

THE HERO TWINS : MYTH AND IMAGE

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BACKGROUND

I have been long puzzled by the curious absence of any but the most cursory references to the Popol Vuh, the sacred book of the Quiche Maya, in Eric Thompson's great and encyclopedic *Introduction to the Study of the Maya Hieroglyphs* (1950 and later editions). Surely he must have noted the striking fact that in both Quiche and Ixil, the name for the day Ahau, last of the twenty named days in the 260-day count, is Hunahpu -- first-born of the Hero Twins. Thompson was in many respects the greatest Mayanist of all, with a deep knowledge of mythology and ethnohistory, and was an outstanding iconographer, but he completely missed the overwhelming significance of the Popol Vuh in solving many problems of Classic Maya iconography and epigraphy.

In my view, the first three parts of the Popol Vuh (using Dennis Tedlock's 1985 divisions of the text) constitute a mythic cycle on a par with the Ramayana and Mahabharata of Hindu literature, the Iliad and Odyssey of Homer, the Cycles of the Kings of early Ireland, and the Norse sagas. One might also compare them with the Arthurian cycle of pre-Anglo-Saxon Britain. In all of these one finds not only earlier eras in which the doings of great

heroes are inextricably woven with those of gods, but also the charters for the elite groups which ruled these ancient societies. Even today, throughout the Hindu-Buddhist world of South and Southeast Asia, the dynastic struggles of the Mahabharata and the royal adventures of the Ramayana come alive in numberless shadow-puppet plays and ballets performed in both villages and royal courts. Indeed, the actions of King Rama and his monkey army in winning back his queen are as alive to Balinese children as events of modern Indonesian political history.

Similar dramatic performances almost surely took place in the great cities of the Classic Maya, and persisted in the highlands following the Spanish conquest. One such display is documented for the K'ekchi' Maya, (Estrada Monroy 1979:168-74) and was tied into an assertion of suzerainty by a local Maya dynast, a "cacique of all caciques" named Aj Pop'o Batz (Lord Howler-monkey). This was held under the auspices of the Dominican friars of Verapaz on Sunday, 24 June 1543, to celebrate and affirm the foundation of a new town, San Juan Chamelco, and to consolidate the power of the native ruler. Lord Howler-monkey was seated upon a dais covered with monkey skin, while two warriors draped a quetzal-feather cape

over his shoulders. After he had been duly baptized, and a Christian mass sung, the K'ekchi' drama began, to the sound of shell trumpets, turtle carapaces, and other instruments. This was the Dance of Hunahpu and Xbalanque, the Hero Twins, and their defeat of the Lords of the Underworld, Xibalba.

The performance opened with the appearance of two youths in the plaza, wearing tight-fitting garments and great black masks with horns. They proceeded to a platform covered with clean mats and adorned with artificial trees; a small brushpile covered a hidden exit. After conversing with two *nahuales* named Xul Ul and Pacan (the names of two diviners in the Popol Vuh; see Tedlock 1985:37?), they came into the presence of other masked beings--the dread Lords of Xibalba. The Xibalbans tried to kill the Hero Twins, but they evaded the dangers and emerged unscathed to the discomfiture of their enemies.

The youths then began to dance before the Underworld lords, the dance becoming progressively more violent and frenzied; little by little the lords became fascinated, until they also were caught up in it. Hunahpu and Xbalanque appeared to fly above bonfires set around the periphery

of the dance ground. Suddenly, unsuspected by the Xibalbans, they lit a multitude of incensarios, and in the midst of dense smoke they set fire to the grove of trees and to the mats. Everything turned into a great conflagration. Facing one another, with extended arms, Hunahpu and Xbalanque hurled themselves into the fire, which consumed the trapped Xibalbans as well. The smoke from the copal obscured all that was taking place in the bonfire, and even those "in the know" were frightened by the cries of the dying lords. When the smoke cleared, only ashes remained.

Then, on the ground, a compartment opened up, from which issued an emissary cloaked in a feather cape; in one hand he carried an incensario, while with the other he indicated the open chamber. As drums, shell trumpets, and the like sounded, the Hero Twins appeared from the compartment, covered with beautiful feather capes, wearing on their brows ornaments appropriate to great lords. Their former masks had been replaced with those of two handsome youths. The Twins proudly greeted the populace, which acclaimed them for their victory over the fearsome Xibalbans.

The Twins' victory over Xibalba was probably widely celebrated in the Maya lowlands as well as the highlands, for Landa tells us that there was a dance called *Xibalba okot* held during the New Year ceremonies preceding Cauac years, in late pre-Conquest Yucatan. This was performed on the western road or *sache* leading to a statue of Uac Mitun Ahau, "Lord of the Sixth Hell", at the entrance to the town (Tozzer 1941:147). And there is some evidence that a dance-drama featuring the shooting of the arrogant bird-monster, Vucub Caquix (see below), by Hunahpu and Xbalanque was still enacted in colonial times in the Guatemalan highlands.

In fact, the Spanish friars were quick to grasp the utility of the "Harrowing of Hell" aspect of the Twins' triumph and divert it towards the Christian theme of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Curiously, in this pious transformation Hunahpu becomes an avatar of the Messiah, and Xbalanque a kind of devil or pagan god ruling over the Underworld. Needless to say, the dynastic function of the Popol Vuh cycle was steadily dissipated throughout the colonial period, as native princes, their lineages, and their courts lost power and eventually disappeared from the pages of history.

The Popol Vuh and the dawn of Maya civilization

The archaeological record as we now understand it makes it reasonably certain that Maya civilization took form during the Late Pre-Classic period, some time after 300 BC, by which time Olmec civilization had either disappeared or been transformed beyond recognition. It was this period that saw the flowering of Izapan culture on the Pacific coastal plain of Chiapas and Guatemala, of early Kaminaljuyú, and of such great lowland cities as El Mirador, Tikal, and Lamanai, with their prodigious architectural complexes and burgeoning populations. It is in this context that the Hero Twins cycle of the Popol Vuh first appears in Mesoamerican art and religion. Much of the evidence for it concerns the Vucub Caquix episode.

It appears that for the Maya, each previous world in the sequence of creations must have had its own "Sun", if information on central Mexican creation myths is pertinent here. In the Popol Vuh, the presiding god of the era preceding ours was Vucub Caquix, "Seven Macaw", who vaingloriously usurped the role of "Sun", but was not really a true sun. He "magnified himself", and boasted of the light he gave off:

I am great. My place is now higher than that of the human work, the human design. I am their sun and I am their light, and I am also their months. (Tedlock 1985 : 86)

This creature was a gigantic bird-monster of magnificent appearance. The eyes of Vucub Caquix were of metal, his teeth glittered with jewels and turquoise (read "jade" for Classic times), his nose shone white like the sun (note the anthropomorphism here), and his nest, like his eyes, was of shining metal. In a universe without a real sun, moon, or stars, the overproud bird puffed himself up on his perch, bragged, and gave off light for a race of wooden manikins that was to perish in the flood that destroyed this penultimate era. It is in the waning days of this creation that the Hero Twins myth is laid.

To vanquish Vucub Caquix -- antithesis of all behavior and values held dear by the Maya -- the gods sent the Hero Twins. The theme recalls native North American mythology, particularly in the Southwest, in which a pair of divine twins is created for the express purpose of annihilating monsters left over from previous, imperfect creations so that the people of our world may be left in peace.

Hunahpu and Xbalanque were handsome young lords, skilled in the ballgame and

in hunting birds with their blowguns. The Twins knew that each day, the bird-monster came to a *nance* tree to eat its fruit. There, Hunahpu shot him in the jaw with his blowgun, and broke his shining teeth. Angered, Vucub Caquix seized Hunahpu's arm and tore it off, hanging this grim trophy in his house. However, his teeth and eyes caused him intolerable pain, and the Twins -- tricksters as well as heroes -- came to "cure" him. After replacing Vucub Caquix's aching teeth with white maize and tearing out his metallic eyes, the arrogant "Sun" of the last creation perished.



Figure 1 Stela 25, Izapa (After Smith 1984, fig 56-c)

There is completely convincing iconographic evidence equating Vucub Caquix with the Principal Bird Deity first defined by Lawrence Bardawil (1976). This major figure makes its debut in the artistic repertoire of Mesoamerica during the Late Pre-Classic, particularly at Izapa and in Izapan-related cultures. To confirm the identification, three researchers (Taube 1980, Cortez n.d., and Lowe 1982) have independently recognized that Stela 25 at Izapa depicts not only Vucub Caquix and his *nance* tree, but also Hunahpu with his arm torn off (Figure 1). At the same site, the bird-monster descends to the *nance*, which is flanked by the Twins (Figure 2).

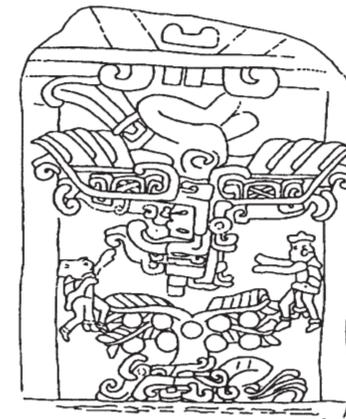


Figure 2 Stela 2, Izapa (After Smith 1984, fig.55-a)

On Stela 4, the creature plunges above a ruler who, Icarus-like, is fitted with Vucub Caquix wings (Figure 3).



Figure 3 *Stela 4, Izapa (After Smith, 1984, fig. 55-b).*

A salient figure of Vucub Caquix (I will use the Quiche term throughout this paper) in early Mesoamerican iconography is the latch-like snout or drawn-out upper lip attached like a great, hooked beak to a somewhat anthropomorphic head, complete with flaring-nostril nose; the accoutrements, in short, of what might be thought of as a "were-bird". As such, he may be recognized in the Late Pre-Classic art of Monte Alban, on Tres Zapotes Stela D, in the Izapan reliefs of the Pacific coastal plain (including boulder sculptures at Monte Alto), at Kaminaljuyú and throughout the Maya lowlands. Many of the gigantic stucco heads which flank the

staircases of Pre-Classic and Early Classic Maya temple-pyramids represent Vucub Caquix -- even though those who fashioned such images may have known him under another name. The Hero Twins' arrogant victim may be seen in diverse times and places in the lowlands, from Late Pre-Classic El Mirador and Cerros, to Early Classic Tikal (such as in the masks of Str. 5D-33-3rd; see Miller 1968:42), to the Late Classic reliefs of Palenque's Temple of the Cross and Sarcophagus, on which the Principal Bird Deity perches on a cruciform world-tree (Figure 4).

I cannot go into the fascinating subject of Vucub Caquix in the detail that it merits, for after all, my theme here is the Hero Twins, but suffice it say that this major actor in the mythic cycle makes its abrupt appearance following on the heels of the disintegration of the old Olmec order of things, and when new sociopolitical entities, especially among the Maya, were taking shape. One may presume that this was the critical moment when the myth or myths, preserved in the earlier sections of the Popol Vuh, must have assumed their later form. Just as the gods and semi-divine kings of the Hindu epics provided charters for the nascent royal houses of Indian Asia, so the doings of Hunahpu

and Xbalanque would have been the paradigm for new elites in southeastern Meso-america.

As I shall document below, Classic Maya pictorial ceramics are replete with Hero Twins imagery, including not only the Vucub Caquix episode, and the victorious encounter of the Twins with the Lords of the Underworld, but also episodes which have no counterpart in the Popol Vuh as it was written down after the Conquest. There are ramifications of this preoccupation with the divine pair throughout the inscriptions, and even in the Post-Classic

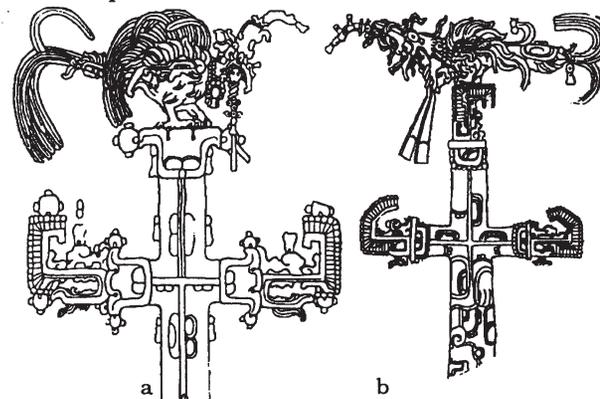


Figure 4 *The Principal Bird Deity (Vucub Caquix) perched on a world tree, Palenque. a, Temple of the Cross. b, Sarcophagous relief, Temple of the Inscriptions. (After Schele 1984:67)*

codices. Yet it is a fact that much of this imagery disappears with the Classic Maya collapse of the eighth century AD, never to reappear.

The great funerary ceramic tradition that characterized the Early and Late Classic found no place in the new order of the Post-Classical, testifying to a downfall of the elite as cataclysmic as that which befell the Yucatec Maya over six centuries later, with the Spanish conquest.

The Twins and the Palenque Triad: the Lounsbury hypothesis

First presented at the 1980 Mesa Redonda at Palenque, an identification by my esteemed colleague Floyd Lounsbury (1985) of the deities GI and GIII of the Palenque Triad with Hunahpu and Xbalanque has received widespread acceptance, for instance by Schele and Miller (1986) and by Robicsek and Hales (1988). I feel that the evidence against this identification is strong. Before I present it, I will attempt to sum up Lounsbury's argument as follows:

1. In the texts of the tablets of the Cross Group at Palenque, a pair of mythological personages of the opposite sex are born shortly before the close of the last era (of 13 baktuns). The male has the same glyphic name as the later GI of the Triad.
2. The mating of these two produced

three offspring, all born within our own era. These are *a*-GI (recognizable by the fish fins at the corners of the mouth and by the Spondylus shells over the ears), *c*-GIII, born four days later, and *b*-GII, born 14 days after GIII and, although not mentioned by Lounsbury, clearly the well-known God K, a triplet of the other two (Figure 5).



Figure 5 Glyphs of the Palenque Triad. *a*, GI. *b*, GII. *c*, GIII. (Drawing - L. Schele)

3. According to Lounsbury, GIII is the Sun God. He has the Mah-K'ina title as a prefix, followed by a cartouche containing a youthful head in profile, with a large circular spot on the cheek, generally before or above another cartouche with a plain-weave mat design. In addition, there is usually a T130 (*wa* or *Vw*) postfix. Lounsbury posits that the basic reading of GIII's glyph is *Ahau*, and identifies it with the Sun. Actually, I feel that this part of the argument is strong, but that it leads to a different conclusion than that which Lounsbury advocates.
4. If GIII is the Sun God, and if there are *two* GI's with the same name, then the

"junior" GI must be Hunahpu and the elder his Popol Vuh father, One Hunahpu. By a process of elimination, then GIII must then be Xbalanque (GII or God K is left unexplained).

5. The Popol Vuh text, however, presents a problem. At the conclusion of their triumph over Xibalba, the Twins ascend to the heavens, one of them (apparently Hunahpu) becoming the sun, and the other the moon, and not the other way around. To reverse this situation, Lounsbury marshals considerable linguistic evidence to show that Edmundson's translation as "Jaguar Deer" is faulty; *balan* is certainly "jaguar", but the *-que* could well be "sun", so that "Jaguar Sun" is a more likely meaning to the Quiche name. Lounsbury's view, also held by Thompson, is that the Popol passage must be corrupt.

6. Iconographic evidence is also brought to bear, from exactly one source: the Metropolitan Museum of Art codex-style vase known as Grolier 46 and Princeton 4. This shows GI dancing with sacrificial axe in hand to the left of an infantile, supine figure with both human and jaguar features, lying on a Cauac Monster head. To the right is God A, one of the Maya death gods, with outstretched hands. Lounsbury wholeheartedly accepts the interpretation of this scene put forward by Foncer-

rada de Molina (1970, 1972) that this is Hunahpu (=GI) in the act of sacrificing Xbalanque during the final entertainment which they put on for the delight of the Xibalbans. He identifies the victim as his "Jaguar Sun" because of the filed teeth and Roman nose (both known to be solar attributes), and because of the jaguar markings and tail.

To refute this argument in full detail would require a doctoral dissertation, but let me point out some flaws;

* GI is a well-known deity on a multitude of examples of Maya pottery and sculpture, throughout the Classic; for instance, see the many GI cache vessels illustrated by Hellmuth (1987). There are the strongest iconographic and glyphic arguments for considering him the Classic version of God B, known as Chac in the lowlands. Further, GI is glyphically identified as Chac Xib Chac on an important codex-style plate (described in Schele and Miller 1986:310-1). To my knowledge, GI is never present in any Maya ceramic scene which can be ascribed to the doings of the Twins in Xibalba.

* Lounsbury hypothesis requires acceptance of not one, but *two*, corruptions in the relevant text: in addition to implying that it was Hunahpu and not Xbalan-

que who turned into the sun, it also says that it was Xbalanque who sacrificed Hunahpu before the lords, and not the reverse.

* The scene of the sacrificial dance with GI and God A is found on a number of codex-style vases (Robicsek and Hales 1981, vessels 19-27 ; 1989). When present, the possible victim on the Cauac Monster runs the iconic gamut from a human child, to one with a jaguar tail, to an anthropomorphic and infantile Jaguar God of the Underworld (JGU), to a fully feline Water-lily Jaguar. If this is Xbalanque, he is of almost protean variability. To prove that the little "victim" on the Metropolitan pot is Xbalanque, one would have to review many more than just one vessel.

* There is a far better candidate for Hunahpu in the Cross Group tablets than GI: this is GIII, The glyph T1000c-f,i -- the youthful head with spot on cheek and one of the main ingredient's in GIII's glyph -- is the head form for the twentieth day, Ahau, read as "Hunahpu in the Quiche language.

* Thanks to the recent research of Karl Taube (1985, 1989), we know who Hunahpu's father, One Hunahpu, really was during the Maya Classic: he was God E, the familiar Maize God. He and his brother Seven Hunahpu are the "Young

Lords" whom I had initially mistaken for the Hero Twins on Maya pottery. On ceramics, the Maize God is tagged not only by his codical glyph (T1006), but by a more specifically "Hun Hunahpu" form. Thus we can rule out the head form of GI's name as that of Hun Hunahpu.

I therefore believe that the Lounsbury hypothesis is untenable. In my opinion, the only path to knowledge in dealing with the incredible complexities of Maya iconography is to examine all known occurrences of a particular iconic entity, and to analyze its behavior with other entities. Such a study would encompass not only the ceramics and codices, but the monumental art as well. For instance, to do ample justice to GI would require a long-term study, covering everything from the god's probable genesis as an Olmec shark deity until his final avatar as God B of the Post-Classic codices, with his lightning-axe.

I will admit to having no explanation of why GI's progenitor at Palenque should have the same name as his offspring, or why GI should have been born on the day 9 Wind (traditional birthdate of Quetzalcoatl). There are many mysteries remaining in the tablets of the Cross Group.

The real Hunahpu and Xbalanque: glyphic identification

Before considering the glyphic and iconographic evidence for the Classic (and Post-Classic) Hero Twins, I must recount a bit of personal history. When I was organizing the 1971 exhibit at the Grolier Club, I was struck by the frequency of pairs of almost identical young men on the pictorial ceramics that I was examining for the first time; these were usually identified as deities by devices on their torsos and limbs that I dubbed "god-markings", by peculiar, tonsured "double domes", and by rich jewelry. It was these beings that led me to the Popol Vuh, and which convinced me that the Hero Twins of the Popol Vuh Underworld cycle were present on this pottery. I christened them the "Young Lords".

As I began work on the Grolier catalogue (Coe 1973) and, later on, on the Princeton exhibit (Coe 1978), it became apparent that there was another very distinct set of twin lords that I labeled the "Headband Gods" to distinguish them from the Young Lords. One had a single spot, or sometimes three of them, on the cheek, along with large spots on the body, while the other had a patch of jaguar skin over the lower part of the face and similar patches as "god-markings". I soon drew the infer-

ence that it was *these* who were Hunahpu and Xbalanque, for reasons to become apparent later.

What then, was I to do with my "Young Lords"? As mentioned above, this problem has been brilliantly solved by Taube (1985): the tonsured Young Lords are the Hero Twins' father and uncle One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu, slain in the Underworld. The "Disembodied Head" so frequently shown on polychrome plates is the head of One Hunahpu which magically impregnated Xquic, mother-to-be of Hunahpu and Xbalanque. Further, Taube demonstrated that One Hunahpu is the young Maize God, his death and resurrection being a paradigm for the planting of the seed in the ground (its journey to Xibalba) and its germination (its resuscitation by maize's Hero Twin off-spring). The Hero Twins cycle is a parable not just of death, but of life itself.

The "decks are now cleared", so to speak, to deal with the *real* Hunahpu and Xbalanque.

The twentieth named day in the 260-day count is "Ahau" in Yucatec Maya. It its more abstract form on monuments in the area where Yucatec was spoken, the Ahau sign is often affixed with T168 (here read *ahau* and T130 (-w), confirming the reading *ahau* as given by Landa and other sources. In the monuments of the Classic sites of the southern lowlands, however, it usually appears in a more personified form -- either as a youthful head in profile with dot or dots on the cheek and with a headband, or in full-figure form (Figure 6). There is no question that this youth is one of the "Headband Gods". Now, in the table of names in various Mayan languages given for this day by Thompson (1971:68), it is called Ahau in Yucatec, Chuh, and

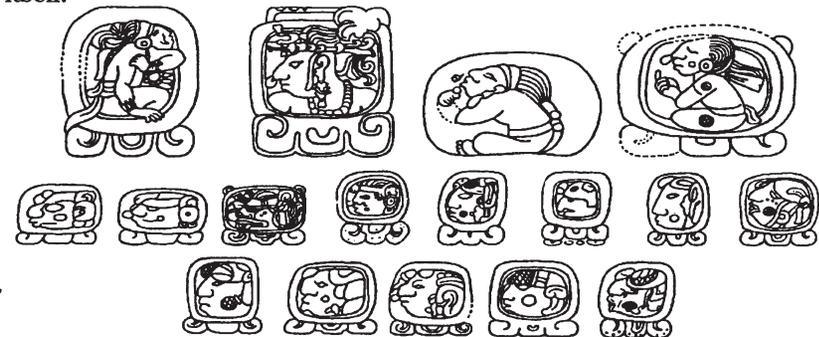


Figure 6 Full-figure and head variants of the day-sign Ahau. (After Thompson 1971, fig. 11)

Jacalteca, and *Aghual* in Tzeltal or Tzotzil. In Ixil and Quiche, significantly, it is *Hunahpu*. Surely, by the principle of Occam's razor, one can conclude that the Quiche identified Hunahpu of the Hero Twins with the same day that is personified in the Classic inscriptions as the Headband God with spotted cheek.

I have already said that I am not averse to identifying GIII as Hunahpu in his aspect as Sun God, mainly because of the car-touched Hunahpu head, and the substitution of the whole glyph group by the indubitable head of the Sun God, but I think the case is far from proved; one would have to reach a more convincing reading for the woven-mat sign than that proposed by Lounsbury. Be that as it may, it *was* Hunahpu who was turned into the sun, and Thompson (1971:87-8) has fairly convincing arguments based on both Aztec and Maya data that the personified Ahau sign is the "young sun god". For instance, the patron of the corresponding Aztec day, Xochitl ("Flower") was Xochipilli ("Flower Prince"), very definitely the youthful sun.

Let us now consider the personified glyphs of the Number 9 (Figure 7). The elements common to the head form in the inscriptions are 1. a youthful profile, 2. a patch of jaguar skin over the lower face, often



Figure 7 Heads variants of number 9 (After Thompson, 1971 fig. 24, 50-55).

turning into a beard, and 3. a *yax* (T16) affixed to the forehead. Setting aside for the moment the *yax* sign, this is patently the other member of the Headband God pair shown on Classic Maya ceramics, even though the beard may not always be present, and even though both may be shown with dots only.

The nominal glyphs for both these supernaturals accompany them on ceramics and codices. It is accepted by most epigraphers (see Schele and Freidel 1989:25) that Hunahpu is named by the coefficient for "one" followed by the spotted Ahau face (T1000 in its restricted sense), while Xbalanque is identified by the personified Number 9 glyph. In the Dresden Codex, of Early Post-Classic date, the main sign of both nominal glyphs is T1003c, prefixed in the case of Hunahpu with "one", and in the case of Xbalanque with *yax* (Figure 8). Although I use the Quiche names throughout this essay, the Classic names for the Hero Twins in the lowlands may have been Hun Ahau and possibly Yax Balam (Schele and Freidel, *ibid*), which may also have been true for Post-Classic Yucatan.

In summary, the evidence of both image and writing supports the identification of the Headband Gods as *the* Hero Twins of the Popol Vuh and rules out any other avatars of these two in Classic times.

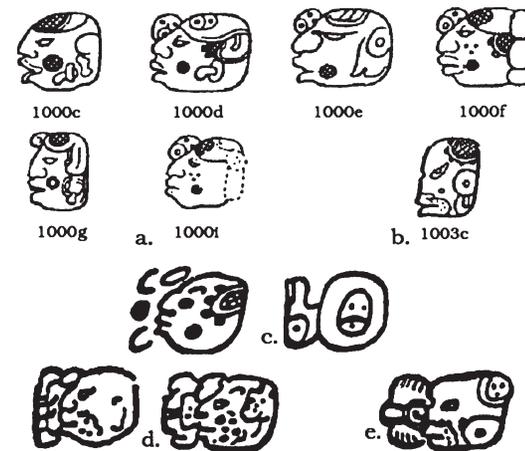


Figure 8 Nominal Glyphs for Hunahpu and Xbalanque. a, T1000 forms for Hunahpu. b., Main sign for the Twins in the codices. c., Glyphs for Hunahpu on pottery. d., Glyphs for Xbalanque on pottery. e., Xbalanque nominal glyph from the codices. (a., b., after Thompson 1962; 457. c.-e. after Schele 1987)

HUNAHPU AND XBALANQUE: THEIR LIFE AND TIMES

I will now discuss various happenings in the lives of the Headband Gods, Hunahpu and Xbalanque, influenced in part by the extant Hero Twins cycle in the Popol Vuh; as I have done before, I would like to emphasize that this cycle presents only *part* of what may have been a very long, complex epic, for there are scenes on the pottery which have absolutely no counterpart in that great book. Moreover, there are things visualized on the ceramics which are connected with the cycle, for example the Hun Batz and Hun Chuen

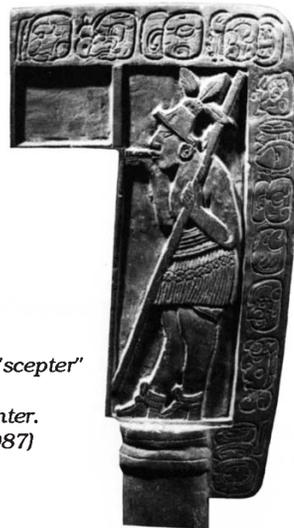


Figure 9 Slate "scepter" with figure of Hunahpu as hunter. (©Justin Kerr 1987)

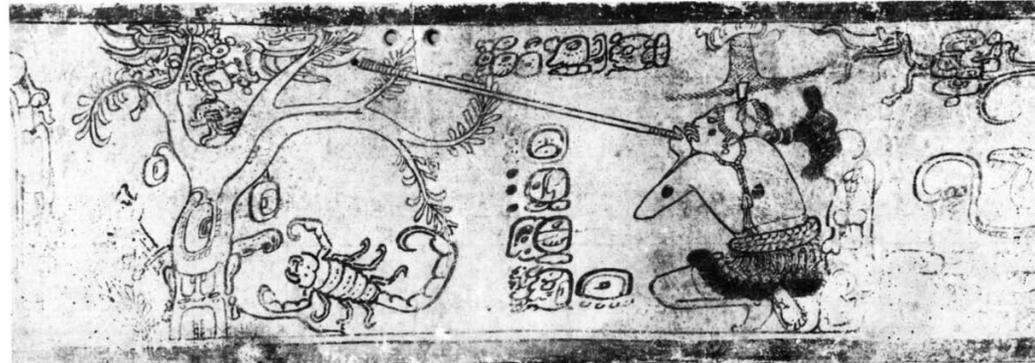


Figure 10 Codex-style vase, Hunahpu shoots Vucub Caquix (©Justin Kerr 1980, file no. 1226)

monkey-men episode (Coe 1977), which leave out the Hero Twins even though they played a role in the narrative.

The defeat of Vucub Caquix

The Hero Twins are the blowgunners par excellence. The very name of Hunahpu, as Tedlock (1985:341) makes clear, is composed of *hun* , "one"; *ah-*, occupational; and *pu*, from *puh*, "blowgun". Thus, the name as a whole could be read as "One Blowgunner". The complete attire of Hunahpu as a hunter can be seen on a beautiful carved slate scepter from the late classic period (Figure 9): he wears the broad-brimmed "hunter's hat" of plaited straw, a fringed kilt, and sandals, and he holds at rest his long blowgun with the left hand, while in the right hand he holds a cigar or smoking tube to his lips. On the

other side of this object is a portrait of the Maya ruler himself, presumably the personage for whom it was made (Kerr n.d.:17). It may be that the ruler had himself depicted as Hunahpu, the eternal prototype of all kings, for the glyphic text accompanying the scenes relate to the ruler's titles.

That this identification of the spotted youth with hunter's hat as Hunahpu is absolutely correct is proved by a codex-style vase first published by Robiscek and Hales (1982, no.20), now universally accepted as the shooting of Vucub Caquix by Hunahpu (Figure 10). The vase shows Hunahpu squatting on his haunches in front of a Cauac Monster (presumably a hill or mountain); he wears substantially the same costume as the figure on the slate scepter. The blowgun pellet is aimed

at the Principal Bird Deity, in the form of a God D head with wings. Infixes in the God D's head is the mirror glyph (T617), which also appears at the foot of the tree and in the head of the deity at the tree's base. Justin Kerr (personal communication) has advanced the interesting suggestion that the jaguar paw extending from behind the tree trunk belongs to the hidden Xbalanque. According to the vertical text, the shooting takes place on 1 Ahau 3 Kankin (misread as 3 Yaxkin by Robicsek and Hales); 1 Ahau, of course, is the "official" date of the great heliacal rising of the Morning Star in the 104-year Venus calendar of Mesoamerica.



Figure 11 *Codex-style vase, Hunahpu shoots a quadruped in a tree.* (©Justin Kerr 1980, file no. 1345)

Hunahpu also wears his hunting outfit on another codex-style vase (Figure 11), in a scene in which he shoots not a bird but a quadruped perched in a tree. This basically unidentifiable creature has a long tail and an ear with toad markings. Another personage with a headdress pierced with what may be brush pens reclines to one side. One of the two glyphs below the rim is Hunahpu's own name, (II.1000c-f.)

Best known of all Maya blowgunner images is the famous Blom Plate (Figure 12), said to be from Quintana Roo (Blom 1950). The Hero Twins are here depicted as the Headband Twins; instead of hunter's hats,

they wear distinctive headbands. Both are marked with black spots, and direct blowgun pellets at the Principal Bird Deity -- Vucub Caquix with a fantastic, long-beaked bird headdress. Although the distinctive jaguar-pelt patches of Xbalanque are missing here, the Twin on the left is seated on a jaguar-pelt throne, possibly a substitute for the usual god-markings.

A somewhat abbreviated version of the theme can be found to the right of the scene on a polychrome vase published as Princeton 8 (Fig. 13). Hunahpu with headband and fringed kilt has shot a downed, anthropomorphic Vulture God (the ta vulture of the codices), perhaps a version of the more usual Principal Bird Deity.

But without doubt the greatest of all pictorial representations of the shooting of Vucub Caquix is a truly magnificent early Classic double cylindrical vessel said to be from Rio Azul in northeastern Guatemala (Figure 14).

And when Seven Macaw arrived, perched over his meal, the nance, it was then that he was shot by Hunahpu. The blowgun shot went right to his jaw, breaking his mouth. (Tedlock 1985:91-2)



Figure 12 Detail; the Blom Plate, *The Hero Twins shoot Vucub Caquix* (After Hellmuth 1987, ill.425)

The great bird-monster, engaged in “self-magnification”, with huge wings raised, towers over the tableau. That he is the “sun” of the penultimate creation is made manifest by his sun-god eyes, and by the *k’in* sign on the back of his right wing. Pendant from his latch-like beak is the *pop* knot of rulership, an iconographic detail which can be matched in the images of Vucub Caquix on the world-trees of the Temple of the Cross and the TI Sarcophagus lid at Palenque.

Crouched in shooting posture on the opposite cylinder, Hunahpu takes aim at

the bird. Three dots on his cheek leave no doubt that this is Hunahpu, “One Blow-gunner”, and he is girded with his hunter’s fringed kilt. Between the two cylinders is a third figure, kneeling and raising an object towards the bird-monster. Could this be Xbalanque, extending toward Vucub Caquix the fatal “white corn” that they mischievously gave him as a replacement for his destroyed teeth? If so, then it might also be Xbalanque with “white corn” in his hand who kneels before the bird-monster on another Early Classic double-cylinder vessel in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Coe 1987:ill.49).

The Hero Twins as ballplayers

Having established the skin markings and distinctive costume of the Hero Twins, it is a relatively simple matter to recognize the subject matter of Drawing 21 in the cave of Naj Tunich (Fig. 15); this is Hunahpu, with his hunter’s hat (apparently also worn in the ballgame), standing before a staircase and a large rubber ball; he has the protective “yoke” on the upper part of the chest, a long jaguar pelt below it, and a knee guard.



Figure 13 Detail from polychrome vase, *Hunahpu shooting the Vulture God*. (© Justin Kerr 1975, file no. 555)



Figure 14 *Early Classic double-cylinder vase, The shooting of Vucub Caquix by Hunahpu. (© Justin Kerr 1982)*



Figure 15 *Hunahpu as ballplayer, Naj Tunich Cave (Drawing by Andrea Stone)*

We owe to Linda Schele (1987) the identification of the two figures on the central marker of Ballcourt IIb at Copan as Hunahpu (whom she calls the "Hun Ahau Twin"), facing the half-kneeling ruler 18-Rabbit in his guise as God of Zero (Fig. 16). She is also to be credited with recognizing not only the "Chicchan variant" of Hunahpu's name glyph, but also the vase and codical forms of Xbalanque's name (see below).



Figure 16 Central marker of Ballcourt IIb, Copan (After Barbara Fash 1987)

Although Hunahpu and Xbalanque are identifiable ballplayers in these examples of Maya art -- which is expected, given the importance of the game they play with the Underworld lords in the Popol Vuh -- it is

by no means easy to pick them out in ballgame scenes on Maya pottery. There is certainly some pattern to the kinds of headdresses worn by the principal players, often involving a deer head and the head of a long-beaked bird, but whether those who wear such headgear are the Hero Twins, or their father and uncle, cannot be decided at present. It should be noted, though, that the characteristic facial and body markings of the Hero twins are absent.

Hunahpu lets his blood

For the moment, we shall leave the main story line of the Popol Vuh to examine episodes in the lives of the Twins which have no obvious counterpart in that great epic. One of these is blood sacrifice by penis perforation. That this important ritual act was performed not only in late pre-Conquest times but in the Classic era, is a fact that was brought to light by Thompson in a pioneering article of 1961. On a polychrome vase said to be from Huehuetenango (Gordon and Mason 1925-28, pl.27), he recognized that six gods squatting over bowls were engaged in drawing blood from the penis by means of the instrument which each held in the hand. One of these deities can be none other than Hunahpu (Figure 17).



Figure 17 Hunahpu drawing his own blood, Huehuetenango Vase (After Gordon and Mason 1925-28, pl. 27)

David Joralemon enlarged on this theme in 1974, and demonstrated that the perforator itself was deified, distinguished by a headdress with a distinctive stack of knots (usually three in number). Such an instrument can be seen on a polychrome plate (Figure 18), grasped in the left hand of Hunahpu in his guise as Headband God; here Hunahpu is enthroned on a Cauac glyph, which itself indicates stone "altar" or throne.



Figure 18 Hunahpu with perforator, polychrome plate (Drawing by Karl Taube)

The Hero Twins in the presence of Itzamna

At one time I had considered that Gods N (Pauhtun) and L were co-rulers in the Underworld, and that only those two were prime over the denizens of Xibalba. But Nicholas Hellmuth has convinced me that there is a third regent among the supernaturals pictured on Maya ceramics, namely God D or Itzamna, a divinity usually connected with the sky and (according to our post-Conquest sources), the supreme being and creator of the universe. That he should also appear in Xibalba is less of a contradiction than it first appears, for in central Mexico, the Aztec equivalent of Itzamna -- the old male/female Ometecuhtli -- has his/her counterpart in the personage of Mictlantecuhtli, Lord of the Land of the Dead. These are just two sides of the same coin, so to speak.

Be that as it may, at some point in the extended Hero Twins cycle, they appear in the court of God D. On a codex-style vase (Figure 19), the seated Twins flank the slouched-over, aged god, who points to a bowl from which a tree rises; this is the crocodile tree, seemingly the same one depicted as Vucub Caquix's perch on Stela 25 at Izapa. Hunahpu is on the left, and judging from his hunter's hat, it may be that he is fresh from his victory over the bird-monster. Unfortunately, the head on



Figure 19 Codex-style vase, the Hero Twins in the court of God D (© Justin Kerr 1981, file no. 1607)

the right-hand figure is worn; this may be Xbalanque, but there are no god-markings on the body.

God D is seated upon a sky-band throne on a marvellous polychrome cylindrical vase (Fig.20) described by Robicsek and Hales (1982:no.7). Before him is a deep vase heaped with offerings which include a skeletonized head. In an antechamber are Xbalanque who, although lacking god-markings or the headband, wears the Jester God headdress, and Hunahpu, with headband. Both Twins have bejewelled short capes and the fringed kilt. The beautiful text at the top is the PSS -- of

special interest is the "Flat-hand Verb" at B which looks like 0C in the Lunar Series (with the JGU as patron), and the glyph at position I, which Robicsek and Hales identify as Xbalanque. While they may be right about that, they further identify J as Hunahpu, "GI of the Palenque Triad of Gods", a highly unlikely proposition. The middle glyph in both secondary texts is the "Chicchan God" variant for the main sign of the Hero Twins' names -- in this case, the dot on the cheek probably indicates Hunahpu alone.

There is an Early Classic precedent for scenes on these Late Classic vases; a

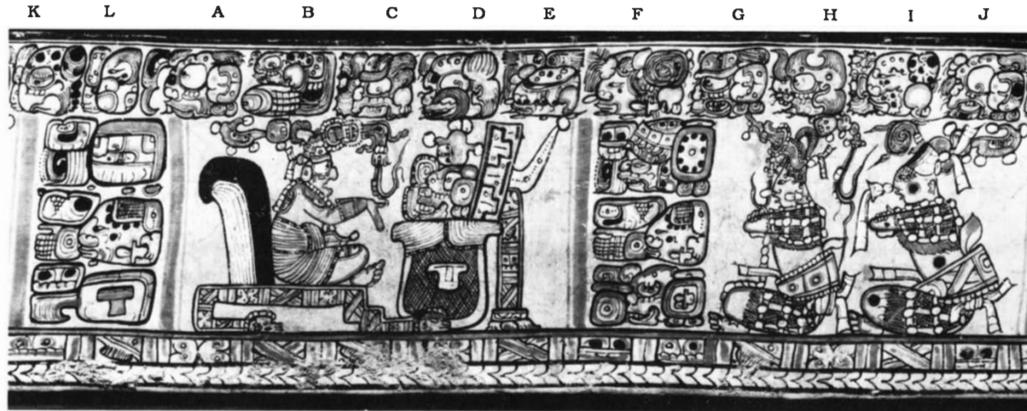


Figure 20 Polychrome vase, *The Hero Twins appear before God D* (© Justin Kerr 1980, file no. 1183)

stuccoed and painted tripod from an Esperanza Phase tomb at Kaminaljuyu, which has two painted panels, each with God D receiving the homage of a Hero Twin (Figure 21).



Figure 21 Panels from an Early Classic stuccoed tripod, Kaminaljuyu. *The Hero Twins before God D.* (After Hellmuth 1987 ill. 436)

The Hero Twins and the Deer Ritual
A still intractable problem is the role of deer in Maya beliefs about the Underworld, at least as depicted on Classic Maya pottery. Given the close association of deer representations with death symbolism, there can be no doubt that this creature was a very important chthonic



Figure 22 Rollout drawing of a polychrome vase at Dumbarton Oaks, *Deer Ritual* (After Morley, Brainerd, and Scharer 1983, fig. 13.34)

deity, in some way connected with the history of the Hero Twins. Let us consider a famous and often-published vase at Dumbarton Oaks (Figure 22), said to be from northern Yucatan. There are two related scenes on the vase, separated by a world-tree and waterlilies arising from the crown of the JGU's head. On the left are two youths with black spots on the body (shown by cross-hatching), each holding two flint-tipped spears or darts. One is engaged in plucking off the antlers from a deer wearing a blanket embellished with crossed longbones, while the other sounds a conch-shell trumpet. Descending from above is the Vulture God, complete with headband as in Figure 13.

On the far right of the world-tree is an armed youth, also blowing a conch, and two spotted youths with capes, seated on either side of the tree. Below are two deer who have had their antlers removed.

One could argue about the multiplicity of "twins" here, and over why the jaguar god-markings of Xbalanque are absent, but both Twins are similarly marked as a kind of double-Hunahpu on the Blom Plate and on the Vase of the 31 Gods (Coe 1973;no.37, Figures 1 and 4); in fact, Xbalanque's markings seem to be of less iconographic significance than those of Hunahpu. Furthermore, both Twins are unmistakably distinguished in a deer ritual pictured on a tall polychrome vase of unknown provenance (Figure 23). In the top register, Hunahpu and Xbalanque are in the presence of God D in the gesture of submission, before a bowl filled with offerings. Below, the Twins hold tree fronds in their hands on either side of a seated Deer God; the deer's cloak has cross-bones and death-eyes. An anthropomorphic Bat God stands just in back of Hunahpu, removing any doubt that this takes place in Xibalba. To the left is a Cauac Monster cave, sheltering a small, rat-like animal.

Although badly eroded in places, this vase could repay further study. For instance, there are interesting details of costume and of personal ornament which might give iconographic clues for the identification of the Twins on other vessels; note, for example, that both have

long, bound hanks of hair, while above Xbalanque's ear is an "extra" jaguar ear and above that of Hunahpu a hybrid "extra" ear which suggests both a deer's ear and a Muan Bird feather.

The same tree frond is held between the open arms of Xbalanque on an important plate, perhaps of Campeche origin (Fig.24): here the young god is seated on a double-pot-throne (for pop, "mat" or "rulership", and a pop-mat sign is at his back. Above and to the right of his head, as part of the

text, is the nominal glyph of Xbalanque, inexplicably prefixed by a mo (T582) sign.

The Hero Twins and the Resurrection of One Hunahpu

We come now to one of the most important episodes in the Hero Twins story, which, while a major theme on the ceramics, receives only fleeting references in the Popol Vuh, sure evidence that we have in the text a somewhat truncated version of the original epic. In fact, it must be admitted that the Popol Vuh obfuscates more

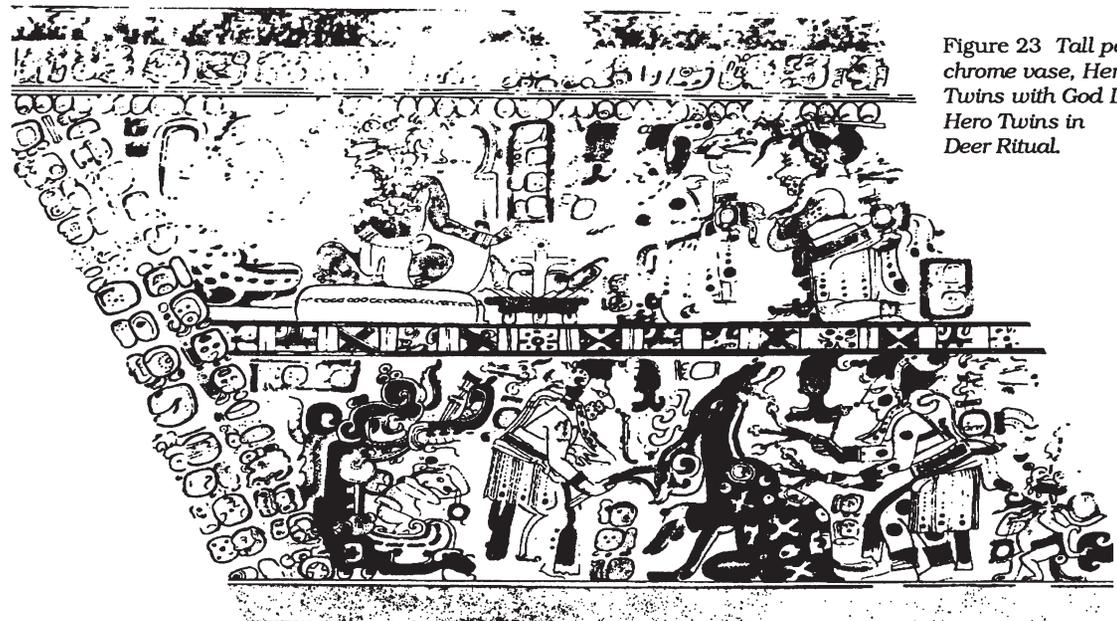


Figure 23 Tall polychrome vase, Hero Twins with God D (?), Hero Twins in Deer Ritual.



Figure 24 Polychrome plate with figure of Xbalanque (After Hellmuth 1987, ill. 435)

than clarifies this particular subject. The written story places the resurrection event just after the defeat of the Xibalbans by the Hero Twins, and at about the same time that the corn ears planted by them in their grandmother's house sprouted as a sign of their own survival. The text says:

And they saw the face of their father again, there in Xibalba. Their father spoke to them again when they had defeated Xibalba.

And here their father is put back together by them. They put Seven Hunahpu back together; they went to the Place of Ball Games Sacrifice to put him together.
(Tedlock 1985:159)

Here we have a problem: their father was not Seven, but *One* Hunahpu. This scribal

slip-up is understandable, since in the preceding lines, both are named as "their fathers".

So, in the Popol Vuh there are *two* resurrection stories; one concerning the sprouting of maize on the surface of the earth, and the other dealing with the head and body of One (or Seven) Hunahpu. The iconography of pictorial ceramics tells us that these ideas were not separate in Classic times. Now, it will be remembered that Taube has demonstrated that One Hunahpu and the Maize God are one and the same; crucial to his argument were several of the vessels that will be described here.

Let us first identify the resurrection theme itself and the principal actors. There seems to be general agreement among those who have studied the great codex-style plate shown in Figure 25 that the Maize God -- One Hunahpu, with his jewelled finery -- is emerging from a split turtle carapace representing the earth's surface. It floats on water, as indicated by the waterlily and other symbols below. To the left of Hun Hunahpu's head is his nominal glyph, with the "corn curl" infix. On the left side of the scene is his son Hunahpu, with the hybrid deer's-ear/Muan-bird feather above his own ear, together with his name glyph;

on the right is Xbalanque, with jaguar-ear just above his own, and a screech-owl headdress without the usual feathers. His name glyph can be seen just to the left of the headdress. Xbalanque is in the act of inverting an Akbal jar, probably to water the sprouting and resurrected maize: his own father.

Hun Hunahpu is thus seen emerging from the Underworld (symbolized by the Akbal skull on the side of the carapace),



Figure 25 Codex-style plate; Resurrection of One Hunahpu (©Justin Kerr 1982, file no.1892)

and through the earth's surface. This was the ultimate metaphor for a people for whom maize was life itself. The descent into Xibalba by Hun Hunahpu and his brother, followed by their sacrificial death, parallels the farmer planting his corn seed in a hole in the ground at the end of the dry season; the resurrection of Hun Hunahpu by the Hero Twins invokes the germination of the seed and sprouting of the young corn plant with the arrival of the rains.

This glorious culmination to the Hero Twins epoch is found elsewhere in the Maya ceramic corpus. On a deep, polychrome bowl (Figure 26), the Maize God is helped from the split turtle-shell by the physical efforts of Hunahpu and Xbalanque, who tug at his arms to free him from the earth. Both sons are attired as Headband Gods.

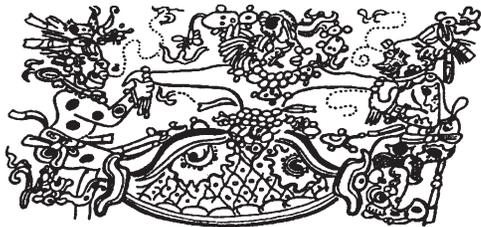


Figure 26 Detail from polychrome bowl, Resurrection of One Hunahpu (After Hellmuth 1987 ill. 438)

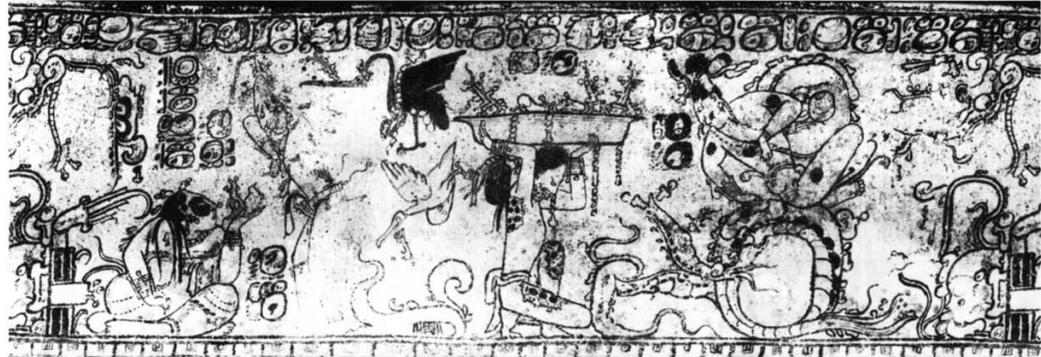


Figure 27 Codex-style vase, The Hero Twins collect the head and finery of One Hunahpu. (© Justin Kerr 1974, file no. 1004)

The Popol Vuh text states that the Twins actually reassembled their father in Xibalba, and that may well be what is going on an extraordinarily complex codex-style vase (Figure 27) that has been described by Robicsek and Hales (1982, no. 12). I will concern myself only with the right-hand part of the rollout. The Hero Twins are both present, depicted with their telltale god-markings. As recognized by Schele (1987), the nominal glyphs for both Twins are present, Hunahpu's being prefixed by a thumb -- for the coefficient "One" -- and the day-sign Ahau for the main sign. Robicsek and Hales call this scene "Nourishment of the Gods", based on their interpretation of the items in the dish borne on high by Xbalanque as blood-

letting paraphernalia. I interpret them very differently: to me, they are the severed head and regalia of Hun Hunahpu, gathered by his sons for reassemblage and resurrection, "Your name will not be lost", they said, "We merely cleared the road of your death, your loss, your pain, the suffering that were inflicted upon you".

The Hero Twins in the codices

The possibility that Hunahpu and Xbalanque appear in the codices was first raised by John Henderson in an important but unfortunately unpublished paper. In fact, they are to be found in both the Dresden and Madrid Codex.

It should be pointed out from the outset that the codical name glyphs of the Twins differ slightly in their main sign from their Classic forms; this is T1003c, confusingly attributed to a so-called "Chicchan God", apparently because the crosshatched element in the head is also to be found in the day sign Chicchan. Whatever the *raison d'être* for such an infix in these nominal glyphs, it can have little to do with either the day name or snakes [the Chichan itself is, indeed, a serpent god].

The first appearance of Hunahpu in the Dresden is at the top of page 2 (Figure 28a). In a 5x52 tzolkin table, the decapitated Hunahpu, identifiable by his black-spotted body, strides along with arms bound behind the back. The four-glyph sentence in the block above the picture opens at A1 with T190.758, a verb for beheading which also occurs on the Altar de Sacrificios Vase with God A'. At A2 is Hunahpu's name, Tl.1003c. The sentence closes with the sign for death. It will be recalled that Hunahpu really did die in the story, if only temporarily -- inside the Bat House, when a "snatch-bat" took off his head.

Next, on page 3a of the Dresden, Hunahpu is taken captive (Figure 28b), in a complex 5x52 tzolkin in which the days zigzag

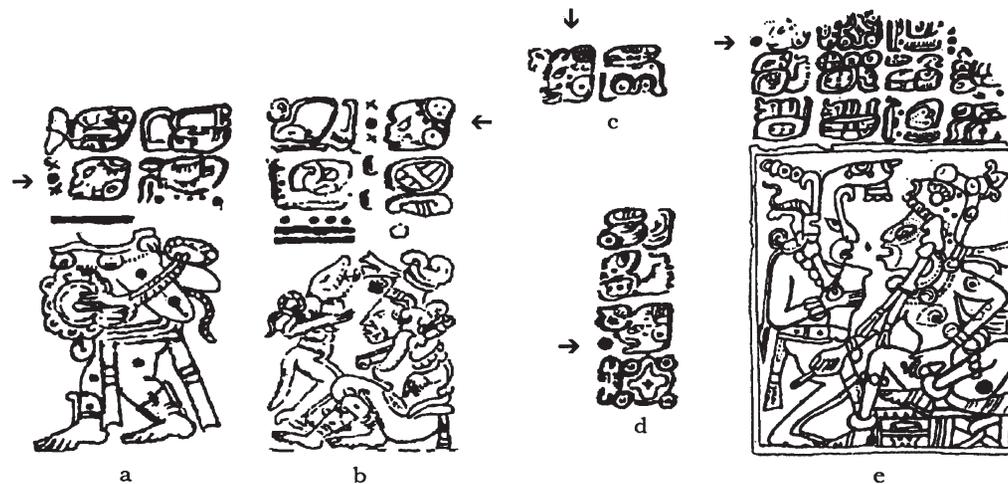


Figure 28 Hunahpu in the Dresden Codex (The arrows indicated Hunahpu's nominal glyphs). a., D2a. b., D3a. c., D24b. d., D49a. e., D50a.

back and forth across a world tree which rises from the open chest of a sacrificed nude captive. On the lower right, Hunahpu sits bound, facing another captive (some kind of unidentifiable animal, perhaps a lizard). The first two glyphs of the block above read *chucah Hunahpu*, "Hunahpu was captured".

Far more significant to the understanding of the Hero Twins in ancient Maya thought is Hunahpu's role in the Dresden Venus Tables, the principal subject of Henderson's investigation. Before we delve into

this subject, however, a few technical remarks are in order concerning Venus Gods and Venus Regents in this body of data. As has been known for over a century, the Maya based their Venus calendar on the fact that five synodic revolutions of the planet, each consisting of 584 days, are equal to eight haabs of 365 days each; this is why there are five pages to the calendar as it appears on Dresden 47-50. Each page is divided vertically into its periods: Superior Conjunction, Evening Star, Inferior Conjunction, and Morning Star.

Listed for each of the 20 (5x4) periods of the table are a world-direction and a Venus Regent; thus, there are 20 Regents altogether. These are to be distinguished from the Venus Gods, who represent the planet in its first appearance in the eastern sky, that is, during heliacal rising as Morning Star following Inferior Conjunction. There are five such gods, shown hurling darts at victims in pictures spread across the middle section of pages 46-50; they are cognate to similar figures in the central Mexican codices (see Kelley 1976:73-83 for a thorough discussion of Venus deities).

It has been established that the glyph in first position in the lower series on each Dresden page corresponds to the deity enthroned in the upper right section of that page. Similarly, the identical name glyph appears as the final sign in the middle position on the preceding page. We can therefore class the seated gods in these pictures as Regents of the Morning Star, in the east. With that in mind, let us now turn to page 50. Here we have a personage (Figure 28e) seated upon a sky-band throne; his body is covered with black spots, immediately suggesting that we are confronted with Hunahpu. This is a very sinister Hero Twin, however, since he is adorned with a death collar and a

skull headdress. Topping the latter is a device which suggested to Henderson the Aztec day sign Xochitl or Flower, corresponding as the twentieth day to Ahau or Hunahpu in the Maya day count.

Facing the enthroned personage is God E -- the Maize God -- holding what may be a ceramic drum. Now, the corresponding name glyph in both positions appropriate for the enthroned deity is TI.1003c, the name of Hunahpu, the "one" coefficient being superfixed with an element which might be phonetic (Figure 28d). The same nominal glyph appears once more on page 24 (Figure 28c), as one of the Venus Regents in the calculation table for the Venus calendar, and in damaged form at the top of page 50. In all three cases, Hunahpu's name is followed by the glyph group which reads *chac ek*, "Great Star", i.e. Venus.

But what about the denouement of the Popol Vuh account, in which Hunahpu and Xbalanque become the sun and the moon (or, in Tedlock's translation, "the sun belongs to one and the moon to the other")? Sadly, the Popol Vuh does not tell us which belongs to which, but since Hunahpu and Xbalanque are always named in that order, it is reasonable to suppose that it should be Hunahpu/sun

and Xbalanque/moon. However, basing himself upon a deep familiarity with contemporary Maya legends, Thompson (1971: 218-9) rejected the notion that one Twin becomes the moon, since the latter is always female among the Maya, and wife of the sun (actually, the Popol Vuh may not be entirely wrong in its scheme, as a young lunar deity, apparently male, is twinned with Hunahpu on the Pearlman Shell Trumpet). In modern Maya thought, the sun and Venus are brothers. Ergo, Hunahpu is Venus and his brother Xbalanque is the sun. This is all compelling logic, and is one of the arguments advanced by Lounsbury for his hypothesis, but I doubt whether the somewhat confused and ambiguous evidence will allow us to say at present any more than this: in the Dresden Codex, Hunahpu was a Venus Regent associated with the Morning Star -- but so was the Moon Goddess!

Finally, what is the evidence in the codices for Xbalanque? The Resurrection Plate has told us what his nominal glyph should look like; *yax* ("Green" or "new"), followed by a main sign; On the plate, this sign is the head of the god with jaguar-skin patch over the lower face -- as it is in the head variant for Number Nine. In the codices, it is the same "Chicchan God" head that is used for Hunahpu.

This nominal glyph can be found in a 4x65 day tzolkin on Dresden 23b, in a text which lists the inauguration dates and appropriate offerings for a series of gods, of whom Xbalanque is one (Figure 29a). On page 7 of the same codex, in a 5x52 tzolkin, the god, with pelage markings on the body, is seated with hand raised as though in discourse (Figure 29b). A hummingbird hovers head down before his mouth; the beak of the same bird appears affixed to the mouth of God D, Itzamna?, in another picture within the same tzolkin. The first two glyphs of the text accompanying each of the four principles in this tzolkin are the same: *ts'un u chich*. Now, *ts'unun* is "hummingbird" in

many Mayan languages, including Yucatec. Could the glyph group be a variant of this word? The second syllabic glyph of the group is T149, *nu*. Visually already a reduplicated sign. Possibly by not repeating the *nu* they avoided further duplication which would have been confusing to the reader. The word *chich* is generally glossed in Yucatec as "word" or "discourse". The entire text could thus read "hummingbird his word, Xbalanque, his burial", (*u muc*, a common augury for days of bad omen).

A third appearance of the younger Twin in the Dresden is on page 21, in another 5x52 tzolkin, in which the young Moon

Goddess is coupled with various deities, among whom is Xbalanque (Figure 29c). He can be identified only through his nominal glyph, since he lacks god-markings or any other distinguishing feature. In the Madrid Codex he materializes in a beekeeping section on page 104b (Figure 28d); in this section, the glyphic passage associated with each supernatural usually reads, as here, *u pak' u kab* [name of god], in this case, "he hived his bees, Xbalanque". Although there is nothing in the Popol Vuh that throws any light on this activity, it does show that Xbalanque was an important deity in the lowlands during the late pre-Conquest period.

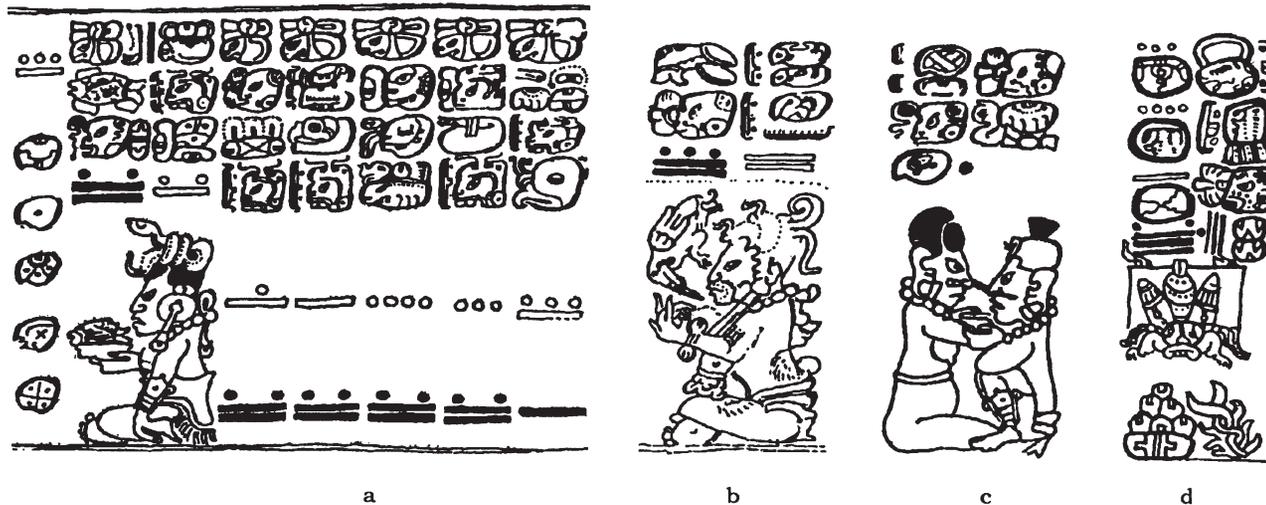


Figure 29 Xbalanque in the codices. a., D23b. b., D7b. c., D21c. d., M104b.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Visual and glyphic evidence for Hunahpu and Xbalanque --for their triumphs over Vucub Caquix and the Lords of Xibalba - reaches from the Late Pre-Classic into the early colonial period, and includes both the highland and lowland Maya areas. In their conquest of the arrogant forces within nature and society, and of death itself, the Twins were the very model of what ruling princes should be. They were eternally youthful and therefore immortal. Their father the Maize God had suffered death in the Underworld, but thanks to their efforts he was reborn on the surface of the earth; in a like manner, so were the temporal lords of the Maya realm responsible for the seasonal planting, germination, and harvest of their great staple food, maize. Iconographically and glyphically, the Hero Twins of the Popol Vuh are to be identified as the Headband Gods (Coe 1973:83), although they may manifest themselves at times without headbands. The face and body of one -- Hunahpu -- is spotted, while the face and body of the other -- Xbalanque -- has jaguar-pelt god-markings and jaguar skin over the lower part of the face. Both may appear with spotting, but jaguar pelage is never found on both. Hunahpu is the God of the Day Ahau/Hunahpu, and Xbalanque is the God of Number Nine.

The Headband Gods are not just a younger or alternate version of the Hero Twins; they are the Hero Twins. Much confusion has resulted from an untenable equation of Triad GI with Hunahpu, and GIII with Xbalanque. Resting on the analysis of a single Classic Maya vessel, the Metropolitan Vase, this hypothesis has spawned numerous progeny, to the point that the GIII concept has come to embrace just about every image and glyph that deals, or seems to deal, with jaguars and the sun (as in Schele and Miller 1986:50-1). To make matters worse, it distorts the true role of GI, whose main function as a god of rain and lightning is confirmed by his Classic name, Chac Xib Chac. There is simply no way to connect the Hunahpu of the Popol Vuh with rain. Show me any image of GI and GIII (or any supposed version of GIII) with blowguns, or shooting a bird-monster, or playing ball, or resurrecting One Hunahpu, the Maize God, and I might reconsider my position!

We have a long way yet to go in understanding Maya iconography, particularly in our best source of all, the scenes on Classic Maya pictorial ceramics. Great caution must be exerted in this early stage of our investigations to avoid "lumping" distinct iconic forms into categories that might later prove unacceptable and misleading. In addition, in dealing with

issues of such complexity, such as ceramic image and text, it would be far wiser to base our conclusions on a whole range of examples rather than just one or a few vessels. This danger is particularly acute in the case of "dirt" archaeologists venturing into this difficult field; nothing could be more risky than to draw sweeping iconographic generalizations from lonely specimens of archaeologically-excavated pottery while highmindedly refusing to take into account comparable, but undocumented, material. I am thinking here of the errors committed by R.E.W. Adams (1971, 1977) in his analysis of the Altar de Sacrificios Vase, which has been subjected to much-needed criticism by Schele (1988:294-9).

Sources like the Popol Vuh, the Books of Chilam Balam, and the Ritual of the Bacabs must be used in this quest, but with great care, for there are many pitfalls. We cannot always expect to define clearcut iconic categories from any of this material, for Maya and central Mexican iconography simply does not work that way. And, finally, we must be on guard for iconographic traps which the ancient Maya seem to have laid for us, with our minds so conditioned by western logic. They always seem to have in reserve a few surprises which can lay waste many of our seemingly watertight explanations!

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