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Music, Warriors, and Ritual Figurines: Life Beyond the Shaft Tombs of West Mexico

Introduction

The Pre-Columbian civilizations of Mesoamerica, or Central America and Mexico, all share a remarkably similar world view, one that has been documented and studied by European scholars since the first Spanish conquests of the area. This shared cosmovision contains complex ideas which resonate throughout all aspects of Mesoamerican life. The objects created by the civilizations are no exception, and they are woven into the fabric of ritual and spiritual life across the region. The creation of figurines in Mesoamerica is a strong example of this phenomenon. In this paper, the Seated Musician with Rasp and Seated Warrior hollow figures from the collection of the Williams College Museum of Art (TL.98.13.4 and TL.98.13.5 respectively) represent a long-standing tradition in the West Mexican civilization that has become the primary source of information on the civilization as a whole. This paper aims to describe and reanimate these two objects by placing their symbolism, iconography, and use in rituals of death within the civilization's worldview.

West Mexico

West Mexico is something of an enigma among Mesoamerican civilizations, so much so that there is not one agreed upon name for the civilization. It is sometimes referred to as the Shaft Tomb Culture or the Teuchitlan Tradition, but for the purposes of this paper it will be referred to as West Mexico. The accumulated knowledge of this civilization is simply too small

in volume and too specific in nature to create a well-defined view of it. The causes of this lie in the lack of written records, the unfortunate amount of looting that has occurred at sites, the slow progress of scientific interest and archaeological efforts in West Mexico due to isolation, and the absence of indigenous descendants from West Mexico (Foias Lecture 3/5). Put together these root causes result in a vague understanding of the civilization that relies heavily on tombs that have already been disturbed. Despite this, there is sufficient archeological evidence to tie West Mexico to the wider cultures of Mesoamerica allowing for comparative studies of the civilization.

Geography

West Mexico encompasses the modern Mexican states of Jalisco, Colima, and Nayarit and parts of Michoacán. These states provide a mild climate with rich soils and bountiful resources. The region is characterized by mountains cut by valleys which form around the plentiful rivers and lakes. With rivers, lakes, and coasts this water heavy region created a prevalence of water and sea related resources. Shells, specifically conchs, are particularly important for both tools and adornment and may have been traded beyond West Mexico by the inhabiting groups (Pickering and Smallwood-Roberts 1998, 5). Both of the objects this paper examines are from the Nayarit state of West Mexico, specifically representing the style of Ixtlan del Rio, so named for the site Ixtlan del Rio (See map: Figure 16). Nayarit spans a wide coastline to the west with forest and mountains toward the east (Pickering and Smallwood-Roberts 1998, 14). The Ixtlan del Rio style is found in the more inland and mountainous Southeastern area of the state.

Sociopolitical Organization

The sociopolitical organization of West Mexico is difficult to detail. This is in part caused by the vast number of different cultures and structures that would have been found in the area and the lack of substantial archaeological investigations to represent them. However, the defining characteristics of West Mexico speak to a certain level of political and social complexity beginning in the Arenal Period (300BCE-200CE). This time period represents the most monumental shaft tombs and the solidification of the circular plaza plan in sites such as Teuchitlan and Huitzilapa. These characteristics continued into the Ahualulco or Early Classic period although shaft tombs generally became less monumental (Weigand and Beekman 1998, 41). There was also an increase in the size of sites representing the nucleation of the population to core areas. While the civilization spans a much greater time period (1500BCE-900CE) much more is known about the Arenal and Ahualulco periods because of the prevalence of shaft tombs.

The identifying features of the Arenal period suggest that West Mexico could have been defined at as a "state-like" society. The central planning of the circular plazas in the larger sites, based around a monumental circular pyramid suggests a central authority with significant control over human labor. These sites also include large ballcourts. Ballcourts are found throughout Mesoamerica although the specific rules of the game seem to vary regionally. The presence of highly elaborate crafted goods within the shaft tombs point to a complex society and a class of people wealthy enough to procure these goods for their tombs (Weigand and Beekman 1998, 40). Additionally, the widespread occurrence of circular pyramids, ballcourts, and shaft tombs suggest an influencing central force; in West Mexico this force is usually considered to be Teuchitlan. These are all good indications of a state civilization. Still, the lack of strong evidence in child burials to support hereditary political power make hereditary status difficult to identify (Rhodes and Mountjoy 2016, 35). Additionally, the lack of writing in West Mexico is another

complicating issue: although writing is not necessary for statedom, it is generally considered a concrete feature of a state. Instead, West Mexico is identified primarily to be at least at a chiefdom level during the periods discussed in this paper, meaning the position of power in the society was likely hereditary and restricted to only select people based on their familial relation to the 'chief'. This is supported by the huge numbers of status related objects found in shaft tombs, so identified by their 'rare' or possible ritual contexts.

Cosmovision and Religion

The West Mexico worldview is closely tied to the shared ideas of Mesoamerica. These ties are seen most prominently in the architecture of major West Mexico sites. The planning of sites was a mix of concentric circles—which culminated, often, in a stepped circular pyramid—and earlier cruciform constructions (Lopez and Ramos 1998, 54). Put together, this plan suggests the same geometric structure of the universe that all Mesoamerican cultures share. The universe was considered to be composed of four corners which converge around a sacred center; this may be represented in West Mexico as the center of the circular plaza where a pyramid was built or by shaft tombs often oriented in line with the cardinal directions (Faugere and Darras 2016, 41). That center is a form of the *axis mundi* which is visualized as a pole that connects all supernatural layers of the universe, accessible to shamans and/or priests who could travel between layers. These layers of the cosmos can be loosely broken into the heavens, which is the world of gods, the earth, the world of humanity, and the underworld, the world of spirits and souls. This worldview is remarkable given the evidence in West Mexico that in at least one case the center of a circular pyramid contained a post hole which is recorded in ceramic models to be used for certain rituals shown in figure 17 (Foias Lecture 3/5). The shaft tomb may also be a continuation of the axis mundi, the shaft representing the axis descending into the underworld

where the souls of the dead reside. Shaft tomb complexity and offerings further suggest a cult of the dead linking the deceased to the living and implying a belief in the continuation of a soul after death (Lopez and Ramos 1998, 63). This is unsurprising since ancestor worship is common throughout Mesoamerica.

Although one should not claim that West Mexico is identical to other Mesoamerican civilizations, these few strong pieces of evidence which link West Mexico's view of the world to wider Mesoamerica, allow for a comparative view of the civilization to the larger region. This is a strong tool that will be used frequently in this paper while analyzing the objects' ritual and spiritual significance. Perhaps the most important connection to mention is the Mesoamerican idea of animacy. In Mesoamerica, all things in the universe are thought to be connected through a life force which is shared unevenly among those things (Bassett 2015). This principle of animacy is important to understand as the objects from Mesoamerica would be considered living following ritual animation during their production, as will be considered more carefully in the following sections.

Object Iconography and Symbolism

Seated Musician with Rasp (TL.98.13.4) (Fig. 1)

The Seated Musician with Rasp figure, once identified as a figure holding a wrapped baby, is from the Arenal or Ahualulco periods, dating in line with other examples of similar figures such as Figures 2-6, of the Ixtlan del Rio style. The style is characterized by "unburnished slip, and figures with modeled oval or round eyes and prominent teeth [in some iterations of the style]. Clothing and ornaments—indicated with black, white, and yellow paint—are often elaborate" (Gallagher 1983, 106). Additionally, the figures are usually square bodied with small, tube-like arms and legs, and a proportionally large head. The WCMA

musician shares broad iconography with the Ixtlan del Rio style which can be observed in the comparable figures as well. The WCMA musician and comparable Figures 2-6 show varying adherence to this general description of the style. The clothing and ornamentation of the figures is also representative of the style in that most figures wear earrings, nose rings, and armbands in addition to their clothing (Gallagher 1983, 106). The WCMA musician's nose has suffered damage and there is no way to tell if he once wore a nose ring, but he wears one simple earring. These elements of ornamentation are significant features given jewelry was connected to status in most Mesoamerican cultures. Additionally, the WCMA musician and Figures 2-6 are seated cross-legged, a common pose for Ixtlan del Rio reserved for male figures. Beyond these general characteristics the WCMA musician is shown to have variation in style from the other five similar figures. For example, the WCMA musician's mouth does not have any visible teeth or any hint of inlays. In contrast, Figure 3 has prominent teeth which have been further emphasized by white slip.

The size of the musicians' heads is also in line with the Ixtlan del Rio style but is also reflective of most Mesoamerican art depicting human figures. This top-heavy treatment of the figures can be linked to the concepts of animacy prevalent in Mesoamerica. While the exact West Mexican concepts of the soul are unknown, a comparative view of other cultures supports this. In most Mesoamerican cultures, the head is considered the seat of personhood and animacy (Furst 1995). For example, the Aztecs conceived of their souls as being in four parts. One part was the tonalli which is linked to life force, identity, and destiny. Tonalli was assigned to a person at birth by the gods. The tonalli was seen to be situated in the top of a person's head and hair (Furst 1995). The Maya had similar conceptions of the soul. Animacy was linked to ch'ulel an impersonal life force and, personhood was linked to pixan which defines fate (Monaghan

1998). The Maya word for head, Baah, was also linked to the entire body, and was considered "the locus of identity" (Houston et al. 2006, 60). These commonalities are significant and allow us to apply similar ideas of souls and animacy to West Mexico. Such a concept both explains and is supported by the figures' composition. The figures' large heads could have been a representation of the identity of the figures, and it may have shown the animate quality of the figures as well. This animacy can also be found in other aspects of the figures.

The WCMA musician's clothing has been worn to a point that it is difficult to tell how elaborate it once was. However, the similarities in dress to the other figures (2-6) such as the scoop or knotted loincloth and painted tunic worn by Figure 7 suggest that they may be considered when describing the WCMA musician's dress. The dressing of the figure is important. In other Mesoamerican cultures, such as the modern-day descendants of the Aztec, the Nahua, the dressing of idols, effigies, and/or paper figures is a part of their ritual animation (Bassett 2015; Sandstrom and Sandstrom 1986). The elaborate style of the painted dress of West Mexico figures suggests that a ritual painting of the figures may have occurred within the context of animation. Another aspect of figure animation is in the giving of eyes and a mouth to the figure. Molly Bassett speaks of the limited direct evidence of eye-opening ceremonies in Mesoamerica because the rituals of object animation were largely privately done. However, Bassett also mentions the Codex Fejervary-Mayer has a sequence of images which Ferdinand Anvers and Maarten Jansen interpreted as an eye-opening ritual (Bassett 2015, 148). Bassett claims that mouth-opening rituals are likewise probable given the link of animacy to breath and even ingestion (Bassett 2015, 153). The slit style mouth of the Nayarit male figures (3-5,7-8,11-12) and large painted oval eyes are then also tied to the ritual animation or enlivening of the figures.

Another identifying feature of the WCMA musician is his headdress. In the Ixtlan del Rio style "headdresses are varied and include: a horizontal band… a horizontal band with two bands running front to back along the top of the head; a cap possibly made from animal skin… An animal skin cap is especially associated with musicians" (Gallagher 1983, 106). All figures included here wear some type of headdress, and aside from Figure 6, all have the headband. The animal skin caps, identified as such by their foot-like appendages coming off the main band of the cap, are associated specifically with musicians (evident in Figures 1-5). Other types of headdress are identified with seated warriors. In fact, headdresses are a feature of nearly all figures in West Mexico, leading to a codified system of identification of the figures through their headdresses (Gallagher 1983, 106). An additional feature of the WCMA musician's headdress is the diamond pattern visible on its cap's main band (Figure 20). This pattern often believed to function as a protective device in many cultures worldwide (Gallagher 1983, 107).

It is possible, that in the ritual context of a musician in West Mexico, that the musician is somehow in need of protection (Gallagher 1983, 107). This protection may have been needed because of the ritual use of music in Mesoamerican cultures, which seems to extend into West Mexico. This is supported by the multitudes of instrument-bearing figures such as the ones in this paper, as well as the presence of instruments buried with individuals in shaft tombs, such as simple turtle shell drums being buried in shaft tombs (Lucido and Ramirez 2016, 62), but also more complex examples of instruments including conch horns and whistles in direct association with individuals. The rasp carried by the musician figures would have been made from wood and decomposed over time, so no examples of such an instrument have been found in tombs. This mirrors a burial that is well documented from the Zapotec region of Oaxaca dated to the late Terminal Formative period 100 AD-250 AD where an individual at the site of Yugüe was buried

with an intricate bone flute (Barber and Sanchez 2012). In this case, the flute was carved with the image of a skeletal male figure connected to both death and fertility (Figure 18). This was clearly a ritual object. Interestingly, it has been suggested that the skeletal male figure is representative of the flute's animacy, given to it through the breath of the player. Buried with its player, the flute can be considered dead having relied on its player for life (Barber and Sanchez 2012). Its ritual use would have been one of connecting the heavens to earth, calling deities closer to the level of humanity (Foias Lecture 3/5). This task would be considered risky to the flute's player since he was the one providing the flute with its animacy and bridging the gap between layers of the universe, a dangerous activity (Barber and Sanchez 2012).

The WCMA musician figurine plays a rasp, probably the most commonly depicted musical instrument in Ixtlan del Rio figures such as in Figures 3-6. It is not an instrument fueled by breath, but it may still be perceived as an animate instrument as was the flute at Yugüe. The rasp has little ornamentation. It is comparable to Figures 3, 5, and 6 included here, although none of the rasps are identical. Except for figure 5, all the musicians carry some type of stick to stroke the rasp; however, these sticks do not seem to be a focus of the figures. They are different with varying levels of visibility. The only identifiable addition to the WCMA rasp's surface consists of two raised and white painted bumps fashioned similarly to the musician's own eyes. These can be seen on the rasps of Figures 3, 5, and 6 as well. Conversely, the rasp played by the musician in Figure 4 does not seem to have these features. As stated before, the addition of eyes to a figure was part of ritual animacy. Furthermore, by identifying the round top of the rasp with eyes, it has also been identified as the 'head' of the instrument. In some figures such as Figure 6, the rasps also appear to have arm like appendages which increase the human-like or animate quality of the instruments. As mentioned, the head was the seat of animacy in Mesoamerica, so

the 'head' of the rasp emphasizes the rasp's living quality. With all of this, parallels to the Yugüe flute may be drawn, and the seated musician can be interpreted as performing a highly ritual act which calls the gods to earth or creates a spiritually significant connotation to the larger activity he is participating in.

Seated Warrior (TL.98.13.5) (Fig. 7)

The WCMA figurine of a seated warrior (fig. 7) matches the same broad description of the Ixtlan del Rio style. The dating of the figure is in line with the provided dates of comparable figures (Figs. 8-12), and the iconography for the Seated Warrior is also nearly identical to the examples of other warrior figures included here (Figs. 8-12). This style of warrior is only one of many in West Mexico. The widespread warrior imagery points to the "importance of raiding and small-scale warfare, [leading to] the rise of powerful chieftains…" (Townsend 1998, 112). Most of the Ixtlan del Rio warrior figures are the most similar in their painted patterns. Although Figure 12 stands apart from this trend, the other five warriors are almost identical. The painted designs are used to emphasize the armor the warriors wear.

This 'armor' is so called due to the ubiquity of the interpretation of these figures as warriors. However, there are other possible interpretations due to the ambiguity of these details. The 'armor' could actually be a cloak type piece of clothing draped over the figures' shoulders, possibly as a symbol of political or military power. Furthermore, the object held in the hands of these warriors is usually interpreted as a weapon although it could also be seen as a baton or staff. But, juxtaposed against other warrior images in West Mexico where the weapons are entirely unambiguous, it is difficult to affirm the baton's weapon status. Perhaps it could instead be seen as a staff or another marker of political power. When these re-interpretations of the "warrior" are considered, one may instead call these figures "political leaders" (Foias personal

communication). There is no conclusive evidence to sway the interpretation of the figures either way. Therefore, despite the other possible interpretation, this paper will continue to primarily identify the figure as a warrior and discuss it in that context, continuing the common line of discussion revolving around these figures. Additionally, however, the possibility of a conflation of the interpretations of both military and political leaders ideas will also be considered in the tradition of the Mesoamerican warrior-rulers.

The paint on the warrior's clothes also continue onto the warriors' faces. The bold white lines contrast sharply to the dark red background, drawing attention to the designs and making them a focus of the figure, suggesting they have an additional symbolic meaning. Body painting is a common practice in many cultures, used mainly to advertise some fact about the person painted. For a warrior in battle it may represent previous success in combat or simply be used as an intimidation tactic (Pickering and Smallwood 2016, 41). Given the uniform painting of the warriors, it would not represent an individual's achievements. Additionally, the warriors are not depicted in an actively combative state. Therefore, the paint is much more likely to have a more spiritual or ritual meaning. There are a few possible interpretations for this discussed below.

In a highly religious society such as West Mexico, rites of passage are an important part of individual's place in society, allowing them to move from one social position to another (Townsend 1998, 111). In the warrior's case, he may be rising to fill an important position of power. This postulation is supported by the warrior's position sitting on a stool as well as by the discussion of the ambiguity surrounding the figure's armor/cloak and weapon/staff. Stools are usually closely associated with authority in Mesoamerica. In fact, "Seating is the most common verbal and visual metaphor for rulership in Mesoamerica, and the seated pose is itself frequently characterizes portrayals of rulers" (Graham 1998, 200). Also, the previously mentioned

interpretation of widespread warrior imagery allows loose connections to be made to wider Mesoamerica's warrior-rulers and high-ranking command figures. In these warrior-ruler's cases, they had to prove their worth and courage by themselves participating in or leading a group in battle (Townsend 1998, 113). With all of this together, a possible interpretation of these figures is that they represent a leader experiencing a rite of passage following a success in battle or sitting in front of his people after a successful military endeavor. The face and body paint may therefore be a part of this rite, marking the warrior figure for the ritual. This makes sense in the context of the multitudes of warrior figures painted in the same way, perhaps marking the rite of passage following a first successful battle in an anecdotal manner for the occupant of the tomb they are buried in. This concept will be explored further in the following section regarding use and function of the objects.

Another possible explanation for the face paint is that "it is likely that the warrior figures of West Mexico also perform a ritual function, guarding the dead against evil spirits" (also elaborated on in the following sections) (Gallagher 1983, 32). In this case the paint may serve some function as protection. This possibility is supported by the extension of the linear painted designs onto the warrior's clothing, specifically his horned helmet. The helmet worn by the warrior figures is very close formally to the roofs of the houses which appear in the architectural models in the Ixtlan del Rio style (figures 13-15 provide examples). Both the figures' helmets and the houses' roofs serve a purpose of protection. In daily life, a helmet protects the head from damage and the roof protects a family and their belongings from the elements. In the context of the figurines and house models, however, this protection may be extended to a more supernatural realm.

House models typically seem to depict a time of cosmological relevance. This is supported by birds present on the roofs—birds are common depictions of ancestors or spiritual messengers (Furst 1995)—and large groups of people in some ritual such as feasting. The houses' roofs are often painted with some pattern, impossible to have been on real houses since they were thatched. Although it is possible that the thatched roofs were covered in adobe and then decorated, there is no concrete evidence to necessarily support this. In many cases, such as Figure 13, the roof is painted in the same diamond pattern used for special supernatural protection as found on the WCMA musician's headdress (Gallagher 1983, 109). On other models, such as Figure 14, the roof is painted in a simpler striped manner. This is markedly similar to the design on the warriors' helmets. Assuming the painted stripes on the houses can be interpreted like the diamond painted ones, the helmets may be also seen in the same light. In this case, the helmet has doubled in purpose to extend from the pure physical protection to protection against dangerous elements of the supernatural. Perhaps the large amounts of body paint and decorated armor serve to give the warrior spiritual fortitude while doing its duty protecting the body it was interred with.

Use and Function of West Mexico Figures

Shaft Tomb Description

To understand the function of these West Mexico figurines in their context, one must first understand the funerary traditions of West Mexico. This culture is best known for their shaft tombs. These tombs are monumental undertakings. Their shafts extend straight down anywhere from 2 to 18 meters, leading to one to four burial chambers (Weigand and Beekman 1998, 39-40). These tomb chambers generally align with the cardinal points, access shafts on the east with the pits containing grave goods toward the west (Faigere and Darras 2016, 44). This orientation

fits with the Mesoamerican cosmovision as discussed previously. The burial chambers are ovular pits which vary in height and have enough room for a body and grave goods, but not much else. The tombs are found in different places, making it difficult for archaeologists to find them before looting takes place. All tombs are marked in some way, some only by stone slabs, while others, such as the tomb at Huitzilapa, are found cut through the floor of residences. This occurrence suggests that, not only was there a belief in a continuing soul, but the living may have had some connection or even duty toward their buried ancestors (Lopez and Ramos de la Vega 1998, 63). Interestingly, many house models of Ixtlan del Rio style show people in a space under the house (Figure 15). Since all houses excavated have been one story, built on platforms, this house model suggests that the population of this underground space are the dead, joining in on the rituals taking place above them (Butterwick 1998, 98).

This tight connection between living and dead may explain part of the elaborate nature of the shaft tombs. The monumental state of these tombs and the work involved in creating them confirm that they are the burials for only the elite of West Mexican society. However, part of the grandeur may also come from the necessity of maintaining a good relationship with the dead. The number of offerings such as food, jewelry, tools, vessels and figures can be interpreted as having been used to appease the souls of the dead and keep them comfortable in the afterlife (Lopez and Ramos de la Vega 1998, 63). These types of mortuary practices were not uncommon in Mesoamerica. The connection between the living and dead is strengthened due to ancestral kinship ties. In tombs such as Huitzilapa, there is conclusive evidence that the many individuals buried in the tomb are linked genetically (Lopez and Ramos de la Vega 1998, 59).

The tombs are thus burial chambers for select elite families of West Mexico. They are interred in the tombs to take them into the underworld and provided with goods to sustain them

in the afterlife. One last part of mortuary practices in West Mexico remains to be discussed. A significant piece of evidence is found at a number of excavated tombs. The tombs appear to be reopened and reused over time. Additionally, at Huitzilapa there is evidence that bodies were cared for above ground before burial. It is suggested that people died more frequently than the tombs were opened, possibly due to the intense rainy seasons which make the tombs unstable (Pickering and Cabrero 1998, 80). It is possible that there were additional, cultural reasons for this practice, but at this time there is no direct evidence of what that may have been. The people buried well after their corporeal death, were most likely wrapped in straw mats or some other material to create a funerary bundle (Lopez and Ramos de la Vega 1998, 64) There are also models in the Ixtlan del Rio style which show funerary processions carrying a bundled figure (see Pickering and Smallwood 2016: p 14, figure 9). No bodies have been found with wrappings still intact. However, there are features in the bones which support bilateral constraints that may have been caused by wrapping the body before burial. In these cases, there is often a presence of red pigments surrounding the bodies indicating the possibility of painted wrappings (Faigere and Darras 2016, 45). These body wrappings may have a ritual connotation comparable to other Mesoamerican cultures, such as the modern Nahua people, where paper or palm mats are used in rituals outside mortuary practice. Additionally, the red color of the pigment could possibly symbolize blood, an important ritual substance across Mesoamerica. Blood was thought to contain part of the life force shared among all things, and bloodletting was a common practice (Furst 1995). Bloodletting was considered to repay some of the debt owed to the gods following their sacrifices to create the world (Basset 2005). In West Mexico, there are records of bloodletting in Ixtlan del Rio style figures where the figures are pierced through their cheeks usually identified as mourners (Figure 19). The red pigment on wrappings may somehow tie into

the same practice and is at the very least an indication of funerary ritual that has left no other trace through time.

"Anecdotal" Status Symbols

Mortuary practices in West Mexico create a picture of a fairly comparable Mesoamerican religion where the soul lives on and may affect the living. However, the figures this paper is focused on are unique to the cultures of West Mexico. Figurines are found throughout the Mesoamerican regions, but the large-scale of the West Mexico figures is an anomaly. This has produced some debate on the purposes of the figures in context. One of the first prominent West Mexico figure scholars, Hasso von Winning, was a strong proponent for a purely anecdotal purpose of the figures. He believed that the figures should be interpreted without any ritual or spiritual connotations and consider the objects to describe daily life (Beekman and Pickering 2016, 9). This theory has since been discounted due to the non-ritual and decorative function it ascribes to the objects, which rejects everything known about Mesoamerican cultures and their art and religion.

When the figures are interpreted in this narrow and restrictive context, they would serve a twofold purpose. They would first act as a status symbol and second to identify the people buried in the tomb, largely through their occupation. While it is obvious that archaeologists may use the quantity and quality of the figures present in the tombs to propose a status for those buried, it is another thing to say that is the *purpose* of the objects. It is far more likely that the personal adornments such as elaborate jewelry found in tombs such as Huitzilapa are direct representations of status, as opposed to the figures themselves. The second anecdotal purpose of identification would put the figures in the tombs as a direct representation of the individual interred. In the musician's case, this meaning would suggest that the individual buried with the

figure would have participated in some way with music. The warrior would literally document the burial of a person involved in war and house models would be interpreted as depicting the daily life in West Mexico, honestly and without relation to the ritual or supernatural.

These interpretations may make sense at a very superficial level; however, the similarities between West Mexico and the rest of Mesoamerica make it impossible to believe that these objects could have been separated from any and all supernatural or ritual meaning. For one, their presence in tombs implies a funerary ritual function. Further, if the figures were meant to represent the individuals buried with them, there would need to be some evidence of portraiture or direct occupational markers which tie them together. The question of portraiture is difficult to answer. On one hand, the figures are generally iconographically similar and stylistically exaggerated. The seated warriors, for example, are nearly identical. On the other, none of these points rule out representational portraiture or the possibility that the resemblance is simply lost under the high levels of regional stylization. The direct occupational markers are easier to examine conclusively. In the tombs of Paracelas, for example, there were tortoise shell drums found with individuals that have no skeletal characteristics that could tie them to musical activity (Lucido and Ramirez 2016, 62). Additionally, a question arises, if the figures were portraits, when would these portraits of the dead have been made (Beekman and Pickering 2016, 19)? While none of this evidence is necessarily conclusive for ruling out portraiture entirely, it is irresponsible to consider the figures in this context alone. Instead, a ritual connotation *must* be considered as well, and all theories after von Winning comply with this necessity.

A secondary interpretation of these figures, less restrictive than that of von Winning due to its acknowledgement of ritual in West Mexico, is that they represent or embody a rite of passage for a specific occupation or status of the interred individual. In the above section on the

iconography of the Seated Warrior, an interpretation of his seated pose and face paint was as representation of a rite of passage that the interred individual the figure was buried with achieved during his life. This may be a rite of passage restricted to an individual who took a position of power, as mentioned earlier, or it may be more common. This is supported by the large numbers of the warrior figures. In this case, the warrior may represent a male's passage from simple adulthood to a more exalted status due to success in battle. The musician figure is typically the smallest and therefore may represent a less important rite of passage such as an inauguration into ritual practices of the civilization. The ritual importance of music and danger associated with it would mean that not everyone was capable of performing; the musician figure could represent those who were capable. Another common figure is that of a ballplayer. That figure could embody a passage into adulthood through the first ballgame game the individual won (Foias personal communication). Finally, house models could represent the rituals or gatherings that the individual held in their homes or hosted for the community. While this interpretation includes some evidence of the ritual life in West Mexico, there is still a more supernatural context to be explored.

Objects as Offerings and "Companions"

Peter Furst was one of the first to wholly reject von Winning's interpretations of the West Mexico figures. He argued for an entirely supernatural lens of interpretation, delving into the realm of shamanism and secondary meanings (Beekman and Pickering 2016, 9). This section aims to consider these objects in a ritual context, perhaps without going as far as Furst did without contextual data to generalize all objects to an entirely supernatural level.

This paper has already touched on the idea that figures were offerings given to the individuals they were buried with and will now be explored more fully. Found in the excavated

shaft tombs are many types of grave goods. Ceramic bowls and vessels are common among these, and they, in many cases, have evidence of food offerings contained within them (Pickering and Cabrero 1998, 79). Considering this in conjunction with the large holes present in the hollow figures, some authors have suggested that the figures were also a ritual vessel for liquids, an unlikely hypothesis, or perhaps meant to ‘contain’ some entity represented anthropomorphically through the figures (Beekman and Pickering 2016, 19). They may have even been meant to contain the souls of the tomb’s dead. A similar purpose was proposed by Houston et al for the jade masks found in burials for Maya elite (Houston et al 2006, 147). The offering the figures represented, however, may not have been quite so tangible at first look.

It is important to note that many of the figures found in shaft tombs are in some way incomplete. It is possible that this is due to a ritual sacrifice of the figures performed during mortuary rites (Lucido and Ramirez 2016, 66). The seated warrior from WCMA has been damaged and then later repaired at an unknown time. The breakage could be a result of damage after burial or during excavation, but it may also be a representation of ritual sacrifice of the object before internment. With this ritual sacrifice the objects would be considered “dead” in the same way a person would, given their status as animate as described in an earlier section. Once placed in a shaft tomb they would therefore enter the same dangerous liminal world as the individual with whom they are buried. In some Aztec funerary rites for rulers, slaves were offered to the ruler upon his death. These slaves were then sacrificed in order to join the ruler on his journey in the underworld as “companions” (Lopez and Ramos de la Vega 1998, 64). Possibly, the West Mexico figures represent a form of the same ritual that equates the figures to living people. Additionally, Rebecca R. Stone describes an Inka belief in a spiritual energy, Camay, which could be infused into figurines that served as a container for the dead’s hair and

fingernails, and which then became wawki, or 'brothers,' to the dead. They are described as separate selves which died in the same way as their owner. Stone relates this concept to the West Mexico figures, saying they "ultimately inhabited and acted in the underworld" (Stone 2016, 189) for a particular function, presumably tied closely to the individual interred in the tomb. However, Stone does not claim that the figures are a direct embodiment of the dead themselves. Instead, figures of a performing nature, such as the musicians, may have kept the soul entertained (Stone 2016, 189).

The other iconographic types of figures found in the shaft tombs would provide a different service as a "companion" to the soul of the dead which coincided with their iconography. For example, in the previous section, this paper outlined that the seated warriors' iconography can be interpreted as a spiritual protector for the souls of those buried in the tombs. During the soul's journey in the underworld, they would certainly encounter dangers in the form of other spirits. The warrior could act as a guard against such foes. This concept is supported by the consistent imagery of the warrior figures found within the shaft tombs. The warrior's proposed purpose for supernatural protection, for example, would be supported by the protective painted motifs and ready stance with his weapon.

Use Before Internment and Other Destinations

These ritual interpretations of the figures as "companions" for the souls of the dead still force an idea of these figures having been solely created for a life after death. However, there is some evidence to suggest these objects would have had a ritual life before or instead of their use in a funerary context. There is documented evidence of wear from use on many of the objects found in shaft tombs meaning they were in some way used or damaged before being buried (Beekman 2016, 105). Unfortunately, there is little available research done on what this use may

have been. This is largely due to a lack of archaeological excavation outside of the shaft tomb at West Mexico sites at large. It is difficult to postulate how the figures may have been used without a firm grasp of what the true day to day life of West Mexico cultures was like.

The only excavations outside of shaft tombs are done in residential areas or the circular plazas of large sites in West Mexico. In some of these excavations, the only hint to a figure's life before the tomb is given. There have been limited fragmented and even some complete figures found in residential and ceremonial center contexts (Beekman 2016, 105). While these figures were obviously not tomb bound, they shed some light into any figure's general ritual purpose. In a residential context, it may be that these figures were still connected to the cult of the dead, somehow enhancing the living and dead connection when used in a common ritual. Or perhaps the figures are somewhat anecdotal, and they were collected throughout the life of an individual to be placed in their tomb upon their death, documenting their life. Neither of these suggestions are rooted in evidence and should be tested with further finds and archaeological study of West Mexico.

However, when taken into a purely ceremonial context, one may consider a wider Mesoamerican practice of making a space sacred through bundles and caches. In Mesoamerican cultures such as the Aztec, part of their ritual and religious life was centered around the sacred bundle. Excavation around the Great Pyramid of Tenochtitlan has revealed many sacred caches full of ritual objects held in high esteem. These caches are considered to be both a force which imbues the space with a spiritual sacredness but also acts as a sort of payment to the earth which is being built upon (Townsend 2010). This type of practice was common and widespread. While it is most likely not identical to the Aztec rituals, but it is possible that a version of the ritual occurred in West Mexico. After having been ritually animated through production, eye and

mouth opening, and dressing rituals (Bassett 2015), the figures may have then been used as a sacrifice or offering to the earth to either make a space sacred or appease a supernatural force. When the objects are found in ceremonial centers, this use would have been for the whole of the settlement, but it is possible that the same function could be applied to the figures that made it to the tombs. Perhaps they were offerings meant, not directly for the individuals buried with them, but for the earth or other supernatural forces that may have threatened the individual following internment. Regardless of this relationship between the figures found in a ceremonial center and those buried in a tomb, it is obvious that the figures do not have a solely funerary context. More research is needed to shed light on the true meaning of the buried figures as well as the civilization as a whole.

Conclusion

The two WCMA Nayarit large ceramic figures examined in this paper have no provenance and little archaeological information connected to them. As a result, it was necessary to make deductions regarding their symbolism and use in a much wider context than the figures themselves. However, research regarding West Mexico tends to create a view of the civilization as an entity entirely occupied with the dead, only capturing a small piece of what the civilization would have been and forcing us to see the objects solely as mortuary. There is no denying that this funerary role is important. All Mesoamerican civilizations have extensive rituals and beliefs revolving around death, ancestors, and the underworld, but it is rarely a self-contained belief. Ancestor worship was a central element of all known Central American and South American indigenous societies because of the ancestors' important role as intermediaries between humans and the supernatural (Lind 2015). It is unfortunate that in West Mexico this fact is obscured by loss of information over time. This paper attempted to widen the lens under which the hollow

figures are examined and provide a possible function for them beyond burial. It was found that this was difficult to do especially for the specific objects contained in this paper. In many situations, different scholars mention the possibility that the figures were used before burial before quickly moving on, citing the need for more research. This paper echoes this need. Still, it hopes to provide a convincing argument that the ritual *life* of objects must be considered and that the supernatural aspects of West Mexico may be unknown but were integral to the daily life of the civilization and imbued within the figures in the same manner as in the well-known Mesoamerican civilizations, such as the Aztecs and the Maya.

In this vein, this paper proposes a few interpretations of the objects' functions. In ritual life before or instead of placement in a tomb, these objects may have acted as sacred bundles sanctifying a space for further ritual use. They may have been used to signify the rites of passage which the individual who procured them had gone through. This use may have followed them into the tomb where they functioned as a representation or extension of the individual they were interred with. They may have also been a companion figure to those buried, serving as protection or entertainment for the continuing souls of the dead during their journey through the underworld. Whatever their exact function, these objects represent the ritual oriented life of West Mexico providing connections between the region and the rest of Mesoamerica and allowing us to see West Mexico as a part of that larger history.

FIGURES

Figure 1

Seated Musician with Rasp
(TL.98.13.4)
(previously figure holding wrapped baby)

Williams College Museum of Art

Nayarit. 250 AD. Painted Ceramic. 8¼ x 5¾ x 4 in. (21 x 14.6 x 10.2 cm). On temporary loan from the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Eliot Robinson

Figure 2

Male Ceramic Effigy with Hollow Construction in Ixtlan del Rio Style
(54.4045)

Gilcrease Museum

Nayarit, Mexico. 300BCE-300CE. Earthenware. 11¾ x 7 5/8 in. (29.8 x 19.4 cm)

Via
https://collections.gilcrease.org/object/544045

Figure 3

Seated Musician (1947.20)

Worcester Art Museum

Nayarit (West Mexico). 200 BCE-500 CE. Terracotta. 32.4 x 18.1 cm (12 3/4 x 7 1/8 in.) Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Aldus C. Higgins. via https://worcester.emuseum.com/objects/29677/seated-musician?ctx=a8d2f5ec-d716-4293-982f-4cb835fc6bd9&idx=7

Figure 4

Ixtlan del Rio style hollow male musician playing a rasp (54.4032)

Gilcrease Museum

Nayarit, Mexico. 300BCE-300CE. Clay, slip, paint. 6 5/8 x 4 3/4 in. (16.8 x 12.1 cm).
Via https://collections.gilcrease.org/object/544032

Figure 5

Seated Human Effigy (1974.596)

Museum of Fine Arts Boston

Nayarit. 300BC-200AD. Earthenware: cream and black on red. 10.8 x 6.8 x 4.4 cm (4 1/4 x 2 11/16 x 1 3/4 in.).

Via https://www.mfa.org/collections/object/seated-human-effigy-5170

Figure 6

Musician play rasp(?) (HM4166)

Hudson Museum (University of Maine at Orono)

Nayarit. William P Palmer III Collection

Via https://library.umaine.edu/hudson/palmer/detail.asp?id=59885561

Figure 7

Seated Warrior (TL.98.13.5)

Williams College Museum of Art

Nayarit. 100BC-250AD. Ceramic. 14 x 7½ x 6¼ in. (35.6 x 19.1 x 15.9 cm). On temporary loan from the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Eliot Robinson

Figure 8

Nayarit style Solid Anthropomorphic Seated Figure (54.4056)

Gilcrease Museum

Nayarit, Mexico. 300BCE-300CE. Clay, slip, paint. 9 x 4½ x 3 in. (22.9 x 11.4 x 7.6 cm)

Via https://collections.gilcrease.org/object/544056

Figure 9

Ixtlan del Rio style Hollow Ceramic Anthropomorphic Figure (54.3894)

Gilcrease Museum

Nayarit, Mexico. 300BCE-300CE. Clay, slip, paint. 9 x 4½ x 3 in. (22.9 x 11.4 x 7.6 cm)

Via https://collections.gilcrease.org/object/543894

Figure 10

Warrior Effigy (1974.596)

Museum of Fine Arts Boston

Nayarit. 300BC-300AD. Earthenware: cream and black on red slip paint. 13.3 x 7.7 x 4.5 cm (5 1/4 x 3 1/16 x 1 3/4 in.).

Via https://www.mfa.org/collections/object/warrior-effigy-5168

Figure 11

Seated Warrior in Barrel Armor (86.506)

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Nayarit. 100BC-300AD. Earthenware with slip. 8x 3¾ x 3 in.

Via https://www.mfah.org/art/detail/10324?returnUrl=%2Fart%2Fsearch%3Fq%3Dnayarit

Figure12

Seated Male Warrior in Armor (HM3902)

Hudson Museum (University of Maine at Orono)

Nayarit. Late Preclassic/ Early Classic. Red, White. 12.2 in x 4.9 in x 5.6 in diameter

Via https://library.umaine.edu/hudson/palmer/detail.asp?id=30319684

Figure 13

House Model (21/122 catalog number)

Smithsonian Institute, National Museum of the American Indian

Nayarit.300BC- 600AD. Pottery, Paint.
33 x 18 x 25 cm

Via
https://collections.si.edu/search/detail/edanmdm:NMAI_224434?q=nayarit&fq=online_visual_material%3Atrue&fq=culture%3A%22Mesoamerica%22&fq=culture%3A%22West+Mexican%2FShaft+Tombs+Tradition+%28archaeological+culture%29%22&record=3&hlterm=nayarit&inline=true

Figure 14

House Group with Parrots (1973.88.27)

Yale University Art Gallery

Nayarit. 100BC-250AD. Ceramic with Pigment. 21.5 x 18.5 x 15 cm (8 7/16 x 7 5/16 x 5 7/8 in). Stephen Carlton Clark, B.A. 1903, Fund

Via
https://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/10958

Figure 15

House Model with Figures (1973.88.27)

Denver Art Museum

Nayarit. 100BC-200AD. Earthenware with colored slip. 10.5 x 7.5 x 5.75 in (26.67 x 19.05 x 14.605 cm)

Via https://denverartmuseum.org/object/1965.198

Figure 16

Map of West Mexico with the modern state of Nayarit outlined and orange circles representing archaeological sites, the most important sites in green. Upper right corner shows where “West Mexico” is situated inside Mexico.

Via https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Teuchitlan_tradition_map.svg

Figure 17

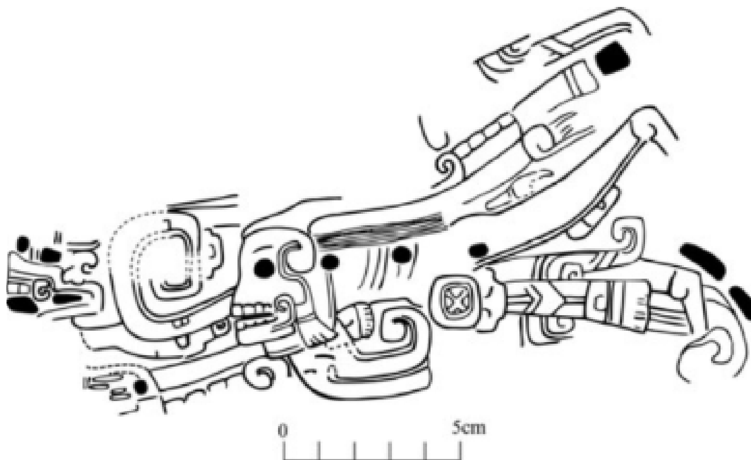
Ceremonial Village Scene with Flying Figure (1959.55.18)

Yale University Art Gallery

Nayarit. 100BC-250AD. Ceramic with pigment. 29 x 18 cm (11 7/16 x 7 1/16 in.) Purchased through fund provided by Mr. and Mrs. Fred Olsen

Via https://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/10009

Figure 18



Rollout of incising on Yugüe flute.

Barber and Sanchez 2012

Via https://www.jstor.org/stable/26300597?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents

Figure 19

Mourners (M.86.296.20)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Nayarit. 200BC-500AD. Slip painted ceramic with incised decoration. 11 × 15 1/2 × 3 1/2 in. (27.94 × 39.37 × 8.89 cm)

Via https://collections.lacma.org/node/253524

Figure 20

Detail of musician's headdress showing diamond pattern

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