

The Maya Goddess of Painting, Writing, and Decorated Textiles

TIMOTHY W. KNOWLTON

Berry College

Several of the Maya goddesses discussed in contact-period Spanish documents from Yucatan remain little understood by scholars. One such deity is the Maya goddess of painting, writing, and decorated textiles. Spanish sources call this goddess Ix Chebel Yax “Lady Paintbrush Blue-Green” yet this name does not appear in Maya language documents like the Books of Chilam Balam. In this paper, I argue that this goddess does appear in colonial Maya language texts, although under different titles. I demonstrate this with examples of two mythological episodes appearing in the healing chants of the Ritual of the Bacabs. The first episode is a previously unknown myth of the origin of tree colors. The second is a version of the myth of the sacrifice of the reptilian earth, of which other versions have been documented in Classic, Postclassic, and Colonial Period Maya sources. I show that the goddess played a hitherto unrecognized but important role in these mythologies. Furthermore, identification of the goddess’s roles and accoutrements in these Maya language texts raises important questions about the changing relationships between religion, gender, and artistic production in Precolumbian and contact-period Maya civilization.

When Spaniards first arrived in Yucatan, they encountered a Maya religion peopled by numerous female divinities, some of them still little understood by scholars to this day. In his *Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán*, Diego de Landa (1973:5) reports how in 1517, Francisco Hernández de Córdoba:

... landed on Isla de las Mujeres, to which he gave this name because of the idols he found there, of the goddesses of the country, *Aixchel*, *Ixchebeliax*, *Ixhunié*, *Ixhunieta*, vested from the girdle down, and having the breasts covered after the manner of the Indians. The building was of stone, such as to astonish them; and they found certain objects of gold, which they took.

Of the goddesses Córdoba encountered, by far the best and most widely known is Ix Chel. Landa (1973:72) calls Ix Chel the goddess of medicine, alongside several male gods of medicine he lists, including Itzamna. Two more of the goddesses Córdoba encountered, Ix Hun Ye

Ta and Ix Hun Ye [Toon], appear by name in the collection of chants and medical remedies known as the Ritual of the Bacabs.¹ For example, in the chant against the Jaguar-Macaw *tancas*, we find three of the goddesses of Isla de las Mujeres invoked as originating this sickness (Table 1).

The organization of deities in these examples into quadripartite groupings is rooted in Precolumbian theology. As Vail (2000) has demonstrated, Maya divinities in the Postclassic codices from Yucatan are organized not so much as discrete entities but rather as members of overlapping complexes of deities with multiple manifestations.² What Córdoba likely encountered at

¹ Marc Zender (personal communication 2015) suggests the deity names Ix Hun Ye Ta and Ix Hun Ye Ton might be translated as “Lady One Tooth [of] Obsidian” and “Lady One Tooth [of] Stone” in keeping with similar Classic-period naming practices documented for the deity G1 at Palenque. I agree this may be the case if the names originated early in the Classic period, but by the later Precolumbian and Colonial periods these deity names would have been understood differently by speakers of Yucatec Maya. The *Diccionario de San Francisco* renders *ye* as “a pointed or sharp-edged thing” (Bolles 2010) and one meaning of *ta* in the *Calepino Maya de Motul* is a “lancet or knife of flint” (Ciudad Real 2001:517). *Ton* or *toon* in colonial Yucatec manuscripts meant “penis” rather than “stone” (although it is conceivable the archaic form of the latter word could have been maintained in the esoteric genres). Besides appearing in colonial katun prophecies, elsewhere in the Ritual of the Bacabs (manuscript page 32) *ta* and *ton* are mentioned as paired components present in the ramada-covered quadripartite altar space (*qulbal*) where bloodletting is being performed. A scene from the murals of the Great Ballcourt at Chichen Itza illustrates that penile bloodletting with lancets was performed before the large stone phalli peculiar to Maya sites of the Northern Lowlands during the Late and Terminal Classic periods (Ardren and Hixon 2006). The Yucatec Maya continued this practice of penile bloodletting through at least the end of the sixteenth century, and autosacrifice more generally was practiced in Yucatan into at least the nineteenth century (Chuchiak 2000:344-349).

² Taube (1992:1, 145) also notes overlapping attributes and functions of Postclassic deities within a system of otherwise discrete beings, but to my knowledge Vail’s (2000) is the first work to systematically analyze patterns in the discrepancies between appellative glyphs and deity images that appear in the codices.

<i>ca sihech</i>	Then you [i.e., the sickness] were born:
<i>max a na</i>	Who is your mother?
<i>max a coob cit ca chabtabech</i>	Who was your sire when you were engendered?
<i>chacall ix chel</i>	Red Ix Chel, ³
<i>sacal ix chel</i>	White Ix Chel,
<i>yx hun ye ta</i>	Ix Hun Ye Ta,
<i>yx hun ye toon</i>	Ix Hun Ye Toon.
<i>la a na</i>	This is your mother,
<i>la a coba cit</i>	This is your sire.

Table 1. Ritual of the Bacabs, manuscript page 4, translation by the author.

Isla de las Mujeres were material manifestations of a quadripartite grouping or deity complex. While three of the goddesses he encountered—Ix Chel, Ix Hun Ye Ta, Ix Hun Ye (Toon)—appear by name in colonial Maya language sources, the fourth does not. The name Ix Chebel Yax is found in neither the Books of the Chilam Balam (Miram and Miram 1988) nor the Ritual of the Bacabs (Arzápalo Marín 1987). The name does appear in other colonial Spanish language sources, however. A mangled rendition of the name, <chibirias> (i.e., Chebel Yax), was given by the cleric Francisco Hernández in an early sixteenth century letter to Bartolomé de Las Casas (1967:1:648-649). The priest reported that this goddess was the daughter of <hischen> (Ix Chel) and the mother of <bacab>, the latter whose father was <izona> (Itzamna). The seventeenth-century historian López de Cogolludo (1957:196) relates in his chapter on Maya ‘idols’ that, while Itzamna was the “inventor of the characters that served as letters for the Indians”:

Otro Idolo era figura vna muger inuentora de pintura, y entretejer figuras en las ropas que vestian, por lo qual la adoraban, y la llamaban Yxchebelyax.

Another idol was the figure of a female inventor of painting and of interweaving figures in the clothes they wore. For this they worshipped her and called her Yxchebelyax.

The association between painting, writing, and

decorated textiles is ancient among the Maya, who worked iconographic and hieroglyphic designs into their clothing. Depictions of high status women in the Classic period often show them adorned in elaborate clothes, decorated at times with glyphs that may have been woven or painted onto them (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Classic-period depiction of woman wearing decorated clothing with hieroglyphic trim. Detail of painted ceramic vase K764 (photo courtesy of Justin Kerr).

³ Although I translate *chacal* as “red” and *sacal* as “white,” it is important to note there may be additional nuances not captured in these translations. In Colonial Yucatec, CVC color terms take a *-VI* suffix in the names of some plants, objects, and gods. Colors in Classic Maya texts sometimes take the *-j-VI* suffix which Houston and colleagues (2009:21-22) translate as an inchoative form. In colonial Yucatec manuscripts, imperfective inchoatives are written *-h-al* or *-h-il*; the vowel represented in either case is the schwa [ə] (Bricker and Orie 2014:188-189). The name of a storm god in the Ritual of the Bacabs is sometimes written as Yaxal Chac (manuscript pages 81 and 89) and at other times as Yaxhal Chac (manuscript pages 3 and 154), but it is unclear whether the scribe is eliding an inchoative *-h-* or whether the additional *-h-* is itself a scribal error. In Itzaj, the rederived adjectival form *chäkäl* means “reddish” (Hofling 2000:151), and it is possible a similar semantic change was meant in Colonial Yucatec that did not make it into the colonial dictionaries and grammars.

<i>chac kakal nok</i> <i>cech nabal bacte noke</i> <i>max tun a na</i> <i>macx a yum ca siheche</i> <i>x hun tah ñib</i> <i>x hũ tah nok</i>	Red glowworm, ⁴ You who are this crawling <i>bacte</i> worm, Who is your mother then? Who is your father when you were born? One Patroness of Painting-Writing, One Patroness of Cloth.
<i>sam tun a ñib chacal lum</i> <i>tab t a chah [164] [c]heb</i> <i>uchic a ñib chacal cheb</i>	A while ago you painted [with] red soil. ⁵ Where did you get the writing instrument? Your painting occurs [with] a red writing instrument,
<i>tij t a chah y etun luum tij chuen</i>	When you dripped on the artwork with soil.
<i>la ta [to] ñibtabci u le</i> <i>chacal t a ñi[btah] chacal chacah</i> <i>habin chacal yaxcab</i> <i>la ta [to] ñibtabci u le chacal chacah</i>	After its leaves were painted, Red you painted the red gumbo-limbo tree, The <i>habin</i> tree [with] parboiled Maya blue, After the leaves of the red gumbo-limbo tree.

Table 2. Ritual of the Bacabs, manuscript pages 163–164, translation by the author.

The name Ix Chebel Yax reflects the domains of human activity Cogolludo ascribes to her. Thus, *chebel* is the adjectival form of *cheeb*, which in colonial Yucatec Maya can refer to either a ‘writing plume’ or to a ‘paintbrush’ (*pincel de pint<ar>*; Ciudad Real 2001:192). The noun *cheeb* also appears spelled syllabically as **che-bu** and **che-e-bu** centuries earlier in Classic-period texts (Boot 1997:64–67, Fig. 4; Coe and Kerr 1998:148–149). The name Ix Chebel Yax therefore can be translated “Lady Paintbrush Blue-Green” with “paintbrush” perhaps serving as an adjective modifying the color term. Here, *yax* evidently refers to one of the several colors of pigments employed in Precolumbian times but also to the notions of moisture, vegetation, and preciousness the color evokes in Maya systems of color symbolism (Houston et al. 2009:40).

As evocative as this is, what are we to make of the absence of the name Ix Chebel Yax in colonial Maya sources? Her appearance in some of the earliest Spanish reports discounts the possibility of the goddess being a later Colonial addition to the Maya pantheon. Given how rapidly competence in Maya writing was extinguished (Houston et al. 2003), at least in the northwestern part of the peninsula (Chuchiak 2010), it is conceivable that this Late Postclassic scribal goddess could have faded into oblivion without leaving a trace in the post-invasion Maya alphabetic sources. Yet another possibility is that Ix Chebel Yax is but one of several titles for this Late Postclassic goddess, who appears under other names in the extant Maya sources. For example, Cogolludo (1957 [1688]:196) noted that a single Maya goddess might be known by *otros diversos nombres* (i.e., “various other names”).

In what follows I argue that the goddess of painting, writing, and decorated textiles does appear in Maya language sources. Specifically, she appears in oblique

mythological episodes in the eighteenth century collection of Maya healing chants known as the Ritual of the Bacabs. As a source, the Ritual of the Bacabs is characterized by intentional archaism, including the use of metaphors that are almost unknown outside of Classic-period written sources (Knowlton 2010, 2012). In this paper I demonstrate from these colonial sources that the goddess played a hitherto unrecognized but important role in these later mythologies. These mythologies include the well-documented episode of the sacrifice of the reptilian earth, of which versions appear in Classic, Postclassic, and Colonial Period Maya sources (Taube 1989, 1992; Stuart 2005a; Velásquez García 2006; Knowlton 2010:Ch. 4).

The Origins of the Colors of Trees

Although not appearing by the name Ix Chebel Yax, the Maya goddess of painting, writing, and decorated textiles does appear in episodes of the Ritual of the Bacabs that must have been part of larger mythological narratives. One such narrative tells of how trees acquired their current colors—in particular, two trees of significant medicinal, ritual, and practical use. This episode appears in the first of two chants treating *xnok ti co* “a worm in the tooth” or tooth decay found on manuscript pages 162–167 (Table 2).

In this text, the paired appellations of the goddess are Ix Hun Tah ñib, Ix Hun Tah Nok. *Tah* is a colonial term for the owner or master of something (*el dueño y señor de alguna cosa y cuya es alguna cosa*; Ciudad Real

⁴ According to the Vienna Dictionary, *kakal cab* refers to a glowworm (Acuña 1993:378). I am interpreting *kakal nok* “fiery worm” as an otherwise unattested name for the same or similar insect.

⁵ See note 3.



Figure 2. The *chacah* or gumbo-limbo tree (*Bursera simaruba* L. Sarg.), Coba, Quintana Roo, Mexico, 13 January, 2015 (photo: Timothy Knowlton).

2001:525). The goddess is invoked here against tooth decay in part as a play on homonymy in the language. Thus, *nok* can refer to a literal worm such as a caterpillar, or in this context to tooth decay. At the same time, however, *nok* is the general Yucatec term for clothing. These paired appellations overlap precisely with the domains of Ix Chebel Yax as described by Cogolludo (1957), as deity of both painting and of decorated clothing.

The chant itself gives us a brief glimpse into the larger mythology in which the goddess participated: the origin of tree colors. The focus is not on the *yaxche* or ceiba tree, which probably became even more important during the Colonial period in the emerging hybrid cosmology (Knowlton and Vail 2010). Instead the mythology here discusses two trees abundant in the region that are of significant practical, medicinal, and ritual importance: the *chacah* and the *habin* trees.

The *chacah* tree has long been important for the Maya of Yucatan (Figure 2), appearing as a significant source of firewood and as a major component in a variety of medical treatments from colonial sources up through the present day (Roys 1931:227-228; Kunow 2003:113; Balam Pereira 2011). The “red earth” with which the tree is painted in the myth is one of the common soils of Yucatan’s karst environment, which has a reddish

color due to the presence of iron oxide (Weisbach et al. 2002). The mineral form of iron oxide, reddish hematite, was a commonly used pigment source in ancient Maya communities (Houston et al. 2009). The *chacah* tree’s reddish-brown and peeling bark stands out amidst the forest greenery, as if a goddess had coated its trunk with red Yucatecan soil.

In contrast with the reddish-brown *chacah*, the bark of the *habin* tree is a splotchy olive-gray (Figure 3). It likewise has been in wide use in medical treatments from the earliest sources to the present, as well as being used for construction due to its durability (Roys 1931:242; Kunow 2003:131; Balam Pereira 2011). Both the *chacah* and *habin* trees are also used today by *h menob* (shamans) in contemporary *cha chac* rainmaking ceremonies for the construction of the altar cross and arches of the central ritual space (Salvador Flores and Kantún Balam 1997). Furthermore, the sturdy *habin* is especially favored for elements of this rite’s *xtasche* altar table (author’s field notes, Yaxunah, Yucatan, Mexico, June 2013). The colonial healers who recited these chants also likely served the community in performing an earlier form of the rain-making ceremony, just as many contemporary *h menob* perform both individual healings and community-wide rituals today (Love 2012). Perhaps also of significance



Figure 3. The *habin* or Jamaican dogwood tree (*Piscidia piscipula* L. Sarg.), Yaxunah, Yucatan, Mexico, 14 January 2015 (photo: Timothy Knowlton).

is that both trees were used in producing organic colorants, an extract of the *habin* for producing a light red plaster and the carbonized resin of the *chacah* to produce a black pigment (Houston et al. 2009:105, 108).

Both Roys (1965:55) and Arzápalo Marín (1987:388) assume the term *yaxcab* in the incantation refers to a third tree, despite being unable to locate a tree by this name in any of the documentary sources. In fact, the Vienna Spanish-Maya dictionary (Acuña 1993:171) notes that *yaxcab* is “cardenillo, confición hecha de añir y tierra blanca” (“verdigris, a product made of indigo and white earth”). This is undoubtedly a reference to Maya blue pigment, made from *choh* (indigo) and the clay mineral palygorskite, known in Maya as *sacuum*, literally “white earth” (Arnold 2005; Houston et al. 2009; Reyes-Valerio 1993). Roys and Arzápalo Marín likely were misled by the homonymy of the term *chacal*, which both scholars interpreted as “red.” However, *chacal* is also the adjectival form of the verb *chac*, meaning to parboil (Bricker et al. 1998:61). Parboiling is the process by which Maya blue is made, as the indigo fixes itself to the palygorskite once heated in water (Magaloni Kerpel 2014:43). Therefore, a Maya blue lake that has been prepared for use would be *chacal yaxcab*. This incantation provides us with a previously unknown episode of Maya mythology relating to important elements of the natural environment that people have made use of on an almost daily basis.

Painting the Reptilian Earth

The goddess of painting, writing, and decorated cloth also plays an important role in the mythologies surrounding the creation of the earth from the sacrifice of a reptilian deity. Several scholars have remarked on versions of this myth involving the sacrifice of the crocodilian god Itzam Cab Ain (Taube 1989, 1992; Stuart 2005a; Velásquez García 2006; Knowlton 2010:73). The example in which the goddess appears is in an incantation against the sickness *yx hunpeokin tancas*, found on manuscript pages 83 through 90. *Tancas* is the term for a sickness caused by a non-human being. These often accompany the *ikob* (personified winds; Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934:166-167) sent as punishment by the non-human lords (*yumob*) of a location, or transmitted by insects escaping from underworld portals like cenotes (interview with *h men*, Yaxunah, Yucatan, Mexico, 17 June 2013). The colonial Maya healing chants of the Ritual of the Bacabs often attribute *tancas* sickness to animals and chimeric animal-like beings. Some examples include *balam mo tancas* “jaguar-macaw *tancas*,” *ah co tancas* “puma *tancas*,” and *ceh tancas* “deer *tancas*.” Some chants are directed against sicknesses resulting from attacks by insects, including the stings of spiders (*am*) and scorpions (*sinan*), as well as *tancas* manifestations of tarantulas (*chiuoh*) and wasps (*xux*). Other chants are directed against poisonous reptiles such as rattlesnakes

(*ahaucan*) and fer-de-lances (*kanchah*) that a sorcerer might surreptitiously cast into a person’s stomach. These faunal or chimeric *tancas* emerge from the dangerous undomesticated spaces of Maya cosmology (see Taube 2003), and likely have predecessors in the *wa(h)y* spirits of Classic Maya civilization (Stuart 2005b; Helmke and Nielsen 2009).

In this chant, the sickness takes its name from the *yx hunpeokin* or beaded lizard (*Heloderma horridum*). The beaded lizard is the larger relative of the Gila monster and is currently found in the Maya area in parts of Chiapas and Guatemala. Although its bite is painful and venomous, its hemotoxin is only rarely life-threatening to humans. In the most serious cases, beaded lizard venom can cause cardiac and respiratory irregularities associated with anaphylaxis (Beck 2005:44-45, 57-59). I believe it is probably due to the respiratory irregularities the beaded lizard can cause that the scribe introduces the chant against its *tancas* immediately following two incantations against asthma. *Heloderma* have been prominent in the folklore and popular medicine of both indigenous peoples and colonists in the regions where they are found (Beck 2005:Ch. 1). Exaggerations of the beaded lizard’s toxicity and abilities are found in Yucatecan documents from the sixteenth through twentieth centuries (Roys 1931:333). In colonial times, the beaded lizard also lent its name to several medicinal plants, including the *Aloe vera* L. The Maya referred to this introduced plant as *hunpeokin ci* (beaded lizard agave), and it has been used to treat ailments associated with the lizard (Roys 1931:246). It is tempting to speculate that the association between animal and plant was made initially due to aloe’s vaguely reptilian appearance (Figure 4).

In the colonial chant against the *yx hunpeokin tancas*,

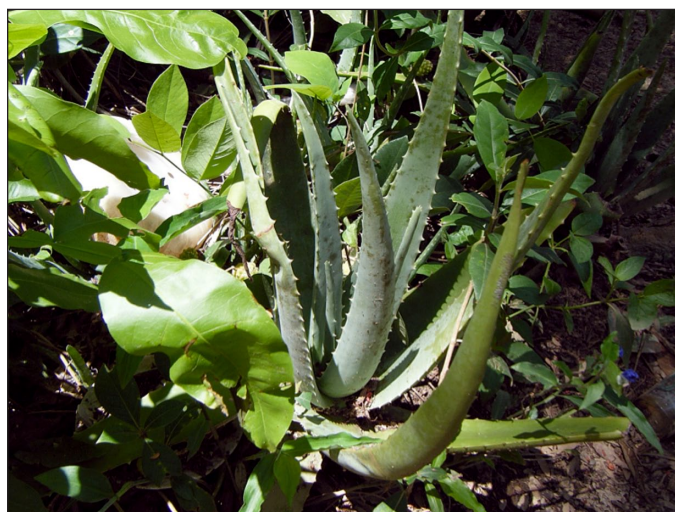


Figure 4. The *sábila* plant (*Aloe vera* L.) in the medicinal plant garden of a Maya herbalist, also known as *hunpeokin ci* (beaded lizard agave) in earlier written sources, Piste, Yucatan, Mexico, 12 June 2013 (photo: Timothy Knowlton).

the goddess of painting is invoked as a member of the deity complex that gave birth to the sickness. This deity

complex includes other goddesses whom Córdoba encountered on Isla de las Mujeres in 1517 (Table 3).

<i>u thanil yx hunpeəkin tancas lae</i>	This is the incantation for the beaded lizard <i>tancas</i>
...	
<i>hunuc can ahau</i>	Eternal Four Ahau:
<i>sihici huntēhi u kinil</i>	She gave birth only once by day,
<i>huntenhi y akbilil</i>	Only once by night,
<i>hun kin ca sihi</i>	One day when it was born,
<i>hun kin c u pec t u nak u na</i>	One day it wiggles in its mother's abdomen.
<i>max u na</i>	Who is its mother?
<i>y al ix yx hunye ta</i>	And it is the child of Ix Hun Ye Ta,
<i>yx hunye ton</i>	Ix Hun Ye Ton,
<i>yx hun tah oib</i>	One Patroness of Painting-Writing,
<i>x hun tah uoh</i>	One Patroness of Written Characters.

Table 3. Ritual of the Bacabs, manuscript page 83, translation by the author.

<i>max u kalo</i>	Who is sealed up there,
<i>ci bin y alabal yax huh lo</i>	According to the meaning of First Iguana there,
<i>yax ytzam</i>	First Crocodilian,
<i>yax haam [hay] cab</i>	First World-Destruction,
<i>yax beke[c]h</i>	First Basilisk?
<i>tux tu chah yen u balo [84]</i>	Where did it take up arms?
<i>ti tu chah y icnal u yum kin</i>	It took them there in the presence of its father the sun,
<i>chac ahau ytzamna</i>	Great Lord Itzamna.
<i>tub tu tu chah u cabil u pach</i>	Where did it take the fortifications?
<i>hun kin coəan ti y ol nictē</i>	For a day it coiled in the heart of the Plumeria tree,
<i>ti y ol xuchit</i>	In the heart of the flower.
<i>tux tu chah u am</i>	Where did it take the divination stone?
<i>y icnal x yaxal chuen</i>	In the presence of Lady Blue-Green Artist,
<i>ti tu chah chacal yaxcab</i>	When she dripped the parboiled Maya blue pigment.
<i>tub tu chah u uelal u uich</i>	Where did it take the blindfold?
<i>ti tu chah y icnal sac bat [baə?]</i>	It took it there in the presence of White Howler Monkey,
<i>ti y ol chuene</i>	In the heart of this artwork.
<i>ti tu chah chacal sabac</i>	(S)he dripped the red ink there,
<i>sac ek sabac kanal sabac</i>	The white [ink], the black ink, the yellow ink.
<i>la oc tu uelal u uich</i>	This entered the blindfold,
<i>sihom takin oc t uu ich</i>	The golden soapberry seed entered [the patient's] eye
<i>suhuy pechech [pechech] la</i>	This pure spindle,
<i>oc [85] t u ne</i>	It entered his/her tailbone.
<i>oipit kab oc t uy it</i>	The ring entered his/her anus.
<i>sum chebil kuch oc t u chochel</i>	The woven cotton rope entered his/her intestines.

Table 4. Ritual of the Bacabs, manuscript pages 83–84, translation by the author.

Here we are introduced to a third appellation of the goddess of painting, Ix Hun Tah Uoh “One Patroness of Written Characters.” In colonial Maya language documents, *uoh* is more closely associated with glyphic writing (Hanks 2010:175) and with written characters as sources of esoteric knowledge (Knowlton 2015).⁶ The chant continues by introducing the mythological conflict behind the origins of the beaded lizard sickness (Table 4).

Like deities and other significant beings of the Ritual of the Bacabs, the crocodilian Itzam appears as a member of a quadripartite complex made up of numerous reptiles. Furthermore, its appearance is understood as a sign to be interpreted as having meaning (*ci bin y alabal*), just as Itzam Cab Ain was prior to its sacrifice in the Book of Chilam Balam of Tizimin (Knowlton 2010:73). The patient afflicted by the reptilian *tancas* is said to be “sealed up” (*kal*), likely a reference to the respiratory difficulties associated with the sickness. The references to arms and fortifications suggest the cure takes the form of a recapitulation of a mythological conflict that, as we shall see, was resolved with the sacrifice of the reptilian earth.

At this point in the chant, the goddess of painting is referred to by the title X Yaxal Chuen (Lady Blue-Green Artist). Parboiled Maya blue pigment is dripped, presumably on the *am* divination stones taken up. Landa (1978:72) reports that, during the festival to Ix Chel in the month of Sip, *am* divination stones were smeared with “a blue bitumen like that of the books of the priests” just as human captives were prior to sacrifice.

In parallel with Lady Blue-Green Artist another personage is invoked, whose name is rendered as Sac Bat. Given the context and the fact that the manuscript at times suffers from scribal errors, it is tempting to read this instead as Sac Baʼ “White Howler Monkey.” The name Sac(al) Chuen also appears a few times in the manuscript. In addition to appearing in the colonial chants, Sac Chuen is a monkey name appearing in the Classic-period texts of Naranjo (Houston et al. 2009:25). The pairing of Baʼ and Chuen of course recalls Hun Batz and Hun Chuen of the K’ichee’ Maya Popol Vuh, the great artists who are turned into monkeys by the Hero Twins, and who served as patrons of the scribal arts during the Classic period (Coe 1977). The discovery of a Late Postclassic polychrome incense burner at Mayapan in the form of a simian scribe has established that this association of monkeys with scribes continued after the Classic period in the Northern Lowlands as well (Milbrath and Peraza Lope 2003).

The imagery of objects entering the body of the

patient may refer to physical signs accompanying anaphylaxis (the “sealing up” of the patient) or perhaps of other ailments the colonial Maya considered similar. The objects listed as “entering” the body of the patient (soapberry seed, spindle, ring, and woven cotton rope) are not unique to the goddess of painting and decorated cloth. Rather, these appear in the incantations as the equipment of other goddesses also, including the underworld goddess Ix Hun Ahau (Knowlton n.d.). Here and elsewhere the symbols may refer to actual equipment employed by the healer during the incantation’s performance. For example, a contemporary Maya healer explained to me that the thread he used to connect gourds full of *saca* (ceremonial corn drink) in the course of a cure was to invoke the presence (*y icnal*) of Ma’ Colel, another goddess also known from colonial sources (author’s field notes, Yaxunah, Yucatan, Mexico, 6 January 2015). Therefore, materials and tools for weaving may serve as a means of invoking the presence of a female deity in ritual, because of the longstanding association of women with textile production (Table 5).

As the chant continues, the reptilian god manifests as four chimeric combinations of the beaded lizard with different types of serpents. This association is perhaps unsurprising, given that beaded lizards share a more recent common ancestor with snakes than most other lizards (Beck 2005:1). These chimeric lizard-snakes are the sickness-causing winds (*ik*) that attack a person from their lairs in caves or in piles of dead leaves, and presumably are responsible for patient’s illness.

As several scholars have pointed out, the 1572 *Relación de la Ciudad de Mérida* describes a Maya ceremony in which “they painted a lizard that signified the Flood and the earth” (*pintaban un lagarto que significaba el Diluvio y la tierra*; de la Garza 1983:1:72). In this case, however, the crocodilian Yax Itzam takes on another composite form, that of a beaded lizard-turtle (*hunpeʼ ac*). Like crocodilians, the turtle also represents the earth in Precolumbian Maya iconography (Taube 1988). The goddess of painting finishes painting the back of this beaded lizard-turtle in preparation for its sacrifice, at which point the chimeric reptile is revealed to be *u na kin* “the house of the day” and *u na akab* “the house of the night.” An alternate reading of this phrase would be “the mother of the day,” as the possessed form of “house” is Yucatec is usually *-otoch*. However, colonial texts discussing cosmological topics occasionally use a possessed form of *na*, as when the Book of Chilam Balam of Kaua says of the sickness-causing sky animals (*ah chibal canob*) that *celob u naob ti can* “cold are their houses in the sky” (Bricker and Miram 2002:99). As the earth, the turtle is the “house” into which the sun enters at night and emerges from at dawn from the perspective of an earthbound observer. Perhaps participating in the same shared symbolism described in this chant is

⁶ *Uoh* is also attested in Classic-period hieroglyphic inscriptions, rendered *wo-j(o)* on the Tablet of the 96 Glyphs (L5b) of Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico, as well as in several other contexts.

<i>max u kalo</i> <i>ci y alabal x hunpeəkin caan</i> <i>x hunpeəkin calam</i> <i>x hunpeəkin kokob</i> <i>x hunpeəkin taxinchan</i> <i>yk ti calam</i> <i>yx paclah actun</i> <i>x mucmuc sohol</i>	Who is sealed up there, According to the meaning of the Beaded Lizard Snake, The Beaded Lizard Boa, The Beaded Lizard Viper, The Beaded Lizard Fer-de-lance, The Wind in the Boa, The Folded One in the Cave, The One Deeply Buried in Dead Leaves?
<i>max u kalo</i> <i>te əoci u əibtabal u pach</i> <i>lay chacal x hunpeəkin lo</i> <i>əibtabi u na kin tu pach</i> <i>hunpeə ac u na kin</i> <i>əibtab[i] t u pach hunpə</i> <i>u na akab</i> <i>ti əibtab[i] tu pach</i>	Who is sealed up there? Over there its back has been painted, This is the Red Beaded Lizard there. The back of the day's house was painted. The Beaded Lizard Turtle is the day's house. It was painted on the back of the Beaded Lizard, the night's house, It was painted on its back.
<i>max u cuch</i> <i>chabi chacal kanal sac ekel</i>	Whose is the inkpot? The red, yellow, white, and black [ink] were taken.

Table 5. Ritual of the Bacabs, manuscript page 85, translation by the author.

a sacrificial rite depicted in the Madrid Codex (Figure 5). In this scene the sun glyph follows a cord emerging from the carapace of a turtle atop some kind of altar. The glyph YAX “blue-green” appears on the back of the turtle’s carapace (see Vail and Hernández 2013:Ch. 9 for an analysis of this scene and related almanacs). Of the five deities participating in the rite, the central figure is God D. This deity is often interpreted as the Precolumbian version of the deity Itzamna, who appears alongside Lady Blue-Green Artist and White Howler Monkey in the section of the colonial incantation discussed earlier.

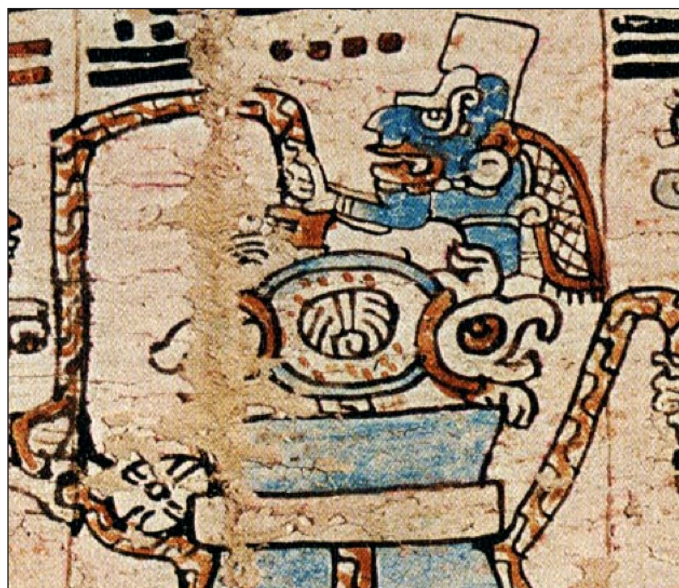


Figure 5. Turtle with yax glyph on back and adjacent solar symbolism (detail of *Madrid Codex*, page 19).

The incantation goes on to relate that the reptilian deity’s throat is cut (*xot u cal*), using the same terminology as the sacrifice of Itzam Cab Ain in the Book of Chilam Balam of Tizimin (Knowlton 2010:73). This scene has deep roots in antiquity, paralleling the much earlier Classic-period account of the beheading of the painted-back crocodilian on the Temple XIX bench at Palenque (Stuart 2005a:73). In the colonial chant, the sacrificial act appears to be the result of the reptile’s involvement in “sealing up” or sickening the patient (Table 6).

Furthermore, it is evident that this healing performance is recapitulating the myth of the crocodilian earth through the healer’s first-person announcements near the chant’s conclusion (Table 7).

In actual performance, the mythical sacrifice of the reptilian earth likely corresponded with the actual sacrifice of some kind of reptile during the cure, just as chickens are sacrificed in contemporary *k'ex* rites in Yucatan (Love 2012). In the myth, the goddess of painting, writing, and decorated cloth is not only present at the sacrifice of the reptilian earth. She also paints the reptile in preparation for sacrifice in this version of the myth.

Discussion

In this paper, I have argued that the Maya goddess whom colonial Spanish sources call Ix Chebel Yax also appears in colonial Maya language sources, if under different names. However, the identification of this goddess in the indigenous sources gives rise to several questions that are beyond the scope of this paper. Gender roles, statuses, and ideologies were not static over the

*bici ci y alabal
ma bici binel u cah tipebel u pucsikal
binel ix u cah ti xotol u cal
tu kalah yax uinicil te
yax uinicil tun*

What does it mean?
In no way shall its heart beat,
And its throat will be cut,
[That which] sealed up the first body of wood,
First body of stone.

Table 6. Ritual of the Bacabs, manuscript page 88, translation by the author.

*Cen ti uli yn chchucub yax huh lo
yax yzam
uatal yn cah yn chucub yax huh lo*

It is I who arrived that I may catch the First Iguana there,
The First Crocodilian,
I stand that I may catch the First Iguana there.

Table 7. Ritual of the Bacabs, manuscript page 89, translation by the author.

course of Precolumbian Maya civilization (Joyce 2000; Ardren 2002). Although evidently present in Yucatan during the Late Postclassic period just prior to contact, just how ancient was this goddess? Is some form of this goddess present in much earlier sources, though not yet recovered or recognized by scholars? Or is the goddess an innovation that only emerged as a significant figure in Maya religion very late in the Postclassic? If the latter, did the emergence of a female patron deity of the scribal arts and textiles correspond with other innovations in elite craft production or social structure? As Inomata (2001) has demonstrated for the Southern Lowlands, scribal activities and textile production occurred alongside one another in different rooms of the same Late Classic elite residence at the site of Aguateca. Closs's (1992) argument that a Classic painted text refers to a female scribe remains controversial in the absence of additional textual sources. Yet writing appeared alongside textile activities in Classic times, as several inscribed bone needles like those used in textile production are known (Houston and Stuart 2001). Although Precolumbian goddesses are regularly depicted in the Postclassic codices as engaged in textile production (Vail and Stone 2002), unambiguous evidence of women's involvement in painting and writing has been elusive thus far. In this paper, I hope to have established that the Maya goddess of painting, writing, and decorated textiles is present in the indigenous language sources. Having done so, I hope this provides a datum for future research on the relationships between religion, gender, and artistic production in Precolumbian and contact-period Maya civilization.

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