

REGENDERING THE PAST

Cheryl Classen, Series Editor

A complete list of books in the series
is available from the publisher.

Women in Prehistory

North America and Mesoamerica

Edited by Cheryl Classen
and Rosemary A. Joyce

PENN

University of Pennsylvania Press
Philadelphia

1997

gender rather than simply look for “males in female clothing.” One point bears repeating: in most North American societies, two-spirits were not simply men who adopted women’s clothing or work. They were members of a third gender with clothing, ornaments, and occupations unique to the gender. These individuals probably would be numerically less frequent than “true males” in cemetery populations, and statistically rare burial accompaniments found with male skeletons might point to an occupational specialization or status associated with two-spirits. Of course, caution must be exercised during interpretation of mortuary remains; any number of social variables, such as status, occupation, or rank, may be symbolized in a mortuary context and may not be simply a reflection of gender.

We might hope for a situation encountered by Elsie Clews Parsons, who described the burial of a two-spirit among the Zuni. In situations where cloth is preserved, the following sort of burial could be identified in an archaeological context.

When prepared for burial the corpse of a *la'umana* [two-spirit] is dressed in the usual woman's outfit, with one exception, under the woman's skirt a pair of trousers are put on. "And on which side of the graveyard will he be buried?" I asked, with eagerness of heart if not of voice, for here at last was a test of the sex status of the *la'umana*. "On the south side, the men's side, of course. (Is this not a man)?" And my old friend smiled the peculiarly gentle smile he reserved for my particularly unintelligent questions. (Parsons 1916: 528)

Acknowledgments

I thank Will Roscoe and Daniel Murley for information and editorial assistance.

12. Gendered Goods: The Symbolism of Maya Hierarchical Exchange Relations

Susan D. Gillespie and Rosemary A. Joyce

In many Southeast Asian societies it is common practice for a group of men to refer to another group of men by kin terms that refer to biological females. These men are called “our sisters” or “our daughters,” or more generally “women of our clan” (Barraud 1979: 152; Clamagirand 1980: 141; Cunningham 1965: 374; Forman 1980: 156; McKinnon 1991: 115; Rodgers 1990: 324; Sherman 1987: 867 after Leach 1965: 80 n. 14; Valeri 1980: 185), although by definition they must be of a different descent line. George Sherman (1987: 867) raised the obvious question: “‘Why are men called by a term for women?’”

This practice has nothing overtly to do with biological sex, gender roles, or gender identity. Instead it reveals the active use of a “gender ideology” (Conkey and Spector 1984: 15)—the “culturally construed difference” between “male” and “female” (Boon 1990: 211)—as both a construct and a code for social (and other) relations. Gender is one of many possible organizing principles, but it has characteristics that make it distinctive. As a mode of classification, gender comprises a complementation of opposites that must be united for both biological and social production. At the same time, paired members can historically take on different values, so that gender can express asymmetry and hierarchy as well as complementarity (Hoskins 1990: 275; Traube 1986: 4).

This chapter presents a model of gender ideology expressed in social action among the ancient Maya of Mesoamerica. Monuments and hieroglyphic texts dating from the Classic period (ca. A.D. 200–1000), as well as documents from the early Hispanic period and contemporary ethnographic information, are brought together to create a coherent picture of Maya social organization. These data are examined against the comparative backdrop of ethnographic material from Southeast Asia, and especially Eastern Indonesia, where gender classification operates overtly in conceptualizing socioeconomic categories and relationships. The Southeast Asian comparison helps to explicate the organizing principles of Maya gender

role" as mediators between houses (Sherman 1987: 873; see also Barraud 1990:202; Cunningham 1964).

From this latter perspective, the house is also the unit of alliance only in terms of the alliances formed between them (Barraud 1990:202). Marriage alliances go far beyond simple "woman exchange" (1990:198). They are the basis for long-lived relationships between houses that create a network of social ties within and beyond a single society. These relationships extend outside the social domain, influencing and signifying ritual, economic, and political behaviors as well.

Data on Maya kinship principles from the colonial to the modern periods indicate that, as is frequently the case, the basic social grouping is often misinterpreted as a descent group (Gillespie 1994). An exhaustive study by Richard Wilk (1988) concluded: "Every ethnographic and ethno-historical account of the Maya seems to point away from the lineage, clan, or *barrio* as the primary social group, at least in the minds of the Maya themselves; the [extended family] household, in contrast, was important in every region and class," and its persistence and pervasiveness indicate that this was "an ancient pattern" (1988:137, 139). Furthermore, this basic social unit, which we posit is the "house" and not just a "household," is still referred to by some Maya peoples by a native term that means "house" (e.g., Vogt [1969:127] for Tzotzil Maya; Wisdom [1940:248-249] for Chorti Maya).

Thus, the ethnographic information on the Indonesian house, as a unit of alliance and exchange, has the potential to elucidate our understandings of Maya social organization stretching back into the pre-Hispanic past. In particular, the embedded gender complementarity that, linked to these kinship ties, is part of a socioeconomic model of Eastern Indonesian alliance was an important component in conceptualizing and operationalizing Maya social relationships.

ALLIANCE BETWEEN HOUSES: THE INDONESIAN MODEL

In most Southeast Asian societies, the wife-provider houses are "male" to their "female" wife-receivers. A single house will be engaged in numerous alliances and so will have several "male" wife-providing houses and several "female" wife-receiving houses with whose members it will interact.

Susan McKinnon (1991:93) has demonstrated how the gender coding of alliance relationships can be explained according to an elegant model that is grounded in certain widely held principles. Her analysis of data from

the Tanimbar Islands of Eastern Indonesia indicates that each house is conceptually androgynous. A house is represented by male and female symbols, united on an altar dedicated to male and female ancestors, and is composed literally of male and female members.

Because each house has the same characteristics, they are equivalent. In order to establish a relationship, the houses must be differentiated from one another in the context of social interaction (McKinnon 1991:34, citing Louis Dumont). Gender is the mechanism for symbolically differentiating members of one's allied houses, forming both a contrast and a complementarity with them (Fox 1980a:13). The androgynous houses therefore act in ways that introduce a sexual dimorphism, transforming them into single-sex (male or female) entities for the purpose of establishing or maintaining a productive relationship. The relationship with a cross-sexed house re-creates the same gender-totalizing unity that each individual house ideally incorporates (McKinnon 1991:35, 95).

As a part of this process, the houses are differentiated from one another by the assignment of opposing genders to the objects used in the ritual exchange transactions between them (Weiner 1992:10). These obligatory prestations are outward signs of the relationship between the houses (Neecham 1980:37), the exchange of "male" goods for "female" goods signifying both the complementarity of the two allied houses as well as the larger gender unity created by the relationship. Once such a relationship has been established by a marriage, it is continued for many years, even generations, by the on-going exchange of male and female goods on numerous occasions outside of marriage, especially at life-crisis rites (McKinnon 1991:112).

In Eastern Indonesia the male wife-providers usually give female objects to their female wife-receivers, who in turn offer male objects. This inversion between the gender of the house and the gender of the goods it is obligated to exchange with its allies has been explained by McKinnon (1991:165) as a product of the conceptual operations inherent in her model. In providing a sister or daughter to their wife-receivers, the androgynous wife-providing house "exteriorizes" its feminine aspect, remaining essentially "masculine." It further exteriorizes its femininity by proffering female goods along with the bride. This out-movement of "femininity" is how the house splits off one of its genders, transforming itself from a totality to a single-sexed entity.

By the same process, and as a necessary part of it, the wife-receivers, in receiving the woman, are endowed with her femininity. From the point

of view of the wife-providers, the wife-receivers are seen as a female offshoot of their house, like a sister or daughter. Becoming essentially female, the wife-receivers exteriorize their masculine aspect in the male objects they give to the wife-providers (Figure 1).

The actual items that are assigned reciprocal genders for the purposes of these highly ritualized exchanges vary from culture to culture. In some instances, gender is assigned on the basis of who typically makes the item or, in the case of adornments and costume, wears the item. Cloth, for example, is often considered "female" in contrast to "male" objects made of metal. Women are associated with textiles because they weave them, while

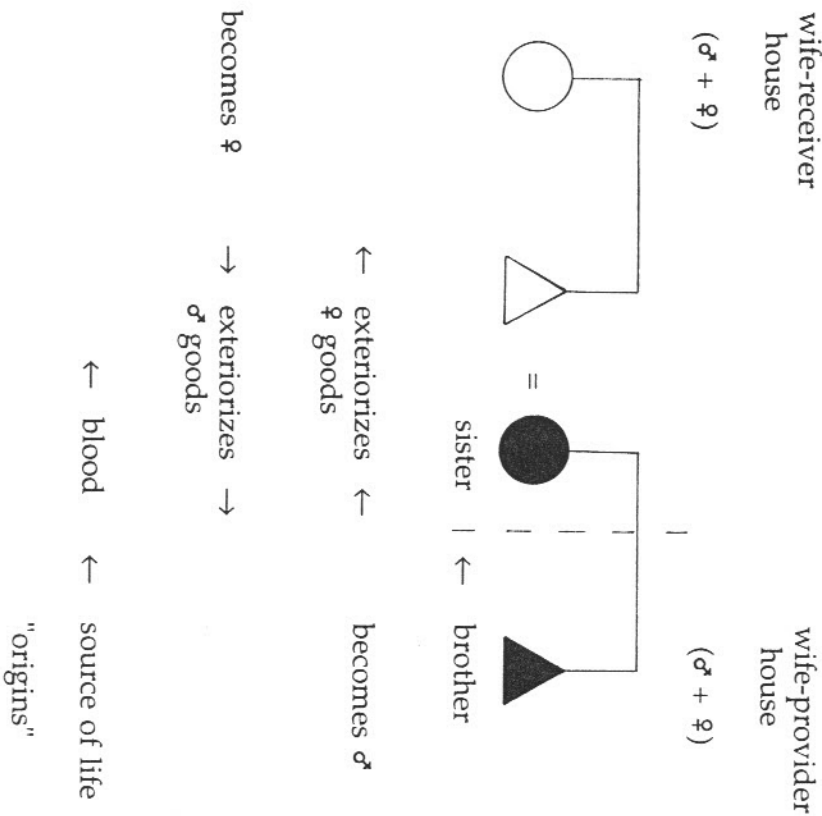


Figure 1. Tanimbar model proposed by McKinnon. The split between brother and sister precipitates the fracture of androgynous houses into single-sexed entities.

the metal items are used by males (Adams 1980: 220). But there are other reasons for assigning gender. Cloth is also female because, like the woman of a house who leave it upon marriage, it is an impermanent good. Metal, on the other hand, may be cast as male because it is more enduring, like the men who remain with a patrilineally organized house (Adams 1980: 220; Hoskins 1989: 166; McKinnon 1991: 177–178; see Weiner 1992: 59). Still other goods are assigned gender for reasons that are more abstract or historical (e.g., Valeri 1980: 189) and have to do with the perception that they constitute opposed categories (Fox 1971: 230).

THE ASSIGNMENT OF GENDER TO HOUSES

It is usual in Indonesia for wife-providers to be male and wife-receivers to be female. This gender assignment is also predicated on a sociocosmic principle, explicated in mythology and cosmology, that underlies the alliance ideology. In juxtaposing a gender opposition for the two allied houses, the model is itself based on a particular cross-sexed relationship, whose two members then represent the two cross-sexed houses.

In Island Southeast Asia, the relationship that is given emphasis in sociological and cosmological contexts is the brother-sister tie (Errington 1989: 237, 243–244). There is a widely shared belief that the cosmos was initially characterized by an undifferentiated primordial that was shattered, resulting in the sequencing of differentiations that constitute the cosmogony. This primordial unity was represented by a brother-sister pair, and it is this unity that continues to lie at the "heart of all kinship relations" (McKinnon 1991: 111; see Errington 1987, 1989, 1990; Fox 1980a: 12–13).

The essential tie between these cross-sexed siblings was epitomized by the "blood" that they shared. People today who are of the same house are also of the same blood, so the house replicates the primordial cosmic unity. As in the past, however, sisters must still be separated from their brothers. The unity of the house is thus continually fractured, its resulting parts forming a gender opposition.

This sociocosmological principle explains the gendering of houses in alliance relationships. The wife-providers represent the "brother" half of this dyad and take on his male gender. Their sisters and daughters go to the wife-receivers, carrying with them the "blood" of their natal house, and thereby bestow upon that house their female gender (McKinnon 1991: 111). The wife-receivers are both literally and figuratively endowed with the women's "blood," which provides them with life in the form of future progeny. The brother-sister tie is one of several possible cross-sexed relation-

ships that could be used to indicate the gender of the allied houses. Indonesian scholars recognize that other societies focusing, for example, on the husband-wife pairing, would reverse the gender assignments of the houses (McKinnon 1991: 111 n). Logically, the wife in this instance would represent her natal house, endowing it with her female gender, and her husband would represent the wife-receivers, rendering them masculine (Valeri 1980: 185).

THE SOURCE OF HIERARCHY

The superior/inferior relationship of wife-providers/wife-receivers is well known in the literature of Southeast Asia (especially following Leach 1965). However, the superiority of the wife-providers, so typical of Indonesia, is not inherent to their male gender (cf. Boon 1990: 222). Instead, hierarchy is predicated on other factors.

Wife-providers in Eastern Indonesia are superior because of what they possess and provide to their wife-receivers, namely, life itself (e.g., Barnes 1980: 79; Clamagirand 1980: 144; Erb 1987: 118; Fox 1980b: 116). Life-force is epitomized as "blood," and blood flows through females as mothers (Fox 1980a: 12). The wife-providers, source of those mothers, are therefore the "source of life," and "it is the relative value accorded to the source of life and its issue that differentiates houses" (McKinnon 1991: 32). As Sherman (1987: 868) noted, this is a specific example of a more general pattern described by Leach (1971a: 25) of an "*uncontrolled mystical influence* [that] denotes a relation of alliance" extending from the wife-providing house to the wife-receiving house members, through the women who entered the latter house. This asymmetry is apparent in the contrast between the types of influence exerted over persons by members of their own house and their wife-provider houses. The wife-providing house has control over the well-being of persons who share in its "blood" or physical substance (Sherman and Sherman 1990: 95). The mother's brother, as the quintessential wife-provider, thus has the power to cure his sister's children when they become ill. By the same logic, he can curse his sister's children if they fail to show respect, for he controls their life functions (e.g., Barnes 1980: 79–80; Erb 1987: 118).

In contrast, a house exerts jurat control over its own members and is concerned with shaping them into social beings. This difference between types of influence is summarized for the Island of Roti as follows:

From his father, a person derives his enduring social person embodied in his genealogical name and represented by his bones, which survive the de-

cay of his flesh; from his mother, a person derives his flesh and blood, and he is dependent on his maternal relations for the rituals that sustain his life. (Fox 1980b: 119)

As the "source of life," the wife-providers are associated with "origins" (Fox 1980b: 117). They are identified with "the original totality, the prior unity" (McKinnon 1991: 36) of the cosmos. For example, on Roti the phrase meaning "mother's brother of origin" refers to all the wife-providers. The notion of origin is also the basis for botanic metaphors used to refer to kin relationships. The term for mother's brother means "trunk" or "stem," and his sister's child is the "plant," the offshoot of that stem (Fox 1971: 221; also McKinnon 1991: 111).

As this botanic metaphor indicates, another source of hierarchy in the alliance relationship derives from the fact that the wife-providers encompass the exteriorized females that issue from their house and their progeny, all of whom share in the blood of the wife-providing, or mother-providing, house. By encompassing its issue, the wife-provider house is necessarily of higher value (McKinnon 1991: 111).

UNITY AND DIFFERENTIATION

To form relationships with other units, the androgynous house reconceptualizes itself as either male or female and then engages in subsequent gender-totalizing actions. Thus there is a constant alternation between these two extremes: unity-differentiation-unity. This dialectic is a key process in sociocosmic classification in Indonesia (McKinnon 1991).

This alternation also explains the importance of the brother-sister pair and the motivation behind marriage alliance. The initial primordial unity was exemplified by "an ancestral brother-sister pair whose sexual relationship, or lack of it, and their eventual parting, is equivalent to the original fracture of unity that brings about the world's events and begins human history" (Errington 1990: 51). This original unity is replicated in the relationships of all brothers and sisters, differentiated beings who, nevertheless, "as zero-degree siblings, are *abready* one" (Errington 1987: 429).

A corollary to this belief is the implicit or explicit notion that although the original brother-sister pair was separated, there is the promise of their reunion in the future. This promise is fulfilled by their descendants as their surrogates, a female descendant of one marrying the male descendant of the other. Just as every brother-sister pair represents the original totality fated for separation, so every husband-wife pair exemplifies their reunification. It is a common practice in Southeast Asia for spouses to address

one another as brother and sister (Gordon 1980:53), the spouse being a ritual substitute for the sibling (Errington 1988:237).

While unity and fracture form a dialectic, different societies may emphasize one over the other in cosmology, myth, and ritual, as well as social practice. Shelly Errington (1990:54) has demonstrated that within Island Southeast Asia, some societies "are preoccupied with unity" and associate fracture or disunity with failure and misfortune. Eastern Indonesian peoples, however, do the reverse—they "represent themselves as irremediably fractured into pairs" (1990:55). This extreme is exemplified by the gender coding of wife-provider/wife-receiver pairings and their exchanges of complementary goods. The emphasis on the fracturing of the primordial brother-sister unity should also explain the focus on the movement of the woman away from her natal house as the act that initiates the gender differentiation of allied houses. This "exteriorizing" of the female aspect from the wife-providers structures the gender assignments to the two houses.

All the symbolic representations incorporating gender coding associated with marriage alliance in Eastern Indonesia are therefore explained in terms of a single model predicated on key cosmological concepts and processes. This same synthesizing model can be applied to the Maya data to reveal how they, too, used gender to organize their equivalent social practices.

The Gendering of Maya Alliance Relationships

Available information for alliance and exchange among the ancient Maya, though fragmentary and scattered among the different Maya peoples, indicates that gender ideology may have been used in the same way as in Eastern Indonesia to motivate and conceptualize social relationships, according to very similar structural principles. There is an essential difference, which is itself inherent in the Indonesian model. Unlike Eastern Indonesian societies, the Maya emphasized unity over difference (keeping in mind that both are the endpoints of a dialectical process and that each requires the other to have any meaning).

This contrast with our Old World example is best revealed in Maya cosmology. Surviving cosmological narratives dating to the early colonial period, such as the Quiche Maya *Popol Vuh* (see Tedlock 1985), relate that the primordium was characterized not by an original unity but by a pre-existing separation into two parts. Cosmic history proceeded as a series of halting steps to combine these dichotomous segments correctly in or-

der to create a unity that was productive both biologically and socially. It was initially achieved in the union of a man and the woman who left her natal house to join his. The explicit motivation for this union was the engendering of children, namely, the Hero Twins who set about creating cosmic order.

In emphasizing unity over fracture, this text downplays the brother-sister relationship (although it is not absent) to highlight the husband-wife, or better stated, father-mother union. Applying this principle to Maya society, according to the model developed for Southeast Asia, the emphasis on husband-wife unity rather than brother-sister separation should reverse the gender assignments of the allied houses. In the wife-provider/wife-receiver relationship that is implicit in this Maya father-mother pairing, the wife-provider should be represented by the wife or mother who comes to the marriage. Wife-providers should be externally female, while the wife-receivers, represented by the husband, would be male. The available data on Maya marriage alliance shows this is precisely what occurred.

The inherent character of the wife-providers is unchanged, and Maya concepts in this regard are remarkably similar to those of Indonesia. Wife-providers are still superior because they are the "source of life." As in Indonesia, this concept is represented by the "blood" of the wife-providers that flows to their receiving houses through women. The female protagonist of the *Popol Vuh*, who left her own house to effect the union of husband-wife, eponymously incarnated blood. She was literally named "Blood," and her father's name "Blood Gatherer," indicates that this characteristic was inherited from her father, the head of her house (Tedlock 1985:114), who was the wife-provider. In Yucatec Maya, *ts'ak* as a noun refers to a curative liquid as well as a poisonous liquid; as a verb it can mean to cure or to kill. It is also the root of *ts'ak'ah*, referring to offspring through the mother's line (Barrera Vásquez 1980:871–873). Following from this concept is another parallel with Indonesia, that the mother's line of kinsmen are associated with the physical well-being of her children, both for good and for ill.

However, the change in gender assignment for the two houses does reverse the symbolic representations of the alliance. For example, the wife-providers are still the source or origin, but instead of being represented by the mother's brother, this notion is embodied by the woman herself, as mother. In Tzotzil Maya, *me'*, the word for "mother," "carries a causative element of meaning, which has to do with the origins of things" (Devereaux 1987:92). The word for mother in Yucatec Maya, *ma'*, has a similar extension of meanings (Barrera Vásquez 1980:545).

As in Indonesia, evidence for the gender coding of Maya alliance relationships is most apparent in the context of marriage exchanges. This evidence is available in documentary materials describing social interactions in the colonial period, as well as in ethnographic descriptions of contemporary Maya peoples. While these data are sparse and reveal the incorporation of Spanish customs, they nevertheless meet the expectations of this socioeconomic model.

In Maya marriage negotiations of the past as well as the present, the greater economic burden was typically placed on the wife-receiving groups. This pattern indicates the inferior standing of the wife-receivers (Leach 1971:102). For example, wife-receivers in early colonial Yucatán were obligated to provide a considerable period of bride-service (Landa 1982: 43; Roys et al. 1940:15), as well as specific goods. The latter consisted of clothing for the bride and groom, chocolate beverage, and precious stone beads used in necklaces. The taking of chocolate drink by the groom's father to the potential bride's father was the custom known as *tak ha'* in Yucatán (Barrera Vásquez 1980:759). *Ha'* is literally "water," but was also used to refer to chocolate beverage (e.g., *ah haan'*; see 1980:165). The payment of stone beads was part of the formal petition for the bride (*taa*, 1980:848) and was a gift for the bride (*ximilá'*, 1980:944). Landa (1982:43) mentioned the bride-price (which was *mu'jinnu'*; Barrera Vásquez 1980:533) without stating what it was, and noted that the groom's mother made clothing for the bridal couple.

It is possible to associate these items with a specific gender. Cloth was a quintessential female good in the Mesoamerican culture area (McCafferty and McCafferty 1991). As for chocolate, a red liquid, it is iconically linked to blood (Sahagún 1969:256), the life-giving fluid that flows through females. It is more difficult to assign a gender to the precious stone beads, but we suspect that it is not the beads themselves that are important in this context, but the fact that they are part of a necklace, probably a female adornment. This supposition is supported by the fact that in modern Yucatán, the necklace worn by women (now in the form of gold chains) constitutes the most important item of the bride-price, a custom that retains its pre-Hispanic name (*mu'jinnu'*) (Redfield and Villa Rojas 1962:193). A Tzotzil Maya groom in Zinacantan is also expected to provide his bride with a necklace as well as a ring (Collier 1968:158).

While there was a reciprocal obligation for the bride's father to provide a dowry (*mek'*) to the wife-receivers, in sixteenth-century Yucatán it was paid in cacao beans (Barrera Vásquez 1980:518). Cacao beans were

used as currency well into the colonial period (Thompson 1966), so it is uncertain whether this "money" payment replaced an earlier type of valuable. The bride's family was also responsible for the wedding feast, and a wife was obligated to provide food for her husband as a "sign" of their married state (Landa 1982:43). Similarly, the modern Tzotzil Maya of Zinacantan conduct a long courtship during which the prospective bride must feed her fiancé cooked food in return for the raw food he brings her family (Collier 1968:158). Thus, the wife-providers did offer specific valuables—prepared food—to the wife-receivers as part of their exchange obligations, both as part of and long after the marriage rites.

More information on colonial period marriage exchanges comes from the central Chol-speaking Maya, a people of the southern lowlands area where earlier Maya rulers had erected monuments with hieroglyphic texts. Documentary evidence records that a simple exchange was customary: a man gave his new wife skirts, a gender-identifying part of costume (Joyce 1990), while she in turn gave him his stool (Thompson 1938:602). Among these same Chol speakers, stools were placed over the graves of men exclusively (1938:597). The gender association of the stool continues among some modern Maya groups, most explicitly in the practice whereby men customarily sit on stools, while women sit on the ground (Gossen 1972:141). Thus the stool or seat may be assigned a male gender in terms of these uses.

In sum, among these items of bride-price and dowry, we see the wife-providers giving the woman herself, who carried the "blood," the life-giving liquid. In addition, the wife-providers offered such things as cooked food (another life-sustaining substance), the man's stool, and cacao beans. As for the wife-receivers, they provided the labor of the groom as well as items actually commonly used as standards of exchange—cacao (but in the form of a beverage), cloth, and precious stones—all of which may be gendered as female in these exchange transactions.

As valuable as these data are, they refer to exchanges between allied houses only in the context of marriage. Because bride-price was paramount in these negotiations, it receives more attention than the reciprocal and complementary goods that should have been exchanged in the other direction. The Southeast Asian ethnographic data indicate that prestations of complementary goods continue long past the marriage itself and occur at many other occasions, especially ritual and life-crisis events.

Fortunately, pre-Hispanic Maya archaeological materials reveal additional items that the wife-receivers may have obtained from their wife-providers at occasions other than marriage. This information is derived

from depictions preserved on stone monuments erected during the Late Classic period in the southern Maya lowlands. Some monuments at political centers in the western Maya area—such as Palenque, Yaxchilan, and Piedras Negras—portray women in the act of proffering items to men. We suggest that these women may do so as representatives of the wife-providing house into which they were born, because they are frequently started in accompanying hieroglyphic texts to be the wives or mothers of the men depicted. Some of the items held out by the women should therefore be part of the ritual exchange obligations owed by the wife-provider to the wife-receiver, represented by the husband or son.

The men shown in these artworks were either paramounts of a major political center or other important nobles, those with the authority and means to erect stone monuments. Thus we are not looking at evidence for average individuals; on the contrary, these data are exclusive to persons of very high status. Nevertheless, the scenes on these monuments can be considered exemplary of a conceptual system whose organizing principles structured the larger society. We do not interpret these monuments as mere records of singular events idiosyncratic to the moment and individuals portrayed, but as icons that manifest the socioeconomic classification.

According to the model that has been presented, the objects held out by the women were construed as male in opposition to the female goods given by the wife-receivers. Among the identifiable objects that women give to men are shields and eccentric blades. A striking example is the Palace Tablet from Palenque, which depicts a paramount in the act of receiving from his mother a shield paired with an eccentric flint (Robertson 1985:19, Figure 277). As Joyce (1990) has demonstrated, these objects as icons are dramatically gendered male in Maya art. They also likely disappeared from the cultural inventory of exchange goods following the Spanish conquest.

Furthermore, the male-gendered seat is also present in these pre-Hispanic data, not in the imagery so much as in the use of certain titles by which royal persons themselves became objectified. As in hierarchical societies of Southeast Asia, these persons literally *are* the sacred regalia (Erington 1989:240). Instead of being actual objects in the exchange, these goods are shown to coincide symbolically with the women themselves.

There are instances where a title given to the mother of the paramount reveals that she herself represented the man's seat, in the same way that the legendary first woman to represent all subsequent wives and mothers was literally named "Blood." For example, the mother of a Late Classic ruler of Tikal has a title string that includes the pictographs reading "jaguar

seat," while the ruler's father's name includes a shield (Jones 1977:41–42), an item that, as noted above, has male associations.

It was the wife-providers who were symbolically "female" and ritually superior to their wife-receivers; both meanings are embedded in the word *ib'han*. The hieroglyphic text on a monument from Naranjo (Stela 23, Schele and Freidel 1990:191) provides a rare explicit confirmation of this extended meaning of the *ib'han* relationship. The protagonist, the paramount of Naranjo, refers to a man of the city of Dos Pilas as his *ib'han*. In an embedded phrase he explains that his own wife was a woman of Dos Pilas. (His mother was also apparently from the ruling house of Dos Pilas.) Thus, Dos Pilas was the "female" wife-provider to the ruler of Naranjo, and a particular personage from that city is referred to as the Naranjo paramount's "elder sister."

Here is an example of a man calling another man by a female kin term, just as occurs today in Southeast Asia in connection with wife-provider/wife-receiver relationships. *ib'han* is a kin term that encodes a cross-sexed relationship, because it is used by a male ego to refer to his sister, but more importantly, it also encodes age superiority. In Maya kinship terminology, relative age is a more important criterion than gender for classifying people as social persons (Danziger 1991).

By metaphoric extension, Dos Pilas was the "source of life" for the Naranjo paramount and his ruling house. In this instance, the ritual superiority attached to the wife-providers was also more literally a political superiority. At this time, Dos Pilas was a powerful center, and Naranjo was struggling to regain its former glory (Culbert 1988:146–147). By claiming wife-receiver status to the sacred center of Dos Pilas, Naranjo became its offshoot or extension, sharing in its access to authority.

The specific use of a sibling term for the female half of the marital alliance indicates that for the Maya, as in Southeast Asia, the socioeconomic concept underlying the alliance relationship is the reunion of brother and sister as husband and wife. This principle survived into traditional Tzotzil Maya weddings of Zinacantan, in which the bride and groom addressed each other as "elder brother" and "younger sister" (Laughlin 1975:63, 321).

All these lines of evidence suggest that among the ancient Maya, the wife-providers, the source of blood and life, were gendered female with respect to wife-receiving houses. The cosmological principle structuring this gender complementarity was the union of husband and wife, the cross-sexed relationship that motivated the assignment of male and female genders to the wife-receiver and wife-provider houses, respectively. In turn, the obligatory exchange transactions consisted of the prestation or "exte-

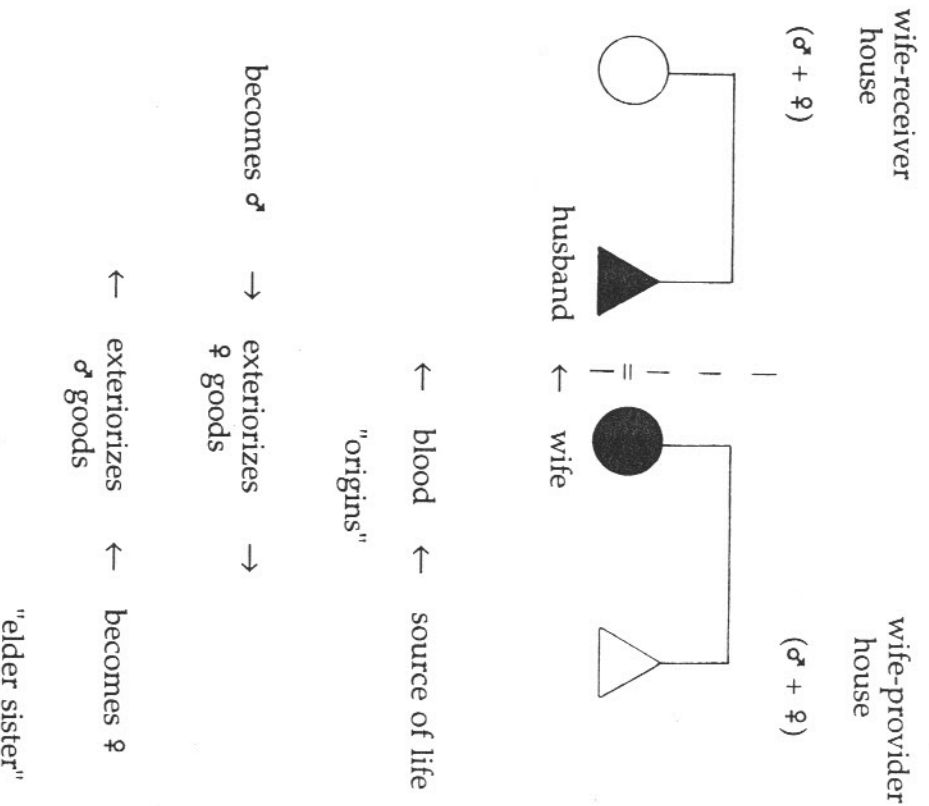


Figure 2. Maya model using Indonesian analogy: The reunion of husband and wife configures the gender assignment of the allied houses.

riorizing" of male goods by wife-providers in return for female goods from wife-receivers (Figure 2).

Summary and Implications for Maya Studies

Information compiled from ethnohistoric, ethnographic, and archaeological sources reveals how gender ideology facilitated social relationships among the ancient Maya. These data are organized into a coherent model,

one that is derived from similar Southeast Asian societies but that also contains within itself the explanation of why Maya socioeconomic classification differed in essential respects from its Asian counterpart.

Marriage was the critical bond that established relationships among family groups, organized as "houses." The allied houses were construed as male and female, a gender code that simultaneously indicates the complementarity of the relationship as well as its asymmetry and hierarchy. The gender assignments for the Maya are the reverse of those typical of Southeast Asia. The Maya wife-provider house was gendered female, and offered goods to its allied houses that were considered masculine in opposition to the feminine items that composed the bride-price owed by the male wife-receiver houses. As in Indonesia, houses were actually a gender totality, androgynous units that stood as "male" to some allied houses and "female" to others. The gender of the house was fluid, expressed through performance in particular relationships.

The implications of this model for understanding ancient Maya civilization are significant. Southeast Asia is the same part of the world from which Maya scholars have recently been borrowing political models, such as galactic polity, segmentary state, and theater state (e.g., Ball and Taschek 1991; Demarest 1992; Houston 1993). But the sociological concepts that would link "people" (social groups) to these various forms of "polity" (political units) have been missing in Maya studies. We have demonstrated the applicability of Southeast Asian types of social organization to the Maya. It is also necessary to indicate where the Maya are unlike their Asian counterparts when using these borrowed models. As our research has shown, there are crucial differences in the basic principles that structure the socioeconomic classifications of Mayan and Eastern Indonesian peoples.

The identification of the "house" as the main social unit for the Maya, and the emphasis on examining social organization in terms of asymmetric relationships between houses are initial steps in this process. Evidence indicates that the paramount, at the top of the political organization, came from a ruling house organized according to the same socioeconomic principles that structured and interrelated all houses. Social actions taking place at the elite level of society, preserved in stone monuments, are homologous to those at the non-elite level.

The Southeast Asian data reveal that social and political organization are predicated on the same principles and processes, so that the ritual hierarchy of wife-providers and wife-receivers is mirrored in the expression of political authority. According to Edmund Leach (1971:74; see also 1965:136):

The status relations between wife givers and wife receivers must conform to the status relations implicit in other (non-kinship) institutions: e.g., when wife givers are socially superior to wife receivers, one can predict that the political and territorial rights of wife givers will be superior to those of wife receivers, etc.—and *vice versa*. In other words, . . . it is part of the political structure.

Among the Maya, the ritually superior wife-providers received as bride-price the same items that Maya vassals paid as tribute to their politically superior overlords. The payment made by the bride's father to the groom's father in early-colonial Yucatán was known as *muk'* (Barrera Vásquez 1980:318). It is the root of a series of words referring to governance; for example, *mek'antab* meant to govern a people or a town. The Yucatec Maya bride-price, *mu'huul* (1980:333) shares its root in colonial Tzotzil Maya (Laughlin 1988:1:261) with the word *mu'nil*, which was the tribute paid by vassals to their overlord, a tribute paid in cloth. Thus there seems to be a pattern whereby the wife-provider was aligned with the ruler, and the bride-price paid by the wife-receivers to their ritual superiors was equated in the political realm with the tribute paid by subjects to their political superiors.

In the Classic period, the Maya paramount, who had ritual as well as political powers, was aligned with the superior wife-providers' side in the dyadic division of society. He was the "source of life," responsible for the physical well-being of his people, and receiving from them the economically costly consumer goods and labor that were his due.

Furthermore, the specific values attached to the complementary categories of male and female, which manifest the asymmetry of this socio-political model, should be found in other domains of Maya society, including related concepts of gender roles and gender identity. They more broadly exhibit the opposition of male and female "kinds of agency" or "modes of action" (Hoskins 1987). The implication from the Classic Maya data is that higher ranked paramounts were wife-providers to lesser lords and vassals, *and* that this position was in some way gendered female. The role and context of female kinds of agency in the diarchical construction of "power," as has been described for Southeast Asia (Cunningham 1965; Errington 1990:18; Francillon 1980:261), warrants further investigation of the connections between political and ritual authority, as well as those between political and social action, among the ancient Maya.

Beyond the specific suggestions we have made for the study of the ancient Maya, what implications does our study have for the archaeology of gender? By examining how gender is symbolically assigned to material

goods, we have shown that there is no simple association between specific items and gender that can be assumed cross-culturally. Instead, the gendering of objects is part of the complex negotiations through which social relations are formed in any particular society. At the same time, our analysis demonstrates that attempts to understand past social systems without addressing gender ideology and gender relations fail to deal with major arenas of social complexity.

Taking seriously the independence of gendering variables from the sex of their users will not provide a simple key to identifying gender in action, and, in fact, makes all arguments about gender and its material symbolism more complex and thus more realistic. In the absence of the kinds of linguistic, textual, and iconographic data that are available for the Maya, we would, nevertheless, suggest that there are particularly fruitful contexts for the possible understanding of gender ideology. These are contexts in which symbolically charged material goods—those that are assigned gender symbolism in our two examples—are used in stereotyped ways stemming from their social significance. Burials, shrines, and other archaeological deposits resulting from formal social action should be examined as sites where gender symbolism may have been used, and their symbolism given explicit form in social relations. Analyses of such socially charged arenas that do not examine how gender ideology and symbolism may be involved will always be inadequate.

Acknowledgments

The authors are greatly indebted to Professor Clark Cunningham and Amanda Grundén for their invaluable assistance with the gathering and interpreting of the Indonesian literature.

(composite bibliography at end of volume
not included here)