

The Idol-Makers in the Madrid Codex

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One of the activities shown in the Madrid Codex is the manufacture of wooden idols. Landa has left us a detailed description of this work which the Maya called “making gods” (Tozzer 1941:159-161; Pagden 1975:121,109). Since the Spanish friars forbade and heavily punished the manufacture of (non-Catholic) idols, we have few other ethnographic records to aid us in the interpretation of the illustrations and texts on this subject, as were available, for example, in previous studies of weaving (Ciaramella 1999) and bee-keeping (Ciaramella 2002) in the codices. However, the literature on the Lacandons, who still make “god pots” is of some use (Tozzer 1907). And a recent study of the carving of the altarpiece of Santiago Atitlán (Christenson 2001) confirms some of Landa’s comments.

Tozzer’s notes to his translation of Landa (Tozzer 1941) contain many references to the writings of previous scholars relating to the Madrid scenes I will discuss. In a very relevant study, Jones (1992) deals with T190, the axe glyph, and T537, Thompson’s “Xipe” glyph. Vail (1989:34) points out that specific almanacs in the Madrid have to do with the renewal of clay and wooden idols.

My procedure was to identify visually the idol-making activities shown in the Madrid (which are not in consecutive order) and to read the texts using generally accepted phonetic decipherments (Schele and Grube 1997) for codical glyphs, or readings listed in Kurbjuhn’s (1989) catalog. I also present evidence for reading T186 as phonetic *le*, T159 as phonetic *lo*, and T62 as logographic **HOK’**. From the phonetic readings appropriate Yukatek words were sought in the *Cordemex* dictionary (Barrera Vásquez 1980). Interpretations of texts and illustrations were drawn from Landa or other ethnographic sources. All figures (except Figure 12) are after Villacorta and Villacorta (1930).

I wish to note here that my work is always directed toward understanding the meaning of the texts and images in the codices. Linguistic specialists will find cause to criticize me on points of grammar and syntax. Their work is important and I respect it. I care about what the Maya said, they care about how they said it.

Let us first read what Landa tells us:

“One thing which these people held to be most arduous and difficult was making idols out of wood, which they called making gods. This fell in the month of Mol. Those who wished to sponsor this task first consulted the priest and, having heard his advice, went to the sculptors; and it is said that the sculptors always made excuses for they were afraid they or someone in their house would

die or become fatally ill. While they fasted, the sponsors of the idols went in person, or sent someone, to the forests to collect the wood, which was always cedar. Once the wood had arrived they made a closed hut of straw where it was stored together with a large [urn] in which the idols were placed and kept covered while they were being made. They put out incense which they placed at the four points of the compass.

“Once the idols were finished and had been perfected [in the month Chen], their owner collected the best gifts he could of fowl, game and some of his honey, to pay the workmen who had made the idols; then they took these from their houses and placed them in another arbor, which had been built in the patio for this purpose and where the priest now blessed them with great solemnity...Once they had anointed themselves...and burned some of the blessed incense, they placed the idol in a small leather casket wrapped in a cloth, and then handed it over to the owner who received it very devoutly” (Pagden 1975:121, 109).

COLLECTING THE WOOD

On M89c (Figure 1) God E is shown standing with axe in hand before a tree. The axe glyph followed by the Kaban glyph occurs at A1 and B. T190.526 can be read **CH’AK-(ka)**, *ch’ak*, with the meaning “to chop” (Jones 1992:141). A3 is T24.1047, the name glyph of God A, the death god. A2 is T15.736[:140], his attribute. A4, the augury, has no satisfactory reading. See Grube in Schele and Grube (1997:82). C is T24.1006c, the name glyph of God E, the maize god.

The following scenes in M89c-M90c (Figure 2) show four gods standing before trees with trunks cut horizontally through. Each deity holds a sign which Knorozov (1982:368) calls a symbol for chopping. The sign resembles a noose, *le* in Yukatek. The word *lebel* (Barrera Vásquez 1980:443) means “*caer el árbol con raíces* (to fell a tree with its roots).” The noose may have been employed to pull up the stump and roots although that would not be necessary in collecting wood for carving. The compound at A is an augury referring to an “abundance of food and water” (Schele and Grube 1997:84). B is skull?-T612.1016, **?-le-k’u**. C consists of two deity heads.

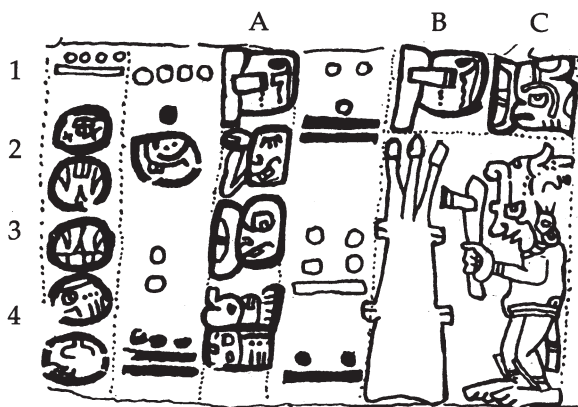
Thompson (1970:191) refers to M98a (Figure 3) as the cutting of a cedar tree for idol-making because the trunk “carries the *ku* or *kul* sign.” The trunk carries T528 **ku** markings. But cedar is *k’uche’* (Barrera Vásquez 1980:419) and could not be identified using unglottalized **ku**. Perhaps this is a real stone tree, since T528 is logographic *tun*, “stone.” Vail (personal communication 2001) notes that two of the trees on the Dresden *Wayeb’* pages have T528 markings. Taube (1988:241) says “It is now generally accepted that the Cauac markings refer to stone, in other words, these markings depict the trees as stone columns, not a particular species of wood.” This image (M98a) does not appear to be relevant to our discussion of idol-making.

“CLOSED HUT OF STRAW”

Landa (Pagden 1975:121) says “Once the wood had arrived they made a closed hut of straw where it was stored together with...the idols...while they were being made.” Three such structures are shown in M97a (Figure 4). A deity sits inside each, holding a human mask or skull. A maize glyph (T506) is shown at the feet of the first deity, God D. Two maize glyphs surmounted by T501, *ha’*, “water,” appear before the second deity.

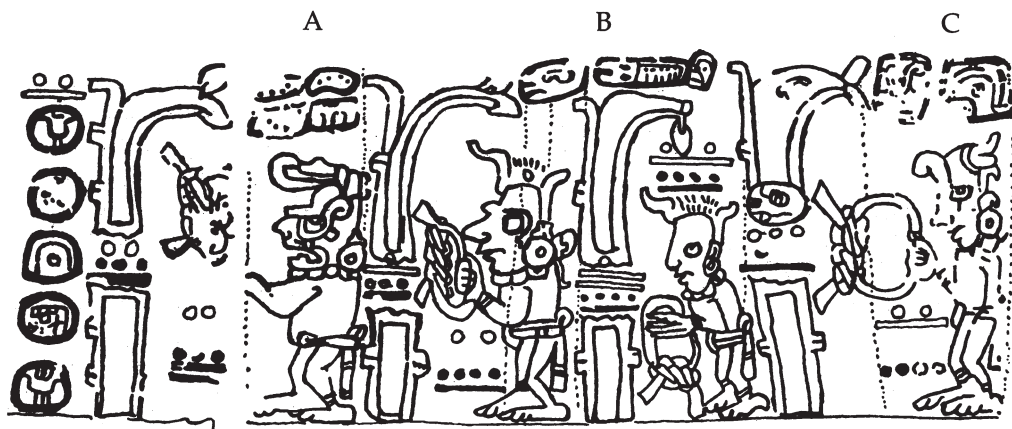
The glyph compound in initial position in the first two texts (A1, C1) is T190.181, **CH’AK-ah**. The compound at B1 is *yotoch*, “house” (possessed). Jones (1992:136) reads this as

FIGURE 1. M89c.



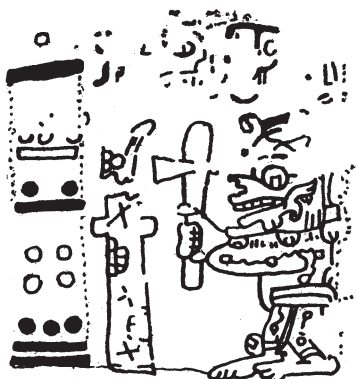
(AFTER VILLACORTA AND VILLACORTA 1930:402)

FIGURE 2. M89c-M90c.

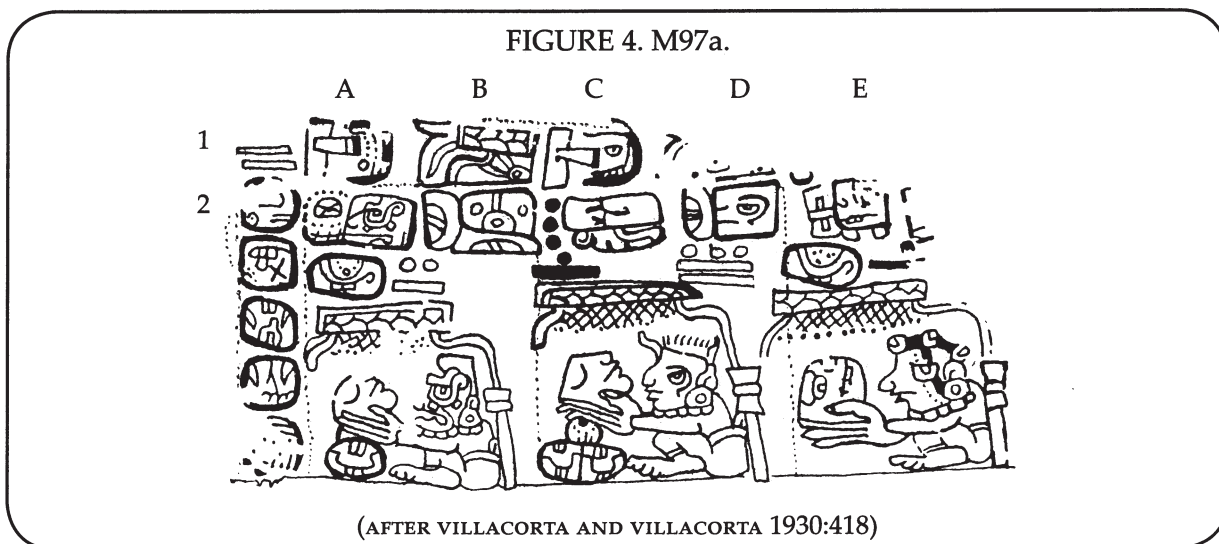


(AFTER VILLACORTA AND VILLACORTA 1930:402, 404)

FIGURE 3. M98a.



(AFTER VILLACORTA AND VILLACORTA 1930:420)



"*ch'akah [ti] yotoch*, [he] carved [in] the house". A2 is the name glyph of God D, T152.1009d. B2 is his attribute, the "flower title" (Schele and Grube 1997:84).

In the second text the name glyph of God R, T24.1005b, appears at D2. Glyph C2 is an augury generally read as "abundance of food" (Schele and Grube 1997:85).

The only visible glyph in the third text (E2) is probably a god's name. The deity, who wears a death eye headdress and has a line bisecting his face, is God Q (Vail 1998:169).

CARVING IDOLS

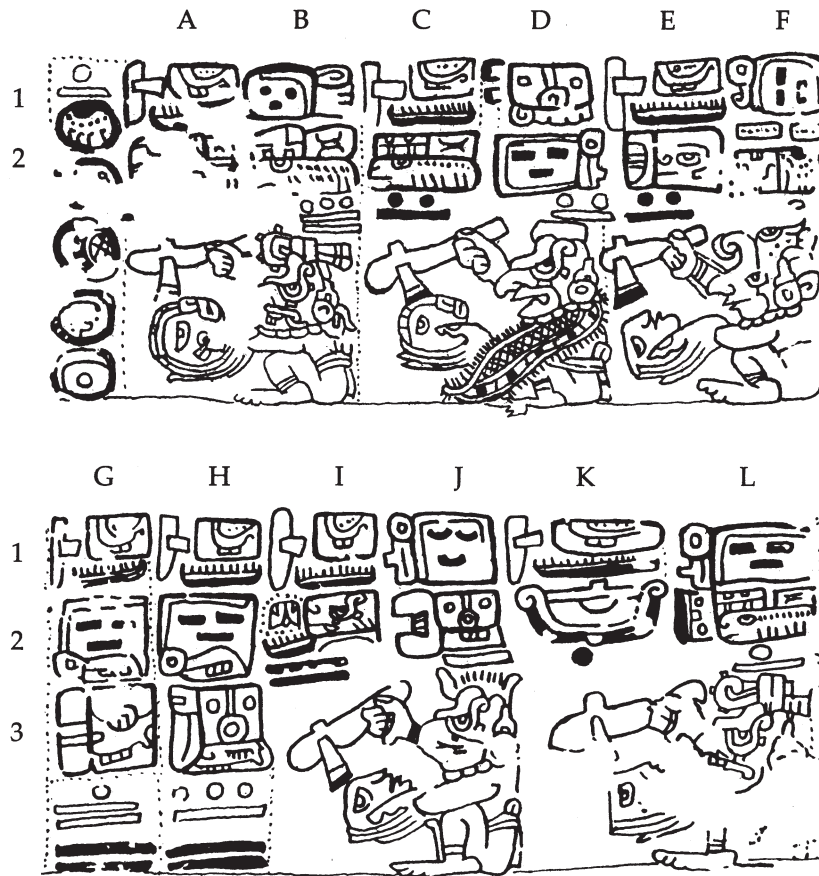
The scene which extends over M97b-M98b (Figures 5a and 5b) shows five deities holding axes in their right hands. The first two hold God C heads in their left hands and the last three hold human heads with the upper part of the skull sheared off, as noted by Jones (1992:134). Each illustration has a four-glyph caption and there are two additional three-glyph texts.

Each text begins with the same verb, T190.682:25, which can be read as **CH'AK-(ka)-ah**, *ch'akah*, "he carved." The second glyph in each case (except for the scrambled second text) should be the object of the action. Each of these glyphs has a T87 affix, which in Yukatek is *che'*, "wood." The Madrid scribe has drawn the main sign with considerable variation. At B1 it resembles T542a, generally accepted as Landa's *e*. At J1 the main sign is a variant of T537, generally accepted as phonetic **na**. In all other cases the main sign is drawn as another variant of T537, with straight lines replacing all the curves. Jones (1992:135) says that the main sign is to be read here as the morpheme **NAK**, Yukatek for "mask." The meaning of the collocation is then "wooden mask." The sheared-off appearance of the human heads can be taken as evidence that masks and not solid idols are being carved.

The remaining glyphs in each text are deity names, attributes, or auguries. God E is named at E2, God A at G3, God D with attribute at I2-J2, and God M, T680, at K2, although the deity in the illustration is not God M. A good augury, *ahawle[l]*, "royal dignity", (Schele and Grube 1997:85) appears at B2, C2 and L2. Another good augury, "abundance of food and water", appears at F2. The glyphs at A2, D1, and H3 cannot be read.

The scene on M95d-M96d (Figures 6a and 6b) also shows deities working on representations of human faces, four with an axe and one with a straight implement, like a chisel. Again there are two short texts in addition to the captions. Three of the texts begin with glyphs which appear to be tree names: at A1 *yaxche'*, literally "green tree", the ceiba, *Ceiba*

FIGURE 5.



a. M97b (AFTER VILLACORTA AND VILLACORTA 1930:418).

b. M98b (AFTER VILLACORTA AND VILLACORTA 1930:420).

pentandra (L.) Gaertn, useful for its fibers (Bricker et al 1998:312); at C1 *nikte'*, the frangipani, *Plumeria rubra* L., an ornamental tree (Bricker et al 1998:197); and at H1 *chakte'*, literally "red tree", *Caesalpinia platyloba* S. Wats., the red wood of which was used for dye and roof beams (Marcus 1982:259).

Lacadena (1997:197) suggests that C1 on M95d can be read as **AHAW-te** (Cholan) "*dado que en yucateco encontramos ahau che* (Alvares 1984:207) *como un tipo de madera empleado para la talla,*" given that in Yukatek we find *ahau che* as a type of wood employed in carving. But the definition given by Alvares (from the Motul) is "*cierto arbol sin fruta de que se hacen cabos de hachuelas,*" a certain tree without fruit from which are made handles for small axes.

I prefer Grube's (1992:217) reading of **NIK** for T533 (when not a day sign) and thus the reading of *nikte'* for C1.

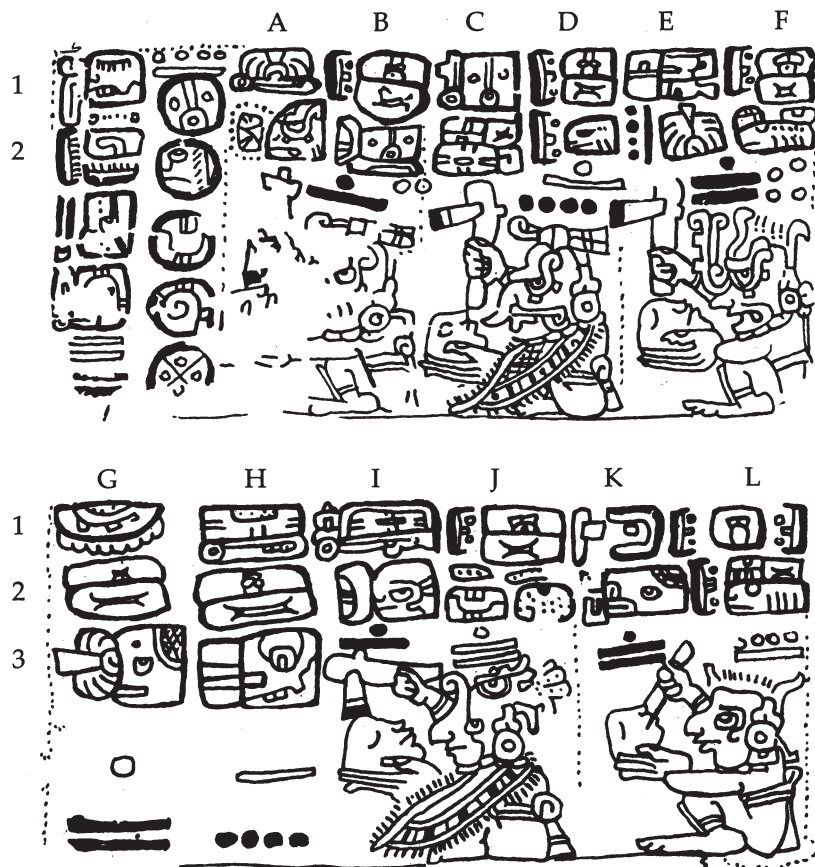
Knorozov (1982:29) remarks in reference to this almanac that "every god had a wood appropriate to his statue." But Landa says the wood used for making idols was always cedar, *k'uche'*, literally "sacred tree", *Cedrela mexicana* M. Roem. Marcus (1982:259) says it was often used for carving sacred images. The altarpiece of Santiago Atitlán was also constructed of ce-

dar. Christenson recounts a myth “in which soon after the coming of the Spaniards powerful Tz’utujil *nuwal* ancestors oversaw the creation of the altarpiece because they wanted a suitable home in the church where the saints could reside:

“A group of six brothers and six sisters, all powerful *nuwals*, went up into the mountains where the ancient gods live in caves and looked for a tree that would be willing to watch over the saints. Each refused in turn until they came to the cedar tree who agreed. While the women played a split-log drum and flute, the men burned incense before the tree and called on its spirit to live on after it was cut down and its wood made into the altarpiece” (2001:66-67).

Each text in M95d-M96d has in the second position the collocation T1.580:687a (in the most complete form). T580 has been read by Stuart (1987:41) as **lo** and T687 is **po**. Davoust (1994:111) says that the glyph at J1 reads **po-l(o)**, and refers to the sculpting of the head by God E. *Pol* (Barrera Vásquez 1980:664) does mean “*labrar o alisar Madera*” (to carve or smooth

FIGURE 6



a. M95d (AFTER VILLACORTA AND VILLACORTA 1930:414).

b. M96d (AFTER VILLACORTA AND VILLACORTA 1930:416).

wood). But the glyph group in every case is written **lo-p(o)**. Jones (1992:138) states that *u lop* is a possessed noun referring to a concave thing, specifically the concave back of the mask being carved. Evidence to support his reading can be found in the last text which reads (with some corrections) *u ch'akah u lo[p]*, "he carved his concave thing." Vail (2000b:45) also suggested a *lop* reading and cited the Itzah meaning "to curve wood" as appropriate to this almanac.

The actors are: God D with flower title at A2-B2; God G, the sun god, T168:544.130 at C2, although God B is pictured; God CH (Taube 1992:62) at G3; a death god at H3; God E at I2; and God H at K2 although God R is shown in the illustration (Taube 1992:113). A reviewer has pointed out that G1 is T682 with an unidentified suffix.

The good augury, "royal dignity," appears at F2 and L2. Another good augury, "abundance of food and water," appears at J2.

OPENING THE EYE

On M101b (Figure 7) two deities are shown each holding a pointed implement over a God C head which rests on a small support before him. The point of the implement passes behind the head at the level of the eyes. There are two four-glyph captions and a third text without illustration. At C2 appears the collocation T186.585a. In Kurbjuhn's catalog (1989:34) there is an entry for T186 ascribed to Fox and Justeson which reads in its entirety "log. -el, -il." The only logograph suggested would be *le*, noose. Indeed T186 does resemble a noose. The collocation T186.585a can be read **le-b(i)**, or *leb*. According to the *Cordemex* (Barrera Vásquez 1980:443), *leb* is "*abrir cosas conjuntas que fácilmente se abren, como el ojo, llaga, mazorca*" (to open joined things which open easily, like an eye, wound, or ear of corn).

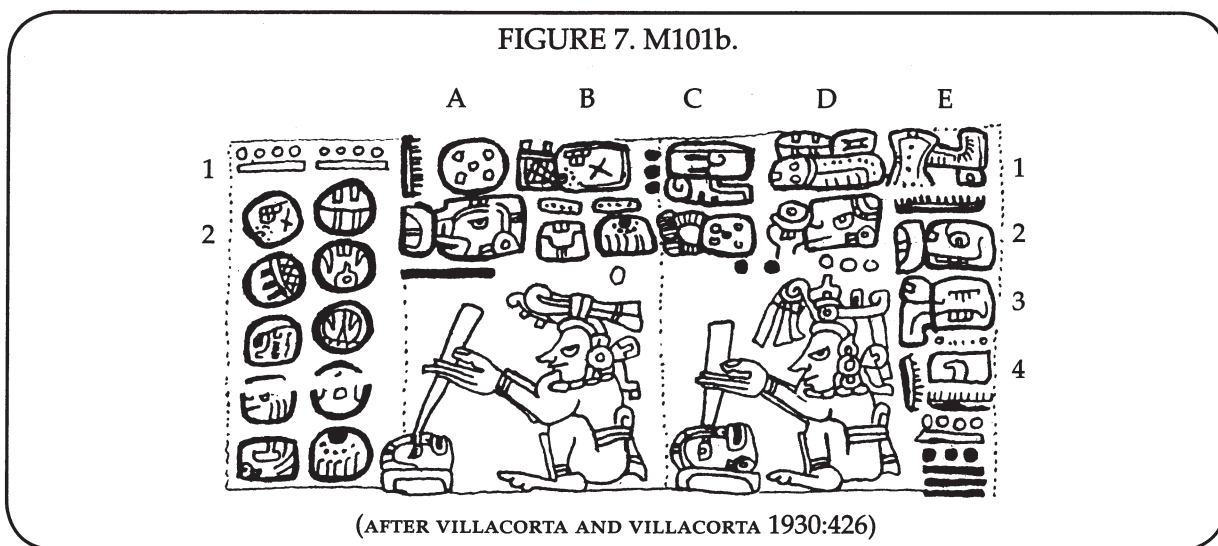
The concept of opening the eye as a metaphor for giving life to an idol is known from other cultures. The huge stone statues of Easter Island were not considered alive until eyes of red stone and white shell were inserted into the empty sockets after the figures had been moved to their final positions. Japanese Buddhist statues underwent a ceremony of consecration, or eye-opening (Guth 1999:112). Houston and Taube (2000:283) state: "It is just possible that the Maya observed a ceremony much like the Buddhist 'opening of the eyes', which activated, enlivened, and empowered sculptures."

The use of tools for waking up / giving life is documented for the Lacandons. One of their myths (McGee 1990:106) tells of a man who traveled to the underworld and received the *asab*, "awakener," a device that allowed him to awaken the dead and give them new life by inserting it into the nasal fossa.

In a note on baptism Tozzer (1941:n462) tells us that "the high priest...took water...and dampened a stick and touched with it the forehead and the eyes and the face, saying three times 'ah, ah, ah' which seems to signify and mean, live again or remember." It may be that the priest was saying *ahal*, which means in Yukatek (Barrera Vásquez 1980:3) *despertar* (to wake up or to recall). *Asab*, though not found in the *Cordemex*, may be related.

The collocation at E1 contains a possible variant of T589 followed by the axe glyph and T25, **ka**. If we consider the last glyph as a misplaced T1 (common in the Madrid), and if we read T190 as phonetic **ch'a** instead of logographic *ch'ak*, we have **u-ho-ch'(a)** or *u hoch'*. *Hoch'* (Barrera Vásquez 1980:218) is "*barrenar*" (to bore or drill). Drilling differs from opening something soft, presumably without force, but we will see another possible *hoch'* used in an idol-making context.

Unfortunately, not much else on M101b except deity names and auguries can be read. At A2 is T24.1016c, referring to God H (Vail 2000a:141). B2 is "abundance of food and water". C1 is the augury "abundance of food", and D1 is "royal dignity". D2 (T147.1059) names God H again (Vail 2000a:124-125). E2-E3 are God A's name and attributes. E4 is *u muk*, considered a bad augury (Schele and Grube 1997:82).



On M99d (Figure 8) two deities are shown holding a human head or mask in their right hands and, in their left hands, an implement pointed at one end and with two opposed volutes at the other end. The implement is gripped midway along its length. The pointed end passes behind the nose of the mask.

In addition to the captions there are two texts without illustrations. The collocation T186.585a, *leb*, "to open the eyes," appears in all four texts in varying positions: second in the first text; last in the second and fourth texts; and first in the third text. The texts are scrambled with no apparent syntax. A1 is the name of God G. A2 is the Madrid form of the maize god's name (Taube 1992:41). B2 is the augury "abundance of food and water". C1 is an unidentified deity and C2 a death god attribute. D2 is God H and E2 is again "abundance of food and water". F1 is the bad augury *u muk*. The death god's name and attribute appear at F2-F3.

Other evidence for the *leb* reading can be found on M97c (Figure 9). The third illustration shows a deity holding a glyph with foliation. Although the glyph is eroded, comparison with the other illustrations in the almanac indicates that it is most probably the Ik glyph, T503. Schele (1996:41) says T503, when not used calendrically, has the value NAL, which happens to be Yukatek for ear of maize. The equivalence of T506, *K'an*, which means something yel-

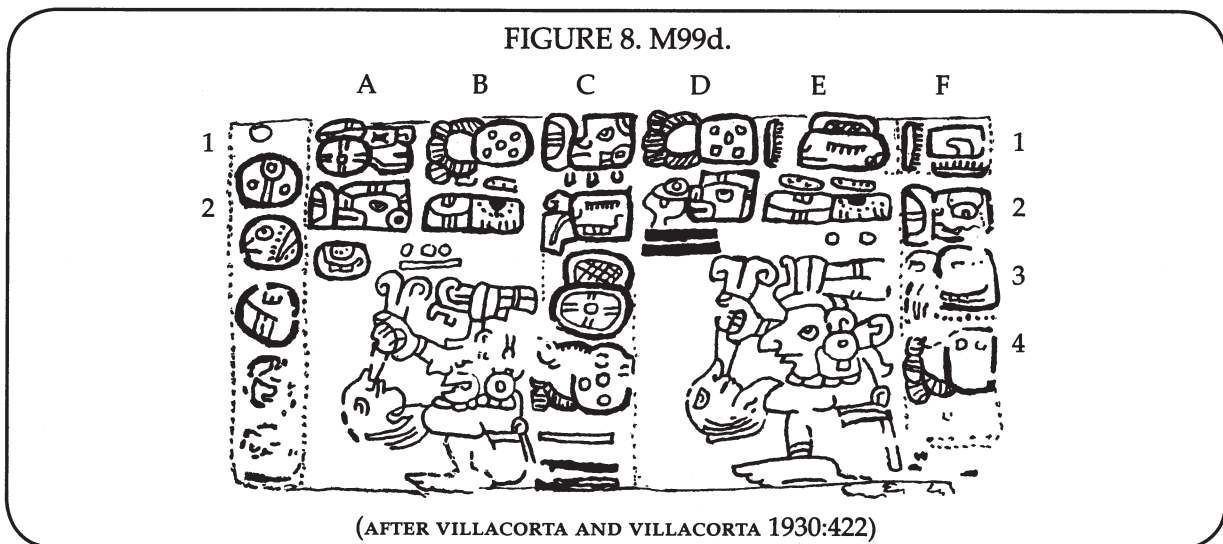
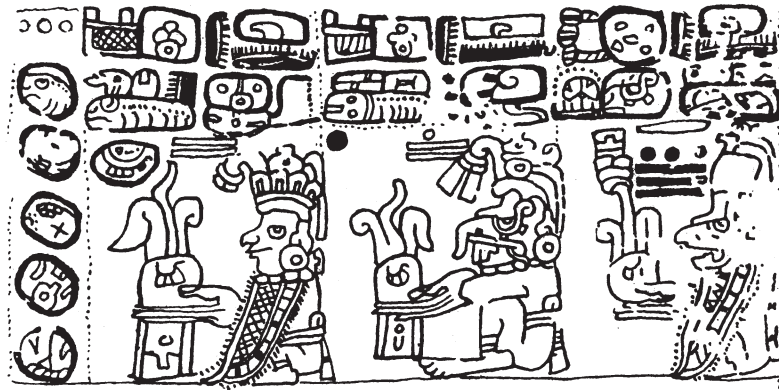


FIGURE 9. M97c.



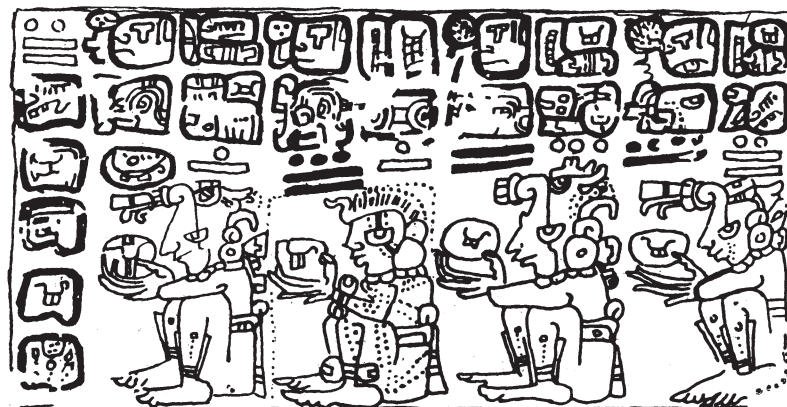
(AFTER VILLACORTA AND VILLACORTA 1930:418)

low (like corn) and T503, the Ik/NAL sign, is shown in M28d (Figure 10) where one god holds T506 and three others hold T503. We can then accept the foliated glyph under the *leb* collocation on M97c as mature maize. Recall that *leb* can mean to open an ear of corn.

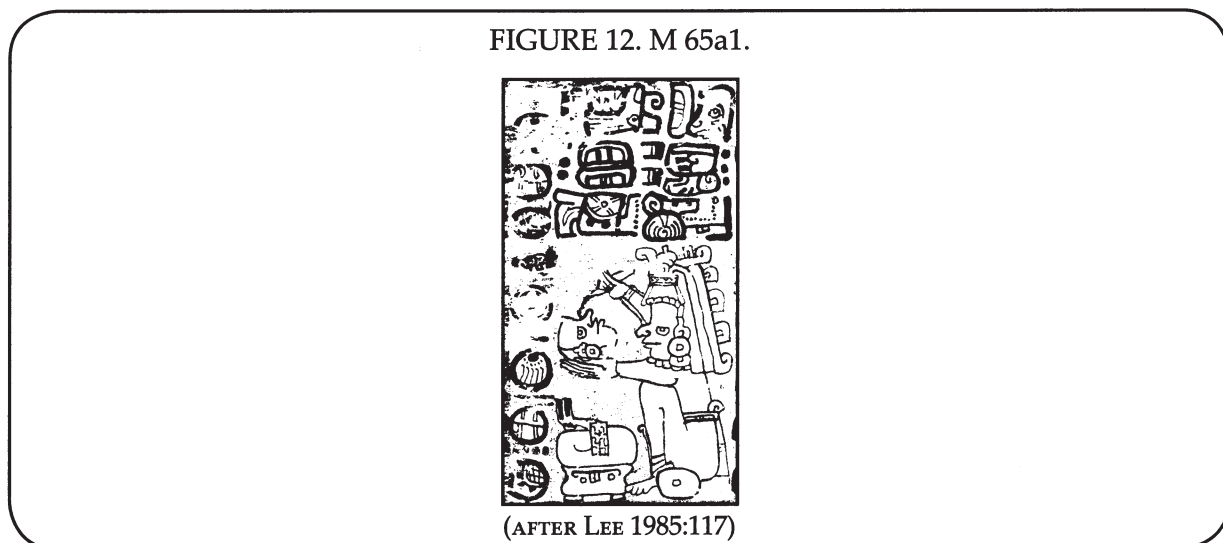
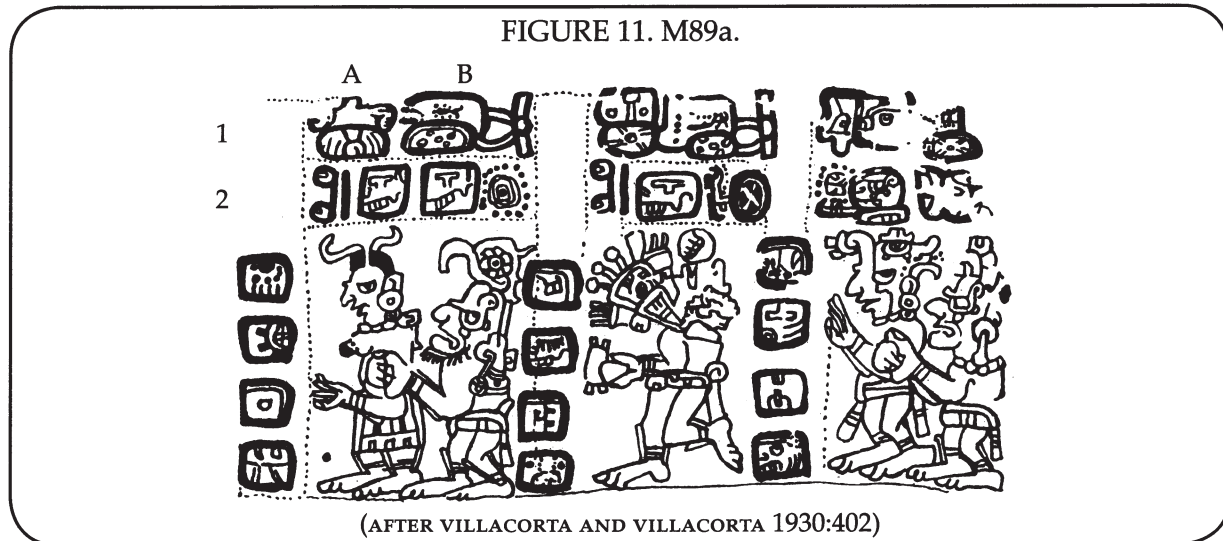
Another piece of evidence for T186 as phonetic *le* may be found on M89a (Figure 11). At B1 there is a skull with dots around the eye. If we accept this as T1048 then the collocation reads *xi-bi-le* or *xibil*. The image shows a female being grabbed around the waist by a male deity. *Xibil* (Barrera Vásquez 1980:941) means “*temblar de miedo*” (to tremble from fear), and *miembro viril*, “penis,” as Vail (1996:385-386) notes in her discussion of T186 in the Madrid, but it also means simply *masculinidad*, *fuerza*, “masculinity” or “force.” I believe it is this latter meaning, which is illustrated here.

Another idol-making scene occurs on M65a(1), (Figure 12). A youthful deity identified as the maize god at B1 is shown holding a possible brush with paint over a human head / mask in his other hand. The paint stream, which is not visible in Villacorta and Villacorta (1976), is quite clear in Lee (1985). A deer haunch rests in a bowl before the deity, recalling the gift of game mentioned by Landa. I will not discuss the text here other than to say that I think it does not refer specifically to idol-making.

FIGURE 10. M28d.

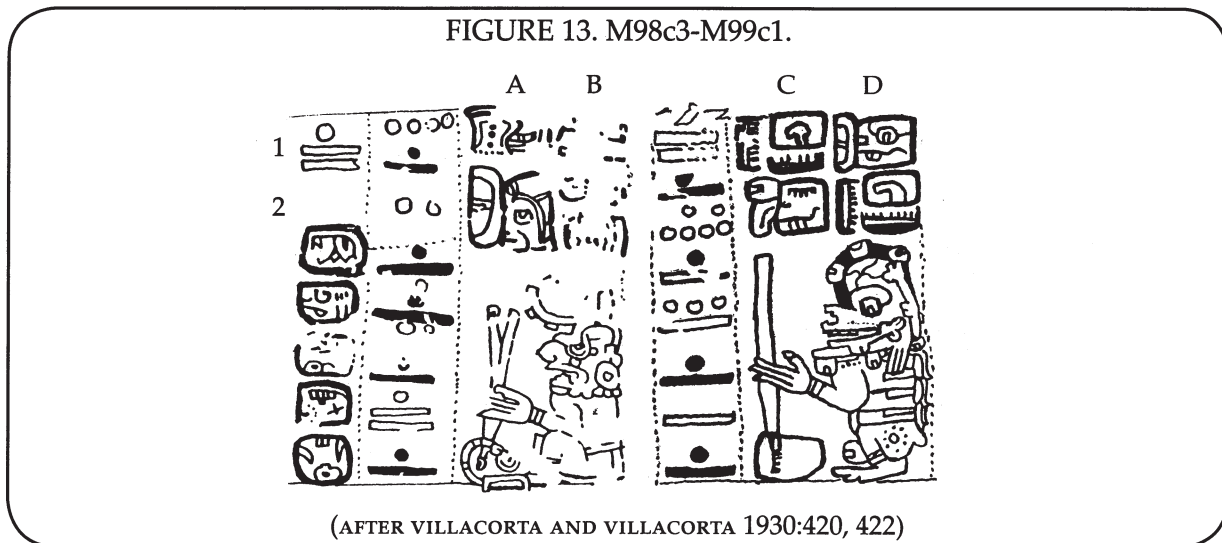


(AFTER VILLACORTA AND VILLACORTA 1930:280)



On M98c(3) (Figure 13), a deity holds a forked implement to the eye of a God C head which rests on a small support. The first collocation in the text above him contains the variant T589, *ho*, previously seen on M101b (Figure 7). The rest of A1 is eroded but this may be another reference to drilling.

Some other evidence may be found on M99c(1), (also in Figure 13). Here a death god is using a straight pointed implement on a round object, like a bowl. D. Graff (personal communication 2001), among others, has pointed out that the object is "apparently the head of an idol with the 'comb' eye of the Cimi glyph." The text is peculiar in that it contains two T1.19:25 collocations, one at C1 where we would expect a verb, and the second at D2, the usual place for an augury. The death god's glyphs appear at D1 and C2, and we know *u muk* is considered a bad augury. But what about the *u muk* at C1? *Muk* (Barrera Vásquez 1980:533) has another meaning of *cepo*, trap, or an excavation which serves as a trap. As is well known, *muk* also means "to bury" (in an excavation). Lastly *muk* is the name of a deer-horn needle according to Blom and LaFarge (1926-27:350). The death god is excavating or drilling a hole with a pointed implement, and the first *u muk* refers to this act.



IDOLS STORED IN AN URN

Landa (Tozzer 1941:160) speaks of a great urn in which the idols were placed and kept under cover while they were being made. On M96c (Figure 14) we see three God C heads, each resting in a large urn and covered with a cloth. Compare the covering with the cloth being woven on M102d (Figure 15). Kurbjuhn (personal communication 2000) says "If a mask or idol is carved out of newly cut wood it will shrink and split...The placing of masks or idols in ceramic pots, covering them with cloth makes the wood dry very slowly and affords the carver...maximum control."

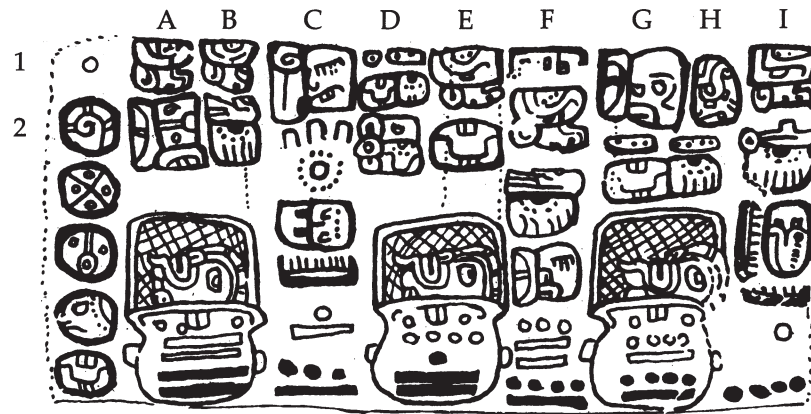
M96c has three captions and three additional texts without illustrations. Four texts contain the collocation T682b:130, **ha-wa**, at A1, B1 (a scribal error of reduplication?), E1, F1 and I1. *Haw* (Barrera Vásquez 1980:186) means "*poner boca arriba*" (to place on one's back, literally mouth upward). The idols are shown face upward in the urns. At F1 the collocation is prefixed by T181, surely an error for **ha-w(a)-ah**.

The collocations at B2 and F2 are identical, T217d:501. This is read *k'ohba* (Friedel et al 1993:65). *K'oh* (Barrera Vásquez 1980:409) is "*el que representa la figura, imagen o persona de otro*" (that which represents the form, image or person of another). Houston and Stuart (1996:299) suggest the common introductory phrase *u-bah-il* possibly means "his body or image." Friedel et al (1993:64-65) read *k'ohba* as "image" or "mask." In the *Cordemex* (Barrera Vásquez 1980:409), *k'ohba* means "*ponerse la máscara o disfraz*" (to put on a mask or costume." At I2 in the last text we have T87:501, *che' ba*, "wooden image."

A strange collocation including the dotted circle T582, **mo**, appears at C2. As Taube (1992:13) observes, "In the codices, God A frequently has a ring of dots against his posterior... In contemporary Yucatec, a common term for sphincter is *molo*, and it is probable that the **mo** sign serves to delineate the anus, *molo* of God A." I was unable to confirm *molo* as anus in the *Cordemex* but in another Yucatekan dictionary (Bricker et al 1998:187) I found *mòlom*, "anus."

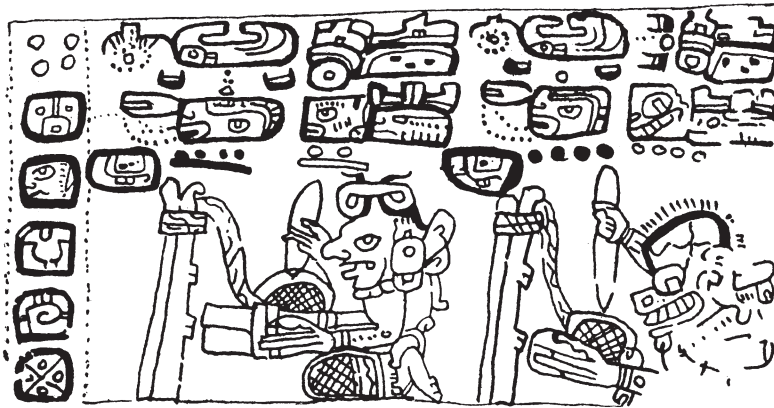
Among the various illustrations of God A with **mo** on his posterior, some show a pointed extension, which is separate from the spinal bones also depicted. See M14b, 57a, 60a, 60b, 81b, and 99c (Figure 13). I began to suspect that the entire word for anus, **mo-lo**, was being represented. I also saw that the strange glyph at D1 on M61b(2) (Figure 17) resembled what I thought was shown on God A's posterior, but with the components in reverse order, **lo-m(o)**. Using Zimmermann's (1956:79) catalog, I was able to identify the lobed component as Z52/T159 and find other occurrences of T159:582, **lo-m(o)**, in the codices.

FIGURE 14. M96c.



(AFTER VILLACORTA AND VILLACORTA 1930:416)

FIGURE 15. M102d.



(AFTER VILLACORTA AND VILLACORTA 1930:428)

Lom (Barrera Vásquez 1980:459) has several meanings. Primarily it means “*tiro de lanza o dardo y cosas así, y estocada o puñalada*” (throw of spear or dart and similar things, and thrust or stab). This sense is illustrated in the Dresden Venus pages where TVII.159:582 appears twice (D50ab) adjacent to illustrations of deities holding spears. On M41b, under the same collocation, a hunter carries short spears in his hand and a trussed up deer on his back.

Vail (personal communication 2001) questions my *lom* reading on D50ab, because “the glyphs in this position in the other clauses name either deity or animal figures.” I think that *Wuk Lom* or “Seven Thrusts” could be a deity name or title. Montgomery (2002:179-180, 208) states that *lo-m(a)*, (illustrated as T580:19.648, *lo-mu*), or *lom*, is “staff, spear” and cites a rare title, *b’a-lom*, “first staff or spear”, that is “head warrior.” And Kelley (1976:120) says that on D19b the collocation TVII.159:582 appears “as the name of a deity associated sexually with the White Goddess.”

Lomtah (Barrera Vásquez 1980:460) means “*trampas para coger venado*” (trap for catching deer). On M91a, under the collocation TVII.159:582, *wuk lom*, an armadillo is shown in a deadfall trap. The text on M93a contains *lom* and the illustration shows two animals caught in a snare and net.

Lom k'ab (Barrera Vásquez 1980:460) means “*hurgar con la mano*” (to poke with the hand). *Lom k'ab pik* means “*sofaldar metiendo la mano a la mujer*” (tuck up a woman’s skirt with the hand). I think that “tucking up” can be extended to “trussing / wrapping” by recourse to codical illustrations. On M70a the text contains *lom* and a black god is shown with his arms tied behind him. On M102a we have *lombi* in the text and wrapped corpses in the illustration. Deities are also shown sitting under arbors of tied branches. The text of M100c contains *lomta* and again shows gods sitting in arbors. This reading of *lom* returns us to M96c (Figure 14) with the God C heads wrapped in cloth.

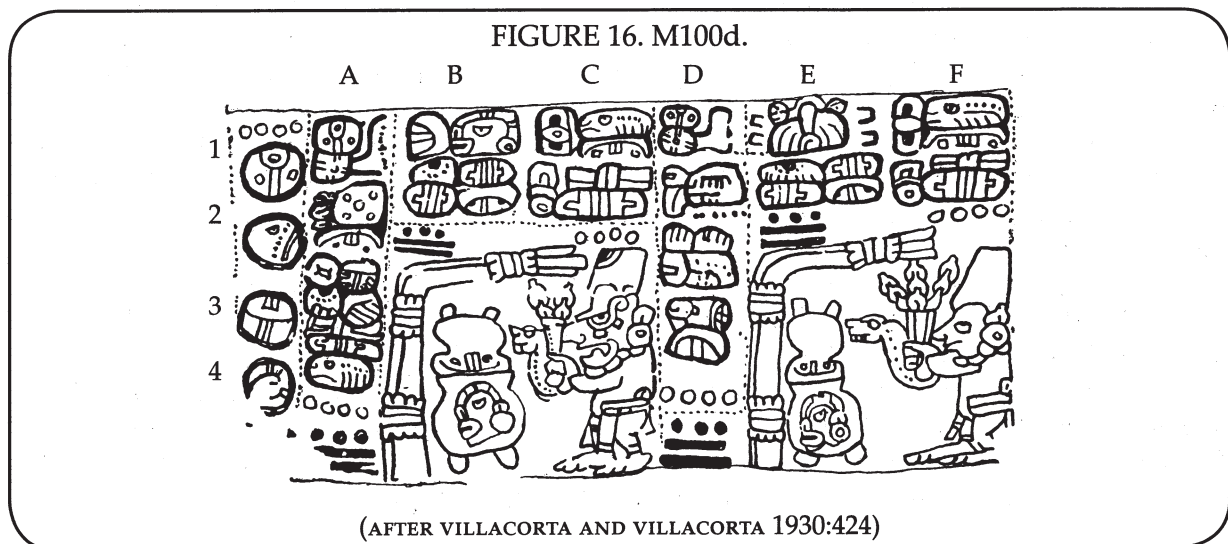
The texts of this almanac are extremely garbled. In addition to the glyphs already discussed we find at A2 in the first text the flower title. The second text contains a death god glyph at C1 and a bad augury, [*u*] *muk*, at C3. D1 is “abundance of food and water”, D2 is not read, and E2 is T506, *wah*, “bread.” F3, G1 and H1 are deity heads, and I3 is again *u muk*.

“IN ANOTHER ARBOR”

To return to Landa (Pagden 1975:109): “Once the idols were finished the owner collected gifts to pay the workmen who had made the idols...then they took these...and placed them in another arbor which had been built in the patio for this purpose and where the priest now blessed them with great solemnity.”

M100d (Figure 16) shows two deities wearing miters and holding snake-shaped *tzitzabob*, the hyssops used to sprinkle water in ceremonies. Before each deity stands a large olla containing a God C head. Vail (1998:175) thinks that these represent Lacandon god pots. In the course of this study we have seen that the God C heads actually represent wooden idols or masks. The ollas are covered with another, placed rim-to-rim. Kurbjuhn (personal communication 2000) remarks that placing the second pot onto the first one retards the process of drying and prevents shrinkage and splitting of the carved pieces. Each scene takes place inside a structure made of branches tied together, the arbor mentioned by Landa.

There are two texts in addition to the captions. Three texts begin with a direction: *lak'in*, “east,” at A1; *lak'in* again at D1, surely an error for *chik'in*, “west;” and *nohol*, “south,” at E1. North would be expected at B1, where we find the codical name glyph for God E, although it is God D who appears in the illustration. Vail (personal communication 2001) says that the glyph at B1 is a variant of the glyph for north, which occurs in the Madrid (e.g. M82a-M83a).



Landa (Pagden 1975:121) says: “they put out incense which they placed at the four points of the compass.”

At A2-A3 we have significant collocations. A2 is T186.585a:23, **le-bi-na**. *Le’bil* (Barrera Vásquez 1980:443) is “*cosa enlazada*” (something tied with cords). A2 may read *le’bil nah*, “house constructed with cords.” A3 is T687.559:501.24, **po-tsu-ba-li**. I could find no useful reading for these phonemes, but (with vowel change) *puts* (Barrera Vásquez 1980:678) is “*doblar o doblegar varas*” (to bend or flex poles). *Putsyah* is “*doblar enarcando*” (to bend in an arch). The two collocations then refer to a house constructed of poles bent in an arch and tied with cords, an arbor. This perfectly matches the illustration.

Tozzer (1941:n832) remarks that Landa makes no reference to the offerings that must have been made to the new idols. McGee (1990:8) tells us that “just as men get drunk on *balche’*, so too the gods enjoy the ritual beverage. Lacandon deities are believed to eat tortillas and beans as do the Indians.”

With this in mind it is possible to find a meaning for the collocations, which occur at C1-B2 and again at F1-E2. C1 is T96.613:23, **ta-MEN-(na)**. *Tamen* (Barrera Vásquez 1980:769) is “*por ti*” (for you). At B2 there is T501:103.103:24, **ba-k(i)-ki-li**, or *bak ki’il*. *Bak* (Barrera Vásquez 1980:27) is “*derramar agua de boca angosta*” (to pour out water from a narrow mouth). *Ki’il* (Barrera Vásquez 1980:316) is “*vianda*” (food). This may be a reference to offerings of water (or *balche’*) and food made to the new idols.

Other collocations can be read phonetically, but I have not been able to find appropriate Yukatek words. A4 is T145:103:613, **che-ki-MEN**. C2 and F2 are T58(?).145:103, **SAK(?)-che-ki**. D2 is a death god glyph. I cannot read D3 or D4.

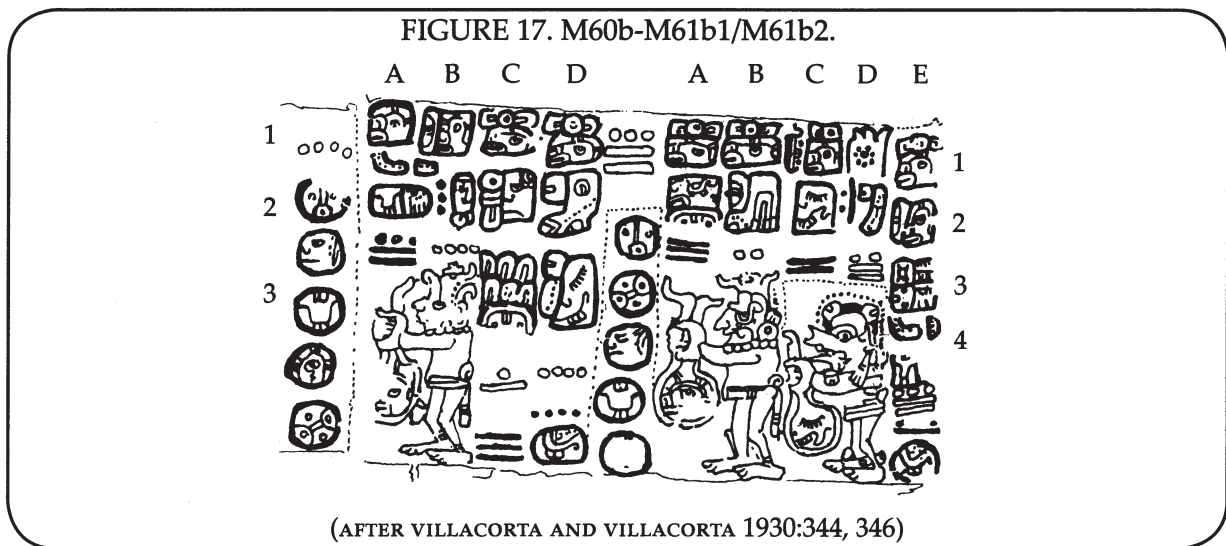
IDOLS WRAPPED IN CLOTH

And finally Landa (Tozzer 1941:161) tells us that “they placed the new images in a little hamper, wrapped up in a cloth, and handed them over to their owner.” Tozzer (1941:n834) thinks that new idols wrapped in leaves may be shown in the two almanacs on M60b-M61b (Figure 17). In the first almanac, M60b-M61b(1), a deity carries a God C head in a bundle. There are two three-glyph texts in addition to the caption. The second almanac, M61b(2), shows a deity carrying a God C head in a bundle and a death deity carrying a human mask with closed eyes, signifying that it is dead. This almanac has two captions and one text without illustration.

Each text in the two almanacs begins with a collocation containing T60/62 and the God C head, T1016, which has the logographic value *k’u*, “god.” T62 is generally read as phonetic *yu*, but I think here it is logographic **HOK’**. Some entries in Kurbjuhn’s (1989:12) catalog support this reading. Schele thinks T60 is an allograph for T684, the “toothache” glyph, read *hok’*. Kurbjuhn (personal communication 2002) informs me that Dütting (1965) was the first to suggest the *hok’* reading. Although the T60/62 glyph shown on M61b lacks the vertical “bandage” of T684, we can accept it here as *hok’* with the meaning (Barrera Vásquez 1980:221) “*atar*” (to tie up). The sense is then to tie up the idol, as is shown in the illustrations.

In the first almanac, M60b-M61b(1), the collocation used in the Madrid to name God E is found at B1 and the maize god appears in the illustration below. A2 and B2 are both good auguries. C2 may name God H. I cannot read C3 and D2. D3 is a death god.

In M61b(2), the glyph at B1 is a duplication of A1, a scribal error. A2 names God D, shown in the illustration. B2 is God K. At D1 is a variant of T159.582, *lom*, “to truss up,” a further reference to the wrapped condition of the idols. C2 is T736, a dead head. I cannot interpret D2. God E is named at E2 and both E3 and E4 are good auguries.



SCULPTORS WERE AFRAID

Landa (Pagden 1975:121) tells us that the sculptors, when asked to make a new idol, always made excuses for they were afraid that they or someone in their house would die or become fatally ill. Yet as pointed out to me by J. Garing, most of the auguries in the texts accompanying scenes of idol-making are good, specifically 21 good auguries to five bad.

IDOLS WERE THE WORK OF THEIR HANDS

We have now followed the manufacture of wooden idols from tree-cutting to delivery to the owner. Landa (Tozzer 1941:111) comments that “the wooden idols were so much esteemed that they were considered as heirlooms.” He informs us (Tozzer 1941:111): “They knew well that the idols were the works of their hands, dead and without a divine nature; but they held them in reverence on account of what they represented, and because they had made them with so many ceremonies.” The present day Tz’utujils regard sculpting as a ritual act (Christenson 2001:153).

Tozzer (1941:n507) notes that one witness in the 1562 investigations of idolatry stated flatly that “idols are gods.” Ironically, a later scholar, K. Sapper (Beaudry-Corbett and Hardy 2000:32) referring to Catholic images noted “They [the Q’eqchi’] not only call each of these paintings or sculptures a ‘god’ — the same as a pagan idol using the Spanish word *dios* — but they believe that these pictures are actually alive.”

To return to the altarpiece of Santiago Atitlán, “most Atitecos old enough to remember the renovation work...in the 1970s know that the Chavez brothers carved a significant portion of the monument. The work was carried out over a long period of time in a very prominent public place with no attempt to hide the progress of its reconstruction. Yet, at the same time these same persons often say the altarpiece is entirely ancient and ascribe it to the work of *nuwals* at the beginning of time...

“Atitecos today...understand the altarpiece to be a unique creation of the Chavez brothers and at the same time perceive it as a timeless vessel for the spirits that reside within it and give it power” (Christenson 2001:67-68).

REMARKS

This paper has given an example of the continuity of Maya belief about idols from pre-conquest times, as related by Landa, until today. Study of Landa's ethnographic notes, together with the illustrations in the Madrid Codex, has led to the decipherment of the associated texts. The codices, formerly thought to deal primarily with ritual, divination and astronomy, are also found to be rich sources of information on the work of the Maya.

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