

# Xib'alb'a y el nacimiento del nuevo sol

Una visión posclásica del colapso maya

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At the end of the Classic, a new mercantile elite arose on the Gulfcoast of Mexico – Tabasco and Campeche. Its members were a mix of Maya, Olmec-Xicalanca and Nonoalca lineages, and descendents of Teotihuacan. This elite developed a mercantile ideology which synthesized two mythological corpuses and its accompanying ritual expressions, summarized in the terms Tullan, a Teotihuacan heritage, and Tzuywa, which might date back to Olmec times. The protagonist of the Tullan complex was the Solar Hero whose central rite was the New Fire. The protagonist of the Tzuywa complex was the Maize Hero and its ritual expression, the Ballgame. I found that one can reduce both mythological corpuses to only two Maya glyphs: *k'in*, 'sun', which is white and masculine, and *k'an*, 'yellow', the color of the corn, which is feminine.

Carriers of this new ideology – aptly called Tullan-Tzuywa in the *Popol Wuj* – changed the traditional trade routes and established new centers, which caused – a hundred years later – the end of Classic Maya culture. The foremost city of that ideology was Chich'en Itza. Among its founders was the Kanek' lineage. They were salt-traders and owners of Salinas de los Nueve Cerros. I propose that Kanek' were the ancestors of the Kaweq lineage, authors of the *Popol Wuj* and the Xib'alb'a myth, which is perhaps the most idiosyncratic expression we have of this new mercantile ideology. The setting of this ideology is the underworld, home to the merchants deities.

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The book offers many new insights. To mention some examples:

The Xib'alb'a myth originated at the end of the Classic in the northern Alta Verapaz region and upper Pasión-river. The cradle of the Kaweq lineage, intellectual authors of the *Popol Wuj*, is also traced back to this area.

There is an historically and geographically demonstrable Xib'alb'a. It was always there in the text of the *Popol Wuj* itself, but never really recognized by its translators. Kaweq authors locate Xib'alb'a in 'Nim Xol-Karchaj'. Karchaj is a reference to San Pedro Carcha and Nim Xol is a *barrio* of Coban, Santo Tomás Nim Xol. An historical analysis of the origin of these peoples shows that they are mostly Ch'ol-speaking Maya from the Franja Transversal del Norte, the area which includes de Candelaria Caves. I propose that the oven of Xib'alb'a, where the Hero Twins die

to be reborn as sun and moon of the new era, was actually the flower-shaped plaza of Machaquilá (*xochitl* = *junajpu*). Archaeologists have shown that it has been the scene of a huge bonfire.

In the Xib'alb'a myth, Jun Ajpu, whose name actually means First of Tullan, is an embodiment of the new mercantile ideology. He is a fusion of both heroes: Maize Hero and Solar Hero. Hence, he dies two times in the story: first as the Maize Hero, decapitated in the House of the Killer bats, a sacrifice associated with the ballgame, and secondly, burned as the Solar Hero, in the oven of Xib'alb'a. Nevertheless, he is restored to life as the maize plant and the sun, the basic elements of the new era.

The well-known Classic scene Sacrifice of the Baby-Jaguar represents a primordial ballgame, in which the three main characters have their specific roles. God C (Chaahk) creates with his axe and lightning stone the cleft in the earth which serves as the ballcourt. The Death God is the executioner who throws the ball into the chasm, personified by the Maize God as a baby. The entire scene is a metaphor for the sowing of corn. The young Maize God is the maize kernel sown by the Death God in the furrow opened by the Lightning God.

The guardian and lightener of the oven of Xib'alb'a, is the Fire God. His Central Mexican counterpart is Xiuhteuctli, Lord of Fire, who is an equivalent of the Classic Maya God L. Both are also the supreme patrons of the merchants and head of the underworld.

A Classic name of God L is B'olon Okte' K'u. *Okte'* is derived from *ok*, 'dog', and *te'*, 'tree'; its highland cognate is *tz'ite'*. *Tz'ite'* is known as *palo de pito*, the tree that produces the red seeds used by calendar diviners. In the *Popol Wuj* the male members of the Wooden People are made of the *tz'ite'* tree. Thus, old God L is a denizen from another creation, and therefore known as Mam o Huehuetotl. He is present in the tale of Xib'alb'a, as the first couple of the Underworld Lords, who turn out to be just wooden effigies, as 1 and 7 Junajpu fail to notice. *Tz'ite'* is also the wood of which Maximon is made, a modern version of God L.

As various scholars have shown, B'olon Okte' K'u is a god of calendrical transitions. Just like his Central Mexican counterpart, Xiuhteuctli, who is patron of the last *trecena*, the last month, and the close of the Calendar Round. There is a reason for that. He is not just the Lord of Fire, he *is* fire. In his body of flames – the terrestrial fire – the new, celestial fire is born, which is the sun. Mayan languages don't have a term for 'time'; they use a variation of the word for 'sun'. Thus, with the birth of the sun, new time and calendrical cycles are created. That's why B'olon Okte' K'u or Xiuhteuctli is present at the beginning of new cycles. He supplies the medium for the sun to be born. In the Xib'alb'a myth, he gives his

daughter, Xkik', as his 'flesh'. She becomes the mother of the Sun and Maize of the new era.

I have identified Tikal's Spearthrower Owl as a high priest of the Xiuhteuctli-cult of Teotihuacan and, hence, as the head of the merchant guilds. The components of his name-glyph that appear on the *marcador* of Tikal, are also found on the famous Tlalocan Tree, an image of the deity itself. It must be the Central Mexico equivalent of the *kealomte'*, a title that came into use among Classic Maya lords with the appearance of Spearthrower Owl in Tikal. His weapon, the spearthrower, is a version of Fire Serpent (*xiuhcoatl*) and the owl is similar as God L's headdress of the *tecolote*.

This knowledge leads to a new interpretation of the facade of the Temple of Quetzalcoatl in Teotihuacan: the serpent with the two masks. We know from the Aztec merchants, that they included two complementary guilds, one in charge of the internal affairs (*pochteca*) and one of the external affairs (*oztomeca*). Thus, on the one hand we have Xiuhteuctli – Taube's Warrior Serpent – who is the god of the divine fire and the center (*tlalxicco* and *tlexicco*), and on the other hand Nacxiti-Quetzalcoatl, the warrior that go marching to the outer corners of Mesoamerica. In this interpretation, the body of the serpent is the road (Ce Coatl Ohtlimelahuac – One Serpent Marching Route). It should not be gone unnoticed that the Quetzalcoatl complex in Teotihuacan was opposite from the biggest marketplace in Mesoamerica.

Merchants had a proper calendar of 9 times 40 days, which they projected on the route they walked. That led to a chain of Nine and Forty Places, each harboring a special building for the merchant guilds. This temple we have come to know as the Wi Te' Naah building.

After the fall of Teotihuacan, lineages tied to the Xiuhteuctli cult, moved into the Maya area, as Taube has shown. They are most clearly present in Chich'en Itza, as shows the iconography of its famous ballcourt complex. Xiuhteuctli is present in the central register of the bas-relieves in the Lower Temple of the Jaguars with his Fire Serpent in his hand. A Maya version of the deity covers both the outer columns. This images have been identified as God N, still he acts as the God of Fire, with a torch in his hand and four Fire Serpents surrounding him.

When in the middle of the sixteenth century Dominican friars directed their evangelical zeal from Coban and Carcha to the Lowlands, they found the Ch'ol Maya pushed beyond the western banks of the Usumacinta river and between the upper Río Pasión (Cancuen) and the Highlands. Belize and the central Petén, all the way up to the Gulfcoast was then populated by Maya from the Yucatan language family (Itza, Mopan, Kehache or Yucatec), an area which by the end of the Classic was entirely occupied by Ch'ol-speaking Maya. What had happened? Interestingly,

the late Juan Pedro Laporte and his Atlas team has shown that during the Terminal Classic we see the first signs of these waves of migrations from the Yucatecan area.

The migration into the central Petén seems a consequence of the mercantile revolution at the end of the Classic. Strangely enough, this massive influx into the central area has hardly been taken into account, when discussing the Classic Maya collapse. I argue that the Kaweq actually lived these times of turmoil, survived them and finally surpassed them, defining themselves as the inhabitants of a new epoch – the first man molded from corn dough by Xmukane is B'alam K'itze', founding father of the Kaweq. They later forged this cultural collapse into myth though leaving traces of history in the tale. Hence the subtitle of the book: 'Una visión posclásica del colapso maya'.

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