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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SANTA CRUZ

**LIVING TIME, PERFORMING MEMORY:
MAYA CEREMONIES OF FOUNDATION AND RENEWAL**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

VISUAL STUDIES
with an emphasis in FEMINIST STUDIES

by

Diana Cristina Rose

June 2017

The Dissertation of Diana Cristina Rose is
approved:

Professor Carolyn Dean, chair

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Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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Abstract

Living Time, Performing Memory: Maya Ceremonies of Foundation and Renewal
Diana Cristina Rose

Living Time, Performing Memory: Maya Ceremonies of Foundation and Renewal is concerned with how Maya notions of cyclical time were practiced, looking specifically at how the past, present, and future coexisted in particular moments. Ceremonies of renewal that took place at certain foldings of time, such as period endings and royal accessions, were crucial occasions when the proper rituals had to be re-enacted in order for the world to continue. Rulers and elites not only performed these rituals, but also left objects that functioned as memory markers to recall actions of the past into the present. This project looks at primary sources in the form of carved stelae, reliefs, painted ceramics, murals, and the built environment from the Preclassic to the Postclassic Maya period. The sites of Palenque and Copán serve as case studies for how rulers performed and recorded their embodied remembrances of time-renewal ceremonies. Small portable objects offer insight as to additional characters who participated in these rituals, which enriches the traditional focus on the role of the ruler.

Through the case studies and a close analysis of the primary materials, this study expands on the notion of cyclical time in Maya culture as was previously understood to one that includes a vision and practice of a coexistence of times, or what I call timefulness. Rulers and elite created these moments of timefulness through elaborate ceremonies in order to renew time and thus, guarantee their future.

These ideas of reaching for the past in a way that propels Maya people towards the future, and not as a sense of nostalgia, challenges current Western ideas that place modern-day Maya as always stuck in the past. Thus, this project enlightens our understanding of ancient Maya philosophies and practices as well as how these ideas endure amongst their contemporary descendants.

Dedication

To my grandparents who danced the world anew until their last breath...

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This project could not have completed without the aid of multiple people; from faculty, to staff, fellow graduate students, and family. First, my greatest gratitude to Professor Carolyn Dean for her guidance from day one, through the transitions of the ideas of a young scholar into what is now found in these pages. Her constant support and careful attention to ideas helped to continue challenging myself to look at this material with a new perspective. It was also her deep commitment to indigenous methodologies that assured me this approach was not only feasible, but a responsible way to conduct research. Professor Karl Taube's rich knowledge of Maya material proved essential in dealing with the complex details of the objects studied in this project. In many ways, his works have been an inspiration for my research and provided a foundation for both my Master's thesis, of which he was an advisor also, and the current study. Professor Elisabeth Cameron provided a very insightful point of view from outside my field, as well as her unwavering support, both academically and personally. The contemporary aspects of the dissertation greatly benefited from the advice of Professors Jennifer Gonzalez, Rosa-Linda Fregoso, and Anjali Arondekar. All three challenged me to look beyond the surface, and guided me towards a decolonial and indigenous methodologies approach.

I was fortunate enough to participate in a number of workshops and programs that furthered my knowledge and commitment to indigenous studies. In particular, I am grateful to all members of the Mellon – Integrative Graduate Humanities Education & Research Training (IGHERT) fellowship on Indigeneity in an Expanded

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A UC-Mexus Dissertation Grant generously funded a field study in Chiapas, Mexico in the summer of 2015. While there, I conducted interviews with Maya elders and researched visual archives that allowed me to analyze contemporary ceremonies and beliefs, to complement the ancient materials. Special thanks to Mr. Joaquin, from Oxchuc, who shared stories of the foundation of his community with me while walking to the top of a sacred mountain. To Mr. Francisco Urbina for introducing me to Mr. Manuel Portillo from Chamula, who proved to be an enthusiastic and generous collaborator, interested in his communities' practices and the way they are presented in scholarly research. Also, thank you to Gilles Polian, or Doctor Chil as he is known in Oxchuc, from CIESAS for opening the doors to his archive of audio-visual materials of ceremonies from various Tzeltal communities. I am grateful for the guidance and translation help from María Gómez Sánchez as she accompanied me during interviews in Oxchuc. Last, but not least, to the staff of the New World Archaeological Foundation for always opening their doors to me to use their research space and materials.

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Introduction

Lady K'abal Xook commissioned Yaxchilan lintels 24, 25 and 26 and placed them in the doorways of her new building, Structure 23 (figure 1). These unique depictions provide a glimpse into the ritual processes of the ancient Maya. The viewer first encounters Lady K'abal Xook as she pulls a rope through her tongue, kneeling in front of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III, her husband and ruler of the site (also known as Shield Jaguar) (Lintel 24). The ruler stands tall, holding a torch as a source of light in this space of darkness, perhaps a cave or a temple interior. Lintel 25 shows the result of this blood sacrifice, with the presence of an armored being that emerges out of a serpent/centipede creature. Lintel 26 reveals the purpose of the ritual: Itzamnaaj Bahlam III's preparation for battle. Here, he stands ready for war while Lady K'abal Xook hands him a helmet. This story is so visually compelling, that the themes of warfare, god-manifesting and bloodletting, take primacy. While the scholarly discussion of these monuments has mostly confined itself to these topics, there is another significant element found in this series that is often overlooked: that of temporality. The dates recorded on the lintels do not belong to a single ritual but to three different ones, where presumably both of the individuals shown, Lady K'abal Xook and the ruler Itzamnaaj Bahlam III, participated. These events are the accession of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III (CE 681; lintel 25), a planet alignment or birth of Itzamnaaj Bahlam III's son (CE 709; lintel 24), and the dedication of Structure 23 where these lintels are located (CE 726; lintel 26).¹ And yet, the images were placed to produce a

¹ Tate, Carolyn E. *Yaxchilan: The Design of a Maya Ceremonial City*. Austin: University of

linear narrative of the events that took place in each of these rituals. A closer look at this illusory discrepancy can help us understand why the ancient Maya recorded several rituals in a manner that appeared to be singular, and yet, they also attempted to demonstrate that these were different ceremonies.

All these events recorded in Lady K'abal Xook's lintels have one thing in common: they fall under the category of ceremonies of renewal. These are rituals where the re-enactment of creation establishes a new beginning, a regeneration. When we look at these lintels through this lens, the vision expands to produce something more complex than a representation of war-related rituals. The first scene sets up the location as a dark place, such as the primordial state of the world before creation, or perhaps even in the underworld. Both, Lady K'abal Xook and Itzamnaaj Bahlam III engage in acts of bloodletting as a way to feed the cosmos in order for it to be reborn; specifically, they are feeding the sun and all that this star encompasses. As part of these rituals, all members of the elite embody ancestors, deities and supernaturals, through a series of steps. Here, the entire scenario, from the ruler and elites to the caves or temples where these rituals took place, have been transformed into the mythical moment of creation in a way that resembles a coexistence of the present with the past. By choosing to represent individual aspects of these various rituals, the patron intended for the pictorial narrative to transcend its linear capacity into a broader cyclical repetition. The result is the ruler winning the battle against the underworld and thus ensuring that the sun will rise once again, a pattern that needed to be repeated again during specific time markers.

Maya mythology and ritual practice make apparent the significance of the sun in their life. The creation of the fourth and current era was a crucial event in the myth-history of the ancient Maya, culminating with the setting in motion of the sun and the moon in the sky.² The *Popol Vuh*, a sacred book of the K'iche Maya recorded in the Spanish colonial period and thought to reflect ancient Maya worldviews, indicates that everything was calm before the world was created; all was dark and still.³ The creator deities gave life to plants and animals. After multiple attempts, the creator deities gave life to humans as well, who were able to worship and give offerings to the gods. Still, darkness prevailed. Maya sources describe the gods involved in acts of bloodletting to give life essence to the sun and the moon. The Mayan word for sun, *k'in*, also means day and, by extension, time, which means that when the sun became alive, so did time. Only then was the cosmos ready to support life on the earth. Some of the best-known Classic Maya monuments depict rulers in the costumes of deities, engaged in these same acts of creation during ceremonies of renewal.⁴ These monuments provide a complex picture of what these ceremonies might have looked

² Scholars divide the ancient Maya civilization into three periods: the Preclassic from 2000 BCE – 250 CE; the Classic from 250 - 909 CE; and the Postclassic from 909-1697 CE. Martin, Simon, and Nikolai Grube. *Chronicle of the Maya Kings of Queens*. Second. London: Thames & Hudson, 2008, 8-9. The term “Classic” was originally used for this year span as archaeological evidence appeared to indicate the height of the culture occurred during this period (the quantity and quality of writing, architectural spaces, art monuments, among others), which has been debunked as research into the Preclassic expands. However, it also has certain connotations. I use the term here as it is common practice, but do not attach any other meanings to it. See Houston and Inomata for more: Houston, Stephen D., and Takeshi Inomata. *The Classic Maya*. Cambridge World Archaeology. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 16-17.

³ Christenson, Allen J. *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Maya*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007.

⁴ Additional examples include Copán Stela H, Quirigua Stela C, Yaxchilan Stelae 24-26, Tikal Stela 22, among others.

like, the roles of the various participants, and the reasons for their taking place. Focusing on the various aspects of rituals of renewal, this dissertation will show how ancient Maya elites not only embodied deities and reenacted creation, but also collapsed temporal distance, bringing the moment of creation into their present. It was in these moments of coexistence of times and spaces, and with the help of deities and ancestors, that order could be established, life regenerated, and time renewed.

Time was then one of the most relevant organizing principles in ancient Maya life. The cycles of human and agricultural life are intrinsically connected to time. This cyclical view permeated their understanding of time senses: past, present, and future; in their calendars; and in the components of ritual performance. As opposed to Western ideas of time as linear and progressive where the past is often better left behind, the Maya viewed time from another perspective where the past is an integral component of the present and the future. The ancient Maya (and most Mesoamerican cultures) largely followed a cyclical model of time. They also used linear time, with the best example being the historical lineages recorded on monuments using the Long Count calendar (explained below). The various calendars with cycles that “came to an end” only to start all over again following a specific pattern are what exemplify the idea of cyclical time. One can find cycles in numerous places, such as the agricultural seasons for planting and sowing, the way plants begin with a seed planted in the earth that grows into a full plant that then dies, and producing seeds that are planted again in an eternal cycle of death and rebirth. The same pattern is seen in humans, from birth to death (including mothers who die during childbirth), and for the Maya

grandparents are reborn in their grandchildren. As the sun traverses the skies throughout the year, it generates specific cycles observed by the Maya for the planting and harvesting of their fields, and more significantly to measure and keep time, which translated into their various calendars.

The Classic Maya had three different calendars, each serving its own function.⁵ They used the 260-day calendar, *tzolk'in*, primarily to determine one's destiny and similar predictions. The Classic Maya based the *haab*, a 365-day calendar, on the vague solar year and thus it was concerned with agricultural cycles and similar earthly endeavors. These two calendars were set to begin at a certain date, and it took 52 years for these calendars to come back to the same date where they started together; this is called the Calendar Round. Additionally, the Maya recorded long periods of time using what is referred to as the Long Count. It counts days continuously, starting with the base date of August 11, 3114 BCE, believed to be the creation of the fourth (and current) era.⁶ This calendar was used during the Classic period to mark significant events of city-states and in the lives of rulers. While the Long Count calendar stopped being used during the so-called Maya Collapse that is not the case for the *tzolk'in*, which is still used in the highlands of Guatemala and

⁵ There are a number of other cycles observed by the Maya, such as the lunar, the 819-day, and the Lords of the Night. However, the three mentioned are the ones most relevant to the discussion in this study. For more information on all cycles, see: Thompson, J. Eric S. *Maya Hieroglyphic Writing: An Introduction*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971.

⁶ In Maya studies these dates are transcribed using cardinal numbers to indicate the number of time periods that have transpired, beginning with the bak'tun down to the k'ins. For example: 9.14.0.0.0 6 Ahau 13 Muan (Dec 1, 711), indicates that nine bak'tuns, 14 k'atuns, and so on, have taken place from the original date in 3114 BCE. For more see: Taube, Karl A. "Ancient Maya Calendrics, Cosmology and Creation: 2012 and Beyond." *Backdirt*, 2012, 10–21.

Chiapas. In some Maya communities in Guatemala, day keepers (*aj' qij'*) still use the 260-day calendar for various purposes, including telling the fate of a person, healing, asking for good fortune in business endeavors and giving offerings to the gods in specific days.⁷

The points when these calendars and divisions of time came together to close a cycle became the preferred occasions to celebrate ceremonies of renewal, officiated by the ruler and his elites. At the folding of one cycle, the Maya gave offerings and performed the correct rituals, including re-creating and ordering the world out of chaos. If these ceremonies were done properly, the sun would come out the next day and time would continue. If not, the world would cease to exist, as had happened in previous eras when floods or similar catastrophic events destroyed the world. This responsibility fell on the shoulders of the ruler, often described as literally carrying a burden, or *cargo*.⁸ This burden was, both, the sun/time, and the royal duty to perform rituals of renewal. David Stuart states that, “rulers were themselves embodiments of time and passage — a role that was fundamental to the cosmological underpinnings of divine kingship.”⁹ As overseers of time, rulers staged elaborate ceremonies that re-

⁷ According to the names and descriptions of the Maya day names, they all relate one way or another to deities or elements that participated and were used in the creation. In addition, the fact that each day also had its own omen that dictated what things could be performed in that day, what things to avoid, and so on, is another example of how time was lived. Stuart, David. *The Order of Days: The Maya World and the Truth About 2012*. New York: Harmony Books, 2011, 155.

⁸ “Cargo” is here the Spanish word used in many modern Maya communities to describe positions of leadership. This term denotes the weight of this responsibility that gets passed on from person to person at the end of their tenure holding a specific position in their community. This concept dates back to ancient times. Miller, Mary Ellen, and Karl A Taube. *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997, 56.

⁹ Stuart, David. “Kings of Stone: A Consideration of Stelae in Ancient Maya Ritual and Representation.” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 29/30 (1996): 165-6.

created the original moment of creation as a way to show their divine abilities to renew the cosmos and ensure fertility.

One goal of this study is to explain how the ancient Maya conceptualized and practiced multiple time dimensions coming together. It is tempting to think of the events of various coexisting times as producing something where the people or moments are timeless. While the concept of timelessness can give the impression of something that lasts, it can also imply an absence — that time does not pass and things remain the same. I am not convinced that this is how the Maya would have understood these moments. Seemingly, in these moments there was no lack of but rather an abundance of time. Perhaps the term “timefulness” better describes ancient Maya beliefs and practices, as it indicates that those moments are full of/with time. The past, present and future all exist at once, for the duration of the ceremony. This includes any changes, good or bad, which have happened since the creation. These ceremonies serve the purpose of healing and bringing stability and order back into the cosmos. The Maya recognized that things get off balance and these ceremonies are a way to maintain and reestablish order.

The coexistence of beings and spaces produced moments of timefulness; rulers and gods became one and seemingly normal locations converted into a primordial state. The next two sections will summarize some of the strategies the Maya used to bring about these concurrences. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 will use case studies to demonstrate how these concepts and strategies were applied at various sites.

Coexisting Bodies

To become their characters, actors undergo an elaborate process of dressing and makeup. Ancient Maya elite went through a similar procedure as they prepared to take part in ceremonies. The way the Maya conceived of this act is perhaps different from the idea conjured in Western minds when one thinks of a theater performance or other types of impersonation. Discussing these complex undertakings raises thorny lexical issues. Terms can become what Cecil King has dubbed “linguistic cages,” which obscure more than they reveal and trap us into certain epistemologies.¹⁰

Impersonation is one such term. To this day, the literature discusses these instances of rulers wearing the attire of deities as acts of impersonation. The most basic definition of impersonation implies a sense of acting or faking, a person pretending to be someone or something else. When one impersonates a deity, one does not become that deity; one only pretends to be or “represents” that being. Despite the ample evidence that Mesoamerican cultures understood what we call “impersonations” to be when deities, supernaturals and ancestors were made physically present in a “living” person’s body and not a pretention, scholarship has continued to use the faulty term.¹¹

For instance, Andrea Stone was among the first to discuss the phenomenon of

¹⁰ King, Cecil. “Here Come the Anthros.” In *Indians and Anthropologists: Vine Deloria, Jr., and the Critique of Anthropology*, by Thomas Biolsi and Larry J Zimmerman, 115–19. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997.

¹¹ Stuart, David. “Ideology and Classic Maya Kingship.” In *A Catalyst for Ideas: Anthropological Archaeology and the Legacy of Douglas Schwartz*, by Douglas W Schwartz and Vernon L Scarborough. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2005, 8.

embodiment.¹² While she discussed this process similar to becoming the other being, she still chooses the term impersonation. John Monaghan has proposed the concept of co-essence as a possible term to use for this type of embodiment.¹³ He describes co-essences as the companion spirits or beings that are linked to a person, what in many Mesoamerican cultures is called a *nahual*. This co-essence can, but does not have to, inhabit the body of a person. While this term seems better than impersonation because it recognizes that it can inhabit the body and be part of that person for at least a limited period, it is still not quite capturing the phenomenon of two beings residing in the same body.

Recognizing that impersonation and co-essence do not quite encompass the act of embodiment, Stephen Houston and David Stuart have proposed the term *concurrence*. Houston and Stuart explain that when they use the term “impersonation” it describes a “*concurrence* rather than a displacement of identities.”¹⁴ Concurrence means the coexistence of two beings in the same space at the same time. This suggests that there is a joint existence within one body through donning the attire of deities and supernaturals and performing as such, even if only for the duration of the ceremonies. However, the identity of the deity or supernatural was given primacy and the observers would not see the ruler but instead see a god, Itzamnaaj for example. This could also apply to inanimate objects, such as effigies.

¹² Stone, Andrea J. “Aspects of Impersonation in Classic Maya Art.” In *Sixth Palenque Round Table, 1986*, by Virginia M. Fields, 194–202. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991.

¹³ John Monaghan, as cited in Stephen Houston and David Stuart, *The Way Glyph: Evidence for “Co-essences” among the Classic Maya*. (Washington D.C.: Center for Maya Research), 1989, 2.

¹⁴ Houston, Stephen D, and David Stuart. “Of Gods, Glyphs and Kings: Divinity and Rulership Among the Classic Maya.” *Antiquity* 70 (1996): 297-300.

Through a ritual process the essence of a deity could inhabit the effigy and become animated. The audience would then consider this effigy not as an object, but as the actual being carved on its surface. Similar to the idea of impersonation, the term effigy is traditionally understood as a “likeness,” and also as something inanimate, which does not appropriately describe the way the Maya understood these objects. In the case of Mesoamerica, including the Maya, effigies functioned as “presentations” of deities or other supernaturals; they hosted a sacred essence that made them sentient and active participants in the rituals.

This practice of coexistence was also present in other Mesoamerican cultures, such as the later Mexica (Aztec). The Mexica use the term *ixiptla* for deities who have been embodied during ceremonies, and even for statues that represent these deities. *Ixiptla* has been translated as representation, image, or impersonator. However, additional meanings of the word suggest that it is more in line with the concept of a literal embodiment of deities and not only a superficial representation.¹⁵ The Maya term that closely relates to *ixiptla* is that of *baah*. *Baah* has been translated as “image, portrait, body, self, person” and also “head, face,” and is often accompanied by the prefix “*u*”, which makes it a possessive: his/her image, his/her body.¹⁶ This term is found in monuments and painted vessels that show a ruler

¹⁵ Bassett, Molly H. *The Fate of Earthly Things: Aztec Gods and God-Bodies*. Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 2015. The traditional definition of representation falls within a terminology of substitution, whereas presentation is to make something present, it is the act of “being” present. For this reason I use the term re-presentation when the action means the making present of a being who participated in an event in a distant past. Also, the term embodiment is used here with the meaning of making a being present in the body of a ruler, elite member, or even effigies.

¹⁶ Houston, Stephen D, and David Stuart. “The Ancient Maya Self: Personhood and Portraiture in the Classic Period.” *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 33 (1998), 83. Houston, Stephen D, David

dressed in the guise of a deity with the following sequence: *u-baah*, the deity's name, *anum* (a term not yet deciphered), the ruler/person who embodies the deity.¹⁷ Thus, the ruler made the self or the person of the deity present. I join scholars like Houston and Stuart to argue that in these ceremonies, two beings occupy the same body and are thus, both present. Donning the garb of deities does more than represent the absent, it brings this presence into the present. For this study, I use the terms embodiment and concurrence instead of impersonation, and also use the term “*baah*” where it is appropriate. Perhaps a Mayan term will soon be chosen, similar to how Central Mexican studies uses *ixiptla*.

Coexisting Spaces

As in any performance, it is not only the actors who have to be dressed for their parts, the stage also needs to be transformed into the right setting for the scene. In this particular case, the goal was to produce a primordial environment — dark and watery — where the gods could enact the key moments of creation. A few locations were chosen for these rituals: open plazas, the ball court, and temples atop pyramids. The Mayan word for plaza is *naab'*, also includes the meanings of water, sea, and water lily, clearly showing that this was conceived as the watery location of the primordial earth.¹⁸ The pyramids near the plaza were symbolic mountains, places where the ancestors live and that also serve to enter the interior of the earth through

Stuart, and Karl A Taube. *The Memory of Bones: Body, Being, and Experience Among the Classic Maya*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006.

¹⁷ Houston and Stuart, “Gods, Glyphs, and Kings,” 298, figures 6-7.

¹⁸ Montgomery, John. *Dictionary of Maya Hieroglyphs*. New York: Hippocrene Books, 2002.

caves. The temples atop pyramids were seen as portals, entrances into the depths of the earth. Taube has demonstrated that many ball courts had flooding systems, most likely for the purpose of manufacturing a watery location for rituals of renewal. The shape of the ball court, which is usually shown in glyphs comparable to a “u” shape, is similar to imagery of mountains or the surface of the earth split open allowing the emergence of a deity, usually the Maize Deity. The ball game itself was “a metaphor for the movements of heavenly bodies, particularly the sun, moon, and venus; the ball itself may have been understood as the sun journeying in and out of the underworld, seen as the narrow alley of the ball court.”¹⁹ These examples show that the built environment was highly metaphoric of sacred, primordial space, and not only of practical functions.

In preparation for ceremonies, these locations must have been cleansed, painted, and adorned in other ways. Some sites, like Palenque, also manufactured large quantities of censers that were placed at the feet of the pyramids and used during the rituals. The fire and smoke from these urns intensified the ambience of darkness and invisibility. It is very difficult to know what else the Maya did to set the stage for rituals, as most of those objects would have been made of perishable materials, which do not survive well in the moist environment of the area. Actions such as the flooding of the ball court or the use of censers were enough to set the stage into a primordial time. No longer was the audience sitting in 681 CE, but they are now witnessing the ordering of the world as it took place in 3114 BCE. This is

¹⁹ Miller and Taube, 43.

one instance of coexisting spaces and times. It was now time for the ruler and his entourage to re-enact the actions of creation.

It is an almost impossible feat to attempt to visualize the process of these rituals, as very few records depict ritual scenes. However, contemporary Maya ceremonies can shed some light in this aspect. During preparations of the fields for planting, the modern Maya give offerings and prayers at each of the four corners and the center of the field, in this way they establish order and the field becomes a micro cosmos.²⁰ Large communal ceremonies include a similar pattern of parading through the town, while marking the sacred four corners with offerings and music. These activities resemble so closely what we know of the process of ordering the world at the time of creation, that it is entirely feasible that the Maya ruler performed similar actions. He walked and marked each of the four quadrants of the world, culminating at the center, or the fifth direction. This was the path of the sun in its daily and yearly cycle. Chapters 1 and 3 will delve further into creation-related rites. The significance of the center is clearly observed in Maya monuments, most precisely, in the stelae that depict the ruler as the *axis mundi*, the one who can connect all three layers of the cosmos: underworld, earth, and sky (chapter 3). Thus, the ruler stood in the middle of the plaza as the *axis mundi*, converging in his body the three vertical levels and the four horizontal divisions of the world — a very charged position, indeed.

Saying that multiple space dimensions have merged, or collapsed, does not quite capture what is happening in these moments of timefulness. It is not that they

²⁰ Taube, Karl A. “Ancient and Contemporary Maya Conceptions About Field and Forest.” In *The Lowland Maya Area: Three Millennia at the Human-Wildland Interface*. Binghamton, N.Y.: Food Products Press, 2003, 462.

have all combined producing something else. For the Maya, these spaces were simultaneously the “now” and the past. The ruler had the ability to inhabit and travel within this liminal space of the “now,” the past, the future — in the spatial component of these time dimensions — as well as the underworld, earth, and skies. In a search for terms to express this phenomenon, “transpatiality” comes closest to conveying the idea that a person can occupy multiple spaces all at once, and that a space can be in multiple time-spaces as well.²¹ Another option is concurrence, discussed above for the embodiment of deities, which in this particular case would denote the fact that various temporalities coexist during a determined ritual. Throughout this study, I use both concurrence and transpatiality to communicate the different aspects of these complex ideas of multiple time-spaces as the ancient Maya practiced them.

Methodology

As gathered from the last two sections, these rituals required many participants and must have elicited a lot of activity. Preparations probably took weeks, if not months or years. It all culminated with the ceremony of renewal, most likely being quite the theatrical performance. By calling rituals a performance, I do not mean to take away their deeply sacred meaning and context. This was an event with serious repercussions. This is not the first time this question of rituals as

²¹ The term “transpatiality” is used in organizational studies to refer to the fact that people can relate to others close to them in a conceptual manner, in addition to a spatial one (Hillier and Hanson, 1984, as cited in Sailer, Kerstin, and Alan Penn. “Spatiality and Transpatiality in Workplace Environments.” In *Proceedings of the 7th International Space Syntax Symposium*, edited by Daniel Koch, Lars Marcus, and Jesper Steen. Stockholm: KTH, 2009, 2). The meaning I ascribe to the concept in this study is different from the one in organizational studies. While the term does prove useful, ideally, a Mayan term should be used.

spectacle has been posed in regards to Maya rituals. Takeshi Inomata and Stephen Houston addressed these aspects of performance, spectacle, and politics in their essays for the volume, *Archaeologies of Performance: Theaters of Power, Community, and Politics*.²² In addition, many other Mayanists have worked on the topics of dance, concurrence, and ritual humor, to name a few examples. All these studies provided a foundation on for the present work.

One difficulty that arises in this analysis, where the emphasis is on trying to understand how concepts were lived, is that there are no records of that nature. What we have left, are pictorial and written texts commissioned by the ruling elite. The question is then how to use these sources for interpretation. The tools of analysis I use here fall within what Diana Taylor calls, the *archive* and the *repertoire*.²³ For Taylor, the archive consists of tangible materials, such as texts, architecture, burials, and so on. For the Maya, it would be codices and hieroglyphic inscriptions on monuments, stelae, buildings, and painted ceramics, to name a few. The *repertoire*, on the other hand, refers to “embodied practice/knowledge,” such as rituals and dance.²⁴ Again, there are no video recordings of the ancient Maya in ritual. Using the archive of objects where ceremonies are depicted, I attempt to gain a better understanding of the repertoire, of how ideas of time were practiced in rituals. But perhaps the best tool is other bodily practices, which is why I refer to contemporary Maya ritual practices.

²² Inomata, Takeshi, and Lawrence A. Coben, eds. *Archaeology of Performance: Theaters of Power, Community, and Politics*. Archaeology in Society Series. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006.

²³ Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

²⁴ Taylor, 19.

Most, if not all, Mesoamericanists use ethnographic and ethnohistoric accounts to aid in interpreting ancient sources. Besides relying on well-trusted ethnographic accounts, I conducted research in the highlands of Chiapas over the last few years, observing ceremonies and conversing with the elders about the meanings inherent in the rituals. As with many other Mayanists, one observation I had was the similarities that have endured over centuries. I recognize that the modern Maya live and practice in a different way than their ancestors did. It can be problematic to apply concepts from ethnographic research to interpret actions that took place hundreds of years before it. Some scholars have attempted that with various degrees of success. The key here is to corroborate carefully all sources available. It is not enough to see an image and find a parallel in a modern-day festival and say they are the same thing. I studied several examples to find common threads, both in the ancient and the contemporary records. With the aid of deciphered texts, it is possible to provide more contexts to the scenes from the Classic period, and thus find any correlations to modern traditions — a common practice amongst Mayanists. Through this approach, I found that while there were obvious changes, some ideas continued to be at the core of ceremonies of renewal, whether they took place in the Classic period at Palenque or Copán, or in contemporary Guatemala or Chiapas. One of those pivotal ideas is the basis for this work: that the world and time needs to be renewed through rituals that bring together multiple times and spaces together, that telescope various key events in the founding of the individual sites as a way to show that all those moments of potential crisis were also moments of birth and rebirth.

Using the terms renewal and endurance when referring to indigenous cultures can often raise concerns, including claims of unchanged continuity and an “authentic” identity. Looking for or claiming that “things have not changed” for indigenous people, is linked to the desire to find the “authentic” indigene that the upheaval of colonization and globalization has not marred; it also implies that indigenous people are not capable of adjusting to the challenges of their current world, in whatever period we want to look at, and they are always in a state of “primitivism.” This is what Chakrabarty calls the state of “not-yet” where, in this case, the modern Maya cannot function in modernity and globalization because they have not yet arrived at the same stage of development as first world countries, and they never will.²⁵ The fact that the Maya reach for their past roots is often used as proof of this “backwardness” and lack of desire (and capability) to progress. However, if we consider Maya beliefs and practices in their own terms, the reality is far from that. As this project will show, including the past and the desire to reach back to the moment of origin is a way for the Maya to ensure continuous life and thus, guarantee a future.

In an effort not to fall into the same traps of looking for an unchanged and ideal Maya, I embrace the changes and differences that are ever present in the records. I show the continuities within the change, and the changes within continuity, from ancient times to the present. As it will become apparent, there are not many

²⁵ Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000.

dominant Western theories that inform the main concepts of this study.²⁶ As much as possible, I attempt to follow an indigenous methodological approach. By this, I mean that instead of imposing structures, terms, and interpretations on the materials, I let the sources do the talking and lead the way, be it Classic period images in ceramics or interviews with community elders; it is similar to letting the indigenous have a voice, instead of speaking for them. This task is problematic as no one is free from bias, from intellectual and cultural instruction that can seep into how we interpret the materials of study. Being aware of these biases is important when approaching something through an indigenous approach. My aim is not to disregard the valuable work that Mesoamericanists have done over the last couple hundred years. It is through their insights and arduous work that one can build the foundations of any project, including this one. My goal is to challenge and expand, as many others before me have done, some of the terms and interpretations found in these visual and performative records.

This dissertation aims to open other possibilities to think about the senses and the visual with a perspective that would resemble the Maya's own vision; to think about the possibility of multiple beings occupying bodies seen not as mimesis but as a real embodiment, and that these beings can also occupy multiple spaces at the same time. By opening the doors to other ways of seeing how the Maya, ancient, and modern understand their traditions in their own terms, we allow for a multiplicity of ways of living to exist and that do not dehumanize indigenous people on the basis of

²⁶ This is not to deny that I rely on the work of Mesoamericanist scholars for the interpretation of images, scenes, and hieroglyphic texts. Many of these scholars do use Western theories, coupled with the same intention I share of getting a better understanding of Maya philosophies in their own terms.

progress.²⁷ Clifford's vision of multiple possibilities summarizes this: "Other kinds of progress become imaginable: utopias that may be already here, ways forward that are not about progressing, but rather involve turning and returning. The challenge is to imagine different directions and movements in history, developments taking place together and apart."²⁸ Clifford's statement is one the Maya can support as their ideas of time involve a constant folding, a "turning and returning," with practices that never forget the past, but instead use it to propel forward.

Chapters

Chapter 1, "Setting the Stage: the Creation of Time," takes the few texts with information on the creation to compose a coherent narrative; it looks at the different sources where these narratives and imagery were recorded, such as codices, glyphic texts, and painted ceramics, and the advantages and limitations of each. Each ancient Maya site highlights certain events of creation that reinforced the site or ruler's particular agenda, all within the overall Maya cosmology. What becomes clear is that creation was a setting in order of elements already in existence in the world, as opposed to an *ex nihilo* view of Judeo-Christian religions. All evidence points to the fact that the sun is the anchoring being to all creation. By extension, rituals of renewal aim to regenerate the sun with proper offerings. These ceremonies included period endings, royal accessions, and New Year/ Year End celebrations, all sharing the fact

²⁷ Vazquez, Rolando, and Walter Mignolo. "Decolonial AestheSis: Colonial Wounds/Decolonial Healings," July 14, 2013. http://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/decolonial-aestheSis-colonial-woundsdecolonial-healings/.

²⁸ Clifford, James. *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2013, 9.

that one cycle ends and a new one begins. Concrete examples are used to paint a general picture of what these events might have looked like, leading to the fact that time was something that permeated all aspects of Maya life.

One thing that becomes obvious through the evidence in chapter 1 is that to put together a pan-Maya story of creation one needs to piece it from objects and monuments that come from all over the Maya area; this makes one question how pan-Maya these ideas and practices really were. I chose two prominent sites that left records of how they used the cosmology of creation to frame their own histories: Palenque and Copán. Choosing two sites on almost opposite ends of the Maya area, can be a good way to test which ideas and practices appear and which do not. Are there any commonalities at all? The reality is more complex than that. Each ruler was free to commemorate his own achievements in his own way, often distinct from his predecessor, although there seems to be some pattern within sites and often rulers would look back using the work of their ancestors as models for their own monuments. After a careful analysis of these two case studies, I conclude that while the manner of recording was different in both sites — Palenque's Group of the Cross used tablets and pyramids, while Copán deployed large stelae —, similar threads occurred. In both cases, the deeds of the rulers were contextualized within the acts of creation. Thus, the rulers claim to be divine actors who can renew their lineages, their communities, through the continuation of the world, or better said, the rebirth of time.

Chapter 2, "Timeful Events: Following the Scripts of the Gods," analyzes the texts recorded on the tablets of the Group of the Cross and the Temple of the

Inscriptions for a better understanding of the ways historical and mythical events were integrated in narratives. These inscriptions include moments from their present, the recent past, distant past, and the future. Thus, they are a good case study to see how the Maya understood that certain events were practically the same, in spite of differences. The site's mythology underscored the importance of what current scholarship has come to call the Triad Gods not only in the foundation of the ruling lineage, but also how it prescribed the proper care for these gods. The history from the tablets in the Temple of the Inscriptions clarifies that during periods of turmoil these deities were not accurately cared for. At the same time the success of a ruler is directly linked to their offerings to the Triad Gods. Both rulers, K'inich Janaab Pakal I and K'inich Kan Bahlam II, prided themselves in caring for the patron deities, all the while highlighting the successful reigns they had. Chapter 2 explores in depth what was necessary to sustain the Triad, which required specific actions as part of the rituals of renewal. During these ceremonies the ruler could bring to life these and other gods, by animating their effigies; thus, the ruler could create the mythical time-space of the Palenque dynasty establishment. Between the imagery and the texts, it is clear that these rulers equated themselves with at least one member of the Triad Gods and/or the Triad Progenitor, as a way to reinforce their ability to renew time and guarantee that the prosperity of their community would continue.

Chapter 3, "Timeful Bodies: Animating the Stage," takes us to the site of Copán, in Honduras. The ruler Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil erected nine stelae in an open plaza to commemorate period endings beginning with the first folding of the

k'atun after his accession, to the next turn of the k'atun (20 years). These stelae show the ruler in the guise of numerous deities who played a significant role in the creation of the current era and local patron gods. This chapter takes the body of the ruler as the place from which to study these notions of embodiment and performance discussed above. As opposed to Palenque, the presence of deities was not manifested in the bodies of “effigies” but in that of the ruler. Here, the concept of concurrence is appropriate, as two beings occupy the body of the ruler at the same time. This chapter will also incorporate ideas of performance, space and audience, attempting to bring to life these ceremonies of renewal to understand how moments of timefulness were created, at this site. In addition, I explore how the multiple purposes and meanings of stelae played out in this example. At the Great Plaza in Copán, these stelae were records of events in the history of the ruler, served as embodiments of the ruler and the deity the ruler had embodied, and were active participants in the rituals as the ruler engaged with these subject-objects.²⁹ All these components support the case that stelae were timeful monuments, holding the essence of multiple times, spaces and beings.

Something that became apparent in analyzing ceremonies of renewal is that it involved more than a handful of participants. Chapter 4, “Timeful Bodies II: Supporting and Engendering Time,” explores who some characters were and the role they played in the ceremonies. Specifically, the chapter focuses on sky-bearers (deities who support the sky) placed at each corner of the world, a series of gods

²⁹ Dean, Carolyn. “Reviewing Representation: The Subject-Object in Pre-Hispanic and Colonial Inka Visual Culture.” *Colonial Latin American Review* 23, no. 3 (2014): 298–319.

whose purpose was to oversee the fate of the years, *wahyob* who played a crucial role in the days of the *wayeb*, and last, by not least, women who served as supporting and leading actresses at some sites.³⁰ Most of these examples come from Prehispanic codices and painted ceramics, with a few cases found in monuments. Colonial documents such as the *Books of Chilam Balam* and Diego de Landa's *Relacion de las Cosas de Yucatan*, provide details on the role of sky-bearers, and especially Landa's text, on the various aspects of the ceremonies of the New Year. These texts helped to paint a picture of how these, often overlooked, players participated in the elaborate ceremonies and their importance. Because women are often given the role of ritual attendants, little attention is paid to the feminine aspects of male-dominated discourses or events. By looking at the activities in which women participated, we see that the calendars and time are infused with female components creating a complementarity so characteristic of Maya thought. By having the rest of the elite embody supporting characters, these rituals reinforced that the existing hierarchical order was one that was instituted at the time of creation and fundamental to keeping the cosmos in motion.³¹

I include a short postscript at the end of each chapter that provides a modern-day example of the ideas presented in the chapters. Maya historians indicated shifts in time within their texts with the inclusion of what epigraphers call a "distance number

³⁰ *Wahyob* is the plural of *wahy*, a category of frightful beings, which will be discussed in the relevant section. Previous spelling of this word was *way*, here I follow the more recent spelling of *wahy*.

³¹ Inomata, Takeshi. "Politics and Theatricality in Maya Society." In *Archaeology of Performance: Theaters of Power, Community, and Politics*, by Takeshi Inomata and Lawrence S Coben, 187–222. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006, 209-210.

introductory glyph.” I use this glyph as a sign to mark the postscripts, indicating that the discussion is about to make a leap in time. These postscripts themselves are an attempt to engage in the Maya practice of going back and forth in time within their inscriptions. As it will become apparent in the following chapters, the Maya wrote about events in the past, went backwards and forwards in a single inscription, and even recorded dates in the future. Distance numbers and indicators were used to note whether time was going back, forward, or a distant past or future. Here, I mainly go between the Classic Maya period to the twenty-first century. If the Classic Maya could have seen how their worldview would endure in their descendants, these short postscripts would be those visions.

A Note on Spellings

The issue of spelling of Mayan words is a complicated one, as new decipherments happen on a rolling basis and more nuanced understandings of Mayan linguistics develop. Undoubtedly, some of the terms and names used in this text will change in a matter of time. Here, I follow the spellings used by Martin and Grube in *Chronicle of Maya Kings and Queens* for the proper names of rulers. For everything else, I use the most current accepted spellings by Maya epigraphers. Terms in Mayan will be italicized throughout the text, with the exception of proper names.

Chapter 1

Setting the Stage:
the Creation of Time

This is the beginning of the ancient traditions of this place called Quiché. Here we shall write. We shall begin to tell the ancient stories of the beginning, the origin of all that was done in the citadel of Quiché, among the people of the Quiché nation.

Here we shall gather the manifestation, the declaration, the accounts of the sowing and the dawning by the Framer and the Shaper, She Who Has Borne Children and He Who Has Begotten Sons, as they are called;(...)

Great is its performance and its account of the completion and germination of all the sky and earth – its four corners and its four sides. All then was measured and staked out into four divisions, doubling over and stretching the measuring cords of the womb of sky and the womb of earth. Thus were established the four corners, the four sides, as it is said, by the Framer and the Shaper, the Mother and the Father of life and all creation, (...)³²

Introduction

These are the opening words of the *Popol Vuh*, which tells of the history and foundation of the K'iche people. This text indicates that one of the first tasks of the creator deities was to measure the earth with a cord, akin to an umbilical cord, and divide it into four corners and sides. Modern-day Maya perform a similar measuring and dividing when they prepare their maize fields.³³ After this measuring and marking (or staking) of the corners, these deities set out to separate the waters from the earth, create animals, and after multiple failed attempts to form humans. They finally succeeded by using corn meal as their substance. Even so, creation was not yet complete. The sun and the moon were motionless in the skies, and so time did not yet exist. The *Popol Vuh* recounts a battle between the forces of darkness and light that took place when the world was still in darkness. Further sacrifices by deities were

³² Christenson, *Popol Vuh*, 59-66.

³³ Taube, *Maya Conceptions About Field and Forest*, 464.

necessary for the sun and the moon to begin their course. As we will see in this chapter, the actions of creation culminated with the movement of the sun in the skies; in other words, creation began with the birth of time.

Similar Maya narratives of the creation of the current era are found in many sources from the Prehispanic, Colonial, and contemporary periods. Despite them being separated by thousands of years, they have common elements: deities measure the earth and divide the cosmos into four horizontal segments; gods are placed at these corners to support the skies and the earth; a conflict between forces of good/light and evil/darkness occurs; the setting of three hearth stones; and last, the need of sacrifice (usually blood) to animate the sun and moon, which were required steps for life in the world to begin. The story of creation is found in relatively few monuments and texts, many which also frame these mythological events within a more local version of their dynastic foundation. While this range in variations of narratives poses certain challenges, it also shows the malleability of Maya mythology and thought. The many parts of a creation story could be chosen as deemed necessary to tell a particular story, or support a vision of a particular ruler or dynasty. It also assumes that the general population had a basic knowledge of these stories to be able to “fill-in-the-blanks” as needed.

This chapter provides a brief summary of the events of creation, pieced together from the few objects from the Prehispanic period that describe it. This is a complicated endeavor and I make no attempt to craft a “complete” narrative. As already mentioned, the sources give portions of events and every site appears to have

its own local version of the story or to emphasize certain portions while neglecting others. For this same reason, the organization of these events is by theme and not by a linear timeline of events, which again reinforces the idea that a linear trajectory was not relevant to the Maya (see Introduction). These themes are: the setting of the three hearth stones; the birth of the Palenque Triad and their role in creation;³⁴ the beheading of an earth creature; the birth, death, and rebirth of the Maize God (called the Journey of the Maize God); the division of the earth into four quadrants and setting four deities in each of the corners; the shaping of humans; and the sacrifice that instigated the motion of the sun and moon. As is to be expected, some of these themes appear in specific time periods, sites or media and not in others. For example, the creation of humans is primarily, if not solely, found in the *Popol Vuh* while the setting of the three stones, as noted above, is discussed mainly in earlier periods. Although the narrative is fragmented, the key result is clear: the actions of creation were performed not for the production of human beings, but for the Sun to emerge, and to move, and thus for time itself to have a beginning. The time-centered actions discussed here will serve as the foundation for the ceremonies of renewal that will be considered in subsequent chapters.

Creation Events

The one event that nearly everybody agrees upon as the major date of “creation” is the closing of the thirteenth bak’tun (13.0.0.0 4 Ajaw 8 Kumk’u). This

³⁴ Other sites, such as Caracol and Quirigua, have similar triads, although the specific deities and stories change. Stuart, *Order of Days*, 227.

date appears in a number of Classic-period objects as the day when the gods set the three hearth stones and began the ordering of the world. According to Quirigua Stela C, these three stones were placed by deities in mythological locations as follows: the first stone or “Jaguar Platform” is planted by the Paddler Deities at a place called “First Five Sky;” the second stone or “Snake Platform” is planted by an as yet-unknown deity at a place called “Large Town (?)”; and the third stone or “Water Platform” is dedicated by Itzamnaaj, at “?-Sky, First Three-Stone Place.” A deity named “Six Sky Ajaw” oversaw all these actions.³⁵ Once the stones were set, it was time to organize the cosmos. The creation of the world is phrased in most examples as an ordering of space and elements rather than on creating matter.³⁶ For example, the so-called *Vase of the Seven Gods* depicts six deities arranged in two parallel rows facing a seventh god, identified as God L, the Lord of the Underworld (figure 2). The text includes the same date of 4 Ahaw 8 K’umku and tells of the ordering of the deities depicted on the vase, named in pairs as the “heavenly,” “earthly,” and the “nine poles gods.”³⁷ This ordering took place in a dark environment, perhaps the underworld or at a time where the sun had not yet been animated and the world was still in darkness.

Postclassic codices provide visual examples of how this ordering was envisioned by the ancient Maya. The world was divided into four quadrants; each of

³⁵ Loooper, Matthew G. *Lightning Warrior: Maya Art and Kingship at Quirigua*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003, 158-164. (Piedras Negras Altar 1, Coba Stela 1, Copán Stela 23, Rio Azul mask (perhaps the oldest example with this date) and the Vase of the Seven Gods and Vase of Eleven Gods also mention this date).

³⁶ The *Popol Vuh* is an exception in that it tells of the forming of humans from different substances, such as mud, sticks, and corn dough.

³⁷ Stuart, *Order of Days*, 224.

these had a sacred tree, a color, a direction, and was held by a sky-bearer, or Bakab (also known as a Pawahtun before the Postclassic period)³⁸. One such example comes from pages 75-76 of the *Madrid Codex* (figure 3). Here we see in the center the world tree surrounded by a frame with the 20 day-names of the *tzolk'in* calendar. A footpath radiates from each corner with footprints converging in the center. In the spaces between these footpaths are two deities who give offerings to sacred trees. The *Dresden Codex* shows a similar connection between the ordering of the world with the divisions of the calendar (and time). Pages 25-28 have been identified as the year-bearer or New Year pages, showing ceremonies related to the beginning of the year (figure 4). Each page includes the giving of offerings and the installation of a world tree corresponding to each cardinal direction. It is also important to mention that these pages follow a page that shows the flood and destruction of the world (Dresden p. 74). Thus, the erection of these four trees is key to the renewal of the world after a flood destroyed it. The books of the *Chilam Balam*, from Colonial-period Yucatan, follow a very similar pattern of a flood and the raising of four world trees at the corners of the world and the center.

A number of inscriptions from Palenque, that Stuart has appropriately dubbed “Palenque’s creation texts” because of their mythological content, add important details to the events related to creation. From the platform in Temple XIX at Palenque, we learn that GI, (one of three deities known as the Palenque Triad composed of GI, GII, and GIII and a key actor in the events of creation), was

³⁸ Taube, Karl A. *Aztec and Maya Myths*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993, 69-70.

instituted into lordship on 12.10.1.13.2 9 Ik' 5 Mol. This event happened in the heavens, under the supervision of Yax Naah Itzamnaaj.³⁹ About 11 years later (12.10.12.14.18 1 Etnab 6 Yaxk'in), this same GI deity, participates in the beheading of a creature called “Starry Deer Crocodile,” followed by starting of a new fire.⁴⁰ This is interpreted as the sacrifice that created the surface of the earth. Many years later, the Triad Progenitor is born on 12.19.13.4.0 8 Ajaw 18 Tzek.⁴¹ The Triad Progenitor has been identified by David Stuart as a deity associated with the Maize God (if not the Maize God himself).⁴² On 1.18.5.3.2 9 Ik' 15 Keh, GI is “born” as a member of the Palenque Triad “apparently as a ‘creation’ of the Triad Progenitor.”⁴³ The two other members of the Palenque Triad are born soon after. These deities are the ones who enact the other events of creation. The tablets from the Group of the Cross also indicate a “rising of the sky,” and at a much later time, the Triad Progenitor initiated movement and life on earth. This “movement” is understood as the setting in motion of the solar cycles, the agricultural cycles, and by extension, the measuring of time. (A more thorough discussion of these tablets and deities is in chapter 2).

³⁹ Carrasco, Michael D. “From Field to Hearth: An Earthly Interpretation of Maya and Other Mesoamerican Creation Myths.” In *Pre-Columbian Foodways: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Food, Culture, and Markets in Ancient Mesoamerica*, by John E Staller and Michael D Carrasco, 601–34. New York: Springer, 2010, 604. Stuart, David. *The Inscriptions from Temple XIX at Palenque: A Commentary*. San Francisco: Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute, 2005, 172. Heinrich Berlin named these deities according to their birth dates: Berlin, Heinrich. “The Palenque Triad.” *Journal de La Société Des Américanistes* 52 (1963): 92-93.

⁴⁰ Stuart, *Inscriptions from Temple XIX*, 172.

⁴¹ For a discussion on the identity of the Triad Progenitor see Stuart, *Inscriptions from Temple XIX*, 180-183.

⁴² Stuart, *Inscriptions from Temple XIX*, 183.

⁴³ Stuart, *Inscriptions from Temple XIX*, 172. See Stuart, *Inscriptions Temple XIX*, for more on the meaning of these births and the local mythology of Palenque.

The stories in the Palenque creation texts appear in other contexts and objects that provide additional details to these stories. The beheading of an earth creature, sometimes referred to as a monster, called “Starry Deer Crocodile” in the inscriptions of Temple XIX, calls to mind other Mesoamerican stories where similar beings are killed, beheaded, or dismembered as a sacrifice and thus become the surface of the earth.⁴⁴ The Books of Chilam Balam, directly link the sacrifice of Itzam Cab Ain (the earth creature) with it becoming the surface of the earth.⁴⁵ A mural from Mayapan, in the Postclassic period, shows this same sacrifice.⁴⁶ Thus we see this story is part of an even broader Mesoamerican mythology, one that reaches back and forward in time and space. The better-known examples come from Mexica mythology where Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl dismember the earth creature, Tlaltecuhli.⁴⁷ After this sacrifice, the earth is set up for the beginning of the fourth and current creation.

Once the space of the world has been divided and the earth formed with the sacrifice of the earth creature, the Maize God emerges in his role of the world tree, the provider of life. The Maize God serves many functions in Maya mythology, such as the sacred tree that stands in the center of the earth, the one who battles the Lords of the Underworld, and finally, through his death and resurrection becomes the substance of which humans are made — corn. A series of painted ceramics illustrate

⁴⁴ This is often called an earth monster in Mesoamerican literature. However, I chose the term creature to avoid some of the connotations of the word “monster,” namely the ugly and frightening aspects. It is difficult to prove that the Maya gave these attributes to these creatures. In this text I use the word creature with the exception of cases where the term “monster” has become the accepted term, while keeping my reservations about the use of the word.

⁴⁵ Craine and Reindorp, *The Codex Pérez and the Book of Chilam Balam of Mani*, 1979, 117-118, as cited in Stuart, *Inscriptions Temple XIX*, 178.

⁴⁶ Mayapan Structure Q. 95, from Stuart, *Inscriptions Temple XIX*, 178-9.

⁴⁷ Taube, *Aztec and Maya Myths*, 37.

portions of his sacred journey into the underworld and his rebirth (figure 5). Based on these images, the following sequence of events is concluded: the Paddler Gods take the Maize God in a canoe into the underworld. After his death and sacrifice, the Maize God is reborn out of a snake-fish creature, still in the underworld.⁴⁸ As a reborn being he lacks clothing and seldom wears any jewelry.⁴⁹ Two or more females dress him and put on his belt and other accouterments, readying him for his journey out of the underworld. As a final step, the Maize God, wearing his full regalia, emerges from the surface of the earth, often depicted as a turtle as seen in the so-called Resurrection Plate (figure 6).⁵⁰ The texts from the so-called Cosmic Plate and vase K688 indicate that the “birth” of the Maize God took place at “Naah Ho’ Chan, the Mountain of the North,” the same location where The Paddler Deities set the Jaguar throne during creation (Quirigua Stela C).⁵¹

Thus far, the evidence tells us of the ordering of deities and the cosmos (separation of sky, earth and underworld, and the division into four quadrants), the setting of the three stones, and the death and rebirth of the maize deity. It is not until the colonial document of the *Popol Vuh* that we find the narratives for the creation of human beings. The *Popol Vuh* tells of two failed attempts by the creator deities to

⁴⁸ Quenon, Michael, and Geneviève Le Fort. “Rebirth and Resurrection in Maize God Iconography.” In *The Maya Vase Book*, by Justin Kerr. 5. New York: Kerr Associates, 1997, 885, propose a different sequence: birth into underworld, canoe trip, dressed, and then resurrection.

⁴⁹ The nudity of the maize deity might be an indicator of divinity versus human, since only gods and goddesses were depicted nude in ceramics. It can also have sexual connotations as this scene is charged with procreative powers for the production of corn.

⁵⁰ Quenon and Le Fort, 894; Taube, Karl A. “A Prehispanic Maya Katun Wheel.” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 44 (1988), 193. David Stuart named this pair as the Paddler Gods in “Blood Symbolism in Maya Iconography.” In *Maya Iconography*, by Gillett G Griffin and Elizabeth P Benson, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988, 190.

⁵¹ Carrasco, *From Field to Hearth*, 617-8.

form and shape humans out of mud and then wood. These beings could not properly worship their gods and were thus destroyed. It is only after a series of heroic actions by the Hero Twins that allows for two things to happen. First, with the help of many animals, the Grandmother finds and grinds the seed of corn to shape humans. One of the first twins, Hun Hunahpu is the Postclassic version of the Maize deity (Hun Ixim) and the story of his death and resurrection is crucial to human creation, as we have seen above. His bones are symbolic of the seed of corn hidden inside a mountain. Classic period scenes tell of Chaak using his thunderbolt to crack open the mountain for the seed to be liberated and used in the making of humans. This is also parallel to how the seed of maize will sprout from the surface of the earth to become a maize plant. Second, after the Hero Twins attempt to resurrect the first set of twins, Hunahpu and Xbalanque become the sun and the moon. However, further offerings are needed before they can begin their path in the current cycle of day and night.⁵²

Ceremonies

The key gods (and goddesses) of this complex mythology of creation became the role models for Maya elite to emulate and link their divine origins. The actions of these deities during creation were re-enacted by the ruler and elite during ceremonies that required a renewal, for example the accession of a new ruler, and period endings, including the folding of a k'atun and the end/beginning of a year. These ceremonies have a few things in common: the dedication of stelae similar to the bundling of the

⁵² For more detailed information on the creation mythologies of the Maya, see Taube, *Aztec and Maya Myths*.

three hearth stones; offerings at the four/five sacred cardinal points; reenactments of the acts of creation; and a change of the year-bearer in the case of New Year ceremonies, although a change in ruler was also seen as a change of a time-bearer. Most of these rituals included the Maize God, Chaak, and Itzamnaaj as the main participants, given their key role in the events of creation.⁵³

One of the best and earliest examples of these ceremonies of royal accession using the Maize God as a divine model was painted on the walls of a temple at the site of San Bartolo, Guatemala. The story begins on the West Wall where four male individuals give offerings to four world trees (figure 7). The first is an offering of fish, the next one of a deer, then a turkey, and the last one consists of yellow flowers.⁵⁴ These are representative of the levels of the cosmos: the underworld through the fish, the earth through the deer, and the heavens by the turkey. On top of the fourth tree stands a large elaborate bird—presumably the Principal Bird Deity, one of the key creator deities. These males also perform bloodletting, piercing their penises with branches, enhancing the sacredness of their offerings.

Following the world trees section is a depiction of the Journey of the Maize God framed on each side by accession scenes of this same deity (figure 8). The one on the southern side is mythological with the “maize god presenting the Jester God jewel of kingship to another enthroned figure and the one on the north is possibly a

⁵³ Taube, Karl A. “The Classic Maya Maize God: A Reappraisal.” In *Fifth Palenque Round Table, 1983*, by Merle Greene Robertson, 171–81. San Francisco: Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute, 1985.

⁵⁴ Taube, Karl A. “The Maya Maize God and the Mythic Origins of Dance.” In *The Maya and Their Sacred Narratives: Text and Context in Maya Mythology*, by Geneviève Le Fort, 41–52. Proceedings of the 12th European Maya Conference, Geneva, December 7-8, 2007. Markt Schwaben, Germany: Verlag Anton Saurwein, 2009, 42.

historical ruler who receives a headdress.”⁵⁵ From these scenes we gather that the coronation of the Maize God is the prototype of royal accession for the ancient Maya. Next to the south accession scene is a standing figure cradling the baby Maize God, signifying the birth of this deity out of the water (or underworld). On the other side, the Maize God dives into the water symbolic of his death. We see in this mural a similar depiction as the vases mentioned earlier with the death of the deity, being born into the underworld and his eventual resurrection. In the San Bartolo mural, the resurrection happens in the center of this mural section as the Maize God dances inside a turtle shell (symbolic of the earth), flanked by two water deities.

The North Wall shows the emergence of the Maize God out of a cave, symbolic of an entrance into the underworld, as part of the four original couples of creation (figure 9). They have offerings of food, drinks, and two men carry bundles. An additional scene shows four infants emerging out of a cracked gourd, and a fifth one standing in the crack. A standing figure oversees this mythological birth. While there is no definitive interpretation of this scene, it is reminiscent of the four divisions of the world, the four bacabs and the four year-bearers who are installed at each corner of the world.⁵⁶ Thus, this mural may well be the earliest example of historical rulers emulating the Maize God in their accession rituals, and also reenacting key points in the creation mythology such as the raising of the four trees and giving blood

⁵⁵ Taube, Karl A, and William A Saturno. “The Murals of San Bartolo and the Development of Maize Symbolism and Mythology in Ancient Mesoamerica.” Presented at 40 Años de Historias Mexicanas: Homenaje-Coloquio a Enrique Florescano Mexico, D.F., 2004, 13-15.

⁵⁶ Saturno, William A, Karl A Taube, David Stuart, and Heather Hurst. *The Murals of San Bartolo, El Petén, Guatemala. Part 1, The North Wall*. Ancient America 7. Barnardsville, N.C.,: Center for Ancient American Studies, 2005.

offerings, alongside repeating the journey of the Maize God into the underworld and his resurrection. Chapter 2 will discuss in detail how rulers from the site of Palenque followed a similar pattern of historical events framed within the mythology of creation, particularly for the accession of rulers.

The ceremonies that commemorated period endings directly recalled the events of creation; reflecting the connection between the renewal of the world and the measuring of time dictated by the cycles of the sun. The activities in these rituals included the binding and erection of stones (both carved and uncarved stelae); the scattering of sacred substances like copal, seeds and blood; the manifesting (“conjuring”) of deities and ancestors; and in some instances an act of divination that involved a scattering of seeds on a table.⁵⁷ All this is in a setting of elaborate performances by the ruling elite, who recalled and embodied deities and ancestors to recreate creation, not as actors playing roles but as full participants in the moment of creation. Sacred stones (*k’uhul lakam tuun*, “sacred big stone”) were at the center of these ceremonies, so much that the word for the twenty-year period (k’atun) is directly linked to the word for stone, and the ritual of binding.⁵⁸ The Postclassic word k’atun, comes from the previous word *k’altun* “twenty tuns,” which comes from an even older word, *k’altuun*, “stone binding.” Stuart describes these “stone binding” ceremonies as a time “when sacred stones that symbolized the individual time periods were ritually bound or wrapped.”⁵⁹ If we recall, the text from Quirigua Stela C opens the acts of creation by stating that three stones were bound together. Thus, we see that

⁵⁷ Stuart, “Kings of Stone,”

⁵⁸ Stuart, “Kings of Stone,” 151-7; Stuart, *Order of Days*.

⁵⁹ Stuart, *Order of Days*, 264.

stones were a way to measure and commemorate the passing of time so much that they represented time itself.

Examples of these period ending ceremonies are, not surprisingly, recorded in countless stelae throughout the Maya area. Monuments from Tikal, Seibal, Yaxchilan, Tonina, and Copán, to mention a few, depict the ruler usually in the “scattering” ritual at the closing of a k’atun or a division of it (figure 10). Many of them also include the presence of ancestors and deities who have been made present through the ritual acts of the ruler. The so-called accession stelae of Piedras Negras show a different take on this theme, portraying the ruler sitting on top of a throne as part of what has been interpreted as his accession ceremony (figure 11). Stuart makes the observation that these monuments:

are highly metaphorical, linking the crowning of the king with the coming of a new k’atun or other period. Each of these “ascension” monuments was dedicated on the first period ending of a new king - not on his actual crowning date - so they serve as artistic fusions of history and time. The new *ajaw* of Piedras Negras merges his identity with the new *Ahaw* date of the period ending, assuming the role of that k’atun or other time period.⁶⁰

These stelae show, once again, that the ruler was the embodiment of time. Chapter 3 will explore the role of stelae in these period ending ceremonies as practiced at the site of Copán.

Another subset of these period ending ceremonies were the New Year rituals, found throughout the Maya area. The best extant examples come from the Yucatan peninsula in the form of Postclassic codices (Madrid, Dresden and Paris — after the cities where they are now located) and in the colonial ethnohistorical document

⁶⁰ Stuart, *Order of Days*, 258-9.

written by Fray Diego de Landa, *Relación de las Cosas de Yucatan*. The *Relación* gives a detailed narrative of ceremonies as practiced at the time immediately after contact parallel to those found in the codices. As already mentioned, page 74 from the *Dresden Codex* shows the goddess Chak-Chel pouring water from a pot, symbolic of the flood that occurred before the creation of the world (figure 12). Pages 25-28 show the immediate acts following the flood, with the setting up of the four world trees (figure 4). It begins with the tree on the east, set up by the sun god K'inich Ahaw, then the one in the north by Itzamnaaj, the west by Kimil, and the south by K'awiil.⁶¹ A "mam" or ritual priest, dressed as an opossum, carries the deity who reigns over the year and who will be changed the next year, as a depiction of the "cargo" or burden of the year (and time). The dates included in these pages indicate the end of one year and the beginning of the next, as demonstrated by Vail andLooper: "suggesting that the lower register on each page serves a dual role — it marks the start of the rituals in a particular year, thereby corresponding to the first day of Wayeb', after which one moves to the top of the next page (to the last day of Wayeb'), and then to the rituals associated with the beginning of Pop, illustrated in the bottom two registers of the page."⁶² The days shown on these pages mark all four days on which a year (*haab*)

⁶¹ Vail, Gabrielle, and Christine L Hernández. *Re-Creating Primordial Time Foundation Rituals and Mythology in the Postclassic Maya Codices*. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2013, 455. The order of these deities is not in this order in the actual manuscript, as the scribe transposed pages 26c and 28 c. See also Taube, Karl A. "The Ancient Yucatec New Year Festival: The Liminal Period in Maya Ritual and Cosmology." Yale University, 1988, 221-222; Thompson, J. Eric S. *Sky Bearers, Colors and Directions in Maya and Mexican Religion*, New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., [1934] 1970, 214.

⁶² Vail, Gabrielle, and Matthew G Looper. "World Renewal Rituals Among the Postclassic Yucatec Maya and Contemporary Ch'orti' Maya." *Estudios de Cultura Maya* 45, no. 45 (2015), 125-6.

can begin (also called year-bearers); when put together with the 13 numbers in the *tzolk'in*, they form a cycle of 52 years.

It is difficult to ignore the idea of motion and performance when thinking of the setting up of these four trees, which follow a counterclockwise motion, starting with the east.⁶³ Even the reading order of the images on the Dresden pages force the reader to move from scene to scene in a non-linear manner. This is reminiscent of ceremonies in contemporary Maya communities, where participants circumambulate the large public plazas of the town in a similar pattern. For example, in the town of Chamula, Chiapas, Mexico, the *Pasiones* (key ritual individuals who embody Christ), run around the plaza three times in a counterclockwise direction before doing their famous “fire walk,” where they walk across burning pine boughs, as a way to purify their community in preparation for renewal. Gossen points out that there is an “overwhelming tendency of almost all Chamula ritual motion to follow a counterclockwise pattern” in order to “move as the sun moves.”⁶⁴ The sun is the major deity in Maya cosmology and its movements, patterns and life dictated all aspects of Maya life, particularly the measuring of cycles and time. All of these ritual acts were done with the sole purpose of renewing the world, especially ensuring that the sun would once again rise.

⁶³ It is important to note that in these pages of the Dresden the directional signs move clockwise, but the day names are in counterclockwise order. It is clear the scribes knew the proper sequence and yet for some reason the order was changed. See Taube, “Ancient Yucatec New Year Festival,” 221-225 and Vail and Hernandez, for a deeper discussion on these complex discrepancies.

⁶⁴ Gossen, Gary H. *Chamulas in the World of the Sun: Time and Space in a Maya Oral Tradition*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974, 140. Also see O’Neil, Megan E. *Engaging Ancient Maya Sculpture at Piedras Negras, Guatemala*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012, 99.

What is Maya creation mythology really about?

Most discussions that include the creation talk about it as a narrative that ends with the creation of humans. This is not surprising; as humans, we are understandably interested in how human beings came into existence. The *Popol Vuh*'s statement that the deities' main goal was to find beings that would worship them properly is often used as an indication of the need for humans (this will be discussed more in chapter 2). And yet, even the *Popol Vuh* does not culminate with the appearance of humans. The evidence points to another major way of interpreting the acts of the creator deities: the key event is the birth of the sun and of the solar cycles that govern life for the Maya. The acts of creation concerned with the ordering of space were directly connected to setting the stage for the sun to be born. In what follows, I will combine the different events we have outlined above, to demonstrate that everything leads to the birth of the sun and by extension, time. And yet, it is relevant to point out that there are no records of a mythology regarding the origin of the sun during the Classic Maya period. Thus, while I argue that actions during creation lead to the birth of the sun it is unknown how this birth actually took place.

A basic telling of the story, with this new reference in mind, also begins at the state of primordial darkness. It was then that the creator deities placed the three hearth stones in their mythical locations. Schele (and others) have suggested that these three stones are symbolic of the three levels of the cosmos: the underworld (Xibalba), earth, and the heavens. If we follow this interpretation, now the cosmos is not "flat" anymore, but is separated vertically into these three spaces. Each of these three levels

was partitioned into quadrants, with a deity standing at each of the four sacred points to support the heavens and the earth. The sacrifice of the earth creature who becomes the surface of the earth, could have taken place before or after the quadripartite divisions; the evidence does not say precisely. At this point, there is a vertical order of three layers and a horizontal one of four spaces (in each layer). The sun touches each of the eight points on the horizontal planes (ENWS and the intercardinal points also) on its yearly cycle. It also traverses the three vertical layers during a single day: emerging in the east, passing through the Zenith (which marks the center), dying in the west while being born into the underworld, reaching Nadir, to emerge once again in the east the next morning. Thus, we see that it was necessary to arrange the space so the sun could properly travel. However, I do not presume to have figured out the “exact” order of events of creation – that is a complicated task due to the few pieces of evidence from the Classic period and outside the scope of this project – I merely point to the notion that space and time were intrinsically connected from the beginning of the ordering of the world.

An excerpt from the *Popol Vuh* illustrates the significance of the sun and the ordering of the cosmos. After defeating the Lords of Xibalba and resurrecting their father, the Hero Twins offered themselves as sacrifices and became the sun and the moon. In their words: “Then they arose as the central lights. They arose straight into the sky. One of them arose as the sun, and the other as the moon. Thus the womb of the sky was illuminated over the face of the earth, for they came to dwell in the

sky.”⁶⁵ At this point, the text goes into the shaping of humans out of corn. The four original couples gave rise to all the nations.⁶⁶ However, without dawn, all these people walked in darkness: “for the sun was yet to be born. There was no light in the days of their increase. (...) There was no one to provide for their sustenance. They would merely lift up their faces to the sky, for they did not know where to go.”⁶⁷ In this state of desperation, the people pleaded to their gods: “Alas, you, Framer, and you, Shaper: Behold us! Hear us! Do not abandon us. Do not allow us to be overthrown. (...) May our sign, our word, be given for as long as there is sun and light. Then may it be sown, may it dawn.”⁶⁸ There is an interesting connection here with the dawn and the prosperity of people as a nation, which brings us back to the fact that creation mythology is often deployed in claims of authority and the founding of lineages. Thus, the sun emerging and shining on a people is the equivalent of getting the favor of the gods and prospering as a nation.

The focus on “dawn” is telling, emphasizing that it is the emergence from the east with a sense of movement that matters. The *Popol Vuh* does not seem to give any specific details on how the dawn happened or what brought it to be. In fact, it is written as if it was an imminent act, which is contradictory to the pleading mentioned above where people request the gods for light and the dawn. Other Mesoamerican mythologies indicate that a sacrifice was required for the sun and moon to begin

⁶⁵ Christenson, *Popol Vuh*, 191-192.

⁶⁶ The fact that there were four original couples parallels the four-part division of the earth and other similar quadripartite divisions in Maya cosmology, however there is no mention in the *Popol Vuh* that each of these couples was given dominion over each quadrant.

⁶⁷ Christenson, *Popol Vuh*, 205.

⁶⁸ Christenson, *Popol Vuh*, 206-7.

moving. The Mexica tell of the gods Tecuciztecatl and Nanahuatzin throwing themselves onto a sacred fire and being the catalysts to the birth of the sun and the moon.⁶⁹ One of the only indications of sacrifice in the *Popol Vuh* comes from the sections immediately before the dawn. It says: “[t]hen they fasted and cried out in prayer. They fixed their eyes firmly on their dawn, looking there to the East. They watched closely for the Morning Star, the Great Star that gives its light at the birth of the sun. They looked to the womb of the sky and the womb of the earth, to the pathways of framed and shaped people.”⁷⁰ The fasting and prayers are indications of rituals that most likely included some kind of offerings equated to sacrifice. In the Classic Period, sacrifice and offerings were crucial in ceremonies that re-created the creation of the world. The ruler gave offerings of copal incense, captives, and including his own blood, to give birth to the creator deities and more importantly to time itself, which as we can see is directly connected to the birth of the sun.

In these lines, we also observe that attention is directed to the “womb of the sky and the womb of the earth, to the pathways of framed and shaped people.”⁷¹ This reference guides us visually toward a center where all things are born, which can be the center of the cosmos represented by the world tree (Maize God) and the three hearthstones. The paths of the people could be a reference to the four divisions of the world that converge at the center, similar to what we see in the Madrid Codex. At this point, all the various elements had been set up in preparation for the birth of the sun, which meant not the positioning of it in the skies but the actual movement of the sun

⁶⁹ Taube, *Aztec and Maya Myths*, 41-44.

⁷⁰ Christenson, *Popol Vuh*, 207.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

emerging from the east traveling across the skies. The sun's path, however, is not one-dimensional, as we all know. The sun moves from east to west, but also north and south. In Maya ideology this was interpreted in a complex ideology visible in the way space and time is organized. I will further develop this idea below by looking at the three more significant divisions of space/time: the quadripartite horizontal partition of the world, the three vertical levels of the cosmos, and the center. All these parameters also correlate to the mechanics behind the calendars, and more importantly, they explain how the Maya conceived of multiple spaces and times coexisting.

As already mentioned, one of the first steps in the ordering of the world was the division of the surface of the earth into four equal spaces. Let's not forget that the Maya conceived of the earth as a flat, or more accurately, a slightly rounded surface, symbolized as a turtle's carapace or the back of a crocodile/earth creature. As a quadrant, each had its own color, and according to some texts, its own tree and bird. From this division, there are five sacred points: one at each corner and one in the center. There are scholarly arguments that the four corner markers correspond to the cardinal directions of ENWS, while others support the idea that they mark the place where the sun rises and sets during winter and summer solstices. Coggins supports a diagram that has the east and west, but instead of north and south, they are "Up" and "Down" or Zenith and Nadir: "[t]his is the equivalent of one day, which the Maya denote with the four-point Kin sign — a two dimensional figure that is equal to the

completion of a cycle.”⁷² In practice, all these schema are correct as the Maya made use of these different points in the solar cycle.

One of the best ways to exemplify the order and complexity of the cosmos is found in the built environment of the ceremonial centers; these built environments are, in fact, a cosmogram. Every site chose their own way to “create” the cosmos around them, but the same principles apply most, if not all, of these sites. The premier example would be the radial pyramid, consisting on an elevated structure with a staircase going up on each of its four sides and a temple at the top, such as the Castillo at Chichen Itza (figure 13). The four staircases are symbolic of the four quadrants of the cosmos that converge at the center, or the fifth direction. The center, believed to be the place that connects all the multiple levels of order, is also a place to access these dimensions. Atop of the pyramids, temples were understood as entrances to caves, often marked with cave or portal signs. It was in these spaces that rulers could access the depths of the earth and the underworld. Another relevant example is Structure A-3 at the site of Seibal (figure 14). Not only is this a radial pyramid, but it also had a stela placed at the bottom of each staircase for a total of four. A fifth stela (Stela 21) was found at the center of the interior temple with three large jade boulders found underneath it, clearly representing the hearthstones and the center of the cosmos.⁷³ In fact, the Classic Mayan name for Seibal contains the label “three-stone-place,” which further reinforces the notion that this architectural complex is a living cosmogram, whose sacredness became even more pronounced during Period Ending

⁷² Coggins, Clemency. “The Shape of Time: Some Political Implications of a Four-Part Figure.” *American Antiquity* 45, no. 4 (October 1, 1980), 731.

⁷³ Taube, Jade Hearth, 441-2.

ceremonies.⁷⁴ If we look at the plan of these radial pyramids from above, they resemble the illustration found in the *Madrid Codex* (figure 3).

Many pyramids also have sculptures, masks, and other decorations on their facades that designate them as sacred mountains. Their importance lies not only on their fertile soil where people planted their corn, but also because they were seen as the dwelling of gods (earth and rain). In fact, David Stuart has shown that these buildings were often referred to as houses, residences of the gods, further reinforcing this connection of mountains and radial structures. Decorations on the doors of the temples often indicate that these are caves, and as such entrances into the depths of the earth. In contemporary Maya communities, such as in Zinacantán and Santiago Atitlán, some of the most important deities are Earth Lords, even if they go by other names.⁷⁵ Earth Lords control the fertility of the earth and are also believed to influence the rains. These deities receive offerings in special ceremonies dedicated to agricultural fertility and requests for rain. The Chaaks, or rain deities, are also believed to reside within these caves; clouds and fog at the tops of mountains reinforce this notion. Thus, as the ruler would enter these sacred structures during ceremonies, he was actually entering the earth through the portal of the cave, and could commune with earth deities and other supernatural beings to make pleas for the continuing agricultural fertility of his community.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Vogt, Evon Z. *Tortillas for the Gods: A Symbolic Analysis of Zinacanteco Rituals*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993.
Christenson ?

Large open plazas are often located in front of or surrounding important pyramids, be they radial, funerary, or triadic group structures. These plazas have been identified as symbolic of the primordial waters from which the earth and all creations emerged.⁷⁶ Similarly, ball courts were symbolic of the underworld, and were portals to Xibalba. As noted earlier, it has been found that many of these courts had systems in place to fill them with water thereby recreating an underworld/primordial milieu.⁷⁷ These locations further reinforce that the Maya were consciously building a space that resembled their stories of creation, from the original primordial waters, the emergence of the earth, the division of the cosmos into four segments, and the placement of sacred mountains, trees and gods at each of the four corners. As will be seen in subsequent chapters, these open plazas in front of pyramids were the prime location for ceremonies of renewal that re-created creation itself.

The built environment was not the only place where the Maya materialized their cosmography. The so-called “Cosmic Plate” is a perfect example of a Maya vision of their three-level cosmos (figure 15). The exterior of the plate includes water-lily pads and a water band, identifying the location as the underworld. Penny Steinbach argues that the total of eight alternating symbols of a water-lily pad and a shell, “mark the cardinal and intercardinal points,” thus the vase “conveys both the

⁷⁶ Reference

⁷⁷ Taube, Karl A, and Marc Zender. “American Gladiators: Ritual Boxing in Ancient Mesoamerica.” In *Blood and Beauty: Organized Violence in the Art and Archaeology of Mesoamerica and Central America*, Vol. 4. Ideas, Debates, and Perspectives. Los Angeles, CA: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press, 2009.

verticality and horizontality of the eight directions.”⁷⁸ The inside has two pictorial levels: one is on the interior rim, and the second the flat surface of the plate. The rim is further divided into two scenes. The lower section shows a centipede maw, which is understood as the entrance into the underworld.⁷⁹ Taube has demonstrated that the other figures on the lower rim are the three hearthstones that function as the centering of the world.⁸⁰ The upper rim has star signs, a quadripartite badge censer on one side and the Starry Deer Crocodile on the other.⁸¹ The interior of the plate represents the surface of the earth. A complex scene depicts the god Chaak sitting on a water band; from his head emerges the World Tree. The inscriptions identify this as Chaak Xib Chaak, who is referred to as the most important of the rain deities, the Red Chaak of the East in Postclassic and Colonial Yucatan records.⁸² Atop the tree stands a growling jaguar, who Taube identifies as the water jaguar *wahy*.⁸³ At the highest section is a celestial bird, probably Itzamnaaj who is seen at many other representations of the world tree. Thus, this plate shows the three vertical levels of the cosmos with the heavens, earth, and underworld, while also showing the horizontal

⁷⁸ Steinbach, Penny. “Aligning the Jester God: The Implications of Horizontality and Verticality in the Iconography of a Classic Maya Emblem.” In *Maya Imagery, Architecture, and Activity: Space and Spatial Analysis in Art History*, by Maline D Werness-Rude and Kaylee R Spencer, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2015, 118.

⁷⁹ Taube, Karl A. “Maws of Heaven and Hell: The Symbolism of the Centipede and Serpent in Classic Maya Religion.” In *Antropología de La Eternidad: La Muerte En La Cultura Maya*, by Andrés Ciudad Ruíz, Mario Humberto Ruz Sosa, and Ma Josefa Ponce de León. Publicaciones de La Sociedad Española de Estudios Mayas 7, 2003, 413-16.

Schele, Linda, and Mary Ellen Miller. *The Blood of Kings: Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1986, 310.

⁸⁰ Taube, Karl A. “The Jade Hearth: Centrality, Rulership, and the Classic Maya Temple.” In *Function and Meaning in Classic Maya Architecture*, by Stephen Houston. Washington, D.C: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1998, 443-5.

⁸¹ Stuart proposes that the Starry Deer Crocodile is symbolic of the milky way, and thus a representation of the underworld sky. Stuart, *Inscriptions Temple XIX*, 72-73.

⁸² Schele and Miller, 311.

⁸³ Taube, “Jade Hearth,” 443.

divisions of space with the cardinal and intercardinal directions. The centering of the cosmos is also prominent here with the inclusion of the three hearthstones and the world tree.

The vertical division into three separate, yet interconnected, realms also separated the various beings that belonged in the Maya cosmos. Humans and animals inhabit the earth while deities and supernaturals reside in the two other realms. Ancestors are primarily in what has been called the underworld, except for those who have been deified. In general deities and supernaturals can move beyond realms with no difficulty. Ancestors can visit their relatives on the earth, particularly during liminal periods such as the Day of the Dead, and the Wayeb days. Humans, however, cannot travel between realms in the same way deities can. Some humans, or so the divine rulers claimed, had the ability to transform the earthly space into a primordial or a “cosmic” space, where supernaturals and deities came to participate in ceremonies.⁸⁴ The surface of the earth was part of this cosmic space that could be accessed through mountains and caves, and through the inner temples of pyramids since these were symbolic mountains. Supernaturals and ancestors inhabited these caves and inner world. This was very significant in that, these would be the only occasions when the general populace would be part of the entire cosmos, even if it was only as an audience.

This brings us to the concept of the center and centering the world. The central axis of the cosmos is perhaps the most important one as the point from which

⁸⁴ These ceremonies did not turn the performative space, whether a plaza, ballcourt, pyramid or cave, into the skies or the underworld, per se, the space became more of a primordial setting. In other types of ceremonies perhaps there was no change of space dimension, still taking place in this world.

everything else pivots. This fifth direction is often represented by the world tree, a maize plant, or by the Maize God himself.⁸⁵ There is no surprise that its associated color is green, because it is the color of living plants and agricultural fertility, to the point where green was considered very precious in Maya culture. In addition, Taube has shown that the three hearthstones are just as important to marking the center.⁸⁶ In fact, many times the hearthstones and the world tree appear together, even if they serve different purposes.⁸⁷ The Holmul Dancer scenes found in painted ceramics exemplify the ideas of the three levels of the cosmos being connected and accessed through an axis mundi. In general, the examples of the Holmul Dancer scenes share the following elements, although there are variations as it is to be expected (figure 16). The main individual has been identified as the Maize God wearing an elaborate backrack as he performs a ritual dance.⁸⁸ The backracks consist of heavy plumage, a celestial bird (Itzamnaaj) resting on a sky band on the upper portion of the rack, and the lower portion ends with a saurian creature identified as a mountain.

The space between this mountain and the sky band forms a small niche where supernatural beings are carried. In the case of Vase K633 (MS1374), the

⁸⁵ Taube, "The Maya Maize God and the Mythic Origins of Dance," 45. See also, Fields, Virginia M., and Dorie Reents-Budet. *Lords of Creation: The Origins of Sacred Maya Kingship*. London; Los Angeles; Easthampton, MA: Scala; In association with Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2005, cat. 20, and Taube, Karl A. "The Symbolism of Jade in Classic Maya Religion." *Ancient Mesoamerica* 16, no. 1 (2005): 25.

⁸⁶ Taube, "Jade hearth,"

⁸⁷ Steinbach,

⁸⁸ Reents-Budet, Dorie. *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period*. Durham: Duke University Press in association with Duke University Museum of Art, 1994, 294. Looper, et al., suggest that this is a different dance than the resurrection one in Looper, Matthew G., Dorie Reents-Budet, and Ronald L. Bishop. "Dance on Classic Maya Ceramics." In *To Be Like Gods: Dance in Ancient Maya Civilization*, by Matthew G. Looper. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009, 118.

supernaturals carried on the back of the three maize deities are a monkey, a jaguar and a crocodrilian, which Looper, et al., argue are personifications of the three hearth stones, or the jaguar-stone throne, the serpent-stone throne, and the water-stone throne.⁸⁹ The main reference of these three stones comes from the inscriptions on Quirigua Stela C that detail their setting up by the Paddler Gods and Itzamnaaj. Thus, the Holmul Dancer vases are of the few objects that directly indicate the Maize God was an active participant in the setting of the three stones. Furthermore, this strengthens the relationship between the horizontal and the vertical levels of the center; one is marked by the hearthstones, which are presumably places on the surface of the earth, and the other by the world tree that reaches up to the sky and down to the underworld.

Living Time

Although the Holmul Dancer is best known in painted ceramics Copán Stela H depicts the ruler in the same guise, including the backrack (figure 17). As mentioned previously, the Maize God was a role model, so to speak, for the Maya ruler. Various examples show the ruler in the acts of the Maize God's journey, resurrection, and eventual coronation. Chapter 3 will discuss the stelae from the Great Plaza at Copán to delve more deeply into the ruler's transformation into the Maize God thereby becoming the axis mundi, centering the world, and connecting all levels of the cosmos at once. For now, the main point I would like to emphasize is that in

⁸⁹ Looper, et al., 116-9. They argue that these are the same stones mentioned in Quirigua Stela C.

the Maya belief system the cosmos could be embodied and was (and is) alive. The organization of the cosmos was not something abstract that only a few people could understand; on the contrary, these were ideas that were part of every day life as much as ritual life at all levels of Maya society. Obviously, the levels of understanding and engagement with the workings of time-space varied within these hierarchical levels, but as we will see, the idea of a living space-time was widely accepted and practiced.

The examples I have thus far provided illustrate the doings of the royal elite, for the most part. However, the basic principles that guide Maya cosmology with regard to time appear to have permeated the entire population. While it is difficult to uncover evidence of commoner beliefs from the Preclassic to Classic period, there are some primary sources from the Colonial period and modern ethnographic accounts that can shed light onto these ideas. It is presumed that when the system of governance fell in the so-called Maya Collapse, the core beliefs of the population were the ones that endured and were passed down from generation to generation. One such example is the way houses and cornfields are built. In most Maya communities, a special ceremony takes place for the building and dedication of a house. The four corners of the structure are marked and measured; three hearthstones are placed at the center and a special sacrifice is offered in this location. The four corners are considered to be the world trees. In certain Maya communities, a rope symbolizing the umbilical cord hangs from the center of the house, and is equivalent to a rope that

connects the heavens with the earth and the underworld.⁹⁰ In yet other places, a “feeding” of the sacred posts and the center takes place.⁹¹ The same is observed in the preparation of the corn field, with the measuring and staking of the four corners and a center, and the giving of offerings to the earth to protect the crops.⁹² These are clear examples of a cosmogram incorporated into the basics of Maya life.

Additionally, the agricultural cycle is dependent on seasonal changes, which means that farmers must pay close attention to the stations of the sun. I have already discussed how the sun’s points during solstices and equinoxes mark the cardinal and intercardinal points of the Maya cosmogram. A close observation of where the sun was rising and setting, allowed the population to prepare for planting or harvesting. (This is a concept that can be found across the globe.) These same markers guided many, if not all, ceremonies on the sky, whether it was the New Year, preparing for the planting or harvesting seasons, or even to celebrate the most important gods/saints of the community.

At a more personal level, people consulted day keepers, or *ajq’ijab*, as they are called in the highlands of Guatemala, for a range of needs. These day keepers use the 260-day calendar, *tzolk’in*, to find suitable dates for marriages, rain ceremonies, business transactions, the naming of children based on their date of birth, and also for healing. Barbara Tedlock documents how the *ajq’ijab* divided the body and the associations of the limbs with cardinal directions and time. The body of the day

⁹⁰ Taube, Karl A. “The Birth Vase: Natal Imagery in Ancient Maya Myth and Ritual.” In *The Maya Vase Book*, by Justin Kerr. New York, NY: Kerr Associates, 1994, 659-661, for more on the birth rope and the house as a cosmos;

⁹¹ Stuart, function and meaning, 393-5.

⁹² Taube, *Maya Conceptions About Field and Forest*, 462.

keeper is aligned to the cardinal directions during healing ceremonies and envisioned in the following manner: the left side faces north, is female, and marriage belongs to it; the right side aligns with the south, is male, and connected to the patrilineage; the front faces east and is understood as being the present, the future and birth (sun rising), it is all the things that are to come, and is connected to divination; and the back of the person aligns west and signifies the past and death, the ancestors who lie behind us and ceremonies for the dead/ancestors.⁹³ When a sick person is going through the process of healing, the *ajq'ij* could determine if the individual doing the harm was someone from the past or from the present based on the “blood movements” on the body of the sick person, and thus come up with a possible cause and solution to her/his ailments.⁹⁴

All those divinations, so to speak, are one of the ways the Maya live time and the calendar. Each day, month, and year in their calendar(s) has a personality — things that are good to do on those days and things that are bad. They can dictate the destiny of a person, when ceremonies are performed, and many other rituals for both the lay people as well as the elite. This is probably the main reason the sacred calendar, *tzolk'in*, has survived for thousands of years — because it was practiced and lived. The idea that time is alive was also represented in the way the signs for days, months, and other dates were recorded in inscriptions. While many of these elements

⁹³ Tedlock, Barbara. *Time and the Highland Maya*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000, 139-143.

⁹⁴ Tedlock, 140. A similar practice is found in the visits of the *ajq'ij* to mountain shrines: the one on the east is for divination, the future; the one on the south for ancestors; the one on the right is connected to the patrilineage of the day keeper; and last, the north was a “feminine” day good for asking hands in marriage.

have a dot and line or a “basic” glyphic sign, they can also be represented with personified beings, such as humans, animals and even supernaturals, including deities (figure 18).⁹⁵

Conclusion

As seen in this chapter, the Maya had complex ways of living time. The central pivot of this philosophy is the cosmogram divided into four segments at the horizontal levels and into three layers: underworld, earth, heavens. The sun and its cycles mark the critical points on the landscape, on time, and on bodies. It is the sun that controls day-to-day and ceremonial life alike. While humans are often placed at the center of creation accounts, the analysis shown here demonstrates that the key actions were done in order for the Sun to emerge, to move, and not for the creation of humans. Furthermore, the gods were the main characters and the reason for all creation. As the *Popol Vuh* indicates, the gods created humans for someone to properly worship them and give them offerings. During ceremonies of renewal, the elite embodied deities and re-enacted the mythical actions that restored order in the cosmos, which guaranteed the sun would rise again. The next chapter will show how the proper feeding and caring of the gods is essential in the well-being of a community, and how rulers immersed themselves into the accounts of creation to restore order.

⁹⁵ For additional information on the personification and personalities of days, months, numbers, and more, see: Thompson, *Maya Hieroglyphic Writing*; León Portilla, Miguel. *Time and Reality in the Thought of the Maya*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988; and Tedlock.



6 k'ins, 14 winals, 16 tuns, 2 k'atuns, 12 bak'tuns after the setting of the stones on 13.0.0.0 4 Ajaw 8 K'umku, on the date 12 bak'tun, 2 k'atun, 16 tun, 14 winal, 6 k'in, 2 Kimi' 19 Sotz' (12.2.16.14.6 2 Kimi' 19 Sotz'; September 10, 1674)

On a cloudy fall morning in the year 1674, Don Jacinto Roldán de la Cueva, a representative of the Spanish crown, stood in front of a small audience in the town of Tehultepeque, in the province of Chiapas, then part of Guatemala. His task was to administer to the people the newest ordinances to govern the native peoples of New Spain. The document instructed in all manners of government, the new socio-political structure (which ended up being more religio-political in practice), institute new cultural practices, as well as to divide up the land.⁹⁶

11 k'ins, 3 winals, 1 tun, 17 k'atuns, 0 bak'tuns later, on the date 12 bak'tun, 19 k'atun, 17 tuns, 17 winals, 17 k'ins 9 Kab'an 10 K'ank'in (December 31, 2010)

The house of the outgoing *alkal* begins to fill as the local traditional authorities of the town of Oxchuc arrive on the last night of the year. His wife and

⁹⁶ Gómez K'ulub, Manuel, Roberto Sántiz K'aal, Samuel Sántiz Kojt'om, and Pedro López Ch'ijk'. *Kajwaltik: La Ordenanza de La Colonia de 1674*. Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas: Consejo Estatal para las Culturas y las Artes de Chiapas, 2010, 79.

other women in the family serve the meals they have prepared in the previous days. Only the light of candles keeps total darkness at bay. Those gathered wait quietly for the rituals to commence. Music slowly begins with the strumming of a harp, then a guitar, and some drums. Incense fills the space and *pox*, a hard liquor, is passed around for the guests. Right before midnight, all the elders with a *cargo* take their positions in front of the house altar as they pick up a large wooden box. This box holds the most precious object in the community, the *kajwaltik* – a colonial-period manuscript bound in leather and wrapped in special textiles. The word *kajwaltik* is translated from the Maya-Tzeltal as “our lord,” referring to the sun, the most revered being in their cosmology. All the people gathered at this house begin a procession to the “House of Prayer,” referred to in their prayers as the “white house.” There the book is removed from the box and placed in a table prepared for this occasion, covered in textiles, adorned with flowers, and accompanied by candles and tobacco offerings.

The sound of prayers, music, and the quiet shuffling of feet as they dance to the music, fills the interior of this house for the next thirteen days. Nobody can touch the *kajwaltik* during that time or bad consequences, such as drought or floods, will come to the community.. On day thirteen, the incoming *alkal* receives the *kajwaltik* on a large piece of cloth tied around his neck that he uses to wrap the sacred book and carry it all the way to his house. During this procession, all the incoming and outgoing cargos line up behind the *kajwaltik* and engage in a series of prayers dedicated to it. The smoke of incense continues to fill the air as the wife of the *alkal*

swings the censers back and forth while she walks. The group makes four stops along the way, sacred markers of the town from ancient times. When they finally arrive at the house of the *alkal*, the *kajwaltik* is placed inside the box, more prayers are uttered and the box is then closed until the next year.

0 k'ins, 0 winals, 0 tuns, 13 k'atuns, 1 bak'tun later, to the date 11.6.17.17.17 10 Kab'an 5 Muwan (June 21, 1360) ⁹⁷

A small group of people is looking for a place to settle, when they stop at a river and hear the faint whistle of a bird. A persistent bird, called *tiwi*, indicates that they should follow him. Thus, the modern-day Oxchuqueros and the *tiwi* begin their search for home.⁹⁸ The small bird leads them along mountains, rivers, lands that look fertile, but *tiwi* is not happy and makes them move, yet again. One day, they arrived at a high mountain where *tiwi* made a dance and sang like it had never before. The people took this a sign that this was to be their new residence. As the bird flew atop the mountain, it led a couple people to a small cave covered with rocks. Inside, they found a shiny circular object so shiny that it blinded them for minute. When they recovered, they noticed that *tiwi* was nowhere to be found; it had fulfilled its mission. The group began to work the land and build a community. From their very beginnings, they began to pay special respects to this sacred round object, which they called *kajwaltik*, “our lord.”

⁹⁷ This is a fictional date as there are no official records to when these events happened.

⁹⁸ The town changed its name from Tehultepeque to Oxchuc, which in Tzeltal means “three knots,” symbolic of the center of the world, or as they say, the umbilicus of the world.

The practices surrounding the *kajwaltik* all indicate that the community sees it as a cornerstone for the founding of their town. It is an object that has been fused with the mythology of how the people of Oxchuc came to be where they are, from the pilgrimage led by a bird to a place that would prove prosperous for the people, to the changes incurred during colonial times exemplified by the ordinances recorded in the book also called *kajwaltik*. Thus, the ancient mythohistory of the founding of Oxchuc has been fused in a way with the colonial impositions of order and government. When the people of Oxchuc venerate the *kajwaltik* they remember their ancestors, the deeds that guaranteed the establishment of their people in that location, and repeat those stories of foundation. During the days of the ceremony of the *kajwaltik*, time gets collapsed with the ancient past, the now, and the future, through the recounting of foundation mythologies that continue the same order for generations to come.

During the year 2016, the town of Oxchuc suffered from political turmoil amongst opposing governing parties. On one particular devastating day of riots and looting, a group entered the house of the *alkal* and took the book of ordinances, the *kajwaltik*, away. Nobody knows where it is, if it was kept hidden from forces that would want to destroy it, or if it was in fact, destroyed amongst other sacred objects. This is not the first time the *kajwaltik* has disappeared; the original shiny stone vanished from the cave where it was first found. And yet, some of the elders at the highest ranks claim to have seen the original *kajwaltik* as it sits atop the open book on the table at the house of prayer, even if not many can say they have been this

fortunate. If the book is not found, the oxchuqueros will find a way to continue venerating their most sacred ruler, the sun. Their efforts to ensure the sun receives offerings and gains strength to be reborn will endure, just as they have for millennia.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Long ago, this ceremony took place around December 21st, to coincide with winter solstice. The elders still say that this ritual is to feed to the sun so it can be reborn and begin on its rising path after it conquered death. Personal communication, professor Joaquin, summer 2015.

Chapter 2

Timeful Events:
Following the Script of the Gods

It shall be found; it shall be discovered how we are to create shaped and framed people who will be our providers and sustainers. May we be called upon, and may we be remembered. For it is with words that we are sustained, O Midwife and Patriarch, our grandmother and our Grandfather, Xpiyacoc and Xmucane. Thus may it be spoken. May it be sown. May it dawn so that we are called upon and supported, so that we are remembered by framed and shaped people, by effigies and forms of people.¹⁰⁰

Introduction

As this passage from the *Popol Vuh* illustrates, one of the greatest reasons for human existence was to “provide for” and “sustain” the gods. Given that rulers claimed a divine status and the ability to mediate between deities and humans, it was also their sacred responsibility to care for the gods in ceremonies of renewal. The proper caring for the deities meant remembering, calling upon, and supporting them, all of which were included in the various rituals the royal elite enacted throughout the year. The remembering part includes “words,” which most likely refers to speeches spoken during these rituals; it could also mean the written records of their acts. With spoken and written words, the royal elite could retell the stories of these divine beings and how humans benefited from their deeds.

During these rituals there was also the giving of offerings, which usually included clothing and other adornments, copal incense, and in many cases, the sacrifice of royal blood to feed the gods. The “calling upon” of deities was not a mere voicing of their names; instead it meant an actual request of their presence in the ceremonies, what many Maya scholars call “god-conjuring,” and what I call god-

¹⁰⁰ Christenson, *Popol Vuh*, 80.

manifesting in this work. This “god-conjuring” action implies that the ruler was able to make the gods present in visions through his own bloodletting during special rituals. Current evidence makes it possible to assume that these deities were not some “ghost-like” beings who could only be seen in visions by the ruler, as the term “conjure” could imply, and instead these gods were embodied, either in the bodies of the rulers or in sacred “effigies.” The embodiment of deities was accomplished through the specific actions of the ruler or other members of the Maya elite.

This calling of deities, supernaturals, and ancestors meant that the ruling elite communed with them during these ceremonies, thus creating timeful events. Some of the best examples of how time was folded in these rituals come from the site of Palenque. Monuments from the reign of K’inich Janaab Pakal I, his son K’inich Kan Bahlam II, and the latter’s nephew K’inich Ahkal Mo’ Nahb III, have long captured the attention of scholars (and the public alike) due to their extensive narratives detailing the rulers’ participation in rituals for Period Endings and royal accessions. These monuments are part of a larger set that records the site’s mythology, from long before the creation of the current era to the arrival of their patron gods soon after this crucial event. These records found mainly in the tablets of the Group of the Cross, Temple XIX, and Temple XXI, show the importance of the proper caring for the gods and the types of offerings given to them in ceremonies.

At the core of these mythological inscriptions lies the Palenque Triad, the three patron gods of the site, and the Triad Progenitor, a creator deity with attributes of the Maize Deity and the one who gave birth to the Palenque Triad soon after the

current era of creation. They were labeled as GI, GII, and GIII, names that are still used because their names are not yet known with the exception of GII, *Unen K'awiil* ("Infant K'awiil").¹⁰¹ I will here use the name of Unen K'awiil for GII. They fall in a hierarchical order with GI as the highest in importance, followed by Unen K'awiil and last GIII. Their attributes and symbolism will be discussed further within each of the three temples of the Group of the Cross.

The mythological narrative of the Palenque Triad, their birth and arrival at Palenque, are explicitly connected to the royal lineage and more specifically to the individual ruler's accession, be it K'inich Janaab Pakal I, K'inich Kan Bahlam II, or K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb III. To accomplish this the texts weave a "mythological" past and a "historical" present in such a way that the acts of the gods and those of humans fold into each other. Carrasco sets up this common practice by saying that "[m]ythic narratives intertwined descriptions of otherworldly events with ritual and dynastic history that were particular to the individual sites at which they were recorded. Indeed, the majority of creation texts in Classic period inscriptions anchored historical events to a mythological framework, rather than being an extensive exposition of cosmogenesis."¹⁰² In fact, the texts at Palenque provide some of the more complete narratives of creation in the Maya area, and yet, they are heavily anchored within its local concerns. Events that appear in these texts do not appear elsewhere and vice versa. In that regard, events at Palenque were similar to those at other sites, where the rulers recorded their histories by incorporating

¹⁰¹ These names correlate to their birth date. See also Merle Greene Robertson for a summary of their identities, *The Sculpture of Palenque*, vol IV, 13-19.

¹⁰² Carrasco, "Field to Hearth," 603.

themselves into the larger span of myth-history, to the point where their actions were the same as those of deities.

Distance numbers were utilized to mark these “foldings” of time in the histories recorded in Palenque. Distance Numbers are a category of numbers that are used to calculate dates in the past or future from a base date. For example, an accession date was noted as “x” many days, months and years since the birth date of the ruler. The sophistication of the Long Count system allowed for a counting of days that go into the millions of years in the past or the future, and these distance numbers are one way these calculations could be made that also linked an event in the “present” to something in the past or the future. Rulers used this strategy to reinforce their sacred roles, by tying their own life events to those of significant deities. In some cases, the ruler would note dates far into the future to indicate their rebirth as deities to their people and thus guarantee that they would never be forgotten. As will be seen here, distance numbers aid in the arrangement of the narratives, and in the separation of relevant passages that occurred in different time-spaces.

Obviously, these “foldings” are not only about arranging narratives within a text, but they are fundamentally rooted in “time.” As already noted, Maya conceptualized time as “folding,” meaning that there were certain events that repeated themselves, that the present was, in a way, a repetition of the past. Period Endings were particular points in time in which these foldings occurred, and thus necessitated ceremonies of renewal. The monuments selected here from the site of Palenque are an example of how these foldings, particularly Period Endings, served to anchor the

history of the rulers. Through the records of ceremonies of Period Endings and royal accession, the rulers emphasized that they remembered and provided for their gods, all the while placing themselves within the larger scheme of their local myth-history.

To understand how the rulers followed the path set out by their local patron deities, it is essential that we begin with a brief summary of the creation mythology particular to Palenque. The analysis will then move to the Temple of the Inscriptions tablets, followed by the Group of the Cross temples, and last with Temple XIX. The rulers who commissioned these structures and respective monuments framed each of their histories within that of a local patron deity, be it the Triad Progenitor or GI, for example. These various monuments will be examined in terms of how they reflect the ideas of timefulness, the coexistence of multiple time dimensions, particularly in the ceremonies that would have been performed for the various rituals recorded in them. By looking at how these rulers emulate their gods, we also get a glimpse of what these performances could have entailed. We see that certain events and deities are deployed for particular reasons, and yet, they all share the common thread that the past is a source for renewal and power.

Palenque Mythology

Palenque is a rare example where multiple monuments provide copious amounts of information regarding their cosmology of creation and the foundation of their dynasty. However, as plentiful as this information might seem, there are still many holes and events that have yet to be understood. David Stuart has gathered the

most complete outline on the mythology of Palenque, and expanded upon the richness of these texts in many sources. Here, I follow closely his book, *The Inscriptions from Temple XIX at Palenque*, and the “Sourcebook for Maya Meetings,” to provide a brief summary, in chronological order, of the key events in Palenque’s mythology as it is understood at the moment.¹⁰³

The oldest event recorded occurred long before the 4 Ajaw 8 Kumk’u date of creation, and it was labeled as a “K’awiil Taking.” Not much is known about this ritual besides it being overseen by the Moon Goddess and two other deities. Two other ceremonies of unknown names or content took place after this first event, known only because they are referenced by Classic Period rulers. Thousands of years later, and nearing the turn of the 13th bak’tun, is the “seating” of GI somewhere in the heavens, presided by Yax Naah Itzamnaaj, the supreme god in the Maya pantheon. GI then participates in the sacrifice of a crocodilian creature that becomes the surface of the earth, in a ritual that altogether indicates is a preparation for creation. Then comes the birth of the Triad Progenitor, one of the key deities for Palenque’s story. The existence of GI before “GI’s Progenitor” will be discussed below. Soon after this birth, comes the 4 Ajaw 8 Kumk’u date with the creation of the new era, stated in Palenque as the “hearth was replaced at the Edge of the Sky,” similar to how it is described in Quirigua Stela C. This 13th bak’tun Period Ending is not mentioned very

¹⁰³ Stuart, *Inscriptions of Temple XIX*; Stuart, David. *Sourcebook for the 30th Maya Meetings*. Austin, Tex.: The Mesoamerica Center: Dept. of Art and Art History, The University of Texas at Austin, 2006; Stuart, David, and George E Stuart. *Palenque: Eternal City of the Maya*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2008.

often in the monuments of Palenque and is mainly used as a point of reference for the other significant activities of the Triad gods and the Triad Progenitor.

About a year after the creation event, the Triad Progenitor undergoes his/her “hoof-binding” ritual — a rite of passage for future rulers that took place around the age of 6-8 years old. A couple days after this, GI descends from the sky to establish his house in a “north” location. Years later, GI participates in a somewhat obscure ritual that involved a hearth sacrifice. The next events are some of the site’s most significant, the birth of the Triad gods in this order: GI, GIII, and Unen K’awiil, all within days of each other. The Triad Progenitor is said to have engendered the Palenque Triad. Much has been said about the existence of GI before his “birth,” an intriguing discussion that is too complicated for the present study.¹⁰⁴ I follow David Stuart’s proposition that this “birth” of GI as part of the Triad is more of a second birth, where these deities become local patron gods.¹⁰⁵ The last two events in this complex mythology, involve a manifesting of gods by the Triad Progenitor and his accession as the ruler of Matwiil a few days later. As will be seen below, many of these mythological actions served as models for Classic period Palenque rulers.

Temple of the Inscriptions

The Temple of the Inscriptions contains three large panels that exalt the ruler K’inich Jaanab Pakal I’s actions during his reign (this ruler is also referred as Pakal; figures 19-21). The narrative of his prosperous reign is contrasted to the fortunes and

¹⁰⁴ Stuart provides a thorough discussion on the matter, *Inscriptions Temple XIX*, 161-170.

¹⁰⁵ Stuart, *Inscriptions Temple XIX*, 170.

misfortunes of his ancestors covering a total of eight k'atuns (CE 514-672), including those he performed during his reign. As other scholars have pointed out, the proper care of the gods during Period Ending rituals was crucial for the well being of the city. This is evidenced by the efforts made by Pakal to frame his legacy as the one who restored proper care for the gods after turbulent periods.¹⁰⁶ It is clear from these panels and from his mortuary chamber that Pakal equated himself with the Triad Progenitor in the guise of the Maize Deity. By doing this he reinforced the prosperity achieved during this reign, a renewal from the dark days before. This set up a precedent for future rulers who emulated other local patron gods and recorded their action in a similar manner as the one Pakal presented in these panels in the Temple of the Inscriptions.

The East Tablet outlines a historical listing of rulers from 9.4.0.0.0 to 9.10.0.0.0, the first Period Ending celebrated by Pakal (figure 19). This history is told anchored on Period Endings, such that each ruler's birth and accession date is directly connected to the Period Ending he oversaw. For example, the first k'atun is described as follows: "On 9.4.0.0.0, 13 Ahau 18 Yax (AD 514), Ahku'l Mo' Naahb I, King of Palenque, gave vestments to the Palenque Triad of GI, Unen K'awiil, and GIII, thirteen years, ten months, and three days after he had acceded."¹⁰⁷ The rest of the list indicates each ruler in sequence and the Period Ending of which he (or she) was in charge. This provides somewhat of a genealogical list of rulers with their names, birth

¹⁰⁶ de la Garza, Mercedes, Guillermo Bernal Romero, and Martha Cuevas García. *Palenque-Lakamha': Una Presencia Inmortal del Pasado Indígena*. Ciudades. Mexico, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2012.

¹⁰⁷ Guenter, Stanley. "The Tomb of K'inich Janaab Pakal: The Temple of the Inscriptions at Palenque." *MesoWeb*, 2007, 9.

dates, and accession dates, the closest we can get to such a list at Palenque. Amongst these rulers is included one of the few females to rule in her own right, Lady Yohl Ik'nal, whose reign suffered many attacks. As the tablet nears its end, the list includes attacks and indications that the proper rituals for Period Endings were not being completed.¹⁰⁸

Amongst the attacks is perhaps one of the major catastrophic events of Palenque, its defeat by its strongest rival, Calakmul. It is after this sacking that the gods are also mentioned as being lost, and proper offerings are not given to them. The ruler listed during this dreadful period when no rituals were made, is curiously named after the Triad Progenitor, Muwaan Mat. Whether or not that was his original name is irrelevant because at the point that Pakal inscribed this history it was certainly a part of the site's lore. What is relevant is that recalling the Triad Progenitor highlights that this was a time of crisis and a new beginning, similar to the time when the Triad Progenitor set order and laid the foundation of Palenque. In a way this could also signify the period of darkness before the actual "creation"; given that this was a period when Palenque was in crisis, this was a moment of darkness.¹⁰⁹ The passages that mention this obscure period indicate which rituals and offerings were not accomplished, noting that the one thing that was completed was giving clothing to the Triad Gods. Perhaps elaborate ceremonies were not possible, but the gods were not completely forgotten and their dressing indicates that some kind of ritual took place.

¹⁰⁸ Guenter, 17.

¹⁰⁹ See Guenter, 18-19, for a discussion of the possible options on the identity of this ruler; he argues that it could have been a woman, and that women could dress as males and take on the names of male deities.

Even more fittingly, Pakal is the successor to Muwaan Mat (the historical ruler) who resumes the proper rituals for the Period Ending of 9.10.0.0.0.

At each of the k'atun foldings, the text mentions that certain gods acceded with the help of the ruler who gave the proper offerings and seated them just as rulers do when enthroned. Some of these gods mentioned include: Chaak; a deity whose name cannot be deciphered but appears related to corn, perhaps the Maize Deity; Ju'n Yalaw Chan Ajawtaak, who was not actually presented in public, most likely meaning there were no public celebrations at this time because it was right when the city fell to Calakmul; and last, 1 Ahau (or Jun Ahau).¹¹⁰ Stanley Guenter interprets these deities as “gods of time,” who rule over certain time periods, such as a k'atun:

The accession of gods to rule over a certain time period is a poorly known but common feature of Postclassic and Colonial Maya histories, such as is seen in the Paris Codex and the books of Chilam Balam. As we shall see, the scribes who designed the Inscriptions Tablets composed their history of Palenque's kingdom by associating the various Period Endings with the kings and gods who ruled at those times, and who were involved with the various ceremonies to initiate and terminate those periods. It is not clear if each city would have had its own gods for these periods, or if the Maya as a whole recognized certain “gods” of time' in common. However, it can be said that none of the gods listed at Palenque, or at other cities such as Copán, where this phenomenon is also in evidence, were local patron gods. Instead, they are from the general pantheon, such as Chaahk the rain god, (...), or the maize god, or various poorly understood deities who appear to have been associated with astronomical features....¹¹¹

The presence of these time gods suggests that the practice common in the Spanish Colonial period existed in the Classic, and perhaps even earlier periods as well. The books of the Chilam Balam describe each k'atun as being ruled by a specific deity

¹¹⁰ He also appears in the *Codex Dresden*, and seems to be a celestial deity.

¹¹¹ Guenter, 12.

whose attributes dictated what kind of k'atun awaited, some being more benevolent than others.¹¹²

The central portion focuses on the Period Endings celebrated by Pakal, discussing in more detail the offerings given to the gods (figure 20). The same pattern of “time gods” overseeing time periods is observed here, as the opening text mentions a “celestial maize deity” ruling over the eleventh k'atun. Immediately after, the text delves into the sprouting of a World Tree that has two different names. One of those names given to it is “five square-nosed beastie,” which Guenter interprets as one “beastie” located at each of the ends of the tree, totaling four, and one that is directed towards the skies.¹¹³ These “beasties” are also seen in the trees of the Group of the Cross. These five supernaturals could be the same deities mentioned elsewhere that are placed at the corners of the world, thus expanding the image of the World Tree into a full cosmogram — the four corners and the tree standing in the middle as the axis mundi. The fact that the previous passages come from a period of darkness, to the current one of prosperity (assumed by the ruling of a maize deity), and the emergence of a world tree, indicate that this was seen as a time of renewal. It is very likely that the rituals for the Period Ending included the reenactment of the raising of a World Tree and placing of deities at each of the cardinal points, by Pakal, thus ordering the world as it was done at the beginning of the current era.

¹¹² Barrera Vásquez, Alfredo, and Silvia Rendón. *El Libro de Los Libros de Chilam Balam. Traducción de Sus Textos Paralelos Por Alfredo Barrera Vásquez Y Silvia Rendón*. 3rd ed. México, Buenos Aires, 1965. Tozzer, Alfred M. *Relacion de Las Cosas de Yucatan. A Translation*. Vol. 18. Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University,. New York: Kraus Reprint Corp, 1966. For a contemporary equivalent, see Tedlock, *Time and the Highland Maya*.

¹¹³ Guenter, 26-7.

The rest of the passages tell of the offerings Pakal gave the Triad Gods, naming them one at a time as they receive a crown, specific to each god, and twenty-one costumes. He also presents a crown on an altar to all the Triad Gods, perhaps “Pakal is offering his gods the crown to rule over Palenque.”¹¹⁴ The next k’atun is ruled by the god called “Laju’n Ajaw,” or Shiny Ten Lord, associated with death. Appropriately so, this k’atun sees the death of Pakal, his wife, and son. For this Period Ending ritual, Pakal offers the crown to the Triad Gods’ altar, as well as twenty-one headwraps, a necklace, earflares and a helmet. At the closing of the panel texts it is stated that Pakal “took care” of the Triad Gods on three k’atun endings.

Learning about the kinds of accouterments each of the gods received, gives us a glimpse into the types of adornments required to dress each god. Many contemporary Maya ceremonies include the dressing of saint statues. New garments and other adornments, usually necklaces and in some cases crowns (especially for the dressing of Jesus), are carefully wrapped in special bundles. It is likely that Classic period ceremonies also incorporated the dressing of deity effigies, and even of humans who were to embody deities. Thus, these are not mere listings of objects but a window into ceremonial practices. Between these dressed deities, which most likely indicated that they were animated with the dressing act, the setting of the World Tree, and the placement of the deities at the cardinal directions we see a re-creation of the ordering of the world that took place during every Period Ending celebrated by Pakal.

¹¹⁴ Guenter, 29-30.

The West Tablet indicates that the Triad Gods were satisfied with Pakal's offerings and highlights the contrast between the previous Period Ending when the city fell into crisis and the ceremonies were not performed properly (figure 21). This section also goes between past, present, and future dates. After repeating how content the hearts of the gods were, the text states that Pakal will once again become a ruler in the year AD 4472. It also makes a reference that his accession took place in the anniversary of the "Zip Monster" accession, about 455,393,641 days in the past.¹¹⁵ He thus places himself beyond what we would call "historical" time, by connecting his accession to one of a god in mythological times and projecting his rebirth much into the future. Guenter proposes that Pakal could even become one of the "time gods":

However, in Maya belief, not only was this the anniversary of K'inich Janaab Pakal, but it was probably also conceived in some manner that he would become king again. One recalls that the East and Central Tablets recorded the accessions of various gods of time on or shortly before or after the major Katun Endings. The Palenque scribes may well have intended the reader to know that in 4772 their king, K'inich Janaab Pakal, would reign again. And, if our understanding of the time gods is correct, that they are universal time gods who reign over the entire Maya world, Pakal would become god of time and the world itself in 4772.¹¹⁶

It is difficult to know if Pakal was indeed thought to become one of these "time gods" but he definitely meant to assure that he would return as a god in a future time. We see once again how reaching back to a past event, in this case the accession of a god in mythological time, was key for the ruler's ability to exist in the future.

The rest of the West Tablet is concerned with various warfare acts in which Pakal engaged to expand his dominion. The texts tell of the arrival of the captives and

¹¹⁵ Stuart and Stuart, 169.

¹¹⁶ Guenter, 42-3.

their sacrifices. In one particular passage it says Pakal and the Triad Gods engaged in not only extracting the heart of a captured ruler, but also in eating his heart.¹¹⁷ Aside from the aspects of cannibalism in this passage, what is relevant for this study is the fact that Pakal is described interacting with the gods as if they were alive and present, thus confirming that for certain events deities were embodied in the flesh and blood of the rulers and elites and participated in ceremonies — there was no conflict between gods and humans (rulers) mingling in the same time-space. In fact, one passage refers to Pakal as GI, making it possible to think that Pakal could have embodied any of the Triad Gods as necessary based on the particular ceremonies celebrated.

The use of distance numbers in these tablets serves multiple purposes. In the first segments they are used to measure period ending celebrations from accession dates of rulers as well as to provide birthdates and accession dates of each ruler. Further into the text, distance numbers are used to take the narrative into mythological times and even into a very distant future. Thus, the connection of multiple time dimensions on a seemingly linear narrative corroborates that for the Maya there was no conflict with merging events that happened in what we consider mythological times with those of historical times — they were all part of the same cycle and could be recalled as needed. In this particular case, it was crucial for Pakal to show that he performed the appropriate rites for the caring of the Palenque Triad

¹¹⁷ Guenter, 51.

during period endings and that this was directly connected to the renewed prosperity of the site under his command.¹¹⁸

Group of the Cross

The Group of the Cross is located on the eastern side of the site, at the base of the El Mirador hill, and is composed of three structures: the Temple of the Cross, the Temple of the Foliated Cross, and the Temple of the Sun (figure 22). The group was dedicated by K'inich Kan Bahlam II on January 10, 692, in preparation for the k'atun Period Ending of 9.13.0.0.0 8 Ajaw 8 Woh, the first of his reign.¹¹⁹ Each of these temples is considered to be an artificial mountain and are at different height levels, further reinforcing their cosmological symbolism. The Temple of the Cross is the highest and holds the shrine to GI, indicating that it is the most important. The Temple of the Foliated Cross follows the Temple of the Cross, and it houses Unen K'awiil. Last, but not least, is the Temple of the Sun, which hosts GIII, the underworld deity. These three temples are considered to be symbolic of the three hearthstones that were set up during creation events at the hearth of the cosmos.¹²⁰ In addition, they symbolize the levels of the cosmos: the skies at the Temple of the Cross, the surface of the water (earth) at the Temple of the Foliated Cross, and the underworld at the Temple of the Sun.

These temples celebrate the birth of the Palenque Triad gods in mythological time: GI, GIII and Unen K'awiil (note that their birth order differs from the usual

¹¹⁸ Stuart and Stuart, 167.

¹¹⁹ Stuart, *Sourcebook*, 89.

¹²⁰ Schele and Miller, 67.

arrangement according to importance). The language used to describe the birth of these deities indicates that this is not a literal birth, instead it describes the “establishment of three already existing gods into a new order of being, directly oriented towards Palenque’s dynasty, after the turn of the 13th bak’tun.”¹²¹ Thus, the creation of the world is incorporated into a local mythology in which the Palenque Triad becomes the local patron gods and sets up the order of ceremonial cycles at the site. The interior shrine of each temple is considered an “underground house” or *pib’naah*.¹²² It is likely that these sanctuaries hosted an “effigy” of the corresponding Palenque Triad. Stuart suggests that a ceremony indicated in the texts of the tablets is one of making and firing of these embodiments of deities who were then housed in their respective temples.¹²³ He also proposes a ceremony that took place the day after the firing of the “effigies” has to do with a ritual “activation” of these gods, at which point they were ready to witness the ceremonies that took place at the turn of the k’atun.¹²⁴

Inside each of these three temples stands an elaborate panel that consists of a central image flanked on both sides by long inscriptions. The figurative panel shows two individuals, one shorter than the other, facing a central icon, whether a “cross” or a shield, in the case of the Temple of the Sun. While there have been many interpretations as to who these individuals are, the current interpretation is that they

¹²¹ Stuart, *Sourcebook*, 90.

¹²² Stuart, *Sourcebook*, 109. See also Houston, Stephen D. “Symbolic Sweatbaths of the Maya: Architectural Meaning in the Cross Group at Palenque, Mexico.” *Latin American Antiquity* 7, no. 2 (1996): 132–51. Houston suggested that there was a symbolic firing of these shrines, similar to a sweatbath.

¹²³ Stuart, *Sourcebook*, 97.

¹²⁴ Stuart, *Sourcebook*, 97-8.

are both K'inich Kan B'ahlam II, as a young heir in the shorter figure and when he actually assumed the throne as the larger figure.¹²⁵ Thus, K'inich Kan Bahlam II is linking his rites of accession to the Period Ending, as well as to the Palenque Triad reinforcing his divine lineage. The middle image, whether a cross or a shield, ties in with the symbolism of the individual temples, as will be seen below.

The Temple of the Cross, the largest and highest of the three temples, is located at the north side of the complex. Its ruling deity is GI, a god of aquatic and solar attributes, probably an “ocean” sun, or the sun emerging from the waters to the east.¹²⁶ Various decorations on the outside of the building mark this as a celestial place. The name for the inner temple has not been fully deciphered but it includes the words “six” and “sky,” both part of the names of sacred locations found in other creation texts, such as Quirigua Stela C.¹²⁷ While the name phrase is unknown, it is clear that it reinforces this location as being in the sky or sky-related. The images in the central panel include the younger and older K'inich Kan Bahlam II as they give offerings to the world tree raised in the middle of the scene (figure 23). According to Stuart, the tree “most likely represents the idea of ascent of the sun toward zenith, a space that the Maya clearly equated with the concept of ‘north,’”¹²⁸ which seems fitting given the location of the temple. This tree emerges from a sacrificial bowl,

¹²⁵ Stuart and Stuart, 195. Another interpretation that has held on for a long time, and to which some scholars still adhere, is that the smaller figure represents the deceased Pakal, K'inich Kan Bahlam II's father, as a deified ancestor who comes to witness his son's accession and rituals. This version was supported by Linda Schele (find reference).

¹²⁶ Stuart and Stuart, 189.

¹²⁷ de la Garza, et.al., 141, propose an interpretation for the name of this structure as Wak-Chan-Ajaw, “ruler of six sky” and suggest he is the same person named in Quirigua Stela C and the one who oversaw the setting of the three hearthstones.

¹²⁸ Stuart, *Sourcebook*, 116.

which is a “symbolic womb of the cosmic alligator that represents the surface of the earth, or the nocturnal sky.”¹²⁹ A passage from nearby Temple XIX, describes the sacrifice of a cosmic crocodile as part of the creation of the world and what becomes the surface of the earth.¹³⁰ A bird stands atop of the tree symbolizing the skies, the god Itzamnaaj. Thus, the tree is an axis mundi who emerges from below the earth and rises to the skies. All these elements make it clear that this scene is a representation of the events of creation when the World Tree was raised. K’inich Kan Bahlam II is here showing that during his ceremony of accession and for the turn of the k’atun he performed rituals that reenacted the events of creation.

The inscriptions on the tablet provide even more details about the overall program for this temple. The texts alongside the figures indicate the historical events associated with each figure, the younger K’inich Kan Bahlam II’s heir apparent rites and the older K’inich Kan Bahlam II’s accession date. The longer texts on the sides begin with mythological actions that then lead to a historical outlining of ancestral rulers finishing with the accession of K’inich Kan Bahlam II. The various passages within the larger narrative begin with the use of distance numbers that link a specific event to an important date in the past, for example a birthdate being measured from the birthdate of the Triad Progenitor. Overall, the story unfolds in what we would call “linear” fashion, as there does not seem to be a going back and forth between the past and the present. The story begins with the birth of the Triad Progenitor followed by the arrival of GI and his dedication of a house in the north after which GI is born.

¹²⁹ Stuart and Stuart, 198.

¹³⁰ Stuart, *Inscriptions Temple XIX*.

This is the event David Stuart suggests is when the Palenque Triad becomes a local group of deities. The mythological section ends with the accession of the Triad Progenitor as ruler. While the first ancestral ruler mentioned could fall within the myth category, the rest of them are all in historical time. Overall, the theme of the temple and tablets is concerned with ancestors and the celestial realm.

The Temple of the Foliated Cross is the second in importance and the house of Unen K'awiil (GII). The overall theme of this structure is agriculture, fertility and kingship. It takes the narrative from the skies down to the earthly level of the cosmos. We see the same composition on the central panel consisting of the two K'inich Kan Bahlam IIs flanking the central tree (figure 24). In this case, the tree is more accurately a maize plant decorated with jewels and emerges from the sacred waters of sustenance. Stuart indicates that the symbol of the maize plant on the sacred water is called the *k'an nahb'ixiimte'* or "the precious pool maize plant."¹³¹ This sets the location as being on the surface of sacred, most likely primordial, waters from which the sacred tree emerged. Here, the world tree is the maize plant that gives sustenance to humans as well as the substance from which humans were formed by the creator couple.

Both images of K'inich Kan Bahlam II stand on sacred locations. The young one stands atop a snail inscribed with the name *K'an ? Ha' Matwiil*, or "Precious Water of Matwiil."¹³² Matwiil is a sacred location in the mythology of Palenque, the place where the Triad arrives and also where rituals take place. The older K'inich

¹³¹ Stuart, *Sourcebook*, 140.

¹³² de la Garza, et.al., 163.

Kan Bahlam II stands on a mountain from which maize flows, labeled as *Yaxhaal Witznal*, “Mountain of Maize of the New Creation” or “New Mountain.”¹³³ The texts recall these as locations where the Triad Progenitor performed god-manifesting ceremonies during the first bak’tun after the Triad was born. The fact that K’inich Kan Bahlam II stands on these locations in conjunction with the older K’inich Kan Bahlam II’s attire resembling the Maize Deity indicate that he performed similar acts of recalling the gods during ceremonies, particularly for the ones mentioned in this tablet: heir apparent, accession, and k’atun ending, mentioned in the secondary texts. While an obvious statement of embodiment is lacking in the text, the visual cues and inferences from the text lead to the conclusion that during these rituals K’inich Kan Bahlam II most likely embodied the Triad Progenitor (or the Maize Deity), and then reenacted the founding of Palenque complete with the birthing of the Triad gods.

The inscriptions begin with the birth of Unen K’awiil. Distance numbers carry the narrative forward to the second bak’tun when the Triad Progenitor performed a god-manifesting ritual at the sites already mentioned. The story then jumps to the more recent past with the telling of the youth rituals of K’inich Kan Bahlam II and his accession years later. These passages make clear references to the manifesting of gods along with the firing of the kilns of the Triad. It is presumed that the shaping and firing of the Triad “effigies” is the equivalent of their birth, made complete by their activation with specific rituals once they were placed in their respective temples.¹³⁴ This activation most likely included dressing and the giving of offerings of incense

¹³³ de la Garza, 163; and Stuart, *Sourcebook*, 145.

¹³⁴ Houston, “Symbolic Sweatbaths,” 139.

and perhaps even blood. It is the ruler's sacrificial blood that brings them to life, similar to the blood offerings given by the Triad Progenitor in primordial times. The last passage uses distance numbers to move the story to a near future when these "effigies" were animated during the thirteenth k'atun ending.¹³⁵

The smaller of the three temples, the Temple of the Sun, houses GIII, an underworld sun deity. The symbolism on the temple facades as well as the tablets indicate that this temple is conceived as an underworld location, bringing together the three levels of the cosmos in the sacred ceremonial space of the Group of the Cross (figure 25). There is a strong association of the underworld with warfare in the panels of this temple. Instead of a world tree, the central motif now consists of a war shield with crossed spears behind it, being supported by two underworld deities, including God L. This shield has the face of the Jaguar God of the Underworld, who is often associated with GIII, and could refer to the nocturnal sun. The "effigy" held by the young K'inich Kan Bahlam II also holds a similar war shield. In addition, the sanctuary panels tell of the victory of Palenque over Tonina under the guidance of K'inich Kan Bahlam II. This must have been a great achievement as these two sites were long-time enemies, and K'inich Kan Bahlam II made sure to record his successes in controlling and expanding his dominion. Both K'inich Kan Bahlam IIs stand on top of two anthropomorphic figures with faces that resemble underworld beings. de la Garza et al. suggest that at least one of them is a captive.¹³⁶ If this is the

¹³⁵ Stuart, *Sourcebook*, 143-151

¹³⁶ de la Garza, et.al., 168, identify this being as a captured ruler from another site because he has the sign *ajaw* (lord) on his body, while in a pose typical of captives in other monuments.

case, it further reinforces the subject of warfare and the important victories of K'inich Kan Bahlam II.

This connection of warfare with the underworld appears in other examples where rulers wear similar shields for cave rituals. The fact that these temples were labeled as mountains means the interior sanctuaries were of conceived as caves, thus, the rituals depicted in the panels could have taken place in these same shrines or in actual caves. As David Stuart points out, “[o]ne gets the sense that the Maya associated the power of war with nocturnal and underworld forces.”¹³⁷ This notion also appears in the story of the *Popol Vuh* where the Hero Twins, and their fathers before them, engaged in a series of trials and ballgames against the Lords of the Underworld. Their final victory entails the sacrifice of the death lords and the resurrection of their father and uncle. Thus, we see that battles (implied by the ballgame) and sacrifice are part of the ruler’s responsibilities. Although the earthly, as opposed to mythological, emphasis on this temple might seem out of place, it, in fact, completes the various roles of the ruler: paying homage to the ancestors and gods, ensuring prosperity for his community and engaging in warfare.

Similar to the previous temples, the inscriptions begin with the birth of GIII and his later arrival at Matwiil after being “created” by the Triad Progenitor. Distance numbers transport the story thousands of years into the future to the reign of K'inich Kan Bahlam II, with the creation and firing of the Triad Gods mentioned above. The text then goes back to the rituals of K'inich Kan Bahlam II’s heir presentation and

¹³⁷ Stuart, *Sourcebook*, 161.

accession. He frames his position in the throne within a mythological setting of the founding of Palenque, the ordering of their world, and his ability to give “birth” to the Triad Gods in a similar manner as the Triad Progenitor.

Analysis of Tablets

While there has been much discussion as to the identity of the two figures on the tablets, less attention has been paid to the purpose of this action. What did K'inich Kan Bahlam II accomplish by including two re-presentations of himself at separate events? These are, perhaps, the only monuments in the Maya region where the ruler depicts himself twice. Most other stelae with multiple individuals include deities, supernaturals or other elite members who serve a secondary role in the ritual shown. These two K'inich Kan Bahlam IIs show two aspects of rituals, the bloodletting and the animation/presentation of “effigies” (which can be how the caring for the gods was represented), but from two separate events. If this was a record of the same event, it could be considered a resonant image in that it shows the duration aspect of the rituals and the various parts they encompass.¹³⁸ This, in a way, helps to make a continuous story of what these rituals encompassed. However, the inclusion of both events does more than that. Each individual functions as a stand-in for an entire ritual, meaning the younger figure depicts not only the act of bloodletting for a ritual but stands for the entire youth ceremony of K'inich Kan Bahlam II and the same for his

¹³⁸ Miller, Mary Ellen, and Stephen D Houston. “The Classic Maya Ballgame and Its Architectural Setting: A Study of Relations Between Text and Image.” *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 1987 (1987): 46–65.

accession. In addition, the texts across the tablets mention other rituals he performed before becoming ruler. It is entirely possible that these tablets are representations of all the rituals K'inich Kan Bahlam II ever performed to profess his care for the gods.

I argue that by including both events, K'inich Kan Bahlam II reinforces the idea that these rituals of renewal are all the same and thus timeless. In these rituals the ruler animates the deities in such a way that time-space becomes this place where beings from seemingly different time dimensions can interact, then the body of the ruler can “fold” within itself. That is, all these ceremonies are repetitions, they occur over and over again in an endless cycle. Thus, the ruler can “return” to a point in time in the past when he performed a similar ceremony, or even to the beginning of time. It is not that one person is going back to the past, or bringing the past to the present, necessarily. What these ceremonies do is open an alternative time-space, almost as a bubble where all these time-spaces and by extension beings can commune together. This is what timelessness means.

In her essay, “Text and Image in the tablets of the Cross Group at Palenque,” Flora Clancy reinforces the idea that K'inich Kan Bahlam II participated in events that transcend one point in time. Her concept of “equivalence” as a theme in these panels was meant as the idea that “all things and times are one.” She continues by saying that K'inich Kan Bahlam II “acts within time and is transformed by acts through time into a status equivalent to divinity.”¹³⁹ Thus, it is time, or should I say, timelessness that allows for the ruler to be on the same plane as deities and also to

¹³⁹ Clancy, Flora S. “Text and Image in the Tablets of the Cross Group at Palenque.” *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 11 (1986): 26-8.

become one. The texts and images of the Group of the Cross indicate that K'inich Kan Bahlam II linked himself to the Triad Progenitor, he followed the same ritual program as this deity. In addition, when we look closer at the entire program we see that there is also a correlation between K'inich Kan Bahlam II and the Triad gods. First and foremost, the temples are dedicated to the Triad gods, to their birth and participation in the closing for the bak'tun, as has been outlined above. Second, in addition to the actions of the Triad Progenitor, the texts elaborate on those of GI more than any of the other Triad members. This could suggest that perhaps K'inich Kan Bahlam II is aligning himself with the Triad and more specifically with GI. If we recall, Pakal immortalized himself as the Triad Progenitor on the cover of his sarcophagus and the tablets of the Temple of the Inscriptions. If GI is the first born of the Triad Progenitor, then K'inich Kan Bahlam II as the first-born (or heir) of Pakal is symbolically GI. This notion of the first-born or heir linked to GI is further demonstrated in the tablets from Temple XIX that will be discussed below, where the ruler clearly claimed to be GI.

The turbulent history of Palenque includes problematics in the dynastic lines, with Pakal's own claim to the throne being one of the most controversial. The period before his reign is obscure in the historical records, perhaps a deliberate move since Pakal and his descendants composed many of these extant texts. For this reason, it is not entirely known where Pakal fits into the overall family tree. One of the recent speculations is that his mother, Ix Sak K'uk' was the daughter of a ruler also named Janab Pakal, who could have been the son of lady Ix Yohl Ik'nal. However, this Janab

Pakal was mentioned as ruling at the same time as Muwaan Mat, and it is not entirely sure if Muwaan Mat and Janab Pakal were brothers or even if Ix Yohl Ik'nal was their mother.¹⁴⁰ Another possibility is that Pakal's father was an outsider, brought in by Calakmul after the defeat of Muwaan Mat. Regardless, it appears as though his accession was a break from the royal dynasty of Palenque up until that point.

Even though there are a lot of gaps in the dynastic line, we have to remember that for Pakal and his contemporaries this history was known. Whatever it was, it was problematic enough for Pakal and his descendants to assert their legitimacy in their monuments. Pakal accomplished this in his own monuments in the Temple of the Inscriptions. It is interesting to point out that Pakal claims to be the Triad Progenitor, whose name is Muwaan Mat, as is the ruler who immediately preceded Pakal. It is clear that at times of crisis these rulers referred to their own mythology to not only claim their divine lineage, but also to show they were able to turn chaos into something ordered, and thus, life could go back to "normal."

A monument from Temple XVIII indicates that the issues of royal accession continued with Pakal's offspring. He had three sons, all of whom were middle-aged by the time Pakal died, and apparently his own problematic ancestry resurfaced as he neared the end of his days. This relief shows a number of seated individuals who can no longer be recognized. The texts indicate that these are the sons of Pakal and the phrase *tz'akbuaj*, "(they) are arranged in order," meaning that Pakal had set the order of his successors, with K'inich Kan Bahlam II as the first heir followed his brother

¹⁴⁰ Stuart and Stuart, 145-150.

K'inich K'an Joy Chitam; the third son died before he could assume the throne.¹⁴¹

Thus, K'inich Kan Bahlam II was also preoccupied with his own legitimacy to the throne and reinforced his divine and historical lineage through the panels in the Group of the Cross.

Michael Carrasco points out that the emphasis on lineage was not the only concern Pakal and K'inich Kan Bahlam II had to address in their monuments. He states that these ancestral lists were framed within a narrative that encapsulated more than a dynastic claim. As mentioned before, there is a strong emphasis on the proper caring for the Triad gods and the effects that battles with other city-states incurred on these rituals. I agree with Carrasco's observation that: "it was a problem quite apart from the irregularities in the patrilineage that haunted Janaab Pakal's dynasty (...), namely, the problem of war, the reasons for war and its aftermath, and in this case the desecration of Palenque's icons and temples."¹⁴² The elaborate programs of both rulers show that they went above and beyond to protect their Triad gods, which also meant the protection of their city against invaders.

A direct result of Pakal fulfilling his duties as a ruler who ensured that his city, and therefore patron deities, prospered, was the birth and survival of male heirs, a fact that was not lost on Pakal or K'inich Kan Bahlam II. Their artistic programs draw a direct connection between the caring for the Triad and the success of Palenque. The imagery surrounding the Triad in various monuments is heavily based

¹⁴¹ Stuart and Stuart, 162-3.

¹⁴² Carrasco, Michael D. "The History, Rhetoric, and Poetics of Three Palenque Narratives." In *Parallel Worlds: Genre, Discourse, and Poetics in Contemporary, Colonial, and Classic Period Maya Literature*, by Kerry M Hull and Michael D Carrasco, 123–60. Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2012, 129.

on infants and young children, almost as if the gods had to be treated as young children or infants. This is particularly significant given that *Unen K'awiil*, the god of dynastic lineages, is the one who most often appears as an infant. The upper façade of the Temple of the Inscriptions has four piers with carved reliefs, two additional ones at both edges are filled with texts (figure 26). These depict an adult cradling a child deity, somewhere between an infant and toddler, who has been identified with *Unen K'awiil*. Three of these individuals are males and one female, who according to Stuart and Stuart “occupy four key cosmological locations in the heavens, perhaps the four solstice points near the horizon.”¹⁴³ Two of the males have been identified as K'inich K'an Joy Chitam II and K'inich Kan Bahlam II, most likely the sons of Pakal and future heirs as opposed to the ancestors who shared the same name. The two innermost figures are the male and the female, who unfortunately cannot be identified. Stuart and Stuart propose these could be Pakal's parents or even Pakal and his wife.¹⁴⁴ It is unfortunate that the texts on the outer panels are completely destroyed as they surely contained information on the links between Unen K'awiil and these royal individuals.¹⁴⁵ However, from the context, we can gather that the royal family is paying their proper respects and caring for this patron deity as a way to ensure their line continues as well as a way to show their gratitude for the birth of male heirs on Pakal's line.

¹⁴³ Stuart and Stuart, 169.

¹⁴⁴ Additional possibilities for the identities of these individuals include that these are ancestors of Pakal, see Robertson, *Sculpture of Palenque. Temple of Inscriptions*, 46.

¹⁴⁵ Stuart and Stuart, 170.

It has already been mentioned that the proper rituals for the Triad gods is very similar to that of the “dressing of the saints” in contemporary Maya communities. The dressing component included the removal of old clothes, cleaning the statues and clothing, incense burning on the statue and the bundle that contains the new clothes, and the actual act of dressing. This is very much as if bathing and dressing a young child who is unable to do this on his own. Obviously, there is a ritual component as this is not an every-day kind of dressing; it is more as that performed for a baptism or other rite of passage. Landa documented that in colonial times, the Maya celebrated similar rituals to mark that children were now incorporated into the family unit, most likely indicating that they had survived their perilous first years.¹⁴⁶ As Palenque’s history shows, children or in this case the deities perceived as children, do not always survive and are always in need of care.

In addition, the imagery from Palenque shows the cradling of Unen K’awiil by members of the royal family, in the same manner as one would hold infants. A recent study by Jennifer Hughes offers a new angle to this ritual practice that steers away from the current notion that these figures are effigies that are static and in many cases presented as offerings or considered to be dead/sacrificed. She argues that in the Mesoamerican worldview these statues are in fact “alive,” they are animated and should be treated in the same manner as one would any other living thing, except that these are powerful deities. Hughes suggests, “that the ritual cradling of effigies, the carrying of effigies as back bundles, and devotion to the maize infant are ritually

¹⁴⁶ Tozzer, 103-8.

analogous practices. Each of these contemplates the paradox of sacred power and powerlessness and the responsibilities of human agents vis-a-vis the vulnerable dependency of the divine.”¹⁴⁷ The images and context from the Group of the Cross and other Palenque monuments support this conclusion.

The carved reliefs from the Temple of the Inscriptions show Unen K’awiil in the most “naturalistic” cradling position of all the examples from the site. Hughes proposes that instead of conceiving of these “effigies” as objects that are offered, which is the most common interpretation, they are actually the ones receiving the offerings:

Small effigies like these, including those misnamed “manikin scepters” in the archeological literature, cannot be fully comprehended as inanimate, wielded, “ offered,” or “ presented” objects, but rather in many cases should be understood as numinous entities who themselves observe, bless, receive blessing, or otherwise interact with other persons in a given ritual context.¹⁴⁸

From this perspective, the “effigies” of K’awiil and other deities shown in each of the panels in the Group of the Cross should be considered as animate beings who are witnessing the entire ritual. They have been dressed and received the offerings made by the ruler, usually including bloodletting that signifies a life-giving ritual. Thus, the “statue” is now understood as a being who is alive and present in the ceremony and can interact with the ruler — in this case, K’inich Kan Bahlam II.

This concept fits in with the overall thematic of the Group of the Cross as the sacred location where the Triad gods are born. The inscriptions on each temple mark them as the birthplace of their specific deity, and include other information regarding

¹⁴⁷ Hughes, Jennifer Scheper. “Cradling the Sacred: Image, Ritual, and Affect in Mexican and Mesoamerican Material Religion.” *History of Religions* 56, no. 1 (2016): 107.

¹⁴⁸ Hughes, 77.

their birth, such as the date and their engendering by the Triad Progenitor. The texts also describe the shaping of these deities, which has led scholars to propose that this event refers to the making of “effigies” that are later fired in kilns.¹⁴⁹ They are then placed inside their inner sanctuaries waiting to observe and participate in the ceremonies, such as the Period Ending one celebrated by K’inich Kan Bahlam II soon after the completion of the Group of the Cross. de la Garza et al. argue that the placing of the “effigies” inside their temples is similar to a gestational period, and their eventual emerging as a birth, presumably after being animated through the proper rituals.¹⁵⁰ While not everyone agrees that the inner temples serve as the “womb” for these gods, the notion that the deities are “born” through a specific process is widely accepted. The challenge is then to see these “effigies” not as stone or ceramic objects but as the deities themselves, not static but animate.

The main theme of the Group of the Cross is that of birth, of the Triad gods, of the Palenque dynasty, and the rebirth of the city after periods of chaos. It is a testament left by K’inich Kan Bahlam II that he fulfilled his duties of protecting the gods, his city, and his lineage. These structures also remain as a sacred location where ceremonies of renewal took place during Period Endings, and perhaps royal accessions. This was the prime location to recreate the creation of the world and the foundation of Palenque. As the ruler moved from one temple to the other, most likely in a counterclockwise direction following the path of the sun, he performed the sacred rituals that gave birth to the world, to the sun, and to the patron gods of Palenque.

¹⁴⁹ Houston, “Symbolic Sweatbaths,” 139.

¹⁵⁰ de la Garza, et al., 148.

Temple XIX

Temple XIX was commissioned and dedicated by K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb (678-737?) on January 10, 734 (9.15.2.7.16 9 Kib 19 K'ayab) (figure 22).¹⁵¹ In general, this structure is dedicated to GI, based on the texts indicating that a temple to GI was dedicated on the same date as the dedication of Temple XIX, as well as the fact that his actions dominate these panels. The platform's inscriptions begin with a mythological section followed by a historical one, including the dedication of structures — the same pattern found in the tablets of the Group of the Cross and the Temple of the Inscriptions (figures 27-28). The narrative on the South Panel begins with the accession of GI under the supervision of Yax Naah Itzamnaaj, although this event is said to have happened in the heavens, it is not known where GI ruled.¹⁵² The next main passage tells of the decapitation of a crocodilian creature (or perhaps two aspects of it) by the hand of GI during a world renewal ritual.¹⁵³ Similar stories are found in the Maya area, and in Central Mexico, where a reptilian is sacrificed for the surface of the earth to be created. The blood of this creature spills into three streams, which Stuart links to “the birth and ‘creation’ (*ch'ab*) of the Triad by the Triad Progenitor.”¹⁵⁴ This passage is clearly associated with the creation of the world.

¹⁵¹ Stuart, David. “Las Nuevas Inscripciones Del Templo XIX.” *Arqueología Mexicana* 8, no. 45 (2000): 33. Carrasco, “From Field to Hearth,” 603-604.

¹⁵² Stuart, *Inscriptions Temple XIX*, 162

¹⁵³ Stuart, *Inscriptions Temple XIX*, 176-7.

¹⁵⁴ Stuart, *Inscriptions Temple XIX*, 180.

The text continues with the “rebirth” of all three of the Triad gods at Matwiil, recorded as the “creations” of the Triad Progenitor.¹⁵⁵ The next act is the accession of the Triad Progenitor, labeled as the “first,” “indicating the deity’s role as a founder or creator figure within Palenque’s political and mythological history.”¹⁵⁶ This is where the fold between mythological and historical time occurs. Again with the use of distance numbers, the narrative moves forward to the accession date of K’inich Ahkal Mo’ Nahb III creating a direct parallel between his and the Triad Progenitor’s “seating” on the throne. Similar to the other monuments, the story takes us to the first Period Ending celebrated by K’inich Ahkal Mo’ Nahb III, which the text indicates as observed by the Triad gods. Again, this could mean that the animated effigies were placed in a position where they could watch the rituals, or we can also assume that members of the elite personified these deities for the duration of the ceremony.

The carved figural panels that accompany these inscriptions show the ruler K’inich Ahkal Mo’ Nahb III sitting on a throne flanked by six other male elite, in what records the ruler’s accession to the throne (figure 28). Secondary inscriptions near the ruler indicate that he is indeed embodying GI.¹⁵⁷ The headdress worn by the ruler is similar to that worn by GI. As observed in other examples at Palenque, the main locus of identity lies on the headdress and this is the place where an indication of sharing a different identity can be found, as seen in this example where K’inich Ahkal Mo’ Nahb III becomes GI by wearing his headdress. In reality, perhaps the ruler wore more accouterments during the ritual of accession, but in the recorded

¹⁵⁵ Stuart, *Inscriptions Temple XIX*, 80.

¹⁵⁶ Stuart, *Inscriptions Temple XIX*, 81.

¹⁵⁷ Stuart, *Inscriptions Temple XIX*, 161.

monuments it was important to emphasize that K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb III and GI were the same during his rituals of accession. As will be seen in the following chapters, there is a range of "visibility" when it comes to showing that two beings are occupying one body, from a headdress like we see here in Palenque to a more complete outfit that covers the entire body, face and headdress as in Copán. It is relevant to point out, again, that imagery from Pakal and do not emphasize the embodiment of deities by rulers. Instead, these rulers of Palenque cared for the deities who are shown as infants and present in the form of animate effigies. By the time of K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb III, the concerns of the royal line surviving had changed and thus we see representations of embodiment similar to other Maya sites, as will be seen in the following chapter.

Of particular interest is the fact that many of the events mentioned here fall on the same day, 9 Ik': GI's seating in the heavens, his birth, the accession of the Triad Progenitor, and lastly, the accession of K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb III. Another inscription found above the Oval Palace Tablet on House E, tells of an event with dates in the very distant past (which cannot be properly reconstructed), which is then connected to the accession of the Triad Progenitor and finally to that of K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb III, likely being another 9 Ik' date. All these alignments of dates, further reinforce the ruler's desire to emphasize the connection between himself and these local patron gods, particularly GI. As he writes his own history framed within the larger one of the site, he does not simply embody GI for his accession, he goes back to the same exact date on the *tzolk'in* calendar. Thus, we see that a coexistence of

times was very feasible in the minds, and practices, of the ancient Maya. They could transform the environment and perform the proper rituals to bring together events that happened in the “past” into a “present” situation. This idea also aligns with the concept of foldings of time periods, and that in a cyclical model dates and events can happen again (on the same date apparently).



0 k'ins, 0 winals, 7 tuns, 4 k'atuns, 3 bak'tuns after the dedication of Temple XIX, on the date 12.19.9.7.15 8 Men 8 Xul (July 24th 2002) a festival took place.

In the Tzeltal Maya town of Tenejapa, the entire city turns out for one of their festivals, the day of Santiago on July 24th of every year.¹⁵⁸ Preparations for the feast began days and months prior by the confraternities in charge of this particular saint, including the making of new clothing to replace the garments he has worn over the last year. On the main day of celebrations, the confraternities embark on a procession from the homes of the highest cargo holder to the church at the center of the town. Once there, the long process of preparing the saints for their own procession begins. While Santiago is the saint celebrated in this occasion, other saints accompany him in his journey. The task of undressing the saints is shared between the men and women, a married couple within the confraternity. While the men take off each individual layer of ornamentation (necklaces, head wraps, and handkerchiefs) and clothing, the women place them in a designated box with extreme care. Other members of the confraternity pass incense over the saint, the garments being put away, as well as each new item of clothing and accessories. Again, the women are the ones who carry the

¹⁵⁸ I was able to observe portions of this festival in 2002, thanks to the collaboration of Antonio Entzin Guzman and Esperanza Gomez Sanchez, who held positions in the local government at the time. I have also observed similar ceremonies in other communities, such as Chamula, Oxchuc, and even in the ladino city of San Cristobal de Las Casas, all in Chiapas, Mexico.

boxes and hand the objects to the men who then dress the saint with his new attire. Once all the saints are properly dressed, a process that can take hours, they are taken out of the church in palanquins in a procession into town. Santiago leads the way with the smaller saints following him; musicians, flag-bearers, and a group in charge of fireworks also form part of the main entourage. The general populace joins at the back or stands along the parade route.

Many other Maya towns engage in similar practices of dressing and parading saints, who are always considered to be alive and are treated as such. Thus, the attitude towards these so-called Catholic saints by the modern-day Maya is very similar to that of the Triad Gods by the rulers of Palenque. The manner in which the elders of the confraternities, both men and women, treat each item that is placed on the body of the saint is similar to the description of gifts, including costumes, given to the Triad Gods in the Tablet of the Inscriptions. It is this ritual of cleansing and dressing that enlivens and animates the effigy in order for it to become “the” saint, a being who is as alive and able to commune with his people during this ceremony and throughout the year.

Chapter 3

Timeful Bodies:
Animating the Stage

Introduction

Ceremonies of renewal emphasized the ruler's role as the overseer of time, whose main responsibility was to ensure the continuity of calendrical cycles and the renewal of life. The strong identification of the ruler with time is seen in the use of the name of the sun god (K'inich Ahaw) in the rulers' names and titles. Portraits of rulers found in day name signs for the day "*ajaw*" (lord) also support this connection, making the ruler the overseer of not just a particular day, but the day that opens new cycles and reigns over the year.¹⁵⁹ It was his sacred responsibility to perform the necessary rituals to ensure that deities were properly revered, including giving the proper offerings at the turning of cycles for the sun to rise the next morning and the earth to continue providing sustenance. In other words, if the ruler performed his duties properly, then the sun would continue its daily trajectory, a new year would "begin" and life could continue as normal. If he failed, the risk of some cataclysmic event was imminent. Because he shared a divine essence with deities, he had the potential to communicate with gods, supernaturals, and ancestors, including those who inhabited the underworld (*xibalba*). This role as mediator is what also allowed him to move between dimensions of time and space. He could shift to a mythological moment without physically leaving his "present." This practice of being in multiple time/space dimensions simultaneously to commune with deities during ceremonies of renewal is the concern of this chapter.

¹⁵⁹ Stuart, "Kings of Stone," 165-167.

Stelae and other monuments document aspects of the complex role the ruler played in rituals. The mask and headdress he wore, identified him with the particular deity he embodied, such as K'inich Ahaw (Sun god) and Hun Ixim (maize deity). Specific elements of his costume, such as the loincloth, placed him as the axis mundi, the center of the world, connecting the heavens, the earth, and the underworld. Bloodletting paraphernalia and/or symbolic acts of scattering sacred substances, symbolize the ruler's sacrifices to renew life, and by extension time. Other visual markers in the monument such as cave markers and sky bands designate the event as taking place in a mythological space and time, which the inscriptions confirmed. The inscriptions reinforce the link between "past" and "present" times, indicating which events and dates from the past were recalled for these ceremonies in the "present." They also corroborate the state of concurrence between the ruler and a deity as depicted in the stone. Few examples document this level of complexity better than the stelae group in the Great Plaza at Copán.

Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil, the 13th ruler of Copán, erected a total of seven stelae in the Great Plaza to commemorate important period intervals of 5, 10 and 20 years during his reign (695 - 738 CE) (figure 29). While each stela has been described as a portrait of the ruler in the guise of deity, these monuments are much more than that. Each of these stelae is a rendition of the ruler in the attire of a different deity that as a group are all significant players in the creation of the world and the founding of the Copán dynasty. The costume of the ruler/deity is in fact merged with many other elements that mark sacred space, as well as symbols of

death, life, and renewal. Most of them have various beings surrounding the figure of the ruler: ancestors, deities, or supernaturals. Thus, one stela contains multiple portions of the ceremonies, including references to multiple characters and indicating sacred locations where these events took place, all while placing the ruler in the middle and most significant position of the ritual as the embodiment of gods.¹⁶⁰ This complexity is what makes this group of stelae relevant for this study. Not only does it provide information about characters and locations of events, but also gives enough information to indicate the coexistence of multiple temporalities at once. It also allows us to corroborate other scholars' arguments for elaborate feasts where numerous elite members participated, and explore the possibility that many aspects of these ceremonies were public, which questions the notion that communication with ancestors and deities always took place in private settings with few if any witnesses, or in most cases assumes the ruler is the only who sees these beings while he is in some dream-like or trance state.

The following analysis will look at how these stelae were used, their multiple meanings and purposes, and how that fits in the larger understanding of how timefulness was achieved in renewal ceremonies. First, I will look at stelae as record-keeping monuments of events in general, and specifically as time markers. The individual events found in the stelae are records that can be placed in historical time (following a "linear" trajectory). They tell us a date or dates, who the ruler was, what he did and, in some cases, the reason why. Within this structure we also learn about

¹⁶⁰ For more on this topic, see: Houston and Stuart, "Of Gods, Glyphs, and Kings," and Stuart, "Blood Symbolism."

the mythological references made in the ceremonies and thus, these monuments become a record of how a specific moment from the past was merged with the present during that specific ceremony. Second, I explore the possibilities that the stelae embody rulers, who in turn embody deities and ancestors; as a consequence, these monuments may be understood as deities and founding figures who are always present the space of the plaza. Third, I investigate how rulers and elites interacted with these stelae in ceremonies and how these subject-objects were active participants in the performances. And last, the idea that stelae in themselves are timeful, is based on the idea that they hold many dimensions into one: they are both the ruler and the deity; are located both in the past, in the present, and extend into the future; and one of their most significant roles is as period ending markers. (While I will be using the stelae from the Great Plaza at Copán as the core of the study, these concepts apply to similar stelae in other sites.)

1. Stelae as Records of Individual Events

The most basic structure of a stela usually consists of a carved image on one side with an inscription on the back and/or sides that provides details such as date of the event and the people involved.¹⁶¹ They can record any kind of significant event in the life of a site, new rulers, battles or capture of important rivals, and period ending rituals. The subset from the Great Plaza at Copán falls in the last category. While this first level of information might seem simple, it is not; rather, it is the foundation for

¹⁶¹ For examples of stela with no carvings at all, see Stuart, “Kings of Stone.”

the complex layers of meanings attached to it. Accordingly, I will begin by taking a closer look at the images portrayed and the inscriptions on each individual stela in this group. Instead of doing an extremely thorough description of each stela, which has already been done with much care by other scholars, I will summarize the key elements of each, in chronological order by dedication date (Table 3.1 for reference). This summary relies heavily on the work of previous scholars, mainly Elizabeth Newsome as the most recent study on the site, but also Jean-Claude Baudez.¹⁶² Schele and Matthews, and lastly, Schele was the one to place these stelae within the mythology of the founding of the Copán lineage.¹⁶³

Stela C

Stelae C is a double portrait, one facing the west and the other east (figures 30-31). The west side shows the portrait of the ruler (Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil), with a *witz* monster mask at the top of his head. The headdress contains three tiers: first the *witz* monster, then another mask of an unidentified supernatural, topped by an anthropomorphic figure seated cross-legged. Two serpents sit at the top of the headdress. The belt supports three deity heads: the one on the left (N) is a supernatural but has been damaged so a full identification is not possible; it emerges from the maw of a creature. The central head is the Jaguar God of the Underworld

¹⁶² Baudez, Claude F. *Maya Sculpture of Copán: The Iconography*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994. Newsome, Elizabeth A. *Trees of Paradise and Pillars of the World: The Serial Stela Cycle of "18-Rabbit-God K," King of Copán*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001.

¹⁶³ Schele, Linda, and Peter Mathews. *The Code of Kings: The Language of Seven Sacred Maya Temples and Tombs*. New York: Scribner, 1998.

and the head on the right (S) is the patron of the month Pax. Two serpents frame the loincloth, and in the middle is the world tree deity.¹⁶⁴ The ruler holds a serpent in his arms, usually called the ceremonial serpent bar.¹⁶⁵ There are many other serpents throughout the monument from which emerge other serpents and/or ancestors who might also hold other serpents, such as the ancestor sitting at the top of the headdress. There are a total of five figures at the top of the headdress, two of which have been identified as ancestors and emerge from the maws of serpents, and the two others are the Sun God and a version of K'awiil holding sacred objects. From the south side of the serpent emerges a monkey deity wearing the turban of Copán's dynasty, and he holds the severed head of the Maize God. The figure on the north side has been badly damaged and is unidentifiable, but he also held an offering, perhaps another Maize God head.

In front of Stela C is an altar in the shape of a turtle, with a water lily carved on top of the shell, symbolizing the surface of the water — primordial waters perhaps (figure 32). There are two heads, one side appears more bone-like and the other is fleshed. Taking into consideration the symbols and main themes of the west side of the stela, Newsome proposes that, “the monument's western iconography concerns not a single episode, but a full cycle of this creation myth. Overall, it emphasizes the god's sacrifice and underworld associations but culminates in 18-Rabbit's fulfillment

¹⁶⁴ Newsome, 108.

¹⁶⁵ The term “vision serpent” has been used by some Mesoamericanists to identify a widely found motif of a serpent held by a ruler and from which emerge deities, supernaturals, or ancestors. Linda Schele first used the term, particularly for the Yaxchilan Lintels, but it is not a term agreed upon universally by all Mesoamericanists. For that reason, and the implications of the term, I do not use it in this text.

of his triumphal destiny: his resurrection as the ripening stalk of maize.”¹⁶⁶ This fact is supported when the altar and the stelae are seen together: the ruler emerges from the earth much as the Maize God did when he resurrected.

On the eastern side of the stela, Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil is now identified with the Imix-Yax-Che, the ceiba tree that brings forth life and order (figure 31). It stands at the center of the world and connects all four quarters of the world, as well as the underworld, earth, and sky. The headdress has three deity masks that are stacked on top of each other, with a seated figure atop of the last mask. This figure holds two serpents from which emerge other anthropomorphic beings who in turn hold other serpents. Ropes also emerge from the mouths of these serpents that fall down in various parts of the stela and frame the ruler and inscriptions on the side. The ruler holds another serpent bar whose heads have been combined with those of supernaturals who appear to be a form of God K. From the maws of these serpents appear two men with headdresses, identified as the Hero Twins. A very complex creature hangs from the center of the belt, composed of cauac heads and a cayman. It appears that this figure is diving into the earth. Newsome connects this monument with Stela 25 from Izapa and concludes that Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil is a tree that grows out of the reptilian’s body.¹⁶⁷

The inscriptions are located on the sides, framed by the twisted ropes that fall from the serpents at the top of the stela (figure 33). On the south side, the text begins with dates set in a mythical distant past that is then linked to the present/historical

¹⁶⁶ Newsome, 112. 18-Rabbit was the name previously used for Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil.

¹⁶⁷ Newsome, 115.

time, and concerns the setting up of sacred stones. This connection between a mythical and historical time is not uncommon.¹⁶⁸ On the North side, the dates are linked to *tun* endings and refer to the setting of stones by deities in a mythological time and place.¹⁶⁹ Similar to the south side, mythical events are then linked to Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil's own dedication of stelae. Thus, the texts are also reinforcing two things: the need to refer to actions done by ancestors and deities in setting the order of the world and instituting time; and by having both past and a present dates, they are timeful (combining times together).

Stela F

In Stela F, Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil wears the mask of a young Jaguar God, identified by the feline ears above the earspools, the shell beard that hangs from the ruler's jaw, and his upswept hair (figure 34). The headdress is formed at its base by a saurian mask, with a figure seated on top. There are ropes that hang from the heads of serpents on the sides of the head of the ruler, and that wrap his legs as if he were a captive. More rope falls from the mask on his loincloth, even between his legs; Newsome states that this probably was used in penis perforation and bloodletting.¹⁷⁰ He holds a serpent bar but the figures emerging from the double heads are badly damaged. The few figures that remain indicate the possibility of these deities being the same Jaguar God that Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil embodies. The north and south sides have a number of deities (also badly damaged), two on each side seemed to be

¹⁶⁸ Newsome, 155.

¹⁶⁹ Schele and Matthews, 146.

¹⁷⁰ Newsome, 122.

paired and opposite to the other side, located above and below the serpent bar (figure 35). The pair on the upper section could have been death gods, who held sacred objects most likely a perforator or instruments for sacrifice. On the bottom section, right next to his legs, rest a pair of anthropomorphic deities with long ears like deer, perhaps “Uc Zip, the deer-eared god of the vision trumpet.”¹⁷¹ They both hold objects although it is difficult to identify what they are, most likely perforators. At the bottom of the stela two other figures emerge from the maws of serpents, which are “deified blades.”¹⁷² Overall the figure is surrounded by elements of auto-sacrifice, the ballgame, and the Jaguar God who is associated with the night sun and venus.

The text on the back of Stela F is grouped into five groups of four glyphs each, (two rows of two glyphs) and framed with a rope around each grouping (figure 36). This rope is very similar to the way burdens are carried on the back of a person, and could very well be symbolic of the ruler carrying the burden of time (since there are dates on the inscriptions). The inscription tells of the blood offerings made by Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil, the deity embodied on the front (Jaguar deity) and other deities.¹⁷³

Stela 4

Stela 4 was reconstructed from fragments and many of its key elements were already destroyed, making some identifications difficult or impossible altogether (figures 37-39). The headdress consists of a single elaborate mask that forms K’awiil:

¹⁷¹ Newsome, 123.

¹⁷² Newsome, 124.

¹⁷³ Newsome, 159-162.

scroll eyes, shell earflares, forehead mirror with shiny markers on the sides, and a space in the middle where a torch could have been placed (figure 37). Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil wears a short capelet made of jade beads; a pectoral hangs from his beaded necklace. The ruler holds a bicephalic serpent bar with unidentified figures emerging from the maws. His belt holds two bags with a depiction of the perforator god, as well as two *ajaw* faces one on each side. The loincloth shows the tree god from whose mouth emerges a rope that is presumed to have passed through the penis. More ropes hang from the top of the monument, wrapping the ruler's knees and connecting him to the backrack. Other ropes hang on the sides with heads of K'awiil emerging from the ends. The abundance of ropes and perforator imagery make the main theme of this monument that of self-sacrifice.

The inscription on this stela gives more than some dates (figure 39). It tells of a lord, Leaf Ahau, who is presumed to be one of the founders of the dynasty and does three things: he bundles "Four-Sky" (this could be a location or a being); he acquires a deity of a local territory (a permission to govern the land); and he receives a black headdress, referring most likely to his own coronation. Newsome believes that Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil is repeating the actions of the founder of the dynasty as they were recorded on Stela I.¹⁷⁴ The rest of the text also includes a reference to Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil erecting the *u-baah* of K'uy Nic Ahau, the patron deity referred to earlier in the text and also depicted on the front of the stela. This labels the stone as the image of the deity.

¹⁷⁴ Newsome, 162; Schele says Stela I records the founding of the lineage/historical kingdom (as cited in Newsome, 162).

Stela H

Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil appears in the same costume and manner as the Holmul Dancer — the young Maize God who carries an elaborate backrack and is shown dancing in painted ceramics from the site of Holmul (thus the name) (figure 40). He wears a beaded outfit consisting of a capelet or perhaps a wide necklace, and a netted skirt of jade on top of a jaguar-skin kilt. The belt has a spondylus shell and a *xoc* fish, usually associated with sacrifice and fertility. Two heads hang on each side; they have the face of a supernatural with squint-eyes and a mirror in its forehead who Newsome identifies as the personified world tree from the panels of the Temple of the Foliated Cross in Palenque. At the base of the headdress is the face of the Principal Bird Deity, a Maya supreme deity and ruler of the skies. The backrack is symbolic of the cosmos and as such contains all three levels: the underworld represented by a small dwarf or ancestor; the earth by the quadripartite god; and the skies by the same Itzamnaaj bird perched at the top. Feathers fill the rest of the space on the backrack and around the headdress of the ruler as depicted in sculpture. We can imagine that in real life and in performance the green color and the shininess of the feathers would have filled the space with both hue and reflected light, especially as they swayed with the wind or as the ruler moved; surely they would have brought to mind the leaves of corn in the cornfield. On top of the headdress rests an ear of corn. Two supernatural heads emerge from the bicephalic serpent bar that Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil holds.

These faces are personifications of flint blades, or sacrificial instruments, and sport the smoking celt of K'awiil.

The sides of the stela have four serpents with four small figures of the Maize Deity that are intertwined with the bodies of the serpents. Two figures are found at the bottom of the sides: one anthropomorphic and the other anthropomorphic with zoomorphic head. They appear to be associated with maize (no specific identity is offered by Newsome). All these elements mark Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil as the axis mundi and the Maize God who was essential in the creation of the world, both as one of the first plants to be born and also as the giver of life. If we consider the performative aspects that we assume are recorded in this monument, then it is feasible to think that this commemorates Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil in the act of setting up order in the world and raising the world tree and thus separating the three main realms of the cosmos, all as the Maize God who performed these duties in the creation of the world. The text in this stela is a bit shorter than some of the other ones. It gives a date, with no Long Count provided, and tells of the erection of the stela by Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil. It lists some titles of Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil. Stela H, A and B were all dedicated in the same year.

Stela A

In Stela A, Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil wears the attire of the old sun god (figure 41). Newsome implies that Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil is in this stela representing Butz' Chan in his apotheosis, a previous ruler, based on the fact that his

name is mentioned in the inscriptions and because the woven mat motif appears in other examples where ancestors are recalled by their descendants in ceremonies.¹⁷⁵ He wears a headdress with a woven mat motif, with a skull of the First Father and foliation at the top most likely representing germinating maize seeds. Serpents frame the sides of the skull, along with supernaturals who each wear a second zoomorphic head and hold the flayed and skeletal bodies of the serpents. Flints for bloodletting emerge from the maws of the serpents. The supernaturals have the glyph *k'in* on their foreheads and the characteristic tooth of the sun god, their bodies are those of monkeys who are often associated with the sun god. The beings that emerge from the serpent bar are very similar to these solar deities at the sides of the headdress, except that their heads transform into flints for bloodletting. The belt is a celestial band, similar to how this band appears in other monuments and architecture. Three heads of young lords are suspended from the belt with the motif of a twisted mat, which marks them as Ahau Pop, Lord of the Mat.¹⁷⁶ The belt also has shining celts and bags with perforators or other bloodletting paraphernalia. The loincloth has two disks on the main section and two serpents framing the cloth on the sides. Maize motifs are found towards the end of the loincloth and the feet of the ruler, implying that the blood the ruler gave will produce maize, and by extension, life.

Also at the bottom of the stela is another double-headed serpent with supernaturals marked as beings from the underworld perhaps even as symbols of the night sun's passage through the underworld. Newsome suggests that the three pairs of

¹⁷⁵ Newsome, 134.

¹⁷⁶ Newsome, 134.

monkeys in the monument make a “vertical distinction between the Sun in different realms of the cosmos. (...) In addition, the north-south contrast that differentiates attributes of the twins implies yet another dimension of solar time: the Sun’s seasonal progression through its northern and southern solstice extremes.”¹⁷⁷ In this stela we see the importance of the sun’s passage on the sky both as a daily path and also through the various stations in the year. Given the fact that Stela A (and H) were dedicated for ceremonies that mark the end of k’atun period, it makes sense that there is a strong emphasis on the sun, cycles of time, and the sacrifice needed to renew life in the world.

The inscriptions on the back and sides of Stela A are perhaps the most elaborate of the group (figure 42). They provide a full dating sequence of the day the monument was dedicated, with an Initial Series, the Lords of the Night, the 819-day calendar, directional deities, Lunar Series, to the *haab* dates. Then at the top section on the back, there is a distance number that takes the events to the same date recorded on Stela H. The rest of the text is perhaps a funerary ritual or the apotheosis of one of the founders, as Newsome proposes, and it also mentions the erection of a stela as part of the funerary rites.¹⁷⁸ The south side tells of four trees, names a location (perhaps the Great Plaza), five unknown objects (perhaps the stelae in the plaza, according to Schele), four skies, and four witnesses which are named as the lords of very important sites: Copán, Tikal, Calakmul, and Palenque. This is followed by a reference to the cardinal directions and to the sky and the earth, paired as

¹⁷⁷ Newsome, 136

¹⁷⁸ Newsome, 173-175.

complementary opposites. The inscription closes with a phrase that could be interpreted as the opening of the jaws of the underworld, which are then closed, presumably during the ceremonies for Stela A. This is interpreted as a reference to the death of the founder and his rebirth or apotheosis.¹⁷⁹ These texts provide many details on ceremonies that took place for the dedication of stelae, linking Stela A with H, and also the opening of a hole on the ground to place a cache of offerings 260-days later. This also tells us of rulers from other sites participating in the ceremonies and the division of the space into the four cardinal directions and the separation between earth and skies — all activities that took place for creation.

Stela B

In Stela B, Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil wears the characteristic turban of Copán's lineage, while embodying the hunting god Zip recognized by his characteristic "prominent lower lip, an aged face, deer ear and antler" (figure 43).¹⁸⁰ He also wears the headband of Chaak is depicted by cut shells on top of the turban and a shell beard hangs from the ruler's jaw down to his chest. The belt contains sky-band imagery similar to Stela A, as well as small heads on the sides and front. The loincloth has a personified world tree with two serpent maws on its sides. The serpent bar also has sky symbols. The figures that emerge from the maws of the serpent bar are depictions of Chaak, with the shell beard and scroll eyes. Numerous figures are found throughout the monument, and are believed to be royal ancestors. The ruler

¹⁷⁹ Newsome, 175.

¹⁸⁰ Taube, *Maya Conceptions About Field and Forest*, 474.

stands inside the portal to the underworld, with the lower part of the mouth seen at the feet and the top of the maw above the head of the ruler. The rest of the head of this *witz* monster covers the entire western side of the stela (back). This imagery closely resembles that found on Stela C. In addition, they both include beings with turbans who could be ancestors, and other supernaturals. The back of the stela has the face of the *witz* monster with the figure of what could be an ancestor sitting on top of the head (figure 43). He wears a large hat and holds an object that could be a perforator or some other object of power. He seems to be a very significant ancestor amongst all others who have been summoned to participate in the ceremony.

The inscriptions name this location as Mo' Witz, or Macaw Mountain, and this is also reflected in the iconography on the back of the stela with macaw heads combined with the *witz* monster. The identification of the ruler with the hunting god Zip is further emphasized in this imagery, as this god is often portrayed inside caves or mountains. Foliage covers the rest of the space on the sides and around the body of the ruler, even some plants that culminate with heads of the maize god or maize people, perhaps indicating the maize plant and seeds that were found in the sacred mountain and from which all humans were formed. Between the agricultural and animal symbolism found in this imagery, the emphasis appears to be on fertility and abundance. Thus, the ruler embodies deities and communes with ancestors to participate in the renewal of life. Newsome observes that: “[t]he actions of [Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil’s] ancestors bridge past and present time, transcending the boundary that separates the community of their living descendant from the

domain of the gods. Under their spell, the enchantment of the earth begins anew, just as the gods first awakened the vital energies of its life-giving plants at the beginning of time.”¹⁸¹ While some of my observations differ from hers, I agree that there is a linking of times happening in these ceremonies that set the world anew.

The inscriptions are on the sides of the monument, and begin with the Long Count date (figure 44). The text then tells of three gods who participate in some kind of activity that has not been deciphered yet. These deities are the Heavenly God, Earthly God, and the One-Sky-in-Hand god, all of which appear in other sources that concern the story of creation. Then the erection of the stela is framed with symbolism of raising the sky followed by naming the location of Mo Witz Ahau. The inscription closes with the scattering event by Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil at the closing of the k’atun, who embodied the old hunting god Zip.

Stela D

Stela D shows Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil as an old god, surrounded by four serpents with God K emerging from their maws (figure 45). Four of the K’awiil beings hold an object of power, and the other four some kind of agricultural gift to the ruler. Four supernaturals hold the bodies of the four serpents: two reptilians, one with a deer head, and the last a dwarf. The two saurians sit on each of the west and east sides; they both have symbols of Chaak, one with specific signs for clouds and the other is hard to know but it could have been identical. The deer-headed being is

¹⁸¹ Newsome, 141.

located on the upper corner of the east side (he also appears in Stela F). On top of the headdress sits a figure, perhaps an ancestor, who also holds another serpent but it has been badly damaged and cannot be identified properly. This monument is unique in the series in that it shows a full mask on the ruler's face, with openings for the eyes and mouth big enough to be able to see the ruler behind the mask (see chapter 4 for a discussion on x-ray masks). The mask has wrinkles and what seem to be toothless gums, which mark it as an old god mask. There is an oval space at the forehead where a mirror was most likely affixed — a sign for brightness. A short beard that hangs from the mask is also part of the costume and not the ruler's own beard. Possible identifications are the old sun god or the tree god from the Temple of the Foliated Cross (the name appears in the inscription of Stela D). Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil wears a necklace made of small beads, probably jade. His belt has sky symbols with heads of Ahau Pop on the sides, with the three celts hanging from the heads. The loincloth has the head of the perforator god and feathers that hang from the head. The wrists and ankles are tied with cloth. Another perforator head is located at the base of the ruler's headdress. The rest of the headdress is too damaged for a proper identification. The ancestor at the top of the headdress holds four serpents that are intertwined in a knot in the middle. Newsome argues that this is a case of emergence or resurrection, in contrast to Baudez' proposition that the ruler here is the sun descending. At the base of the stela are two glyphs that mark the location where this event is taking place as being in the underworld.

The text on the back of this stela is quite unique, in that it has personified characters for the numbers and time periods recorded (figure 45). For example, it begins with a figure whose face has a jaguar-skin patch, thus meaning the number nine (using a play in words where nine and jaguar are Bolom). He carries on his back a bird that represents the bak'tun. And so on for the rest of the dates, followed by naming the dedication of the stela by Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil. I take Newsome's suggestion that these figures are similar to a "caravan of merchants" and propose that these are, in fact, personages in a ritual procession where each individual carries the burden of time and takes this burden/time period to its respective place.

2. Stelae as Embodiment of Ruler and Deities

As the previous section outlined, each stela from the Great Plaza group shows Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil in the guise of a deity, or as the axis mundi (Table 1). In chronological order, these are the beings embodied: axis mundi/Imix-Yax-Che, young Jaguar God (perhaps Hun Kuwal, a founder of the city), K'awiil (or Bolon K'awiil, another founder), Hun Ixim, the Old Sun God (or Kan Te Ahaw, another founder), and the hunting god Zip; all key players in the story of creation or the foundation of Copán's dynasty.¹⁸² Most interpretations of these monuments declare them portraits of the ruler, but if we follow a Maya understanding of embodiment and the notion of a shared sacred essence between beings and "objects" we arrive at a slightly different

¹⁸² The identities in parenthesis were proposed by Linda Schele, and not followed by Newsome. Schele also has a story of the foundation of Copán where she lists the names and actions of these three individuals within that mytho-history. See Schele and Matthews, *Code of Kings*, 147-9, for this foundation story.

conclusion. I argue that these stelae are, in fact, deities and supernaturals in a sacred space participating in ceremonies of renewal for Period Endings, and not portraits of the ruler in the western sense of this concept where it would be a depiction of a person absent of any animated substance, and which captures their physical or superficial likeness at a fixed moment in history.

Speaking of the relationship between objects and the depictions carved on them, David Stuart states that:

[i]n Maya art, and Mesoamerican art in general, portraits of people, gods, or other entities were seen as extrasomatic manifestations of individual identities or personas. That is to say, Mesoamerican images realize their subjects in a very literal sense. (...) Such captions do not simply label an image or identify the person acting out some episode or event but may convey the understanding that the image embodies that figure.¹⁸³

There is a strong connection between rulers and stelae, as Stuart and others have elaborated on previously. Stelae were not only permanent reminders of the power and actions of the ruler, but they also shared a sacred essence. This is why the object “embodies that figure.” As Stuart says, these stone monuments are extensions of the ruler, and are treated as the ruler himself in a “perpetual state of ritual action.”¹⁸⁴ We can see how these ideas are reflected on the stelae group at Copán, with Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil shown embodying deities and engaged in rituals of renewal. However, we cannot forget the fact that these particular images show the ruler embodying deities and supernaturals. During the ceremony, the ruler was in concurrence with a deity, and this is the moment captured on the stones. If stelae share the essence of those whose depictions are on their surfaces, and the images are those of deities

¹⁸³ Stuart, “Kings of Stone,” 164.

¹⁸⁴ Stuart, “Kings of Stone,” 165.

(because it is not just the ruler), then these are deities or supernatural themselves engaged in ceremonies.

The fact that the stones are re-presentations of deities has tremendous implications. Most significantly, this shifts the emphasis from the ruler as the central personage to the deities as the ones being present in this sacred space, and perhaps the stelae themselves (more on this below). This is not to say that the stelae were not reminders of the ruler's actions in ceremonies and his ability to embody deities, as this was clearly an obvious purpose. However, by considering that these were deities it actually expands the ruler's powers by showing his ability to commune with deities and bring them to life. It also charges the space, making it even more sacred.

Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil made present in the space of the plaza, key deities in the foundation of Copán for the purpose of renewal of time and the life of his people.

These deities were constant witnesses and participants in the life of the community by being present in the plaza. The fact that the ruler could have given offerings to these stelae during ceremonies of renewal also supports the idea that these monuments were considered deities.¹⁸⁵

The actions required to activate the spirits that were housed in these monuments are not entirely known. As mentioned in the introduction, it is possible that some kind of ritual had to take place to transfer the essence of the ruler/deity onto or into the carved stone and in this way animate it and share that sacred essence. In addition, it is feasible to think that during these ceremonies of renewal, the offerings

¹⁸⁵ This is not to say that future rulers did not give offerings to Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil as a ruler at the foot of these stelae. There is indication that rulers remembered their ancestors, gave offerings to them, and referenced them in their own inscriptions.

of blood and incense animated the deities and supernaturals. The next step is to consider how these deities, made present through the carved stones, participated in the ceremonies.

3. Performance and Interaction with Stelae in Ceremonies

The idea that stelae were active participants in rituals is not new. In his article, “Kings of Stone,” David Stuart discusses the active role of stelae in ceremonies and how royal participants most likely interacted with these objects.¹⁸⁶ The ruler (and other participants) gave offerings at the feet of the stelae, wrapped it, and burned incense to it. This level of engagement with the monuments usually happened during dedication rituals for the stela in question. However, the elite interacted with these stones in ceremonies that took place after the stelae had been installed. Previous studies on the subject consider these interactions in the realm of ancestor veneration, and others focus on their position within the architectural space, with a strong interest in any alignments with solar positions or other astronomical phenomena. In her study of this group of stelae in Copán, Newsome proposes that these are “trees in stone,” referring to the cosmic trees that were placed at the key directional points at the time of creation, and that hold the skies, the earth and maintain the cosmos in place. While I agree with much of her evidence and arguments, I suggest that these are not the trees but rather the deities that were in charge of setting the trees in place and of performing the necessary rituals and offerings at the various sacred points. Again,

¹⁸⁶ Stuart, “Kings of Stone,” 151, 165. For additional examples see O’Neil.

these deities would have come to life during the ceremonies and participated in these roles, alongside the ruler and elite. These ideas change the way one thinks of the role of stelae in these ceremonies and also about the performative aspects of these ceremonies.

These postulations are somewhat difficult to prove, as there are no specific records or images from the Classic period that tell us of these stones coming to life. However, ethnographic and ethnohistorical evidence from the present day tells us that the ways the Maya interact(ed) with “effigies”, saints, and other sacred objects demonstrate a relationship akin to interacting with things that are alive. During certain feasts, especially for the patron saints, sacred objects such as crosses and saints occupy center stage and become the focus of offerings in a series of ritual actions. In various Maya communities in the highlands of Chiapas, the saints are cleansed, dressed, taken on parades to sacred locations around the community, and are addressed as living beings. In a more dramatic example, during Easter Week in Antigua, Guatemala, two groups carry the figures of Jesus and the local god Maximón, who symbolizes chaos, on a procession. At a particular moment, these two groups confront each other, making the figures meet in the middle, walk back and then forward to meet again. This is a symbolic battle, of the forces of “good” and “evil,” of light and darkness, order and chaos. Even though Maximon wins and governs the town for a few days, Jesus resurrects five days later as his body is raised

on a crucifix/world tree at the center of the church.¹⁸⁷ This reminds us of the battle between the Hero Twins (symbolic of order and life) and the Lords of the Underworld (forces of darkness and death). With the help of their wit and deities, they triumph over death and resurrect their father as the Maize God. After his resurrection, he orders the world, the sun rises, and time “begins.”

While the stone stelae could not be moved and taken on parades (although deity effigies probably were, as the previous chapter on Palenque showed), it is reasonable to think that the rulers engaged with them in different manners. If we think of these stone monuments as being alive, and actually “doing” what is shown on their surfaces, then we see that everybody is doing some action in the overall act of creation. Some deities perform self-sacrifice giving blood offerings; others raise the trees at the corners of the world and as such they also prepare the space to be divided into the four sections of the world; other(s) serve as the axis mundi providing not only the center, but linking (and perhaps creating for the first time) the different spaces of the underworld, earth, and heavens. And thus, the space of the plaza was transformed; it was replete with deities, ancestors, and other sacred supernaturals, repeating the acts of creation to renew the world. The ruler and elite embodied other deities or supernaturals also to create a complete cast of actors to re-enact the acts of creation. Regarding the performative aspect, it is likely that when the ruler danced, he did it

¹⁸⁷ Christenson, Allen J. *Art and Society in a Highland Maya Community: The Altarpiece of Santiago Atitlán*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2001, 185.

with the deities and not only “as” a god; this is perhaps another reason some of these depictions show the feet in a dance pose.

We could also think about the ruler (or elite) giving offerings as a way to animate the deities carved on stones, and once animated these gods played their roles together with the rest of the actors. Remains of paint indicate these stelae would have look more life-like. Could they have been adorned in other ways? If the dressing of the ruler is what activated the sacred essence of the deity and allowed for deity embodiment, could the stone have been “dressed” also? In present day Maya communities, it is common practice to adorn crosses, which are modern versions of the ancient Maya world tree, with flowers and pine boughs. They also have candles and incense burning at their feet as offerings. Saints are also cleansed, their old clothes changed for new ones, and adorned before taking them on processions. There is already a level of sacredness (ch’ul/k’uh) and animacy found in crosses and saints, the acts of cleansing and dresses only re-charges those energies and prepares them for the ceremonies. As others have shown, stelae also had a sacred ch’ul/k’uh regardless of what was carved on them, and all these additional beings enhanced its powers.

Obviously, we are able to make these analyses after the fact and looking at the group as a whole, which was not the case when Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil performed his ceremonies. However, it should not be surprising to think that he would have envisioned the project from the start and added the pieces at the right times. For example, during the setting of Stela C, Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil embodied the World Tree and the resurrected Maize God, and engaged in all the

activities to resurrect and set the world in order, as recorded on the stela. Ten years later, with the installation of Stela F, Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil embodied the young Jaguar God while other nobles could have embodied the hero twins, the bakabs, and the founders of the Copán lineage. Stela C was already in place as the world tree and was used accordingly, characters interacting with it and actions during the ceremony took place around it. Fifteen years later, the ruler embodied the old Sun God or Butz' Chan, as recorded on Stela A, but nobody needed to embody the young Jaguar God or the World Tree since they were already present in Stela F and C. As there were many different characters in these ceremonies, members of the nobility (including women, as will be discussed in chapter 4) embodied all other beings not made present by the stelae or the ruler. As such, all the key participants in the acts of creation were included in the ceremony, whether by their being carved on the surface of stelae and brought to life for the rituals, or by being embodied by the ruler and elite.

As mentioned above in the descriptions, each stela has portions of ceremonies, and if we combine the many sections from each stela into one large collective, then we can possibly have an entire diagram of ceremonies of renewal as they were practiced in Copán, by Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil. Stela A gives some details that could expand one's understanding on what took place during the ceremonies. It mentions four trees, five objects which could be stelae on the plaza, a reference to a watery place, four skies, four rulers from four important sites, the earth and the sky, and ending with the four cardinal directions in paired opposites. All together these

elements could be a reference to locations, objects, and characters of these ceremonies of renewal. The location is named as the *Hao Ha*, a watery place, which can be the Great Plaza as plazas were considered to be the watery underworld. At this point in time, the plaza had five standing stelae, with an arrangement that could resemble a quincunx (figure 29). This diagram is similar to the Olmec jade celt from Arroyo Pesquero with four points at the corners and a central figure that marks the center of the cosmos (figures 46). In a similar way, the stelae on the Great Plaza mark four corners and Stela C functions as the center, although not placed in the middle of the space, it is placed at the North side but very much in a central position and the imagery is explicitly marking the ruler as the axis mundi. The reference to four trees could be the sacred trees that hold up the skies at each corner of the world. It is certainly possible that the four witnesses were the equivalent to the Postclassic Bakabs who participated in the dividing of the space into four and set the trees at the corners of the earth to support the sky.

So far, we have a primordial watery space with sacred trees at the four quadrants, who separate the sky from the earth/water, and the world tree in the middle. Another stela (C), talks about the setting of three stones at sacred locations by deities, which we can assume was done during the ceremonies. All the stelae include many ancestors and supernaturals, who one can assume participated in some way or another. These beings are often assumed to be the product of visions while the ruler was in a trance state, after bloodletting rituals and perhaps the ingestion of hallucinogenic substances. These visions or dreams took place in private places, and

as Newsome suggests, the ruler would walk out of the temple after completing these visions to greet the audience gathered in the plaza. What I propose, however, is that not all communication with ancestors, deities, and supernaturals took place in private spaces and that these are not records of the so-called “visions” of the ruler. Instead all the beings on these stelae were included for the purpose of public performances where the audience would have seen these beings alive and interacting with the rest of the elite and the ruler. All these elements transformed the space and brought the space into a mythical time (“past”), but the audience was in their “present”/“now,” creating these moments of timefulness.

These different types of rituals find contemporary equivalents in the private ceremony for San Martín, in Santiago Atitlán and the more public carnivals from the highlands of Guatemala and Chiapas. In the San Martín example, the most sacred part of the ceremony takes place at the Cofradía of San Martín at midnight. The *nab'yesil* (a powerful priest) of San Martín dances with the bundle of San Martín around the room while incense burns. In this dance, the *nab'yesil* communes with San Martín and ancestors are made present in the space.¹⁸⁸ Allen Christenson writes that the *nab'yesil* asked him if he could see the saints and ancestors during the ceremony, because they were present — the *nab'yesil* was able to see them and assumed the rest of the people in the room could too. On the other hand, public carnivals such as the one from Chamula, Chiapas take place in open plazas and the entire community takes part on it, whether because they have a *cargo* to fulfill or as audience. In Chamula,

¹⁸⁸ See Christenson, *Art and Society*, 24, for a more detailed account of the ceremony and his personal experience.

the groups called *max*, or monkeys, re-enact significant battles, and at the end the *pasioness*, equivalents of Christ, come renew the space and set order. Testimonies from participants in these feasts indicate that they consider themselves monkeys, and their actions as those of sacred beings. Thus, they embody the supernatural being whose clothing they wear. In this festival, we see reenacted the chaos versus order component of creation and at the end the sun rises again and time can continue. Most significantly, their community is regenerated through a public ceremony.

The presence of local dynasty elements, such as the founding deities and supernaturals wearing the iconic turban of Copán, supports the idea that lineage foundations were intrinsically linked with the ideology of the creation of the fourth era. Some of the stelae also mention founders of the Copán dynasty and the obtaining of sacred objects and headdresses, signifiers of authority to rule. This concept is further reinforced by the numerous K'awiil gods, who are symbolic of kingship, emerging from serpents and around the figures in the stelae. Thus, this is the perfect example of the combination of foundation of lineages with the idea of maintaining and renewing those lines through blood, sacrifice, and the setting things in order. The ceremonies that took place to erect these monuments, as well as the future ceremonies where these monuments could be interacted with, means that Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil was thinking about an overall theme of renewal and his ability to re-create and put order in the cosmos, and in his own city/kingdom.

These Period Ending rituals entailed a level of engagement with the stelae that ranged from being wrapped similarly to sacred bundles and given offerings of incense

and blood administered by the ruler (or his attendants) to bringing to life the numerous deities and supernaturals carved on their faces as active participants with the ruler in renewing the world.¹⁸⁹ These elaborate rituals indicate the sacredness held in the stone itself as a marker of time, and as a sacred object that shared a holiness with those being depicted on the stone. All together, the stelae, the ruler and the deity shared the burden of time.

4. Stelae as Timeful Monuments

In his article “Kings of Stone,” David Stuart carefully delineates the complex interplay between rulers, stelae, and time.¹⁹⁰ Stelae are at once embodiments of time and “extensions of the royal self.”¹⁹¹ Let’s not forget that rulers were also embodiments of time. Stuart convincingly argues that the term for stelae (*kaltun*) has direct connections with the counting and wrapping of years (*tuns*). As such, stelae were markers of time, as they were erected to commemorate various time divisions, with the *k’atun* being the most common, but also for any divisions of the *k’atun* as well. It is important to note that these monuments had a lifespan that lasted much longer than the duration of the ritual they commemorated (and the life of the ruler who commissioned it) and thus further reinforced the ruler’s ability to transcend time.

Houston speaks so clearly of sculptures’ ability to embody and extend the life span of the ruler in the following excerpt:

¹⁸⁹ Stuart, “Kings of Stone,” 157.

¹⁹⁰ Stuart, “Kings of Stone,” 167.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

To ancient thinking, the sculptures listen, interact, and talk by voicing first- and second-person pronouns. According to glyphic texts, they are the *baah*, the “self” or “body” of the person they depict - no captives appear with this term nor do many people of non-royal status. In this, the term conveys the same shading as the far later Nahuatl word *ixiptlayotl*, an “image, likeness, representation.” More than an image, it lodges a spirit by wearing appropriate “mask” or “masked raiment”; the word itself contains particles for “face,” “eye,” or “surface,” a “flaying,” and things intrinsically possessed. But being of stone, the Maya carvings last longer than their human originals. By multiplying a person, they allow it to exist in several places at once, fixed in a particular time - most have inscribed dates that pin down the portrait. They also remain eternally in that time, uncorrupted.¹⁹²

There are a couple of relevant concepts to gather from this passage. First, as Houston points out the inscriptions corroborates that these sculptures are the “self” or “body” of the ruler. Second, because their material nature is more long-lasting than say, human bodies, these portraits allow the ruler to “live” longer and in different time-spaces. I would like to focus on the second portion of the excerpt and take these ideas a bit further. Houston says that these sculptures “allow [the ruler] to exist in several places at once, fixed in a particular time.”¹⁹³ Based on this interpretation, the multiple places the ruler is allowed to exist are in the plaza or any other place the stela is located, and wherever the king happens to be in his daily routine. In some way, it also extends the life of the ruler past his own life in the form of ancestor veneration by future generations. However, considering the ideas of embodiment and timefulness that I have outline thus far, we can see that these stelae extend the “life” of the ruler and the beings carved on them far beyond the lifespan of the ruler and his immediate

¹⁹² Houston, Stephen D. *The Life Within: Classic Maya and the Matter of Permanence*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014, 99.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

descendants into a mythical and “forever” time. These stelae can be timeful in and of themselves.

If we think of these stelae not as the ruler but as the deities the ruler has embodied, then, it is not only the ruler who has been “multiplied” in time and space, but the deities as well — they are made to be always present in that space. (Perhaps it was only during ceremonies that these sculptures “came to life” as deities and the rest of the time they were seen as portraits of the ruler and a record of his abilities to embody deities). The ruler and deities are also remembered in rituals that transcended one specific moment and where the past was merged with the present, creating a moment of timefulness. This is what the stelae are recording, these moments pregnant with time. Instead of the dates on the inscriptions linking the sculpture to one specific time, as Houston states and can certainly be the case in some stelae, the dates on some of these stelae from Copán use distance numbers to transpose the actions to a mythical past, or even into the future. Thus, the inscriptions connect to more than one historical date, and the idea that they “remain eternally in that time” takes on a different meaning, where time is eternal in a way that allows for this back and forth between time dimensions and for the coalescence of times during sacred ceremonies.



**10 k'ins, 4 winals, 14 tuns, 4 k'atuns, 3 bak'tuns after the dedication of Copán
Stela D, on the date 12.19.19.4.10 7 Ok 18 K'umk'u**

A photograph titled, *Tuch, retorno al origen / Tuch, Return to the Origins*, by Silvia Patricia Martin Briceño, from Yucatan, Mexico, provides an example of an artist looking to her roots while connecting to contemporary indigenous issues (figure 47). Here the artist depicts a female standing in the middle, connected to two male ancestors one on each side. In the middle of these three figures and what serves to connect them is an illustration of a corn plant outlined in red. This red line also connects all three individuals and extends below to form the roots of the plant. Through this red line, Martin Briceño sutures together the times of the ancestors and the current time. By linking all of these individuals to the plant of corn, she also extends this connection to a mythical past that asserts the Maya were created out of sacred corn. Martin Briceño plays here with this dual place of origin, the individual line of ancestors as well as the fact that all Maya people have their mythical beginnings as sacred corn. The title of this piece reinforces these interpretations. One of the meanings of the word *tuch* in Yucatek, is the belly button, or a sign or symbol of the place where we all originated. In fact, most Maya communities refer to the center of the world as an umbilicus. The bloodline is here symbolic of an umbilical

cord that ties together the mythical past, a more recent past, and the present. The past giving birth to the future, multiple temporalities endlessly linked.

In the photograph, the two ancestors and the young woman are visually connected in a way that produces multiple readings. The straightforward interpretation is that the young woman is the product of her ancestors as she stands in the center of the maize plant holding her two bloodlines. But, life could be going in the opposite direction as well; if grandchildren are the embodiment of ancestors then perhaps through her life actions she continues to give life to her ancestors. By doing this, she continues to solidify her, and by extension Maya peoples, claims to the places they currently inhabit. This is similar to what the ruler Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil is doing in the Great Plaza: attaching themselves to a particular space/land through their long line of ancestors, while simultaneously connecting to a mythical origin be it the maize god, or other similar creator deities. While the outward depiction of these ideas has changed over the centuries since Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil's stelae were erected, at their core, the notion of connecting with ancestors to claim a right to land (be it as a ruler of it or not), endures in the photograph of Martin Briceño.

Chapter 4

Timeful Bodies II:

Supporting and Engendering Time

Introduction

The previous two chapters centered on the actions of rulers as overseers of time. Through the examples from Palenque and Copán, we learned about the processes needed for rulers and deities to transform time and space in such a way that they communed with each other during ceremonies of renewal. It is so common to think of the ruler when talking about ancient Maya ceremonies, that other participants tend to be overlooked. And yet, the events of creation included many actors, such as the deities who set up the three hearth stones; four deities who were placed at the four quadrants to support the earth (also referred to as sky-bearers) called Bakabs or Pauahtuns in Mayan; underworld deities and creatures who battle with the gods, particularly evident in the *Popol Vuh*; animals who helped identify maize as the substance of which humans were made; and even the mother-father deities who shaped humans. Undoubtedly, there are many other actors that we are not aware of, and undoubtedly the cast of characters varied from place to place and time to time depending upon the needs and circumstances of the telling. What we can be sure of, is that ceremonies in which creation was re-enacted must have required a fairly large number of participants. The idea that only rulers embodied deities or supernaturals is highly unlikely. In this chapter, I will consider some of these additional participants in rituals of renewal in order to understand their roles, not only in the mythological stories but also in Maya social structures.

In Chapter 1, I divided the broad events of creation into separate themes. Some of those events required the participation of other characters, outside of the ruler/main deity and other supreme deities. Amongst them are: the birth, death and rebirth of the Maize God; the division of the earth into four quadrants and setting four deities in each of the corners; and the shaping of humans. Because most of the imagery showing these scenes comes from painted ceramics and murals that are mythologically charged, the scholarly analysis of these stories has remained in that sphere as well. However, as we have seen here (and other scholars have pointed out elsewhere), the lines between mythology and history, and deities (or supernaturals) and humans, are less distinct for the Maya than they are in current Western epistemologies. One of the main points I aim to prove in this chapter is that these events painted on vases and in murals were very much part of the ritual performances during ceremonies of renewal and were not mere actions that took place in a mythological time-space [yes?]. Furthermore, in this study of timeful spaces, I have also highlighted that the individuals depicted in these objects could be concurrently historical and mythological beings.

Here I will show how the many auxiliary players in creation, aided in achieving the coexistence of beings, times, and spaces essential to ceremonies of renewal. This multiplicity of moments together can explain some of the ideas that seem not to make much sense (to Western scholars, at least), such as rulers interacting face to face with underworld gods, or with any other deity. I emphasize that these interactions are not taking place in what is assumed to be a trance state where the

ruler is the only one seeing these deities, but this is in fact an event with multiple participants where all these beings, be they “humans,” deities, ancestors or supernaturals, all exist in the same time-space. This is not to say that trance-inducing substances and actions were not part of the rituals, as there is plenty of evidence for that. Instead, the emphasis here is on the materialization of beings during ceremonies in such a way that they were visible to a wider audience rather than solely the ruler (or a handful of his assistants), as is commonly believed.

The chapter will begin with examples of the role of Bakabs or Pauahtuns, sky-bearers who were placed at each of the quadrants of the earth and who play a prominent role in the ordering of the world. Even though they are rarely depicted in the Classic period, their appearance in Postclassic, Colonial and contemporary Maya ceremonies, signal their importance. Next will follow a brief discussion of a group of deities whom Taube calls the “gods of the new year,” as they are in charge of the fate of the years.¹⁹⁴ A group of beings found in painted ceramics who have been previously designated as *wahyob*, come next. I claim that these supernaturals are not just creatures of fright from the underworld or spirit/animal companions of people, but in fact, they are participants in the creation of the world and were embodied during ceremonies. Last but not least, the discussion will lead into the role that women played in the ordering of the world and in these ceremonies of renewal. As I will demonstrate here, Maya women were not only active participants in rituals beyond the role of assistants usually given to them (by Western scholars), but they

¹⁹⁴ Taube, *The Ancient Yucatec New Year Festival*.

were also an intrinsic part of Maya cosmology. In a worldview of complementary dualities, women and the feminine formed fundamental pairs with their male and masculine opposites. Time did not escape this basic complementarity, as I will demonstrate by looking at the role of women in ceremonies that is also connected to the calendars.

Most of the examples in this chapter come from the Postclassic or Colonial periods, supported with more modern ethnographic studies. Instead of assuming that these characters were not included in Preclassic or Classic Maya rituals, I take the few examples in ceramics and murals as an indication of a widespread practice that was not recorded on carved stelae and monuments.¹⁹⁵ It is important to note that after the so-called Maya collapse when the ruling systems fell, certain practices and ideas did not disappear. Instead, the evidence from contemporary rituals demonstrates that beliefs and practices around the creation of the world have endured through centuries of turmoil. Contemporary examples allow us to amplify our studies beyond the male ruler to include the many additional individuals who participated in earlier elaborate rituals of renewal. Just as the Preclassic and Classic Maya re-enacted their stories of creation and foundation, Colonial and contemporary Maya continue to perform their own stories of foundation and survival, during which they constantly renew their world.

¹⁹⁵ This is most likely due to the function of these objects. Stelae were erected to commemorate the greatness of rulers, while smaller portable objects were used in the ceremonies and feasts themselves where it was relevant to highlight the actions of the elite.

Directional Characters

The ancient Maya placed great importance on the proper division and ordering of time and space. As seen in chapter 1, directional characters played important roles in literally sustaining the cosmos. Such is the case of the Pauhtuns or Bakabs (both names are used for the same beings), who served as the four sky-bearers holding up the firmament so it would not collapse onto the earth.¹⁹⁶ Colonial documents such as the Chilam Balam and Landa's *Relación*, indicate that there were other quadripartite deities also associated with the four quadrants, namely the Chaaks, Wayeyabs, Acantuns and Mams.¹⁹⁷ These also had a color and direction associated with them. A similar situation is found in Central Mexico, and other Mesoamerican cultures, indicating that this concept of sky-bearers and rain gods, who had dominion over specific quadrants of the world, was a widespread notion in Mesoamerica.

One of the best examples of Pauhtuns supporting the heavens comes from the Lower Temple of the Jaguar at Chichen Itza, located on the back side of the main ball court of the site (figure 48). The facade of the temple has two panels on the sides, two supporting columns, one on each side, and a jaguar throne in the middle.¹⁹⁸ The end walls portray two Pauhtuns, who hold rattles and dance (figure 49). Schele and Matthews argue that the Pauhtuns were the patron deities of the Itza because the Chilam Balam of Chumayel refers to them as being the "lords of the Itza on 4 Ahaw, the day of creation."¹⁹⁹ If this is the case, then the Itza are following the footsteps of

¹⁹⁶ Taube and Miller, 132.

¹⁹⁷ Tozzer, 136-138.

¹⁹⁸ Schele and Matthews, 213.

¹⁹⁹ Schele and Matthews, 214.

other sites mentioned already where the rulers recall the founding deities of their dynasty during renewal ceremonies. They often performed these rituals at ballcourts; thus, it is not impossible to conceive that the viewers were reminded of this myth-history as they approached the ball court to watch games or other rituals.

The two columns have carvings on all four of their sides (figure 50). The south columns show the four Pauahtuns. The column on the north shows two goddesses: two are Chak-Chel, identified by the crossed-bones motif on her skirt, and the other two are the Moon Goddess who wears a netted skirt. All of these figures stand on sacred mountains that are surrounded by the primordial waters. Schele and Matthews argue, based on the story of the *Popol Vuh*, that these two deities were the parents of the Maize God, and the creators of humankind; Chak-Chel being the midwife who shapes humans from corn dough and the Pauahtuns serve as the attendants of the goddess. While this interpretation cannot be proven (and scholars do not uniformly accept it), the fact remains that here we have the four sky-bearers in the action of lifting the skies in primordial waters. The upper registers of the Pauahtuns reliefs are depictions of the Maize God emerging from the cleft of a *witz* (mountain), similar to the Resurrection Plate (figure 6). It is common in Chichen Itza to see anthropomorphic *witz* with the heads of old men, as seen in this particular example. Schele and Matthews interpret the Jaguar Throne as the first stone of creation that the Paddler Gods set during creation. While this could be a lucky coincidence, the overall theme of creation in the sanctuary cannot be denied.

While the columns at Chichen Itza can be interpreted at a cosmological level, Pauahtuns were also used to reinforce the hierarchical organization of the Maya elite. Miller and Taube indicate that “the sky bearers were widely identified with the office of rulership. (...) The role of sky bearers probably related to the Mesoamerican concept of public office as an elevated burden or cargo to be passed from one officeholder to another.”²⁰⁰ The Del Rio Throne from Palenque, Chiapas demonstrates this concept of higher nobility in the role of Pauahtuns/Bakabs as the ones who support the heavens cosmologically, and the ruler at a more earthly level (figure 51). It records on its face the inauguration dates of many rulers, including K’inich Janahb’ Pakal and his two sons, the most prominent rulers of the site. The two supporting legs at the front show two seated figures dressed as marine deities rising up one hand, indicating their role as sky-bearers. According to the text, these individuals were nobles with the title of Ajk’uhun.²⁰¹ The text also describes them as “‘images’ of beings related to the B’akab or Pawahtun who occupied the four cardinal points and supported the heavens.”²⁰² Here, the nobles literally support the ruler, like the Pauahtuns support the sky, showing that power relations are reinforced through their mythology.

We find a similar example in a panel from the site of Pomona (figure 52). This relief depicts four individuals sitting together, although what is left of the monument shows only one complete figure and fragments of the others. The inscriptions indicate

²⁰⁰ Miller and Taube, 155.

²⁰¹ Stuart and Stuart, 157-8.

²⁰² Ibid.

that their title was “4 Pauahtun.” — a very rare occurrence in Classic texts.²⁰³ These individuals hold in their hands glyphs that indicate the first day of the new year. Because of this, David Stuart suggests that these could be a Classic example of year-bearers.²⁰⁴ If that is the case, then these Pauahtuns are also carrying the burden of the year, marked by their holding of the year-bearers. Taube notes the possibility that “in the Maya region, the four aged Pauahtuns may have been considered as the yearbearers.”²⁰⁵ This idea is supported by Landa’s observation that in Colonial Yucatan the year-bearer days were intrinsically associated with the four bacabs, both standing in their respective cardinal direction.²⁰⁶ Thus, each year-bearer is a world direction that coupled with their dividing of the fifty-two year cycle into four sections, means that every thirteen years a new year-bearer reigns over that quadrant of time until the passage of all four concludes in the renewal of a Calendar Round cycle. In addition, examples from other cultures in Mesoamerica also pair the year-bearer days with sky-bearers, strengthening this connection. During ceremonies of renewal, lesser elite could have performed the role of these year-bearers standing at each of the corners of the plaza ready to receive offerings, or even installed in their position during a procession that re-enacted the original division and ordering of the earth.

²⁰³ Taube, *Ancient Yucatec New Year Festival*, notes for page 191; Schele and Miller, 142.

²⁰⁴ Stuart, David. “New Year Records in Classic Maya Inscriptions.” *Mesoweb*, 2005, 4. See also: Schele and Miller, 142, Fig. III.12

²⁰⁵ Taube, *Ancient Yucatec New Year Festival*, 191.

²⁰⁶ Tozzer, 136.

Gods of the New Year²⁰⁷

The tablets from the Temple of the Inscriptions at Palenque included several deities who were in charge of a year, such as Chaak or Hun Ixim (see chapter 2). They were in a rotating system, similar to the year-bearer system. These gods of the new year are found in a few examples in a manner that leads one to believe they were part of period ending rituals. Perhaps the best representation of these deities comes from the Dresden Codex' New Year pages (figure 4). At the top register of each page, stands a figure dressed as an opossum, also called a *mam*, who carries on its back the deity who has reigned over the previous year. The *mam*, is considered an old earth god who was in charge of overseeing the end of the year.²⁰⁸ Various scholars have argued that the New Year pages show both the end and beginning of a year.²⁰⁹ The bottom register depicts the setting up of the deity who will rule over the next year, with the giving of offerings by the ritual performer. The top register of the following page shows the *mam* parading the same deity as it is moved to a different location in preparation for the new deity to rule over the coming year. For example, register 25c shows K'inich Ahaw as the reigning deity, who the *mam* then carries in page 26a in a parade that will take him to a different location. Page 26c shows the next deity, Iztamnaaj, being set up as the ruling deity for the New Year. The gods included in these pages are in pairs, one at the bottom register and the other at the top in this order (25c - 25a): K'inich Ahaw and his jaguar counterpart, Iztamnaaj and the Maize

²⁰⁷ Taube calls them "gods of the new year" even if falling a bit short of coining the term, *Ancient Yucatec New Year Festival*, 239.

²⁰⁸ Taube, *Ancient Yucatec New Year Festival*, 226.

²⁰⁹ Vail and Looper; Taube, *Ancient Yucatec New Year Festival*, 223-7.

God, two versions of the death god, with the last pairing as the god of lightning and K'awiil.²¹⁰ These are all major deities in Maya cosmology, and key players in the events of creation as we have seen in this study. Each of them also had a personality and brought with it omens for the year, both fortunate and otherwise. It was the responsibility of the ruler, as the main overseer of time, to ensure that proper rituals were performed to assuage any ill-fated incidents.

The imagery associated with the gods of the new year as seen in the Dresden Codex, is one of being carried on the back of a deity or the ruler. This evokes the iconic manner in which mothers carry an infant on their backs in Maya communities. The term “cargo” used to describe the positions of leadership the elders of the communities, denotes the heaviness of these responsibilities. In a similar way, carrying a child is also a burden, not only because of the weight of the child, but as the responsibility for this care also. As seen in chapter 2, effigies of the gods were cared for as if they were children, dressed, fed, and protected. We can say that time, in this instance represented by the gods of the New Year, needs to be cared for properly. Time, or the year, is carried as an infant and taken on its yearly path. As the overseer of time, the ruler literally carries time on his back as he aids in the transition from the old to the new year. Perceiving the concept of a “cargo” in this manner allows us to see time as something that is alive, that grows like a child, and that can become heavy; sharing the burden to carry time is necessary, just as it is with a child to ensure its survival.

²¹⁰ Vail andLooper, 125-6.

It is certainly possible that during these ceremonies of renewal, other high-ranking members of the elite functioned in these roles of deities of the New Year, each one rotating every year and transferring their burdens to the next deity/elite member. They would have received this new duty either at a private ceremony, or during a procession across the open plazas where the exiting deity would walk or perhaps even carried in a palanquin similar to those depicted in some ceramic vases, to the incoming one. At that point some ritual for transferring the *cargo* would have taken place. Just as likely, the New Year deity could have been an effigy that was cared for, washed, and dressed by members of the elite to prepare them for their new position. Even if the ruler functioned as a the equivalent of the *mam* carrying the deity of the New Year, the supporting characters would have prepared the effigies and most likely also participated in the offerings given to them.

Supernaturals (*wahyob*)

Thus far, the ritual scene consists of the ruler and other high-ranking members of the elite embodying the key deities of creation. They engage in the re-enacting of the ordering of the world by setting up the hearth stones at the center and placing the Pauahtuns at the corners of the world along with the gods of the year. Painted ceramics depict additional characters in royal ceremonies, which provide details regarding the performance process. A group of vases from the site of Motul de San Jose show a category of supernaturals who have been identified as *wahyob* in the act of dancing and processing some with implications of sacrifice. *Wahyob* are

anthropomorphic animals or other imaginary, grotesque, and supernatural creatures. They often show signs of death or being in the underworld. Scholars have interpreted the term *wahy* as co-essences and companion spirits. Recent studies argue they are spooks, or even “personifications of spells wielded by the ruler,” or that they are “forest spirits.”²¹¹ I argue that not all figures previously identified as *wahyob*, especially those painted in Ik’-style vases, are in fact *wahyob*; evidence points to at least some of them being supernaturals present during the events of creation and who elites embodied during their local ceremonies of renewal.

The ceramics from the site of Motul de San Jose, also called Ik’ style, are well-known for their vivid imagery and high-quality execution. The examples chosen for this study depict individuals wearing animal skins and masks, most of them dancing for kingly accessions or period ending ceremonies.²¹² This selection of vases can be classified into two groups based on stylistic differences that also correspond to two different rulers of the site. The first group belongs to the ruler Yajawte’ K’inich, who reigned in the mid-eighth century. The individuals in these scenes wear full-body animal skins and animal masks or helmets covering their heads in what is called “X-ray style,” meaning that there has been a section cut-out of the mask that allows us to see the “human” head underneath it. The second group belongs to the ruler Lamaw Ek’, successor to Yajawte’ K’inich. These vases show the individuals wearing tight animal skin pants, mittens, and the animal heads as headdresses, almost as an

²¹¹ Stuart, David. “Notes on a Sacrifice Scene.” *Maya Decipherment*, October 31, 2014. <https://decipherment.wordpress.com/2014/10/31/notes-on-a-sacrifice-scene/>. Taube, *Maya Conceptions About Field and Forest*, 466-7.

²¹² These vases include: K1439, K533, MS0031, K1896, K791, K792, K793, the so-called Altar Vase.

extension of their own; the so-called Altar Vase is a well-known example. I have chosen one example from each category--vases K533 and K791 respectively—so that I might more deeply analyze the imagery and meaning of these scenes and the supernatural beings depicted in them.

Vase K533, commissioned by Yajawte' K'inich, shows four individuals wearing full-body jaguar skins (figure 53). The individual on the far left wears a black skin, possibly that of a black jaguar. The skins of the animals are worn tightly, confusing the distinction between human and feline bodies. Each individual wears the head of the animal they embody as a “helmet” that fits over their heads.²¹³ The identifying captions include the term *u-baah* along with the names of the nobles and the deities in concurrence. This image has been interpreted as the “impersonation” of *wahyob*, meaning each masked individual is only emulating a *wahy*.²¹⁴ It is important to note that the inscriptions in this particular group of vases do not include the term *wahy* at all, and yet the figures have been called *wahyob* seemingly because of their appearance.²¹⁵

Vase K791, commissioned by Lamaw Ek', shows nine figures in a ritual dance (figure 54). The figures are divided into three groups. Each group is composed of one dancing individual facing another one, who sits below or in front of them, and one animal: a bird, possibly a vulture; and two jaguars, one in a cave and the other tied to a scaffold. The dancing figure on the left wears jaguar pants and mittens, and the one

²¹³ The two central characters wear an animal head that is a combination of a jaguar and a centipede, one wears a jaguar head, and the black figure on the left has not been properly identified.

²¹⁴ Looper, et al., 138.

²¹⁵ This is to the extent of my knowledge based on research for this particular set of vases and theme.

on the right wears a dog skin. The head of the respective animal seems to grow out of the humans' heads. The inscription records a dance and includes the term *wahy* in the name captions.²¹⁶ Numerous elements, such as the fact that the jaguars appear to be dead, some figures wear necklaces of disembodied eyes, one figure has a skeletal face, and the use of the term *wahy* in the inscriptions has led some scholars to propose that this is a scene of underworld beings dancing in the underworld. According to these interpretations, these are "actual" *wahyob* in "their own element" and thus are not impersonations or concurrences.

Additionally, some scholars suggest that the use of "X-ray style" for some scenes and not others, and variances in dancing poses between the figures indicate a difference in the nature of the beings depicted in these vases. That is, whether "the dancer represents a person dressed as *wahy* or an actual *wahy*."²¹⁷ In this case "the Yajawte' K'inich vases [with the "x-ray" style] emphasize the physical aspects of impersonation, whereas the Lamaw Ek' images transport the audience directly to the spirit world, providing a vision of *wahy* themselves."²¹⁸ While these are possibilities, I propose that the deliberate inclusion of the names of historical nobles in the texts, along with the visual strategies of "X-ray style" and costuming, serve to emphasize the person's ability to embody these beings, be they deities, ancestors, or other supernaturals like sacred animals and *wahyob*. It is not a lack of ability, as one can assume when one uses the term impersonation. Instead it demonstrates that these nobles have the power to make present and serve as the bodily vessels for these

²¹⁶ Reents-Budet 177; of note, the inscriptions do not include the term *u'baah*.

²¹⁷ Looper, et al., 138.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

supernatural beings. As such, both scenes could be taking place in the underworld, or the embodying of these beings could transform the current space of the plaza into that primordial space. For the ancient Maya, this distinction did not exist or did not pose a problem.

Going back to vase K533, let's put ourselves for a moment as spectators, seeing the animal helmets completely covering the heads to the point where the individual behind the mask is obscured, which is how the audience would have seen these actors at the time of the ceremony. Now we can picture a scene of dancing supernatural animals. From the context we know that dressing, dancing, and self-sacrifice — indicated by the red scarfs worn around their necks present in other sacrifice scenes — are part of this ceremony. The text tells us that these are local lords of various ranks and they are *u-baah* of other beings. Using the gloss of “self” for the term *u-baah* then the phrase is understood as the “self” of the particular deity or supernatural residing in the bodies of these lords. This idea has a closer equivalence to what we know about how the Maya understood these practices. Instead of limiting these individuals as “impersonators” we open the possibility that these are deities or supernaturals (including *wahyob*) made present in the bodies of the nobles, through the dressing, dancing and self-sacrifice of the participants. Their state of concurrence is interpreted as a full physical presence of the supernatural.

In a similar manner, the figures in Vase K791 dance and perform self-sacrifice, indicated by perforators held by a couple individuals. The clue to interpreting these figures as embodied supernaturals is in the text itself. The structure

of the identifying phrases includes the name or description of the *wahy*, the word *wahy*, followed by the name of a lord. For example, the inscription next to the standing lord with jaguar pants reads: “Sacred tapir-cat is the *wahy* of the Yook Lord, Head Stone.” As already mentioned, *wahyob* (and by extension, these figures) are traditionally understood as companion beings, usually connected to death and the underworld. Recently, it has been shown that they are also associated with lineages and “topographic features,” such as in the text in this vase (Head Stone being a location).²¹⁹ The text denotes that a certain lord is the *wahy* of a supernatural, indicating two beings in concurrence. It is possible that the location points to the place where the lord is performing the ritual act, just as it could mark his place of origin or lineage. Each figure in this vase has a location, some of which resemble the locations named in Quirigua Monument C. Another possibility is that these lords serve as the bodily vessels for *wahyob* of places or lineages. It is feasible that these are physical re-presentations and animations of sacred places and patrons of lineages from a mythical time of creation, and their presence sets the stage for the ruler to perform the necessary rites to set the cosmos in order.

What is unique about these vases is the depiction of the embodiment of sacred animals and *wahyob*. Most examples of deity embodiment show the ruler, alone, in the attire and form of a deity or ancestor. These two groups of Ik’-style vases, instead show additional actors at play in these events of renewal, thus opening the curtain that

²¹⁹ Looper, et.al., 135; referring to Grube, Nikolai, and Werner Nahm. “A Census of Xibalba: A Complete Inventory of Way Characters on Maya Ceramics.” In *The Maya Vase Book*, by Justin Kerr, 686–715. New York: Kerr Associates, 1994.

allows us to see a larger portion of the stage and its multiple actors. The beings we see in these painted ceramics could be re-presentations of mythical beings described in the *Popol Vuh* account of creation, such as animals and underworld creatures. Michael Coe was one of the first and main proponents of the connection between scenes on ceramics and the stories found in the *Popol Vuh*, such as the many deeds of the Hero Twins on the earth and in the underworld as they battle with the Lords of the Underworld. While many of Coe's ideas have not withstood the test of time, some are still used in the analysis of complex depictions. For example, in his book, *Lords of the Underworld: Masterpieces of Maya Classic Ceramics*, Coe claims, "it is the Underworld and its dramatis personae that largely claimed the attention of the ancient artists and scribes who made these vessels."²²⁰ Scholars still use this argument to explain these scenes as events that happened in the underworld and only underworld beings participated.

While this idea is not wrong, I suggest that we expand this notion and show that these events could and did happen on the "earth" level of the Maya cosmos with historical personages becoming these underworld supernaturals. By opening this possibility, these scenes tell us that for ceremonies in which rulers re-created moments of creation it was more than just the ruler dressing as one of the creator deities or as several of them in turn. Everything had to be transformed. And as that mythical moment of the past was brought to their present (or participants and viewers were swept into the past), an overall environment of darkness and disorder was

²²⁰ Coe, Michael D, and Justin Kerr. *Lords of the Underworld: Masterpieces of Classic Maya Ceramics*. Princeton, N.J.: Art Museum, Princeton University, 11.

evoked by nobles embodying animals, the *wahyob*, and other supernatural and underworld beings who danced between worlds and times.

These prancing animals remind us of the musicians and dancers dressed as animals from the Bonampak murals (figure 55). In this scene, the musicians await to participate in the events honoring the new ruler who will be presented to the community in a different section of the mural program.²²¹ Four of the musicians and dancers wear animal masks, of what appear to be amphibians or other type of water-related animals. One of them also has lobster hands. Mary Miller has proposed that at least one of these figures is related to mythical beings of creation.²²² In a similar manner as the group of vases as a whole, the murals show the preparation of the participants, including the ruler, the procession, musicians, dancers, and other components of the celebration. These examples, from Bonampak and in the Ik' style vases, show more of the typical components of renewal ceremonies, where there is a mythical space of chaos and then through sacrifice and dance the world is restored and life can continue.

A similar process occurs in contemporary Maya communities during various festivals, such as carnavales. In some modern Maya communities, the New Year begins around February, when the fields are prepared for planting and a new agricultural season starts. Many Maya communities in the highlands of Chiapas celebrate this cycle with a Carnival, around mid- to the end- of February. In the town

²²¹ Stuart, "Notes on Sacrifice Scene;" also see Looper, et al.

²²² Miller, Mary Ellen, and Claudia Brittenham. *The Spectacle of the Late Maya Court: Reflections on the Murals of Bonampak*. 1st ed. The William and Bettye Nowlin Series in Art, History, and Culture of the Western Hemisphere. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013.

of Chamula, Chiapas, a group of young *cargo* holders (figures of authority) dresses as monkeys (and recently as popular and political figures to be mocked) and cause a raucous around the town (figure 56).²²³ The next day the figures with higher authority perform a prescribed ritual where they vanquish the monkeys and renew order in the town. I suggest the possibility that the Chamula monkeys (and any other similar creatures in other rituals across the Maya area) are the equivalents of these supernatural figures in painted vases from the Classic period. These contemporary feasts and the ancient ceramic scenes show the activities that took place during the Wayeb days, as enacted by the Classic and contemporary Maya.²²⁴ It was in these five liminal days that chaos and darkness reigned, an idea brought to life with the presence of these supernatural beings who the ruler, as a Maize Deity and/or other creator deities, later vanquishes.

Women

Scholars often assume that Maya women did not participate in most rituals, and by extension feminine components of ceremonies are frequently overlooked. This is largely because Maya imagery itself emphasizes the actual performance. If we enlarge our understanding of “ceremony” to include preparation, however, the role of women catches our eye particularly given the importance of costume, much of which was produced by women. Although instances of dressing individuals are extremely

²²³ “Cargo” is a Spanish word, it means a burden, a weight, and this position of authority is seen as something they carry on their backs for the whole year.

²²⁴ The Wayeb days are five days at the end of the 365-day calendar that are considered a liminal period, a time when darkness and chaos reign, and in general, a dangerous time. Taube and Miller, 176-7 (as Uayeb).

limited, we do have examples in painted ceramics from the Classic period where a male individual receives jewelry, headdresses, or masks from attendants. The largest subset of these scenes depicts the dressing of the Maize Deity, usually by females. This section will analyze these dressing scenes searching for clues to the parallel role women surely played in ceremonies of renewal. Additionally, monuments from Palenque will show how women played a vital position in the cosmology and ritual program of Maya society. By looking at the ways women participated, we can also gain insight into the feminine aspects of rituals of time and the workings of time itself.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Maize Deity dies and travels through the underworld to be born again, as part of the acts of creation. Several figures help him along the way: the Paddler Gods transport him in a canoe, women dress him, and the Hero Twins aid in the resurrection process. The Classic period depictions of the dressing of the maize god take place in the watery underworld as preparation for his resurrection (figure 57).²²⁵ Certain elements mark these dressing scenes as taking place in the underworld, namely the water lilies on the headdresses of the maidens, cormorant birds, and references to water. Two or more young, beautiful women tend to him and dress him in his belt ornament and skirt, or carry parts of his accouterment. Vase K3033 (figure 58) is one of few examples depicting the entire sequence of the journey of the maize god in the underworld, including a typical dressing scene. On the left side of the scene depicted in this vase, two nude young

²²⁵ Quenon and Le Fort, 892.

women arrange the hip cloth and belt of the standing maize god. On the right side is the rebirth scene of the Maize God and his canoe journey out of the underworld.²²⁶ That women dress the maize god should not be surprising. Tarn and Pretchel note that “[c]lothing is also female in the sense that everything concerned with flesh and its adornment is female.”²²⁷ Women are the principal weavers, and the ones who literally dress the family, both in contemporary as in ancient times. Thus, dressing is the domain of women.

Numerous other vases represent a combination of mourning and dressing scenes.²²⁸ In vase K6979, a woman pulls her hair in mourning while the other three women give the Maize God his headdress jewels (figure 59).²²⁹ The lady on the right of the Maize Deity has “a painted face and death signs on her body,” which makes her an underworld deity or a mourner; in fact, two of them wear what looks like a percentage symbol, which is a death sign.²³⁰ These dressing scenes have obvious connections with the underworld and death. Many texts in these dressing scenes contain the glyphic compound *och ha’* or “enters the water,” a metaphor for death.²³¹

²²⁶ As an observation, most women who appear in these scenes of dressing the Maize deity are nude. This is a rare occurrence found only in painted ceramics, and that appears to be reserved for divine and not historical beings.

²²⁷ Tarn, Nathaniel, and Martin Pretchel. “Constant Inconstancy: The Feminine Principle in Atiteco Mythology.” In *Symbol and Meaning Beyond the Closed Community: Essays in Mesoamerican Ideas*, edited by Gary H Gossen. New York: Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, University at Albany, State University of New York, 1985, 173.

²²⁸ See vases K4358, K6979, K6298, K1202, K1488, K1566, and K1648.

²²⁹ Taube, Karl A. “Flower Mountain: Concepts of Life, Beauty, and Paradise Among the Classic Maya.” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 45 (2004), 79.

²³⁰ Bassie-Sweet, Karen. *Maya Sacred Geography and the Creator Deities*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008, 290; Taube describes God A’ having this sign, and therefore it is a death sign in: *The Major Gods of Ancient Yucatan*. Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1992, 14.

²³¹ Taube and Saturno, 9.

In this scene, the Maize God has just died in the underworld, which might explain the mourning of the women. In addition, it is likely that royal wives were in charge of the dressing of the deceased body of the ruler in preparation for burial.²³² These examples can be contradictory. On the one hand, the women are mourning the death of the Maize Deity, and on the other, they are the ones preparing him for his resurrection. Thus, the dead ruler embarks on the same journey as the maize deity. However, seen through a Maya lens, death is a precursor to life. Women are the foremost symbol of fertility, the givers of life; who better to aid the deity, as he is about to be reborn?

Bassie-Sweet proposed that part of the dressing rites performed by these maidens includes a sacred bathing ritual: “[t]he water location, the nakedness of the goddesses and their unbound hair suggest that part of the adornment of One Ixim involved the bathing of this god and his costume elements.”²³³ She supports this idea with the common fact that to this day, Maya women are the ones to wash the clothes of the saints. In the Tzeltal town of Tenejapa, only the women clean the necklaces and clothing of the saints before the procession on the feast day of the patron saint, San Ildefonso.²³⁴ It is common in contemporary Maya healing ceremonies to conduct some kind of cleansing of the person seeking healing. In cases where it is believed that the soul has left the body, river water is often used to aid in the return of the soul.²³⁵ If we agree with Bassie-Sweet’s claim that “some kind of soul returning process would have been necessary for the resurrection of One Ixim to occur,” then

²³² Bassie-Sweet, 309.

²³³ Bassie-Sweet, 292. One Ixim is the Classic period name for the Maya Maize God, spelled as Hun Ixim elsewhere in this text.

²³⁴ Personal observation during field study in Tenejapa, Chiapas, August 2006.

²³⁵ Bassie-Sweet, 293. See also Vogt.

perhaps this bathing or cleansing process with river water, in the underworld, was a necessary part of the resurrection of the Maize Deity.²³⁶

While it is difficult, if not impossible, to know if the ancient Maya also had a similar practice of bathing as a soul returning ritual, we do know that sweatbaths were used for various healing treatments.²³⁷ Midwives performed a series of bath on pregnant women before, after, and sometimes during birth.²³⁸ If the Maize Deity is to be reborn, then it is the women, similar to the role of the midwife, who participate in this bathing process for him to be born. There is also a strong connection between the sweathouse and the child, often being called his/her home and roots. If we recall, the inner shrines at the temples of the Group of the Cross at Palenque are also symbolic sweathouses. These are the locations where the Triad Gods were born. Thus, we see that the birth of deities takes place in location and through processes that are the domain of women, from the midwife who aids in the bathing and birthing, to the women who dress the child.

Historical women are also found in this role of dressing men for particular ceremonies, although the connection between these mythological and historical events is not always mentioned. A carved bone from Copán is an example of a dressing scene of a ruler, Yax Pasaj, embodying the maize god (figure 60).²³⁹ Schele and Miller describe the scene as “an unnamed woman at the left, dressed simply in a jaguar pelt skirt, helps the ruler adjust his most intimate apparel, dressing or

²³⁶ Bassie-Sweet, 293.

²³⁷ Houston, “Symbolic Sweatbaths,” 139.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ Schele and Miller, 152; Taube, et al., 35-37.

undressing him.”²⁴⁰ The woman engages in the same act as the corn maidens of arranging the belt or skirt of the ruler. Her sloped head resembles that of the Classic maize god and corn maidens.

The relationship between the Maize Deity and women is a more complex one. Monuments show that historical women wore an attire ensemble usually designated as the Maize Deity’s (as a male god). In addition, Copán Stela H shows Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil wearing this same attire but with a long-skirt typical of women, leading scholars to believe this was a female character. Thus, scholars have greatly debated the gender identity of this deity, with some arguing for male-only, others for an identity that includes a female aspect, and others for an identity that is androgynous. While this is not the space to discuss these issues in detail, the conversation is relevant considering many of the women who wear the attire of the Maize Deity in monuments are recorded performing rituals of renewal. Thus, there is a clear implication not only that women participated in these ceremonies, but that their roles and significance were connected with the Maize Deity, or most likely with its attributes of fertility and ability to engender life. Here, I align mostly with Quenon and Le Fort who propose that this costume is a marker of “progenitor gods” and not only the Maize God.²⁴¹

The site of Palenque, once again, provides unique and significant examples of rulers, male and female, donning the attire of the maize god during accession rites. The Oval Palace Tablet, for example, shows the ruler Pakal seated on a double-

²⁴⁰ Schele and Miller, 152.

²⁴¹ Quenon and Le Fort, 885.

headed jaguar throne (figure 61). His mother, Lady Sak K'uk is dressed with a netted costume and hands a headdress to the ruler. This netted attire includes a netted or beaded skirt, a spondylus shell-Xoc belt piece, and usually a headdress and other maize-related ornamentation such as jade and plumes. This panel commemorates the royal accession of Pakal. It is significant that his mother gives him the royal headdress due to the problematic issues of lineage succession that saw Pakal's claim to the throne through his mother's lineage. Rosemary Joyce states that: "[w]omen wearing the net-skirt costume were often described in texts as mothers of rulers, who had married into the ruling house from other, more powerful sites. (...) Such women were almost literally re-creating primordial conditions, reestablishing royal houses or establishing them for the first time."²⁴² This argument aligns with the ideas shared in this study, that ceremonies of renewal were occasions when order was established through the re-enactment of creation. In the case of Palenque, and perhaps in other sites as well, the predominant presence of women (Pakal's mother) indicated to a grander scale this idea of ordering and establishing a new dynasty.

In a recent article, Looer proposes that men and women who wear the attire of the Maize Deity portray different aspects of this deity, men solar (and male) aspect and women, the lunar (yet still male) side. His observations are worth mentioning at length:

In sum, male rulers wore the beaded net skirt (often short) as an attribute of the Maize God in a variety of ritual contexts, including accession, resurrection, sacrifice, deity conjuration, and solar rebirth. These rites are

²⁴² Joyce, Rosemary A. *Gender and Power in Prehispanic Mesoamerica*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000, 82-3.

thematically related to the mythical dances of creation performed by this same deity. In these contexts, the net skirt may be considered an attribute that indicates that the ruler is acting in the guise of the Maize God as dancer and world creator. This meaning complements the significance of the net skirt when worn by women. In the context of female leaders, the net costume is usually worn with a different headdress that signals an association with the lunar aspect of the Maize God. Wearing this attire, women frequently performed acts of conjuring or presenting K'awiil, as well as conducting sacrifices and martial acts.²⁴³

Previous studies looked at the fact that the Moon Goddess appears in some examples wearing the net costume, and this was part of the gender predicament of the Maize Deity. However, what Looper suggests is that the Maize God (male) had two aspects: a solar and a lunar, and the lunar is the one emphasized by women who wore the net attire. This argument allows for the notion of complementarity in these rituals of creation or renewal in a way that is different from previous arguments, namely that the sun and moon were essential in these rituals.

As an example of how this complementarity worked, he looks at Pier D from House D, in Palenque (figure 62). This relief shows Pakal and a female, perhaps his mother.²⁴⁴ The ruler stands in a dancing position and wears the net skirt and turtle carapace distinctive of the resurrection of the Maize God. His mother also wears a net skirt, with a capelet, the xok-and-shell motif, and one element that Looper argues is the distinguishing one of the lunar aspect of the Maize God: a jeweled serpent headdress. They both hold a “centipede effigy” serving as the medium through which the sun is being reborn.²⁴⁵ The dancing ritual performed by the two individuals

²⁴³ Looper, *To Be Like Gods*, 233-4.

²⁴⁴ The texts do not identify the participants, these are assumptions made by scholars from the context, which I follow and have no reason to doubt.

²⁴⁵ Looper, *To be Like Gods*, 231.

emphasizes this solar rebirth, much as the Maize God dances during his own resurrection. This pairing of the solar and lunar aspects for perhaps the most significant of all the acts of creation — the moment when the sun emerges from the underworld — is indicative of the valuable role women played in creation, and by extension these rituals.

While Looper supports the idea of a lunar aspect of the male Maize God, I would like to stress the fact that it is women who had to perform these “lunar” traits. Specifically, why is it that a female and not a male performed the lunar side of the Maize God? Throughout Mesoamerica, the deity who is identified with the moon is overwhelmingly female. For the Maya, Ix Chel was the young moon and Chak-Chel, the older and waning moon, usually associated with midwives, childbirth, and death. Thus, even if it is an “aspect” of a male deity, it is highlighting a female component or domain. Women are quintessential symbols of fertility, whose fundamental bodily cycles (menstruation and pregnancy/birth) find patterns with those of the moon. Many ancient cultures have observed this fact, including the Maya. By including women, all this symbolism of fertility, birth, and the lived lunar cycles, were brought into an otherwise male/solar-dominant ritual. This was a complementarity of genders, celestial bodies, and calendrical cycles.

The ancient Maya developed a lunar calendar that was included as part of the extended Long Count dates in monuments. This calendar marked the day within the current lunar “month” and the number of days this “month” would have: 28 or 29. A lunar cycle lasted six months, thus, a solar year could fit two of these cycles almost

perfectly. However, this is only one example of a connection between the solar and lunar cycles. The linking of the *haab* (365-day) and the *tzolk'in* (260-day) is yet another. These two calendars were used to name the specific day in the Long Count calendar, and they are interconnected to such an extent that it is nearly impossible to separate them. The year-bearers mentioned above are from the *tzolk'in* calendar, carrying the solar calendar. The 52 years it takes for both calendars to come together to the same “origin” point was considered a very sacred time, one of the most widely observed period endings in all Mesoamerica.

Time, being a concept that was very much a lived principle for the ancient Maya, relied on the cycles of nature. The sun and the moon are a complementary pair that was used to measure different aspects of life.²⁴⁶ The records of rulers performing period ending rituals and all other ceremonies of renewal could show that the realm of time was male-dominated, or at least male-centric. However, the few examples from Palenque and other sites that include women in these ceremonies disrupt this idea. Aside from the fact that these women provide the lunar component to a solar calendar, there is another significant cycle found only in the lives of women: pregnancy. Women are the only ones who can form and give birth to new life. In a ritual where the key component is the birth of the sun and the emergence of new life, it seems women could be the ideal symbol for this concept. Ethnographic accounts from contemporary Maya communities reveal that the length of the *tzolk'in* calendar

²⁴⁶ Previous chapters of this dissertation have discussed the sun's patterns as clear models for ritual practice.

is observed as the length of a human gestational period.²⁴⁷ I am cautious to suggest that the *tzolk'in* could be the female correspondence to the male *haab* calendar, but this is certainly worth exploring.

Conclusion

A key concern throughout the examples discussed in this chapter is the process of embodying and becoming supernaturals and deities. Chapter 2 introduced the notion that dressing the effigies was key in their animation process that allowed them to participate in the rituals as actual deities. Allen Christenson makes an observation about the acts of “transformation” found in the *Popol Vuh*, where the word *wuq'* is used to define this process. He says: “I base this reading on *wuq'e* which is “to embody, convince.” It may also be “to wrap one’s self, envelop, or bundle,” perhaps a reference to the clothing and accouterments worn in transformational dances.”²⁴⁸ This term clarifies that the wearing of specific costumes allowed for an embodiment of that being. The particular section on which Christenson comments denotes that an individual could be transformed into several other beings and materials, including blood, and could transcend spatial boundaries traveling between the earth, the skies and the underworld in his many guises.

Costumes must have held a sacred essence that was transfused to the wearer, thus giving him or her the ability to transform into another being. It is likely that many of the attire elements of gods/goddesses were heirlooms passed down from

²⁴⁷ Stuart, *Order of Days*, 104. Tedlock, 93.

²⁴⁸ Christenson, *Popol Vuh*, 275, note 772.

generation to generation. While some components of an outfit were made brand new (as it happens in many modern Maya communities), many others were kept in sacred bundles for as long as anyone could remember and used during special ceremonies. These bundles contained jewelry, perhaps even jewels to be attached to headdresses, and sacred objects of power held by effigies and rulers. It is well established that for the Maya, identity was often found on the head, best exemplified in the manner of composite headdresses worn by rulers and elite. If deities or the founding father/mothers of lineages once wore these objects, it is feasible that the sacred essence of the gods infused the objects and passed it on to future wearers of that object. As some of the examples in this section have shown, the act of dressing an individual, often by women, was crucial in the bringing to life of deities and supernaturals for particular ceremonies.

The cases explored in this chapter have expanded the notion that rituals of renewal were events dominated by the male ruler, and perhaps a handful of attendants. While this is not a new idea, few studies focus on these additional characters. Here, I show how these various groups of people participated in various roles crucial for re-creating creation. From musicians, dancers, and supernaturals who produced an environment of darkness and chaos typical of the underworld, to sky-bearers who aided in the partitioning and supporting of the world, to women who were essential in preparing for the rebirth of the Maize Deity and the sun itself. As well as bringing to life these ceremonies, these examples show that time was a concept that all members of the community lived. Only the elite participated in the

most important roles for these rituals, but all members of the community could witness them and thus become part of these moments of timefulness. Since modern Maya communities continue to practice ceremonies where the world is re-created, to both commemorate past events and as a way to guarantee their continuous existence, this indicates how strong the belief of timefulness is amongst the Maya. The past is always part of the present, and without it, there could be no future.



16 k'ins, 10 winals, 10 tuns, 5 k'atuns, 3 bak'tuns after the construction of Palenque House D (9.14.8.15.18 6 Etnab 6 Zac), on the date 12.19.19.8.14 13 Ix 17 Sotz' (June 20, 2012) a young girl became the *baah* of her grandfather in the form of a sacred jaguar.

The first scene shows a young girl staring longingly at a photograph of her grandfather (figure 63). She then lights a candle in front of the photograph which now stands on a piece of furniture, recalling the manner many Maya families construct “altars” to their deceased ancestors. The next image shows the girl looking at her open hands where dark spots have appeared, similar to those of a jaguar. Half of her face has also been transformed, although she does not realize it until she sees her image in a mirror. Her reaction to this change is at first one of rejection or disbelief. We then see her standing on a door frame looking in, as if she is seeking an answer cautiously. In the last scene she smiles at the portrait of her grandfather, who is revealed to have the same jaguar spots on his body and face as she does.

In this series titled, *Baalam, Nosotros Somos Nuestros Ancestros / Jaguar, We Are Our Ancestors*, Mayan artist Flor Canche Teh conveys ideas of identity formation that incorporate ancestral beliefs, embodiment of sacred beings, and the strong

connection with ancestors. Canche Teh explains that the figure of the baalam¹ (jaguar) is “the image of darkness, fertility, and power for Maya culture. (...) it continues to be the strength and enigma of the Maya. (...) The manifestation of this figure happens in the person of the grandparents. (...) They are a representation of the legendary baalam.”²⁴⁹ The ancient Maya held the jaguar in high regard, a powerful being who was associated with rulers and gods, particularly the night sun god. Rulers were also shown in concurrence with jaguars for various rituals. In fact, the glyph that describes the notion of embodiment, *wahy*, consists of the *ahau* (lord, king) sign with a jaguar pelt covering half of it, similar indeed to the face of the girl in the *Baalam* series. By becoming a *baalam*, the girl is not merely seeing imaginary animal spots on her skin as part of a dream or something to that effect. She is taking on an actual position, a powerful one. She becomes a figure that will continue to transmit the culture of/to her people, who will serve as a healer, a storyteller, an adviser, and any other roles that the elderly of the community play.

This process of transference of powers and responsibilities depicted in this series shows the gradual transition of her change, and the contributions of the ancestors in transmitting that knowledge until that person is fully ready to accept their new roles. As already discussed in this study, the Maya have a strong belief in communicating with their ancestors on a somewhat regular basis. Many modern-day Maya communities believe that grandparents are alive in their grandchildren, many of

²⁴⁹ From abstract submitted by the artist to the Primera Bienal Continental de Artistas Indígenas Contemporáneas (First Continental Bienal of Contemporary Indigenous Artists) held in Mexico City, Fall 2012.

which are named after their grandparents to indicate this phenomenon. The transference of knowledge from one generation to the next is particularly strong between grandparents and grandchildren, something this *Baalam* series indicate by the longing of the girl for her grandfather.

Conclusion

In this project, I examined the strategies used by the ancient Maya to evoke events that occurred in the ‘past’ and brought them to their ‘present,’ via ceremonies where multiple time and space dimensions coexisted and in which mythological or atemporal beings were embodied. Reaching for the past served a number of purposes: to legitimize a ruler’s right to the throne, to claim a site’s place in history and mythology, and to renew the cosmos. Although the creation story was adapted to the local needs of each site, there was one persistent element found throughout the Maya region: that all actions lead to the sun rising for the first time. Thus, the sun and its path ordered all aspects of life and the cosmos, reflected directly in the calendars, as well as in rituals practiced throughout the year. Events that were considered moments of crisis, such as a period ending or royal accession, required a certain type of ceremony where everything was transformed into a primordial state. It was then that the ruler and many members of the elite embodied deities and supernaturals in order to re-enact creation and set their world in order again.

The case studies presented here showed that taking care of the patron deities was equivalent to caring for time, and this in turn, ensured prosperity of the site. Some of the greatest rulers of Palenque went through great lengths to associate themselves with their local Triad Gods, to emulate the actions of these deities, and create a ritually charged space at the core of their site. At Copán, Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil, erected stelae to mark the sacred points in the cosmos, while also marking the period endings for which he presided over. By depicting himself as he embodied creator deities, he showed his ability to commune with these supreme beings in a way

that challenges us to expand our notions of what embodiment means. The use of stelae for such a sacred purpose confronts the Western divisions that would place rocks as inert objects in contrast to humans and animals that are animated. For the Maya, these divisions are not the same, and stelae, “effigies” and other “objects” can host the essence of deities and supernaturals as their *u-baah*. The last chapter shows that for the Maya, the sacred essence of beings could be hosted by and animated other beings or subject-objects. Thus, human bodies could host mythological animals and supernaturals. In order to accomplish this, women and other attendants dressed the “host” and performed other activating rituals. Once we consider the additional participants in these ceremonies, we see a broader picture of what these ceremonies would have looked like and the reason for each of the many characters on that timefuf stage.

By continually recreating the past in their present, the ancient Maya renewed their community and guaranteed their future, a notion latent in modern Maya communities as well. On one gloomy morning I was walking with the rest of my family down the narrow dirt road that led to my grandparents home in Oxchuc, Chiapas, Mexico. The quiet of the town was suddenly interrupted by the loud noise of music, fireworks, and people howling. When we turned around we saw a group of people dressed as monsters, or at least, to the mind of a seven-year-old, these creatures could not be anything else. This was my first memory of the celebrations of the Carnival and the *wahyob*, beings who come to incite chaos before the renewal ceremonies. My grandmother explained to me the importance of this celebration as

she weaved yet another *huipil*. For years, I saw my grandparents dance the slow dance of renewal during many different rituals, including my own wedding, without knowing the full significance of their actions until now. My grandfather always said: “it is vital that we do not forget our traditions, our ancestors.” The rapid influence of globalization worried him and other community elders about the future of their culture. Thus, they organized a revitalization program where they recorded oral histories, rituals, language, and even traditional skills such as weaving, cooking, hunting, and such. One of the things of which he was the most proud, was taking his small group of children from the *Casa de la Cultura* (community cultural center) to participate in dance festivals across the region. He felt that by teaching the youth, their local history and practices had a chance to endure. As with the ancient Maya, dance is the equivalent of renewal.

This example of cultural revitalization tells us that, just as their ancestors, the Maya of today take matters into their own hands, particularly during times of crisis. They are not sitting still, nor are they passive, or in the past as Western colonial agendas would make us believe. This is a powerful way of thinking about how the Maya respond to events that radically change their ways of life, whether it was drought, battles with enemy states, or the European conquest and evangelization, and up until the current state of neoliberalism and globalization. While these circumstances certainly disrupt their way of life, they do not destroy it, as James Clifford states:

Tribal, aboriginal, or First Nations societies had long been destined to disappear in the progressive violence of Western civilization and economic

development. Most well-informed people assumed that genocide (tragic) and acculturation (inevitable) would do history's work. But by the end of the twentieth century it became clear that something different was going on. Many native people were indeed killed; languages were lost, societies disrupted. But many have held on, adapting and recombining the remnants of an interrupted way of life. They reach back selectively to deeply rooted, adaptive traditions: creating new pathways in a complex postmodernity. Cultural endurance is a process of becoming.²⁵⁰

This is certainly true for the Maya, both ancient and modern, who have found ways to keep their most sacred traditions, practices and beliefs alive, albeit changed in form. By enacting these ceremonies of renewal, all these historical events and any chaos they might bring, are all brought together in a manner that heals and restores, that allows for renewal of life out of death, and shows the endurance of Maya beliefs and ways of life, even until the present moment.

Contemporary Maya artists, as well as community elders, are working to preserve their history. Not in a way that makes things static, with no changes, but more along the lines of a perpetuation, something that is alive and continues. The young Yucatec artist, Flor Canche Teh, explains this idea that the rich cosmology of the ancient Maya is still present in the modern Maya:

The wise grandfathers inherited from their grandfathers their knowledge of the Maya culture, and in life, they will transfer that wisdom which they carry to their grandchildren. (...) This work wants, above all, to show the profound veneration towards the *baalam*, the significance in the transferring of knowledge, talents, and the way of seeing and resolving the world. In other words, it aims to illustrate that what was recorded on codices and stelae is still present in our days.²⁵¹

²⁵⁰ Clifford, 7.

²⁵¹ Canche Teh, Flor, Abstract for her series *Jaguar, We are the Ancestors* (Jaguar, Somos nosotros los ancestros). "Los sabios abuelos heredaron de sus abuelos los conocimientos de la cultura maya, y en vida traspasarán la sabiduría de la que son portadores a sus nietos. (...) Este trabajo quiere sobre todo evidenciar la profunda ritualidad hacia el báalam, la vigencia en la transmisión de los saberes, de los dones y la forma de mirar y resolver el mundo. Es decir, pretende ilustrar que lo

The way this knowledge was passed on was through oral traditions, visual practices, and performances; all practices that involve lived and embodied actions. If this knowledge is to be kept and continue to live it has to be practiced, it has to be lived. The current study is but a small contribution to the vast field of Maya studies. With this, I provide a vision that broadens our understanding of the purpose and meaning of ceremonies of renewal. More significantly, I challenge current ideas around time to allow for the possibility that multiple time-spaces can coexist in moments of timefulness. The actions of the Maya, ancient and modern, certainly demonstrate that they were/are able to move between the past, the present and the future, that these “times” are all interconnected. This is but an opening into the Maya ways of living time and performing memory.

plasmado en códices y en estelas, sigue vigente en nuestros días.”

Figures



Figure 1. Lintels 24, 25 and 26, Yaxchilan, Chiapas, Mexico. 681-726 CE. Source: Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc. (FAMSI), www.famsi.org

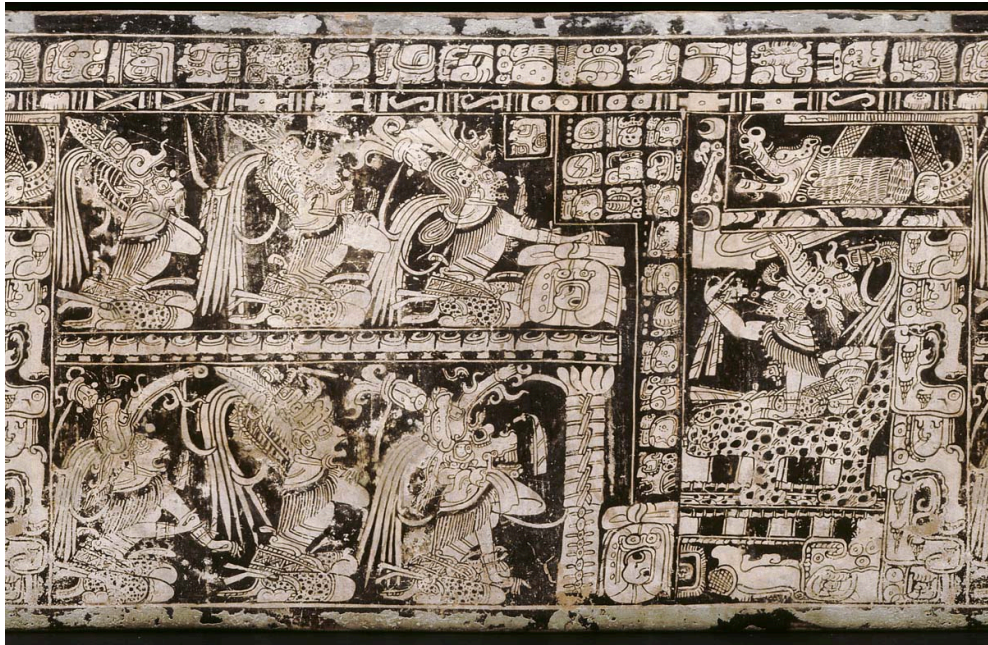


Figure 2. The Vase of the Seven Gods. Vase K2796. Classic Period. Source: Maya Vase Database, www.research.mayavase.com

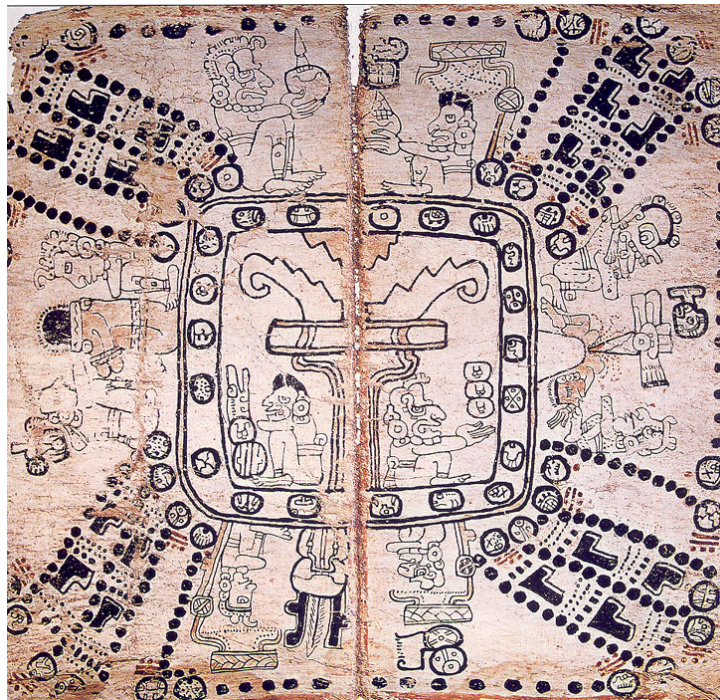


Figure 3. Cosmogram. *Madrid Codex*, folios 75-76. Postclassic Period. Source: Latin American Studies Website: <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/maya/madrid-codex-pg-75-76.jpg>



Figure 4. New Year Pages. *Dresden Codex*, folios 25-28. Postclassic Period. Source: Maya Codices Database, <http://mayacodices.org/AlmDetail.asp?almNum=357>



Figure 5. The Journey of the Maize God. Vase K3033. Classic Period. Source: Maya Vase Database, www.research.mayavase.com



Figure 6. The Resurrection Plate. K1892. Classic Period. Source: Maya Vase Database, www.research.mayavase.com

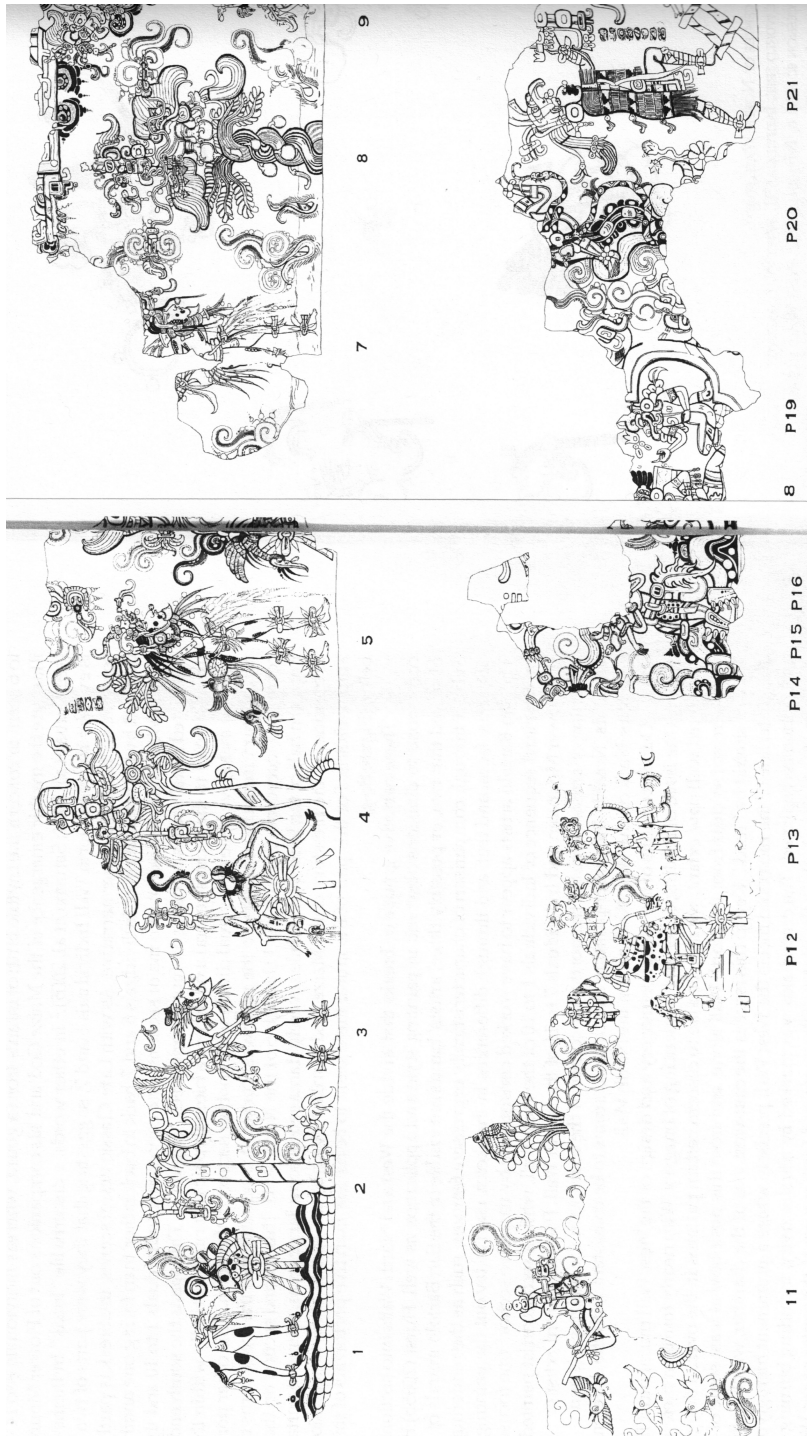


Figure 7. Offerings at Four Trees. West Wall, Las Pinturas Sub-1A structure, San Bartolo, Guatemala. ca. 100 BCE. Source: *The Murals of San Bartolo, El Peten, Guatemala Part 2: The West Wall.*



Figure 8. Dance of Maize God inside a cave and coronation scene. Pinturas Sub-1A West Wall Murals, San Bartolo, Guatemala, ca. 100 BCE. Source: *The Murals of San Bartolo, El Peten, Guatemala Part 2: The West Wall*.



Figure 9. Emergence of four original couples and birth of babies from a gourd. Pinturas Sub 1-A North Wall Murals, San Bartolo, Guatemala. ca. 100 BCE. Source: *The Murals of San Bartolo, El Peten, Guatemala Part 1: The North Wall*.

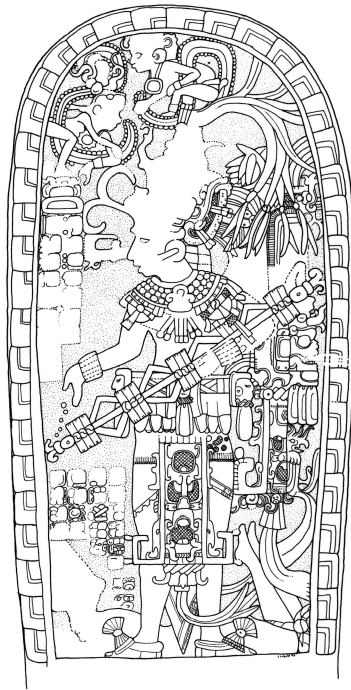


Figure 10. Scattering ritual, Stela 11, Tikal. Late Classic Period. Source: The Linda Schele Drawings Collection, www.famsi.org

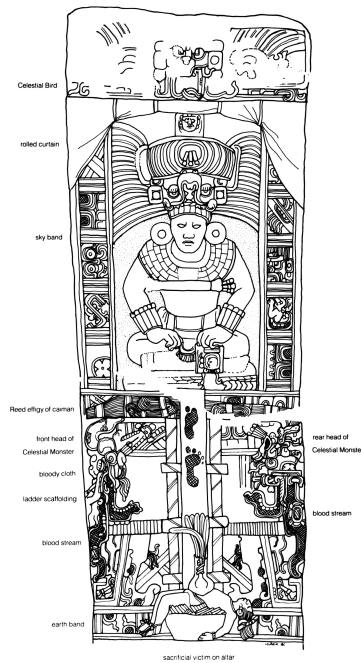


Figure 11. Stela 11, Piedras Negras, Guatemala. Ca. 731 CE. Source: The Linda Schele Drawings Collection, www.famsi.org.



Figure 12. Flooding. Dresden Codex, folio 74. Postclassic Period. Source: Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc. (FAMSI), www.famsi.org



Figure 13. Radial pyramid. El Castillo, Chichen Itza, Mexico. Postclassic Period.
<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/content/dam/travel/photos/000/280/28011.jpg>



Figure 14. Structure A-3, Seibal, Guatemala. Postclassic Period. Source: Arizona Archaeological and Historical Society, <http://www.az-arch-and-hist.org/2013/09/daniela-triadan-new-theory-of-mayan-origins/>



Figure 15. Cosmic Plate. K1609. Late Classic Period. Source: Maya Vase Database, www.research.mayavase.com



Figure 16. Holmul Dancer Vase. K633 (MS1374). Source: Maya Vase Database, www.research.mayavase.com

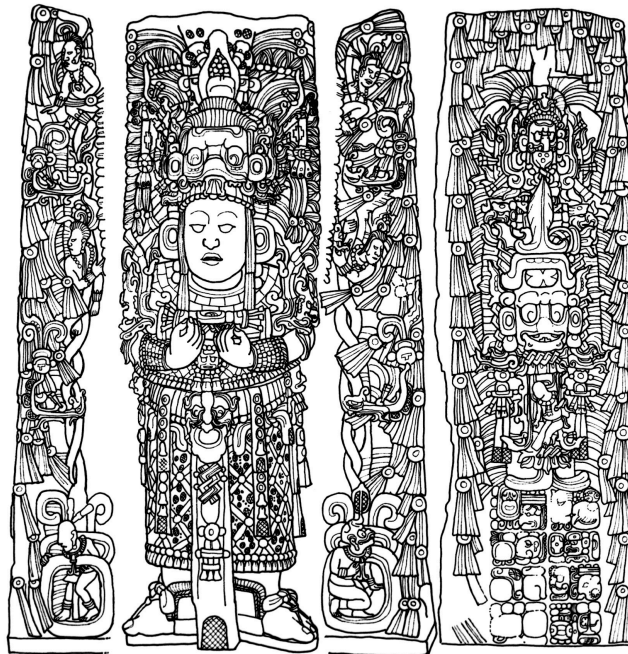


Figure 17. Stela H, Copán, Honduras. 730 CE. Source: The Linda Schele Drawings Collection, www.famsi.org.

Dates - Long Count






<p>K'IN 1 day</p> <p>#s 0-19</p>	
<p>WINAL / WINAAK 20 k'in = 20 days</p> <p>#s 0-17</p>	
<p>TUUN / HAAB 18 winal = 360 days</p> <p>#s 0-19</p>	
<p>K'ALTUUN 20 tuun = 7,200 days</p> <p>#s 0-19</p>	
<p>BAK'TUUN / PIK 400 tuun = 144,000 days</p> <p>#s 0-19</p>	

Figure 18. Personified periods of time. Source: Inga Calvin workbook on Maya Writing. www.research.famsi.org.

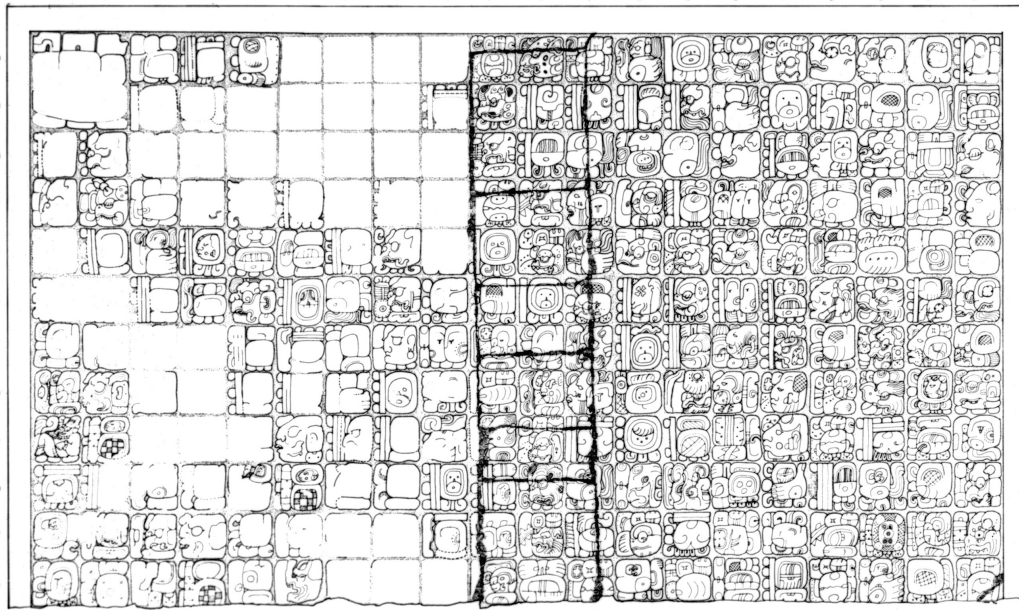


Figure 19. Tablet of the Inscriptions, East panel. Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico. Late Classic. Source: The Linda Schele Drawings Collection, www.famsi.org.

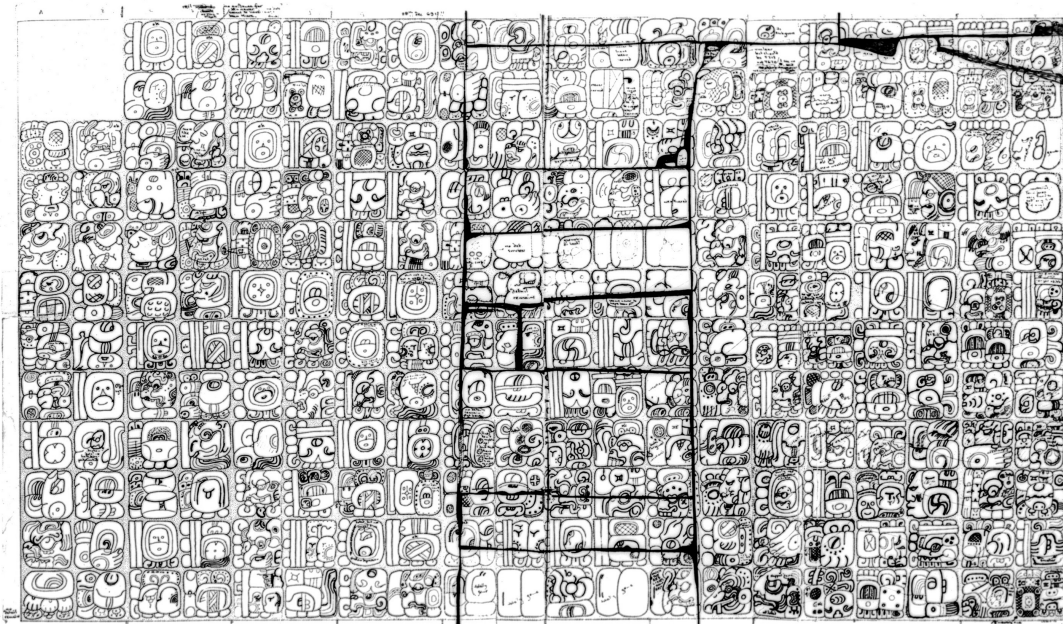


Figure 20. Tablet of the Inscriptions, Central panel. Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico. Late Classic. Source: The Linda Schele Drawings Collection, www.famsi.org.

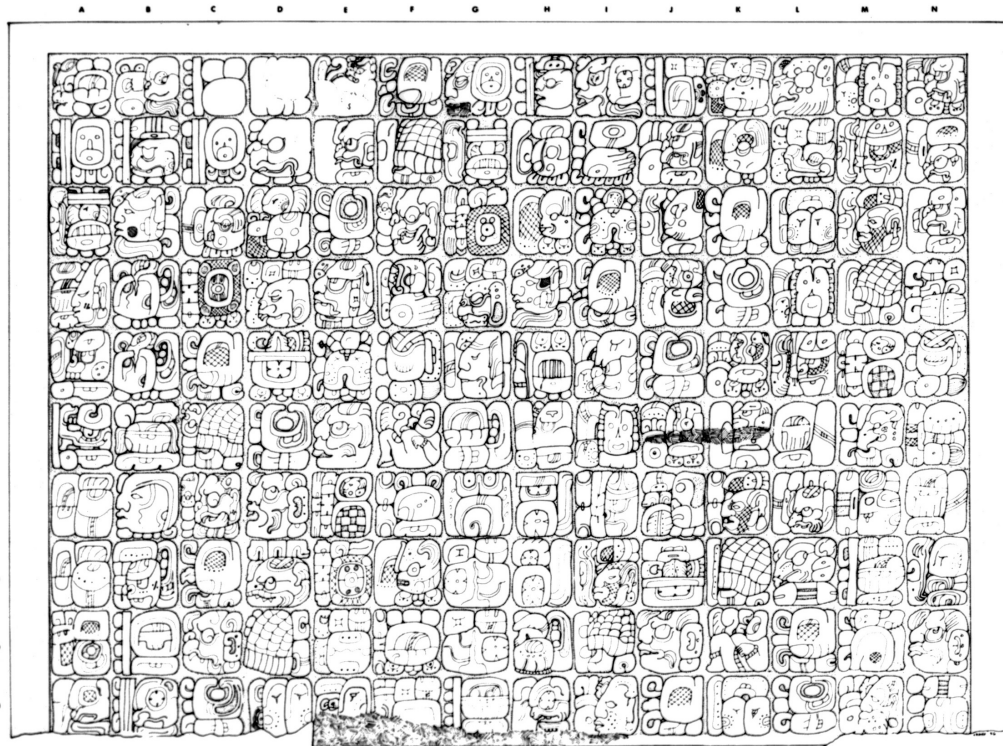


Figure 21. Tablet of the Inscriptions, West panel. Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico. Late Classic. Source: The Linda Schele Drawings Collection, www.famsi.org.

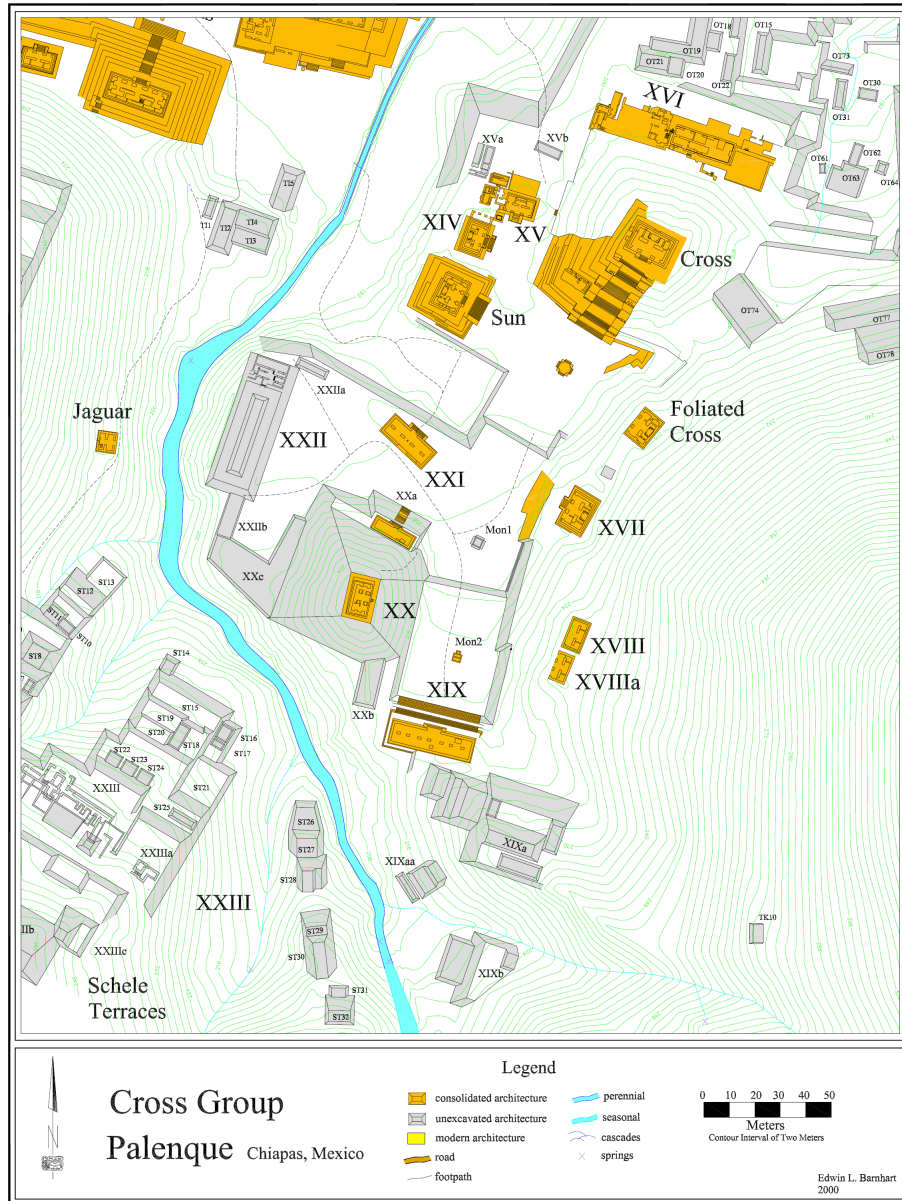


Figure 22. Group of the Cross and neighboring structures. Site map, Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico. Source: Edwin Barnhart, 2001: fig. 2.3.

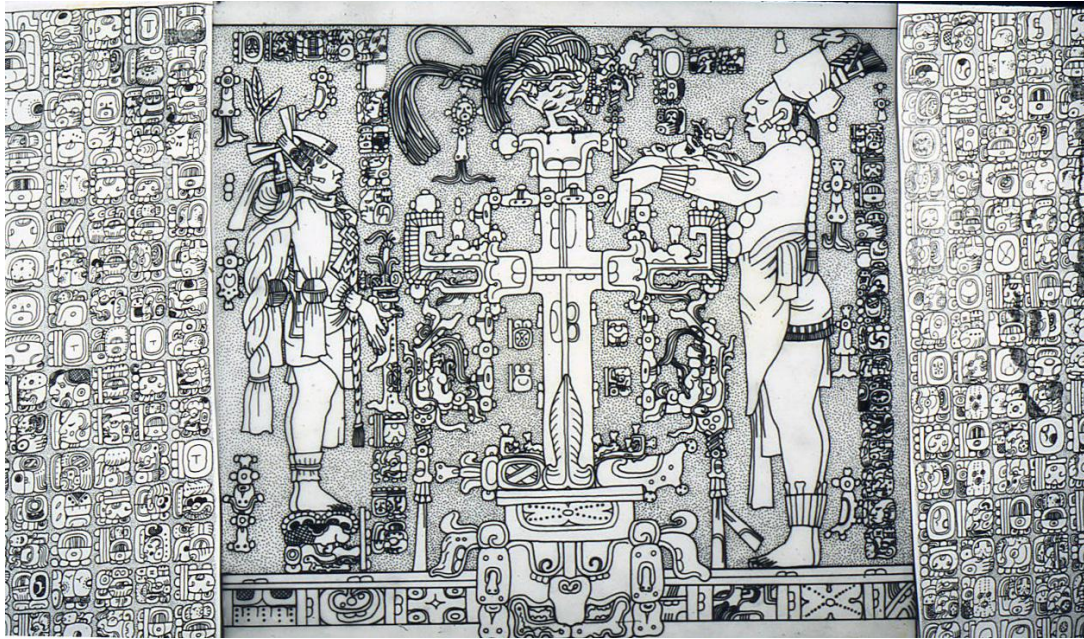


Figure 23. Central panel and side panels with texts, Temple of the Cross. Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico. Late Classic. Source: The Linda Schele Drawings Collection, www.famsi.org.

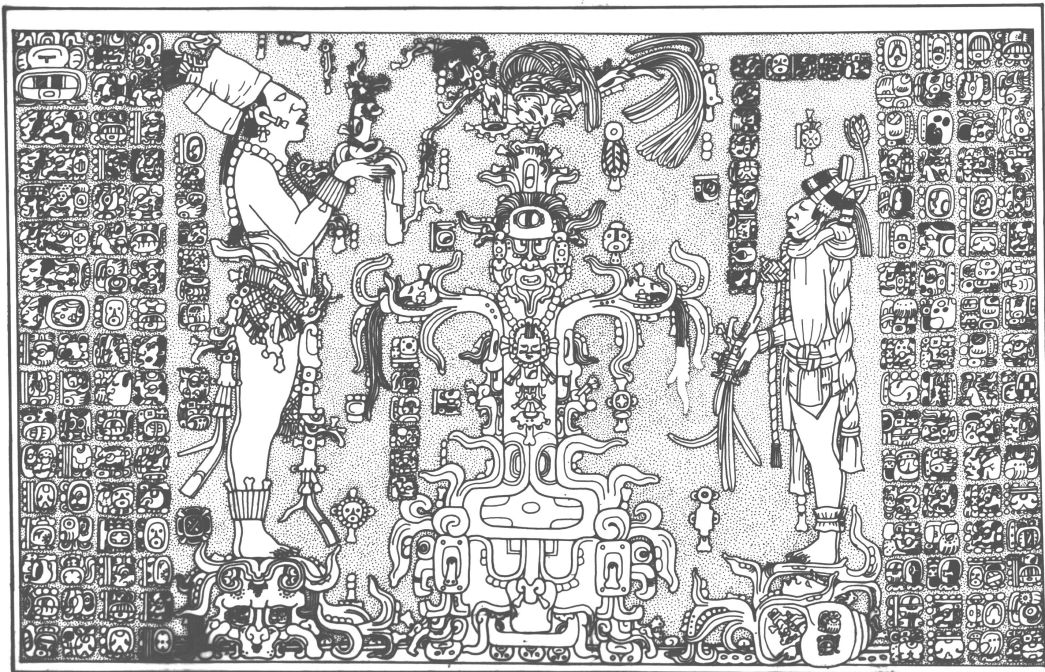


Figure 24. Central panel, Temple of the Foliated Cross. Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico. Late Classic. Source: The Linda Schele Drawings Collection, www.famsi.org.

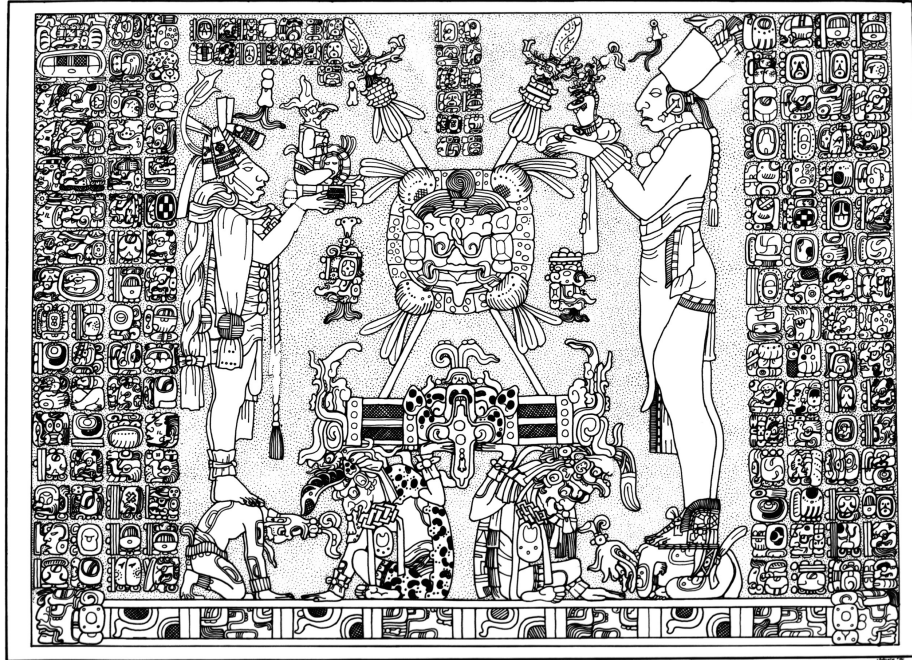


Figure 25. Central panel, Temple of the Sun. Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico. Late Classic. Source: The Linda Schele Drawings Collection, www.famsi.org.

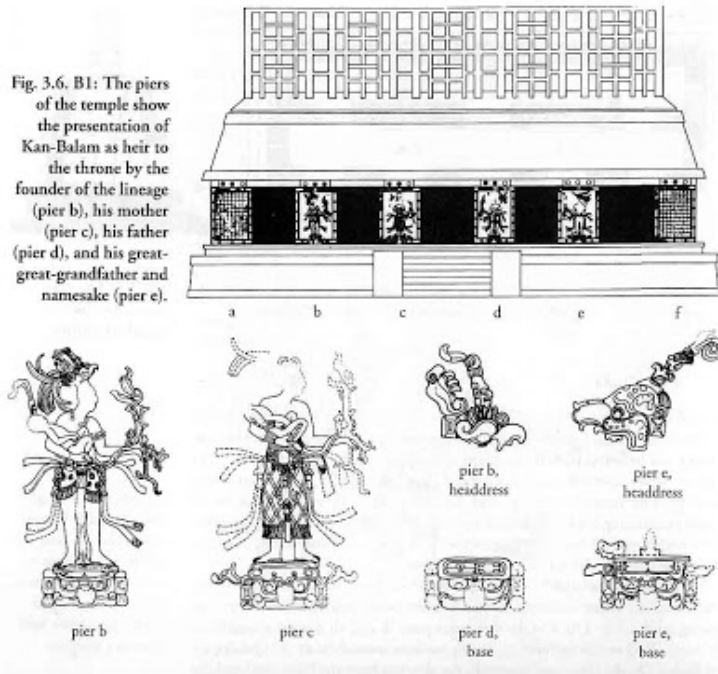


Fig. 3.6. B1: The piers of the temple show the presentation of Kan-Balam as heir to the throne by the founder of the lineage (pier b), his mother (pier c), his father (pier d), and his great-great-grandfather and namesake (pier e).

Figure 26. Piers, Temple of the Inscriptions. Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico. Late Classic. Source: The Linda Schele Drawings Collection, www.famsi.org.

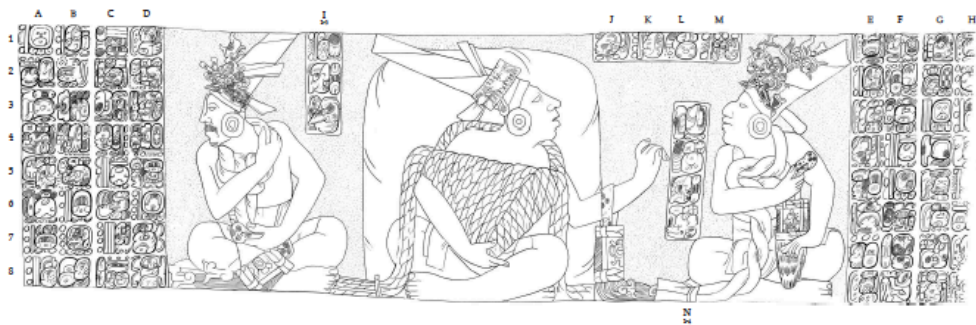


Figure 27. West side of platform, Temple XIX, Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico. Late Classic. Drawing by David Stuart, Photograph by Jorge Perez de Lara. Source: Stuart, *Inscriptions Temple XIX*.



Figure 28. South side of platform, Temple XIX, Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico. Late Classic. Drawing by David Stuart, Photograph by Jorge Perez de Lara. Source: Stuart, *Inscriptions Temple XIX*.

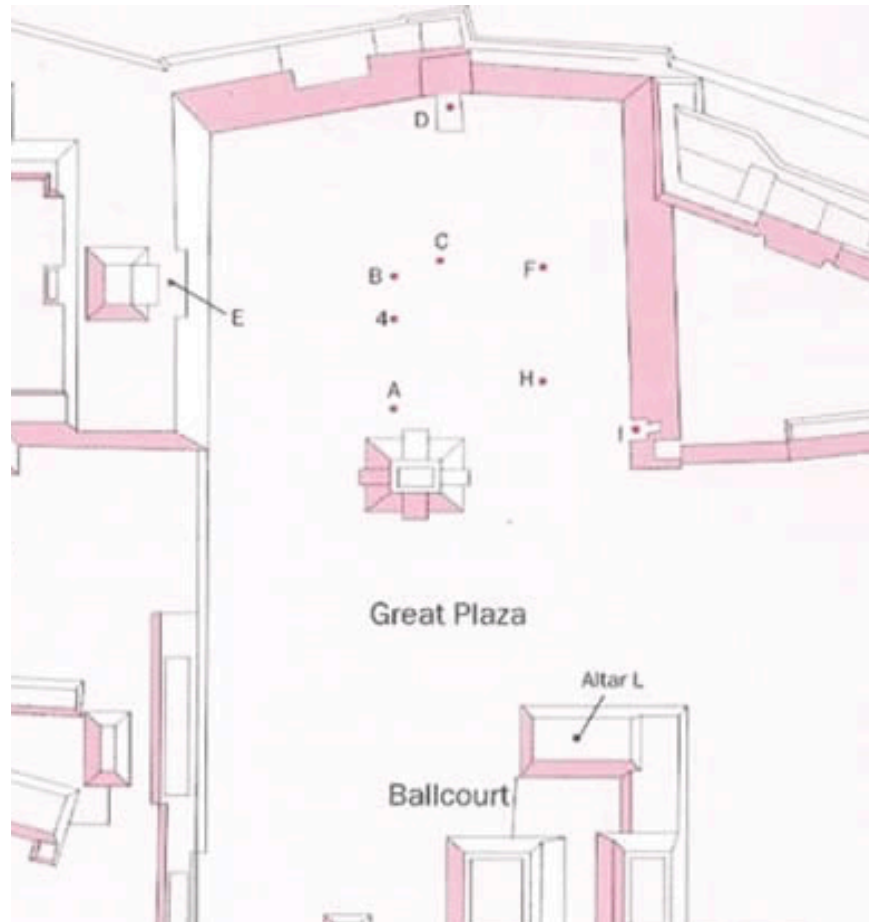


Figure 29. Detail of site map focusing the Great Plaza of Copán with stelae of Waxaklahuun Ubaah K'awiil. Source: Martin and Grube, *Chronicle of Maya Kings and Queens*.



Figure 30. Stela C, west side. Copán, Honduras. 711 CE. Source: Baudez, *Maya Sculpture at Copán*. Copán

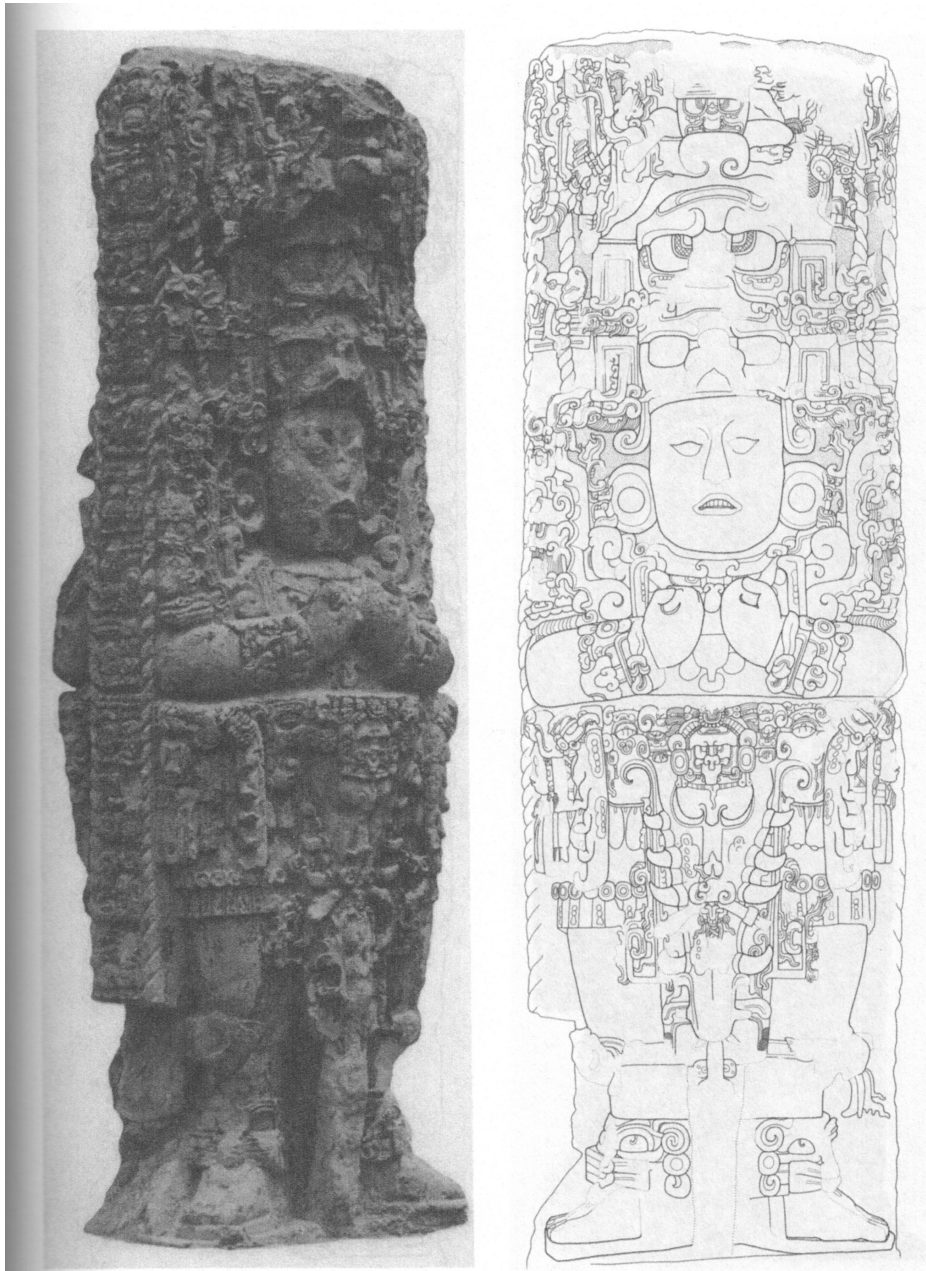


Figure 31. Stela C, east side. Copán, Honduras. 711 CE. Source: Baudez, *Maya Sculpture of Copán*.

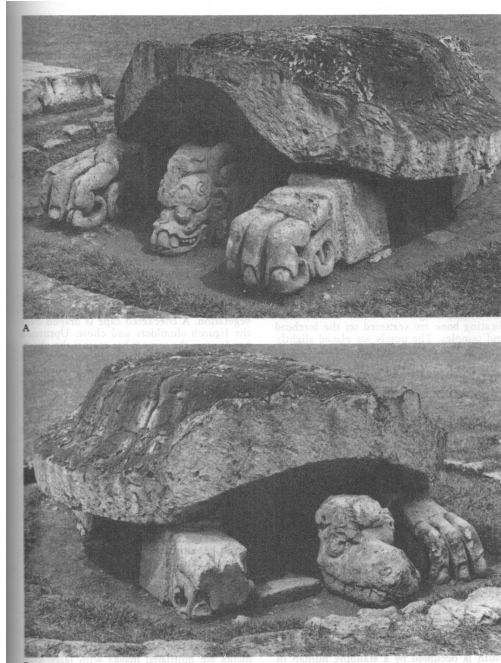


Figure 32. Altar in front of stela C. Copán, Honduras. 711 CE. Source: Baudez, *Maya Sculpture of Copán*.

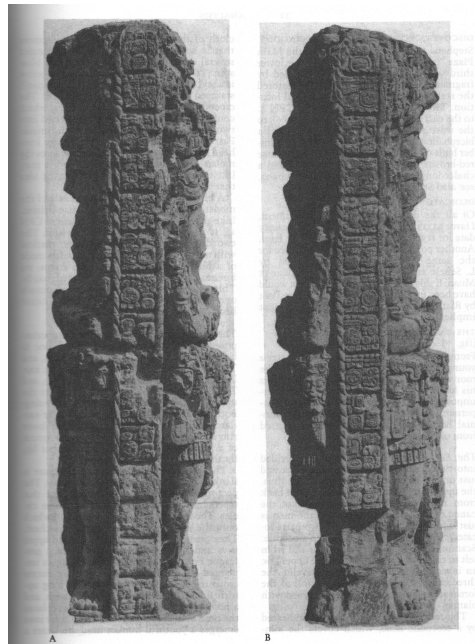


Figure 33. Inscriptions/sides of Stela C. Copán, Honduras. 711 CE. Source: Baudez, *Maya Sculpture of Copán*.

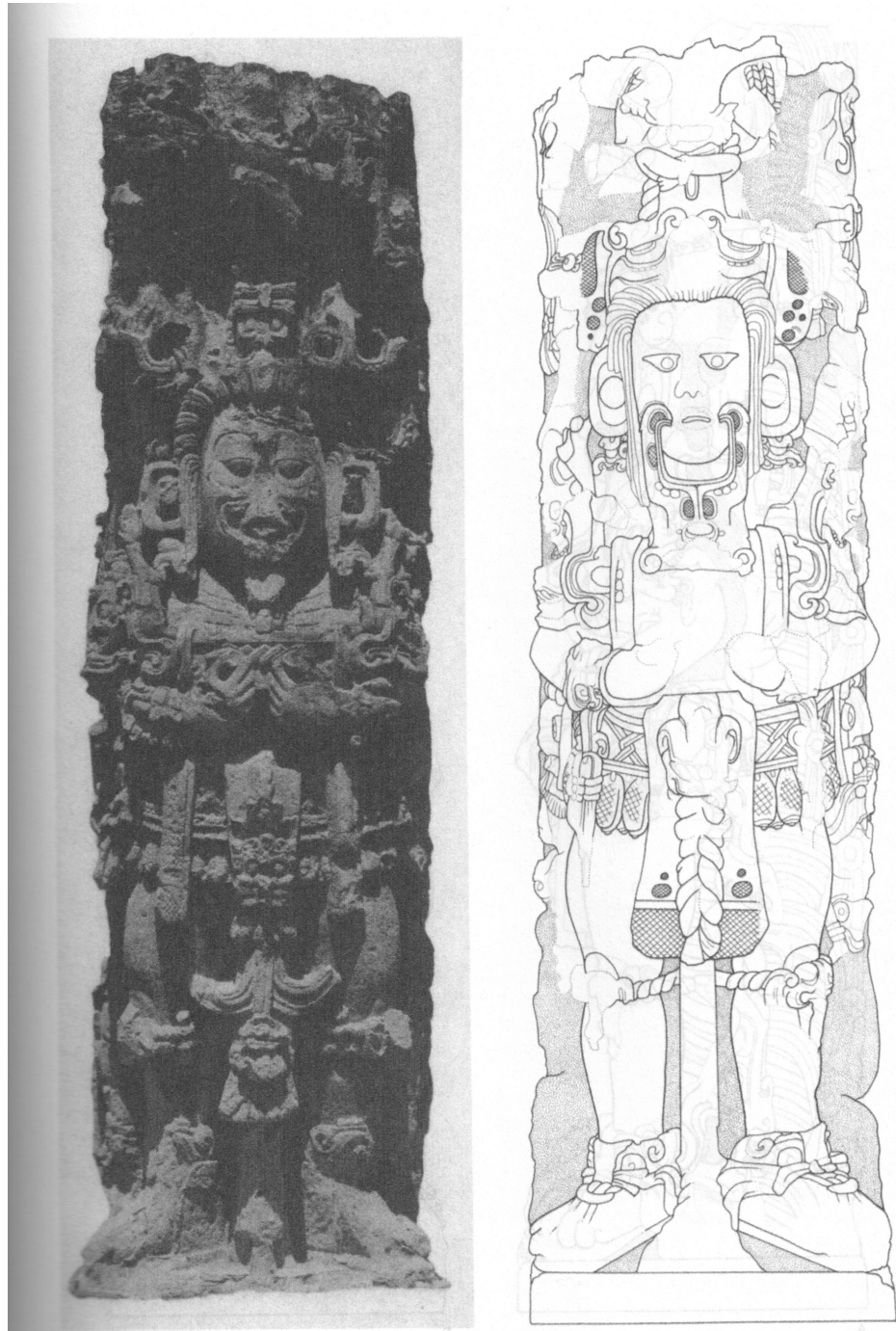


Figure 34. Stela F, west side (front). Copán, Honduras. 721 CE. Source: Baudez, *Maya Sculpture of Copán*.

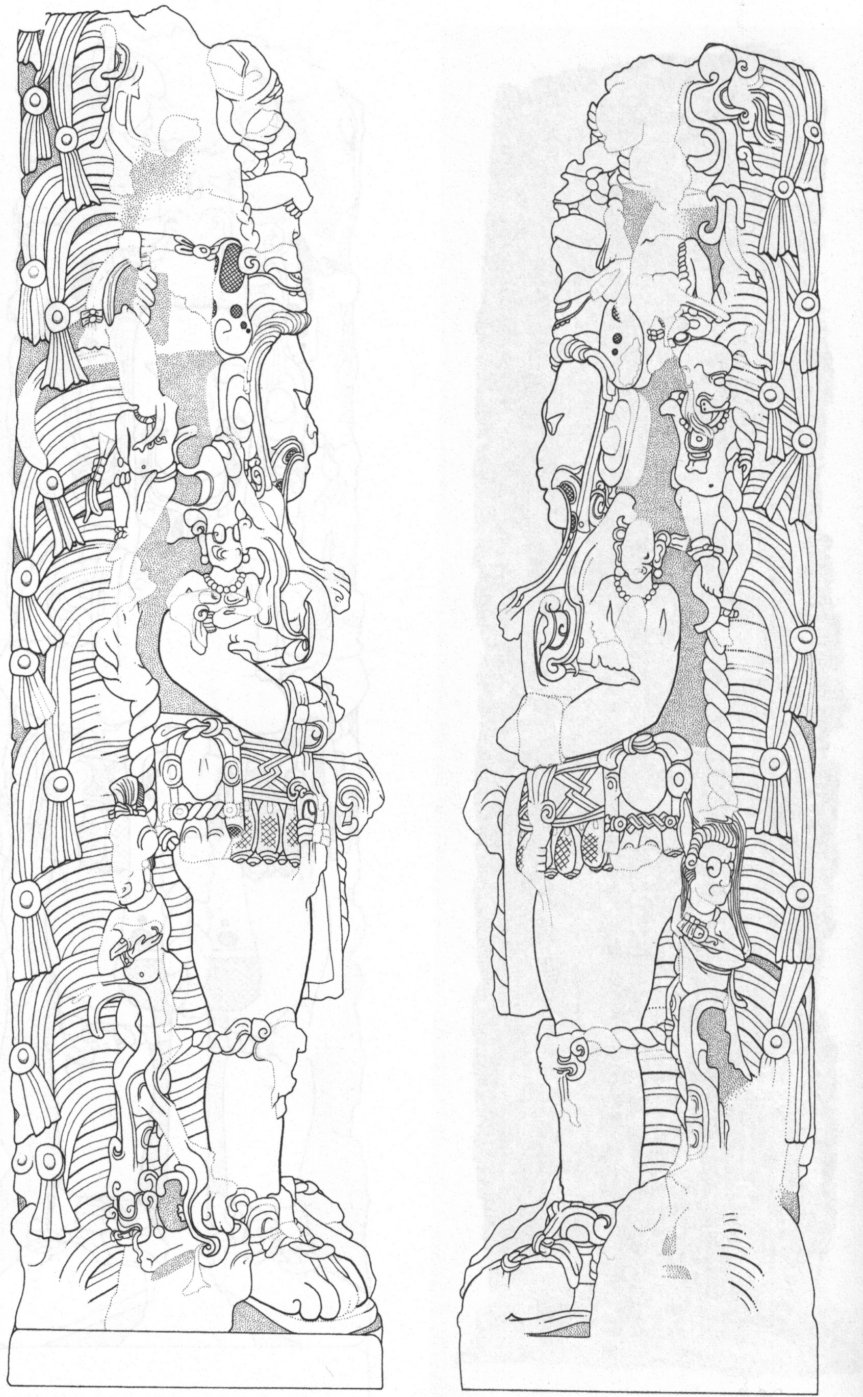
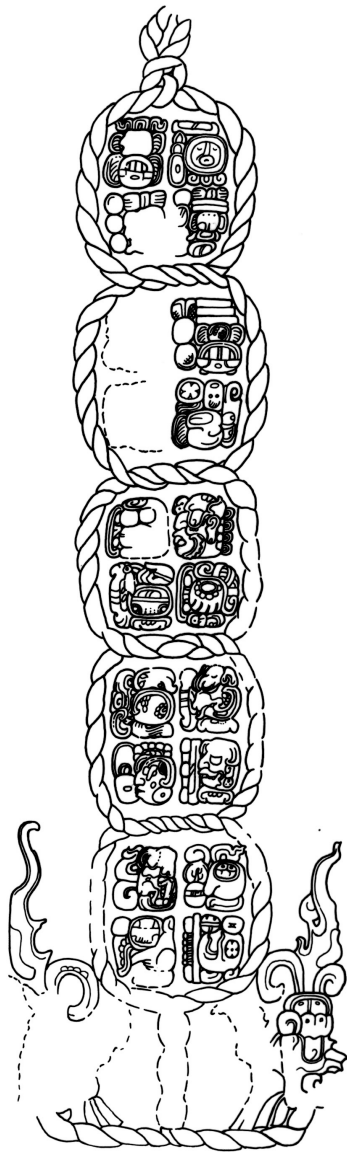


Figure 35. Stela F, north and south side. Copán, Honduras. 721 CE. Source: Baudez, *Maya Sculpture of Copán*.



Copán Stela F. East. Mark Van Stone 6/96/CPM11



Figure 36. Stela F. East side (back). Copán, Honduras. 721 CE. Drawing by Mark Van Stone, www.famsi.org

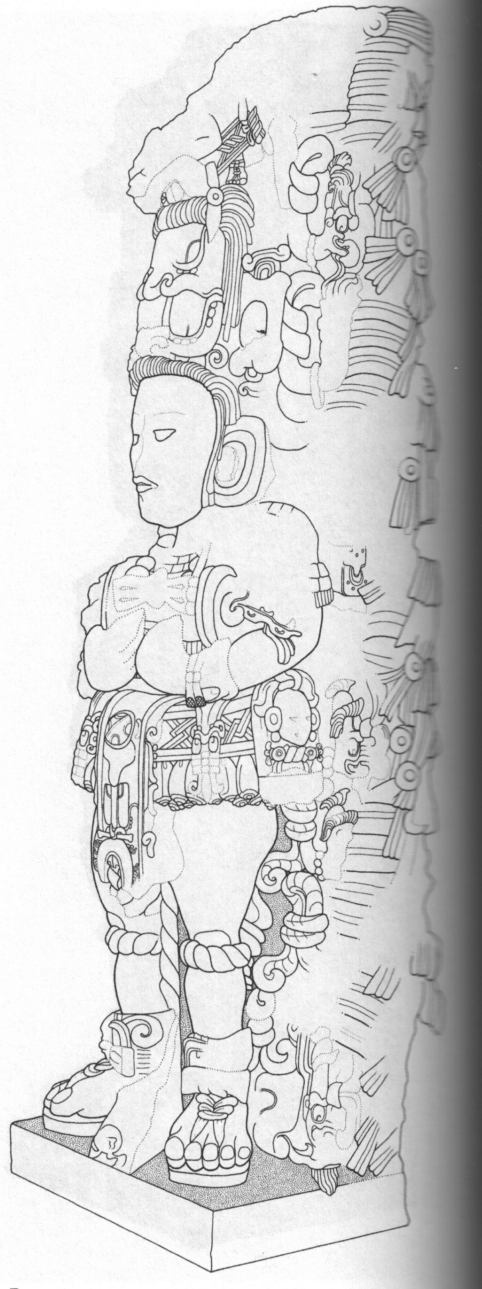
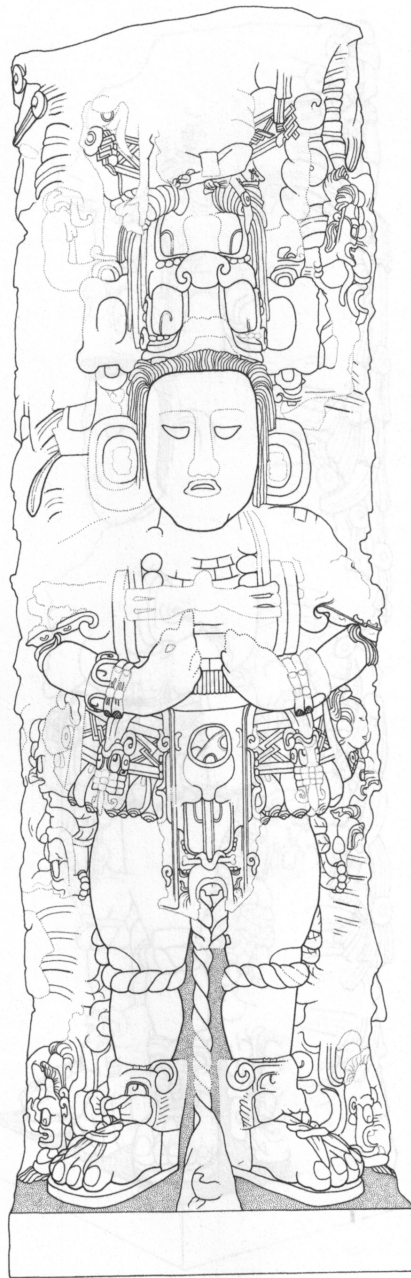


Figure 37. Stela 4. East and northeast side. Copán, Honduras. 726 CE. Source: Baudez, *Maya Sculpture of Copán*.

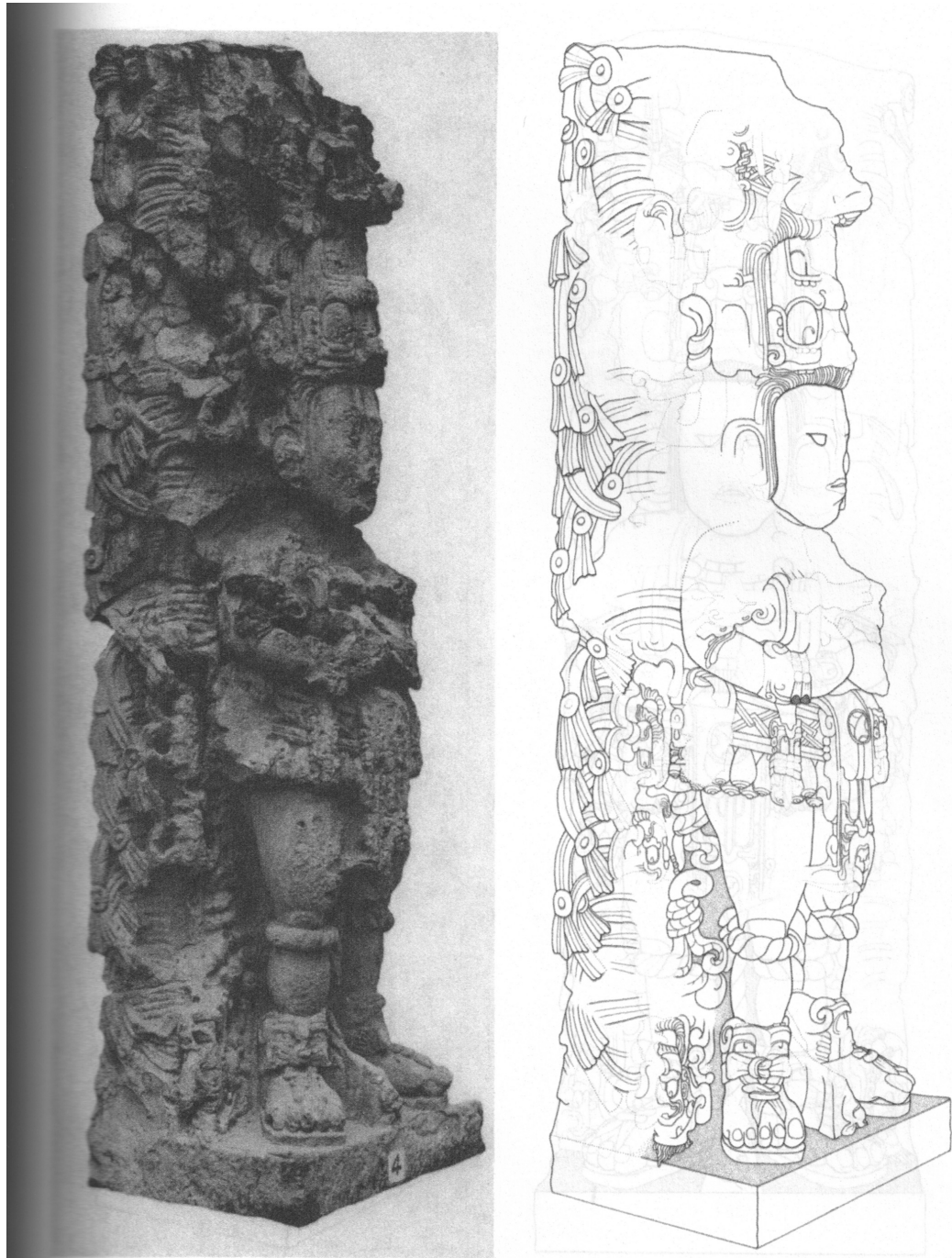


Figure 38. Stela 4, southeast side. Copán, Honduras. 726 CE. Source: Baudez, *Maya Sculpture of Copán*.



Figure 39. Stela 4, inscriptions, west side. Copán, Honduras. 726 CE. Source: Copán Maya Ruins website: https://mayaruins.com/copan/a1_1093.html

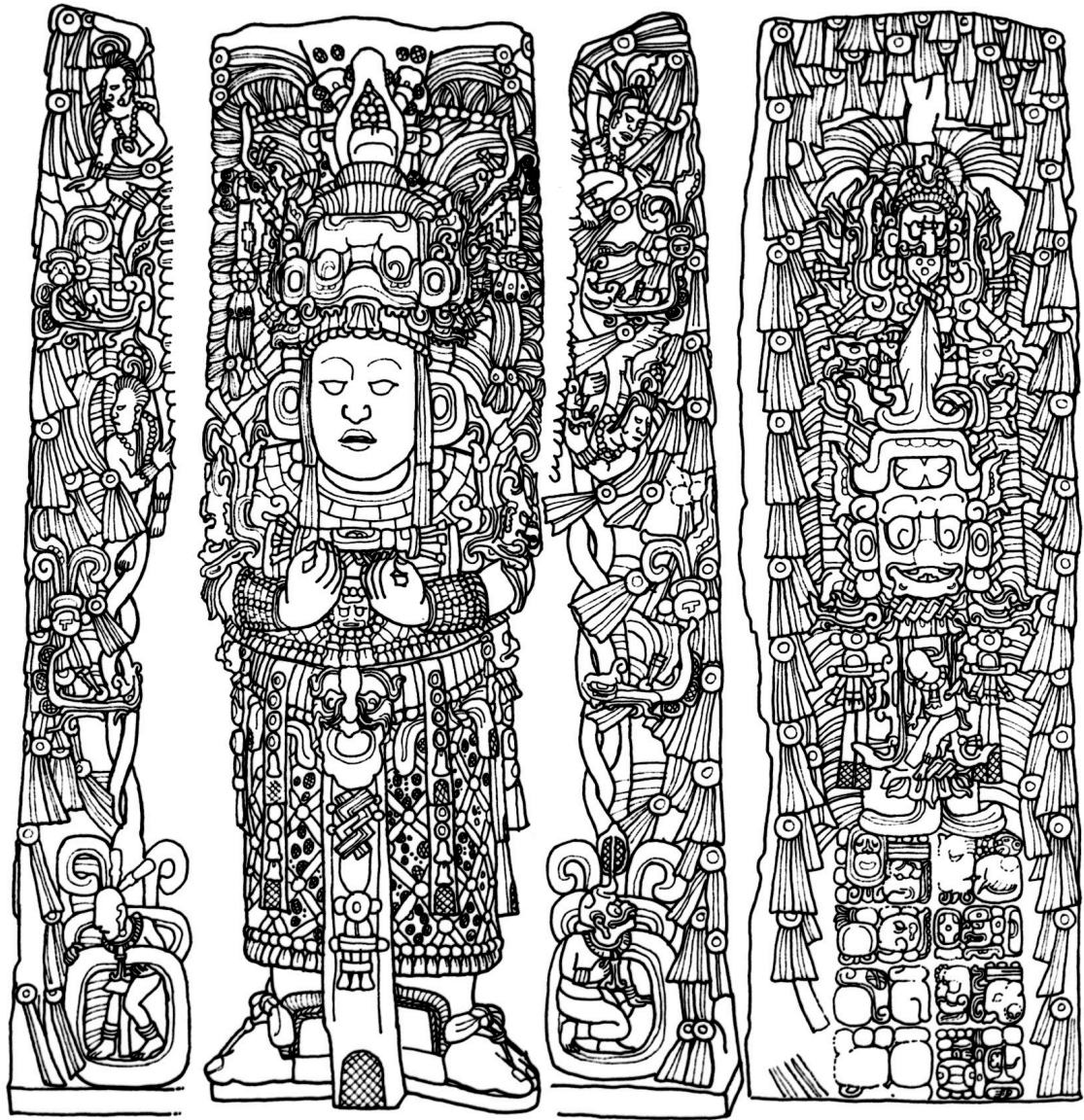


Figure 40. Stela H, all sides. Copán, Honduras. 730 CE. Source: The Linda Schele Drawings Collection, www.famsi.org

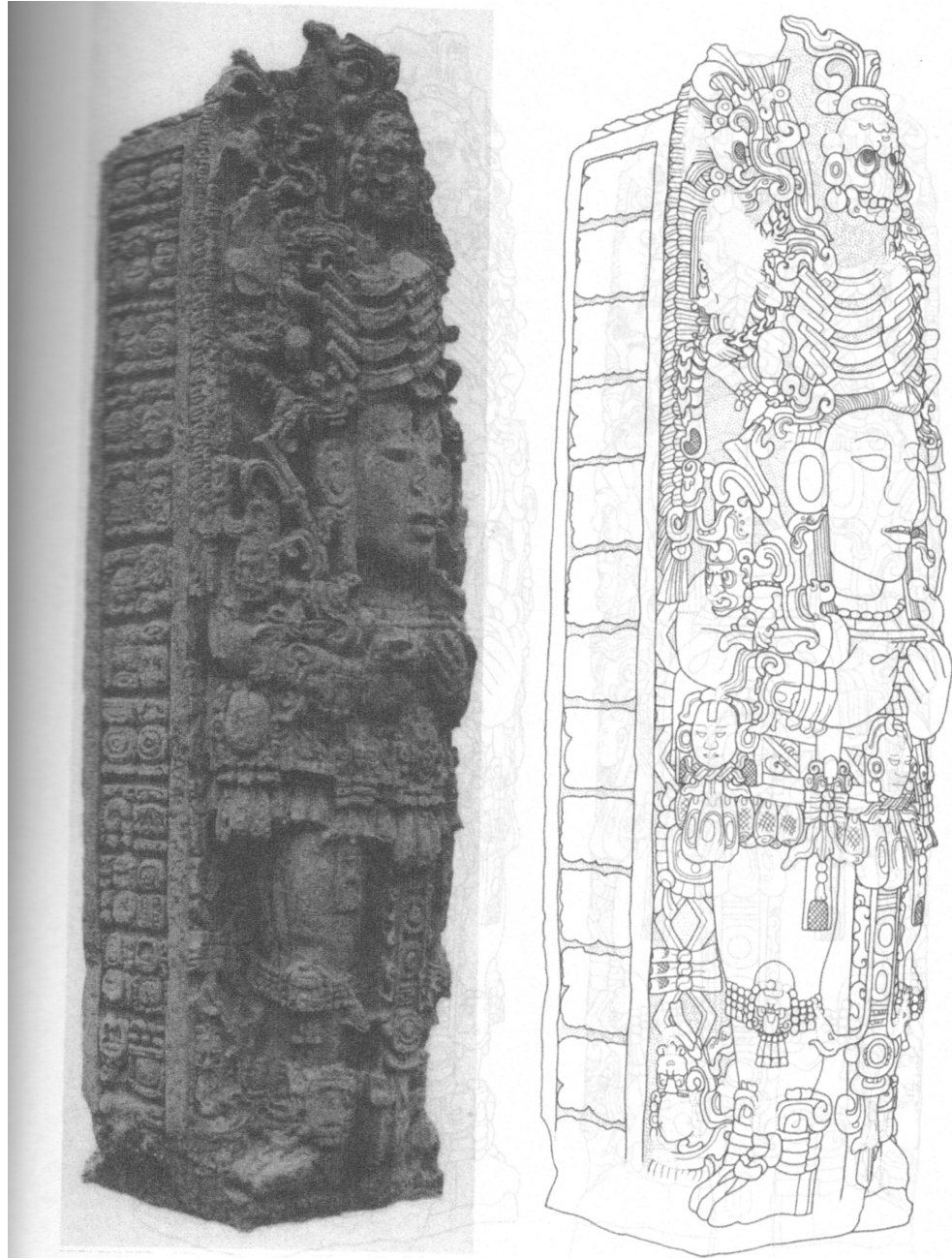
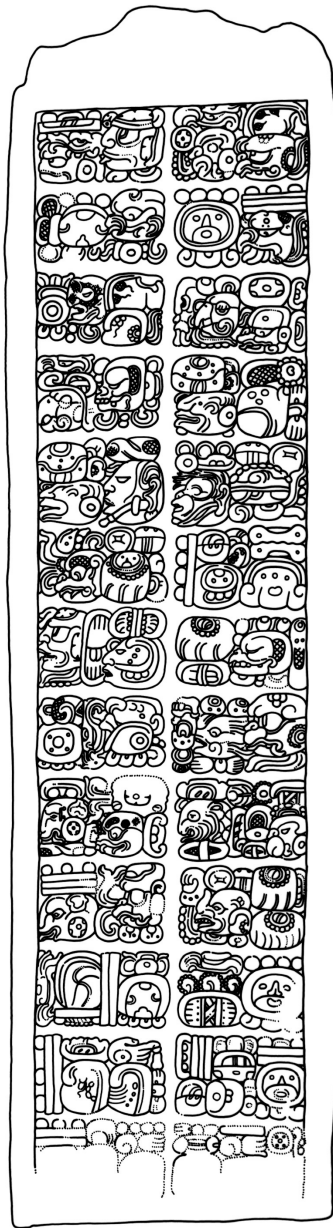


Figure 41. Stela A, south side. Copán, Honduras. 731 CE. Source: Baudez, *Maya Sculpture of Copán*.



CPJ 1 / STELA-A, COPAN.



Figure 42. Stela A, north side. Copán, Honduras. 731 CE. Source: Mark Van Stone, www.famsi.org

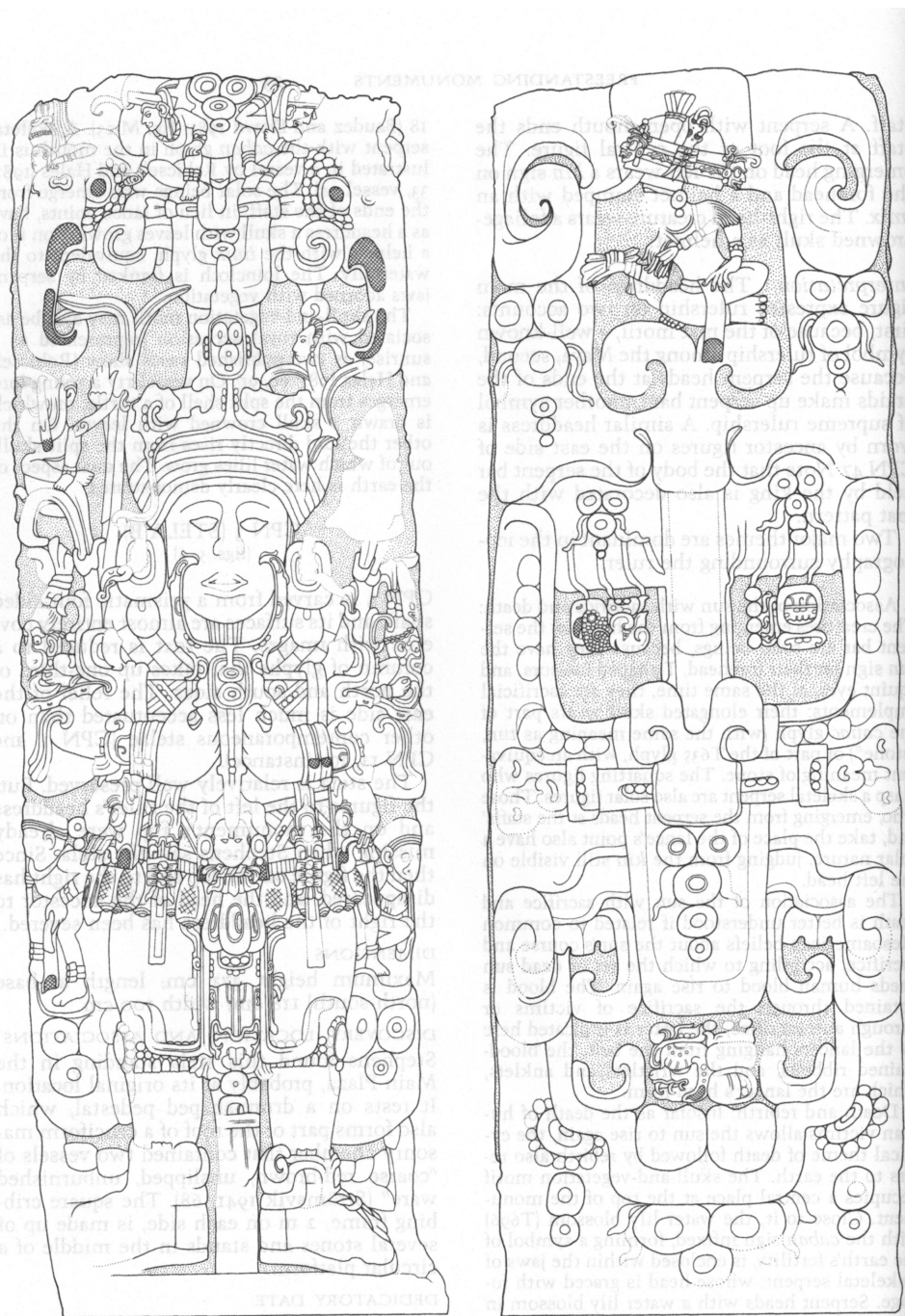


Figure 43. Stela B, east and west sides. Copán, Honduras. 731 CE. Source: Baudez, *Maya Sculpture of Copán*.

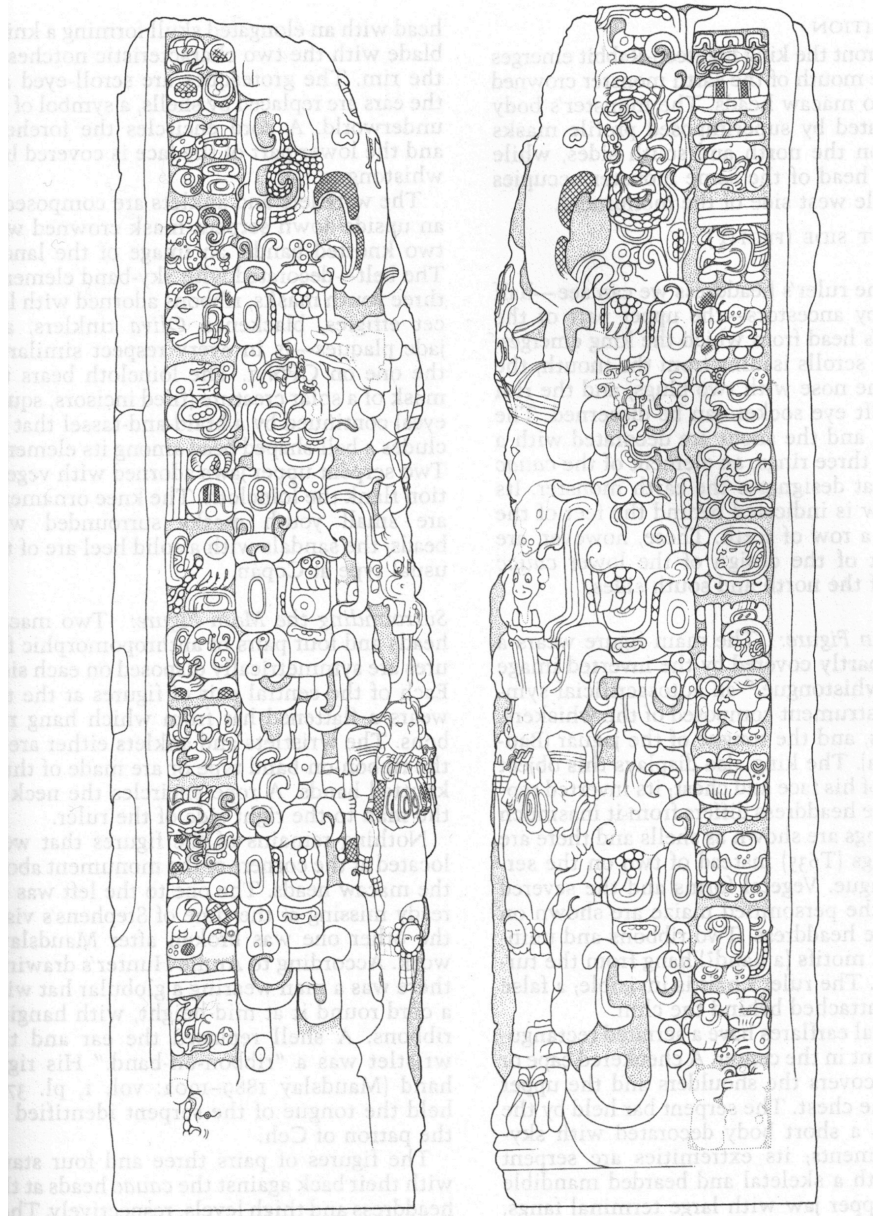


Figure 44. Stela B, inscriptions, south and north sides. Copán, Honduras. 731 CE.
Source: Baudez, *Maya Sculpture of Copán*.

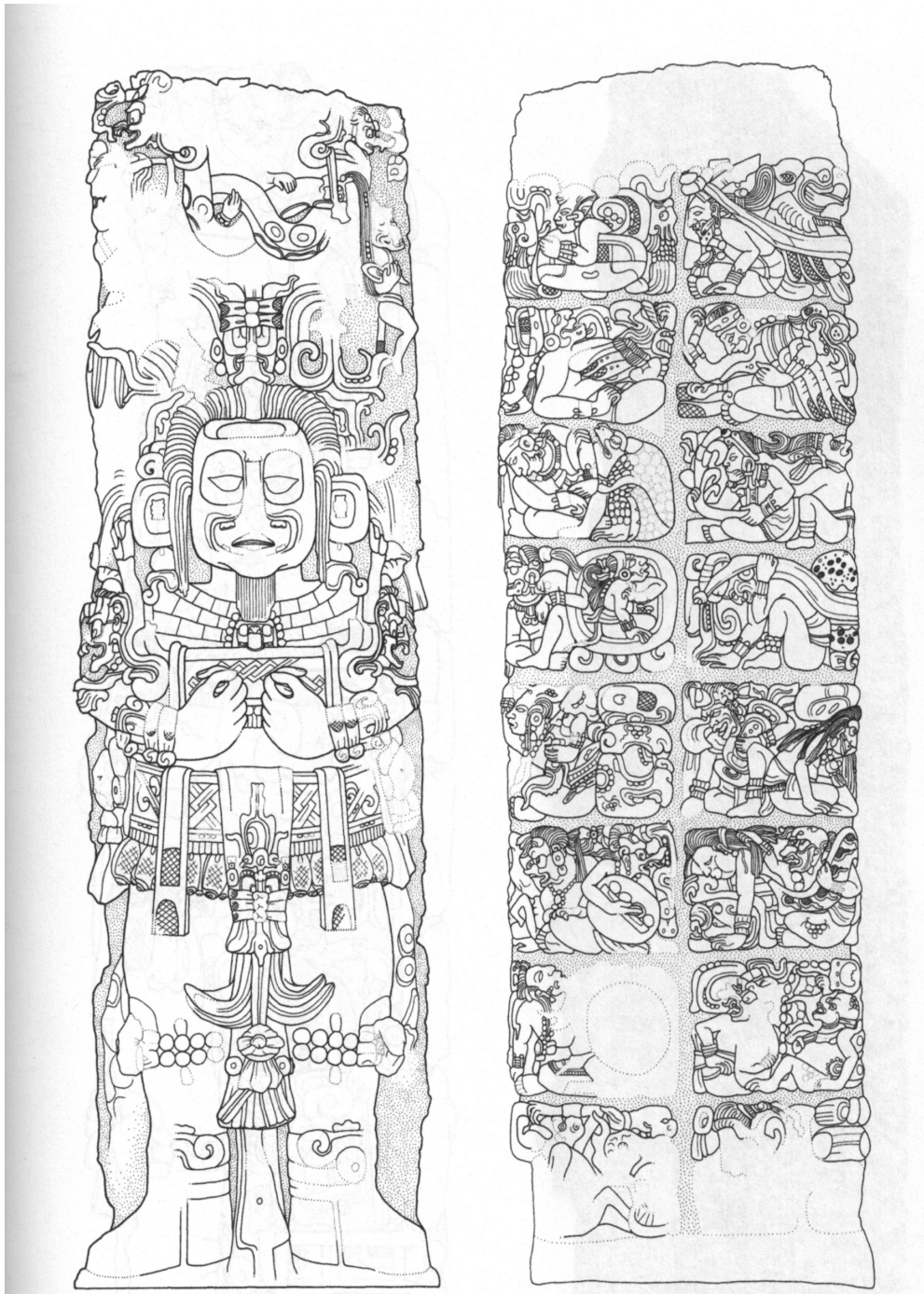


Figure 45. Stela D, south and north sides. Copán, Honduras. 736 CE. Source: Baudez, *Maya Sculpture of Copán*.

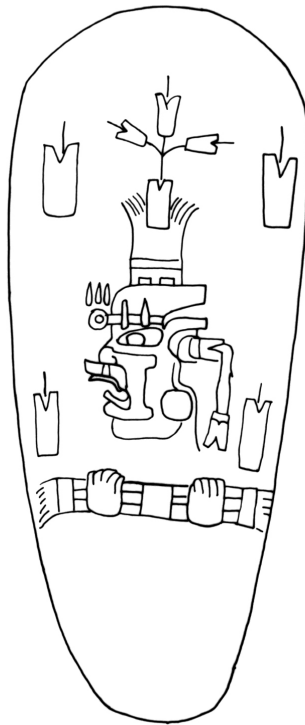


Figure 46. Arroyo Pesquero celt. Preclassic Period. Olmec. Source: Ancient Americas at LACMA, <http://ancientamericas.org/collection/aa010437>

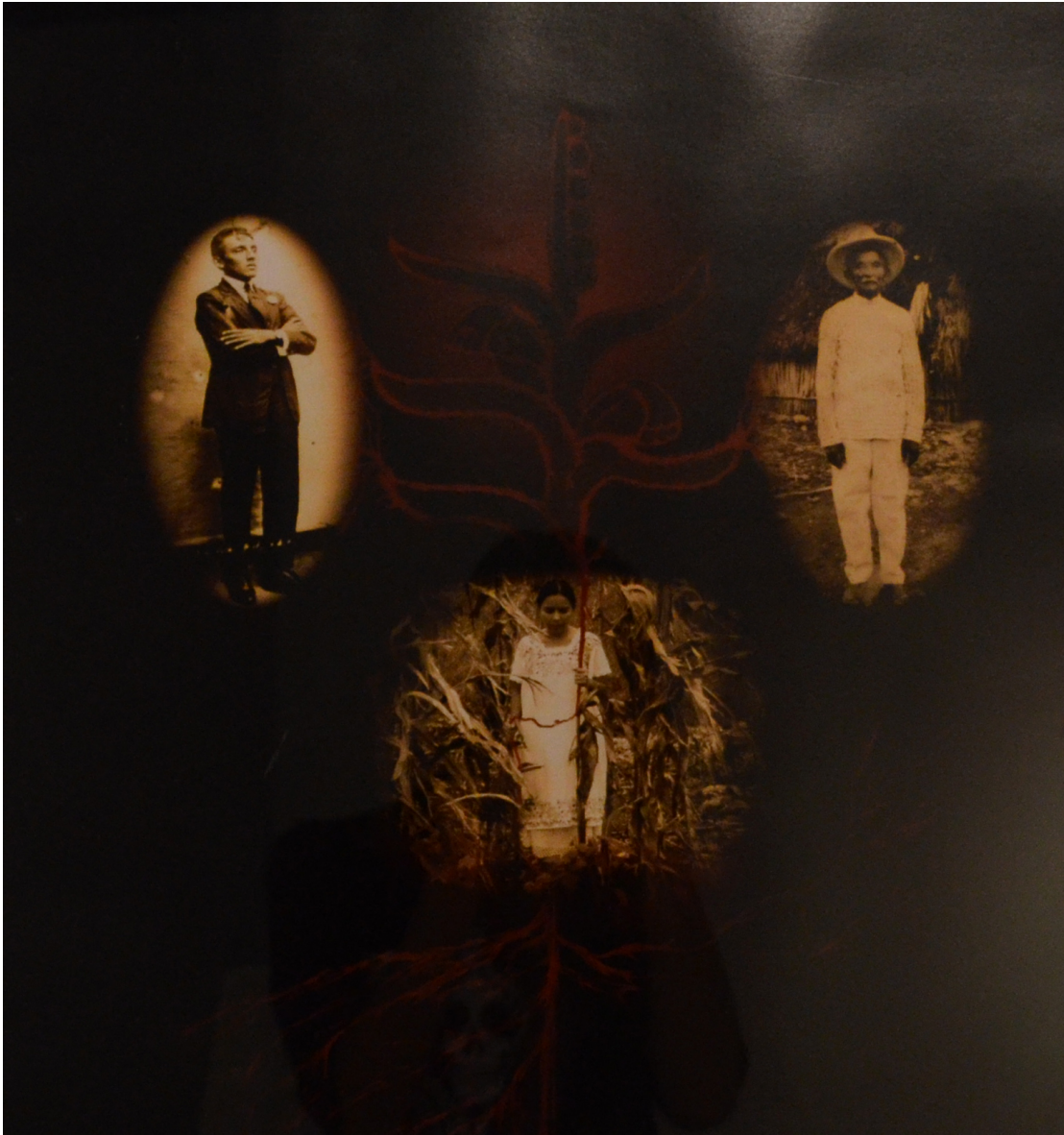


Figure 47. Patricia Martin Briceño. *Tuch, Retorno al Origen / Tuch, Return to the Origin*. Photograph. 2012. Photograph by the author, with permission of the artist.



Figure 48. Lower Temple of the Jaguars. Chichen Itza, Mexico. Postclassic Period. Photograph by Linda Schele. Source: www.famsi.org.

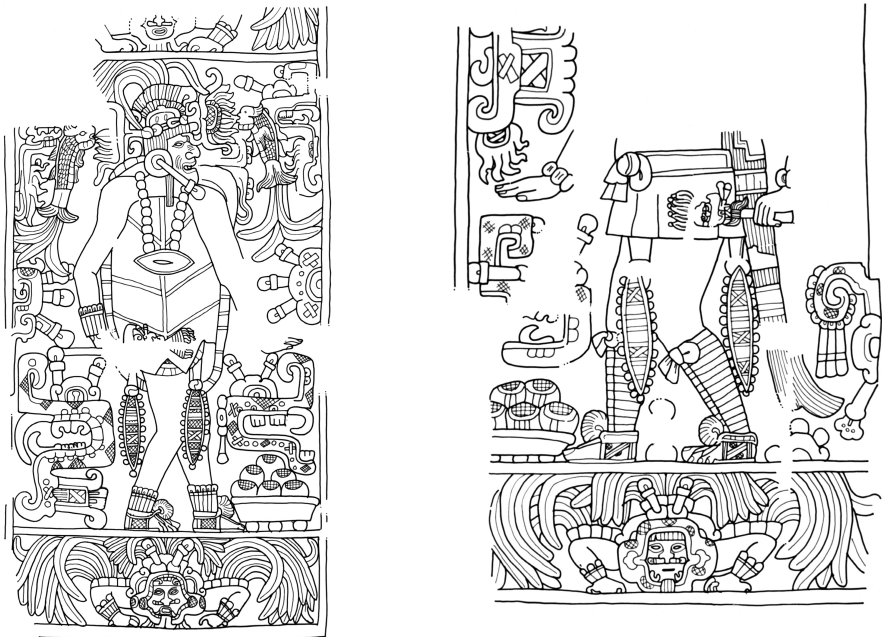


Figure 49. Drawings of side panels, Temple of the Jaguars. Chichen Itza, Mexico. Postclassic Period. Source: The Linda Schele Drawings Collection. www.famsi.org.

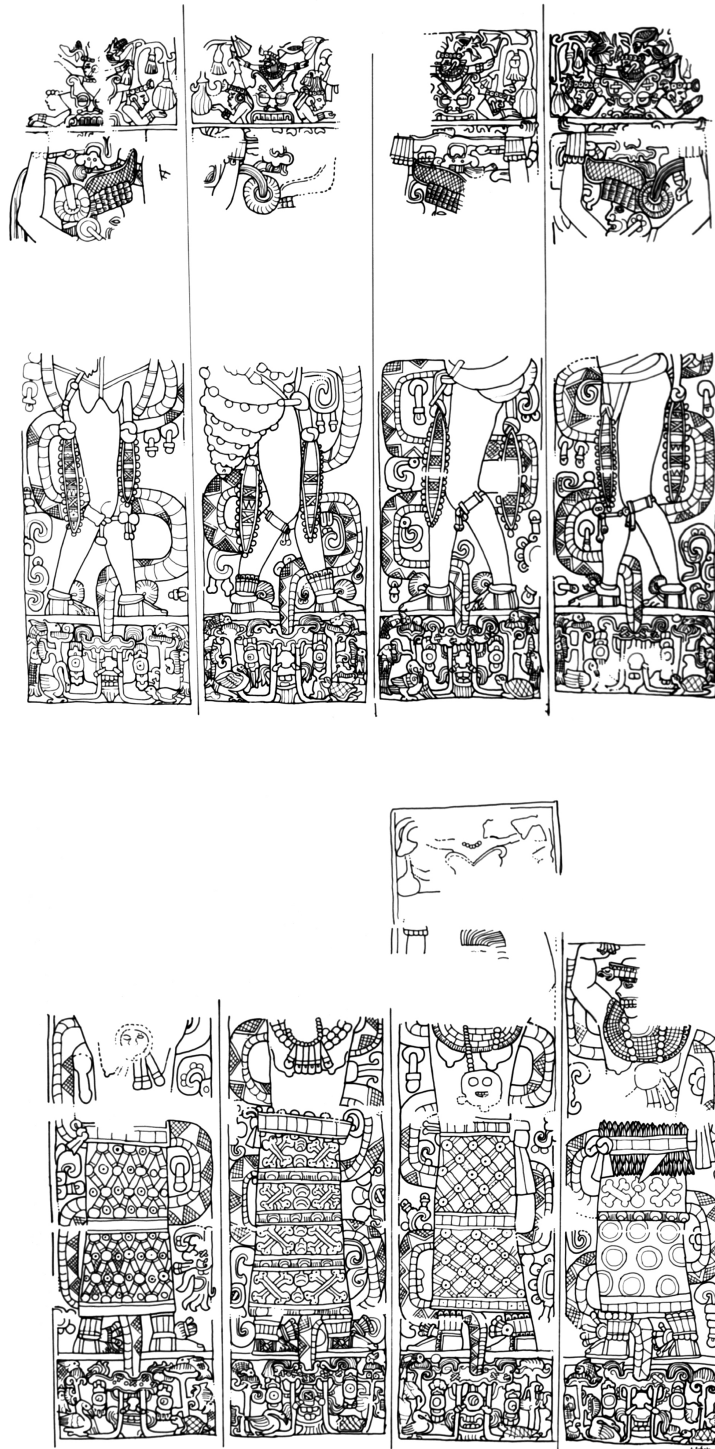


Figure 50. Drawings of columns, Lower Temple of the Jaguars, Chichen Itza, Mexico. Postclassic Period. Source: The Linda Schele Drawings Collection. www.famsi.org.

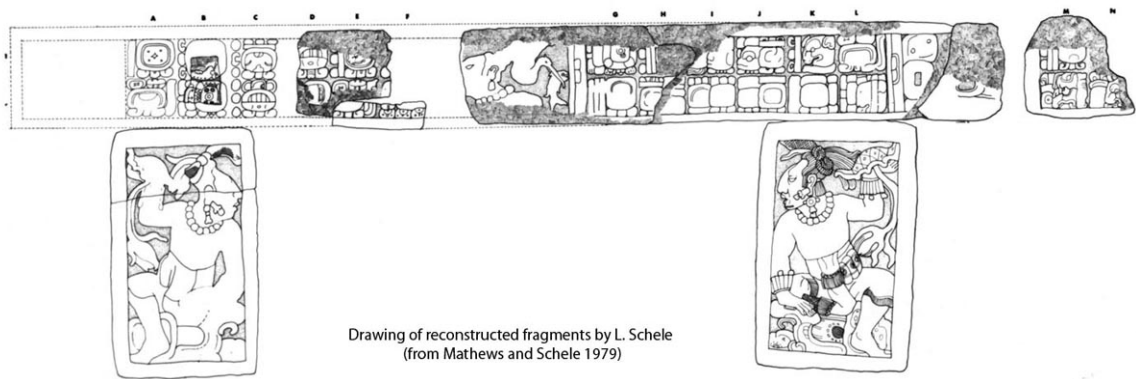


Figure 51. Del Rio Throne. Drawing by David Stuart, based on Linda Schele's drawing. Late Classic. Source: Maya Decipherment Blog by David Stuart, <https://decipherment.wordpress.com/2008/10/21/notes-on-palenques-del-rio-throne/>

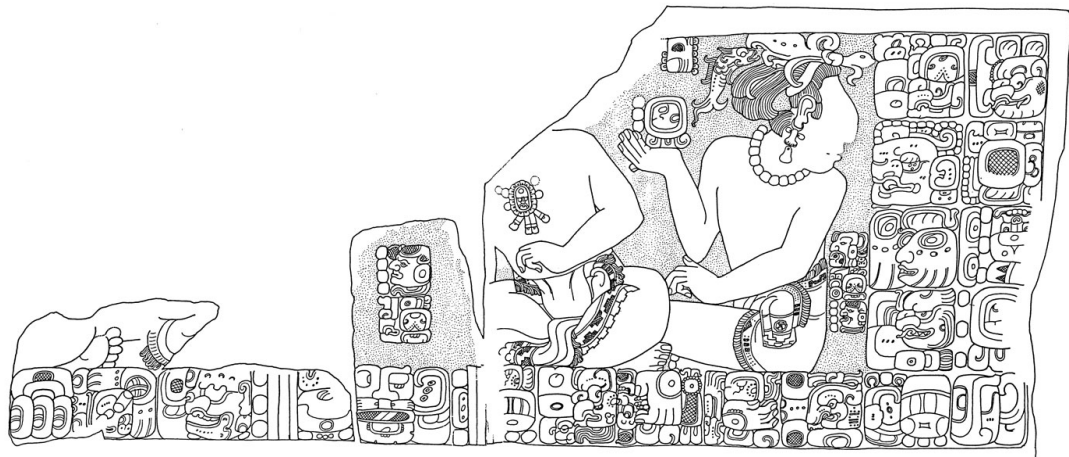


Figure 52. Pomona Panel 1. Late Classic. Source: The Linda Schele Drawings Collection. www.famsi.org.



Figure 53. Ceremony with X-Ray view masks. K533. Late Classic Period. Source: Maya Vase Database, www.research.mayavase.com



Figure 54. Supernatural scene. K791. Late Classic Period. Source: Maya Vase Database, www.research.mayavase.com



Figure 55. Musicians and dancers, detail, Room 1. Bonampak, Chiapas, Mexico. 791 CE. Source: Miller and Brittenham, *Spectacle of the Late Maya Court*. Digitally enhanced image of murals to highlight details.



Figure 56. Dancers and musicians, Carnaval, Chamula, Chiapas, Mexico. 2009, © Syrian Sindibad, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/syriansindibad/7588388004/>



Figure 57. Dressing scene. K7268. Late Classic Period. Source: Maya Vase Database, www.research.mayavase.com

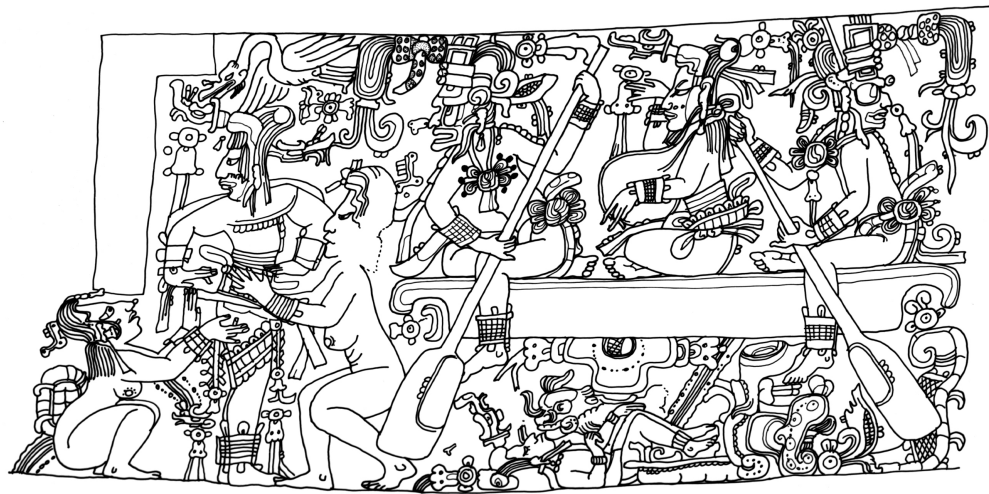


Figure 58. Journey of the Maize Deity. K3033. Late Classic Period. Source: Maya Vase Database, www.research.mayavase.com; The Linda Schele Drawings Collection. www.famsi.org.



Figure 59. Mourning women and Maize Deity. K6979. Late Classic Period. Source: Maya Vase Database, www.research.mayavase.com

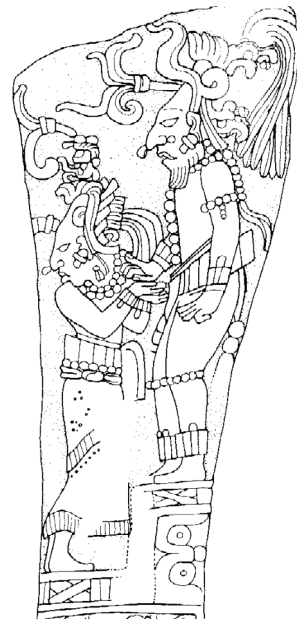


Figure 60. Ruler Yax-Pasaj and female attendant. Carved bone from Structure 10L-11, Copán, Honduras. K2872b. Date. Source: Maya Vase Database, www.research.mayavase.com; Schele and Miller, *Blood of Kings*, Plate 50a.



Figure 61. Oval Palace Tablet from House E, Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico. K'inich Janaab Pakal and his mother Lady Sak K'uk giving him the Drum Major headdress. Late Classic. Source: The Linda Schele Drawings Collection. www.famsi.org.

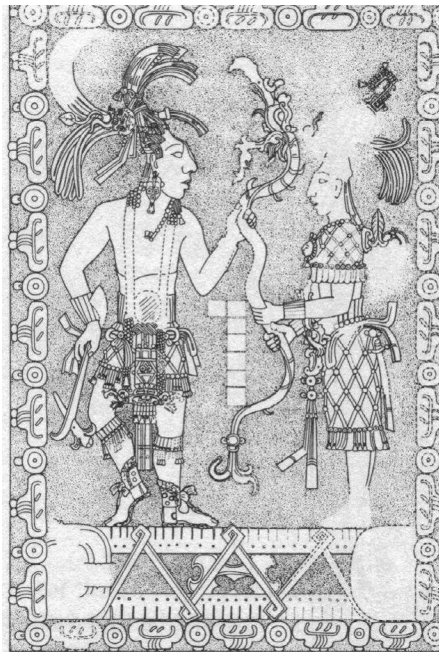


Figure 62. Pier from House D, Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico. Late Classic. Drawing by Merle Greene Robertson. Source: "Divine Couple's Gender Roles," fig. 8.7.



Figure 63. Flor Canche Teh. Baajlam, *Nosotros Somos Nuestros Ancestros / Baalam, We Are Our Ancestors*. Photographs. 2012. Photograph by the author with permission of the artist.

Tables

Stela	Cardinal location	Direction it faces	Deity Embodied	Main Theme	Date
Stela C	N/C	E/W	Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil as axis mundi	Emerging from earth monster; both are the same ruler; agricultural rebirth; sacrifice and rebirth; fertility; world renewal;	9.14.0.0.0 6 Ahau 13 Muan (Dec 1, 711)
Stela F	E	W	Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil as Hun Kanal Tzuk Ahaw	Ruler as victim; auto-sacrifice; sacrifice	9.14.10.0.0 5 Ahau 3 Mac (Oct 9, 721)
Stela 4	W	E	Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil as Bolon K'awiil	King as 'penitent', auto-sacrifice	9.14.15.0.0 11 Ahau 18 Zac (Sept 13, 726)
Stela H	E	W	Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil as Maize God	Sacrifice and fertility	9.14.19.5.0 4 Ahau 18 Muan (Dec 1, 730)
Stela A	W	E	Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil as Kan Te Ahaw	Earth as place of death and rebirth; sun of sacrifice and death	9.14.19.8.0 12 Ahau 18 Cumku (Jan 30, 731)
Stela B	W	E	Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil as Zip	Fertility and death; rising sun; emerging from earth	9.15.0.0.0 4 Ahau 13 Yax (Aug 18, 731)
Stela D	N/C	S	Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil as unidentified deity	Death and life	9.15.5.0.0 10 Ahau 8 Ch'en (July 22, 736)

Table 1. Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil's stelae in Great Plaza, arranged in chronological order by dedication date (themes by Baudez, deity identifications based on Schele & Friedel, dates from Newsome).

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