

Cacao in Ancient Maya Religion

First Fruit from the Maize Tree and other Tales from the Underworld

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Like all agrarian societies, the ancient Maya had an abiding and intimate relationship with the natural world. All manner of trees, plants, leaves, flowers, fruits, and roots found a place in their symbol system, and the flora that surrounded them, both wild and cultivated, were embedded in their spiritual outlook. The crops that fed and enriched them were especially charged with religious sentiment and took pivotal roles in their mythic narratives.

In recent years we have gained notable insights into the past use of cacao, *Theobroma cacao* L., as a status marker and elite consumable, as well as into some aspects of its ritual use and function as a rudimentary currency (a literal “cash crop”).¹ But it is fair to say that we have yet to establish its place in Maya theology. I address this issue here, focusing on the art and writing of the Classic period (A.D. 250–900), with forays into the Postclassic (A.D. 900–ca. 1542) and Colonial eras (A.D. ca. 1542–1820). The themes encountered—fertility and sustenance, sacrifice and regeneration, embodiment and transformation—are pan-Mesoamerican in scope, and we can usefully draw on descriptions of Central Mexican religion made shortly after the Spanish Conquest. Moreover, since certain pre-Columbian ideas survive in traditional Maya communities to this day, modern ethnographies are fertile sources of complementary data.

Cacao and Corn

We will begin with a revealing relationship between text and image on a small stone bowl from the Early Classic era (A.D. 250–600), now in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection in Washington D.C. (M. D. Coe 1975:11–12; Kerr 1992:470 [K4331—K-prefixed numbers refer to the Kerr Photographic Archive, accessible at <www.mayavase.com>]). It was originally carved with three roundels, each containing a figural scene accompanied by a hieroglyphic caption, with



Figure 8.1. The Maize God as an embodied cacao tree. a. The seated god points to what may be a chocolate pot. b. The Maize God points to an open codex. c. Text naming the human protagonist as a “Maize Tree” (F2). Unprovenienced stone bowl. (K4331). Early Classic period. The Dumbarton Oaks collection, Washington, D.C. Drawings by Simon Martin after a painting by Felipe Dávalos in Coe 1975 and a photograph by Justin Kerr.

additional columns of text between each roundel. The two surviving scenes feature a male figure variously sitting or lying on a mat-decorated seat (Figure 8.1). His limbs are studded with ripe cacao pods, and his skin is marked with wavy “wood” motifs. Clearly, an anthropomorphic cacao tree is at hand. In one scene he points to what may be a chocolate pot (see Figure 8.1a); in another he examines an open book (see Figure 8.1b). Although much of the third scene is now missing, enough remains of the telltale pods to show that it was a similar portrait.

Not unnaturally, this young lord has been dubbed a “Cacao God” (S. D.

Coe and M. D. Coe 1996:45). Yet his physical characteristics—his sloping brow, tonsured hairstyle, and prominent forehead jewel—all ally him with the Maize God (see Taube 1985). Thus, despite his chocolate coating, this is not a cacao deity as such but the familiar Maize God in the guise of, or, more accurately, as the embodiment of a cacao tree (Martin 2002a; M. E. Miller and S. Martin 2004:78).

Confirmation of what seems, at first, an odd fusion comes from the captions to the scenes. In both surviving passages the second glyph joins the head of the Maize God to the sign for **TE'** 'tree' (at A2, E2). In one case, they are conflated into a single sign, as if mimicking the god-tree fusion in the scene (E2).² David Stuart (personal communication 1999; this volume) has proposed a reading of **IXIM** for this particular portrait of the maize deity; *ixim/ixi'im* is the word for 'maize' in almost every Mayan language spoken today. This would make the depicted figure the *iximte'* 'Maize God Tree' or simply 'Maize Tree.'³

In each case, *iximte'* is preceded by a term describing the posture or activity engaged in, while a subsequent glyph names the human actor who impersonates this entity.⁴ Only one of these names is legible today, but it is the same male who forms the subject of the inter-roundel columns. Here again he is linked to an *iximte'* glyph (at F2), further emphasizing that he has assumed the identity of this supernatural, cacao-sprouting arbor (see Figure 8.1c).⁵

But how are we to understand "Maize Tree" in this context, and what is the nature of its connection to cacao? Since Karl Taube's fundamental work on the Maya Maize God, we have understood much of the supernatural narrative of corn (Taube 1985, 1986).⁶ This tale of sacrifice and resurrection, reflecting the seasonal cycle, finds its fullest expression in the sixteenth-century K'iche' Maya epic the *Popol Vuh*—a work that draws on myths of far greater antiquity (Christenson 2003; D. Tedlock 1985). Although several episodes in the Maize God's complex journey remain to be explained (Quenon and Le Fort 1997), we can say with confidence that the corn cycle was the central metaphor of life and death for the Maya and the nucleus around which much of their religiosity was formed. If we are to appreciate the meaning of the cacao-maize relationship we must investigate this story still further.

Within the Mountain

One remarkable blackware vessel (known as the Berlin vase) illuminates key stages in the bodily transubstantiation of man, maize, and cacao (Figure 8.2). Produced in the Early Classic period, most likely in the central Peten region, it currently resides in the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin (Eberl 2001:312; Schele and Mathews 1998:122–123; Taube 2004a:79–81). The subject matter is simultaneously an account of divine passage—the death and transformation of the Maize God—and the mortuary progress of the human lord who is follow-

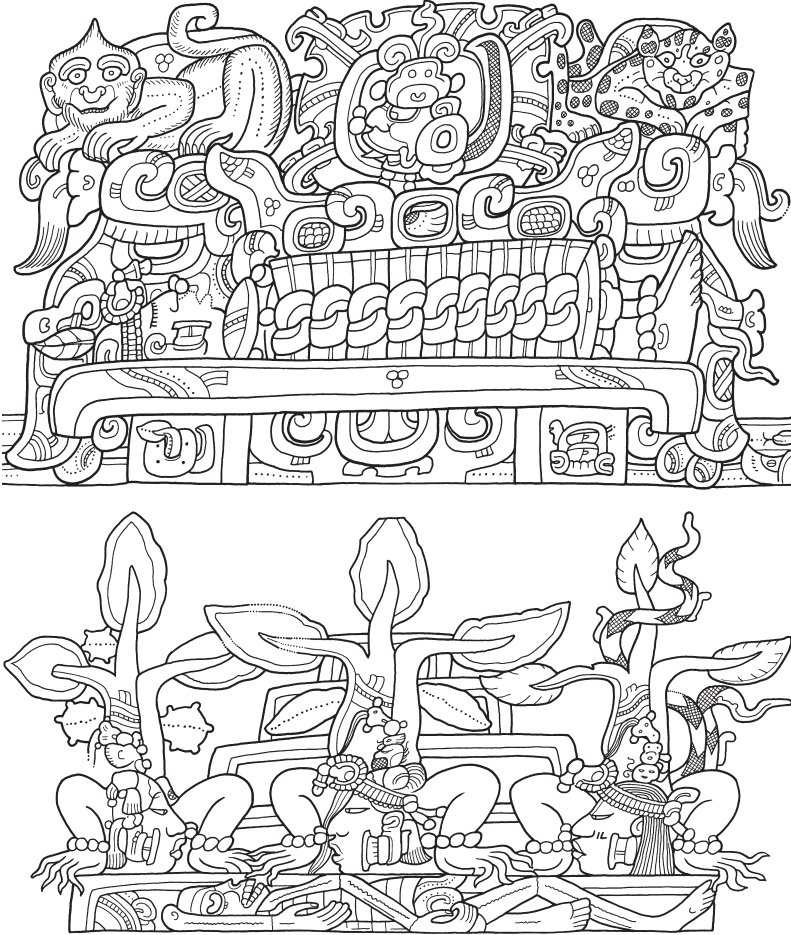


Figure 8.2. The burial and transformation of the Maize God within Sustenance Mountain. a. The dead god lies on a bier. b. His body is reduced to a skeleton surmounted by anthropomorphic trees. Details. Unprovenienced vase (K6547). Early Classic period. Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin. Drawing by Simon Martin after a photograph by Justin Kerr.

ing in his footsteps. Two vignettes on the incised surface offer a sequential story, both set in the kind of watery environment that marks Underworld locales.

In the first scene the outstretched body of the dead lord is flanked by supernatural mourners in varied poses of distress. He lies on a funerary bier, his bejeweled head and feet protruding from an elaborately knotted shroud (see Figure 8.2a). The left leg of the bier carries the hieroglyph *och bib* 'road-enter.' This is a metaphor for death, describing, as it does, one stage in the mortuary odyssey of the Maize God (D. Stuart 1998:387–389). The whole assemblage is set within the rolling volutes of a personified mountain marked with maize kernels and the sign for *ak'ab* 'darkness,' identifying it as the Maya version

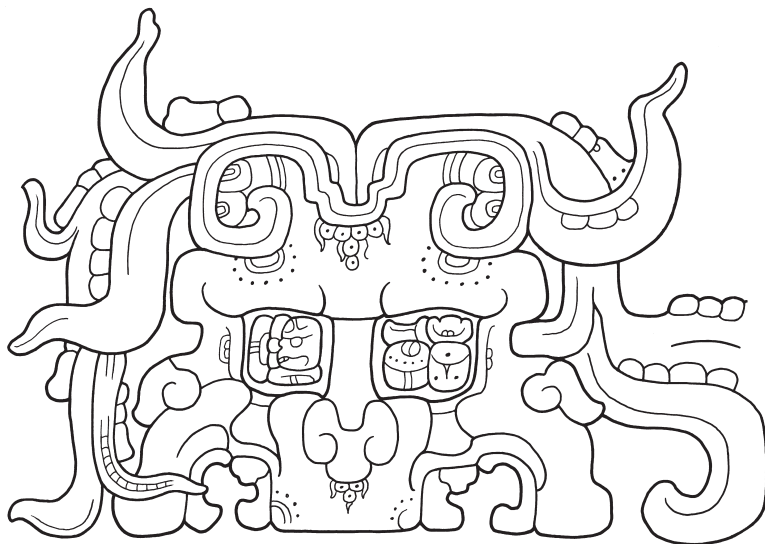


Figure 8.3. Sustenance Mountain in Maya art. Detail. Late Classic period. Tablet of the Foliated Cross, Palenque, Mexico. Drawing by Simon Martin after David Stuart (Stuart 1987:Figure 27).

of the Central Mexican *tonacatepetl*, or ‘Sustenance Mountain.’⁷ This primeval origin of maize and other important foodstuffs is a recurring feature of Mesoamerican mythologies, and the idea survives in many traditional societies today. One seventh-century representation at Palenque, Mexico, labels it **YAX-ha-li wi-tzi-na-la** *yax ? witznal* ‘First ? Mountain Place’ (Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:138) (Figure 8.3).⁸ In the *Popol Vuh* this peak is called *paxil* ‘Clefted (Place),’ which presumably describes the lightning-carved fissure at its summit from which maize will be reborn. In modern belief it is a realm of the honored dead, with a cavernous interior in which clouds are born and with a surface covered with verdant life, especially wild game and fruit trees (Fischer 1999:483; Christenson 2001:78, 84–85).

Above the mountain on the Berlin vase appears the scalloped frame of a solar cartouche. Here it encloses an image of the Sun God within a lunar crescent, his head crowned by an undeciphered sign that has the sense of “seed” or the like.⁹ Solar cartouches are elaborated glyphs for *yaxk’in* ‘first sun’ and often contain ancestral portraits in place of the sun deity (Tate 1992:59–62; Taube 2004b:286–287). In Mayan languages as widely separated as Yukatek in the north and Ch’orti’ in the south, *yaxk’in* refers to the onset of the dry season, when the harvest is over. Between the cartouche and shrouded body there is a “wing” hieroglyph, recognizable as the sign **K’A’** in this context (David Stuart in Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:440). We currently lack a secure translation for it, but it forms the verbal root of the most common death expression in Maya inscriptions: *k’a’ay u-? sak ik’il*, which refers to the loss of a variety of *ik’*

‘breath-essence’ (Houston and Taube 2000:267).¹⁰ This particular *ik’*, whose name includes the same “seed” glyph observed on the Sun God’s head (the query mark in the translation), constitutes some inner life-force, or essence, of the Maize God.

Numerous ethnographic sources describe the soul or spirit of corn (for example, J. E. S. Thompson 1930:48–49; Wilson 1990:Chapters 1–3), and even the idea that such a spirit must leave the cob before it is harvested (Girard 1962:307–308). As we shall see, death produces a separation of body and soul in which the former is not simply an empty and discarded vessel but one that harbors the germ and material for future reproduction. In Mesoamerican ideology, humans are composed of a variety of soul-essences—each with its own nature and, on their division and release at death, their own afterlife destination (see López Austin 1988:203–236, 313–343; Vogt 1976:23). The scene on the Berlin vase depicts the flight of the Maize God’s soul and its union with, or even formation of, the great celestial bodies (Figure 8.2a). In one modern story, Jesus Christ—almost universally considered a god of maize and fertility in traditional Maya societies—rises to the heavens after his crucifixion and becomes the sun

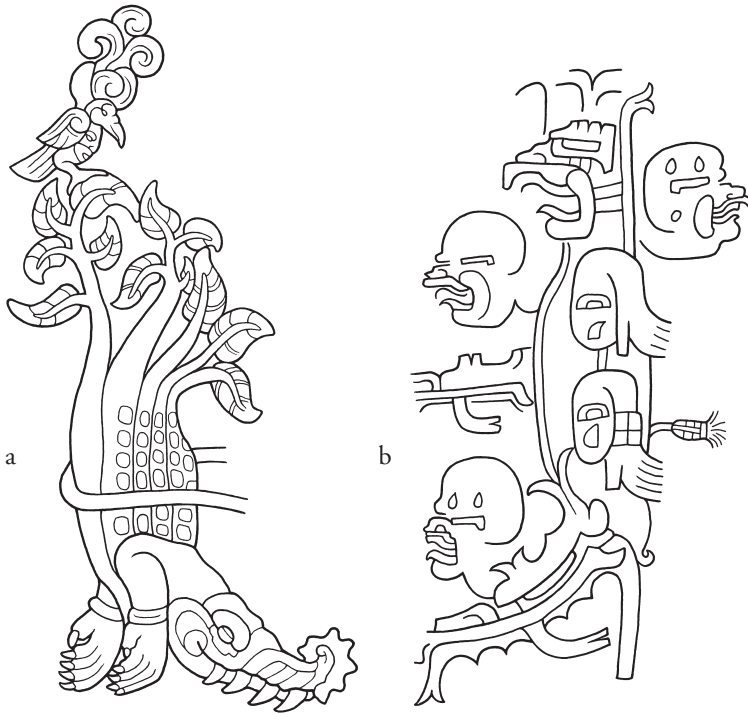


Figure 8.4. Crocodilian World Trees. a. Detail. Stela 25, Izapa, Mexico. Preclassic period. Drawing by Simon Martin after an unpublished drawing by Ayax Moreno. b. Detail of an incised design on “The Young Lord.” Olmec jadeite sculpture. Unprovenienced. Drawing by Simon Martin after Gillet Griffen in *The Olmec World: Ritual and Kingship* 1996:240.

(Sosa 1985:429–430). The same source says that Jesus traverses the sky on “his road,” and that the souls of the dead travel with him.

The second scene depicts the body, now reduced to a skeleton, buried beneath a stepped pyramid (Figure 8.2b). The surrounding stony volutes and their animated covering of life (omitted in the illustration for the sake of clarity) emphasize that we are still within Sustenance Mountain, the conceptual prototype for funerary pyramids. Three anthropomorphic trees surmount the cadaver. Fertilized by, or erupting directly from it, their bodies are inverted, with fingers spreading to form sinuous roots, their torsos and legs transformed into trunks and leafy branches. The model for this posture is clear, the sky-supporting “World Trees” that are manifested as inverted crocodilians—a topic we will return to (Figure 8.4a, b).

Of the three tree figures in Figure 8.2b, the central one sprouts cacao pods, the one on the left bears a spiked fruit that may be *guanabana* (*Annona muricata* L.), and the one on the right has a snake-like design that may represent a vine or creeper (Judith Strupp Green, personal communication 2005; Schele and Mathews 1998:123). Each is identified by a hieroglyph in its headdress. The central figure is the owner of the vessel, as named in an incised text that runs over its three slab feet. This is the lord who now follows the Maize God’s path through death and on to the afterlife. His companion trees—one male, one female—most likely represent his parents.

The best-known anthropomorphic trees in Maya art, those that ring the sarcophagus of Pakal of Palenque, Mexico (Robertson 1983; Ruz 1973), present an almost identical theme. Set inside a tomb chamber deep within the Temple of the Inscriptions—a symbolic cave within a mountain—the great slab of its lid shows a reclining Pakal wearing the net kilt of the Maize God, with the fiery torch of the lightning deity K’awiil set in his forehead (Figure 8.5a).

The lid scene famously illustrates Pakal’s “rebirth,” although it is a regeneration of a particular kind. Much debate has centered on whether Pakal emerges from or falls into the Underworld—whose entrance is symbolized here by the great pincers of an infernal centipede (Grube and Nahm 1994:702; Taube 2003b). Yet the key event is his transformation into an ascending World Tree, a mythical arbor marked with **TE’** ‘tree/wood’ signs and bearing bejeweled, serpent-headed flowers. Similar ideas are found in certain Maya communities today, where trees are planted over newly laid graves as tokens of future resurrection (Christenson 2001:206). J. Eric S. Thompson (1970:337) long ago noted the relationship of the lid scene to those in the Central Mexican codices Borgia (1993:49–53) and Vatican B (1972:17–18) in which recumbent deities give rise to directional World Trees (Figure 8.5b).¹¹ The reclining, flexed-limb pose of infancy fixes the Pakal/Maize God as a child of sacrificial death (Martin 2002b; Taube 1994b). Here he is immolated in an offering brazier so that new

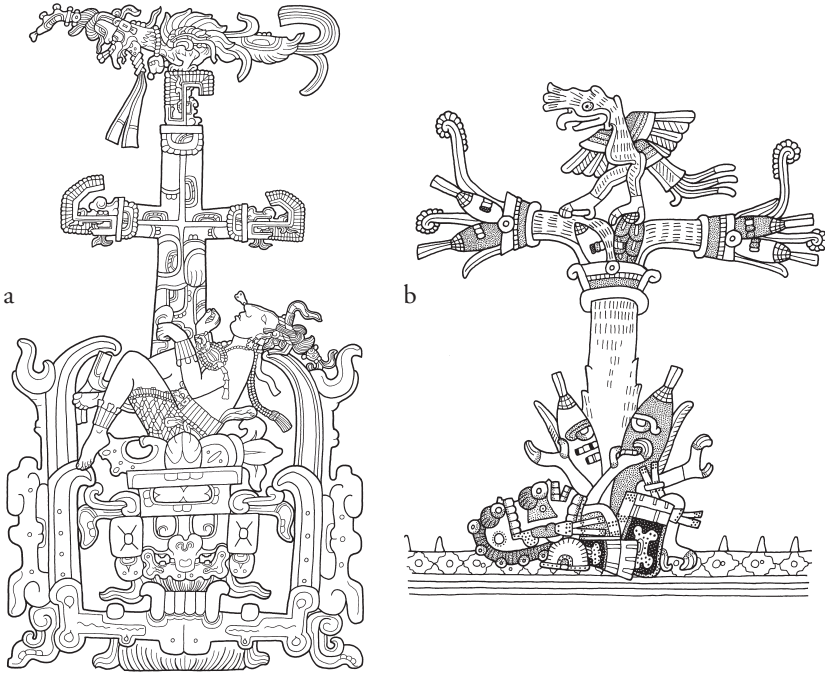


Figure 8.5. Maize and the World Tree. a. Detail from the lid of Pakal's sarcophagus. Late Classic period. Palenque, Mexico. Drawing by Simon Martin after a photograph by Merle Greene Robertson (Robertson 1983:Figure 98). b. Detail from the Codex Borgia, page 53. Drawing by Simon Martin.

life might take his place; the potency of fire in transformative events is a recurring theme in Mesoamerican belief (López Austin 1988:324).

On the sarcophagus sides, ten fruit-laden saplings emerging from cracks in the ground can be identified from the shape of their progeny as cacao, guayaba, avocado, zapote, and nance (Robertson 1983:67–72) (Figure 8.6a). Each tree is fused with a human portrait, identified by its headdress and adjacent glyphic caption as a particular forebear of Pakal (with his parents shown twice, on either end of the sarcophagus). On both of its appearances the cacao tree is associated with Pakal's deceased mother, *Ix Sak K'uk'*, 'Lady Resplendent Quetzal,' the person believed to represent his closest blood connection to the ruling line of Palenque (Figure 8.6b).

This four-sided tableau has memorably been dubbed an "orchard of the ancestral dead" (Schele and Freidel 1990:221), and links have been drawn between the cultivated landscape of life-sustaining tree crops and an animistic understanding of personified forebears (Carlsen and Prechtel 1991; McAnany 1995: 75–76). But we should also note the connection of this bounteous grove to its context; that is, its relationship to the body inside the stone coffin. Like

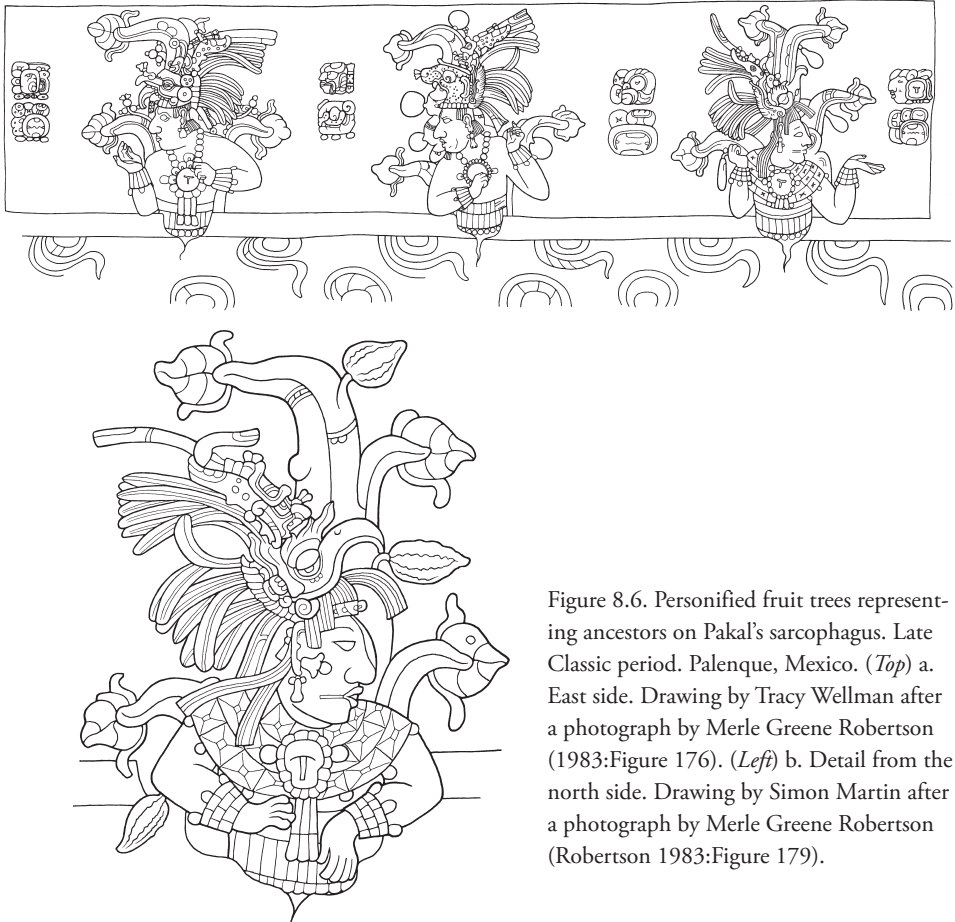


Figure 8.6. Personified fruit trees representing ancestors on Pakal's sarcophagus. Late Classic period. Palenque, Mexico. (Top) a. East side. Drawing by Tracy Wellman after a photograph by Merle Greene Robertson (1983:Figure 176). (Left) b. Detail from the north side. Drawing by Simon Martin after a photograph by Merle Greene Robertson (Robertson 1983:Figure 179).

the trees on the Berlin vase, these trees take succor from the decomposing corpse and represent a further allusion to Pakal's like-in-kind relationship with the Maize God.¹²

The themes of decomposition and transformation on both the Berlin vase and Palenque sarcophagus resonate strongly with the mythology of Central Mexico and a description in the sixteenth-century *Histoire du Mexique* (Jonge 1905). Here the Maize God Centeotl buries himself in the floor of a cavern and from his body grows corn, as well as the fruits and seeds of other useful plants:

[Centeotl] put himself under the ground, and from his hair emerged cotton, and from an eye a very good seed which they eat gladly, called *cacatzli*. . . From the nose, another seed called *chia*. . . From the fingers came a fruit called *camotli*. . . From the fingernails another kind of broad maize, which is the kind they eat today. And from the rest of the

body emerged many other fruits, which the men gather and sow. (Jonghe 1905:31–32)¹³

Similar ideas survive in contemporary Maya groups such as the Tzotzil (Gossen 1974:327, 335), while among the K'iche' of Chichicastenango, Guatemala, the concept has been incorporated into the Christian story. Here it is the crucified body of Christ, the latter-day Maize God, from which corn and other crops first emerge: "While nailed to the cross, Jesus miraculously turned around completely, exposing his back, and from his back came maize—white, yellow, and black—and beans and potatoes and all the other food plants" (Tax 1949:127).

All the Classic Maya sources discussed thus far give cacao a privileged position as the first or most prominent among the fruit trees grown from the Maize God's body. This no doubt reflects the special economic and status-reinforcing role this crop had in ancient times. Equally clearly, cacao was but one among many products of the Maize God's "death," an event of universal fruitfulness with greater implications for human sustenance than corn or cacao alone. As such, he is the provider of all food plants and the center of wider concepts of fecundity and abundance.

The ancestral fruit trees make it plain that this new growth encompasses the notion of generational rebirth. Robert Carlsen and Martin Prechtel (1991) have explored the themes of transformation, replacement, and regeneration among the modern Tz'utujil and their neighbors, tracing antecedents in earlier art. They join James Mondloch (1980:9) in arguing that the human desire for immortality is satisfied in Maya religion less by removal to a heavenly paradise than by reincarnation in future generations, specifically as grandchildren. Mesoamerican religions are as one in believing humanity to be composed of corn dough, and the life cycle of the Maize God serves to "re-process" the material from which all people are made. Youngsters both in ancient and modern times are referred to as "sprouts" because they represent the fresh growth of the human seed.

The Embodied Tree

Just as this regeneration could be conceived of as an orchard of trees, it also could be condensed into the idea of a singular great arbor weighted with all the fruits of the earth except maize (see, for example, Carlsen and Prechtel 1991:27; J. E. S. Thompson 1930:134–135). The relationship between the single fruit tree and the Maize God is explicit in the *Popol Vuh*. The sacrifice of the Maize God (there called One Hunahpu) by his Underworld enemies, One Death and Seven Death, is followed by his decapitation, with the severed head then set into a barren tree:

Now when they went to place his head in the midst of the tree, the tree bore fruit. The tree had never borne fruit until the head of One Hunahpu was placed in it. This was the tree that we now call the calabash. It is said to be the head of One Hunahpu. One Death and Seven Death marveled at the fruit of the tree, for its round fruit was everywhere. Neither could be seen clearly the head of One Hunahpu, for his face had become identical in appearance with the calabashes. (Christenson 2003: 126)

Earlier in the same K'iche' tale in which the crucified Jesus was transformed into food plants, we are told of a tree which he climbed to hide from pursuers:

Jesus came down from the tree and lay down in its shade. Then he blessed the tree that it might serve for cacao. Instantly there was cacao. He told the people . . . that the cacao should serve in *cofradías* in marriages, and for borrowing money and maize. (Tax 1949:126–127)

Although adapted to the new religion, this is a recognizable reference to the miraculous tree of the Underworld engendered by the Maize God. It sets out the divine origin of cacao, as well as its role as a means of exchange. In narrative terms, the *Popol Vuh* episode provides the means by which One Hunahpu reproduces himself, impregnating an Underworld maiden with his spittle and thereby giving rise to his sons and avengers, the Hero Twins. Here the fruit serves the purpose it has in nature: a means of generational descent.

The closest visual analog for these passages in ancient Maya art is on a small polychrome cylinder vase now in the Museo Popol Vuh, Guatemala City (Kerr 1997:816 [K5615]; Taube 1985:175). Two stylized cacao trees on opposing sides of the vessel sprout heads bearing the distinctive sloping brow, tonsured hair, and jewels of the Maize God (Figure 8.7). At the base of each tree are large flowers, a feature also seen in the Madrid Codex (1967:69), where the blossom serves as glyphic *nik* in *nikte'* 'Flower.'¹⁴ Flowers, specifically the frangipani (*Plumeria*), were viewed as sources of divine birth in some Maya lore (J. E. S. Thompson 1970:202–203). Flowering trees and mountains also symbolized paradisiacal locations of beauty and abundance in the afterlife (Taube 2004a), and one attested name for Sustenance Mountain in Tz'utujil Maya is *kotsej juyu ruchiliew* 'Flowering Mountain Earth' (Carlsen and Prechtel 1991:27). On one of our painted trees a smaller, immature head emerges, its eyes closed as if in a fetal sleep. This is most easily explained by regarding all fruit as symbolic heads of the Maize God, as the *Popol Vuh* text clearly implies we should. Monument 21 at the Cotzumalhuanan site of Bilbao, Guatemala, shows a tree of abundance bearing cacao in which each pod is also a human face (L. A. Parsons 1969:101–

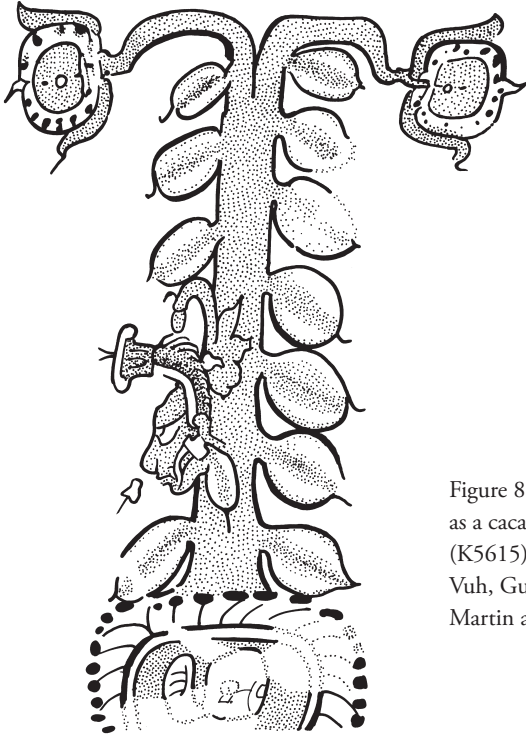


Figure 8.7. The head of the Maize God as a cacao pod. Unprovenienced vase. (K5615) Late Classic period. Museo Popol Vuh, Guatemala City. Drawing by Simon Martin after a photograph by Justin Kerr.

103, Plate 31). This association was so close that in many Maya languages the words for “fruit” and “face” are homonyms.

At this point we need to touch on the wider concept of World Trees and their relationship to the Maize God. The Maya *axis mundi* is usually described as a ceiba tree (*Ceiba pentandra* [L.] Gaertn.), and its names include *yax che'el kab* ‘First/Green Earth Tree’ among the Lacandon and Itza (Means 1917:135; Tozzer 1907:154) and *yax imix che'* ‘First/Green *Imix* Tree’ in the Colonial-era Chilam Balam documents of Yucatan (*che'* is a cognate form for *te'*) (Roys 1933:64).¹⁵ *Imix* was the Maya counterpart to the Mexican *cipactli*, a supernatural crocodile and the name for the first of the twenty days of the *tonalpohualli* (calendar) (Seler 1902–23: 1:499). *Cipactli* symbolized the surface of the earth in which plants grow, as well as the trunks of trees.¹⁶ The Chilam Balams call the four trees that define the limits of the cosmos *imix yaxche'* or “*imix* ceiba,” each prefixed by the color assigned to its relevant cardinal direction.¹⁷ In the Maya calendar, major cycles conclude on the day *ajaw*, with the first day of any new era falling on the next *imix*. In accord with this, all five *imix* trees in the Chilam Balams were set up directly after the destruction of the previous

world—the most recent in a recurring cycle of cataclysms to re-shape the earth, a fundamental Mesoamerican concept of annihilation and renewal.

The iconography of crocodilian trees is applied to the Maize God's rebirth, stressing his transformation into a World Tree (Taube 2005:25). Some images picture his lower body as the saurian's inverted snout or label him *juun ixim abiin* 'One Maize Crocodile.'¹⁸ The same visual metaphor was applied to cacao at Classic period Copan, Honduras, where now-fragmentary sculpted containers were originally shaped like inverted crocodiles sprouting cacao pods from their tails (Lara 1996) (Figure 8.8a).¹⁹ A similar motif appears on a carved block newly recovered from the Osario Temple at Chichen Itza, Yucatan, Mexico (Schmidt 2003) (Figure 8.8b).

An association between World Trees and the Maize God survives in certain *loh* and *ch'a chaak* ceremonies still performed in rural Yucatan. Both rites involve a model of the world whose corners and sky-defining arches are made from bent sprigs of *Citharexylum schottii* Greenm., one of several shrubs known today as *iximche'* (Sosa 1985:379–380). It may be the long use of such plants to symbolize the incorporeal *iximte'iximche'* that explains how at least some of



Figure 8.8. Crocodilian cacao trees. a. Reconstruction of a sculpted stone container. Late Classic period. Copan, Honduras. Drawing by Simon Martin. b. Panel fragment. Late Classic or Postclassic period. Osario Temple, Chichen Itza, Yucatan, Mexico. Drawing by Simon Martin after a field sketch by the Proyecto Arqueológico Chichen Itza, courtesy of Peter Schmidt.

them got this name. Ruud van Akkeren (1999:291–292) has previously argued that references to *iximche'* in the Rabinal Achi document of Highland Guatemala refer not to the Kaqchikel Maya citadel of that name but to the central World Tree.

Inversion alone was an attenuated reference to the crocodile tree. Karl Taube has recently identified many of the “acrobats” and “contortionists” in Maya art as images of the Maize God adopting the tree posture (2003a:461).²⁰ In one jade cache at Copan, such a figurine was placed at the center of a quin-cunx—the world-directional model in its most abstract form. This observation has implications that go beyond this, not least for cacao.

The lid of one ceramic censer from Copan depicts an arched “acrobat” with a cacao pod in his headdress (see Schmidt, de la Garza, and Nalda 1998:603), and Peter Schmidt has reassembled a fragmentary censer—perhaps from the Río Bec region in Mexico—showing an inverted body peppered with cacao pods (Figure 8.9a). Although the object is badly broken today, one can see that

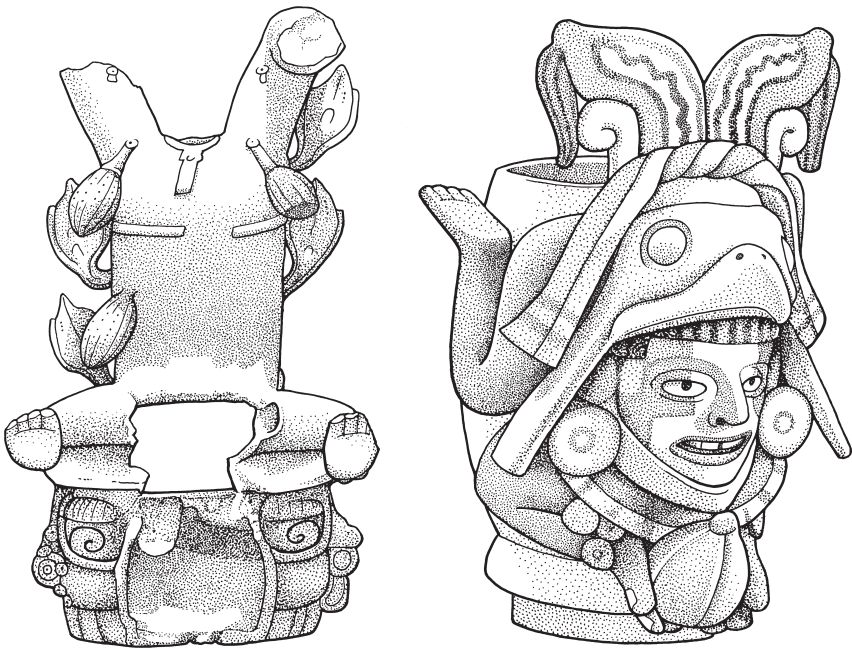


Figure 8.9. The Maize God in the inverted posture and bearing cacao. a. Censer lid, possibly from Río Bec, Mexico. Ceramic. Late Classic period. Currently at the regional headquarters of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología y Historia, Merida. Drawing by Simon Martin after a photograph courtesy of Peter Schmidt. b. Censer pot. Unprovenienced (K1504b). Ceramic. Postclassic period. Unknown private collection. Drawing by Simon Martin after a photograph by Justin Kerr.

precisely the same motif was carved in stone at Copan (McNeil, Hurst, and Sharer, this volume, Figure 11.13), and is presumably analogous to the upright figurines from Highland Guatemala that are similarly festooned with pods (see this volume McNeil, Hurst and Sharer, Figure 11.15a).

The “diving” figures that become prevalent in the Postclassic era also allude to the Maize God as an embodied tree, and on small appliquéd censers we see him carrying corncobs, seeds, or cacao pods (see Figure 8.9b). Yet the bird headdress he often wears on these occasions signals that he is also flying. This seemingly incongruous conflation of ideas is made explicit in some architectural stuccoes, where leaves sprout from the divers’ legs as well as wings from their arms (Taube 1992a:41, Figure 18a). The downward motion may symbolize heaven-sent beneficence in general, but it could refer to something more specific, such as the fall of seeds in planting.²¹

Four inverted deities on page 15 of the Dresden Codex (1975) also appear to combine tree personification with the act of falling or flying (Figure 8.10). Three sprout cacao pods whereas the limbs of the fourth, a skeletal Death God, transform into barren branches. Accompanying texts share the verbal root *pak'* ‘to plant, sow’ (Bricker 1986:147), which an early Yukatek lexicon, the *Vienna Dictionary*, elaborates as “sembrar aguacates y demás frutas; plantar árboles (to sow avocados and other fruits; to plant trees)” (Barrera Vásquez 1980:624). These gods seem to be the presiding patrons of auspicious and inauspicious days for the planting of fruit trees.²²

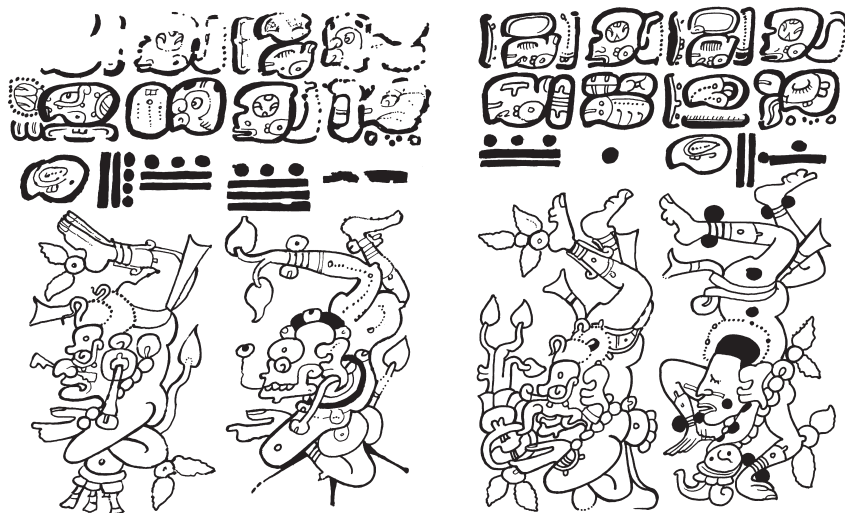


Figure 8.10. Four inverted deities in a tree-planting augury. Dresden Codex, page 15. Drawing by Simon Martin.

Out of the Underworld

Although the transformation of the Maize God into a World Tree represents his final revelation as a pillar of the sky, many of the fruitful examples, including cacao, leave us at an earlier stage, still encased within Sustenance Mountain. This is the situation that prevails in the *Popol Vuh*, where the tree of One Hunahpu grows not on the surface of the earth but in the Underworld. We must go through a further narrative turn before cacao and the other gifts of the *iximte'* reach the earth's surface.

A relatively rare appearance of cacao pods in a painted ceramic scene, on a vessel known as K631, provides important information (Kerr 1989:29; M. E. Miller and S. Martin 2004:62) (Figure 8.11). Seated in a throne room is God L—identified by the owl avatar, or familiar, in his broad hat—the most senior and powerful lord of the Maya Underworld. An aged figure with jaguar characteristics, he is often shown with a decorated cape, a staff, and a cigar.²³ On K631 he converses with the fiery, torch-headed K'awiil, who gestures toward an anthropomorphic tree weighted with cacao pods. Essentially the same inverted figure depicted on the Berlin vase (see Figure 8.2b), this character, in turn, interacts with a standing companion dressed in a scarlet macaw headdress and feathered “back-rack.”²⁴

Like the corresponding gods in the *Popol Vuh*, One Death and Seven Death, God L would have presided over the demise of the Maize God and possessed the resulting Maize Tree. This would explain why he is associated with the wealth of cacao. In his palace on the Princeton vase (see Reents-Budet, Figure 10.9, this volume) we see, uniquely in Maya art, a female attendant pouring a chocolate



Figure 8.11. A palace scene in the Underworld, featuring God L, K'awiil, and the Maize Tree. Unprovenienced vessel (K631). Late Classic period. Drawing by Simon Martin after a photograph by Justin Kerr.



Figure 8.12. God L with merchant's pack and cacao tree. Mural detail. Late Classic period. Red Temple, Cacaxtla, Mexico. Drawing by Simon Martin after a photograph by Enrico Ferorelli in M. E. Miller and S. Martin 2004:Figure 24.

drink from height—the traditional technique for producing a frothy surface (S. D. Coe and M. D. Coe 1996:50). The use of cacao as monetary exchange would similarly explain God L's ties to commerce and long-distance transport. In the murals of Cacaxtla, Mexico, we see him as a trader, his hat resting atop a large merchant's pack (Figure 8.12). Interestingly, this scene seems to be another version of the transformation story. Set in a symbolic netherworld at the foot of a stairway (omitted from the drawing), God L faces a cacao tree. But the scene continues up the steps, toward the earth's surface, where the tree is replaced by a series of cornstalks on which each cob is the head of the reborn Maize God.

A supernatural patron of cacao described by Diego de Landa for Colonial Yucatan was Ek Chuah, who similarly oversaw trade and long-distance travel (Landa 1941 [1566]:107, 164). In Yukatek, *ek' chuah* means 'black scorpion,' and two deities in the Madrid Codex, Gods L and M, are shown with scorpion tails and black body color (pages 79a–84a) (Seler 1902–23, v. 1:413, 451), suggesting that this was a euphemistic term for them both in late times.²⁵

In the *Popol Vuh* it is the sons of the Maize God, the Hero Twins, who ultimately topple the Underworld gods from power. This is depicted on a vase painted some six or seven centuries earlier, portraying the brothers stripping God L of his fine clothes and insignia—hat, jewels, cape, and staff—and sacrificing his companion or former co-ruler (M. E. Miller and S. Martin 2004:60,

Figure 21). Mortal kings and queens sometimes brandish God L's staff as a scepter, perhaps in commemoration of this victory.²⁶ His undoing paves the way for the resurrection of the twins' father who, returned to bodily form in another vase scene, gives the now-naked God L a kick (M. E. Miller and S. Martin 2004:Figure 22 [K1560]). In these Classic period versions God L survives the ordeal (which the *Popol Vuh* gods do not), but he must now pay homage and tribute to the sun (David Stuart in G. S. Stuart and G. E. Stuart 1993:170–171). This obligation evidently served as a key paradigm for tribute payment in the mortal world.

A vestige of God L survives in Highland Guatemala in the complex character of Maximon, or more properly Rilaj Mam 'Ancient Grandfather' (Christenson 1998, 2001:176–190). Known as the Lord of Merchants, his effigy sports a broad-brimmed hat, fancy clothes, and a cigar. In Santiago Atitlan, Guatemala, he presides over the death of Christ and rules in his place for five days of Holy Week. For this he is brought to a special chapel symbolically set in the earth's interior, where he receives offerings of liquor, money, tobacco, and heaps of fruit (including cacao brought from the coast). On Easter Saturday he meets the resurrected Christ in ceremonial combat, and his inevitable defeat means banishment and, until lately, disrobing and disarticulation for the rest of the year. In Chichicastenango the Rilaj Mam (identified as Judas there) is publicly stripped of his clothes at the end of his reign and beaten, kicked, and burned by boys (Bunzel 1952:223). In Yucatan very similar ceremonies were once held to mark Wayeb, the last five days of the ancient Maya year (Pérez 1843:437). Here called simply Mam 'Grandfather,' the effigy was also feted for five days, then denuded and tossed to the ground (López de Cogolludo 1957[1688], v. 4:197).

A similar episode is in the Chilam Balams, the previously cited group of part-annals, part-prophecies, written in Yukatek Maya during the Colonial period. These documents combine indigenous and imported ideas, often in mystical, elliptical prose that defies easy comprehension. In a section of the Chumayel version that declares itself a history of the world before the coming of the Christian God, we find close affinities to the smiting of God L (Barrera Vásquez and Rendón 1948:153–155; Roys 1933:98–99): "Then Oxlahun-ti-ku was seized, his head was wounded, his face was slapped, he was spat upon, and he was thrown on his back as well. After that he was despoiled of his insignia and smut."²⁷

Soon after, the narrative turns to the destruction of the world, first by flood and then by a collapse of the sky. God L is featured in flood scenes in the Dresden (page 74), Madrid (page 52), and Paris (1968:21) codices, where he is the recipient of a deluge poured from the water jars and open mouths of other deities and from an eclipsed sun and moon. No such image is known for the

Classic period, although his defeat on one of the aforementioned vases also takes place under an eclipsed moon (M. E. Miller and S. Martin 2004:Figure 21 [K5359]). It could also be relevant that the “Vase of the Seven Gods” shows him presiding over his infernal court on the final day of the previous “Great Cycle” in 3114 B.C. (Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:68; M. E. Miller and S. Martin 2004:82–83, Plate 35). The accompanying text describes a formal ordering, or re-ordering, of the gods—perhaps establishing God L’s Underworld realm in the current world era.

Returning to K631 (see Figure 8.11), we might begin to explain this scene by considering the nature of the enigmatic K’awiil and comparing this with wider Mesoamerican myths about Sustenance Mountain. K’awiil has long been linked to ideas of fertility and abundance, and, significantly, he often shares the tonsured hairstyle of the Maize God (an emblem of the ripe corn cob) and can be fused with the Maize God, or even Sustenance Mountain itself (Taube 1992a: 48, 78, Figure 48b).²⁸ K’awiil’s strongest tie, however, is with lightning, and he evidently originated as the personified axe of the Maya storm god Chaak (Coggins 1988:127–128; Taube 1992a: 69–79).²⁹ Although often referred to as a “lineage god,” this seems to be the weakest of his associations—if the term is appropriate at all. Rulers take a K’awiil scepter at their inauguration and other important points in their careers, but here it allies them with Chaak, and thus to his powers as a thunderous rainmaker and nurturer of crops. In some scenes on painted ceramics Chaak and what is probably Yopaat, a closely related god of storms, are shown splitting open the back of a great turtle with their fiery axes, making the cleft from which the Maize God will be reborn on earth (Taube 1986:57).

The link between lightning and human sustenance recurs with regularity in both Central Mexican mythology and accounts from across the Maya world. Indeed, so many native legends describe maize and other seeds as coming from under a rock or from within a mountain and freed by the agency of lightning that it can be considered a core Mesoamerican belief (see Bierhorst 1990:215 and J. E. S. Thompson 1970:348–354). To cite one of the more famous examples, in the Mexican Codex Chimalpopoca (*Leyenda de los Soles*) the god Quetzalcoatl uses lightning to recover maize from its original home within *tonacatepetl* ‘Sustenance Mountain’ (see Bierhorst 1992:146–147). Here maize is not only the future food of humans, it will be ground into dough by the gods to create the first people on earth. A version of this earth-shattering event appears on some Maya vessels (Taube 1986:57; 1992b:55–58).³⁰ Crucially, it is Chaak and his weapon, the bolt of lightning embodied in the serpentine leg of K’awiil, which splits the “house of the earth” with a tremendous crack.

The meaning of the conference depicted on K631 (see Figure 8.11) is lost to us, although we can imagine a dialogue well known to a contemporary audi-

ence.³¹ In whatever way K'awiil acquires the precious cacao, the next time we see him he has it as his cargo. A series of painted capstones that decorated the vaults of buildings in Campeche, Mexico—most dating to the eighth or ninth centuries A.D.—supply this narrative connection. One of these, now in the Museo Amparo, Puebla, Mexico, is particularly explicit (Arrellano 2002:351; M. E. Miller and S. Martin 2004:75) (Figure 8.13a). The bursting bag K'awiil carries has been mistaken for a sack of maize, but the mention of *kakaw* 'cacao' in the lower glyph-band (here in the under-spelling **ka-ka**) makes it clear that cacao is the intended subject (Arrellano 2002:351). A painted glyph on the bag spells **9-PIK** *bolon pik* for 'nine eight-thousands.' This could describe the unfeasibly large and unworldly quantity of beans it contains (seventy-two thousand), although "nine" is also used as a synonym for "many" in Mayan languages and that is probably the intention here. In any case, numeration of this kind is typical of the cacao sacks presented in scenes of tribute payment and is additional evidence that these are the seeds in question. The text on a second capstone, this one from the site of Dzibilnocac, Mexico, mentions an *ox wi'il* 'abundance of food' and lists bread, water, and cacao (here rendered as **ka-wa**), which are shown stacked in plates, sacks, and baskets (Figure 8.13b).

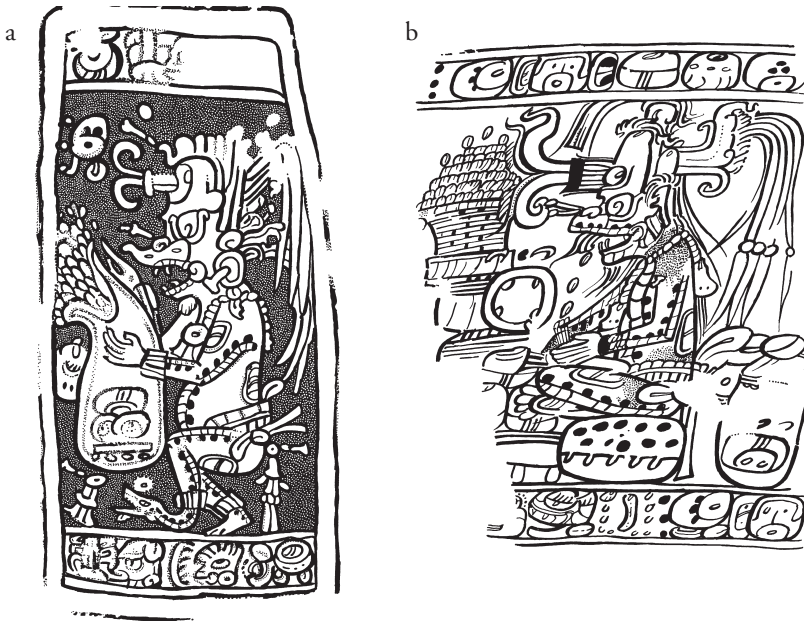


Figure 8.13. K'awiil gathering cacao beans and other foodstuffs. a. Painted capstone. Unprovenienced. Late Classic period. Museo Amparo, Puebla, Mexico. Drawing by Simon Martin after a photograph in M. E. Miller and S. Martin 2004:Plate 31. b. Painted capstone. Dzibilnocac, Mexico. Late Classic period. Drawing by Simon Martin after a photograph by Gallen N. Charles in Fuente 1999:Plate 140.

The theme is further amplified on a now-destroyed capstone from the Temple of the Owls at Chichen Itza, Yucatan, Mexico (Taube 1994a:226–228; Winning 1985:74–80) (Figure 8.14). Here a winged K'awiil emerges from the mouth of a coiled serpent, a motif that regularly encapsulates notions of rebirth and transport between worlds. In so doing he passes through the same crescent-shaped “Jaws of the Underworld” depicted on the Palenque sarcophagus lid, a motif that also denotes real portals in the earth such as cenotes and the mouths of caves. His destination is the heavens, represented by an enclosing sky-band that emits beams of radiance. In one hand he carries a plate loaded with spherical beads surmounted by jade earspools.³² Significantly, ripe cacao pods (painted yellow in the original) hang both from the heavens and the Underworld, as if growing naturally from them.



Figure 8.14. K'awiil's flight from the Underworld. Reconstruction of a painted capstone. Late Classic or Postclassic period. Temple of the Owls, Chichen Itza, Yucatan, Mexico. Drawing by Simon Martin after a photograph by T. A. Willard in Winning 1985:Figure 95.

This image has previously been linked to cacao production in cenotes (Gómez-Pompa, Flores, and Aliphath Fernández 1990:253). Doubtless the Maya of Yucatan were impressed by the affinity cacao trees have for the sheltered and humid microclimates of cave mouths and sinkholes, but the association here is rather more profound in placing the origin of cacao in the Underworld. The scene expresses the rescue of the seeds—here pictured as precious jewels—from the infernal depths and their gifting to heaven and earth (M. E. Miller and S. Martin 2004:63).

K'awiil has long been identified with Bolon Tz'akab of the Colonial sources. This connection comes from the Maya New Year ceremonies, where each of four cycling “year-bearers” is ascribed its own divine patron. The two lists we have differ in only one major regard, the patron of the “Kan Years,” a role the Dresden Codex assigns to K'awiil and Diego de Landa gives to Bolon Tz'akab (Seler 1902–23, v. 1:377). In view of this, the passage in the Chumayel that directly follows the defeat and robbery of Oxlahun-ti-ku reads rather like a summary of our three capstones: “Also taken [from Oxlahun-ti-ku] were lima beans, our bread, ground hearts of small squash seeds, ground large seeds of the *ca* squash, ground kidney beans. He wrapped up the seeds, this first Bolon Tz'akab, and went to the thirteenth heaven” (Barrera Vásquez and Rendón 1948:153–155; Roys 1933:99; J.E.S. Thompson 1970:281).³³ But there is a greater connection between the Temple of the Owls and K631. We must first understand the capstone not as an isolated element but as part of an integrated architectural program. The two piers that once supported the wide central doorway of the temple sanctuary carry relief carving on each of their four faces (Winning 1985:44–58) (Figure 8.15). Three show alternating panels of mat symbols and the horned owls that give the building its name. But the remaining, outward-facing side shows a trunk weighted with cacao pods and motifs that resemble both long-pistiled flowers and jade earspools. These are closely connected in Maya art, with the latter simply a representation of the former in greenstone (D. Stuart 1992). As we have seen, the same objects appear in K'awiil's bowl on the capstone. At the foot of this tree is a beaded semicircular motif, most likely another flower-jewel. Beneath this is an open socket into which is set a three-dimensional sculpture of a humanoid in a crossed-arm pose, creating a match for the anthropomorphic cacao tree on K631 (Taube 1994a:227).

The iconography of the Temple of the Owls largely replicates that on K631 and should encode the same narrative thread. The fruiting *iximte'* places the temple in a symbolic Underworld, while the emblematic owls invite thoughts of God I's owl familiar. In combination with the “royal” mat symbols, these features suggest we are looking at a physical reproduction of the same palace pictured on K631. The location of the capstone image is far from incidental,

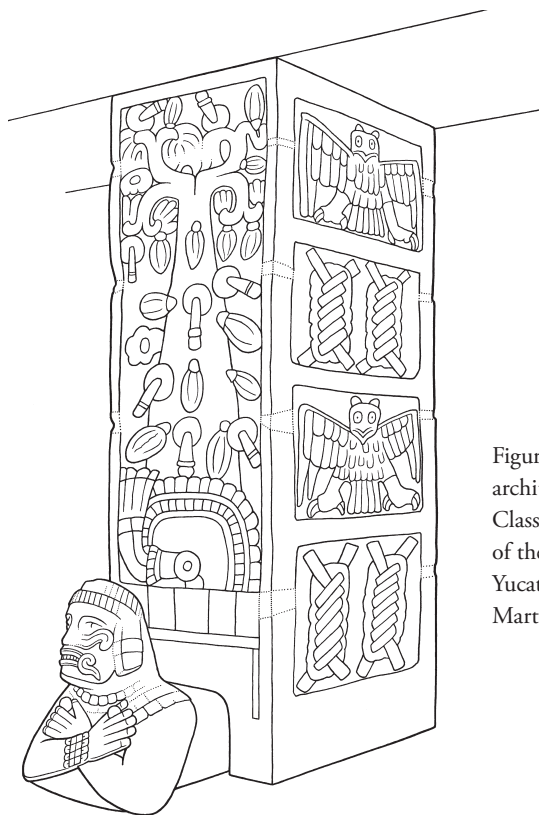


Figure 8.15. The Maize Tree as an architectural motif. Reconstruction. Late Classic or Postclassic period. West pier of the Temple of the Owls, Chichen Itza, Yucatan, Mexico. Drawing by Simon Martin.

since converging vaults were perceived as the jaws of the infernal centipede, with the flat line of ceiling capstones a conceptually open gateway to the sky (M. D. Carrasco and K. Hull 2002). Together, the Temple of the Owls appears to be a shrine celebrating the maize-cacao story and the setting for appropriate rituals and reenactments by the Chichen Itza elite (Martin 2004). We might wonder if the chapel of Rilaj Mam in Santiago Atitlan is the modern descendant of such a structure.

Drink of the Gods

The only context in which the word *iximte'* appears in Maya inscriptions apart from the Dumbarton Oaks bowl (see Figure 8.1) is in the Primary Standard Sequence that encircles many ceramic vessels (M. D. Coe 1973:18–22; Grube 1990; Houston, Stuart, and Taube 1989; B. MacLeod 1990; D. Stuart 1988, 1989, this volume). Such texts formally dedicate the vessel and detail the food or drink for which it was intended. Here, *iximte'* always appears in descriptions of cacao beverages in the form *iximte'el kakaw* (Stuart, this volume) (Figure 8.16a). The literal reading here would be 'Maize Tree-like cacao,' or, more sim-

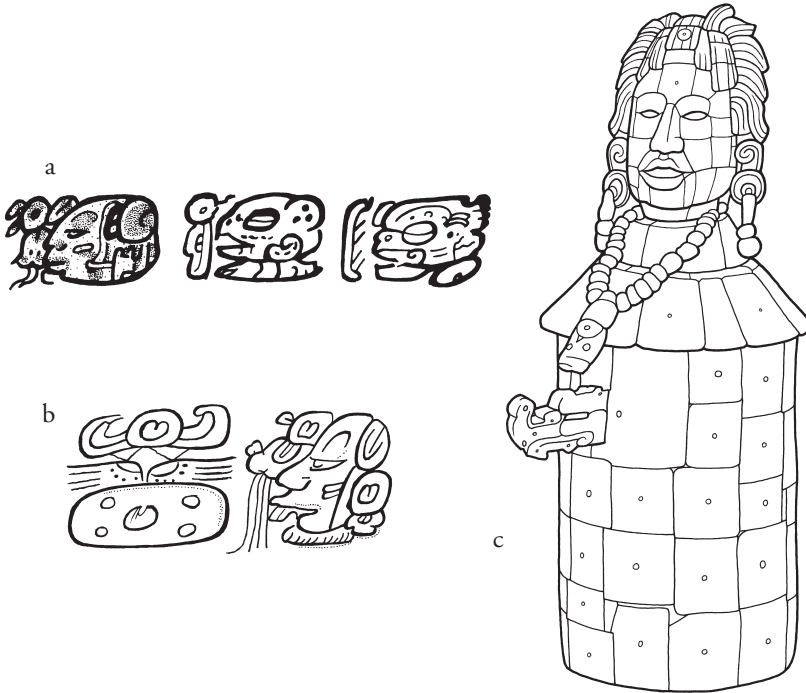


Figure 8.16. The Maize Tree and chocolate pots. a. **IXIM TE'-e-le ka-ka-wa iximte'el kakaw** 'Maize Tree-like cacao.' Detail of a text on a Late Classic period vessel. Burial 196, Tikal, Guatemala (K8008). Drawing by Virginia Greene in Culbert 1993:Figure 84. b. **yu-k'i-bi IXIM[TE'] yuk'ib iximte'** 'his drinking vessel (for) Maize Tree.' Unprovenienced vessel. (K5514) Early Classic period. The Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York. Drawing by Simon Martin after a photograph by Justin Kerr. c. Jade mosaic vessel. Late Classic period (K4887) Burial 196, Tikal, Guatemala. Drawing by Simon Martin after a photograph by Justin Kerr.

ply, 'Maize Tree cacao.' The *ixim* component is sometimes omitted, providing *te'el kakaw* 'tree-like cacao'; in very attenuated versions, *kakaw* is left out and *iximte'* becomes the sole description of vessel content (Figure 8.16b).

Structurally, the *iximte'el kakaw* section might seem to form a particular "recipe," one among several in the Primary Standard Sequence. We know that maize was commonly added to Mesoamerican chocolate drinks (see Landa 1941 [1566]:90), and this could help explain the Maize God portrait here. Alternatively, since *iximte'iximche'* refers to a number of different plants, one of these could be an ingredient or flavoring. Yet the mythological entwining of maize and cacao we have established thus far points in another direction—to 'Maize Tree Cacao' as more of a compound term. If so, the cacao they are talking about was directly compared to the magical bounty that grew from the flesh of the

Maize God—with the traditional mixing with corn no doubt having symbolic as well as culinary significance. Some support for this might be seen in the “embodied” cacao pots whose lids bear humanoid portraits (Houston, Stuart, and Taube in press). The more elaborate versions, such as the jade mosaic vessel from Tikal Burial 196, can be identified as Maize Gods (Figure 8.16c).³⁴ Like the other images we have discussed, they are manifestations of the deity as a cacao tree further transformed here into a chocolate pot.³⁵

Discussion

This study has drawn together representations of cacao in ancient Maya art and writing in search of their symbolic purpose and place in mythic narrative. We must be alert to the difficulties inherent in any such endeavor. Representations always have lives independent of the concepts that first inspire them, and plot points can be replayed from different viewpoints or realized in equally valid metaphors. In seeking a single “meta-narrative” we might easily miss essential details or unwittingly combine distinct ideas. The fragmentary nature of our sources means that any reconstruction is provisional. Nonetheless, with these caveats in mind, we are in a position to recognize some important episodes and draw viable inferences about the significance of cacao in Maya religion.

Sources from across Mesoamerica agree that the sacrificial death of the Maize God at harvest-time—for the Maya at the hands of Underworld deities—was followed by his burial in a cave within a mountain. At least part of his soul or spirit left his body and rose to the heavens. In the *Popol Vuh* it is the Hero Twins who ascend to become the sun and moon, but in earlier versions it may be the Maize God whose apotheosized spirit joins or forms these celestial bodies. His abandoned corpse, by contrast, gives rise to trees bearing edible fruits and seeds. This takes place while he is entombed within Sustenance Mountain and symbolizes the process of germination, which occurs out of sight underground. Cacao, the most coveted product of the mortal orchard, was emblematic of all prized and sustaining vegetal growth—with the exception of maize—and the myth served to explain how it and other foodstuffs came into being. Cross-culturally, trees supply a rich collection of metaphorical meanings appropriate to generational descent, and in Maya ideology they evidently constitute a bridge between death and rebirth. It is the Maize God’s manifestation as a fruit tree that allows him to pass on his procreative seed and to eventually triumph through the heroic deeds of his offspring.

The cacao of the Maize Tree grows in the domain of the Underworld’s paramount lord, God L, where it is evidently the source of his wealth. He enjoys the good life, drinking and trading, unaware of his forthcoming punishment at the hands of the next generation. The task of rescuing cacao and all the other

foods that will sustain humanity falls to the lightning bolt, K'awiil. His special power was to penetrate different worlds, with the awe-inspiring phenomenon of nature's electromagnetism making him a great energizer and catalyst (there are interesting overlaps here with scientific understandings, in which lightning fixes nitrogen—nature's fundamental fertilizer—in the soil, and electricity is harnessed to power all manner of different processes). The fusion of the Maize God with K'awiil, as on the Palenque sarcophagus, may suggest a shoot empowered in its struggle to reach the surface. Embarked on analogous journeys skyward, the torch-headed Maize God and the tonsure-coiffured K'awiil are partly synonymous entities.

The story builds to a climax with the Maize God's rebirth. On various painted vessels he is dressed in jade jewels and quetzal feathers symbolizing maize foliation and watered by the Hero Twins, before emerging from the cleft made by Chaak and K'awiil. The Maize God's realization as a World Tree is the ultimate expression of his resurrection, with his ascent to the sky implicated in a reconfiguration of the universe, the creation of humanity, and an end to earthly darkness and chaos.

This great life and death cycle was no remote paradigm for the Maya elite but one that seems to have made even a sip of chocolate a sacramental act. More particularly, the images on the Dumbarton Oaks bowl, the Berlin vase, and the Palenque sarcophagus must be recognized not simply as pious celebrations of the Maize God epic but as purposeful expressions of personal redemption. The lords so commemorated emulate the corn deity on his triumphal journey through the purgatorial Underworld and beyond to an ultimate, deeply desired, union with the cosmos.

Acknowledgments

This chapter developed from collaborative work with Mary Miller while on a fellowship at History of Art Department, Yale University, in 2002, and was first presented at the 22nd University of Pennsylvania Museum Maya Weekend, 2004. I want to express my gratitude for the assistance and suggestions of Oswaldo Chinchilla, Allen Christenson, Michael Coe, Barbara Fash, Judith Strupp Green, Sharon Edgar Greenhill, Stephen Houston, Justin Kerr, Bruce Love, Barbara MacLeod, Cameron McNeil, Frauke Sachse, Peter Schmidt, Joel Skidmore, David Stuart, Andrew Weeks, and Marc Zender.

Notes

1. For some of the practical and symbolic uses of cacao see S. D. Coe and M. D. Coe 1996; McAnany 1995; L. A. Parsons 1969; Reents-Budet 1994a; D. Stuart 1988, 1989; Taube 1994a; and J. E. S. Thompson 1956.

2. Glyphic connotations often appear to be whimsical fusions or strategies to save space in the inscriptions. In many cases, however, there is a semantic purpose, especially where they form compound nouns.

3. Today we find *iximté'* and its cognate *iximche'* as plant names in Yukatek, Ch'orti', Tzeltal, K'iche', Q'anjob'al, and Jakalteco. Yet none are varieties of maize or cacao, referring instead to a range of unrelated trees and shrubs (the best known of which is the *ramón*, or breadnut, tree, *Brosimum alicastrum* Sw.).

4. The caption to the prone figure (E1-3) begins **pa-ka-la-ja** to make *paklaj iximté'* '(the) Maize Tree is face-down,' an explicit reference to the position he adopts (for *paklaj* see Stuart, Houston, and Robertson 1999:32). That to the seated figure (A1-3) begins **u-BAAH-?**, where the final sign is a scroll representing speech, poetry, or song (Stephen Houston and Marc Zender, personal communication 2004). This is a rare compound, with other examples on Quirigua Monument 26 at C8 (C. Jones 1983: Figure 13.2), Naranjo Panel 1 at B2 (I. Graham 1978:105), and in a Maya text painted on a Teotihuacan mural (see Taube 2003c:Figure 11.8b).

5. The protagonist is named [**CH'OK**]CHAN *ch'ok chan(al)* 'Young Snake' in one caption (A3) and a fuller **UH-CHAN-na IXIM[TE'] AJ-CH'OK CHAN-la** *uh chan iximté' aj ch'ok chanal* 'Jeweled? Sky, Maize Tree, He of Young Snake' in one of the longer columns (F1-4) (my thanks to Marc Zender for *uh chan* as '(be)jewel(ed) sky,' personal communication 2004). Parenthetically, the name *ch'ok chanal* also appears as a name or title on Calakmul Stela 114, created in or around A.D. 431.

6. The Maya Maize God was first examined in detail by Eduard Seler (for example, 1902–23:3:595) and Herbert Spinden (for example, 1913:89–90) and is treated in the ethnographic writings such as those of Raphael Girard (1962), among others. In unpublished work, Nicholas Hellmuth also contributed a number of important observations (cited in Taube 1985:172).

7. Although not ever-present, T504 **AK'AB** 'darkness' glyphs (one seen beneath the bier here in Figure 8.2a) are distinctive features of Sustenance Mountain in Maya art. The reference to darkness could locate the mountain within the Underworld, although, since the same sign marks the vessel of Chaak, containing rainwater, it more likely refers to dark thunderclouds inside. Page 65a of the Dresden Codex (1975) makes reference to this *ak'ab ha'al* 'dark rain,' and according to the Chilam Balam of Chumayel water was created on the day 11 Ak'bal, the day name of *ak'ab* (Roys 1933:117).

8. The sense behind the **ha-li** spelling is uncertain. The *-l* ending can be adjectival, and the use of disharmonic **-li** could suggest *haal*, *ha'al*, or possibly *ha'il*. *Ha'il* can mean 'watery' and *ha'al* is 'rain' in a number of Mayan languages, but compounds like these are usually formed with logographic **HA'** 'water' (Lacadena 2000).

9. At the time of writing, this sign (numbered T533 in J. E. S. Thompson 1962) is an active topic of debate among epigraphers, with contributions from Luís Lopes, Barbara MacLeod, David Mora-Marin, and David Stuart, among others.

10. The "psychoduct" that emerges from the sarcophagus of Pakal of Palenque and ascends to the temple sanctuary far above (see Ruz 1973:232) was designed to carry the

deceased's departing breath-essence. For the ordering of T533 prior to T58 **SAK** in this spelling of the death phrase see Zender (1999).

11. Pakal's transformation into a tree is hard to appreciate at first since his body lies over the tree, which thus seems to grow from the plate below. The same overlapping convention, however, is applied to the ancestor portraits on the sarcophagus sides, which are plainly fusions or embodiments; it is seen again in the Codex Borgia versions.

12. The opening phrase of a text encircling the outside rim of the sarcophagus lid mentions the Maize God and must refer to the scene in some way. David Stuart (personal communication 2004) has recently suggested that it reads 'The Maize God's burden(?) forms thusly,' in reference to the ancestral fruit trees (see also Schele and Mathews 1998:341–342).

13. This translation is courtesy of Joel Skidmore.

14. The damaged glyph within the blossom can be recognized from other examples as the gopher head **BAAH** or **ba**. Its role here is unknown. If in some way a phonetic cue, it could allude to the frangipani, whose full name seems to have been *baak nikté* 'bone flower.' One Early Classic incised vessel depicts the plant as an anthropomorphic tree with bone-petaled flowers (Hellmuth 1988:Figure 4.2).

15. For discussions of Mesoamerican World Trees see Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993; Furst 1977; Heyden 1993, 1994; León Portilla 1973; Roys 1933; Schele 1992, 1996; Selser 1902–23; Taube 1994a, 2005; and Tozzer 1907, 1941.

16. The crocodilian World Tree has been identified in Olmec art of the first millennium B.C. (Reilly 1995:38) (Figure 8.4b). The humanoid heads appended to the "trunk" probably represent individual fruits. Mexican World Trees in later periods were also considered to be fruitful. One in the Postclassic Codex Fejérváry-Mayer (1971:1), representing the south, is a cacao tree; in the Codex Borgia (page 53) the fifth, central place, is occupied by a maize plant—in close accord with Maya thought (Figure 8.5b).

17. Directional World Trees in the Dresden Codex show axe-wielding storm gods, Chaaks, seated in their boughs (pages 30–31, 69). There is some parallel here with the royal title *kaloonte* 'Tree,' which has versions aligned to the four cardinal directions and uses a glyph for the root *kal* that depicts a Chaak brandishing an axe. Ethnographic sources also tie storm gods to World Trees, telling of the eastern "trunk of heaven" in which the Chaaks live during the dry season (Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934:116).

18. The spelling *ahiin* is a revision from *ayiin* (letter from David Stuart to Luís Lopes 2003).

19. David Stuart (personal communication 2003) first told me about these sculptures, and both Barbara Fash and Cameron McNeil (personal communications 2004) generously sent me materials about them.

20. A fine plate excavated at Uaxactun, Guatemala, depicts the inverted Maize God/Tree in the lowest, Underworld register of the scene—his eyes closed in death as he awaits resurrection (R. E. Smith 1955:Figure 72f).

21. The same ritual specialist who described Christ's walk as the sun along a road in the sky also tells of his return: "diving here upon the earth" (Sosa 1985:429–430).

22. The cacao pods serve only as a generic reference to fruit here, since the texts mention not *kakaw* but what may be *tzen(?)* 'food, sustenance' (Bricker 1986:148). This point is reiterated in an analogous section on page 46 of the Madrid Codex, where the text supplies the same *pak'* and *tzen(?)* terms, while the scene again shows the patron gods embodied as trees, this time as upright trunks without cacao pods.

23. The initial recognition of God L outside the codices was by Michael Coe (1973:91, 107), with more recent analyses by Taube (1992a:79–88) and M. E. Miller and S. Martin (2004: 58–63, 281). On one painted ceramic (K5359) God L is captioned with glyphs reading **13-? yu-CHAN**, whereas in the Dresden Codex (pages 7 and 10) his owl avatar is named **13-CHAN-NAL[?]** *ku-yu oxlajuun chanal ? kuy* '13 Sky ? Owl.' The latter, although with different numbers at times, usually appears in the headdress of God L. In the Dresden Codex (for example, page 14), God L is named with an iconic depiction of rain followed by a blackened portrait head.

24. This enigmatic character is conceivably the Classic period version of the *Popol Vuh's* Seven Hunahpu, brother of One Hunahpu. He may also appear on the vessels K8540 and K8736.

25. Schellhas (1904:35–36) linked Ek Chuah to God M in the codices, and Taube (1992a:90–92) has discussed the characteristics Ek Chuah shares with God L. Ek Chuah is doubtless equivalent to Ik Chaua, a Chontal Maya deity (J. E. S. Thompson 1970:306). As first noted by J. E. S. Thompson (1962:282), the name glyph of God M in the codices is identical to one used for the Jaguar God of the Underworld—a god of fire and warfare—in Classic period inscriptions. There is good reason to view God M as an aspect or derivation of the Jaguar God of the Underworld (Grube 2000:98–99; M. E. Miller and S. Martin 2004:281), who had been conflated with a Mexican merchant god, probably Yacatecutli (Kelley 1976:72; Martin 2005).

26. Compare, for example, El Peru (Guatemala) Stelae 33 and 34 (J. Miller 1974: Figure 2, 6) to K1398 and K1560 (Kerr 1989:81, 98).

27. My thanks to Barbara MacLeod who reassessed the translations of Roys and of Barrera Vásquez and Rendón and made this version for me (personal communication 2004). Oxlahun-ti-ku means 'Thirteen God/s' and, as mentioned above, this number appears in one glyphic name for God L. The reference to 'insignia' comes from *cangel(kanbel)*, which seems to have been a staff of some sort (Roys 1933:67). The reference to 'smut' comes from *zabac(sabak)*, a black dye that could refer to body paint or possibly a magical powder (J. E. S. Thompson 1970:265, 281–82). Interestingly, in the sixteenth-century *Relaciones de Yucatan* (1:51), Spanish chroniclers tell us that the Yukatek Maya already "knew of the flood and the fall of Lucifer." J. E. S. Thompson posited a connection to the world destruction and Oxlahun-ti-ku episodes (1970:340), and we might now extend that to God L.

28. J. E. S. Thompson made the first speculative connection between Schellhas's God K and K'awiil (1970:226)—subsequently proven by David Stuart (1987:15–16)—

interpreting the name as a union of *k'aa* 'surplus, abundance' and *wi'il* 'sustenance' (Barrera Vasquez 1980:359, 922; J. E. S. Thompson 1970:289).

29. Complex aspects to K'awiil's character remain to be understood, especially where his name seems to function more like a general term for embodiment or image (see Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:193–199; Houston, Stuart, and Taube in press), or his body hand-crafted by other gods in several scenes on vessels.

30. The two vases in question are K2068 and K2772 (Kerr 1990:211, 285). The earth is represented as a house, with corn kernels inside seemingly symbolized by piled stones (Taube 1986).

31. There is greater complexity to their relationship, since on other occasions God L holds a severed head or effigy of K'awiil, while on page 46 of the Dresden Codex he spears K'awiil with an *atlatl* dart.

32. The identification of jade earspools here was by Karl Taube (1994a:227), who also noted their appearance on page 52 of the Madrid Codex, in a scene where cacao is an offering. The same motif seems to be represented in the hieroglyph T66 (J. E. S. Thompson 1962), which represents a positive augury in the codices.

33. This translation draws elements from the three published versions listed. Bolon Tz'akab can be translated as 'nine/many generations' and, although this could be a name for the seeds that will found humankind, Landa (1941[1566]:140, 142) makes clear that it represents a distinct deity.

34. Compare the blunt-nosed serpent on this vessel with those representing flowers on Figure 8.5a and, especially, Figure 8.4b.

35. For deeper discussions of embodiment in Mesoamerica see López Austin (1988) for Central Mexico and, especially, Houston, Stuart, and Taube (2006) for the Maya.