

CHAPTER IV

THE FIGURINE CLASSIFICATION

The Method

Any study of Mesoamerican figurines is hampered because of the lack of a standardized classification (Rands and Rands 1965: 549). Studies have been carried out using figurines excavated at various sites in Mesoamerica, but no pan-Mesoamerican figurine classification has been attempted. Even at Teotihuacan the entire repertory of figurine styles has not been published. Helpful information for the classifier of Teotihuacan figurines would be 1) the number of figurines recovered there, both in surface survey and controlled excavations, 2) a typology based on figurines with provenience from Teotihuacan, 3) a comprehensive chronology, and 4) the distribution of figurine types throughout the ancient city. Until such information is available, studies of recently excavated material will be limited in scope. Noguera's classification (1935a, 1962, 1965) does not include many of the figurine types known from other publications, and Séjourné's amply illustrated work (1966a) has no apparent chronological order.

Some figurine studies which attempt more precise typologies

employ the type-variety method. Dahlin (1978: 136) describes this system as "several hierarchically arranged levels of analysis believed to correspond to general levels of socio-cultural interaction," and Wallrath (1967: 110) sorted the Tehuantepec region figurines into "types which were described on the basis of their culturally significant attributes."

The classification of figurines in this thesis, like Dahlin's (1978: 135), is more analytical than taxonomic. Following Rouse (1960), the artifacts are grouped into classes according to the diagnostic trait(s) or "mode which is any standard, concept, or custom which governs the behavior of the artisans of a community." Rouse's system of classification is interpreted here to fit the specific problems presented by this group of figurines.

With few exceptions, the figurines are broken at the neck, and limbs are broken off torsos. The "figurine" collection is, in reality, a collection of fragments. As a result, diagnostic criteria differ for some of the types. Size, shape, or detail of decoration is used, depending entirely on what is seen on the figurine fragment. Some heads are stylistically complex. In these cases head shape is considered a primary diagnostic trait, and decoration (headdress, jewelry, etc.) as secondary. One of the purposes of this classification is to emphasize those attributes which may have been more meaningful to the Teotihuacanos, but whether those people would have agreed with the criteria is, of course, a matter of speculation.

The figurine groupings follow the chronological sequence as it is now understood (Noguera 1935a, 1962, 1965; Rattray 1966; Parsons 1972).

The 248 fragments were first divided into hand modelled and moulded categories because, generally, hand modelling pre-dated moulding. The moulded pieces were then subdivided into Classic, Coyotlatelco, and Aztec groups. Within each of the categories, the figurines were further divided into human and animal groups, and then by anatomical parts (heads, torsos, limbs).

All the limbs appear to be hand modelled, and are put into one general category even though it is likely that some were part of hand modelled, and others of moulded, figurines. Whistles comprise one group because in all but one case a face or torso is attached to a hollow tube. They are not precisely figurines, and are both hand modelled and moulded.

It would have been possible to use each general category as a type (hand modelled human heads, hand modelled animal heads, etc.), but that approach would have entailed a cumbersome amount of subdivision. As it is there are almost as many subtypes in this classification as there are figurines. What some readers might consider a tedious splitting is done deliberately to call attention to the variation, and overlapping, of stylistic detail. Each piece is fully described in Appendix I, and the figurine types listed in Appendix II.

Hand Modelled Figurines

Because of overlap in size, shape, and motif, the hand modelled human heads could have been grouped together in several different ways. The classification of these figurines is based as closely as possible

on chronological order, but subdivisions within the Early Classic phases are poorly understood. The coffee bean eye is considered to be diagnostic of the Tzacualli phase (and earlier), and the slit eye more common in the later Miccaotli and Tlamimilolpa phases (Barbour 1975: 37). The only head in this collection with the coffee bean eye is Type I. All other hand modelled heads have slit eyes, but no further refinement in the chronological sequence may be made. It seems certain only that they were made during the Miccaotli and Tlamimilolpa phases. The problem with classification of hand modelled figurines is that the very nature of shaping the clay by hand allows for individuality of each piece that is precluded in moulding, and no two pieces look the same. Diagnostic traits are described for each type, but in most instances not all the pieces show all traits.

Diagnostic characteristics of Type II are small heads which have no earspools, wear helmet-like headgear, and have rather flat faces. "Small" heads and "flat" faces are determined by comparison with the other hand modelled human heads in this collection. Type III heads (Figs. 8-13) are large, have pronounced prognathism, wear earspools, and have narrow slit eyes. Headgear and head shape vary so greatly that they could not be used as classificatory criteria for this group of heads.

Type IV (Figs. 14-17) were made by rolling the clay into a single lump, and seem not to have been attached to anything. The remaining hand modelled heads fit even less easily into groups. The transitional pieces (Figs. 18-21) stylistically anticipate forms later seen in moulded form, but so do Figs. 9 and 11. The latter could have been

placed in either type, but head size is given more weight in this classification.

Figs. 18 and 19 foreshadow later moulded portrait heads. Fig. 18, however, must remain in a class by itself because of its unique and sophisticated execution. A slightly similar piece is illustrated in Séjourné (1966a: Lam. 7). It is more crudely fashioned, and does not have the long slope of the face which makes Fig. 18 distinctive. Fig. 19 is stylistically a transition in form between the bald prognathous face and the portrait head (Gamio 1922: Lam. 89), and may be a chronological transition as well. Barbour (1975: 27) discusses a finely made, hand modelled bald head which was recovered in Teotihuacan Excavation 22, the upper tunnel of the Pyramid of the Sun, by the Teotihuacan Mapping Project personnel. It was found in a layer associated with Tzacualli ceramics. Fig. 20 may also be a forerunner of the head style seen on puppet figurines without headgear. Its neck does not look as if it attached to a puppet torso. Fig. 21 is stylistically similar to later moulded representations of the human head wearing an animal headdress; but in this case, the face seems to be part of the animal itself.

The animal heads are rudimentary, and are divided only into round heads (Figs. 24-25) and heads with beaks (Figs. 26-28).

The hand modelled torsos may be divided into three groups: human (Figs. 29-36), human, dancer type (Figs. 37-42) (discussed below with portrait heads), and animal (Figs. 43-49). Teotihuacan hand modelled torsos are seen on a variety of heads (Artes de México 1965: 90-92, 95). Some torsos that look like the dancer type are joined to heads which are

not portraits, so identification is problematical. Torsos with limb scars which might indicate four-footed or tailed creatures are considered as animals. However, Séjourné illustrates figurines on all fours, some of which have human, and others animal, heads (1959: Fig. 84e-f). Fig. 45 might have once been part of a feline similar to the one illustrated by Aveleyra Arroyo de Anda (1964). Both Figs. 43 and 44 are perforated through the body and may have been worn as pendants. Fig. 44 was recovered in stratigraphic pit 1 from layer 9, which was associated with ceramics from the Late Tlamimilolpa phase.

Figs. 35 and 36 seem to be the shoulder and arm area of upright figures. Both have the tenon by which the upper and lower parts of the figure were connected. The shoulder area of a figurine from the town of Calpulalpan (Linné 1942: Fig. 99) is similar to these fragments. The Calpulalpan figurine wears a cape and skirt, the arms are extended; unfortunately the head is missing.

Classic Moulded Figurines

The process of making part of a figurine in a mould began in the Early Xolalpan phase (Noguera 1965: 135; Barbour 1975: 79). The unbroken figurine is referred to as "dancer," and the head alone as "portrait." (Figs. 50-56) Torsos and limbs were hand modelled by the one or two coil method, and the heads were moulded. Some examples of these figurines may be seen in Artes de México (1965: 67), Séjourné (1966a: Lam. 4), Smith (1968: 73), von Winning (1969: Fig. 218), and Bernal (1974: 274).

Portrait heads are bald, with no earspools or decoration of any

sort. The rudimentary torso and limbs contrast sharply with the well-defined features of the moulded faces. Torsos are slightly twisted as if in a dancing posture. Arms are sometimes curved or flexed, and hands cupped as if to hold a stick or pole. Legs are flexed at the knee and feet are small in proportion to the hands. Neither toes nor fingers are outlined, only the thumb is shown as opposed. Moulded portrait heads are Type XII. Possible dancer torsos are Figs. 37-42. Legs that may be from dancer figurines are seen in Fig. 129a-i. Fragments in Fig. 130g-k are broken at both ends, making identification impossible, but are the size of dancer arms. It would have been preferable to put all dancer fragments as one type, but because many hand modelled torsos and limbs are similar, whether attached to portrait or other heads, certain identification is impossible.

Moulded articulated figurines with bald cleft heads, or puppets (Figs. 57-65), appear at about the same time as dancer figurines. Some puppet figurines were hand modelled, and thought to be earlier, than the moulded ones. Head shapes of both portrait and puppet figurines, when moulded, are associated with the Xolalpan phase (Noguera 1965: Fig. 43).

Borhegyi (1950, 1954) and von Winning (1958) have studied figurines with movable joints, but it is the latter work which is particularly relevant to pieces in this collection. Von Winning divides the material into Types A and B. With Type A figurines, the head and the limbs were joined to the torso with a maguey or some other fiber, whereas with Type B figurines, the head was firmly attached to the torso, and only the limbs were tied on. Type A heads may be identified by a perforation

which was made vertically from mid-back, through the head, to below the chin. Type B heads obviously do not have the perforation. None of the heads in this collection has the perforation; they may be considered as belonging to von Winning's Type B.

Perforation for attaching limbs is the same in Types A and B. The triangular torso was perforated horizontally from shoulder to shoulder just under neck level, and a hole was put through the bottom of the torso. Limbs were perforated near the top of the arm or leg. Limbs were either hand modelled or moulded (von Winning 1958: 6), but none of the legs or arms with holes in this group appear to be moulded (Fig. 127a-p).

The heads shown in von Winning's article are all triangular and rather heart-shaped. Type A subtypes differ in torso adornment, as most have bald cleft heads, whereas Type B subtypes vary in head adornment, but the torsos are similar. Puppet torsos from site 9N1E7 (Figs. 57, 62-65) are Type B (Type XIII in this classification). Von Winning's articulated figurines measure from 15 to 24 cm in height; however, he does not consider size a diagnostic trait (1958: 6). Bald cleft heads from site 9:N1E7 are grouped in the puppet category because some puppets do have that head shape (von Winning 1958: 4), although there is no certainty that these heads were part of articulated figurines. Moulded bald cleft heads appear on torsos other than the puppet type (Séjourné 1966a: Lam. 56). These may be hand modelled. Figs. 58 and 60 may have been attached to puppet torsos. Fig. 59 has the perforation through the shoulder area. Puppet torsos are grouped here with bald cleft

heads, and not with other moulded torsos, because in one case (Fig. 57) the head and torso are still joined together.

Fig. 60 appears to be a bust, not part of a puppet figurine, but is included in this type because of its head shape. There is a stylistic progression from hand modelled heads which are wide at the top or crown (Fig. 20) and the wide heart-shaped cleft head (Fig. 11) to the moulded wide cleft head, and triangular-shaped head with headgear. Figs. 66-71 continue the logical stylistic extension of heads usually associated with puppets, given the extant published information, because of the distinct headdress. The diagnostic characteristic of this headdress is a series of wavy ridges.¹ The wavy ridges are often bounded by side tufts (mechones). It is the side tuft element which is usually linked to puppets. A thorough search of the literature has not revealed an illustration of this particular type of headdress attached to a puppet torso--or any torso, for that matter.² Figs. 66-71 exhibit the wavy ridge motif on the headdresses; other details differ slightly. Shared similarities are the triangular head shape, the size, and the standardized facial features.

The problem of chronology again looms up. Von Winning (1958) placed moulded puppets with bald cleft heads in Teotihuacan III because of the similarity to the baldness of moulded portrait heads, and because this head and torso combination occurs earlier in hand modelled form. Puppets with headdresses were not hand modelled. However, Figs. 66-71 are generally considered to be in the Metepec style, that is, faces are standardized and triangular. Unfortunately, there is

no definition or set of diagnostic traits for Metepec figurines. They are simply any type of moulded figurine which is not a portrait, or dancer, and not a puppet, and which have elaborate headdresses and are in the Teotihuacan style (not Coyotlatelco, Aztec, etc.).³ According to Barbour (1975: 26), portrait and puppet figurines "are common during roughly the same time span (from the Early Xolalpan to the Early Metepec phases); they reach a peak about the same time (Late Xolalpan to Early Metepec phases); and they become scarce thereafter."

Figs. 58, 59, 68, 69, 88, 92, 94, and 95 show strikingly similar facial features. Decoration and head shape differ, but the faces look as though there was a standardized form accepted for figurines. But does this mean that all those heads were made at the same time, and during the Metepec phase? Surely no more rigid stylistic convention is found than in the size and cast of portrait heads which are the first moulded heads. The problem is not solved here; only future excavations may turn up material in contexts which will shed light on the question of which figurines are Xolalpan and which are Metepec, if those categories do indeed serve figurine chronology.

Other Classic period moulded heads show a variety of headdresses and styles, and do not fit easily into discrete categories, or the iconographic elements overlap from one category to another (Figs. 75-77, for example). For Figs. 72-79 the diagnostic criteria switch from the portrait and puppet types and associated motifs to "unrealistic"

head shapes and facial features. A few Teotihuacan deities are seen in figurine form. This collection includes the rain deity (Fig. 72, Type XV) and the old god (Fig. 74, Type XVI). Unrealistic head shapes may have signified the supernatural. The pyramidal shaped heads (Figs. 75-77, Type XVII) and the heads with protuberances from the forehead (Figs. 78-79, Type XVIII) fit into that category.

Other Classic moulded heads have "realistic" shapes, and are grouped by headgear, or other traits in those cases where the head-dress is broken away. Headdress types are the wide band (Figs. 80-81, Type XIX), helmet (Figs. 82-88, Type XX), frame (Figs. 89-91, Type XXI), horizontal bands (Figs. 92-96, Type XXII), and diagonal segments (Fig. 97, Type XXIII).

Figs. 98 and 99 (Type XXIV) may have been attached to vessels. Fig. 98 was recovered in layer 7b of stratigraphic pit 1 with Metepec phase ceramics. Figs. 100-104 (Type XXV) are eroded, broken, and lack identifying traits.

Figs. 105-107 (Type XXVI) are hollow and proportionately larger than the other heads. There are no torso or limb fragments of corresponding size in this group.

Classic moulded animal heads, unlike the hand modelled ones, are well-defined stylistically. Canine (Figs. 108-110, Type XXVII), feline (Figs. 111-112, Type XXVIII), zoomorphic (Figs. 113-114, Type XXIX), and bird (Figs. 115-116, Type XXX) are rather easily distinguished forms. Alternative types are realistic (Figs. 108-109, 111-112, 115-116) and unrealistic (Figs. 110, 113-114). No moulded animal torsos were recovered.

The design of Classic moulded torsos emphasized the garments rather than the anatomy. On some figurines the bottom of the robe or skirt is the finished bottom of the piece (Fig. 118, for example); in other cases, the legs may have been formed, but were broken off (Fig. 126). Probably each of these figurines was formed in a mould that included the entire figure. Parts of heads are still attached to some torsos. Three have rounded fronts and flattened backs (Figs. 117-119, Type XXXI), and are referred to as half conical. The garments extend out at the bottom to make a base wider than the head area, and the figure can stand alone. Other torsos are concave in back and some have stands so the figurines could stand upright (Figs. 120-122, Type XXXII). Flatter torsos (Figs. 123-124, Type XXXIII), and even the so-called "gingerbread" type (Figs. 125-126, Type XXXIV) have no stands.

Limbs with perforations (Fig. 127a-p, Type XXXV) may be identified as having been parts of puppet figurines. Possible dancer legs (Fig. 129a-i, Type XXXVII) are grouped together. Apart from these, other limbs have no particular association with specific figurine types.

Whistles are included in the classification because three of them (Figs. 131-132, 135) have human or animal faces attached to hollow tubes. Fig. 133 may have been a whistle. Fig. 134 is a pipe or whistle stem, and could possibly have had a human or animal form on the part that is now broken away.

Coyotlatelco Figurines

In the most recent study of Coyotlatelco cultural remains, Rattray lists the diagnostic traits of the figurines:

1. Thin slab-like body. 2. Poorly defined facial features, except for a long, pointed nose. 3. A chin that blends into the chest area. 4. Red matte paint covering face, parts of body, and headdress. 5. Arms parallel to body. 6. Absence of fingers. 7. Short legs that project forward. 8. Toes either absent or indicated by a few simple markings. 9. Female apparel. 10. Tan base clay, compact and well-fired. 11. Smooth but unpolished surfaces (Rattray 1966: 136-137).

The figurines in her study are divided into five categories: enthroned, Tlaloc, animal headdresses, elaborate headdresses, and Cerro Tenayo (1966: 134).

The 9:N1E7 Coyotlatelco heads are divided into types by size, not because size per se is diagnostic, but rather because the attributes are found on heads of one size and not on another. For instance, the two examples of dental mutilation are seen on large size heads, whereas the mouths of all the small heads are only slits, and seemingly unimportant to the overall design. A few pieces are not slab-like, and this difference is noted. The division of Coyotlatelco heads is: thin small heads (Figs. 136-150, Type XLVI), thick small heads (Figs. 151-153, Type XLVII), and thin large heads (Figs. 154-159, Type XLVIII). The only mould in the collection (Fig. 160) is Type XLIX.

Within each type two levels of subdivisions are based, where possible, on head adornment. There is an extra subdivision for the Coyotlatelco heads because of overlapping traits. The details of each subdivision may be seen in Appendix II.

In contrast to the great variety of decoration on heads, most Coyotlatelco torsos repeat the triangular quechquemitl and skirt (Figs. 161-169, Type L). Within this group there are three sizes of torsos; therefore they are placed in subdivisions by size, only to point up size difference within a group which has unusually standardized decoration. Other torso types are the draped quechquemitl (Fig. 170, Type LI) and the enthroned figure (Fig. 136). This is the most complete figurine from 9:N1E7, and is included with the heads. The torso form should be noted, but the figurine cannot be listed twice in the classification. Ideally a classification would be based on full figure types, but figurines are almost always found in fragments.

Aztec Figurines

In Parsons' study (1972) Aztec figurines from the Teotihuacan Valley are divided into three types: hollow rattles, slab jointed figurines, and solid standing figurines (1972: 82). Her typology is based largely on torso forms but head styles differ according to torso types. All the 9:N1E7 Aztec pieces are within Parsons' Type III. The heads (Figs. 171-172, Type LII) have open mouths; the eye treatment differs slightly. Each of the torsos (Figs. 173-176) is a type in this classification.

NOTES

1. "Wavy ridges" is the term used by Wardle (1902: 214) for this headdress. Barbour (1975: 19) describes the motif as "multi-wave." Because the lines are raised, "wavy ridges" seems to better describe the motif and that term will be used in this text.
2. Barbour (1975: Fig. 6) illustrates a puppet figurine with this wavy ridge, side tufts headdress. It is a drawing, not a photograph. The caption cites Covarrubias, but the only articulated figurine shown (Covarrubias 1957: Fig. 54, bottom row on left) has a heart-shaped cleft head.
3. Noguera (1965: 93-94) says that Teotihuacan figurines with headdresses are found in Period III, but are few in number. However, in Teotihuacan IV, "aumenta su número para constituir su característica principal y por esa razón la clasificación de estas figurillas de este período, se basa en los tocados" (1965: 94). Barbour writes of Metepec figurines from TE-23 (Tepantitla): "characteristics of the latter part of the Metepec phase in TE-23 are extremely flat moldmade torsos, including bound figurines and extremely flat moldmade heads" (1975: 95).