

# The Maya Ceramic Book of Creation

## The Trials of the Popol Vuh Hero Twins Displayed on Classic Maya Polychrome Painted Pottery

“First they entered the dark house.  
[...] but they didn’t burn the torch - instead,  
something that looked like fire was substituted.

This was the tail of the macaw,  
which looked like a torch to the sentries.”

(Tedlock 1996, 119)



“So next they entered the midst of the fire,  
a house of fire with only fire only inside.

They weren’t burned by it,

just toasted,

just simmered,

so they were well when it dawned.”

(Tedlock 1996,125)

Text: Tedlock, D., 1996. *Popol Vuh: The Definitive Edition of the Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life and the Glories of Gods and Kings*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Figures: Kerr, J. *Maya Vase Database: Kerr Number 1561, added 01-04-1998*. Digital image, [www.mayavase.com](http://www.mayavase.com), accessed 2009-2013.

Kerr, J. *Maya Vase Database: Kerr Number 3831, added 25-01-1999*. Digital image, [www.mayavase.com](http://www.mayavase.com), accessed 2009-2013.

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The Trials of the Popol Vuh Hero Twins Displayed on Classic  
Maya Polychrome Painted Pottery

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## Preface

My thesis will be an iconographic study of Classic Maya ceramics. Pictorial polychrome pottery is the primary source of Classic Maya painting that is left to us. The pottery discussed in this thesis is of a particular kind. These wares were exclusively for the elite and were in itself a symbol of prestige. In the sixth century we find the appearance of unique painting styles, the establishment of elite workshops and works that were so exceptional that they could be linked to specific painters. The painters of these vessels were among the most highly educated people in Maya society. They were educated in Maya history, science, ideology and cosmology and they also learned how to read and write (Reents-Budet 1994, 4-6). The elite painted pottery is therefore a fine source to get more information about Maya mythology.

A large amount of Classic Maya vessels originate from the illegal activities of tomb robbers. They were therefore ignored for a long time, because Maya scholars did not want to encourage robbery. Besides that, it was also thought that texts on pottery were meaningless and were therefore left unstudied. Michael D. Coe was the first to elaborately study the themes displayed on painted vases and the accompanying hieroglyphic texts (Coe 1973, 1978, 1983). Coe discovered that many of the painted scenes depicted the Hero Twin's trials in the Underworld and many other tales from the Popol Vuh (*Popol Wuj* in modern K'iche'), the sacred "Book of council" of the K'iche' Maya.

The Popol Vuh is the creation story of the Maya. The document was written down sometime between 1554 and 1558, by authors that stayed anonymous (Christensen 2007, 37). It is commonly believed that the story of the Popol Vuh was actually much older and might once have been written in codex form. The opening chapters of the Popol Vuh describe the separation of the sky and the sea and the creation of the earth. It also retells the attempts of the creator gods to form humans. This creation narrative is interrupted by the story of the heroic deeds of the twins Junajpu and Xb'alanq'e<sup>1</sup>. This second part tells how these Hero Twins defeated Wuqub' Kaqix ("Seven Macaw"), a large anthropomorphic bird deity that had to be vanquished for his false claim to be the sun and the moon (Tedlock 1996, 75-88). The Popol Vuh then tells the story of the father and uncle of the Hero Twins, who were sacrificed by the Lords of the Underworld. The Hero Twins also end up in the Underworld where they are tested by the Underworld Lords in a series of trials. Incredible tricksters as they are the Hero Twins survive all the trials and defeat the Underworld Lords, Jun Kame and Wuqub' Kame. The Hero Twins then ascend to the sky and become the sun and the moon (Tedlock 1996, 89-142).

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<sup>1</sup> The original spelling of Junajpu is *Hunahpu* and of Xb'alanq'e is *Xbalanque*, but I will uphold the new spelling.

In my thesis I will compare passages from the Popol Vuh to Classic Maya pictorial polychrome pottery. There are vessels that have already been identified as displaying scenes from the Popol Vuh. But there has not been a specific research concerning this matter. Specifically it will be a study about how the Hero Twins are displayed on ceramics. Features of the Hero Twins have been identified by other Mayanists, such as Michael D. Coe. It is my intention to do the same at first, describe the important features of the Hero Twins by which they can be identified. With the help of these features I will investigate how they are displayed on ceramics. By an intense study into the ways that the Hero Twins are displayed on Maya ceramics it will be possible to tell more about this important Maya creation story. But even more interesting would be to find parts displayed on ceramics that are not mentioned in the Popol Vuh itself. It is likely that this creation story has been orally transmitted for a long time, thus it would not be surprising that there are parts from this creation story that are lost to us and my goal is to retrieve these parts from the images displayed on pottery.

I believe that pottery can give us much more information about Maya society than it has done so far. The Maya were very adept in portraying stories in a very condensed form. Also the Maya world was full of signs that carried multiple symbolic meanings. Justin Kerr wrote in his article *A Fishy Story*:

“For many years I have been seeing what I believe are abstract Maya concepts, condensed down to a specific image or group of images. On examining these images closely, we find that the Maya, as did many other people, use parts of complex imagery that would express a concrete idea. These images may be as small as one or two glyphs to express the primary standard sequence, or parts of other images that carry the message” (Kerr 2003).

I agree with him that the Maya used complex imagery to express certain ideas and even stories in a very abbreviated form. By an intense study of Maya pictorial pottery I believe it is possible to retrieve much more information about the signs and symbols displayed in the pottery scenes.

### *The Maya Vase Database*

The main source for the Maya vases in this study is the Maya Vase Database, an archive of rollout photographs created by Justin Kerr. This database is accessible online through the site [www.mayavase.com](http://www.mayavase.com). Click on the Maya Vase Database link on this homepage and it will redirect you to the search page where specific vessels can be found by entering their unique Kerr Number. The first attempt by Justin Kerr to make a flat picture of the design on a Maya vase was done by a paste composition. Kerr photographed a vase in different sections, matched these together and

pasted them down to create a 'rolled-out' vase. In 1973 Kerr made the photographs for Michael D. Coe's *The Maya Scribe and His World*. For this work he made a couple of still photographs of a vase and then had them drawn by an artist. This was a rather expensive method and it did not allow him to study the original artist's own hand and style. He knew that that he had to find a way to make a rollout photographs in one step and for that he needed a peripheral camera. When he could not acquire one, he made one himself. Simply explained he put a vase on a turntable in front of an adjusted camera. By turning the surface of the vase, in the same speed as the film is moving through the camera, it was possible to make a rollout photograph of the cylindrical object (Kerr 1978). Justin Kerr has now photographed more than 1900 Maya vases and made them available on [www.mayavase.com](http://www.mayavase.com).

### Orthography

Since the very beginning of Maya studies the spelling of the Maya words in our modern alphabet has been a problem. This has led to numerous different spellings of Mayan words. A good example is the spelling used for the word 'lord' or 'king' which appears at least in five different forms in Maya studies: ahau, ahaw, ajau, ajaw, and 'ajaw. During the 1980s an official alphabet was created by the Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala (ALMG) to create order, coherency and uniformity. However, although many scholars have adopted this new alphabet in their studies, the actual application of it is still done in various different ways. In this thesis the new alphabet and new orthography will be followed for Maya words, except for place names which have been incorporated into English, those will remain to be written in the old fashion. The reason being that these names are well established into the geographical vocabulary, such as maps and road signs. Another exception are b's, which according to the new orthography should all be glottalized (chab' rather than chab), but since the glottalization makes no difference to the meaning of the words with b, this will not be used in this thesis. Also, accents placed on Maya words will be omitted, because Maya words are pronounced with the stress placed on the last syllable. Thus Spanish-derived accents are removed, writing for example Tonina instead of Toniná. Personal names of Maya rulers, gods, deities and figures from the Popol Vuh will not be written in italics. Although these are Mayan words and most often have an underlying meaning, they are used to refer to a specific being and thus are treated as proper names.

In this thesis long-standing epigraphic conventions will be used:

1) Transliterating Maya words in **boldface**

- Syllabic sign in **lowercase bold**
- Logograms in **UPPERCASE BOLD**

- 2) Transcribing Maya words in *italics*
  - Reconstructed sounds are represented in [square brackets]
- 3) Translated Maya words in “quotes”

The following example is to indicate how the above mentioned stages function:



- 1) BALAM
- 2) ba[h]lam
- 3) “jaguar”

# Chapter 1: The ancient and contemporary Maya

The Maya were once a thriving civilization, with grand cities that supported thousands of people. The ancient Maya cities were built up out of impressive temples and pyramids for the gods, palaces for the rulers and elites, and grand plazas for public performances. The cities were surrounded by simple commoners houses made of loam and straw roofs. The religion and ideology of the ancient Maya was significant and complex, with a rich amount of creation myths and maintained by the performance of countless rituals. In the aftermath of the conquest men believed that this civilization was completely wiped out and their customs and rituals forever lost. But it has become more and more apparent that the Maya still thrive today. Albeit in smaller numbers and their practices and religion somewhat Westernized. There are ancient Maya rituals that have survived through time and that are still being performed in Maya villages today.

## 1.1 The ancient Maya civilization

In many areas of Mesoamerica people were living in agricultural villages well by 2000 B.C. (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 157-160). Mesoamerica is a term used to refer to civilizations that established themselves within a defined geographical area. These civilizations shared linguistic and cultural features; such as, the construction of stepped pyramids, the use of a 260-day and 365-day calendar, pictographic and hieroglyphic writing systems, the use of rubber and bark paper, etc. (Kirchhoff 1943).



Figure 1.1: Map showing the culture area of Mesoamerica (Covarrubias 2007).

Mesoamerica covers the area from approximately northern Mexico to Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and northern Costa Rica (figure 1.1). Multiple civilizations flourished in this area, such as the Olmec, Zapotec, Mixtec, and the Maya. The specific area that the ancient Maya occupied included the modern countries of Guatemala, Belize, the western parts of Honduras and El Salvador, and the Mexican states Campeche, Quintana Roo, Yucatan, and the eastern parts of Chiapas and Tabasco (figure 1.2). The environment of this area varies greatly, from rough, steep mountains to broad plain areas. Maya scholars often divide the area into three geographical zones, the Pacific coastal plain, the highlands and the lowlands (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 26-30). As can be deduced from the name, the Pacific Coastal Plain covers the stretch of land along the Pacific, from the Mexican state Chiapas, through southern Guatemala and into El Salvador. The area is excellent for agriculture and thus it is here that we find the first permanent settlements. This is also the area where we see the first signs of a flourishing Maya civilization (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 31-34). To the north of the coastal plain we find the highlands, a mountainous area. Although the valleys in the highlands have fertile soils, they are often disturbed by volcanic eruptions and earthquakes (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 34-35). The lowlands comprises the largest of the three areas. The area extends over northern Guatemala, Belize, and the Yucatan Peninsula. Almost all of the terrain lies below 800 m in elevation and its most characterizing feature is the tropical forest. This tropical forest provides a wide range of resources and houses many animals (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 41-44). Of these animals the jaguar was deemed very powerful by the Maya. The jaguar is one of the most portrayed animals by the Maya and its pelt, tails and paws were considered as valuable materials. The pelt covered thrones, was worn by rulers and hanged in elite buildings as curtains.

The Pre-Columbian history of the Maya can be subdivided into three periods: the Preclassic period (ca. 2000 B.C.-A.D. 250), the Classic period (ca. A.D. 250-900/1100) and the Postclassic period (ca. A.D. 900/1100-1500), which can each be further divided into period such as Early, Middle, Late and Terminal (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 155-156).

#### *The Preclassic period (ca. 2000 B.C.-A.D. 250)*

The Preclassic period is marked by the widespread appearance of agriculture. In Mesoamerica the most common domesticated plants are maize, chili, squash and beans. In this period we also find the first domesticated animals, being turkey and dog (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 160-163). Another marker of the Preclassic period is the appearance of pottery. Pottery is the result of the firing of clay. Pottery vessels are quite difficult to transport and the emergence of pottery is therefore an indicator for permanent settlements. The earliest pottery in Mesoamerica has been found on the Pacific Coast of Chiapas, Guatemala and western El Salvador and constitutes the Barra phase (ca. 1850-1650 B.C.).

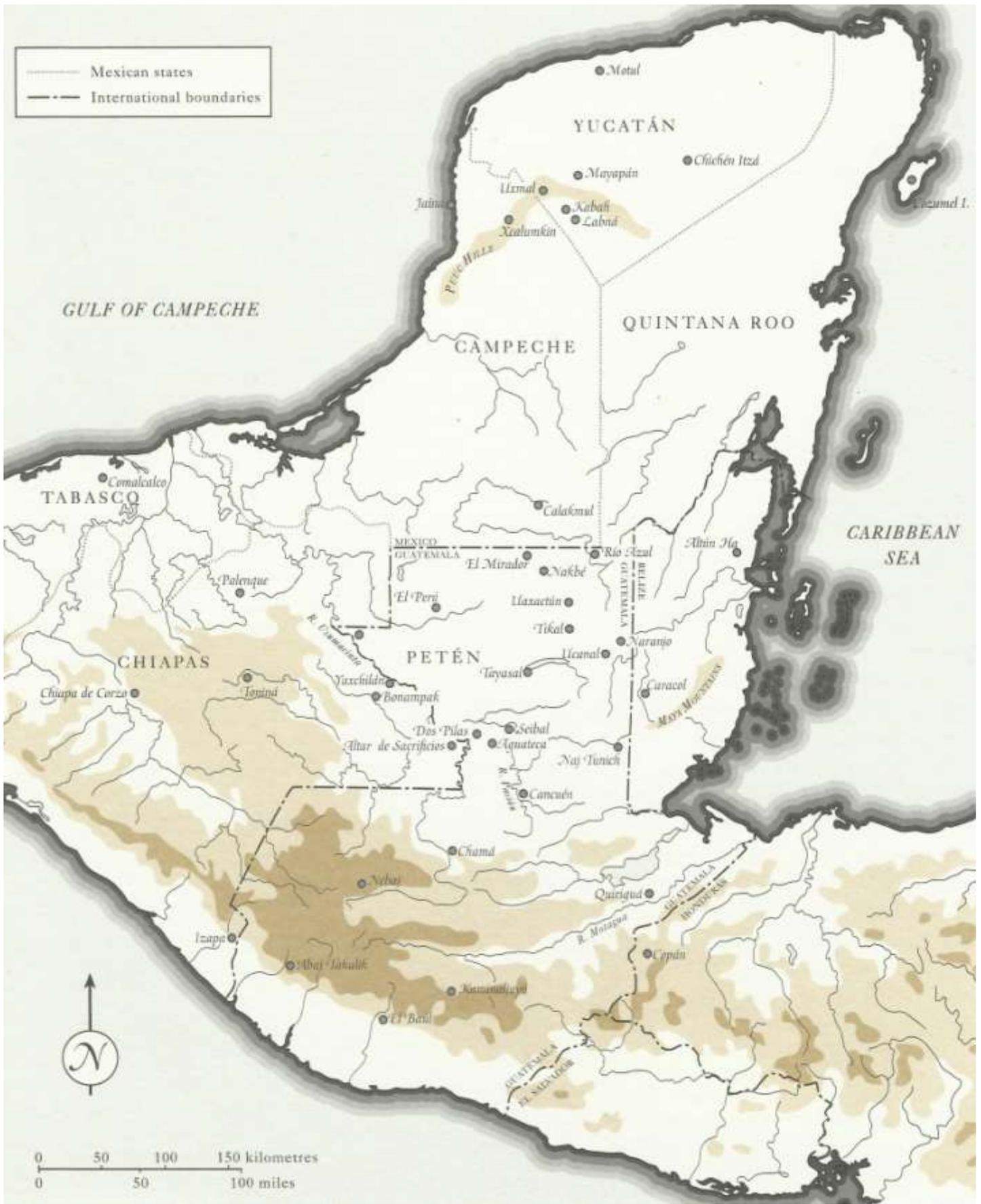


Figure 1.2: Map of the Maya area (Coe and Kerr 1998, 28).

The ceramics from the Barra phase are quite simple and seem to be derived from the older tradition of making containers out of gourds. The following Locona phase (ca. 1650-1500 B.C.) displays more complexity in the pottery and in the Ocos phase (ca. 1500-1200 B.C.) there appears more diversity (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 160-161). The earliest Maya pottery consists of basic forms most suitable for its function; such as the large, neckless jars for water storage and perhaps food products, and simple open flatbased bowls for serving food and drinks. These cooking and storage vessels were unslipped. Some wares were decorated by either punctuations, appliqué, incising, fluting or painting (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 161). In the Middle Preclassic period (ca. 1000-500 B.C.) we find a variety of distinctive ceramic traditions in the lowlands, indicating that colonization was undertaken by different populations, quite possibly distinct ethnic and linguistic groups (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 177). Later in the Middle Preclassic period these distinctive ceramic traditions disappear and are replaced by a more uniform ceramic tradition, the Mamom (ca. 700-400 B.C.) (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 202). New forms of decoration in the Middle Preclassic include polychrome painting (black, white, red, and yellow paints applied after firing), bichrome slipping, and the beginnings of fired-resist decoration, also known as the Usulután tradition (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 181).

In the Gulf coast lowlands of Mexico a complex society called the Olmecs already established itself in the Middle Preclassic period. Two major Olmec sites were La Venta and San Lorenzo. The Olmec displayed a specific style in monumental architecture, pottery, figures, jades, and other objects that can be found throughout Mesoamerica. For many years therefore men assumed that the Olmec were the source for all civilization in Mesoamerica and was called the “mother culture” (Covarrubias 1944). Further archaeological research has indicated that there were however many other societies that were flourishing at the same time of the Olmec society. Instead of a one-sided cultural influence it is now believed that these early complex societies held close interactions and influenced each other in a two-way stream of cultural exchange (Flannery and Marcus 2000).

Village life slowly evolved in the Maya area. Men became highly dependent on agricultural yields, thus the need arose to use other agricultural methods. Intensive methods such as terracing, raised fields, and irrigation. The agricultural diet of the ancient Maya was supplemented by wild-food, obtained from fishing, hunting, and gathering. Most hunted animals were deer, tapir, agoutis, rabbits, monkeys, and birds (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 638-648). Communities continued to grow leading to the appearance of social stratification, with communities falling under the authority of a single ruler (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 80-82). The appearance of monumental constructions; such as plazas, causeways, canals, reservoirs, and huge platforms at many Middle Preclassic sites, indicates that rulers were able to mobilize large numbers of peoples and efficiently organize their labor activities. To mobilize the people it was necessary to change the ideological system. During the Preclassic period the supernatural belief system becomes more commonly portrayed and

supernatural symbols, that were shared throughout Mesoamerica, appear. Belief in supernatural gods; as rain deities, maize deities, and earth deities formed a crucial source of power for rulers. Maya rulers were believed to have the ability to communicate with these gods (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 181-182). Maya rulers were called *ajaw* "lord" and their greatest task was to uphold the cosmological order. The Maya ruler is often portrayed as the center of the world, the one that held everything together. A ruler achieved this by conducting rituals, which were believed to be fundamental to obtain the necessities of life: water, food, and security (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 75-77). A ruler also gained authority by being a successful warrior and a strong military leader. Extending once territory through warfare allowed a polity to grow and could provide a ruler control over critical resources. Resources that were not locally available and could only be obtained by trade, gave a fundamental power basis and an economical advantage to a ruler (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 82-93). At the end of the Middle Preclassic period (ca. 400 B.C.) we find the first examples of carved monuments that display rulers in a position of authority. These monuments were a form of public proclamation of their legitimacy to rulership. The accompaniment of texts in later periods allowed the ruler to record the time period of his reign, his achievements, and connections to powerful ancestors and gods. These monuments show rulers wearing elaborate costumes and often carry symbols of rulership (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 182-183). The increase in the power and wealth of Maya rulers is further identifiable from the elaborate tombs and funerary temples that were being constructed in the Late Preclassic period. These tombs were filled with precious funerary gifts, such as pottery, carved jade, incense burners and stingray spine bloodletters (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 250). The Late Preclassic period (ca. 400 B.C.-100 A.D.) is marked by the emergence of what is often called civilization (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 223). Accompanied by the development of a distinct Maya art style and the Maya writing system. There are a few monuments in the Valley of Oaxaca and the Gulf Coast that display hieroglyphs dated from before the ones so far found in the Maya area. It is possible that the knowledge of writing was imported into the Maya area, but it may have well been a local development. The Maya writing system did however turn out to be the most complex system in the pre-Columbian New World and was based on borrowed glyphs from neighboring systems and locally created glyphs (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 223-224).

The city of Kaminaljuyu dominated the highlands in the Preclassic period. It was established in the largest and richest basin, the Valley of Guatemala. During the Middle Preclassic the site shows a dramatic growth in population and construction of monumental architecture. Through the construction of enormous irrigation canals, that subtracted water from Lake Miraflores to the sites fields, Kaminaljuyu became the largest and most prosperous highland capital. Centers such as Kaminaljuyu became important for ceremonial, economic and political activities. Also these centers often lay in central places ideal for the acquisition and export of minerals and precious items.

Kaminaljuyu lay close to a major obsidian quarry and the only known sources of Mesoamerican jadeite, which all added wealth to the city and its rulers. Jadeite is a variety of jade stone and was valued to be the most precious material by the ancient Maya. Unfortunately the city declined during the end of the Preclassic as lake Miraflores began to dry up and the irrigation system silted in (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 194-197, 249).

By far the largest capital in the Maya lowlands by the Late Preclassic was El Mirador, Guatemala. The site is marked by massive architectural complexes, such as triadic pyramids (a dominant structure flanked by two smaller buildings, all on one basal platform) (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 251-253). It is likely that El Mirador was the capital of a large polity during the Late Preclassic, considering its size and innovations, and by that represents the first Maya lowland state (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 262-263). At the end of the Preclassic period we find many sites being abandoned and a decline apparently appeared throughout much of the highlands and along the Pacific coast. Research has indicated that this decline might be attributed to the eruption of the Ilopango volcano in central El Salvador. Sites in close proximity to the volcano were abandoned shortly after its eruption and research has now shown that due to the ash fall the area within a 100 km radius of Ilopango was uninhabitable for about a century. But the overall decline of the Maya area at the end of the Preclassic period cannot be solely explained by the Ilopango eruption. The southern Maya area was already in decline possibly because of shifts in trade routes, lower agricultural yields, and the migration of new populations. The Teotihuacan state clearly took advantage of the declining power in the Maya area. Teotihuacan, a state in the Valley of Mexico, was a great capital that rose to power in the Preclassic period (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 279-281).

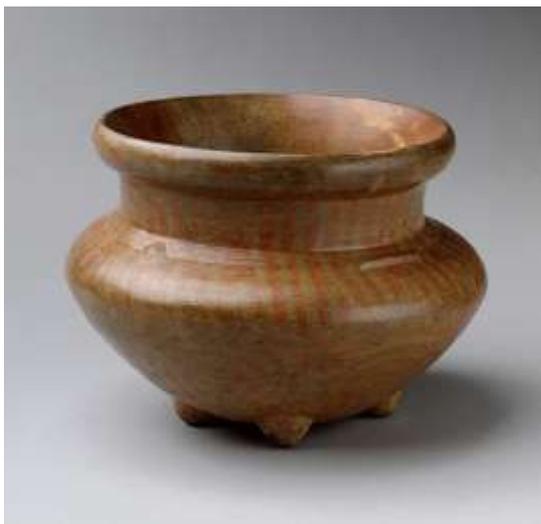


Figure 1.3: Usulután ware from Guatemala or El Salvador (The Metropolitan Museum of Art Cat. No. 1982.207.5).

During the Late Preclassic there are two dominant ceramic traditions in the Maya area. In the highlands we find the Providencia/Miraflores tradition and in the lowlands the Chicanel tradition. Both traditions were an elaboration of the Middle Preclassic pottery. The Chicanel tradition was dominated by the so-called Sierra Red wares. In the southeastern Maya area there is an abundance of wares decorated with Usulután “resist” lines (figure 1.3). These lines were created by the application of a resistant substance to the surface of vessels, which melted away during firing thus leaving lighter-colored lines on the surface. These Usulután wares were created at several

southern sites and traded widely, appearing in many Maya elite tombs. The pottery was so valued that some cities even began to make imitations of it (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 244-245).

### The Classic period (ca. A.D. 250-900/1100)

The Classic period is the period in which Maya civilization flourished and reached its apogee. The period is marked by the appearance of magnificent monumental structures and spectacular crafts. A great amount of stelas were created in the Classic period depicting Maya rulers in spectacular outfits and recording important achievements of their lives. Most of the inscriptions that have survived till this day are from the Classic period. Many of these included Long Count dates and it is therefore that we are able to make accurate reconstructions of the events of the Classic period. The Long Count is part of the calendar system that the Mayas used. The Maya had multiple cyclical day counts, but the 260-day count, the 365-day year and the 52-year Calendar Round were the ones most commonly used. The 260-day count, also called the Tzolk'in, consists of the combination of the numbers one to thirteen with one of 20 named days. It will thus take 260 days before a day name will reoccur with the same number. The 365-day year, also called the Haab, is formed by 18 months each consisting of 20 days and an extra "month" consisting of five days. The combination of the 260-day count and the 365-day year formed another calendrical cycle, consisting of 52 years of 365 days each. Because the same date would appear every 52 years the Maya accompanied the Calendar Round with a Long Count date. The combination of the Long Count and Calendar Round provided the Maya with the option to record dates from far back into the past, but also years into the future. The Maya used the calendar for both practical and esoteric purposes. They used a vigesimal numerical system, which means that they counted by the twenties, four hundreds, eight thousands etc., instead of the common decimal system whereby men counts by tens, hundreds, and thousands. The writing of numbers was done by a so-called bar-and-dot system. The dot (●) had a value of one and a bar (—) a value of five (Sharer and Traxler, 100-112).

In the Early Classic period (ca. A.D. 250-600) the Maya cities continue to grow (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 287). Especially in the southern and central lowlands the statelevel political organization expanded. There is much contact between Teotihuacan and the Maya area in this period, visible by the appearance of distinct Teotihuacan pottery. An especially close alliance formed between Kaminaljuyu and Teotihuacan. Around A.D. 400 Kaminaljuyu experienced a major revival of its fortune, brought on by new trading alliances. For about two centuries, Teotihuacan dominated the Maya area, but after ca. A.D. 600 the trade contacts diminished. Teotihuacan itself shows signs of destruction around ca. A.D. 550 followed by a population decline and abandonment of the great city. Kaminaljuyu, however, continued to prosper (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 290-293).

Polychrome painted pottery becomes a widespread phenomenon in the Early Classic period. The most common style is red and black painting on an orange or cream background. Monochrome wares mostly display a black, cream or orange polish. Motifs are painted in bands and consist of repetitive geometric patterns. In the lowlands we find a pottery tradition in the Early Classic that is classified as Tzakol and can be identified by glossy surfaces, orange slips and thinner vessel walls (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 288).

In the lowlands the most characteristic aspect marking the Early Classic was the emergence of many independent states and spectacular cities, in both size and architecture. The Classic Maya cities differed greatly in size and organization. Throughout time there has never been one uniform Maya state, there were always multiple centers of power. In the Classic period we see that the size and power of individual Maya states changed continually. Not all rulers had equal power, some kings were referred to as vassals (*sajal*) of a more powerful king. The difference in power led to a lot of interpolity competition. Warfare became an important means for states to expand resources, labor and prestige. The most destructive form of warfare was for a ruler to conquer and control an enemy polity in which case it was necessary to capture the ruler of a city. Many Classic period texts account the taking of captives as an important achievement of rulers. Prisoners taken in war were often brought to the victorious city where they were bound, humiliated by stripping them of their clothes, abused, and either used as slaves or sacrificed (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 299-301).

One of the most fierce power struggles took place in the Peten region between Tikal and Calakmul. During the Classic period they continually waged war against each other. Tikal was one of the largest of all Maya sites. Its origins lay in the Late Preclassic during which it might have been a subordinate to El Mirador. However as El Mirador declined Tikal rose to power. Stela 29 of Tikal portrays a ruler wearing royal regalia and holding a double-headed serpent bar, one of the most important insignia of



Figure 1.4: Tikal emblem glyph (Kettunen and Helmke 2011, 45).

Maya kings. On this stela we find the Tikal emblem glyph (figure 1.4; a glyph that names a specific city or lineage), which might be the best evidence that Tikal was by this time an independent polity. Stela 29 is also the first dated lowland monument and bears a Long Count date of 8.12.14.8.15 (A.D. 292). Up to about A.D. 500 Tikal continued to grow and prosper, but there were many rivalries in the lowlands and Tikal became to be constantly in war against different cities (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 310-333).

The city of Calakmul in Campeche, Mexico, was in size and power equal to Tikal and became its chief rival. Calakmul formed so many alliances that it eventually had Tikal nearly surrounded. In A.D. 562 a war was raised against Tikal by Calakmul and Tikal was defeated (Sharer and Traxler 358-371). For over a century Tikal's history remains obscure. Most of the historical records present at Tikal were destroyed and no new ones were commissioned. Tikal did however remain to exist only its riches

and power were diminished and the city probably became under Calakmul supervision. In the meantime Calakmul continued to thrive and prosper (Sharer and Traxler 379-387). Under the guidance of the new ruler, Jasaw Chan K'awil I Tikal again revitalized. This ruler restored the cities glory by renewing construction and placing new monuments. His next move was to strike against his great enemy Calakmul, which he defeated in A.D. 695 (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 390-400). Calakmul remained in existence albeit severely diminished in power. The son of Jasaw Chan K'awil I, Yik'in Chan K'awil defeated Calakmul again in A.D. 736 (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 400-403). The latest mention of a Calakmul ruler is on a monument that commemorated an event in A.D. 909. After that the Calakmul rulers disappeared (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 415). Tikal had by this time also lost its greatness and its realm had broken up into smaller polities. The latest monument from Tikal dates to A.D. 869 (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 417-421).

In the western lowlands the city of Palenque dominated for much of the Late Classic period. Palenque has yielded a great deal information on Maya cosmology. It has a rich amount of monumental records of dynastic successions, but also of creation mythology. In fact it has given an unique insight on how myth and history were combined and used by the Maya rulers (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 451-455). Palenque is well-known for its greatest ruler K'inich Janaab Pakal I and his burial tomb. K'inich Janaab' Pakal I (shortened to Pakal) ruled the city from A.D. 615-683 and its most famous construction was the Temple of the Inscriptions, which records Palenque's dynastic history up to the time of the inauguration of Pakal's first born son. The tomb of Pakal lay hidden below this temple and remained undiscovered till the mid-twentieth century. The tomb contained the bones of four men and one woman as sacrifices. Inside the burial chamber itself stood a colossal sarcophagus, its sides carved with portraits of Pakal's ancestors and records of the kings of Palenque before Pakal's rule. The sarcophagus lid is undoubtedly the most magnificent object in the room, displaying Pakal himself in the transition from life to death. Inside the sarcophagus lay the skeletal remains of Pakal. These were covered with jade beads, a disintegrated jade mosaic mask and other offerings. Elaborate tombs for Maya rulers were a characteristic of the Classic period in which most rulers were buried in burial chambers with many funerary offerings, such as jadeite beads, pottery vessels and sacrificed humans (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 453). During Pakal's rule Palenque emerged as a major power and expanded much of its authority over the surrounding region (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 462). The city of Tonina apparently took over as main capital in the lower Usumacinta region after some successful defeats of Palenque. Although Tonina eventually also declined, its kings managed to hold their position longer than in any other polity. It is from Tonina that we have the latest known Long Count date, 10.4.0.0.0 (A.D. 909) on Monument 101 (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 472-476).

In the Late Classic period the Tepeu pottery tradition defines the lowlands. This tradition is clearly different from the preceding Tzakol tradition especially by the disappearance of Mexican-style cylindrical tripods. The Tepeu tradition is commonly known for its fine polychrome pottery, most often produced by elite artists. The tradition is divided into two periods: Tepeu 1 (ca. A.D. 550-700) is characterized by black and red on orange polychromes and the most common forms are round-sided bowls and large tripod plates, Tepeu 2 (ca. A.D. 700-800) is characterized by finer decorations on brighter orange and cream polychromes. Decorations are found on plates and flaring-wall bowls, but the finest painted examples are cylindrical vases. The polychrome cylindrical vases were also produced in the northern Maya highlands and in the southeastern region at Copan. In the Late Classic we also find finely modeled and painted incensarios (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 378).

### *The Terminal Classic (800-900/1100)*

After 800 the monumental architecture portrays a dramatic decline. By the ninth century texts on stone monuments stop to appear, monumental construction ceases at most sites and the manufacture and distribution of many prestige and ritual goods disappeared. These profound changes in the Maya area define the Terminal Classic period beginning about 800 and its end varies from region to region (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 499). In the central and southern lowlands the changes were most dramatic. As described before rivalries and power struggles came to a height in this region already during the Classic and Late Classic period. These power struggles took their toll on some cities already by 800, such as Dos Pilas in the Petexbatun region. In most of the southern and central lowlands the great capitals of the Classic period had vanished by 900. The southern Maya lowlands were slowly abandoned. The collapse of the Maya civilization is still debated, but probably caused by a combination of invasions, wars between the Maya states, and degradation of the economy and milieu. There are evidences of deforestation, soil erosion, and drought, which diminished agricultural yields. Population decreased and around the tenth century there was only a fraction left of the Maya civilization. In some instances site palaces were reoccupied by commoners or outsiders, but this was only for short times as eventually archaeological record of human occupations vanishes for most Maya heartland sites (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 499-513). Within 100 to 200 years the population of the central and southern lowlands diminished by 90 percent. Many people must have died from the conflicts and famine that existed in the area, but other also fled to either the Caribbean coast to east, to the highlands in the south, or the Yucatan peninsula in the north (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 525). Many Maya capitals experienced a loss of control of their territory and a breakdown of centralized authority. This was probably led on by overpopulation in the

Late Classic period, which must have weakened the confidence in Maya rules and in some cases led to a revolt against those in power. Polities broke down into a series of autonomous units, but many regions remained inhabited for several generations before they were completely abandoned. There was no sudden catastrophe and the Maya Classic “collapse” was actually a gradual process that extended over a century or more. The process of decline did not take place simultaneously in all areas nor did all regions experienced the same combination of causes (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 502-504). There were a number of cities that adapted to the changing conditions and were able to survive and retain their riches for some time. Caracol for instance continued to thrive until the end of the Terminal Classic, but was also abandoned between ca. 1000 and 1050. Lamanai, a polity in Belize, even maintained its position and power up to the time of the Spanish conquest (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 520-521).

The process of adaptation and revival spread to the north. The Puuc region in the north western Yucatan peninsula is the area were multiple sites thrived during the Terminal classic. The largest of several polity capitals was Uxmal which likely extended its authority by warfare. The dominance of the city was apparently short lived. There is only one king historically known to us and his reign is only mentioned from 895 to 907 (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 533-535). This pattern of rapid growth and decline was probably typical for Puuc sites as we also see it at the city of Sayil. This site was first settled around 800 and declined around 950 and was already abandoned by ca. 1000. So far there have not been any proved explanations of the rapid decline in the Puuc region, but it was likely a combination of ecological failure and destruction by warfare (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 544-548). Chichen Itza was another powerful and successful Terminal Classic Maya state in Yucatan. It is believed that beginning in 800 a group of new people arrived in Yucatan, which were called the Itza, but we do not know where they originated from. These were the people that rose to power and turned Chichen Itza into a great capital (Sharer and Traxler 200, 554-560). The success of the Chichen Itza state can be ascribed to a combination of factors. First of all military expansion created the Itza state. Secondly control of production and trade of commodities helped the Itza to hold their dominant position. Its success can be further attributed to a more flexible and stable political system. There seems to be less emphasis on the achievements of individual kings. The usual stela portraying divine rulers are absent and instead it seems that rule at Chichen Itza was shared by a number of elite lords. Also a different state religion was promoted, based on a new central divinity named K’uk’ulkan, the feathered serpent. A cult that spread through most of Mesoamerica and Mexico, where this principal divinity was known as Quetzalcoatl (Sharer and Traxler 2006,569-582).

The domestic pottery in the Terminal Classic period changed relatively little, but the polychrome pictorial ceramics decreased both in frequency and quality. The distress and population decrease of the Maya capitals in this period caused a lesser demand of pottery used for rituals and

feasts. Also we can imagine that the specialized, elite-sponsored workshop where this pottery was produced declined because of less support from the elite. Throughout the Maya area a new type of pottery appeared that favored mass production and more efficient distribution. Plumbate ware is the most distinctive ware of the Terminal Classic period which was produced along the Pacific coast of southern Guatemala, but traded throughout and beyond the Maya area. It was the only known glazed pottery in pre-Columbian America and was elaborately decorated by modeling and carving. Another specific type of pottery was the Fine Orange Ware, produced in the lowland state of Tabasco from a fine-grained clay. This pottery was also traded throughout the Maya area and often displays militaristic scenes. In Yucatan we find skillful made slateware characterized by a waxy gray to brownish slip and often painted in a pale, gray tint (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 501).

#### Postclassic (ca. 900/1100-1500)

The beginning of the Postclassic period is mostly set at ca. 900, but it actually varies per region depending on the end of the Terminal Classic. The Postclassic marked a period of complex changes. The Maya area was influenced by Central Mexican states and migrant peoples, such as the Pipil from Central Mexico and the Chontal from the west coast of the Yucatan Peninsula (Sharer and Traxler 589-591). At around 1050 the power and prestige of Chichen Itza began to decline. Some of the sites monuments show destruction which might indicate that the end of Chichen Itza was caused by conquest. It is also possible that the destruction was caused by looting of the site in later periods, after it had already lost its power and authority. The cities downfall remains unclear but was probably a combination of series of factors like those that also caused the collapse of Classic period polities. Chichen Itza was never completely abandoned and a small population still inhabited the city by the times the Spanish arrived. Mayapan succeeded Chichen Itza as the dominant power of Yucatan. The transition course is not completely clear, but it might be that Mayapan conquered Chichen Itza. Mayapan was apparently founded by a group of Itza that originated from Chichen Itza (Sharer and Traxler 591-598). The rule of Mayapan was shared among several elite families which originated from different places. A conflict between two of these ruling houses eventually led to the downfall of Mayapan. The city remained occupied by a small population till an epidemic forced the last residents to leave the city shortly before the Spanish conquest (1480-1500). After the fall of Mayapan the Maya area fell apart into small independent states. Some eighteen petty states existed at the time of the Spanish conquest and these were constantly at war with each other (Sharer and Traxler 601-603).

Monochrome utilitarian pottery dominated the Postclassic period. Fine Orange and Plumbate wares disappeared in the Late Postclassic, but mass production continued to be the norm in Yucatan. In the Mayapan polity we find elaborately decorated deity-effigy incensarios (Sharer and Traxler 590).

In the Postclassic period we find that instead of one ruler, power was now shared among a number of elites. A new economy strategy with lower production and transportation costs allowed the “middle class” to grow larger and wealthier and prosperity in general became higher closing the gap between elite and the rest of society. Population numbers grew in the Maya lowlands and in many areas of the highlands. Even the central lowlands were revived to some degree. In the southern highlands we find the K’iche’ Maya expanding their state by conquest and political consolidation. The Kaqchikel state was its biggest rival, but their struggle for power was interrupted by the arrival of the Spanish (Sharer and Traxler, 627-628). In other parts of Mesoamerica we see an increase in population, founding of new cities and the rise of powerful civilizations as the Mexica and Aztec.

### Conquest (1502-1697)

The Spanish invasion of Mexico in 1519 led to a few encounters between the Maya and the Spanish, but it was Hernán Cortés who first passed through the central and southern Maya lowlands in 1524 (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 757-762). The arrival of the Spanish meant a drastic change of Mesoamerican lives. When the Spaniards arrived in the New World in the sixteenth century they came across civilizations which stunned and amazed them. The different cultures they encountered surprised them with their knowledge of writing, calendrics and astronomy; their vast cities and stunning sculptures; their splendor of minerals, such as gold and silver; and their political organization, and agricultural technology. Unfortunately, even though the Spaniards were taken at back at first they still managed to eradicate a vast number of these new found civilizations. The peoples of the Americas proved to be less competent in the art of war, but even more devastating was their lack of resistance against European diseases. The Spaniards possessed firearms and cavalry making them superior on the battlefield. Spanish also took advantage of the existing rivalries in Mesoamerica and were joined by many local groups. In the highlands for example the Kaqchikel joined Pedro de Alvarado to defeat their enemies, the K’iche (Sharer and Traxler 757-763). Not long after the Kaqchikel turned against the Spanish and tried to drive them from their lands, but they were defeated. In 1527 the Spanish conquered the highlands, establishing a new Spanish capital now known as Ciudad Vieja. Yucatan took another twenty years to colonize and was invaded under the command of Francisco de Montejo and conquered by his son (Sharer and Traxler 766-767). It took the

Spanish almost 200 years to subdue the Maya. Most of the Maya area was conquered by the mid-sixteenth century, but the Itza of the Peten hold out for another 150 years.

Many Maya crafts were destroyed directly by the Spanish, such as the burning of the codices and idols. Screenfold Books, or "codices", were still widely used at the time of the Spanish conquest.

Codices are made of the inner bark of a tree of the fig family. The bark was beaten and then processed into a thick, bark cloth or bark paper. This paper was folded back and forth like a screen and both sides of the bark paper were covered with a coating of either plaster or gesso, or a mixture of both. These coated pages were then covered with writing and pictures (Coe and Kerr 1998, 143-145). Only four have survived the humid weather and the Spanish bonfires of the sixteenth century: the Dresden, Madrid, Paris, and Grolier codex. The authenticity of the Grolier codex is unfortunately questioned by many Maya scholars. Tests have indicated that the bark paper is indeed pre-Columbian, but there are scholars who believe the paper might have been repainted and thus a forgery (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 129). The Dresden and Paris codices have been dated to the Late Postclassic, while it is believed that the Madrid codex is post-Conquest in date (Coe and Kerr 1998, 175-181). The codices are divinatory almanacs and deal mostly with calendrical and ritual matters. The information in the codices is not portrayed in a narrative mode and although there is a lot of information to be gained of ancient Maya gods, rituals and cosmology it pertains little of Maya mythology.

Indirectly the Spanish presence also destroyed many Maya knowledge and beliefs. As the Maya population dwindled down knowledge of the script, calendar, cosmology, deities, rituals, and history was lost. As the practitioners of the traditional crafts began to disappear so did the crafts themselves vanish. We therefore find that by the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century there was nobody left to read the ancient Maya script.

## **1.2 The rediscovery of the Maya civilization and decipherment of the script**

In time the fascination arose for those abandoned cities in the tropical forests of Mexico and Central America, which were clouded by mystery. Who had built these cities, where did these people come from, and what led them to their downfall? These unanswered questions led some to amazing fantasies, such as that the ancient Maya originated from Old World civilizations, or came from the mythical island Atlantis, some even suggested that the ancient Maya must have descended from

aliens. As more and more scientific research is conducted the mysteries are beginning to be unfold and our current understanding of Maya origin, rising and collapse is quite sufficient.

It was John Lloyd Stephens and his companion Frederick Catherwood who rediscovered many of the Maya ruins when they traveled the area between 1839 and 1842. They explored the ruins, wrote reports, made maps and drawings of the ancient sculptures and buildings. They published their adventures in two illustrated volumes: *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (1841) and *Incidents of travel in Yucatan* (1843). It was these books that brought the ancient ruins of the Maya back in human interests. However ancient Maya sites had been explored and recorded before that time, but these early archaeological investigations were poorly executed and there were no strict methods employed (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 64). In time men began to conduct more scientific archaeological research, such as Alfred P. Maudslay at Copan, Honduras, in the late nineteenth century.

In 1862 it was Charles Étienne Brasseur de Bourbourg that found a manuscript titled *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán* written by the bishop Diego de Landa. This turned out to be the most important and elaborate colonial document regarding Maya society. Diego de Landa became a Franciscan monk in 1541 and was one of the first Franciscans to arrive in Yucatan in 1549. In July 1562 Diego de Landa conducted the auto-da-fé at Maní, in which about 40 Maya codices and 20.000 cult images were burned (Chuchiak 2005, 614-615). With this act Landa attracted a lot of negative attention from many other authorities. Landa had to return to Spain to defend himself for the accusations against him of using excessive violence in the conversion of the Maya and of overstepping his authority. On his return, around 1566, he wrote *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*, a manuscript that formed part of his defense. This manuscript describes Maya religion, Maya language, culture and the Maya writing system (Chuchiak 2005, 619-638). Although *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán* was written in part for his own defensive, thus he might have exaggerated some details, it is believed that his recordings are quite accurate (Wells 1996, 201). Landa did have intimate contact with the Maya and travelled to places where others would not go. He also visited territories that were only recently conquered. *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán* is therefore quite a complete work on Maya civilization. More important it is our main source for Mayan history. It is therefore extensively used in this thesis. The document also turned out to be of invaluable help in cracking the workings of the Maya Long Count and Calendar Round, because this document the astronomical and calendrical portions of Maya texts were already quite well understood by the early twentieth century. Diego de Landa also describes what he thought were Maya alphabetic characters, this is called the *Landa alphabet* (Figure 1.5).



Figure 1.5: The Maya alphabet according to Diego de Landa. Detail from the manuscript *Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán* (after Coe and Kerr 1998, 228).

He mistakenly thought the script to be alphabetic. Unfortunately many Maya scholars made the same mistake as Landa. Therefore Maya texts were hardly understood at all. Some great Mayanists, such as J. Eric S. Thompson and Sylvanus G. Morley even began to declare that Maya monuments merely contained dates and no other information and that text on ceramic vessels were only copies of monumental inscriptions and had no value of its own. In 1960 Tatiana Proskouriakoff published evidence that texts on Maya monuments did indeed contain historical records. She had been investigating the stelae from Piedras Negras and discovered that many did not exceed over sixty years. Proskouriakoff therefore proposed that these stelea recorded the life of a Piedras Negras ruler and by close investigations she was able to identify the glyphs that must have recorded the birth of a ruler, his accession to power, and other important anniversaries during his rule. She found more evidence on stelea from other sites and was able to associate more glyphs with their apparent meaning. Proskouriakoff was able to interpret the meaning of some Maya glyphs, she did however not actual read the Maya words. The discovery of the actual reading of Maya glyphs lies profoundly with the Soviet linguist Yuri Knorozov. In the beginnings of the 1950's Yuri Knorozov tested the Landa alphabet against the then three known Maya codices. He used the Landa Alphabet but treated the signs as phonetic ones. The process of his decipherment was slow, but in time he was able to decipher some words. Today there are roughly some 800 glyphs indentified (Kettunen and Helmke 2011, 9-12).

The Maya writing system is *logosyllabic*, which basically means that it consists of logographs, signs representing whole words, and phonetic signs expressing syllables. Phonetic sign are often fixed to the logographs, to help in the reading of the sign. It was also possible to spell a word by only using syllabic signs. Thus the same Mayan word can be represented by different glyph compounds, as can be seen in by the different spellings of *balam*, "jaguar", represented in figure 1.6.

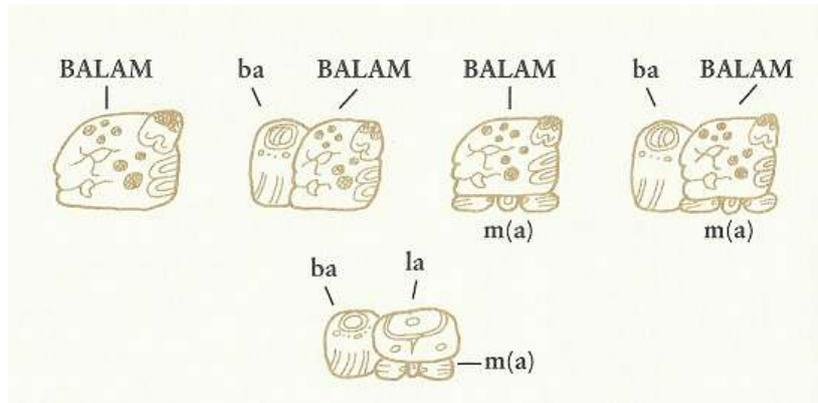


Figure 1.6: Different spellings for *balam*, "jaguar" (after Coe and Kerr 1998, 54).

As a general rule Maya words end with a consonant and thus when present the last vowel was unpronounced and dropped off. Maya hieroglyphs are commonly to be read in paired columns, from left to right and top to bottom. Shorter texts on monuments or on object such as pottery, bone and shell can also appear as single horizontal lines or single columns. The language of the Maya script differs per region. In general men spoke and wrote Yucatec in the northern lowlands and Ch'olan in the southern lowlands (Coe and Kerr, 53-55).

### 1.3 The contemporary Maya

Today there some five to six million Maya surviving, spread over Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. The contemporary Maya peoples can be divided into different groups based on both linguistic and geographic grounds.

There are some thirty Maya languages still spoken today (figure 1.7). They all descended from a common ancestral language termed Proto-Mayan, that began to break up around 2200 B.C. (Kaufman 1976). In some cases there only remain a handful of speakers of the language. K'iché and Yucatan are the largest languages groups, with close to a million speakers each. Other larger groups



Figure 1.7: Map showing the present day location of Maya languages. The colors of the language names shows closely related groups. The size of the name shows the relative number of speakers (Wikipedia 2007).

- Largest size = over 500,000 speakers
- Large size = over 100,000 speakers
- Medium size = over 10,000 speakers
- Small size = under 10,000 speakers

are the Mam, Kaqchikel, and Q'eqchi' estimated to have between a half-million and million speakers, and Q'anjob'al which has about 100,000 speakers (Richards 2003, 44-88). In Mexico the Maya have mostly remained in the states of Chiapas and Yucatan. Guatemala has a large Maya population of about 60 percent spread throughout the country. There is a considerable number of Maya who have migrated to large cities as Mexico city and Guatemala city and even the United States to find work and improve their financial situation (Boot *et al.* 2012, 59).

In general the Maya live in small villages and are poor. After the Spanish conquest the Maya were stripped of their land and forced to move and work on plantations of Spanish colonists, where they were exploited. Although Mexico and Guatemala have been independent of Spain for about two hundred years, the Maya are still being suppressed, often through violence. Maya people never received any land rights, which kept them in a deprived position. The Maya were also forced to speak Spanish, they had to send their children to schools where they were not educated about Maya history. The people were punished when they performed ancient rituals. Somehow the Maya still retained a considerable amount of their ancient cultural and ritual beliefs and habits. Some still wear the traditional clothing, especially women. Men are more likely to wear modern clothing. Traditional clothing is very important, because through the colors and the weavings the Maya are able to tell their story, to show where they come from and where they stand in life. The traditional patterns of clothing can be centuries old (Boot *et al.* 2012, 58, 73-77).

The contemporary Maya still have maize, beans and squash as their most important food sources. Most live on farm homesteads situated around a central village which they go to during fiestas and markets. They live off the cultivation of maize, beans, squash, coffee and herding small cattle, such as goats and sheep in simple houses of adobe and mud-brick. Almost all Maya are Roman Catholics, but the Christian religion is heavily intermixed with native religion. Christian religion is mostly upheld by the public by attending masses and saint's day celebrations, but in the domestic sphere men perform mostly native pre-Columbian rites. Many Christian figures are also identified with Mayan deities. In recent times the cultural awareness of the Maya is beginning to return. Children are being educated about the Maya past and given an education in their native tongue (Boot *et al.* 2012, 62-66).

There are actually quite some sources of historical information about the ancient Maya available to us. These sources include both pre-Colombian Maya texts and native Maya and Spanish accounts from the Spanish conquest and early Colonial period. The most important Colonial native Maya manuscripts from Yucatan are the *Books of Chilam Balam*. There are nine surviving *Chilam Balam* books each written in the alphabetic language and named after the town in which they were discovered. They have a somewhat overlapping context and the books deal with a wide variety of subjects, such as origin stories, prophecies, song texts, rituals, almanacs, medical cures and accounts

of historical events. The *Annals of the Cakchiquels* provides us with a historical narrative of the highland Kaqchikel Maya state. Notable works from the K'iche' are the *Título de Totonicapán* and the *Rabinal Achí*, a transcription of a K'iche' dance-drama. But one of the most important sources on ancient Maya mythology and history is the *Popol Vuh*, a sixteenth century K'iche' narrative. This document is besides Classic Maya polychrome painted pottery the primary source used in this thesis (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 123-125).

The next chapter gives an overview of the history of the *Popol Vuh* document, its authors, and the origin of the story. The contents of the *Popol Vuh* is only shortly discussed, as the complete story will be revealed in the rest of this thesis.

## Chapter 2: The “seeing instrument” of the Ancient Maya

In K'iche', a place in the highlands of Guatemala, the rulers once possessed a “seeing instrument”, an *ilb'al*, with this instrument they could foresee distant and future events. This instrument was a book, which rulers consulted when they sat in council (Tedlock 1996, 21). Their name for it was *Popol Vuh*<sup>2</sup>. *Popol* derives from *pop*, which means “mat”. In the past a woven mat was used as a royal throne, from which rulers gave counsel to their subordinates. In time the mat became an important symbol for rulership, but in a way it also symbolizes the unity of the members within a community. *Vuh* refers to Maya books or codices. Thus literally *popol vuh* can be translated as “book that pertains to the mat” and interpreted as “Book of the community” or “Counsel Mat Book” (Christensen 2007, 64-65, n.33).

The *Popol Vuh* is one of the most significant literary sources about Maya society that is left to us. The document stems from the sixteenth century and contains a collection of mythological and historical narratives of the K'iche' people. The K'iche' are a Maya group who established a powerful kingdom shortly before the Spanish conquest. In that time they controlled most of Guatemala with their political center being Utlán. In Central America they therefore formed the primary object of the Spanish conquest. K'iche' was actually the name of the language that was spoken in Utlán and most of the rest of the K'iche' territory. The K'iche' language belongs to the K'ichean branch of the Maya family language (Carmack 1981, 3). K'ichean itself was already a separate language by 700 and K'iche' had become a separate language by 1000 (Carmack 1981, 54-55). The K'iche' kingdom was actually formed by three groups, the K'iches, the Tamubs and the Ilocabs. The K'iche' eventually became the dominant group. The K'iche' referred to their capital as Q'umarkaj while its Nahuatl name was Utlán (Carmack 1981, 5-6).

The K'iche are believed to be the descendants of Chontal-Nahuatl speaking warlords who came from the Gulf coastal Tabasco-Veracruz region of Mexico and migrated when the city of Chichen Itza met its downfall. The *Popol Vuh* describes the journey of the K'iche' forefathers and mentions the places which they passed and founded. This description has made it possible to retrace their steps and sketch the route they must have followed to the Guatemala highlands. The arrival of the Chontal-Nahuatl warlords in the K'iche' basin has been placed around 1250 (Carmack 1981, 44). They are believed to have been mostly men. In the Guatemalan highlands they began to build small

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<sup>2</sup> The name “*Popol Vuh*” is used to refer to the Maya-K'iche' mythic-historical narrative that was transcribed and translated by Francisco Ximénez. Officially this was not the title of the book, but it is how the authors referred to the original book. *Popol Vuh* is therefore not written in italics, except when the title is used to refer to the original book, and I will retain the old spelling because this is the title most widely used in scholarly work.

centers from which they terrorized the local population through warfare and human sacrifice. These warlords excelled the local population in military technology and organization. The warlords intermarried with the local K'iche' population, adopted their language and gradually established an Epi-Toltec state (Carmack 1981, 44-61).

In 1524 Pedro de Alvarado invaded Uatatlán with a small army. The K'iche' were defeated and Uatatlán was burned and leveled to the ground (Carmack 1981, 143-147). These events drastically changed the K'iche' culture. For a time the K'iche' succeeded in retaining their political structure and belief system. However, through time, their hold on the old ways broke and they were forced to adopt peasant lives and became divided into ethnically distinct communities adopting more and more Christian elements into their religion. The K'iche' capital was relocated to Santa Cruz del Quiché, which was a town nearby Uatatlán, and believed to be the town from which the Popol Vuh originated (Carmack 1981, 305-311).

The Popol Vuh is considered as a masterpiece and an important legacy of the Maya. In 1971 it was even officially declared as Guatemala's national book. It is rich in mythology and therefore a significant source for obtaining insight into the ancient Maya world. The manuscript is used by Maya scholars worldwide and has been translated about 30 times in 7 languages.

## 2.1 The alphabetic Popol Vuh

The Popol Vuh begins with recounting the separation of sky and sea and the creation of earth. The gods then join together to create humans. Their first three attempts fail as the gods are unable to create beings that are capable to reproduce and venerate their creator gods (Tedlock 1996, 61-74).

The creation narrative is interrupted by the story of the heroic deeds of the twins Junajpu and Xbalanq'e<sup>3</sup>. This second part tells how these Hero Twins defeated Wuqub Kaqix ("Seven Macaw"), a large anthropomorphic bird deity that had to be vanquished for his false claim to be the sun and the moon (Tedlock 1996, 75-88). The Popol Vuh then tells the story of the father and uncle of the Hero Twins, who were sacrificed by the Lords of the Underworld. The Hero Twins also end up in the Underworld where they are tested by the Underworld Lords in a series of trials. Incredible tricksters as they are the Hero Twins survive all the trials and defeat the Underworld Lords, Jun Kame and Wuqub Kame. The Hero Twins then ascend to the sky and become the sun and the moon (Tedlock 1996, 89-142).

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<sup>3</sup> The original spelling of Junajpu is *Hunahpu* and of Xbalanq'e is *Xbalanque*, but I will uphold the new spelling.

The story then returns to the creation narrative with the fourth attempt to create humans. The gods are finally successful when they form beings out of maize dough. The first four K'iche' men are formed, being Balam K'itze' (Jaguar Quitze), Balam Aq'ab (Jaguar Night), Majukotaj (Not Right Now), and Iki Balam (Dark Jaguar). Wives are created for these four men and together they become the founders of the four K'iche' lineages. The historical narrative recounts the events in the lives of these first four men and concludes with naming their descendants up to the time of the kings who were in power when the Spanish arrived in 1524 (Tedlock 1996, 143-198).

A troubling aspect of the Popol Vuh is that the distinction between myth and history is somewhat vague. Halfway through the Popol Vuh there is a transition from what may be called "myth" to "history". In the Maya worldview myth and history are complementary. The realms of the divine and human are inseparable. Tedlock uses the term "mythistory" to clarify the nature of the Popol Vuh text. In the Greek world this word was used to address historical narratives with mythic undertones (Tedlock 1996, 58-59). To understand how the Popol Vuh was put together and exactly which history it reflects it is necessary to have knowledge of the history of the document, history of the text and the identity of its authors.

#### *History of the document*

The Popol Vuh was written with the use of a modified Latin alphabet to represent K'iche' sounds, and was established by the Franciscan priest Francisco de la Parra in 1545 (Christensen 2007, 52). The missionaries introduced the Maya to alphabetic writing, because they wanted them to translate Christian prayers, sermons, and catechisms into Mayan languages. Instead they used it to preserve their own creation mythology. From the Popol Vuh text itself we know that it was completed between 1554 and 1558, likely in the town of Santa Cruz del Quiché (Christensen 2007, 36-38). In the early colonial period the town of Santa Cruz del Quiché became overshadowed by Santo Tomás Chichicastenango and at some point a copy of the alphabetic *Popol Vuh* ended up in this town. For centuries the *Popol Vuh* was kept hidden in the town of Chichicastenango, until the Dominican monk Francisco Ximénez found the document between 1701-1704, when he was parish priest in Chichicastenango. He transcribed the document and added a Spanish translation of its contents. The original document has not been seen since Ximénez presumably gave it back to the Maya. The manuscript of Ximénez remained in the possession of the Dominican order, but when in 1830 all monasteries were forced to close, the manuscript was transported to the library of the University of San Carlos in Guatemala City. It was in this library that Carl Scherzer examined the document in 1854. Scherzer made a copy of the document because he feared that the original would be useless in a few years for it was written in such light ink. Scherzer published the Spanish translation of Ximénez in 1856. Apparently Ximénez made another transcription of the Popol Vuh which remained in the town

of Rabinal, where he was parish priest from 1704-1714. Charles Étienne Brasseur de Bourbourg obtained this manuscript in 1855 from Ignacio Coloch, a K'iche' man who lived in the town of Rabinal. This manuscript was obviously a different one than Scherzer examined in the San Carlos library, because the document was and still remains in good condition with well-preserved ink. The copy of the Popol Vuh by Ximénez that Scherzer examined has unfortunately disappeared. Brasseur de Bourbourg published the K'iche' texts and a French translation in 1861. The Popol Vuh text is part of a series of linguistic studies of Ximénez, which he named *Arte de Tres Lenguas: Cakchiquel, Quiche y Tzutuhil*. Brasseur de Bourbourg took the document with him to Paris, where it became part of his Bibliothèque Mexico-Guatémaliennne. When Brasseur de Bourbourg died in 1874 his library was bought by Alphonse Pinart. Pinart's collection was later sold in auction and eventually purchased by Edward A. Ayer, who donated the document to the Newberry Library in Chicago, Illinois. It still resides there today and is catalogued as Ayer MS 1515 (Christensen 2007, 38-42; Tedlock 1996, 25-27).

### Originality of the Popol Vuh

"This we shall write already within the word of God,  
     Already in Christianity.  
 We shall save it  
     Because there is no longer  
 A sight of the Book of Counsel,  
     A sight of the bright things come  
         from beside the sea,  
 The description of our shadows,  
     A sight of the bright life, as it is called.  
 There was once a manuscript of it,  
     And it was written long ago,  
 Only hiding its face is the reader of it,  
     The mediator of it.  
 Great was its account  
     And its description  
 Of when there was finished  
     The birth  
 Of all heaven  
     And earth" (Edmonson 1971, 6-8)

There has been some debate about the originality of the contents of the Popol Vuh. The problem being that the document was written after the conquest. The authors themselves state that they write amidst the preaching of God, in Christendom, which gives the document a negative connotation in relating its contents to pre-Colonial information. But they follow this statement with the explanation that their own gods actually accounted for everything. They are writing down the "Ancient Word", that accounts "of the completion and germination of all the sky and

earth”(Christensen 2007, 64-65). Still, it has often been argued that the first chapters of the Popol Vuh reflect that of Genesis. Therefore claiming that the Popol Vuh is a fraud, an adjustment of Maya mythology to Christian religion. The Popol Vuh describes a watery, calm primordial world, which is moved and shaped by supernatural beings that create an earthly platform and populate it with living creatures. Although it reflects the story of Genesis, this was also a widespread belief in Mesoamerica. In fact, it is actually a contrast, as Genesis describes the primordial state as a maelstrom. There are other biblical themes that seem to be represented in the Popol Vuh, such as the world in darkness, the flood, the creation of the first woman, etc., but many biblical themes also existed in Mesoamerican mythology and cannot solely be ascribed to the bible (Tedlock 1983, 261-263; Himelblau 1989, 17-30)<sup>4</sup>. The real problem might actually be that Europeans are so accustomed to the biblical version of creation that we cannot read such a document as the Popol Vuh without relating it to the story of Genesis (Tedlock 1986, 78).

The Popol Vuh mainly consist of dual perceptions. Duality was part of the primordial world and all that was created was in dual aspects, sky and sea, men and female, light and darkness, etc. There is however one singular creation and that is the creation of men out of mud. All other creations are done by two and fours. Thus it was clear from the beginning that this creation would have no descendants and was doomed to fail. The men made out of mud did indeed turned out unsuccessful, as he dissolved into water. Seeing this creation in light of Genesis we might actually say that this is not just an adaptation but a direct refusal that men could have been created out of mud and thus a refusal of the probability of the existence of Adam. We do not know if this was indeed a form of rebellion against Christianity, but it does provide another example of difference between Genesis and the Popol Vuh (Tedlock 1986, 81).

Even Ximénez himself saw the clear difference between Genesis and the Popol Vuh as he writes in his prologue that although the manuscript “starts of dealing with God” the stories are “wrapped in a thousand lies and tales” provided by “the father of lies, Satan [...] in order to deceive and mislead these wretches” (Ximénez and Estrada Monroy 1973, 10, translated by Tedlock 1986, 77).

We cannot deny that the authors of the Popol Vuh were not aware of the Christian religion and the possibility that they might have mixed pre-Colonial mythological stories with that of Genesis. However, I believe that the document was created with the intention to save mythological tales of Mayan origin as they were known in the 1550’s and we can assume that the content is original. To be absolutely certain of this assumption it is important to know who the actual authors of the Popol Vuh were. This will be discussed in the next section.

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<sup>4</sup> A general discussion of biblical references in the Popol Vuh can be found in Tedlock 1983, 261-271.

### Authors of the Popol Vuh

In the Popol Vuh it is stated that there were multiple authors, “This account we shall now write [...]. We shall bring it forth [...]”, but they do not give us their names (Christensen 2007, 64; emphasis added). It is likely that they stayed anonymous for fear that they would be harmed if the Spanish authorities discovered the book or that the book itself would be destroyed. There have been three possible authors suggested by Maya scholars. René Acuña (1998) has suggested that the Popol Vuh was actually written by a Dominican Friar, named Domingo de Vico. According to Acuña the Popol Vuh formed a tool in the conversion of Mayas to Christianity.

Acuña’s main arguments for a friar as author have all been refuted by Ruud van Akkeren (Akkeren 2003, 237-239). One of these arguments was that the Popol Vuh is structured by Western literary concepts. Parallelism is the primary means used to create order in the document. European devices for structuring a text such as periods, commas, and capitalization are in fact hardly present. Every hundred lines or so there does appear a large dark indented capital. These were clearly meant to subdivide the manuscript, but opposite to European custom, these subdivisions remained untitled (Edmonson 1971, xiii-xiv). It seems that the authors lacked the knowledge of such devices and thus actually forms evidence that the document was not written by Spaniards.

Acuña further argues that the Popol Vuh displays such a profound knowledge of mythical themes and tales that it must have been written by friars as they had access to sources with such information. Acuña especially points to the works of the Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas as he wrote about the peoples and scenes in the Popol Vuh before the Popol Vuh was actually written down (Acuña 1998, 85–86). However, Akkeren notes a considerable difference between Acuña’s excerpt of Las Casas and the Popol Vuh concerning the monkey brothers of the Hero Twins. The older brother of the Hero Twins, Jun B’atz’ and Jun Chowen, are portrayed as malicious and jealous creatures in the Popol Vuh. The Hero Twins are mistreated by them and therefore turn them into howler monkeys. But in Las Casas his notes the monkey brothers are actually younger than the Hero Twins and they act as being the creators of the world. Akkeren explains this reversal as being done on purpose by the authors of the Popol Vuh. The authors had had a conflict with another ruling lineage, named *B’atz’* or “Howler Monkey”, for a very long time. This lineage identified themselves with the monkey brothers Jun B’atz’ and Jun Chowen, who according to their own mythological tale were quite creative. Las Casas’s version of the monkey brothers is the version of the *B’atz’* lineage and this version was actually known throughout the Maya lowlands in the Classic period. The authors of the Popol Vuh thus reversed the nature of the monkey brothers to make them look bad. Akkeren stipulates that a Dominican friar would not have been able to mention such historical details and weave them into the mythological parts of the tale. The authors themselves must have been in strife with the Verapaz *B’atz’* lineage and were definitely Maya (Akkeren 2003, 239).

Antonio Villacorta (1926) has proposed Diego Reinoso as author of the Popol Vuh. Diego Reinoso was one of the authors of the *Título de Totonicapan*, another very important document containing history and legend of the K'iche people. Diego Reinoso represents himself in this document as a *popol winaq*, "Council Man". Akkeren is not convinced that Reinoso was the author of the Popol Vuh mainly because Francisco Ximénez knew about Reinoso and even possessed a document of his hand, but never associated Reinoso with the Popol Vuh (Akkeren 2003, 239-240).

Another possibility for the authors is based on the last few lines of the Popol Vuh. This part declares that the three *Nim Ch'okoj* of the principle K'iche' lineages were "the mothers of the word, and the fathers of the word" (Christensen 2007, 305). "The word" is used to describe the Popol Vuh itself (Christensen 2007, 36-37). Tedlock believes that in this passage the authors gave away their own identity. *Nim Ch'okoj* is a title that stands for "Principal Convener of Banquets", also called "Master of Ceremonies". Master of Ceremonies were in charge of the banquets that were given to plan or perform a marriage. During these banquets the Master of ceremonies are the principal speakers. If indeed the Popol Vuh was written by the *Nim Ch'okoj* than we at least no one of their names. Don Cristóbal Velasco is the only known *Nim Ch'okoj* of the three who held this title at that time the Popol Vuh was written (Tedlock 1996, 56-57). Akkeren agrees with Tedlock that *ch'okoj* does probably refer to the authors of the Popol Vuh, but he does not agree with his translation of the word. Akkeren mentions that *ch'okoj* can also be translated as "kinkajou", referring to a nocturnal animal (Akkeren 2003, 240-243). Animals were often used as emblems for tribes or lineages. In fact the kinkajou does indeed occur in the *Chilam Balam of Chumayel* as the name of a lineage that had an Toltec origin. *Nim Ch'okoj* would thus refer to "Great Kinkajou". Akkeren concludes that the Popol Vuh was very likely composed in a few sessions in which lords, priests and dance masters from different lineages all contributed to the story. It is also very likely that pre-Columbian codices were used in the compilation of the stories. Editing and shaping of the book must have been done by a few special *Nim Ch'okoj* scribes (Akkeren 2003, 253).

Although there remain different opinions about who exactly the *Nim Ch'okoj* were, we can conclude the Popol Vuh was definitely written by Maya people, and thus the content is original.

## 2.2 The hieroglyphic Popol Vuh

The Popol Vuh as we know it today is definitely a transcription of an older version. In the Popol Vuh it is explicitly stated that "There is the original book and ancient writing" (Tedlock 1983, 277). Also, throughout the Popol Vuh there are repeated references to the *oher tzih*, meaning the "former

words” (Edmonson 1971, 7; 3; 164; 221). The original document is said to be very ancient and was obtained by K’iche’ lords on a pilgrimage from the highlands to the Atlantic shore. The book is therefore also called “The Light That Came from Besides the Sea” (Tedlock 1996, 21). The authors of the Popol Vuh probably did not have this original scripture, because they describe it as “already lost” (this part could also be translated as destroyed or forgotten) and also mention that “there is no longer a sight of it” (Edmonson 1971, vii). It is very likely that this “original book” was a hieroglyphic codex.

The authors of the Popol Vuh referred to the original book as an *ilb’al*, meaning an “instrument of sight or vision”. Today the word is used to refer to clear quartz crystals that are used in divinatory practices by K’iche’ priests. It can also refer to magnifying glasses or spectacles, used to see things more clearly (Tedlock 1996, 218; Christensen 2007, 34-35). The alphabetic Popol Vuh also refers to divinatory practices:

“Clearly they saw  
Everything they saw,  
Whether death,  
Whether famine,  
Whether fighting would come.  
They certainly knew.  
And there was a crystal for it;  
There was a Book.  
The Counsel Book they called it” (Edmonson 1971, 243).

Hieroglyphic codices contained information of divinatory nature. This strengthens the idea that the original book was a codex.

Tedlock also has a point when he states that the writers of the Popol Vuh seem at some occasions to be describing pictures, especially when they begin new episodes in narratives. They also use sentences that begin with “this is” and use verbs in the present tense, which cause the reader to stand still for a while and actually form an image of the situation (Tedlock 1996, 28). Of course this would make sense if the Popol Vuh was based on a hieroglyphic codex, which contained many images. What follows is an example from the Popol Vuh where the authors seem to be describing a picture:

“This is the great tree of Seven Macaw, a nance, and this is the food of Seven Macaw. In order to eat the fruit of the nance he goes up the tree every day. Since Hunahpu and Xbalanque have seen where he feeds, they are now hiding beneath the tree of Seven Macaw, they are keeping quiet here, the two boys are in the leaves of the tree” (Tedlock 1996, 28).

A problem concerning the assumption that the Popol Vuh was based on a hieroglyphic codex, is that the form of writing of the Maya codices that have survived differ significantly of that of the Popol

Vuh (for comparison see figures 2.1 and 2.2). There is no known pre-Colombian text that is as extensive as the Popol Vuh. The codices contain texts that are highly formalized and only briefly reference to dates, persons, and events. Ruud van Akkeren also addresses the fact that the Maya hieroglyphic writing system was not suited for composing the long and complex stories and dialogues that are found in the Popol Vuh (Akkeren 2003, 237). Instead, the story must be understood as an interpretation and elaboration of the mnemonic topics that were dealt with in the pre-Colombian codices. It was the task of a narrator to tell the story and a priest to explain his divination with the aid of a codex. The alphabetic Popol Vuh is more an account of what the readers of the ancient book would give when they gave performances. They would tell about the story that this ancient book portrayed behind the text, pictures and divinatory schemas (Tedlock 1996, 30).



Figure 2.1: Page 9 of the Dresden codex (Förstemann 1880).



Figure 2.2: Page from the Popol Vuh manuscript (The Ohio State University Libraries 2013).

## 2.3 The oral Popol Vuh

The Popol Vuh is not only important for its historical and mythological content but also for it being a magnificent work of literature. It has a poetic nature not in the sense that it is based on rhyme or metrical rhythms, but the concepts are arranged into original and complex parallel structures. This means that concepts or ideas are elaborated upon by adding synonymous concepts, metaphors, or descriptive epithets (Christensen 2007, 42-43). The poetic nature of the Popol Vuh has often been ignored or was not recognized in the past by its translators. Edmonson (1971) was the first who directly addressed the poetic nature of the Popol Vuh and composed his entire translation in parallelistic couplets. However, the structure of the Popol Vuh is more complex than Edmonson proposed, as it also contains single phrases, triplets and longer paragraphs. There is a wide variety of parallelism present in the Popol Vuh, but it mostly consists of couplets that are semantic, syntactic or both<sup>5</sup>. Following is an example from the Popol Vuh containing a single phrase, triplet, and couplet:

“And here we shall take it up

The demonstration

The revelation

And account

Of the hiding place,

The dawning place” (Tedlock 1983, 220-221).

Walter Ong has noted that parallelism is a common feature of orally transmitted texts (Ong 2002, 34-36). To memorize and retrieve a story Ong states that men has to think in mnemonic patterns. Mnemonic patterns such as rhythm, repetitions or antitheses, alliterations and assonances, and other formulary expressions, aids the recall of a story. The Popol Vuh does not contain rhyme forms, but it does contain all of the other patterns, which strongly suggest that the Popol Vuh has an orally history.

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<sup>5</sup> For a complete list of the types of parallelism in the Popol Vuh, see Christensen 2007, 44-52.

## 2.4 Conclusion

The alphabetic Popol Vuh preserved the knowledge of what was recorded in the “original book” and the “ancient writing”. The authors wrote the story down as a response to the fact that the Spanish were burning all their hieroglyphic codices and they wanted to preserve its contents. It is clear that the alphabetic Popol Vuh is not a word for word transcription of an older text. The authors instead wrote down the spoken words of a performer, whose skills exceeded that of just speaking out loud. The Popol Vuh thus also prevented the loss of the words of the interpreter of the ancient writing (Tedlock 2010, 301). This was needed because of the threat posed by a ban on public performances of indigenous verbal art (Tedlock 2010, 9). We can conclude that the contents of the Popol Vuh are indeed based on a pre-Columbian book or maybe even multiple books, but in part also on oral traditions. The poetic nature of the Popol Vuh strongly suggests the text had an oral history. The text in codices was in fact so abbreviated that its story had to be told by a performer. We do not know however how much of its contents was part of an oral tradition and how long it was orally transmitted before it was written down.

The ancient codices must have functioned as mnemonic devices which helped the Maya recount the mythological creation story. But it is likely that the story existed long before it was even written down in hieroglyphic form. Another, older mnemonic device for retrieving ancient stories might have been polychrome pottery. Polychrome painted pottery often display scenes of the Popol Vuh on its surface. It is possible that before the mythological creation story was written down in codices, it was instead recited with the help of pictorial scenes on pottery. As previously mentioned, Tedlock believes that the authors of the Popol Vuh were at times describing pictures. Look again at the text from the Popol Vuh and compare this to figure 2.3.

“This is the great tree of Seven Macaw, a nance, and this is the food of Seven Macaw. In order to eat the fruit of the nance he goes up the tree every day. Since Hunahpu and Xbalanque have seen where he feeds, they are now hiding beneath the tree of Seven Macaw, they are keeping quiet here, the two boys are in the leaves of the tree” (Tedlock 1996, 28).



Figure 2.8: Rollout photograph of vessel K1226 (Photograph © Justin Kerr)

K1226 displays a scene that is comparable with the Popol Vuh text. On the left side we find a tree with a bird on top. The figure in the scene is apparently using his blowgun to shoot the bird, which is comparable to what happens to Seven Macaw in the Popol Vuh. This vessel will be more extensively discussed in chapter 6, but this little example shows that parts of the Popol Vuh tale already existed in the Classic period. Before I will discuss which other scenes from the Popol Vuh are represented on ceramics the next chapter will first give an introduction and overview of Maya ceramics.

## Chapter 3: Maya ceramics

The Maya used a wide variety of materials for their crafts, such as stone, wood, plaster, paint, ceramics, jade and shell. Many of the ancient Maya monuments used to be very colorful, unfortunately the paint has disintegrated in time. One of the best surviving murals in the Maya area are those of San Bartolo and Bonampak, but pictorial polychrome pottery is by far the best source of Classic Maya painting that is left to us. Maya ceramics have survived because of their durability, but also because they were sheltered when buried in tombs and refuse deposits.

Polychrome pottery belongs to the Classic period being part of the complex social, political and economic developments in that time. These ceramics were part of the elite life. The ruling elite sponsored public and private rituals for the display and continuation of their power and the display of the ideologies on which their power was based. These rituals included an abundant display of prestige to assist in the statement and reinforcement of the ruler's authority (Reents-Budet 1994, 4). Plazas were created to hold the elaborate theatrical rituals and these were surrounded by buildings for residential and administrative purposes. The rituals further demanded special objects, such as elaborate costumes for the participants, decorations for the ritual spaces and painted service wares for the ritual feasts. The forms of elite Maya ceramics were relatively simple in the Classic Period compared to the extravagant painting they displayed. There were only three basic shapes of service ware, being vessels, bowl and plates. This simplified form may have been upheld because it provided the most pictorial space and relatively flat surfaces are easier to paint (Reents-Budet 1994, 16). Polychrome pottery was also used as social currency and as funerary ware. Many of these elite wares were decorated with cosmological and religious imagery, but there are also those which display historical events. These consist of scenes such as rulers depicted inside their palaces receiving tribute. Maya vases can give us a unique insight into the life of the Maya royal elite as such scenes inside palaces are rarely displayed on stone monuments.

This thesis will mainly focus on Classic period painted vessels that were created for and used by the upper levels of Maya society. These wares only represent a small amount of the totality of ceramic production in the Classic period and many lack archaeological context, but it is because of their uniqueness and ancient value that they give us such a valuable insight into ancient Maya mythology. To be able to understand the significance and symbolism of these wares it is important to have knowledge about how they were produced, by who they were produced and what their specific function was. All these aspects will be discussed in this chapter.

### 3.1 Production and painting

#### Production process

Workshops in which the elite ceramics were produced have hardly been investigated with the main reason that there is almost no archaeological data about them available. However we can deduce most of the production process from the pottery itself.

The Classic Maya ceramics were made from a mix of local clays, which were tempered by materials such as calcite, quartz, or volcanic ash. Tempering materials are added to decrease the plasticity of clay, but also to prevent too much shrinking in the drying process. The first step of production of a clay product was making a flat pan-cake shaped bottom. On top of this bottom men stacked coils of clay which were then pulled up to form the walls of the vessel. The sides were thinned by a combination of pinching and scraping of the clay with the use of wooden tools, which unfortunately have not survived in the archaeological record. Maya potters did not use a pottery wheel, but the clay product was probably placed on a wooden platform that allowed the pottery to turn the product during the shaping process. Modern Yucatec potters use a *k'abal*, which is a wooden disk resting on a smooth board that is spun by the feet of the potter. It is the closest thing to a potter's wheel that was ever used by the Maya (Reents-Budet 1994, 210).

After the vessel was shaped into the correct form it was set to dry to let it become leather hard. The exterior of the leather hard vessel was then smoothed and burnished with wooden tools and smooth stones. If the vessel was smooth enough men applied a base slip which was most often white or cream colored. The wares were then slip painted, which is the application of a mixture of finely ground pigment, clay and water. It is likely that the vessels were painted with a type of *terra sigilatta* paint, which is a slip-based paint that gives a significant glossy surface. During burning and polishing *terra sigilatta* creates a glossy hard surface, which makes the vessels waterproof and resistant to chemical attack. Only small amounts of coloring oxides are necessary to create vivid colors out of the *terra sigilatta*. Red and orange were the predominant colors used by the Maya (Reents-Budet 1994, 211-214). The color range of the ancient Maya was extremely restricted, because more exotic colors would have been destroyed by the firing process (Coe and Kerr 1998, 140-141)

Firing of the vessels was done at temperatures ranging from 500-700°C. These low range temperature were easily produced in open bonfires and pit fires. Unfortunately due to the absence of workshop in the archaeological record, there is little information about the firing process. The

finding of fire pits on a few sites do confirm that pottery was being fired in pit fires (Reents-Budet 1994, 214-216).

Painting was a specialized skill and it must have taken a large amount of time to finish a polychrome painted vessel. It is therefore assumed that the master painter did not produce the pot itself, but that this was done by specialized potters and/or apprentices. It is also assumed that potters and painters worked close together in the same workshop. First of all, because to produce consistent quality and ensure that the glossy slip would stick to the vessel, it was necessary for the vessel and slip paint to be produced from the same clays. Second, too much handling of vessels causes the smooth surface to degrade and oil from human hands diminishes the adherence of slip paint to the vessel's surface. Third, unfired vessels are extremely vulnerable to damaging and breaking. A workshop probably consisted of a master painter who trained and supervised multiple apprentices (Reents-Budet 1994, 216-222).

#### Painting process

Images on Maya pottery were either carved or painted in multiple colors. Maya pottery painting probably had its beginning in painting on architecture. One indication of this is that the word for painting, drawing and writing is the same, as all are referred to by the verb stem *tz'ib*. Also painting, drawing and writing were all done with a brush which points again to the fact that they were perceived as the same creative activity (Reents-Budet 1994, 8).

The primary device for creating imagery was by contour lines and color fields. Dark contour lines were used to create images on a light background. The primary function of colors was to differentiate the components of the images, but also to highlight precious materials such as jadeite and quetzal feathers. Images are mostly two-dimensional and when present the third dimension is really shallow. Basically the image was put on the foreground on a single ground line (base line) (Reent-Budet 1994, 7-11; 20). Human figures are mostly painted in profile view, probably because it was difficult to represent the volumetric nature of the nose and lips of full frontal human faces with only the use of contour lines (Reents-Budet 1994, 21). The Maya used the figural viewpoint to underline the status of a figure. People of secondary importance were mostly represented in profile and more important figures were presented with a frontal body or in such a way that the figure took in a lot of pictorial space (Reent-Budet 1994, 22).

The tools of Maya painters are presented to us by the representations of painters on ceramics, such as the one shown in figure 3.1. These represented painters are often holding a paint container and paint brush. The paint was apparently held in a conch shell that was cut in half,

sometimes represented with a blackened central area signifying the paint that was inside. A few of these paint containers have survived (figure 3.2) (Reents-Budet 1994, 36-37).



Figure 3.1: Photograph of vessel K1185 portraying artist holding a paint pot and quill pen (Photograph © Justin Kerr).



Figure 3.2: Interior view of a conch shell paint pot with the remains of pre-Columbian red paint inside its chamber (after Reents-Budet 1994, 42).

There were different types of paint brushes. Unfortunately none have survived, but there are many depictions of them left. The most often presented tool was the brush pen. The brush pen consisted of a hollow tube at which hair bristles were attached to the end. The brush pens were available in different sizes, including very fine brush pens with only a few hairs at the end (Coe and Kerr 1998, 146-147). The kind of painting tool hold by the painter on figure 3.1 resembles that of a stylus. It is characterized by the fact that it has the same form from shaft to tip. This is a quill pen and these were probably used to write codices (Coe and Kerr 1998, 148-150).

### Workshops

Elaborate research of Maya ceramics has made it possible for scholars to divide the corpus of Maya ceramics into different groups that share clay chemistry, painting technique, and hieroglyphic text styles (Reents-Budet 1994, 153). Through Instrumental Neutron Activation Analysis (INAA) it is possible to determine the clay composition of ceramics. Knowing the elemental concentration of the clay from which ceramics were made, makes it possible to group the ceramics by their chemical make-up and can help to identify the source of the clay. Pottery that shares a distinct paste composition can thus be represented as being produced in the same area or site and possibly even within the same workshop (Reents-Budet 1994, 168-169). Another identifying marker for grouping

ceramics is style. Style is an important method for a society to express its own identity. Stylistic identity can be expressed through dress, speech and the arts. For the ancient Maya painted pottery formed an important medium for expression and display of identity (Reents-Budet 1994, 164). Stylistic research, including iconographic, epigraphic, technical, and form elements in combination with INAA has led to the identification of a large variety of style groups and their location of origin. One of the largest known group of pottery produced is the so-called 'codex-style' ceramics. The specific painting style of these wares is similar to the painting in codices. It is therefore that Coe suggested the term codex-style ceramics, because he believed that they were copied from codices (Coe 1973, 91). The painting style consists of dark monochrome contour lines on a cream color background. The pottery further consists of red or black painted rim and basal bands. Codex-style pottery was produced in the Mirador Basin, with the sites Nakbé and El Mirador being the prime producers (Reents-Budet 1994, 154-155). Other well-known pottery painting styles are the *Ik'* Emblem Glyph Style, the Holmul Style, the Turkey Vulture Plates, the Chamá-Style, the Tikal Dancer Plates, the Altun Ha Style, the Naranjo Area Group<sup>6</sup>.

### 3.2 Hieroglyphic texts

A large amount of Maya vases originates from the illegal activities of tomb robbers. They were therefore ignored for a long time because Maya scholars did not want to encourage robbery. Michael D. Coe was the first to elaborately study the themes displayed on painted vessels and their accompanying hieroglyphic texts (Coe 1973, 1978, 1982). Before that time scholars believed that texts on pottery were meaningless and were therefore left unstudied. J. Eric S. Thompson had claimed for a long time that the artists of polychrome pottery were unfamiliar with the principles of writing and the meaning of glyphs. When Coe published his first work on Maya ceramics, *The Maya Scribe and His World* in 1973, not a single glyph on vessels was deciphered. Still he believed that they must have had some significance and divided the text on ceramic into two groups. The *primary* text appears as a horizontal band just below the rim of the vessel and sometimes in a vertical column. *Secondary* texts are mostly shorter and appear in the depicted scene often found near figures (Coe 1973, 18). The primary text is a very repetitive one and therefore Coe called it the Primary Standard Sequence (PSS) (Coe 1973, 13).

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<sup>6</sup> For a complete discussion of these painting style see Reents-Budet, Bishop, and MacLeod 1994.

Coe thought that the PSS was a long hymn which may have been sung over the dead or dying person, guiding the descendant into the Underworld (Coe 1973, 22). He came to this conclusion because of the many scenes depicting the Hero Twin's trials in the Underworld. After the decipherment of the PSS it became clear, that the texts actual meaning was completely different than first assumed by Coe. The PSS did not say anything about the images displayed on the vessel, it gave information about the vessel type, its uses, and owner. Decipherment has also shown that many PSS glyphs are Cholan words. It is therefore assumed that the PSS was developed and elaborated by the Cholan subfamily of Mayan languages (Reents-Budet 1994, 106).

### The PSS

The PSS can be subdivided into five sections (Reents-Budet 1994, 109):

- Presentation
- Surface Treatment
- Vessel Type
- Contents
- Closure

The Presentation section mentions a sort of dedication of the vessel. It consists the so-called Initial Sign, the God N or 'Step' glyph, and the 'Flat Hand' sign (figure 3.3). The actual meaning of these glyphs is still somewhat obscure. When translated the Presentation section would say something like "Came into being, was presented, was blessed" (Reents-Budet 1994, 109-111; Coe and van Stone 2001, 99-100; Montgomery 2002, 261-262).



Figure 3.3: Different forms of the Presentation section: a) Initial sign (after Coe and van Stone 2001, 99); b) God N/Step glyph (after Coe and van Stone 2001, 99-100); c) Flat Hand sign (after Coe and van Stone 2001, 100).

The Surface Treatment section tells whether the surface was painted or carved. The most simple expression for painting is *tz'ib* or *utz'ihb*, based on the root noun *tz'ib* for “painting” or “writing”. The expression can be extended to *utz'ibnajal* or *utz'ibaalnajal*, which means something like “drawing/ decoration” (figure 3.4a/c). Carving expression are based on the root *ux* for “carving” or “scraping” and take forms as *yux*, *yuxulil*, or *yuxulnajal* (figure 3.4b)(Kettunen and Helmke 2011, 31-32).

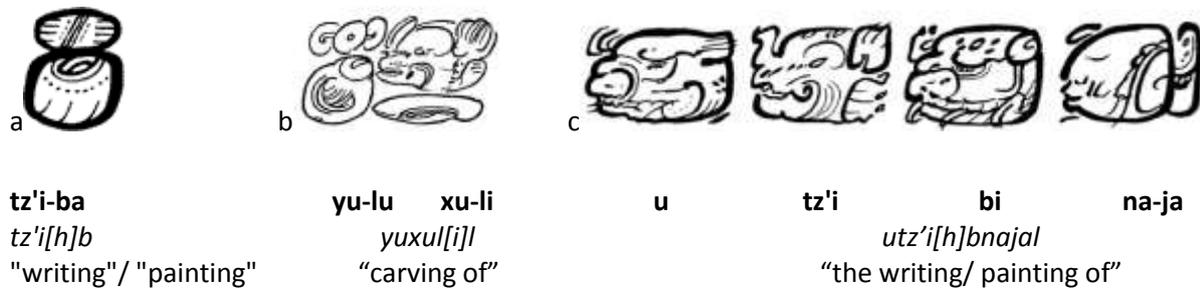


Figure 3.4: Different forms of the Surface Treatment section: a)(Montgomery and Helmke 2007); b)( Kettunen and Helmke 2001, 32); c)(Kettunen and Helmke 2011, 31)

The Vessel Type section mentions what the type of the ware was and relates to the form of the pottery (figure 3.5). The most common expression is *yuk'ib*, “his/ her drinking cup”, which refers to cylindrical and barrel-shaped vessels with a flat base and sometimes straight-walled bowls. Bowls with a rounded or flat base are more commonly referred to by *ujaay*, “his/ her bowl”. The third most common service ware are plates, which are denoted by *ulak*, “his/ her plate”. This term refers to flat-based, wide-mouthed plates or dishes. Dishes or plates with tripod supports are named *ujawa[n]te'*, “his/her tripod plate” (Kettunen and Helmke 2011, 33-35).



Figure 3.5: Different forms of the Vessel Type section (after Kettunen and Helmke 2011, 33).

The next section states the content of the vessel. The most common content was drinks made of chocolate, *kakaw*, “cacao” (figure 3.6). Another common content was atole, written as *ul* (figure 3.7). Atole is a gruel made from cooked maize mixed with water often sweetened by honey or sugar (Coe and van Stone 2001, 102-103; Montgomery 2002, 265-267; Reents-Budet 1994, 115-119).



**ka-ka-wa**  
*kakaw*  
“cacao”

Figure 3.6: *kakaw* glyph (Kettunen and Helmke 2011, 86).



**u-lu**  
*ul*  
“atole” / “maize gruel”

Figure 3.7: *ul* glyph (Montgomery and Helmke 2007)

The last section, Closure, can give both generic descriptions and personal names and titles of the vessel’s owner or patron. Two often occurring generic descriptions are *ch’ok* and *kelem*, both meaning “youth” (figure 3.8 and 3.9)(Reents-Budet 1994, 133-134). This section can be very long in length and varies widely in content. Some royal names are followed by an emblem glyph and if the artist would have signed his work than his name would be mentioned in the Closure section.



**ke-KELEM?-ma**  
*kelem*  
“strong / youth”

Figure 3.8: *kelem* glyph (Kettunen and Helmke 2011, 86)



**CH’OK**  
*ch’ok*  
“youth / sprout”

Figure 3.9: *ch’ok* glyph (Kettunen and Helmke 2011, 83)

Although this is the standard pattern of texts on Maya vases there are many deviations from it. An example is the painter skipping the Presentation and Surface Treatment and immediately opening with *yuk’ib* (Reents-Budet 1994: 120-121). The actual length of the PSS varies therefore considerably. Textual styles also vary from region to region as of course painting styles in general also do.

Writing on ceramics was used more than simply as a way of communication. The glyphs form, placement and color were integrated into the whole of the image. Glyphs were often used in a composition to separate the images on a vessel or the PSS formed the base or the ceiling for the depicted scene. Still the PSS is not totally incorporated into the images as it does not comment on it, but comments the vessels form, function and owner. If there were any comments on the portrayed scene it was added by a secondary text placed within the image (Reents-Budet 1994, 12-16). The

secondary text either describes the actions displayed in the scene, names the main protagonists, or records what the protagonists were saying.

There are texts on Maya ceramic vessels that do not carry any real meaning. Many of these texts are composed of repetitions of one to three glyphs. Some of these signs could be readable and related to the PSS, but many were only simple imitations of Maya hieroglyphs, carrying no meaning. They are therefore named ‘pseudoglyphs’. Imitation might have been done to create the effect of high-status pottery for persons of lower status. The presence of pseudoglyphs seems to indicate that the artists was illiterate, but we cannot be certain of that (Reents-Budet 1994, 139-140).



Figure 3.10: Repetition of a pseudoglyph replacing the PSS on vessel K2599 (after Photograph © Justin Kerr)

### 3.3 Maya artists

There are a few general titles given to artists, such as *ajtz' ihb*, “scribe”; *yuxul*, “sculptor”, or *itz' aat*, “sage / wise man / learned one” (figure 3.11)(Stuart 1987, 1-8; Coe and Kerr 1998, 90).



**AJ-tz'i-bi / AJ- TZ'IB-ba**  
*a[j] tz'i[h]b / a[j] tz'i[h]b*  
 “writer / painter”



**yu-xu-lu / yu-xu-lu**  
*y-uxul / y-uxul*  
 “carver / sculptor”



**i-tz'a-ti / ITZAT?-ti**  
*itz'aat / itz'aat*  
 “sage” / “wise man”

Figure 3.11: Artists titles (after Coe and Kerr 1998, 90)

Another scribal title that was identified by Nikolai Grube has led to a wealth of information about the specific role of artists in Maya society. This title reads *aj k'uh hun*, “he of the holy books” (Schele and Grube 1995, 18-20). Grube interpreted such a personage as the keeper of the royal library. However,



Figure 3.12: Detail of vessel K4340, showing an *aj k'uh hun* wearing a sarong and headcloth with 'stick bundle' (after Photograph © Justin Kerr).

this title also appears on stone monument and vessels, thus it seems that this title was also applied to artists who produced paintings and carvings. Depictions of *aj k'uh hun* artists have shown that artists had their own specific costume and adornments (figure 3.12). This costume consists of a sarong that is wrapped around the body and bundled at the waist. The sarong is often quite long and can reach to the knees or even to the ankles. The hair is wrapped in a simple headcloth and is either cut short with jagged ends, or worn long bound together on the back of the head. Often tied to the headcloth is a 'stick bundle', which are believed to

be quill pens (Coe and Kerr 1998, 91-92). Sometimes one or more brush pens are stuck into the headdress. The brush pen(s) can also be replaced by a waterlily, which Coe and Kerr believe to be a punning metaphor for brush pen (Coe and Kerr 1998, 96). The representations of *aj k'uh hun* artists have shown that their role was greater than that of normal artists. They were also supervisors of ceremonies (involved in costuming rulers for ceremonial activities), marriage negotiators and tribute recorders (Coe and Kerr 1998, 93-95).

Most represented painters are male and almost all personal names of artists are preceded by the masculine classifier *aj*-. There is only one known instance where the title *tz'ib* is preceded by the feminine classifier, *ix-/na-* (K0772), thus we can assume that the artist profession was male dominated (Closs 1992; Reents-Budet 1994, 48).

The abundance of representations of Maya artists suggest that they were important individuals in Maya society. Artists are represented with elaborate clothing and fine jewelry and they seem to have been close company of the elite, as they are often portrayed sitting on or next to the ruler's throne. The most skillful painters were also the most highly educated people as they needed complete knowledge of the writing system and a full understanding of Maya history, science, ideology and cosmology. To be able to produce these polychrome painted ceramics long apprenticeships were in order (Reents-Budet 1994, 6). This might explain why they were so highly respected. There is one vase where the connection of a painter to Maya royalty is very explicitly stated. K635 bears the personal name of an *itz'at* and mentions that this artist is the son of a noble woman from the site Yaxha and his father is the ruler of Naranjo, known as Lord "Flint-Face" (figure 3.13). The artist is often referred to as Maxam, because his name includes the expression *aj-maxam*, "he of maxam" (Stuart 1989, 156-157; Reents-Budet 1994, 55). A few works from this artists are known and they are all exceptional skillful painted vessels. The ruler "Flint-Face" is depicted on a

number of stele from Naranjo, and ruled the city from A.D. 755-780 (Martin and Grube 2008, 80-82). We know that after the death of his father, Maxam did not acceded to the throne. Master Maya potters were thus in some cases sons of nobility, but they probably did not have a direct claim to the throne (Reents-Budet 1994, 53-54).

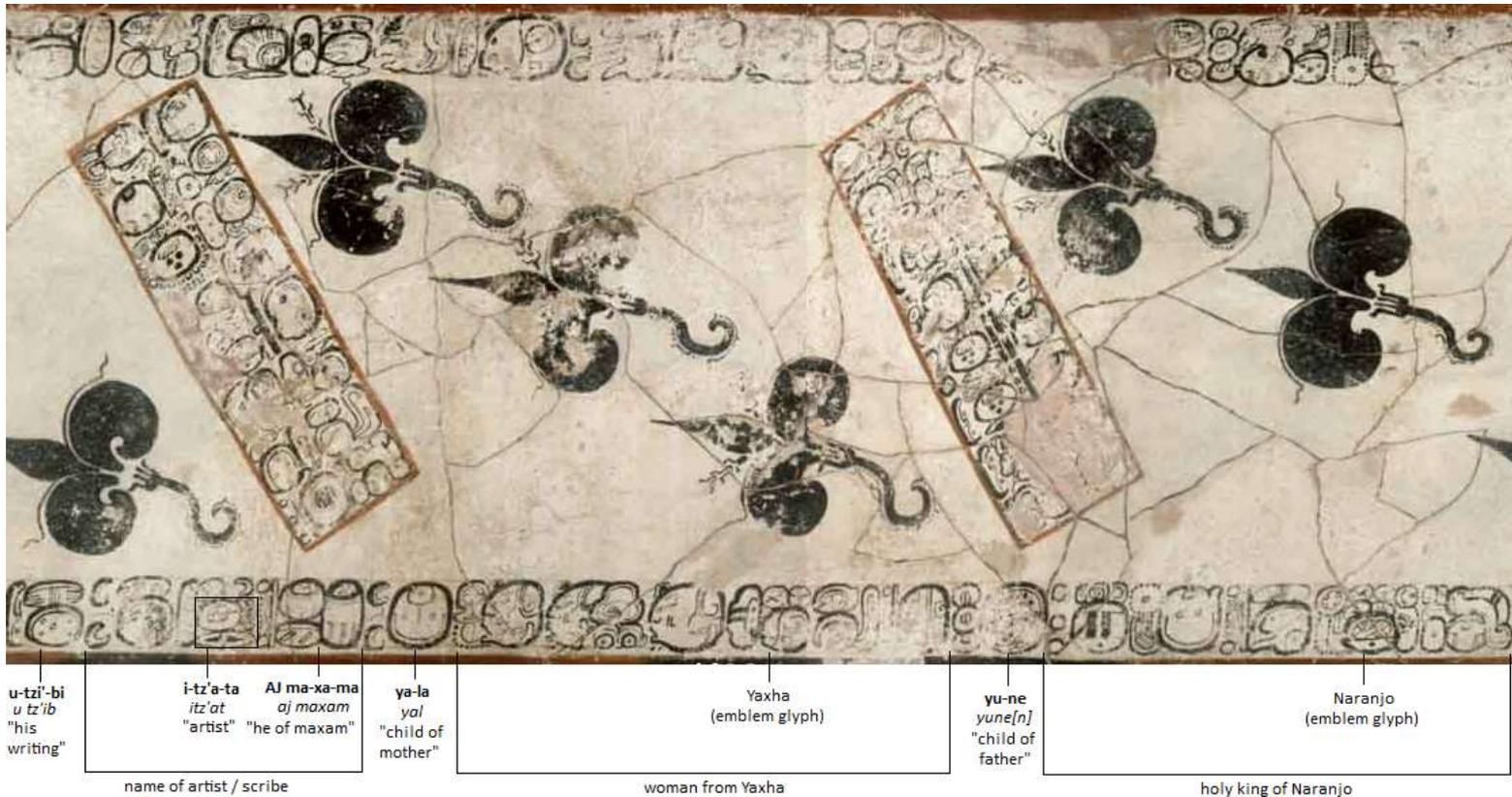


Figure 3.13: Rollout photograph of vessel K635 with partial translation of PSS (after Photograph © Justin Kerr).

Diego de Landa also mentions that the second sons of the lords were instructed by Maya priests and learned sciences and the art of hieroglyphic writing in codices. Landa mentions that Maya lords in general were well educated (Landa 1937, 27-28). To rule a city men must have had complete knowledge of religion and cosmology of a society. Maya rulers were also believed to be both rulers and priest so they had to have enormous amount of knowledge also about prophecies and divinations. Classic period stone monuments and vessels indeed name on some occasions an *ajaw*, "ruler/ lord", as an artist. Some rulers are also displayed with the 'stick bundle' on their headdress or with brush pens stuck into their headdress. This indicates that Classic Maya kings must have been lettered persons and were proud to display themselves as such (Coe and Kerr 1998, 97-99). In conclusion the Maya elite and scribal class held close social links. Many elite are presumed to have had a scribal education and some children of the ruling class would have taken the scribal arts as their profession.

There are also some supernatural beings depicted as artists. The Maize God, Itzamnaaj and Chahk are all depicted as artists in the codices. The god most associated with artists and the artists trade is God N. The pre-Columbian name of God N is Pawahtun a title that was also given to scribes. Pawahtun is represented as an aged deity, with toothless mouth, and wears a netted headdress. This headdress is often worn by other supernaturals when they take the role as scribes. Pawahtun himself is portrayed as a painter and carver of masks (Coe and Kerr 1997, 104). Furthermore there are some animals that on occasion acquire the artist profession. The monkey scribes Jun B'atz' and Jun Chuen (discussed in chapter 6) appear frequently on Maya ceramics, but there also appears to have been a supernatural vulture scribe and the rabbit associated with the Moon Goddess appears one time as scribe (K511)(Reents-Budet 1994, 43-46).

Supernatural artists had their own scribal insignia, such as the 'Sprangled Turban'. This is a large headdress made of some kind of padded element. In front of the headdress may appear the head of the Jester God, or a waterlily blossom and brush pens are often sticking out. Two other aspect often represented on supernatural artist are the so-called 'deer ear' tucked behind the ear of the artist and the 'print-out' icon. The element tucked behind the ear is in fact not a deer ear, but either represents a conch-shell inkpot or a feather pen (Coe and Kerr 1997, 105). The 'print-out' icon is thought to represent a strip of *amate* paper of which the codices were produced. This strip of paper emerges from under the arm of the artist or from his mouth and is always covered with bar-and-dot numerals. The strip of paper may therefore refer to Maya codices as these were filled with mathematical computations. It might be that the artists who created codices were the same as those who painted the polychrome pottery (Reent-Budet 1994, 41-43).

Only a small amount of ceramics are actually signed by the artist and these are all truly exceptional works. It might be that signed objects were the ones that were used as a social currency, because the signature added prestige to the vessel and thereby increased its social value (Reents-Budet 1994, 47-49). The works signed by an *itz' at* were made by artists who truly mastered painting techniques and pictorial conventions, but who also had full knowledge of the Maya script, history, cosmology and religion. Creations of an *itz' at* were so magnificent that they were associated with the deeds of creator gods (Reents-Budet 1994, 50).

### **3.4 Functions**

Pottery was invented for purely utilitarian functions for containing, storing and cooking foods and drinks. Pottery is a very useful material because it is easy and cheap to produce and it can be shaped in nearly every possible form. It has also proven to have many decorative possibilities and with that it

can be used as a medium for communication (Rice 1987, 266-267). The ancient Maya had three common functions for ceramics: 1) Service ware 2) Social currency 3) Funerary ware.

### Service ware

The presence of service wares in palace scenes on ceramics, such as the meeting of elites and the payment of tribute, show that ritual meals were part of historical events (Reents-Budet 1994, 85-86). There are three basic shapes of ceramic service wares which contents can first of all be deduced from common logic. Bowls and vessels usually hold liquids, and plates mostly contain solid foods. These basic assumptions are actually confirmed by the hieroglyphic texts on ceramics and the representation of ceramics in pottery scenes. The PSS, if present, tells us what the vessel, plate or bowl contained. The most common drinks were those made from cacao (chocolate). Residue analysis from several spouted vessels of the archaeological site at Colha, northern Belize, Central America, showed that chocolate (*Theobroma cacao*) was consumed by the Maya as early as 600 B.C. (Hurst et al. 2002). Cacao was considered a very important food and drink in Mesoamerica. The cacao seeds were not an abundant resource and they were therefore associated with wealth. Chocolate drinks apparently played an important part in Maya rituals and banquets as Maya ceramic vessels portray drink and foods present in palace scenes (Coe and Coe 1996, 36-40). From Diego de Landa we also know that rich Yucatan merchants and nobles often gave large parties in which they served chocolate:

“They often spend on one banquet all they have made by many days of trading or scheming. They have two methods of making these feasts; the first of these (that of the chiefs and leading men) obliges each guest to return an invitation to his host; to each guest the host must give a roast fowl and cacao and drinks in abundance, and after the banquet it is the custom to present each with a mantle to wear, with a small stand and a cup, as fine as the host can afford. If one of the guests has died, the obligation to give the return invitation lies on his house or parents” (Landa 1937, 35-36).

Dennis Tedlock mentions that at festivities, such as wedding banquets, the K'iche' used to *chokola'j*, “drink chocolate together” (Tedlock in Coe and Coe 1996, 63). We unfortunately have no knowledge about how commoners consumed cacao and in fact if they consumed it all (Coe and Coe 1996, 45-46).

There were many forms of chocolate drinks as can be deduced from hieroglyphic expressions. Common expressions on ceramics are *tsih te'el kakaw*, “tree-fresh cacao”, *tsih kakaw*, “fresh cacao”, and *te'el kakaw*, “tree cacao”, all referring to cacao made from the sweet pulp of the

cacao pod. Another drink, called *k'ab kakaw*, was made from fermented cacao mixed with honey, and the Maya also drank a bitter cacao drink, *ch'ah kakaw*, with no sweetener (Reents-Budet 1994, 75). There was also a drink that was flavored with chili, called *ikal cacao*, “chili cacao” (Houston in Coe and Coe 1996, 51). Cacao expressions on ceramics are also often preceded by *yutal* meaning something like “fruity”, not knowing what that exactly refers to. We do not know if the Maya drank their chocolate hot or cold, but of course they could have done both (Coe and Coe 1996, 51).



Figure 3.14: Partial drawing of vessel K511 showing the earliest depiction of the froth-producing process (Coe and Coe 1996, 49).

Coe and Kerr mention that it is unlikely that the Maya actually drank from the pictorial polychrome vessels themselves. Instead these were used to hold the bulk of the liquid. The chocolate was probably drunk from smaller and more handy calabash cups (Coe and Kerr 1998, 60). The Princeton Vase (K511) gives us a glimpse of how these vessels were used. The lady standing on the right side of this vessel scene is shown pouring a dark liquid from one vessel into another by a considerable height (figure 3.14). This was probably done to create a large foam layer on top of the chocolate that was considered as the most desirable part of the drink by the Aztec and most likely also by the Maya. In early Colonial Yucatec dictionaries we indeed find expressions as *yom cacao*, meaning “chocolate foam”, *takan kel*, “to roast the cacao very well in order to make a lot of foam on the chocolate” and *t’oh haa*, meaning something like pouring from one vessel into another from a height (Coe and Coe 1996, 48-50).

Cylindrical vessels mainly contained chocolate drinks, but dishes and bowls contained other food stuff besides chocolate, of which *ul*, was the most common. This corn drink is known today as *atole*. The most common food served on plates are tamales or bread made from corn. The tamale was known as *waaj* among the Classic Maya and we find it represented on numeral vessels scenes, but also in the codices. In palace scenes on ceramics, tamales are often portrayed placed in broad, shallow bowls. Tamales could be filled with other foods, such as iguana, deer, and fish. Many tamales shown on vessels are covered with some sort of sauce (figure 3.15). This could have been honey or paste made of squash seeds. The tamale was also an esteemed ceremonial food for offerings as can clearly be seen in the codices (Taube 1989). Other food served on plates was *pozole*, a more solid form of *atole*, and pulp of the cacao fruit.

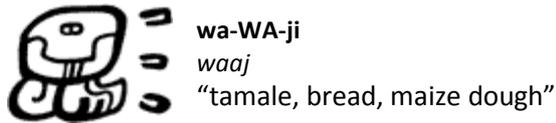


Figure 3.15: a) *waaj* glyph (Montgomery and Helmke 2007); b) Tamales covered with a red sauce and served in a tripod plate (after Photograph © Justin Kerr).

Besides foods, service ware also held ritual items (Reents-Budet 1994, 83). Plates depicted on ceramics, carved stone, and painted murals show us that plates were used to hold strips of paper cloth spattered with human blood and other paraphernalia used in bloodletting rituals (figure 3.16). Plates are also portrayed holding the body of sacrificed victims or different body parts, which might indicate that they served as offering plates (figure 3.17)(Reents-Budet 1994, 79-80).



Figure 3.16: Detail of Yaxchilan Lintel 14 showing Lady Chak Chami holding a sacrificial plate, which contains an obsidian lancet and blood-covered strips of paper (after Schele 2000).



Figure 3.17: Detail of vessel K1203 showing monkey holding a plate with disembodied hand, eyeball, and femur (Photograph © Justin Kerr).

### Social currency

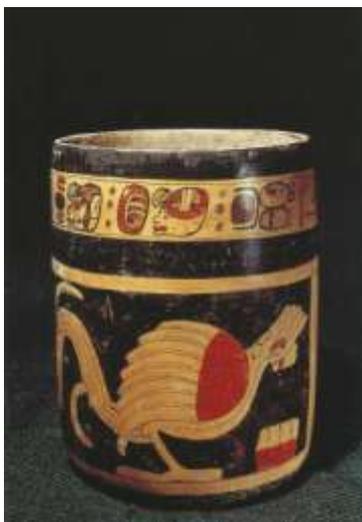


Figure 9.18: The Quetzal Vase (Reents-Budet 1994, 98)

Polychrome pottery also functioned as social currency. We can imagine that a ruler would bestow gifts on elite from other sites to ensure their continuing social, political, and economic alliance. Among these gifts were finely painted vessels. One example of such 'trade ware' is the so-called Quetzal Vase (figure 3.18). This vessel was found in the tomb of an elite person of Copan, but painting style and paste chemistry have indicated that it was not produced in the Copan Valley. It was not even produced in Honduras, but in north-central Belize. The vessel itself could have been used in a social visit between the ruling elite of these two regions, it could also have been

a regal gift. Whatever its use, the vessel became symbolic of the alliance and its accompanying obligations. Such a finely crafted vessel underscored the relation between the two elite lineages. The receiver acquired status and power just by possessing such a gift because it physically showed his connection to the ruler who gave him the vessel. In return such a vessel also lend prestige to the giver as it showed that he possessed the power and resources to have such a fine pottery vessel produced. In order for an object to have this status it must have been a special object, finely crafted and painted by well-trained artists. The presence of the name of an artist would possibly add more value to the piece (Reents-Budet 1994, 88-89). But besides the actual signature of an artist, artists 'signatures' could also be recognized in the painting style. Different painting styles have been indentified to belonging to a specific area, site or workshop. Some styles are so specific that they are even attributed to a specific painter. An example is the Buenavista Vase (figure 3.19), excavated in a tomb at Buenavista del Cayo, Belize, which has such a distinguishable style that the works of this master painter can easily be recognized from the other hundreds of vessels painted in the Holmul-style (discussed in chapter 8). The Buenavista Vase was actually produced near the site of Naranjo and gifted to a ruler of Buenavista del Cayo by the powerful Naranjo ruler *K'ak Til*. The artist signature is especially recognizable from the shapes of his glyphs, and the choices of certain PSS glyphs. The Buenavista Vase was apparently so valued that men began to make their own version of the style at a workshop in Buenavista del Cayo (figure 3.20). These local version were however of lower quality. (Reents-Budet 1994, 89-91; 99). If we are able to recognize pottery form different regions we can imagine that the ancient Maya also must have recognized when a certain ceramic object had a 'foreign' nature. It is possible that specific vessels were gifted more than once as the act of giving itself only enhances the worth of the object (Reents-Budet 1994, 92).



Figure 3.19: The Buenavista Vase (Reents-Budet 1994, 99)



Figure 3.20: Holmul-style vases produced in a workshop at Buenavista del Cayo (Reents-Budet 1994, 99)

### Funerary ware

The amount of painted vessels that are found in Classic Maya tombs suggest that an important function of polychrome painted pottery was as funerary wares that held food and other offerings for the deceased. The practice of leaving food for the deceased is a very common one. In Japan tea, rice and water is left for the deceased on a daily basis (Hicks 1999, 355). We find this practice of feeding the dead also in contemporary Mexico. On the Day of the Dead (2 November), family and friends remember those who have died. They do this by cleaning and repainting the graves, decorating them with flowers, and lighting candles. But also by preparing foods and drink that are offered to the dead (Hicks 1999, 97). Food is offered to the deceased because it is believed that it is needed in the afterlife. In a way the dead are not entirely gone. Something of the individual continues after death and therefore it is believed that the deceased are still present among the living (Davies 2002, 3-6). This thought of an afterlife is also present among the Maya. They believed that the deceased travelled to the Underworld. The deceased had to travel through all of the nine layers of the Underworld, and at each layer he had to go to ordeals such as horrible rivers, hills that clashed together, high plains with incredible cold winds, etc. After going to all the trials and defeating the Lords of the Underworld the deceased was able to resurrect. The Hero Twins also have to take a journey when they travel to the Underworld, one that is much like the journey deceased souls had to take (Coe 1973, 12-13).



Figure 3.21: Photograph of plate K5054, a so-called 'Turkey Vulture' plate (Photograph © Justin Kerr).

There are some categories of pottery that were exclusively produced for funerary purposes. An example of these are the so-called 'Turkey Vulture' plates. These plates are almost all found in burials and they portray images which are connected to death and the Underworld. The most frequently portrayed image is that of a Muan bird, which is known as a messenger of the Lords of the Underworld, with around its neck a diadem with a *kimi*, or "death", sign. Often this Muan bird is surrounded by a saurian creature that seems to be swimming in the black waters of the Underworld. These wares are all plates that lack PSS text and they were produced in large quantities. Thus it is assumed that they

were created for a broad audience. Because of the limiting iconographic variation and its specific representation of Underworld themes these plates have been identified as purely being funerary wares (Reents-Budet 1994, 187).

Another indication that pottery was interred in tombs to provide the dead with the right materials for the afterlife is that often a complete service set is found with the deceased. In Dos Pilas we find many burials that contain a cylinder vessel, a bowl and a plate thus giving the deceased a complete service set to use in the afterlife (Reents-Budet 1994:82).

However, on close examination it appears that many pottery stemming from burial tombs show signs of heavy wear indicating that they were used before they entered the tomb. The patterns of wear on these funerary pottery correspond with the damage suffered by pottery that was used in food services and related rituals (Reents-Budet 1994, 74-75). These wares were probably used in a wide variety of feasts. They might even have been used in funerary rites, but we cannot prove that. It is also possible that the ceramics found were personal possessions of the deceased. Many vessels found in tombs were actually imported, some from quite far away. We might imagine that these would have been highly valued and if these vessels were personal items it is quite logic that they stayed with their owner even after death (McNeil 2010).

The question remains if the funerary wares actually contained anything at all when they were place in tombs of the elite. Residue analysis can give us an answer to this question. Residue analysis from three early Classic tombs in Copan clearly confirm the importance of cacao as a ritual offering. All tombs held at least one vessel that had contained cacao (McNeil 2010). Residue analysis also showed that cacao was not only consumed as a beverage. Cacao has been found together with animal and fish bones, suggesting that meat and fish might have been served with some sort of cacao sauce. A cacao sauce may also have been used in combination with tamales, as cacao was also found on a tamale platter (McNeil 2010). In Copan men also discovered that cinnabar and hematite were frequently added to foods. Especially cinnabar, that was found throughout the ritual spaces and over the bodies of the rulers. This addition of hematite and cinnabar suggest that the Maya differentiated between foods created for the living and those created for the dead. Cinnabar contains mercury, which can cause many diseases, and thus is not considered to have been eaten by the living. Also the cinnabar and hematite found in the vessels was very coarse and thus would be unpleasant to consume for a living person (McNeil 2010).

### **3.5 Conclusion**

Although simple in form some Classic Maya polychrome pottery portrays extravagant painted scenes. These images could be related to mythological, religious, or historical events. There were Classic Maya pottery painters that held a high position in society and these were considered as important

individuals. Some were even sons of the nobility. Their high position is shown by their frequent association with elites and rulers and the fact that they had their own specific costume and adornments. It is likely that these 'master' pottery painters not only possessed the skill of painting, but also of writing and carving. The acts of writing, painting and carving were all considered as the same creative activity by the ancient Maya. Master artists must therefore have had an extensive education and long apprenticeships. This might be the reason why they held such a high position in society. Master artists produced ceramics that exceeded in quality and were used for palace and ceremonial use by the nobility and priests or they were used as elite ritual gifts. However, these master painters only created a small amount of the totality of ceramics. There were also many common craftspeople that produced ceramics for the lower strata of the society. In the Maya corpus of polychrome pottery we find many differentiation of artistic quality. There are hundreds of vessel with simple and some even poorly executed imagery. Many are without hieroglyphic texts which might indicate that the artist was illiterate (Reents-Budet 1994, 66). The majority of Classic period polychrome pottery is not elaborately decorated. Most pottery portrays simplistic pictorial scenes and short versions of the PSS if they represent text at all. These shortened versions of the PSS do not include the names of the owner or artist. In general the painters of these vases were less talented and not so highly educated as the master painters. Polychrome pottery is not only found in elite tombs and residences, but also in refuse deposits. A pattern emerges from archaeological finds, which shows that the exceptionally well-painted and personalized pottery is found in elite residences and the lesser quality pottery is found in the refuse deposits that belonged to the residences of the 'commoners'. Higher status residences thus contain more high quality wares and lesser quality wares are connected to lower-status living compounds. As the lesser elite and commoners represented a much larger proportion of society we can imagine that the amount of lesser quality pottery is far greater than the high quality pottery. In general we also find that less elaborately painted pottery is connected to the smaller subservient sites and the more powerful sites show higher quality in pottery (Reents-Budet 1994, 98).

The Classic Maya polychrome pottery discussed in this thesis is mostly considered being of high quality and was produced by master painters. These wares display unique scenes that can provide valuable insights into ancient Maya mythology. The images on these vessels express ideas and stories in a very abbreviated form, being composed of complex symbolic elements. To be able to identify and understand the signs and symbols used in these pottery scenes and understand the complex mythological tales they tell it is important to have a clear method of researching these pottery scenes. The next chapter will therefore discuss the studies of iconography and semiotics to provide a methodology for researching Classic Maya pictorial polychrome pottery.

## Chapter 4: Theory and method of iconography

The research conducted in this thesis is the study of images depicted on Maya ceramics. The identification, description, and interpretation of images is in itself a complete study called iconography. Iconography concerns itself with the subjects that are depicted in an image, the composition of these subjects, and the individual elements and details of which the image is composed. Therefore this chapter will describe the field of iconography in order to have a clear methodology of how to approach the images on Maya ceramics. Iconography is in fact a study of the 'logos' (the words, ideas, discourse, or 'science') of 'icons' (images, pictures, or likenesses) (Mitchell 1986, 1). An icon is considered as a sign and an image is composed of different signs. To understand the difference between particular signs it is also important to look at the field of semiotics. Semiotics is the study of signs and sign systems. Some of the symbolic signs used by the ancient Maya are only left to us in the form of decoration on ceramics. An important part of this thesis is to identify symbolic signs on Maya ceramics and explain their possible meaning, for which the disciplines of semiotics and iconography will be used. At the end of this chapter will be a short discussion about how the Maya used the surface of vessels to display images and the particular ways in which continuous scenes and stories were displayed.

### 4.1 Iconographical theory

#### Panofsky's Iconography

Iconography is a branch of art history that concerns itself with the identification, description and interpretation of the content of images. Or as Erwin Panofsky proclaims it is the focus on the subject matter or meaning of works of art, instead of looking at their form (Panofsky 1967, 3). Erwin Panofsky was an influential figure in the field of iconography. His most important work was *Studies in Iconology*, in which he introduces his three levels of iconographical description (Panofsky 1967, 3-17). Following will be a description of this approach, which I will use throughout this thesis.

The description of the form of an image is nothing more than stating what we perceive visually, thus the colors; lines; and forms used in an image. We add meaning to this description when we start to identify what is actually displayed, such as the objects and actions taking place in an image. Identifying the visible objects in an image comes from our practical experience. This first level of interpretation, which Panofsky calls the *factual meaning*, is something that we automatically do

when we see an image (Panofsky 1967, 3). To explain the process of iconography Panofsky uses the example of an acquaintance greeting him on the street by the removal of his hat. A formal description would mention the colors, the lines and forms that are visible in the image. But most of the times we skip this step and immediately go the facts, indentifying the gentlemen as the object and the removing of the hat as the action. The identification of certain objects and actions is instantly followed by the creation of a second layer of meaning, which Panofsky calls *expressional meaning* (Panofsky 1967, 3). The expressional meaning in this example is that you will sense certain details about the person that is greeting you. Being, for instance, the fact if this person is indifferent, friendly, or hostile to you and you might even sense if the person is in a bad or good humor. The expressional meaning thus involves a sort of sensitivity towards the objects and actions, which again is provided by our practical experience. Looking at an image of a person is of course different than an actual meeting with a person. The expressional meaning in images might be grasped by the physical characteristics of individuals, such as their facial expression. Unfortunately in Maya art persons were hardly individualized by physical characteristic, figures were generalized and represented types rather than individuals. Instead their identity was indicated by the application of signs, which were incorporated in their clothes and headdresses. In this case our practical experience is not very helpful in providing an expressional meaning. The factual and expressional meaning together are classified by Panofsky as the *primary or natural subject matter* (Panofsky 1967, 5). In the case of iconography of Mayan images the expressional meaning will be part of the next step, because to understand the nature of Maya persons and figures we need the be acquainted with Maya civilization and their customs and cultural traditions.

The *secondary or conventional meaning* has to do with the significance of the image (Panofsky 1967, 4). To come to this level of understanding our knowledge from practical experience is no longer sufficient. The secondary meaning can only be understood when we are familiar with the customs and cultural traditions of the civilization from which the image arrives. To understand that the action of hat removing is an actual greeting towards you, it is necessary that you are familiar with the customs of the western world. Thus understanding the significance of hat removing as a greeting belongs to the secondary meaning. Panofsky explains that neither an Australian bushman nor an Ancient Greek would have grasped the actual meaning of the hat removing, because they do not know the customs of western civilization (Panofsky 1967, 4).

The ultimate level of meaning is named the *intrinsic meaning or content* (Panofsky 1967, 5). It is the level in which we not only explain the visible image, but its total significance. This level is difficult to research and cannot be done on the basis of a single image or event. We need to compare the image to others and have a full understanding of the atmosphere from which the image arrives (Panofsky 1967, 3-5). The *content*, according to Panofsky, of the man removing his hat is not only

understanding the complete significance of this action, but knowing the complete nature/ personality of this man (Panofsky 1967, 4-5). We can achieve this by comparing the actions of the man other than the hat-removing and interpret them in connection to the general information we have about the man's nationality, social class, etc.

### Primary meaning

In the first instance we have to identify pure forms and interpret the objects they represent. Forms that carry meaning can be called motifs and we can also identify how these motifs are related to each other in the composition. This is termed a *pre-iconographical* description of an image and constitutes the level of *primary meaning* (Panofsky 1967, 5). Everybody is able to recognize human beings, animals, and plants. Sometimes it is possible that our personal experience is not broad enough to identify a certain object, animal, or plant. In that case we just have to consult other sources in order to be able to identify what is being represented and thus widen our practical knowledge. Panofsky expresses an interesting note when saying that our practical experience should be sufficient, but it does not guarantee the correctness of our description of an image (Panofsky 1967, 9). There are no specific truths about what or how we see. Each person relates to things in its own way and imagines things in his own way. What a person perceives in an image is dependent on two types of factors, external and internal (Hermerén 1969, 34). External factors occur outside the observer and internal factors are the interests, education, knowledge and assumptions of the observer. The expectations of the observer determine what he will detect in an image and how the image will be ordered. Therefore every image will be perceived differently by different observers (Hermerén 1969, 39). What we perceive in an image is in part influenced by the time period in which we live. Panofsky mentions the history of *style*, which denotes that every time period is accompanied by different styles of representation (Panofsky 1967, 11). Thus the correctness of our description of an image depends to a certain extent on whether we are able to see 'through' the style and recognize the objects and events depicted. It is difficult to grasp the style of the ancient Maya. For one because the style is part of a completely different time period and secondly it is a style that is historically not related to me. The fact that I am European relates me to a western style of representation and my education and life experiences have been influenced by European/ Western styles. However, I have been studying Maya civilization and Maya ceramics for over 7 years now and I have acquainted myself with the style of representations and particular uses and meaning of motifs and elements. I should therefore be able to see 'through' the style and recognize object and events depicted on Maya ceramics. Motifs and elements in an image might help us to reconstruct the specific scene that is represented. Identifying the elements in an image is thus an important step in

our iconographical analysis. The elements in an image are in fact different signs and to understand the working and meaning of signs the next section will give an introduction into the field of semiotics, the study of signs.

## 4.2 Semiotics

A 'sign' can be defined as anything that stands for something else, including words, images, sounds, gestures, objects, etc. (Chandler 2007, 2; Preucel 2006, 5). Semioticians study everything involved in the use of signs, thus not only the sign itself, but also how signs are formed, how meanings are attributed to signs and how they are represented. Semiotics, in other words, studies the capacity of humans to produce and understand signs. It is in our nature to make meanings out of things. Anything can be a sign as long as there is someone imbuing it with significance, thus making it stand for something different than itself.

The dominant contemporary models of semiotics are those of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce. These studies combined form the foundation of what today is generated under the term semiotics (Chandler 2007, 2-3). Saussure saw semiotics as a signifying system of which linguistics was the basic component (Saussure 1983). Peirce had a different view in seeing that semiotics was a part of life, encompassing all that exists in the universe (Peirce 1934). The danger of using Saussure's approach is that we have to force all media in a linguistic framework (Chandler 2007, 8). Language is often seen as the most powerful communication system, however, a large part of our world now and also in the past consists of visual signs. Visual signs do not work according to the same system as language, objects are different than words. Another difference between Saussure and Peirce is that Saussure focuses on dichotomies, such as signified and signifier, langue and parole etc. and Peirce on trichotomies, such as sign-object-interpretant. Dichotomies only stipulate the oppositional relation of difference. Trichotomies on the other hand are more suited for exploring the dynamics of mediation (Preucel 2006, 249). I therefore agree with Robert Preucel that a semiotic approach based on that of Peirce is the most useful in archaeological practice (Preucel 2006, 247-250). In archaeology the basic task is to identify the different signs that humans used in cultural constructs. Peirce's tripartite notion of sign relation and his distinction between icon, index, and symbol comes to hand in this endeavor. I will therefore also use Peirce's semiotics approach for my own study.

Peirce made multiple typologies of signs to be able to categorize the different meanings of signs. The most used division of signs is that of the three modes, being symbol, icon, and index

(Peirce 1932). A symbol is a sign that refers to something by the standards of some sort of law, it is associated with something else by a general idea. It does not resemble to what it refers and thus the relationship must be agreed upon and learned. An example is a flag, which in itself has no meaning yet is commonly taken as being the symbol of a country. Other examples are language in general, numbers, morse code, traffic lights, etc. (Chandler 2007, 36-37; Preucel 2006, 56).

An index is a sign that refers to something by being itself affected or changed by the object it refers to. The sign is directly connected in some way to the thing it signifies. An example is a weathervane, which is affected by the direction of the wind and that is also what it refers to. Other examples are medical systems, thermometer, clock, etc. (Chandler 2007, 37; Preucel 2006, 56). Pottery analyzed by the use of neutron activation to determine where it originated from, functions as an indexical sign. The inclusions in the pottery are indexes of the geology at the place of origin. When studying ethnic or group identity as is expressed through pottery style, style is also an indexical sign (Capone *et al.* 2002, 111).

Icons are signs that refer to something else by using its characteristics. In a sense they are imitating or resembling what they refer to. Examples are a diagram, painting, metaphors, etc. Icons have qualities that make them resemble the objects that they actually represent (Chandler 2007, 37-41; Preucel 2006, 56).

The difficulty with this division is that the symbol, index and icon are not mutually exclusive. A specific sign can actually be all three forms or any combination (Chandler 2007, 44). For example a map can be perceived as an index, because it points to the location of places, but it is also an icon as it imitates the directional relation and distance between places and a map is in a way also a symbol because the significance of the elements used to indicate places and landmarks have to be learned to be able to make sense of a map. A petroglyph picturing an eagle can also represent many things (figure 4.1). It can be indexical, representing a signature of a warrior or an emblem of a tribe, it could also be symbolic for courage, or just an iconic picture, depicting an eagle.



Figure 4.10: A petroglyph of an eagle at Legend Rock Petroglyph site in Hot Spring County, Wyoming (Schwartz 2011)

The meaning of an image does not simply reflect the object it depicts. A picture or an image is in fact not a duplicate of what it is supposed to represent. An icon is therefore described as resembling that what it refers to and it only resembles an objects in some respects. Not every icon is therefore so easily recognizable (Mitchell 1986, 38). However, with a little bit of research it should be possible to recognize an icon, but a symbol is more difficult to understand. For example, figure 4.2 represents a cross and when asked for the symbolism many will identify it as the Christian Cross, the most common symbol of Christianity, representing the death of Jesus when he was crucified on the True Cross and his resurrection. Christianity is so widespread that it is recognized by a great many people across the world. Of course when not familiar with the Christian religion it is difficult to understand what an image of a cross might symbolize.



Figure 4.11: The Christian Cross (Wikipedia 2011).

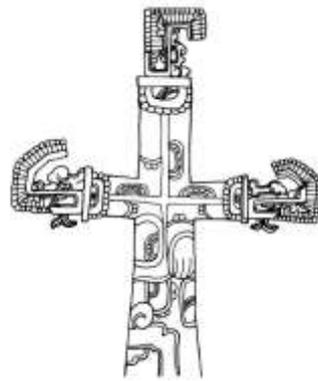


Figure 4.12: The World Tree. Detail from the Sarcophagus lid of K'inich Janaab' Pakal I of Palenque (after Schele, 2000).

The ancient Maya for example had their own cross symbolism. The World Tree of the ancient Maya was also shaped as a cross and it represented the center of the cosmos, connecting all the layers of the world with each other. The Maya did not visualize a heaven, earth and hell as Christians do but they conceived the universe as consisting of three worlds (Underworld, Middleworld, and Upperworld), further divided into multiple layers, in which humans, spirits, gods, and ancestors continuously interacted (Freidel *et al.* 1993, 34). The World Tree symbolized Maya religion, such as the cross symbolizes Christianity. Cross-shaped World Trees existed long before the Spanish arrived. In time the image of the World Tree transformed into and merged with the Christian Cross, but in the early days of Maya conversion the image of the Christian Cross was taken as a symbol for the cosmic center (Freidel *et al.* 1993, 251-256). This shows that similar motifs and themes do not always have the same meaning. Throughout time the meaning of symbolic elements change, further complicating iconographic analysis. When analyzing iconographic elements it is therefore necessary to compare the different representations in time and also by looking at the other elements that are depicted in

the image and see how they are related to each other, that is how we might discover the actual meaning of the iconographical element.

So how do we know if an image has a symbolic meaning and more importantly what that meaning might be? Symbols are formed out of other signs and there is often a connection between that sign and the symbolic meaning. For example, humans have a habit of identifying every object that is longer than it is wide with a phallus. In this case when the form of an object resembles that of a phallus, the object can be used to symbolize the phallus. It is also possible that not the form, but certain properties link a sign to its symbolic meaning. In both cases there is a natural connection between the object (X) and symbolism (Y). Thus people think of Y when X is represented because they share a natural connection that can be recognized without there being some sort of conventions or rules (Hermerén 1969, 80). This can be termed as a natural symbol and defined as: “[...] a property or a set of properties *P* is attributed to something (ape, lion, unicorn) *X*, and since there is some kind of similarity or analogy between *P* and an idea *Y*, an image of *X* lends itself to be used as a symbol of *Y*, that is, to make people think of *Y*” (Hermerén 1969, 82). For example lions were used as a symbol for heroes because of their supposed courage and strength. The ancient Maya used a great many natural symbols and it is therefore that we are able to understand the meaning of many of their symbols. For example nocturnal animals, such as owls and bats were associated with darkness and therefore became symbolic for the Maya Underworld. Animals were often used as natural symbols. Another example is the turtle which symbolized the earth, because the turtle floats in the water and its shell actually looks like the earth because it sticks out of the water’s surface.

### **4.3 Iconographical method**

Let us apply the iconographical approach to a Classic Maya vessel and give a pre-iconographical description of the image, identifying all the different signs in the image, and determine its primary meaning. A formal description of vessel K6995 (figure 4.4) would mention that the image has four basic colors, orange, yellow, black, and white. On the top and bottom of the vessels we find an orange band, followed by a black and white colored band. The space between these bands is colored yellow and filled with four composite forms. The discussion of form, although useful is most often skipped because it is something that everyone can perceive, and in this thesis it will just take up too much time and space to consider in great detail. There is however an interesting fact about the form of the representation of vessel K6995. The vessel’s yellow background, the use of bright white, black,

and orange colors and especially the black-and-white bands with chevron motifs at the rim and base is an index that the vessel belongs to the Chamá-style. The Chamá-style pottery originates from the Chamá Valley and adjacent Chixoy Drainage area in the southern Guatemala highlands and date from the late seventh or early eighth centuries (Reents-Budet 1994, 194-197).

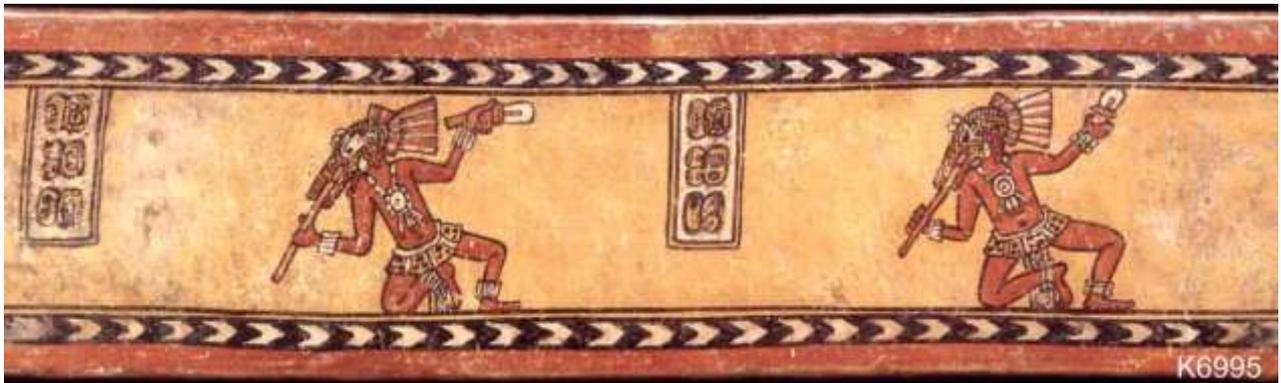


Figure 4.13: Photograph of vessel K6995 portraying two Armadillo dancers (Photograph © Justin Kerr).

The factual meaning of the vessel, although also an automatism, is in fact very important. K6995 represents two identical figures, their bodies are human, but they have armadillo heads. The composition of their body and the fact that they are holding certain objects in their hands leads to the suspicion that they are in the middle of some kind of action. When the representations come from a society or period unknown to us we must try to acquaint ourselves with the knowledge that the maker of the representation must have had. When analyzing Maya images we must gather as much information about Maya culture as possible. We thus need to connect the motifs that we have identified on the Maya vessel to themes or concepts of the ancient Maya. This secondary level of meaning is called the *iconographical analysis in the narrower sense* (Panofsky 1967, 7). This level is the basic part of the description of images in this thesis. Let us turn back to the figures of K6995. The bodies of the figures are human which suggest that they are actually wearing armadillo masks. Imitation of supernatural beings or animals was a very common practice for the ancient Maya and often they wore masks and costumes in certain performances. From other depictions we can identify the objects that the figures are holding. In their right hand they hold a flute and they are actually playing it. In their left hand they hold a rattle. The figures are thus making music and the position they are taking might indicate that they are dancing (Coe 1973, 44-45). The act of dancing in Maya imagery has been recognized for quite some time. In early Maya research men only sporadically mentioned dancing. Teobert Maler noted that on Stele 2, of Motul de San Jose two figures are portrayed wearing elaborate costumes and are standing on tiptoes (Maler 1910, 134-135). He did identify this position as dancing, but did not stress the subject further. That dancing was a significant performance of the ancient Maya became clear after the discovery of the Bonampak murals in 1946.

The mural paintings of Room 1 and 3 show elaborately dressed figures performing dances. That these figures were indeed dancing was confirmed by the translation of the verb for dancing by Nicolai Grube (Grube 1992). He noticed that a specific verb often accompanied scenes that depicted elaborately dressed figures which had their heel raised. This position had already been associated with dancing and thus made Grube come to the conclusion that this verb must represent this action. This interpretation also fitted the phonetic reading of the sign being either phonetically used as *ak'* and accompanied by *a* prefixes and *ti* or *ta* suffixes, or used as a logogram spelling *ahk'ot*, "to dance". Although the hieroglyph for dance is not present on vessel K6995 the pose has indeed been identified as dancing (Coe 1973, 44-45).

An iconographical analysis does not only deal with motifs, but with images, stories and allegories. To fully understand the secondary level of meaning we must be familiar with specific themes and concepts that can be found in literary sources or that are transmitted orally. We thus need to access texts or stories that give information about the depicted scenes. Unfortunately, there are no texts accompanying the images of pre-historic societies. Iconography without text is a problematic field. When using Panofsky's three levels of iconography we would not be able to advance further than the first. When text is inaccessible it will be difficult to understand the meaning behind an image not to say impossible. Texts are therefore always introduced somewhere in the discussion of the meaning of images. Images alone can only give us information about the resemblance and depiction (Taylor 2008, 8-9). It is fortunate that a large amount of Classic period Maya imagery is accompanied by text. Thus the meanings of the imagery is partly understood. However, there are only a few vessels which have textual information on the depicted scenes. The depiction of vessel K6995 is accompanied by hieroglyphic text, but I have not been able to translate it. But there is a scene in the Popol Vuh in which the Hero Twins are playing music and perform a dance called the Armadillo (Christensen 2007, 183). This vessel has therefore been identified as displaying the Hero Twins in the act of the Armadillo dance (Coe 1973, 44-45). The Popol Vuh is in fact an invaluable source to the iconographic research of polychrome pottery, because many ceramic vessels do not portray any hieroglyphic text and if there is a hieroglyphic text accompanying the scenes on vessels it hardly ever comments on the depicted scenes.

The third level of meaning, called the *iconographical interpretation in a deeper sense*, or the *intrinsic meaning*, is apprehending the underlying principles of an image that reveal the basics of a nation, a period, a religious influence, etc. (Panofsky 1967, 7-8). The interpretation of the content of the image requires not only acquaintance with specific themes and concepts from one image, but a much deeper and fuller understanding of the civilization from which the image arrives. This level of interpretation deals with understanding the basic principles which underlie the choice and presentation of motifs, the production and interpretation of images and stories, and even the

arrangement of forms and techniques used to produce the image (Panofsky 1969, 16). Just as we can acquaint ourselves with styles throughout history we can also acquire knowledge about how themes and concepts were expressed by objects and events. K6995 presents only a small part of the myth of the Popol Vuh and we cannot truly ascertain that this part of the story was really the same in the Classic period by one representation. To understand the mythological tale of creation of the Classic Maya period it is necessary to look at all possible representations of the Popol Vuh. The third level of iconography can only be reached after we have identified which specific scenes from the Popol Vuh are displayed on Maya ceramics and especially how they are portrayed. The intrinsic meaning of the content of images will thus be discussed in the concluding chapter nine.

In the next section there will be a short overview of how men can illustrate a story. It is important to know the process by which an artist transforms a story into an image and especially how the Maya artists illustrated stories on ceramics.

#### **4.4 Illustrating a story**

A story often evolves in an amount of time. The problem of illustrating a story is that an image lacks the dimension of time and thus the artist has to create it. Events and actions that take a considerable amount of time in a story, have to be transformed into a static immobile representation. There are different methods to achieve this. General principals involved in the illustration of a story are: simplification, abstraction, condensation, dramatization, and specification (Hermerén 1969, 59). The illustrated story is often simplified by omitting various parts of course because of the restrictions of the medium. The artist will focus on what he perceives to be the essential features of the story. A text is composed of words and thus leaves much to the imagination of the artist who wants to illustrate the text in an image. Thus an artist cannot avoid specifying the text in his own way and supplementing or abstracting parts from the story. The story will be condensed by combining and reducing certain passages of a scene together and forming one scene. Of course a text can also be dramatized by putting more emphasis on certain features. Just as an image can be interpreted in many ways we must not forget that also a story or text can be interpreted in several ways.

Maya artist had two common ways of displaying images on ceramics. One form was to divide the surface of the vessel into two halves on which men mostly displayed the same image. Vessel K2294 (figure 4.5) for instance displays two almost identical figures, suggesting that the same



Figure 4.14: Rollout photograph of vessel K2294, portraying two male figures (Photograph © Justin Kerr).

person is displayed twice. Although the figure might represent an important personage the image does not really display any action and there is definitely not a display of a continuing story

The other form was to display the image as a continuous scene, taking up the whole surface, in which a person has to rotate the vessel in order to see the whole image. Vessel K504 (figure 4.6) displays an example of such a vessel in which we can clearly see that the image consists of scene displaying a meeting of three individuals which share drinks and food. Again this is a fairly static image, there is no real action. There is only one scene displayed and not a complete story.



Figure 4.15: Rollout photograph of vessel K504, portraying a meeting of three figures (Photograph © Justin Kerr).

A general method of illustrating a story is to represent key moments in separated pictures and place these pictures side by side in chronological order (Hermerén 1969, 58). The story thus progresses per following picture and men gets the sense of time passing. Men can either repeat the same person in different moments or situations to illustrates that there is a change, thus continuation, or the other way around, representing different moments of a story without repeating any of the persons involved (Hermerén 1969, 57-58). These two different methods were also employed by the ancient Maya. Vessel K4151 (figure 4.7) for instance shows two scenes which might looks quite identical at first sight, but when we look closer it is actually possible to see an evolving story.

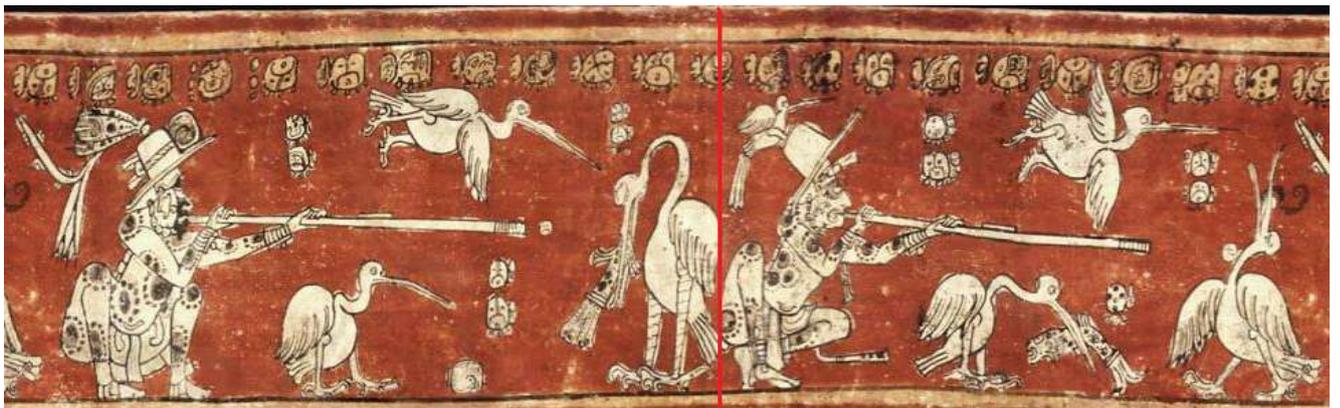


Figure 4.16: Rollout photography of vessel K4151, portraying two scenes in which a bird gets blowgunned by a male hunter (after Photograph © Justin Kerr).

The left scene (a vertical red line divides the left and right scene on the vessels surface) portrays a squatting person holding a blowgun. In front of his blowgun stands a bird who has just caught a fish, which he is holding in his beak. There is another bird under the blowgun and one flying above the blowgun. The squatting person has in fact just shot a stone or clay pellet from his blowgun which we can see heading straight for the bird in front of him. The scene on the right portrays the same squatting person and three birds, but the stone or clay pellet has now actually hit the bird in the neck. His head is thrown back by the impact of the shot. Interestingly enough he apparently dropped the fish that he had just caught, as the bird on his left is now holding this fish in his beak. The artists of this vessels thus illustrated the shooting of a bird in two scenes by the repetition of figures.

Vessel K555 (figure 4.8) depicts three different scenes placed side by side (vertical red lines divide the scenes). The division of the vessel's surface in three different scenes is assumed from the position of the depicted individuals. To explain this figure 4.8 shows a rollout of vessel K555 in which all the individuals and compounds of individuals have been numbered. Noticeable is that figure two is interacting with one of the figures of compound one. They are actually facing each other, making this one scene. Figures three and four also face each other and seem to be in a conversation. Again we can assume that this is one scene. On the right side, figure seven is in the act of shooting figure six

with his blowgun, while figure five looks onto the scene. In this situation figures five and six are facing figure seven indicating that these three individuals also make up one scene.



Figure 4.17: Rollout photograph of vessel K555, portraying part of a story in three different scenes (after Photograph © Justin Kerr).

None of the figures on this vessels is repeated and thus the actual portrayed story is not as clear as K4151, but as these scenes make up one image it is likely that they are connected and part of a single story.

Although the illustration of a story can be done in many different ways, there are some general methods which are deployed. Understanding the use of these general methods can be of profound help in the iconographical discussion of Classic Maya pictorial scenes.

## 4.5 Concluding remarks

Panofsky uses the field of iconography to explain the meaning of sculptures and paintings from the Renaissance. He studies for example the paintings by Piero di Cosimo, and Italian painter (Panofsky 1969, 33-67). The advantage that Panofsky has is that he knows the life history of Piero di Cosimo. Persons that influenced his work during his life, such as his master Cosimo Roselli, are known and men knows that his style is based on the Florentine tradition. We do not have this luxury in Mayan iconographical research. There are only a few Maya artists that are known by name, as only a few exceptional ceramics are signed by the artist. It is possible to identify an artist's by his hand, which makes it possible to recognize ceramic objects that were made by the same artists. Still it is difficult

to come to the third level of meaning without knowing anything about the background of an artist. The intention of this thesis is therefore not to identify the specific works of one painter, his style and choices of represented themes, but to look at all ceramic images which may be connected to the Popol Vuh. By researching all the different ceramics that might displays scenes from the Popol Vuh I believe it is possible to get a deeper knowledge of this important creation story and also to understand which specific elements and ideas were important for the Classic Maya. Chapters six, seven, and eight will discuss the portrayal of particular scenes from the Popol Vuh on Maya ceramics and in chapter nine the portrayal of the complete story will be reviewed thereby reaching the *iconographical interpretation in a deeper sense*.

In the next chapter the first part of the Popol Vuh story will be discussed and more importantly there will be an account of how the main characters, Junajpu and Xbalanq'eb, are portrayed on ceramic images and by which characteristics they can be identified.

## Chapter 5: The Hero Twins identified

In this chapter we will start with the actual telling of the Popol Vuh story. Throughout this thesis the basic method will be to tell a small part of the story, then discuss the most important characters of this part and highlight the iconographical elements of the story which will likely be portrayed on Maya ceramics. Following will be a discussion of the ceramics that have been identified as portraying this particular Popol Vuh story by Maya scholars and myself.

The most important goal for this chapter is to list the characteristics by which we can identify Junajpu and Xbalanq'ë on ceramic scenes. The identification of the Hero Twins on Maya ceramics makes it possible to investigate which particular scenes and trials of their story are portrayed on ceramics and thus which tales were already present in the Classic period. This chapter will start with the beginning of the Popol Vuh story, the creation of the earth. The chapter will provide some information of the most important characters in the Popol Vuh and of course tell the story of the birth of Junajpu and Xbalanq'ë.

### 5.1 The birth of heaven and earth

In the beginning all was silent and calm in the world. Only the sky and sea existed, which lay still in the darkness. Then the creator gods, u K'u'x Kaj, Xmuqane, and Xpiyakok came together and they began to think and ponder about the creation. They created the earth by merely uttering 'earth' and they shaped mountains and valleys. They covered the earth with cypress groves and pine forests. Then they created deer and birds and awarded them homes. Puma's, jaguars, and serpents were put on earth and they were told to worship their shaper and framer. This was the first attempt of the creator gods to shape humans. They wanted to create beings that were able to procreate and worship their makers. Only the animals did not worship their creators, they were unable to speak their names. So it was decided that the animals should serve another purpose. They would merely serve as food, they would be killed and eaten (Christensen 2007, 67-77; Tedlock 1996, 64-68).

For their second attempt, the creator gods formed men out of earth and mud, but it just came apart and dissolved in water. It could not walk nor multiply and when it spoke it made no sense, thus they destroyed it. Their next attempt was to shape effigies of carved wood, manikins. These manikins indeed looked like people and talked like people. They walked the earth and multiplied, but they walked without purpose. They had no blood nor sweat, their legs and arms were

stiff and they were incapable of understanding. They could not remember their framer and shaper, thus they did not worship them. The manikins were therefore ruined, crushed and killed. Their own grinding stones, griddles, plates, pots, and dogs turned on them and grounded them up like maize. The stone from the hearths came out of the fire and hit them on their heads. They tried to flee, but were eventually washed away by a great flood. It is said that the spider monkeys that reside in the forest today are the descendants of the effigies of carved wood. Spider monkeys therefore resemble people, because they descent from this attempt to shape and frame humans (Christensen 2007, 78-90; Tedlock 1996, 68-74).

The creation of the cosmos in the Classic period



Figure 5.18: Quirigua Stele C (flickr 2009).

The creation of the present world and humanity is, besides the Popol Vuh, also recorded on ancient Maya monuments, such as on Stele C of Quirigua, Izabal, Guatemala. On the broad sides of the stele C of Quirigua we the ruler K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Yopaat depicted. He ruled Quirigua from 724 A.D. to 785 A.D. (Martin and Grube 2008, 218-221). The two small sides are decorated with text. One of these sides deals with a mythological story and the other side with historical accounts of the Quirigua ruler. The mythological text opens with the long count date 13.0.0.0.0 4 Ajaw 8 Kumk’u, August 11, 3114 B.C. According to the Maya the world was created on the day 4 Ajaw 8 Kumk’u, which fell on August 11, 3114 B.C. in the Gregorian calendar (Tedlock 2010, 48-52). The story then elaborates on the planting of the three stones.

These three stones were wrapped and planted in a particular place. The first stone was planted by two gods, known as Jaguar paddler and Stingray paddler. The stone was called the ‘jaguar platform stone’ and was planted in the ‘far sky’. The second stone was called the ‘snake platform stone’ and planted in the ‘parted earth’ by *Ik’an Chak Chan*, “Dawn Red Snake”. The last stone was planted by a god named Itzamnaaj at a place ‘where the sky lies down’ and it was called the ‘water platform stone’ (Tedlock 2010, 52-54; Freidel *et al.* 1993, 61-66).

Linda Schele concluded that these stones represent the three hearthstones that have been used in Maya homes for a very long time. The hearthstones surround the cooking fire and thus are

actually at the center of the home. The three stones set at the creation probably represent the center of the cosmos (Freidel *et al.* 1993, 66-67).

This tale of creation is also portrayed on a Classic Maya vessel, called the Vase of the Seven Gods (K2796 figure 5.2)(Coe 1973, 107-108). The black background of this vase represents the dark, primordial world. Further the position of the figures in the depicted scene actually represent the three levels of the cosmos.



Figure 5.19: Rollout photograph of vessel K2796 portraying Seven gods on the eve of creation (Photograph © Justin Kerr).

The three figures sitting on the upper row seem to be placed in the sky, Upperworld. The lower three figures appear to be in the Underworld. These six figures sit in front of a deity who is placed in the middle and thus is situated on earth, Middleworld. We can identify this figure as God L<sup>7</sup>, the patron deity of merchants recognizable by the cigar he is smoking and his broad hat, decorated with owl feathers and with a Muan owl placed on top. In the scene are three bundles depicted. These are cloth bundles tied with bowknots and each has an inscription on the front. One is placed in front of the first figure of the upper row, *Balam Ak'ab*, or "Jaguar Night". On Stela C of Quirigua he is represented as Jaguar paddler. The second is placed on the base line of the painting and the third is partly hidden behind the back of God L. The first two bundles have the same text that can be read as "9 stars of the earth". The bundle behind God L only reads "earth", spelled phonetically (Tedlock 2010, 36-40; Freidel *et al.* 1993, 68-69).

<sup>7</sup> The particular characteristics of the major gods that are mentioned in this thesis are listed in Appendix 1.

The rim text is a standard PSS mentioning that the object was a drinking vessel for the fruit of a new grove of cacao trees (Tedlock 2010, 34-36). The secondary text on the vessel tells us that the scene we are witnessing took place on 4 Ajaw 8 Kumk'u. The whole secondary text can be translated as:

“On 4 Ajaw  
8 Kumk'u,  
The darkness of the center was put in order,  
The stars of the center were put in order.  
The one who gave the sky its place,  
Who gave the earth its place,  
Who gave the nine jaguars who entered the tree their places,  
Who gave the 3 who were born together their places,  
Who gave the open space its place,  
Who gave Jaguar Night his place,  
Was the Black-Faced Lord,  
The Star-Faced Lord” (Tedlock 2010, 39).

The event depicted on this vase is the same as the one told on Stela C of Quirigua. There are however some differences the main difference being that the vase records the setting of three stars and not stones. However the three hearthstones represent the center of the cosmos and in the sky they were symbolized by three stars. According to the K'iche' the three hearthstones of the kitchen fireplace are in the sky represented by the stars Alnitak, Saiph, and Rigel in Orion (Tedlock 2010, 41). These stars were created when stones shot out of a volcano, according to a K'iche' creation story. Andrés Xiloj believes that the Popol Vuh also refers to this incident. He believes that the hearth stones that come out of the fire to destroy the effigies of carved wood are in fact a reference to the stones that shot out of the volcano and thus refers to the origin story for the stars in Orion (Xiloj in Tedlock 1996, 236-237).

Although there existed a distinct creation story in the Classic period this story can only be indirectly associated to the creation of the Popol Vuh and in general the stories are quite distinct. The representation of the different attempts of the gods to create humans have not yet been discovered on Classic Maya ceramics. Quirigua Stele C and the K2796 do show however that the creation of the cosmos was an important part of Classic Maya mythology. I therefore doubt that this first part of the Popol Vuh story actually existed at all in the Classic period. The creation of the cosmos seems to have been far more complex in the Classic period and involved more gods than are mentioned in the Popol Vuh. I have therefore chosen not to focus too much on this first part of the Popol Vuh. Instead let us look at the creator gods mentioned in the Popol Vuh, which continue to play an important part in the rest of the Popol Vuh story. With a bit more discussion it might be possible to find their equivalent of the Classic period.

### The Creator gods

The Popol Vuh accounts for the creation of all things by a couple of which the female is called Xmuqane and the male Xpiyakok. This creator couple is referred to by a great many different names, such as Framer and Shaper, She Who Has Borne Children and He Who Has Begotten Sons, Hunahpu Possum and Hunahpu Coyote, Great White Peccary and Coati, Sovereign and Quetzal Serpent, etc. They are the Mother and the Father of life and all creation (Christensen 2007, 60-66; Tedlock 1996, 63-64). J. Eric Thompson noted that deities could have more than one manifestation that would each have a different name (Thompson 1970, 198-200). One of the most common used aspects for different manifestations of deities was the idea of quadripartite gods, a single deity that was represented as four separate gods that were each assigned to a different cardinal direction and color. Thompson also noted that deities often had a dual nature. For example being both benevolent and malevolent, youthful and aged, male and female, etc. These dual natures were also expressed by multiple manifestations of a single deity. God G, the sun deity, for example had both positive and negative associations. In the daytime he was associated with the sun in the heavens and in the nighttime it was believed the sun moved to the Underworld. God G was often the manifestation of the daytime sun, while a jaguar represented the Underworld sun, but both are believed to represent aspects of the same deity (Vail 2000, 135). Manifestations of deities could take many different forms and could be represented by plants, animals, natural formation and even phenomena such as wind, lightning, thunder, and fire (Bassie 2002, 1). It has become evident that some gods were closely linked to each other and even substituted for one another or were conflated (Vail 2000, 133-137). The identification of specific deities is therefore highly complicated. Vail argues that the Maya conceived their deities to be associated to complexes or clusters, instead of being individuals associated with certain aspects (Vail 2000, 142). The different manifestations of a deity could be expressed by naming patterns, costuming and association to specific attributes. Separating the Maya gods into a series of discrete entities might be a western construct and not at all how the Maya perceived their gods (Vail 2000, 144). It is possible that all the names given to the creator grandparents, Xpiyakok and Xmuqane, actually represent different manifestations of the grandparents (Bassie 2002, 3). It is therefore extremely difficult to identify representation of Xpiyakok and Xmuqane on Classic Maya ceramics. There are however some indications about which gods they represented in the Classic period.

Christensen gives an intriguing translation for the name Xpiyakok (Christensen 2007, 63, n.26). He claims that the name might partly be based on the word *kok*, which means “turtle” in both lowland and highland Maya languages. God N (for more information about God N see appendix 1) of the ancient Maya often is portrayed with a turtle carapace and bears up the sky (Taube 1992). Therefore Christensen claims that Xpiyakok might possibly be the K’iche’ version of God N. It is

however more likely that God D, identified as Itzamnaaj, represented Xpiyakok in the Classic period. Bartolomé de Las Casas mentions an old creation couple called Xchel and Xtcamna. Clearly these names refer to Ix Chel and Itzamnaaj (Las Casas 1909, 619; Coe 1977, 329). Itzamnaaj was one of several creator gods and very important in both the Classic and Post-Classic period. He was the patron of all human shamans and himself considered as the greatest shaman of all (Freidel *et al.* 1993, 40).



Figure 5.3: Detail of vessel K7265, showing Itzamnaaj (after Photograph © Justin Kerr)

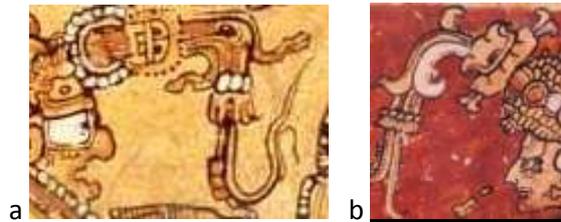


Figure 5.4: Two examples of the *akbal*-flower headdress: a) Detail of vessel K1183 (after Photograph © Justin Kerr); b) Detail of vessel K0504 (after Photograph © Justin Kerr).



Figure 5.5: Detail of vessel K1183, showing the *yax*-shell ornament of Itzamnaaj (after Photograph © Justin Kerr).

Itzamnaaj was represented as an old man with an aged face, a toothless mouth, and a large round or squarish eye (figure 5.3)(Schellhas 1904, 22-23). Characteristic is his headdresses consisting of a *yax*-shell (figure 5.5) and an *akbal*-flower ornament (figure 5.4). The Akbal sign with beaded edge may represent a mirror. The ancient Maya used mirrors of pyrite, obsidian, hematite and other materials for divinatory scrying (Taube 1992, 31-34). Itzamnaaj appears quite often on Classic Maya pottery scenes and will be profoundly discussed in chapter 6. It is clear that Itzamnaaj and Xpiyakok represent the same entity, but it is also possible that God N was another Classic period manifestation of Xpiyakok, there are however no pottery scenes that support this notion.



Figure 5.6: Name glyph of Goddess O, Chak Chel, Ix Chel (after Coe and van Stone 2001, 117).

The name Xmuqane likely derived from *x* which is a feminine marker and *muqik*, which means “to bury, to cover, plant in the ground” (Christensen 2007, 63, n.27). Xmuqane can thus be translated as “She Who Buries or She Who Plants”, which can refer to the sowing of seeds or pregnancy (Christensen 2007, 63-64, n. 27). Xmuqane is also referred to as *lyom* which can be translated as “midwife”. Xmuqane’s role as midwife indicates that

she might be the K'iche' equivalent of the lowland Maya Goddess O, also known as *chak chel* from the codices and *ix chel* or *chakal ix chel* from alphabetic documents (figure 5.6). Las Casas indeed mentions that the female of an old creation couple is called Xchel, which must refer to Ix Chel. Ix Chel is known to be an elderly goddesses of medicine, childbirth and weaving (Tedlock 1996, 217). There are only two vases (K5113, K6020) in which we find a clear representation of an older woman. K5113 represents Ix Chel in a complex scene as a midwife and K6020 represents Ix Chel in a badly understood vomiting ritual. Both scenes however do not seem to be related to the Hero Twins or any story form the Popol Vuh.

Another creator god form the Popol Vuh is U K'u'x Kaj. U K'u'x Kaj, "Heart of Sky", seems to be the principal character in the Popol Vuh. It is the only deity that is mentioned in every phase of creation (Christensen 2007, 69, n.56). Heart of sky is also addresses to as Juraqan, which is a shortened version of *jun raqan*, "one-legged". This one legged aspect of Juraqan connects him to the Classical God K, K'awill (figure 5.7), who is often represented with one leg turned into a serpent. God K is a god of fertility, water, and lightning. He sometimes takes the form of a fire-striking or lightning-striking axe (Tedlock 1996, 223-224).



Figure 5.7: Detail of vessel K5164, showing God K, K'awill (after Photograph © Justin Kerr).

The creator god Juraqan also seems to be represented by multiple manifestations. As it is later mentioned that Juraqan is a trinity, composed of *Kaqlja Juraqan*, "Thunderbolt Hurricane"; *Ch'i'pi Kaqlja*, "Youngest Thunderbolt"; and *Raxa Kaqlja*, "Sudden Thunderbolt" (Christensen 2007, 70). These three gods that together form Heart of Sky in the Popol Vuh have a few striking similarities with the Palenque Triad Gods. The Palenque Triad Gods are three specific gods mentioned on the monuments of the ancient Maya city of Palenque. The so-called Cross Group temples in Palenque consists of three temples, each of them decorated with tablets carved with scenes and hieroglyphic texts. The hieroglyphic texts in each temple mentions the birth of a deity. Together they form a triad of gods known by the nicknames GI, GII and GIII (Bassie 2002, 41). The temple of the Cross mentions the birth of GI, the Temple of the Sun relates the birth of GIII, and the Temple of the Foliated Cross tells of the birth of GII. GI has a large roman nose, a shark tooth and fish barbells protrude from the side of his mouth (Bassie 2002, 41-42). GI often wears a simple jade earring. Karen Bassie believes that this jade earring connects GI to the Classical God B, Chahk, who often wears a *Spondylus* shell earflare. Chahk was the Classic god of rain and lightning. The jade earring of GI would even implicate that Chahk formed part of his name thus indicating that GI himself represented a lightning deity and possibly Chahk himself (Bassie 2002, 42-43). GII is the thirds born of the Palenque Triad gods, but he is always named in the second position which explains his nickname. GII is represented as a

manifestation of God K, K'awill. GII's name is a conflation of God K and of *unen*, "baby, child" and he can thus be named baby K'awill, which suits him, as he is the youngest of the Palenque Triad gods. This also connects him to *Ch'i'pi Kaqulja*, "Youngest Thunderbolt", of the Popol Vuh (Bassie 2002, 44). GIII has often been given the nickname "Jaguar God of the Underworld" and he is believed to represent the night sun (Coe 1973, 15, 83, 107). Unfortunately his name glyph lacks an accurate decipherment. GIII has the same appearance as the sun god, but with jaguar features. He is associated with fire and meteors and also identified as being a god of lightning. The sudden impact of meteors connect this god to *Raxa Kaqulja*, "Sudden Thunderbolt", of the Popol Vuh (Bassie 2002, 45-47). *Ch'i'pi Kaqulja* apparently the youngest of the lightning gods, is always named second same as GII who was also the youngest, but always in second position when all the three Palenque Triad gods are named (Bassie 2002, 47). Taking this all in consideration I believe that the Palenque Triad are indeed equivalent of the Juraqan trinity (Bassie 2002, 41-54; Tedlock 1996, 224-225). God B and God K in general are commonly represented on pottery scenes. Representations of all three of the Palenque Triad gods together however are rare. As my focus of this thesis is on representations of the Hero Twins I will only discuss vessels in which the lightning gods are connected to or represented with the Hero Twins.

In conclusion we can say that the creator gods of the Popol Vuh were also known in the Classic period. The previous section have named all of their Classical equivalents, but we should be careful with substituting one for god the other. The ancient Maya pantheon of gods was a very complex one and some deities are still poorly understood. The gods were often represented by different manifestations which could take entirely different forms. The identification of specific gods has therefore proven extremely difficult. Many gods were also known to have both benevolent and malevolent natures, a practice that goes against western nature. It is important to keep an open mind about the characteristic and qualities of the gods represented on Maya ceramics and not hastily jump to conclusions nor immediately identify each Classic god with one from the Popol Vuh.

## **5.2 The trials of Jun Junajpu and Wuqub Junajpu**

Xpiyakok and Xmuqane had two sons, twins, called Jun Junajpu and Wuqub Junajpu. Jun Junajpu and Wuqub Junajpu played dice and ball every day. One day Jun Junajpu and Wuqub Junajpu played ball on the road to Xibalba, the Maya Underworld, and thereby disturbed the Lord of the Underworld (Christensen 2007, 113-114; Tedlock 1996, 91). Jun Kame and Wuqub Kame, the lords who ruled

Xibalba, complain about all this stomping and shouting and complain that they do not get any respect. They sent their owl messengers to Jun Junajpu and Wuqub Junajpu. These four owls go to the ballcourt to tell Jun Junajpu and Wuqub Junajpu that they have been summoned to the Underworld and that they should bring their gaming things, their yokes, arm protectors, and their rubber ball. For it is only the gaming things that the Lords of the Underworld desired. The Twins say goodbye to their mother before they descend to the Underworld, but they leave their ball behind, tied to the top of the house (Christensen 2007, 119-121; Tedlock 1996, 93-94).

On their way to the Underworld the twins survive the passage through the rivers and canyons, but by the four crossroads they were defeated. There they choose the Black road straightaway to the Underworld. Jun Junajpu and Wuqub Junajpu were again defeated when they met before the Lords of the Underworld. They greeted the first two figures and named them Jun Kame and Wuqub Kame, but these two figures were merely puppets of carved wood. The Lords of the Underworld burst into laughter, because the twins had fallen for their trick. The twins also fall for their second trick which was a very hot rock that the Lords of the Underworld called a bench. The twins burned themselves when they sat down on the rock causing them to immediately spring up. Again the Lords roared with laughter. Jun Junajpu and Wuqub Junajpu were then sent into the House of Darkness, where they had to spend the night. They were given a lit torch and a cigar each, but were not allowed to finish them and they had to return the torch and cigar intact in the morning. But Jun Junajpu and Wuqub Junajpu used up the cigar and the torch and thus again they were defeated. The Lords of the Underworld decided that as punishment they should die (Christensen 2007, 122-125; Tedlock 1996, 94-97).

The twins were sacrificed and buried at a place called Crushing Ballcourt. The head of Jun Junajpu was cut off and hung in a tree, while the rest of his body was buried. This tree had never bore fruit before, but after Jun Junajpu's head was hung in it, it began to flourish and the tree became what is now called the calabash. The fruit that the tree bore looked so much like the head of Jun Junajpu, that it became unclear which was actually his head. The tree was widely discussed, but it was decided that no one should pluck its fruit and no one should stand directly underneath it (Christensen 2007, 125-127; Tedlock 1996, 97-98).

#### Jun Junajpu and Wuqub Junajpu

Xibalba is a composition of the words *xibij*, "frighten" and *bal* meaning "place of". Thus Xibalba is commonly translated as "place of fright" or "place of fear" (Tedlock 1996, 251). It was the K'iche' name for the Underworld where, according to the Popol Vuh, Jun Kame and Wuqub Kame ruled. *Kame* is one of the twenty day names and derives from the same root as words such as *kamel*, "dead

person". Jun Kame and Wuqub Kame are therefore translated as "one death" and "seven death" (Christensen 2007, 114, n.231; Tedlock 1996, 251). There are many depictions of Underworld Lords on Maya ceramics, but these will be discussed in chapter 7.

Junajpu is likely a combination of *jun*, meaning "one, first", *aj-*, male prefix, and possibly *pub'*, meaning "blowgun", leading to the complete translation of "one blowgunner" (Tedlock 1996, 238). Jun Junajpu can then be translated as "first one blowgunner" and Wuqub Junajpu as "seven one blowgunner". Christensen however points out that when the authors of the Popol Vuh directly refer to a blowgun they write it as *ub'* or *wub'* and not *pu*, thus it is unlikely that men actually referred to blowgun when writing the name Junajpu. Another proposed translation comes from Linda Schele and Peter Matthews, who claim that the name might refer to Teotihuacan (Schele and Matthews 1998, 74, 295). In the Classic Period the Maya referred to the city of Teotihuacan as *Puh*, "place of cattail reeds", and thus Jun Junajpu might then be translated as "one first he of the place of cattail reeds" and Wuqub Junajpu as "seven first he of the place of cattail reeds". Both Christensen and Tedlock leave the name untranslated giving the argument that Junajpu is a proper name. It might once have been a descriptive name, but it is possible that by the time the Popol Vuh was written down men just remembered the name as a proper one and not its descriptive connotation. I will also leave the names untranslated (Christensen 2007, 94, n.163; Tedlock 1996, 238-239).

### Head in tree

The way that Jun Junajpu and Wuqub Junajpu are represented on ceramics is not clear. Their appearances are not described in the Popol Vuh and they only take a small part in the tale of the twins. To my knowledge there is no vessel of which we know for certain that it depicts Jun Junajpu and Wuqub Junajpu. However it appears that in the Classic period they were associated with different deities and their role in Maya mythology was more complicated than it is portrayed in the Popol Vuh. Karl Taube discovered that Jun Junajpu was the Maize God in the Classic period (Taube 1985). Representations of the Maize God are numerous and will be discussed in a separate chapter (chapter 8). The scenes in which the Maize God is represented on ceramics are however not directly from the Popol Vuh story. There is only one scene featuring Jun Junajpu that might be represented on vessel K5615 (characterized as *head in tree* in appendix 2). In the Popol Vuh the head of Jun Junajpu is hung in a tree that then transforms into a calabash tree. K5615 is the only representation of a head in a tree on Maya ceramics (figure 5.8). The head is clearly recognizable replacing one of the pods of the tree. This tree however is not a calabash tree, but a cacao tree. The head however does resemble that of the Maize God, displaying an elongated, flattened, tonsured forehead. Taube also believed that this depiction referred to the head of the Maize God in the calabash tree (Taube 1985, 175).



Figure 5.8: Detail of vessel K5615, showing the head of the Maize God in a cacao tree (after Photograph © Justin Kerr).



Figure 5.9: Detail of vessel K4331, showing the Maize God covered with cacao pods (after ecoturismo yucatan 2005)

The Maize God was in fact closely connection to cacao. Miller and Martin have even proposed that the Maize God may have also been a deity of cacao (Miller and Martin 2004, 63). On a gourd shaped, carved, stone vessel (K4331, figure 5.9) this connection is made very explicit. This vessel depicts the Maize God as an anthropomorphic tree, covered with cacao pods. He is named as *iximte'*, “maize tree” (Miller and Martin 2004, 63, 78). Cacao and the calabash tree also seem to be connected and it might be that they were either mixed up, or purposely substituted for one another. The Popol Vuh mentions that the fruit of the calabash is really sweet, but in fact the calabash is not edible at all. On the other hand, the pulp of the cacao pod is sweet. Also chocolate was originally drunk from cups made from calabash gourds and it is likely that in the Classic period the chocolate drinks were still drunk from the smaller and more handy calabash cups (Coe and Kerr 1998, 60). In the Popol Vuh it is mentioned that the skull of Jun Junajpu looks very much like a calabash gourd. It might be that the calabash tree was substituted for the cacao tree because the sweetness of the fruit that is mentioned in the Popol Vuh refers to the cacao beverage that was contained in the calabash gourd.

### Ballgame scene

Wuqub Junajpu might have been a deity of the ballgame in the Classic period. This connection is made because Wuqub Junajpu’s name glyph appears in a number of ballgame representations. On three vessels (K1383, K635, K3296) and on a fragment of the hieroglyphic stairway of El Peru, rulers are mentioned to impersonate a deity named **HUK-?** or **HUK-Te’?-wa**. Marc Zender believes that the name glyph of this deity can be read as *Huk Ajaw* or *Hukte’ Ajaw*, meaning “Seven Ajaw”, the Classical version of the name Wuqub Junajpu (Zender 2004, 4-5). The impersonation is mentioned to take place either *ti pitzill*, “in the act of ballplaying” or while the ruler *pitzijj*, “plays ball”. As Jun Junajpu and Wuqub Junajpu were skillful ballplayers and Wuqub

Junajpu was actually sacrificed and buried at the ballcourt in the Underworld it would be fitting for Wuqub Junajpu to be a patron of the ballgame.

The ballgame plays an important role in the Popol Vuh story. Unfortunately there is not much information on the game itself and its significance for the Classic Maya. There are dozens of ballcourts known and hundreds of pieces of ballgame paraphernalia have been found, but there is still little known about the rules of the game, its specific purpose and its origin. The ballgame was known throughout the whole of Mesoamerica and played already around 1500 B.C. Early evidences of the ballgame have been found on the Gulf Coast of Mexico at the Olmec site, San Lorenzo, but also in the valley of Oaxaca, at the small site of Dainzu, and at the site of Izapa in the Chiapas mountains. (Freidel *et al* 1993, 340; Whittington 2001, 65).



Figure 5.10: *pitz* glyph (Kettunen and Helmke 2011, 90).

In the Maya area the game was called *pitz*, “ballgame” (Freidel *et al.* 1993, 340). Ballcourts were shaped like a capital I and the ball was bounced through the field against the angled benches that were placed on either side of the narrow central alley. Round or square markers were often placed in the middle and ends of the central alley. We do not know the purpose of these markers nor is it known how the game was scored. From colonial documents we know that the Aztec played a similar kind of ballgame in which the ball was struck with the hips and sides and not with the arms and legs. In the Aztec ballgame each team had to drive the ball through a stone ring which were placed in the wall one opposite the other in the middle of the court. The rubber ball of the Maya was however much larger than that of the Aztec and did not go through a ring. Maya imagery does however suggest that Maya ballplayers also passed the ball with their hips and sides and not with their arms and legs. The outfits of ballplayers also support this notion, as the players wore large yokes and cotton padding around their waist for protection. The players also wore thick cloth padding around their forearms and kneepads. Apparently protecting them from their own maneuvers to keep the ball from hitting the floor (Freidel *et al* 1993, 341-345). It appears that the ballgame had already disappeared in the Maya area when the Spanish arrived, as there are no formal ballcourts known from Late Postclassic sites. The only significant information on the ballgame came therefore for a long time from the Popol Vuh. On the basis of the Popol Vuh and the ballcourt markers of Copan Linda Schele reconstructed the mythic and ritual context of the Maya ballgame (Freidel *et al.* 1993, 345-350). She stipulated that through the ballgame the ancient Maya reenacted the mythic Underworld contest between the death gods and the Hero Twins, who were symbolic for life and fertility. The ballcourt itself was therefore seen as an entrance to the Underworld. The central marker of the Copan ballcourt A-IIb was interpreted by Schele as representing a ballgame contest between Junajpu and a Lord of the Underworld (Freidel *et al.* 1993, 362-369). The ballcourt marker indeed names Jun Ajaw (the Classic form of Junajpu), but he does not play against an

Underworld Lord. Instead he plays against the Copan king Waxaklaju'n 'U-baah K'awiil (Tokovinine 2002, 2). In fact there is no known Classic Maya monument nor text that mentioned the Hero Twins playing ball against the Lords of the Underworld. The ballgame itself is rarely portrayed on Maya ceramics and there is only one vessel that can be connected to the Hero Twins.

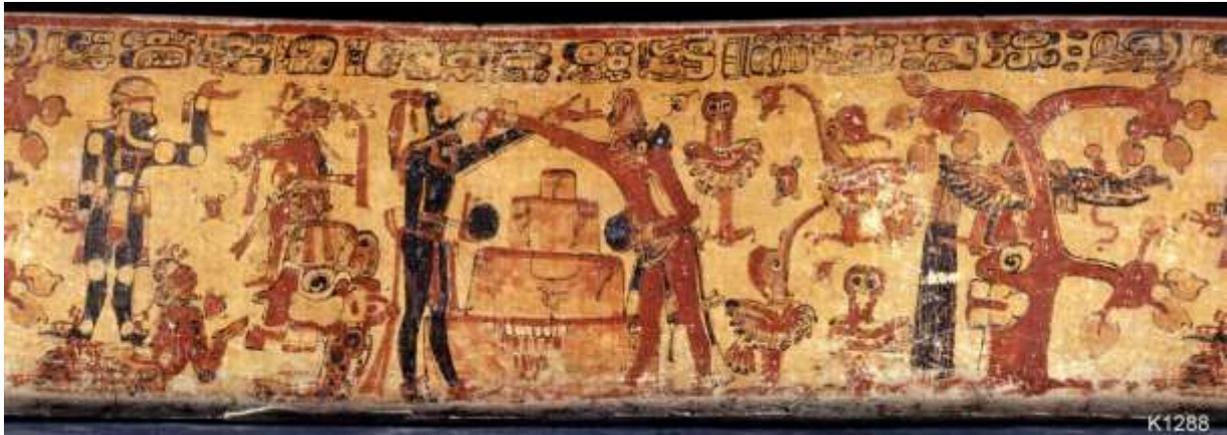


Figure 5.11: Rollout photograph of vessel K1288 portraying a complex ballgame scene (photograph © Justin Kerr).

K1288 (figure 5.11, categorized as *ballgame scene* in Appendix 2) is the only vessel that portrays a ballgame scene that also portrays the Hero Twins. On the left side of the vessel we can clearly identify Junajpu, by the large black dots on his body, kneeling on the floor. The black dots are one of the identifying characteristics of Junajpu that will be discussed in the next section. It is possible that the figure standing on top of him represents Xbalanq'ë. They are apparently meeting with Itzamnaaj, who sits in front of them on a large jaguar head. Next, there is another scene, clearly portraying two ballgame players standing in front of each other each holding a rubber ball (Coe 1982, 31-33). In the back we see a stepped pyramid which is almost always portrayed as part of the ballcourt. The ballplayers are not represented as either Junajpu or Xbalanq'ë. In fact I am not sure who they represent, they might be Jun Junajpu and Wuqub Junajpu. On the right side of the ballgame players there are four birds, two displayed in a frontal position and two sideways. The large round eyes of the frontal birds suggest that they are owls. I believe they all depict the same kind of birds. These could then be the owl messengers that were sent to summon Jun Junajpu and Wuqub Junajpu to the Underworld. This in itself would indicate that the ballgame players may represent the father and uncle of the Hero Twins. As the last scene of the vessel we find an anthropomorphic bird sitting in a tree. It is not exactly clear which bird is represented. There is however a bird mentioned in the Popol Vuh that watches over Junajpu and Wuqub Hunajpu when they play ball in the ballcourt. This bird was called *Wok* and translated as “falcon”, he was a messenger of Juraqan. His representation would fit in the represented scene, but we cannot be certain that the represented bird is *Wok*.

### 5.3 The birth of Junajpu and Xbalanq'ë

Lady Xkik' from the Underworld, which was the daughter of the Underworld Lord Kuchuma Kik', heard the story of the fruit of the tree and was truly amazed. She became curious about it and alone she went beneath the tree. It was there that the skull of Jun Junajpu spoke to her and ordered her to stick out her right hand if she really desired the fruit. When she did the skull spat in her hand and told her he had given her a sign. His saliva still contained his essence and Xkik' became pregnant. After six moons Kuchuma Kik' noticed his daughter's pregnancy (Christensen 2007, 128-130; Tedlock 1996, 98-99). He began to question her about the father, but she told him she was not pregnant, she explained: "I have not known the face of any man" (Christensen 2007, 131). This is indeed true, considering that she only saw the skull of Jun Junajpu. Still the Lords of the Underworld decided that she must be killed, because she was an adulterers. They instruct the Underworld owl messengers to sacrifice her and bring back her heart in a bowl for examination. The owls take Xkik', but they are reluctant to kill her. They decide to fill the bowl with red sap from the croton tree, which transforms into a heart. The owls bring back the bowl with the substitute heart and give it to Jun Kame. The Lords of the Underworld put the heart over the fire and the smell of the sap was so delicious to them that they were all distracted. At that moment the owls let Xkik' escape through a hole that led to the earth. That is how Xkik' blinded the Lords of the Underworld and defeated them (Christensen 2007, 131-134; Tedlock 1996, 100-102).

Xkik' goes to the mother of Jun Junajpu and Wuqub Junajpu and she explains to her that she is her daughter-in-law. Xmuqane does not believe her for she believes that her sons died in the Underworld. To test the story of Xkik' the Grandmother sends her to collect a netful of maize from the maizefield. This maizefield contains only one stalk of corn, not enough to fill the net. Xkik' decides to call upon the guardians of the food and when she rips the tassel in the top of the corn ear it begins to multiply until the net is filled with food. Xkik' brings the net to Xmuqane, who gets upset and runs off to the maizefield, thinking that Xkik' must have cut the whole corn stock. At the maizefield she sees that the cornstalk is still in place and she takes this as a sign that Xkik' is truly her daughter-in-law. Not long after Xkik' gives birth to twin boys who were named Junajpu and Xbalanq'ë (Christensen 2007, 135-139; Tedlock 1996, 102-104).

#### Junajpu and Xbalanq'ë

The name of Xkik' is composed of *x-*, the feminine identifier, and *kik'*, which means "blood". Xkik' can thus be translated as "blood woman" or "lady blood". Tedlock suggest the name might also have

been a play on words for *ik'*, meaning “moon”, and translates *Xkik'* as “blood moon” (Christensen 2007, 128; Tedlock 1996, 260). Her father is called *Kuchuma Kik'*, a composition of the terms *kuchu-*, “gather, join together”, and *kik'*, “blood”, and can thus be translated as “blood gatherer” or “gathered blood” (Christensen 2007, 115; Tedlock 1996, 251).

On page 2 of the Dresden codex it is mentioned that the goddess *Sak Ixik*, “moonlight woman”, was the wife of the Maize God. This section also mentions and portrays *Junajpu* and it is possible that the goddess *Sak Ixik* was represented as *Xkik'* in the *Popol Vuh* (Tedlock 2010, 166-170). *Sak Ixik* was first identified as Goddess I by Schellhas (Schellhas 1904, 31-32). Goddesses I is believed to be the Classic Maya moon goddess, which is also indicated by her name glyph. This glyph is composed of a main sign representing a portrait of the goddess with the distinctive *kab*-curl, the sign for “earth” attached to the temple of the head and either the *sak*, “white, pure” prefix, or *ki* postfix. The *kab*-curl sign is mentioned in Landa’s alphabet as the phonetic value *u*, the Yucatec term for “moon”. Figure 5.12 display both the name glyphs for *Sak Ixik* and *Ixik* with the *kab*-curl.



Figure 5.12: Name glyphs for Goddess I, the moon goddess. Left is the glyph *Sak Ixik* and right the glyph *Ixik* with the *kab*-curl sign (after Coe and van Stone 2001, 117).

Figure 5.13: Detail of vessel K504, showing the Moon Goddess with lunar crescent (after Photograph © Justin Kerr).



The most specific identifying features of the moon goddess are the lunar crescent and the rabbit (figure 5.13). In Maya iconography maize and the moon are closely connected. It appears that the Maize God and the moon goddess were also associated as the moon goddess sometimes appears with attributes of the Maize god (Taube 1992, 64-68). The Moon Goddesses also appears on Maya ceramics, clearly identifiable by the crescent moon and/or rabbit. The scenes in which she appears are varied and so far I have not been able to connect any of them to the story of *Xkik'* from the *Popol Vuh*.

The small amount of representations of the Goddess I and O does not signify that they were insignificant deities in Classic Maya mythology. It is just a fact that females are not so widely displayed in Maya art as males. In fact less than six percent of the total amount of vessels in the

Maya Vase Database actually displays females, thus it is not that odd that Goddess I and O appear so little.

As argued before there are a few possible meanings for the name Junajpu. "One blowgunner" would have been an apt name for Junajpu as he was an excellent blowgunner. The name can however also be translated as "one/ first he of the place of cattail reeds" (Christensen 2007, 94, n.163; Tedlock 1996, 238-239).

The x- of the name Xbalanq'ë can have multiple meanings. The x- was used by the Maya as a feminine indicator, but we can rule this out because Xbalanq'ë was most definitely not a female as the Hero Twins in the Popol Vuh are often referred to as boys or sons. The x- was also used as a diminutive, its meaning depending on the context, thus standing for either "young, small or little". *Balan* is easier to translate as it definitely refers to jaguar, with its ancient Maya spelling being *bahlam*. The derivation of *q'ë* again is more difficult. It most likely stands for either *keej*, "deer", or *qij*, "sun or day". As the jaguar is often associated with the sun and the Hero Twins in the end rise as the sun and the moon Christensen believes that the most likely translation would be "young hidden/ jaguar sun" (Christensen 2007, 94-95, n.164). Tedlock points out that with the contemporary Kekchí the term *bahlamq'ë* is used to refer to the sun when it passes beneath the earth at night. The term for the daytime sun is *saq'ë*, which leads us to believe that *q'ë* is thus the term for sun, although the Kekchí do not use a term for sun in general. *Bahlam* refers to both "jaguar" and "hidden" in Kekchí and the term *xbahlam* can be translated as "its hidden part". This leads Tedlock to translate *Xbahlamq'ë* as "sun's hidden aspect" and it is likely that Xbalanq'ë is a derivation hereof (Tedlock 1996, 239). As argued before I believe the names Junajpu and Xbalanq'ë are used as proper names in the Popol Vuh and will therefore leave them untranslated.

### The Hero Twins identified

While organizing the 1971 exhibition at the Grolier Club Michael D. Coe noticed the large amount of pairs of young men that were displayed on the ceramics. These young men often appeared finely dressed with rich jewelry and some displayed 'god-markings', so-called because the markings were used to represent supernatural figures on monuments and in the codices. Thus the young men were commonly addressed as deities, but after consulting the Popol Vuh Coe was convinced that these men actually represented the Hero Twins and he called them the 'Young Lords' (Coe 1973, 13). Coe discovered another representation of particular twin lords when he began to examine more ceramics. He labeled these the 'Headband Gods', to distinguish them from the Young Lords (Coe 1973, 14). As the name suggests these twins often wore headbands to restrain their hair. The physical characteristics of the Headband Gods eventually led Coe to the conclusion that these were

Junajpu and Xbalanq'è. The Young Lords then were their father and uncle, Jun Junajpu and Wuqub Junajpu, a discovery made by Karl Taube (1985). The terms Young Lords and Headband Gods are hardly used anymore and in this thesis they will not be further mentioned. The problem with the distinction is that in the beginning of Coe's research of Maya ceramics almost every male was labeled either a Young Lord or a Headband God. Further research has shown that ancient Maya rulers are also commonly portrayed on ceramics and not every pottery scene is related to the Popol Vuh. Thus not every identification of a Young Lord or Headband God in Coe's earlier work actually represents a Hero Twins. The physical characteristics that led Coe to the identification of the Headband Gods as Junajpu and Xbalanq'è, which will be discussed in the next section, are widely accepted and clear identifiers of the Hero Twins. In this thesis the expression Hero Twins is thus used to refer to Junajpu and Xbalanq'è.

### Iconographical elements of the Hero Twins



Figure 5.14: Detail of plate K1892, showing Junajpu. Notice the large black dots on his body, the inverted triangle of black dots on his cheek, and the bird headdress with Muan bird feathers (after Photograph © Justin Kerr).

There are a few elements that are extremely characteristic for Junajpu and Xbalanq'è. For Junajpu these are the single black spots or the inverted triangle of black spots, on his cheek and his body (figure 5.14). For Xbalanque these elements are the patches of jaguar skin on his body and/or the patch of jaguar skin on his lower jaw, also called the 'jaguar-beard' (figure 5.15)(Coe 1989, 167). These elements are the most significant and when present we can definitely identify the figures as either Junajpu or Xbalanq'è. Unfortunately these characteristic are not always present, but there are other identifiable markers.

Xbalanq'è is often represented with a 'jaguar ear' and occasionally wears a cut shell *yax*

jewel on his headband or in his hair (Stone and Zender 2011, 45). Junajpu often appears with feathers of the Muan Bird by his ear or on top of his headdress and wears the Ajaw diadem on his headband (Coe 1989, 176). The headbands are very distinctive and it were the headbands that actually that led Coe to the identification of the Hero Twins. The headband consists a piece of paper cloth tied on the forehead. This simple paper headband appears to have been one of the key symbols of authority in Classic Maya times. Attached in front of the headband we often find the Jester God. The Jester God, named after medieval



Figure 5.15: Detail of plate K1892, showing Xbalanq'è. Notice the jaguar patches of skin on his arm and back, the jaguar beard, the jaguar ear, and the bird headdress with *yax* jewel (after Photograph © Justin Kerr).

court jesters, because of the resemblance between the tri-pointed cap of jester and the tri-pointed forehead of the Classic Maya Jester God, is also identified as being a symbol of Maya rulership (Schele and Miller 1986, 53). This Jester god is also a principal motif associated with the Hero Twins (Coe 1978, 52-57). That the paper headband and Jester God were symbols of authority in general is represented on the stone bench of Temple XIX at Palenque. This bench represent the accession of K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb III to rulership. On this day K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb III was given a paper headband and Jester God diadem by his cousin, Janaab Ajaw, symbols for his accession to rulership. However other representations of the headband have shown that the headband and Jester god pendant were not only worn by rulers, but by all nobility (Zender 2011, 36-37). We thus cannot identify figures as the Hero Twins solely on the presence of the headband.

Another identifiable element is the long hair of the Hero Twins that is bound together by a piece of cloth. The tail often rest on the top of the head with the rest of the hair bundled in some kind of knot. Their clothes do not show much consistency. It appears that they had different outfits connected to particular situations or roles. The most simple outfit is a basic white loincloth. They also wear the attire of ball players, represented wearing a large yoke at the hip and a jaguar skin kilt. Another outfit identifies them as scribes, or more specific as *aj k'uh hun*, "he of the holy books", as they are shown wearing the sarong which was one of the specific elements of the *aj k'uh hun* costume. Junajpu sometimes appears in hunter's clothes. These consist of a broad-brimmed straw hat, a frayed kilt, and of course his blowgun (Coe 1989, 169). Notable is that the outfit of the Hero Twins is somewhat more elaborate when they are presented with the Maize God. See for instance figure 5.16 in which Junajpu is represented in a beautiful jade bead costume with a large yoke around the hips.



Photograph © Justin Kerr File no. K1183

Figure 5.16: Rollout photograph of vessel 1183 portraying Jun Junajpu and Junajpu in the court of Itzamnaaj (Photograph © Justin Kerr).

We must be careful with identifying elements as they are not mutually exclusive. For instance the dark spot in the cheek of Hunahpu is also a marker of mammals and a marker for putrifaction (Stone and Zender 2011, 37). The identifiable aspects of the Hero Twins vary considerably and sometimes even one figure may represent both of the Hero Twins (Kerr 1992, 109). We can conclude that the Classic Maya Hero Twins were represented as handsome young lords, skilled ballplayers, good hunters/blowgunners, and they were literate. The Hero Twins must have been considered as role models for the young future lords (Coe 1989, 182).

### Nominal glyphs



Figure 5.17: Name glyph of Junajpu, Jun Ajaw (after Coe and van Stone 2001, 116).

In some cases the Hero Twins are accompanied by nominal glyphs. The hieroglyphs for Junajpu and Xbalanq'ë consist of portraits of themselves, showing young men. The glyph used to identify Junajpu consists of the coefficient one and the spotted Ajaw face (figure 5.17) and that of Xbalanq'ë consists of the personified number nine glyph often prefixed by the yax sign (figure 5.18)(Coe 1989, 168). It is possible that in the Classic Maya lowlands their names were Jun Ajaw and Yax Bahlam. This might also have been the case in Post-Classic Yucatan (Schele and Miller 1986, 25).

Xbalanq'ë was apparently also connected to the number nine as his head, with jaguar beard and jaguar ear, was used as a glyph for this number (Coe 1989, 168). Junajpu's portrait served as the example for the Ajaw glyph and the day Ajaw. In Yucatec Maya the twentieth day in the 260-day count is still named Ajaw, as it is also in Chuc and Jacalteca. In Tzeltal and Tzotzil the day is named Aghual and in Ixil and K'iche' the day is named Junajpu (Coe 1989, 167-168).



Figure 20: Different forms of the name glyph of Xbalanq'ë, Yax Bahlam (after Coe and van Stone 2001, 117).

### Example of representations of the Hero Twins

Representations of the Hero Twins are found throughout the Maya area and on a wide variety of material sources, such as stone monuments, cave paintings, murals, and even in the codices. As this thesis is filled with representations of the Hero Twins on ceramics I will here give some example of representation of the Hero Twins on other media.

A very recognizable representation of the Hero Twins can be found in the Naj Tunich cave. Naj Tunich is a cave most famous for its numerous cave paintings. The cave belongs to the longest cave system in Central America and is located in southeastern Peten, Guatemala (Stone 1995, 99-100). The cave mainly contains paintings, but there are also petroglyphs, drawings, and handprints. These were made by many different artists over a period of about eighty years (Stone 1995, 111). Thus far, 94 units of cave art have been identified. There are also some 40 hieroglyphic texts present, containing together about 500 hieroglyphs. From the hieroglyphic dates we know that the paintings were created in the period 692-771 A.D. The cave seems to have functioned as a pilgrimage center, attracting people from as far as Caracol as can be deduced from the Emblem Glyphs present in the cave texts (Stone 1995, 106-107).

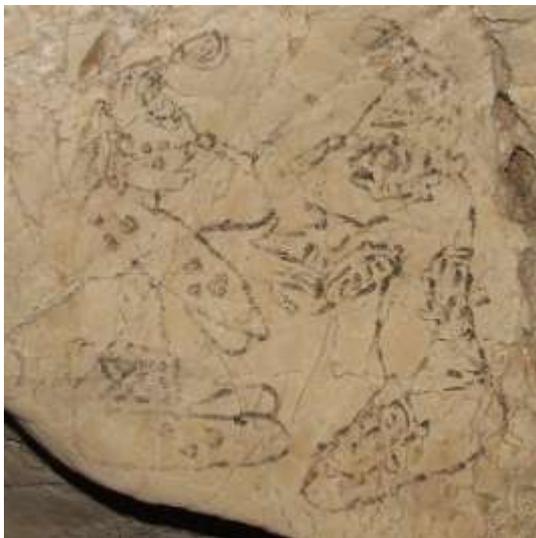


Figure 5.19: Drawing of Junajpu and Xbalanq'ë in the Naj Tunich cave (Costa 2008).

One of the most important paintings at Naj Tunich is a very clear representation of Junajpu and Xbalanq'ë (figure 5.19)(Drawing 87 in Stone 1995). The painting shows two cross-legged seated figures. On the left sits Junajpu, identifiable by the black spots on his cheek and body and the presence of a yoke. On the right is Xbalanq'ë with his jaguar beard and jaguar patches on the skin. Both wear the common bundled hear on the top of the head. They seem to be in an animated dialogue deduced from the gesturing of their hands (Stone 1995, 148-149; 229-230). There are no glyphs accompanying the drawing. There is thus no further information about what the image represents.

The Hero Twins are also mentioned in the codices of Dresden and Madrid. The Dresden codex consist of 39 pages and in total there are 74 pages inscribed. The document originated in Yucatan and was written in the Late Postclassic period. The codex contains almanacs, astronomical and astrological tables and ritual schedules. Its fame derives from its Lunar series and Venus table. In 1739 the codex was purchased by Johann Christian Götze for the Dresden Royal Library, who had found it in a private library in Vienna (Bricker and Bricker 2011, 4-7). It still resides in Dresden today, in the *Sächsische Landesbibliothek*.

The Madrid codex is the longest of all four codices. It contains 56 pages of which both sides were painted, thus the codex contains 112 pages with contends. The outer or cover pages of the document have both sustained quite some damage and almost all original painting is gone on both pages. The codex was written in the post-Conquest period and derives from northeastern Yucatan. The contend mainly consist of almanacs and horoscopes and contains some astronomical tables. The

codex had been divided into two parts which were rediscovered in different places in Spain in the 1860's. León de Rosny realized that the parts belonged together, forming one codex. Both parts now remain in the *Museo de América* in Madrid (Bricker and Bricker 2011, 19-20).



Figure 5.20: Detail of page 2 of the Dresden Codex, showing a decapitated Junajpu (Förstemann 1880).

In the Dresden codex Junajpu appears first on page 2 (figure 5.20). Junajpu is portrayed without a head with his arms tied around his back holding some kind of fan. He is easily recognized by the black dots on his body. The full text on the page mentions that Jun Ajaw cuts his own umbilical cord after which he becomes famous. The story continues mentioning that food and drink flow from the umbilical cord which was apparently connected to the Maize God, Sak Ixik. There are other representations of Jun Ajaw in the Dresden and Madrid codex, but they do not provide any additional information.

On page 7, of the Dresden codex, Xbalanq'e is displayed together with a hummingbird (figure 5.22). He can be identified by his jaguar beard and jaguar patches of skin on his arm, back and leg. On Dresden page 21 is another occurrence of Yax Balam. In this depiction Yax Balam occurs without his usual markings and is only recognizable by his name glyph (figure 5.21)(Coe 1989, 180-181).



Figure 5.21: Detail of page 21 of the Dresden Codex, showing the name glyph of Yax Balam (Förstemann 1880).



Figure 5.22: Detail of page 7 of the Dresden Codex, showing Xbalanq'e with a hummingbird (Förstemann 1880).

## 5.4 Categorizing the Hero Twin scenes on Maya ceramics

This chapter has giving on overview of the first part of the Popol Vuh story and an attempt has been made to identify these stories on Classic Maya polychrome pottery. Throughout this thesis the basic method will be to tell a small part of the story, then discuss the most important characters of this part and highlight the iconographical elements of the story which will likely be portrayed on Maya ceramics. Following will be a discussion of the ceramics that have been identified as portraying this particular Popol Vuh story by Maya scholars and myself. To provide a clear overview of the totality of

Popol Vuh scenes that I have identified, all the categorized ceramics are listed in a table, that can be found in appendix 2. When a category is discussed the identified category will be mentioned in the text, so that it is possible to look up which ceramics are grouped in this category. Appendix 3 is inherently the same table as appendix 2, but here the ceramics are listed according to Kerr number, to facilitate the process of looking up particular ceramics. The table of appendix 2 and 3 also provides additional information about the vase type, shape, and the dimensions.

This chapter has already shown that it is complicated to identify scenes from the Popol Vuh on Classic Maya ceramics. There are basically two problems with using the Popol Vuh as textual information for an iconographical research of Maya Classic period polychrome pottery: First the polychrome pictorial pottery dates from roughly 600-900 and the Popol Vuh was written between 1554-1558. There is thus a huge time gap between the two and therefore we cannot just assume that the Classic period pottery portrays the tale from the Popol Vuh as we know it today. Many elements of the story must have changed in time. An important part of my research will therefore be to discover which scenes from the Popol Vuh are actually displayed on ceramics and how much they differ from the story. The second problem is that one text on its own does not reflect the whole of society. Although the Popol Vuh is a very elaborate and important mythological text we should not restrict our research to one source. I will therefore incorporate any relevant sources in my research, such as ancient Maya text and images from monuments and murals, the Maya codices and other mythological tales from Mesoamerica. Still this thesis only represent a selection of sources for there is not enough time and room to discuss all. The most important restriction made is concerning the Popol Vuh story. This thesis will only focus on the scenes in which we can identify the Hero Twins and thus only this part of the Popol Vuh story will be told. The reason for this is that the Hero Twins are the only characters of the Popol Vuh which have clearly been identified and for which even the Classical names are known. Although there are a lot of suggestions of how the creator gods were represented in the Classic period there remains a lot of uncertainty about their identification. We also do not know how Jun Junajpu and Wuqub Junajpu were represented, nor if Xkik' really represents the Classical Maya moon goddess. By looking specifically at representations of the Hero Twins a lot of uncertainty can be avoided. Still we must tread carefully, a single representation of a scene does not prove that the portrayed story was equivalent to that of the Popol Vuh. The ballgame scene on K1288 (figure 5.11) for example is connected to the Popol Vuh by the presence of Junajpu. I have further argued that this scene might be interpreted as presenting Jun Junajpu and Wuqub Junajpu playing ball at the time they were summoned to the Underworld. However this is the only representation of this kind and there is no basis to identify the two ballplayers as Jun Junajpu and Wuqub Junajpu. Even stranger is the fact that although the ballgame plays a significant role in the Popol Vuh story, K1288 is the only one pottery ballgame scene in which we can identify the Hero

Twins. The connection of the Hero Twins to the ballgame in the Classic period is thus poorly understood and at this point identifying K1288 as representing the summoning of Junajpu and Wuqub Junajpu remains a wild guess.

In the next chapter the discussion of the Hero Twins represented on ceramic will continue with the trials of the Hero Twins on earth.

# Chapter 6: The Hero Twins on earth

## 6.1 The defeat of Wuqub Kaqix

Wuqub Kaqix proclaimed himself to be the light of the people on earth before there was a sun. He boasted himself, declaring to be the sun and the moon. Wuqub Kaqix was a gigantic bird-monster, with glittering jewels as eyes, jades stones as teeth and a nose that shone brightly like the moon. His nest was also made of shining metal (Christensen 2007, 91-93). Wuqub Kaqix was not truly the sun, he only glorified himself and that angered Junajpu and Xbalanq'ë. It also angered Heart of Sky and he told the Hero Twins that they had to defeat him, because his self pride was too great. To reduce the glory of Wuqub Kaqix, they decided to shoot him with their blowguns (Christensen 2007, 94-96; Tedlock 1996, 73-74). Wuqub Kaqix came to eat the fruit of a nance tree each day and it is there that the Twins Hero hid and when he was up the tree they shot him. The shot of Junajpu broke his jaw and shining teeth, which caused him agonizing pain. Wuqub Kaqix fell from the tree on the floor where Junajpu tried to seize him. Instead Wuqub Kaqix tore off the arm of Junajpu and flew away to his home, taking Junjpu's arm with him. The Hero Twins asked their grandfather and grandmother for help to retrieve the arm of Juanjpu. Xpiyakok and Xmukane agreed to accompany their grandsons to Wuqub Kaqix. The grandparents told Wuqub Kaqix that they could repair his teeth and eye. He pretended to be professional curers and because Wuqub Kaqix was in agonizing pain he begged them to cure his ailments. The grandparents took out his teeth and replaced them with false teeth made of maize and immediately his face fell. They also replaced the silver of his eye, taking away his wealth. The loss of his wealth and pride caused Wuqub Kaqix his life and made it possible for Junajpu to retrieve his arm (Christensen 2007, 97-100; Tedlock 1996, 78-81).

### Wuqub Kaqix

*Wuqub* can be translated as "seven" and *kaqix* is a combination of *kaq*, "red", and *qi'x*, "feather". *Wuqub Kaqix* thus means "seven red feather", which likely refers to the scarlet macaw (*Ara macao*, see figure 6.1), of which the plumage is mostly red (Christensen 2007, 91, n.150; Tedlock 1985, 237, n. 73). The scarlet macaw has an upper beak that is pale horn in color and thus matches the description of Wuqub Kaqix proclaiming to have a beak, that shines brightly like the moon (Christensen 2007, 92, n. 158). The scarlet macaw is the only macaw with a white beak, thus strengthening the fact that Wuqub Kaqix would have been a scarlet macaw.

The fact that Wuqub Kaqix is shot in the jaw might be an actual explanation why the upper beak of the macaw is bent and the fact that it is much larger than the lower beak (Christensen 2007, 98, n.184). Literally the Popol Vuh claims that the eyes of Wuqub Kaqix were plucked and the shining metal removed. Again this might explain why the macaw has a large white eye patch, which seems to have been plucked clean of feathers, and why his eyes are so small, as if something has been removed from it (Christensen 2007, 100, n. 189). Wuqub Kaqix is therefore more widely known as Seven Macaw.



Figure 6.1: A scarlet macaw (wikipedia 2008).

### Shooting of Wuqub Kaqix

There are three ceramics vessel and one plate that most definitely display the shooting of Wuqub Kaqix by the Hero Twins (K1226, K4546, K3638; categorized as *shooting of Wuqub Kaqix* in Appendix 2). The bird depicted on these ceramics is not exactly a scarlet macaw, but a bird that has been identified as the Principal Bird Deity.

The Principal Bird Deity is an avian supernatural that seems to have hold a prominent place in Maya iconography as it is the most often portrayed avian being. It is therefore that Lawrence Bardawil named this creature the Principal Bird Deity, a term that is still widely used in Maya iconographical studies (Bardawil 1976). The Principal Bird Deity can be seen as a dynamic iconographic complex, which constantly evolves and changes stylistically, but which intrinsic identity remains constant. The Principal Bird Deity is basically composed of three elements which are the full figure, the wing, and the head.



Figure 6.2: Two representations of the Principal Bird Deity serpent wing (after Taube 1987, 3).

To identify the Principal Bird Deity its head and wing are the most essential. The wing of the Principal Bird Deity is called the serpent wing because a long-lipped serpent-like figure is embedded inside the wing (figure 6.2). The wing also displays an abundance of feathers and other varying stylistic elements of which crossed bands are the most significant (Bardawil 1976, 196-198). Karl Taube has accurately pointed to the fact that the serpent wing is not an isolated trait of the Principal Bird Deity, but also appears on other birds. He suggest that the serpent should actually be read and translated as meaning “sky”. The Mayan word for sky, *chan*, also means “snake” and thus the serpent might have been symbolic for sky. Thus the attachment of a serpent wing to a creature might simply indicate that the figure is a sky creature. This also explains the displays of crossed bands on the wings as this is also a common sky symbol (Taube 1987, 2).



Figure 6.3: Head of the Principal Bird Deity with long upper lip (after Taube 1987, 7).

The most diagnostic elements of the Principal Bird Deity head is its long upper lip (figure 6.3). In the Late Classic Period we often find the Principal Bird Deity represented with a jeweled headband (Bardawil 1976, 198, 204-205). This jeweled headband is comparable to the *akbal*-flower headdress that is characteristic for the creator god Itzamnaaj (see figure 5.4). There are a few ceramic vessels that portray both Itzamnaaj and the Principal Bird Deity wearing the same attributes. See for example K3863 (figure 6.4). The figure on the left side of this vessel can be identified as Itzamnaaj by the specific *akbal*-flower headdress and he appears with a large feathered wing. On the left side of the vessel’s surface we find the Principal Bird Deity recognizable

by its feathered serpent wing and long upper lip. The bird however also wears the *akbal*-flower headdress. It is undeniable that these figures are closely connected. It is even possible that the feathered wing on Itzamnaaj symbolizes the transformation of Itzamnaaj into the Principal Bird Deity. Therefore the Principal Bird Deity has been identified as being the bird manifestation of Itzamnaaj (Freidel *et al.* 1993, 211). There are some occasions were this bird is even named as Itzam Yej, strengthening its strong connection to Itzamnaaj. It is not known if the Principal Bird Deity has always been perceived as a manifestation of Itzamnaaj or that this was something related to the Classic period.



Figure 6.4: Rollout photograph of vessel K3863 portraying Itzamnaaj and the Principal Bird Deity (Photograph © Justin Kerr).

Let us now look at the vessels that display the shooting of this Principal Bird Deity. K1226 (figure 6.5) shows Junajpu in his hunter's outfit. This outfit consists of a broad-brimmed straw hat, a frayed kilt and of course his long blowgun. Junajpu can easily be identified on this vessel by the appearances of large black dots on his arm, back and cheek. Junajpu is squatting in front of a tree in which we can find a bird sitting in the top branches. Junajpu has just shot a pellet from his blowgun in the direction of the bird perched in the branches of the tree. The tree is made animistic by the *tzuk* head on his trunk, which associates the tree with the World Tree. *Tzuk* is the Maya word for "partition" and is often used in reference the primordial act of creation, were divisions were made to create the earth, sky, and the sea. Also the word refers to the divisions of the four corners and the center of the universe. The *tzuk* glyph is found an almost every image that has something to do with the partitions of the



Figure 6.5: Rollout photograph of K1226 portraying the shooting of Wuqub Kaqix by Junajpu (Photograph © Justin Kerr).

world. The glyph was often placed on the trunk of the World Tree, because it represent the partition of the center (Freidel *et al.* 1993, 140). The World Tree was called the *wakah-chan*, the “raised-up sky”. The tree represents the central axis of the universe, the *axis mundi*, the axis of creation. The World Tree was represented in many different ways often elaborately bejeweled and adorned with mirrors (Freidel *et al.* 1993, 53). On this vessel this is also clearly the case and we can conclude that the tree on K1226 symbolizes the World Tree. Next to the tree we find a scorpion. We do not know the relation of the scorpion to this scene as it is not mentioned in the Popol Vuh. Justin Kerr has made the interesting notion that the jaguar paw that is visible extending from behind of the tree trunk might belong to Xbalanq’*e*, who is apparently hiding behind the tree (Kerr in Coe 1989, 169-170). The wings of the bird in the tree are comparable to the wings of the Principal Bird Deity. That the bird in question is in fact the Itzam Yej bird can be deduced from the identifiable *akbal*-flower, here worn as a necklace, and the name Itzam Yej that is recorded in the accompanying hieroglyphic text. This vase has therefore been accepted by scholars as displaying the shooting of Wuqub Kaqix.

The scene portrayed in K4546 is comparable to that of K1226. Again we find Junajpu in his hunters outfit pointing his blowgun at the Itzam Yej bird who is perched in the branches of the World Tree. The vessel shows however three hunters with blowguns. It is not clear who the other hunters are supposed to represent.

Another very famous plate, showing the shooting episode, is the so-called Blom plate (see figure 6.6)(Blom 1950, 81-84). In this scene the Hero Twins wear the headbands and are not in hunters outfits. The figures both appear with black spots on their body, although Coe suggest that the jaguar cushion on which the left figure is sitting might be an indication that this is supposed to be Xbalanq’*e* (Coe 1989, 170).

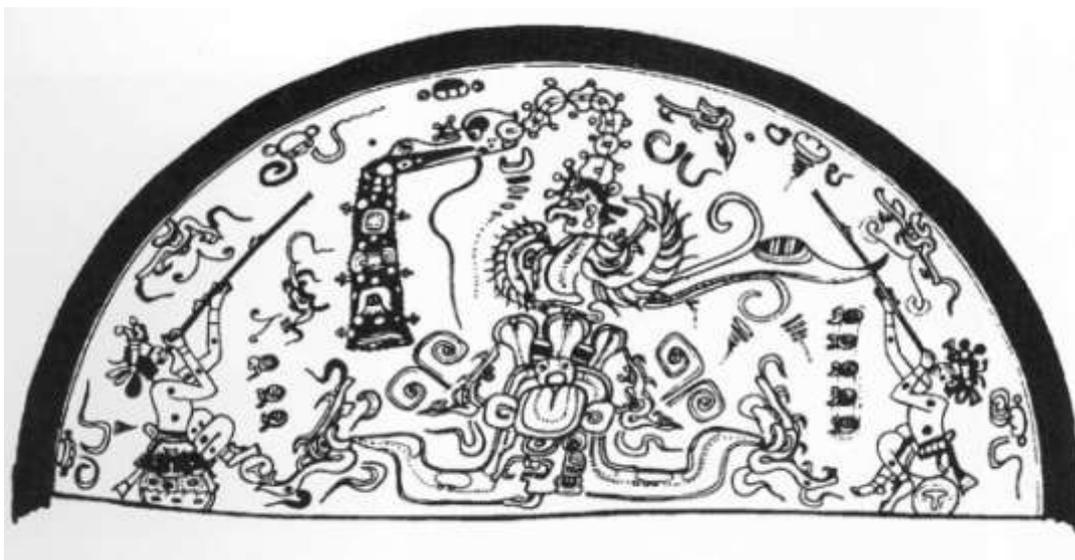


Figure 6.6: Drawing of plate K3638 portraying the shooting of Wuqub Kaqix (after Photograph © Justin Kerr)

The missing of the jaguar patches that usually identify Xbalanq'è is not very exceptional. There are many ceramics on which the jaguar patches and/or jaguar beard are missing. There are even scenes in which Xbalanq'è is completely absent. It is possible that the Hero Twins were in some occasions perceived as one entity, which appears also have been the case with their father and uncle. There are references to this fact in the Popol Vuh, here I will provide a few example specifically from the Wuqub Kaqix scene. When the Hero Twins go to their grandfather and grandmother for help they say: "We would like you to accompany us to retrieve our arm from Seven Macaw." (Christensen 2007, 98 emphasis my own) When they finally get back the arm the text again mentions that "the boys retrieved their arm" (Christensen 2007, 100 emphasis my own). This indicates that the Twins perceived themselves sometimes as one entity and might explain why there is often only one Hero Twin displayed.



Figure 6.7: Photograph of vessel K3105a portraying the shooting of Wuqub Kaqix (Photograph © Justin Kerr).



Figure 6.8: Detail of vessel K3105d showing Junajpu, who can be identified by the inverted triangle of dots on his cheek (Photograph © Justin Kerr).

There is another majestic double cylindrical vessel representing the shooting, said to be from Rio Azul, Guatemala (figure 6.7). The magnificent Wuqub Kaqix, with large feathered wings, is perched on top of one of the two vessel. That he identifies himself with the sun is strengthened by the appearance of the *k'in* glyph, "sun", on the back of his right wing. He wears a pendant of the *pop-knot*, "mat"-knot, which is an iconographic symbol for rulership (Coe 1989, 170-172). On the opposite cylinder we find a crouching Junajpu, identifiable by the tree dots on his cheek (figure 6.8).

The figure wears a fringed kilt, also an identity marker for Junajpu. In between the cylinders is another figure could be Xbalanq'e, although we cannot ascertain this as he has no identifiable markers present.

The previously discussed ceramics vessels make it clear that the shooting of a bird by Junajpu was a well-known story in the Classic period. Although we cannot deny that this bird was the avian manifestation of Itzamnaaj associating this bird with Wuqub Kaqix causes some problems. First of all some Maya scholars have argued that the bird represented on these ceramics does not represent a macaw. But the name Wuqub Kaqix actually means "seven red feather", although his description in the Popol Vuh might seem to refer to a macaw, he is not directly addressed to as a macaw. In the Popol Vuh, Wuqub Kaqix is actually described as a large bird, with glittering jewels as eyes, jades stones as teeth, and a nose that shone brightly like the moon. This sounds like an anthropomorphic bird that would have been represented with many glittering jewels and a large nose. If we look at the bird portrayed in K3638 we actually see the sort of bird that is described in the Popol Vuh. Especially if we imagine the wings of this bird to have red feathers. I believe that this bird does indeed represents Wuqub Kaqix.

Secondly it has been stipulated that the Hero Twins spent most of their days hunting with their blowguns and thus these depicted hunting scenes do not necessarily have to refer to the Wuqub Kaqix blowgun scene. Indeed the Hero Twins were mentioned to be excellent blowgunners and it is likely that in the Classic period there existed other blowgun episodes besides that of Wuqub Kaqix. On K555 (figure 4.8, categorized as *Junajpu blowgun scene* in Appendix 2) there might be such a different blowgun scene. On this vessel we find Junajpu pointing his blowgun at the anthropomorphic Vulture God, Ta Hol, characterized by the *ti* affix above his beak (Coe 1978, 58-63; Coe 1989, 170). The complete vessel scene also represents Itzamnaaj meeting with a dog and Chahk ripping out the lower jaw of some Underworld creatures. The blowgun scene featuring Junajpu and Ta Hol and the complete represented story of vessel K555 unfortunately remains unclear. It must have been another part of the Hero Twins tale that did not survive in the Popol Vuh. So we can conclude that there are indeed other blowgun scenes featuring the Hero Twins, but the specifics of the scenes portrayed on K1226, K4546, K3638, such as the appearance of the bird, the presence of a tree, and the hunters outfit of Junajpu all fit closely to the shooting of Wuqub Kaqix scene from the Popol Vuh. I am therefore convinced that these portray the actual shooting scene of Wuqub Kaqix. Even the multitude of representations of this particular scene on vessels indicates that it was an important episode and thus one that would likely survive in time.

A third problem concerning the shooting of Wuqub Kaqix scenes is that the prideful, selfishness nature of Wuqub Kaqix seems to be misplaced when identified as Itzam Yej. Itzamnaaj was a venerated creator god and naturally we would assume that his avian manifestation would have

had a positive nature. Karen Bassie does therefore not believe that the shooting of the Itzam Yej represent Wuqub Kaqix. She instead believes that this bird is parallel to another bird mentioned in the Popol Vuh, called Wak (Bassie 2002, 31-33). This bird appears in a latter episode in the Popol Vuh and he is one of the messengers that were sent to the Hero Twins to summon them to the Underworld. Wak has been identified as representing laughing falcon (Christensen 2007, 156,n.366; 158, n. 371; Tedlock 1996, 270). The Hero Twins also shoot this falcon as he disturbs them when they are playing ball at the ballcourt. One of the arguments Bassie gives for the bird on K1226, K4546, K3638 to represents Wak, is that the laughing falcon is often perched on the top of trees for long periods of time (Bassie 2002, 31-33). However lots of bird sit in trees, so I do not think this is a strong argument. Especially as the episode in which the Hero Twins shoot Wak takes place on the ballcourt and Wak therefore would not be sitting in a tree, but on the ballcourt. Also Junajpu is wearing his hunters outfit on the vessel scenes and if the scenes would represent the shooting of Wak we would aspect him to wear his ballgame yoke. The bird is also dressed in riches and this is exactly how Wuqub Kaqix is describes and not the falcon.

However, it still remains odd that the Hero Twins would shoot the avian counter part of Itzamnaaj as they seem to have held a strong relationship to Itzamnaaj. This can be deduced from the fact that Itzamnaaj has been identified as Xpiyakok, which means that Itzamnaaj would have been the grandfather of the Hero Twins, but also by the fact that the Hero Twins are often represented meeting with Itzamnaaj on ceramic vessels. This category (categorized as *Hero Twins in counsel with Itzamnaaj*) consist of a large amount of vessels, being K732, K1183, K1222, K1607, K1991, K7821, and K8468. Vessels K732, K1183, K1222, K7821 and K8468 all represent a meeting with Itzamnaaj apparently at his court as he is represented either sitting on a throne or cushion, or the presence of curtains identify the place as a palace. On K1183 Itzamnaaj is even represented sitting on a skyband throne suggesting he was an important deity of the sky. Itzamnaaj was indeed commonly portrayed sitting on a skyband and meeting with important deities such as god N and god L. From the composition of these vessel scenes it is clear that Itzamnaaj had an higher status than these lords. This indicates that Itzamnaaj was considered as the supreme ruler of the sky. I therefore believe that Itzamnaaj might also be a Classical version of Heart of Sky of the Popol Vuh.

Let us look at K732 (figure 6.9) to better understand the Hero Twins in counsel with Itzamnaaj scenes. The figure on the outer left side of this vessel depicts an anthropomorphic toad, so far I have not been able to understand the relationship of the toad to this scene. In front of the toad sits Xbalanq'e, recognizable by the patches of jaguar skin and jaguar beard. In front of him sits Junajpu, represented with large dots on his body. Interestingly enough they both wear the outfit on an *aj k'uh hun*, "he of the holy books", symbolizing that they were literate and practiced the scribal arts. Itzamnaaj is facing the Hero Twins and seated in front of a large cushion. The Hero Twins are

both holding a drinking cup that likely contained a chocolate beverage. The large vessel between Junajpu and Itzamnaaj might have been the storage container for this drink. Itzamnaaj seems to be telling them something, animating his story with his right hand. The position of Junajpu and Xbalanq'ë suggests that they respected and even venerated Itzamnaaj, as they are sitting slightly bent forward and Junajpu even bows his head.

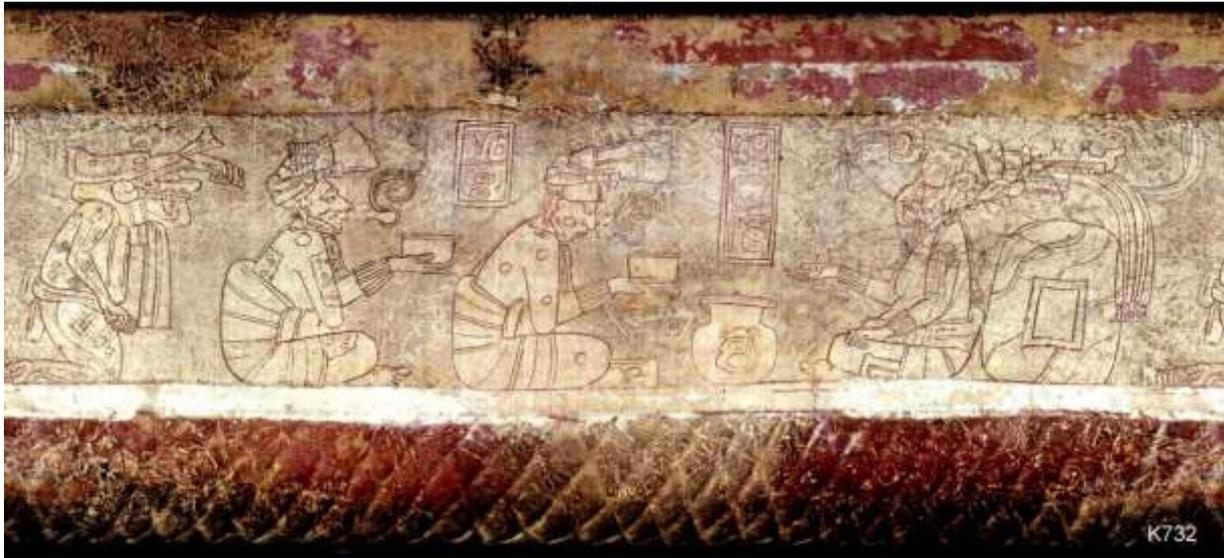


Figure 6.9: Rollout photograph of vessel K732 portraying a meeting between the Hero Twins and Itzamnaaj (Photograph © Justin Kerr).

The other vessel scenes also suggest that the Hero Twins carry an animated conversation with Itzamnaaj. On four occasions only Junajpu is represented, but as discussed previously this is not very exceptional. On vessel K1183 Junajpu is accompanied by the Maize God, however Yax Balam is mentioned in the accompanying hieroglyphic text. On K1222, K1183, and K7821 the Hero Twins are both named in the hieroglyphic text. The friendly relationship between Itzamnaaj and the Hero Twins is particularly evident on vessel K1991. On K1991 the Hero Twins are presented hunting together with Itzamnaaj. In this scene Itzamnaaj sits astride a peccary trying to catch the animal. Junajpu and Xbalanq'ë are behind Itzamnaaj, trying to capture the animal with the use of spears.

This all suggest that there was a strong and friendly relationship between the Hero Twins and Itzamnaaj and complicates understanding the act of the Hero Twins shooting Wuqub Kaqix. This might be explained by seeing Itzamnaaj as a complex deity with a dual nature. As discussed in the previous chapter the ancient Maya gods were more likely to be perceived as complexes or clusters, instead of being individuals associated with certain aspects (Vail 2000, 142). These entities were represented by different manifestation that each had their own name and identity. It is possible that Itzamnaaj and Itzam Yej were manifestation of the same entity. Itzamnaaj being its Upperworld

manifestation, representing its creational nature and Itzam Yej being its Underworld manifestation, representing its destructive nature. There is one other solution to understanding the complex relationship between the Hero Twins and Itzamnaaj. Itzamnaaj has been identified as a supreme ruler of the sky and I have therefore connected him to Heart of Sky. If Itzamnaaj in fact represented Heart of Sky in the Classic period the meetings of between the Hero Twins and Itzamnaaj might represent him ordering the Hero Twins to destroy Wuqub Kaqix and his sons. But this also means that he would have ordered the shooting down of his own manifestation. This is even more unlikely except if we see Wuqub Kaqix in a different light. The Popol Vuh describes Wuqub Kaqix as a false god, representing himself as a creator god, which he was not. He pretends to be someone else and it is possible that this alludes to the idea that he had actually 'stolen' the identity of a creator god. I believe that the Maya artists portrayed Wuqub Kaqix as a false god by adorning him with the characteristic costume of Itzamnaaj. Portraying Wuqub Kaqix as a well-known creator god thus represented him as having literally stolen the identity of this creator god. It is then logical that Itzamnaaj would have instructed the Hero Twins to defeat Wuqub Kaqix by stripping him of this costume and reveal him for the false god he was. There is no direct evidence supporting this hypothesis, but in light of the importance of the Wuqub Kaqix shooting scene and the strong relation between Itzamnaaj and the Hero Twins I believe the most reasonable explanation of the depicted scenes.

## **6.2 The defeat of Sipakna and Kab'rajan**

Wuqub Kaqix had two sons which were also killed by the Hero Twins. Sipakna was his first son who built up mountains and claimed to have created the earth. Kab'rajan, his second son, moved the mountains and caused them to tremble. He claimed to have felled the sky and caused the earth to tumble down. Like their father Sipakna and Kab'rajan proclaimed themselves to be something they were not and thus they had to be defeated (Christensen 2007, 96; Tedlock 1996, 77-78).

Sipakna was one day passed by four hundred boys, who were carrying a large tree, which they were going to use as a supporting beam for the hut they were building. Sipakna offers to help them carry this tree. Sipakna manages to carry the tree all by himself and for that the four hundred boys mistrust him. They make a plan to kill Sipakna, by letting him dig a large hole and throw in the beam when he is down at the bottom. However, Sipakna realizes he is to be killed and he escapes by digging a branching tunnel in the hole, in which he hides when the boys throw down the beam. After

three days the boys believe that they have killed Sipakna and become very drunk. It is then that Sipakna reappears and collapses the hut upon the four hundred boys, who are thus all killed. It is said that these boys became the Pleiades (a star cluster in the constellation of Taurus) (Christensen 2007, 101-104; Tedlock 1996, 81-84).

Junajpu and Xbalanq'ë were appalled by the death of the four hundred boys and set out to kill Sipakna. Sipakna only ate fish and crab for which he searched each day. The Hero Twins create a huge crab, with which they trick Sipakna. When they come across Sipakna he is very hungry for he has not eaten in days. The Hero Twins then lead him to the fake crab which they had put in a cave. Sipakna gets stuck when crawling in this cave, which causes the mountain to collapse on top of him, which made him turn into stone. Thus this is how the Twins killed Zipacna (Christensen 2007, 105-107; Tedlock 1996, 84-85).

Kab'raqañ like his father glorified himself and called himself the destroyer of mountains. Heart of Sky ordains the Twins to also kill Kab'raqañ, because he believed himself to be too great and important. The Hero Twins meet Kab'raqañ on the road and tell him of a great mountain, which they then travel to. On the way they shoot some birds and roast them. One of these birds they coat with baked earth, and it is this one that they give to Kab'raqañ. Eating this bird makes Kab'raqañ weak and causes him to lose his ability to destroy mountains. The Hero Twins were therefore able to tie him up, knock him down and bury him in the earth (Christensen 2007, 108-111; Tedlock 1996, 85-88).

### Sipakna

Sipakna is composed of *Sip*, a Yucatec verb referring to a sliding or slipping motion, nominalized by –*ak*, and *na* being the term for house in Yucatec. This does not give us a useful translation, but the reference to a sliding or slipping creature has led to the identification of Sipacka as being a caiman (Tedlock 1995, 240). The acts of Sipakna, bathing besides a river and hunting in its waters, also link him to a caiman. In addition the name is probably related to the Yucatec month *Sip*, which is represented by a glyph composed of the profiled head and snout of a caiman (Tedlock 1995, 240). *Sip* and Sipakna are probably both related to *cipactli*, the monstrous Nahuatl caiman which represented the earth floating on the primordial sea (Christensen 2007, 95, n. 168). A caiman representing the surface of the earth is a belief that was also present among the ancient Maya. In fact the caiman as a symbol for the earth was a widespread belief throughout Mesoamerica (Taube 1989a, 1). The Late Postclassic Maya of Yucatec also connected the caiman to the cosmogenic flood that ended the previous creation, which is described in the Yucatac Chilam Balam books of Chumayel, Maní, and Tzimin (Roys 1933, 98-101; Craine and Reindorp 1979, 118; Edmonson 1982, 40-41). The creature in these books was known as *Itzam Kab Ayin*. The exact translation for *Itzam* is still widely debated, but

*Kab Ayin* can be translated as “earth caiman” (Taube 1989a, 2). The flood connected to a caiman was also presented in the Classic Maya period as reference to such an event is found at the site of Palenque.

In 1999 the hieroglyphic platform of Temple XIX at Palenque was discovered. This platform was constructed during the reign of K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb' III and dedicated in A.D. 734 (Velásquez García 2006, 3). The platform recalls an important mythological event that occurred in the previous creation. It mentions that on March 10, 3309 B.C. god GI gained access of rulership over the sky. His accession to the throne was supervised by Yax Naah Itzamnaaj. The story continues eleven years later with the decapitation of a caiman. This caiman has star and deer attributes. The text refers to the caiman as *Way(?) Paat Ahiin(?)*, *Tz'ihb'al Paat Ahiin(?)*, “Hole(?) -Backed Caiman(?)”, *Painted-Back Caiman(?)*,” (Stuart 2005b, 59, 70). The decapitation of this crocodile caused a flood of blood that apparently destroyed the previous world. The god GI was apparently responsible for the decapitation of the caiman, that was necessary for the destruction and renewal of the universe. The creation of a new cosmological order was overseen by god GI. The caiman is thus symbolic of cosmic destruction and renewal (Velásquez García 2006, 3-4). In the *Popol Vuh* there is also a previous creation that is destroyed by a flood. Except the flood that destroyed the effigies of carved wood was produced by the creator gods and not a mythological caiman. In the Dresden Codex there is also a representation that has been interpreted as the destruction of the world by a flood (Schele and Grube 1997, 198-199). This representation can be found on page 74 (figure 6.10) and shows Goddess O holding a jar from which she pours water. This has been interpreted as representing the flood. Beneath Goddess O we find a black-painted god, identified as God L by the owl that sits on his headdress. God L is sort of crouching holding a staff in one hand and a spear-like weapon in the other. Above we find a skyband that forms into a caiman. From the jaws of this caiman appear streams of water that descends to the earth. Again this scene shows a connected of caimans to the cosmogenic flood.

We can thus conclude that there is a widespread belief in Mesoamerica that a previous world was destroyed by flooding. The destruction of the world allowed for the creation of a new cosmological order. For the Maya the flood was often connection to the decapitation of the caiman, which is documented in Palenque in the eight century A.D., but seems to have persisted to the eighteenth century were the Chilam Balam books also mention the destruction of a previous world through a flood caused by the beheading of a caiman. Of course there are multiple variations on the story through time. Most noticeable is that in the Classic Maya version the beheading of the caiman causes a flood of blood, while in the Dresden codex the flood is caused by water (Velásquez García 2006, 8).



Figure 6.10: Page 74 of the Dresden Codex, showing the destruction of the previous world by a flood (Förstemann 1880).

### The caiman represented on ceramic vessels

There are only three ceramic wares that, to my knowledge, represent a caiman creature (K1607, K1609, K1892). Unfortunately none of those actually represents the defeat of Sipakna by the Hero Twins. I will however discuss the ceramics as I believe that the essential significance of the caiman, as is portrayed in the Popol Vuh, was the same as that in the Classic period.

K1607 portrays a so-called 'crocodile tree' again alluding to the caiman as representing the surface of the earth from which vegetation grows (Freidel *et al.* 1993, 88). The plate K1606, also named the Cosmic Plate, represents a mythical scene which features the god Chahk. The hieroglyphic texts tells about the rebirth of *Chac Xib Chaahk*, "Chaahk the red man" taking place in a watery space on 13 Oc 8 Zotz. The place that is mentioned is believed to be mythological and reads something like The Black Lagoon, The Site of the Black (?) and of Five Flower (García Barrios *et al.* 2004, 6-8). The plate portrays Chahk emerging out of the dark primordial waters of the Underworld. Chahk is being reborn and thus symbolizes the victory of birth and life over darkness and death. The Plate in general is seen as representing the tree layers of the cosmos (García Barrios *et al.* 2004, 9-11). The Underworld is represented by a fleshless head from which water plants emerge, an iconographic motif used very frequently in ceramic scenes to display the Underworld, and the dark waters. Chahk himself is positioned in the middle and represent the Middle World. The Upper World is occupied by the Principal Bird Deity, recognizable by his wing and long upper lip. Also the bird wears a death collar with eyes attached and the *akbal* sign, referencing that this is a death scene. More explicitly this scene implicates the death of Chahk, necessary for him to be reborn and allow him to nurture new life as is represented by the vegetation sprouting from his body (García Barrios *et al.* 2004, 8-11). Along the border of the right side of the plate we find a crocodilian creature. His paw and eye are transformed into the well-known star symbol. The exact role of this creature in this rebirth scene is not known, but I would like to point out that Sipakna was also connected to stars as the four hundred boys that he killed are mentioned to be transformed into the Pleiades.

The crocodilian monster on plate K1609 can be seen as part of the Middle World and Sipakna also was a creature of the Middle World expressing to have created mountains. I am not proposing that this creature represent Sipakna from the Popol Vuh story. My hypothesis is that the essence of what Sipakna represents is also represented by this crocodilian creature on K1609. Whatever his role, this creature obviously was connected to rebirth and resurrection. K1892 also represents a resurrection scene, this time that of the Maize God and thus again alludes to the caiman being connected to death, resurrection, and renewal.



Figure 6.11: Photograph of plate K1609, the Cosmic Plate (after Photograph © Justin Kerr).

Sipakna in the Popol Vuh needed to be destroyed by the Hero Twins in order to create a world in which it was possible to create humans. In the Postclassic period a crocodile also represented both the destruction and creation of the world. This concept of destruction of the world and renewal in a sense is also part of rebirth as a person must die in order to be reborn. Sipakna and crocodiles in general were linked to this concept both in the Classic and Postclassic period.

### Kab'raan

Kab'raan is the K'iche' term used for earthquake. This of course is exactly what Kab'raan does as he proclaims to shake the mountains. Literally the name can be translated as "Two His Legs" (Christensen 2007, 96, n.169). Still today the K'iche' attribute earthquakes to a bound giant buried beneath the mountains (Christensen 2007, 111, n.219). In Chichicastenango Ruth Bunzel recorded the following story:

“They say of the earthquake, that there is a giant under the earth, bound by his hands and feet, and when there is a slight tremor, it is because he has moved his hands or feet a little; and when he turns over on the other side is when there are strong earthquakes”(Bunzel, 1952, Chichicastenango: a Guatemalan village).

The Popol Vuh does not give a further description of Kab'rajan thus we do not know what he looks like. I have therefore not been able to identify this creature on Classic Maya ceramics.

#### *The significance of Wuqub Kaqix and sons*

The story of the shooting of Wuqub Kaqix from the Popol Vuh definitely existed in the Classic period. The representation of this scene on Maya ceramics is very clear. The defeat of his sons however is not portrayed on Maya ceramics. It is likely that this story was different in the Classic period than how it is nowadays portrayed in the Popol Vuh. The underlying significance of the defeat of Wuqub Kaqix and sons however remains the same through time. They represent entities that had to be destroyed in order to allow the renewal of the world. The destruction of the world was in the Classic period literally represented by the destruction of a caiman. In essence Sipakna represent this caiman that provided the means to destroy the previous world in order to create a new one. Human beings could not have been created in a world where such selfish and prideful creatures as Wuqub Kaqix and his sons existed. Wuqub Kaqix and his sons all portrayed themselves as something they were not, they identified themselves with the creator gods and no creature on earth was allowed to do this. The representations of Wuqub Kaqix might have reminded Maya rulers of their position and posed a forewarning not to become too self-righteous. The Principal Bird Deity was indeed an important aspect in accession ceremonies of Maya rulership. When a Maya ruler was portrayed as the World Tree, Itzam Yeh is often represented in his headdress. The presence of Itzam Yeh might have served as a warning not to become arrogant, because then his strength might become empty and he might lose his face (Freidel *et al.* 1993, 213). Aggrandizing oneself was seen as a forbidden evil and severely frowned upon. Those guilty of excessive pride and boastfulness were punished by Heart of Sky (Christensen 2007, 91, n. 149). Wuqub Kaqix is one of those who is punished because of excessive pride that he found in his own appearance.

### 6.3 The defeat of Jun Batz' and Jun Chowen

From the day Junajpu and Xbalanq'e were born their twin brothers, Jun Batz' and Jun Chowen were envious and jealous of them. Jun Batz' and Jun Chowen were great sages, they were excellent flautists and singers and also writers and carvers, but nothing became of them because of their envy and jealousy. The Hero Twins were not allowed into the house when they were young and therefore grew up in the mountains. Grown up, Junajpu and Xbalanq'e went out each day shooting birds with their blowguns. They brought these birds home to their grandmother and everyday Jun Batz' and Jun Chowen would eat all the food leaving nothing for Junajpu and Xbalanq'e. One day they did not bring any birds back and their grandmother got angry. She asked them where the birds were and the Hero Twins told her they could not get the birds out of the tree and they would like their older brothers to come with them to get the birds. The next morning they went to this tree. The Hero Twins shot many birds, but none fell out. They told their older brothers to go up the tree and get the birds. Jun Batz' and Jun Chowen climbed up to the top of the tree and then it started to grow and the trunk became so large, that they were unable to get out. They asked Junajpu and Xbalanq'e to help them and the Hero Twins told them to retie their loincloths, putting the long end at their backs. However when they pulled out the ends of their loincloths these became tails and Jun Batz' and Jun Chowen turned into spider monkeys. They swung from the branches of the trees into the forest. All along this had been the plan of Junajpu and Xbalanq'e and that is how they defeated Jun Batz' and Jun Chowen, because they had mistreated their younger brothers. The Hero Twins went home and told their mother and grandmother that their older brothers were suddenly transformed into animals: "They've become simply shameless, they're like animals now" (Tedlock 1996, 106). Their grandmother was very upset and the Hero Twins told her that she could see their faces again, but it was also a trial for her because the Hero Twins would only call their older brothers four times and she was not allowed to laugh. Junajpu and Xbalanq'e began to play on their flutes and drums (Christensen 2007, 140-144; Tedlock 1996, 104-106). In their song they called for Jun Batz' and Jun Chowen and they indeed came and danced. But when their grandmother saw their ugly faces she laughed and the older brothers immediately went away. Again the Hero Twins began to sing and play their flutes. Jun Batz' and Jun Chowen came back, but their grandmother could not hold her laughter, for they looked truly ridiculous, with their skinny little things below their bellies. The third time the grandmother laughed again because of their red lips and blank faces and because they were scratching themselves. The fourth time the older brothers did not come, they remained in the forest.

Jun Batz' and Jun Chowen have since that time been called upon by flautists, singers, writers and carvers as their patrons (Christensen 2007, 145-147; Tedlock 1996, 106-108).

### Jun Batz' and Jun Chowen

Tedlock refers to *jun batz'* and *jun chowen* as "one monkey" and "one artisan". In K'iche' and Chol *Batz'* is a day name and can be translated as "howler monkey" in both languages. In Kekchí and Yucatec this same day is named *Chuen*, thus this name refers indirectly to howler monkeys, but in Yucatec it also refers to craftsmanship. *Aj chuen* is a title used in Yucatec, meaning "artisan", which in this case is appropriate as these monkey twins are very artistic and monkey twin scribes appear often on Maya vessels (Christensen 2007, 113, n.225; Tedlock 1996, 250).



Figure 6.12: *maax* glyph (Kettunen and Helmke 2011, 88)

There are two important monkey species that reside in the tropical lowland forest of the Maya: the howler monkey (*Allouatta palliata*) and the spider monkey (*Ateles geoffroyi*). *Ba'tz'* is the Classic Mayan term used for "howler monkey" and *maax* the term for "spider monkey".

The logographic sign for *maax* represents the head of a spider monkey in which there is a clear distinction between light and dark facial fur. The dark spot on the cheek is a common marker for mammals and the oval dotted marker indicates rough, wrinkly skin (Stone and Zender 2011, 196-197).

The Maya associated the howler monkey with scribes and artisans. Howler monkeys are a bit lazy in their behavior. They sleep some 15 hours a day and hardly move more than 400 meters daily. Spider monkeys on the other hand are much more active. They are known to be mischief-makers, hurling stick and stones to passerby's and even harass the larger howler monkeys. The Classic Maya also saw the spider monkey as a playful mischievous animal and as a humorous entertainer. Spiders monkeys are therefore associated with humorous acts and are often shown scratching themselves, dancing and enjoying fruits and cacao pods which they probably stole from kitchen gardens. But monkeys were also associated with drunkenness, licentiousness and sexual transgression and are frequently shown exposing their genitalia (Stone and Zender 2011, 196-197).

### Monkey's on ceramics

There are to my knowledge no representations known that clearly represent the Hero Twins with Jun Batz' and Jun Chowen. One logical explanation for this is that we do not know what Jun Batz' and Jun Chowen looked like and thus are unable to identify them. On the other hand there are many Maya ceramics representing monkeys. Both the howler and spider monkey are commonly portrayed.

Howler monkeys are most often associated with the art of writing and are displayed as scribes themselves. K1225 (figure 6.14) is a very clear example. The vessel portrays two figures sitting crossed-legged holding an object in their hands. In ancient Maya times the first and the last pages of



Figure 6.13: *huun* hieroglyph (Coe and Kerr 1998, 170)

codices were glued to thin boards. These were either covered with jaguar skin or painted with jaguar spots. The logograph for *huun*, "book" is also a schematic representation of a stack of paper leaves covered with jaguar skin on the top and bottom (figure 6.13)(Tedlock 2010, 148). The object held by the figures on K1225

clearly resembles the *huun* logograph and can thus be identified as being a codex.

The figures have the facial characteristics of howler monkeys. The rest of their body however is clearly human and they are indicated as being gods by the markings on their skin. They can be identified as scribes by the fact that they seem to be either reading a codex or writing in it. But also by their headdresses in which we can clearly see scribal reeds sticking out in front.



Figure 6.14: Rollout photograph of vessel K1225 portraying two howler monkey scribes (Photograph © Justin Kerr)

The way that spider monkeys are portrayed on ceramics is very alike to how Jun Batz' and Jun Chowen are described in the Popol Vuh as monkeys. They are commonly displayed with ugly, stupid faces and bright red lips (figure 6.15). There are also often associated with mischievous and humorous acts. Either shown scratching themselves (K1211, K7525), dancing (K1558, K3637, K5622, K6063, K7007, K2592, K4643, K8234) or enjoying a cacao pod (K8357). They are also represented

exposing their genitalia (K1211, K5070), something that the Popol Vuh mentions as their skinny little things below their bellies (Tedlock 1996, 267).



Figure 6.15: Rollout photograph of vessel K5744 portraying a spider monkey in the middle of the scene with stupid face and bright red lips (Photograph © Justin Kerr).

### Monkey conclusions

If we compare the description of the Popol Vuh monkeys with those depicted on ceramics it is clear that they must represent spider monkeys. Spider monkeys are also the ones depicted dancing and swinging from tree branches. Interesting fact is that the Maya mostly associated the tail with spider monkeys. As the tail is an important aspect in the Popol Vuh myth this again points to spider monkeys as representing Jun Batz' and Jun Chowen.

The ancient Maya must have sensed that monkeys and humans are quite similar and it is probable that the Jun Batz' and Jun Chowen Popol Vuh tale served as a warning for humans. The monkeys represented a failed human race from an earlier world as is described in the Popol Vuh. Inappropriate behavior to which monkeys are associated belonged to failed humans and that probably served as a warning for humanity not to take over this kind of behavior. Also this episode of the Popol Vuh warns humanity of envy and jealousy. It is probably not a coincidence that Jun Batz' and Jun Chowen are transformed into monkeys which were earlier described as being the descendents of the wooden people, who did not have a heart nor a mind and walked the earth without purpose. They in fact were considered as a failed attempt of human creatures. The acts of Jun Batz', Jun Chowen and Xmuqane against Junajpu and Xbalanq'e goes against the nature of the highland Maya, who treat their children with the upmost care. Children and infants would never be left alone by the highland Maya thus the acts of Jun Batz' and Jun Chowen would be considered as a terrible wrong. The punishment of Jun Batz' and Jun Chowen and Xmuqane is would probably be considered justified (Chistensen 2007, 140, n.321).

## 6.4 The summoning of Junajpu and Xbalanq'ë to Xibalba

After the defeat of their older brothers, the Hero Twins started farming the maize field. They did not do this themselves, they let the hoe and axe do all the work. While the hoe and axe did all the work, they merely hunted with their blowguns. They even tricked their grandmother, because when she came to bring their food they dirtied their hands and one of the Hero Twins even dirtied his face so he looked like a farmer and the other sprinkled wood chips on his head so he looked like a woodcutter. The following day they discover that at night the maizefield had become unplowed and that all the trees had been raised up again. Again they set the hoe and axe to work, but decide to come back at night to see who is pulling a trick on them. They hide themselves on the maizefield and then see that all the animals, small and great, gather at night and they all speak: "Arise trees; arise bushes" (Christensen 2007, 148-150). First arrived the puma and jaguar which the Hero Twins failed to catch. Next came the deer and rabbit, which they caught by their tails, but these just broke off. That is why the deer and the rabbit still have short tails today. The fox, coyote, peccary and coati also escaped. But then the twins caught the rat in a net. They strangled him, which is why rats today still have bulging eyes, and they put his tail over a fire, which is why rats do not have any hair on their tails. The rat told the Hero Twins that they should not kill him, because he knew that it was not their task to be farmers. He told the Hero Twins that their fathers gaming things were still in the house, hanging in the rafters (Christensen 2007, 150-151; Tedlock 1996, 109-111). The Hero Twins went home and sent the rat up in the roof to get the gaming things. They told their grandmother they were thirsty and thus she went away to get water. To stall her the Hero Twins instructed a mosquito to make a hole in her water jug so that the water would run out. After a while they told their mother that they were really parched with thirst, thus also sending her away. With both of them gone the rat was able to cut loose the ball, yokes, arm protectors, and leathers, which the Hero Twins then hid on the road to the ballcourt. They then went to the river and repaired the jug for their mother and grandmother so that they could all go home (Christensen 2007, 152-152; Tedlock 1996, 111-112).

The Hero Twins swept their fathers ballcourt and played ball for a very long time. Thus the Lords of the Underworld were disturbed once again by all this noise and stamping above them and they send their messengers to summon the Hero Twins to the Underworld to play ball. The Underworld messengers went to the house of the Twins, but as they were not there they left the message with Xmuqane that the Hero Twins were expected in the Underworld in seven days. The grandmother send a louse to repeat the message to her grandchildren. The louse went on his way and on the road he met the youthful toad, Tamazul. The toad offered to swallow him so that he would go faster. Thus the louse was licked up by the toad. They in turn met with a great snake, who

offered to eat the toad to arrive more quickly. The snake in his turn was swallowed by a falcon so that they would go even faster. When the falcon arrived at the ballcourt he disturbed the Hero Twins and thus they shot him with their blowguns. The falcon then told them he had a message in his belly and he would tell them if they would first cure his eye which was hit by the pellet from the blowgun. The Twins sliced a bit of rubber from their ball and with that they fixed the eye of the falcon. He then vomited the great snake which in turn vomited the toad. The toad tried to vomit the louse, but he couldn't and therefore the Twins began to hit him. But when they looked into his mouth the louse was just stuck in his teeth, he had never swallowed it. The louse then told the Hero Twins that they had been summoned to the Underworld. The Hero Twins went to say goodbye to their mother and grandmother. They each planted a cornstalk in the middle of their grandmothers house as a sign of their word. When the cornstalk would dry up their grandmother would know that they were dead, but if it would sprout she would know that they would be alive (Christensen 2007, 154-159; Tedlock 1996, 112-116).

### Missing scenes

This part of the Popol Vuh seems to have been quite different in the Classic period, as there are no clear representations of it on Maya ceramics. The rat in itself does not occur at all on Maya ceramics and as said before there are also no representations of the Hero Twins playing ball.

The summoning part of the Popol Vuh also lacks representations. It is in fact very difficult to identify the four messenger, being louse, toad, snake, and falcon. The louse is not represented on any vessel. The toad, snake, and falcon on the other hand are very often portrayed, but these representations are mostly in the form of them being Underworld deities.

## **6.5 Concluding remarks**

The survival of the tales of the Hero Twins on earth vary per different section. The shooting of Wuqub Kaqix appeared to have been a well-known story in the Classic period, as it is very clearly displayed on a number of vessels. In the Classic period the bird was apparently called Itzam Yej. The exact nature of Itzam Yej remains complicated. If we take Itzam Yej to be the avian manifestation of Itzamnaaj than this deity clearly represented a dual nature. I however believe that Itzamnaaj was comparable to Heart of Sky in the Popol Vuh and that Itzamnaaj and Itzam Yej should be regarded as two different deities. The display of Itzam Yej with the specific costume elements of Itzamnaaj in my opinion symbolized that Itzam Yej had stolen the identity of Itzamnaaj. The inherent message being that we should not pose ourselves as something that we are not, cause there will be a punishment.

Wuqyb Kaqix also symbolizes that excessive pride and boastfulness were negative properties.

The story of the sons of Wuqub Kaqix was not so well-known in the Classic period. However the actual significance of the story of Sipakna and Kab'raqaan was present in the Classic period. The belief in the destruction of a previous world that had to be destroyed in order to create the present one is something that was of great significance for the ancient Maya.

The difference between spider monkeys and howler monkeys that is alluded to in the Popol Vuh did also exist in the Classic period. It is not clear if the actual story about the defeat of Jun Batz' and Jun Chowen by the Hero Twins was present in the Classic period. More important seems to have been the message that men should not take over the behavior of spider monkeys. The howler monkey who were more calm and serious held a much higher respect in ancient Maya society, representing the patron of scribes.

The last part of the Hero Twins on earth was either not known in the Classic period or just perceived to be of lesser importance. Whatever the reason there are no representations of this part of the Popol Vuh on Maya ceramics.

## Chapter 7: The Hero Twins in the Underworld

### 7.1 Greeting the Lord of the Underworld

The Hero Twins passed the rivers and river canyons until they arrived at the four crossroads. There they each plucked a hair from their leg that turned into an insect named Mosquito and they sent it on the Black road, to bite all the Lords of the Underworld. The first two seated figures that Mosquito bit made no sound. The third figure screamed "Ouch!". Wuqub Kame asked him "What, Jun Kame? What is it?". "I am being bitten!" said Jun Kame. In that way all the Lords were bitten and all their names were named. Mosquito was then able to tell all the names to the Hero Twins. When the Hero Twins were presented to the Lords of the Underworld they knew that the first two were not Lords, they were just mere effigies of carved wood, and they greeted the rest of the Lords by their proper name. "Sit down here", the Lords told the Hero Twins, but the Hero Twins told them it was not their bench, the bench was just a heated stone. That is how the Hero Twins survived the first tests and were not defeated (Christensen 2007, 160-163; Tedlock 1996, 116-119).

#### The Lord of the Underworld

In a way life in Xibalba was comparable to life on earth. The Lords of the Underworld, like humans, had wives and children, they played the ball game, and conducted business. Jun Kame and Wuqub Kame, "one death" and "seven death", ruled in the Underworld and presided over a bunch of other death creatures. In the Popol Vuh it is mentioned that Jun Kame and Wuqub Kame sat in counsel with *Ajal Puj*, "Pus Demon", and *Ajal Q'ana*, "Jaundice Demon", who made people swell up until pus would come from their skin, and their faces would become yellow with jaundice. *Ch'ami'ya Baq*, "Lord Bone Staff", and *Ch'ami'ya Jolom*, "Lord Skull Staff", both carried staffs which were merely bone, and they were responsible for turning people into bones and skulls. *Xik'iri Pat*, "Flying Scab", and *Kuchuma Kik'*, "Gathered Blood", made people sicken in their blood. *Ajal Mes*, "Lord Sweepings Demon", and *Ajal Toq'ob*, "Stabbing Demon", stabbed and knocked people to the floor if they had neglected their sweepings and left trash in their house. *Xik'*, "Lord Wing", and *Patan*, "Lord Packstrap", caused people to die on the road (Christensen 2007, 115-118; Tedlock 1996, 92-93). These were all the Lords of the Underworld mentioned in the Popol Vuh. The Lord of the Underworld are also referred to as Death Gods, because they presided in the realm of the death, caused death,

and were thought to be in charge of the death (Taube 1992, 11-14). The names of the Death Gods, besides Jun Kame and Wuqub Kame, all reflect the manner in which they killed people (Bassie 2002, 4). It seems that the Maya actually personified certain diseases and shaped them into Death Gods. This is a practice that was also present in the Classic period. It is now believed that the *way* creatures, commonly portrayed on Maya ceramics, are actual personifications of death and sorcerers spells (Stuart 2005a). *Way* creatures have originally being identified as representing an 'animal companion', an aspect of the human soul. Because the *way* creatures were commonly connected to Maya nobles, it was assumed that they represented the animal souls or 'co-essences' of Maya rulers (Grube and Nahm 1994). However, the *way* creatures seem to be connected to death and the Underworld. The sinister nature of the *way* creatures has led David Stuart to the new interpretation that the *way* creatures were representations of the dark forces of Classic Maya sorcerers (Stuart 2005a). There are many *way* creatures, some are pretty straightforward in their meaning such as *k'ahk*, "fever" or *Mok chih* "pulque sickness. Other mortal illnesses might be *k'ahk ohl may chamiiy* "fire-heart snuff death", which might have referred to some heart or lung ailment. *Sitz' chamiiy* "gluttony death" might have referred to death of overindulgence. Death on the road was apparently represented by a venomous snake wrapped around a raptorial bird which was called than *bihil chamiiy*, "middle-road death". There are other *way* figures which meanings are less well understood such as *juun ook may chamiiy* "one-legged snuff death" and *ah kook chamiiy* "turtle-foot death" (Stone and Zender 2011, 42-43; Stuart 2005a).

The Underworld was apparently filled with personified illnesses, represented as either gods or animals. Indeed on ceramic Maya vessel we find an immensely large amount of depicted Underworld creatures. It is therefore impossible to identify exactly which creatures the Underworld Lords of the Popol Vuh represented on Maya ceramics. In general the Death Gods A and A' are the best known Underworld deities<sup>8</sup>. The represented gods in the Underworld Popol Vuh scenes will be referred to by Underworld Lords, unless the gods had been identified, in which case it will be mentioned which specific god is represented.

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix 1 for more information about God A and A'. For a complete overview of all the Classic Maya *way* creatures see Grube and Nahm 1994.

### Mosquito represented on ceramics



Figure 7.21: Detail of vessel K1254, showing a bat being stung by a mosquito (after Photograph © Justin Kerr).

K1254 portrays multiple scenes from the Popol Vuh. In total there are six or seven different stories portrayed. Part of this I have already discussed in chapter 6. Figure 7.1 shows a small element of the vessels representations and I believe this scene is connected to the mosquito story of the Popol Vuh. Portrayed here is a bat with in front of him an insect that is quite possible a mosquito. The insect seems to be stinging the bat in his nose. Another vessel portraying an anthropomorphic mosquito is K2759 (figure 7.2). Again the mosquito seems to be stinging an animal, this time an armadillo. It is believed that also the gods had *ways*. As mentioned before Itzam Yej is thought to be the counterpart of Itzamnaaj. Barbara and Justin Kerr suggest that God L may have had the armadillo as his counterpart (Kerr and Kerr 2005, 79). The clearest evidence for this is the design of the black-and-white cloak of God L which is remarkably alike the pattern of the carapace of armadillos portrayed by the Maya. On K3332 we even find an armadillo dancer wearing a broad-brimmed hat quite like the one of God L<sup>9</sup>. The Underworld was apparently filled with animals besides all the death gods. It is also likely that many of the death gods had their own animal *ways*. It is therefore that I mention these two vases because although they do not represent a mosquito biting 'Lords' I still believe that these are connected to the Popol Vuh scene. On K1254 the mosquito stings a bat. There will be a broad discussion of the bat further in this chapter, but it appears to have been an important figure in the Underworld and identified as a Killer Bat, called Camazotz'. K2759 shows a mosquito pricking an armadillo which might actually be God L. The anthropomorphic mosquito itself also suggests a connection to the Underworld as he is portrayed as a skeletal mosquito and has an disembodied eye attached to his forehead. Most interesting I find the two animals beside the armadillo. One a deer seems to be 'shouting out' against the anthropomorphic bird besides him. It is almost like the deer is upset and the armadillo and bird are both concerned and are asking what is wrong. We can almost reconstruct the Popol Vuh scene: The deer shouts out "Ow!", the armadillo asks "what is it?" the deer says "I am being bitten!". Just at that moment the armadillo himself gets bitten. There is another vessel depicting an anthropomorphic mosquito also associated with the Underworld by the death collar it wears around the neck. In this case the victim of the mosquito is God N, shown half emerged from his shell. Coe also connects this vessel to the Popol Vuh scene of the mosquito biting (Coe 1973, 123-124).

<sup>9</sup> For more evidence of the armadillo being the way of God L see Kerr and Kerr 2006



Figure 7.22: Rollout photograph of vessel K2759 portraying an anthropomorphic bird, deer, armadillo, and insect (Photograph © Justin Kerr).

## 7.2 The Houses of the Underworld

The first real trial for the Hero Twins was the House of Darkness. Only darkness prevailed in that house and the Hero Twins were given a torch and cigar each for light, but they were not allowed to finish them off and had to give them back whole the following day. So the Hero Twins put a red tail feather of a macaw on the torch and fireflies on the tips of the cigars. That way it looked as if they were lit and that is how the Hero Twins survived the House of Darkness (Christensen 2007, 163; Tedlock 1996, 119).

The Lords of the Underworld then decided that they would play ball with the Hero Twins. The Lords took their ball, but the Hero Twins insisted on playing with their own. They said that the ball of the Lords was just a skull, but the Lords threw their ball anyway. The ball landed in front of Junajpu's yoke and then it showed its true nature for a knife. A knife came out and clashed over the entire ballcourt floor. The Hero Twins then threatened to leave, but the Lords of the Underworld begged them not to leave and offered to play with their ball instead. It was decided that there should be a prize for the one who would win. The prize for the winner would be four bowls of flowers. Each day the Hero Twins played ball with the Lords of the Underworld. They only lost the first game on purpose, the other games they played even. The Hero Twins had to spend the second night in Blade House and deliver the four bowls of flowers in the morning (Christensen 2007, 164-166; Tedlock 1996, 120-122).



Figure 7.23: Detail of vessel K521, showing a firefly holding a burning cigar (after Photograph © Justin Kerr).

Blade House was filled with blades who wanted to slice the Hero Twins apart. The Hero Twins survived only because they promised the blades that all the flesh of the animals would be theirs, which stopped the blades from moving. The Hero Twins then called for the cutting ants and instructed them to get the flowers from the garden of Jun Kame and Wuqub Kame. The cutting ants went away cutting all the flowers from the Lords garden and the guardians of the garden did not notice a thing. The ants brought the flowers to the Hero Twins and in the morning the Hero Twins gave the Lords four bowls of flowers. The Lords of the Underworld were defeated yet again (Christensen 2007, 166-168; Tedlock 1996, 122-124). The next night the Hero Twins had to stay in the House of Cold. Inside it was intensely cold and thick with hail, but immediately the Hero Twins drove away the cold (Christensen 2007, 169; Tedlock 1996, 124). Next the Hero Twins entered the House of Jaguars. The house was crowded with jaguars, but the Hero Twins struck a deal with them. They gave them plenty of bones to gnaw on. Thus the Hero Twins were spared (Christensen 2007, 170; Tedlock 1996, 124-125). The following trial was the House of Fire. This house was filled with fire and the Lords of the Underworld were sure that the Hero Twins would be set aflame and die. But the Hero Twins were not burned, they were fine when dawn came (Christensen 2007, 171; Tedlock 1996, 125).

The following house was the House of Bats. A house filled with death bats with snouts like blades which they used in their attacks. The Hero Twins had to sleep inside their blowguns to keep save. All night the bats shrieked and when they stopped Junajpu went to see if dawn had arrived, but when he stuck his head out of his blowgun it was snatched off by a bat (Christensen 2007, 172; Tedlock 1996, 125-126).

### The House of Darkness

There are a few vessel in which we find a representation of a firefly (K521, K1003, K8007, K8608). Unfortunately the firefly does not occur with the Hero Twins. The firefly does however take part in scenes related to the Underworld. The depicted firefly creatures are clearly connected to darkness and death, as they are represented with *ahk'ab*, "darkness", markings on their forehead and wings, with disembodied eyes attached to their heads, and sometimes they are marked with the percentage sign. On K521 (figure 7.3) the firefly holds in his hands a burning cigar while on K8608 (figure 7.4) he smokes a tubular cigar. If we compare the torch held by the firefly on K521 with



Figure 7.24: Detail of vessel K8608, showing a firefly smoking a tubular cigar (after Photograph © Justin Kerr).

other vessel scenes we find that the object occurs on multiple vessels but then with feathers attached to the end. One striking vessel is K1561 (figure 7.5, categorized as the *House of Darkness* in Appendix 2), which in my opinion depicts the Hero Twins in the House of Darkness. This vase displays two youths sitting crossed-legged in a confined chamber separated from each other by panels portraying *tzuk* heads. Underneath the seated figures we find *ne'hn*, “mirror”, symbols.



Figure 7.25: Rollout photograph of vessel K1561 portraying the Hero Twins in the House of Darkness (Photograph © Justin Kerr).

Unfortunately the two youths displayed on this vessel do not show any of the identifying markers of Junajpu and Xbalanq'ë. They do not even wear the Jester god headband. Although the two figures seem very much alike at first sight, further investigation shows that there are small difference in their attire, such as the earspools and the wrapping of the hair. This indicates that there are in fact two different persons represented, although there share a strong physionomical connection, almost like brothers. The jaguar cushion represented as a backseat for the first figure might also be an indication that the two figures were distinct. The aspect that leads me to conclude that this vessel represents the Hero Twins in the House of Darkness is the object that they are holding in their right hand. These objects are exactly alike the cigar that the firefly holds on K521. Only the cigars of the figures on K1561 have large feathers attached to their ends. The fact that these are feathers seems to be underlined by the little bird sitting on the torch of the first figure.

Another vase, K3386 (figure 7.6) also shows two crossed-legged sitting figures in a confined space separated by panels. These figures are smoking a burning cigar. The background of the spaces in which they are sitting have been painted black, as to indicate that the room was dark. Again I draw the conclusion that these represent the Hero Twins in the House of Darkness. The burning cigars might allude us to believe that these are actually Jun Junajpu and Wuqub Junajpu, as they leave their

cigars burning and are thereby defeated by the Lords of the Underworld. However there is one curious detail on this vase that draws me to the conclusion that the figures represent Junajpu and Xbalanq'è and not their father and uncle. On the panels separating the two figures we find depictions of what appear to me as bowls containing flowers. Of course the Hero Twins have to provide four bowls of flowers the night they spend in the House of Blades, not when they are in the House of Darkness. The bowls on K3386 might contain something else or allude to something different. Still I do not believe that it is a coincidence and the depictions to me do very much look like bowls with flowers.



Figure 7.26: Rollout photograph of vessel K3386 portraying the Hero Twins in the House of Darkness (Photograph © Justin Kerr).

There is an aspect of the House of Darkness that has fascinated me for some time. The Hero Twins are given a torch and a cigar, these attributes are by definition the attributes of God L and God K. God L is often portrayed smoking an cigar and even believed to have been himself symbolic for tobacco (Kerr and Kerr 2005). God K is quite often represented with a smoking torch in his forehead. I therefore believe that there is a deeper symbolism behind the cigar and torch given to the Hero Twins. It is the wish of God L and God K to destroy the Hero Twins by their own power. They wish to defeat them by the instruments that belong to themselves. A vessel that might contribute to this idea is K702. This vessel portrays God K and God L both holding a torch in their hands. Behind them is a youthful person sitting down on one knee. This person might represent a Hero Twin indicated by the Jester God headdress. The person is gesturing his hands forward either in a position of receiving

or giving. I think that the vessels portrays either the giving of the torches to the Hero Twins by God L and God K or the Hero Twins giving the torches back to God K and God L after they resided in the House of Darkness.

### The House of Bats



Figure 7.7: *Sotz'*, "bat" (Stone and Zender 2011, 177)

The bat is a common iconographic element used by the Maya. In Mesoamerica the bat is linked to darkness, probably stemming from the fact that the bat is a nocturnal creature, and death. The connection of bats with death and sacrifice might directly be linked to the vampire bat, which main food source is blood, but the natural trait of bats snatching fruit from trees has also led the Maya to identify them with decapitation (Miller and Taube 1997, 44-45; Stone and Zender

2011, 176-177). On Classic Maya ceramics we often find portrayals of bats with death markings, mostly appearing on the bat's wings. These markings can either be crossed bones, a human mandible, a shell-like device, the percentage sign, or the eyeball with the optic nerve still attached. The bat head was also widely used in Maya writing (figure 7.7). The head served as a logograph for "bat", was used as a syllabic sign, was the symbol for the month *Sotz'*, and was even used as an emblem glyph for the city of Copan (Stone and Zender 2011, 176-177).



Figure 7.8: Rollout photograph of vessel K3102 portraying the Hero Twins in the House of Bats (Photograph © Justin Kerr).

In figure 7.8 we see a vase that is often associated with the House of Bats (categorized as *House of Bats* in Appendix 2). On this vase we see two seated figures surrounded by representations of bat heads. The figures are male and seem to be confined in a small space. I believe that their left hand is signifying that they are closed in, touching the boundary of that small space. Above and below the image is a row of what seems to be representations of eyeballs. These male figures might represent the Hero Twins sitting inside their blowguns, hiding from the bats. That they are in the House of bats is signified by the bat heads. Also the depicted eyes might be an indication that there were many more bats.

The K5036 (figure 7.9) also displays bat heads, but no humans. The image resembles that of the image of figure 5 and therefore this vase is also identified as representing the House of Bats. I also believe that the two vases are comparable and were meant to represent the same idea or story.



Figure 7.9: Rollout photograph of vessel K5036 portraying row of bat heads (Photograph © Justin Kerr).

The depictions of bats on Maya ceramics are icons which may reference to *Camazotz'*, the killer bat that decapitates Junajpu and the Popol Vuh, but it is also possible that the bat refers to another mythological story, or to the natural environment. The bat was likely an important sociopolitical symbol and might also have been used by a social group or ruling family as their symbol and basis for their power. The bat on ceramics thus might have been emblematic of a Classic period family or town. For example, the modern Tzotzil Maya of Zinacantan have taken the bat as their identifying emblem. The men of this town have decorated their jackets with a stylized representation of the bat (Reens-Budet 1994, 240).

#### *The House of Blades, Cold, Jaguars and Fire*

I have not been able to identify any vessels that are connected to the Houses of Blades and Cold. The jaguar was an important animal in the ancient Maya worldview and there are therefore numerous depictions of jaguar on ceramics. None of these clearly represent Junajpu and Xbalanq'è. There are a few vessels scenes which a male is portrayed being enraptured in flames (K1256, K3831, K5112, categorized as *House of Fire* in Appendix 2). The figure in flames on K3831 can even be identified as Xbalanq'è, as he is depicted with jaguar patches of skin. However I do not think these representations are as clear as those described for the House of Darkness and House of Bats and will not discuss them. We might wonder why these four houses are not so clearly represented on ancient Maya ceramics. There are a few possible explanations. First the story told in the Popol Vuh pertaining to the trials of the Underworld might have been quite different than the stories from the ancient period. Second themes of this nature might have been more difficult to portray, for instance how would men portray cold. This leads to another possibility, namely that the Houses are represented but so far not recognized. Third is it possibly and quite likely that these houses were deemed less important in view of the whole story. The House of Darkness is the first trial and thus takes a

prominent place in the story. Secondly as I told before I believe this house indirectly points to the fervent wish of God L and God K for the Twins to be defeated by their hands. Their hands being portrayed by the torch and cigar. The next four houses are again trials but not so specifically important. Then the House of Bats does take a prominent position, being the last House and the house in which the Twins do not completely survive.

### **7.3 Death and resurrection of the Hero Twins**

The Lords of Death rejoiced and placed the head of Junajpu atop the ballcourt. Xbalanq'è decided he had to fabricate a new head for Junajpu. He called for all the animals, big and small, and told them to bring the food they ate. Coati brought in a squash and that is what they used to carve the head of Junajpu. Juraqan even came down from the sky to help. When dawn finally arrived both of the Hero Twins were well again (Christensen 2007, 172-174; Tedlock 1996, 126-128).

They then played ball, but now the head of Junajpu was used in the game instead of the rubber ball. The ball landed before Xbalanq'è who bounced it over the ballcourt into the tomatoes. There a rabbit awaited, instructed by Xbalanq'è to run off as soon as the ball would land near him. The Lords of the Underworld all went after the rabbit and thus Xbalanq'è was able to retrieve the head of Junajpu and put it back on its place. The Hero Twins called out to the Lords of the Underworld and they began to play again, but now with the squash. After a while the squash became weak and it splattered into pieces all over the ballcourt. Thus again did the Hero Twins defeat the Lords of the Underworld (Christensen 2007, 175-176; Tedlock 1996, 128-129).

The Lords of the Underworld decided to kill the Hero Twins once and for all. The Hero Twins knew however that they were about to get killed and they planned their own death with the help of two sages, called xulu and pacam. The Lords of the Underworld prepared a great pit oven with heated stones. They challenged the Hero Twins to jump over the oven, but because the Hero Twins knew already that it was just a trick they jumped right into the pit oven. This is how Junajpu and Xbalanq'è died and the Lords of the Underworld rejoiced with joy. Next they sent for xulu and pacam and as the Hero Twins had instructed them they told the Lords that it were best to ground the bones and scatter the remains in the river. After five days the Hero Twins were resurrected. There were seen in the river looking like catfishes (Christensen 2007, 177-179; Tedlock 1996, 130-132).

### The Hero Twins as catfishes

K3266 (figure 7.10) represents two almost identical sorts of fish. The two fish have darker upper bodies and white undersides and they swim against a sort of red brown colored background. The fish have forked tails and a long barbel extending from below their mouths. The barbel is an identifiable aspect of certain fishes, such as catfish. Along the rim is a white band that displays two different motifs, which are repeated three times. One element represents an inverted triangle of three black dots and the other a curved black form that is surrounded by small black dots.

Justin Kerr believes the catfishes on K3266 represent the resurrected Hero Twins (Kerr 2003). I agree that the two displayed catfishes probably referred to the Hero Twins. There is more evidence to connect this image to the Hero Twins. The Hero Twins are often depicted with certain characteristics that help identify them. One of these qualities for Junajpu is for instance the inverted triangle of three dots, which often appears on his cheek. This symbol also appears in the white band on the vessel. Also Justin Kerr believes that the other element depicted on the white band might be a form of the *kimi*, “death”, glyph (Kerr 2003).



Figure 27.10: Rollout photograph of vessel K3266 portraying the Hero Twins as catfishes (Photograph © Justin Kerr).

In total there are 9 vessels known to depict catfishes in the same manner as K3266 (categorized as *Hero Twins as catfish* in Appendix 2). We know from the painting style that these were painted by different artists. It is therefore my opinion, that whatever the meaning was behind this image, it was shared by multiple people and was deemed an important theme. Another vessel (K4871) decorated in the same style, depicts large-sun like disks instead of the catfishes. Justin Kerr believes that they represent the sun. In fact the image is also related to the story of the Hero Twins as in the end the Hero Twins rise to the heavens to become the sun and the moon. All these vessels could then be explained as depicting the resurrection and renewal theme. Death is symbolized by the *kimi* glyph,

resurrection after death by the catfishes and renewal is either symbolized by the sun or by linking the depiction of Junajpu and Xbalanq'è to the sun and moon (Kerr 2003). Resurrection and renewal are concepts that occurred often in Maya culture and I think that this interpretation is what Panofsky meant by *iconographical interpretation in a deeper sense*. Of course this is only a small part of the *iconographical interpretation in a deeper sense*. The style and composition of the image can give us much more information, but for the brevity of this thesis I will not go into that.

#### **7.4 The defeat of the Lords of the Underworld**

The next day the Hero Twins appeared as poor orphans, wearing only rags, but they did marvelous things. They performed dances and other tricks, like setting a house on fire and materializing it back again and they sacrificed themselves and brought each other back to life. They were talked about by everyone in the Underworld and thus the Lords summoned them. In front of the Lords of the Underworld they took a deep bow and were truly humble and they hid themselves with rags. The Lords of the Underworld wanted them to perform everything they knew so that all of the Underworld could watch. So they danced and when the Lords asked them to sacrifice their dog and revive it again, they did. They also sacrificed a man, took his heart out and then revived him again. Xbalanq'è then sacrificed Junajpu and brought him back to life. The Lords of the Underworld rejoiced greatly and were dancing as if they themselves were doing it. Jun Kame and Wuqub Kame wanted to be sacrificed themselves. The Hero Twins sacrificed them both and took their heart from their chest, but they did not revive them. All the other Lords ran and fled into a great canyon. They gave themselves up, they wept and begged humbly to be spared. Junajpu and Xbalanq'è had defeated the Lords of the Underworld and then revealed their names and the names of their fathers (Christensen 2007, 180-187; Tedlock 1996, 132-138).

The Lords of the Underworld lost their greatness and their power. The Hero Twins declared that the Lords would never again receive great offerings. They would receive croton sap and no longer clean blood. At home their grandmother cried in front of the cornstalk, that the Hero Twins had planted in her house, because the plant had dried up when they had been killed in the pit oven, but then the maize had sprouted again when they were resurrected (Christensen 2007, 187-189). The Hero Twins went to the Underworld Ballcourt to adorn their father and uncle. They wanted to restore them, but it could not be done. Their uncle only remembered the name of the parts of his face, but nothing else and so they left them at the ballcourt. They promised their father that his

name would be honored and he would be worshipped by mankind. Junajpu and Xbalanq'ë then arose into the sky and become the sun and the moon (Christensen 2007, 190-191; Tedlock 1996, 138-142).

### The Hero Twins as performers

It is difficult to identify Junajpu and Xbalanq'ë while they perform tricks for the Lords of the Underworld, because they are mentioned to have disguised themselves and so we do not know how they would have been presented. A very well-known vessel commonly accepted by Maya scholars to represent the Hero Twins in the act of one of their tricks is K511 (figure 7.11, categorized as *Hero Twins as performers* in Appendix 2). The scene on this vessel consists of two parts. On the right the main character is God L. He is seated on a throne and appears to be in some sort of palace, indicated by the surrounding structure and swagged curtains. God L can be identified by his hat made of Muun bird feathers with on top the Muun bird himself. God L is surrounded by five ladies. One of the ladies is directly opposite to God L and he is adjusting or tying a bracelet on her wrist. The woman besides her is looking to the left where another scene has captured her attention. She is tapping the women in front of God L on her feet, sort of suggesting that the other scene deserves her attention.



Figure 7.11: Rollout photograph of vessel K511 portraying the Hero Twins performing a sacrifice and resurrection trick in the court of God L (Photograph © Justin Kerr).

In this other scene two figures are on the verge of decapitating a bound person. All three are deities, indicated by their body markings (Coe 1978, 16-21). The two figures performing the decapitation can be identified as representing the Hero Twins by a number of things. First of all the figures are clearly

wearing disguises, the figure on the right is very clearly wearing a mask. From the nose of this mask extends a jaguar paw, which can be taken as a reference that this figure is Xbalanq'è. Furthermore, the two figures are wearing the ballgame yoke and jaguar kilt that is commonly portrayed as the costume of Junajpu and Xbalanq'è. Last the headdress of the left figure consists of the paper headband with Jester god, also characteristic of Junajpu and Xbalanq'è. I therefore believe that this vessel indeed portrays the act of Junajpu and Xbalanq'è sacrificing a man, which thereafter revive again.

There is another vessel, K6995 (figure 4.4), that might represent the Hero Twins as performers. I have already discussed this vessel in chapter four and argued that the two represented figures are playing the flute and are possibly dancing the Armadillo dance. The figures are represented with human bodies, indicating that they are wearing armadillo masks, and it is possible that these figures are Junajpu and Xbalanq'è.

Unfortunately K511 and K6996 are incidental representations. Without more representations of the Hero Twins as performers in the Underworld it remains uncertain if this story of the Popol Vuh existed as such in the Classic period. In this case, as we do not know exactly how the Hero Twins were disguised, it is possible that there are more representation of them as performers, but that they have not been identified as such.

#### The humiliation of the Death Gods

There are multiple vessels that portray the defeat of the Lords of the Underworld at the hands of the Hero Twins (categorized as *Defeat Lords of the Underworld* in Appendix 2). None of them however represent the Underworld Lords being sacrificed by heart extraction.



Figure 7.12: Rollout photograph of vessel K1299 portraying Junajpu in the act of torching an Underworld Lord (Photograph © Justin Kerr).

K1299 (figure 7.12) portrays Junajpu with a torch in hand, ready to burn an Underworld Lord. This Underworld Lords is shown with his arms tied onto his back. This exact same scene is portrayed on

K4598. On K4118 we find again this Underworld Lord, but this time he is sacrificed by a large personified stone that Junajpu apparently threw on him.

There is another vessel, K5166 (figure 7.13), that portrays a different form of defeat of the Lords of the Underworld. In this scene there are multiple deities represented with a lunar crescent. The first four figures on the left side of the scene seem to be pushing a specific deity forward. They are pushing the fifth figure from the left side, and this god seems to be kneeling before the moon goddesses and her rabbit. The kneeling god can be identified as God L by his pitted mouth and large square eye. God L is shown naked, without any of his characteristic costume elements. He also takes a somewhat humiliating, submissive pose toward the moon goddesses and her rabbit. The moon goddesses, identifiable by the lunar crescent on her back, is portrayed sitting on a throne making her the supreme deity of this scene. She is holding her rabbit in her arms, which appears to be holding a cloak and headdresses. In fact the Muan feathers identify this to be the headdresses of God L. The scene thus represents a humiliated God L, after being stripped of his clothes.

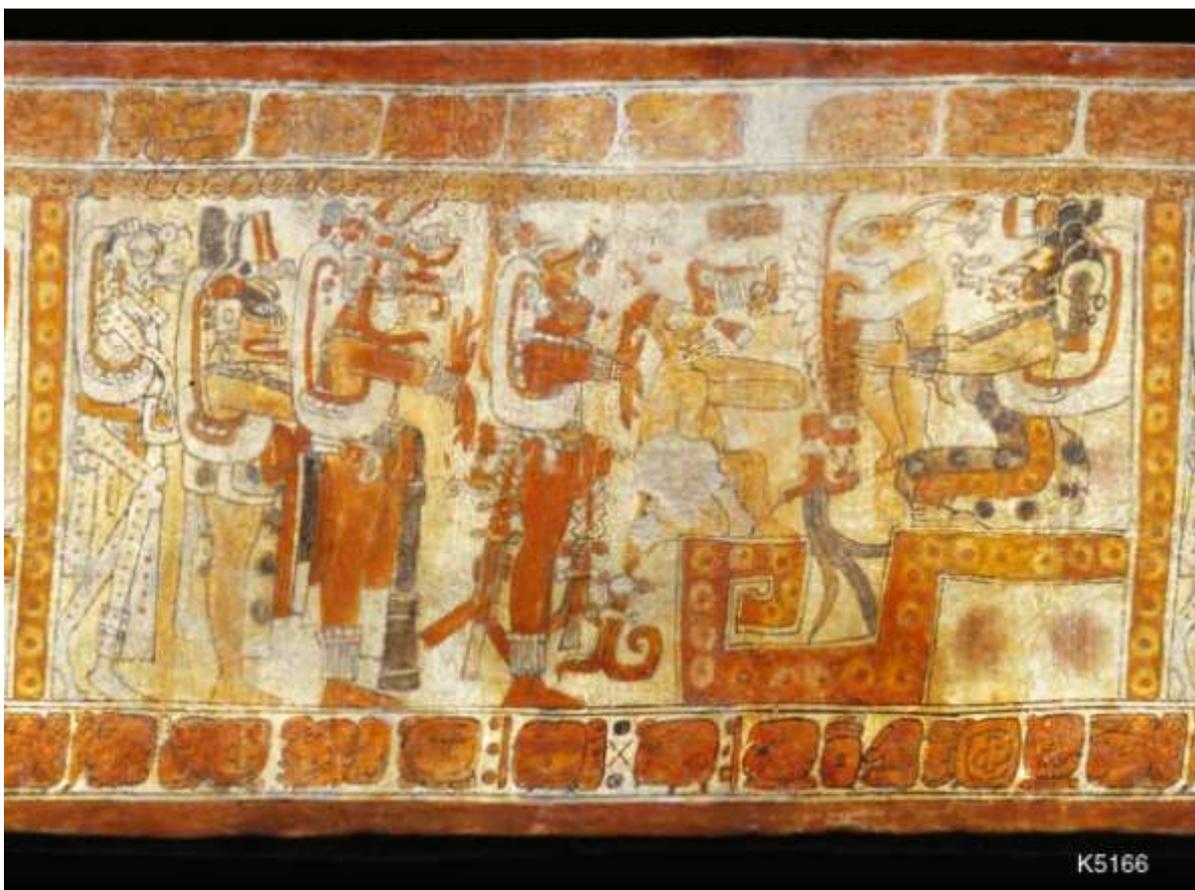


Figure 7.13: Rollout photograph of vessel 5166 portraying the humiliation of God L by the stripping of his clothes (Photograph © Justin Kerr).

This form of humiliation was very common in the Classic period. War captives are frequently depicted on stone monuments shown bound and naked. In the Classic period there was an immense

increase of warfare between different polities. An important aspect of warfare was the taking of captives, which were stripped of their battle costumes and then taken to the city of the victors. Monuments show that the captives were often bled and mutilated and ended up being killed. The public display of captives is frequently depicted and must therefore have been considered as the an important event (Schele and Miller 1986, 209-211). K5166 portrays that the Underworld Lords were humiliated in the same way as war captives were in the Classic period. This particular practice and form of humiliation and defeat must therefore have been essential in Maya Classical society.

## 7.5 Concluding remarks

After making the earth ready for the creation of humans it was necessary for the Hero Twins to move to the Underworld. The Lords of the Underworld had too much power and control over those on earth. They were spreading a great many diseases and causing many illnesses. Thus the Hero Twins set out to humiliate and defeat them. The houses that were part of the trials of the Hero Twins seem also to have existed in the Classic period. I even believe representations of the houses of blades, jaguar, cold, and fire may have been omitted on purpose, because these houses were perceived as less significant.

The multitude of representations of catfishes suggest that these were not mere images of this particular fish. The indeed were symbolic for the Hero Twins, representing their resurrection. The focus on this particular scene might have been so strong because and death and resurrection was a very important aspect in Maya society.

The episode of the Hero Twins as performers in the Underworld is not well portrayed on Maya ceramics. But the lacking of knowing how the Hero Twins would have been portrayed as they were in disguise might have caused that scenes of the Hero Twins as performers have been overlooked. Thus we do not exactly know how much of this story actually existed in the Classic period.

The eventual defeat of the Hero Twins is then again more commonly portrayed. We can imagine that this was in fact a very important part of tale of the Hero Twins in the Underworld. This story of humiliation and defeat of the Lords of the Underworld may in fact have been deemed so important that the Classic Maya ruler themselves began to use this specific practice of humiliation. In the Classic period there are a great many stone monuments that portrays the defeat and humiliation of war captives, quite in the same manner as this was represented for the Lords of the Underworld.

## Chapter 8: The Classical version of Jun Junajpu

### 8.1 The shaping of humans out of maize

Humans were eventually created out of maize dough by the creator couple Xpiyakok and Xmuqane. Animals brought them to a mountain that was filled with fruits and food. The fox, coyote, parrot and crow came from Split Place and showed them the mountain that had split and where all the foods could be found. Xmuqane took the yellow ears and white ears of maize from this mountain and grounded them nine times. The ground maize became the flesh of men and water their blood. The first four men were *balam k'itze*, *balam aq'ab*, *majukutaj* and *ik'ib alam* (Christensen 2007, 192-202; Tedlock 1996, 145-149).

#### Jun Junajpu identified



Figure 8.28: Detail of plate K1892, showing the classical maize god. Notice the flattened, tonsured head, the beaded necklace and the Jester god headdress (after Photograph © Justin Kerr).

The Maize god was first described by Schellhas, who labeled him as God E (Schellhas 1904, 24-25). Maize foliation emerges from the top of his head with on the back a so-called 'corn curl', identified as a maize grain. According to Schellhas the head of God E represented a maize cob and therefore he concluded that this must have been the god of maize (Schellhas 1904, 24-25). The corn curl is now known to refer to a tamale, but is nevertheless a maize sign (Taube 1989). The Maize god is a male entity with a youthful appearance and fine features. Most characteristic is the deities extremely flattened and elongated skull (figure 8.1). To accentuate his flattened forehead he is often represented without any hair or with only a small tuft of hair on the top of his head. Taube labeled him the Tonsured Maize God because of this typical hairstyle

(Taube 1985, 172-173). The maize god has a very distinctive costume. As already discussed his headdresses consists of maize foliation that signifies the tamale, but we also find the Jester God head in front and on top of the Tonsured Maize Gods head is an entity with a long-nosed face adorned with beads. The Tonsured Maize God often wears a beaded, complex belt on which we find a *Xoc* monster and *spondylus* shell medallion (Taube 1985, 172). The skirt attached is either a jaguar skin or also beaded.

The name glyph of the maize god is composed of a representation of the god's own foliated head prefixed by the phonetic sign *li* (figure 8.2). The head of the Maize god also serves as the numeral eight head variant (Taube 1985, 171-173; Taube 1992, 43-44). The Maize god is connected to life and fertility. But he is also connected to death and sacrifice, which may be explained by his connection to the agricultural cycle of maize, as the planting of maize in the earth is thought to be equivalent to death and burial. Growth is perceived as resurrection and the harvest in which men remove the cob of maize from the stalk is perceived as the severing of the head of the Maize God (Taube 1992, 44). The Maize god is actually the Classic version of Jun Junajpu. The Maize God was a very important entity in the Classic period and is therefore often displayed on Maya ceramic scenes. The importance of the Maize God in the Classic period makes it exceptional that Jun Junajpu played such a small role in the Popol Vuh. On the basis of the identification of the Hero Twins and the Classical representation of the Maize God it has been possible to identify a few specific scenes featuring the Maize God that will be discussed in this chapter.



Figure 8.29: Name glyph of the Maize God (after Coe and van Stone 2001, 116)

*Defeat of the Underworld Lords by Jun Junajpu*

One identified episode featuring the Maize God is actually an episode in which the Maize God does not take part in the Popol Vuh. This is the defeat of the Lords of the Underworld. K1560 (figure 8.3) portrays again the humiliation of the Lords of the Underworld, this time at the hands of the Maize God. We see on this vase three deities whose headdresses are involuntarily removed. The first figure on the left is a deity with large god eyes lying on the ground being stamped down by the Maize God. His headdress is being removed by a hunchback dwarf.



Figure 8.30: Rollout photograph of vessel K1560 portraying the defeat of the Lords of the Underworld by Jun Junajpu (Photograph © Justin Kerr).

In the middle we find another god with a jaguar ear, and pulling a thick rope between his loins. He is being kneed by the Maize God. In front of him is a dwarf holding the staff, cloak and Muan-bird headdress that are identified as being connected to God L. It is remarkable how much the headdress and cloak resemble that of K511. The appearance of this costume suggests that the god with jaguar ear is in fact God L. On the right we find again a deity this time sitting on the ground, he appears to have god or jaguar markings on his body. His headdress is being removed by the Maize god who also seems to be kicking him in the groin (Robiscek and Hales 1981, 35).

### Resurrection scene

One of the most important episodes on ceramics is the resurrection of the Maize God, Jun Junajpu (categorized as *Resurrection Maize God* in Appendix 2). Strangely this scene is only fleetingly mentioned in the Popol Vuh. Thus indicating that the Popol Vuh is only a small version of the intricate mythological tales that must have existed in the ancient Maya world (Coe 1989, 176). In the Popol Vuh it is mentioned that the Hero Twins were unable to put their father and uncle's remains back together and thus they leave them at the ballcourt. In the Classical period however Jun Junajpu was resurrected and this resurrection scene is one of the most portrayed scenes on Maya ceramics. In most of the resurrection scenes the Maize God is shown emerging from a split, either from a turtle carapace or a gourd. One of the most important resurrection ceramics is K1892 (figure 8.4).

In the middle of this plate we find the maize god emerging from a split turtle carapace. This carapace represents the earth's surface and appears to be floating on water, as is indicated by the waterlily flower and the other water motifs (Coe 1989, 177). On the left side we find Junajpu with the Muan bird feather ear and headdress. On the right is Xbalanq'ë with the jaguar ear and a screech owl headdress. Xbalanq'ë is holding an *akbal* jar, seemingly pouring something into the split carapace. Displayed on ceramic vessels the *akbal* sign indicates the color of the substance inside, often being rainwater or alcoholic beverages (Stone and Zender 2011, 14). Coe suggests Xbalanq'ë is pouring water to help the resurrection and sprouting of the maize plant (Coe 1989, 177). That Jun Junajpu arises from the Underworld is indicated by the *akbal* skull on the split carapace (Coe 1989, 177). Coe sees the resurrection as a metaphor for the sprouting of the maize plant (Coe 1989, 178).

On K1004 we also have a kind of resurrection scene with both of the Hero Twins present. Xbalanq'ë is holding a large bowl with the maize god's attributes in it. It might be that this refers to the Popol Vuh, as the Hero Twins actually try to reassemble their father. The nominal glyph for Junajpu is here represented by a thumb for one and the day sign ajaw (Coe 1989, 178).

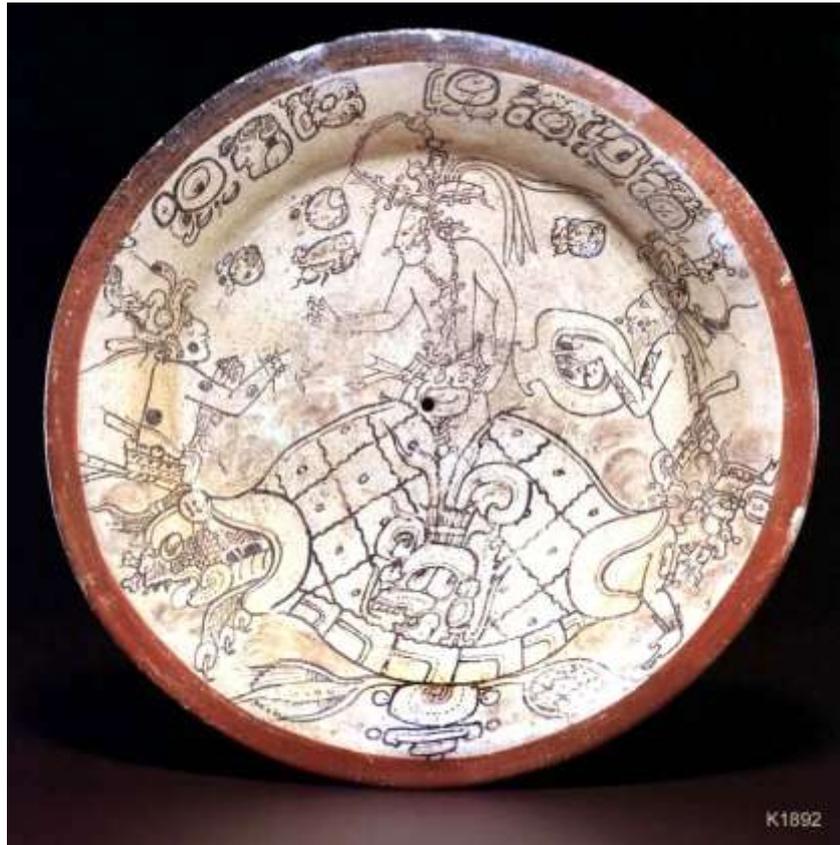


Figure 8.31: Photograph of plate K1892 portraying a resurrection scene of Jun Junajpu (Photograph © Justin Kerr)

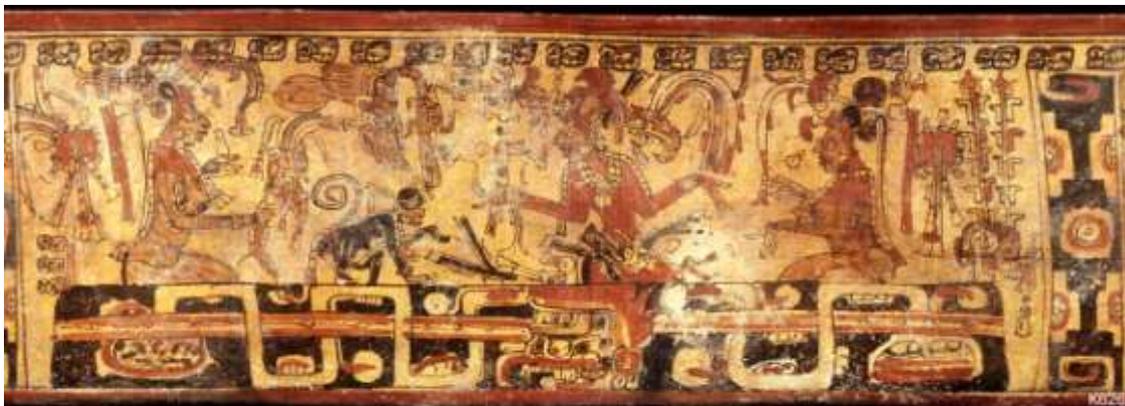
*The dressing of the Maize God*

Another categories of Maize God depictions is the *Dressing of the Maize God*. I have termed these vessels this way because they portray the Maize God being adorned in his riches by females. All of the females portrayed on these vases appear naked, often with long black hair. As said before females are rarely portrayed on Maya ceramics and therefore it is not clear who these females represent. There are two vessels (K1004, K1566) in which appears a female that has blackened eyes, which might symbolize a connection to the Underworld.



Figure 8.32: Detail of vessel K1202, showing a dressing scene of the Maize God (after Photograph © Justin Kerr).

Figure 8.5 represent one of the dressings scene. The central figure of this image is the Maize God, identifiable by his flattened and tonsured forehead. The females apparently have not yet begun dressing him, as he is still naked. His adornments are however already present, as we can see that the females on the outer left and outer right side, are both holding elements of the Maize God attire. Striking is that the figures are only half portrayed. This might have been caused by the form of the vessel which made it impossible to portray the full figures. However it could also have been done on purpose to symbolize that the figures were in fact half submerged in water. I make this conclusion from the fact that other dressing scene vessel portray the figures standing in water (K626, K4479, K3033, K6298, K7268). The remaining vessels in this category portray the figures the same way as K1202, with only half of their bodies visible. Apparently the Maize God is shown shortly after being resurrected from the turtle shell carapace, indicated by him still being half submerged in water.



Photograph © Justin Kerr File no. K626

Figure 8.33: Rollout photograph of vessel K626 portraying a dressing scene of the Maize God (Photograph © Justin Kerr).

Another example of a dressing scene is vessel K626 (figure 8.6), which displays three human figures seated on a tableau that shows a reptilian god's head from which waterlily plants sprout. Coe suggests that the structure can therefore be seen as a solidified freshwater lake or pond, probably in the Underworld (Coe 1973, 60-61). The central figure is shown emerging from this lake. By his youthfull appearance, his attire, and the presence of a Jester God headdress we can identify this figure as the Maize God. The Maize God is flanked by two naked ladies whose body markings suggest that they are also divine beings. The lady on the left, carries the mask of a jawless god. She is handing this mask toward the Maize God. Between this lady and the Maize god are two animals. Below is a spider monkey and above him hovers a bird which might be a cormorant. The spider monkey may allude to Jun Batz' and Jun Chowen and represent the both of them. I do not know what, or who the cormorant is supposed to signify.

There are three scenes in which both of the Hero Twins are present (K1004, K6298, K7268) and two other in which only Junajpu is presented (K1202, K4479).

## 8.2 Concluding remarks

The Popol Vuh story tells that humans were eventually created out of maize dough. The Hero Twins are not able to resurrect their father and uncle and therefore leave them at the Underworld ballcourt. There is no reference to the resurrection of Jun Junahpu while in the Classic period this was apparently an important mythological tale. The tale of the resurrection of the Maize god from a turtle split carapace is often portrayed in Classic Maya art and the Maize god was considered as a very important deity. Although the Maize God is not represented in that way in the Popol Vuh story, maize does play a very important role as it is the substance from which humans were made.

## Chapter 9: Conclusion

The Popol Vuh is the most significant source on ancient Maya mythology that has survived and it is therefore an invaluable source for the study of Classic Maya period mythological. In this thesis I have given an iconographical discussion of Classic Maya polychrome painted pottery scenes that portray episodes from the Popol Vuh. Pictorial polychrome pottery is in itself a very valuable source for research into the ancient Maya world. These ceramic often portray scenes that do not survive on any other Maya art form. In chapter two I have discussed that the ceramics researched in this thesis are identified as wares of the Maya elite. It might seem that this research only provides information on the Maya elite, for it is their ceramics that have been investigated, but in fact it provides information on Maya mythology. Mythology is important for every member of society and is often incorporated into religion. Mythology and religion were not only part of the elite life, but important for the totality of civilization. Research of pictorial polychrome pottery provides knowledge about the fundamentals of Maya cosmology and history. The images express the worldview of the ancient Maya. A worldview that was not only shared by the elite, but also by the commoners. If the commoners did not share the elite worldview and religion why else would they have given their continued support. If their mythology and religion would have been fundamentally different the rulers would not have been able to uphold society and organize such large labor forces that were necessary to built the grand monumental structures that were characteristic of the Classic period. Thus this thesis provides an insight into the lives of the ancient Maya of the all the levels of society.

The goal of this thesis was to identify which scenes from the Popol are in fact displayed on Maya ceramics and thus had an counterpart in the Classic period. In general we can conclude that many stories of the Popol Vuh were already present in the Classic period, but some interesting fact has come forward by the specification which scenes are and which are not displayed.

As discussed in chapter five the opening scene of the Popol Vuh which is described as a darkened primordial world in which the sun and moon did not yet exists is something that we also find in the Classic period, represented for instance on vessel K2796 by a blackened background. The first attempts of creating humans however are not shown on Classic Maya representations. I actually believe that this story did not exists in the Classic period as it is told in the Popol Vuh. It has indeed been mentioned that the man made out of mud might have been a direct refusal that men could have been created out of mud and thus a refusal of the probability of the existence of Adam (Tedlock 1986, 81). If this part was indeed a form of rebellion against Christianity than it is obvious that this part of the story was added to the Popol Vuh when it was written down in its recent form. But as

argued in chapter two I do not believe that the complete Popol Vuh is a fraud and by the end of this thesis it must have become clear that many parts of the Popol Vuh were indeed present in the Classic Maya period.

Because of the complexity of Classic Maya deities and gods I have chosen to focus my research on the representations of two particular characters, Junajpu and Xbalanq'ë. These are of course also the main characters of the Popol Vuh and thus it seems apt to focus on them. By listing the characteristic elements of Junajpu and Xbalanq'ë I began to identify all the vessels on which they were presented. This has proven to be quite an extensive list and therefore only a selection of these vessels are actually discussed in this thesis. What has become most apparent from this study is that the Classic Maya artists represented what they perceived to be the most important part of certain stories. For instances of the six houses in the Underworld only two are clearly represented on Maya ceramics. The scenes portrayed often had an underlying significance. The representations of Wuqub Kaqix for instance reminded the Maya elite to keep themselves in check. The fate of Wuqub Kaqix would have reminded Maya rulers not to become too selfish and boastful. Representations of the spider monkey also must have reminded that jealousy was not a good character trait and that the Maya were to keep their drunkenness, licentiousness, and sexual behavior to a minimum or else they would represent the previous creation of the effigies of carved wood who were in fact a failed human race.

On the other hand Junajpu and Xbalanq'ë were seen as role models for every young adult. In fact Maya elite often associated themselves with the Hero Twins, or even portrayed themselves as the Hero Twins to represent their good qualities. As the Hero Twins show the strength of a man does not lie in brute force, it is by cunning that the Hero Twins survive all the trials of the Underworld. The Lord of the Underworld are not weak they are just outwitted by the Hero Twins time and again. The ability to recognize falseness and counteract it with imaginative, at times even humorous solutions was what the Maya perceived as a real hero. The Maya king had to go to the same trials as the Twins after he died. He would descend into the Underworld and defeat the Lord of the Underworld in his own way to then resurrection himself once again (Schele and Miller 1986, 32). In Maya historical text we often find that Maya mythology was reenacted by elite and rulers. Maya rulers reenacting those mythological events that founded Maya civilization and those that were necessary to maintain the continuity of the cosmos. On the stone bench of Temple XIX of Palenque K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb III is mentioned to impersonate the god GI, while his cousin impersonated Itzamnaaj. The scene portrays the installing of K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb III into office under supervision of his cousin. Itzamnaaj installed GI into office and thus by imitating this event K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb III provide supernatural justification for his accession (Stone and Zender 2011, 36-37). Another impersonation scene might be represented on K1345 (figure 9.1). At first sight this vessel seems to portray

Junajpu, who is represented in his hunting outfit pointing his blowgun to what appears to be lizard. This vessel scene looks quite like the shooting of Wuqub Kaqix scenes, represented with a tree with a *tzuk* head on its trunk. There is even a jaguar paw visible just from behind the trunk. On the other side of the tree another hunter is lying on the ground, apparently trying to catch any prey that escapes the blowgun (Coe 1986, 170).



Figure 9.34: Rollout photograph of vessel K1345 portraying a ruler impersonating Junajpu (Photograph © Justin Kerr).

The main difference between this hunting scene and the others so far discussed is that the portrayed prey (bird and lizard) are quite realistic animals instead of anthropomorphic beings. I believe therefore that this is an imitation scene. I think that the represented Junajpu might actually be an elite person disguised as Junajpu, to point to his excellent abilities as a blowgunner. This might further be indicated by the large black dot on his cheek. In all the other blowgun scenes Junajpu's body is dotted with large black spots, but in this image he has only one dot on his cheek. This causes the face of the hunter to resemble that of the *ajaw*, "lord", hieroglyph and might indicate that he was in fact a real lord/ ruler.

There is one Classical mythological story that apparently did not survive in the Popol Vuh. This is the complex tale of the Maize God, who in itself signified the belief of resurrection. It is logical that he is so often portrayed as the goal of a deceased elite would also have been to be able to resurrect. These ceramics therefore often accompanied the deceased in his grave. That such an important part of Classical mythological is missing from the Popol Vuh shows that this book probably pertains to only a small part of the of the totality of mythological tales that existed in the ancient Maya world. It is after all only one book, and in the Classical period there must have been libraries full. I therefore believe that there is many more knowledge to be gained from the representations of

Maya ceramics. As more and more vessels are unearthed, more and more does our knowledge of ancient Maya mythology, and thereby worldview of the ancient Maya, becomes complete.

## Abstract

This thesis presents an iconographic study of Classic Maya ceramics. Pictorial polychrome pottery is the primary source of Classic Maya painting that is left to us. The pottery discussed in this thesis is of a particular kind. These wares were exclusively for the elite and were in itself a symbol of prestige. In the sixth century we find the appearance of unique painting styles, the establishment of elite workshops and works that were so exceptional that they could be linked to specific painters. The painters of these vessels were among the most highly educated people in Maya society. They were educated in Maya history, science, ideology and cosmology and they also learned how to read and write. The elite painted pottery is therefore a fine source to get more information about Maya mythology.

By an iconographical study of the Maya ceramic vessels it is determined which scenes from the mythological tale of the Popol Vuh are displayed on the images of the vessels. The Popol Vuh is the creation story of the Maya. The document was written down sometime between 1554 and 1558, by authors that stayed anonymous. It is commonly believed that the story of the Popol Vuh was actually much older and might once have been written in codex form. The Popol Vuh is the most significant source on ancient Maya mythology that survives today.

The iconographical research is restricted to the heroic deeds of the Hero Twins Junajpu and Xb'alanq'e. With the help of the previously identified characteristics of the Hero Twins, these characters are searched on all the available ceramics in the online Maya Vase Database, created by Justin Kerr. By an intense study into the ways that the Hero Twins are displayed on Maya ceramics many stories from the Popol Vuh have been identified. Some represented scenes such as the resurrected Hero Twins as catfishes, the defeat of the Lords of the Underworld, and the Hero Twins shown meeting with Itzamnaaj proved to have been displayed on numerous vessels. Other scenes such as the head of Jun Junajpu in a tree and the ballgame scene proved to be less important and were only portrayed sporadically. Multiple scenes from the Popol Vuh were not portrayed at all suggesting that these stories were altered or added at a later time.

The most commonly depicted scenes on ceramics related to the Popol Vuh are those featuring the Classical Maize God. Interestingly enough these scenes are not mentioned in the Popol Vuh, showing that the Popol Vuh probably only pertains to a small part of the of the totality of mythological tales that existed in the ancient Maya world. It is after all only one book, and in the Classical period there must have been libraries full.

The Maya used complex imagery to express certain ideas and even stories in a very abbreviated form. By an intense study of Maya pictorial pottery it has been proven possible to retrieve much more information about the signs and symbols displayed in the pottery scenes than has been done so far.

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## Appendix 1

Schellhas is definitely one of the most important figures in the advancement of Maya studies. His most significant contribution is his study and classification system of the major Maya gods and deities (Schellhas 1904). He identified all the gods displayed in the three remaining codices, at the time, the Dresden, Madrid and Paris codex. By comparing the characteristics of the figures displayed in these manuscripts he was able to conclude that the same figures appear in all the manuscripts and designated each figure with an alphabetic letter so to be able to identify the specific gods. Karl Taube (1992) has expanded the original study of Schellhas by including Postclassic murals and sculptures and Classic Maya epigraphy and art into his study of Maya gods. Following will be an overview of the specific gods that have been identified by Schellhas and Taube. This list is however limited to the gods that are discussed in this thesis.

### God A

The most characteristic attribute of God A, also known as the Death God, is his skeletal appearance (Schellhas 1904, 10-16). God A is an of deity of death, the Underworld and sacrifice. He might have been regarded as the specific deity of corporal decomposition and the one in charge of the welfare of the deceased. God A is often accompanied by elements of decay, such as black spots for putrification and a bloated belly. His costume is decorated with extruded eyeballs, which appear on his head, collar, wrists and ankles. Other symbols associated with God A are two crossed bones and the sign for the day *kimi*, "death" (also called the percentage sign). In the Dresden codex God A is referred to by a glyph reading *xib*, "death" or "fright" (See figure...). His name leaves no doubt that this deity was related to the Underworld. However frightful he looks, God A does not appear to have had a very high status in the Maya pantheon. Men did not have much respect for him, representing him with an exaggerated anus and connecting him to elements of filth (Taube 1992, 11-14).

### God A'

There appears to have been another important death god that is represented in the codices and also in Classic Maya inscriptions and art. This deity was not recognized by Schellhas, but as this deity is clearly distinct from God A Zimmerman has termed him God A' (Zimmerman 1956, 162-163). God A' is recognizable by the 'percentage sign' (%) on his cheek, the black vertical band around his eyes, the *Akbal*, "darkness", sign in his eyes or upper head, and a large bone placed in his hair. God A' is often

represented on ceramic vessels in the acts of cutting off his own head with a flint axe (Taube 1992, 14-17). Grube and Nahm discovered that this deity was actually named Akan (Grube and Nahm 1994). *Akan* is the Mayan word for “wasp”, which might explain his blackened eyes which is a characteristic of wasps and also his connection to death imagery as many insects were connected to death by the ancient Maya. Akan seems to have been a deity of alcoholic beverages and ritual intoxication (Zender 2011, 38-39).

### God B

God B is the most represented deity in the codices. Characteristic are his long, pendant nose and tongue hanging out of his mouth. He has a head ornament which looks like a knotted bow and a peculiar rim to the eye (Schellhas 1904, 17-19). God B has been identified as Chahk, the Classic god of rain and lightning. *Chahk* means “rain and thunder” and the god is closely associated with thunder and lightning. He frequently wields an axe, which is a known symbol of lightning. Chahk is also connected to serpents (his body often covered with snakeskin patterns) which were also symbolic for lightning. Chahk’s name glyph consist of a representation of his own head. In this portrait he is represented with a large spiral eye, a *Spondylus* shell earflare, a shark tooth and fish barbells. Chahk seems to have been a quadripartite god associated with the four cardinal directions and their respective colors<sup>10</sup>. Chahk was also connected to war and human sacrifice. It appears that Chahk had a dual nature of raging war and sacrificing beings, but also representing fertility by causing rain. This combination made him the perfect model for Classic Maya kings, who are frequently portrayed impersonating this deity and often took his name as their own (Taube 1992, 17-27; Zender 2011, 40-41).

### God D

God D is one of the most important gods of both Classic and Post-Classic Maya. The god is represented as an old man with an aged face, a toothless mouth, and a large round or squarish eye (Schellhas 22-23). God D has been identified as Itzamnaaj. Characteristic is his headdresses consisting of a *yax*-shell and an *akbal*-flower ornament. The Akbal sign with beaded edge may represent a mirror. The ancient Maya used mirrors of pyrite, obsidian, hematite and other materials for divinatory scrying (Taube 1992, 31-34). When the Spanish arrived Itzamnaaj was the principal god of the Yucatec Maya. He was the patron of all human shamans and himself considered as the greatest shaman of all (Freidel *et al.* 1993, 40). Itzamnaaj was one of several creator gods. In Classic Maya

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<sup>10</sup> The ancient Maya associated the east with the color red, north with white, west with black, and south with yellow. The center of the world was associated with the most precious color in the ancient Maya world, blue green (Sharer and Traxler 2006, 147).

vessel scenes Itzamnaaj often sits upon a skyband and is meeting with important deities such as god N and god L. From the composition of these vessel scenes it is clear that Itzamnaaj had a higher status than these lords. This indicates that Itzamnaaj was considered as the supreme ruler of the sky. But he was also connected to the earth and presented with the World Tree. Portrayed in scribal scenes and a scribal costume, Itzamnaaj was also a great scribe (Taube 1992, 35-40). The name glyph of Itzamnaaj is composed of the *akbal*-flower element prefixed to Itzamnaaj's portrait head. There still is no accurate translation of his name. The Principal Bird Deity, a deity strongly connected to the World Tree and the heavens, is believed to be the avian manifestation of Itzamnaaj. When his bird manifestation is represented, the *akbal*-flower element prefixes the bird head portrait with the same large eye decorated with a curl as is represented on the Itzamnaaj portrait (Bassie-Sweet 2002, 25).

### God E

The Maize god was first described by Schellhas, who labeled him as God E (Schellhas 1904, 24-25). Maize foliation emerges from the top of his head with on the back a so-called 'corn curl', identified as a maize grain. According to Schellhas the head of God E represented a maize cob and therefore he concluded that this must have been the god of maize (Schellhas 1904, 24-25). The corn curl is now known to refer to a tamale, but is nevertheless a maize sign (Taube 1989). The Maize god is a male entity with a youthful appearance and fine features. Most characteristic is the deities extremely flattened and elongated skull. To accentuate his flattened forehead he is often represented without any hair or with only a small tuft of hair on the top of his head. Taube labeled him the Tonsured Maize God because of this typical hairstyle (Taube 1985, 172-173). The Maize god is connected to life and fertility, but also to death and sacrifice. His connecting to the agricultural cycle of maize might explain his association with death and resurrection. As the planting of maize in the earth is thought to be equivalent to death and burial, growth is perceived as resurrection, and the harvest in which men removes the cob of maize from the stalk is perceived as the severing of the head of the maize god (Taube 1992, 44). The name glyph of the maize god is composed of a representation of the gods own foliated head prefixed by the phonetic sign *li* (Taube 1992, 43). The Maize god has been identified as being the Classical version of Jun Junajpu (Taube 1985). The maize god has a very distinctive costume. As already discussed his headdresses consists of maize foliation that signifies the tamale, but we also find the Jester God head in front and on top of the Tonsured Maize God's head is an entity with a long-nosed face adorned with beads. The Tonsured Maize God often wears a beaded, complex belt on which we find a *Xoc* monster and *spondylus* shell medallion (Taube 1985, 172). The skirt attached is either a jaguar skin or also beaded.

### God G

The name glyph of God G contains as the main element the *k'in*, “sun”, sign, by which he is identified as the Sun God (Schellhas 1904, 27-28). God G is characterized by a large roman nose and square eye. The Sun God is both represented as a middle-aged and old deity. He is representative for the number four. In Classic representation he has filed incisors and curling rope-like elements in the corners of his mouth. A *k'in*-sign will often be infix in his cheek, brow, or other part of his body. The Sun God has been associated with GIII of the Palenque Triad, but it is not exactly clear if they represent the same deity (Taube 1992, 51-52). The Jaguar God of the Underworld seems to represent the night sun and might be a different manifestation of God G (Taube 1992, 53; 50-56).

### Goddess I

Schellhas somewhat confused Goddesses I with Goddesses O and does not clearly define the difference between the two (Schellhas 1904, 31-32; 38). Taube’s division is first of all based on the name glyphs. The name glyph of Goddesses I is composed of a main sign representing a portrait of the goddess with the distinctive *kab*- curl, the sign for “earth” attached to the temple of the head and either the *sak*, “white/ pure”, prefix or *ki* postfix. Leading her name to be read as Sak Ixik. It seems that Goddesses I had both youthful and aged aspects. The youthful appearance of the Goddesses represents the Classic Maya Moon Goddesses. This is also indicated by her name glyph, as the *kab*-curl sign is mentioned in Landa’s alphabet as the phonetic value *u*, the Yucatec term for “moon”. The most specific identifying features of the moon goddess are the lunar crescent and the rabbit. In Maya iconography maize and the moon are closely connected. It appears that the Maize God and the Moon Goddess were also associated as the Moon Goddess sometimes appears with attributes of the Maize god (Taube 1992, 64-68).

### God K

God K is a god of fertility, water, and lightning and is therefore closely connected and often represented with God B. The most characteristic detail of God K is his ornamented nose, a long, upturned snout, and the smoking torch or axe blade stuck into his forehead (Schellhas 1904, 32-34). In the Classic period God K is often represented with one foot turned into a serpent. The smoking celt and torch, and the serpent foot are all symbolic for lightning, thus making God K a lightning deity (Taube 1992, 69-77). Whichever device is portrayed in the forehead of God K, mirrors, fire, burning axes, torches, and cigars all allude to lightning. The name of God K has been translated as Kawill and this is now widely accepted to have been his name in the Classic period (Taube 1992, 78). The ‘Mannikin scepter’, which is a scepter in the form of God K, was an important icon of rulership and

bloodletting and therefore God K himself seems to be a deity of lineages and royal descent (Schele and Miller 1986, 73). God K is one of the important gods in Classic Maya mythology, but also a complex deity for his broad range of iconographic and epigraphic associations (Taube 1992, 78-79).

#### God L

God L is an old God with toothless mouth and a black face. His most characteristic attribute is the large brimmed feathered headdresses in which a Moan screech owl rests (Schellhas 1904, 34-35). God L was clearly an important deity in the Classic period as he is often represented on ceramics vessels and always takes a leading position. He seems to have been one of the principal Lords of the Underworld made clear by his prominent position in Underworld scenes (Coe 1973, 14). The Moan bird itself is known to be a messenger of the Underworld. In Classic scenes God L is represented with a large square eye, jaguar characteristics, and is often smoking a cigar. God L is a complex divinity, connected to the Underworld but also to the Middle and Upperworld, as he is associated with water and agricultural fertility. He also appears to have been a god of merchants, as he often carries a pack such as merchants wore on the road (Taube 1992, 79-88).

#### God N

God N was also one of the major gods of the Classic period and is often represented on ceramic vessels. However his exact role is unclear as he is portrayed in a multitude of different scenes (Schellhas 1904, 37-38). He is an aged god and is often represented protruding from a conch or tortoise shell. God N has a characteristic headdresses that is described as a 'sprangled turban'. The name of God N has been identified as Pauhtun and it is clear that he is a quadripartite god often represented as four figures. He is associated with the four directions and their colors and seems to have been responsible for holding up the sky. God N is associated with both the Underworld and the heavens. It might be that the quadripartite god was not only responsible for holding up the sky, but also the earth (Taube 1992, 92-99).

#### Goddess O

Goddess O has the features of an Old Woman. Characterized by a single tooth in the lower jaw, which was a sign of age of the ancient Maya, and sometimes represented with a red body. Her name is usually composed of the prefix *chac*, meaning "red" or "great" and *chel*, which is the word for rainbow in Yucatec. Leading her name to be her as Chac Chel, but she is also referred to as Ix Chel. Although Westerners often perceive the rainbow as something beautiful, the Yucatec Maya connect it to something dreadful being connected to the death gods and believed to cause diseases (Taube 1992, 99). Goddesses O does indeed appear as a somewhat fearful being, connected to the flood and

world destruction. Goddesses O is also often represented with claws and fangs, an *ix* jaguar eye, and wears a skirt that is adorned with death symbols, such as crossed bones. She is represented with a serpent headdress which might allude to her association with storms and water (Taube 1992, 100-101). Coe also mentions that the old creation couple was known as Xchel and Xtamna, clearly referring to Ix Chel and Itzamna (Coe 1977, 329). Chac Chel is thus associated with both creation and destruction, but also with divination, medicine, childbirth, and weaving (Taube 1992, 101).

### The Palenque Triad gods

The temple of the Cross mentions the birth of GI, the Temple of the Sun relates the birth of GIII, and the Temple of the Foliated Cross tells of the birth of GII. GI has a large roman nose, a shark tooth and fish barbells protrude from the side of his mouth (Bassie 2002, 41-42). GI often wears a simple jade earring. Karen Bassie believes that this jade earring connects GI to the Classical God B, Chahk, who often wears a *Spondylus* shell earflare. Chahk was the Classic god of rain and lightning. The jade earring of GI would even implicate that Chahk formed part of his name thus indicating that GI himself represented a lightning deity and possibly Chahk himself (Bassie 2002, 42-43). GII is the thirds born of the Palenque Triad gods, but he is always named in the second position which explains his nickname. GII is represented as a manifestation of God K, K'awill. GII's name is a conflation of God K and of *unen*, "baby, child" and he can thus be named baby K'awill, which suits him, as he is the youngest of the Palenque Triad gods. This also connects him to Ch'i'pi Kaqulja, "Youngest Thunderbolt", of the Popol Vuh (Bassie-Sweets 2002, 44). GIII has often been given the nickname "Jaguar God of the Underworld" and he is believed to represent the night sun (Coe 1973, 15, 83, 107). Unfortunately his name glyph lacks an accurate decipherment. GIII has the same appearance as the sun god, but with jaguar features. He is associated with fire and meteors and also identified as being a god of lightning. The sudden impact of meteors connect this god to Raxa Kaqulja, "Sudden Thunderbolt", of the Popol Vuh (Bassie-Sweet 2002, 45-47).

## Appendix 2

Kerr Number	Vase Type	Shape	Height in cm	Diameter in cm	Circumference in cm	Category
1288	Polychrome	-	19			Ballgame scene
1299	Codex Style	Bowl	9	11	31	Defeat Lords of the Underworld
1560	Codex Style	Vessel	16,3	15	41,5	Defeat Lords of the Underworld
4118	Codex Style	Bowl	7	22	30,3	Defeat Lords of the Underworld
4598	Codex Style	Vessel	23,5	13,5	41	Defeat Lords of the Underworld
5166	Polychrome	Vessel	25,5	10,7	36,5	Defeat Lords of the Underworld
626	Polychrome	Vessel	20,5	17,2	54	Dressing Maize God
1202	Codex Style	Bowl	6,5	20	53	Dressing Maize God
1488	Codex Style	Bowl	7	24	65	Dressing Maize God
1566	Codex Style	Bowl	9,5	24		Dressing Maize God
3033	Polychrome	Vessel	22,5	9,5	31	Dressing Maize God
4479	Polychrome	Bowl	15,5	17	50	Dressing Maize God
6298	Polychrome	Vessel	16,3	12	40,5	Dressing Maize God
6979	Codex Style	Bowl	10	11,8	32,8	Dressing Maize God
7268	Polychrome	Vessel	24,5	17,5	53,7	Dressing Maize God
5615	Polychrome	Bowl	18	18,5	57,4	Head in tree
3266	Polychrome	Vessel	22,3	10,5	33,7	Hero Twins as catfish
4835	Polychrome	Vessel	17,3	9,8	30,5	Hero Twins as catfish
4871	Polychrome	Vessel	22	10,5	33	Hero Twins as catfish
5088	Polychrome	Vessel	17,5	9,5	30,3	Hero Twins as catfish
5225	Polychrome	Vessel	21,5	16,5	47,5	Hero Twins as catfish
5389	Polychrome	Vessel	22,5	9,5	33,4	Hero Twins as catfish
5464	Polychrome	Vessel	22,5	11,8	37,7	Hero Twins as catfish
7522	Polychrome	Vessel	22,5	11	36	Hero Twins as catfish
8678	Polychrome	Vessel	23,9	10	33,6	Hero Twins as catfish
8679	Polychrome	Vessel	23	10,5	33,2	Hero Twins as catfish
511	Codex Style	Vessel	22	16,3	47	Hero Twins as performers
6995	Polychrome	Bowl	12,9	14,7	46	Hero Twins as performers
4548	Polychrome	Vessel	17	11,5	34,5	Hero Twins in counsel with Itzamnaaj
732	Incised	Vessel	24,5	16	51,8	Hero Twins in counsel with Itzamnaaj
1183	Polychrome	Vessel	20	17	55	Hero Twins in counsel with Itzamnaaj
1222	Codex Style	Vessel	17	12,8	37	Hero Twins in counsel with Itzamnaaj
1607	Codex Style	Vessel	15,8	13,2	40,5	Hero Twins in counsel with Itzamnaaj

1991	Codex Style	Vessel	12	11	36,5	Hero Twins in counsel with Itzamnaaj
7821	Polychrome	Vessel	24,6	13,2	42	Hero Twins in counsel with Itzamnaaj
8468	Polychrome	Vessel	18	15	45	Hero Twins in counsel with Itzamnaaj
3102	Polychrome	Bowl	17	25,2	78,5	House of Bats
702	Polychrome	Vessel	17	12,4	38,9	House of Darkness
1214	Polychrome	Vessel				House of Darkness
1561	Codex Style	Vessel	22,3	11,3		House of Darkness
3386	Polychrome					House of Darkness
1256	Polychrome	Vessel	27,5	15,7	50,5	House of Fire
3831	Polychrome	Vessel	24,4	12,5	40	House of Fire
5112	Polychrome	Vessel	18	16	48	House of Fire
555	Polychrome	Vessel	17,7	13,8	43,3	Junajpu blowgun scene
1345	Codex Style	Vessel	13,3	11	30,5	Junajpu impersonator
634	Carved	Bowl	12	13	36,5	Resurrection Maize God
731	Polychrome	Vessel	22	11,7	0	Resurrection Maize God
1004	Codex Style	Vessel	15	13	39	Dressing Maize God
1892	Codex Style	-	-	-	-	Resurrection Maize God
2706	Polychrome	Bowl	15,5	22	66	Resurrection Maize God
4681	Polychrome	Vessel	16	15,5	49	Resurrection Maize God
4998	Polychrome	Vessel	25,5	14	44	Resurrection Maize God
5608	Polychrome	Vessel	17,4	14	49	Resurrection Maize God
8540	Polychrome	Vessel	19,5	16	49	Resurrection Maize God
8654	Polychrome	Vessel	9	6,3	21,4	Resurrection Maize God
8736	Polychrome	Bowl	18	19	71	Resurrection Maize God
9174	Incised	Vessel	16	14,7	42	Resurrection Maize God
1226	Codex Style	Bowl	11,4	12,5	34	Shooting of Wuqub Kaqix
3638	Polychrome	Plate		44		Shooting of Wuqub Kaqix
4546	Codex Style					Shooting of Wuqub Kaqix

## Appendix 3

Kerr Number	Vase Type	Shape	Height in cm	Diameter in cm	Circumference in cm	Category
511	Codex Style	Vessel	22	16,3	47	Hero Twins as performers
555	Polychrome	Vessel	17,7	13,8	43,3	Junajpu blowgun scene
626	Polychrome	Vessel	20,5	17,2	54	Dressing Maize God
634	Carved	Bowl	12	13	36,5	Resurrection Maize God
702	Polychrome	Vessel	17	12,4	38,9	House of Darkness
731	Polychrome	Vessel	22	11,7	0	Resurrection Maize God
732	Incised	Vessel	24,5	16	51,8	Hero Twins in counsel with Itzamnaaj
1004	Codex Style	Vessel	15	13	39	Dressing Maize God
1183	Polychrome	Vessel	20	17	55	Hero Twins in counsel with Itzamnaaj
1202	Codex Style	Bowl	6,5	20	53	Dressing Maize God
1214	Polychrome	Vessel				House of Darkness
1222	Codex Style	Vessel	17	12,8	37	Hero Twins in counsel with Itzamnaaj
1226	Codex Style	Bowl	11,4	12,5	34	Shooting of Wuqub Kaqix
1256	Polychrome	Vessel	27,5	15,7	50,5	House of Fire
1288	Polychrome	-	19			Ballgame scene
1299	Codex Style	Bowl	9	11	31	Defeat Lords of the Underworld
1345	Codex Style	Vessel	13,3	11	30,5	Junajpu impersonator
1488	Codex Style	Bowl	7	24	65	Dressing Maize God
1560	Codex Style	Vessel	16,3	15	41,5	Defeat Lords of the Underworld
1561	Codex Style	Vessel	22,3	11,3		House of Darkness
1566	Codex Style	Bowl	9,5	24		Dressing Maize God
1607	Codex Style	Vessel	15,8	13,2	40,5	Hero Twins in counsel with Itzamnaaj
1892	Codex Style	-	-	-	-	Resurrection Maize God
1991	Codex Style	Vessel	12	11	36,5	Hero Twins in counsel with Itzamnaaj
2706	Polychrome	Bowl	15,5	22	66	Resurrection Maize God
3033	Polychrome	Vessel	22,5	9,5	31	Dressing Maize God
3102	Polychrome	Bowl	17	25,2	78,5	House of Bats
3266	Polychrome	Vessel	22,3	10,5	33,7	Hero Twins as catfish
3386	Polychrome					House of Darkness
3638	Polychrome	Plate		44		Shooting of Wuqub Kaqix
3831	Polychrome	Vessel	24,4	12,5	40	House of Fire
4118	Codex Style	Bowl	7	22	30,3	Defeat Lords of the Underworld

4479	Polychrome	Bowl	15,5	17	50	Dressing Maize God
4546	Codex Style					Shooting of Wuqub Kaqix
4548	Polychrome	Vessel	17	11,5	34,5	Hero Twins in counsel with Itzamnaaj
4598	Codex Style	Vessel	23,5	13,5	41	Defeat Lords of the Underworld
4681	Polychrome	Vessel	16	15,5	49	Resurrection Maize God
4835	Polychrome	Vessel	17,3	9,8	30,5	Hero Twins as catfish
4871	Polychrome	Vessel	22	10,5	33	Hero Twins as catfish
4998	Polychrome	Vessel	25,5	14	44	Resurrection Maize God
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8654	Polychrome	Vessel	9	6,3	21,4	Resurrection Maize God
8678	Polychrome	Vessel	23,9	10	33,6	Hero Twins as catfish
8679	Polychrome	Vessel	23	10,5	33,2	Hero Twins as catfish
8736	Polychrome	Bowl	18	19	71	Resurrection Maize God
9174	Incised	Vessel	16	14,7	42	Resurrection Maize God