

CHAPTER 8

SUMMARY

"Truly now,
double thanks, triple thanks
that we've been formed, we've been given
our mouths, our faces, we speak, we listen,
we wonder, we move, our knowledge is good,
we've understood what is far and near
and we've seen what is great and small
under the sky, on the earth.
Thanks to you we've been formed,
we've come to be made and modeled,
our grandmother, our grandfather."

Popol Vuh, The Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life
Translated by Dennis Tedlock, 1996:147

The passage above is a translation from the Popol Vuh, a sacred book written shortly after the Spanish Conquest, that was translated from Quiché Maya (from Guatemala) into Spanish by Father Francisco Ximénez in the beginning of the eighteenth century (Goetz and Morley 1950). The book was sacred in that it contained the origin and creation stories, as well as the ancient traditions of the Maya. The passage recounts the creation of humans made of cornmeal dough, after imperfect creations made of clay and wood previously had been destroyed. The Creator and Maker gods made the humans to venerate and sustain the gods. The humans made of corn were perfect in that they were all-knowing and all-seeing. They praised the gods for their creation. The gods were not pleased that the knowledge and the vision of humans was equal to themselves, however, and they blew mist into the humans' eyes so that they could only see what was near to them (Goetz and Morley 1950:169). Thus the Maya ancestors were created. This passage seems fitting because it might demonstrate a belief in the significance of the act of making figures in Mesoamerica, as an activity that began with the gods, and through this activity, humans themselves could acquire the power of the gods. In addition, this passage relates to the goals of this thesis by making references to the making and modeling of human forms (figurine manufacture), and references to humans communicating with animate

forces in the supernatural realm (figurine function).

The San Andrés ceramic figurines provide clues to human behavior on the outskirts of the major Middle Formative period center of La Venta. The importance of figurines, in general, lies in the fact that they are representational in nature. They can be representative of social relationships between genders, different age groups, and possibly different social rankings within the area in which they were found. They can be representative of a community's means by which to communicate with the supernatural realm. At San Andrés, the context of the ceramic figurines suggests they were sometimes used during feasting rituals, which may have involved various occasions including healing ceremonies, rituals involving pregnancy and childbirth, and worshipping ceremonies such as period ending rites (Ekholm 1979).

Most of the San Andrés figurine torsos are female, many of them appearing to be of reproductive age. Many of them wear round pendants that may represent mirrors, and some wear earspools, turbans and head ornamentation, all of which were symbols of status in Formative period Mesoamerica. The figurines were made with some planning and preparation for a specific ritual activity. Thus, the purpose of the figurines involved a more formal situation as opposed to a casual one. In some cases, the figurines were found associated with large serving vessels used not for daily purposes but for special occasions, as in Units 7 and 8 feasting refuse. Some imported materials such as greenstone, serpentine, and obsidian were found in association with the figurines. These special items may have been acquired through gift-giving associated with feasting.

The San Andrés figurines resemble La Venta figurines, indicating a close tie with the La Venta polity. The figurine-makers at San Andrés used the local clays that were used for pottery production, demonstrating that the figurines were local to the site and not of foreign origin. The broken, fragmentary occurrence of the figurines, along with the nature of the breakage areas, suggests that the people who used them may have ritually broken them before disposal. The figurines at San Andrés emerged from special ritual deposits in household areas, demonstrating that figurine-use was intended for the living rather than the deceased, although burials were not found at San Andrés.

Figurine Manufacture

The San Andrés figurine collection includes 306 fragments, all of which are incomplete with the exception of one small dwarf or infant figurine. The figurines occur in the Early Formative Molina phase (1350-1150 B.C.) and throughout the phases of the Middle Formative period, reaching a peak during the Early Franco phase (700-550/500 B.C.) with 178 fragments, or 58 percent of the total collection. Eighty-nine percent of the torsos are female, and 77 percent of the complete figurine heads are female.

The figurine torsos were manufactured in either one of two positions: standing or seated. Each of the figurine heads were unique but were constructed using one of three techniques: punctations, incisions (sometimes with appliqué elements), or modeling. The use of punctations occurs in the Early Franco phase while the use of incisions is found throughout the Early Puente, Late Puente, and Early Franco phases. The technique of modeling occurs later in time during the Early and Late Franco phases.

Warren Barbour's analysis on fingerprints from four San Andrés figurines indicates that all four fingerprints were most likely female. This finding suggests that women probably manufactured the San Andrés figurines. The significance in such an analysis is that it contributes to more understanding on what women's work may have included during the Formative period.

The clays for figurine manufacture were local clays that were also used for constructing the pottery. The use of clays yielding white or light colors for figurine-making increased dramatically during the Early Franco, signifying an increase in availability of these clays or an increase in preference for these colors. The use of clays yielding red colors steadily increases over time reaching a peak in the Late Franco, while the use of white clays decreases significantly at the same time.

Approximately 99 percent of the figurines were fired. The majority of them were incompletely fired, which meant that they were fired for short periods and at low temperatures. The majority of the figurines are of solid composition (approximately 86 percent). They occur from the Molina phase and onwards. Hollow figurines begin to appear in the Late Puente phase and occur through the Late Franco phase. The number of hollow figurines is smaller perhaps due to their later occurrence in time, they may have been more difficult to construct, or they may

have been used only for rare occasions. The figurines were manufactured in three relative sizes: large, medium, and small. Approximately 89 percent of the figurines are medium in size, all of which are solid. The large figurines tend to be mostly hollow fragments and occur less frequently throughout time.

Based on Follensbee's (2000) gender descriptions for Olmec imagery, almost ninety percent of the San Andrés figurines are female. The female torsos at San Andrés wear simple clothing, such as low slung pubic coverings or aprons. Female figurine heads, which comprise approximately seventy-seven percent of the heads, wear their hair in buns on top or on the sides of their heads. They may also have hair close to their heads creating an inverted U shape around their faces, or they may have ponytails on the backs of their heads. Some wear turbans folded on top of their heads and wrapped under their chins, or some may wear close-fitting helmets. Male figurine characteristics include geometrical body shapes. The San Andrés male figurines wear thick belts high on the waist, loincloths that wrap under the crotch, and vest-like shirts. Male heads may wear helmets with elaborate decoration on top, or have tonsured areas. The ornamentation on San Andrés figurines include round pendants worn on the chest, earspools, and shells or other ornaments worn on the forehead or on top of the head.

In addition to the anthropomorphic figurines at San Andrés, zoomorphic figurines were also manufactured from the Molina phase up to the Late Franco phase. Ten animal figurines are present in the collection; seven are birds, one is a possible jaguar, another may be a bat, and another figure is possibly a paca. The depiction of birds is common in Mesoamerica because they were considered special animals that could inhabit the three realms of sky, land, and water. Jaguars were also special animals in Mesoamerica because they were considered to have inherent supernatural powers. The people of high status associated themselves with the jaguar image. The presence of the animal figures in the San Andrés collection suggests an appreciation and respect for these creatures of nature and a belief in their having special powers beyond the natural realm.

Formative Period Figurines in Mesoamerica

A comparison of Formative period figurines helped to demonstrate that San Andrés had close ties to the La Venta polity. The similarities of the figurine collections to each other shows that a strong link existed between the two sites. The similarities of the figurines from Chiapa de Corzo also revealed a link with San Andrés, further supporting the fact that San Andrés participated in an exchange network that extended along the Grijalva River. A comparison of figurines from the Pacific Coast suggests that a continuity of beliefs, ideas, and practices during the Early Formative was carried over into the Middle Formative period. Overall, the comparison of Formative period figurines reveals that Middle Formative figurines occur in household spaces, and the majority of the figurines are female figures.

The ethnohistoric and ethnographic records on later cultures of Central America provide key information on figurine use. In particular, the ethnographic accounts on the Otomí of Mexico and the Q'eqchi' of Guatemala document how figures functioned during ritual activities. The Otomí shamans constructed paper figures to represent the animating forces of living things. The figures were used during healing rituals to draw out illnesses from afflicted individuals, or to replace the lost spirits of individuals. The Otomí also used human images to represent ancestors and deities, to whom they made offerings of worship during festivals. The Q'eqchi' made anthropomorphic figures made of copal and beeswax. The shamans offered them to supernatural beings as substitutes for animating forces that had become separated from their human counterparts.

The capacity to replicate something in order to derive power from it is the process of mimesis. I argue that the function of the San Andrés figurines can be understood through this process, combined with the gender and contextual information, and the ethnographic information. The combination of these factors suggests that the San Andrés figurines were used during various ritual activities conducted in household areas during the Middle Formative period. Furthermore, I propose that the figurines were used to copy and embody particular forces or entities with whom the San Andrés inhabitants wished to communicate. The figurines provided a means to interact with forces in the supernatural realm, where they offered supplications and requested aid.

The San Andrés figurines are significant because they offer clues as to specific activities that occurred at this site. The figurines signify that feasting and ritual activities occurred, and these activities probably involved elite members of the community. The study of the San Andrés figurines is significant in that it demonstrates ritual behavior at household spaces outside of the La Venta center, and it contributes to the knowledge of Middle Formative figurine use in Mesoamerica.