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Abstract

This paper discusses ritualized practices in domestic spaces as signs of an ongoing and dynamic engagement between the people living there and non-human material and incorporeal social actors, using archaeological evidence from the ancient town of Cerro Palenque and related sites in northwestern Honduras occupied from the 7th to 11th centuries. The paper considers the ways that figurines, pottery, and other kinds of material culture were given meaning through their involvement in these ritualized practices, the materiality of the objects themselves, and their association with human bones. These practices are situated in particular spaces and occur at particular points in the life cycle of individuals and the social groups. They leave behind traces that reflect the desire of the participants in these practices to create social memory and to connect to the larger spatiotemporal order structuring their relations with the world around them.

Keywords

Mesoamerica, Honduras, Ulua Valley, Cerro Palenque, social memory, ritual, religion, burial, materiality

Disciplines

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Comments

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Social Memory and Ritualized Practice in Prehispanic Honduras.

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© 2012 (*Presented in the session, “Ancient Permeable Crossings and Modern Bounded Borders: The Materiality of Religious Cosmographies” at the 111th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, San Francisco, CA, November 17th, 2012.*)

This paper discusses ritualized practices in domestic spaces as signs of an ongoing and dynamic engagement between the people living there and non-human material and incorporeal social actors. Drawing on archaeological evidence from the ancient town of Cerro Palenque and related sites in northwestern Honduras occupied from the seventh to eleventh centuries, the paper considers the ways that figurines, pottery, and other kinds of material culture were given meaning through their involvement in these ritualized practices, the materiality of the objects themselves, and their association with human bones. These practices are situated in particular spaces and occur at particular points in the life cycle of individuals and the social groups. They leave behind traces that reflect the desire of the participants in these practices to create social memory and to connect to the larger spatiotemporal order structuring their relations with the world around them.

During the seventh to eleventh centuries, people living in Honduras made, used, and exchanged objects made from clay. These objects include pottery vessels in abundance but also three-dimensional figures made from clay, including figurines, musical instruments, jewelry, and ritual paraphernalia such as censers. Many of these objects were “discarded” if we understand that term to mean practices that removed objects from daily life and deposited them in some location, where they remained until excavated by archaeologists in the nineteenth, twentieth, or twenty-first centuries. Some of these objects were deposited in burials, some formed part of caches, some were trash deposits, some were dumps of materials placed at the beginning of or as part of building projects. Nor were clay objects the only things discarded. As will become clear below, these deposits were made up of a variety of objects and, sometimes, remains of the dead. I highlight the clay objects, however, because they represent my entrée into thinking about these deposits and because clay was one of the most commonly used materials to make objects that

were considered appropriate to deposit in these ways. Although the individual objects are interesting in their own right, it is their context and associations -- where found, what found with -- give deeper insight into people's practices and relationships.

Temporal and Geographic Setting

The Ulua river, among the largest in the country, flows north to the Caribbean Ocean. People have lived along its winding course and its tributaries, the most important of which is the Chamelecon, for more than 3000 years (see Joyce and Henderson 2001 for more information on early occupations; also Kennedy 1980, 1982; Poponoe 1934). The fertility of the alluvial soils deposited by the river and the suitability of the river itself for transport no doubt explain much of the attraction of the valley and compensated for the rivers' tendency to flood and change course (see Mason 1940; Pope 1985). Archaeological interest in the valley began in the late nineteenth century (see Gordon 1898; Sapper 1898). Although many archaeological sites have been buried under layers of alluvium, survey and excavation in the late 1970s and early 1980s have revealed that the valley was heavily occupied by about 500 CE. By about 700 CE, variation in the size of settlements is quite noticeable and material culture, especially pottery, becomes more differentiated in terms of raw material and style. These changes suggest the emergence of social difference encompassing differences in status and wealth as well as the development of localized social identities (see Blaisdell-Sloan 2006; Henderson 1984, 1988; Hendon 2010; Joyce 1982, 1985, 1991; Joyce et al. 2008; Lopiparo 2003; Mason 1940; Sheptak 1982; Sheptak et al. 2011; Stone 1941; Strong et al. 1938; Wonderly 1985).

Cerro Palenque itself is established after 500 CE, part of the expansion of settlement in the valley. It is located in the foothills at the valley's southern end where the Ulua, augmented by two other rivers, becomes the major waterway of the lower Ulua valley. Cerro Palenque starts out as a relatively small grouping of five architectural groups made up of domestic and religious buildings plus a reservoir built on the highest elevation of its cluster of foothills. Despite its size, this initial settlement included the kinds of architectural features that archaeologists working in Honduras use to argue for elevated social status: massive construction, worked stone and lime plaster, and sculptural decoration on some buildings. The presence of jade from Guatemala, obsidian from Central Mexico, and foreign pottery signal Cerro Palenque's connections to the larger Mesoamerican world (Joyce 1988b, 1991; Hendon 2004, 2011; Sheptak 1987). Cerro

Palenque's residents were also part of a regional system that included several large and elaborate centers, the best know of which is the site of Travesia. Located north of Cerro Palenque in the alluvial plain and heavily looted in modern times, Travesia is believed to have had about 250 buildings, including a ballcourt, during its peak period of occupation (see Hendon et al. in press b; Joyce 1983, 1987a; Robinson et al. 1979; Sheehy 1978, 1982; Sheehy and Veliz 1977; Stone 1941). Architectural and artistic similarities between Travesia and Cerro Palenque led Rosemary Joyce (1988, 1991) to argue that Cerro Palenque began as a subordinate of the larger site. Other large settlements in the valley at this time include Currusté on the tributary river, the Chamelecon (Hasemann et al. 1977; Lopiparo 2008, 2009) and La Guacamaya on the eastern edge of the valley (Robinson 1989). Currusté also had about 250 mounds and may have had a ballcourt, now destroyed, making it comparable to Travesia in terms of size and association with the ballgame.

After 850 CE, many of the larger settlements decline in size or are abandoned although occupation in the valley as a whole remained substantial through the period of Spanish contact. Cerro Palenque emerges as the largest town in the valley, not just because others dwindle but because it experiences significant growth in population. It also undergoes an important change in its layout. The original area was abandoned and people began living on the lower ridges. Survey and mapping recorded over 500 structures, including a ballcourt, houses, and several groupings of religious structures. An impressive central precinct, made up of large public buildings around a 300 meter long plaza, becomes the ceremonial and political heart of the new settlement (Joyce 1982, 1985, 1991; Hendon 2007, 2010, 2012a). In addition to being larger than its valley-floor neighbors, Cerro Palenque is also the only place with a ballcourt in the ninth century. This distinction allowed it to play a more prominent role in the presentation of ballgames which were tied to seasonal changes or other important points in the passage of time (Hendon et al. in press b). Nevertheless, Cerro Palenque does not dominate the smaller villages politically or economically (Hendon 2010). It participates in a network of production and exchange of figurines, whistles, and pottery that created strong social ties centered on the reproduction of identities tied to gender, location, and materialized through ritualized actions tied to ideas about how the world worked. The hilltop where the earlier part of Cerro Palenque is located does emerge as an important place in the valley-wide ritualized landscape in the ninth century as does the mostly abandoned town of Travesia. Smaller settlements on the alluvial plain oriented their

houses and the graves of their dead to align with the peak of Santa Barbara. This mountain, near Lake Yojoa, is the highest peak in the range of mountains out of which the Uluá river flows. These alignments also passed over the older part of Cerro Palenque or the main plaza of Travesía (Lopiparo 2003, 2007; Joyce et al. 2009).

Ritualized Practice and Local Theories of Production

It is very clear that people in Mesoamerica elaborated complex sets of beliefs about how the world came to be, how it works, why people exist, and how they should live. Whether one wants to call these answers to important epistemological and ontological questions philosophy or religion is less important than recognizing that, in John Monaghan's words (1998a:48) "it is not at all clear that a discrete category of ritual action ever existed" in Mesoamerica. That is to say, the desire to bracket off some set of activities as religion and others as economic, political, quotidian, or social does not allow us to appreciate fully the world view of the people we are studying. Miguel Angel Astor-Aguilera (2010: 3) has discussed the same issue, writing that "Mesoamerican cosmologies are more about a daily social way of life revolving around conceptions of self, personhood, and a sense of place relating to what is both visible and invisible" than they are about "what one could term codified religion founded on classifications based on binaries of the sacred and the profane." Catherine Bell's discussion of ritualization, which she defines as a culturally specific "way of acting that sets itself off from other ways of acting by virtue of the way in which it does what it does" (1992:140), is also worthwhile introducing at this point. Ritualization as a concept provides a way to talk about meaningful actions and relationships informed by cosmological beliefs that are integral to production, social life, and identity without having to argue about whether these actions are best classified as sacred or profane.

Domestic space is thus part of how Mesoamerican people created identities for themselves and tied those identities to their beliefs about the way the world worked and their place in it. This claim does not mean that domestic places are the only kind of spatial setting in which ritualized action took place. The residents of the towns and villages in the lower Uluá valley participated in formally organized special events taking place in such monumental spaces as ballcourts or large plazas. But they also used their living space as a location in which to celebrate many different kinds of ritualized actions, which imbued these spaces with a set of

meanings that forged local histories for the people living there. These actions and the histories they create helped shape communities of practice at multiple social scales, including that of the localized residential group, the ridgetop neighborhoods, and the town as a whole (Hendon 2007, 2010, 2011, 2012a).

Although this relationship between place and meaning has been demonstrated at archaeological sites throughout the valley (see Joyce et al. 2009; Lopiparo 2003, 2007), I focus on Cerro Palenque in the rest of this paper since it is the site at which I have done the most work and which I have studied most intensively. In 1998, I began excavating in a large household group located just south of the ballcourt (see Hendon 2002, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2012a; Hendon and Lopiparo 2004; Joyce and Hendon 2000; Lopiparo and Hendon 2009; Lopiparo et al. 2005.). This Ballcourt Residential Group (BRG) follows the pattern of residential architecture at the site first outlined by Joyce (1991): foundation platforms form a three- or four-sided arrangement around a central open patio. The platforms supported living space, cooking areas, and other kinds of buildings. Earlier excavations by Rosemary Joyce in several other residential groups provide important comparative information (see Joyce 1985, 1988b, 1991). These comparisons reveal both differences and similarities. As noted, the BRG conforms to the pattern of residential architecture and domestic activities. The BRG is distinctive, however, for the large size of its patio, the height of its southern foundation platform, and its proximity to the ballcourt and associated monumental architecture. Its inhabitants used more imported obsidian than other residents of the site, who tended to use local cherts for their stone tools needs (Hendon 2004; Shackley et al. 2004). Like the rest of Cerro Palenque, much of the pottery from the BRG falls into the fine paste tradition that becomes common in the valley after 850 CE, replacing the earlier Ulua polychromes as the fancy serving and eating dishes (see Joyce 1987a, 1987b, 1988a, 1988b, 1993a, 1993b). The sherds I excavated exhibited a greater variety of types and decorations than found at other residential groups in the town but they are definitely in the same tradition. Analysis of the clay used to make fine paste pottery at Cerro Palenque and other sites in the valley reveals that Cerro Palenque was one of several centers of pottery production in the valley after 850 CE. Clay objects were exchanged among neighboring settlements (Lopiparo et al. 2005). My excavations in the BRG uncovered two kilns and other evidence of this production process, including molds used to make or decorate vessels and to make figurines -- the only evidence found at Cerro Palenque to date, suggesting that the BRG was involved in activities not

shared by other residents of the town (Hendon 2010; Hendon and Lopiparo 2004). Work at sites on the valley floor has documented other villages involved in pottery production, further supporting that Cerro Palenque was one among many locations involved in these activities (Lopiparo 2003, 2004).

Objects and Noncorporeal Actors

This brings us back to the objects that I mentioned at the beginning of the paper. The peoples of the lower Ulua valley had a long tradition of shaping clay into three-dimensional figures of people, animals, or hybrid beings. Styles, raw materials, and methods of manufacture all change over time but the importance of small scale representations of various kinds of beings runs through the entire Prehispanic history of the region (see Hendon 2003; Hendon et al. in press a; Joyce 1993a, 2000, 2003, 2007, 2008; Lopiparo 2003, 2006; Lopiparo and Hendon 2009; Poponoe 1934; Tercero 1996). Some of these creations are musical instruments, mostly whistles although some can produce multiple notes on the scale through the addition of finger or air holes. Typically the mouthpiece is in the back rear of the figure, thus also providing a more stable base for the figure when standing on its own. Other kinds of objects that were made include pendants or things sewn onto clothing (see Lopiparo 2003 for a thorough inventory). Although the earliest figurine traditions were hand modelled, the ones made and exchanged in the lower Ulua valley after 850 CE are at least partially mold made. Often the mold is used to shape the front of the figure, where most of the imagery is found, including detailed depictions of headdresses, hairstyles, jewelry, facial features, clothing, and appurtenances -- what people hold or wear, such as babies, pots, animals, musical instruments. The backs of many, though by no means all, of these figures, in contrast, are generally undecorated and modelled by hand. This contrast has led Jeanne Lopiparo (2006) to suggest that it is the molds, which are made from the same clays as the fine paste pots and figurines, that are the product of more specialized or trained work whereas the making of the figurines themselves, and especially the backs, may have involved a broader range of people, including children. Building on her ideas, developed from her work in several small and medium sized settlements on the valley floor, I have argued that figurine production became a performance, carried out at Cerro Palenque in the largest and most prominent living area as part of get-togethers tied to life cycle events, the calendar, and/or the ballgame (Hendon 2010). The variety of imagery present in the figurine tradition and the fact that molds were frequently broken and buried as part of special deposits at Ulua valley sites has

led both of us to note that the decision to switch to molds as a manufacturing technique does not seem to have been driven by a desire for efficiency, standardization, or mass production (Lopiparo 2003; Lopiparo and Hendon 2009). Rather, molds seem to have been used because of the detailed representation they made possible and because they allowed for exactly this wider level of participation while helping to produce imagery at different scales.

Figurines and whistles are examples of what Alfred Gell (1998) called person-like objects (see Hendon 2010, 2012b for a more extended discussion of these issues). In fact, they are more than that in the cultural context within which they were made and used -- they are persons, or at least have the potential to be persons. Ideas about personhood and the self among the Maya, the Mexica, the Mixtec, and other Mesoamerican groups in the present day and in the past do not restrict either state or capacity to the individual human being. Nor is there just one self per person. One's identity or being is not predicated on assumptions of a bounded, autonomous individuality that is restricted to the living, human beings, or tangible entities (see, for example, Astor-Aguilera 2010; Brotherston 1992; Gossen 1996; Grube and Nahm 1994; Houston and Stuart 1989; Monaghan 1995; Vogt 1969; Watanabe 1992). Since these elements of the self are considered to be separate and capable of being separated from the physical being to form connections and relations with other individuals, groups, natural forces, and the dead, they exist across time and space beyond the boundaries of a particular body or lifespan. Elements of a person's self (often referred to as souls) can be shared with other beings, such as the things that people make and use. Indeed, these essences must be fixed or tethered through ritualized practices involving objects and places (Astor-Aguilera 2010).

Robert Laughlin found that "It is believed that an individual's possessions are representative of himself, have acquired his soul. Corn, too, shares it soul with the farmer, his family, and his farm tools" (Laughlin and Karasik 1988:9). Evon Vogt (1969:370-371) elaborates further on this point. "The phenomenon of the soul is by no means restricted to the domain of human beings. Virtually everything that is important and valuable to Zinacantecos possesses a soul: domesticated plants...; houses and household fires; wooden crosses erected on sacred mountains, inside caves, and beside waterholes; saints whose 'homes' are inside the Catholic churches; musical instruments used in their ceremonies; all the various deities in the Zinacanteco pantheon." Objects can do more than acquire a trace of a person's coessence. They have souls in their own right and enter into relations with other souls. As Vogt (1969:371)

observes, “the most important interaction going on in the universe is not between persons nor between persons and material objects, but rather between souls inside these persons and material objects.”

Objects, which we would see as inanimate, animals and plants, and other non-human entities may become persons in their own right not only by being infused with a human being's essence. Like people, they are part of the ordered existence created by beliefs about time and space (Monaghan 1998b). They are born (or made), exist for a period of time in one form, and then come to an end or transform into something else. This sequence is analogous to the human life cycle and such an analogy can be discerned in how people in Mesoamerica interact with their material possessions. People and objects, the living and the dead, the animate and the inanimate, the corporeal and the non-corporeal are transformed into persons through their connection to systems of measuring time and making landscapes that exist above and beyond any individual lifespan or period of existence. As noted earlier, social relations are also integral to the transformation of an entity, whether human or not, into a person. “Being alive,...or being human, for that matter, is not enough to be considered a person” (Astor-Aguilera 2010:207). Participation in appropriate actions and socially recognized relations create persons (Astor-Aguilera 2010; Gillespie 2001, 2008; Monaghan 1998a; Watanabe 1992).

Thus, at Cerro Palenque, the periodic celebrations of ballgames and important events in the life cycle of individuals and groups required the participation of non-human persons. Making figurines and whistles as part of these events -- or in anticipation of them -- was part of the process of defining personhood and tethering souls to objects, buildings, or places through the production process and subsequent involvement of these things in the ritualized actions of the group. Clay persons participated in the ritualized performances as musical instruments and were given as gifts. Their ability to represent gender roles and identities, and to mark people's ties to particular social groups and locations, made them especially powerful icons and indexes, in a semiotic sense, of the relationships between souls that Vogt discusses, relationships that must endure through time and across space (Hendon 2010, 2012b).

Deposits and their Significance

Discussions of ritual often assumes that caches and burials are expressions of religious beliefs while trash deposits are merely practical solutions to an ongoing consequence of daily

life. Construction fill may include dedication or termination deposits but is not itself inherently sacred. In this section I consider all three types of deposits in order to demonstrate that the burial of persons in caches, the building of buildings, and the discarding of trash had the potential to be ritualized at Cerro Palenque.

Cache-Burials

One way that figurine-persons were deposited was through burial in or near buildings. These kinds of deposits are typically called caches rather than burials by archaeologists but this seems to be a distinction that matters more to modern investigators than to the people actually carrying out the action. A cache-burial of three figurines was described by Joyce who found the deposit in a small raised platform in a residential group (1985, 1991, 1993b). This type of platform is a common feature of residential space although not all groups have one. It does not seem to have been used for activities of daily life such as cooking, eating, storing, or sleeping. Rather, these platforms, one of which was present in the BRG, seem to have been a place to carry out ritualized actions designed to create and maintain relationships with the dead and other noncorporeal actors. The figurines in the cache represented a man dressed in a bird costume and holding a shell trumpet, a woman dressed in a skirt and holding a jar on her head, and a third figure also elaborately dressed. All three objects were placed carefully despite the fact that they were also deliberately broken as part of the deposition process. Joyce found traces of a large clay figure wearing a bird costume in association with a large monumental structure north of the Great Plaza. The deposit was disturbed because of earlier looting but it looks like the figure was deliberately buried and possibly broken on purpose (Joyce 1991). These two caches illustrate how figurines represented gendered identities and identities tied to place. The bird motif is repeated at Cerro Palenque in other figurines and in other ways, suggesting that it has a special association for the place. In her study of the distribution of how figurines are dressed at different sites, Lopiparo has demonstrated that headdresses in particular seem to mark geographic based identities. She has been able to argue that valley floor towns and villages such as Currusté and Campo Dos have preferred headgear for the figurines made in the settlement (Lopiparo 2003). Extending this argument to Cerro Palenque, we have argued that the bird headdress is its emblem (Lopiparo and Hendon 2009).

The residents of the BRG also engaged in this kind of ritualized deposition (Hendon 2010). Like the two examples just discussed, the one I describe here connects particular kinds of objects and people's actions to particular locations in the landscape of the residential group. Underneath the patio floor near the eastern platform, the BRG residents placed a small pottery bowl, a triangular piece of green marble, and two *Spondylus* shells. The shells and the color of the marble link this deposit to one placed in the older part of the town (Hendon 2011; Joyce 1991).

Constructing Buildings

An even more elaborate example was integrated into the construction of the western platform mound. Underlying the western platform mound were earlier versions of the building. As part of the construction of these predecessors, the builders and residents (who may have been one and the same) did more than lay stone and build walls. Construction began with the laying of a pavement that preceded the building itself. Once laid, it became a space in which people congregated to eat, drink, and burn incense. At the end of the feast, people left censers and fine past serving and eating vessels behind, dropping them deliberately so that they broke on the floor. Among the pieces were those belonging to a censer decorated with a design of human long bones tied around with robe, appliquéd in high relief on the surface of the vessel.

The pavement and its broken vessels were then covered by a fill of gravel and dirt deposited in a series of fine layers. Throughout this sixteen centimeters of fill were pieces of figurines, fine paste vessels, censers, and other items which had been broken as part of the process of preparing and depositing the fill. The presence of sherds from the same vessel in the same layer and the lack of weathering on the pieces suggest to me that the fill was created on purpose from materials used in the feast itself and was then deposited quickly. These vessels, censers, figurine-whistles, and other items had their useful life deliberately and prematurely cut short by people's decision to break them and leave them behind in this place.

The end or top of the fill is marked by two actions. One is the placement of a femur from the body of a young, healthy adult on a bed made from large sherds broken from different pottery vessels. The other is the placement of a short staircase which covered the bone. The bone itself showed little signs of weathering, suggesting it was either removed from the body of someone who had recently died or had been conserved in a protected location until the people living there

were ready to construct the building that would house it (Diane Ballinger, personal communication, 2002). Human bones thus mark the beginning and ending of the ritualized interment of the pavement and the birth of the western structure. Bundling or binding things such as bones is part of the creation and instantiation of ancestors who continue to be part of the social group even after death. The fact that both bodies are incomplete -- and that one is clay -- does not detract from their ability to be persons. Bones and binding are elements of creation mythology, metaphors for building construction, and symbolic of the ties across generations that define social groups. Mortuary rituals in southeastern Mesoamerica were long processes that required multiple stages of manipulation, relocation of bodies, and curation of body parts to insure communication with disembodied ancestors and to connect particular places with those ancestors (Astor-Aguilera 2010; Gillespie 2001; Weiss-Krejci 2004).

Different Kinds of Trash

Crafting objects also becomes part of the creation of human and non-human persons or social actors. The two kilns in the BRG were placed right in the central patio space of the residential group. Both were at the southern end of the patio, one right in front of the largest platform mound, the southern one. The other was located further west, at the end of the western mound. Both would have been visible to people in the group as would the materials needed to make the pottery -- clay, molds, firewood, water, slips, and paints. The production of pottery in the BRG was probably not something that went on all the time judging by the scale of the features and the amount of artifacts recovered.

The area south of the West mound, near the kilns, also contained a large amount of discarded material. A low stone platform had been built here that was not visible on the surface. One area of trash was located south and east of the platform in a trench dug into the yellow subsoil. Another was to the north and west of the platform where a large pit had been dug that removed part of the platform in the process. In both cases a variety of artifacts were recovered but pieces of pottery from a limited range of vessels predominated. The majority of the sherds come from fine paste serving vessels. Forms include small bowls, often with feet, plates or small jars, forms used mainly for serving or consuming food and drink. In fact, almost 75 percent of all the fine paste sherds from my excavations came from these two deposits. Pieces of censers and imported polychrome pottery were also present. Fragments of clay figurines and whistles and other molded or modeled clay artifacts were found along with broken molds which are of the

type used to make the fine paste vessels. In one case a piece of a mold corresponds exactly to the design on a piece of a fine past vessel. Other finds include obsidian tools, animal bone, and items of personal adornment such as a clay earspool and a clay labret.

I found a second concentration of trash behind the southern mound. The greatest concentration of cultural material was found in an ancient trench dug into the subsoil which had been used as a trash dump and contained sherds, obsidian, quartz, and chert tools, marine shell, and animal bone. The southern deposit contained only eight percent of the total number of fine paste sherds recovered during my excavations. Some censer and figurine pieces were present. Ceramic types associated with food preparation and storage, however, predominate. The South mound ceramic type distribution reflects a greater orientation towards storage and food preparation, an orientation confirmed by the presence of two manos. These differences suggest that the West mound trash deposit was where the BRG inhabitants disposed of the debris associated with producing fine paste vessels and figurines, which was kept separate from trash resulting from activities relating to food preparation.

Social Memory and Local Histories

Feasting, hosting neighbors from within and outside of the town, crafting, making music, and gift giving accompanied the ritualized events discussed here, whether those events were oriented towards the burial of human or non-human persons, playing the ballgame, celebrating the important moments in the lifecycle of individuals and the group, or communicating with ancestors. In fact, many or all of these concerns or actions may well have been bundled together in the events. Through the repeated celebration of such events, places like the BRG become part of a landscape of memory. The accumulation of ritualized actions provide a way to mark the passage of time in conjunction with seasonal and calendrical time keeping -- or independent of such markers. The burial of clay figurines, censers, human bones as well as such objects as labrets, earspools, spindle whorls, and other things tied to gendered, age specific, and productive identities, provide a way of infusing the living space of the BRG with the history of the communities of practice who lived and worked there. Identities become connected to places in ways that transcend the individual life span of particular social actors even in the absence of written records. Social memory grows out of the relationships between people, things, and places, relationships that are include souls (persons) who are no longer living -- or who never

were. Domestic places actively contribute to the meaning people give to their actions and interactions with one another and the material world, and thus become a central part of how communities of practice create a sense of continuity for themselves over time. By shifting the focus from a concern with "sacred" and "profane" or religious and secular realms to one that emphasizes on the ways that ritualized actions become part of a process of world building and construction of personhood, we can begin to recognize the importance of all arenas of social action and interaction and all aspects of lived experience, including daily life at home.

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