

Introduction: Inalienability, Value, and the Construction of Social Difference

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ABSTRACT

Annette Weiner's concept of "inalienable wealth" is a powerful theoretical construct that can help archaeologists understand how artifacts gained value, were used to foster group identity, and created social difference. In this chapter we first review the concept of inalienable wealth as conceptualized by Weiner for use in understanding cultural practices of contemporary societies in Melanesia. We then discuss why inalienable wealth holds potential for archaeological datasets, how archaeologists have used it in the recent past, and how contributors to this volume employ the concept.

Almost three decades ago, Annette B. Weiner (1985) drew upon Marcel Mauss's concept of objects classified as what he termed *immueble* among Melanesian societies to formulate the concept of "inalienable wealth." Unlike other forms of material wealth, in objects of inalienable wealth the social identity of the owner becomes embedded and—along with the restricted ritual knowledge used to produce the object—forms the basis of its value. Inalienable possessions can either be kept out of circulation completely or given to others in a form of exchange where the ownership rights are never actually transferred: possession is still linked to the social and political identity of the original owner. Furthermore, this transfer does not merely connect the temporary owner to the original one; it also bestows an "emotional lien" upon the receiver (Weiner 1985). Inalienable possessions link their owners to the past and legitimate identities and authority in the present. We believe the concept of inalienable wealth holds great potential for studies of social valuables in archaeology because it helps us better understand how value is created in an

object by taking into account aspects related to raw materials, production techniques and organization, social identity of producers and owners, and specific use-and-exchange contexts. Inalienable possessions can be present within any level of socioeconomic status and can be an important aspect of restricted exchange in societies where the economy is not centralized. Finally, inalienable possessions can be used to authenticate either individual or collective identities, and to both establish and defeat hierarchical social structures (Mills 2004).

This volume stems from an organized session sponsored by the Archaeology Division of the American Anthropological Association for the 73rd annual meetings of the Society for American Archaeology in Vancouver. Organizers asked participants to apply the concept of inalienable wealth to prehistoric cultures in Mesoamerica. Presenters were invited to discuss methodologies that could identify inalienable possessions in the archaeological record, compare and contrast forms of inalienable wealth through time and culture areas within Mesoamerica, address issues

related to the production and circulation (or non-circulation) of specific forms of inalienable wealth, and present case studies where inalienable possessions may have been used by individuals or communities to authenticate identity and establish or even defeat hierarchy. In this introductory chapter, we will acquaint readers with the concept of inalienable possessions as first proposed by Annette Weiner for the restricted exchange (or lack of exchange) of certain valuables within contemporary cultures of Melanesia. We move next to a discussion of how archaeologists have utilized the concept of inalienable possessions in archaeological datasets. We conclude with an outline and overview of the remaining chapters in this volume.

The Concept of Inalienable Possessions

In her first chapter of *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-while-Giving*, Weiner (1992:23–36) traces how she conceived of the theoretical framework of inalienable possessions. Her interpretation was aided by (1) a new understanding of the Trobriand concept of *mapula* (see below); (2) Mauss's (1990:9–10) concept of “movable” and “immovable” (or *mueble* and *immueble*) objects or property; and (3) a critique of exchange theory as it was defined by Western anthropologists. It is interesting to note that Mauss's (1990) work was included in this critique. Specifically, Weiner saw in it a contradiction: Mauss conceptualized the gift as ambivalent (“at once desirable and disinterested, dangerous and social, the source of sacrifice and acquisition” [Weiner 1992:43]), yet his ultimate conclusions reflected Western notions of exchange theory that reciprocity still served to “neutralize” power—however, Mauss himself observed that it actually created difference and hierarchy.

Weiner (1992:23–28) explains how she originally viewed the concept of *mapula* as identical to Malinowski's definition of the term. She (1992:24) states that Malinowski (1922:178) defined it as “repayment, equivalent” or “the general term for return gifts, retributions, economic or otherwise.” To put it simply: Weiner, like Malinowski and anthropologists before her (Lévi-Strauss 1964, 1969, 1987; Malinowski 1922, 1926; Sahlins 1972), viewed the exchange of goods and services as the social glue that held cultures together. Thus, as described and defined by Malinowski, this *mapula* was the return item presented to the original giver in an effort to balance out exchange; however, after subsequent fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands, she, like Mauss (1990) began to see problems with this original definition. Weiner found new meaning for *mapula* when one of her main informants, and also interpreter, recited an example of the term, which is best given in its original account:

If my father gives me [mapula] a coconut palm and several years later a strong wind comes and knocks down the palm, my father will give me another one. If I go to the trade store and buy a kerosene lamp and later the lamp breaks, do you think Mr. Holland will give me back my money? Mapula is not the same as *gimwali* [to buy and sell]. If anything ever happens to that coconut palm, my father will always replace it [mapula]. When my father dies, his brothers will come and give me money and take the palm back. If they do not do this, I continue to use the palm until I die. Then someone from my father's matrilineage must come and make a payment for the palm tree. If no one comes, the palm is lost to them and my own matrilineal relatives will get the palm. [Weiner 1992:25–26]

It is through this definition and subsequent research on the topic in Melanesia that Weiner first came to see the term *mapula* as sometimes embodying the traits of an inalienable possession, or an object that is given but never truly alienated from its giver. Furthermore, loss of the object to the giver—in this specific case, the failure of the informant's father's relatives to retrieve the palm—implies a greater sense of loss, possibly even the identity and status of the lineage.

Weiner was also greatly influenced by the work of Marcel Mauss. In his famous *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, Mauss distinguishes between two fundamental types of property. He uses the Samoan linguistic terms *oloa* and *tonga* in his discussion. Concerning *tonga*, Mauss (1990:9) states that “this [term] designates the permanent paraphernalia, particularly the mats given at marriage, inherited by the daughters of that marriage, and the decorations and talismans that through the wife come into the newly founded family, with an obligation to return them. In short, they are kinds of fixed property—immovable because of their destination.” In the original French, Mauss uses the word *immueble* (translated to “immovable” in English). However, in French *immueble* not only connotes the fixed nature of these types of objects but also likens them to landed property or estates that have been in the possession of specific French families for generations. The fixed ownership of these estates, and in turn Samoan *tonga*, make them less the property of current owners and more the property of a specific family or lineage. In contrast to *tonga*, Mauss (1990:9–10) states that “the *oloa* – designate objects, mainly tools, that belong specifically to the husband. These are essentially movable goods.” Mauss explains that certain property owned by husbands does not hold the same meaning as the *tonga* passed on through women. These goods are essentially “movable,” or alienable, in their ability to change owners, whereas *tonga* are inalienable, or nearly impossible to separate from their original owners even when in the hands of subsequent

individuals. Mauss (1990:10) concludes with, “certain goods that are called *tonga* are more closely linked to soil, the clan, the family, and the person than certain others that are termed *oloa*.” Weiner (1985) herself returns to the exchange (or lack of it) of certain types of *tonga* in one of her first publications on the concept of inalienable possessions—a topic we will address below.

Through her own fieldwork, ethnographical comparison, and the theoretical underpinnings of Mauss (1990), Maine (1875), and Simmel (1978), Weiner (1992) used the concept of inalienable possessions to critique then current Western ideas about exchange theory. As Wells states in his chapter in this volume, Weiner essentially turned exchange theory on its head. Weiner (1992:28–36) traces the Western concept of exchange theory—or the principle that the *exchange* of objects forms the foundation of social relations within and between groups—back to the Middle Ages in Europe. She believes that the principle of reciprocity and previous scholars’ placement of the importance on exchange to create social bonds is so ingrained in our collective Western heritage that anthropologists have trouble seeing the true nature of exchange and its inevitable outcome—just as Mauss did in his conclusions to *The Gift* and as she did in regard to understanding the concept of *mapula* when she began her research in the Trobriand Islands. Weiner (1985:224; 1992:43) argues that more important than the exchange of goods between individuals and groups is the lack of exchange—more specifically, the desire to keep certain objects out of exchange. These certain objects constitute the most powerful possessions linked to aspects of corporate or family identity, and their loss might even trigger the loss of social standing, political power, or that family identity itself. Weiner (1992:10) argues that through keeping certain objects out of exchange, social difference, not homogeneity and equality, is created. These objects are, of course, those same objects considered *immueble* by Mauss and now “inalienable” by Weiner. We will now examine Weiner’s definitions of inalienable objects, their traits, and how she saw the Maori of New Zealand employ these objects.

What is an Inalienable Possession?

Weiner (1985, 1992) provides us with a number of passages focusing on slightly different dimensions of inalienable possessions. She never provides a singular, all-encompassing definition of the term, as its meaning is highly contextually dependent, a point reiterated by many contributors to this volume. An inalienable possession is something that can never truly be detached from its original owner, possibly physically detached but not spiritually (Weiner 1992:6).

Like Mauss’s *immueble* property, an inalienable object can be something owned by a corporate group or family and passed down through generations (Weiner 1985:210). Inalienable objects are imbued with qualities of successive curators (“owners”; Weiner 1985:210; 1992:6–7). Their value, in turn, is attached to the identity of their past owners and subsequently to their age and their curators’ ability to guard against their loss and destruction (Weiner 1985:210). Weiner discusses how value is created in inalienable objects:

The primary value of inalienability, however, is expressed through the power these objects have to define who one is in an historical sense. The object acts as a vehicle for bringing past time into the present, so that the histories of ancestors, titles, or mythological events become an intimate part of a person’s present identity. To lose this claim to the past is to lose part of who one is in the present. In its inalienability, the object must be seen as more than an economic resource and more than an affirmation of social relations. [Weiner 1985:210]

In this way, inalienable objects are not only defined and made valuable by the individuals who once owned them but also by the knowledge and history embedded in them. In turn, this value comes to define those who possess the objects in the present. Weiner (1985:212) goes on to say that “an individual becomes more than she or he is because the self is enlarged and enhanced by the power of the past. In linking persons with things, the things are made into more than their own materiality, for the things themselves stand as the means through which individual mortality is transcended, ensuring some measure of the person’s or group’s immortality.” As Mills (2004:239, this volume) notes, this idea integrates materiality studies into cultural anthropology—or more specifically, the idea that things have agency—and that material objects are not merely acted upon by humans, but that they act back on us as well (see Olsen 2003, 2010).

One of the most important aspects of inalienable possessions is their restricted circulation. Weiner (1985:210) makes a distinction between two types of inalienable objects:

those that should never circulate and those that under certain circumstances may be given to others either on loan, as copies, or in return for another object of the same or similar kind. In the latter case, the affective qualities constituting the giver’s social and political identity remain embedded in the objects so that when given to others the objects create an emotional lien upon the receivers.

Inalienable objects that never circulate may have counterparts that do—as in like-objects or replicas (see also Callaghan, this volume; Kovacevich, this volume). The

circulation of these copies only serves to enhance the possessor of the real inalienable object (Weiner 1985:223). This act is part of the essence of “keeping-while-giving,” a concept Weiner demonstrates through the example of the Samoan chiefs who circulate some fine mats en masse while simultaneously retaining the oldest and most valuable versions for their own lineage. Godelier (1999, 2004:19) expanded upon this idea and subsequently identified objects meant for three types of exchange—buying and selling, giving, and keeping—all of which act together to integrate a society and create social hierarchy.

Imperative to the value of an inalienable object is what Weiner called its “cosmological authentication” (1992:4–5, 99–100, 152–153). Weiner (1992:4–5) states that cosmological authentication is used “to amplify how material resources and social practices link individuals with an authority that transcends present social and political action. Because this authority is lodged in past actions or representations and in sacred or religious domains, to those who draw on it is a powerful legitimating force.” Equally important to an object’s original cosmological authentication is the continued practice or belief in that source of power. If that source of power ceases to inspire groups of people, then the object loses value and may go from being an inalienable object to an alienable mundane one. Similarly, if a certain group does not believe in the cosmological authentication of an inalienable possession, then that possession can lose its value and become alienable if stolen, gifted, or otherwise exchanged across cultural boundaries. In Weiner’s work among cultures of Melanesia, women played a vital role in creating and maintaining resources used to make inalienable possessions as well as in protecting both the objects themselves and those forces responsible for their cosmological authentication (Weiner 1992:152–153). In this way, Weiner reflects ideas about desire adding value to an object (Appadurai 1986) as well as an object’s ability to change its status from gift to commodity or from social valuable to utilitarian object (Kopytoff 1986).

Ultimately, Weiner sees inalienable objects as the product of the human need to create a permanent force or presence in an otherwise constantly changing, or decaying, social world. She states:

An individual’s role in social life is fragmentary unless attached to something of permanence. The history of the past, equally fragmentary, is concentrated in an object that, in its material substance, defies destruction. Thus, keeping an object defined as inalienable adds to the value of one’s past, making the past a powerful resource for the present and the future. The dynamics surrounding keeping-while-giving are attempts to give the fragmentary aspect of social life a wholeness that ul-

timately achieves the semblance of immortality, thereby adding new force to each generation. [1985:224]

However, Weiner (1992:120–129), Mills (2004), and contributors to this volume note that while inalienable objects may be used to sustain present social relations, they can similarly be called upon to change them. In this way, they can be used to both create and defeat hierarchy or existing social structures that are predicated on difference and inequality (Mills 2004).

Weiner (1985, 1992) uses the lens of inalienable possessions to study the economic production and exchange of specific goods in several contemporary cultures of Melanesia. Here, we will briefly summarize her conclusions on inalienable possessions in the form of cloaks and nephrite objects among the Maori of New Zealand (see Weiner 1992 for examples of fine mats among Samoans and the more complicated and infamous kula exchange). One of Weiner’s first applications of the framework of inalienable possessions was her study of the production and consumption of what were considered *taonga* among the Maori of New Zealand (Weiner 1985). The Maori, of course, were already well known among anthropologists, as their concept of *hau*, originally studied by Mauss (1990), had become the source of a great debate concerning the motivation of individuals to enter into economic exchange (Levi-Strauss 1969, 1987; Sahlins 1972). While it is not our goal to rehash this debate, the concept of *hau* is important in understanding how inalienable possessions were utilized among the Maori. Like the similarly spelled *tonga* of the Samoans, briefly mentioned earlier in regard to Mauss’s notion of *immuable*, Maori *taonga* were a class of goods—cloaks made of flax-seed thread, or nephrite weapons and ornaments—which were rarely, if ever, exchanged among the Maori. When given, *taonga* carried with them the *hau* of the giver. To Mauss (1990:11–12), the *hau*, or “spirit” or “soul” of the gift, was an external force that flowed from the giver into the object given. Ideally, the *hau* of a gift would eventually make its way back to the original giver in the form of a like-gift or even the same gift by the recipient to the original giver. Failure of the *hau* to return to its original owner in the same or a similar *taonga* could result in illness on the part of the original giver and reduction in social standing of the receiver who failed to reciprocate.

As inalienable possessions, the value of any *taonga* is determined by the cumulative histories of the people who have owned the item, a lineage’s ability to guard against its loss to someone outside the lineage, and the process of cosmological authentication that lay behind the *taonga*’s importance. In the case of the Maori, certain flax-seed cloaks and bundles of threads woven by women were considered

taonga. They both gave value and were given value by cosmological authentication, which was conveyed through the *tohi* ceremony in which they were used. During the *tohi* ceremony, the hau—also likened to a “soul” or “life force”—was imbued into a person. Before this important life-cycle ceremony, Maori individuals were not considered real persons but mere “clay” (Gudgeon 1905:127; Weiner 1992:55). Weiner explains (1985:215–217; 1992:54–55) that after a birth, flax-seed cloaks are spread out at the bank of a stream and the infant placed atop them. Relatives and a ritual specialist also sit atop the mats, and it is there that the *tohi* ceremony takes place in which an infant is given his or her name. The baby is then brought back to the village and placed atop the spread-out cloaks once again to receive gifts from other members of the family and village. The Maori believe that it is through the cloaks that the hau is passed into the body of the infant from the supernatural world—thus, imbuing those cloaks with the infant’s life force. From this point onward, the cloaks are inextricably linked to that child’s life force. Loss or destruction of the cloaks could result in loss or destruction of the soul of their associated owners. Cloaks are not infrequently the object of sorcery when an enemy seeks to do harm to a Maori person. For example, such sorcery would occur when a ritual specialist steals an individual’s cloak or even just a flax-seed thread from it, creates a mound of earth in the form of a human, inserts the thread or cloak into the mound, and calls on the hau of the person to come to the mound. Once the hau is believed to have entered the mound, the mound would be destroyed—thus, destroying the hau of the person (Best 1901:88; Weiner 1992:55). Therefore, cloaks and flax-seed threads become inalienable possessions, imbued with the qualities of individuals and—if they are eventually handed down through enough generations—entire lineages.

As we will see in chapters by Clark and Colman, Kovacevich, and Inomata, prehistoric Mesoamerican lithic objects played similar roles to Maori nephrite taonga. Certain nephrite weapons and personal adornments that bore witness to important ritual, military, or otherwise historic occasions and that were possessed at one time by not merely one famed Maori person but a culmination of individuals absorbed the hau of their owners and became inextricably linked to a specific Maori tribe (Weiner 1985:217–219; 1992:61–62). The loss of these objects was to be guarded against at all costs. They were only exchanged in rare circumstances and ideally kept within the lineage. Sometimes nephrite taonga would be given away in efforts to stop an ensuing war between tribes; however, battles would almost certainly follow in a tribe’s effort to regain its lost taonga. Some of the most powerful nephrite taonga were given specific names and displayed at important ritual occasions, dur-

ing which their history would be recounted and their value further crystallized.

Inalienable Possessions in Archaeology

Some archaeologists have begun to specifically apply the concept of inalienable possessions to the study of value in prehistoric material objects and how these objects mediated social relations (Aswani and Sheppard 2003; Berdan 2008; Clark 2007; Gillespie 2001; Hendon 2000; Joyce 2000a; Lesure 1999; McAnany 2010; McAnany and Wells 2008; Mills 2004; Rice 2009; Wells 2006, 2008; Wells and Davis-Salazar 2007), while others have hinted at the framework through the concept of heirlooms (Lillios 1999) or circulation of replicas or like-objects with important objects being kept (Freidel 1993). However, the real archaeological point of departure for this volume came from Mills (2004), who utilized the concept to identify inalienable possessions and their use in the creation of social hierarchy within prehistoric southwestern Pueblo cultures before the solidification of the Kachina cult circa C.E. 1,400.

Though not the first study exclusively dedicated to the identification and use of inalienable possessions in prehistory (see Lesure 1999 and discussion below), Mills’ work (2004) is noteworthy to us in that she (1) provides “key attributes” (2004:241) of inalienable possessions in the archaeological record, following closely the definitions set forth by Weiner (1992) and discussed above in the preceding section; (2) identifies contexts in which inalienable possessions can be found in the archaeological record; (3) identifies specific inalienable possessions in the archaeological record; and (4) traces a history of the use of inalienable possessions by prehistoric Puebloan cultures and identifies the presence of hierarchical social order within groups of people who traditionally lacked a centralized political authority. The “key attributes” of inalienable possessions include objects that (1) are not subject to mundane exchange transactions; (2) rarely circulate widely or do not circulate at all; (3) are considered repositories of knowledge; (4) require special knowledge to produce; (5) encompass a production system that is highly gendered; (6) are classified as “singularities” (see Kopytoff 1986); (7) are used in ceremonies of authentication and commemoration; (8) are used to authenticate individual as well as collective identities; and (9) are used to establish and defeat hierarchy (Mills 2004:241, table 1). Like Weiner (1985, 1992) discovered in her study of Melanesian cultures, Mills found that objects used to commemorate collective identity—that of a lineage or larger group—were usually more valuable and restricted than those used to commemorate individual identity. Using

ethnographic and archaeological data, she identified three types of collective and individual inalienable possessions of prehistoric Puebloan cultures as well as the contexts in which they were (and most likely would be) found. Collective objects included pieces of altar furniture that would have been used in group ritual activity and were never found in individual burials, only in cave deposits and ritual storage rooms. Individual objects comprised both clothing and wooden staffs of office, which, although passed down from one generation to the next, were eventually taken out of circulation and placed in the burials of specific individuals.

While inalienable objects' production contexts are difficult to identify in the archaeological record alone, they could be accompanied by important social events, such as feasting activities, a fact Mills learned through integrating ethnographic data into her research. Mills (2004:242) cites Bunzel (1932:848) and the production of individually owned inalienable Kachina masks among the contemporary Zuni. Mills (2004:242) notes that it was often considered "expensive" to have a mask made for oneself, not necessarily because of the material involved and labor required (although fabrication would indeed require great skill). When these objects were produced, those who commissioned the masks were obligated to hold a large feast (Mills 2004:242). Thus, Mills hypothesizes that the presence of feasting debris in conjunction with production evidence may point to the creation of inalienable objects in the archaeological record of the Puebloan Southwest (see Barber et al., this volume, for a similar example in relation to ancestor veneration). Finally, equally as important as the identification of Puebloan inalienable possessions and their potential production and deposition contexts was Mills' use of Weiner's framework to identify potential social hierarchy. Social difference was created through the keeping of specific material objects by matrilineages in both ethnographic and potentially archaeological contexts, which was significant in a culture that seemingly lacked more obvious signs of social hierarchy, much less a centralized political authority.

Lesure (1999) speaks directly to the identification of inalienable possessions in the archaeological record of Mesoamerica, but with a more specific definition than Weiner's original conceptualization. Lesure (1999:31) explains that "an item's alienability can be thought of as the degree to which it moves freely in exchange without developing a memory trace that favors either its being kept at all costs or its eventual return to an original owner." Lesure, like Mills (2004), endeavors to create a methodology for identifying inalienable possessions in the archaeological record based on culturally specific correlates and deposition contexts. Critical in an object's ability to become an inalienable possession is what Lesure (1999:26) considers

the potential for "gradations of value" of the object class. A "gradation of value" means that certain objects within an artifact class—in Lesure's example, greenstone—can have more value than others of the same artifact class. Certain material, like greenstone, ceramics, and textiles (although Lesure does not mention textiles), has a high potential for the creation of gradations of value. Lesure (1999:29) argues that it is the expansion of value gradations within an artifact class and its exchange (or lack thereof) that maintain social difference and hierarchy. However, he is quick to note that an expansion in value gradations is not necessarily what led to the *creation* of hierarchy and social difference. Gradations of value can be seen in archaeological objects through differences in size, form, composition, and specificity (Lesure 1999:29). Potential inalienable objects may generally be identified by their specificity, scarcity, and indivisibility—that is, to Lesure (1999:30–31) inalienable objects are typically unique, made of rare material, and seldom divisible. However, Lesure notes (1999:30–31), as do many contributors in this volume, that these archaeological correlates are not universal, nor are they fixed. Often inalienable possessions are not "singularities" (Kopytoff 1986), they may not be made of rare materials, and their divisibility may serve to strengthen their value, not diminish it—as in cases when inalienable objects are broken and later partially restored or even integrated into another inalienable object (e.g., Joyce 2003; Kovacevich, this volume).

More recently, archaeologists in the Maya area have begun to use the framework of inalienable possessions to study the value of prehistoric objects and their use in the creation, maintenance, and destruction of social identity. Julia Hendon (2000:46–49) uses the concept of inalienable possessions to argue that previously considered ancient Mesoamerican storage facilities that housed only utilitarian or surplus items were actually repositories of social memory and household identity. Storage structures, not unlike the Puebloan ritual storage rooms mentioned by Mills (2004), were places in which sacred items integral to sustaining the identity of a particular household were stowed away. Hendon (2000:46) demonstrates an important aspect of inalienable possessions that we briefly mentioned in reference to Lesure's correlates: she notes that inalienable possessions need not always be singularity-type objects or, in Lesure's terminology, "specific." Hendon points to the discovery of seven crudely worked jade beads in a storage facility at the village site of El Ceren, El Salvador, as potentially being inalienable possessions of that particular household (see Sheets 1992). For Hendon, what gives these beads the potential for inalienability is the context in which they were found: hidden, stowed away, curated, and—in the context of El Ceren—to a certain degree, rare. Hendon (2000:48–49)

also references the importance of cosmological authentication and the role of inalienable possessions that have been taken out of circulation and placed in ritual caches at other Mesoamerican sites around which later ceremonies of cosmological authentication and group identity formation take place. In this way, the inalienable objects in these caches do physically act as “the hub around which social identities are displayed, fabricated, exaggerated, modified, or diminished” (Weiner 1992:99–100).

Both Joyce (2000a) and Gillespie (2001) employ the concept of inalienable possessions as it relates to the passing down of heirlooms from one generation to the next within the social context of ancient Maya “house societies” (Lévi-Strauss 1982:174; Monaghan 1996, 1998). Joyce (2000a:203–206) identifies in the archaeological record of Mesoamerica specific objects that were fabricated in previous time periods at particular locations, passed down through generations, and sometimes deposited hundreds of years later in locations far from their places of origin. One example is that of a jade deposited in the sacred well (cenote) of Chichen Itza. This object, which commemorated the rule of a Piedras Negras lord, was then burned, broken, and deposited in the cenote following the ruler’s death. Joyce (2000a:206) notes that Proskouriakoff herself had a hard time reconciling her interpretation of these jades being looted in antiquity with the fact that the king’s tomb did not appear to have been disturbed. This example could be a case of inalienable possessions that could not circulate, or at least not circulate widely (in this case, it was possibly a gift to the ancestors). In contrast, some jades like the Leiden plaque do appear to have been transferred to other communities (see also Clark and Colman, this volume; Kovacevich, this volume).

In her study of mortuary rituals, personhood, and the concept of Maya house societies, Susan Gillespie (2001:96–98) references the presence of inalienable possessions in the form of sacred bundles at Palenque, Mexico. Using ethnographic evidence (Stenzel 1970), ethnohistoric data (Tedlock 1996:174), and previous studies of Classic Maya iconography and epigraphy (Benson 1976; Tate 1992), Gillespie (2001:96) argues that the sacred opened and unopened bundles referenced in tablets at Palenque represent the passing down of heirloom objects from patrilineal lineage heads to successive kin. The passing down of royal heirlooms in the form of sacred bundles represents the transference of social identity, personhood, and the continuation of a powerful Maya lineage at Palenque during the Late Classic period. In Gillespie’s (2001:85) view, “personhood” in Classic Maya culture was the product of the social relations created and maintained by an individual through the course of his or her life, not, as in many Western cultures,

the result of personal achievements or predicated on the concept of individualism (see Novotny, this volume, for the Postclassic and contemporary Maya; and Conklin and Morgan 1996 for a similar example for Amazonian cultures). In many respects, the sacred bundles demonstrate why the theoretical framework of inalienable possessions holds merit in the study of prehistoric Mesoamerican social relations. Returning to Weiner’s description of the tohi ceremony among the Maori, personhood in much of prehistoric Mesoamerica was constructed through social interaction that was often mediated through material objects (see Joyce 2000b, 2006). Like Maori cloaks and nephrite objects, Samoan fine mats, and kula shells, objects used in important social events of prehistoric and contemporary Mesoamerican peoples (see for example Kockelman 2007) acquired value, and even agency itself, that was later used by successive generations to create, maintain, or fabricate anew their own identities.

In her recent synthesis of Classic-period Maya economics, McAnany (2010) identifies in the archaeological record a number of classes of inalienable possessions. McAnany (2010:148–152) views architecture (both simple households and monumental constructions) as the ultimate example of an inalienable possession—one in which the collective identity and labor of a lineage or larger group of people (e.g., settlement or city) was embodied (see also Clark and Colman, this volume; Lohse, this volume). Monumental construction was especially valuable because it was both the consequence and cause of cosmological authentication—that is, the place where rituals of cosmological authentication took place as well as the result of a belief in the forces behind cosmological authentication. Because of their powerful connection to the past and their association with the source of cosmological authentication itself, monumental architecture and sculpture were often the first targets of destruction by rival polities. McAnany also specifically discusses the importance of finely crafted textiles (2010:189–190) and jade (2010:287–288) as inalienable possessions. Both items were imbued with the identity of not only the royal individuals who owned them but also the skilled craftspeople who made them (see also Inomata 2001, this volume; Kovacevich 2007, this volume). These objects—which were also possibly part of the ceremonial bundles passed down through generations of royals and noted by Gillespie (2001:96)—were so linked to their owners’ identities that McAnany sees evidence for them being targeted for what she calls “tribute ransom” (2010:278–283). Tribute ransom amounts to a type of extortion where royal leaders of polities would endeavor to capture leaders of rival polities; however, the goal was not to quickly kill the rival leader but to hold him ransom in an effort to gain his lineage’s inalienable possessions. In

essence, a royal's possessions, not his person, were more important to legitimate a political victory.

Finally, LeCount (2001:947), Callaghan (2008:56–57, this volume), Rice (2009:145–146), and Halperin and Foias (2010:395–396, 407) have recently begun to apply the concept of inalienable possessions to Late Classic-period serving vessels that display the Primary Standard Sequence (PSS) of hieroglyphs (Coe 1973, 1978; Houston and Taube 1987; Houston et al. 1989; Reents-Budet 1994). The PSS usually appears in a band running across the exterior rim of vases and bowls, and interior rim of wide dishes. It identifies the substance once contained therein as well as the vessel owner's name and title. Vessels displaying a PSS can also show a historical or mythical scene, sometimes with accompanying text describing the action taking place. It is not unusual for vessels once belonging to a lord of a specific polity to be found in the burial of the lord of another polity, sometimes far from the objects' place of origin (see Reents-Budet et al. 1994). LeCount (2001:947), Rice (2009:145–146), and Callaghan (2008:56–57, this volume) argue that such vessels can be considered a type of inalienable possession that was allowed to circulate in restricted exchange among elites. Like Trobriand kula shells, Samoan fine mats, and Maori toanga, these vessels carried with them the identities of their original owners. By using these vessels in feasts, current curators connected themselves to a political and religious authority in a foreign realm, thus legitimating their own authority at home.

The Inalienable in the Archaeology of Mesoamerica

Our goal in organizing this volume was not merely to present what we know about inalienable possessions in the archaeology of Mesoamerica; our goal was to share another way of understanding how value may have been created in prehistoric material culture and how individuals and groups may have used objects at specific historical moments to create, maintain, or destroy identity, hierarchy, and social relations. In the spirit of this aim, we invited contributors to apply the theoretical concept of inalienable possessions to archaeological datasets of Mesoamerica in which they were actively engaged. Many of the contributions overlap theoretically, but they also differ in how the authors chose to apply the various dimensions of inalienable possessions to their own research. Regardless, the themes of Weiner's original work (1985, 1992)—especially the paradox of keeping-while-giving, the restricted circulation of inalienable possessions, and their inextricable connection to the identity of previous owners—are always apparent.

The volume begins with essays that address how inalienable possessions were used by prehistoric peoples in relation to land, the promotion of group identity, and the tying of that identity to a specific place. The section begins with John Clark and Arlene Colman's contribution, which is both our chronologically earliest case study and the historically oldest dataset in the volume. Clark and Colman employ the concept of inalienable possessions at the Middle Formative Olmec center of La Venta, Mexico. They reexamine objects that rarely, if ever, circulated. Clark and Colman focus on social valuables contained in caches and embodied as stone monuments or buildings that were literally (and in the Maussian sense) immovable. They focus on the life history of these objects and how these social valuables conveyed collective identity and historical meaning. Essential to their argument is that many of these objects were obviously used, remembered, revisited, and/or reworked by successive generations, simultaneously creating and reinforcing inalienability.

From the Gulf Coast we move forward in time to the Terminal Formative-period Lower Río Verde valley, Oaxaca. Sarah Barber, Andrew Workinger, and Arthur Joyce focus on ritual caching and burials, arguing that communal events served to bring together groups of differing social, political, and economic statuses in an effort to promote community identity at the local level while simultaneously defeating growing regional hierarchies. Imported ceramics obtained by elites in long-distance exchange networks were interred in public, community settings, whereas locally obtained, more "mundane" materials were placed in domestic caches and burials. In essence, elites "gave" valued imports to the community, reinforcing the communal identity. The authors argue that the inclusion of children in communal burials (themselves seen as inalienable possessions) and the connection of individuals to these possessions from birth undermine emergent regional political hierarchy and promote group cohesion.

Discussion then moves to western Belize, where Anna Novotny discusses the concept of inalienability as it relates to human osteological remains. She examines Classic- and contemporary-period Maya concepts of the "soul" and reciprocal relations between living communities and their sacred ancestors. Novotny's analysis focuses on skeletal remains from Classic- and Terminal Classic-period burial contexts at the site of Chan. She argues that human remains were significant inalienable objects whose original owners, the ancestors themselves, played an active part in ritual activities and reciprocal relations with living communities—even after their death. She finds that changes in burial patterns through time reflect shifts in political strategies. During the Preclassic period, often human skulls were retrieved from burials and deposited in other locations, thereby serving

as inalienable possessions. During the Late Classic period, as political power became more centralized, tomb re-entry ceased, and associated grave goods shifted to personal items, as opposed to the heirlooms that were included in earlier periods. Novotny argues that this change reflected a shift in the creation of communal social memories and how ancestors were materialized.

Christian Wells applies Weiner's concept of keeping-while-giving to cultivated landscapes of the Classic Maya of southeastern Mesoamerica. Wells uses archaeological and ethnographic data to trace a system of the creation of inalienable cultivated landscapes back in time through the Classic period. He outlines the importance and complicated relationship between a lineage's inalienable attachment to a tract of cultivatable land in relation to the alienable rights this group gives others to cultivate and utilize the terrain. As Wells notes, landed property was little discussed by Weiner and Mauss, but it is at the crux of Mauss's (1990) concept of "immovable" property in that it was based on the medieval French concept of a fixed and inherited, landed estate (Weiner 1985:213). Although not a feature of many of the small-scale societies Weiner and Mauss discussed, landed property is key to applying the inalienability concept to hierarchical societies. Wells demonstrates the importance of the connection of the Maya to their landed property, especially in relationship to their cosmological origins and connections to ancestors. He argues that archaeological ritual deposits in field houses located near agricultural land were similar to ethnohistoric and ethnographic examples of *ch'a chaak* ceremonies, aimed at propitiating ancestors who were and still are the original owners of the inalienable landed property.

The proceeding chapters focus on how inalienable objects gain and maintain value through production and use. Here, contributors utilize dimensions of Weiner's framework of inalienable possessions but also integrate ideas from Marx (1976) and his views on labor and alienability. This section's authors often implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, question Marx's assumption about labor, production, and alienation (see also Damon 1980; Feil et al. 1982). Each author essentially poses the same critical question: Are producers ever truly alienated from their labor and products? Jon Lohse employs the framework of inalienable possessions to examine the labor contributions and identity of commoners at major Classic-period centers in Guatemala and Belize. He addresses the concept of inalienability as it relates to labor, and he uses it as a means to critically assess the discursive practices of Western archaeologists who have historically ignored the study of Mesoamerican commoners. As Weiner (1976) exposed the importance of the contribution of women's wealth to yam exchange in Kiriwana, Lohse exposes the importance of the contribution of com-

moner labor in relation to monumental architecture at major Classic-period Maya centers.

Brigitte Kovacevich approaches the relationship between the value of inalienable possessions and labor through examining the production process of jade objects at Cancun, Guatemala. She sees the production process as well as access to finished jade goods as segmented and reflective of Classic Maya social hierarchy, beginning with the production of jade pre-forms by non-royal, lesser elite, or even commoner, craftspeople and ending with highly skilled elite craft workers. She argues that some, but not all, jade artifacts were inalienable possessions of elites and commoners alike. Many of these jades materialized individual and collective identities, as they were crafted and curated by multiple individuals with long production and use lives.

Michael Callaghan employs the concept of inalienable possessions to assess how certain Late Classic-period polychrome serving vessels gained value and were used to promote social hierarchy and community identity. He focuses on eight specific vessels from one tomb context at the site of Holmul, Guatemala, and argues that the value of these pots was inextricably linked to the producers who made them, the individuals and groups who originally owned them, and the contexts of cosmological authentication in which the vessels were used. In addition to his focus on the creation of value, he uses the concept of inalienable possessions to identify previously overlooked heirloom vessels dating to the Early and Late Classic periods. Like Clark and Colman's contribution, Callaghan's study shows how the application of the concept of inalienable possessions to older archaeological contexts can produce valuable new data.

Takeshi Inomata's essay rounds out this group of chapters and demonstrates how the value in artifacts from the rapidly abandoned Late Classic-period Maya site of Aguateca, Guatemala, was inseparably tied to their production by important elite members of society and their use in specific politico-religious ceremonies. He argues that value in an object is dependent on social practice or how specific individuals and groups may have used that artifact in the past. He makes the point that various individuals or social groups may have perceived a single object differently, and therefore these groups may make competing claims for inalienability for the same object. Inomata uses the example of "Jester God" royal diadems to argue that they were polyvalent symbols and hubs of social interaction, which had inalienable ties to both individual and collective identities. These identities could be negotiated or contested via these powerful inalienable objects.

The volume concludes where, in many ways for us, it conceptually began: with Mills' insights into the theoretical

framework and methodological application of inalienable possessions. Mills (2004) challenged archaeologists to consider the implications of inalienable wealth for archaeology. Her work on materiality and social memory also served as a point of departure for our present analyses (Mills and Walker 2008). She identifies three key aspects of materiality studies: value, identity, and social difference. These themes are viewed through the lens of inalienable wealth in each of the chapters presented here. She concludes that objects, land, bodies, and labor have been demonstrated to form repositories for social memories and identities, actively creating and deconstructing social difference.

We began this chapter by stating that this volume was the result of a search to understand how prehistoric peoples of Mesoamerica imbued material objects with meaning and value, how these objects were used to create social identity, and how they were exchanged (or kept from exchange) in an effort by their owners to both create and defeat hierarchical social structures. We have found that the concept of inalienable wealth holds great value in pursuing these endeavors, but, as Mills states, "it is not inalienability, per se, that is the goal of this volume. Instead, it is how the recognition of inalienability leads to other questions of anthropological interest." In the end, this was the primary purpose of the Archaeology Division sponsored session in the 2008 SAA meetings, and it is in this spirit that we look forward to future studies that build upon and engage with the contributions presented here.

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