

Personhood, Agency, and Mortuary Ritual: A Case Study from the Ancient Maya

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The archaeological identification of individuals has been an important component of both processual attempts to characterize social organization by the treatment of individuals in mortuary ritual and more recent agency theory applications to studies of political economy and social change. Both approaches have been critiqued for failing to adequately define the individual, instead applying the Western concept of the individual to other societies. These shortcomings are shown to be part of a larger problem in social theory: the continuing polarization between individualism and holism. They point to the need for renewed interest in the anthropological analysis of the “person”—a socially shaped construct—in order to better understand social relationships and recognize the collective aspects of agency. A case study from the Classic Maya civilization illustrates how emphasis on the individual, as represented in mortuary events, artistic depictions, and texts, has resulted in interpretive difficulties that can be avoided by viewing these data from the perspective of the social collectivity from which personhood was derived. Maya corporate kin-based groups, known as “houses,” were a major source of the social identities expressed in political action and represented in mortuary ritual and monumental imagery. © 2001 Academic Press

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Social science theories have tended to cluster around two polar oppositions, “holism” and “individualism” (Agassi 1960: 244; Gellner 1968; Ritzer and Gindoff 1994:3; Varenne 1984:295). Holistic theories, the first to develop, consider society as an entity that exists beyond the individuals who compose it. As a self-regulating system, society constrains or determines individual behaviors and beliefs, treating individuals as epiphenomena and downplaying their role in social change (Ritzer and Gindoff 1994:12; Sztompka 1994a:30). Theories such as the Durkheimian super-organic, functionalism, structuralism, structural Marxism, behaviorism, systems theory, and cultural materialism lean toward this end of the polarity (Morris 1985: 724; Sztompka 1991:3). They have been

labeled “methodological holism” (Ritzer and Gindoff 1994:11) or “metaphysical holism” (Brodbeck 1968:283; Sztompka 1994b:258). Some are still used today, including in archaeology, along with such holistic theories as Darwinian selectionism and sociobiology.

In reaction to the overemphasis in holism on the social collectivity, the diverse theories labeled “methodological individualism”^{1,*} were formally developed beginning in the 1950s, in which explanations of all social phenomena are based on individuals and their actions (Lukes 1970: 77; Ritzer and Gindoff 1994:11). Also grouped at this end of the polarity are interpretive sociology and phenomenol-

* See Notes section at end of article for all footnotes.

ogy, approaches that consider society to be constructed from human actions (Archer 1982:455). Methodological individualism was a radical paradigm shift that was equally biased, but in the opposite direction (Sztompka 1991:4). Inevitably a new class of theories emerged—a “third sociology”—to bridge the dichotomy between individualism and holism, examining the integrative relationships that link society and its members (1991:4; Ritzer and Gindoff 1994:13). Various known as theories of agency, action, practice, and praxis, they have been widely adopted in anthropology since the 1980s (Ortner 1984: 144) and form an important component of postprocessual archaeology (Dobres and Robb 2000; Hodder 1986:73–77). The integration of society and individuals—now in terms of structure and agency—has become the central problem of modern social theory (Archer 1982:455; Giddens 1984:35).

Agency theories in Europe and their counterparts in micro–macro sociology in America began to take shape by the 1970s (Ritzer and Gindoff 1994:6). These approaches have been labeled “methodological relationism,” in which “neither social individuals nor social wholes can be explained without analyzing the social relationships between them” (Ritzer and Gindoff 1994:14). In this country, Giddens’s (1979, 1984) structuration theory and Bourdieu’s (1977) *habitus* have become popular, especially in archaeology, although there are competing theories [Archer’s (1982, 1996) morphogenesis and Sztompka’s (1991, 1994b) social becoming among others; see Ritzer and Gindoff 1994:9–10; Sztompka 1994a]. These theories typically posit a dynamic recursive relationship linking structure and agency. They contend that human action creates or reproduces “structure” (e.g., social structural relations, cultural categories, and customary practices) such that society is always in process. However, actors are

constrained and conditioned to act, and to validate actions and their consequences, by their sociocultural circumstances. Structure is thus both shaping of and shaped by actors, who are both producers and products of structure (Sztompka 1994a:43).

Despite this advance over earlier theories, continuing problems in agency approaches have prevented the development of a satisfactory solution to the holism–individualism polarity. These include the lack of consistency in defining both structure and agency (Dobres and Robb 2000:8–9; Ritzer and Gindoff 1994:9–10) as well as in identifying actors or agents. Agents are often considered to be individuals, but sometimes agency is granted to taxonomic groups within society, such as a class, faction, age group, and gender, or to actual collectivities and institutions. In some perspectives, agency is a property limited only to dominant individuals or groups.

In archaeology, one result of the failure to adequately define structure and agency is that purported case studies in agency theory actually constitute a retreat back to methodological individualism (McCall 1999:16), whose limitations agency theory is supposed to overcome. Agents are typically seen as dominant individuals acting in their own self-interests, which are frequently antithetical to society (Dobres and Robb 2000:9; cf. Sassaman 2000:149). Hodder (2000:23) recently suggested that for archaeologists to move beyond such “big man aggrandizer” models, they should concentrate on the microscale biographical analysis of individual “lived lives.” This approach renders society as epiphenomenal as it leans even more toward the individualism pole.

In large part this inability to reconcile structure and agency, and the falling back on individual actions (with society or structure as mere backdrop), reflects the contemporary Western fascination with

the individual as an autonomous, self-interested actor (Johnson 1999:83; Meskell 1996:11). This has been called the “illusion of egocentrism” (Sztompka 1994b:271). While some archaeologists (e.g., Bender 1993:258; Hodder 2000:23; Johnson 1999:82; Knapp and Meskell 1997:189) recognize that the idea of the “individual” is a historically contingent and quintessentially modern social and political construct—and this is not at all a new idea in social theory (Morris 1985:723)—a different concept has not yet been proposed to replace the individual that incorporates the social dimension of actors to thereby bridge the divide between people and society.

I suggest that one useful approach to this dilemma is to reexamine an old literature on “personhood.” Personhood, as opposed to the casual use of the term individual, is a topic that is infrequently mentioned (e.g., Dobres and Robb 2000: 11) and more often left unexamined in archaeology, although hints of this concept survive in such contexts as the recognition of social persona expressed in mortuary ritual. Personhood, and the related but distinct concept “selfhood,” can be analyzed in terms of objective (behavior and structure) and subjective (mind and culture) relationships or some combination of both (Ritzer and Gindoff 1994:14). While studies of the “person” should not replace those of the individual or self, they may provide a more balanced perspective, leaning more toward the side of society and collective representations.

A major component of personhood derives from the enactment of relationships within a society, typically as part of everyday experience or practice. These include relationships between different persons, persons and groups, different groups, the living and the dead, and people and objects, since personhood is not confined to living human beings.² Furthermore, personhood need not be relegated to the older view of social structure as composed

of groups and roles, but can be integrated within the contemporary perspective of society as a “system of contexts, or forms, of social action,” when such relationships come into play and are open to negotiation, subversion, and transformation (Harrison 1985:128). The “emergent” quality of the human subject (Morris 1985:724) becomes apparent in social interactions, as people act in the capacity of persons, thereby internalizing structure as they engage in actions to reproduce or transform it.

Recent calls in archaeology for the increased focus on the individual or the self in terms of “lived lives” and psychological constructions have emphasized three investigative domains. In decreasing order of archaeological accessibility, these are (1) burials, in which actual physical remains are usually present together with material signifiers of the individual’s experiences and identities in life (Hodder 2000; Meskell 1996); (2) imagery of humans (Knapp and Meskell 1997; Meskell 1996); and (3) written information on the intentions, actions, and selfhood of individuals (Houston and Stuart 1998; Johnson 1989, 2000). All three of these domains come together in rare instances such as that of the Classic Maya civilization of southern Mexico and northern Central America, where textual information and imagery concerning certain high-ranking persons is being linked to actual skeletal remains of individuals found in royal tombs. As I will show, current interpretations that treat these Maya figures as historically documented agents have relied too greatly on the Western concept of the individual. The elaborate tombs have been assumed to reflect individual statuses and aspirations. Actions and events determined from portraiture or texts have been credited to the unique motivations of individual rulers. However, controversies and disagreements have arisen concerning how to interpret who did what and

why. One reason for these disagreements is the explanatory poverty of the notion that Maya rulers acted as individuals whose motivations can only be conjectured. This article develops the proposal that much of this explicit archaeological evidence for "individuals" consists of purposeful representations of persons, whose identities, actions, and motivations were especially shaped by their membership in a social unit. For the Maya aristocracy in particular, this social unit was a multigeneration kin-based, hierarchically organized corporate group known as the "house."

In order to show the need for a rethinking of individuals in the past as "persons," as a means to bridge the structure–agency divide, I discuss how the earlier mortuary archaeology and later agency theory focused on individuals in order to investigate society and how both have been criticized for their failure to pay sufficient attention to the relationships between individuals and groups. The concept of "person" as devised by the French sociologist Mauss is then introduced to contrast personhood with individual and self, indicating how "individual" is a historically specific construct. Personhood, which recognizes the important social and collective component of one's identity, is not inconsistent with an actor-oriented or agency approach. On the contrary, it provides a critical sociocultural context for elucidating the recursive relationship between people and groups. The second half of the article provides the case study from the Classic period Maya to demonstrate how quite different interpretations will result pertaining to both grave treatment and symbolic evidence for agency when the contextually defined "person" is substituted for the generic "individual." The reconsideration of Maya actors as persons will ultimately entail a rethinking of Maya sociopolitical organization and history.

ACCOUNTING FOR THE INDIVIDUAL IN ARCHAEOLOGY

The Saxe–Binford Mortuary Program

Despite the by-now stereotyped view that processual archaeology considered ecomaterialist forces as determinants of cultural stasis or change—typifying the holistic paradigm—a number of the "new" archaeologists were interested in identifying individuals in prehistory. These attempts included recognizing the works of individual craftsmen (e.g., Hill and Gunn 1977), but a major impetus for this research was the classification of ancient societies into political (evolutionary) types, specifically egalitarian vs hierarchical, based on whether and how individuals were treated differently upon their deaths. While this type of analysis was occasionally done in the 1940s and 1950s (Sears 1961:228–229), credit for this approach is most frequently given to Saxe (1970, 1971) and Binford (1971), originators of what is now called the Saxe–Binford research program (Brown 1981:28, 1995:9; see also Pader 1982:53; Tainter 1978:106).³ The basic assumption in their approach was that status differences in life were reflected in differential treatment upon death, such that burial variation, or its absence, would reflect the general structural features of a society (Saxe 1971:39; see Binford 1971:18; O'Shea 1984:3; Peebles 1971; Peebles and Kus 1977; Rothchild 1979). In other words, social organization was considered the "primary determinant of variation in mortuary practices and burial form" (Carr 1995:106). Diagnostic differences in burial treatment include the expense of grave preparation, its location with respect to other features or defined spaces, the quantity and quality of grave furniture, and the position and orientation of the body.

Significantly, in order to clarify the social phenomenon reflected in burial treat-

ment, both Saxe (1970) and Binford (1971) drew upon Goodenough's (1965) innovation of the terms "social identity" and "social persona," concepts which he differentiated from "status" as previously defined by Linton (1936:113). Recognizing that all living individuals assume several social identities, and not all at the same time, Goodenough (1965:7) coined the term "social persona" for the composite of social identities selected as appropriate to any specific interaction. As used in mortuary analyses, the social persona was considered dependent on such common determinants of identity as age, sex, relative rank or position in a social unit, and affiliation of the deceased to other groups. Other archaeologists, however, used less well-defined concepts to indicate distinctions among grave treatments, including status (e.g., Peebles 1971; Rothschild 1979), rank (e.g., Brown 1981; Peebles and Kus 1977), and wealth (e.g., Rathje 1970; see Pader 1982:57).

The early work of Saxe and Binford, and the subsequent scholarship influenced by their research program, constituted a major advance in the archaeological analysis of social organization, parts of which are gaining newfound respect (e.g., Morris 1991). Eventually, however, much of this work came under attack, the substance of which can be only briefly discussed here (see also Brown 1995). A frequently noted shortcoming is the explanation of mortuary treatment as dependent on a single variable—social organization—a view which is antithetical to the contemporary emphasis in archaeology on cross-cultural and historical variability. For this reason, Ucko's (1969) earlier caveat concerning the diversity of mortuary beliefs and practices is often cited (e.g., Chapman 1994:44; Pearson 1993:204). The assumption that graves are reflections of social order is considered simplistic and unworkable [but see Brown (1995) for a response], and fails to take into account such collective

representations as religious beliefs and worldviews (Carr 1995:110–111; Morris 1991:147). Other studies have shown that burial variability need not signify whether a society is egalitarian or ranked (Pearson 1982; Huntington and Metcalf 1979:122).

In short, variability in burial treatment may indicate something quite other than the usually assumed "fossilized terminal statuses of individuals" (Peebles 1971:69). This has become an especially thorny issue where child burials have the kind of treatment that, if found with an adult, would be taken to indicate a high rank. The initial assumption was that the child did indeed have an ascribed status, evidence for a hierarchical society (Saxe 1970:7; Rothschild 1979:661; Tainter 1978:106). This supposition was found not to be universally supported by archaeological and ethnographic evidence (Hayden 1995:49–50). An alternative view—that it is more likely the status of the child's parents that is being marked in this way—calls into question the operating assumption that grave treatment reflects the status of the deceased individual (Brown 1995:8; Pader 1982:57).

Furthermore, there is the larger arena of mortuary ritual that must be considered, of which the grave is only one part. The context of mortuary practices extends far beyond the cemetery or burial place (Pearson 1993:226–227). Grave furniture may reference the burial ritual itself rather than the social status of the deceased (Pader 1982:58). That which is associated with the body represents only a portion of a series of actions, which may serve to distort or mask social relations and identities rather than accurately reflect them (Hodder 1982:201). Mortuary ritual often includes multiple stages of body processing and prolonged secondary funerary rites carried out in various locations, as first described in the classic study by Hertz (1960 [1907]).

In sum, mortuary rituals have more to

do with the *relationships* negotiated by the survivors between themselves and the dead and/or the ancestors the dead will become (Joyce 1999, n.d.; Pearson 1982: 112, 1993:203). These rituals pertain to relationships within and among the social units that were involved with the deceased, including political and economic relationships (Brown 1995:4; Goldstein 1981:57). Items included with a child's burial may better indicate the relationship of the parents with their deceased child (Joyce 1999:21; Hayden 1995:44–45; Pader 1982:62), and there is no reason why the same marking of relationships should not hold for adults as well. Pader (1982:58) cites Edmund Leach on this point: "If graves are in any way an index of social status it is the social status of the funeral organisers as much as the social status of the deceased that is involved." Drawing especially on ethnographic information, Joyce (n.d.:4) concludes that "ancient burials can be viewed as particularly charged sites through which the living survivors inscribed the dead into social memory in particular ways, as part of an ongoing process of spinning webs of social relations between themselves and others."

Hertz's thesis that mortuary practices are determined by the relationships constructed to link the corpse, the soul, and the living mourners has been called the closest thing to middle range theory in mortuary archaeology, amenable to cross-cultural applications (Carr 1995:176). The dead, who are often transformed into ancestors or other forms of spirits as the result of funerary rites, are resignified at the time of death rituals and also in subsequent actions that may involve handling their curated remains and in rites of commemoration that innovate social memories of the dead for political ends (Chapman 1994:46; Kuijt 1996; McAnany 1998; Morris 1991:156; Pearson 1982:101, 1993: 203). Such ritual may purposely result in the loss of individual identities as the

dead represent the social collectivity, for example, becoming generic ancestors in the oft-cited example of the Merina of Madagascar (Bloch 1982:220; see also Chapman 1994; Glazier 1984).

Thus, the critique of the early mortuary archaeology points to the need for a perspective that relates the individual bodies archaeologists excavate to other persons within the multidimensional contexts of social dynamics beyond the grave itself. The social persona cannot be considered an essentialized attribute of a single individual—a terminal status—but must take into consideration enacted links to other persons. This factor had not been neglected in the earliest studies (Binford 1971:17; Peebles 1971:68; Saxe 1970:6, 9), but it subsequently had received less attention.

Brown (1995), in a recent review of the Saxe–Binford program, suggested that the implicit focus in mortuary archaeology on identifying the status of individuals resulted from the relatively common occurrence of finding individual bodies in separate graves. This situation called for the application of a theory that would link individual variability to social organization. Thus, Goodenough's role theory was adopted to characterize the identities of those individuals while living (1995:11). Brown (1995:5) further observed that this intellectual framework reflects the contemporary experience of the archaeologists who devised it, namely, the common Euro-American practice of assigning social identities to individuals and interring them in separate graves.

Agency Approaches

The concern for the individual, now as an actor and not a reflection of social order, is an important component of contemporary archaeological theory (Hodder 1986:6). The shift away from systemic or ecological holism toward agency or actor-

centered approaches (Bell 1992:30; Johnson 1989:189; Robb 1999:3) raised its own series of problems, for in archaeology agency is often little more than a “buzzword” (Robb 1999:3; see Dobres and Robb 2000). The actor is seldom defined as a contextually relevant construct (e.g., Gillespie 1999:225; Johnson 1989:190). One reason for these shortcomings may be the common reliance on Giddens’s structuration theory, whose fullest exposition is in his 1984 book *The Constitution of Society* (Giddens 1991:204).

Giddens’s approach differs significantly from that of other agency theorists, who tend to lean toward the side of structure, in that it embodies agency in human actors (Sztompka 1994a:38–39). “Structure,” idiosyncratically defined by Giddens as organizing principles or rules and resources (Ritzer and Gindoff 1994:10), is drawn upon by actors in their everyday lives, primarily as “practical knowledge” that is routine and taken for granted. Actors engage this knowledge and then reflect on the consequences of their actions as they understand them—for they may be at odds with intentions and expectations—thereby reproducing or changing the knowledge and conditions that originally enabled their actions (Giddens 1984: 2–4). Giddens thus proposed that

[t]he constitution of agents and structures are not two independently given sets of phenomena, a dualism, but represent a duality. According to the notion of the duality of structure, the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize. Structure is not ‘external’ to individuals: as memory traces, and as instantiated in social practice, it is in a certain sense more ‘internal’ than exterior to their activities in a Durkheimian sense. Structure is not to be equated with constraint but is always both constraining and enabling. (1984:25)

As applied to archaeology, however, McCall (1999:16–17) observed that agency theory has more frequently focused on actors’ intentions, which is a minor con-

cern in Giddens’s writings and outside of the more collective, less conscious nature of Bourdieu’s (1977:72ff) *habitus*. Consequently, such studies are not much different from competing theories of methodological individualism and rational actors. Indeed, Ortner (1984:151) characterized practice approaches in anthropology as a whole as dominated by a concept of motivation derived from “interest theory,” based on an “essentially individualistic, and somewhat aggressive, actor, self-interested, rational, pragmatic, and perhaps with a maximizing orientation as well.” This theory has been heavily criticized and is too narrowly focused on rationality and “active-ness” (1984:151).⁴ It assumes pragmatic rationality as the universal dominant motivation for action, in contrast to agency theory, which views actors as “socially embedded, imperfect, and often impractical people” (Dobres and Robb 2000:4). Interest theory also disregards the growing literature that demonstrates cross-cultural variation in the conceptions of self, person, and motivation (Ortner 1984:151).

This approach is apparent in several applications of agency theory to cultural evolution in prehispanic Mesoamerica, provided here as just one example.⁵ Marcus and Flannery (1996:31) explicitly adopted the “essentially individualistic, self-interested, rational, and pragmatic” actor from interest theory for their model of the evolution of Zapotec civilization in Oaxaca. Using Giddens’s concepts to account for the rise of social inequality in lowland Mesoamerica, Clark and Blake (1994:28) concluded that societal changes “result from the purposive action of individuals pursuing individual strategies and agendas within the structural constraints of their cultural system.” Joyce and Winter (1996:33), in a similar study to account for the rise of social complexity in Oaxaca, also focused their interpretation on “individual-level behavioral strategies.” How-

ever, a more ambitious attempt by Blanton and colleagues (1996) to use agency theory to account for evolutionary change throughout Mesoamerican prehistory developed two contrasting political-economic strategies, one more individualistic and the other more collective. The “network” strategy was based on “individual-centered exchange relations” (Blanton et al. 1996:4), while the “corporate” strategy emphasized “a corporate solidarity of society as an integrated whole” (1996:6; see also Blanton 1998:149–150).

Some of these studies were criticized for their failure to adequately develop the social context of human action. Joyce and Winter were accused of focusing “almost entirely upon autonomous, strategizing individuals” without concern for “[s]ocial roles such as gender, occupation, and kinship” (Brumfiel 1996:49) that shaped their identities, motivations, and options. Criado (1996:54) remarked that the emphasis on individual-centered strategies incorporates a model of agency only as it operates in postindustrial capitalist society. Thus, agency applications in archaeology are being faulted for presuming the universality of the Western notion of the individual, the same critique applied to the more holistic mortuary archaeology analyses. However, the individual as a unit of investigation has become even more emphasized in the paradigm shift in Anglo-American archaeology from determinist to rational actor approaches (Hodder 1986:6–8).

This situation is not unexpected given that the “individual as a self-motivated agent” is fundamental to Euro-American social philosophy (Varenne 1984:281). In fact, the same criticism has been lodged against Giddens himself. His notion of the actor is derived from the Western concept of the individual and is never socioculturally constituted, only structurally situated (Pazos 1995:220). Giddens “is simply uninterested in the characteristics of the

noncapitalist formations and their subjectivity,” and his concepts are thus difficult for anthropologists to utilize (Karp 1986:134, 132). Structuration theory was developed in reference to “highly self-controlled individuals in advanced industrialized societies. But it is unable to show how this kind of individual came to develop in the first place: for Giddens, people have, apparently, always been the same since the dawn of history” (Kilminster 1991:101). Archaeologists who apply Giddens’s model to the past should not be unduly criticized for failing to adequately define the actor and for implicitly assuming, as Giddens does, the contemporary Western concept of the individual.

In seeing the individual as a self-contained entity, Giddens’s model of structuration—a process that depends upon interaction—has been faulted for its failure to consider the interdependence of actors: “individuals are seen here only in the first person, as positions. There is no conceptual grasp of the perspective from which they themselves are regarded *by others* in the total social web, nor of their combined relatedness” (Kilminster 1991:99; emphasis in original). In a similar critique of Giddens’s work, Sewell (1992:21) asserted that “agency is collective as well as individual...The transposition of schemas and remobilizations of resources that constitute agency are always acts of communication with others.” Sewell (1992:21) suggested shifting attention away from the individual toward relationships enacted with others (see also Kilminster 1991:100), which gets back to the core of agency theory as “methodological relationism.”

In short, a critical component missing from the influential works of Giddens is a recognition of the “[d]ifferences in personhood” (Karp 1986:133; see also Devillard 1995). This comment refers to the early anthropological literature on the constitution of the “person,” concerned with the construction of mutually identi-

fyng relationships linking people in society. It is worthwhile to review this literature to determine where it might shed light on the problems at hand, especially as it points specifically to the historical development of the Western notion of the individual within the more general notion of personhood.

PERSON, *PERSONAGE*, AND INDIVIDUAL

The idea of personhood has deep roots in anthropology, going back to the time when holistic approaches were dominant, and perhaps it has become somewhat neglected for that reason. In American anthropology theorists were concerned with defining concepts such as status, role, and social identity that later influenced the interpretations of Saxe and Binford. Linton (1936:113) defined a status as a collection of rights and duties constituting a position in a particular pattern of reciprocal behavior. Status cannot exist alone but only in relation to the overall societal pattern. Humans enact these statuses as roles, thereby reproducing society. Linton contrasted this abstract meaning of a *status* with *the status* of any individual as “the sum total of all the statuses which he occupies” (1936:113). In this usage, status can refer to both a position in a network of relationships and to individuals occupying one or more of those positions, a source of confusion that Linton acknowledged: “Since these rights and duties can find expression only through the medium of individuals, it is extremely hard for us to maintain a distinction in our thinking between statuses and the people who hold them and exercise the rights and duties which constitute them” (1936:113).

Goodenough (1965:2) complained that Linton and others had mistakenly merged statuses—combinations of rights and duties—with social positions and with categories of persons, assuming that they all

formed an “indivisible unit of analysis.” He therefore introduced his own terminology—social identity and social persona—although their definitions are not easy to apply to specific instances, particularly in archaeology. Social identity is “an aspect of self that makes a difference in how one’s rights and duties distribute to specific others” (1965:3), to be distinguished from “personal identity.” Social persona is “[t]he composite of several identities selected [by an individual] as appropriate to a given interaction” (1965:7). Archaeologists actually reframed these definitions to make them workable with respect to mortuary analysis and the representation of identities of a deceased individual. Social identity now referred to a category of person, social position, or status (Saxe 1970:4), lumping together that which Goodenough tried to keep separate. Social persona was understood as the “composite of social identities maintained in life and recognized as appropriate for consideration at death” (Binford 1971:17), assuming that death must require the fullest representation of the deceased’s various social identities (Saxe 1970:6).

Across the Atlantic this issue was tackled from a different angle by the French sociologist Mauss, a student of Emile Durkheim, in a 1938 essay (Mauss 1985). Mauss examined empirical information from Zuni Pueblo, the Kwakiutl, and other peoples concerning their clan organization. He observed that each clan owned a set of names—really titles relating to the clan totem—that were distributed to clan members, who also assumed kinship positions that determined rank and authority, altogether forming a complex social classification system. He concluded, “on the one hand, the clan is conceived of as being made up of a certain number of persons, in reality of ‘characters’ (*personnages*). On the other hand, the role of all of them is really to act out, each insofar as it concerns him, the prefigured totality of

the life of the clan" (1985:5). Each *personnage* was a metonymic referent to that totality, taking its position with respect to all the others.

Independently, in the 1920s Franz Boas was having problems classifying the Kwakiutl local group (*numayma*) as a kind of clan. He ultimately suggested that

[t]he structure of the *numayma* is best understood . . . if we disregard the living individuals and rather consider the *numayma* as consisting of a certain number of positions to each of which belong a name, a 'seat' or 'standing' place, that means rank, and privileges. Their number is limited, and they form a ranked nobility. . . . These names and seats are the skeleton of the *numayma*, and individuals, in the course of their lives, may occupy various positions and with these take the names belonging to them. (in Lévi-Strauss 1982:169)

From the perspective taken by Mauss and Boas, the embodiment of *personnages* as "names" or "seats" reproduces social units that compose society, which should be seen as much more than a collection of clans or descent groups. Individuals at various stages in their lives assume the titles and associated roles, ranked positions, and ritual behavioral prescriptions that belong to the clan and thereby define it and shape its relationships to other clans. For the Kwakiutl, as Mauss (1985:8) explained:

[w]hat is at stake in [the keeping of titles within the clan] is thus more than the prestige and the authority of the chief and the clan. It is the very existence of both of these and of the ancestors reincarnated in their rightful successors, who live again in the bodies of those who bear their names, whose perpetuation is assured by the ritual in each of its phases. The perpetuation of things and spirits is only guaranteed by the perpetuating of the names of individuals, or persons. These last only act in their titular capacity and, conversely, are responsible for their whole clan, their families and their tribes.

The subsequent ethnographic literature that makes use of the notion of personhood further reveals its important features (e.g., Barraud 1990; Fortes 1973;

Graeber 1996; Howell 1989; Kan 1989; Strathern 1981). The social persona is seen as an intersection of different qualities—gender, age, birth order, kin groups of parents and affines, life experiences, and metaphysical essences—but personhood is something more. It is often encompassed by a title or name and materialized by insignia, totemic crests, or badges of office. They signify a category of being that may be coextensive with specific groups, property, and places. Personhood has rank or status implications vis-à-vis other persons and may also be associated with estate/caste/class, religion, ethnicity or ancestral group, and occupation. In Mauss's conception, specific "persons" exist in perpetuity. They preexist those humans who take on these identities, and at certain times it is possible that no human being will embody a specific *personnage*, which nevertheless exists as a category and thus as a means of interrelating, or potentially interrelating, people, ancestors, places, and things.

Personhood is not an automatic status and often conjoins separate components acquired over a lifetime or beyond. Such acquisition is the focus of a great deal of ritual as well as utilitarian effort and expenditure of resources, usually involving many people because their own identities are impacted by their relationships with others (LaFontaine 1985:132). Individuals who embody a specific person representing a unique constellation of features may, by dint of effort or luck, add to or subtract from those features. Biographies of persons are always changing, based on real "lived lives" and on how these are memorialized later. Conversely, some people in a society may never be recognized as having achieved full personhood, especially slaves and children (Fortes 1973:304ff; Kan 1989:64), so the coincidence of human being and person is not always complete.

Mauss's concept of *personnage* might seem to place too much emphasis on the

social collectivity and on determinative social constructionism, of which the Durkheimian school has long been accused (Goody 1962:27). However, Fortes (1973:287), in reviewing Mauss's ideas, more explicitly linked "person" to "the perennial problem of how individual and society are interconnected in mutual regulation," which is the central problem in social theory. Fortes (1973:286) asked: "If personhood is socially generated and culturally defined, how then is it experienced by its bearer, the individual?" In response, he observed that the analyst must keep distinct the

two aspects of personhood. Looking at it from the objective side, the distinctive qualities, capacities and roles with which society endows a person enable the person to be known to be, and also to show himself to be the person he is supposed to be. Looked at from the subjective side, it is a question of how the individual, as actor, knows himself to be—or not to be—the person he is expected to be in a given situation and status. The individual is not a passive bearer of personhood; he must appropriate the qualities and capacities, and the norms governing its expression to himself. (Fortes 1973:287)⁶

As in practice or agency theory, the positions themselves, and the interdependent or oppositional relationships with others that they entail, do not exist except when "person" and "other" are defined in social interaction and in the reflection and discourse that follow from it. The actor does not simply play a role society has determined for him: "he has not simply put on the mask but has taken upon himself the identity it proclaims. For it is surely only by appropriating to himself his socially given personhood that he can exercise the qualities, the rights, the duties and the capacities that are distinctive of it" (Fortes 1973:311).

Incorporating the notion of personhood is one means for better comprehending structuration as the mutual constitution of society and individual. Structure is internalized by individuals in the context of

their interdependence within the total social web as a collective medium for agency, by their assumption of the status (in the Lintonian sense) of *personnages* to become a person. This complex social system is instantiated in practice, including daily routines involving the navigation of the constructed landscape (e.g., Barrett 1994; Bourdieu 1973), the exchange of objects (e.g., Barraud et al. 1994; Howell 1989), and other social interactions. It is especially prominent at life-crisis rituals, such as funerals, when people are most "invested with the capacities of personhood specific to defined roles and statuses" (Fortes 1973:287).

Mauss's original intention was to develop an evolutionary outline for these concepts. From the *personnages* of traditional societies, he traced the development in Western thought, beginning with the Romans, of the *personne* as a juridical and later moral entity that is autonomous and subject to rights and duties (Mauss 1985:18). It need not be a human being but can refer to corporations, cities, or universities as a "collective person" (1985:19). An even more recent development since the Reformation and Enlightenment was the emergence of the category Mauss called "self" (*moi*) and its coincidence with *personne* (1985:20–22) in Western philosophy. This combined category is the basis of the Western concept of the "individual" as a self-contained, autonomous moral entity.

Mauss's 1938 article had little impact on Anglo-American anthropology and was generally neglected in ethnography (La Fontaine 1985:123; Morris 1985:736). However, it may have influenced Radcliffe-Brown's 1940 essay "On Social Structure" (reprinted 1952), which distinguished "individual" from "person" as follows: every human being as an individual is a "biological organism" and as a person is "a complex of social relationships." The failure to distinguish the two is "a source of confusion in science" (1952:193). However,

it was Mauss's pupil, Dumont, and his followers who have maintained the discrimination in Mauss's original essay between the person as a feature of many traditional societies and the Western notion of the individual as a value, a merger of "person" and "self" in Mauss's terms. This contrast is now more usually labeled the dichotomy between person and individual. Dumont (1970:11) traced the development of the individual to the European introduction of the social division of labor and the French Revolution. Others see its origin in the bureaucratic nation-state (La Fontaine 1985:136-138) or as early as the Medieval period (Barraud et al. 1994:4). While this terminology introduces the assumption that the Western "individual" is an essentialized concept, and there is likely variability in the notion of the self among Westernized societies (Sökefeld 1999:418), the contrast between individual and person remains a useful heuristic device.

Whatever its developmental trajectory, in Western society, characterized as individualistic versus holistic, or as modern versus traditional (Barraud 1990:215; Dumont 1970:9), the individual is "a particular cultural type (of person) rather than a self-evident analytical category" (Strathern 1981:168). In individualistic societies like ours, "society is constituted of autonomous, equal units, namely separate individuals and . . . such individuals are more important, ultimately, than any larger constituent group The Western concept of the individual thus gives jural, moral and social significance to the mortal human being, the empirically observable entity" (Alan MacFarlane in La Fontaine 1985:124).

If in our own society the individual has absolute value, then not surprisingly, it is difficult for us to maintain the distinction between individual and person (La Fontaine 1985:125). Nevertheless, anthropologists, who spend most of

their efforts studying non-Western peoples, should be paying more attention to this issue (Barraud et al. 1994:4) because undue emphasis on the individual distorts our interpretations of non-Western societies (Dumont 1975). This distinction is particularly critical to the holism/individualism duality that agency theories are struggling with: "In Western notions of personhood, bounded units of the species are seen as *ipso facto* morally self-contained, and further are set in opposition to nature and society. Social science notions of personhood that emically oppose 'the individual' to 'society' are best understood as flowing from this specifically Western conception. But in other cultures, the ethical entity, the person, may be conceived along rather different axes" (Strathern 1981:168-169).

In considering representations of status or social persona in mortuary treatment, and in judging the contexts and motivations for agency, archaeologists should be aware of the profound difference between "person" and "individual" as culturally specific constructions and that the individual in this sense did not exist for most of the past. They should further consider that "the practices by means of which actors construct their social world, and simultaneously their own selves and modes of being in the world, are . . . symbolically constituted and themselves symbolic processes" (Munn 1986:7). As I suggest in the following case study, what have often been seen as individualistic representations and actions may be better understood as social constructions that symbolically refer to "persons," whose identities, statuses, and motivations were shaped by their linkages to others in a collectivity. The interpretive differences that result from this perspective are significant enough to warrant serious consideration of the personhood of actors in the past.

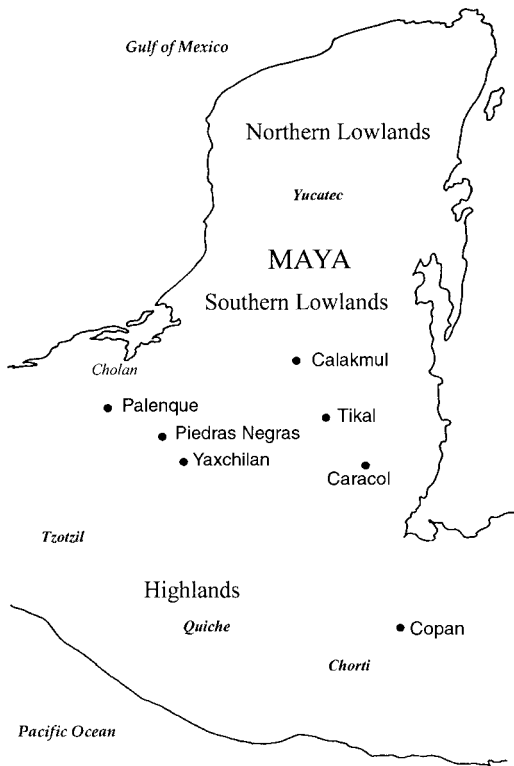


FIG. 1. Map of the Maya area (southern Mexico and northern Central America) showing major Classic period sites mentioned in the text. Maya language names are in italics.

MAYA REPRESENTATIONS OF PERSONHOOD

Representations of Maya Individuals

The archaeological concerns for identifying individuals in mortuary analyses and in other actor-centered contexts accessible through imagery and text have coincided in interpreting events of the Classic Maya civilization of southern Mesoamerica (ca. 250–1000 A.D.; Fig. 1). Data from the Late Classic site of Palenque, Mexico, are highlighted here, although a similar analysis could be carried out for any center with equivalent information on dynastic history and royal tomb occupation. I emphasize how the value implicitly

assigned to the individual has resulted in some interpretive difficulties. An analytical shift away from the individual as a natural unit toward the relationships that are created and maintained among interacting persons may alleviate some of these difficulties and allow prehistorians to broaden their understandings of social dynamics.

The Maya are an interesting case for this purpose⁷ because they created many human images juxtaposed with written texts which, since the pioneering work of Proskouriakoff (1960), have been interpreted as depicting named historical individuals, namely rulers and their close family members or high-ranking subordinates, the most powerful agents in Maya society (Coe 1984:166). The monumental inscriptions are thus thought to record the “grand assertions of kings” (Freidel 1992: 129). Sculpted in bas-relief on stone stelae, lintels, panels, and similar objects used in association with architecture or defined spaces, these images are typically not portraits in the usual sense of depicting exact physiognomy. Instead, the textual and iconographic symbols identify the persons and show them engaged in some ritual action (Schele and Miller 1986:66). Some of the artworks from Palenque, however, are an exception for they are believed to be lifelike portraits (1986:64–66). Because of the huge effort and expense devoted to describing and picturing the activities of individual kings—the “public glorification of named rulers”—and also to building their palaces and tombs, Blanton and colleagues (1996:12) considered the Classic Maya to exemplify the individualizing “network” political strategy: “Elite families promoted the cults of named rulers and the rhetoric of royal descent and ancestor veneration” (Blanton et al. 1996:12), especially with the erection of impressive pyramids for the tombs of rulers in the Late Classic (600–1000 A.D.).

By the time of Welch’s (1988) survey of

lowland Maya mortuary practices, the skeletal remains in about a dozen such tombs had been matched with the names of rulers mentioned in the inscriptions (1988:Table 99), and that number continues to grow. Being able to associate a unique individual known from the written record with specific physical remains presents obvious advantages to the archaeologist. Moreover, text-aided archaeology has been suggested as a means to better understand the "theoretical question of 'the individual'" (Johnson 1989:190; see Meskell 1996:11ff). Nevertheless, the situation can actually become more clouded than in nonliterate societies, as Trinkaus (1984) noted. Not only is mortuary ritual now seen as an opportunity for manipulating statuses and identities (e.g., Joyce 1999:22; Pearson 1982), but "written records are acts of symboling in themselves . . . [and] the use of written records as factual notation and as powerful manipulators of fact is fundamental to the organization of the complex societies that produce them. Those which describe rituals therefore pose, at the very least, a double blind for interpretation" (Trinkaus 1984:675). This problem has been recognized for the Maya in the sense that the surviving texts would have been commissioned only by successful lords to tout their achievements (Schele and Freidel 1990:55), and the promulgation of what we call "propaganda" is thought to have been a major function of writing in Mesoamerica (Marcus 1992:16).

The "double blind" of the manipulative uses of both mortuary ritual and writing appears in certain continuing controversies concerning the famous royal tomb in the Temple of the Inscriptions at Palenque.⁸ Although these arguments seem simplistic today, they succinctly characterize the difficulties that may arise when considering the individual as a self-interested rational actor. The Temple of the Inscriptions is a massive pyramidal

platform with a masonry building (a temple or shrine) on top. In 1952 Ruz Lhuillier discovered a hidden stairway descending from the temple floor over 20 vertical meters into the interior of the platform to below ground level, terminating in a vaulted chamber. Nearly filling this chamber is a massive limestone box hollowed out to hold the remains of a single adult male, in correct anatomical position (Dávalos Hurtado and Romano Pacheco 1992:333).⁹ The four sides of this sarcophagus are sculpted with images of 10 named men and women, identifiable from inscriptions as predecessors of the sarcophagus's occupant. He is depicted in full figure on the separate, nearly 4-m-long limestone slab that forms the sarcophagus lid (Robertson 1983:57, 65). His name was read phonetically as Pakal, and his biography as written in Palenque's inscriptions was first analyzed in a seminal decipherment by Mathews and Schele [1974; the name was later more completely read as Hanab-Pakal (Schele and Mathews 1998:95)]. The entire structure was apparently made to house the sarcophagus because the tomb chamber and sarcophagus had to be in place before the pyramidal platform was constructed above.

Who built this grandiose funerary architecture has become a subject of disagreement. When Ruz Lhuillier first excavated the Temple of the Inscriptions, he likened its construction to that of the Old Kingdom pyramids of Egypt and presumed that the occupant commissioned it for his personal use (Ruz Lhuillier 1992:285). More specific arguments to prove that Pakal built his own tomb and temple include the fact that the articulated body was surely placed in a prepared coffin soon after death (Sabloff 1997:187). The sloppy execution of part of the sarcophagus bas-relief must mean that death occurred after the carving had begun but before it was finished (Schele and Freidel 1990:468–469). Furthermore, why was a

fine stairway needed from the temple down to the tomb except to inter the body after the platform and temple were finished (Robertson 1983:24)? The supposition that Pakal designed his tomb some 10 years before his death—the time needed to build it—has generally prevailed (Coe 1988:234; Robertson 1983:23–24; Schele and Freidel 1990:225; Schele and Mathews 1998:97). Foncerrada de Molina (1974:78, my translation) called the structure a “monument to individuality, in this case, that of a ruler . . . who could exercise his authority over the inhabitants of the Palenque area, even attaining, for his personal glory, the erection of the most spectacular mausoleum in all the Maya area.” In this supposition we see the usual presumption that grave treatment reflects the status of the deceased—a great tomb is the sign of a great man.

Palenque’s rulers, like those elsewhere in the Maya world (e.g., for Tikal, Haviland 1992), are further seen to have had political motivations to commission buildings and monuments “designed to gain personal glory” and to fulfill their “personal agendas” (Schele and Freidel 1990: 244, 261). The attribution of a building or stone monument is typically given to whoever’s name or image appears most prominently on it. However, the assumption that Pakal was motivated by self-interest to build his tomb presupposes that it was not in anyone else’s greater interest to do so. Most of the Maya evidence indicates that survivors typically built or renovated structures to house the dead (Bassie-Sweet 1991:75; Welsh 1988:186), the death often triggering new construction (McAnany 1998:276). At Caracol, Belize, however, some tombs were built before they were needed, and of these, some were never used (Chase and Chase 1998: 311), indicating variability in Maya practices.

Bassie-Sweet (1991:75) proposed a counterargument that the Temple of the

Inscriptions was built after Pakal’s demise. She noted that the body could have been placed within the hollowed-out limestone container, quickly sealed with a plain inner lid, soon after death, before the sarcophagus sides were carved and the temple-pyramid constructed over the tomb. The stairway was needed for the final rituals, when the great sculpted cover, which was housed beside the sarcophagus, was finally moved into place. Her scenario thus introduces a long time span between death and the final interment ritual. She further suggested that this building project was undertaken to fulfill the personal political aspirations of Pakal’s successor, Snake-Jaguar (Kan-Balam in Yucatec Maya; his name was not written phonetically). Despite the prominent portrait of Pakal on the sarcophagus lid, and the recounting of his life events in the inscriptions in the temple above his tomb, that text does end with the statement of the accession of Kan-Balam (Schele and Mathews 1998:104–108). Kan-Balam also is believed to have commissioned the three temples in the adjacent Cross Group complex, which prominently display his image, as “the monument to his personal accession to the throne” (Freidel 1992:124; see Robertson 1991:9; Schele and Freidel 1990:237).

Other evidence for the actions and motivations of these two important Palenque rulers comes from the unusually prominent retrospective dynastic information in the texts and images of the Temple of the Inscriptions and the Cross Group. The history of the ruling house takes the form of king lists rather than a genealogy. As Schele and Freidel (1990:220) remarked, “[t]he very existence of these king lists raises questions about their context and motivations of the men who made them. What so fascinated and troubled these men that they felt compelled to present such a comprehensive treatise on their dynasty on such important monumental

space?" The answer, they suggested, is political manipulation. Palenque, like some (but not all) Maya centers, displays female images and names in the monuments. However, at Palenque women were said to have achieved paramount status [*ch'ul ahaw*, "holy lord" (Freidel 1992:130)], considered a serious breach of the presumed strict rule of patrilineal succession and inheritance (Schele and Freidel 1990:84–85). The woman named as Pakal's mother, Sak-K'uk' (White Quetzal bird), was one such female ruler named in the retrospective texts. She is thought to have been a "masterful politician, able to manipulate the rival interests of her paternal clansmen" as she managed to bequeath the throne to her own son while he was still a child (Schele and Freidel 1990:220). Having inherited the throne under inauspicious circumstances, Pakal, and later his son Kan-Balam, needed to "justify this departure from the normal rules." Thus they invested much effort and expense in these monumental constructions (1990:221).

Here we see projected onto Pakal and Kan-Balam the motivations of a self-interested, rational, and pragmatic agent engaging in actions to further an individual agenda against the established sociopolitical order. This is the typical approach in agency applications in archaeology, now with the advantage of knowing the names, dates, and historical events of these protagonists. From this individualistic perspective alone, it is difficult to decide which of the two gained the most from building the Temple of the Inscriptions and so to whom it should be attributed. A similar disagreement concerns the identification of the human images in the Cross Group buildings. Each of the three buildings has a bas-relief wall panel depicting two recurring figures, one tall and one short, each holding objects. Assuming that the Cross Group is Kan-Balam's accession monument, it made sense to iden-

tify the short figure as the deceased Pakal handing the insignia of rulership to his living son (Schele and Freidel 1990:242, 470–471). However, others (Floyd Lounsbury in Schele and Freidel 1990:470; Bassie-Sweet 1991:203) have suggested, on the basis of the identifying text adjacent to the short figure, that this is Kan-Balam as a child. He was shown in each panel at two different times in his own life, heir-designation and accession, with Pakal's role visually invisible.

A more acrimonious argument, related to the same issues of symbolic representation, concerns the age of Pakal at death. The physical anthropologists who examined the skeletal remains in the sarcophagus reported in 1955 that the man died at an age between 40 and 50 (Dávalos Hurtado and Romano Pacheco 1992:333). Two decades later, epigraphers deciphered the hieroglyphic inscriptions and read Pakal's name and his birth and death dates (Lounsbury 1974; Mathews and Schele 1974). These indicate that he was born in 603 A.D., acceded to the paramountcy of Palenque in 615 at age 12, and died in 683, making him 80 years old at his death, twice the age determined from the physical examination (Mathews and Schele 1974:Table 1; Robertson 1983:23). Ruz Lhuillier (1977), who had excavated the tomb, then called for new skeletal analyses, which yielded the same result as before. He therefore soundly criticized the epigraphers for failing even to consider the physical evidence of age in their reconstruction of Pakal's life-history given the huge discrepancy presented by these two sources of information (see also Acosta 1977:285).

Stepping into the controversy, Carlson (1980) suggested that the inscriptions—which are heavily weighted toward calendrical and astronomical cycles—should not be so literally interpreted. He observed (1980:199) that Palenque's inscriptions are known to have linked events in the lives of the ruling family to earlier

actions by ancestors and gods through the use of contrived dates to place those events in equivalent positions within calendrical cycles (Lounsbury 1976). Such contrived dates may have taken precedence over historical accuracy in recording royal biographies (Carlson 1980:202; Lounsbury 1991:819). Nevertheless, Pakal's age discrepancy remains an "apparent contradiction yet to be resolved" in Maya archaeology (Sharer 1994:280; also Carlson 1980:203). In a final response, Schele and Mathews (1998:342–344) referred to more recent studies that contest the age-determination techniques of the 1950s–1970s, and reiterated the "incontrovertible" arithmetic used to arrive at Pakal's age from his birth and death dates. They argued that unwillingness to accept these dates would call into question all that is known about the Maya Long Count calendar at every Maya site (1998:343).

Social Death

The arithmetic is not in doubt, and more sophisticated techniques for aging mature adults are now available (e.g., Schwartz 1995:185–222), but the controversy cannot so easily be resolved. A major source for the discrepancy in Pakal's age may be the identification of the body in the sarcophagus with Pakal as a person represented in inscriptions and images. The same type of identification has resulted in interpretive problems at other Maya centers. For example, at Copan, Honduras, archaeologists at first believed they had found the tomb of the Early Classic founder of the ruling dynasty, named Yax K'uk' Mo' (First Quetzal Macaw) in the later retrospective texts. The preponderance of the evidence in terms of tomb location, chronology, iconography, and grave goods pointed to that identification (Stuart 1997:75). Yet the physical analysis later showed that the body was that of a woman, leaving archaeologists to con-

clude she was the wife of the founder (1997: 82), the only female likely to have shared the symbolic references that designated this ruler.

In other cases the identity of a tomb occupant has been made from a name inscribed on included grave goods, such as the name (currently read Yikom Yich'ak' K'ak') on a pottery vessel in Tomb 4 of Calakmul, Mexico. The excavators used this vessel to identify the man in the tomb, despite earlier readings of other inscriptions that the same named individual had been killed (and buried) at Tikal, Guatemala (Carrasco Vargas et al. 1999: 49). Stuart (1989:158) has sounded a note of caution regarding this practice because pottery vessels were widely traded and show up in graves far from their point of manufacture. He had already confronted this same problem in deciphering the life history of an important woman, as inscribed on four shell plaques in Burial 5 at Piedras Negras, Guatemala, a grave which turned out to house an adult male rather than the expected female (Stuart 1985). Nevertheless, the operating assumption, overturned only in the face of irrefutable physical evidence, is that names on grave goods should coincide with the individual in the grave because it is believed that the deceased's status should be most prominently marked in mortuary contexts. A one-to-one correspondence is presumed between the skeletal remains and the symbolic references to social identity.

However, many Maya tombs were reentered and also reused, housing multiple bodies in differing states of articulation, so these graves cannot easily signify the status and identity of a single individual at a fixed point in time following immediately after death.¹⁰ At Caracol, tombs served multiple uses and were not always the final resting place, as bodies were subjected to several stages of processing in different locales (Chase and Chase 1996: 76, 1998:311), and the same practice may

explain empty tombs found elsewhere. In addition to the physical evidence for such secondary mortuary rituals, which sometimes involved the curation of body parts (Chase and Chase 1996:77; Welsh 1988: 216), there are ethnohistoric descriptions of similar practices from late prehispanic Yucatan (Landa 1982:59). Thus, only at certain times or for certain persons were Maya tombs sealed (Chase and Chase 1994:56) in a ceremony that “reflects several things: the end of mourning, continuity, and a reaffirmation of the social order” (Chase and Chase 1996:77).

Such a ritual or class of rituals to the dead may be indicated in inscriptions at a number of sites by a hieroglyph that Stuart (1998:396–397) suggested may read *muknal*. It refers to activities directed at a place for the dead, and *muknal* is the Yucatec Maya word for tomb (*muk* is not read phonetically). Stuart (1998:398) further suggested that this ritual took place after interment and apparently involved the burning of substances such as incense, evidence for which has been found archaeologically both within and outside of tombs. McAnany (1998:289), however, interpreted the *muknal* event as the interment of the deceased in the final resting place, which may have required a great deal of time to gather the resources and labor to construct. From sites where both the *muknal* and the death dates are known, McAnany showed that the median number of days between the two events was 482, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ years, and the longest known elapsed period was 24 years.

In McAnany's hypothesis the *muknal* event may be the ritual marking of “social death.” The well-known dichotomy between “biological” and “social” death (Bloch 1982:220) obligates us to analytically separate the physical and social aspects of persons as opposed to individuals. This is especially the case in traditional societies in which physical in-

dividuality, experienced most obviously by death, is an obstacle to a social order based on the continuous incarnation by humans of the legitimate positions (*personnages* in Mauss's term) that make up society (Bloch 1982:223; Goody 1962:27). Where succession or inheritance are concerned, social death can be more critical than biological death, since personhood (and hence rights to office or property) can extend beyond one's demise. For example, in medieval France the dead king was treated as if he were alive, via the medium of an effigy, until his funeral—marking his social death and the legitimate accession of his successor—in order to eliminate the conceptual problem of an interregnum (Mayer 1985:211–212).

Hertz, another student of Durkheim, is credited with bringing the common occurrence of secondary mortuary rituals to anthropological attention with his 1907 essay, in which he observed that in social terms, death is “the object of collective representation” (Hertz 1960:28; see also Bloch 1982:224–225). While death starts the process of physical decomposition, funerary and later commemorative rituals are necessary to deconstruct the *social person* as opposed to the self and personal identity (Gluckman 1937:118). They separate out the various parts that had come together, also by ritual means, throughout one's lifetime. These components include tangible and intangible elements contributed by the father's and mother's kin groups, as well as identity relationships amalgamated through marriage and other social exchanges (e.g., Barraud 1990:225; Goody 1962:273; Kan 1989:66; Munn 1986:164; Weiner 1976:8). The Maya, like many other peoples, believed that the corporeal aspect of the body was composed of two major essences (e.g., Barley 1995:100; Bloch 1982:224–225; Lévi-Strauss 1969:393). The bones, a dry enduring material, were contributed by the father

representing the continuity of the patriline. The flesh or blood, a wet and perishable but life-giving substance that influenced one's well-being, was contributed by the mother's or wife-providing group (e.g., Nash 1970:109; *Popol Vuh* 1996:98–99; see Gillespie and Joyce 1997:199). In addition, each person had one or more "souls" or spiritual essences (Freidel et al. 1993:181–185; Vogt 1970) that connected them to the ancestors and to the local setting of their social group—collective representations beyond their individual destinies. The final disposition of the souls was also a subject of ritual concern.

Funerary and commemorative rituals to "decompose" the social person simultaneously serve to reorganize the relationships of the survivors to one another to reaffirm order within the collectivity, as Hertz (1960) first observed. Kan (1989:289) similarly noted for the Tlingit of Alaska: "To make the deceased into a valuable cultural resource, the ritual must separate his perishable and polluting attributes from the immortal and pure ones. The funeral begins this process, but time is needed for all the elements constituting his total social persona to be separated from each other, for the perishable and impure ones to be discarded, and for the immortal ones to be channeled back into the social order of the living." Thus, it is not surprising that a Maya Long Count date recorded for social death—possibly the *muknal* event—may be far removed from that of biological death. Among the Tlingit, for example, the dead body was considered "unfinished" until the memorial potlatch took place, which was necessary to "celebrate the end of a long process of transformation of the deceased's social persona" (Kan 1989:181–182). In Indonesia, it is similarly the last prescribed exchange prestation that "signifies the end of a person" (Barraud 1990:224).

Ancestors and the "House"

If death precipitates "the removal of a social person from society" (Humphreys 1981b:2) and all the ritual entailed in that process with its political and economic consequences, then to get beyond the individual in the grave requires some understanding of the social classification of the populace into meaningful units and relationships from which people, as persons, construct their identities. Maya settlement pattern analysis provides important evidence in this regard. The typical residential pattern was a grouping of structures around one or more patios, forming a compound that would have housed a multifamily kin-linked unit over multiple generations (Ashmore 1981). Out of the daily practice of shared living arrangements and economic and ritual activities, the group who occupied this space maintained a collective identity (Hendon 1999). Some of these domestic compounds include recognizable shrines, generally on the east side, providing a localized religious focus for group identity (Ashmore 1981; Chase and Chase 1996; Haviland 1981, 1988; McAnany 1995:66, 104; Tourtelot 1988; Welsh 1988:217).

These domestic structures were frequently renovated, their superstructures razed to make way for new buildings. Significantly, rebuilding episodes were usually contemporary with the interment of one or more persons within the substructure (Coe 1956:388; Haviland et al. 1985:152; McAnany et al. 1999:141; Welsh 1988:7). While some of the interred human remains are believed to be sacrificial victims (Becker 1992:188), the main burials in elaborate graves suggest that the deaths of these persons motivated the renovations that followed (1992:188; Coe 1956:388; McAnany et al. 1999:141). This practice began in the Formative (Pre-Classic) period (Adams 1977:99), and careful excavations at K'axob, Belize showed that

“Formative ‘burials’ are so temporally and contextually connected with construction of a new structure that often they reside stratigraphically in a place betwixt an old and a new building” (McAnany 1995:161). On occasion, one or more “terminal” burials may have signaled abandonment of the structure (Haviland et al. 1985:150–151), a practice known historically in Yucatan (Landa 1982:59) and ethnographically in the Chiapas highlands (Blom and LaFarge 1926–1927:2:362).

The use of structures—predominantly residences—to house the graves of Maya elite and nonelite persons is the one consistent pattern noted by Welsh (1988:166) among the great variety of burial treatments used by the Classic lowland Maya (Ruz Lhuillier 1965, 1968). Subfloor interments were typically topped by a masonry altar or bench (Welsh 1988:188–189). Some elite households used a special shrine building rather than the dwelling for their dead (1988:188–189; Haviland et al. 1985), and most rare are the temple-pyramids built completely *de novo* over a subsurface tomb (Welsh 1988:190). Ritual activities continued to be performed at all these locations, as indicated especially by the evidence of incense burning. Thus, the dead were important to the living at all levels of society (Chase and Chase 1994: 54). The huge and disruptive architectural investment in graves, the high number of graves within structures, the curation of some body parts, and evidence for continued ritual veneration at those locations show how pervasive the dead were to the daily practice of the living. Coe (1988:234) considered Maya centers to be “necropolises, in which the living were gathered to worship the honored dead.”

Nevertheless, other evidence shows that it was not for the dead that this effort was expended but for ancestors, noncorporeal beings with whom the living, who transformed the dead into ancestors, continued to interact (Gillespie

2000b; McAnany 1995:161, 1998; see also Chapman 1994; Morris 1991). Maya archaeological evidence supports ancestor veneration practices congruent with ethnohistoric and some ethnographic accounts [Landa 1982:59; Las Casas 1967:2:526; see Gillespie (1999, 2000b) and McAnany (1995, 1998) on prehispanic Maya ancestor veneration; Nash (1970:22), Vogt (1969:298–301), and Watanabe (1990:139–141) on the contractual relationships by which the modern Maya engage with ancestors]. The shrines and altars were places for active commemoration of ancestors (Welsh 1988:186–193), whose bodily remains may have served to attract their spirits, the way analogous house shrines do today (Vogt 1964:499–500), as a means for maintaining their souls within the control of the residential unit (Gillespie n.d.). The juxtaposition of the living with the dead and the continued veneration of their spirits in domestic contexts indicates that the house compound itself was a material means for signifying the group’s continuity with the ancestors [McAnany 1998:271, 276; see Chapman (1994:57) for an Old World example]. The interment of the dead contributed to the sacral quality of the house, to the point that temples or shrines sometimes replaced the domestic structures (McAnany 1995:161, 1998:279).

In the case of the ruling group, continuity with ancestors was also maintained via the curation of predecessors’ monuments (Adams 1977:99). They formed a major material means by which the dead were recreated in memory as “an anchor for meaning” (Humphreys 1981a:272). Commemorative activities would also have contributed to what Halbwachs, another student of Durkheim, called “collective” memory, which is sustained within a specific social group (Halbwachs 1980); it is now more frequently referred to as “social” memory (Connerton 1989; Fentress and Wickham 1992). Such memories, which legitimate a present order or inno-

vate a new one, are conveyed through ritual performances and commemorative ceremonies (Connerton 1989:3–4), for “memory is actively constructed as a social and cultural process” [Melion and Küchler 1991:4; see Miller (1998) for Maya examples of social memory evoked through architecture].

The architectural evidence indicates that Maya society was divided into spatially separate kin-based groups maintaining ties to their ancestors as an important resource and symbol of continuity with the past. Another important clue to identifying these social units and their links to personhood comes from the buildings themselves, which were typically called “houses” (*na* and *otot/otoch*). Houses had proper names that appear in inscriptions of dedication and termination rituals for the structures (Freidel and Schele 1989; Schele 1990; Stuart 1998:376; Stuart and Houston 1994: Fig. 104). They were sometimes named for ancestors. For example, two of Palenque’s Cross Group building inscriptions relate the dedication of the house (*na* and *otot*) of K’uk’ (Quetzal). These texts have been interpreted as naming the Cross Group as the “house” of K’uk’ (Schele 1990:149), a reference to a legendary paramount of Palenque, Balam-K’uk’ (Jaguar Quetzal), who apparently served as an “anchoring ancestor” for the ruling dynasty by the time of Kan-Balam’s reign (Freidel 1992: 123–125; Schele 1987). Indeed, there is much evidence that “Maya rulers rebuilt, refurbished, and rededicated lineage houses of their founding ancestors” (Freidel 1992:125).

Thus houses, which were named and whose social births and deaths were ritually marked, overlapped in these qualities with the people who occupied them. Moreover, despite the common presumption that monumental inscriptions were commissioned to extol the life events of rulers, Stuart (1998:375) has shown that

they instead served more precisely to “record the activities surrounding the placement, creation, and activation of ritual things and places,” specifically objects, monuments, and buildings, and that these “dedication events were among the most important events worthy of permanent record.” In this sense, stone monuments erected in front of or within the buildings also served a commemorative function linking persons to those named places, reiterating their co-identities. Other objects also preserve a record of these ritual events. For example, a vessel in a dedicatory cache in an Early Classic palace structure at Tikal has an inscription “his house, Jaguar Paw, Ruler of Tikal, 9th Ruler.” It makes explicit both the commemorative nature of the ritual in which the cache items were deposited, in association with the erection of the building (Jones 1991:111) as well as the linking of the named ruler to his “house.”

The identification of persons with houses extends beyond even these examples, for the word “house” is used by the Maya to refer to their domestic groups apart from the structures. Among the modern Tzotzil Maya, *sna* (house) is the term for any named localized extended family group that maintains a separate identity which is objectified by a single house shrine and continuously enacted by group participation in dedication rituals (Vogt 1969:140). The equivalent social unit for the Chorti Maya is the *otot* (Wisdom 1940:248). Similarly, the Postclassic Quiche Maya aristocracy were organized by membership in a *nimha* (“great house”) (Carmack 1981:160). The Classic period inscriptions also provide evidence for prehispanic social identity as referring to a “house” as a social group. In a Tamarindito, Guatemala, text the “house names” are provided for a ruler’s mother and father, the woman being of the “flower house” and the man from the “maize house” (Houston 1998:521). A widespread courtly title used by both males and

females is read *ah ch'ul na*, "person of the holy house" (Houston 1993:130). This title relates them to the ruler, *ch'ul ahaw*, "holy lord," the head of the royal ("holy") house in which those persons claimed membership.

The organization of Maya society into long-lived property-owning groups known as "houses" is not unusual but conforms to a widely distributed pattern also found in medieval Europe, whose aristocracy formed noble houses to which commoners were attached (Gillespie 2000b). Lévi-Strauss (1982:174, 1987:152) first recognized, from ethnographic and historical descriptions of a wide range of ranked societies, that the house is a recurring social unit that most frequently is emically referred to by the word for a dwelling.¹¹ He correspondingly observed that anthropologists often mistakenly identified social "houses" by their own etic term, lineage (see also McKinnon 1991:29), thereby assuming that these are strictly descent groups and missing the critical point of the association of the social unit with architecture, place, and property. From the various occurrences of what he called "house societies," Lévi-Strauss devised the following definition in which the "house" is treated as a "person" in the sense that Mauss intended. The house is a *personne morale*, usually translated as a corporate body, "holding an estate made up of both material and immaterial wealth, which perpetuates itself through the transmission of its name, its goods, and its titles down a real or imaginary line, considered legitimate as long as this continuity can express itself in the language of kinship or of affinity and, most often, of both" (Lévi-Strauss 1982:174).

As a person, the subject of rights and responsibilities, the "house" emerges as the collective unit in exchange relations, particularly marriage, with other houses (Lévi-Strauss 1982). While many house societies have a unilateral basis for inheritance and succession, ties to spouses' "houses" are maintained. Property may

flow through both parents as well as through spouses, and noble "houses" typically engage in strategic marriages to acquire property from affines (Gillespie 2000a). The "house" is also a key source of personhood for its members, providing a place for them in the social nexus and a corresponding physical place in the spatial network of the settlement (Forth 1991:74). People's identities are therefore shaped by their "house" identity, and their relationships to others are based in part on the relationships of their respective "houses" (Barraud 1990:228). This is amply demonstrated in Indonesia where house societies have been best studied by ethnographers (e.g. Barraud 1990; Forth 1991; Fox 1980; McKinnon 1991; Waterson 1990).

Maya "Houses" and "Persons"

In the case of the Maya, several concrete expressions of personhood as derived from "house" affiliation are interpretable from the available evidence. They are manifested by the "house's" estate consisting of real and intangible property, by the strategic "language" of consanguineal kinship and affinity to create relationships that increase and perpetuate the estate over time, and by the maintenance of the estate over multiple generations.

Beginning with the "house" estate, among its important immaterial property is a set of names or titles, which may form a ranked classification system as the names are disbursed to certain "house" members (e.g., the descriptions of Zuni and Kwakiutl above; Fortes 1973:312; Kan 1989:70). These names are often attributed to real or legendary ancestors, and in assuming them, the living house members assume the ancestors' position or part of their identity, and thereby perpetuate that portion of the "house's" estate. Many modern Maya believe that the soul(s) of the dead are reincarnated in subsequently

born family members given the same name, such that the two share in important aspects of their identities (Carlsen and Prechtel 1991:29; Thompson 1930:82). Thus, the ancestral spirits as well as the names should be considered immaterial “house” property that is curated across generations and reproduces the social unit.

Mauss (1985:4–5) and Boas (in Lévi-Strauss 1982:167) also emphasized how aspects of personhood are acquired through the taking of various names at different life stages, a practice documented for the Postclassic Yucatec Maya (Roys 1940). In the 16th century, Landa (1982:58) reported that children were given different names and that upon marriage they assumed a double surname, taking both their mother’s and father’s names. This custom would have signified the continuity of the patriline and the affiliation to the wife-giving group as embodied by each child. The use of multiple names and titles for Classic period paramounts at different life stages was recorded in the inscriptions (Schele 1988a:67). Moreover, upon taking important captives in war, a victorious Maya ruler would usurp the vanquished’s titles (Schele and Freidel 1990:143). Mauss (1985:8–9) described this same practice among the Kwakiutl, explaining that by killing a captive or seizing his names, warriors appropriated his “person.” As Kan (1989:71) argued, it is the *name* that is a member of the “house” more so than the individual who is the current holder of that name.¹²

Palenque’s dynastic history, as it has been tentatively reconstructed from king lists (Bassie-Sweet 1991:242; Schele and Freidel 1990:222), reveals the repetition of certain names, demonstrating the concern to manifest the continuity of the royal “house.” It could be argued that the long retrospective historical texts were prominently erected as a material means by which the ruling house actively claimed

names and ancestors as its property. Specifically, the texts name as royal persons Hanab-Pakal, Kan-Balam, K’an-Hok’-Chitam, Akhal Mo’ Nab’, and K’uk-Balam (Schele and Mathews 1993; Stuart 1999). These same names were apparently appropriated by later paramounts, starting with Hanab-Pakal buried in the Temple of the Inscriptions. New discoveries show that Akhal Mo’ Nab’ erected texts specifically concerning two legendary paramounts who shared his name. Akhal Mo’ Nab’ is presumed to have been the son of a high office-holder, for unlike the previous two rulers (K’an-Hok’-Chitam and Kan-Balam), he did not claim to be a descendant of Pakal. The newly found inscriptions have been thought to reveal “some conniving to prove he had the right to rule” (Robertson et al. 1999:3). However, the fact that he could assume the name Akhal Mo’ Nab’, known from Kan-Balam’s earlier king list, demonstrates his membership in the royal “house,” and it is “the language of kinship” rather than strict succession rules that can strategically position someone as head of that “house.”

The material signifiers of “house” property and continuity are more readily apparent. The constant rebuilding or refurbishing of houses and related structures, typically consonant with the death of an important person, has already been noted as a common pattern at Maya sites. The enlargement and embellishment of structures are visible indications of a “house’s” success in maintaining or increasing its prestige vis-à-vis others. The changes experienced by domestic structures may also represent events in the life histories of their inhabitants (Bloch 1995). Another important component of tangible property are named heirloomed valuables, often attributed to the acquisitive exploits of ancestors in legendary or even primordial times. Accompanying such valuables are oral narratives of their history, which con-

tribute to their value and are constantly adjusted as the objects are passed down within a social group or moved to another group in marriage-based exchanges (Weiner 1992:37, 42). In this way, the actions of individuals as persons become entwined with the life histories of the items that objectify the "house" as a social unit.

For the Classic Maya, there are texts and images that deal with these valuables, including the story of the acquisition of royal costume ornaments from gods, as written in Palenque's Temple of the Inscriptions (Schele and Mathews 1998:102, 107). In addition, inscriptions that preserve some of this history were written on the valuables themselves. These include the named stone stelae, which were often reerected, cached in buildings, or even mutilated as part of their resignification by later curators and also the fine costume ornaments recovered from building caches and tombs. For these latter objects, Joyce (2000) has demonstrated that many were deposited long after their initial creation and sometimes far away, as they were moved through exchange networks, such that their final disposition would have signified the history of a "house(s)," and not simply the discrete individual in the tomb. The Piedras Negras shell plaques described above fall into this category.

Mortuary ritual was a critical opportunity for "house" members to secure the inheritance of tangible and intangible property attached to the person of the deceased. The transfer of property rights is an act of social continuity in itself, but to transfer them, they must be actively claimed. Ethnographic examples reveal that it is common for the "house" valuables to be put on display at the deaths of important people. Barraud (1990:224) reported for the Kei Archipelago of Indonesia that "all jewels and valuables belonging to the deceased's house were exhibited and hung inside and outside his

house in order to show both the greatness of his name and the grief of his family. For the last time, the deceased was identified and represented by his house." Kan (1989: 63) has similarly shown for the Tlingit that the commemorative potlatches to the dead were major occasions when ownership of property was reasserted, the histories of the heirlooms were recited, and the normally hidden objects were put on public display.

Heirloomed valuables are sometimes depicted in Maya art as wrapped bundles, especially at Palenque and neighboring Yaxchilan (Benson 1976; Tate 1992). Cloth bundles have long usage in Mesoamerica as containers for curating that which is valuable and/or sacred (Stenzel 1970). Such bundles were described as the inalienable property (after Weiner 1992) of the aristocratic "great houses" of the Postclassic Quiche Maya, handed down from legendary ancestors, and it was said that they were never unwrapped (*Popol Vuh* 1996:174). However, at Palenque there is imagery and text concerning *opened* bundles, their contents displayed, in the tablets of the three Cross Group buildings, the adjacent Temple XIV Tablet, and the Palace Tablet. Similar objects (without the cloth wrapping) are shown on the Oval Palace Tablet, the Tablet of the Slaves, and the Dumbarton Oaks Panel.¹³ In every case but the three Cross Group tablets, the presentation is made to a paramount or high official by parents who would have been deceased, showing transfer of property rights across generations, although these are not meant to depict real-life events. For the Cross Group, it is the older Kan-Balam himself who holds the opened bundle (ostensibly at his accession).

Significantly, at least two of these panels (Temple XIV and the Dumbarton Oaks Panel) have been interpreted as posthumous depictions of the paramount (Schele 1988b; Schele and Miller 1986:272–276).

This is in keeping with the ethnographically documented display of house history—as encapsulated by its most valuable heirlooms—at the death of a high-ranking member. We can suspect that accession to the head of the royal “house” may have called for a similar display, as in the case of the Cross Group tablets, as part of the final events of ending the interregnum brought about by the death of the previous ruler. This pattern suggests the likely commemorative purpose of the other tablets as well and indicates that they refer to a collective identity, rather than to the self-promotion of an individual.

The depictions of the deceased parents in these artworks is also significant, keeping in mind that these are symbolic representations. Many Maya inscriptions have been interpreted as naming the mother and father of an ego, usually the ruler. However, I suspect that the concern was not to identify a unique individual with regard to his parents, but to position his person with respect to other persons and “houses.” In the case of the patrilineal Maya, one’s own “house” was referenced through the naming of the “father” or the head of the “house” or even the “house” name, while the naming of the “mother” indicated the maternal or wife-giving “house,” the source of “blood” and thus of life (Gillespie and Joyce 1997:199). The persons named as parents and the items they hold would thereby represent the contributions of their “houses” to the composite identity credited to the personage receiving them (1997:202). Indeed, the very names chosen to be displayed in the inscriptions and narrated in ritual events may indicate the qualities that were contributed to the person of the paramount. As one example, we’ve seen the appellation *K’uk’* applied to the founder of the king lists for both Palenque and Copan and to the mother of Pakal. In Yucatec Maya, *k’uk’* meant more than “quetzal bird.” It also referred to the sprout,

sucker, or shoot of trees and other plants, and the same word was applied to one’s children and descendants (Barrera Vásquez et al. 1980:420). This is an apt botanic metaphor for a founder of a new line of kings, which in the case of Pakal was a role assigned to a female (while the name of Pakal’s father indicates other qualities).

Mortuary and commemorative rituals have been interpreted since the time of Durkheim as a necessary act of restoring the cohesion of the group threatened by the loss of a member (Goody 1962:30, 27–28). As Kan (1989:288–289) and Bloch (1982:218–219) have observed, however, death is sometimes the only opportunity for social order per se to be ritually represented. It is also an opportunity for re-shaping, and not just reifying, social order (Gluckman 1937:118). Positions within the “house” and between rival “houses” are shuffled, and heirlooms associated with the deceased take on additional life history, increasing their value and the competition for them. Sociopolitical relationships could be further manipulated through secondary mortuary rituals to construct innovated social memories of the dead, thereby enhancing the status of the living.

At Palenque the person represented as Pakal continued to be reshaped in social memory. Some artworks that name or depict him have been interpreted as postdating his demise, such as the Dumbarton Oaks Panel, where he is shown with his also deceased son, *K’an-Hok’-Chitam*. Another prominent image of Pakal, on the Oval Palace Tablet, may have served a similar commemorative function, although it is generally interpreted as Pakal’s accession monument, commissioned by him (Robertson 1985a:28, Fig. 92). It has no date and does not use the Palenque accession verb, but it does name Pakal as an enthroned actor receiving a headdress held out by *Sak-K’uk’*, elsewhere said to

be his mother. The assumption has been that only he would commission such a scene and that it refers to the transfer of power, symbolized by the headdress, directly from the antecedent ruler, his mother (although he is shown as an adult, and according to the inscriptions, he was a boy when he became king). The same headdress is also shown being offered (by males, considered to be fathers) on the Palace Tablet and the Tablet of the Slaves.

The Oval Palace Tablet was erected on a wall of House E of the Palace, above the bench-throne that actually names a later paramount, Akhal Mo' Nab' (Robertson 1985a:31), who did not claim descent from Pakal. Both the throne and a painted text above the Oval Palace Tablet refer to Akhal Mo' Nab's accession (Schele and Mathews 1993:129). I suggest that the tablet relates in imagery the remembered or innovated history of the headdress as a specific named heirloom by displaying its active transfer to the person represented as Pakal, for image production is a major component in the active construction of memory (Melion and Kuchler 1991:4). In enhancing the value of the object, the tablet also forms an important referent to the high status claimed by the ruling "house" after the death of Pakal, visually evidencing ties to a known predecessor through the association of his person with the headdress. In this way the headdress was an important part of the imagery associated with the throne, and both were related by this juxtaposition to the *personnage* of the head of the royal "house" of Palenque, who presumably sat on that throne.

Pakal was referred to by a title read "he of the pyramid" in an even later inscription, the Tablet of the 96 Glyphs (Robertson 1991:79, Fig. 264). This title located his person spatially in the imposing Temple of the Inscriptions while also associating him with the powerful Maya earth-lords or "grandfather" (ancestral) deities who

inhabit the mountains (Thompson 1930: 57). The central figure named in the Tablet of the 96 Glyphs called himself Balam-K'uk' (Jaguar-Quetzal), the name of a founding ancestor of Pakal's "house." However, he claimed to be a son of Akhal Mo' Nab' and thus not a descendant of Pakal (Bassie-Sweet 1991:247; Schele 1988a:103). Nevertheless, as with his putative father, this last paramount associated himself with the same ruling "house" as Pakal's, most obviously by the assumption of this important name, without the need to demonstrate agnatic descent from prior rulers.¹⁴ This Balam-K'uk' additionally claimed other titles used by Palenque's previous rulers (Schele and Mathews 1993:131). These monuments and their ritual usage reveal an intent to innovate or sustain a collective memory of the person of Pakal as an anchoring ancestor and metonymic reference to the ruling "house," to enhance its longevity, prestige, and power. History proved otherwise, and there are no surviving records for any successors of Balam-K'uk' to the paramouncy of Palenque.

CONCLUSION

This article has proposed that the socially constituted "person" may serve as one means to bridge the theoretical divide between "individualism" and "holism." It draws on an earlier literature that, with the proper perspective, can be updated to fit more contemporary practice or actor-oriented theories. In applying this concept to the prehispanic Maya, I have focused on how important aspects of personhood were derived from the organization of the Maya aristocracy into "houses," long-lived property-owning groups, as can be determined from the archaeological and epigraphic evidence. I suggest that much of the surviving imagery at Palenque in particular served commemorative purposes in the sense that certain persons

were actively remembered, claimed, and reshaped even long after the deaths of specific name-holders in order to enhance the identities and sociopolitical positions of the living within the framework of allied noble "houses" and their commoner clients. Similar manifestations of commemorative activities characterize other Maya centers, although the organizational principles by which royal persons were constructed and represented were not exactly the same, and new forms were innovated.

For example, the observation that female images and names are far more common in the western Maya area, along the Usumacinta River, than in the rest of the Maya lowlands, indicates more than a difference in gender relations at these various sites (cf. Haviland 1997:10). It also signals significant variation in the construction of Maya personhood, including the contributions of agnatic, uterine, and affinal "houses" and the gendered association of specific qualities that make up a person (e.g., Joyce 1996:186–187). In addition to the greater emphasis on females, these western sites also reveal name repetition by members of the royal "house" and the imagery of bundled valuables. Perhaps these symbols and others form a specific historical complex that developed only in this part of the Maya lowlands. The likely implications of such variability for Maya political organization need to be further explored.

The elaborate material evidence of mortuary and commemorative rituals also indicates the importance and complexity of social identity as both created and deconstructed in a lengthy process that is not neatly confined to the biological events of birth and death. It signifies that identities were not isolable essences but were linked systematically to others—both persons and "houses," both the living and the dead—in the reproduction and transformation of society. There were other important interlocking components of Maya

personhood and selfhood beyond kinship and "house" membership, notably gender, occupation or craft activities, and social estate ("class") (Joyce 1993, 1996), and none of these should be treated in isolation. Studies of Maya artistic depictions of humans have revealed how gender was visually represented and manipulated quite apart from the actual biological sex of individuals (Hewitt 1999:260; Joyce 1996). Similar archaeological analyses of gender imagery elsewhere have also explained how appearance is "a means of social communication between individuals or groups [that] gives a unique understanding of the construction and symbolic reflection of social categories" (Sørensen 1991:122). Indeed, feminist literature has argued against the idea that gender is an essentialized, ahistorical, transcultural, even natural category (Meskell 1996; Strathern 1981). The same type of analysis needs to be applied to the notion of the "individual" in archaeology.

The metaphysical concepts of "self" highlighted in ethnopsychological approaches (e.g., Hill and Fischer 1999; Houston and Stuart 1998) also may serve to relate people to a totality beyond the self. In Mesoamerica, in addition to the "souls" that link people to their ancestors and related social collectivities, the ritual almanac (a 260-day "calendar") was a means of linking cosmic forces to human experience. Monaghan (1998:140) independently suggested that in Mesoamerica, "personhood is not something that is a necessary property of the individual, but is a status that inheres in a collectivity." He proposed that the Maya word for human being, *vinik* (cognate *winik*), which also means "20," is a reference to the 20 day names and associated destinies of the Mesoamerican ritual almanac by which the fate of every human is metaphysically entwined with specific cosmic forces. In assuming one of these 20 names based on the day of birth or baptism (social birth),

each person therefore represents a necessary part of the larger cosmic system, such that “personhood is relational” (1998:140). Monaghan (1998:140) observed that this makes sense given “the great emphasis we see in Mesoamerican societies on the maintenance of corporate rights and the equally strong emphasis on collective versus individual forms of worship.”

Blanton and colleagues (1996:14) had called for more attention to be paid to prehistoric collectivities to understand the trajectories of Mesoamerican cultural evolution because most archaeologists have tended to concentrate on the individualistic processes and outcomes of the network strategy. The pendulum has shifted too far toward the “individual” pole in archaeology, and there is a need to model the bridging mechanisms between corporate groups and individuals, to explore the diversity and transformation of political economies. I suggest that we first consider how different strategies are best interpreted from the available evidence. The Classic Maya, considered to exemplify the network strategy because of the emphasis on pictures of named rulers and the costly enshrinement of royal ancestors, can be seen to evince the same collective construction of person and agency that one would expect to find with the corporate strategy. The emphasis on representations of named humans in Maya art cannot be taken as an emphasis on individual-centered activities and self-glorification. The pictures and texts may be references to persons, dependent for their identities on collectivities, namely the ruling and major subroyal “houses.” The highly visible royal ancestral cults need not have entailed restrictions on group membership but may have had the opposite intent—to attract large numbers of clients lacking descent ties to the authority of a corporate unit by their participation in ritual, political, or economic activities, as has been

described ethnographically (e.g., Boon 1977:63–65; Feeley-Harnik 1991).

A better approach to the unresolved issue of who built Pakal’s tomb is first to consider that it was the work of his “house,” whose members invested much of their own identity and prestige in his person and his memorialization after his death. The more interesting issue becomes investigating why it was that in some, but not all, Mesoamerican cultures since the time of the Formative period Olmecs (beginning ca. 1200 B.C.), powerful corporate groups were sometimes represented in artworks and mortuary contexts as “persons” embodied by individuals, with aspects of “house” identity literally constructed upon the human figure (Gillespie 1993, 1999). Depictions of rulers manipulating specific objects, wearing certain costume items, or located in association with powerful places—all of which signal the sacred qualities of their person—characterize the monumental art of the Olmecs and Maya, but are almost completely absent from the central Mexican highland civilizations of Teotihuacan and the Aztecs. This absence need not indicate the lack of sacred kingship and the embodiment of political power, however. Even for the Postclassic Aztecs, who exemplified the corporate strategy par excellence, the totality of the state was anthropomorphically referred to by the name (title) of the divine king *Mo-teuczoma*, as recorded in colonial documents (Gillespie 1998:245).

As for the majority of archaeological cultures that have left few such direct clues to social identities, it is nevertheless important in interpreting evidence for agency and status differences to recognize how “personhood” was enacted within a network of social groupings. A call for increased consideration for collectivities, by which individuals’ lives are shaped through their interactions with others and their environment, is not a return to the Durkheimian assertion that people’s be-

haviors are determined by societal rules and roles. Indeed, applications of the “house” model have dealt precisely with the innovative and self-reflexive decisions made to maintain the house and increase its prestige (Gillespie 2000a). In particular, the conscious deployment of the enabling principles of kinship—considered a resource and utilized as a strategic language—is what Lévi-Strauss (1987:180) emphasized in proposing the model of the “house” in contrast to the traditional notion of lineages, which is premised on the supposition that kinship rules had to be obeyed if negative consequences were to be avoided. The construction of persons, a constant process throughout (even beyond) people’s lives, puts into practice the organizing principles or generative schemata of society. It is one means by which structure becomes internalized, even as its source lies outside of individual human beings. “Individual and collective are not mutually exclusive but are rather two sides of the same structural complex” (Fortes 1973:314), and it is their recursive relationship, dynamically enacted in practice, that produces society.

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NOTES

¹ For a sample of views for and against methodological individualism in social theory, see Agassi (1960, 1973), Brodbeck (1968), Gellner (1968), Lukes (1970), Stzompka (1994b), and Watkins (1968); for archaeology specifically, see Bell (1992), Meskell (1996), and Sassaman (2000).

² This last form of relationship was explained by Mauss (1954:10) in his famous essay *The Gift* regarding the exchange of objects among the Maori: “It is clear that in Maori custom this bond created by things is in fact a bond between persons, since the thing itself is a person or pertains to a person. Hence it follows that to give something is to give a part of oneself.”

³ For overviews see Bartel (1982), Brown (1981, 1995), Carr (1995), Chapman and Randsborg (1981), Goldstein (1981), O’Shea (1984), Pader (1982), and Tainter (1978).

⁴ As Gellner (1968:258) had earlier noted, “[b]y and large, institutions and social structures and climates of opinion are not the results of what people want and believe, but of what they take for granted.” Ortnor (1984:150) observed that, whereas Bourdieu and Giddens joined other practice theorists in “opposing a Parsonian or Saussurian view in which action is seen as sheer en-actment or execution of rules and norms . . . both recognized the central role of highly patterned and routinized behavior in systemic reproduction. It is precisely in those areas of life—especially in the so-called domestic domain—where action proceeds with little reflection, that much of the conservatism of a system tends to be located. Either because practice theorists wish to emphasize the activeness and intentionality of action, or because of a growing interest in change as against reproduction, or both, the degree to which actors really do simply enact norms because ‘that was the way of our ancestors’ may be unduly undervalued” (see also Dobres and Robb 2000:5).

⁵ For agency approaches that stress “practice” over the conscious rationalizing actions of a few self-aggrandizing individuals, see Lightfoot et al. (1998), McGuire and Saitta (1996), Yaeger (2000), and for a phenomenological approach utilizing Giddens’s concepts, Barrett (1994).

⁶ Linton (1936:114) had made a similar distinction in his discussion of status: “if we are studying football teams in the abstract, the position of quarterback is meaningless except in relation to the other positions. From the point of view of the quarter-back himself, it is a distinct and important entity. It determines where he shall take his place in the line-up and what he shall do in various plays. His assignment to this position at once limits and defines his activities and establishes a minimum of things which

he must learn." The issue is to move beyond a description of society as composed of roles and examine situations in social action when these are constituted by actors.

⁷ See Stuart (1996:162) and Houston and Stuart (1998) for an ethnopsychological perspective on Maya "personhood" based on imagery and textual references to the "self." They use the terms self, person, and individual interchangeably and always in the Western senses, whereas the literature to which I refer stresses culturally specific social constructions, and these concepts are kept distinct.

⁸ Ever since the earliest scientific explorations at Palenque [Blom and LaFarge 1926–1927; Holmes 1895–1897; Maudslay 1974 (1889–1902); Rands and Rands 1961; Thompson 1895], archaeologists have commented on the high number of well built graves, most of them "looted" in the past (empty when discovered), many with multistone slab sarcophagi in chambers under the floors of several temples, intrusive into platforms, and in special burial constructions (Ruz Lhuillier 1965, 1968). Several temples had access to subfloor chambers via a stairway or corridor, such as the Temple of the Lion (Holmes 1895–1897:189). However, the Temple of the Inscriptions is far grander.

⁹ The proximal end of the right humerus had moved 6 cm (Dávalos Hurtado and Romano Pacheco 1992:333). A possible reason for this displacement, suggested by Linda K. Klepinger (personal communication, 1997), is that the upper arm was invaded by necrophagous flies. There would have been plenty of opportunity for this to occur, especially as time was needed to glue the 200 pieces of a mosaic jade mask directly to the man's face after his death (Ruz Lhuillier 1992:195).

¹⁰ Such evidence has been found at, e.g., Caracol, Copan, K'axob, Palenque, Piedras Negras, Tikal, and Tonina (Becker 1992:189; Chase and Chase 1996:61, 1998; McAnany et al. 1999:135; Schele and Mathews 1998:128; Sedat and Sharer 1994; see also Blom 1954).

¹¹ The material focus for the group need not be a dwelling, but may be a shrine, a tomb, the area of houses and fields claimed by the local group [as in the case of the Tzotzil *sna*, "house" (Vogt 1969:71)], the place where a building once stood, or even a portable object.

¹² Multiple holders of the same name also appear in king lists at nearby Yaxchilan (Tate 1992:9). At Tikal (Jones 1991:109) and Copan (Schele and Freidel 1990:311), however, continuity back to a founder was maintained by numerically marking one's position in a line of succession back to the putative founder (see the reference in the text to the Tikal ruler said to be the ninth paramount). These are important clues to differences in the construction of personhood and

the maintenance of continuity, and hence authority and power, of the royal line.

¹³ For the tablets of the three main Cross Group buildings, see Robertson (1991: Figs. 9, 95, 153), Temple XIV Tablet (1991:Fig. 176), and Tablet of the Slaves (1991:Fig.229); for the Palace Tablet, Robertson (1985b:Fig. 271); for the Oval Palace Tablet, Robertson (1985a:Fig. 92); and for the limestone panel at Dumbarton Oaks, Schele and Miller (1986:Fig. VII.3). Stuart (1996:157) demonstrated that stone stelae, which were also the property of named persons, were wrapped in cloth or tied with rope for certain ceremonies.

¹⁴ Bassie-Sweet (1991:249) called attention to the fact that although the Tablet of the 96 Glyphs names Pakal and his second putative son who became ruler, it does not name the elder son, Kan-Balam, who succeeded Pakal and dedicated the "house" of K'uk'. This omission was also an act of reshaping the collective memory of the ruling house and those associated with it.

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