

The Inalienability of Jades in Mesoamerica

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ABSTRACT

The rarity of jade as well as its hardness, durability, and sacred color gave it a value incomparable to other materials in Mesoamerica. The labor investment of the crafter, the esoteric knowledge used to create the objects, and the identity of the possessor(s) all contributed to the legacy of jades as inalienable possessions. Jades were gifted, displayed, interred, and even destroyed in honor of the history, memory, prestige, and identity of the object *and* of the possessor, which were mutually constituted. Jades that were once thought to simply legitimate the elite prestige may have had nested social meanings, and the concept of inalienable possessions can help us to understand that complexity.

This chapter will explore how and why jades were valued by the people of ancient Mesoamerica. Certain jade objects were endowed with properties of inalienability, which made them more powerful, valuable, cherished, and restricted. While notions of inalienability may imply that jades could not be physically alienated from or circulated by an individual owner, I would suggest that in many cases inalienability means that the object is endowed with elements of the personhood and memory of the owner(s) and/or possibly the crafter(s) who produced it (see below and Kovacevich and Callaghan, this volume, for a more detailed definition). An inalienable jade object is indefinitely tied to a specific person, lineage, or community. Although it may be gifted, bequeathed, cached, interred with the dead, or ritually destroyed, the connection to the original owner(s) is rarely forgotten and can be what adds value to the object. I argue that properties of inalienability are endowed in an object along a spectrum, rather than the strict extreme states of being alienable versus inalienable (see also Clark 2007:23; Inomata, this volume). In addition to the circulation of finished pieces among multiple owners, there were many other means of building and instilling inalienability in an object: ideologies surrounding the raw material, the marking of the object with the owner's and/or artisan's name, ritual and ceremonial functions, reworking and trans-

forming the object over time, and long and complex crafting processes that require esoteric knowledge. This chapter will focus primarily on the production process and the instillation of inalienability via labor in the creation of jade objects. This inalienability could express the personhood and power of an individual, but also of a community (Weiner 1985:212, 214), simultaneously generating a divisive and cohesive force.

One of the first scholars to discuss inalienable possessions was Annette Weiner (1985, 1992), who elaborated on Marcel Mauss's (1990) original idea of the spirit of the gift, or the Maori concept of *hau*, which requires reciprocity. Weiner focused on objects that Mauss argued were endowed with *hau* and on what he considered to be "*immueble*" (the medieval French concept of a fixed and inherited, landed estate [Weiner 1985:213]) in that they could never be completely detached from their origins. Weiner (1985, 1992:9) argues that inalienable possessions can act as a stabilizing force, as they reinforce and authenticate "cosmological origins, kinship, and political histories." If inalienable possessions are circulated, they can bring danger to the individual or group who has gifted them, in that the individual's or group's very identity and history can be in jeopardy of loss (Weiner 1985); however, reciprocal exchange of an inalienable possession can also bring prestige, notoriety, wealth,

political followers, and indebted social and economic relationships. In this way these objects become different from the commodities or equivalencies used in everyday exchange (Weiner 1992:42). Inalienable possessions—depending on how they are kept, circulated, and/or destroyed—can both establish and defeat hierarchy (Mills 2004), create social difference, or maintain the status quo (see also Gregory 1980:630).

Although much of the conversation about inalienable possessions focuses on reciprocal exchange relationships (i.e., Mauss 1990; Weiner 1985, 1992), it is important to note that not all inalienable possessions are gifts—and not all gifts are inalienable possessions (e.g., Godelier 1999; Mills 2004). Wiener discusses the distinction between alienable and inalienable possessions:

What makes a possession inalienable is its exclusive and cumulative identity with a particular series of owners through time. Its history is authenticated by fictive or true genealogies, origin myths, sacred ancestors, and gods. In this way, inalienable possessions are transcendent treasures to be guarded against all the exigencies that might force their loss. [Weiner 1992:33]

Godelier (2004:6) makes the point that certain things are made to be sold, some to be given, and some to be kept. He goes on to say that the same object can make the transition from commodity to gift, to clan treasure taken out of economic circulation, or the other way around (see also Appadurai 1986; Costin 2007). The act of giving away inalienable possessions, while often reciprocal in nature, can add more to social status and economic gain than can egalitarianism, as it seems to imply, and is to some extent implied by Mauss (1990).

In discussions of exchange, many have made the basic distinction between commodities and non-commodities, originally made by Marx (1990) and then elaborated by Mauss (1990) and others (e.g., Clark 2007; Graeber 2001; Gregory 1982). Commodity exchange is characterized by the exchange of material alienable objects between social actors who are in a state of reciprocal independence (see Marx 1990). Gifting has been argued to be the exchange of inalienable objects between social actors who are in a state of reciprocal dependence (Lévi-Strauss 1964; Mauss 1990; Morgan 1877; see also Gregory 1982 and Wiener 1992). Mauss (1990:63) emphasizes the inalienability of the gift, noting that “the alliance that has been contracted is no momentary phenomenon, and the contracting parties are deemed to be in a perpetual dependence towards one another.” Gift giving is able to alienate the inalienable but, at the same time, retain a connection to the object and the person to whom it was given (Gregory 1980:645). Gregory (1980:640) has likened this relationship to a tennis ball on a

string, in that the giver still retains some control over the object and can jerk it back. Mauss (1990:12–13, 49) suggests some agency in the object itself, as the object is endowed with the essence of the giver, which strives to return in some form.

Mauss explains this reciprocal dependence relationship with the inalienable properties of the gift, imbued with the spirit of the giver, as well as the material agency of the object itself:

In this system of ideas one clearly and logically realizes that one must give back to another person what is really part and parcel of his nature and substance, because to accept something from somebody is to accept some part of his spiritual essence, of his soul. [Mauss 1990:12]

Finally, the thing given is not inactive. Invested with life, often possessing individuality, it seeks to return to what Hertz has called its ‘place of origin’ or to produce on behalf of the clan and the native soil from which it sprang, an equivalent to replace it. [Mauss 1990:13]

There are degrees of inalienability: some gifts retain little of the individual or personhood of the giver, while some inalienable possessions are never gifted at all and can never be estranged from their owners. The act of gifting lends itself to the creation of inalienability in the gift, as the identities of successive owners can become attached to the object. Crafting can also help to create properties of inalienability, especially if the object had to travel between multiple producers and/or if it was extremely difficult to produce. The use of esoteric, restricted knowledge in production can imbue the item with an even greater social meaning (Helms 1993; Mauss 1990).

Another trajectory for inalienable possessions is the grave—that of the original owner or later recipient. This end may seem like the ultimate act of inalienability, as the object would never again be physically alienated from its owner. The Classic-period Maya did not observe such restrictions, and items—including bones, pots, and jades—were regularly removed from burial contexts and curated, circulated, cached, and/or ritually destroyed (see also Joyce 2003 and Novotny, this volume; see Clark and Colman, this volume, for an argument that not all grave goods were inalienable).

As Gregory (1980) also notes, not all gifts are given to living, breathing individuals. Many are given to gods and ancestors, and in the same spirit of “the gift,” the deity is compelled to make a return (see also Hubert and Mauss 1964; Morehard and Bulter 2010). Burial goods could be construed as gifts that retain the favor of that deceased family member or venerated ancestor. In ancient Mesoamerica, even labor and tribute expended by commoners can be seen as gifts that bind social entities, gods, ancestors, and elites and commoners in perpetual indebtedness and a kind of

“sacred covenant” (e.g., Monaghan 1995; McAnany 2010; Saitta 1999). Some inalienable wealth finds its way into caches, offerings, and burials, but the principle of gifting and reciprocity remains. While Gregory (1980:645) argues that this relationship allows the alienation of the inalienable, again, as Hubert and Mauss suggest (1964), a return is expected in some form. And here we can see the degree of inalienability is underscored. Although interring an inalienable item does not constitute a form of circulation, as an economic exchange of commodities, the object is taken out of circulation, so an exchange of sorts is still taking place. In extreme cases, the inalienable possession is ritually destroyed. Sometimes this destruction takes the form of a ceremonial activity, such as a potlatch (see Gregory 1980), or a ritually sacrifice, such as the jades that were broken and cast into the Sacred Cenote of Chichen Itza (see Joyce 2003). In some senses, this destruction is the ultimate act of inalienability, as an individual can never again own the object. Loss would seem to diminish the item’s potency; however, the memory of the object and the act of destruction can bring more power and notoriety than circulation or curation.

Hendon (2000:49) argues that things included in Classic Maya caches were not actually taken out of circulation because as long as they were remembered, they were endowed with inalienability. By implication, the individual or group associated with the cache may still be sought out as a valuable trade partner or ally because of the existence of the cache. The requisitioning of materials for burials or caches would only increase their prestige or value. Merton (1968:58) identified the “Matthew effect,” from the biblical principle of the Book of Matthew 13:12: “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have in more abundance.” Merton applies this effect to scientific publishing and renown or notoriety, but it could also be understood in terms of the concept of inalienable possessions: those objects that are kept, cached, or destroyed can bring more wealth and prestige to the individual or community that deposited them.

In the case study discussed here, I will explore how Classic Maya elites and commoners used jade to legitimate or negotiate individual and/or collective identities through jade production. The concept of inalienability speaks to this distinction, as Mills (2004) has identified collective and individual inalienable possessions in the American Southwest. She also suggests that inalienable possessions can be powerful indicators of collective social group identity if they can be identified in the archaeological record. I argue that Classic Maya jades could be at once representations of individual as well as collective identities in certain cases, especially when multiple producers may have been involved. The

pointedly difficult, painstaking, and complicated production processes, often undertaken by multiple producers, added to the inalienability of jades. Not only were the life histories, memories, and personhood of multiple owners imbued in many jade objects but so were those of multiple producers. According to Barbara Mills (2004: table 1), inalienable objects are often unique, have long life histories and stories or names that personify the object, require special skill to create, and are often made from exotic raw materials. Most importantly for this study is that inalienable possessions can be difficult to produce, may be crafted in a process that is highly gendered (in this case, referring to status), and can represent individual and collective identities.

The crafters’ investment of labor, the esoteric knowledge used to create the objects, and the identity of the possessor(s) all contributed to the legacy of jades as inalienable possessions. Jades were gifted, kept out of sight, displayed, interred, and even destroyed in honor of the inalienability, memory, prestige, and identity of the object *and* the possessor—which were mutually constituted. While this is a component of the concept of materiality (e.g., Meskell 2005; Miller 1987) and material agency (e.g., Latour 1993; Olsen 2003), the study of inalienable possessions can add a nuanced understanding in that certain artifacts were especially potent and effective constituters of identity.

Jade Artifacts as Inalienable Possessions

The concept of inalienable possessions is important for the study of nonindustrial economic systems, especially in relation to jade artifacts, as the prestige goods models may not highlight the complex social relationships these artifacts may entail (see also Lesure 1999). These inalienable objects could have helped to establish social networks and could have acted as symbolic capital that reinforced the power of the elite who circulated them. They also may have been important in forming the social identities of the various groups—both elite and commoner—involved in the crafting and curation.

Jade was a raw material that lent itself to the creation of inalienable wealth. Weiner (1992:59) argues that hard, durable materials like jade, precious metal, or bone make them inherent symbols of permanence and historical accounting. Taube (2005) concludes that jade was valued in Mesoamerica not only for its beauty and inherent qualities but also for its role as a symbol of maize, water, fertility, and life’s very essence. The jade’s rarity, hardness, durability, and sacred color gave it a value incomparable to that of other materials in Mesoamerica and contributed to the status of certain jade artifacts as inalienable wealth (Kovacevich 2011;

Taube 2005; Taube and Ishihara-Brito 2012). The Aztec emperor at the time of the Conquest, Motecuhzoma, declared the value of greenstones, or *chalchihuites* (derived from the Nahuatl word *xalxihuitl*, or *xalli* [sand or jewel], and *xihuitl* [herb or herb-colored]; Foshag 1957:7) as more than two loads of gold each (Díaz del Castillo 1632, 2:136–137; cited in Foshag 1957). Beads are known to have been a broadly circulating form of exchange currency during the contact period (e.g., Landa [Tozzer 1941]:19, 95–96, 130), but the more elaborate jades were possessed and worn only by the most elite. In the Aztec empire, the use of certain jade was controlled by sumptuary laws (Durán 1994:208–210), which almost certainly existed in some form during the Classic period (e.g., Kovacevich 2006:114–127). An essential part of a ruler's burial goods, jade adornments were also included on the ritual costume used by Maya kings and nobles during presentation, as monuments and stelae attest. The actual use of jade as ceremonial paraphernalia also acted to increase value and inalienability, tying it to shamanic power of the individual or lineage, as Freidel (1993) argues for jade casting stones and Taube (2005) argues for jade earspools as conjuring devices. Evidence suggests that commoners also possessed certain jades that in some cases might have been inalienable wealth (see below).

In Maya archaeology, jade has often been used as a signifier not only of wealth but also of high status. Some scholars have challenged jade's use as an exclusive marker of elite status, as it has been found in many non-elite households (see Garber 1993:166–172; Guderjan 2007:81–88; Moholy-Nagy 1994:88, 1997:301; Palka 1995:20; Rochette 2009). Rochette (2009) has argued that jade was a precious substance not restricted to only the elite of Classic Maya society (see also Kovacevich 2006, 2007). Rochette (2009) found in the Middle Motagua valley of Guatemala that jade production was not restricted to elite individuals; all levels of the social structure were involved. At the same time, certain objects seem to have been exclusively owned and exchanged by elites or elite lineages (Kovacevich 2007, 2011). These multiple levels of production and exchange suggest numerous spheres of exchange and gradations of value for jade (see also Lesure 1999).

Ethnohistoric sources suggest that there were many types of jade during the contact period, and common people were allowed to use some of the inferior jades (Durán 1994:209; Sahagún 1961:167) and only in certain forms, particularly beads. High-quality jade that incorporated the iconography of the high culture was restricted to use among elites (Baines and Yoffee 1998). For the Maya, these restricted types took the form of large earflares (e.g., Pendergast 1998; Taube and Ishihara-Brito 2012:151), *ahaw* pendants (e.g., Freidel 1993:153–159; Freidel and Schele

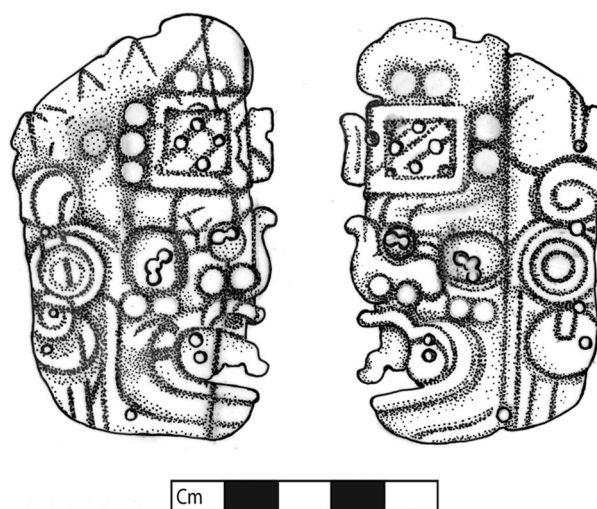


Figure 7.1. Jade diadem from a cache beneath the royal throne room of Cancun, showing both sides (drawing by Fernando Alvarez).

1988:556), and what have been termed “Jester God” royal diadems and other headdress ornaments (e.g., Eberl and Inomata 2001; Freidel 1993; Freidel et al. 2002:45, 70; Schele and Freidel 1990:114–115, 121, 135, figures 3.14, 3.19, 4.4; Schele and Miller 1986; Taube and Ishihara-Brito 2012:147–150; see also Inomata, this volume; Figure 7.1). I argue that this pattern relates to consolidation of power and restriction of status-reinforcing goods through mechanisms like sumptuary laws and/or control of elite exchange networks (Kovacevich 2006), and also the creation of inalienable properties in some jades.

One of the key attributes of inalienable possessions is that they rarely circulate or do not circulate widely (Mills 2004: Table 1). There may often be copies or replicas that circulate and may even increase the value of the inalienable possession itself. In looking at the distribution of jade with the emergence of social hierarchy, Lesure (1999) suggests that jades in the Middle Formative period moved from personal inalienable wealth to symbols of collective identities as social hierarchies began to develop. He emphasizes gradations of value in which certain valuable objects—relegated to restricted spheres of exchange or not exchanged at all—will have a widely circulated counterpart. These multiple spheres of circulation can add to the value of the restricted object. Wattenmaker also argues this case for emerging states in northern Mesopotamia:

However, the use of prestige goods to verify rank can only be effective if there is some recognition of the goods symbolizing prestige, and demand for them, among the non-elite. Emulation of these craft goods by the non-elite to advance their own standing would be especially

effective in a large-scale and diverse society. [Wattenmaker 1994:111]

Childs (1998) notes that spears produced for chiefs in West African society were singularities, were named, and were not circulated, all leading to their inalienable association with the chief and the mutual constitution of the identity of the spear and the social identity of the chief. However, copies were made and circulated among followers to increase social cohesion and lend value to the inalienable wealth of the chief. As Mauss notes for the Kwakiutl (1990:134, n. 245), there were two kinds of coppers: those that did not leave the family and those that were less valuable and that circulated as a kind of “satellite” for the first kind (Weiner 1992:164, n11). Jades in Precolumbian Mesoamerica may have operated in much the same way: less valuable forms, such as beads, were circulated more widely while more valued forms, like incised plaques and carved pendants, remained as valued heirlooms.

When circulated, inalienable possessions are often curated and become heirlooms, which acquire a genealogy as they are inherited from one person to the next. Rosemary Joyce (2000) has discussed the genealogy and heirloom status of certain jade artifacts in Mesoamerica. Hieroglyphic inscriptions are the principle means for identifying the circulation history of an artifact—its life history as an heirloom—as in the case of the Leiden Plaque (R. Joyce 2000:205; Figure 7.2). The plaque commemorates the acts of a Tikal lord before C.E. 400, but it was deposited at the mouth of the Motagua River nearly four hundred years later (Figure 7.3), when it was taken out of circulation and placed with cached materials that date to ca. C.E. 800.

The Leiden Plaque is also an example of how the Maya marked certain jade, ceramic, bone, and shell artifacts with what has been called “name-tagging” (Houston and Taube 1987; Houston et al. 1989), in which the name of the elite patron, his or her ancestors, and/or the name of the artisan is recorded. Dorie Reents-Budet (1994, 1998) has referred to this process as one of a number of “additives of prestige,” or steps in the production process, aimed at imbuing the object with added value. Based on her insights, I would argue that these processes, among others discussed below, contributed to the inalienability of the object (see also Callaghan, this volume). Naming the owner indelibly ties that object to the owner for eternity, marking it as his or her property, but, more importantly, it materializes memory (Joyce 2003). Hieroglyphs indicate the name of the owner, but this does not mean that marked objects never circulated. The addition of the owner’s name conveniently allows us to track these artifacts that may have served as gifts or heirlooms, or that may have been captured

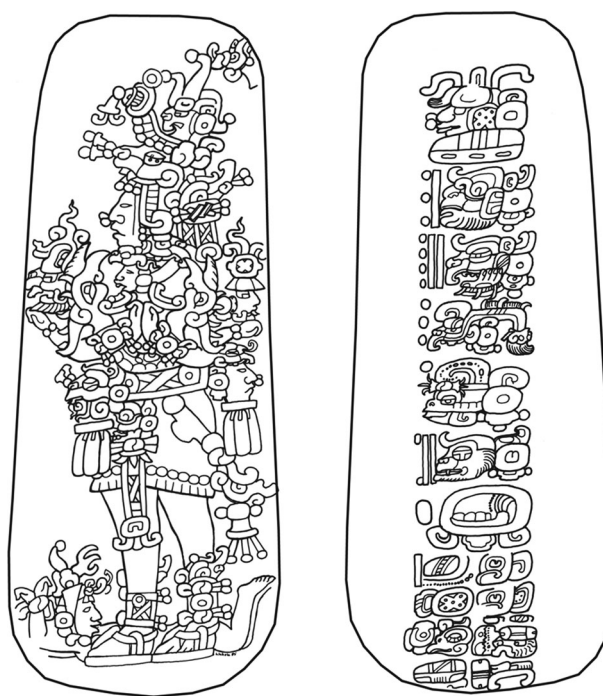


Figure 7.2. Drawing of the Leiden Plaque, showing image of the lord with hieroglyphic inscription detailing his name, historical acts, date, and location on the reverse side (drawing by Linda Schele © David Schele; courtesy Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc., www.famsi.org).



Figure 7.3. Map of the Maya area, showing relevant sites and natural features (map by author).

as part of tribute ransom (McAnany 2010). Ethnographic examples of inalienable possessions have been found to circulate in all of these ways (e.g., Weiner 1985). Weiner (1992) also notes that inalienable possessions often had long genealogies or histories that could be recounted, and hieroglyphic inscriptions such as that on the Leiden Plaque

facilitated these memories. Rosemary Joyce (2003) discusses such objects as points of reference for memory of historical events and genealogical connections that brought power and prestige to the heirlooms' inheritors or recipients. The names on these items served to do more than just mark them as property: they created inalienable historical connections between individuals and objects.

In the absence of glyphs, style and color can serve as a means to identify curation. For example, a cache beneath an altar at the base of the Hieroglyphic Stairway at Copan contained "a lidded ceramic censer containing two jadeite pieces, a lanceolate flint knife, a shell, some ash and carbon, and some sting-ray spines and sea urchin spines" (Fash 1991:147). Fash (1991:148) identifies the two jade pieces as heirlooms because they were carved in the style of the fourth or fifth century C.E. In addition, one was a pendant typical of those shown worn by rulers. If it were produced in the fourth or fifth century, then it would have been worn and passed down for three hundred years before it was placed in the cache by K'ak' Yipyaj Chan K'awiil (Smoke Shell) in the Late Classic period. This curation and gifting, or handing down, of these artifacts contributes to their value and inalienability. Their endurance through time and passage between important individuals would have lent some of the sacred essence of the individual to the object; simultaneously, the object would have helped to construct the social identity of the individual.

A second example is Cache 4 of Cival, dating to approximately 600 B.C.E. (Bauer 2005; Estrada-Belli 2011:80–83). In Mesoamerica, caches of jade celts or axes represent a connection to maize, fertility, and centrality, as well as a ruler's ability to wield these forces. The cache contained five jade celts arranged in a quincunx pattern, with the finest of the five in the central position, argued to represent sprouting maize plants (see Taube 2000). A posthole had been cut into the center of the plaster cap of the cache, suggesting the placement of a wooden post, which would have represented the mature maize plant and the world tree or axis mundi, directly linked to the central blue-green jade celt below (Bauer 2005:29; Estrada-Belli 2011:83). The celt is argued to be an Olmec artifact based on its color and length, both of which were production preferences for the Olmec. The surrounding celts were not only shorter (more typical of Maya style), but also a lighter green color commonly used for Maya jade objects (Hruby et al. 2007; see Seitz et al. 2001 for a discussion of "Olmec Blue" jade). In this case, the ideological properties of jade as a raw material, the final form of the object and its context, as well as its possible procurement from a distant and powerful culture lend to its prestige and inalienable connection with the elite power to control forces of fertility. But this was not just an inalien-

able connection to an individual or lineage: these items were interred in a public plaza, likely with a large portion of the community present at their deposition. This type of ritual and the memory associated with it reinforced community bonds and identity; it simultaneously promoted an individual or royal line, thereby becoming an inalienable possession as memory of the community itself. Thus, we see identities nested within one another (see also LeCount 2005 for a ceramic example). A feeling of solidarity and community must complement any divisive and divisional strategies in order to effectively maintain power (e.g., Barber and Joyce 2007; Gilman 1981; A. Joyce 2000; Kertzer 1988).

As the above example illustrates, the archaeological repositories for many Maya jades were caches and burials, but this does not mean that they were removed from the social sphere. Hendon (1996) notes the similarities among burials, caches, and storage containers. They all mark areas that must be remembered as well as confer that particular area with meaning. The inclusion of symbolic artifacts (often forms of wealth, whether economic or symbolic) within these interments is a way of removing possessions from circulation but not from memory (Weiner 1992). Hendon (1996:49) argues that objects do not necessarily leave circulation as they enter into caches and ritual deposits, but they become (or remain) inalienable (see also Mills 2004; Weiner 1992). Interring them can transform them into an even more powerful identifier of group identity, as they have been removed from the possibility of transfer to another group or individual to whom they would bestow power. Although the items are interred, they are not completely forgotten, and they continue to provide power and identity to the group or individual owner. If memory and object are separated, the memory itself can become a form of cultural capital (Hendon 1996:49). This memory is often accessible to only certain members of society—"belonging" to only these members of society—thus helping to form their social identity. Hendon (1996:49) argues that people themselves become repositories or storehouses of knowledge. Memory—along with other factors such as kinship, material culture, and daily practice—can serve as a powerful force that helps to shape social identity. The memory of the object can bring individuals seeking alliances and trade partnerships. As Rosemary Joyce (2000:208) points out, "Classic Maya nobles took them [jades] out of circulation and transformed them from transactable media into permanent points of historical reference." Heirlooms as inalienable possessions were taken out of circulation at strategic times, and the act of removing them was deliberate and may have actually brought more power and prestige than did their circulation.

Inheritance and circulation of heirlooms are not the only ways to create inalienability in an object. The rarity of

the raw material as well as an extensive production process can also imbue an object with inalienable properties (Helms 1993; Mills 2004:table 1). Ethnographic research in China and New Zealand has shown that a single elaborate jade object can take years to produce and requires the skills of multiple producers (Gump 1962; Wills 1964, 1972). The esoteric knowledge used to produce an object also can add to its inalienability. The skill of the artisan, along with socially and culturally charged iconographic elements represented on the object, imbued it with the personality and powerful cultural knowledge of the crafter (see also Inomata 2001). The fact that some Maya artifacts, ceramics, and stone monuments are actually “tagged” with the name of the artisan demonstrates that artisanal skill actually added value to the object and attached the personhood of the artisan to the thing itself (Reents-Budet 1989, 1998; Stuart 1989). Reents-Budet (1994, 1998) has also identified on some ceramic vessels painting styles that can be attributed to particular artists, even in the absence of an artist’s signature (see also Martin 1997:850). While no jades have been “tagged” by particular artists, the artisan’s identity may have been known and recognizable to the Maya themselves.

Reents-Budet (1998) goes on to argue that master artisans, painters of fine ceramics, could be likened to creator gods. The artisans were ensouling the clay of the pots, just as the Maya gods had done in the creation of humans of mud or corn. Citing Tedlock (1996:63, 216), she argues that the Maya creation myth recounted in the *Popol Vuh* actually refers to the original Creator Couple, Xpiyakok and Xmukane, as jeweler, carpenter, master craftsman, plate shaper, and bowl shaper (Reents-Budet 1998:77). This argument could be extended to jade production, as the creators are also likened to jewelers. Taube and Ishihara-Brito (2012:140) point out that for the Aztec and Olmec, it was the painstaking process of drilling that was thought to give life to the jade object. Taube (2004) argues that the piercing of the nasal septum on Olmec stone statues bestowed life or, more specifically, breath or life essence to the carving. In prayers the Aztec compared the drilling of a jade bead to the birth of an infant (Sahagún 1970:183, 202). They also compared the baby to a chip or a flake of precious stone that was removed by a creator god, just as a master crafter would do:

Here ye look into its face: the thorn, the spine of the grandfathers, of the grandmothers; the chip, the flake of those who already have gone to reside in the beyond—the old men, the old women. Here the truth is that thou our lord we seem to dream, to see in our dreams, that we look into the face of the one who hath arrived, the precious necklace, the precious feather, the baby that which here hath been flaked off. Here the truth is that verily

now, here in the humble mound of dirt, in the humble reed enclosure, the master, our creator, the master, Quetzalcoatl, flaketh off a precious necklace, placeth a precious feather. [Sahagún 1970:180–181]

This prayer likens the god itself to a crafter, lapidary, and feather worker. Graeber (2001:214–215) argues that Maori and Kwakiutl cultures rarely acknowledge the artists of inalienable wealth; they focus more on self-realization through appropriation or gifting. In contrast, Mesoamerican cultures stressed creation and re-creation, which emphasized the artistic process.

The artifact’s initial forming may have been linked to a divine act of creation, but the subsequent reworking and even repurposing of the object could also add significantly to its life history and value. Although at first glance reworking may seem to erase earlier qualities of the original work, it may actually be a way of preserving history and associated memories of owners and artisans. As Clark and Colman (this volume) point out, the parting or division of an object may have allowed different persons or multiple heirs to share in the joint heritage of the object and multiply its influence (see also R. Joyce 2000). The parting of an artifact may also allow one to “keep-while-giving” as argued by Weiner (1992:41). She cites examples of copper shields and valued robes that were cut apart and the pieces themselves became highly valued among the Kwakiutl (Weiner 1992:180). Individuals would remove pieces of copper shields to circulate them in hopes that they would one day reacquire the estranged piece to rivet it back together and make the original shield even more valuable. Interestingly, Kwakiutl copper shields were used in naming ceremonies of children in which both the child and the object would receive names (Boas 1921:684–685). This ceremony is analogous to the Aztec example cited above, as newly born human beings and objects seem to be related to and to mutually constitute one another.

For one repurposed jade from the Dumbarton Oaks collection, Virginia Fields and Alexandre Tokovinine (in Pillsbury et al. 2012:185–189, plate 19) argue that as the incised pendant was reworked into a plaque, the first hole drilled during the reworking process was in the figure’s chest; this frontal incision served to ritually deactivate the object and its former owner (Figure 7.4). In its final form, the head of the original figure and some of the glyphs on the reverse side had been removed, but the incomplete image and text remain, demonstrating the importance of retaining at least part of the image connected to its former history and owner. Other artifacts, such as the Winged Plaque, retain more of their original iconography and relationship to powerful genealogies and trade partners (Pillsbury et al. 2012:plaque 13). This artifact, carved in the Olmec style possibly in



Figure 7.4. Reworked jade celt with the image of a standing king on one side and hieroglyphs recording his ascension on the other. Suspension holes can be seen piercing the body of the subject (drawing by Linda Schele © David Schele; courtesy Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc., www.famsi.org).

Guerrero or Oaxaca (Taube 2004:180–181), made its way to the Maya Lowlands to have an image and text added to its reverse side; these additions commemorate the ascension of a Maya lord in the Preclassic period. The genealogy and life history of these reworked or fragmentary jades certainly contributed to their status as inalienable wealth, and their age and relationship to powerful past lineages reinforced the status and identity of their subsequent owners.

The death mask of Pakal the Great of Palenque is another example of the Maya reworking jades. Several of the mosaic pieces bear signs of previous use as beads, pendants, or other adornments. For example, a reused bead with a drilled hole is visible in the nose of the mask. Some of the pieces incorporated into this mask may have been heirlooms or gifts from distant nobles. Repurposing of jade in this manner can be attributed to its scarcity, but a review of the life histories of many of the heirlooms discussed above suggests that it was not only scarcity that prompted the reuse and reworking of jades. The mosaic pieces sourced by Laser Ablation Inductively Coupled Plasma Mass Spectrometry (LA-ICP-MS) chemical characterization show that the jades come from several sources, including several that match the jade from production areas of Cancuen (see Kovacevich 2006:137–138; Kovacevich et al. 2005; Neff et al. 2010). This finding suggests that the mosaics may have been acquired from different times and through different exchange relationships, supporting the possibility of curation for some of the jades.

The Production of Inalienability in Jades at Cancuen

As Barbara Mills (2004) points out, the production of inalienable possessions is often specialized, requires esoteric or ritual knowledge, and employs artisans distinguished by status or sometimes gender. The organization of production at the Classic-period Maya site of Cancuen is consistent with these distinguishing characteristics (see also Kovacevich 2006, 2007, 2011, 2013; see Figure 7.3 for location). Certain groups were responsible for segmented stages of production, which also may have helped to define their social identities. Commoners were a part of that production, thus integrating them into the identity of the jades finished and later owned by elites. Commoner artisans initially shaped the artifact—via percussion, sawing, and drilling—until it formed a blank or a template. Elite crafters completed the final stages of incising and polishing, ritually giving life to the object (see discussion above and also Inomata, this volume). It appears that while Cancuen commoners were involved in the early stages of production of jade artifacts, they were not permitted to use or possess certain finished objects (especially carved plaques and pendants, which were closely associated with nobility and rulership at many sites), as none of these artifacts were recovered from their residences, caches, or burials. Control over these objects may have been facilitated by sumptuary laws, ritual taboos, and/or control of technology and esoteric knowledge, as I have discussed elsewhere (Kovacevich 2006:114–127). The segmentation of production and restriction of technologies at Cancuen may have served as a form of social control and as a pathway to power; at the same time, it may have created social cohesion. Sumptuary laws are by nature exclusionary and hierarchical, but the participation of a large segment of the population in the production of valued objects is inclusive. The labor and participation in the production of jades could not be alienated. Although the commoners involved in the production process did not have finished jades, more than three thousand pieces of debitage were associated with one area of jade production (see also Kovacevich 2007).

Jade technologies were not restricted by the control of the means of production (i.e., types of tools used) or restriction of raw materials, but by the knowledge and skill needed to produce the objects (see Kovacevich 2007; Rochette 2009). As discussed above, it is not only the circulation and ownership of objects that can contribute to inalienability but also the production process itself. Elites surely received special training in order to produce elaborately carved jade plaques, a form of cultural capital not available to all members of the society. This also points to

some finished jade artifacts as inalienable possessions of elites, either commissioned by them or in part finished by the final elite patron.

At the same time, the combined labor in these jades served to link commoners and elites with objects that were publically displayed, representing the collective identity of the community as well as that of the elite individual and their royal or noble lineage. Even if those involved in the production were not the final owners, the object was still tied to all who were involved in its production. It is probable that even those not involved in production were similarly united under the item's communal symbolism, but those involved in the production certainly experienced a deeper connection to the jade because part of their essence was involved in its creation. The labor of the group could not be completely alienated, as also argued by McAnany (2010), Lohse, and Clark and Colman (this volume) for monumental structures, Inomata for diadems and stelae (this volume), and Callaghan for ceramics (this volume).

Jade debitage was found in large amounts in general household middens in non-elite structures involved in jade working at Cancuen, with 3,259 pieces from a single production area. Partially worked jade was also found in ritually cached deposits in commoner houses. Structures M10-4 and M10-7 contained cached jade nodules, one sawed and one worked by percussion respectively, in the second-phase construction fill correlating to the late Tepeu 2 period (C.E. 770–800). In Structure K7-24, a string-sawn jade boulder formed part of a what has been interpreted by Michael Callaghan as a termination ritual for the residential low mound (in Barrientos et al. 2000:109–110; Figure 7.5). The boulder was placed on the edge of the patio working floor near three groundstone metates, with associated manos placed below them and with three storage jars surrounding the jade nodule (Barrientos et al. 2000:figure 6.6). Nearby there were several unfinished jade beads in the associated midden. In fact, beads were associated with elite and non-elite residences, but were of noticeably lesser quality and significantly smaller size in commoner houses (see also Kovacevich 2007). This difference in quality and type of artifacts recovered suggests different gradations of value, as discussed by Lesure (1999) for the Olmec and noted by Barbara Mills (2004) as a property of inalienable possessions (see also Weiner 1992:164, 180).

The caches in commoner houses represent early stage jade crafting as part of the household identity of the residents of these structures (see also R. Joyce 2000), nested within the larger communal identity of the Cancuen community and the presiding K'uhul Ajaw, or Holy Lord. These residents did not include finished, carved jade products in their caches and burials. Although commoners may have been



Figure 7.5. String-sawn jade nodule from a ritual cache in Structure K7-24 of Cancuen (photo by author).

prohibited from wearing or using the most ritually charged prestige-reinforcing goods, they were aware of their own participation in the production of a community heirloom—a situation that exemplifies how jade could simultaneously possess both divisive and integrative power as a communal object. LeCount (2005) argues that utilitarian pottery, just as much as elite pottery, expressed social identity and affiliation; in the same way, at Cancuen, craft activities and caching of jade boulders in non-elite structures expressed identity as much as elite crafting did (cf. Inomata 2001). The memory of these caching events helped to define the identity of these social groups. While the non-elite caches of jade raw material were sealed away in structure fill, they certainly were not forgotten (Hendon 1996; Mills 2008).

At Cancuen, carved jades were present and ultimately deposited in caches and burials. I argue that these carved jades were a significant marker of elite and community identity. An important example is two headdress ornaments from Burial 50 (Figure 7.6). These crossed-band elements represent maize (Karl Taube, personal communication 1998, 2005). The wearing of this symbol could represent the power of elites to control fertility and provide for political constituents (see also Fields 1991), an act of reciprocity made in exchange for the labor and tribute provided to elites by commoners. A second diadem or headdress ornament was included in a cache beneath the royal throne room. This diadem is in the form of what has traditionally been called the “Jester God,” but Taube and Ishihara-Brito (2012:148)

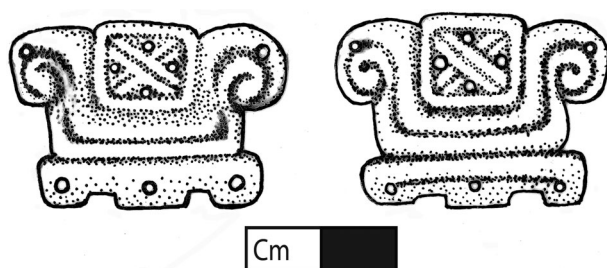


Figure 7.6. Jade diadems from Burial 50 of Cancuen (drawing by Fernando Alvarez)

more specifically call this representation the piscine form, probably depicting an inverted shark. As Taube (2004) argues that fishing was a symbolic rainmaking activity, the diadem could have signified control of rain and water. The god wears a maize cross-band symbol similar to the one found in Burial 50 (see Figure 7.1). I suggest this artifact was interred as an inalienable possession and a representation of collective royal identity at Cancuen. Witnessing rituals where this diadem was worn, commemorated, or remembered would have connected the royal line with the community as a whole, a connection similar to the solidarity expressed by the wearing of the crown jewels by the British monarch: they are held in trust by an individual and function as a symbol of the royal line, but they are really tied to the community and to British soil, and are not to be estranged from their place of origin. Even Malinowski noted the similarities between the British crown jewels and kula shells in his research on the Trobriand Islands (cited in Weiner 1992:45). As Inomata (this volume) notes, even if the royal diadem could not be seen by all the members of the community in a public ritual, representations of such diadems on monuments would certainly afford a visible connection.

It is important to note that unworked, partially worked, or fragmentary materials can also be imbued with inalienability. Also included in the royal cache was a partially string-sawn jade boulder, attesting to the sacred nature of all stages of jade production and the sacred nature of the raw material itself. This is similar to Mills's findings (2008) for Chacoan society, where unworked shell, turquoise, and other materials were often treated in the same manner as finished products in ritual caching behavior in kivas. She argues that they were not just debitage or leftovers, but part of the materiality of production of ritual artifacts. Payson Sheets (1991) echoes this sentiment for chert found within the Sacred Cenote of Chichen Itza, as there were not only finished products but debitage recovered, attesting to the *process* of production being ritually important, not just the finished product. This conclusion is reinforced by production debris found in tombs and special deposits at such sites as Tikal (Moholy-Nagy 2003), Piedras Negras (Hruby

2006), and Kaminaljuyu (Kidder et al. 1946). In the case of Cancuen, commoners co-opted part of this identity as a function of their participation in the segmented manufacturing sequence of jade. Commoners also cached raw and partially worked jade nodules within construction sequences of their houses, further identifying themselves with the early stages of jade production. Simultaneously, elites were obviously referring to their involvement in and power over all stages of production, as it also helped to reinforce elite identity.

Discussion

The production process of an object lends itself to inalienability: it is not just the circulation of the object and who may own it, but, in some cases, how an item is produced that can make it inalienable. Jade's arduous production process is one such instance (see also Kovacevich 2011). As mentioned above, ethnographic examples suggest that it could take years to produce one intricately carved piece. As Fred Damon (in Feil et al. 1982:342) has suggested, gift exchange is predicated upon inalienable labor, whereas commodity exchange is predicated upon alienable labor. Labor can be an important contributor to inalienability, as can exchange.

The social identity of the producer can add value and inalienability to an object (see also Costin and Wright 1998), as can the skill it takes to produce an object. The ideology behind production is also important, as certain societies liken production of crafts to the initial creation of humans by the gods (Nakamura 2005; Reents-Budet 1998). As evidenced by the curation and caching of lithic artifacts in all stages of production in the Maya world, the production process was a sacred act, not merely a mundane shaping of what would then become a sacred artifact. Jade, obsidian, and chert production refuse were often incorporated into Maya caches and burials (see Hruby 2007; Hruby and Rich 2014).

A difficult or challenging production process not only lends value to the artifact itself but also prestige to the producer. Skeletal evidence of exaggerated muscle attachments for a probable elite lapidary specialist at Copan (Widmer 2009:188) supports other archaeological data that indicate elites were physically involved in crafting by performing time-consuming and difficult activities. This direct elite involvement in the production process contributed to the value of the object being produced (see Appadurai 1986; Helms 1993; Widmer 2009:182), although elites' primary contributions may have been the finishing stages in a long operational chain of tasks (Costin 2007; Kovacevich 2006, 2007). The key point is that we cannot assume that elites were not involved in certain stages of jade production just because they were time-consuming or challenging. It may have been just this difficulty that imbued the object with power

and value. Similarly, we cannot assume that commoners were not involved in the production of valued objects. Both elites and commoners may have had social identities defined by production, and their products retained elements of them.

Although specific classes of goods were certainly restricted to elites, and their ownership conferred prestige in state-level societies, they nevertheless could ideologically and ritually reinforce the identity of the community and could be seen as simultaneously centripetal and centrifugal forces within that society. Monumental temples, which represented sacred mountains (e.g., Schele and Freidel 1990), offer an effective example of the opposition of these forces in Maya society. Community labor was conscripted for their construction, and the enactment of rituals as well as burials within them was restricted to the elite, but communal rituals practiced at the temples by elites served to reinforce the larger community identity and stability in the Durkheimian sense of “collective effervescence” (Durkheim 1995), later called “collective memory” by Halbwachs (1992). Public rituals that included the caching or interment of jade objects drew in the participants and established a collective memory surrounding the object, which was especially salient if the individual participant had contributed labor to create that object.

Conclusions

Value and inalienability were instilled into jade artifacts through many means. The sacred nature of the raw material itself contributed to its value but was not the only means for recognizing its worth. There were gradations of value of jade artifacts, and copies or lesser-quality artifacts may have been circulated to enhance the value of the inalienable jades. The curation of the artifact (i.e., its status as an heirloom) contributed to its inalienability—or perhaps it was its exchange between lineages, gifted to create social debt relationships and social networks. The item may have been cached or included in a burial in order to establish a collective memory of the lineage, person and/or community, and the object (an act that mutually reinforced the identities of all). Not all jades were inalienable: we must look at things like quality of material, context (source, use-life, deposition), gradations of value, and—especially for this study—the production process.

At Cancun, there is evidence of commoner participation in the early stages of jade production, but finished products were not found within commoner residences, caches, or burials. It seems that elites were the ultimate possessors of these objects, as evidenced by elite caches and burials. While commoners may have been physically alienated from

the final products, they could not be alienated from the labor used to produce them, making the items at once inalienable possessions of the individual, the elite lineage, and the community at large because all of these groups were in some way involved in the creation of a sacred artifact. The caching of raw or worked jade boulders in non-elite structures attests to non-elites’ communal identification with the early stages of jade production, and these caches themselves seem to represent non-elite inalienable wealth. By using the framework of inalienable possessions, we can possibly better understand elite and commoner identities, which may be more complex than a simple dichotomous relationship. Objects that were once thought to simply legitimate the prestige of the elite may have had nested social meanings, and the concept of inalienable possessions may help us to understand that complexity. Jade cannot be ignored as possible commoner inalienable wealth, albeit in different forms than elite inalienable possessions. At the same time, many so-called prestige goods may represent elite power *and* the identity of the community at large—and serve as both divisive and integrative forces within Classic Maya society.

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