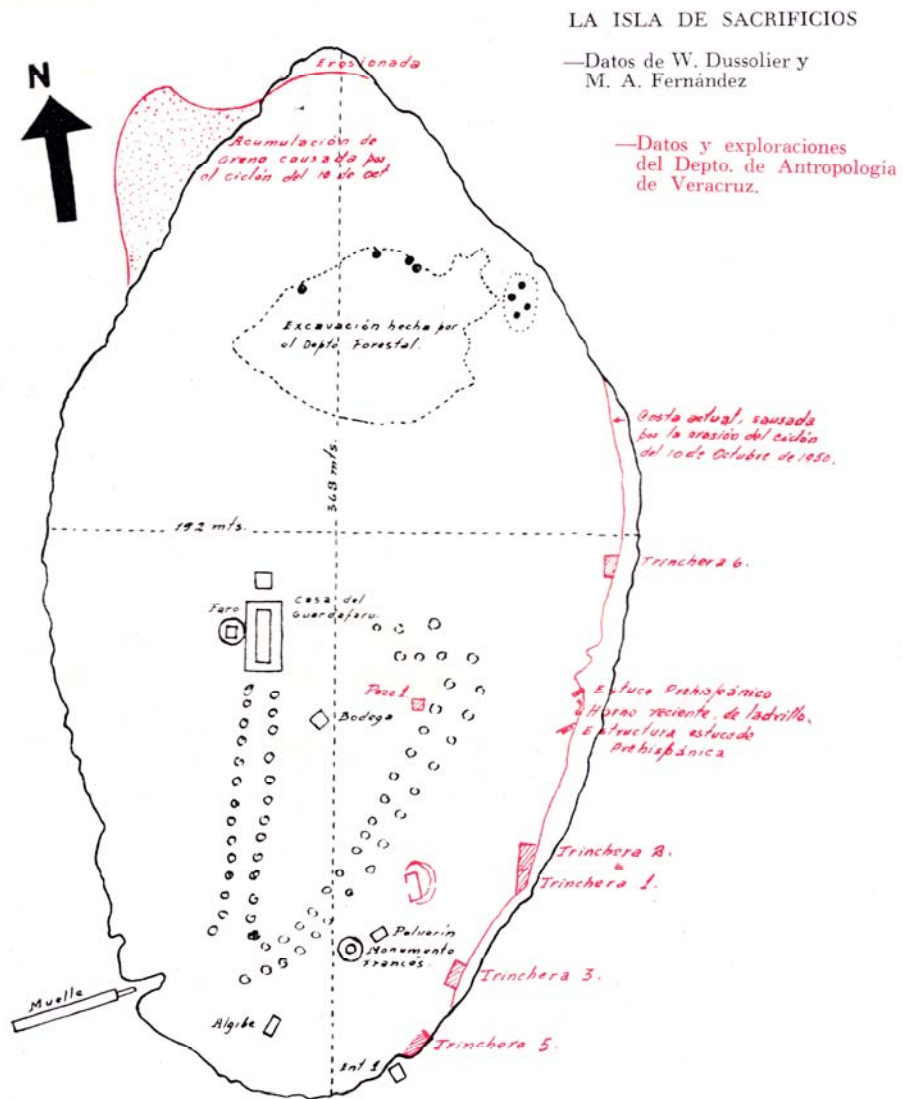


Figure 7.1: Isla de Sacrificios; drawing from Medellín Zenil (1955:18).

Nicholson (1971: 420) pointed out that in the days preceding the Spanish conquest both the northern and southern Gulf Coasts designated the primary region for the cult of Tlazolteotl-Ixcuina. The Nahuatl name, Tlazolteotl, comes from term *tlazolli* which derives from the verb *izolihui* indicating something that is old or worn out and *teotl* designating divinity. Implicit in this was the concept that in order to be renewed *tlazolli* was required (Burkhart 1989: 88). The manure distributed throughout agriculture fields to make them sustainable was called *tlazolli* (Molina 1970: II, 137r). In Postclassic Central Mexico *tlazolli* belonged to the deities Tlazolteotl and Tezcatlipoca following the Mesoamerican tendency to split a single function between male and female deities (Estrada Quevedo 1962: 163). Ixcuina comes from the Huastec Mayan language and means “Lady Cotton.” Tlazolteotl-Ixcuina was often depicted with a headband of unspun cotton. The Huastec-Totonac section of the Gulf Coast was a region associated with richly woven textiles from the Early Classic period to the time of contact (Stark 2001). The goddesses of the Gulf Coast were also called by other Central Mexican names such as, Teteo innan, “Mother of the Gods”; Toci, “Our Grandmother”; Temazcalteci, “Grandmother of the Bathhouse” (Fig. 7.2); Yohualiticitl, “Midwife of the Night”; Tonantzin “Our Mother” Tlalli iyollo, “Heart of the Earth”; Ilamatecuhtil, “Old Woman”; Itzapapalotl, “Obsidian Butterfly”; Xochiquetzal, “Flowery Quetzal Feather”; and Cihuacoatl “Snake Woman” (Sullivan 1982: 7-8). In the Codex Borbonicus Tlazolteotl-Teoteo innan-Toci is portrayed in a jade net overskirt with a triangle *quechquemiltl* top and the trapeze ray Mexican Year Sign in her headdress (Fig. 7.3). The *quechquemiltl* costume element was worn by Aztec goddesses and their impersonators but it was also a

garment most often associated with women from northeastern Mesoamerica. In the Central Mexican codices the most depictions of the *quechquemiltl* costume element pertained to representations of Tlazolteotl, Chalchiuhtlicue, and Xochiquetzal (Anawalt 1982: 42).

The Spanish friars were not too fond of the Tlazolteotl-Ixcuina cult or the Huastec priestesses, the Ixcuiname, who had brought the cult to Central Mexico. The friars linked this cult with vice and sexual licentiousness. Sahagún (1981: I, 51) called Tlazolteotl “another Venus” and Torquemada (1975-83: III, 100) noted that Tlazolteotl was “a goddess of loves and sensualities, what can she be but a dirty, filthy and stained goddess” (in Burkhart 1989: 93). The Friars equated her with Eve because she, like Cihuacoatl, had serpent associations (see Taube 1992a: 122, n. 9) which struck them as manifestations of lust and the Devil. Because Huastec women were often linked to this deity, they became, from the friars’ point of view, deviant women defined in terms of European views of sexuality not under patriarchal control - the adulterers, the exhibitionists and the promiscuous women sorcerers who drank too much *pulque* in their worship of the “Filth Deity” (Burkhart 1989: 94).

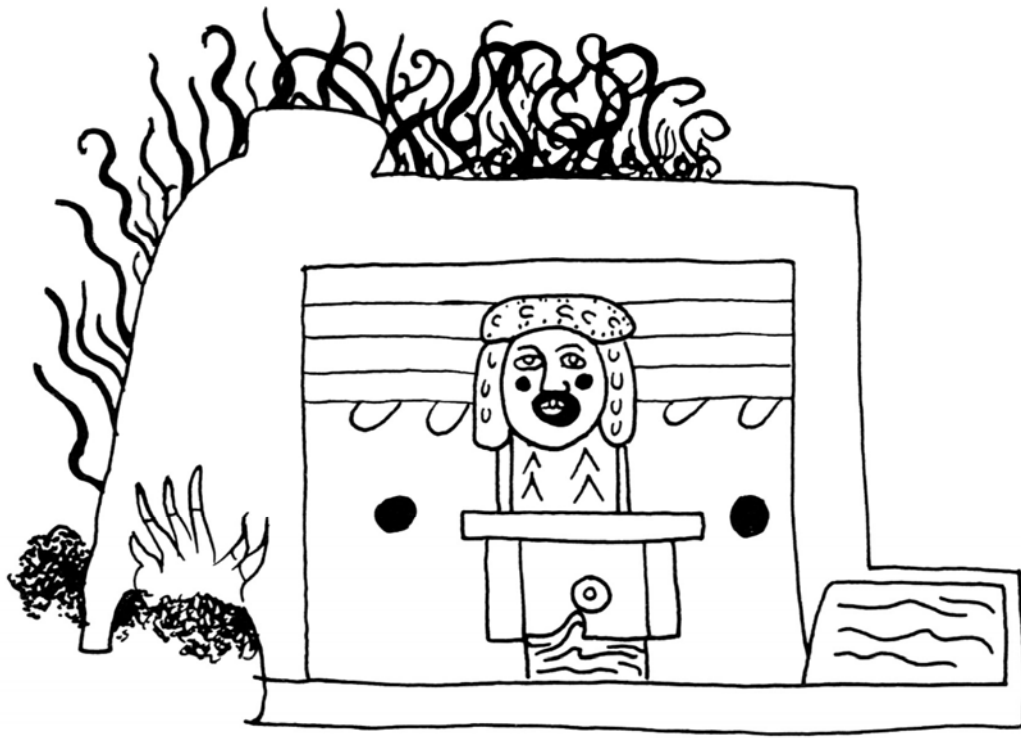


Figure 7.2: Temazcalteci, “Grandmother of the Bathhouse” from Codex Magliabechiano 77r (drawing from Sullivan 1982: 21).

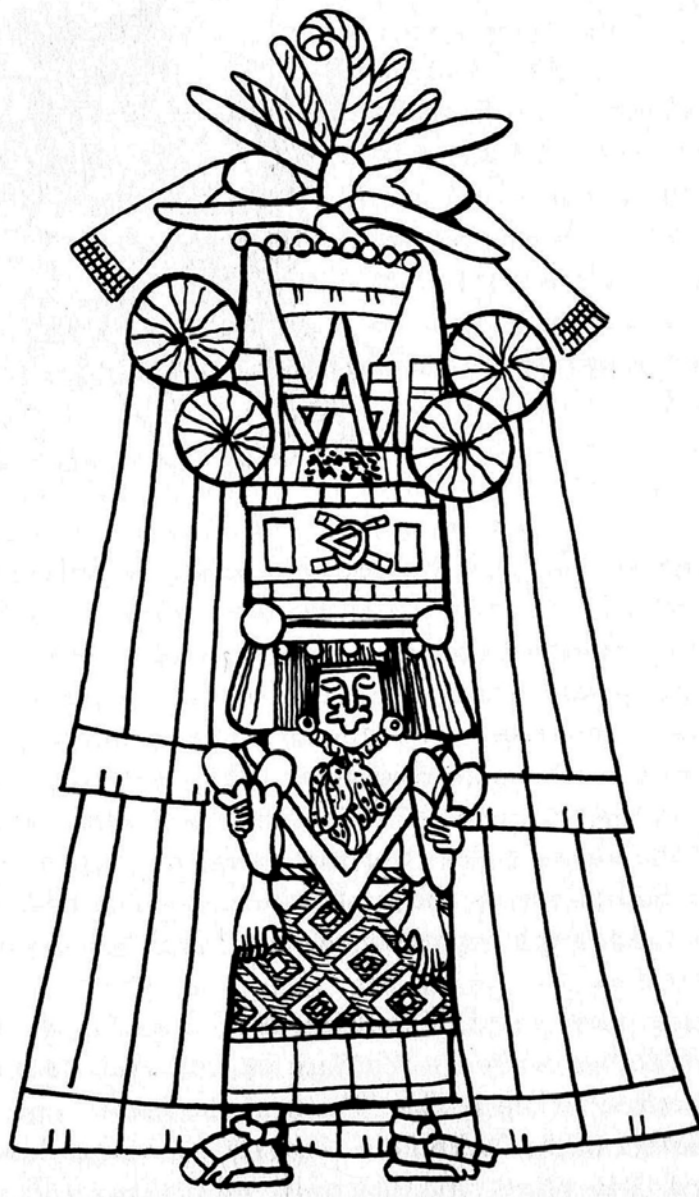


Figure 7.3: Tlazolteotl-Teteo innan-Toci from Codex Borbonicus 30 (drawing from Sullivan 1982: 20).

## **The Nepean Collection**

The Nepean Collection has the largest group of artifacts from Isla de Sacrificios in Veracruz, Mexico that the British Museum acquired from a British Navel Officer, Captain Evan Nepean in 1844. While several well known pieces from this collection have been documented and analyzed (see summary below), very little information was available regarding the non-ceramic vessel items in the collection. Acquired in 1844, the Nepean Collection was first described by Nepean and Birch (1843) and also discussed in *Archaeologia*, Vol XXX (Birch 1844). Nuttall (1910) who first summarized the Spanish documents that recorded the conquistador's impressions upon visiting Isla de Sacrificios, also analyzed the iconography from twenty-two Nepean ceramic vessels and two vessels acquired by the British Museum in 1851 from Lt. Forrest and then compared them to similar island vessels found in Mexican and U.S. museums. Thomas Joyce (1912, 1914) published additional photos of the ceramics and provided drawings featuring six of the collection's spindle whorls. Iconographical analysis of the collection's motifs by Strebel (1885-89) and E. Spinden (1933) situated this site in relation to Totonac history. In Smith's (1958: 158) ceramic description and an analysis of Fine Orange pottery in Mesoamerica, he stated Isla de Sacrificios stood out because of the variety of Fine Orange ceramic ware types and the amount of distinctive fine polychromes from nearby and distant sites. McEwan (1994, 2009) highlighted the importance of the Nepean collection for understanding Mesoamerican pilgrimage offerings. Clara Bezanilla whose work (see Dahlin et. al 1998) helped document the importance of coastal sites in the

northwestern Gulf Coast of Yucatan, also worked at organizing the collection's ceramics and figurines.

El Zapotal underscores the importance of feminine funerary ritual in this area. Does the material from Isla de Sacrificios in the Nepean collection reflect these traditions? Taube (2010: 183) contends the main iconographic themes of the Postclassic International art style represent themes concerning Flower Mountain, the eastern solar paradise where ancestors resided. As we examined previously, this celestial flower paradise is connected to the Cult of the Feathered Serpent. Taube (ibid) points out that representations of the plumed serpent were often ornamented with flowers which embodied the Flower Road a celestial path upon which the sun, gods, and ancestors travelled. Do the iconographic elements found on the ceramics in the Nepean collection reflect such associations? In what ways does the collection reflect the pilgrimage model as put forth by Ringle and colleagues (Ringle et al 1998)? Is there any evidence regarding a feminine component to this cult? With permission from the British Museum, field research conducted in late 2011 and early 2012 involved photographing and documenting about 80% of the collection<sup>4</sup> focusing on the ceramic vessels and figurines for the purposes of situating Isla de Sacrificios within new views regarding the feathered serpent cult and in order to investigate regional Postclassic pilgrimage practices. I have

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<sup>4</sup> Time constraints prevented the documentation of the osteological, metal and lithic components of the Nepean collection. Additional difficulties involved in syncing multiple artifact cataloging and locational practices involved in a large collection that is 168 years old and has expanded over time as other Nepean purchases housed in separate British museums were consolidated, makes any statements in regards to final statistical quantification nearly impossible at this point in time.

divided the results that pertain to the questions mentioned above into the following categories.

### **Evidence for Pilgrimage: the Ritual Ceramic and *Incensario* Complex**

A Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic pilgrimage assemblage includes Fine Orange wares in addition to Plumbate pottery and a distinct *incensario* complex (Ringle et al. 1998: 216). The presence of Fine Orange and Plumbate pottery at Chichen Itza and at other sites in Mesoamerica had been traditionally interpreted as evidence for Toltec domination, but is now seen as indicative of involvement in a pilgrimage network linked to the Feathered Serpent Cult (Bey and Ringle 2007: 378). Social practices associated with the ritual consumption of beverages, such as cacao or *pulque* or the preparation of ritual cuisines or feasts may have also played a factor in the distribution of these particular trade wares at feathered serpent cult sites (Bey and Ringle 2007: 420, Ringle et al. 1998: 218). The Nepean collection includes many examples of Fine Orange and Polychrome Orange wares, the Isla de Sacrificios I-III Orange and fine paste wares, Plumbate, Tres Picos, Mixteca Puebla Black-on-White-on-Red and the distinct *incensario* complex.

#### Fine Orange Wares

The majority of the vessels in the Nepean collection are Fine Orange wares. Some of the main characteristics of this ware include its fine texture, homogeneity, lack of temper and orange color (Brainerd 1941). Some of the examples from the Nepean



collection include incised and non-incised pedestal-based pyriform vessels (Fig. 7.4a-g), cylindrical pedestal-based vases (Fig. 7.5a-d), jars, (Fig. 7.6a-d), effigy jars (Fig. 7.7a-e), tripods, effigy bowls, and plates (Fig. 7.8a-f). These examples are near identical to the numerous examples found in the Marquez collection (see Smith 1957a) reportedly derived from Isla de Jaina, the coastal site of Huaymil, Isla de Piedra, Champoton, and Isla de Carmen in Campeche (ibid: 117).



Figure 7.4: Examples of Pedestal based pyriform vessels of Fine Orange ware.



a) 953



b) 955



c) 956



d) 957

Figure 7.5: Examples of Cylindrical pedestal based vases of Fine Orange ware (a-d).



a) 981



b) 1000



c) 965



d) 992

Figure 7.6: Examples of jars of Fine Orange ware.



a) 930



b) 985



c) 972



d) 989



e) 988

Figure 7.7: Examples of effigy jars of Fine Orange ware (“a” courtesy of the British Museum).



a) Tripod 915



b) Effigy bowl 1218



c) Plate 1205



d) Plate 1208



e) 1090



f) 1200

Figure 7.8: Tripods, plates and effigy bowls.

### Isla de Sacrificios II-III Polychrome Fine Orange and Fine Paste Wares

The following ceramic items are polychrome Fine Orange wares, and other fine paste wares with distinctive designs unique to Isla de Sacrificios. These include polychrome Fine Orange pedestal based cylindrical vases (Fig. 7.9a-d) and the polychrome Fine Orange pyriform vessels with floral and bird designs (Fig. 7.10a-f). Medellín Zenil (1955: 36) found similar vases with the motif pictured on the pedestal based cylindrical vase in this example and determined that the design represented the Feathered Serpent (Fig. 7.11a-c). Another motif in common with polychrome Fine Orange ware from the east coast of Yucatan is the butterfly motif (see Taube 2010, 2011) as depicted on this cylindrical pedestal based vase and on the accompanying Isla de Sacrificios type pedestal pyriform vase (Fig. 7.12a-b). Other examples of the Isla de Sacrificios III polychrome Fine paste ware include jars; a tripod with rattle feet, a pedestal based cylindrical vase, and a cup (Fig 7.13a-e). In addition, the Isla de Sacrificios II polychrome Fine Paste ware included a cylindrical vase, cups, plates (Fig. 7.14a-f), effigy jars and effigy bowls (Fig. 7.15a-c), as well as standard jars unique to this coastal region (Fig. 7.16a-d).



a) 954



b) 952



c) 1204



d) 949

Figure 7.9: Polychrome Fine orange pedestal based cylindrical vessels.



a) 1022



b) 1018



c) 1011



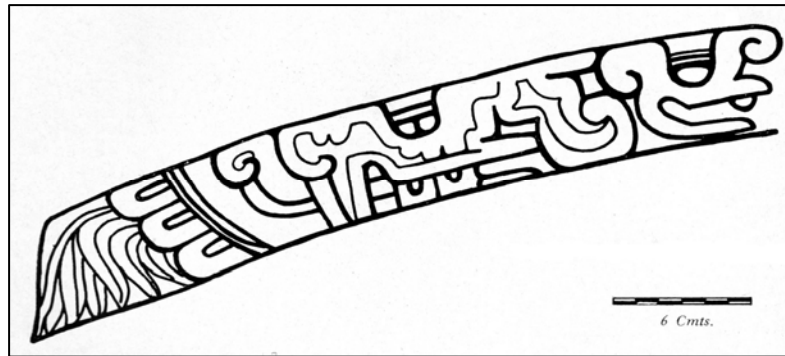
e) 1015



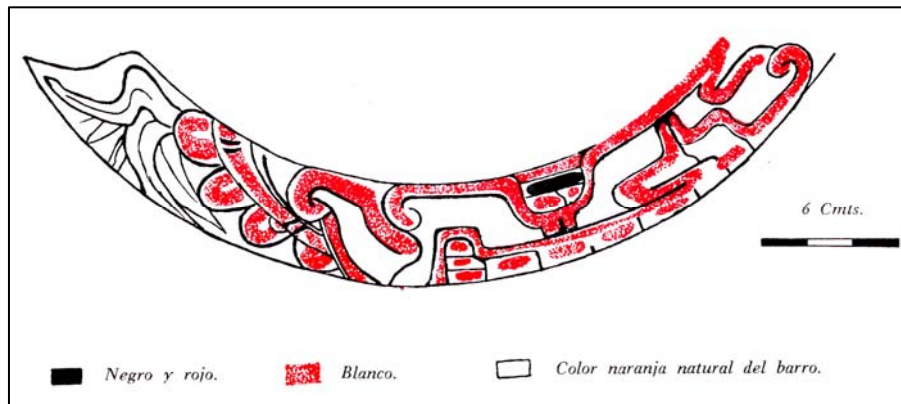
f) 1025

Figure 7.10: Polychrome Fine Orange pedestal vessels with floral and bird motifs.





a)



b)



c) 948

Figure 7.11: Feathered serpent motif on Isla Sacrificios ware ("a" and "b" redrawn from Medellín Zenil 1955: 36)



a) 947



b) 951

Figure 7.12: Polychrome Fine Orange cylindrical pedestal and pedestal pyriform vessels with butterfly motifs (photos of “a” and “b” courtesy of the British Museum).



a) 1204



b) 1104



c) 945



d) 949



e) 946

Figure 7.13: Isla de Sacrificios variety polychrome fine paste wares; jars, tripod with rattle feet, pedestal cylindrical vase, and cup (photos of “a” and “b” courtesy of the British Museum)



a) 1204



b) 917



c) 1196



d) 949



e) 1103



f) 1028

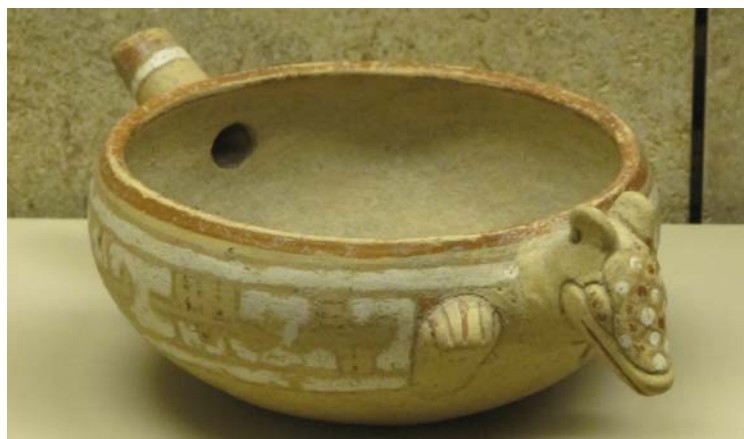
Figure 7.14: Isla de Sacrificios variety polychrome fine paste wares: cups, plates and a pedestal based cylindrical vase



a) 978



b) 975



c) 976

Figure 7.15: Isla de Sacrificios variety Fine paste wares: effigy jars and effigy bowls.



a) 994



b) 1008



c) 995



d) 1010

Figure 7.16: Isla de Sacrificios variety polychrome fine paste wares: jars.

### Tres Picos and Mixteca Puebla Wares

Other examples of Fine Orange wares include the Tres Picos vessels. The pictured examples include a globular jar and a plate with the *ehcacozcatl* symbol (Fig. 7.17a-b). An unusual pedestal based incised vase with bird and floral designs, and an incised vase and incised jug and spout are pictured in this example (Fig. 7.18a-c). The Nepean collection also has a cup representing a polychrome orange Mixteca Puebla Black-on-White-on-Red design with the distinctive Mixteca Puebla International style skull and crossed long bones symbol (Fig. 7.19).

### Plumbate Pottery

Plumbate ware has a lustrous gray surface due to the of high iron content of the textured clay (Smith 1957b: 117). It was one of the most widely traded Early Postclassic ceramic types. Its likely source has been traced to the Pacific coast of Chiapas in Guatemala (Neff 1989). The Nepean collection has several examples of plumbate pottery. Some pictured examples include a pyriform tripod vessel with incised motifs and bulbous feet (Fig. 7.20a-c), and animal effigy jars.

### Incensarios

The *incensario* complex contains four types of vessels for burning incense such as the frying pan or ladle censer, open work censers, spiked braziers and Tlaloc pots (Ringle et al. 1998: 216). The Nepean collection has ceramic examples of the frying pan or ladle censers (Fig. 7.21a-d) as well as the open work censers (Fig. 7.22a-b) and the spiked braziers and a Tlaloc pot variety that is unique to Isla de Sacrificios (Fig. 7.23a-b).



a) 993



b) 1094

Figure 7.17: Tres Picos Fine Orange ware globular jar and plate with the *ehcacozcatl* symbol.





a) 1026



b) 991



c) 998

Figure 7.18: Tres Picos pedestal based incised vase with bird and floral designs, and vase and jug.



1027

Figure 7.19: Mixteca-Puebla orange ware cup with skull and crossed long bones motif.



a) 1027



b) 973



c) 990

Figure 7.20: Plumbate wares.



a) 1221



b) 1224



c) 1230



d) 1231

Figure 7.21: *Incensarios*: Frying pan censers.



a) 930



b) 931

Figure 7.22: *Incensarios*: Open work censers (photo “b” courtesy of the British Museum).



a) 959



b) 964

Figure 7.23: *Incensarios*: Spiked brazier and Tlaloc pot examples.

## **Evidence for Pilgrimage: the Flower Mountain Complex**

According to Taube (2010: 182) the dominant motif in Postclassic International style art is Flower Mountain which reflects a theme involving flowers, butterflies, and birds associated with an eastern solar paradise for the honored dead. Music, breath, and the wind animate both humans and the earth and remain thematic elements emphasized in the assemblage related to this concept. The Nepean collection has items that would fit into this eschatological theme.

### Pendant Masks

The collection includes several stone mask pendants (Fig. 7.24) that are smaller versions of the pendant masks in the Yale University Art Galley thought to originate from Teotihuacan (Fig. 7.25) (see Kubler 1986: 39). The drilled holes in the side of the masks indicate its use as a type of pendant rather than serving as a mask for the face (ibid). Another example in the Morton D. May collection at the St. Louis Art Museum also comes from Teotihuacan. These stone masks are assumed to be funerary masks, but unfortunately such examples have never been excavated *in situ*. The deeply cut eyes and open mouth once held inlays (Parsons 1980: 106).

### Alabaster (tecalli) and Travertine Effigy Vases/Jars

The white alabaster effigy vases and jars (Fig. 7.26) from Isla de Sacrificios at the British Museum were items acquired from Lt. Forrest in 1851. A Spanish account describes the removal of alabaster vases from Isla de Sacrificios. According to Juan Diaz's record of the Grijalva expedition, in Nuttall's (1910: 258) translation of the account, "... while the captain was thus speaking, a Christian disinterred two jars of

alabaster, worthy of being presented to the Emperor and filled with many kind of stones.” A monkey effigy jar from Isla de Sacrificios acquired by the British Museum in 1969 is made of travertine and has a lipped rim and is in the shape of a crouching monkey (Fig. 7.27a). Other monkey effigy jars include items in the Yale University Art Galley taken from Veracruz (Fig. 7.27b) and the East Coast of Yucatan (Fig. 7.27c). Another example of a monkey effigy jar from Isla de Sacrificios (Fig. 7.27d) is in the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City (Fig. 7.27e). The one monkey jar actually found in archaeological context demonstrates funerary associations (Beyer 1969). In the Codex Laud (page 14) the monkey is often paired with death symbols (see Urcid 2010: 197-199).

#### Animal Effigy Jars

Animal effigy jars make up a significant portion of the Fine Orange and Plumbate wares in the collection. Many of the jars were designed to resemble birds, turtles, coatimundis, monkeys and other animals (Fig. 7.28a-e). Since the Fine Orange and Plumbate pottery comprised part of the trade wares involved in the consumption of ritual cuisines or beverages, these jars seem like the most likely candidate for the jars that may have contained *pulque* or *balche*. Such drinks were consumed during Maya drinking rituals as illustrated on Late Classic Maya vases where participants were depicted in various states of physical transformation into birds and other watery creatures.

#### Whistles, Flutes and Ocarinas

The Nepean collection also contains various examples of whistles, flutes and ocarinas as depicted in this water color painting by Captain Nepean (Fig. 7.29). The



flutes were crafted so that the sound coming out the end of it exited the mouth of a bird. The ocarinas also resemble avian creatures. The Nepean collection also has an array of copper bells that in addition to the rattle figurines, and the rattle legs of the ceramic vessels that make noise upon picking them up, contributed to the musical sounds that accompanied activities on the island.



a) 894



b) 893

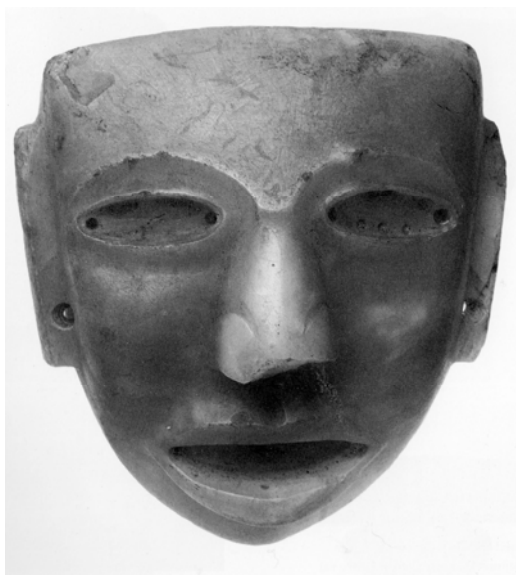
Figure 7.24: Pendant Masks from Isla de Sacrificos (photos of “a” and “b” courtesy of the British Museum).



a)



b)



c)

Figure 7.25: Pendent masks from Teotihuacan (a. Parsons 1980: 106, b. Kubler 1986: 204, c. Kubler 1986: 205)



a) 1851 809a



b) 1851 809b

Figure 7.26: Alabaster jars/vases (photos of “a” and “b” courtesy of the British Museum).



a)



b)



c)



d)



e)

Figure 7.27: Monkey effigy jars (a: Evans 2012: 196, b: S. Patel, c: Kubler 1986: 244, d: Kubler 1986: 245, e: Cyphers 2004: 244).



a) 879



b) 986



c) 974



d) 987 (front)



e) 987 (backside)

Figure 7.28: Animal effigy jars.



Figure 7.29: Flutes and Ocarinas (photo of painting courtesy of the British Museum).

## **Evidence for Pilgrimage: Gender**

Representational art provides unique opportunities to study gender relations (see Brumfiel 2006b: 41). Gender is often expressed differently in certain media such as monumental sculpture in contrast to figurines and these conflicting ideological statements concerning gender help archaeologists determine the political, economic, or social constraints affecting how gender relations play out in actual lived society. Figurines in contrast to monuments often portray a wider range of social identities (Halperin 2007: 46) usually because of their association with household or commoner settings. Although figurines are well represented in the Nepean collection and in previous excavation accounts, little information exists regarding monumental sculpture at Isla de Sacrificios. However in an 1842 report written by Samuel Birch that detailed his examination of Captain Nepean's collection he had the following to say regarding two sculptures recovered from the island.

Among the idols and small statues, which form one of the most interesting portions of his collection, are two of terra-cotta, of considerable size for that material, being nearly two feet high, in a very fragile state, and at present, as they were found, broken by the weight of the superincumbent stratum. They are apparently intended for female divinities, and bear much resemblance in their execution to the works of Aztecs or Mexicans, the eyes being closed, the mouth open and showing the teeth, the head decorated with large ear-rings, and the nose with a nose ring. These objects have been colored in their accessories with red and blue paint (Birch 1844: 140).

It is possible that Birch may be referring to the two portrait heads reflective of Late Classic Remojadas sculpture (Fig. 7.30a-b) included in the collection and currently on display at the British Museum.

### Flat Back Figurines

Figurines from Isla Sacrificios generally fall into two categories; figurines with hollow bodies and figurines with flat backs. Each type has mold made characteristics. Most figurines still attached to torsos in the Nepean collection delineate women. Figurines that have flat backs include the Postclassic Cerros de las Mesas II type (Fig. 7.31a-c) first documented by Drucker (1943: 63-64) at Cerros de las Mesas and later observed by Stark (2001: 206) for the Mixtequilla. In these figures the bodies are flat with arms at their sides or across their abdomen. Similar to the Cerros de las Mesas and the Mixtequilla examples, the Isla de Sacrificios figurines depict feminine figures with conical hats and braided headdresses in addition to figurines who wear the *quechquemitl* (Fig. 7.32a-b, Fig. 7.33a) and a mirror (Fig. 7.33b-c) or a unique combination of *quechquemitl* and a version of the Veracruz diving bird headdress (Fig. 7.34a-c). The drilled holes on the sides of several of these examples, suggests they may have been worn as pendants or costume elements. In addition to the small flat back variety, the Nepean collection also has examples of the large flat back type Cerros de las Mesas III reminiscent of the flat back figurines from Postclassic Central Mexico (Fig. 7.35a-b).

### Hollow Figurines

Isla de Sacrificios' hollow figurines of the Cerros de las Mesas II type (Fig. 7.36a-e) also have their hands at their sides or across their abdomen. Figurines associated with the Isla de Sacrificios type from previous excavations include two hollow figurine-rattle varieties (Medellin Zenil 1955). In the first group, the feminine figure wears a blue and white *quechquemitl* (Fig. 7.37), or the hollow figurine body is depicted sitting cross-



legged in a blue *quechquemitl*. This particular type of hollow figurine sitting cross-legged and wearing a *quechquemitl* was also found on Cozumel (see Phillips 1979: 63). The second group of hollow figurines is shaped like a bell or a rattle but also has the *quechquemitl* clearly delineated (Fig. 7.38a-b). Another subgroup of the bell or rattle shaped variety is also reflected in the collection. The facial expressions on the figurines in this group resemble Drucker's dead heads (Fig. 7.39a-b).

### Figurine Heads

A majority of the figurine heads in the Nepean collection are a version of Drucker's dead heads – a reference to the figurine's facial expression resembling one of death. At Cerro del las Mesas a small percentage of the figurine heads in the Cerro de las Mesas II type represented dead individuals. Many of the figurine heads in the Nepean collection originate from this variety and exhibit the drooping eyelids or sagging mouths (see Drucker 1943: 64) associated with this type (Fig. 7.40a-k). Some heads are clearly individuals with war serpent headdresses (Fig. 7.40 l). A subgroup of the dead heads also includes figures with large hollowed out eyes resembling either Tlaloc heads or other Tlalocan<sup>5</sup> individuals.

### Spindle Whorls

The presence of spindle whorls in ritual contexts is associated with certain feathered serpent pilgrimage cult centers. Seventy six spindle whorls with incised decorative designs were excavated from Postclassic ritual contexts at Cozumel (Phillips

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<sup>5</sup> For the Postclassic Nahuatl speaking peoples Tlalocan designated the watery afterlife paradise of Tlaloc, the rain god, where people whose bodies do not look like the majority (deformed individuals, dwarves, or the physically disabled) and people whose appearance is distorted from drowning or dying from other interactions with water reside (Miller and Taube 1993: 167).

1979: 64). Archaeologists found over five hundred spindle whorls in the Pyramid of the Flowers at Xochitécatl in Tlaxcala (Serra Puche 2001: 268). The Carnegie Institution excavated one hundred and six spindle whorls from Chichén Itzá many from ritual contexts, such as the sweat house east of the Court and the Temple of the Xtoloc Cenote (Kidder 1943: 96). Kidder delineated two types of spindle whorls representative of the collection found at Chichén Itzá. The first type consisted of an incised oval form with decorative designs characterizing one side. The second type of spindle whorl resembled a steep-sided truncated cone resembling a cupcake. Decoration commenced through deep incising and possibly the use of a mold made ceramic stamp. Two designs seemed consistent; one which denoted geometric shapes and flower like symbols and the other which depicted more realistic portraits of animals such as birds and monkeys. The spindle whorls originated from the near surface layers of stratum which indicated to Kidder that they were most likely deposited after the site's abandonment.

There are over two hundred spindle whorls in the Nepean collection from Isla de Sacrificios. Most of the spindle whorls were made from clay or ceramic mold designs although a few examples were crafted from bone and coral. The incised designs on the spindle whorls do reflect Kidder's categories from Chichén Itzá. Such specimens include depictions of birds, monkeys, and geometric flowers (Fig. 7.41a-b). However, many of the designs on the Isla de Sacrificios' spindle whorls also depict earlier isthmian specific symbols and motifs (Fig. 7.41c-g).



a)



b)

Figure 7.30: Remojadas Sculptures on display at the British Museum.



a) 822



b) 808



c) 817

Figure 7.31: Cerro de las Mesas Type II figurines from Isla de Sacrificios; small flat back variety.



a) 809



b) 807

Figure 7.32: Cerro de las Mesas II/Isla de Sacrificios figurines small flat back variety with *quechquemitl*.



a) 813, 814, 815



b) 816



c) 810

Figure 7.33: Cerro de las Mesas II/Isla de Sacrificios figurines small flat back pendant variety with *quechquemiltl* (b-c with mirrors).



a) 791



b) 788



c) 853

Figure 7.34: Cerro de las Mesas II/Isla de Sacrificios figurines small flat back variety with *quechquemitl* and version of the Veracruz diving bird headdress.



a) 853



b) 805

Figure 7.35: Cerro de las Mesas Type III large flat back variety with *quechquemitl*.





a) 840



b) 841



c) 1304



d) 834



e) 838

Figure 7.36: Cerro de las Mesas Type II/Isla de Sacrificios hollow figurines.



a) 839



b) 829

Figure 7.37: Isla de Sacrificios hollow feminine figures wearing the *quechquemitl*.



Figure 7.38: Hollow figurines from Isla de Sacrificios  
(photo from Medellín Zenil 1955: 85)



a) 830



b) 795

Figure 7.39: Isla Sacrificios' hollow rattle or bell-shaped figurines of the Dead Head variety.



Figure 7.40: Drucker's Dead Heads and Tlalocan Heads; figurine heads with drooping face and mouth (a-k). War serpent headdress (l)



a) 12



b) 35



c) 2



d) 24



e) 7



f) 92



g) 22

Figure 7.41: Spindle whorl designs: flowers and monkeys (a-b); Spindle whorl designs reflecting isthmian themes (c-g).

## **Pilgrimage and the Nepean Collection**

Although Medellín Zenil (1955) observed that the majority of archaeological material from Isla de Sacrificios dates to the Early Postclassic period (A.D. 900-1200), he also found a small percentage of material indicative of Late Postclassic (AD. 1200-1521) activities. Archaeologists (see Curet et al. 1994) that work in Veracruz separate this period into the Middle Postclassic (AD 1200-1350) and the Late Postclassic (1350-1521). It is in the Middle Postclassic where changes reflective of the Mixteca-Puebla international style ceramic sphere occur (ibid: 29). Another shift in material culture in this region takes place in the Late Postclassic period and accompanies the political expansion of the Aztec Triple Alliance into the Gulf coast region (ibid: 13). In what ways does the Nepean collection reflect such developments?

The term “feathered serpent cult” denotes, for better or worse, a variety of serpent traditions in Mesoamerica from Preclassic Olmec depictions of an avian serpent, Classic period Maya illustrations of a plumed serpent, Central Mexican representations of a quetzal plumed rattlesnake, to Postclassic examples of the Toltec culture hero Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl (Evans 2008). The feathered serpent cult as it is materially defined for the Epiclassic and Postclassic traditions (Kubler 1985, Ringle et al. 1998) refers to shrine centers and sites that have Epiclassic/Early Postclassic orange and plumbate ceramics, *incensarios*, and exhibit serpent iconography indicative of the Late Postclassic international art style. Feathered serpent pilgrimage practices undoubtedly incorporated a variety of deities as well as varying regional and local religious practices. Isla de Sacrificios’ role as a feathered serpent pilgrimage site was defined by Nuttall’s (1910)

excavations of the island particularly in her documentation of the remnants of an international style serpent mural and her initial examination of serpent imagery found on the vessels in the Nepean collection (ibid: 289-291). Du Solier (1943: 71) added additional points to this conversation. First, Isla de Sacrificios' reflected two temporal periods based on its ceramics which included an earlier period where vessels resembled those found at Chichén Itzá and a later period where vessels resembled those found in Central Mexico. Second, the island had never been permanently inhabited as most of the material derives from caches and burials. Most of the ceramic material in the Nepean collection consists of the orange and plumbate wares as well as *incensarios* indicative of pilgrimage activities associated with the Epiclassic/Early Postclassic feathered serpent cult. However, in addition to these objects there were also many examples of fine paste wares associated with local coastal traditions (see Drucker 1943, Medellín Zenil 1955, 1960).

Pilgrimage in antiquity was not heavily theorized and it often had few written rules. Ancient pilgrimage traditions were often not part of a single religion but rather a collection of beliefs and practices that could be incorporated into divergent religious viewpoints and varying ritual practices (Coleman and Elsner 1995: 29). The diversity of the ceramics in the Nepean collection reflects the diversity of ritual practices expected for an ancient pilgrimage site. Where the diversity of ritual practices in the Nepean collection becomes most evident is in the material related to gender.

If we follow Drucker's (1943: 64) chronology regarding female figurines at Cerro de las Mesas many of the female figurines in the Nepean collection date to the Middle

and Late Postclassic periods. Representations of female figurines in the collection denote changes to ritual practices. First, many of the figurines reflect local coastal traditions and are identical to figurines excavated from Cerro de las Mesas. Second, according to Garraty and Stark (2002: 29) spatial arrangements and ceramic features in the Mixtequilla underwent a significant change from Middle to Late Postclassic times because of the extension of the Aztec empire into south-central Veracruz. It is during the Middle and Late Postclassic period that the region became much more oriented to highland stylistic patterns with subsequent changes to ritual practices reflected by the introduction and use of flat mold-made figurines (Curet et al. 1994: 27). In addition, earlier examples of orange and plumbate vessels in the Nepean collection seem to reflect iconographic themes associated with Flower Mountain, while the Middle and Late Postclassic Dead Head figurines exhibited imagery associated with Aztec descriptions of Tlalocan. Based on his excavations of the island, Medellín Zenil (1955) concluded that there was a pronounced decline in material deposition for the Middle and Late Postclassic periods. As Garraty and Stark (2002: 27) note the Late Postclassic period in the Mixtequilla is defined by a greater gap between the rich and the poor most likely resulting from elevated Aztec tribute demands. The extension of the Aztec empire into Veracruz changed social relations resulting in changes to depositional practices and to material culture.

In what ways does the Nepean collection reflect religious practices dedicated to the cult of Tlazolteotl-Ixcuina? The best evidence for ritual practices associated with a goddess depicted with spinning and weaving tools comes from the numerous incised and



decorated spindle whorls found in the collection and the variety of bone awls, needles, and weaving picks that time constraints prevented me from documenting. Many of the spindle whorls I examined exhibited isthmian imagery as well themes related to the international art style. Spindle whorls were used for the production of textiles, a vital activity to Postclassic central Mexico because textiles served as a unit for tribute payment. In addition to being found in domestic contexts, spindle whorls often show up in ritual and burial contexts. McCafferty and McCafferty (1991) noted that incised and decorated spindle whorls start to appear in Cholula's archaeological record after A.D. 900, with many examples originating from ritual contexts. Proyecto Cholula excavated over six hundred spindle whorls from the ceremonial center surrounding the Great Pyramid (McCafferty and McCafferty 2000: 42). While the deposition of spindle whorls may relate to pilgrimage practices characteristic of both the Early and Late Postclassic periods, refining the chronology associated with the examples in the Nepean collection in order to integrate them into local histories remains a task for future investigators.

As Robles Castellanos (2010: 66) has argued the feathered serpent cult lost ground in Central Mexico to the Aztec imperial cult of Huitzilopochtli in the Late Postclassic period. One of the strategies the Aztecs utilized to bring feathered serpent cult activities under imperial control included integrating Quetzalcoatl into their pantheon, and the importation of the Gulf Coast goddess cults, including their priestesses to their capital at Tenochtitlan. Some of these goddesses included not just Tlazolteotl-Ixcuina but also Cihuacoatl (Woman Serpent) and Coatlicue (Serpents Her Skirt) who becomes the goddess that gives birth to Huitzilopochtli. Many of the serpent elements

that relate to Cihuacoatl and Coatlicue representations such as the two headed serpent belt (see Boone 1999) have their antecedents at El Zapotal in the Late Classic Mixtequilla. Were the Gulf Coast priestesses the same as the feathered serpent priestesses? In order to make comparisons between pilgrimage centers across ethnic and political regions and across the temporal specifics of Postclassic chronology, I have utilized the term “feathered serpent priestesses” as a heuristic device in order to examine the history, linkages and connections between female religious specialists associated with pilgrimage centers that displayed feathered serpent imagery in the Postclassic period. The small flat back figurine pendants in the Nepean collection may have been worn by priestesses conducting rituals at Isla de Sacrificios in the Middle Postclassic. These pendants depict women wearing the *quechquemiltl*, a costume element originating in the Gulf Coast realm (Anawalt 1981), but also incorporated into the religious attire of the Postclassic priestesses and goddesses found in the Mixtec, Aztec, and Maya regions. Therefore it is likely that the Tlazolteotl-Ixcuina priestesses and the feathered serpent priestesses in the Gulf Coast region were one and the same.

## **Chapter 8: Pilgrimage, Politics, and Gender in Postclassic Mexico**

This chapter looks at the connections between Isla de Sacrificios and other feathered serpent cult centers located in Tlaxcala, Oaxaca, and Yucatan and the social relations involved with this pilgrimage and trade network. It addresses previous interpretations of women and ritual in Mesoamerica that tend to interpret women's religious practices as centering first and foremost on the issues of fertility. In what ways was the fertility of the land that sustained agriculture practices in Mesoamerica linked to women's biological reproduction in Postclassic religious discourses and how did women respond to such associations are the questions that will be answered in the following pages.

### **Xochitécatl**

Xochitécatl is a pilgrimage center built on top of an ancient volcano in the Puebla Tlaxcala valley. The top of the hill had been leveled to create a plaza which served as the foundation for a monumental architectural complex consisting of four structures. In the north was the Building of the Serpent, the south denoted the Base of the Volcanoes, the west represented the Building of the Spiral, and the largest structure in the east, aligned to a nearby cave, denoted the Pyramid of the Flowers. The architectural complex was initially constructed in the Late Preclassic period and then reoccupied with the Pyramid of the Flowers elaborated during the Epiclassic/Early Postclassic period. Located next to Cacaxtla along a trade route that connected the Gulf of Mexico with Oaxaca, Xochitécatl

served as a ceremonial center not just for pilgrims who passed through the region but also for local inhabitants of the valley. From the very first excavations carried out by Spranz (1970, 1973) this site has been linked to an assemblage of artifacts interpreted as evidence for female-centered ritual. The numerous feminine figurines excavated by Spranz (1973) and classified as goddesses led him to conclude that site had been important to the cult of Tlazolteotl, Xochiquetzal, and Cihuacoatl. However, Serre Puche (2001) while agreeing with this overall assessment pointed out that the figurines were actually depictions of women in various stages of the life cycle.

Most of the material offerings that link this center to women derive from the Pyramid of the Flowers. Numerous figurines were found under its staircase along with caches of spindle whorls and the burial of children and adolescents. Some of the figurines included *sonrientes*, women in floral headdresses, women wearing the *quechquemitl*, pregnant women, women with small children, infants in cradles, enthroned and warrior women, old women, and articulated figurines with moveable joints and figurines resembling rattles. In addition, a stone monument in front of the Pyramid of the Serpents depicted a woman with serpent associations (ibid).

### **The Arrival of the Feathered Serpent Cult to the Mixtec Region**

Part of the evidence Ringle and colleagues (1998: 185) provide for the expansion of the feathered serpent cult into the La Mixteca region consisted of examples found in the Codex Zouche-Nuttall that discuss the earliest historical events in Mixtec history which they suggest took place in the Epiclassic period. The authors contend that the

retelling of the “War of Heaven” event on pages eighteen and nineteen of the Codex Zouche-Nuttall, which depicts Twelve Wind descending from heaven with a temple on his back, actually describes the arrival of the feathered serpent cult to Oaxaca. The authors draw a causal link between the arrival of the feathered serpent cult and the subsequent depictions of ball court ritual and warfare (ibid, Ringle 2004). One of the founding priests as illustrated in the first two pages of the Codex Zouche-Nuttall obverse is Lord Eight Wind who conducts an important fire drilling ritual at a cave near the river at Apoala. This is where the first “War of Heaven” takes place. According to Antonio de los Reyes (1976 [1593]: i-ii) the Mixtec were not the first group of people linked to Apoala. It was also a sanctuary important to the Tay Nuhu thought to be the previous occupants of this region (Byland and Pohl 1994: 13). On page three (Fig. 8.1) of the Codex Zouche-Nuttall, the “War of Heaven” commences with combatants such as Lady Six Eagle shown with spear and shield, Lady Eight Monkey who ended up a war captive, and Lady Eight Deer who was successful in taking a war captive of her own. After the battle, sacrifices take place followed by a ritual conducted by the maguey/pulque priestesses. In the retelling of the “War of Heaven” on page 20 of the Codex Zouche-Nuttall both Lord Nine Wind and Lady Nine Grass fight in the battle (ibid: 14).

The Codex Selden documents the life of Lady Six Monkey the prominent granddaughter of Lord Eight Wind and Lady Ten Deer. On page five of the Codex Selden (Fig. 8.2) Lady Nine Wind, the daughter of Lord Eight Wind and Lady Ten Deer, takes over the second dynasty at Jaltepec and is depicted conducting a ritual related to rulership in front of a mummy bundle. She then starts an important alliance with the

oracle priestess Lady Nine Grass at the funerary cave shrine at Chalcatongo. The narrative continues with Lady Nine Wind marrying Lord Ten Eagle. Their first son, Lord One Reed Ball Court dies by sacrifice at Chalcatongo. On page six (Fig. 8.3), their second son, Lord Twelve Water, and their third son, Lord Three Water, also become sacrificial offerings for the cave shrine at Chalcatongo. Their fourth child Lady Six Monkey becomes queen and consults with a priest Lord Ten Lizard at Chalcatongo. When Tilantongo attacks Jaltepec Lady Six Monkey's father Lord Ten Eagle is successful at defending the realm. Lady Six Monkey, accompanied by priest Lord Ten Lizard, travels to Chalcatongo. At a conference with the oracle priestess Lady Nine Grass Lady Six Monkey agrees to marry Lord Eleven Wind from Red and White Bundle (Hua Chino). On page seven (Fig. 8.4) at her wedding Lady Six Monkey receives the Serpent *quechquemil*, a dance takes place, and the couple undergo a ritual in a sweat bath before receiving the garments of rulership. Priest advisor Lord Ten Lizard instructs priests Lord Two Flower and Lord Three Crocodile to take Lady Six Monkey to the towns of Sun Hill and Salyutepec where the party is subsequently threatened. Lady Six Monkey again seeks counsel from the oracle Lady Nine Grass at Chalcatongo where they discuss issues related to war. On page eight (Fig. 8. 5), Lady Six Monkey leads and completes a successful military campaign against the offenders and personally sacrifices Lord Two Alligator at Jaltepec and then travels to Red and White Bundle Town to sacrifice Lord Six Lizard. After completing the sacrifices Lady Six Monkey receives a new insignia "Warband *Quechquemil*" (Boone 2000: 72-75, Furst 1982, Troike 1982, Williams 2009: 184-185).

If we look at the foundation of the Mixtec world in the Codex Vindobonensis Mexicanus I (the Vienna) obverse one of the first events discussed is the arrival of Lady 1 Deer and Lord 1 Deer and Lord Nine Wind's establishment of primary shrines aligned to certain landscape features and cardinal directions (Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2007: 70). Each of these shrines was linked to an oracle priest, priestess or to an oracle priestly couple. In the north was the mountain temple Dark Mountain founded by priest Lord Two Dog. In the west the priestess Lady One Eagle and priest Lord One Grass, had a river sanctuary associated with sweat bath rituals. At the funerary cave Skull Place (Chalcatongo) in the south Lady Nine Grass held power. The shrine in the east was a cave temple associated with a sun oracle linked to priestesses Lady Nine Reed, Lady Eleven Serpent and priest Lord One Death. At the center shrine was the oracle shrine Heart of the Earth where Lady Five Flint and Lady Seven Flint both called Maize Flower resided (ibid: 85).

The Vienna obverse depicts how the Mixtec oracle priests and priestesses received the authority and the sacred items behind their office from the Snake Lords. The text illustrates that in the year Thirteen Rabbit day Two Deer, Lord Four Serpent and Lord Seven Serpent present the ritual materials and insignias associated with religious office to the oracle priests and priestesses who figure so prominently in the Mixtec histories. On page 33c, Lady Nine Grass is fifth among twenty-two participants in a conference with Lord Four Serpent and Lord Seven Serpent. The conference begins on page 34d. On page 31 (Fig. 8.6) Lord Nine Wind provides Lady One Eagle and Lord One Grass with the ritual sweat baths required for their river shrine. On page 30 the

sweat baths were put to use in the ear-piercing ceremony for Lord Two Dog. On page 28d (Fig. 8.7) Lady Nine Grass receives the insignia of her office, a serpent *quechquemitl*, from Lord Nine Wind. Other items related to her office were depicted on the following pages. On page 25b (Fig. 8.8) Lady Nine Grass is one of twelve women drinking the sacred intoxicating beverage *pulque* and on page 24b (Fig. 8.9) she participates with eight others in the ritual consumption of mushrooms. On page 15b (Fig. 8.10) Lady Nine Grass is shown at her funerary cave shrine receiving the ritual objects associated with her office which includes a blue flanged pectoral with a round jewel that oracle priests and priestesses give to royal lineage founders to signify legitimate rulership (Furst 1982: 215-217).

Mixtec rulers made pilgrimages outside the area and to local sanctuaries to perform rituals related to rites of passage such as birth, marriage, warfare, death, and ascension to office. On page 14-15 (Fig. 8.11 and 8.12) of the Codex Zouche-Nuttall Lady Three Flint, a prominent Mixtec ancestress is depicted participating in a pilgrimage to the Seven Caves of Origin place. She is accompanied on her journey by her husband Lord Five Flower and four priests. Her pilgrimage encompasses several sites outside the Mixtec region that may have included Xochitécatl. When she returns home she visits the shrine of Lady One Eagle where she conjures a Vision Serpent. During this divination session Lady Three Flint receives a jewel from Lady One Eagle signifying rulership (Furst 1982). Later Lady Three Flint returns to the Lady One Eagles' sweat bath shrine for a ritual that results in the birth of her daughter (Fig. 8.13). Following the birth of her



daughter Lady Three Flint undertakes another set of rituals taking place in the shrine's cave and river (Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2007: 115-119).



Fig. 8.1: Lady Six Eagle, Lady Eight Monkey, and Lady Eight Deer fight in the “War of Heaven” from Zouche-Nuttall page 3 (image courtesy of FAMSI).

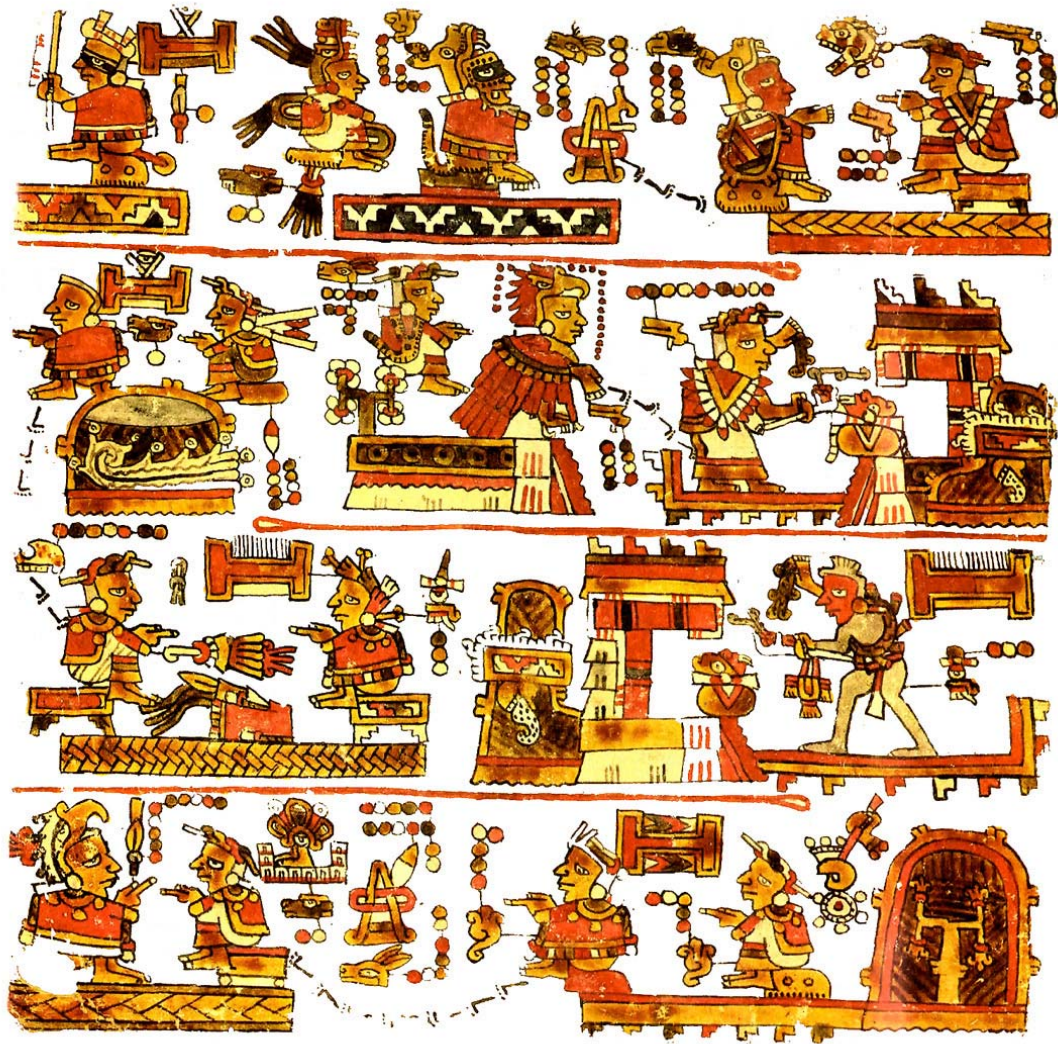


Fig. 8.2: Lady Nine Wind performs a ritual related to rulership on Codex Selden page 5 (image courtesy of FAMSI).

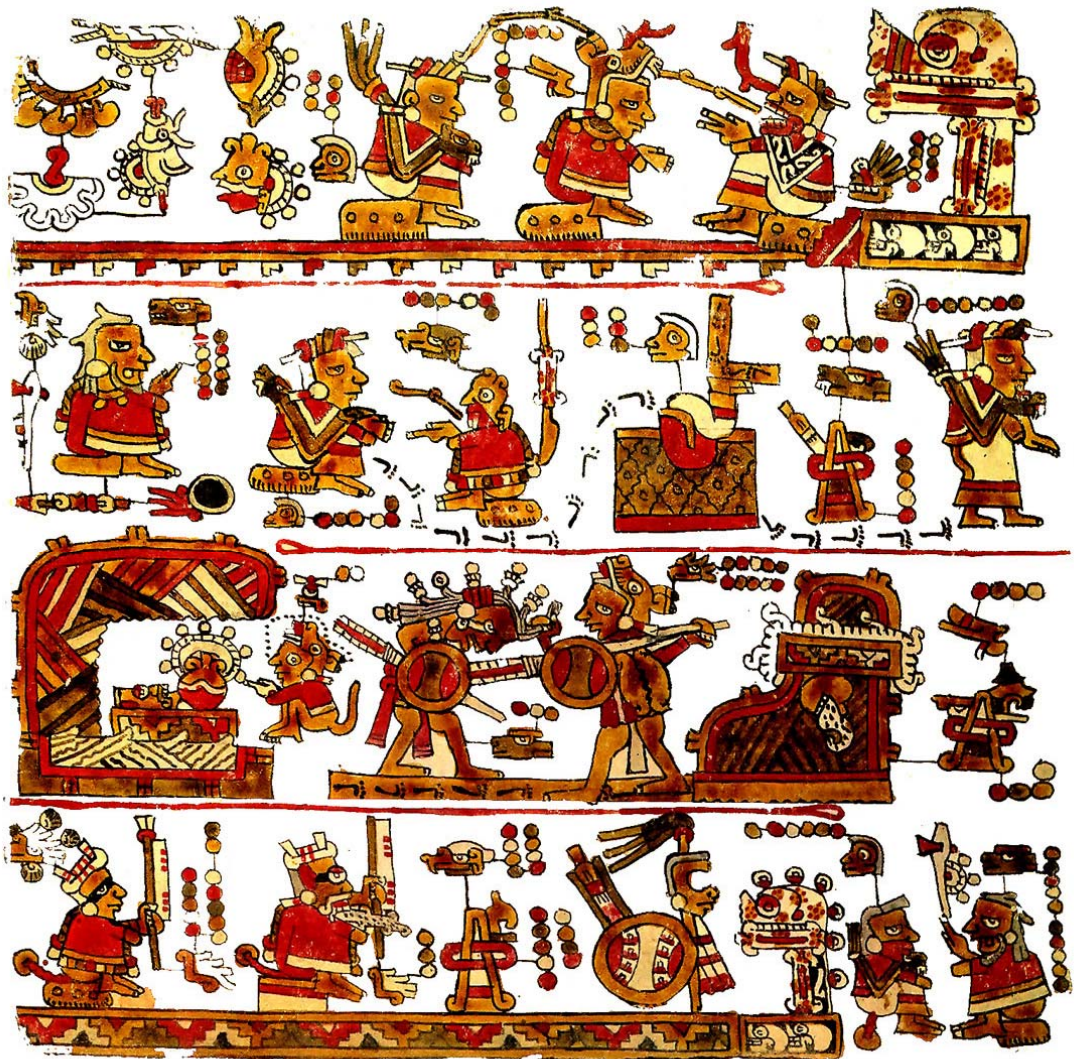


Figure 8.3: Lady Six Monkey, accompanied by priest Lord Ten Lizard, travels to meet with Lady Nine Grass, the oracle priestess of Chalcatongo from page 6 of the Codex Selden (Photo courtesy of FAMSI).

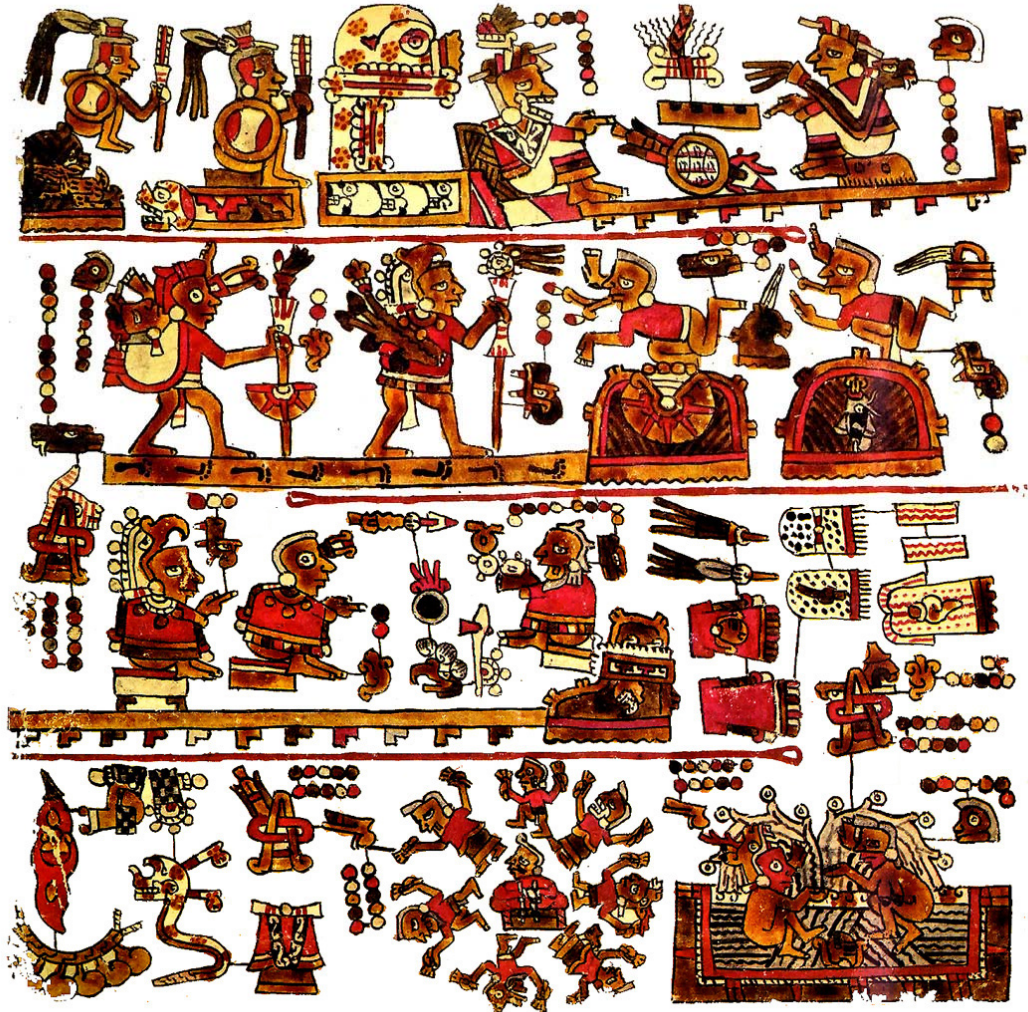


Figure 8.4: Lady Six Monkey travels to the oracle priestess Lady Nine Grass to discuss warfare from page 7 of the Codex Selden (photo courtesy of FAMSI).



Figure 8.5: Lady Six Monkey leads a successful war campaign, sacrifices the captives, and receives a new title, “Warband *Quechquemil*” from page 8 of the Codex Selden (photo courtesy of FAMSI).

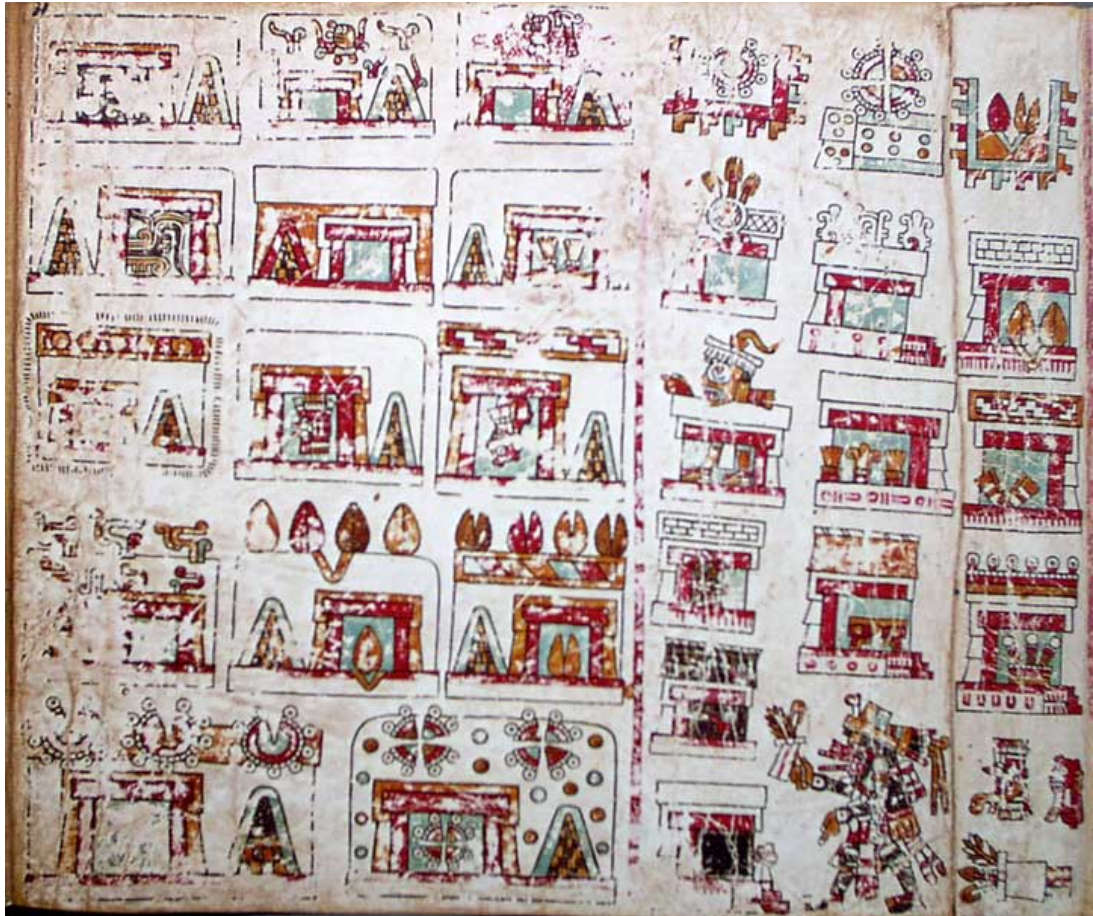


Fig. 8.6: Lord Nine Wind provides Lady One Eagle and Lord One Grass with the ritual sweat baths required for their river shrine on page 31 of the Codex Vienna obverse (photo courtesy of FAMSI).



**Figure 8.7:** Lady Nine Grass receives the insignia of her office, a serpent *quechquemil*, from Lord Nine Wind on page 28 of the Codex Vienna obverse (photo courtesy of FAMSI).



Figure 8.8: Lady Nine Grass is one of twelve women drinking the sacred intoxicating beverage *pulque* on page 25 of the Codex Vienna obverse (photo courtesy of FAMSI).





Figure 8.9: Lady Nine Grass participates with eight others in the ritual consumption of mushrooms on page 24 of the Codex Vienna obverse (photo courtesy of FAMSI).



Figure 8.10: On page 15 of the Codex Vienna obverse Lady Nine Grass is shown at her funerary cave shrine receiving the ritual objects associated with her office (photo courtesy of FAMSI).

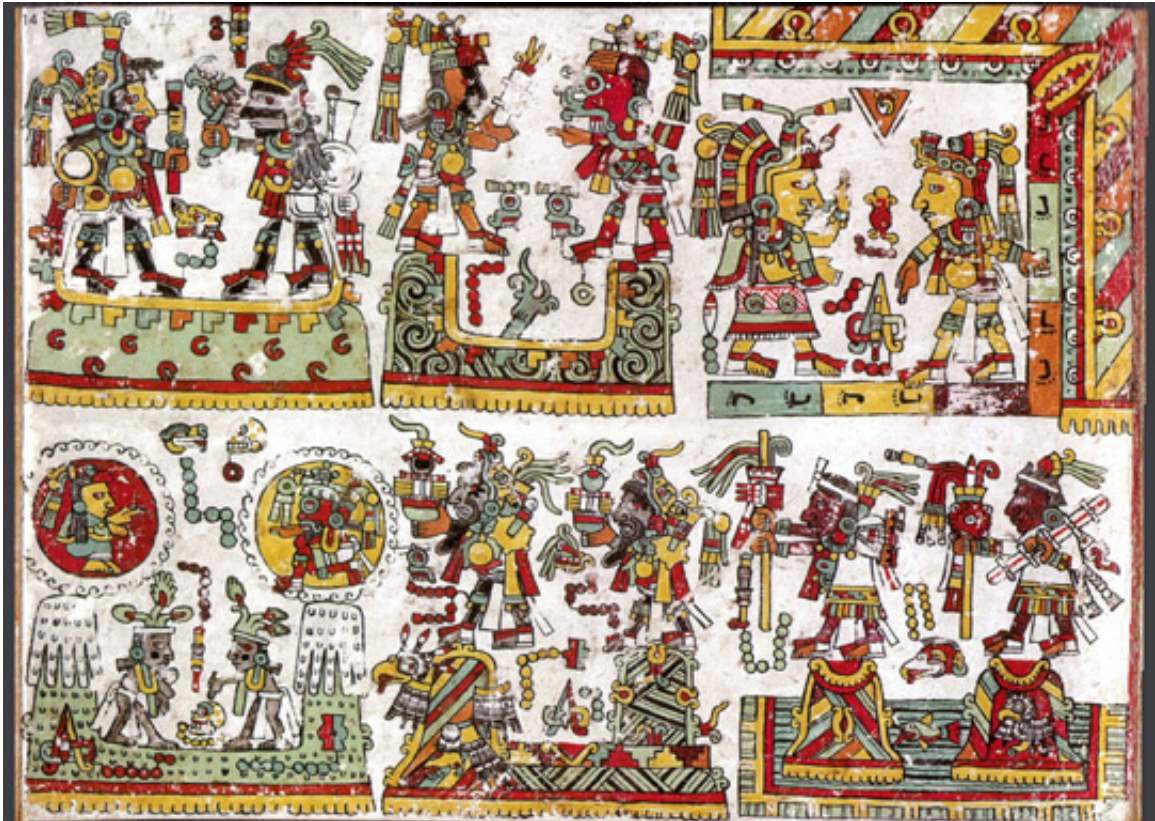


Figure 8.11: Lady Three Flint Shell *quechquemiltl* travels to the Seven Caves of Origin Place on page 14 of the Codex Zouche-Nuttall (photo courtesy of FAMSI).



Figure 8.12: Lady Three Flint makes a pilgrimage to the oracle Lady One Eagle who instructs her in how to conjure a Vision Serpent from page 15 of the Codex Zouche-Nuttall (photo courtesy of FAMSI).



Figure 8.13: Lady Three Flint travels to Lady One Eagle's sweat bath shrine where she gives birth to her daughter followed by rituals involving the shrine's cave and river on page 16 of the Codex Zouche-Nuttall (photo courtesy of FAMSI).

### **Shrines of Birth, Death and Sacrifice: Rites of Passage and the Postclassic Feathered Serpent Priestesses**

Throughout Postclassic Mexico oracle priestesses working within the context of the cult of the feathered serpent performed ceremonies associated with rites of passage. When analyzing religious practices in a cross cultural setting, two forms of ritual often stand out. These religious practices include human life cycle rites and rituals associated with human crises such as an illness (see Livingston 2005: 80). The Mixtec codices point

out the importance of feathered serpent oracle shrines in officiating rituals associated with birth, marriage, death, ancestor veneration, divination, initiation into occupational office, and the act of human sacrifice. We also know from Spanish sources that pilgrimage centers also served as places of healing. These examples indicate that Postclassic pilgrimage centers were designated community and intra-community locations where rites of passage, divination and the rituals involved in the practice of medical knowledge took place. Because women were not excluded from religious positions of power in Postclassic Mesoamerica, female priestesses held authority in the religious and medical practices concerning women as a social group.

#### Birth, Marriage and Occupational Specialization

Because of native scientific observations regarding the interactions between nature and human beings, goddesses in Mesoamerica tended (although not exclusively) to be linked to the moon, water and the earth in religious discourses. Such associations inferred that the fertility of women was connected to the fertility of the earth. During the Postclassic era the proliferation of birth imagery in relation to the birth of vegetation or maize associated with Mixteca Puebla or International art style increased in representations from the codices of Central Mexico and the Mixtec regions (Milbrath 1988: 153). One example includes page 13 of the Codex Borbonicus (Fig. 8.14) which depicts Tlazolteotl-Ixcuina in a parturient stance at the moment of giving birth to the maize god.

Despite religious equivalencies between women, moon, maize and the earth, in ancient Mesoamerica, women were not disempowered with respect to their own bodies

and reproduction rights. While it is often assumed that priestesses associated with the pregnancy and childbirth goddesses such as Tlazolteotl and Ix Chel were primarily patronized in order to become pregnant (see Miller 2005), it is likely that they were also consulted in other matters relating to women's fertility such as how not to become pregnant or how to end a pregnancy once it commenced, or for their knowledge of midwifery during the act of giving birth. Elite women travelled to certain oracle shrines for rituals relating to the birth of their children. The depiction in the Codex Zouche-Nuttall of Lady Three Flint visiting Lady One Eagle's sweat bath shrine, just prior to giving birth, the accompanying religious rituals involved in promoting a successful delivery and the rites of reincorporation involved thereafter is one such example. Another archaeological example that such shrines existed include the shrines on Cozumel whose temples contained sculptured architectural columns depicting women in birthing positions (Patel 2005, 2009). The numerous examples of sweat baths on Cozumel (see Ríos Meneses 1988) indicate the possible use of such structures in birthing rituals in Yucatan. In addition to rituals surrounding birth, such sites may have also been locations for marriages. Both the Codex Selden and the Codex Zouche Nuttall depict instances where both the bride and groom visited an oracle shrine at the advent of their marriage. This would have been the perfect time for a woman to consult with a priestess/midwife physician concerning the correct herbs that either promoted or deterred a pregnancy.

While an official ideology equating women's fertility with the fertility of the land may have been in play during the Postclassic period, there is also a counter ideology that emphasizes women's roles in economic production in addition to their other important

social roles as diviners, curers, and warriors. In the Maya Postclassic codices there is more of an emphasis on representations of goddesses engaged in economic production such as spinning, weaving, and apiculture. Goddess I, although depicted performing rituals involving water (Ciaramella 1994), is primarily shown weaving (Fig. 8.15) while wearing a net skirt and a serpent headdress and sometimes a headdress resembling a pair of horn like elements (Fig. 8.16). The hieroglyphs that designate the name of Goddess I consist of a female head prefixed by the T58 *zac* or “white” glyph (Fig. 8.17) (Taube 1992a: 64). Although Goddess O or Chak Chel also had water associations, she remained linked to divination, medicine, childbirth, and weaving. These roles and attributes that define Goddess O compare closely to the roles and traits associated with Tlazolteotl (ibid: 103). Much like Tlazolteotl Goddess O is also a weaver, midwife and warrior with specific attributes that link her to the Central Mexican fierce goddesses associated with warfare and sacrifice (see Klein 2000). The priestesses of Goddess O were diviners who often carried a mirror used in divination rituals as depicted on the Dresden Codex page 42a where Goddess O holds a mirror containing the face of God C (Fig. 8.18). A similar example from Central Mexico is the sculpture from the feathered serpent cult site of Xochicalco in Morelos that denotes a woman holding a mirror while wearing the war serpent headdress (Fig. 8.19). The Goddess O impersonator as depicted on the mural from structure 16 at Tulum wears the *quechquemitl* designating religious and noble office as well as a serpent and spindles in her headdress denoting the importance of women in priestly offices and their value to the occupation of textile production (Fig. 8.20). These images reflect that in the context of Postclassic religious discourses, the ideology that



compared women's reproductive capacity with that of the earth, met with resistance as women emphasized their importance and leadership skills within the professional or occupational organizations of Mesoamerican society. Additional evidence includes the decorative spindle whorls that end up in Postclassic feathered serpent ritual archaeological contexts demonstrating the act of decoration as a social strategy that calls attention to women's roles in economic production particularly during a period of increased tribute and labor extraction resulting from the centralization of Aztec power (Brumfiel 2006b, McCafferty and McCafferty 1991: 31-32, 2000: 47-48).

#### Isla de Sacrificios: a Feathered Serpent Funerary and Sacrificial Shrine

Isla de Sacrificios was simultaneously a funerary ritual site, a place for human sacrifice, and a location associated with a feminine cult. The feathered serpent pilgrimage assemblage of items from Isla de Sacrificios in the Nepean collection included special jars, plates, and vessels involved in feasting or the consumption of ritual alcoholic beverages. Such items could have also been interred with the dead for their possible use in similar activities found in the afterlife. Funerary rituals as rites of passage helped individuals as well as the community in which they lived to accept changes resulting in the loss of one their members. In many world religions death is a liminal or transitional period prior to a rebirth in a new status (Livingston 2005: 90) and funerary rituals served to situate the deceased into this new status in the afterlife (Van Gennep 1909). Many of the animal effigy vessels and jars in the Nepean collection as well as their iconographic content reflected themes associated with Flower Mountain, a floral solar paradise where

the departed dead were transformed into birds, butterflies and other animals (Taube 2010, 2011).

The figurines in the Nepean collection can be divided into several thematic categories: figurines reflecting the honored dead, figurines with parturient postures,<sup>1</sup> or headdresses of twisted cords and conical hats, and female figurines wearing the *quechquemiltl*. Many of the female figurines with the *quechquemiltl* were rattles that made noise and most likely accompanied music. While rattles were found in the sweat bath areas at Cihuatecpan, the use of such items has been interpreted as “...to avert or draw off dryness and sterility from women’s bodies” (Brumfiel and Overholtzer 2009: 313). Yet such definitions of use reflect Sahagún’s (1950-82: 6: 157) notion that any rituals pertaining to women should reflect concerns with biological reproduction rather than the more simple explanation that such items were used in the production of music that accompanied healing or sweat bath rituals. Figurines of women wearing the *quechquemiltl* emphasized their crucial roles in the religious hierarchy of the feathered serpent cult and Aztec imperial cult practices.

The Veracruz, Campeche and Yucatan coasts had a long history of interaction. Many of the traits associated with the Flower World funerary complex were already in place in Veracruz during the Early Classic period. Medellín Zenil’s excavation at Remojadas and Loma de Los Carmona revealed the use of such sites for the production of clay figurines such as the smiling face figurines that also doubled as whistles and rattles skirts and pectoral bands adorned with snakes, monkeys, stepped frets and other

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<sup>1</sup> The juxtaposition of birth and death may reflect ideas of reincarnation – that the spirits of ancestors came back to inhabit newborn babies.

geometrical images (Medellin Zenil and Peterson 1954). The assemblage of artifacts from Late Classic El Zapotal also underscores the historical importance of snake imagery to women who served as religious officiates in funerary rituals in this area. The Epiclassic period marked a shift in elite funerary locations and practices from the mainland to Isla de Sacrificios.

The proximity of the dead was vital to the acts of divination that affected the living. In the Mixtec codices Lady Nine Grass' power to commune with the dead or with the spirit world derived from her temple at the Chalcatongo cave shrine where prominent Mixtec personages had been buried. An island used for the interment of the dead may have given feathered serpent Postclassic priestesses associated with Isla de Sacrificios the power of oracular divination. In addition, such places denoted the location for human sacrifice where infants, adolescents, or war captives were slain to compensate nature and the divinities associated with it. Additional evidence for the importance of Postclassic priestesses can be seen in the numerous sculptures of prominent religious women adorned in symbols associated with the International art style found on the coasts of northern and southern Veracruz. These were some of the first cultural items to be taken by European explorers and many of these statues and sculptures can be found in museum collections in the U.S. and abroad (see catalog compiled by De La Fuente and Gutierrez Solana 1980: 51-134). The British Museum has several such sculptures from central Veracruz on display which includes a woman wearing a headdress with the International art style solar rays (Fig. 8.21), perhaps indicating an affiliation with the rituals that situated the dead into a solar afterlife. Another sculpture from the northern Veracruz coast in the

Dumbarton Oaks collection (Fig. 8.22) also depicts a woman wearing the war serpent headdress.



Figure 8.14: Tlazolteotl-Ixcuina in a parturient pose giving birth to the maize god from page 13 of the Codex Borbonicus (drawing from Sullivan 1982: 10).



Figure 8.15: Goddess I weaving from page 102c of the Madrid Codex (drawing from Taube 1992b: 65).



Figure 8.16: Goddess I with headdress with horn-like elements from page 107b of the Madrid Codex (drawing from Taube 1992b: 65).



Figure 8.17: Hieroglyph for Goddess I with *zac* prefix and portrait glyph from Dresden page 22b (drawing from Taube 1992b: 65).



Figure 8.18: Goddess O holds a mirror containing the face of God C from the Dresden Codex page 42a (drawing from Taube 1992b: 104).



Figure 8.19: Sculpture of a woman holding a mirror and wearing the war serpent headdress found at Xochicalco, Mexico (drawing from López Luján et. al. 1995:136).



Figure 8.20: Goddess O impersonator with serpent headdress and *quechquemilt* from the mural from Tulum Structure 16 (drawing from Taube 1992b: 102).



Figure 8.21: Statue of a woman wearing an international style solar headdress from the central coast of Veracruz on display at the British Museum (photo S. Patel).





Figure 8.22: Sculpture of a woman wearing the war serpent headdress from the northern coast of Veracruz in the Dumbarton Oaks collection (photo from Evans 2010: 226).

### **From Priestess to Harlot: Friars' Rewrite History of Indigenous Women**

The first Franciscan friars of colonial society were far more interested in promoting indigenous histories that resembled “natural” Christian communities than they were with providing genuine descriptions of pre-conquest religious practices or gender relations. The business of the conquest involved converting the natives from heathens into Christians who would live in accordance with Christian policy which was a prerequisite for incorporating natives into the hierarchal relations of colonial society. This process took place through the reorientation of language, social space, the human body, and everyday social conduct (Hanks 2010: 2). To situate Indians as “proper” members of Christian society involved situating indigenous women into a “proper” code of conduct befitting western European understandings of gender and sexuality. Both Fr. Sahagún and Fr. Landa included passages in their histories that presented European views on what attributes contributed to a proper indigenous woman vs. the attributes that characterized an improper indigenous woman.

According to Fr. Landa (in Tozzer 1941: 127) proper Maya women stayed in their houses to raise their children. Yet in their houses they were great workers who labored during the evening hours to pay their tribute. Proper Maya women were “natural” mothers who taught their daughters that it was improper to raise their eyes to men.

[They] considered it as a very improper thing to look at men or to laugh at them; and so much so that this alone was sufficient to constitute impropriety and without anything more to bring them into ill repute (ibid).

Maya women, according to Landa, were “marvelously chaste” for which he provided an example of a woman captured in Bacalar, Quintana Roo by Captain Alonso Lopez de Avila. Because she was a good chaste woman who valued her chastity above all else she allowed herself to be put to death by dogs rather than to have sexual relations with a man who was not her husband (ibid).

One of the main ways of reorienting language and indigenous society was to describe gender relations in terms of the Christian patriarchal good vs. evil binary. Reorienting sexual mores was a major concern of the friars and they were quite specific as to what constituted proper gender and sexual relations. Fr. Sahagún discusses in great detail the different types of evil women in Aztec society. An Aztec woman who went to a healer for herbs that caused abortions or who had a child outside of marriage was a *tetzauhcihuatl* “an ominous woman” (Burkhart 1989: 150). Another evil woman as described in Sahagún’s narrative was the “hermaphrodite” - a “detestable woman” who has a penis or who has carnal relations with other women or who went about acting like a man. An additional example was the evil female physician who provided herbs for contraception or abortion and who “...has a vulva, a crushed vulva, a friction-loving vulva. [She is] a doer of evil. She bewitches – a sorceress, a person of sorcery, a possessed one” (Sahagún 1958-70: 10, 53). Fr. Sahagún probably had the Ixcuiname or the feathered serpent priestesses in mind when he described the Aztec harlots in this passage from Book 10 of the Florentine Codex.

She appears like a flower, looks gaudy, arrays herself gaudily; she views herself in a mirror – carries a mirror in her hand. She bathes; she takes a sweat bath; she washes herself; she anoints herself with *axin*. She lives like a bathed slave, acts like a sacrificial victim; she goes about with her head high – rude, drunk, shameless – eating mushrooms. She paints her face, variously paints her face; her face is covered in rouge, her cheeks are colored, her teeth are darkened...rubbed with cochineal. [Half] of her hair falls loose, half is wound about her head. She arranges her hair like horns (Sahagún 1958-70, 10:55).

As Arvey (1988: 190) pointed out Book 10 of Sahagún's Florentine Codex is more reflective of colonial views regarding women and sexuality rather than an accurate reflection on beliefs regarding "good" and "evil" women in pre-conquest society (see also McCafferty and McCafferty 1999).

The Franciscan friars had most likely read *the Malleus Maleficarum* or *Hammer of Witches* a European text written in 1484 by the Reverends Kramer and Sprenger. Over the course of three hundred years this manual served as the primary legal reference for spotting and prosecuting European women suspected of being witches. According to the *Malleus* "when a woman thinks alone, she thinks evil," and women who were witches were accused of taking pleasure from sex, being organized, and for possessing medical and obstetrical skills (Ehrenreich and English 2010 [1973]: 39-40). Such views are reflected in this passage from *Malleus Maleficarum*,

Now there are, as it is said in the Papal Bull, seven methods by which they infect with witchcraft the venereal act and the conception of the womb: First, by including the minds of men to inordinate passion; second, by obstructing their generative force; third, by removing the members accommodated to that act; fourth by changing men into beasts by their magic act; fifth by destroying the generative force in women; sixth by procuring abortion; seventh by offering children to the devils, besides other animals and fruits of the earth with which they work much harm (ibid: 41).

When the friars encountered indigenous women in Mesoamerica who held their heads up thinking themselves equal to men or who controlled their own fertility and the decisions affecting their own bodies, the friars could not help but to think that such women had been swayed by the Devil and thus feverishly worked to reorient them into more acceptable views of sexuality and gender relations that reflected European Christian policies.

## Chapter 9: State Formation and Gender Subordination

One of the reasons for exploring pilgrimage in the context of Mesoamerica is to understand the larger social, economic, and political relations involved in a multi-polity religious network. Implicit in that objective is the question of what constitutes a political polity. Debate over the nature of the ancient state in the Maya Lowlands acknowledges the high variation in these political forms over time and space and the difficulty in applying a “one size fits all” model. Much of the debate in the Classic Maya region has focused on centralized and decentralized models of the Maya state with some scholars suggesting they represent ends of a political spectrum (See Iannone 2002, Lecount and Yaeger 2010: 22). Other researchers (Chase et al. 2009) emphasize the political diversity of governing styles calling attention to the evidence for centralized hierarchal structures as well as more collective and heterarchical arrangements. Epigraphic models equate emblem glyphs with distinct political polities (Mathews 1991, Schele and Mathews 1991) akin to an independent city-state or peer polity model. According to epigraphers each polity with an emblem glyph represented a monarchy ruled by a ruler who held the title “divine lord.” Martin and Grube (1995: 42, 2008: 19) pointed out the glyphs which designate subordinate (such as *sajal* and *y-ajaw*) and dominant (*koloomte’* and *kuhul ajaw*) social and political relationships. The prevalence of an emblem glyph and subordinate and dominant titles at more than one site has led to discussions of regional states (Adam and Jones 1981) and superpowers (A. Chase and D. Chase 1996; Marcus 1993, Martin and Grube 2000). However, assumptions that larger sites controlled nearby

smaller sites reflective of a regional settlement hierarchy is not always confirmed by archaeological data. In southern Quintana Roo, excavations at both Dzibanché and the contemporaneous smaller site of Kohunlich located 30 km away revealed that these two sites rarely interacted with one another (Nalda 2005).

A historical material approach to state formation implies an on going process that is not unidirectional. It does not privilege the state as the highest form of human political expression or the inevitable result of human progress (Diamond 1974, Gailey and Patterson 1987). The process of precapitalist state formation produces various kinds of communities where the social, political, and economic relations develop differently from community to community producing “heterogeneous mosaics of societies rather than polities with the same sociopolitical structures” (Patterson 1987: 117, 2003: 99-100). As an uneven form of development when state formation encounters strong resistance it affects the forms of extraction (Gailey 1987b). The social and political relations between a tribute receiving Classic Maya elite polity and adjacent commoner communities providing surplus labor and agricultural products were diverse with clear limits in some communities on what could be extracted. In regions where archaeological investigations have focused on farming communities, excavation results demonstrate a great deal independence and resistance among certain farming communities to state exploitive practices. At Chan, a farming settlement located 4 km southeast of Xunantunich, archaeologists found a community that, despite its proximity to a polity, had retained a great deal of control over the products of their labor. The construction of Xunantunich in the Late Classic period coincided with Chan’s resistance and ethnogenesis based strategy

that saw an increase in group focused political activities as ritual practices changed from focusing on individual ancestors to more community based activities (Robin 2012: 318). Additional data that indicates Chan retained control of their community included the extensive agricultural terraces that were not the result of state centralization but rather improvements made by Chan community members over time (Wyatt 2012). Chan also demonstrated sociopolitical and economic relations with networks outside Xunantunich. Finally, one of the most significant findings is the lack of evidence for social stratification and gender subordination within this farming community (Robin 2002, 2012: 330).

If there were limits on what could be extracted from farming communities the leaders of some polities responded by increasing labor demands on their own relatives. Excavations at Classic period Maya polities have demonstrated evidence for polychrome pottery, stone tool, textile, and shell production in royal and non royal elite contexts (see Halperin and Foias 2010, Robin 2004). At Sepulturas, Copan Hendon (1997) found a direct correlation between the highest-status residences and the intensity of cloth production. Another form of wealth and surplus labor in the Classic period was warfare. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century the arrival of a new cult at Teotihuacan was marked by the construction of the Temple of the Feathered Serpent and the sacrifice of over two hundred individuals who had been dressed in multiple symbols indicating they were warriors. Because elite burials may have been integrated into the pyramid's construction Sugiyama (2005: 226) equates this temple with themes relating to human sacrifice, militarism, and rulership. As Taube (1992a) has argued much of the imagery surrounding the Temple of the Feathered



Serpent pertains to a cult of warfare. Religious ideologies can often be used as means to designate as “other” certain social groups in society. Taking human rights away from “others” is one way to justify a social order based on inequality. War captives had no human rights in the ideology of the cult of the feathered serpent. They lost their right to life once they had been captured. War captives also lost the right to the fruits of their labor by working for their captors or through their social status as slaves. Once objectified, war captives became commodities whose lives could be used as payment and recompense to sacred powers or for the aggrandizement of ruling families. Burial programs and funerary rituals incorporating human sacrificial offerings emphasized the success of rulers (and their ancestors) who acquired wealth and power through successful war campaigns.

We are only just beginning to realize the extent of interregional cultural exchange between the Maya and the residents of Teotihuacan. The characteristics of Classic period pilgrimage and politics consisted of an intra-polity religious network/institution that developed in tandem with a multistate society, which had recourse to some level of force, sanctioned political legitimacy through the visitation of culturally significant religious sites and/or natural features, and whose members consisted of elite men and women drawn from different polities. It seems obvious that elite consensus did not exist regarding the efficacy of this cult. If consensus existed then “lineage replacements” or the death of key political actors surrounding the arrival of religious personages would not have occurred with such frequency in the epigraphic and archaeological record of the Maya Lowlands.

Membership in this religious cult during the Classic period meant that Maya royalty never acted independently. *Kolomte'ob* could travel to witness religious and political rites, or they could attach their *aj k'uhuun*<sup>1</sup> to be “seated” in an official priestly capacity at another site (see Houston and Inomata 2009: 174), and/or they could also send their *sajal* to make sure that the cult’s interests were served. When royalty went on pilgrimage they were always accompanied by other lords or Snake specialists. However, the construction of Chichén Itzá marks a shift in the institutions surrounding this cult. Some of the earliest dates for Chichén Itzá come from material pulled from its Great Cenote indicating that this particular area of Yucatan had been ritually important long before the dedication of its major structures. The foundation of this city seems to center around religious legitimacy of its key political figures. The inscriptions dating to the early history of this site includes building dedications and fire rituals related to structures housing deities and ancestors rather than housing members of a royal court. In the 10th century there is a policy shift from asserting linguistic independence in the monumental inscriptions to implementing a narrative iconographic program that transcended linguistic and literate boundaries. Did changes in social, political, economic relations in the Southern Lowlands prompt the policy change? Was it obvious that the extraction of surplus labor needed to build huge dynastic monuments was no longer a strategy to be tolerated by the farming communities and commoners whose labor and food such polities relied on?

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<sup>1</sup> The *yajaw-k'ahk'*, the fire’s lord, was another important religious attendant related to this cult.

The way divine rulership in the Classic Maya region has been framed is that rulers claimed to be gods or at least enjoyed their support. They supposedly performed rituals that mediated between the humanity and the spiritual realm to ensure the survival of society. Royal tomb complexes, which required an enormous amount of labor, associated political power with a ruler's family lineage. It is often assumed that both elites and commoners in society bought into the sanctity of the ruler. Yet farming communities like Chan used a completely different ceramic complex from Xunantunich in their ritual activities (Kosakowsky et al. 2012) either indicating separate religious spheres or a complete lack of faith in the divine statements made by rulers. Since ideologies of rulership were no longer an effective means to acquire surplus labor for the construction of large dynastic pyramids dedicated to ruling lineages at the close of the Classic period in the Maya Lowlands, did the priests and priestesses of the feathered serpent cult respond by shifting the focus of the cult to include commoner communities?

Rulers in Classic period Yucatan were already resistant to the Southern Lowland traditions of divine kingship as evidenced in the large amount of inscriptions from this region that drop the "holy" or "lord" component in royal emblem glyph titles. Switching to a narrative iconographic program speaks to a new political policy to break all social and religious ties with Southern Lowland elite traditions, as well as their intention to forge new economic and political relations not only with non-Mayas living to the north but also with commoners or illiterate members of their own society. Through a network of pilgrimage centers the feathered serpent cult took over the rites of passage most relevant to the political centers engaged in its network: the rites of initiation regarding

political legitimacy and the funerary rites that situated deceased family members into a solar afterlife. Yet, because the acquisition of wealth, which benefited both rulers and religious specialists, continued to be based on warfare, the sacrifice of captives continued to be integral to the art surrounding this cult. Therefore, it seems unlikely that marriage alliances among members of this network were about avoiding war (i.e. Webster 1997).

Taube (2003, 2004) also found a connection between the Maya eschatological concept of Flower Mountain, and the Feathered Serpent Pyramid at Teotihuacan. A pilgrimage/political/religious network between the Maya and Teotihuacan seems to have played a role in the dominant religious/warlord titles (i.e. *kaloomte'*) found among royalty in the Maya area. Since west *kaloomte'* signified a title received from Teotihuacan, it seems reasonable to assume that east *kaloomte'* and north *kaloomte'* found in Classic period inscriptions in the Maya region might represent other important religious centers associated with this network that were spread over great distances in Mesoamerica. One of the responses to the shift in the forces and relations of production at the close of the Classic period was to shore up the distances between shrines. In the Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic period it seems the arrival of the cult into certain regions like Campeche and La Mixteca<sup>2</sup> began with an establishment of multiple local shrines aligned to the cardinal directions. The use of an International art style that did not rely on literacy to record rites of passage indicate that a change in policy, one refashioned from an earlier strategy used by Teotihuacan, to emphasize corporate identity among elites and commoners who lived within the purview of local regional shrines. Rituals of

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<sup>2</sup> There are other linkages of this cult that extend into Central Mexico such as the reorientation of cult practices resulting in the construction of the Temple of the Feathered Serpent at Cholula.

birth, death, marriage, and healing became a means to inculcate the cult into the everyday lives of the people who lived within the region as well as providing recognizable shrines to foreign traders and pilgrims who passed through the area. Surplus labor did not go into building huge dynastic shrines for royalty but rather went into building multiple local shrines where religious specialists held power particularly along the coasts of Yucatan, Campeche, and Veracruz where numerous settlements thrived in the Postclassic period under a flurry of construction projects brought about by increased trade and commerce.

The Classic period arrival events of women to polities in the Maya region has always been framed as the arrival of women to biologically re-seed a new dynasty rather than the arrival of women religious specialists who performed important social rituals. While certainly some Snake women married into polities participating in this network, not all arrival events of female religious specialists to Maya polities in the Classic period were about marriage and biological reproduction. Women were privileged members and religious specialists in the Usumacinta River region, Yucatan and Veracruz coasts through the important religious titles inherited through their mothers, through embracing their association with waterways which brought additional knowledge and wealth from other regions of Mesoamerica, and through their social roles in ball court, warfare and divination rituals. The feminine cult that parallels these regions in the Postclassic period is a direct result of the efforts of Classic period women to secure their place in maintaining and promoting pilgrimage practices. While the jade net skirt continues to be an important ritual costume related to this cult, we also see the use of a new costume

element in the crossed long bones that appear on priestesses' skirts indicating expertise in sacrificial and funerary divination.

### **Women and States**

At the beginning of my research I started out with the assumption that women's subordination could be easily discerned among the elite in ancient Classic Maya society and that the decentralization of political structures in the Maya Lowlands during the Postclassic period would lead to measurable improvements in elite women's status and authority in Postclassic pilgrimage practices. However, locating Classic period gender inequality and the numerous institutional practices that would lead to the subjugation of women in the Northern Lowlands only revealed the vast differences between gender inequality in precapitalist states and gender inequality found in contemporary capitalist examples. In addition no models of state formation allow for the privileging of a matrilineal system of descent as seen in Yucatan and the Usumacinta River region during the Classic period. Buried deep in my initial hypothesis was the assumption of male dominance characteristic of most models of state formation and complex societies (See Pyburn 2004: 5).

In "A Feminist Critique of Recent Archaeological Theories and Explanations of the Rise of State-Level Societies" (2000) Key and MacKinnon postulated that during the rise or collapse of a state-level society gender relations temporarily become more equitable implying that women's status in class societies only improves during times of political transition. Focusing on the Classic Maya they relied on the Copan queen as one

of their examples arguing that the splendor of her burial could only be explained through an analysis of the state because at the time she was interred Copan resembled more of a chiefdom than a state (ibid: 113). Using Engels (1884) as a model they (Key and MacKinnon 2000: 110) assumed Classic Maya women's activities would be located only within the private realm of the household or the family since this space would be the most reflective of women's activities in all precapitalist state societies. Although Engels offered an extremely useful historical methodology in which to investigate gender relations in the context of ancient class based societies, his ideas were also the product of nineteenth century anthropological narratives which assumed that the rights of the father had long ago replaced the more primitive rights of the mother. Sexism predates capitalism but its material and social manifestations were dependent on the historical preconditions found within the variety of forms characterizing social inequality in state societies.

In the *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884) Engels proposed theoretical and methodological guidelines for investigating the origin of gender hierarchy. First, he stressed the importance of historical factors in the dialectical linkages between the production of the means of subsistence and the reproduction of human social and physical life. Second, he pointed out that the oppression of women emerges historically, not naturally, within the development of state societies. However, the main drawback in utilizing Engels' argument as a trans-cultural explanation for gender subordination resides in his use of an evolutionary framework and analytical categories alien to the philosophy behind historical materialism (Gimenez 1987: 42). Because

Engels lacked current anthropological non-European data regarding the variety of articulations between different modes of production and the manner of human social and physical reproduction which produces varying impacts on gender relations in societies that predated capitalism, he fell into the trap of presenting gender inequality in idealist terms, at the level of appearances, which universalized existing family arrangements and gender relations assumed under capitalism (ibid: 45). Nineteenth century notions regarding the monogamous family based on the private ownership of land, marriage as an arrangement between individuals and a few determined parents, the “natural” division of labor, sexual repression of women to ensure legitimate heirs, and the privatization of household labor were all presented as unchanging realities common to all class based societies throughout space and time. Unfortunately, this perspective only reinforces current views of patriarchy where men exchange women or control women’s reproductive ability in their interests and where men alone are the social agents with the power to shape history in their favor. Posing the problem in such a manner transforms the existence of gender inequities into an ahistorical battle between the sexes that ignores the underlying social and economic contradictions found in the intersections of gender, sexuality, race, and class that result in only some men benefiting from patriarchal arrangements under capitalism. Such existing social structures demonstrate that not all men are the enemy and that not all women are “sisters” (ibid: 53).

In regards to the Classic Maya state(s) it is not clear that the alienation from nature and its devaluation in production processes had necessarily occurred which would have allowed land to be viewed as a personal commodity to be exchanged between



individuals or to be bought and sold in the marketplace. Archaeological investigations in Mesoamerica have failed to prove that concepts similar to western notions of private property arose as a result of state formation in this region or that writing developed to keep track of such transactions. Gledhill's (1984) exploration of the applicability of the Asiatic mode of production to the case of Aztec state formation revealed that even at the height of Aztec state domination it was the use-rights to the land that were transferred rather than land titles that implied ownership (ibid: 139).

Patriarchy in the context of Classic and Postclassic Maya society looks very different from patriarchy today. Patriarchy implies that men hold power, make the decisions, and are the dominant figures in society. Usually patriarchal power is reproduced and maintained through multiple social institutions like religion, the economy, media and art, the legal system and particularly the realm of politics. Patriarchy in Classic Maya society was not reinforced through multiple social systems of inequality that prevent women's full participation in deciding policy in the leadership positions found in legal, political or religious spheres of U.S. society. Gender inequality in the Classic Maya area seems to have only affected a small number of women in certain regions rather than the entire female population. Gender hierarchy could only be minimally maintained in Classic Maya religion where gods and goddesses shared religious responsibilities. In the Maya precapitalist patriarchal society occupational opportunities were limited by class rather than constrained solely through gender. Within the constraints of class, women could become rulers, warriors, farmers, weavers, chefs, traders, priestesses, scribes, artisans and healers even if they happened to be also mothers,

sisters, wives, and daughters. Finally, in this example of a patriarchal state society, women were successful in preventing the state from controlling their reproduction rights. Although Classic Maya women were equated with nature in terms of their reproductive capacity in religious discourses, they were also active social agents that could not be barred from political or religious positions of power, and were thus able to use such associations with nature, water and the earth to their advantage ensuring that their Postclassic female descendents controlled the political conversation, the medical knowledge and the material conditions involved in making personal decisions regarding fertility and family planning.

### **Concluding Statement**

This dissertation sought to decolonize archaeological narratives regarding pilgrimage practices associated with women in Postclassic Mexico because what we say about women in the past has political consequences for women in the present. I originally started this project from Engels (1884) point that gender subordination is linked to state formative processes. I reasoned that if a state was in the process of decentralization gender ideologies would change providing women more access to authority and power, but this point I was unable to prove, not only because most models of the state assume male domination, but also because history is a messy process (see Patterson 2009) and although the Maya state was in the process of decentralization gender ideologies in the Postclassic Yucatan and Veracruz regions were ultimately affected by state formative processes associated with the expansion of the Aztec empire.

However, by applying a feminist standpoint to pilgrimage practices I was able to demonstrate that women in Mesoamerica were valued for their social contributions to politics, the economy, religion, and warfare and that the focus on women's reproductive potential in certain archaeological narratives originates from western colonial attitudes and not from objective scientific accounts of the material record. In addition, I tried to provide a deeper history of the feathered serpent cult by exploring the connections between Classic Maya women, religious titles and attire, serpents that facilitated divinatory visions and pilgrimage to Teotihuacan.

My examination of the Nepean collection from Postclassic Veracruz highlighted the potential that pilgrimage assemblages can provide for understanding regional and local politics. The pilgrimage model as proposed by Ringle and colleagues (1998) tended to conflate Epiclassic and Late Postclassic chronologies which did not adequately explain the real material differences between the Epiclassic/Early Postclassic and Middle and Late Postclassic pilgrimage assemblages at Isla de Sacrificios. Yet I did demonstrate that pilgrimage assemblages can provide information concerning gender relations and that women do make history despite state constraints found in hierarchal societies. Finally, what I learned from this research project is that archaeologists working in the Maya region need better state models that do not automatically assume that a woman's child belongs to the father's kin group or that gender subordination is the main form of oppression experienced by women in precapitalist societies.

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