

Glyph T93 and Maya “Hand-scattering” Events

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IN THE UPPER TEXT of each of the four “New Year” pages of the Dresden Codex (Fig. 1a-d) appears the compound T93.682b (Fig. 1e). In one instance, the suffix T87 — the familiar **TE** sign (Thompson 1950:271) — is attached (Fig. 1f). In a recent presentation (Love 1986), I proposed that these are to be read, respectively, as **ch’a-h(a)** and **ch’a-h(a) TE**, with the alternative possibility that T93 was used, not as the phonetic syllable **ch’a**, but logographically, as **CH’AH**, with T682b as a redundant phonetic indicator, or **CH’AH-(ha) TE**. Further investigation supports the **ch’a/CH’AH** reading for T93 to the extent that it now warrants presentation to the community of Mayanists for evaluation. This is the primary purpose of the present paper. In addition, I will examine some implications of the proposed reading for current interpretations of the “hand-scattering” events in Maya art and texts.

The combinations T93.682b or T93.682b:87 appear on Dresden 25-28 with numerical coefficients of 7, 16, 5, and 6. In all four cases the glyph is paired with T687b — read as **po-m(o)**, or **pom** (“incense”) by Lounsbury (1973:107) — which consistently occupies the preceding glyph block. Each of these also carries a numerical prefix, or coefficient (9, 7, 11, and 6). This pairing of two nominals, each with prefixed numbers, and one with the clear meaning of “incense,” suggests that both refer to offerings connected with the ritual depicted in the accompanying scenes.

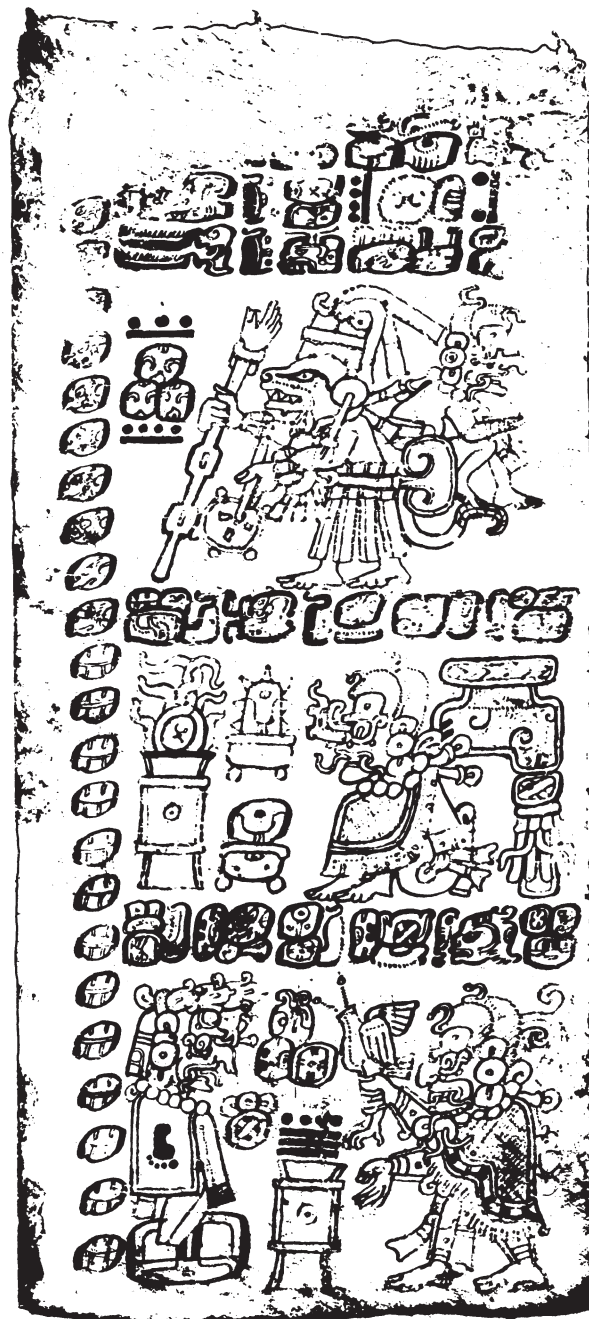
Just such a pairing appears in Diego de Landa’s descriptions of sixteenth-century Maya New Year ceremonies. Two passages in particular suggest the readings **ch’a-h(a)** or **ch’a-h(a) TE** for the glyph following that for *pom* in each of the Dresden passages. Writing of offerings to a statue of the god Bolon Dzacab, Landa states:

And when they came there the priest incensed it with forty-nine grains of maize ground up with their incense, and they distributed it in the brazier of the idol and perfumed him. They call the ground maize alone *sacah* and that of the lords *chahalte* (Tozzer 1941:140-41).

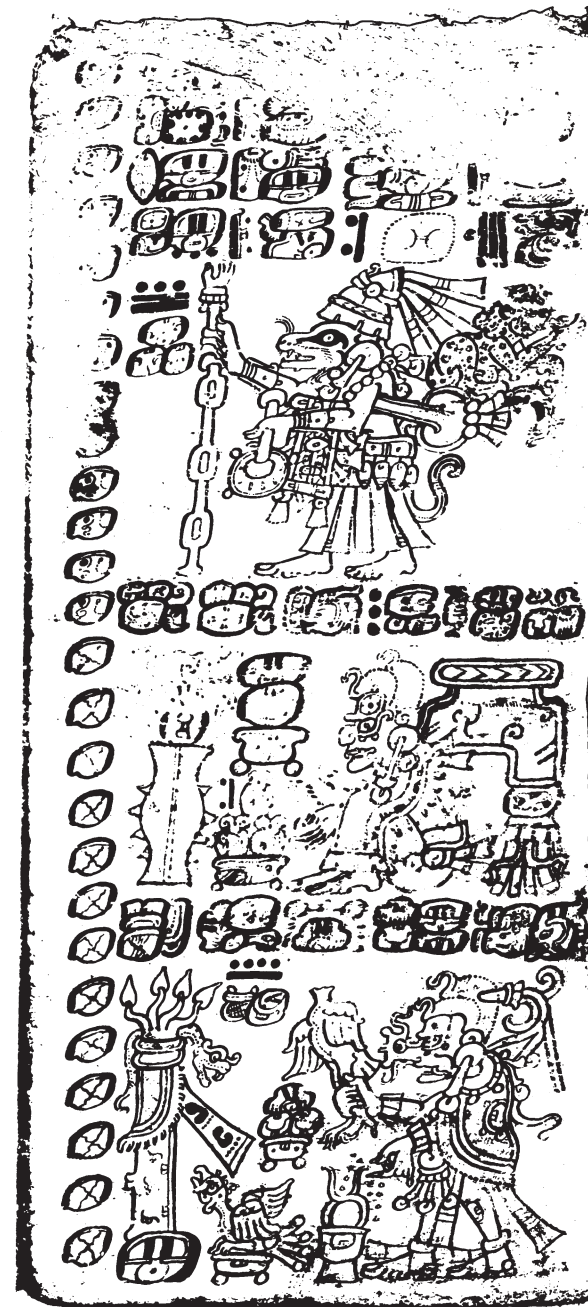
Later, describing the same ceremony, but for a different year, Landa reports on the homage paid to an image of Chac u Uayeyab:

On arriving there, the priest perfumed it with fifty-three grains of ground maize and with their incense, which they call *sacah*. The priest also gave to the nobles more incense of the kind we call *chahalte*, to put in the brazier (Tozzer 1941:144).

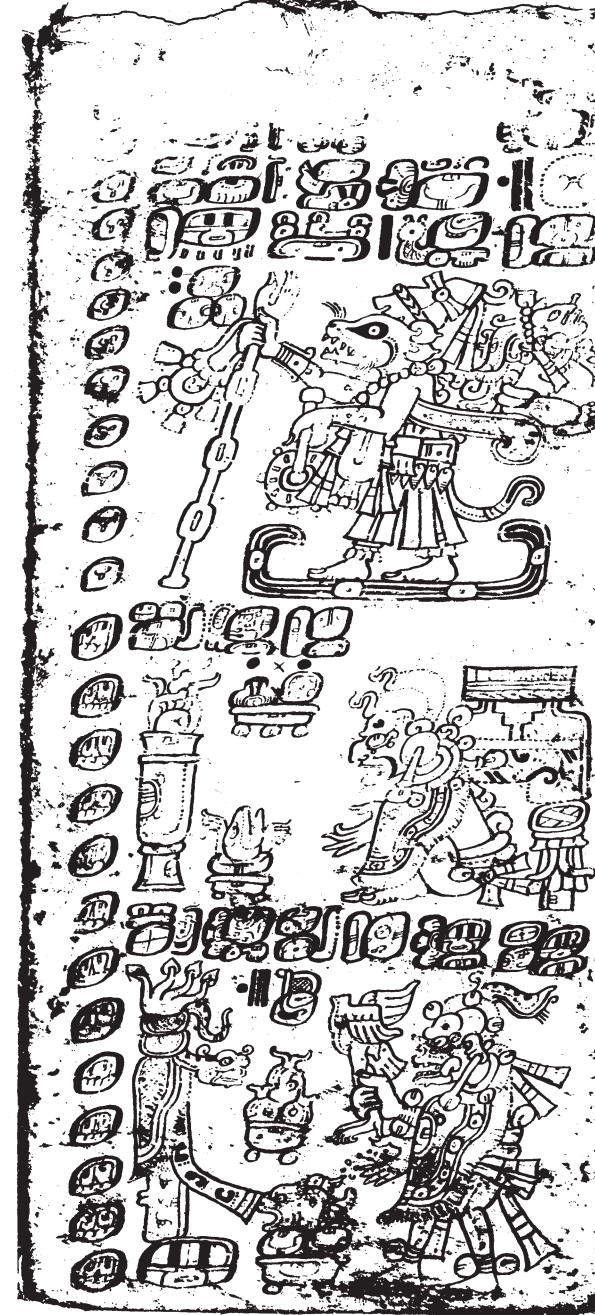
In the Motul Dictionary, <*ch’ah*> is glossed as *gota de agua, orina, o de otro licor*, or “a drop of water, urine, or other liquid” (Motul ms. 15lv; Martínez Hernández 1929:323). In the “Vienna Vocabulary,” it appears as *gota de qualquier licor* — “a drop of any liquid” (Mengin 1972:113v). The use in the glyphic compound of T87 **TE**, (“tree”) — proto-Cholan **te*’ (Kaufman & Norman



a



b



c



d



e



f

FIGURE 1. THE NEW YEAR PAGES OF THE DRESDEN CODEX

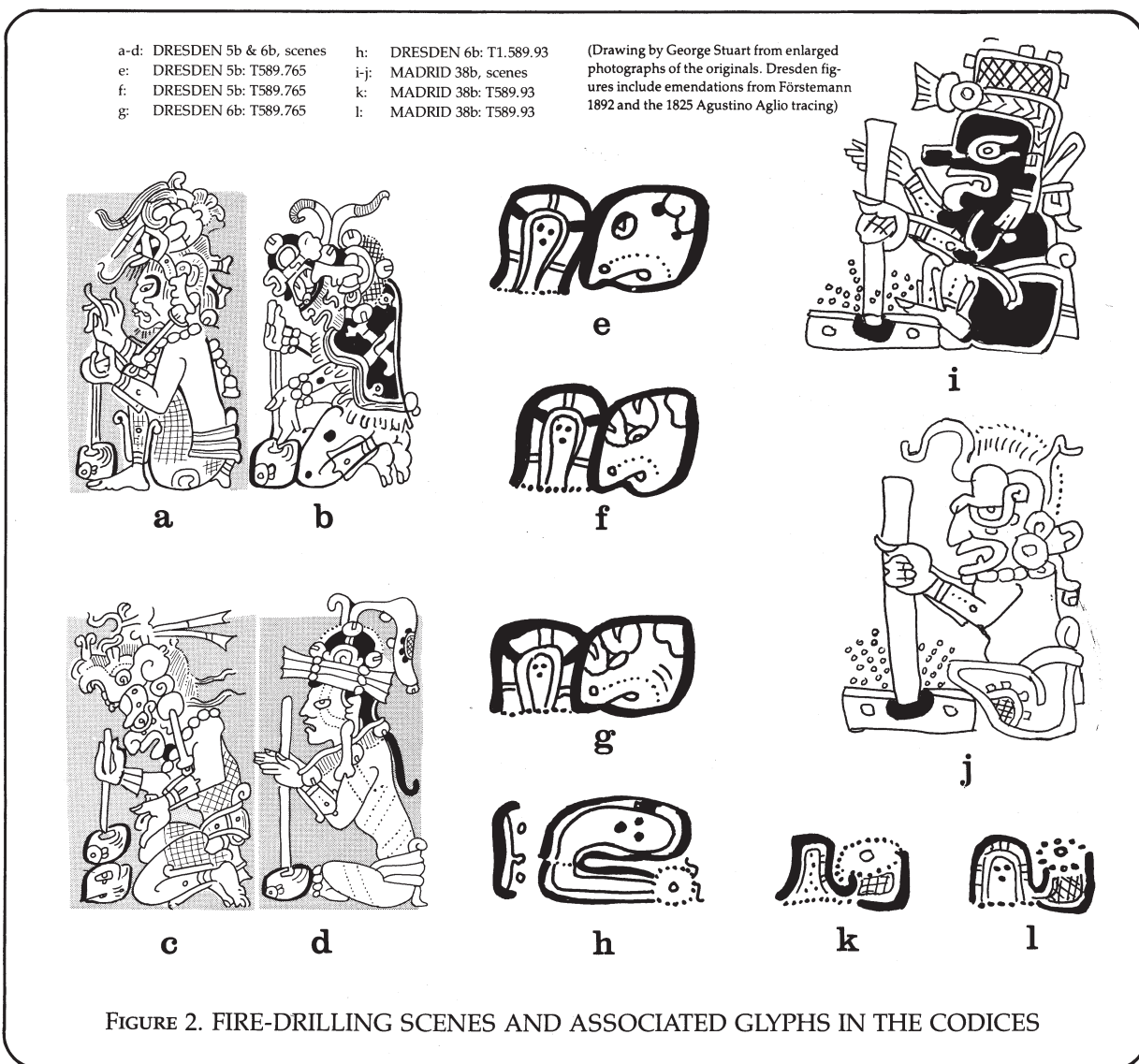
a-d: DRESDEN 25-28, approximately three-quarters actual size
(Fürstemann 1892)
e: DRESDEN 26a: XVI.T93.682b
f: DRESDEN 27a: V.T93.682b:87

1984:132); Yucatec *che'* (Barrera Vásquez 1980:85); etc. — strongly suggests that Landa's *chahalte*, literally “tree drops,” refers to resin or, in another word, incense.

Aside from its use in the Dresden New Year pages, **ch'a/CH'AH** occurs mainly in three other contexts: as part of the “fire-drilling” compound in the codices; preceding the “fire-fist/shell fist” sign (hereafter “shell fist”) in monumental inscriptions; and following the “hand-scattering” glyph on the monuments. Other, less frequent, occurrences of T93 are listed by Thompson (1962:72, 82), but will not be discussed here.

Accompanying the “fire-drilling” scenes in the Dresden and Madrid Codices (Fig. 2a-d,i,j) are two differing forms of the verb denoting the action — either T589.765 (Fig. 2e-g) or T589.93 (2h,k,l). Kelley (1976:144-150) discusses the history of their decipherment in detail. *Hax*, Yucatec “to drill,” is generally mentioned as a possible reading for the T589.93 compound, giving rise to a possible reading of **xa** or **-x** for T93, but there is no confirmation of either that reading or of **hax** or **ha-** for the three-dotted T589, based on substitutions in the script. In the Dresden examples, an apparent substitution involving T93 and the T765 dog (?) head (Fig. 2e-g), which might either confirm or refute a reading of **ch'a** for T93, so far eludes explanation.

In the “shell fist” glyph (Fig. 3a), T93 precedes the main sign T762. No reading has yet been



accepted for this compound.

With the “hand-scattering” glyph (Fig. 3b), T93 occurs as the object of the verb, that is, the thing being “scattered” (Note 1). In all but one case which I have seen, it follows the verb, thus reinforcing the argument that it is the object of the action. In the single example in which it precedes the verb, it is used in a pictographic fashion in which the drops from the hand merge into the T93 sign (Fig. 3c), showing indisputably that T93 is the thing being scattered. In this instance, logographic CH’AH works very well as *gota de cualquier licor*, “a drop of any liquid” (Note 2).

In summary, in the four most frequently encountered environments in which T93 is used — the numbered offerings in the Dresden New Year pages; the “fire-drilling” compound; the “shell fist” glyph; and the “hand-scattering” combination — the reading of syllabic *ch’a* or logographic CH’AH work quite well in the Dresden examples and with “hand-scattering.” The other cases neither confirm nor refute the proposed reading.

THE READING OF THE SIGN T93 as *ch’a*/CH’AH, if correct in the case of the Dresden scenes as referents to *chahalte*, leads us to the broader subject of “hand-scattering” events as they appear in Maya art and texts of the Classic Period.

Schele and Miller (1986:101) characterize the action in question as “the scattering of what looks like pellets and streams, which are now recognized as blood.” Since my proposed reading of T93 pertains directly to this interpretation, I would like to follow Hammond (1981) in keeping open the question of the identification of the pellet-like symbols, and to thus help temper our understanding of ancient Maya ritual.

In the bottom register of pages 26, 27, and 28 of the Dresden Codex (Fig. 1b-d), the actor of the scene in each case appears to be tossing objects which the Dresden scribe depicted as circlets. Several lines of evidence suggest that these represent pellets of incense.

The Maya priests of the New Year described by Landa threw incense pellets into braziers. On Dresden 26 (Fig. 1b) the receptacle is securely identifiable as just such an incense burner and, moreover, it is shown with smoke issuing from it. The possibility that the circlets represent blood of the decapitated turkey (?) held in the actors’ right hands would appear to be negated by the different convention used for what is clearly blood emanating from the neck of the decapitated bird in the counterpart scene on Dresden 25 (Fig. 1a). In Landa’s account, the incense *chahalte* was put into a brazier just before decapitating a hen (Tozzer 1941:144), indicating that the two events — decapitation and incensing — were separate but essential parts of the same ceremony.

a: BPK Stela 2, F4. T93.672.142 “Fire Fist”
(After Mathews 1980: Fig. 4)

b: QRG Stela A. “Hand-Scattering” with T93 as object of the verb
(After Maudslay 1889-1902,2: Pl. 6 & 7)

c: CPN Stela J. “Hand-Scattering” compound with T93 merging
with the objects being “scattered” (After Maudslay 1889-1902,1:
Pl. 66 & 68)



a



b



c

FIGURE 3. “FIRE FIST” AND “HAND-SCATTERING” GLYPHS

The tossing of incense pellets into smoking braziers was one of the most sacred of the Maya ritual acts performed in sixteenth-century Yucatan, and was intimately associated with period-ending ceremonies, especially that carried out during the five-day Uayeb period that ended the 365-day year and the New Year celebrations during the month of Pop. Incense burning sometimes even dominated certain non-calendrical rites. One of these, described by Landa, was held for the purpose of cleansing an area of "evil spirits" before a baptism ceremony. The elaborate ritual included a priest seated beside a burning brazier within an area marked by four *Chaac* performers. This priest handed pellets of incense and ground maize to a procession of boys and girls who reverently tossed them into the brazier (Tozzer 1941:103-104). Similar incensing accompanied all four of the Uayeb rites described by Landa, but nowhere was it more vital than in the New Year ceremony of the month Pop:

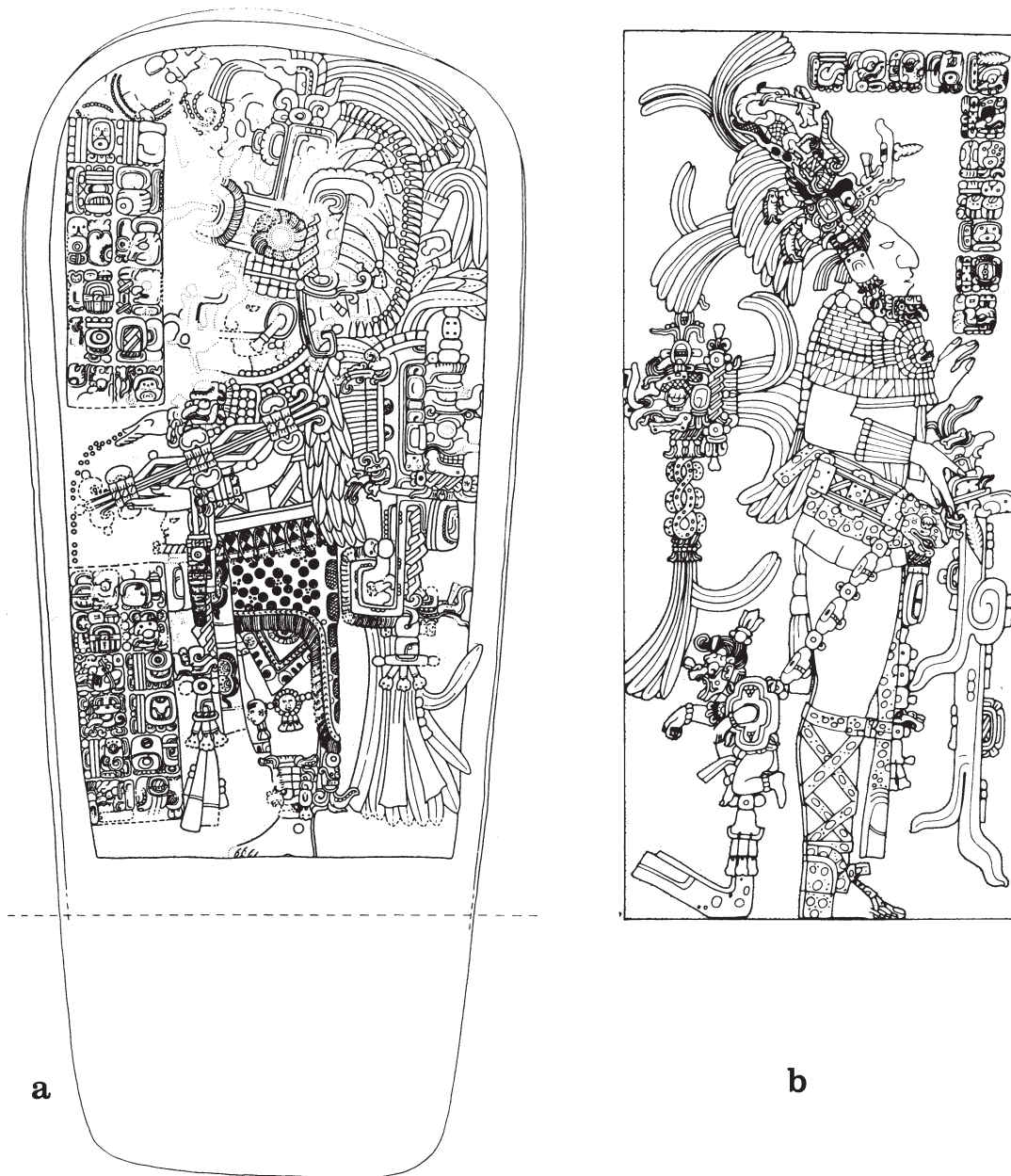
It was at this time that they chose officials, the *Chacs* to assist the priest, and he prepared a large number of little balls of fresh incense upon little boards which the priests had for this purpose, so that the fasters and abstainers might burn them in honor of their idols. . . . All having come together with the presents of food and drinks, which they had brought, and also a great quantity of wine, which they had made, the priest purified the temple, seating himself in the middle of the court, clothed like a pontiff, having near him a brazier and the little boards with incense. The *Chacs* seated themselves at the four corners, and stretched from one to the other a new cord, within which were to enter all those who had fasted, in order to drive out the evil spirit. . . . Once having expelled the evil spirit, all began to pray with great devotion, and the *Chacs* kindled the new fire, and lighted the brazier for in the feasts in which all joined in common, they burned incense to the idol with new fire and the priest began to throw this (kind of) incense into it, and all came in their turn, beginning with the lords, *to receive incense from the hands of the priest, which he gave them with as much gravity and devotion as if he were giving them relics. And they threw it into the brazier little by little waiting till it had finished burning.* After this perfuming, they all ate the gifts and presents, and the wine went round till they became very drunk, and this was their new year and a service very acceptable to their idols (Tozzer 1941:152-53, emphasis mine).

Descriptions of auto-sacrifice, or bloodletting, in the sixteenth-century ethnohistorical sources usually did not involve the scattering or sprinkling of blood into braziers. During Uayeb ceremonies, Landa noted, blood was smeared or spread (*untaba*, translated "anointed" by Tozzer) onto the stone statues known as *acantuns*. Even the vivid description of bloodletting quoted by Schele and Miller (1986:175) continues, "they anointed the idol with the blood which flowed from all these parts (Tozzer 1941:114). Stuart (1984:10) quotes another sixteenth-century source: "Before he [a Maya] was baptized [as a Christian] he sacrificed and drew certain blood from his genitals and threw it upon the ground." Two sentences later, the narrative continues, "And he again declared that the blood from his genitals that he had said that he had thrown on the ground, he now remembered that in the time before he became a Christian, he smeared the idols with it" (Scholes and Adams 1938,1:58).

In the *Relaciones* of mid-sixteenth-century Yucatan, blood drawn from the bodies of individuals, as well as hearts of sacrificial animals and humans, was also smeared onto the faces of idols, not dropped or scattered into braziers. A typical description appears in the *Relación de Popola, Sinsimato, Samyol, Tixholop, y Tixmukul*:

They used for worship some jars made with disfigured faces, having them for their idols, they burned inside and offered some resin called *copal*, which is like hardened turpentine, of great fragrance, and they cut themselves in many parts to offer the blood to that idol, fasting many days to arrive at this rite, killing a male or female Indian slave to extract the heart, presenting it as an offering, and lacking that, the hearts of dogs, making it a virgin offering [?] *which was smeared on the mouth and nostrils that the idol had*, believing and making them understand, the *Ah K'in* which they had for a priest, that the idol ate all that was offered to it . . . (de la Garza 1983,2:217; translation and emphasis mine).

FIGURE 4. "HAND-SCATTERING" EVENTS ON TWO MAYA MONUMENTS



- a: TIK Stela 22 (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982: Fig. 33)
 b: PAL TC, west Sanctuary Jamb (Drawing by Linda Schele)

The practice of smearing sacrificial blood on the faces of idols is also noted in the 1612 *Relación* of Tomás López Medel:

In addition . . . it was very usual . . . to sacrifice to the idols that they found on the roads, anointing the face of the idol with blood they drew right there, either from their ears, piercing them, or from their nostrils or tongue, or even from their private parts. . . . (Tozzer 1941:222)

Some ethnohistorical accounts note that blood or bloody body parts were burned in fires. In one, a ceremonial fire was built in the open carcass of a peccary and extinguished with blood (Scholes and Roys 1938:610). Typically, however, incense was burned inside the idols (the ceramic effigy braziers), while blood was smeared on the faces.

Thus, the ethnohistorical, iconographic, and epigraphic evidence related to incensing and bloodletting overwhelmingly favors the interpretation that the individuals shown in the bottom register of Dresden pages 25-28 are “scattering” incense, not blood. This leads to a consideration of the possibility that some of the hand-scattering events which appear on the Classic Period monuments may likewise involve incense instead of blood. The case for the latter, based on the Dresden substitutions, is reinforced in certain instances on the monuments, as on Piedras Negras Stela 40, where the protagonist of the scattering scene carries what is surely an incense pouch (Hammond 1982:78).

The position and appearance of the actors’ hands in the Dresden scenes (Fig. 1a-d), together with the associated circlets (b-d), are almost identical to the hand-scattering glyph itself (Fig. 3b-c), and similar to the poses in many of the hand-scattering scenes on monuments (Note 3).

An examination of the general corpus of hand-scattering scenes reveals two distinct clusterings of motifs representing the event. In one, which recalls the Dresden examples, the action involves depictions of isolated circlets or dots which, for convenience sake, I will term “droplets” (Fig. 4a). In the other, what appears to be a pouring of a stream is shown (Fig. 4b).

In two detailed studies, Stuart (1984a & in press) identifies the “pouring stream” icon (with associated *kan*, *yax*, and/or “completion” motifs) as blood, and considers at least some droplet depictions as representing blood as well. He also notes that T710, the hand-scattering verb itself, can appear with scenes of both streams and droplets. In another study (1984b), Stuart acknowledges that T710 may represent a word applying to the scattering of solids (Note 4).

I would strongly agree. The occurrence of the T710 verb with both kinds of scenes does not mean that the droplets of the scene have to be blood. The verb “to scatter” could be used for scattering blood or scattering incense. There is no clear one-to-one relationship between the verbs in the texts and the event pictured in accompanying scenes. As Stuart (in press) points out, of the eight or more monuments showing the flow motif, from Yaxchilan and La Pasadita, only two are accompanied by the hand-scattering glyph, and Thompson’s (1962) catalog shows that T710 occurs in many texts that accompany scenes which do not depict scattering.

More research is called for which will analyze the two types of scattering scenes and their associated hieroglyphic texts. It may be that both the droplets and the flows are indeed blood, but the proposed **ch’a/CH’AH** reading, and the identification of the droplets as incense in the Dresden pages which follows, suggests that the question should remain open.

Acknowledgments

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NOTES

1. "Scatter" is perhaps not the best paraphrase for the "hand-scattering" verb, but it is firmly entrenched in the literature. The objects are not being dispersed or strewn in different directions, as the word "scatter" implies, but rather are being deliberately dropped into various receptacles. In the Spanish of the Landa manuscript, the verb *echar*, "to throw," is used to refer to the manner in which incense pellets are placed into a brazier (i.e., Landa ms: folio 39v).
2. The Cordemex Dictionary (Barrera Vásquez 1980:121) cites the "Vienna Vocabulary" as the source for the meaning of <ch'ah> as *gota de cualquier licor o resina de árbol*. However, a check of the latter shows that the reference to tree resin applies, not to <ch'ah>, but to the Yucatec <thuunul>, another word for *gota*, or "drop" (Mengin 1972:113r).

3. In an unpublished work, Simpson (1972) has rather thoroughly examined the occurrences of scattering motifs on the monuments and warns against the "uncritical equation" of what appear to be two principal kinds. He has also traced the history of their interpretations, beginning with that of the "beneficent god" as protagonist (Maler 1903:126).

4. Kelley (1976:51-52) proposed that the T710 "scattering" verb be read as **mal**, which means scattering, casting, spilling, sprinkling, or passing in several Mayan languages. He further suggested that the glyph could refer to either solids or liquids. Stuart (1984b) shows various examples from Palenque in support of the **mal** reading, but now considers that reading as tenuous (Stuart, personal communication, 1987).

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VIENNA DICTIONARY OR VIENNA VOCABULARY

See Mengin 1972

sino hazian estas ceremonias anian de tener ciertas enfermedades que ellos tienen en este año pasado los estos dias ayagor llevan an la estatua del demonio Bolonzacab. al templo y la imagen a la parte del oriente para ir alli otro año por ella, y cesaban la por ay, y iban se a sus casas a entender en lo q les quedava a cada uno que hazer para la celebracion del año nuevo. Dexando con las ceremonias hechas es