

Table A4.2. Quantity and percentage of figurine/whistles in each broad category*.

Category	Ejutla	Mitla Fortress	El Palmillo low status	El Palmillo high status	El Palmillo ballcourt	Lambityeco
modeled animal	91	34	69	39	2	125
miniature anthropomorphic	110	58	112	90	5	135
female #1 (braided headdress)	217	26	17	23	1	213
female #2 (intricate headdress)	4	6	6	7	–	405
female #3 (small crossed arms)	2	13	3	2	–	127
male/warrior	417	138	62	110	16	370
whistle (small)	50	74	12	29	1	209
whistle (large globular)	52	32	62	45	1	2018
total	943	381	343	345	26	3602
modeled animal	9.7%	8.9%	20.2%	11.3%	7.7%	3.5%
miniature anthropomorphic	11.7%	15.2%	32.7%	26.1%	19.2%	3.7%
female #1 (braided headdress)	23.0%	6.8%	5.0%	6.7%	3.8%	5.9%
female #2 (intricate headdress)	0.4%	1.6%	1.8%	2.0%	–	11.2%
female #3 (small crossed arms)	0.2%	3.4%	0.9%	0.6%	–	3.5%
male/warrior	44.2%	36.2%	18.1%	31.9%	61.5%	10.3%
whistle (small)	5.3%	19.4%	3.5%	8.4%	3.8%	5.8%
whistle (large globular)	5.5%	8.4%	18.1%	13.0%	3.8%	56.0%

*percentages are based only on the number of figurines that could be classed to one of the eight categories.

is grooved, with a perforation on the edge that passes through the groove. There is often a second perforation near one of the ends, likely for stringing. Most of these whistles are made of ceramics, although a few in our collections were made of stone, including one from Ejutla. Although not a common artifact, these small whistles have been recovered from all four sites.

A4.3.8. Large Globular Whistles

These whistles have a large, globular, hollow body with a narrow neck into which a molded head has been inserted (Figure A4.10a; Martínez López and Winter 1994, figure 49; Sánchez Santiago 2005). Two fin-like vertical appliques are appended to the torso, one on each side in place of arms. The large whistles stand on two spike-like appliques at the base of the front of the body and a large slab-like tail on the back below the blow hole.

All of the headdresses have some kind of large feather representation, but several variants have additional imagery of bats/owls, snakes/jaws of snake, and jaguars. Within each of these principal variants is a wide range of portrayals of the animals. Whistles categorized as having a feathered headdress either have no animal representation beyond feathers or simply were too fragmentary to know (Figure A4.10b).

The bat or owl face is stylized in different manners but is usually placed above the figure's forehead in the center of the headdress (Figure A4.10c). There is typically a tuft of

feathers above the bird's face and feathers that fan out on either side.

Fauces de serpiente (jaws of snakes) representations are very common and variable, but they typically occur in a central cartouche in the headdress above the forehead of the figure (Figure A4.10d). In many of these whistles, there is some representation of a jaguar, often just the nose, above the cartouche. The cartouche is usually ensconced in or situated above sets of curving lappets that drape down the sides of the forehead, with large feathers above the lappets and surrounding the cartouche.

Jaguars are prominently displayed in another whistle headdress variant (Figure A4.10e–f). Typically, a complete jaguar face, snarling with teeth visible, sits in the center of the headdress above the forehead of the figure. There are large feathers to the sides and the top of the jaguar. The stylization of the jaguar face is variable, but one specific whistle headdress stands out for its large size and specific imagery. In this variant, the jaguar face is centered between a lappet that contains the symbol for 1 Jaguar on the left and a stylized snake face and reptilian eye on the right (Figure A4.10f). This is the largest headdress in our collections, with a width of 16 cm.

A4.4. Interpretation and Discussion

A central goal in broadly classifying the figurines in our collections and looking at contextual differences in their distribution is to elucidate behavioral patterns.

The excavated deposits that we exposed can be grouped into three principal contexts: domestic, production, and civic-ceremonial. The production-related context is still in a residential/domestic setting (Feinman 1999), but the nature of the artifacts and features vary considerably from other houses. At three of the sites we excavated in domestic areas: three commoner houses at the Mitla Fortress, one house of intermediate status at Ejutla, and three elite and five commoner houses at El Palmillo. A small ballcourt was attached to one of the elaborate residences at El Palmillo. At Lambityeco we excavated in the civic-ceremonial core of Lambityeco, in an area that includes a priest's residence (Feinman and Nicholas 2016b; Feinman et al. 2016) and a much larger ballcourt (Feinman and Nicholas 2019a). The residents of the Ejutla house were also involved in ceramic production, including figurines (Feinman 1999; Feinman and Nicholas 2004a). Because of these site-to-site differences, the figurine assemblages from the four sites are not entirely equivalent, and our interpretations should be considered preliminary.

Although most published literature for prehispanic Mesoamerica emphasizes the use of figurines in domestic rituals (e.g., Marcus 1998, 2009b; Triadan 2007), there is evidence that figurines were used in public ritual contexts during the Classic period (Halperin 2017; Vera Estrada and García Wiguerras 2014). By looking at the distribution of the broad categories of figurines in our sample, we can begin to identify differences in figurine use in domestic and public spaces, and also see how different the production context is from others.

We outline broad expectations for these three different contexts. In domestic areas, we would expect to find a higher proportion of modeled figurines than in civic-ceremonial areas. Modeled figurines were widely used in domestic contexts during the Formative period (Marcus 1998, 2009b). The modeled figurines could be made by people with less expertise, so we would expect them to be variable and well represented in houses. We also would expect higher proportions of small whistles than larger ones in domestic contexts.

Production contexts should be characterized not only by large quantities of figurines in general, but also by lopsided numbers of specific varieties of figurines. We also would expect other indicators of production, including wasters and molds. In civic-ceremonial contexts, we would expect to find lots of large whistles for making music in public ritual settings (Broda 1970, 210; Wyllie 2010; Zender 2004). The large figurine quantities should not be accompanied by indicators of production activities.

The figurine assemblages from the four sites basically conform to these general expectations. Small modeled animals and miniature anthropomorphic figurines are a much smaller component of the figurine assemblage in the civic-ceremonial core of Lambityeco than in the domestic contexts at the three other sites (Table A4.2).

These small figures were made for and apparently used mostly in household activities, sometimes placed in burials. Although small modeled dogs and modeled anthropomorphic figures are the most broadly distributed across domestic contexts and are found in each house (see Table A4.1), there is little consistency in which specific variant predominates at each site. The small molded anthropomorphic figurines also are variable but well represented at all sites.

We did note significant differences in the distribution of the three categories of females among the four sites. All three categories are present in much higher numbers at Lambityeco and are poorly represented in the domestic contexts that we excavated at El Palmillo and the Mitla Fortress. The only exception is the variant of female #1 who wears a plain tunic and garment, present at Ejutla (see Table A4.1). Most of the female #1 figurines at Lambityeco wear decorated tunics; there are many fewer with plain tunics. This pattern is reversed at Ejutla, where the female with plain tunic is the most abundant variety in the entire assemblage, and there are few female figurines in decorated tunics. Given the abundance of this female at Ejutla and several molds for braided headdresses (see Figure 7.16) recovered from the fill of ceramic firing features (Balkansky et al. 1997), this female variant appears to have been produced in Ejutla, which would account for its overrepresentation compared to the figurine assemblages at the other sites. There is a similar overabundance of a variant of female #2 at Macuilxochitl, where numerous molds for producing that specific variant were found during excavations on one residential terrace (Faulseit et al. 2016, 316). Fragments of this particular variant are present at Lambityeco, and it is possible that they were made at Macuilxochitl.

At Lambityeco, two of the female variants are tied to public ritual events (Feinman et al. 2016). On the platform and the plaza situated at the north side of the ballcourt in Lambityeco's civic-ceremonial core, we excavated two separate trash-filled pits where we found discrete sets of female figurines, each associated with only one of the pits. The different portrayal of the cotton garments, jewelry, and headdresses of these two females likely was significant. In the pit on the plaza, we recovered numerous fragments of a variant of female #2, all of which had the exact same intricate headdress of concentric serpentine lines (see Figure A4.4 top left) and/or were wearing precisely equivalent decorated garments with basal fringe, amplified by an elaborate necklace (see Figure A4.5 middle row left). Many of the fragments could be fit together, so that there was a minimum number of eight figurines. The other pit contained numerous fragments of a variant of female #1 wearing a simple braided headdress and a simply decorated quechquémitl (see Figure A4.3e). Again, the figurines had been broken before being deposited in the pit; we were able to refit many fragments for a minimum of 11 figurines. Examples of these figurines, though rare, are present in domestic contexts at the other sites we excavated; it is possible that although they were

made and stored in domestic areas, they were brought to public venues to be used in communal ritual events (e.g., Halperin 2017).

Female #3 is found with any frequency only at Lambityeco and is very rare at the other three sites. It also is rare or not present in all other published figurine assemblages in the valley (Bernal and Gamio 1974; Brockington 1973; Elson et al. 2010; Faulseit 2013; Faulseit et al. 2016; Markman 1981), including Monte Albán (Caso and Bernal 1952; Martínez López and Winter 1994). We did not recover any from intact ritual deposits, and proportionally this female category is more abundant in domestic areas at Lambityeco (López Zárte 2016) than in the civic-ceremonial area. These figurines appear to have been made at Lambityeco for largely local use in domestic ritual.

Although whistles are present at all four sites, there are differences in the distribution of small and large whistles. Small whistles are largely present in similar proportions, whereas large whistles are disproportionately abundant at Lambityeco, where they are more than half of the figurine assemblage, far more than at any other site. The small whistles generally appear to have been used in domestic rituals and the large whistles in public ones. Another important difference is the imagery in the headdresses of large whistles. *Fauces de serpiente* and bat/owl imagery are present on whistles at all sites; these representations are widely shared with other sites in the Valley of Oaxaca (Caso and Bernal 1952; Faulseit et al. 2016; Martínez López and Winter 1994). At Lambityeco, however, we recovered hundreds of large whistle headdresses that include prominent jaguar imagery; whistles with jaguar representations are rare elsewhere in the valley, even in reported assemblages from Monte Albán. The use of large whistles with jaguar headdresses may have been limited to specific public rituals in civic-ceremonial areas.

One particular variant of these whistles (1 Jaguar) combines prominent jaguar and snake imagery. Across Mesoamerica, the juxtaposition of jaguar-snake imagery is associated with the cycle of the Sun, renewal, and the ballgame (Barrios and Tokovinine 2005; Cohodas 1975). At Lambityeco, we recovered more than 100 whistle fragments with this specific jaguar headdress. In published assemblages to date, the only other site where this particular variant is present is nearby Macuilxochitl (Faulseit et al. 2016; López Zárte 2016), where there are fewer than a dozen, mostly small fragments, many of which were found on a terrace whose residents engaged in figurine production (Faulseit et al. 2016, 316). We found a set of 1 Jaguar whistles in the same pit on the north side of the ballcourt with the female #1 variant discussed above (see Figure A4.10f). Significantly, a large ceramic effigy jaguar was also placed at the base of the pit before it was ritually closed (Feinman et al. 2016).

Figurines also are present in the smaller ballcourt that we excavated at El Palmillo; however, that assemblage is markedly different (see Tables A4.1 and A4.2). We

excavated only a small part of that ballcourt, so the quantity of figurines recovered is not large. But of the 26 figurine fragments that were large enough to code, only one was a large, globular whistle fragment. Over 60% were molded warriors, most wearing cotton armor or feathered capes. Although most warrior figurines also served as whistles, their imagery does not match either the larger, globular whistles or the female figurines found in the pits adjacent to the Lambityeco ballcourt.

The ballcourt at Lambityeco was large, built earlier, and is located in the civic-ceremonial core of the site, like the main ballcourt at Monte Albán, whereas the smaller, later one at El Palmillo is ensconced between two elaborate residences just outside the site's public core (Feinman and Nicholas 2011a, 2019a). Toward the end of the Late Classic (ca. 800–900 CE), as Monte Albán began to decline, palaces became more central loci in local civic-ceremonial governance, and small ballcourts were often built adjacent to these high-status residences (Feinman and Nicholas 2011a, 2016a; Vera Estrada and García Wigueras 2014). Given the location and size of the ballcourt at El Palmillo and the presence of so many warrior figurines, the rituals enacted in these palace-linked courts likely carried a different meaning and message to a smaller number of specific attendees than at the earlier, larger ballcourts, such as at Lambityeco. In both cases, fired-clay figurines were integrated into nonresidential rituals, but seemingly for a different set of participants in distinct ways.

The spatial patterning of warrior figurines and differences in the distributions of specific warrior variants illustrate another axis of intraregional variation. Warrior figurines are relatively abundant at Classic period sites in eastern Tlaxolula and the southern part of the valley but are seemingly rare at Monte Albán. Even though certain representations in headgear and garment are widespread, the most common warrior variant in Ejutla and Miahuatlán simply wears a loincloth, whereas warriors in cotton armor and feathered capes are much more common at the Tlaxolula sites, including Lambityeco. Based on stratigraphic contexts, the warriors date slightly later in the sequence than most of the other Classic period figurine categories (Feinman and Nicholas 2015; Paddock 1983) and have been found to be more prevalent at sites distant from Monte Albán. The Mesoamerican ballgame has long been associated with militarism (e.g., Fox 1996; Kowalewski et al. 1991), and the presence of the later, smaller ballcourts adjacent to high-status residences, as at El Palmillo, may signal heightened intraregional competition at the end of the Classic period (Feinman and Nicholas 2016a). At that time, warrior and ballplayer figurines became more common across the region. If the presence of warrior figurines marks the breakaway of sites from Monte Albán's sphere of political hegemony after that central settlement began to decline at the end of the Classic period (Feinman and Nicholas 2016a, 54–56), then the observation that the warrior figurines in the southern part of the valley differ from those in the

east is not that surprising. As Monte Albán declined and its political coalition fragmented, the eastern edge of the Valley of Oaxaca may have been part of a different political interaction sphere than Ejutla in the south, as clearly was the case later in the prehispanic era (Feinman and Nicholas 2013). Accordingly, the conventions of figurine representation may have diversified between the two valley sectors.

A4.5. Synthetic Thoughts

Through this analysis of the figurine assemblages from four Classic period sites in the Valley of Oaxaca, we have illustrated the utility of examining broad sets of figurines from a variety of contexts. Large quantities of broken figurines recovered from secondary and tertiary contexts can yield new vantages and information on patterns of behaviors associated with figurine use, especially when large assemblages from domestic and public areas at numerous sites are examined holistically.

We have advanced broad categories to organize key axes of variability for Classic period figurines from the prehispanic Valley of Oaxaca and have illustrated how those classes pattern distinctively between different sites and contexts. The distributions of the various classes of figurines are the behavioral remnants of activities that were enacted in those different contexts and likely were deposited close to where they were used (e.g., Beck 2003). Distributions of discrete categories of figurines and their relative abundances serve to distinguish the figurine assemblages in domestic contexts from the assemblages in public ritual and production contexts. We have also documented patterned variation across regional space for certain classes of figurines, a line of investigation that should be pursued further in future analyses of figurines at other sites in the valley.

Even though the use of molds for making figurines developed during the Classic period, a significant number of figurines continued to be modeled by hand. It is now clear that these small hand-formed figurines remained in use, mainly for domestic rituals, as they had been employed for more than a millennium. The new molded figurines appear to have been made in larger quantities for somewhat different purposes. Molded figurines wore decorated garments and feathers, which seemingly encoded and conveyed new classes of information. In Mesoamerica, figurines have long been considered mainly as objects for domestic ritual. Although some varieties continued to be used in household rituals during the Classic period, others were used in ceremonial activities that were enacted in public spaces. Based on our findings, fired-clay objects were utilized and consumed in significant quantities during these nondomestic ritual activities.

This analysis is only the first stage in our analytical investigation focused on Classic period figurines from the Valley of Oaxaca. Our intent is to generate feedback

and encourage others to examine more holistically the production, use, discard, and diversity of figurines at other Oaxaca sites through a behavioral lens, rather than circumscribing discussion to the identification of potential representations or the enumeration of descriptive attributes. All those broken pieces of fired clay can be channeled to serve as an insightful vantage into the lives and activities of those who made and used them (Skibo 1999, 1). More specifically, this comparative examination has allowed us to outline several key general themes that transcend the fired-clay figures from any solitary site to the entire Central Valleys of Oaxaca. At the same time, precise details and particular representations varied in frequency across the same sample.