Chapter One

Spinning and Weaving as Female Gender Identity in Post-Classic Mexico

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Introduction

Spinning and weaving are traditional activities specific to the female domestic sphere in indigenous Mexican society. Evidence from ethnohistoric sources, including Spanish accounts and pre-Columbian codices, indicates that spinning and weaving were also important in Central Mexico immediately prior to the Spanish Conquest as both functional and symbolic activities. Finished textiles played an important role in the economy and tribute of Post-Classic Mexico. As costumes, they also served to communicate status, rank, ethnic affiliation, and gender.[1]

In addition to these functional qualities, spinning and weaving acted symbolically in defining and reifying female identity. In this chapter we discuss how spinning and weaving acted as metaphors for sexuality, childbirth, and female life-cycles in Post-Classic Mexico; and how these

activities served as a means of initiation into female ideologies. Finally, we suggest that the symbolism surrounding spinning and weaving defined female identity as one source of control over reproduction and thus as a basis of female power. The changing symbolic role of these activities during the Late Post-Classic and Early Colonial periods allows interpretations of the construction and transformation of female gender ideologies and the negotiation of gender relations.

Symbolic Archaeology and the Study of Gender

Spinning and weaving were traditionally considered women's work in pre-Columbian Central Mexico (Hellbom 1967). Although functional aspects of these activities have been described by anthropologists, the possibility of a symbolic significance has been largely overlooked. In Mesoamerica, Cecilia Klein (1982) has addressed the relationship between spinning and weaving symbolism and the metaphor of the loom as a structuring principle of the Mesoamerican worldview. For the Aztecs of Central Mexico, June Nash has interpreted spinning and weaving in gender terms as a "metaphor for subordination and humility" (1978:356). She supports this with the example of Tezozomoc, king of Azcapotzalco, who sent a shipment of cotton to the king of Texcoco in 1410, allegedly as an insult to his masculinity (see also Bernal 1976). Nash goes on to suggest diachronic changes in gender relations during the Post-Classic period, emphasizing specific arenas of female participation but concluding that male monopoly of military and bureaucratic spheres limited female access to wealth and prestige (1978:361) and was supported through a state ideology of male dominance.

In contrast to the paradigm of male dominance, this chapter employs a model in which the symbolism of spinning and weaving acted within an alternative, female discourse, operating apart from, even in resistance to, the dominant male ideology. Symbols helped to define female identity and delimit an arena within which female power could be negotiated. While evidence supports Nash's contention of a dominant socio-political position for Aztec males, it must not be assumed that other groups were without access to power. Several recent studies have addressed the issue of pre-Columbian gender relations from the perspective of women as an active interest group negotiating status through strategic decision-making (Brumfiel 1990; Kann 1989; Kellogg 1988; G. McCafferty and S. McCafferty 1989a, b; S. McCafferty and G. McCafferty 1988; see also Silverblatt 1978, 1987 for examples from South America).

A comparable use of symbolism in female discourse has been illustrated in the ethnoarchaeological studies of the Ilchamus of Baringo, Kenya (Hodder 1982, 1986), where women decorate calabash gourds used for feeding milk to children. While the ethnographic study of the Ilchamus indicated that women had little overt power in the public arena, "covertly, ... the decoration defines and emphasizes the reproductive importance of women in a society in which reproduction (of children and of the cattle that produce milk) is the central pivot of male power" (Hodder 1986:109). Women have adopted a strategy of emphasizing the source of their power in resistance to the pattern of male behavior. We assert that a comparable female discourse existed in pre-Columbian Mexico, as women expressed their control over reproduction and domestic production through symbolic representations of spinning and weaving.

Recognizing gender differences in the past is complicated by the androcentric bias that permeates anthro-pological research (Conkey and Spector 1984). The male bias that characterizes Western science has traditionally emphasized male activities while peripheralizing female activities. This is particularly true of the documentary records from the Spanish conquest (Brown 1983; Leacock and Nash 1977). The inherent androcentrism of early Colonial period ethnohistoric records—written by priests and *conquistadores* using a medieval mind-set—conforms to the culture historical model used in anthropological convention: an emphasis on political history, economics, technology, and the masculine elements of the native religious pantheon. Women, women's activites, and female cultural elements were dealt with superficially and stereotypically.

To study past gender relationships it is necessary to critically appraise potential biases that affect interpretation at every stage of analysis. In our investigations of pre-Columbian Mexican spinning and weaving we have used a variety of sources.[2] However, in addition to relying on literal textual references, this study also considers the pictorial representations of spinning and weaving and their associated tools in different contextual situations. In so doing we adopt methodologies from historical archaeology and material culture studies, which indicate that biases existing in textual records are often less pronounced when referring to material culture (Deetz 1977). An example of this principle in Colonial Mexican texts is found in the *Florentine Codex*, where the Spanish priest Bernardino de Sahagun noted that women had little influence in the marketplace; yet in the accompanying illustrations women are shown selling an assortment of goods (Hellbom 1967:134; Sahagun 1950-1982, Book 10:61-62, cf. plates 119 and 120).

The approach we use presumes an active role for material culture and its encoded symbols in the creation and transformation of society (Hodder 1982). On one level, symbols act as a form of communication, mediating social relationships while establishing group identity and maintaining boundaries (Wobst 1977). On another level, meanings vary depending on situational contexts, and symbols help to create those contexts (Bourdieu 1977; Hodder 1986). For instance, material culture—in this case spinning and weaving implements—will have different meanings within the different contexts in which it appears. These contexts can vary widely, based on who and what other factors are involved, when and where the activity takes place, and how all of the factors are integrated into the total context.

Another critical factor is the identification of historical antecedents, or traditions, for particular types of behavior. When contextual patterns are culturally prescribed, elements of material culture acquire symbolic properties that can evoke meaning regardless of context. The symbols are meaningful to those participants familiar with the patterned behavior. In this way symbols can be transmitted, but as symbolic information becomes invested in material culture it can also be controlled and manipulated. By studying symbols diachronically, we have a means of monitoring relationships not otherwise observable in the historical record.

The Ethnoarchaeology of Spinning and Weaving

Central Mexico had a well-developed weaving industry incorporating a wide range of materials, motifs, colors, and forms. This was noted by the early Spanish chroniclers (Cortes 1986; Diaz del Castillo 1963; Duran 1971; Motolinia 1951; Sahagun 1950-82) and has been well documented by Patricia Anawalt (1981).

Pre-Columbian weaving was done on the backstrap loom, a highly portable device where one end is attached to a tree or post, while the other end is wrapped around the weaver who maintains tension on the warp using body weight (figure 1a).[3] Spinning techniques included both drop- and supported spinning methods, depending on the material being spun and the desired quality of the thread (Hochberg 1980). Drop-spinning is done with a heavy whorl on the spindle shaft, where the rotating spindle is repeatedly dropped to draw out and twist the raw fiber. Drop-spinning can be done virtually anywhere, and ethnographic accounts describe women spinning with this technique as they walk to the fields or in the marketplace (Granberg 1970:13-16; Starr 1908). Supported spinning is done with the tip of the spindle shaft resting in a small bowl or on a flat surface. It provides greater control over the spinning process and results in a finer-quality thread (figure 1b). Drop-spinning can only be done with relatively long staple fibers, such as maguey, while cotton is best suited for supported spinning.

Cotton in particular was a valuable trade and tribute commodity associated with elite status (Berdan 1982:30-31; Rodriguez Vallejo 1976). Maguey fiber was another commonly spun material, and depending on the species used and the number of production steps, it could produce either coarse or high-quality thread. Additional materials used for spinning included human and animal hair (rabbit and dog), feathers, and vegetable fibers such as milkweed and *chichicastle*, a fibrous nettle native to Southern Mexico, also known as *mala mujer* (Garcia Valencia 1975:61-62).

Education in spinning and weaving techniques began at an early age, and by adolescence girls were learning the rudiments of weaving (Codex Mendoza, plates LIX-LXI, described in Hellbom 1967:110-115) (figure 2). The primary weaver in a household was the wife, who had the responsibility of making clothing and other woven goods for the household (Duran 1971:423). Thread was often spun by other family members, especially young girls and old women, and occasionally by males depending on production needs and end use.

In addition to domestic use, spinning and weaving provided a means for women to participate in the market economy (Sahagun 1950-82, Book 8:69; Hellbom 1967:299). Woven goods produced in the household could be sold in the market or used as tribute. Capes and blankets were regularly presented as gifts at different ceremonies and were an important means for gaining social status (Sahagun 1950-82, Book 6:196). A woman's skill as a weaver was considered a positive asset in this pursuit. The practice of polygamy by the Aztecs was credited in part to the need for the elite to maintain a large labor pool of women for producing textiles for ritual gift-giving (Motolinia 1951: 202, 246). In temple compounds, spinning and weaving of fine textiles produced costumes, cotton armor, and incense bags for distribution as emblems of rank and for religious and state ceremonies (Anawalt 1981; Motolinia 1951). Finally, capes and *quachtlis* (small woven cloths) were used as standards of value in the pre-Columbian economy and were exchanged at a rate regulated by the Aztec state administration (Sahagun 1950-82, Book 9:48; Book 3:6-7; Berdan 1982:44).

Spinning and weaving were important functional tasks in Mesoamerican society, but it is our contention that they were equally important ideologically in structuring patterns of female identity. The female experience could be described as an analogue of spinning and weaving

activities, "interwoven" throughout daily practice by myth, folklore, gossip, and jokes. The metaphor of spinning and weaving is used in many cultures to explain the world (Eliade 1975:45-46; Klein 1982; Schaefer 1989; Wilbert 1974). There is ample evidence that this was the case in Post-Classic Central Mexico, as has been noted by Thelma Sullivan (1982:14):

> Spinning goes through stages of growth and decline, waxing and waning, similar to those of a child-bearing woman. The spindle set in the spindle whorl is symbolic of coitus, and the thread, as it winds around the spindle, symbolizes the growing fetus, the woman becoming big with child .... Weaving, too, the intertwining of threads, is symbolic of coitus, and thus spinning and weaving represent life, death, and rebirth in a continuing cycle that characterizes the essential nature of the Mother Goddess.

The metaphor of spinning and weaving is demonstrated in the Nahuatl riddle "What is it that they make pregnant, that they make big with child in the dancing place?" Answer: "Spindles" (Sahagun 1950-82 Book 6:240; paraphrased in Sullivan 1982:14). The "dancing place" was the bowl in which the spindle was set. Contemporary spinners in Mexico still refer to the spindle as dancing (*bailando*) in a bowl during supported spinning (Garcia Valencia 1975:60).

Indoctrination into female ideology began at an early age in a dedication ceremony involving spindles, fiber, whorls, looms, needles, and cooking utensils as symbols of female gender identity (Sahagun 1950-82, Book 6:201) (figure 3). The Aztec ceremony involved the presence of a midwife/priestess of the Mother Goddess, who read the astrological destiny and gave the child its calendrical name (Hellbom 1967:39). The priestess then took the umbilical cord of the girl child and buried it by the hearth, and "thus she signified that woman was to go nowhere. Her very task was the home life, life by the fire, by the grinding stone ... She was to prepare drink, to prepare food, to grind, to spin, to weave" (Sahagun 1950-82, Book 6:171).

Spinning and weaving were an essential part of the moral upbringing of young girls. They were associated with high status, but were taught as desirable skills for all "good" girls. Young girls began learning to spin by the age of four and learned to weave clothing by the age of fourteen (Hellbom 1967:167; Codex Mendoza; Zorita 1963:137). Since spinning and weaving were activities practiced predominantly in the household, it was taught that this was the female domain, with weaving ability a characteristic of a "proper wife" and thus a favorable trait for obtaining a husband:

> Pay heed to, apply yourself to, the work of women, to the spindle, to the batten.
> Watch carefully how your noblewomen, your ladies, our ladies, the noblewomen, who are artisans, who are craftswomen, dye [the thread], how they apply the dyes [to the thread], how the heddles are set, how the heddle leashes are fixed ...
> It is not your destiny, it is not your fate, to offer [for sale] in people's doorways, greens, firewood, strings of chiles, slabs of rock salt, for you are a noblewoman.
> [Thus], see to the spindle, the batten ...
> [Sahagun 1950-82, Book 6:96, quoted in Sullivan 1982:13-14]

The combined tasks of spinning and weaving were symbolic of the changes in the female life cycle, with spinning an activity of young girls and old women, while a married woman had the responsibility of weaving to supply clothing for the family, especially her husband and children. A common metaphor for infertility was one who spun but never wove (Sullivan 1982:19), as in the myth of *cihuapipiltin*, deified women who died in childbirth. A contemporary myth from the state of Chiapas relates how witches in the mountains spend their time endlessly spinning, with the implication that "spinning without weaving is a futile and unproductive occupation" (Cordry and Cordry 1968:42).

The sexual symbolism of spinning and weaving is also incorporated into the Christmas ceremony of the Tzotzil Maya of Chiapas (Bricker 1973:19). Men dressed as "grandmothers" give the young women a lesson in spinning and weaving full of sexual metaphors on the importance of pleasing their husbands by fulfilling their female duties.

The symbolism of spinning and weaving as an emblem of female identity is richly demonstrated in ethnohistory and folklore. In addition, its significance pervades the mythology surrounding the Central Mexican goddesses.

Mythology and Gender Identity

Symbols of female gender identity were transmitted through religious beliefs incorporating the female deities to create active social roles. In pre-Columbian Mexico religion was not an abstract set of norms but an active factor in prescribing behavior. The myths that surrounded the goddesses

were a means for enculturation, as mythology was used to transmit and justify gender ideologies (Taggart 1983). The metaphors expressed in mythology served to transform the natural into the supernatural, creating an ideological mystification of gender relationships and defining a female identity.

Mesoamerican religion was complex, and the Aztec pantheon in particular incorporated deities from neighboring lands as a result of imperial conquest and diverse cultural composition. As a consequence, isolating a specific deity associated with spinning and weaving is difficult. The traits extend beyond any one goddess and blend into many, until we see an archetypal pattern with multiple identities. The three main deities associated with spinning and weaving were Tlazolteotl, Xochiquetzal, and Mayahuel. A fourth, Toci, was also closely linked to the patterns embodied by the Mother Goddess and, by extension, to female identity. A brief description of each will present their individual traits and will demonstrate their overlapping attributes.

Tlazolteotl was known as the "Great Spinner and Weaver," and probably originated among the Huaxtecs of northern Veracruz (Sullivan 1982). She was associated with childbirth, the moon, menses, and purification; sexuality, witchcraft, and healing. She was also the *Tlaelquani*, "Eater of Filth," who absolved the sins of both men and women before death. Since it was believed that a child came into the world coated in the sins of its parents, Tlazolteotl (in the guise of her priestesses/midwives) received and purified the new-born (Sahagun 1950-82, Book 6:175). Another name for Tlazolteotl, Ixcuina, is a reference to her relationship to cotton (*ixcatl*), used in spinning but also important as an abortive, a lactogenic, and for absorbing menstrual flow (i.e.,"eating filth") (Sullivan 1982:19). Tlazolteotl was often depicted in the four-part nature of the female life cycle: first young and immature, then in full sexual bloom, later as a mother and center of the household, and finally as an old woman wise with experience (Sahagun 1950-82, Book 1:23; Sullivan 1982:12).

Tlazolteotl was often portrayed in the codices wearing a headband of unspun cotton and with cotton draped from her earspools (figure 4). Spindles with whorls were thrust into her hair as decoration or carried as a staff or weapon. Black bitumen (*chapopote*) was used to decorate her face as further indication of gender identity.[4] Another diagnostic emblem of Tlazolteotl was the crescent shape, which signified the moon, and which decorated her clothing and *yacametztli* nose ornament. Tlazolteotl's skirt and/or *quechquemitl* were occasionally divided into red and black halves, symbolic of the structural oppositions incorporated in her character.

Tlazolteotl was associated with snakes, dogs, and centipedes (Sullivan 1982:17-18), all symbolic of fertility and the earth. Dogs were regarded as "eaters of filth" because they were commonly found foraging in garbage dumps. Centipedes are also found in areas of decomposing trash and were associated with the transformation of waste into productive humus. The essence of female ideology was embodied in Tlazolteotl, with the metaphor of spinning and weaving symbolic of the ongoing process of generation and regeneration.

Xochiquetzal, or "Precious Flower," was in many ways the Nahua equivalent of Tlazolteotl and shared many of her attributes. She was associated with flowers, artisans, and sexuality, both as the goddess of the marriage bond and as patroness of harlots (Brundage 1982; G. McCafferty and S. McCafferty 1989a). Xochiquetzal was reputed to have introduced the knowledge of spinning and weaving and to have provided the creative initiative for painting, carving, and music (Heyden 1985). These were occupations of the elite, especially of the children of the nobility who would not succeed to political posts (Sahagun 1950-82, Book 8:45). Hummingbirds, butterflies, and flowers were glyphic elements identifying her as protector of the earth and its vegetation and the souls of the dead. The quetzal bird, dual locks of hair or twin upright tassles, a gold butterfly nose ornament, and a blue dress were other visual means of identifying Xochiquetzal (Duran 1971). In another aspect of the goddess, Itzpapolotl, or "Obsidian Butterfly," was a goddess of war and death in combat (Berlo 1983). While she was a protector of male warriors, Xochiquetzal was especially sensitive to women in labor, "since childbirth itself was likened to death and to battle" (Klein 1972:40).

Mayahuel was known as Lady Maguey because of her association with the agave plant, one of the fundamental elements of Mexican culture. Virtually every portion of the plant was used, including fiber for weaving, juice for the fermentation of *pulque*, and spines for ritual blood-letting (Goncalves de Lima 1956; Sullivan 1982:24-25). Although spun *maguey* did not have the elite status of cotton, it was more versatile in many ways and thus was more widely used. Mayahuel was a goddess of weaving; she was also associated with healing, female productivity, and reproduction. *Pulque*, the fermented juice of the maguey, was used ceremonially throughout Central Mexico. Like Tlazolteotl, Mayahuel shared the characteristic headband of

unspun fiber, in this case probably maguey, with spindles thrust into it (Sullivan 1982). Mayahuel was the embodiment of female productivity, often depicted with bare breasts as a symbol of her nurturing character. In the *Codex Vaticanus A* (21v) she is portrayed with 400 breasts (a metaphor for "prolific") in reference to her fecundity (Sullivan 1982:24; another possible example of this is found in the *Codex Nuttall* 27:I).

Finally, the goddess Toci, or Teteo-innan, was associated with the bath house, an area of healing, illicit sexual union, and childbirth. She was referred to as "Our Grandmother," a protector of women and source of wisdom. Her symbols were the broom and the shield, relating to her role in women's work and healing, and also as a warrior and protector. Toci was also known as Ilamatecuhtli, "the Mother of the Gods," and as such was a central figure in Mesoamerican mythology (Nicholson 1971). As part of the ritual calendar, the "Feast of the Sweeping" (*Ochpaniztli*) was dedicated to Toci, in which a goddess impersonator was sacrificed after performing her symbolic roles as a woman (Duran 1971:232-3):

> [The impersonator] was delivered to the old women who brought her a bundle of maguey fiber. They made her comb it, wash it, spin it, and weave a cloth of it. At a certain hour she was led out of the temple to a place where she was to perform the act [of weaving].... When the eve of the feast arrived, the woman, who had finished her weaving (which was a skirt and blouse of maguey fiber), was led by the old women to the marketplace. They made her sit there and sell the things she had spun and wove, thus indicating that the mother of the gods had been engaged in that occupation in her time to make a living, spinning and weaving garments of maguey fiber, going to the markets to sell them, thus providing for herself and her children.

As spinning and weaving were attributes of the Mother Goddess complex, they were linked symbolically to the authority of the goddesses and metaphorically to fertility and reproduction. Priestesses of the female deities were skilled midwives and adept at herbal and magical methods for inducing conception and contraception (Sahagun 1950-82, Book 1:4-5; Hellbom 1967:36). This implies control over reproduction, one of the most important sources of female power, and therefore a potential arena for gender competition.

Evidence for the multiplicity of symbolic meanings surrounding spinning and weaving can be found in the pre-Columbian codices, where the presence of spindles and spindle whorls were characteristic traits for identifying the female deities and their priestesses. In the *Codex Nuttall* (e.g., pages 43:III and 48:IV) they were used to denote place names, perhaps as a means of identifying female domains or specific activity areas. Spindles, with or without whorls or thread, were also used as hair adornments in the codices, serving as an emblem of gender identity. Spindles are still worn in the hair in weaving communities of the Mixteca de la Costa, Oaxaca, where they are diagnostic of *malacateras*, or "spinners."[5]

An additional use of spinning and weaving symbolism in the codices was the use of weaving tools, especially battens, as weapons or as staffs of authority to represent female power (G. McCafferty and S. McCafferty 1989b; Sullivan 1982). In the feast of *Atemoztli*, images of mountain fertility deities were made out of amaranth dough, sacrificed using weaving battens, and then eaten (Sahagun 1950-82, Book 2:29; Anawalt 1981:14). This suggests that the weapons of the female deities were the same domestic tools that served to define female identity.

Conclusion

The symbolism of spinning and weaving served to define female identity in the sense that it created a set of meaningful associations that united women as an interest group. Spinning and weaving were gender specific activities that took place in the household, an area in which female power was concentrated. They were tasks that were practiced by virtually all women, regardless of class or age, and were taught as a fundamental part of the female gender role. The primary female goddesses associated with spinning and weaving were also linked with reproduction, and this theme was related metaphorically in the folklore surrounding spinning and weaving. The relationship between weaving materials (such as cotton and maguey) and fertility further reinforces the concept that female power was closely related to control over reproduction. The tools of spinning and weaving (spindles, whorls and battens) acted as symbols of this power, with the women represented in the codices that bore these tools—be they goddesses, priestesses, sacrificial impersonators, or mortals—identified as women with access to resources of female power.

The Archaeology of Gender Identity

This chapter has developed out of our study of archaeological spindle whorls from Cholula, Puebla. Spindle whorls were usually made of baked clay and acted as fly-wheels to maintain inertia for the rotating spindle

while twisting fiber into thread (Hochberg 1980; Smith and Hirth 1988). In Post-Classic Mexico (A.D. 900-1520) spindle whorls were often decorated with mold-made or incised designs, and occasionally they were painted or coated with bitumen. Interestingly, whorls are rare from earlier and later time periods, suggesting that permanent baked clay whorls may have had a symbolic role in addition to their functional utility. In contrast to highland Mexico, at the site of Matacapan in central Veracruz, spindle whorls *were* found in Classic period contexts (Hall 1989) and can possibly be related to increased status of women associated with textile production (Kann 1989).

In comparing archaeological assemblages from Post-Classic Cholula, striking differences are apparent in the decorative motifs on spindle whorls that probably relate to cultural changes through time. From an excavated household compound (the UA-1 site on the campus of the Universidad de las Americas) dating to the Early Post-Classic period (ca. A.D. 1000-1200) (G. McCafferty n.d., 1986), whorls displayed diverse decorative motifs, including complex geometric and zoomorphic patterns (figures 5a-f), and many have a bitumen coating over the mold-impressed designs (14%, n = 51).

Bitumen-covered whorls have been associated with the Gulf Coast region based on archaeologically recovered examples from sites in Veracruz (Ekholm 1944; Parsons 1972:57). Functional explanations for bitumen as a covering are unsatisfactory, and instead we suggest a symbolic interpretation, particularly as it relates to the cult of Tlazolteotl. While the Gulf Coast affiliation of the goddess would support the identification of bitumen-covered whorls as trade goods, it is not conclusive. At the UA-1 excavation at Cholula, five whorls were found with identical molded patterns, suggesting that they were produced in the same mold, and two were covered with bitumen. This suggests that the bitumen covering was probably applied on-site.

In another assemblage from the same area (UA-79), dating to the Late Post-Classic period (ca. A.D. 1350-1520), many of the previous motifs are nearly absent as is the use of bitumen. Instead, the whorls are often decorated with floral patterns, possibly depicting marigolds (figures 5g-j). Flowers were closely associated with the Mother Goddess complex, especially Xochiquetzal and Toci, and the marigold was used in special rituals by priestess/midwives (Sahagun 1950-82, Book 2:19; Heyden 1985).

The stylistic differences between the two assemblages occurred over a period of about 200-400 years, during which time the documentary sources record the conquest of Cholula by the Tolteca-Chichimeca ethnic group (Historia Tolteca Chichimeca; Olivera and Reyes 1969). The historical evidence for ethnic change, from the original Olmeca-Xicallanca group (with ties to the Gulf Coast) to the Tolteca-Chichimeca, is supported by changes in the material culture (McCafferty 1989a, b). The evidence from this spindle whorl analysis suggests that spinners were initially affiliated with the cult of Tlazolteotl, using symbolic elements such as bitumen to identify with her power. By the Late Post-Classic period this affiliation had been transferred to the cults of Xochiquetzal and Toci as evidenced by the predominance of floral motifs. What effect this religious change may have had on gender relations remains to be explored further, although the similarities between the goddesses suggest that the structural differences may have been minimal.

Another symbolic association relates whorl patterns and shield decorations.[6] Decorated shields are represented in the pictorial manuscripts, with different motifs relating to regional identity and military rank (Penafiel 1985). Patterns identical to those found on shields were also found on spindle whorls, particularly those from the UA-1 household context. Whorls decorated with hatched semicircles, for example, may relate to the *teueuelli* ("sacrificial shield") carried by the goddess Toci and the Aztec patron Huitzilopochtli. Susan Kellogg (1988) has discussed the conceptual similarities between warfare and childbirth as a "structural equivalence" linking male and female genders. This may be one explanation for the use of shield patterns on whorls, relating to the exhortation of the midwife to "take up the little shield" during childbirth (Sahagun 1950-82, Book 6:154, 161; G. McCafferty and S. McCafferty 1989b). On a more practical level, it can be speculated that a sharp spindle through a whorl would have been a formidable female weapon, the Mesoamerican equivalent of a long hat pin.

Spindle whorls *do* play a functional role in spinning, but they do not need to be as elaborately made as the Post-Classic Cholula whorls. Contemporary spinners often use spindles with sun-baked clay whorls applied directly to the shaft, resulting in an efficient system that would rarely leave a trace in the archaeological record. Since whorls are not recovered from Classic period contexts, yet woven garments are depicted in mural paintings, it is likely that a similar, impermanent spindle whorl was used.

We suggest that the symbolic importance of decorated spindle whorls emphasized affiliation with the female deities and therefore promoted a group identity. Spindles with whorls worn in the hair may have been an emblem of status as is still the case among the Mixtecs of the Oaxaca coast. As a talisman of the deity, spindle whorls may have been used in fertility rites

(Duran 1971: 264-5, 269). The act of spinning itself, which was practiced throughout the day in varied situations, could almost be interpreted as a form of worship in the sense of symbolic bonding with the Mother Goddess(es).

Based on ethnohistoric evidence and supported by the archaeological spindle whorls from Cholula, female power during the Post-Classic period was expressed through the metaphor of spinning and weaving. Following the Spanish Conquest, the ideological system of Mesoamerica was fundamentally altered and consequently so were gender relationships (Nash 1980). The authority of the female deities was transferred to the cult of the Virgin and any overt control over reproduction was discouraged by the Church. Effectively, female power rapidly declined. And although technological change did not alter the indigenous weaving industry, the use of decorated and baked spindle whorls was quickly abandoned.

The use of archaeological methods to study ideology, through symbols and material culture, provides a methodology for studying change in the relations between and within social groups. Group relationships are continuously redefined as strategies for control over power are negotiated. Changing symbols of group identity can relate to these changing relationships and thereby indicate the arenas of interaction. In the example from Post-Classic Mexico, control over reproduction was one focus of gender competition, symbolized in the myths of spinning and weaving. That these symbols were abandoned following the Spanish Conquest does not necessarily mean that the competition was also abandoned but only that gender identities were redefined with other symbols of identity taking their place.

Endnotes

1. This paper has been revised from a seminar paper entitled "Mesoamerican Myth, Material Culture and Female Gender Ideology" for Symbolic and Structural Archaeology taught by Dr. Ian Hodder at SUNY Binghamton in the spring of 1986. Earlier drafts of this paper have been read by Lon Bulgrin, Margaret Conkey, Ian Hodder, James W. McCafferty, Randall McGuire, Susan Milbrath, and Susan Pollock. Additional comments were made by members of the "Feminist Theory in Archaeology" discussion group, Dept. of Anthropology, SUNY Binghamton. We gratefully acknowledge the constructive advice that has been offered and take full responsibility for the end result.
2. To illustrate the activities of spinning and weaving we have drawn data from throughout the Mesoamerican area, and from a long historical

sequence. This is not meant to imply that we consider Mesoamerica as a homogeneous unit, as certainly there are important cultural differences within the area. Instead, we see the symbolism of spinning and weaving as a cross-cutting theme that was prevalent in the Post-Classic period (A.D. 900-1550), albeit with informative regional and cultural variations. The core area from which we derive most of our examples, and hence for which the conclusions are most appropriate, is Central Mexico, especially the valleys of Mexico, Puebla/Tlaxcala, Tehuacan, and Oaxaca; and the Gulf Coast and the Mixteca of Oaxaca.
3. Illustrations were drawn by Sharisse D. McCafferty.
4. Bitumen is a natural tar that was available in the Gulf Coast. It was believed to have curative and magical properties, especially when applied to pieces of bark paper. Mixed with *axin*, an oily substance derived from ground insects, bitumen became *chicle* and could be chewed like gum (Sahagun 1950-1982, Book 10:89). It was the "preference" of girls and unmarried women to chew publicly. Married women, widows, and old women also enjoyed chewing but never in public. Harlots chewed *chicle* "quite publicly, ... clacking like castanets" (ibid.). Men chewed *chicle* "very secretly —never in public," with exception of homosexuals: "the men who chew *chicle* achieve the status of sodomites" (ibid.:90). This suggests that the use of bitumen was an overt indicator of the sexual as well as gender status, with the application of bitumen paint on the face an emblem of female identity.
5. Our thanks to Dr. Patricia Anawalt for providing illustrations of shield patterns from her study of the Codex Mendoza.
6. Female weavers from the weaving community of Jamiltepec (Oaxaca) are known as *malacateras* and continue to wear spindles in their hair.

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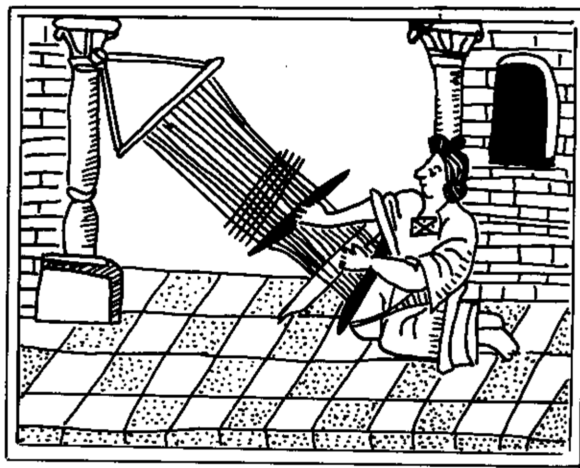


Figure 1a. Aztec noblewoman weaving on backstrap loom in patio of house (after Sahagun 1950-1982, book 10: figure 58). Drawing by Sharisse McCafferty.

Figure 1b. Aztec woman spinning with spindle supported in small bowl (after Codex Mendoza, vol. 3, folio 68r). Drawing by Sharisse McCafferty.

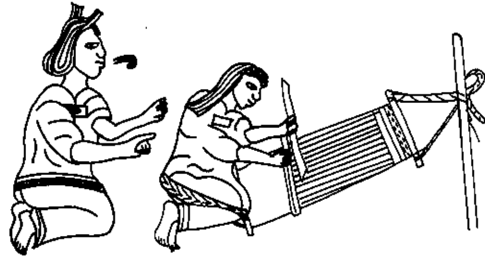


Figure 2. Aztec woman instructing daughter in weaving technique (after Codex Mendoza, vol. 3, folio 60r). Drawing by Sharisse McCafferty.

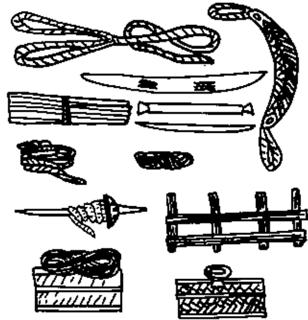
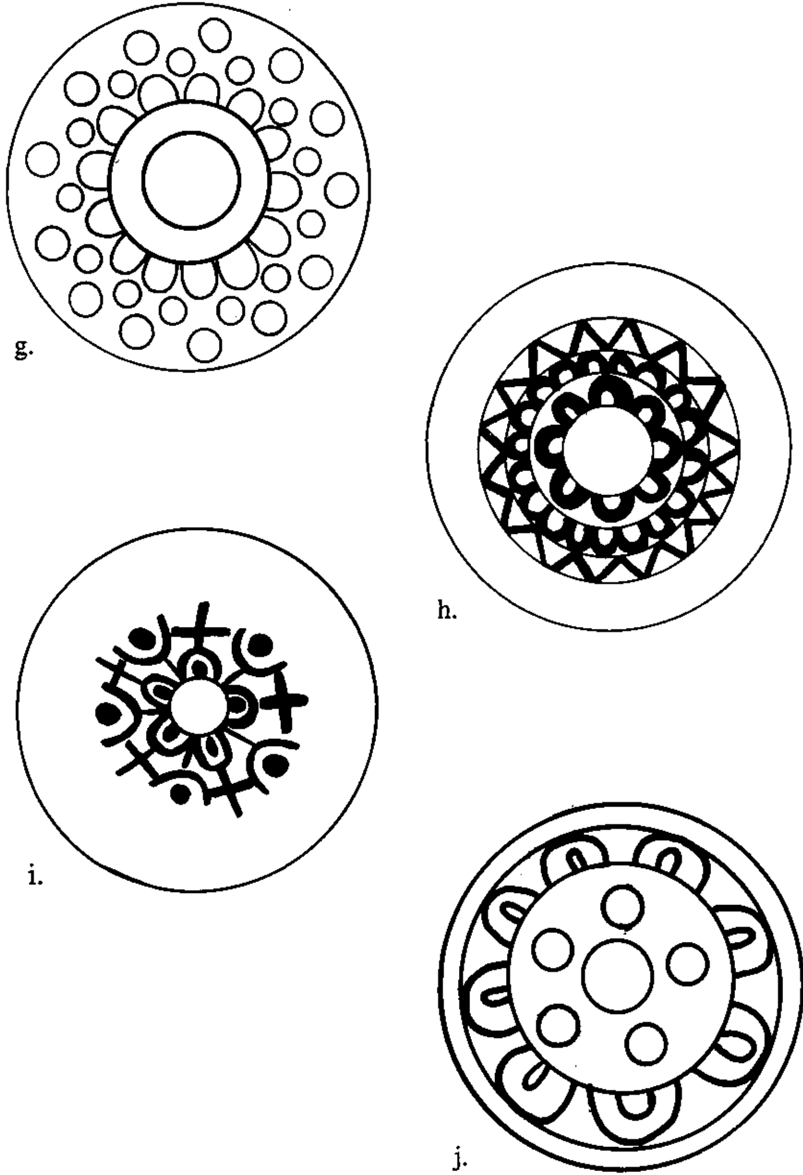


Figure 3. Spinning and weaving implements (after Sahagun 1950-1982, book 8: figure 75). Drawing by Sharisse McCafferty.

Figure 4. Mexican goddess, Tlazolteotl, with spindles in headband and hand (after Codex Laud:39). Drawing by Sharisse McCafferty.

Figures 5a-f. Archaeological spindle whorls from UA-1 (Cholula, Puebla) showing complex geometric and zoomorphic design motifs. Drawings by Sharisse McCafferty.



Figures 5g-j. Archaeological spindle whorls from UA-79 (Cholula, Puebla) showing floral motifs. Drawings by Sharisse McCafferty.

Chapter Two

Communicative Imagery in Guatemalan Indian Dress

Cherri M. Pancake

Social parameters or codes governing dress are found to a degree in all societies. Some, such as the sumptuary laws of ancient Rome or Mesoamerica, are formally defined and stringently enforced by the governing class, while other restrictions are dictated simply by public opinion. Because unofficial dress codes are imposed by the general public upon itself, anthropologists and sociologists have become increasingly aware of their value as sources of information on aesthetic and social values. In this chapter, we explore the concept of textile imagery by assessing the role of Guatemalan Indian dress as a communicative medium.[1]

It is rare that clothing traditions are as clearly defined and accessible for study as among the Indian communities of Guatemala. Highland Guatemala is densely populated and a majority of its inhabitants are of Indian descent. Although there is a certain degree of cultural amalgamation and intermingling between the Indian and non-Indian sectors, many Indian