Figure 1. Agedness as a divine attribute in Maya art. Stucco sculpture from Tonina, Mexico. Photo: Javier Hinojosa.

The Old Man of the Maya Universe: A Unitary Dimension to Ancient Maya Religion

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The ancient Maya have left behind a dazzling array of religious expressions. Whether in art or writing, or in interactions between the two, each sought to turn the transcendent into the tangible, the invisible into the visible. Although representations of the supernatural are usually no more than surrogates—pointers that connect believers with mindscapes of infinitely greater abstraction—they are the products of symbolic systems and therefore subject to their rules, codes, and conventions. Using a range of iconographic and epigraphic approaches we can hope to understand those systems and retrace the one-time relationships between images, words, and artifacts on the one hand and the concepts that they were meant to convey on the other. We are fortunate that help comes from later literary sources, in the shape of accounts of Maya beliefs made under Spanish colonial rule of the sixteenth century and later. Fragments from a culture undergoing profound transformation, these offer us a tenuous but precious bridge between the Prehispanic and modern worlds.

Representations of the natural world are based on iconicity, which is to say likeness grounded in the shared principles of sight. Since the supernatural domain has no material basis it can only be represented on a symbolic level. Symbolism has two major branches: one consisting of arbitrary signs and another that enlists the power of metaphor. In both cases meaning must be agreed by convention, but metaphors differ in that they co-opt pre-existing objects or ideas and imbue them with new significances. To distinguish this extraordinary meaning from its ordinary model it is usually necessary to mark it in some way, appending special identifying signs or setting it in some revealing context. Efforts to capture the otherworldliness of the numinous are often drawn to the transgressive and counter-intuitive, a "calculated strangeness" that distances the metaphysical from physical. Yet no matter how fantastic the resulting forms might be, they are never spontaneous ad hoc creations but the realizations of existing formulae and templates.

Images of the human body form a particular category of religious metaphors, archetypes that draw on our collective understanding of physical and mental properties.[1] Anthropomorphism is always far more than a pictorial mode; it encompasses the whole process by which nonhuman agents are ascribed personalities possessing complex thoughts, emotions, and motivations (Guthrie 1993; Boyer 2001:161-164) and engages them in humanlike social worlds. Here it stands apart from zoomorphism and the symbolism of the beast, which, however humanlike its attributes, always evokes something alien and

[1] See Houston et al. 2006 for a comprehensive study of the body in Maya art and culture.

outside of ourselves.

The idealized forms of many Maya gods, ever young and beautiful, can be read as expressions of their vitality and potency as supernatural agents. But there are other bodily codes, not least the sharply contrasting one of divine decrepitude (Figure 1). Gods whose timeworn flesh hangs over near-cadaverous frames convey a different kind of message, one in which outward deterioration signals not so much decline as a shift in power from the body to the mind. Where there was once athleticism there is now acumen, where strength there is sorcery. This paper focuses on the most notable figure of this type, the wizened character traditionally known as God N. Emerging evidence suggests that he had a more profound role in ancient Maya religion than hitherto realized. The initial sections of this study describe four of the major contexts in which he appears, followed by a summary of the relevant epigraphic data, and then a wider discussion of the implications arising.[2]

[2] The core ideas in this paper have been presented in several symposia (Martin 2006c, 2006d, 2007b) and a written version was circulated to colleagues in 2007.

Figure 2. Portrait of God N with his diagnostic net headscarf knotted at the brow. Unprovenanced shell. Photo K3245 © Justin Kerr.

1. The World Atlanteans

The archetypal God N is an old man with a large nose and almond-shaped eyes, his wrinkled and chap-fallen face matched by a correspondingly wasted and sagging body (Schellhas 1904:37-38; Thompson 1970a; Coe 1973:14-15; Hellmuth 1987a:371-372; Taube 1992b:92-99; Bassie-Sweet 2008:132-139). On occasion he sports a wispy beard, although this is common only in the later portraits. His clothing is humble, usually restricted to a loincloth and a cut shell strung on a necklace, with his most distinctive attire a net headscarf knotted at the brow (Figure 2). Among the most common forms of God N are those that occupy turtle carapaces and mollusk shells, though he occasionally appears within spider webs or fitted with the wings of a bat (Figure 3). He is often depicted in quadripartite form, an organization used throughout Mesoamerica to signal an alignment to the four cardinal directions. Scenes that show these old men with arms raised above their heads persuaded J. Eric S. Thompson (1970a, 1970b:276-280) that they are
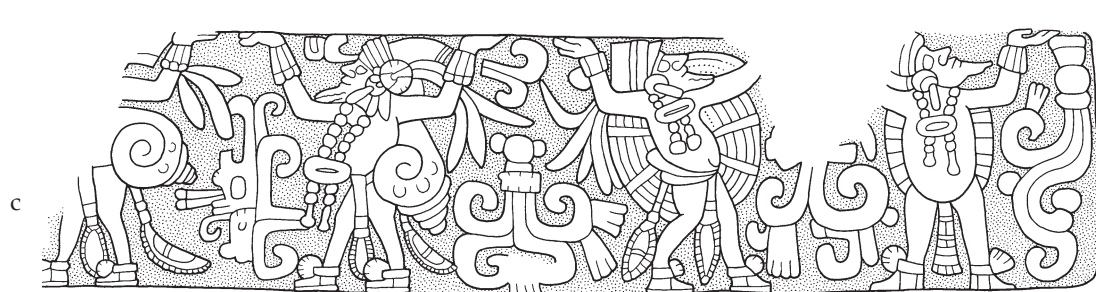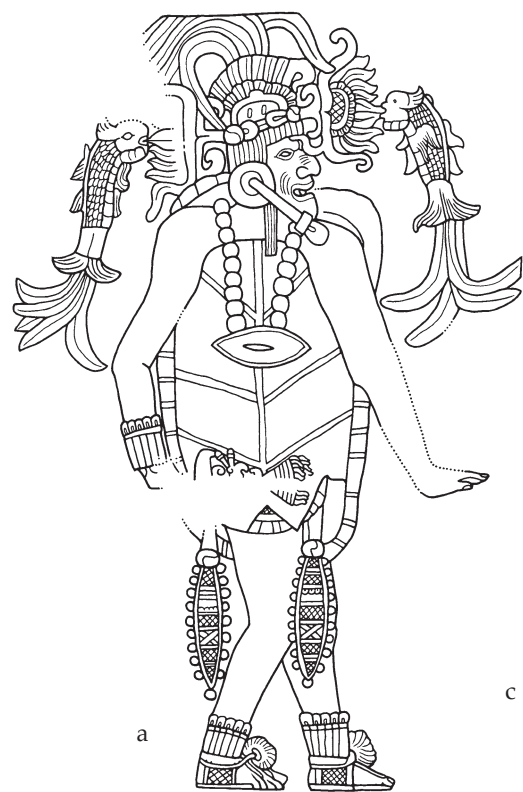
Figure 3. Varieties of God N and their role as quadripartite world-bearers: (a) Southeast Corner Column, Lower Temple of the Jaguars, Chichen Itza (drawing by Linda Schele); (b) detail from an unprovenanced vessel (after a photo in Coe 1973:124); (c) West Serpent Column, El Castillo, Chichen Itza (after a rubbing by Merle Greene Robertson). All drawings by the author unless otherwise stated.
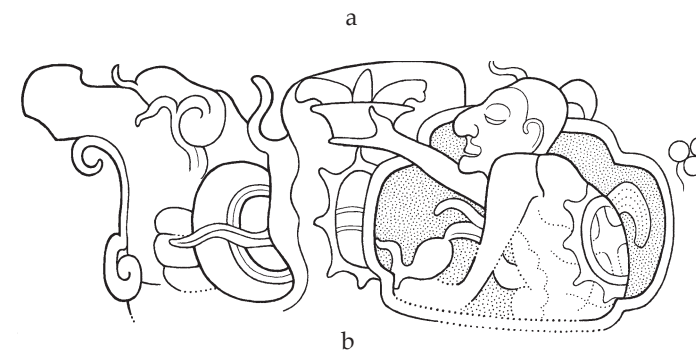
a

b

Figure 4. God N and world-bearing mountains on Tikal Altar 4: (a) photograph by William R. Coe; (b) detail of the turtle-backed God N within a cave.

the sky-bearing Atlanteans described by early colonial writers such as Diego de Landa (Tozzer 1941:135-136):

> Among the multitude of gods which this people worshipped, they adored four, each one of whom was named Bacab. These were four brothers, they said, whom God placed at the four quarters of the world when he created it, supporting the sky so that it should not fall… They give to each of them other names, and with these indicate in what quarter of the world God has placed him, holding up the sky, and they appropriate one of the four year-bearers to him… (Landa, translation in Thompson 1970b:276)

In Maya iconology the heavens are represented by a "skyband"—a string of celestial emblems including those for the sun, moon, and stars—or else by a great crocodilian monster. Such a beast encircles the top of Tikal Altar 4, whose sides show four personified mountains on which it rests, each perforated by a cave within which we see a seated, carapace-backed God N (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:Fig. 58) (Figure 4). This long-lived quadripartite concept reappears in the four stone figurines of God N in his turtle guise excavated inside Mayapan Structure H-17, carved as much as a thousand years later (Thompson 1955:282; Proskouriakoff 1962:Fig. 2a-c). The old god's association with cosmic mountains is emphasized again at Chichen Itza, where he is shown rising, arms aloft, from their summits (Taube 1992b:94, Fig. 48a). More commonly, his skin is emblazoned with rocky motifs, establishing his role as a pillar and cornerstone of the world (Figure 5).

The world-bearing concept found its way into architectural representations and political metaphors. Structures designed as cosmic models show God N as a roof support at each visible corner—something we see in both depictions of buildings and as fully formed monumental sculptures (Tozzer 1957:Figs.195, 196, 615; Schele and Miller
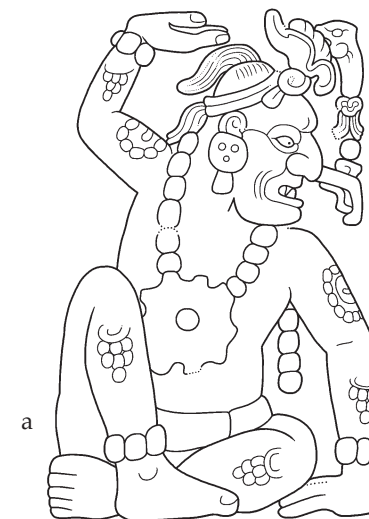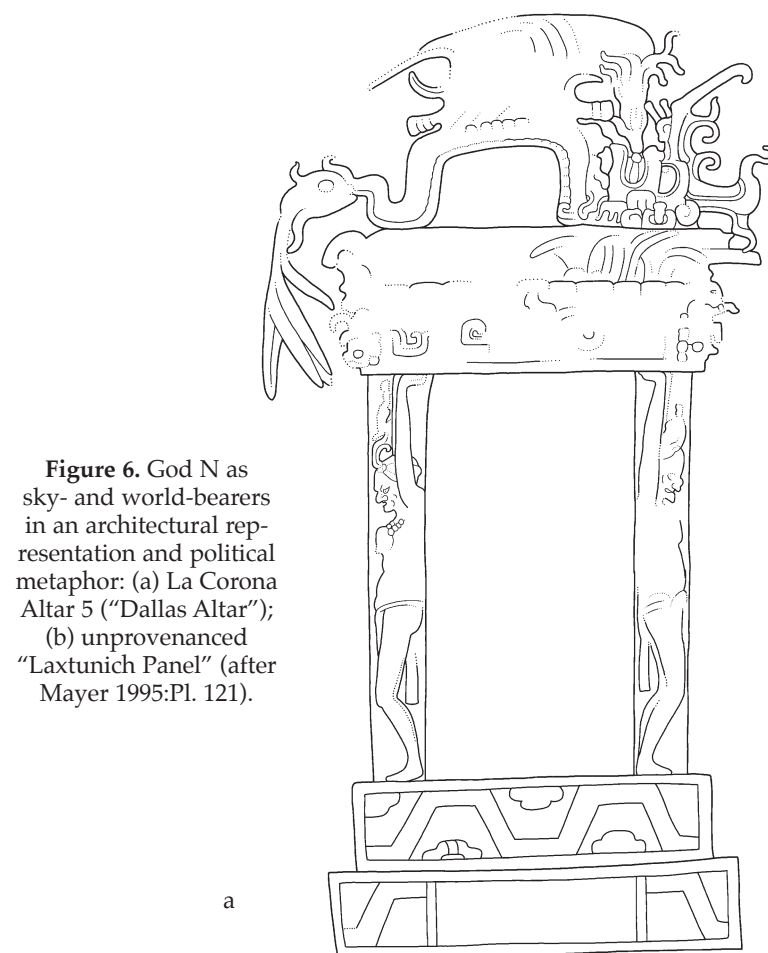
a

b

Figure 5. God N as cosmic cornerstones: (a) Copan Sepulturas bench support; (b) detail from unprovenanced vessel K1485 (after Robicsek and Hales 1982:19).

Figure 6. God N as sky- and world-bearers in an architectural representation and political metaphor: (a) La Corona Altar 5 ("Dallas Altar"); (b) unprovenanced "Laxtunich Panel" (after Mayer 1995:Pl. 121).
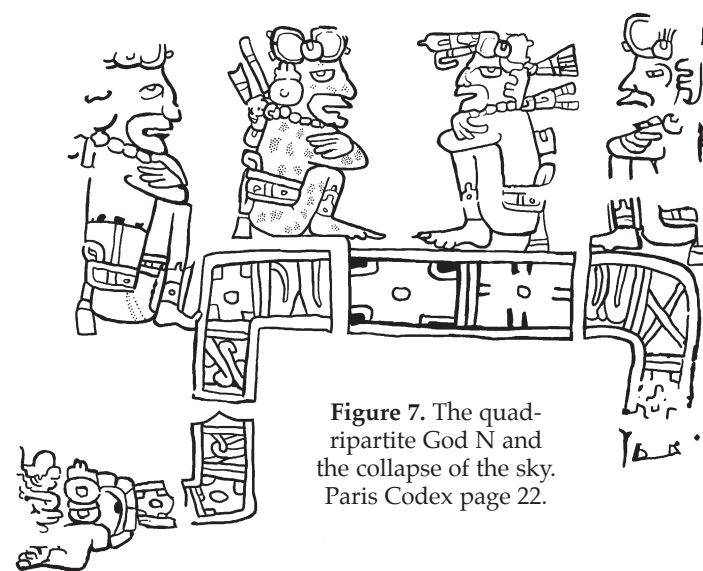

Figure 7. The quadripartite God N and the collapse of the sky. Paris Codex page 22.

1986:122; Mayer 1989:Pl. 96; Houston 1998:352-355) (Figures 6a and 48). By extension, the duty a subordinate lord owed to his master was thought to mirror the responsibility of a heavenly bearer. Accordingly, vassals identified as God N impersonators in their glyphic captions are shown holding their suzerains aloft on sky-monster thrones (Taube 1988:198; Houston 1998:355-356) (Figure 6b).[3]

Colonial-era accounts not only describe how the bearers made mortal life possible by separating sky from earth, they also tell how they destroyed the previous world by allowing the heavens to fall (Roys 1933:99-100). A scene in the Paris Codex from the Postclassic period (900–c.1542), previously taken to be an image of world creation (Freidel et al. 1993:100) or a map of the spirit world (Love 1994:82-83), likely depicts this catastrophe (Martin 2005b) (Figure 7). It appears on a page introducing the New Year—a position filled with scenes of world flood and eclipses in comparable sections of the similarly dated Madrid and Dresden codices—where we see the four aged bearers, identified by their knotted headscarves. They sit in an anomalous position, not beneath the skyband but above it, with their arms folded in poses of pointed

[3] The example illustrated here has the masks of three personified stones set along its body, as if they form a sheath through which the skyband-bodied monster passes. This may serve to indicate a sky-earth fusion (of which more later) and stress that these supporters are comparable to the "sky-earth bearers" described by several contemporary Maya communities (see Taube 1992b:94; also Holland 1963:92; Gossen 1974:22; Vogt 1976:13).
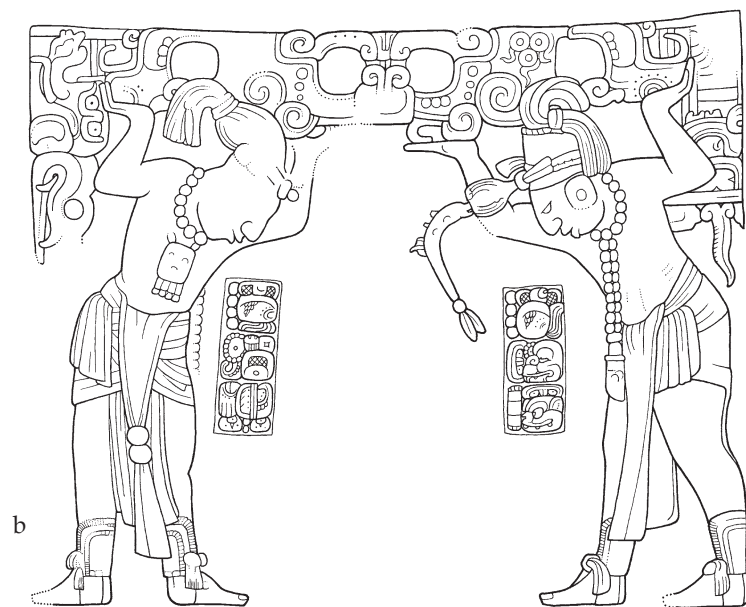

Figure 8. Representations of God N as the Earth Turtle: (a) unprovenanced plate (Robicsek and Hales 1981:Fig. 57); (b) detail from an unprovenanced plate (Robicsek and Hales 1981:91) (K1892); (c) Dresden Codex page 37a.

inactivity. The blood-red scene around them is dominated by giant snakes—specified by attached hieroglyphs as the agents of eclipses—which bear death gods in their mouths.

God N's links to water are just as strong as those with stone. His net headscarf can be replaced or combined with a tied water lily leaf or its flower, often nibbled by a fish (Figures 3a, 5a, 5b, 6b, 9a). This evidently alludes to a conflation with the Water Lily Serpent, occasionally made explicit by an added feathered crest on his back (Figure 4) or an elongated snout or beak (Figure 5a) (compare to Hellmuth 1987a:Figs. 321, 322). This aquatic dimension makes reference to the great primeval pool in which the God N turtle swims. The latter is considered both the center of a five-point quincunx and the quartet of turtles united as one, thereby constituting some central focus or fulcrum for the world. It is from a fissure in its back that the Maize God emerges to symbolize the sprouting of corn (Figure 8a). In this, he breaks through the hieroglyph for *k'an*, generally understood as "yellow, precious, ripe," but also a reference to fecundity more generally and here an emblem of centrality as well.[4] The head of God N often emerges from the front of the shell, either alone or from within the turtle's mouth, although

the turtle wearing the net headscarf marks his presence just as well (Figure 8b). This substitution is important, since we might otherwise read the "disgorgement" of the aged man as an act of mythic emergence. Instead, the head-in-mouth device does no more here than indicate that the two entities are in some way conjoined and is equivalent to more fully anthropomorphic versions (Figure 8c).

Landa's description of the four Bacabs finds further purchase in David Stuart's work on a panel from Pomona, Mexico (2004a:4) (Figure 9a). Now fragmentary, it originally showed four figures adorned with water lily headbands, named in their captions as more lordly impersonators of the

[4] The male version of the Central Mexican earth monster, Tlalteotl, bears the symbol for *xihuitl* "turquoise/year"—a design that closely resembles the Maya *k'an* sign—on his back or midriff (see Taube 2000:312-313). This contrasts with the *chalchihuitl* "jade/precious stone" symbol borne by the female version, from which deities are born (Nicholson 1967a:82). The idea of centrality in the Maya form is emphasized in one example, shown as Figure 15c in this study, where the normal *k'an* marking is replaced by a quincunx (in side view)—a design that represents the world axis surrounded by the four directions.

Figure 9. God N and the Maya Year: (a) Pomona Panel 1 (after a photo by Carlos Pallan); (b) Dresden Codex page 48a (together with substituting name glyphs); (c) Palenque Tablet of the 96 Glyphs, D1a.
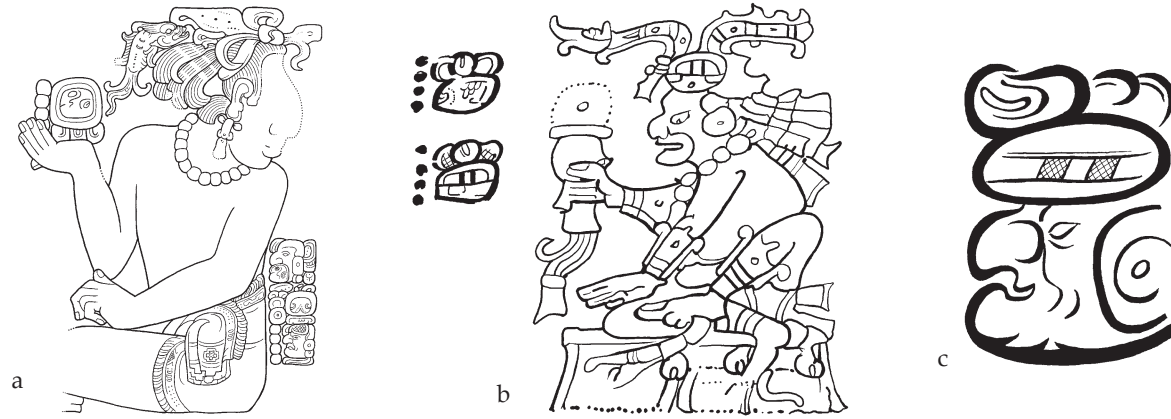
aged cornerstones. Each holds a hieroglyphic day sign and its coefficient, representing one of the four days of the 260-day ritual calendar on which the *haab/ha'b* or 365-day "vague year" can begin—making them direct analogs to the year-bearers described by Landa. God N's intimate relationship to the Maya year is no plainer than when he wears the hieroglyph for this period atop his head (Figure 9b, c). Time itself was one of his burdens.

To recapitulate, thus far we have seen God N representing the earth's center as well as sky- and year-bearers in cardinally aligned, quadripartite form, all of which are linked to primeval waters and to the rock from which cosmic cornerstones are made. The following sections will take us beyond this terrestrial domain to show how the Old Man (a nickname we will use outside these contexts) appears in other parts of the Maya universe.

2. Crocodiles Above and Below Us

We will turn next to the Cosmic Monster, a term that actually encompasses two separate beasts, both based on a fantastic crocodile. Each is associated with a complex array of motifs

Figure 10. Contrasting crocodiles on a pair of shell earflares: (a) Earth Crocodile; (b) Sky Crocodile. Photo K7544 © Justin Kerr.

and body forms, at times combined in ways that defy easy separation. A pair of unprovenanced ear ornaments of cut shell—likely dating to the Early Classic period (250–600 CE)—neatly illustrates the contrasting versions: one associated with the earth (Figure 10a), the other with the sky (Figure 10b).[5]

The heavenly version has been discussed under half a dozen or more nicknames, including the Sky Monster, Celestial Dragon, and Starry-Deer Crocodile (Spinden 1913:53-56; Thompson 1970b:216-224; Stone 1985:39-48; Freidel et al. 1993:90-91; Milbrath 1999:275-282; Velásquez García 2002:419-432, 2006; Stuart 2003, 2005c:70-75) (Figure 11). Its body often takes the form of the aforementioned skyband (Figure 12a), and in the Classic period (250–900 CE) its eyes usually consist of star symbols, half-obscured by heavy lids (Figure 13b). Rare examples sport deer antlers but more regularly show the same animal's long ears—themselves marked by stars. More stars can be attached to its body, at times defining the spiny ridge of its back. A bivalve shell, of the kind associated with the rain deity Chahk, can be worn behind its cheeks. Its legs end in hooves, often inset with one or more polished celts, while its joints are marked by a curled motif associated with water. A stream of liquid can flow from the mouth, often containing the same jewel-like motifs dispensed in royal "scattering" ceremonies. In the Dresden Codex this outpouring represents a world-destroying flood (Figure 12b), while on carved monuments it can be crosshatched to indicate a dark color—reminding one of blood or the resinous rain that ends the third creation in the Colonial period Popol Vuh epic of the K'iche' Maya (Tedlock 1996:71; Christenson 2003:87). Where we would expect to see a tail we often find another head, this one skeletal and inverted. This is the personified base of a "sun"-marked vessel

[5] This object is designated as K7544 in the Justin Kerr photographic archive, in this case in the Portfolio section accessible at research.mayavase.com/kerrportfolio.
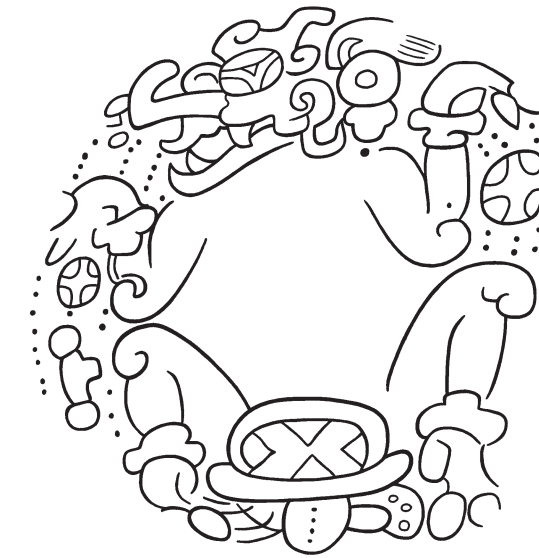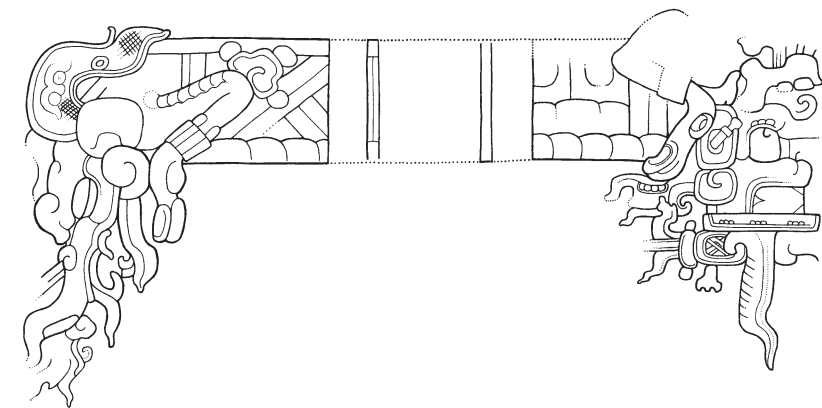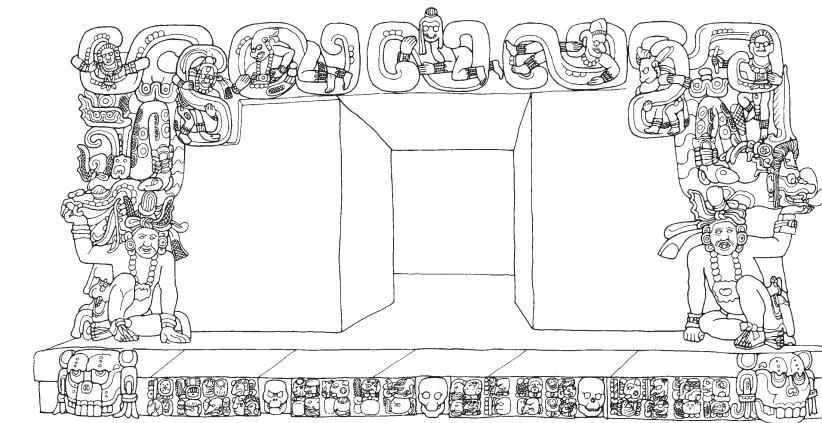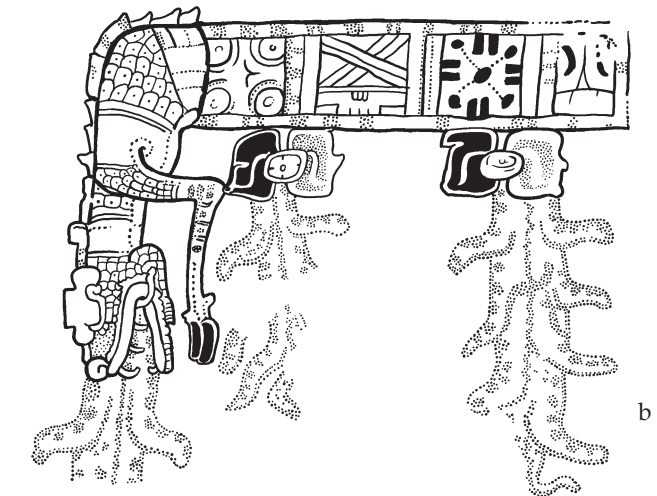

Figure 11. Cosmic Monster of the Sky on an unprovenanced jade earflare. Photo K3166 © Justin Kerr.

Figure 12. Cosmic Monster of the Sky: (a) Piedras Negras Stela 11 (drawing by David Stuart, Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions, Peabody Museum, Trustees of Harvard University); (b) Dresden Codex page 74; (c) Copan Temple 22 interior sculpture (drawing by Linda Schele).
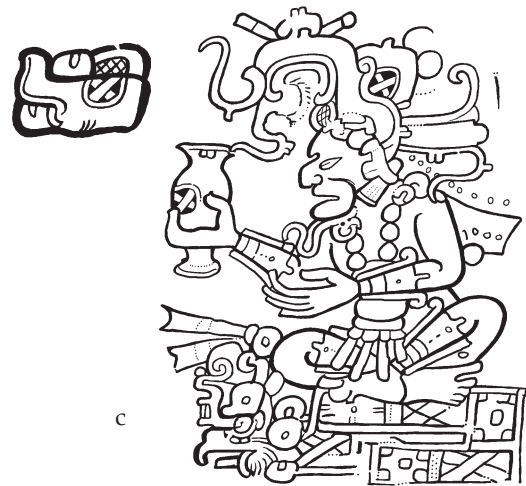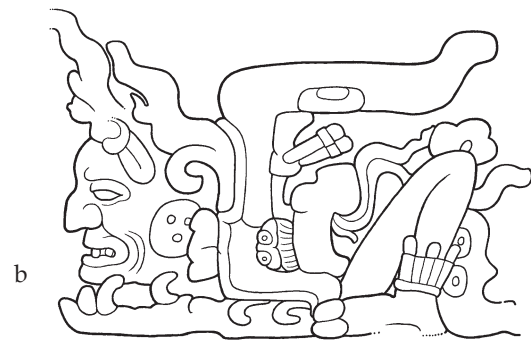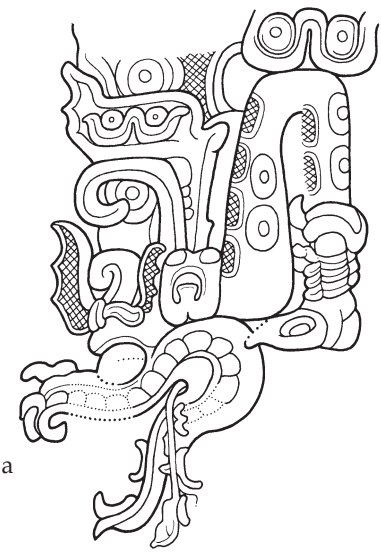
Figure 14. Cosmic Monster of the Earth carved in shell. Photo K8750 © Justin Kerr.

Figure 15. The Earth Monster of Quirigua Zoomorph P: (a) frontal view, after Maudslay 1889-1902:2:Pl. 58c; (b) top view, after Maudslay 1889-1902:2:Pl. 58b; (c) hieroglyphic name in Panels C and D, after Maudslay 1889-1902:2:Pl. 63c, d.

containing a stingray spine, shell, and pectoral jewel—items collectively known as the Quadripartite Badge (Robertson 1974). This sacrificial bowl or brazier is strongly associated with the east and the rising sun (Stone 1985:48; Stuart 2005c:167-168), and in one recent analysis is thought to symbolize a womb entrance (Taube 2009:99-106).

Recurring stellar motifs plainly suggest a creature of the night. Its head, or even just its half-closed starry eye, can take the place of the regular star sign in Lamat, the eighth day of the ritual Maya calendar (Figure 30a). A more specific identification emerges from Copan, Honduras, where a sculpted frieze inside Structure 22 shows its body—suitably supported by a pair of elderly bearers complete with net headscarves and stone motifs—composed of the kind of S-shaped scrolls that elsewhere represent clouds, suggesting that it depicts the great "cloudy" arc of the Milky Way (Stuart 1984:15-16, 2003; Houston and Stuart [1990]1992; Freidel et al. 1993:Fig. 2:20) (Figure 12c). In modern times the Ch'orti' Maya have described the sky as a great inverted ocean (Girard 1952:27), and one might credibly see the silvery ribbon of the night as the sinuous body of a floating crocodile.[6]

Most importantly for our purposes, the sky monster commonly wears the net headscarf (Stone 1985:39, 46) (Figure 13a) or has the head of the Old Man emerging from its jaws (Figure 13b). Another variant from the Dresden Codex shows a full-bodied old god seated on a skyband throne, his net headscarf peeking from beneath a saurian headdress (Figure 13c). His corresponding name glyph combines the head of a crocodile with the headscarf—the latter standing as a *pars pro toto* device for the Old Man as it does in art.

The earthly counterpart of the sky crocodile shares its basic anatomy but differs in several respects. This second creature serves as a Maya metaphor for the material

Figure 13. Sky Monsters conjoined with the Old Man: (a) interior frieze from Copan Structure 22; (b) Copan Structure 9N-82 Bench (detail of far left side); (c) Dresden Codex page 46a.

[6] Following Spinden (1928:23), another scholarly tradition characterizes the beast as a "Venus Monster," whose starry eye represents this planet (one native term for Venus is Ah Noh Ich "Great Eye"; Joyce et al. 1927:317). Other interpreters have seen the motion of Venus in the crocodile's form (Closs et al. 1984), or the solar pathway of the ecliptic (Velásquez García 2002)—a view consistent with its association with the eastern dawn. The descent of Venus in the wake of the setting sun is further viewed as the monster's pursuit and ultimate devouring of the solar disk, filling the sky with darkness (Schele and Miller 1985:45; Ignacio Cases, personal communication 2007).
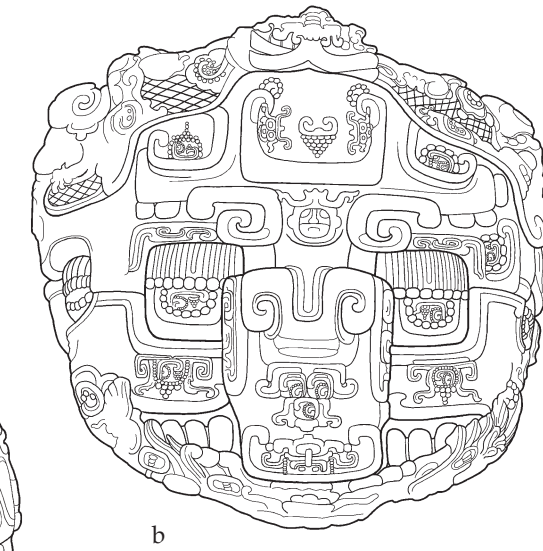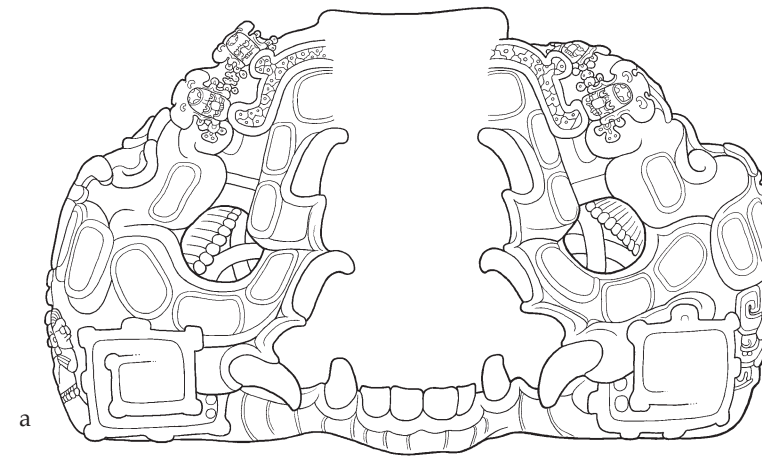
body of the earth, equivalent to Cipactli and Tlalteotl, monsters that play very similar roles in the mythology of Central Mexico (Martínez Hernández 1913:165-166; Hellmuth 1987a:276-277; Taube 1989a, 1992b:128-131). In one Central Mexican legend, creator gods transform the part-fish, part-crocodile Cipactli into Tlalteotl, while in another they slay Tlalteotl to make its body into the first land (Garibay 1965:26, 108).[7] The Maya of Colonial-era Yucatan called this creature Itzam Cab Ain (*itzam kab ahiin*) or "Itzam Earth Crocodile." It takes a prominent role in the stories of world creation in the Chilam Balam documents, where it is also killed and its body used to make the first terra firma (Roys 1933:101). A vestige of the tale survives in the Popol Vuh, where the Hero Twins trick an aquatic monster called Zipacna into entering a cave, where it is trapped and turned into stone. The relationship between the names Zipacna and Cipactli provides clear support for this connection (Tedlock 1996:240; Christenson 2003:95 n. 168).

Images of the terrestrial monster naturally lack the star signs and skyband body of the celestial version, but it also does without the deer antlers, ears, and hooves. Its snout is usually curled and tipped by the scalloped shell of the *yax* sign (Figure 14, 15a), a feature tied to the ability to exhale mist and clouds

(Taube 2003:426-427). Its eyes take a cross-banded design peculiar to supernatural crocodilians, while ovoid patches enclosing a line of dots are another diagnostic element. It is often associated with maize foliation, a symbol of both sprouting corn and by extension the concept of place (Stuart and Houston 1994:21; Tokovinine 2013:9-10). This finds a close analogue in images of Cipactli, whose spiny back is planted with maize stalks to symbolize fertile ground (see Codex Borgia page 27). Also like Cipactli, its hind limbs can be missing altogether as the lower body becomes overtly piscine and ends in a feathery tailfin. These watery characteristics are amplified by the water lilies and aquatic environments it is associated with—like the turtle, this is a creature of the primeval pool. The sometime inclusion of stone

[7] Cipactli is described in the *Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas* as: "…a great fish… which was like an alligator and from this fish the earth was made…" (Garibay 1965:26; Taube 1989a:2). This entity has a heritage reaching back to Olmec times. The cape worn by a clay figure from Atlihuayan, Mexico, consists of a saurian with a fin-like tail (Joralemon 1976:Fig. 4a). In addition, the early greenstone figure of the "Young Lord" has two inverted beasts incised on its thighs—one of them crocodilian, the other a shark-like fish (see Reilly 1991:159-162; Joralemon 1996b), both of which appear to symbolize cosmic trees (Martin 2006a:Fig. 8.4, n. 16).
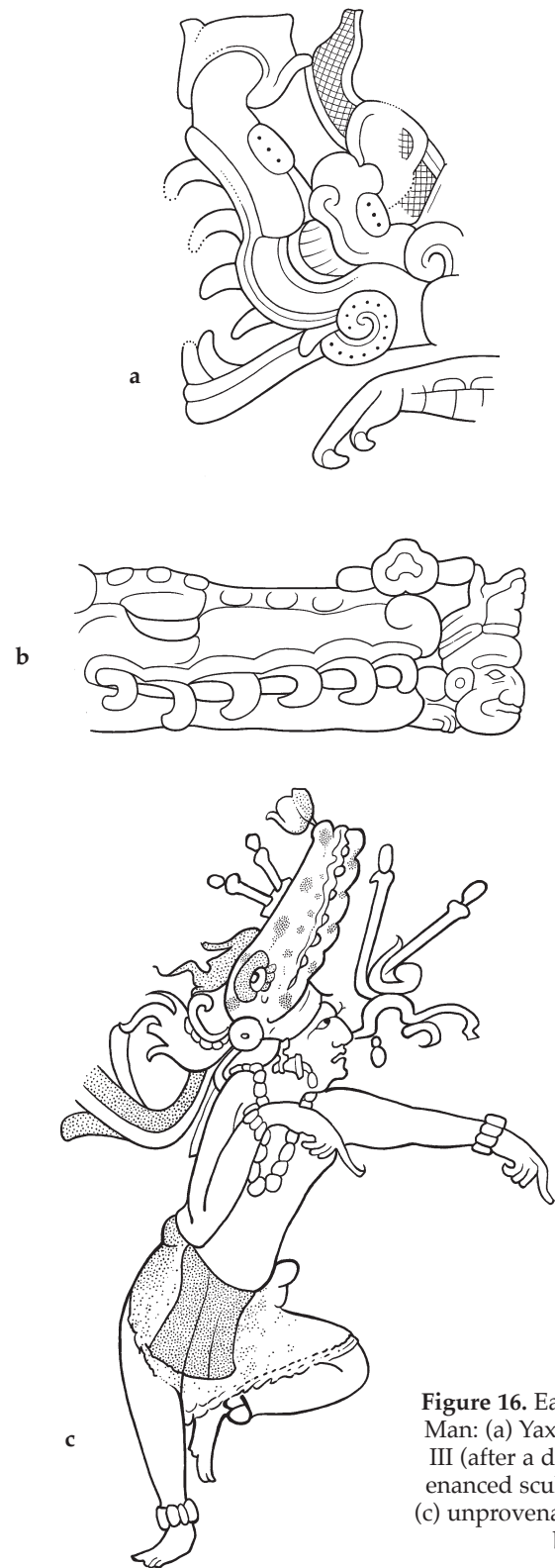
Figure 16. Earth Monsters conjoined with the Old Man: (a) Yaxchilan Hieroglyphic Stairway 3, Step III (after a drawing by Ian Graham); (b) unprovenanced sculpted block (after Mayer 1984:Pl. 52); (c) unprovenanced polychrome plate (after a photo by Stephen D. Houston).

motifs on its skin presumably expresses its relationship to the rocky body of the earth (see Maudslay 1889-1902:1:Pl. 68a). Zipacna declared himself the "maker of mountains," while his sawtooth back was compared to a mountain range (Christenson 2003:101 n. 168).

There was also a fourfold dimension to the earthly version, represented by another form of heavenly support: Cosmic Trees. As in Central Mexico, these great arbors at the corners of the world were embodiments of the crocodilian earth monster, rendered with its torso rearing up to form the trunk, its tail dividing into branches and leaves (Hellmuth 1987a:282, Figs. 595-599). It is this leafy aspect that is highlighted in the earthly beast on the shell ear ornaments (Figure 10a). Occasionally cosmic trees retain their fishy tailfins, which can, a little incongruously, also sprout fruit (see Martin 2006a:Fig. 8.8a).

A feature the terrestrial creature shares with its celestial cousin is its association with the Old Man. The great leviathan of Zoomorph P at Quirigua, Guatemala (Figure 15a), wears a net headscarf, visible from above (Stone 1985:39) (Figure 15b). The plates on its face are filled with hieroglyphs, and sequential ones feature first a turtle-backed God N and then a fishtailed crocodile, as if they combine to name the compound entity (Figure 15c).[8] Other instances of the *yax*-nosed beast also wear net headscarves (Figure 16a), show the Old Man within their jaws (Figure 16b), or show a full-bodied Old Man wearing a crocodile headdress (Figure 16c)—the latter matching the anthropomorphic sky variant previously seen in the Dresden Codex (Figure 12c). The set of three equivalent ways of expressing the involvement of the Old Man is therefore repeated. They are joined by a subtler fourth, which shows a crocodile equipped with human hands in place of claws, tied water lilies serving as its cuffs (see Maudslay 1889-1902:2:Pl. 95; Meskell and Joyce 2003:91). One last case may come in the human bodies of the ear-ornament crocodiles, which are likely more than simple anthropomorphism and constitute a fifth way of expressing this union (Figure 10).

[8] Note here the three-spotted ear ornament worn by the Old Man, a device that otherwise appears on the tympanic membranes of turtles and toads in Maya art. Together with water lilies, it is a fairly consistent reference to the aquatic dimension of this character.

Figure 17. God D examining an open codex on an unprovenanced vessel. Painting by Mary Louise Baker, courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

3. The Old Man and the Bird

Paul Schellhas (1904:22-23) assigned the label God D to a prominent old deity in the Postclassic codices, ultimately recognized in the art and writing of the Classic era by Nicholas Hellmuth (1987a:303-312) (Figure 17).[9] On polychrome vessels he is commonly shown seated on a skyband throne, sometimes shared with the Moon Goddess, from which he presides over a celestial court (Figure 18). He is visited by a variety of other deities, each of which assumes a deferential pose. Under the name Itzamna—a term we will examine presently—God D has long been considered the preeminent Maya deity of the sky (Seler [1887]1990:98; Thompson 1970b:228-229; Taube 1992b:31-41).

The typical God D wears a diadem featuring a tasseled, flower-like motif that when shown frontally has the glyph for *ahk'ab* "darkness/night" at its center.[10] His face is aged, with a prominent nose and a near-toothless, wrinkled jaw.[11] His eyes are large with a square pupil in one corner, a feature that produces a cross-eyed effect

when depicted in three dimensions. God D's head can be elongated, with his hair cut into the tonsured fringe usually associated with the Maize God. His crown is further embellished with an upward-pointing earspool jewel, from which emerges the scalloped shell of the *yax* motif. He has markings on his body that represent jade or more specifically the concept of "brightness/shininess"—a point we will also return to—and wears a fancy tri-lobed medallion on a bead necklace.

All of these features, with the exception of the human face and body, are shared with another entity, the Principal Bird Deity (Hellmuth 1987a:254-262, 362-367) (Figure 19). First described by Lawrence Bardawil (1976), this creature additionally shows the serpent-head wings of supernatural avians—sometimes containing opposed emblems for *k'in* "day, light" and *ahk'ab* "night, darkness"—and the arching beak of a raptor, which often grasps a bicephalic serpent. The Principal Bird Deity has a deep history in Maya culture and can be traced first through art and then writing for almost two millennia (Lowe et al. 1982:Fig. 2.2; Parsons 1983:155; Stone 1983:216; Cortez 1986; Hellmuth 1987a:227-270, 364-365; Taube 1987; Guernsey 2006:95-117; Taube et al. 2010:29-57). The earliest precursors of the great bird can be recognized in Olmec art (Cortez 1986; Joralemon 1996:54-55), while versions seen among other Mesoamerican cultures attest to its lasting pan-regional significance (Nielsen and Helmke 2015). From about 300 BCE onwards the Preclassic Maya carved its image on monuments, painted it on murals, and modeled it in stucco as the huge

[9] The caption to this figure seems to be only partially literate, but after **u-ba-ji**/**hi** *ubaah* "the image of" we find a crosshatched sign that could equate to a net headband and then a clear bird head that refers to the Principal Bird Deity—see following discussion.

[10] See Proto-Ch'olan *ahk'ab'* "noche" in Kaufman and Norman 1984:115 (Marc Zender, personal communication 2015).

[11] There are a few portraits in which God D appears young and handsome (e.g., K2026 and K8008). Some of these seem to be human impersonators, or possibly fusions with a youthful deity such as the Maize God, but another possibility is that an archetypal image of kingship, *ajaw*, can supplant that of the Old Man.

Figure 18. God D in his celestial court; unprovenanced vessel. Detail of rollout photo K504 © Justin Kerr.

Figure 19. The Principal Bird Deity on an unprovenanced vessel. Photo K3863 © Justin Kerr.

"long-lipped" masks set on building facades. During the ensuing Classic era it is commonly shown perched on skybands or as the central mask and wings within the richly feathered headdresses worn by kings. It is attested in Postclassic and even Colonial times, where it corresponds, at least in part, to the malign Vucub Caquix "Seven Macaw" described in the Popol Vuh.[12]

The visual link between God D and the bird is perhaps clearest where the arms of the celestial ruler are plumed in the form of wings (e.g., Hellmuth 1987a:Fig. 585; Houston et al. 2006:236-241). In some of these instances his head is replaced

[12] Two episodes from the career of Vucub Caquix—the blowgun attack launched by Hunahpu and the bird's retaliation in tearing off Hunahpu's arm—have precedents in much earlier sources, but the type of bird differs in each. The Principal Bird Deity receives the blowgun pellet while the arm is severed by a macaw, whether pictured as such or named in an accompanying caption (Hellmuth 1987a:365; Zender 1999:40, 2005:9; Bassie-Sweet 2002:31-34; Chinchilla Mazariegos 2010:125). This discrepancy suggests some greater complexity to the original story or stories. Based on scenes in the Codex Borgia, it is possible to see the macaw as a directional aspect of the solar avian god (Martin 2006b). However, the consistency with which this bird appears in the Central Mexican versions of the tale (see Nielsen and Helmke 2015:Figs. 6, 11, 18)—including one case in the Maya area displaying clear Teotihuacan iconography (Fash and Fash 1996:132, Fig. 3)—might point to differing regional traditions that were accommodated and mixed over time.
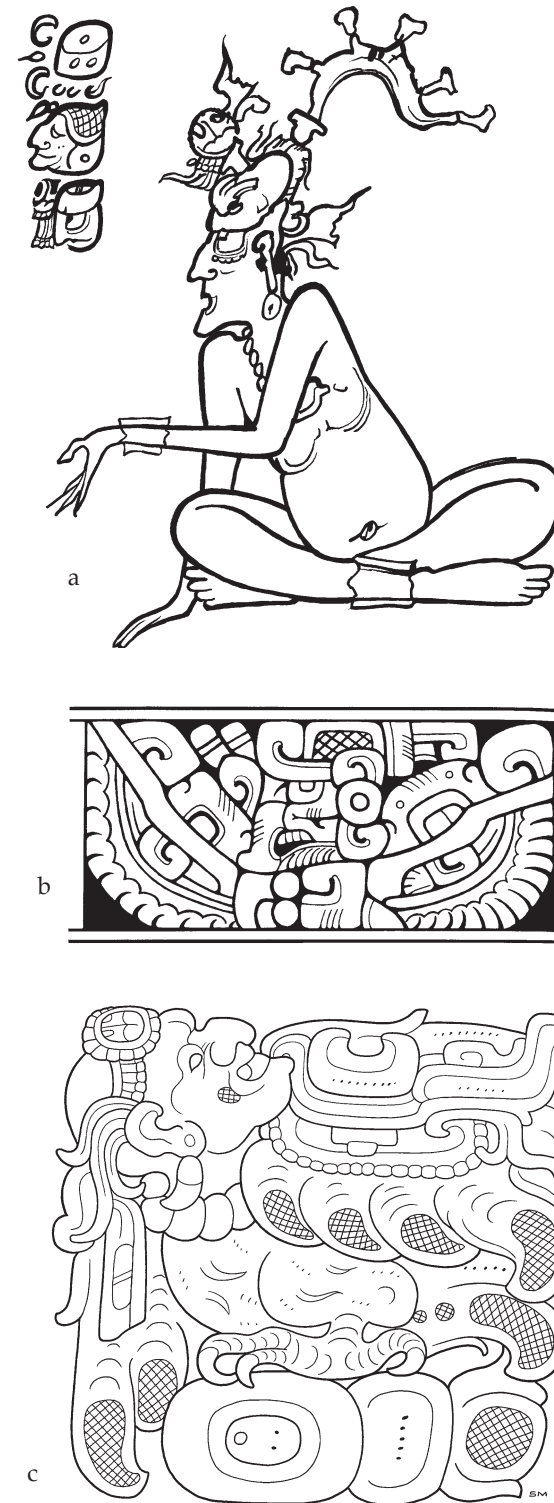

Figure 20. God D as the Principal Bird Deity fused with the Old Man: (a) unprovenanced vessel (after photo K7727 by Justin Kerr); (b) Esquintla-style vessel (from Hellmuth 1987a:Fig. 488); (c) panel in the Tonina site museum.

by that of the bird, with one Early Classic vessel from Kaminaljuyu depicting a group of four such winged dancers (Kidder et al. 1946:Fig. 207e)—a scene that brings to mind the quadripartite set of Principal Bird Deities perched in trees in the murals of San Bartolo (Taube et al. 2010:52, passim). The Principal Bird Deity has variously been described as the "manifestation," "avatar," "aspect," or "messenger" of God D, although the precise nature of their relationship remains cloudy.[13]

Until recently there was little to suggest the involvement of the Old Man here, yet his role proves to be fundamental. Images of God D are normally captioned by a single hieroglyph, his portrait head (see Figure 31b). Yet there are a few crucial exceptions. In one of these the text begins with *yaljiiy* "he said it," followed by the heads of first the Old Man and then the Principal Bird Deity (Figure 20a, see also Figure 32). Depictions of the bird character include at least one where it wears the net design (Figure 20b, compare to Figure 32d), although an even clearer link comes where it displays the now-familiar wizened human face (Figure 20c).[14] Karen Bassie-Sweet (2002:29, 2008:139) has proposed a radical but convincing solution to these conjunctions. She identifies God D as a fusion of God N with the Principal Bird Deity—with the former supplying the roman nose, sunken jaw, and sagging body; the latter the square "god-eye," tasseled-diadem, and attendant jewels.[15] The union we see in figural representations is mirrored in the standard glyphic form, with a habitual conflation between man and bird that successfully obscures their separate identities. We will debate the meaning of this later, but it is enough for now to note the value of this observation, which opens a door to new notions of God D and his significance to Maya religion.

[13] For example, Taube 1992b:36; Schele and Mathews 1998:268; Bassie-Sweet 2002:29, 2008:140; Boot 2004:2, 2008:14; Zender 2005:9; Houston et al. 2006:236, 238; Taube et al. 2010:30.

[14] On a few occasions the name of God D is preceded by *muut* "bird." Rather than a general descriptive or permanent fixture of his name, this seems to refer to a fully realized bird body for this character, distinguishing it from the overtly anthropomorphic form that is much more common. The Old Man-headed bird in Figure 20c perches on a **ti** sign, which acts as a phonetic suffix to **MUUT**. More complete spellings of this version of God D appear at the site of Xcalumkin (Houston et al. 2006:236), while an additional example probably appears on Tonina Monument 160 at G3–H3 (Graham et al. 2006:96-97). See K3413 and K4143 for other Old Man-headed versions of the Principal Bird Deity.

[15] Michael Coe (1978:46) anticipated this work by identifying the character that would ultimately prove to be God D as a form of God N, based on his aged features.

Figure 21. God L as ruler of the Maya Underworld on the unprovenanced "Vase of the Seven Gods." Photo K2796 © Justin Kerr.

4. Aged Lords of the Netherworld

Conflations between the Old Man and major supernaturals do not end here, and there is reason to believe that God L, the primary lord of the Maya Underworld, is also connected to this complex. Key features of God L stem from the jaguar: he commonly sports a feline ear or patches of spotted pelt on his body, especially around the mouth (Figure 21). Usually he is shown with a large god-eye, this time in spiral form, and skin that is either colored black or marked by glyphs for *ahk'ab* "darkness." On his head he wears a broad feather-trimmed hat, within which sits an owl crowned with maize symbolism. God L also wears a fancy cape of woven textile or jaguar pelt and carries a square-nosed serpent scepter. The latter can become the long walking staff of a trader, and in this guise he sometimes carries a merchant's pack on his back. An inveterate smoker, he puffs on slender cigarillos as well as fat, loosely rolled cigars, or holds a bouquet of tobacco leaves (Schellhas 1904:34-35; Coe 1973:91, 107, 1978:16-21; Hellmuth 1987a:297-298; Taube 1992b:79-88; Miller and Martin 2004:58-63, 281; Houston et al. 2006:114; Martin 2006:169-172, 2010, 2013:534-537).

God L always has elderly features, and these can develop

into a fully human countenance (Figure 22). Previously seen as mere variation, this might yet have a greater meaning. The Underworld lord turns up in Postclassic codices such as the Dresden Codex, where his diagnostic attributes are unchanged from earlier times (Figure 23a). In the Classic era his name glyph is rather elusive, but here it consists of an icon of falling rain joined to a blackened portrait head, with a large nose and spiral god-eye.[16] Elsewhere in the same manuscript we see a figure wearing the owl crest and fancy cape associated with God L, although his face has become that of an aged man with pale skin (Figure 23b). Importantly, atop his head he wears the *haab/ha'b* hieroglyph, the emblem of God N as year-bearer (compare with Figure 9b). His name is missing from the relevant caption, but any doubt as to whether this remains a portrait of God L is dispelled by a third image in this codex (Figure 23c). Here we have the same old, pale-skinned deity who sports the owl and "year" device on his head, but this time the accompanying text explicitly names him as God L (see Thompson 1970a:479).[17]

If such a combination can represent a singular God L in the Postclassic period, might his aged features in the Classic allude to another such union? Both iconographic and epigraphic support can be marshaled for this suggestion. A vase listed as K1398 in the Kerr archive—or less formally the "Regal Bunny Pot"—bears two scenes from a narrative in which God L is robbed of his clothes and insignia (Kerr 1989:81).[18] In the first, a near-naked God L is taunted by a rabbit that has possession of his staff, hat, cloak, and jewels (Figure 24a). In the second, God L kneels submissively before the Sun God and accuses the rabbit of their theft (Stuart 1993a:170-171) (Figure 24b). On this occasion God L wears the net headscarf, distinctively knotted at the brow. This association with the Old Man is echoed in the rabbit's speech to God L in the first scene, which concludes with a nominal glyph composed of the net headscarf atop a conventionalized human penis (see Figures 24a and 35b).

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[16] The reference to rain in the Postclassic version of God L's name could relate to a world-destroying flood of which he was a principal victim (Martin 2005b). For the Classic era the best lead appears in K5359, where we find him captioned by **13-mu? yu-CHAN-na**, perhaps reading *uxlajuun muy chan* "Thirteen Cloud Sky." For further discussions of God L's Classic-period name see Miller and Martin (2004:281 n. 17) and Martin (2006:182 n. 23).

[17] Thompson (1970a:479) notes that Mictlantecuhtli, the Underworld lord of Central Mexico, was also a sky-bearer. Later, in his commentary on the Dresden Codex, Thompson draws back from some of his earlier conclusions and identifies both the second and third of these examples as Bacabs, which is to say God N (Thompson 1976:40, 60). He notes the similarity of the crest to that worn by God L, but is undecided if it represents a bird or a fish.

[18] K-prefixed designations refer to images in the Justin Kerr photographic archive, in this case the Maya Vase Database accessible at research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya.

Figure 22. God L with the face of an aged man on the "Princeton Vase" (after photo K511 by Justin Kerr).
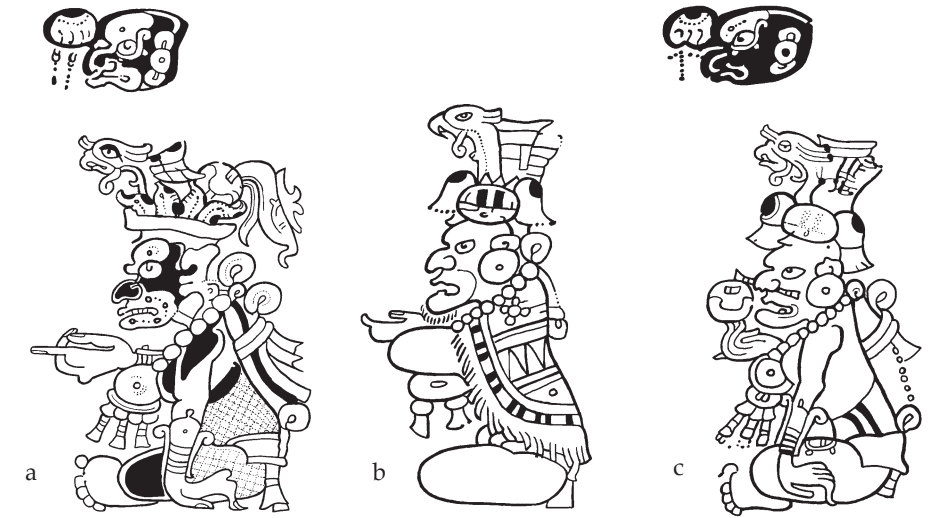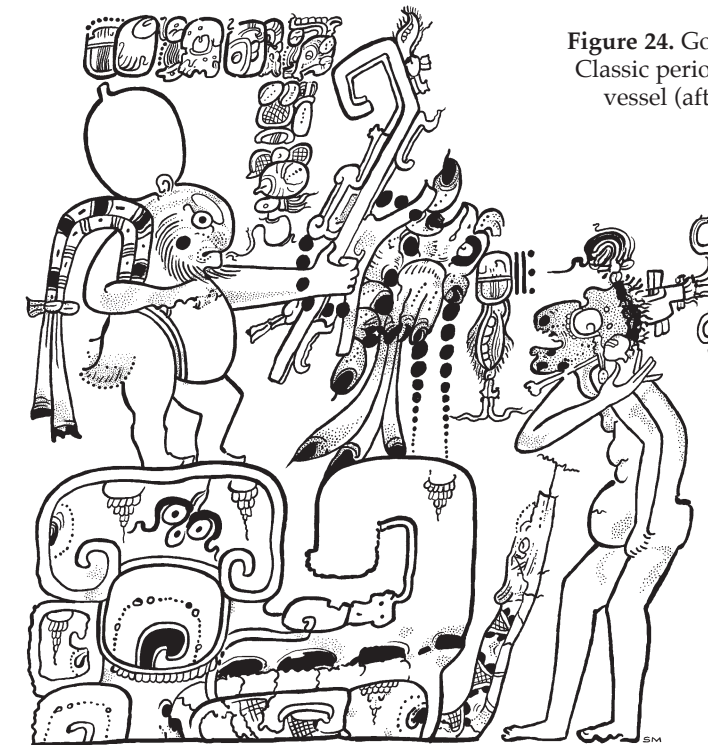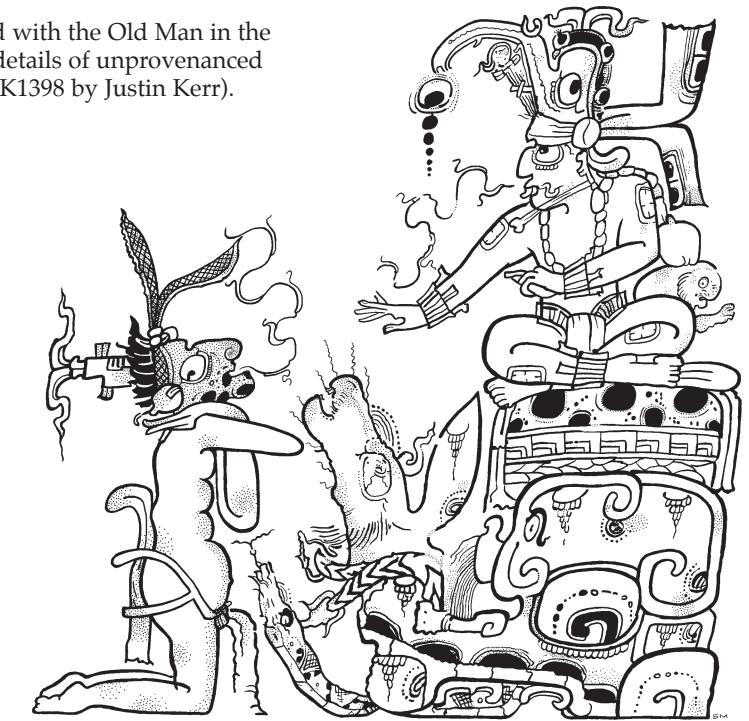

Figure 23. God L fused with the Old Man in the Postclassic period: (a) Dresden Codex page 14c; (b) Dresden Codex page 23c; (c) Dresden Codex page 14b.

Figure 24. God L fused with the Old Man in the Classic period: (a, b) details of unprovenanced vessel (after photo K1398 by Justin Kerr).

a

b

Figure 25. The humiliation of God L. Unprovenanced vessel (after photo K1560 by Justin Kerr).

The same term is applied to God L on a vessel illustrating a related episode (Figures 25 and 35a). A "codex-style" ceramic designated K1560, it shows three scenes of the Maize God and his dwarf and hunchback companions assaulting and denuding old deities (Kerr 1989:98). In addition to God L, punishment is meted out to the Stingray Paddler and Jaguar Paddler. This pair take their names from the scenes in which they transport the Maize God across a great primeval water, a key episode on his journey into death and darkness. Each scene on K1560 is accompanied by one or more texts spoken by the corn deity, with all three victims referred to using the same headscarf-and-penis glyph—as if it serves as a collective term for them. The Jaguar Paddler is the better known of the two ferrymen and on most occasions is indistinguishable from the Jaguar God of the Underworld. The prime diagnostics of this other key netherworld deity are a single shark's tooth, spiral-eye, and aged face, often topped by a jaguar headdress (see Schele 1987:3; Martin 2013:535-537, Fig. 11.11).[19] As with God L, the Paddlers' elderly features could reflect degrees of pictorial engagement with the Old Man.

Here we should also note a significant find made at the site of Holmul, Guatemala (Estrada-Belli 2011:92-95). There excavation of Structure B revealed two monumental stucco masks, both consisting of a large jaguar head with the face and hands of an aged man in its jaws (Figure 26). The masks are flanked by human skulls and crossed bones, all enclosed

[19] The headscarf-and-penis glyph is also associated with the Jaguar God of the Underworld on a finely incised vessel excavated from the Mundo Perdido complex at Tikal (see Stuart et al. 1999:20). Its scene shows a handsome lord equipped with a jaguar headdress and paws—common attributes of this deity—enthroned within a monstrous cave mouth. Beyond a now-effaced supplicant he views two ranks of anthropomorphic beasts and elderly deities, including at least two varieties of God N. The jaguar lord has a curling "speech scroll" and his words are recorded in the adjacent first-person inscription. After **ya-la-ji-ya** *yaljiiy* "he said it" we find his lengthy name phrase, which concludes with the headscarf-and-penis compound.

Figure 26. The Old Man set within the jaws of a jaguar surrounded by Underworld symbolism: Holmul Structure B, Phase I. Photo: Jesus Lopez, courtesy of Holmul Archaeological Project.
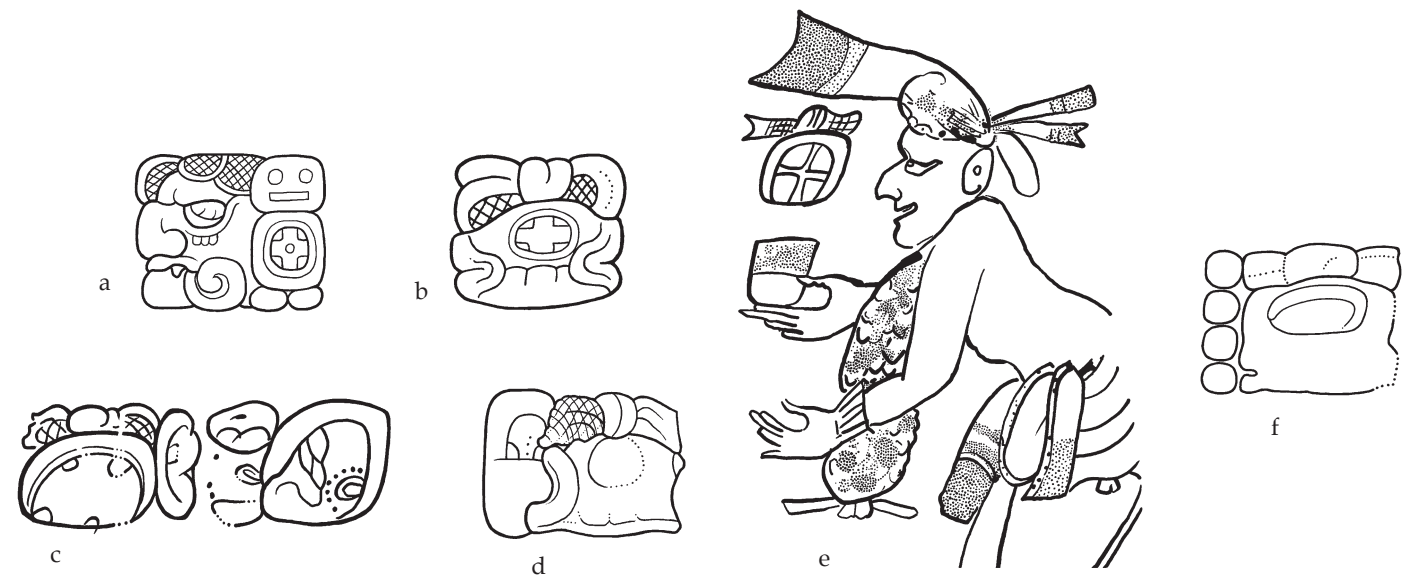
Figure 27. Names of the God N turtle: (a) Piedras Negras Panel 3, U3; (b) Piedras Negras Panel 2, X10 (drawing by David Stuart); (c) Paqal Incised sherd, Yaxche phase, Piedras Negras Operation 24B-1-4 (after Houston et al. 1999:Fig. 7); (d) Copan Structure 2, Step 2, S1a; (e) unprovenanced vessel (after photo K8763 by Justin Kerr); (f) panel originally from Pomona (after Mayer 1978:Pl. 53).

by the stepped profiles of mountains. This netherworld setting, together with the "in-mouth" motif indicative of conjoined identities, could suggest that the central character is one of the netherworld jaguars in his Old Man persona. Whatever the truth of this, the dating of the first phase of these sculptures to about 400 BCE, the beginning of the Late Preclassic period, makes these the earliest known images of the Old Man in Maya art.

Reading the Old Man

Before going further, we need to address the outstanding epigraphic questions and to examine the names by which ancient believers knew the Old Man and his conjoined forms. The fragmentary nature of the evidence means that this is no simple task, with interpretation often turning, somewhat hesitantly, on a handful of spellings and contexts. Each of the major cosmological domains in which we find the Old Man is here revisited in turn.

(1) Landa gives several names for the sky-bearers, but emphasizes one of them, Bacab (bakab). In the wake of Thompson's (1970a) work on the topic this became something of a default name for God N. But while bakab appears in Classic-era inscriptions it does so only as a title borne by kings and high-ranking nobles and is never applied to supernaturals like God N.[20] In pursuit of a decipherment for the old bearer, attention fell on another character mentioned by Landa called Pauahtun (pawahtuun)—a similarly fourfold deity aligned to the cardinal directions (Tozzer 1941:137-138; Coe 1973:14-15). Although the case for this reading was initially persuasive, it has fared

less well in recent years and we are now obliged to pursue alternatives.[21]

In 1994 David Stuart made a fresh proposal, drawing on inscriptions from the sites of Piedras Negras, Copan, and Xcalumkin.[22] The trail begins at Piedras Negras, Guatemala, where several rulers took the name of the carapace-backed God N (Kelley 1976:72) (Figure 27a, b). An example on a vessel excavated at the site makes the reading order especially clear—it begins with the Old Man's headscarf, followed by K'AN-na k'an and then a-ku ahk "turtle" (Houston et al. 1999:Fig. 7) (Figure 27c).

[20] On page 74 of the Dresden Codex we find the spelling ba-ka-bi in a text dealing with world destruction. This is likely to be the first occasion we have in which bakab is used to refer to the sky-bearers (Taube 1988:145). See Houston et al. (2006:62-63) for further discussion of the bakab term.
[21] It was the presence of tuun "stone" in both pawahtuun and one of the most common glyphic names for God N that prompted the idea of a connection. This necessarily equated the pawah component with the knotted headscarf. Floyd Lounsbury noted that the words paw and pawo' mean "net bag" in Yukatek (Barrera Vásquez et al. 1980:635), while the netted design resembles the syllable sign pa—a potential phonetic cue (Coe 1973:15). The central element in the headscarf was subsequently interpreted as the lexeme WAH "maize bread" (Taube 1989b:36, 1992b:92)—suggesting a full reading of pa[WAH]-TUN pawahtuun. However, these readings are challenged by more recent phonetic evidence, as we will presently see.
[22] This suggestion came in a letter to Linda Schele dated November 14, 1994 (the text is now available in Stuart 2007a). The earliest published reference to the reading appears in Houston et al. 2000:104; see also Stuart 2005c:93 n. 32. It should be noted that the same head form has a different value when it appears as a verb in dedicatory phrases (Coe 1973:21; Stuart 1998:409-417).

Precisely the same variety of God N appears as part of another royal name, this time at faraway Copan (Figure 27d). There it carries an i prefix in a context where it can only be acting as a phonetic complement, establishing that the Old Man hieroglyph represents an i-initial word. For Stuart, these features provoked comparison with the Chontal Maya capital Hernán Cortés visited in 1524 called Ytzamkanac (itzam k'an ahk in its component parts and orthography appropriate to the Classic Period)—suggesting ITZAM as the reading for both the Old Man portrait glyph and the abbreviated form of his headscarf.[23]

In support of this, it may be significant that the colonial Ritual of the Bacabs manuscript talks of four Ytzam Kan (itzam k'an), each ascribed to a cardinal direction in standard world-quarter fashion (Roys 1965:64-65, 108-109). Shortened names are something of a feature of this document—in other sections the earth-crocodile Itzam Cab Ain is given as just Ytzam Cab (Roys 1965:49-50, 59-60, 99-100, 105-106). Coincidentally or not, we know that the turtle name could be curtailed in just this way during Classic times, since one polychrome vessel, probably from the sixth century CE, shows God N captioned by the net headscarf atop a lone K'AN sign (Figure 27e).[24] Another version of the turtle name appears on a damaged panel—originally from Pomona—where it is prefixed with 4 chan "four" (Houston 1998:355) (Figure 27f).[25] This evidently refers to the sets of four God N turtles seen at Tikal and Mayapan.

Each form of God N had its own nominal hieroglyph, combining the Old Man or his headscarf with the particular object or animal concerned (Zimmermann 1956:164-165) (Figure 28). In general, there is a strong continuity between the Classic and Postclassic forms, although the variant that wears the "year" sign HAAB/HA'B takes a more active nominal role in later times, apparently referring to
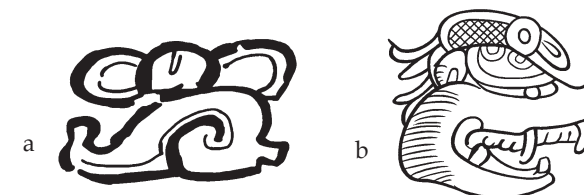

Figure 28. Names of shell and opossum(?) versions of God N: (a) Dresden Codex page 41b, A1; (b) unprovenanced vessel (Coe and Kerr 1982:71).
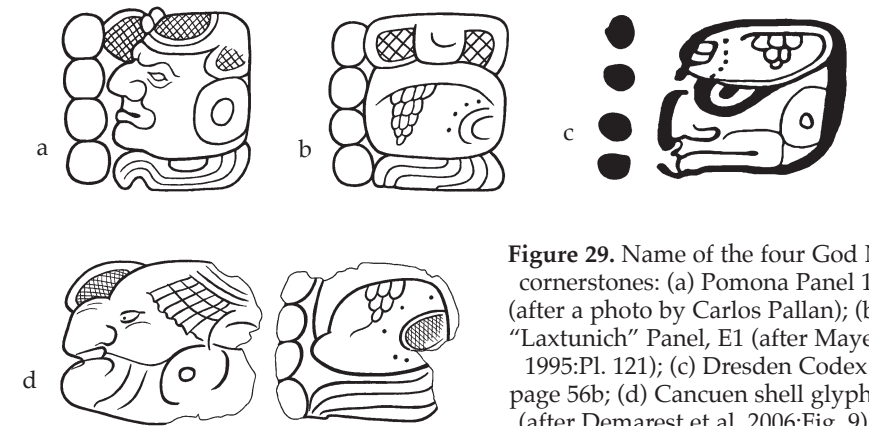

Figure 29. Name of the four God N cornerstones: (a) Pomona Panel 1 (after a photo by Carlos Pallan); (b) "Laxtunich" Panel, E1 (after Mayer 1995:Pl. 121); (c) Dresden Codex page 56b; (d) Cancuen shell glyphs (after Demarest et al. 2006:Fig. 9).

the collective identity of God Ns as year-bearers.[26] The version most closely associated with sky- and year-bearing responsibilities in the Classic period combines the Old Man with the signs 4 chan "four" and TUUN "stone(s)"—a reference to the four cornerstones of the universe (Figure 29a–c, see also Figures 6b, 9a, 9b).[27] The reading order is less than sure in these cases because the scribes could put numerals at the left-hand edge of a glyph for aesthetic reasons rather than strict word sequence, giving alternatives of

[23] If ITZAM were to be the correct value we might expect the i– prefix at Copan to be matched by a corresponding –ma suffix at some point. In fact, another Copan monument, Altar K, probably supplies this. There the head of the Old Man is sandwiched between two well-known ma signs: T74 and T142 (see the Thompson 1962 sign catalog). Although in normal circumstances this might signal two sound values (as if complementing a word like MAM), the ma syllabogram is a special case in that its full form is a trigraph that readily takes superimposition over its central portion. The most common spelling of this kind comes in the high title kaloomte', where the upper and lower parts of the full ma sign are usually visible but denote only a single suffix. It is likely that the elongated space available on Altar K made superimposition the best space-filling tactic and the "double-ma" really only renders ITZAM-ma.
[24] The lack of the usual ahk "turtle" here may be reflected in the absence of a carapace on the old god's back.
[25] This hieroglyph appears on a fragment now in the Museum Rietburg, Zurich, Switzerland (Mayer 1978:Pl. 53). David Stuart (2007b) has recently recognized that it joins two other panel fragments excavated at Pomona, Mexico (García Moll 2005:Pls. 6-10, 6-25a).
[26] In the Classic period this "year"-wearing form of God N serves as the personification of the number "5" (Figure 9c) and, more rarely, of the glyph HAAB/HA'B "year" itself. It has a close relationship to the TUUN "stone" form, best seen in substitutions in the Venus Tables of the Dresden Codex on pages 24, 47, and 48 (Kelley 1976:72, Fig. 28) (see Figure 9b). Although long interpreted as a phonetic alternation, it is more likely to be semantic in nature. On page 37 of the same manuscript, a depiction of the God N turtle is captioned by the HAAB/HA'B form, suggesting that it has a generic function applicable to all year-bearing varieties of this god.
[27] The turtle and cornerstone variants appear together on the so-called "Birth Vase," a four-sided vessel painted with scenes and accompanying texts (Taube 1994). Side II C1 refers to the birth of ITZAM[K'AN]AHK in some remote timeframe and shows an Old Man in appropriate "serpent birth" imagery. Side III A2 mentions the 4-ITZAM-TUUN, and Side VI shows the four old gods. Although damage to the scenes and texts makes further interpretation difficult, this is a rare glimpse of the deeper mythology surrounding these characters.
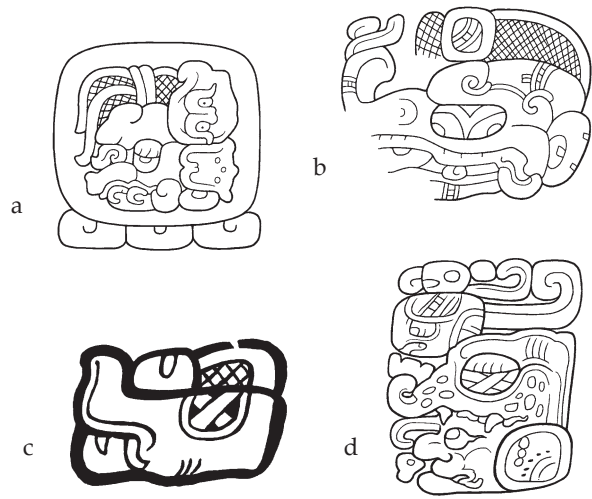
Figure 30. Names for the Sky and Earth Monsters: (a) Copan Hieroglyphic Stairway, Block 593; (b) Tikal Miscellaneous Text 9, B; (c) Dresden Codex page 50, D4; (d) unprovenanced vessel, E (after Hellmuth 1987a:Fig. 604).
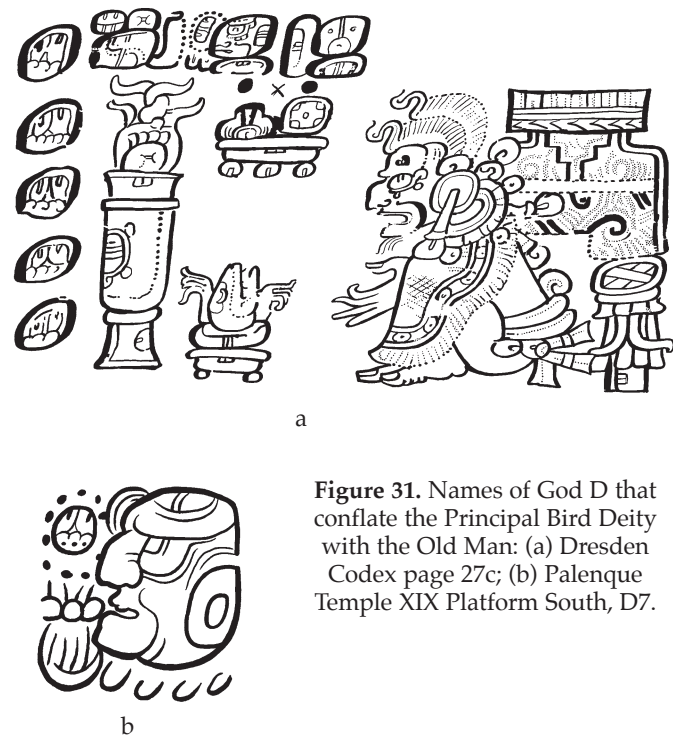

Figure 31. Names of God D that conflate the Principal Bird Deity with the Old Man: (a) Dresden Codex page 27c; (b) Palenque Temple XIX Platform South, D7.

chan itzam tuun or *itzam chan tuun* for **4-ITZAM-TUUN**.[28] Help might come from a discovery at Cancuen, Guatemala (Demarest et al. 2006:764) (Figure 29d). Despite being disarticulated when found, two shell-fashioned glyphs could form a pair and indicate that the Old Man is to be read in first place once again.[29] We will leave the meaning of *itzam* to one side for the moment, returning to this key issue a little later.

(2) Neither version of the Cosmic Monster appears in the inscriptions very often, and as a result our understanding of their names is not strong. The word for "crocodile" is represented in the script by the logograph **AHIIN**, a spelling surmised from the consistent presence of **na** suffixes and a partial phonetic substitution of **a-hi** (Stuart 2005c:64 n. 16). This beast is frequently portrayed with crossed bands in its eyes and therefore represents a conceptual, rather than naturalistic, category of animal (see Houston and Martin 2012). If *ahiin* is the base term in both, the celestial version is usually distinguished by its appended stars and deer ears, while the terrestrial one includes stone and maize motifs. Whether these parts denote words in combination or act as cues to quite different single readings remains unclear. Where either form is combined with the Old Man we might anticipate, based on the precedents above, that his name is to be read first. This would be consistent with our Colonial-era earth monster Itzam Cab Ain—part of Stuart's original argument for the **ITZAM** reading.

We have already noted the sky monster's substitution for the star glyph in the day name Lamat (Figure 30a), an alternation repeated where the beast serves as the patron for the month Yax within the Initial Series Introductory Glyph. It is tempting to read it simply as *ek'* "star" in both cases, but this is not a known Maya day name, and the Lamat term seems to be an archaic one (Thompson 1950:77; Kaufman 1989:21). This is strongly supported by **ta** suffixes to two Classic-era examples of the star day-sign (Marc Zender, personal communication 2015). Given its substitutions, one might take *lamat* itself to be a viable moniker for the monster, but the values of signs inside day name cartouches do not necessarily match those outside. We can only be sure we have the sky monster's proper name in non-calendrical contexts

[28] Figure 29a employs the principle of superimposition: laying the head of God N over the **TUUN** sign so only its **ni** complement remains in sight. This may be motivated, at least in part, by the fact that their values are not sequential in the reading, something that could be misleadingly implied by other forms of combination such as infixation or conflation.

[29] The Old Man head in the shell text looks to be **ITZAM**, but there remains the possibility that it is a **T'AB?** verb absent its normal **–yi** suffix. The **4-TUUN-ni** grouping is persuasive because it appears within the collective term for God N on another Cancuen text, this time a looted panel from the same era (Mayer 1995:Pl. 169). There we see the *chumlaj* "seating" of **4-ITZAM-TUUN** (at M6–N6)—probably to be understood as the installation of lordly lieutenants as symbolic sky-bearers. It is possible that the shell text—originally attached to some apparel—refers to someone who has taken this same role. Interestingly, the seating ceremony on the panel has not one but two subjects, with the second (at M7) read **4-xi?-wa-TUUN-ni** (see also Stuart 2007a). This refers to a separate set of bearers especially associated with the watery Underworld (see Martin 2012:72 n. 12).

(Figure 30b). A phonetic clue to its reading comes from a possessed example that lacks the headscarf but has a star in its eye that is prefixed by **ya**. The latter supplies both the possessive pronoun *y-* and the opening vowel of an *a-* initial word, implying that **AHIIN** "crocodile" forms the next part of the reading (Stuart 2005c:71, 88). If the iconography is to be read literally then **EK'** "star" and **CHIJ** "deer" would be active elements, yet where we get a complementary suffix it is **ma** (on Yaxchilan Hieroglyphic Stairway 3, Step IV, B1; Graham 1982:170). This either
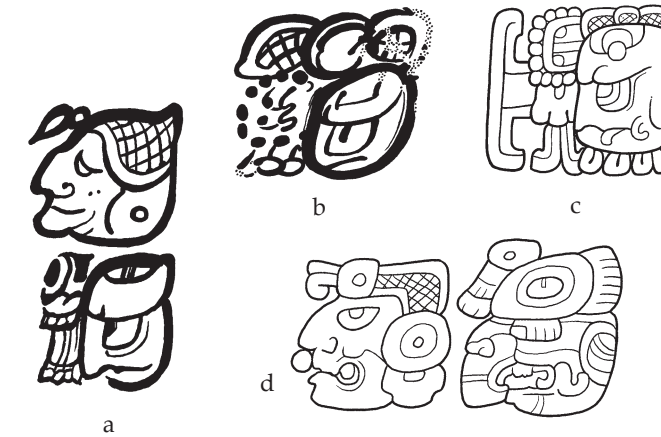

Figure 32. Names of God D that separate the Principal Bird Deity and the Old Man: (a) unprovenanced vessel, zG2–3 (after photo K7727 by Justin Kerr); (b) unprovenanced vessel (after a photo by Raphael Tunesi); (c) Quirigua Stela C, B12; (d) unprovenanced mask, C4–D4 (after a sketch by David Stuart).
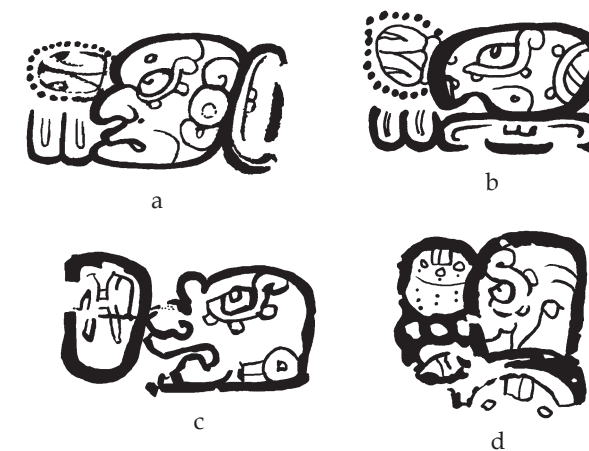

Figure 33. Names of God D in the Postclassic codices: (a) Dresden Codex page 7b, A2; (b) Dresden Codex page 15a, A2; (c) Madrid Codex page 80c, A2; (d) Madrid Codex page 110b, A2.

points to a quite different value or indicates the presence of an unrepresented **ITZAM**. In the sky-enthroned version from the late Dresden Codex the star and deer characteristics have fallen away, perhaps to render a plain *itzam ahiin* there (Figures 30c and 13c).

When it comes to the earthly variety, the clearest moniker appears within a series of deity names carved on an Early Classic vessel (Hellmuth 1987a:284) (Figure 30d). Here the cross-banded eye crocodile has the appropriate *yax* sign on its nose and the sprouting maize motif on its crown—the latter infixed with a personified, shining jewel to mark its precious qualities. The cheek of the monster features an inset stone sign, with the combination completed by the face of the Old Man in its jaws. It is possible that **TUUN** "stone" and **NAL** "maize ear/place" joined **AHIIN** in the Classic-period form, but the reading could equally be quite different.

(3) The name of God D presents an equally complex challenge. Historically, our understanding of it has relied on a page of the Dresden Codex, where God D appears as one of four deities who rotate in their patronage over the incoming New Year (Figure 1a). In Diego de Landa's account of closely matching sixteenth-century New Year ceremonies, the equivalent position in the sequence is taken by Yzamna *(itzamna)*—a character richly attested in Colonial sources as one of the most important native gods. This connection was first noted by the great Eduard Seler, and for well over a century now God D has been equated with this powerful figure (Seler [1887]1990:98-99; Tozzer 1941:145-146).

God D's hieroglyph, like his bodily representations, combines portraits of the Old Man and the Principal Bird Deity (Figure 31b). On those rare occasions where they are separated the aged fellow—whether in full or abbreviated form—appears in initial position followed by the head of the bird (Bassie-Sweet 2002:29-30, 2008:139) (Figure 32a–c).[30] Such spellings allow us to identify similar pairings as names for God D, even where there is no accompanying illustration (Figure 32d). Examples from the Postclassic are always conflated, oscillating in their emphasis between man and bird with no effect on their meaning (Figure 33a, b). To the evidence for the Old Man as **ITZAM** we can add two spellings in the Madrid Codex: one where God D's tasseled diadem is replaced by a complementary **i** prefix and another where it is infixed with an unconventional complement of **tzi** (Stuart 1987a:16; Nikolai Grube, personal communication 1999; Boot 2008:19) (Figure 33c, d).

No less than three different suffixes appear with God D's name. In the earliest apparent instance, on the "Hauberg Stela,"

[30] The same spelling of the name appears on the vessel K2026—where it appears in a passage together with one of the Hero Twins that can be translated as "Juun Ajaw said to God D." See Tunesi (2008) for the example illustrated as Figure 32b.
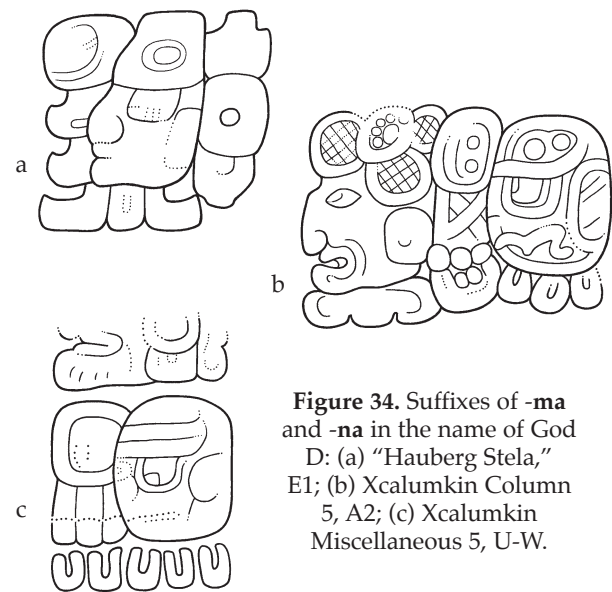
Figure 34. Suffixes of -**ma** and -**na** in the name of God D: (a) "Hauberg Stela," E1; (b) Xcalumkin Column 5, A2; (c) Xcalumkin Miscellaneous 5, U-W.

dating to the first stages of the Early Classic, we find **ma** (Figure 34a). However, this spelling is unique, and for the remainder of the Classic period if any suffix is present it is a form of the **ji** sign (Figures 31b and 32c). By the time we reach the Postclassic it has changed again, this time to **na** (Figure 33a, b, d). Any satisfactory reading of God D's name must explain this variation.

Taking them in reverse order, we would normally expect a **na** suffix to complement an –*n* ending word (as it does in *ahiin*).[31] However, since this would conflict with the *itzamna* indicated by the New Year records, Floyd Lounsbury (1984:176-177) suggested that it has a different function in this case and provides or reinforces a –*na* ending. Unfortunately, our poor understanding of the structure of *itzamna* stymies us at this point. Since the –*na* ending is not a known grammatical marker it is usually viewed as an independent word, with Yukatekan *na* "house" the long-favored option (Seler [1887]1990:98; Thompson 1970b:214). Although not expressed in Colonial Yukatek orthography, this term would originally have had a glottal spirant ending of –*h* (Ola Orie and Bricker 2000:304), in accord with the *naah* "house" term attested in Classic inscriptions.[32] The **ji** signs that suffix God D's name in the Classic are complements that mark a contrasting terminal velar spirant –*j* (Grube 2004b:74-77). Their use can be reconciled with *itzamna* only by positing an ancestral

[31] Lakandon Maya has *itzan* in place of *itzam*—as seen in the god names Itzan Noh K'u and Itzanal (Baer and Baer 1952; Bruce 1967:96)—but this is clearly a local shift and there is no evidence that this once had a wider distribution.

[32] Interestingly, there are some elaborated God D names in the Classic period prefixed by *naah*: **NAAH** on Quirigua Stela C (B12) (Figure 32c) and **YAX-NAAH-hi** on the Palenque Temple XIX Platform South (C7-D7, V1). *Naah* has two senses in the script, "house" and "first," which are represented by the same logograph (T4 in the Thompson system). With *yax* meaning "first/new/green," *yax naah* could be interpreted as "first house," or simply an amplified form of "first" (Stuart 2005c:66). It is tempting to see in this term the origin of the enigmatic –*na* ending in *itzamna* (Martin 2006c, 2006d). There is little precedent for such a positional switch, but this did not prevent Barrera Vásquez et al. (1980:272) from exploring such a possibility, inspired by the honorific *namak* "cosa alta y soberana (something lofty and supreme)." The best glyphic analogy might be the behavior of the *aj* "person," which is often used as a suffix in the Early Classic but appears almost exclusively as a prefix in the Late Classic.

It is interesting, and potentially significant, that the –*na* also turns up in the name Zipacna. There is no known source for it within K'iche'—the language of the Popol Vuh—or any of the other highland languages, and this suggests that both the root and suffix are imports, though evidently from different languages.

[33] The best argument for this reading emerges from the codex-style vessel K1226 (Kerr 1989:68). There we see a standard God D name followed by a variant form of T511, a sign of unknown value (though see Martin 1996:225), suffixed by **ji**. Since **ji** is a regular suffix to God D's glyph it raises a suspicion that the role of T511 is to provide an expanded spelling of his name. The sign itself depicts an upward-pointing earspool—here very cursively drawn—precisely the orientation seen on the head of the Principal Bird Deity. Since the head of God D already includes the flowery diadem of the bird, this scenario requires a two-part nominal for the bird deity (Bassie-Sweet 2002:30 n. 10). Unless we entertain the possibility of scribal error or a redundant restatement of the name, this presents difficulties with reading T511 as **NAAJ**. An alternative explanation for T511's role could lie in its locative uses (as seen on Quirigua Stela C, A11b). Parenthetically, it was the misidentification of T511 as T512 **YE'**/**ye** on this vessel that led to the reading Itzam Yeh for the Principal Bird Deity (Freidel et al. 1993:70, 412).

form of *itzamnaaj*, an interpretation that undermines the "house" hypothesis and leaves us in search of some other root and meaning for *naaj*. Tentatively, this form has been linked to "earspool" (recalling the appearance of this item on the head of the great bird and derived from Proto-Mayan **na'* "to know" [Kaufman 2003:214]) (Houston et al. 2006:236).[33] Lastly, we come to the early **ma** suffix, which can be explained by the two-part composition of God D's name. If the first reads **ITZAM** then **ma** would be attached to that word and appropriately signal its –*m* ending.

It seems logical to analyze the full compound as *itzam* (Old Man) plus *na/naaj* (Principal Bird Deity), but certain spellings make this very difficult to sustain. The **na** suffix first appears at the site of Xcalumkin, Mexico, around 750 CE, in an example noted by Stuart (Figure 34b). Here we see the Old Man and Principal Bird Deity separated once more, but this time they are appended by **na** and **ji** respectively. Any faint possibility that the **na** could be a complementary prefix to the bird is undermined by a second example from the same site, where it retains its attachment to the Old Man even though the name is divided between two glyph blocks (Figure 34c). Postclassic spellings of God D's name present a conundrum of their own. Featuring conflations between man and bird just like those of Classic times, it is hard to see why the **na** sign would be necessary if the head of the Principal Bird Deity already supplied that value. Indeed, if these contexts are taken at face value we would have to assume that the **na** plays no part in the bird's name.

which we would take to be a quite different word ending in –*j*.[34] Interestingly, certain early Yukatek Maya sources link Itzamna to a bird called Yax Cocah Mut (*yax kokaj muut*) (Roys 1933:153 n. 5; Thompson 1939:161; Tozzer 1941:145 n. 695; Thurber and Thurber 1959) and it is logical to now extend that tie to the Principal Bird Deity (Boot 2004:2). The original –*j* ending within this name sets up the possibility of a connection between literary accounts and the much earlier hieroglyphic form (Martin 2006c, 2006d).[35]

Given that the earliest and latest examples of God D's hieroglyphic name are separated by as much as a thousand years, it is perhaps unsurprising that it shows development over time. Differences could reflect new spelling strategies, innovations in its composition, or a combination of the two. An evolution in the basic nature of God D should not be discounted. Religious ideas can show remarkable stability, but they are also capable of change, especially in times of social transformation or rupture. The evidence to hand allows us to speculate on how this shift might have occurred. By around 750 the *itzam* component had acquired an additional –*na* suffix, an element whose significance is
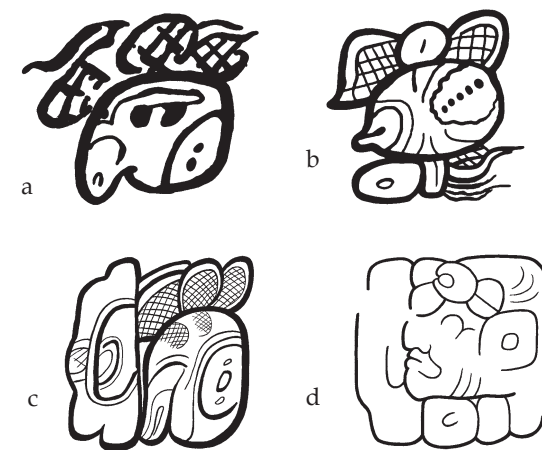

Figure 35. Names that combine the Old Man with a penis: (a) codex-style vessel, S3 (after photo K1560 by Justin Kerr); (b) Regal Bunny Pot, X2 (after photo K1398 by Justin Kerr); (c) Palenque Temple XIX Platform West, B3 (after photo by Jorge Pérez de Lara); d) Palenque Temple of the Sun, North Sanctuary Panel, B5 (after photo by Merle Greene Robertson).

unclear but could constitute an amplification of some kind. By colonial times, or perhaps even during the Postclassic, the name of the bird that originally followed it fell from use and *itzamna* alone came to denote God D. More data will be required before we can be sure whether this scenario, or some other, offers a proper resolution of the issue.

(4) We can turn now to the glyphic descriptions of God L and his Underworld cohort. There are no further leads on the reading of the Old Man to be had from this limited sample, but we can identify the partnering sign as the logograph **AAT** "penis" (Figure 35a). On K1398 this is supported by **ti**, the appropriate disharmonic complement that both confirms the –*t* ending and produces a lengthened vowel (Figure 35b). The examples we have only employ the isolated headscarf in their glyphs, but two spellings from a non-mythological context, the name of a human part-namesake, supply the expected alternation between the netted form and its elderly owner (Figure 35c, d). The application of this putative *itzam aat* to a trio of characters emphasizes that it

[34] In such a scenario, the **na** suffix—possibly meaning "first"—would reflect some enhancement to the Old Man's name that appears in the script only from c. 750 onwards. If the correspondence of the New Year patrons holds true, this would imply that the name of God D (that is, the Old Man plus the Principal Bird Deity) was originally a lengthier affair truncated to *itzamna* only in later times. It follows that if Itzamna was the name by which God D ultimately became known then this was derived in whole or in large part from that of the Old Man.

[35] The Vienna Dictionary describes a certain class of prominent native gods or "idols," including a high deity of incorporeal form from which all things flowed called both Hunab Ku and Colop u Uich Kin. The subsequent entry reads: "Idol which they say was of this: Hun Ytzamna. Yax Cocah Mut." Even though separated into two parts by a period, the text addresses them in the singular. Since Mut (*muut*) means "bird," the avian nature of Yax Cocah Mut has always been clear (Roys 1933:153 n. 5). Apart from its veneration in Yucatan, the seventeenth-century Itza worshiped this character under the name Ah Cocah Mut, and Avendaño saw its mask as part of a *yax che'el kab* "First Earth Tree" effigy at Noj Peten (Tayasal) in 1696 (Means 1917:135-136).

Thompson (1939:161) suggested that Yax Cocah Mut could be related to the "celestial birds" of the four world quarters. This was provoked by the mention of an Ek Cocah Mut (*ek' kokaj muut*), a "black" version of the bird in the Chilam Balam of Chumayel (Roys 1933:153). With black associated with the west, it raised the likelihood that there were five colored birds in the original scheme, with four assigned to the world quarters and Yax Cocah Mut at the center. It may well be relevant that the recently uncovered West Wall mural at San Bartolo shows four world trees with Principal Bird Deities perched in each, with a fifth bird in flight (Taube et al. 2010:52-56, Fig. 7).

The word Cocah (in current orthography *kokah*) is not otherwise attested in Yukatek, although this language does have *ko'koh* for the Trogon bird (Barrera Vásquez et al. 1980:330) and, more usefully, Tzeltal has *kok mut* for the Harpy Eagle, one of the world's largest birds of prey (Hunn 1977:142; Boot 2004:2; Harri Kettunen, personal communication 2006). Yukatek originally had the same velar-glottal spirant distinction (*j*/*h*) seen in Ch'olan, but Colonial sources only partially recorded it and in the case of terminal spirant endings they transcribed the velar form as –*h*, while omitting the glottal ending (see Ola Orie and Bricker 2000:304; Marc Zender, personal communication 2006). This means that sixteenth-century *kokah* is more properly rendered as *kokaj*. We cannot yet be sure that this word equates to the name of the Principal Bird Deity and its –*j* ending, but one of the rare textual references to the bird by itself includes a *yax* prefix (Palenque Temple of the Inscriptions West Panel at M7). A form such as **ITZAM[KOKAAJ]-ji** *itzam kokaaj* would be possible for God D, with the later insertion seen at Xcalumkin making it *itzamna kokaaj*, while the bird in isolation could be *yax kokaaj* (Martin 2006c, 2006d). These reconstructions remain wholly conjectural and Footnote 52 cites other data that might be relevant to the reading issue.

Erik Boot (2008:17-19) has developed similar but different readings for this complex, with God D as the base unit of analysis and the Principal Bird Deity as his avian manifestation. As further elaborated in this study, I see the bird as intrinsic to the composite identity of God D, a figure that, following Bassie-Sweet, equally depends on the inclusion of the Old Man/God N.

behaves more like a title, or group designation, than a personal name, differing from the cases examined thus far. We can only speculate about its significance, although the libidinous nature of Rilaj Mam, a contemporary deity of the Tz'utujil Maya associated with the Underworld, may be relevant (e.g., Tarn and Prechtel 1997:283; Christenson 2001:178), or instead a deliberately coarse or mocking association. Like God L, the Paddlers have personal names of their own, although their portraits, which are always gnarled and aged, could betray a similar underlying identification with the Old Man.[36]

Discussion

The foregoing survey highlights the involvement of the Old Man in a series of key cosmological contexts. To describe a pattern is one thing, to explain it quite another of course, and we are left with a number of pressing questions regarding both the sense behind these bodily conflations and his particular contribution to them. Although the full sweep of these topics, which ultimately reflect on the nature of Maya divinity itself, can only be touched upon lightly here, it is possible to isolate the main problems and explore certain interpretations.[37]

Religions populated by a range of suprahuman beings or deities—which is to say polytheistic ones—come in a number of hues. Even the most cursory of examinations reveals how much the notion of a "god" differs from one tradition to the next. In some, gods are discrete entities with relatively stable identities, while in others they have far more amorphous characters, readily adopting different names and guises, their boundaries sometimes so permeable that one can merge with another. Even within the same tradition we usually find different classes of supernatural being, each with their own qualities, capabilities, and spheres of action. By definition, such systems divide divine agency among a series of actors.

Yet faced with a multitude that can sometimes number in the thousands, they often develop organizing principles by which deities are ranked, grouped, or equated. Polytheistic schemes commonly feature high gods of distinctive powers—some of a remote and intangible nature, others styled as rulers or patriarchs on human models. At its most extreme, their relatedness can amount to a form of "pantheism," in which a seeming host of gods are no more than different aspects or manifestations of a single divine being or essence. A more nuanced version combines singular and plural perspectives, in which many gods contribute to a spiritual whole. If we can gain some understanding of the Old Man and the meaning of his merged forms we might cast some useful light on where Maya beliefs lay on this spectrum.

The Old Man and Theosynthesis

Our first challenge comes in comprehending the Old Man's varied appearances and how they work to define his wider role in the Maya universe. This study has used "combination," "fusion," "union," and their synonyms to describe the engagement of bodies and motifs in pictorial form, without as yet addressing their theological sense. What does it mean to merge the body of one supernatural entity with that of another, and what does this tell us about the production of divine identity among the Maya? More specifically, do the cases at hand (a) constitute differing manifestations of a singular Old Man, (b) signal his confluence with genuinely distinct beings, objects, and materials, or (c) work to specify some quality shared by a group of such entities?

Deity combination, often attested in the sequencing or joining of names as well as in fused representations, occurs in a number of religions worldwide, where it creates especially intimate relations between two, three, or more separate beings. Although its precise significance varies from case to case, it always expresses ways in which one supernatural is related, qualified, or expanded by another. In pooling their respective identities some combinations emerge as singular entities different from the sum of their parts (Hornung 1982:97; Porter 2000b:235-239). Egyptologists, who deal with perhaps the largest inventory of such forms, refer to the phenomenon as "syncretism." This would be a problematic usage for us to adopt, given the more dominant role of this term elsewhere to describe the assimilation of religious ideas from different cultures (Martin 2007b). Instead a neologism, "theosynthesis," better suits our purpose (Martin 2007b). We can define this rather broadly, without pre-judging its significance, as the pictorial convergence of a deity with some other deity, creature, object, or material. As such, it is descriptive rather

than analytical in purpose.

Prominent examples from ancient Egypt include those in which the sun deity Re is fused with Amun to produce Amon-Re or with Horus to produce Re-Harakhte.[38] Here the presence of Re is usually signaled by a solar disk, worn in the form of a crest by these other deities. Accompanying inscriptions sometimes allude to the concept of "inhabiting," in which each god has taken up residence in the body of the other (Bonnet [1939]1999).[39] The resulting unions can also be understood to function rather like chemical compounds in blending particular deities to achieve particular divine effects (Hornung 1982:97). This need not imply an equivalent status. Indeed, through name order and visual precedence they often encode clear hierarchies (Baines 2000:36).[40] Not all cases of theosynthesis in Egyptian religious art signify the union of separate gods. For example, the crested disk of Re is also used to identify his different manifestations, as in the case of the scarab-beetle Khepri. Representations of this character, like others in this iconographic tradition, roam freely between the zoomorphic and the anthropomorphic in different contexts with no effect on their meaning—so that Khepri visualized as a whole scarab is fully equivalent to that of a scarab-headed humanoid. Variant and combined forms of Re are alike in the sense that they express particular aspects of solar identity, often associated with specific stages in the sun's passage across the sky. Thus, for example, Khepri is associated with dawn, Re-Harakhte with midday, and another manifestation, Atum, with sunset.[41]

Indic Hinduism offers another rich vein of theosynthetic forms, which expresses unities between particular divine beings or illuminates otherwise hidden personas. A leading example is that in which the primary gods Vishnu and Shiva are merged to form Harihara.[42] The dualistic nature of this entity is made explicit by a bilateral representation that is half Vishnu and half Shiva, highlighted by their contrasting dark and light skin colors.[43] This union gained particular popularity among the Khmer of Southeast Asia, where it worked to combine alternative conceptions of royal sovereignty and promoted a political as much as a religious agenda (Lavy 2003). Pictorial unions also characterize the *dashavatara*, the different avatars assumed by Vishnu in his ten incarnations on earth. Here too representations take human or animal form as aesthetic choices rather than as shifts in significance. Thus the second avatar, the tortoise Kurma, is usually pictured as an anthropomorphic Vishnu emerging from the mouth or carapace of that creature, but it can also be represented as a whole tortoise wearing the god's crown or jewels. Similarly, the third avatar, the boar Varaha, is shown

as a boar-headed human with four arms, yet can equally be realized as the whole animal adorned with divine emblems. More rarely, both tortoise and boar appear unmarked, their significance as manifestations of Vishnu read solely from their context.

Very similar strategies appear among some of the Maya's neighbors in Mesoamerica, the cultures of Postclassic Central Mexico. There we have relatively abundant original sources but, even more significantly for our purposes, descriptions of their meaning made by the Spanish, who took a close interest in the religious philosophy they were in the process of eradicating. Deities in this tradition had discrete identities, yet these were not confined to a single name or representation and often adopted different appearances and appellatives depending on their role. Additive processes are also apparent, seen in both name combinations and depictions in which diagnostic body parts, costumes, or emblems were transplanted or merged (e.g., Seler [1905]1993:236-239; López Austin 1993:149-151, 1997:22-26).[44]

These are individual gods with strong personalities, but their individuality is not permanent. There is no contradiction in that. The gods merged or divided themselves, and in each union, or in each one of the divided parts, they acquire a new personality. (López Austin 1993:146)

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[36] Copan Stela 2 calls the Paddlers the *mam k'uh* "ancestral gods," employing the **MAM** "grandfather/ancestor" sign first identified by David Stuart ([2000]2007). Their aged countenance may equally stem from this sign (Martin 2014).

[37] A key disagreement on the topic of Maya divinity comes between those identifying a "pantheon" of discrete gods, in the tradition of Schellhas, and those perceiving embodied natural forces and deified ancestors, in which a shift to truly anthropomorphic gods only took place during the Postclassic era and under foreign influence (Proskouriakoff 1978; Marcus 1978:180, 1992:270-271; Baudez 2002a). Evidence for strong historical continuity and distinct divinities came with the decipherment of glyphic **K'UH**, whose descendent forms of *k'u* and *ch'u* were universally translated as "dios" by the early Spanish lexicographers (Ringle 1988; Houston and Stuart 1996; Stuart in Stuart et al. 1999:41; Prager 2013). However, since not all suprahuman characters are labeled as *k'uh* in Maya writing, "true" gods are distinguished from a range of other categories and types.

[38] The switch in vocalization between Amun and Amon in this context is demonstrated by Greek transcriptions; see Baines 2000:32 n. 47.

[39] Hans Bonnet ([1939]1999:189) describes it thus: "...[S]yncretistic formulas should be understood in terms of "inhabiting." Just as any god can take up abode in a fetish or in an animal, or even in the king, so he can inhabit the body of another deity. The formula Amon-Re does not signify that Amun is the same as Re or that one god has merged into the other. It simply observes that Re is in Amun."

[40] Though not matched in visual compounds, name sequences could function so that one deity worked to qualify or determine the character of another to which it was appended (Kurth 1977, cited in Baines 2000:34). The relationship between identity and role is blurred as a result:

It is as if the process of personification occurs in reverse: instead of a powerful concept becoming a deity, a deity is reduced from being a full "person" to being a concept or designator of a quality. (Baines 2000:35)

[41] See Assmann 1995 for a major synthesis of Egyptian solar theology.

[42] Hari and Hara are alternate names for Vishnu and Shiva respectively. Their union was also known as Shankaranarayana, where Shankara refers to Shiva and Narayana to Vishnu.

[43] It should be noted that not all sacred unions in Hinduism receive a theosynthetic treatment. When Shiva and Vishnu are combined with the god Brahma to form the Trimurti, a concept of divine unity, they are shown as three separate beings.

[44] "This interplay of changes, attributes, fusions, and separations does have its own codes. One is iconographic. Specific garments and attributes in the portraits place the gods at a given moment of power, at one point on their path... The gods cross levels, characterizing the different regions of the cosmos in a myriad of functions; but they are still the same gods" (López Austin 1993:150-151).

This hybridity had a range of purposes and effects, including the representation of natural phenomena. Thus when the sun god Tonatiuh disappears at sunset he has the face of the rain god Tlaloc to symbolize the watery Underworld into which he is descending (López Austin 1993:150). In this way motifs were spread beyond that of the core deity with which they are most closely associated. In a telling assessment, Alfredo López Austin (1997:23-26) discerned four qualities to the substance from which the gods were fashioned: it could be divided, it could return to its origin, its components could be separated, and it could be mixed to produce new divine forms.

When it comes to theosynthesis among the Maya, the cases involving the Old Man are far from unique. The phenomenon has been noted by a number of specialists over the years (e.g., Stuart 1984:17; Taube 1992b:148-149) without attracting systematic investigation. We see it, for example, in the triple conflation of Chahk, K'awiil, and Yopaat—normally distinct rain and lightning gods—to form a composite storm deity (Kerr 1990:286 [K2772]). Since these characters appear elsewhere as individuals working together, their pictorial union likely goes beyond the known affinities between these agents of tempest to denote concerted action. Fusion is especially prevalent among divine beings associated with the mythology of corn and the agricultural cycle, the various combinations of the Maize God, Principal Bird Deity, and K'awiil, which regularly interchange diagnostic features. For example, we see the Principal Bird Deity with its head replaced by that of K'awiil (e.g., Schmidt 2007:Fig. 20) or by that of the Maize God (e.g., Métropoles Mayas 1993:No. 43). More often, these combinations are abbreviated, in the first case to just an axe or flaming torch inset in the bird's forehead and in the second to a tonsured hairstyle. Amalgamations between the Maize God and K'awiil are especially common, with the visual precedence given to one or the other varying from example to example. Again, the purpose of theosynthesis could well lie in bringing individual agents to bear on a common theme or activity—with this last union especially associated with lightning-empowered germination and sprouting in the Underworld (Martin 2006a:179).

Transposable to a degree unusual even by the plastic standards of Maya art, ancient believers plainly did not associate these conceptual unions with any set form. As we have seen, representations show little

Figure 36. The Old Man on the back of the Principal Bird Deity: (above) lid of an unprovenanced vessel (photo K2131 © Justin Kerr); (facing page) the vessel with lid (photo © Denver Art Museum; Denver Art Museum Collection: Purchased in honor of Jan and Frederick Mayer with funds from 2001 Collectors' Choice, 1998.34A-B).

regard for the visual priority of their components, a crocodile wearing a net headscarf serving just as well as its inverse, a full-bodied old deity sporting a crocodile headdress, or for that matter the same character set within the throat of the beast. What mattered was not the specific configuration but the inclusion of a group of motifs, each the visualization of a nominal component. Theosynthetic compounds have much in common with the graphic potential of hieroglyphs, which in like manner insert and merge one element with another.[45] This, in turn, could lead us to a textual understanding of divine portraits as a form of embodied nomenclature, in which images are not so much portraits of the gods as they are representations of their names.

While their visualizations may be variable, the nominal

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[45] For many aspects of Maya hieroglyphs as corporeal embodiments see Houston 2014:102-123.

sequences describing these combined entities follow a fixed order. These could be simple compound nouns, but in many Mayan grammatical forms the final position is taken by a head noun—making *ahk* "turtle" in *itzam k'an ahk* and *tuun* "stone" in *itzam chan tuun* their respective foci. Here preceding terms are attributives that modify or qualify the head noun. Adjectives are obvious attributives but other nouns serve the function just as well, with many words in Mayan languages falling into both grammatical categories. If *itzam* denotes a quality here, then the *ahk* and *tuun* would share a certain common *itzam*-ness. Yet attributives are not restricted to expressing a quality and can also specify a category or class to which the head noun belongs (Kerry Hull, personal communication 2010). This would make for a different emphasis in which these particular versions of *ahk* and *tuun* are members or types of *itzam*. Since any of these readings is possible, syntax alone cannot narrow the question of meaning.

Yet we might draw a lesson from an instance where we understand not only a composite name and its depiction but also something of the theological sense behind them. Some images of the Maize God show "wood" markings emblazoned on his skin and cacao pods sprouting from his limbs. An accompanying caption calls this figure the *ixiim te'*, the "Maize (God) Tree." Wider iconographic analysis indicates that this represents a stage in the corn deity's progress through the Underworld and a metaphor for the germination of fruiting plants (Martin 2006a, 2012). The head noun *te'*—which commonly appears in plant names or objects made from wood—is here a form or vehicle, while the attributive *ixiim* denotes its inner vivifying persona. This tree is not simply like the corn deity in a qualitative sense, but constitutes a transfiguration of the god specific to a particular time and place. If we were to see *itzam chan tuun* as broadly analogous in structure, we could interpret "stone" as the material form assumed or inhabited by the Old Man in a given cosmic context. The appearance of his name and image would, in this scenario, denote an inherent identity—functioning much as the solar disk of Re does in representations of Khepri or the portrait and emblems of Vishnu do in Kurma.

We know that pictorial unions can signify specific properties or material qualities without contributing a nominal component. The Principal Bird Deity is already an amalgam of this kind, with its square god-eyes and mirror markings drawn from a separate personification of luster and brilliance nicknamed the "Shiner." The diagnostic features of this character are combined with other reflective or bright beings, most especially the sun god K'inich Ajaw. Although the Shiner can appear in an isolated anthropomorphic form and bears its own name, it shows no

sign of being a mythic actor in its own right.[46]

Among all the depictions of God D one stands out for the emphasis it puts on the individuality of its components. The lid of an Early Classic blackware dish shows a diminutive but full-bodied Old Man seated on a "sun" sign while riding on the back of a Principal Bird Deity, the artist having produced the sculptural equivalent of a "separated-out" glyphic spelling (Figure 36). The man wears the bird's medallion, signaling their combination, yet the more telling point is the effort that has been put into their differentiation. Should we take this as evidence for their separate existence? In order to fully demonstrate the autonomy of any given component one would need to show not only that it is capable of separate representation and bears its own name, but that it can act independently outside its combined forms. There are certainly instances where the Principal Bird Deity or one of the Cosmic Monsters, for example, are mentioned without displaying any discernible visual or nominal link to the Old Man.[47] Yet it is hard to exclude the possibility that he nevertheless remains an innate presence within them.

To address this point we must take a closer look at the metaphysics of the God D and Principal Bird Deity connection, and at a problem that predates the complications introduced by the Old Man. There is a blunt distinction between God D as the supreme ruler of the sky to which the Hero Twins, among other gods, pay homage (Coe 1989:174-175, Fig. 19-21) and the Principal Bird Deity as the target of a violent assault by those same brothers (Coe 1989:169-172, Fig. 10-14). This last event is alluded to on Preclassic monuments at Izapa, but its first explicit appearance is on a modeled twin-cylinder blackware vessel from the Early Classic, where one brother is shown luring the bird while the other levels a blowgun at him (Coe

[46] Although it resembles and occasionally merges with the head form for **K'UH** "god" this is a distinct form first identified by Stuart (1988:201-203). The Shiner is a personified attribute of divinity conceived in terms of the reflective quality found in polished stones (Saturno et al. 2005:38-41; Stuart, personal communication 2007; Taube 2007; Houston 2014:92-96). In early representations of the Principal Bird Deity we see the face of the Shiner set into its breast (see Parsons 1983:152), although in later ones its diagnostic mirror designs are more comprehensively combined with the bird's body. These mark it as bright, shiny, and jade-like in ways that closely parallel the description of its partially descendent form, Vucub Caquix of the Popol Vuh (Martin 2007a). It plays a similar role among other beasts presented in conceptual rather than naturalistic form—including sharks, toads, and eagles—which could express a perceived affinity between a reflective glow and the sheen of wet skin and feathers, as well as the dazzling glare of the sun.

[47] A context in which visual ties to the Old Man are absent comes in the mythic episode from Palenque Temple XIX in which the sky monster is beheaded (Velázquez García 2002:447-448, 2006; Stuart 2005c:68-77). A possessed form of this creature's name later in the same text (Stuart 2005c:88) clearly omits the Old Man from the spelling, as noted earlier.
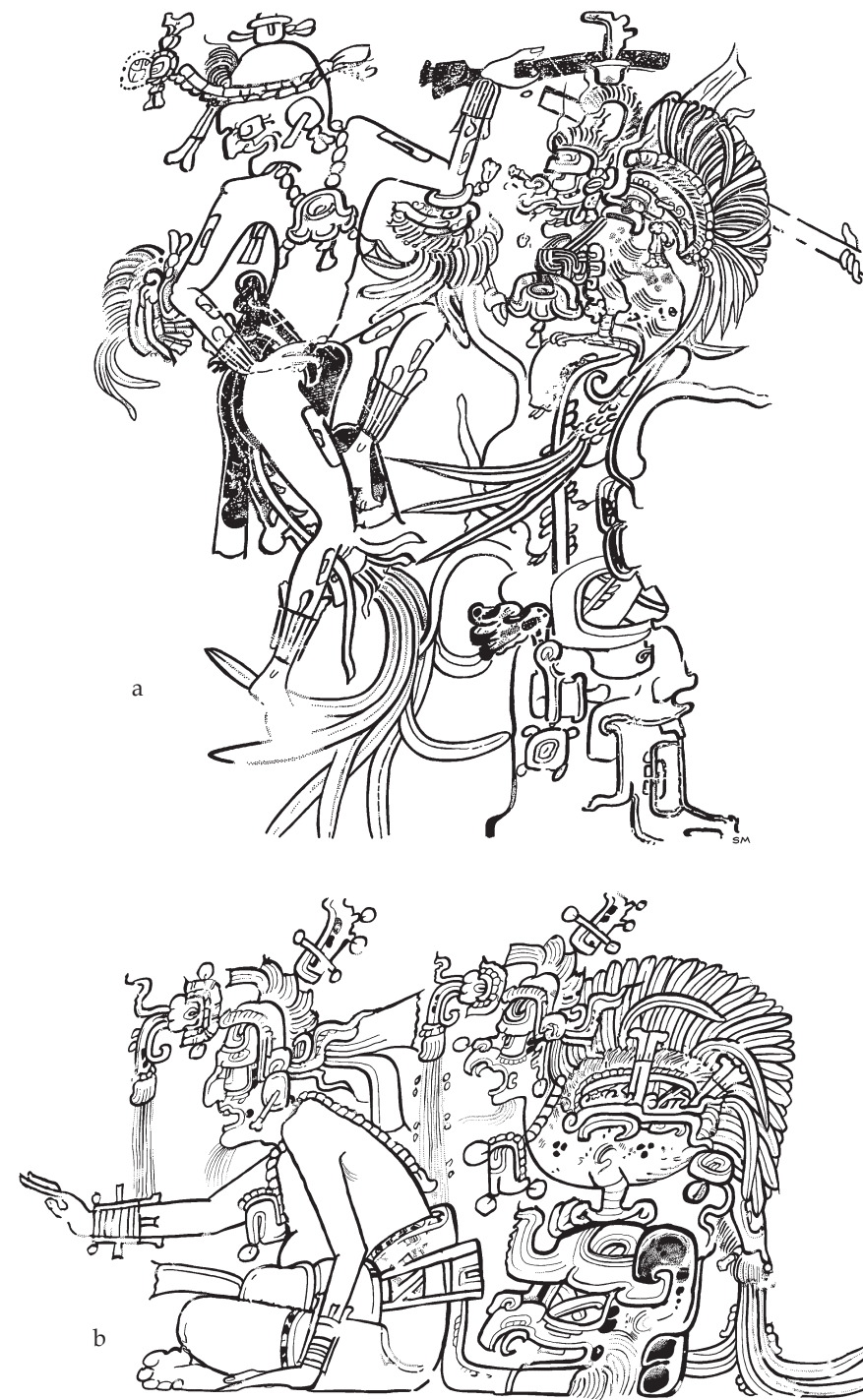
Figure 37. The complex relationship between God D and the Principal Bird Deity: (a) the plumed God D under fire from Juun Ajaw (after photo by Nicholas Hellmuth); (b) God D and the Principal Bird Deity together as separate beings (after photos by Michel Quenon and Coe and Houston 2015:Pl. 18).

1989:Fig. 14).[48] At least three Late Classic vases depict this same event, one of which, K1226, bears a text dating the action to the day 1 Ajaw—clearly linked to the identity of the shooter Juun Ajaw—and captions it with *ehm(i) chan* "he descends (from the) sky" (Zender 2005:8-13).[49] Famously, this finds a close counterpart in the Popol Vuh, where Juun Ajaw (there called Hunahpu) shoots Vucub Caquix with a blowgun, thereafter robbing him of his jewels and ending his presumptuous claim to be the sun and moon (see Christenson 2003:97).

One little-examined Late Classic example supplies some important, if still enigmatic, information that must be taken into account. Only two views of this painted cylinder have been published to date, but enough can be seen to know that it bears another bird-hunting scene featuring the Hero Twins, who are identifiable by the tips of their blowguns (see Hellmuth 1987a:Figs. 578, 579). The scene on view features a tree with two images of the Principal Bird Deity and one of God D, the latter splendidly fitted out with feathered arms and tail. There is a cinematic quality here, an apparent sequence in which a bird first flies up into the tree, then perches in its branches, then emerges on the other side in new guise.[50] The pivotal detail, hard to see in the photo, is that one blowgun pokes into the scene and—doubtless in the hands of Juun Ajaw—fires its pellet not at the birds but at the old sky god, the only occasion he appears as the target of the shooting (Figure 37a). This narrative turn only raises more questions.

[48] This evidently relates to a section of the San Bartolo mural in which a duck-billed character speaks or sings to attract the attention of a flying Principal Bird Deity (Taube et al. 2010:48-52). On K8721, an unprovenanced Late Classic vessel, a matching scene is captioned with *ehm(i)* "he descends," the same term used in the shooting of the Principal Bird Deity on K1226 (Zender 2005:8-11; for discussion of the latter scene see Robicsek and Hales 1982:56-57). At San Bartolo the "luring" is directly adjacent to a damaged portion in which the Maize God appears to spear the creature (Saturno 2007), a deduction enhanced by a "dead" bird deity separately pictured hung on the back of a young lord who is probably Juun Ajaw (Taube et al. 2010:19, Fig. 12). If correctly understood, the defeat—or separate defeats—are the work of the Maize God and the Hero Twins (putative father and sons). This feature is paralleled in the defeat of God L, where separate but closely similar events of denuding and humiliation are performed by both the Hero Twins and the Maize God (Miller and Martin 2004:59-61). There is an implicit correspondence here between victories over the sky and netherworld and the humiliation or subjugation of enemies of the Maize God and his kin.

[49] One vessel, K4243, identifies the falling Principal Bird Deity with his anticipated name glyph, but on K1226 the same scene is captioned with the name of God D. This points to an important equivalence between the two entities, of which we are about to see more.

[50] Nicholas Hellmuth (1987a:255-262, 364-367) includes this scene in his interpretation of a sequence in which God D is transformed into the Principal Bird Deity. However, the blowgunning detail favors, if anything, a transition in the opposite direction.
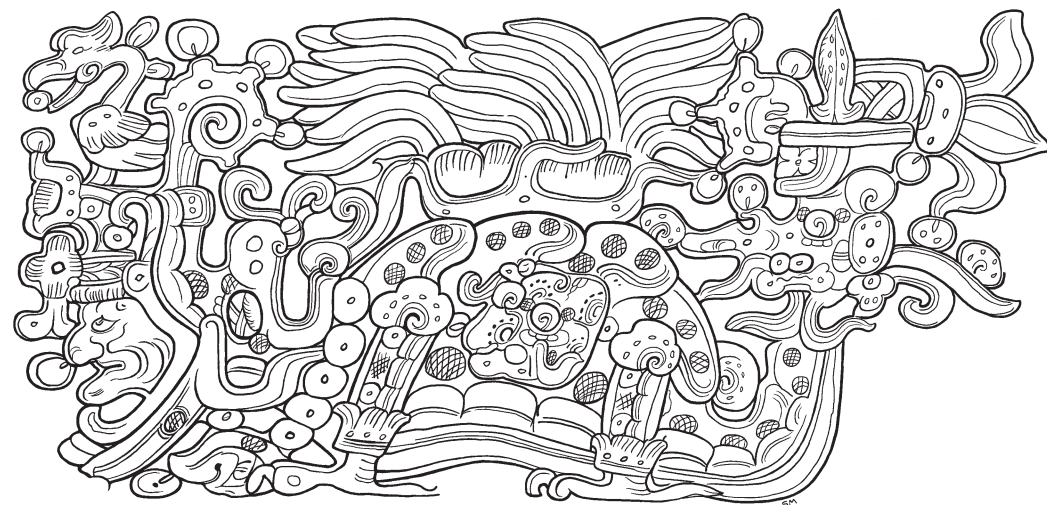
Figure 38. The Old Man combined with multiple supernatural beings: detail from rollout of unprovenanced vessel (photo K6626 © Justin Kerr) and drawing of detail.

Does the pellet's strike reveal the bird's "true" self, demonstrating that the difference between the two is merely one of appearance? Or is it that the shooting and resulting "descent" in some manner invokes or realizes the Old Man, elaborating the Principal Bird Deity into God D?[51] The plot point that takes us from prey to preeminence may be a simple one, but it currently eludes us.[52]

We could suppose that each form belongs to its own temporality, with bird and human divided by this decisive act of violence. However, we have other scenes in which God D and the Principal Bird Deity share the same space and time, where no before-and-after sequence seems feasible (Hellmuth 1987a:Fig. 553), including one vase that shows them jointly enthroned as they preside over supplicant deities (Boot 2008:Fig. 1a; Coe and Houston 2015:Pl. 18) (Figure 37b). Such images oblige us to accept that the bird

can exist independently of its overt hybridization with the Old Man—which is to say, that the two entities can be simultaneously separate and joined. Deeply at odds with the natural world, this would in no way violate a supernatural one typified by malleable divine essences untethered to corporeal forms, in which singularity and multiplicity coexist with ease.

A more extreme example of theosynthesis than those encountered so far offers further clues to the coexistence and mixing of Maya divinity. A carved vessel designated as K6626 in the Kerr Archive, shows the Old Man within a fabulous merging of some six or more supernaturals, each contributing body parts to a single chimera (Figure 38). We can discern elements belonging to the piscine deity GI, the Principal Bird Deity, the Wind deity, and the Water Lily Serpent, but the image is dominated by that of a great crocodile combining several features of the earthly beast with one, the Quadripartite Badge, that normally distinguishes the sky-borne version.

[51] The Preclassic Principal Bird Deities at Izapa are fusions with another divine being, whose face appears in their open jaws in most cases. Though not overtly aged, this character is likely to be an early equivalent of the Old Man (Martin 2007a).

[52] There is an important relationship here to the two scenes on vessel K7821. One is the aforementioned luring of the bird by the duck-billed being, captioned with the *ehm(i)* "he descends" term and the 1 Ajaw date of the shooting (Zender 2005:11, Fig. 6). The other shows the same duck-billed character as a supplicant at the court of God D, where a text informs us that the "descent" he supervised thirteen years earlier was attended by the Hero Twins (Zender 2005:11-12, Figs. 7, 8). The name of the descending subject appears to be that of God D, but features a **ch'a** sign in place of the flowery diadem. This is hard to explain as an error or stylistic oddity and instead conceivably works as a phonetic complement to the name of the great bird.
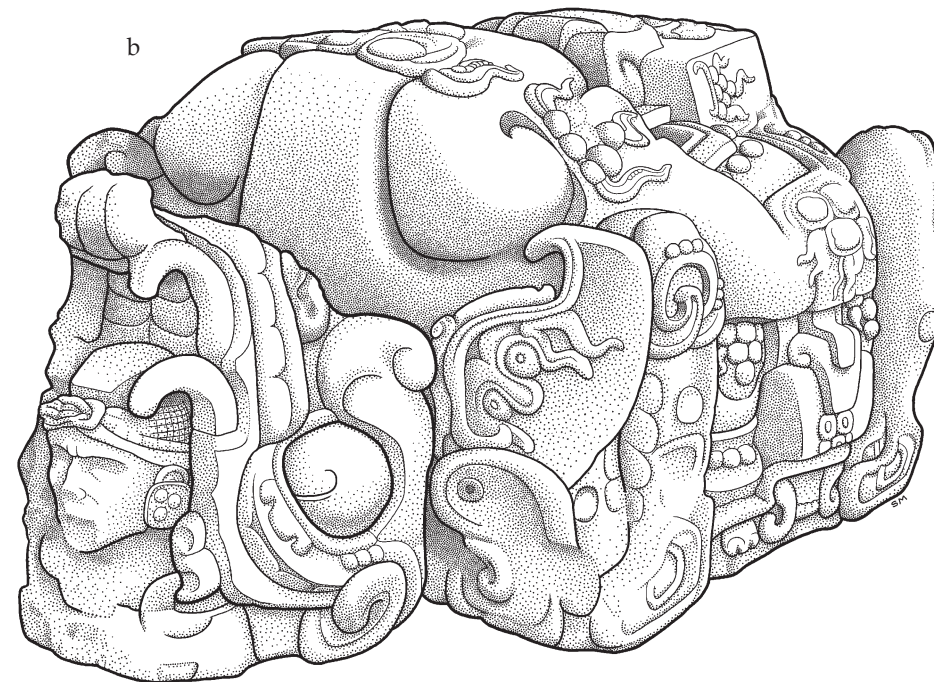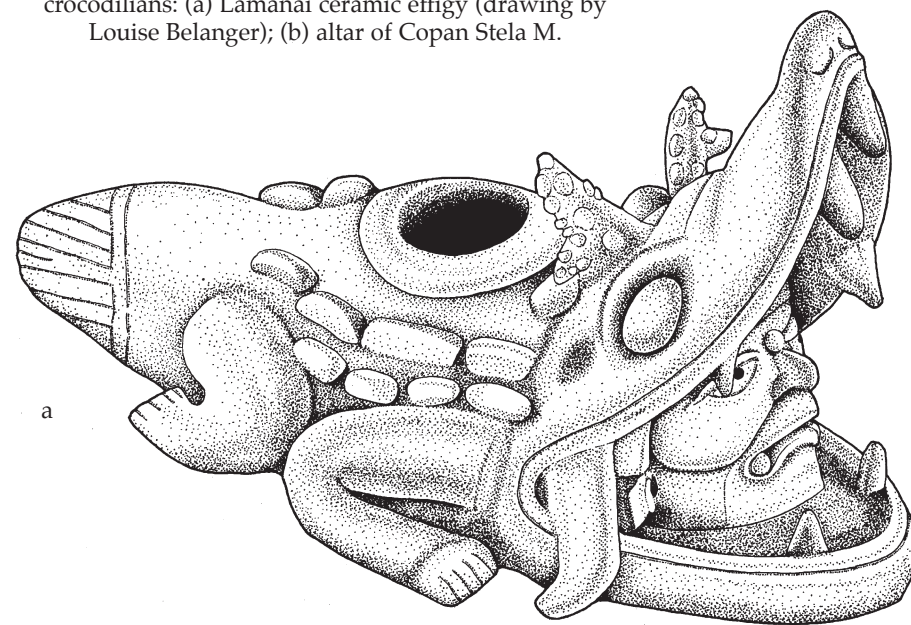
Several terrestrial-style crocodiles include this brazier assemblage, and it is conceivable that it was a motif they could share.[53] More likely, however, its presence signals the kind of fusion we see in effigy vessels from the Late Postclassic period, such as one excavated at Lamanai, Belize (Figure 39a). Here the jaws open to reveal the Old Man's visage once more, but the monster's head and body present both (celestial) deer antlers and a (terrestrial) fishtail. An earlier version of this combination seems to be offered by star-marked crocodiles whose central trunks are formed from three personified stone masks, as we see on the altar to Copan Stela M (Figure 39b) and on a previously mentioned carved relief (Figure 6b). These same rocky masks make up the body of Quirigua Zoomorph P (Figure 15b), where they would appear to be a core attribute of the great earth monster.[54]

These crocodilian unions might symbolize a holistic concept of heaven-and-earth, or even represent a primeval creature prior to some ancient separation (Martin 2008). In Central Mexican legend only half of the slain body of Tlalteotl was fashioned into the earth; the remainder was raised up into the sky (Garibay 1965:108; López Austin 1997:13-

[53] Terrestrial-style crocodiles that include the skeletal head and its Quadripartite Badge appear at Copan (Maudslay 1889-1902:1:Pl. 114a), Quirigua (Maudslay 1889-1902:2:Pl. 12b), Yaxchilan (Graham 1982:169), and Copan Altar of Stela M, to be discussed momentarily.

[54] An argument could be made that the masks refer to the three "stones of creation," a cosmic "hearth" with strong celestial connections (Taube 1992b:37, 1998:432-446; Freidel et al. 1993:67). However, the generalized stone motifs on cosmic monsters such as Copan Altar 41 (Maudslay 1889-1902:1:Pl. 114a) and within the Temple of the Cross at Palenque (Maudslay 1889-1902:1:Pl. 68a), as well as the single personified mask seen on K6626, counter the idea that the number three has particular significance here.

16).[55] It was the violent division of this monster that produced the fabric of the current universe. Its reconfigured form made the mortal world possible, but it remained so unstable that the analogous efforts of cosmic bearers and arbors were necessary to keep it from collapsing.

The image on K6626 is hardly a canonical one—there is nothing else quite like it in the surviving corpus—yet it must distill a meaningful religious truth. Should we read it as a concentration of power in which many gods contribute to a fundamental "oneness" of the spiritual world? Or is the Old Man to be seen as hierarchically salient and the whole form as his metaphorical body, each part composed of a lower-order being? However it should be interpreted, this is plainly a divine abstraction rather than a phantasm imagined to tramp the Maya cosmos.

To summarize, fused forms of the kind in which we see the Old Man have wide currency among polytheistic religions, including elsewhere in Mesoamerica. This representational strategy, here called theosynthesis, has no fixed meaning but can fulfill any of our three interpretive options—combinations, manifestations, or qualities—and, indeed, can serve more than one role even within the same tradition. What can be said is that the presence of the Old Man in these compounds animates them with a distinctive persona and that each serves to define a different quadrant, plane, or zone of the cosmos.

Sorcerer and Creator

We can go no further without addressing what the Old Man himself might signify. A figure that pervades so many universal domains clearly embodies a profound concept, and we must ask why agedness was the most appropriate way of expressing it. Unlike other Maya gods, the wrinkled skin of the Old Man normally bears no special markings attesting to its otherworldly surface—his flesh, if not mortal, at least resembles our own. Likewise, he squints at us with small, human eyes, not the oversized optics that equip so many of his fellow deities. He carries no tokens of office and wears no royal regalia; he is neither a king nor a model for kingship. The sole mark of his magnitude is his manifest age, with its implied benedictions of experience, knowledge, and wisdom. This much makes him a sage, certainly, but Mesoamericans saw even greater gifts to long life: the mystical powers of the diviner and sorcerer. Such powers are wryly self-evident in the contrast between the prodigious strength of the heavenly bearers and their withered physiques. It is not muscle, but magic, that keeps the sky aloft.

For Mesoamericans, the ultimate act of sorcery was the creation of the universe, and their founding gods are typically a male-female pair of elderly magicians. Since cosmogenesis

was an event of significant antiquity, this in itself required that its instigators be very old. Their marital union simultaneously evokes the mysterious fruitfulness of the sex act and the idea—a recurring one across the region—that neither man nor woman are truly complete in themselves, that only their joining produces a "whole" person.

Evidence for these figures in the Maya area comes in ethnographic accounts from the southern highlands of the sixteenth century. Las Casas (1909:619), working in an unspecified part of the Verapaz region, was told that the world was created by the marital pair Xtçamna and Xchel, clear counterparts to the gods Itzamna and Ix Chel attested in northern Yucatan.[56] Moreover, Zuñiga and Morán, authors who conducted separate studies among the Poqomam Maya around the same time, record the name of the founding deity as a combined IxchelItzam and Xchelitzam respectively (Miles 1957:748). The male form survived into modern times among the lowland Lakandon Maya of Mexico, where Itzan Noh K'u "Itzan Great God" is associated with crocodiles (Bruce 1967:98), and among a Yukatekan-speaking community in southern Belize, where Itzam is said to be a creator deity and head of the native pantheon (Joyce et al. 1927:317; Thompson 1930:58).[57] There he is further described as one of four Mam "Grandfathers/Ancestors," but, significantly, also considered to be dual-sexed.

The idea of a creator couple, or a dualistic "Mother-Father," is found in Maya societies under a variety of other epithets (Nuñez de la Vega [1702]1988:131; Guiteras Holmes 1961:292; Holland 1963:113; Vogt 1976:16; also see discussion in Thompson 1970b:200-206). Among the Jakaltek Maya of the highlands it is striking that their "Old Father" and "Old Mother" bear calendar names equivalent to 9 Lamat and 9 Imix (La Farge and Byers 1931:114; Thompson 1970b:203). We have already encountered Lamat's connection to the sky monster, but Imix—which begins

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[55] The Histoyre du Mechique tells us: "Y la apretaron tanto, que la hicieron partirse por la mitad, y del medio de las espaldas hicieron la tierra y la otra mitad la subieron al cielo, de lo cual los otros dioses quedaron muy corridos" (Garibay 1965:108). In its female form the monumental sculptures of Tlalteotl combine earthly and celestial motifs (Nicholson 1967a:82, 86-87). We also learn from the Histoyre du Mechique that Tlalteotl's original home was in the sky (Garibay 1965:108). If its dismemberment can be equated to that of Itzam Cab Ain (Martínez Hernández 1913:165-166), and this in turn relates to the aforementioned passage from Palenque Temple XIX (Velásquez García 2002:447, 2006; Stuart 2005c:68-77, 180), then it would explain why the creature in the latter is explicitly identified as the Cosmic Monster of the sky.

[56] Surviving sources from Yucatan disagree on the relationship between Itzamna and Ix Chel, but a text published in 1595 by Fray Jerónimo Román y Zamora identifies them as a married couple (although he transposes the sexes) (Thompson 1939:152).

[57] Itzam was cited in Mopan Maya prayers from southern Belize as recently as 1970, in the form "O Dios, santo hok, santo witz, santo luum, o itzam..." (Norman Hammond, personal communication 2015).

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the twenty days of the Maya ritual calendar—corresponds to the Aztec day Cipactli. It is tempting to see in these forms a distant echo of the contrasting variants of the Cosmic Monster. The pairing of old gods is also very prominent in the K'iche' Popol Vuh, where the "shapers" of the universe, Xpiyacoc and Xmucane, are called "Patriarch" and "Midwife" (Tedlock 1996:217; Christenson 2003:62 nn. 23-26).[58] Bassie-Sweet (1996:53, 2008:53-55, 125-130) dubs them the "creator grandparents" and, following suggestions that go back to the time of Brinton (1881:642), equates them with Itzamna and Ix Chel.[59]

The creatrix Ix Chel corresponds to Goddess O in the Schellhas system, although hieroglyphic spellings make it clear that her name was formerly Chak Chel or "Great Rainbow" (Taube 1992b:99). This menacing old woman is a familiar one in Maya art, where she can display the ears, claws, and eye of a jaguar, a coiled snake for a headband, and a skirt decorated with crossed long bones and disembodied eyeballs. She appears in the roles of a midwife, child-minder, spinner, warrior, and most powerfully as a cosmic destroyer: joining the sky monster and rain deities in creating a world-ending deluge in the Dresden and Madrid codices (on page 74 and page 50 respectively) (Taube 1992b:99-105, 1994:657-658; Miller and Martin 2004:95-96).

A partnership between Goddess O and God N is suggested by reliefs in the Lower Temple of the Jaguars at Chichen Itza (Foster and Wren 1996) (Figure 40). This structure, dating to the Terminal Classic or Early Postclassic (c. 800–1000 CE), features two squared columns whose faces are carved with a quadripartite arrangement of bearers in the
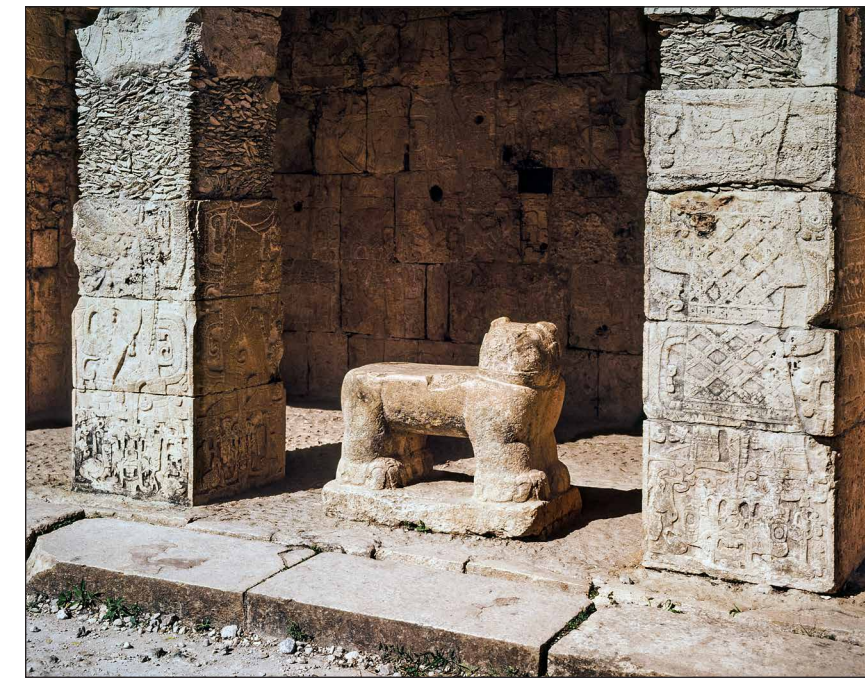
Figure 40. Lower Temple of the Jaguars, Chichen Itza, showing the squared columns carrying images of God N and Goddess O. Photo: Jorge Pérez de Lara.
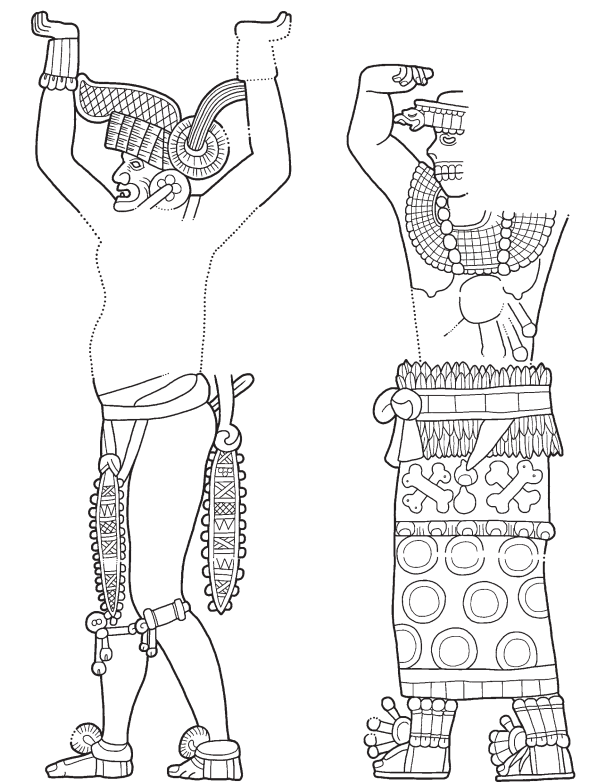
Figure 41. The Old Man as God N paired with Goddess O: details from the columns of the Lower Temple of the Jaguars, Chichen Itza.

raised-arm pose. One column provides four varieties of God N while its companion shows four versions of Goddess O (Tozzer 1957:Figs. 195, 196, 615) (Figure 41).[60]

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[58] The literal terms are *mamom* "He who has had Grandchildren" and *i'yom* "She who has had Grandchildren" (Christenson 2003:62 nn. 23-24).

[59] In her discussion of Maya creator gods, Bassie-Sweet joins Stuart in seeing God N and the Principal Bird Deity as "manifestations of the same god"— situating the combined God D at the top of a divine hierarchy (Bassie-Sweet 2002:25, 28, 2008:128-130; letter by David Stuart transcribed in Stuart 2007a). Initially, she posited that the head of the Principal Bird Deity was alone sufficient to spell Itzamnaah and that the head of God N had an honorific function, possibly to be read *mam* or *ama* "old man" (Bassie-Sweet 2002:30-31). More recently, she equates both God N and God D with Itzamnaaj, and the Principal Bird Deity with the "Itzamnaaj Bird" (Bassie-Sweet 2008:139).

[60] This multiple form of Goddess O/Ix Chel is uncommon but does appear on the "Birth Vase" (Taube 1994:657-658). The face of the goddess at Chichen Itza is unusual for its skeletal features, which may relate her to the Mexican earth goddess Cihuacoatl (Thompson 1950:83) and/or to the subterranean bearers of the Maya, the *xiiw(?) chan tuun* (see Footnote 29). The influence of Central Mexican ideas is strong at Chichen Itza and no clearer than in the appearance of Tezcatlipoca on other piers at the site (Thompson 1942).

Each supports not the sky but a fused turtle-mountain and its sprouting Maize God—the symbol of the fecund earth elsewhere depicted as the God N turtle. Lynn Foster and Linnea Wren (1996) were the first to identify this pair of bearers as cosmic progenitors, and it was subsequently argued that these scenes depict a key moment of world creation (Schele and Mathews 1998:215-218, Fig. 6.11).

The association between these two deities reaches back into the Classic proper, as seen on a fine red-background vase (Coe 1978:106-110; K501 in the Kerr catalogue) (Figure 42).[61] Here God N takes the role of an artist, wearing a distinctive swept-back style of headscarf and holding a cut-shell paint pot in his hand (Figure 43a). The scroll that emerges from his nose signals his divine breath, while his three-spotted ear ornament and leafy headband link him to the watery, turtle aspect of God N as world center. He is juxtaposed with an image of Goddess O, who carries the brazier of the Quadripartite Badge in a sling across her back (Figure 43c). There it takes the place of an idol or infant—not unrelated ideas for the Maya—and sets up a connection to the sky monster, a link enhanced by the crocodilian appearance of its supporting head. Unusually, both old gods show mirror devices on their bodies, imbuing them with the shining quality that marks positive, beneficent deities. Between them lies the mouth of a cave (Figure 43b). Within we see a man in a broad-brimmed hat and, just outside, a woman who faces away as if departing. Stephen Houston has persuasively interpreted this as an episode in the genesis of humankind, with the creator couple presiding over the emergence of the first people from a primeval cave—a legend

61 The base portions of this image have been heavily restored, in parts invented, and are therefore not iconographically reliable. For a photograph taken prior to this renovation effort see Hellmuth 1987a:Fig. 126. It is clear from this that the white fracture lines we see today are deceptive later additions in a number of cases (Justin Kerr, personal communication 2015).

Figure 42. The Old Man and Goddess O: detail from a partially restored unprovenanced vessel. Photo K501 © Justin Kerr.

with a rich history in Mesoamerica (Houston 2001:337; Houston et al. 2006:53).

A clear inference emerges from these disparate but related sources. If Goddess O's relationship to God N in Classic iconography parallels that of Ix Chel's to Itzam/Itzamna in the colonial and ethnographic sources, then we would have another reason to believe that the latter is the correct identity of the aged, net-headscarfed creator and bearer here dubbed the Old Man. The proposals in this study stem from other evidence, much of it iconographic, but Stuart's *itzam* reading plainly offers powerful synergies across time periods and the full expanse of the Maya domain, making connections to the rich lexical sources at our disposal.

The meaning of *itzam*, so far as it can be gleaned from ethnographic and linguistic data, would indeed be appropriate for a sorcerer-creator. In lowland languages *itz* is used to refer to liquids that form droplets—such as sap, milk, and sweat—and it appears as the ethereal, dew-like substance *yitz ka'anil* or "*itz* of the sky" invoked by contemporary ritualists in Yucatan (Sosa 1985:435, 438). In the

Figure 43. The Old Man, Goddess O, and the creation of humankind: (a) the Old Man; (b) cave with emerging people; (c) Goddess O (Chak Chel).

highlands of the south, *itz* is a widely distributed root for sorcery and the related realms of divination and curing. In many communities today an Aj Itz "He of *itz*" is a practitioner of the black arts who casts spells and curses to commission (Miles 1957:751). Structurally, there is some evidence in Yukatek that the suffix –*am* can serve as an agentive (Swadesh et al. 1970:34).[62] In this scenario *itzam* would be the person who embodies or manipulates *itz*, evidently some magical force or substance. In their review of the lexical evidence, Linda Schele and David Freidel (Freidel et al. 1993:50-51, 411-412) follow Alfredo Barrera Vásquez et al. (1980:272) in offering the sense of *itzam* as "shaman, magician, wizard."

Parallels in Central Mexico

Universal creation in Postclassic Central Mexico was also described as the work of an elderly couple—known individually as Ometecuhtli and Omecihuatl and in their conjoined form as Ometeotl "Dual God." Literary texts refer to the varied identities these characters adopt depending on their particular generative roles (León-Portilla 1963:30-34, 84-99, 1999; Nicholson 1971:410-411). Thus, as the providers of life and sustenance the divine pair become Tonacatecuhtli and Tonacacihuatl—depicted on at least one occasion in an androgynous union (Codex Borgia page 61). In another guise the creators adopted stellar personalities, expressed as Citlallatonac and Citlalinicue, producers of the stars and Milky Way. Equally, the couple inhabited the Underworld in the fearsome, skeletalized forms of Mictlantecuhtli and Mictecacihuatl.[63] Xiuhtecuhtli, the god of fire and time, was also equated with Ometeotl and at times addressed as "Mother of the Gods, Father of the Gods, the Old God" (Sahagún 1950-1982:Book 7:41, 88-89).

Significantly, Tonacatecuhtli had a special relationship with Cipactli, ruling as the earth monster's patron when it served as both a day name and that of a 13-day *trecena* period (Figure 44a). A character intimately related to this complex was Cipactonal (*cipac(tli)*

+ *tonal* "day/heat/soul"), who in some tellings was the offspring of Tonacatecuhtli and Tonacacihuatl. A transitional figure between gods and humans, Cipactonal was an old sorcerer often identified by his crocodile headdress, bodysuit, or appended Cipactli name glyph, at other times recognized by the red line drawn around his eye and his unruly hair and beard (Figure 44b). These features are expressed in full theosynthetic style where Cipactonal is embodied as the great gaping crocodile in the Codex Borgia (Seler 1963:2:42; Taube 1989a:9) (Figure 44c). Cipactonal and his wife Oxomoco are said to be parents to the first humans and the inventors of the ritual calendar and divinatory arts (Robelo 1911:339-350; Garibay 1965:25, 110; Guilliem 1998:50; Boone 2007:24-26, 195). Soothsayers and sages, physicians and priests, both can be portrayed with sacerdotal tobacco vessels on their backs (Figure 45). Rock carvings situated between Coatlan and Yauhtepec, Mexico (Figure 46), show the aged pair engaged in artistic production and divination, seated to either side of a cave entrance (Figure 47)—a composition uncannily close to the one on K501.[64]

62 Alfonso Lacadena (personal communication 2007) sees evidence for the –*am* agentive in glyphic texts from Ek' Balam in Yucatan, specifically in **tz'i-ba-ma TUUN-ni** *tz'i[h]bam tuun* "Painter Stone."

63 Michael Coe (1978:21) has compared God L to Mictlantecuhtli and suggested that they share parallel relationships to Itzamna and Ometeotl respectively.

64 The male is traditionally said to be reading a codex (Nowotny 1961:53, Fig. 9), although he wields the sharpened bone carried by other Central Mexican deities that elsewhere serves to energize or animate sacred objects (Boone 2007:183). The female holds a shell with which she casts maize grains in divination, seen more clearly in other portraits of her (Boone 2007:24, 27).

The scope of the Ometeotl complex was so extensive that Hermann Beyer (1910:116) argued that Aztec religion was essentially pantheistic, its host of deities "really many manifestations of only one god" (see also León-Portilla 1963:95-96 and López Austin 1993:147-149). The sources certainly emphasize the pervasive qualities of this dualistic entity, a phenomenon Miguel León-Portilla called its "multi-presence" (1963:93). The supreme deity could not, it seems, be truly separated from its creations and derivations, and through them engaged in an on-going maintenance of the universe in all its dimensions.

The focus on time, the carrying of the four successive stations of the year in a cardinal circuit, is another area in which the resonances between the Maya and the peoples of Central Mexico are strong. In the latter it is the four sons of Ometeotl—each a version of the god Tezcatlipoca—who established the cardinal directions as well as all the domains of the world, from the sky to the earth to the netherworld (León-Portilla 1963:33-36; Garibay 1965:23-25). This was equated to the division of the 260-day divinatory cycle into four quadrants, giving this universal geography an intrinsic temporal dimension—a notion that has been compared to the "space-time" of modern physics (Soustelle 1940:85).[65] Cipactonal's relationship to the scheme is reflected in the aforementioned image from the Codex Borgia, where his splayed crocodile body depicts the earthly continent of Cipactli circumnavigated by all the other day signs (Boone 2007:197-199) (Figure 44c). A Maya semblant of this idea, dating to the Early Classic, could appear in a damaged stucco frieze at Copan (Fash 1991:84, Fig. 40). Clearer examples are found in Postclassic murals at the sites of Coba and Tancah, and on a small stone altar at Mayapan—all of which show Maya day signs on the
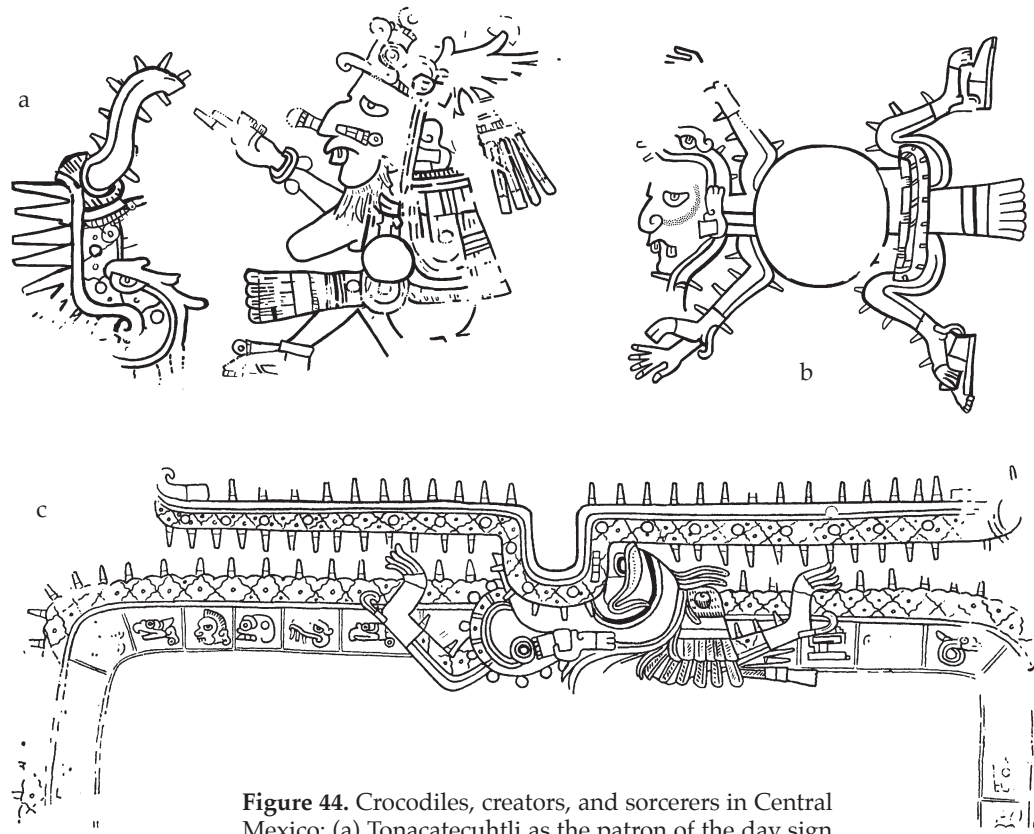
Figure 44. Crocodiles, creators, and sorcerers in Central Mexico: (a) Tonacatecuhtli as the patron of the day sign Cipactli, Codex Borgia page 9; (b) Cipactonal as a rubber ball, Codex Borgia page 7; (c) Cipactli combined with the features of Cipactonal, Codex Borgia page 39.

bodies of crocodiles (Proskouriakoff 1962:Fig. 4e; Taube 1989a:4-9, Fig. 5).[66] At Coba its scaly form serves as a groundline in an explicit reference to Itzam Cab Ain. At Tancah the beast forms the oversized headdress of the Old Man, while at Mayapan it carries a

[65] The famed cosmogram of the Codex Féjérváry-Mayer pictures the quadripartite division of the 260-day cycle, with the creative act expressed as the bloody, four-way dismemberment of a single Tezcatlipoca. The flow of his blood converges at the center of the world, where Xiuhtecuhtli presides as the first of the nine "Lords of the Night," with the rest of the sequence distributed around the cardinal directions. This set of deities has long been equated to a cycle of nine daily patrons among the Maya (Thompson 1929). Kelley (1976:90) correlates the two sequences, matching Xiuhtecuhtli with the character dubbed G9—a version of the Old Man with the glyph for **IHK'IN** "night" atop his head.

[66] It has been suggested that the days of the Maya 260-day ritual calendar were seen as products of a bodily dismemberment, provoking comparison with the division of Tezcatlipoca in the Codex Féjérváry-Mayer (see Footnote 65). Early depictions show day signs that drip with blood, simplified in the Classic era to an enclosing cartouche of conventionalized blood which, when colored, is rendered a vivid red (Stuart 2005c:76; Houston et al. 2006:93, Figs. 2.36-2.38). The appearance of day signs on the bodies of crocodiles provoked the idea that it was the slaying of Itzam Cab Ain that gave rise to the ritual calendar (Houston et al. 2006:93). This has been similarly linked to a key mythic episode from the platform of Palenque Temple XIX, in which the starry sky-monster is beheaded and its blood spilled (Velásquez García 2002:447, 2006; Stuart 2005c:68-77). The emphasis there, significantly, is less on a body rent asunder than the sacrificial product of blood (Stuart 2005c:180). One might wonder if it is the materiality of blood itself that time is compared to, perhaps as a kind of vital force coursing through the universe, a focus also implied by the Codex Féjérváry-Mayer cosmogram.

now headless humanoid on its back—presumably another image of the aged one in the manner we last saw in Figure 36.

The first attempt to link Maya and Central Mexican notions of a creator was made by Seler ([1887]1990:98). In the same paper in which he associated Itzamna with God D he pointed to similarities with Tonacatecuhtli, based on their shared roles as instigators of life, culture, and learning. Seler was an avowed comparativist and one of the first to conceive of Mesoamerica as an interactive whole—long before the region itself was so defined. There is much that distinguishes Mesoamerican religions, but there is also much that they held in common. Correspondences are not only the result of a shared heritage, which is to say concepts that can be traced across great temporal and geographic gulfs, but also of contact and cross-fertilization between living societies that took place throughout the Prehispanic era. The impact of Central Mexican ideas on Postclassic Yucatan, for example, is well known (e.g., Thompson 1942, 1957; Taube 1992b:120-143).[67] The full antiquity of the old god complex in either region remains unclear, but the concept of creators that initiated time and space, and whose identities suffused the different layers and facets of the universe, seems to be rooted in both.[68]

[67] Among many examples of Postclassic Maya art produced under the stylistic influence of Central Mexico are the important murals at Santa Rita Corozal (Gann 1900:665-673). As described by Karl Taube (1989a:4, Fig. 2b), here we find the earth monster serving as the groundline for a group of deities, its gaping mouth closely resembling that of Cipactli depicted on page 39 of the Codex Borgia. At Santa Rita it is fused with attributes of the late form of God D—identified by a tall cylindrical headdress pierced by a sharpened bone (see Taube 1992b:34)—instead of the headscarfed Old Man seen in earlier times. Similarly, the crocodilian from pages 4 and 5 of the Dresden Codex displays the head of God D in its maw in place of the Old Man (Seler 1902-1923:4:650). Both examples are related to a wider shift in God D's symbolism during the Postclassic in which the tasseled diadem of the Principal Bird Deity, once ever-present, first declines and then disappears (in the Dresden Codex only 6 of 19 images bear it, and it is absent in all 76 portraits in the Madrid Codex). By now the tassel form is only present in his glyphic name, while the bird's head is only recognizable in the Dresden. This evolution of form may reflect conceptual changes that realigned God D's role in the late period, merging his identity more closely to that of the Old Man, perhaps under the influence of foreign deities such as Tonacatecuhtli.

[68] Elderly gods in other parts and eras of Mesoamerica present too large a topic to explore here, but nevertheless demonstrate an enduring, pan-regional interest in the symbolism of old age. They include the old men in turtle carapaces we see in Classic Zapotec and Postclassic Aztec art.

The Many and the One

The "oneness" of the godly forms on K6626, with its mélange of otherwise unrelated divine identities, gives cause to wonder if Maya polytheism obscures some deeper underlying coherence. Holistic principles are strongly attested in ethnographic research from across Mesoamerica, where living traditions describe numerous supernatural actors, yet also express a belief in the sacred unity of all things (Monaghan 2000:26-27).

Studies of religion frequently come from a functionalist perspective that seeks to expose the underlying order to systems of belief. Yet religious traditions, modern as much as ancient, routinely encompass diffuse and overlapping ideas that can be hard to rationalize in this way. Indeed, the mysteries that give religions their otherworldly character seem in no small measure related to their inconsistencies, paradoxes, and contradictions, things which "make sense" only when we consider the wider purposes to which religious practice is put and how religious logic works on a cognitive level. At any one time traditions can hold alternative or competing interpretations—what might be called "concurrent theologies"

Figure 45. The old sorcerers Oxomoco and Cipactonal: (a) Codex Borgia page 60; (b) Codex Borbonicus page 21.

(Stephen Houston, personal communication 2007)—even in regard to fundamental questions about the nature of the divine. We must also keep in mind that religions are subject to ongoing social, cultural, and historical dynamics, and usually under the sway of political authorities for which they serve as a key tool of legitimation and control.

Polytheism and monotheism appear to be antithetical schemes, but neither seems entirely content with its lot, each feeling some gravitational pull toward the other. Monotheistic systems can incorporate a host of quasi- or semi-deities—one thinks here of the plethora of saints and angels in Roman Catholicism or of the *bodhisattvas* and *devas* of Mahayana Buddhism—perhaps because we perceive greater efficacy when specific functions are aligned with dedicated agents. What distinguishes monotheism from polytheism is not the number of supernatural agents in the system, but its more exclusive classification of "deity" (Porter 2000a:2). The attraction works the other way in polytheism, since the existence of multiple gods implies some common source to their divinity, an underlying power that is singular rather than plural. This leads to ideas of universality, if not fully formed in common practice, then as a topic of speculation at the more rarified level of theological discourse. There is, in sum, an inherent tension between division and unity in much religious thought. Within this the "one and the many" are not opposed but complementary formulations (Hornung 1982; Porter ed. 2000), each addressing a different facet and perception of an ineffable divine experience (Evans-Pritchard 1974:316).

The idea of some greater structure and cohesion to ancient Maya polytheism would be a far from new one since it was a major theme in the work of J. Eric S. Thompson (1939, 1970). His points of departure were lexical entries from Colonial Yucatan, especially those that describe a certain Hunab Ku *(juunab k'uh)* "One/Unique God," who was said to rule over, or in some sense encompass, all other native deities. The early Motul Dictionary, for example, speaks of "Hunab Ku: Only live and true god. He was the greatest of the gods of Yucatan" (Martínez Hernández 1929:404). Notably, the Relaciones de Yucatán (2:161) links this figure to Itzamna: "…they worshipped one god alone who had the name Hunab and Zamana." Although Maya informants could have contrived this singular divinity to please or appease their Christian interlocutors, the consistency of these references persuaded Thompson that they reflected a basic truth.[69] He took them as evidence for an underlying unitary character to Maya religion, in which all other gods were mere aspects of one encompassing entity.

Figure 46. Photographers Juan E. Reyna and José Escalante Plancarte pose before the three carved boulders near Yauhtepec (from Robelo 1911:Pl. 4).

The conception of Itzam Na is, indeed, a majestic one. One realizes why the Maya rulers came at one time to consider him the only great god, for it rather looks as though the Maya of the Classic period had developed the cult of Itzam Na into something close to monotheism, with all other beings… [his] servants or his manifestations… (Thompson 1970b:233)

Like Seler before him, Thompson was impressed by the number of deities in colonial sources whose names include either Itzam or Itzamna (Seler [1887]1990:103; Thompson 1970:210).[70] Beginning

[69] The ethnographer Ralph Roys was one who suspected Christian influence (cited in Thompson 1970b:203).

[70] These include not only *itzam kab ain* and *itzam k'an*, as we have seen, but *itzamna itzamtzab, itzamnak'abul, itzamna k'awil, k'inich ajaw itzamna, k'in chak ajaw itzamna, itzamnat'ul chaak, itzam luk,* and *itzam pech* (e.g., Barrera Vásquez et al. 1980:272).
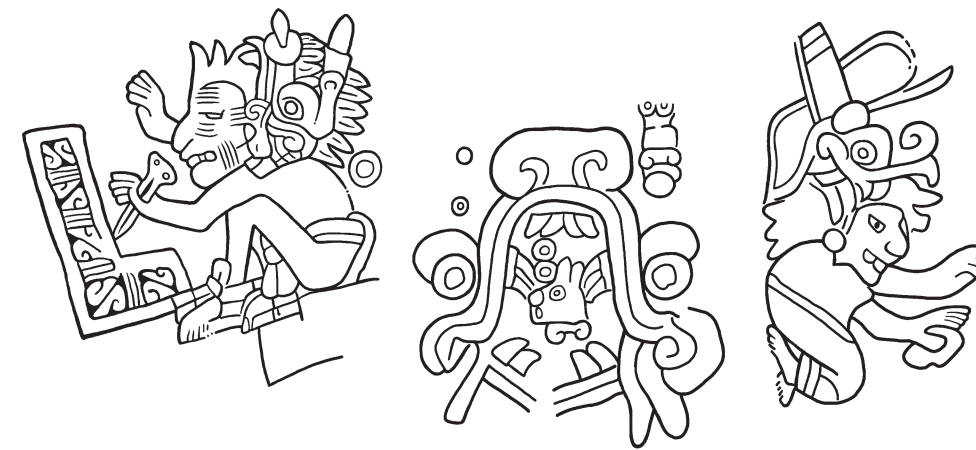

Figure 47. Cipactonal and Oxomoco flanking a cave mouth on a carved boulder near Yauhtepec (redrawn from Nowotny 1961:Fig. 9).

with Itzam Cab Ain, he argued that virtually every reptile in Maya religious art was an expression of this all-pervading deity—visualized in its highest, anthropomorphic form as God D (Thompson 1939:153-160). Later, using the then-newly uncovered Vienna Dictionary—where *itzam* is translated as "lagartos, como iguanas de tierra y agua [lizards, like land- and water-iguanas]"—he read *itzamna* as "Iguana House." The "House" element was taken to refer to a four-sided model of the universe based on a human dwelling, each of its planes defined by one of these cosmic saurians (Thompson 1970b:209-233).

Yet the Vienna Dictionary stands alone in its definition of *itzam*, and Barrera Vásquez et al. (1980:272) subsequently demonstrated that it is no more than a faulty derivation from Itzam Cab Ain—where the only reptilian component is *ain* (*ahiin*) "crocodile." The scheme was further undermined as later iconographers dissected Thompson's reptilian universe and found no holistic entity, only a range of distinct beings and motifs. As we now know, the affiliations of God D are not saurian but avian, a decisive blow to the model. The Colonial-era data on which so much of Thompson's case rested are today viewed either as a late phenomenon distorted by European perspectives or simply folded into the conception of God D. Since the 1980s almost all researchers have concentrated their efforts on the individuality of the deities first systematized by Schellhas at the end of the nineteenth century, a unitary vision for the ancient Maya having fallen first from favor and then from sight.[71]

Might the emerging evidence on the Old Man tempt us to reopen this question, posing him as a better candidate for the unitary entity referred to in the historical accounts? The similarities to descriptions of the Ometeotl concept of Central Mexico give reason to ask if Mesoamerican religions shared a belief in an all-compassing, aged creator. Yet if we are to remain within the evidence available to us the answer to this must be a negative one. The appearances of the Old Man in Maya art and writing are, if not entirely confined to the cases described, restricted in their range and give no grounds to believe that his identity underlies those of all deities in the system. There are, instead, a particular set of contexts in which he appears and plays a decisive role. These are concentrated in the elemental fabric of the universe, in ways not so very distant from the house

model suggested by Thompson. Even though that idea was based on a faulty reading, its central protagonist misidentified, and its scope overextended, an architectural analogy seems not entirely inappropriate.

It may be too late to know if those early colonial descriptions of a supreme being were attempts to disingenuously portray Maya belief as monotheistic in the face of enforced Christianization, or whether they capture a genuinely ancient, if somewhat vague, concept of divine holism. The contradiction in the Motul Dictionary, where "only live and true god" is followed by "greatest of the gods," does not support a monotheistic reading in the strict sense required.[72] At best it hints at a divine hierarchy and the complexities that singular and multiple perspectives generate, a feature that requires believers to keep both concepts in mind at the same time. If the Maya were obliged to name a counterpart to the Christian God they would have had good reason to choose *itzam/itzamna,* whose creative role would suggest a clear parallel. That the new God was composed of three divine *hypostases* or "persons"—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—and therefore simultaneously divided and unified, would not strike the Maya as the slightest bit strange or novel.[73]

[71] Mention should be made of a proposal by Gabrielle Vail (2000), who reinterprets the "attributive" glyphs in the codices first described by Günter Zimmermann (1956:18-24), not as omens or tidings but as terms distinguishing underlying deity complexes. Her emphasis on the "fluidity" of Maya god concepts evades the rigidity of the Schellhas categories, although the specifics of her case remain unproven.

[72] See Versnel (2000:91-112) for a similar formulation by the Greek philosopher Xenophanes, made around 540 BCE, which is seen by many as the dawn of Western monotheism. It shares the same kind of contradiction, which is best reconciled by holding simultaneously unified and divided concepts of the divine.

[73] Like the Hindu Trimurti, depictions of the Trinity in Christian art are normally separated into its component parts, with separate images of an older man, younger man, and white dove. But between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries it was given the theosynthetic form of a "tricephalous," the image of a single man with three faces (see Rishel and Stratton 2006:392).

Conclusions

This study has examined the major contexts in which we find the character here dubbed the Old Man, and concludes that he had unusual significance within ancient Maya religion. It supports his identification as a creator and sustainer, expanding the analysis to show how his varied forms defined the shape and substance of the cosmos. These ontologically complex entities, realized through the pictorial and nominal strategy of "theosynthesis," focus attention on dualistic states of being, collaborative presences, and the nesting of identities in the composition of Maya divinity. Whatever the precise status of the Old Man in these unions, he is the common thread tying each of them to a greater purpose and meaning.

In his best-known variant, God N, he fixes the center and four corners of the world, orienting the entwined dimensions of space and time. His ongoing task in this form was to maintain cosmic order, with a focus on separating the sky from the earth and demarking stations in a yearly cycle. Yet he was by no means restricted to those roles and was equally engaged in defining the celestial and terrestrial planes themselves, in the forms of contrasting sky and earth Cosmic Monsters. Further fusions supplied the ruler of the heavens and his subterranean counterpart. Thus in his contribution to the avian God D he became the lustrous, bejeweled lord of the sky, and as a feature of the feline God L he presided over the dank gloom of the Underworld.

The complementary relationship between the singular and multiple, the divided and unified, are central to these personas, and necessitate a realignment in our thinking in some cases. For example, Mayanists have long ascribed paramountcy in ancient Maya religion to God D, but it is now clear that this understanding must be qualified. If we consider the hybrid nature of this deity in its wider context it follows that he was but one member or expression of the Old Man complex—an especially eminent and powerful one to be sure, but part of a larger category of compound entities realized in theosynthetic form. The Old Man himself is of a different order. Implicated in the foundation, maintenance, and ultimate destruction of the world, his involvement lends coherence and, if not unity in a pantheistic sense, then a unitary dimension to core elements of the cosmos.

Lastly, it is important to return to the point that the model the Maya selected to signify these special qualities was neither a paragon of youthful vigor nor that of a highborn king, but instead that of the community sage, seer, and diviner—a character feeble in frame but magical in mind. This places enchanted knowledge as the foremost of divine powers and makes universal order the work of a sorcerer's spell.

Figure 48. Head from a monumental sculpture of the Old Man, one of a pair that originally stood as bearers in the iconographic program of Copan Temple 11. Photo: Ken Garrett.

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