

BEARING MEMORY: WOMAN AND CHILD FIGURINES FROM TLATILCO

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Patricia S. Christmas, B. A.

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BEARING MEMORY: WOMAN AND CHILD FIGURINES FROM TLATILCO

Committee Members Approved:

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Dr. F. Kent Reilly III, Chair

---

Dr. James Garber

---

Dr. Robert Williams

Approved:

---

Dr. J. Michael Willoughby  
Dean of the Graduate College

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1: Defining the Problem**

Between approximately 1300 B.C. and 200 B.C., the inhabitants of the village on the edge of Lake Texcoco that would come to be known as Tlatilco produced hundreds of small, hand-modeled ceramic figurines. These figurines, many of which were interred as burial goods, have fired the imaginations of archaeologists, artists and collectors since their re-emergence from the clay during the Twentieth Century. Continuing a process long known in Mesoamerican indigenous archaeology, these items were reclaimed and redefined by the later holders according to their own needs and tastes (Hamann 2002: 351). Mexican artist Diego Rivera used images of Tlatilcan figurines as parts of murals celebrating the spirit of the Mexican Republic. Archaeologists and anthropologists such as Michael Coe and Laurette Sejourné identified them as fertility figures (Coe 1965: 25).

Since the late decades of the twentieth century, there have been attempts to move away from these reinterpretations and to re-assess the figurines within the context of the culture that created them. María Elena Bernal-García has criticized the traditional academic interpretations of these figures as having a specifically male bias, although it should be noted that two of the first archaeologists to deal with these figures were female (Bernal-García 2006: 163 – 164). Muriel Nazzari Porter (later Muriel Porter Weaver), who produced the first thorough analysis of the excavation material from Tlatilco, discussed

the figurines that had been recovered but made no attempt at interpretation. Her study focused on a comparison between the materials excavated at Tlatilco and materials from contemporaneous regions of North and South America. The Tlatilcan figurines were only valuable in that context as chronological markers (Porter 1953: 43). Laurette Sejourné was credited by Coe with making the original identification of the figurines as fertility symbols (Coe 1965: 25).

The identification of the female figurines as symbols of fertility even by female researchers is not surprising, given the atmosphere within archaeology and anthropology as a whole in the mid to late twentieth century. During this period, academics from a variety of disciplines were questioning the traditional interpretations of the roles of women in human cultures. In 1978, Eleanor's Leacock's article "Women's Status in Egalitarian Society: Implications for Social Evolution" overturned many traditional assumptions about the role of women in Native American cultures. Reinterpretations of history or cultural data during this period led many cultures to be described as having been once been matriarchal or at the least gender-egalitarian (Lerner 1986: 30). Some researchers went so far as to posit the existence of a period of time before female domination by men, a sort of Golden Age characterized by peaceful matriarchies – in this case, meaning a political system in which the gendered dominance roles were reversed – and, above all, fertility goddesses. Merlin Stone, professor of Art and Art History at the State University of New York at Buffalo, identified cultures as disparate as Elam, Anatolia and Crete as having been originally matriarchal (1972: 25 – 47). In her 1982 book, *Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe*, University of California at Berkeley

archaeologist Marija Gimbutas identified practically every pre-Iron Age female figurine found east of the Rhine as being a fertility goddess (Gimbutas 1982: 152 – 235).

Claassen and Joyce (1997: 1) have argued that the strong emphasis on what they refer to as “womanist” rather than feminist study topics in the latter part of the twentieth century is completely apolitical, coming as a logical outgrowth of previous studies. However, it is known that trends and tensions in the larger community often influence, often without conscious effort, the attitudes and even the questions presented by researchers. As actors within the larger community, researchers cannot help but be affected by societal tensions. Academia, regardless of the discipline, is historically no less a forum for cultural debate than politics or religion, and it is disingenuous to suggest that social tensions would not affect the choices and interests of researchers. To be fair, if, as Bernal-Garcia argues, male archaeologists and other commentators were guilty of reducing feminine images to mere companions for males on their way to the afterworld, they were not alone in their misidentification (Bernal-Garcia 2006: 163). Early feminist researchers also, and just as unconsciously, perpetuated an atmosphere that encouraged a biased interpretation of female figurines as part of the larger gender issues within Western culture. Each side of the issue was equally guilty of unconsciously skewing their interpretations to meet needs peculiar to their own culture.

The figurines chosen for this study are another example of the skewing of perception based upon the cultural needs and expectations of the researcher. Throughout Mesoamerica, figurines depicting adult women in the company of children or infants have been identified as “Mother and Child” figures (Porter 1953: 3) (Weaver 1997: 37) (Anton 1973: plate 30, plate 32, plate 33) (Bernal-Garcia 2006: 164) (Vaillant 1936: 198)

(Pratt and Gay 1979: 99). The association of adult women holding children with the concept of *Mother and Child* appears to be an automatic response for Western researchers. However, the very ease with which these artifacts, modeled by the hands and minds of people from a culture distant in both time and space from the culture that has produced the researchers themselves, are identified with this concept requires that this association be examined carefully.

In Jo Ann Roman Brisko's catalog of Aztec goddesses, the Mesoamerican concept of motherhood is depicted graphically. The goddess Tlazolteotl is shown squatting in a birthing position, with the newborn head emerging from the divine uterus (Brisko 1995: 15). In other images, goddesses are shown nursing infants (Brisko 1995: 10, 22, 24). Similar images can be found in the artwork of earlier Mesoamerican cultures. However, these images are relatively uncommon and only one photograph of the figurines from Tlatilco was found that reflected this dominant image of motherhood. Of the remaining Mesoamerican figures of adult women – identified as such by the unequivocal presence of either primary or secondary sexual characteristics – with children or infants, many depicted women who showed clear signs of advanced age or were depicted in clothing that were typical of older females. For instance, the figurine depicted in plate 30 of Anton's *Pre-Columbian Women* is described as a mother with her child (Figure 1.1). In the caption to this photograph, Anton himself comments that the adult female is wearing a skirt that "was the usual dress of elderly women (Anton 1973: Caption, Plate 30)." In another plate, the same author identifies another figurine as depicting a mother and child (Figure 1.2), noting that the mother seems "care-worn and ill (Anton 1973: Caption, Plate 32)." A more reasonable interpretation is that the adult

female depicted is not so much ill as simply old. Only in the most obvious examples, in which the deeply incised wrinkles or pendulous, flat breasts simply could not belong to a young woman, have Mesoamerican depictions of adult women accompanied by infants or children been identified as elderly.

There are several reasons for the misidentification of woman and child figurines by Western researchers. Ideals and expectations regarding motherhood and infancy or early childhood often color the interpretation of artifacts, especially artwork. Symbols used in art are culturally specific (Layton 1991: 238). However, even within the culture of origin, the interpretation of art can be highly subjective. In a discussion of Ylongu bark paintings, Robert Layton points out that symbols used in a work of art may vary in meaning depending upon the viewers' education level or social background (Layton

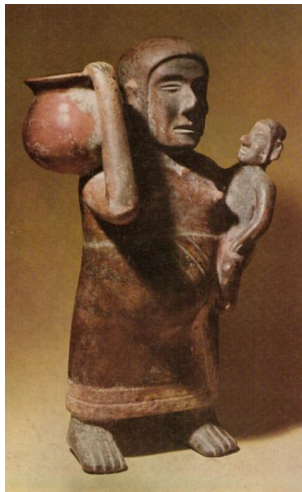


Figure 1.1: Woman and Child, after Anton, Plate 32



Figure 1.2: Woman and Child, after Anton, Plate 30

1991: 138). When the viewer is not a member of the culture that produced the artwork, interpretation can become even more subjective and tends to reflect the cultural symbols familiar to the viewer. While there may be some parallels between the symbols of the

two cultures, the foreign viewer will not have the same understanding of the image as a native of the culture that produced the symbol (Layton 1991: 126).

The image of the Mother and Child has been deeply ingrained in Western culture through Christian religious art (Figure 1.3). Images of the Madonna and the infant Christ



**Figure 1.3: Madonna with Child, Antonello da Messina, 1475**

are immediately identifiable and resonate deeply with Westerners. Because the Catholic Church encouraged women to associate themselves with the Virgin Mary, early Flemish paintings of the Madonna and Child often incorporated portraits of living women (Bauman 1986: 16). Over time, the basic composition associated with these devotional images became the template for images of secular mothers and their children. It is considered “prototypical, primordial and archetypal (Fredrickson 2004: 153).”

Generally, the image is of a woman cradling an infant on her lap. The woman’s head is angled toward the child and her arms are curved protectively around the child’s body. The child is generally depicted as reaching toward or leaning into its mother’s body. This pattern is repeated in modern paintings and portraits of mothers and their children, and is quickly identifiable regardless of style (Figures 1.4 – 1.6). In light of this cultural influence, it is not surprising that researchers, who are as deeply ingrained in their parent culture as anyone else, should quickly and almost uncritically identify a figure reflecting a similar model as being equivalent to the one with which they are intimately familiar.



**Figure 1.4: Mother and Child, Gustav Klimt, 1905**



**Figure 1.5: Mother and Child, Jared Gehling, 2007**



**Figure 1.6: Mother and Child, Matt Sabow, 2005**

Western ideas about aging are still another source of bias hampering the interpretation of Mesoamerican figurines. In his discussion of the depiction of older individuals in Western art, Covey states that Western society has long been ambivalent toward aging and the elderly. Advanced age is seen as being characterized by increased wisdom and spirituality on one hand, but by physical decay and dependence on the other (Covey 1991: 19 - 20). Elderly women have been depicted in an especially negative light: avaricious, jealous of the young, and a worthless burden to their families (Covey 1991: 17, 51, 60). In his two-volume dictionary of artistic iconography published in 1779, *Iconology*, George Richardson states that the concept of avarice is best portrayed artistically by an elderly woman (cited in Covey 1991: 51). The kinds of behavior expected from older individuals are strictly circumscribed, as well. Western society views old age as a stepping stone into the here-after, not as an active period of life. Elders are expected to be seen engaged in passive activities, such as religious contemplation or knitting, not actively involved with others (Covey 1991: 22 – 25). Western artistic depictions of older persons with children tend to show the children physically separated

from the adults, rarely as being held. Artistic representations of grandmothers with their grandchildren are remarkably rare, and although photographs may be more common, these are typically casual family photographs, not published art photography.

Given the combined weight of current issues in Western society, a cultural bias toward viewing images of adult women with small children as mothers, and a second cultural bias against interpreting images of actively contributing adults as older adults, it is not surprising that researchers have overlooked potential images of older women within Mesoamerican art, even when physical indicators of age are present. Among the Tlatilcan figurines, interpretation is further compromised by both the size and the abstract style of the depictions. Many of the woman and child figurines fall into the Hay-Vaillant D-types, which tend to measure between 10 cm and 17 cm in length. Although many are strikingly intricate for their size, facial features are often highly stylized rather than naturalistic. Also, while many of the figurines are depicted with jewelry or headdresses, depictions of clothing – which, as in the Anton image in Figure 1 above, can be an indicator of age – are fairly rare. However, the symbolic details of the woman and child figurines from Tlatilco suggest that they are part of the larger, pan-Mesoamerican theme depicting older women and children.

One of the most commonly recurring themes within Mesoamerican ideology is the idea of the cyclical nature of time and of the natural world. Days passed in cycles from light to dark and back to light. Seasons passed from dry and barren to wet and fertile and back again. Even the universe had a cycle of life and death, with each age marked by the creation and then destruction of the sun, clearing the way for the creation of a new sun and a new age. In the same way, human affairs also passed in a cycle, from year to



year and from generation to generation, with the durations of cities or entire cultures being conceived of in terms of the solar cycle (Graulich 1997: 64). This concept was intimately bound up with agricultural cycles, especially maize agriculture. Using the methods of structural analysis pioneered by Erwin Panofsky combined with an analysis of the myths and known ritual practices of later Mesoamerican groups, I will argue that the woman and child figurines uncovered at Tlatilco are part of the local representation of this specifically Mesoamerican concept of regeneration and continuation, a theme that is expressed not only in the plastic arts, but in myths and religious rites.

## 1.2: Organization of the Thesis

Chapter Two of this thesis will consist of a history of the site of Tlatilco and the excavations that have been conducted there. It will include a survey of current research into Mesoamerican society and material culture during the Formative Period (1200 B.C. to 300 B. C.) and an introduction to the Hay-Vaillant Typology of Central Mexican ceramic figurines. Chapter Three will describe the methodology employed in this study, and Chapter Four will consist of an introduction to the study's corpus of figurines, including a detailed analysis of the individual figurines. A discussion of the results of the analysis and the cultural significance of the theme of the older woman and child will occur in Chapter Five. This will include a discussion of the role of art in small-scale. The final chapter will contain the summary and conclusion, with directions for future research.

## **Chapter 2: Excavation History of Tlatilco, the Tlatilco Culture Sphere and the Hay-Vaillant Figurine Typology**

### **2.1: Excavation History of Tlatilco**

Scientific excavation at Tlatilco has been hampered by decades of industrial exploitation. The site's thick clay deposits proved to be an ideal material for brick making, and workmen mining the clay deposits looted the burials freely for many years. As a result, many artifacts such as ceramic vessels, stamps and seals, and especially the enigmatic and lovely figurines have disappeared into private collections around the world. Ironically, however, it was this very process that brought the site to the attention of researchers.

The first scientific excavations at Tlatilco were organized by the Mexican artist and art historian Miguel Covarrubias, who had long been an aficionado and collector of Tlatilcan ceramics (Taube 2004: 3-4). These excavations were conducted under the supervision of Rubin de Barbolla from the Instituto Nacional de Anthropologia y Historia in four seasons between 1942 and 1950. Further excavations conducted in 1963 on the plain above the Rio Hondo by Paul Tolstoy helped reassess and correct the temporal divisions at the site (Tolstoy and Paradis 1970: 346 - 347). Between 1962 and 1967, a series of excavations were undertaken by Arturo Romano and Roman Pina Chan,

individually. Since the last excavations, Tlatilco has been completely covered by the spread of Mexico City, with the exception of a limited area near a sixteenth century church. A small, under-funded museum houses a number of artifacts, but many more are held in private or public collections around the world.

## 2.2: Temporal divisions and the Tlatilco Culture Sphere

In her original report on the materials recovered from Tlatilco, Muriel Porter Weaver identified the area as a “one-period site” (Porter 1953: 19). Since that time, further data has come to light that has allowed researchers to divide the Tlatilco deposits into two distinct temporal periods. The earliest phase identified at Tlatilco is the Ayotla phase, from approximately 1200 to 1000/ 900 B. C., identified by Tolstoy (Tolstoy and Paradis 1970: 347) (Niederberger 2000: 172). The second Manantial phase lasted from approximately 1000 – 800 B.C. (Niederberger 2000: 172). After the Manantial phase, the area declined in population and power, while the Middle Formative center of Cuicuilco rose to prominence.

David Grove has described Tlatilco as being part of a larger Tlatilco Culture Sphere, based upon similarities of village formation and material remains, including ceramic vessels and figurines. He has identified the point of origin for the Tlatilco Culture Sphere as being in the modern Mexican state of Morelos, just south of the Valley of Mexico. The site from which the culture group takes its name is one of the northern-most examples of this grouping (Grove and Gillespie 1992: 192). Chalcatzingo is situated on the eastern-most border and there is evidence of interaction between Chalcatzingo and

the neighboring Tlatilco culture villages in the appearance of Red-on-Brown bottle sherds and exotic obsidian types within the Chalcatzingo assemblages (Grove 1987: 434).

The Tlatilco Culture Sphere was characterized by large villages with ruling elite classes and public architecture in a dominant relationship with surrounding communities. Grove postulates that there were three to four levels of hierarchy within groups of communities situated in river valleys, with each valley comprising a sphere of chiefly control (Grove and Gillespie 1992: 201). The communities of the Tlatilco Culture Sphere were also united by the appearance of types D and K ceramic figurines (described in greater detail below), and Brown-and-Red ceramic vessels (Grove and Gillespie 1992: 201). The Tlatilco Culture Sphere rose during the Early Formative Period and faded away around the beginning of the Middle Formative, roughly between 1450 B.C and 900 B. C.

### 2.3: Hay-Vaillant Typology and the Ceramic Sequence of the Valley of Mexico

Typologies have long been valuable tools for archaeologists. They provide a quick and easy method of describing the formal qualities of an artifact or group of artifacts based upon common, measureable characteristics (Chilton 1999: 44). Typologies are often used as methods for establishing relative chronologies in the absence of materials suited to absolute dating methods. The primary means of categorizing and describing figurines from Tlatilco and other sites within the Valley of Mexico is through the Hay-Vaillant typology of Central Mexican ceramic figurines. The taxonomy was first developed by Clarence Hay and elaborated upon by his former student George Clapp Vaillant in his efforts to establish a method of relative dating at his “Middle Culture”

sites of El Arbolillo, Ticoman and Zacatenco in the Valley of Mexico (see: Vaillant 1931a; Vaillant 1931b; Vaillant 1936; Vaillant and Vaillant 1936).

The Hay-Vaillant typology divides figurines into lettered and numbered categories based upon their formal qualities. Since its introduction, the typology has undergone a series of changes and refinements as different researchers added new categories and subcategories. Each general lettered type has several numbered sub-types, and many sub-types have further subdivisions. A useful chart was published by Miguel Covarrubias showing what was believed to be the evolution of each type using sketches of typical examples of each category (1957: figure 8). New types were added by Frances Pratt, again, in 1979, with the publication of *Ceramic Figurines of Central Mexico*, in which the author made distinctions between Type K, Type K Xolostoc and three subdivisions of Type K Abstract (1979: 61). A detailed description of as much of the Hay-Vaillant Ceramic Figurine Typology as could be constructed from published materials appears in Appendix A of this thesis.

The figurines found at Tlatilco are generally of the type D or K variety, with type D being more common. Types C5 and C3 are also found, though less commonly (Porter 1953: 23) (Bernal Garcia 1988: 33) (Niederberger 2000: 172). According to Vaillant type C and D figurine faces are characterized by the addition of appliquéd fillets, in this case narrow rolls of clay, to define the brow and nasal ridges and to shape the eyes and mouths. In type C figurines, these fillets seem crude, while those of the type D fillets are more gracefully modeled. Type D figurines have a chin, which is absent in the type C figurines. Type C3 figurines combine these facial characteristics with wide hips and thighs, and occasionally a protruding belly that Vaillant interpreted as a pregnant belly

(1931a: 127), but that may simply indicate a plump individual. Type D2 figurines are hollow (Bernal Garcia 1988: 33). The K-type figurines feature large heads and square headdresses. The hands and feet are ill-defined, often resembling a flipper with a few impressed lines to indicate fingers and toes. The eyes are generally formed by the application of small ovals of clay that are then impressed with two triangular plough-marks to indicate the eyes. The eyes of all three types generally have incised pupils. The Type K, Xolostoc Variety, has appliquéd eyes with oval impressions, while Type K Abstract figurines, a type unique to Tlatilco, often consist of a torso and stubby legs with only the crudest of vestigial heads when there is any head at all (Pratt and Gay 1979: 61).

Covarrubias has asserted that the combination of distinctly different figurine types in the same locations argues “that peoples of different tribes and cultures shared the same communities in early times, each making, and perhaps even importing, its own traditional styles of figurines” (Covarrubias 1957: 27). However, as Howard Morphy’s work with Yolngu bark paintings shows, it is possible for markedly different styles of art to coexist within the same culture (Layton 1991: 185 - 186). In his study of Akan terracotta portraiture, George Preston makes a similar observation: “Styles ranged from the geometric to an idealized naturalism closer to the classical Greek than the Roman sense of the term. Archaeological evidence too extensive to elaborate upon here demonstrates that there was no chronological sequence in these naturalistic and geometric modes... The differences in style had no iconographic significance” (1990: 71). Markedly different styles of expression may exist within a culture simultaneously, in other words, without the need for outside influence or a mixing of traditions. The choice of which style to use may, as with the Yolngu bark paintings, depend upon the knowledge and experience of

the artist, or may depend upon some other factor as yet undetermined (Layton 1991: 139 – 140).

When Vaillant first described the figurines of Central Mexico, he did so in the hope of defining a ceramic sequence for the Valley of Mexico that could be used as a means for relative dating of sites. In her analysis of the ceramic artifacts from Tlatilco, Weaver used the Hay-Vaillant typology to date the materials from Tlatilco as being roughly contemporaneous with Vaillant's late Middle Zacatenco phase (Porter 1953: 23). Most researchers considered the Olmec-style elements found at Tlatilco to be a later addition to the corpus, with the hand-modeled figurines being local pre-cursors. Tolstoy's work at Loma del Atoto, however, up-ended this traditional sequence, showing that the Olmec-style Pilli and Isla type figurines actually pre-dated the Manantial phase at Tlatilco, during which most of the figurines in this study were produced, by several hundred years (Niederberger 2000: 172).

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The majority of the figurines selected for this project have been drawn from a broad pool of photographs published in print and digital media, including books, journals, and museum and private auction websites. One figurine was viewed personally at the Art Museum at Princeton University. There are, naturally, a number of difficulties associated with working with published images. Not least among these is the issue of selection bias. Photographs are expensive to publish and take up valuable space in a book or journal. As a result, authors tend to be selective about which images they choose to support their particular argument. Authors may also tend to select artifacts that they find personally appealing. Regardless of the potential problems raised by the use of published photographs, I believe that the bias is fairly insignificant. Artifacts that might be overlooked or omitted by one researcher may be selected by another in order to illustrate an entirely different point. This repeated selection process should work to correct any omissions in the overall published corpus.

Choices made by either the photographer or the publisher may also affect the quality of the images available. The choice between using color or black-and-white photography may also affect both the selection of figurines to photograph and the quality of the available images. The images that are published are generally a single obverse or oblique view; while this may be sufficient to many purposes, for the purposes of iconographic analysis, at least four views of the object are preferable, showing both the



obverse and reverse sides of the object as well as both side views. Even on museum websites, this is rarely possible. In fact, the only figurine images available in all four views were found not on a museum website, but on the website of a private auction house. It is hoped that as curation comes to increasingly rely upon digital records, more museums will make full images of their collections available.

The available images were categorized according to the Hay-Vaillant typology for Central Mexican ceramic figurines. The images were then grouped according to apparent thematic similarities. Themes were defined as similarities in attributes that crossed the boundaries of typology into at least three categories. These similarities were found by entering qualitative descriptions for various attributes, such as eye shape, the presence or absence of fillets, the presence or absence of various forms of jewelry, etc., into an Excel spreadsheet and sorting based upon different criteria. A number of themes were identified in this manner, including those of dancers, women with necklaces and extended palms, women with infants, women with multiple heads, ballplayers, musicians, etc. Since an analysis of all of these themes was clearly beyond the scope of this project, the theme comprised of adult women paired with infants was chosen for particular attention, based upon its relative frequency within the corpus and the fact that relatively little attention appears to have been paid to it in the available literature. The woman and child theme is represented in this study by a total of fourteen figurines.

An attempt at estimating the frequency of the woman and child theme's appearance in the overall population of Tlatcan figurines proved frustrating. While many of the published accounts of the excavations listed the number of figurines found within specific burials, few were so exacting as to offer detailed descriptions or photographs of

the individual figurines. The single document that did so – *Catalogo de Entierros de San Juan de Tlatilco, Temporada IV* – covered only one season, during which no woman and child figures were recovered. The dearth of detailed burial data made it impossible to make an estimation of the frequency of the appearance of this theme within the burials or of any thematic patterns that might exist within the larger caches of figurines. However, in the original thematic analysis of published figurines – which contained eight of the pieces that were ultimately used in this project – the woman and child theme accounted for approximately 12% of the population. By comparison, the woman with necklace and outstretched arms theme represented slightly fewer, with six of the original figurines falling into this category. The ballplayer theme was represented by only two, one a robust male with a ball under his arm and the other a slender youth wearing the distinctive headgear of a ballplayer. Although this number does not conform to the requirement that a theme cross three styles, it is a distinctive theme with enough representatives in other locations throughout Mesoamerica to be considered. Whether these comparative numbers reflect the actual frequencies of these themes within the corpus of Tlatilcan figurines remains to be seen. The original study did not consider figurines that were found in fragmentary form, such as the type K head that appears to have been used in Burial 48 of the *Catalogo* as a replacement for the individual's missing head. Many of the thematic elements of these figurines are lost in breakage, making fragmentary pieces inappropriate for iconographic analysis.

Once the specific theme that was to be analyzed had been selected, a second more specific survey of published materials was conducted in order to locate as many examples of the woman and child theme as possible. This second search resulted in the addition of

six more figurines to the original eight, bringing the total corpus to fourteen figurines. Line-drawings were made from the published photographs using a Hamilton 51J012 1.5 amp light table and tracing paper. The line-drawings were then scanned, enlarged when appropriate and used as the basis for structural analysis using the methods devised by Erwin Panofsky, and later introduced as a tool for the iconographic analysis of archaeological materials by Dr. F. Kent Reilly III.

Panofsky's method of iconographic analysis is detailed in the introduction to his 1955 *Meaning in the Visual Arts*. Panofskian structural analysis occurs in three stages. The primary stage, the pre-iconographic description, deals with the most basic subject matter of a work of art. It describes what the viewer of a work of art actually sees and identifies motifs that appear within an artistic corpus. The second stage identifies what Panofsky (1955: 28) describes as the "secondary or conventional subject matter" by making the connection between the motifs identified in the first stage with specific cultural figures or allegorical concepts. The third stage is the iconological analysis, in which the viewer identifies basic ideas and concepts that underpin the culture that produced the art object being analyzed (Panofsky 1955: 28 – 30). When dealing with archaeological material, of course, it is unlikely that the third stage of analysis will be reached. This study will concern itself with the first two stages. By breaking down each figurine in the corpus to its most basic components, an analysis can bypass the kind of unconscious cultural biases that have hampered the identification and analysis of the motifs they represent to arrive at interpretations that will hopefully be more useful in building our understanding of Formative Period Mesoamerican life.

A second path of investigation involved a comparison of the Tlatilcan figurines with images of adults paired with infants from other pre-Hispanic Mesoamerican cultures. This part of the study focused on identifying the contexts within which these pairings occurred. Like the Tlatilcan figurines, the images of these figures were drawn from previously published sources. This comparison strongly suggested that Mesoamerican art often depicted infants in the company of more mature women, rather than in the company of women who could be clearly identified in maternal roles. It also demonstrated a clear set of indicators for the identification of the maternal role in Mesoamerican art, although there are some differences in the case of art from Western Mexico, which will be discussed in a later chapter.

In a third path of investigation, an ethnographic survey was conducted using Spanish descriptions of Aztec beliefs and rituals, the stories recorded in the Maya *Popul Vuh* and modern Mexican folktales. The theoretical basis of this survey is William N. Fenton's concept of upstreaming (Fenton 1952: 333). Upstreaming is a method of using known information about a culture to inform the researcher's understanding of that cultural group's ancestors. Although the Aztec were fairly recent immigrants into the Basin of Mexico, they are known to have adopted many of the practices of the Toltec, who were descendants of the Formative Period cultures of Central Mexico. The Maya and their descendants have been argued to have carried on cultural beliefs and practices of preceding cultures as well, especially those of the Olmec, an idea that has found recent support archaeologically. Reporting on developments within the last ten years in Mayanist archaeology, David Freidel writes that in addition to the depiction of an Olmec-style mask among the regalia of the Maize God in the San Bartolo murals, excavators

have found architectural masks in the Olmec style on the inner structures of Maya temples at Calakmul and Cival (2007: 18).

The Olmec inhabited an area along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico which is currently contained within the modern states of Veracruz and Tabasco. However, their influence was felt throughout Formative Period Mesoamerica, with Olmec or Olmec-inspired materials appearing as far west as Juxtlajuaca Cave in the modern state of Guerrero. Formative Period deposits in Tlatilco and other Basin of Mexico settlements such as Tlapacoya also contain Olmec and Olmec-inspired materials (Tolstoy and Paradis 1970: 349 – 351) (Niederberger 2000: 172) (Taube 2004: 3). According to Tolstoy, the Olmec materials at Tlatilco precede the creation of the distinctive Tlatilcan style figurines by several hundred years (Niederberger 2000: 172). Olmec materials and motifs are so wide-spread throughout Mesoamerica that it has been argued that they represent a mother culture that provided the inspiration and conceptual foundations for all of the state-level cultures that followed in this region, although some researchers have posited that the Olmec were only one of a number of roughly concurrent cultures (Ferguson and Mansbach 1996: 225) (Niederberger 2000: 169 – 170) (Taube 2004: 41). Since the current understanding of the ceramic sequence for the Valley of Mexico also points to an early Olmec presence in that area, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the Maya and later Central Mexican cultures might both have retained some belief structures from the earlier culture.

Whether one considers the Aztec and the Maya as inheritors of the Olmec belief system or of a larger pan-Mesoamerican religious complex, it can be argued that some remnants of early original Mesoamerican beliefs and practices can be found within the

more modern ethnographic data. As Fenton states, exact correlates for these earlier practices will not be found in the modern cultures, but the basic themes may be present (1955: 333). While any of these paths of investigation would not individually provide enough evidence to support the presence of a pan-Mesoamerican theme linking older women with infants of which the Tlatilcan woman and child figurines are a part, together they provide a convincing argument.

## **Chapter 4: Structural Analyses**

### **4.1: Description of the Corpus**

The corpus for this study is comprised of fourteen hand-modeled clay figurines. In most cases, types were designated by the authors who originally published the images. Since these researchers presumably have had an opportunity to examine the actual figurines depicted, where figurine types have been assigned, they have been preserved for this study. The figurines cross typology, with entries from types K, C2, C3, D1 and D2. Ten of the figurines are variants of type D, with two examples of type K and C variants, respectively. This supports other researchers' statements that type D variant figurines are the most common among the Tlatilcan assemblage (Bernal Garcia 1988: 33). In all of the figurines, detail is concentrated on the front, while the back is typically neglected and sometimes flattened. Some of the figurines are curved forward at the extremities, probably from shrinkage during drying. Each of the figurines consists of two components that were modeled separately and then combined prior to decoration or firing.

The larger component of each figurine is an adult figure identified as female by the clearly modeled primary or secondary sexual characteristics. In several of the figures, clear impressions are made to represent the female genitalia, while all of the adult figures

have carefully modeled breasts, most with appliquéd nipples. Twelve of the figures are either wearing head wraps or have hair that is intricately coiffed with indications of ribbons and other ornaments.

A variety of regalia are found on the adult components of these figurines. Necklaces or yokes appear on six of the fourteen figurines. Head wraps appear on thirteen of the figurines, making it the most commonly depicted article of clothing or regalia in the corpus. The least commonly depicted pieces of regalia were ankle rattles, which appeared on only three figurines. Earflares appear on nine of the fourteen adult components. A surprising number of the adult figures, eight of the fourteen, are depicted as masked.

Masks have long been noted in the corpus of Tlatilcan figurines, and many of them are obvious. However, in the course of this study it became apparent that many of the depictions of masks are not obvious at first glance. When comparing the masked figure in Figurine 1 to other woman and child figurines, it was noticed that the top of the mask mirrored the V-shaped pattern of the brow fillets definitive of the D2 type figurines. When Vaillant first described these fillets, he suggested that they were intended to represent brow ridges (Vaillant 1931a: 119). Upon closer examination of these images, it became obvious that the fillets were not brow ridges at all. The fillets' edges tend to continue far beyond the area where brow ridges would be located and often disappear into the hair lines or under the headdresses of the figures. This observation was confirmed by first-hand examination of D2 and D4-type Tlatilcan figurines on display at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and at the Art Museum at Princeton University. An examination and comparison of the formation of the eyes and mouths of figurines



known to depict masks with the same areas on general D-type figurines shows that these features are depicted similarly in each. In the cases of most D1 and D2 figurines, the surface of the face below the fillet is higher than the surface of the forehead above them. On D4 and some of the blockier D2-type figurines, often only the brow filleting appears as a *pars pro toto* representation of a mask. Masking explains the “coarser and more formalized” facial features noted by Vaillant when describing the D2 type (1931a: 119). The facial features and shapes on these figurines were less naturalistic because they were intended to represent something less natural. While it is true that Olmec and Olmec-style masks do not reflect this V-shaped top surface, most of the Olmec masks that have been recovered are rendered in greenstone or jadeite. It may be that there are material or production technology issues that dictate the forms these masks take. Any Olmec masks of more perishable materials have not survived and we have no way of knowing what those masks might have looked like. Also, it is worth noting that while there was an early Olmec influence at Tlatilco during the Ayotla phase, by the time the Manantial-phase figurines considered in this study were being produced, several hundred years had passed. Very small clay masks that may have been worn over the lower face have been recovered at Tlatilco, but, again, masks that may have been made from more perishable materials have not survived, although the later Aztec and Maya are known to have created regalia from bark paper and feathers and it is likely that their predecessors did, as well. In this study, the presence of brow fillets has been interpreted as a mask on eight of the fourteen figurines.

The smaller component of each of these figurines is an infant. The infants are just as clearly modeled as the adults, with careful attention sometimes paid to the facial

features. On the infants that are facing away from the viewer, inspection of the back of the composite figurine shows that the faces are present as on the infants that are facing the viewer. The infant figures appear in a variety of positions, some apparently sleeping, while others are actively holding onto the female figure in some way. Three of the infants appear to have a cleft in their heads, while another three appear to be wearing headdresses of their own. At least one is wearing a turban and another is definitely masked. Two of the infants are bundled on a cradleboard supported across the female figures' knees.

The figurines have been arbitrarily numbered for the purposes of organization, although the figurines were arranged according to whether they appeared in a seated or standing position before numbering. The following sections consist of full iconographic analyses of each figurine to Panofsky's first level. Deeper analysis will be performed on the corpus as a whole in Chapter 5.

#### 4.2: Structural Analysis: Figurine 1

Figurine number 1 is a type D2. Like many of the figurines, the adult woman wears a headwrap around the top of her head. The artist has allowed her hair to fall around her shoulders below the wrap, with incising to indicate straight locks of hair rather than braids or individual strands. The figure is wearing a mask, as indicated by the heavily filleted brow line that forms the top of the mask with the woman's own forehead visible above it and below her headwrap. Figurine 1 is an example of one of the more obviously masked figurines, as the surface of the face appears raised above the surface of



**Figure 4.1: Figurine 1, after Pina Chan**

the visible forehead. The eyes of the mask are formed by appliquéd fillets while the woman's own eyes are indicated by deep plough-mark incising and raised, incised pupils. The mouth is raised and incised directly below the modeled nose. Small ears are just visible from behind the mask, but it is impossible to tell from the photograph if the figure wears earflares.

The figurine's torso is fairly well proportioned, with heavy breasts tipped by appliquéd nipples that have been slipped a darker brown. She sits stiffly with her legs extended directly in front of her and her arms extended to hold the infant out almost at arm's length. Her hands curl up over the infant. The extremities are less well modeled. The figure's hands consist of flat pads marked with impressions to indicate fingers and the line of the knuckles. Even less attention was paid to the feet. Her legs seem to end abruptly, though the presence of polished slip indicates that they were not broken off, but simply never fully formed by the artist. The entire figurine appears to have been covered by a polished white or buff slip, which then had a darker brown slip applied to the hair and nipples.

The infant cradled in the woman's arms lies stiffly with arms to the sides. The hands are disproportionately large and, like the woman's formed by large pads with impressions to indicate fingers and knuckles. The infant's hair is indicated by a raised ruff along the sagittal line of his head. His eyes and mouth are incised. The mouth appears to be open, while the infant's visible eye appears closed.



**Figure 4.2: Figurine 2,  
FAMSI.org**

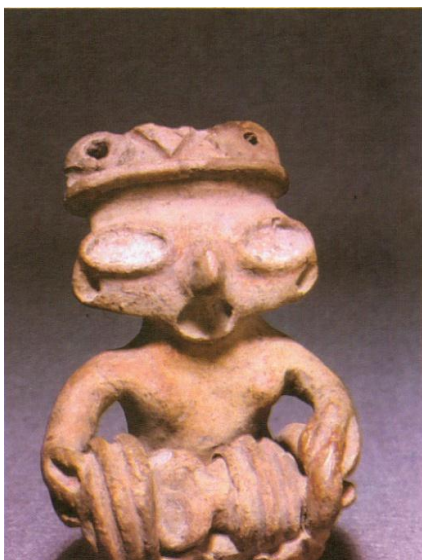
#### 4.3: Structural Analysis: Figurine 2

This figure is a Type D1. The female figure is seated with her legs extended stiffly in front of her with the infant lying supine with his head toward the ends of her legs. Her arms are extended with her hands resting on her knees on either side of the infant's head, and her face is angled toward the infant. The female figure's head is covered by a headwrap with a distinct, wide front fold or headband. Her face is covered by an obvious mask; not only is the top edge of the mask visible, but the entire surface of the face below the edge is raised. Like the mask in Figurine 1, this mask was likely appliquéd as a thin sheet over the head of the figurine. Her eyes are heavily filleted, then marked by plough-stroke incising and incised pupils, giving the impression of long slashes. The nose is poorly shaped and the mouth is indicated by an incised line. The neck is thick and has a roll of clay along the bottom. This may indicate a collar or yoke and a separate necklace. The breasts are small with round appliquéd nipples. The shoulders are sloping and it appears that the arms were modeled separately from the body. The hands are indicated by impressed lines for the fingers and the line of the knuckles. The feet are not modeled.

The infant appears to have been modeled separately and then laid in the female figure's lap. The eyes are formed by plough-stroke incising with incised pupils. The mouth is incised. The infant's nose is large in proportion to his face. Three flattened pads of clay were appliquéd to the infant's head, either indicating styled hair or a tripartite

headdress. The center pad has three impressed lines on the edge nearest the infant's face. The infant's arms are raised and crossed at the wrists as if reaching for the adult.

#### 4.4: Structural Analysis: Figurine 3



**Figure 4.3: Figurine 3, after Ochoa Castillo**

Figurine 3 is a Type K, Xolostoc Variety, figurine. The female component of this figurine has the wide, chinless head typical of the K-types. The eyes are appliquéd ovals with an oval impression, but no incised pupils, giving the figure a wide-eyed stare. The nose is formed by a protrusion of clay. The figure's mouth is an oval formed by two opposing plough-stroke impressions, leaving a central vertical ridge in the open mouth. The lower part of the oval

extends below the bottom of the rest of the head. Earflares are present on the figure, indicated by two deeply incised round depressions in the head below each eye.

The figure's hair is elaborately coiffed. The lower platform may be a fabric headwrap or some other kind of support. The hair is piled on top of the platform and crisscrossed by incised lines. The sides of the hair are pierced by two small holes. Joyce Marcus has suggested that holes found in similar Formative period figurines from Oaxaca may have allowed the artist to weave ribbons into the figures' hair as decorations (1996: 25). In this case, the incised lines may also indicate ribbons woven through the hair, or

braiding. The platform and the narrow area of the forehead beneath it may have been intended to provide a place for decorations such as wound ribbons or strips of fabric.

The rest of the female figure's body is depicted in a rudimentary fashion. The breasts are present, but small. The figure is seated with an infant in an elaborately modeled cradleboard balanced across her knees. The figure's feet stick out from under the cradleboard, toes marked by impressed lines. The arms are formed from long rolls of clay that are bent in arcs from the shoulders to rest at the head and foot of the cradleboard. There are no elbows. The hands are disproportionately large, indicated by flattened pads with impressed lines for the fingers.

The infant in his cradleboard is a separately modeled figure that was attached to the female figure at the latter's hands and lap. The infant lies on a flat, oval cradleboard and is secured by several strips of fabric bindings across the head and lower extremities. The infant appears closely swaddled and has no visible arms. The head is formed similarly to the adult figure's, with large oval appliquéd eyes and pinched nose.

#### 4.5: Structural Analysis: Figurine 4

Figurine 4 is a type D1. This figurine is part of a private collection that was unavailable for viewing, although the photograph in Figure 4.4 was made available for public viewing on the internet. The female component of the figurine is seated, with arms bent to support the infant in her lap. As in the two previous examples, she wears what is very obviously a mask that appears to have been separately modeled and applied to the figurine's face. The eyes show incised pupils. Her hair is arranged in a top knot with



**Figure 4.4: Figurine 4, private collection**

longer hair falling over her right shoulder. The mask is largely expressionless. The one visible hand, supporting the infant's back, shows the same kind of flattening with impressed lines depicting the fingers.

By contrast, the infant's face is very expressive, with wide eyes and the avid expression one often sees on an infant when something new has caught their attention. The infant's eyes are formed by plough-marks with incised pupils. The

mouth is also incised. The infant's hair is difficult to discern, but appears to form a sort of V-shaped hairline in the front. His left hand is larger than would be proportionate and rests on the woman's breast. Impressed lines are used to indicate the fingers.



**Figure 4.5: Figurine 5, after Porter**

#### 4.6: Structural Analysis: Figurine 5

Figurine 5 is a D2 that was recovered during the Borbolla-Covarrubias excavations in 1953. It was published by Weaver as Figure B, Plate 5 (1953: Pl. 5). Like other figurines of its type, the seated female component wears a mask, indicated by the distinct V-shaped fillets in place over the eyes. The hair is covered by a short cap or headwrap. The eyes are heavily filleted with

incised pupils. The mouth is also heavily filleted with an incised opening. The figure wears earflares. The body of the figure is small in proportion to the head, with breasts that seem more pendulous and pointed than in other examples. The arms have no elbows, but are smoothly bent to loosely encircle the infant component. The hands are flattened and large in comparison with the rest of the figure, with impressed lines to indicate the fingers. The short legs are extended toward the front. The feet were broken off sometime prior to being photographed.

The infant component of this figurine is in a stiff posture, which may indicate the use of a cradleboard, but may also simply be the result of an inexperienced artist. As with the other examples in this corpus, the infant was modeled separately from the female component. The infant's head shows the elongated shape that would have been achieved by cranial deformation in a living child, although not by the apparent age of this infant. This suggests that the infant may represent an idealized concept of an infant rather than an actual child. The hair is arranged in two tufts, with a cleft between them. The eyes are formed by plough-stroke incising with an incised pupil. The mouth is also incised. The infant wears earflares. Only one hand is visible, with the arm being held stiffly at the infant's side. The hand is large and flattened with impressed lines for the fingers. Little attention appears to have been paid to the rest of the infant's body, which is a very basic lump of clay resting in the lap of the female figure.



#### 4.7: Structural Analysis: Figurine 6



**Figure 4.6: Figurine 6,  
MOMA, New York**

Figurine 6 is a type D4 figure. This figurine is structurally more complex than many of the other figurines in this corpus and shows a greater command of the medium on the part of the artist than Figurine 5. In this case, the figurine was modeled in three components which were then attached to each other. The female component was modeled as a single figure, while the infant component is a composite figure consisting of the infant itself and an elaborate cradleboard to which the infant is bound. The body of the female component features a reddish brown slip, with red paint appearing on both the face of the female component above the left eye, and on the cradleboard bindings of the infant component. White paint is visible on the cradleboard itself, the cushioning that appears under the body of the infant and on the swaddling around the infant. Lines of black paint extend from the eyes to the jaw of the female figure.

The mask on this figurine is less obvious than in the previous figurines. The heavy fillets that form the top edge of the mask extend all the way across the forehead of the figure and disappear underneath the rolled edge of her cap. Another fillet extends from the lowest point of the mask fillet, at the middle of the forehead between the figure's eyes, and forms the nose ridge of the mask. All of the fillets stand out clearly above the surface of the woman's face. The eyes are narrow and formed by heavy fillets with incised dots for pupils. The mouth is similarly filleted with a single incised dot at the

center. The figure wears earflares and a short cap with a rolled edge. The edge of the cap appears to have been left unslipped and unpainted, while the top of the cap is covered with black paint.

The infant component of this figurine is bound to a cradleboard. Great care was taken in the modeling of the cradleboard, down to the detail of rolls of cotton or fabric – painted white – to provide cushioning for the baby. The bindings secure the infant at waist, shoulder and across the top of the head. The head binding is particularly wide, obscuring the eyes of the child. This may indicate the first stages of the cranial modeling process. The infant component lies stiffly in the cradleboard, with arms held close to the sides. There are earflares visible. The legs end without indication of feet, hanging slightly over the end of the cradleboard. There are remnants of white paint across the infant's shoulders and some reddish paint on the bindings.

#### 4.8: Structural Analysis: Figurine 7



**Figure 4.7: Figurine 7,**  
after Coe

Figurine 7 is a seated D1 type figure. The legs of the adult component appear to be folded in a crossed-leg position. The figure's right hand rests on the right knee. The body of the adult component has secondary sexual characteristics in the form of breasts with appliquéd nipples. The fingers are formed by narrow impressions in the flattened ends of the arms. The figure's eyes and mouth have the fillets characteristic of other D-type figures, but there is no indication of fillets forming the top of a mask in this case. The pupils of

the eyes are incised. A headwrap or hair was appliquéd to the top of the figure's head, but details are not visible in the published photograph. The figure's bowed left arm supports the infant component with the feet of the infant resting against the adult component's leg and abdomen.



**Figure 4.8: Las Limas Figure**

The body of the infant component is modeled in a stiff posture, although there is no indication of a cradleboard. This could be an artifact of the tiny size and the type of clay used in the construction of the figure, but it could also be related to the similarly stiff postures held by infants in other Mesoamerican sculptures and figurines, such as the infant Maize god draped across the legs of the adult component of the Las Limas figure (Figure 4.8). The visible eye is formed by plough strokes with an incised pupil. The hair is

appliquéd to the top of the infant's head. The visible ear appears to have been pinched out from the side of the head. The visible left arm is an appliquéd, slightly flattened oval with impressed lines for the fingers.

#### 4.9: Structural Analysis: Figurine 8

Figurine 8 is a type D2. This figurine is more crudely modeled than others of its type within this corpus, with blocky facial features. The adult component is standing, although the limbs are poorly defined. A headdress comprised of a sort of cap is covered



**Figure 4.9: Figurine 8, after Coe**

with appliquéd disks. Like others of this type, the adult figure is masked, with fillets defining the upper limit of the mask and surrounding the eyes and mouth. Pupils of the eyes and the mouth are incised within the fillets. The nose is long, prominent and angular. The figure wears earflares. The figure's right arm is extended to the side while the figure's left arm is curled to support the infant component. The arms are disproportionate to the body of the figure and to each other; should the left arm be extended, it would be considerably longer than the right. This particular female figure appears to be wearing some sort of padded garment similar to chaps. It is also possible that the artist was adding clay in an attempt to provide the wide hipped figure of other D-type figurines. The legs that extend below the garment are stubby and not carefully modeled. Although the quality of the photograph found for this image is poor, it appears that on the left hand, at least, fingers are minimally present.

The infant component is angled slightly so that it appears to be gazing up at the adult component. The eyes are large and formed by plough-marks in the clay of the infant's face. Feet with impressions to indicate toes extend below the supporting arm of the adult component. This infant has what appears to be a large tuft of appliquéd hair or perhaps a headdress of some sort. Picture quality is too poor to allow further detail.

#### 4.10: Structural Analysis: Figure 9

Figurine 9 is a Type D1. The adult female component of the figurine is standing



**Figure 4.10: Figurine 9,  
private collection**



**Figure 4.11: Figurine  
9, obverse side**

and carries an infant on her left hip. Her left arm is raised and supports the infant's back, while her right hand grasps the infant's left leg. In contrast to the previous figurine, however, the face of the adult female component of Figurine 9 has an angular, birdlike shape that is accented by the painted red line that travels across the nose and from temple to temple. The nose is pinched, small and sharp. The eyes are deeply incised in the plough-stroke style with raised pupils instead of incising. There appears to be some red pigment on the raised pupils. The upper lip of the mouth is raised and the mouth is open with the tongue, painted red, protruding out and over the chin. The top of the figure's head is encased in a headwrap formed by appliquéd rolls of clay that form a crossed bands motif. It is unclear if this is intentional or if it is simply a by-product of the attempt to represent a specific style of head wrap. There are earflares in the figure's ears.



**Figure 4.12: Tlatilco Mask. The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979**

As shown in Figure 4.11, little or no attention was paid to details on the obverse side of the female figurine. However, this view offers important information about the construction and the basic-level content of the figurine.

Under close inspection, a seam in the clay is visible along either side of the adult figure's head.

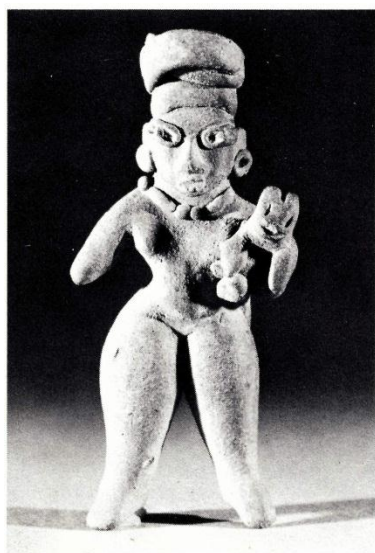
This seam is not visible on the front of the figure.

The seam results from the addition of a thin mask of clay, rolled out separately and then laid over the still wet form of the figure's head. The details would have been added after the placement of the mask. The idea that this figure is intended to be viewed as masked is supported further by the protruding tongue, the extent of which is impossible for a normal human, but which is seen in Tlatilcan masks such as the one pictured in Figure 4.12. The mask also displays large earflares and the typical slashed eyes of many Tlatilcan figurines. This may be the kind of mask the adult component of Figurine 9 is intended to be understood as wearing.

The body of the adult component of Figurine 9 is long and slender. One breast is exposed, with the nipple painted with a red dot instead of being appliquéd, as in some figurines. The figure's hands are made similarly to those of other figures, with impressed lines meant to indicate the presence of fingers. More red paint appears at the waist of the figure and covers the hips, ending with a stronger line of pigment at the knee level on the legs. This painting may have been intended to indicate a skirt or some other kind of regalia. Appliquéd bands encircle both ankles and may indicate anklets or ankle rattles.

The infant component of Figurine 9 is held so that the face of the figure is looking over the adult's left shoulder. The back of the infant component is flattened, much like that of the adult component. The figure's left arm appears elongated in comparison to the rest of its body. The hair or headdress on the infant's head is arranged in a trefoil design comprised of three rough ovals with impressed lines. Eyes were impressed and the mouth is open. The infant wears earflares.

#### 4.11: Structural Analysis: Figurine 10



**Figure 4.13: Figurine 10, after Coe**

Figurine 10 is a type C3 figure. The standing adult component has a narrow waist coupled with thick thighs and wide hips with feet angled to the outside. The figure's arms are disproportionately short. The overall form of the torso is fairly well-modeled, but the extremities lack detail. The top of the adult's head is wrapped in a high turban formed by coiling long flattened strips of clay. The figure is adorned with prominent earflares, an appliquéd necklace and what appear to be thick anklets or ankle rattles. The necklace is formed from both long thin strips and smaller round bits of clay, indicating a necklace of both tubular and round beads. Eyes and mouth are thickly appliquéd and then incised. There does not appear to be a mask present, but the expression on the face is bland.

The infant component is cradled in the bent left arm of the adult component, facing out with arms dangling in front. Coe interprets this component as a dog, possibly because of the deep cleft on the top of the infant's head, but the incised facial features are not canine, as far as can be determined from the photograph. Likewise, the cleft does not appear particularly like ears; rather, it seems more like the flattened and divided heads found on Olmec and Olmec-style depictions of the infant Maize god.

#### 4.12: Structural Analysis: Figure 11



**Figure 4.14: Figurine 11,  
The Art Museum at  
Princeton**

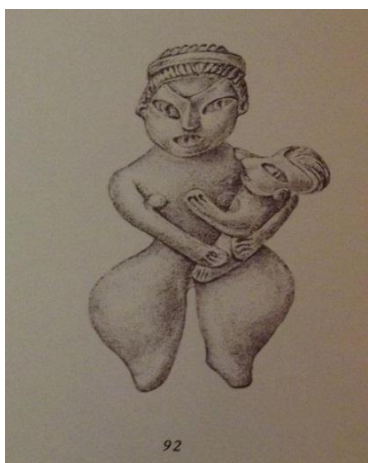
Figurine 11 is a type D2 from the collection of the Art Museum at Princeton. This figurine is the only part of the corpus that I had a chance to look at in person. It is also the only part of the corpus that depicts a specifically maternal relationship between the woman and infant.

The adult component is in an erect position. She supports the infant component against her left hip. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, she and the infant are both masked. The right side of her body from neck to foot is covered in an intricate red design. Her eyes are almond-shaped and have incised pupils in the form of a vertical line. The eyes are painted white. Remnants of what may be black paint are dotted across the top of her head, from just below the eyes to the headdress. Her mouth is incised and open, with red paint on the interior. Her ears are small and round with central depressions. These may indicate earflares rather than her ears. Her headdress



is formed by an appliqué cap of clay with a larger protrusion falling over her left ear. This may indicate a headcloth with the hair bundled as in a hair net and falling to one side. The female's breasts are formed by appliqué and smoothed down fillets, creating a flat and sagging effect that is clearly visible from the underside of the figurine. The appliqué balls that form the nipples are in sharp contrast, appearing swollen and red. Although the infant component is shown nursing, the general shape of the breast is unusual for a nursing mother. The figurine has an incised navel and an incised line between the thighs indicates the vulva. The thighs are wide, but the legs are short with little attention paid to the feet. The arms are also short in relation to the body, with only the left arm having an identifiable hand with finger impressions.

The infant component of Figurine 11 is shown leaning toward the female component's breast with the nipple held firmly against its mouth. The infant's left hand is raised to cling to the breast. When viewed from the bottom, the side and lower edges of the mask are clearly visible. Although the infant is shown in a nursing position, it seems



**Figure 4.15: Sketch of a type  
D2 Woman and Child  
Figurine, after Pratt and Gay,  
plate 92**

likely that a mask would interfere with this activity. The infant's head is also shown having been already altered into the ideal elongated shape. Cranial modification is a long and involved process. It is unlikely that this shape could have been achieved by the age depicted. These two facts strongly suggest that this infant and woman are not intended to represent human individuals, but supernatural entities.

The infant's eyes are formed as the woman's. Its hair is appliquéd as a small flat oval at the crown of the head with parallel incisions for the hair. The infant wears earflares. There is a residue of red paint over the face, hair, hands and feet of the infant. The infant's body is squat with little torso. The infant's right arm reaches around to rest on the adult component's back. The short legs end in impressed toes. Finger impressions appear on the hands.

This is not the only example of a woman and child figurine from Tlatilco in which both woman and infant are depicted as masked. Figure 92 from Florence Pratt's *Ceramic Figures of Ancient Mexico* depicts a similarly masked pair. This figurine was not used as part of this corpus because only this sketch was available, rather than a photograph.

#### 4.13: Structural Analysis: Figurine 12



Figure 4.16: Figurine 12, after Coe

This figurine was categorized as type D2. The adult component is standing with the infant component cradled stiffly in her arms. The adult's head features what may be appliquéd hair or a headdress of some sort with an impressed pattern that could be hair or a patterned textile. This is topped by a small head wrap or cap and an appliquéd disk sitting on the crown of the woman's head. The fillets that form the top of the *pars pro toto* mask extend from a low point

between the eyes to disappear under the appliquéd hair/ head wrap. A third fillet connects with the low point of the first two and extends below to form the nasal ridge. The effect enhances the mask-like quality of the filleting. The eyes and mouth are filleted and appear sunken below the level of the fillets. The eyes have incised pupils and the mouth displays a circular incision at the center. The adult figure wears a necklace formed by a single appliquéd loop of clay around the neck. The breasts are somewhat flattened, except for the large, round appliquéd nipples. The arms are disproportionately short for the body and both are crooked to support the infant component with hands indicated by impressions denoting the wrist and fingers. The legs are held hip-width apart with minimally modeled feet facing directly ahead of the figure. The hips are very wide on the outer thighs down to the ankles, but not on the inner thighs. No knees are indicated.

The infant component is unusual. The body is held very straight with the arms pinned stiffly to the sides. The face points straight up. The eyes are filleted and impressed

and there is an indication of earflares on the infant that are absent on the adult component. The nose is prominent.

The infant's mouth is also incised. A fillet is wrapped around the top of the infant's head and topped with what may be appliquéd hair or a headdress of some sort. The stiff posture of the infant is reminiscent of that of the infant in the Las Limas figure or in the figurine of the infant and crone from Xochipala.



**Figure 4.17: Figurine 13, after Coe**

#### 4.14: Structural Analysis: Figurine 13

The standing adult component of this type C4 figurine does not appear to be masked. The eyes are shown closed and the face appears slack rather than the rather stiff, wooden expressions noted on the masked figures. The head is wrapped in a neat turban formed by flattened coils of clay. At first glance, there appears to be a fringe of short hair extending below the turban across the figure's forehead, but upon enlarging the image the regularity of the design is more suggestive of a beaded headband than hair. Appliquéd hair with an impressed pattern is visible below the turban on either side of the head and may extend to the back of the figure. The ears are appliquéd and display prominent earflares. Both of the adult figure's arms are curved to support the infant component against the adult's middle. The poorly detailed hands cross in front of the infant. An appliquéd necklace is barely visible behind the infant's head. The legs are spread shoulder-width apart with the feet pointed slightly outward. The ankles display appliquéd anklets or ankle rattles.

The infant component is held in an unusual position, although reminiscent of the position of the infant in Figure 10. The infant is held about the middle directly in front of the adult component's torso, facing the viewer. The top of the infant's head is wrapped in a turban, as well, and ears flares are indicated. The baby's eyes and mouth appear to be open. The infant's legs hang loosely below the woman's arms, while the arms are extended with the hands resting on those of the adult component.

#### 4.15: Structural Analysis: Figurine 14

This type K figurine is the only example in which the adult component is holding something in addition to the infant. A bottle effigy rests on the adult figure's right shoulder, with the short arm curled to support it. Like other figures, the limbs are



**Figure 4.18: Figurine 14, after Coe**

disproportionate to the size of the torso in both adult and infant components, with little attention paid to extremities other than the impressions indicating fingers and toes.

The adult component has a stocky torso with small breasts and appliquéd nipples. The legs are held shoulder-width apart and end in thick feet with toe impressions. The head is topped by a head wrap or hair that is indicated by a horizontal impressed line just above the appliquéd eyebrows and seven shorter, almost vertical impressions from that line to the top of the head. In keeping with Marcus' idea that

these figurines may have been dressed or decorated, the forehead groove may indicate a place for ribbon or colored yarn to be tied (1996: 25). The eyes are appliquéd ovals with plough-mark impressions on either side of a raised pupil. The nose appears to have been appliquéd on. A single earflare is visible on the left side, with the right ear obscured by the bottle on the figure's shoulder. The mouth is formed by two plough-stroke impressions, leaving the center raised; the effect is that of an open mouth with a tongue visible. The left arm is crooked to support the infant component at her hip.

The infant component is as crudely formed as the adult. The hands and feet are huge in proportion to the body, with simple impressed lines indicating the fingers. The infant is facing toward the adult's shoulder, making it impossible to see the facial features in this image, but the one visible ear appears to have an ear flare. The top of the head is elongated and appears to be cleft. The infant's left hand is extended and touching the female figure's left breast.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **5.1: Discussion of the Structural Analyses**

Art in pre-state level societies has long been considered to be so tightly bound to tradition that little innovation or variation from a prescribed convention is allowed (Layton 1991: 199). However, more recent ethnographic studies have shown that, although conventions may exist that limit the variations in the portrayal of specific ideas or entities within a culture, the level of acceptable variation is quite fluid from culture to culture. In many cases, the true limiting factor is that imposed by what Robert Layton describes as a shared cultural grammar of symbolic imagery (1991: 127). In order to be accepted as legitimate, an artist's work must make sense to the members of his culture. If the artist is depicting a specific individual, that person or entity must be recognizable to the audience. If the artist intends to address a particular concern or idea, the symbolism used must be recognizable to the audience (Layton 1991: 238). To a certain extent, this is true of any culture, including modern Western societies. Although artists in our own culture may have more leeway to use personal symbolic systems, in order to have their work understood, they are obliged to explain their images. For instance, artist Matt Sesow, who produced one of the mother and child paintings used in the introductory chapter, has published a symbolic glossary on his professional webpage (Sesow 2010). In a culture with no widely available written language, however, such explanations are

simply not feasible. Choices of symbols must be made from within a known cultural lexicon in order for the subject matter to be decipherable.

In the figurines analyzed for this study, the artists had a variety of standard features from which to choose when creating their individual works. The most necessary feature, of course, was that the completed figurine had to consist of an adult female and a young child. The apparent age of the child showed little variation, ranging from newborn infants in cradleboards to babies old enough to hold their heads up on their own. The female figure was required to be holding the infant, but not necessarily to be engaged with the infant in a mothering posture. Birthing postures, otherwise common in Mesoamerican art, were not used. The nursing posture was not rejected outright, as shown by Figurine 11, but was not favored for this theme. The seated or standing position of the adult figure was apparently irrelevant to the theme and therefore could be chosen on the whim of the artist. This is reflected in the posing of exactly half of the corpus in each position.

Head coverings were strongly favored, appearing on all of the figurines, but whether this feature was required to recognize the events recalled by the theme or to place the adult components into a specific category is unclear. The fact that many of the head coverings are markedly different suggests that they may have been associated with social or perhaps age groups rather than a characteristic of a particular entity. Other types of regalia were apparently not important in their own right, but the presence of masks among the regalia suggests something about the nature of the event or concept that was being portrayed.



Masks cannot be considered to be common, everyday clothing. They are “a technique for transforming identity, either through the modification of the representation of identity, or through temporary – and representational – extinction of identity” (Pollock 1995: 582). As a means of transformation, a mask is an item that would be worn only during ritual activities. The fact that masks appear on eight of the fourteen figurines indicates that, while not absolutely necessary to convey the desired theme, this distinctive piece of regalia was one of its acceptable and recognizable features. Except in the case of Figurine 9, the masks are too small to be identifiable as specific types of masks, although in many cases any painting that may have distinguished them to the original artist has mostly been lost. The simple presence of masks, however, argues strongly against the idea that Tlatilcan figurines were intended to celebrate scenes from everyday life, but rather were scenes intended to evoke memories of ritual events or concepts.

Of the infants themselves, several interesting features have been noted in the structural analyses. Most interesting to this study is the appearance of cleft heads or trefoil headdresses. Although appearing on only three of the fourteen infants, the cleft is another of those definitive elements that cannot simply be ignored due to its inherent meaning within the Mesoamerican religious context. Both the cleft head and the trefoil have been identified as features of the Olmec Maize God (Taube 2004: 25 – 27).

The idealized shapes of the heads of some of the infants are also noteworthy. Cranial modification is known to have been practiced at Tlatilco as well as at other Mesoamerican sites (Garcia-Moll et al. 1990: 27). This is a process that would have taken considerable time to perfect. Although some change could be seen in as little as one day, Blackwood and Danby describe the process used by the Arawak of New Britain as taking

up to a year to effect a permanent change in shape (1955: 175). Certainly infants of the age depicted in the Tlatilcan figurines would have been too young to have such perfectly-formed heads. It might, however, make a statement about the infants so shown. Pamela Geller reports that among Pre-Columbian Maya communities, the decision whether or not to modify an infant's head was left to the mother, and only some infants were chosen for the procedure. Geller postulates that these children may have been the family's firstborn, of whom there would have been greater expectations, and the modified head shapes would have marked the child's status within his household (Geller 2011: 252). Houston, Stuart and Taube associate the elongated shape favored by the Maya and other Mesoamerican cultures as being associated with the Maize God (2006: 45).

A final interesting feature is the stiffness of the body position of some of the infants. As will be discussed further later, body posture is a learned cultural trait (Mauss 2007: 52). However, infants are too young to have learned the postures and gestures expected of them. In two of the infants in this corpus, the stiff posture was achieved through the use of a cradleboard. Others, though, seem to be holding themselves stiff of their own accord. This could be a result of an inexperienced or less talented artist, but the fact that it appears so commonly among the figurines from Tlatilco suggests that it may have been an intentional choice on the part of the artist.

Having identified several necessary or distinctive acceptable features of the woman and child theme, it was necessary to determine if there was any pattern in the ethnographic literature that mirrored the juxtaposing of mature adult women, infants, and masks. Based on Fenton's concept of up-streaming, it was possible that later Mesoamerican societies and their descendants had inherited at least a vestige of the

original theme. If so, the existence of these traces, however faded, would tend to support the concept of a broad theme linking the two in the past. Evidence for these was found surprisingly quickly.

## 5.2: Ethnographic Evidence

The closest match linking all three criteria appeared, not unexpectedly, in the ethnographic sources closest to Tlatilco in both location and time. Although separated from Tlatilco by some two thousand years, the Aztec embraced the religious ideology of their predecessors, the Toltecs, eagerly in order to legitimize their occupation of the area around Lake Texcoco. One of the principal maize deities was called Cinteotl. Cinteotl was originally an infant deity, the first infant, born to the goddess Xochiquetzal after an illicit union with the god Piltzintecuhtli (Graulich et al. 1983: 577) (Nicholson 1967: 65). Xochiquetzal died in childbirth, becoming the first woman to be awarded the status of sacrifice. (Graulich et al. 1983: 577) The infant Cinteotl, called “most precious” by the gods, immediately burrowed under the soil and became a number of different cultivated plants (Graulich et al. 1983: 577) (Nicholson 1967: 65). By the time of the Spanish conquest of Mexico, Cinteotl had become a complex of both male and female maize deities (Frazer 1999: 169). The male aspect was by that time described as a young adult male, ready for battle, reflecting the martial ideals of the Aztec (Nicholson 1967: 65).

Sahagún recorded a ritual sacrifice performed by the Aztec during a festival called *Ochpanitzli*, celebrated on or around the twenty-fifth of August (1997: 62-63). In this sacrifice, a woman of forty years of age was chosen to represent the goddess Toci, or

Teteo Innan, called “Our Grandmother” among other epithets. Upon the woman’s sacrifice, her body was flayed and the skin donned by the priest of Teteo Innan, with the exception of a single portion. The skin of one of the thighs was removed and carried to the priest of Cinteotl, who wore it as a mask and took on the persona of Teteo Innan for the remainder of the festival (Gingerich 1988: 209). “First an aged victim, then a young and strong impersonator: obviously the ritual was meant to symbolize rejuvenation, a recreation of the earth” (Graulich 1989: 45).

After this point, the physical characteristic embodied in the mask disappears from the woman and child theme. However, the connection of this theme with agriculture, suggested by the stories and rituals surrounding Toci/ Teteo Innan and Cinteotl, is continued. In a variety of Mesoamerican stories about the origin of maize, old women and children are juxtaposed. In these stories, mature or elderly women appear in both nurturing and destructive roles.

Mary Preuss’ examination of the role of Xmukane in the story of the hero twins of the Popul Vuh points out the central role played by grandmothers in Maya society (Preuss 1985: 1-2). Xmukane is portrayed as the head of the household in the absence of her sons. It is she who decides whether or not to accept the pregnant Lady Blood Moon into the household, which she does only reluctantly after the successful completion of special tasks. Once the twins are born, it is Xmukane who decides not only what tasks the boys will perform, but when and whether they would be allowed to eat and drink. A hint of her destructive aspect is offered by verses that suggest that as infants, the twins may have been exposed in unsuccessful attempts at infanticide (Tedlock 1985: 119). Comparing the role of Xmukane in this story to contemporary Yucatecan stories, Preuss makes an

argument that grandmothers in Mesoamerican societies act as agents of social control. Grandmothers, she argues, set the expectations of the household. They make the rules about acceptable behavior and set the punishments for failure to follow those rules. They are ultimately responsible for providing nourishment as well as setting standards (Preuss 1985: 6).

In one of the variations on the story of Homshuk, recorded by George M. Foster and reproduced in Appendix B, the old woman appears in both of these roles. In this version of this story, a childless old woman finds an egg in the water. She brings her husband to help her retrieve it. The husband realizes that the egg is actually on a ledge overlooking the water. The old woman decides to take care of the egg. Seven days later, the egg hatches, producing a golden haired child who grows at a phenomenal rate. Within seven days, he is mature enough to help with household chores like fetching water. When the boy eventually proves willful, the old woman instructs her husband to kill him so that they can eat the boy. The boy enlists the aid of a bat to kill the old man instead, and flees. The old woman pursues the boy and is eventually killed. Ultimately, after a series of adventures in which the boy defeats the evil Hurrican, Homshuk becomes maize and feeds the people for all of time. In another version of the Homshuk story, the child's body is transformed into all sorts of useful plants: his fingers become yams, his fingernails become maize, etc. (Nicholson 1967: 65). This is exactly the fate described for the Aztec deity Cinteotl as described above, and it seems likely that the modern Homshuk was derived from this earlier deity (Lankford 2008: 52).

The story of the Dwarf of Uxmal, as recorded by Robert Redfield and Alfonso Villa Rojas in *Chan Kom, A Maya Village*, is similar to the preceding story of Homshuk,

except that the role of the old woman is fully that of a nurturing figure. Once again, an egg is discovered by a childless woman who nurtures it until a small boy hatches. In this story, the hero Ez calls the old woman who raises him Ma' chich. The authors explain that this name is a combination of the elements mam, meaning maternal grandfather, and chich, which means maternal grandmother. It is tempting to suggest that the old woman in this story may be conceptually related to the idea of Ometeotl, the ancient Mesoamerican creator/creatix deity. However, it could simply refer to the apparent absence of a male figure in the story, implying that the old woman had fulfilled the roles of both mother and father to the hero.

Upon finding an egg, Ma' chich places it into a *homa*, an oval gourd with an opening at the stem-end and used for food offerings (Redfield and Villa Rojas 1964: 36). She then forgets all about it. Upon hearing a baby crying while sitting in her house, her first thought is not to look in her own home, but to make a nourishing drink for her neighbor, who she presumes to be a new mother. It is only upon finding that none of her neighbors have recently given birth that she begins to search her house for the child. Once she finds that the egg she left as an offering has been replaced by a baby, she immediately takes responsibility for him, raising a son who ultimately benefits the community by overthrowing a tyrannical local ruler. This story is fully recorded in Appendix C.

The ambiguity in the character of the elderly women in some of these stories is undoubtedly related to the alternately creative and destructive nature of Mesoamerican deities in general. The same gods who created the earth and life, who brought the rain and the nourishing plants, also demanded the sacrifice of humans. The goddess Tlaltecuhli,

whose torn body formed the earth itself, was envisioned as having eyes and mouths at every joint, constantly crying out in her hunger for human hearts. The gods of Mesoamerica gave much, but they took in equal measure. Another source of this ambiguity, however, may lie in the nature of the role of grandmothers in human evolution.

Many researchers have noted that childbirth is one of the most dangerous events in a woman's life, especially in times before access to modern hospitals and life-saving techniques. The risk of maternal mortality was high. Since their primary source of early nutrition was their mothers, the infants of women who died in childbirth often perished within a few months as well (Joyce 2001: 19). Current research into the role of grandmothers in human evolution points to a strong correlation between the survival rates of both mothers and infants and the presence of the maternal grandmother. However, Volund and Biese's study of a rural German community of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries points to an equally negative correlation between mortality for both mother and infant, and the presence of the paternal grandmother in the home (2003: 240 – 241). The authors argue that a maternal grandmother's primary interest is in the continuation of her own genetic material, embodied in her daughter. The paternal grandmother, on the other hand, has an equally strong interest in ensuring that her own genetic material, in the person of her son, is passed along to as many women as possible. This interest is compounded if the paternal grandmother has daughters of her own in the household, since she will favor her own daughters over her daughter-in-law. In some cases, there was clear evidence that daughters-in-law were quite simply worked to death, and then quickly replaced (Volund and Biese 2003: 248). In the subconscious quest for the survival of the

grandmother's own genetic strain, the daughters-in-law and their offspring were expendable.

An acknowledgement of this ambiguous relationship between grandmothers and their grandchildren is obvious in the relationship recorded in the Popol Vuh between Xmukane and the sons of Lady Blood Moon. When the twins are born, Xmukane clearly favors the two elder sons, boys she can be certain are her own son's offspring. It is only after the hero twins defeat their elder half-brothers by tricking them into transforming into monkeys that Xmukane accepts them (Tedlock 1985: 121 - 122).

### 5.3: Archaeological Evidence

Archaeological evidence to support the idea of early ritual behavior connecting older women with young children or infants is sparse, but what does exist is intriguing. This is especially true in consideration of the story of the infant deity Cinteotl, whose body becomes many different food-bearing plants. Part of the archaeological data involves evidence of fetal and infant sacrifice recovered from the early Olmec site of El Manatí by Ponciano Ortiz and Maria del Carmen Rodriguez. The site of El Manatí is believed to have been active between approximately 1600 BC and 1200 BC, the latter date making it roughly contemporary with some of the earlier dates at Tlatilco. Of the twelve sets of neonate remains that were recovered from El Manatí, nine were recovered as dismembered and scattered pieces. Ortiz and Rodriguez report that the remains were disarticulated at the time of their interment, not as the result of site formation processes following deposition (2000: 89). The authors take this as possible evidence of ritual



cannibalism (Ortiz and Rodriguez 2000: 75 – 93). However, another interpretation may be that the dismemberment was part of a ritual reenactment of a story similar to that of Cinteotl, who can be argued to have been metaphorically dismembered when different parts of his body became different plants.

Another interesting connection came to light when analyzing the types of burials in which figurines and other grave goods appeared at Tlatilco. Of the burials listed in the catalog compiled by Garcia Moll, et al., three burials of women aged between thirty-five and forty-five were found associated with the partial remains of infants or fetuses. One of the fetuses (Burial 157) was clearly dismembered before interment, since the neonate's remains were found on different sides of the female's remains (Garcia-Moll et al. 1991: 70). According to the sketch of Burial 157, the child's cranium was found near the female's left shoulder, a right scapula near her right arm, and the left ilium near her right leg. While hardly conclusive evidence of much of anything, the existence of these three burials along with the dismemberment of the infant in Burial 157 is interesting when viewed alongside the results of the ethnographic study and structural analyses of the Tlatilcan figurines.

#### 5.4: Figurines as Mnemonic Devices

Based on the previous associations, it seems likely that the woman and child theme among Tlatilcan figurines is intimately related to agricultural rites. The presence of masks on many of the figures argues that these figurines are meant to depict ritual or supernatural concepts rather than mortal individuals. As detailed in the introductory

chapter of this thesis, the overwhelming majority of figurines combining women and children in Mesoamerica tend to portray older adult females rather than younger women. With the exception of Figurine 11, the poses chosen for the figurines tend not to be specifically maternal. Even in the case of Figurine 11, the flaccid modeling of the breasts suggests the body of an older woman rather than that of a mother. The infant components seem idealized, with heads already shaped.

The postures chosen by the artists do not seem to be entirely random. Of the standing figurines, all but one of them is holding the infant in their left arm. This seems unusual, since the majority of any community is right handed; this is the hand that would be instinctively used to pick up and support something as heavy as an infant. Generally, the moving of an object from the right hand to the left is a sign that the right hand is needed for some other purpose. It seems as if the adults in these standing figurines are frozen at a moment in time. They are on the verge of doing something. The final standing figure, Figurine 13, appears to be displaying the child in her arms. The seated figures all seem to be focused intensely on the infant balanced across their knees or between their legs. Each of these postures would have been chosen by the artist because they carried meaning within their cultural context.

Body postures are as culturally conditioned as any other human activity. Observing the kinds of postures adopted in populations as disparate as young Maori girls in New Zealand, and WWII-era French and British soldiers, Marcel Mauss discovered that the way people move is often quite different from community to community. Every activity from swimming to using a shovel – even the way people swing their hands while walking across a room – is an activity that has been learned, and is recognizable to

members of that community (2007: 52). “The body is man’s first and most natural instrument (Mauss 2007: 56).” Some activities, such as the correct way to use a tool or to sit in a chair, are learned by the young as they grow up through observation, with some occasional coaching by the adults of the community. Other activities, such as dance forms or combat stances, must be consciously taught and practiced until mastered (Mauss 2007: 53). Ritual postures would be learned both by different members of a community both by observation of the actors performing the ritual and by direct instruction in the appropriate ritual methods.

The postures reflected in the figurines from Tlatilco would have been instantly recognizable to members of the community. The audience would have known by experience what actions had preceded the posture and what actions would have come next. Memories of past experiences would have been stirred. Both the specific situations involved in the ritual – the time of year, the myths and stories, perhaps songs and dances that accompanied it – would have been recalled to the observer. All of this information would have been intimately tied up with the emotions generated by past experiences of this ritual – awe, joy, fear, revulsion.

Layton argues that the stirring of memory is an important part of the purpose served by art in pre-literate societies. He points to the combination of sculpture and found objects that make up the teaching art of the Bwami society of the African Lega as examples. These objects are often not obvious as to their meanings. They must be explained to the initiate as part of their training. The objects themselves serve as mnemonic devices for initiates (Layton 1991: 63). Not only do art objects carry meaning, however, but they may carry multiple meanings depending upon the individual viewer’s

level of initiation and understanding (Layton 1991: 140). All of these multiple meanings will be bound up in a single art object. The figurines from Tlatilco likely served a very similar purpose within that community.

## **Chapter 6: Summary and Conclusion**

### **6.1: Summary**

Woman and child figurines from Tlatilco are one expression of a larger Pan-Mesoamerican theme connecting older women and infants. Sculpture from outside the Valley of Mexico ranging from the Formative through the Classic Periods, combined with ethnographic literature dating from the Spanish Conquest to modern native storytelling both support the existence of this theme and help to link it with agricultural concepts. The evidence of the ritual dismemberment of infants and fetuses uncovered at the roughly contemporary Olmec site of El Manatí may be associated with the ideas of agriculture. The Olmec are well known to have associated the idea of maize agriculture and infants, and a similar connection is suggested by the myths surrounding the Aztec deity Cinteotl, another infant god associated with agriculture.

After a review of Mesoamerican depictions of infants in the company of adults, it is very unlikely that the Tlatilcan figurines were intended to represent mothers with their children. Because the idea of motherhood in Western cultures is bound up with the idea of spirit as divorced from the mortal body, the most common depictions of mothers and their children tend to focus on spiritual and emotional aspects of the relationship. As

discussed in the introductory chapter, Mesoamerican art depicting the mother and child relationship is more graphic, intimately bound with the fleshly relationship between the subjects. Only one of the figurines selected for this study reflects this kind of relationship.

The relationship between the component figures in this corpus of Tlatilcan figurines is more vague, perhaps intentionally so. Their primary relationship appears to the uninitiated viewer to be one of holding – the infant is being held by the adult. A secondary relationship is that of ritual, suggested by the presence of masks in many of the figures. Masks are depicted in three ways within this corpus. In the D1 type figurines, masks appear as full-face coverings modeled closely with that of the figurine and depicted by a facial surface raised above that of the visible forehead. Masks on D2 type figurines are more angular and less lifelike than those that appear on D1 type figurines. The distinctive filleting of the D4 type figurines marks the presence of *pars pro toto* representations of masks. D3 type figurines are not considered here, although they could be considered as masked as well, since this category was created by Vaillant to house larger hollow figurines of the D1 and D2 types. In all of these cases, the mask is recognizable by its upper surface, visible as a V-shape elevated above the surface of the figurine's forehead.

Ideological connections between older women and infants have been shown to exist using the evidence from Aztec ritual sacrifices and contemporary Mexican folktales. During the Aztec festival of *Ochpanitzli*, a mature woman of forty years was sacrificed representing the goddess Toci, Our Grandmother. The flayed skin of her thigh was delivered to the priest of the maize god Cinteotl to be worn as a mask. The deity Cinteotl was originally an infant deity whose body became all kinds of vegetables and agricultural

plants, including maize. In the story of Homshuk, an older woman is shown as both nurturer and as destroyer, first caring for the infant who hatches from her foundling egg and later attempting to kill him. The boy Homshuk goes on to become maize. This connection between infants or boys and maize is a very old one, as well, appearing in Olmec iconography in the form of the infant maize god. The sacrificial deposits at El Manatí are evidence that the ritual dismemberment of infants was practiced in ancient Mesoamerica in association with agricultural or vegetative rituals. At Tlatilco, three burials of mature women with the partial remains of infants or fetuses, in one case a clearly dismembered fetus, are a tantalizing find. While this set of burials is too small to be definitive in and of itself, it does provide a tantalizing suggestion of ritual activity centered upon mature women and the dismemberment of infants. This kind of ritual activity is represented at Tlatilco by the woman and child figurines.

Bodily postures are cultural artifacts that are recognizable both internally by members of the culture that created them and externally by observers from different cultures. Mauss' concept of techniques of the body holds that an action as simple as walking or the tilt of a head may communicate information to those observing. Even moreso, the precise and patterned postures and activities associated with ritual behavior create an easily recognizable series of motions. The holding posture of these figurines is one that would have been familiar to the viewers of these artworks, and which may have carried a number of meanings and associations, both to knowledge and emotional content. The connection of the two in this ritual posture of holding may have been the only cue needed to unlock these associations, within the Tlatilcan cultural context. These images become memory-bearers on a number of levels, evoking the emotive responses

created during ritual as well as allowing those with the correct knowledge and training to retrieve complexes of related information about ritual activities, associated songs and stories, and agricultural information that would have been essential to the community's survival.

## 6.2: Future Directions

This study has dealt with only one of several themes visible within the Tlatilcan figurine corpus. Many more are left. How many themes are identifiable and the actual frequencies of their appearance are two of the obvious questions left to be answered. Future research into these figurines should focus on identifying these themes and attempting to understand them and their place in the life of this Formative Period community. Further research is needed to determine whether these additional themes, like the woman and child theme discussed in this thesis, can be placed within the larger Mesoamerican cultural context.

Additionally, it would be interesting to conduct a thorough survey of the figures found within each of the burial caches to determine if internal thematic patterns can be identified. If patterns of themes can be detected, they may be able to tell researchers more about the ritual life of Tlatilco and the interactions between the different households. Are certain themes associated only with female burials or only with male burials? Are there clusters of themes, with certain sets only appearing in burials within a specific area of the site? What part do the fragmentary figurines recovered from mortuary contexts at Tlatilco play? Are they accidental additions, parts of the fill from other burials



unintentionally broken during the digging of a grave and only coincidentally redeposited in a later burial, or are they purposeful additions to the graves in which they are found?

These are only some of the questions that await careful study and analysis.

## **Appendix A: Hay-Vaillant Typology of Ceramic Figurines of Central Mexico**

Having searched in vain for a clear, concise explanation of the Hay-Vaillant Typology, I am offering this list for the benefit of future researchers. I cannot promise that the explanations offered here are either clear or concise, but they are at least all in one place. The original tabular form for this section could not be well-adapted to the prescribed thesis format, so the data has been reorganized into a list of the major lettered types, with subheadings for each numbered subtype and lettered secondary subtype, with descriptions of each.

The following typology and descriptions were drawn primarily from George Clapp and Susanna B. Vaillant's excavation reports for the sites of Gualupita, El Arbolillo, Ticoman and Zacatenco, published between 1931 and 1936. Other information was derived from Miguel Covarrubias' 1957 chart of Central Mexican figurines and their presumed relationships, from Michael D. Coe's *The Jaguar's Children*, published in 1965, and from Frances Pratt and Carlo Gay's 1979 *Ceramic Figurines of Central Mexico*. These appear to be the only published sources that make any attempt to thoroughly describe most if not

all of the figurine types established by the Hay-Vaillant Typology. Where other authors have mentioned criteria that do not appear in the original descriptions, or that seem to explain the criteria more clearly, those works have been cited as well. Where some author's descriptions of the figurine types conflict with those of previously published sources, I have preferred to keep the original descriptions as they appear in Vaillant's reports. After all, it is his name on the typology. Where Vaillant's own descriptions appear to conflict with earlier versions, I have honored the most recent publication.

This section is arranged by headings named for each of the larger lettered groups. Under these headings, subheadings are listed for subtypes and so on. Each subheading is indented to set it off visually from the text of the larger group of which it is a part. Secondary subtypes are included in this list, although they appear to have fallen out of usage. This is understandable, since often the variations that exist between the secondary subtypes are quite small, and their use makes the typology somewhat unwieldy. In some curious cases, lettered types are mentioned in lists of figurine types, but no descriptions have been published; in these few cases, the types have been omitted from the list for brevity. Type N has also been omitted, since even Vaillant admits that it was simply a catch-all type for a couple of figurines from Ticoman that did not seem to fit anywhere else (1931b: 367).

### Type A:

The paste is a porous brown clay, sometimes with white paint used like a slip. Applied fillets of clay are used to form the nose and mouth, both features sunk into a kind of central groove in the face. The eyes are formed by two plough-stroke impressions, sometimes with impressed pupils. The face is broad and round. Limbs are stubby, attached to a squat body. The figurine is sometimes formed from two elements, a chest and stomach. Figurines are usually in a seated position. Red paint is used to emphasize details. Headdresses are simply and heavy. (Vaillant 1931a; Vaillant 1936)

### Type B, large:

The figurines are unslipped and made from a gray, fine-grained clay. The eyes are formed by impressions, sometimes a simple almond shape, sometimes created by two plough-stroke impressions. The heads are large in proportion to the bodies with features in low relief. Some double-headed examples have been found. The figures appear in both standing and seated positions. The flat, shallow bodies are made in three sections: head, torso and legs. There is a wide range in sizes. Red paint is sometimes applied after firing. Headdresses are simple. (Vaillant 1931a; Vaillant 1936)

### Type B, small:

The head is still large in proportion to the body. The torso shows some modeling. Figures may be either erect or seated. (Vaillant 1931a)

### Type B-C:

According to Vaillant, the B-C type figurine marks a transition between B and C type figurines, with features of both. There is considerable variation in size. (Vaillant 1936)

### Type C:

The C group has the largest number of subtypes. Generally speaking, the faces have a pinched forward appearance and most have little or no chin. The eyes are applied with double impressions. The legs and arms are long. The arms are often shown outstretched, either to the sides or slightly to the front. Bodies are flattish, with feet modeled in a sort of tip-toed position. (Vaillant 1931a; Vaillant 1931b; Vaillant 1936; Vaillant and Vaillant 1936; Coe 1965; Pratt and Gay 1979)

### Type C1:

Vaillant describes the C1 figurines as having “prognathic” faces. However, prognathic refers to having a lower jaw that juts forward prominently. That does not really seem to describe these figurines well, since they have no defined chins. The “bird-like” description is a better fit, in most cases. Features are formed by applied fillets with details picked out with incising. The paste is a reddish color. Their torsos tend to be small, and the heads are large in proportion with their bodies. Figures generally stand erect. Headdresses are elaborate and realistic, applied with fillets of clay. Red paint is applied to the hands and face after firing, while black paint is used for body decoration. Turbans, bracelets and anklets are applied. (Vaillant 1931a; Vaillant 1936; Coe 1965)

### Type C1a:

These figurines are made from a reddish clay and the surfaces have been well smoothed. The features are formed from applied fillets, with little or no attempt to work them into the surface of the base clay. The mouth fillets often obscure the chin. The heads are elongated and somewhat pear-shaped, with

prognathic jaws. The female torsos are anatomically proportionate. The arms are short and the legs long, often with applied anklets and bracelets. (Vaillant 1936; Coe 1965)

#### Type C1b:

Type C1b figurines are generally modeled standing erect. They are very similar in form to the C1a variety, except that the paste is a coarse gray and the surface is rough. Modeling of the torso is less proportionate than in the C1a variety. (Vaillant 136)

#### Type C1-2:

Vaillant reports that this type has traits of both the C1a variety and the C2, which follows. It has applied fillets for features, but lacks the bird-like quality of the C1a variety. The eyes are formed by fillets that have been smoothed into the clay of the face and then incised. Headdresses are naturalistic. Vaillant states that the figurines are painted after firing, but does not elaborate on the colors. Presumably they are similar to those recorded for other C-group figurines. (Vaillant 1936)

### Type C2:

Vaillant describes these as a “better executed version” of the C1 figurines (1931a: 103). The clay is reddish. All of the features are still formed by applique, but the overall size of the fillets are reduced, resulting in a more natural appearance. The head is still pear-shaped, with the beginnings of a chin. The posture is generally erect. (Vaillant 1931a; Vaillant 1936)

### Type C3:

#### Type C3a:

The paste of these figurines is a bright brick red. The eyes and mouths are still formed by filleting and impression, but the noses are modeled from the base clay. Heads are heavy and oblong, the bodies chunky and poorly-formed. Headdresses are simple turbans formed by thick bands of clay. Paint is applied after firing to emphasize features. (Vaillant 1931a; Vaillant 1936)



Type C3b:

The features are formed as in C1a or C2, but carelessly.

The head is squarish. Headdresses are simple. (Vaillant 1936)

Type C3c:

The heads on these figurines are roughly square or rectangular. They are formed from a light tan paste. The features are filleted, but small in proportion to the rest of the face. Little attempt is made to smooth the fillets into the surface of the face. (Vaillant 1936)

Type C3d:

These figurines are made from a grayish clay with features appliqued onto broad faces using large fillets. (Vaillant 1936)

#### Type C4:

The paste is a heavy reddish clay. They have thin, flat conical heads with chins formed from an applied fillet that has been smoothed to contour. Features are in low relief. The eyes are round fillets with double impressions. The bodies have a slight protrusion at the belly, which Vaillant describes as “pregnancy,” a feature shared with the C6 variety (1931a: 127), but are otherwise fairly flat. The heads are sometimes tilted back. Headdresses are depicted in two dimensions. (Vaillant 1931a; Coe 1965)

#### Type C5

Figurines of this type have large, plump, rounded heads with undeveloped chins and a “sheep-like” appearance (Vaillant 1931a: 108). The face is prognathic, the brow low and conical. Features are formed by applied fillets with a large nose. Bodies have the three-dimensional quality of the C-type figurines but with the stiffness of the B-type. Headdresses are simple. (Vaillant 1931a; Vaillant 1936)

#### Type C6:

These figurines are covered with a polished slip. The features are formed from appliqued fillets that are worked into the base clay. Eyes are marked by impressions with some incised pupils. The facial proportions are naturalistic. The bodies share the protruding belly of the C4 variety.

(Vaillant 1931a)

#### Type C7:

Appears on Vaillant's list of figurines and on Covarrubias' chart, but there are no published descriptions.

#### Type C8:

These figurines have a shiny slip and the eyes are formed by incision. The formation of the bodies is similar to other C-type figurines.

(Vaillant 1931a)

### Type C9:

These figurines are generally described as being Olmec-style. The heads are elongated. Facial features are formed using minimal filleting combined with incision. Turbans have tassels. Covarrubias illustrates a large hollow Olmec-style baby as a Gualupita variant of this type. (Vaillant and Vaillant 1936; Covarrubias 1957)

### Type C10:

Appears on Covarrubias' 1957 chart as a variety from Cholula.

### Type D:

Vaillant describes the D-group as most closely resembling modern aesthetic standards. The D2-type, especially, tends to have a cubist feel to them. Some figurines are shown with short skirts or leggings.

### Type D1:

Facial features are formed by applied fillets, but they are not as pronounced as on the C-group. The eyes and mouths are both formed by “extremely narrow lenticular slashes in the clay” with incised dots in the centers (Coe 1965: 26). The bodies are modeled as in the C-group “but with more grace” (Vaillant 1931a: 115). Hips are swollen. Heads are small and tilted forward. The heads are in good proportion to their bodies. (Vaillant 1931a; Vaillant and Vaillant 1936)

### Type D2:

Heavy distinctive filleting on face is definitive. Eyes are elongated and grooved on their axis. They have flat, circular heads with “coarser and more formalized” features (Vaillant 1931a: 119). The bodies are flatter and more square than in D1.

### Type D3:

This type was created by Vaillant to house the hollow figurines of the D2 variety. The majority are slipped and polished in red. Sizes vary widely. (Vaillant and Vaillant 1936; Covarrubias 1957)

### Type D4:

The description for these figurines is derived from Covarrubias' chart. The heads are round and chins are receding or absent. Features are filleted. Like the D1 figurines, eyes and mouths are formed by narrow slashes in the clay with a single incised dot. Eyes and mouths are narrower than in other D-types. Filleting on brow is pronounced. Arms are short. Thighs are heavily swollen. (Coe 1965; Covarrubias 1957)

### Type E:

#### Type E1:

The paste is brown or red and fine-grained. They are generally unslipped. Eyes may be formed by filleting or by two incised strokes. The nose is pinched out and fairly prominent. The mouth is small and incised.

The head is flat in back. It is pinched forward and bird-like. They may be either seated or erect. Bodies are small, thin and flat. Little attention is paid to body contour. Headdresses are ornate with both filleting and incision, with a trefoil shape most common. (Vaillant 1931a; Vaillant 1931b)

#### Type E2:

Heads pinched forward and flattened in back. Little modeling to the body. Headdresses are elaborate. (Vaillant 1931b)

#### Type E3:

Flat faces with large cheek planes. Features formed by fillets. Eyes and eyebrows are incised. (Vaillant 1931b)

#### Type F:

The head defines the F-type figurine. Heads are crude, heavily convex and prognathic with receding brows. The eyes are formed by plough-strokes. The nose and mouth are filleted and dominant in the faces, forming flattened muzzles.

Seated specimens lack torsos. Otherwise, the torsos are crudely formed.

Headdresses tend to be crude or absent entirely. Some double headed examples appear. (Vaillant 1931a; Vaillant and Vaillant 1936)

#### Type F-C:

Nose plugs are diagnostic for this type. Heads are low and rounded with a flattened muzzle as in the F group, but with features more like the C group.

(Vaillant 1936)

#### Type G:

##### Type G1:

The paste is a finely granulated brown clay, often slipped and polished. All features are rudimentary, and incised rather than appliqued.

Heads are flat in the back, narrow and bird-like. Seated figures have square bodies with arms and legs created by fillets. Erect figures have swollen thighs and stubby arms. (Vaillant 1931a)



### Type G2:

This type is comprised of figurines made like the G1 figures, but with animal heads. (Vaillant 1936)

### Type H

#### Type H1:

The paste is a finely-kneaded brown clay, slipped and highly polished. Nose and mouth fillets are applied before the slip. They have no eyes. The bodies are thin and square, and the limbs are formed by fillets. Limbs are proportionate to the body. Some are painted before firing. (Vaillant 1931a; Vaillant 1931b)

#### Type H2:

Paste and features are as with H1, but this variety has incised arcs for eyes. Some are painted entirely red. (Vaillant 1931a; Vaillant 1931b)

### Type H3:

Some examples of this type are coated in a brown slip. Filleting is extreme. All features including hair and headdresses are formed by fillets. Eyes are covered in slip and polished. They have high noses. (Vaillant 1931a)

### Type H4:

#### Type H4a:

These figurines are unslipped. The features are appliqued, and the eyes have impressions. (Vaillant 1931b)

#### Type H4b:

These figurines are unslipped with features formed as in H4a. They share a general lack of detail with types H1 and H2. (Vaillant and Vaillant 1936)

#### Type H4c:

Figurines of this type are made of a red clay, with lavish filleting that is better worked into the surface of the head. (Vaillant and Vaillant 1936)

#### Type H4d:

Vaillant and Vaillant believe this type to have been a derivation of H4c. They have larger heads. Features are formed by use of appliqued fillets as well as incising and modeling. (Vaillant and Vaillant 1936)

#### Type H5:

Type H5 figurines are larger and slipped in white. They have triangular eyes. (Vaillant and Vaillant 1936)

Type I:

Type I1:

These figurines are slipped and polished as for types H1 and H2.

The eyes are formed by application of fillets with central impressions and incised pupils. (Vaillant 1931a)

Type I2:

Vaillant describes these figurines as having features in common with both the I-group and the L-group (1931b: 352). The pictured figurine heads have a polished brown surface. The eyes are elongated fillets with central horizontal impressions; some of the eyes are down-turned at one or both edges, giving them a weeping appearance. Mouths are filleted and formed in the same way as the eyes, sometimes even to the downturns. Noses are formed by applied fillets and then modeled. Headdresses are simple, formed from both applique and impressions. (Vaillant 1931b)

### Type I3:

These figurines are covered by a white slip. The features are filleted, with the eyes being formed by a central impression and incised pupil in the fillet. Mouths are incised and have an indication of a tooth row or upper gum. The appearance is more naturalistic. (Vaillant 1931b)

### Type J:

Eyes are formed by small fillets. The nose is modeled directly from the clay of the head. The bodies are crude and flat, with heavy legs. (Vaillant 1931a)

### Type K:

The type K variety has been described by Vaillant and Vaillant as “frog-faced” (1936: 35). The heads are round and flat, with large eyes formed by two broad gouges on a heavy fillet, sometimes resulting in a central raised area. The mouths are two gashes separated by a vertical incision. Headdresses are simple. (Vaillant 1931a; Vaillant and Vaillant 1936)

### Type K, Xolostoc Variety:

Anyone who has ever seen the Steven Spielberg movie *E.T.* or played with a Troll doll will easily recognize the Xolostoc Variety of the Type K group. The heads are large with eyes formed by heavy applied fillets with a central oval impression. Headdresses are often simple, although modeled coifs with indications of ribbons are occasionally found (see Figurine 3, this thesis). Noses are large. The mouth is formed by two plough-stroke gouges. (Covarrubias 1957; Pratt and Gay 1979)

### Type K-Abstract:

This type is apparently unique to Tlatilco. It consists of highly stylized figurines with heavily incised decorations of either parallel lines or geometric motifs. They rarely have heads at all, but when they do, the heads and features are rudimentary at best. The Type K-Abstract group is divided into three groups based upon the formation of the legs. (Pratt and Gay 1979)

Type K-Abstract A:

Often consists of a torso with two conical prongs for legs.

Decoration appears as heavily incised parallel lines or geometric motifs.

(Pratt and Gay 1979)

Type K-Abstract B:

Similar to above, but with two balls for legs. The hip joints are indicated by incised lines. (Pratt and Gay 1979)

Type K-Abstract C:

Often consists of a torso with a rounded ball of clay at the lower end. The ball of clay is incised horizontally at the top and vertically across the mid-point. The overall resemblance to a phallus is impossible to deny. (Pratt and Gay 1979)

### Type L:

The paste for these figurines is a polished brown clay. Features are formed by filleting, with the eyes formed as in the Type I group. The features are carelessly presented. The overall construction is massive. (Vaillant 1931b)

### Type M:

The eyes are the distinctive feature of this figurine type. They are formed by the application of round bits of clay that are then impressed with a central dot surrounded by incised or impressed lines or dots. The overall effect is of someone who is wide-eyed and surprised. The bodies tend to be long and slender. (Vaillant 1931b; Covarrubias 1957; Pratt and Gay 1979)

### Type O:

Figurines of this type are unslipped clay with features crudely applied as fillets. The features tend to be in the center of the faces. (Vaillant and Vaillant 1936)



## **Appendix B: “The Origin of Maize”**

(as told to George M. Foster by Leandro Pérez)

Formatting appears as it was in the original text. A version of this story also appears in Nicholson 1967: 64 – 65.

Once upon a time there was an old couple who had never had any children. Daily the woman went to the stream to carry water. One day when she went to the stream, she saw in the water an egg. When she returned to her husband, she said, “I encountered good fortune.” Her husband replied, “What is it?” “An egg,” said the old woman. “Come with me to take it out.” They went and they arrived. The egg was shown to the old man, and he was astonished. He saw it swimming down there. “How are we going to get it out?” he asked. “I am going to take it out with a fish net,” said the old woman. She began to try, but was not able to reach it. She did not realize that the egg was on a large rock over the pool in the stream and that what she saw was its reflection. Then the old man looked around, and he saw then that the egg was up above on the rock. “You have been deceived,” he said to his wife. “I encountered good fortune,” she said. Then the man climbed up and got the egg. Together they returned with it. “I am going to take care of it,” said the woman, and she put it in with her clothing.

After seven days they heard a child cry, and looking in the clothing they found a tiny child with hair golden and soft like the silk of maize. "What did I tell you," said the old woman. "I encountered good fortune." "We will raise him as our son," replied the old man. Then the boy grew, and after seven days he was already large, and could talk and walk. Then the old woman said, "Ai, my son, go and fetch water." When he arrived at the stream, he was made fun of. Little minnows said, "You are only a little egg taken out of the water with a fish net." "Don't make fun of me," said the boy. He returned home and told his little old grandmother and said, "They made a great deal of fun of me, the minnows." "Don't think anything of it," replied the old woman. "But it makes me very angry that they say I am an egg taken out of the water with a fish net," said the boy.

The next day, his little old grandmother said to him, "Go and fetch water," "I am not going," said the boy, "because the minnows make fun of me." But he was sent. "You go," said the old woman. When he arrived at the water, they commenced to make fun of him. They said, "You are a little egg taken out of the water with a fish net." When he returned home he said to the old woman, "Make me a fishhook. I am going to teach them a lesson for making fun of me." The next time he went to the water he took his fishhook. He arrived where the minnows were and he said to them, "Now I am going to teach you a lesson for making fun of me." He commenced to take them out and put them in a sombrero. Then he returned with them to his house. "Didn't I tell you," he said to the old woman, "that I was going to take them out of the water?" The old woman said, "Ai, you, son. Why do you jest? You will have to put them back." Again he returned with them to the water, but before putting them back he warned them against making fun of him, and told them that from that time they would be sought by the rest of mankind to be eaten.

Then he returned to where the old woman was. One day he went to the milpa with his foster-parents, and upon arriving there, the thrushes began to shout, "You are a little egg. You are a little egg." "The thrushes are mocking me," he said to the old woman. "Don't let it worry you," she replied. "I don't like to be mocked," said the boy, "Grandfather, make me a bow and arrow." His grandfather did not know that he wanted to shoot thrushes. The boy did not know that the thrush was indeed the chicken of his little old grandmother. Then he killed a great many thrushes and the old woman appeared at the place where he had killed them. She commenced to scold him, saying, "Now you will have to revive these thrushes." The boy replied, "I killed them because they mocked me." Then he commenced to revive them, and said to them, "Never mock me," and he threw them up into a tree.

The boy did many other things he was not supposed to do. The old woman said, "You do many bad things. You do not listen. Many times you are told not to do something which you immediately do again." Later she said to her husband, "We will have to eat our son. We will eat him. Now we will tell him to climb up to the *tapanco*. Then when night comes we will drink his blood." The boy went up to sleep, but he knew that they were going to kill him. Up above he talked with a bat. "When my little old grandfather climbs up, cut his throat." Then he went up to the ridge of the roof. When the hour arrived, the old woman said, "Our son sleeps." "He sleeps," said the old man. Then he went up to where he thought the boy was, but the boy was outside on the ridge of the roof. The bat came down and cut the throat of the old man. The old woman heard many drops of blood falling, tasted it, and said, "The blood of our son does not taste good." Then she said to the old man, "Why don't you talk? You have the best part (the flesh) and

I am down here drinking something that is no good. Don't be stingy. Bring him down so that we can eat him together. The two of us raised him together, and it's not right that you should eat him alone." Then she saw that the old man didn't speak. She went to look and found him dead. It was his blood that she was drinking. And the old woman was very much annoyed because her husband had been killed. "Ai, you, son, why did you kill your little old grandfather? Now I am going to eat you." The boy went far away, but she followed him. He looked behind and saw his grandmother who called out, "Stop, let's talk things over."

"Let alone (sic)," said the boy, "for I am very strong and able to destroy you. I am the one who is going to give food to all mankind." But since the old woman continued to follow him he climbed a tree in the middle of a savanna beside the shore, and from there he saw that the ground all around him was burning. "Don't eat me, for if you try to do it you will be burned up. Come here and climb the tree and see how everything is burning all around. If you try to eat me, you will be burned." The old woman did not know she was going to be burned. While she looked, the boy escaped through the flames which were drawing near. Then she looked and saw that the boy was not there, and she commenced to cry in a loud voice, "Ai, son, why are you going to burn me?" The boy went away, and the old woman remained there in the *encanto*, for such it was, where she was burned to death.

Free of all danger, the boy went on his way. On arriving at the shore of the ocean he began to beat on his drum. Hurricane heard him and said, "Who know who is drumming out there?" He sent a man to find out, saying, "Go and ask the name of the one who is drumming there." When the man came to the boy, he said, "I have come to see

you. Tell me your name.” The boy replied, “I am he who sprouts at the knees. I am he who flowers. This is what you shall say.” The man returned to Hurricane and said, “He did not tell me his name.” “Return to him,” said Hurricane. “Tell him that he must tell you his name.” The man returned and said to the boy, “I came to ask you your name. You must tell me because Hurricane wishes to know.” Then the boy replied, “Very well. My name is Homshuk. Tell him that I am the one who is shelled, and the one who is eaten.” The man returned to Hurricane and reported, “He told me that his name is Homshuk, that it is he who sprouts at the knees and gives fruit.” Hurricane answered, “He didn’t tell you his real name. He is a nagual.”

Then the boy spoke to a tarantula, “Build me a house,” he said, “because it is going to rain very hard. Hurricane is going to send a heavy rainstorm and I will need protection.” The tarantula did as requested. That night the rain poured down in torrents, but in the morning when Hurricane’s men came, the boy was still on the shore, drumming. He had not been harmed. Hurricane said, “He is a nagual.”

Then a tortoise came to Homshuk and asked, “What are you doing, uncle?” Homshuk said, “Well, here I am, uncle, drumming. I want to cross the ocean, and if you are a good fellow you will take me.” Said the tortoise, “I will take you.” “You are not going to deceive me?” asked Homshuk. “I am not going to deceive you,” replied the tortoise. “Run along and try and see if you are able to swim well,” said Homshuk, and the tortoise showed that he was a good swimmer. “I am going to climb up on your back,” said Homshuk. After he had swum only a short distance the tortoise shouted, “Ai, uncle. My chest is being broken.” Said Homshuk, “Didn’t I tell you that you were not big enough to bear my weight?” And then he came back to the shore. This type of tortoise

has since been known as *pecho quebrado*. Presently another much larger tortoise arrived and it asked, “What are you doing, uncle?” Homshuk replied, “Well, here I am drumming. If you are a good fellow you will carry me to the other side of the ocean. If you do thing I will give you colors such as none other of your species has.” “Well, if you will do that,” said the tortoise, “I will carry you.” Immediately the boy painted the tortoise, then climbed on his shell, and was carried across the ocean to where Hurricane was. Ever since, this type of tortoise has been brightly colored.

“What are you looking for?” asked Hurricane. “I’m just passing by,” replied Homshuk. “You are a nagual,” said Hurricane, and ordered him taken prisoner. In the land of Hurrican, there were different kinds of jails: one in which there were hungry tigers, another in which there were many famished serpents, and still another in which there were arrows in constant flight. Then Homshuk was ordered placed in the jail where there were serpents. “You are a nagual,” Hurricane said. “Here you are going to be eaten.” But in the morning when they appeared, he was seated on a serpent. He had not been eaten. And the other serpents had disappeared, for Homshuk had said to them when he was locked up, “You shouldn’t harm me, for I am a strong man, and it is essential that I live in order to give food to mankind. Moreover, you are supposed to live in the forests and mountains.”

The next night he was placed in the jail with the tigers, and he told them the same thing that he had told the serpents, keeping only the largest to serve as his chair. When Hurricane saw what had happened, he said, “This time we are going to put you where there are arrows,” and he was put there so that he would die. Homshuk said to the arrows, “Don’t harm me. You are to aid in the defense of man, and to help him in hunting.” Then

they all fell to the ground and he gathered them in a bundle, on which he sat. On the following day, Hurricane saw that the boy was not dead, and he said, "That is a nagual." The he pondered, and finally said, "We won't be able to kill him this way, but since he is a nagual, he can't continue to live among us." "I am not a nagual," replied Homshuk. "I am a good fellow and will be the source of food for all mankind. You should not try to kill me."

"Well, we will have a competition, and if you win, you can live here. If you lose, you must die." "And what is this competition?" asked the boy. "Well, it's a question of who can throw a stone from here to the other side of the ocean," explained Hurricane. "Well, I don't know how to throw," said the boy. "But before trying I would like to get my own stones." So the boy went into the woods and called out for Woodpecker and said to him, "I am in danger. If you don't aid me Hurricane will kill me." "What do you want of me?" asked Woodpecker. "Well, I want you to go to the other side of the ocean, and when I throw a stone you must begin to peck on a tree so that Hurricane will believe it is sound (sic) of my stones against the tree." The boy returned. "You were very slow," said Hurricane. "Moreover, it appears that you didn't bring any stones." The boy threw the first stone, and after a little time they heard from far off, "tra-tra-tra" (which was the only sound produced by the bird). "Do you hear?" asked the boy. "My stone arrived on the other side, and with so much force that it goes bouncing from one tree to another. Now it's your turn." Hurricane threw his rock with all his strength, but when after several hours they heard no noise, he was declared vanquished.

But Hurricane was not able to get the idea of killing the boy out of his head, and after talking it over with his people he ordered a gigantic hammock placed between two

large trees on the shore of the ocean. This done he said to the boy, "Are you staying here, or are you crossing the ocean? For my family and I are going to the other side. If you care to come, it is very easy to cross with this hammock." The boy knew the intentions of Hurricane, but he knew he was safe, so he said. (sic) "Very well, I'll go with you." "Then climb into the hammock," said Hurricane, and he commenced to swing it until it was going as fast as possible and swung far out over the ocean. Believing that Homshuk had fallen into the ocean, Hurricane stopped the hammock, and out jumped the boy.

"Yes," he said. "It's really a very good way to cross the ocean, for I arrived half way over. I didn't go to the other side because I didn't know where you were planning to go. Therefore, it will be better if you go first and then I will follow." "Very well, all of us will go first," said the people of Hurricane, and they climbed into the hammock after him. Meanwhile Homshuk called to Tuza (Gopher) and said, "Senor Tuza, I want you to cut the roots of these trees very rapidly," and Tuza went off to do his task. "Ready?" asked Homshuk. "Yes," they all replied, and he began to swing the hammock. When it reached its greatest swing, Tuza cut the last root, and the hammock and trees fell in the ocean. All of the people were killed, but Hurricane alone miraculously managed to escape, though with a fractured leg, since he had fallen from a great height. Upon arriving at the shore, he begged, "Give me pardon. Now I know who you are" "Well, what are you going to offer me?" asked the boy. "When you are dry," replied Hurricane, "I can water your head." And since during the months of June and July there was not enough water for Homshuk to grow, he agreed to this. And since that time, Hurricane has watered the milpas during these months so that man can have maize to eat.



## Appendix C: The Dwarf of Uxmal

Note: The following story has been recorded by Robert Redfield and Alfonso Villa Rojas in *Chan Kom, A Maya Village*, pp 335 – 337. Explanations for uncommon terms are bracketed immediately following. Full citations are made when the information appears on a different page or within a different resource; no citation is given when the information appears in a footnote on the same page as the story in the original text. Formatting appears as it was in the original text.

There was a woman who found an egg and put it in a *homa* [an oval gourd used for food offerings (Redfield and Villa Rojas 1964: 36)], and forgot all about it. Three weeks went by, and one day she was sitting in her house when suddenly she heard a baby crying, “Cune-e! Cune-e!” So she thought, “My neighbor has a baby.” So she made some *atole* and took some bread, and went to her neighbor’s house, so that her neighbor should have some warm *atole* to drink after giving birth to a child. But when she got there her neighbor said, “You must be crazy; I haven’t had a child. Perhaps it is my neighbor in the next house.” So the woman went back to her own house and sat down on a bench. All at once she heard the baby crying again, “Cune-e! Cune-e!” She hurried all around the room and at last she found that the sound was coming from the *homa* in which she had put the egg. She took the *homa* to the light and looked in, and there she found a baby lying. “He

shall be my child,” thought the woman. She began to make his shirt and his diaper, and to prepare his food, and she gave him the name Ez. He grew very fast, was very lively, and in two months he could walk and talk. Then he asked for a guitar, and when it was given him he began to play.

Now at this time there was a king at Chichen that had a beast (alak); it was a serpent, like those you can see now at Chichen. It was called X-Kukican. It lived on children; it ate only children. From time to time the king sent to the villages round about for children to be fed to this serpent. At last it came the turn of Ez to go to Chichen to be fed to the serpent. Then the woman (who had found him) began to cry. But Ez said, “Do not cry, Ma’ chich, it will be all right.” And he took his guitar and began to play. When the men sent by the king came to fetch him, he jumped into an olla and hid there. They came in, and looked all around, but they could not find him. When they had gone, he jumped out and began again to play his guitar. So it went on; the men sent by the king would hear him playing his guitar, but when they came to get him, he was always hidden in the olla, guitar and all, and they could not find him.

By now he was very big and strong. One day he said, “Ma’ chich, now I am going to give myself up to the king. But do not worry about me; I shall be all right.” He took a splinter of glass (tok) and hid it under his tongue. When the men came to get him, they felt his clothes all over to make sure there was nothing in them that would hurt the serpent when he should eat him up. They felt him all over, but they did not find the glass under his tongue. They took him to the serpent, and the serpent swallowed him whole without chewing him. Then Ez took out his splinter of glass and with it slashed to right and left; he cut the serpent’s liver; he cut the serpent’s heart. Then he cut open its belly

and jumped out. When he jumped out he was bigger and stronger than ever. He left the body of the serpent there and went home.

At first the king did not know that his alak was dead. But then there came by a bird, and it sang, “Zac tanen, Zac tanen” (white belly, white belly). Then the king went and found the serpent lying dead, its belly all white with the eggs laid upon it by the flies, the eggs that would hatch into maggots. Then the people came out and thanked Ez, for the serpent had eaten many children, and they had been in great terror.

But the king became very angry, and resolved to punish Ez. He sent his policemen to arrest him. Ez did not resist, but went before the king. The king said, “We will have a contest, and if you do not win I will cut your throat.”

“What must I do?” asked Ez.

“You must climb to the top of the ceiba,” said the king, “with a bottle of honey, and you must pour all the honey out of the bottle into an empty bottle placed on the ground below. But if you spill so much as a drop, I will cut your throat. Be here at noon tomorrow.”

“Very well,” said Ez, and went back to his house. “Ma’ chich,” he said, “give me fifty hairs from your head, for I am going to need them badly.”

So she gave him the fifty hairs, and in the middle of the night he climbed to the top of the ceiba tree. He made a thread of the fifty hairs, and tied a stone to the end, and dropped the stone into the bottle on the ground below, fastening the other end to the tree. Next day at noon the soldiers came and brought him before the king. Two empty bottles

were placed on the ground, and Ez and the king climbed the tree, each with a bottle of honey. The king had a secret way, and filled his bottle. Ez made the honey run down the thread of hair into the other bottle without spilling a drop. Then the king said, "I did not beat you this time, but we will have another contest. At noon tomorrow we will have a horse-race, and if you beat me, I will give you my hacienda, but if I beat you I will cut your throat."

Next day the king and Ez met to have the horse-race. The race was to be in that part of Chichen where there are two long walls, in one of which there is fastened a round stone with a hole in it [the ball court]. First the two horses were close together, neck and neck; then Ez's horse got the lead, and Ez drove it right through the stone ring. The king followed, but he could not make his horse pass through the ring; it stuck, and he had to back up and start again. So Ez won the race, and the king gave him his hacienda. But he said to Ez, "We will have another test. You must shake the trunk of a ceiba tree so as to bring down all the fruit on it; if you succeed, you may cut my throat, but if you fail, I will cut yours."

"Very well," said Ez, and went home. When Ma' chich heard about it she began to cry and lament, but Ez comforted her and told her to make him a pair of wings like those of a bat. So Ma' chich did so, and that night he put them on and flew all around the ceiba tree, cutting all of the stalks of the flower clusters with his teeth, so that each hung by only a slender thread, a piece as slender as a fiber of henequen. Next day at noon he met the king at the ceiba tree, and when he shook the tree, every flower cluster, to the last one, fell to the ground. Then Ez made ready to kill the king, but the king begged for mercy, and at last Ez relented and let him go.

Then the king thought and thought how to kill Ez, and at last he went to him and said, “We will have one more contest. We will get ten *cargas* [approximately 42 kilograms (Redfield and Villa Rojas 1964: 52)] of *cocoyoles* [nuts of the wine palm], and we will crack five of the *cargas* on your head, and five on mine.”

“Very well,” said Ez, “I will meet you here at noon tomorrow.” And he went home. When she heard the news, Ma’ chich began crying and crying. “The second or third *cocoyol* will kill you,” she said. “Do not cry,” said Ez, “but go to the ironworker and have him make a hat of bronze. Tell him the hat is for your grandson, and be sure he covers it well with hair.” She did as he told her, and the bronze hat was made just as he wished it. Next day Ez appeared, wearing his bronze hat. The king told two slaves to crack the *cocoyoles*; one of them held the nut on Ez’s head, while the other broke it open with a great stone. So they went on until five *cargas* had been cracked. Then it was Ez’s turn; he cracked the first *cocoyol* on the king’s head. But the king’s head cracked too. The second *cocoyol* went right into the king’s head, and the next into his throat, and so on until his body, filled with *cocoyoles*, burst. And as the *cocoyoles* came rolling out, Ez picked them up and ate the insides. So the king was dead, and Ez was made king.

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### **Vita**

Patricia Sue Allen Christmas was born in Baytown, TX, on 9 July 1967 to Virginia Merle Allen and Louis Elton Allen, Sr., the youngest of four children. She attended Channelview High School in Channelview, TX, and upon completion of her studies in 1985, enrolled in the University of Houston, Central Park campus. During the same year, she married Darren Ray Christmas. Their daughter Michelle Celeste Christmas was born in 1988. After her husband's death, she transferred to Lamar University in Beaumont, TX, and completed her Bachelor of Arts degree in History in May 2000. After moving to New Braunfels, TX, she began working for CFAN, a mid-sized aeronautical engineering and production facility in San Marcos, TX. After her daughter completed high school, she enrolled at Texas State University-San Marcos in the Department of Anthropology and decided to pursue a Master's Degree. She entered the Graduate College at Texas State in 2009.

Permanent Email Address:   pschristmas@gmail.com

This thesis was typed by Patricia S. Christmas