Weaving the Past

A History of Latin America's Indigenous Women from the Prehispanic Period to the Present

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Introducing the Indigenous Women of Latin America

This book describes the history of indigenous women in Latin America. It treats them as active agents, instrumental in shaping the region's history. Neither house-bound nor passive, native women have responded to many challenges—demographic, economic, political, and social—over the past millennia. What my research in both primary and secondary sources ranging across the fields of archaeology, ethnohistory, and ethnography repeatedly demonstrates is that indigenous women have a long history of performing productive labor, contributing to familial well-being in a variety of ways, and being politically active. In responding to the forces of change, whether resisting or embracing them or seeking to control the rate and impact of change, women became creators of change and have served as transformative agents.

I began this project thinking it would be interesting to compare Mesoamerican and Andean women across space and time. Along the way the book turned into something bigger—more unwieldy, yet more useful—as I pondered how to tell the stories of women and cultural change across thousands of square miles and years. If every region and group cannot be covered, I nonetheless attempt to include a wide variety of areas and peoples. The book retains some focus on Mesoamerica and Andean South America, in part because these have always been the areas of densest native populations. This focus also reflects the English- and Spanish-language literatures' concentration on these areas, with the depth of these writings helping to shape the selection of peoples. But *Weaving the Past* also discusses women of the Caribbean, Central America, the tropical lowland cultures of Brazil and northern South America, and the northern border area encompassing parts of Mexico and the southwestern United States.

Across these areas, many factors influence the way that cultural transformations influenced women's lives past and present, as well as their activities and responses. Geographic location, extent of integration into trade or market systems, the presence of empires or nation-states, already existing patterns of gender relations, concepts of ethnic and racial identity, and interventions by outsiders (particularly military and religious) all have been important influences on gender patterns. While transformational changes often led to decline in women's authority and status, another theme of *Weaving the Past* is that such decline was and is not inevitable.

To understand the impact of such changes, we must carefully consider region, levels of political and economic integration, ethnicity, and time period. This book offers a synthesis of indigenous women's history, but it is a nuanced synthesis, aiming to provide the bigger picture while at the same time keeping multiple little pictures clearly in focus. It argues that no one single concept or image suffices to describe complex realities. Are indigenous women embodiments of exploitation or of complementarity? Do they serve as agents of acculturation or as guardians of tradition? Have they been history's passive victims or instruments of transformation? While any of these characterizations may be true for a particular time, place, or people, this book argues that observers, scholars, politicians, activists, and even sometimes indigenous men have downplayed indigenous women's agency, in part because until relatively recently, women have not been able to shape or help create a historical record that fully includes them. In order to understand particular configurations of gender patterns, we must look carefully at time, place, power relations, and identity construction while recognizing the existence of hemispheric and global trends in the histories of indigenous peoples and the dynamics of gender relations.

Some Introductory Remarks

In the years I have worked on this project, I have often thought about what drew me to such an undertaking, especially since as a non–Native American, I cannot claim to be telling the story of "my people." My interest in women's studies and women's history is longstanding, dating back to writing a dissertation in the late 1970s on the impact of Spanish law on central Mexico's Nahua peoples. I began to realize—just as the great interest in women's studies and feminist approaches to a variety of academic disciplines was developing—that the historical documentation with which I was working was filled with references to women. I wanted to figure out how I could include them in that story of early colonial change. The publication of Irene Silverblatt's book *Moon, Sun, and Witches* offered a model for understanding women and gender roles, especially how the rise of the state and the impact of European colonial rule might influence these, even if the particulars of the Andean area were somewhat different from those of the Central Mexican region.[1] Through my years of reading and teaching about Latin America's indigenous and other women, I became aware of a constantly expanding literature on

women of specific ethnicities, regions, and time periods, yet very little comparative work emerged.[2] What's more, in the torrents of literature on women and modernization in the twentieth century, while Latin American women are often included in discussions of change and development, class rather than ethnicity usually gets highlighted, and thus the particular economic, political, and social situations of indigenous women correspondingly get slighted.[3] More recently, after some years as an anthropologist teaching in a history department, I became interested in reengaging with ethnographic literatures, to use such texts as historical documents to try to understand change not only in the distant past but also for more recent times. My experience as a teacher also influenced the way my scholarly interests developed. I endeavor to have my students understand the richness of indigenous cultures past and present in the Americas and hope they grasp the global implications of the economic and governmental policies of western nations that influence the lives of people everywhere in this increasingly interconnected world.

Weaving the Past is intended as a chronicle of both tradition and change. It focuses on women's work, family lives, and political and social activism and recounts the growing dialogue among indigenous women (and between these women and indigenous rights groups and nonindigenous women's groups) about responding to and managing the increasing impact of globalization. I hope this book will serve as a resource for scholars and students on the immense gender scholarship produced within and beyond Latin America as this literature relates to native women. The chapters also examine the uses to which images of indigenous women are put and accentuate indigenous women's voices wherever possible to counter tendencies in both popular and scholarly literatures to ignore native women's contributions to day-to-day survival and movements for political and social change.[4]

Some Useful Concepts

While the book depends upon a variety of concepts to describe and interpret women's lives, roles, and experiences, there are several that are basic for the themes developed throughout, and they merit discussion here: "woman/women," "agency," "status," "complementarity," "indigenous," and "globalization." Of course the meaning of the terms "woman/women" seem self-evident, but in a postmodern scholarly age in which all terminology is deconstructed and the predictive value of social science theorizing has been undermined, we cannot assume that who women are and how they live their lives is natural, universally patterned, or solely defined biologically. One's sexual or gender identity is both inscribed and performed, societies may have more than two genders (the term preferred here since I see sexuality as part of one's gender identity), yet all the societies described in this book draw distinctions between men and women as individuals and groups.[5] Not only do they see men and women as different but also conversations about the meanings of those differences go on all the time. In other words, both women and men think about and discuss their differences and what those mean in terms of status. And because all societies define gender identities relationally (whether there are two or more), any discussion of female gender identities within communities and cultures or by outside observers necessarily entails reference to male identities as well. Nevertheless, this book highlights *women's* lives and activities, both because I believe such a comparative history is long overdue and because I believe that women's history is not so much a step on the way to gender history as it is a vital component of gendered historical analysis.[6]

Weaving the Past details the long history of such activities, reminding us that women past and present have been active agents; thus agency is a crucial concept underlying the interpretations presented here. In fact, the title of the book emphasizes that women have been creators of history, even if their voices do not survive in the historical record to the same extent as do men's. Readers should not assume, however, that weaving was or is a women's activity everywhere in native Latin America. Male weavers were and are common in some times and places, especially in highland South America.[7] Instead weaving serves here as a metaphor for agency.

The concept of agency has two faces, and both appear in this book. On the one hand, it is, as Sherry Ortner points out, "virtually synonymous with the forms of power people have at their disposal, their ability to act on their own behalf, influence other people and events, and maintain some kind of control in their own lives." On the other hand, there is an "agency of intentions—of projects, purposes, desires," actions that "infuse life with meaning and purpose."[8] Examples of both kinds of agency abound in this book. In many ways, without denying the forms of subjugation indigenous women have often experienced and that are chronicled in succeeding chapters, this book is a history of women's agency, of their political actions and of their purposeful carrying out of the projects necessary for daily life.

Yet both anthropologists and historians continue to find evidence of gender asymmetry, with women usually in the lower status in relation to men, in many of the world's societies past and present.[9] This book assumes neither that such asymmetry is universal nor that a single set of factors (be they biological, economic, ideological, or psychological) underlies this pattern. Nor does the book assume that asymmetry expresses itself the same way throughout Latin America or elsewhere in the world. For ease of communication, I use the term "status" to refer to the ways men and women interpret their respective positions within their societies as individuals and groups, a usage close to Ortner's notion of status as "relative prestige." But while issues of domination, subordination, and access to power shape the possibilities for women to achieve power and prestige, feminist scholarship also generally rejects the idea that women have *a* single status in relation to men in any society. Anthropologist Naomi Quinn argued over twenty-five years ago against assuming that "women's status can be treated as a unitary construction" because age, context, and individual abilities and skills all play some role in how societies define both individual and group statuses.[10] The book shows that women's perceptions of their statuses often play a vital role in influencing them to become active in a variety of political contexts, though these perceptions are not the sole cause of women's political activities.

Another concept that turns up frequently in scholarship about indigenous women is that of "complementarity," sometimes appearing with the term "parallelism." Anthropologist John Monaghan wisely cautions that complementarity carries more than one meaning and these must be disentangled:

> First, there is the sense of two halves "constituting the whole." . . . The second sense in which the genders are said to be complementary is that of males and females mutually completing each other to achieve a certain status in society. . . . Finally there is the sense that men and women complement each other in order to produce effects in concert that are different from those produced separately.[11]

While instances of each type can be found in the pages of this book, the third definition, as in the gender division of labor in many parts of Latin America, is a particularly common usage.

The related notion of "parallelism" also appears and overlaps with ideas about complementarity. Referring to the existence of parallel lines of authority and institutionalized positions of leadership held by women and men, parallelism is most appropriate for describing aspects of gender patterns in societies like the Aztec or Inka, with highly developed institutions of trade, diplomacy, and warfare.[12]

These concepts, rather than being ideas that sum up women's status, are better thought of as elements constituting part of male-female relations in particular times and places. Furthermore, several scholars have pointed to the multiple ways that concepts of complementarity and parallelism can mask inequality between the genders and conflict over women's subordination. The downplaying of gendered relations of inequality can occur both within indigenous groups themselves, because a discourse of complementarity may disguise the existence of inequality in everyday life, and within scholarly analysis, through a theoretical discourse that deemphasizes gender hierarchy and male dominance.[13]

Another concept that appears throughout this book is "indigenous." Admittedly I use the term loosely and inclusively to refer to individuals and groups who identify themselves as autochthonous, or original, peoples, as well as groups so identified by archaeologists, historians, and anthropologists. The term as used here thus sits at the intersection of self- and scholarly definition (emic and etic meanings, as anthropologists might term them). These peoples or groups are often more commonly referred to as "Indian," a term of identity that can be used by indigenous or nonindigenous people. I prefer "indigenous" because it points to both the early and persistent presence of native peoples throughout the Americas, as well as their close connections to lands and territories that they once controlled (and sometimes still do) even when they did or do not own them individually in the Euro-American sense. In addition, the term *indio* in Latin America can carry a stigmatizing connotation best avoided.

But because interethnic and interracial mixing, as well as cultural change and synthesis, have been a constant social process from the late fifteenth century on, the interpretations offered here make no assumptions about cultural homogeneity, nor do they assume any essential or persistent basis, biological or cultural, for the definition of identities. While race is not a primary focus, the chapters suggest that constructions of race (or "ethno-race," a term used in places to suggest the amalgamation of ethnic identities that would eventually become racialized in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) vary quite significantly in different parts of Latin America. What is "indigenous" in Mexico is not the same as what is indigenous in Guatemala or Honduras, and South America, particularly the Andes, presents yet another variation. There the urban indigenous identity has its own terminology (*chola/o*), and disentangling the ascribed or asserted meanings of *indigenous, chola/o,* and *mestiza/o* (a term used to suggest a "mixed" identity whose primary components are indigenous and Spanish) is no easy task. It is also important to remember that significant class differences can exist within indigenous communities, whether rural or urban.

I therefore treat as indigenous an array of peoples whose biological and cultural identities may be quite mixed, some of who are sometimes seen as nonindigenous within their own nation-states or by scholars. In Central Mexico, for example, the pace of cultural change has been such that in many rural villages language, dress, and ways of making a living all shifted dramatically, especially in the second half of the twentieth century, yet anthropologists find persistent forms of social organization and ritual that suggest that an indigenous identity can and does survive even when its most obvious markers disappear.[14] The black indigenous people of the Circum-Caribbean, such as the Garifuna or Miskito, are also included, in spite of scholarly disagreement about which is the primary component of their identity. This debate may be less interesting than questions about how these people knit together a persistent identity for themselves out of the various cultural and biological strands that became intertwined in the sixteenth and seventeeth centuries, as the indigenous survivors of the European domination of the Caribbean came into close contact with African enslaved populations.[15]

The historical processes of globalizing change that created diverse meanings and ways to be indigenous also led to remarkable amounts of both cultural hybridity and persistence. Many different definitions of globalization exist. On the one hand, it can be seen simply as the "intensification of global interconnectedness."[16] On the other, it may be useful to view globalization more specifically as the continuous processes of economic and cultural change developing primarily out of the expansion of European markets and colonial domination of nonwestern peoples. These processes were rooted in

both the economic transformations tied to the rise of capitalism, as described in Wallerstein's "world-system" model, and the cultural changes termed by Norbert Elias the "civilizing process." Such a definition highlights the double-sided nature, both economic and ideological, of transformation in the post-1492 Americas.[17] Yet also clear is that beginning in the second half of the twentieth century, change accelerated, seeped more deeply into remote corners of the world, reorganized divisions of labor, and added or substituted goods and information whose production is organized transnationally rather than nationally or locally.[18] This book shows that globalization has had a strong impact on Latin America's indigenous women, who have responded to the changes associated with it in a variety of ways.

Women everywhere are playing a growing role in the world economy whether or not they work for wages. While more women worldwide perform paid labor than ever before, much of the growth in women's employment, especially factory employment, has occurred in Latin America and Asia.[19] Yet waged employment is only part of the story of economic change for women, especially indigenous women. Even when women do not perform wage labor, they may take on traditionally male tasks because of male outmigration, they may intensify aspects of traditional female productive roles, such as craft production to earn cash in local, regional, national, even transnational markets, often by producing handmade items for tourist markets and foreign demand, or they may themselves migrate. Some of the women cleaning houses and caring for children in what sociologist Arlie Hochschild refers to as "global care chains" in towns or cities in the United States or Europe may well come from indigenous backgrounds and communities.[20]

The increased workload borne by Latin American (and other) women has had a heavy impact on their lives. In addition to the greater time spent working, whatever small increases in autonomy for wage-earning women occur tend to be outweighed by the subordination experienced in workplaces that use gender hierarchy to keep women's wages low and control their potential workplace activism. In addition, male attitudes in homes and communities increasingly define and denigrate work like craft production as housework rather than productive labor. These changes are frequently accompanied by an increasing destabilization of family life in which domestic violence, alcoholism, and single-parent households—usually headed by women—become more common.[21]

This book is about how these long-term processes affected indigenous women in Latin America and how indigenous women experienced and responded to these transformations. My research has drawn upon original documents of various times and places, newspaper and Web resources, and the voluminous writings of archaeologists, historians, and anthropologists on women in indigenous societies, past and present. Each type of source relied upon by various disciplines and scholars presents its own challenges. For archaeologists, the interpretion of gender roles based solely on material remains creates certain difficulties. Reconstructing social patterns and cultural beliefs, not to mention patterns of resistance, on the basis of these remains means relying upon both an incomplete archaeological record (due to processes of decay and human intervention) and forms of inference and interpretation that are speculative. In addition, reconstructing the lives and voices of individual women and men of this long-distant past is a nearly impossible task, yet archaeological remains offer information about changing gender roles, and sometimes these are especially visible in the prehistoric images from which archaeologists draw inferences.

Ethnohistorical evidence offers images, but it also provides vivid descriptions of behavior and ideologies of prehispanic and colonial peoples, although such descriptions often come in the voices of the conquerors, not the conquered. Much ethnohistorical scholarship of the last decades has therefore been devoted to finding other voices, especially those of indigenous people, and I make heavy use of that scholarship here.

Ethnographic descriptions provide a high level of detail but are very specific to time and place, even though past ethnographers often downplayed the impact of colonialism and other forms of change. In addition, issues that capture the atttention of ethnographers of one region may not be of interest to ethnographers elsewhere, making comparison of patterns and processes of change difficult. Nonetheless, ethnographies constitute an incredibly valuable historical source, as long as they are placed carefully into a regional chronological context.

During the most recent past, newspapers in some Latin American countries have paid close attention to indigenous groups and issues, whereas in others these issues receive far less attention. This variation grows out of both the different numbers and density of native populations and is also due to historically rooted conceptions of national and ethnic identities. The number of newspaper articles about native peoples published in Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, and Peru attest to the continuing impact of indigenous peoples, demographically and culturally. Their presence influences the self-images and policies of these nation-states even as their governments continue to foster repressive policies toward these populations. In Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, and many of the nations of Central America, on the other hand, the media pays less attention to indigenous issues, and native women face greater difficulty in organizing to press their agendas within activist indigenous groups or in regional, national, or international governmental or other settings.

Whatever the variation in the extent to which Latin American media cover indigenous and women's issues, the Internet makes sources like newspapers and magazines more widely available than do print editions. It also provides an arena for indigenous activist groups to promote their identities and ideas, especially as these concern an increasingly international agenda of self-determination and human rights.[22] Internet resources proved very useful for an examination of the most recent past and of women's participation in indigenous groups and creation of their own advocacy groups.

Indigenous women's contemporary statuses and activism have deep historical roots, even if this history is neither chronologically linear nor spatially continuous. To explore the depth of those roots, this introductory chapter ends with a discussion of archaeologists' reconstructions of gender relations and roles among the earliest inhabitants of Latin America and considers whether gender hierarchy accompanied the first signs of cultural complexity. The second chapter deals with women and the rise of urban- and state-level societies within prehistoric Latin America, emphasizing highland and lowland Mesoamerica as well as the pre-Inka and Inka Andes. The third chapter covers the impact of conquest and colonial rule, ending with a brief discussion of indigenous women in the nineteenth century as the modern Latin American nation-states began to form. Chapters 4 and 5 look at indigenous women in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in Mesoamerica, Central America, and South America. These chapters are largely organized by region, ethnicity, and nation-state (a form of territorial and political organization that has had an ever-increasing influence on indigenous groups from the nineteenth century on).

I recognize that there can be no one right way to synthesize the disparate and enormous literatures covered in this book, and writing a synthesis in an age of intellectual uncertainty and skepticism entails some risk. Because there are periods of change that profoundly influence cultural configurations, at times a thematic organization provides the best way to describe what Andre Gunder Frank and Barry Gills refer to as periods of "hegemonic leadership."[23] This introductory chapter and the third and sixth chapters (on the colonial period and the postmodern, globalizing beginning of the twenty-first century, respectively) especially reflect this thematic organization, whereas the organization of the other chapters reflects an emphasis on place and ethnicity. Analysis of this lengthy, complex past shows that change, not continuity, has been the norm for indigenous peoples, and women have been embedded in, responsive to, and creators and shapers of those changes, even in the most distant past.

Some Background on Latin America's Earliest Women

The first people to populate the Americas, known as Paleoindians, were the ancestors of today's Native American peoples. These Asian men and women migrated from Siberia across the Bering Land Bridge at least 15,000 years ago.[24] Scholars have long envisioned this early way of life as revolving around the role of men as hunters. The possible misidentification of Tepexpan Man (perhaps dating to 8000 B.C.E., and who may well have been female) provides only one example of the older tendency in early human studies, Old World or New, to overemphasize male remains and activities at the expense of a more balanced view.[25] More recent archaeological and ethnographic studies of hunting and gathering peoples show that while hunting of large mammals occurred, Paleoindian people probably relied more on the hunting of small game, fishing, collecting shellfish, and gathering plants. Both women and men participated in these activities.

As human settlement spread from north to south and west to east, men, women, and children settled in areas with diverse climates and natural resources, which led to the development of a variety of divisions of labor. Aside from participating in hunting, gathering, and fishing, types of work likely to have been performed by the Paleoindian women of the Americas include food preparation, skin-working, and cloth and basketry making, as well as the production of tools used by both genders in these forms of work. Healing, childcare, and participating in or leading decision-making and rituals constitute other activities carried out by the America's earliest women.[26]

During the Archaic period (about 8000 to 3000 B.C.E.; also known as the Formative in some regions) an important set of changes transformed early American hunting and gathering ways of life. These changes centered on the emergence of horticulture and agriculture, a set of changes in which women probably played a key role, with consequences for the gendered division of labor. While archaeologists find it impossible to trace all the steps involved in the shift from food-procurement strategies centered on collecting and gathering to those based on domestication and production of plant foods, they believe it likely that women played a strong role in this transition across the Americas. Wherever it occurred, the causes were multiple and involved factors including climatic change, experimentation with and spread of new types of plants, and the desire to live in larger, more permanently settled communities and to engage in trade. From this transformation then others flowed, including eventually the appearance in some places of class structures, larger towns and cities, and, in some areas, civilizations.[27] In those places where the diet became particularly dependent on corn (in many parts of Mesoamerica, for example), women's work often grew to be increasingly organized around its cultivation and preparation, with the latter being sometimes quite a time-consuming task. Pueblo women of the U.S. southwest have been noted to spend three or more hours a day grinding the corn needed for feeding their families. Archaeological evidence, especially skeletal, suggests a similar pattern for prehistoric indigenous women in this region.[28]

What may have happened in those areas where maize and other crops, such as squash, beans, peppers, and potatoes, became the basis for daily subsistence is that more overlapping and flexible patterns of work organization gave way to more defined and complementary forms. Within households, male and female work spaces began to develop, with the tools of each gender clustered in identifiable areas. The site of Guilá Naquitz in the eastern Valley of Oaxaca of Mexico shows some of the earliest evidence for such gendered clustering, seen in artifact and food remains from perhaps as early as 7000 B.C.E. Villages from coastal Ecuador (ca. 3000–1500 B.C.E.) also offer evidence for the development of male and female work areas as greater amounts of economic specialization began to develop.[29] The later El Salvadoran Maya site of Ceren shows this clustering too. At its houses, buried under the ash from a volcanic eruption that occurred around C.E. 600, female workplaces with tools for cooking and weaving can be seen, along with evidence of women's production of pottery vessels, used for cooking, eating, drinking, and storage. Payson Sheets, the archaeologist who led the team of researchers who excavated and studied the site, also identified a male meeting space, as well as a building that might have been the home of the village's religious specialist, possibly a woman.[30]

Women of Preclassic Mesoamerica and Central and South America (a period also known as the Formative for some areas, dating from approximately 3000 B.C.E. to C.E. 150, depending on the region) played key roles in ritual and belief systems that often highlighted young women's procreative and other powers. During this period in early Latin America, images of women, often depicted in small clay figurines, were commonly placed in a variety of spatial settings (especially households and burials). Sometimes the depictions emphasize younger women; sometimes they show women across the various stages of the life cycle. While female sexuality and fertility may well have been a theme represented through these figurines (especially in those areas where the depiction of the bodies and genitalia of younger women is dominant), these small clay images probably had a range of meanings and were used in different ways, not just to encourage human, plant, or animal fertility.[31] Archaeologists Joyce Marcus and Kent Flannery think that female figurines from Tierras Largas–phase Oaxaca (1400–1150 B.C.E.) represent female ancestors and were used in a "woman's ritual complex centered in the home" (see fig. 1.1). Such worship could have focused on communicating with or worship of ancestors, divination, life-cycle rituals, or healing.[32]

The female figurines of the Sinú people of the Caribbean lowlands of Colombia (third through tenth centuries C.E.) were more elaborate than the earlier Oaxaca figurines. Often depicted as seated in a position commanding respect, the ceramic women, perhaps produced by women, with their cast-gold adornments reinforce the impression of power and prestige (see fig. 1.2).[33] Across diverse areas, female figurines show us that Preclassic (and early Classic) women carried out a variety of political, religious, productive, and social activities, in addition to horticultural and agricultural labor. As producers of pottery and agents of trade and exchange, women's activities in economic, political, and ceremonial domains of prehistoric life suggest they often played roles complementary to those of men.[34]

This observation leads to the question of what archaeologists can infer about women's status and gender hierarchy in those societies where agriculture, systems of exchange, and power relations within and between groups were becoming more complex. Evidence from late Archaic and Preclassic burials—which can tell us about funerary ritual, beliefs about an afterlife, and social status—provides a means to examine the question of whether the first increases in social complexity and hierarchy indeed meant an intensification of gender hierarchy and subordination for women. While these ideas are often

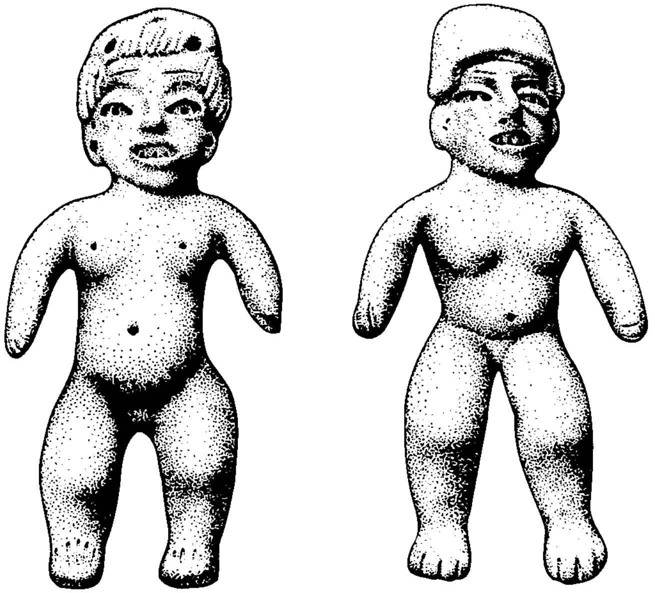

FIGURE 1.1. While most figurines from the period are female (as is the figurine on the left), some are male (figure on the right). (Drawing from Joyce Marcus and Kent V. Flannery, *Zapotec Civilization*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1996, 85. Courtesy of Joyce Marcus.)

linked in feminist scholarship to the origins of gender asymmetry,[35] the evidence from early Latin America does not strongly support such an argument, at least not for the first complex societies of Mesoamerica and Andean South America. The burials from Tlatilco, Mexico (just south of today's Mexico City), show, for example, that both younger men's and women's burials were more elaborate than those of older men and women, and women's burials from Preclassic Tlatilco often contained greater numbers and types and greater numbers of objects than men's. However one male burial—perhaps that of an elder of a kin group or prominent religious specialist—stands out for the number and quality of grave goods associated with it.[36]

The Oaxaca region offers a different pattern, in which Preclassic burials often include paired burials of men and women. Though some male burials are grouped together and contain more grave goods than those of other men or women, the occasional female burial occurs with extensive amounts of grave goods, a different style of cranial deformation (a practice that involves changing the shape of the skull through pressure and was probably intended to convey social rank), or a different burial position from men and other women, all characteristics that may indicate a higher social status for these women.[37] As time went on, the tendency to bury men and women in pairs

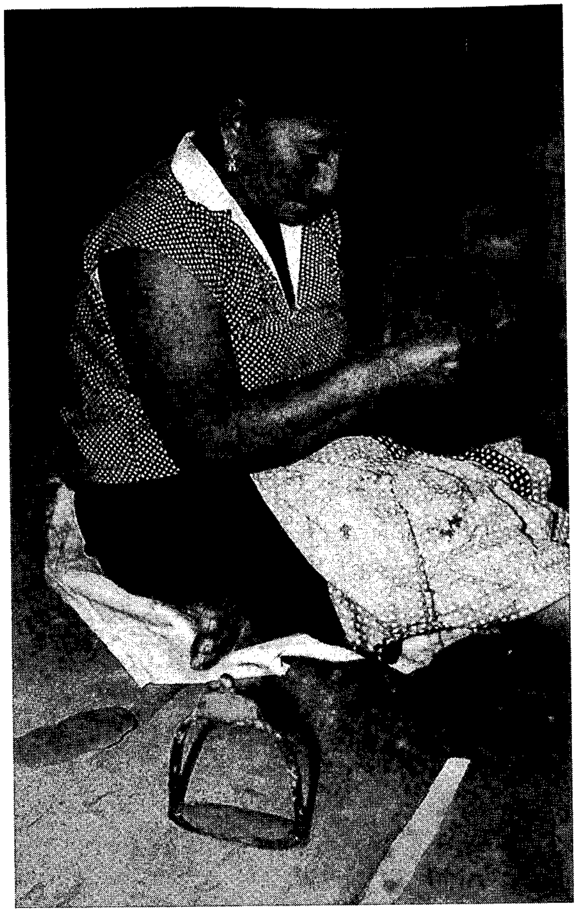

FIGURE 1.2. A woman of the Santa Elena peninsula of southwest Ecuador shown using ancient lost wax techniques for metal casting. (Photo by Karen Stothert).

increased, with any tendency toward the single male burials with special grave goods declining. Joyce Marcus and Kent Flannery argue that

> with increasing frequency it seems to have been important to emphasize one's membership in an elite family rather than in a male line descending from Earth or Sky. Most later Mesoamerican elites reckoned descent bilaterally, emphasizing whichever parent had the most noble pedigree. At smaller communities receiving hypogamous brides [brides of higher status than their new husbands], little would be gained by emphasizing a father's relationship to Earth, while ignoring an even more highly ranked mother.

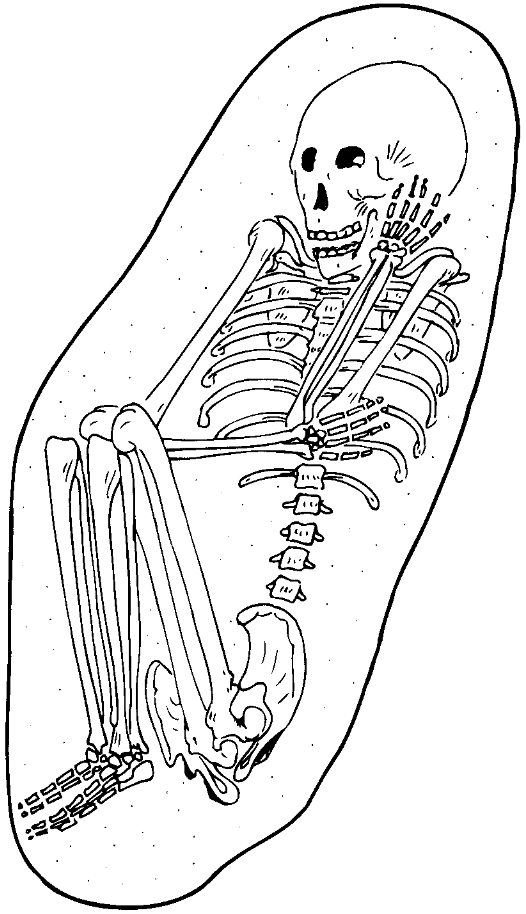

FIGURE 1.3. Female burial from Paloma. An extensive array of goods was found with these remains, including textile-producing tools, beads, a fur skin, and straw wrapping and matting that covered the body. (Drawing by Bernardino Ojeda E., reprinted from Jeffrey Quilter, *Life and Death at Paloma*, University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, 1989, 89. Courtesy of University of Iowa Press.)

These ancestors of the later Zapotec civilization developed a form of hierarchy in which male and female elites held power, with female elites from larger, more important communities frequently marrying leading men from smaller communities.[38]

Another area where burial sites exist from early periods is coastal Peru. One of the most extensively studied sites there is Paloma, occupied from about 5000 to 2500 B.C.E. Many burials were found at the site; the single most elaborate burial was that of a late adolescent male, placed over a cane grid, with three mats covering the body and numerous funeral goods placed around the grave. While the site's primary excavator, Jeffry Quilter, argues that over time the number of grave goods for women declines, the differences in amounts and quality of goods are slight. The site actually contains more burials of women than men, and several women's burials are quite distinctive, even if they do not contain the same number of grave goods as those of the elaborate male burial (see fig. 1.3).[39] Archaeological data from other coastal Andean areas and sites not only do not show enough consistent differences in male and female burials to support the argument that, while socioeconomic complexity was developing, gender hierarchy was also increasing but also sometimes suggest women's social power and position as heads of kin groups and ritual specialists.[40]

While more evidence of gender hierarchy emerges in the following periods of development, variations in the gendering of political organization, work arrangements, and worship of deities continued. If any factor best predicts those places where older patterns of gender complementarity gave way to more ingrained forms of hierarchy, it is militarism—key to the origin of empire in parts of Mesoamerica and the Andes, a topic that is taken up in the next chapter.