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“The Names of the Lords of *Xib’alb’a* in the Maya Hieroglyphic Script”

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*Sistematización de los estudios americanistas y sus repercusiones*

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## The Names of the Lords of *Xib'alb'a* in the Maya Hieroglyphic Script

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Stanley Guenter

The ancient Maya gods and their manifold manifestations on monuments, in codices and on beautiful polychrome ceramics have fascinated researchers for over a hundred years. Many of these gods and their complex, highly patterned and often overlapping series of traits share conventions of representation with gods of the Borgia group of codices of Central Mexico, such as the well known *Miclantecuhli*, *Cinteotl* and *Tlaloc*, for example. These similarities have been shown to reflect pan-Mesoamerican beliefs, and similar depictions across space and time have rightly been considered to reflect the historical relations of these deities (see Coe 1982; Taube 1985, 1988a, 1992). Taube (1992: 4), for instance, has recently noted that “it is necessary to consider the Maya gods not as isolated phenomena but as integral parts in the greater ideological system of ancient Mesoamerica”.

This polemic was truly initiated by Eduard Seler, one of the first great Mesoamericanists, whose studies ranged over all of Central America –encompassing the traditional territories of the fields of archaeology, ethnography and linguistics– and who laid the groundwork for much of what is now known about the Mesoamerican culture area, and its attendant world system and *sprachbund*. In fact, it was Seler’s (1898, 1904a) insightful explanations of the *Dresden Codex* Venus pages in light of the *Borgia*, *Vaticanus B* and *Cospi* codices that first opened the door to the identification of the depictions of ancient Maya deities with the cults of their modern-day descendants, whose names and rites have in many cases survived to be



collected by modern-day ethnographers. Subsequent identifications of Mayan deities and their diagnostic features by Förstemann (1886, 1906), Schellhas (1886, 1897, 1904) and Seler (1887, 1904b) led to the description of some fifteen deities, including, in many cases, their nominal and augural glyphs.

As the greater part of these signs could not yet be read, these deities were given letter designations by Schellhas (1904), and this system was eventually adopted by all other researchers due in large part to the ease with which new additions and emendations could be comfortably accommodated within it (see Coe 1973, 1978, 1982; Kelley 1965, 1972, 1976; Thompson 1934, 1939, 1970a, 1970b, 1972; Taube 1985, 1988a, 1992). The usefulness of this system, and its entrenchment in the literature, urges its maintenance even during this time of increasing confidence in the decipherment of Maya hieroglyphic writing. Thus, while one of the stated purposes of this paper is the recovery of the original, ancient names of these deities, we will continue to refer to them by the Schellhas letter codes as well.

With regard to method, we follow some of the most convincing modern work on ancient Maya religion (Coe 1989; Houston and Stuart 1996; Stuart, Houston and Robertson 1999: II; Taube 1988a, 1992: 7-9) –and, not inconsequentially, that of the earliest chroniclers such as Bernardino de Sahagún (1950-1982), Diego De Landa (Tozzer 1941) and their contemporaries– in seeing true animistic “deities” in Classic Maya art and writing. In our opinion, arguments by such scholars as Proskouriakoff (1965, 1978, 1980) and Marcus (1978, 1983) that the Mayan and Central Mexican deity complexes were not truly “gods”, but rather animatistic forces of nature or reflections of impersonal spiritual forces, are untenable. The overwhelming abundance of evidence from archaeology, epigraphy, iconography, linguistics and ethnography assure us that ancient Mesoamericans believed in the existence of sentient, anthropomorphic supernatural entities constructed along lines very similar to that of most ancient civilizations the world over.

We also part company with the recent revival of Proskouriakoff’s (1965: 470-471) concerns that the frequent overlap in iconography between and among various deity complexes, and the seemingly “protean” of such complexes, renders their division into discrete “gods” problematic (see Gillespie and Joyce 1998; Vail 1996: 365). We feel that the exact opposite



is the case, and that division is not nearly so problematic as some have claimed. In our view, physical associations and shared iconographic traits—especially when controlled by related epigraphic, linguistic and ethnographic data—do not make the identification of discrete deities impossible; rather, such iconographic interaction communicates to us the profound relationships and overlapping duties of these gods as perceived by the ancient Maya. It is this emic viewpoint, rather than the forced taxonomic approaches that have led to some scholars' confusions, that we wish to stress with regard to our principal focus in this paper: the Classic Maya death gods.

As related in the seventeenth-century *K'iché* Maya creation epic, the *Popol Vuh* (Tedlock 1985), two brothers—*Jun Junahpu* and *Wukub' Junahpu*—quickly found that the names of the Lords of *Xib'alb'a* were the key to successfully penetrating their bleak domain. Upon failing to provide the proper means of address to such notables as “Skullsplitter”, “Bloodgatherer” and “Seven Death”, these brothers failed the first important test. Their heads were separated from their bodies, and they became denizens of the land of death themselves. By contrast, the Hero Twins *Junahpu* and *Xb'alanque* passed this first test with aplomb. Reckoning on the importance of first appearances, they tasked a mosquito to bite each demon in turn, causing them to scream, at which act the next demon would ask him *by name* what it was that ailed him, and so on down the line. This ingenious ploy allowed the twins to march right into *Xib'alb'a* and greet each demon in turn by the names which they had heard. This tamed the lords of death and took the wind out of their ghostly sails. *Xib'alb'a* and its mysteries would be brought screaming forth into the light; death would be vanquished, so that life might flourish.

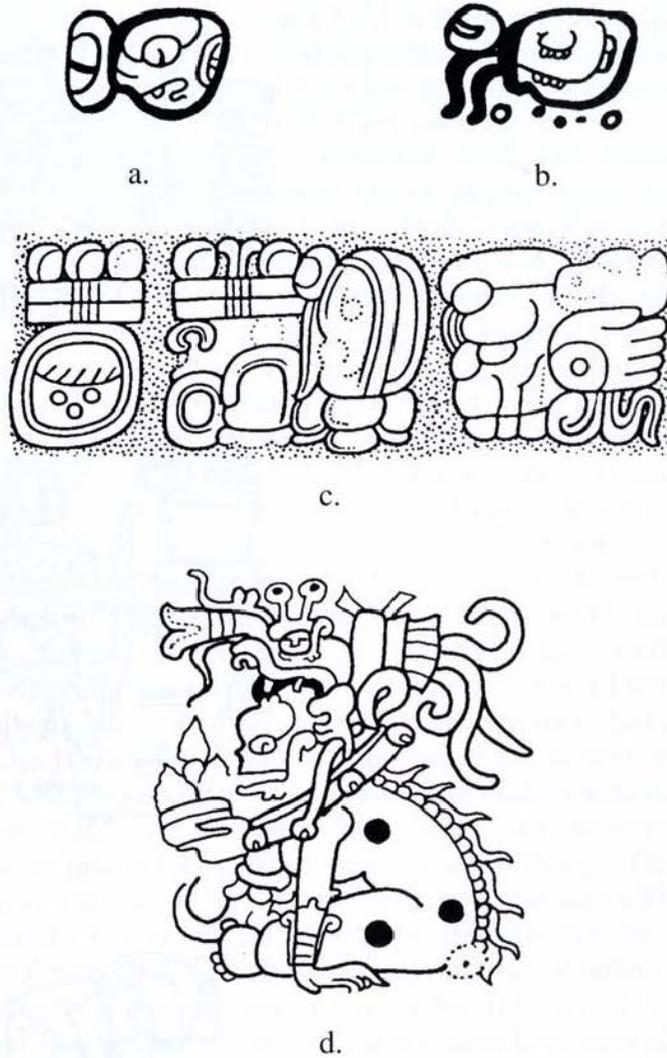
In this paper, we wish to follow the Hero Twins' example in unraveling the coveted names of the Lords of *Xib'alb'a*. Earlier scholars have revealed the faces of these deities, but have hitherto been unable to remove the masks which still conceal their identities. Recent hieroglyphic decipherments will be the mosquito by which we hope to coax from these entities their names and identities. This, in turn, should allow us to comment on their importance to the ancient Maya; on the models and metaphors these deities provided for the operation of the natural and social worlds, and, of course, on the implications of such metaphors for our understanding of Classic Maya religious practices.

## God A

God A is an easily recognized skeletal deity heavily associated with death and the underworld (Coe 1973, 1978; Taube 1988a: 56-59; 1992: 11-17). Diagnostic features of God A include dark body spots (Fig. 1d), skeletal arms and legs, a death's head, and a necklace of extruded human eyeballs (Figs. 1d, 2a, 3a). Beyer (1937: 151-2) coined the term “death-eyes” for these diagnostic features, which were later identified on both monumental and ceramic representations of this deity (Thompson 1950: 45; Coe 1973: 16). While Schellhas (1904: 11) saw these as copper bells, both Rivard (1965) and Taube (1992: 11-13) have demonstrated that they do, indeed, represent extruded eyeballs. Recently, Zender (n.d.) has demonstrated the existence of these “death-eyes” in the hieroglyphic script. T15, T108 and T135 are all death-eyes read as syllabic **cha**.<sup>1</sup> In Yucatekan languages, *cha(h)* signifies “darkness”, “blindness” and “the shivers” (Barrera Vásquez 1980: 75), and these are all apt labels for a lord of death indeed.

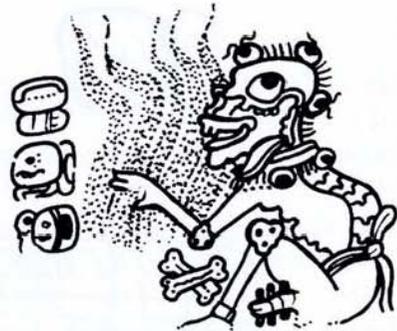
Modern Maya refer to the death god in terms of decomposition and filth. This can be seen in a number of depictions of God A on pottery, in the codices and on monuments. On an unprovenanced vase from the Petén, for instance, we find God A labeled **xi-ni-li** *xinil*, or “he who stinks”, and clouds of stench are seen to coil up and away from him (Fig. 2a) (Grube and Nahm 1994: 707). This concept is also reflected in the Lacandon term for the death god, *kisin*, or “farther” (Coe 1973: 15). Interestingly, as Fox and Justeson (1984: 38-59) have shown, God A is actually named in hieroglyphs on Madrid page 87c as **ki-si-ni** *kisin*, “farther” (Fig. 2b). This connection with stench and physical decay is reflected in many depictions of God A in the codices with a **mo** phonetic sign over his anus (Fig. 1d), which probably refers to the Yucatek word *molo*, or “sphincter” (Taube 1988a: 58; 1992: 13). The highlighting of this body part most assuredly refers to the vile stenches which issue forth from this deity, as they do on a Classic period monument from Xunantunich, where God A is shown with great swirls of stench or decaying entrails issuing forth from his stomach (Fig. 2c). Taube (1992: 14), following Coe (1973: 15), suggests that this

<sup>1</sup> This paper employs the system of glyphic numeration devised by J.E.S. Thompson (1962); transliteration conventions follow the guidelines proposed in the *Research Reports on Ancient Maya Writing* (G. Stuart 1988).



**Figure 1.** God A's Name, Title and Appearance.

- a. God A's name, Dresden page 12b (after Taube 1992: Fig. 1a)
- b. God A's title or augury, Dresden page 12b (after Taube 1992: Fig. 1a)
- c. Death-phrase of *Tahoom-U-K'ab'-K'ahk'*, Naranjo Hieroglyphic Stairway 1 (drawing by Ian Graham, CMHI 2: 110)
- d. God A, Dresden page 13a (after Taube 1992: Fig. 1f).



a.



b.



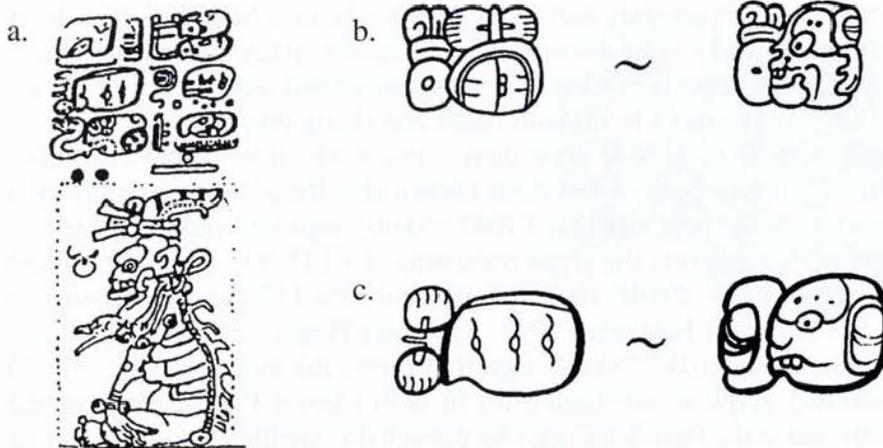
c.

**Figure 2.** Other Epithets of God A.

- a. God A labelled *xinil* “stinking” from an unprovenanced Late Classic vessel (redrawn after Grube and Nahm 1994: Fig. 43)
- b. God A labelled *kisin* “farther”, Madrid page 87c (after Prager 1997: Fig. 7a)
- c. God A with stench-scroll, Xunantunich Altar 1 (redrawn after Taube 1992: Fig. 1g)

aspect of God A, variously named *Xinil* or *Kisin*, may have had the role of punishing the dead – as he does today, for instance, in Lacandon mythology. However, other aspects of God A are less associated with stench or decay, and seem to have more to do with death and dying proper.

Since Schellhas' (1886) great pioneering work on revealing the name-glyphs of Codical gods, it has been known that the glyph consisting of a "Mirror" sign 'A' prefixed to a T1047 "Skull" sign referred to the deity's name (Fig. 1a), whereas the glyph consisting of a T15 "Death-Eye" prefixed to a different T736 "Skull" sign, and suffixed with T178 **la**, was his augury (Fig. 1b). As both Houston (1992: 529) and Prager (1997: 34-37) have noted, the same T1047 "Skull" sign that forms the major portion of God A's nominal glyph is substituted for in both Classic Period monumental contexts and in the Dresden Codex by the syllabic spelling **ma-su** for *ma'as* "hobgoblin" or "fright" (Figs. 3b, c) (cf. Yukatek *ah mas* "duende", Barre-ra Vásquez 1980: 502, Ch'orti' *ah mauhs* "duende", Wisdom 1950: 444); this provides us with evidence that the T1047 "Skull" sign is itself a logograph for **MA'AS**. Combined with the frequent 'A' prefix, then, God A's name seems to have been 'A'-**MA'AS**, *Aj-Ma'as* or "He, the Hobgoblin" or "He of Fright". His underworld associations are further affirmed by his nearly constant augural glyph. Here, the frequent T15 and T108 **cha** prefixes and the occasional T1673 and T173 **mi** suffixes, have led to the decipherment of the T736 "Skull" main-sign of the augural collocations as **CHAM** "to die" (Zender n.d.). Considered in tandem with the occasional suffixation of this sign by **mi**, **mi-la** or simply **-la**, the augural glyph of God A can be read as **CHAM-(mi-la)**, *cham-ii* or "dying". This may finally explain why God A's augural glyph itself forms the verb **CHAM** "to die" throughout the Classic period inscriptions (Fig. 1c) (Zender n.d.). It also motivates the use of this glyph in the name phrases of nobles at Yaxchilan and elsewhere, for this aspect of God A has little to do, it seems, with stench and decay; rather, *Aj-Ma'as* seems to have been most closely related to the Highland Mexican *Mictlantecuhтли* (as noted also by Taube 1992: 7), and was most definitely the god of death itself, who is frequently shown in Classic pottery scenes with arms outstretched awaiting the embrace of the soon-to-be-dead.



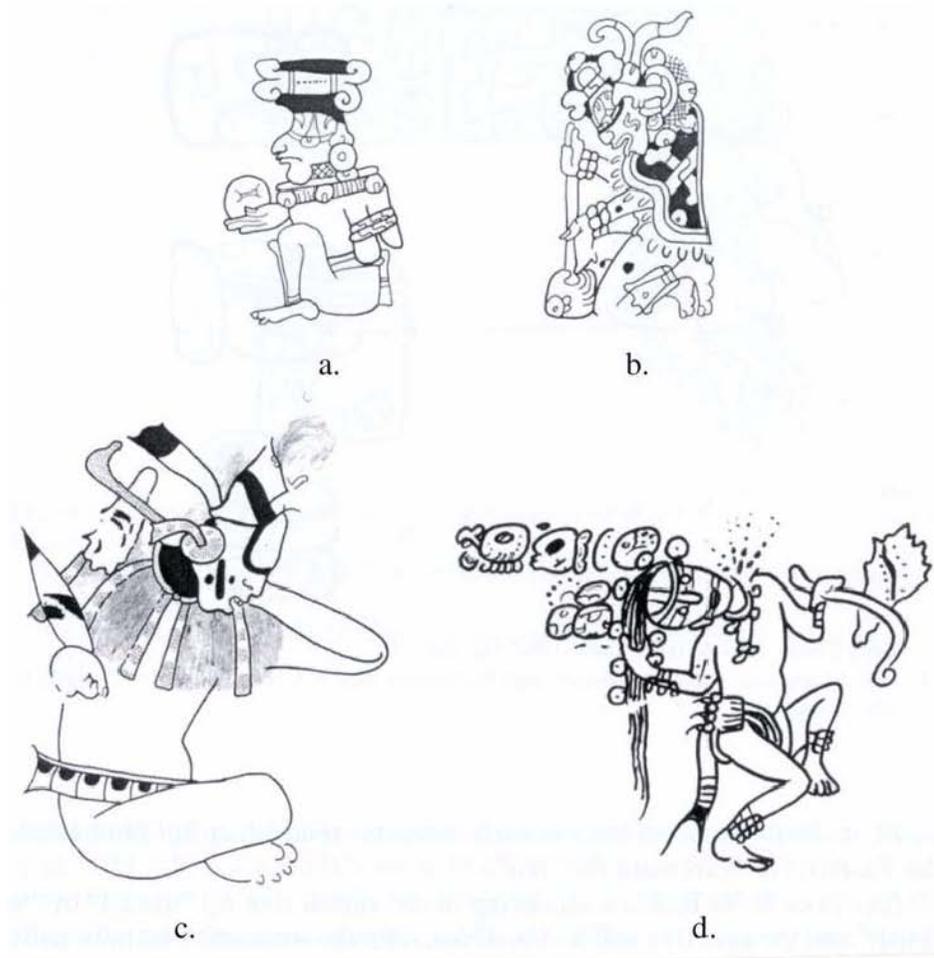
**Figure 3.** *Ma'as* as the Name of God A.

- a. God A labelled *ma'as* “Hobgoblin”, Dresden page 8a (after Prager 1997: Fig. 8a)  
 b. Substitution of **ma-su** for T1047 MA'AS, Site Q panel (redrawn after Prager 1997: Fig. 8b)  
 c. Substitution of **ma-su** for T1047 MA'AS, Dresden page 8a (redrawn after Prager 1997: Fig. 8c).

## God A<sup>1</sup>

God A<sup>1</sup> was first recognized as a distinct death-god by Zimmermann (1956: 162-163), and his name glyph was first isolated by Thompson (1972: 38). Recently, Taube (1992: 14-17) has greatly expanded our knowledge of this intriguing and enigmatic god. His diagnostic features include the so-called “percentage” sign on his cheek or body (Figs. 4b-e), and a darkened area—sometimes marked with the ‘AK’AB’ “darkness” sign—covering his forehead, and often obscuring his eyes (Figs. 4a,b,d,e). As Taube (1992: 14) has noted, “a large bone, presumably a human femur, is placed in the hair. Usually supplied with some sort of lashing in midsection, this bone appears with God A<sup>1</sup> from the Early Classic to the Late Post-Classic” (Figs. 4a, b, e).

His name glyph is quite clearly a portrait of the god. This glyph regularly takes both final **nu** and **na** phonetic complements, which most likely reflect variations in vowel quantity through time (Figs. 4f-h) (see Houston, Stuart and Robertson 1998 for this aspect of Maya orthography). As this head also alternates with that of God A in the context of the numeral “ten” (Figs.



*Continúa figura 4*

**Figure 4.** Representations of God A<sup>1</sup> and his Appellative Glyphs.

- a. Madrid page 72b (after Taube 1992: Fig. 2e)
- b. Dresden page 5b (after Taube 1992: Fig. 2f)
- c. God A<sup>1</sup> impersonator engaged in mock sacrifice, Altar de Sacrificios vase (after Taube 1992: Fig. 3b)
- d. God A<sup>1</sup> in act of self-decapitation (redrawn after Taube 1992: Fig. 2g)



e.



f.



g.



h.

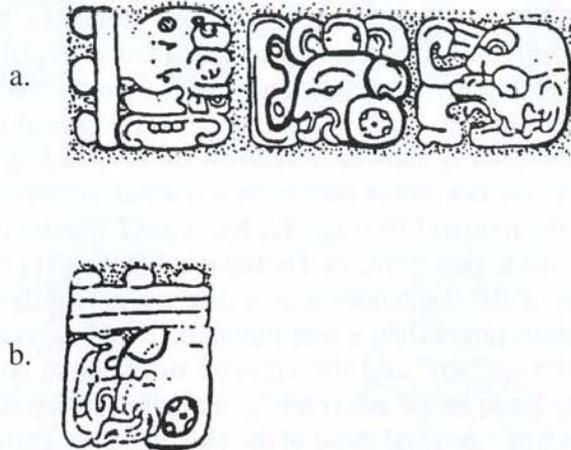
e. Early Classic God A<sup>1</sup> (after Taube 1992: Fig. 2h)

f-h. God A<sup>1</sup> appellative glyphs, Dresden page 5b, Naranjo Altar 1, Copan Temple 11 (drawings by Marc Zender).

5a-b), it clearly must—at least in such contexts—read either *laji'in* or *lajiin*, the Eastern Ch'olan word for “ten”.

*Laji'in* or *lajiin* is also a rendering of the verbal root *laj* “to end” or “to finish” and the agentive suffix *-Vn*, which refers to someone who habitually engages in the action of the verb. Hence, at least one of the names of God A<sup>1</sup> was *Laji'in* ~ *Lajiin*, “He who Ends/Finishes”. This is an appropriate appellative for a god whose head variant operates as the number “ten”, for once one reaches one’s tenth finger, the count has likewise ended. We should perhaps also note that, in other contexts where God A<sup>1</sup> is associated with alcoholic beverages and enemas, his name may also be read **AKAN** (Grube n.d.).

Images of God A<sup>1</sup> regularly associate him with violent death by sacrifice, as opposed to the contexts of putrefaction and decay wherein we find God A. God A<sup>1</sup> is depicted on many Late Classic vessels in the act of self-



**Figure 5.** Glyphic substitution in the Name of *Waxaklajin-U-B'aah-K'awil*, the 13th-ruler of Copan.

- a. **WAXAK-LAJIIN-na u-B'AAH-hi K'AWIIL**, Copan Temple 11 panels (redrawn after Schele and Looper 1996: 223).
- b. **WAXAKLAJIIN u-B'AAH-K'AWIIL**, Copan Stela B (redrawn after Schele and Looper 1996: 223).

decapitation (Fig. 4d). The associated text of one from the northern Petén reads **CH'AK-b'a LAJIIN-na u-WAY K'UH-cha-TAN-WINIK** *ch'ak-b'a[ah] Lajiin 'u-way k'uhul Chatan Winik*, or “*Lajiin*, the way of the Holy *Chatan* Man, head-chops” (see Boot n.d. for a convincing analysis of *Chatan* as an ethnic group from the area north of Lake Petén Itsá). The famous Altar de Sacrificios vase, likewise, depicts a God A<sup>1</sup> impersonator engaged in a theatrical display of this gruesome act (Fig. 4c). Even in the Post-Classic codices, God A<sup>1</sup>'s connection to sacrificial death is maintained. We see him on Madrid page 72b, for instance, trussed up with cordage like a captive destined for sacrifice (Fig. 4a).

These characteristics carry over into the deity first named by Thompson (1950: 131) as God Q, and interpreted by us as merely another aspect of God A<sup>1</sup>. God Q's primary diagnostic feature is a curved band passing from his forehead through his eye and down to his cheek (Figs. 6 e-h). He carries



similar bands of dots on his body (Fig. 6 e-g), and often wears the death-eye collars, bracelets and anklets of the God A complex. His name glyph is clearly a portrait that regularly takes **ni** phonetic complements and is often prefixed by the number “ten”. Sometimes, this numerical prefix is topped by a dot, but there are a number of reasons for not reading this compound as eleven: first, the dot never occurs in a normal numerical position, but always above the numeral 10 (Figs. 6a, b); second, the dot is not obligatory (Taube 1992: 105), and; third, as Thompson (1950: 131) has pointed out, clear drawings of the dot render it as a death-eye, and therefore simply a decorative feature rather than a true numeral. Taken together, the optional numerical prefix of “ten” and the optional **ni** phonetic complement both cue the reading *Lajin* or “he who ends”,<sup>2</sup> a reading which well explains the overlap between this god and those of the God A and A<sup>1</sup> complex (Schellhas 1904: 27). This said, the actions in which God Q is engaged have led Taube (1992: 105-112) to interpret him as a god of execution. Thus, he regularly wields hafted flint weapons and torches, and is sometimes shown dispatching other entities with them (Fig. 6h). Despite that he carries the same name as God A<sup>1</sup>, however depictions of God Q *never* show the self-decapitation which is the hallmark of God A<sup>1</sup>, nor the stinking vapors or skeletal features which characterize God A. He is thus a distinct avatar of God A<sup>1</sup>, though not distinct enough, apparently, to warrant a different name, title or epithet.

## God L

As early as 1904, Schellhas (1904: 34) was able to distinguish the deity he named God L from a number of similar looking entities in the Postclassic codices. The most common diagnostic features of the codical God L include black body coloration (Figs. 7b, 8, 14b), a chapfallen visage (Figs. 7, 9, 11, 17), and an accompanying owl either seated in his feathered headdress (Figs. 7-10, 14b, 17) or located somewhere in his immediate vicinity (Figs. 11, 14a,c). Secondary characteristics include a jaguar ear, jaguar pelâge

<sup>2</sup> The short vowel may be explained by Stuart, Houston and Robertson's (1998) model of Late Classic loss of long vowels. Since God Q was a postclassic deity who never turns up in the Classic Period, the absence of a long vowel is expected.



**Figure 6.** Representations of God Q and his Appellative Glyphs.

a-d. Appellative glyphs of God Q from the postclassic codices, Dresden page 6b, Dresden page 8c, Madrid page 84c, Paris page 8 (after Taube 1992: Figs. 53a-d).

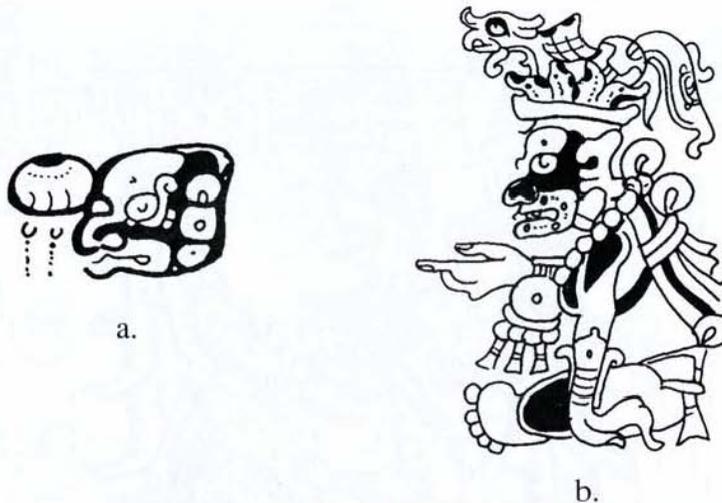
e. Dresden page 6b (after Taube 1992: Fig. 53e); f. Dresden page 10b (after Taube 1992: Fig. 53f); g. Madrid page 84c (after Taube 1992: Fig. 53g); h. Madrid page 50a (after Taube 1992: Fig. 53h)

around the mouth (Figs. 10, 11, 14c, 17), and a propensity for smoking large cigars (Figs. 10, 14b, 17).

Thompson (1950: 114-115) first noted the underworld associations of God L's attendant bird, and Michael Coe's (1973: 14; 1978: 16) brilliant studies of this deity have cemented these associations.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, God L is clearly enthroned in *Xib'alb'a* on at least one Classic polychrome ceramic: the Princeton vase (Fig. 9). Here, God L is surrounded by young women and courtiers in his palace beneath the earth, and looks on in amusement as the Hero Twins perform magical feats. He also seems to have been involved in both the destruction of the previous world by flood (Fig. 8) and the creation of the current world (Fig. 10). Numerous scenes also connect God L with merchants, as first noted by Thompson (1966), which explains God L's occasional merchants' walking stick (Fig. 11, 14c) and bundle (Figs. 10, 14a-b). It also explains his black colour in the codices and on occasional ceramics, since black is a colour often associated with merchants (Taube 1992: 88), who, at least among the Postclassic Aztec, regularly travelled at night amidst great secrecy. The Postclassic name glyph of God L (Fig. 7a) depicts a portrait glyph prefixed by a water sign from which rain-drops fall. This is most likely an allusion to the flood mentioned earlier (Fig. 8), though it is clear to us that this was not connected to God L's name in the Classic Period, as this glyph is absent from any texts antedating the Postclassic. However, there is another name glyph that occasionally appears in association with images of God L in the Classic period, and it is to this evidence that we shall now turn.

On the so-called "Vase of the Seven Gods", God L is seated on a jaguar-covered throne presiding over events on the Maya day of creation 13.0.0.0.0 4 Ahau 8 Cumku (Fig. 10). While most researchers have taken the seven anthropomorphic figures depicted on this vase to be the sole entities named by the associated glyphs, there remain some significant problems with this interpretation. For one thing, *eight* gods –not *seven*– are named in the

<sup>3</sup> It is, however, incorrect to refer to this entity as a *Muan* owl, a reading initiated by Thompson (1950: 114-115) and still followed by many scholars (cf. Taube 1992: 81-88). As Grube and Schele (1994) have reminded us, Thompson ignored Seler's (1904-1923: 609-616) demonstration of the clear distinctions between the screech owl and the Muan bird of the 15th month. God L's avian companion is a *kuy* or "owl", whereas the entirely unrelated month-name now read *Muwaahn* clearly depicts a "hawk" (Grube and Schele 1994: 11-12).



**Figure 7.** Representation of God L and his Appellative Glyph  
a. Portrait glyph of God L, Dresden page 14c (after Taube 1992: Fig. 38a)  
b. God L, Dresden page 14c (after Taube 1992: Fig. 38b)

accompanying captions. Moreover, the final deity name seems to have been shoved far up to the front of the text when the scribe presumably ran out of room; he even lacks his customary title **K'UH** *K'uh* “god”. Previous interpretations have failed to reconcile these problems with the clear depictions of only seven anthropomorphic deities. Our analysis, however, finds nine depicted gods on the surface of this pot rather than seven. Who are these two extra gods, and why have they not been previously noticed?

Above the enthroned God L is the entity first identified by Thompson (1970) as *Itzam-Kab'-Ayiin*, the “Caiman-Earth”. Moreover, on the top of God L’s head rests his owl companion, an entity that Selser (1904-23: 615) –citing the compound now read **UXLAJIIN-CHAN-NAL** *Uxlajiin Chanal* “13 Heavens” often attached to its head– long ago identified as the personification of the thirteen celestial realms. There are thus nine deities depicted, not seven, and this must still be reconciled with the presence of only eight deity-names in the associated text. Since we already know that the scribe ran out of space for the name and title of the 8th god, however, it is not unreasonable to consider that he or she may not also have left out the entire name of the 9th.



**Figure 8.** Dresden Codex “Flood” Scene, page 74 (after Villacorta and Villacorta 1977: 158)

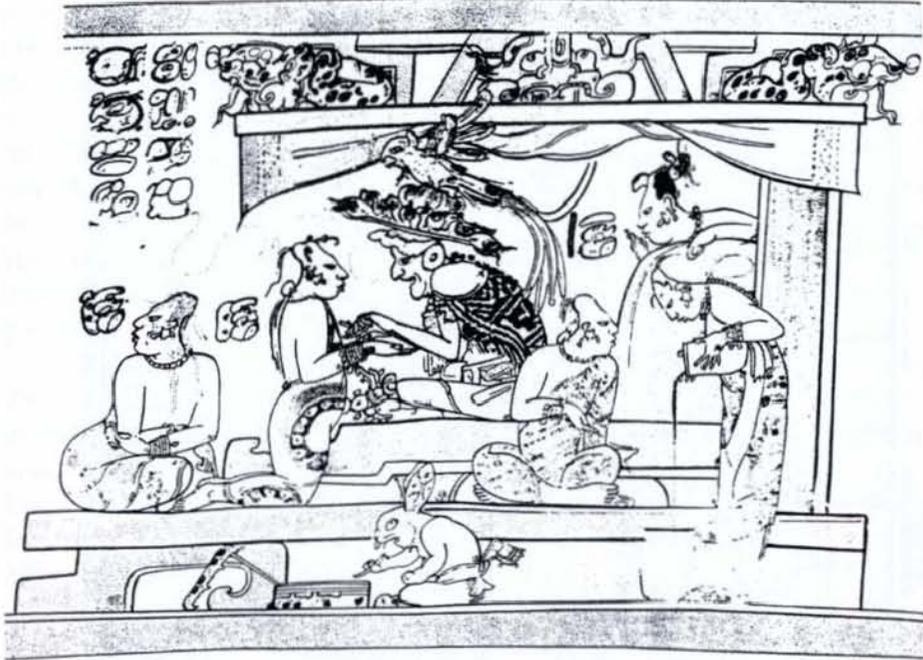
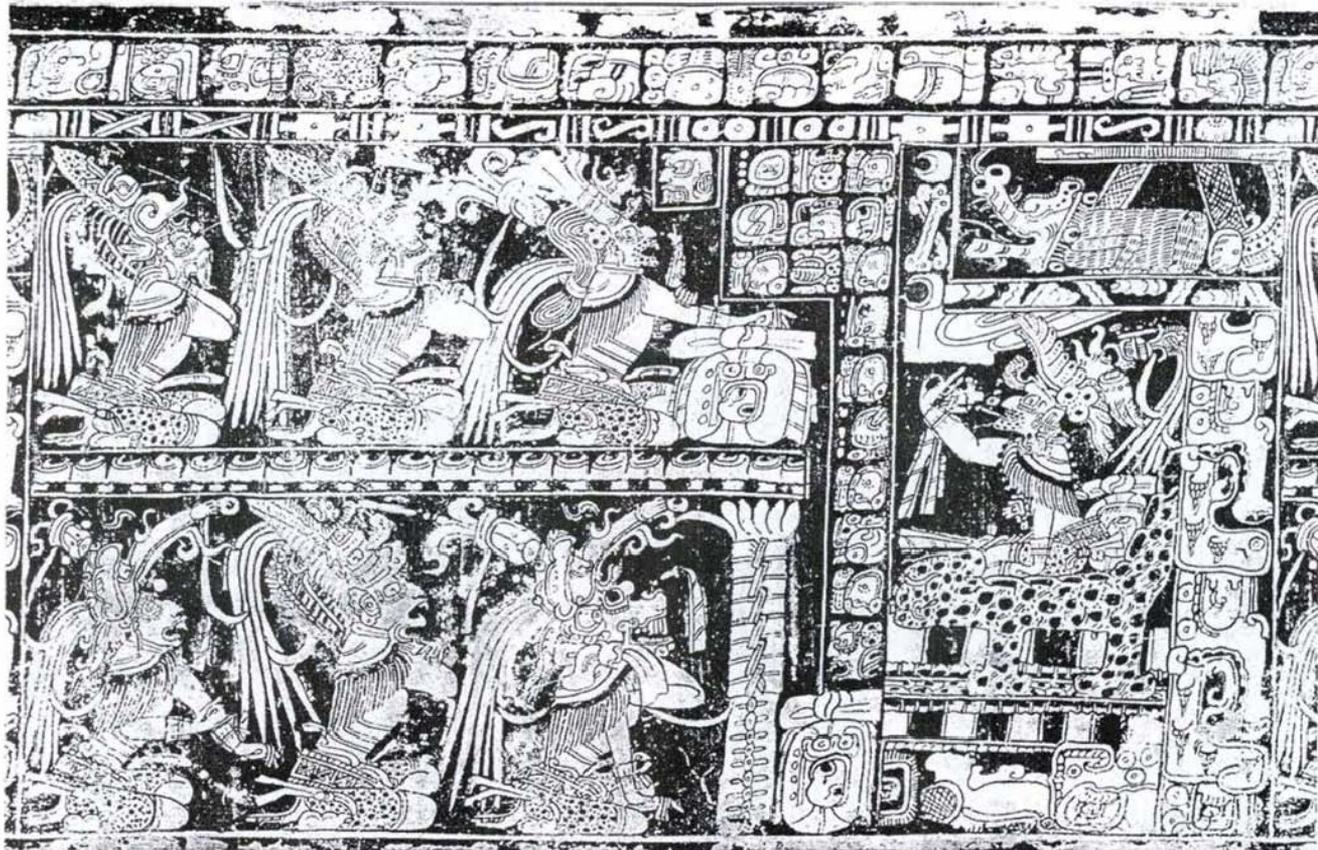


Figure 9. God L enthroned on the “Princeton Vase” (after Coe 1973: 92)

These considerations now make it possible to identify the name glyphs of all but one of the nine gods depicted on this vase. In our analysis, the first god is **‘IK’-‘AK’AB’-TAN-na** *Ik’-(Y)ak’ab’-Ta[h]n*, “Black His Dark Heart” or “Black is the darkness of the heart”. Given the iconographic associations on this vase –as well as the patterns inherent to the glyphs themselves– this can only refer to God L himself. We will return to this important consideration presently.

The second god is named **CHAN-na-NAL-la-K’UH** *Chanal-K’uh*, or “Heavenly God”, a clear reference to God L’ owl and its personification of the heavens. Next we have **KAB’-la-K’UH** *Kab’al-K’uh*, or “earthly god”, which we take to refer to Thompson’s *Itzam-Kab’-Ayiin*, the “Caiman Earth” (see Taube 1988b for a discussion of this deity and its frequent associations with earth imagery). Fourth, we have **B’OLON-OOK-TE’-K’UH** *B’olon-(Y)ook-Te’-K’uh*, or “Nine-Strides God” (cf. Thompson 1950: 56; 1966; 1970: 320), which most likely refers to the lower leftmost god (an interesting

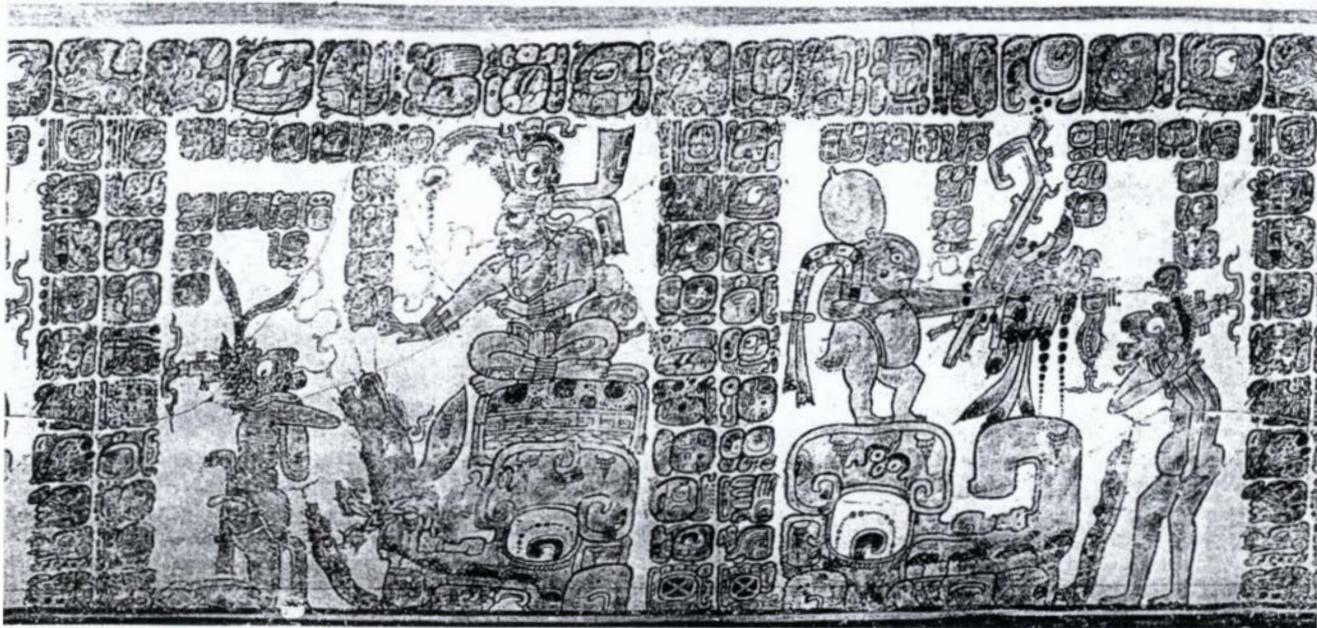


**Figure 10.** Vase of the Seven Gods (photograph © Justin Kerr 1985, K2796).

deity to whom we will likewise return). The next two signs comprise the still undeciphered “Palenque Triad” introductory glyph, and must refer to the lower central god. The remaining three names are all very easily attached to the depictions of the minor gods in front of God L. The glyph at C8, for instance, is to be read **JAW-wa-na-TE’-chi** *Jawan-Te’-Chi[j]* or “Deer with Mouth Agape”, and only the lower right god looks in the least deer-like. Similarly, the final two signs are clearly portrait-glyphs of the upper rightmost god, **B’ALAM** *B’a[h]lam* or “Jaguar”, and the god of “Pax” immediately behind him, named **TE’** *Te’* or “Tree”. The final upper leftmost god is unnamed.

This identification of God L as **‘IK’-’AK’AB’-TAN-na** *Ik’-(Y)ak’ab’-Ta[h]n*, “Black his Dark Heart” immediately calls to mind the occasional depiction of God L during the Classic period with **AK’AB’** or “darkness” signs painted across his midsection (see Kerr 1989: 98), and the frequent black body coloration accorded his depictions in the codices and elsewhere (e.g. Fig. 7, 8, 14b). Nor would such an epithet be at all misplaced for the Merchant Lord of the Underworld himself.

There are indications, however, that *Ik’-(Y)ak’ab’-Ta[h]n*, was not the only Lord of the Underworld; nor that his position and rank were unwavering. A series of narrative and quotative scenes on the famous “Regal Rabbit” vase (Fig. 11) lead us to the identification of the night-aspect of the Sun, *B’olon-(Y)ook-te’-K’uh*, and reveal the great enmity that existed between these deities. In the scenes depicted on this vase (Fig. 11), a whimsical rabbit steals the clothing and regalia of God L in one scene, and God L kneels in whining explanation of his misfortunes to the Night-Sun in another (Dütting and Johnson 1993; Stuart 1993: 170-171; Stuart et al. 1999: II; Taube 1992: 85-88). That this is the night aspect of the Sun is clear from the death-eyes affixed to his bizarre, smoking long-beaked headdress and the T504 **AK’AB’** “darkness” signs affixed to his headband (see also Dütting and Johnson 1993). Otherwise, he is clearly marked by T544 **K’IN** “sun” signs and has the shark-tooth and square-eyes diagnostic of the Maya “Sun God” (cf. Schellhas 1904: 27; Taube 1992: 50-56). A speech scroll exits the mouth of God L where he kneels before the Night Sun (Fig. 12) and he clearly refers to the rabbit and then states **’u-CH’AM-wa ni-yu-KUY ni-b’u-ku ni-pa-ta** *u-ch’am-aw-[ø] ni-kuy ni-b’uhk ni-pata[n]*, or “he took my owl, my clothes, and my tribute” (as first noted by Stuart 1993: 170). However, his complaints seem to fall on deaf ears,



**Figure 11.** The “Regal Rabbit” Vase (photograph © Justin Kerr 1980, K1398).

because the Sun God hides the little rabbit behind his left thigh, and thus seems to be complicit with the rabbit in the theft of God L's regalia.

It is clear both from the pose of the little rabbit, with paw outstretched and mouth open (Fig. 11), as well as from the vertical texts of the vase (Fig. 12) –that the rabbit is actually narrating this story for us in the long vertical texts framing each scene. After citing the date of this event –13 Ok 18 Wo– the rabbit clearly says: **T'U'UL ni-CH'AM-wa ni-KUY yi-ta B'OLON-OOK-TE'-K'UH** *ni-ch'am-aw-ø ni-kuy y-iit B'olon-[Y]ook-Te'-K'uh*, or “I Rabbit, the companion of B'olon-Ook-Te'-K'uuh, took my Owl”. Given that the rabbit is hiding behind the leg of the Night Sun, and that he seems to refer to himself as the companion of *B'olon-[Y]ook-Te'-K'uh*, it seems reasonable to assume that this might be the name of the Night Sun himself.<sup>4</sup>

The identification of *B'olon-[Y]ook-Te'-K'uh* as the Night Sun finds support on an unprovenanced stela from a private collection in New York city (Fig. 15a). The local ruler is dressed in a very similar garb to that of the Night Sun on the “Regal Rabbit” Vase. The hieroglyphs immediately associated with this figure (Fig. 15b) clearly state **'u-B'AAH-hi-A'AN B'OLON-OOK-TE'-K'UH** *u-b'aah-i[l] a'an B'olon-[Y]ook-Te'-K'uh*, or “he has become the image of *B'olon-[Y]ook-Te'-K'uh*”. Perhaps even more convincing, however, are two reoccurrences of the same date of the event on the “Regal Rabbit” vase –2 Ok 18 Wo– on the Tablet of Temple XIV at Palenque (Fig. 16). Here, *B'olon-Ook-Te'-K'uh* is said to have performed an undeciphered action upon the *way*, or “animal companion” of *K'awiil* at the same underworld location mentioned on the “Regal Rabbit” vase. More importantly, a young *Kan-B'ahlam II* is clearly depicted in the costume of the Night Sun, complete with the “Smoking **K'IN**” sign in his headdress.<sup>5</sup> He dances at the edge of a pool of water above the selfsame toponyms mentioned in the events on the “Rabbit Vase” (as first noted by Dütting and Johnson 1993: 182). Presumably, then, *Kan-B'ahlam II* here takes on the persona of the Night Sun, defeating the power of the lords of

<sup>4</sup> Could the Night Sun, in having arranged or at least supported the theft of God L's regalia, be asserting his control over Xib'alb'a throughout the night?

<sup>5</sup> While Schele (1988) and Gillespie and Joyce (1998: 289) have seen this event as involving 2 deceased actors, we follow Bassie (1991: 223-228) in seeing this as a pre-accession event of *Kan-B'ahlam II*.

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**Figure 12.** God L's complaint (from a photograph © Justin Kerr 1980, K1398).

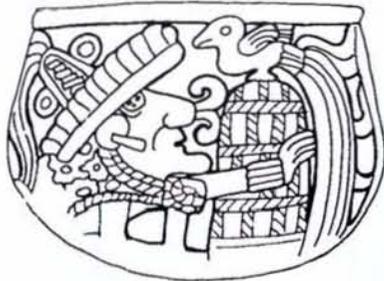


**A**



**B**

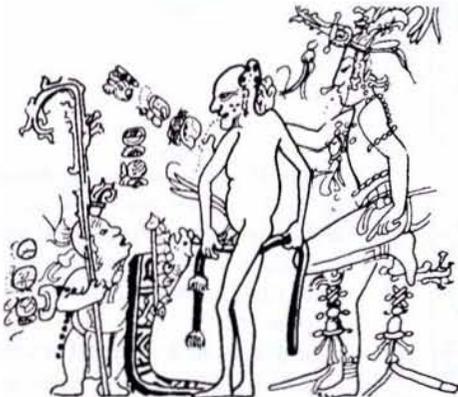
**Figure 13.** The Rabbit's Narration (from a photograph © Justin Kerr 1980, K1398).



a.



b.



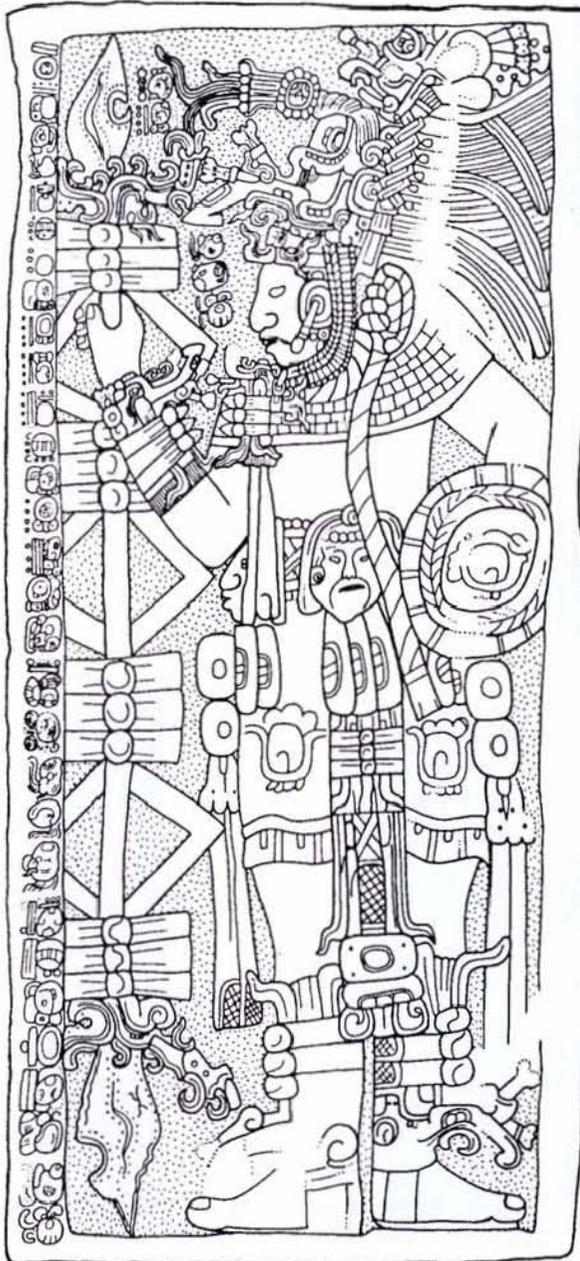
c.

**Figure 14.** God L as a “Merchant” Lord.

a. after Taube 1992: Fig. 40c

b. after Taube 1992: Fig. 40e

c. after Taube 1992: Fig. 39a



a.



b.

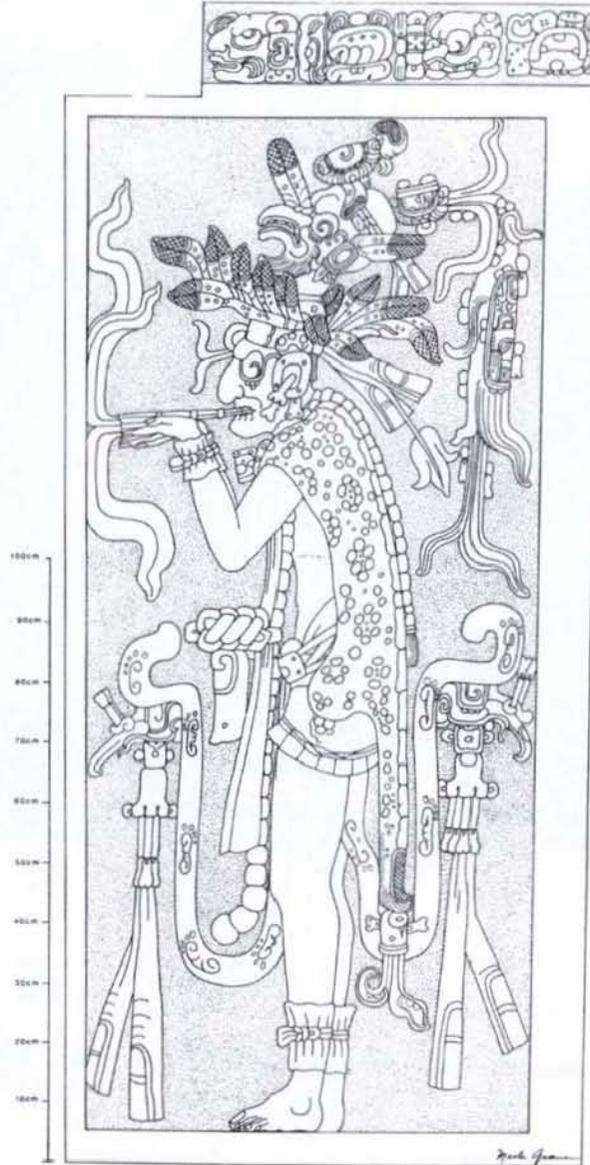
**Figure 15.** An unknown ruler dressed as the God *B'olon-(Y)ook-Te'-K'uh*.

- a. Unprovenanced stela in a private collection, New York City (drawing by Christian Prager, after Mayer 1995: plate 104).
- b. **u-B'AAH-hi-A'AN B'OLON-OOK-TE'-K'UH** (drawing by the author after a photograph supplied by Justin Kerr).



**Figure 16.** The Temple XIV Tablet (drawing by Merle Greene Robertson, Robertson 1991: Fig. 176)

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**Figure 17.** Temple of the Cross, East Jamb (drawing by Merle Greene Robertson, Robertson 1991: Fig. 43)

*Xib'alb'a*. The name *B'olon-[Y]ook-Te'-K'uh* appears no less than six times at Palenque (twice on the Temple XIV Tablet, one the West Tablet of the Temple of the Inscriptions, on the House C Stairs, on the East Eaves of House C, and on Pier F of House D), and thus his identity as the Night Sun and as an important Palenque patron deity seems firm (see also Kelley 1976: 73). In this light, the appearance of God L on the East Jamb of the sanctuary of the Temple of the Cross at Palenque (Fig. 17), where he faces an older *Kan-B'ahlam II*, may refer to an ongoing affiliation of *Kan-B'ahlam II* with the God of the Night Sun, *B'olon-[Y]ook-Te'-K'uh*. This helps to motivate somewhat the Palencanos' adoption of this deity as a local patron.

J. Eric S. Thompson (1970: 320), analyzing the *Chilam Balams*, first suggested that the name *B'olon-[Y]ook-Te'-K'uh* should read “He of Nine Strides”, which he connected with merchants and travelers. With the knowledge that the name refers to the nightly aspect of the sun, however, we can perhaps expand the scope of this reference to refer to the nine layers of the Underworld over which the Night Sun may have ruled. Merchants traveling by night would only naturally come to feel an affinity between the Underworld Gods and themselves (Thompson 1966). Moreover, as a number of scholars have noted (Schele, Freidel and Parker 1993; Tedlock 1985), *Xib'alb'a* can itself be identified with the night sky, and who better to invoke for safety in a long night-time journey than the Underworld Lord who reigns during the hours of darkness? However, it now seems clear that the *real* night-time lord of this shadowy realm was none other than the Sun God himself. In his nightly aspect of *B'olon-[Y]ook-Te'-K'uh*, the Sun God took the crown of office otherwise held by *Ik'-(Y)ak'ab'-Ta[h]n*, God L, and assured all of humanity that the darkened roads of the earth were now safe for travelers who made the proper propitiations.

## Conclusions

This paper has utilized recent decipherments of Mayan art and writing as a heuristic mosquito by which to read the names of the lords of *Xib'alb'a*.

God A's primary name seems to have been *Aj-Ma'as*, “He the Hobgoblin” or “He of Fright”, and he has been shown to have at least two aspects: the first, a diseased stinking corpse often referred to as *Xinil* or *Kisin*, seems to have represented death by bodily decay; the second, occasionally named



*Lajiin* and *Aj-Ma'as* seems to have been a lord of death proper, and to have been similar in many respects to the Highland Mexican *Mictlantecuhtli*. God A<sup>1</sup>, who we can now identify as either *Lajiin* or *Akan*, has been demonstrated to be a god of self-sacrifice by decapitation, and the cult of his Postclassic alter-ego *Lajiin*, or God Q, seems to have been largely concerned with execution. These specific facets of death revealed in the names and imagery of Gods A, A<sup>1</sup> and Q reveal something of the concerns that the ancient Maya must have had for the afterlife, and of their respective place within it should they die one or more of the gruesome deaths embodied in the persons of these varied deities. God L, long known to have been the primary lord of *Xib'alb'a* and one of the deities of creation, can now be called by the name *Ik'-(Y)ak'ab'-Ta[h]n* “Black is His Dark Heart”. He was known by this epithet throughout the Classic Period, though he would much later be associated with the destruction of the previous creation by flood under a different, still elusive *cognomen*. An important and widespread god, his images are found as far away as Cacaxtla (where he was associated with the calendrical name “4 Dog”) and he was an especial enemy of one of Palenque’s patron deities, *B'olon-(Y)ook-Te'-K'uh*, the night-aspect of the Sun God, who reigned in *Xib'alb'a* from dusk until dawn. The transience of night and day, then, was reflected in the transient status of God L in his Underworld lair. The periodic triumphs of the Night Sun and his rabbit familiar, moreover, were themselves models and metaphors seized upon by at least one king – *Kan-B'ahlam II* of Palenque – as the mythic backdrop for the tale of his own heir designation ceremonials and eventual crowning as the king of his city.

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