The idea of holding a Dumbarton Oaks conference on Pre-Columbian gender was originally proposed by Barbara Voorhies and Heather Lechtman at a meeting of the Dumbarton Oaks senior fellows in 1994. The initial response of the rest of the group was mixed, with much of their hesitation stemming from fear that a conference on Pre-Columbian gender would be premature. Since gender studies were still very young in preconquest American research, some argued, too few Pre-Columbianists were yet engaged in them. Others knew, however, that substantial numbers of Americanists were already working on gender issues. As a senior fellow at the time, I spoke with particular enthusiasm in support of the proposal. As a result, not only did the committee agree to pursue the project, but I found myself agreeing to serve as the conference organizer, as well.

My interest in gender issues had been kindled back in the late 1970s by the discovery of the huge Aztec stone-carved relief of a nude, bound, decapitated, and dismembered woman named Coyolxauhqui. The relief was found at the foot of pyramid stairs leading to the temple that housed the principal statue of the state’s patron war god, Huitzilopochtli. The scene corresponds to colonial texts that record an Aztec legend in which Huitzilopochtli kills a rebellious sister, Coyolxauhqui, and then rolls her body down a mountain, where it breaks into pieces. In several articles (Klein 1988, 1993, 1994), I tried to explain why the Aztec state would have invested so heavily in a monumental depiction of this defeated woman and what it might tell us about the rhetorical role of gender in both Aztec social relations and imperial discourse. In the course of searching for answers to these questions, I learned of a surprising number of fellow Pre-Hispanicists who were likewise asking questions about the role and status of women in the early Americas, both in Mesoamerica and in the Andean region. This was one reason why I felt sure that Dumbarton Oaks would have no trouble putting together a quality conference on Pre-Columbian gender.
Being vastly wiser than I was then, I can now say, however, that at the time I had no idea how many of my colleagues shared my interest in Pre-Hispanic gender issues. Had it been feasible, Dumbarton Oaks could easily have extended this conference for another week, or even longer, without exhausting the pool of first-class contributors. It ultimately became clear to me that, far from being premature, a conference on gender in the preconquest Americas was already overdue.

By 1996, the year in which the Dumbarton Oaks gender conference was held, there had not yet been a follow-up to the pioneering interdisciplinary symposium, “The Role of Gender in Pre-Columbian America,” organized by art historians Virginia E. Miller and Mary Ellen Miller for the 1985 International Congress of Americanists in Bogotá, Colombia. The published proceedings of that symposium, which were edited by Virginia E. Miller and appeared in 1988, still stand alone in their class. While the presenters at the Bogotá symposium had included art historians as well as archaeologists, virtually all subsequent conferences on Pre-Columbian gender were lodged in, and featured presenters from, the social sciences; no art historians were ever involved. Pre-Columbian art historians, moreover, had organized no gender conferences of their own. In other words, social scientists and art historians studying precontact American cultures had gone their separate ways between 1988 and 1996, with the art historians working in total isolation from one another.

It is not entirely clear why gender specialists in Pre-Columbian art history were so slow to organize and collaborate with their colleagues in other disciplines, although there were still comparatively few trained Pre-Columbian art historians working on gender in 1996. In addition to myself, only the art historians Magali Marie Carrera (1979), Betty Ann Brown (1983), Susan Milbrath (1988, 1995, 1996), Virginia E. Miller (1988), Andrea Joyce Stone (1988, 1991), and Margaret Campbell Arvey (1988, n.d.) had written extensively on Pre-Columbian gender issues at that time. This number contrasts significantly with that of anthropologists, archaeologists, and historians, both in the United States and in Latin America, who have worked on Pre-Columbian gender since the early 1960s.2

1 By “trained Pre-Columbian art historians” I mean scholars with advanced degrees in Pre-Columbian art history, as opposed to any other discipline. This does not imply, of course, that scholars trained in other disciplines cannot “do” art history or that their work is not important to art historians. In fact, some of the most important insights into the relation of Pre-Columbian art to gender have been provided by archaeologists, anthropologists, and historians.

2 For a concise survey of the work done on gender in the preconquest Americas up to 1988, see Miller (1988).
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The first serious study of the representation and role of women in ancient America was produced by Tatiana Proskouriakoff, who had served as architectural illustrator for the 1939–40 Carnegie Institution of Washington archaeological expedition to the Maya area. Although Proskouriakoff herself was trained not as an archaeologist or an anthropologist but as an architect and draftsman, her field experience and financial support had come from the social sciences. In 1961, Proskouriakoff published the seminal article “Portraits of Women in Maya Art,” in which she identified a number of human figures in Classic Maya stone sculpture, which had been previously thought male, as portraits of royal women. This was soon followed by her studies (1963, 1964) of the inscriptions of Yaxchilán, which shed further light on representations and roles of high-ranking Maya women.

Studies of Pre-Columbian gender in Central Mexico were likewise initiated by social scientists. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, anthropologists June Nash (1978, 1980) and Eleanor Leacock (Leacock and Nash 1977) raised important questions about the change in women’s status in the process of the formation of the Aztec state and its expansion. For South America, the earliest systematic studies of Pre-Hispanic Andean women were also conducted by anthropologists (although they frequently focused on visual representations), such as Irene Silverblatt (1976, 1980, 1987), Anne Marie Hocquenghem (1977; Hocquenghem and Lyon 1980), Patricia J. Lyon (1979), and Alana Cordy-Collins (1983). Curiously, the only serious study of Pre-Columbian sexuality was published in 1971 by a physician, Francisco Guerra, who focused on sexual deviance. One of the pioneers in the field of Pre-Columbian gender studies was Mark Graham, who was trained as an art historian. His 1985 doctoral dissertation on Pre-Columbian Costa Rican stone sculpture contains important ideas about gender ideology in Central America.

The lag may speak to the traditional reluctance on the part of Pre-Columbian art historians to insert their findings and ideas into broader intellectual discourses (see Conkey, this volume). As Dana Leibsohn (n.d.) observed in her 1994 assessment of the state of current research in Mesoamerican art history, Mesoamerican art historians have not tended to relate their findings to issues and problems taken up in other fields and disciplines. Not only do they publish very little of their work in journals, but when they do, they often do not publish in mainstream periodicals. I think it is safe to say that what holds true for Mesoamerican art historians can be extended to Pre-Columbian art historians working elsewhere in Latin America.

The explanation of this phenomenon may lie in the history of the field, since Pre-Columbian art history initially derived its main inspiration from the
school of European art formalism. Moreover, many of its practitioners started out as artists (Klein 1982a, 1982b, 1989, n.d.). Earlier studies therefore tend to be descriptive, iconographic, and formalist in nature, rooted in particulars whose theoretical value was limited to comparisons with Old World forms and subject matter. When Old World comparisons came to be seen as limited in value, Pre-Hispanicists trained in the discipline began to distance themselves from many of the premises and methods of Western art history. The belief was that these had been inappropriately transferred to non-Western cultures, and that we should try to understand Amerindian art “on its own terms” rather than apply theoretical models developed for and by European culture. Moreover, whereas most social scientists define as their ultimate charge a general understanding of human behavior, few Pre-Columbian art historians try to place art in this broader context. The result is that most Pre-Hispanic art historians still eschew broad questions that transcend geographic and temporal specificity. Although many of their findings have important implications for scholars working in other disciplines and fields, Pre-Columbian art historians have seldom attempted to point out these implications, to explore the links between what they do and what scholars outside their discipline do.

In putting together the slate for this conference, I therefore invited scholars who not only had recently made significant contributions to studies of Pre-Columbian gender, but whose work had broad implications of potential interest to scholars working on gender issues in other parts of the world, as well. That is, it was my intention to bring Pre-Columbian gender studies to the attention of not only other Pre-Columbianists, but also scholars working in a variety of disciplines. While many of the presenters had never indicated a particular interest in “theory” per se, I saw their work as rich in theoretical potential. By putting them on the same program with several scholars who actively engaged in theory building, including Margaret W. Conkey, our commentator, I hoped to stimulate a dialogue across disciplinary lines. I encouraged Conkey, who works with the archaeology of gender in European prehistory as well as with gender theory, to share her impressions of our work in order to assess just where Pre-Columbian gender studies might “fit” within the larger picture of gender studies in archaeologically known societies. It is representative of the state of the field that, like Conkey, all of the more theoretically oriented scholars who participated in the conference were archaeologists or anthropologists.

To further broaden the discourse on gender, I included among the conference speakers a historian and an ethnographer.3 My goal in doing so was to

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3 The historian was Richard C. Trexler, from the Department of History of the State University of New York at Binghamton. Trexler decided not to publish his essay, “Gender
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open up Pre-Columbian studies to a greater variety of disciplinary points of view and make them, in turn, relevant to a greater number of scholars. In line with this desire for intellectual breadth, I also wanted the essays to deal with aspects of both Middle and South America and to touch on a range of time periods. Beyond these ambitions, I was determined that we not be a roster made up exclusively of women, since gender studies is by no means—nor should it be—a field from which men are excluded. Nor did I want women and the feminine to be the only subjects of these essays, not only because there are many other forms of gender that deserve serious treatment, but also because we should not assume a priori that Pre-Hispanic peoples categorized and ranked genders in the same way we do. Finally, I was anxious that the conference not be construed as unilaterally “feminist” in the sense of a monolithic or formulaic set of working premises. Feminist theory is not unitary, and some gender specialists, including some women, have been critical of certain forms of it. It was my intention, rather, to “mix it up” by including presenters whose theoretical orientation derived from other schools of thought, along with those who refused to identify with any particular school or platform. The idea was to generate debate and controversy.

Formulating the above criteria, however, turned out to be far easier than fulfilling them. I found that the vast majority of Pre-Columbianists—at least, those known to me—worked on the years immediately preceding and postdating the Spanish conquest. Most of these scholars concentrated on Central Mexico, primarily on Nahua (i.e., Aztec) speakers. Nearly all of our gender specialists, moreover, focused on women; and, not surprisingly, perhaps, almost all were women! The relatively small number of male contributors in this volume therefore reflects the current state of the field, in which the ratio of male to female gender specialists is still very small.

The title of the 1996 conference, “Recovering Gender in Pre-Hispanic America,” has been modified in this volume by the removal of the word recovering. The change was made as a result of objections raised during the discussion at the close of the conference (see Conkey, this volume). It was argued that “recovering” falsely implied a tangible past that awaited our “discovery” should we simply dig deeply enough in the right places. In other words, it suggests that there is a “reality” or “truth” about gender “out there” that is accessible if we try hard enough—and are lucky enough—to find it. Current postmodern thought postulates that such access is illusory because our individual and cultural perceptions and experiences condition, limit, and indeed construct what

Subordination and Political Hierarchy in Pre-Hispanic America,” in this volume. The ethnographer was John Monaghan, whose essay is included here.
we see and the way in which we see it. They lead us to “fill in the blanks” where our information seems weakest and to organize our perceptions in specific, culturally determined ways. Our scientific “findings,” in other words, are ultimately interpretations or imaginings, as diverse, in the end, as the number of people who generate them. We therefore can only “envision” the past, whether individually or culturally, but we cannot definitively “recover” it.

Nonetheless, a number of the scholars represented in this volume still see themselves as attempting, if not always entirely successfully, to recover some aspect of the “truth” about past gender practices. For that reason these contributors resist the implication that their hard work has yielded nothing more than a mere “vision” of the past derived largely from their imagination. They have noted that, regardless of whether every scholarly act involves interpretation, there are few of us who do not mentally rank these interpretations, including our own. As Michael Ann Holly (1996: 172) puts it, “some descriptions, explanations, and so on seem to work better than others.” This suggests that we are still looking for—and identifying—the arguments that seem to us to be the most “convincing.” No matter what the topic is, what makes an argument appear sound and thus worth further consideration usually depends on how well it convinces us that it represents, or at least closely approximates, “the truth.”

The conference from which this volume derives was divided into three half-day sessions, each focused on a different aspect of gender studies in the ancient Americas. The first session dealt with methodological problems, the second with Pre-Hispanic concepts of (or ways of thinking about) gender, and the third with what has been called “gender politics.” Each presenter was invited to participate in a specific session and to tackle a particular problem or issue germane to it. Those divisions have been eliminated in the present volume because, in the end, the concerns addressed in the essays overlapped to the point where the distinctions became meaningless: essays that had been assigned the responsibility of addressing methodology also addressed the politics of gender, and so forth.

Most presenters in each of the three sessions were chosen because they had previously tackled aspects of their session’s theme, but given free rein to select their own topic. Some speakers, however, were drafted to address a particular question or issue that I thought needed to be covered, in some cases taking on a pioneering role. This was the case, for example, with Carolyn Dean, who was asked to develop an essay on Pre-Columbian notions of masculinity, a topic about which no one had previously written extensively. In turn, I took on the unexplored questions of whether there may have been more than two genders in Nahua Mexico and whether preconquest Nahuas viewed ambiguous gender in the same way that many Mesoamericans do today.
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Besides Conkey, the only presenters who were specifically asked to address problems of theory and method were those who participated in the first session, “Methodological Problems in Recovering Gender.” Contributors to the subsequent sections, “Pre–Hispanic Conceptions of Gender” and “The Politics of Gender,” were free to theorize more extensively when revising their essays for publication, in accord with feedback from the commentator and audience. Few, however, chose to do so. None of the participants was asked to define or problematize the very notion of gender itself, with the result that the word is used in different ways throughout this volume. In short, there were no general, overarching directives that might have focused all the essays on one common problem. The intention instead was to provide a sample of some of the principal kinds of work being done in the field today—that is, to emphasize a variety of approaches to Pre–Columbian gender.

A number of the essays in this volume attempt to identify and analyze some of the most challenging problems that Pre–Hispanicists face when they undertake to better understand the roles played by gender in remote times. Many of these problems are the same as those encountered by other students of Pre–Columbian culture history, deriving from the destruction of material remains, our unfamiliarity with preconquest record-keeping systems, the slippages that occur in the course of cultural encounters and translations, and so on. In her interpretation of gender in the Recuay culture of Peru, usually dated to ca. 200 B.C.–A.D. 600, Joan Gero points out that gender, like climate, is an abstraction, something that cannot be “seen” or touched. Gero emphasizes that theory is an important methodological tool for understanding gender when one works, as she does, in “deep prehistoric time,” without the aid of written documents.

Under such circumstances, we must pull together as many other lines of evidence as possible—archaeological, ethnographic, linguistic, iconographic, and anthropological. They are, however, not necessarily of equal value. Elizabeth Brumfiel points out that, whereas the archaeological record is relatively thin for the Aztecs of Central Mexico, the colonial written documentation is relatively plentiful. This is a problem because, as Brumfiel points out, although ethnohistories can complement archaeological data by helping archaeologists to link material objects with specific kinds of activities and ideas, all written documents have serious limitations. Central Mexican historical texts are particularly rife with problems: they are narrow in focus, lack historical depth, typically derive from (and thus reflect upon) life in the urban capitals (thereby saying little about life in the hinterland), and are invariably male–centered and Eurocentric. Moreover, the archaeological record can sometimes contest the representational accuracy of these written sources. For example, while the archaeological records reveal that Aztec women’s status and roles changed over
time, such changes are not noted in the ethnohistories. Instead, the written
records tend to provide static, uniform representations of gender roles and iden-
tities.

Louise Burkhart’s essay explores other problems that arise when these colo-
nial documents are used as sources of information about the Pre-Hispanic past.
Noting that all of the colonial texts were penned by Christians, whether Euro-
pean or native, Burkhart points out that we cannot just “strip away” the obvi-
ous Christian and European influences in these sources in order to find some
“pure” Pre-Hispanic truth. The very act of drafting these texts was part of a
colonial strategy, conducted in the midst of rapidly changing social circum-
stances. In our efforts to better understand Pre-Columbian concepts of gender,
it is therefore necessary to look at how gender is represented in Christian dis-
course and to appreciate the complex interrelation of native tradition and
Christian teachings that can be discerned in these documents. Burkhart notes
that too much of their content derives from a native perspective to justify
regarding them as reflections of a truly Christian discourse. Rather, she con-
cludes, they represent a “counterdiscourse” to Christianity, possibly motivated
by a Nahua desire to portray native religion as more Christian than it really had
been, as a means of legitimizing it within the new order. The complex inter-
weaving of Nahua and European elements within this hybrid Christian fabric
highlights the difficulties inherent in using any colonial text as a transparent
window onto the native concepts of gender.

Some of the problems posed by colonial texts, however, are inherent in
preconquest material as well. Rosemary Joyce argues that the writings of Eu-
ropeans in colonial Mexico are no more limited by political agendas and class
biases than are Pre-Hispanic texts and images. Since Pre-Hispanic graphic records
were themselves means of representing, and thus controlling, desired behavior,
sixteenth-century European observers reported a wider range of native prac-
tices and attitudes than did manuscripts and monuments that had predated the
conquest. These European sources are critical for envisioning Classic Maya
gender roles, for they suggest that Mesoamericans viewed gender as neither
innate nor immutable, but rather as fluid. All gender was derived from an “original
androgyny” manifest in dual-gendered deities and natural forms, such as maize
or the moon, that were thought to change their gender over the course of their
lives.

The way in which Pre-Hispanic peoples defined and constructed gender is
also taken up by Dean in her examination of Andean notions of masculinity.
Dean notes the Andean emphasis on the performative nature of masculinity,
which contrasts with the understanding of femininity as a state of being. Andean
women registered their femininity simply by dressing and grooming like women. The ways in which they otherwise behaved could not compromise their gender. Men, on the other hand, were defined largely by their actions, by what they did rather than by how they looked. In the Andes, a mature male was expected to undertake certain tasks (such as warfare or plowing), marry, father children, and support his family. This implies that full masculinity was attainable only at a certain stage in the life cycle. Thus, an unmarried male Inka youth, like a child, was regarded as sexually unbridled, if not oversexed, as well as unbalanced, disruptive, and dangerous—in other words, as less than a man. Only as a man aged did a single gender begin to manifest itself, and only at adulthood, once he had entered into a married, procreative state, did it stabilize. Later, when men lost the ability to reproduce, they came to be viewed again as essentially androgynous. As among the Classic Maya, then, Andean gender was not biologically determined at birth, but rather socially constructed and fluid, stabilizing and destabilizing over time. Andean males therefore “appeared to move from androgyny to single sex, and back to androgyny” (p. 164).

According to Dean, the creative principle in the Andes was likewise androgynous, but this androgyny represented the absence of sex, making the creator god a sexless being. This contrasts with Joyce’s characterization of Classic Maya androgyny as dual-gendered. In my essay, where I focus on Late Postclassic Central Mexican notions of androgyny, I insist that Mesoamericanists interested in androgyny have failed to recognize a very important conceptual distinction. This distinction opposes dual gendered-beings, of the kind discussed by Joyce (this volume), to beings of a compromised or imperfect single gender. It would further distinguish both of these from the completely sexless creator being posited by Dean for the Andes. It therefore appears that there were at least three different ways to conceptualize androgyny in Pre-Columbian times. I suspect that ambiguous gender of all kinds was of considerable interest to Nahua for the same reason that it was so prominent among the Maya and the Andeans: in all three cultures, as the essays by Dean, Joyce, and myself reveal, gender was generally perceived as unstable. In other words, it was not thought to be solely biologically determined, but rather could be altered at birth and again within a person’s lifetime by social, cultural, natural, or even supernatural means.

It is not surprising that archaeology has produced little information regarding Pre-Columbian attitudes toward ambiguous gender and same-sex preference since it is difficult to imagine what kinds of evidence such attitudes might have left in the material record. In her essay, Mari Carmen Serra Puche points out, however, that archaeology has done little better with regard to women.
Serra Puche notes that archaeologists have tended to make ancient Mesoamerican peoples seem uniform in terms of not just their class and economic status, but also their age and gender. She presents the results of her recent excavations at the Tlaxcalan site of Xochitécatl, next to Cacaxtla, as an important corrective to this failing.

Several of the authors represented in this volume inquire into the ways in which people used gender to structure their lives and serve their interests, whether these be of the group as a whole or of its particular factions (e.g., social classes, ethnic groups). What purposes, in other words, did Pre-Columbian gender constructs actually serve? What were their social, economic, and historical effects? John Monaghan observes that earlier anthropological attempts to answer such questions have met deserved criticism for having rested on the faulty premise that all human societies organize gender on the same basis as Westerners. Monaghan points out that this complicates the process of trying to understand how non-Western peoples actually use gender. Moreover, as a male ethnographer, Monaghan recognizes the difficulty of asking people to discuss a taboo subject, especially when men are being asked to discuss women and women are being asked to answer questions about sex that have been put to them by a man. Using field data that he collected in the Mixteca Alta community of Santiago Nuyoo, Oaxaca, Monaghan therefore undertakes to discern the basis for Nuyooteco gender distinctions through an examination of cultural taboos. He shows that Nuyootecos seem to differentiate males and females primarily not on the basis of their genitalia, but rather on the basis of the pregnant body. As elsewhere in the Americas, unmarried, barren, and post-reproductive people are not regarded as fully gendered (see Joyce, Dean, and Klein; this volume). Monaghan's explanation for this is that Mixtecs use organic life, including the body and its processes, as the model for organizing the realm of production, including institutional acts.

Like Monaghan, Joyce Marcus seeks to understand and explain the distribution of power among genders. Marcus asks, what are the conditions under which women are more likely to attain political rule? She addresses this by analyzing two societies, South African and Egyptian, in which women are known to have ruled, in order to establish the two ends of a spectrum of female political power. Mesoamerican women, she then argues, fall somewhere in the middle of the spectrum. Her analysis reveals that, although every social arrangement presents a special case to be studied on its own terms, there are two factors that seem to have favored acceptance of women rulers in ancient states. The first was parentage and descent; a woman was more likely to rule if her father had been a king and her dynasty was the highest ranking in the area. The second
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was luck and opportunity, such as occurred when a ruler’s designated male heirs were killed.

In her epilogue, Conkey comments on the diversity and richness of the contributions to this volume, as well as their innovative and provocative nature. She focuses, however, on what she sees as the pressing need for Pre-Columbianists to use more theory in their work and to point out its implications for, and relevance to, work in other fields concerned with gender, history, symbol, and social practice. Like Leibsohn (n.d.), whose assessment of the field was discussed above, Conkey observes that most Pre-Columbianists working with gender have not yet learned to reach out and communicate easily with scholars working in other fields and disciplines. Such a reorientation toward the general would, in Conkey’s view, eliminate some of the more specific problems that she finds in this volume, such as, for example, the tendency to view gender as some prepackaged, universal, essentialized “thing” that can be “captured” or “recovered.” Another problem lies with the untroubled “slippage” between past and present that appears in those analyses of the preconquest past that are dependent on ethnohistorical and ethnographical support. In the final essay in this volume, I address some of Conkey’s points, as well as several others that surfaced during the discussion following the conference at Dumbarton Oaks. The audience response to the conference and to Conkey’s comments was spirited, and debate continued long after the conference had ended and all participants had returned home. Since many of the issues continue to be controversial, I have attempted to represent multiple viewpoints. Ultimately, I agree with Conkey, who in her epilogue concludes that the essays included here represent a significant contribution to Pre-Columbian gender studies. We can expect them to stimulate future thought on a wide range of issues pertaining to gender in general.
Cecelia F. Klein

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Field Knots and Ceramic Beaus:  
Interpreting Gender in the Peruvian 
Early Intermediate Period 

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INTRODUCTION

For this volume on gender I was expressly charged with addressing methodology, and I do so. In fact, both parts of my discussion, the field “knots” and the ceramic “beaus,” concern locating gender in the evidence available to archaeologists, while the essay as a whole offers an example of how gender can be approached in deep prehistoric time. However, I must note from the start that the methodology of doing gender research in prehistoric contexts is not strictly, or even primarily, concerned with identifying and inspecting archaeological artifacts and their associations (Conkey and Gero 1991: 11–14). Rather, the methodology for understanding gender in prehistory is deeply entwined with the process of locating gender in social and political developments, examining how gender “works”—and is reworked—under different historical conditions, both functionally (as a way to coordinate cultural activities) and symbolically (as a system of meanings and social identities). In my view, linking gender to material culture, on the one hand, and to social processes, on the other, cannot and should not be thought of as separable endeavors, material culture being evidential and social processes interpretive. As I illustrate below, it is not necessary (and sometimes not possible) to find empirical associations between gender and specific artifact classes in the archaeological record before, or independently from, being able to reach understandings about the significance of gender in the unfolding of prehistoric life. Instead, direct empirical evidence for prehistoric sex/gender systems, like interpretive social meanings, itself must always be construed just as all evidence is construed: it is ambiguous and without meaning until we learn to read it, until the perspective that we collectively take on it and the assumptions that we collectively make about it are clarified.
Often, the assumptions and perspectives that we use to “construe” archaeological evidence are so entrenched in traditional, disciplinary assumptions that we do not question them; contemporary everyday semantic orderings may be applied to otherwise ambiguous data in order to subsume the latter under pre-existing categories of understandings as, say, when we speak of finding an “activity area” or a “household unit” or even an “adaptation.” The construing assumptions have become so conventionalized and naturalized as to appear to make the evidence itself seem unambiguous. But gender has only recently come under analysis in archaeology, and it is therefore especially important to subject the archaeological evidence relevant to gender inquiries to very careful theoretical positioning. In doing so, we may well find ourselves having to reexamine other foundational assumptions that we have regularly brought to bear on more general archaeological evidence.

I start then with three methodological comments about “doing” an archaeology of gender for deep prehistoric time. First, we cannot expect to “see” gender in the archaeological record any more easily than, say, we expect to “see” climate or ethnicity. Like gender, these are complex, composite abstractions that do not translate simply and in any straightforward manner into a single material correlate. Not only is gender not a “thing,” but it is not even a static set of relationships between fixed personnel. Gender is constantly negotiated and reconstituted, seizing on tradition, surprising in new assertions, sometimes exaggerated and sometimes played down; it is performed routinely or strategically. As with other complex manifestations, we bring together different lines of evidence (“ropes of inference,” in Alison Wylie’s words [1992a]) to “see” what, after all, may not have even been visible to the people who lived in remote times—the variability and nuance that we may not comprehend even in our own sex/gender system.

The second related point, then, is that we cannot require or expect a technological breakthrough to make this task easy. A technological trick, like the rumored differentiation of male and female fingerprints, ideally could associate males or females with specific objects or spaces. In some prehistoric instances, we actually do have reliable gendered links between personnel and properties, including the *tupu* pins discussed below. But even in those cases where a technological breakthrough could offer a secure association between gender and artifacts, it would not be possible to distinguish between artifact production, artifact ownership, and artifact consumption or use; such an association would still leave unresolved the nature and meaning of the gendered association with material culture. Most pressingly, gender attributions cannot reveal what it means to be male or female, nor do technological breakthroughs
Field Knots and Ceramic Beaus

point us toward what we want to know about gender. Even if fingerprints were “sexable” (and the central FBI crime labs in Washington, D.C., staunchly insist that they are not), we would still have little information about the critical role that gender plays in constituting the social fabric. Therefore, asking good questions, as well as being clear about the gender theory used to construe evidence for gender in prehistory, is a fundamental methodological step that supersedes gender attributions in importance.

Finally, as with other complex phenomena, we need to understand the nature of what we are looking for in prehistory. To reconstruct climate, we must know about the interaction of relevant factors, variations in climatic states, how climate change occurs and so on, in order to be able to model what we reconstruct. I argue that, just as we need to know ecology to study it in the past, we need to read and understand gender theory before we “see” it in prehistory. It is by knowing about gender that we devise appropriate analytical categories and interpretative frameworks as part of a basic methodology, in order to recast traditional evidence into new “gendered” understandings.

There is no shortcut, then, to locating gender; our insights into prehistoric sex/gender systems emerge out of observations of patterning in material culture, together with clues from ethnoarchaeology, ethnography, cross-cultural probabilities, iconography, and inscriptions, all heavily interwoven with understandings of known gender processes. Instead of postulating a standardized set of procedures to reveal gender in deep prehistory, I will review gender patterns and processes here as I have tied them together for one area of the Peruvian Early Intermediate period, approximately 200 B.C.–A.D. 600—in other words, for a specific sociohistoric setting—which already significantly conditions the gender manifestations we can expect to find.

THE PERUVIAN EARLY INTERMEDIATE PERIOD

The Early Intermediate period (EIP) is defined in terms of profound and far-reaching sociopolitical changes; these included increasingly centralized regional authorities, densely settled populations, monumental architecture at enlarged scales, spectacular burials, a whole suite of technological innovations, and, significantly, the explosion of extraordinary labor-intensive crafts that suggest restricted (specialized) knowledge domains, such as Paracas textiles, Moche metallurgy, and the Nazca, Moche, and Recuay ceramics. In some senses, all these changes, experienced to different degrees in different parts of the Andean world, are construed as following from the same fundamental underlying process, namely the consolidation and centralization of new forms of power in the hands of first small-scale and then larger-scale local authorities.
Fig. 1  Callejón de Huaylas, Peru.
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In order to address gender, however, we need to translate these profound structural transformations into newly initiated social, economic, and political practices undertaken by individual participants or lineages. Although they may not have been officially titled, newly powerful individuals (or maybe lineages) had to have exempted themselves from reciprocal labor obligations, and ultimately had to have laid claims to the labor or products of their lower-ranking kin. The broad recognition and widespread acceptance of some people's institutionalized rights over other people's labor, or products of their labor, and the loss of reciprocal exchanges of labor in favor of nonreciprocal obligations, require—and indeed imply—fundamental social reorganization, negotiation, and contestation. How are these overarching changes mediated in local social arrangements?

It is at this level that gender dynamics become significant. The undermining of traditional kinship ties and the appearance and intensification of new hierarchical power relations, as independent households and communities are transformed into regional polities under civil authority, would necessarily require a reformulation of social relations at many levels; among these, gender ideology, gender roles, and gender relations would be profoundly reorganized. How did gender systems both enable and resist social change? In which areas of prehistoric life, and in what order, did gender transformations occur, and how were they experienced by the men and women who lived them?

These inquiries structured my research in the northern central highlands of Peru, and more specifically in the Callejón de Huaylas (Fig. 1), an elongated intermontane river valley situated at 3,200 meters above sea level, bounded on the west by the Cordillera Blanca and on the east by the older, lower Cordillera Negra. At the beginning of the EIP, the Callejón de Huaylas witnessed the classic EIP changes in burial patterns, site locations, and craft production, which by late EIP times had become intensified, respectively, into wealth-laden burials (Grieder 1978; Wegner n.d.b), large agglutinated villages, and an elaborate, patronized ceramic tradition known as Recuay. In this archaeological context, could one find women and men engaged in new ruler-to-ruled relationships?

FIELD "KNOTS" IN THE CALLEJÓN DE HUAYLAS

Based on reconnaissance and survey in the central portions of the Callejón, I began by identifying a series of replicative, regularly spaced EIP ridgetop sites laid out approximately at ten-kilometer intervals along the low terraces of the valley (Gero 1991). Comparison between the two best preserved sites, Kotu and Queyash Alto (Fig. 2), illustrates their many common characteristics. At both sites, two small stone mounds mark the extremities of a narrow, elongated
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ridge, and a linear alignment of rooms and courtyards fills the entire steep-sided ridgetop. Well-defined terraces follow the ridge contours along their long east-west axes. Surface collections from both sites include significant quantities of diagnostic EIP white-on-red pottery and, in smaller amounts, Recuay kaolin wares. These sites, with their formal layout, apparent lack of significant domestic occupation residues, pattern of restricted movement along the ridgetop, and regular spacing along the valley floor, suggest public spaces, and I quickly came to think of them as “administrative centers.”

From these, the site of Queyash Alto was selected for excavation, in order to identify the activities and practices that we signify today as the “consolidation of power.” Excavations in 1988 revealed three functionally distinct areas (Fig. 2). On the uppermost northern terrace, a discrete sector of remodeled structures and superimposed house floors showed heavy concentrations of domestic remains among hearths and charcoal lenses (Fig. 2, Sector I; Fig. 3). Here were numerous indicators of a high-status household, including fine-quality decorated ceramics, cut spondylous shell, and copper tuwu pins. In close association with the residential structure was found a dramatic deposit of llama bone, with five split lower mandibles as well as vertebrae (some still articulated), ribs,

Fig. 2   Maps showing structural similarities: (left) Queyash Alto and (right) Kotu.
and split long bones, suggesting a brief dumping episode of large quantities of butchered llama. The lowest living levels, with abundant white-on-red pottery, date the initial occupation of the site to 170 B.C., that is, the earliest phase of the EIP. Below these earliest floors, in a hollow dug in the bedrock of the ridge (Fig. 3), we discovered a superimposed pair of carefully prepared burials, both females, with at least one infant, interred in a stone box. Diagnostic grave goods were lacking, and only the lower female was accompanied by recoverable materials, namely, two stone beads and the remains of a monkey and several cuy.

In contrast, on the actual ridgetop itself, the area associated with the eastern mound (Fig. 2, Sector II) revealed high densities of large uncharred, open-necked storage vessels as well as numerous colander sherds generally linked with the production of chicha. Thus, for at least some part of the site occupation, this sector served as a production and storage area for maize beer.

But it was the open plaza area in front of the western mound (Fig. 2, Sector III) that held the greatest surprises. Apart from the stone courses that still defined the plaza-facing eastern side of the mound, no additional structure could be associated with the mound. Nothing more than a north-south wall segment, three and a half meters long, set into a well-defined foundation trench re-
mained from what may have been an earlier structure on the western perimeter of the plaza. Along the eastern side of the remaining wall segment, however, were found numerous overlapping ash- and charcoal-laden pits containing unburned and calcined fragments of llama long bones, suggesting that the best cuts of roasted llama meat had been prepared and possibly consumed here. Appropriately, the tools associated with meat preparation—the chipped and ground stone bifaces and knives—were also recovered in overwhelming numbers from this walled plaza area of the site. In addition, we found many large sherds of the characteristic early EIP white-on-red bowls, straight-sided and shallow, with white slip geometric patterns painted around the external perimeter; the size, form, and uncharred aspect of such bowls (Fig. 4) argue for their use as drinking vessels, most likely for chicha, which might have been served from the large-diameter, undecorated open-necked jars that were recovered in other sectors of the site. In fact, all three of the ceramic ladles and spoons excavated at Queyash Alto came from this restricted area of the site, together with two other unusual serving implements—smooth-edged bone dippers carefully cut out from the cranial vaults of llamas in such a way as to leave a
convenient handle formed by the butchered llamas' nose bones. Taken as an assemblage, these finds allow us to imagine a sensuous scene of generously flowing libations accompanying succulent meals of roast meat, all served at the most formally prepared and prominently positioned area of the site. When we note the profusion of panpipe fragments from this same sector, along with a bone flute from the eastern mound area, we can make the further assumption that music was provided to the preparers and consumers of meat and drink at Queyash Alto. Thus, the excavations in Sector III give new meaning to the “administrative” function of Queyash Alto: there is ample evidence here to suggest formalized, ritual feasting.

I have discussed the implications of this EIP feasting elsewhere (Gero 1990, 1992), presenting it as apparently sponsored by an emerging ranked and recognized social authority, possibly a prestigious kin group, which had both the economic resources and the accepted status to convene surrounding lineages, to impress them, and, perhaps, to repay and redistribute the products of their labor. The EIP evidence from Queyash Alto argues that by the time of the site's founding, some individuals or lineages had already successfully gained control of enough agricultural surplus to take on responsibility for redistributing food and drink; this resident population had also extensively leveled, terraced, and otherwise modified the Queyash ridgetop. The holding of feasts at Queyash Alto by the time of its earliest occupation further suggests that the ranking of lineages was already hereditary and passed transgenerationally, perhaps through some combination of new systems of land-use rights, newly inheritable wealth, a new monopolization of important outside resources, and, most likely, established marriage rules and arrangements (Clark and Blake 1994: 21).

How to Envision Women at Queyash Alto?

At Queyash Alto, women are identified unarguably by the recovery of tupu (or tikpi) pins, metal (in this case copper) clothes fasteners that were widely used by Andean women and have been commonly recovered from archaeological sites (e.g., Bennett 1944: 48; Gambini 1983–84: 122 ff, pl. 3.3; Grieder 1978: 119–129; Isbell and Cook 1987: 30; McCown 1945: 306–308, pl. 18; Rowe 1963: pl. 79; Tschopik 1946: 46). Not only are the bilateral garment pins clearly being worn by EIP women on contemporaneous Recuay ceramic vessels (discussed below), and reported in use in much the same fashion by Inka women some one thousand years later (Dransart 1992, 2000; Uhle 1903: 89, pl. 19), but variants of the bilateral garment pins are also associated with early Sumerian, Mesopotamian, and Greek women (Marcus 1994). In the Andes as elsewhere, the pins are worn with an untailored garment (in Quechua, the
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aqsu), a cloth rectangle that is wrapped around the entire body from chest to shins and then pinned vertically above each shoulder, with the sharp ends of the pins pointing up. Sometimes an additional pin of different design is used horizontally to fasten a second draped cloth, the likilla, across the shoulders, allowing it to fall down the back like a cape.

At Queyash Alto, flat disc-headed tupu pins were recovered both in the northern terrace residential structures and at the ridgetop feasting site. I hardly mean to suggest here that tupus correspond in any simple way to where women went; they do not “map” women’s movement on the site. In a more general sense, however, these pronouncedly female-linked artifacts bespeak women’s activities at least in these two areas of Queyash Alto.

Women’s presence is also marked by a high frequency of spindle whorls found in all sectors of Queyash Alto. Of course, a sexual division of labor can be arranged with either men or women (or both) designated as spinners, and indeed men do spinning in some areas of the Andes today. The Callejón de Huaylas region, however, manifests a long record of women undertaking the spinning, and ethnohistorical references from the region specifically mention women as the primary spinners (Silverblatt 1987: 9). Thus, it seems safe here to assign spindle whorls, at least tentatively, to the women’s domain. Over time in the EIP, spindle whorls appear in a wider variety of materials, with the purely ceramic types of the earlier levels supplemented in later levels with those made of bone and polished stone.

Yet, even though they establish women’s presence at Queyash Alto, the copper tupu pins and the spindle whorls do not directly reveal what is interesting or meaningful about women’s lives in this dynamic sociopolitical context. Instead, we must contextualize such artifacts in time and space, in association with their immediate and not-so-immediate surroundings and in relation to relevant theoretical domains, to tie them, along with other artifacts, to aspects of gender in the EIP. We recall, for instance, that copper was used extensively in the Peruvian Andes only beginning with the EIP, precisely when Queyash Alto was first occupied, so that owning and displaying the new, technologically sophisticated copper tupus should be taken to indicate some sort of high status—or access to relatively rare prestige items—among Queyash Alto women. Moreover, since both tupu pins and spindle whorls were recovered from Sector I, namely, the restricted residential area on the northern terrace that was occupied throughout Queyash Alto’s history, it can be argued that the tupu-wearing women were associated with an elevated kin group that was closely connected with the site, suggesting again that these artifacts belonged not to commoners but to elite women. Other interpretations of the prestigious tupus are more suppositional;
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perhaps they were worn to mark important stages in a woman’s life cycle (Marcus 1994: 3), helping to construct and objectify the gender-based social distinctions that maintained the symbolic and practical order in the EIP and at Queyash Alto.

Women were also uniquely buried below these house floors (perhaps as progenitors, or founding mothers of a matriline), lending further support to the theory of an established, distinguished, hereditary kin group, and one that might have held women in high regard. But high-status women were also present at the site of the feasting in Sector III, where their copper tupus and spindle whorls are counted among the material evidence of the EIP feasting. It is likely that women were here among the guests; it is also likely that high-status women, who were members of the feast-sponsoring lineage, were publicly carrying out traditional roles of food preparation and service, for example, ladling chicha from large storage vessels into drinking bowls and handing around cuts of meat.

On the one hand, it is hardly surprising that women are well represented at an EIP “ceremonial center” or “administrative site,” especially once it is shown to be a site of feasting. Modern accounts of Andean feasting regularly identify women with responsibility for food preparation, both in traditional community agrarian feasts (Skar 1981: 45) and in the mid-twentieth-century hacienda-sponsored, redistributive oyanzas where landlords celebrated the harvest by taking large quantities of wheat, barley, maize, quinoa, and potatoes from their storehouses and designating peasant women to prepare chicha and food for villages of up to three hundred people (Crain 1987: 8). On the other hand, what is compelling about the Queyash Alto case is that the prestigious women of the feast-sponsoring lineage were carrying out traditional roles in a charged and transformational political context, a situation that may not be paralleled in traditional communal feasts or in the hacienda-style, pre-land-reform, oyanza model.

And so we arrive at our field “knot,” our conundrum: working back and forth between empirical patterns and probable underlying processes, we have found that high-ranking women resided at and participated in political feasts at Queyash Alto. Yet we have no empirical thread to follow from this premise in order to answer the next critical questions: what roles did women play in the ridgetop political feasts, and what meanings would have been attached to their participation? If indeed Queyash women were prominent players in these new power negotiations that marked the EIP, was it primarily as traditional food preparers? Were the elite tupu-owning, house-buried, on-site–spinning women oblivious to, or excluded from, the politics around them and simply perform-
ing as they always had, cooking food for their kin? Or were these women at the Queyash political feasts “players” in a different sense, shaping—and sharing in—political outcomes? To loosen this knot, I follow a different inferential thread, turning to the EIP iconography in the Callejón de Huaylas, namely, the Recuay ceramic tradition, in search of engendered ceramic “beaus.”

RECUAY ICONOGRAPHY

Recuay ceramics, in use during the entire EIP occupation at Queyash Alto, are named after the province in the Callejón de Huaylas from which they were principally collected. The Recuay ceramic style is defined largely on the basis of ornate funerary vessels of fine white kaolin clay, highly decorated by both modeling and slip painting in red, brown, and black, as well as by the use of postfire negative resist techniques. Pottery forms are highly variable and include necked ovate bottles with flaring or flat disk rims, effigy vessels of humans or animals modeled with varying degrees of representativeness, and hemispherical bowls with pedestal ring bases painted either with simple geometric patterns or with humans or animals. Long-handled spoons, dippers, and “poppers” are also well known (Gero 1996: 546; Wegner n.d.a: 1). Virtually the entire collection of an estimated eleven hundred classic Recuay vessels was removed from burials in the nineteenth century and has offered no provenience information beyond its mortuary context,1 although excavations at Pashash in the 1980s revealed in situ Recuay mortuary vessels that were mostly nonfigurative and represented variants of the classic Recuay forms and motifs (Grieder 1978). Unfortunately, despite various researchers’ proposals, Recuay materials still lack a credible chronological seriation; remarkably, these materials exhibit much conformity both in the employment of artistic conventions and in the presentation of particular subject matter that has persisted for centuries and is manifested throughout a large portion of the northern central highlands and beyond (Gero 1996).

Recuay ceramics give material expression to many of the dynamic sociopolitical changes of the EIP; like the other “mastercraft” traditions that exploded throughout the Andean world during this period, Recuay ceramics incorporated a high degree of decorative innovation and technical skill coupled with a reliance on restricted raw materials (in this case, kaolin clay) for their production. The very existence of a Recuay tradition thus suggests newly powerful elites who could support and probably control the labor of specialized

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1 Most interestingly, Wegner (n.d.b) has documented the 1965 collection of materials from an undisturbed Recuay tomb that was opened by a schoolteacher in the Callejón de Huaylas community of Jancu.
artisans commissioned to advertise their status, as well as a new set of economic arrangements based on the elites’ control of productive labor and the flow of elaborated, conventionalized goods. In this sense, the EIP “art” represents the material product of a competitive prestige economy in which local elites participated and which was based on the conspicuous consumption and display of work undertaken by patronized artisans.

Similarly, the conventionalized human subjects of Recuay “art” are aspects of an iconographic system that partake in and underscore the EIP conditions of increasing power consolidation; in fact, the human figures represented on Recuay pots reiterate themes of a locally emergent sociopolitical hierarchy in their depictions of wealth and position, pomp and ceremony. Even beyond the specific subject matter, the broader iconographic context for Recuay human images confirms again the increasing centralization of power in the hands of local hierarchies. That is, prior to the EIP, there exists in Andean iconography a dramatic paucity of human depictions, to which the proliferation of human images in the EIP Recuay and Moche traditions stands in great contrast. The sudden appearance of carefully depicted, well appointed human figures as the subject of a ceramic tradition suggests a new perception of what is significant and powerful in the human landscape. Recuay figures have no supernatural characteristics: they are neither jaguars nor staff gods. Rather, they command representational attention for being nothing more than human beings, and one reason why they command attention is, presumably, their embodiment of unprecedented degrees of power centralized in single individuals or lineage heads—for these local humans are themselves powerful. Without ignoring its supernatural legitimation, we should recognize public EIP authority as overtly and increasingly linked to real world management.

2 We can compare the relative scarcity of human images before and even during the Andean EIP with the modern proliferation of human depictions in our visual landscapes. Indeed today a great wealth of common cultural knowledge is predicated on a widely shared familiarity with portraits of strangers (e.g., sports figures and movie stars), and our elites and political leaders figure prominently among these. But in the relatively image-poor EIP, images of contemporary human strangers would not have been central either to a group’s common cultural knowledge or to its public life. In fact, there would have been fewer political elites, and each would have been kin to a much higher proportion of local people.

Whenever human images were employed early in these EIP circumstances, highly realistic representations (portraits) would have been unlikely to emerge, not because the technology was lacking or artisans were incapable of sufficient precision, but because realistic likenesses of specific personages had no function in local groups that were both small and personally familiar with the elite personages. This is not to say that representative portraits of individuals could not appear under these circumstances, but simply that the situation of local and limited power legitimation did not require them.
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The centrality of sociopolitical hierarchy and power consolidation as the central features of the EIP landscape may even help to explain why Recuay human figures are depicted in such depersonalized manners and in such a narrow range of conventionalized poses. I would argue that, while processes of power consolidation were intensifying and assuming new forms in each generation of the EIP, the lineage heads, local lords, or ethnic authorities who were filling (or creating) these positions were probably familiar figures to local populations—relatives, neighbors, or acquaintances. Under these circumstances, human depictions might “represent”—in the sense of “standing for”—specific, known individuals without having to actually reproduce detailed anatomical features or individual mannerisms of gesture or dress. On the other hand, one aspect of these local individuals that would not have been familiar was their newly increased powers and rights to command the labor of others. Thus, as the emerging elite class strove to expand its authoritative power and its unaccustomed, asymmetrical rights, the development of a visual vocabulary of power—including the presentation of clothing, adornments, and other power accoutrements—would have been useful to establish postures, gestures, and regularized actions that symbolized and came to stand for the right to hold authority. A relatively rigid visual vocabulary would be developed, to accompany and be associated with high rank and its attendant rights, while the individual who associated him- or herself with these attributes remained generalized.

In this light, it is hardly surprising that Recuay figures are shown as standardized, legitimated figures of power, rigidly codified, represented with formulaic faces and bodies, devoid of expression, particularity, or active movement, but instead arranged in a small repertoire of stately poses and with redundant regalia that announce and reiterate their authority rather than introducing them as specific individuals. Clearly, it is their power rather than their personhood that is on display.

The Gender Content of Recuay Ceramics

If the Recuay ceramic tradition reflects and participates fully in the EIP intensification of local power bases, the iconography of Recuay also offers fertile ground for interpreting gender. Recuay human subjects are directly

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3 Generalizations offered here about Recuay iconography are made on the basis of a personal photographic archive that I began assembling in 1992. It includes images from published sources and Dr. Raphael Reichert’s yet larger archive, photographs provided by museums across North America and Europe, and personal photographs of private collections as well as of Recuay collections at the Museum für Völkerkunde (Berlin), the Linden Museum (Stuttgart), the American Museum of Natural History (New York), the
depicted as female and male and paired with specific items of material culture and dress; each gender exhibits characteristic gestures and relational positions and is shown undertaking a range of gender-specific, everyday and ceremonial, activities (discussed below, pp. 29–36). The use of iconography thus promises us straightforward gender attributions; by studying iconographic representations we can (sometimes) bypass the tricky interpretive steps that archaeologists must employ in order to attribute gender to more ambiguous classes of archaeological data. Instead of using cross-cultural analogy, historical precedent, or statistically derived probabilities—all of which are mainstays of linking archaeological materials to gender (Costin 1996)—iconography promises us a “direct look” at gender, without any intermediary linking arguments.

Iconography also promises to reflect shared social meanings, including shared perspectives on gender. If we think of iconography as a conventionalized system of representation, we can follow Michael Lynch (1988), who has noted that conventionalized image-making coordinates the practices and understandings of the producers and consumers of images. The outcome of this coordinated practice is what he calls “consensual seeing,” where communities of “consensual viewers” are created and delimited by participating in the encoding and decoding of significant, communicable information. To accomplish this, iconographic conventions isolate and simplify significant information; they reduce extraneous detail and eliminate ambiguity to provide a fixed perspective on the represented objects and their relations to one another. In effect, iconographic conventions offer schematized propositions about what is important and how it should be viewed (Lynch 1988) and provide critical access points to understanding how prehistoric gender systems were to be thought about. In the case of Recuay iconography, the consensual viewing that would have emerged through the process of stylizing male and female human figures would have presumably included shared perspectives on gender ideology and gender relations. The following analysis is based on my photographic archive, which currently includes 525 Recuay vessels that directly depict gendered humans.

Females and males were first differentiated in Recuay ceramics by Raphael Reichert (n.d.: 47–48), who noted that only males wore earspools and headresses, while only females wore the “cowl” (or manta) head coverings and tupu pins. Females’ mantas generally hang straight across and bisect the forehead,

Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History and National Museum of the American Indian, the Ethnographic Museum (Göteborg), the British Museum, and the Haddon Museum (Cambridge, England).
Fig. 5 Recuay vessel depicting a female. Photograph courtesy of the Linden Museum, Stuttgart, cat. no. M32022L.

Fig. 6 Recuay vessel depicting a female with a cup. Photograph courtesy of the Linden Museum, Stuttgart, cat. no. M32015L.
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then falling loosely on both sides of the face, covering the ears and sweeping back onto the shoulders (Fig. 5). Tupu pins are positioned bilaterally on the upper chest and either painted, often as a variant of an “anchor” form, or modeled as funnels (Figs. 6, 7). Reichert further points out that females are uniquely associated with checkerboard motifs as clothing designs, and have facial decoration, often in the form of dots between the mouth and the chin (n.d.: 49; Figs. 6, 7). Likewise only females hold infants in outstretched arms before them (Fig. 7).

Males are most prominently identified by their headdresses, which can vary greatly. Unadorned helmets (either plain or vertically striped), brimmed or double-brimmed hats, and simple turban forms (Fig. 8) contrast with extremely exaggerated modeled headgear that sometimes features a bilateral pair of small animals (birds or snakes; Fig. 9), or centrally positioned animal heads, or even entire animals (foxes?) with tails curled around the back of the headdress. In addition to the animal motifs, there are also combinations of plumes (Fig. 10), half-circles (Fig. 11), or bilateral representations of open hands (Figs. 10–12).4

4 The paired hands on headdresses might be thought of as representations of severed trophy hands or warriors’ spoils of war. However, they do not occur regularly on the male
Fig. 8  Recuay vessel depicting a male chewing coca and wearing simple turban headgear. Photograph courtesy of the Linden Museum, Stuttgart, cat. no. M32021L.

Fig. 9  Recuay vessel depicting a male under a flat disk rim, flanked by two felines. Photograph courtesy of the Linden Museum, Stuttgart, cat. no. M32053L.
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Fig. 10  Recuay vessel depicting a ceremonial scene, with a principal male prone on his stomach, surrounded by four females, two with cups and two with shells(?). Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of Natural History, cat. no. A552753.

any of which might be affixed to an underlying turban. Circular earspools, which are usually flat but occasionally tubular, similarly identify males, and males more often than females wear necklaces depicted as dotted strings of white beads (Figs. 9, 10, 13). Males are frequently shown wearing a tunic garment that hangs to the knees and ends in a fringed hem represented by an appliquéd strip that is typically painted with black triangles (Figs. 9, 11, 13); this design never appears on women’s tunics, although it may be shown along the edge of a woman’s manta (Fig. 5). Males uniquely carry a square shield and/or a club (Fig. 14) and play musical instruments such as panpipes and flautas. Also, solo males are frequently paired with larger, painted or low-relief animals that have fully sculpted heads (Fig. 9), especially birds, felines, or snakes, while women are seldom paired with animals or musical instruments and never with clubs or llamas.

figures carrying clubs and shields, but appear more frequently on males with ritual paraphernalia such as cups. Moreover, the seeming interchangeability of paired hands with paired animal paws on headdresses (and indeed, the indistinguishability of these elements in some cases) suggests that the hands may rather refer to representations of shamanistic power points. This bilateral hands motif is also well known from Recuay stone statues.
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Fig. 11 Recuay vessel depicting a male holding a ceremonial cup. Photograph courtesy of the Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin, cat. no. VA 48270.

Fig. 12 Recuay stone statue with the bilateral hand motif on the male’s headdress, similar to ceramic effigy vessels. Museo Regional de Ancash, Huaraz, Peru.
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Fig. 13  Recuay vessel depicting a male wearing a double-hemmed garment. Photograph courtesy of the Linden Museum, Stuttgart, cat. no. M32028L.

Fig. 14  Recuay vessel depicting a male with a club and shield. Photograph courtesy of the Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin, cat. no. VA 48880.
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Although both females and males wear unshaped garments, these seem to be structured differently: the Recuay female is shown in an unsewn, pinned, and belted aqsu (Figs. 6 and 7), while the male wears a side-sewn, unbelted tunic, most clearly seen on standing males, where the unique appliqué hem piece is accentuated. Some fully modeled males with llamas wear a double tunic, the outer garment shorter than the inner one, and others wear an additional garment with another hem riding high over their bellies in a big arc (Fig. 13).

Other iconographic traits, however, are not gender-related. Both females and males, clearly distinguished, carry cups or bowls (Figs. 6, 10, 11, 21) as well as other distinctive items that are sometimes difficult to identify. Both are shown with their knees pulled up in a seated squat, exhibiting geometrically decorated arms and legs; this ornamentation is better interpreted as painted or tattooed stripes than as clothes in patterned textiles (Fig. 6), since shaped sleeves and pants are unknown. Most surprisingly, the textile designs represented on clothing are not gender-specific; although frequencies vary, all the textile designs on men’s clothes also appear on women’s, including wavy lines, vertical zigzags, step frets, polka dots, crosses, and diamonds. (The reverse, however, is not true: the checkerboard pattern worn by women is never seen on men.) The two genders are likewise associated with the same animal designs of the Recuay textile repertoire, namely cats, birds, and snakes, as well as the distinctive Great Crested Being motif (Bruhns 1976), which frequently appears both on cup-bearing and infant-bearing females (Fig. 15) and on males carrying clubs and shields or flanked by pairs of felines (Fig. 9).

Despite these overlaps, the unambiguous marking of female and male categories in Recuay human representations is itself noteworthy. Individuals are shown with headdresses or with mantas, with earspools or with tupu pins; they have painted (tattooed?) faces or necklaces. It is significant that Recuay conventions do not subsume gender under a social category of “powerful person,” but instead retain it as an independent critical marking of social personhood. Redundant, non-overlapping sets of distinguishing characteristics “upgrade” (Lynch 1988) gender to a central social trait, as dim heterogeneous differences are conventionalized into invariable and clearly marked structural features that are easily identified. This is all the more apparent if we consider that Recuay women and men most likely did not continuously display the gender signifiers shown on the ceramics. Many of these may have been reserved for public occasions—as social personhood was formally reaffirmed and reconstituted in ceremonies or public aggregations—and would then have been worn only by select (elite) individuals. Yet the Recuay iconography makes gender distinc-
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Fig. 15  Recuay vessel of a female with the prominent Great Crested Being motif displayed on her garment. Photograph courtesy of the British Museum, Christy Collection, cat. no. 96-1230.

...tions contrastive and consistent, segregating and creating bounded uniformity between male and female populations, constituting and framing the ideology of gender as a significant phenomenon.

Although my archive represents roughly five and a half times as many individual males as individual females, the human effigy vessels ultimately depict individuals of either gender as richly garbed and associated with important ritual paraphernalia. Solo females are as decorous as males and display a parallel but different repertoire of standardized postures and gestures that signify women’s arenas of authority. There seems little doubt that both females and males are represented as powerful individuals in their own right and not, for instance, for their associations with their spouses. In fact, pairs of Recuay individuals occur only in ritual scenes of copulation (my archive has thirty-one at this time), where males and females are both dressed in the most elegant clothing, sometimes with closely corresponding textiles and ornamentation. Couples may be lying on top of the vessels, alone or surrounded by ceremonial witnesses as in a copulation ceremony (Fig. 16); or they may be shown as a pair of interlocking, full-relief effigy vessels in seated positions (Fig. 17), in which case the female, associated with the lipped container vessel, is usually taller than the male, represented by a vessel with a pouring spout.

These copulation scenes, however, leave us wondering about the absence of effigy vessels depicting human couples in any other social or representational
context. If we are ultimately to understand the status of EIP women in shaping political outcomes, we need to pay close attention to the representation of “associational power” in kin or household groups. Examination of 325 solo-male vessels and 60 solo-female vessels, and the absence of a single non-copulating paired male–female representation, suggest a domestic “decoupling” of power, with a “wife” neither deriving status from, nor sharing status with, a “husband” (or vice versa). Instead, the solo pots suggest that rights and authority were held individually, being passed down hereditarily—perhaps through the familiar Andean bilateral patterns that are ethnographically documented today—and/or accruing from direct control over distinctly held resources. Inspection of other classes of Recuay vessels offer us hints about what these gender-specific rights and resources may have been.

One large and clearly significant subcategory of effigy vessels is represented by forty-seven vessels with full-relief individual males standing beside full-relief llamas (Figs. 18, 19), often holding the independently sculpted llama by a rope and thus indicating a relationship of ownership or control between the “llama man” and the domesticated llama. These figures can be contrasted with

![Fig. 16 Recuay vessel depicting a copulation scene, with the principal male and female surrounded by four female ceremonial onlookers. Photograph courtesy of Raphael X. Reichert.](image-url)
the solo effigy males in low relief who are flanked by pairs of non-llama animals also in low-relief but with sculpted heads (e.g., Fig. 9) that show one of the forty-one pots with flanking felines; there are also ten examples of flanking birds, six of flanking snakes, and two of unidentified mammals. The low-relief effigy male flanked by a pair of wild animals, one on each shoulder, suggests a quite different relationship, more akin to an identity-sharing or an ideological pairing relationship between man and animal.

Although we can identify several different male personages in the Recuay corpus (Gero n.d.), none is as distinctive as the llama man who is set apart not only by artistic rendering but also by his headgear, garment designs, and textile patterns. Llama men wear predominantly (but not exclusively) two different kinds of headgear that are not generally worn by other Recuay males: the upward-expanding fez (Fig. 18) and the tricornered hat (Fig. 19), in contrast to the types of headgear associated with other solo males, such as the turban, followed in popularity by the helmet and the brimmed hat. Like the turban, either of the llama man’s two headgear variants can support a number of different, interchangeable, sometimes highly visible elements including the unique enormous hemispherical crescent with short, radial grooves (Fig. 18) or the
double-circle extravaganza (Fig. 19). The llama man is also the only wearer of the unique notched earspools. Like other effigy males, he may carry a shield or play a musical instrument, but unlike other males he never carries a cup or manifests the otherwise common male motif of a pair of hands or paws on his headdress, and he alone carries a \textit{wana}, the staff of office portrayed as a baguette-like stick with diagonal incisions to suggest cord or yarn wrapping. His layered tunic is also unique, with a short overgarment worn over a longer inner garment. The common Great Crested Being motif displayed by both males and females is absent from the clothes of the llama man.

Recuay depictions of these particularly impressive and well-dressed males offer an important clue to the wealth of Recuay elites: they suggest that control over llama herds was the key to male wealth and prestige, and that stratification in Recuay society was associated with the accumulation of wealth in the form of llama herds, introduced to the northern highlands of Peru at the end of the Early Horizon period, or very close to the beginning of the EIP.

Interestingly, there is an inverse relationship between the size of the headgear worn by the llama man and the size of the llama. The llama’s model size is approximately shoulder height to the male, but it is comparatively smaller when the headdress is larger, and, conversely, when the headdress is smaller, the llama becomes larger relative to the male figure.
In fact, we have seen llama meat distributed at the Queyash Alto feasts; in addition, the archaeological record from this period manifests a widespread tradition of ceramic llama figurines, often crudely made, which are recovered from the Callejón de Huaylas EIP sites including Balcón de Judas (Wegner, personal communication, 1989), Chopíjerka, Kotu, and both the residential area and the feasting site at Queyash Alto (Figs. 1, 20). Such small, crude representations may have functioned as sacrificial images or votive icons, believed important for increasing herd size and health; in fact, two of the llamas from Chopíjerka are clearly marked as female, which seems to have more to do with emphasizing the fertility of the animal than it does with artistic accuracy. Robin Burke (n.d.: 65–72) reviews a number of ethnographic accounts where crude animal representations known as llas or conopas (often llamas) play a part in ceremonies concerned with the fertility of animals, with women centrally involved in all aspects of the rites. Taken together, the use of votive miniatures in the EIP, the use of such objects today to ensure herd strength, the feasting evidence from Queyash Alto, and the reiterated representation of the finely dressed Recuay llama man all argue for a critical role that llamas must have played in the EIP economy. The exclusive association of males with llamas in Recuay iconography may suggest an exclusively male control over these critical resources.
In contrast to the domain of the llama men are several arenas in which females are exclusively depicted. Small-scale females, for instance, are consistently shown on Recuay vessels that represent architectural models. Here it is always females who guard or protect rooftops and entrances (Fig. 21), almost as background to other prominent social dynamics. To understand this positioning, we need to go beyond the idea that these architectural models are literal representations of the ways in which houses were planned, constructed, and occupied (see Furst 1975). Rather, we might view these house forms as visual tropes for lineages or descent groups; in other words, the house forms correspond, in some essential way, to the people who occupy them, and referents to these “models” are easily transposed between house and lineage, as in the well-known “House of Windsor.” Seen in this light, the “background” females, although diminutive, hint at an important ideological role. These rooftop and doorway figures appear to embody a kind of spirit with female aspects, associated with the stability and continuity of the descent group, perhaps the matriline, or with some female-related central feature of hearth and home. Moreover, since these females are placed so casually in the backgrounds of the depicted scenes, it is tempting to suggest (and I am certainly speculating here) that women’s role as protector or progenitor of hearth and home may have been an older, less contested ideology than the llama man’s emerging central economic role. In
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any case, it is not so farfetched here to recall the contemporary females buried beneath the house floors at Queyash Alto who are associated very directly with household continuity.

Yet an even closer female parallel to the llama men is found in the class of fifteen Recuay vessels showing solo women who hold infants in outstretched arms (Fig. 7), with the infants lying horizontally across the main figures’ arms or held at arms’ length rather than being cuddled against the chest. The reiterated portrayal of these elaborately decorated females presenting (offering?) small children argues for an important and specialized arena of female power, linking human procreation with divine oversight. Assuming that these are not “merely” mothers but rather participants in some kind of sacred or priestess practice is only part of how we might read these images. The exceptional clothing of all the infant-bearing females, the elaborate textile designs on their garments, and the elevated, decorated pillbox hats that rise above the normal manta suggest a very high rank and special recognition for these women. Indeed, the EIP worldview, arising out of kin-based society and conceptualized in the same deeply personalized, relational terms by which it was lived, would have judged direct female intervention with the gods to ensure birth—and thus the very survivability of the lineage—to be as powerful, critical, and honorific as the male-associated abilities to accumulate llama wealth or take prisoners. There is

Fig. 21 Recuay architectural vessel depicting a female on the roof; below, a male is flanked by two females. Photograph courtesy of the Dallas Museum of Art, the Eugene and Margaret McDermott Fund, cat. no. 1970.23.MCD.
ultimately no reason to evaluate these significant figures as any less powerful than males in their respective arenas of authority.

A final important class of Recuay vessels combines males and females in the densely populated “ceremonial scene” representations, where a larger central male (and never a female), standing, seated, or supine, is surrounded by two or more smaller figures that are usually female (Figs. 10, 22). Reichert calls the smaller figures “attendants,” presumably because they surround the central male, sometimes facing him and sometimes looking forward as though in a procession, often bearing cups, bowls, or other objects. Reichert’s term connotes gender hierarchy, implying—perhaps too easily—that the females are of lower status or subordinate to the male, as his mere attendants. However, as Reichert him-

The size differential and the placement of figures in the ceremonial scenes indeed suggest that the larger, central, and inevitably male figure has a more significant, prestigious status than the smaller surrounding figures. However, this is less a necessary reflection of gender hierarchy (that is, of the central male having power over the smaller females) as it is a representation of a restricted (male) role as a principal ceremony official, with the male and the females playing different roles. Division of labor, with exclusive male and female arenas of power, is not to be confused with gender hierarchy.

A different argument suggests that, even if hierarchical importance is implied by the size differentials and placements of figures on these vessels, the scene nevertheless contrasts with, say, Judeo-Christian rituals in which women play no public part whatsoever and are completely absent from liturgical representations.
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self notes (personal communication, 1993), the ritual depicted here makes a stronger case for the interdependence of gender roles, since these females neither present objects nor attend to the male as much as they participate, apparently indispensably, in the ceremony. Moreover, these “attendants” are reiterated in solo effigy vessels (Figs. 6, 11), where individual males and females alike are shown with similar bowls and cups. Identifying individual women with ritual cups strengthens the argument that women, like men, played significant and indispensable roles in pouring ceremonial libations.

I want to avoid here any simple equivalency between the specific Recuay-depicted ceremonies and the actual feasts at Queyash Alto. Although we believe them to have been congruent in chronological time, we cannot say that the ceremonies depicted on Recuay pots took place in conjunction with the feasts on ridgetops. These may have been rather different occasions, with different sociopolitical objectives, and it would certainly be out of line, on the basis of these ceremonial vessels, to generalize about women’s EIP status or to evaluate women’s role in shaping political outcomes at feasting sites like Queyash Alto. However, there is probably some overlap in the meanings inherent in the two types of events; we note, for instance, that both the ritual portrayed in the Recuay ceremonial scenes and the evidence of feasting at Queyash Alto make important associations between household production and the production of power in an extrahousehold context. The obligatory ritual liquids (chicha beer?) that women are associated with in the Recuay scenes were probably produced by women at the household or interhousehold level, just as at Queyash Alto where chicha brewing and storage were strongly connected with Sector II of the ridgetop feasting site. Both instances presented an opportunity for EIP women to participate in ritual or ceremonial activity by extending the context of domestic food preparation into politically significant ritual areas; indeed, political feasts evolved partly to represent the political community on a familial scale, and women as political mothers (and food preparers) were central to this process. Thus, the Recuay ceremonial scenes refer back to and underscore the productive labor of women that underlay the performance of ritual (Joyce 1993), again making the liquid bearers not merely “attendants” but rather coproducers of, and essential participants in, central ritual events.

The multiple-figure Recuay ceremonial scenes also offer us clear indications of male hierarchy, most notable in the varieties of headgear that appear in distinct combinations on various personages. The more elaborately modeled headdresses, such as turbans with animal paws or entire animals, bilateral hands, and crescents, occur on solo male effigy vessels but are also associated with the centrally placed, principal males of the ceremonial scenes. The principal male
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may then be surrounded by male figures in less elaborate hats or helmets, although a simple headdress is never associated with the principal figure: and, conversely, male figures wearing more elaborately modeled headgear never flank or surround a principal male. Similarly, while the Great Crested Being motif is often worn as a clothing design both by solo males and by the principal males of the ceremonies, it is never shown on the flanking or surrounding males.

There are also intimations of female rank differentiation, although these are less easy to read. Some vessels with ceremonial scenes display small females arrayed as contrasting pairs, sometimes with the frontal pair wearing different manta designs from the rear pair or with the females on the right side of the vessel wearing different textiles from the females on the left (see Fig. 22 for females differentiated by belt designs). These contrasts, not between individuals but between groups, suggest a formal differentiation among female personnel without necessarily indicating any ranking.

Hierarchical differentiation among women is more clearly exhibited by those females who appear only in copulation scenes or carrying a child and are shown wearing a special variety of head covering that rises stiffly above the head as a short round cylinder or square pillbox, while the manta element of the headgear still flows out from the bottom to cover, as always, the ears and the back of the neck (Fig. 7). Females wearing this distinctive headgear are invariably clothed in garments made of more elaborately designed textiles, often including a woven belt with figures running its entire length and/or a tunic with Great Crested Being designs or other motifs clearly shown. Such well-attired females, marked especially by the elevated pillbox hat, are never depicted on multiple-figure vessels with a principal male, but only on solo effigy vessels or in copulation scenes; they thus appear to hold a distinctly high female rank. Finally, a unique pot from the British Museum (Fig. 23) portrays a principal male with three flanking females, all of whom face the largest and foremost figure, that of a female lying on her back and displaying a full-relief animal (feline cub?) atop her head-covering manta. This depicted scene is unusual for many reasons, such as the complexity and asymmetry of the composition of figures, the presence of a figure reclining on her back, the fact of a central (reclining) figure being female, and the association of a female with an animal headdress (or indeed with any headdress that is more elaborate than an elevated “pillbox”). This unusual scene employs no obvious referents to a supernatural world—no mon-

7 Reichert (n.d.: 147) notes the possibility that the animal atop the reclining woman’s head may represent an animal accompanying the depicted Recuay scene rather than a unique female headdress.
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Fig. 23 Recuay vessel depicting a ceremonial scene, with a principal male, three smaller females, and a disproportionately large female lying on her back in the foreground. The principal female wears a unique headdress with a small animal on it. Photograph courtesy of the British Museum, Christy Collection, cat. no. 1910-7.
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It seems that theRecuay canon, like the rest of the Recuay system, still refers to the world of humans. Perhaps we are being shown a different dimension of reality, possibly a legendary historic event such as the death of a renowned female; in any case, the scene conveys an unequivocal image of elevated rank for women.

Feminist Interpretive Frameworks for the EIP Data

Both the appearance of the elaborate Recuay ceramic tradition and the feasting practices at Queyash Alto coincided with—and contributed to—an intensification of hierarchical power relations in the northern central highlands of Peru during the EIP. Both the ceramics and the feasting reiterate themes of power and ritual, intertwined with messages of a complex gender system. Indeed, it seems likely that the intensification of hierarchy and the transformations in the EIP gender system are mutually determining aspects of the same process, and neither one is intelligible without the other.

But understanding how women’s and men’s sociopolitical status was defined and redefined during the EIP does not primarily arise from an analysis of artifacts, although we require artifacts to position our questions, correct our assumptions, and corroborate our interpretations. Rather, we have worked back and forth between two different data sets and the context in which they were formed in order to establish some foundational understandings about gender in the EIP. Now, however, we have another methodological option to draw upon, namely, turning to accounts of kinship societies like the one represented at Queyash Alto, in which Andean feminist ethnographers and ethnohistorians have shown us that women derive authority and social status in part from their control over the means of production. Andean women in particular have been observed over several centuries to inherit land directly from their mothers through the pervasive bilateral inheritance and widespread parallel descent systems that characterize the Andes (Silverblatt 1987; Skar 1981: 41). Moreover, Andean women are often reported by ethnographers to exert exclusive control over the storage and distribution of agricultural products (Skar 1981: 41) as another form of domestic power. Finally, feminists have demonstrated that in agrarian kin societies, women’s procreative abilities are often symbolically associated and highly valued as a primary means of kin group continuity and social reproduction (Gailey 1987: 54). Thus, several lines of evidence derived from feminist studies support reconstructing the early EIP sociohistoric context as one in which women participated in and contributed to defining the meanings and outcomes of cultural life.

At the same time, it is also impossible to ignore the significant tensions and contradictions that women eventually would have had to confront in these
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roles over the course of the formation of political hierarchy. Abundant archaeological evidence suggests that the regional EIP context favored internale warfare and competition as routes to prestige and power. Therefore, the existing gender ideology must have come under severe strain, and innumerable contradictions must have made themselves apparent as political practice became increasingly defined on the basis of sex-segregated activities (such as warfare) and accompanied by rituals that celebrated these male practices. We can easily imagine deep tensions that would develop in maintaining a balance between the single-sex, power-appropriating male group and the sex-integrated lineages through which power had been traditionally held and disseminated. For example, female procreation—once revered because it was key to the reproduction of the primary social group, the lineage—may have been undermined as a central organizing value if the lineage no longer played such a hugely determinant role in the production and reproduction of social organization. Instead, noble male pursuits like warfare and civic administration would increasingly crosscut the hegemony of the individual lineage; these alternative institutions would also increasingly deploy youthful labor, which previously had been allocated solely for the promotion of and by the kin group. Thus, women’s symbolic and functional positions in regard to social continuity and labor processes would be undercut by the new political order.

The EIP processes that produced gender tensions and contradictions were played out both in feasting and in the selected iconographic themes of Recuay ceramics; in both contexts, shared and probably shifting power is evident. We are not well served at this point by framing questions such as: “By the end of the EIP, was women’s status lower than men’s?” or “Are male and female statuses equal?” In fact, we are told quite another story here—a story of represented individuals’ power over undepicted others, a world of depicted feast hosts and undepicted feast guests. Ultimately, both (some) female and (some) male elites would have been considered powerful, with women and men involved differentially in distinct arenas of female and male power. A first lesson that can be derived from this is to reconsider how we think about power and status, and to get rid of the abstracted, homogenized notions that measure degrees of status and power in different sociohistoric moments like heat on a thermometer. At Queyash Alto as in the iconography of Recuay, we recognize the mosaic quality of gendered power as more characteristic of human sex/gender systems than such monolithic notions as “high” or “low” status; in Eric Wolf’s words (1999: 61), “cultural hegemony is not a seamless web of domination but a panoply of processes of varying intensity and scope.” Certain women may be able to assert power and hold sway in some arenas of social, political, and economic life while being devoid of influence in others.
An even more powerful lesson comes from feminist writings on the nature of power. Feminist theory has much to teach us about the routine categories of analysis that we regularly use to focus our research; thus, when we ask whether men or women “have more power” (and especially when we seem to find that women are perceived as having less of it), we need to recognize that the term “power” is traditionally defined as a distinctly masculine notion, one that restricts its meaning in such a way as to effectively preclude women from consideration (Duffy 1986).  

Classic conceptions of power reiterate two themes. First, they conflate power with public authority, focusing on legitimized, institutional, sanctified forms of power, that is, power that is often held through authoritative structures (Wylie 1992b: 56)—which is precisely the subject of so many representations in the Recuay materials. At the same time, such conceptions of power emphasize the imposition of will on a passive or even resistant opposition that may need to be subdued or dominated: “To be powerful is to be able to realize one’s will, even against the resistance of others” (C. Wright Mills, cited in Duffy 1986).

However, feminists (among others) have worked with more subtly undercutting issues of power, attempting, for example, to separate its behavioral and ideological aspects (that is, recognizing that the person who enacts power is not necessarily synonymous with the person believed to have power) or viewing such factors as control over the larder and other economic resources as significant (gendered) factors in determining decision-making structures. Early feminist investigators pointed to women as the “goal-setters” of society (Rogers 1975) and demonstrated that, as such, women exercised enormous de facto power, even though such power was kept largely invisible by authoritative structures. Feminist critics have argued for looking to “covert, informal, non-institutionalized and unrecognized or unauthorized forms of power” (Wylie 1992b: 56), suggesting that if the concept of “having your way,” rather than “realizing your will,” is taken as the central idea behind power (or perhaps we need a new word here), then a very different research and very different understandings about gender and the determination of social arrangements emerge (March and Taquu 1986; Rogers 1975). Some researchers propose replacing the term “power” with a term like “social capital” to suggest the composite social perspective—achieved through education, access to networks and information, and public recognition—that makes it more likely that women’s wills are realized.

While Duffy’s (1986) feminist analysis of the concept of power is both innovative and classic, the longer evolution of notions of power is detailed succinctly by Wylie (1992b).
Today, the examination of power takes off where feminists first led; it is widely argued that an anthropological account of power must recognize power as relational, not only in that it exists in many kinds of relationships (Wolf 1999: 4), but also in that different relationships will shape power differently (ibid., 67). The notions that power is diffuse rather than manifested in single individuals, and that it operates on many different levels and in different domains, are coming to be central in anthropology today. What we are still challenged to do, however, is to demonstrate how these differences are articulated in specific cultural arrangements.

CONCLUSIONS

Not surprisingly, neither a feminist nor a relational account of power is available to us in Recuay iconography. Since Recuay pots are so heavily conventionalized, they tell a “fixed-perspective” or “official” story, continually reiterating and broadcasting a small set of messages about similarity and difference by obliterating nuance, change, deviance, and the multiple perspectives on social realities. The very coherence of Recuay gendered depictions, which held such promise for the unambiguous elucidation of a prehistoric gender system, in the end obliterates exactly what we want to know about gender, namely, how it intersects with power at many levels and how it is partaken of differentially by different men and different women!

To add to this frustration, the Recuay representational system and its official story can be understood to be in place precisely because these are messages that require reiteration in the EIP context, social lessons that suggest a social—and gender—tension to which the “official view” is a response. The reproduction of elaborate and redundant iconographic themes alerts us to the fact that the depicted messages are contested ones, requiring reiteration and legitimation. Yet these very contestations and tensions are excluded and hidden by the conventional representational system that asserts a simplified social resolution. The upgraded, high-contrast male–female presentation of Recuay teaches us to beware of simple iconographic lessons about the ways in which gender functioned in EIP society.

On the other hand, the archaeological data are less self-consciously constructed; the field “knots” are openly ambiguous. We get glimpses of Queyash Alto’s autonomous women who are buried under the earliest house floors, who leave their jewelry and spinning whorls in their homes and at the site of feasting, and who prepare and distribute chicha and llama meat for public, political consumption. Yet the meaning that life held for these women and the role that their gender played in their cultural identities are no clearer for the
evidence having been left unselfconsciously in the ground. Not surprisingly, in
the end the archaeological data, like the iconographic interpretations, require
framing, and the frame that they require is likewise provided by gender theory.

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Asking about Aztec Gender: The Historical and Archaeological Evidence

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ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDIES OF GENDER address gender roles, gender ideologies, and gender identities in human social life. Gender roles consist of the economic, political, and cultural activities of men and women as well as their status within society. Gender ideologies include the expectations, associations, and sentiments attached to gender categories. Gender identities refer to any individual’s affiliation with a gender category and his or her feelings about that identity. Gender studies have three goals: (1) to describe the variation in gender roles, ideologies, and identities from one society to the next; (2) to define the child-rearing practices and forms of symbolic action by which gender roles, ideologies, and identities are produced; and (3) to examine the interaction of gender with other economic, political, and cultural processes (Conkey and Spector 1984; Conkey and Gero 1991).

In dealing with past societies, gender studies draw heavily upon archaeology and ethnohistory. Archaeology analyzes the material remains of past activities, while ethnohistory interprets the texts left by the members of a culture or by outside observers. Both sources of information are problematic. Ethnohistorical sources often describe the activities and attitudes of men and women, but they inevitably express the viewpoint of the writer, who is sometimes mistaken or biased, and—because of familiarity, discretion, or ignorance—may not tell us everything we want to know. Material culture is more democratic. All members of society leave material remains of their activities, even if the materials left by some are at times more striking than those left by others. Material culture is also more abundant; it is coextensive with human history. Texts are produced only during limited periods of a culture’s past. However, the archaeological record is itself riddled with omissions: because of decay and site disturbance, only a fraction of the material record of human activity is available for study. Moreover, to move from material objects to the activities and attitudes of the
past, archaeologists must use a series of inferences or bridging arguments, so-called middle range theory.

Ethnohistory and archaeology complement each other. Each may provide information where the other is silent. On topics where both supply data, archaeology can be used to correct the errors and biases of literate observers, while ethnohistory can provide the bridging arguments that link material objects to past activities and attitudes. It is difficult to lay down a set of general procedures for testing the ethnohistorical record or interpreting artifacts. The historical and archaeological records are different for each region of the world, and in each region they offer different problems and possibilities for recovering gender. In all regions, however, gender research should be oriented toward questions that arise from coherent theoretical approaches to gender.

Political economy supplies one such approach. It studies the organization of production and exchange that underlies and supports a system of power. Since the mid-1970s, this approach to gender has generated two large bodies of literature relevant for the study of gender in the ancient past. The first includes studies of women and work. Literature on this subject explores women’s (often neglected) participation in the domestic and extradomestic economies, their strategies for integrating domestic and extradomestic economic activities, the ways in which women’s economic contributions do or do not translate into their status and power, the effect of gender ideologies upon the gendered division of labor, and the effect of women’s economic activities upon their self-identities and sense of agency (Hartmann 1976, 1981; Friedl 1978; Tilly and Scott 1978; Nash and Fernández-Kelly 1983; Gero 1985; Leacock and Safa 1986; Benería and Roldán 1987; Stephen 1991; Tiano 1994).

A second, somewhat smaller, body of literature examines the relationship between women and the state. State formation has long been regarded as having important consequences for women’s status (Engels 1972). Since most production in agrarian states is household-based, political leaders invariably intervene in household economic activity in order to extract goods and labor with which to fund their administrations (D’Altroy and Earle 1985; Brumfiel 1994). The state’s demand for goods and labor produces change in the household division of labor; it also transforms the gender ideologies that order relationships among household members (Gailey 1985). Gender identities change in response to these new gender roles and ideologies. In addition, gender relationships may be altered by the state efforts to break up corporate kinship groups in order to end their monopoly of important resources. For example, the destruction of corporate kinship groups can leave women exposed to the demands of unreasonable fathers and husbands (Diamond 1951; Ortner 1978; Rapp 1978; Sacks
Asking about Aztec Gender

In this essay, I examine what historical and archaeological data can tell us about the Aztec gender system when these data are explored from the perspective of political economy. After reviewing the nature of the Aztec historical and archaeological records, I turn to a particular class of archaeological data, ceramic spindle whorls, to investigate how the Aztec state was supported by a gender-based division of labor and how gender roles, ideologies, and identities were affected by the expansion of the Aztec state.

AZTEC ETHNOHISTORY

Historical sources concerning native life in Central Mexico are exceptionally rich. First of all, they include the usual records of discovery, conquest, and colonial administration produced by the Western empire builders (Cline 1973; Lockhart 1992). Such documents provide only snapshot portraits of native cultures. They lack historical depth, focus on only a narrow range of topics, and are uninformed by the native perspective. They are, therefore, of limited value. Nevertheless, observers like Hernán Cortés (1986) and Bernal Díaz del Castillo (1956) were sharper than most, and their descriptions of markets, palaces, political alliances, and rivalries supply information on the institutional context for Aztec gender systems.

Sources of the second type—sixteenth-century ethnographic documents such as Bernardino de Sahagún’s (1950–82) Florentine Codex and the Codex Mendoza (Berdan and Anawalt 1992)—are much more informative. These works cover a wide range of topics, including the roles of men and women in production and ritual, their behavioral norms, and the domains of power of male and female gods. In addition, these documents are illustrated by native artists. The illustrations frequently provide information not given in the text, which can sometimes be used to critique the text itself. For example, the Florentine Codex shows women weaving, cooking, healing, midwiving, and marketing, which belies textual statements that recognize only cooking and weaving as women's work (Nash 1978: 356). Similarly, the Primeros memoriales (Sahagún 1993) shows women in ceremonial roles that are not mentioned in the text (Brown 1983).

Illustrations are especially valuable for archaeologists because they suggest how artifacts were used. From illustrations, archaeologists can extract ideas concerning artifacts’ functions as well as the gendered division of labor. For example, the Florentine Codex does not state which members of the household hunted and which cared for domestic fowl, but it does contain illustrations of men hunting and turkeys being fed by women (Sahagún 1950–82, 10: fig. 188;
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11: fig. 744; see Figs. 1, 2). This information helped me to interpret archaeological materials from Aztec Xaltocan. It lent plausibility to the argument that the decrease in the bones of aquatic birds and the increase in turkey bones at Xaltocan signaled a shift in the gendered division of labor, with increasingly less hunting by men and increasingly more turkey-raising by women (Brumfiel n.d.).

Native histories constitute a third category of ethnohistorical document. These come in two indigenous forms: illustrated annals (xiuhcatli) and cartographic histories (Boone 1994). They also survive from the colonial era as books that record the oral narratives accompanying ancient pictorial texts (Gibson 1975). Native historical documents deal with fewer topics than the ethnographic documents; they mostly record migrations, marriages, succession, and warfare. However, they do lend historical depth to these few topics, especially political organization. They also provide information on some forms of symbolic action, such as feasting and gift-giving, that were used to negotiate power and worldview (Brumfiel 1987; M. Smith 1987).

Native histories sometimes contain useful bits of random information. For example, from Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl’s (1975–77, 1: 346) account of an encounter between a Texcoco prince and a commoner woman in the Chalca countryside, we learn that the woman was out gathering aguamiel (the sap of maguey plants). To my knowledge, this is the only source that mentions the fact that women gathered aguamiel. Such information can be used to call into question statements of gender ideology that appear elsewhere, such as the Florentine
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Fig. 2 Woman feeding teopochol seed to turkeys to fatten them (after Sahagún 1950–82, 11: fig. 744). Courtesy of the School of American Research, Santa Fe, N.M., and the University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

Codex assertion that “the girl was one who went nowhere” (Sahagún 1950–82, 4: chap. 1, 4).

Most important, when subjected to structural analysis, the native histories are highly informative with regard to the principles that ordered native gender systems (Gillespie 1989). Native gender stereotypes are revealed when male or female characters are repeatedly assigned the same roles in different historical incidents. For example, Susan Gillespie (ibid.) shows that women in Aztec history frequently initiate periods of chaos ending with their own sacrificial deaths and the establishment of new periods of order.

The corpus of historical documents from Central Mexico is so rich that archaeology is often dismissed as not very helpful. It is felt that the impoverished archaeological record can tell us little that we do not already know from historical documents. As rich as they are, however, the documents suffer from certain deficiencies.

First, the documents are temporally limited with regard to gender. They provide little information on gender norms and practices as they changed over time. June Nash (1978) has suggested that imperial expansion resulted in the subordination of Aztec women, but there is little information in the historical records that can be used to assess this argument. Second, the ethnographic
documents are geographically limited. Most of them come from the Aztec and colonial capital, Tenochtitlan/Mexico City; they may or may not reflect gender norms and practices in hinterland towns and villages. Hinterland settlements differed from political capitals both because they lacked the wealth and sophistication of centers and because, to resist exploitation, they organized themselves differently, especially in the areas of kinship, marriage, and gender (Gailey 1987; C. Smith 1995). Third, insofar as we know, writing was an exclusively male activity in Central Mexico; thus, the documents present the male view of gender norms and practices. They give voice to male hopes and expectations, without specifying whether these hopes were shared, contested, fulfilled, or frustrated by native women (McCafferty and McCafferty 1988). Finally, all of the documents were produced either by Spanish men or by men of the native ruling class who themselves interacted with the Spanish men. Thus, the gender norms and practices expressed in the documents may have been influenced by Western beliefs and customs (Brown 1983; Hill 1997; Burkhart, this volume). For example, it is possible that recorded versions of the story of the birth of the Aztec patron deity, Huitzilopochtli, appropriated Spanish concepts of gender and chastity to explain why Huitzilopochtli’s sister, Coyolxauhqui, was angered when their mother became pregnant while performing temple service.¹

Archaeology can help to remedy the deficiencies of the historical record. However, the nature of the contribution that archaeology can make to Aztec gender studies depends on the particular character of Aztec archaeology.

AZTEC ARCHAEOLOGY

Elite Structures

The spectacular finds at the Aztec Great Temple appear to provide excellent opportunities for studying gender. Pieces of monumental art recovered from the excavations present female and male figures in stereotyped poses and contexts, while patterned arrangements of objects in buried offerings at the temple express the Aztecs’ engendered worldview (López Luján 1994). However, the construction of both the temple and its contents was guided by the same class of elite males that supervised the production of native documents, and therefore engendered images at the temple tend to reiterate the views expressed in native histories. In fact, the Great Temple was meant to evoke the memory of

¹ A comparison of this list of deficiencies in Aztec documents with the one supplied by Costin (1995) for the Andean region suggests some of the ways in which the quality of historical records differs by geographic region, with varying implications for gender research.
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Huitzilopochtli’s birth, which is recounted in the text and illustrations of the Florentine Codex and several other historical documents (Matos Moctezuma 1988: 135–145; Hill 1997). This story presents gender roles in highly ideological forms. For example, the main antagonist of the story, Huitzilopochtli’s sister, Coyolxauhqui, is portrayed as a generator of cosmic conflict, an enemy who is destined for defeat (Klein 1988; Gillespie 1989). Her role as the antagonistic and subordinated “other” is commemorated in sculpture at the Great Temple: Coyolxauhqui’s dismembered body, carved on a large monolith, was placed at the foot of the stairway leading to Huitzilopochtli’s shrine. The archaeology of the Great Temple demonstrates that the gender roles communicated in oral narratives assumed material form in sculpture and ritual here. These material forms were one means of lending an aura of reality to the elite gendered mytho-logic (Kus 1982; DeMarrais, Castillo, and Earle 1996).

Although Coyolxauhqui occupies a prominent place in the external adornment of the Great Temple, women and female symbols are rare in other Great Temple contexts. For example, although the buried offerings at the Great Temple are organized according to a plan of binary opposition (López Luján 1994: 138–139), the opposition of male and female aspects in these offerings is muted. Instead, the opposition centers on heaven and earth, sun and rain, and fire and water (the opposing fluids that symbolized war). Warfare was seen as producing the union of contraries through the incorporation of the defeated by the conquerors; it therefore served as a metaphor for sexual intercourse and fertility (Klein 1994; López Luján 1994: 290–291). This was, however, a peculiar representation of fertility, where the female principle was displaced by the enemy male warrior while sexual intercourse was presented as an act of coercive dominance. Such androcentric symbolism seems to pervade the offerings.

In order to recover other views of gender in Aztec culture, archaeologists must work in nonelite settings. Artifacts and images, floor plans and burials from nonelite contexts are the fundamental sources of archaeological data used to reconstruct gender systems (Costin 1995).

Household Contexts

In the Basin of Mexico, a regional site survey has provided information on the size, complexity, and location of Aztec settlements (Sanders, Parsons, and Santley 1979). These data have not yet furnished any information on the Aztec gender system, but they have established its economic and political contexts. Potentially, the survey data could be combined with a documentary study of how the Aztec landscape was engendered through the naming of mountains and other natural features (e.g., Broda 1991: 89–90; Serra Puche, this volume;
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Fig. 3  Personifications of the volcanoes Popocatepetl (left) and Iztactepetl (i.e., Iztaccihuatl, right) shaped from amaranth seed dough for ritual occasions (after Sahagún 1950–82, 1:figs. 25, 26). Courtesy of the School of American Research, Santa Fe, N.M., and the University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

see Fig. 3). This might enhance our understanding of both the way in which settlements were located and the way in which individuals came to view the gender system as part of the natural order.

Intensive surface collection and excavations in the hinterland settlements surrounding Triple Alliance capitals have yielded large assemblages of artifacts, many of which are quite informative about the operation of the Aztec gender system at the household level. Usually (but not always; see Dobres 1995) the first step in studying gender on the basis of artifacts is gender attribution. This means establishing that certain categories of artifacts were used in tasks performed primarily by men or women, or that certain attributes (for example, particular design elements) or certain sectors of household and settlement space were regarded as characteristically male or female. Once the artifacts and contexts are thus engendered, they can be employed in three kinds of studies. The artifacts can be used, first, to trace changes in the intensity or the organization of female and male labor, and second, to study the cultural processes by which the gender system was generated. Third, artifact decoration can serve as a medium for recovering distinctive male and female views on gender and other issues.

The floor plans of residential structures are also valuable sources of information on gender. The arrangement of rooms and the distribution of male and female activities within household space can reflect the level of control exer-
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The distribution of facilities for gender-specific work and ritual can suggest the opportunities for men or women of different households to gather together in order to nurture their separate male or female views and their collective power (Jackson 1991).

Burials supply two further important sources of data on gender, i.e., skeletons (Cohen and Bennett 1993) and burial arrangements (Robb 1994; Joyce n.d.). However, since few Aztec burials have been recovered, these data contribute little to the following discussion.

AShING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

Current limitations of the archaeology of gender include (1) a lack of imagination with regard to the archaeological situations in which gender might be “seen,” and (2) a lack of imagination concerning the theoretical questions that might be asked about gender, questions that go beyond statements of “women did this, and men did that.” For this reason, I devote the remainder of this essay to investigating what we can learn about the Aztec gender system by analyzing...
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archaeological data—in this case, spindle whorls—using research questions generated by the literature on women and work and on women and the state.

Spindle whorls are perforated ceramic disks used to weight spindles during spinning (Fig. 4). The use of spindle whorls is illustrated in several documents (Sahagún 1950–82, 8: chap. 16; Berdan and Anawalt 1992: fols. 58r, 68r), and they are still used in many areas of Mexico today (Parsons and Parsons 1990: 317–332; Berdan n.d.). Mary Parsons (1972) has shown that the spindle whorls from the Basin of Mexico fall into two categories—small and large. According to Parsons, the small spindle whorls were used for spinning cotton, and the large for spinning maguey fiber. Parsons’s suggestion is widely accepted (e.g., Mason 1980; Smith and Hirth 1988; Brewington n.d.).

Spindle whorls, and textile production in general, were heavily gendered as female in Central Mexico. Sixteenth-century ethnographic documents provide pictures of baby girls being awarded spindles to signify their life’s work as

2 Small spindle whorls weigh 10 grams or less and have hole diameters of 2 to 4 millimeters. Large spindle whorls weigh more than 10 grams with hole diameters of 6 to 12 millimeters.

Fig. 5  Mother holding unspun cotton teaches her four-year-old daughter to spin. Note the dark-colored spindle whorl on the end of the spindle and a tortilla above. Codex Mendoza, fol. 58r (after Berdan and Anawalt 1992).
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spinners and weavers. Girls were taught to spin and weave from the age of four, while boys were taught other crafts (see Fig. 5; also Berdan and Anawalt 1992: fol. 57r). Sahagún (1950–82, 6, chap.18) reports that girls (but not boys) were told, “Apply thyself well to the really womanly task, the spindle whorl, the weaving stick….” Gerónimo de Mendieta (1980: 122–123) states that in noble families little girls showed their fathers their weaving in order to receive their praise or reprimand, while little boys presented their fathers with the flowers and fruits that their mothers had given them for the purpose (see Rodríguez 1988: 49–50). Female goddesses were portrayed with spindles adorning their hair and weaving implements in their hands (Sahagún 1950–82, 1: illus. 6, 12; see McCafferty and McCafferty 1991). Thus, the historical record provides strong evidence that spinning and spindle whorls were gendered female.

In Central Mexico, women wove to produce clothing (Anawalt 1981; Hicks 1994), which served a number of functions. In the high intermountaine basins of the Aztec heartland, clothing provided welcome protection against cool morning and evening air, but it was also worn because of modesty and concerns about pollution (see Monaghan, this volume) and to assert one’s affiliation with gender, class, and ethnic groups (Anawalt 1981). Rulers distributed gifts of clothing to validate social status and to win political allies (Berdan 1975: 126–129; Broda 1976: 41–42). Cloth was demanded as tribute by both local lords and imperial rulers (Guzmán 1938; Mólins Fábrega 1954–55; Berdan 1975; Hicks 1982: 238–241), as well as being used as currency in regional markets (Motolinía 1971: 374). Since cloth was so important in the economic and political affairs in ancient Mexico, accumulating stores of tribute cloth became a primary concern of the Aztec state (Fig. 6).

Using a diachronic analysis, we can examine the impact that the creation and expansion of the Aztec Triple Alliance had on existing gender systems. To begin with, we might ask how the increased demand for tribute cloth affected household economic activity. In order to answer this question, we can examine changes in the frequency of use of small spindle whorls and other implements used in household tasks.

The appearance of cotton textiles on almost every page of Aztec tribute lists (see Berdan and Anawalt 1992) leads us to expect that the quantity of small spindle whorls increased markedly as each province was brought under imperial control. Dramatic increases in the quantity of small spindle whorls did occur in some areas, but not in others; for example, spindle whorl numbers did not increase in prime food-producing regions close to Tenochtitlan (Brumfiel 1991). This suggests that households in different regions had different strategies for acquiring cloth that was to be used as tribute. In many areas, women wove
Fig. 6  Tribute cloth paid to the Aztec Triple Alliance by the province of Coaixtlahuacan, in the Codex Mendoza (after Berdan and Anawalt 1992). The tribute included loads of cotton mantles bearing designated patterns as well as loads of loincloths, blouses, and skirts. The treelike element at the top of each bundle designates units of 400. The fingers attached to the first three bundles may specify the required length of the cloth. Codex Mendoza, fol. 43r (Berdan 1992: 95).
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The cloth that their households paid as tribute. However, in prime agricultural areas close to the Triple Alliance capitals, the production of food surpluses for sale in urban markets enabled households to purchase the textiles that they needed to meet their tribute payments. Thus, the impact of the state policies on household labor, and particularly women’s labor, was variable. It was modified by the character of local resources and the accessibility of markets. While the ethnohistorical record suggests uniformity, the archaeological record reveals variation.

Did the state’s demand for tribute cloth create ripple effects in other aspects of the gendered division of household labor? Apparently so. Cooking, like weaving, was gendered as women’s work in Aztec culture (see Fig. 7; Guzmán 1938: 94; Sahagún 1950–82, 10: chap. 3; Díaz del Castillo 1956: 73, 138, 205; Alva Ixtlixochitl 1975–77, 1: 347; Berdan and Anawalt 1992: fol. 60r). Changes in the quantities of different cooking vessels reveal that changes in food preparation routines must have occurred to accommodate the need to acquire cloth. Within the Basin of Mexico, the numbers of jars decreased while those of griddles increased, suggesting that food was less commonly stewed and more commonly toasted under the Triple Alliance rule. In Mexican cooking, stewed
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foods require less labor than foods prepared on the griddle; however, Blanton et al. (1981: 71–72) suggest that foods prepared on griddles are drier and more portable than foods prepared in jars. Drier foods, they argue, become more popular when household members are drawn away from their homes by the extrahousehold labor demanded by the state. In the Basin of Mexico, dry griddle-cooked food may have been preferred by commoners who were cultivating new, more distant, fields and carrying the surplus to urban markets in order to purchase tribute cloth. In regions like Morelos, however, where women wove more and households marketed less, stewed food retained its popularity and jars predominated throughout the prehistoric era (see Brumfiel 1991). Thus, archaeology suggests that the Aztec state caused a general reorganization and renegotiation of household activities.

In some circumstances, this reorganization might have led to a major alteration in the gendered division of labor. For example, at Cholula, in a mass grave containing the remains of fifty individuals, spindle whorls were associated with both male and female skeletons, suggesting that both men and women engaged in textile production (Suárez Cruz 1989; G. McCafferty 1992). This poses an interesting series of questions. What economic and political conditions drew men into “women’s work”? What were the consequences for individuals involved, for the gender system, and for the wider social structure? The investigation of the social identity and fate of these males who spun seems to offer a fruitful line of research, warning us that gendered divisions of labor are not absolute and eternal, even when they are strongly inscribed in a culture.

Increases in the quantity of labor demanded from the household might be accompanied by decreases in its quality. The functional and formal attributes of spindle whorls might reflect the effort invested in cotton cloth production. For example, spindle whorl weights and diameters vary according to the quality of the thread being spun (Parsons and Parsons 1990: 316–332; Barber 1991: 52–53; Keith n.d.; McCafferty and McCafferty 2000). Greater weights and diameters imply the production of a thicker, more loosely spun thread and a poorer-quality cloth, while smaller weights and diameters imply the production of a finer, more tightly spun thread and a higher-quality cloth.

Data from six sites in Central Mexico show that spindle whorl weights and diameters either remained constant or declined under Aztec and Spanish rule, when tribute demands were heavy (Brumfiel 1996). This is surprising since we might expect that women would produce lower-quality cloth in response to

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3 Spinning by males during the mid-20th century has also been reported by the Mexican ethnographer Miguel de Mendizábal (1947: 162) for the Mezquital Valley.
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the demand for more tribute; yet evidently they did not. The explanation might involve considerations of gender ideology. Women might have produced high-quality tribute cloth because skills in spinning and weaving were important measures of a woman’s status. Alternatively, the quality of cloth could have been maintained through state coercion (Brumfiel 1996).4

The decorative attributes of spindle whorls may indicate the attachment of women to their identities as cloth producers. In many regions of the world, the decorated artifacts serve as sources of gender identity and gender claims to power (Hodder 1982; 1986: 105–115). Sharisse and Geoffrey McCafferty (1991) suggest that spindle whorls in Postclassic Central Mexico bore elaborately painted, molded, or incised decorations because they were an important means of communicating female identity and power.

In Cholula, for example, spindle whorl decorations enabled women to identify with the power of both female deities and the priestesses, midwives, and curers associated with them (McCafferty and McCafferty 1991). Early Postclassic spindle whorls in Cholula were sometimes decorated with bitumen, which was associated with Tlazolteotl, an earth goddess connected with childbirth, the moon, menses, purification, sexuality, witchcraft, and healing (Sullivan 1982). In ethnographic documents Tlazolteotl is portrayed with a headband of unspun cotton, spindles (with whorls) in her hair, and bitumen paint around her mouth (Fig. 8). Thus, women who spun with bitumen-decorated spindle whorls asserted their access to the considerable power exercised by Tlazolteotl (Fig. 9; McCafferty and McCafferty 1991).

The importance of spinning for women’s identity, however, evidently diminished as women became more heavily engaged in tribute cloth production. This is suggested by changes in the quantity and quality of spindle whorl decoration. For example, in the northern and central Basin of Mexico, large spindle whorls were often decorated, while small spindle whorls were generally plain. Possibly, women felt that their role as providers of maguey-fiber clothing for their households was a source of pride and personal prestige, while their role as producers of cotton tribute cloth for the empire was not. In the southern Basin of Mexico, Robbie Brewington (n.d.) found that spindle whorl decoration became simplified under Aztec rule. Complex spindle whorls (i.e., painted, carved, and polished, or painted, engraved, and polished) accounted for 50 per-

4 McCafferty and McCafferty (2000: 46) suggest that thin thread and lightweight cloth were produced under Spanish rule in order to stint on raw materials and resist tribute demands. However, demands by Spanish administrators that tribute cloth be “mejor tejidos y más delgados,” that is, better woven and thinner (Riley 1973: 47) suggest that lightweight tribute cloth was actually produced in response to Spanish requirements.
cent of the spindle whorls deposited before Aztec dominance, but only for 23 percent of the whorls deposited during the period of Aztec rule. Conversely, simple spindle whorls (i.e., plain unpainted or molded unpainted) accounted for 40 percent of the pre-Aztec whorls and 73 percent of the Aztec whorls. In Cholula, as the McCaffertys (2000) report, moldmade spindle whorls recovered from an Early to a Middle Postclassic context were very carefully crafted. In contrast, moldmade spindle whorls from a Late Postclassic context were poorly formed, with uneven impressions. Thus, both Brewington's and the McCaffertys' data suggest that the significance of women's roles as spinners and weavers weakened as tribute extraction intensified. 5

Who controlled the production and decoration of these artifacts, with their messages about gender? Archaeological data suggest that spindle whorls were probably made by craft specialists (see Charlton, Charlton, and Nichols [1993: 163] for a description of a spindle whorl workshop). If women did not make their own spindle whorls, then how did the spindle whorls come to bear decorations that underscored women's power? Did the craft specialists share in these conceptions of women's power? Were the craft specialists themselves women? Given the presence of a highly developed market system, did the craft specialists cater to female customers who purchased spindle whorls according to their own tastes? The archaeological study of spindle whorl production now being undertaken by Cynthia Otis Charlton at Otumba may reveal how gender identity formation was affected by the regional market system.
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Within states, gender systems differ according to class (Fernández-Kelly 1983; Benería and Roldán 1987; Silverblatt 1987; Ohnersorgen n.d.). Therefore, we might expect that gender roles, ideologies, and identities were different for Aztec commoners and nobles. These distinctions might be reflected in the spatial distribution of spindle whorls in the houses of elites or commoners. Both in the Basin of Mexico and in Cholula, spindle whorls are widely distributed throughout the rooms of commoners’ houses (Evans 1988; McCafferty and McCafferty 2000). Evidently, female commoners were not confined to particular rooms or work areas; they seem to have enjoyed autonomy within the domestic sphere. However, space may have been more segregated in upper-class residences. In a hinterland palace in the Teotihuacan Valley, excavated by Susan Evans (1988: 118–181), the floor areas of public rooms at the front of the palace near the entry (Rooms T–Y) contained fewer spindle whorls than domestic suites along the back of the palace, and a semi-public dias room in the middle of the palace (Room L) contained an intermediate number of spindle whorls (Fig. 10). The number of spindle whorls found on living floors, twelve, is relatively small, and their association with these floors is not certain. Thus, this single example supplies no compelling argument. However, the low number of spindle whorls near the entrance to the palace may indicate that women engaged in spinning were not usually present in the public areas of the palace.
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Spindle whorls were present in intermediate numbers along the back of the palace where two possible sweatbaths (temazcalli) were located. In Aztec culture, sweatbaths were used to cure both men and women of disease, but women also visited sweatbaths regularly before and after childbirth (see Fig. 11; Sahagún 1950–82, 1: 70; 6: 155; 8: 48; Boone 1983: fol. 77r; see Houston 1996). Evans (1991: 88) suggests that, since sweatbaths were not present in every residential structure at Cihuatecpan, women from several households might have converged at the available facilities, for example, those present in the Cihuatecpan palace. The patchy distribution of these ceremonial facilities promoted
interhousehold contacts among women. Sweatbaths might have constituted a segregated female context where a separate female identity could be nurtured. Interestingly, however, the documents warn us that this was not an exclusively female space. Diego Durán (1971: 270) insists that “when women went to bathe, if they were not accompanied by a man or two, they dared not enter, considering it ill fortune. In the same way, in our own times, a man dares not enter if a woman does not accompany him.” Thus, it is uncertain whether the sweatbath was an institution that nurtured the development of a “backroom transcript,” a separate women’s world-view (Scott 1992).

CONCLUSIONS

This discussion has focused on spindle whorls, artifacts that were clearly gendered female in Aztec culture. Would a discussion of male artifacts yield similar results concerning the status of Aztec men? Perhaps not. In drafting men into military service or labor on public works, states often establish relations with men that are not duplicated in their relations with women. Thus, states introduce asymmetries in female and male ideologies and identities (Nash 1978; Silverblatt 1988; Hastorf 1991), which are sometimes reflected in the archaeological record.

For example, in Aztec assemblages there is no category of artifact that is as significant for male identity as spindle whorls are for female identity. It is always
dangerous to argue from an absence of evidence in archaeology; in this case, however, the absence of highly symbolic male artifacts seems to be confirmed by the illustrations in ethnohistorical documents where male commoners in plain clothing work with plain tools. Such male artifacts may be absent because male ideology was broadcast through the use of larger, more public media such as temple mounds and monumental sculpture. The absence of household artifacts symbolic of male identity might thus suggest that male commoners had less opportunity than females to construct their own identities and that they were more absorbed by the system of militaristic achievement promoted by the Aztec state. If so, then in important ways, male commoners had less ability to pursue their own interests than did female commoners.

One of the strengths of archaeological data is the ability to recover variability in past gender systems. Whereas ethnohistory often gives us a static, normative view of gender systems, archaeological data reveal how gender roles, ideologies, and identities varied according to geography, social status, and changing economic and political conditions. This variation challenges the idea of a single, genetically determined gender system existing for humans, and it even calls into question the idea that gender systems are rigidly dictated by culture. Numerous factors in Central Mexico generated wide variation in gender roles, ideologies, and identities, and these components of the gender system were not stable, but changed even as environmental variables and social practices evolved.

Archaeologists can use the spatial, temporal, and social variation in gender roles, ideologies, and identities to make controlled comparisons of gender systems and to test new theories of gender system development. For example, in Central Mexico, spinning as a part of a woman’s role reached its peak importance (gauged by spindle whorls’ numbers) during the period of Aztec rule when large quantities of tribute cloth were produced in commoners’ households. However, spinning as a part of a woman’s identity (as gauged by spindle whorl decoration) was most salient at an earlier point in time, during the Middle Postclassic period. This suggests that the importance of an activity in terms of gender roles does not directly determine its salience in terms of gender identities. Probably, in determining an activity’s significance for gender identity, the social relations implicated in that activity should carry equal or more importance than the sheer quantity of labor devoted to it (Hodder 1984:108–109).

As archaeologists explore the complex range of variables that affect gender systems, they will begin to identify the strategic, and often creative, choices that women and men made as they navigated ecological and social structures in pursuit of their goals. Although artifacts are fragmentary and nonverbal, they have the advantages of being ubiquitous and sensitive to variation. With these
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advantages, archaeology is sometimes able to recover more of the agency of past peoples than is history with its reliance upon a documentary record, which is more articulate but also more limited and normative.

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Gender in Nahuatl Texts of the Early Colonial Period:
Native “Tradition” and the Dialogue with Christianity

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INTRODUCTION

Colonial documents are a major source of information about gender in Pre-Hispanic America, but the fact that they were produced in a colonial context—one of political and economic oppression, Christian evangelization, and demographic collapse—complicates their use in reconstructing Pre-Hispanic ideas and practices. In the case of Central Mexico, this has not stopped many scholars from making uncritical use of such sources as Sahagún and Durán in their cultural reconstructions. Miguel León-Portilla has defended this practice by arguing that the Late Postclassic Nahuas were capable of passing down the exact words of their ancestors through combinations of hieroglyphic writing and memorization (1992b). Even if they were capable of doing it, this does not necessarily mean that they did so.

There is no simple solution to the problem of using colonial texts. The very inscription of native culture in these documents was a colonial process, an attempt to render the natives knowable and known. Indigenous concepts became articulated in this process, both as a counterdiscourse to Christianity and as a revaluation and reinterpretation of native tradition. Native people who took over alphabetic writing for their own purposes were living under altered circumstances; native authorship does not mean that a text is faithful to Pre-Hispanic models. One can attempt to strip away obvious Christian and European “influences,” but one is not then left with some pure Pre-Hispanic product—and these influences can be quite subtle.

In respect to gender, there is also the problem of male bias. It is not simply that male consultants described native ways of life in a manner that reflected their own gendered experience, thus leading to an underrepresentation and misrepresentation of women’s experience. The entire culture of alphabetic literacy, of education in European languages, and of text production was not
only an elite but also a male domain, from the friars who taught these skills down to the scribes who copied and recopied the documents. True, some indigenous consultants were female and some of their words were written down, but all within a context defined and controlled by men. The apparatus of inscription marginalized women in a manner parallel to and functionally interrelated with their exclusion from other domains of formal and public culture in the colony.

Simultaneously with the production of the codices and other ethnographic texts there occurred the inscription of Christianity into indigenous languages, a process that involved many of the same priests and native scholars. In order to evaluate representations of gender in the ethnographic corpus, it is important to consider how gender was treated in the Christian texts. These show how priests sought to alter Nahua ideas and practices related to gender; however, just as the ethnographic texts are not pure Pre-Hispanic discourses, so the Christian texts in Nahuatl are not pure European discourses. Indigenous interpreters sometimes adapted Christian texts into Nahuatl in such a way that native views of gender were expressed in them. For example, in a Nahua adaptation of a Spanish Holy Week drama, the native translator rewrites a dialogue between Christ and Mary so that Mary is accorded more deference and shows greater foreknowledge of events. The relationship between mother and son is thus adjusted to show greater gender complementarity and filial obedience (Burkhart 1996).

In the Christian texts as well, men dominated the process of inscription. However, women were active in the early Nahua church. It is possible that they may have had indirect influence on the production of Christian materials, for example by exerting preferences for certain types of text and by affecting customary usage through their oral performances of Christian or Christianized discourses.

Although Christianization is only one of the colonial changes that affected gender roles and ideology in native society, it is one that is relatively accessible on the discursive level and also provided the rationale for other significant changes. For example, reducciones were said to facilitate indoctrination, early marriage was to prevent sins of fornication, and restrictions on women’s activities were to promote chastity.¹

In this essay I discuss how certain aspects of gender are represented in colonial Nahuatl ethnographic texts and in Nahuatl-language Christian literature,

¹ On the impact of colonialism on Nahua women’s status, see Kellogg (1995) and Nash (1980).
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with particular attention devoted to interconnections between the two discursive domains. What can these documents tell us about the ways in which gender was treated in the ongoing dialogue between the native people and their Catholic evangelizers? I focus on models of proper female and male behavior, with an emphasis on the female, as the issue of male bias makes this the more problematic area.

SEX AND THE HUEHUEHTLAHTOLLI

To a large extent, the Christian discourse on proper gendered behavior is a discourse centering on the control of sexuality. Christian teachings set up sexual difference as the primary distinction between men and women, while at the same time exhorting men and women to explore this difference as little as possible. Virginity is presented as the ideal state for both sexes; barring this, marital fidelity is the only acceptable choice (see Lavrin 1989 for a discussion of colonial Mexican views on sexuality). Confession manuals make it clear that even within marriage sexual contact should be limited to vaginal intercourse with the man on top (Confessionario n.d.: fols. 16v–17r; Molina 1565: fols. 12v–14r; Molina 1569: fols. 34r–35r). Sexuality is represented as immoral, polluting, dirty, the domain of the demons; sexual transgressors are destined for hell. Through preaching the evils of sex, questioning sexual behavior at confession, and controlling the marriage rite and the choice of marriage partners, the priests sought to shift the locus of control over sex from the family and the native judicial system to the Church.

Friars recorded Nahuatl orations known as huehuehtlahtolli, or “old speech.” They intended to use these speeches to gain insight into native ideas and values as well as to obtain linguistic and rhetorical tools that they could employ in their own preaching. These were contradictory goals, for the texts were expected simultaneously to document exotic and diabolical customs and to serve as protosermons. Native orators’ desire to present their traditions in a manner that might impress the friars or, alternatively, defy their teachings adds yet another layer of ambivalence.

There are two major collections of such speeches. One set was recorded for fray Andrés de Olmos in the 1530s, probably in Texcoco, emended and edited by fray Juan Bautista and, presumably, the indigenous scholars on whom he relied very heavily, and published by Bautista in 1600 (Bautista 1988). The second is the set collected by fray Bernardino de Sahagún for his Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España (1950–82); most of these are contained in book six of the treatise, though some appear elsewhere in the work (see Sullivan 1974 for a listing). These orations are thought to have been first collected beginning
in 1547, but they may have been edited repeatedly prior to the work’s final and extant redaction in the 1570s.

According to Alonso de Zorita (1994: 140), a Spanish judge who used Olmos’s work in his own chronicle, Olmos asked the elders reciting the texts to “take out the names of their gods, substituting the name of the true God and of our Lord.” To assume, however, that the texts are otherwise verbatim preconquest discourses would be naive. George Baudot (1995: 233–234) credits Olmos with a subtle reworking of the texts to accord with Christian preaching on sin. In contrast, in Sahagún’s collection Baudot (1995: 232) finds a “deep idolatrous resonance” and believes that these are verbatim transcriptions not adapted by the friar. Regardless of either friar’s editing policies, however, the native consultants and assistants may themselves have adapted the traditional oral texts to the colonial situation.

The huehuehtlahtolli orations are often treated as canonical native texts that gloss the traditional wisdom of the Aztecs. They are used as sources of information on many aspects of preconquest culture (García Quintana 1976; Sullivan 1974), whether to illustrate a balanced and harmonious philosophy of life (León-Portilla 1963, 1992a) or to provide evidence of the systematic subordination of women (Rodríguez-Shadow 1991). Some of them were directed at controlling the behavior of children, including sexual behavior. There is no reason to doubt that preconquest parents were concerned with controlling their children’s sexuality; however, the Church’s emphasis on abstinence determined not only the fact that these speeches were recorded but also, to some extent, their content.

For example, Sahagún’s collection of huehuehtlahtolli contains a ruler’s speech to his son exhorting him to chastity; this is the longest and most explicit text on the subject that speaks, or purports to speak, in a native voice (Sahagún 1950–82, 6: 113–119). Other huehuehtlahtolli directed at children, both in the Sahagún and the Olmos and Bautista collections, also warn against premature and excessive sexual activity, but this is the only oration devoted entirely to this topic.

The oration tells of divine reward for virginity and chastity. One has to wonder, however, whether the gods in preconquest times cared all that much about a person’s sex life when selecting who would die in battle and consequently go to the heaven of the Sun and who would die of the water-related causes that sent the soul to Tlalocan, the home of the rain deities. Small children go to the garden of Tonacatecuhtli because they are precious and pure; in context, sexual innocence is implied. It seems that the afterworlds most closely resembling the Christian heaven were being recast as places of reward for sexual purity. In turn, the underworld was now characterized in negative terms, as a
frightening place of obsidian-bladed winds, as if it were a place of punishment.

The text also argues for delay of sexual relations until marriage, lest the youth dissipate himself through uncontrolled emission of semen in his tender years and thus become unable to satisfy his wife later on. The father describes an old man who, because he abstained in youth, was able to be sexually active in old age. He also tells of two elderly women driven to adultery, who complain that men get all used up and are good for nothing. This part does not sound very Christian, since it does seem actually to condone, not just tolerate, sexual relations between married adults as well as sexual activity beyond childbearing years. However, one statement suggests that the Christian idea of the conjugal debt has been worked into this text. This is the notion that, if one’s spouse desires sexual relations, one must comply (within reasonable limits), lest the spouse be driven to commit some unchaste act such as masturbation or adultery (see Lavrin 1989: 73–74). In the oration, the father suggests to his son that his future wife might desire “earthliness” (tlalticpacioti), that is, sexual relations, “which you owe to your spouse” (inic timaceoalti in monamj); with him unable to comply, she will commit adultery against him (mitzontlaximaz) (Sahagún 1950–82, 6: 117).

The instructions addressed to marrying couples in fray Alonso de Molina’s Spanish and Nahuatl Confessionario mayor, first published in 1565 and reprinted in 1569, explain the conjugal debt. Marriage partners must obey one another in respect to copulation, lest they fall into deadly sin and offend God. If a man is driven to extramarital liaisons, his wife will go to the underworld, as will the man himself—although the text does not actually impute any unchaste acts to the frustrated wife (Molina 1569: fol. 54r–v).

Further on in the Florentine Codex oration, the wife is described as monacaio, “your body” or, more literally, “your flesh.” It was in order to express Christianity’s dualism of body and soul that this Nahuatl term became a commonly used word for the body as a whole, as opposed to simply its fleshy parts. In Molina’s Confessionario, the following statement comes immediately after the explanation of the conjugal debt: “It is necessary that you know that the body of the man who is someone’s spouse in a sacred way [that is, married by the Church], it is as if it is no longer his body, it is the possession of the one who is his woman in a sacred way. And the woman, her body is his possession, it pertains to the man” (1569: fols. 54v–55r; translation mine).

Similarly, Sahagún in the Apéndice of 1579 tells Nahuas of what St. Paul says on the subject: “the woman who was married in a sacred way, her body is not her possession; it is the possession of the man; he [St. Paul] speaks in the same way in regard to the man who is married in a sacred way, his body is not his
possession, it is the possession of his wife” (1993a: 100; translation mine). Such reciprocal ownership of one another’s body would appear to be a Christian introduction.

The Florentine Codex oration refers to the boy’s future wife as *monamic*, “your spouse” or “your match,” rather than *mocihuauh*, “your wife” or “your woman.” While admitting that the evidence is somewhat ambiguous, James Lockhart (1992: 80–81, 270) suggests that the use of *namiclī* as a kin term for spouses is of colonial origin, a coinage related to the introduction of Church marriage. Thus, what is being described for this boy is his future marriage in the Church.

Sahagún’s collection also includes a noblewoman’s oration to her daughter, about a third of which is devoted to advice regarding chastity within marriage. The daughter is told to “keep” (*moxicpia*) the injunction against infidelity as “your very firm commandment” (*vel motepitznaoatil*) and never betray her husband (the word *monamic* is used). The mother states, “as the words are said, ‘do not commit adultery.’” The phrasing suggests an intertextual link to the Christian catechism, through which Nahuas were taught the ten commandments, the sixth of which prohibits adultery. If the daughter commits adultery and is discovered, she will be stoned—the Pre-Hispanic punishment, according to many sources, but also one found in the Bible. She will disgrace the memory of her ancestors. Even if her husband does not find out, God will see what she has done. The epithet *Tloque Nahuaque*, or “he of the near, he of the nigh,” appears in these texts as a vague reference to an omnipresent and omnipotent deity—in effect, the speakers are represented as having a god equivalent to the Christian one rather than any particular native deity. He will bring divine vengeance in the form of blindness, paralysis, or impoverishment, and will inspire the daughter’s husband to be angry with her. Moreover, he will send her to the underworld; again, the implication is that this is a place of punishment for misdeeds. But even if “our lord” is merciful—a trait of the Christian god—and does not make the adultery known, he will still cause the woman’s husband to be angry with her (Sahagún 1950–82, 6: 102–103).

Are these *huehuehtlahtollī* Christian sermons in disguise? Certainly not. They do not present Christian teachings in any direct or systematic way. In contrast to Christian moralizing, the ruler’s advice to his son does take a positive view of sexual pleasure, as does the ruler’s address to the daughter in the same collection (p. 93). There are many other statements in the *huehuehtlahtollī* that priests would be unlikely ever to use. In the address to the daughter, for example, it is only after the ancestors are invoked as arbiters of morality that there is any mention of divine sanction. We may read speeches such as these as
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counterdiscourses to Christianity. They do, to some extent, articulate indigenous values that we may presume to be of pre-Hispanic origin. At the same time, however, they represent native culture as being more like Christianity than it may really have been, and therefore—from the perspective of colonial Nahuas and their friars—as being more legitimate. They also indicate the extent to which Christian discourses have worked their way into native expression.

Elsewhere, Sahagún rejects the arguments put forth in the exhortation to chastity about the sexually pure receiving divine reward—even though these probably were, at least in part, a response to Christianity. In the Apéndice, written in 1579 (1993a: 91–101), he discusses “how your old men loved pure living and chastity” but mixed it with many false words (ibid.: 96–97). Sahagún thus sought to break down the authority of the ancestors. The purity and penances of native children and any other non-Christians, he claimed, were of no value: their gods were demons and, since all the people were tainted by original sin, not even the babies were pure. Purity did not admit one to the Sun’s heaven, to Tlalocan, or to the home of Tonacatecuhtli. Instead, all went to the underworld, with the young children to be confined in Limbo. Only the purity of those who worshiped the sole God was valued and rewarded. Abel, son of Adam and Eve, was the first to keep his virginity; likewise the male saints John the Baptist, John the Evangelist, and Paul received divine favor because of their virginal status. Sahagún adds that many Christian men and women follow this lifestyle in the present time. Through this text the friar, well aware that the Nahuas had their own highly developed concepts of purity and pollution, was striving to establish a strong distinction between those and his own Christian views.

The words that the friars used for virgins, regardless of their age, were telpochtli, “youth” or “young man,” and ichpochtli, “girl” or “young woman”; sometimes intensifiers were added, but often not. Virginity was expressed by the abstract noun forms telpochotl and ichpochotl, gender-specific terms that, as used by the Church, defined sexual inexperience as the essential quality of young manhood and young womanhood. The usage in Christian religious contexts, especially the constant use of the term ichpochtli in reference to the Virgin Mary, changed the meanings of these words. However, as is also true of other Nahuatl terms adapted into Christian usage, it is difficult to guess how quickly, to what extent, or how pervasively Nahua understandings and associations were shifting.

These changes in usage and meaning probably affected numerous terms relating to sex. Did “pure living” formerly refer specifically to sexual absti-
nence or to a broader range of behaviors aimed at moral and/or ritual purity? Or is the very term a Christian coinage? Did “keeping of oneself” mean chastity, in the Christian sense of restriction of sexual relations to marriage? Did “earthliness” refer specifically to sexual acts, and if so, which ones? The fact that the meanings of the terms were being contested between two religious and moral systems further complicates our readings of the indigenous texts.

The Church’s ongoing diatribe against sexuality changed the terms in which Nahuas expressed the relationship between the sexes. But the denigration of sexuality applied to both genders. How did gender difference find expression in the dialogue with Christianity?

One difference that may be noted between the two orations discussed above is the contrast between the notions of preserving male potency and of guarding female chastity. This is consistent with a greater emphasis on female virginity and chastity in the Christian devotional texts in Nahuatl. Even though male saints who preserved their virginity are extolled, as is Christ for the same reason, this is less of a defining characteristic for men than it is for women.

**SAINTLY WOMEN**

Moralizing about the evils of sexuality was one way in which the friars sought to affect gender-related behavior. Another was to provide role models that were considered appropriate to each sex. In order to find models of specifically female behavior, I discuss here the female saints whose festivals are included in the two major Nahuatl hagiographic compilations of the sixteenth century: the *Psalmodia christiana*, authored by Sahagún and four native scholars (Sahagún 1583, 1993b), and the *Sermonario* by the Augustinian friar Juan de la Anunciación, presumably also prepared with indigenous assistants (Anunciación 1577). I have chosen to focus on female saints because they are so underrepresented in these books—between the two collections, nine female saints are included as opposed to forty-three male saints, which speaks of the relative importance assigned to men and women by the Church. The fact that there are so few women makes those included even more important.

These narratives are significant in the dialogue about gender because they are presented to Nahuas both as models for emulation and as models of the female sacred. These saints differ from the Pre-Columbian female deities not only in character but also in function, as Pre-Columbian deities were superhuman figures with divine powers of their own, and on the whole not models one presented to one’s daughter to teach her moral behavior.

The principal female saint is, of course, the Virgin Mary. Several of her festivals are included in these collections: the Conception, Nativity, Annuncia-
tion, Visitation, Purification, and Assumption. She is described as existing in a state of total purity. Not only is she a perpetual virgin, with her body intact even after childbirth, but she is conceived without original sin, commits absolutely no misdeeds during her entire life, and is taken bodily into heaven. She marries, but she and Joseph share a vow of virginity; his role is to accompany her and provide for her. In general, she appears in these texts as humble and obedient in character. However, as a young girl brought up in temple service—an experience that paralleled that of some preconquest Nahua girls—she refuses the priests’ demand that she marry when she comes of age (Doctrina n.d.: fol. 104v). Just before the Passion, she seeks to dissuade Christ from going through with his foreordained suffering and execution (Burkhart 1996). She also intercedes with Christ on behalf of her devotees, sometimes insisting that he pardon even very sinful individuals (e.g., Burkhart 1999; Doctrina n.d.: fols. 65v–66v).²

In addition to Marian festivals, both collections observe the days of Ann, Catherine of Alexandria, and Mary Magdalene. Sahagún’s collection also includes Clare of Assisi and Martha, while Anunciación covers Agnes, Lucy, and Monica. Five of these saints are, like Mary, virgins. These virgin saints are by no means uniformly passive and submissive; indeed, they display more self-determination than does Mary in the same and other texts. St. Martha, for example, after fulfilling her Gospel-attested role as host to the itinerant Christ, goes on to a career as apostle to Marseilles, where she converts the local population, heals the sick, raises the dead, tames a dragon, and then retreats into the forest with other maidens to live a penitential life, subsisting on tortillas and water (Sahagún 1993b: 208–213). St. Catherine, wealthy, highly educated, and heir to a kingdom, argues theology with the pagan emperor Maxentius, who calls in fifty great sages to refute her. She persuades the sages that Christianity is superior to their pagan philosophy. When as a result the emperor has her beheaded, milk flows from her neck, and Christ himself buries her on Mount Sinai (Sahagún 1993b: 334–339). In addition to describing her martyrdom, Anunciación’s version includes the story of Catherine’s mystic marriage to Christ. After she rejects all earthly suitors, Catherine has a vision in which the Christ child gives her a ring, which is on her finger when she awakens (Anunciación 1577: fols. 208v–210r).

St. Agnes, for her part, spurns the marriage proposal of a Roman official’s son. Her suitor’s father orders her to worship the idols; she refuses to do so and

² I am currently preparing an anthology of Nahuatl texts on the Virgin Mary, in which these traits are evident. See also Burkhart (1989, 1992a).
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speaks against the worship of false deities. He then has her hauled off to a brothel, but an angel surrounds her with a light so bright that none can look at her. After Agnes’s prayers save her suitor from a demon, he accepts Christianity, but she is burned to death by other idolaters (Anunciación 1577: fols. 132v–133v). In St. Lucy’s case, an idolatrous judge orders her taken to a brothel for refusing to make offerings to the images of the demons, but it is impossible to move her body, even with chains. She is tortured with fire on the spot and then beheaded (Anunciación 1577: fol. 214r–v).³

Valor is a trait these Early Christian women share with some of the Aztec female deities—as is dismemberment—but their valor is exerted in defense of the faith and linked to sexual purity. The old goddesses were sexually ambivalent and were dismembered to symbolize the defeat and humiliation of the enemies of the Mexica state (Klein 1994), whereas these pure Christian virgins are extolled for their symbolic victory over paganism. Friars may have seen these women as appropriate models for Nahua girls and women in that, in addition to being virgins, they refused to participate in non-Christian worship or to marry idolaters.

St. Clare, also a virgin, was an early follower of St. Francis and founder of the women’s branch of the Franciscan order. The text devoted to her in the Psalmodia (Sahagún 1993b: 236–241) sets her up as a model of chaste and penitential womanhood: she made a vow of virginity; she was cloistered and went about with bowed head; she lived on water, old tortillas, and crusts of bread; she cut off her hair and wore coarse garments, including “an itchy mantle called a hair shirt”; she swept, cleaned, and cooked all day and prayed at night.

Clare’s life is contrasted with a model of womanhood designated for noblewomen. The noblewomen described, however, are indigenous Mexican noblewomen, not those of thirteenth-century Italy. They love meat tamales and other rich foods; they esteem fancy skirts and blouses decorated with coyote fur and other materials; they fix up their hair, paint their faces and teeth, and hang about the roads and in the marketplace, showing themselves to people and making people (that is, men) desire them.

This is not, however, a simple dichotomy between Christian and native discourses on female virtue. The huehuehtlahtolli addressed to noble girls similarly tell them not to dress themselves very fancily, not to use cosmetics, not to linger in the streets and markets, and not to go around looking at people. Instead, they are to be moderate and circumspect in all things and ignore men.

³ Anunciación’s account omits the action that got Lucy into trouble, namely, her spurning of her pagan betrothed and donation of her dowry to the poor (Voragine 1993, 1: 25–26); the episode of her gouging out her own eyes is also omitted here.
who try to flirt with them (Bautista 1988: 312–325; Sahagún 1950–82, 6: 93–103). Neither is this simply a dichotomy between Christian behavior and a traditional native model of bad behavior. The term “sinner women” (\textit{tlatlacoani ciuau}) used here (Sahagún 1993b: 240) would not have been applied to these noblewomen outside of a Christian or Christianizing context. Although the \textit{huehuehtlahtolli}, with their ideals of marriage and moderation, certainly do not condone a lifestyle like Clare’s, penitential practices are extolled for both sexes and girls are told to get up during the night and talk to “our Lord” (Sahagún 1950–82, 6: 95). Noble girls were, reportedly, sequestered away from men (see below, p. 102–103). And we may note that Clare sweeps, which is a penitential and housekeeping rite closely associated with native women (Burkhart 1989: 117–120; 1992b: 32–40; on this text see also Burkhart 1989: 138–139; 1992a). Thus, even when set up as foils for one another, native models muddle the Christian ones, and vice versa.

As Nahua girls were not permitted to become nuns and generally married at a young age, married saints may have been more realistic role models. The two married, noncelibate women in the hagiographic collections, Monica and Ann, derive their main claim to fame from their offspring. St. Monica is the mother of St. Augustine. A Christian woman married to a pagan man, Monica succeeds in converting her husband; her prayers, weeping, and penances eventually help to bring about her son’s change of faith as well (Anunciación 1577: 153r–v). Like the virgin martyrs, Monica can serve as a model of religious zeal in a context of recent or ongoing conversion.

In a similar vein, St. Ann is famous for being the mother of Mary and the grandmother of Christ. Her cult is based not on the canonical Gospels but on the apocryphal Gospel of the Birth of Mary and Protoevangelion, which tell of her long-childless marriage to Joachim and the angel-heralded conception of Mary. Ann is also notable for another reason: Sahagún (1981, 3: 352–353) attested to the case of a Nahua community, formerly devoted to the deity Tocih (“Our Grandmother”), which now had Ann as its patron saint. The friar suspected that the old goddess was still being worshiped under the cover of the saint.4

The \textit{Psalmodia}'s songs dedicated to St. Ann are based in part on an Old Testament text from the book of Proverbs (31:10–23). The biblical verses describe a strong and industrious woman, trusted by her husband, who spins thread and makes fine clothing, brings her bread from far away like the merchant’s ships, rises before dawn to prepare food, plants a vineyard, labors at night by

4 The community is Santa Ana Chiauhtempan, near Tlaxcala.
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candlelight, provides well for the members of her household, and is generous
to the poor. Part of this text was used as a breviary reading for Ann’s festival;\(^5\)
this, presumably, is how the Psalmodia’s authors came to connect it with Ann.
But the authors—perhaps the native writers more than Sahagún—translated
the biblical text as a literal description of St. Ann and made a few adjustments
in accordance with the local context. For example, Ann’s house was full of
goods as if it were a house of merchants (oztomecacalli). She sought wool and
cotton, rather than wool and flax, for her spinning, and “she made many mantles,
because she knew her womanly work very well.” The people of her household
kept many adornments. The final verse, “Her husband is known in the gates,
when he sitteth among the elders of the land” (Prov. 31:23), is translated as
“And her spouse, St. Joachim, she dearly loved, she greatly honored. She would
adorn him with many precious mantles, with designs on them” (Sahagún 1993b:
206–207; translations mine).
The Psalmodia’s Ann could be the matron of a Nahua household, a
hardworking woman properly brought up according to huehuehtlahtolli dictates,
with Christian charity thrown in. The wool and the grapevine being Spanish
imports, she could not quite be a preconquest woman. The weaving of mantles
(tilmahtli) was a central economic activity of Nahua women, vital not only for
clothing household members but also for paying tribute and trading for other
goods. Ann as a weaver of mantles is ambivalent: she supports the Spanish
colonial economy but also ensures her household’s economic survival. Here,
native and Christian models of womanhood are not contrasted but subtly
conflated, to an unusual degree for a Church-sanctioned text.

In Anunciación’s (1577: fol. 171r–v) text, in contrast, Ann serves as a model
for rejecting an aspect of native behavior. Women who are unable to become
pregnant should, like Ann, pray to God rather than consult the native midwives
(titicih), specifically those who specialize in fertility problems, the tepillaliliah, or
“they who place children for people” (on these practitioners, see López Austin

Unlike the other female saints, St. Mary Magdalene was neither married
nor a virgin. Anunciación (1577: fol. 167r) describes her as a wealthy and beau-
tiful woman who, deceived by the demon, became enamored of “earthliness”
and the “foul pleasures of the flesh”; the Psalmodia does not explicitly identify
her misdeeds as sexual in nature. On meeting Christ, Mary Magdalene aban-
donated her sinful life, repented, and became his follower. After Christ’s ascen-
sion she went to France (with her sister Martha) and did the usual apostolic

\(^5\) I have found verses 31: 10–12 used in this context in a 16th-century breviary (Breuiarium romanum 1553).
work of converting people and working miracles. But afterward she moved to a mountaintop and spent thirty years living in a cave in the forest and doing penance for her sins, alone except for the angels who would come every day to feed her and carry her in their arms (Anunciación 1577: fols. 166r–167v; Sahagún 1993b: 198–201). Thus, Mary Magdalene serves as a model of repentance and penance for sin, but her life has little in common with the life experience of Nahua women or with the native deities associated with female sexuality.

TEACHING SUBMISSION?

Over the course of the early colonial period, women’s status declined, in part because of the colonial policies that favored early marriage and emphasized the nuclear family over consanguineal kinship networks (Kellogg 1995). One might expect that the Christian texts in Nahuatl would have encouraged female subordination within marriage, in accordance with Spanish ideals, but this was not a predominant or pervasive theme compared to the theme of general disapprobation of sexual excesses. As we have seen, the female saints are submissive to divine authority and are valued more for chastity than for any other single quality, but they are not controlled by fathers and husbands.

One complicating factor, I suggest, is that the priests (like other Europeans) saw all native people as weak, passive, and submissive by nature. Sahagún (1993a: 112), addressing a native audience, compares the Spaniards to the lion (castilla miztli) and the indigenous people to the rabbit, which cannot succeed in emulating the lion. These animal metaphors have clear masculine and feminine associations for Europeans. The native people as a whole were also considered more carnal and less spiritual than the Old World Christians (Burkhart 1998), and thus more susceptible to temptation, especially toward sexual sins and acts of idolatry or Devil worship. Laura Lewis (1996) documents various contexts in which native Mexicans were directly or indirectly feminized and treated as legally and morally comparable to women; such discourses stripped them of legitimate power and authority while at the same time ascribing to them illicit power gained through witchcraft and ties to the Devil—powers more often associated with women than men in Europe (see also Behar 1989).

The friars’ concern with eradicating polygyny may have led them to see native men as equally—or more—susceptible to sins of the flesh as native women, in contrast to the typical views on gender difference among Europeans. For example, they preach to men against concubinage (momecatliztli, “tying oneself”). Women’s traditional clothing was notably more modest, by European standards, than that of men. In this sense, both sexes were constructed as being morally weaker than Europeans, with women not necessarily seen as weaker than men.
Thus, some critical ways in which gender hierarchy was constructed in European discourses collapsed in New Spain under the weight of more salient hierarchies of power—Spaniard over Indian and Christian over pagan. Feminization of colonized people is, of course, typical of colonial discourses, as Edward Said and others have noted (e.g., Said 1979; Thomas 1994). If all natives are by their very nature meek and humble, it is unnecessary to teach such traits to the women and pointless to try to eradicate them in the men.

Molina’s instructions to the marrying couple, cited earlier, teach mutual obedience only in respect to the conjugal debt; the woman is not told to obey her husband in other matters. Preaching against sexual excesses, Sahagún (1563: fol. 18v) states that spouses must not obey one another in such matters if the acts entail disobedience to God; the example he gives is mutual touching, presumably of the genitals.

While wifely submission is not a common topic, there are some examples of texts that condone it. Some tell of Eve’s punishment in Genesis (3:16), when God tells her, “in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.” In a sermon of Sahagún’s (1563: fol. 29v), God tells Eve that she will bear many children with suffering and “your husband will rule over you; you will obey him.” This judgment applies to all women: “To you it happens as our Lord said.” Adam is also punished, but with the tilling of the now-cursed earth, not with obedience to his wife—for it was obedience to her that got him into trouble.

Female obedience within marriage is given further sanction in another of Sahagún’s sermons, which emphasizes the permanence of the marriage bond. For women who are married in the Church, the command is to obey their husbands, and to love and honor them. Sahagún provides the following model speech for women to deliver to their daughters, a substitution for the traditional huehuehtlahtolli:

My precious daughter, you little woman, you are going to marry in a sacred way. And marriage in a sacred way, it is very great, it is a sacrament. It is not like the marriage of long ago, when a woman who was jealous would leave her spouse; thus she would console herself. But today when you marry in a sacred way, if indeed you should become jealous, if indeed your husband beats you, if indeed he afflicts you, in no way will you be able to leave him. It is necessary that you will always live with him, you will obey him, you will honor him. He is your lord, he is your spouse in a sacred way. It is ordained by our mother the Holy Church. It is also ordained by God. It is a sacrament. No one at all will be able to break it. May you thus be taught. It will
become your command when you marry that never will you leave him, you will always obey him. And if sometime you become jealous, you do not obey him, or perhaps you leave him, you will be caught, you will be locked up, and in the church you will be shamed, you will be whipped. Our mother Holy Church is the example for women who have married in a sacred way, as she obeys her husband, our Lord Jesus Christ. She loves him very much, she honors him very much, and she looks after her children very well, she takes good care of them. (1563: fol. 65r; translation mine)

With Christ and the Church presented as the model couple, there was little room for women to assert independence. The essence of marriage here is the inviolable bond created by the Church. 6

The huehuehtlahtolli teach diligence and chastity. Young men and women are exhorted to submit to the authority of their parents and ancestors. But do the orations teach women to be submissive to their husbands? The orations to the marrying couple in Sahagún’s collection emphasize hard work and responsibility for both partners; marriage is depicted primarily as an economic partnership and a union between families. The bride is told to be diligent in selling the mantles that her husband gives her, so that she will be able to obtain food and firewood; the groom is exhorted to go on trading expeditions. Their comportment toward one another is not mentioned (Sahagún 1950–82, 6: 130–133). Here, the essence of marriage appears to be the formation of a household based on complementary productive activities.

In the Olmos–Bautista collection, however, the mother tells the daughter that, when she is married, she will attend to how her husband advises and commands her, and she will obey him, receiving his words with gladness. She is not to become angry or turn away from him (Bautista 1988: 320–321). Sons do not receive comparable advice. Rather, the father cautions the son against marrying before he has the wherewithal to support a wife and children (1988: 296–297). A married son is told by his father to make his wife do housework: spinning, weaving, preparing drinks, and grinding maize (1988: 356–357). Perhaps preconquest parents would have also made such statements, but it is possible that a Christian model of marriage, with an obedient and economically dependent wife under the direct authority of her husband, has worked its way into

6 The bond was not so inviolable as the friars would have liked. According to Zorita (1994: 125), judges in preconquest times had discouraged divorce and sought to reconcile the partners. Zorita states that he was informed by friars that divorce became more common under Spanish rule than it had been previously.
these speeches. Women’s responsibility for household tasks is not at issue; rather, it is a question of whether these are represented as a female domain of economically productive activities over which women exercise control, or as work that women do to serve their husbands.

Christian reworking is also apparent in the Bancroft dialogues. These are a collection of model Nahuatl speeches recorded probably in a late-sixteenth-century Franciscan context, apparently in Texcoco, and known from a seventeenth-century Jesuit transcription (Karttunen and Lockhart 1987). The collection contains a speech addressed by a male speaker to a couple newly married in the Church. The bride and groom are told to live prudently, serve God, and avoid moral error. Addressing the groom, the speaker says, “You are the head and trunk of the maiden here whom our Lord has vouchsafed to you” (ibid. 1987: 109). The groom is then told to work hard to provide for his household. The bride is not told to obey her husband, but she is admonished to be diligent in household tasks—the canonical ones of sweeping, cooking, spinning, and weaving—“so that you will please your husband whom our Lord has vouchsafed to you, for as a woman you are to take care of things, watch over things, and not let things go to ruin in your house and home; and keep yourself so that you do not live in vice and badly, for this is why you will be loved and honored” (ibid. 1987: 108–111). There is a clear sense of gender hierarchy here, and of the mutuality of the conjugal relationship as contracted through the Church. Whether the author, a Christian Nahua, was writing to please the priests or transcribing what he really would have said to newlyweds, the dialogue with Christianity was affecting what was being recorded as native discourse about marriage.

CONCLUSIONS

In the Bancroft dialogues there is a speech attributed to an elderly woman. She reminisces that children were much better brought up in the old days and misdeeds such as adultery were more severely punished. After describing the education of noble boys in a wide range of activities—warfare, hunting, crafts, singing, oratory, musical instruments, astronomy, reading, and agriculture—she narrates how noble girls were raised:

Likewise within the houses, where the ladies were in their quarters, the girls [ichpopochtin] were taught all the different things women do: sweeping, sprinkling, preparing food, making beverages, grinding (maize), preparing tortillas, making tamales, all the different things customarily done among women; also (the art of) the spindle and the weaver’s reed and various kinds of embroidery; also dyeing, how rab-
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bit down or rabbit fur was dyed different colors. And in the same way (as with the boys) those who did something wrong or did not take care were severely punished. And they were all well cared for: no men, no matter who, entered there; taking care of them was the exclusive domain of the elderly noblewomen. (Karttunen and Lockhart 1987:152–155)

As for commoners, the girls were raised “at the women’s temple, where the female penitents were enclosed and fasted” (ibid.: 154–155).7

Is this an accurate description, a nostalgia-tinged exaggeration, or a projection of new, Christian values into the past? Or is it a counterdiscourse to colonialism, a way of saying “we were better Christians when we were pagans than we are under Spanish rule”? Knowing that female saints were represented as cloistered, hardworking, and penitent, that domestic productive tasks were virtually the only activities of preconquest women explicitly sanctioned in Christian teaching, and that virginity was treated as the most important attribute of young women, we may reasonably suspect that this account has been framed in terms of the dialogue with Christianity, regardless of how ethnographically specific or accurate it may (or may not) be.

The same speech describes how the old sacred books discussed “he of the near, he of the nigh, the creator of people” (ibid.: 152–153), while also dealing with the false gods about whom people used to be confused before the coming of the faith. Turning the ancestors into proto-Christians was not an uncommon strategy for colonial Nahuas who wished to assert continuities between past and present and depict their forebears in a favorable light.

These examples of interconnections between ethnographic and Christian texts have indicated some of the ways in which gender representations are complicated by the dialogue with Christianity. In respect to female gender, the documents reflect a new emphasis on chastity and virginity, a stress on domestic work and limitations placed on female activity outside the household, a revaluation of the marriage bond, and the demonizing of women who do not fit Christian patterns, including medical practitioners. But we also find evidence of indigenous constructs working their way into Christian texts as, for instance, a Clare who sweeps or an Ann who weaves many mantles. Only by treating ethnographic inscriptions as part of the same discursive universe as Christian inscriptions—a universe dominated by both elite, literate native men

7 For another description of the cloistering of girls in preconquest times, see Zorita (1994: 130–131, 136–137).
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and Catholic priests—can we evaluate them as sources of information about indigenous gender constructs. And while we cannot expect to recover Pre-Hispanic gender in some pure, essential form, these sources do reveal a great deal about the negotiation not only of gender but also of ethnicity, class, and religious identity by native people during the early phases of Spanish rule.

The Nahuatl texts have broader implications for the study of gender in colonial situations. Wherever the ruling group’s gender-related values and practices differ significantly from those of the subordinate group, the result is not simply that the colonizers will disapprove of the indigenous expressions and attempt to alter them. One can also expect indigenous discourse on gender to undergo what Pierre Bourdieu (1977: 22) calls “regularization” (see also Hanks 1987). That is, the colonized will attempt to represent themselves as being in line with the values of the dominant group. In the case of a confrontation with patriarchal Christian Europe, this will most likely lead to an increased emphasis on female chastity and submissiveness, as seen in the Nahua case. In turn, this revaluation of indigenous culture, on the part of indigenous people themselves, may have the unfortunate result of furthering the process of colonial hegemony. If European constructs of gender come to be represented as part of traditional native culture, their adoption is condoned, as it were, from both sides. The decline in status experienced by Nahua women over the course of the early colonial period (Kellogg 1995, 1997) may thus have resulted not just from direct Spanish pressure but also from a growing sense among Nahuas that this was, after all, the normal order of things.
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Today it is of course impossible to directly observe the actions of members of Pre-Columbian Mesoamerican societies such as the Classic Maya. And while literate Mesoamerican societies left written records behind, and all Mesoamerican societies produced some visual representations, these sources were themselves a means within these societies of asserting limits on what constituted intelligible action, and thus should not be used as indications of the actual range of gendered performance in Pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica.¹

Paradoxically, the determination of Mesoamerican ethnohistorical records by political agendas of control may make the testimony of sixteenth-century European observers more valuable in establishing the actual diversity in living practice that exceeded the limits of Pre-Hispanic attempts at discipline. In their initial encounters with Mesoamerican peoples, Europeans created texts that, while constrained by European concepts of gender, did not necessarily reproduce the same limitations as did native Mesoamerican records. We are already in a position to critique the kinds of assumptions about gender that are embedded in the European accounts, thanks to active contemporary scholarship in feminist anthropology and gender studies.

I argue that early European records attest a highly fluid Mesoamerican ideology of gender, which is not an essential, innate, and immutable quality in the classic European mode, but rather produced, from an original androgeny or encompassment of sexual possibilities, by creative action in mythological time and recreated by social means in individual time (Joyce 1996).² The fluidity of

gender implicit in Mesoamerican ideology is expressed in multiple ways. As Eva Hunt (1977: 95–109, 139) noted, several conquest-era Mesoamerican deities were described as sexually fluid, sometimes male, and sometimes female. She draws particular attention to the association of such ambiguity with cyclic phenomena, such as the growth of maize (leading to characterizations of maize as male or female at different stages of growth) and the phases of the moon. Some Mesoamerican mythologies place a dual-gendered being at the beginning of creation, as the singular parent of subsequent fixed, dichotomously gendered supernaturals. The figure of Ometecuhtli (“Two-Lord”), of Aztec belief, is the most fully described example (León-Portilla 1963: 99–111). Other Aztec deities exhibit gender ambiguity beyond the gender dualism of Ometecuhtli. For instance, Cecelia Klein (1976, 1980: 157–165) has documented the gender-ambiguous aspects of the earth deity, Tlaltecuhtli, and the rain and fertility deity, Tlaloc. Contemporary Nahua beliefs reflect the possibility of dual-gendered supernatural beings in the form of nayos, lightning bolts, both male and female, described as “characters who bridge many polarized elements in the universe and help tie it together into a whole” (Taggart 1983: 66; see also 60–61).

Mesoamerican originary beings may also reassert undivided gender through overlapping identification between paired male and female representations. The couple identified by Jill Furst (1982: 209–10) as Generator Deities in the Vienna Codex have the same calendar name, 1 Deer, and both wear the headdress of 9 Wind, whom Furst calls the Mexica cultural hero. Painted as paired male and female but merged by naming, they could be equally conceived of as two aspects of a single being, 1 Deer. Sixteenth-century texts recording Aztec traditions of human founders, Oxomoco and Cipactonal, the patrons of the calendar, divination, healing, and midwives, routinely fail to maintain stable identifications of these characters as male and female (López Austin 1988: 238). Similar fluidity of the gender of actors in royal histories of the Mexica has been documented by Susan Gillespie (1989).

This phenomenon is by no means peculiar to Central Mexico, although our sixteenth-century documentation is richest for this region. Modern ethnographies record the use of terms like “mothers/fathers” (totilme’il) by specific Maya groups (in this case, Zinacantec Tzotzil speakers) for the corporate ancestors (Devereaux 1987: 92). Leslie Devereaux (1987) argues that dual gender is necessary for the active role of Maya ancestors in founding lines of descent, and that, represented as the ancestral collectivity denoting both origins and authority, the ancestors are not separated into distinct First Mother and First Father figures.
Negotiating Sex and Gender in Classic Maya Society

I have argued elsewhere (Joyce 1992a, 1994, 1996) that Classic Maya depictions of actors dressed in variations of a beaded net skirt represent performances of gender-encompassing primordial characters by Maya rulers. These costumes have been identified as “male” accoutrements because they are worn by supernatural beings assigned an early mythological date, including the maize god, the moon god, and the supernatural actor GI named in mythological texts at Palenque, each of whom has been presumed to be male (Reents-Budet 1991; Stone 1991: 201–202; Taube 1985: 178). It is notable that these characters include the same categories of supernatural beings—maize and moon gods—whose gender Hunt (1977: 139) identified as cyclical, thus suggesting that they also share the quality of encompassing multiple possibilities of gender, expressed as a cycle through time.

Support for the idea that civil authorities actually enacted gender-encompassing performances comes from sixteenth-century descriptions of Mexico society. At the top of the political hierarchy were the tlatoani, whom the Spanish recognized as the supreme civil authority, and the cihuacoatl (literally, “woman serpent” or “woman twin”). The latter person, a male, wore a mixed-gender costume (Gillespie 1989: 62–63, 133; Kellogg 1995: 99–100).

The existence of Mesoamerican epistemologies of gender as fluid, unfolding over the life course (Joyce n.d.b, n.d.c), would have posed a challenge to attempts to represent dualistic heterosexuality as the norm. Judith Butler (1990, 1993) takes the societal imperative of heterosexuality as a driving force behind constructions of normative gender in Euro-American cultures. As in the European tradition, it does appear that states in Mesoamerica had interests in controlling people by, among other things, controlling their adult sexuality. That attempts at control were an issue would be evident from the stereotyping of Mesoamerican human representations alone, even without abundant sixteenth-century documentation of this intent. The admonitions of Aztec parents to their children, the disciplining of Aztec children in gendered labor, dress, and action, and the denunciations of deviation from these norms of decorum, as found in the Florentine Codex (Sahagún 1950–82), amply testify to the concern of one of Mesoamerica’s most centralized polities with the production of dichotomous heterosexual adult genders. 3

Although the material is somewhat terse and native voices are absent, descriptions of Postclassic Yucatec Maya society provided by the sixteenth-century Relación de las cosas de Yucatán of Bishop Diego de Landa (1941) express a

parallel concern with the production of heterosexual adult men and women. However, I suggest that, far from reflecting a reification of concepts of an essential gender dichotomy, these late Mesoamerican disciplinary practices were themselves the activity through which authorities and elders attempted to stabilize normative genders against a contradictory philosophical background of gender fluidity (Joyce n.d.a, n.d.b, n.d.c; cf. Dean, this volume).

Butler (1993) argues that attempts at controlling gender practices must begin with control of the materialization of the body, that is, with the socially sanctioned recognition given to physical features, and the modification and discipline of those features according to social dictates. The sixteenth-century state of affairs in Mesoamerica, in which dress, ornaments, and treatment of hair all were tightly controlled and linked to adult gender identity and sexual status, was the final sedimentation of approximately three thousand years of body manipulation. This history is accessible to us archaeologically because the control was accomplished not only through practice, but also through the permanent representation of acceptable practices in images and the production of imperishable items used in gendered action. The picture that these enduring media communicate must, of course, be understood to stand in contrast to largely unrecorded negotiation of gender in day-to-day life. The very abundance of documents that polarize gendered statuses and present them in highly stereotyped ways is a reflection not of stability achieved, but of constant reinforcement of a state of affairs idealized and desired by those in control of the production of this imagery.

MATERIALIZING THE BODY: A MESOAMERICAN HISTORY

From Central Mexico to Honduras, between approximately 1200 and 900 B.C., burials began to incorporate body ornaments made of durable materials, with both forms and materials becoming highly standardized over time. At the same time, a series of local styles of hand-modeled ceramic figurines presented permanent inscriptions of ornamented bodies, many explicitly marked as adult females. During the same critical interval, at a smaller number of sites, larger-scale human representations were carved in stone (or, more rarely, painted on natural rock surfaces outside and inside caves). Unlike the small-scale figurines, the majority of the figures represented in these monumental images are apparently male.

I argue that these three developments are linked inscriptions of practices of bodily incorporation that, among other things, served as media for the creation of precedents for the citational performance of gender within emerging centralized polities with interests in the control of the personhood of their popu-
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Explanations for the production of these items emphasize their utility: figurines were used in small-scale life-cycle rituals, perhaps controlled by elders, or in veneration of ancestors or rulers; monumental images, to demarcate large-scale spatial settings for political rituals and to assert specific claims to political authority; and body ornaments, as luxuries, products of patronized craft with restricted circulation, and badges of social status. However else they were employed together these media inscribed certain forms of bodily existence as normative.

These linked Early Pre-Classic practices of inscription provide a history for the materialization of sex and gender in the Mesoamerican tradition (Joyce n.d.d). The inscription of bodily appearance, in both small- and large-scale permanent media, was a mirror for everyday practices, against which individual performances could be evaluated as better or worse citations of what was represented as the norm. The two permanent media of human representation differed, not only in the preferential presentation of sex and gender, but also in relation to spatial settings of gendered performance. Figurines, by nature of their small size, were inherently intimate media, and they are found in refuse around house compounds. In contrast, monumental images carved in stone and painted on rock faces, while inherently more visible, were hallmarks of spatially restricted settings through which their circulation appears to have been limited and formalized (Grove 1999).

In spite of their different scales and contrasting settings, small- and large-scale inscriptions of human performance are bound together by an extraordinary common iconographic vocabulary of body ornaments, matched by items recovered from contemporary burials. Earspools, neck pendants, especially what appears to be concave mirrors, and strands of round beads at the neck and wrists are repeated elements of human images and burials. The execution of this common vocabulary of body ornaments in imperishable materials represents the further inscription of bodily practices in media that, surviving their wearers, perpetuated practices of body modification and ornamentation. Body ornaments like these, made of jade or other green stone, became heirlooms in later Mesoamerican societies, including the Classic Maya. Examples of Pre-Classic ornaments were selectively retained by the Classic and Postclassic Maya and the Postclassic Aztec (Benson and de la Fuente 1996: nos. 94, 95, 97). Such

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4 The terms inscription and practices of bodily incorporation are drawn from the work of Paul Connerton (1989). Space limitations prevent an explication of my use of these terms; see Joyce (1998).

heirloom ornaments exhibited the history of bodily practices and undermined the contingency of fleeting performances through the evidence of their recreation of long-standing historical precedents.

Even ornaments that were not heirlooms embodied the same weight of history-as-precedent due to their resistance to change over the millennia of Mesoamerican history. Naturally occurring iron ore was polished in Early and Middle Pre-Classic Mesoamerica for use in costume. Among the multiple forms of ornaments executed in this material, the most standardized was surely the concave mirror. Examples from La Venta, San Lorenzo, Tlatilco, Chalcatzingo, the Valley of Oaxaca, and Guerrero all fall within a narrow range of sizes and share similar optical characteristics (Carlson 1981), even though analysis of their raw material suggests multiple centers of manufacture (Pires-Ferreira 1976). All are found in burials in one of two positions, which correspond to representations in pottery and stone—either as a pectoral ornament, or at the center of the forehead. While the use of solid iron ore for mirrors was discontinued following the Middle Pre-Classic period, the mirror itself continued to be made on the same scale and worn in the same ways. Mirrors made of iron pyrite mosaic in Teotihuacan style were worn as pectoral ornaments and in headdresses, as well as at the small of the back (Taube 1992). The Classic Maya executed mirrors in mosaic of iron pyrite set onto carved slate backs, and produced other polished obsidian mirrors, which were placed as pectoral ornaments or elsewhere on the bodies of buried individuals (Kidder, Jennings, and Shook 1946: 126–133; Schele and Miller 1983: 9–20; Willey 1972: 141–143; cf. Carlson 1981). Classic Maya texts suggest that some of these mirrors were worn on headbands, as their Pre-Classic predecessors had been (Schele and Miller 1983: 12). The Postclassic Aztec, among others, produced polished obsidian mirrors that are shown worn in the headdress by supernatural figures in painted manuscripts and on carved monuments (Pasztory 1983: 83–84, pl. 291).

Perhaps the sharpest illustration of this sedimentation of bodily practices through specific forms of body ornament is provided by earspools, the ubiquitous ornaments placed in pierced openings in the earlobes. From the earliest Pre-Classic examples to the latest Postclassic, earspools (in the form of tubes) and flares (provided with a wider exterior surface), executed in pottery, green stone, or other materials, were characteristic of diverse Mesoamerican cultures (cf. Caso 1965: 897–909; Piña Chan 1971: 173–174; Rands 1965: 563–565; Woodbury 1965: 175–176). Despite variation in ornamentation and materials, the basic forms remain remarkably similar from the early examples to the late, and imply continued practices of body modification necessary to prepare the ears for these weighty ornaments. Attention to the Mesoamerican history of
ear ornaments reminds us that the stability of this form of ornamentation stemmed from the use of ear ornaments as media for creating and marking adult identity. In Pre-Classic burials, earspools were limited to adults—the only form of ornament restricted by age (Joyce 1999). Earspools were also one of the major markers of adult status in Postclassic Mesoamerican societies including the Aztec, where the ears of children were pierced in a shared ceremony and earspools were adopted after taking a prisoner or giving birth (Joyce n.d.a, n.d.b, n.d.c).

The body manipulation required by the use of ear ornaments is one of a set of practices that are evident from the Pre-Classic period through the Postclassic. Pre-Classic figurines and monumental images attest to the shaping of hair into prescribed forms through cutting, shaving, braiding, and binding with other materials. Hair treatments have a special character as forms of bodily discipline, since hair persists in growing and must be repeatedly reshaped. Hair cutting is an archetype of the compulsive repetition of action that, Butler (1993: 114) notes, is a mark of the failure of the imposition of discipline on the materiality of the body. It is no accident that the loose, wavy hair of women engaged in the Aztec sex trade was a primary physical sign of their status (Arvey 1988).

The production of disciplined bodily materiaity in Pre-Classic Mesoamerica extended to the shaping of the head itself. In burials from the Central Mexican site of Tlatilco, a majority of men and women showed evidence of their skulls having been shaped to approximate a cultural ideal (Joyce n.d.a). This practice started in infancy: individuals as young as six months had been subjected to such treatment. While not all subsequent Mesoamerican societies engaged in it, the Classic and Postclassic Lowland Maya are notable for the widespread practice of one mode of cranial modification (Romero 1970: 65–67). The Classic Maya also continued practices of dental inlay and shaping, as well as of tattooing, which had roots in Pre-Classic Mesoamerican societies (Johnson 1971: 301; Landa 1941: 89, 91, 125–126; Rands and Rands 1965: 548, 555–556; Romero 1970: 50–58; Thompson 1946).

Thus, from at least the end of the Early Pre-Classic period, Mesoamerican societies made attempts to channel bodies into certain shapes. The persistence of these body practices may have accounted for a large part of their power. Given an ahistorical status by their continuity with little change, these practices established a specific Mesoamerican history for acceptable bodily appearance and action. This history underwrote the Classic Maya construction of dichotomous heterosexual adult genders, through which authorities attempted to narrow and fix the fluidity of Mesoamerican gender.
DICHOTOMOUS GENDERS AND POLITICAL CONTROL
IN CLASSIC MAYA IMAGES

I have previously argued (Joyce 1992a, 1992b, 1993b, 1996) that Classic Maya monumental images represent actors with normative, complementary, paired genders engaged in political rituals that required the assertion of totalizing qualities like those represented by dual-gendered creators and ancestors. I do not recapitulate this entire argument here, but rather review the conclusions I have reached as a basis for further exploration of their implications for the performance of gender and the materialization of gendered bodies.

It is important to reiterate that these representations were politically motivated and limited to idealized statuses exemplified by ruling noble families. Thus, not only are the presented gender statuses normative heterosexual male and female, but the age of the figures is shown as a timeless young adulthood, regardless of the biological age stated in the accompanying texts (Joyce 1996). The kinds of selections made thus erase any histories that the materialization of these bodies had in infancy, childhood, and later adulthood. A primary feature of these paired representations is a systematic de-emphasis of the bodies of social women, vividly contrasted with the display of the bodies of social men (Fig. 1).6

6 The use of the term social here, drawn from anthropological practice, indicates that these are gender statuses, not sexes; obviously, images have no sex and can only be considered as documents of gender.
body parts of social women are those that are indistinguishable in form from the body parts of social men. In contrast, at its most extreme, the emphasis on the physical bodies of men is reinforced by the depiction of facial hair on selected figures (Joyce 1996).

Cultural materials in the form of costume covered the bodies of women in these images, and it was through costume that female figures were originally identified by students of the Maya. The paired male and female figures that have been my focus systematically contrasted in costume in two ways (Joyce 1992a, 1996). First, women's costume was elaborated from woven textiles, that is products of transformative labor in the small-scale, intimate settings of the house compound, while men's costume additionally employed a wide range of products of the forest, notably animal skins and skulls and bark cloth. Second, women's costume was repeatedly marked symbolically as a horizontal surface, like that of the cultivated earth, while the paired male costume was defined by symbols of the vertical axis, or World Tree, of Maya cosmology. Both kinds of contrast are, in terms of Classic Maya society and cosmology, spatially complementary, with women's costume being associated with the village and the surface of the earth, and men's with the encircling forest and the sun's path across the sky. The composition of images presenting such paired figures reiterated these spatializations of dichotomous gender, especially the high/low axis (Joyce 1996: 172–176).

While costume marks paired male and female figures as complementary halves of one spatial whole, the narratives of monumental images present noble men and women as cooperative actors in common ritual action (Joyce 1993b, 1996). By muting any references to distinctive actions by women in particular, these images assert a uniform set of interests—those of a ruling class. Comparison of monumental images with small-scale ceramic figurines and, to a lesser extent, painted pottery vessels draws attention to two gestures unique to female figures in these paired compositions (Joyce 1992b, 1993b, 1996). The first gesture is that of a woman holding a wrapped cloth bundle. In the second, either the bundle has been unwrapped to reveal a low, open bowl, or the female figure holds an unwrapped bowl.7

The presence among small-scale images of female figures shown actively engaged in weaving and grinding corn, as well as women offering bowls with round maize dough tamales, offers an alternative reading of these gestures of noble women engaged in joint ritual action (Joyce 1992b, 1993b).8 While rep-

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7 While these gestures were unique to female figures in such paired compositions, in other multifigure images male servants sometimes hold similar bowls.

8 Small-scale images were painted on pottery vessels or modeled as figurines that were
resenting support for the actions of a ruling class, monumental images at the same time reference the control of the products of women’s labor, specifically those forms of labor that in later Mesoamerica were stereotypically constitutive of being female. Among the many suppressed meanings that these inscriptions attempt to exclude as precedents for citational performance is women’s work, and even, as comparison with figurines that show suckling infants makes clear, women’s reproductive role.

In contrast, the small-scale media of figurines and pottery vessels, produced and employed in the intimate confines of house compounds, may have served the interests of an alternative group striving for political power through control over the materiality of existence in Classic Maya society—the senior members of the residential groups whose labor underwrote Maya society (Joyce 1993b; cf. Hendon 1991, 1997). Greater explicitness in representing distinctive human action served the purpose of inscribing how nonruling noble houses contributed to the success of the ruling ones. It was not only women’s contributions that were made focal by the distinctive features of this medium, in which individual male warriors, hunters, and musicians were also portrayed. Here, age also entered into play, with infants, young children, adults, and elderly figures all featured.

The diversity of action highlighted in the small-scale medium of figurines challenges the hegemony of monumental media, inscribing a plurality of ways of being that counters the narrowness of stereotypic ruling imagery. Nonetheless, like their larger-scale analogues, figurines were created in the service of a Classic Maya version of what Butler (1993: 110) calls “the heterosexism of culture”; in this medium the master narrative begins with figurines showing a male/female couple, continues with the suckling of infants and the feeding of young children, and ends with depictions of old age. No alternative sexualities—not even the comprehensive dual gender of primordial beings shown in some monumental images—were allowed to become part of this material history of Classic Maya gender. Like their counterparts in ruling houses, the senior members of nonruling houses exercised control over, and attempted to discipline, the materialization of individual bodies, sexes, and genders by their juniors (cf. Lesure 1997).

used within household compounds. Despite the dominance in publications of examples from burials, especially those of Jaina style, most documented painted pottery and figurines were disposed of in trash deposits associated with house compounds (e.g., Hammond 1975: 371–374; Hendon 1991: 909–910; Willey 1972: 7–8, 1978: 7–9). It is such documented contexts that frame my discussion. While Jaina-style figurines in art collections may be the best preserved examples, the more common, fragmentary mold-made figurines from the eastern and western Maya lowlands provide the majority of evidence for my argument.
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BEING AND BECOMING: BODILY PRACTICES IN CLASSIC MAYA SOCIETY

While for the Postclassic Aztec and the Yucatec Maya we have Spanish accounts detailing to greater or lesser degree the kinds of practices that were used to effect the materialization of desired sexes, for the Classic Maya we must draw on the implications of archaeological data. The later accounts are briefly considered here, not to suggest their static applicability to earlier Mesoamerican societies, but for the guidance these outgrowths of earlier roots can provide about possible sites of construction of gender in Classic Maya society.

Descriptions in the Florentine Codex (Sahagún 1950–82), depictions in the Codex Mendoza (1978), and fragmentary references in the Relación de las cosas de Yucatán (Landa 1941) suggest that the enforcement of normative gender on infants began at or around birth, with rituals of the umbilical cord’s disposal, first bathing, divination, and naming that employed a rhetoric of adult labor and costume in order to “girl” (Butler 1993: 7–8) or “boy” undifferentiated newborns (Joyce n.d.b, n.d.c). Divination and naming imposed on the child an adult destiny that was already gendered.

Despite the strength of the expression of gender in such initial ritual actions, both Aztec and Yucatec sources suggest that for the first few years boys and girls were little differentiated in terms of those adult destinies: they neither wore adult clothing nor undertook the tasks of adults, nor did they participate in the social and ritual life of the adult community. In each case, this early stage of undifferentiated existence was formally ended by the beginning of disciplinary practices centering on the appearance of the body and everyday actions. Marked by rituals of transition, this second phase of childhood began a gradual process of adoption of adult dress, adult names, adult work, and adult worship. Still more like each other than like adult men and women, children were formally admonished about their behavior, punished, and encouraged to learn the skills of adult life. Young adulthood was represented as beginning with the exercise of abilities to produce dependent human subjects through engendering children and capturing prisoners in battle. Adulthood was marked physically by the adoption of new hairstyles and new forms of body decoration, including tattooing, labrets, and ear ornaments.

These late Mesoamerican sources suggest that gendered performance took shape in the intimate confines of the house compound through everyday practices of labor, discipline, body modification, and dress, marked at regular intervals by participation in more visible social rituals of transition to increasingly constrained forms of bodily materiality. The assertions of stable, dichotomous, heterosexual genders in large-scale, highly visible settings in Classic Maya sites are less the location of construction of gender (as lived bodily reality) than citations of what in fact occurred elsewhere. The formality of gendered per-
performances in these “public” spaces—with their consistent spatial associations of male and female as the paired up and down, right and left, east and west, and north and south halves, their insistence on the extreme differentiation of the sexed male body from the sexless female body, and their subsuming of individual action into stereotyped gesture—already presumes a particular reading of sex and gender.

Maya household compounds exhibited no patterned variation that could easily be attributed to segregation of women’s and men’s actions, as Julia Hendon (1997) has noted in her examination of Sepulturas, the nonruling noble residential quarter of Copán. Instead, they were settings for a constant intersection of daily activities through which embodied individual experience was shaped simultaneously by the crosscutting dimensions of seniority, age, social status, competence in work, and physical appearance. The bodies that were materialized through daily practices may well have manifested these other dimensions of identity as strongly as they did sex or gender. Sources written later suggest that we can only understand the production of sexed bodies and genders in Classic Maya society as a partial result of practices through which other aspects of being were created.
We have little direct evidence in Classic Maya society of life-cycle rituals like those described in sixteenth-century sources. Monumental inscriptions and images from a few places (Palenque, Bonampak, Naranjo, Tikal, and Piedras Negras) have been interpreted as representations of rites of passage in the lives of the young men who were heirs to rulership at these sites (Bassie-Sweet 1991: 203–204; Miller 1986; Schele 1985: 297; Schele and Freidel 1990: 235–237, 239–40, 470–471; Schele and Miller 1986: 114, 136–137, 148–150). Notably, inscriptions and images include references to the adoption of particular costume ornaments as the core action by the six- to thirteen-year-old boys who were the foci of these events. Other inscriptions document the use of different names during youth and adulthood by these same privileged subjects of monumental art. For example, Yaxchilán Lintel 2 depicts two standing figures, one markedly shorter than the other (Graham and von Euw 1977: 15; Fig. 2). The main text contains the titles of a ruler called Bird Jaguar; texts adjacent to the smaller figure end with the Yaxchilán emblem glyph and contain phonetic signs spelling the name Chel Te. This person has been identified as a five-year-old child, presumably identified with a childhood name before he adopted the name Shield Jaguar, under which he ruled (Tate 1992: 107, 138, 224, 275). Such Classic-period inscriptions suggest practices similar to the changes in naming throughout one’s life that were recorded in later Maya sources.

Following such tentative hints of practices in Classic Maya society that are comparable to those recorded in later documents, we can imagine that the specialized ritual structures identified in the many household compounds in Classic Maya sites may have witnessed sequences of ritual transformation of infants into children, and children into young adults, using some of the same media that were employed in the sixteenth century: clothing, personal ornaments, body modifications, and personal names. The one such transformation for which we regularly recover evidence is the final step, from living members of the group into ancestors, who, as Patricia McAnany (1994) has noted, constituted a continuing living presence within the house compound in subfloor tombs and graves.

As their deep Mesoamerican history suggests, certain forms of body ornamentation were likely to be crucial in these rituals of transformation. Ear ornaments, which are common elements in ancestral interments, are highlighted in images of the ritual of transformation pictured in the Group of the Cross at Palenque, where the six-year-old male heir is first shown engaged in political ritual (Bassie-Sweet 1991: 203–204; Schele 1985; Schele and Freidel 1990: 235–237, 239–240, 470–471; Fig. 3; Schele and Miller 1986: 114). As in earlier and later Mesoamerica, the use of ear spools may have particularly marked the tran-
sition to adulthood, otherwise manifest in the discipline of hair, and perhaps, such additional bodily practices as tattooing. The perishability of hair and skin themselves is partly countered by the production of imperishable representations, especially pottery figurines that feature children, with their hair unbound and apparently uncut, or represent tattooed skin only on apparent adults. The preparation of ears for their adult ornaments through piercing, the repeated cutting and dressing of hair, and the execution of tattooed patterns on skin would have been reiterated events within the small-scale setting of the house compound. As children aged into young adulthood, they would have experienced these practices not simply as unique events in the materialization of their own bodies, but as explicit citations of other occasions they had already witnessed. Inscribed on the bodies of others, these cultural transformations would already have been naturalized into existential conditions, the only thinkable ways of being human in these societies.

Such citational performance (Butler 1993: 12–16, 101–119) of different sexes may have been lodged most closely in the use of specific items of clothing, the boy’s loincloth and the girl’s huipil and skirt, which, as later documentary sources suggest, were adopted earlier in life than any distinctive ornaments or hairstyles. These items of clothing constituted disciplinary practices for the
bodies of children, requiring different ways of dressing, moving, and undressing. Not only was the use of these items of clothing within the house compound ubiquitous as precedent for citation, but the production of clothing presented the most marked site for differentiation of gender through labor in the sixteenth century. Girls alone were trained to spin cotton and weave it on the backstrap loom into lengths of the plain or brocaded cloth that formed both men’s and women’s clothing; this activity was represented as one of the stereotyped gendered performances of Classic Maya imagery (Fig. 4). Girls materialized their own bodies through the action of making the cloth that would form their social skin, and they were also the originators of the social

Fig. 4 Classic Maya figurine of the weaver. Collection of the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of the American Indian (formerly Heye Foundation). Photograph © Justin Kerr, reproduced by permission.
skin of boys. Echoes of this are heard in monumental and small-scale images in which women present men with items that will complete their ritual costume. A pot from Tikal depicts a woman holding out a mask with dangling textile ties to a lord dressing in formal warrior garb (Gallenkamp and Johnson 1985: 141). On Yaxchilán Lintel 26 a woman holds a flexible shield and a jaguar headdress for a lord also ceremonially dressed as a warrior (Graham and von Euw 1977: 57; Tate 1992: 121; Fig. 5). I argue that such images are more than a reflection of the relative status of these men and women—they are citations of the pro-

Fig. 5 Woman holding a shield and a jaguar headdress for a man dressed in war costume. Yaxchilán Lintel 26 (after Ian Graham and Eric von Euw, Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions, vol. 3, pt. 1, Yaxchilán, 57). Courtesy of Ian Graham. © President and Fellows of Harvard College.
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duction of the body as the defining activity of being female in Classic Maya society.

Here we can note the importance of women as midwives in Mesoamerica. In the Aztec Florentine Codex (Sahagún 1950–82, bk. 6: chap. 27), midwives are described as producing a child by manipulating the pregnant woman, in the Yucatec Maya Relación de las cosas de Yucatán (Landa 1941: 129), as intervening in pregnancy both physically and through mediation with supernatural powers, and in the Postclassic Quiche Maya Popol Vuh (Tedlock 1985: 369–370), as the paradigmatic female Xmucane cooperating in the creation of the first humans with the first male diviner, Xpiyacoc. Gary Gossen and Richard Leventhal (1993) have argued that women in Classic Maya society practiced as specialists in decentralized rituals. They base their argument primarily on structural models derived from the repeated description of women as legendary or historical originators of decentralized, ritually sanctioned social movements in post-conquest Maya societies. Leslie Devereaux (1987) offers a similar structural interpretation of the cluster of meanings for Tzotzil Maya me’, “mother,” which also involves origins. While often regarded as a natural specialization for women, midwifery has no biological determinants, and its practice in Mesoamerica as a gendered form of healing has less to do with sex and more with an abstraction of Woman as the sex that produces social beings.

The decentralized practice of curing and its ritualized component have left no obvious archaeological signatures in Classic Maya sites. One repeated representation in both monumental and small-scale images, however, may relate to this complex of concepts. On Yaxchilán Lintels 13, 14, 15, 25, and 55, figures dressed in huipiles, and labeled in captions with the linguistic signs determinative of noble women, are shown in the presence of supernatural beings in the form of floating serpents, from whose mouths emerge human busts (Tate 1992: 88–91). Years ago Tatiana Proskouriakoff (1973) noted the association of figures that she identified as women with this specific action. The same image is depicted on polychrome pottery vessels, where conventions of presentation of the human form allow the depiction of an exaggerated adult female breast (Reents-Budet 1994: 328). Contemporary analyses identify these scenes as the evocation of spirits, perhaps ancestors, and this action is strongly tied to a birth in more than one instance (Reents-Budet 1994: 338; Tate 1992).

The discipline of training young girls in spinning and weaving was more than the inculcation of good work habits—it was part of a set of citational practices through which adult femininity was figured as the production of social beings. The practice of ritually and physically assisting in childbirth, the provision of food to form the body’s substance and of cloth to form the body’s
social surface, and even (in sixteenth-century Yucatán, at least) the practices of tattooing, cranial shaping, and inducing the crossing of the eyes were all performances of this female gender. They owe relatively little to what we would recognize as sexuality.

Adult male gender in Classic Maya society appears more strongly tied to the sexual. There are no images of stereotyped labor by men that would correspond to the small-scale images of food production, weaving, and suckling of infants by women (Joyce 1993b). The most distinctive practices implied in both small- and large-scale images for figures in male costume are participation in war and its outcome and the capture and sacrifice of prisoners, including costumed dancing. Monumental inscriptions explicitly represent activities related to warfare as shared by the idealized male/female couple. While the Bonampak murals have no distinctively female warriors in their battle scenes,
the scene of judging the prisoners, in Room 2, which is contiguous with the battle scene, presents a frontally posed woman near a frontally posed ruler as joint focal figures (Miller 1986; Fig. 6). Stelae 22 and 24 at Naranjo face each other on northern and southern sides of a courtyard (Graham and von Euw 1975: 55–57, 63–64; Proskouriakoff 1961: 94). One depicts the enthroned ruler; the other, a woman, interpreted as his mother (Closs 1985; Proskouriakoff 1961: 94), standing on a war captive (Fig. 7).

Indeed, while the exclusive association of spinning and weaving with female gender crosses Postclassic Mesoamerican cultural and political boundaries, there is no corresponding limitation of the role of warrior to males. Female warriors are prominent in the Mixtec codices from Oaxaca in scenes concerning creation, and Sharisse and Geoffrey McCafferty (1994) have argued that figures in the battle murals of Cacaxtla are also gendered female.
Cecelia Klein (1993, 1994) has suggested that Aztec sources present women warriors as symbols of the defeated “other,” the figure of the enemy in its abjection. At the same time, Aztec midwives addressed women in childbirth as warriors, and, as the McCaffertys (1988, 1991) note, female deities were presented as warriors and the tools of female labor as weapons.

Labor, then, does not appear to have served as the ground for citational performance of male gender in Classic Maya society in the way that it did for performance of female gender. Instead, maleness seems to be insistently defined in terms of sexuality (Joyce 2000). Exposing the body in order to reveal a lack of signs of female sexuality is a notable feature even in highly formal portraiture (Joyce 1992a, 1996). The typifying item of male costume, the loincloth, with its long hanging ends, draws attention to male genitalia as much as it conceals them. When male figures are paired with female figures in monu-
mental art, an image of the central World Tree with its branches folded down is carried on the loincloth. This representation implies the possibility of an upward unfolding of the branches to replicate the normal form of this icon—a metaphor of erection. That this is not simply a projection of European, post-Freudian symbolism is suggested by the narrative of the sacred tree in Xibalba, the supernatural underworld domain, in the Postclassic Quiche Maya *Popol Vuh*. There, the decapitated head of one of the Hero Twins—defeated in their contests with the lords of Xibalba—which has been hung in the tree and transformed into a hanging gourd, impregnates a daughter of the underworld by spitting on her (Tedlock 1985: 114–115). The Classic-period tree icon is paired with a mask of a decapitated head on male loincloths, suggesting a probable earlier history for this later motif (Fig. 8).

Defined in terms of the possession of a phallus, male adult gender was inscribed in Classic Maya texts through the use of a pictograph of male genitalia as a title (Fig. 9). This pictograph first appeared on Late Pre-Classic to Early Classic jade body ornaments, and continued in use in Late Classic texts at sites throughout the Maya area, including Copán, Quirigua, Los Higos, Caracol, and Bonampak (Justeson 1984: 356; Lounsbury 1989; Schele and Miller 1986: 83, 151; Thompson 1962: 361–362). The prominence of imagery of penis manipulation in Classic and Postclassic Maya ritual should be viewed in the context of this sexualization of maleness. Classic Maya figurines and pottery vessels, as well as Postclassic Maya manuscripts, depict the piercing of the penis to produce blood in ritual, and some Classic Maya monumental images have been interpreted as referring to or representing the same practice (Schele and Miller 1986; Stuart 1984, 1988; cf. Fig. 10). Wider Mesoamerican examples of personal bloodletting by no means give the same prominence to production of
blood from this particular site, even when they are equally explicit about both bloodletting and the exposure of genitalia. Postclassic Aztec stone reliefs, for example, show ritual participants piercing their ears and portray blood flowing down to the mouth of the earth (Klein 1987), and Postclassic Central Mexican manuscripts regularly portray bloodletting from the head. In no other Mesoamerican tradition do we find images of multiple male actors joined by a rope run through their pierced genitals, a scene pictured on an early page of the Postclassic Yucatec Codex Madrid (Codex Tro-Cortesianus 1967: 19). And no other tradition of Mesoamerican culture includes monumental inscriptions.
of male genitalia as subjects of stone sculpture, as they are in Terminal Classic to Early Postclassic northern Yucatec sites such as Chichen Itza, Labna, and Uxmal (e.g., Pollock 1980: 590).

This phallocentric construction of the male body in Classic to Postclassic Maya societies suggests an almost homoerotic sensibility (Joyce 2000). The composition of Classic Maya images, which served to dehistoricize individual practices, never presented scenes with groups of women alone, even though an examination of vocabularies from sixteenth-century Yucatán by John Clark and Stephen Houston (n.d.) documents the existence of such groups, particularly involved in textile production. But scenes portraying groups of men without women were common, particularly those showing raids, ritualized deer hunts, and dance performances (see, for example, the themes identified on polychrome Classic vases, in Reents-Budet 1994). The display of the male body was central to these all-male performances, as was the display of the products of women’s work to the corresponding all-female performances described in the sixteenth-century sources.

Indeed, Andrea Stone (1995: 143–146) has recently suggested that an image from Naj Tunich cave, previously regarded as a depiction of heterosexual intercourse, involves two men, one of them marked by hairstyle and ornament as socially female (Fig. 11). She emphasizes the apparent lack of any identifiable
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female characters in the texts and images documenting visits to these caves (Stone 1995: 117, 145, 183–184, 239). Stone suggests that caves constituted an arena for all-male socialization during which, among other things, sexuality was openly subject to verbal and physical play, as it is in some performative settings among contemporary Highland Maya. If she is right, such performances, whether held in the confines of caves or in other locations within settlements, would have provided one of the major experiences through which male citational gender was constructed in Classic Maya society—through a male gaze on male sex.
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On 19 March 1804, Doña Pasquala Quigua, an indigenous Andean, completed her last will and testament in Cusco, Peru. In the will, she denounced her second husband as a wastrel, subject to numerous vices, who squandered the major portion of the wealth she had brought to their union. Doña Pasquala complained bitterly about her husband’s failure to generate any income, his inability to father children by her, and the fact that he kept a mistress for the twelve years of their marriage. Claiming, nonetheless, to have pardoned his manifold shortcomings, she bequeathed him two Chuncho dance costumes and a parrot, probably intending its colorful feathers to be used in the Chuncho headdress. “Chuncho” was the generic highland Andean designation for a number of cultural or ethnic groups native to the montaña, the heavily forested zone of the eastern Andean piedmont, particularly the region of the Inka empire known as Antisuyu, to the east of the capital of Cusco (Steward 1963). The montaña dwellers were stereotyped by highlanders, serranos, as savage cannibals; it was also said that male Chunchos were effeminate. In leaving Chuncho costumes to her husband, the “forgiving” Doña Pasquala was apparently offering one final insult.
Fig. 1  Anonymous, *Madonna with Indian Worshipers*, Bolivia, 1752. Oil on wood panel, 10 1/4 x 7 9/16 inches. Brooklyn Museum, 41.1275.225.
Andean Androgyny and the Making of Men

In the southern Andean highlands, native dancers dressed as Chunchos were popular performers during colonial-period festivals, as they are today. A 1752 painting from Bolivia depicts a confraternity of Chuncho dancers devoted to the Virgin Mary (Fig. 1). While the lone woman, pictured at the far left, wears clothing typical of an eighteenth-century southern Andean Aymara female, the three men are dressed in the dance costumes of Chunchos, featuring the elaborate feathered headdresses by which Chuncho dancers can be recognized. The Chuncho dances performed by highlanders, such as these Aymara, were not so much imitations of montaña performatory culture as they were creations of how highlanders believed Chunchos to behave. Through dance, colonial-period serranos brought their imagined Chuncho into being as a wild, uncontrolled and uncontrollable, alter ego. When the dance was performed, it ultimately and paradoxically established highlanders as the agents of civilization and as valuable allies of Spanish colonial authorities, who classified montaña peoples as hostile natives, usually calling them indios de guerra (Dean n.d.b; Renard-Casevitz, Saignes, and Taylor 1988: 43). In a drawing, the Andean chronicler—and serrano—Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala depicts a dance of montaña dwellers, whom he identifies as “Antis and Chunchos” (Fig. 2). In marked contrast to the dances of the other parts of the empire, in which men’s roles and costumes are distinct from those of women, males and females act and dress similarly in the montaña dances. In fact, Guaman Poma says that the men dress like women (todos los hombres bestidos como muger) and identifies the dance itself as the “savage woman dance” (in Quechua, the uarmi auca).

I have argued elsewhere that Chunchos were represented by Andean highlanders as an abnormal or uncivilized opposite in an effort to establish themselves and the serrano culture as the norm for civilization (Dean n.d.b). The confused gender of Chunchos was part of the stereotype. Although two biological sexes, female and male, are identified, the sexes are transgendered. Specifically, Chuncho males look like females while Chuncho females—often described as warriors—behave like males. In a second illustration of Chunchos of silver leaf” (tres libras de dansante, las dos con chapas de plata y la una con chapas de oja de plata) to her sobrina política, Doña Josefa de Zuniga, and a “small dance costume or [a costume] with small ornaments” (librea pequeña o con chapas pequeñas) to her female servant, whom she described as being like a daughter. To her male heirs, with the exception of her husband, she left “costume flounces” (volantes de uniforme). Doña Pasquala apparently earned a living by renting out costumes and dance regalia, for she owned 600 “colorful feathers” (plumas de colores) as well as other apparel, including three items of Inka vestment and three additional Chuncho costumes, which she requested to be rented out to pay for masses and the costs of her burial. See Lavrin (1994: 169–171) for a description of a standard colonial-period woman’s testament.
by Guaman Poma, depicting a scene of burial, we see how alike the sexes appear and act: they are coiffed and dressed the same, and both cry (Fig. 3). A fundamental notion of highland Andean gender operating in the colonial period, then, seems to have been the differentiation of the sexes in terms of both appearance and action, such that gender corresponded to an individual’s biological sex. More precisely, proper females “looked” feminine while proper males “acted” masculine. The idea that males must act—that is, that masculinity does not exist outside of its performance—seems to be key to understanding Andean gender paradigms.

The juxtaposition of female appearance with masculine behavior resonated clearly throughout the colonial period, as can be observed both in the early seventeenth century, when Guaman Poma penned his characterizations of
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Chunchos, and nearly two hundred years later, when Doña Pasquala composed her will. Doña Pasquala selected a traditional Andean symbol of alterity that every highlander at the time would have understood. If she evoked the Chuncho to accuse her husband of inappropriate action, however, we may well wonder which of his misdeeds made him most Chuncho-like. Her references to his inability to sire children may point toward the effeminacy associated with the Chuncho; certainly, accusing males of being effeminate was—and is—almost universally an effective slight. In upbraiding her husband for keeping a mistress, however, Doña Pasquala would appear to contradict this exact point.

My present concern is whether a greater understanding of indigenous Andean gender concepts can provide a more nuanced reading of Doña Pasquala’s bequest. Accordingly, in this essay I attempt to identify what made a biological...
male a man in traditional, indigenous Andean culture, and to discern some of
the ways in which masculinity was conceptualized and expressed. In so doing,
we may understand better the many ways in which—in Doña Pasquala’s mind,
at least—her husband failed to measure up. I also hope to introduce another
perspective to current discussions about gender, namely how notions of gender
(in this case, Andean masculinity) could be, were, and are wielded in the effort
to influence and constrain, if not control, the activities of human beings.

GENDER COMPLEMENTARITY IN THE ANDES

As everywhere, Andean gender was (and is) constructed in relation to an
opposite, and no particular construction of gender is ever meaningful without
its complement. Thus, for example, highland men could be contrasted with
Chuncho men; they could also be constructed in complementary alterity to
highland women, and a variety of other binary opposites could be selected.
While gender finds meaning through contrast in all societies, in the Andean
system, past and present, the complement is recognized as vital, as numerous
scholars have shown (Harris 1978, 1980; B. J. Isbell 1976, 1985, 1997; Platt
1986; Rostworowski de Diez Canseco 1986; Silverblatt 1987, 1991). Hence, it
is unlikely that in Andean society one would ever hear the rhetorical query,
“Why can’t a woman be more like a man?” with its implicit injunction that a
woman should be more like a man. Andean constructions of gender seem to
recognize the fundamental value of contrast, which is always relative, situationally
embedded, and negotiable.5

Andean gender complementarity appears to stem from the notion that the
creative principle in the cosmos is androgynous. The famous depiction of the
Andean universe, drawn by the native Juan de Santa Cruz Pachacuti Yamqui
Salcamaygua (1993: 208) in the second decade of the seventeenth century,
illustrates best the complementary workings of the cosmos (Fig. 4).6 In Pachacuti’s

5 Although B. J. Isbell (1997) suggests that, according to Andean conceptualizations,
“female” may be the unmarked gender, it would seem that in the Andes neither sex was/is
the presumptive norm (i.e., “man” does not signify both “man” and “man and woman,” nor
vice versa). While centuries of colonization have surely impacted the way indigenous Andeans
conceptualize gender, in general Andeans have resisted Western gestures that mark one sex
as normative. Ethnographers (such as those listed above) have documented how profoundly
the structures of gender complementarity are embedded in indigenous Andean society. See
Allen (1988: 78–85) for a splendid articulation of flexible gender complementarity as prac-
ticed by the community of Sonqo in the southern Andes today.

6 Pachacuti Yamqui descended from non-Inka, indigenous nobility in the southern
Andean highlands. Traditionally, his chronicle is dated to 1613. Duviols (in Pachacuti 1993:
18–19) suggests, however, that it might be later in date, closer to 1620. The “cosmological
diagram” with glosses in Spanish, Quechua, and Aymara appears on fol. 13v.
work, the creative center, Wiraqocha, is an unmarked, unsexed elliptical figure. A Quechua text accompanying the creator underscores its ambivalence; it can be translated as “whether it be male, whether it be female” (1993: 208). Thus, although Pachacuti himself was Christian and strongly influenced by Christian precepts (Duviols in Pachacuti 1993: 30–58), his understanding of the creator as androgynous was deeply rooted in the Andean worldview. Unlike the traditional European androgyne, who is of a known biological sex (usually male) but co-opts the symbolic value of the so-called opposite sex, the Andean androgynous creator is neither a male who assumes some feminine traits nor a female who utilizes certain masculine codes. It is perhaps for this reason that Pachacuti, despite having been exposed extensively to European images of a light-skinned, bearded, male God, cannot give the creator a face, much less a body. Without further elaboration, the indigenous author describes the oval
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creator in his drawing as being made of a sheet of fine gold, and indicates that it was placed in the Qorikancha (the Inka’s main temple in their capital of Cusco) by Manko Qhápaq, the mythical founder of the Inka state. One of Manko’s descendants, Maita Qhápaq, had various figures added around it.

Many scholars have discussed and analyzed Pachacuti’s drawing. Now generally referred to as a cosmological drawing, the diagram, supplemented by text, distinguishes between four hierarchical levels, which are divided into two complementary columns (Earls and Silverblatt 1978: 318–319). The mediating, androgynous center is the creator Wiraqocha. The right side (from the perspective of the creator itself) is generally associated with masculine concepts and figures, while the left is comprised of feminine ones. In the upper right is the sun, depicted as the great-grandfather of men. Below, Venus as morning star is glossed as man’s grandfather, and, still lower, the mountains of earth as his father. On the left (viewer’s right), the moon appears as the great-grandmother of women. Below, Venus as evening star is woman’s grandmother, and the ocean her mother. Therefore, not only was the Andean cosmos sexed, but its parts were identified in kinship terms, as well. The universe was thereby “humanized,” that is, categorized in ways that humans could relate to one another in complementary sets. At the base of the drawing, located on earth are the mortal couple, male and female, united to form the most basic social unit.


Despite Pachacuti’s claims, most scholars do not believe that his drawing actually represents an interior wall of the Qorikancha in Pre-Hispanic times. Many Andeanists do maintain, however, that the diagram reflects a native Andean understanding of the nature and structure of the universe. Recently, Duviols (in Pachacuti 1993: 30–58), in his analysis of the drawing and its companion text, has argued that the drawing is entirely fictitious—that it was inspired by and responded to Christian monotheism, that its organization (namely, the archetypes of creation surrounding the creator) was European, and that the archetypes Pachacuti chose matched those featured in late-16th-century Christian doctrines. Duviols concludes that the drawing does not evoke anything that could suggest authentic Andean religious thought, and that only two of the figures may represent Andean mental structures (the “grid” at the bottom of the drawing, which he identifies as the wall of the Qorikancha covered in gold plates, and, significantly, the oval plaque representing Wiraqocha). Further, he argues that the drawing ought to be called “The Retablo of the Creation” or “The Retablo of Monotheism.” He does not, however, discuss the complementary distribution of elements, nor does he challenge the male/female dichotomy so widely discussed by others. While I find aspects of Duviols’s argument persuasive, I would note that the Andean creator is not just the origin of all of the elements depicted by Pachacuti, which is a European notion, but also the mediator of complements, which is very Andean indeed.
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The sexes were apparently conceived of as appropriately different. What those differences were and how they were manifested is critical to our understanding of what made a biological male a man in Andean terms. Guaman Poma’s (1988: 168–209) description of Inka census categories, which he identifies as calles (passages)—ten for males and ten for females—helps to define the characteristics distinguishing not only human males from females, but boys from men and girls from women, as well.\(^9\) Although his information may not be strictly accurate, it is in his description of the process of aging that we see how gender first waxed and then waned as humans moved through the phases of their lives.\(^10\)

BOYS TO MEN/GIRLS TO WOMEN

According to the information Guaman Poma provides, the stages of growth of a Pre-Hispanic Andean child were distinguished by the child’s physiological capabilities. Age was not so much the sum of years as an evaluation of physical attributes, abilities, and dexterity (Dean 1995: 119–121), and, thus, “men” and “women” were not ahistorical, universal biological categories.\(^11\) The native chronicler tells us that indigenous children of less than one year of age, still in the cradle, had to be cared for by others, as did those under five years of age who could crawl but were as yet unweaned. Small children of both sexes were,
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according to Guaman Poma, without purpose or usefulness in that they served no one and, in fact, had to be served by others. His drawings of a male and female of one month depict infants who are similarly wrapped and cradled (Figs. 5, 6). In both text and image, there is little to differentiate the sexes at this young age. One-year-old children likewise engage in similar activities (Figs. 7, 8). Interestingly, it is in dress that the female child is distinguished: she wears a gender-specific head covering and belted tunic. Thus, the young girl has already begun to look female. The male, however, who wears a nondescript, generic tunic, can still do nothing but crawl and so has yet to act male. The *rutuchikuy*, or haircutting ceremony, which was (and is) performed when the infant was weaned, marks this preliminary stage in the gendering of the Andean child.

According to Guaman Poma, Inka children aged five through nine were assigned certain tasks; it is at this point that masculinity becomes visibly apparent in his illustrations (Figs. 9, 10). Boys of this age aided their parents and
community by watching younger siblings, performing various domestic chores, and helping to raise orphans. Girls of the same age served as pages for important females; they also helped their parents by collecting firewood and straw as well as spinning, gathering edible wild plants, raising younger children, fetching water, cooking, and cleaning. From nine to twelve years old, young males served both their parents and the cacique (native lord) by hunting small birds, herding, fetching firewood, spinning wool, and twisting rope. Girls of this age collected flowers, herbs, and leaves for dyeing cloth and cooking; they could also serve the government as human sacrifices.

Apart from the all too casual reference to the sacrifice of girls (a point to which I shall return), the tasks assigned prepubescent children were not strikingly different. Both sexes spun wool, gathered firewood and other items, helped to raise younger children, and aided in a variety of domestic chores. In the companion drawings, however, the sexes begin to diverge in behavioral terms.
At age five, the young boy is shown with a sling, practicing to be the hunter or warrior he will become (Fig. 9); the young female is, in contrast, much more restrained in her activity as a porter (Fig. 10). At age nine, the boy hunts birds (Fig. 11) while the girl gathers flowers to be used in dyeing wool (Fig. 12). Again, while his motions as depicted by Guaman Poma are expansive—reaching out—hers are restrained as she pulls things toward her.

At age twelve, both sexes are shown herding (Figs. 13, 14). The male carries dead birds—the trophies of his successful hunt—while the female has gathered firewood and is engaged in spinning. The companion text tells us that male youths aged twelve to eighteen guarded the herds and hunted birds. Females of this age group served their elders by spinning and weaving, shepherding, sowing, tending crops, and making chicha (an alcoholic beverage); they also helped around the house, performing numerous tasks. Despite a remarkable variety of duties that Andean females discharge, spinning and weaving become the typical
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feminine activities from puberty on. Adult females are identified by this task throughout Guaman Poma’s work. Interestingly, this does not mean that females necessarily risked losing their femininity when they participated in activities that were gendered male, such as warfare. Perhaps because femininity

12 See Franquemont (1979) for the ways in which spinning and weaving activities define stages in a female’s life in late-20th-century Chinchero, a community near Cusco. Allen (1988:78) discusses the identification of weaving with women in the Quechua community of Sonqo, even though Sonqueno men both spin and weave.

13 Inka legend features two prominent warrior–women in particular: Mama Waqo (Mama Huaco), the first queen who helped to pacify the original inhabitants of Cusco, and Chañan Qori Kuka (Chañan Curicoca), who led the people of Choco and Cachona (two villages to the south of Cusco) against the Chanka when the latter rebelled against the Inka. Of course, these women also fulfilled female gender roles. Mama Waqo was Manko Qhapaq’s mate and mother of his children, and Chañan Qori Kuka is described as a “widow” (Pachacuti 1993:220; see Urton 1990: 54–55 for an analysis of Chañan’s role in Inka history). Other
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was a state of being rather than an act of doing; “doing” male activities did not seem to have violated female gender boundaries. This contrasts with the effect produced by males who “looked” like females and did not “act” according to masculine gender paradigms, as is the case for Guaman Poma’s unisexed male Chunco who cries in Figure 3. If my observations are accurate, the Andean case provides an interesting juxtaposition to Julia Kristeva’s (1980: 137–138) observation that women (in the West) cannot “be” and do not belong “in the order of being” because they are defined negatively as “not men.” Andean women,

tales of Inka history feature women as diplomats, engineers, agronomists, inventors, and a variety of other noteworthy occupations, as well as warriors (Dean n.d.a).

14 Gender roles clearly could be, and were, flexible and contingent on circumstances. Allen (1988: 83) accounts for a certain pliancy in gender norms among the contemporary Quechua by observing that “a man should express his female aspect in a properly masculine manner; a woman should express her male aspect in a feminine manner.”
in contrast, appear “to be,” while Andean men must establish their masculinity by acting.

Females over the age of eighteen were eligible for marriage and therefore considered adults. Guaman Poma’s drawing shows a woman of thirty-three years of age with a spindle in hand (Fig. 15). In contrast, young males aged eighteen to twenty served as messengers of the community and lackeys to warriors and great lords; Guaman Poma calls them Indians of half-tribute, noting their status as “not quite adults.” His drawing shows a youth of eighteen functioning as a messenger (Fig. 16).

A second drawing of a thirty-three-year-old woman shows her weaving (Fig. 17). The text tells us that she is an adult woman and as such is either

15 Since Guaman Poma depicts two 33-year-old women, we may conclude either that there were actually only nine census categories for females and the artist duplicated the
married or widowed. The native author also indicates that until marriage a female is referred to as a child, niña, no matter what her age. This view persists in the contemporary Andes where a person—male or female—is not considered an adult until he or she marries (Harris 1978: 28; B. J. Isbell 1976: 37; 1978: 214; Platt 1986; Urton 1985: 252). Like Pachacuti (and as is done in the Andes today), Guaman Poma conceives of the conjugal pair as a complementary unit. The counterpart to the adult female is the thirty-three-year-old warrior, whose trophy now is a decapitated human head (Fig. 18). Just as spinning and weaving are the feminine activities par excellence, warfare is the adult male’s; his youth-

female at the prime of life for reasons of complementarity or that Guaman Poma intended to identify the woman on folio 223 [225] as being 18 years old (thus matching the pictured male) but erred.
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ful bird hunting has evolved to this end. These “typical” activities marked gender and defined adulthood (see Silverblatt 1987: 9–10, 14). Both Andean male and female puberty rites—kicuchikuy for girls and warochikuy for boys—stressed the gender duties that adult Andeans were expected to perform. Burial practices also underscored gender-specific tasks. Women often carried spindles and skeins of yarn to the grave as mementos of feminine activities, while men were usually buried with either the weapons of warfare or their takllas, the hoes they used in plowing (Arriaga 1968: 27–28). Plowing and warfare were equated as masculine activities in the Pre-Hispanic Andes.16 Songs of victory, hayllis, were

sung at the first breaking of the earth prior to planting, as well as in celebration of military triumphs.

While plowing was analogous to warfare with its destructive consequences, planting was a metaphor for sexual intercourse and its creative potential. In Guaman Poma’s work one often sees couples engaged in planting; while men open the earth with their foot plows, women plant the seeds (Fig. 19). The subtitle in his drawing of August plowing rites, “Hailli, chacra iapvicvi pacha” (Haylli, chakra yapuykuy pacha), translates as “victory songs at the time of plowing the earth.” While the male conquest of the earth is celebrated in song, the female contribution is equally valuable. In the Andean sierra today, planting consists of activities that are gendered both masculine and feminine (see, e.g., Fortún 1972). Many highland Andean peoples still believe that the placing of the seed in the ground should be done by a woman, and that while the man is
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Fig. 20 Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, El primer nueva corónica, fol. 217 [219], 1615. Andean female, fifty years old (after Guaman Poma 1988: 193).

the cultivator, she is the owner of the seed (Harris 1978: 30; B. J. Isbell 1976: 37). The sexes combine their efforts to produce a successful harvest; the male conquest of the earth, when met and matched by its female complement, is generative.

Masculinity and femininity contrasted most strongly in sexually active, reproductive humans involved in a pair bond whose duties and conduct insured the continuity not only of their lineages, but of the community and—more broadly—the cosmos itself. Gender in the Pre-Hispanic Andes thus operated, as it does in many places, to encourage stable pair bonding between men and women. In nonreproductive humans, gendering was less important.17 Thus, while

17 Guaman Poma’s (1988: 176–177, 196–197) account of Inka census categories indicates that the handicapped—the infirm, the disabled, the blind, the deaf, the mute, hunch-
childhood witnessed an increasing divergence between the sexes, old age saw a return to similitude. Guaman Poma tells us that by the age of fifty the woman—no longer capable of reproduction—is considered old (Fig. 20). Apparently having raised her own children, she has now entered into the service of female elites, acting as a porter, servant, maid, cook, or manager. Males, according to Guaman Poma’s account of life stages, do not become “old” until the age of sixty. He shows us a man of that age gathering firewood (Fig. 21). The text indicates that he is past the age of tribute and serves native lords as a porter, servant, or accountant. Interestingly, the male at age sixty looks somewhat like the twelve-year-old female, complete with a companion dog (Fig. 14). This returns, etc.—were classified separately, as they never assumed full adult roles and responsibilities.
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visual correlation complements Guaman Poma’s textual assertion that the elderly, like the young, are less useful. It is particularly interesting to note that it is the male who, as he ages and becomes less capable of masculine action, behaviorally approximates the nearly pubescent female. Also, elder women with their shorter hair resemble older males just as girls resemble boys in childhood. Long, flowing hair is the mark of a sexually active, potentially reproductive female (B. J. Isbell 1997: 278–279).

In the final phase of life, from eighty to one hundred or one hundred fifty years old, the elderly person cannot do anything but eat and sleep; he is “withheld from everything” (reservado del todo) and she is “past it all” (pasada del todo) (Figs. 22, 23). If they are capable of doing anything, it is to help raise domesticated animals and watch over houses. Both male and female are shown with staves; the male is somewhat more active, but essentially, both pictorially and
textually, the sexes have come full circle. At the beginning and the end of life, they are strikingly similar.

Thus, humans appeared to move from androgyny to single sex, and back to androgyny. The first differences were manifested in dress and were most apparent in the female. Later, differences were also apparent in the types of activities in which each sex participated. In behavioral terms, males acted expansively while females were more restrained; while males lashed out and destroyed (birds and human beings), females gathered and created (textiles and human beings). Although Guaman Poma’s reference to the sacrifice of girls was brief and casual, it should also be noted that whereas males killed, females died. As observed in the Chuncho stereotype above, while femininity is a state of being, masculinity is acted or performed. When the male body is incapable of gender-appropriate action—in infancy and dotage—its androgynous nature is readily
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apparent in Guaman Poma’s representations. Because females are female, in contrast to males acting male, they manifest femininity early on (through dress) before they are old enough to do much of anything; once past menopause, however, females display androgynous characteristics and thus, according to Guaman Poma’s characterizations, precede their male counterparts in the turn to androgyny. Interestingly, the ethnographic data indicate that postmenopausal Andean females today take on some social roles and behaviors of males, so that elder women are said to exhibit androgynous aspects by the contemporary Quechua as well.

CACHED MASCULINITY

If it is true that, according to Andean gender paradigms, masculinity was performed, then it is interesting to note that the body—that which exists, or that which is—appears to have been conceptually female when it was at its most inactive, that is, in death (B. J. Isbell 1997: 256 ff). The dead body, whether biologically male or female, was called malki, which means seed or plant. Pachacuti pictured the malki as a seedling and located it on the left, or feminine, side of his cosmological diagram (Fig. 4). The malki, especially the mummified corpse of a revered ancestor that was preserved and propitiated, was understood to be like a seed not yet sown—full of potential life, but dormant until acted on by exterior forces. Owing to its inactivity, the malki was feminized. What, then, happened to a man’s masculinity after he could no longer “act” it?

It is fairly clear that in the Pre-Hispanic Andes, masculinity could be housed apart from the dead body, or the feminized malki. That is, the masculine aspects of the human could be and were separated from the more feminine mortal remains. Various chroniclers report on a range of sacred objects, especially those known as huanca (wanka) and huaquis (wawkis), which hosted masculine energies in particular. Huanca refers to a male ancestor who turned to stone; the stone was conceived of as the owner of the location, village, or

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18 The Pre-Hispanic Andean notion that death separates (at least some of) the complementary aspects of the living human appears to have modern corollaries. Bastien (1987: 46, 72), for example, reports that the contemporary Qollahuayas of Bolivia conceive of the living body as a hydraulic system and believe that death severs permanently the wet from the dry elements of the body. Allen (1982: 183–185) indicates that in the southern Andean community of Sonqo the inseminating qualities of ancestors are thought to be located physically within the desiccated bones while the ancestors, as a category, are said to inhabit ancient tombs where no physical remains actually exist. While Allen does not interpret the evidence in this way, it would seem that Sonqueños continue an ancient Andean tradition of separating the masculine from the feminine aspects of the androgynous deceased and locating each in its distinct place—in this case, masculinity in the bones and femininity in the tombs.
territory where it stood, and was a symbol of the occupation and possession of that place (Duviols 1978, 1979). As there are no reports of female *huanca*s, and the actions associated with these tutelary monoliths are those of conquest and control over territory, we may understand *huanca*s as repositories of the masculinity thought to have been possessed and expressed by particular male cultural heroes. *Huanca*s were widespread in the high agricultural zones of the southern Andes.19 According to Pierre Duviols (1979), there were at least two types of *huanca*: the *marayoc*, the colonizer and proprietor of a village, and the *chacrayoc*, the tiller and owner of a productive field. The stone, in its un-<em>malki</em>-like incorruptible, indestructible body, commemorated the dual masculine activities—those of conquest, whether actual (the taking of land) or metaphorical (the tilling of agricultural fields), and of possession.

Although the *huanca* was usually said to be a petrified ancestor, Duviols (1978: 360) observes that every *huanca* corresponded to a *malki*. At the death of this important male—usually the conquering hero and founder of a place—he split into two, the body and the stone. The pair were conceived of as two different entities, and the name of the *huanca* was generally different from that of the *malki*. *Huanca*s were not only signs of conquest, control, and foundation, however; they also referred to male regenerative energies, especially when considered in concert with the *malkis*. While the *malki* was likened to a seed housed in the womblike cave of mother earth (and ancestral corpses were, in fact, usually preserved in caves), the *huanca* was the inseminating phallus. Duviols (1978: 362–363; 1979: 21–23) argues that the masculine *huanca*, often oblong in shape and planted vertically in the earth, is the phallus that plunges into the womb of *pachamama* (mother earth), recalling male insemination during sexual intercourse.

Duviols (1978: 359) also observes that the *huanca* was closely related to another type of repository for aspects of male elite identity, the *huauqui*. While the *huanca* was conceived of as a male turned to stone after death, or at least the male properties of a deceased man housed in stone, the *huauqui* was ordinarily constructed while a man was alive. The term *huauqui* means “a male’s brother,” and it was regarded as the living man’s double. Both Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa (1943) and Bernabé Cobo (1990) provide considerable information on the *huauquis* of Inka royalty; much of their information is probably derived from Juan Polo de Ondegardo, the magistrate of Cusco who, in the latter half of the sixteenth century, tracked down Inka mummies (*malkis*) and with them fre-
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quently found their *huauquis*. Recently, Maarten Van de Guchte (1996) has offered an extremely useful discussion of the subject. Apparently, *huauquis* could be made of a variety of materials. Those belonging to the Inka emperors were usually stone or gold, but there were exceptions. According to the chronicler Juan de Betanzos (1987: 220), when Atawalpa challenged his brother for Inka rulership, he ordered that a *bulto* (bundle) be fashioned of his own nails and hairs, as had been done earlier for his father, the ruler Wayna Qhápaq; he then named this composite Inga Guauguin (Inka Huauqui). Although Cobo describes them as “portraits” of the Inka, most, if not all, *huauquis* were not physiological likenesses. Sinchi Roqa’s, for example, was a stone shaped like a fish called Guanachiri Amaro (Sarmiento de Gamboa 1943: 63).

An important individual might have had more than one *huauqí*; in fact, Manko Qhápaq, the legendary first Inka, had several, the most famous of which was Huanacauri (Wanakwiri). According to Cobo (1990: 74), Huanacauri Huaca, the *huauqui* of Manko Qhápaq, was an unshaped, “somewhat tapering” stone of moderate size. It was taken to war by his descendants; Wayna Qhápaq, for example, took it to Quito during his campaigns to conquer the northern realms. It was returned to Cusco when Wayna Qhápaq died (Cobo 1990: 74). Both Polo de Ondegardo (1916: 10–11) and José de Acosta (1962: 227) confirm that the *huauquis* of rulers were taken to war as well as carried in processions to insure adequate rainfall and good harvests. The *huauqui*, then, began as the companion of a living man, but after his death apparently became most useful as a stand-in for him. Both the *malkí* and its stone “brother” had their own estates and servants. Like *huanca*s, *huauquis* housed male properties; their use in war and to induce rainfall—conceived of as an inseminating fluid—correlates with Andean notions about masculine attributes and activities.

Like *huanca*s, *huauquis* were paired with *malkís*. While the chroniclers are not always clear about distinguishing *malkí* from *huauqui* (often using the hopelessly imprecise term *bulto*), there is a suggestion that the *huauqui* might have been the more active of the pair. Many of the *malkís* were found outside of Cusco, in places considered “homes” of the deceased Inka. Yávar Wákaq’s mummy, for example, was discovered in Paullu, which is where he was raised. Similarly, Wiraqocha Inka’s mummy was found by Spaniards in Caquia Jaqujahuana, a village where he had taken refuge during the Chanka invasion of Cusco. Thus, in death, the feminine aspects of both rulers returned to nourish places that had offered them shelter and safety during their lives. Although I have little conclusive evidence, I would suggest that the *huauqui* was constructed as the future brother/mate of the inevitable *malkí* (echoing the practice of Inka rulers marrying their sisters). The *huauqui* amassed the masculine
energies of its owner during his lifetime, and was put into “action” when the mortal body ceased to be active (i.e., at death). Accordingly, it was probably most frequently the huauqui, “brother/mate” of the malki, that was taken in procession and especially to war.

Although the malkis of female elites were kept and propitiated, no female counterparts to huauquis have been recorded (Van de Guchte n.d.: 293). Like huancas, huauquis seem to have been a means of housing the masculine side of males, particularly those whose actions were of note and therefore worthy of preservation. This made a hero’s masculine properties immortal and allowed his energies to be used by future generations. While masculinity may have been suspended in an inanimate state, it was thus regarded as an exploitable resource by the living. Accordingly, the repository itself was treated as though it were animate or capable of animation. Catherine Allen (1988: 63), in her study of one contemporary southern Andean society, observes that, “from an Andean perspective, the compact hardness of stones, bones, and statues implies not a lack of animation, but a different state of animation—life crystallized, as it were.” This notion is surely an extension of Pre-Hispanic beliefs. Obviously, such reverence of “crystallized” masculinity encouraged living males to behave like these role models, or, in other words, “like men.” The use of huancas and huauquis to capture masculinity thereby induced humans to reproduce gender roles by simultaneously rewarding those who exhibited desired behavior and shaming those whose actions challenged the so-called norms.

OF ROCKS AND MEN

In light of the earlier observation that the Andean universe was sexed, it is interesting to note that stone seems to have been the most common vessel for storing masculinity. Rocks, according to an Andean worldview, are potentially animate. There are numerous Andean legends of stone coming to life and of human beings and animals turning into stone. One popular legend concerns a recalcitrant boulder that the Inka attempted to move. The stone, distressed at

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20 Classen (1993: 85–95) discusses some of the ways in which Andeans thought about the dead human body and its potential for affecting the lives of the living. It is clear that they considered the human dead as active participants in the social structure of the living (Urioste 1981: 15–17). Separating the masculine energies from the feminine malki seems to have been a way for Pre-Hispanic Andeans to isolate the particular contributions that the dead could make to the living. These ancient understandings have modern corollaries; see, for example, Bastien (1978: 173) on how the Bolivian Qollahuaya dead are reintegrated into the community.

21 There were, however, statues made in the likenesses of royal women (Estete 1968: 393), but their function was, unfortunately, never recorded.
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being relocated and weary from travel, began to cry tears of blood. Guaman Poma relates and illustrates one version of this story (Fig. 24). He shows tears spilling from the monolith that the Inka, under the command of Inka Urcon, are trying to relocate; on the weary boulder itself, he has penned *lloró sangre la piedra* (“the stone cried blood”). The petrifaction of the Ayar brothers in the legendary accounts of the founding of Cusco and the pururauka—monoliths that came to life to fight for the Inka against the invading Chanka army—are just two more of the better known examples of “lithomorphing” in Inka lore. Given the rock’s potential for animating, this natural material would seem to have served as an ideal host for energies temporarily at rest.

In the gendered landscape of the Andes, rock appears to have been associated with masculinity. While the earth itself is conceptually feminine, most

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**Fig. 24** Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, *El primer nueva corónica*, fol. 159 [161], 1615. “El noveno capitán, Inga Urcon” (the ninth captain, Inka Urcon) (after Guaman Poma 1988: 138).
rocks that are specifically identified are male, as are most mountain peaks, suggesting that masculine energies are what is ordinarily housed apart from the body, which is, in its essence, female.22 Females, however, do turn into stone in some instances, and these exceptions are enlightening. In a myth from Huarochirí, the supernatural female Caui Llaca changes into stone rather than have sexual relations with the lustful deity Cuni Raya Vira Cocha (Salomon and Urioste 1991: 46–48). This myth accounts for the rocky islands off the coast of Pachacámac, surrounded and assaulted by “Vira Cocha,” which means “sea-foam.” The frothy white foam, which ceaselessly assails the partially submerged rocks, not only refers to Vira Cocha, but suggests his semen as well. When the woman becomes transformed in this legend, she is rendered unproductive as a female; that is, she cannot be inseminated by Vira Cocha and thus, although inundated in his (symbolic) semen, remains forever impregnable. Here, the process of petrifaction can be said to make her, at the very least, not female (if not conceptually male). In other tales from Huarochirí, lithification is directly associated with an end to female sexual activity (see, e.g., Salomon and Urioste 1991: 59, 63, 134).

Interestingly, Guaman Poma (1988: fol. 389 [391]) reports that the captive Inka ruler Wáskar, imprisoned and abused by followers of his half-brother, was given a rock dressed like a woman to serve as his wife (“le dio . . . por muger, una piedra larga bestida como muger”). The fact that the dethroned, doomed Wáskar would produce no progeny was cruelly apparent in the mocking sterility of the stone in feminine garb.23 Whether historically accurate or not, the story related by Guaman Poma employs a symbol—the rock—that resonates in the gendered landscape of the Andes.

In an illustration that in some ways mirrors the Huarochirí story of Caui Llaca and Cuni Raya Vira Cocha, Guaman Poma (1988: fol. 316 [318]) depicts the Chacan drainage system, most particularly the entry of the river Saphi (or Watanay) into Cusco (Fig. 25). Van de Guchte (n.d.: 115) identifies the place-names given in the drawing as being linked to this river system: Cinca Urco (Mt. Senqa), for example, is located to the north of the beginning of the Chacan

22 Although, in my opinion, it can be argued that rocks in the Andes are generally conceived of as masculine, there are exceptions. Núñez del Prado (1974: 243, 246) indicates that near Qotobamba, in southern Peru, some outcrops (wiñaq rimqi) are considered to be extensions of pachamama; they are called ñust’a (princess) and are said to house her female spirit. See Decoster (n.d.: 62–63) for a discussion of this notion in 20th-century Accha (in Paruro province south of Cusco); he also offers pertinent observations about the gendering of landscape features.

23 See Van de Guchte (1996) for a discussion of some of the other dimensions of this story.
drainage system; Quean Calla (Quiangalla) is a famous huanca in the area; and Uaca Punku is the entry into Cusco below Sacsayhuaman. Thus, the artist has telescoped the Chacan drainage into a single image. Since the Andean landscape is gendered, Guaman Poma’s drawing can be understood to refer, metaphorically, to sexual intercourse. The place of the river’s entry into Cusco is occupied by two nude women. Two men sit atop (masculine) mountain peaks and blow (phallic) flutes; according to the caption, they are playing arawi, which are love songs. Guaman Poma’s female figures, awash in the raging river, are the very opposites of Caui Llaca in the Huarochirí myth, who turned into stone to avoid insemination; these females are vulnerable (note the long, loose hair, which, as mentioned above, suggests sexual receptivity). In the drawing, the blowing

Fig. 25 Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, *El primer nueva corónica*, fol. 316 [318], 1615. “Canciones i muica” (songs and music [of young men and women]) (after Guaman Poma 1988: 289).
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of flutes is analogous to fellatio, which sets the fertilizing waters flowing. Interestingly, according to an Inka legend, Pachakuteq (identified as a son of Manko Qhápaq) once stopped torrential rains and prevented flooding by persuading a supernatural male entity not to blow his trumpet—the symbolic equivalent of ejaculation (Murúa, 1986: 313).

R. Tom Zuidema (1990), in his discussion of an Inka structure in Cuzco called the Casana, has commented on the fact that the Saphi gorge—the place shown in Guaman Poma’s drawing—was gendered female and conceived of as vaginal. He notes (1991: 165) that “the term casana is derived from casay, ‘to pierce,’ a verb used for ‘planting’, that is ‘to put maize seeds in the ground using a stick.’ It can also be applied to other means of piercing. Yet casa also means a ‘gorge’ through which a river penetrates.” Thus, Zuidema suggests that the river penetrating the valley at the entrance to Cusco was a symbol of impregnation, both of the earth and of women. The Inka edifice known as the Casana was located on the northern side of the Haucaypata, on the eastern bank of the river Saphi (Watanay), close to the place where the river entered the city. Although its functions are not described in detail by any of the chroniclers, William Isbell (1978: 275) concludes that the northwestern side of the plaza, where the Casana was located, can be identified with masculine and intellectual activities, in complementary balance to the opposite side of the plaza, which was devoted to feminine fertility and production.

Casana also refers to a tunic design that was an arrangement of four smaller squares within a larger square. It refers, according to Zuidema’s (1990, 1991) insightful analysis, to the earth divided into its four parts and being pierced through by the Axis Mundi, which is a reference to male procreative power. When worn on an Inka tunic, the casana design, I would note, rather suggestively covers the man’s groin: his penis, when erect, becomes the axis that penetrates. This reading is especially apparent in Guaman Poma’s illustration of the Inka plowing ritual of August, in which the sexual metaphors, already discussed above, are obvious (Fig. 19).

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24 Harris (1980: 73) discusses the phallic symbolism of wooden pipes among the Laymi of Bolivia today. The complementary opposition and conjugal union of metaphorized males/conquerers/mountain peaks/rushing water and females/conquered/valleys/still water are salient features of Andean oral and visual culture. For a discussion of the operation of these metaphors in the myths from Huarochirí, see Salomon (Salomon and Urioste 1991: 9–10, 14–15). Bergh (1993: 82–85) argues that the Pre-Hispanic Moche culture on the northern coast of Peru identified mountains with masculinity and the water originating there with semen. Modern Andeans still compare rushing or foaming water to semen; see, for example, B. J. Isbell (1978: 124, 143, 163), Ossio (1978: 379–381), and Urton (1981: 202–4).
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CONTROLLING THE MASCULINE

Huancas, huanquis, and the gendering of nature in general not only allowed Andeans to utilize vital masculine energies associated with cultural heroes, but also afforded a sense of control over masculinity, which had a dangerous, destructive side. Andean legend and history are rife with examples of men whose “male” activity is excessive and, therefore, ruinous. According to Pachacuti (1993: 246), Wayna Qhápaq endeavored to marry one of his sisters, Mama Koka and, when she rejected his advances, attempted to punish her by giving her to a decrepit, coca-addicted kuraka (native leader). These inappropriate and vindictive actions against his sister provoked divine rage, and a plague that ended his life was the result. Sexual intercourse and marriage between royal siblings were not prohibited among the Inka; what was offensive here was the forced nature of the act—the inappropriate and destructive assertion of the masculine over the feminine. Wayna Qhápaq’s son and heir Wáskar committed similar “sins” when he defiled akllas, or chosen women (virgins dedicated to religious service). According to Pachacuti (1993: 254–255), Wáskar ordered his troops to rape a group of akllas. Duviols (in Pachacuti 1993: 25–26) points out that the sexual violation of akllas was a challenge to the Creator’s authority, an assertion of control over what did not properly belong to the Inka ruler (see also Trexler 1995: 154). If the sexual act was equated with military conquest, Wáskar, in his rape of akllas, declared victory over the Creator or at least challenged His supremacy. Pachacuti offers this as the reason for the subsequent slaughter of Wáskar and his entire family by Atawalpa’s generals. What matters here is not whether this incident ever actually occurred, but that Pachacuti understood it to be a reasonable explanation for the demise of Inka rulers.

It is certainly the case that Pachacuti’s interpretation of Andean history was influenced by Christian precepts; control over the sexuality of the colonized was a preeminent concern of the clergy, and such moralizing tales no doubt reflected the preoccupations of the colonial church. There are, however, a sufficient number of such tales to suggest at least that Andeans and Europeans shared the belief that deities were concerned with proper sexual behavior. What constituted “proper behavior” in the minds of Europeans differed from the understanding of Andeans, of course. One instructive tale, recorded in the late sixteenth century, accounts for the downfall of the north coast ruler Fempellec.

25 For further discussion of this incident and its other implications, see Duviols (in Pachacuti 1993: 25–26).
26 Pachacuti (1993: 266) writes that Wáskar was found “[f]ornicating with virgins who were dedicated [to the Creator] without considering His grandeur” (Fornicando a [las] doncellas [del Hazedor] y a él dedicadas sin hacer caso a su grandeza del Hazedor).
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His unrestrained sexual relations with a “demon” who appeared to him “in the form and figure of a beautiful woman” (en forma y figura de una hermosa mujer) prompted a heavy, prolonged rainfall, which resulted in disastrous flooding (Cabello Balboa 1945: 312). The Andean moral appears to condemn the fact that the ruler’s libido distracted him from his duties (tan poca la continencia del Fempellec), rather than the fact of his having illicit sex, which would be a more European reading. Not only did masculine lust bring about a natural disaster in this legend, but the resultant calamity came in the form of rainfall, a common Andean metaphor for semen. The irony here is rich: immoderate masculinity leads to excessive rainfall, which leads to destruction (specifically, sterility and hunger) rather than creation. According to the legend, to remedy the situation, Fempellec’s own priests and nobles took him prisoner, bound his hands and feet, and cast him into the sea. Similarly, in the origin myth of the Cañari of the Ecuadorian highlands, when male lust leads to rape, the transgressor is drowned (Sarmiento de Gamboa 1943: 37–38).27 In both cases—that of Fempellec and that of the Cañari—the libidinous male drowns, thereby suffering an appropriate fate.

The Inka likewise seem to have understood excessive rainfall, as well as prolonged drought (more of a danger in the Cusco region), to be divine punishment meted out for transgressions (Murúa 1986: 429). In Cusco, drought was often met with appeals to either the malkís (the corpses) or the huauquiis (the statuary “brothers”) of deceased Inka rulers. Inka Roqa (as a malki) or his huauqui, called Vicaquirao, was carried in procession to alleviate drought, for example. Apparently, it was appropriate to call on him because, according to some sources, it was Inka Roqa himself (and according to others, his mate, Mama Mikay), who was credited with ordering irrigation channels to be built to bring water to Cusco from the Chacan drainage. Their lineage, the ayllu also called Vicaquirao (or Vicaquirao Panaca ayllu), was charged with caring for this system of irrigation (Cobo 1979: 124–125). While Mama Mikay may have

27 The myth concerns two Cañari brothers, Ataorupaguí and Cusícayo, who were the only two men to survive a great flood. One day, while they were away from their hut, sowing their land, they were left bread and chicha. After this occurrence was repeated, the brothers hid themselves near their hut and observed two Cañari women bringing them gifts of food. The brothers tried to capture the women but failed. Realizing they had done wrong, the brothers prayed to the Creator to let the women return, which He did in order that the men not die of hunger. Shortly thereafter, the elder brother had forced sexual relations with one of the women; apparently, as a consequence of this rash and unapproved act, he drowned in a nearby lake. The younger brother married one of the women and took the other as his mistress. By them, he produced ten offspring; five of them comprised the moiety of Hanansaya, and the other five, the moiety of Hurinsaya, and from them all Cañari descended.
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been associated with attracting the fertilizing fluid to Cusco, her male complement was called into action when there was a problem with its delivery.

Clearly, masculine energies could be summoned to aid the living. Their excess could be dangerous, however, and it most often required feminine forces to control them (B. J. Isbell 1997). As Frank Salomon (Salomon and Urioste 1991: 10) points out in his analysis of the Huarochirí manuscript, the paradigm of complementarity accounts not only for cooperative action, but for conflict and its resolution as well. In the Huarochirí myth of Collquiri and Capyama, male sexuality represented as rushing irrigation water is controlled by women (Salomon and Urioste 1991: 139–142). A second Huarochirí myth tells the story of how one of Chuqui Suso’s sisters seduces the fearsome Tutay Quiri, the strongest son of Paria Caca, by showing him her genitalia and breasts, and in so doing successfully brings to an end his conquest of the region (Salomon and Urioste 1991: 82–83).²⁸ In both stories, masculinity is characterized as destructive unless countered by femininity, and the delicate fabric of society, as highly susceptible to ruptures emanating from conflict. Women, the prototypical weavers, represent in these stories feminine forces that sustain the social fabric against the rending effects of masculine aggressivity.

In contemporary southern Andean society, the unsocialized, sexually aggressive and unrestrained young male is likened to the bear, an animal of the forested lowlands; in fact, as Gary Urton (1985: 270–272) has noted, young men dressed in bear costume for ritual performances speak in falsetto, imitating the adolescent boy’s cracking voice. Only when a young man enters into a union with a female complement, begins to procreate, and finally assumes full adult responsibility and kin obligations is he recognized as being like animals of the Andean highlands: first he is compared to the fox and then, as a fully responsible member of the community, to the puma. B. J. Isbell (1985: 289), commenting on Urton’s findings, notes that this signals the man’s transformation from “sexually unbridled to socially reproductive, from self-gratifying to self-sacrificing for communal interests, from irresponsible to responsible.” The bear, as performed by young highland men, is a boisterous, sexually aggressive,

²⁸ Inverting this myth, the Inka evoked what has been called a “conquest hierarchy,” characterizing themselves as victorious males while the conquered were conceptualized as defeated females (Silverblatt 1987: 67–80; Zuidema 1996: 40–41). Under these circumstances, controlled masculine aggressivity was applauded, as it led to the further enhancement of the Inka empire while the feminine counteraction was held in abeyance. In this context, females were subordinated to males and metaphorized as victims. See Nash and Leacock (1982) for an analysis of how the concept of male superiority/female inferiority is often linked to male competition over social and economic prerogatives in stratified societies.
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unsocialized animal, identified with his forest origins and conceived of as an
invader of highland villages, indiscriminate impregnator of women, and disrup-
ter of civilized society. As evidenced by the Chunchos mentioned at the
outset, the jungle—the complementary opposite of the highlands—produces
unbalanced sexuality; in this case, the lowland masculinity of the bear threatens
to destroy rather than properly complement its female counterpart.

CONCLUSIONS

This reprise of the lowland-highland opposition brings us back to Doña
Pasquala’s tacit attack on her husband’s masculinity. Her bequest to him of
Chuncho costumes accuses him not (or not just) of effeminacy, but of failing
to perform as her complementary partner. She certainly offers ample evidence
that he failed to participate with her in their conjugal union. In Andean terms,
that means not merely that he was a man who was like a woman, but that he
was not a man at all. Here Olivia Harris’s (1978) discussion of the notion of
chachawarmi among the contemporary, Aymara-speaking Laymi of Bolivia is
extremely helpful. Chacha means “man” or “husband,” while warmi means
“woman” or “wife.” Harris explains how this term operates to identify the pair
bond as a single, distinct unit.29 In Quechua, q’ariwarmi (again, “man–woman”) or
warmi-q’ari has a similar meaning (Allen 1988: 72–77; Platt 1986). Since
Doña Pasquala’s mate—the q’ari to her warmi—did not participate in the pair
bond either in terms of work (he did not contribute to her income) or in
terms of reproduction (he fathered no children by her), he failed to be an
Andean man. She reasoned that since he did not perform the activities that
would have defined him as a man, and since being a man did not exist outside
of performance, he was no man at all. In fact, Doña Pasquala’s bequest echoes
the Inka custom of sending women’s clothes to men who had failed as warriors
and so had not lived up to their gender role (Guaman Poma 1988: 96, 360;

Like the Inka state before her, Doña Pasquala practiced gender, that is, she
purposefully put it into play in order to effect change, prompt certain behav-
iors, and/or preclude others. Doña Pasquala’s argument was critical not just as a
potent insult from beyond the grave, one final attempt to “get even” with the
man who clearly did not live up to her expectations. Under Spanish colonial
rule, a wife’s belongings were legally controlled by her husband.30 Doña Pasquala’s

29 Similarly, Platt (1986: 245–257) discusses the concept of yanantin (pair) among the
Macha of Potosí, Bolivia, which includes the idea that the human couple is but a single
body in two halves. Allen (1988: 85) also explores this concept.

30 See Silverblatt (1987: 119–120) for an insightful analysis of how this law affected
Andean women in colonial Peru.
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ability to bequeath her possessions as she desired, in accordance with the Pre-Hispanic tradition of parallel inheritance, depended on her charge that her husband, because of his failure to act like her husband, was not entitled to anything but what she chose to leave him—and what she chose to leave him was a damning assessment of his masculinity and therefore, essentially and implicitly, a claim to her own independence.

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None of the Above:
Gender Ambiguity in Nahua Ideology

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In her critique of the Western medical establishment’s treatment of hermaphroditism, Julia Epstein (1990: 101, 104–105, 129) notes that the law today “assumes a precise contrariety between two sexes, whereas medical science has for several centuries understood sex determination to involve a complex and indefinite mechanism that results in a spectrum of human sexual types rather than in a set of mutually exclusive categories.” Epstein is referring here to modern medical awareness of the variety of biological factors that enter into the determination of a person’s sex, such as chromosomal patterns, gonadal structure, hormonal dominance, and the morphologies of both internal and external genitalia, as well as to the multiplicity of combinations that these can form. Despite scientific understanding that in some infants neither sex prevails biologically and that some of the determinants may not fully reveal themselves until the child is older, our law requires doctors to register a name and sex for every newborn at the time of birth. If the doctor’s choice of sex for the infant later turns out to have been awkward, the “error” is often addressed, as among transsexuals, with genital surgery.¹ For unless such so-called mistakes are “corrected” so that they can be classified as either “true” males or “true” females, hermaphrodites, homosexuals, effeminate men, and masculine women in our culture are likely to suffer psychological anguish and social discrimination, if not outright abuse. Neither sexual nor gender ambiguity, in other words, is accorded a constructive place in our society, where what Epstein calls the “legal fiction” of binary gender boundaries forms the basis of the social order and is, therefore, rigidly maintained.

¹ In this essay I use the definitions of sex, gender, sexuality, transsexualism, gender identity, gender variance, and sexual identity that are provided by Jacobs and Cronwell (1992: 62–64). Gender, according to most gender theorists, is a sociocultural construct, whereas sex is based on observable biophysiological characteristics.
Anthropology and history have made it clear, however, that this has not been, and still is not, the case always and everywhere. A number of cultures not only recognize more than two genders, but also acknowledge that an individual’s sexual preference, gender role, and sexual and/or gender identity can change over time. The implications of these findings are profound, for they not only refute the common modern Euro-American assumption that gender is immutable, but also, as Anne Bolin (1996: 23, 29) has observed, “problematize our Western biocentric paradigm of gender as bipolar and biologically unequivocal.” Nor should we assume that ambiguous gender was and is, always and everywhere, deemed socially destructive and therefore dangerous. In numerous non-Western cultures, as in the European past, gender ambiguity is known to have played important and constructive roles.

I argue here that during the Late Postclassic period (A.D. 1250–1521) Nahuatl-speaking inhabitants of Central Mexico likewise perceived gender as neither immutable nor stable, nor did they see sex and gender as inherently bipolar and necessarily biologically determined. Rather, both sex and gender could be determined socially and supernaturally. Uncertain gender, moreover, was not always viewed as negative and marginal, as it is in contemporary Western culture, but instead played a far more variable role. I provide evidence of the belief that because gender ambiguity served as a powerful Nahua metaphor for a wide range of social identities, it was not perceived as deviant but rather as a normal and expected part of social life.

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2 I know of no culture that has recognized only one gender, whereas a number of cultures recognize more than two (Jacobs and Cromwell 1992). Laqueur (1990: 4 ff) has shown, however, that until the 18th century Europeans adhered to a one-sex model in which women were perceived as having the same genitals as men, albeit inside the body rather than out. As such, the woman represented an inferior variant of the biological male. Recent research among the transgendered has revealed that an individual’s gender identity may change at least once during his or her lifetime, regardless of biological characteristics and/or sexual preference (Ramet 1996: 14–15, 36–38). The word *transgendered* here includes both surgical and nonsurgical transsexuals, as well as cross-dressers, male and female (cf. Bolin 1996: 37).

3 It was not until recently that sexual preference was thought to play a major role in defining one’s self-identity. As Rocke (1996: 10–11, 13–14, 258, n. 20) notes, the current dichotomy between homosexuality and heterosexuality is a relatively recent, 19th-century European phenomenon, which did not penetrate American culture until the present century. Rocke has found that 15th-century Florentine men who temporarily or sporadically engaged in same-sex relations were not regarded, and did not regard themselves, as “deviants.”

4 This is particularly well documented for Native North America, where gender-ambiguous men and women have sometimes attained high social status, performing, among other things, as diplomats and ceremonial leaders (Jacobs and Cromwell 1992). For a more detailed discussion of the positive social value assigned to gender ambiguity in Native North America, see Roscoe (1991), Whitehead (1981), and Williams (1986). For an opposing viewpoint, see Trexler (1995).
variety of human hopes and fears, it was perceived as capable, under the right conditions, of actually facilitating necessary and much wanted change.

These conditions occurred on at least four strategic occasions in the indigenous Nahua calendar, each marking the end of one important astronomical period or season and the need for a smooth transition to another. Mesoamericans, it is well documented, viewed such times as fraught with physical and cosmic danger. The first of these occasions was the ceremony held at the end of every solar year; the second, the celebration of the end of the annual dry season and the beginning of the time to plant; the third marked the end of the wet season and a turn toward warfare and the hunt; and the fourth occurred every twenty-eight-plus days at the end of the lunar cycle. At these times, ambiguous gender enabled the transformation of one temporal phase into another by giving an appropriate bodily form to Nahua fears. These included fears of cosmic and social chaos, loss of direction and purpose, illness and madness, the recklessness of youth, impotence, barrenness and loss of reproductive energy, darkness and deception, the onset of poverty and powerlessness—indeed, formlessness itself. Ambiguous gender gave these dangerous forces form so that man could harness them and transform them into something new and positive. As a symbol of inversion, of reversal, and of the in-between, gender ambiguity was enormously important in Nahua ideology because it could reinstate social and cosmic order, thereby guaranteeing renewal, maturity, prosperity, and good health.5

In what follows, my frequent use of modern ethnographic data should in no way be taken to imply that I see Mesoamericans today as living in a pristine state unaffected by the almost five-hundred years of often traumatic change wrought by conquest and incorporation into a new political and religious order. Nor should my willingness to look at other Pre-Hispanic, non-Nahua cultures suggest that I view Mesoamerican ideation in general as uniform throughout the area (Chevalier and Buckles 1995: 1–2). Rather, due to the limited and often biased reports provided by colonial sources, I turn at times to other Mesoamerican times and places where documented beliefs and practices can help us to recognize certain cultural patterns and thus hypothetically to flesh out our understanding of preconquest Nahua gender ideology.6

5 In so doing, gender ambiguity in Nahua culture represents yet another instance of the wide use of mythic and ceremonial inversions to mark boundaries and endings, effect transitions, and thereby create ideal conditions for the new (Babcock 1978: 27 ff; Turner 1967: 93–111).

6 For a full defense of the controlled use of ethnographic analogy in Pre-Hispanic Mesoamerican studies, see my “Conclusions” in this volume. On the limitations of colonial Spanish understanding of native sexuality in particular, see Burkhart (1989, this volume)
It is necessary at the outset to distinguish between gender ambiguity and what I call “gender duality,” since past failure to do so has led to considerable confusion in the literature. Gender duality refers to entities who simultaneously incorporate within themselves both a wholly male and a wholly female aspect. These entities are often described in colonial texts as married couples (see Joyce, this volume). The best-known example of a dualistic Pre-Hispanic Nahua supernatural is the supreme creator deity Ometeotl, or “God Two,” who comprised both a male and a female aspect. The male aspect was addressed as Ometecuhltli, “Two Lord,” and the female as Omecihuatl, “Two Woman.” In Nahua art, dual-gendered supernaturals appear as two separate, distinctly gendered beings. In Codex Borbonicus (Nowotny 1974: fol. 21), for example, the creator gods Cipactonal and his wife Oxomoco appear, in the context of the first half of the Nahua “century,” or fifty-two year cycle, facing each other across an empty space (Fig. 1). They are represented as equal in size, and their

Fig. 1 Codex Borbonicus, fol. 21. Oxomoco and Cipactonal divining (after Nowotny 1974).

respective genders are indicated clearly by the differences in their costumes and—since, among the Nahua, only men were supposed to sit with their knees up, and only women could properly kneel—in their poses. In earlier Mexican manuscripts, bilateral symmetry and gender-appropriate poses and dress similarly characterized the harmoniously paired man and woman (Fig. 2).

In a number of Mesoamerican communities today, the contented married male–female couple serves to structure the perception of nature. In many places, for example, the cosmos and its contents are believed to be composed of two discrete but complementarily gendered aspects. Among the Otomi and the Mixtec, the sky tends to be gendered male, and the earth female. Each of these entities, in turn, has its own male and female aspects (Galinier 1990; King n.d.: 369). William Madsen (1969: 130) has found that the present-day Nahua of San Francisco Tecospa similarly organize their world in terms of a balance

Fig. 2 Codex Borgia, fol. 58. Happily married couple (after Nowotny 1976).

7 Single supernaturals with a male and a female component survive today in rural ideologies throughout Mexico and Guatemala. Tarn and Prechtel (1986: 173), for example, discuss beliefs in dualistic supernaturals among the present-day Tz’utujil Maya of Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala, while Knab (1979: 30–130) and Sandström (1991: 267) have reported the same phenomenon for contemporary Nahua (see also Madsen 1969: 130).
between male and female elements, while Nahuas living today in the Sierra de Puebla say that the earth has two differently gendered aspects addressed respectively as Tlaltetata, “Earth Father,” and Tlaltenana, “Earth Mother” (Sandstrom 1991: 240). This practice probably goes back to the colonial period, for the anonymous author of the mid-sixteenth-century Nahuat document *Histoyre du Mechique* (Jonghe 1905: 25) states that, while some early colonial-period Nahuas thought that the earth took the form of a woman, other informants claimed that the earth looked like a man. Among today’s Chortí Maya, according to Charles Wisdom (1940: 410), the male component of a supernatural being is said to affect only women, whereas the female side affects only men. For Mesoamericans, including Nahuas, a dual, male-plus-female unit was held to have generative and protective powers far greater than could be possessed either by a dysfunctional or infertile couple, or by any single individual regardless of the gender. This is why in some places important, highly venerated individuals, whether dead or alive and of either gender, were—and still are—called “Father Mothers.”

8 The author of the *Histoyre du Mechique* (Jonghe 1905) calls the earth Tlaltentli, which is probably a mishandling of Tlaltecuhtli, “Earth Lord,” the name given by most sources. For similar gendering of the earth among the Totonacs of Veracruz, see Ichon (1973: 146). For the Nahuas of San Miguel Tznacapan in the Sierra de Puebla, see Knab (1979: 130). Knab (n.d.: 221) reports a Nahuat association of land with the masculine and water with the feminine, a distinction echoed among the Otomi in a study by Dow (1974: 4).

9 This concept may arguably be European in origin, since the Spanish inquisitor Pierre le Broussard, working in Arras, reported that for women the Devil took the form of a man and vice versa (Caro Baroja 1964: 91). In the New World, however, the concept seems to have its strongest hold in precisely those areas where Catholicism has made the fewest inroads into traditional beliefs, thus suggesting that it has preconquest roots.

10 Pre-Hispanic Nahuas used the term “Our Mother, Our Father” to address important supernaturals such as the state patron god Huitzilopochtli (“hummingbird left”), as well as their political superiors (Durán 1994: 131). The people of Tepeyac, for example, acknowledged the dominance of the Nahuas of Tenochtitlan by calling them “Our Mother and Our Father” (Leibsohn n.d.: 360). When a new ruler was installed at Tenochtitlan, the people were told, “It is assuredly true that he is thy real mother, thy real father. Thy mother is not thy mother; thy father is not thy father. Truly this [the ruler] is thy mother, this is thy father” (Sahagún 1950–82, 6: 79). Among the Maya, one finds an example of this as early as the 7th century, on a stucco panel in the Temple of the Cross at Palenque where the Maya ruler Kan-Bahlum II wears a netted jade skirt that was first worn, according to Freidel, Schele, and Parker (1993: 286), by First Mother and First Father, the Maya equivalent of the Nahuat Ometeotl, or “God Two.” The accompanying text identifies Kan-Bahlum, who was male, as the “Mother” of the gods, which is a reference to his ability to materialize the ancestral deities by “suckling”—that is, nourishing—theem (Newsome n.d.: 24). Today, the highland Tzotzil Maya address as “Father–Mother” (totilme’il) not just their ancestors but anyone who has held a higher office or who otherwise protects his or her fellow beings. The Quiche, in turn, refer to their patrilineage heads and priest-shamans as “Mother Father” (chuchbahaw) (Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993: 169; D. Tedlock 1985: 47).
None of the Above

This ideology reflected Mesoamerican social values. Throughout Mesoamerica, the stable and productive marriage of a fully feminine woman to an entirely masculine man represented the hallmark of social maturity and formed the basis of the socioeconomic order. Gender dualism, in which a male and a female took on complementary gender roles designed to benefit the family as a whole, thus represented the social ideal (see Joyce, this volume). This parallels the Andean region, where gender complementarity continues to structure domestic roles and where people have long conceived of the successful married couple as a single body with two halves (see Dean, this volume). Olivia Harris (1980: 90) has found that among the present-day Laymi of Bolivia, the fundamental conceptual opposition is not between man and woman, but between the married couple, viewed as “the embodiment of society itself,” and unmarried people, “who in certain respects are relegated to the wild.” “Women and men,” in Harris’s words (ibid.), “are not pre-given, eternal categories but change their relationship to the symbolic in the course of their lives.” As we see below, a similar opposition structures thought in parts of Mexico and Guatemala today.

What we find here are cases of multiple but discrete genders that combine to form a single, male-plus-female whole. The two genders may be viewed either simultaneously or in alternation, but they are never ambiguous or ambivalent because there is nothing uncertain, unpredictable, or incomplete about them. Rather, these genders are additive, or doubled. In none of these cases do the individual aspects or components that make up the unit ever change their gender, nor do they represent an intermixture of gender traits within themselves. The anticipated benefits of such gender doubling are perhaps best seen in a lengthy 1958 healing chant addressed, under the influence of hallucinogenic mushrooms, to “Father Jesus Christ” and “Most Holy Mary” by the Mazatec shamaness María Sabina. As the chant gained momentum, Sabina frequently augmented her credentials by repeating “Woman [male] saint am I, and woman [female] saint am I” (Halifax 1979: 199). María Sabina became all of the above.

NONE OF THE ABOVE: GENDER AMBIGUITY

By “gender ambiguity”—or what some call “gender liminality,” and others call “gender blending,” “gender reversal,” or “gender variance”—I refer to instances in which a single entity is either not entirely or not consistently male or female.¹¹ The boundaries between female and male, in other words, are suffi-

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ciently blurred that it is impossible to assign a single gender. Rather than comprising all genders or having one integral gender, the gender-ambiguous individual has less than one gender. Such an individual represents a single, fundamentally male or female being who, by virtue of being infused with traits of the other gender, is incomplete, imperfect, unfulfilled, partially disguised or hidden, and therefore severely compromised.

Semiotically speaking, only true gender ambiguity can successfully invert—and thus construct and validate—the meanings conveyed by gender doubling. This must be why Wisdom (1940: 410) found the Chortí Maya death god described both as a male with a female consort, each dressed according to sex, and as a giant male dressed in female clothes. A single, transvestite death god whose masculinity has been compromised by his feminine dress has a meaning directly opposite from that of a death god who can present himself either as a single entity of two opposite genders or as one or the other member of a pair.12

As Marjorie Garber (1992: 11–13) points out, cross-dressing is a powerful signifier because it introduces an epistemological crisis by destabilizing and thus challenging the inevitability of bipolar gender categories. A man in a woman’s dress—whether he be a regular cross-dresser, an actor, or the impersonator of a female deity—is by no means truly female, yet neither is he, at least for the time being, entirely male.

Like the Chortí, Pre-Hispanic Nahuas apparently did not recognize a completely intersexed adult in whom neither sex predominated. There could only be effeminate men and masculine women. When Nahuas spoke of what we today call hermaphrodites, they identified them as women who possessed pronounced male biological traits and sexual habits.13 Thus, the Franciscan Bernardino de Sahagún’s informants defined what they called the patlache, or hermaphrodita, as a “detestable woman” who had a penis and testes, a beard, and man’s speech, and who had carnal relations only with women (Sahagún 1977, ambiguity).

Whether the emphasis is on mixed gender signs, homo- or bisexuality, or intersexed individuals depends on the author.

12 For lack of adequate alternatives, I continue to use certain controversial words here, such as transvestite and homosexual, which, I realize, can connote Western biases. These terms are not, of course, drawn from indigenous vocabularies or discourses, and the values and meanings that they represent to us today may differ significantly from Pre-Hispanic concepts of, and attitudes toward, mixed gender signs. They should therefore be taken here strictly as descriptive terms devoid of any implicit moralizing. Transvestite, in other words, means cross-dresser and nothing more.

The implications can be seen in Diego Muñoz Camargo’s (1978: 151–152) account of a Tlaxcalan girl of low birth with whom the son of the ruler became enamored. The ruler put the girl with the other women of the court, only to come home from a long trip to find that “she” had impregnated more than twenty of his women. The imposter, obviously male, was denounced as una hermaphrodita que tuvo dos sexos—that is, a woman of two sexes—and was promptly condemned to a gruesome death. We can assume that, in order to effect this deception, the man had appeared to the prince and the court dressed and coiffed as a woman.

As the foregoing demonstrates, what offended Nahuas about those whose appearance and behavior were at odds with their “real” sex was their view that these individuals might take advantage of appearing to be something they were not. As agents of trickery and deceit, hermaphrodites, like homosexuals, were therefore not just disapproved of, but often killed as well. Interestingly, Fernando de Alva Ixtlixochitl (1975–77, 2: 101) claims that in Texcoco, although both

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14 In Nahuatl, patlache means “one who is extended” (translation mine). Another Nahu term for hermaphrodite, ciuatl tepule, literally means “woman who has a virile member,” a concept that for us is an oxymoron (Siméon 1977: 113, 501).
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Nahua partners in a male same-sex relationship were killed and buried in hot ashes, it was only in the case of the “passive” partner, or cuiloni (“he who is taken”), that entrails were removed through the anus.\(^{15}\) It was also the passive partner alone who was condemned as “a defilement, a corruption, filth; a taster of filth, revolting, perverse, [and] full of affliction,” and as a man who, being “womanish,” deserved to be burned (Sahagún 1950–82, 10: 37–38). The sexual behavior of the active partner in a male same-sex relationship, in contrast, was viewed as essentially consonant with his biological sex and therefore not a direct cause of misfortune.\(^{16}\)

The link between misfortune and effeminacy can be seen in Alfredo López Austin’s (1982: 167; 1988, 1: 305–306) observation that the Nahuał word cocoxqui, “effeminate,” can also mean “sick” and “weak.”\(^{17}\) Bernard Ortiz de Montellano (1990: 151) notes seventeenth-century testimony collected by Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón (1982: 182) that same-sex behavior was thought by Nahua to cause crops to freeze, livestock to die, and business deals to fail. Similar associations are found today among the Otomi and the Quiche Maya. Jacques Galinier (1990: 642) reports that the Otomi attribute male impotence and female barrenness to homosexuality, while Barbara Tedlock (1992: 116) tells us that a Quiche child born on the day Tz’i will be not only confused, weak, and unlucky but also sexually unsatisfied and, possibly, a homosexual, a fornicator, or a prostitute.\(^{18}\) According to the commentator of Codex Magliabechiano (Nuttall 1978 fol. 77r), if Nahua diviners diagnosing illness threw maize kernels in such a way that one kernel fell on top of another, it was said that their client’s illness was the result of “sodomy.” The damage wrought could be psychological, as

\(^{15}\) In the Spanish version of the Florentine Codex, Sahagún (1977, 3: 120) defines the cuiloni as el somético paciente; “the passive partner,” while Molina (1970: fol. 100v) equates the word with the Spanish term puto que padece, or “puto [sodomite] who suffers,” as opposed to teculontiani, “puto who does it to someone else” (Molina 1970: fol. 93r; see also Sahagún 1997: 253). We do not know whether the Nahua similarly distinguished between the dangers posed, respectively, by the active and the passive partner in a female same-sex relationship.

\(^{16}\) Colonial sources concur that in the urban capitals of Tenochtitlán and Texcoco both participants in a same-sex act were likely to be killed (e.g., Jonghe 1905: 18). Trexler (personal communication, 1996), however, sees these claims as part of a later Nahua attempt to represent their sexual past in terms acceptable to the Church.

\(^{17}\) See Molina (1970: fol. 24r) and Siméon (1977: 121) for this definition of cocoxqui. Two Nahua terms for male homosexuality (amo tlacayotl and ayoc tlacayotl) suggest that it was regarded as inhuman behavior (López Austin 1982: 167; Molina 1970: fol. 115v).

\(^{18}\) The name Tz’i comes from tz’ilonic, “to be dirty, soiled, stained, and impure,” with, according to B. Tedlock (1992: 116), the “connotation of making love either to the wrong person or at the wrong time or place.” In divination, a high-numbered Tz’i count indicates that the person has committed a serious sexual sin, such as sodomy.
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well. Mid-sixteenth-century Nahuas, for example, described the masculine woman as “a corruputer, a deranger; one who deprives one of his reason” (Sahagún 1950–82, 10: 37).19

In addition to causing illness, gender ambiguity, not surprisingly, had dire social connotations. Nahua youths who had in some way hindered the efforts of the state’s armies or musicians, for example, were said to have become “old-womanish” (Sahagún 1997: 244). The word *cuiloni* was often used by warriors to insult their enemies because it connoted (and hopefully would incur in the opposition) “womanly” cowardice and defeat.20 Women’s garments on a male body therefore served as a common visual and verbal metaphor for military weakness, defeat, and the poverty and disgrace that attended submission (Klein 1994: 113–114).21 In some sources, these garments are specifically described as dirty and tattered. The *Anales de Tlatelolco* (Berlin and Barlow 1948: 74), for example, states that, once his city had fallen to the Spaniards, *el gran señor, el hombre poderozo* (“the great lord, the powerful man”) of Tlatelolco appeared only in rags, wearing the headdress, skirt, and blouse (*huipil*) of a woman (translation mine).22

19 Many Mesoamerican peoples today fear transvestites—whether males dressed as females or masculine women who appear to be wholly feminine—who lie in wait in order to trick members of their own sex into having intercourse with them. As in Europe since the Middle Ages, it is frequently feared that the act will drive the victims mad. It is possible that the notion was transported across the Atlantic following the Spanish conquest, but even in that case it undoubtedly fused with comparable indigenous beliefs, since, as we will see, the association of gender ambiguity with treachery and illness permeated Nahua ideology and language.

20 For the association of cowardice with femininity, see Guerra (1971: 154), Klein (1994: 113), Stenzel (1976: 183), and Trexler (1995: 64–81). Muñoz Camargo (1978: 209) states that at the start of the conquest the Cholutecas believed that the Spaniards could not prevail, in part because they saw the invaders’ Tlaxcalan allies as sodomites “who are nothing but their women” (translation mine).

21 Durán (1994: 91–92) recounts the story of a Coyoacan ruler who ordered three visiting ambassadors from the Aztec capital to return home to Tenochtitlan in women’s skirts and blouses (*huipils*) as a means of provoking a war. Burkhart (1986: 120–121) calls attention to Juan Suárez de Peralta’s tale of a braggart who was sent by Motecuhzoma II into a war against the Purépucha (Tarascans) but balked at the onslaught and fled the battle. Motecuhzoma punished the coward by dressing him in a woman’s blouse and castrating him so that he could never reproduce. According to the *Relación de Michoacán* (Craine and Reindorp 1970), upon hearing of Tenochtitlan’s defeat at the hands of the Spaniards, the Nahua’s Purépucha cousins in Michoacán lamented that “they have put women’s underskirts on all of us” (Krippner-Martínez 1991: 191).

22 The report is no doubt allegorical, but in some places female dress is still associated with the end of political power and the ensuing poverty. In Tzotzil Maya Zinacantan, Chiapas, for example, one of the male members of an outgoing administration is dressed in the clothes of a white Ladino woman (Blaffer 1972: 41). This may symbolize the fact that many Maya officials deplete their resources in the course of fulfilling their responsibilities.
In all documented instances in which Nahua men were forced to cross-dress as women, their tormentors’ intention seems to have been not just to mark but also to mock their victims’ loss of status and power. The man or woman who voluntarily cross-dresses, in turn, typically mocks other people. We see this in certain parts of Mexico today, where ritual mockery is a principal activity of certain men who voluntarily dress in women’s garments. For example, Victoria Bricker (1973: xiv–xv, 9) notes that Zinacanteco Maya festivals feature costumed men, some of them dressed as women, who mock and humiliate the ruling functionaries. As is typical of such rites elsewhere in Mesoamerica, men’s costumes are either a combination of male and female garments or a tawdry parody of proper female dress; as is common elsewhere, these men engage in obscene acts.

End of the Year

In Zinacantan, as in a number of places in Mesoamerica today, obscene transvestite performances are held at certain times of the year, suggesting that gender ambiguity is somehow tied to specific points in time. One occasion is the End of the Year, or New Year, ceremonies, which run from 16 December through 25 January, coinciding with the end of our Gregorian year. At this time, according to Evon Vogt (1976: 177), the Zinacantecos “are first unwiring, or unstructuring, the system of order and then rewiring it, or restructuring it.” The second major occurrence is Carnival, which takes place shortly afterward, in February or March, and is linked with Easter. At Zinacantan, as in many other places in Mesoamerica, Carnival coincides with the last five days, or “lost days,” of the indigenous solar calendar, a period that currently runs from Ash Wednesday (a moveable feast normally falling in February) through Easter Sunday. In other communities, the “lost days” immediately precede, if they do not

23 Bricker’s (1973) pragmatic explanation of Zinacanteco ritual cross-dressers’ costumes and behavior is that, by publicly exposing the failures of outgoing officials who have neglected their duties, the cross-dressers impress society’s standards and expectations, as well as the consequences of any future failures, on incoming officeholders. At the same time, such comic imitations of female appearance and behavior reinforce the communal notion of how a proper woman—as well as a proper man—should look and behave. For more information on modern ritual mockery of people’s foibles, see Bricker (1973: 64, 130, 135–136) and Taube (1989).

24 In places, the obscenities are perpetrated by men dressed as fos (“uglies”) (Wagley 1949: 117). Among the Tzotzil speakers of San Pedro Chenalhó, with whom Guiteras-Holmes (1961) lived for some time, impersonators of mythic and historical figures, including men dressed as negros (blacks), visit the local officials and, once there, “realistically” simulate the carnal act. Guiteras-Holmes (ibid.: 101) does not say whether any of these impersonators are dressed as women.
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overlap, the beginning of Semana Santa, or Holy Week. This represents a shift from the original European practice of holding Carnival earlier, during the period extending from Epiphany (January 6) to Ash Wednesday (see Provost n.d.). Nonetheless, at Zinacantan both of the principal occasions for ritual cross-dressing mark the end of a solar year—the Gregorian year in the first case and the indigenous year in the second case. The association of gender ambiguity with year endings is further made evident by J. Steward Lincoln's (1945: 118) observation that, during the five unlucky days (O’ki) in their calendar, the Ixil Maya fast and offer sacrifices because it is feared that boys born at that time will “be like girls.” Ixil children born during O’ki may also grow up to be impotent, sterile, and “without molars.” Here effeminacy is conflated with other sexual failures as well as with immaturity in order to characterize the end of the indigenous year in terms opposed to the ideal, reproductive married state.

The ancient Maya Uayeb and modern Maya carnival. The five “lost days,” as Bricker (1973: 8–9) points out, also correspond to the period of five “nameless days” that the Yucatec Maya formerly called Uayeb, which fell at the end of the indigenous Yucatec year. Although Bishop Diego de Landa’s (1975: 135–149) lengthy sixteenth-century description of the Uayeb rites does not mention cross-dressing, it is likely that transvestites performed at those times. Bernardo de Lizana (1893: 41), writing in the early seventeenth century, mentions female impersonators in the area, and Bricker (1973) points out that gender impersonation has not been uncommon in Yucatán in recent times. In 1971, in the Yucatec town of Hocabá, for example, Carnival featured a woman who was dressed as a man; the star female impersonator, called Mariquita (Sissy), pretended to be a homosexual while making jokes about homosexual behavior (Bricker 1973: 182–183). In 1901, during Carnival in Mérida, Frederick Starr (1902: 80–82) saw an “indecent” dance in which half of the dancers were dressed as women with exaggerated breasts.25 Robert Redfield (1936: 241) mentioned that during “the annual fiesta” at Dzitas, one of two men acting like clowns was dressed as a woman, and the costumes of both were “in tatters.”

Landa’s description of the sixteenth-century Uayeb rites includes several features that have parallels in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico. Landa (1975: 143, 145, 147) mentions, for example, much dancing by old women “clothed in certain garments,” who, as we can infer from another passage in his work, were

25 For more on ritual humor, buffoonery, and ceremonial cross-dressing, see Bricker (1973: 185–187) and Taube (1989).
midwives. As discussed below, elderly midwives have an important relation to gender ambiguity among the Nahua. In addition, Landa (1975: 138–149) refers to an effigy of a god that was carried first to the home of the *principal*, or chief, where it was honored, and then, once the five unlucky days ended, to the temple, where it remained until the Uayeb of the incoming year. Folios 25 through 28 of the Maya Codex Dresden (Thompson 1972) refer to these Uayeb days, with each page depicting an anthropomorphic opossum carrying a deity on its back (Fig. 4). The four opossums are thought to represent the four Maya “year bearers”; the term refers to the four day signs that alternate in giving their names to the first day of the Mesoamerican year (Taube n.d.: 220 ff). In Codex Dresden, as in Landa’s Yucatán, the year bearers are Kan, Muluc, Ix, and Cauac, but in the present-day Quiche Maya town of Momostenango they are all referred to as Mam (B. Tedlock 1992: 89–90, 99–100). There, as among the Mam-speaking Maya of Todos Santos, each Mam year bearer is identified with a particular mountain (Oakes 1951: 71). J. Eric S. Thompson (1930: 57–58) had the impression that the Mams were “dual-sexed,” but, as we see further on, their gender is more likely ambiguous.

The figures carried by the opossum year bearers in Codex Dresden represent the patron deity of the last day of the old, outgoing year (Taube n.d.: 277–279). From Landa’s (1975: 139) description, it seems certain that they were statues made of clay. Diego López de Cogolludo (1954–55, 1: 353), however, writing in the seventeenth century, said that the Uayeb image of his time was a piece of wood dressed like a “boy” and placed on a stool; its clothes, once the ceremonies were completed, were removed and thrown onto the ground. Two centuries later, Juan Pío Perez (1843: 437) identified the Uayeb effigy as a god called Mam, who, over the course of the first four days, was gradually moved from the altar of the temple first to its floor and then to the threshold. Even though these European reports identify all of the Uayeb images as essentially male, Pío Perez associates them with an effigy referred to as Mam, who is today described as dual-gendered (meaning ambiguously gendered). As discussed be-

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26 Landa (1975: 129) states that on one festive occasion, “certain old women” were admitted to the temples. These old women were apparently the “sorceresses” who attended women in childbirth, whom he referred to in the remaining sentences of the same paragraph. Tozzer (Landa: 129, n. 597) relates the women in this passage to the old women who in his reference to old women’s roles during Pop, however, Landa (ibid.: 152) does not specifically state that they danced at that time.

27 In the Toledo district of Belize, the Mams correspond to the four world directions; there they are all called *Huítz-Hök*, “mountain-valley” (Thompson 1930: 57).

28 These passages from Cogolludo and Pío Perez were first cited by Tozzer (Landa 1975: 139, n. 646).
low, Mam is the name of a present-day bisexual, transvestite, highland Maya supernatural who, in the form of a wooden effigy sometimes addressed as “Boy,” plays a major role in the End of the Year celebrations.

*Carnival in modern Mexico.* While these accounts of the Yucatec Uayeb differ somewhat, they all emphasize that the Uayeb effigy was either moved or undressed, and sometimes both, at the end of the five unlucky days. The logic behind this appears to lie in Landa’s repeated assertion (1975: 138–139, 142, 145–146) that the purpose of the Uayeb rites was to get rid of the evil spirits that caused sickness, so that the incoming year could begin safely. When the aged Mam was removed, in other words, he took with him those dangerous forces. We see a similar pattern in Mesoamerican Carnival celebrations today. In the Otomi village of El Zapote in the Huasteca, for example, Carnival features a specially built platform, called *altar de los viejos* (“altar of the old ones”), that supports a seated *muñeco* (“doll”) made of large leaves, whose face is a black

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29 See Landa (1975: 139, 143, 147, 149). Taube (n.d.: 300) notes that the Mam figure featured in Uayeb ceremonies “seems to epitomize the evil and anti-social forces present at this time.”
mask with a white beard signifying its male gender and advanced age (Williams García 1960). Often referred to as *El Viejo,* “The Old Man,” the effigy not only represents the evil spirits who walk freely at such times, but is also said to absorb the evil that could otherwise bring future trouble. At the end of Carnival, the figure and the platform are removed, and the figure is decapitated and abandoned by the side of a road outside of town. In other places in Mesoamerica, Carnival effigies are either disassembled or burned (e.g., Reina 1966: 161; S. Lothrop 1929: 20).

In Guy Stresser-Péan’s (1959: 459) opinion, the mannequin honored during Carnival in the Huasteca “is probably . . . in part of European origin.” While Spanish-speaking mestizos in the Huasteca today sometimes make these “dolls,” the Huastec-speaking peoples do not. Indeed, present-day Carnival in Spain often involves manufacture of a crude figure made of straw or rags, which is sometimes called *Judas, Mahoma* (Mohammed), *Diablo* (Devil) or *Pelele* (Roma Riu 1980: 81, 132–134). In at least one instance, the mannequin appears dressed in ancestral clothes to emphasize that it is very old. Julio Caro Baroja (1965: 89, 106) says that Pelele clearly embodies something evil that needs to be removed from the community, apparently to “expiate its sins.” Even if Mesoamerican Carnival effigies owe much to Spain, however, it seems likely that they ultimately descend from the effigies used in Pre-Hispanic year-end ceremonies. Paul Jean Provost (n.d.) emphasizes that the Huasteca is largely separated from the heavily Hispanicized, “Latin” parts of Mesoamerica, and thus has been free to develop its own, syncretic versions of Carnival. Carnival’s function and meaning in the Otomi Huasteca have been grafted onto indigenous beliefs and customs as well as adapted to local, present-day needs. Such religious syncretism probably characterizes much of today’s rural Mesoamerica, and undoubtedly dates back to the years immediately following the conquest, when Carnival was first introduced to Mesoamerica.

**Nahua Carnival.** In Nahua communities in the Sierra de Puebla today, Carnival is again held at the end of the indigenous solar year, which occurs during *Nanahuatilih,* “the wild days,” and usually falls between mid-February and the end of March. Alan Sandstrom (1991: 288–290) writes that the celebration lasts about a week and features the appearance of a group of men representing the *mecos,* or spirits of the underworld, half of whom are dressed as women and speak in falsetto voices (Fig. 5). These raucous Nahua beings, according to Sandstrom, similarly mock people, make obscene jokes and ges-
None of the Above

voices of local carnival performers were originally intended to suggest that “the Spaniard is a homosexual.”

tures, and generally raise havoc. At the end of the festivities, the mecos retire to their underworld home, hopefully not to bother people for another year. Nanahuatili also briefly sees the mecos cleanse and purify sick children, which is another common feature of contemporary Carnival rites. Finally, with the disappearance of the mecos, it is said, the rains can return, vegetation will revive, and spring planting can soon begin. In other words, their withdrawal prepares the world for agricultural renewal and rebirth.
Nahuas associate these transvestite dancers with homosexuality, and some of the dancers are recognized homosexuals. In Nahua Ichcatepec, Veracruz, homosexuals join the carnival group called the comparsas, part of a larger group of Viejos, or “Old Ones,” that is partly made up of men dressed as obscene mestiza prostitutes. Luis Reyes García (1960: 57–58) notes that although these men appear in women’s clothes, they wear men’s sombreros on their heads—that is, they represent themselves as neither male nor female. Enzo Segre (1987: 22, 35) states that the men who impersonate obscene women during Holy Week in the Nahua town of San Miguel Tzinacapan are likewise known homosexuals; Galinier (1990: 352, n. 108) makes a similar claim for the Otomi. Since men who assume the sexual role of women are normally looked down upon, the function of these dancers appears to be that of loosing sexual deviancy in order to mock it and thus contain and remove evil before the New Year begins.

Nahua Carnival celebrations date back to shortly after the Spanish conquest in the Valley of Mexico, allowing for continuity through time. The earliest recorded Carnival celebration in Mexico City was held in February 1539. Just a few years later, however, Bishop Juan de Zumárraga canceled the city’s Corpus Christi festival because the participants were cross-dressing and “conducting themselves lasciviously in dance.” For these reasons, Carnival was severely circumscribed in the capital throughout the next two centuries, although it continued to be celebrated on its outskirts (Lopes Don 1997: 20–21). It is problematic, however, whether the cross-dressing and obscenities that so offended Zumárraga had indigenous roots, since in today’s Spain Carnival is similarly characterized by the freedom to adopt the dress and manners of the opposite sex and, as in Mexico, the sexual identity of Spanish men who dress as women at this time may be regarded as “equivocal” (Caro Baroja 1965: 89, 91). In some towns in Aragon, men dressed as women also go about suggesting “sexual liberties” (Roma Riu 1980: 98). Nonetheless, there are significant differences between Old World and Mesoamerican ritual transvestism, such as the fact that

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31 A later ban on men dressing as women during Carnival in Los Reyes Culhuacán, which today is part of Mexico City, was published in 1731 (Oehmichen 1992: 35).

From early times, Carnival in the Mexico City area has involved dancers called huehuenches or huehuetones, “old ones,” half of whom are typically men dressed as women. They appear today in those sections of the city that were urbanized only recently, where civil and ecclesiastical attempts to suppress Carnival were ineffective—e.g., Culhuacán to the south and Huixquilucan in the western suburbs (Domínguez 1962a: 102–103). For details regarding Carnival practice in these communities, see also Oehmichen (1992: 35–36). Carnival has disappeared, however, in the historic center of the city as a result of this suppression.
None of the Above

Mesoamerican women are typically far less apt to dress up as men than their Spanish counterparts. That the cross-dressing and obscenity of modern Mesoamerican Carnival predate the conquest is further suggested by Diego Durán’s (1971:295) dismay at having seen, in some mid-sixteenth-century Nahua villages, an obscene dance called the cuecuechcuicatl, “tickling dance” or “dance of the itch,” which involved men dressed as women. Unfortunately, the offended Dominican did not specify the occasions.

Pre-Hispanic Nahua End of the Year Rites: Tititl and Nemontemi

It is known that men dressed as women were featured in the rites held in Tenochtitlan and its environs during the indigenous Nahua month Tititl. The anonymous Spanish commentator of Codex Tudela (Orden 1980: 80–81), regarding folio 27, stated that twenty to thirty priests, calling themselves Tona and wearing women’s clothes, danced with the female slave who would soon be sacrificed to the “demon” Tonan, “Our Mother.” The Codex Tudela helps to interpret a depiction of a goddess, identified as Cihuacoatl, “Woman Snake,” in the cognate scene in Codex Magliabechiano (Nuttall 1978: fol. 45r). Cihuacoatl was sometimes addressed as “Our Mother.” Moreover, like the old women who danced during the Yucatec Uayeb, Cihuacoatl was a midwife. At the time of the conquest, she was the patron deity of Nahua midwives and childbearing women. According to Sahagún (1950–82, 2: 155–158), however, it was specifically Cihuacoatl’s aspect of Ilamatecuhtli, “Old Woman Lord,” that was honored during the rites of Tititl. In line with the effigies and many of the female impersonators of the present-day Carnival, then, the patron deity of Tititl was not only a midwife, but also an “Old One.”

At the top of the Codex Tudela page (Orden 1980: 80), the commentator adds the date 20 December, which coincides with the date of the winter solstice in our calendar. Since Codex Tudela was written prior to the 1582 change from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar, however, this date in reality corresponds to our 30 December. Sahagún’s (1997: 66) Primeros memoriales states that the festivities of Tititl salía (“got underway”?) on 23 December, which corresponds to our 2 January.32 It is nonetheless significant that during the period stretching from the first solar nadir, which falls on 18 November, to the winter solstice, the sun is lowest in the sky. At this time, Susan Milbrath (1980: 292) argues, it would have been perceived “as moving from a position of weakness

32 Unless otherwise indicated, all dates given in this essay refer to the current Gregorian calendar.

Caso (1971: 341) calculated that Tititl began on 30 December according to the Julian calendar, which again would place it in what is now January.
toward one of growing strength as it moves toward the zenith at the close of
the dry season.” According to Milbrath (1980: 292), at the time of contact with
the Spaniards, the rituals conducted during the Nahua month Panquetzaliztli,
which, by her calculations, began two days after the first solar nadir, celebrated
the birth of the Nahua patron god Huitzilopochtli, who in some way repre-
sented the reborn sun. If she is correct, during Tititl the sun would have been
perceived as still in its infancy or early childhood. Moreover, the end of the
indigenous Nahua year would have corresponded to the beginning of our
Gregorian year, making an eventual conflation of the two both easy and likely.

Although the Codex Tudela commentator and Sahagún both claim that
Tititl was the seventeenth, or next to last, month of the solar year, Alfonso Caso
(1967: 134) believes that it was conceptually, if not originally, the eighteenth
and thus the last month, since the succeeding month, Izcalli, symbolized re-
newal. Sahagún (1950–82, 7: 19) himself says that Tititl marked the end of cold
and frost, the beginning of mild weather, and “the time of sowing.” This may
seem odd given that today farmers in the Basin of Mexico usually do not sow
until May. For the Lake Texcoco area, however, where chinampa agriculture
allowed for continuous cultivation throughout the year, including during the
dry season (Coe 1964: 90, 95; Armillas 1971: 654), Sahagún’s identification of
Tititl as a time for planting is not unreasonable.

If Caso is right—and I (Klein 1980: 192–193) have other reasons for think-
ing that he is—it was Tititl rather than Izcalli, at least at some point in the past,
that immediately preceded the wild and dangerous five nameless days at the
end of each solar year. Pre-Hispanic and colonial-period Nahua called this
period Nemontemi. Sahagún (1950–82, 3: 35) says that the five days of
Nemontemi were regarded as evil and unlucky, and adds that during this time
Nahuas did no work. The association of cosmic cataclysm with the five un-
lucky days at the end of the year was probably widespread. Karl Taube (n.d.:
290–291), for example, cites a song in the Yucatec Maya Cantares de Dzitbalche
(Barrera Vásquez 1965), probably compiled in the eighteenth century, which
states that “these [five unlucky] days will be the end of the world.”

Since no source states that Nahua conducted public rites during Nemontemi,
any Nahua year-end rites that were held must have taken place during Tititl.
Assuming this was the case, the male priests in women’s clothes discussed by

33 Nemontemi, according to Siméon (1977: 325), means “insufficient to fulfill or com-
plete the solar year” (translation mine).
34 Taube (n.d.: 291–292) points to two passages in the Yucatec Maya Chilam Balam of
Chumayel indicating comparable expectations that the unlucky days will witness cosmic
and political catastrophe (Roys 1933: 112, 149).
the Codex Tudela commentator would have appeared at the end of the solar year. This conforms to the appearance of the transvestite mockers of present-day Carnival and year-end ceremonies in Yucatán, Guatemala, Chiapas, the Huasteca, and the Sierra de Puebla.

A depiction of the rites of Tititl appears in Codex Borbonicus (Nowotny 1974: fol. 36) in the context of the completion of a fifty-two-year cycle, or Mesoamerican “century,” which was a dangerous period, full of great fear that the world would come to an end (Fig. 6). At the time of contact with the Spaniards, this period began with the Drilling of New Fire ceremony during the Panquetzaliztli festival celebrating the birth of Huitzilopochtli, which, as we have seen, corresponded to the first solar nadir and continued through the

![Codex Borbonicus, fol. 36. Tititl, detail (after Nowotny 1974).](image)

35 On the timing of the New Fire ceremony, see Broda (1982), Krupp (1982), and Milbrath (1980: 294). The New Fire ceremony was a moveable festival timed by the midnight zenith passage of the Pleiades and, according to Milbrath and Krupp, by the solar nadir as well. Milbrath (1997: 191–195, 203; personal communication, 1999) suggests that it was also associated with the first full moon following the solar nadir, preferably during a lunar eclipse. At the time of Spanish contact, to judge by Codex Borbonicus (Nowotny 1974), this occurred during Panquetzaliztli.
five days of Nemontemi. The Codex Borbonicus scene includes a number of individuals representing the priests who, as we know from a variety of sources, dressed for the occasion as deities. Here, four of the impersonators are dressed as goddesses.\(^36\) The costumes worn by two of these, with their skeletal masks and red shifts bordered at the hem with a row of shells, match those in several colonial manuscript paintings of Cihuacoatl-Ilamatecuhtli.\(^37\) The smaller of these two figures may represent the female slave who impersonated Cihuacoatl-Ilamatecuhtli during Tititl, only to be sacrificed by having her heart excised. After the woman’s death, her body was decapitated and her costume donned by a male priest. This signaled, in Milbrath’s (1997: 196) opinion, the goddess’ “transformation into a male persona.”\(^38\) It is probably this transvestite priest who is represented by the larger of the two figures, standing on a platform decorated with skulls (Caso 1967: 129–130) (Fig. 7).

The connections between Tititl and the Maya Uayeb go beyond the shared emphasis on midwives and ritual cross-dressing. During both Tititl and the Uayeb, a large wooden object was constructed in the main precinct and then ceremonially burned. Sahagún (1950–82, 2: 156–157) describes the Nahua version as a framework of pine branches that were joined and then caulked with paper, stating that the Nahua called it a “grain bin.” Although Landa (1975: 148–149) identifies the Uayeb structure as a large “arch,” his description of it sounds more like a wooden crib with doors of the sort commonly used for food storage in Mexico today.

According to Landa, the Maya filled their ceremonial crib with bundles of sticks, which were consumed in the flames. This is significant because toward the end of every fifty-two-year cycle, Nahua bundled together and ceremonially burned fifty-two reeds representing the fifty-two years of the “century” that was coming to a close. In Codex Borbonicus (Nowotny 1974: fol. 36), just such a “year bundle,” dressed like a human corpse, awaits cremation. I would like to propose at this point that the fact that the Pre-Hispanic Nahua year bundle was anthropomorphized, together with the fact that it was ritually de-

\(^36\) Of the other impersonators of goddesses depicted in Codex Borbonicus (Nowotny 1974: fol. 36), one is dressed as the maize and fertility goddess Xilonen, while the other represents Toch, the old goddess of cotton and midwifery.

\(^37\) See, e.g., Codex Magliabechiano (Nuttall 1978: fol. 45r), its cognate Codex Tudela (Orden 1980: fol. 27r), and Codex Telleriano–Remensis (Hany 1899: fol. 6r), all of which represent Tlaloc. The patron deity in the Telleriano–Remensis scene is twice identified mistakenly by the commentator as Xochiquetzal. As Quiñones Keber (1995: 150) points out, this name in both cases has been struck out, while the ruler diadem that accompanies the figure could well refer to the teuatli (lord) in Ilamatecuhtli’s name, “Old Woman Lord.”

\(^38\) Milbrath (1997: 195) links this transformation to the disappearance of the moon during its conjunction with the sun.
None of the Above

Fig. 7 Codex Borbonicus, fol. 36 (detail). Priest impersonating Ilamatecuhtli during Tititil (after Nowotny 1974).

stroyed at the end of the cycle, relates to the colonial Yucatec Uayeb practice of creating and then discarding a wooden effigy at the end of each solar year. It is entirely possible, in other words, that the wooden and leaf Carnival effigies representing the past solar year in rural Nahua areas have descended from these anthropomorphized year bundles of sticks or reeds. As noted earlier, in many modern Mesoamerican villages, the effigies constructed to expiate communal sins during Carnival are burned, as were the year bundles.

Yet another parallel between Tititil, the Maya Uayeb, and today’s Carnival can be seen in the behavior of the Nahua priest who impersonated Cihuacoatl-Ilamatecuhtli. Following the sacrifice of the female impersonator of the goddess, the priest who assumed her costume grasped her severed head in his hand. What this man did next is very interesting. Sahagún (1950–82, 2: 156) says that

39 The form of earlier Maya year bundles is not known. Milbrath (personal communication, 1998) suggests that the so-called cross-batons glyph that seems to represent “founder” in Classic Maya script at Tikal and Copan depicts a pair of year bundles (see Schele 1992: fig. 8). Since this glyph frequently contains a small face or a pair of eyes between the bundles, these bundles may have been anthropomorphized.
he danced with the head and that, as he danced, “he kept stepping back; he raised his legs up behind him . . . And when he thus danced, it was said ‘Ilamatecuhtli backeth away.’ And they put on him a mask; it looked in two directions. It had large lips, it had huge lips; and it had big, round, protruding eyes.” Exactly what this mask looked like unfortunately remains uncertain because the masked Cihuacoatl-Ilamatecuhtli impersonator in the Codex Borbonicus scene appears to look in only one direction.40

Like the mask that looked in two directions, the backward dance movements of the Cihuacoatl-Ilamatecuhtli impersonator seem to symbolize reversal or inversion. I suspect that, like the Mam effigy that was moved from place to place and finally set in the doorway or simply undressed during the Uayeb, and like the present-day effigies that are burned or discarded at the end of Carnival, the priest who impersonated Cihuacoatl-Ilamatecuhtli had the function of absorbing and removing the contamination that had accumulated over the course of the period drawing to a close.41 John and Sarah Fought (1972: 503–505) provide a Chortí Maya text, “Exorcism of the xiximai,” that tells of a secret ceremony performed in July to purify not only a house, but also its corncrib, by removing the evil spirits, xiximai, who would otherwise use up all the food. The corncrib in this story recalls the granaries, or “arches,” that were burned during Tititl and Uayeb. Moreover, following a censing of the Chortí house and its contents, the mistress of the house, like the priest who impersonated Cihuacoatl-Ilamatecuhtli, exits walking backward, “so that,” we are told, “the xiximai in the house will go out.” The narrator adds, “They say that that woman, it is as if she were the xiximai.” Walking backward and having feet that are turned backward are common features of anthropomorphized forces of evil in many Mesoamerican cultures, including those of Nahuatl speakers (Hunt 1977: 102, 105; López Austin 1988, 1: 225; Sandstrom 1991: 252).42 Vogt (1976: 170, 176–177), for example, notes that the only Zinacantecos to dance or march

40 The next day at the conclusion of the ceremonies, boys filled net or grass bags with flowers or paper scraps and threw them at girls and women who failed to protect themselves. Sahagún (1950–82, 2: 157–158) describes this melee as a “mock fight” that, nonetheless, caused some girls to weep. Mock battles also characterized Uayeb ceremonies, as they do modern Carnival, and thus provide yet another link between Tititl and these other year-end ceremonies.

41 In former times, Guatemalans sometimes killed an old woman in order to represent and thus purge the community’s “sins.” In such cases, people sought the oldest, most decrepit woman they could find (Tomas López Medel, in Landa 1975: 217).

42 Those who die by drowning at Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala, for example, are said to be restless and dangerous; they are distinguishable from the other dead by their heads, which are turned backward. These shades also “dance backwards, they can only look backwards. They don’t look forward like people do” (O’Brien n.d.: 118–120).
None of the Above

backward are those dressed as the evil spirits, both male and female, who are
driven out during the year-end festivities.\(^{43}\)

A second dance performed during Tititl cements its link to modern year-
end ceremonies. In his *Primeros memorials*, Sahagún (1997: 66) says that Tititl
was also called *ilamatechicholohoya*, which translates as “Ilamatecuhtli’s leap.” Special
dance movements described as great leaps are characteristic of Mesoamerican
Carnival and year-end ceremonies today. At Tepoztlán, Morelos, where Nahuatl
is still spoken by some, Redfield (1930: 106–107, 110) observed the cross-
dressed male members of a Carnival group called Chinelos “leap” for hours in
a fashion “prescribed by custom” to music that, he claims, is literally called
“leaping.” Vogt (1976: 148–149) reports something similar for Zinacantan, where
men dressed as women during the year-end ceremonies “leap” about, creating
what Vogt calls a “ludicrous and unbecoming picture of masculine behavior in
women.” Sahagún (1997: 66) says that during Tititl, all of the gods performed
this leaping dance.\(^{44}\)

Sahagún (ibid.) adds that one group of these masked men “assumed the
likenesses of the Cihuateteo.” The Cihuateteo, or “Divine Women,” were the
shades of Nahua women who had died during childbirth; their patron goddess
was the archetypal old midwife, Cihuacoatl–Ilamatecuhtli. These dancers there-
fore were probably the same male priests whom the Codex Tudela commenta-
tor called Tona and described as dressed like women. Like today’s Carnival
transvestites, the Cihuateteo were regarded as “mockers of the people.” It was
feared that they would return to earth at crossroads, either at midnight or dur-
ing eclipses, to inflict illness and deformities on the living, especially children
(Sahagún 1950–82, 4: 41, 107; 6: 162–163). In Mesoamerican thought, cross-
roads appear to have represented an excessive number of paths or directions,
and as such to have symbolized lack of direction, disorder, and immorality.

It is not surprising, then, that Codex Vaticanus B (Anders 1972: fols. 78–79),

\(^{43}\) Another Chortí text collected by Fought and Fought (1972: 71–74) tells of a frightening
being named *sesimite* whose toes point backward and heels forward, for which reason he is
said to walk in reverse. I cannot help seeing in the Chortí names *xiximai* and *sesimite*
adulterations of the Nahuatl word *tzitzimitl*. The *tzitzimine* (plural of *tzitzimitl*) were the
nocturnal shades of earlier races who had been transformed into fallen stars and returned to
earth during certain periods of darkness, such as eclipses, to bring illness and physical de-
formities to the living. They were particularly feared at the very end of a 52-year cycle,
when people worried that the sun would never rise again. Cihuacoatl, the archetypal mid-
wife, was one of them; for more on Cihuacoatl’s role as a *tzitzimitl*, see Klein (2000).

\(^{44}\) Much like present-day Carnival dancers who are taken to perform at the homes of
ruling functionaries, the male priests costumed as gods during Tititl were taken to private
homes and made to dance there. One purpose, as in Carnival, may have been purificatory,
since “it was said that when the gods danced, their feet were washed” (Sahagún 1997: 66).
probably painted not far from the Valley of Mexico, shows one of the five Cihuateteo portrayed with her feet turned inward (Fig. 8). The reversed feet probably allude to the woman’s prior sexual infidelities, since Nahuas attributed a difficult pregnancy or labor to sexual misbehavior (López Austin 1988, 1: 293–308). Reversed or contorted bodies, limbs, and heads often specified sexual misconduct in colonial-period Nahua manuscript paintings. In Codex Telleriano-Remensis (Hamy 1899: fol. 11r), for example, the upper body of a weeping woman identified as Ixnextli, “Eyes Blinded with Ashes,” is twisted to face backward (Fig. 9). The commentary explains that Ixnextli weeps because she “gathered roses,” which, like blindness and the vase of excrement in her hand, was a euphemism for sexual indiscretions. In the Pre-Hispanic Codex Borgia (Nowotny 1976), some of the figures on the pages dealing with marriage prognostications appear with twisted heads and bodies. Folio 59, for ex-

Fig. 8  Codex Vaticanus B, fol. 79. Cihuateteotl (after Anders 1972).

45 Codex Borgia was probably painted in the Puebla–Tlaxcala area a century or more before the Spanish conquest, and, if not the product of Nahuatl speakers, is at least iconographically very similar to both precontact Nahua relief carvings and early colonial Nahua manuscripts such as Codex Borbonicus.
ample, represents a presumably adulterous man: despite the grasp of a woman who is probably his wife, he fondles the breast of another woman whose pose is as contorted as his (Fig. 10). Such figures not only violate the compositional symmetry that characterizes depictions of harmonious couples (Figs. 1, 2), but also, through the disarray of their bodies, graphically express the principles of moral disorder and lack of direction that were attributed by Nahuas to adulterers.

The reversed feet of the Cihuateteotl in Codex Vaticanus B (Anders 1972: fol. 79) therefore identify this dead woman as an adulteress. In Sahagún’s (1997: 122) earliest list of attributes of Nahu a deities, the only attribute that he notes for the Cihuateteo is *tetlaximaliztli,* “adultery.” It was presumably because the Cihuateteo were regarded as experienced in sexual indiscretion that, as the commentator of folio 18v in Codex Telleriano–Remensis (Hamy 1899) informs us, prostitutes and adulteresses ritually petitioned them for assistance in ridding themselves of their “sin” (Quiñones Keber 1995: 182, 265). Their compromised femininity is reflected in the belief that they had to leave their clothing behind when they relocated, after death, to the western horizon, where they took up the costumes and shields of male warriors instead. Clearly un-
happy in their predicament, they periodically returned to earth to search for their female garments and domestic implements (Klein 1993a: 47; 1994: 141; n.d.).

This explains the *maxtlatl*, or male loincloth, that hangs beneath each Cihuateteotl's skirt in Codex Vaticanus B (Anders 1972: fols. 78–79; Leeuwen–van Koppen 1990: 66; see Fig. 8). The present-day counterpart of Cihuacoatl among the Cuicatec of northern Oaxaca is an adulterous gender-shifter whose Nahuatl name is Maxtlacihuatl, “Loincloth Woman.” Eva Hunt (1977: 102–107) reports that when Maxtlacihuatl seduces a man, he becomes pregnant. The baby he bears resembles feces, which is an allusion to sodomy, according to Hunt, who observes that this goddess represents an inversion of normal female sexuality. Hunt interprets the reversed feet of the Cihuateteotl in Codex Vaticanus

The Cihuateteo were one of three closely related groups of deified women who had died in childbirth; the other two were the Ciuapipiltin, or “Princesses,” and the Mocuauquetzque, “Valiant Women.” While the Mocuauquetzque do not appear to have been hostile to the living, members of the other two groups were. For the Mocuauquetzque, wearing male garb was apparently a sign of honor (Klein 2000).

Codex Borgia (Nowotny 1976: fols. 47–48) contains a similar set of deformed Cihuacateo. None of these women, however, wears a *maxtlatl*, nor do any of them have feet that turn backward.
None of the Above

B (Anders 1972: fol. 79) as a local “visual euphemism for homosexuals,” since the Cuicatec call homosexuals “reversed walkers.” The neighboring Chinantec, on the other hand, say that Maxtlacihuatl “has only one foot,” a deformity that, as we see below, likewise symbolizes ambiguous gender (Weitlaner 1977: 138 ff, 145 ff). In the case of the Nahua dancers who represented the Cihuateteo during Tititl, then, gender ambiguity took the form of men dressed as women who were believed to dress as men.

End of the Dry Season

Maximon. We have thus been seeing provocative evidence that ambiguous gender played—and still plays—a pivotal role in Nahua rites marking the end of the indigenous year. At these times, it is the ambiguously gendered who remove the stains of the past, making it possible for time, and with it individual and agricultural life, to begin anew with a “clean slate.” But if gender ambiguity has this potential to reverse misfortune, then one might expect to find it in operation at the closing of other major temporal periods, as well. Indeed, there is good reason to think that Nahua also employed gender ambiguity to ritually facilitate the annual transition from the dry season of winter, when agricultural activities were relatively minimal, to the wet, highly agricultural season of summer.

This argument draws inspiration from ethnographic work conducted over the course of this century among Tz’utujil Maya speakers residing in the village of Santiago Atitlán in highland Guatemala. There, as elsewhere in the Guatemalan highlands, people speak of a being named Mam—the same name as that given by López de Cogolludo and Pío Pérez to the clothed wooden figure honored during the Yucatec Uayeb. Mam is actually one of several names for the important supernatural also known as Maximon. Like the colonial Yucatec Mam, the Aiteteco Mam/Maximon is represented in the form of a large (ca. four feet high) wooden effigy or “doll” dressed in a man’s clothes. In Santiago Atitlán, it is constructed of wooden sticks that are taken from a sacred tree, tied together with strings and rings, and then padded with rags and

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48 The Cuicatec today fear certain legendary women who, in addition to reversed feet, have mouths at the back of their neck. This last trope, as Hunt (1977: 102–103) tells us, must signify sodomy, since the anus is called the “mouth of the buttocks.”
49 In 1927–28, when S. Lothrop (1929: 20) was in the area, the Mam cult was shared by the Quiche and Cakchiquel, as well as other Tz’utujil communities.
50 According to Carlsen (1997: 172–173, n. 12), the Tz’utujil seldom refer to this being as Maximon, preferring to call him Mam. Carlsen thinks that the name Maximon derives from the Tz’utujil words ma (“mister”) and xim (“knotted”) and means “Mr. Knotted,” a reference to the effigy’s manner of construction.
cornhusks before being clothed and adorned with numerous colorful scarfs. One or more broad-brimmed hats crown its head, which is said to be made of a gourd placed to face backward (Mendelson 1959: 57; O’Brien n.d.: 175, 189) (Fig. 11).

The effigy’s arms and legs, which have been cut off at the ends, and this reversed head constitute an “eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth” punishment. The story relates that Maximon was created by the ancestors at the beginning of time to save the town from rampant adultery, but ran away with his powers. One of the abuses he inflicted on the Aiteteco was to frighten adulterous women so badly that their heads remained in reversed position. For this, Maximon was condemned to the same fate (Mendelson 1959: 9; O’Brien n.d.: 160–161, 175). In view of Sahagún’s description of the Nahua Cihuacoatl-Illamatecuhtli impersonator as having worn a mask with two faces—one looking forward and one looking back—it is significant that Maximon wears, on the back of his reversed gourd head, a carved wooden mask that faces forward.

Maximon is housed in the cofradía Santa Cruz, where he is tended by a male officer called the telinel, who is symbolically Maximon’s “wife” (O’Brien n.d.: 199). For decades, his effigy has been removed from the cofradía only once a year, during Holy Week, when it is publicly displayed for a period of five days ending on Good Friday. Robert Carlsen and Martín Prechtel (1991: 30) emphasize that this five-day period also marks the end of the indigenous year, the “delicate” days that provide the transition to a new year.\textsuperscript{51} Maximon therefore plays a calendrical role today that parallels the role played by the Mam effigy during the Yucatec Uayeb.

Although the Aiteteco do not celebrate Carnival during Lent, Maximon at this time resembles many of the Carnival and Holy Week effigies elsewhere in Mesoamerica in representing Judas Iscariot (Mendelson 1958: 5). Maximon appears, in fact, to have replaced a straw effigy of Judas that was formerly used during Holy Week; according to an Aiteteco informant, the Judas effigy was afterward discarded in the cemetery (Tarn and Prechtel 1997: 202). Like Carnival and Judas effigies everywhere, as well as the ancient Yucatec Mam effigy and the Nahua Illamatecuhtli impersonator, Maximon is said to represent the accumulated “filth” of the past year (Taube n.d.: 287–288). Nathaniel Tarn and Prechtel (1997: 192) state that the effigy is regarded as heavy with “all the sins which go into the Mam’s body.”

The point in the local calendar at which Maximon is publicly honored also coincides with the end of the local dry season, which, although the rains do

\textsuperscript{51} The Kekchi Maya bury an image of Mam during an “unlucky” five-day period that falls during their Easter ceremony (Taube 1989: 354).
not usually begin until April or May, closer to the first zenith passage of the sun on 18 May, symbolically ends on the day of the vernal equinox.\footnote{O’Brien (n.d.: 173–174) agrees with Carlsen and Prechtel (1991: 30) that Maximon’s public appearance theoretically occurs at the time of the vernal equinox. Both she (n.d.) and E. Lothrop (1948: 120), writing of a 1928 visit to Santiago Atitlán with her archaeologist husband, S. Lothrop, say, however, that Maximon is not assembled and presented to public view until the Tuesday before Easter. Curiously, O’Brien (n.d.: 140) claims that the New Year at Santiago Atitlán begins later, on 24 June. This would put it at the summer solstice—a placement that, in the face of other data, I find unconvincing.} According to Tarn (1984: 401), Mam is “principally the deity of the dry season,” which Carlsen and Prechtel (1991: 30) describe as a “time of death.” Since Mam is “retired” at the end of Holy Week, the wet season, the time of agricultural
rebirth, can begin. Carlsen (1997: 152) states that during Holy Week, Maximon is vital to “fueling the transition of the dry season into the wet.”53

In preparation for the Holy Week ceremonies in which Mam/Maximon is featured, a group of Aiteteco men are sent down to the coast to bring back tropical fruits that will be offered to Christ. According to Linda O’Brien (n.d.: 179–180, 187), who studied the songs sung by these men while on the road, these fruits, which are phallic in shape, are gendered male, while the bearers themselves, like the telinel who cares for Maximon, are gendered female. In the songs, the fruits address their bearers as “Mother” and “Midwife.” The men reenter the town bareheaded, wearing women’s shawls. After a period in which the fruit is censed and allowed to ripen, it is brought in procession to the municipal building where it is joined by a second procession coming from the cofradia Santa Cruz. This second procession is headed by the telinel who, like the opossum year bearers in Codex Dresden carrying the patron deities of the outgoing years on their backs, carries Mam/Maximon on his shoulders. At the municipal building, the effigy is laid among the fruit, where it remains until late afternoon.

O’Brien (n.d.: 180) claims that Maximon at this time is identified with the masculine fruit, while Carlsen (personal communication, 1996; 1997: 152) describes him as intensely hypersexual and fertilizing, “a penis,” in his words, “whose task it is to reseminate the world and hence pave the way for the coming of the rainy season” (see also Tarn and Prechtel 1997: 203–204). So sexually potent is Maximon that barren Aiteteco women used to drink the water in which Maximon’s clothes had been washed, apparently because it was believed that Maximon could help women to conceive.54 In his unbridled hypersexuality, Maximon is preceded by the aged Pre-Hispanic Maya God N, whom scholars have long identified with the ancient Mam of the Yucatec Uayeb.55 Taube (1989: 367–368) links God N to the randy old man who appears in Classic-period Maya figurines (a.d. 200–900) fondling a young woman who may represent the moon. If this genealogy is accurate, excessive sexuality

53 Since Maximon represents the point at which the dry season ends and the wet season is about to begin, he is at this time associated with the center of the world and referred to as “Lord of the Middle of Everything” (Carlsen 1997: 173, n. 13).
54 John Monaghan (personal communication, 1997) witnessed a woman visiting the cofradia Santa Cruz climb onto Maximon’s lap and simulate intercourse with him. The embarrassed telinel pulled her off but would not discuss with Monaghan the woman’s motives for her actions. It is possible that this woman hoped that Maximon’s “wild” sexuality would help her to conceive (Mendelson 1959: 59).
55 For a history and defense of this identification of God N with Mam, see Taube (1992: 92).
has long been an important aspect of both the modern and the ancient Yucatec Mam.

After lying on the floor of the municipal building for a while, the fruit is tied to a wooden framework behind the altar. At this time, Maximon is bound to a small “tree” made of a pole adorned with leafy branches, which is planted in a small chapel in the church plaza constructed solely for the purpose (Fig. 12). Tree branches are painted on the inside of the chapel, and real tree branches are tied to the post (Carlsen, personal communication, 1996). Later Maximon’s

56 For details of these events, see Mendelson (1958, 1959, 1965) and O’Brien (n.d.: 177 ff).
57 In 1928, this “tree” was not enclosed; the chapel appears to have been added later (E. Lothrop 1948: 123; S. Lothrop 1929: fig. 9). See Fig. 12 in this chapter.
effigy is removed from the “tree” and paraded through the town, where it encounters a procession bearing the church statue of the crucified Christ. It is only after this confrontation with Christ at the end of Good Friday that Maximon is unceremoniously returned to the cofradía. Formerly, the figure was quickly disassembled and its parts stored in the rafters until the following year. Around twelve years ago, however, the cofradía began reassembling the figure shortly after the conclusion of the Good Friday ceremonies, presumably so it could receive visitors and offerings throughout the coming year (Carlsen, personal communication, 1996).

The Tz’utujil notion that masculinity is produced by gender ambiguity informs Tarn and Prechtel’s (1990: 80–81; 1997: 282–286) interpretation of the role played by Maximon during Holy Week. They argue that when Maximon is first brought out of the cofradía on Wednesday of Holy Week and laid on the municipal building floor, he is understood by the Aiteteco to “eat” or “copulate with” the surrounding fruit. The fruit, according to these authors, not only is male, but also specifically symbolizes Christ, who represents the sun. At the time of the vernal equinox, the sun is seen as passing from youth to maturity, and the resurrected Christ is perceived to be “reborn” as maize on Easter Sunday. Tarn and Prechtel suggest that Christ at the beginning of Holy Week is, like Maximon, understood to be immature, feminine, and even bisexual. By sexually attacking Jesus’s femininity, Maximon draws it out, thereby bringing the sun/Christ to full masculinity at the crucifixion. This must happen because, like the Laymi of Bolivia, Aitetecos say that effeminacy must be transformed into mature masculinity in order for two people to marry and produce food and children alike (Tarn and Prechtel 1990: 81). The idea that Maximon “sodomizes” Christ at this time is supported, Tarn and Prechtel contend, by the fact that Aiteteco men who show signs of becoming priest-shamans are described as being “sodomized” by Mam.

Maximon’s hypersexuality is therefore presented not only in terms of an oversexed male but in the form of same-sex behavior, and thus bisexuality, as well. This is evident in the fact that he has a female complement in the form of a bundle, kept in the telin’s home, that contains a mask called, among other names, María Castelyan and Yamch’or, “Virgin Whore” (Carlsen 1997: 153). Carlsen says that María Castelyan represents both the promiscuous wife and the

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58 Many of the key points made by Tarn and Prechtel in the 1990 article first appeared in Tarn (1984).
59 This situation appears to contrast with that reported by Lincoln (1942: 124) for the Quiche community of Santa María Chiquimula, where the opening of a new year, with the entry of a new year bearer, is referred to as “when the Mam takes possession.”
female aspect of Maximon, who must never be brought into direct contact with the mask lest the world will end. María Castelyan’s identity as an adulteress and a prostitute recalls the adulterous Cihuateteo. During fiesta Santiago, Tz’utujil whores visit Maximon and his “whore” wife daily in their cofradía. Prostitutes in Guatemala City keep images of “their best friend” Maximon in their rooms (Tarn and Prechtel 1997: 193, 300).

The gender-ambiguous Maximon is also described as a shape-shifting trickster who can turn into a woman at will. At the beginning of the world, Maximon not only frightened adulterers and promiscuously mated with young women, but often turned into a woman in order to have sexual relations with young boys as well (Mendelson 1958: 9). In the latter case, he resembles the Nahua stereotype of the trickster and deceiver who shifts his gender signs in order to engage in same-sex relations. According to O’Brien (n.d.: 172), Maximon still turns into a woman at will so that people will not realize that he is present. According to Carlsen (1997: 26), the price of succumbing to his attractions is death.

Like the Laymi of Bolivia (Harris 1980: 90), then, the Aiteteco equate Maximon’s immaturity with sexual disorientation (Tarn 1984: 402; Tarn and Prechtel 1990: 75; 1997: 276–288). Once married, however, a person must remain faithful to one’s spouse, for extramarital sex can cause fever and madness. In Santiago Atitlán, it is Maximon who can cure these ills, no doubt because he epitomizes illegitimate sex (Tarn and Prechtel 1997: 203). His further association with nonreproductive marital sexuality is evident in his reputation for either being sterile or fathering cretins (Tarn and Prechtel 1997: 203). These traits identify him as overmature, too old to reproduce, as well. Maximon thus represents all forms of sexuality that fall outside the category of faithful, reproductive marriage. The conflation of unmarried youth, sterile old age, and ambiguous gender is apparent in Aiteteco songs that address Maximon as “old old boy, old old man,” “the boy, the girl,” and “mama, papa” (O’Brien n.d.:197, 245). Slapping Maximon on the back, the telinel calls him “pretty boy” (Tarn and Prechtel 1997: 201).

60 O’Brien (n.d.: 200) says that María Castelyan is regarded as promiscuous, and Carlsen (1997: 25–26) sees her as evidence of Maximon’s promiscuity. According to O’Brien, the telinel keeps an “image” of María Castelyan as his special guardian spirit and helper, but she does not say whether or not this image is a mask.

61 Grigsby and Cook de Leonard (1992: 127, 137), writing of the present-day Nahua community of Tepoztlán, say that the period corresponding to Tititl runs there from 20 March to 8 April and thus overlaps the end of Lent. On 19 March, the day before the period begins, there is a festival honoring San José, who is described as elderly and asexual.
It is precisely because his gender is ambiguous, then, that Maximon can remove sexual impurities and produce maturation in another entity such as Jesus. He is said to do this in his home in the underworld, which is an odorous sweatbath of sulfurous waters, where at night he “burns” people’s sins for a price (Tarn and Prechtel 1990: 78–79). The role identifies him, like the Cihuateteotl, as a punisher and a mocker, who is referred to in songs as the “laughing man” (O’Brien n.d.: 246). This ability to erase vices in turn makes him especially important to curers, who, during certain festivals, visit his cofradía to pay him homage. Whereas Cihuacoatl was the patroness of Nahua midwives, Maximon represents the first and greatest Tz’utujil shaman (O’Brien n.d.: 175, 242). This makes him a patron of midwives, as well. Since his sweatbath represents a primal womb, Maximon is thought to help to “ripen” unborn children with his heat, much as he does the young sun-child over the course of the dry season. For this reason, he is important to midwives, who call upon him, just as Nahua midwives called upon Cihuacoatl, when a woman is in labor or a child is born ill (Tarn and Prechtel 1997: 282, 302–303).

What we are seeing in this case is the need to give a name and a physical form to socially unacceptable sexual behavior. This need is felt at moments when an important time period has come to its end, necessitating the removal of those dangerous forces that have accumulated over its course in order for the next period to begin on schedule, with renewed vigor. It is precisely because the materialized being represents, and thus locates and crystallizes, those threatening forces that it is properly equipped to remove them. Since its gender blurs or vacillates between male and female, the ambiguously gendered embodies the very principles of transition and reversal. It is the ambiguous nature of Maximon’s gender identity that makes it possible for him to safely “cross over” from the stable center into the world of spirits, sickness, and death—to leave the one true path for the crossroads at the periphery, where he can aimlessly mix with the forces of the wild and lawless.62 Maximon was described to E. Michael Mendelson as a “great traveler” who traveled at night through every country (in Tarn and Prechtel 1997: 196, 203, 282).63 A Ladino midwife said that she saw him one night dressed in black and smelling of cigar and skunk. Indeed, one of Maximon’s names is Mapaar, “Lord Skunk” (Carlsen, personal commu-

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62 As Gillespie and Joyce (1998: 291) point out, in Mesoamerica the center is contrasted with the periphery, which is represented by the wilderness and represents, in turn, asocial, immoral behavior, danger, filth, and disharmony. Yet the periphery, they note, is also a place of creativity and sacred knowledge.

63 Sometime before the 1980s, E. Michael Mendelson took the name Nathaniel Tarn as his nom de plume.
Maximon is therefore a wanderer, who reeks of odors that spread in all directions, and is therefore likened to the darkness and the wind. As such, he represents lack of direction, unpredictability, and cosmic disorder. This is reflected in the fact that the priest-shamans working with Maximon are associated with the so-called enemies who, like him, represent the unknown and the unpredictable in nature and work to destroy the order of the saints.

This is surely the reason why Maximon, like the Chinantec Maxtlacihuatl, suffers from several physical deformities. In addition to the backward-turned head and cut-off arms and legs of his effigy, Maximon is said to have only four fingers on his hand and to be lame as well. The Aiteteco provide diverse accounts of how one of Maximon’s legs came to be injured (Tarn and Prechtel 1997: 102, 133). Moreover, like the Cihuateteo and the Chortí Maya sesimite, Maximon—who is believed to violate all of the sexual rules instituted by the ancestors—is said to do his work “with the feet toward the back” (Tarn and Prechtel 1990: 81–82). According to one informant, Maximon, like Cuicatec homosexuals, walks backward, as well (Tarn and Prechtel 1997: 102, 106–107, 133).

Tezcatlipoca. There are striking parallels between Maximon and the one and only Pre-Hispanic Nahua god whose masculinity was said to be in question—Tezcatlipoca, “Smoking Mirror,” also known by a host of other names, who is identified by many sixteenth-century writers as the most important Nahua deity at the time of the conquest. Like Maximon, Tezcatlipoca was characterized by a physical deformity in the form of a bad leg for, like the Chinantec “Loincloth Woman” Maxtlacihuatl, he had only one foot.

Sahagún recorded several occasions on which Tezcatlipoca was apt to be berated as a sexual deviant by individuals whose luck had turned against them. When a person’s fortunes had fallen because he had abused a slave, for example, he cried, “O Titlacauan, thou sodomite! Thou wretched sodomite! Thou hast made fun of and mocked me” (Sahagún 1950–82, 4: 35). A sick person who blamed his illness on Tezcatlipoca addressed the god thus, “O Titlacauan, O wretched sodomite! Already thou takest thy pleasure [with me]” (Sahagún 1950–82, 3: 76).

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64 According to Tarn and Prechtel (1997: 218), “Today, unusual, crippled, retarded, or eccentric individuals are still sometimes granted miraculous powers.”


66 The Spanish translation uses the word *puto* for “sodomite” (Sahagún 1977, 1: 277; 3: 2).
While it would be easy to dismiss these as conventional insults rather than valid indicators of the god’s gender or sexual preference, there is further evidence that Tezcatlipoca’s gender was ambiguous. The Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas (García Icazbalceta 1891: 231, 233) states that Tezcatlipoca was the first of the Five Suns, presiding over the cosmic era in which giants were said to have lived on earth. Juan de Torquemada (1975, 1: 34–35) claims that these giants committed great sins, especially those “against nature,” for which they were burned by a fire that came from heaven. Nahuas feared that one of these giants would return as “the disguise, the transformation, of the demon Tezcatlipoca with all of which he maketh sport of men,” presumably because Tezcatlipoca was the leader of these deviants (Sahagún 1950–82, 4: 35). Torquemada (1975, 2: 393) says further that sodomy was long ago introduced into Central Mexico by a god named Chin, who “committed the nefarious sin with another demon in order to demonstrate to the people how it was done.” Chin is one of the names provided by Bartolomé de las Casas (1909: 627) for the god who, he says, introduced sodomy to the Maya; one of this god’s other names was Cavil. Significantly, K’awil is the name of the Pre-Hispanic Maya deity also known as God K, whose left foot is replaced by a serpent in Classic Maya art (Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993: 46; Stuart 1987). God K, the first Maya shaman and a sorcerer, is thought by many to be a Maya precursor of the Nahua Tezcatlipoca (Coe 1972: 5 ff; 1973: 116; Spero 1991; cf. Taube 1992: 79).
Tezcatlipoca’s gender ambiguity is additionally evident in numerous mythohistorical accounts of the Toltec peoples who during the Early Postclassic period controlled Central Mexico from their capital, Tollan. These accounts agree that the man–god Quetzalcoatl ruled the city in peace until he was tricked into disgracing himself by a great sorcerer named Tezcatlipoca or Titlacauan. Alva Ixtlixochitl (1975–77, 1: 277) says that the first sign of trouble came from a priest in Cholula who broke his vow of chastity, a sin invented by two brothers who were great nigromantici (practitioners of black magic), the elder being Tezcatlipoca. These two proceeded to talk everybody into “great sins and ugly and abominable things.” In other stories, Tezcatlipoca changed himself into a woman to seduce his enemy.\(^{70}\) His deceit may explain why, in addition to being called Yaotl, “Enemy,” the god was addressed as Necoc Yaotl, “Enemy on Both Sides.”\(^{71}\) Both names recall Maximon’s identification with the Aiteteco “enemies.” Like Maximon, then, Tezcatlipoca was not just a trickster, a sorcerer, and a sodomite—he was also a shape-shifting transsexual.\(^{72}\) In terms of the bipolar opposition of male versus female, Tezcatlipoca was none of the above.

**Toxcatl.** Tezcatlipoca was honored during the month fest of Toxcatl, which, according to Durán (1971: 100, 426), began on 19 or 20 May in the Julian calendar. Milbrath (1980: 292; personal communication, 1998), however, has determined that Toxcatl ran from 7 May to 27 May, pointing out that it fell exactly six months after Panquetzaliztli.\(^{73}\) If Milbrath is right, Toxcatl encompassed the month in which the third and last of whom was K’awil. This account of the so-called Palenque Triad is often compared to the Quiche Popol Vuh (D. Tedlock 1985: 159–160), which tells how, before the first humans were created, twin boys—who seem to represent the first two members of the Triad—had ascended to heaven as the sun and moon.

\(^{70}\) For example, the Anales de Cuauhtitlan tells of two sorcerers, one of them named Tezcatlipoca, who deceived the Toltec ruler Huemac by changing themselves into women and seducing him; the subterfuge successfully brought an end to Huemac’s reign (Bierhorst 1992: 38).

\(^{71}\) In the story mentioned above, in note 70, the second brother’s name was Yaotl.

\(^{72}\) As such, Maximon precedes present-day brujos and “witches,” who throughout Mexico are said to be able to change their sex at will (e.g., Blaffer 1972: 14; Galinier 1990: 642; Kelly 1965: 51; Lipp 1991: 161).

Milbrath (1995: 59–60) interprets a contorted female figure in Codex Borgia (Nowotny 1976: fol. 60) as a hermaphrodite because it has what she reads as two heads, one male, one female. She identifies the body and the first head with the goddess Xochiquetzal and the second head as that of the male deity Tepeyollotl, an aspect of Tezcatlipoca. The considerably smaller “second head” looks to me, however, like a mask of the sort said to have been worn on the back of the head by the Nahua impersonator of the goddess Cihuacoatl-Illamatecuehtli during Tititl.

\(^{73}\) Durán (1971: 426) claims that Toxcatl usually coincided with Corpus Christi, whereas P. Carrasco (1976: 275), following Caso’s correlation, thinks that it began on 5 May.
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passed 18 May, the date of the first zenith passage of the sun in Central Mexico. In this region, this day marked the end of the dry season, just as Semana Santa does at Santiago Atitlán. Indeed, the name Toxcatl is generally translated as “Something Dry” (Heyden 1991). For this reason, Tezcatlipoca was personally beseeched for rain. The god was also blamed for droughts, famine, plagues, and, like Maximon, sterility (Durán 1971: 110). It is likely that, like the Aiteteco, the Nahua perceived the young sun as maturing into an adult man at this time.

There is no mention of transvestites having participated in the rites of Toxcatl. Sahagún (1950–82, 2: 75), however, states that the women who danced at this time “were leaping about” and that it was said of them and the (male) offering priests who danced with them that “they make the Toxcatl leap.” The leaping dances movements recall descriptions of the dances performed by masked participants during Titizen as well as during modern Carnival, where many dancers were and are dressed as women. In addition, Sahagún (1950–82, 2: 76) says specifically that the two men who led the dancing at this time “danced in the fashion of women.”

Following the sacrifice of the male slave who had been chosen to represent Tezcatlipoca for the entire year preceding the ceremonies, the Nahua sacrificed another youth who shared several of Tezcatlipoca’s other names. Although the Tezcatlipoca impersonator was “married” to, and allowed to sleep with, four slave women for twenty days prior to his death, the other young man who was sacrificed is described by Sahagún (1950–82, 2: 76) as “he who had lived together with Titlacauan” (that is, Tezcatlipoca). This suggests that up until his death the Tezcatlipoca impersonator participated in both hetero- and homosexual relations—in other words, that he was bisexual. In Nahua legends, as we have seen, Tezcatlipoca is often accompanied by a male friend or a younger brother. In Torquemada’s (1975, 2: 393) rendition of the introduction of male sodomy, the “other demon” mounted by the god “Chin” [Tezcatlipoca] was presumably this male sidekick.

I have long marveled, moreover, at the insistence on physical perfection required of the youth who was selected to give human form to Tezcatlipoca for the year prior to his sacrifice during Toxcatl (Sahagún 1950–82, 2: 66–69) (Fig. 13). This man, Sahagún tells us—in a litany that spans more than a page of the

74 Williams García (1960) has linked Tezcatlipoca’s cult to present-day Carnival, but his arguments differ considerably from mine. A more commonly accepted model is that proposed by Boilès (1971: 142–149), who argues that Carnival rites have evolved out of the Pre-Hispanic rites of the month Tlacaxipehualiztli, “Flaying of Men,” which was dedicated to the god Xipe Totec, “Our Lord the Flayer.” Although Tlacaxipehualiztli took place in the spring, I see little resemblance between it and Carnival.
Florentine Codex—had to be, among many other things, slender, not too tall, “like something smoothed, like a tomato, like a pebble.” His hair had to be straight and long, falling to his loins like a woman’s, and his features and skin without blemish. While this description arguably applies to the ideal Nahua man, it impresses me as effeminate.75

Moreover, an important part of the Toccatl ceremony involved a flute and a whistle, which the surrogate was required to play wherever he went (Sahagún 1950–82, 2:68). As he ascended the stairs of the pyramid to meet his fate on the

75 We know little about Nahua views on male beauty. Nahua gender ideology, however, stressed the military virtues of bravery and endurance for both men and women; daughters of noble families, for example, were urged to metaphorically “assume the shield like the good soldiers” (i.e., conduct themselves well) and to “suffer manfully” while giving birth (Klein 1994: 139–140; Sahagún 1950–82, 4:9, 79; 6, 162–164). Since Nahua presumably valued muscular strength and “toughness” in young men of military age, it seems unlikely to me that Sahagún’s description of the beautiful Toccatl impersonator matches the appearance of the ideal Nahua male.
sacrificial stone, the beautiful impersonator broke his instruments, scattering their parts behind him (Fig. 14). Since Galinier (1984: 54) says that the Otomi associate the whistle and the flute with the penis, these broken wind instruments may have symbolized Tezcatlipoca’s “castration” and thus his feminization. The Otomi word for penis, *pita*, is also used to refer to the flute and the whistle. In Nahuatl, the penis is described as *pitzoaac*, “thin,” a word derived from the root *pitz*, which means “to huff and puff with anger, to blow on something, to play a wind instrument” (Karttunen 1992: 197; Sahagún 1950–82, 10: 39). Two Nahuatl words for flute, *uilacapitzli* and *tlapitzalli*, contain this root (Molina 1970: 63v). Today, in Mexico, the Spanish word for pipe, whistle, or flute, *pito*, is also a vulgar euphemism for the penis (Eulogio Guzman, personal communication, 1997).

Each of the four slave women “married” to the Tezcatlipoca impersonator before his sacrifice personified a goddess. As Yolotl González Torres (1995: 47–48, 52) points out, Tezcatlipoca is the only male deity in Nahua mythology.
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who has sexual relations with goddesses. He is also the only god who remains without a permanent female consort. This would seem to testify to Tezcatlipoca’s hyperheterosexuality; indeed, González Torres describes him a great “seductor.” At the same time, however, González Torres recognizes Tezcatlipoca’s androgynous nature, which, she suggests, signifies a symbolic return to the “chaos of undifferentiated unity that preceded the creation.” One is reminded of the Laymi and Aiteteco conflation of bi- and homosexuality in their opposition to the ideal married state. What seems to have mattered most to the Nahua is that Tezcatlipoca’s sexuality—whether it be heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual—was immature, asocial, and unpredictable. Tezcatlipoca, like Maximon, represented the sexual behavior that was fundamentally opposite to that of the ideal, married man.

It was no doubt precisely because Tezcatlipoca was hyper- and bisexual that people believed that he, like Cihuacoatl and Maximon, could cure certain kinds of sickness. Mothers took their sick children to Tezcatlipoca’s temple and pledged them to future service in the temple if the god healed them (Durán 1971: 110). Like Maximon, Tezcatlipoca seems also to have specialized in inducing and curing diseases caused by sexual improprieties. Durán (1971: 97, 99) reports that every four years, during Toxcatl, errant people who feared that the god, in his wrath, would punish them with an illness sought his pardon. As among the Cihuateteo and the Aiteteco followers of Maximon, these transgressions included adulterers; other sexual deviants presumably did the same (Durán 1971: 97; Sahagún 1950–82, 3: 11–12). The maladies that these peti-

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76 This was probably due to the fact that many illnesses, from the time the child was a fetus in the womb until he or she became sexually active, were attributed to the sexual peccadillos of the parents. Once the child began in turn to engage in sexual practices, many health problems that might arise were attributed to his or her own carnal vices (López Austin 1988, 1: 222, 259–260, 262, 306).

77 Their fear would have been fueled by the fact that Tezcatlipoca was said to “taketh pleasure, delighteth in the castigation” (Sahagún 1950–82, 6: 2). In the Borgia group manuscripts, Tezcatlipoca appears in his manifestation of the blindfolded god of punishment, Izquimilli, wielding an axe to disembowel small, naked individuals who have presumably committed a sexual offense (Klein 1993b: 24–25). In Classic Maya art, the axe wielded by Tezcatlipoca’s progenitor, K’awil, is a symbol not only of lightning but also of sacrifice (Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993: 200). A frightening Nahua apparition called the Night Axe was said to be a manifestation of Tezcatlipoca (Sahagún 1950–82, 3: 11–12). It looked like a headless man with the chest and belly split open, the two sides noisily opening and closing as it wandered at night.

78 A confession of adultery initially addressed to Tezcatlipoca as “The Lord of the Near, of the Nigh” switches its target to the “Goddess of Filth,” Tlazolteotl (Sahagún 1950–82, 6: 29–34). Since Tlazolteotl, originally a Huastec goddess who presided over illicit sex, did not have a cult or a temple in the religious precinct of the capital, it may be that, for the state, Tezcatlipoca was the chief confessor and punisher of sexual improprieties.
tioners hoped to avert included, in addition to problems with legs and feet, several anal and genital disorders attributed to sexual misbehavior. One of these was skin pustules, which were probably caused by venereal disease and were attributed, among other vices, to sodomy (Klein 1993b: 23; Sahagún 1950–82, 1: 31). 79

That Maximon is related to Tezcatlipoca is further suggested by numerous other mutual traits and habits. As Tepeyollotl, “Heart of the Mountain,” Tezcatlipoca parallels the yearbearing Mams of Todos Santos, each of whom, as we have seen, is identified with a mountain. 80 Like Mam/Maximon, Tezcatlipoca was a wanderer. David Carrasco (1991: 35 ff) notes that Tezcatlipoca’s youthful impersonator wandered randomly through the capital during the year prior to being sacrificed. Like Maximon, too, Tezcatlipoca appeared in black, usually at night or in the darkness of the shadows. The god was said, in fact, to be invisible, like a shadow or the wind, and thus able to see and penetrate everything; his “abode was everywhere—in the land of the dead, on earth, [and] in heaven” (Sahagún 1950–82, 1: 5). 81 Accordingly, like Maximon, Tezcatlipoca was associated with substances and odors that pervaded space. The most obvious of these was smoke, which formed part of the deity’s name. 82

79 Other illnesses included leprosy, swollen knees, cancers, “the itch,” hemorrhoids, and “humors of the feet” (Sahagún 1950–82, 3: 11).

80 Taube (1992: 94) notes that the Maya God N was likewise identified with mountains. Moreover, colonial authors often report that there were four Tezcatlipocas, just as there were four year-bearing Mams.


82 The pictograph for the name Tezcatlipoca, a smoking mirror, often replaces the god’s left foot or appears at his temple as part of his headdress. Ortiz de Montellano (1990: 138–40) informs us that for the Nahua, as for the Maya, smoke, like all odors, bore moral connotations and was thought to cause or cure disease. A Nahua penitent, for this reason, referred to his vices as his “stench” and his “rottenness,” while smoke was a metaphor for the odorous gases that emanated from bodily orifices, especially the anus, locus of excrement and sodomitic pleasure (Hunt 1977: 103; Sahagún 1950–82, 6: 29). Sahagún’s (1950–82, 10: 22) informants described the anus (tzoiotl) as “smoky.”

Dead bodies smell too, however. The name of the Yucatec Maya death god was Cizin, “Stench” (Thompson 1970: 302). Cizin burned the souls of the dead on the mouth and anus, perhaps in the belief that the smoke could prevent the spread of the diseases that were borne by the odors released by the corpse. Not surprisingly, there is a Nahuah tale that has Tezcatlipoca tricking the Toltecs by turning into an odorous cadaver whom the Toltecs tried unsuccessfully to remove: “Verily it terrified one as it stank; verily it wounded the head. And wheresoever the wind carried the stench, then the common folk died” (Sahagún 1950–82, 3: 27–28). Sahagún’s illustration of the event is relatively benign, but the illustrator of a different version of the story in Codex Vaticanus A (fol. 11) shows a gaping wound in the corpse’s abdomen, indicating that it has been disemboweled. Since disembowelment,
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the skunk; in fact, one name for Tezcatlipoca, Tlacauepan, seems to be derived from *tlacaua*, “master of slaves,” and *epa*, from *epatl*, “putrid” or “skunk” (Corona Núñez 1964–67, 3: 32). Just as Maximon is said to appear reeking of skunk, the skunk was one of the omens of Tezcatlipoca. When the skunk emitted its foul odor, people said, “Tezcatlipoca breaketh wind” (Sahagún 1950–82, 5: 171).83

Not all of the god’s odors were unpleasant, however. The Toxcatl impersonator went about for a year smelling flowers, while, during a famine Tezcatlipoca, in another story of his trickery, assumed the form of a little old woman toasting maize, which “spread its fragrance to the world over.” The starving Toltecs migrated to the source of this delicious smell, where the treacherous transgendered god promptly slew them (Sahagún 1950–82, 5: 171).84 Such pleasant smells, it is clear from the sources, represented prosperity and wealth, which, like odors, were tempting, potentially dangerous, and always fleeting. Tezcatlipoca, like Maximon, was therefore arbitrary Fate; one of his names was Moyocoyatzin, “Capricious One” (Sahagún 1950–82, 3: 33; Sullivan 1974: 86). It was for this reason that he was honored by royal families; only he could determine whether those in power would keep or lose that power, thereby having to dress in rags.85

The newly installed Nahua ruler was told that “our lord, the lord of the near, of the nigh, is made to laugh. He is arbitrary, he is capricious, he mocketh. He willeth in the manner he desireth. He is placing us in the palm of his hand; he

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83 The Nahua said that if one chased a skunk, it, like the god, “mocked and gibed.” The odor, like smoke, “penetrated one . . . [it] was spread all over the area; it extended all over the region. It reacheth everywhere, and spread on people” (Sahagún 1950–82, 5: 171). See also Sahagún’s (1950–82, 11: 13–14) definition of the skunk as one whose stench “is spread all over the land; it pervades the whole countryside.” It was believed that if the spray got in one’s eyes, it would cause blindness.

84 Flowers also connoted illicit sexuality (Heyden 1983: 107–108). They were identified in particular with the fertility goddess Xochiquetzal, “Precious Flower,” who was a patroness of adulterers and a mother of twins. Codex Magliabechiano states that it was from Xochiquetzal’s sexual member that flowers were born (Nuttall 1978: fol. 61v). In one myth of the creation, Xochiquetzal is said to have sinned against her husband, the rain god Tlaloc, by stripping the petals from his flowers (Anderson 1982: 45). A woman born on the day 1 Flower, moreover, might be afflicted with piles and infections sent by Xochiquetzal (Ortiz de Montellano 1990: 133–34). Some of these infections, which affected the genitals, were acquired through sexual vices, but many were contracted by simply smelling or stepping over certain flowers (Sahagún 1950–82, 5: 183).

85 Of these unfortunates, it was said, “Poverty, misery, uselessness prevail. Destitute are they whose tatters hang from their necks, their hips. There the wind cometh, there it carrieth them off, there it whippeth them about, there it taketh them away. They escape nowhere” (Sahagún 1950–82, 6: 35, cf. 18).
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is making us round. We roll; we become as pellets. He is casting us from side to side. We make him laugh. He is making a mockery of us” (Sahagún 1950–82, 6: 51). Unpredictably rolling people in any and every direction, creating chaos where there had been calm and order, Tezcatlipoca joins Maximon and the transvestite clowns of Carnival when he is addressed as Moquequeloa, “The Mocker” (Sahagún 1950–82, 6: 14, n. 16).

Frightened petitioners therefore left offerings of fir branches at Tezcatlipoca’s “mound” or “watching place,” which, like the shrines to the adulterous Cihuateteo, was located at a crossroads (Sahagún 1950–82, 3: 12). This was done, we are told, on the last five days of every month, a period that, like the endings of all temporal cycles, was clearly fraught with danger. These chaotic places were associated with sexual immaturity, as a passage in the Tulal manuscript testifies: “Rather than be mothering, rather than be fathering, instead at the crossroads I scatter ash, I scatter seed. Hooklessly I father children, I mother children” (Maxwell and Hanson 1992: 175). The initial mention of mothering and fathering here appears to refer to proper parenting within the matrimonial state, and thus to mature, marital sexual behavior. To “heedlessly” father and mother children, on the other hand, means to engage in illicit philandering outside of marriage—behavior that is immature and socially irresponsible.

The Huichol and the Tamales de Maiz Crudo ceremony. In order to lend further support to my argument that gender ambiguity was used to mark the end of the Nahua dry season, I now turn to a modern Huichol ceremony that Carl Lumholtz (1987, 2: 28) describes as “the greatest feast of the year.” The Huichol, who live in western Mexico in the modern state of Nayarit, speak an Uto-Aztecan language related to Nahuatl. Perhaps due to a distant mutual ancestry, their beliefs and customs often parallel those of the Nahua.

Lumholtz (1987, 2: 28), who observed this feast at San José in the 1890s, called it the Tamales de Maiz Crudo, or “eating cakes of unhulled corn,” ceremony. Although there was no pole dance at the ceremony witnessed by Lumholtz (1987, 2: 46), he was told that in the southeastern part of the country

86 If a man had taken a captive who then managed to escape, he chastised the god thus, “Thou sodomite, O Titlacauan! O that this had likewise befallen thee! Be assured that thou hast given me a captive only to make sport of me” (Sahagún 1950–82, 4: 35).

87 Under the name Yaotl, “Enemy,” the god advised the early inhabitants of Cuauhtitan not to become arrogant and proud, for, he warned, “If you people become proud, I will mock you, destroy you, the way I mocked [the ruler] Maxtla, who lived at Toltecatepec, who had two daughters, Quetzalquen and Quetzalxilotl, whom he kept in a jeweled cage. I got them pregnant with twins and they gave birth to two creatures in the form of opossums” (Bierhorst 1992: 41).
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Tamales de Maiz Crudo rites include a pole dance in honor of the sun that is performed by men dressed like women. Tall poles, like cross-dressing, often play an important role in Nahua and Otomi carnivals, as well. Like the present-day Nahua Carnival, the Huichol Tamales de Maiz Crudo festival was held for the people of the underworld. Moreover, its pole dance involved jumping and backward steps reminiscent of transvestite dances during Carnival and Tititl. The leader of the Huichol pole dances distinguished himself, according to Lumholtz (1987, 2: 35), “by executing a good deal of lively backward kicking.”

Lumholtz does not mention the time of year at which this ceremony took place, but Konrad Theodore Preuss (in Furst 1996: 122–124), in the course of his travels among the Huichols between 1905 and 1907, observed a Tamales de Maiz Crudo ceremony that was held in June. He notes that it was followed closely by a sowing ritual, which was the last ceremony of the year. At that time—which correlates with the summer solstice—the dry season in Nayarit ended, according to Preuss, and the rainy season began. This also marked the beginning of the Huichol new year, as manifested by the sprouting maize. During the Tamales de Maiz Crudo ceremony, Preuss (in Furst 1996: 132–133) witnessed the local temple officers, all dressed as women, each grab a sash suspended from a pole that “reaches to the sky.” As they proceeded to dance, an old man ran around with his penis exposed and simulated sexual intercourse with them (see also Zingg 1938: xxxiv).

88 Otomi communities in Hidalgo and Veracruz, for example, erect a tall pole for Carnival and tie the effigy to its base. Representing the center of the world, the pole is used for the Volador ceremony, which, according to Galinier (1990: 383–84), retains its traditional meaning in this remote area. The performers who descend from the pole with ropes symbolize the fall and expiation of “devils,” or evil, while the dancer who remains on the top of the pole represents Christ in ascension (Galinier 1990: 394–395). In the mixed Nahua and Otomi village of Los Flores, Veracruz, a “doll” is placed at the foot of a Volador pole during Carnival; it is later taken to the captain’s home, where it purifies and then shares a meal with him and his family. Costumed men dressed as “ladies” dance with the “devil” before the effigy is finally discarded by the side of a road (Williams García 1960: 44). For more on ceremonial poles, see Redfield (1936).

89 Zingg (1938: xxxv–xxxvii, 660), who visited the area later, in the 1930s, never got to see the Tamales de Maiz Crudo ceremony and the pole dance because the tradition had died out by the time he arrived in Huichol country. He assumed that it was part of a separate temple dedication ceremony that had followed the First Fruits ceremony, although he did not say exactly when the First Fruits ceremony was held. There are striking similarities, however, between the First Fruits ceremony that Zingg (1938: 482–502) witnessed in 1934 and the Tamales de Maiz Crudo ceremony described by Lumholtz (1987). For example, both describe their ceremony as an appeal to the sun-father, in Zingg’s case to prevent smallpox. Also common to both is an emphasis on the ritual consumption of tamales.
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End of the Wet Season

If Nahuas employed gender ambiguity at the end of the dry season in order to prepare the way for a fruitful wet season, then it is logical to suspect that gender ambiguity also played a role during the transition from the wet to the dry season. At this time, as the agricultural season came to a close in most parts of Mesoamerica, hunting and warfare gained tremendously in importance (Durán 1971: 145–148, 455–456; Sahagún 1950–82, 2: 25–26, 134–140). According to Ruben Reina (1967: 325), the rainy season in the Central Mexican highlands comes to a close at the end of October, a month or more after the first harvest of fruits. Milbrath’s identification of the first day of Panquetzaliztli as 22 November places the first solar nadir, which occurs on 20 November, on the last day of the month Quecholli. This may explain why the rites of Quecholli, which featured the manufacture of vast numbers of arrows, were primarily dedicated to the hunting god Mixcoatl (also known as Camaxtle) and to the hunt. It also fits well with the Tovar Calendar statement that during Quecholli “the captains who had been idle on account of there being no war raised their banners and performed deeds worthy of their persons” (Kubler and Gibson 1951: 32). At this time, the sun was presumably perceived as greatly aged and very weak, in need of immediate regeneration or rebirth.

If Quecholli did indeed celebrate the end of the wet season and preparations for the dry season, it is worth noting Torquemada’s (1975, 2: 299) statement that, in the course of the rites of Quecholli, there appeared, in addition to “public, indecent women” who were dressed for war, what he calls “the effeminate men, [who were] womanly, in the habit and dress of a woman.” While Torquemada notes that the “public women,” who were of the sort that followed warriors into battle, were sacrificed, he does not say the same of the “effeminate.” Of them he says only that they were “very abject and of little value” because they stayed with the women and did women’s work (translations mine).

It is impossible to know exactly who these male transvestites might have been. No other text concerning Quecholli mentions them. Torquemada’s

90 Tichy (1981: 234) argues that the indigenous Nahuatl year Quecholli, named after a brightly colored bird, began on the next to last day of October and ended on 18 November. Carrasco (1976: 276) calculated earlier that the first day of Quecholli was 1 November, but Tichy has modified Carrasco’s schema.

91 These “public women” were known as maqui, a name that Torquemada (1975, 2: 299) translates as “gossips,” but which may relate to the words maquiza, maquizani, and maquixtia, which refer to fleeing danger and seeking refuge (Siméon 1977: 256).

92 An alternative explanation of this reference is that the Quecholli transvestites were temple “berdache” who, willingly or by force, had given up male dress and occupations to
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sources, however, may have been describing priests who, as we saw in the case of Tititl, sometimes appeared at ceremonies dressed as deities, both male and female. Although such an appearance is not included in descriptions of the regular events of Quecholli, it is reported for the feast of Atamalqualiztli, which was held every eight years and often fell during Quecholli (Sahagún 1997: 68). It is also documented for the Drilling of New Fire ceremony. Johanna Broda (1982: 134) argues that due to a combination of circumstances, the New Fire ceremony may at one time have fallen during the last days of Quecholli rather than during Panquetzaliztli. For the New Fire ceremony, priests, “arrayed in and wearing the garb of the gods,” proceeded from the main temple in the capital to the hill of Huixactlan, where New Fire was drilled (Sahagún 1950–82, 7: 27). In the Codex Borbonicus depiction of this event (Nowotny 1974: fol. 34), we see clearly that some of the impersonated deities were female.

There are scattered reports of other Mesoamerican communities featuring cross-dressing in rites that probably took place at the end of the wet season. Thompson (1930: 103), for example, mentions a “chorus” of men dressed as women who participated in the deer dance at San Antonio, in what is now Belize. He thinks that the performance was a hunting play aimed at ensuring a good hunt, and notes that in Landa’s day, in Yucatán, it occurred on 7 Zip, which corresponded to 1 September. According to Landa (1975: 4), the Yucatec wet season in his day came to a close at the end of September. Landa’s de-

perform womanly duties, possibly including sexual favors to other men, in the temples. Trelaxler (1995: 103–104) notes that both Pedro de Gante (Ghent 1954) and Bernal Díaz del Castillo (1968, 1: 162) claimed that such individuals lived and worked in the temples in Tenochtitlan. Gante’s credibility has to be questioned in this matter, however, since in the same paragraph he makes the ludicrous claim that Nahua priests survived solely on the blood of babies sacrificed for the purpose. Motolinía (1971: 321), moreover, later denied categorically that there was “sodomy” in or even near the capital. Nonetheless, it is possible that it was a group of temple transvestites who participated in the rites of Quecholli.

93 S. Lothrop (1929: 5) witnessed a Quiche “snake dance” in which half of the maskers dressed as women and danced with those who were dressed as men. In one town, one of the male dancers simulated the rape of one of the “females,” invoking much laughter. Nonetheless, Lothrop felt that the dance had a serious purpose and that it may have been a fertility ceremony. He compared it to the Pre-Hispanic Nahua Atamalqualiztli ceremony held every 8 years, in which snakes also played a role. The purpose of Atamalqualiztli was to give the maize a deserved “rest” and thus “revive” it (Sahagún 1950–82, 2: 177–178). Atamalqualiztli, however, was held in the late summer or the fall, while Lothrop observed the Quiche ceremony during the winter.

94 A deer sacrifice was an important component of Carnival around Ixhuatlán de Madero, in the Sierra de Puebla. The deer, according to Galinier (1990: 371), is one of the principal incarnations of El Señor del Mundo; after its death, it is implored to remove todo el mal (“all the bad”) from everyone in the community.

95 This may seem odd given that today September is normally the month of the heaviest
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scription (1975: 156) of the sixteenth-century deer dance makes no mention of cross-dressed performers, but it does mention a tall pole that was set up at the end of the ceremony.

End of the Lunar Cycle

The Huastecs say that the moon goddess “may be a man transformed into a woman” (Stresser-Péan 1952–53: 231). Today, as the moon changes its form over the course of a month, it is widely believed not only to age and die like the sun, but to change its gender, as well. Among the Quiche, the waxing moon is said to have been reborn, and thus is called “little moon” or “baby moon.” As it grows, the moon is seen to “mature” and is addressed in prayers as “Our Mother.” Significantly, on the one night that the Quiche moon is completely full, it takes on a fully male aspect. As it immediately begins to wane, however, it resumes its essentially female gender. At this time it is addressed as “Our Grandmother.” Finally as, the waning moon draws ever nearer the sun, it is said to “dry up,” eventually to be “buried” as it disappears in conjunction (B. Tedlock 1992: 182–185).

Like many Mesoamericans today, the Zoque living in Chiapas believe that the development and gender of a fetus are directly related to the moon’s phases, with the first (waxing) phase being associated with femininity (Báez-Jorge 1988: 246). Certain points in the lunar cycle are associated with ambiguous gender, as well. The Pokomam Maya at Chimaltenango, for example, say that a girl born face-down during a full moon—the ideal condition for a male birth—will grow up to be “as strong as a man” (Reina 1966: 242). According to Barbara Tedlock (1992: 184), the Quiche of Momostenango believe that “babies conceived on the night of a full moon, especially during a partial eclipse, will become either twins or transsexuals.” These “ambiguous babies,” she adds, “are said to at first change back and forth rapidly (every three or four days) from male to female,

rainfall in the area (Milbrath, personal communication, 1998). It is possible, however, that the timing of the change of seasons has shifted somewhat over the past 400 years.


97 See also Neuenswander (1981: 143) on the Achi Maya, who similarly described the moon in conjunction as buried, dried up, and “finished.” Some Mesoamerican communities today believe that the moon has both a male and a female aspect, only one of which is responsible for menstruation (Báez-Jorge 1988: 259; López Austin 1994: 131).

98 A similar belief obtains among the Tewa Pueblo Indians of the North American Southwest, where the kuido, an androgynous male who may be homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, or trisexual, is said to come into being because his genitals were exposed to the full moon when he was an infant (Jacobs and Cromwell 1992: 55–56).
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and female to male. Later they change their behavior and gender identification more slowly, eventually alternating between female and male behavior, dress, and identification every three or four years” (ibid.).

The notion of an aging moon dates back at least to the conquest, since Sahagún (1950–82, 7: 40) reports that Nahua believed the moon to die as it disappeared in conjunction. Milbrath (1995, 1996a, 1996b, 1997) has discussed Nahua perceptions of the moon as aging as it progressed through its cycle, and has also pointed out that certain phases of the moon were represented by Nahua goddesses temporarily transformed into males. In Nahua art, Milbrath notes, these goddesses often wear men’s loincloths, while in Nahua calendrical rites, the skin and clothing of sacrificed women who had impersonated these goddesses were subsequently donned by male priests.

For Nahua as for the Tootonacs, however, the principal representative of the moon at the time of contact with the Spaniards was a bisexual male. In the sixteenth-century sources, his name is given as Tecxitpectatl, “Sea Shell Lord,” a reference to the conch shell that often appears with him in colonial Nahua manuscript paintings. As Milbrath has noted, the conch shell is a metaphor for a woman’s womb. The fact that the Nahua moon god had an effeminate aspect is made clear in the Leyenda de los soles (Bierhorst 1992: 148), where it is related that during the creation, while the pauper Nanahuatl prepared to become the sun, the moon—whose name is given here as 4 Flint—sang and danced “like a woman.”

The Leyenda de los soles suggests that, among the Nahua, lunar effeminacy was peculiar to periods of darkness when the moon was invisible. In that case, it would have corresponded to either lunar eclipse or the “dead” moon in conjunction, or to both. The latter interpretation is strengthened by Galinier’s (1984: 48) report that in the nearby Otomi Mezquital region, the third, waning quarter of the moon is called Moon of the Great Rotted Foot, while the darkened new moon of the fourth quarter is said to be “amputated.” One

99 The fact that Tecxitpectatl’s conch shell symbolized the womb is well attested to in the sources; see, e.g., Codex Vaticanus A (fol. 26) and Corona Núñez (1964–67, 3: 68).

100 In Nahua manuscripts, an aspect of Tezcatlipoca known as Chalchiuhtotolin, “green hen” (depicted as a turkey), was patron of the day sign tepatl, “knife” (Seler 1990, 1: 133); most heavy-duty knives were made of flint. The date of 4 Flint has been associated with the god Mixcoatl, as well as the goddesses Xochiquetzal, Tlazolteotl, and Quilatzli (Caso 1967: 198). According to the Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas (García Icazbalceta 1891, 3: 237), Quilatzli, in the form of a two-headed deer, fell from the sky in a year 4 Flint. A legend recorded by Torquemada (1975, 1: 80–81) identifies Quilatzli as a “manly woman” who dressed as a warrior and challenged the men who ruled the migrants from Aztlan. She, too, was therefore of ambiguous gender.
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Otomí name for the moon in conjunction means “the moon is amputated”; presumably, the amputated body part is once more a foot. Galinier (1984: 46) notes that, in line with the Otomí attribution of all malformations of the foot to lunar influences, Otomí parents present the Great Rotted Foot with offerings to protect their newborns from its wrath (Galinier 1984: 46).

This is surely tied to the belief, found in many places, that the moon poses the greatest threat to plant and human reproduction and good health during lunar conjunction. Throughout Mesoamerica, however, a link between fetal deformities and lunar eclipse can also be found (Reina 1966: 239; Sahagún 1950–82, 7: 58; Wisdom 1940: 400). Often these deformities involve the feet. In Coahuila, for example, there is concern that the child of a pregnant woman who has been exposed to a lunar eclipse will be born clubfooted (Kelly 1965: 9, 116), while in Momostenango, it may be born lame (B. Tedlock 1992: 184). The widespread association of foot deformities with lunar eclipses recalls the Cihuateteotl with reversed feet depicted in Codex Vaticanus B (Anders 1972: fol. 79). John Pohl (1998: 194), it should be recalled, identifies the Cihuateteo with the stellar tzitzimime who, it was feared, would descend to harm the living during periods of darkness such as eclipses.

The gender of the full moon in eclipse may likewise have been viewed as ambiguous. Today the full moon is associated with maximum potency in many places; among the Tzotzil Maya, for example, it marks the most auspicious time to plant (e.g., Holland 1963: 78). The Pipil say, moreover, that plants sown when the moon has disappeared, as during an eclipse, will not grow (e.g., Thompson 1939: 142, citing Schulz Jena). Since present-day inhabitants of a number of Otomí communities refer to the full moon as mba po, “His Erection,” it follows that a lunar eclipse would connote the opposite—detumescence, castration, and effeminacy (Galinier 1990: 535).

There is no doubt, in any event, that the Otomí association of lunar conjunction with a missing limb, presumably a leg, implies that, in this culture, the gender of the moon while in conjunction is ambiguous. According to Galinier (1984: 45), among the Otomí, the absence of a foot renders a male feminine because the foot symbolizes the penis. One Otomí word for penis, kwa, also means foot, while male Otomí shamans sexually metamorphize into women by removing one of their own legs. The moon whose leg or foot has been amputated, by this reasoning, has been castrated and metamorphized into a womanly man.¹⁰¹ That other Mesoamericans shared this belief is supported by Bricker’s (1973: 113) record of a similar connection between the foot and the

¹⁰¹ For more on the symbolism of a missing foot, see Galinier (1990: 627–633).
penis in the Tzotzil Maya town of Chamula. 102 Missing or injured legs are linked to illicit or deviant sexuality in a number of places in Mesoamerica. Among the Quiche of Momostenango, for example, an idiom that literally means “to burn his/her leg” (c’atic rakan) is a metaphor for a married person committing adultery with a virgin of either sex (B. Tedlock 1992: 110).

While there is no comparable linguistic relation between the words for foot and penis in Nahuatl, the word for moon, metzli, also means leg and thigh. The fact that it also forms the root of words referring to menstruation suggests that the Nahuas, too, made a connection between the moon, femininity, and the leg (López Austin 1988, 2: 163; Siméon 1977: 271). 103 Like the Otomi, they apparently related all of these concepts to sorcery, as well. Today, as in Pre-Hispanic times, the female Nahuah magician called mometzcopique changes her form—and presumably her gender—by detaching her calf and fitting bird claws in its place. To return to the normal condition, she must restore her missing limb (López Austin 1988, 1: 173). Sahagún (1950–82, 4: 43) describes the magician as “one who removed his leg.” 104

These connections bring to mind the missing foot of Tezcatlipoca, Maximon, and the Chinantec Maxtlacihuatl, all of whom are described as sorcerers. The data strongly suggest that a deity’s missing foot connoted, among other things, his or her compromised sexual identity. In Santiago Atitlán today, those who behave in an irrational, abnormal manner, especially when “in love,” are described as “standing on one leg” (Carlsen and Prechtel 1994: 99). Since in this community one side of the body is associated with the female aspect, the other with the male, the absence of a leg or foot would logically have implications for one’s gender (Carlsen and Prechtel 1994: 92). It seems likely, therefore, that for Nahuas Tezcatlipoca represented conjunction at the end of the lunar cycle.105

102 The Huichol cultural hero Kauymahí, a trickster referred to as “the lame one,” is in contrast described in myth as having a powerful and extraordinarily long penis (Zingg 1938: 361–362).

103 The connection is visualized in the so-called thigh skin mask, or mexayacatl, which plays an important role in the Nahuah month fest of Ochpaniztli, and is decorated with lunar crescents in Codex Borbonicus (Nowotny 1974: fol. 12).

104 The Chortí today say that evil sorcerers keep their patron saint in their left leg, whereas diviners and curers keep their spirit in their right leg (Wisdom 1940: 428). The Nahuatl verb cotzqua, which derives from cotzli, “calf” (of the leg), means “to enchant someone.” According to López Austin (1988, 1: 173), the calf for Nahuas “apparently contained a kind of vital force”; the verb meaning “to devour a victim” literally means “to eat the calf.” Curiously, cotzli also meant “the obsidian stone of round surface,” a probable reference to the obsidian mirror used for divination and another possible allusion to Tezcatlipoca, “Smoking Mirror.”

105 Tezcatlipoca’s association with the moon may relate to the widespread belief that the changing position of the crescent moon correlates with the changing wet and dry seasons.
As Henry B. Nicholson (1971: 412–413) has pointed out, Tezcatlipoca seems to have been in some way related to Tecciztecatl. In Codex Borbonicus (Nowotny 1974: fol. 6) and the Aubin Tonal amatl (fol. 6; Aguilera 1981), for example, Tezcatlipoca replaces Tecciztecatl as co-patron of the sixth trece na (thirteen-day period). A bird wearing Tezcatlipoca’s smoking mirror and heron headdress is accompanied in Codex Vaticanus A (fol. 47; Corona Nuñez 1964–67, 3: 111) by the written statement that on the day 7 Cuauhtli (7 Eagle), which was dedicated to the moon, women with menstrual problems offered sacrifices.106

CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing strongly suggests that, unlike us, Pre-Hispanic Nahuas viewed gender as both complex and mutable and did not expect it to necessarily conform to a person’s physiology and sex. Moreover, a recent study of words used by the Gulf Coast Nahua for the reproductive organs points “to an intertwining of gender attributes, a blending of masculinity and femininity written over both sexes from the moment of birth” (Chevalier and Buckles 1995: 287). Put another way, “each sex partakes of the attributes of the opposite gender” (ibid., 289). Among present-day Gulf Coast Nahuas, therefore, gender is seen as inherently ambiguous. Among the Otomi today, a belief that women are capable of metamorphizing into men and back is said to cause considerable anxiety (Galinier 1984: 44–45).107

Any society that is dependent on frequent, successful human reproduction, in which sex and gender are believed to naturally intermix and possibly change within the individual, must feel a pressing need to ensure that the mature individual, upon marriage, can and will play the proper role of either one gender or the other. In such societies, the years preceding marriage can therefore be expected to provoke, both in parents and in society at large, a strong desire to

As in Pre-Hispanic Mexican manuscript paintings, the moon among the Chortí today is depicted as a jar of water that stands upright during the dry season and lies on its side, releasing its contents, during the rainy season (Girard 1966: 111). A similar concept orders ideas of the Achi Maya about the changes of season (Neuenswander 1981: 130, 139). See also Báez-Jorge (1983: 389) and Fought and Fought (1972: 387).

Certainly, Nahua linked the moon to the detached limbs of sorcerers. The commentary to fol. 12v in Codex Telleriano–Remensis (Hamy 1899), which depicts Tecciztecatl as co-patron (with Tonatiuh, the sun) of the sixth tecena, says of the day 1 Death that “those who were born here would be magicians for they tried to transform themselves into the shapes of various animals as well as other shapes as well as making it appear as if a man were separating into pieces, as if each leg and arm were detached” (Quiñones Keber 1995: 260; emphasis mine).

106 Lang (1996: 187) notes that ambiguity and transformation are recurrent themes in Native American world-views.
stabilize a child’s gender. López Austin (1988, 1: 289) notes that from the time of reaching puberty until his or her marriage, a Nahua child was believed to be in danger of becoming sexually deviant. This fear probably extended to the very young child, as well. We know that, like our doctors today, Nahua parents were very quick to assign a gender to their newborns (which they presumably based on the infant’s genitalia) and to culturally reinforce it, providing babies within several days of birth with miniature versions of the work tools appropriate to their designated gender (Berdan and Anawalt 1992, 3: fol. 57r; Durán 1971: 124; Sahagún 1950–82, 6: 201–204). This eagerness implies a concern that the child’s gender might fluctuate. This may explain why none of the Nahuatl terms for prepubescent children differentiates sex; the word *piltontli*, for example, refers to a child of either sex (López Austin 1988, 2: 272–273). Society introduced gendered terms only once the child’s gender had hopefully begun to stabilize.

A number of Mesoamerican peoples today share this concern for the child’s gender identity. According to Calixta Guiteras-Holmes (1961: 107–108), for example, a Tzotzil woman will take care not to let a pregnant woman pick up her newborn “for fear that the sex of her infant will change after birth.” Guiteras-Holmes was told of several cases where this had occurred. Aiteteco midwives, on the other hand, are thought to be capable of changing the sex of a child while it is still in the womb (Carlsen and Prechtel 1994: 100–101, citing William Douglas). These sex changes, as we have seen, can also be caused by natural and supernatural forces. As noted earlier, Quiche babies in Momostenango who are born under a full moon or during a partial lunar eclipse may become transsexuals whose gender will keep changing from male to female throughout life.109

When a Nahua child was old enough—around four years of age, to judge by painted scenes in Codex Mendoza (Berdan and Anawalt 1992, 3: fol. 58r)—its parents began to teach it how to perform gender-appropriate tasks. Boys learned to hunt and fish, girls to spin and weave. More importantly, parents

108 See also Lockhart (1992: 603, n. 18) regarding the gender neutrality of many Nahuatl kinship terms.

109 A Nahu myth in the *Leyenda de los soles* (Bierhorst 1992: 145) relates that the god Quetzalcoat found the bones of the previous inhabitants of the earth neatly laid out in two piles in the underworld; one pile contained the bones of women, the other of men. He wrapped them up to take them back to earth but, on the way, fell into a pit and spilled them. Quails nibbled the bones before the god gathered them up, rewrapped them, and took them to the goddess Cihuacoatl/Quilaztli, with whose help he then produced from them the first humans. Belief that at least some of the male and female bones became mixed together as a result of this accident would help to explain Nahua parents’ concern for the stability of their offspring’s sex.
were anxious to ensure that their offspring was not contaminated by contact with the work tools of the other gender. Sahagún (1950–82, 3: 52, 61), for example, mentions twice that the parents of young boys going off to school for the first time entreated their sons’ teachers to make sure that their boys would not so much as lay a hand on a spindle or a weaving stick lest they become effeminate.110 These admonishments clearly reflect a belief that socialization can ultimately determine a growing child’s gender, regardless of its biological sex. Added to the effects that certain natural and supernatural forces, such as the moon, could have on a child’s gender, this makes clear just how tenuous Nahuas must have perceived gender to be.

Like us, then, Pre–Hispanic Nahuas appear to have been disapproving and fearful of those whose gender was ambiguous, and to have perceived it as a disruptive, antisocial force. In a world where the socioeconomic order is predicated on the dual-gendered married couple and yet gender identity is understood to be socially and supernaturally conditioned, ideology works to maintain the precarious separation and equilibrium between that which is regarded as entirely female and that which is seen as wholly male. It characterizes as backward, dangerous, and even criminal the inhabitants of that frightening area where women begin to look like men and men begin to talk and act like women.

Unlike us today, however, Nahuas harnessed the metaphorical power of ambiguous gender and turned it back upon itself. As we have seen, among many Mesoamericans, including Nahuas, ceremonies held at the end of major astronomical periods and seasons featured cross-dressing, male effeminacy, female masculinity, and obscene mockery on the part of beings often reputed to be promiscuous, adulterous, gender-shifting, homosexuals, bisexuals, and hypersexuals. These ceremonies fell at the end of the year, of the dry season, and of the wet season, all of which tended to be associated with a major station of the solar cycle. Additional rites were probably held during lunar conjunction and lunar eclipses. The asocial behavior of the gender-ambiguous performers was manifested by their leaping and backward movements as well as their often-tattered clothing; in myth it was expressed in terms of extreme age or immaturity, reversed heads and limbs, and missing body parts, especially feet.

110 A modern Huichol myth tells how the hunting god changed a boy’s sex to that of a female simply by taking away his bow (Zingg 1938: 123). An interesting variant of this theme can be found among the Tzotzil Maya described by Guiteras-Holmes (1961: 112), who reports that in San Pedro Chenalhó, boys are not allowed to put on girls’ clothes because it is believed that their children will then be girls, and vice versa.
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These beings, however, were usually also described as powerful shamans, midwives, or sorcerers, and as such they had the power to purify and cure. It was precisely because uncertain gender represented a reversal of the social ideal, if not the norm, that such a person possessed the inherent ability to reverse the undesirable in nature. Given the right form, put in the right places at the right times, and directed to make the appropriate movements, the twisted could therefore straighten out social disorder and cure sickness and deformity, the aged could cause rebirth, the unpredictable could ensure stability, the soiled could purify, and the being whose gender was contaminated by aspects of the other gender could literally produce, as Maximon produced each year in the form of Christ, a thing of singular, pure masculinity or femininity.

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Recent advances in archaeology, as well as its self-assessment as a discourse created by and for a particular society, have without doubt broadened not only the explanatory scope of our discipline but also its ability to provide useful and reliable information for all those who seek an explanation of their present in the past. Archaeological studies of gender have made one thing clear: On many occasions, the interpretation of archaeological finds reflects a homogeneous concept of society. Researchers—men and women alike—tend to generalize and to refer to the inhabitants of ancient settlements as generic human beings, forgetting that the place assigned to each member depends on his or her physical characteristics, age, manual and mental skills, economic status, class membership, and even personal preferences. We frequently overlook the fact that we are talking about men and women who have a specific place in society, and that often it is precisely their sex that determines their position in life and the social group to which they belong. The same can be said about other groups, such as children and the elderly.

This tendency to generalize has invariably led researchers to give attention to very broad aspects of the social group they are studying, forgetting not only everyday life but also the importance that individuals, with their own particular skills and limitations, have within their society. The dangers inherent in such neglect of the individuals are illustrated by the recent excavation at an Epiclassic site in Central Mexico.

In the southeastern part of the state of Tlaxcala on the Central Plateau of Mexico, in a landscape framed by the majestic volcanoes Popocatépetl, Iztaccíhuatl, and La Malinche, stands the hill of Xochtécatl, an ancient volcano with a Pre-Hispanic ceremonial center at the top (Fig. 1). Its favored geo-

1 All figures and photographs were made for the Proyecto Arqueológico Xochtécatl, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia–UNAM, México, D.F.
Mari Carmen Serra Puche

Fig. 1 The archaeological site of Xochitécatl, Tlaxcala, and its surrounding landscape, from the northwest, with the view of the Iztaccíhuatl (White Woman) volcano in the background.

Graphical location at the center of the Puebla–Tlaxcal plains, permanently watered by the Zahuapan and Atoyac Rivers, was a factor that determined the settlement here of large population nuclei engaged mainly in agriculture (Fig. 2).

As is normal in any archaeological project, the investigation of the Xochitécatl site has yielded a large amount of information and, along with this, some puzzles yet to be solved. The chronological and geographical position of Xochitécatl (Fig. 3) provided those of us who excavated the site with an initial framework for systematizing and delimiting our data. However, as work progressed, the excavations led us along an unexpected path. In contrast to other occasions, we did not need in-depth studies to be able to begin interpreting the roles played by individuals, both men and women, in this society.

The presence of feminine elements in cultural discourse came to light with the first archaeological finds. Numerous ceramic and stone representations of women discovered at the site were key in determining the course of our interpretation of the data. At the risk of jumping to conclusions, we can say that Xochitécatl appears to have been a ceremonial center that at the end of the Formative period (400 B.C. to A.D. 100) and during its second occupation in the Epiclassic period (A.D. 650 to 850) (Fig. 4) was dedicated to a feminine cult.
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Fig. 2  Aerial view of the ceremonial center at Xochitécatl, Tlaxcala, after the excavations (counterclockwise from left to right): the Pyramid of Flowers, the Building of the Serpent, and the Building of the Spiral; at the center of the plaza, the Base of the Volcanoes.

Images of goddesses, female rulers, and women in various phases of the life cycle, as well as fertility symbols and evidence of cosmic rituals, have begun to emerge during our work.

The archaeological evidence at Xochitécatl has compelled us to study the representations of women, their associations, and their contexts in depth. At this stage of investigation only a very descriptive study can be offered, since the data need further analysis before more exact and verifiable conclusions can be reached. With this essay, however, I hope to provide new elements of analysis for the investigation of gender in Pre-Hispanic Mexico.

The ceremonial center of Xochitécatl was built on the top of a hill, which was altered to give it the form of a great plaza. This monumental architectural complex is composed of four buildings. In the Formative period, the first building stage of the incipient ceremonial center was completed, which included the construction of the Building of the Serpent, the Pyramid of Flowers, and the Base of the Volcanoes. In the site’s second period of occupation, between A.D. 650 and 850, the Pyramid of Flowers was again used for ceremonies, but it was enlarged by the addition of more levels and a temple on the top, and given a new orientation, as was the Base of the Volcanoes.
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Xochitécatl is closely connected with its better-known neighbor, the archaeological site of Cacaxtla, famous for its splendid palace murals with designs and colors exhibiting Maya influence. Cacaxtla was at its height between A.D. 600 and 800, or, in other words, at the end of the Classic period, at which time the two sites formed a single cultural unit. Xochitécatl most probably became the place of worship for the residents of the palaces, people from the public and administrative buildings of Cacaxtla, and the population of the surrounding valleys. In addition, it also became a key trade center, controlling the routes to the Gulf of Mexico, Oaxaca, and the Maya area.

Despite its strategic location, monumental architecture, and closeness to Cacaxtla, Xochitécatl had received little attention from scholars of Pre-Columbian Mexico. Until a few years ago, only a handful of investigators knew this site. From the beginning of colonial times up to 1939, Xochitécatl lay completely forgotten.

The site is mentioned in such colonial documents as the map of Cuauhtinchan no. 2 (Reyes García n.d.), Diego Muñoz Camargo’s Historia de Tlaxcala (1978), and the Monarquía indiana by Juan de Torquemada (1969). Nineteenth-century travelers such as José María Cabrera (1995), Hubert Bancroft (1883), and Eduard Seler (Sepúlveda y Herrera 1992:89) likewise noted that it
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<th>Xochitécatl Occupation Sequence</th>
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Fig. 4  Cultural chronology of the Puebla–Tlaxcala valley.
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existed. Xochitécatl is also referred to in the *Atlas arqueológico de la República Mexicana* of the Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia (1939), and described by Pedro Armillas in an article in *Revista Mexicana de Estudios Antropológicos* (1946). However, it was not until 1969 that Bodo Spranz of the German Foundation for Scientific Research conducted an archaeological survey of the hill of Xochitécatl and sketched the ceremonial area. He later carried out the first controlled excavations (1970:37). Due to further topographical surveys, and the analysis of archaeological material made by Angel García Cook (García Cook and Merino Carrión 1984), it has been possible to define the chronology of the most important archaeological sites in Tlaxcala.

Thanks to the project begun in 1992, the ceremonial center of Xochitécatl has been explored intensively as part of the fourteen Special Archaeological Projects carried out under the auspices of Mexico’s National Archaeology Fund. The archaeological work of the Xochitécatl project began with an analysis of aerial photographs, surface reconnaissance, and detailed topography studies, and ended with extensive excavations and the clearing and strengthening of the structures. It has enabled us to sketch out a history of the settlement, which shows distinct cultural influences from the Valley of Mexico, Teotihuacan, Cholula, the Gulf Coast, Oaxaca, and the Maya area. The site was abandoned during the Classic period and reoccupied in the Epiclassic, around a.d. 850. It was again abandoned at the end of this period with the eruption of Popocatetl, an event that, thanks to recent studies, can be carbon 14–dated as contemporary with Xochitécatl (Siebe et al. 1996).

The largest and most imposing building at Xochitécatl is the Pyramid of Flowers, located at the eastern end of the central ceremonial plaza, with a rectangular base almost as large as those of the Pyramid of the Moon at Teotihuacan and the pyramid called Tepalcayo 1 at Totimehuacan, Puebla. This base measures approximately 144 meters from east to west, and 110 to 115 meters from north to south. It is more than 30 meters high, and is composed of nine stepped tiers on its northern, eastern, and southern faces. The most complete sequence of cultural materials comes from the Pyramid of Flowers and dates from the Late Formative, the Epiclassic, and, in a few cases, the Post–Classic period. This is the building that yielded the archaeological evidence discussed below.

The most important find consisted of more than thirty-two burials, mostly of females and infants, accompanied by offerings and several stone sculptures. Two large monolithic vats were discovered in front of the pyramid’s main fa-
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cade, which faces west and has a central staircase composed of rectangular blocks of stone. The first layout and the construction of the building—with boulders and blocks of tuff, or tepetate—date from the Late Formative period. Later on, in the Epiclassic period, the pyramid was remodeled, a tepetate staircase was constructed over one of the stone blocks, and a temple was built on top of small blocks of dressed tepetate covered with stucco. The building's enormous volume suggests that many gangs of workers carried hundreds of tons of rocks and boulders from the lower slopes of Xochitécatl. The structure therefore provides evidence of a high degree of social organization in which the ruling group assigned activities and ceremonies.

At the southern end of the central plaza is the Building of the Serpent. It has a rectangular ground plan (73 by 58 meters), faces north, and has a mud-covered staircase and a ramp leading up to its top. It consists of four stepped tiers, which have rounded corners on the southwestern face. Another monolithic vat, 1.3 meters in diameter, which was found in the middle of the top platform, contained a sculpture of a serpent’s head.

The Building of the Spiral, located at the western end of the ceremonial center, is composed of thirteen circular stepped tiers. The diameter of its base is 50 meters, and that of the upper tier, 17 meters. Rising 15.6 meters over the level of the central plaza, it belongs to the Middle Formative period. According to radiocarbon dating, it was built in the Texoloc phase (760 to 380 B.C.).

At the center of the plaza is the rectangular Base of the Volcanoes, measuring 45 by 33 meters. As it is a later structure, its design and orientation are not like those of other buildings. Its architectural features, style, and materials date it to the end of the Epiclassic period (A.D. 650–850). It is distinguished by its talud and tablero faces of red volcanic stone, or tezontle, covered with stucco like the faces of the temple of the same date built on top of the Pyramid of Flowers.

The region of the Puebla–Tlaxcala valley, where Xochitécatl stands, shows signs of sedentary occupation by people engaged mainly in agriculture on the alluvial plains since early times. There is evidence of this in some archaeological sites located in the region, with domestic units belonging to the Late Formative period, precisely when the ceremonial center was planned and built. The scarcity of cultural material from Early and Middle Classic periods, when Teotihuacan flourished, and its increased abundance after this time would seem to support the theory that the ceremonial center reached its peak during this final, Late Formative, period, as was the case for the neighboring elite palaces at Cacaxtla. At this time, trade with places such as Teotihuacan, Cholula, Oaxaca, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Maya area brought numerous luxury items to Xochitécatl, and with them came the integration into a shared system of religious beliefs.
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The buildings of Xochitécatl fall squarely within the pattern common for the Central Plateau of Mesoamerica. For the moment, however, we can know the use of the spaces created in this ceremonial center only through their archaeological contexts. The activities that took place in the buildings and plazas can be reconstructed by inferences drawn from the analysis of traces that are left by the individuals who acted here at particular times. Here I agree with Diane Lyons:

All context, i.e., all human experience occurs in time and space. Control of resources in a society requires control of social interaction and control of how individuals or groups of individuals perceive their roles and identities to be within their society. Both social interaction and social identity are profoundly shaped by the manipulation of time and space. In order to understand past social structure we must be conscious of the construction and meaning of the dimensions of context. (1991: 113)

I define the space discussed in this essay as including not only that occupied directly by the Pyramid of Flowers at Xochitécatl, but also that of the area surrounding it—both the platform on which it stands and the landscape, as well as “sight lines,” orientation, and siting, with the view of the volcanoes Popocatepetl, Iztaccíhuatl, and La Malinche. In addition, there is a “sidereal space,” the movement of constellations and stars as points to be observed from this building. In short, one can speak of sacred geography.

We have identified a complex of artifacts and architectural features as signs of the possible activities that were carried out at the Pyramid of Flowers. They include offerings of figurines; spindle whorls; burials of mostly young women and children; staircases and the temple; stone monuments, namely, round sculpture and vats; and a cave. Orientation and integration of the building into the surroundings contribute to our interpretations.

OFFERINGS OF FIGURINES

The offerings of female figurines found embedded in the staircases of the Pyramid of Flowers are the most important indications of a feminine cult and its association with fertility.3 The offerings, seven in all, were deposited directly in the fill of the different tiers, in other words, without any type of special casket or pit to hold them. They covered areas ranging from 2 to 7 square meters, and were made up of figurines placed one on top of the other, some-

3 Due to their position and composition, the figurines reported earlier by Spranz (1970, 1973) were likely part of one or more of the votive caches.
times in association with bowls or other figurines. Only one of the offerings
had a connection with architectural elements (a floor and a bench), while two
others were associated with child burials (Fig. 5).

The figurines can be divided into eight different groups:

1. Supplicating, praying, or worshiping women. The first group consists of
modeled and polished figurines that are hollow (some with perforations, per-
haps for hanging) and polychrome. Either seated or standing, they are charac-
terized by the particular position of their arms, which are raised in an attitude
of supplication or prayer. The figures have short hair with a fringe and side
Fig. 6 Female figurines, Xochitécatl, Tlaxcala: (a) worshiping women; (b) richly dressed women; (c) pregnant women, or receptacles.
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bunches, and red-and-white headbands, sometimes with circular ornaments. Their faces are painted red from eyes to chin, and several have black lines that look like tears. The women’s smiling mouths reveal the so-called T-shaped dental mutilation. The figures also have circular earplugs. They are wearing blouses, or *quechquemitl*, with geometric decoration in red, black, and white; the garments seem to be very complex in structure, perhaps produced using the technique of curved weaving. Many figures also wear skirts or wraps around them, held up with a sash, as the fringes hanging at the waist indicate; the skirts are likewise decorated, following the design of the blouse, in red, black, and white. The hands of the figures are painted red, with bangles indicated in black. Most have their feet shown painted or with bands around their ankles, and some are wearing sandals with bows (Fig. 6a).

2. Richly dressed women. The second group consists of flat, polychrome figurines cast in molds, usually with two holes for hanging them up. They represent richly dressed and adorned women whose faces are half covered with red paint. The figures show T-shaped dental mutilation, and each has earplugs in the shape of flowers, a necklace of beads or in the form of a band, a *quechquemitl* decorated with fringes, a skirt with varying designs, and bare feet. There are two variants in this group: women alone and women with children. The women alone wear headbands with three flowers, of five petals each, and both of their hands are placed on their skirts (Fig. 6b).

3. Pregnant women, or receptacles. This group includes hollow modeled figurines, each with an orifice in the abdomen usually occupied by the small, removable figure of a child. The mothers wear headbands decorated in the center with a circle and a feather surround, flower-shaped earplugs, and red face paint. Hands are not indicated at the ends of their short arms, and clothing is simply drawn on the figures with black and white lines. The child figure is flat and also has a headband, circular earplugs, and face paint (Fig. 6c).

4. Women with children in their arms or on their laps. This group is made up of flat, polychrome, cast figurines, which have holes for tying or hanging them. Each of these images represents a woman with a child in her arms and sometimes another on her back. In addition to the presence of infants, the headdresses are markedly different, consisting of a wide band with three sloping stripes in black and white; in the center, there is a circle surrounded by feathers (Fig. 7a).

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4 On the subject of this form of mutilation, Spranz says, “This T-shaped mutilation with inlays of small stone disks is known from the Maya region of Belize, the Ulua valley, Copan, and Uaxactún. Surprising in this connection is the first and hitherto only appearance of wall painting in a Maya style in the Mexican highlands, discovered in 1976 at Cacaxtla, immediately to the east of Xochitécatl” (1982: 165).
Fig. 7 Female figurines, Xochitécatl, Tlaxcala: (a) women with children; (b) infants in cradles; (c) old women; (d) articulated figurines.
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5. Infants in cradles. This group contains modeled figures of babies in cradles, which are simple flat plaques, usually with a handle that extends over the baby’s upper body. The infants have face paint, and their clothing is drawn on them (Fig. 7b).

6. Enthroned, deified women. Each of these figurines depicts a woman seated on a palanquin or throne, wearing a headdress of a serpent, or the Earth Monster, holding a shield and a scepter, and richly dressed in a quechquemitl, skirt, sandals, belt or sash, bracelets, and necklaces. Like the figurines of pregnant women, these represent an occupation or activity—not of a mother this time, but of a ruler, a warrior, or a priestess. Although they could be deities, I suggest that, based on the overall context and their association with other figurines representing different phases of the female life cycle, they are worldly and ordinary. (Fig. 8)

7. Old women. This group of figures, which may be flat or hollow, cast or modeled, represents old women. Their faces are crossed by lines depicting wrinkles, while their smiles show their only two remaining teeth. Their hair is carefully arranged, and they wear a simple quechquemitl or their bodies are painted (Fig. 7c).

8. Articulated figures and rattles. The last group is composed of hollow figurines with movable limbs. They are anthropomorphic and have pear-shaped bodies covered in red paint. These “women” wear headdresses profusely decorated with bands, flowers, circles, and other motifs, and display the red face paint and the T-shaped dental mutilation mentioned above. Some of them resemble the “praying women” described earlier (group 1), and several contain beads and can be used as rattles (Fig. 7d).

The types of figurines described by Spranz (1973) coincide with those found in the Pyramid of Flowers. Having been made locally, they correspond chronologically to the late period of Teotihuacan, or the Epiclassic. Spranz tried to identify the figurines by comparing them with the pictures of deities in the codices of the Borgia group, although the figures are more complex in their design and coloring. According to his analysis, three Borgia-group goddesses are represented in the Xochitécatl figurines: Xochiquetzal, identified by a headband, sometimes twisted, and a typical headdress with three rosettes and two upright or lateral bunches of hair (this is the type referred to here as “richly dressed women”); Xilonen, the young corn goddess, who wears a headband with rosette in the center (as in the case of “women with children in their arms”); and Tlazolteotl, originally a Huastec goddess of the earth and a patroness of newborn children, who wears a cotton headband with dark and white stripes (corresponding to “pregnant women, or receptacles”).
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Recent explorations at Xochitécatl have demonstrated limitations of the analysis made by Spranz. The absence of a clear archaeological context for the origin and association of the figurines that he studied prevented him from going beyond iconographic analysis and the questionable identification with Aztec deities. In my opinion, the figurines from the offerings at Xochitécatl represent flesh-and-blood women. Each offering includes infants, mature women, mothers, and old women, or, in other words, the complete life cycle of real women. Although it may be true that some of their traits appeared later as attributes of Aztec goddesses, this is because Mesoamerican supernaturals typically adopted elements of dress from mortals (Fig. 8).

SPINDLE WHORLS

Nearly five hundred spindle whorls were found in the Pyramid of Flowers, most of them in the stratigraphic level corresponding to the figurine offerings, although they were not associated with the figurines. It is significant that more than 65 percent of the whorls were discovered in the upper part of the pyramid and the staircase area. As has been pointed out many times, spindle whorls were closely linked to the images of goddesses or women.

BURIALS

Thirty-two burials were found in the Pyramid of Flowers. Covering all the different periods of the site’s occupation, the burials were collective and indi-
Fig. 9 Offering 6, Pyramid of Flowers, Xochitécatl, Tlaxcala.

individual, primary and secondary. They contained more than fifty persons and were distributed in the upper section of the pyramid and along the front staircase in excavated pits. Fourteen of the burials additionally included offerings of conch shells, shell artifacts, small obsidian blades, beads and plaques of green stone and bone, ceramic vessels, and figurines dating from the Epiclassic period (Fig. 9).

Preliminary analyses of bone remains, which are in a very poor state, show that some of the burials are of adult women, but the majority—70 percent—
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Another element associated with the female nature of the space is the staircases that lead to the top of the pyramid where a temple once stood. These staircases are where most of the figurine offerings were discovered. They are built of dressed stone, but saddle querns (metates) were used for some of the steps. This isolated element could lead one to think that although the metates were worn and had been discarded, it was logical to reuse them in buildings because they were made of very good raw material, generally basalt. In connection with all the other archaeological evidence present, however, it is valid to assume that they do in fact have a ritual meaning associated with the feminine cults practiced in the Pyramid of Flowers (Fig. 10). In the archaeological context in Mesoamerica there is always an association between grinding maize and women’s work.

STONE MONUMENTS

The stone sculptures found in the rubble of the staircase of the Pyramid of Flowers are yet another feature of the “feminine cult.” They are as follows:

1. A man, perhaps the only male figure at Xochitécatl, sits cross-legged...
with one arm over his chest and his hand resting on his shoulder. In the other hand he holds his penis as if masturbating, which almost certainly is an allusion to semen as fertilizer. This statuette is fragmented and has no head (Fig. 11a).

2. A skeletal woman carved in relief lies with her arms over her head and her legs spread open to reveal her sexual parts. The woman’s ribs are marked in the chest area, and she has an opening in her belly like the “pregnant” figurines discussed above (Fig. 11b).

3. A serpent woman (Cihuacoatl) of gray stone, found in the debris of the staircase of the Pyramid of Flowers, is portrayed with gaping jaws and the body of a serpent that spirals around the statue to end in a rattlesnake’s tail on the woman’s back (Fig. 11c).

4. Two round stone vats or water holders, measuring 1.7 and 3.7 meters in diameter, Vats 1 and 2, were discovered in association with the staircase. The first contained four sculptures: a toad, a person in the jaws of a reptile, and two anthropomorphic figures, one probably suffering from facial paralysis and the other with a face suggesting death. Vat 2 seems to have been buried with its rim at floor level; like Vat 1, it has a drainage hole. Judging from their stratigraphic position, both vats, like the stone staircase, date earlier than offerings of figurines. They could be related to a fertility cult because they contain water and were oriented to face the female volcano of La Malinche (Fig. 12).

Finds like these have been recorded at other sites in the Puebla–Tlaxcala valley (e.g., Totimehuacan and Tlalancaleca, suggesting that the complex just described is not unique to Xochitécatl but typical of the whole region.

THE CAVE

During the surface reconnaissance, a cave was detected on the eastern slope of the hill, located exactly opposite the facade of the Pyramid of Flowers and aligned with it. This archaeological feature has not been studied thoroughly because of the poor safety conditions inside it. However, we do know that it is a natural cavity that people altered by cutting chambers and entrance tunnels into it. As has been demonstrated at Teotihuacan, the presence of caves gives a site a mythical meaning, linking it with the places where the human race and the universe were thought to have originated. Caves were also often associated with the woman’s womb in Pre–Hispanic times.

ORIENTATION AND INTEGRATION INTO THE SURROUNDINGS

As noted previously, Xochitécatl is a ceremonial center located at the top of an extinct volcano. Its orientation is very important in connection with the arguments laid out here. Once topographic surveys were made and the exact position of each building plotted, there became distinguishable a series of sig-
Fig. 11 Round sculpture from the Pyramid of Flowers, Xochitécatl, Tlaxcala: (a) man masturbating (ca. 60 cm high); (b) skeletal woman (ca. 45 cm high); (c) serpent woman (front and rear views) (ca. 75 cm high).
Fig. 12 Vats 1 and 2, in front of the staircase at the Pyramid of Flowers, Xochitécatl, Tlaxcala.
nificant factors that were in accordance both with the natural landscape and with an artificial landscape constructed on the basis of ritual interpretation. In other words, the choice of site and of positioning for each of the buildings seems to have been the expression of a particular “cosmovision,” and, more specifically, an interpretation of the relationship between the volcanoes and humans.

In this case, there is a close connection with Popocatepetl and Iztaccíhuatl southwest of the site, and with La Malinche to the east. Viewed from the center of the plaza, the Pyramid of Flowers aligns perfectly with the profile of La Malinche. This is evident not only in the direction of the facade and the staircase, but also in the positioning of burials and offerings. The Nahuatl name for this extinct volcano is Matlacueye, or “She with the Blue Skirt,” which, depending on the source, refers either to the springs that rise in its foothills or to the color of renewed vegetation.

Throughout Mesoamerica, mountains and settlements were related symbolically by alignments with astronomical and calendrical characteristics. These particular connections could have influenced the foundation of sites and temples throughout the Puebla–Tlaxacala valley, including places surrounding Xochitécatl where there was concordance between such observable phenomena (Broda 1991: 461). The concepts that the ancient Mesoamericans had of geography and climate included not only elements derived from exact observation of the environment, but a large number of mythical and magical notions as well. Cosmovision, defined as the structured observation of the universe in relation to man, embraced the close fusion of these components.

I do not discuss here the archaeoastronomical studies that are being conducted at La Malinche and Xochitécatl; it is worth mentioning, however, that there are important days, such as 28 September, when sunrise can be observed from the highest part of the archaeological site. As John Carlson has observed (personal communication, 1994), the orientation of the Pyramid of Flowers (and possibly Building A at Cacaxtla) is related to La Malinche, as well as to the connection between Venus, corn, and fertility.

At dawn on 28 September the sun, when seen from the Pyramid of Flowers, casts its first rays through the “mouth” of the female profile formed by La Malinche (Fig. 13); at the same time on the other side of the valley, these rays light up the Popocatepetl volcano. The next day, the nearby village of San Miguel del Milagro celebrates its patron saint in a regionally important fiesta. These days coincide with the beginning of the Late Postclassic (A.D. 1300–1520) Nahua month Tepeihuitl, or “Feast of the Mountains,” which fell on 30 September, as described by Bernardino de Sahagún:
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In this month they celebrated a feast in honor of the high mountains, which are in all these lands of this New Spain, where large clouds pile up. They made the images of each one of them in human form, from the dough which is called tzoalli, and they laid offerings before these images in veneration of these same mountains.

Upon arrival of the feast in honor of the mountains, they slew four women and one man. The first of these [women who were representations of the mountains] they called Tepexoch. The second they called Matlalcueie. The third they named Xochitécatl. The fourth they called Mayauel. And the man [who represented a serpent] they named Milnauatl. They decked these women and the man in many papers covered with rubber. And they carried them in some litters upon the shoulders of women highly adorned, to the place where they were to slay them.

After they had slain them and torn out their hearts . . . they carried the bodies to the houses that they called calpulco, where they divided them up in order to eat them. The papers with which they arrayed the images of the mountains, after they had broken them to pieces in order to eat them, they hung in the calpulco. (1982: 137–139; translation mine)
Fig. 14  Cycle of life: Female clay figurines of Xochitécatl, Tlaxcala.
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CONCLUSIONS

The most important conclusion so far about the finds at the Pyramid of Flowers at Xochitécatl derives from the clear archaeological evidence of an obviously feminine ceremonial center. Further analysis of the contexts and material briefly discussed here will no doubt eventually enable us to draw a full picture of places where rituals and ceremonies of a female nature took place.

In contrast to neighboring, Cacaxtla, Xochitécatl is clearly an “exclusively ceremonial area”; it cannot be said with any assurance, however, at what date or time of the year the ceremonies were performed, and to which deity, natural power, or moment in the life cycle they were dedicated. Approximate answers can only be arrived at through ethnographic comparison, analysis of sources, and tools such as archaeoastronomy.

It is important to emphasize that many of the female figurines found among the offerings show birth, motherhood, maternal care, and old age—in other words, the complete female life cycle. This probably points to ceremonies related to the fertility aspect of female life, connected not only with the earth, but also with the reproduction of human society itself (Fig. 14). Other elements, such as the vats, clearly indicate a water cult. Thus, the entirety presents duality, the pairing of earth and water, of positive and negative, of masculine and feminine principles.

Who performed these ceremonies? Men and priests or women and priestesses? Perhaps this is not the most important unknown element; possibly both sexes participated. What is more interesting is to understand the meaning of any such ceremony and the influence it had on the behavior of the social group that performed it and believed in it. The reason for the existence of a feminine cult, a female deity, and a feminine space can be explained in part by studies of Nahua female deities, which reveal similarities to some of the archaeological evidence found:

Women were offered up at the feast of Xochiquetzal. Girls who were sacrificed in her honor had their legs crossed at the moment of being killed to indicate that they were dying virgin. Another woman was sacrificed who was dressed as the goddess; she was flayed so that a man could put her skin on and sit on the temple steps, where he pretended to weave. Artisans and painters dressed as different animals gathered in front of this man to dance, each holding his working tools. This dance lasted until dawn, then they all went to bathe and so wash away their sins. (Rodríguez-Shadow 1996; translation mine)
Among the archaeological elements found in direct association with the Pyramid of Flowers and possibly related to the description of this ceremony are the sculpture of a sacrificed woman and figurines that are richly decorated with flowers.

At the time when the sculpture of the serpent woman was discovered, some old residents of two nearby communities, San Miguel Xochitecatlita and San Rafael Tenayecac, had already told us the legend of Queen Xochitl, who lived at Xochitécatl. A very beautiful woman, always dressed in white, she charmed men who looked at her and made them cross a river where she washed her clothes. Once these men, attracted and captivated by her beauty, plucked up the courage to cross the river, she helped by carrying them but, halfway across, turned into a serpent and devoured them.

As noted by Cecelia Klein (1988), the elites of the Aztec capital emphasized the cruelty of Cihuacoatl and expressed her monstrous aspect in terms of insects, skulls, sacrificial knives, and her alleged lasciviousness.

To retain their place in the T enochca pantheon, the goddesses worshiped by peasants had to adopt masculine, warlike characteristics and equip themselves with feather headdresses, shields, and arrows.

The above simply shows that the fertility traditionally associated with the female figure and peasants cults was transferred to and identified with what may be the penis because of a masculinizing, warlike ideology. Therefore, goddesses of agriculture, especially Xochiquetzal, could not remain completely female but had to acquire a dual or ambiguous character, in a way, a type of symbolical hermaphroditism. (Rodríguez-Shadow 1996, translation mine)

As regards the worship of female deities in Mesoamerica, we can refer to the ideas put forward by Janet Berlo (1992) and Félix Báez-Jorge (1988) about the existence of a feminine cult that took various forms during the region’s history. The Mother Earth Goddess originated very early on and was basically linked to agriculture. However, in Aztec times she was separated into several different avocations, which dramatized their presence in many spheres of divine action. For example, there were Chicomecoatl, propitiator of human fecundity, who was venerated for her fertility that provided corn and thus nourishment; Xochiquetzal, who turned sexuality into a sacred moment and place of earthly and human fertility; Tlazolteotl, who helped her sons and daughters to sweep away their sins and who assisted at the birth of new human beings; Chantico, honored daily by the household fire; Mayahuel, symbol of pulque, which referred back to the myth of death generating life; Tonantzin,
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“Our Mother,” generous but a fearsome warrior; Tonacacihuatl or Omecihuatl, the primordial creator goddess, a Mother deity par excellence; and Coatlicue, mother of Quetzalcoatl–Venus, Huitzilopochtli–Sun, and Coyolxauhqui–Moon.

The goddess of Xochtécatl is a bridge between the Great Mother Goddess of Teotihuacan and the multiple avocations of the divine female principle that appeared in Aztec times. Although she shares certain traits with the Mother Goddess, such as, for example, an association with caves and mountains, there are peculiarities in her representations that may allow for differentiation of specific deities.

Although Xochtécatl’s dedication to a specific deity is still the subject of debate, its geographic location shows that it was a cosmic center of primary importance. This is evidenced by the orientation of the site toward dawn on a particular date, its special relation to La Malinche, and the fact that the Pyramid of Flowers is a copy of that mountain itself (Fig. 13). Together, these observations reveal a site where ceremonies were performed in which women played the main roles, where children were sacrificed, and where other ritual activities, such as baths and offerings, took place. All of these factors point to ceremonies dedicated to the Earth Mother, as personified by the female volcano.

Another hypothesis still open to proof is whether there was a government made up of women, perhaps a matriarchy, in view of the overwhelming presence of females among the figurines and stone sculptures. Women are shown seated on thrones, holding shields and scepters, which is often associated with goddesses in colonial manuscript paintings. Why not consider the possibility of a female ruler, an outstanding “Amazon,” or a religious leader? As I have repeated throughout the discussion of the archaeological evidence, however, we still lack data to confirm these hypotheses.

For now, it only remains for us to accept the challenge of identifying what indicators an archaeologist should look for, and which ones have yet to be interpreted, in order to bring us closer to an understanding of the position and the role of the women who lived at Xochtécatl.

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Physiology, Production, and Gendered Difference:
The Evidence from Mixtec and Other Mesoamerican Societies

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In the 1980s some of the most interesting anthropological work on kinship was reconstituted in the field of gender. I am specifically referring to David Schneider’s criticism of the widespread assumption that kinship is based on the “natural facts” of sexual intercourse, pregnancy, and parturition. Prior to Schneider’s work, anthropologists had assumed that the biology of human reproduction produced a genealogical grid that was the same for all societies. Where societies differed, ran the argument, was in how they classified various elements in this grid, for instance, grouping the children of same-sex siblings together in one category and the children of opposite-sex siblings in another, or how they emphasized certain relationships over others, for example, descent from mother over descent from father (Meigs 1984: 118).

Schneider (1968, 1984) argued instead that the idea of a genealogical grid itself—which in its diagrammatic form was used by generations of fieldworkers after W. H. R. Rivers for structuring their kinship data—is based on a Western folk model, where relatedness is constructed as “blood” and/or “law.” Following Schneider’s lead, we discovered that societies may use substances other than blood to construct relatedness. For example, Zoque speakers of Chiapas say that fathers transmit bone and anima to their children (Báez-Jorge 1975: 169). Furthermore, the ways in which these substances are thought to be transmitted need not be limited to sexual relations between males and females. Among Mixtec speakers of Oaxaca, it is indeed blood that relates mothers and children. However, blood is transmitted through the mother’s feeding of her child, both inside the womb and outside the womb, as the child nurses (breast milk is considered blood). All this has important consequences for kin relationships, and may produce a kinship grid that departs in significant ways from one an ethnographer might construct based on Western notions of consanguinity. To
return to the Mixtec example, since it sometimes happens that a woman will not be able to nurse her child after birth, the child is nursed by another woman. This second woman then establishes a blood relationship with the child; when the child grows up, it will be taught to refer to the wet nurse as his or her “mother.” The child will then have two “consanguineal” mothers. The general conclusion to be drawn here is that if we are to use kinship to explain social patterns, we must begin by defining what constitutes kinship in each particular case.

In extending this insight, Sylvia Yanagisako and Jane Collier (1987) took aim at the idea that gender is simply a device through which particular groups comprehend the facts of sexual differences. Just as Schneider rejected the idea of a universal genealogical grid, they reject the idea that sex is a presocial, biological fact. They suggest instead that sex is culturally variable, and that one cannot assume that it universally provides the raw material for gender constructions. This position converges with the views of those, such as Michel Foucault (1978–86), who emphasize the historical construction of naturalized and essentialized sexualities (see also Moore 1994: 817).

An interesting example of the way in which the sexual body is historically and culturally defined comes from the case of infant Siamese twins separated at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto during the 1990s. The twins both had male chromosomes, but they shared only one set of genitalia. Doctors chose to leave the more active, “aggressive” infant as a male, while constructing a vagina for the meeker infant, who will be given hormones to develop as a woman, although she will remain infertile. In Western “folk” thinking, genitals are viewed as naturalized signs of gender difference, in no small part because they are seen as connected to differences that are interior to the body, such as chromosomes, hormones, and dispositions (Errington 1990). However, the Canadian case turns this premise on its head, since the doctors began with what they perceived as interior differences in the twins (dispositions) in order to construct the corresponding exterior signs (genitals). Many things could be said about this example, including the way femaleness was defined by absence or lack, but, most important, it clearly illustrates the way in which the gendering of individuals concerns things that go far beyond the natural facts of sex.

In sociocultural anthropology today, it is accepted wisdom that the scope of gender questions is as broad as the field itself. Even something as basic to Mesoamerican ethnology as ethnic/community identity is a gendered category.1

1 Paraphrasing Leslie Devereaux (1987: 99), one is not simply a Zinacanteco; one is either a Zinacanteco man or a Zinacanteco woman.
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We are fortunate to have in the ethnographic literature a number of rich accounts of the ways in which males and females interact in given contexts. Recent studies have also emphasized the differential impact of development and economic change on males and females in rural communities, which has created new insights into the organization of rural Mesoamerican societies (e.g., Bossen 1984; Ehlers 1990; Mathews 1985; Stephen 1991). But if gender is not necessarily defined in terms of the obvious, biological binary sexual difference, then one of the things ethnographers need to do—something that has not been done in relation to Mesoamerica—is ask what the gender distinctions, in this area, are based on.

In carrying out this project, we have to be careful not to reduce the meaningful aspects of gender to one or two core functions (Phillips 1990: 94–95; Strathern 1988), acknowledging that gender can be conceptualized and classified in more than one way (Meigs 1990; Moore 1994). Failure to realize this can produce confusing and even misleading results. For example, an assertion is often made in the ethnographic literature of Mesoamerica that genders are “complementary.” One can discern three distinct senses in which genders are said to be complementary. First, there is the sense of two halves “constituting the whole,” as in the gendered images used in Mesoamerican religions, which begin with the proposition that reality is unified. The divine principle responsible for the nature of the cosmos is often rendered in a discourse that combines maleness and femaleness, as in the case of the Father–Mother gods of the Maya (Hunt 1977: 234). Here, the indivisibility of reality is highlighted, and transgndered images are used to evoke wholeness and completion. These images derive their force from denying the seemingly binary relation between male and female (D. Tedlock 1983: 268). The second sense in which the genders are said to be complementary is that of males and females mutually completing each other. The ethnographic literature in this instance focuses on the way men and women need each other to achieve a certain status in society. Thus, throughout rural Mesoamerica, one becomes a fully adult man or woman only after marriage. Finally, there is the sense that men and women complement each other in order to produce effects in concert that are different from those produced separately. In this case, the focus is usually on something like cargo service, fiesta sponsorship, or household maintenance, which requires males and females to pool their efforts to ensure a successful outcome.

We can see from these examples that the assertion of gender complementarity in Mesoamerica can have diverse references—a nondualistic image of cosmological wholeness, the achievement of a social status, or the organization of collective activities. Unfortunately, these concepts are often collapsed, or as-
sumed, rather than shown, to be mutually related. This is further complicated
when complementarity in something like fiesta sponsorship is taken as evi-
dence for a thoroughgoing ideology of equality. Not only does this reduce all
contexts to one, but it ignores the possibility of ordering complementary rela-
tionships in a hierarchical way.

In this essay, I focus specifically on the physiology of gender difference in
Mesoamerica, without making any claims about gender relations, the way this
difference may be used socially, or even how it may relate to nonphysiological
markers of gender difference. I am willing to concede that by doing so, I fail to
account for the roles that various institutions and practices play in shaping the
body, sex and gender, or the way in which gender discourses function within
hegemonic projects. At this stage, however, we need fewer totalizing pronounce-
ments and more precise analysis.

I begin with examples from my own fieldwork among Mixtec speakers in
southern Mexico. The Mixtecs constitute the third largest indigenous language
group in Mexico, with more than four hundred thousand speakers. They live in
villages and small towns in the Mixteca, a region covering western Oaxaca,
eastern Guerrero, and southern Puebla, with sizable immigrant communities in
Baja, California, and elsewhere in the United States. Since 1983, I have been
working with Mixtec speakers in Santiago Nuyoo, a town of about three thou-
sand inhabitants in the Mixteca Alta region of western Oaxaca (Monaghan
1995). I have also carried out fieldwork in Mixtec-speaking towns on the Pa-
cific coast of Oaxaca and in the arid Mixteca Baja of Oaxaca and Puebla. Most
of the information I present here comes from Mixtec communities that have a
high proportion of monolingual Mixtec speakers, a very low percentage of
converts to evangelical and other faiths, and only a handful of nonindigenous
inhabitants. Many of the points made in this essay about the construction of
gender in the Mixteca can be applied to other Mesoamerican communities
that share similar profiles, as I attempt to demonstrate with supporting evidence
from the literature.

THE BODY AS MATERIALIZED DIFFERENCE

It is not easy to frame questions that would allow one to establish whether
bodily organs or physiological processes are a focus of gender difference. First
of all, there arises the problem of talking about a subject that is not normally
discussed in mixed company. Additionally, it is problematic for a man to discuss
women with other men, as well as talk to women directly about sexual matters.
But perhaps the most difficult issue for me has been deciding how to deter-
mine what a “focus” might be for the people I work with. No one would deny,
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for example, that there are genital differences between males and females, yet how does one conclude whether these differences are a major center of attention in Mixtec gender ideology? I have decided to approach this question through an examination of taboos, since norms of avoidance and prohibition single out matters of special interest, often because they are powerful, dangerous, or both.

In Santiago Nuyoo there are several taboos that constrain female participation in productive activities. Women should not sow or weed corn fields, they should not climb fruit trees, nor should they step over or sit upon corn, beans, or any other agricultural products. With some variations, this pattern can also be found in other areas, as among the Q’eqchi’ Maya of Guatemala (Wilson 1995: 114–115). The reason for this taboo is that in Mixtec discourse women are ten’en, “polluting,” which the Mixtec relate to the odor and emanations from female genitals. Such emanations, it is believed, will cause the crops to fail, fruit trees to become barren, and seeds to spoil. A particularly vivid example of this is found in the Codex Laud (Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García 1994: fol. 40), where the scribe has portrayed Tlazolteotl, the Central Mexican goddess identified with sexual filth, with a dark vapor coming from between her legs.

Male activity is also constrained by taboos. As discussed below, men in certain states should not go into corn fields at any stage of production, nor should they approach places where other men are making lime. (This process requires limestone to be heated in an underground oven.) These males are also ten’en, or polluting, and the odor and emanations coming from their genitals will likewise cause crops to fail, fruit trees to become barren, and so on.

If males are not all pure, however, females are not all polluting. Young girls for example, may help in the fields or climb fruit trees without causing any damage. Aged women are also often freed from these restrictions (although I do not believe that many eighty-year-old women would rejoice at being allowed to shimmy up a mango tree again).

What makes certain males and most adult females polluting is not something essential to their being, but the fact of their having engaged in sexual intercourse. In Nuyoo Mixtec, the verb used to describe the sexual act is sa’a cuachi, “to sin,” which should be interpreted as physical stain or defilement rather than interior guilt. The idea that the sexual act produces pollution and negative effects can be encountered in other areas of Mesoamerica as well. For the Mixe, another indigenous group in Oaxaca, a dream of sexual union portends the loss of crops, terrible sickness, or the death of a family member (Lipp 1991: 45). Among the Q’eqchi’, sex is “a shameful, guilty act,” although it is not the odor but the heat generated by the act that damages the corn (Wilson 1995: 112, 152). In a Tzotzil Maya story from Chiapas, people begin to engage in sex
only after they are instructed how to do so by a demon named Pukuh (Gossen 1993: 424). Although the Catholic Church itself had once taught that Original Sin was transmitted through marital sexuality (Ingham 1986: 78–79, 188), at least some colonial Spanish priests found the idea that sex could lead to crop failure and misfortune so unorthodox that they described it in their reports on illicit and demonically inspired knowledge (e.g., Ruiz de Alarcón 1892: 182–183). Early Spanish accounts also documented the Náhuatl practice of bathing children at birth to remove the contamination of their parents’ sexual activity, since it was believed that sexual fluids could pollute the child (Burkhart 1989: 113; López Austin 1980, 1: 326, 336; Sullivan 1966: 83).

Since the source of pollution is the sexual act, the males who are not allowed to go into the corn fields must be those who have had sexual relations relatively recently. It is said that a man should wait at least a day after sex before going back to work and should bathe thoroughly, especially if he is planting or weeding. Participation in ritual activities is also prohibited after sex. Some indigenous groups in Oaxaca extend this prohibition in dramatic ways. In the Chatino-speaking town of Santiago Yaítepec, for instance, the ritual calendar requires the general population to observe 249 days of abstinence yearly; as a consequence, July, August, and October, which fall nine months after the periods with few restrictions, have consistently high birth rates (Greenberg 1981: 163–168). For individual Mazatec religious specialists, periods of sexual abstinence can last up to fifty-two days (Boege 1988: 173).

It is true that defilement from the sexual act lasts longer in the case of women. One Nuyooteco man has attributed the difference to bodily architecture, saying that women retain sexual fluids and cannot remove the pollution as quickly and easily as men; consequently, since it is assumed that adult women have sex regularly, they are never completely free from the pollution. Thus, there is nothing inherently more polluting about female genitals than male genitals. The same notion can be seen in the widespread Nuyooteco opinion that the reason for the difference is a functional consequence of clothing: men wear pants, which prevent the odors and emanations from escaping the genital area, while women wear skirts, from which the emanations are free to escape. June Nash (1970: 272) reports something similar for the Maya of Chiapas, among whom a woman’s skirt is perceived to capture the “negatively powerful” odors that emanate from her body. In some areas adult women seem to achieve a pure state by abstinence, just as males can. The Totonac of eastern Mexico, for example, consider widows pure because they do not have sex. Widows therefore often assume the task of preparing foods and other objects on ceremonial occasions (Ichon 1973: 248–249, pl. 18).
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All this suggests that differences between male and female participation in productive activities are not based on genital difference. Men and women can be equally polluting, and the source of this pollution is the same for both. It should be noted that the word often translated as “genitals” in Mixtec, shu, encompasses both genitals and anus, and Nuyootecos generally identify this area of the body as the part that is most likely to “pick up dirt.” Barbara Tedlock (1982: 146) notes that in Quiche, the polite name for genitals of either sex is awas, or “taboo,” while Leslie Devereaux (1987: 92) remarks that for the Zinacantan “there is no particular conceptual elaboration of the physiological differences of male and female.” The idea that genitals are not the focus of differentiation for Mesoamerican people may perhaps also be seen in the Aititeco use of the avocado as a metaphor for both sexes’ genitals (Tarn and Prechtel 1986: 173), as well as in the belief that males and females, as gendered beings, existed prior to their acquisition of genitals. Alfonso Villa Rojas (1978: 437–438) cites a Yucatec Maya Adam and Eve story, in which the two, while in the Garden of Eden, were physiologically undifferentiated. Even though they formed “la primer pareja humana,” neither of them had genitals, and Eve had no breasts. God placed them in the garden to take care of an apple called Príncipe. After a while they were unable to resist and ate the apple (Eve’s culpability is much reduced in the Maya version). Pieces of the apple got stuck in different places in their bodies, causing changes to appear. One piece, stuck in Adam’s throat, became his Adam’s apple, another piece got stuck between his legs and turned into his penis. One more piece became Eve’s breasts, and another her “zona sexual.” Sin occurred for the first time because the two began to have sexual relations, not because they disobeyed God.

It is true that the lack of genitals here could be interpreted as a manifestation of a presocial world. There is evidence from Mesoamerica that genital ambiguity can be viewed as a manifestation of a general lack of identity. Thus, in some places those born on the five unlucky days—the period “sin año,” or time out of time, as Toribio de Benavente o Motolinía (1914: 29) puts it—are said to lack a destiny. Destiny in Mesoamerica is identity, personality, and fortune all rolled into one, so those born at this time lack identity. Among the Ixil Maya of Guatemala, such individuals were held to be sexually ambiguous; girls looked like boys, and boys looked like girls (Lincoln 1945: 118). We do see individuals without genitals portrayed in the Codex Vindobonensis (Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García 1992), one of the few surviving Pre-Columbian books, even though these individuals are not genderless.

To repeat, the argument here is only that genitals are not an important basis for an ideology of gender differentiation; Mesoamerican people certainly do
recognize distinctions between male and female sexual organs. So, we may ask, is there a body organ or physiological process that does define gender difference for native Mesoamerican people? The evidence so far has been based on the equivalences found in the way male and female genitals are treated in the taboo system. Are there bodily organs or physiological processes that are differently tabooed? To answer this question, we need to consider the treatment of pregnancy in Nuyoo and other Mesoamerican societies.

**PREGNANCY**

In Nuyoo, there is a wide range of activities that pregnant women should avoid, and which do not have anything to do with their health or the health of their fetuses. Pregnant women should not approach metal pots where pork rind is frying, since it will then come out heavy with fat and sticky. Pregnant women should avoid the places where tamales are being boiled, since the tamales will then cook only on one side. The same is true for meat and ground corn cooked in underground ovens (the famous Mixtec *barbacoa*). Among the Huave of Oaxaca, pregnant women should not approach places where chocolate or atole is being prepared, since they will cause it to curdle (Rita 1979: 285). In Nuyoo, even tortillas will be affected, since pregnant women will cause them to grow mold after only half a day. Pregnant women should also avoid the ovens where men make lime, since the fire will burn unevenly, and the rock will come out only half-done. This can also be seen in Zinacantan, where it is believed that the fire will burn outward from the chimney where the stones are piled, toward the oven entrance (Blaffer 1972: 122). In pottery-making communities in Oaxaca, pregnant women do not approach kilns for the same reason. Finally, pregnant women in Nuyoo should avoid contact with fruit, in particular bananas, since these will mature only on one side, with the other side remaining green. Some say that pregnant women may upset things because they have a strong vision, *nuu sheen*, sometimes translated as the “evil eye,” which Jacques Galinier (1990: 649–651), who has worked among the Otomi, alludes to when he notes that pregnant women are sometimes suspected of witchcraft.

Becoming pregnant and giving birth are a rite of passage in many Mesoamerican societies. Conversely, not being able to produce children is often grounds for divorce. Among the Chinantec of Oaxaca, brides take pride in being visibly pregnant at the wedding ceremony (the betrothed may initiate sexual relations immediately after the formal *pedida*, or marriage request) (Bartolomé and Barbas 1990: 176). According to some Nuyootecos, women who do not bear children find themselves condemned to a very unhappy fate.
after death. They say that the evil wind Tachi forces these women to have its children, so they spend eternity giving birth to snakes, toads, scorpions, and the like. Others say that they go to a cold, dark, sad place, where they live alone. No such fate awaits men, although Nuyootecos do tell the story of a man whom god returned to life because he had not had sex.

These data suggest that in Nuyoo and other Mesoamerican societies there is a focus on the pregnant body as a gendered sign of difference. While a variety of taboos restrict the activities of women who are pregnant, in Nuyoo at least there is no equivalent set of taboos for men. We might ask at this point why pregnancy is of special interest in Mesoamerica. If genitals represent, for us, things that are constitutive of differences in male and female identity, can we say that pregnancy represents something equally significant?

One way to answer this question begins with considering the widespread use of the body and its processes as a kind of idiom to organize the realm of production in Mesoamerica. Those familiar with the physiocratic eighteenth-century model of the economy, in which exchange was likened to blood circulation (see Gudeman 1986), should not be surprised that Mesoamerican ideas about the body would enter into ideas about production. Indeed, Europeans in the premodern period frequently wrote about production as “giving birth” to new material objects. This seems to be the general sense in which production is viewed in Mesoamerica as well. Perhaps the best example of this is found in the work of Martín Prechtel and Robert Carlsen (1988: 123), when they note that “amongst the people of Santiago Atitlán, weavings are not just woven but in fact born.” As evidence, they point out that the shed is called the umbilicus, and the shuttle, nourishment (1988: 126). In Santiago Nuyoo, corn production is a process where the corn plant, identified as a young, fertile woman, bears an ear of corn like a mother bears a child (Monaghan 1995: 110–117). As in other areas of Mesoamerica, containers such as large cooking jars and ovens, in which a number of productive processes take place, are equated with wombs (Monaghan 1995: 57; for other examples, see Galinier 1990: 303, 307; Katz 1996: 6. Alfredo López Austin (1980 1: 275) notes that during earthquakes the Aztecs covered their ollas so that pregnant women would not miscarry. Moreover, in the Mixteca, the womb is seen as a kind of receptacle in which the fetus grows, and women who are pregnant are said to be “cooking.” Thus, any process that involves the transformation of something through baking it in an oven, firing it in a kiln, or boiling it in a jar resembles what goes on in a woman’s womb when she is pregnant.

Three clarifying points need to be made about the notion that production is like the process by which a woman brings a child to term. First, we need to
be careful not to view production simply as the projection of human physiological processes onto the acts of weaving, corn growth, lime making, or cooking. Mixtec ideas about the process of becoming pregnant and bringing a child to term are also informed by ideas about other productive processes. The woman's body, for example, goes from being yute, while she is with child, to nijia, after she gives birth and is given a sweatbath by the midwife. The former is a term used to refer to plants that have not ripened and whose fruits remain green, immature, and full of water, while the latter signifies things that are mature and hard, like stout beams used for constructing a house (see also Katz 1996). Moreover, the state of being pregnant is compared to a plant seed that has become wet and sprouted. This projection of the cycles of plant development onto pregnancy can likewise be seen among the Chinantec, where, as Carole Browner (1985: 27–28) reports, the gestation of the fetus is compared to the process of growth of a parasitic mistletoe. The fetus is believed to attach itself to the mother's spine, much as the mistletoe attaches itself to a tree trunk, and then to feed from the mother's intestine, just as the mistletoe seed sends roots into the host plant and is nourished by the plant's food intake. The parallel can also be found among the Zoque, where Laureano Reyes Gómez (1988: 207–212), noting the frequent metaphorical associations between the human body and trees, concludes that the plant world is the model for the body. Nor should we see this only in naturalistic terms. As mentioned above, the process of carrying a child to term is explicitly said to be a process of “cooking” (see also Blaffer 1972: 123). Esther Katz (1996: 6, 13) reminds us that the Mixtec word chi’yo, “cooking,” can mean boiling and steaming as well as roasting, and that it is the former processes that the Mixtec want to evoke when referring to pregnancy. These examples indicate that, just as we should be careful not to accept one's sex as a presocial, biological fact, so we should be equally careful when considering reproduction.

The second clarifying point concerns the division of labor. Many ethnographic accounts have documented a clear-cut division of labor in rural Mesoamerican societies, with activities divided into male and female tasks (although what these are can vary). Productive tasks that are not gendered are the exception. In the Mixtec households I lived in, only shelling corn, gathering firewood, tending goats and sheep, harvesting crops and hauling loads from the fields occur to me as activities in which men and women participated equally. Most other jobs were either “male” or “female.” Moreover, participation of women in many male tasks was constrained by taboos, as was male participation in some female tasks (although, of course, people could ignore these taboos in a pinch). In Zinacantan, there is a well-developed sense of shame that
surrounds the participation of males in female tasks such as cooking tortillas or even picking up a loom (Devereaux 1987: 97–98).

If one looks closely at Mesoamerican ideas about production, however, the ideological segregation of genders is not as absolute as it appears initially. One could argue that both males and females are present in any productive act. Thus, in Nuyoo it may be men who make lime, but the focus of the activity is the lime oven, which men treat as a womb. If a pregnant woman, for example, happens by, and the process is ruined because the fire begins to burn unevenly, the men will pull out all the timbers and reinsert them, starting the fire again. In this case, however, they will also add bone to the logs. Bone is considered a highly charged, fertile, even seminal substance in Mixtec culture (Furst 1978: 318), and thus it is as if the men have reinitiated the productive process by refilling the oven/womb with bone/semen. This interpretation is supported by the Mixtecs’ own explanation for this practice: they say that the bone gives yi’, “heat” or “force,” to the fire. Yi’ is an unbound morpheme that also appears in the words yi’in, “bone,” and tee yi’, “male” (King n.d.).

Weaving is another activity where both male and female elements are present. The batten of the loom is called in Nuyoo the machete, which is the preeminent male symbol; dreams of a machete, for example, portend the birth of a male child. Even though weavers are female, weaving depends on their manipulation of this highly charged object (it is so potent, in fact, that should one strike nettlesome female children with it, it might leave them sterile). In other words, males may be the ones who engage in agriculture, and females, the ones who weave, but—at least in terms of the ways in which production is imagined—both activities seem to be joint creations. Even the delivery of infants can be seen in this way, since in Nuyoo males serve as midwives.

The third point to make about production is that when we are confronted with examples like this, our tendency is to think of the production process as involving the producer engaged in a kind of sexual act with a female or male who is symbolically present or symbolically giving birth. If one looks closely at the ethnographic material, however, another interpretation offers itself. In the case of agriculture, the male farmer manipulates both male and female items in the productive process—the digging stick and the machete on the male side, the earth and the “female” corn plant on the female side. In weaving, the female weaver manipulates both female and male items; the shed may be female, but the batten is male. What this suggests is that producers are not symbolically having sex or becoming pregnant; rather, the producers’ role is to bring together items that are critically matched and integral to the creative process.

If we return to the question posed earlier—why pregnancy is a basis for the
construction of gender difference in Mesoamerica—the answer, of course, has
more than a little to do with the fact that pregnancy is something that males
cannot achieve. This does not tell us, however, why, among all physiological and
bodily states that might distinguish males from females, pregnancy is such a
focus. To address this question, it is important to begin by noting that taboos on
pregnant women are not about contamination. In my opinion, this is a point
that Sarah Blaffer misses in her discussion of the Zinacantan material. Blaffer
(1972: 122) says that pregnant women cause things to putrefy, but I do not
think that this is the only, or even the correct way to conceptualize the situa-
tion (it is not clear to me, for example, how lime can putrefy). While it is true
that Nuyooteco men and women in a state of pollution can damage the same
things as pregnant women, the ethnographic material indicates that they do so
for different reasons. Pregnant women are definitely not ten'en,”polluting,” and
do not emit odors or any other kind of emanations that cause things to “go
wrong.” Most say that the danger lies with their vision. The Huave even con-
sider that pregnant women emit a very pleasing odor (which may attract un-
wanted visitors) (Rita 1979: 279). In Nuyoo, pregnant women affect things by
causin them to “remain raw” (nza'a ti'i'in) or “not cook” (ndu chi'yo), not by
causin them to rot. The explanation seems to be that pregnant women, who
are “cooking,” should avoid contact with things that are also being cooked,
such as baked foods, pork rinds fried in fat, lime made in ovens, pottery fired in
kilns, and so on. The examples that Blaffer (1972: 122) gives, in which pregnant
women harm lime and chicha, involve things that are also cooking or trans-
forming, with the result that they come out badly.

Women, then, are cooking, ripening, and “producing” while they are preg-
nant, and thus may disrupt other productive processes. The taboos that exist are
concerned with keeping productive processes discrete, since the things that
pregnant women negatively affect are all likewise in the process of cooking,
ripening, or transforming (even the moldy tortillas are the product of improper
cooking; they have not been baked long enough, and too much water has been
left in them). As one Nuyooteco pointed out, no one would try to cook barbacoa
in the oven where one was making lime—one or the other, if not both, was
bound to be ruined.

Cooking, of course, is a widespread metaphor for creation and transforma-
tion, perhaps as widespread as birth, and thus, if pots are born, it should not be
too surprising that babies are cooked. However, it is worth noting that, based
on the Mixtec idioms, what occurs in a woman’s body is the direct counterpart,
if not the equivalent, of the very process that makes humans civilized. One
example of this is the classification of space. Cleared land, where people have
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cut down the forest to build houses, make milpa, and carry out social activities, is also called *chi’yo* “cooked.” In the sixteenth century, the term *chi’yo* was used for altar, house site, or foundation. In the ancient writing systems, the concept of *chi’yo* was represented by a temple platform with a stairway to one side (Smith 1973: 45, 47). “Cooked” lands contrast with forests and brush (*yuku*), places beyond ordered existence.

On another level, pregnancy and birth are equated with agriculture. For Nuyootecos, corn agriculture, along with living in houses, sacrificing to the gods, and cooking food, is a practice that distinguishes humans from the presocial *tiumi,* “owl people,” of ancient times, who hunted, lived in caves, did not worship the gods, and ate their food raw (see Monaghan 1995: 32–33). The gods made corn agriculture possible by giving to people their daughter, the corn plant, just as parents give their daughters in marriage. She then bore a child, the ear of corn, just as newly married women ideally bear children.

Finally, birth is widely used to represent institutional acts. There is, for example, the idea that Nuyootecos had claimed the territory that they came to occupy because they had emerged from a place called *soco usha,* “cave seven” or “womb seven.” Caves of emergence are iconographically compared to wombs throughout Mesoamerica, and images of wombs are ubiquitous in the cosmogonic events portrayed in Mesoamerican manuscripts (Milbrath 1988). Even sacrifice—the cosmogonic act articulating Mesoamerican social, political, and cosmological arrangements—is related to pregnancy and birth. In a neat conjunction of images, the Lord 9-Wind, the Mixtec Quetzalcoatl, brings water from the sky to make the land fertile, oversees the birth of the Mixtec elite from the tree at Apoala, initiates key rites in the Mixtec cult, and is born from a sacrificial knife (Codex Vindobonensis, in Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García 1992: fol. 49a), suggesting that if creation is like the act of sacrifice, then sacrifice is like the act of giving birth. Again, throughout Mesoamerica, sacrificial wounds and wombs are equated (Milbrath 1988).

Although Nuyootecos say that pregnant women are sick, *ca’vi,* and although, after giving birth, women are flaccid and weak, *ki’mu,* one should not assume that this is a negative state. To the contrary, the processes associated with it suggest that women possess a unique power. It is true that the literature usually describes pregnancy in negative terms. However, Q’eqchi’ women, when pregnant, strive to reach a state of *kalkab’il,* which means peace, contentment, and

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2 The term *ca’vi* refers specifically to the blotches that sometimes appear on the skin of pregnant women and boys entering puberty.

3 The term *ki’mu* is also applied to chickens and turkeys that have just laid an egg.
optimism. Richard Wilson (1995: 129) notes that the Q’eqchi’ use the same word for the desired ambiance of a ritual, suggesting that a pregnant woman is in a marked, sacred condition.

It is also clear that pregnant women can act positively. In the ethnographic literature this involves righting productive acts that are going badly. Victoria Bricker (1973: 107) mentions that in Chamula feasts, the sponsor may ask women who are pregnant to bite the brisket of the bull that has been slaughtered, to protect the meat from flies and from spoiling. In other words, while pregnant women can cause meat that is already in the fire to cook improperly, they can also prevent raw meat from starting to cook improperly. Among the Otomi, pregnant women can cause frying pork rinds that have become too crisp to soften again (Galinier 1990: 425). Similarly, in San Miguel el Grande, a Mixtec-speaking community near Nuyoo, a man may ask a pregnant woman to walk around the oven in a counterclockwise direction if lime or barbacoa is coming out badly, so that the product comes out as it should. A somewhat different example is provided by the ethnohistorical literature. The Mexica saw women who died in pregnancy as the counterparts of warriors who died in battle. Warriors would try to force midwives to surrender the bodies of women who died in this way, or even disinter a buried body, so that they could cut off her middle finger and remove some of her hair, which they would then attach on the inside of their shields when going into battle. This would “numb” the feet of their foes, ensuring that they captured and killed many of them (Sullivan 1966: 89). Thus, as this example clearly shows, the power of the pregnant body cannot be said to be absolutely positive or negative, since it depends on the woman’s relationship to the object she affects.

To conclude, if bodily organs and processes are viewed in terms of what is singled out as special and powerful, i.e., tabooed, then male and female genitals do not appear strongly differentiated in Mesoamerica. However, men and women are strongly differentiated by pregnancy in the taboo system, in that the restrictions placed on activity of pregnant females have no parallels for males. Moreover, pregnant women have unique effects on things, which should not be seen as contaminating. While the regulative functions of these constructions have not been considered here (see, however, Browner 1986, 1989), it is clear that the Mesoamerican fascination with pregnancy must be seen in terms of the discourses that associate it with the practices of corn agriculture, clearing land for building houses and towns, and craft production—in other words, the civilizing acts that make humans distinct from the presocial beings of the past.
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Under certain conditions women became political leaders in the ancient world. In which ancient societies was it easier for women to rule, and why? I begin this essay by presenting two Old World societies in which women rose to power. In one society, female attributes were thought to be desirable for rulership; in the other, rulership was considered so “gender male” that a queen literally had to be depicted as a king. Having established the two opposite ends of the continuum, I then situate Mesoamerican societies between those extremes, evaluating the degree of difficulty that women had in becoming rulers. By looking at the two Old World cases first, we can begin to develop a framework for the comparative study of Mesoamerican women, and we can focus on those Mixtec, Maya, and Aztec women who broke through the “glass ceiling” to be rulers in their own right.

Male rulers dominated the records of ancient states. Their names and faces are well known to us from the many monuments they commissioned. Most women who became politically powerful were members of royalty. Many were the mothers of kings, wives of kings, or temporary regents who kept the throne warm for sons too young to rule. Countless royal women influenced political decisions through advice and persuasion, but remained invisible to history. Their role was to be “the whisper behind the throne” (Cohen 1993: 191). Among Africa’s Ashanti, for example, the whisper came from the ohema, or “queen mother.” Her son, the king, sat upon a stool that was defined as a male artifact on which no woman, save one, could sit. When the Ashanti king went off to war, his wife took her husband’s name and sat upon his seat. This occasion was the “only exception,” according to Robert Rattray (1969: 83), “to the rule that
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no woman may sit upon the male stool.” Nevertheless, his mother’s words were said to have profound influence on his political decisions.

Each society discussed here defined gender differently, and each had its own history (Gero and Conkey 1991). Such histories reveal that programmatic statements like “history is androcentric” or “men make states, women make babies” are too rigid and stereotyped to be useful. As anthropologists, we must analyze each culture in its own terms before we search for general trends. As Lynn Meskell (1995) argues, our goal must be to discover the truth about past societies without imposing a modern political agenda.

THE LOVEDU OF SOUTH AFRICA

I begin with a society in which rulership became “gender female,” the Lovedu of South Africa (Fig. 1). According to the ethnohistory of this Bantu-speaking group, their last male ruler held office around 1800. He was followed by three female rulers named Mujaji I, II, and III (Krige and Krige 1943).

Key to the Mujajis’ success were five attributes—order, peace, prosperity, nurturing, and appeasement—all intimately associated with women by the Lovedu. On the other hand, the Lovedu connected chaos, aggression, and strife with men. “Politics that works was feminine,” says Ronald Cohen (1993: 194), and “politics that leads to dispute or even violent conclusions was masculine.”

The Lovedu regarded women as nurturers, associating them with harmony and peace. Their last male ruler, they explained, was a leader during times of war, but after him they needed a leader to bring peace and prosperity, and a woman was considered to possess more of the necessary qualities. “The Lovedu case is instructive,” says Cohen (1993: 195), “because womanly qualities are the cardinal virtues associated with political skills even when, as they usually are, the practitioners are men.”

The Lovedu version of how they came to have queens undoubtedly combines legend with history, but it reveals a worldview and a political ideology in which women could rise to power. The regime of the last male ruler, they say, was marred by intercne strife. At the end of his reign, this ruler predicted that a new era would begin and that a woman would rule. He confided this vision to his daughter, who later became Mujaji I, asking that she bear him an heir. Since the first child of this incestuous union was a son, he was strangled; the second child was a daughter who lived to be Mujaji II.

Mujaji I, known as the Rain Queen because her name literally meant “Transformer of the Clouds,” was on the Lovedu throne from ca. 1800 to 1850. This period was noted for its peace and prosperity, a relief from the chaos of her father’s reign. Mujaji I spent most of her life secluded from her own people,
which gave rise to legends about her fair skin, her wisdom, and her immortality. In her court she received ambassadors from the neighboring Zulu and Swazi, who gave her gifts of young women as “brides.” In return, the Mujaji was supposed to send rain to the territories of these foreign visitors. Her reputation as a rain-maker was great, with the Zulu regarding her as “the greatest magician of the north.” Among her neighbors, the Mujaji was considered “immortal, inaccessible, mysterious.” She was described as the “queen of locusts and of drought, a four-breasted marvel, her name struck terror in the hearts of would-be enemies, and her fame surpassed even that of Mantatisi, the ferocious female tyrant who . . . laid the foundations of the Rotse empire” (Krige and Krige 1943: 1).

The young women received as “brides” by the Mujaji were used by her in a strategy of alliance building; she married them out to most of the one hundred district heads ruling below her in the political hierarchy. By allocating wives to district heads, the Rain Queen became “parent-in-law” to all (Krige and Krige
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1943: 175). This web of fictive kinship extended to other spheres, and many offices were considered “gender female.” For example, the intermediaries who came to the Lovedu capital and through whom political and legal matters were brought from the districts to the Rain Queen, were called “mothers” of their districts. This was a hereditary post that could be filled by either men or women. In 1940, 86 percent of the “mothers” were biological males whose role it was to “nurture” their respective districts (Krige and Krige 1943: 180). Many “mothers” were relatives of the Rain Queen, whose job it was to settle disputes among her “children.”

It should be noted that, although the Rain Queen was the de facto head of the judicial system, she never appeared in court because it was located in the men’s courtyard. She was, however, “always in the background, and in theory all decisions at the capital should be reported to, and confirmed by her” (Krige and Krige 1943: 186).

The Lovedu queen had no official husband, but maintained a secret male consort by whom she bore offspring. Mujaji II, allegedly the incestuous offspring of Mujaji I and her father, was secretly entrusted with the scepter of office around 1850. Because Mujaji II was barren, her “wife” bore her successor, Mujaji III, who ascended the throne in 1896. By then, there were so many Europeans living in South Africa that we have written histories independent of the oral accounts of the Lovedu themselves.

These European histories confirm the queen’s reputation for being able to bring rain and good harvests. They tell us that her emotions were thought to affect the rain. For example, when she was upset there was drought, and during droughts the “mothers” of the districts approached her with gifts, pleading for rain and a good crop. “It is doubtful,” write Eileen and Jacob Krige (1943: 273), “whether any one other than the queen herself is in possession of this secret [of bringing rain], for it is bound up with the title and power to succeed to the throne.” This secret of rain making was imparted to the queen’s successor just prior to the queen’s death.

Without question, the likelihood of female rulership among the Lovedu was increased by that culture’s positive view of feminine qualities such as nurturing and peacemaking. “The queen does not fight,” say the Lovedu (Krige and Krige 1943: 284), who consider appeasement a strength and a source of prestige, rather than a sign of weakness. Nowhere else in South Africa, according to the Kriges, were so many women found in so many important political positions, especially considering the fact that kinship was patrilineal. Lovedu worldview and ideology may be contrasted, for instance, with those of their neighbors, the Lozi, for whom leadership was considered a masculine role. The
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Lozi at that time had two capitals, with a man ruling the northern capital, and a woman the southern. All Lozi considered the leader of the southern capital to be a man, including the ruler herself. “When I go into council,” said a Lozi princess to anthropologist Max Gluckman (1951: 24), “I change—I am a man.” This revealing statement prepares us for the case of Egypt’s Hatshepsut.

EIGHTEENTH-DYNASTY EGYPT

Egypt’s eighteenth dynasty (1550–1300 B.C.) offers a sharp contrast to the Lovedu. It would be difficult to imagine an ancient state in which a woman had less chance of becoming ruler. The ancient Egyptians considered kingship “gender male,” because Re (the sun god and father of the pharaohs) was male, as were both Horus (the falcon sky god) and Osiris (god of agriculture, death, and rebirth). There was, in fact, no word for “queen” in early Egyptian hieroglyphic texts; the only titles open to royal women were “god’s wife,” “king’s wife,” and “king’s sister.” To be recognized as a ruler in eighteenth-dynasty art, one had to wear a chenjyt or kilt, a false beard, and a nemes headcloth—all male garments. To rise to the top, a woman literally had to become “king.”

Out of Egypt’s roughly three hundred pharaohs during three thousand years, we know of four who were women—Nitocris, Sobek Neferu, Tausret, and Hatshepsut. Of these four, the best-documented case is that of Hatshepsut, who ruled from ca. 1479 to 1458 B.C., during the eighteenth dynasty.

Hatshepsut’s Rule

Hatshepsut’s father was Thutmose I (1504–1492 B.C.). Upon his death, Hatshepsut’s husband (and half-brother) Thutmose II came to power; when her husband died in 1479 B.C., Hatshepsut’s stepson (and nephew) Thutmose III acceded to the throne. Within a few years of Thutmose III’s reign, Hatshepsut usurped the throne of Egypt. For perhaps twenty to twenty-two years, she was the supreme power. Her young nephew Thutmose III did not disappear, but seems to have remained as junior co-regent, while his aunt was senior co-regent (Murnane 1977: 32–44). In her monuments, Hatshepsut backdated her reign to 1479, the date of her husband’s death; she also made sure that her monuments were set up within Egypt’s boundaries, while Thutmose III’s were erected outside.

Scholars believe that Hatshepsut had been planning her takeover as king for some time, but shrewdly kept her male relative on as junior partner (Murnane 1977; Naville 1906; Redford 1967: 21; Uphill 1961: 251). She clearly knew how Egyptian kingship worked. Prior to her takeover, Hatshepsut had borne three principal titles—“god’s wife,” “king’s wife,” and “king’s sister.” Of the
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three titles, the crucial one was “god’s wife,” which provided her with divine credentials that helped pave the way to kingship (Robins 1983: 76–77; Troy 1986). The title “god’s wife” seems to have referred specifically to a priestly office for which a woman wore a short wig to conduct special temple rites.

Even as co-regent, “Hatshepsut reinforced her authority by drawing on kingly iconography, titulature, and actions” (Robins 1993: 46). In seizing the throne, Hatshepsut began to refer to herself with masculine pronouns such as “he,” “him,” and “his.” Compensating for her role as usurper, she commissioned more than two hundred statues of herself, a behavior reminiscent of usurpers in Mesoamerican cultures as well (Marcus 1974: 83; 1992b: 306, 351). Most of these statues and reliefs come from Hatshepsut’s funerary temple at Deir el-Bahri on the west bank of the Nile at Thebes; these reliefs were carved before her death.

On most monuments commissioned by Hatshepsut, she is shown wearing male attire. Not only did Hatshepsut wear a nemes headcloth, a kilt, or a fake beard, but she had herself portrayed with the body of a man, as is evident when she is shown naked to the waist (Fig. 2). On other occasions she had herself depicted as a sphinx (Winlock 1942). Of scenes carved on the walls of her temple, Edouard Naville (1906: 5) says, “She knew that her sex was an obstacle to her recognition as king; the Egyptians would not allow a woman to occupy the throne, so she had to appear as a man.” Gay Robins (1993: 50–51) concurs, “Since there was no provision for a female king within Egyptian ideology, she had to adapt to a male gender role, appearing on her monuments in male costume with the figure of a man.”

Strategies of Hatshepsut

As had many male usurpers before her, Hatshepsut followed a multifaceted strategy to legitimize her reign. The main components of her strategy were as follows:

1. First, she “rewrote history” to claim that she had originally been crowned king by her father before his death (Redford 1967: 21; Robins 1983: 74). In her temple at Deir el-Bahri she claimed to have received the artifacts of kingship in a ceremony called “the appearance of the king of Upper and Lower Egypt,” held on New Year’s Day toward the end of her father’s reign (Naville 1906: 23–24).¹

We know that this claim is revisionist history, since other texts—written during her husband’s reign and the first years of her nephew’s reign—refer to

¹ An alternative reading of the same text holds that she was merely designated “heiress to the throne,” not king.
Hatshepsut as the “king’s wife.” A more likely “true” coronation date for her is recorded in the temple at Karnak. In the latter text, Hatshepsut claims that during the early years of her nephew’s reign, she was confronted by the god Amun who told her that she was “king of the two lands,” and crowned her. Following her usurpation, Hatshepsut kept her nephew absent from Egypt for extensive periods, conducting foreign wars, while she attended to internal affairs. Later we see carved reliefs in which Hatshepsut, in male attire, appears as the protagonist, while Thutmose III plays a less prominent role.

2. Hatshepsut’s claim that her father had chosen her as his heir was a good beginning; but she also needed divine parentage. So, in her funerary temple reliefs, she had herself variously portrayed as (a) the offspring of the god Amun.

Fig. 2  Chapelle rouge, Hatshepsut Block 26, Karnak. Hatshepsut (left) and Thutmose III (right) are both shown as males, naked to the waist, wearing the kilt of rulership. The only way we know that the figure on the left is not a biological male is by reading the name of Hatshepsut in the cartouche above her head.

Drawing by Kay Clahassey.
and her human mother, Ahmose, or (b) the offspring of the cow goddess Hathor and her human father, Thutmose I. One scene shows her drinking directly from Hathor’s divine udder (Fig. 3); another shows her being created as a male infant and his double, or ka (Fig. 4).

3. Hatshepsut allied herself with loyal men, some of whom had also served her father and husband during their reigns. These men included the steward Senenmut; Ineni, her father’s chief advisor; Ahmose pa-nekhbit, a treasurer and professional soldier; and Hapuseneb, a high priest of Amun.

Senenmut’s close relationship with Hatshepsut is reflected in his titles, “governor of the royal palace” and “superintendent of private bedrooms and bathrooms.” In anticipation of becoming king, Hatshepsut sent Senenmut to the Aswan quarries to procure red granite for two enormous obelisks to be set up in the eastern part of the temple at Karnak. Once these obelisks were erected,
Labib Habachi (1957: 96) assures us, “it is certain that [Hatshepsut] was known as 'king', for such monuments as obelisks were only erected by reigning kings.” Hatshepsut later commissioned two more obelisks of red granite, which showed her offering those monuments to the god Amun-Re. Significantly, the hieroglyphic text reads, “The king himself [sic] erected two large obelisks for his [sic] father Amun-Re” (Habachi 1984: 68).

4. In Egypt, kingly behavior included victory in battle and the taking of captives. There is evidence to suggest that war and captive taking became part of Hatshepsut’s strategies as well. Donald Redford (1967: 62) cites an inscription, carved by Hatshepsut’s artist Amenmose, that was found on the island of Sehel near Aswan; this text indicates that Hatshepsut was victorious in a war with Nubia. Referring to Hatshepsut only with masculine pronouns, an eyewitness account by an official named Ty describes the battle as follows: “I saw
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him [sic] overthrowing the Nubian nomads, their chiefs being brought to him [sic] as prisoners. I saw him [sic] destroying the Land of Nubia, while I was in the following of his [sic] Majesty. Behold I am a king’s messenger doing what is said” (Habachi 1957: 99–100, 102, 104).

Reinforcing Hatshepsut’s role as victorious general is a scene carved in her funerary temple at Deir el-Bahri; it shows the Nubian god Dedwen leading Nubian captives to Hatshepsut (Naville 1894–1908: VI, pl. 152). In the same part of her temple, Hatshepsut is depicted as a sphinx crushing enemies beneath her feet (see Fig. 5; Naville 1894–1908: VI, pl. 160). Further evidence comes from the stela of Djehuti, a man who claims to have seen Hatshepsut collecting booty on the battlefield itself (Habachi 1957: 104; Redford 1967: 60).

While these texts surely contradict earlier views of Hatshepsut’s reign as devoid of foreign wars (Wilson 1951: 174–175), one wonders whether Hatshepsut actually was present on the battlefield to receive prisoners and booty. Like the depictions of the Mixtec cacica 6 Monkey, discussed below, Hatshepsut’s texts are probably royal propaganda—a mix of fact, exaggeration, and fiction.

In support of this statement is the fact that Hatshepsut claimed to have expelled from Egypt the Hyksos, invaders from Palestine who ruled Egypt for

Fig. 5  Hatshepsut shown as a sphinx (head of a man and the body of a lion) trampling the bodies of her many enemies (redrawn after Naville 1894–1908, VI: pl. 160).
a time. This claim ignores the fifty to seventy-five years of prosperity that Egypt had enjoyed since two earlier rulers, Ahmose and Kamose, had repelled the Hyksos at the end of Egypt’s Second Intermediate period (ca. 1555 B.C.). Hatshepsut simply took credit for the victories of her predecessors.

Hatshepsut also tried to lay the groundwork for her daughter to succeed her as king. In a text from Sinai, carved in the eleventh year of her reign, Hatshepsut asserted that her daughter, Neferure, would succeed her in office. In preparation, she bestowed on her daughter the title hmt ntr, “god’s wife” (Gardiner and Peet 1952–55: 179). Her daughter, significantly, is shown in the accompanying scene with a single braid hanging from the side of her head (Troy 1986: 136), exactly as a royal male child would be depicted (Fig. 6). Further evidence of Hatshepsut’s effort to reverse gender roles was her appointment of a male steward, Senenmut, as her daughter’s “caregiver”—a role defined as female by Egyptian society (Fig. 7). Unfortunately for Hatshepsut, her attempt to establish her daughter as heir apparent by portraying her as “gender male” was unsuccessful. As Redford (1967: 85) puts it, “Hatshepsut was making a supreme effort by the sheer weight of her personality to modify the basis of Egyptian kingship and succession. But her personality was not sufficient, and her ancillary measures were not thorough enough. Nor were they
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logically conceived: her assumption of *kingly* attributes was, in fact, a concession to patriarchy.”

*The Execration of Hatshepsut’s Name*

For the better part of two decades, Hatshepsut succeeded in portraying herself as divine king and victorious general. But she was swimming against the tide of Egyptian culture, and “an aura of illegitimacy always surrounded the person of Hatshepsut” (Redford 1967: 82).

Sometime around the sixteenth year of her reign, Senenmut, her loyal supporter, disappeared from the written record; not long after, her daughter, Neferure, died. Her nephew and stepson Thutmose III, a successful general, was more often at Hatshepsut’s side, and he began to assume more and more of her duties. Although the early years of Thutmose III’s reign had been claimed by Hatshepsut as part of her reign (Murnane 1977; Redford 1967: 55), he finally ruled on his own after his aunt died.

Following Hatshepsut’s death, most of her monuments suffered the deliberate defacement, which Egyptologists call “execration.” “One by one her reliefs were hacked out,” Redford (1967: 87) tells us, “her inscriptions erased, her

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Fig. 7  Granite statue of Senenmut, Hatshepsut’s steward, in his role as “caregiver,” with his arms wrapped around Neferure, Hatshepsut’s daughter. Drawing by John Klausmeyer.
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cartouches obliterated, her obelisks walled up. Egypt was to know her no more.” The erasure of Hatshepsut’s name from her monument on the island of Sehel near Aswan was done in a manner identical to the erasures of her name at Deir el-Bahri, suggesting that most of the destruction can be attributed to Thutmose III after his aunt’s death (Habachi 1957: 91). Redford (1967: 87) explains Thutmose III’s actions as being “motivated not so much by a genuine hatred as by political necessity. His own legitimacy stood in need of demonstration. . . . To leave the glories of Hatshepsut’s reign open to view would, in any case, invite invidious comparison with his own accomplishments, a comparison that the new monarch just would not brook.”

Nor did the execration of Hatshepsut end there. An official king list, commissioned by Seti I more than 150 years after Hatshepsut’s death, does not mention her (Kemp 1989: fig. 4; Marcus n.d.b). Nor, for that matter, does the king list mention any of the other female rulers we know existed. Because of this deliberate “defeminization” of the Egyptian king lists, we probably cannot answer the question, “How many women ruled Egypt?” The simplest answer is, “More than Seti I wanted us to know.”

Mesoamerican States

Now let us turn to the Americas and examine the careers and strategies of some royal Mixtec, Maya, and Aztec women. Our excursion into the Old World has provided us with a comparative framework and a means of evaluating royal women in the Americas. As shall be demonstrated below, royal women of the Americas were intermediate between the Lovedu and eighteenth-dynasty Egypt in terms of the difficulty of breaking through the glass ceiling.

6 Monkey “Serpent Quechquemitl”: A Mixtec “Warrior Queen”

By the eleventh century A.D., the Classic Mixtec states of southern Mexico had broken down into smaller Postclassic polities known as cacicazgos, señoríos, or principalities. While these societies retained kingship and social stratification, their rulers generally controlled territories no larger than that of a small chiefdom.

The Postclassic Mixtec had a bilateral descent system with Hawaiian kinship terms (Spores and Flannery 1983: 340), which allowed nobles to reckon their descent through whichever parent had the bluest bloodlines (Spores 1974). Many lords and princes inherited titles through both parents. In theory, the father’s title was to pass to the first-born son of his first wife, but when no male heir was available, it could go to the first-born daughter. Sociobiologists would undoubtedly see this as a case of the ruler wanting his title to pass to a close genetic relative, regardless of gender.
Unlike the Aztec system of succession, in which the title was likely to pass to a brother, uncle, or nephew, the Mixtec system produced a lot of cacicas, or female rulers. From the painted books, or codices, of the Mixtec we know the names of at least 951 noble women (Marcus 1992b: 203, Whallon 1992). It is likely that the small size of many Mixtec principalities served to limit the pool of noble males, thereby increasing the likelihood of a woman rising to power.

The royal woman 6 Monkey, nicknamed “Serpent Quechquemitl” for her decorated overblouse, was born into this eleventh-century culture (Caso 1964; Spinden 1935). Her story is told in the Selden Codex, a painted book believed to have been written in Magdalena Jaltepec in Oaxaca’s Nochixtlán Valley (Smith 1983, 1994). Six Monkey had three older brothers, 1 Reed, 12 Water, and 3 Water, all of whom were ahead of her in the line of succession; but all three were defeated in battle and apparently sacrificed by their enemies. This left 6 Monkey as heir apparent, but in need of showing her military prowess.

The Selden Codex then follows 6 Monkey’s career. She is first shown conferring with a priest named 10 Lizard “Dead Man’s Hair/Jade Axe” (Fig. 8); they probably discussed what she needed to do to claim the throne of “Belching Mountain,” the place ruled by her father. The priest 10 Lizard sent her to a second priest, 6 Vulture “Planting Stick,” who in turn sent her on a pilgrimage to a sacred cave (Fig. 9). Following this, 6 Monkey selected her future husband,
Fig. 9 The priest 10 Lizard (a) sends 6 Monkey (b) to talk with a priest named 6 Vulture “Planting Stick” (c). Footprints indicate that 6 Monkey traveled to, and entered, a sacred cave (d) (redrawn after Marcus 1992b: fig. 11.20).
Fig. 10 The royal couple 6 Monkey (right) and 11 Wind (left) are shown in a “bathing scene,” one of the Mixtec conventions for marriage ceremonies. The wedding presents are shown above them (redrawn after Marcus 1992b: fig. 11.22).
Fig. 11  6 Monkey sends out two ambassadors (a and b); they pass through Hill of the Moon and speak with its lord, 6 Lizard (c); then they pass through Hill of the Insect with its lord, 2 Crocodile (d). These two lords (c and d) insult 6 Monkey's ambassadors. The insults are indicated by flint knives attached to their speech scrolls, a depiction of their “cutting words” (redrawn after Marcus 1992b: fig. 11.23).
Fig. 12  6 Monkey (a) is shown grasping the hair of her enemy, 6 Lizard (b), followed by 2 Crocodile (c); these prisoners are the two lords who insulted her ambassadors. Behind them is the compound place-name of Hill of the Moon/Hill of the Insect. Flames in the upper corners of the place sign indicate that those two towns were burned (redrawn after Marcus 1992b: fig. 11.26).
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a prince named 11 Wind “Bloody Tiger,” heir to the throne of a place called “Bundle of Xipe.”

The engaged couple visited a priestess named 9 Grass at “Skull Temple,” probably seeking her blessing before their wedding. They were married on the day 7 Flower in the year 12 House. The bride and groom are shown bathing nude together, one of the Mixtec conventions for a royal wedding (Fig. 10).

Now, having strategically married a prince with good bloodlines and the support of his warriors, 6 Monkey set about claiming her throne (Marcus 1992b: 379–380). On her way to her husband’s town, she and her ambassadors passed through two communities, “Hill of the Moon” and “Hill of the Insect.” There, her ambassadors were insulted with “cutting words,” shown in the codex by speech scrolls tipped with sharp flint knives (Fig. 11). These “cutting words” were used by 6 Monkey as the pretext for declaring war. After consulting again with the priestess 9 Grass, 6 Monkey launched an attack that left Hill of the Moon and Hill of the Insect in flames. Although it is unknown whether 6 Monkey actually accompanied her troops into battle, the Selden Codex shows her personally taking captive the two princes who had insulted her (Fig. 12). This scene may be compared with Djehuti’s “eyewitness” account of Hatshepsut collecting booty after the battle in Nubia (Habachi 1957).

Following her military victory, 6 Monkey’s nickname was changed from “Serpent Quechquemitl” to “War Quechquemitl,” and she and her husband...
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were installed as rulers in his hometown, Bundle of Xipe (Fig. 13). Reading between the lines, we suspect that the marriage uniting 6 Monkey and 11 Wind—a marriage that united their warriors as well—consolidated their grip on both hometowns. Her second son, 1 Crocodile, went on to be ruler of Belching Mountain.

Royal Maya Women at Palenque and Yaxchilán

In contrast to the small principalities of the Postclassic Mixtec, the Classic Lowland Maya (A.D. 250–900) lived in state polities often considerably more extensive (Marcus 1995b). To be sure, these Maya polities went through periodic cycles of consolidation and breakdown, and during their periods of dissolution they might break down into provinces no larger than a principality (Marcus 1989, 1992a, 1993). At their peaks of consolidation, however, Classic Maya states covered thousands of square kilometers and had large pools of male nobles from which rulers could be chosen (Marcus 1973, 1983).

Although more than seventy royal Maya women are depicted or named on stone monuments, very few left behind complete records of their lives and deeds (Berlin 1959; Marcus 1976, 1992b, 1992c; Proskouriakoff 1960, 1961; Schele and Freidel 1990). When a Maya woman is mentioned in texts, it is usually because of her relationship to a man. A male ruler might mention his mother, especially if she came from a more important dynasty than his father’s; for example, Copán’s ruler 18 Jog (Waklahuntah Kabah Kawil) claimed that his mother was from Palenque, but never mentioned his father (Marcus 1976: 145; 1995a: 13–16). A male ruler might also mention his wife, especially if she came from a more important dynasty than his own (Marcus 1976: 176–179; 1992b: 250–255). Only rarely do we see a royal woman described as the ruler of a major city, and when we do it is usually because she served as regent until her son was old enough to rule. Among the Maya, “the whisper behind the throne” was often the queen mother.

One of the most widely publicized male rulers of Palenque was Pacal, “Shield” (Fig. 14). He claims to have ruled from A.D. 615 to 683, but, interestingly, no hieroglyphic inscriptions from the first thirty-two years of his reign have been found. This is remarkable enough to start us thinking, especially since we know that in Egypt usurpers sometimes execrated their predecessors’ monuments and extended their reigns back in time to account for the gap (Berlin 1977).

Of further interest is the fact that Pacal refers to his mother in what Linda Schele and David Freidel (1990: 227) have called a “mysterious and unusual way.” He uses the name of a mythical goddess to refer to his mother, thereby
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The name Pacal, “Lord Shield,” is recorded in different ways in the Palenque inscriptions (redrawn after Marcus 1992b: fig. 7.17).

Creating for himself a kind of divine right to rule, as Hatshepsut did when she described herself as the child of Amun. Pacal gives his mother’s name as Zac Kuk, “White Parrot,” and says that she assumed the Palenque throne in A.D. 612, turning it over to him three years later (Fig. 15). The fact is, however, that no monuments dating from White Parrot’s alleged reign have yet been found; we know her only from texts commissioned by her descendants. In fact, before the thirty-second year of Pacal’s reign, we have no contemporaneous records.

Pacal asserts that his mother lived for twenty-five years after he took office. What was her status during those years? Was she co-regent with her son, and is...
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that why no monuments from the first three decades of her son’s reign have yet been found? We know little about Pacal’s father, except that he never ruled Palenque. Was Pacal a usurper who, like Hatshepsut, created his own semifictional divine ancestry? Or were his mother’s monuments later obliterated because, like Hatshepsut, she was a female ruler in a man’s world?

The mystery continues with Pacal’s son, Chan Bahlum (“Snake Jaguar”), who acceded to the throne of Palenque in A.D. 684. In the three temples comprising the Cross Group, Chan Bahlum presents his own hieroglyphic version of Palenque’s dynastic history (Schele and Freidel 1990: 237). Although Pacal had only extended his dynasty back to A.D. 431, Chan Bahlum extended it back to supernatural ancestors who lived thousands of years ago. He used a mythological prologue to link himself to a goddess allegedly born in 3121 B.C. (Berlin
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1963, 1965; Kelley 1965; Lounsberry 1980), and took pains to make it appear that his father’s date of birth was an anniversary of hers. This supernatural ancestor, Chan Bahlum asserted (Fig. 16), took office in 2305 B.C. at the age of 815! Like Hatshepsut, who showed herself drinking from the udder of Hathor, Chan Bahlum created his own divine credentials.

The scribes of Palenque leave us with an interesting ambiguity. On the one hand, they reveal no ideological barrier to having a woman on the throne. On the other hand, they have so far provided us with no monuments that date to, and confirm, the alleged reigns of either Kanal Ikal (Pacal’s great-grandmother) or Zac Kuk (Pacal’s mother).

Further evidence of the ambiguity surrounding female rulership among the Classic Maya comes from Yaxchilán. That city erected stone monuments

Fig. 16  Inscription commissioned by Chan Bahlum, who asserts that a mythological ancestor was inaugurated thousands of years before his own time. This passage can be paraphrased as follows: “At the age of 815 an ancestor/goddess took office on August 13 in the year 2305 B.C.” (re-drawn after Marcus 1992b: fig. 9.20).
from A.D. 514 to 808. Some of Yaxchilán’s rulers claimed that their dynasty had been founded in A.D. 320, long before the earliest known royal inscription.

Most of the Yaxchilán texts and monuments revolve around the reigns of two rulers, Shield Jaguar and Bird Jaguar. From A.D. 681 to 742, Shield Jaguar ruled Yaxchilán. Following a ten-year gap, his son Bird Jaguar ruled, from A.D. 752 to 771 (Marcus 1992c: 236; Proskouriakoff 1963). This gap in succession is hard to explain, since Bird Jaguar claims to have been thirty-two years old when his father died. Why, then, was Bird Jaguar’s inauguration delayed for a decade?

Tatiana Proskouriakoff (1963: 163) was the first to discuss the ten-year gap, arguing that there might have been pretenders to Shield Jaguar’s throne. More recently, Carolyn Tate (1987: 822; 1992: 125) has suggested that a woman may have ruled in the interim. With the recent discovery of hieroglyphic texts as well as the reanalysis of other extant texts at Yaxchilán (Stelae 10, 11, and 35, and Lintels 32 and 53), I can now suggest that a royal woman from Calakmul named Lady Ik Skull (also called Evening Star) may have ruled Yaxchilán during the ten-year gap (Fig. 17). In support of this suggestion is the fact that Lady Ik Skull bears titles usually associated with male rulers, such as mah k’ina, k’ul ahau, and batab (Tate 1987, 1992; Schele and Freidel 1990; Marcus 1976, 1992b, n.d.b).

How did a woman from Calakmul come to rule Yaxchilán for a decade? Limited data suggest at least one possible scenario. This Calakmul woman came to Yaxchilán to marry Shield Jaguar, although she was not his first or second wife. When Shield Jaguar died in A.D. 742, there may have been serious competition for the throne among the sons of his various wives (Bardslay n.d.; Proskouriakoff 1963; Tate 1992). Lady Ik Skull may have prevailed in this competitive environment, precisely because she was from the ruling lineage of Calakmul, a dynasty more powerful than Yaxchilán’s. She therefore outranked...
Fig. 18  Stela 11, Yaxchilán. Bird Jaguar, ruler of Yaxchilán, reviewing captives. His parents are shown facing each other (top). Seated on the left is his mother, with text (behind her) giving her name as Lady Ik Skull. Seated on the right is his father, whose text (behind him) is largely illegible but does include the glyph for jaguar and the titles “captor of ahau” and “Lord of Yaxchilán,” both associated with Shield Jaguar (redrawn after Marcus 1992b: fig. 11.5).

Shield Jaguar’s other wives, which allowed her (perhaps with the backing of Calakmul) to take over as regent until her own son, Bird Jaguar, could get himself in position to be inaugurated. Lady Ik Skull died on 13 March in A.D. 751, apparently leaving the throne empty. Even though Bird Jaguar had been waging war to obtain high-ranking captives and had produced an heir of his own, it was still almost a year before he was inaugurated as ruler of Yaxchilán on 10 February 752 (Fig. 18).
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Although I originally thought that the marriage between Shield Jaguar and Lady Ik Skull was isogamous—that is, a marriage between equals (Marcus 1992b: 255–256)—I now believe that it must have been another case of Maya hypogamy. In hypogamy, the bride outranks the groom. Such marriages seem to have been a major reason why Maya rulers mentioned their mothers (Marcus 1973, 1976, 1992b). It is highly significant that we learn about Lady Ik Skull of Calakmul only from inscriptions commissioned by her son (Marcus n.d.a, n.d.c).

I conclude that royal Maya women played important roles in marriage alliances between major cities, that they held thrones open for their sons, and that there were brief periods when they served as regents or even rulers. They occasionally became rulers in their own right when there were gaps in succession or bitter disputes over succession. Almost never, however, were monuments erected to such women while they were on the throne. That honor was reserved for men, leaving royal women to be mentioned only in the inscriptions of their sons or their lower-ranking consorts.

Ilancueitl and Atotoztli: Royal Aztec Women

The Aztec empire of A.D. 1520 was the most territorially extensive of all Mesoamerican states, exceeding in area even the largest Maya polities (Barlow 1949; Berdan et al. 1996). Once vassals of Azcapotzalco, the Mexica or the Aztec traditionally began their king list in A.D. 1376 with a ruler named Acamapichtli. They had a kind of dual rulership in which the tlatoani, “he who speaks,” was in charge of external relations, while the cihuacoatl, or “snake woman,” was in charge of internal affairs. Despite his female title, the cihuacoatl was usually a man. In fact, the sixteenth-century documents portray Aztec kingship as almost exclusively male, although many Aztec ethnohistories also make it clear that there were important roles for royal women. As in the case of the Classic Maya, women played such major roles because of hypogamy, that is, the marriage of a male ruler to a more highly ranked woman (Marcus 1973, 1976, 1992b).

Such seems to have been the case with the royal woman Ilancueitl. In the ethnohistorical documents she is variously described as the aunt, mother, foster mother, wife, or wet nurse of Acamapichtli, the first Aztec king. Most sources agree that Ilancueitl was from Culhuacan and hence a member of the Culhua dynasty, who were descendants of the Toltec. As such, she was a source of legitimization for Acamapichtli, linking him to the imperial Toltec dynasties.

According to some sources (Anales de Cuauhtitlan 1938: 174; Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas 1941: 227–228; Origen de los mexicanos 1941: 268; Relación de la genealogía 1941: 249–251), Acamapichtli began his career as the husband of
his aunt Ilancueitl. He could not immediately assume office, because Ilancueitl herself was the tlatoani, or external relations ruler, of Tenochtitlan (van Zantwijk 1985: 99). Only later did Acamapichtli become her cihuacoatl or internal relations minister, and the progenitor of a ruling line, putting himself in position to become the first male ruler of the Aztecs.

As often happens in legendary histories, there are conflicts among the various accounts of Acamapichtli’s role as the founder of the Aztec royal line. It appears that he needed the prestige of Culhua ancestry to legitimize his son; hence the story that he married his aunt. Ilancueitl, in the words of Susan Gillespie (1989: 26), “gave the fledgling dynasty its nobility; in an act of ‘royal incest’ with her husband-son [Acamapichtli], she demonstrated that the power of kings is beyond that of their subjects.” Indeed, some sources (Origen de los mexicanos 1941: 270; Relación de la genealogía 1941: 252) consider Huitzilihuitl—the half-Culhua, half-Mexica son of Acamapichtli and Ilancueitl—to have been the first true male tlatoani of Tenochtitlan.

This story of royal incest, of course, reminds us of the Lovedu mating of a king and his daughter. Marshall Sahlins (1985: 79) adds that the dynasty of sacred chiefs in Hawaii began with a similar incestuous relationship of father and daughter, and he argues that incest, patricide, and fratricide are common elements in the legends of “founders” and the origins of rulers. Sahlins (1985: 80) concludes, “The king must first reproduce an original disorder. Having committed his monstrous acts against society, proving he is stronger than it, the ruler proceeds to bring system out of chaos.” While Ilancueitl, the incestuous Culhua aunt, looms large in Aztec legends, her role in real life is still being debated (van Zantwijk 1985: 102).

Equally mysterious is the royal woman Atotoztli, another member of the Culhua dynasty. Documents left by Domingo Francisco Chimalpahin (1965: 182), a resident of Chalco in the southern Basin of Mexico, assert that Atotoztli was the daughter of the ruler of Culhuacan and the mother of Acamapichtli. J. M. A. Aubin (1886: 318) suggested that Atotoztli and Ilancueitl were the same woman, while Gillespie (1989) has proposed that they might simply have become conflated into one person over time.

In Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl’s accounts (1975: 297–303), Ilancueitl and Atotoztli are described as sisters. Atotoztli is said to have married Huetzin, heir to the throne of Coatlichan, while Ilancueitl married Acamapichtli, ruler of Tenochtitlan. The Codex Xolotl (Dibble 1951: pl. III) shows Ilancueitl and Atotoztli as the daughters of Achitometl, ruler of Culhuacan; in this codex (Fig. 19), we see each daughter leaving her father’s town and traveling to her husband’s community. This represents a typical pattern of Nahua hypogamy:
princesses from the highly ranked dynasty of Culhuacan are “married down” to princes of the lower-ranked communities of Coatlichan and Tenochtitlan (Carrasco 1984; Marcus 1992b: 223–229). Any sons resulting from the marriages would probably mention their highly ranked mothers in their genealogies.

Indeed, there are suggestions that the male recipients of such hypogamous brides might even claim them in their histories as mothers. The Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas (1941) gives Ilancueitl as the first ruler of Tenochtitlan, with Acamapichtli as her successor. “Since Acamapichtli was to begin the dynasty,” says Gillespie (1989:50), “Acamapichtli’s wife became his mother so that he would be her descendant, for it was she who was noble, and it was from her that he derived the right to rule, as some accounts explicitly state.”
Breaking the Glass Ceiling

The association of the names Ilancueitl and Atotoztli with the founders of dynasties is not limited to Tenochtitlan. For example, a woman named Ilancueitl is given as the dynastic founder of Azcapotzalco (Los Códices de México 1979), and a woman with the two-word name Ilancueitl Atotoztli is given as the dynastic founder of Texcoco (Muñoz Camargo 1978).

Much later, yet another woman named Atotoztli (Fig. 20) may have served as tlatoani of the Mexica during a six-year gap between the reigns of Motecuhzoma I and Axayacatl, from A.D. 1466 to 1472. This possibility is raised by a document Los Anales de Tula (van Zantwijk 1979). Another document, the Relación de la genealogía (1941: 254), goes even further, claiming that this Atotoztli actually ruled for more than thirty years. Rudolf van Zantwijk (1985: 188, 191) argues that we know little about Atotoztli’s reign because the official Aztec scribes—almost all of whom were men—neglected to mention the female tlatoani since female rulers were so uncommon. Thus, rather than mentioning Atotoztli, most scribes filled this gap between male kings either by extending

Fig. 20  Atotoztli’s name is given both in European script and in Nahuatl writing. Above her head, we read *çihua* (woman) *pilli* (noble) *atotoztli*, or “noblewoman Atotoztli.” Her hieroglyphic name, attached to the back of her head, is composed of three signs: (1) water (providing the initial sound *a* or *at*); (2) two bird heads (*toto* [*tl*] or *totl*), “bird” + *taz* [*nene*] “yellow parrot”; and (3) a feather (*ihuitl*) or obsidian blade (*iztli*, the final sound “*til*”) (re-drawn after Caso 1958).
the reign of Motecuhzoma I beyond his death, or by pushing back the begin-
ning of Axayacatl’s reign to a date before his actual inauguration. Earlier in this
chapter, we saw the same “defeminization” of the Egyptian king lists by their
scribes (Marcus n.d.b).

CONCLUSIONS

What general patterns can we derive from the histories of these royal women
who broke the glass ceiling? To begin with, each woman must be understood
in the context of her own culture and political system, without the universal
stereotypes sometimes seen in gender studies—stereotypes that usually tell us
more about the author than about gender (Meskell 1995).

Furthermore, gender is not a static, permanent status; rather, it is a changing
and moving target, and therefore much more difficult to pin down for a spe-
cific time and place without the aid of historical and ethnographic data. As
Martin Whyte (1978: 170) concluded in his comparative work, one “can no
longer assume that there is such a thing as the status of women cross-cultur-
ally. . . . each aspect of the status, roles, and relationship of women relative to
men must be examined and explained separately, unless future research shows a
cross-cultural reality that is very different from the patterns we have discov-
ered.”

We have seen that the route to the top was much easier for a woman among
the Lovedu, where qualities such as nurturing and appeasement were consid-
ered appropriate for a ruler. It was much more difficult for a woman to become
ruler in Dynastic Egypt, where rulership was considered so much a male pre-
rogative that Hatshepsut had to depict herself either as a man or as a sphinx.

The route to the top started with having a father who was the reigning
king. It also helped to come from the most highly ranked dynasty around.
Many of the Mesoamerican royal women I have examined in this paper held
office only because their bloodlines were bluer than those of their consorts.
Even incest was not considered out of bounds, if it led to an heir who out-
ranked everyone else (as we saw among the Aztec and the Lovedu).

Still, one had to be lucky or opportunistic. The Mixtec princess 6 Monkey
inherited the throne of Belching Mountain only because her older brothers
had been killed in battle, and she married an appropriate male ruler before
claiming that throne. Some Maya women ruled only because their husbands
died while their sons were too young to ascend the throne. Some Culhua
women may have ruled Tenochtitlan while their lower-ranking Mexica hus-
bands waited for an heir who was half-Culhua. Even in societies where rulership
was conceived of as “gender male,” many kings preferred to be succeeded by a
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daughter who was their direct descendant rather than by a nephew or a male cousin (Goody 1966).

When a king had more than one wife, each wife often fought to ensure that her son succeeded him on the throne after his death. Lady Ik Skull, mother of Bird Jaguar of Yaxchilán, may have held the throne for her son until the dispute over succession could be resolved. It also seems clear that in all these societies, at one time or another, royal women held office during gaps in succession. It was usually a thankless task, since later Egyptian, Aztec, and Maya scribes omitted them from the king lists. Hatshepsut’s own nephew execrated her monuments.

We have also seen, in many of these cases, some interesting reversals of gender roles. The Rain Queen of the Lovedu made “mothers” out of her male district heads, and in the ritual aspects of her marriage she received “wives” and performed in the role of a man. The Aztec “snake woman” was a man. Hatshepsut made her male steward into a “caregiver.” And Hatshepsut gave herself the ultimate “makeover,” appearing with the false beard, kilt, headcloth, and bare chest of a man.

In cultures where having a female ruler caused cognitive dissonance, “defeminization” of the king lists has probably led us to underestimate the number of women who reached the top (Marcus n.d.b). At the same time, those very cultures’ legends of dynastic origins are filled with royal women—queen mothers, incestuous aunts and daughters, and women who fought alongside male soldiers in battle. These epics suggest that the low numbers of documented female rulers do not necessarily reflect the actual political power of royal women in their roles as hypogamous brides who raised the status of their grooms, as widows who held thrones for their sons, and as queen mothers who were “whispers behind the throne.” As Queen Mkabi of the Zulu explained it to Cecil Cowley (1966: 28), “And have we wives and mothers of the Zulus not the greatest power over our kings and princes, when we talk to them in the silence of the night?”
Joyce Marcus

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Epilogue: Thinking about Gender with Theory and Method

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The conference that generated this book was exceptionally stimulating and wide-ranging. Each presenter took an original and different tack in grappling with the overall theme of the conference, initially defined as “Recovering Gender in Pre-Hispanic America.” This volume is another testimony to the innovative and previously unimagined diversity of approaches that has characterized the last decade, in which gender has become increasingly of concern to scholars of past human societies (Conkey and Gero 1997).

It is not possible to summarize here all the provocative issues that the authors present; indeed, each essay stands firmly on its own merits. However, as an anthropological archaeologist who does not work with the ancient New World, I might be in a good position to comment on some of the theoretical and methodological implications of these essays in the hopes of furthering two ends. On the one hand, there is much that the relatively recent engagement with gender in archaeology and other fields studying the human past can offer to other disciplines that are also probing gender. On the other hand, there is inevitably further internal enrichment that we can generate for our own continuing inquiries. That is, we can both offer things outwardly, to other disciplines and fields, and enrich things inwardly, in the archaeological study of gender. Toward these ends, I want to explore three primary issues of a rather ambitious sort: the concept of gender, theoretical resources, and methodological directions.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL PREAMBLE: GENDER IS NOT A “THING”

I begin by returning to a term, recovering, which was part of the original mandate for the conference, “Recovering Gender in Pre-Hispanic America.” However, I want to use it as a vehicle for making an epistemological point. To recover, according to Webster’s New World Dictionary (sic), “implies a finding or getting back something that one has lost in any manner.” As a literal term,
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recovery—in this case, of gender—raises some fundamental epistemological and ontological issues. Despite a decade of concern with gender in the field of archaeology, which has been the most recent to enter into this discussion, there are still some serious differences of opinion as to what this kind of inquiry is all about, and the issues that lie behind terms such as “recovery” are part of this debate.

While we can and should celebrate the fact that, indeed, the very topic of gender in past societies has been increasingly considered a serious and important enterprise, I still worry about those who think that “gender” is some sort of static, bounded phenomenon that can be “captured” or, in a strict reading of the term, “recovered” by us. In her chapter in this volume, Louise Burkhart puts this most succinctly when she notes that “we cannot expect to recover Pre-Hispanic gender in some pure, essential form” (p. 104). As I have mentioned elsewhere (Conkey 1993), this notion of “finding” gender can be a rather positivist view of the past; it reminds me of a well-known story in Americanist archaeology that was part of the famous debate on typology between James Ford (1954) and Albert Spaulding (1953; see also Hill and Evans 1972) in the 1950s. They differed on whether artifact types were inherent and “real” or created by the archaeologist. Ford accused Spaulding of viewing classification as if it were an Easter egg hunt, in the sense that there were (to Spaulding) real types that could be discovered: “You talk as if you think Nature has provided us with a world filled with packaged facts and truths that may be discovered and digested like Easter Eggs hidden on a lawn!” (Ford 1954: 109).

Indeed, in the case of an Easter egg hunt, it has been decided that, as objects, Easter eggs are worth finding; someone obtained or collected the eggs, decorated them, hid them, and waited. In archaeology and other historical inquiries, the enterprise is often characterized in this positivist manner: certain classes of data or objects of knowledge have been constructed as “worth finding,” and it is our task to “discover” them.

In the early years of our explicit concern with gender in past human life, we could see and show that previous histories and archaeologies were either gendered male or not engendered at all (at least not explicitly), because many of the preferred data and objects of knowledge had little or nothing to do with women or other-than-men genders, which led to either androcentric or dehumanized pasts.

Yet, with the enriching of archaeologies and histories that have deemed gender discoverable and recoverable—perhaps as a new Easter egg of archaeological and historical value—two important issues all too readily get sidestepped. One is the positivist notion that there is such a thing as gender “out there”
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waiting to be “found,” if only we ask the right questions and/or develop the breakthrough methods. While I want to be clear that asking good questions and deploying innovative and robust methodologies are crucial to all we do, there is much more to the interpretive process. Secondly, the lack of the method for “finding” gender, or the lack of the attribution of gender to specific classes of archaeological/historical data, is not, in my view, an adequate basis for dismissing the engagement with gender from archaeological and historical research (cf. Dobres 1995). As with any other domain of historical inquiry, some questions or concerns will be more appropriate, and perhaps more strongly supported, given the specifics and contingencies of the case in question. As Elizabeth Brumfiel suggests in her essay, gender research has been necessarily opportunistic. An insistence on gender attribution or gender “method-idolatry” (Daly 1978) or on there being just one or a few limited methods or ways of studying gender, often discourages the more imaginative approaches, so richly represented in this volume. I would reinforce Brumfiel’s point: not only do we need to envision genderimaginatively, but the choice of where we try to “see” gender must be imaginative as well. That gender could be differentially “at work” in tribute payments, for instance, as Brumfiel (1991) discusses, had not been imagined previously.

CONCEPTUALIZING AND PROBLEMATIZING GENDER

Just over a decade ago, the historian Joan Scott (1986) argued persuasively for gender to be viewed as a “useful category of historical analysis,” which indeed it is, as is demonstrated repeatedly in the essays in this volume. But it is much more than a category: it is lived experience of all members of our society and presumably of many peoples in the past. Few of those who spend their time thinking and theorizing about gender would accept it as a given, as a unidimensional phenomenon, or as an attribute that has some fixity to it. On the contrary, if there is one thing to be learned from more than two decades of vibrant and voluminous scholarship that takes up gender in many disciplines and from many perspectives, it is that gender must necessarily be problematized and wrestled with. The concept of analysis—of gender—is a dynamic and contested concept; it refers to a diverse set of roles, practices, and beliefs, not to a static unchanging “category” or “type.” In this volume, Joan Gero, for example, makes an important point about gender as being a process, while Brumfiel underlines the multiple dimensions of gender. Both Cecelia Klein and John Monaghan provide important reminders and documentation about gender not being the equivalent of, or derived from, some sort of given biological sex. As Thomas Laqueur (1990), among others, has shown, the very notions that “we”
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have about sex are themselves historically and socially contingent, and not much more than a century in use. And an entire body of work, most prominently represented by that of Judith Butler (e.g., 1990, 1993), has also raised questions about the “naturalness” of sex (see also Dreger 1998; Fausto-Sterling 1985; Kessler 1998). In Carolyn Dean’s exposition (in this volume) of gender transformations throughout the life cycle in Inka society as reported by Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, the answer to the question “Are men and women really the same?” is, “Well, it depends.” Certainly, in the case of the Inka, there is some convergence, especially in old age.

Since there are still rampant misunderstandings about what gender is, and since in works such as Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990) or Judith Lorber’s *Paradoxes of Gender* (1994; see also Ferree, Lorber, and Hess 1999) scholars themselves are still negotiating, defining, and reconceptualizing gender, we must be quite explicit. In this volume, there are many essays that have engaged with gender as something that creates social personae other than just women, as something that is relational (that is, emerging out of and being created through relationships with others) rather than an attribute. But we should not be fooled into thinking that we do not need to be explicit about how we conceptualize gender, for, of course, that *does* influence our analyses, the questions we ask, and how we “read” the evidence.

I myself can get caught short on this. For example, my French archaeology colleagues find the Anglo-American concern with gender—and, consequently, the existence of a gender archaeology—to be incomprehensible. There is no comparable word in French (or in Spanish; see del Valle 1993a); their best approximation is “masculine/feminine relationships.” They see our concerns with male/female differences and power to be culturally and historically contingent on our own social history, asserting that “the French have always known that men and women occupy two different culturally and socially defined places in the society” (Anick Coudart, personal communication, 1994), which in itself is a very revealing and contingent statement. These archaeologists do not, as they themselves say, “understand why some (American, English, Australian) need a gender archaeology to tell what seems so obvious” to them (Coudart, personal communication, 1994; see also Demoule and Coudart 1997). Thus, even within Western academic circles, the concept of gender has no single, stable set of meanings. Without explicit attention to what each scholar means by gender—and this is sometimes very hard to put down in writing—we may seriously subvert our own inquiries and the possibilities for genuine insights into the past.

I do not intend to be programmatic about what gender “is”; there are sev-
eral different approaches in this very volume. I am only programmatic about the idea that we still need to be very explicit about the conceptualizations that direct our research. Of course, the logical next question is, how does one come to do this? What are (and have been) the theoretical resources?

WHAT’S THE POINT OF THEORY?

In a review of the archaeological literature on gender and feminism, Gero and I (Conkey and Gero 1997) noted that it is frequently the case that writings on gender in the human past do not make manifest the theoretical sources upon which they draw. Many studies that might be enriched by explicit engagement with feminist and other social theory are often mute in this regard; many merely “graft” gender onto an extant—and unquestioned—conceptual framework (Hanen and Kelley 1992; see also Wylie 1996, n.d.b). In the surge of gender studies in archaeology, as Barbara Bender (2000) noted, in her role as discussant for a 1994 gender conference, there appears to be a rush to be “pragmatic,” and generate case studies, which bypass the necessary simultaneous engagement with theory. Her pronouncement on those papers as a group was a very British, yet thoroughly understood metaphor of, “rather thin gruel.”

While one recognizes that feminist theory today is enormously complex, often contradictory, and of uneven value to our archaeological and historical concerns, there nevertheless exists in such theory a rich and ever-expanding body of concepts that deals explicitly with gender, difference, and relationships between sex and gender. It is a body of theory that raises questions about symbol, language, and social practice, which are certainly of central concern to archaeologists and historians. It is also a body of theory that simultaneously endorses the centrality of grounded empirical research and a critique of science and the production of knowledge (e.g., Longino 1990; Wylie 1992, 1997). Much of this literature is openly concerned with how we move between hypothesis and evidence.

It is precisely in much of this social, critical, and especially feminist theory that one finds clear recognition of the fact that one’s position does affect one’s research. Contrary to popular lore, the recognition of positionality—that is, where one stands in relation to the research at hand—does not mean that “we can say anything since it is all constructed,” nor is it the case that we are completely constrained by our stances. As Ruth Tringham and I have argued (Conkey and Tringham 1995; Tringham and Conkey 1998; see also Billington and Green 1996; Goodison and Morris 1998; Meskell 1995) with regard to the use of archaeological data (specifically, Paleolithic and Neolithic female figurines) in support of the so-called Goddess movement, with its female-centered interests,
we cannot say something about the past just because it is desired or perhaps even needed. We can, of course, say such things if we make it very clear that it is only speculation.

Theory is not something that comes in a little tool box that you take with you to the field or to the archives, with different theories like drill bits of varying size that you can just “apply.” It is much more complicated than that, especially since few people are writing theory with our particular questions in mind—questions about the past, technology, space, settlement, imagery, history, and change. A point is frequently made that scholars who are interested in exploring human relations with the environment can gain much from consulting ecological theory and adapting it to help solve archaeological or historical problems. Unfortunately, we still need to ask many scholars of gender, Why not consult an extant (albeit somewhat unruly) body of feminist/social theory in our inquiries into gender and other social phenomena? Certainly, some applications of this theory can be found in the essays in this volume.

For example, Brumfiel’s discussion and research on Aztec gender (see also Brumfiel 1991, 1992) is clearly embedded in a theoretical approach that combines feminist theory with that of political economy, where cultural phenomena—engendered ones at that—are to be understood within the complex dynamics of material practices and political formations. Bringing an explicitly gendered approach to political economy allows for a more nuanced understanding of what can often be taken only as macroprocesses. If we want to—as I believe we must—take our narrow disciplinary insights and show their significance for history, art history, and anthropology, as well as for feminist studies and social theory more widely, then it is up to us to make the connections. In this still-new venture, we should neither take our theory/theories for granted nor hide them under the proverbial bush. The very underdetermined and poorly understood nature of what we work with in studying Pre-Hispanic America (or any other past contexts) requires an explicit engagement with theory, which fills the spaces whether we address it or not.

In Mari Carmen Serra Puche’s contribution to this volume, we are impressed (if not also envious and admiring) by the rich and almost redundantly female nature of the archaeological finds of figurines, burials, sculptures, and spatial layouts at Xochitecatl. And, as she shows, one issue in particular demands thoughtful and careful theorizing: in what specific contexts, given what we know about this time period and place, would such symbolic and material practices have been meaningful, and to whom? In other words, as the feminist art historian Griselda Pollock (1977) has asked: “What do images of females mean?”
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There are many potentially useful theoretical perspectives, such as practice theory, that do not make any explicit reference to gender, but which could and should be engendered, as Rosemary Joyce (1998, 2000; Joyce and Hendon 2000) shows with her particular wedding of the theories of Butler (e.g., 1990, 1993) and Pierre Bourdieu (e.g., 1977) in a study of gender in Pre-Hispanic Central America. As Joyce points out, for example, there is an enormous literature regarding “the body”; indeed, if most traditional notions about how to get at gender in the past suggest that we want evidence like mortuary data (especially based on sexed skeletons) or depictions of humans, then the literature on the body is potentially of great use. The proposition that we have much to gain from reading gender, and related theory, is made compelling by Joyce’s approach, among others.

But a point of theory made by Caroline Bynum (1995), who asks, “Why all the fuss about the body?” is worth stressing here. She reminds us once again that the point of theory is not to just “apply” it to our specific contexts of concern. Since we situate our own categories in the context of our own politics, then we must, Bynum argues (in reference to the Middle Ages), situate those of the past (e.g., Pre–Hispanic America) in the context of theirs. As she notes (Bynum 1995: 29), “The relationship between then and now will thus be analogous and proportional, not direct.” In reference to the theories of Butler (e.g., 1990, 1993), Bynum points out that, since Butler is addressing such very contemporary issues as identity positions (and Butler is indeed unlikely to be thinking of how her theory applies to the Aztecs or other cultures!), and since she also finds it impossible that any of us could “be us” without performing what we call gender, it is up to us to question the applicability of Butler’s notions, because only we can best assess how analogous the situations are. Bynum (1995: 29) goes on to state that “The past is seldom usefully examined by assuming that its specific questions or their settings are the same as those of the present. What may, however, be the same is the way in which a question, understood in its context, struggles with a perduring issue such as, for example, group affiliation.”

At this point in the development of gender studies, it is important to address the question “Why theory?” or “What is the point of theory?” (Bal and Boer 1994). On the one hand, there is often resistance to theory—“I am not a theorist,”; “I don’t do’ theory.” In fact, there was considerable resistance at this conference to my suggestion that there is a need to read and draw on some of the rich resources of feminist theory. As Gero and I have pointed out (Conkey and Gero 1997), however, “one must do the reading.” No one is without theory; all facts are theory-laden (e.g., Daston 1991; Wylie 1992; among many). On the
other hand, theory, like all scholarly work, is complicated, and often intimidating or made to be so. Jonathan Culler (1994) has made an important and interesting case for theory to be best considered not so much in that or how it is “applied,” but in terms of its effects, its practical effects. He argues that theory is something that changes people’s views; it makes them conceive of their objects of study and knowledge, as well as their activity of studying them, differently. And this, he goes on, will be “different for people differently situated” (1994: 16).

Theory, then, is inevitably practice, and “its value cannot be separated from participation in the activity itself” (Culler 1994: 16). By not engaging with theory, or by a widespread occurrence—at least in contemporary American archaeology—of a conflation of theory with method and of offering up theories that are those for methods, what is inhibited are the possibilities of generating what Culler suggests to be “new understandings of cultural forms and activities that come from widening the range of disciplinary references” (1994: 16).

One aspect of theory is that it has the potential to democratize knowledge making, to encourage it as a pluralistic enterprise, engaging dissent seriously and fostering views from all sorts of vantage points, or, as the feminist philosopher, Helen Longino (1994), has said, from “many wheres” (see also Wylie 1995). Of course, it is of equal concern to consider how theory is done, how and when it is used as a tactic for disciplinary control, what its narratives and images are, and how it is produced and practiced. There are, for example, serious concerns about the problematic nature of the gender of theory—that is, which genders are more likely to be rewarded for “doing” theory—in cultural anthropology (Lutz 1995) and in archaeology (Conkey 1998). By not practicing theory explicitly, however, we risk falling short of the potentials of what our inquiries—in this case, into gender in Pre-Hispanic America—might yield. Why should anyone resist or refuse ideas that might help to increase our insights and understandings?

That I have chosen to address theory in these comments, despite the resistance from some who attended this conference, is not an attempt on my part to impose some mandate on those who study Pre-Hispanic America, nor is it a request or an admonition that we need to hear the “right” theoretical citations. Rather, I am inspired to suggest, following Culler and others, that it is not easy for scholars to embrace the fact of the necessity of theory, since “to admit to the importance of theory is to make an open-ended commitment, to leave oneself [myself included] in a position where there are always things one doesn’t know” (Culler 1994: 14). Theory is no longer something preliminary, basic, or
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foundational; instead, it is an “open-ended corpus of writings that have an impact on domains other than those to which they ostensibly belong” (Culler 1994: 16). In that sense, it is just as crucial that what is said about gender in Pre-Hispanic America has an impact on literary and medieval studies, political science, or art history as what is said in feminist literary theory, contemporary studies of the body, or feminist anthropology has an impact on how one goes about exploring gender in Pre-Hispanic America. The point of theory, as Culler concludes, is the recognition that the “intimidation we feel when confronted with discourse we don’t know or understand is inseparable from the possibility of new understanding” (1994: 17).

WHAT ARE SOME USEFUL METHODS?

Of course, we cannot disentangle the two foregoing issues—that of the problematization and conceptualization of gender, and that of the centrality of explicit theory—from each other, or from the ways in which researchers conduct their inquiry into gender in the specific Pre-Hispanic contexts at hand. It is clear that Klein, in her role as conference organizer and editor, intended to elicit contributions that addressed the issue of “how to,” or methods, and has succeeded, which is no small task in such a subject matter. The methods are likewise not something to be thought of as a tool kit, no matter how much we think we would like one, with a few big hammers, wrenches, or pliers for extracting or beating gender out of our data. Several papers, however, show particularly useful approaches that have potential applicability to other contexts.

First, both Gero’s and Joyce’s chapters in this volume show effectively how one can use the repetitiveness, the constraint, or the consistency of markings in artifacts, such as Recuay pots, Maya ear spools and ornaments, and so on, as a platform for inferences about gender concepts and engendered practices. Admittedly, these selected sets of artifacts and practices do not perhaps show the range of gender options or expressions in these particular societies, but, as Joyce points out (see also Joyce 1998), it is, in fact, possible to infer here historically situated practices of inscription through which the citationality of sexed bodies was created. Methodologically, both studies serve as a reminder that attributes of material culture that we might categorize merely as “standardized craft production” are, in fact, potentially important sources for new queries—such as, for example, queries into practices of bodily and gender inscription, that is, ways in which one inscribes and therefore produces and announces one’s situational, specifically gendered, identity. As Janet Spector (1993) has shown, for a very different archaeological/historical context, the very category
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we archaeologists might have been tempted to use—in this case, “standardized craft production”—can be replaced by a framework that is consistent with an engendered archaeology (Roberts 1993), promoting more sensitivity to the active peoples of the past.

Second, in her essay Dean illustrates that it is as much in the oppositions, the negations, the internal contradictions that we can tease out conceptions of gender. Gender is not something that can be “read off” in some direct way by the twenty-first-century observer. Anyone studying hierarchical societies knows how material imagery and forms can be used for fibbing, if not lying, or at least for misrepresentation (e.g., Marcus 1974, 1992).

Third, in Brumfiel’s contribution to this volume, it is underscored that, in the past, studies of certain classes of artifacts, such as spindle whorls, may not have been given much attention precisely because such artifacts were associated with women. Once they are reconsidered in the context of a gender consciousness and an approach informed by gender theory, however, there is indeed much to be learned not only in terms of morphology and issues of formal variation (in and of itself an important enrichment of empirical evidence), but also in terms of issues of identity, changing roles, and labor (see also McCafferty and McCafferty 1991; for another interpretation of the Aztec materials, see Evans 2001).

Thus, as many of the chapters show, it is not necessarily the case that in pursuing a relatively new topic, we have to collect new data, only that the extant data are readily reconceptualized, as is the case with the array of imagery used by both Dean and Klein in support of their studies. And yet, with time, we should also have what we find in Gero’s essay: the first results from a project begun some eight years ago, which from the very beginning was undertaken with a gender consciousness on Gero’s part. At some point, as a companion piece to her paper, there should be a discussion of how this particular starting orientation affected the collection of data and the choice of problem.

On Ethnography and Ethnohistory

Methodologically, and perhaps interpretively as well, I, as an outsider to Pre-Hispanic studies, have another concern, which emerges from some of the chapters—a concern about the use of ethnography and ethnohistory. This is not to say, as has been sometimes misinterpreted, that there should not be so much ethnography or ethnohistory in this area of research. On the contrary, there should probably be more, and, in any event, no one should ignore any available resource—and certainly not the available ethnography and ethnohistory—and every possible line of evidence. For those of us who are, so to speak, ethno-
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graphic orphans (such as myself, a student of the Late Paleolithic period in Europe, of some fifteen thousand years ago), we are always impressed and sometimes worried by what Pat Watson once called the “embarrassment of riches” (personal communication, April 1988) that most Pre-Hispanic scholars have in the form of their ethnohistories and ethnographies in a more-or-less direct historical relation to their archaeologies.

When I read Gero’s essay in this volume, which boldly ventures into issues of representation (specifically, representation of humans on Recuay ceramics) in a context of emergent political complexity, I find myself expecting certain references—not to the specific cultural history of the Andes, much less to Pre-Hispanic America, but for example, to the volume on African art and leadership (Fraser and Cole 1972). There are references that could bolster what many of us consider to be a set of riches, that is, local ethnohistories that can perhaps inhibit as much as inform the imaginative possibilities for interpretation. Perhaps we need another version of Martin Wobst’s classic paper (1978) on the tyranny of ethnography, this time with specific implications for the study of gender (see Marcus 1995: 25–27).

From Joyce Marcus’s essay in this volume, one gets a sense of how enriching it can be to consider what appear to be analogous situations in other cultural and historical contexts, as well as what it is about these specific situations that can illuminate one’s own case study. What was it, for example, about gendered conceptions and specific social actions or strategies that provided the context within which the Mujais of the Bantu-speaking Lovedu of South Africa could succeed? Marcus’s chapter also shows precisely why there is much to be gained from an in-depth empirical understanding of the available historical evidence in convergence with the analysis of iconographic and writing systems.

Perhaps I am more sensitive to the occasional “slippage” back and forth between ethnohistorical and ethnographic examples. While a Paleolithic archaeologist is hardly allowed to make a critique of how others conflate several centuries into a generalization, I would like to think that if we Paleolithic scholars had such resolution we would be more careful about its use. Just as we must be cautious about projecting the present onto the past, or thinking that the relationship between the present and the past is a direct one (rather than analogous; see Bynum, 1995), we must similarly conclude that even though ethnographic circumstances of one place (or two) in Mesoamerica or the Andes have “ended up” in a certain way and been thus observed, this does not mean that they were always that way (e.g., Hastorf 1991; Marcus 1995). In gender research, as in other domains of inquiry, few would disagree with the notion that an archaeology, history, or ethnohistory that only confirms the ethnogra-
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Phy or the texts is on very tectonic scholarly terrain. It is clear that we often require dynamic models that can see change(s) over time.

However, for those who worry about the casual way in which a community of scholars can come to dip generously into ethnographic/ethnohistorical accounts, the chapter by Burkhart is elegant, insightful, and appropriately troubling. This essay is crucially important for this volume. I readily applaud her use of some fundamental tenets of discourse theory to scrutinize the double discourse, or, as she calls it, the counterdiscourse, and the dialogues on a case-by-case (or text-by-text) basis. She does not just appeal to the “texts,” but shows that each text or each genre has its own history and sources. This is a fine example of a dialogical method, at many levels; Burkhart works back and forth between the Christian (specifically, the Franciscan Catholic) and the Nahuatl texts and cultures, between gender roles and ideologies, between practice and theory. It is a method of “tacking” that could be readily applied to other data and questions. What Burkhart shows, of course, is not that the texts are useless—not at all—but that there are problems, and that the circumstances in which a particular text is written and the reasons for writing it need scrutiny. These texts can be used, but used judiciously indeed.

Representation and Sexuality

There is no doubt that most essays in this volume—as well as much gender research in wider archaeological/historical contexts—have been notably successful when at least some of the evidence concerned has been iconographic, especially representational imagery. While this is a powerful foundation for inferences, it is also a potential interpretive land mine, often lacking an explicit framework. It is for some art historians who have dared to, and who must, to work in this arena. The theories of representation are, like every other theoretical domain, not a stable, agreed upon body of theory, but they have been affected by feminist concerns and critiques in productive ways. As we are emboldened to step up to images and representations in the hopes of inferring something about gender or cultural meanings, we must first scrutinize our own systems of visual conventions, since we inevitably take these to the very images upon which we want to draw.

1 I have often held this debate with various archaeologists studying hunting–gathering peoples in southern Africa and Australia.

2 What this means is that many of us need to do this reading, too. See Bryson (1983), Davis (1996), Garb (1998), Kampen (1995), Mitchell (1994), Nochlin (1988), Pollock (1977), and Solomon-Godeau (1997), to name but a few, and not all feminists.
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This leads me to note something rather remarkable about many of the essays in this volume, namely, their explicit engagement with sexuality. Since about half of the essays confront this topic head-on, in provocative, if not always “resolved” sorts of ways, I would say that this gives the volume somewhat of a landmark status. With few exceptions, at least in anthropological archaeology (but cf. Schmidt and Voss 2000), the only works on archaeology or history of sexuality that a few might know about are either somewhat popular overviews (e.g., Taylor 1996) or writings by Michel Foucault (1972, 1978), who hardly had our kind of concerns in mind when he appropriated the term “archaeology.”

If there is much to learn about the complexities and multiplicities of the concept of gender, there is even more to think about in terms of sexuality. It is not just that there is a notable homoerotic dimension to Classic Maya society (see Joyce, this volume), but there is also the real probability that what is labeled “homosexuality” and perceived rather monolithically is itself a varied phenomenon, just as there is no fixed concept of what it means to be heterosexual (e.g., Herdt 1994; Roscoe 1991, 1994). The fact that there is no single way to approach this, even within an admittedly large but agreed-upon “culture area” such as Pre-Hispanic America, can be seen in the tension between the respective approaches employed by Joyce (this volume, 2000a, 2000b) and by Richard Trexler (1995).3

While there is a great deal to be said about the necessity of bringing sexuality into the conceptions and theories of gender, Monaghan’s chapter in this volume pinpoints rather precisely what is at stake here, namely, the necessity of working out the relationships between varying concepts and practices of sexuality and the concepts and practices of gender. In an exceptionally concise and accessible commentary, Henrietta Moore (1993: 196–198) summarizes some of these new observations, including the feminist critiques of Foucault’s work on sexuality. Our earlier, simpler notions concerning the sex/gender system have been seriously destabilized. And, as Monaghan notes, “At this stage . . . we need fewer totalizing pronouncements and more precise analysis” (p. 288).

Where Do We Stand?

Thus, Pre-Columbian studies are still contributing to innovative and provocative research directly relevant to understanding gender. In Engendering Ar-

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3 For other attempts to address issues of sexuality in various past contexts, see, for example, Hollimon (1997), Kauffmann (1979), Leick (1994), Ringrose (1994), and Schmidt and Voss (2000); for Mesoamerica specifically, see McCafferty and McCafferty (1991, 1999).
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_chaeology_ (Gero and Conkey 1991), one of the first edited volumes on archae-
ology and gender, three out of the nine areal studies were concerned with the Pre-Hispanic Americas, while Virginia Miller’s book (1988) may still be one of the few works focused on this topic in a particular geographic or cultural area, along with a publication by Cheryl Claassen and Joyce (1997) and another more recent one by Joyce (2001).

We have come a long way from the somewhat simplistic, but necessary entry into this kind of research, with the notion that doing gender research means primarily finding out what women did, or identifying women’s roles. As Alison Wylie (n.d.a) has argued, this approach has, nonetheless, generated a new consciousness and reinforced a central tenet of feminist research, namely, that gender is not to be “disappeared.” In an excellent assessment of the anthropology of gender, Moore (1993) is insightful and incisive about the new perspectives generated from that wider field. She makes a particularly compelling point about our need to think as much about what she calls “differences within” as about “differences between.” Moore reminds us that anthropology has moved beyond the early implicit assumptions that each society being studied had a single gender ideology or model based on the two—and only two—discrete categories of “male” and “female.” The picture now, she notes, is much more complex, and, as mentioned above, there is no single way of categorizing the male or the female and no one gender ideology within any one society (Reeves Sanday and Goodenough 1990). As Moore summarizes,

> It is clearly necessary to . . . recognize that the increasing evidence for the instability of the sex/gender distinction, as anthropology has conventionally applied it, complicates the investigation of indigenous concepts of personhood. . . . Once more, it becomes crucial to investigate differences within categories and entities, as well as between them, and this applies to the categories woman and man, the categories female and male, and the social entities of cultures, bodies, persons. (1993: 202)

We have seen some explorations of this approach. Dean’s essay presents an example among the Inka of differential performative inscriptions, which vary not just between men and women but throughout the life cycles of each. If Monaghan’s observations about only certain women being able to serve ritual meals were applied to Gero’s Queyash feasting, she might have access not only to differences between genders and classes, but to differences within them as well. Brumfiel also has suggestive data about the differences within the category of Aztec women, in terms of their solutions to providing tribute cloth.
As Marcus elucidates here (see also Marcus 1992), it may be the case that in most states royal and noble women were differentiated from each other, as were noble women from commoners. She goes on to insist that, “in fact, royal women are more like royal men than (like) commoner women” (Marcus, personal communication, 1997).

In Moore’s overview of *Gendered Anthropology* (del Valle 1993b), she points out that in the last twenty years of the anthropological study of gender, both new ethnography and “theoretical illumination” have been produced. The historical and archaeological study of gender may not be too far behind, but it is not easy and will never be unambiguous. This volume represents just the tip of the iceberg of complexities and complications in a field that many scholars are still reluctant (and perhaps resistant or afraid) to address. The results achieved here are bold.

To me, inquiry into gender in ancient societies means that it is no longer business as usual; gender is not just another variable to check off, to “find,” or to measure. The historian of science Lorraine Daston has formulated some compelling guidelines for this kind of new work. She has developed a concept of “perspectival suppleness,” which she defines as the ability “to try to think one’s way into another world” that is designed to “unsettle the self-evidence of our belief structure and encourage an intellectual as well as moral empathy with other ways of thinking” or of being in the world (quoted in Thomas 1993; see also Daston 1991). Probing into gender and other social, ideological, and symbolic processes and practices of the past requires that we develop alternatives to what appears to be logical.

Once we have grasped that there are alternative ways in which we can think about the past and such phenomena as gender, an engendered archaeology immediately becomes the enterprise in which we are not merely seeking to learn what men/women or others “did,” but investigating our own inquiry as a highly constructed form of knowledge seeking, from the general disciplinary goals to the research interests of individual practitioners. This volume makes a significant contribution to that enterprise.

As Bynum (1995) points out in her consideration of what is to be learned about the remote past from current feminist theories, the “only past we can know is one shaped by the questions we ask; yet these questions are also shaped by the context we come from, and our context includes the past.” Thus, to paraphrase Bynum in regard to the focus of this volume, our picture of Pre-Hispanic concerns is “as influenced by current feminist debates as those debates”—debates on language, symbol, and social practice—“are influenced by the ideas from which they partly descend. . . . We must never forget to watch
ourselves knowing the otherness of the past, but this is not the same as merely watching ourselves” (1995: 30–31).

Acknowledgments I am grateful to Cecelia Klein for inviting me to join a distinguished group of scholars who have been so important in advancing our understanding of both the ancient New World and gender. The hospitality and professionalism of all at Dumbarton Oaks made for a delightful and most comfortable event. I am indebted to Joyce Marcus for many helpful editorial comments and suggestions, and to colleagues Rosemary Joyce and Joan Gero for continuous dialogue and discussion, which have improved my thinking and helped me to understand better the culture of Pre-Hispanic scholars. Several anonymous reviewers were generous in their endorsement of my outsider’s approach and made helpful suggestions on improving the manuscript. Finally, without the work of scholars outside the field of anthropology, such as Caroline Bynum, Jonathan Culler, Lorraine Daston, and Helen Longino, as well as Alison Wylie, this essay would not have been possible.
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Conclusions: Envisioning
Pre-Columbian Gender Studies

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The points raised by Margaret Conkey in the preceding essay evoked a firestorm of debate at the conference, not only during the discussion that followed the last presentation, but long after as well. Once the conference ended, both Conkey and I received a barrage of e-mail messages, phone calls, and letters from both conference participants and members of the audience. Later we exchanged summaries of the feedback each of us had received, as well as our own impressions of the conference, our reservations, and our rejoinders. That the controversy galvanized many of us to continue the dialogue well into the next month and beyond was a clear sign (to me, at least) that it had been, despite the insufficient time allowed for discussion, a success. In what follows I address what I perceive as the key issues raised during the conference discussion itself and the weeks that followed, and try to convey the nature of those debates. In the process, I share my personal assessment of what the conference and this volume imply in terms of the current state of Pre-Columbian gender studies, and indicate some key directions in which I think the field might develop. I do so, however, as a trained art historian with no personal experience of conducting archaeological research, and my perspective and interests have surely been shaped and limited accordingly.

The issue that elicited the greatest reaction among both participants and the audience was that of the relevance and importance of theory to Pre-Columbian gender studies. Conkey’s frank assessment of the conference papers as, with a few exceptions, sadly undertheorized brought forth eager endorsements from some people at the same time as it raised the hackles of others. The latter response was of no surprise to me, since I already knew that Pre-Columbian studies had been traditionally resistant to gender theory. In fact, one of my major goals in inviting Conkey, a leading gender theorist who was not herself a Pre-Columbianist, and some of the other presenters to participate was to put the relative isolationism of Pre-Columbian gender studies “on the table,” so to speak.
Cecelia F. Klein

There are multiple reasons for the skepticism regarding theory that permeates the field of Pre-Columbian gender studies. For one thing, the field has tended to be dominated by archaeologists, and archaeology, as has been previously pointed out by others (Conkey and Spector 1984; Gero 1983, 1988), has been historically defined and practiced largely by men. It is no secret that male scholars in many disciplines are either indifferent to or feel threatened by gender theory. Some of them see it as a feminist attempt to criticize, if not depose them, while others simply view it as a minor subset of their discipline, which, they seem to assume, should be left to female scholars. At the same time, many serious archaeologists lament the current lack of a scientific methodology for envisioning gender. They are dissatisfied with the efforts of scholars, like some of those represented in this volume, who, when data are scarce, rely on context to help them to “see” gender in the archaeological record. Like many practitioners of other disciplines, such as history, moreover, they often perceive efforts to study gender as biased or “soft,” and thus inconsequential, no doubt in part because, in this country, gender studies first emerged in departments of English and literature. Some archaeologists warn that a focus on women and an engagement with political feminism necessarily undermine the objectivity and empirical rigor expected of a “hard” science—a charge that is denied by gender theorists (Wylie 1992).

As I noted in the introduction to this volume, Pre-Columbian art history, even though it tends to be regarded as a “sissy,” or “woman’s,” discipline, has done no better. Art history, unlike archaeology, has engaged theory head-on in recent decades, but most art historical theory, including theory that addresses gender, has been generated by scholars of modern and contemporary art (Gouma-Peterson and Mathews 1987; Nochlin 1988; Pollock 1988; Broude and Garrard 1992). Many art historians who elect to work with pre-contact New World art regard themselves as “divorced” from such allegedly Eurocentric scholarship, preferring to specialize in the “non-West” and to remain microfocused and data oriented. Some practitioners even see Pre-Columbian studies as a place of refuge from the complex theoretical debates raging in other art historical fields. I therefore think it fair to say that the current attitude of many Pre-Columbian art historians toward gender theory is at least as hostile as that of many archaeologists.

Pre-Columbianists frequently offer other reasons for either avoiding theory altogether or resenting the accusation that they do not sufficiently consult and use it. Some admit to not being certain just what “theory” is. This is not difficult to understand, given that definitions and uses of the term have changed over time (Culler 1994: 15–16). The word “theory” is often used in place of
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“speculation” or “hypothesis”—as in “I have a theory”—and that still is its principal meaning to some scholars. For others, theory is equivalent to methodology; it tells one, in other words, how to go about one’s work. For this reason, those who are self-conscious about their methodology will often claim that they, in fact, “do” theory. The relatively new field of critical theory, in contrast, suggests to many that theory is essentially criticism and self-reflection. Because critical theory is rooted in postmodernist thinking, it translates as the questioning of one’s sources, one’s institutional base, one’s biases or views in general, and in particular the premises upon which these rest. Many scholars believe that they already take a critical approach to their sources, although their success in doing so must be questioned. Few Pre-Columbians, in any event, seem to currently understand theory in the sense that Jonathan Culler (1994: 13, 16) defines it. To Culler, theory is an unbounded corpus of writings that challenge and reorient thinking beyond the field in which they have been generated. Theory, in other words, makes us look at things differently by taking advantage of the “most powerful and innovative thinking and writing available today,” regardless of the discipline or field that generates them.

One member of the conference audience argued that there was too much specialized knowledge required in Pre-Columbian studies for us to get bogged down in nuanced deconstructions of texts and objects. There just is not sufficient time to read and “know” everything, so we must eschew the “nonessential” writings. At the conference, Conkey criticized Pre-Columbians for this preoccupation with data and empirical knowledge, lamenting their reluctance to abandon an empirical, positivist approach to the past. Unfortunately, the venue for this critique was somewhat unsuitable given that the Pre-Columbian Studies program at Dumbarton Oaks, a research center and a library rather than a humanitarian center or a “think tank,” has traditionally regarded data collection and dissemination as its primary mandate. Moreover, as has been pointed out since the conference, no truly meaningful understanding of Pre-Columbian gender, theoretical or otherwise, can be constructed without engaging the data. The fact that Conkey works primarily on Paleolithic Europe, for which data are far more scarce than those found in the Pre-Columbian field, together with her unfamiliarity with the data available to Pre-Columbians, may help to account for her position. Nonetheless, Conkey’s remarks have triggered the countercharge, perhaps inevitable, that theorists theorize only because they personally lack data.¹

¹ Several of the attendees noted after the conference that the most highly theoretical presentations had been “data poor.”
The resolution of this tension, it seems to me, lies somewhere between the two extremes. The need to collect and analyze data does not prohibit theorizing any more than theory prohibits the need for ample and solid data. What we need to strive for is the extension of our data analyses to the point where they become more obviously relevant to the work of scholars outside our field, as well as within. Some of us may be better equipped and more inclined to do this than others, but more of us need to involve ourselves in the effort. The field needs to balance more excellent data sets and case studies with the formulation of more appropriate and relevant theoretical frameworks.

Perhaps the most frequently heard excuse for not theorizing one’s work concerns what many Pre-Columbianists view as the use of unnecessary “jargon” in theoretical discourse. Most Pre-Columbianists seem to think that the specialized vocabulary that has emerged in theoretical writing is not only pretentious but also deliberately opaque and therefore obfuscating. Theorists do not want to be understood, according to this complaint, and deliberately talk over most peoples’ heads. Even Culler (1994: 14) acknowledges that theory is “hard reading.” I personally think that the above criticism is sometimes justified, and wonder why more female and gender theorists have not taken to heart Catherine Lutz’s (1995: 252–255) observation that it is, in part, precisely because theory is difficult reading that it tends to be coded masculine in our culture. Lutz identifies other characteristics of theoretical writing that help to engender it as male, among them broad generalization at the expense of history, emphasis on originality of thought rather than information (data), relatively few citations, and a celebration of (usually male) authorial genius. Much gender theory today, even when written by women, exhibits these same characteristics instead of attempting to contest them. What we need to develop is a new way to write theory that does not have the effect, described by Lutz, of saying to some readers, “This is not for you.”

On the other hand, Pre-Columbianists need to acknowledge that many of the unfamiliar words bandied about by theorists have been constructed because no extant word conveyed their exact meaning. A “problematic” is something more than just a “problem,” for example. Many of these words intimidate and confound us because they are relatively new and unfamiliar to us, not because they are overly long or unnecessarily convoluted. Moreover, as in the case of all “foreign” words, their meanings can be, with effort, learned. Learning to read and write theory is obviously hard work, but it is, I would agree with Conkey, work that is important.

There are, however, justifiable complaints about the relative lack of effort on the part of many theorists to help the uninitiated to “learn the lingo” and
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“talk the talk.” A number of our presenters admitted that, although they would like to better theorize their writing, they were unsure how to go about it. Obviously, simply listening to or reading theory does not necessarily help novices to figure out how to use it. At our conference, some of the most theoretically sophisticated papers were more or less incomprehensible to many in the audience because specialized terms and unfamiliar names were never defined or identified. The presenters were perceived as not wanting to communicate with anyone who was not already steeped in the literature. We have tried, in this volume, to correct this problem by taking care to define these new words and concepts wherever they crop up.

Ironically, the charge of esotericism can also be turned around and directed at the Pre-Columbian field itself. When theorists complain about Pre-Columbianists talking only to each other and not communicating with scholars outside their field, they often do more than admit to having little interest in our actual field and data. They may also gripe that the literature is hard to read because Pre-Columbianists, too, write in their own, highly specialized jargon. Pre-Columbianists often fail to see this. For us, Nahuatl and Quechua names drip from the pen like honey from a piece of toast. Because all of us know what a “horizon,” a *ceque*, or a “star war” is, much of the time we do not bother to define such terms, and I doubt that we ever seriously consider whether someone without the appropriate training will be able to make sense of our material. In other words, while data-oriented Pre-Columbianists, among others, charge theorists with obscurantism, they themselves seem disinterested in communicating with nonspecialists! Thus, all Pre-Columbianists, theoretically inclined or not, need to improve their manner of communicating to a broader audience. If progress is to be made in raising the level of sophistication in Pre-Columbian gender analyses, scholars on all sides have got to find a way to speak to each other across the real and imaginary borders that separate our disciplines, our fields, and our areas of specialization.

One of the most spirited debates at the conference centered on the emphasis placed in several of the papers, as well as in Conkey’s commentary, on the primacy of feminist theory. Some people stated that they read other kinds of theory but are not particularly well disposed toward feminist theory. The major reason given at the time was that feminism had “gone soft” in recent years by deliberately striving to refute former feminist representations of women as relatively powerless, which was accomplished by redefining power to include women’s influence in the informal, individualized, private, and domestic realms (e.g., Rogers 1975; Duffy 1986). A proponent of this argument, I pointed out at the conference that because feminism formerly concentrated on social injus-
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tice, it originally propelled people to take an activist stance. “Theory,” in other
terms, has inspired social action, which is responsible for the improvements we
have seen. I stated that, for me, the original power of the Women’s Liberation
movement of the 1960s and 1970s lay in its recognition that women had less
official political and economic power than men—a situation that has not sub-
stantially improved since then. The feminist contention at that time was not
that women lacked power of any kind, but rather that they lagged behind men
in terms of being in a position to make decisions that could radically and swiftly
improve both their individual situations and the status of other women. I am
concerned that, as much current feminist theory focuses on female forms of
power that are not primarily or directly political or economic, it does little to
enable women to exercise greater direct control over the lives of women as a
group. In other words, since this new emphasis obscures the gross inequities in
the broader powers of women versus men, feminist theory today fails to lead to
the social action that might correct them, restricting itself instead to verbal
criticism and attempts to alter negative representations of women.

This is, of course, part of the recent broader theoretical shift away from
materialist and social theories of historical change toward the current
postmodernist preoccupation with discourse, signs, subjectivity, and meaning—
in other words, the “mental” and the “ideational” (Weeden 1987; Mascia-Lees,
Sharpe, and Cohen 1989; Nicholson 1990; Butler 1992). What we need, as
Sherry Ortner (1996: 1 ff) points out, is a better way to integrate the study of
the ways in which we “construct” categories, such as representations, with so-
cial practice. Not surprisingly, it was primarily the older feminists at the confer-
ce, those who had participated in the women’s movement in the 1960s and
1970s, who shared my point of view. Most of the younger feminists aligned
themselves with the more recent attempts to highlight the power that women
already have.

In the weeks following the conference, at least one archaeologist identified
a related tendency for feminist theorists to eschew general theories of social
power. In our conference presentations, gender hierarchies, when they were
discussed at all, were seldom situated in relation to the writings of the major
social theorists of the modern era, such as, for example, Karl Marx (1973),
Pierre Bourdieu (1977), Michel Foucault (1978–86), Anthony Giddens (1984),
and Michael Mann (1986–93). In part, this may well be due to an understand-
able feminist skepticism regarding the masculine origins of these theories (e.g.,
Hartsock 1990). I suspect, however, that much of our reluctance to take on the
“big guys” is due not so much to the fact that they are “guys,” but rather to a
concern that their models may skew our understanding. John Monaghan (in
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this volume) states outright that he has neither chosen to analyze gender relations in Santiago Nuyoo, nor addressed how gender and sex there are conditioned by institutional practices. His reason is that “at this stage . . . we need fewer totalizing pronouncements and more precise analysis” (p. 288). It must be kept in mind, however, that many social theories are not totalizing in the sense of allowing for no amendments or alterations. Rather, they are general in the sense of looking at the big picture without imposing a limited and inflexible set of analytical categories. There is no reason why we cannot and should not test such theories against our data.2

One conference speaker, anthropologist Rosemary Joyce, invoked Bourdieu’s writings in her conference presentation, but felt it necessary to remove those references for the published version because some people in the audience had failed to grasp the connections that she made between Bourdieu’s ideas and her analysis of Maya gender. This was particularly true of art historians, some of whom might defend their bewilderment, however wrongly, by arguing that social theory is not part of art history’s preserve. This is not to say, however, that the essays in this volume have no broader social theoretical value. Joyce Marcus’s cross-cultural study of female rulers, for example, draws conclusions that can be readily tested against other case studies. As generalizations about female power, they have implications for scholars working in a number of fields outside anthropology. Elizabeth Brumfiel’s study shows how gender identity may change in response to changes in production that result from state formation and control. Brumfiel also has something to say about the ways in which state demands for goods and labor affect the organization of labor and how these relate to gender and class. Her work should affect not just that of other social anthropologists and archaeologists, but also that of historians, economic anthropologists, and gender theorists.

A final complaint regarding feminist theory that surfaced at the conference concerns its tendency to accept as a given for other societies the West’s bipolarized categorization of gender, our myth that society is largely, if not entirely, made up of exclusively what we call men and women. Some feminists at our conference contested this essentialism, rightfully pointing out that feminism means too many different things for such a generalization to be valid. However, as I noted later to Conkey, only one of the self-professed feminists who spoke at our conference—Joyce—ever questioned whether gender categories within the society she worked with were bipolar. The others took it as a premise that among Pre-Columbian peoples, as among us in the West today, there were only men and women to (seriously) consider. Whether there was anybody else out

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2 I owe special thanks to Claire Farago for working through this argument with me.
there, or whether men were not always masculine, and women not always femi-
nine, was neither recognized nor factored into the questions these other femi-
nists addressed. Moreover, none of the other presenters ever asked how gender
in these societies was determined—that is, on what basis their recognized gen-
der categories were constructed. As Joyce (in Joyce and Classen 1997: 1), fol-
lowing previous authors, has recently observed, “Neither feminist nor womanist
writings consistently address what might be taken as central to both, the prob-
lematic status of gender as a concept.” “In archaeological writing,” Joyce notes,
“gender has largely been treated as self-evident, coincident with biological sex
or sexual orientation, and women have often been viewed as almost inter-
changeable, engaged in universally predictable activities.”

Besides Joyce, curiously, it was Monaghan, an ethnographer, and two art
historians—Carolyn Dean and myself—who took up these issues at the con-
ference. Like Monaghan, neither Dean nor I wear feminism on our sleeves.
Why were we the ones who refused to assume outright that gender in Pre-
Columbian America was defined according to the criteria used by us today?
Why were we the only ones to ask whether gender was contingent upon biol-
yogy in these cultures, and whether it was thought to be immutable or suscep-
tible to factors such as age, illness, nature, and the gods?

I can only speak for myself here, but in my case it was because I was reading
a set of theorists different from those whom most of the feminists were regu-
larly citing. These readings included medical studies of intersexuality, cross-
cultural works on cross-dressing and same-sex relations, and, in particular, queer
theory. Why, as I later asked Conkey, do feminist archaeologists seem to eschew
these other kinds of theoretical writing on gender? Why, if Judith Butler’s
work on the performativity of gender is regarded as useful by archaeological
feminists, is her objection to the feminist elision or pathologization of gender
normativity so commonly ignored? As Butler notes in the anthology Feminism
Meets Queer Theory (1997: 2), the binary between “men” and “women” seems
“not only to be a constant presupposition within feminist work, but [in the past]
was elevated to the theological status of the ‘irrefutable’ within some
French Feminism.” In so doing, she points out, it has “only shored up, without
marking, the heterosexist assumptions of the paradigm”—that is, it has rein-
forced the categorical distinctions that have created so many of our problems
in the first place. I also have to ask why, in concluding that many of us failed to
adequately theorize our studies, Conkey did not perceive those papers that
problematized the gender binary as having a theoretical foundation and value.
Is this a manifestation of what Butler criticizes as the deep identification of
feminism with heterosexist assumptions?
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One person who attended the conference has shared with me her disappointment that, although feminists demand that others situate themselves in the historical and institutional context in which they operate, they seldom do so themselves. Surely, the historical conditions that fostered the women’s movement in recent decades—women’s need to enter the workplace in the face of sex discrimination, for example—could be linked to feminist archaeology’s continuing determination to naturalize the categories “male” and “female.” Those earlier battles centered on the roles and statuses of women in relation to men rather than on people whose gender was ambiguous. More self-reflexivity would be refreshing. It seems to me that if we really want to problematize gender, to open it up to new understandings, and to force a radical rethinking, we have to be willing to “queer” some of our most fundamental assumptions (Weed 1997).

I will even go further and claim that the studies in this volume that ask how gender was formulated in Pre-Columbian times produce a consensus that constitutes a significant contribution to gender theory. For in the studies by Joyce, Dean, Monaghan, and myself, gender was not found to have been inherently bipolar. Gender categories were not biologically determined either by the Classic Maya or by the Nahua, and multiple variants of the masculine and the feminine were clearly recognized in these two cultures, as they were in the Andes. In all of the areas covered by these authors, some form or forms of androgyny played central roles in formulating gender identity and structuring social relations. Among the Inka, the Classic Maya, and the Nahua alike, people were perceived as singularly sexed only during the time that they were married and producing offspring. In the course of the life cycle, individuals moved from a relatively androgynous, or gender-ambiguous, state to having a single sex, and then back to androgyny. Among the Nahua, moreover, ambiguous gender was not perceived as invariably antisocial because at certain times of the year its antisociality could be harnessed to benefit society. Certainly, none of these findings is without parallel; in fact, they fit well with mounting evidence that many ancient and non-Western peoples thought about gender very differently from us today (e.g., Blackwood 1984; Laqueur 1990; Roscoe 1991; Herdt 1981, 1994; Ramet 1996; Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang 1997). Scholars working on gender in other times and places should therefore find these studies relevant to their own findings.

There are other instances in which the studies in this volume bear upon theory. Louise Burkhart’s very careful analysis of the interrelation between Christian and indigenous Nahua elements in colonial Central Mexican texts speaks eloquently in regard to some of the key issues currently being debated by
postcolonial theorists. On one level, it resonates with the general critique of both colonial and twentieth-century representations of the indigenous people and customs of the Americas, which exploded in the years just before and after the Columbus Quincentennial. This, in turn, was an offshoot of the broader critique of Western representations of culture, launched earlier by Edward Said (1978, 1989) and later forcefully brought to the attention of social scientists, and Pre-Columbianists among them, by authors such as James Clifford (1988; Clifford and Marcus 1986). Since all Pre-Columbianists engage in interpretation of culture in one form or another, the postmodern issues of how we construct our knowledge, in particular knowledge of our “Others,” must be confronted. Understanding what happens to a culture dramatically affected by another, in many ways very different, culture is particularly important for Pre-Columbianists, because even our interpretations of data from periods long predating the conquest tend to be rooted in models drawn from postconquest sources (Boone and Cummins 1998).

Burkhart’s analysis therefore is critical. She makes it quite clear not only that colonial texts cannot be used uncritically as “windows” onto the Pre-Hispanic past, but that merely trying to strip away from them what seems to be European influences does not solve the problem, either. Colonial sources are not just blends of native and European—they are colonial constructions drafted for colonial purposes and thus produced under new or altered circumstances. They are often reinterpretations, misrepresentations, and fabrications; they reflect biases and counterdiscourses. As Burkhart notes, some are even dialogical, embedding the tensions and counterarguments generated by life in a colonial world. Her study therefore has serious implications for scholars interested in the effects of colonization on cultural forms such as literacy (Mignolo 1995) or visuality (Farago 1995). It also speaks directly to the process that theorists refer to as cultural hybridity (Young 1990, 1995; Bhabha 1994, 1997). Homi Bhabha (1997) identifies hybridity with that space “in between,” the interstitial site of a double consciousness, a place of ambiguity and ambivalence where identities are blurred and people are engaged in an ongoing process of negotiation. It is precisely within this “midstness,” this place of mimicry and slippage and translation that Burkhart situates her work.

That Burkhart focuses on the representation of gender in early colonial Central Mexican texts is even more important, for it helps to relate the concept of gender to the problem of hybridity. How did Christian authors treat the issue of gender during this period of culture contact and transition? How did these representations relate to the ethnic backgrounds and colonial identities of their authors? How were sexuality and morality represented in culturally
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hybrid documents? In a previous work (Klein 1995), I tried to address some of these same questions as they pertained to colonial Nahua images of a Pre-Hispanic goddess. As with Burkhart’s Nahua documents, I found the colonial visual hybrid to be complex, ambiguous, not capable of being distilled into European and indigenous Nahua “parts.” The gender of the subject, too, was affected by the interstitial colonial space of production. As the sixteenth century wore on, the gender of the goddess in these images slowly changed from female to androgynous and, finally, male. In my article in this volume, I deal even more directly with “gender hybridity” by focusing on Nahua notions about ambiguous gender.

One point that comes across loud and clear in Burkhart’s article is the particular importance of language at moments of exceptional hybridity. Since she works with written documents produced during a period of double consciousness and negotiation, some penned in Spanish, some in Nahuatl, Burkhart can assess their implications for gender only by knowing both languages. Similarly, in my 1995 article, I argue that an art historian cannot comprehend what happened to visual imagery in the New World during the colonial period without knowing as much about the visual languages of preconquest times as about those used in Europe and colonial Latin America. This is not just a technical or methodological point. One of the key issues in current postcolonial theory is that of native agency and voice. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s (1988) classic essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” has ramifications for both Colonialists and Pre-Columbianists. We in Pre-Columbian studies cannot escape from our temporal, cultural, and institutional positions when writing—and hence speaking—for others (Mohanty 1984; Alcoff 1991–92). How do Pre-Columbianists allow the voice of their subjects to be heard when, by definition, all their subjects are long dead?

One of the ways to provide for this is to enter into these ancient discourses, whether they be literary or visual, with knowledge of the languages in which they were waged. Work by Burkhart, James Lockhart (1992), and his students, among others, has shown that careful translation of colonial documents written in Nahuatl dramatically changes the way we perceive the position and attitudes of the “Other.” Other scholars have done the same for Quechua speakers in the colonial Andes (e.g., Mannheim 1998). When these texts are analyzed, it becomes clear that the ethnic survivors of the conquest were active participants in the construction of their colonial experience. They were not the passive “victims” of a “spiritual conquest,” for example, as we used to think (e.g., Ricard 1966). Burkhart’s article points directly to mastery of the indigenous languages as an important means to reinstating native agency in our representa-
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tions of the colonizing process. As she has shown, this can have equally important results for our efforts to envision gender relations and identities in ancient times.

This brings me to the last of the controversial matters taken up in our discussion after the conference. Like the others, this one continued to be debated in the months that followed. As Conkey puts it in this volume (p. 352), she is concerned about "the casual way in which a community of scholars can come to dip generously into ethnographic/ethnohistorical accounts." The ethnographers at the conference tended to take these comments personally, as a negative assessment of the relevance of their work for Pre-Columbian studies. Those presenters who had extensively used postconquest data to support their arguments concluded, on the other hand, that Conkey opposed all use of ethnographic information. The debate that followed, which was based on these misunderstandings, was therefore somewhat volatile. In this volume, Conkey tries to make it clear that she is not against the use of ethnographic material, but rather objects to what she perceives as the scholarly practice of moving back and forth in time as though time had not really passed, or in her own words, the tendency to "conflate several centuries into a generalization" (p. 351). In so doing, Conkey rightly warns us, we risk missing the "slippage" that inevitably occurs over the centuries, and may therefore end up reproducing the present in the past.

The debate over whether or not it is appropriate to use ethnographic data to interpret the Pre-Columbian past is not new to the field, and no Pre-Columbianist who uses ethnographic material today is unaware of its history or the problems that such usage entails. The arguments have come from different places, however, and the vocabulary, emphases, and actors cited shift substantially from camp to camp. Conkey mentions the cautions of Martin Wobst (1978) against what he called the "tyranny of ethnography," but the debate among social scientists had begun long before that (e.g., Steward 1942; Hawkes 1954; Ascher 1961; Heider 1967; Anderson 1969; Oswalt 1974). Social scientists could point as well to the defense of this methodology by the anthropologist Gordon Willey (1973) that was immediately rebutted by the art historian George Kubler (1973). Kubler had already published frequently on the subject of what the earlier art historian Erwin Panofsky (1960) had called "renascences," contrasted with what he had termed "disjunction." Like Panofsky, Kubler (1977) makes the point that old art forms may survive the era that produced them without keeping their original meanings, just as old subjects and themes may remain vital but, over the centuries, become expressed through new or different forms. One cannot, in other words, assume that, just because a particular art
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form in the present is similar if not identical to one from an earlier era, it maintains the same meaning that it bore originally.

All Pre-Columbian art historians are well aware of the famous debate between Willey and Kubler; in fact, many Pre-Columbian art historians were trained by Kubler. All are alert to the possibility that disjunction has occurred. Moreover, as historians, they know as well as anyone the degree and kinds of changes that may occur over time, particularly in the often-oppressive aftermath of a violent political takeover. However, the majority of Pre-Columbian art historians working with cultures that immediately predated contact still turn to ethnographic data for inspiration and support. They do this for the same reason that they continue to depend heavily on colonial (ethnohistorical) sources: without these, it has proved to be almost impossible to derive verbal meaning from the Pre-Columbian visual record. Social scientists who seek the same goal likewise continue to employ ethnographic analogy, while being fully aware of more recent cautions and suggestions by colleagues such as Patty Jo Watson (1979; Gould and Watson 1982), philosopher Alison Wylie (1982), and Bruce Trigger (1982).

It seems to me that, whether one is an archaeologist or an art historian, the relative reliability of ethnographic analogy in helping us to interpret the past depends on a number of variables. The Paleolithic material with which Conkey works, for example, dates to a far more distant point in time than does that of any of the other authors in this volume. Whereas the Paleolithic period ended at least twelve thousand years ago, most Andeanists and Mesoamericanists work with societies that flourished after the fourth millennium BC, and less than six hundred years have passed since the Spanish conquest. When, in my essay in this volume, I use contemporary highland Maya field data from Santiago Atitlán to provide insight into how Nahuas thought about ambiguous gender, I need to extend my findings only five centuries back in time. Moreover, sixteenth-century documents make it clear that the peoples living in highland Guatemala today have descended from those living there at the time of the conquest, when many communities in the highlands had close socio-political ties with Nahua.

As Bryony Orme (1973: 482) points out, archaeologists of the Americas are therefore better able than Europeanists to document historical continuity between the prehistoric past and the present. As a result, they tend to approach the problem of ethnographic analogy differently. Americanists, for example, often eschew the cross-cultural, even transoceanic comparisons that Conkey advocates in this volume, instead favoring analogies drawn from historically connected groups living within a single geographic area. They do so because it is generally agreed by scholars that continuity produces the stronger form of
analogy (e.g., Gould 1974; 1978: 255). The so-called direct historical approach, which is used by most Pre-Columbianists, depends on this demonstrated cultural continuity between the archaeological past and the ethnographic present. These Pre-Columbianists can show, in other words, that the same ethnic and linguistic group has continuously occupied the area that they study. At the same time, as Marcus and Kent Flannery (1994: 56) have observed, this approach allows scholars to more easily recognize the changes that have inevitably occurred over time and to appreciate the tendency for change to take place faster in some areas of experience than in others. Certain circumstances, in other words, make the use of ethnographic analogy not just far less risky than Conkey implies, but far more reliable than the cross-cultural comparisons that she advocates, as well.

In the past decade, it has been the ethnographers themselves who have made the strongest case for ethnographic analogy. Robert Carlsen and Martín Prechtel (1994: 78–81) remind us that there is a difference between the meanings of cultural phenomena as seen from the emic vantage point of the people who experience them and the meanings that we, as etic observers, impose upon them. Social scientists taking an etic approach may be blind to the meanings that people themselves attach to their cultural experiences and products, while the same people may be unable to relate to—to see themselves in—the scholars’ findings. For those of us who seek to better understand how earlier peoples thought about gender, ethnographic descriptions provide the best clues. Refusing to ground our gender models in an ethnohistorical or an ethnographic model makes it more likely that we will perceive the past in terms of our own, ethnocentric Western categories and experiences.

Primed by postmodern, feminist, and subaltern critiques of their discipline, and supported by the findings of ethnohistorians and linguists like Burkhart and Lockhart, ethnographers are also the social scientists who have allowed the greatest space in their thinking for the possibility of local agency. Fieldworkers are more sensitive now than they were twenty years ago to the ways in which native peoples adapted to their colonial circumstances, accommodated the Christian hierarchy, absorbed and synthesized new ideas, and yet retained the basic structures of their preconquest worldviews. As Carlsen (1997: 24) points out, all the evidence from the Maya community of Santiago Atitlán, where he works (and from where I have drawn much of my material), indicates that “the Atitecos adapted to their Post-Columbian environment in such a way that, while significant change within their cultural configuration certainly occurred, change of that configuration was avoided.” “Post-Columbian Mayas,” according to Carlsen, citing Judith Friedlander, “were not successfully drafted to serve as
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‘accomplices in their own oppression’” (Carlsen 1997: 23; also see p. 2). To think they did so “entirely discounts the role of the huge Maya population in shaping the history of the region in which they remain the majority. In so doing, it utterly ignores the Mayas’ capacity to resist, to subvert, to adapt; in short, to think.”

Carlsen takes care to locate his analysis of Santiago Atitlán in its own history and to analyze its social institutions through time. Precisely because he does so, he can make a convincing case for the continuation of certain traditional customs and structures despite the changes that have occurred. His approach is very much in line with that advocated by Nicholas Thomas (1994: 8–9), who criticizes what he sees as a postmodern essentialism of colonialism, one which implies that there is one, universal, colonial “experience.” Thomas advocates instead a “pluralized field of colonial narratives,” or what he terms “colonialisms rather than colonialism.” In this he seconds Jorge Klor de Alva (1992, 1995), who goes so far as to question the appropriateness of the concept “colonial” for the postcontact experience of most Latin Americans. This experience, Klor de Alva warns us, varied so widely from place to place, was so irregularly paced over time, and was so deeply affected by issues of class, race, and ethnicity (to which I would add gender) that the usual generalizations about moral oppression and cultural extinction are simply invalid.

The way to locate the differences in the reactions of groups to being colonized, according to Thomas (1994: 9), is to undertake what he calls a “historicized ethnographic approach.” In other words, each colonial and postcolonial instance must be studied on its own terms before one tries to theorize about the effects of the colonial process. I would extend this to suggest that one should not generalize a priori about the degree of cultural change that may have taken place in colonized/postcolonized communities. This means that theory should not be allowed to get in the way of research in such matters. It also means that the extent to which data from a particular postconquest or even living community might be useful to the Pre–Hispanicist depends in large part on the historical experience of the people living there. Some ethnographic data are more potentially useful than others for helping us to envision the past. It is the job of responsible scholars to identify and restrict themselves to those data.

This can be accomplished not only by considering the historical circumstances that conditioned this information, but also by limiting ourselves to modern material that can be more carefully controlled. Wylie (1985: 97–101), in a lengthy and detailed review of the history of the debate over ethnographic analogy in the social sciences, has proposed several strategies for strengthening our use of analogical reasoning. One is to “determine the overall extent of the
similarities’ in order to ensure that a systematic comparison of the items under consideration has outweighed the differences. A second strategy is to locate the similarities in a wide range of source contexts—that is, to expand the base of interpretation; in other words, we need to broaden the breadth and specificity of the similarities. There is no reason why everyone who uses ethnographic analogy should not try and hope to be able to do this. However, the question remains: If these criteria cannot be met, should ethnographic data invariably be eliminated from consideration? My guess is that there are those who would refuse to give up the insights that they believe to have gleaned just because the similarities between the two cultural forms being compared are statistically deficient. They might well argue instead that one or two really close similarities will be enough to raise the possibility, at least, that other correspondences existed.

Many of these dissenters would be art historians. There is no doubt that in the course of this entire discussion we have been seeing some of the major differences between the ways in which social scientists—particularly feminist archaeologists and anthropologists—approach their work and the ways in which art historians approach theirs. The problem is not so much that one group is “more theoretical” than the other; it is that the theoretically informed members of each group often draw on their own discipline’s literature and different bodies of theory. Art historians seem to read more literary criticism, for example, than archaeologists. The social scientists, in contrast, seem to me far more preoccupied with talking and writing about how they do what they do and how they have come to the point of doing it than are art historians. Art historians tend to just go ahead and “do it,” often relegating matters of method and theory to the margins and footnotes, if they include them at all. I do not propose to try to account for these differences among the disciplines but simply point out the obvious. Art historians, because they do not aspire to be scientists, tend to find an intrinsic value in offering up provocative yet plausible interpretations and ideas that they realize they cannot always “prove.” In other words, although their arguments are typically data oriented, they are as interested in producing interpretive models and plausible hypotheses as they are in what scientists call “hard truths.”

If Pre-Columbian gender studies are to move to the next level, where, hopefully, more works will be produced that fit Culler’s criteria for theoretical writing, the various disciplinary players must make a greater effort, as Conkey urges, to reach out to each other. As I have tried to indicate here, there are places where the different approaches and emphases can meet and mingle, as well as places where improved communication can occur. It is equally important, how-
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ever, that we try to gain a better understanding of, and respect for, the specialized nature of the questions that each discipline "wants to ask" about the past, and thus the specific goals that each is trying to achieve. Archaeologists are archaeologists because of the nature of the questions that they strive to answer, just as art historians choose art history because they have a somewhat different agenda. Hopefully, this volume and the conference that produced it represent a significant further step along the path leading to the kinds of interdisciplinary collaborations that could greatly expand and enrich our future visions of gender in Pre-Columbian America.

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