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The Sociopolitical Identity of Classic Maya Ceramics in the Three Rivers Region of Belize: Exploring the Relationship between La Milpa and Say Kah

Lindsay Argo

Overview

Objects of material culture are considered complex due to their multifunctional capability. The manner in which an object functions portrays the object’s agentive power lending to the coherence of the identity displayed. Initially, the object-identity equation may not seem complex. However, the depth of the dynamic relationship between object and identity is increasingly apparent as an object transforms throughout time.

For example, recent diachronic ceramic analysis of the Maya Lowland Three Rivers Region has exposed the dynamic nature of the object-identity relationship. Acknowledging the multidimensionality of the object-identity relationship has encouraged a synchronized shift in the theoretical frameworks of Maya ceramic analysis. Whereas, hierarchical approaches were once favored by ceramicists to analyze the object-identity relationship, the exclusive nature of taxonomic-based systems result in misconstrued and oversimplified interpretations of the object-identity relationship. Therefore, Maya ceramicists evolved their theoretical framework into a heterarchical attribute-based system. Thus, the new theoretical framework is capable of interpreting ceramics in a manner that displays a more accurate representation of the dynamic object-identity relationship. An increasingly accurate depiction of the object-identity relationship results in a more inclusive understanding of the multidimensional identities that existed within the sociopolitical sphere of the Three River Region, and more specifically, the relationship between urban centers and the surrounding mid-level suburban areas.

Culture History of the Lowland Maya

The Early Classic Period (ca. A.D. 250-600)

The regional variation during the Early Classic Period of the Lowland Maya is problematic for archaeologists (Manning 1997:56-59; Sullivan 1997:45). Whereas some sites flourished and are well represented in the archaeological record, other sites remained stagnant and lack significant archaeological data (Manning 1997:56; Sullivan 1997:45). For example, one region that experienced growth and stagnation during the Early Classic Period was the Three Rivers Region (Manning 1997:56; Sullivan 1997:45). Located in the Lalucha Uplands of the Three Rivers Region, the urban and peripheral zones of La Milpa experienced population growth (Manning 1997:59). The existence of highly populated rural areas around La Milpa contrasts with the settlement pattern found in the western portion of the Three Rivers Region. For example, the western portion of the Three Rivers Region experienced population decline during the Early Classic period and its population remained concentrated into centers with very little surrounding rural populations. The contextual variation of the data collected from the Maya Lowlands suggests a reorganization of the sociopolitical realm of the Early Classic Period (Freidel 1979; Sullivan 1997:47).

The Late Classic Period (ca. A.D. 600-800)

Similar to the Early Classic Period, the Late Classic Period brought another rapid rise in population (Manning 1997:62; Sullivan 1997:50-51). However, unlike the regional variation of the Early Classic Maya Lowland population increase, the Late Classic Maya Lowland population experienced a relatively substantial and uniform increase (Manning 1997:62). For example, the largest population levels are reached in the Three Rivers Region during the Late Classic Period (Sullivan 1997:52). More specifically, population inflations of the La Milpa community in the western portion of the Three Rivers Region included large portions of the community’s population inhabiting rural peripheral zones (Manning 1997:63). Consequently, the steep rise in the population of the rural areas surrounding La Milpa and contemporary large scale construction and agricultural advancements throughout the community alludes to a multifaceted community evolved from Early Classic sociopolitical reorganization of hierarchies (Manning 1997:63; Scarborough 1995; Sullivan 1997:52).
A Ceramic Perspective of Regional Variation: A Study by Sullivan and Sagabiel

Background

Sullivan and Sagabiel’s diachronic analysis of Maya ceramics displays the hierarchal nature of “a fluid political organization with flexible power relations” from the Early Classic to the Late Classic (2003:25). Sullivan and Sagabiel utilized ceramic data from excavations conducted by the Pro-Belgian Archaeological Project (PfBAP) and the La Milpa Archaeological Project (LMAP) (2003:25). The PfBAP and LMAP ceramic data represent multiple sites of various size and significance within the regional hierarchy (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:25). Although the sherds were analyzed using the hierarchal type:variety-mode analysis, Sullivan and Sagabiel interpreted the data within a hierarchal framework to allow for the observation of different interacting spheres within a single complex system (2003:25). The application of a hierarchal framework exposes the dynamic nature of the object-identity relationship retained by the analyzed ceramics.

Ceramics in the Early Classic Three Rivers Region

The Early Classic Three Rivers Region ceramic assemblage is relatively descriptive, indicating a largely hierarchal political organization denoted by the function of utilitarian and prestige ceramics (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:31). Ceramics in the Early Classic are characterized by a low percentage of utilitarian wares and a high percentage of luxury ceramics (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:34). The Early Classic luxury ceramics discussed by Sullivan and Sagabiel (2003) are found within Maya tombs. The luxury ceramic grave goods are located in both contexts that are associated with elite and nonelite populations (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:28). These contexts are deduced through the presence or absence of symbolism and connections to large Early Classic centers outside of the Three Rivers Region (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:28). For example, La Milpa yields luxury ceramic grave goods within two very different contexts (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:28,30). Although it yields luxury ceramics, the tomb discovered at La Milpa in 1996 by Norman Hammond lacks any other elite association (i.e. proximity to monumental architecture) (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:28). Similarly, while the Tzakol 3 tomb at La Milpa contains luxury ceramics from surroundings regions of the Three Rivers Region, such as a jade necklace with elite avian imagery, and is located in the center of Plaza A near Temple 1 and Stela 1, it also yields utilitarian ceramics (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:30). The luxury and utilitarian ceramics recovered from the Early Classic Tombs at La Milpa exhibit the interregional sociopolitical connections between the Three Rivers Region and surrounding influential sites (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:31).

Ceramics in the Late Classic Three Rivers Region

The ceramic assemblage of the Late Classic Three Rivers Region is nondescript relative to the ceramic assemblages of the Early Classic and Classic Three Rivers Region. In contrast to the restricted styles and context of ceramics in the Early Classic Three Rivers Region, the Late Classic Maya ceramics discussed by Sullivan and Sagabiel (2003) are valued differently and found in various contexts. In the Late Classic there is an increase in the percentage of locally made utilitarian wares and a decrease in luxury vessels (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:34). For example, the preferential use of utilitarian ceramics is determined by the study of the paste and temper of Three Rivers Region utilitarian wares (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:34). The data collected implies the local distribution of utilitarian ceramics in contrast to the interregional exchange of utilitarian ceramics (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:34). Localized control and consumption of utilitarian ceramics by rural populations shows the reorganization of political structure from large scale regional connections to regional independence (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:34).

In addition, the distribution of both luxury and utilitarian ceramics across many different contexts (i.e. elite ceremonial contexts that are not exclusively burials and rural areas) within the Late Classic Three Rivers Region reduces the impact of restricted ceramic styles on the display of local sociopolitical identities and illustrates interregional independence (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:35). For example, large burial jars, one prestige in style and the other utilitarian, were recovered from an elite burial near an elite Late Classic Structure at La Milpa (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:34). The utilitarian jar, although found in an elite burial context at La Milpa, was the same type of unslipped large-mouthed jar found in many other contexts throughout the Three Rivers Region (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:34). The unslipped large mouthed jar was additionally recovered from both elite ceremonial contexts and rural courtyards (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:34). Similarly, the striated luxury jar type was not exclusively found in elite burial contexts throughout the Three Rivers Region (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:34). Contemporaneous with the elite burial at
La Milpa, the striated luxury jar was also recovered from both rural courtyards and elite ceremonial contexts (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:34). The multifunctional uses of luxury and utilitarian ceramics during the Late Classic Period in the Three Rivers Region reveal that the luxury-utilitarian type dichotomy and their respective roles decrease in influence as context becomes more indicative of the connected sociopolitical identity than type.

Conclusion

The use of restricted ceramic styles to convey sociopolitical affiliations is apparent in the Early Classic Period, but becomes relatively nonexistent in the Late Classic Period of the Three Rivers Region (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:35). In result, Sullivan and Sagabiel infer that the Early Classic is characterized by small elite populations with strong ties to powerful sites outside of the Three Rivers Region. These small elite populations, in addition to population increase in Late Classic rural communities, are indicative of regional independence via the reorganization of sociopolitical spheres (2003:35).

Nodes of Contention: Ceramics and the Identity of the Three Rivers Region Maya

The multifunctional and multivocal nature of the ceramics found in the Three Rivers Region presents various complexities for archaeologists attempting to interpret the sociopolitical identity of a site. Sullivan and Sagabiel’s (2003) diachronic perspective of Three Rivers Region ceramics illustrates the limitations of a hierarchical approach to exploring an object-identity relationship, in which object appropriation, material culture misfires, and the issue of boundary maintenance combine to form the multidimensional object-identity relationship.

Ceramic Appropriation

Appropriation is an important characteristic to consider when interpreting object-identity relationships displayed by the archaeological record. Illustrated by Claude Lévi-Strauss’ (1966) explanation of bricolage, the bricoleur adopts an object of material culture from the engineer of the object and reappropriates the object to best fit the needs and beliefs of his own identity (18-19). Consequently, appropriated objects of material culture amplify the complexity of the object-identity relationship. For example, Sullivan and Sagabiel (2003) were presented with multiple instances of object appropriation when analyzing the ceramics of the Three Rivers Region. There are two different contexts of appropriation that are involved in the ceramic-identity relationship of the Three Rivers Region- (1) appropriation and reappropriation of ceramics by different groups of the ancient Maya and (2) a reappropriation of ceramics within the interpretive framework of the archaeologists. Although the appropriation by different ancient groups is a relatively easy concept to understand, the reappropriation of ceramics within the interpretive framework of the archaeologist may be more complex. Illustrated by Siân Jones (1997), the categorization used to differentiate artifacts within an assemblage impacts the interpretation of the artifacts’ function and significance to the culture being studied (110). Therefore, archaeologists are reappropriating an object within their own cultural domain, resulting in a transformed idea of how the object functions within its original culture.

Ceramic Misfires

Defined by J.L. Austin, a “misfire” occurs when “the procedure which we purport to invoke is disallowed or is botched: and our act is void or without effect” (1975:16). However, describing the outcome as “void or without effect” does not mean that the misfire had no impact; instead, it implies that the misfire did not have the intended effect (Austin 1975:16-17). Although Austin focuses on the misfiring of communicative utterances, he explains that misfires can be applied to other behaviors of both humans and objects (1975:16-24). Consequently, when interpreting ceramics in the Three Rivers Region, archaeologists should consider the possibility of object misfires. There are two types of misfires caused by the Three Rivers Region ceramic assemblages- (1) a misfire within the context of the ancient civilization being studied and (2) a misfire within the context of the archaeologist’s perspective. Dissimilar to the multicontextual nature of appropriation, a “misfire” within the context of the ancient civilization may be more difficult to resolve than a “misfire” within the interpretive framework of the archaeologist. When an object does not act the way it is expected within an archaeologist’s theoretical framework it is obvious. However, the fact that verbal communication with the ancient culture is impossible, realizing that an object has misfired within the subject’s culture is nearly impossible. Although artifact association and ethnography may allude to certain object misfires of the ancient culture, there are only inferences of secondary data.
Boundary Maintenance and Ceramics

Boundary maintenance is important to the archaeological interpretation of cultures because the strongest implementations of cultural systems via material culture are often found on the boundary between groups that fill certain niches within a culture (Barth 1969; Jones 1997:72-79). Similar to the definition of ethnic groups defined by Fredrik Barth (1969) subpopulations of a culture are groups that: are largely biologically self-perpetuating; share fundamental cultural values realized over the unity of cultural forms; make up a field of communication and interaction; and/or possesses membership which identifies itself and is identified by other categories from within the same order (1969:10-11). The diachronic interpretation of boundaries via ceramic assemblages has proven to be both problematic and revealing in the Three Rivers Region because ceramics exhibit the ability of an artifact to both substantiate and distort group boundaries.

The Importance of a Heterarchical Framework

Sullivan and Sagabiel’s (2003) heterarchical analysis of the Three Rivers Region ceramic assemblage acknowledges the many nodes of complication when interpreting the object-identity relationship. Crumley (1995) argues that heterarchy “may be defined as the relation of elements to one another when they are unranked or when they possess the potential for being ranked in a number of different ways” (3). Heterarchy allows for attributes of a culture to be counterposed, however, this does not mean that heterarchy and hierarchy are diametrically opposed (Crumley 1995:3; Tourtellot, Estrada-Belli, Rose, and Hammond 2003:39). Rather, heterarchy includes, but is not limited to hierarchially ranked relationships. Unlike the heterarchical approach to archaeology, the hierarchical approach overlooks the multidimensional attributes of an object. For example, the hierarchical interpretation of Maya sociopolitical organization is complicated by a common confusion of scalar hierarchy for control hierarchy (Aylesworth 2005:119-120). In a scalar hierarchy any level of a hierarchy can affect any other level of that hierarchy; whereas, in a control hierarchy higher levels affect lower levels (Aylesworth 2005:119-120). The confusion of a scalar hierarchy for a control hierarchy mistakes the position of an object as possessing a prescribed value (Crumley 1995:2). Consequently, because the relative importance of an attribute changes simultaneously with an alteration in the context of the inquiry and “the values that result in the continual reranking of priorities,” hierarchal examination of an object would only reveal a portion of its object-identity relationship (Crumley 1995:3). The preceding comparison of hierarchy and heterarchy illuminates the importance of a dynamic theoretical framework when interpreting an equally dynamic object-identity relationship.

Example from the Early Classic Three Rivers Region

The fact that Early Classic ceramic grave goods are located in multiple contexts with various associated artifacts illustrates issues of appropriation, misfires, and boundary maintenance when interpreting the role ceramics play in the object-identity relationship (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:28). As previously discussed, La Milpa yields ceramic grave goods within two very different contexts (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:28,30). For example, the urban center of La Milpa yields both luxury ceramics in a tomb that lacks any other elite association and utilitarian ceramics in a tomb that is associated with multiple elite characteristics (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:28,30). In addition to explaining the multicontextual existence of ceramics in the Early Classic Three Rivers Region, appropriation, misfires, and boundary maintenance display the importance of a heterarchal framework of interpretation.

The appropriation of both luxury and utilitarian ceramics for their use as grave goods could be one explanation for why ceramics show up in unexpected contexts. For example, the luxury vessel found in the tomb located at La Milpa in 1996 is not within close proximity to monumental architecture, yet could have been appropriated by the deceased as a sign of his wealth or likeness elite status (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:28). However, the appropriation of the luxury vessel by a member of an ancient society is different from the expected hierarchal interpretation of a luxury vessel as a marker of culturally acknowledge social status. The multicontextual grave goods found at La Milpa exhibit how the restricted use of ceramic styles to display status, a concept that would be correctly interpreted by a hierarchal view, is not applicable for Early Classic Three Rivers Region tombs. The appropriation of the restricted use of ceramic style and accompanied transformation from restricted use to unrestricted use requires a heterarchal interpretation of the archaeological data. That is, instead of assuming luxury ceramics are exclusively indicative of high sociopolitical status, the bigger picture (i.e. the unrestricted use of ceramic styles) must be examined as well.

Misfires of both luxury and utilitarian ceramics grave goods are other explanations for why ceramics show up in unexpected contexts. For
example, the Tzakol 3 tomb at La Milpa contains both luxury and utilitarian ceramics (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:30). Tzakol 3 is a tomb situated near monumental architecture, and contains avian imagery and luxury ceramics similar to elite burials in other regions outside of the Three River Regions (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:30). Consequently, a hierarchical interpretation of everything about the Tzakol 3 tomb would indicate an elite burial, everything except the enigmatic utilitarian jar. The utilitarian jar is a misfire in the hierarchal context of the archaeological perspective. Unfortunately, as previously discussed, misfires within the ancient culture or not always possible to determine. In the case of the Tzakol 3 tomb, determining whether or not the utilitarian jar is misfiring within the context of the ancient culture is subjective to the archaeologist’s interpretations of the social, political, and economic systems of the Early Classic Three Rivers Region and, therefore, must be approached heterarchically.

Exemplified by the aforementioned appropriation and misfires of ceramic assemblages, the sociopolitical boundaries of La Milpa are distorted by the hierarchal interpretation. However, from the heterarchal approach, the distortion of one boundary is evidence of new boundaries being formed. This concept is attributable to the fact that the beginning of a shift from interregional connections to regional independence was displayed through individuals retaining some conventional style-restricted uses of ceramics employed in areas outside the Three Rivers Region, while also incorporating unconventional uses of local utilitarian wares. However, it is not until trends in multi-use ceramic style become a wide-range group action during the Late Classic that The Three Rivers Region is inferred as a regionally independent area.

Example from the Late Classic Three Rivers Region

Similar to the multidimensionality of Early Classic grave goods in La Milpa, the Late Classic Three Rivers Region experienced a distribution of both luxury and utilitarian ceramics across unconventional contexts. However, the variety of contexts displayed by the archaeological record of the Late Classic Three Rivers Region is indicative of a substantial disregard for the restricted-use styles of ceramics that still existed to some extent in the Early Classic Three Rivers Region. The various contexts in which luxury and utilitarian ceramics are found illustrate how chronologically compounded issues of appropriation, misfires, and boundary maintenance are able to reveal the object-identity relationship of ceramics in the Late Classic Three Rivers Region.

For example, large burial jars, one prestigious in style and the other utilitarian, were recovered from an elite burial near an elite Late Classic Structure at La Milpa (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:34). The utilitarian jar was the same type of unslipped large-mouthed jar which was also recovered from elite ceremonial contexts and rural contexts throughout the Three Rivers Region (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:34). Furthermore, the striated luxury jar existed in rural areas and elite ceremonial context contemporary to the elite burial context it was recovered from in La Milpa (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:34). In comparison to the Early Classic tombs of La Milpa, the containment of both luxury and utilitarian ceramics within tombs, ceremonial centers, and rural area in the Late Classic displayed the establishment of a popular cultural attribute. Whereas tombs are indicative of only one person’s beliefs, the nonrestrictive use of ceramics illustrates a transformation in group organization. The diachronic analysis of major trends in ceramic appropriation during the Late Classic Period impacts the archaeologist’s view of how ceramics are intended to behave within a culture, and what boundaries they are meant to represent. The restricted use of ceramics in the Early Classic Three Rivers Region was meant to distinguish between the social statuses of individuals amongst an interregional network; however, the use of ceramic styles was transformed into a non-restrictive role in the Three Rivers Region as the boundary between regions became more important to the culture during the Late Classic. Therefore, transformed use of different ceramic styles is believed to be indicative of a sociopolitical reorganization of the Three Rivers Region during the Late Classic Period (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003:35).

Applying the Heterarchal Approach: A Ceramic Perspective of the Affiliation between the Minor Center of Say Kah and the Major Center of La Milpa

The analysis of multifunctional and multivocal ceramics and the accompanied interpretation of the object-identity relationship in the Early and Late Classic Three Rivers Region (more specifically within the major center of La Milpa) is a valuable tool for Maya archaeologists. For example, Heather McKillop (2004) concludes that the concern for future Maya archaeologists will go beyond the previous emphasis on “big cities, large architecture, great names, fancy goods, and exotic resources” to search for the middle class through regional surveys and “ceramic studies that go beyond the type-variety system” (318). Responding to McKillop’s call for a
heterarchal mid-level site exploration, Sullivan and Sagabiel’s (2003) ceramic perspective of the sociopolitical reorganization in La Milpa and other major centers in the Three Rivers Region can be applied to Say Kah, a minor center within the La Milpa suburban area.

Sullivan and Sagabiel’s (2003) heterarchal approach to alterations in sociopolitical organization is diachronic and focuses on major centers and accompanied changes in the use of ceramics over time. Whereas, the application of Sullivan and Sagabiel’s (2003) theory to Say Kah is scalar and compares the use of ceramics in the major center of La Milpa to the hypothesized functions of ceramics in its neighboring minor center. The scalar comparison of ceramic uses in the geographically and temporally similar La Milpa and Say Kah is capable of revealing their sociopolitical organization and affiliation.

Background

The site of Say Kah is located within the tropical rainforest of the Three Rivers Region in northwestern Belize (Houk 2005: 45). Since the 1990s Say Kah has generated a lot of archaeological interest due to its close proximity (< 4km to the southeast) to the major center of La Milpa (Houk and Hageman 2007:152). First mapped by surveys completed under Thomas Guderjan and the Programme for Belize Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area in 1990, Say Kah was described as located southwest of La Milpa. However, due to its actual location southeast of La Milpa, Say Kah remained unexcavated for nearly a decade because it could not be relocated from the original maps (Houk 2005:45-46; Houk 2006:17; Houk 2007:127; Houk and Hageman 2007:152). For the duration of the time Say Kah spent “lost” in the rainforest of northwestern Belize, looter’s destroyed much of the contextual integrity of tombs and other ceremonial areas within the architecture of the site with their tunnels, and severely depleted the archaeological record by pillaging ceramics and other artifacts (Houk 2006:18). Failed efforts to relocate Say Kah included a search by William Saturno and the Programme for Belize Archaeological Project (PfAB) in 2001 (Houk 2005:46). However, Jon Hageman was surveying the area southeast of La Milpa in 1999 and rediscovered Say Kah, resulting in the launch of the Say Kah Archaeological Project (SKAP) (Houk 2006:17; Houk 2007:127; Houk and Hageman 2007:153). Say Kah was excavated by SKAP in 2004, 2005, and 2006 (Houk 2005; Houk 2006; Houk 2007; Houk and Hageman 2007:153).

2004 Excavations

The 2004 excavations were limited in scope and mainly focused on cleaning and profiling looters’ trenches and mapping related architectural groups (Houk 2005:48). Three different architectural groups were determined at Say Kah: A, B and C (Houk 2005: 49). Groups B and C are both small courtyards with small associated buildings (Houk 2005:45). Group A includes plaza structures and non-plaza structures that share the northern ridge of the site surrounding the Main Plaza (Houk 2006:18). There are two instances discussed in the site report that include the mention of ceramics (Houk 2005:50). Structure A-1, a plaza structure composed of a basal platform supporting three small temples, yielded no ceramics due to the destruction of provenance by looters’ trenches (Houk 2005: 49-50). However, the architecture is indicative of Early Classic or Early Late Classic traits (Houk 2006:19). Similarly, no ceramics were recovered from Structure A-2 in 2004 (Houk 2006:18). Structure A-2 is the largest mound on site and is situated on the southern edge of the main plaza (Houk 2006:18). Structure A-2 contains a looted crypt void of any ceramic artifacts and chert lenses that are implicative of a possible Early Classic tomb at the eastern edge of the structure (Houk 2005: 50; Houk 2006:19). Although the 2004 excavations of Group A lacked diagnostic ceramic sherds, Group A’s building phases were interpreted as spanning both the Early Classic and Late Classic, the latter in which Say Kah experienced significant expansion of the Main Plaza (Houk 2007:130).

2005 Excavations

Similar to the 2004 excavations, the excavations that took place in 2005 focused on architectural Group A (Houk 2006:18). The 2005 excavations confirmed the 2004 hypothesis that the western side of the Main Plaza experienced multiple construction phases (Houk 2006:27). Unlike the 2004 excavations, diagnostic sherds were recovered from within buildings of Group A excavated in 2005 (Houk 2006:27). In addition to architectural survey, diagnostic ceramic sherds were recovered from the fill of Structure A-5 (Houk 2006:27). However, only the age of the ceramics is mentioned in the site report, there is not a description of the styles of ceramics recovered (Houk 2006:27). The ceramics within the fill of Structure A-5 were dated to the Tepeu 2 phase of the Late Classic Period (Houk 2006:27; Houk 2007:129).
The 2006 excavations advanced the chronological understanding of the Main Plaza (Group A) construction phases (Houk 2007:147). The test-pitting of the Main Plaza yielded diagnostic ceramics indicating that the site was occupied from the Early Classic (based on Tzakol lots) through the Late Classic (based on Tepeu 3 lots) (Houk 2007:147). Although the 2006 excavations were still focused on the architecture of Say Kah, the site report of the 2006 excavations included a detailed report of the ceramic styles recovered (Houk 2007:Appendix A). The ceramic data displays a spectrum of styles indicative of both luxury (i.e. slipped, striated, incised) and utilitarian (i.e. unslipped) wares recovered from both Early Classic and Late Classic contexts of Group A’s monumental architecture (Houk 2007:Appendix A).

Inferences

Say Kah’s position as a mid-level site in relationship to La Milpa is best described as “a congeries of familiar elite components writ small” (Tourtellot, Everson, and Norman Hammond 2003:106). The excavations completed at Say Kah in 2004, 2005 and 2006 focused on architectural transformations of the site to explain the relationship between Say Kah and La Milpa. Similar to La Milpa, Say Kah was occupied in both the Early and Late Classic and experienced significant construction in the Late Classic (Manning 1997:63; Robichaux 1995). The existence of both a main plaza and surrounding courtyard communities at Say Kah mimics the organization of La Milpa on a smaller scale. Furthermore, the three pyramids situated on the east ridge of Say Kah, a architectural feature unique to this region, “evokes the layout of the Great Plaza at La Milpa Centre, with Temples 1-3 forming its eastern edge” (Houk and Hageman 2007:155). In terms of architecture, Say Kah seems to be La Milpa “writ small” (Tourtellot, Everson, and Norman Hammond 2003:106).

Proposed Resolutions

Although previous studies have focused on the architectural parallels between Say Kah and La Milpa, diagnostic ceramics have been recovered from the site (Houk 2005; Houk 2006; Houk 2007). The closest attempt at a ceramic perspective of Say Kah has been the utilization of ceramics to date the architectural contexts from which they were recovered. SKAP’s focus on architecture may seem to be a more pragmatic approach to understanding the sociopolitical relationship between Say Kah and La Milpa because so much of the ceramic data is missing or has lost its provincial integrity due to the looting that has occurred at the site. However, I believe that shifting the focus from the Main Plaza at Say Kah to the small courtyard sites may reveal diagnostic ceramics that are comparable with those found at the Main Plaza.

The recovery of both luxury and utilitarian ceramic sherds from the Main Plaza is only a piece of the puzzle. In order to demonstrate the analogous relationship between the use of ceramics in La Milpa and the use of ceramics in Say Kah, the courtyard communities, presumably associated with everyday tasks, must be excavated. If both luxury and utilitarian ceramics are found within the Main Ceremonial Plaza and the courtyard communities of Say Kah, then hypotheses can be formed regarding the relationship between Say Kah and La Milpa based on previous ceramic perspectives of political organization at La Milpa (Sullivan and Sagabiel 2003). If the style-restricted use of ceramics is absent at Say Kah as it is at La Milpa then the level of sociopolitical influence La Milpa had over Say Kah will reveal itself through similarities in the details of recovery contexts and appropriated use of certain ceramic styles to display a shift in sociopolitical boundaries.

Conclusion

Sullivan and Sagabiel’s (2003) diachronic ceramic analysis of the Three Rivers Region has exposed the dynamic nature of the object-identity relationship through the exploration of appropriation, misfires, and boundary maintenance. The multi-dimensionality of the object-identity relationship displayed by Sullivan and Sagabiel (2003) encourages a heterarchal approach to understanding the object-identity relationship displayed by ceramic usage during the Late Classic Period. Consequently, a heterarchal approach to analyzing the object-identity relationship allows for analogous relationships to be drawn between sites of different scale (i.e. Say Kah and La Milpa) based on similarities of other facets that otherwise may have remained unrecognized by a hierarchal approach. The analogous relationship between sites of various scales presents new direction for the research questions, methods, and hypotheses concerning the sociopolitical relationship between the major center of La Milpa and its neighboring mid-level site of Say Kah.
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Transactional Sex as Agency Granting in Developing Countries: Sex for More than Just Money

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Introduction

The topic of transactional sex is often misunderstood and scholars sometimes lump together many categories of sex as transactional. When monetary transaction or gifting is involved, excluding distinctive sexual acts that take clear advantage of people (usually women) or the exploited (notably children), occasions of sex and gifting between consenting teenagers and adults are more wrinkly than simple prostitution. One must make clear distinctions between coercive sexual practices, which take place in many forms throughout the world, and sex entered into as a choice.

When one argues that transactional sex is a construct of people applying power relationships to gifts, one may see that granting agency to these gifts often validates the sexual relationship between two people into something more. Since sexual relationships often have agency associated with the participant’s interactions, many times sex in exchange for something is more than an act of selling one’s self. In other words, both parties ascribe a value to the gifts or money that is exchanged that transcends their simple monetary value. The objects, money and gifts become empowered within themselves to further connect two people in a relationship.

Specific to this paper, I will discuss the associations of transactional sex as agency-granting, meaning the empowerment of actors within a sexual relationship, for people in developing countries specifically. While attempting this argument, I will make distinctions between a few key dichotomies that exist in the literature concerning the subject of transactional sex. I will discuss the factors that influence transactional sex, the notion of forced sex, through economics, and the choice to engage in sex. I will make the distinction between prostitution and transactional sex. Finally I will explain gift giving in regard to transactional sex and how gifts are given agency by both partners that transcends their value and connects two people who engage in a sexual relationship.

The implications for such a review are important to the greater community as a whole when academics, government agencies and non governmental organizations attempt to focus resources on those who are truly being oppressed or coerced versus those who engage in the same behaviors but are making the conscious and culturally consistent choice of engagement in sexual behavior.

Two Portrayals of Transactional Sex

Transactional sex involves two dichotomies specifically focusing on women and their empowerment in transactional sex. The first set of literature maintains that women are the victims of economics and circumstance and are forced into risky sexual behavior in order to be productive. (Bene 2007: 882). This model emphasizes social pressures and the need to “survive.” A second school of thought is that young women are “social agents who rationally choose their behaviors and negotiate their sexual relationships” (Bene 2007: 882). This idea says that women are rational actors who, far from being taken advantage of, maximize their return in exchange for their engaging in sexual behavior. I must be extremely clear in my view that forced and coercive sexual exploitation is happening throughout the world and much study has been done on this topic in order to combat the terrible oppression of many people who are forced into such practices, notably women and children. But for this review, I am focusing on the situations in developing countries where one views women and men as rational economic and social partners in sexual relationships with a comparably smaller disenfranchisement over their rights.

The Overview - Factors Influencing Transactional Sex

Much of the literature concerning sex choices in developing countries concentrates on health issues, specifically HIV/AIDS (Morison 2001; Plummer 1991; Eisele 2008; Stillwaggon 2003). Through this biological lens, many researchers attempt to understand the social constructs of sex to better tackle public health concerns. One of the larger bodies of literature on the subject focuses on youth in developing nations in sub-Saharan Africa (Mathews 2009; Tenkorang 2008; Wight 2006; Pattman 2005).
Though differences between prostitution and transactional sex might seem mute to some, youth in developing countries generally view transactional sex distinctly different from prostitution (Minki 2005: 57). The reasons for this are cited as gifts not being given at each sexual encounter, an idea to which I will return. Additional reasons for engaging in transactional sex include garnering funds to cover “education-related expenses and gain connections in social networks” as well as “peer pressure to obtain luxury items, such as expensive clothing, jewelry, fashionable hairstyles, accessories, and makeup” (Minki 2005: 57). Gift giving, then, holds a paramount place in social relationships and is interwoven into sexual relationships in developing countries (Plickert 2007; Kaufman 2004). In this case, a western perspective on the idea of prostitution might not be in accordance with the emic cultural beliefs on the same subject in the developing world.

Youth, and more generally older adults, may engage in transactional sex for prostitution’s sake (perhaps in order to make money to survive) but according to most studies, “extreme poverty is not usually the overriding factor leading young women to exchange sex for money or gifts” (Minki 2005: 57). This finding does not suggest that transactional sex sometimes involves more direct exchange of money, similar to prostitution. A better way to look at the situation for this discussion is on a continuum that I have constructed, with pure prostitution on one end, and sex within marriage on the other.

For this purpose, pure prostitution is defined as sex with a partner which there is absolutely no social interactions or obligations beyond the strict sex act. Conversely for this continuum, Marriage sex is the most intense relational component having pronounced obligations and deep social impacts. I must explicitly note that for many situations the “marriage” component I use on this continuum could most surely serve as a placeholder for another type of relationship that similarly embodies a deep, ongoing, romantic or institutionalized bond between people.

Through this continuum, gifts and money act with agency, or power in securing the social relationship beyond sex, and, as I argue through this paper and as I move along the continuum, the sex partners grant a further amount of agency to the transacted objects as one moves to the right on the continuum and the relationship becomes “something more” than the sexual act. This is not to say this continuum is absolute or irrefutable, rather, it provides an overview of my attempt to categorically classify types of transitional sex in order to better understand the agency of objects and the relationships involved in the sex. This continuum should be and is open to disagreement and interpretation.

Prostitution to Quasi-Prostitution in Transactional Sex

Copious and voluminous amounts of research have been conducted by health workers and anthropologists on the subject of prostitution (Edlund 2002). As a logical beginning point for transactional sex, the selling of sex exclusively for money would involve less gift giving and more cash. In a study using commercial sex workers on the Trans-Africa highway in Kenya, women were given a journal and asked to fill out several statistics about the clients with whom they had sex. Variables such as day, time, place and occupation of the client were recorded and subsequently analyzed. (Ferguson 2006: 178). Most notable for our purpose in this paper, sex workers were asked to record whether the client was a regular customer or a “one-off,” or one time, visitor, as the case with over-land truck drivers.

Though the women revealed that “casual clients outnumber[ed] regular clients,” the women still met about 50% of their regular clients in a given month (Ferguson 2006: 179). Though these commercial sex workers have more “one-off” encounters, they are still frequented by men who give them money for regular sex. These regular customers develop stronger relationships with the sex workers as demonstrated by the women’s willingness to forgo condom use, for example (Ferguson 2006: 182).

As these relationships become stronger, sex workers begin to accept gifting in lieu of cash. As regular clients, and especially wealthy men who become “sugar daddies” to young women, their relationship progresses from prostitution to gift-giving (Luke 2006: 5). Since these concurrent sexual relationships last on average of 14 months (Luke 2006: 9), the exchange takes the tone of relationship rather than business transaction.

One might wonder if it is possible for a “prostitute” and a client to have a social relationship beyond the commercial aspect. As gift-giving demonstrates, both people endow agency upon the objects, and even the cash, that is exchanged in a
long-term arrangement. The fact that these regular clients might pay in sugar or clothes elevates the status of their interaction to more of a relationship. The key point in this example and the others that will be presented is that relationships can be transformed by gifting and these gifts act with power, or their own agency, to solidify each relationship.

**Quasi-Prostitution and the Further Building of Relationships**

Additional studies involving money and gifts in exchange for sex concentrate on the empowerment of the women in the decision making process. Indeed many studies have found that “women are not desperate and certainly not passive victims” in the exchange of sex for goods and money (Swidler 2005: 2). Most sexual relationships foreign researchers classify as prostitution are instead relationships with longer-term girlfriends, perhaps in addition to a wife, to which the man will buy gifts and gives money. These gifts are “not negotiated as a price” as a prostitute would do, but are instead “framed by the man and received by the woman as an expression of “love”” (Swidler 3).

In illustrating one such case in Malawi, an anthropologist studying sexual relationships interviewed a group of women from a small trading center to gauge their experiences with sex workers. One woman told a story of a wife who was tired of her husband’s regular extra-marital sex. She went up to the local bar and started screaming at the bar girl who had been sleeping with her husband.

Her insults included the fact that she, as his wife, got most of the money and that the bar girl only received a small amount when she had sex. The bar girl hollered back to the wife that “your husband is not for you alone! He...[is] sleeping with all of us in here because we also need what he has. We need the penis as well for once it enters on us we just know that we are to eat that day. No penis no money!” (Swidler 2005: 6).

Whether or not cultural beliefs support or reinforce this type of action, sex in Malawi, and specifically in this context, “naturally goes along with material benefits so that erotic and material interests reinforce, rather than compete with one another” (Swidler 2005: 7). The actors in sex are searching for “ties of dependence” rather than simply money and something more complex is going on other than sex (Swidler 2005: 7).

The dichotomy of labeling sex as prostitution when money is exchanged discounts the relationship building qualities of the material benefits of the act. Notably, the gifts and money exchanged while in a sexual relationship that is not “one-off” are granted agency to act as glue to bind people together in social, rather than exclusively sexual, relationships.

The relationship becomes more functional than simply the selling or pleasure of sex. In studies on women and fish-for-sex, authors describe the transactions involving fish in the poorest developing communities where a cash economy is non-existent (Bene 2007). In this sale of sex, female fish traders, usually older, widowed and divorced women engage in activities because “they lack the cash necessary to purchase the fish from the fishers and are therefore ‘forced’ to offer sex to secure their access to the product (Bene 2007: 876). But this “forcing” may be ethnocentrically applied and is certainly not the mentality of local people, including women.

![Prostitution Sex](Prostitution.png) ![Marriage Sex](Marriage.png)

The women who are globally involved in “Fish-For-Sex” are not considered by their local communities as in the same category as prostitutes (Bene 2007: 883). Instead, their activities are view by society as legitimate business ventures where they “purchase” fish through an economically productive means. The idea that women are being taken advantage of in this fish relationship does not reflect the fact that “women are socially active agents” in this system “who may rationally choose their behaviors and negotiate the nature and continuance of their relationships with their [sexual and business] partners” (Bene 2007: 883).

This point is echoed by interviews of informants engaging in transactional sex for fish but is ignored by the (mostly Western) non-governmental organizations which work on women’s empowerment issues in developing countries. They decry the “Fish-For-Sex” practice while local people separate it from the realm of both prostitution and being taken advantage of (Bene 2007: 884).

The fish, as the currency for a given culture, act with agency granted unto them by both the women and the fishermen. Again, this transaction is focused on the relationship that is built by the women and the application of which serves an economic means but is chosen much of the time rather than forced.

**Transitioning from Quasi-Prostitution to Something Else**

Transactional sex is mostly discussed in terms of women as the people able to assign agency to money or gifts – being the ones who accept or reject sex.
many settings, most notably prisons, a female role is played by a male and the relationship becomes wrinklier in the sense that traditional male roles are exchanged for new relationships. Numbers of studies have been done by those seeking to look inside prison walls in search of constructions of relationships (Wolff 2008). Sexual relationships most surely are manifested through different means in different parts of the world.

In South Africa, the sexual relationships of prisoners are complex. Though men routinely involve themselves in sexual relationships with other men, they are not considered homosexual relationships. Through intimidation, agreement and functionality, men might trick another younger inmate into being his sexual partner (Gear 2005). Specifically, an older man might be nice to a newly arrived, younger inmate. He will give him gifts and promise him protection in exchange for loyalty. By the time the young man accepts these gifts and protection; he is indebted to the older man and becomes his “wifie” (Gear 2005: 198). Reemphasizing the power relationships that are contractually “locked in” once a young man accepts gifts, the older man is the penetrator while the wifie is penetrated. Through the whole process the wifie does not enjoy the relationship but is forced into it by the acceptance of gifts. As a man with a wifie explains, “I cannot just give a person 20 rands and buy anything I want to buy him’ and tomorrow he says I have raped him” (Gear 2005: 200). In this case, the young man is equated with a woman, which is horribly embarrassing but has no cause to exit the “relationship” because he is forced to accept gifts from his “husband.”

Prostitution Sex                    Marriage Sex

Though a young person has the capacity to throw off the yoke of wifie status, the entrenched gang structure makes it difficult to do so. Restoring manhood might involve stabbing another inmate or a guard (Gear 2005: 201) and many wifes with shorter sentences would prefer to suffer in the dominated position than extend their sentence further. All wifes do not speak of being dominated once they return to their families. Otherwise, as a prisoner describes, his “wife and children [will think], ‘You’re nothing! After all, you’ve been raped; you are just as good as women’...Of course he can’t tell his family!!” (Gear 2005: 199).

In this context, though the sex is not welcomed, it is tolerated as the cost of receiving goods from the dominant men. Since this perpetuating cycle continuously loops, and the only way out of the loop is through violence that will garner a longer stay in prison, most young wifes would rather continue to accept the material gifts, knowing full well that all parties in the prison grant agency to them as acceptance being the signature on the contract of a continued relationship. I place this example further along the continuum because, however unhealthy and unwanted the relationship between a prisoner and his wifie may be, the relationship is rooted in goods, money and protection to which the wifie is afforded. The agency for the goods, cigarettes, items from the prison commissary and protection, are bestowed by both the dominant man, the oppressed man, and by the gang structure that recognizes that goods equal sex.

Sex Tourism as Transactional Sex

Extensive literature has also been written about sex tourism (Jacobs 2009; Romm 2008; Padilla 2008) and, to incorporate into the discussion of agency, the idea that gifts can be granted in exchange for the implicit consent to have sex. Sex tourism most certainly is widespread throughout the world and many of these situations include women and prostitution. Aside from literally paying of money for sex, which the quantity of literature suggests is the most common form of sex tourism, there are some people in developing countries who attach themselves to tourists in hopes of scoring gifts and riches. Different from the outright selling of sex, these “workers” sell an experience that doesn’t necessarily have to be paid back in cash.

In the country of The Gambia, a tourism culture exists where female Europeans fly down to stay on the beautiful beaches and, perhaps, engage in a sexual fantasy relationship with a local young man. These local beach-boys, called bumsters, share accounts of their sub-culture that attempts to secure relationships with older white women in hopes of securing gifts (Nyanzi 2005). These gifts are never enumerated by the women who call upon the bumsters for a sexual relationship, but are mutually understood by both bumster and white woman. The goal of the bumsters is to secure these mutually understood gifts. Within the bumster culture there are three specific levels of young men based on the level of gifting that has taken place between a bumster and a white woman:

There are three levels of bumsing: primary school level in which amateur bumsters hustle and see what they can get without working at all – they openly hassle [white
These *bumsters* and the women both view the relationship as one of mutual giving. *Bumsters* are expected to give pleasure with their “large members,” for which the women’s desire is explicitly made clear (and labeled as such), and the women in turn respond with gifts. Because this relationship begins and extends on the basis of an understood benefit to both woman and *bumster*, and because the relationship is facilitated by gifting but in a closer and mutually understood way, I place this example further on the continuum. Agency is ascribed to both sets of “gifts” and unconsciously agreed upon. Instead of a “one off” encounter, *bumsters* keep relationships alive long after the white women have gone back to Europe. Ascribing value to the *bumsters’* penis and the *bumsters* ascribing agency to the women’s gifts, both partners form a relationship that uses the most carnal elements of sex, being the “big black organs” and young “black bodies,” with the attention and pocketbook of the white women.

In a related example, I lived in Malawi, Africa for close to two years and, during my second year I set up a volunteer program to bring other Americans over to volunteer. After some months my first set of volunteers decided to go on vacation to Victoria Falls, Zambia. When they returned, one of my housemates told me how she met a very handsome young man from Uganda who was a river rafting guide. He was to visit us in a few weeks time on his way north to Uganda. From the time of her vacation until six weeks later when he visited, he sent “love” text messages to her on her mobile phone. As the date of his arrival approached and she realized the potential expectations, she became very nervous for his visit and decided that she was not going to spend time with him when he arrived. She begged me to entertain him for the three days he would be present.

Yotam arrived and I spent a lot of time with him. He quickly found out that my roommate did not want to see him and was not looking for a sexual relationship. He was indifferent and explained, after an evening of drinking local beer, that he knew he would probably have to sleep with her so that he could stay at our place for a couple days as he traveled north to his home. This was his expected exchange: his physical relationship for a stay at our house. I asked him to explain more about this and about sexual relationships at Victoria Falls, where he works for nine months of the year.

Since he works at one of the largest tourist locations in Africa he is in constant contact with “whites” as they visit. He said that he normally will “woo” a white woman or girl for a couple days. During this process the woman buys him many things such as clothes and dry goods as well as paying for all entertainment in exchange for him taking her (and usually her friends) out to the clubs by Victoria Falls. He said he and his friends (who also engage in these activities) have learned that it is best to sleep with the woman only on her last night. In this way, Yotam can be interacting with multiple women at any given time, only needing to sleep with them on their last night. They spend the final night passionately and then he usually asks the woman if she will help support him and his family, perhaps to pay for “school fees.” The woman usually agrees. Each morning, he sends emails to many women all over the world with whom he has been constantly communicating. He said that many of them respond with gifts of cash from time to time.

I asked him about any other relationships and he said he keeps an African girlfriend in Victoria Falls and uses some of the money to buy her things. I asked him if he had any longer encounters with women and he said that one older woman, in her late 40s, asked if she could take him on safari all over Southern Africa. He agreed and said that she treated him excellently. She bought him everything he could want, including new clothes, and in return she asked that they have sex two or three times per day for about a two week period. She left him all of her remaining foreign currency, which was a hefty sum and after she left he never heard from her again.

Yotam and his women were in a relationship that, like the *bumsters*, was facilitated by the transaction of goods for which expectations were apparent. The sexual and cultural experience that Yotam provided equated with the monetary value that women tourists exchanged. Far from being a “prostitute,” Yotam engaged the women beyond the
initial experience and created a relationship with the women beyond the sex.

Mutual Benefits for Transactional Sex

Some anthropologists have suggested the inherent qualities of transactional sex transcend prostitution from such deeply historic constructs as bride price (Dunkle 2007: 1236). Specifically, cross-cultural African studies peg the exchange of sex with money (or gifts) by young women from 5% to 78%. The purposes of transactional sex are reemphasized as not simply economic but to help with advancement in education, to gain employment or business opportunities, or to achieve a higher status among peers where “youth cultures which prioritize conspicuous consumption” (Dunkle 2007: 1236).

Transactional sex becomes mutually beneficial when the woman expects the man to provide “food, cosmetics, clothes, transportation, items for children and family, school fees, somewhere to sleep, alcohol or a “fun night out”” (Dunkle 2007: 1238). With the exception of “one-off” casual partners who might accept cash or gifts as a payment, a relationship develops from consensual and constant sex and gifting. Resources are more likely to be shared, through gifting, with a constant partner than with a “one-off” sex worker (prostitute) and more intimate resources (those which I define as not cash or alcohol) are more likely to be shared with a constant partner than a “one-off” sex worker (Dunkle 2007: 1240). This type of gifting supports the ideas that transactional sex is a form of social relationship building and not of prostitution. This falls directly into line with the central argument of this paper that says as people prescribe more agency to gifting; the social culture of the gifts, even money, becomes more important than the sexual act and is culturally necessary for a good social relationship.

A case study in contemporary Papua, eastern Indonesia, shows that transactional sex as “secret sex” involves gifting in sexual relationships among youth. The study seeks to explain youth changing sexual patterns from traditional to more free while still maintaining control over the process of sex. Specifically Butt writes of youth participating in sexually transgressive behavior by expressing “agency through their actions.” The crux of their control through agency lies on their belief that “they have control over facets of their lives” (Butt 2007: 114).

Within Papua’s “secret sex” culture, “young people can display intentionality through their sexual practice” by both engaging in transactional sex and choosing sex partners (Butt 2007: 115). In these relationships of “secret sex” the sexual intercourse is not the main point of focus; it is instead the control over which the youth exhibit the act and the gifting that takes place to secure its social place. Specifically within “secret sex,” a boy will notice a girl and then send an intermediary, usually a friend, to secure the sex.

The girl can accept or refuse. Both know that they cannot be caught by their family or elders because there are hefty fines involved and marriage might become a requirement. Once a meeting is arranged, they come together in “empty houses or dark alleys” or “empty storage sheds of abandoned village homes outside of town” as to not get caught. Never is it acceptable to have sex outside as this act “poisons the soil and makes couples sick” (Butt 2007: 119).

Before the sex, which is always fast and to the point, the boy will “regularly offer a ritual bracelet as a prelude to sexual encounters.” The girl always expects a gift though “what the gift is appears less important than the giving and receiving of it” (Butt 2007: 119). To illustrate this further, on many occasions the gift is a betel nut, which is bought very inexpensively: a handful for around ten cents. Though one might view the nut itself as worthless since its monetary value is so extremely low, the act of gifting is itself still the primary function. Girls who have sex without gifting are seen as morally reprehensible (Butt 2007: 119).

As a further development to this “secret sex,” a “sex IOU” has developed whereby the boy does not have anything for the girl during the act and, therefore, owes the girl some kind of good. Agency for the material goods are fixed so stringently in this society that young, lustful people must connect a gift to the sexual act even if no such gift is available. The presence of nothing is no excuse for giving nothing. The “sex IOU” serves to unconsciously solidify the social relationship of gifting with the sexual act itself. For this reason, the relationship with gifting as necessary to the encounter places this occurrence further on the continuum.

Stretching our Thinking of Transactional Sex: Same Sex Temporary “Marriage”

Renegotiating transactional sex into further stable structures, one might look at a case study of mining compounds in South Africa. In such areas, men live in close proximity with no women allowed into the
camp. From within this context, as written about in
prisons and the military, sexual relationships develop
between men and exclude women. These
relationships are more about functionality than of
sex, though transactional sex is surely a factor in the
exchange of money and services (Niehaus 2002).

As a group of informants discusses the
relations between men in South African mines from
the 1980s and 1990s, they describe a system where
some men withdrew their masculine identities in
favor of additional gifts and money. To begin, the
men describe the single-sex dormitories where
women were forbidden to visit. Other
accommodation was impossible to find and
sometimes men would resort to building a shanty for
a wife’s visit. Frequently the mine would call the
police on the visiting wives. The police would then
tear down the shanty and arrest the wife! Additionally, men saw masturbation as
compromising one’s health but saw the need to keep
balance within one’s self by having sex (Niehaus
2002).

Mining men would be able to visit
prostitutes in nearby towns, and many did, but the
culture dictated that relations with sex workers was
“not conducive to masculine dignity” (Niehaus 2002:
83). Many of the prostitutes were seen as very
unclean. Instead, the better alternative was for a
masculine man to choose a younger man who was
willing and accepting to become his “faithful
partner.” These relationships mimicked a traditional
marriage outside the compound with intimate sexual
relations and comforts of a solid relationship. A large
bride price was even paid to the young man’s older
brother and a public wedding ceremony was held
(Niehaus 2002: 84).

A young man who accepted to be a wife was
paid a large sum and took over domestic duties for
the man, including cleaning, cooking and serving
him. The young boy was expected to “offer himself
for thigh or anal sex” whenever the older man wanted
him (Niehaus 2002: 84). The younger man’s wife
(who, many times, knew of the second “marriage” of
her husband to the older man) was also sent money
each month from the older man to share her husband.
Asked why these men preferred the young men as
wives instead of other women from the villages, older
men responded that it was “cheaper to have sex with
men” and that they “ate less expensive food than
women did, and never demanded clothes” (Niehaus
2002: 85). Additionally the perception was that one
was less likely to get a sexually transmitted infection
from another man.

In this case, agency is ascribed to the gifts
and financial support offered by older men to the
younger. The younger, being fully cooperative in the
venture, benefit from the marriage as they increase
their earnings substantially. Additionally, they are
able to send more money back to their (female) wives
and able to support their families to a greater extent.
Transactional sex, in the case of same-sex marriages
of mine workers, served the social aspect of allowing
for relationships to form and gender roles to be filled.
Both parties benefited. Unlike prison sex in South
Africa, in the miner relationships partners were
equally willing to be in the relationship as both saw it
mutually beneficial through the transfer of gifts,
money and services.

Sex as Power through Agency Allocation

In cases where there is a perceived “dominant” and
“submissive” role, usually encompassing the binary
of men and women, one must shift his or her thinking
from the idea that the submissive is always without
power in a transactional sexual relationship. Though
there are people who have “one-off” sex for money,
also called “hit and runs” (some statistics put this at
15% of all non-marital sexual encounters), most
transactional sex is between two people who know
one another and consider each other as committed
boyfriends or girlfriends (Poulin 2007: 2386).

In many parts of the developing world
including Malawi, a commitment to be boyfriend and
girlfriend is an acceptance of sex with the
understanding that gifts will be exchanged. If a
woman, for example, does not wish to engage in sex
or receive gifts, she will simply deny any gift from a
boy and will not accept a proposal to be one’s
girlfriend. It is almost absolute in Malawi that to be
in a formal relationship, with proposal and
acceptance garnered, requires both sex and gifting.
There is no ignorance of expectations on either side
so participants willingly enter a relationship, through
formal proposal, only if and when they are willing to
accept sex and gifting.

The notion that girls are taken advantage of
in sex denies the idea that girls and boys alike simply
enjoy sex. “Girls expect to be “giving” sex, but
clearly enjoy it, finding it “sweet”” (Poulin 2007:
2387). Additionally, a man is willing to give gifts and
money to his girlfriend or lover because “both sexes
benefit from female partners’ improved social
standing. Girls use money to buy luxury items, such
as body lotions or cookies, bringing them admiration
from their peers” (Poulin 2007: 2387). If one still
doubts the empowerment of women in a transactional sexual relationship, one can look at Cornwall’s work among the Yoruba in Nigeria where “women’s increased earning potential has not altered social expectations that men spend on their wives (Poulin 2007: 2388).

The material objects involved in gifting speak twofold: first as status symbols to the exterior people viewing the relationship and second to the internal expectations of the couple. Gifting is important to position one’s partner high so that the gift giver, usually the man, is seen as a good provider. Likewise, gifting is important to the person receiving the gift as a solidification of the social relationship. Gifting, which the man might control, is reciprocal to the sex, which the woman usually controls. Gifts may, and are, at anytime rejected thereby asserting the woman’s control and not allowing a man to “demand” sex for a gift that was not accepted.

**Conclusion**

Transactional sex is more about relationships and social structures than about the act of intercourse. Within a continuum, participants engage in sex for material benefit but transcend the objects or money to encompass a social network. This network is manifested by the participants’ granting of agency to the gifts and money. These gifts serve as powerful adhesive to “stick” these social relationships together. Agency, or the magnets of social interaction through gifts manifested through sex, is granted by both men and women in relationships and may follow a variety of patterns. Depending on the circumstances, gifting may serve a variety of purposes including economic, as with the “Fish-For-Sex” example. It may also serve as a socially acceptable excuse to engage in sexual relations as the Papua “secret sex” example points out.

Transactional sex is more complicated than the act of intercourse. The ascription of agency granted to gifts and money is profoundly important to both parties who are engaging in sexual relations. Transcending all reasons for gifting, the transfer of goods through gifts or currency solidifies the social connections establishing and maintaining a relationship quite different from one that is achieved (or not achieved) through simple prostitution.

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Introduction

In the early evening hours of April 25, 1838, the steamboat *Moselle* disembarked from the Public Landing at Cincinnati, and made a routine excursion a couple miles up the Ohio River to take in more passengers and cargo. However, as the packet was putting out for its destination back downstream to St. Louis, Missouri, it suddenly erupted into a violent explosion that scattered people and debris all over the river (see Figure 1).

Soon after the blast, witnesses observed a “father, who lay partially deranged, with a scalded child on one side – a dead daughter on the other – and a wounded wife at his feet,” and many other similar tragic scenes (“Awful Catastrophe” 1838:1). It was estimated that of the 276 men, women, and children on board, about 86 passengers were killed and another 57 were deemed missing. The remaining passengers were saved from the wreckage, many of whom were listed as “badly injured.” By the next day, a committee was created by the mayor of Cincinnati charged with the duty of investigating the causes of the explosion on the steamer. The investigative committee confirmed the presuppositions of a local broadside produced about the accident, suggesting that “simply…she had too high steam” (“Awful Catastrophe” 1838:1). The dangerous pressures created in the *Moselle*’s boilers turned the fully laden boat into a time-bomb ready to blow up.

Through much of the nineteenth century, when steam was the primary source of power for long distance travel or manufacturing, incidents like that of the *Moselle* were not uncommon. In 1856, over a quarter century later, James T. Lloyd produced a volume about the steam navigation on western waters that included hundreds of descriptions of steamboat accidents, many of which were the result of steam engine explosions. He noted in his preface that he did not write the book “to gratify a morbid taste for the horrific,” but to teach people of the “gross and criminal mismanagement of steam power which...[had] made the navigation of the Western waters so eminently perilous and destructive to human life” (Lloyd 1856:iii). While the engineers were often at fault for committing grievous errors in allowing such high pressures to build up in the boilers, the fact remained that steam engines were extremely volatile and were potential dangers to anyone near them. Due to the threat and expense of higher-output steam engines, many people in nineteenth and early twentieth century American cities like Cincinnati preferred to use the cheaper, safer, and in some cases, more effective power of horses.

The vast number of boiler blasts was, in all probability, the result of the increasing popularity of the steam engine in all areas of the United States over the course of the nineteenth century. Initially, the low-pressure steam engine developed by Thomas Newcomen in 1712 lacked power, was expensive to maintain, and had limited functionality by second half of the eighteenth century. These setbacks thus reduced its employment in most industries through much of the 1700s. However, the creation of the Columbian high-pressure steam engine in 1804 by
Oliver Evans, increased the effectiveness of steam engines, making them a better source of power for industrial use in applications previously dominated by water, and specifically, animal power (Pursell 1969). Slow but steady improvements in steam technology through the first several decades of the nineteenth century established critical foundations for Cincinnati to “become one of the nation’s great centers of machine tool trade” (Pursell 1969:100).

Yet, as illustrated in the 1838 Moselle accident, developments in the power output of steam engines did not necessarily improve their safety. As Hills explains, many “people were afraid of the dangers of using steam at higher pressures through the added responsibilities that this might entail, particularly when the lives of working people might be at stake,” and that because of its inherent danger, “it took a long time to convince manufacturers of the advantages of high-pressure steam” (1989:70,163). However, by the 1860s this fear was allayed as more precise machining techniques continued to provide stronger and more airtight cylinders, and as the breakthrough in the understanding of thermodynamics facilitated advances in boiler output, fuel efficiency, and most important, safety. Ultimately, the major cities of the United States could not have grown or become significant manufacturing and commercial hubs without the employment of steam power.

Cincinnati, in particular, gained much from the innovations in steam engine technology. As some of the early towns in the Western frontier “turned enthusiastically to industry” and “others…maintained their reliance on commerce,” Cincinnati “experimented with both” (Wade 1996:42). With the introduction of Evans’ high-pressure steam engine in 1804, manufacturers began replacing older hand, animal, and water-powered machines with newer, and seemingly, more advanced steam-powered machines. But Cincinnati became more centered on trade due to its strategic location on the Ohio River and the advantage that steamboats provided in the transportation of people and goods both up and down the river systems, though steam-powered industry was developed on a small scale in the town’s early stages (Wade 1996:58-59). However, such an account of progress in Cincinnati during the 1800s tends to focus too narrowly on the role of steam-power, overemphasizing the significance of steam and neglecting to take other important factors into account. In other words, steam was not the only source of power that helped Cincinnati become a influential urban center in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Horses were utilized by many areas of Cincinnati to not only supplement steam engines in production, industry, and travel, but to even serve as more efficient means of power.

Filling this void, it is the goal of this research to illustrate how important the horse was to Cincinnati from its beginnings in 1788 through the 1910s. By identifying and explaining the role that horses played in powering various sectors of Cincinnati, this study will demonstrate that despite the growing popularity of steam power in the nineteenth century, people in and around Cincinnati continued to utilize horses for their strength and endurance in completing many different tasks. This paper aims to move outside the traditional narratives of nineteenth century America to suggest that though the use of horses in industrializing urban areas seemed outmoded or old-fashioned, they were often employed alongside or in place of steam engines in Cincinnati because they were very flexible, efficient, cheap, and reliable sources of power. And since other works of American urban history have already noted the benefit that horses had on the growth and expansion of cities, then this research will not address the role of the horse in basic transportation that horses have typically been associated with, such as haulers of carriages, carts, or wagons.

Instead, it investigates the influence of horses in applications that have not been commonly regarded as typical work for horses. In other words, it primarily looks at the use of horses in operations that the majority of people in Cincinnati did not witness or come into daily contact with, such as in gristmills, manufacturing, or other unusual modes of moving. A second idea that this study addresses is the extent to which Cincinnatians really understood their horses as just machines. While many people exploited the strength and endurance of the horse and often pushed the animals to their “breaking” points, not everyone regarded their horses as unfeeling things. Rather, people in and around nineteenth and early twentieth century Cincinnati demonstrated a persistent and widespread belief that their hard-working horses deserved respect for the services they provided their owners, handlers, and the river town as a whole.

**Horse-Powered Gristmills**

Soon after Cincinnati’s founding in 1788, horses provided several necessary and beneficial services to many of the new settlers, and also the village as a whole. In order for the small camp to become established as a settlement, and grow into a thriving urban center, the basic needs of the people needed to be met. First, the settlers had to have a consistent supply of food and water to sustain them through periods of intense labor and long winters. Second,
proper shelter was necessary to keep the men, women, and children safe from the harsh effects of the surrounding environment. With the creation of a reliable food and water source and effective shelter, the people of early Cincinnati could then focus on establishing and improving their local economy to bring more people, money, and prosperity into the region.

Horses in and around the young town of Cincinnati, as in most other rural areas in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century America, were goaded and prodded by farmers to plow the hard earth to provide good soil for proper agricultural growth and prosperity. The painstaking work done by plow-horses was a great help to the settlers because it allowed them to efficiently cultivate the land and produce a surplus. However, once the crops had been harvested, the horses’ work was still not done. Not only were horses working the fields, but in performing an equally important function, they were subsequently utilized to refine the grain and corn into flour and meal for bread and other foodstuffs. For example, as noted in The Cincinnati Directory of 1819, by 1791 (three years after the town’s initial settlement), “a horse mill for grinding corn” was established to produce a viable source of corn meal for the growing village (1819:26). While no other available sources record the existence of other horse-powered mills in Cincinnati before 1791, it is likely that other grist-mills turned by horses or oxen would have been quickly created to feed the steadily growing population. It is also interesting to note that though “horse mills were a common resort in many communities,” especially “where millstreams or mill seats were wanting,” available resources do not indicate the use of water-powered mills despite Cincinnati being situated on a major river system (Hunter 1979:13).

Although Cincinnatians would have been able to feed themselves without this more efficient alternative to hand-powered mill stones, they would not have been able to produce enough meal to feed the increased population necessary to transform Cincinnati from a small frontier town into a bustling urban center. Moreover, settlers in Cincinnati relied heavily on the protection provided against Indian attack by the garrison of United States militiamen stationed at Fort Washington erected adjacent to the town in 1789. Before a respite of peace and safety resulting from the Treaty of Greenville signed between U.S. Gen. Anthony Wayne and representatives of several Indian nations on August 3, 1795, Cincinnati farmers, millwrights, and bakers worked together to feed the hundreds of American soldiers posted near the town (Painter 2006:7). Therefore, horses helped ensure the survival of the early settlement at Cincinnati by not only serving in cavalry units in defense against Indian attack, but also powered the much needed millstones that provided meal for the village’s citizens and soldiers.

Equids seemed to be the primary sources of milling power until the early second decade of the nineteenth century as steam engines began to be employed in Cincinnati. The steam-powered mill owned and operated by the Cincinnati Manufacturing Company “erected in the years 1812, ’13 and ’14,” along the banks of the Ohio River became the “most capacious, elevated and permanent building in this place [Cincinnati]” (Drake 1815:137). Once in full operation after 1815, the grist-mill driven by a seventy horsepower steam engine was expected to produce about 700 barrels a week, or nearly 36,400 barrels of “superior quality” flour per annum (Drake 1815:147). In addition to grinding flour, this massive nine-story tall steam mill was also designed to house spaces for flax seed oil mills, fulling mills, and other machinery that processed the raw wool and cotton into material for clothing. In fact, Daniel Drake implies that his description of the estimated output, the immense structural details, and large amount of construction material used in the steam mill was an effort to draw people to Cincinnati, or possibly to attract potential outside capitalists into financing other improvements in the burgeoning river town.

However, despite the enthusiasm for this behemoth, the steam-powered mill did not reach the level of productivity that it was claimed capable of achieving. As the 1819 Cincinnati city directory illustrates, only about 15,000 barrels of flour a year were being made at “the Steam Mill and one or two horse flour mills in the city” (The Cincinnati Directory of 1819 1819:50). Not only was the steam mill producing less than half as much flour as it was expected to, it was not fully responsible for the annual production of flour in Cincinnati. Rather, after about thirty years of growth and expansion, the people of Cincinnati continued to utilize horses to turn their millstones. These local horse-powered mills undoubtedly aided in refining the 130,000 barrels of flour totaling almost $650,000 in revenue that were exported from Cincinnati and its environs between October 1818 and March 1819. In lieu of the advances promised by the introduction of steam-power into manufacturing, horse power still proved to be a reliable, effective, and widely employed source of power in grinding flour necessary for feeding the city and producing Cincinnati’s number one export of the early 1800s (The Cincinnati Directory of 1819 1819:53; Drake 1815:148).

Even as steam engines became much more widespread and popular by the 1850s, local mill manufacturing companies still recognized the utility
of horses in driving millstones, and thus, continued to build horse-powered mills. Renowned Cincinnatian, Charles Cist, published several notices in his Cist’s Weekly Advertiser from 1845 that the “power necessary to drive one of these mills,” was “not more than that of three horses, or the equivalent water of steam power” (“Portable Flour Mills” 1845:1). He believed that with the help of three hard-working horses, these patent mills could “grind fourteen to sixteen bushels [of flour] per hour,” which was “as good a performance as a merchant mill” (“Portable Flour Mills” 1845:1). And since portable mills were often built for the underdeveloped regions of America (specifically the south, west, and southwest) and areas “where water-power is scarce,” horses again proved invaluable in providing the necessary muscle to turn the millstones and produce flour for consumption (Cist 1851:193; see Figure 2 for an example of how horses powered portable mills). Interestingly, despite being a large manufacturer of steam engines in the 1840s and 1850s, the primary item produced by the J.H. Burrows & Co. Foundry of Cincinnati was a portable mill operated by horse-power.

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Horse-Powered Water Supply

Horses not only powered the grist-mills that helped feed the growing population of Cincinnati, but they also provided the energy required to pump drinking and washing water from the Ohio River to reservoirs in town in the early nineteenth century. For several years after Cincinnati’s founding, many of the settlers engaged in “toting” water by hoop and buckets up from the river (Cist 1851:102). While the authors of the WPA narrative of Cincinnati industry argue that carts pulled by horses were utilized as early as 1791 to collect and distribute river water to the townspeople, Cist records in his 1851 treatise that the practice was not begun until James McMahan sought to meet the increasing demand for water during a very hot and dry summer in 1802. The two sources are in agreement, however, that by 1806 enterprising men began constructing water-carts to supply the residents with fresh water as a business. Cist suggests regarding the significance of these casks upon wheels: “The facility this water-cart afforded, was as great a desideratum, and as marked an epoch in the history of the progress of the comforts of the town, as any subsequent improvement for furnishing the city with water” (Cist 1851:102; Works Progress Administration 1938:320).

Eventually, proprietors employed horses not to merely pull water-carts, but to drive contraptions that propelled water up from the Ohio River into reservoirs closer to town. Yet, after the incorporation of horse-drawn casks to deliver fresh water, improvements were gradual and deliberate. In 1817, Cincinnatian Jesse Reeder constructed a “tank on the bank of the river, near Ludlow street,” and through the use of “elevators, worked by horse power, he lifted the water into this tank, and thence sold it to the water carts” (Cist 1851:103). A second improvement in water supply came on July 3, 1821 when water began to flow to various parts of the city via wooden pumps and pipes built by the Cincinnati Manufacturing Company and later owned by S.W. Davies of Cincinnati. Unlike Reeder’s earlier operation, Davies’ business employed a more advanced system of wooden pumps powered by horses walking “a circular treadmill to bring water up” the hill from the river via underground pipes to a reservoir on Third Street (WPA 1938:320-321). Finally, in 1824, Davies bought the steam engine from the steamboat Vesta, fixed it to the pump house on the river bank, and began using steam to power “two new pumps” able to function at “a capacity of 1,200,000 gallons a day” (WPA 1938:321).

Although the earliest steam-powered pumps of the 1790s were easily adopted to and used in water pumping applications, horses performed this function.
to the benefit of villagers in Cincinnati in the first three decades of the frontier-town’s existence. Drake alludes to the advantage provided by the horses that powered the water-carts, elevators, and pumps by explaining that the few springs near Cincinnati could not provide enough healthy water for widespread distribution. Therefore, most water was “drawn up in barrels from the river” because after it had settled it was “preferred to well water” that contained many more impurities than the river water (Drake 1815:139). Just as horse-powered mills helped Cincinnati grow in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by helping to drive several mills that produced flour for the townspeople, it also allowed the city to expand away from river. No longer were people forced to walk long distances to the river or the small springs in the surrounding hills, but could rely on horses to power the pumps that brought water much deeper into the heart of Cincinnati for daily consumption.

**Horse-Powered Water Transportation**

Perhaps one of the most intriguing ways in which early Cincinnatians utilized the strength of horses was in their adaptation to operating in water travel. The application of horse-power to propelling waterborne vessels was not a new technology by the early nineteenth century – it was found in many canal systems throughout the United States and the world. In this basic mode of transportation, horses, mules, or oxen were attached to the canal boats by a yoke and rope system and then forced to pull the boats along the nearby towpath. Over time, horse power was employed in various forms on different types of waterborne conveyance, such as inland ferries that crossed the Ohio River. Though boats powered by horses tended to have a lower maximum payload and were slower than ships powered by steam engines, in many instances around nineteenth century Cincinnati horses proved more efficient and the better option for transporting goods and people.

Poor and difficult overland transportation routes throughout Ohio and most of the western frontier in general, led to the development of water courses for faster and easier transportation in the first half of the nineteenth century. Local and state leaders interested in improving the economic prospects of Ohio aimed to invest a large portion of the capital the state collected through tax revenues to creating a canal system that would connect Lake Erie with the Ohio River. They believed that such a transportation system would not only replace more expensive and difficult overland passages, but would provide gains in interregional trade and “a vital link in the chain of communications that might bring America to the threshold of a new age” (Scheiber 1987:4,8-9). As a result, surveys were conducted in 1822 and 1823 to find the best north-south route through Ohio, settling on a canal that would begin in Toledo on Lake Erie and follow the western border with Indiana and terminate in Cincinnati at the Ohio River. On February 4, 1825, the Ohio state legislature passed the “1825 Canal Law,” which authorized the first sixty-seven mile stretch of the Miami-Erie Canal to be constructed between Cincinnati and Dayton (Scheiber 1987:19,28-29).

Talk around Cincinnati regarding the economic benefits that a canal passing through town would offer began as early as 1816. Local leadership reflected the sentiments of state leaders by suggesting that a canal system would improve the area by encouraging increased business investment, such as in shipping and manufacturing, in and around Cincinnati. More specifically, the author of the 1819 city directory projected that the Miami-Erie Canal would be an enhancement for much of southwestern Ohio:

> A water communication of this kind would be of infinite importance, not only to Cincinnati, but to the whole Miami Country. It would make our city the depot of all the produce of the country; and would afford the citizens an easy, cheap and safe conveyance to and from market. It would, in a manner, bring the market to their doors. (*The Cincinnati Directory of 1819* 1819:75-76)

The increase in possible profit presented by the Miami-Erie Canal near Cincinnati made the venture a widely popular and sought after addition to the city. With the Ohio River, the canal allowed merchants to avoid unnecessary travel along the state’s inadequate system of roads and turnpikes. The canal also augmented the attractiveness of Cincinnati as a major hub for transportation and shipping between eastern and western United States, which the city would quickly grow to become by the 1840s and 1850s.

After nearly three years of construction, the Miami-Erie Canal between Cincinnati and Dayton was finally completed in November 1828, but was not opened until March 1829 due to the onset of winter (*The Cincinnati Directory for the Year 1829* 1829:169). However, once the canal was put into full operation, the progress it promised could not be realized without horses and other pack animals, such as mules and oxen. While oxen were employed to help dig and clear obstacles in the path of the canal along its urban and rural sections during the
construction process, horses, and to some extent mules, seemed to have been the preferred source of power in and around Cincinnati once the canal was flooded and put into operation (Woods 2008:13-14). It is likely that horses were the popular choice in hauling canal boats through Cincinnati because in addition to being capable of pulling heavy loads, they were much more common than oxen as one moved out of the countryside and closer to the city.

Furthermore, horses were also favored over the use of steam engines on the canals. As an inventor from Middletown, Ohio (located about 27 miles north-east of Cincinnati) explained in a letter to the editors of the *Scientific American* in 1863, it was apparent that steam power on the canals “has not yet proved successful – horse-power being again in the ascendant” (Harding 1863:404). Although steam power had become the prominent source of power on the Ohio River to and from Cincinnati, horses continued to establish their efficiency and usefulness on the canals well into the Civil War. By providing the strength to pull the canal boats through Cincinnati and along the length of the Miami-Erie Canal, horses facilitated the economic growth of the city. They provided valuable service for overcoming the state’s poor transportation system, via the canal, and helped foster interest in Cincinnati for financial investment in commercial, shipping, and manufacturing enterprises (Woods 2008:56).

Unlike the simple solution for inland transportation and hauling made possible by horse-towed barges and thousands of miles of man-made canal beds, however, the ingenious manipulation of basic mechanics by American ferrymen allowed horses to virtually “walk on water.” The earliest successful horse-powered boats in the United States, also known as *teamboats*, employed inclined-treadwheels similar to that patented by Joseph Best Robinson of Cincinnati in October 1816, whose “device consisted of a treadwheel fitted with cog teeth beneath its lower rim to turn a lantern gear and horizontal power shaft” (Crisman and Cohn 1998:62). However, it was Moses Isaacs who, in March 1818, placed the inclined-treadwheel (essentially a round platform tilted to one side that revolved around a central axis) on a boat to serve as the source of power on water vessels. This mechanism proved quite effective in utilizing horses to drive the paddle wheels of water conveyances for much of the period between the middle 1810s and the 1830s (Crisman and Cohn 1998:62-65).

On the other hand, a second development in horse-powered boats caused the treadwheel to fall out of use, and brought the rise of the horse treadmill. As demonstrated in Figure 3, another more straightforward way that ferries used horse-power for locomotion was by having the horses, usually in a pair, walk on an inclined and stationary conveyor belt (“Chilo Horse Ferry” ca. 1890). The sprockets of the treadmill were then linked to the paddle wheels and as the horses walked in place they turned the wheels, which moved the ferry forward through the water. This method of applying the strength of horses to boats, which largely replaced the inclined-treadwheel by the 1840s, became the mainstay on horse-powered ferries through most of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries. Yet, more significantly, horse treadmills were accepted by many to be a sufficient, or even preferred, way to propel small ferryboats despite the development and improvement of the steam engine over the same period. Not until the creation of gasoline and diesel-powered motors were horses supplanted from this long-established role as driving forces on inland water travel.

Before the Roebling Suspension Bridge was opened to pedestrian and wagon or carriage traffic in 1867, the only means of crossing the Ohio River between Cincinnati and Newport or Covington, Kentucky was aboard ferryboats. The growth of some manufacturing and trade in the region led to the development of the first commercial ferry in 1792 that employed polemen to push the ferries through the water (WPA 1938:20). Another early ferry line in the Cincinnati area was owned and operated by Thomas Kennedy and his family at the turn of the nineteenth century, who had migrated to Kentucky from Pennsylvania. Recognizing the economic, social – and during the Indian campaigns – military importance of transporting goods and people across the river between Ohio and its southern neighbor, the
Kennedys utilized the potential of horses for driving paddle wheels. In 1821 they “commenced use of horse-power on the ferry boats,” and they continued to take advantage of horses for another twelve years until about 1833 when they began to employ steam engines on their ferries (Conteur 1923:9).

Indeed, the horse-powered ferries of early Cincinnati were so effective in accomplishing their tasks that the author of the 1819 city directory predicted a continued reliance on this form of travel between Ohio and Kentucky. Upon explaining that the “great public utility of the Horse Ferry Boat, in conveying persons and property across the Ohio at this place [Cincinnati]” was “too well established to need comment,” he does go on to indicate that the “safety, comfort, dispatch, and capacity for heavy burthen” of the horse ferry provided a beneficial service to the town (The Cincinnati Directory of 1819 1819:101,102). Moreover, the author was so amazed by the impact of the horse ferry on Cincinnati travel and trade that he claimed “boats of this kind” would be “used at most of the ferrying places on the several rivers in the Western Country” in the near future (The Cincinnati Directory of 1819 1819:101-102). Once Americans figured out a way to allow their primary modes of transportation, their horses, to “walk on water” as well as on the rudimentary frontier highways, they opened up new possibilities for communication and trade between regions previously separated by inland watercourses.

Yet, local ferry lines never completely replaced their horses with steam when the engines became a popular source of power on inland vessels. As Conteur notes regarding a ferry that worked between Sedamsville, Ohio and Constance, Kentucky, “[h]orse-power continued on that line until” about the late 1870s, long after the first use of steam power on ferries in the Cincinnati region (Conteur 1923:9). As late as 1929, a Kentucky Post article reported that Henry Kottmyer, “veteran river man, of Anderson’s Ferry,” remembered “when horses walked all day long on the ferries and didn’t get anywhere” (“Ferry Has Been in Family 65 Years” 1929:12). Though it is unclear as to how recently Kottmyer recalled seeing functioning horse-powered ferries at Anderson Ferry, it can be assumed that he would have witnessed this scene during the rising influence of steam by the 1860s. Not until around 1855 were Newport and Covington, Kentucky described as being “connected with Cincinnati by steam ferry boats, running to and fro continually” (Bowen 1855:393). In short, while the busier ferries closest to Cincinnati had changed to steam power by the mid-nineteenth century, several decades after the incorporation of steam on inland water travel, other local ferries continued to employ the brute strength of horses to drive the ferries’ paddle wheels.

In fact, before and during the mid-nineteenth century, a period when many ferries on the Ohio River were beginning to utilize steam-powered engines, several other towns in southern Ohio and northern Kentucky also operated horse ferries. For example, Ulysses S. Grant recorded in his personal memoirs that on a certain occasion while going to school in Maysville, Kentucky (about sixty miles upriver from Cincinnati) in 1836, he recognized a cherished “colt as one of the blind horses working on the treadwheel of the ferry-boat” at the river there (Grant 1885:12). Similarly, the horse ferry shown in Figure 3 was located on the river at Chilo, Ohio (about thirty-five miles upriver from Cincinnati), and most likely photographed working between 1885 and 1895. Though these different horse ferry outfits were not located within a short ride from Cincinnati, they serve as good examples of the way in which frugal ferrymen opted, or were possibly forced, to employ horses in their businesses over the use of steam power.

Due to the nature of ferrying across the Ohio River, the use of horses for driving the paddle wheels was more practical than the higher output steam engines. Not only were steam engines more expensive than horses, the cost of coal could also put a strain on a ferryman’s finances. Additionally, the constant starting and stopping of the ferries as they reached each side of the river to be loaded and unloaded would also be inefficient for a steam engine. Since steam-powered engines needed to maintain a constant and steady steam pressure, then they invariably burned a lot of fuel when not in motion. It is interesting to note that some ferries’ “paddle wheels that had been invented for steam-powered boats” were “retrofitted to equine power,” as McShane and Tarr mention (2007:166). While providing ample strength for many situations, horses proved to be better sources of power on lower-tonnage ferries because they could be easily started and stopped as needed without wasting fuel (horse feed) when docked along the river bank.

**Horse-Powered Manufacturing**

The simple design and principles of the horse-powered gristmills were also applied to other operations that were not as critical as the production of food, but still helped Cincinnati grow during the early period of the nineteenth century. Once the basic necessities of food, water, and shelter were secured with the help of laboring horses, town-dwellers could then move on to the production of consumer goods for a market economy. Due to
Cincinnati’s location along the Ohio River, the production of steamboats, especially their steam engines, became a profitable business for the budding Western town. As Steven J. Ross explicates, with “increased trade and passenger travel along western waterways sparking an upsurge in local steamboat production…the total number of machine and boiler shops, foundries, iron works, and rolling mills” also ballooned over the first half of the nineteenth century (Ross 1985:33).

Working with extremely hard materials, such as iron and brass, foundries, machine tool manufacturers, and other heavy industries required sources of power strong enough to bore, shape, or form metal. Hand-powered tools that were used in some machining applications proved ineffective in the manufacture of steam engine boilers or cylinders because it was quite difficult for a laborer to produce enough force to work the large metal castings. However, similar to the gristmills in town, by the late 1810s these businesses had appropriated horses and steam engines to turn the lathes for processing the materials needed for boilers and other items like furnaces, ovens, or bells. For example, the author of the 1819 city directory explains that “the machinery…necessary to carry on the works” of the Phoenix Foundry, which at the time was employing about a dozen workmen in producing lighter iron pieces such as stoves, was “turned by a horse power” (The Cincinnati Directory of 1819 1819:49).

Similarly, in a second larger and better established company, the Cincinnati Bell, Brass and Iron Foundry begun by William Greene in 1817, not only utilized steam power on its production floor, but its “boring mill, and several lathes (one of which cost 4000 dollars, and is equal to any in America) for turning iron and cutting screws,” was “driven by horse power” (WPA 1938:178; The Cincinnati Directory of 1819 1819:48). Although Oliver Evan’s high pressure steam engines were capable of providing more power and had existed for about thirteen years by the time Greene opened his foundry in Cincinnati, horses were still seen as necessary to work the machinery that fashioned the various castings made out of some of the hardest materials available. Ironically, however, the horses put in operation at the Cincinnati Bell, Brass and Iron Foundry and similar shops were helping to produce parts for the steam engines that would eventually replace them as the sources of production power in most of the manufactories in Cincinnati by the second half of the nineteenth century. Horses as a source of power may have had a short and limited run in Cincinnati foundries, but they helped many metal-forming shops create a sound commercial foundation that would grow into Cincinnati’s important machine-tool industry in the period of rapid industrialization following the Civil War.

Other tools designed to be operated by horses were also used and produced in Cincinnati throughout the nineteenth century. Daniel Drake documented in 1815 that a wood-working machine patented in 1811 by a man from Kentucky, and powered “by one or two horses;” was employed by several coopers in Cincinnati (1815:144). This contraption was capable of dressing and jointing “in a superior manner, the staves necessary for one hundred barrels, hogsheads or pipes, in twelve hours” (Drake 1815:144). One may assume that judging by Drake’s apparent praise of its quality, efficiency, and speed, this machine and the horses that drove it were considered to be a great advantage for coopers and other wood-workers in town. Drake also notes that of the “four cotton spinning establishments” in Cincinnati in 1815, all four contained “upwards of 1200 spindles,” which were “moved by horses” (1815:145). These businesses were typically smaller outfits that did not have the economic clout or regional significance that heavy industries had in Cincinnati, but they were, nonetheless, important to the city because through the work of horses and craftsmen they created items the city required and limited the need for imports.

Even as late as the turn of the twentieth century, horses were still considered essential to powering machinery. The Cincinnati Mill & Mine Supply Co. produced small, medium, and large-sized hand-tools or other iron and steel components necessary for railroads, mining, mills, furnaces, and breweries. Their catalogue from about 1905 also lists many different types and outputs of steam engines designed for any multiple applications. However, despite the obvious emphasis on modern technology, there continued to be a demand for horse-powered devices. As shown in Figure 4, through the use of a few simple gears and pulleys, which was quite reminiscent of older methods, a miners could hitch horses to a “single drum…hoisting machine” to winch material out of vertical mineshafts (“Single Drum Horse Power Hoisting Machine” ca. 1905:95).

This hoisting machine, like other similar equipment, had various versions with different weight capacities and lifting speeds. The Cincinnati Mill & Mine Supply Co.’s advertisement demonstrates that though usable steam engines had existed for over a century, electricity was being increasingly improved and harnessed for more applications, and gasoline engines were becoming common, by the early 1900s the horse still found a niche as a reliable and efficient source of power when the others were not possible or accessible.
Thus far, it has been the research focus of this study to avoid analyzing horses as sources of power for traditional transportation, such as wagons, carts, or carriages. Rather, the goal has been to explain how horses were utilized in different sectors of Cincinnati that were not in daily visible or physical contact with the majority of the city’s population. However, one exception can be made when discussing the impact of these animals as wagon- haulers on the operation of the Cincinnati Fire Department (CFD). These horses were important not because they were “living machines” to be exploited, but because as “civil servants” they helped the city protect its citizens from the ravages of fires. Without the utility, strength, and endurance of its well-trained horses, the CFD could not have functioned as a proper city-managed fire department. They and their fellow human fire fighters often went headlong into danger to extinguish dangerous and potentially deadly infernos throughout Cincinnati. Essentially, the CFD’s fire horses allowed the institution to serve as the basic foundation for modern, professional, municipal fire departments that would spring up in cities across the United States over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Before the Cincinnati Fire Department was officially reorganized by a city ordinance in March 1853, the frontier town was first protected from fire by the cooperation of each of its freeholding citizens or householders that paid at least thirty-five dollars annually in rent. These people were each required to maintain a leather bucket of specific dimensions to be used to extinguish fires collectively by anyone between the ages of sixteen and fifty who were in earshot of the fire alarms (Firemen’s Protective Association of the Cincinnati Fire Department 1895:53-54). This system evolved over the first half of the nineteenth century into the volunteer fire-fighting companies created by various people in Cincinnati that improved the response and efficiency of putting out fires, and which operated as beneficial independent organizations with their own members and bylaws. In return for putting out devastating flames, the volunteer companies that arrived on the scene first and extinguished the fire were originally paid by the property owners, and later, by the insurance companies that insured the property (Kiefer 1970:84-86). Due to this competition and the allure of socializing among members of a company, volunteer fire-fighting groups deteriorated into greedy, corrupt, and rowdy organizations, which quickly “produced a feeling of insecurity and distrust” in the fire department that once had commanded respect and confidence (Walker et al. 1852:2).

In addition to the problems and difficulties that the members of volunteer companies were beginning to cause for civic leaders and city-minded townspeople, the equipment that they employed also decreased the effectiveness of the companies for putting out fires. As late as 1853, the “hand-drawn, hand-pumped fire engines,” which were heavy and exhausting to work for even several firemen, were proving to be woefully inefficient during a period of technological advancement (Kiefer 1970:90). In response to these detrimental factors, several city councilmen pushed for an investigation into the improvement of the fire department. The report produced by the selected committee made two recommendations to foster positive progress in Cincinnati fire-fighting. They suggested that first, the fire department should be reformed into “an organization which makes it the special duty of men to extinguish fires,” and second, that they should use new steam-powered “engines drawn by horses, which shall be constantly kept harnessed” and ready for quick response (Walker et al. 1852:7; see Figure 5).

This report indicated that by reorganizing the system into a paid fire department, the city would have committed, properly-trained, and mature firefighters under its jurisdiction, which would limit the troublesome and corrupting elements that thrived in the volunteer companies. Similarly, although the
committee recognized that danger from fire would always be present, it argued that the “use of horses and steam” would “tend greatly to diminish the labors” of the fire-fighters that swore to “wisely discharge the duties” of which they were to be given (Walker et al. 1852:9-10). On March 17, 1853, Cincinnati city council voted on and passed an ordinance that reestablished the fire department as a professional, full-time, city-paid organization to begin operating on the first of April. As part of the reorganization, the voluntary fire companies were disbanded and the human-powered fire engines were replaced by up-to-date steam-powered engines pulled by horses (Giglierano 1982:90).

For nearly sixty-five years after its reorganization, the Cincinnati Fire Department successfully employed teams of horses to haul the steam-powered fire engines quickly and efficiently to blazing city fires. As suggested above, the CFD could not have operated productively in the second half of the nineteenth century without the help of strong and well-trained fire horses. Since steam-powered fire engines were much too heavy for a group of men to pull through the city streets and because self-propelled steam fire engines were extremely slow and difficult to drive to their destination, then Cincinnati relied on horses to get the necessary tools to the fires. Though the fire horses did not actually extinguish the flames, they were, like their fellow firemen, highly regarded for their faithful and invaluable service to the city. Many fire horses were an essential component of the holiday parades that honored the local firemen and other civil servants in Cincinnati.

Horses proved so effective in pulling the fire engines, in fact, that they were utilized by the CFD through the age of steam-power and well into the gasoline era. They were not completely replaced until the summer of 1917, when the CFD determined that “[m]otor driven fire apparatus” was “a great saving over horse drawn apparatus” (“Costs Less Than Horses” 1917:8). Yet, the work of the fire horses did not stop when the CFD began using the more efficient gasoline-powered fire engines. As the fire department’s purchasing log for 1913-1917 illustrates, many of its fire horses were transferred to other city departments, such as the street cleaning, infirmary, or public works division (Cincinnati Fire Department 1917). Although by the 1850s horses were beginning to be considered archaic and old-fashioned, the Cincinnati Fire Department enthusiastically embraced the possibilities of horse power in modernizing and improving its internal operation and effectiveness in fighting fires. Thus, despite the growing belief that steam engines would easily and quickly supplant horses in nineteenth century urban centers, the hard-working equids continued to be reliable and useful sources of power and civil service in Cincinnati through the first quarter of the twentieth century.

Sentimentalizing the Horse

Through the late eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries, horses had proven to be vital to the growth and expansion of Cincinnati, helping it become one of the largest and most prosperous cities in the United States by the 1850s. In achieving this status and prestige, horse owners and handlers – who sought to take the fullest advantage of the benefits in labor that horses offered – severely exploited their animals. In many cases, horses were not fully appreciated for the power they provided and were often times mistreated or abused. As indicated above, McShane and Tarr expand on this relationship between man and horse that emphasized work in nineteenth century New York City. They argue that “the urban horse can be viewed primarily as an animal who was regarded and utilized by a wide variety of urbanites…as a living machine,” and that owners evaluated their horse’s attributes “primarily in terms of his ability to contribute constructive work in a variety of contexts” (McShane and Tarr 2007:x). In other words, these historians suggest that the desire to complete a job quickly and efficiently by exploiting horses usually overrode any sense of emotional connection to the animals people encountered in their daily lives.
However, though people in nineteenth and early twentieth century Cincinnati did treat “horses mostly as machines,” a belief existed in and around the city that horses should be respected for their noble character and service to the citizens (McShane and Tarr 2007:7). For example, an article in an 1845 issue of the Cist’s Advertiser recounts the story of a unique horse from Nashville, Tennessee. The story emphasized the incredible intelligence of the horse who was able to accomplish seemingly difficult tasks often times on its own without any human direction. The author then posed the question, “Are these things the result of training, or are there instincts in the brute creation yet undeveloped and unknown?” (“Sagacity of the Horse” 1845:1). While it was not new for Americans to be amazed by the level of intelligence in horses, the author seems to insinuate that horses have the natural potential to be much more similar to human, posing a similar capacity for intelligence equal to humans, than many thought. It is also interesting to note that this story, which paid tribute to and even praised a horse from Nashville, was worthy of or important enough to be reprinted in a Cincinnati newspaper.

Another more obvious – and local – way in which people of Cincinnati held horses in high regard and not just as things to be exploited for the benefit of humans was how many treated the animals in horse catalogues. Between 1859 and 1881, several area horse breeders, trainers, and traders issued catalogues of the horses they intended to put up for auction at certain times. While some of the horses listed in the brochures were only given a number for identification, many others were named as individuals. By bestowing names on specific horses, breeders or owners were consciously setting each horse apart from the others so as to make the horses’ character and reputation meaningful and memorable. More to the point, by giving these animals names they were placing them on a higher plane that entitled them to more respect than other animals. The value that accompanied a name even placed horses higher than some slaves who before 1865 may not have possessed a legally recognized name, which aimed to make them less than human.

For example, in a small catalogue for Northern Kentucky horse trader R.S. Strader, four stallions – Cassius M. Clay, Jr., Crittenden, Ohio Volunteer, and King Ethan – were noted on the cover of the advertisement as unique entities (1875). Although it is uncertain as to why these horses were named as they were, it is likely that some took on the surnames of their owners or made reference to other important features such as military prowess. The reference to these four horses on the cover suggests that their notoriety and prestige within the Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio tri-state region gave credence to the breeding and training of the owner, Strader, and highlighted the quality of horses foaled on his farm. Strader also relied heavily on the prominence of these distinctive horses to draw farmers, trainers, horse dealers, and others to purchase offspring from his ranch.

Similarly, since horses were so highly valued for the services they provided Americans until the early twentieth century, then they were also seen as worthy of the dignity or honor that came with a respectable family history and lineage. For example, in 1859 Isaac D. Johnson of Alexandria, Kentucky, not only listed the pedigree of his stallion, Comet, but utilized Biblical rhetoric to describe it:

COMET was bred at Enosburgh, Vt., sired by Nimrod; Nimrod was sired by True America; he by Quicksilver. Nimrod’s dam was a bay mare, sired by Justin Morgan; Comet’s dam was sired by Sherman Morgan, he by Justine Morgan, raised by Justin Morgan, at Springfield, Mass., and taken to Randolph, Vt., in the fall of 1795, sired by True Britton or Beautiful Bay, raised by Gen. DeLancy, of Long Island, and sired by his imported English horse, Traveller. (1859:8)

This section of the Johnson catalogue demonstrates that nineteenth century horse breeders and owners near Cincinnati held their equines in higher regard than most other livestock, and thus treated them as partners or family rather than simply as tools. In a way, since most keepers had such a close relationship with the horses in which they interacted on a daily basis then they were given humanistic qualities, such as a family legacy. Ultimately, the horse catalogues illustrate that nineteenth century Cincinnatians held their horses in high enough regard for their beauty, prestige, and versatility to elevate them over mere machines (like steam engines) and give them qualities almost equal to their human counterparts.

More significantly, the way in which the Cincinnati Fire Department dealt with its fire horses after it decided to replace its equids with gasoline-powered fire trucks illustrates their concern for the welfare of the faithful animals. As noted above, the fire department’s purchasing log indicates that it ceased to acquire horses in June 1917, and began getting rid of its animals, steam engines, and a few older automobiles to make room for the new fire trucks. Partially because the horses still served a
purpose and partially because people cared about the wellbeing of the brave and faithful fire horses, the CFD transferred all its horses to other city departments. Similar to aging streetcar horses, the fire horses lived out their lives in less strenuous city jobs that required some exertion, but not anything like they were expected to give in the fire department. However, no such respect was shown to the steam-powered engines and the early automobiles. Rather, most of these machines were junked and thrown away or dismantled and sold for scrap; only a few automobiles were transferred to other city departments and all but one steam engine was destroyed. Thus, horses, especially those that gained notoriety for their sacrifice and service to the city, were often treated as sentient laborers, not as just machines to be pushed to exhaustion and then sent to the scrap yard when they were no longer of any effective use (CFD 1917).

Conclusion

Histories of the United States have often discussed the nineteenth century in terms of industrialization and forward technological progress resulting from American ingenuity. While this assessment is not unfounded, such narratives tend to glorify new technology, such as the steam power, and place too much emphasis on their role as the vehicles through which positive advancement was made possible in the United States in the 1800s. However, as this study has shown, steam engines were not the only factors in driving America into the modern age. In Cincinnati, horses played critical roles in powering the tools and machines that would allow the young river village in 1788 to grow and thrive to become a major American city by the mid-nineteenth century. Even amidst the widespread expansion and popularity of steam engines after the Civil War, horses continued to be utilized by many different people in Cincinnati well into the twentieth century.

Due to their great strength and endurance, horses proved to be exceptionally effective as producers of power. Although steam engines were capable of achieving higher outputs over a longer duration of time (as long as fuel was continuously added to the furnace), horses were employed to turn gristmills to help feed early Cincinnati. Since the city also needed a supply of fresh water for drinking and cleaning, horses were used to bring water up from the Ohio River and into the heart of the growing city. During Cincinnati’s rise to prominence as a commercial and shipping center that took advantage of steamboat travel, some businessmen in Cincinnati used horses efficiently to power the boats needed to transport people and freight down the canal system or across the river. As late as the 1820s, both large and small manufacturing operations utilized horses to drive the tools needed for production. Many of the machines created in Cincinnati into the early twentieth century, though done with the help of steam power, were sold to the South and West and designed to be worked by horses since they were more reliable, cheaper, and easier to obtain than either water or steam power. Horses were even turned to by the Cincinnati Fire Department as a means of modernizing its operations since the steam-powered fire engine could not accomplish this without the help of horses.

On the other hand, this prevalent exploitation of horses by various businesses and sectors of society for their highly flexible and functional labor did not mean that all people in Cincinnati regarded horses as merely machines. As demonstrated above, those who understood or witnessed the ubiquitous and useful nature of horses recognized that these animals had earned the respect and sentimentality of their owners and handlers. These people conferred status and value on horses by giving them qualities that only humans were believed could maintain, specifically unique names and family lineages or legacies. Horses were prized for their physical attributes, natural intelligence, companionship, loyalty, character or demeanor, and their ability to get difficult jobs done. Although horses were mistreated to the point of needing a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals chapter in Hamilton County to regulate cruel practices, overall, Cincinnatians identified the noble qualities of their horses, and bestowed a level of respect for what the horses provided their human handlers.

The importance of horses in serving as a source of power, however, could not endure forever in the United States. Today, highly efficient and powerful engines have supplanted the need for horses to power the vast machinery in American cities. Horses are still utilized in many rural areas, but not to the extent on which they were relied upon during the previous three centuries of farming in the United States. Though horses are no longer sought after as alternatives to expensive or ineffective sources of power, such as steam engines, they serve another role. They are still used by Cincinnatians to pull carriages, not for basic travel, but as a way to recall the simplicity of the past. They are still raced at Turfway Park, and taken on weekend strolls along various recreational horse-riding trails. Ultimately, horses have not lost significance as twentieth century technology has replaced them as sources of power. Rather, the role of horses has changed from powering machinery to serving as symbols of nostalgia, as
Cincinnatians today reminisce about their revered and cherished past.

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Initially, trade in Cincinnati usually only flowed one way, with the river current down towards the Mississippi River, and on to New Orleans, Louisiana. However, with the introduction of the first steam-powered boat on Western waters by Robert Fulton in 1811, river traffic could finally flow upstream against the current, which expanded the markets available to major shipping centers like Cincinnati.

For the boundaries of the Treaty of Greenville see *A Treaty of Peace Between the United States of America and the Tribes of Indians, Called the Wyandots, etc.* Available online: http://www.earlyamerica.com/earlyamerica/milestones/greenville/1.html.

Harvey Hall records in *The Cincinnati Directory for 1825* that the Cincinnati Steam Mill burned down on November 3, 1823, and was expected to be rebuilt within the year. However, subsequent sources do not indicate that the steam mill had ever been repaired or put back into operation.

Flour production remained Cincinnati’s primary export until about 1830 when pork products, such as bacon, began to generate more revenue.

In this announcement Cist also mentions that a horse-powered portable mill like the one listed was being employed “across the Ohio.”

Additionally, Cist printed a very similar description of a portable horse mill from Cincinnati in his *Sketches and Statistics of Cincinnati in 1851* (pg. 194). However, no such advertisements were noted in his earlier treatise, *Cincinnati in 1841: Its Early Annals and Future Prospects*, suggesting that portable horse mills were perhaps not popular enough in the early 1840s to be recognized in publications about the city, or did not have as much an impact as they would by 1851.

Woods notes that the Miami-Erie Canal began to decline when the southern terminal facility at Cincinnati was abandoned in 1863 due to competition from the railroads.

For a longer discussion of horse treadmills on ferry boats see Crisman and Cohn, *When Horses Walked on Water*, pg. 127-151. Much like treadwheels that were popular by the late 1810s, the treadmill horse ferry in Figure 1 functioned by linking the separate treadmills to different gearing systems to provide forward motion, as found in an automobile transmission. Rather than making the horses turn around each time the ferry reached the opposite bank of the river, a set of gears could be engaged to turn the paddle wheels in one direction, while another set of gears would turn the wheels in the other direction. These separate gear assemblages were possibly housed and operated in the small rooms at the far end of the ferry. Note the boarding planks at each end of the boat.

The author also notes that his readers in the early 1920s, who crossed the river between Sedamsville, Ohio and Constance, Kentucky on the fifth successive steam-powered ferry named after Daniel Boone, possibly also remembered traveling on the horse ferry there near present day Anderson Ferry.

By the mid-nineteenth century, many of the original volunteer firemen no longer served, leaving positions open for “minors or half-grown boys” that were “incapable of correction” and did not possess the maturity-level to properly fight infernos. Thus, the local volunteer fire company slowly became more of a social club for adolescent delinquents than an effective fire-fighting system.

In late 1852, Cincinnatian Alexander B. Latta successfully built the first steam-powered fire engine that could pump a greater amount of water further than the old hand-pumped engines. Pulled by three or four horses, city leaders believed that this new technology could help create positive change in the fire department.
**Elite Presence and Regional Expansion as seen through Elite Architecture: La Milpa, Belize**

**Meredith L. Coats**

**Overview**

This paper will examine the construction and development of architecture and monuments at the Maya site La Milpa, Belize. Specifically, I will analyze evidence of architectural remains as documented from multiple seasons of survey and excavation at the site, in order to better understand the presence of the elite royals and courtiers at La Milpa. By looking at the construction and renovation of the multiple plazas that span the city center, I will present an overview of elite existence at La Milpa while considering the ways that built space and the idea of a sacred landscape can be used to examine the chronological rise, growth and expansion, and eventually decline/abandonment of the regional center. After looking at the concept of built space over time at La Milpa through construction and renovation phases with the help of demographic and ceramic data, I will attempt to draw hypotheses about the cultural construction of the elite class. Additionally, I will pose questions that can not yet be answered confidently, but deserve further research and consideration to gain a better understanding of the development of La Milpa and the elite population who lived there.

**Introduction to La Milpa**

La Milpa is a Maya center located in northwestern Belize less than 100 km away from the other major Maya sites Tikal and Calakmul (Figure 1) (Hammond et al 1998: 831). The site center is located on a natural hill (the highest in a 2 km radius) that utilized man-made concave and convex reservoirs to maintain sustainable water levels (Scarborough 1995: 99-101). At its largest capacity, La Milpa was made up of several “subordinate ceremonial precincts” that covered an area of approximately 113 sq. km from 6 km radius extending out from the center of the site (Tourtellot et al 1993: 97). This paper will specifically focus on the area called La Milpa Centre (Figure 2), which is made up of the multiple plazas and coinciding courtyards, monuments, and residential areas within and around them (Figure 3). La Milpa Centre is not only the central area where a large portion of elite activity and monument veneration took place, but the first place of substantial occupation by the Maya at this regional hub that continued to flourish until the end of the Maya Classic period.

**La Milpa Occupational Timeline**

Extensive survey and excavation carried out at La Milpa (LaMAP website: http://www.bu.edu/lamilpa/) provides enough information to examine the “interaction of space, landscape, and culture” at various levels and scales (Tourtellot 2003a: 37). In order to understand the changing demographics in conjunction with the shifting elite presence and authority, I will present a brief timeline of La Milpa to which I will refer and elaborate on throughout the rest of this paper. To cohesively bring together several site reports covering field work from multiple generations of scholars, I will outline a broad summary of La Milpa population size and construction patterns within each of the basic Maya timeframes: Preclassic, Classic (Early, Middle, and Late), Terminal Classic, and Postclassic.

**Preclassic/Early Classic**

Although much less is known about Preclassic settlement at La Milpa than other periods, occupation deposits and plaster floors dating from 400 BC-AD 250 have been excavated throughout the
site, suggesting that initial settlement and formation of the Great Plaza took place in the Late Preclassic (Hammond et al 1998: 831-3). Early Classic remains at La Milpa indicate a time of substantial growth in terms of new additions, resurfacing, and remodeling in and around the original Great Plaza area (Sagebiel 2005: 615-6). During this early stage of development, several new residential structures including Kotanil Courtyard, Grp. 306, and Grp. 325 were constructed throughout La Milpa Centre. Also constructed at this time was Structure 88, which has been speculated as the first elaborate palace of an elite royal family at La Milpa (Sagebiel 2005: 628, 715).

Also throughout the Early Classic, more elite and ritual architectural structures were erected, such as tombs and associated caches (B11 Tomb, Tomb 1 Str. 1), shrines (Groups 306, 351), and temple/pyramid complexes at Plaza A (Sagebiel 2005: 617, 619). These architectural additions to the La Milpa landscape along with the early development stages of the southern Plaza group (B, C, and D) as a public area indicate the Early Classic period at La Milpa as a time of population expansion and increasing elite presence and power. From the very beginning of La Milpa occupation, we see a dedication to monumental (and religious) architecture whose construction most likely ordered by rulers or elite members of society.

Middle and Early Late Classic

A lack of ceramic remains from the Middle and Early Late Classic periods indicates what is believed by some scholars to be a period of decline in the 6th and 7th centuries (Hammond et al 1998: 831-3, 836). At this point in La Milpa occupation the construction phases greatly slowed, and the lack of ceramic remains would suggest a decline in population not only within La Milpa Centre, but also significantly in immediate minor centers such as La Milpa East and La Milpa West. To account for this change in population patterns and architectural development within the main plaza, I suggest two explanations. The first, considers the ongoing development and addition of flourishing minor centers surrounding La Milpa during the Middle and Early Classic (located further away than the aforementioned La Milpa East and West sites) including Say Kah and Maax Na, which contained elite architecture and temples (Houk and Hageman 2007). If La Milpa was indeed the central hub of a regional group of sites, efforts of monumental architectural may have been put on hold at La Milpa center as focus was put on developing other outlying sites. The second explanation for the apparent ‘decline’ in activity is revealed by looking at changes occurring within residential areas of the site.

While little construction of the plazas and monumental architecture took place during this time, the early part of the Late Classic brought about construction of elite residences (Groups 306, 324, 325, and 554) south and west of the Great Plaza (Sagebiel 2005: 635, 642). This focus on elite residential formation suggests that this was a phase of occupation at La Milpa that brought larger numbers of elite citizens that wished to live in the central ‘elite’ region of the site. These could possibly have been elite leaders from the surrounding smaller sites moving into or even visiting the elite ‘center’ in order to maintain their place in the regional scheme of elite power and connectedness. So, although ceramic evidence shows that La Milpa suffered a decline in population and certain types of production, there were still elite residents who held enough power and controlled enough resources to continue building projects for their own benefit. On a regional scheme, the Early and Middle Late Classic was not a period of decline for the La Milpa area, but a time of physical expansion and most likely restructuring of social and political organization to accommodate such expansion.

Additionally, during the Early Late Classic period a sacbe (Maya road or causeway) was built between Plaza A and Plaza B (Figures 2 and 3) (Sagebiel 2005: 635). The construction of a

Figure 2. Topographic Map of La Milpa Centre and immediate surroundings (LaMAP website: http://www.bu.edu/lamilpa)
causeway reinforces the idea of an expanding center and the need for a way to unite this complex/dynamic system of plazas and recurrent development. At this point, it is worth wondering where these new elite members of society were coming from. Were new members being ‘inducted’ or ‘added’ to the royal court, or is it possible that more people from surrounding regions or settlements with high status were moving into La Milpa Centre before the major expansion that occurred in the latter years of the Classic period? Further more, what types of changes might we see in architecture (other than just expansion of place) that would have been brought on by these new members of the elite class? These are questions that have yet to be fully explored by archaeological investigations, but if considered, could help to explain the development and expansion of La Milpa politically.

**Late/Terminal Classic**

Between AD 750 and AD 850 a period of ‘rapid modification’ and rebuilding took place at La Milpa (Hammond et al 1998: 831). House groups scattering the area coupled with plaza construction dating to the Late/Terminal Classic alludes to what must have also been a rapid population growth during that same time frame (Hammond et al 1996: 86-90; Sagebiel 2005: 677). Calculations by John Rose suggest that the population at La Milpa went from approximately 11,700 in the Late Preclassic/Early Classic (what he defines as period 1 at La Milpa) to 62,000 in the Late/Terminal Classic (what he defines as period 2), approximately a 500% increase throughout Maya occupation of La Milpa (Rose 2000: 86). This period of florescence also brought substantial development to the entire southern sector of the site including Plazas B, C, and D beyond residential structures, employing the multiple plazas for varying needs that would have attributed to La Milpa’s complex social structure, which consisted of a large elite population (Hammond et al. 1996: 837).

**Post Classic and Abandonment**

By the early Post Classic it seems as though the site as a whole had been cleared out of human occupation except for “occasional pilgrims and perhaps hunters” (Sagebiel 2005: 710). Architectural remains suggest that throughout Plazas A and B multiple events of reconstruction and renovation were taking place during abandonment (Hammond et al 1996: 833). While hypotheses concerning this rapid abandonment should be saved for another line of research, the abandonment is useful in examining the processes of reconstruction noting that at that point in time, several different structures all over the site were in various stages of development as well as renovation.

**Timeline of La Milpa: Separate ‘sites’, same location**

The extended and dynamic length of occupation at La Milpa presents several questions to the archaeologist concerning cultural, social, and political attributes and changes that might have coincided with the development of the site. One theory presented by the
primary investigators at La Milpa is that there was a certain disjunction between the two major periods of development and the people who lived there: “in effect, we are dealing with two different sites, from two different periods of time, which just happened to occupy the same space” (Tourtellot 1997: 2). If we can reasonably say that these were indeed two distinctly separate ‘sites’, then can we suggest that evidence will also support separate elite ruling parties or families over time? The question then becomes, how do we search for evidence of different social and political orders at a site that was continually occupied for hundreds of years? Did the multiple generations at La Milpa have markedly different architectural styles, or is tradition continued over large spans of time?

Multiple building phases and renovation focused within the same areas and on top of preexisting buildings signal some type of structural continuity over time at La Milpa. Archaeologists must not look at these buildings and monuments as static structures frozen in time, but consider how and why they were developed. Although remaining evidence and available archaeological data makes it difficult to discern specific artistic or stylistic changes of the architecture over time, the numerous changes and additions that occurred over hundreds of years at La Milpa continually pay homage to the people and structures that were there before them. The elite citizens who were in charge of commissioning construction and monument veneration were aware of the ongoing history and occupation at La Milpa. As will be discussed later, these rulers even built similar monuments and stelae next to those erected in the Early Classic and ritually buried certain buildings, while continually adding on to and ‘reinventing’ buildings that stood in use from Pre-classic to Terminal Classic eras. So it seems that contrary to Tourtellot, there is more cultural continuity at La Milpa than perhaps previously envisioned. In the next section, I will continue to show that even though La Milpa underwent several physical changes throughout its existence, the site was continually occupied and restructured to fit the needs of the growing population and power of the elites.

Construction and renovation of Main Plaza Areas at La Milpa

As the population at La Milpa grew, so too did the site itself, as new extensions of the site center were built up and other structural groups were added onto the pre-existing areas, resulting in four main plazas that were actively being used and reconstructed at the time of abandonment. This section will examine specific architectural groups and individual structures that provide evidence of elite occupancy and actions. While the previous timeline was meant to provide a brief overview of La Milpa occupation, the following segments will examine specific, detailed structures and attributes that offer insight into the lives and actions of elite members of the La Milpa community.

The Great Plaza

Plaza A, also called the Great Plaza, is the largest of the plazas at La Milpa (and one of the largest reported in Maya history), covering 18,000 square meters (Figure 4) (Guderjan 1991: 7; Sagebiel 2005: 41). The plaza was originally constructed in the Late/Terminal Preclassic (ca. 300 BC). Several test pits, unit excavations, and exploration of looters trenches provided ceramics and stratigraphic views of plaster floors at the lowest floor sub levels and ‘occupational layers’: almost all of which could be considered main structures dated to the Late Preclassic or very early Classic (Sagebiel 2005: 598-9).

Figure 4. Plaza A (Great Plaza) and stelae from multiple periods (Hammond and Bobo 1994: 20)
considered the earliest nucleus of large-scale settlement and activity at La Milpa. Origins of the plaza itself, two main residential groups (Grp. 88 and Grp. 351) that surrounded the plaza, and water control features have all been dated to the late Pre-Classical (Sagebiel 2005: 600, 607, 628).

During the Late Classic period, however, very little if any construction took place within the Great Plaza, even though it was still in regular use and habitation as suggested by high amounts of ceramic sherds from “surface, tumble, and midden (trash) contexts” and residential structures surrounding the plaza that were built at this time (Sagebiel 2005: 685). Researchers must of course consider the possibility that the continuous use of this plaza and the monumental architecture within it could simply be out of convenience for those who either continued to live there from generation to generation, or for those who might have migrated in from elsewhere (Sagabiel 2005 and Tourtellot and Hammond 2004 have addressed this possibility of considerable migration to La Milpa from surrounding or distant Maya sites). However, it is also logical to consider whether or not there could also be some cultural motivation for building on top of and around architecture from previous periods, since continual building on top of earlier structures was a common (and sometimes ritualistic) trend in the Maya world. The continued use of large monumental structures suggests continuity in ritual practices and elite displays of power. As I move to discuss specific parts of the main plazas, I will continue to address questions of permanence and continuity in the face of renovation of built space over time.

**Stelae from the Great Plaza**

When La Milpa was first visited by Sir Eric Thompson in 1938, he made record of a dozen stelae located in lineal fashion in front of the major temple-pyramids (str. 1-3) in the Great Plaza (Hammond and Bobo 1994: 20-2) (see Figure 4). Today, after subsequent archaeological investigations, upwards of 20 stelae have been recorded (Hammond and Bobo: 1994). As Tourtellot et al. have suggested, “rulers [at La Milpa] proclaimed political independence by erecting monuments to themselves as conquering warriors in the fifth century” (1994: 123).

Stelae 1, 2, 6, 10, 15, 16, and 20 have been dated to the Early Preclassic and are the only example of such structures within the La Milpa area and surrounding regions from that time (Figure 5) (Sagebiel 2005: 617, 628). Stela 7 is one of only two stela still standing upright and unfractured, as well as the only monument that includes a legible hieroglyphic inscription. The stela includes the emblem glyph of La Milpa and identifies a ruler of the polity named Ukay (Hammond and Bobo 1994: 23). Although only text from only one stela is legible, the referenced ruler is enough to show that there was elite activity and propaganda taking place at La Milpa. Also, I would argue that to some degree, one can assume to some degree that the other illegible stelae once contained similar inscriptions that were dedicated to certain rulers or elite citizens of La Milpa. On that same front, some of the fragmented stelae do still maintain legible Maya long-count dates (Figure 5) (Hammond and Bobo 1994: 21). This reminds us of the Maya recognition of time over long chronological periods concerning both the past and the future.

Regardless of the quality of artistic preservation of the stelae, excavation has proved that these monuments are very useful for recognizing elite trends throughout La Milpa occupation and beyond into Post Classic and historic times. Like at many Maya sites throughout Central America, the stelae were placed in front of the large temple pyramids as a type of public propaganda that reminded those who visited the extravagant public spaces of the rulers and what they had done in their lifetime (Figure 4). What is quite interesting about the stelae are the range of
dates that they were erected and the length of time that early stelae remained standing in the main plaza area. The list below illustrates the time span these stela cover, reminding the reader again of La Milpa’s continual occupation and appreciation for architectural elements that remained prominent at the site over long periods of occupation.

- Stela 10: Preclassic
- Stela 1: Early Classic
- Stela 6: Early Classic
- Stela 12: Late Classic

(Hammond and Bobo 1994: 19-25)

Remains from plaster plaza floors have allowed archaeologists to determine the construction sequences associated with each of the stela as well as approximate dates of erection. This same data also shows where missing stela might have been placed originally and where certain stelae have been re-placed by post-abandonment visitors to the site. Regarding the actual present day state of the stelae at La Milpa, dates of original monument erection for some of the stelae (those not listed above) were not established other than by hypothesized stylistic references because they had been relocated or reset (presumably by nomads or later settlers in the area) long after the Late/Terminal Classic abandonment of La Milpa.

Plazas B and C

While the first evidence of activity and occupation in the southern section of La Milpa Centre occurs in the Late Preclassic and Early Classic, extensive use and activity of Plazas B, C, and D appear in the archaeological record in the Late/Terminal Classic Period (Sagebiel 2005: 601, 619). Plaza B was connected to the Great Plaza by a causeway creating a “single circulatory system… [that joined and] integrated the entire regal-ritual center of La Milpa” sometime in the Late/Terminal Classic Period (Tourtellot 1994: 120).

Such physical connection and relation between the separate plazas suggests not only more light on the continued use of Plaza A throughout La Milpa history, but that the elite citizens of the Late/Terminal Classic were at the very least locationally connected. We can assume it is less likely that there was more than one major ruling power at La Milpa in opposition to another. Instead, we might consider a larger number of elite royal family members and courtiers resided at La Milpa Centre, growing considerably with the rest of the population. This substantial elite population would coincide with the upkeep of already built ritual structures as well as the development and construction of new monuments, pyramids, ballcourts, and elite residences.

Construction of buildings within and around these plazas such as Structure 21 remained unfinished at the time of abandonment, while the entire section between the Great Plaza and Plaza B was “in the course of redevelopment” (Hammond et al. 1996: 833-4). This unfinished construction work suggests that the regional center was still growing considerably up until the time of site abandonment.

The Southern Acropolis

Perhaps the most overtly elite area at La Milpa from the Late/Terminal classic period was the southern acropolis built off of Plaza C (see figure 3) (Tourtellot 2003a: 45-6). Presumably a royal residence/palace, the acropolis was scattered with thrones, major courtyards, and residential housing. The acropolis underwent significant changes and additions throughout the Late Classic. Courtyard 115 has been recorded as having four different construction phases just within the Middle Late Classic (LCII) period (Hammond and Tourtellot 1999). During abandonment, several structures such as Group 129 were undergoing considerable amounts of construction (Sagebiel 2005: 690-1). As an elite location for residence and personal religious ritual, the acropolis is scattered with throne rooms, altars, and ritually buried structures. A specific example of these ritualistic areas will help to explain why these activities are important to understanding La Milpa elite history over time.

Thrones in structures 38 and 39

Excavation of structures 38 and 39 located in the acropolis area off of Plaza C (as discussed in the previous section) shed light on the use of thrones within elite buildings, as well as ritual activities that focused on specific architectural forms (Hammond et al 1996: 834). Described by Hammond et al. as a “succession of ‘seats of power’”, structure 38 contained three thrones, chronologically set up in linear fashion, the ‘newest’ and most extravagantly decorated located at the front (1996: 834). Some time during the Late Classic period, structure 38 was filled with rubble and ritually terminated. Remaining scorch marks around the floor, doors, and outside of the building and evidence of burnt copal incense on and around the thrones themselves demonstrate the care that the people at La Milpa took in “destroying” such a throne room (Hammond et al. 1998: 634; Sagebiel 2005: 690-1).
Just before abandonment at La Milpa, a new throne room, Structure 39, was built directly across from Structure 38 within Courtyard 115 (Hammond et al. 1996: 833-5). Furthermore, after the ritual termination of the Structure 38 (which was built earlier that Structure 39), a new terrace was built in the back side of it in order to re-orient the building facing it towards Structure 39, the new throne room (Hammond 1998: 834). What purpose could the re-orientation of a building that has already been destroyed possibly serve? Even though Structure 38 would no longer contain ritual activity or elite citizens, it remained standing as a sort of historical or symbolic building.

In the case of this example, the original linear layout of progressive thrones in Structure 38 left the earlier thrones still exposed to the public as opposed to tearing each one down before erecting a new one. Additionally, the ritualized termination of the throne room within Structure 38, as well as the reorientation of the building after that same termination, show an adamant attempt to preserve the memory and tradition of past rulers and their reign through objects of power. Sagebiel (2005) dates the earliest fill within Structure 39 to the Early Late Classic Period, suggesting that Structure 38 was built and used for at least a few generations before Structure 39 was being used (634). This evidence suggests that whoever commissioned the building of the new throne room was also responsible for the ritual sacrifice of Structure 38. Therefore, within Courtyard 115 a single throne room can be seen as being used by multiple rulers, as well as another generation of rulers who built their own new throne room, yet keeping with the trend of respect and observance of prior elites and their ‘seats of power’.

**Surrounding architecture and settlement**

Although this paper focuses on the elite architecture located in La Milpa Centre, a brief look at the rest of the site will shed light on the development and expansion of the plaza areas. Having identified a type of cosmological layout within the site of La Milpa, it seems as though the Maya at this site were not only using the individual buildings and monuments to deliver messages of power and ritual, but they also used the general layout of those structures and settlements as a form of ritualized cosmological design. (Estrada-Belli and Tourtellot: 2005; Tourtellot et al. 200: 481-2). The impact of sacred landscape within the Maya world is notoriously great, and developing sites in cosmological forms places extreme focus upon a site that is centered within the apex of that layout. Additionally, we must remember that all cosmological arrangements aside, the sheer layout of the regional center and the numerous sites surrounding La Milpa Centre insinuate the prestige and power that would have come with elite citizenship within this concentrated area.

**Broader implications of Elite Life at La Milpa: Conclusions about elite occupation**

Although investigations and excavation have shown that La Milpa was heavily populated periodically, rather than experiencing a population increase at a steady, continuous rate (Sagebiel 2005: 711; Tourtellot et al 2003a: 50), evidence also suggests that elite activity took place throughout all stages of occupation, on a steadily increasing plane. Specifically, this included the construction of causeways linking the various plazas and surrounding courtyards as well as several large residential groups. Additionally, heavily filled middens, such as at Group 88 near Plaza A, suggest the inhabitance of elite members throughout this period of ‘decline’ or plateau (Sagebiel 2005: 633-4). So although extravagant public monuments were not being erected at this time, we still see evidence of activity within La Milpa Centre and a focus on making the inner nucleolus accessible and functional.

Having discussed several specific aspects of the main plazas at La Milpa, we can now ask ourselves, what can these architectural remains tells us about elite lifestyles at La Milpa and how did these elites use buildings and monuments to portray their status? We see that the construction and renovation taking place within the Late Classic Period at La Milpa Centre was done so with consideration to past construction, both at the monumental level and the smaller residential/courtyard level.

**Hierarchy and Heterarchy within the elite spectrum: La Milpa as a politically united site**

Attempting to understand the social and political composition at La Milpa, archaeologists at the site have looked at the multiple plazas as a possible representation of hierarchy within the elite class (Tourtellot et al. 2003a: 47). It is clear that the plazas and activities were physically joined (by way of sacbe), and were used and occupied at similar rates over similar periods of time (as expressed through chronological and locational descriptions above). But if there was one singular unified political power at La Milpa over time, why are there so many smaller plazas and various areas of residential structures rather than one massive central area?

Tourtellot also points out several differences between the four plazas such as the inclusion of
certain types of monumental architecture (ie stelae, pyramids, ball courts) and the addition of an acropolis at Plaza C and not at Plaza A (1993a: 47). But are these differences a representation of hierarchical relationships or ‘rival parties’? I find the observations of Tourtellot et al. more convincing when describing the different plazas as an interconnected network where one makes up for what the other might lack: the plazas are “functionally specialized rather than equivalent [or competing]… Plaza A had hieratic and public uses…Plaza C is an assembly area… Plaza D is a court… [and] Plaza B is the best candidate for a marketplace” (Tourtellot 1993a: 47-8).

While it seems as though the elite center of the La Milpa network was rather massive, we must take into account the cultural needs of such a center. My current hypothesis supports the idea that as La Milpa Centre and the outlier sites continued to grow so too did the major area of elite activity. Ceramic analysis done by Sagebiel notes that half of the total Preclassic population living within the 6 km radius of La Milpa lived in the much smaller radius of La Milpa Centre itself (2005: 717). As the number of people living in the La Milpa area began to rapidly expand in the Late Classic period and more populated outlier sites began emerging, we can only assume that the number of elite people (including courtiers and ruling members) would also have increased. While most satellite sites probably would have had their own forms of power, La Milpa Centre would have served as a vital area for large groups of those elite to come together possibly for large-scale ceremonies.

**Elite architecture over time**

At this point, I have discussed in the detail the chronological history of La Milpa with regard to architectural changes. Although there is a large temporal difference between different generations of elite citizens who lived within La Milpa Centre, there is no denying that over time elites were overtly aware (and in some cases extremely respectful) of the people who lived and worked there before them and the built landscape they left behind. With this an undeniable continuity that exists at the site of La Milpa must be identified, supported by a strong elite presence throughout times of florescence as well as what might be seen as a period of decline. Also evident is the sheer power and progressive development that La Milpa underwent throughout occupation. Continual construction and renovation at the site signals the importance that La Milpa, as a strong regional site, would have had throughout the Maya world. I have come to fully support Sagebiel’s observation that while La Milpa may have been connected to other nearby major sites, such as Tikal, it was in no way subordinate. Rather, it could have acted as a significant “client state” that would have served as a place for a large elite community to come together (2005: 731-5). La Milpa Centre was not only home to several hundred years of occupation and changes within the built environment, but a nucleus for elite inhabitants that valued ideas of a royal/elite presence that cross temporal and spatial boundaries Maya existence within the entire La Milpa region.

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Elite Material Culture of Ireland: An Analysis of Religious Identities

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Overview

Ireland has undergone several transitions in its religious history. The Irish have a rich history, but it is often romanticized and full of conflict. Certain images of identities are evoked when one thinks of Ireland and its religious traditions. The ancient Celts of Ireland evoke images of druids, mythological heroes and gods. Christianized Ireland is known for St. Patrick and the long conflict between Catholics and Protestants.

I argue that Ireland’s material culture offers evidence of more complex identities than superficial identities perceived by outsiders. Religious identities explored here exist over certain times and places in Ireland. The religious identities discussed make reference to the ancient past, and the 19th and 20th centuries. I explore past and present complex identities through material culture, such as ancient Celtic portico. I will analyze how outsiders like Romans and modern museum-goers construct Celtic identity through this object.

Secondly this research focuses on the role of nostalgia and how modern people use nostalgia in reaction to material culture. Nostalgia can assist to understand the complexities of modern identity are linked to past material culture. This discussion explores how modern people are implemented through critical nostalgia in this complicated process of preservation. The idea of nostalgia is a new approach to think about relationships between people and material culture. Therefore it is integral to explore the idea of nostalgia and what role it plays in preserving material culture.

Another complicated relationship between people and objects is appropriation. Since the introduction of Christianity to Ireland local people have claimed old holy wells and mass rocks as sacred. For the locals the sacredness these objects have contributed both to pagan and Christian traditions. Local people interpret the material objects in new ways to integrate their different religious identities.

Lastly the goal of this research is to analyze identities in transition by looking at architecture in a border town named Ballymenone. In Ballymenone there are interesting similarities between the houses and the people who occupy these structures. The residents of Ballymenone are Catholic and Protestant where the architecture of their houses appear distinct between the two groups.

However this paper explains the difference in architecture is a characteristic of a deeper multi-layered identity. Furthermore this research focuses how this architecture or material culture in transition is affecting certain identities of individuals in the community of Ballymenone. This example of residential architecture demonstrates how material culture and people affect the other.

Material Culture, Interpretation and Identity

Scholars know very little about ancient Celtic religion. Sources on Celtic religious practices come from archaeological evidence, like the 3rd cen.-2nd cen. portico found in ancient Gaul (Southern France) and from indigenous narratives. According to scholars are certain the ancient Celts believed the human soul dwelled in the head (Ellis 1998:61). The portico found at Roquepertuse in Southern France supports this fact. The doorway is a structure of a simple square frame. The interesting part about the structure is the cubby holes on the front legs of the doorway. The cubby holes function as storage of human skulls.

The narratives support this fact. These narratives consist of accounts from outsiders and from Celtic myth. The outside narratives were largely from conquering Romans who wrote some details of Celtic life. According to Ellis Celtic warriors would take the heads of their opponent after killing them in battle. Then the warrior would process the head, extract the skull and place it in the doorway. The cubby holes function as storage of human skulls.

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Imagine being a Roman approaching a portico displaying several skulls. According to Ellis it must have been a shock since the Romans did not perform this practice. As outsiders it was drastically different from their own culture. The Romans admired the Celts in certain areas like warfare, but abhorred it other ways as explained by Ellis, “As a Roman, Caesar saw the Celtic religion as something exotic, alien and barbaric” (1998:169).
Through material culture like the portico, Roman interpretation created an identity of the “other” (Ellis 1998:177). Historically this identity creation occurs by a process of imperialism. This “other” was a perspective held by the Romans which is defined by what is not Roman. It means the Romans felt culturally superior compared to the Celts. The interpretation concluded the Celts were the “other”, and this identity placed on the Celts justified Roman conquest in the ancient Celtic world.

In this example of identity construction, complexities exist underneath this simple dichotomy of “us” and “them”. Therefore an approach is required to sort out this complexity of identities from the material world. Lele argues semeiotic realism is a theoretical tool to “explore the extent to which they might be useful for understanding human identity through material culture” (2006:49). The author argues to explore the complex relationship in a triadic format. These are the representamen, the object and the interpretant. Lele explains this dynamic relationship more clearly:

Let us say representamen $R$ stands for object $O$ in some quality or aspect. $R$ seeks to ‘generate’ an interpretant (an idea, thought, meaning) called $I$, which stands in relation to $R$. In doing so it creates a relationship between $I$ and $O$. Generating an interpretant ‘completes’ the sign-that is, it makes meaning. $R$ seeks to draw $I$ into a relationship with $O$ and generate an $I$ such that $I$ will stand in relation to $O$ in a way equivalent to how $R$ presents $O$ (in a particular quality or aspect). $I$ is not immediate with $O$, rather $R$ mediates and represents as aspect of $O$ to and for $I$. (Lele 2006:51).

All one must do is plug the entities involved in the complex relationship into this formula. In the dynamic relationship presented here one can place the portico as the representamen, $R$. The portico is $R$ because it presents certain aspects or qualities of the object, $O$. In this formula the portico is should not be confused to stand as $O$. The object, $O$ is defined as anything, a sign, a behavior or habit. In this case $O$ is head taking, an act practiced by the Celts. The portico, a display of human skulls, generates an interpretation. This sign or behavior generates reaction from outsiders. The $I$ represent the interpretation of the ancient Romans. The portico as $R$ acts as a link between the act of head taking and the interpretation being formed by an ancient Roman.

By using this formula for identity in a relationship between material culture and people, some of these complexities begin to disappear. An understanding is revealed of how identities are formed from whatever perspective it comes from. In most instances interpretations are often influenced by what we do not know or what is different than us. Identities, once formed can give rise to judgment and all kinds of assumptions about an individual or a group. In this illustration of the portico, perhaps one could understand how an outside group created an identity of another group. The Romans did create a religious identity for the Celts. This religious identity was a primitive undeveloped system which the Romans reacted in feeling superior over the Celts. This reaction generated social action, specifically imperialism. This formula is useful for making sense how material culture is linked to identities projected by outsiders.

The use of the portico was helpful in figuring out how identities are constructed in a historical framework between the ancient Celts and Romans. Now to the present, this same portico found at Roquepertuse in Southern France now resides in a museum. There are different complexities at work here due to a different time and setting. The complexity this research will address is why. Why has an ancient Celtic portico been displayed? Why is it important to the modern person? From the previous discussion of the portico, some of these answers are clear. By tackling these questions we can reveal more complexities about modern identity in relation to old material culture.

To address the reasons why material objects, like the portico, are displayed in the first place, the answer is found in the interpretation of the ancient Romans. The portico represents an act of head taking. This ancient Celtic practice stems from a religious belief very different from the modern individual. People are fascinated about differences whether culturally or between past and present. This fascination of odd and exotic practices which define the “other” is developed in a museum setting. The concept of the “other” is often applied to groups of people, but material culture can be labeled as the “other” through its associations. In a museum setting, the material object is standing in for the people and their cultural practices.
Nostalgia and Modern Identity

According to Cashman, the reason modern people display objects in museums is nostalgia. “The impulse to preserve material traces of the past and to relive past ways understood to be threatened today…” (Cashman 2006:145). In other words, an object like the Celtic portico is displayed despite what it represents because of a human need to preserve the past. There is a sense this object stands for something that will never been seen again. Modern society believes in the practice of preservation and an obligation to display it. Where does this obligation come from?

The obligation for preservation says something about our modern identity. I argue that modern identity is one which is frightened at the thought of his/her culture being lost to time. Cashman argues nostalgia is a structure of feeling, it invokes a positively evaluated past. Beyond that, nostalgia is just not about imagination but reaches into a realm of imagination but reaches into a realm of action (Cashman 2006:137-138). Nostalgia serves as a motivation to preserve past material culture; thus preserving identities that would otherwise be lost. More importantly nostalgia and preservation are important to modern people because we also want our identities to survive beyond our physical selves. Therefore nostalgia plays an important role in the process of displaying material culture in the museum institution to preserve past and future identities.

Furthermore nostalgia is a form of resistance to time, and change in identities. Nostalgia is part of this process by affecting our time. Cashman argues there is a desire to stop time for the sake of reflecting on the past. More clearly, nostalgia is used to allow oneself to feel appreciation for and to reconsider all the changes that have occurred from one’s past to the present (Cashman 2006:146-8). In extreme terms, nostalgia is a rebellion against changes a person has no control over. Usually nostalgia is characterized by aromatization of the past, but reflecting on the past does not mean it is always seen in a positive light and that progress, or change as a negative occurrence. In fact, nostalgia acts as a bridge between past and future, to reconcile the present and the identity that is currently taken on. This could very well support why we preserve material culture to stabilize our own modern identities.

Material Culture and Layers of Identities in Transition

This research has touched on change and identity. Like the other concepts previously explored, identity and material culture has yet another complicated relationship. To better illustrate this process, this research will refer to Henry Glassie’s book *Stars of Balleymenone* (2006) on material culture and identity among the residents of a small boarder town in Ireland called Balleymenone. Identity is explored and how it is affected by material culture. If material culture does affect identity, then it is integral to discuss identity when material culture changes.

In Glassie’s *The Star of Balleymenone* (2006), in 1972 houses were classified by their roofing. The traditional houses were thatched and the more modern ones had metal or slate. Almost all the houses were thatched in this small community. When Henry Glassie returned to Balleymenone in 2000, no houses existed with a thatched roof. All the houses had the modern style with metal roofing. This research argues how the transition of material culture leads to a change of a local community identity to an isolated global identity. A change in house construction seems unimportant, but a change in material culture could impact identity in dramatic ways. The community Balleymenone experienced a change of identity and lifestyle through a change of the material culture around them.

Glassie explains how thatching has many benefits over the use of tin. With thatching, the material is grown from the land. The material is renewable and has an appeal. A thatched house did not take money; in fact it did not involve the economy at all. Thatching a house was a process involving hard work and the community. Most importantly thatching did require knowledge of the process. This decline of knowledge led to the modern use of tin. The people who did know how to thatch roofs grew older, they could no longer stand out in the fields or climb a house. Eventually maintenance became a problem and the community had to give up thatching and progress with the rest of the modern world by using tin roofs instead (Glassie 2006:192-193). The switch to tin from thatch caused social changes especially in terms of religious identity.

According to Glassie the identity of the local residents changed from a highly social identity to a whole new identity which was tied to a global community (Glassie 2006:193). Thatching for instance was hard work involving a complicated process. Therefore thatching required outside help from your neighbors. In the community of Balleymenone neighbors socialized with each other through assistance and obligation. The locals did not have to deal with cash-economy. However the switch to tin allowed for less opportunities to socialize, and for obligations to be returned. Thatching was a communal effort, very close and personal in nature. Additionally, the residents were forced to earn money, something very new to them. Joining the larger economy and modern lifestyle forced the
Ballymenone residents to shed their neighborly identities. As residents of this community resisting unwanted change this reluctance to change is not difficult to understand for people who are so accustomed to close social relationships.

Thatching was a practice associated with Irish Catholics, but not with Protestants. Donnan explains how material objects like the landscape or architecture become fixed to certain identities. Protestant residents were known to follow suit with what England was doing at the time. For some Protestants it was necessary to keep a link between themselves and their English cousins (Donnan 2005:79-80). Protestants are the minority in the country except, of course, in Northern Ireland. However for Protestants living in Catholic majority communities, a conscious effort is made to differentiate themselves from the majority. Therefore many, but not all Protestants adopted certain styles of architecture like the use of tin roofs. Tin as opposed to thatching is an example of using material culture as a distinction between identities. In Ballymenone, the community is conscious in the difference in house construction between Catholics and Protestants.

For any Catholic or Protestant maintaining religious identity was a conscious effort. Donnan argues this consciousness rises when dealing with towns that live on the border of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The two religious identities make distinctions between each other, like landscape and architecture (Donnan 2005:73-74). Donnan explains, “This enables those familiar with local code to ‘read’ the identity of place from a set of sectarian and stereotypical cues, just as they say they can ‘tell’ a person’s religion by the ‘look of them’…” (2005:80). Distinctions made across religious lines have fueled the conflict for so long between Catholic and Protestant. Some members of these religions feel the need to hold onto material culture and objects to declare their identity. Material culture is used to create binaries between religious identities, but objects can represent layered identities beyond stereotypes.

Returning to Ballymenone, fixation of characteristics to certain identities does not hold true in every place. People do not carry one identity as just Catholic or just Protestant. Human beings are capable of layers upon layers of identity. An example is the individuals in Ballymenone known for their storytelling abilities. According to Ryan storytellers are an official identity or position within the community. People who are identified as storytellers likely do not call themselves storyteller. The person is simply known for their ability to answer questions that could be found in the stories they have to offer (Ryan 2006:317-318).

The identity of storytellers is reflected in material culture, specifically the houses they dwell in. I argue that storytellers in communities do cross religious boundaries. Ryan (2006:314-5) argues the identity of a storyteller is not defined by exaggerated ethnic or religious characteristics. In other words an identity of a story teller can transcend simple dichotomies such Catholic and Protestant. Story tellers are capable mediators between different religious identities. Catholic and Protestant both are storytellers in Ballymenone. As thatch and tin roofs were distinctions of religious identity, architectural layout of a house represents the identity of a storyteller. When material culture connected to story tellers change the identity itself is affected for both Catholics and Protestants.

Glassie explains most houses were based on the same plan. The plan consisted of no porch on the front and an open kitchen with a hearth. Later on, the residents began to adopt a more modern plan. This house type consisted of a porch baring or covering the front door. The front door no longer led into the kitchen. Instead the front door leads into a hallway with closed off rooms branching off to the sides. In comparison the older house plan is very open. The front doors open immediately to a social room with the hearth. The hearth served as an epicenter of social activity, specifically for story-telling and singing (Glassie 2006:194-224).

The decline of storytellers in the community of Ballymenone is no coincidence with the adoption of new house plans. The need to adopt a new modern style had created less opportunity to socialize. The story-tellers and singers grew older and passed away. The next generation was not interested in learning these traditions because the younger generation was pushing for modernity. As the situation in Ballymenone is analyzed, one can see how the material culture is acting on identity. The material culture is changing as it is bolstered by a modern collective identity.. The residents of Ballymenone experienced material culture affecting their lives rather material culture reflecting their identities.

Reconciling Religious Identities

In order to understand identity and material culture more fully, appropriation is an important discussion. Appropriation is defined as different meanings are projected on a material object which may not have been the original meaning of the people who created the material object in the first place. Basically appropriate is characteristic of material culture having multiple meanings, or has been re claimed taking on whole new meanings. Appropriation can reinforce history and identity.
Specifically this paper will look at appropriation of holy wells and mass stones in Southwestern Ireland. These features have been around for hundreds of years. The local people are assumed to have little knowledge of these features. Surprisingly the sense of history of the locals is very well informed. The discussion of the people at Chaco canyon lack knowledge of the objects original use differ from the locals Southwestern Ireland visiting features. The local people are very aware they are descendants of a pre-Christian past. One may assume proclaimed Christians admitting to a pagan past described with pride as unusual. However the Irish have created a different kind of Catholicism. Material culture is a bridge between different religious identities. As a result Irish Catholicism is a hybrid religion integrating old beliefs with new ones in Ireland.

O’Brien explains there are several holy wells and mass rocks scattered throughout Ireland. Many Catholic pilgrims journey to these sites for an array of reasons. The most important reason is “making the rounds”. “Making the rounds” is when a pilgrim is religiously obligated to visit certain sacred sites. The holy wells are part of this religious obligation. The holy wells are believed to be a source of healing and rejuvenation. Many stories surround them adding to the belief that the holy wells have power (O’Brien 2008:333).

Mass stones are considered sacred like the holy wells. Mass stones are structures so ancient no local person is absolutely certain of their original meaning. O’Brien argues the local people are aware the mass stones come from a pre-Christian past. Though the meaning of the mass stones is lost, the local people have appropriated the mass stones to form new meanings (O’Brien 2008:332). The mass stones are considered sacred when these objects are in a certain proximity to other materials objects. These material objects are religious structures like Catholic churches.

Material culture like the holy wells and mass stones are powerful for the local people. The Irish believe these objects can directly affect their lives. In other words these objects have agency. The existence of these stones compels people to react or behave in a certain way. The continuation of this agency is due to narratives of healing and generational learning. The stories of healing come from the thousands of pilgrims claiming these sacred structures healed their injury or sickness. This reinforces the power of these sacred objects. Additionally Irish Catholic pilgrims take their children to learn about how to “make the rounds”. This ensures the belief sacred objects are powerful by continuing to the next generation.

Many scholars see many religious sites as points of contention. Contention is expected in most cases for people following a new faith to reject an older religious identity. However rejection is not what occurred among the local Irish Catholics. According to O’Brien the local people do not see these material objects as points of religious and political conflict. Instead the local people were able to form a connection between the objects signifying the pagan religion of the past with material culture associated with Catholicism (O’Brien 2008:333-334). The material culture of the Catholic Church and the pagan past seem really different. However locals found a way to integrate a past religious identity with their present day Catholicism. The research shows how these objects, wells and mass rocks provide reconciliation and reflect diverse histories. There is a process going on between the locals and material objects. This process results in no senses of conflict from history or from the transition from paganism to Christianity.

O’Brien’s point is people who visit these sites with long conflicted histories themselves have managed to integrate multiple identities through ritual engagement. Ritual engagement allows the individual to relate to a structure, just not stand a part from the structure. In this way the agency of objects truly come into play by helping to form a religious heterogeneous identity. Heterogeneous identity refers to the integration of conflicted and peaceful experiences stemming from historical religious contention. The local people are conscious the wells and stones have not physically changed but have lived through diverse contentious histories which gives them power as observers of history. The ability of these objects allows an individual share diverse histories and assist incorporating identities that otherwise would remain separate (O’Brien 2008:333).

According to O’Brien local people search similarities from material culture for a meeting point between paganism and Christianity. The similarities are the reason no conflict or tension is found among the objects from the past and present identities. The holy wells or stones are given an indigenous quality about them from the local people (O’Brien 2008:335). The local people use this quality to draw a connection from the objects to themselves. There is a sense among the locals, O’Brien argues that places paganism as just as important as Christianity. It is the indigenous quality of paganism, that it was the first religion in the land (O’Brien 2008:335-336). There is no total rejection of a pagan past because the integration between the two religious traditions is perceived as linked in their similarities.
Many locals discuss the holy wells and mass rocks as a natural flow from paganism to Catholicism. O’Brien explains the local people see the Trinity in regards to the ancient wells. For the local people view the religious idea of the Trinity existed in the pagan past relatives to its beliefs. Like the wells for example, is a symbol of water. This water is used for healing by drinking or washing with it. Water is part of a pagan trinity that includes earth and fire. Water is also mentioned and used in Catholic rituals (O’Brien 2008:334). Therefore these objects are reinforcing a marriage between two identities, linking the two religions through local perspectives of the past.

Further O’Brien) argues this integration of identities of pagan and Christian identity could have been a heavily conflicted transition. However this was not the case in this part of Ireland. The local people respect the holy wells and stones because they are far older than Catholic mass (O’Brien 2008: 336-337). However the local people are adamant about how Christianity is very important to them. The local idea to connect the two religious identities is to believe the landscape, and everything on it can be converted to Christianity. This idea is a really radical idea in view of material culture. In order for this idea to work the locals must think of the landscape, wells and mass stones are alive in some way. To think an object has a religion is very interesting idea. This concept is better understood from a local perspective how they were to easily integrate two religions and as a result create a heterogeneous identity.

As research of Ireland’s past and present was revealed, one realizes how complicated material culture and identity really are in the world. For the past all modern people have is the material culture left behind. Deetz argues material culture is really the only source that modern people can rely on to find out about the past (Deetz 1977:259). Deetz says it best, “For the seemingly little and insignificant things that accumulate to create a lifetime, the essence of our existence is captured” (1977:259). In terms of the past modern people want to know who lived in the past and what happened. Material culture can truly serve as a link to document the journey of mankind. This research revealed how identities are created through the interpretation of another group. In addition nostalgia is just not a feeling that romanticizes the past. Additionally, nostalgia is not always positive because it can motivate us to preserve out past and voice our dissatisfactions about our present world. This realization implements modern people and how we perceive our identity.

When material culture experience transition, people are affected by these changes as well. This connection between people and objects proves how people are truly connected to the material world. Lastly, we saw how material culture can help reconcile two very different religious identities. It is interesting how people can envision the past and use it to integrate ideologies that would otherwise be at conflict with each other.

In closing identities are developed from a complex relationship with the material world. In order to understand the complex relationship of identity and material culture, one cannot satisfy this explanation with simple categories. One cannot scratch the surface, and find an answer to these complexities. This relationship between us and our objects is imperative to understand ourselves and the world around us.

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