

8 Gender, space, people and power at Cerén, El Salvador

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Introduction

My interest in examining power relations via gender in archaeology began with a critique of traditional anthropological assumptions that all "power" was domination (Paynter and McGuire 1991). As was explained in the Introduction to this volume, traditional approaches tend to focus on formal institutions of power and authority as defining where power is located in any given society. This formulation of power confines the definition to domination and seriously circumscribes the possibilities for "who" can exercise it. These possibilities do not include anyone not directly associated with institutions of authority such as heads of state, governing bodies, or household rulers. Very often this perspective excludes women and other classes of people, such as the apparently poor and dispossessed, who have been historically subjugated within Western society (see Woodhouse-Beyer, Chapter 7 in this volume). As many have already pointed out, this is no coincidence (e.g. Engelstad 1991; Wylie 1992: 56–57, 61) but demonstrates the attention needed in disentangling Western social constructions of power relations from interpretations of the social constructions of power relations in prehistoric societies that may not have been the same (see Kent, Chapter 2 in this volume).

This Western perspective limits how power relations can be visualized and thus limits the "discovery" of other possible ways, beyond domination, in which power relations operate. For example, the perspective is limited in that it does not account for how cooperation happens in the absence of force or manipulation. Nor does the perspective account for various manifestations of resistance, or of the interplay between contesting interests (Miller and Tilley 1984; Paynter and McGuire 1991).

Asking questions regarding the existence of cooperation, resistance, and contesting interests provides more refined and realistic understandings of the possibilities of "how power works" at a variety of levels, such as that between states, between villages, or between lineage groups. But examination at the level of interpersonal interactions, among individuals seeking to further their own interests, can refine interpretations of the possible ways that power operates even further (see Cohen 1994; Sweely 1998) since it is individuals interacting with one

another that "operationalize" constructions of power (see Introduction to this volume). Since they are embedded in larger social institutions and ideologies, interpersonal relations in the traditional view of power have been seen only as affected by larger social forces and not as having any effect on them. The assumption that interpersonal interactions have no bearing on social conditions and the direction of social change is beginning to be challenged (Sweely 1998; in anthropology, Cohen 1994). Joyce (1996) submits that there are more opportunities for social regulations to be contested in progressively more private social spaces among closely related individuals than in highly visible social venues. This point encourages research for the purpose of assessing the possibility of individual adherence to or contestation of ideological institutions (in anthropology, see Cohen 1994; see also Strauss and Quinn 1994) and provides interesting insight into the lifestyles of "common" people.

For archaeological analysis, research on interpersonal relations requires study at the level of the household, and requires analysis of how societies draw distinctions among members and what attributes and social values mark and define those distinctions (Introduction to this volume; Bourdieu 1977; Moore 1986). Gender distinctions, when they are known to have existed as social distinctions, can be used in assessing power relations among the sexes of prehistoric societies. If two gender categories, or more (cf. Claassen 1992; Joyce and Claassen 1997; Moore 1994; see also Kent and Woodhouse-Beyer, Chapters 2 and 7 in this volume, respectively), are known or assumed to have existed, associations between the material expression of these categories can be heuristically employed in archaeological contexts to examine possible manifestations of cooperation, resistance, and contesting interests.

The primary objective of this chapter is to explore the implications that a set of gender categories, formulated from Maya iconography, has for the construction of power relations among men and women at the interpersonal level in the prehistoric community of Cerén, El Salvador.¹ This chapter begins with an introduction to the site of Cerén, El Salvador, and a description of the spatial and artifactual data used in this analysis. I then describe how the set of gender categories used to analyze the data was arrived at and used in the analysis of gender and power at the site. Next, I present the results of the analysis of gender-associated artifacts across the site and within specific spaces. Finally, I examine some implications of these results for power relations within the prehistoric community.

Cerén

The following discussion of the data from Cerén is based on the preliminary reports of the Cerén Research Project (Sheets and Brown 1996; Sheets and Kievit 1992; Sheets and McKee 1989, 1990; Sheets and Simmons 1993), unless otherwise specified. Cerén is located in the Zapotitán Valley of western El Salvador (Figure 8.1, inset). It was abandoned suddenly due to the eruption of Loma Caldera volcano, about AD 595, and now lies buried under 5 meters of volcanic

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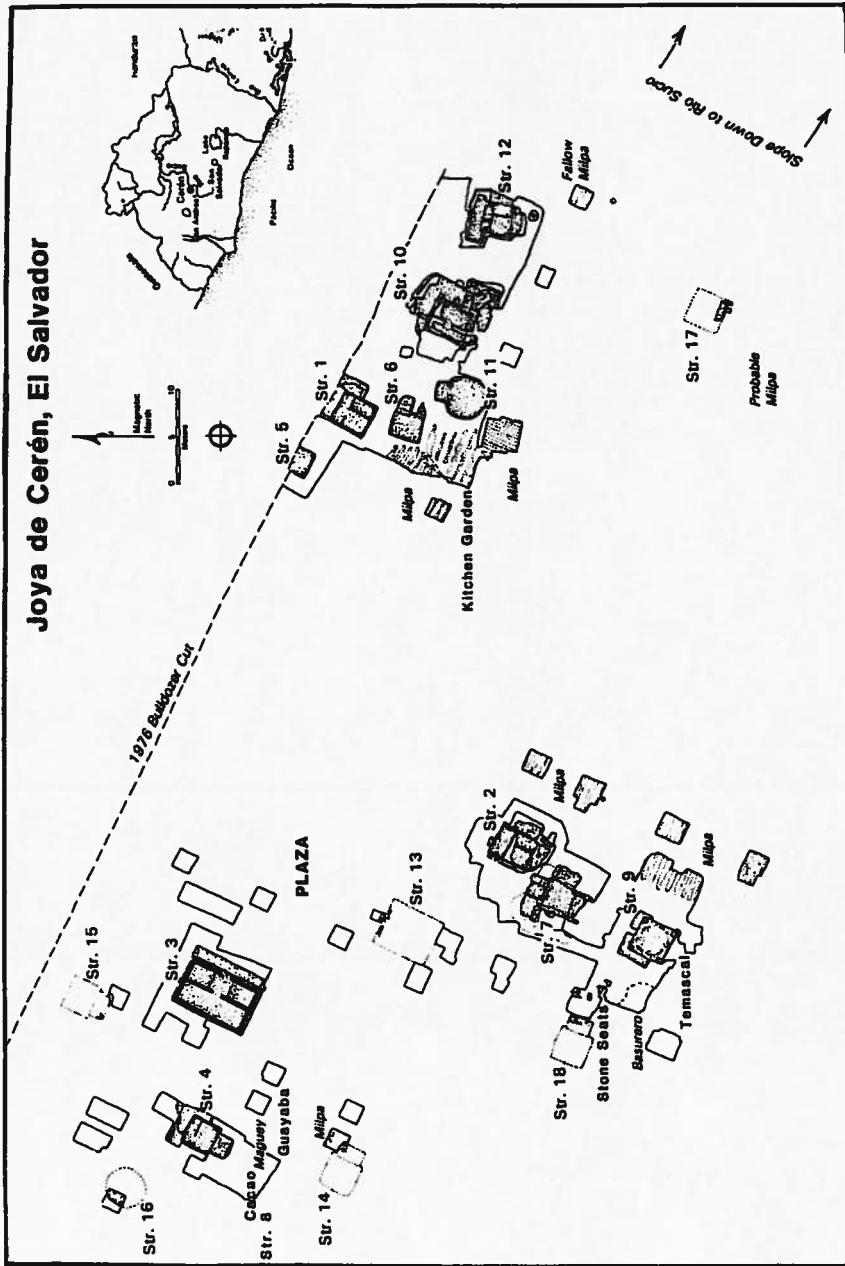


Figure 8.1 Excavated portions of Cerén, El Salvador, as of 1996 field-season

ash. The inhabitants seem to have barely escaped, leaving their possessions where they were stored or last used.

Cerén was a prehistoric village located on the Maya periphery. It appears to have been primarily a farming village, but there is evidence of some specialization within households, for either exchange within the village or for exchange at a regional market, probably located at the site of San Andres. It is believed that Cerén was part of a regional political hierarchy (Sheets 1992). In this hierarchy elites from the regional center of San Andres controlled trade and redistribution of important resources, as well as important religious and judicial enterprises (*ibid.*). It is not yet clear exactly what position the village held within this hierarchy.

Figure 8.1 shows the excavated portions of the site. Geophysical testing has produced evidence of an additional seventeen structures that await excavation (Conyers 1996). Given that three site boundaries have been established, the combined excavation area and geophysically discovered features probably represent one-half of the site (P. D. Sheets, personal communication).

The data I use consist of two categories, spaces and the objects within them. There are four architectural categories defined by function used in this analysis. One is the residential/living structure, indicated in Figure 8.1 by Structures 1 and 2. Another category is the storeroom. These are called bodegas, and are indicated in the figure by Structures 4, 6, and 7. Another category is that of the kitchen, indicated in the figure by Structures 11 and 16. These three categories of buildings, the residential/living structure, the storeroom, or bodega, and the kitchen are the defining features of the dwelling unit or house, within which the household existed. Structures 1, 6, and 11 comprise a single dwelling unit, referred to here as Dwelling 1, and they are detailed in Figure 8.2, along with Structure 5 (at right of figure) discussed below. Structure 2 and 7, a residential/living structure and a bodega, respectively, comprise what is referred to here as Dwelling 2, and for which a kitchen has yet to be excavated. The final dwelling compound, referred to here as Dwelling 3, is solely represented by Structure 4, a bodega.

Structures 3, 5, 9, 10, and 12 in Figure 8.1 are special buildings, the fourth

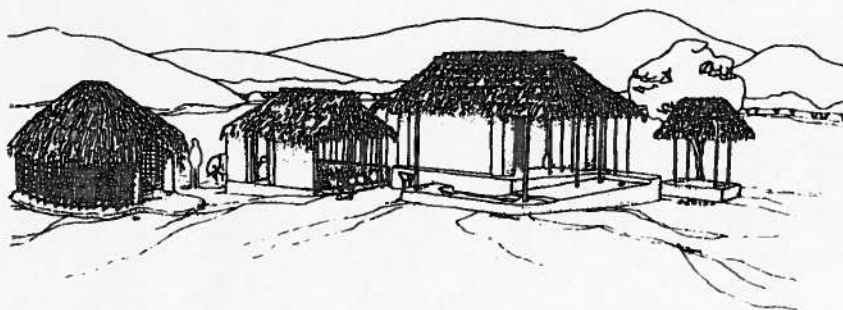


Figure 8.2 Artist's rendition of the types of structures that comprise the Dwelling 1 compound: Structure 1 is the residential/living structure, Structure 6 is the bodega, and Structure 11 is the kitchen. Structure 5, which is a stoneworking outbuilding, is included. By D. Tucker

architectural category. Structure 5 has no artifacts within it but is associated with a sparse scatter of lithic debris. It has been interpreted as a stoneworking outbuilding of Dwelling 1. Structure 3 has been interpreted as a communal building. It has very few artifacts, but large benches may have served the purpose of seating many people, and a large jar may have been used for dispensing a beverage to members of the group. Structure 9, a sweatbath, also lacks artifacts.

Structure 10, detailed in Figure 8.3, is what has been interpreted as the large-scale food serving structure for a religious association such as a *chinimit* or *cofradia*. In this structure, there were large quantities of stored foodstuffs, food preparation implements, large cooking vessels, and a hearth; 67 per cent of the vessels found here appear to have been used for food serving (Gerstle 1992). There was also a deer antler headdress that likely had a ritual function.

Structure 12, a plan view of which is shown in Figure 8.4, presents a bit of a problem. The structure has a highly unusual inventory of artifacts. Though the artifacts do not indicate a wealthy inhabitant, the building possesses complex architectural features, including a lattice window, the only window found at the site to date, and painted decoration on walls and columns. The most plausible function that it could have served is as a shaman's or diviner's establishment (Simmons 1994; S. E. Simmons, personal communication).

Structures 5, 10, and 12, along with the structures comprising the dwelling units, are the features I will use in my discussion of the gendered use of space

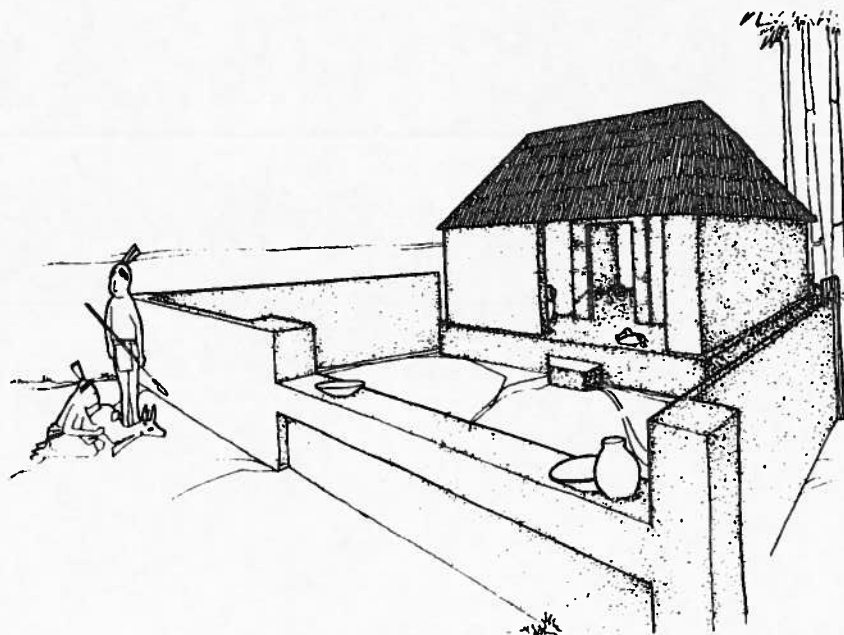


Figure 8.3 Artist's rendition of Structure 10, the food-serving religious association. By K. Kievet

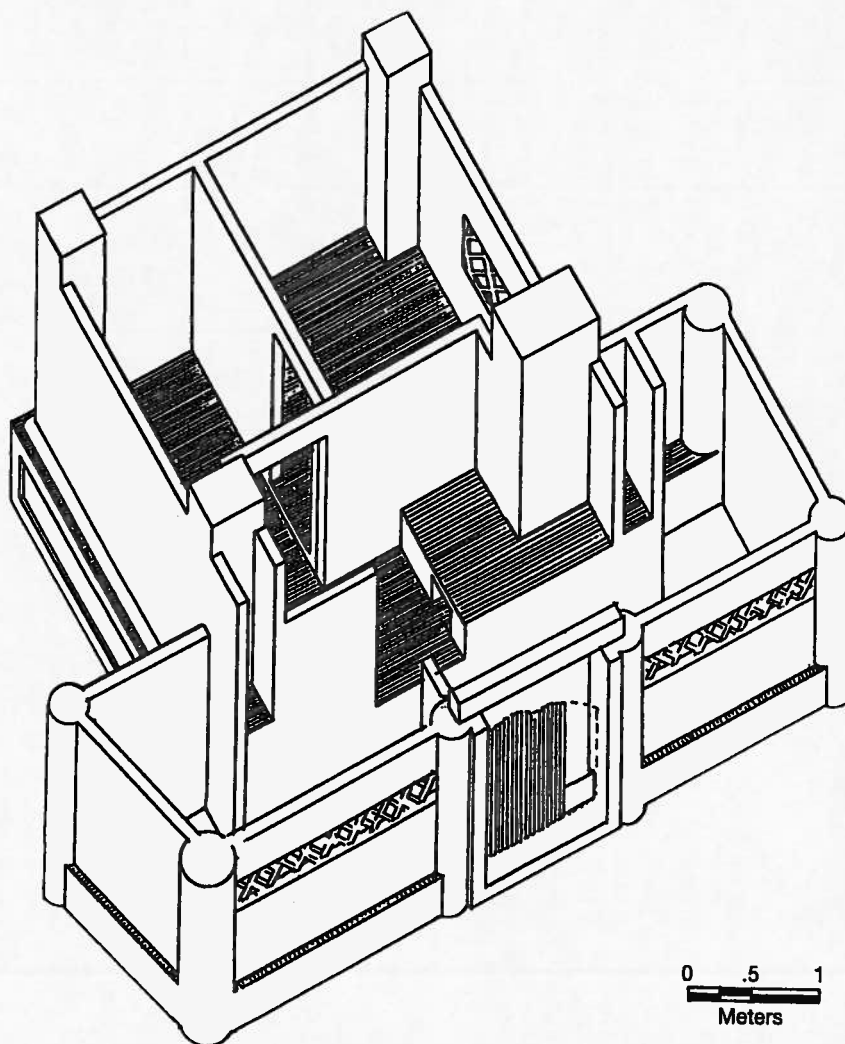


Figure 8.4 Plan view of Structure 12, "the shaman's house." By K. Kievet

and its relationship to power. The other special structures, Structure 3 and 9, are excluded from this study because of their relative lack of artifacts. Other structures located on the site map have yet to be fully excavated.

Gender-associated artifacts

Although the ethnicity of the ancient villagers of Cerén is uncertain, the site is located within the southern boundary of the Maya region. For this analysis I draw upon a known gender division of labor from the Maya Classic Period to trace

gender across the excavated areas of the site. A number of gender-associated artifacts were determined using images of the sexual division of labor represented in both elite- and non-elite-associated Classic Maya images of humans involved in productive activities. There are many examples of figurines and painted images which consistently show Maya men and women involved in exclusively different tasks. Maya women are shown involved in weaving, food preparation and presentation, and carrying children or dogs (Joyce 1992, 1993). Maya men are consistently shown participating in ritual, hunting, and warfare (ibid.). It is interesting to note that Classic Period Maya men are not depicted either farming or flint knapping, two productive activities thought to be male associated based on ethnographic and ethnohistoric evidence, and which I assume for this study.

From these images and assumptions I derived a list of artifacts that could indicate the presence of women or men in the location in which the artifacts were found. Artifacts associated with Maya women would include cooking implements, such as mano and metate sets, ceramic pots used in food preparation, and implements used in textile production, such as weaving tools, spinning tools, and sewing tools. Artifacts associated with Maya men include hunting implements, such as projectile points, stone working tools and debris, and implements used for farming such as axes or celts, and digging sticks.

In drawing upon these gender-associated artifact categories, it is my intention to use them in a heuristic manner. Although the sexual division of labor represented in Classic Period imagery does appear to be virtually exclusive (ibid., for exceptions), in practice gender roles may not have been so rigidly defined. Using these gender associations as a lens to view the Cerén data may cause important variability to be obscured. The method can be used, though, to provide an entry point into examining possible power relations at the site and in the development of future lines of inquiry.

Once the list of gender-associated artifacts was compiled, artifacts found at the site were examined for gender association and then tallied by structure and across the excavated portions of the site as a whole. Male-associated artifacts found included celts, hammerstones, and lithic debris. Female-associated items found at Cerén included mano and metate sets, spindle whorls, needles and awls.

There were three artifact categories found at the site that proved to be problematic and that are utilized in this analysis differently than the other artifact categories. Lithic debris counts, though low in concentration, were high enough to obscure comparison to other artifact counts, so these were not included in the analysis of gender-associated artifact distributions. The presence and absence of this category of artifact by structure will be accounted for in the interpretation.

Ceramic pots, like lithic debris, were also not considered in the distribution, due to the large number, which would obscure comparison to the other artifact counts. Unlike lithic debris, the presence and absence of pots by structure will not be included in this interpretation, since pots were found virtually everywhere, and it is likely that they are not a gender-exclusive artifact category.

Similarly, digging stick weights, in the form of perforated stones, were problematic. As farming implements they could possibly be male associated. But since,



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ethnohistorically, Maya women were specifically reported to have worked in gardens (Joyce 1992), these items may not be gender-specific. Because of this, perforated stones were not included in the distributions, but these items will be discussed, albeit briefly.

Results

Figure 8.5 shows the distribution of raw counts of gender-associated artifacts by pooled, functionally equivalent structures.² Artifact counts from three bodegas, two residences, and one kitchen are represented here. Figure 8.5 also shows the distribution in Structures 10 and 12 and across the site as a whole. Unshaded bars represent female-associated artifacts, and shaded bars represent male-associated artifacts. As can be seen, there are generally more female-associated artifacts than male in all architectural classes and across the site. All of the gender-associated artifacts in Structure 12 are female associated. Structure 5, though not shown in Figure 8.5, would be considered an exclusively male-associated structure because of the lithic debris associated with stone tool manufacture.

Figure 8.6 shows the distribution of percentages of gender-associated artifacts. The structure type that shows the least amount of difference in gender-associated artifacts is the bodega, or storehouse. The most amount of difference, aside from Structure 12, and Structure 5 (not shown), is the kitchen.

The distribution of gender-associated artifacts at the site is interesting in terms of a notable absence of certain artifact types. Of particular interest is that no

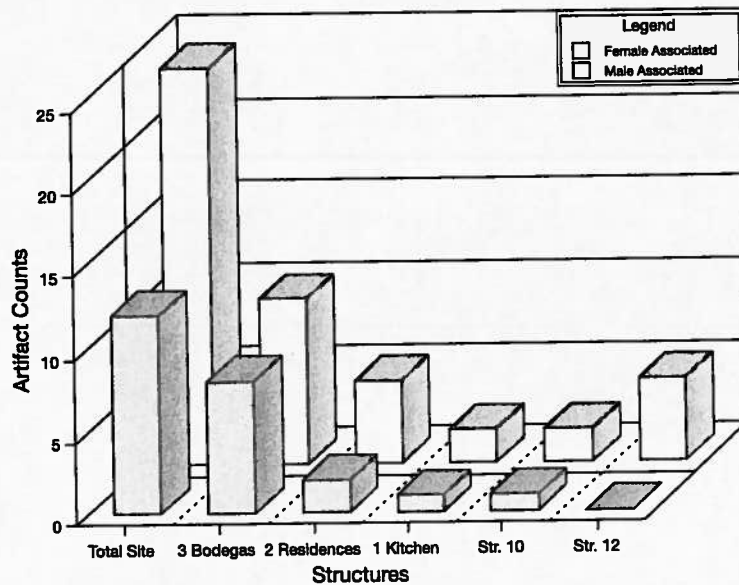


Figure 8.5 Distribution of raw counts of gender-associated artifacts by pooled, functionally equivalent structures

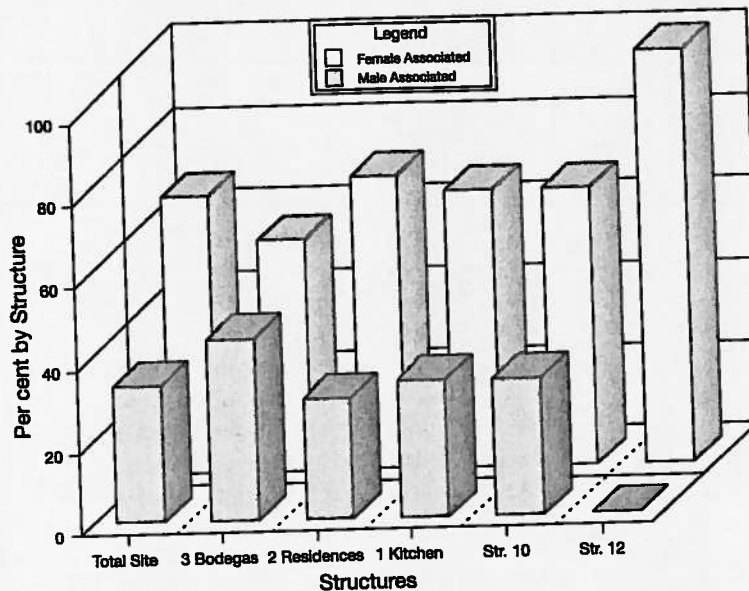


Figure 8.6 Distribution of percentages of gender-associated artifacts by pooled, functionally equivalent structures

projectile points, whole or fragmented, were found anywhere in these excavated areas. Projectile points may have been so valuable that they were taken at the time the inhabitants made their escape. But, since no fragments were found, these items may not have been produced, stored, or discarded in any of the areas excavated thus far. As for the female-associated artifact categories, although spinning tools were discovered, there were no weaving tools found.

Interpretation

The striking differences in raw counts are not statistically significant. That is, no statistically significant differences were found in the use of space by men and women either across the site, using a chi-square, or in pooled functionally equivalent areas, using a small sample binomial. The statistical tests used are weak due to generally low artifact counts. The chi-square test is also weak, because the expected values may not reflect "real" shared spaces. Equally shared productive space may not display equal numbers of gender-associated artifacts, since numbers of artifacts per productive activity would primarily be activity dependent rather than gender dependent.

If we accept the results, the statistical tests combined with examination of raw counts indicate that, although gender segregation appears to parallel functional segregation, there may also have been a low level of gender integration. That is, except for Structures 5 and 12, the differentiated productive spaces do not appear to be gender exclusive.

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Greater clarification of this is possible when referring back to the artifacts. A majority of the male-associated artifacts are in the form of hammerstones, probably used for ground stone tool manufacture (P. D. Sheets, personal communication). Most of these are found in the bodega of Dwelling 1. Two other hammerstones were located in Structure 2, the residential/living quarters of Dwelling 2. However, no evidence for their use has been found in the area, so these may have been in storage as well.

The only other male-associated artifact category represented, celts, may also have been in storage. Of the three celts found, two were in food preparation contexts, one in a kitchen and the other in Structure 10, the food-serving structure. Males may have been using them in these spaces, but there is no evidence of wood-cutting activities. The firewood associated with these structures indicates breakage as the method of preparation for use (P. D. Sheets, personal communication). The last celt was found in a bodega, another storage context. These celts may have been used by males and been stored by them in these contexts, or they may have been used by females and been stored by them. Either way, the fact that they were found in these structures, with female-associated artifacts, may indicate that gender roles and, specifically, the gender division of labor may not have been as rigidly defined as the categories used in this analysis. These object locations seem to indicate a pattern in which gender integration of productive activities is in the form of shared storage space. I would consider this quite a low level of integration for productive activities.

Kent (1994; see also Kent, this volume) has pointed out, through intensive cross-cultural comparison in terms of segregation of space, that, while general functional segregation tends to increase with sociopolitical complexity, i.e. increasing segmentation and hierarchy, gender segregation does not. Rather, gender segregation exists in all but the least complex societies. She concludes that gender-specific areas are influenced by variables other than that of sociopolitical complexity.

Varying characters of gender distinctions produce particular social conditions that affect interpersonal power relations in different ways. One variable of gender distinction is the differential attribution of symbolic value to each gender role, the productive activities associated with that role, and, hence, the spaces associated with those activities. Differentially valued activities and roles might affect the abilities of a gendered individual to control their activities, areas, and resources. This would result in different abilities of each gender to exercise power in economic as well as other areas of social life (Moore 1988; Strathern 1988). Economic power can be explored at Cerén generally. The household in Dwelling 3 appears to have been producing a surplus of maguey fiber and cacao (P. D. Sheets, personal communication). These surpluses could have been used either in exchanges among local households or in exchanges at the regional market. There are non-local objects found at the site that may have been obtained at a regional market like San Andres (Sheets 1995). While these products do not have explicit gender associations, other items do, and these give insight into gender-associated productive activities and the power that may have come with it.

In many structures at Cerén, there are small spindle whorls, which were probably used to spin fine cotton thread, a commodity for local and possibly nonlocal exchange. Thus far in the excavations, there have been eight whole spindle whorls discovered. However, no weaving implements were found. This is surprising, given the excellent preservation at Cerén. Ethnographically, battens, part of the backstrap loom, are made out of hard woods; if this was the case at ancient Cerén, they would not have been completely incinerated by fire at the time of the eruption (P. D. Sheets, personal communication). Weaving may have been taking place somewhere else in the village, or thread may have been exported to be woven elsewhere, or the lack of battens may indicate that these items may have been so valuable that they were taken when the inhabitants made their escape.

These options have important implications for the power of the women of Cerén. Ethnohistorically, weaving has been considered a very valuable skill. Women who learned to weave likely enjoyed the ability to exercise power resulting from their abilities and the economic value of the items they produced. There is not yet enough information to know if these women had direct control over the thread they produced or the textiles they may have produced, or if these were part of a household or lineage economy directed by a household or lineage head. If these products were exported, it would allow them a different position in the economy of textile production than if they were used internally. It would also matter significantly to their position in the economy if thread, as opposed to finished textiles, was being exported.

If weaving was being done within the village, but not within the houses, this could imply that women were gathering in work groups to weave. There is ethnohistoric evidence that Maya women did, in fact, gather together to weave (Joyce 1992: 67). If this were the case, it could have effects on information flow and access to knowledge, another primary variable in the ability to exercise power (Spain 1992). Spain (1992) and Strathern (1988) argue that possessing secret knowledge contributes to an individual's ability to exercise power. An individual choosing to guard or share knowledge can be associated with the assertion of individual will or the manipulation of situations in order to achieve goals. In other cases, disclosure of secret information could also reveal that power is not naturally innate in, or limited to, those holding secret information (Spain 1992; cf. Tefft 1980). Though access to knowledge can be difficult to address in most archaeological contexts, it can be addressed at Cerén.

There are two areas at the site that provide information about access to knowledge. First, within Dwelling 1 there were five complete, functioning metates. This household may have been supplying ground corn to Structure 10 (Sheets 1995; see Sweely 1998), which is located about 10 meters away. This is the building used for ritual food serving. Structure 10 contained only one metate, which probably would not have supplied sufficient ground corn for the volume of food this building appears to have been serving (P. D. Sheets, personal communication).

It is generally assumed that for each adult woman in a household, there is one set of grinding tools. It is unlikely that there were five adult women living in this house. If Structure 10 functioned as a *chinimit-* or *cofradia*-type structure, it is

reasonable that these women may have been either natal or affinal members of the extended family responsible for the food-serving association. They might have lived in the village or nearby but may have gathered here to grind corn for ritual occasions.

This house may have been a locus where women discussed or controlled knowledge about the community and its members, and it may have provided a context for particular individuals to assert their own wills or support the wills of others. Elsewhere (Sweely 1998) I examine the placement and orientations of the metates in and around these two structures. While they are separated but visible to one another in some cases, the metates are not all in one location and so are not all visible to one another. In fact, there is only one metate position from which all the others are visible. The placement of the metates indicates that interaction may have been dependent on either individual preferences for interpersonal interactions with specific individuals or on the dictates of one authority figure (*ibid.*). Communication of knowledge may have been shared among certain individuals, but it could also have been controlled by one metate user, in a position to oversee the others (*ibid.*).

There is not yet much evidence that indicates that the men of Cerén gathered in productive activities or what kind of power relations they may have had within the context of these activities. They may have exchanged information while working in the cornfields, or they may have gathered in Structure 3, the communal building. A perforated stone was located on the porch of this building, and, since there were no female-associated artifacts beyond a pot that may have been used to dispense a beverage, this may have been a male-associated space, but the types and numbers of artifacts present do not indicate gender exclusion. This structure may have had a civic function, since it was large enough for many people, and productive activities do not appear to predominate. There simply is not yet enough information to present more certain possibilities for access to community knowledge that the men of Cerén had.

The second example of access to knowledge is Structure 12, which may have provided access to supernatural knowledge for one or a very limited number of individuals. Of the gender-associated artifacts, this structure has only female-associated artifacts in it. There are two spindle whorls along with a worn blade that were left above the entrance. There is also a stored, but moderately used, metate. Since the spindle whorls are female-associated, it follows that activities associated with the supernatural may have been performed by, or at least in the presence of, a gender-female individual.

The repeated use of the lattice design may also link Structure 12 to concepts of the feminine gender and supernatural activities. Simmons (1994) has interpreted the lattice design as the "mat" symbol, thought to represent the authority of a community council house, known as a *popol na*. Based on ethnographic information, he also raised the possibility that the design is associated with divinatory and shamanic activities (*ibid.*).

Another important association that may pertain to this design is that of the lattice motifs found in Classic Period sculptures of elite individuals, which is

distinctly different from the mat symbol. Joyce (1992) argues that latticework costumes in Maya art indicate female gender. In her analysis of the complementarity of elite male and female costumes, Joyce also suggests that the latticework of the elite women's costume "represents the horizontal plane of the spatial world, the green sprouting surface of the earth encircled by the ocean, considered part of the supernatural world by Maya" (1992: 64, emphasis added; see also Joyce 1996). This information could link Structure 12 to both female gender and to supernatural activities.

Whatever the case with the structure's design, the artifacts indicate that a gender-female individual was associated with Structure 12 and may have had access to supernatural knowledge. This structure had highly restricted access, based on wear patterns to the entrance but not beyond it, and based on its unusual architecture (Sheets and Simmons 1993; Simmons 1994). Therefore, it is likely that not everyone had access to this space and knowledge of the supernatural that it may have been associated with.

There are three points to be made from this interpretation of Structure 12. First, women in the Classic Period could have had access to the power of secret and supernatural knowledge. Ethnographically, at Zinacantan, women can be curers and shamans (Vogt 1990). Of course, it should be noted that the person using the artifacts I have deemed "female-associated" could have been a biological male. There is a possibility that a berdache- or Two-Spirit-type of gender category could have been an option to the villagers at prehistoric Cerén.

Second, if Structure 10 is a *chinimit*- or *cofradia*-type organization, it may represent another element of the control of the supernatural. One function of these lineage-owned organizations at the time of contact was to perform important religious ceremonies to perpetuate life (Carlson n.d.). Structure 12 and Structure 10 share a patio, may be associated (Gerstle 1992) and also may share lineage affiliation.

Finally, these data suggest that access to the supernatural was not limited to elite individuals occupying regional centers. The traditional research concentrating on elite rulers and priests might suggest that these elite individuals were invested with foremost control over and responsibility for the forces of the supernatural. Structures 10 and 12, which may represent supernatural-related activities in a village setting, indicate that there was a demand beyond what the regional center of San Andres may have provided.

Conclusion

This analysis has been an attempt to illuminate some possible power relations, operating among the prehistoric villagers of Cerén, by using a specific set of gender categories arrived at through Classic Period Maya iconographic representations of humans involved in productive activities. The method here has been to impose a hypothetical set of social distinctions, derived from temporally, and somewhat geographically associated representations onto a set of material

arrangements. The purpose of this has been to begin to examine what possible power relationships could exist, given this particular combination of social distinctions and material remains. It is not intended to be the "final word" on power relations at Cerén, rather it is intended to be a contribution to the "simultaneous working hypotheses" championed by Kehoe (Chapter 1 in this volume).

An additional purpose has been to expand upon traditional theoretical conceptions of power, by emphasizing power relations that occur on a small scale, i.e. among individuals. Since power relations are seen here to be operationalized by individuals, it is appropriate to examine them from the small scale, rather than from large-scale ideological structures and institutions. Though it has not been achieved here, the ultimate goal is to demonstrate the effects that individuals have on large-scale ideological structures and institutions rather than solely what effects structures and institutions have upon individuals. Although gender relations among the Maya have been interpreted as hierarchical, these interpretations have been rooted in traditional assumptions that have been extensively criticized as androcentric and ethnocentric. As I have stated elsewhere (Sweely, 1998), it is not my intention to begin an analysis by assuming hierarchical relations since doing so not only reinforces traditional androcentric and ethnocentric assumptions, but also obscures the process of ideological development as outlined in the introduction to this volume.

The ability to explore more thoroughly power relations at Cerén will entail obtaining more data, and critically reviewing existing data, regarding this population's place in the wider social, economic, and political network. It will also entail the critical examination of data obtained from future excavation at the site. Re-examination of existing data will also be necessary. For example, I initially expected to discuss both women and men in my analysis of power in response to a recent trend in the literature to privilege women in an attempt to correct a traditional androcentric bias. Where it seemed appropriate I speculated about male roles. However, the nature of the available data may be reflecting spaces used predominantly by the women of Cerén more than those of both genders. Although, this may be a function of the categories used, it may also be a function of the fact that non-productive activities are not accounted for, since they leave little, if any, material remains.

The productive activities reflected in the material remains at the site, viewed through the gender distinctions used here reveal some basic yet interesting possibilities. First, there is a low level of gender integration since gender segregation parallels functional segregation but storage spaces are shared. If men and women were segregated in their daily activities, they may have had access to different kinds of knowledge and different opportunities for interaction. To understand the implications of this arrangement for power relations it would be necessary to explore what kinds of knowledge were valued and for what purposes this knowledge was used.

Second, women may have formed somewhat dispersed work groups for grinding corn, and perhaps weaving, in which they may have shared or controlled practical and community knowledge in order to assert their own wills. Lack of

evidence for work groups would suggest an entirely different set of power relations (see Sweely, 1998). Again, it is necessary to know what kinds of knowledge were valued in order to understand how the sharing of knowledge affects power relations.

Third, Structure 12 appears to have been used by a gender-female individual. This seems to indicate that the women of this village could have had access to secret and supernatural knowledge, i.e. they may not have been excluded from this type of power. If Structure 12 is associated with Structure 10, access to supernatural knowledge indicated by Structure 12 may have been bound up with lineage systems. This knowledge, then, may have been highly valued by members of the community.

Fourth, thread was being produced either as an exportable resource to be used elsewhere or it was made into textiles in a village location other than the houses that have been excavated. Power for women weavers was dependent on where the cotton resources were processed and on how they were used as well as how valued this labor was by members of the community. Future excavation should provide insight into this, since weaving implements such as battans may yet be discovered.

The method employed here has extended traditional archaeological interpretations of the power relations of inhabitants of this area in a number of ways. Aside from visualizing prehistoric women as possibly having opportunities to exercise power, this analysis challenges researchers to view "what constitutes power," in non-Western ways. For example the shaman, residing in Structure 12, does not appear to have been the wealthiest member of the community, perhaps not possessing a great deal of economic power, but, likely had a great deal of power, in terms of spiritual affairs. Power may not be exclusively indicated by Western concepts of "wealth" as was proposed in Brown's (1996) commentary on Maya "service" institutions. This point mirrors Kehoe's warning for researchers to be suspect of Western assumptions of power being embodied in conspicuous display. Power can and does reside in inconspicuous people and places. The challenge taken up here is to try to envision where, beyond the conspicuous, power exists.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Payson Sheets for allowing me to use the Cerén data and for his subtle reminders to "not forget the men." I would also like to thank Barbara Voorhies and Douglas Bamforth for comments on earlier drafts. Finally, I would like to thank Suzanne Spencer-Wood for appropriate and pointed comments regarding the subtleties of the theory employed.

Notes

- 1 The approach laid out here is based on Spector's (1983) "task differentiation" approach.
- 2 Residences had five female- and two male-associated artifacts, bodegas had ten female- and eight male-associated artifacts, the kitchen had two female- and one male-associated

artifacts, Structure 10 had two female- and one male-associated artifacts and Structure 12 had five female- and zero male-associated artifacts. Total for the site: twenty-four female- and twelve male-associated artifacts.

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