

Corn Deities and the Complementary Male/Female Principle

Presented at La Tercera Mesa Redonda de Palenque, July, 1999

Revised September 2000

Karen Bassie-Sweet

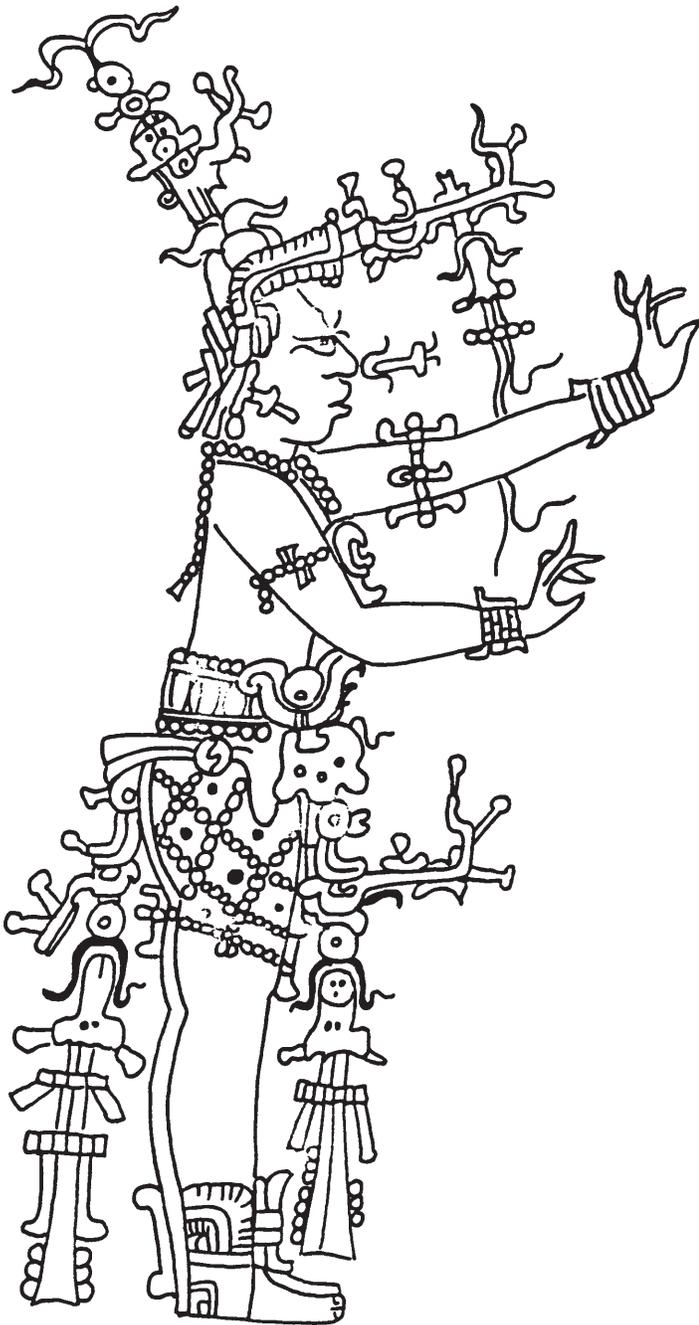


Figure 1. Corn God (K4464)

The Maya were corn cultivators, and this primary crop was their most important commodity. Their myths concerning the creation of the earth and its preparation for human habitation revolved around establishing the corn cycle. The central role of corn in Maya life is also reflected in the myths concerning the creation of humans. The Maya believed that the creator deities made the first humans from white corn seed that was hidden inside a great eastern mountain under an immovable rock. In order to access this corn seed, a rain deity split open the rock using a bolt of lightning in the form of an axe, and this act burnt some of the corn, creating the other three colors of corn seed: yellow, black and red. The creator deities took some of the freed corn seed, ground it into corn dough, and used it to model the first humans. This primary act irrevocably connected humans to corn.

Schellhas identified a male Corn God (God E) in the codices, and similar corn-related deities were also noted in Classic period art.¹ There is a distinctive skirt composed of a diamond pattern which is frequently worn by the Corn God (Figure 1). It is also worn by a goddess who is most often identified by

¹ See Taube (1992) for a history of these identifications.

researchers with the moon (Taube 1985, 1992) and by high status male and female humans who are shown performing a variety of rituals (Proskouriakoff 1961, Marcus 1976, Joyce 1992, Quenon and Le Fort 1997). It has been noted that when humans donned the costume of a deity, they assumed the traits and power of the deity or were temporarily transformed into the deity. In keeping with his identification of this skirt as one of the traits of the Corn God, Taube (1985, 1988a:80, 1992:48) suggested that these humans were impersonating the Corn God. Following this interpretation, Stone (1991:201) suggested that it was a male costume and that “women wearing this costume are impersonating a male image of power, specifically a view of kingship that iconographically condenses the ruler’s connection to the cyclical forces of nature”. Because skirts were typically the costume of a female, Joyce (1992:68) concluded that male rulers wore the female skirt as an attempt “to subsume in themselves the totality of social differentiation”. This paper re-evaluates the identities of the Corn God and the so-called moon goddess and explores some of the reasons why the Maya elite emulated these corn-related deities.

Like all humans, the Maya placed themselves and their environment into categories that allowed them to order and manipulate their world. They frequently categorized using the basic complementary pairing of male/female, right/left and senior/junior. In many contemporary communities, a human being is thought to be both male and female, with the right side of the body male and the left side female. However, in order to be a complete person an adult must be married. A husband and wife are thought to work in complementary unison, just as the right side of the body works with the left (Wagley 1949:16, Tarn and Prechtel 1986, Devereaux 1987).

The importance of being married is emphasized in the Popol Vuh. The section of this epic story that deals with the creation of human beings focuses on the first four lineage heads of the Quiché and notes that when the deities created these men, they also created a wife for each one (Edmonson 1971:153). Most contemporary communities require that a man be married in order to obtain political and religious offices. In some communities, a wife will even finish the term if her husband dies (La Farge 1947:133, Guiteras 1961:223). Without his wife’s presence, it is believed that a man’s power is greatly reduced (Siegel 1941:73, La Farge 1947:25, 70, 133).

In ideal circumstances, a husband and wife are viewed as complementary parts of one unit (Tarn and Prechtel 1981, 1986, Devereaux 1987). This concept is reflected in the title “mother-father”. In the Popol Vuh, the first lineage heads are called our first mother-father. In contemporary communities, the ancestors are called mother-father, as are certain high status ritual specialists. The use of this title in the Pokomam area highlights the belief that husbands and wives are one unit. In the Pokoman town of Palin, the position of mother-father is held by both a man and his wife, they are both called mother-father, and both share in the status and prestige of the office (Maynard 1963:62). Similar situations occur in other highland communities (Guiteras 1961:98, 223, 241; Morris 1987:64, 209, La Farge 1947:133).

The complementary nature of a married couple is perhaps best demonstrated by corn production. A man may plant and harvest corn, but he must have a wife to transform

it into food. It has been demonstrated that some Classic Maya elite rituals show females performing gender-specific activities that complement those of the male (Joyce 1992:69). Joyce noted that the labor of women transformed the raw materials provided by men into useful products crucial to social, ritual and political process. While the actions of a man usually place him at the center of the public stage, his wife performs essential tasks that allow him to fulfill his obligations. For example, a wife produces the food, drinks, offerings and gifts used during the various ceremonies and feasts and acts as a ritual assistant to her husband.

A wife was an indispensable complement to her husband, and she shared in the status and prestige, but the vast majority of wives illustrated in Maya art play the role of an assistant, and this suggests that they held a junior position. This junior rank of a female is reflected in the Popol Vuh where Xbalanque, who plays the role of an assistant to Hunahpu, is named with the “x” diminutive or female marker, and in contemporary rituals where the senior male ritual specialist refers to his junior male assistant as his wife (Tarn and Prechtel 1981:119). Haviland (1997) has argued that the difference in the quality and contents of Tikal tombs indicates that women were subordinate to men. This junior ranking in the social order does not mean that women were without influence. Although women are generally illustrated in secondary roles in Maya art, they are significant roles.

As noted, human beings were thought to have been first created from corn. This suggests that the corn plant embodies aspects of the complimentary male/female principle. The corn plant has male and female parts. It is composed of a single stalk that terminates in a male tassel. Buds are found attached to the upper stalk just below the tassel. In the initial development of the female ear, many leaf-like husks grow from the bud, then the corn ear begins to appear with silks emerging from the end. The male tassel produces pollen, which falls on the silk of the female ear and fertilizes it. A mature corn plant is incomplete without its female ear of corn, just as a man is incomplete without his wife. The mature corn plant is the epitome of the complementary male/female principle.

In accordance with the biology of corn, some contemporary Maya identify the stalk and leaves of the corn plant as male and the ear of corn and its seed as female. Corn seed is frequently referred to as “our mother corn” (for example see Siegel 1941, Guiteras 1961, Tarn and Prechtel 1986). The female nature of the corn ear is reflected in one of the riddles of the Chilam Balam of Chumayel, where an ear of green corn is metaphorically referred to as a beautiful maiden (Roys 1933:130). In the proto-Cholan list established by Kaufman and Norman (1984:121), the word for corn seed is *ixim* and the word for shelled corn is *ix*, while the words for female and woman are *ix* and *ixik*, respectively.

The division of the corn plant into male and female parts is also apparent in the deities that represent this sacred commodity. Taube (1985) separated the male corn gods into two classes and called them the Foliated Maize God (God E, the Number Eight Deity) and the Tonsured Maize God. He interpreted these two gods as aspects of the same deity, with the Foliated Maize God representing young, green corn and the Tonsured

Maize God representing the mature corn ear. He also demonstrated that the Tonsured Maize God was parallel to Hun Hunahpu of the Popol Vuh. There is a female goddess who has attributes similar to the Tonsured Corn God. Following Thompson and others, Taube (1992:67) identified this woman as a young moon goddess. I differ in my interpretation of these deities.

A diagnostic trait of both the Foliated and Tonsured Maize Gods is corn foliage growing from their heads, but the crown of the Tonsured Maize God's head is shaved. This quality has been related to an ear of corn, but the smooth head actually represents a gourd. In Central Mexico, the young males who took care of the temples were called *elocuatecomame*. Their heads were shaved on the top, but the hair around the face and neck was left. Duran's description of this hair style indicates that the crown was related to a gourd:

These youths who lived in seclusion were called *elocuatecomame*. When this name is explained in our language, it almost sounds nonsensical since it refers to the *tecomate* [gourd] which is smooth and was used in referring to their shaved heads. And to indicate that their heads were tonsured, the word *elotl* (ear of corn) was employed. People call this tonsure 'a smooth head like a gourd with a round rim like that of an ear of corn', for that is what *elocuatecomame* means [Duran 1971:82].

When Hun Hunahpu's skull was placed in an underworld tree it was transformed into a *tzima* "gourd" (Edmonson 1971:74). This is why the Tonsured Maize God (his Classic period counterpart) has a gourd-like head. In several Classic pottery scenes, the Tonsured Maize God is seen sprouting from the earth, suggesting he represents the young plant (Figure 2).

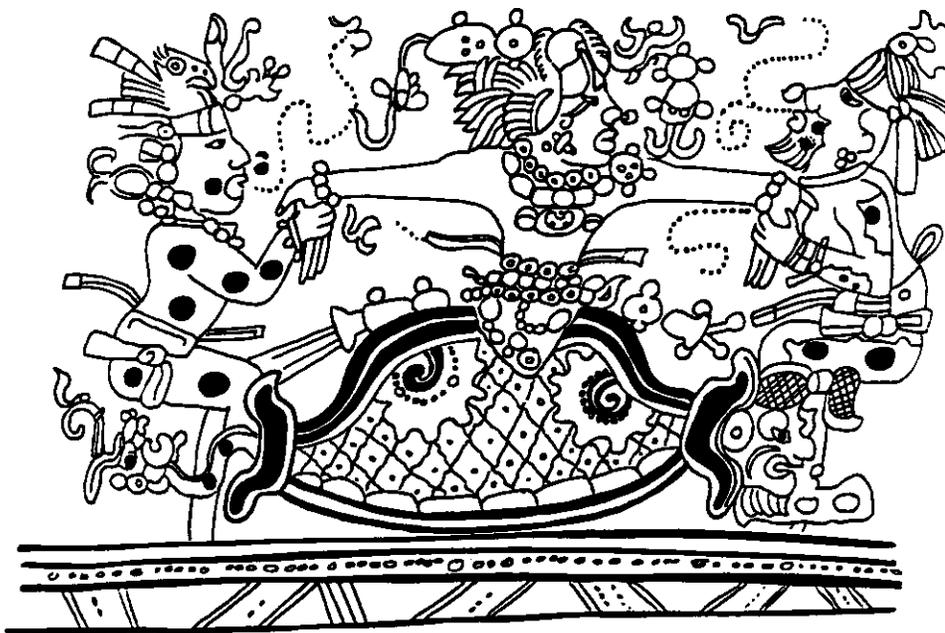


Figure 2. K4681

After the corn ear has reached a certain point of maturity, the Maya bend the stalk in two just below the ear. This places the corn ear in an inverted position that lessens moisture and wind damage and prevents birds from readily accessing the seeds. During this stage, the young green ear of corn ripens and turns hard. In the context of the number eight, the foliage of the Number Eight Deity (the Foliated Maize God) is bent back against his head, just as the corn stalk is bent over (Figure 3a). For this reason, I believe the Number Eight Deity represents the corn stalk, male tassel and foliage of the mature corn plant. The hieroglyphic sign for ballplayer and for ballplaying incorporates a portrait of the Number Eight Deity with his bent-over foliage (Figure 3b). This relates him to Hun Hunahpu of the Popol Vuh, for this deity was the first ballplayer on the surface of the earth.

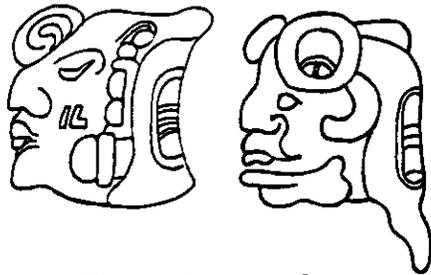


Figure 3a. Number Eight Deity

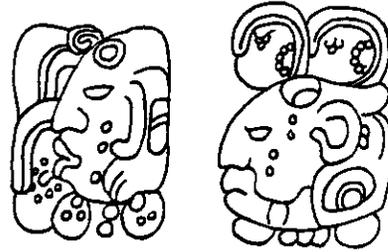


Figure 3b. Ballplayer signs.

In light of the male/female principle and the female nature of the corn ear, it seems apparent that both the Corn God who represented the corn plant and his Popol Vuh counterpart Hun Hunahpu should have had a wife who represented the ear of corn. Hun Hunahpu had such a wife. Her name was *Xbaquiyalo* and she was his first wife. Early researchers recognized the *baq* portion of her name as Quiché *baq* “bone” and translated it as “tied bones”, “bone keeper”, “giver of bones to the people”, “produces bones” or “uneven bones” (Edmonson 1971:58). I use the term Bone Woman, as this is the only part of her name that is certain.²

Hun Hunahpu and Bone Woman formed the first marriage and household on the surface of the earth. Bone Woman bore the Monkey Twins, the first sons of Hun Hunahpu. She was also the first supernatural to die and presumably be buried. Although the story says very little about this woman, it does directly link her death with the ballplaying at the eastern ballcourt by Hun Hunahpu, his brother and the Monkey Twins. This ballcourt was on the road to the underworld and in the immediate vicinity of the cave where the white corn used to create humans was later found. I

² With little justification, Edmonson interpreted *Xbaquiyalo* to be a Nahuatl name derived from *cipactli-alo* “alligator-parrot”. Dennis Tedlock (1996:250) translates *Xbaquiyalo* as Egret Woman. He believes it derives from the Yucatec term *bak ha’* “bone water” which is used to refer to herons and egrets. He further argues that the goddess named in the Cross Group inscriptions of Palenque was also called Egret Woman, but this parallel is in error. The bird which represents the Cross Group deity is a cormorant and is pronounced *mat* (Stuart 2000). I believe that *Xbaquiyalo* may derive from the phrase “bone water” or “the bone of the water” and that one of her bird manifestations was a white water bird.

believe that this ballcourt was, in fact, at the mouth of this cave. Cave burials are well attested in the Maya area, which suggests the possibility that Bone Woman was buried within this cave and that the ballplaying was related to her burial rites.

The Popol Vuh does not explain the origin of the corn within the cave, it merely says that wild animals brought news of its discovery to the creator deities. If the creator deities did not initially place this corn within the cave when they first brought forth the earth, where did it come from? The answer to this question lies in the terms used to describe corn seed. In addition to being called “our mother”, the ear of corn and its seed are also referred to as bone and teeth (Roys 1933:130, Barrera Vasquez 1980:710, Laughlin 1988:377). In the Tzutujil region, corn seed is not only referred to as bone but as *muk* “interred ones” and as *joolooma* “little skulls” (Carlsen and Prechtel 1991:28).³ When a body rots away what remains is the skull, teeth and bones. This information strongly suggests that the white female corn seed/bone found in the eastern cave was the buried remains of a female, and the logical choice would be Bone Woman (Bassie-Sweet 1998a, 1998b, 1999, in prep.).

There is a Classic period goddess who has parallels with Bone Woman. She appears as the goddess of the number one (Number One Deity) and as the patron of K’ayab’ (Figure 4a). Her diagnostic trait is long flowing hair, which is how the Maya metaphorically refer to corn silk. Portrait glyphs of this goddess also precede the personal names and titles of elite women and represent the word *ix* “female, woman” and *ixik* “woman” (Stuart 1998:386). This context indicates that she was a role model for women, as was Bone Woman who created the first household on the surface of the earth and gave birth to the first sons of Hun Hunahpu. A portrait of this goddess is also used to represent the syllable *na* (Figure 4b). In these contexts, she is often por-



Figure 4a. Number One Deity.

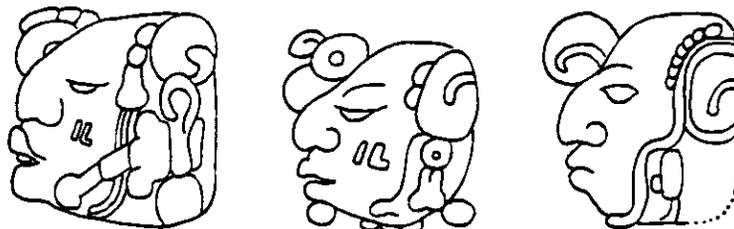


Figure 4b. Na Goddess.

³ The close relationship between corn seed and bone is also found in the pre-Columbian custom of using both corn kernels and bones as divination lots (Saville 1921:206; Tozzer 1907:163, 1913:505; Edmonson 1971:59).

trayed with an element over her ear which represents the corn bud, that is, the bud from which the corn ear grows. An ear of corn appears attached to this corn bud in other contexts (Taube 1985: figure 2). This element is also found in the T528 Kawak sign, where it represents the corn within the cave (Bassie-Sweet 1991:109-110, 1996:68-69). On Quirigua Stela J, a portrait of the Na Goddess appears in a verbal phrase with her head split open and an axe over her ear (Figure 5a). As noted, the rain god split open the corn stone with an axe.

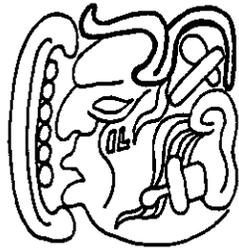


Figure 5a. Quirigua Stela J sign.



Figure 5b. T181 conflated with Na Goddess

There are many examples of a skull with the corn element of the Na Goddess as an infix (Figure 6, next page). Some of these are split open. Others have waterlilies attached to them. The Maya refer to the waterlily as *ixim ha'* "the corn seed of the water" (Venture cited in Schele 1979), and I have argued that the flower manifestation of the Na Goddess was the waterlily.⁴ I believe it is reasonable to conclude that the Na Goddess represented corn seed and that she was the Classic period parallel of Bone Woman. Like Hun Hunahpu and Bone Woman, the Corn God and the Na Goddess were husband and wife, and together in marriage they represented the mature corn plant with its ear of corn, the epitome of the male/female principle (Bassie-Sweet 1997, 1998, 1999, in prep.).

The Na Goddess is most frequently identified as a moon goddess based on her association with the T181 sign and its full form T682 (fig. 5b). In some examples of her portrait, these signs are attached to her head, extend from her body or enclose her (Thompson 1951:fig. 36-21). It is believed by most researchers that the T181 and T682 signs are pictographs of the moon. In many areas of the new world, the dark outline on the face of the full moon was interpreted to be a rabbit, and in some examples a rabbit sits in the enclosure of the T181/T682 signs, which reinforces the assumption that these signs represent the moon. A close examination of these signs and the rabbit indicates, however, that they were specifically associated with Lunar Regents, not manifestations of the moon (Bassie-Sweet 1998a, 1998b, in prep.). This is most apparent in Glyph C of the Lunar Series in which the other two regents of the lunar cycle also appear with the T181 sign. These are the Number Seven Deity and the Number Ten

⁴ The Na Goddess was also manifested as a Mexican burrowing toad (Bassie-Sweet 1998a, 1998b, in prep.).

Deity (Thompson 1951:fig. 36-7, 36-26).⁵ I, therefore, doubt that the Na Goddess was a manifestation of the moon goddess. In the Popol Vuh, it is the second wife of Hun Hunahpu who is associated with this celestial body.

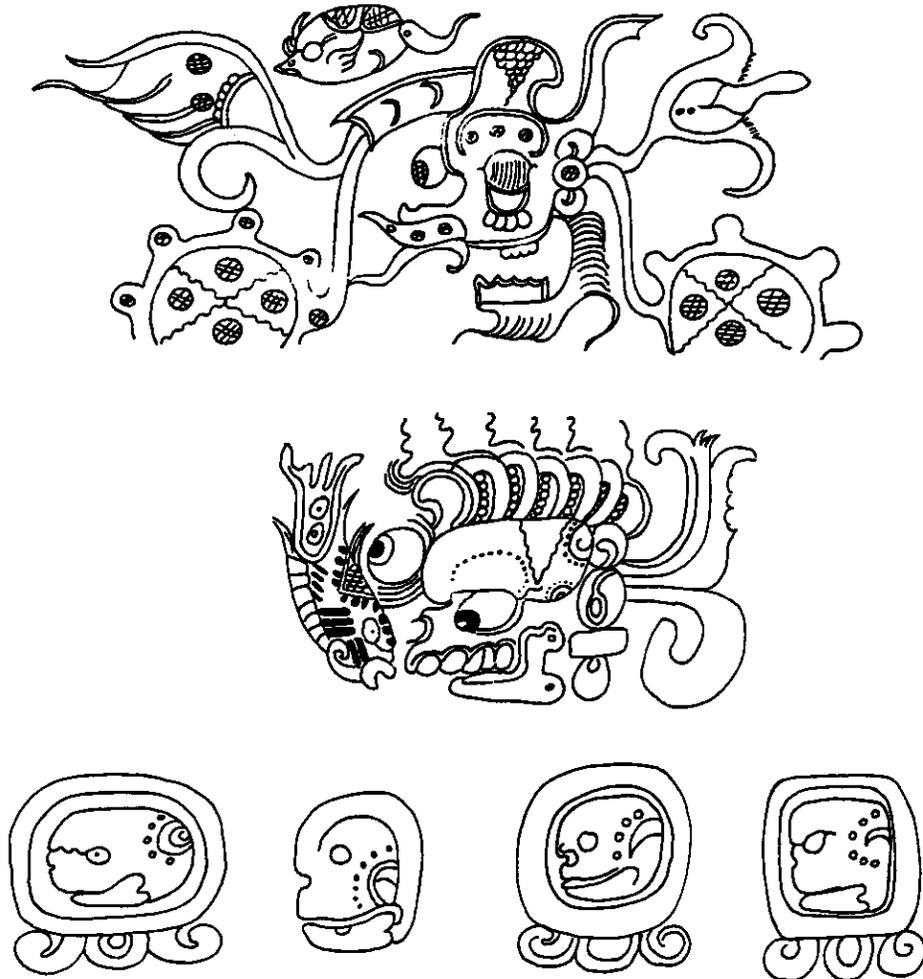


Figure 6. Skull signs.

The Planting of Corn

The Popol Vuh explains how the cycles of sun, moon and Venus were established in order to prepare for the first planting of corn on the surface of the quadrilateral earth. In the final act of this preparation, Hunahpu and Xbalanque (the sons of Hun Hunahpu by his second wife Blood Woman) reassembled the remains of their father at the ballcourt of the underworld, and then these twins journeyed to the eastern horizon and rose up as the sun and full moon. The Popol Vuh also says that the rising of

⁵ Regents are the deities who ruled a particular time period. For example, each of the five Venus pages of the Dresden Codex illustrates one of the five morning star intervals that make up the greater Venus Cycle. Each page shows both the regent for the period and the morning star deity. The Na Goddess who was also a morning star regent is illustrated on Page 49 of the Dresden Codex.

Hunahpu and Xbalanque was followed by the rising of the Four Hundred Boys who have been identified with the Pleiades (Tedlock 1985:342, 1996:246). This indicates that this first rising of the sun and full moon occurred at the beginning of the planting season, for this is when the Pleiades rises in the predawn sky. The text also says the first rising of the sun was preceded by the first appearance of morning star, which occurred on the date 1 Ajaw according to the Dresden Codex Venus pages.

A contemporary Kekchi planting ceremony illuminates the importance of these celestial events in planting (Wilson 1995:63, 94-95). The night before planting, the Kekchi farmer performs a ceremony to prepare himself and the corn seed. Before sunrise while the full moon and morning star are still in the sky, the farmer arrives at his field carrying his corn seed in a bag. He erects a tree/cross in the center of the field and places a large white candle in front of it. He makes offerings to the mountain lord and then swings a burning incense holder at the four directions, the sun, the morning star and the full moon. Following his petition to the guardians to protect his field, he plants the first corn in front of the tree/cross. The farmer splits open the earth with his planting stick and drops in a number of corn seeds (on average the Maya plant about five kernels per hole). After this act, he splits open the earth and plants corn in each of the four directions. After the sun rises, he is joined by others who help him plant the rest of the field.

The Popol Vuh does not recount how the first planting ceremony of the quadrilateral world was accomplished, but several Classic period scenes do. The journey of the

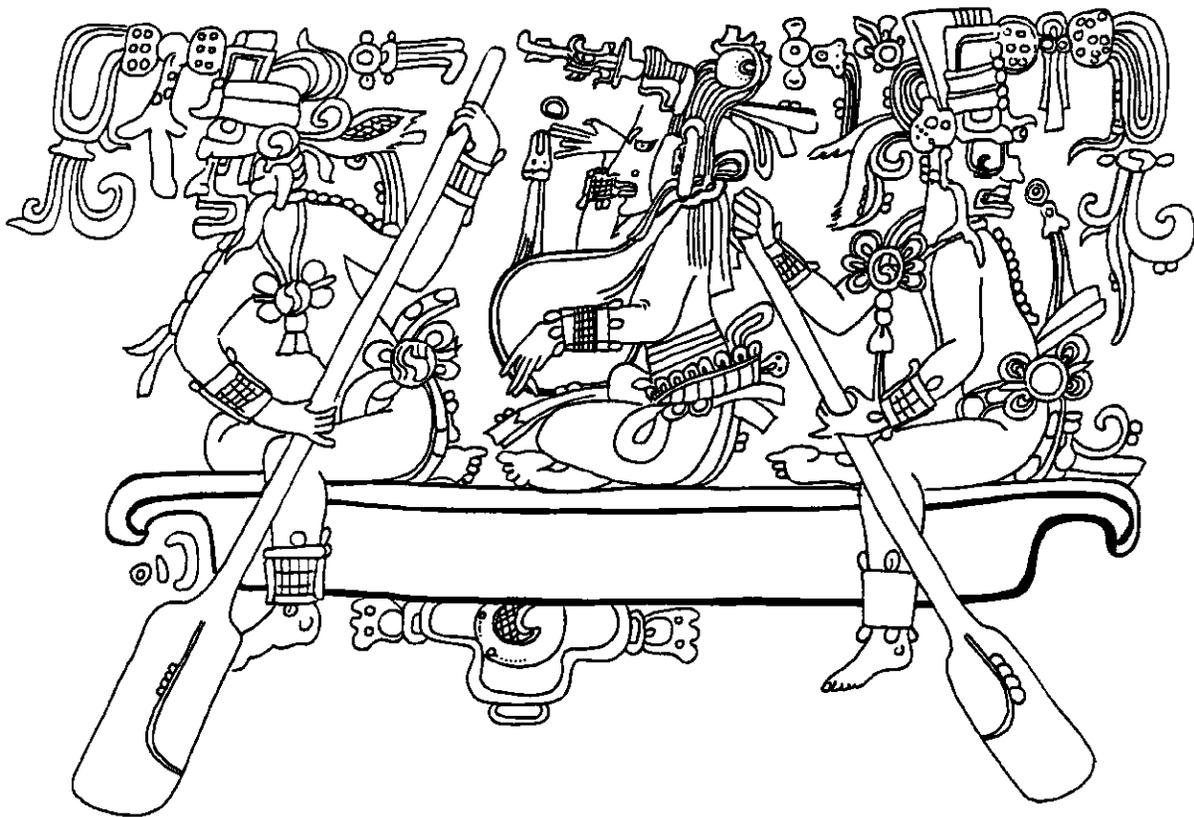


Figure 7. K3033.

Corn God from his burial place at the western ballcourt through the underworld to the eastern cave to obtain the remains of his wife and his subsequent journey to the center of the quadrilateral earth to plant those remains is featured in a number of pottery scenes (Bassie-Sweet 1998a, 1998b, in prep.). In many of these scenes, the Corn God is transported by the Paddler Deities in a canoe. On K3033, the Corn God has gathered some of the remains of his wife, and he carries this seed in a bag around his neck (Figure 7, previous page).

It has been demonstrated that a turtle was used to represent the surface of the earth (Taube 1985, 1988b). On K731, the earth is represented by a turtle shell with an old deity and God N emerging from the mouth and tail (Figure 8). The center of the turtle/earth is marked by a split, just as the farmer splits open the center of the corn field with his planting stick in order to plant the first corn. The Corn God stands adjacent to the crack holding a corn sack in the crook of his arm while he makes a scattering gesture with his other hand. He is in the process of planting the seed. The old deity who is emerging from the turtle shell on the left is similar to the deity who appears as the Venus Regent of the 1 Ajaw morning star interval in the Dresden Venus tables. That is, he is the deity who came into power at the first appearance of the morning star. Above this Morning Star Regent is a dog. The Kekchi say that the morning star is a dog running ahead of the sun (Thompson 1970:250). As noted, the Kekchi plant the first corn just before sunrise when the morning star is in the sky.⁶

The scene on BOD 117 also depicts the first planting (Figure 9, next page). The earth is

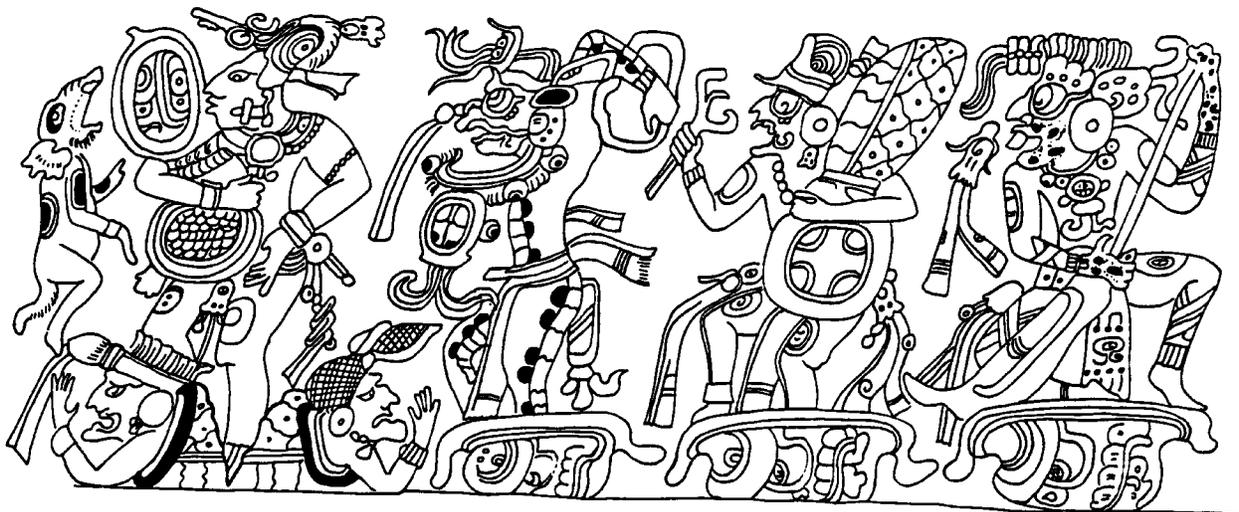


Figure 8. K731.

again represented by a turtle shell with a split at its center. A waterlily toad and Pax God emerge from the head and tail openings. The Corn God is again pictured adjacent to the split. At the base of the split is the corn/skull of the Na Goddess. A burning torch is placed on the top of the skull. This is reminiscent of the Kekchi candle. The

⁶ There is an eroded day sign above the dog's head which appears to be 1 Ajaw. I have not included it in this illustration because of its eroded state.



Figure 9. BOD 117.

pre-Columbian Maya did not have candles; they used torches. The Corn God is flanked by the Headband Gods who have been shown to be parallel to Hunahpu and Xbalanque (Mathews cited in Coe 1978:58, Coe 1989) and who represent the sun and full moon (D. Tedlock 1985:368, 1996:287). In terms of the world model, the Headband Gods are positioned at the edges of the world in opposition to one another just as they are in nature. The sun is rising and the full moon is setting. The Kekchi plant at full moon (Wilson 1995:63). The Itza Maya living in the Peten believe that crops should be planted at full moon to grow properly (Atran 1993:678). The Tzotzil plant corn when the moon is full or just slightly waning (Guiteras 1961:35, 175, 287; Breedlove and Laughlin 1993:106). The Quiché plant yellow corn at the full moon, and other agricultural rituals are performed on subsequent full moons (B. Tedlock 1985:85). The setting of the full moon was thought to bring the rains. On BOD 117 (Figure 9), the Jaguar Headband God is in the process of tipping over a water jar. This is the same vessel used by the Chacs in other scenes to dispense rain.

The glyphs in front of each of the three main figures are their names. The Spotted Headband God is named 1 Ajaw. As the rising of the sun was associated with birth, and Mesoamerican deities were often named for the day they were born or reborn, it seems a reasonable conclusion that this scene occurred on the Tzolkin position 1 Ajaw. As noted, this date is also associated with the first appearance of morning star. This scene, thus, shows dawn just after the appearance of morning star, with the sun rising in the east and the full moon setting in the west. It is a cosmic model for planting.

On K4681, the Corn God emerges from the turtle shell at waist height (Figure 2, page 5). The Headband Gods pull on him, apparently trying to help him arise. There is no skull in this scene because the corn seed is no longer a skull, it has sprouted into a young corn plant represented by the Corn God. The presence of the Jaguar Headband God who represents the full moon suggests that this is one lunation after the planting of the corn. During this period, the young corn plant is developing its roots and producing its stalk and first leaves. The sun and moon are thought to play instrumental roles in the growth of the young corn plant. The Corn God in this scene stretches out his arms in the form of a cross; he is growing his foliage with the help of the sun and the full moon.

In the contemporary Kekchi planting ceremony, the farmer plants the first corn in the center of the field and then plants corn in each of the four directions. Although the Corn God is not specifically illustrated making four directional corn plantings, there is visual evidence in Classic imagery that he performed a similar act. On BOD 116, the central image illustrates the Corn God sprouting from the skull of the Na Goddess (Figure 10, next page). In each corner of the scene is a corn skull. These motifs indicate that the Corn God planted corn oriented to each of the four corners of the quadrilateral world. Such a planting pattern is found in many areas of the Maya region.

The Maya consider the center of the world to be a navel (Seigel 1941:66; Guiteras 1961:26, 159, 203, 217, 287, 289; La Farge 1947:112, 127). If the center planting of corn represented the navel of the Na Goddess, then the corner plantings had to represent the ends of her limbs. In other words, when her remains were planted at the center and four corners, her body was symbolically laid out on the surface of the earth in a spread-eagled fashion. In this model, her fingers and toes marked the corner plantings of the quadrilateral world; her limbs formed the boundaries of the quadrants and her navel marked the center planting. The intimate relationship between digits and corn kernels is reflected in the Jacaltec and Chuj words for fingers and toes. They are called the corn seeds of the arm and the corn seeds of the leg, respectively (personal communication John Fought).⁷

The Maya believe that a cornfield does not exist until corn is planted in it. This means that the creator deities may have made the physical form of the quadrilateral world, and the sun may have defined its borders, but it did not come into existence until the

⁷ Another metaphor for digits is “the children of the arm” and “the children of the leg”. The parentage term used in this expression is that used to express the child of a woman.



Figure 9. BOD 116.

remains of the Na Goddess were planted within it. What brought all beings to life was the presence of a soul. It can be inferred from this belief that through the act of the first planting ceremony, the Na Goddess became the soul of the quadrilateral earth, she became the earth goddess. The notion that the earth is female is common in Mesoamerica.

In the Maya worldview, each quadrant of the quadrilateral world is associated with a particular color: east/red, north/white, west/black and south/yellow. During the process of breaking open the corn stone, the four different colors of corn were formed from the bones of the Na Goddess. Given that the Maya always separate and plant corn according to color, it can be inferred that each of the four directional plantings of the Na Goddess's remains would have been a different color of corn. By planting a different color in each of the corners of the world, the Corn God established not only the quadrants but also their color associations.

The Corn God planted five corn seeds in each corner, one kernel for each digit, twenty

corn seeds in all. The vigesimal counting system used by the Maya originated from counting all twenty digits of the hands and the feet. The Tzolkin calendar used for divination was composed of twenty day names, and the lots used to count out the twenty day names in divination casting were either corn kernels or objects that were metaphorically referred to as corn kernels (Saville 1921:206; Tozzer 1907:163, 1913:505; Edmonson 1971:59, B. Tedlock 1982:85). In other words, the corn kernels used to count out the twenty day names represented the fingers and toes of the Na Goddess. In the Tzolkin calendar, there were twenty day names but only four of these could begin a new year and they were called the Yearbearers. The Yearbearers are separated from each other by five days. This means that no matter how one counts out the day names, there can be only one Yearbearer for each appendage. In Maya cosmology, each Yearbearer was associated with a particular direction and color. By planting the five digits of the Na Goddess in the four directions, the Corn God established the directional associations of the Yearbearers and by extension their color aspects. The Yearbearer which began the new year dictated the fate of that year. In Landa's description of these four kinds of years, he emphasized the impact that the Yearbearer day name had on the success of the agricultural cycle (Tozzer 1941:136-148). The planting of the Na Goddess's body on the surface of the earth, thus, established a fundamental relationship between the 260 day divination cycle, the 365 day solar cycle and the fate of the agricultural cycle.

The Corn God is most frequently shown wearing just a shell and Xoc Monster belt. There are, however, examples where both the Corn God and the Na Goddess wear a skirt decorated in diamond patterns. In some examples, the design is created by jade beads (Figure 1, page 1). Although there were ritual occasions when males wore them, skirts were female attire. The diamond pattern is used in the Dresden Codex to represent the word *pik* "skirt" (Fox and Justeson 1984:35), which suggests that it represents the quintessential skirt, and by extension this skirt should belong to the quintessential female, that is, the Na Goddess. The diamond pattern is found on the turtle shell which represents the surface of the earth, and it has been suggested that the diamond/jade design represents the green surface of the earth (Joyce 1992:65, Quenon and Le Fort 1997:885). The diamond pattern is similar to the one used on contemporary Tzotzil huipils to represent the surface of the quadrilateral earth covered in corn fields (Morris 1987). Given that the body of the Na Goddess represented the quadrilateral earth, it seems apparent that the green corn fields that covered this surface would be identified with her skirt.

When the Corn God wore the Na Goddess's skirt he was neither androgynous nor a transvestite. This costume symbolically placed him at the center of the quadrilateral earth, where he sprouted as a young corn plant from the Na Goddess's remains (Figure 2, page 5). She, in turn, would be regenerated when that plant produced its ear of corn. One could not exist without the other. The Corn God and the Na Goddess represented not only the corn plant and its seed but also the male/female principle. The marriage of the Corn God and the Na Goddess established the ideal relationship between a husband and a wife. In terms of role models, these two deities were the primary supernatural couple for humans to emulate.

It was a common practice for Maya elite to inlay their teeth with jade. Given the fact that the Maya equate corn kernels with teeth, it seems obvious they were decorating their teeth as young green corn. They also flattened their skulls in order to mimic the shape of a cob of corn, which the Maya refer to as bone. Haviland (1997) has noted that at Tikal the flattening of the skull was a predominantly female practice beginning in the Early Classic period. It is apparent that these cosmetic devices were an attempt to emulate the form of the Na Goddess.

There are numerous examples where the ruling elite dressed in the Na Goddess's skirt and wore the belt of the Corn God. For example, the Palenque Palace Tablet, the Oval Palace Tablet, the Temple 14 Tablet and several piers of the Palace each illustrate the mother of the protagonist wearing this skirt. These mothers hand their sons objects related to preaccession offices (Bassie-Sweet 1991, 1996). The acquisition of these offices and their associated skills was a preparatory step for even higher offices that would eventually lead to kingship. On the Tablet of the Foliated Cross, the skirt is worn by the ruler Kan B'ahlam on the occasion of his accession. The ruler Pakal wears the skirt in the scene on the Temple of the Inscriptions sarcophagus lid, which has been interpreted to represent the afterlife journey of Pakal's soul. Monuments from other sites illustrate both men and women wearing this garb while performing a variety of functions, including the Period Ending ceremonies that were primarily rites of renewal. Examples are found on monuments from such diverse sites as Calakmul, Caracol, Copan, El Peru, El Zapote, Naranjo, Tikal, Tulum and Yaxchilan.

The ruling elite chose to identify themselves with these two deities for a number of reasons. The success of the agricultural cycle was the single most important factor for a healthy economy, and corn was the primary food crop. Whoever controlled the corn surplus commanded tremendous power. By identifying themselves with the Corn God and his wife, the ruling elite were placing themselves at the center of agricultural renewal and production. Furthermore, it is not known how land was divided within a community or how ownership, tenure or access rights were established. Landa, however, stated that in Postclassic Yucatan, some of the land was held in common and he who first occupied the land, that is, he who first cleared and planted the land, became the "possessor" of it (Tozzer 1941:97). He then gave part of his crop as tribute to the ruler of his community. A similar situation exists in some contemporary communities where tenure is established through the process of clearing the land and planting corn. In some areas, the town authorities give permission to clear the land but it is thought to be owned by a supernatural, and a part of the harvest is symbolically given to the deity in exchange for using the land. By aligning themselves with the Corn God who planted the first corn on the surface of the quadrilateral world and with the Na Goddess who became the soul of the earth, the ruling elite may have been declaring their ownership of the *milpa* lands within their territory and their right to collect tribute in the form of agricultural products.

Another reason for the ruling elite to associate themselves with the Corn God and his wife is related to divination. The Maya have a long history of relying on prognostication to guide them in their decision making. Postclassic sources indicate that virtually all events required a divination forecast, which greatly influenced the course of action

taken by the participants and its outcome. It is highly likely that a similar situation occurred during the Classic period. I have argued that one of the main functions of the ruler during the Period Ending ceremony was to perform the prognostications for the coming time period (Bassie-Sweet 1997, in prep.). In the Popol Vuh, Hun Hunahpu is said to have been one of the most powerful diviners, and the Corn God is shown performing divinations in many Classic period scenes. As noted, the lots used in divination casting were the remains of the Corn God's wife. This is reflected in the contemporary Quintana Roo practice of referring to the lots of the diviner as his wife (Villa Rojas 1945:74) and in the Quiché belief that the relationship between a diviner and his paraphernalia is a marriage (B. Tedlock 1982:71). By identifying themselves with the Corn God and his wife, the ruler and his wife established an intimate relationship between themselves and the divination system, which was the most powerful tool for social control in their society.

References Cited

ATRAN, SCOTT

1993 Itza Maya Tropical Agro-forestry. *Current Anthropology* 34 (5):633-700.

BARRERA VASQUEZ, ALFREDO

1980 *Diccionario Maya Cordemex*. Ediciones Cordemex, Merida.

BASSIE-SWEET, KAREN

1991 *From the Mouth of the Dark Cave: Commemorative Sculpture of the Late Classic Maya*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman.

1996 *At the Edge of the World*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman.

1997 Human Diviners and Their Supernatural Counterparts. Paper presented at the Maya Weekend, University Museum, Philadelphia.

1998a The Maya Corn Goddess. Paper presented at the Maya Weekend, University Museum, Philadelphia.

1998b The Maya Earth Goddess. Paper presented at the Maya Weekend, University Museum, Philadelphia.

In prep. *Maya Deities of Corn*. Book manuscript.

BREEDLOVE, DENNIS AND ROBERT LAUGHLIN

1993 *The Flowering of Man: the Tzotzil Botany of Zinacantan*. *Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology*, Vol. 35. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington.

CARLSEN, ROBERT AND MARTIN PRECHTEL

1991 The Flowering of the Dead: An Interpretation of Highland Maya Culture. *Man* 26: 23-42.

COE, MICHAEL

1978 *Lords of the Underworld*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.

1989 The Hero Twins: Myth and Image. In *The Maya Vase Book*, edited by Justin Kerr, 1:161-184. New York, Kerr Associates.

DEVEREAUX, LESLIE

1987 *Gender Difference and Relations of Inequality in Zinacantan*. In *Dealing with Inequality: Analysing Gender Relations in Melanesia and Beyond*, edited by M. Strathern. Cambridge University, Cambridge.

DURAN, DIEGO

1971 *Book of the Gods and Rites and the Ancient Calendar*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman.

EDMONSON, MUNRO

1971 *The Book of Counsel: the Popol Vuh of the Quiche Maya of Guatemala*. Middle American Research Institute, New Orleans.

FOX, JAMES AND JOHN JUSTESON

1984 *Polyvalence in Mayan Hieroglyphic Writing*. In *Phoneticism in Mayan Hieroglyphic Writing*, edited by John Justeson and Lyle Campbell, Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, Pub. 9:17-76. State University of New York at Albany.

GUITERAS, CALIXTA

1961 *Perils of the Soul*. Free Press, Glencoe, N.Y.

HAVILAND, WILLIAM

1997 *The Rise and Fall of Sexual Inequality: Death and Gender at Tikal, Guatemala*. In *Ancient Mesoamerica*.

JOYCE, ROSEMARY

1992 *Images of Gender and Labor Organization in Classic Maya Society*. In *Exploring Gender through Archaeology*, edited by C. Claessen. Monographs in World Archaeology 11. Prehistory Press, Madison.

KAUFMAN, TERRANCE AND WILLIAM NORMAN

1984 *An Outline of Proto-Cholan Phonology, Morphology and Vocabulary*. In *Phoneticism in Mayan Hieroglyphic Writing*, edited by John Justeson and Lyle Campbell, Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, Pub. 9:17-76. State University of New York at Albany.

LA FARGE, OLIVER

1947 *Santa Eulalia*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

LAUGHLIN, ROBERT

1988 *The Great Tzotzil Dictionary of Santo Domingo Zinacantan*. Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology Vol. 31. Smithsonian Institute Press, Washington, D.C.
1985 *Popol Vuh*. Simon and Schuster. New York.

MARCUS, JOYCE

1976 *Emblem and State in the Classic Maya Lowlands*. Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C.

MORRIS, WALTER F.

1987 *Living Maya*. Harry N. Abrams, New York.

PROSKOURIAKOFF, TATIANA

1961 *Portraits of Women in Maya Art*. In *Essays in Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology*, edited by Samuel K. Lothrop. Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

QUENON, MICHEL AND GENEVIEVE LE FORT

1997 *Rebirth and Resurrection in Maize God Iconography*. In *The Maya Vase Book, 5: 884-902*, edited by Justin Kerr. Kerr Associates, New York.

ROYS, RALPH

1933 *The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel*. Carnegie Institution of Washington Pub. 523, Contribution 31. Carnegie Institution, Washington D.C.

SAVILLE, MARSHALL

1921 *Reports on the Maya Indians of Yucatan* by Santiago Mendez, Antonio Garcia y Cubas, Pedro Sanchez de Aguilar and Franciosco Hernandez. *Indian Notes and Monographs*, 9: 133-226. Museum of the American Indian, New York.

SCHELE, LINDA

1979 *The Puleston Hypothesis: the Waterlily Complex in Classic Maya Art and Writing*. Manuscript.

SEIGEL, MORRIS

1941 *Religion in Western Guatemala*. *American Anthropologist*, 43(1): 62-67.

STONE, ANDREA

1991 *Aspects of Impersonation in Classic Maya Art*. In *Sixth Palenque Round Table, 1986*, edited by Merle Greene Robertson and Virginia Fields. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman.

STUART, DAVID

1998 *The Fire Enters His House: Architecture and Ritual in Classic Maya Texts*. In *Function and Meaning in Classic Period Architecture*. Stephen Houston ed. Dumbarton Oaks.

2000 *Ritual and History in the Stucco Inscription from Temple XIX at Palenque*. *PARI Journal*. Vol. 1, #1.

TARN, NATHANIEL AND MARTIN PRECHTEL

1981 *Metaphors of Relative Elevation*. *Estudios de Cultural Maya*, vol. 13: 105-123. Mexico.

1986 *Constant Inconstancy: the Feminine Principle in Atiteco Mythology*. In *Symbol and Meaning Beyond the Closed Community*, edited by Gary Gossen. Institute of Mesoamerican Studies. State University of New York at Albany.

TAUBE, KARL

1985 *The Classic Maya Maize God: A Reappraisal*. In *Fifth Palenque Round Table*, 1983, Vol. 7, edited by Merle Greene Robertson and Virginia Fields, 171-81. The Pre-columbian Art Research Institute, San Francisco.

1988a *The Ancient Yucatec New Year Festival: The Liminal Period in Maya Ritual and Cosmology*. Ph.D. diss. Yale University.

1988b *A Prehispanic Maya Katun Wheel*. *Journal of Anthropological Research* 44(2): 183-203.

1992 *The Major Gods of Ancient Yucatan*. Dumbarton Oaks, Washington D.C.

TEDLOCK, BARBARA

1982 *Time and the Highland Maya*. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque.

TEDLOCK, DENNIS

1985 *Popol Vuh*. Simon and Schuster. New York.

1996 *Popol Vuh*. Simon and Schuster. New York.

TOZZER, ALFRED

1907 *Comparative Study of the Mayas and Lacandonas*. Archaeological Institute of America. Macmillan, London.

1941 *Landa's Relacion de las Cosas de Yucatan: a Translation*. Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, Vol. 18. Peabody Museum, Cambridge.

THOMPSON, J. ERIC S.

1950 *Maya Hieroglyphic Writing*. Carnegie Institution, Washington D.C.

1970 *Maya History and Religion*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman.

VILLA ROJAS, ALFONSO

1945 *The Maya of East Central Quintana Roo*. Carnegie Institute of Washington Publication 559.

WAGLEY, CHARLES

1949 *The Social and Religious Life of a Guatemalan Village*. American Anthropological Association, Memoir 71.

WILSON, RICHARD

1995 *Maya Resurgence in Guatemala*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman.