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# Changing Identities in Changing Times: Gendered Roles and Representations through the Ceramic Figurines of Greater Nicoya

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Changing Identities in Changing Times: Gendered Roles and Representations through the  
Ceramic Figurines of Greater Nicoya

by

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A THESIS

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## ABSTRACT

The archaeology of Greater Nicoya is shifting focus from large, exceptional ceramic anthropomorphic figurines, to the smaller, more common specimens found in domestic contexts. Most figurines display obvious sexual and gender characteristics. An analysis of gender identity provides an opportunity to study these objects as part of daily life and ritual that speak of group and individual identities. Data from an almost unstudied collection of figurines from the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology and a sample of fragmented specimens from the site of Santa Isabel (Ni-Ri-44), Nicaragua, will help trace the broader changes in the forms of gender representations from the Bagaces (A.D.300-A.D.800) to the Sapoá (A.D.800-A.D.1350) periods. Roles and representations, along with styles and manufacture, underwent a gradual transition from naturalistic, sexualized and individualized to abstract and gender ambiguous, reflecting major changes in community values and socio-political organization.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The peoples of Lower Central America have produced an impressive number and variety of art objects. Gold, jade, obsidian, stone and ceramic artefacts abound, some produced with intricate artistic detail. The apparent effort and time necessary to create such goods have led archaeologists to associate many objects with elite or high status ritualistic practices (Bruhns 1992; Day 1995; Day and Tillett 1988). The limited amount of professionally excavated sites in this region has obliged researchers to rely on objects from looted contexts to complete their studies, but these contexts over-represent burials and sites identified as elite, which tends to emphasize the influence of high-status individuals. Additionally, many of the figurine analyses from the 1980s and 1990s were based on large, rather exceptional pieces, and virtually ignored the smaller, more common specimens. This approach provides us with a one-sided understanding of what these figurines represent and for whom they were produced. It also works on the assumption that early Greater Nicoya native groups functioned as stratified societies, often referred to as chiefdoms (Carneiro 1998; Creamer and Haas 1998; Helms 1992; Pauketat 2007), and that figurines were not accessible to all. Through the use of anthropological and archaeological approaches to gender and identity, we can start looking beyond issues of status and focus on certain elements of shared identity. I am particularly interested in gendered representations of females as these are the most common, although as I will demonstrate, gender and sex are at times difficult to assess with certainty.

Among Greater Nicoya figurines, females have mostly been identified by the presence of visible breasts, even in the absence of other primary or secondary sexual

features. But recent research into these figurines has demonstrated the many intersections of sex and gender (McCafferty and McCafferty 2009; Preston-Werner 2008; Wingfield 2009); gender representations may be more complex than previously believed. Some figurines, thought to be female, may in truth be a combination of male and female concepts. Even the more obvious female specimens may display fluid, changing representations of “femaleness.” These possibilities will be explored here.

The study of gender in archaeology was once considered rather controversial and arguably continues to be a subject of debate in some areas. Although many artefacts can be said to contain or represent gender, figurines and other anthropomorphic representations are often seen as representations of gender “par excellence.” In Greater Nicoya, gender studies have rarely been attempted and are recent endeavours, but gender should not be set aside simply because it is difficult to assess archaeologically. An impressive range of ceramic styles and gender representations exists, and though these figurines are mostly referred to in terms of elite practices, their number, variability and presence in different contexts point towards multiple meanings and uses. As a result, a focus on gender should reveal new dimensions.

My thesis focuses on demonstrating how through time gender representations in Greater Nicoya underwent a gradual transition along with the broader changes in figurine styles and manufacture. While at times figurines were transformed in dramatic ways, they often retained elements from past traditions. The way gender was depicted and the roles they portray are more complex and enduring than previously acknowledged, and these appear to be linked, at least in part, to these broader changes in style. If anything, anthropomorphic figurines should be considered as objects of daily ritual that speak of

varied gender roles, as they hold purposes and symbolic content that transcend assumptions about elite goods and representations while still being affected by the wider socio-cultural climate. My purpose is not to deny the elite nature of some figurines or to argue that they do not represent shamans or other special-status individuals, but rather to provide balance to interpretations that seek to categorize unilaterally, and in some cases to glorify certain objects. I propose to accomplish this by identifying gender among a collection of mostly complete figurines from the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology.

This is one of the larger collections of such figurines available to the public for study purposes, and most specimens have not been given analytical attention. Rosemary Joyce (1993) published a study based on a selection of the Peabody figurines, but her focus was mostly on specimens from the Classic Lowland Maya and Honduras. Nonetheless, her consideration of Greater Nicoya figurines led to the conclusion that human representations on objects used in everyday life or in ritual do not reflect the gender and social status divisions known among the Maya and other highly stratified societies (Joyce 1993:264). Here I follow her lead, and by presenting a more detailed study of Greater Nicoya figurines spanning multiple styles and time periods, I will elaborate on the complex subject of gender in Greater Nicoya society. This research is supplemented by a collection of fragmented figurine specimens from the site of Santa Isabel site (Ni-Ri-44), near Rivas, Nicaragua. Many of the figurine types present in the Peabody Collection are also among the Santa Isabel material and thus the latter may provide additional insights into how these figurines were understood and used.

The Greater Nicoya archaeological subarea (Norweb 1961) is divided into a northern sector that encompasses Pacific Nicaragua, and a southern sector which corresponds to the Nicoya Peninsula of Costa Rica (Figure 1). On a wider scale, it is part

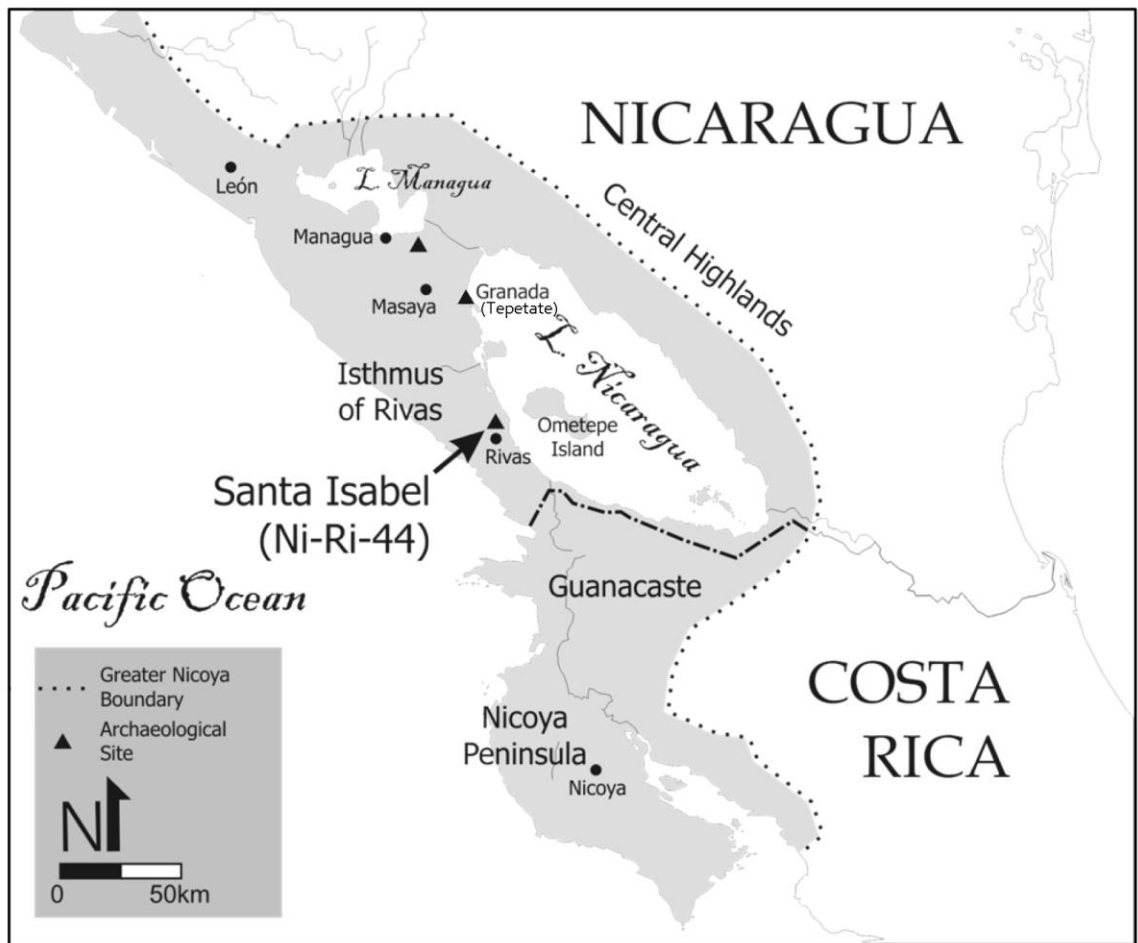


Figure 1. The Greater Nicoya archaeological subarea (based on original map by Larry Steinbrenner, see Steinbrenner 2010, Figure 1.1).

of Lower Central America, an archaeological concept that encompasses multiple modern-day states: most of El Salvador and Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama (Lange and Stone 1984; Willey 1982). The definition of Greater Nicoya is geographical and

cultural, relying on characteristics and associations with other better archaeologically known regions, mainly Mesoamerica and South America (Creamer and Haas 1985). What generally distinguishes this subarea from others is its designation as a frontier or boundary zone. Most often associated with Mesoamerica, it also neighbours regions having been, and in some cases continuing to be, occupied by Chibchan speaking populations. Greater Nicoya's own Chibchan heritage has often been set aside to emphasize its later Nahua and Oto-Manguean speaking inhabitants. Issues regarding ethnic and cultural identity permeate this archaeological sub-area, and although I will focus on some of them out of necessity, my thesis has more to do with how people used and understood figurines rather than about what specific ethnic group made them.

Indeed, the Chibchan people of Greater Nicoya have produced figurines since approximately 800 B.C., a practice that continued as new inhabitants migrated into the region, bringing changes in styles that eventually transitioned into the early Spanish Colonial period. Changes in craftsmanship and representations can equally be linked to broader socio-political patterns, notably the rise of centralized power and prestige structures in the later periods (Healy 1980; Hoopes 2005; Niemel 2003; Salgado 1996a). Although many connections can be made between the material culture of Greater Nicoya and that of Mesoamerica, some striking differences exist between these locally produced figurines and those made within regions more widely affected by Mesoamerican hegemony. This is especially true of the earlier periods in Greater Nicoya prehistory, a time during which egalitarian societies were likely numerous. Settlement patterns, artefact types and distribution, monumental architecture (or lack thereof) and mortuary traditions all indicate kinship-based communities, where status was a function of one's

abilities and value within the community (Lange 1992a; also see Chapter 3 for full discussion). However, ancient Greater Nicoya, as part of Lower Central America, was a region of diverse human interactions and a whole range of social organizations should be considered from one period to the next (Drennan 1996). However, my research, while referencing some of this early prehistory of Greater Nicoya, focuses on the millennia immediately preceding European contact: the Bagaces (A.D.300-A.D.800) and Sapoá (A.D.800-A.D.1350) periods. Not only does this timeframe provide the most abundant set of figurines, but it also represents a period of significant change in patterns of social stratification and ethnogenesis that should have material and symbolic impacts on such object. In such periods of social dynamism it becomes particularly interesting to study populations from the perspective of gendered identities, as these are flexible identities that are often affected by the socio-political landscape and wider community identities.

The Bagaces period in Greater Nicoya demonstrates clear sedentary lifestyles, newer agricultural practices, and continued reliance on hunting and gathering. The notion of power is often misapplied by archaeologists in this socio-cultural context, as rank and status should not be confused. Overall, very little evidence of truly ranked societies exists for the early Bagaces period, save for a few cases of differential burial treatment (Briggs 1993; Lange 1993). Yet, the figurines for this period are numerous, and appear to represent mostly females and/or gender ambiguous individuals. Many of their characteristics point toward shamanistic and/or other spiritual symbolism (Day and Tillett 1996; Wingfield 2009), but these figurines need not be categorized solely as special status symbols or representations, especially given the greater social and material context.

The later portion of the Bagaces period saw a transition from bichrome ceramics to a polychrome tradition and along with this an increase in population, as well as changes in settlement patterns and subsistence strategies. This marks a period of change, one where increased influence from Mesoamerica seems apparent (Coe and Baudez 1961; Healy 1980; Salgado and Vazquez 2006). In light of these changes, how did this affect figurine production and style preferences? Were gender roles affected by these sociological changes and if so, is this reflected in how people artistically represented gender and sex?

The nature of the Sapoá sites and their associated material show for the first time a period in which social differences and social dynamics are more obvious, and possibly more politically complex, with individuals having to negotiate their identity on a daily basis, as newcomers arrived and culture changed. Such dynamics make this period particularly interesting from the point of view of gender identity, as it is a branch of identity often affected by the socio-political landscape and the institutionalization of social class distinctions (Joyce 1992). Gender can be approached from multiples stances, though it must always be considered a branch of identity theory because as a social construct, gender is an important aspect of personal and group identities. With that in mind, I will focus on concepts of the body –or embodiment– on the psychological aspects involved in how people understand and relate to miniaturisations of human beings (as opposed to large-scale representations) and on gender as an active component of ritual practices, whether in the household or in more public spheres.

The site of Santa Isabel, diagnostic of the Sapoá period, was likely inhabited by the Chorotega, Oto-Manguéan speakers who allegedly migrated from Mexico to



Nicaragua during this timeframe. The polychrome tradition of the Sapoá is known for its predominantly female mold-made figurines, which are highly standardized and stylized, contrasting quite sharply with the earlier handmade figurines, which were more naturalistic and came in varying styles and quality of manufacture. This major shift in style and production will be explored in this thesis as it likely affected gender representations.

From the Bagaces to the Ometepe period, archaeologists typically have considered figurines, human and otherwise, as objects belonging to high ranking individuals or as representing special, often powerful roles, such as chief, shaman or god (Day and Tillet 1996; Lange 1992a; Wingfield 2009). Such interpretations have often resulted from a reliance on the art-historical perspective –that is, more attention to decontextualized objects and aesthetic trends– with little consideration of archaeological context. This is no surprise as figurines available for study have made their way into museums and private collections through a tradition of looting and black market sales, leaving scarce archaeological evidence available to provide spatial, material, and cultural information. Though art history analyses of gender have proven their value, the archaeological and broader anthropological perspectives, can add important dimensions that make all the difference to social and historical interpretations. Archaeological theory and the history of archaeology are also important, as they form the foundations of how scholars decided to interpret figurines in the first place. Indeed, as methodologies and hypotheses are never detached from their historic and scientific context, the same can be said about specific figurine analyses. What scholars choose not to discuss regarding a

specific artefact or artefact type is almost just as informative as what they choose to emphasize.

As my thesis explains, archaeologists associate figurines with elite practices for a few basic reasons. Potentially the first is their pleasing aesthetics and interesting styles that compel and fascinate us (Lange 1992a). Because of our pre-conceived notions of social complexity, in part related to our knowledge of Mesoamerican socio-political development and our predispositions to “art,” a prejudice exists against such artefacts being accessible to the common population, either in production or in usage (Bailey 1992). Additionally, very few publications on Greater Nicoya figurines acknowledge the finding of figurines in domestic contexts. Although publications emphasizing elite practices are interesting and important in their own right, they do little to advance our knowledge of how the majority of people lived, used, and understood their own material culture. The study of gendered identities through figurine analysis should certainly be done with an open mind in regards to the elite versus non-elite issue, mainly because of the uncertainty surrounding the socio-political development of Greater Nicoya, but also because gender is a social construct that may well have transcended those categories.

Human figurines and other forms of anthropomorphic representations have persisted as subjects of fascination for artists, art historians, and even the general public. In the field of archaeology, the study of figurines as indicators of complex symbolic and social realities has varied, but can mainly be linked to more recent investigations (see Bailey 1992; Biehl 1996, 2006; Halperin et al. 2009; Joyce 1993). Used in typologies for studies on ceramic production and commercial exchange, they have less frequently been the subject of complex analyses supported by explicit theory. From an archaeological

perspective, figurines overall do not provide any more valuable information than, for instance, lithic scatters or trash middens. In other words, their meanings are not inherent or universal, although cross-cultural comparisons and theory can provide a helpful framework for analysis. Indeed, the insights that figurines can offer depend on the broader objectives of the project, and no thorough excavation would have as a main goal the recovery of figurines. I argue that a strong theoretical background is necessary to study human and anthropomorphic figurines as they offer no straightforward data; they are by their very nature representations of people, their practices, and their subjectivities. Such subjectivity invariably affects the researcher, who must engage with it in order to understand these artefacts and hypothesize about them. Consequently, this analysis will combine techniques from archaeology, anthropology and art history to develop a theoretically and empirically robust framework for studying these ambiguous objects. As most of my archaeological figurine specimens come from secondary household deposits (i.e., trash middens) I do not benefit from the rich contextual data that stem from *in situ* discoveries. Nonetheless, the finding of figurine fragments in contexts identified as ancient homes and their surrounding environment is in itself a major interpretive tool and demonstrates that many figurines types are to be found among other common goods and can no longer be interpreted exclusively as special burial goods.

In my assessment of gender and sex, I give attention to the general form, style and manufacture of the figurines, as well as to their representational content. The latter includes descriptions and analyses of such characteristics as facial features, anatomy, pose, clothing and decoration types. Used carefully, some ethnographic and cross-cultural data from the area and other regions serve to support certain hypotheses regarding

function and use, as well as symbolic and/or ideological content. Archaeological and anthropological theories, notably those focused on identity, gender and embodiment, will be incorporated into my analysis to provide a more complete understanding of the figurines.

The main questions that I seek to answer are as follows: Beyond their sometimes more obvious spiritual roles, what do these figurines indicate about gender identities and roles, and how did these change through time? If, as I believe, important stylistic and symbolic differences do exist between the Bagaces and Sapoá periods, what does this say about the larger socio-political landscape in which they were made?

Chapters 2 and 3 of the thesis will provide the reader with the general context of my study; basically, what has the archaeology of Greater Nicoya contributed to the field as a whole and what do we know about the chronology and time periods for this region. In these chapters I discuss the theoretical and methodological advances that are relevant to the type of figurine study presented here, as well as the time periods and associated socio-cultural characteristics that were prevalent when certain figurine types were produced. Chapter 4 is all about figurine analysis. I discuss the various approaches to figurine analysis employed today, but since very little work has been done on Greater Nicoya figurines, or even on Lower Central American figurines, my focus includes studies on Mesoamerican specimens and even those of other regions, as some of the approaches and theories behind these analyses have merit and can to a certain extent be applied to other areas. This chapter also incorporates the relevant theoretical framework (i.e., identity, gender and embodiment.). Chapter 5 presents the methodology and data, including the material from the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology and the

Santa Isabel archaeological specimens. The reader will be acquainted with the figurine typologies and will be given descriptions of each individual figurine, with Appendix 1 and 2 providing even more thorough descriptions. Some preliminary interpretations are offered, especially concerning typology. Chapter 6 uses information stemming from the aforementioned approaches as I tie together the data from these last chapters and offer my interpretations. Finally, in Chapter 7 I conclude the thesis with summarizing statements and last thoughts on figurine analysis.

## CHAPTER 2: AN OVERVIEW OF THEORY AND METHOD IN GREATER NICOYA

We can hardly discuss how the archaeology and anthropology of Greater Nicoya have been affected by new methodologies and fieldwork without also considering the influence of the shifting theoretical perspectives that often accompanied them. In this chapter, I provide an overview of some of the key events and people having contributed to the archaeology of Greater Nicoya and how they are attached to broader anthropological paradigms. I focus on some key research projects that overall prove relevant to the subject of my thesis. I will also mention some of the trends having particularly affected the archaeology of Lower Central America and Mesoamerica, as these go hand in hand with much of the research that took place in Greater Nicoya.

### **The Early Years: Ethnohistory and Early Archaeology**

Historical and ethnographic studies of this region started early in the Colonial period, well before any archaeological undertakings and what might be properly termed “ethnographic.” Most of these documents are the work of clergy members, *conquistadores* and various political figures: men of means and of power. Not surprisingly, no women explicitly documented similar observations in these regions. Some noteworthy chroniclers and early ethnographers are Gil Gonzales Davila, the first Spanish explorer in the region, and Andres de Cereceda, Gonzalez Davila’s treasurer. Davila and Cereceda set foot in Greater Nicoya in 1522 as part of a Spanish exploratory

expedition providing historians with early accounts of the local communities and environments (Abel-Vidor 1981:85). Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo y Valdes provides in his *Memorias* (Oviedo y Valdes 1976) some of the richest and most quoted accounts about indigenous groups, their environment, and their beliefs. He was the official chronicler of the Indies between 1532 and 1557 (Abel-Vidor 1981: 88). These men provided accounts of encounters with native populations, which included the Chorotegas and Nicaraos (Abel-Vidor 1981, 1988; Chapman 1974). Others, such as Peter Martyr D'Anghera, did not publish primary sources, but rather a variety of data pertaining to the Americas based on verbal and written accounts (Fowler 1985).

These primary and secondary accounts have strongly affected our notions about indigenous culture, and yet, obvious questions about reliance and representation arise once the identity of these chroniclers is brought to light. Indeed, histories written by elite members of society tend to be tainted by their particular socio-cultural circumstances (Abel-Vidor 1981; McCafferty 2000). Although these biased perspectives can in themselves provide interesting information about European perceptions, this does little to portray native people accurately. Fear, ignorance and the sheer wonder of discovery can lead to highly colourful narratives bordering on the fictional. In some cases, inaccuracy can be unintentional, because people often describe new things all while comparing them to their mental database of known elements (McCafferty 2000).

Many of these early accounts compare the Chorotegas and the Nicaraos with the Aztec culture, portraying them as having striking similarities. These comparisons have been carried through time and relied upon as a starting point for archaeological and ethnographic research (Fowler 1985; Healy 1980; McCafferty 2005; Squier 1990). They

have indeed proven valuable, but the archaeological data do not seem to support such strong correlations, which leads us to question not only the historical accounts but also the oral histories described to the chroniclers (McCafferty 2005). Native myths regarding ethnic migrations from Mesoamerica comprise part of the recorded information and offered scholars what seemed to be a fitting scenario to explain the nature of Lower Central American cultures, their relationship with Mesoamerica and the presence of Nahuatl and Oto-Mangue languages, idioms normally associated with Central Mexico (Abel-Vidor 1981; Chapman 1974; Stone 1966). These realities definitely made sense when viewed through the lens of diffusionist and world-system theories, but we may wonder if the accounts actually influenced the application of the theories, rather than the other way around. Early scholars such as Squier (1852, 1853) were hardly critical of these sources, and though recent authors are more prudent, evidence still exists of heavy reliance on historical accounts, with insufficient doubts expressed. For instance, Abel-Vidor (1988) praises the work of Oviedo and gives him much credibility because of his kind and liberal attitude toward natives, but this in itself demonstrates a political stance that could have affected his writing.

### **Archaeology and Theoretical Approaches of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

Scientific interest began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the burgeoning culture-historical perspective (Abel-Vidor 1981). Culture historical archaeology was mainly concerned with categorizing material culture and attributing it to distinct ethnic groups. In other words, pottery = people (Trigger 2007). This was a step forward from studying artefacts



for the sake of aesthetics and antiquarian interests, but the work of Squier (see Squier 1852, 1853), for instance, was consequently very descriptive and bent on creating categories and cultural sub-divisions (Haberland 1992; Joyce 2004; Squier 1990). The leading scholars of this period were not trained archaeologists or anthropologists; Squier was a journalist and diplomat, Bransford (1881) a member of the navy, and Bovallius (1886) a botanist. Nonetheless, they brought their interest and observational skills to the field and provided some of the first ceramic typologies (Healy 1980, Stone 1984). These typologies provided a foundation for future research, especially those devised by Samuel Lothrop (1926), whose legacy for the archaeology of Greater Nicoya is substantial and still referred to despite important modifications in ceramic typologies by recent scholars. A focus on identifying and comparing ethnic groups through these ceramic typologies remained prevalent through most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as demonstrated by the comparisons made by Lehman (1920), Spinden (1925) and Lothrop (1926) between the Chorotega and culture areas to the north and to the south. This is not due to a lack of development within the discipline, but it is rather an outcome of the minimal database available for Lower Central America (Lange 1996) and the interests of the time. This remains a subject of study today.

The rest of Central America has been the subject of much more research due in good part to its monumental architecture and other classic Mesoamerican traits (Creamer 1989; Kirchoff 1968; Quilter and Vargas 1995; Smith and Berdan 2003). The relevance of these traits will not be discussed here, other than to mention that such a classification led Lower Central America to be considered by many as a “watered-down” version of Mesoamerica, because of its distance from the core area of influence (Joyce 2004) and

because the local populations were never “able” to attain state level social complexity (Coe 1962). Michael Coe, as late as 1962, perfectly expresses this sentiment: “Greater Nicoya can be best considered as the Southernmost sub-region of Mesoamerica, being throughout its prehistory in the cultural shadow thrown by the higher civilizations of the Maya and Mexicans” (1962:180).

Diffusionist and world-system models better succeeded at attempting to explain the expansion of populations, innovations and material culture in the Americas, to outline their economic relationships, and to account for their specific traits (Creamer 1989; Kepecs and Kohl 2003; Smith and Berdan 2003) While this led archaeologists in a theoretically more sophisticated direction, Greater Nicoya archaeology has made slow progress until recently because some key problems have not yet been resolved: scholars continue to debate the origins and ethnic identity of such groups as the Chorotega and the Nicarao. While asking such questions as “who were these people?” is an intuitive and seemingly obvious launching point for further research, sometimes such mysteries can eventually be solved by looking at cultures more closely, at individual lives and practices, that are themselves worthwhile study subjects. A shift from broad research questions, such as ethnicity, to more focus on local socio-cultural and economic patterns in Nicaragua and Costa Rica characterizes the mid-century, all while the old questions continue to persist and affect research methodologies.

## **Archaeology and Theoretical Approaches of the Early to Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century**

Of great importance for understanding the state of archaeology in Greater Nicoya is the acknowledgement that theoretical and methodological trends employed in Greater Nicoya and in Lower Central America have been strongly affected by those of Mesoamerica. As previously mentioned, when cultural evolutionary models were in vogue, scholars considered the Chorotega and Nicarao as lower on the chain of socio-cultural development (Coe 1962; Joyce 2004). Fortunately, new multi-evolutionary theories were added to the mix, such as cultural ecology, that took into account the importance of the environment, how it affects populations, and how they adapt specifically to it (Cooke 2005; Steward 1955).

Environmental data and settlement patterns offered a whole new range of possibilities by permitting archaeologists to reconstruct past environments and understand subsistence patterns (Joyce 2004; Lange 2005). This also promoted the understanding of broader regional patterns and how smaller sites were linked and seemingly dependent on larger ones. Lower Central America was again tied into Mesoamerica, but in a more economic sense. For example, ceramic analysis, including figurines, has undoubtedly been affected from what we may term the “Mesoamerican prejudice.” Indeed, many publications interpret ceramic styles, shapes and functions without giving much consideration to the possibility of indigenous creativity or innovation, every new style being the result of outside influence (Coe and Baudez 1961; Lundberg 1977; Snarskis 1981). For instance, the presence of early pottery types, such as the Dinarte type found on Ometepe island, has mainly been explained as products of

trade routes between South America and North America, as though local populations could not be responsible for its presence (Haberland 1966; Lange et al. 1992:23).

### **Archaeology and Theoretical Approaches of the Mid to Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

The institutionalization of archaeology and the later processual revolution (Binford 1962; Trigger 2007) brought new scientific methods and multi-disciplinary approaches that pushed archaeology into a more objective realm of science. Using a combination of stratigraphic analysis and radiocarbon dating, Coe and Baudez (1961) produced a chronological sequence for Greater Nicoya that would be used for decades to come and that closely followed the sequence established for the Maya. Their system is not commonly used in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as it has been replaced by new appellations and a slightly different chronology that takes into account recent data (see Chapter 3). This newer periodization demonstrates that chronologies for Greater Nicoya are not perfectly correlated with Maya or Mexican sequences (McCafferty and Steinbrenner 2005b). Indeed, as regional ceramic typologies became more refined through research, and archaeologists were less focused on comparing them with those of Mesoamerica, absolute dating became a more accessible method of dating, thus linking typologies to specific periods of time.

In the past few decades, ceramic studies have offered a multitude of new perspectives on production and trade in this region. Ceramic compositional analysis, such as x-ray diffraction and thin-section petrography, are recent analytical techniques that work with geology to produce information about the content of ceramic paste by defining

which minerals and other geological components are present (Bishop et al. 1988, 1992; Dennett et al. 2008; Healy 1980; McCafferty et al. 2007). These data can help define resource “procurement locations, production sites, production techniques, patterns of redistribution and in some cases even specialization” (Dennett et al. 2008: 1). For Greater Nicoya, one of the important discoveries regarding ceramics is evidence of local production for many types of pottery that were thought to have been imported because of stylistic similarities with other regions. For instance, the Papagayo and Pataky polychromes of the Sapoá and Ometepe periods famous for their jaguar iconography and Mixteca-Puebla motifs (see Day 1994) have allegedly been found in Mesoamerican contexts, but are now known to have been produced in Greater Nicoya (Healy 1980; McCafferty and Steinbrenner 2005b). Indeed, trade goods were not unidirectional, and Lower Central American cultures have also contributed to the culture of Mesoamerica by providing pottery objects, gold, feathers, cacao and more (Creamer 1989; Healy et al. 1996; Lange and Bishop 1988).

Central to this debate are two of Nicaragua’s most influential archaeologists: Frederick Lange and Paul Healy. Healy’s dissertation (1974) involved ceramic materials from some of Nicaragua’s most important sites, notably Rivas and Ometepe Island, areas also known for the presence of large-scale anthropomorphic stone sculptures. His ceramic typologies and stylistic studies for the Rivas area continue to be used today and are the basis for his belief in the major influence of Mesoamerican cultures on the ancient population of Rivas (Healy 1980). Despite this, Lange (1978, 1992a, 1992b, 1996) was not entirely convinced of the extent of Mesoamerican influence and favoured a more dynamic view of Greater Nicoya trade and production, one which left space for local

styles to have developed more independently, all while acknowledging the power of external influence .

Overall, the 1980s were a less than favourable time for archaeology in Nicaragua because of the political turmoil caused by the Sandanista leadership. Scholars thus shifted their interest to the Costa Rican portion of Greater Nicoya. Of relevance to my thesis is the fact that during this time the debate between the proponents of “local development” versus “Mesoamerican influence” became more heated, as the archaeological record was finally becoming rich and sufficiently complex to demonstrate that diffusionism and culture-area approaches did not provide satisfactory answers for the variety and nature of local material culture (Creamer and Haas 1985; Hoopes 1987). I would argue that once this realization started to permeate the field, it became easier for scholars to justify their interests in other issues, such as local economies, local ceramic production and lifeways. The term “Intermediate Area” was coined as a more neutral term (although first used by Haberland in 1957), one that avoided any assumptions regarding cultural relationships with Mesoamerica or the Mesoamerican “frontier.”

### **Post-Processual Archaeology and Beyond: The Late 20<sup>th</sup> to Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Lower Central American archaeologists are slowly parting from their old objectives and embracing new approaches to field research and analysis, mainly through household archaeology and with the help of anthropological perspectives and theories that have broadened the range of scientific interests. These changes in the discipline coincided with a period of heightened interest in Greater Nicoya as the 1990s

experienced the development of many key projects that would lead the way into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This was also a fruitful period in terms of publications, which permitted wider interest in the area, discussions between various scholars of different expertise and promoted further research. Of particular note are the major surveys undertaken by Silvia Salgado (1996) and Karen Niemel (2003). The data recovered by Niemel eventually led to a major project in Rivas. Indeed, the Proyecto Santa Isabel, Nicaragua (SIN), a University of Calgary project, took place in the Rivas district between 2000 and 2005, and was initially chosen because it was believed to be the site of Quauhcapolca, the Nicarao capital at the time of Spanish contact. Although ultimately this proved to be incorrect (McCafferty 2008; McCafferty and Steinbrenner 2005b), this project was the most extensive and thorough investigation ever undertaken in the region. Involving a multitude of scholars, universities and funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the data recovered benefited from broad multidisciplinary studies and included faunal, mortuary, lithic, ceramic and even identity and gender analyses (McCafferty 2008b). Figurine fragments from this project have been analyzed as part of my thesis. They were found in multiple loci and mixed in with domestic refuse, which supports a hypothesis for daily domestic use of at least certain figurine types (McCafferty 2008a, 2008b).

Salgado's research survey (1996) of the Granada area led to a different project. The site of Tepetate was identified among 37 other sites, and was the focus of another University of Calgary project in 2008. The excavations were somewhat less successful because of many instances of poor preservation and soil disturbances. However, Tepetate and Salgado's overall research provided an interesting balance, in that she acknowledged

local production and innovation in ceramics while maintaining that the Chorotega, a Mesoamerican group, migrated to Greater Nicoya in the late Bagaces to early Sapoá Period, around A.D.900. This migration affected material culture, notably with the appearance of Papagayo polychrome. Papagayo figurine molds were recovered at the site which supports hypotheses for local and extensive production. In 2009 and continuing in 2010, another University of Calgary project was started at the site of El Rayo.

El Rayo is situated in the Asepe Peninsula at the base of the Mombacho volcano, south of the city of Granada, and is a multi-component site spanning the Bagaces and Sapoá periods. This was the first time that professional archaeologists excavated materials that transitioned from one period to the next. The area was largely undisturbed by modern activity and permitted the recovery of a significant amount of diagnostic artefacts, including human figurines. Locus 1, described as a “mortuary and ritual area” (McCafferty and Dennett 2011: 9), contained multiple burials, and in one of them a Sapoá period hunchback was found in association with several shoe pots, some of which had miniature vessels inside (McCafferty, personal communication 2012; McCafferty et al. 2011). At Locus 2, Bagaces period figurines were found in domestic contexts. The figurines from El Rayo are generally female figures with large or exaggerated bellies and buttocks (McCafferty 2011a).

These projects are interesting in that their focus is not solely on elite members of society in ancient Greater Nicoya and actually attempt to approach notions of identity, such as gender. Indeed, over the past 20 years or so household archaeology has become a major archaeological trend. This is not only beneficial because archaeologists are finally tapping into a major part of the archaeological record that had mainly been ignored, but



also because it provides different perspectives for studying social identity, without necessarily depending on studies of ethnicity (Webster et al. 1997). This is because household archaeology permits scholars to approach social identity from a “commoners” perspective, finally breaking the top-down views on material culture and social structure. The fascination with monumental architecture, elaborate burials and rare artefacts is understandable, but these tell a story different from that told by more common artefact types, and ceramic figurines are definitely common.

Despite this commonality, they have almost exclusively been studied from an elite or special status perspective and this has led to an interest geared towards large, masterfully crafted specimens, which are the exception rather than the rule (see Chapter 6 for discussion). For instance, Day (1995) does mention that many figurines are found in domestic context, however, she does not consider these within her stylistic and functional analyses. Instead she focuses on oversized figurines of the Galo and Mora types, as she considers these to be associated with the elite and their shamanistic rituals. Other articles focus on the extraordinary or the odd, such as Haberland’s (1995) analysis of a one of a kind articulated figurine.

Arguably, this is in part due to the ongoing debate regarding whether or not Greater Nicoya cultures ever achieved considerable levels of social complexity (Fowler 1989; Lange 1992a, 1992b). Contradictions between archaeological and ethnographic evidence are somewhat to blame for this, but overall most publications seem to take for granted that early populations were socially stratified. This is a major issue for the archaeology of the region and I will address it multiple times in the following chapters.

The study of social identity –of which gender is an important and ever-evolving component– through the daily activities portrayed by household contexts provides characteristics to people who would have otherwise been considered as faceless “blobs” and to individuals, such as women, who often go unmentioned in written texts (Tringham 1991). Patterns of domestic practice are of course particularly fascinating in sites such as Céren, where a volcanic eruption buried the settlement, thus providing archaeologists with a well preserved “snapshot” in time (Sheets 2006; Sheets et al. 2002; Webster et al. 1997). Greater Nicoya may not have the luck of having such an ideal archaeological context, but household archaeology has nonetheless made impressive advances in the field. It also seems likely that many figurines from museum collections, which are usually assumed to be from looted burial sites, may in truth be from a wide range of contexts. Sites such as those excavated by Healy (1980), McCafferty (2008), Salgado (1996) and Niemel (2003) have unearthed household contexts and many figurines and figurine fragments. The sites of Santa Isabel and Tepetate have not always provided primary contexts, but the presence of figurine fragments, body ornamentations, spindle whorls, and other symbol-rich artefacts in household refuse indicate widespread use. McCafferty and McCafferty (2009) used these objects to infer elements relating to native perceptions of body image, aesthetics and gender (see Chapter 4) and I shall be following their lead by expanding on the subject of gender.

## Conclusion

To summarize, theories and methods in the archaeology of Lower Central America, and Greater Nicoya in particular, have followed broader historical and scientific developments in archaeology as a whole, especially those occurring in Mesoamerica. As archaeology gradually became a legitimate scientific endeavour rather than a hobby for the elite, the interest in past populations and the methods used to acquire information changed quite drastically. As studying and explaining change, lifeways, political organization and various socio-cultural realities became the prevalent interests, archaeologists put more time and energy into conducting formal digs, creating databases, surveying, comparing settlement patterns, and investigating household sites rather than only assumed public and elite spaces. Old categories and heavy reliance on ethnohistorical sources were questioned, and once the value of these cultures was understood regardless of their connection to Mesoamerica or South America, it became more acceptable and interesting, to offer new hypotheses. Archaeometric techniques now available also give archaeologists the chance to investigate new paths. Ceramics can be studied more accurately as the regional database grows, trade and inter-cultural contacts can be better assessed, and more theoretical questions may finally arise regarding belief systems, gender and ritual practices. While the old issues about ethnic identity are still relevant, the perspective has at least broadened. Additionally, new geographic connections and origins are now being considered. Indeed, Chibchan origins are often mentioned, as well as intra-culture developments (Cooke 2005; Lange 2005). One must admit that the study of gender might be very problematic considering the lack of primary

contexts (though further excavations may remedy that problem), but through a combination of anthropology, archaeology and art history, we can nonetheless come to some interesting conclusions. I propose that such analyses are possible for Greater Nicoya figurines without always having perfect contexts as this has been done in other regions.

### **CHAPTER 3: GREATER NICOYA SOCIETY THROUGH TIME**

Much research has yet to be done on pre-contact Greater Nicoya and consequently many key issues are still shrouded in uncertainty. Among other things, archaeological evidence of ranking and markers of social complexity are scarce, even in the later Sapoá and Ometepe periods, which lead up to the European contact and colonialism when various accounts describe what is generally regarded as chiefdom-level societies. Without going into specific detail about each archaeological site, it is important to understand the current views on the subject of socio-political organization in Greater Nicoya, especially since this has been one of the main focuses in archaeology. Because of the minimal set of data and the diverging opinions regarding this issue, there have been multiple ways of subdividing the temporal framework. The first widely used archaeological sequence, the result of excavations by Michael Coe and Claude Baudez in the 1950s and 1960s (Baudez and Coe 1962; Coe and Baudez 1961) and their subsequent ceramic typologies, represented four periods closely related to Mesoamerican chronology: the Zoned Bichrome (300B.C.-A.D. 200), Early Polychrome (A.D.200-A.D.800), Middle Polychrome (A.D.800-A.D.1175) and Late Polychrome (A.D.1175-Conquest) (McCafferty and Steinbrenner 2005b). But this system failed to account for periods of change in Greater Nicoya and became outdated with the refinement of chronological sequences and the increased application of radiocarbon dating.

Since the early 1990s, a nominal system using place names relevant to Greater Nicoya prehistory was developed and more accurately describes cultural developments through time in this specific region. Each period is meant to represent different phases of

socio-cultural development. They have been developed using ceramic sequences, settlement patterns, radiocarbon dating and ethnohistorical analogies. Although this developmental chronology concerns Greater Nicoya, other areas of Lower Central America are also mentioned in this chapter as most research has come to include such comparisons, and discoveries in other regions are often considered relevant to broader regional hypotheses. However, on close inspection, it is apparent that this periodization began as a series of ceramic sequences based on changes in decorated ceramic assemblages and their position in stratigraphic levels (Lange 1992; Linares 1979; Willey 1982). Information regarding broader socio-cultural patterning, such as settlement patterns, other material culture and subsistence strategies were added on as the archaeological database for the region was augmented. Indeed, much about the archaeological record points towards long periods of relative stability and low rates of change (Bishop et al. 1988).

Finally, this chapter will provide a general outline of socio-cultural development in Greater Nicoya, but will not focus on enumerating all relevant ceramic and figurines types. These will be part of chapters entirely devoted to figurine types and figurine analysis in Greater Nicoya, and in other relevant regions.

### **The Early and Middle Formative Phases (±2000B.C.-500B.C.)**

The Early Formative is characterized by the arrival of the first bands of hunter-gatherers in the region, of which no traces have been found save for one fluted spearpoint (Snarskis 1981). The Middle Formative is likely a transitional phase into horticulture and

farming, as some very early specimens of pottery have been found in Panama and Nicaragua. However, some of the earliest pottery in the American Southeast is associated with hunter-gatherers, not horticulturalists, and such a possibility for Greater Nicoya populations should be considered. Nonetheless, it is possible that sedentism and agriculture could have developed as early as 2000 B.C., as both lithic and palaeobotanical evidence indicates the possible cultivation of maize (Salgado and Vazquez 2006; Willey 1982).

The Monagrillo ceramic type from Parita Bay is the earliest complex known to date in Lower Central America. Equally intriguing is the Dinarte phase material discovered on Ometepe Island. Even for these early phases, scholars adopted a diffusionist approach by pointing towards Mesoamerican and South American influences. More specifically, the Monagrillo type, though it does not match closely any other known complex, has been linked to Venezuela and Colombia (Lundberg 1977). In terms of broader culture, this period is characterized by small villages, early agriculture and egalitarian societies that have been compared to the pre-Olmec stage in Mesoamerica (Willey 1982). Some scholars, such as Doris Stone (1966, 1984), believe that the first chiefdoms emerged during this period, as jadeite and other exotic goods traded through long-distance exchange networks have been found in burials as far south as Costa Rica. Olmec-style artefacts recovered in Greater Nicoya have been interpreted as symbols of prestige and authority. It remains to be seen if sources for jadeite existed locally; some archaeologists propose that long-distance material procurement has been exaggerated, in quantity and in importance (Abel-Vidor 1981; Sharer 1984). Figurines for this period seem to be virtually non-existent, or at least none have yet to be found.

### **The Late Formative or Tempisque Period (500B.C.-A.D.300)**

Previously referred to as the Zoned Bichrome phase in its later half (300B.C.-A.D.300), the Tempisque Period is by far better known archeologically than its antecedent. Despite the small number of sites excavated for this period, supposed evidence of rank-ordered societies is attested, and in the beginning of this period, purported Olmec influence continues to be interpreted through Costa Rican artefacts. These goods are thought to have travelled through a “down-the-line” trading system, where they would have been exchanged through numerous intermediaries before arriving in Greater Nicoya (Sharer 1984; Snarskis 1981). Though Olmec influence in both Maya and Lower Central American regions apparently disappeared during this period, the precedent for interregional distribution of luxury goods is thought to have affected socio-political development by reinforcing the positions of elite groups through their control of these exotic items (Willey 1982). Very little evidence truly points to this, and it seems possible that this assumption has been formulated based on the socio-cultural developments of Mesoamerica during this time, where the beginnings of non-egalitarian complex societies were well on their way and closely affected the local politics of other Lower Central American countries, such as El Salvador and Honduras.

There is nonetheless evidence of villages and cemeteries with differential mortuary goods. The Las Pilas cemetery, though heavily looted, underwent salvage archaeology during the 1970s. This formal cemetery yielded such burial goods as metates and jade amulets, often considered luxury or ceremonial items (Lange and Scheidenhelm



1972; Snarskis 1981; Stone 1977). Unfortunately, most of the cemeteries for this period have provided poorly preserved human remains. Consequently, associations between burial goods and potential status or rank are difficult to assess. What does seem more obvious is that this period demonstrates clear sedentary lifestyles, partial agriculture and continued reliance on hunting and gathering. Among the pottery typical of this period is the often admired Rosales Zoned Engraved, famous for its naturalism and sculptural qualities and includes small, human figurines. This type only appears a few centuries after the beginning of the Tempisque Period (after 300B.C.) and in many ways is quite unlike the figurines from the later periods (see Chapter 6 for discussion).

Ceramics for the earlier portion of this period are mostly unknown because only a handful of sites corresponding to these centuries have been excavated. Finally, other than the production of Rosales Zoned Engraved in Pacific Nicaragua and its distribution throughout Greater Nicoya, very few data suggest cultural homogeneity between sites (Bishop et al. 1988). The fact that jade is almost absent from southern Nicaragua, yet present in neighbouring regions, possibly indicates the presence of distinct communities that could not always be bridged by trade (Salgado and Guerrero 2005, Salgado and Vazquez 2006).

### **The Bagaces Period (A.D.300-A.D.800)**

This period marks the beginning of the polychrome phase in its later half and major changes in figurine typologies. The archaeology of the early portion of this period is not well known, although some nucleated villages occupied areas of over 50 hectares,

leaving behind earthen mounds and imports from El Salvador and Honduras, such as polychrome vessels and prismatic obsidian blades (Salgado and Vazquez 2006). Sites from this period start to be oriented towards the coast, and we begin to see increased use of marine resources for these locations (Lange 1978). However, despite the shift from bichrome to polychrome, this period seems to demonstrate much continuity with preceding periods. Snarskis (1981) explains the transition to polychrome in terms of Greater Nicoya's relations with Mesoamerican trade routes. He hypothesizes a rupture in trade due to political turmoil, possibly related to the decline of Teotihuacan and its subsequent effects on the Mesoamerican long-distance exchange networks (Sharer 1984). This in turn would have forced populations in Greater Nicoya to develop their own luxury goods. However, as most ceramics from earlier periods were locally produced, and chemical analyses of vessels from the polychrome periods demonstrate similar results, this interpretation proves to be weak (Bishop et al. 1990).

Figurines from the earlier half of the Bagaces period are monochrome or bichrome, with red slip being the dominant color, connecting them to the earlier Rosales Zoned Engraved type despite major differences in figural representations. Indeed, types such as Chavez White on Red and Red on Cream Transitional are overall more in line with figurine types from the Tempisque period. The striking Galo Polychromes, which include large and small figurines, are typical of the later half of the Bagaces period and are often interpreted as elite goods (Day 1988, 1995; Day and Tillett 1996) despite the fact that they come in highly variable sizes and quality. Galo Polychrome shares more in common with Sapoá period Polychromes, notably complex painted decoration and their portrayal of rotund females with stylized and abstracted anatomy (see Chapters 5 and 6

for discussion). No types seem predominant in the North for this period, while Carillo, another striking polychrome type similar to Galo, characterized the southern sector. Galo Polychromes are thought to reflect influence from the Ulua-Yojoa regions of Honduras (Salgado and Vazquez 2006).

Many scholars see the Bagaces period as characterized by an increase in sociopolitical complexity (Healy 1980; Hoopes 2005; Salgado 1996a, 1996b; Salgado and Fletcher 1994) Nonetheless, actual numbers of foreign objects are quite limited, and this period shows few signs of rising social stratification, but rather a continuity of the social organization noted in the earlier phases. Once again, the main evidence of hierarchical differentiation is to be found in differential mortuary goods, through the presence of sparse exotic goods and the large stone sculptures that may be associated with this period (Bruhns 1992). However, the exact period during which this statuary was erected is unclear and they may have been sculpted during the Sapoá period. Finally, data regarding settlements do not permit to distinguish between primary and secondary sites, and so it is assumed that regions were more important than individual sites (Lange 1984). The end of the Bagaces period leads into more tumultuous changes in community patterning and material culture.

### **The Sapoá Period (A.D.800-A.D.1350)**

The sites attributed to this period have been more commonly studied in Pacific Nicaragua than in any other region, mainly in recent years as two major projects have been developed in Rivas and Granada (Healy 1980, McCafferty 2008). However, the

southern portion of Greater Nicoya has not yielded much information regarding habitation contexts, although regional surveys have led to the discovery of numerous cemeteries. Around A.D.800 archaeologists see the abandonment of many sites in a clear shift from inland occupation to coastal and lakeshore settlements, along with a new reliance on marine resources for subsistence, as attested by the numerous fish bones and mollusc shells found in domestic contexts. This could be explained by an increase in population, which may have resulted in a diversification of subsistence strategies (Salgado and Vazquez 2006). The size of settlements equally increases, with regional centers as large as 350 hectares and earthen mounds arranged around plazas. There is also apparent specialization of the economy, with sectors that indicate higher rates of production of lithics and ceramics.

Burial customs during this period seem more homogenous. Burial urns are the most common form of interment in Pacific Nicaragua, but primary and secondary burials with extended bodies are also frequent, even more so in Guanacaste where the bones of other individuals are sometimes found alongside the bodies of apparently high status individuals. For the first time, some cemeteries are found in areas segregated from habitation sites (Haberland 1992).

If ethnohistorical accounts (Motolinia 1951; Oviedo 1976:311) and linguistic data (Constenla 1994; Kaufman 1990) are correct, this is when populations from Central Mexico, possibly from Cholula, migrated to Greater Nicoya. Origin myths for the Chorotega suggest they were driven out of Mexico by tyrannical overseers (Abel-Vidor 1981; Stone 1966). Despite the fact that these myths speak of migrations in terms of short term travel from one place to the next, the archaeological evidence suggests a series of

migrations along Central America over a period of centuries. The Sapoá period may have obvious ties with Mesoamerica, as can be seen through the Papagayo and Pataky Polychromes that share stylistic elements with the Mixteca-Puebla tradition (Day 1994; McCafferty and Steinbrenner 2005b). Pataky polychromes are famous for their jaguar representations which have encouraged comparisons with Mexican deities (Cabello 1980; Day 1988, 1984). Nonetheless, the overall material culture and traditions, such as foodways, remained mainly local in tradition (Lange 1984; McCafferty 2005, 2011). Originally, Pataky and Papagayo ceramics were considered diagnostic of the Ometepe period, but C-14 dating from samples from Santa Isabel have helped refine chronologies and prove that these ceramics, and many others, had appeared in the Sapoá period (McCafferty and Steinbrenner 2005b; Steinbrenner 2010:202).

Many archaeologists speak of a cultural break starting with the appearance of polychrome vessels, but we actually see complex interactions between local and foreign traditions. We should not forget that polychrome ceramics, including figurines, actually appeared during the Bagaces period with the likes of Galo and Carillo Polychrome. While the Santa Isabel excavations have shown some continuation of earlier ceramic traditions, these consisted mostly of exceptions: the occasional sherd and a handful of figurines. It is nonetheless of interest that a Sapoá period site the size of Santa Isabel shows Bagaces and Sapoá period figurines found side by side (see Chapters 5 and 6 for further discussion) (McCafferty and Steinbrenner 2005a). This is particularly intriguing since the Sapoá period polychrome figurines differ significantly from earlier types, mainly because they are mold-made, highly standardized and stylized. Figurines for this period rely on more simple geometric shapes and are not meant to realistically represent the human

body. Additionally, some of the new, possibly Mexican, iconography seems to have been incorporated into pre-existing techniques, styles and motifs.

Finally, domestic features for this period are abundant, as traces of ovens, kilns, hearths, wattle and daub houses, floors and postholes have been excavated at sites such as Vidor, Nacascal, Santa Isabel, Tepetate and El Rayo (Salgado and Vazquez 2006; McCafferty 2011b). The size and configuration of these sites and their associated material, which demonstrate craft specialization, show clearly for the first time a period in which social differences and social dynamics are more apparent, and possibly more complex, a time during which people were potentially having to negotiate their identity on a daily basis, as newcomers arrived and cultural practices were under negotiation.

### **The Ometepe Period (A.D.1350-A.D.1522)**

Largely a continuation of the preceding Sapoá period, the southern sector shows subsistence strategies that were mixed, but heavily reliant on marine resources, while the north appears oriented towards agriculture and freshwater fishing (Lange 1992a). The Ometepe period nonetheless reveals a few key changes. One of those is a significant decline in the number of sites found in most regions except for the Isthmus of Rivas. Oddly, except for Leon Viejo, no Contact or Colonial period sites have been excavated in Greater Nicoya and this leaves many questions unanswered in regards to this apparent population decline and site abandonment.

Polychrome ceramics continue to reflect external influences (Day 1988, 1984; Healy 1980) and these purportedly hybrid objects are usually explained through

migration, since linguistic and ethnohistorical evidence suggests a second wave of northern immigrants having arrived around A.D.1200. These immigrants were the Nicarao, who allegedly shared cultural and linguistic traits with other Nahua peoples, including the Pipil and the Aztecs (Fowler 1985). Luna Polychrome, which has no local antecedents, is often attributed to the Nicarao as they are found predominately on Ometepe Island, identified by Spanish chroniclers as being part of their territory (Squier 1990). However, Lange (1995) reflects on the dangers of attributing too much change to migration, because internal dynamics involving interaction spheres of the southern and northern sectors demonstrate economic, cultural and political exchanges that created important ties between populations that could account for much of the variation in material culture. With the discovery that multiple ceramic types associated with the arrival of the Nicarao during the Ometepe period were in truth produced in the preceding period, we are reminded that important questions remain and that these migration stories must be substantiated by further evidence (Steinbrenner 2010).

Finally, while large populations were mentioned by early chroniclers, such as Oviedo (1976), few sites have attested to high population densities, and overall, monumental architecture is absent. While there appears to be a differentiation between public and domestic spheres at some sites, this could be the difference between community and individual spaces. Nonetheless, in Nicaragua and Costa Rica, the newly-arrived Spanish encountered indigenous people led not only by *caciques* (chiefs), but *cacicas* (female chiefs) (Oviedo 1976). Councils of elders were also apparently an important part of decision-making (Léon-Portilla 1972; Lothrop 1926:47-48). This may be an indication that societies during the Sapoá and Bagaces periods were also

community oriented, and not necessarily rigidly ranked, and permitted women to hold important positions. However, Lothrop (1926) also mentions at least three different social classes among the Nicarao and Chorotega: shamans, the common people and slaves, which certainly appears to counter the notion of an egalitarian society during the Ometepe period. But from an archaeological standpoint, many of the artefact types considered as indicative of chiefdom-level (ranked) societies and elite trade systems are scarce. Gold objects, jade, carved metates and elaborate ceramics vessels, figurines and effigy-heads only represent a small proportion of the materials of Greater Nicoya. Additionally, many of these artefact types can be found in domestic as well as in mortuary contexts. And so while both the Sapoá and Ometepe periods appear to indicate an increase in social stratification in Greater Nicoya (as compared to the earlier temporal phases), the extent of ranking and its specific nature is still to be discussed. Regardless, the existence of rank in later periods and of special status individuals in the earlier periods does not preclude the fact that ceramic figurines could well have been made for personal satisfaction as well as to satisfy community needs and expectations. For that reason, I think the term elite should not be so gratuitously applied to figurines.



## **CHAPTER 4: FIGURINE ANALYSIS: THEORIES, METHODOLOGIES AND APPROACHES**

Approaching archaeological problems from an explicit theoretical perspective can be a risky path to tread in areas where factual databases are far from complete. Regardless of the nature of the data at hand, archaeologists must always face the question of how to convincingly link theory to evidence. Admittedly, theory should not always be at the forefront; many good interpretations stem from solid, data-oriented research. Nonetheless, the latter should eventually lead to more extensive hypotheses that address how people lived in the past and go beyond studies of settlement patterns, economy and basic inter- and intra-cultural comparisons.

Figurine analyses began with data and fairly straightforward methodologies, and like many other artefact types, are now benefiting from more complex hypotheses and interpretations. Nonetheless, I have noticed a pattern that is telling of the situation of figurine analyses within archaeology. Most publications that focus on figurines mention the work of the same small group of researchers, with people such as Douglass Bailey, Richard Lesure and Rosemary Joyce at the forefront. This is no coincidence, and my thesis falls within the same tradition. Despite the commonality of figurines as an artefact category, this reliance on the work of a handful of individuals demonstrates how little has actually been accomplished and how very few researchers write about issues that can be transferred to different figurines and other geographic regions.

The study of figurines may not be a recent endeavour, but the manner in which they are studied and the importance they are given has changed quite drastically. This

chapter will focus on describing the approaches to figurines and other anthropomorphic artefacts most relevant to contemporary Lower Central American archaeology, while also mentioning some of the older approaches. Early scholars studied figurines mainly as art, as objects that are aesthetically pleasing and interesting and that could be studied in and of themselves, separate from their wider social context (Biehl 2006; Marcus 2009). Archaeologically, they have generally been studied as part of broader assemblages (mostly ceramics as these comprise arguably the most common figurine type), providing typological and chronological information about a site or region (Barbour 1975; Lubensky 1991; Rands and Rands 1965; Vaillant 1935). More often than not, however, these authors mentioned figurines without giving them much interpretive weight (Begun 2008). Functional approaches to figurine analysis are nonetheless relatively common, and have been so since the popularity of functionalism in anthropology (Faust and Halperin 2009).

Without needing to adhere to the notion that every behaviour or component of culture has some profound utility in human survival, figurines lead people to the obvious question of “what is their function?” A stone tool, a ceramic bowl or even a piece of jewelry has at least a few functions that immediately come to mind, although they may also have more ambiguous applications. But what can we say about a miniature human or anthropomorphic representation? Such objects may have as many purposes as our imagination may allow (Conkey and Tringham 1998). Not surprisingly, figurines were and continue to be commonly associated with ritual practices, as amulets of power, representations of gods, etc. (Biehl 1997, 2006). Female figurines in particular have a long history of being interpreted as “mother goddesses” or personifications of fertility

(Gimbutas 1991). In more recent research they have been studied as active components of the economy, with much focus on production and exchange. Some samples of ceramic figurines have been chemically analysed, a technique common enough for utilitarian ceramics, but rare for this artefact type (Bishop et al. 2000; Halperin 2007). Since the advent of post-processual archaeology (Hodder 1982, Hodder and Hutson 2003) and our current interpretive approaches to archaeology, emphasis on identity, gender and embodiment have been particularly popular with regards to figurines, as shall be discussed in this chapter.

In my study of figurines from Greater Nicoya, I argue that we should speak in terms of interpretive “degrees” or “levels” --although this should also be relevant for most artefact categories-- rather than looking at different approaches as competing, mutually exclusive, or easily separated from one another. For instance, while pondering what I should attempt to demonstrate through my figurine analysis, I often felt confused between the approaches, but identity, embodiment and gender are all intersecting realms of theory. The fact is we cannot begin to speak of gender and embodiment without considering the issue of identity. Gender is one of the many facets of personal or group identities, and embodiment is one of the approaches used to study it. This chapter will provide a general introduction to these theories and approaches and will delve more specifically into the ways we can approach figurines, with a particular emphasis on examples from Greater Nicoya and other regions of Central America.

## **Broader Theoretical Frameworks**

### *Identity and the Psychology of Figurines*

Archaeology provides a unique take on social identities because it approaches people's perceptions and experiences through material culture (Insoll 2007). Identity has in some ways always been a key concept in archaeological research, but it has mainly been used to describe and categorize populations in terms of ethnic and overall cultural identity, which denies the complexity of the identity concept. Biology and ethnicity are too ambiguous and often unrelated to cultural factors to be of great value (Diaz-Andreu 2005). Anthropologically, identity is often defined either as something personal --an individual identity-- or as a group reality (Barnard and Spencer 1996). And yet, no identity can truly be individual, since no person exists wholly outside of their social context. The post-processual emphasis on multidisciplinary approaches has led archaeologists to incorporate sociology and psychology into the study of identity, and the once prevalent Cartesian dichotomies of mind versus body and culture versus nature that had caused an artificial divisiveness of social meaning have been mostly abandoned (Lesure 2005). This has given way to studies of social identity that emphasize agency, practice and embodiment.

A commonly referenced definition of identity describes it as an internal sameness of self, all while sharing characteristics with a community whose overall structure provides the social elements that contribute to the individual's identity (Sökefeld 1999). However, this definition seems to imply that identity should be considered as a consistent whole, that the self and the broader society are akin and complete one another. While

they are definitely counterparts, they can also be opposites, for an individual's overall identity can consist of multiples layers, some which can be strangely incompatible with one another. Gillespie (2001) for instance, distinguishes social identity from personal identity. Social identity is "an aspect of self that makes a difference in how one's rights and duties distribute to specific others" (Gillespie 2001: 81). This takes into account the fact that how a person behaves and perceives himself or herself on a personal level is not necessarily how they are understood and categorized within wider society.

Regarding figurines, what a manufacturer, artist, or artisan chooses to depict (or not to depict) reflects conscious and unconscious social structures, but there is always room for personal taste and creativity that may be situated outside of the norm (Talalay 1993). Ironically, the comprehension of differential identities has resulted in an understanding of the human experience as an integrated assemblage of thinking, feeling and acting. Despite this, some archaeologists do continue to study identity as a single variable: race, ethnicity, gender or social status, such as the Lower Central American focus on ethnicity (Lange 1993), or the interpretation of most figurines as elite objects, representing mostly elite identities (see Wingfield 2009). Regarding the latter, elite identities are often considered as more obvious and more valuable than the commoner perspective. And yet, even for those objects that undeniably belonged to an elite group, this does not mean there were no other underlying identities at play. Fortunately, such interpretive tendencies are changing as the understanding of material culture and its relationship to identity/identities becomes clear in its complexity.

Indeed, authors such as Douglass Bailey (1992, 2005) have gone beyond analyses of style and function to explain why people make and use figurines, and why

archaeologists find them so appealing from an interpretive point of view. In his 2005 publication, he introduces the reader to the influence of psychological processes that come into play in the creation and use of such artefacts. The study of psychological factors has the advantage of being applicable to different populations and to a variety of anthropomorphic representations. It is first necessary to understand that many figurines are anthropomorphic miniaturisations, and that in itself has considerable interpretive importance. Anthropomorphism is the attribution of human characteristics and behaviours to inanimate objects, animals or natural phenomena (Bailey 2005).

In the form of figurines, we find an array of human features presented in such a reduced form. In some cases, figurines may be used as proxies of actual people, as “human non-humans” (Lopiparo and Hendon 2009:69), thus permitting certain behaviours or the playing out of rituals that otherwise would have been harmful to a real human being. In this sense, a scaled-down object acquires new power and meaning, empowering the viewer and providing a different perspective. The spectator is thus enlarged and given an alternate world to experience. Many people should be able to relate to this, because most of us, as children, have played with dolls, toy figurines and other miniatures (train set, doll house, etc.) and imagined we were actors in alternate realities. Finally, miniatures can provide knowledge of the whole rather than of its separate portions. In other words, miniatures make the world and its concepts more manageable through facilitated visualization. And so we could say that figurines actively engage and influence human experience. They function to make people understand, and they function to make them question, too (Bailey 1993, 2005).

Finally, archaeologists are faced with numerous categories of material culture, each of which provides different, sometimes even competing, insights into identity. For instance, in mortuary analyses, archaeologists must consider the complexity of identity and abandon the idea that burial traditions and incorporated offerings are always direct representations of the individual. They also do not necessarily perfectly mirror broadly accepted or idealized cultural practices. Death does not lead to a full representation of an individual's various identities (Gillespie 2001), and the same can be said about figurines. How much, or how little can one figurine tell us about an individual or a society? This is a difficult question to answer, but it does seem that figurines are one of the artefact types most linked to an individual's sense of self (Bailey 2005; Mina 2007). Burials, mortuary artefacts and human remains provide particularly interesting contexts in which to study the body as a creator, witness and product of identities (Reisher and Koo 2004), and anthropomorphic figurines can give access to similar insights because of the connection between the real and imagined body.

### *Embodiment*

Identity is studied through the body, the concept of self, and bodily constructions of identity (Fisher and Loren 2003). Embodiment is “the materialization of the physical person as the site of the experience of subjectivity” (Bachand et al. 2003:238). In other words, embodiment theory provides a framework in which the human body is seen as the materialization and performer of action, experience and identity. In an archaeological perspective the body can be considered as an artefact, but it must also be studied as the locus of lived experience, whether this experience leaves corporeal traces or not (Joyce

2005; Lesure 2005). Rosemary Joyce views figurines and the production of other anthropomorphic images as “a cultural means of responding to and shaping conditions of social existence” (1993:255). Indeed, such images and objects can serve to promote certain behaviours and ideals. Bachand et al. (2003) demonstrate that this can be done at different scales, with consequently differential social outcomes. They contrast practices of bodily incorporation --intimate and internalized bodily practices which can be seen, for instance, through personal adornments-- with practices of inscription, which make certain actions and appearances more permanent. Practices of inscription can be seen in monumental sculptures, murals and elements of architectural landscaping, which are larger scale productions than figurines.

Larger representations have the opposite effect of miniaturisation; the viewer becomes smaller, the world bigger, thus creating different perceptions. Joyce (1993) argues that standardized images executed in permanent materials serve to control individuals. People, seeing these representations on a daily basis, would have been forced to evaluate (or re-evaluate) themselves in light of these ideals. The permanent nature of sculptures could be reinforced by their incorporation into architecture and the broader landscape. This implies a creation process that may have non-discursive and discursive objectives, as well as strong politically oriented cultural practices. Identity and embodiment are key issues when considering anthropomorphic images and objects because they provide a means of reflection of the self through the creation and/or the viewing of an “other,” whether this be a figurine or a sculpture. The power these objects may have on human beings, and as objects relating to identity, is important if we wish to understand their meaning.



On the other hand, Douglass Bailey (2011) recently played devil's advocate with his own hypotheses as he challenged the application of embodiment theory to non-Western cultures on the basis of linguistics. He explained how recent linguistic studies with Australian aboriginals demonstrated that the concept of the "body," as we know it, has no equivalent word in their language and does not truly exist as a concept. While this culture understood concepts of personhood and individuality, they made no distinction between mind, body or soul. Such a perspective would necessarily affect how we should interpret their material culture. Although there is no evidence to indicate that the people from ancient Greater Nicoya shared these views, it is possible that some of the concepts we use as researchers do not fully apply. Because of this disconnect between the body, available archaeological remains, intangible experiences and social constructs, scholars must embrace a multidisciplinary approach that combines anthropology, art history, sociology and even psychology. Meskell (2000) warns that there is no clear one-to-one relationship between the body, identity, material culture or landscape, because the body and the concept of embodiment are not one and the same.

As a result, figurines should be studied with this complexity in mind. For instance, a figurine of the Mora type (see Chapter 5 for discussion and description) found in a burial context likely has a ritualistic purpose related to death or the afterlife, and though the quality of workmanship may be further evidence of an elite burial, such a figurine has other less obvious interpretive "layers." Indeed, the figurine may have personal connections to the deceased individual or to the craftperson who created the object. Furthermore, rituals can be very personal and related to daily, seemingly mundane events. Indeed, domestic ritual in Greater Nicoya was an important aspect of daily of life

(see McCafferty 2008; McCafferty and McCafferty 2009) and women were probably very active within that sphere. The existence of such a wide range of female figurines spanning hundreds of years demonstrates how deeply these objects were imbedded in the local culture. We must keep in mind that ritual is not only a religious phenomenon related to group identity; it can be a secular experience expressed through small actions and objects, such as the preparation of food, life cycles and experiences, and even certain types of work. While personal identity is usually tied to wider cultural and family identities, daily ritual can be a way of defining one's self within this broader reality (McCafferty 2007:213)

Brumfiel and Overholtzer (2009:298) argue that “figurine attributes such as shape and finish are chosen to suit the human body, and the choices will differ according to whether the figurine was intended to be held, heard or displayed.” Embodiment theory offers an interesting means of considering the relationship between “material culture and human sensory faculties” and may eventually lead to insights pertaining to figurine use and applications (Brumfiel and Overholtzer 2009:298). Even the choice of representation and decorative techniques may speak of gender roles and personal preferences, as these are visible aspects of identity.

Making sense of so many layers can be daunting and the science is rarely exact, but this type of analysis is worthwhile and can help enrich our knowledge of the past. It is also anthropologically relevant for the present understanding of people in general and how they relate to certain types of material culture. Bailey et al. (2010), regardless of their own interpretations of figurines, attempt to lead the readers towards their own understanding of them. They thus imply that people who do not necessarily study

archaeology or anthropology may nonetheless have certain insights into the world of figurines and other miniature objects. This is obviously a rather controversial statement, but it demonstrates the complexity of the dialectic between figurines and issues of identity.

### *Gender Studies*

The complexities of identity paired with the physical and analytical limitations of material culture in the archaeological record indeed make for varied interpretations. Concepts of identity and embodiment tend to be studied through gender theory, because for the most part, identity and embodiment cannot be qualified as bona-fide “theories” and consequently must rely upon other theoretical frameworks. Obviously, no theory is viable entirely on its own because each one is linked or rooted into previous theories or paradigms. Gender theory is rooted in the need to better represent and acknowledge elements of gender and sexuality in various academic fields. In archaeology it has often been applied as a means to address issues pertaining to women in the past, as the focus had often been on men. Females and genders other than male are often underrepresented in written records and because archaeology was largely a male-dominated field until later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, much research was male-biased.

It was only in the 1980s that archaeologists finally acknowledged that what had always seemed like a somewhat natural and logical division between the sexes clearly was not. Gender does not simply refer to biological sex, genetics and physiological dimorphic traits; it is a complex social construct reflecting cultural background and historical contexts as well as group and individual psychology (Conkey and Spector

1998:24; Voss and Schmidt 2000:2). Anthropologists and archaeologists alike are more than ever aware of the danger of transposing our current views of sex and gender onto societies from the past, or onto other regions of the globe (Gero and Conkey 1991).

As archaeologists, material culture should be seen as a privileged opportunity to study the dialectic between gender identity and the physical world. There is however a divide between archaeologists that affects the reputation of material culture as embodiments of gender and identity. Some theorists, focused on intentionality and free-will, believe artefacts are inactive residues or creations of human agency that hold no inherent power, while others argue that objects can have their own meanings, histories and personhood, thus actively constructing the world of which they are a part (Wobst 2000). For understanding figurines, these different views can be of great consequence. For instance, does a figurine represent only selected themes and idealized versions of reality, or are they active mediums for the construction and negotiation of social identities (Triadan 2007)? Wobst considers artefacts as linked to people's intentions to change something from what it is to what they think it should be, or to prevent change that would take place in the absence of these artefacts --as a way to promote tradition. He calls this "material interference" because objects help materialize and constrain actions (Wobst 2000:48).

Manipulations of gendered representations are possibly a means to dominate and/or resist certain social pressures. Brumfiel (1996) argues that small, household Aztec figurines were used by women in order to resist gender ideologies within a male-dominated state. This relates to scale --whether an object is represented as small or large, miniature or life-like in size-- and demonstrates the different meanings similar objects

can have when imagery is either officially sanctioned or of a more modest background. In this case, women rejected the state ideology by creating and using figurines of a different style, and sometimes of opposing symbolism. However, female figurines should not automatically be connected to the concept of resistance. It is likely that some of the identities expressed through figurines were compatible with the dominant ideology, or possibly an expression of it (Wolff 1993).

I would add that figurines are like windows onto gender and identity at large in that they enable archaeologists to observe social categories and to make identifications that would otherwise necessitate direct observation or other reliable primary sources of information. Artefacts relating to dress are often rich in interpretive potential because of the intimate relationship between the body and adornments (Fisher and Loren 2003; Loren 2010). Unfortunately, this material category is rarely preserved, but can be studied through other types of artwork. Figurines, murals, sculptures and iconography on ceramic vessels can all point towards issues of gender and how this relates to what is happening in the broader society. But when human remains are recovered, they are often considered as ideal subjects for this type of study. This is because they are often associated with objects that represent important aspects of the individual's life, and the bones, which can often be biologically sexed, may show traces of injuries and illnesses related to their daily activities (Cohen and Bennett 1998:301). Because sex and gender are not necessarily one and the same, this sort of context can be particularly enriching as it can demonstrate sometimes surprising variation in elements regarding identity. However, well preserved burials are not common, even less so in Greater Nicoya where looting and poor conditions for preservation are common. Figurines, complete or fragmented, offer an

appealing alternative, especially when found *in situ*. They are physical representations of gender identity, since gendered agents are always involved in the manufacture of anthropomorphic figurines (Mina 2007).

In figurine analyses, the identification of figurine gender seems to be a primary concern, maybe in part because of the great number of presumably female gendered figurines and the implications this has within a discipline that was until recently, very male oriented. For Greater Nicoya, most figurines seem to have been sexed mainly by the presence or absence of breasts (Preston-Werner 2008). Day and Tillet (1988), for instance, identify certain figurines as female shamans, based mainly on this characteristic, despite naming other features usually associated with males or relevant to both sexes. Without claiming these figurines are gendered male, it is nonetheless important to rely on multiple characteristics for establishing gender, and the possibility of alternate, or third, genders should not be ignored. Shamans commonly hold very specific statuses that may be situated outside normal gender boundaries because of the fact that they perform specific tasks associated to spiritual beliefs (Day and Tillet 1988). In North America, multiple cases are known of third genders having existed within Native American communities, and those individuals often held certain ritualistic roles (Hollimon 1997). As mentioned above, descriptions of figurines as male or female are not uncommon for Greater Nicoya figurines, but McCafferty and McCafferty (2008, 2009) have authored some of the only truly gender-focused research in Greater Nicoya and they do this without relying on assumptions about shamanism or other “elite” practices.

## **Figurine Analysis in Greater Nicoya**

Because Lower Central American archaeology, and Greater Nicoya research in particular, has been strongly influenced by Mesoamerican approaches and interpretations, figurine analyses also have ties to that realm. As mentioned previously, figurines were first treated as “witnesses” of ancient cultures, or culture areas. Diachronic analyses of styles and types led to the creation of typologies quite similar to those utilized for ceramic vessels. These types could also be used within frameworks of spatial analysis, thus determining where these artefacts could be found so as to identify trading relationships, directionality of influence and control from one population to the next (Halperin 2007). For Greater Nicoya, Healy’s description of figurines from Rivas remains one of the most extensive to date (1980). Mainly descriptive, his work serves to compare different periods of occupation at the same site. Despite the fact that such an approach tells us very little of the meaning and function of these objects, and says even less about social identity and belief systems, this sort of basic analysis was necessary to establish the foundation of archaeological data for the region.

Laura Wingfield’s (2009) recent work on figurines has bridged a gap and provided much needed insight. Based on past and present beliefs and practices of native people such as the Kogi of Colombia and Bribri of Costa Rica, she identifies many female and gender-ambiguous figurines as related to shamanism and proof that Chibchan groups in ancient Greater Nicoya held females in high regard as community members and even leaders. While her detailed analysis of gendered roles and the appearance of figurines is excellent, she does not include specimens from the Sapoá period and

considers many of these Bagaces, and even Tempisque, period figurines as being elite objects.

Until recently, why have the figurines of Greater Nicoya been given so little attention? This is especially surprising when one considers the existence of extensive collections, public and private, in Nicaragua and across North America. Admittedly, most of these specimens have no archaeological provenience because they come from looted sites, or they are objects having been sold and passed along since the Spaniards took control of the region in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. While keeping in mind the ethical issues involved in studying such objects, these collections can be, and have been, of great use. This being acknowledged, the lack of context for figurines can somewhat be remedied by the fact that some figurines (or figurine fragments) have known proveniences, having been excavated through professional projects (see Healy 1980; McCafferty 2008; Niemel 2003; Salgado 1996b). Fragments can be compared with these collections, and because most styles are recurrent, it becomes possible to identify chronology, possible functions and even elements regarding gender. However, the importance of context remains crucial, and for figurines in general, there are usually three main types: burials, deliberately arranged scenes, such as an altar, and household contexts. Each one provides different clues pertaining to the meaning and function of figurines (Bailey 1996; Marcus 1996).

If context can be combined with ethnographic data, this can provide valuable information regarding practices that leave little or no traces in the archaeological record. Some studies have focused on creating world-wide ethnographic databases of figurine manufacture and use. This information can be used comparatively, although cautiously, especially within regions that have their own ethnographic database. This is the case for



Mesoamerica where scholars have combined data from the Late Post-Classic and early Colonial periods to analyze older figurine specimens (Lesure 1997, 1999). For instance, Marcus has studied women's rituals among the Zapotec and the Oaxaca people by relying on 16<sup>th</sup>-century accounts of Zapotec ritual practices, which indicated that the worship of ancestors occurred through rituals involving figurines. Nonetheless, her research is mainly possible because of provenience and a focus on household archaeology (Marcus 1996). Such a focus is particularly interesting because it gives the archaeologist the chance to study the lives of common people, veering away from the pervasive studies of elite practices. Indeed, domestic practices leave certain patterns that may lead to new approaches for the study of identity (McCafferty 2008a; Webster et al. 1997).

In terms of gender, household archaeology provides a wide range of areas in which people of all ages, sexes and genders could have had substantial influence. In Nicaragua, at the sites of Santa Isabel and Tepetate, McCafferty has been applying a household-oriented methodology that has led to considerable advancement in knowledge of the ancient cultures of Greater Nicoya. Though questions of ethnicity were still core objectives of the projects, concepts of identity went beyond politics and elite practices, as gender and approaches to embodiment were equally assessed (McCafferty and McCafferty 2009).

I propose that similar analyses are possible for Greater Nicoya figurines without always having context, because certain styles can be associated with specific time periods, thus diachronic comparisons should be possible. Sites such as Santa Isabel have not provided primary contexts, but the presence of figurine fragments, body

ornamentations, spindle whorls, and other symbol-rich artefacts in household refuse indicate widespread use (McCafferty and McCafferty 2008, 2009).

In Lower Central America, the few articles that include figurines in broader analyses seem mostly inspired by ethnohistories and ethnographies. Day and Tillet (1988) for instance analyze figurines as part of their assessment of shamanistic practices in Greater Nicoya. They claim shamanism had a strong presence in the past as evidenced by data from burials dating between 300B.C. and A.D.800, thus before the hypothesized migrations into the region of Nahua and Oto-Manguéan speaking populations (Day and Tillet 1988, 1996). Although linguistics and stylistic similarities within ceramics are used to link Greater Nicoya to South America, the figurine interpretations seem mainly to have been established through knowledge of shamanistic practices provided by fairly unspecified ethnographic material. The description of the figurines is oddly subjective, though presented as if quite obvious: “the figures convey a sense of majestic dignity and commanding presence” or “the obvious power emanating from them” (Day and Tillett 1988:224). The fact that some figurines are represented as seated on low stools is used as means to identify the representation as linked to elite practices (Day and Tillett 1996; Wingfield 2010). Stools may indeed be associated with shamanism, but this type of seated position is not uncommon nor is there proof that it relates only to shamanism or elite members of society. However tempting the use of ethnographic material may be, archaeologists must remain aware of the dangers of applying these data to chronologically remote assemblages. Indeed, though inhabitants of Lower Central America did not develop along the same lines of certain Mesoamerican cultures, they were not static or frozen in time.

## Conclusion

Finally, there is no reason not to further incorporate theories of embodiment, gender and identity into the study of Greater Nicoya and its anthropomorphic figurines. Obviously, the discipline has been slow to catch up due to the lack of professional research in the area, but outside of such a problem, the region abounds in archaeological sites and in varied material culture. As more projects are commenced, some of the difficulties regarding lack of *in situ* contexts should be in part resolved. Academics such as Bailey (2003, 2005) have demonstrated that even artefacts lacking in context or documented background can permit interpretations. Figurines in Greater Nicoya have such potential because of the existence of archaeological material, and of private collections, which often help fill in the blanks and refine typologies.

As outlined above, figurines permit archaeologists to study identity in multiple ways, particularly through notions of gender and embodiment. Bodies, corporeality and notions of perception are not universal; they are context specific, tied to communities, belief systems, histories and individual trajectories (Butler 1993; Triadan 2007). This makes figurine analysis a particularly worthwhile endeavour not only in terms of identity, as this chapter has focused on, but also as a way to understand belief systems, hierarchy, daily practices, and other social dimensions. For Lower Central America, authors such as Rosemary Joyce demonstrate the variety of ways in which figurines can be analysed. The study of figurine themes, combined with context and diachronic analyses, can go beyond what studies of style and function have provided in terms of anthropologically relevant information (Joyce 1993). If artefacts can be viewed as agents or at least as having

agentive force, then the study of concepts of gender within the archaeological record can lead us to cultural meanings and values that can reside within the body, and that can influence the social world. This opens the door to a variety of methods and approaches that may significantly help Greater Nicoya archaeologists in their quest to define the identities of the ancient cultures having peopled the region.

## **CHAPTER 5:**

### **THE FIGURINES: COLLECTIONS AND CONTEXTS**

While ceramic typologies for the Costa Rican and Nicaraguan regions of Greater Nicoya have been developing since the 1950s, many additions and modifications have been made in the past decades by Healy (1980), Lange (Lange et al. 1984) and more recently Steinbrenner (2002, 2010). These typologies are for the most part based on classic features: slip, paint, decorative techniques, shape and region of manufacture. Figurines are classified within these typologies, but currently no publication exists that names and describes all known figurine varieties, which makes classification particularly difficult, and some types are still in the process of being refined. The books (e.g., Abel-Vidor 1981; Healy 1980; Lange 1988) and articles (Day 1995, 1998; Day and Tillett 1996) that do exist specifically on this subject usually focus on describing and interpreting specific specimens as case studies or works of art. The following descriptions and interpretations of ceramic figurines are based on two collections, one from the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology and the other from the archaeological site of Santa Isabel, in Rivas, Nicaragua. The first consists of mainly complete figurines in good condition, but devoid of useful context, while the other features fragmented specimens, with the addition of some archaeological data.

The newly published book *Prehispanic Ceramics of Pacific Nicaragua* (Zambrana Lacayo 2011) and the dissertation of Laura Wingfield (2009) often permitted me to judge whether or not my own observations and interpretations seemed coherent and correct.

## Methodology

To study the figurines (or figurine fragments) at my disposal it was necessary to start with general observations and then work toward specifics. Whether studying museum specimens or the more recently unearthed archaeological specimens from Santa Isabel, I started by re-grouping figurines based on some key characteristics: color (i.e., monochrome, bichrome, polychrome), general shape and key facial features, body positions (i.e., seated, kneeling, legs crossed or standing) and technique (i.e., hand-modeled or mold-made). While this is a broad set of characteristics, they nonetheless permitted me to make an initial assessment of possible figurines types, which I could then compare against established ceramic typologies, when these existed. Indeed, while some ceramic types have certain overlapping features, notably painted decoration and body positions, many types are so striking in appearance that basic categorization is easily possible.

For all the categories thus created I cross-referenced the specimens with figurines and general ceramic types identified in various publications, mainly Wingfield's (2009) art historical dissertation on Greater Nicoya figurines, Abel-Vidor's (1981) *Between Continents/Between Seas: Precolumbian Art of Costa Rica* and Lange's (1988) *Costa Rican Art and Archaeology*. These comparisons permitted me to properly identify some of the more ambiguous specimens. The latter mostly consisted of types that appeared only once or twice in the collections available to me, such as the Rosales Zoned Engraved type, but there still remained a number of specimens that I could not identify because of

possible gaps in typologies or poor preservation. Such figurines were eliminated from my analysis.

With the specimens remaining I could move on to the next level of analysis. I made observations on the following elements: physical dimensions, condition of the object, manufacturing technique (handmade or mold-made), sex and/or gender, body position, description of body parts and facial features, adornment (clothing, head pieces, jewelry), decorative techniques (paint, applique, incisions), body modifications (tattoos, body paint, earpools, etc.), general style (naturalistic or stylized) and any other notable feature (see Appendix 1 for further details). With this information, I could compare figurines within and between each type, noting differences and similarities. I individually photographed each figurine and sometimes groups of similar figurines. Then, by further consulting the various, but admittedly limited, publications mentioning Greater Nicoya figurines, as well as the more general bibliography for that region, I was able to start constructing my interpretations regarding gender and the evolution of figurines through the Bagaces and Sapoá periods.

### **Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology**

In 2009 and 2010 I was given access to the Harvard University Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology's collection of figurines from Central America, which includes specimens from Greater Nicoya. While some of these artefacts were found in archaeological excavations, others were purchased from collectors in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and even in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, notably by E. Flint who acted as an

independent “archaeologist” first for the Smithsonian than for the Peabody Museum at Harvard University (Whisnant 1994)<sup>1</sup>.

Unfortunately, these objects have virtually no provenience, and the best one can find in the archives are brief mentions such as “figurine found in the bank of the river” and general geographic location (see Appendix 1 for any available details on provenience). While these early archaeologists and collectors at times wrote detailed letters to colleagues or kept personal diaries, their field notes were either scarce or never became part of any official record. Yet, these figurines provided crucial information; they permitted me to learn many of the main figurine types and served as examples with which to judge and assess previous interpretations. The Peabody specimens, combined with the fragments excavated in the field in recent years and my observations of other figurine collections as comparisons (mainly Mi Museo, Granada, Nicaragua, figurines shown in books, and specimens studied in Wingfield [2009]), the information was sufficient to offer new interpretations and alternative interpretations to older hypotheses.

<b>Peabody Figurine Specimens</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Catalogue Numbers</b>
Rosales Zoned Engraved	1	RZE-1
Red on Cream Transitional	6	RCT-1,2,3,4,5,6
Galo Polychrome	7	G-1,2,3,4,5,6,7
Papagayo Polychrome	6	PP-1,2,3,4,5,6
Mora Polychrome	4	M-1,2,3,4,
Mora/Papagayo Polychrome	1	M/PP-1

<sup>1</sup> This information comes from the original letters that Flint wrote to the director of the Peabody Museum while doing fieldwork in Greater Nicoya. These were accessed through the Peabody archives at Harvard University.



<b>Peabody Figurine Specimens</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Catalogue Numbers</b>
Total	25	--

Table 1. Figurine types studied at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology.

The figurines listed above (Table 1) include all identifiable specimens, complete or fragmented, of the given types relevant to this study. In the next section I will discuss each type and describe every specimen. Most of these types are fairly well established and some are very common, both in museum and archaeological contexts. The Red on Cream Transitional type is an exception, as it was only recently proposed as a separate type (Wingfield 2009). Nonetheless, even ambiguous figurines were useful in providing data about gendered representations and style changes through time. Each specimen's interpretive value was also considered, and because my study focused on human representations, I eliminated those types that displayed obvious animal or zoomorphic traits.

### **Description of Figurine Types**

This section provides descriptions of each of the Peabody figurines and information on general typology. For all photos and more detailed descriptions, refer to Appendix 1. I present these types and the corresponding figurines in chronological order, from the oldest types to the more recent. In the next chapter, specimens of each type will be discussed and compared more fully.

*Rosales Zoned Engraved (500B.C.-A.D.500): N=1*

Although my interpretations focus mostly on the figurines of the later periods, it is important to mention the Rosales Zoned Engraved ceramic type, because in many ways it contrasts sharply with any other later type. The objects associated with this type include bowls, plates, various shaped pots and effigy vessels, and of course human and anthropomorphic figurines.

This hand modeled, bichrome ceramic is defined by its predominantly red slipped surface and the use of black paint to create designs often resembling clothing, head gear, jewelry and body painting, especially on figurines. Fine incised lines were used to form parts of the body, such as facial features. Rosales Zoned Engraved figurines are one of Greater Nicoya's most realistic types (Figure 2). Proportions and facial features, though never entirely true to the human form, are less abstract and geometric than later types. Well-defined musculature and anatomical details such as navels are commonly portrayed, which theoretically could have made sex and gender easy to identify. This is particularly interesting, because later figurines mostly represent larger individuals, with legs and buttocks out of proportion with the rest of the body, and some of the finer physical details seem to lose importance in favor of more complex decorative techniques, namely the use of polychrome paint (Zambrana Fernandez and Zambrana Lacayo 2011:39-41). And yet, these hollow figures are often of ambiguous sex. They are frequently depicted seated, legs crossed or out-stretched, with hands on hips. The poses are not active, and the person represented usually looks ahead, head straight.



Figure 2. Rosales Zoned Engraved (RZE-1) human figurine, shown from the front and the back. Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. Photograph by the author.

The Peabody specimen provides an excellent example of this type (see RZE-1, Appendix 1), as the figure is seated with legs folded in front and hands on upper thighs. It appears rather emotionless as it gazes ahead. Its gender is uncertain, and although it displays small, round breasts, these could belong as much to a male as to a female. However, figurines similar to this one are usually considered female. While its head is slightly out of proportion, its body is expertly crafted and very naturalistic, even including an indentation in the torso that may represent the ribcage. The facial features are finely modeled and incised. Carefully painted jewelry and clothing adorn its body, and even its ears are shown pierced.

Many of the humans and anthropomorphic individuals represented by such figurines are described as shamans or shamanesses related to fertility, but also bat shamans and warrior-shamans (Tillett 1988; Wingfield 2009:181-182). Because of their often meditative or contemplative stance, these figurines are often associated with

spirituality, ritual and meditation (Day and Tillett 1996). Rosales has generally been associated with elite burial contexts, notably cemeteries in Costa Rica, because of their association with other special status goods such as decorated metates, jadeite, and stone maces (Hartman 1901; Lange 1984; Snarskis 1984). However, they are also found in household contexts (Tillett 1988:48) and a Rosales head has been found in household refuse at the site of Santa Isabel.

*Red on Cream Transitional (circa A.D.200-A.D.500): N=6*

This type was named by Wingfield (2009:206-207) as she claims this represents a previously un-named variety. The figurines are overall common, occurring frequently in archaeological and museum collections. The figurines of Red on Cream are handmade, usually hollow, sometimes with an opening at the top of the head (or headpiece), and characteristically burnished with red slip. By its color, usually a dark red, it is similar to the Rosales Zoned Engraved style (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Red on Cream Transitional human figurines, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. Photograph by the the author.

Contrary to the finely modeled features of the Rosales Zoned Engraved, the eyes, nose and mouth of the Red on Cream seem crudely appliquéd. The eyes resemble cacao beans and the round nose and lips are oversized, giving the face what could be described as an “insect-like” look. This is the case for all six Peabody specimens. Indeed, facial expressions and general appearance do not seem to vary much between these specimens. RCT-1, RCT-2 and RCT-3 are all seated with hands on upper thighs. Admittedly, RCT-3 is incomplete, but the remaining arm and leg fragments are sufficient for me to identify the original pose of the figure. RCT-4 is different; it is both a vessel, as attested by the rimmed opening at the top, and a representation of what may be described as a large individual dancing or kicking. The large, globular shaped body provides space for containing food, drink or other consumables. The figure’s left leg supplies part of the support for this vessel, and the item stands on its own. It was thus likely used as a practical object related to food, but also as a display piece. Despite its difference, I decided to include this piece because it provides an example of the wide range of representations that exist within this type. Indeed, Red on Cream ceramic objects can be found both as simple effigies and as effigy vessels, which are actually very common and come in varying sizes and qualities of manufacture.

RCT-5 and RCT-6 are detached, possibly severed heads, and share the same facial features as the other figurines, but both wear what appear to be a braided headpiece or hairstyle. Oviedo (1976) mentions in his accounts that some Huetar men wore their hair braided and wound about their head, but this may not be the case for the Chibchan people of the Bagaces period. These heads may have belonged to male figurines, but

braided hair or headpieces also appear on figurines with obvious breasts and other female features. Their sex and gender will be impossible to confirm because of their missing bodies.

The other figurines represent females with highly exaggerated thighs and buttocks, enlarged bellies and breasts (often with protruding nipples, see RCT-2, RCT-3, RCT-4) that could indicate pregnancy or fertility. Clothing, jewelry and other sorts of adornments are seldom portrayed on this type; in most cases the figures appear to be naked. In this case, RCT-2, RCT-3 and RCT-5 appear to have earrings or earspools and RCT-1, RCT-2, and RCT-3 display a modeled band or rim at the top of their heads, which may represent a hairstyle or hat.

Red on Cream is similar to Chavez White on Red, but according to Wingfield (2009) it appears earlier in the archaeological record. Having seen very few Chavez specimens in person (none of which were identified) and finding very few examples from books, I am not well equipped to overall analyze and describe this type. Nonetheless, based on Healy's description of figurines from Rivas (1980:264), Chavez figurine heads have down-turned mouths, round eyes and a round nose, and often have white or cream colored stripes painted over parts of the facial features and body parts. They often seem to be wearing a headpiece and a type of loin cloth. But overall, their general appearance, especially their rotund bodies and red slip, are almost identical to Red on Cream.

It is difficult to assess whether Red on Cream constitutes a legitimate type, but based on physical appearance alone, it is similar enough to Chavez that perhaps it should be considered a variety of the latter. Tola Trichrome is another type also very similar to Chavez, and according to recent paste composition analysis (personal communication,

McCafferty 2012), they should possibly be considered as varieties of one single type. Also, having examined Wingfield's (2009) figurine catalogue, I believe she has misidentified specimens of the Chavez type as Red on Cream (see Wingfield 2009: catalogue no.49, no.50). Indeed the figures shown are in most ways identical to the specimens I encountered in museums, mainly the body shape and the cream colored facial features and loincloth. Her dissertation hardly mentions the Chavez type, which is an unfortunate omission considering the similarities with Red on Cream. For clarity in this thesis, I will refer to the Peabody specimens as Red on Cream, but this is certainly a typological ambiguity that requires further investigation.

*Galo Polychrome (A.D.500-800): N=7*

The variety of individuals represented within the Galo type is potentially the broadest of all figurine categories and includes women, men or ambiguously sexed individuals seated, kneeling or standing, women giving birth, women with children, individuals with physical handicaps or diseased bodies, such as survivors of scoliosis, and what have been interpreted as warriors and shamans (Day and Tillet 1996; Wingfield 2009).

This type is characterized by its highly polished surface and the use of three main colors: black, red and orange (or cream). The background is alternatively light with black and red motifs or black with red and cream motifs. It is the use of these paints that make these hand modeled figurines unique. The designs are at times zoomorphic, but overall rely on geometric patterns that often cover the body of the individual (or animal) represented (Lacayo 2011:71).

Quoting Snarskis (1981), Wingfield's dissertation describes Galo Polychrome as the most realistic type for the area, "Galo artists chose to sculpt more naturalistically than had been seen before in Nicoyan art" (Wingfield 2009:214). Overall, though, I disagree with that generalization. First, Galo figurines vary greatly in size, shape, and quality of manufacture, and while some of the larger, more finely decorated specimens are almost as naturalistic as the early Rosales type (for an excellent example of this refer to Plate 22 in Lange 1988), many of the smaller figurines --which are much more common-- hardly look human, such as is the case with the Peabody specimens. Nonetheless, many of these figurines have a documentary nature; studying Galo effigies "can explain how certain stamps were used on the body, how hairdos were shaped, how hats or *tangas* were woven, how children or clubs were held, or how and where earspools pierced the ears" (Wingfield 2009:214). In that sense, they are perhaps more realistic or show a more realistic range of representations, but it is imprudent to interpret figurines as unambiguous, true-to-life renderings of real people and how they adorned themselves. Their clothing, jewelry and body paint may represent stylized ideals or even trends from a previous period. Nonetheless, the information provided by these figurines is rich, and worth using in archaeological interpretations, especially since it provides insight into gendered practices and relates to bodily perceptions, which can be relevant whether or not the figurines accurately represent reality.

G-1 to G-4 have bulging, round eyes, huge heads placed on a tubular core and diminutive extremities. Compared to earlier types such as Rosales Zoned Engraved and even Red on Cream Transitional, the manufacturing appears crude, especially the appliqué facial features. G-5 and G-6 are headless and are overall in poor condition, with



most of the paint and slip worn away. However, based on their disproportionate body shape and pose –G-5 kneeling and G-6 squatting-- they are consistent with the other specimens. G-7, while very similar to G-1 through G-4, appears to have been made with more care and expertise. Facial features appear to have been made by a combination of appliqué and incision, and the anatomy is symmetrical with more detailed musculature.

G-1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 share another important characteristic; they display exaggerated or stylized sexual features (see Figure 4 for example). These female figurines are represented with swollen labia, shown as a mound with a pronounced “slit.” G-6 is particularly interesting, as the “slit” is so exaggerated it is almost half as tall as the (headless) figurine. The figure is shown squatting with one arm on her back for support and the other on her knee, giving the viewer the impression of an elderly woman. There also appears to be a hump on her back, which can be indicative of age, an arthritic condition or other disease (Wingfield 2009:233). The exaggerated labia could be meant as an additional indicator that in her younger days, healthier days this individual was very successful in child-bearing. G-7 is the only specimen represented with painted clothing that covers its sex in the form of a triangular *tanga*. It nonetheless appears to be female, based on the presence of breasts, body structure and headwear.



Figure 4. Small specimen of the Galo Polychrome type (G-1). Note the prominent sexual features and stylized form of representation. Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. Photograph by the author.

All of the specimens (those with heads) share the same headwear. They wear a sort of skullcap, which is a common style for Chibchan females in Greater Nicoya, although they also appear on some of the more gender-ambiguous figurines. The skullcap appears on many other figurine types (Carillo, Guinea Incised) and thus must have been popular for many centuries. Wingfield (2009:226) believes that these skullcaps, many of which are decorated with painted or incised motifs, were meant to emphasize “the crown of the head as a place to be simultaneously covered (i.e. protected) *and* highlighted” and thus considers the skullcap as being worn by older females, as individuals with experience and authority, possibly shamans.

Finally, all specimens display similar painted motifs. However, G-5 and G-6 are very worn, and I can only deduce that they shared these motifs based on the remnant paint color left on their bodies, which is consistent with the red, orange/cream, and black of the Galo type. These motifs represent either tattoos or temporary body art, both of which were observed on Greater Nicoyan people by early European colonizers (Lothrop 1926:38). The significance of these mainly geometric patterns, is uncertain; they could indicate kinship and group affiliations or could depict elements related to shamanistic trances or visions (Carlsen 1988; Day and Tillett 1996; Wingfield 2009: 104). On most of the Peabody specimens, the surfaces are too worn to distinguish specific motifs, except for G-3 and G-7, which both have circles, divided into triangles, on each breast. Their faces also display various vertical lines and rectangles, and G-8 has the same circle and triangle motif on its arms.

*Papagayo Polychrome (A.D.800-A.D.1522): N=6*

Found throughout Greater Nicoya, this type is recognized by its white or cream slip, which marks the beginning of a white-slipped polychrome tradition that continues into the Ometepe period (Figure 5). The decorative painting is red, orange and black and is the predominant decorative technique. The motifs and imagery thus created are believed to be Mesoamerican in origin and include, among others, representations of jaguars and plumed serpents (Zambrana Fernandez and Zambrana Lacayo 2011:81). Papagayo Polychrome comes in a much wider range of forms than previous ceramic types, including pots, large jars, cylindrical vessels, tripod bases, pedestal foundations, and of course, human figurines (Zambrana Fernandez and Zambrana Lacayo 2011:79).

Papagayo Polychrome marks an important change: the handmade figurines that had been the norm for centuries were by A.D.800 replaced by the use of molds. This transition was overall accompanied by an increase in ceramic production and other goods, which can in part be explained by an increase in the local population, but it is also possible that this new technique/technology was introduced into the Greater Nicoya region when immigrants from Central Mexico entered the region (Dennett and McCafferty 2011; McCafferty 2011b; McCafferty and Steinbrenner 2005b). In Mesoamerica, many cultures during the Classic period shifted from hand modeling figurines to making them with the use of molds (Begun 2008). It is possible that immigrants from Mesoamerica, familiar with mold-made figures, brought such a tradition to Nicoyans during the Sapoá period. This could in part explain why the use of molds became widespread in Greater Nicoya in both the northern and southern regions after centuries of relying on the hand modeling technique. This change affected more than manufacture; it created a style of figurine that more than ever was highly standardized and stylized. Fragments of these molds have even been found in archaeological contexts (see Santa Isabel and Tepetate in this chapter). They could likely be produced quickly and in large quantities, and based on my observation of their numbers in museums and private collections, such an increase in production is likely and is certainly consistent with the broader socio-political changes associated with this time period (see Chapter 3 for discussion).



Figure 5. Papagayo Polychrome figurines (PP-1, 2, 3, 4). Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. Photograph by the author.

Papagayo human effigies characteristically depict thick or obese individuals, likely females, with large bellies and thighs, standing with hands on hips and arms jutting out to the side, forming a “loop” shape. They are highly stylized, and their legs often resemble large cones. All of the Peabody specimens share these general characteristics, but depending on the mold they came from, there is variability. For all, the head (except PP-5, which is headless), headdress, torso and abdomen form one nearly seamless piece as they were made from one continuous piece of clay. Indeed, there are no appliqué elements on these Papagayo figurines.

PP-1 and PP-2 are most similar to each other. Their large, conical legs rest on small nubbins, and their torsos, mainly painted white, have round bellies and small round breasts. PP-3, 4 and 5 have legs that are slightly more rectangular that rest on actual feet. The latter are very stylized and are represented by painted lines forming the toes, yet this feature adds a slight bit of realism to these specimens. Almost no paint remains on PP-4

and only a small amount is left on PP-5, however, they both likely resembled PP-3, which has predominantly red/orange paint on its legs and torso. This may represent clothing. PP-3 also has a black motif on its upper chest, breasts and arms that represents a weaved garment. The use of red/orange is also used on PP-1 and PP-2, but mostly on their legs. This may represent some form of skirt.

The faces of all the Peabody specimens (and Papagayo Polychrome in general) are dominated by large, almond-shaped eyes, tilted upwards, while the noses and mouths are diminutive. Details, such as facial features, are included in the mold and appear in low relief, and so overall, these figurines vary only slightly, especially when it comes to facial expressions and general appearance. They are then painted for added realism: eyes are outlined in black and the small mouths are red. While previous figurine types could potentially have been made to represent specific, real-life individuals, Papagayo Polychrome seems designed to reflect a broader, shared identity



Figure 6. Papagayo Polychrome Mold (PP-6). Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. Photograph by the author.

Finally, while PP-6 is not an actual figurine, I included it in this collection because it provides an excellent example of a figurine mold (Figure 6). Its similarity to PP-1 and PP-2 is striking and can lead to the conclusion that the choice of paint and motifs likely became the main means of personal expression when creating figurines during the Sapoá period.

*Mora Polychrome (A.D.800-A.D.1350): N=4*

This type is similar in many ways to the Papagayo Polychromes and was probably contemporaneous, but was manufactured only in the Costa Rican sector of Greater Nicoya (Wingfield 2009). While the use of slips and paints follows the same color scheme of red, orange and black on a white or cream slipped back, the decorative motifs, often rectilinear and geometric, are similar to earlier types, notably Galo Polychrome. Individuals seated on metates or benches, such as M-1 (Figure 7), are also more typical of Galo and Carillo types.

Stools, benches and metates are thought to hold special significance in Greater Nicoya and are most often interpreted in relation to elite individuals and shamanism. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Oviedo mentioned that chiefs and important women used stool and mats for seating (Lothrop 1926:75-76). They are often considered tools of the shaman for burials, sorcery and healing rituals (Stone 1975; Wingfield 2009:108). Metates are also important tools for food preparation, but possibly also for grinding certain foods and herbs used as medicine or as mind-altering drugs in ceremonies (Snarskis 1984:219). Two kinds of metates are usually found archaeologically: the utilitarian type and the

adorned, meticulously carved versions, which often have taller legs and thinner grinding plates. The metate shown with M-1 would have had four legs and is decorated with a mat or weaved pattern, lending strength to the hypothesis that it was of ceremonial use rather than for regular, everyday food preparation.



Figure 7. Mora Polychrome female figurine seated on a bench or metate (M-1). Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. Photograph by the author.

The painted decoration on the Mora figurines often covers the torso, legs, arms and back, and the dominant pattern is a weave or mat pattern, not unlike the ceramic roller stamps found in archaeological contexts or museum collections (Carlsen 1988). M-1, 2 and 3 share the same overall weave pattern, formed by diagonal cross-hatching. M-4 likely shared similar patterns, but the paint has mostly worn off. McCafferty and McCafferty (2009) proposed that since much of this patterning covers the upper body, encircling the arms and back, it may represent a cloth wrap. Its presence on the upper thighs may also indicate a skirt. This hypothesis has also been suggested for certain



Papagayo figurines (see PP-3). Other elements of adornment are represented on Mora Polychrome, such as hairstyles and headdresses, earpools, lower body clothing and possibly body paint or tattoos.

As I mentioned above, decorative techniques are more in line with earlier figurine types, but conceptually, Mora Polychrome is much closer to Papagayo. The individuals represented are very stylized with large, tubular legs. The body does not display many obvious sexual features, as opposed to what was often customary for earlier figurine types (see Red on Cream and Galo Polychrome). Indeed, none of the Peabody specimens show primary or secondary sexual traits. The fullness of the bodies certainly appears more consistent with females, but this is not a foolproof indication of sex or gender. As with Papagayo Polychrome, the head and headdress of the specimens are large, flaring outwards. They form a seamless whole. All specimens have painted facial features, except for M-1 and M-2, which also have noses in relief with punctured nostrils. M-4 also has a nose in relief, but is cruder and has no nostrils. While the features on M-3 and M-4 are no longer discernible, M-1 and M-2 are similar in appearance to Papagayo figurines, notably the almond shaped eyes.

Also worthy of note is the fact that M-3 and M-4 are miniatures, which is interesting since Mora is often considered a very elite type of figurine and is better known for the larger specimens. While M-1 is certainly an example of an expertly manufactured figurine, M-3 and M-4 are simpler, less detailed, yet overall share the same characteristics as the larger specimens.

*Ambiguous Type or “Hybrid” of Mora and Papagayo Polychromes (M/PP): N=1*

Finally, for one of the Peabody specimens I created a sub-category that incorporates characteristics shared by the Mora and Papagayo Polychrome types. Because this specimen, M/PP-1 (Figure 8), shares characteristics from these two types it was impossible for me to say with certainty to which one it belongs. In fact, it may represent a hybrid or an example of a transitional period between styles. This makes sense as Papagayo and Mora are overall similar types representative of the Sapoá period trends in figurine manufacture. They are both mold-made, stylized figurines that do not focus on sexual features.



Figure 8. Ambiguous figurine type: Mora/Papagayo Polychrome (M/PP-1). Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. Photograph by the author.

M/PP-1 is similar in general body type to the Papagayo figurines: the seamless integration of body, head and headdress, the stylized “loop” arms and large thighs, the

large rectangular headdress. It is very symmetrical and appears to have been made from a mold (see PP-6) similar to that presented as part of this collection. Mora polychromes of this size tend to have slightly more naturalistic details, mainly in the representation of hands and feet (see M-1). M/PP-1 would have had painted facial features, much like the Mora specimens. It also has a nose in relief with two nostrils, similar to M-1 and M-2. So little paint remains on this specimen that I cannot say if weave motifs would have been part of the decorative design; however, the remnant black and red paint seen on the torso and on the legs are more reminiscent of the Mora colors. While Mora and Papagayo share a similar color palette, the red used in Mora Polychromes is much closer to the deeper red found in earlier styles, such as Galo, Red on Cream Transitional and even Rosales Zoned Engraved.

The ambiguity of this figurine is not a problem; rather it offers an interesting example of the transition between the Bagaces and the Sapoá periods. In the next chapter, this transition between styles, and what it entails, will be discussed in further detail.

### **Archaeological Data and Context**

This section lists and discusses the figurine fragments associated with the Santa Isabel archaeological project. Many of the fragments will be described here, but others will be mentioned as part of the following Chapter 6. For a full list and description of each fragment, refer to Appendix 2. For a summary of each relevant figurine type, refer to the general descriptions provided for the Peabody collection within this chapter.

### *The Site of Santa Isabel*

The site of Santa Isabel is situated in the Department of Rivas, near the shores of Lake Nicaragua. It was a large 300 hectare settlement of roughly 20 mounds occupied for many centuries between A.D.800-A.D.1250, according to carbon-14 dates and recovered diagnostic ceramics. The site was occupied until the supposed arrival of Nicarao populations around A.D.1250 (McCafferty 2008b; McCafferty and Steinbrenner 2005b)

Excavated from 2000 to 2005 by Dr. Geoffrey McCafferty and his team, seven different loci were investigated (Figure 9), some more thoroughly than others. While the polychrome pottery tradition occasionally had decorative elements typical of Cholula iconography (Mixteca-Puebla) and the general Mesoamerican sphere, architectural features, foodways and religious practices represented at the site are not consistent with the hypothesis that the Mesoamerican sphere greatly influenced Greater Nicoya either through trade or migration. Indeed, most cultural elements could be purely local traditions associated with Chibchan-speaking people (McCafferty 2008; McCafferty and Steinbrenner 2005a).

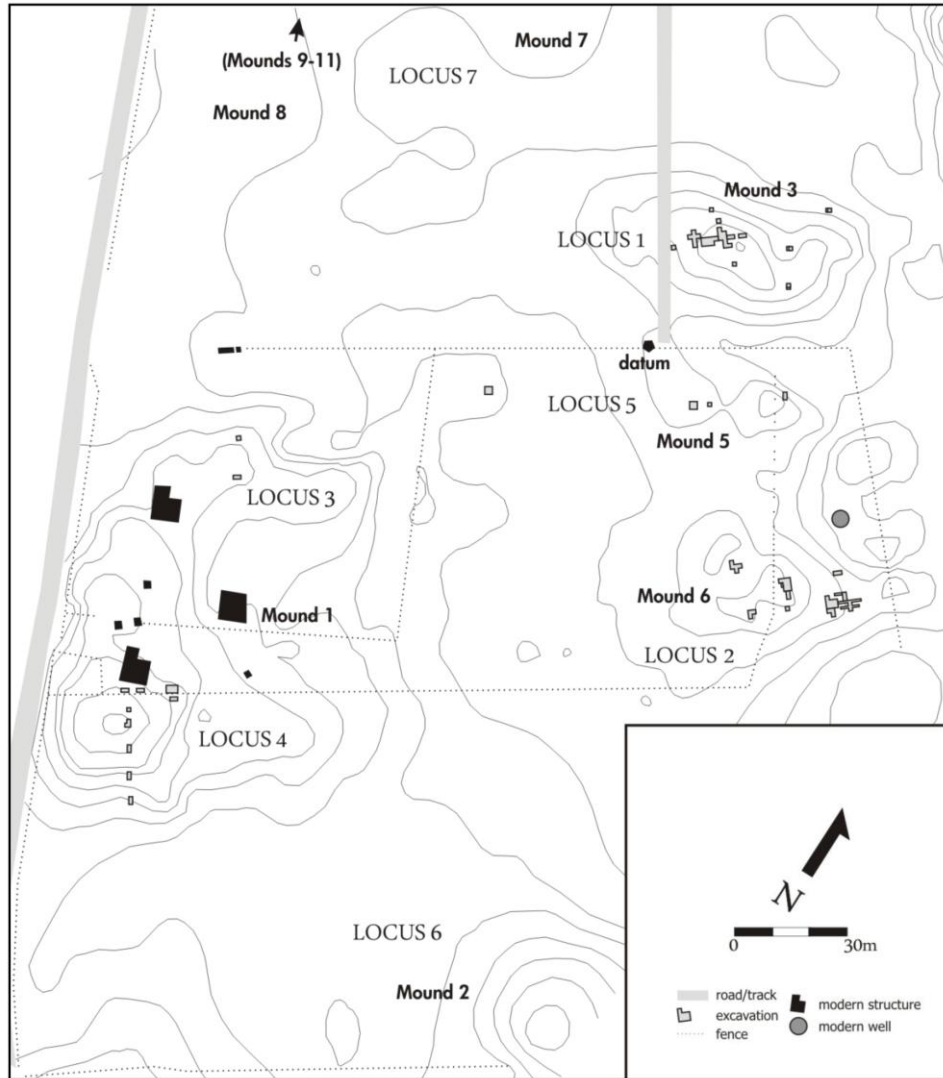


Figure 9. Archaeological investigations at the site of Santa Isabel (Ni-Ri-44), Rivas Nicaragua (based on original map by Larry Steinbrenner, see Steinbrenner 2010, Figure 6.4 ).

Hundreds of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines and vessel fragments were unearthed over the years at Santa Isabel, and of the specimens where sex was apparent the majority were female polychrome figurines from the Sapoá period (McCafferty 2008b:49, 81). However, there also was a small number of bone and metal

figurines, and the occasional representation of animals, but the latter seem to mostly have served as decorative support pieces for ceramic vessels or appliqué decorative elements. The figurines found on the site were generally distributed throughout domestic contexts and mixed with other refuse in and around each of the mounds (McCafferty 2008b:49-56). This indicates that figurines were part of domestic practice. The fact that they were found with trash or other common artefact categories certainly seems to refute the notion that figurines mostly related to high social status. Furthermore, their presence in household contexts should make it clear that these small, common figurines are worth studying as they provide more information about cultural traditions and daily practice than do the larger specimens devoid of archaeological context found in museum collections.

Some of the fragments from Santa Isabel are large enough to identify to a specific type, which is key for their interpretation. The fact that a number of figurine heads were excavated certainly aided the identification process, but often even small fragments, such as arms or legs, can be identified due to their decorative painting (Figure 10).



Figure 10. Papagayo Polychrome figurine fragment (no.10). Note the weaving motifs and painted decoration which permits the identification of this ceramic type. Santa Isabel, Rivas Nicaragua. Photograph by the author.

Table 2 includes the sample of figurines from the Santa Isabel site used in this analysis. Since not everything could be transported out of Nicaragua, the figurines selected to be brought to Canada were the least fragmented and thus the most conducive to identification of specific ceramic types. I attempted to include those fragments that could be identified as human, as opposed to animal or zoomorphic representations. I also excluded pieces that upon further analysis I identified as appliqué elements and vessel supports, since these forms fall outside of the purview of this figurine analysis. Appendix 2 provides more detailed information on all figurine fragments: ceramic type, condition, sex (when identifiable) and physical description.

<b>Figurine Type</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Catalogue Numbers</b>
Rosales Zoned Engraved	1	No.1
Red on Cream Transitional	4	No.2,3,4,5
Papagayo Polychrome	15	No.6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15 16,17,18,19,20
Total	20	--

Table 2. Study sample of figurines excavated during the University of Calgary archaeology projects at the site of Santa Isabel, Rivas.

*Papagayo Polychrome: N=15*

The main polychrome ceramic type found at Santa Isabel was Papagayo Polychrome (with a total of 1986 positively identified fragments) (see McCafferty 2008b:44, Table 3). This seems consistent with the figurine assemblage, since the majority of figurines were types from the Sapoá period, notably Papagayo Polychrome. Out of 15 Papagayo fragments, 5 represent portions of the head and face while the other 10 include portions of the body (core and limbs). While all are consistent with what I deem to be “typical” Papagayo characteristics as described for the Peabody specimens, some have features that do not appear in that collection. Specimen no.11 (Figure 11) has a black painted mouth, and what appears to be sharp teeth.





Figure 11. A fragment of a Papagayo Polychrome figurine head (no.11). Santa Isabel, Rivas, Nicaragua. Photograph by the author.

The red painted line connecting the ear (or earspool) to the mouth may be some form of mouthpiece. No. 12 displays a similar red line. Earspools appear more prominent in no. 13 and 14 than in any of the other specimens (archaeological or museum collection), as there is a total of 3 earspools or earrings on each head fragment (Figure 12).



Figure 12. A fragment of a Papagayo Polychrome figurine head (no.11). Santa Isabel, Rivas, Nicaragua. Photograph by the author.

*Red on Cream Transitional: N=4*

Outside of the dominant Sapoa period fragments, a number of figurines dating to the earlier Bagaces period were found near the surface (McCafferty 2009, 2011). I have identified most of these as Red on Cream specimens. This is odd considering the near complete lack of other artefacts diagnostic of this period –only a few Bagaces period vessel sherds were found-- and remains somewhat of a mystery. One fragment, a figurine head, displays features typical of this type, such as the red slip, headband or braided hair above the forehead, and simple, appliqué eyes and mouth. The overall head shape, however, is different (Figure 13). Red on cream heads usually appear either round or rectangular (no.2, Appendix 2) while this one is almost triangular.



Figure 13. Figurine head from the Bagaces period, likely a variety of the Red on Cream Transitional (no.3). Santa Isabel, Rivas, Nicaragua. Photograph by the author.

Also, the cacao-bean shaped eyes are tilted upwards. No. 5 is also different in that the head and even the nose are triangular. These two specimens (no.3 and no.5) may thus be variants of the Red on Cream type as they are overall consistent with broader Bagaces

period typologies. This further shows that Red on Cream and/or Chavez White on Red include a broader range of characteristics than what has been officially established. Other similar heads were found during Niemel's (2003) surface surveys at Santa Isabel, and as mentioned, two such heads also appear in the Peabody collection (RCT-5 and RCT-6).

*Rosales Zoned Engraved: N=1*

Also noteworthy is one Tempisque period fragment found at Santa Isabel, a Rosales Zoned Engraved figurine head (Figure 14). Although the Sapoá period figurines dominate, it is certainly worth noting that figurines from earlier periods were found in a site that was materially consistent with the Sapoá period. Can this be attributed solely to disturbance? If so, we would expect other artefact types from the earlier periods to be more widespread. Indeed, only six other ceramic vessel fragments were identified as Rosales Zoned Engraved, and in total only 73 ceramic fragments were positively identified as Bagaces or Tempisque period, from a total of over 10,000 ceramic fragments (McCafferty 2008b: 44, Table 3). In the next chapter, I delve deeper into this interesting issue and how it may be a cultural phenomenon rather than a taphonomic process.



Figure 14. Rosales Zoned Engraved figurine head fragment (no.1). Santa Isabel, Rivas, Nicaragua. Photograph by the author.

With these characteristics in mind –temporal variation, depositional context, physical dimensions, body shapes, and stylistic elements– this research can now return to larger issues of gender and identity in Greater Nicoya. The physical data and associated inferences from museum and archaeological collections provide the foundation to build outward to strong interpretations of figurine meaning and use, and upward to new hypotheses that may change how archaeologists interpret these figurines and how they go about recording them in the field.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

Greater Nicoya figurines have rarely been studied outside of the elite perspective, and that is also the case when it comes to how gender has been approached. Indeed, the majority of the female figurines have been interpreted as powerful shamans. I do not deny that certain figurines found alongside high status objects, such as jade and gold, are objects having possessed special value. In many cases, figurines may represent such important individuals or at least a type of person or role having held special meaning, and I believe many of these figurines may well be connected to ritual practices. However, these interpretations do not deplete the full range of potential uses and meanings of Greater Nicoya figurines, and the gender representations may themselves be more complex than they appear at first glance. Most importantly, female figurines should not be interpreted exclusively as shamans or as objects having been used in exclusively shamanistic ceremonies. Their variability in terms of size, general appearance and context offers potential for broader, more varied interpretations.

When considering gender through the range of figurines presented here, it is important to view information diachronically so that changes and variations can be more realistically assessed (McCafferty and McCafferty 1991). And so among these Greater Nicoya figurines we must ask whether we are seeing changes in gender roles and identity through time, or changes in styles and artistic preferences that affect how archaeologists interpret gender? Or could both be at work?

While some archaeologists have posited that major shifts in social organization and a trend towards increased social complexity occurred between the Tempisque and

Bagaces periods, the differences between these periods show settlement and subsistence patterns that do not necessarily indicate a need for rising hierarchies, nor are there any ground-breaking changes in material culture save for the transition from bichrome to polychrome pottery, and some variation in type and quantities of certain exotic goods, such as jade (see Chapter 3 for full discussion). As for gender representation in figurines, I will demonstrate that these earlier periods show a range of individuals, many clearly female, that seem in line with the notion that women held certain kinds of power and were seen as key members of society. Only later, during the Sapoá period, do figurine styles change more dramatically, along with gendered representations. And yet, through the centuries, we can also see a form of continuity in the ceramic styles and in gendered representations. As for the changes in the figurines, they likely reflect broad socio-political changes that altered gender perceptions and roles that can even be seen in more permanent, large scale figural art. However, the transition from naturalistic to highly stylized figurines may in itself be a factor that has blurred understanding of gender between time periods.

Unfortunately, as documented in the previous chapter, the vast majority of figurines available for study, including the Peabody collection, have either been taken from looted contexts or excavated by early archaeologists, who had little training and more interest in unique pieces than in cultural data. Other than this general lack of data, another problem attached to figurines excavated in this fashion is the hasty conclusion that “burials” necessarily refer to elite burials. Indeed, if our only provenience for an object consists of a basic entry stating, for instance, “Mound 1” or “Burial 2,” this is

weak at best. For the most part, these are *assumed* elite contexts, founded on our assumptions regarding social status and its connection to certain artefact types.

In fact, figurines were incorporated into many households –as attested by their presence in household refuse and their commonality as an object type in recent professional excavations in Lower Central America-- and thus part of daily practices. While the contexts from Santa Isabel are not ideal and lack in specificity, figurines do appear in areas identified as houses and their associated refuse. Many of these figurine fragments were found alongside other artefacts associated with daily living, such as ceramics, food remains and lithic debitage, though to date many researchers have preferred to focus on burial finds or so called “elite” specimens.

From the perspective of gender, it is important to take into account these varied contexts and uses because these may have consequences as to how we interpret figurines. When analyzing gender there is always the risk of falling into perspectives where males are seen as dominant and females (or other genders) are considered as resistant or exceptions to the rule. This is especially true when females are represented in ritual or political roles. However, it is unlikely that representations of females in Greater Nicoya were only used in special occasions or reserved for specific individuals. They were widespread, which is consistent with what we know about early Greater Nicoyan societies and the importance of female leadership. Based on what we know about gender in South American (Chibchan) and Mesoamerican societies (Ardren 2002; Brumfiel 2001), substantial evidence exists that the ancient people of Greater Nicoya accepted at least three genders: male, female and an alternate gender. Wingfield (2009:252), as one of the first researchers to identify certain figurines as intersexed –figurines displaying

sexual and gender elements of both males and females— posits that along with an increasing numbers of specific societal roles in the Bagaces period, women and intersexed individuals were also more frequently represented, suggesting a society with gender-balanced authority. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Spanish colonists allegedly encountered indigenous people in Greater Nicoya led by *caciques* and *cacicas* (female chiefs) (Oviedo 1976). The fact that many physical and cultural traits common to females are represented through the figurines certainly seems to indicate that females were considered particularly important from a spiritual perspective, perhaps also from a political one.

### **From the Bagaces to the Sapoá: Gendered Figurines in Changing Times**

#### *The Ambiguity of Gender in Greater Nicoya Figurines*

The study of sex and gender is at the core of many figurine analyses. As part of her dissertation, Wingfield (2009) presented an extensive Greater Nicoya figurine analysis that includes the study of gender and sex. I summarize some of her and other scholars' findings and relate them to my own observations and interpretations, which in some cases go against previous hypotheses. This is an important contribution because many of the individuals --male, female or other-- represented as figurines are portrayed in ways that appear to highlight gender and sex.

Figurines from any given geographical region are classically identified as male or female by the presence of labia, or other pubic symbols (a triangle), or by the presence of a penis (Biehl 1996; Marangou 1992). The representation of breasts, protruding nipples



and a pregnant or swollen belly are other features typically associated with female figurines. For males, a more defined musculature and facial hair can be other indicative, though much less obvious and potentially ambiguous, characteristics (Bailey 1994). Even if we admit that these various physical features are fairly definite indicators of sex, that does not guarantee an equivalent gender designation.

Indeed, other features on figurines can complicate matters, and many of these can be found on the Peabody specimens. Hairstyle, clothing, adornments and even pose may provide clues to gender and may not be in line with anatomical sex. In some cases, none of these material characteristics are present, or feature combinations of female and male traits on the same figurine. Also, body paint, jewelry, clothing and other garments should not necessarily be interpreted at face value. We should keep in mind that as figurines are artistic, stylized representations of human beings (or in some cases, possibly deities), so can clothing and other adornments be. Proportions and anatomical features are two elements that are almost never represented realistically. Practically all figurine heads are oversized, often representing 1/3 to half of the total height of a specimen. Even genitalia, when represented, can be widely exaggerated, such as the labia of specimen G-6. For clothing, as will be discussed further in this chapter, the difference between representations of clothing and body paint may be impossible to distinguish. But even if clothing is literally represented, can we be certain it is realistically attributed by sex or gender? As Biehl (1996:161) puts it, “the whole concept of these anthropomorphic representations was the abstraction of the human body.” While he was speaking of European figurines, I think this can also apply to Greater Nicoya figurines and to gendered representations, which need to be studied as complex, multi-faceted renditions

of gender and gender roles. Many figurines, especially the Sapoá period mold-made specimens, are indeed abstractions, interpretations of gendered individuals and may incorporate elements associated traditionally to both males and females.

To explain the combination of male and female characteristics within the same human representation, some scholars have proposed the possibility of a third gender (see Harvey 2003). Among Central American and South American native communities, it is not uncommon for alternative genders to be associated with shamanism or other animistic spiritual belief, or with other social positions of some significance (e.g., healer, warrior, etc.) (Ardren 2002; Brumfiel 2001). Usually, alternative genders do not refer to physical sex, although intersexed individuals displaying both female and male sexual traits have been mentioned ethnographically and can be seen represented on figurines (Harvey 2003). Wingfield (2009) identified two intersexed specimens among her Greater Nicoya collection, a Carillo Polychrome vessel and a Potosi Appliqué vessel. The first shows an individual with a beard and penis, but with prominent nipples, while the second has no clear genitalia but small breasts and a long beard.

The majority of figurines recently studied in Greater Nicoya have mostly been identified as female despite the at-times ambiguous portrayal of sexual features. Rather than acknowledge this uncertainty, figurines with breasts, whether small or large, are usually designated female; this is often the case with Rosales Zoned Engraved. Indeed, Preston-Werner (2008) points out the fact that some of the smaller breasts could easily be male nipples, and this should definitely be considered when other female primary or secondary features are absent. The aforementioned intersexed specimens from Wingfield (2009) may upon reconsideration be identified simply as male. From the Peabody

collection, RZE-1 is an excellent example of gender ambiguity and in terms of sexual representations is rather typical of this figurine type, though it is one of the better manufactured specimens. Female figures are considered the dominant form of representation in the Rosales corpus (Wingfield 2009:248), but the slim bodies and protruding nipples of these figures are a far cry from the more obviously gendered types from the Bagaces Period. Yet, this sort of gender ambiguity also appears among later figurine types.

#### *Gender and Sex during the Bagaces Period*

The Bagaces period saw an increase in figurine types, and although here I only speak of three such types, they nonetheless provide a representative example of the challenges in identifying sex and gender among figurines, making it doubly hard to interpret how and who used them. Day and Tillett (1996:224) in their case study of a few female figurines as representations of shamans note that:

These figures are unlike the female fertility figurines common in so many other cultures of the New World. They do not have the exaggerated sexual features that are characteristic of such figurines, nor are they found in domestic context or household debris.

However, their analysis focused exclusively on large, masterfully rendered examples of Galo and Mora Polychrome figurines. The Galo figurine in question (Day and Tillett 1996: 225, Figure 10.3) stands erect --unlike the many seated or kneeling figurines of this

type-- with arms held to the side and hands on its ribcage (or belly?). It is symmetrical and fairly naturalistic, with details such as defined musculature, hands and feet. Its expression is blank despite detailed facial features: round eyes, complete with iris and eyelids, round nose with incised nostrils and thick lips. The figurine is shown as slim, with small breasts and a flat stomach, and wears a *tanga* that covers its genitalia. Despite this lack of obvious sexual identifiers, I would agree that it likely represents a female based on the fact that the hairstyle –somewhat conical hairbuns on both sides of the head— has been attributed to females by Stone (1975) and Wingfield (2009) through their ethnographic observations of modern-day indigenous (Boruca) women in Costa Rica. Nonetheless, sexuality and fertility do not seem to be the main focus of this large Galo specimen (Day and Tillett 1996)

However, for Galo Polychrome there exists versions of these figurines that are less artistically impressive, smaller and much more common. Most importantly these indeed display obvious sexual features, notably swollen labia (see G-1, 3, 4, 5 and 6). Furthermore, the round bellies, large thighs and general body softness of many of these figurines have recently been interpreted as representations of fertile women, consistent with pregnancy or past child-bearing (Wingfield 2009) These modest, hypersexualized specimens tend to be overlooked. While diachronic references to other figurine types and comparisons with large databases are not always possible, the interpretation of Galo Polychrome in reference to a narrow set of large, elaborate figurines has led to unsubstantiated conclusions (Day 1995; Day and Tillett's 1996), leading readers to believe these figurines are all large, exquisitely detailed elite specimens with no obvious gender or sex. The opposite is true: Greater Nicoya has many figurines that at first glance

would fit perfectly in the category of “fertility figurines,” especially the Galo Polychrome type as shown in the Peabody collection. The smaller specimens of this figurine type are much more common, but generally display traits similar to the larger specimens used in Day and Tillett’s case study, notably a female sitting or kneeling (though rarely standing) looking ahead, in what is occasionally described as a trance-like state (Day 1995; Day and Tillett 1996; Wingfield 2009). Their bodies are decorated with tattoos or body paint. But even earlier during the Bagaces period, figurines such as the Red on Cream Transitional provide examples of female figurines that display features possibly relating to their success in fertility.

While genitalia are not depicted on any of the Red on Cream Peabody specimens, it remains clear that the general appearance of each figurine portrays a certain female body type. RCT-1,2,3 and 4 show individuals with thick, soft bodies, especially thighs, buttocks and bellies. These are all body parts that tend to be particularly affected by child-bearing, and while breasts appear rather small, nipples are depicted in a very prominent way on RCT-2, 3 and 4. I propose that some of these females may be depicting not pregnant women, but women who have already given birth. Indeed, if pregnancy were being featured, one would expect representations of distended bellies. Also, the navels on all these figurines are recessed or inverted, which is not consistent with pregnancy.

Among the Galo specimens, G-6 appears to represent an elderly woman, and this hypothesis may be used to explain the appearance of the Red on Cream specimens. It seems possible that the soft, thick bodies of fertile females may in some cases actually represent elder females. So far they have been interpreted as shamans (Day and Tillett

1996, Tillett 1988, Wingfield 2009), but their appearance, as possibly related to fertility, and their frequent presence in household contexts, as attested by the Santa Isabel material, may necessitate alternative interpretations. As for the Galo type, it seems clear that it cannot be considered a type that is completely different from the fertility figurines. Consequently, I would like to tentatively propose the existence of two sub-types within the Galo Polychrome type: Type A and Type B.

Type A is the more common variety and depicts hyper-sexualized females, such as G-1, 3, 4, 5 and 6. Even though G-2 does not depict labia, I would also include it in this category based on its overall appearance, consistent with the aforementioned specimens. Sexuality, and likely fertility, seem to be the focus of these ceramic creations. Compared to Type B, they are crudely made figurines, and facial features seem to have been made hastily with no effort towards realism. It seems unlikely that these figurines represent specific individuals.

On the other hand, Type B shows much artistry and superior craftsmanship. Most importantly, sexual features –primary and secondary– appear less important than the facial features and painted details that enhance the body of the figurines. The sex of the individual is often “hidden” by painted clothing. While the seated or kneeling position is common, the Galo specimen shown in Day and Tillett (1996:225, fig.10.3) provides an example of an individual standing rigidly. I have seen similar specimens in other collections (see Canouts and Guerrero 1988: plate 22; Wingfield 2009:665, catalogue no.204). I tentatively include G-7 within this type because while Type B is usually associated with larger figurines (more or less 15+ cm in height), G-7 is closer in style and craftsmanship to the larger specimens. Indeed, G-7 is very well crafted: it is symmetrical,

has defined musculature, naturalistic body representations (such as detailed hands and feet), and carefully incised facial features. It is also the only Peabody specimen clearly shown wearing clothes, thereby hiding the groin by a painted *tanga*. The painted decorations, which includes clothing and body art (tattoos or body paint), follows geometric patterns, and as mentioned in the previous chapter, this may relate to shamanistic visions or could even represent motifs related to group identity (Carlsen 1988; Day and Tillett 1996). For instance, permanent tattoos among the Nicarao, made by cutting the skin and applying coal into the cuts, indicated an individual's affiliation to a specific cacique (Lothrop 1926). Today, among the Guaimi people of Costa Rica, the motifs painted on one's face and body varies depending on the occasion, with the most elaborate motifs being applied during festivals and gatherings of importance (Salazar 2002). The complexity of the patterns represented on Galo Type B certainly seems to indicate that the figures represented were engaged in an important activity or held special status.

It is possible that the smaller figurines (Galo, Type A) depict fertile women (former child-bearers, pregnant or giving birth) and even individual people while the larger Type B specimens represent a more symbolic, spiritual form of birth. As Wingfield (2009:105) says: "The shaman must birth her other self during trance in order to transform and be able to deal with the spirits and heal. Then the shaman must die in the spirit world and rebirth herself to re-enter the land of the living." This interpretation could explain the differences between figurines within a same stylistic type. Both types of representation express gendered power, but in different, yet complementary forms and exemplify the symbolic complexity of these figurines.

However, both Day (1995) and Day and Tillett (1996) state that female fertility figurines are more common in male-dominated societies. If we follow this logic, the creation of modest-sized figurines with obvious sexual features becomes a form of agency, a means of social negotiation in a male-dominated society. This implies that the displaying and highlighting of female fertility through figurines could be a form of resistance, rather than an important form of representation in itself.

While this is a reasonable hypothesis that has been applied to many other cultures (see Begun 2008; Brumfiel 1996; Joyce 1993), there is little indication that the Chibchan people inhabiting Greater Nicoya in the Bagaces period were organized in patriarchal societies or that they were anything other than egalitarian. Based on ethnographic knowledge of modern-day Chibchan speakers (Bozzoli de Wille 1982; Melton 2004; Stone 1962, 1977), it is likely that societies were matrilineal and even matrilocal during much of Greater Nicoya history: “inheritance of property, including one's grave, marriage alliances, and position or role in society was related to one's matrilineal clan. Multiple examples of matrilineal and matrilocal practices have been recorded for modern, colonial, and ancient Greater Chibcha” (Wingfield 2009:162). In fact, women seem to have held important positions within their community. Considering the latter and our general knowledge of Greater Nicoya during that timeframe (see Chapter 3), there is little basis to interpret female figurines with obvious sexual features as a form of resistance.

In Day (1995) and Day and Tillett's (1996) analyses there is also a subtle insinuation that female figurines displaying less pronounced “femaleness” must represent truly powerful individuals, as if powerful females, whether this power be spiritual, political or a combination of both, must have downplayed their gender/sex in order to



obtain it. Similar interpretations have been proposed for Aztec imagery (Gonzales 1979; Rodriguez 1988), where goddesses are sometimes represented as androgynous or accompanied by male symbols. In a male-dominated cultural context, these images negate female power while permitting certain females to be represented as powerful.

Brumfiel (1996), in her study of Postclassic female imagery in Aztec domestic ritual, came to the conclusion that female figurines were particularly important in such contexts because they contrasted with the male-centered state ideology as a form of gendered negotiation or resistance. In Greater Nicoya, however, little evidence of major differences between the public and the private spheres exists, and it is not even certain whether there truly was a public sphere of political and religious power during earlier periods (Bruhns 1992; Lange 1992a). The existence of female figurines with less pronounced sexual features, such as Galo Type B, may thus represent a form of spiritual power that required sexual or gender flexibility while performing certain shamanistic rites.

#### *Gender and Sex during the Sapoá Period*

By the beginning of the Sapoá period representations of obvious females, as indicated by primary sexual traits, have all but disappeared. In Chapter 5 I briefly mentioned that Mora Polychrome retained certain stylistic and decorative elements from previous periods, but representations of sexualized individuals are not one of them. Among the Mora specimens from the Peabody collection not one displays labia, as was seen in the Galo type, nor do they depict exaggerated thighs and buttocks, large bellies or even pronounced breasts. M-3 is the only figure that seems to have breasts at all, and

these can almost be mistaken for a belly. The thighs on M-1 and M-2 are large, but they are very stylized, even tubular, and this shape seems to have been used as a space for decorative weave motifs, rather than as a way to display a female body type. The shift is interesting, in that it appears among specimens both small and large, crudely or exquisitely executed. This again contrasts with previous types, where the smaller, cruder versions were represented as more sexualized.

Papagayo Polychrome also follows this general pattern. Not one of the Peabody specimens displays visible labia, nor have I seen any in other museum collections (Mi Museo, for instance). However, Papagayo figurines have other secondary traits that more obviously identify them as female: bellies and small, round breasts (see PP-1 and PP-2, also no. 17, 18 and 20, Appendix 2). One could arguably identify the oversized, conical legs (see PP-1 and PP-2) as representing the full figure of a pregnant or fertile woman, and this may well be the case, but PP-3, 4 and 5 show a slightly different version of Papagayo figurines where legs, while still large, are more rectangular. Among the Santa Isabel fragments, no.16 also displays a rectangular leg. This kind of variation, combined with the overall stylized appearance of these figurines (a noticeable divergence from the more naturalistic versions of the Bagaces period) suggests that these may be stylistic choices rather than an attempt to make the sex/gender of the figurines any clearer.

## **An Evolution of Styles: Sex and Gender in the Bigger Picture**

### *From Naturalistic to Highly Stylized*

The gender ambiguity of figurines of the Galo (Type B), Mora Polychrome and Papagayo Polychrome types can also be interpreted as being part of the general change in styles taking place in the later Bagaces period and culminating in the Sapoá period. By observing figurines that span multiple periods and types, I have come to the conclusion that figurines become increasingly stylized and less true to the human form, and thus more gender ambiguous in later periods (see Appendix 3). Whether this is only a question of changing aesthetic preferences or the result of changes in society and gender perceptions is something to be discussed. This trend, however, has its roots much earlier. In the Tempisque period and observe the Rosales Zoned Engraved specimens, which are very naturalistic with well-proportioned limbs and finely modeled features, they differ significantly from early Bagaces period types which are much more stylized.

Later figurines focus on representing larger individuals, with legs and buttocks out of proportion with the rest of the body, and some of the finer physical details seem to lose importance in favor of more complex decorative techniques, namely the use of polychrome paint (Zambrana Fernandez and Zambrana Lacayo 2011:39-41). Life-like features become geometrical or exaggerated; eyes are bulging or cacao bean shaped and are often appliqué rather than modeled in relief, as seen in the Red on Cream and Chavez types. Overall craftsmanship is different in that Red on Cream appears much cruder than Rosales Zoned Engraved. Figurines in the Bagaces period also become increasingly sexualized, as fertility either becomes a more prevalent focus, or it is represented in a

more blatant way. However, in the early Bagaces period color schemes remain similar to previous ones and consist mostly of red and cream slip. As the shift from monochrome and bichrome to polychrome paint takes place as the Bagaces period progresses, painted decoration, poses and individuals represented increase in variability. This transition is easily seen in the Galo type because it retains some of the earlier figurine characteristics, mainly poses and gendered representations, while also breaking tradition in terms of painted decoration. Indeed, the portrayal of a seated woman in the Red on Cream type (see RCT-1 for example) likely influenced the Galo type (see G-2 for example), where this pose is very common.

Of course, the whole range of figurine types for Greater Nicoya has not been presented here, and I do not claim that this trend affected all figurine types equally. The important thing to keep in mind is that despite change over time, there is an important measure of continuity within the broader evolution of styles, even if exceptions existed. This may be because of the gendered nature of some of the body poses and body types represented.

### *Changes in Body Poses*

Many of the body poses portrayed in the figurines can be interpreted from a gendered perspective, and have ties to certain modern day practices among groups of indigenous people in Central and South America. Wingfield (2009) mentions her own experience witnessing shamanistic practices in Peru and Ecuador, and describes the shaman transitioning from a seated or squatting position to a kneeling position to gradually rising with hands on knees until standing. These transitions of pose and body

movements would have been an important component of the shaman's ritual. Indeed, the "seated or squatting position is the first in the stages from shamanic trance to transformation, where curing and conflict resolution can take place" (Wingfield 2009:104). The poses of shamanism have also been documented in ancient Mesoamerica (Fields and Reents-Budet 2005; Reilly 1989; Tate 1999). While there is very little ethnographic evidence from the Greater Nicoya area, it is not unreasonable to assume that some of these practices may well have been shared by many cultures in the larger area. However, as many of these bodily positions are rather common, I urge caution when interpreting them as related only to shamanism. Indeed a seated position cannot on its own be indicative of shamanism.

The kneeling pose itself, as exemplified by some of the Galo figurines (see G-4 and G-5, and probably G-1 and G-3) may be a further indicator of gender as it represents a birthing position common in Central America (Wingfield 2009:105). Some of the figurine specimens, notably G-1, have swollen and enlarged labia, which may represent the moment before or during birth. But the differences between the Galo Type A and Galo Type B may not be so much related to pose alone (although I have only encountered the standing position among Type B), but to the presence of a visible sex in combination with the seated or kneeling poses.

By the Sapoá period, the seated pose continues to be used in the Mora figurines, with figures either seated with legs stretched out (see M-2, 3, 4) or seated on a stool, bench or metate (see M-1). But despite this continuity in pose, almost all major indicators of sex, as discussed previously, disappear with the Mora figurines. The appearance of Papagayo Polychrome marks somewhat of a break with previous styles in that the main

pose portrayed through the figurines is that of an individual standing with hands on hips. This in itself is not new, as this pose could be seen among the Red on Cream and Galo types (especially Galo type B). But the most dominant pose in the earlier period was arguably the seated and/or kneeling pose, which seldom appears among Papagayo figurines.

#### *Manufacture and Style: A Transition between Periods*

By the Sapoá period, the differences between newer and past types appear to increase, as the variability within figurines themselves decreases, in part because of the shift from hand-made to mold-made figurines. Papagayo figurines are not only different from previous types, but gender ambiguity is more prevalent. We no longer see obvious representations of genitalia and pregnancy/fertility, although breasts and secondary sexual features remain noticeable. Nonetheless, some transitional elements are apparent.

Mora Polychrome is currently considered a Costa Rican regional variant of the Papagayo type (Wingfield 2009:68), as my own research reconfirms. It incorporates elements typical of the Bagaces period, such as elaborate body painting and seated individuals, occasionally on a bench or a metate, but otherwise it mostly resembles Papagayo figurines (see M-1). The latter are more often than not sexually ambiguous, but are generally designated as female because of their general body type, hair, dress and the frequent presence of breasts.

Another interesting example of transition between periods is provided by Wingfield (2009: catalogue no.262). She describes a female effigy whistle in the form of a seated woman holding a baby that appears to be a transitional piece between Galo and

Mora, noting that “her face, ears, and torso reflect Galo traditions, while her hat, child, and legs represent the new trends of Mora” (Wingfield 2009:741). The eyes of the female are rendered through a complex combination of impression, paint and appliqued techniques, while the child’s eyes are simply painted on in an almond shape.

Many Mora figurines do seem to be better manufactured and more complex than other types for the Sapoá period, and some are known to be found among other grave goods in elite or high status burials (Day and Tillett 1996). If a study of the Mora figurine depicted above (M-1) was done without reference to other figurine types it would likely result in the interpretation of its lack of sexual features as related to its apparent elite nature, but that would ignore its place in the broader pattern of figurine styles for the Sapoá period. As I have shown, analyses of individual figurines, without referral and comparison with other specimens from the same period (and arguably other periods), can be one-dimensional and biased. Mora figurines may indeed be depictions of the elite, or could be a regional variant representing a hybrid of previous and current styles. I propose that Mora may have actually appeared slightly before Papagayo Polychrome and this would explain why some Mora figurines seem to strongly either resemble earlier types, or seem to incorporate elements of multiple styles (see M/PP-1).

### *Clothing in the Sapoá Period*

Another aspect that changes between the Bagaces and Sapoá periods is clothing as represented on figurines. With the Red on Cream and Galo types, clothing is minimal, and most figurines actually appear to be nude. Even in the earlier Tempisque period the main article of clothing is the *tanga* (see RZE-1), a small triangular cloth that covers the

pubic region and is held in place by straps, similar to a thong. I have seen museum specimens of Red on Cream wearing a *tanga*, but in the Peabody collection RCT-1 is the only specimen that may be wearing one. As mentioned previously, Type B figurines of the Galo type seem most likely to be represented with clothing, and this appears to be the artist's conscious choice to hide primary sexual features. The fact that some form of clothing appears on most Mora and Papagayo Polychromes is particularly interesting as this may indicate that they have more in common with Galo Type B than with any of the other previous figurine types.

All Papagayo Peabody specimens appear to wear some form of clothing represented by painted designs (even with the paint worn off from PP-4, there appears to be an incised line around the pubic area which may indicate a *tanga* or skirt). As discussed in Chapter 5, the designs, which include geometric shapes and cross-hatching, may represent woven garments. The way they are painted around torso, upper arms and thighs is particularly consistent with clothing. Greater Nicoya people are ethnographically known to have woven, and spindle whorls are often found among grave goods and household refuse (Lothrop 1926; McCafferty and McCafferty 2009). Carlsen (1988:195), however, points out that it can be difficult to distinguish textile representations from body art, especially since many of the same designs are found on roller stamps and seals. These designs appear to have been inspired by weaving and held important symbolic value. Additionally, while he hesitates to attribute these elaborate textile patterns to rank or status, he acknowledges that they likely conveyed a sense of sacredness (Carlsen 1988). McCafferty and McCafferty (2009:198), however, see many of these patterns as actual representation of textiles:



Women's upper body garments generally appear to be looped over the shoulders and tucked into the back beneath the arm. Net and plaited twill patterns are most common. Skirts may be banded or solid and occasionally depict a border.

PP-1 and PP-2 appear to wear such a skirt, and PP-3 wears what appears to be a twill patterned garment around its breasts and arms. Most of the Santa Isabel Papagayo fragments that include body fragments (no. 7, 8, 9, 10, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20) wear similar garments, though each one is unique. Even the fragments that include only portions of the head and/or face include weave motifs since they appear on the figurines' headdress or headband. These elaborate and often disproportionately large headdresses are ubiquitous in the Sapoá period figurines and seem to have mostly replaced earlier hair and headgear representations, such as the small caps worn by the Galo Type A figurines.

While during the Bagaces period, figurines wearing clothing mostly appeared among the larger, more elaborate specimens, mainly Galo Type B, they become ubiquitous in the Sapoá period. Since I believe Galo Type B likely represents shamanism or a similar type of spiritual embodiment, it seems likely that Papagayo Polychromes also shared this role. Galo type B and Papagayo figurines are also similar in that they are often portrayed standing. However, if Galo Type B represented a special, rarer kind of figurine, we cannot say the same for these Papagayo specimens. This is where the Santa Isabel material becomes particularly important; it proves the commonality of this figurine type within household contexts and general archaeological materials, which in turn leads me to conclude that Sapoá period figurines mostly ceased to represent obviously fertile

females and instead became focused on a specific type of individual, the shaman or other spiritual practitioner. As discussed in this chapter, the gender ambiguity, body poses, highly stylized anatomy and presence of clothing and/or complex body paint make these later figurines consistent with such an interpretation.

This trend towards mold-made, standardized figurines with more ambiguous genders and how it affects our broader interpretations of figurines as symbols of gender and ritual practice is likely linked to broader changes in socio-political organization and stylistic influences from Mesoamerica. The divisions between “elite” and “non-elite” seems more than ever blurred, and this opens up the possibility that figurines could have been used in many kinds of ways, by different people, and applied to different situations.

### **More than Shamanism: Daily Ritual in Archaeological Context**

Whereas it seems probable that shamans and other special practitioners presided over certain ceremonies or events in ancient Greater Nicoya, ritual activities as mentioned in Chapter 4 should not be associated solely with figurines considered as high status, as is often the case with Rosales Zoned Engraved, Galo Polychrome (mainly Type B) and even the common Papagayo Polychrome. Even if shamanism was important, figurines were likely part of daily lives and not reserved only for special ceremonies or special status people. Recent archaeological projects and surveys, mainly the Santa Isabel project described in Chapter 5, have unearthed figurines from domestic contexts. Combined with my analysis of the Peabody specimens, this demonstrates substantive variability within and between figurines types. It is thus likely that each household, each

family and maybe even each individual had their own way of experiencing spiritual and cultural beliefs, and this is reflected within the figurine assemblages, especially during the Bagaces period where figurines show much more variability.

Additionally, based on the wide range of individuals and genders represented as figurines, it is unreasonable to link all of them directly to shamanistic practices, especially the female figurines, which are numerous and come in many sizes and forms. Figurines possessed characteristics that rendered them accessible to many people, even in later periods (Sapoá and Ometepe) when stronger hierarchical differences seem more probable (see Chapter 3). Figurines from the Tempisque and Bagaces periods are mainly handmade and household-manufactured. They vary in quality and in workmanship, and come in multiple sizes. A point worth making is that the material figurines are made of, clay, was very accessible locally and of good quality (Lange 1992a:132). Contemporary indigenous Costa Ricans (and likely past people) source their clay from pits, streams and rivers near their homes (Wingfield 2009:175). Because many figurines were made locally from abundant raw material, just like the associated ceramic vessels (see Chapter 3), they cannot be classified in such categories as rare trade goods, as are obsidian or jade. For such reasons, it is important to interpret figurines as objects of domestic ritual, even those specimens seemingly related to special status individuals. When speaking of domestic ritual, gender is key, since the figurines themselves relate to gender in multiple ways.

The earlier Rosales Zoned Engraved exemplifies one of the problems facing Greater Nicoya figurine analysis. Tillett (1988:48) mentions this type as being found in domestic context, yet also describes it as an “elite type because of its unique decorative characteristics.” We must ask ourselves what constitutes a feature “special” enough to

claim elite or special status. All figurines from the periods preceding the Sapoá period (excluded from my statement because at that point in time figurines are more “mass-produced” and become very standardized, thus arguably less “unique”) show a range and variety of characteristics that are at times striking, such as exaggerated sexual features and complex decorative painting. Some types, such as the larger specimens of the Galo type, seem masterfully constructed, but the Rosales figurines also come in modest formats and are not always so well manufactured.

A figurine from the National Museum of the American Indian (see Wingfield 2009: catalogue no.12) shows a Rosales specimen of ambiguous sex kneeling with hands on hips. While stylistically similar to others of its type, the symmetry is inexact and body parts are crude with no defined musculature. The incised and modeled features are oversized and appear almost clown-like. Indeed, it is generally acknowledged that preceding the Sapoá period, most figurines were made by individual, household level artists (Wingfield 2009:248), and this freedom of manufacture can itself explain why some figurines appear better made than others. However, I also think --as discussed in this chapter-- that some figurine variation within a same type may be related to the fact that the artist was attempting to create figurines either more distinctly related to shamanism and other forms of ritual, or figurines with a focus on female fertility.

#### *Figurine Use in Different Contexts*

The Red on Cream Bagaces period type, which includes representations of fairly naturalistic figurines depicting large fertile females, appears in domestic contexts at Santa Isabel (see Appendix 2, no.2, 3, 4, 5) and lends weight to the interpretation of its use in

daily life. To my knowledge, this type is rarely, if at all, mentioned in association with burials and may further indicate its domestic nature. This does not exclude its possible use in burial rituals, but certainly indicates that it cannot be interpreted only as such. Many of the Red on Cream specimens available for study were fragments, specifically heads. This may be due to taphonomic processes, but other explanations should be considered. All of the Santa Isabel fragments are heads very similar to the Peabody figurines; they share the typical appliqué facial features with cacao bean eyes and downturned mouth. Even the Peabody collection included two detached heads (see RCT-5 and RCT-6) similar in appearance to the Santa Isabel specimens, especially figurine no.2 (Figure 15).



Figure 15. Bagaces period Figurine Head, likely Red on Cream Transitional. Santa Isabel, Rivas, Nicaragua. Photograph by the author.

This is not, however, the first time that figurine heads from the Bagaces period received analytical attention. Healy (1980:276) in his description of figurines from Rivas mentions one figurine head from the Bagaces period that is somewhat concave on the back with two holes atop the head that seem to have been punched through the clay while it was

still soft. He interprets them as holes for cord attachment, which may indicate that figurines, or parts of figurines, were worn as pendants. The figurine was found in the lower level of the excavation pit among other ceramic sherds and in a domestic context. Healy's description is similar to that of McCafferty's (2007: 232), who mentions that many of the detached figurine heads from Cholula "were concave on the back and featured perforations so that they could be tied onto other figurines, or perhaps onto fingers, as masks." Some literature (such as Lothrop 1926) refers to Chibchan people wearing pendants. However, these observations refer more specifically to frog-shaped pendants made out of gold-copper alloy.

Nonetheless, some of the smaller figurines or figurine heads could have been used as pendants to hang from a necklace, and Wingfield (2009:71) does mention that through personal communications from archaeologists at the Museo Nacional de Costa Rica that some of the smaller Galo and Mora type figurines and whistles were found in the graves of the deceased, worn as pendants. This indicates an intimate relationship between certain figurines and individuals, a relationship that goes into the afterlife. It is also another example of the numerous ways figurines were used. Two figurines from the Peabody collection are small enough to have been pendants, M-3 and M-4, but they do not appear to have any obvious loops, although the space between their arms and body would be sufficient to accommodate a necklace. While Papagayo figurines appear too large to be worn as pendants, they almost all display "loop" shaped arms. Greater Nicoya figurines of course have long been represented with arms or hands resting on hips or thigh, but with Papagayo and Mora Polychromes the arms became so stylized as to actually resemble functional loops. While this at first appears to be a stylistic preference

stemming from the long standing representation of individuals with hands on their hips, it may also be a functional choice. These “loops” appear on large and small specimens, in museum and in archaeological contexts. Among the Santa Isabel fragments, no. 6, 7, 8, 10, 16 and 19 have “loop” arms (Figure 16).



Figure 16. Papagayo figurine fragment of “loop” arm resting on upper thigh (no.16). Santa Isabel, Rivas, Nicaragua. Photograph by the author.

However, not all Papagayo figurines have such arms (Figure 17) and this is a further indication that the existence of “loop” arms relates to how certain figurines were used or displayed.



Figure 17. Papagayo Polychrome fragment of half of a female body, seated, with arm placed on upper thigh. The arm appears relaxed and does not form a “loop” (no.18). Santa Isabel, Rivas, Nicaragua. Photograph by the author.

That said, many of the figurines with “loop” arms appear too large to have been practical as an adornment or pendant. Indeed specimens PP-1, 3, 4, and 5<sup>2</sup> are 14 cm or more in height. For those figurines too large to be worn as adornments, there are other ways of interpreting these holes or loops. Diego Duran (1994) mentions that among the Aztec, idols of varying materials including clay “were from ropes strung from tree to tree in the cornfields, perhaps to promote agricultural fertility” (Brumfiel 1996:6). This could explain why some figurines and figurine fragments are found strewn about large areas. While many figurines are found in household deposits, others have been found in less defined areas, near the surface, and are often sampled during surveys and shovel test pits (Niemel 2003, Salgado 1996b). This is, of course, a tentative interpretation and requires testing, but it is an important dimension to consider since little effort has been expended to explain some of the characteristics present on these figurines. While not stated

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<sup>2</sup> This headless figurine measures only 11.9 cm in height, but since Papagayo heads are rather large it originally, and in its complete state, probably measured over 15 cm.



explicitly by archaeologists, there appears to be an assumption that figurines were used as static objects, to be placed somewhere, such as a burial, and left behind. They are seen as replacements and passive actors, when in truth they may have been considered as active agents in ceremonies and in and around people's home.

Worth noting, some of the figurines are so small, or what might be properly termed miniature, that they were likely meant to be held, carried around or transported from different locations. The specimen (M-3) shown in Figure 18 does not have loopholes and is not a whistle or a rattle, either. Figurine M-4 is similar. They are solid figurines, as opposed to the numerous hollow specimens. As they are well under 10cm in length, I believe their size does have interpretive value.



Figure 18. Miniature Mora Polychrome (M-3) figurine. Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. Photograph by the author.

A similar figurine was found at the site of Santa Isabel in domestic contexts (Figure 19). The small figurine, well under 10 cm, is a Bagaces period miniature and appears consistent with the Red on Cream type. Despite its missing limbs and eroded surface, the red, burnished slip and stylized facial features certainly resemble the aforementioned

type. It also appears to have a swollen belly, typical of this type, and small breasts. It is basically a smaller version of the larger Red on Cream specimens.



Figure 19. Miniature Red on Cream figurine (no.4). Santa Isabel, Rivas, Nicaragua. Photograph by the author.

In terms of embodiment a figurine such as this brings to mind the ways in which a human being would physically interact and respond to its size. If large scale art forces people to contemplate their identity within a community and engage with it, than a figurine this size should provoke more intimate feelings (Bailey 2005), and be used accordingly. For instance, it could easily fit in someone's hand or be placed in a pouch or some kind of pocket. They are so small that it seems unlikely that they would have been valued as a display on an altar or a shelf, for example. Maybe they were amulets or mementos, portable versions of larger representations that could be kept on one's person. They could have been used in rituals outside of the household, where larger figurines were not available or too large to be transported. It is impossible to propose conclusions

at this time, especially for this region, and of the handful of available figurine analyses for Greater Nicoya, none focus on these miniatures. Nonetheless, these are worthwhile possibilities to consider for future research and a further reminder that figurines are multi-faceted objects.

### *Memory, Gender and Ritual Breakage*

Figurines, as small human representations, are particularly good mnemonic agents; they can trigger memory through personal engagement and physical proximity (Bailey 2005:33-34). When a person interacts or comes in contact with a figurine, it becomes infused with meaning or memory. When the individual returns to that object, this can cause an emotional feedback, created by the link between the person and the object. The latter example concerns memory at the individual scale, but memories can be shared, common to a large group and even transmitted from one generation to the next (Van Dyke and Alcock 2003). The recurrence of certain themes among the figurines studied here, particularly the gender and sexual characteristics, the body types and body poses, demonstrate that traditions and memories were shared and transmitted through generations.

In terms of the individual or group relationship with a figurine, embodiment theory permits the consideration of figurines as symbolic extensions of personhood. A figurine, for instance, can be considered as a symbolic sacrifice; it can represent either a live individual of some importance or a deity, a figure of authority. In societies that do not perform human sacrifice this can be an alternative way of symbolically incorporating individuals into the graves of their loved ones. This is a case where the miniature value of

a figurine is key, as it takes the place of a real (or imagined) being (Bailey 2005). While the figurines from the Bagaces period show much more facial variability and may in some cases have been meant to represent specific individuals, by the Sapoá period it seems evident that the figurines represent a common ideal, a symbol often tied to femaleness but no longer dependent on specific people. And so while I have demonstrated that significant continuity exists between periods, it also appears that major changes in identity, or its manifestation in clay effigies, must have occurred for figurines to become not only mold-made, but produced at a larger scale and very standardized.

As mentioned in Chapter 5, many of these earlier figurines are found in domestic contexts and often display patterns of breakage that may not be entirely accidental. In many regions throughout the world the phenomenon of breaking, modifying, or completely destroying figurines has been well documented, but the reasons for these actions remain rather elusive (Biehl 2006). This is an intriguing practice that has yet to be considered for Greater Nicoya. Although Biehl's studies focus on figurines from prehistoric Europe, it is still useful to mention that he believes this was a "socio-ritual practice performed for specific reasons and according to known rules" (Biehl 2006:209). It can be defined as a communicative act, not a random, meaningless act of destruction and certainly not due to accidental breaks alone. This admittedly broad explanation can reasonably be used to discuss figurine breakage in other contexts and other regions where signs point towards intent. Intentional breaking of figurines has been documented in Mesoamerica (Evans 1990; McCafferty 2007) and other regions, such as the Ulua Valley in Honduras (Lopiparo and Hendon 2009), not to mention Europe (Biehl 1996, 2006).

In modern Western culture we typically associate the breaking of objects as having a negative meaning --acts of anger, violence or catharsis-- but in certain contexts this can actually be a way to incorporate a valued cultural symbol into a larger event, such as breaking a wine goblet and shouting “Mazeltov!” in Jewish wedding ceremonies. We can also construe the destruction, damaging or hiding of figurines and other figural objects as an act of rebellion or opposition against a certain meaning (Mock 1998). Since figurines or their fragments have been found in domestic contexts, we can speak of ritual breaking as a household occurrence. Indeed, the breaking and burying of figurines in households can be a means to incorporate the past into the present (Biehl 2006; Lopiparo and Hendon 2009). Such an act would be particularly powerful if the figurines were imbued with social memory, and this seems likely considering the continuity of this artefact type throughout the region and through time.

The intentional breaking of clay figurines can thus be considered a form of body alteration through which the figurine is used as a miniature representative of the true human form. However, the same can be said of whole figurines placed within specific contexts, such as an altar, cache, or burial. When unlooted burials are discovered, figurines are for the most part whole and unbroken. The fact that broken figurines appear mostly in domestic context may be an indication of how figurines had different roles and meanings in different settings.

In the Maya site of Cerro Palenque, Honduras, fragmental figurines were used in rituals of renewal within habitation sites, and are thought to have been purposefully deposited during renovations or construction of houses as a means to help old meet new, not only for people’s living quarters but within their own life cycles (Lopiparo and

Hendon 2009). Such a practice is not so different from ancestor worship, where individuals from the past are considered as important active components of the present who can help or hinder. In some Postclassic Aztec sites, figurine heads from the Formative and Classic eras are occasionally found in otherwise undisturbed levels. Brumfiel (1996) proposes the Aztec collected and curated these heirlooms to incorporate them into household rituals and serve as representatives of ancestral authority. In the domestic contexts at Cholula, most figurines were found headless, two found at the bottom of a well, in what could represent a ritual of termination, where the spirit is released (McCafferty 2007:234; Mock 1998) or a rite tied to fertility.

In Greater Nicoya, figurine fragments from earlier periods found within later Sapoá sites may have been placed there as a means to incorporate past and present. In Chapter 5 I provided the examples of the Red on Cream and Rosales Zoned Engraved fragments found in the Sapoá period layers at Santa Isabel. If these were purposefully kept by Greater Nicoya people and not simply the result of site disturbances, this practice could be an interesting outcome of the socio-political events of the Sapoá period, where there is considerable evidence that people's livelihoods were changing along with their socio-political circumstances (see Chapter 3 for discussion). The Sapoá period also marks a departure from the creation of highly sexualized female figurines during the Bagaces period. The latter often represented naturalistic traits such as thick thighs and buttocks, large bellies and round breasts, prominent nipples and even visible sexes. As discussed already, it is currently difficult to assess whether this shift towards less sexualized figurines actually has to do with real-life gender roles and perceptions or if it is part of broader stylistic changes. But the fact that most of these earlier period figurines

fragments are mostly heads and found among Sapoá period diagnostic artefacts such as polychrome vessels, in household contexts and their associated refuse middens (see McCafferty 2008b), suggests that their presence could be culturally significant. Indeed, of the collections from Santa Isabel and other figurine heads I have observed, such as those found by Karen Niemel (2003) during her surveys, I did not identify any limb or torso fragments from the Bagaces period, yet these are not uncommon for the Sapoá period fragments.

Worth mentioning as well are the handmade figurine fragments (in Healy's sub-category of "solid" figurines) found in Rivas in the 1959-1961 field seasons. Of these, 12 were torso or head fragments for only 14 limb fragments. As there should be 4 limbs per figurine, a higher number would have been expected. Interestingly, Healy (1980:256) mentions evidence of sawing under the chin of figurine heads and believes they have been intentionally removed. The figurine heads he refers to are of the Red on Cream or Chavez White on Red type and are very similar to those found at Santa Isabel. They have the classic red slip surface, cacao bean eyes and downturned mouth. Analysing the surface of these heads under a microscope may provide further assistance in assessing intentional versus accidental breakage. Among the Peabody specimens, RCT-1 and RCT-2 both had detached heads that were glued back on. I presume these were broken *in situ*, but since there is no field documentation for these specimens I cannot be certain. Nonetheless, the head of RCT-2 shows a surprisingly perfect breakage point. The line is clean and smooth as though sawed off with precision. RCT-5 and RCT-6 are heads that have no associated bodies within the Peabody collection. This is interesting, as these were the only two detached heads in the whole collection of figurines from Nicaragua

and Costa Rica. This is an additional indicator that Red on Cream transitional is a type that may have been purposefully broken.

These Bagaces period heads may have provided a link between past and present, perhaps to gender representations that were becoming obsolete or purposefully being replaced as Greater Nicoya society became politically more centralized and controlled by *caciques*. Archaeologists still strongly debate whether or not the Sapoá period was marked by the arrival of Oto-Manguean speaking immigrants and a transition into a more Mesoamerican style set of cultural practices and beliefs (see McCafferty 2011a), but either way, ample evidence of socio-cultural and political transformation exists, not to mention major changes in material culture, including the transition from handmade to mold-made figurines and the appearance of large-scale human representations. Both males and females are represented in mostly equal proportions in monumental stone sculptures. On the one hand this can indicate the importance of both genders in society (Wilke 2011:228). However, as males are overall less common among ceramic figurines, their frequent appearance as stone statues may be a sign of male dominance over certain aspects of ritual and political life in the Sapoá period.

In many cultures throughout the world, including Mesopotamia, Mesoamerica and Lower Central America, the head holds specific spiritual importance as the locus of personhood (Leibsohn 1988). In fact, Costa Rica, including the Greater Nicoya region, is known for its ceramic effigy head tradition. These ceramic heads come almost exclusively from burial or spiritual contexts and are thought to represent important individuals or broader groups of important and prestigious people, such as shamans, warriors and deities. Leibsohn (1988:145) notes that the effigy head tradition “can be



characterized by a continuum which shows naturalistic death heads at one end and abstract deity-figures at the other.” This not only designates heads as symbolically important, but fits comfortably within my own hypotheses regarding the evolution of styles from realism to abstraction that can also be seen in the ceramic figurine tradition, as demonstrated in this chapter. The anatomical precision of Rosales Zoned Engraved, gradually gave way to more interpretive renditions of bodies and their proportions, until finally, in the Sapoá Period, we find abstracted beings, characterized by geometric shapes and repetitive patterns.

. If during the Bagaces period, figurines and effigy heads represented specific individuals --mothers, ancestors, shamans-- they would be seen as not only culturally meaningful, but also at times as intimate objects associated with desirable traits: success in fertility, family, and spirituality. Indeed, if certain figurines served as portraits, proxies for real people, than they must have been important symbols of personal identities. But if during the Sapoá period figurines (and effigy heads) came to represent less personal entities of power, then it is possible that mementos from the past would have been valued, kept, curated in some form or other. Or, as mentioned above, these heirlooms could have been incorporated into rituals of consecration for homes, for example.

The fragmented specimens from Santa Isabel appear to indicate that figurines were important domestic objects, and their number in archaeological context and in museum collections implies widespread use even in the Sapoá period, when figurines no longer represent sexually potent females. They also obviously cease to represent specific individuals and this important difference hints at broader changes in society and community identities.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

The figurines analyzed in this thesis demonstrate an overall gradual transition in styles and gendered representations, particularly female, that was not previously documented. Rather than a major break separating the Bagaces and Sapoá periods, we see a mixture of change and continuity. Despite significant differences in style and manufacture, Sapoá period figurines are obviously inspired by centuries of previous figurine manufacture in Greater Nicoya. In other words, I argue that they were not introduced by new arrivals, nor were they simply mimicked by them. During the Sapoá period, not only are figurines highly stylized and standardized, they also represent a smaller variety of individuals, and while female figurines are dominant, they no longer look like typical “fertility” figurines. For the first time they are consistently depicted wearing clothing, thus hiding their primary sexual features. This trait is shared with the earlier Galo Polychrome (Type B), as is the standing pose typical in the Sapoá period. While the Papagayo type comes in different sizes, it does not appear to vary much in terms of quality of manufacture due to the use of molds. However, painted decoration, including elaborate motifs, clothing, headwear and body modifications becomes the main means of expression and makes each figurine more personalized. These new traits could be indicative of large portions of the population adhering to a more standardized belief system, controlled by certain powerful individuals.

But Bagaces period figurines, or at least their heads, continue to appear in Sapoá period contexts, and this may be further proof that the way people experienced ritual was possibly changing too fast for some or even being opposed through the continued use of

older styles. This could also be the sign of a transitional period, during which many figurine styles were in use at the same time (Steinbrenner 2010:232). Indeed, if such a transitional phase existed, then Mora Polychrome was probably a component of that transition, as it incorporates themes and decorative elements typical of previous figurine types into the Sapoá period forms.

The way we interpret these seemingly anachronistic artefacts will likely evolve as further archaeological projects take place and typologies are better refined. I myself offered some typological alternatives for Galo Polychrome, which should be interpreted as a two-state figurine type. One version of the Galo type shows females with exaggerated or obvious sexual traits that highlight their fertility and sexual nature. The other focuses more on body decoration, elaborate geometrical motifs, clothing, and even jewelry. The figures' sex is hidden by clothing and more effort was put into the creation of striking and detailed facial features. This second type has been given substantive attention from art historians who see them as prime examples of elite objects, in part because of their more sexually ambiguous nature.

But the notion that powerful women must become more “male” or gender neutral to be taken seriously is a modern bias. This is no reason to apply these notions to the archaeological record without corroborating evidence, especially within a culture that held female fertility and sexuality in high regard. Shamanism itself is known to include many genders, and the sexual ambiguity of the Galo Type B figurines probably related to the shaman's need to transcend his or her form. Furthermore, in Bagaces period Greater Nicoya, women likely held significant power in multiple spheres, precluding the need to rely on household figurines to obtain prestige. I do not mean that these smaller, sexually

potent figurines were unimportant, but rather quite the opposite: they were likely just as meaningful, but in their own right. As mentioned in the previous chapter, they could have been used to sanctify homes, promote fertility and represent aspects of daily life and ritual that held particular importance. The wide range of figurines that exists for this period shows that gender, sexuality and power were intricately linked.

It is unlikely that female shamans or other important women were represented in a more androgynous way as a means to appropriate male roles. Indeed, “while male and female actions are differentiated, both male and female figures are shown seated on benches that may represent wooden or carved stone seats, a mark of high social status” (Joyce 1993: 264). It is thus entirely possible that some of the less obviously female shamans are in truth male, or that a third gender was represented as part of the shamanistic experience. Indeed, there is no need for an artificial opposition between household agency and ritual, and more public forms of spiritual power. Joyce (1993) points out that we cannot attribute the better known Maya and Honduran social divisions to Lower Central American people, especially concerning gender. However, all Lower Central American scholars would not agree with this statement. Graham (1985) believes female figurines from Costa Rica are merely fertility symbols in a society largely controlled by men. Yet, many figurines clearly do not relate directly to fertility or often combine multiple symbolic meanings.

This complexity in figural representations is likely a reflection of the personal nature of these objects, because while they appear to represent broader community values and ideals, their variability in style and quality are indicative of many craftspeople. There is very little indication of craft specialization during the Bagaces period; most figurines

must have been made at the household level. Bagaces figurines reflect personal tastes and creativity more so than in the Sapoá period, at least in terms of general shapes and the choice of figural subject. This is not surprising since figurines were predominantly handmade during the Bagaces period. The use of molds by the Sapoá period partially explains this standardization, but this new preference itself leaves many questions unanswered.

Moldmaking technology is sometimes associated with the Mesoamerican immigrants who allegedly arrived in the northern sector of Greater Nicoya around A.D.800 (Abel-Vidor 1981; Stone 1966). If this is the case, then we are dealing with much broader changes in cultural identity that could explain these new approaches to figurine production and techniques. However, these migrations may not have been abrupt, as the archaeological record shows little or no evidence of warfare or violent encounters, which would be expected if newcomers impinged on Chibchan territory. And so it seems likely that certain local dynamics, such as the rise of socio-political organization in Greater Nicoya, may have affected this particular aspect of material culture.

With the advent of the Sapoá period, monumental sculptures rise as a form of human figural representation (Joyce 1993; Stone 1961) while figurines become standardized and stylized. While standardized images executed in permanent materials may serve to control individuals by forcing them to view these sculptures on a daily basis, as part of their broader cultural landscape (Joyce 1998), I think it is meaningful that they seem to be associated both with cemeteries (Bruhns 1992; Lothrop 1921), repositories of past lives, and areas where they would be directly in contact with people

and their daily lives, such as a plaza or market (Haberland 1973:136). The statues could thus have been both political and religious symbols of power, affecting people's lives and perceptions at multiple levels. In her book, Guernsey (2012) discusses the role played by monumental sculpture in Preclassic Mesoamerica in creating and institutionalizing social hierarchies. For Greater Nicoya, it can be assumed that these sculptures were associated with a certain level of prestige and wealth, as the time and the craftsmanship needed to create, erect, and maintain them indicates specialization and possibly economic surplus (Bruhns 1992). This converges with other evidence that the Sapoá period saw an increase in population and possibly in social stratification.

The size of settlements increased significantly, aspects of the economy became specialized, and we see the appearance of plazas surrounded by earthen mounds. Burial customs became more homogenous, and for the first time, some cemeteries were found in areas segregated from habitation sites (Haberland 1992). While this seems consistent with the changes brought by migrations, the archaeological evidence suggests that material culture remained overall local in tradition, suggesting a series of migrations along Central America over a period of centuries (Lange 1984; McCafferty 2005, 2011). It also seems that figurines for that period increase, likely because of higher demand (i.e., larger populations) and specialized manufacture. The variety of figurine types decrease and is replaced by the dominant Papagayo and Pataky Polychrome mold-made types. Interestingly, Guernsey (2012) observed a decrease of domestic rituals involving ceramic figurines coinciding with the appearance of the first monumental sculptures, which is clearly not what happened during the Sapoá period. This increase in number of figurines and in standardization may thus be related not only to the use of molds or to new cultural

arrivals, but to a wider form of standardization within culture caused by the centralization of power and authority that was compatible with the stone statuary. This in turn caused a shift in cultural preferences and maybe changes in gender roles. If both male and female traits were believed necessary for spiritual success, as seen in shamanistic practices, then the representation of powerful individuals as being somewhat more gender ambiguous may have become the ideal. Whether this belief was shared by all members of the community is to be debated, but the fact that previous figurine types mostly disappear, most notably representations of sexually potent females, appears to indicate that household production may have mostly ceased.

For at least a time, figurines typical of the Bagaces period appear side by side with Sapoá specimens, and indicate a form of cultural resistance to these changes. Generally, from the Sapoá onward, creativity and personal expression appears to shift from the overall figurine form to the painted details adorning figurines, such as the patterns, clothing, jewelry and complex headdresses represented on Papagayo Polychrome. This appears to be a more subtle form of expression compatible with the overall societal norms of the time. In a society that has become more controlled and standardized, the creation of figurines could thus have remained an important outlet for personal and group identities even though they mainly represented broader community ideals.

The junction between the Bagaces and Sapoá periods certainly offers a plethora of intriguing and complex socio-cultural possibilities, and the study of figurines offers rich interpretive potential for the future, especially concerning identity, and specifically gender. Gender is a very important component of identity that has personal and

community implications and should be further explored. I have demonstrated here that even without the best of archaeological contexts, we can start to better define elements of gender and daily ritual through figurine analysis if we give as much credence to the small, modest figurines as we do to the larger, more elaborate versions. Indeed, while context will always remain important and should be sought wherever possible, the archaeological and anthropological perspective can help researchers think of figurines differently, as objects that belonged to real people and that held multiple functions. They are certainly artistic representations, but also much more. Most importantly, this research can happen on small figurines that likely belonged to common individuals. Archaeologists do not need to start with “elite” materials, especially when the concept itself is hard to define in Greater Nicoya.

Finally, I hope that figurine analyses in Greater Nicoya will continue to develop in such a way as to participate in wider, inter-regional dialogues on figurine studies. This has already started, most recently in Halperin et al. (2009). This book focuses mainly on Mesoamerican figurines, but includes an article on the figurines of Santa Isabel (McCafferty and McCafferty 2009). The study of figurines has become almost a sub-field of its own, with researchers from over the world participating in conference sessions and publications. This is because figurines touch so many aspects of individual and group identities, and consequently must rely on a strong theoretical backbone. Figurine specialists can and should participate in exchanges on gender, agency, practice theory and ritual. Figurine analysis will rightfully continue to be a part of ceramic studies, but we must also go beyond material and economic concerns in order to understand why and by whom such objects were made. And, as issues of ethnic identity continue to be core to



many projects in Greater Nicoya, I believe figurines can not only be useful in unravelling the mystery of broader group and cultural identities, but can at the same time provide a window on how ancient peoples actually lived and how they viewed their world and themselves.

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## APPENDIX 1

This appendix provides photos and descriptive details of the figurines from the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology studied in the context of this research. All photos by the author.

### Rosales Zoned Engraved (500B.C.-A.D.500)



#### RZE-1 (976-59-20/24941)

Artefact type: human effigy

Dimensions: 12.6 x 8.7 x 5.6cm

Condition: complete; excellent condition, most of the paint present; some weathering and cracking; large crack on right side of head

Material: ceramic

Site: Samara, Nicoya region (Costa Rica)

Fabrication technique: handmade

Sex (+ justification): ambiguous- possibly female; breasts and triangular cloth (*tanga*) covering pubic area; very obvious inverted navel

Position: seated with legs folded and feet touching; hands placed upon thighs; head straight, looking ahead; back straight

Body features: naturalistic- proportions close to reality; long, thin torso; ribcage visible; small, round breasts with nipples; thin arms; hands and feet represented; round buttocks

Head and facial features: ovoid, oversized head; large nose, flaring nostrils; thick lips; eyes disproportionately large; thin, painted brows; large, well-formed ears, high cheek bones, well-formed chin; hair short and painted black (or headpiece?)

Decoration type: red and black paint; slip; glaze; incisions

Dress/Clothing/Jewelry: triangular loincloth, or *tanga*; necklace and bracelets (maybe tattoos?); earspools

Body modifications: tattoos, or body painting; pierced ears

### **Red on Cream Transitional (circa A.D.200-A.D.500)**



#### **RCT-1 (78-42-20/16908)**

Artefact type: human effigy

Dimensions: 8.5 x 5.3 x 3.8 cm

Condition: complete after repair (head glued on); good condition; paint half intact; some wear, especially on extremities

Material: ceramic

Site: Rivas (near lake), Nicaragua

Fabrication technique: handmade; solid figurine (as opposed to hollow)

Sex (+ justification): female; small breasts; large buttocks; round, soft belly; large thighs (associated with pregnancy and fertility?)

Position: seated with legs stretched out; hands on back of hips/upper buttocks; head straight, looking ahead.

Body features: stylized- body more naturalistic than head; short torso with round breasts and belly; very large thighs and buttocks; feet represented; hands not represented; anus possibly represented (slight, round indentation between buttocks)

Head and facial features: rectangular head; simple, round nose; large frowning mouth; large, appliqué cacao bean eyes; ears represented

Decoration type: red paint; slip; burnishing; appliqué

Dress/Clothing/Jewelry: possible outline of a triangular garment (*tanga* or loincloth?) between legs; rectangular headdress

Body modifications: none apparent



**RCT-2 (78-42-20/16936)**

Artefact type: human effigy

Dimensions: 12.2 x 7.3 x 6.8 cm

Condition: incomplete; good condition; lower half of left leg missing; head glued back on, but breakage line oddly smooth and even (head was sawed off?); most of paint and slip remains; wear around face and thighs

Material: ceramic

Site: Nandaime, Nicaragua

Fabrication technique: handmade

Sex (+ justification): female; small breasts, with pointed nipples; large buttocks; soft, round belly and large thighs (associated with pregnancy and fertility?)

Position: seated, with legs stretched out; hands on back of hips/upper buttocks; head straight, looking ahead

Body features: stylized- body more naturalistic than head; short, narrow torso; round belly, prominent navel; small breasts, with pointed nipples; very large thighs and buttocks; feet represented (although could be knees); hands crudely represented; anus possibly represented (slight, round indentation between buttocks)

Head and facial features: oversized, rectangular head; flat face (other than the appliqué features); round nose with incised nostrils; large, frowning mouth; appliqué cacao bean eyes; appliqué eyebrows; large ears

Decoration type: red paint; slip; burnishing; appliqué

Dress/Clothing/Jewelry: rectangular headdress; earspools or earrings

Body modifications: pierced ears



**RCT-3 (78-42-20/15119)**

Artefact type: human effigy

Dimensions: 12.2 x 6.3 x 4 cm

Condition: incomplete; poor condition; left arm missing, most of both legs missing, large hole in back; head fractured and glued back on; most of paint worn away except on chest; scratched and chipped

Material: ceramic

Site: Nandaime, Nicaragua

Fabrication technique: handmade; hollow with intentional hole at back of head

Sex (+ justification): female; pointed breasts, with nipples apparent; round belly; large buttocks

Position: likely seated (difficult to assess because of missing legs); hands on thighs/upper buttocks; head straight, looking ahead

Body features: stylized; body more naturalistic than head; breasts with pointed nipples; round belly with navel; wide hips; large buttocks; thin arms jutting out; hands represented

Head and facial features: oversized, rectangular head; appliqué facial features; cacao bean eyes; prominent eyebrows; frowning mouth; pointed nose; large ears represented; wears hat or headdress with border

Decoration type: red paint; slip; appliqué

Dress/Clothing/Jewelry: rectangular headdress; earspools or earrings

Body modifications: pierced ears



**RCT-4 (976-33-20/24788)**

Artefact type: human effigy vessel

Dimensions: 13.5 x 18 cm

Condition: complete; good condition; most of paint is intact; wear and chipping around the face, arms and legs

Material: ceramic

Site: Guanacaste, Costa Rica

Fabrication technique: handmade

Sex (+ justification): female; small, appliqué breasts, nipples apparent; round belly; large buttocks

Position: standing; arms on hips, one leg kicking in the air; head straight, looking ahead

Body features: stylized; very large, globular body; undersized arms jutting out, small hands on hips; large thighs; small feet represented



Head and facial features: oval head with flared opening at top; appliqué cacao bean eyes, set wide apart; small round nose, placed higher than eyes; small, crooked mouth

Decoration type: red paint; slip; appliqué

Dress/Clothing/Jewelry: possibly earspools or earrings

Body modifications: possibly pierced ears



**RCT-5 (78-42-20/15117)**

Artefact type: severed human figurine head

Dimensions: 4.8 x 4.7 x 3.2 cm

Condition: incomplete; no body; severed head in good condition; wear around the eyes and nose

Material: ceramic

Site: Nicaragua

Fabrication technique: handmade

Sex (+ justification): undetermined; no primary or secondary sexual features available for observation, but braided hair (or headband) may be associated with men (see main text p.68)

Position: n/a

Body features: n/a

Head and facial features: round head; appliqué facial features; cacao bean eyes, thick eyebrows, round nose placed above eyes; large frowning mouth; large ears; braided hair (or headband)

Decoration type: red paint; slip; appliqué

Dress/Clothing/Jewelry: earspools or earrings

Body modifications: pierced ears



**RCT-6 (78-42-20/15116)**

Artefact type: severed human figurine head

Dimensions: 4.9 x 5 x 3.7 cm

Condition: incomplete; no body; severed head in good condition

Material: ceramic

Site: Nicaragua

Fabrication technique: handmade

Sex (+ justification): undetermined; no primary or secondary sexual features available for observation, but braided hair (or headband) may be associated with men (see main text p.68)

Position: n/a

Body features: n/a

Head and facial features: rectangular head; appliqué facial features; cacao bean eyes, with round piece of clay added to the middle to create eyeball; round nose placed above eyes, oversized frowning mouth; small ears

Decoration type: red paint; slip; appliqué

Dress/Clothing/Jewelry: braided hair or headband

Body modifications: n/a

**Galo Polychrome (A.D. 500-A.D.800)**



**G-1 (47-2-20/17405)**

Artefact type: human figurine

Dimensions: 15.7 x 11.8 x 8.3 cm

Condition: incomplete; medium condition; both legs missing; paint and motifs mostly worn away but were probably elaborate with many motifs on chest, arms, belly and face, where still slightly apparent; many scratches and chipping, mainly on top of head

Material: ceramic

Site: Nicoya Peninsula, Filadelfia, Costa Rica

Fabrication technique: handmade; mainly hollow figurine (head may be solid); hole on each side of neck; hole as navel; hole in underside

Sex (+ justification): female; very round, stylized appliqué breasts; very apparent genitalia (labia and vagina); large buttocks

Position: seated with hands on stomach; legs may have been stretched out; head straight, looking ahead

Body features: very stylized; torso cylindrical and thick; flat belly; navel represented by small hole; arms muscular, jutting out; small, round breasts with obvious nipples; buttocks prominent with large cleft; labia is large and swollen, large “slit” indicating vaginal opening; legs absent but were probably thick and tubular; hands are represented with incisions creating fingers

Head and facial Features: flat, rectangular head with appliqué facial features; head appears bald or wearing some form of cap; eyes round and bulging; small, roundish nose; cacao bean lips with “pursed” look; ears represented

Decoration type: polychrome paint (red, orange, black); appliqué; burnishing.

Dress/Clothing/Jewelry: head cap/ hat; no obvious clothing identifiable because of worn paint

Body modifications: tattoos or body paint



**G-2 (17-3-20/C8065.1)**

Artefact type: human effigy

Dimensions: 9.9 x 7.7 x 7.6 cm

Condition: complete, but after repair (leg and arm glued); good condition; paint and motifs mostly worn away but were probably elaborate with many motifs on chest, arms, belly and face, where still slightly apparent; wear and chipped paint

Material: ceramic

Site: Lagunilla, Costa Rica

Fabrication techniques: handmade; solid (not hollow), with holes to let out pressure, one as navel, other on bottom, one at each side of neck

Sex (+justification): likely female; prominent breasts; sex not represented

Position: seated with legs extended, hands on thighs; head straight, looking ahead

Body features: stylized; proportions of this figurine closer to reality; slim waist but slight belly with navel; muscular arms jutting out; large, tubular thighs; small, stylized feet; hands painted on

Head and facial features: rectangular head; modeled and appliqué facial features; round, bulging eyes; upper and lower eyelids represented by appliqué lines; fairly naturalistic nose with incised holes for nostrils; slightly protruding lips painted red; large ears

Decorations type: polychrome paint (black-brown, red); burnishing; incisions; modeling; appliqué

Dress/Clothing/Jewelry: swirly motifs on arms, torso and thighs represent either clothing or body art; possibly wears a *tanga* or loincloth

Body modifications: tattoos or body paint; earspools



**G-3 (17-3-20/C8065)**

Artefact type: human effigy

Dimensions: 9.3 x 6.4 x 5.3 cm

Condition: incomplete; medium condition; missing front portion of each leg; paint and motifs mostly worn away but were probably elaborate with many motifs on chest, arms, belly and face, where still slightly apparent; wear and chipped paint

Material: ceramic

Site: Lagunilla, Costa Rica

Fabrication techniques: handmade; hollow body, solid head; multiple holes (one on each side of neck, one as a navel, one at bottom between legs); signs of reduction

Sex (+justification): female; round and prominent breasts; possible painted labia; prominent buttocks

Position: seated with legs probably folded in front; hands on upper thighs; head straight, looking ahead

Body features: very stylized; thick core; round breasts; undersized, but muscular arms jutting out; hands represented; legs appear to have been small in comparison to torso

Head and facial features: head trapeze shaped and oversized compared to body; face very flat; modeled and appliqué facial features; round, bulging eyes set wide apart; upper and lower eyelids represented by appliqué lines; fairly naturalistic nose with incised holes for nostrils; thick, protruding lips; naturalistic ears (not visible in photo)

Decoration type: polychrome paint (brown-black, orange, red); burnishing, incisions; modeling; appliqué

Dress/Clothing/Jewelry: cap or skullcap on head

Body modifications: tattoos or body paint



**G-4 (47-2-20/17407)**

Artefact type: human effigy

Dimensions: 9.9 x 8 x 6 cm

Condition: incomplete; poor condition; reconstructed head (multiple pieces put back together), upper thigh portion of left leg missing, portion of right buttocks missing, most of right eye missing; chipped and scratched paint

Material: ceramic

Site: Nicoya Peninsula, Filadelfia, Costa Rica

Fabrication techniques: handmade; solid figurine; hole at bottom and one hole on each side of neck

Sex (+justification): female; prominent breasts; labia represented; prominent buttocks; thick body

Position: seated, probably kneeling, with hands on thighs; head straight, looking ahead; body slightly hunched over

Body features: stylized; large head; thick, round torso; this figure looks notably squat and disproportionate; shoulders and upper arms muscular, jutting out; legs short and “stubby;” hands and feet represented

Head and facial features: large head; crude, oversized facial features, modeled and appliqué; round, bulging eyes; upper and lower eyelids represented by appliqué lines; fairly naturalistic nose with incised holes for nostrils; very thick, protruding lips



Decorations type: polychrome paint (black-brown, red); burnishing; incisions; modeling; appliqué

Dress/clothing/Jewelry: wears a cap or skullcap

Body modifications: tattoos or body paint



**G-5 (78-42-20/15138)**

Artefact type: human effigy (body only)

Dimensions: 7.4 x 7.3 x 4.9 cm

Condition: incomplete; poor condition; head, right arm and right leg missing; paint worn off

Material: ceramic

Site: Zapatera Island, Nicaragua

Fabrication technique: handmade; hollow figurine with large hole at the bottom; slight hole for navel; signs of reduction

Sex (+ justification): female; no breasts, but labia clearly represented; round, distended belly

Position: seated or kneeling, probably with legs folded under body; hands on thighs

Body features: fairly naturalistic; flat chest with large “drooping” belly; navel represented; muscular arms, jutting out; hands represented; only upper thighs represented, which implies that they are folded underneath body or to the side; obvious labia, with large “slit”

Head and facial features: n/a

Decoration type: polychrome paint?

Dress/Clothing/Jewelry: none apparent

Body modifications: none apparent



**G-6 (78-42-20/15139)**

Artefact type: human effigy (body only)

Dimensions: 6.3 x 6.7 cm

Condition: incomplete; poor condition; head missing, torso damaged; minimal paint remains; much wear

Material: ceramic

Site: Zapatera Island, Nicaragua

Fabrication technique: handmade; hollow figurine

Sex (+ justification): female; round breasts apparent but damaged; belly with “rolls;” very prominent labia; large buttocks;

Position: sitting (as if on stool or chair); one hand on knee while other hand on back as if the person is holding her back while sitting down

Body features: fairly naturalistic body; large lump on back as figure appears bent over; extra fat around midsection; large, distorted navel; exaggerated labia with very long “slit;”

prominent buttocks; arms thin, jutting out; only lower legs represented, not thighs; feet and hands represented

Head and facial features: n/a

Decoration type: presumably polychrome paint; incisions

Dress/Clothing/Jewelry: none apparent

Body modifications: none apparent



**G-7**

Artefact type: human effigy

Dimensions: 9.5 x 6.6 x 5.2 cm

Condition: complete; excellent condition

Material: ceramic

Site: n/a

Fabrication technique: mold-made; hollow figurine; hole in front

Sex (+ justification): female; round breasts with obvious nipples

Position: seated; legs extended, slightly spread; hands on upper thighs; head straight, looking ahead

Body features: stylized; fairly naturalistic proportions; thick torso, with no belly; round breasts with nipples; muscular arms jutting out; hands represented with paint and incisions for fingers; muscular legs; feet carefully modeled; incisions for toes

Head and facial features: head trapeze shaped and oversized compared to body; face very flat; modeled and appliqué facial features; round, bulging eyes set wide apart; upper and lower eyelids represented by appliqué lines; fairly naturalistic nose with incised holes for nostrils; thick, protruding lips; naturalistic ears (not visible in photo)

Decoration type: polychrome paint (brown-black, cream, red); burnishing, incisions; modeling; appliqué

Dress/clothing/Jewelry: cap or skullcap on head; triangular *tanga* or loincloth represented by red and cream paint; earspools

Body modifications: tattoos or body paint on breasts, arms and face; complex motifs with triangles within circles; pierced ears

### **Papagayo Polychrome (A.D.800-A.D.1522)**



**PP-1 (78-42-20/17129)**

Artefact type: human effigy

Dimensions: 14 x 10 x 5.5 cm

Condition: complete; excellent condition; majority much of paint remains but much chipping

Material: ceramic

Site: Tola (mound), Rivas, Nicaragua

Fabrication technique: mold-made; hollow figurine with hole at bottom, one at back of head

Sex (+ justification): female; small, round breasts; belly with navel; possible concavity between legs indicating vagina/labia

Position: standing with hands on hips, head straight looking ahead.

Body features: very stylized; large belly on thick torso; small, round breasts; very large, conical, thighs; feet represented as knobs; thin loop-shaped arms, jutting out; no hands; backside flat but with small buttocks; bottom serves as stand

Head and facial features: Oversized head (roughly half of the whole figurine); head and headdress form a whole; facial features part of mold and painted on; oversized, almond-shaped eyes; painted eyebrows; round nose; small, red mouth; ears implied by presence of earspools; pointed chin; no neck

Decoration type: polychrome paint (red/orange, black, cream); gauze-weave motif on chest and back, maybe other textile motifs on headdress

Dress/Clothing/Jewelry: large, flaring headdress; fabric around chest; red bands around legs may represent skirt.

Body modifications: earspools and possible mouthpiece (red lines from ears to mouth)



**PP-2 (80-27-20-22534)**

Artefact type: human effigy

Dimensions: 8.9 x 6.1 x 4 cm

Condition: complete; good condition; some chipped paint, scratches,

Material: ceramic

Site: Tola (mound 2 on plain west), Nicaragua

Fabrication techniques: mold-made; hollow figurine with large opening at base and at top (in headdress), large hole in the back at neck level

Sex (+ justification): female; small, round breasts; belly with navel

Position: standing with hands on hips, head straight looking ahead.

Body features: very stylized; large belly on thick torso; small, round breasts; very large, conical, thighs; feet represented as knobs; thin loop-shaped arms, jutting out; no hands; backside flat but with small buttocks; bottom serves as stand

Head and facial features: Oversized head (roughly half of the whole figurine); head and headdress form a whole; facial features part of mold and painted on; oversized, almond-shaped eyes; painted eyebrows; round nose; small, red mouth; ears implied by presence of earspools; pointed chin; no neck

Decoration type: polychrome paint (red/orange, black, cream)

Dress/Clothing: large, flaring headdress; red bands around legs may represent skirt.

Body modifications: earspools and possible mouthpiece (red lines from ears to mouth)



**PP-3 (86-2-20/38177)**

Artefact type: human effigy

Dimensions: 14.6 x 10.5 x 5.6 cm

Condition: complete; excellent condition; most paint still present, some chipping

Material: ceramic

Site: not indicated, but catalogue file indicates object was found under rock along with 38176

Fabrication technique: mold-made; hollow figurine with large opening at base, round hole at back of head

Sex (+ justification): female; small breasts (or nipples?); belly with navel, possible hairstyle with two knobs typical of females.

Position: standing with hands on hips; head straight, looking ahead

Body features: very stylized; round belly on thick torso; small, round breasts (or nipples?); wide, somewhat rectangular thighs; thin loop-shaped arms, jutting out; no hands; feet and toes represented by painted lines; backside flat but with small buttocks; bottom serves as stand

Head and facial features: oversized head (roughly half of the whole figurine); red headband dividing hair in two sections (black painted lines represent hair); facial features part of mold

and painted on; oversized, almond-shaped eyes; painted eyebrows; round nose; small, red mouth; ears implied by presence of earspools; pointed chin; no neck

Decoration type: polychrome paint (red, black, cream); gauze-weave motif on chest and back

Dress/Clothing/Jewelry: red headband dividing hair in two sections; garment around chest; red paint on legs may represent garment

Body modifications: earspools and possible mouthpiece (red lines from ears to mouth)



**PP-4 (83-72-20/32591)**

Artefact type: human effigy

Dimensions: 14.6 x 9.8 x 6.8 cm

Condition: complete; good condition; very weathered; most of the paint has disappeared

Material: ceramic

Site: San Ramon, Nicaragua

Fabrication technique: mold-made; hollow figurine with large opening at base, round hole at back of head



Sex (+ justification): female; small breasts (or nipples?); belly with navel, possible hairstyle with two knobs typical of females.

Position: standing with hands on hips; head straight, looking ahead

Body features: very stylized; round belly on thick torso; small, round breasts (or nipples?); wide, somewhat rectangular thighs; thin loop-shaped arms, jutting out; no hands; feet and toes represented by incised lines; backside flat but with small buttocks; bottom serves as stand

Head and facial features: oversized head (roughly half of the whole figurine); headband dividing hair in two sections; facial features part of mold and would have been painted on; oversized, almond-shaped eyes; round nose; small mouth; ears implied by presence of earspools; pointed chin; no neck

Decoration type: polychrome paint (mostly worn off); signs of red and beige (note: because this figurine is similar to others, it probably had textile motifs on head and maybe other body parts)

Dress/Clothing/Jewelry: headband or headdress; possible the outline of a *tanga* or skirt around the pubic area.

Body modifications: earspools



**PP-5 (78-42-20/17132)**

Artefact type: human effigy

Dimensions: 11.9 x 10 x 5.2 cm

Condition: incomplete; poor condition; head and part of left leg missing; paint chipped, scratched

Material: ceramic

Site: Tola, (mound), Nicaragua

Fabrication technique: mold-made; hollow figurine; hole at bottom, hole at back

Sex (+ justification): ambiguous; possible breasts (round protuberances are present, but placed above the legs, so could be knee caps); round belly, small protuberance between the legs may indicate male sex

Position: standing with hands on hips

Body features: very stylized; figure appears somewhat lopsided; round belly on thick torso; small, round breasts (or knees?); wide, rectangular thighs; thin loop-shaped arms, jutting out; no hands; feet and toes represented by incised lines; backside flat; bottom serves as stand

Head and facial features: n/a

Decoration type: polychrome paint (black, reds, yellow)

Dress/Clothing/Jewelry: red paint on legs may represent clothing

Body modifications: none apparent

## Mora Polychrome (A.D. 800-A.D.1350)



### M-1 (48-61-20/18034.1)

Artefact type: human effigy

Dimensions: 16 x 13.7 x 10.5 cm

Condition: incomplete; good condition; top of headdress missing, right hand missing, right part of stool missing, left back leg of stool missing; fractures in face, back of head, left leg; paint well preserved, some chipping and scratches on front of legs

Material: ceramic

Site: Guapiles, Costa Rica

Fabrication technique: mold-made; hollow opening at top of headdress, a hole in each thigh (side), a hole at back of each arm, a small slit in back, hole through each earpool

Sex (+ justification): female; small, round breasts; loincloth or *tanga* hiding genitals

Position: seated on stool; hands on stool, placed slightly behind body; head straight, looking ahead

Body features: very stylized; small, short torso; small, round breasts; large, tubular thighs; small stylized feet; thick shoulders and upper arms; hand details painted on

Head and facial features: large trapezoid-shaped head; head and headdress form seamless whole; no neck; flat face simple painted facial features; large almond-shaped eyes set wide apart; no visible mouth; roundish convex nose with punctured nostrils

Decoration type: polychrome paint (red, brown-black, cream); incisions

Dress/Clothing/Jewelry: headdress or head band with textile motifs; cross-hatching textile motif on chest and upper arms indicating possible clothing (not represented from the back); same motif represented on thighs

Body modifications: earspools; tattoos or body paint (?); possible mouthpiece (red lines painted around mouth area)



**M-2 (17-3-20/C8283)**

Artefact type: human effigy

Dimensions: 9.3 x 6.3 x 5.1 cm

Condition: complete; excellent condition; some paint chipping and scratches

Material: ceramic

Site: Grave 4, at Lagunilla, Costa Rica

Fabrication techniques: mold-made; hollow with multiple holes (top of headdress convex, a hole on each side of figures neck, underneath figure two holes, one on each thigh); signs of reduction; piece of clay inside was cooked, causing it to rattle

Sex (+ justification): possible female; small breasts; large thighs; prominent buttocks

Position: seated, legs stretched out, hands on hips; head straight, looking ahead

Body features: very stylized; small, thick torso; very large, tubular thighs; large buttocks; loop-shaped arms; hands not represented; feet present as simple nubbins

Head and facial features: oversized, rectangular head; head and headdress form seamless whole; face fairly flat; large almond-shaped eyes painted on and set wide apart; no visible mouth; roundish convex nose with punctured nostrils

Decoration type(s): polychrome paint (red, brown-black, yellowish); incisions

Dress/Clothing/Jewelry: headdress or head band with textile motifs; textile motif on chest and upper arms indicate possible clothing (not represented from the back); same motif represented on thighs

Body modifications: earspools; tattoos or body paint



**M-3 (17-3-20/C8315 (B))**

Artefact type: human effigy

Dimensions: 3.3 x 2.6 x 2.3 cm

Condition: complete; good condition; substantial wear, but much of the paint remains

Material: ceramic

Site or geographic information: Costa Rica

Fabrication technique: mold-made; solid figurine

Sex (+ justification): possible female; no primary sexual characteristics, general body shape (fullness) may indicate female; two small knobs on head may indicate hairstyle associated to females

Position: seated, legs stretched, out and hands on hips; head straight, looking ahead

Body features: very stylized; thin waist; no belly or obvious breasts although upper torso has a thickness to it that may represent breasts; thick tubular shaped thighs; feet represented as small nubbins; thin arms, jutting out

Head and facial features: head oval-shaped; hair in knobs, parted in the middle; face flat; facial features and ears painted on, but no longer apparent except for nose (probably modeled)

Decoration type: polychrome paint (red, black, yellow/tan)

Dress/Clothing/Jewelry: painted weave motifs possibly representing clothing; maybe earspools

Body modifications: maybe pierced ears; tattoos or body paint



**M-4 (17-3-20/C8315 (A))**

Artefact type: human effigy

Dimensions: 4.3 x 2.6 x 2.5 cm

Condition: complete; fair condition; almost no paint or slip remains because of extensive wear

Material: ceramic

Site: Costa Rica

Fabrication technique: mold-made (?); so small could be handmade

Sex (+ justification): possible female; no primary sexual characteristics, general body shape (fullness) may indicate female; two small knobs on head may indicate hairstyle associated to females

Position: seated, legs stretched out, hands on hips; head straight, looking ahead

Body features: very stylized; thin waist; no belly or obvious breasts although upper torso has a thickness to it that may represent breasts; thick tubular shaped thighs; feet represented as small nubbins; thin arms, jutting out

Head and facial features: head oval-shaped; hair in knobs, parted in the middle; face flat; facial features and ears painted on, but no longer apparent except for nose (probably modeled)

Decoration type: polychrome paint (red, black, yellow/tan)

Dress/Clothing/Jewelry: likely had painted weave motifs possibly representing clothing; maybe earspools

Body modifications: maybe pierced ears; tattoos or body paint

**Mora/Papagayo Polychrome? (A.D. 800-A.D.1350)**



**M/PP-1 (17-3-20/C8077)**

Artefact type: human effigy

Dimensions: 10.4 x 7.7 x 8 cm

Condition: incomplete; fair condition; one arm missing, damage on headdress; very worn, paint almost completely gone

Material: ceramic

Site: Near Lagarto, Costa Rica

Fabrication techniques: mold-made; head and body hollow; two large rectangular holes on back of legs; large round hole in back of head; at nape of neck sort of loop hole (to permit suspension of figurine?)

Sex (+justification): ambiguous; no apparent breasts or sex depicted; buttocks prominent, but not necessarily associated with sex, because it is pointed as if it shaped to be a stand

Position: seated with legs extended and hands on hips; head straight looking ahead

Body features: very stylized; small, short torso; large, tubular thighs; small stylized feet; thin, loop-shaped arms, jutting out



Head and facial features: large trapezoid-shaped head; head and headdress form seamless whole; no neck; flat face would have simple painted facial features (probably almond-shaped eyes); raised line seems to represent mouth; roundish convex nose with punctured nostrils

Decoration type: polychrome paint (red, brown-black, cream); incisions

Dress/Clothing/Jewelry: headdress or head band (likely had textile motifs)

Body modifications: earspools; tattoos or body paint (?)

## APPENDIX 2

Detailed description of all figurine fragments from the site of Santa Isabel (Ni-Ri-44), Rivas, Nicaragua, studied in this thesis.

<u>Item #</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Condition</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Decoration</u>	<u>U of Calgary Catalogue #</u>
1	Rosales Zoned Engraved	Incomplete; half of head/face	Large almond shaped eye, ear, maybe edge of headdress	N/A	Red, black paint; incisions	RI.00.05.07.011 (# blurred)
2	Red on Cream Transitional	Incomplete; head	Wide face, appliqué facial features, cacao bean eyes, possible headpiece or braided hair	N/A	Red paint, appliqué	N/A
3	Red on Cream Transitional	Incomplete; head	Cacao bean eyes, round nose, small mouth; possible headdress or braided hair. Odd insect-like appearance because of almost triangular head	N/A	Red paint, appliqué	RI.44.03.1421.1
4	Red on Cream Transitional	Incomplete; head, torso, no arms or legs	Miniature figurine, round head, applique features mostly worn away, cacao bean eyes, exaggerated belly, arms and legs broken off	N/A	Red paint, appliqué	RI.44.04.2.001.02
5	Red on Cream Transitional	Incomplete; head/face	Flat, triangular-shaped face, triangle nose; very unusual specimen	N/A	Red paint, appliqué	RI.44.03.1386.1
6	Papagayo Polychrome	Incomplete; back of head/headdress, portion of back, one arm	Large head with headdress (linear pattern and red band), small "loop" arm	Female?	Red, black, cream paint; geometric patterns (weave motif)	R2.44.94.4.502.11

<u>Item #</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Condition</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Decoration</u>	<u>U of Calgary Catalogue #</u>
7	Papagayo Polychrome	Incomplete; one half of torso, thigh, arm	Part of torso and one "loop" arm with black weave motifs, red band on upper thigh/hip	Female?	Red, black, cream paint; geometric patterns (weave motif)	RI.44.03.1701.89
8	Papagayo Polychrome	Incomplete; one half of torso, thigh, arm	Part of torso and one "loop" arm with black weave motifs extending to back, part of hip/thigh with red paint	Female?	Red, black, cream paint; geometric patterns (weave motif)	44.04.2.095.01
9	Papagayo Polychrome	Incomplete; unidentified body fragment	Part of torso and headdress? Difficult to identify. Presence of weave motif and red bands. No visible arms or other body parts	N/A	Red, black, cream paint; geometric patterns (weave motif)	RI.44.03.018 (# blurred)
10	Papagayo Polychrome	Incomplete; one half of torso, thigh, arm	Part of torso and one "loop" arm with black weave motifs extending to back, part of hip/thigh with red paint	Female	Red, black, cream paint; geometric patterns (weave motif)	RI.44.04.4.011.08 (# blurred)
11	Papagayo Polychrome	Incomplete; half of head/face	Facial features in low relief and painted; tilted, almond-shaped eyes; large headdress, earrings or earpools, sharp teeth (maybe modified), possible mouthpiece	N/A	Red, black, cream paint	RI.44.03.1125. ---
12	Papagayo Polychrome	Incomplete; half of head/face	Facial features in low relief and painted; tilted, almond-shaped eyes; smaller headdress with weave motifs, earrings or earpools, possible mouthpiece	N/A	Red, black, cream paint; geometric patterns (weave motif)	RI.44.04.3.110.01

<u>Item #</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Condition</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Decoration</u>	<u>U of Calgary Catalogue #</u>
13	Papagayo Polychrome	Incomplete; 1/4 of head/face	Facial features in low relief and painted; tilted, almond-shaped eyes; smaller headdress with weave motifs, earrings or earpools	N/A	red, black, cream paint; geometric patterns (weave motif)	RI.44.05.7.153 (numbers blurred)
14	Papagayo Polychrome	Incomplete; 1/2 of head/face	Facial features in low relief and painted; tilted, almond-shaped eyes; smaller headdress with weave motifs, earrings or earpools	N/A	Red, black, cream paint; geometric patterns (weave motif)	RI.44.03.1474.1
15	Papagayo Polychrome	Incomplete; upper right portion of face	Facial features in low-relief, only one almond-shaped eye present, large headdress with possible Mixteca-Puebla patterns?	N/A	Red, black, cream; Mixteca-Puebla patterns?	N/A
16	Papagayo Polychrome	Incomplete; one leg, one arm, small part of hip	Thick leg with painted foot and toes, "loop" arm on hip with weave motif	N/A	Red, black, cream; geometric patterns (weave motif)	RI.44.04.5.0.68.05
17	Papagayo Polychrome	Incomplete; torso and head fragments, no arms or legs	Painted facial features; eyes oval rather than almond-shaped; large headdress with weave motifs; earrings or earpools; exaggerated belly and breasts; weave motifs on body covering breasts (clothing)	Female	Red, black, cream; geometric patterns (weave motif)	RI.44.04.1.103.06

<u>Item #</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Condition</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Decoration</u>	<u>U of Calgary Catalogue #</u>
18	Papagayo Polychrome	Incomplete; one arm, torso, one thigh	Kneeling or seated female, arm on thigh; small, round breasts covered by linear pattern (clothing); lower body painted red (skirt?); large buttocks	Female	Red, black, cream; linear patterns (weave motif)	N/A
19	Papagayo Polychrome	Incomplete; one arm, small portion of torso and hip	One "loop" arm placed on hip, painted black with linear pattern; hip painted red	N/A	Red, black, cream; linear patterns (weave motif)	RI.44.045.067.03
20	Papagayo Polychrome	Incomplete; torso and head fragments, no arms or legs	Facial features in low relief and painted; tilted, almond-shaped eyes; headdress with red band; earrings or earpools; small, round breasts covered by weave motif (clothing); belly	Female	Red, black, cream; geometric patterns (weave motif)	RI.44.00.145 (153)

### APPENDIX 3

General observations (presence or absence) of select figurine characteristics in museum and archaeological specimens. Note that “yes and no” refers to variability within the same figurine type. Examples provided only for positive identification of traits.

Characteristics	FIGURINE TYPES BY PERIOD					
	<i>Tempisque</i>	<i>Bagaces</i>			<i>Sapoa</i>	
	Rosales Zoned Engraved	Red on Cream and/or Chavez	Galo Type A	Galo Type B	Mora	Papagayo
Seated and/or reclining position	Yes (RZT-1)	Yes (RCT-1,2,3)	Yes (G-1,2,3,4,5,6,7)	Yes (G-7)	Yes (M-1,2,3,4)	Yes (M-1,2,3,4,5)
Standing position	No	Yes (RCT-4)	No	Yes (G-7)	No	Yes (M/PP-1)
Large thighs and buttocks	No	Yes (RCT-1,2,3,4)	Yes (G-1,2,3,4,5,6)	No	Yes (M-1,2,3,4)	Yes (PP-1,2,3,4,5)
Obvious sexual features (labia, penis, breasts, etc.)	Yes (RZT-1)	Yes (RCT-1,2,3,4)	Yes (G-1,2,3,4,5,6)	No (G-7)	No	No
Realistic or complex facial features and anatomy	Yes (RZT-1)	No	No	Yes (G-7)	Yes (M-1) No (M-2,3,4)	No
Simple, stylized facial features and anatomy	No	Yes (RCT-1,2,3,4,5,6)	Yes (G-1,2,3,4,5,6)	No	Yes (M-2,3,4) No (M-1)	Yes (PP-1,2,3,4,5)
Monochrome or bichrome, red dominant	Yes (RZE-1)	Yes (RCT-1,2,3,4,5,6)	No	No	No	No
Polychrome, with complex painted decorations	No	No	Yes (G-1,2,3,4,5,6)	Yes (G-7)	Yes (M-1,2,3,4)	Yes (PP-1,2,3,4,5)



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