Figure 1. Greenstone *cuauhxicalli*. Height 14.5 cm, diameter 23.8 cm. Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin. Photo: Art Resource.

The Womb of the World: The *Cuauhxicalli* and Other Offering Bowls of Ancient and Contemporary Mesoamerica

Karl Taube

In ancient Mesoamerica, certain objects were used to contact the spirit world of gods and ancestors, including mirrors, incense burners, and offering bowls. The fact that many of these items were circular relates to one of their basic meanings as cave-like passageways through which supernaturals could emerge. In this study, I will focus on vessels used for presenting offerings, although it should be understood that these items were more than containers, but offered access between the world of the living and that of gods and spirits. Among the vessels to be described are the Aztec *cuauhxicalli*, ritual gourd vessels of the contemporary Huichol and Cora, and censers of the Classic Maya. Aside from being vessels for sacrificial blood offerings, these items share a number of thematic meanings, including the sun, the earth, and the four directions and world center. In addition, as circular bowls for contacting and conjuring gods and ancestors, they are also symbolic wombs and birth passages through which the sun and other supernatural beings are born. It will also be noted that although expressed among very different peoples and regions over a great expanse of time, this is a deep, historically shared tradition that, as of yet, can be first documented for the Classic Maya.

The Aztec *cuauhxicalli*

As noted by Nelly Gutiérrez Solana (1983:115), the term *cuauhxicalli* has been used by Colonial chroniclers and modern researchers for a variety of Aztec vessels, monuments, and even structures. This study will refer specifically to a series of semispherical stone bowls used as receptacles for sacrificial hearts, with images of the sun carved in the interior and portrayals of the earth deity on the base. In her detailed study of Aztec stone ritual vessels, Gutiérrez Solana (1983:83-86, Figs. 47-56) lists three examples, one in the Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin (Figures 1–2), another in the Museum für Völkerkunde in Vienna, and a third currently in the Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. Fashioned from dense, hard stone, these *cuauhxicalli* are finely carved and highly polished. They are also relatively small, ranging from 15 to 23.5 centimeters in diameter. The first researcher to identify these objects as receptacles for

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human hearts was Eduard Seler (1902-1923:2:704-716). He noted that the Berlin example, the largest and most elaborate of the three, has a series of 18 inverted human hearts on the rim (Figure 3a). Seler compared this object to portrayals of sacrificial vessels in the early colonial Codex Borbonicus, which are similarly rimmed with human hearts and in addition emit gouts of blood (Figure 3c). For both the Berlin bowl and the Codex Borbonicus examples, the sides of the vessel rim are lined with vertical eagle plumes. Seler noted that these feathers relate directly to the name *cuauhxicalli*, which derives from the terms for eagle, *cuauhtli*, and vessel, *xicalli*. It will be subsequently noted that *xicalli* is more specifically a cut gourd bowl, currently referred to by the derivative Spanish term *jícara*.

Aside from identifying stone examples of *cuauhxicalli*, Seler (1902-1923:2:714) also illustrated a ceramic polychrome vase portrayed with vertical eagle plumes on its sides. According to Seler, such ceramic vessels may have been used for containing sacrificial blood. While studying the Mesoamerican collection in the San Bernardino County Museum, I came across a ceramic sherd portraying another *cuauhxicalli*, although in this case a low bowl rather than a vase (Figure 4). Along with the eagle plumes on the upper rim, the bowl had a band of quincunx crosses on the sides. Although quincunx crosses denoting centrality do not occur on the three cited stone examples, Leonardo López Luján (personal communication 2008) notes that they do occur on portrayals of *cuauhxicalli* appearing in Aztec sculpture (see Alcina Franch et al. 1992:354). Although the sherd is in "Cholula polychrome" style, Cholula was not the only source for this type of ware. Neutron activation studies by Hector Neff have determined that much of the "Cholula polychrome" from the Aztec Templo Mayor was actually made in Texcoco. While it is conceivable that the ceramic vessels were for holding sacrificial hearts and blood, it is also possible that they were feasting vessels used during particular festival sacrificial events, such as occurred during the month of Tlacaxipehualiztli.

In Aztec thought, the eagle symbolizes the sun. According to the Florentine Codex, first the eagle and then the jaguar followed the sun as it rose out of the sacrificial pyre at Teotihuacan (Sahagún 1950-1982:Book 7:6). On the famed *huehuetl* drum from Malinalco, an eagle and jaguar pair flank the sun, animals surely referring to the well-known Eagle and Jaguar military

Figure 2. Greenstone *cuauhxicalli*, Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin. Side and interior views. Photos: Art Resource.

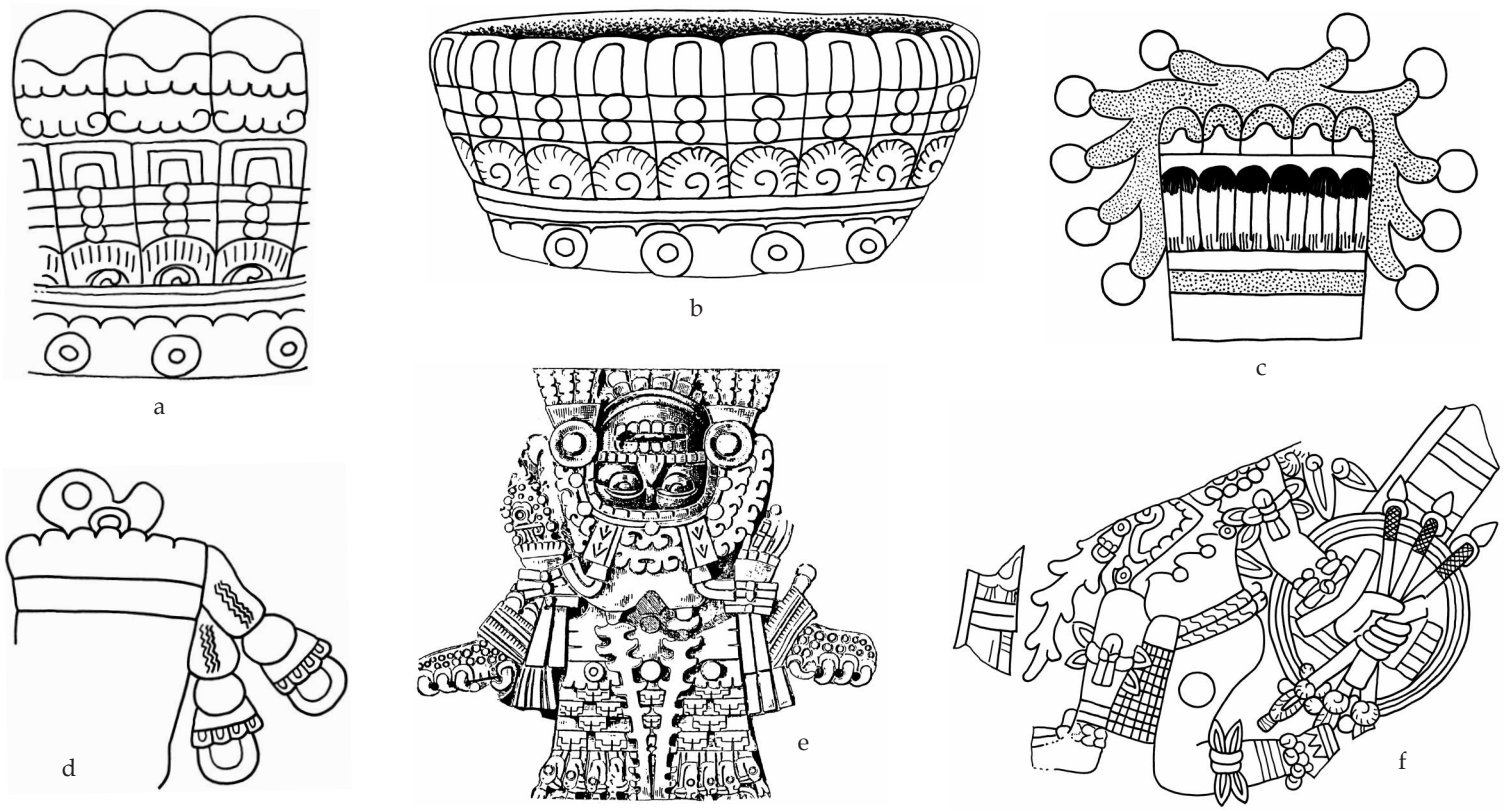


Figure 3. The *cuauhxicalli* and portrayals of cut flesh in Aztec iconography: (a) detail of side of *cuauhxicalli* in the Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin—note hearts, eagle feathers, and basal band with jade disks and crenellated upper edge (after Seler 1902-1923:2:707); (b) *cuauhxicalli* bowl in the Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienna (after Seler 1902-1923:2:712); (c) Aztec portrayal of *cuauhxicalli* containing sacrificial hearts, Codex Borbonicus p. 18; (d) severed upper thigh with cut-flesh motif, detail of Coyolxauhqui Stone (after Alcina Franch et al. 1992:383); (e) pulque goddess with cut-flesh motif across lower abdomen, detail of Bilimek Pulque Vessel (from Seler 1902-1923:2:944); (f) sacrificed warrior with open chest (after Umberger 1981:Fig. 152c).

orders as well as the mythic origin of the sun. Hermann Beyer (1965:137-40) noted that the eagle was closely identified with the sun in Late Postclassic Mexico, as can be seen in the Mixtec codices, the Borgia Group, and Aztec art and texts. In the Aztec *Primeros Memoriales*, the rising sun is referred to as "the eagle ascendant" (Sahagún 1997:124). For the Aztec, the eagle symbolized the diurnal, celestial aspect of the sun, an entity born at dawn out of the earth.

Whereas the uppermost portion of the Berlin *cuauhxicalli* is rimmed with inverted human hearts, the sides and rims of the Vienna and New York examples are composed only of the vertical eagle feathers (Figure 3b). Near the base of all three *cuauhxicalli*, there is a horizontal band marked by a series of disks denoting jade. For a *cuauhxicalli* appearing on page eight of the Codex Borbonicus, the disk appearing on this basal band is green, clearly denoting jade. In Late Postclassic Central Mexican iconography, jade symbolizes preciousness and frequently appears on speech scrolls, bodies of water, and blood. In portrayals of *cuauhxicalli* in Aztec sculpture, the basal band can appear as a series of disks atop undulating bands, a motif denoting liquid (see Caso 1927:Figure 2; Gutiérrez Solana 1983:Figure 77). Given the ritual function of these bowls, the fluid denoted by the horizontal undulating lines is surely sacrificial blood.

Although not marked by the undulating lines denoting blood, the basal bands of the three Aztec *cuauhxicalli* vessels refer to sacrifice. Zachary Hruby (2006b) notes that the upper portion of the band is scalloped, an Aztec sculptural convention denoting cut flesh (Figure 3a–b). For the famed Coyolxauhqui Stone from the Templo Mayor, this scalloping appears on the severed head, limbs, and torso of the slain goddess (Figure 3d). Hruby (2006b) compares the basal band to a similar motif appearing on the Bilimek Pulque Vessel, in this case crossing the abdomen of the skeletal pulque goddess (see Figure 3e). In the case of the pulque goddess, the scalloped band is marked with jade disks, precisely the same version appearing on the three *cuauhxicalli* under discussion. According to Hruby (2006b), the scalloped motif

Figure 4. C*uauhxicalli* sherd in San Bernardino County Museum (photo by Karl Taube).

indicates that the goddess has been cut open.

The scalloped motif ringing the base of the *cuauhxicalli* bowls denotes a circular wound, but of what? It is probably the gaping, blood-filled hole created when the heart is ripped from the torso of the victim. The lower sides of the *cuauhxicalli* bowls are portrayals of this wound in profile. One Aztec relief portrays a sacrificed warrior with the same scallops rimming the wound of his open chest, although in this case the orifice is rendered in profile as a V-shaped cleft (Figure 3f). The same convention also appears in Codex Borgia portrayals of heart sacrifice, and here the cut flesh is yellow, probably denoting subcutaneous, fatty tissue. Page 11 of the Codex Laud portrays a monkey holding a sacrificial flint dagger and the skeletal death god holding a human heart. These beings are also sacrificial victims, with their hearts emerging from scalloped yellow wounds on their lower chests, probably the same type of sacrificial wound rimming the three Aztec *cuauhxicalli* bowls.

For the Florentine Codex description of the spring rites of Tlacaxipehualiztli, the relation of the sacrificed captive to a drinking vessel is explicit. Before climbing the *temalacatl* stone of gladiatorial sacrifice, the captive warrior was presented pulque to be drunk through a straw (Sahagún 1950-1982:Book 2:52). Following the defeat and sacrifice of the captive, a straw was placed in the open chest to offer drink to the sun, much as if the chest and body were the godly drinking vessel of the sun god Tonatiuh (Sahagún 1950-1982:Book 2:53). The slain victims were referred to as "eagle men," linking them to both the *cuauhxicalli* and the sun. However, the *cuauhxicalli* bowl alludes to more than the mutilated chest of the human victim; it is also the great womb and vagina of the earth goddess, a blood-filled passageway of both sacrifice and birth (for a discussion of the relation of blood sacrifice to birth among the Classic Maya, see Taube 1994a). The well-known ritual event of drilling new fire on the chest of a victim probably relates to this symbolism, with the fire being born out of the symbolic center of the body (for new fire sacrifice, see Sahagún 1950-1982:Book 7:25-26).

In Aztec religious thought, sacrifice is a creative act closely related to cosmic genesis (Taube 2004a). Aside from the birth of the sun and the moon out of the sacrificial pyre at Teotihuacan, there is also the mythic dismemberment of the earth monster to create the cosmos (Garibay 1979:26, 105, 108). According to the *Histoire du Mechique*, the earth was made from the sacrificed body of Tlaltecuhtli, with trees and other plants being her hair, small grass and flowers her skin, and pools and small caves her eyes (Garibay 1979:108). A similar mythic episode appears on page one of the Codex Fejérváry-Mayer, which portrays the bloody, dismembered body of Tezcatlipoca placed at the four corners of the world. But just as gods were sacrificed to create the world, human sacrificial victims also embodied cosmic principles. For example, it is generally believed that the human skins worn by impersonators of Xipe Totec symbolized new spring growth covering the surface of the earth. In addition, during the act of heart sacrifice, four priests held the limbs of the victim, thereby creating a model of the four directions, with the center place being the chest of the victim (Taube 2004a:175).

On the base of the three *cuauhxicalli* bowls, immediately below the cut-flesh motif, is the image of the earth deity Tlaltecuhtli, a being of ambiguous sex (Figure 5b). Although termed the "earth lord," Tlaltecuhtli also displays overtly feminine characteristics, including a skirt and the squatting "hocker" or *mamazouhticac* birth position (Nicholson 1967:82).[1] Nicholson (1967:87) notes that "most of the available evidence suggests that in late pre-Hispanic Central Mexico the earth in general and the earth monster in the *mamazouhticac* position in particular was usually conceived to be female and depicted wearing the costume proper to that sex." Aside from the skirt, Tlaltecuhtli often has the back element known as the *citlallicue*, or "stars her skirt," a device commonly worn by Aztec death and earth goddesses (Nicholson 1967:86). The *citlallicue* is typically a human-skull belt piece from which shell tinklers hang on long, braided cords. The appearance of this back element on the three

[1] The term "hocker" is widely used in Aztec studies to refer to the common parturition pose of Tlaltecuhtli; in German it signifies one who is in a squatting or crouching position.

cuauhxicalli earth deities indicates that Tlaltecuhtli is lying on her back with the bowl corresponding to the front, ventral side of her body, much as if the vessel portrayed the open wound and womb of the earth goddess immediately below.[2] During the climactic moment of heart sacrifice the victim adopted the pose of Tlaltecuhtli, lying on his back with his limbs splayed and a gaping, blood-filled hole in the center of his abdomen.

Noting that many Tlaltecuhtli figures display a prominent jade jewel in the middle of the abdomen, Nicholson (1967:83) suggested that this concerned both the heart and the world center. Nicholson (1954, 1967) noted that one fragmentary Aztec sculpture discovered near the southwest of the Zocalo explicitly portrays Tezcatlipoca being born from this central jewel of Tlaltecuhtli. Nicholson (1954:170) compared this monument to a goddess appearing on page 31 of the Codex Borgia, who is also in the *mamazouhticac* parturition pose, with a diminutive demonic being emerging with a stream of blood from a jade disk in the center of the torso. Nicholson (1967:83, Figs. 10-11) subsequently noted that the same page also illustrates another goddess in identical pose giving birth, not from the jade disk but from her exposed heart. The difference between the heart and the navel of the earth is not clear, although the heart designation may refer to the netherworld center, as Tepeyollotl, or Heart of the Mountain, was a jaguar being of caves and the underworld. In the case of Tepeyollotl, the heart is explicitly related to both the dark interior of the human body and the earth. It is conceivable that the "heart" and the "navel" of the earth correspond to centers of two distinct realms, the underworld and the surface of the earth. During heart sacrifice, the blade was introduced below the bony sternum and then thrust into the interior of the chest cavity. Thus whereas the "heart of the earth" might refer to the original, dark interior region of the heart, the earth navel may allude to the place where the heart was excised and by extension the surface of the earth.

Although the abdominal jade disk of Tlaltecuhtli clearly relates to the heart, centrality, and birth, it also concerns the navel, another part of the body related to parturition. Rather than occurring in the chest region, the jade disk occurs in the very center of the torso, and this is probably close to where the heart was excised, in the fleshy region immediately below the rib cage and sternum. In Aztec thought, there was the concept of the *tlalxicco*, or "earth navel," the pivotal *axis mundi* of the world and

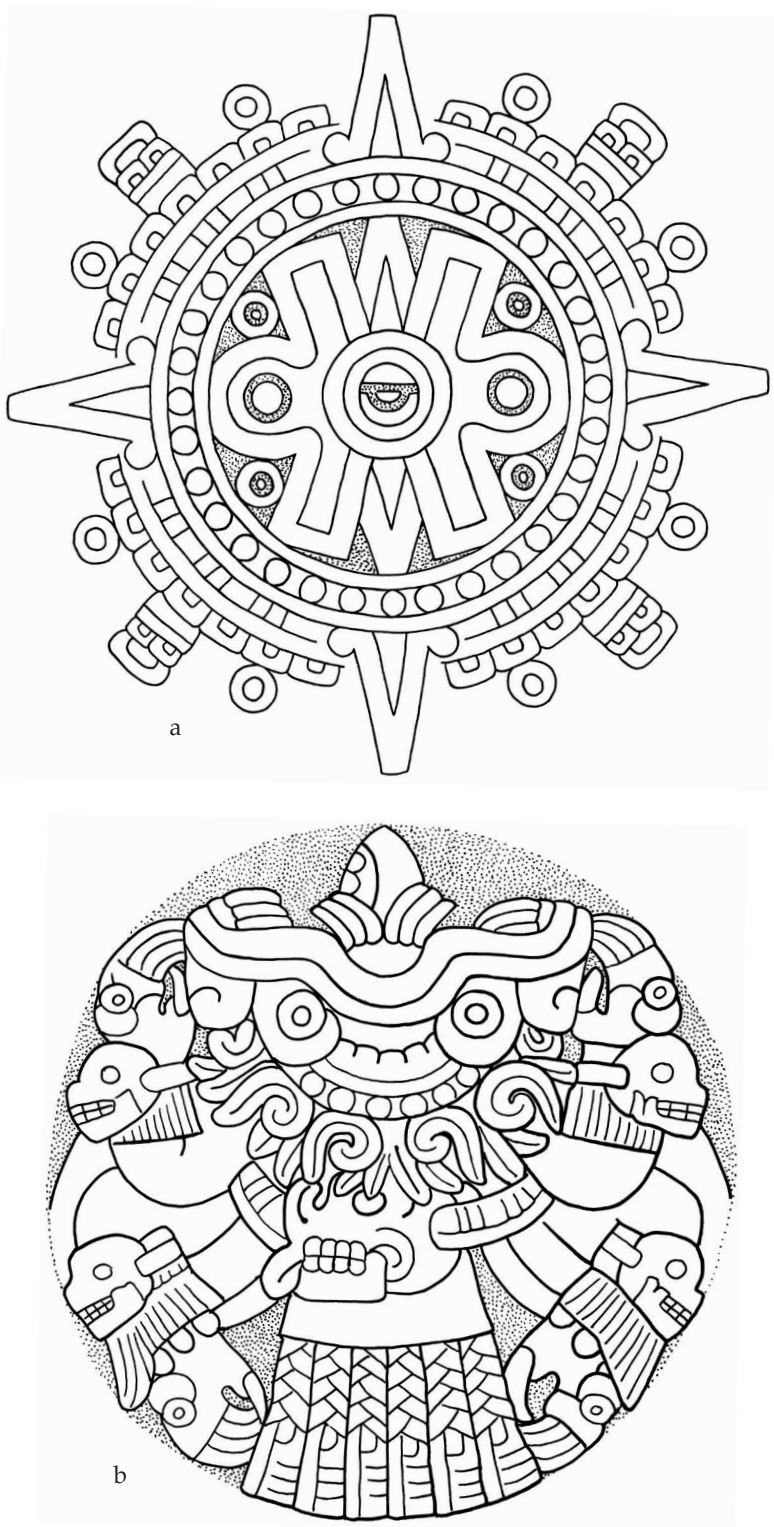


Figure 5. The interior and basal motifs of the Berlin *cuauhxicalli*: (a) solar sign inside *cuauhxicalli* bowl; (b) Tlaltecuhtli carved on base of vessel (after Alcina Franch et al. 1992:310).

[2] A number of Aztec supine "Chac Mool" sculptures hold bowls in the center of the abdomen (Cuéllar 1981:95, 120-31). For one example, the vessel is clearly a *cuauhxicalli* lined with human hearts on the rim. The deity holding the bowl is an archaistic form of Tlaloc, and another Tlaloc floating in water appears on the base of the monument. The basal Tlaloc has the body of Tlaltecuhtli in the *mamazouhticac* birth position (see Pasztory 1983:Plates 139-140).

a place of primordial creation. Whereas Tepeyollotl, or "heart of the mountain" was the netherworld jaguar god of caves, the fire god known as Xiuhtecuhtli or Huehueteotl resided at *tlalxicco*. A passage in the Florentine Codex describes this earth navel as the dwelling place of the fire god as well as clouds and water:

> ... the mother of the gods, the father of the gods, who resideth in the navel of the earth, who is set in the turquoise enclosure, [enclosed] with the waters of the lovely cotinga, enclosed with clouds—Ueueteotl, he of Ayamictlan, Xiuhtecutli. (Sahagún 1950-1982:Book 6:88-89)

In the cosmogram appearing on page one of the Codex Fejérváry-Mayer, the fire god Xiuhtecuhtli occupies the central place, a probable portrayal of *tlalxicco*.

Although only the back, dorsal side of Tlaltecuhtli is visible on the base of the three *cuauhxicalli* bowls, the four quarters and world center are also conveyed, in this case by the four skulls on the limbs and the larger one strapped to the back (Figure 5b). These five skulls create the well-known Mesoamerican quincunx cosmogram, formed of four corner elements framing the central world axis. In this case, the large central skull serves as a netherworld version of the jade disk appearing on the belly of Tlaltecuhtli.

In the interior of the *cuauhxicalli* bowls, centered directly above the supine Tlaltecuhtli, is the image of the present sun Nahui Ollin, the calendrical name of the sun god Tonatiuh (Figure 5a). The solar sign is surrounded by four solar rays and four jade signs, both of which motifs commonly appear on Late Postclassic solar disks. Although the jade *chalchihuitl* elements could simply denote preciousness, they may also have directional significance, for among the Olmec, the Classic Maya, and the Aztec, jades were frequently placed to mark the four directions and world center (Taube 2005b). In other words, just as the five skulls on the base denote a netherworld, nocturnal realm, the four jades mark the diurnal world of the sky and the surface of the earth. In this regard, it is noteworthy that according to the *Primeros Memoriales*, incense was offered to the sun five times at night and four times during the day (Sahagún 1997:124).

The five skulls appearing on Tlaltecuhtli figures and the four jades on the solar disks are hardly unique to the *cuauhxicalli* vessels and often appear with other solar and earth monster images. What is unique for the three *cuauhxicalli* is the explicit placement of the sun atop Tlaltecuhtli. According to Umberger (1981:119): "The juxtaposition of the threatening earth monster and the sun is the Aztec symbol of cosmic tension." Umberger (1981:181-182) compared the three vessels to one of the most important and complex Aztec sculptures, the Teocalli of Sacred Warfare (see Caso 1927). Carved in the form of a temple, the sculpture portrays Tlaltecuhtli lying prone on the upper platform. Almost immediately above, in the region corresponding to the temple doorway, there is a vertical solar disk (see Caso 1927:Figs. 46, 64). Umberger (1981:181-182) notes that as in the case of the three *cuauhxicalli*, the earth monster and the solar disk are juxtaposed in dynamic opposition, the rising sun contrasted with the devouring earth. However, Umberger (1981:182) also mentions that Tlaltecuhtli faces away from the sun: "It is not a direct threat, because the sun is still in the east." Although the earth monster is generally considered to be a ravenous, devouring being, she is also a fertile deity of life and creation. As noted by Nicholson (1971:422), "the earth is at one and the same time the great womb and tomb of all life…" The Teocalli of Sacred Warfare may depict Tlaltecuhtli giving birth to the rising, eastern sun. Not only is Tlaltecuhtli in the *mamazouhticac* birth position, but her hips and loins are directly underneath the solar disk.

The relation of Tlaltecuhtli to solar birth relates directly to *cuauhxicalli* vessels, which are the symbolic womb and birth passage of the earth monster. In a number of cases, the skirt of Tlaltecuhtli strongly resembles a gourd-like bowl with a gently rounded base, although the Tlaltecuhtli skirts are often marked with crossed bones and skulls, motifs not known for *cuauhxicalli* and other sacrificial vessels (Figure 6).[3] In the case of the Bilimek Pulque Vessel, a prominent Ollin sign appears just above the hips (Figure 6b). Much like the juxtaposition of the sun and Tlaltecuhtli on the Teocalli of Sacred Warfare, the Ollin sign may refer to the birth of the sun, Nahui Ollin, out of the earth. Pages 31 and 32 of the Codex Borgia demonstrate that the hips and loins of the earth monster were conceived of as a bowl. Codex Borgia page 31 portrays the birth of skeletal demonic beings from goddesses appearing in the hocker pose. To the right side of the page, the newly born infants kneel in basins while being doused with water, quite probably denoting the rite of baptism known for both the Aztec and the Maya (see Taube 1994a:664). In scenes of baptism in the Codex Mendoza and the Florentine Codex, large bathing basins appear with the infants. In the Codex Borgia scene, the baptismal basins are in the form of skulls with the rims marked by the red and yellow bands denoting cut flesh. In fact, for the largest and most elaborate of these basins, the yellow rim is scalloped, clearly marking it as a wound (Figure 7a). As has been mentioned, similar cut flesh signs encircle the three Aztec *cuauhxicalli* vessels (Figure 3a–b).

[3] Zachary Hruby (2006b) independently noted the similarity of the skirt of certain Tlaltecuhtli figures to bowls. A Huastec sculpture from Tepecintla, Veracruz, portrays a deity in the hocker position with its hips strongly resembling a bowl. Although this being bears clear attributes of Quetzalcoatl, Alcina Franch suggests that it also may be an antecedent to the Aztec Tlaltecuhtli figures (Alcina Franch et al. 1992:128).

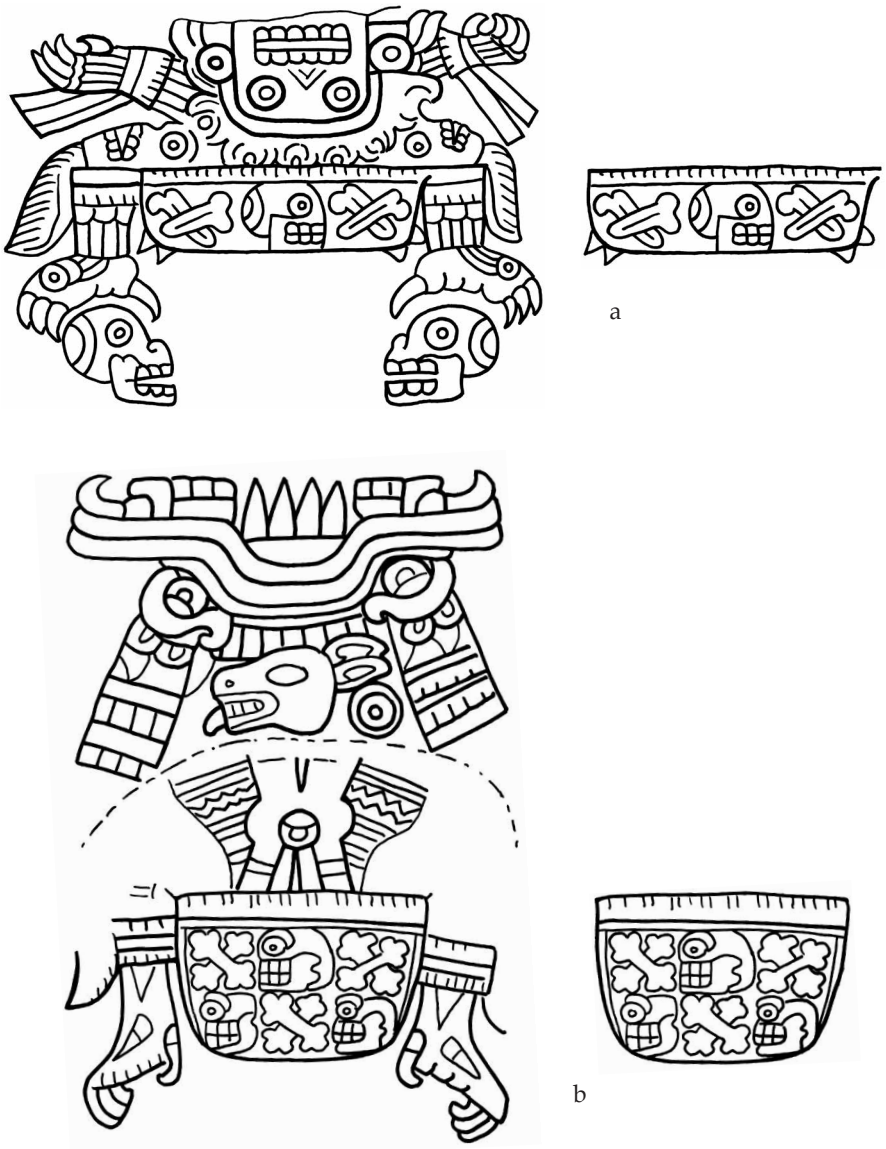


Figure 6. Tlaltecuhtli figures with skirts resembling bowls: (a) Tlaltecuhtli with skirt marked by a skull and crossed bones, detail of Stuttgart Statuette (after Alcina Franch et al. 1992:305); (b) Tlaltecuhtli wearing skirt with skulls and crossed bones, detail of Bilimek Pulque Vessel (after Seler 1902-1923:2:951).

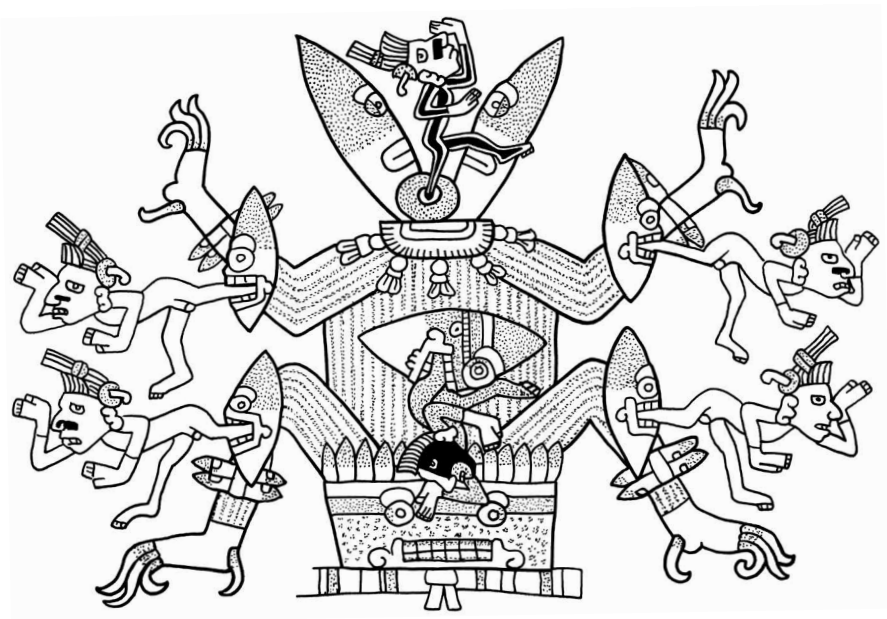
A very similar skull basin containing sacrificial flint knives appears on page 32, the following page of the Codex Borgia, as the hips of a figure seated in the *mamazouhticac* birth position (Figure 7b). In the case of this Codex Borgia hocker, the hips and skirt are clearly a large bowl rimmed with sacrificial blades. Four infant Tezcatlipocas emerge from skeletalized flint blades on the limbs of the figure. Each of these Tezcatlipoca figures has a distinct color to denote directional symbolism, as has been noted for the five skulls appearing on the bodies of Tlaltecuhtli figures. Whereas a fifth, black Tezcatlipoca emerges from two blades serving as the head of the hocker figure, Quetzalcoatl descends from a flint in the center of the body. Quetzalcoatl also appears at the base of Codex Borgia page 32 flanked by another pair of sacrificial blades as he emerges from a wound in the belly of a skeletal goddess marked by flint signs (Figure 7c). Marked with the yellow scallops denoting cut flesh, the wound is clearly a bowl, as vessels in the Borgia Group are frequently portrayed with "x-ray" U-shaped profiles (Figure 7d–e). In other words, this scene corresponds closely to the suggested symbolism of the Aztec *cuauhxicalli*, a sacrificial birth vessel in the central abdomen of the goddess.[4]

Although in his important initial study of *cuauhxicalli*, Seler (1902-1923:2:704-716) defined *xicalli* simply as a bowl, this Nahuatl term specifically denotes a bowl fashioned from cut gourd. According to the Florentine Codex, the sacrificial vessel was termed *cuauhxicalco*, *calco* being a word roughly cognate with *calli*, signifying a house, container, or enclosure (Sahagún 1950-1982:Book 2:48). In the shorter Spanish account of Tlacaxipehualiztli, the heart of the victim was placed in a gourd bowl, or *xícara* (Sahagún 1950-1982:Book 2:3). In the more detailed Nahuatl text, however, the vessel is described as a green gourd bowl (*xicalli*) lined with feathers on the rim (Sahagún 1950-1982:Book 2:54). Fray Bartolomé de las Casas (1967:2:188) also mentions that the sacrificial heart was placed in an elaborately painted gourd dish (*un escudilla hecha de calabaza muy pintada*) and that such vessels were known as *xícaras*.

Given that only three examples of stone *cuauhxicalli* bowls are known, it is unlikely that these items were commonly used in rites of heart sacrifice. Instead, these are probably elite imperial copies of sacrificial gourd vessels, such as were used during the spring rites of Tlacaxipehualiztli. Relatively

[4] The sacrificial emergence of Quetzalcoatl out of the belly of the Codex Borgia goddess recalls a series of Early Postclassic scenes at Chichen Itza portraying serpents with sacrificial blades emerging from the abdomen of a supine goddess (see Taube 1994b:Figs. 3a-b, 4b, 25b). For one example, there are a pair of serpents with blades, and I have suggested that this sacrificial scene constitutes an early version of the *Histoire du Mechique* episode in which Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca transform themselves into serpents to dismember Tlaltecuhtli (Taube 1994b:216). Codex Borgia page 32 portrays both Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl flanked by pairs of flint blades, and it is likely that this page concerns the creation of the world through the sacrifice of the earth goddess, who is painted with the red stripes marking captives destined for sacrifice.

a



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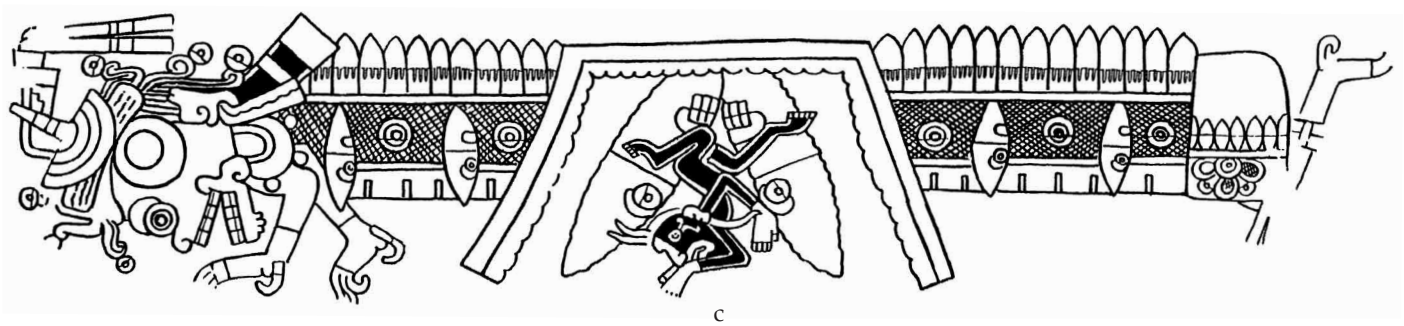

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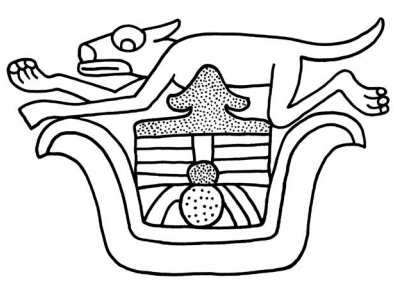

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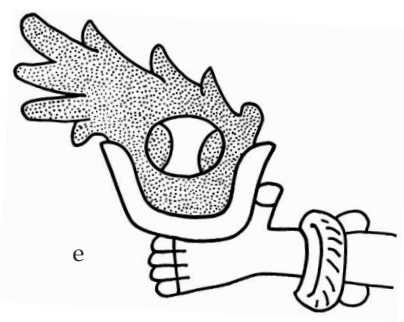

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Figure 7. Vessels of birth and sacrifice in the Codex Borgia: (a) scene of probable baptism with infant demon in skull vessel, detail of Codex Borgia p. 31; (b) Quetzalcoatl and five Tezcatlipocas being born from flint blades on figure in the hocker birth position, detail of Codex Borgia p. 32—note hips in form of skull vessel containing sacrificial blades; (c) Quetzalcoatl emerging out of open midsection of goddess, detail of Codex Borgia p. 32—compare profile of orifice to bowls appearing in *d–e*; (d) offering vessel containing sacrificed animal, detail of Fejérváry-Mayer p. 22; (e) bowl containing heart and blood held by water goddess Chalchiuhtlicue, detail of Codex Borgia p. 20.

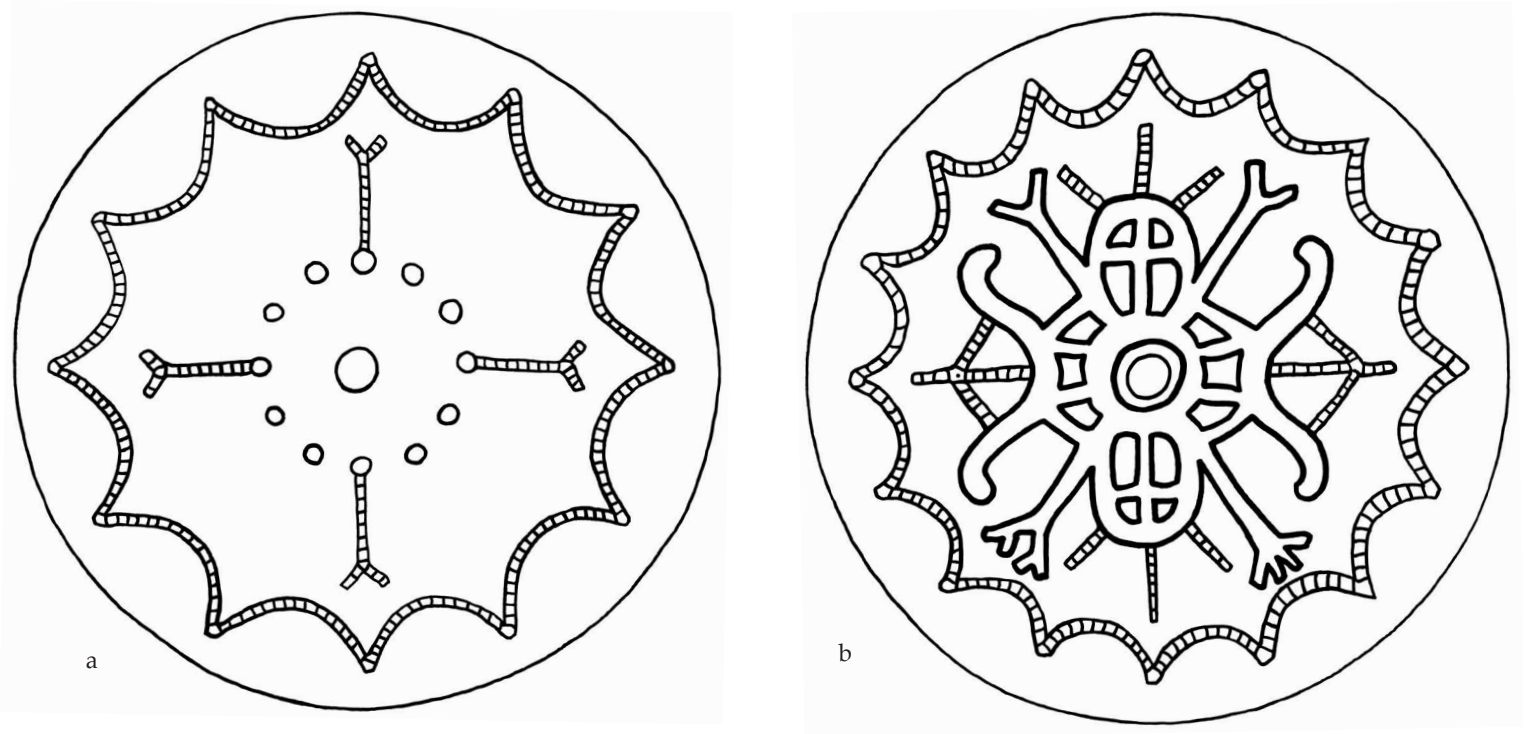

Figure 8. Cora gourd offering vessels and iconography: (a) interior of bowl with four directions and central disk representing the sun (after Preuss 1998a:Fig. 24.3a); (b) interior of bowl representing the world with four directions and goddess of earth and moon in center (after Preuss 1998a:Fig. 24.3b).

small items, all under 24 centimeters in diameter, the three stone *cuauhxicalli* approximate the size of gourd bowls, and like the green gourd vessels they could have been ritually carried to feed blood to the gods. Page 20 of the Codex Borgia portrays the water goddess Chalchiuhtlicue holding a bowl containing a human heart and blood (Figure 7e). Of simple rounded form and lacking nubbin feet, the vessel might well be a *xicalli*. It will be subsequently noted that the appearance of the water goddess with the sacrificial bowl is not only consistent with the spring symbolism of Tlacaxipehualiztli, but also with sacrificial bowls of the contemporary Huichol.

Ritual Gourd Vessels of the Huichol and Cora

Close linguistic relatives of the ancient Aztec, the Huichol and Cora of Jalisco and Nayarit have many religious traits that can be readily compared to traditions of Late Postclassic Central Mexico (Seler 1902-1923:3:355-91; Preuss 1998a, 1998b). For example, among the Huichol the sacred name of the sun is Werikúa, or "eagle," and according to Huichol myth, the sun god was created from the sacrificial immolation of a youth, an episode strikingly similar to the burning of Nanahuatzin and the birth of the sun at Teotihuacan (Negrín 1975:50-52; Schaefer and Furst 1996:13-14; Seler 1902-1923:3:372). Among the Cora, the sun is also identified with the eagle (Preuss 1998a:411). In addition, both the Cora and Huichol use decorated gourd bowls for blood offerings, and much of the symbolism found with these ritual vessels is very similar to that noted for the Aztec *cuauhxicalli*.

During an *entrada* into Cora territory in 1722, the Spanish seized a number of sacred items, including a mummy bundle and a stone bowl bearing an image of the sun, both of which were sent to Mexico City (Seler 1902-1923:3:355). According to the 1722 account, a child each month was sacrificed to the sacred vessel (Seler 1902-1923:3:355, 364). As Seler (1902-1923:3:364) noted, this solar bowl was surely a form of the stone *cuauhxicalli* known for the Aztec. Among the contemporary Cora, gourd vessels are also used for sacrificial offerings. In a detailed study of these ritual bowls, Konrad Preuss (1911, for Spanish translation see Preuss 1998a) compared them to Aztec *cuauhxicalli*. Although Preuss (1998a) noted that these vessels have a number of ritual functions and are not used exclusively for blood offerings, their imagery and symbolism resemble the aforementioned *cuauhxicalli* vessels discussed by Seler. Not only did Preuss record the elaborate designs within two Cora ritual bowls, but he also was able to consult Cora informants concerning their symbolic meaning. In Cora thought, the sacred gourd bowls are replications of both the ceremonial patio with its central fire and the entire world (Preuss

1998a:408).[5] The sacred *jícara* placed on the raised Cora altar symbolically contains the entire universe of the six directions and represents the earth waiting for rain (Preuss 1998a:319-20).

One of the illustrated Cora vessels contains a strongly quadripartite plan in its interior, with four lines denoting the four world directions and, in the middle, "the center of the universe where lives our father the sun" (Preuss 1998a:408, author's translation). Preuss (1998a:408) also mentioned that the middle place corresponds as well to the central fire of the ceremonial patio, another solar symbol (Figure 8a). According to Cora informants, during the lighting of the patio fire the newly born solar eagle appears in the burning hearth (Preuss 1998a:411). This belief recalls the Aztec solar creation account of the eagle emerging out of the sacrificial pyre at Teotihuacan.

The second and more elaborate gourd vessel design also represents the world, with a cross for the cardinal directions and the four bifurcated elements at the intercardinal points denoting the flowers of the directional gods (Figure 8b). According to the Cora informant, Matías Canare, the central region is occupied by "our mother," the goddess of the earth and moon (Preuss 1998a:410). Preuss (1998a:411) noted that both the solar fire and the earth symbolism found with the Cora vessels correspond closely to Aztec religious belief, including the ancient conception of the central *tlalxicco* hearth. In addition, Preuss (1998a:412-5) compared the radial designs in the Cora bowls to the solar Nahui Ollin sign carved in the interior of Aztec *cuauhxicalli* vessels.

Ritual gourd vessels, often bearing elaborate beadwork designs in their interiors, are a prominent component of Huichol religious practices. In fact, the individuals engaged in five-year offices in the native *tuki* temple are referred to as *jicareros*, meaning people of the *jícara* (Kindl 2003:88; Neurath 2002:149). The ritual gourd bowl is known as a *xukuri*, a term obviously related to the Nahuatl *xicalli*, and is commonly used for holding and presenting blood offerings to the gods (Neurath 2002:176). Because of its frequent use in blood offerings, the *xukuri* also has been compared to the Aztec *cuauhxicalli* (Kindl 2003:23). As in the case of the two Cora vessels discussed, Huichol *xukurite* commonly portray the cosmos and world center in their interior. A number of ritual gourd bowls recorded by Lumholtz (1900:Figure 214) and Kindl (2003:192-197) contain four round elements evenly spaced on the interior sides with a fifth in the center, a representation of the five sacred directions of the Huichol, the four cardinal points and the world center. Kindl (2003:208) notes that the symbolism of the five directions and the cosmos is also incorporated in copies of sacred bowls made for commercial sale to outsiders (Figure 9).

The Huichol vessels are especially identified with the goddesses of the earth and water who correspond to the wet half of the year, roughly extending from May to October. In Huichol myth, rain was created when ocean water was taken up into clouds and then fell into the gourd bowls of the cave-dwelling water goddesses (Zingg 1938:325). As vessels filled with nurturing water or blood, *xukurite* are closely identified with women. The wives fashion the sacred gourd bowls of the temple *jicareros*, and in this role they replicate the old goddess Grandmother Growth creating the world (Kindl 2003:88). According to Johannes Neurath, "the *jícara* is an object that symbolizes women and the earth" (Neurath 2002:176, author's translation). Neurath (2002:177) notes that the gourd bowls are supernatural vaginas from which life is born. In addition, Neurath (2002:147) notes that the ritual gourd bowls can symbolize the world, a concept that has also been noted for the Aztec *cuauhxicalli* and the Cora offering bowls.

In Huichol thought, the earth is considered symbolically as a pregnant female belly that continually contains and produces life. A remarkable Huichol myth recounted by the Huichol artist and shaman José Benito Sánchez describes the creation of the earth from the gourd womb of the earth goddess Tatéi Yurinaka, Our Mother Moist Earth (Negrín 1975:82-85). The culture hero and trickster Kauyumari first asked the earth goddess if "she would become a gourd bowl which would become the matrix of the world." Upon entering her womb, Kauyumari magically enlarged her belly: "It is his energy which expands the belly of Our Mother Moist Earth into the world, her womb is like a prayer bowl fashioned out of a gourd." In the accompanying yarn painting by Benito Sánchez, the *xukuri* earth womb is portrayed as a circle with four quarters and a disk in the center containing wild plant foods (Figure 10). Four directional eagles also descend from the corners, and the entire composition is very similar to Fejérváry-Mayer page one, which portrays the world center and four quarters as well as four descending birds at the corners. In the Huichol myth, the ancestral gods create a great flood of blood that fills the earth womb, thereby causing them to emerge on the surface of the earth (Negrín 1975:84). Not only does this flood of blood and emergence reflect the process of human birth, but it also evokes the symbolism and imagery of the blood-filled *xukuri*, a feminine vessel of life and creation.

As with the Aztec and Cora offering bowls, the Huichol *xukuri* can also bear representations of the sun in the interior. Gourd bowls used for offerings to the sun god, Tayau, frequently contain images of the sun. Lumholtz (1900:165, Fig. 215)

[5] Christopher Beekman (2003) notes that the relation of patio groups to cosmology, including the four directions and the world center, is of great antiquity in western Mexico and can be documented through both *guachimontón* sites in Jalisco and portrayals in Protoclassic ceramic tomb sculpture.

Figure 9. Huichol beaded *xukuri* for the tourist trade. Note quadripartite placement of butterflies. Photo by Karl Taube.

Figure 10. Huichol yarn painting by José Benito Sánchez portraying gourd womb of Our Mother Moist Earth. Note five partitions denoting the four directions and world center. Image copyright José Benito Sánchez.

described and illustrated a votive bowl from San Andrés displaying a central floral image of the sun. For a recent solar bowl documented by Kindl (2003:93, Fig. 24), a coin glued to the interior displays an explicit image of the sun emitting solar rays. More commonly, Mexican coins displaying eagles are glued into the center of the *xukuri* (Berrin 1978:No. 10; Kindl 2003:75, Figs. 18-19). Kindl (2003:93, 126, 190) notes that these eagles symbolize the sun. As sacrificial vessels closely related to the cosmic directions and world center, the earth goddess, and the sun, the Cora and Huichol gourd bowls share many symbolic traits with Aztec *cuauhxicalli*.

The "Quadripartite Badge" and Offering Vessels of the Classic Maya

In pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica, bowls for offering blood, hearts, and other sacrificial material were by no means limited to the Aztec. As will be noted, the Early Postclassic Toltec also had bowls lined with eagle plumes and filled with hearts, much as if they were food vessels containing fruit or tamales (Gutiérrez Solana 1983:101-2; Taube 1994b:229). Among the still earlier Classic Maya, sacrificial vessels were frequently used to make offerings to gods and ancestors. In this case, the vessels were primarily censers for fire offerings. Nonetheless, as with the sacred bowls of the Aztec and the contemporary Cora and Huichol, the censers fed supernatural beings: "incense burners are the kitchen hearths for the gods and ancestors" (Taube 1998:446).

One Classic Maya vessel in particular, a bowl containing the solar *k'in* sign, appears to have been an especially important censer for contacting the supernatural realm. The vessel typically supports three elements: a bundle with a trefoil form at one end, a spondylus shell, and a central stingray spine (Figure 11a). In addition, the bowl is usually the brow of a skeletalized zoomorphic head, usually that of a bird or serpent. In the first detailed analysis of this motif, George Kubler (1969:33-46) termed it the Triadic Sign and argued that it was a fire symbol related to the burner rituals known for the contact-period and early colonial Yucatec. However, Merle Greene Robertson (1974) noted that the solar *k'in* sign below the three elements was also an important component of the motif, and for this reason named

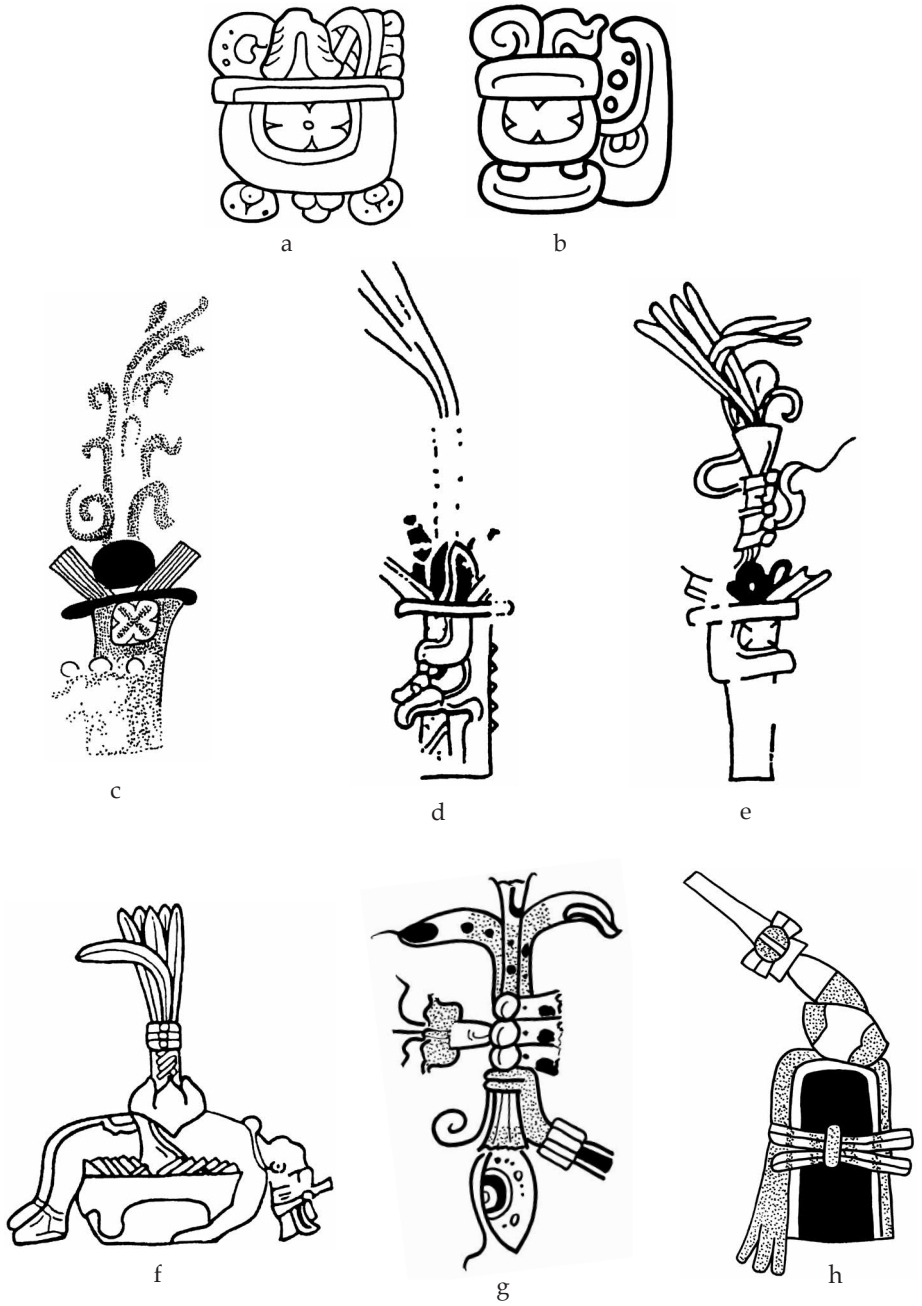

Figure 11. The Quadripartite Badge, censers, and heart sacrifice in Classic Maya epigraphy and iconography: (a) glyphic sign of Quadripartite Badge, Temple of the Inscriptions, Palenque—note stingray spine flanked by spondylus shell and bundle with trefoil atop *k'in* sign; (b) verbal glyph for "house censing," Piedras Negras Panel 4; (c) censer with *k'in*-marked bowl containing burning offering, detail of Late Classic vessel (after Kerr 2000:1003); (d–e) censers containing probable hearts pierced by sacrificial knives—note spikes on *d* (from Taube 1994a:Fig. 8d-e); (f) sacrificial victim with cut heart pierced by knife, Piedras Negras Stela 11 (from Taube 1994a:Fig. 9b); (g) sacrificial knife with "stacked bow tie" knotted handle and feathered butt, detail of Chama-style vessel (after Kerr 2000:966); (h) Late Postclassic Central Mexican portrayal of knife piercing heart atop sacrificial altar, detail of Codex Borgia p. 26.

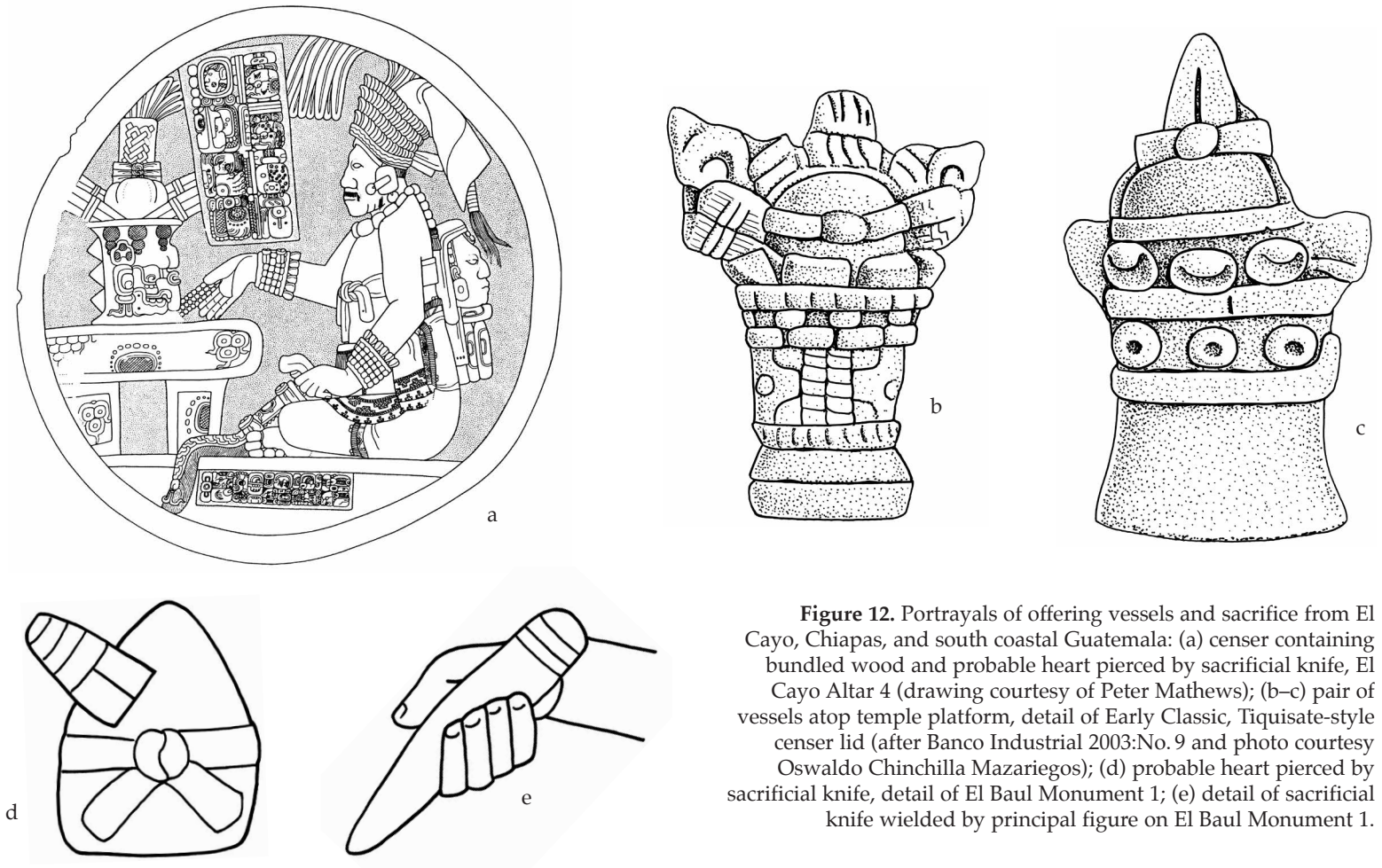

Figure 12. Portrayals of offering vessels and sacrifice from El Cayo, Chiapas, and south coastal Guatemala: (a) censer containing bundled wood and probable heart pierced by sacrificial knife, El Cayo Altar 4 (drawing courtesy of Peter Mathews); (b–c) pair of vessels atop temple platform, detail of Early Classic, Tiquisate-style censer lid (after Banco Industrial 2003:No. 9 and photo courtesy Oswaldo Chinchilla Mazariegos); (d) probable heart pierced by sacrificial knife, detail of El Baul Monument 1; (e) detail of sacrificial knife wielded by principal figure on El Baul Monument 1.

the entire motif the Quadripartite Badge. It was subsequently noted that the Quadripartite Badge was an offering vessel and constituted a symbolic "portal" for providing sustenance to the gods (Freidel et al. 1993:216-17). In Classic Maya art, supernatural beings emerge out of such bowls (see Coe 1982:91). In addition, the pivotal world tree can also rise from the vessel, thereby identifying it with the central *axis mundi*.

Although an offering bowl, the Quadripartite Badge vessel is more specifically a brazier for fire offerings. David Stuart (1998:389-90) noted that the *k'in*-marked bowl epigraphically appears in dedicatory texts denoting censing and frequently emits smoke or flames (Figure 11b). Following a reading proposed by Stephen Houston, Stuart (1998:389-90) suggested that the dedicatory verb is to be read *el-naah*, or "house censing." However, David Stuart (2005:168; Stuart and Stuart 2005) notes that *el* has another meaning and can signify "to rise or come out." Thus whereas the Classic Maya glyph for west was read *och k'in*, or "sun enters," the glyph for east was probably *el k'in*, meaning "sun rises" (Stuart and Stuart 2005). Of course in terms of fire ritual the events of burning and rising are closely related, as the essence of the offering would rise in hot convection currents out of the burning censer (Taube 2003a:431).

Aside from the *el* epigraphic reading for the *k'in*-marked bowl, there is also strong iconographic evidence that this vessel is a brazier, as in many scenes it has the spikes found on Maya censers and more importantly the bowl often emits smoke or flames (see Taube 1994b:668-69) (Figure 11c–d). In many ritual events these censers may have been for such offerings as copal or paper soaked in rubber or penitential blood. However, it is also likely that these vessels were used to burn human hearts, a sacrificial practice known for the sixteenth-century Yucatec Maya (Tozzer 1941:119, n. 541, 543). In a number of codex-style vessel scenes, the vessel contains a rounded or conical object flanked by probable strips of *ocote* wood (Figure 11d–e). A vertical element with stacked "bow tie" knots and tipped with feathers projects out of the top of the offering. It is quite telling that on Piedras

Negras Stelae 11 and 14, this same device protrudes out of the abdomen of supine sacrificial victims (Figure 11f). In Late Classic Maya iconography sacrificial flint knives appear with similar handles, including the series of "bow tie" knots (Figure 11g). I have suggested that the braziers in the codex-style scenes contain vertical knives penetrating sacrificial hearts. In Postclassic Central Mexico, sacrificial blades often pierce human hearts to denote the act of heart sacrifice (Taube 1994b:688) (Figure 11h). As bowls bearing solar *k'in* signs and containing excised human hearts, the Maya vessels are very similar to the three Aztec *cuauhxicalli* bowls bearing portrayals of the present sun, Nahui Ollin, in their interiors.

In Late Classic Maya iconography, the appearance of sacrificial knives could have served to qualify the contents of offering vessels, such as distinguishing hearts from balls of copal or rubber. However, the knives may also refer to a sacrificial practice mentioned in the 1562 testimony of Juan Couoh, a Yucatec resident of Yaxcaba (Tozzer 1941:118, n. 541). According to Couoh, the native priest Gaspar Chim gave "two cuts in the form of a cross" across "the point of" a freshly excised human heart. Whereas the heart was ritually fed to the aged creator Itzamna, the sacrificial blood was collected in "a large *jícara*," recalling sacrificial practices of both the Aztec and the contemporary Huichol and Cora. In the case of Piedras Negras Stela 11, it is quite likely that the curious flower-like form in the chest of the victim is the heart sliced crossways, here with the knife still standing in the center (Figure 11f). Another example occurs in the brazier appearing on Altar 4 of El Cayo, dating to the time when the site was under the control of Piedras Negras (Figure 12a). In this scene, the sacrificial knife penetrates a heart cut crosswise on its upper surface. Among the Classic Maya, the heart, or *ohl*, was also related to concepts of centrality and the *axis mundi* (Freidel et al. 1993:215; Houston et al. 2006). The cutting of a cross atop the heart is another ritual statement of centrality, the creation of the four quarters and world center.

For the El Cayo Altar 4 brazier, the heart is atop diagonally placed bundles of firewood, recalling the Classic Maya "crossed bundles house" glyph, a sign referring to structures related to Teotihuacan and Early Classic Maya dynastic history and ritual (Stuart 2004:235-39; Taube 2004b:273). From the region of Escuintla, Guatemala, an elaborate Tiquisate-style censer in the collection of the Banco Industrial in Guatemala City portrays a temple structure with two vessels on its platform (Figure 12b–c). Both contain spherical objects, with one atop diagonal bundles, recalling both the El Cayo censer and the crossed-bundles sign (Figure 12b). Teotihuacan-style volutes atop the offering indicate that it is burning, as in the case of Maya rituals

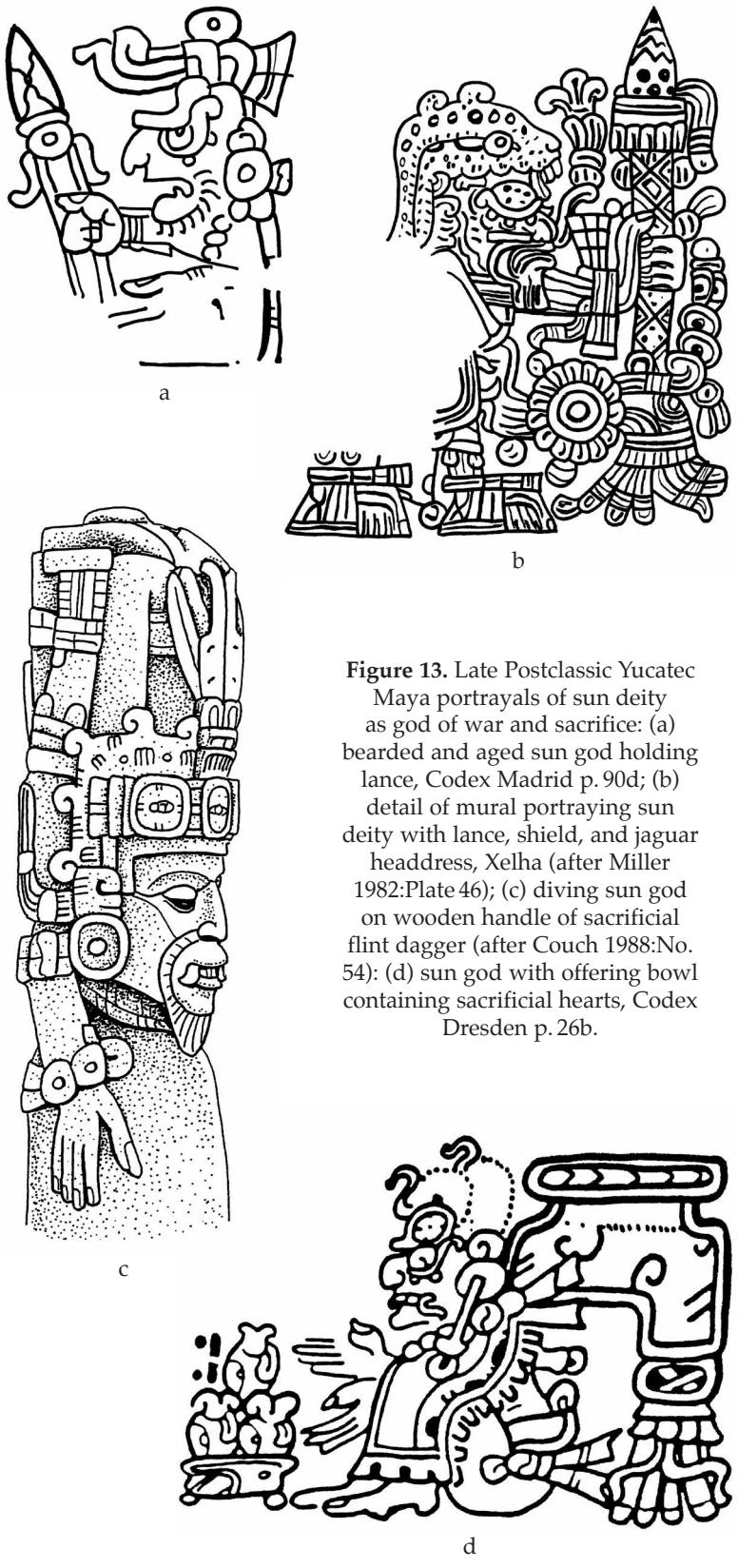

Figure 13. Late Postclassic Yucatec Maya portrayals of sun deity as god of war and sacrifice: (a) bearded and aged sun god holding lance, Codex Madrid p. 90d; (b) detail of mural portraying sun deity with lance, shield, and jaguar headdress, Xelha (after Miller 1982:Plate 46); (c) diving sun god on wooden handle of sacrificial flint dagger (after Couch 1988:No. 54): (d) sun god with offering bowl containing sacrificial hearts, Codex Dresden p. 26b.

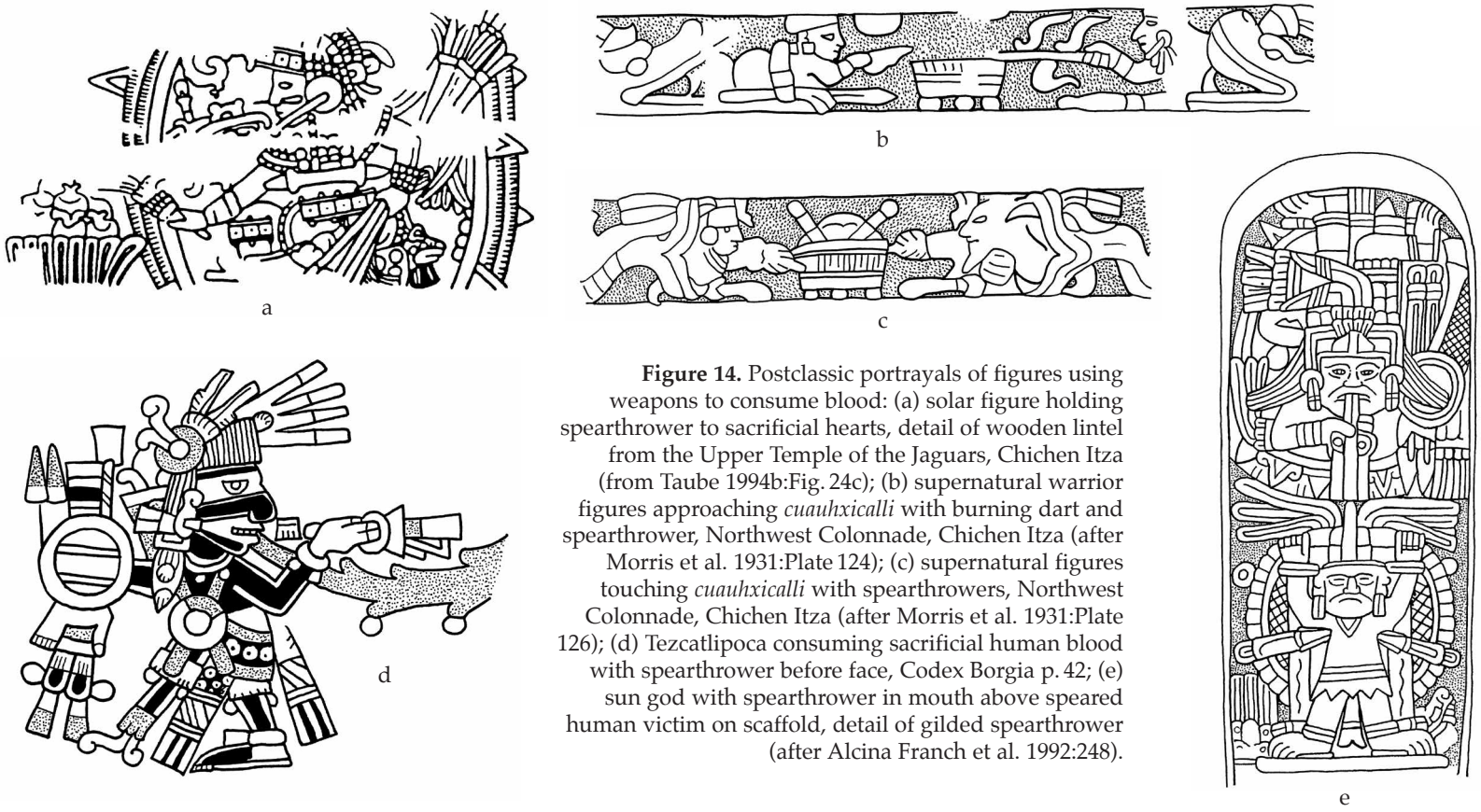

Figure 14. Postclassic portrayals of figures using weapons to consume blood: (a) solar figure holding spearthrower to sacrificial hearts, detail of wooden lintel from the Upper Temple of the Jaguars, Chichen Itza (from Taube 1994b:Fig. 24c); (b) supernatural warrior figures approaching *cuauhxicalli* with burning dart and spearthrower, Northwest Colonnade, Chichen Itza (after Morris et al. 1931:Plate 124); (c) supernatural figures touching *cuauhxicalli* with spearthrowers, Northwest Colonnade, Chichen Itza (after Morris et al. 1931:Plate 126); (d) Tezcatlipoca consuming sacrificial human blood with spearthrower before face, Codex Borgia p. 42; (e) sun god with spearthrower in mouth above speared human victim on scaffold, detail of gilded spearthrower (after Alcina Franch et al. 1992:248).

of heart sacrifice. The sides of the brazier are marked with the quincunx-cross sign related to fire and centrality, precisely the same element that appears on the Aztec portrayals of *cuauhxicalli*, including the aforementioned fragmentary ceramic bowl as well as Aztec monumental sculpture. As in the case of the well-known Huehueteotl ceramic sculpture from Cerro de las Mesas, it is likely that conceptually there were four of these signs around the censer (see Alcina Franch et al. 1992:116). The second offering vessel contains a spherical object topped by a knot and a triangular element (Figure 12c). From the same general vicinity of the earlier Tiquisate ceramic style, Bilbao Monument 1 portrays a sacrificial scene of human decapitation and dismemberment. Along with five severed heads and a limbless torso, there is a conical bound object diagonally pierced by a sacrificial knife (Figure 12d). The handle of this weapon is virtually identical to that appearing on the knife held by the principal figure in the Bilbao scene (Figure 12e). As with the examples described for the Maya and Late Postclassic Central Mexico, the Tiquisate and Bilbao forms may portray excised human hearts pierced by sacrificial knives.

The placement of hearts in an offering bowl containing the solar *k'in* sign suggests that in Classic Maya thought the sun was also a bellicose drinker of human blood. In fact there is considerable evidence that as with the Central Mexican Tonatiuh, the Maya sun deity K'inich Ajaw was also a god of war. According to Landa, the contact-period Yucatec Maya performed war dances during the New Year celebration of the eastern year-bearer Muluc in honor of the sun god (Tozzer 1941:144). Page 90d of the Codex Madrid portrays the bearded sun god holding a spear, and similarly a mural from Xelha depicts the sun god wielding a lance and a shield (Figures 13a–b). Carved in the style of Late Postclassic Yucatan, the wooden handle of a sacrificial knife depicts a diving sun god with outstretched arms, much as if he were grasping the flint blade (Figure 13c). In the Codex Dresden New Year pages, page 26b portrays the sun god before a ceramic bowl containing sacrificial hearts, clearly a Maya version of the Aztec *cuauhxicalli* (Figure 13d).

Early forms of *cuauhxicalli* containing sacrificial hearts have been identified for both Early Postclassic Tula and Chichen Itza (Acosta 1957:127, 142, 157; Gutiérrez Solana 1983:101-2; Taube 1994b:229). Rimmed with vertical feathers, these vessels are clearly ancestral versions of Aztec *cuauhxicalli* (Figure 14a–c). At Chichen Itza, the *cuauhxicalli* can appear before an enthroned Maya ruler seated within a solar disk, a figure that I identify

as the immediate ancestor of Tonatiuh, the sun god of Late Postclassic Central Mexico (Taube 1992:140-143, 1994b:224-225) (Figure 14a). In one scene he holds his spearthrower to the hearts, and this curious convention appears in other supernatural scenes of gods or the souls of heroic warriors holding spearthrowers or darts before *cuauhxicalli* (Figure 14b–c). In these Early Postclassic scenes, the weapons apparently serve as symbolic "straws" for drinking the sacrificial blood. In a detailed scene of human heart sacrifice in the Codex Borgia, Tezcatlipoca holds his spearthrower horizontally out before his face as he drinks the spurting blood of the victim (Figure 14d). A Late Postclassic, gilded wooden spearthrower depicts the sun god with an *atlatl* in his mouth while hovering above a speared victim bound to a scaffold (Figure 14e). The victim is dressed as Xipe Totec, and it is likely that this scene corresponds to the sacrificial events performed during the month of Tlacaxipehualiztli in honor of Tonatiuh and Xipe Totec. It will be recalled that in the Aztec Tlacaxipehualiztli rites, a straw was placed in the chest of the victim for the sun to suck the blood. With their feather rims, the Early Postclassic and Aztec *cuauhxicalli* evoke open flowers lined with petals, and I suspect that the straws and weapons used to drink the blood allude to the beaks and proboscises of birds and butterflies, creatures that to the Aztec symbolized the souls of warriors who reside in the eastern paradise of the sun (see Sahagún 1950-1982:Book 3:49, 6:162). The concept of the sun god as a blood-sucking bird or insect can be documented for the Late Classic Maya. One remarkable vessel portrays two scenes of the Maya sun god with a long proboscis or beak piercing the "stacked bow tie" motif denoting blood sacrifice (Figure 15). Although it is possible that his face alludes to a hummingbird, it is more likely a mosquito, a creature well known for its bloodthirsty activities, especially at dusk and dawn.

As with the Late Postclassic Yucatec Maya, the sun god is a being of sacrifice and war in Classic Maya art. One recently reported stela possibly from Chancala in the Palenque region portrays a figure, epigraphically labeled as "Lord of Sun," dressed as the sun god and armed with a lance and shield, the same weapons wielded by the Late Postclassic sun god at Xelha (see Grube and Bernal 2007). Room 3 at Bonampak features a victory war dance featuring human sacrifice, penis perforation, and war trophies. Presiding over this celebration are visages of the sun god looking down from the uppermost celestial portion of the vault (Taube 2001:306-7). This theme also appears on one of the great stairway blocks from Structure 10L-16 at Copan, where the founder of the Copan dynasty K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo' is portrayed as the sun god engaged in a bloodletting war dance (see Taube 2001:307, 2004b:288-90) (Figure 16a). Located in the

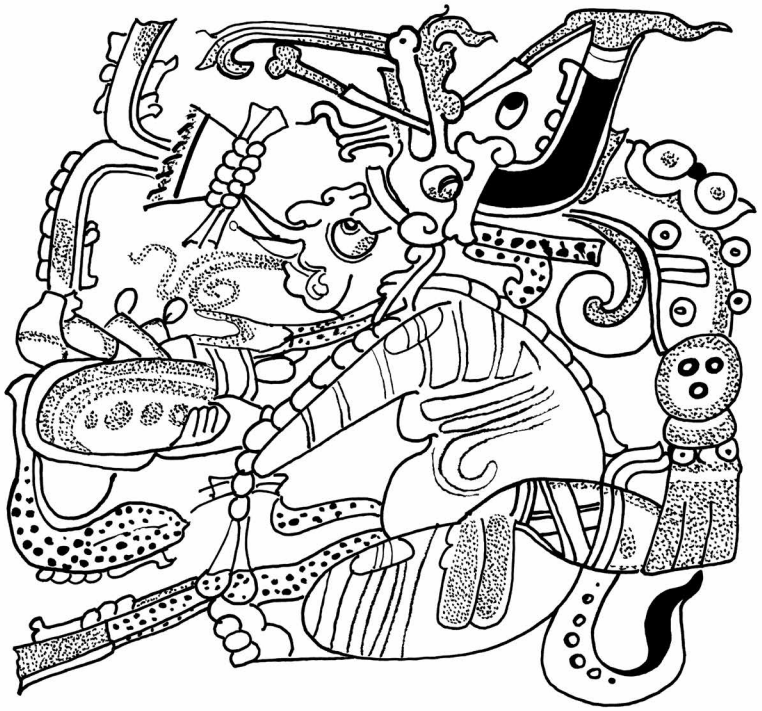

Figure 15. Classic Maya sun god as blood drinker, detail of Late Classic vessel (after photograph K6960 by Justin Kerr [2000:981]).

Las Sepulturas area of Copan, the exterior of Structure 66C featured massive carvings of flint blades as well as visages of the sun god in solar disks rimmed with rattles. In view of the solar and sacrificial imagery, this structure has been interpreted as the possible "residence of a war captain" (Webster et al. 1998:332). The interior chamber contained a carved skyband bench with images of celestial beings, including the eastern day and western night aspects of the sun god. A pair of eagle heads appear at both ends of the skyband, and although such heads often terminate skybands, they are probably also symbolic vehicles for the sun (Figure 16d). Carved as either a sarcophagus lid or the seat of a free-standing throne, a Late Classic monument from Tortuguero features on its four corners eagle heads with heads of the sun god in their open mouths (Figure 16e). A Late Classic Maya vessel portrays the sun god with jaguar paws wearing an eagle headdress, immediately recalling the solar symbolism of the eagle and the jaguar known for the later Aztec (Figure 16f). Stela 1 of Ek Balam portrays the ruler Ukit Kan Le'k Tok' apotheosized as the sun god armed with a flint centipede lance and a shield in a solar disk (Figure 16b). The solar figure sits atop an eagle-headed skyband suggesting both a vehicle and a throne. A very similar scene from a Late Classic vase depicts the sun god with a lance, axe, and shield seated in profile as if riding the eagle

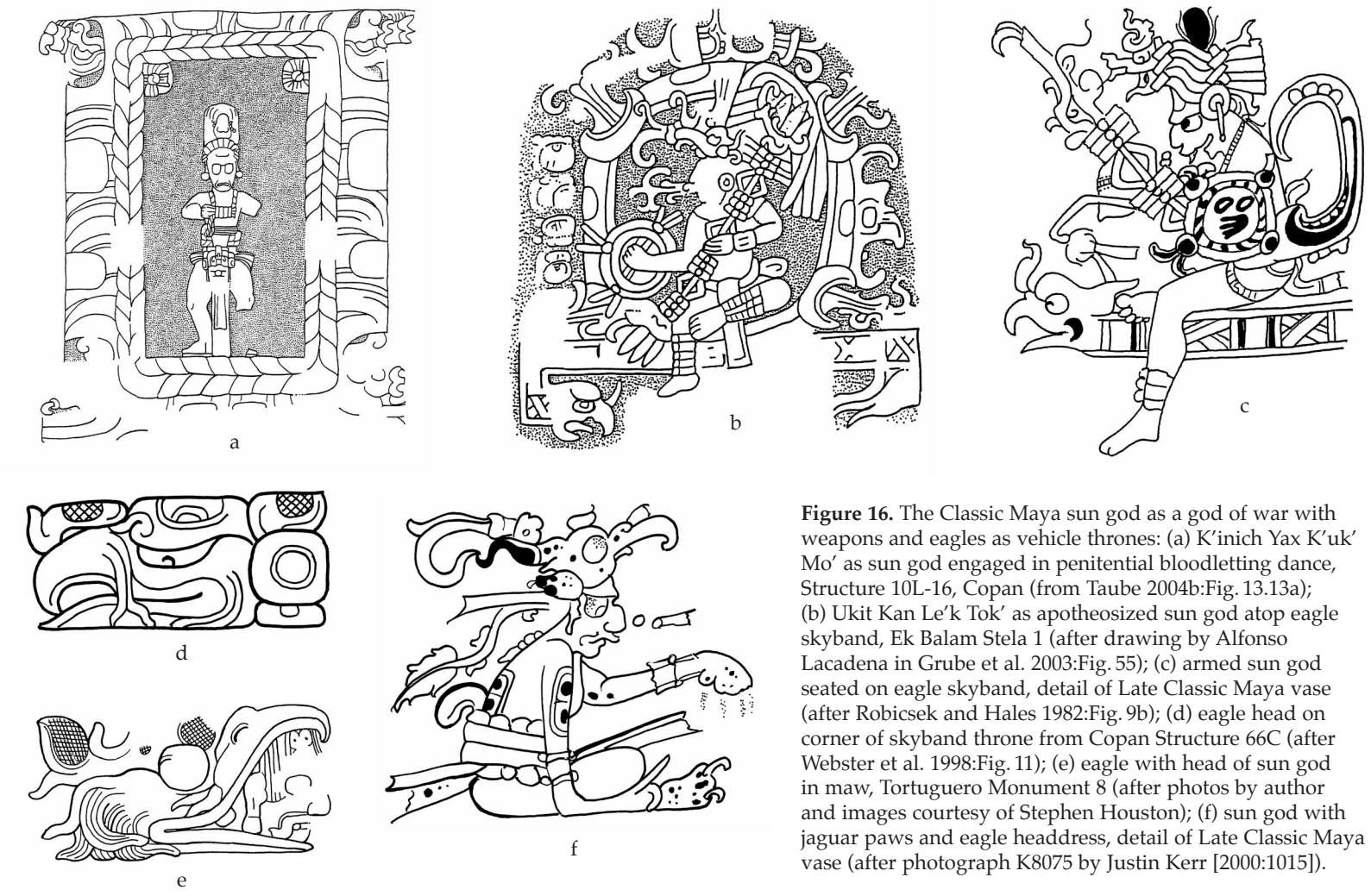

Figure 16. The Classic Maya sun god as a god of war with weapons and eagles as vehicle thrones: (a) K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo' as sun god engaged in penitential bloodletting dance, Structure 10L-16, Copan (from Taube 2004b:Fig. 13.13a); (b) Ukit Kan Le'k Tok' as apotheosized sun god atop eagle skyband, Ek Balam Stela 1 (after drawing by Alfonso Lacadena in Grube et al. 2003:Fig. 55); (c) armed sun god seated on eagle skyband, detail of Late Classic Maya vase (after Robicsek and Hales 1982:Fig. 9b); (d) eagle head on corner of skyband throne from Copan Structure 66C (after Webster et al. 1998:Fig. 11); (e) eagle with head of sun god in maw, Tortuguero Monument 8 (after photos by author and images courtesy of Stephen Houston); (f) sun god with jaguar paws and eagle headdress, detail of Late Classic Maya vase (after photograph K8075 by Justin Kerr [2000:1015]).

skyband throne (Figure 16c). The individual who occupied the celestial throne bench of Copan Structure 66C was probably identified not only with war but also as a person representing the physical power and presence of the sun.

It has been previously noted that the Aztec *cuauhxicalli* and the Cora and Huichol gourd bowls closely relate to women as well as the creative womb. The same is also true for the Classic Maya *k'in*-sign offering bowls. Whereas in Classic Maya scenes goddesses carry these objects on their backs, historical women of royal Maya courts typically wear them as headdresses (Figure 17a–c). Rather than being a functional censer worn atop the head, it is likely that the headdress served to denote an important courtly office, such as the ceremonial feeder and conjurer of gods and ancestors. Of course, many Late Classic reliefs from Yaxchilan portray women communicating with supernatural beings through sacrificial fire offerings (see Schele and Miller 1986:175-207). In addition, it has been argued that the ritual conjuring of supernatural beings through blood sacrifice constituted a symbolic form of birth, a natural process performed exclusively by women (Taube 1994a:660).

Along with the Classic Maya scenes of women with the Quadripartite Badge, page 105 of the Codex Madrid portrays an aged goddess holding a bowl containing two objects with bifurcated tips (Figure 17d). These items are probably sacrificial hearts and are notably similar to the aforementioned hearts appearing in the Codex Dresden (see Figure 13d). With its petalled rim, this offering vessel closely resembles the Early Postclassic *cuauhxicalli* of Tula and Chichen Itza as well as later Aztec examples. However, Classic-period sacrificial bowls lined with plumes remain to be documented for Central Mexico or the Maya area.

Aside from the widespread identification of the solar

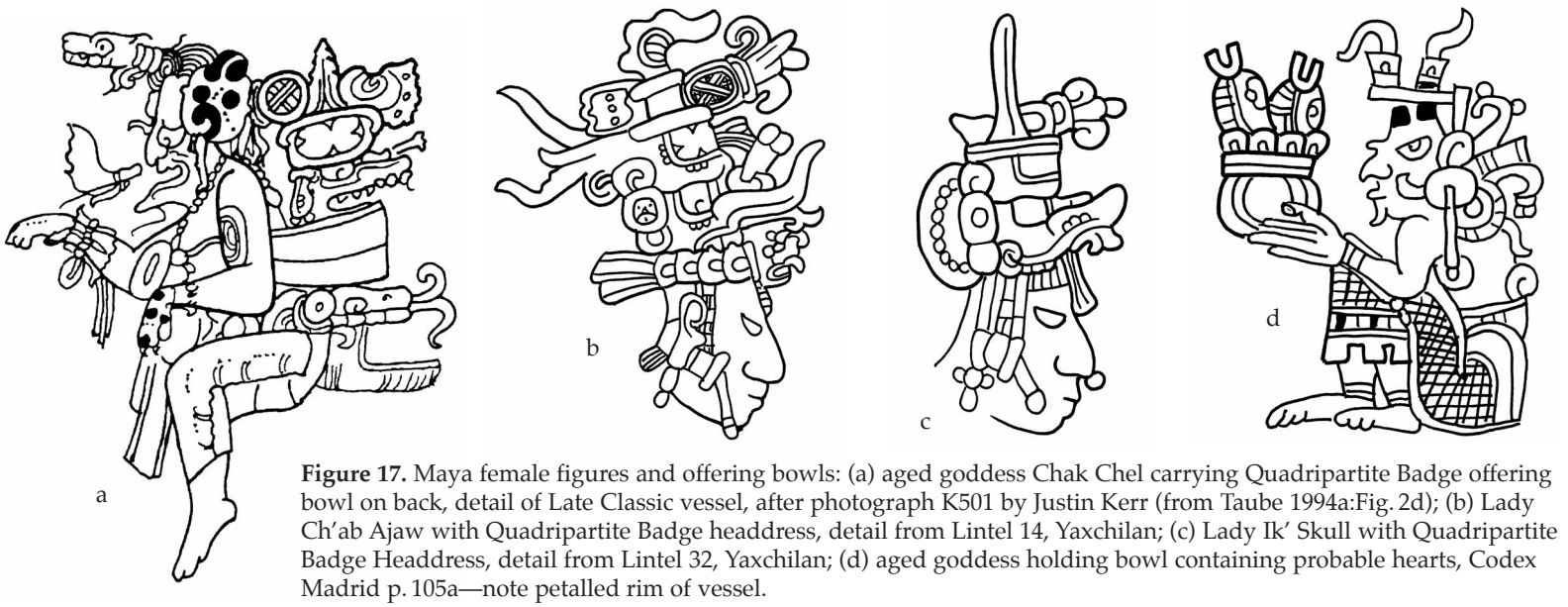

Figure 17. Maya female figures and offering bowls: (a) aged goddess Chak Chel carrying Quadripartite Badge offering bowl on back, detail of Late Classic vessel, after photograph K501 by Justin Kerr (from Taube 1994a:Fig. 2d); (b) Lady Ch'ab Ajaw with Quadripartite Badge headdress, detail from Lintel 14, Yaxchilan; (c) Lady Ik' Skull with Quadripartite Badge Headdress, detail from Lintel 32, Yaxchilan; (d) aged goddess holding bowl containing probable hearts, Codex Madrid p. 105a—note petalled rim of vessel.

sacrificial bowl with elite women and goddesses, the Quadripartite Badge vessel also symbolized a cosmic birth passage. In Classic Maya iconography, the *k'in*-marked bowl commonly appears at the hips of saurian, supernatural creatures. As David Stuart (2005:167; Stuart and Stuart 2005) notes, such vessels serve as the symbolic vulvae of these cosmic beings. One such creature is the "Starry Deer Crocodile," which Stuart (in Stuart and Stuart 2005) compares to Cipactli and Tlaltecuhtli, the earth monster of Aztec creation mythology. Appearing occasionally as a head variant for the day name Lamat, this being commonly frames or embodies architectural devices, including doorways, platforms, and thrones (Figure 18a). An Early Classic example incised on a jade earspool is in the same hocker birth position noted for the Aztec Tlaltecuhtli (Figure 18b). Although many examples of the cosmic creature are rendered in profile, it is readily evident that they have the same flexed limbs and hocker pose found with the incised jade example. Stuart (2005:Figure 136) notes that Step III of Yaxchilan Hieroglyphic Stairway 3 portrays the earth crocodile with the sun god inside its belly, much as if it were pregnant (Figure 18c). In the loin region of the crocodile is the offering bowl, clearly the place from which the sun will emerge. The same motif appears on Step VIII of Yaxchilan Hieroglyphic Stairway 2, although in this case the earth crocodile is worn by a ballplayer as a back ornament (Figure 18d). The placement of the solar bowl in the hip region of the earth crocodile is strikingly similar to the symbolism described for the *cuauhxicalli*, a symbolic birth canal for the sun.

Conclusions

Many important symbolic themes of Aztec *cuauhxicalli* can be traced readily to sacrificial vessels of the Classic Maya, especially the offering bowl often referred to as the Quadripartite Badge. The Aztec stone *cuauhxicalli* are both ritual items and detailed portrayals of Aztec cosmology and belief. Used as sacrificial receptacles for human hearts, *cuauhxicalli* also portray the present sun, Nahui Ollin, and the surface of the earth, here personified as the deity Tlaltecuhtli. Whereas the sun appears in the interior of the vessel, the Tlaltecuhtli image is carved on the base, and it is likely that the placement of these images refers to the celestial, diurnal sun above the earth. However, the co-occurrence of the sun and Tlaltecuhtli is not simply a reference to the levels of earth and sky, and it is likely that Tlaltecuhtli is giving birth to the sun through sacrifice, with the *cuauhxicalli* constituting her blood-filled womb and loins. Although the natural birth passage is between the legs, the *cuauhxicalli* relates closely to the concept of centrality, not only as the pivot of the four quarters but also the central region of the human torso. The sacrificial vessels of the contemporary Huichol and Cora as well as the Classic Maya share important symbolic traits with Aztec *cuauhxicalli*. Just as the three stone *cuauhxicalli* contain images of the sun, the Huichol, Cora, and Classic Maya offering vessels are also marked by solar signs. Nonetheless, as of yet no Classic Maya offering bowls with *k'in* signs in their interiors have been documented from archaeological excavations or unprovenienced objects. Late Classic depictions of sacrificial offerings suggest that the Quadripartite Badge motif may refer to stone or ceramic effigy

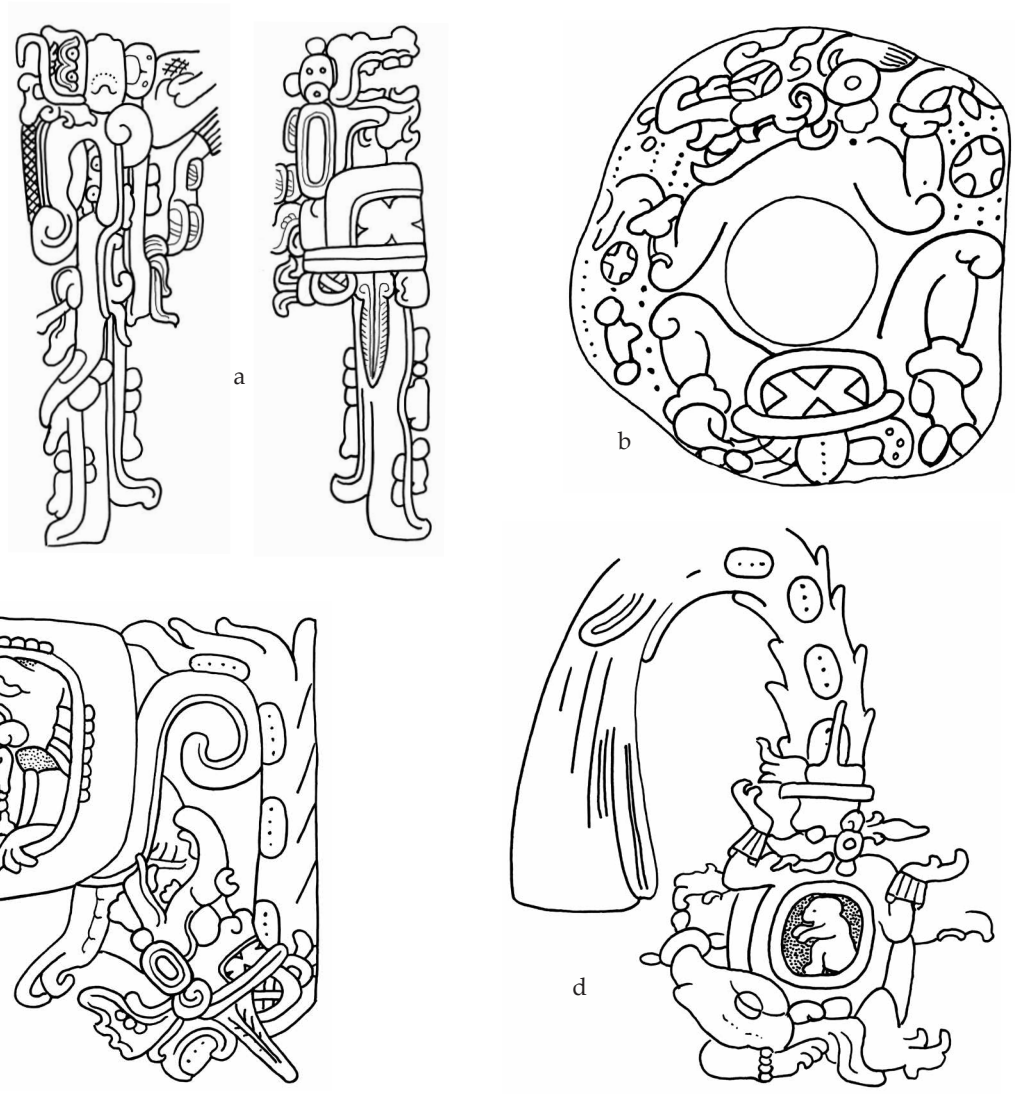

Figure 18. Classic Maya portrayal of cosmic saurian beings with *k'in*-marked bowl in loins: (a) Starry Deer Crocodile atop scaffold platform, detail of Piedras Negras Stela 6—note inverted brazier on rear of creature (after Stuart and Graham 2003:36); (b) incised Early Classic earspool portraying Starry Deer Crocodile in hocker position—note inverted offering bowl in hip region (after Townsend 1983:No. 56); (c) earth crocodile with sun god in abdomen and bird brazier at rear, detail of Step III of Hieroglyphic Stairway 3, Yaxchilan (after Graham 1982:169); (d) earth crocodile with jaguar in abdomen and censer in loins, detail of Step VIII of Hieroglyphic Stairway 2, Yaxchilan (after Graham 1982:162).

censers, usually in the form of skeletalized zoomorphic heads.

It appears that as with the Aztec, Huichol, and Cora, the Classic Maya identified eagles with the sun. In addition, as in the case of the Aztec sun god Tonatiuh, the Classic and Postclassic Maya sun god was closely related to both sacrifice and warfare. These shared traits over a broad region suggest considerable time depth for this symbolic complex. However, solar symbolism and imagery remain poorly known not only for the Formative Olmec but even Early Classic Teotihuacan. It is certainly conceivable that a major solar complex related to war and sacrifice was present at Teotihuacan, but it is also likely that as the area to the far east, the Maya region had a special role in Central Mexican thought as the daily birthplace of the dawning sun (see Taube 2004b, 2005a, 2009). For the contemporary Cora and Huichol as well as the ancient Aztec and Maya, the offering vessels under discussion represent the world in terms of the four directions and *axis mundi*. Along with the navel, the human heart serves as a basic symbol of the world center in Mesoamerican thought. Although many of the solar associations pertain to the male domain of warfare, these offering vessels also relate closely to the earth and the female body. They symbolize a birth passage or womb, a creative force, and a place where divine beings can emerge. As vessels used for contacting gods or ancestors, they are powerful objects serving as symbolic passageways to the supernatural world.

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