

# The Bicephalic Monster in Classic Maya Sculpture\*

MARVIN COHODAS  
University of British Columbia

## RÉSUMÉ

Par le rite inaugural de transformation, les gouvernants maya renaissaient comme dieu du soleil – mais pour réclamer l'autorité surnaturelle qui légitimait leur pouvoir temporel. Dans les monuments l'image artistique dominante de cette renaissance est un monstre bicéphale avec une tête de serpent et une tête de crocodile. L'image du monstre bicéphale est aussi liée à des représentations de femmes maya qui perfont des rites d'auto-saignée sacrificielle. Même si le monstre bicéphale est ordinairement considéré comme une divinité mâle, il semble plutôt représenter la déesse terre qui apporte les pluies quand elle est enceinte du nouveau soleil, et qui, comme toutes les déesses-mères de l'Amérique centrale, meurt quand le soleil sort, rené, de son sein.

## INTRODUCTION

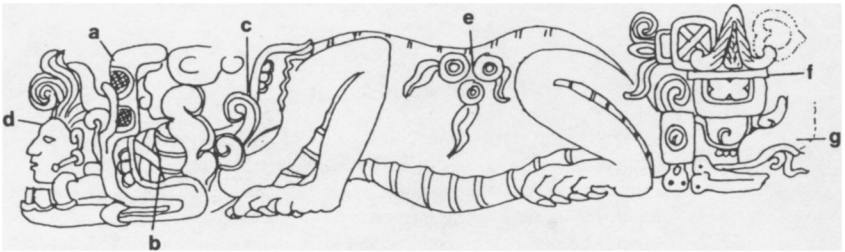
Multiple approaches are necessary to synthesize the vast information on Maya supernatural images. The approach followed here and in previous papers is concerned with interpreting the sacred and ritual meaning of images employed for dynastic aggrandizement. These meanings are interpreted contextually, according to the underlying spatio-temporal structure of

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\* A comprehensive study of supernatural images in Classic Maya art has been undertaken at the University of British Columbia. So far a file has been completed of all supernatural images in published examples of monumental art, allowing a classification into discrete entities and discrimination between standard and modified or compound forms. Since the material presented here is supported by their effort in drawing and classifying, I would like to acknowledge the contributions of T. Anderson, C. Arnett, S. Farrington, J. Hoskinson, P. Lando, and J. Russow.

Maya cosmology. This structure is both cyclic and dualistic, with the opposition of death and rebirth imagery employed in monumental art to proclaim the ruler's transformation from human to divinity. The bicephalic monster appears to be the dominant artistic expression of the ruler's divine rebirth. Through its (fig. 1) components parts and companion images, the bicephalic monster complex represents a synthesis of Maya rebirth-associated images, distinct from such death-associated images as the jaguar god and *bacabs*.

FIGURE 1



Bicephalic monster (slightly restored) (Copan altar O', after Spinden 1913: fig. 52).

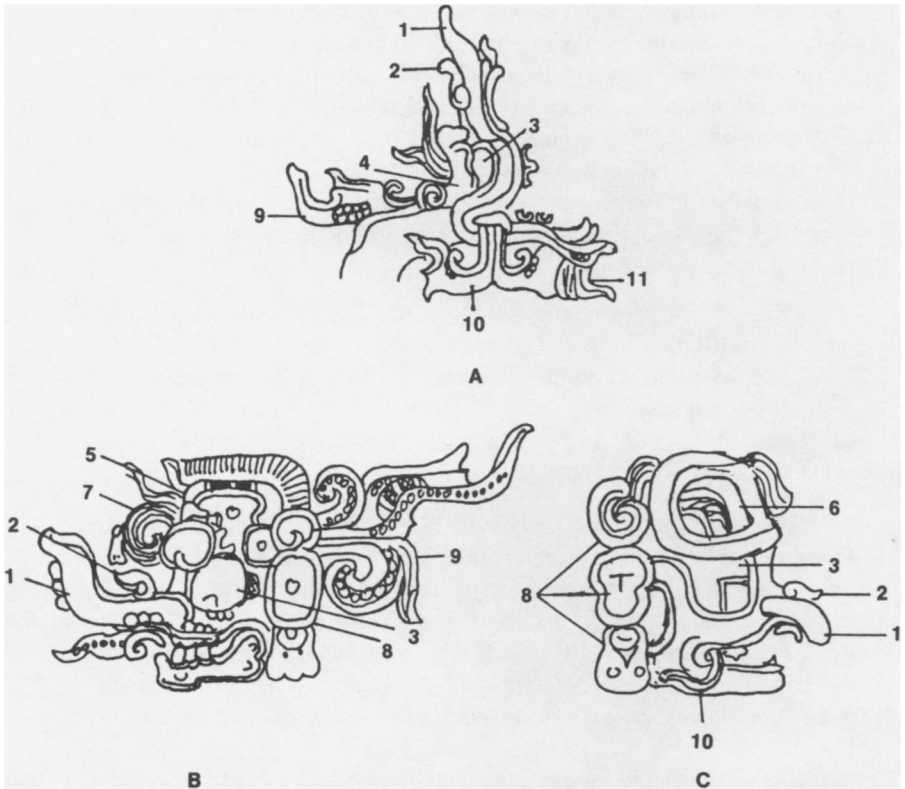
This study will be organized according to the component parts and contexts of the bicephalic monster image. In each section, selected components will be analyzed according to their context in monumental art, including analyses of closely related images. Analogy with Aztec and Post-conquest sources will be used sparingly since, as Kubler (1973) suggests, disjunctions between the form and meaning of a motif often occur through time. This synchronic and normative study will be limited to the monumental arts, erected at the height of the Maya dynastic cult in the Late Classic period, since these offer an abundant and relatively conservative (in contrast with the funerary arts) sample of supernatural images for comparison. Innovative manipulations of these images do characterize major monuments, especially at Copan and Palenque, but space limitations prevent mention of all but a few such variants.

## 1. THE TWO CATEGORIES OF ZOOMORPHIC IMAGES

Both heads of the bicephalic monster share the stylized characteristics employed in Maya art for a variety of zoomorphic and especially reptilian

images. These include large eyes, supraorbital plate, curl dangling from the corner of the mouth, small nose often with bead ornaments inserted through the septum, foliage emerging from the side of the head, and frequent beard (fig. 2). These zoomorphic images fall into two broad categories: one is

FIGURE 2



#### Comparison of Ophidian and Saurian Heads

A. Ophidian head (Yaxchilan lintel 15, after Spinden 1913: fig. 24).

B. Saurian head with infix (Tikal Temple IV, lintel 3, after Jones 1977: fig. 11).

C. Saurian Head with cavity (Palenque, House D, after Spinden 1913: fig. 115).

*Legend:* 1. snout; 2. nose; 3. eye; 4. supraorbital plate; 5. infix; 6. cavity; 7. hair;  
8. three-part earplug; 9. foliage element; 10. curl from corner of mouth;  
11. beard.

ophidian and completely animalistic, appearing as the front head of the monster: the other is an animal-human composite with a saurian emphasis, appearing both as the rear head of the monster and as deities which emerge from the ophidian front head.

The generalized serpent head (fig. 2A) is differentiated from the saurian by the elongated proportion which results in an extended snout and narrow, U-shaped supraorbital plate. Corresponding to ophidians in nature are the general lack of earplugs, since snakes lack external ears, and the mouths open at right angles, which snakes accomplish by unhinging their jaws. In contrast, the saurian category (figs. 2A-B) is distinguished by the superimposition of the zoomorphic characteristics (snout, nose beads, large eyes, mouth curl, foliate scroll) on a vertically-oriented humanoid face, complete with three-part earplug arrangement and often with hair, headband, and human body. This contrast is evident when rulers wear masks of supernaturals: the serpent mask is worn horizontally, extending from the upper lip (fig. 4c-d); the saurian-anthropomorphic mask is vertical and covers the entire face (fig. 20d).

Other animals are subjected to this Maya stylization. Jaguars, monkeys, birds, fish, rodents, and possibly amphibians are depicted with the same saurian-anthropomorphic features as well as in naturalistic form, without the large eyes and snout (fig. 16). The association of this second category with saurians is in fact based more on supposition than on sound evidence, since none of these heads is shown with a saurian body.

The saurian-anthropomorphic category may be subdivided according to the treatment of the forehead region. This elongated area may be infixed with hieroglyphs or other devices (fig. 2B), or it may be surmounted by a ruff and contain a cavity, occupied by the T617a glyph (fig. 2C). While these saurians are generally shown with horizontal or upturned snouts, a specialized category, associated primarily with death and destruction, (fig 5) is distinguished by the pendulous snout, extended tongue, and absent lower jaw.

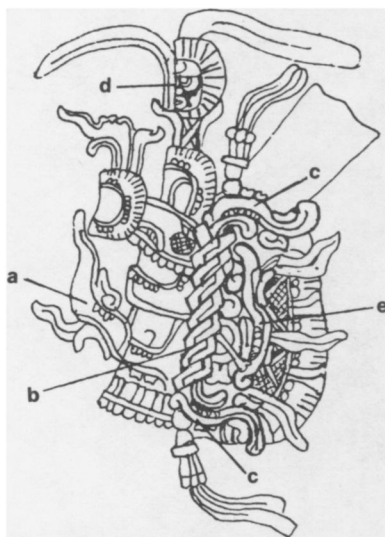
The ophidian and saurian supernatural images are treated differently by the Maya artist. The serpent head is more commonly shown in profile, while the saurian type may be either frontal or in profile. Frequently a hierarchic grouping is formed by flanking the frontal saurian-anthropomorphic image with two profile serpent heads, as in the ruler's loincloth (fig. 13c), and in the headdress, where inverted serpent wing elements flank the central saurian deity (fig 3). Ophidian heads rarely function as the main headdress element, sometimes with the lower jaw and bifurcated tongue

appearing beneath the ruler's chin. Only saurian heads appear to function as independent compositions in disembodied form, as on altars and the basal panels of stelae, and the saurian head is also the most common architectural decoration. The composite nature of the bicephalic monster image is shown by the unrealistic joining of these two contrasting head types. Although the body is usually that of a four-legged saurian, the front head is ophidian, while the saurian head type is appended onto the monster's posterior, and is frequently inverted or on its side.

## 2. THE FRONT HEAD AND SERPENT IMAGERY

This typical ophidian head, identical to both heads of the more common two-headed serpent,<sup>1</sup> is distinguished only by occasional depictions

FIGURE 3

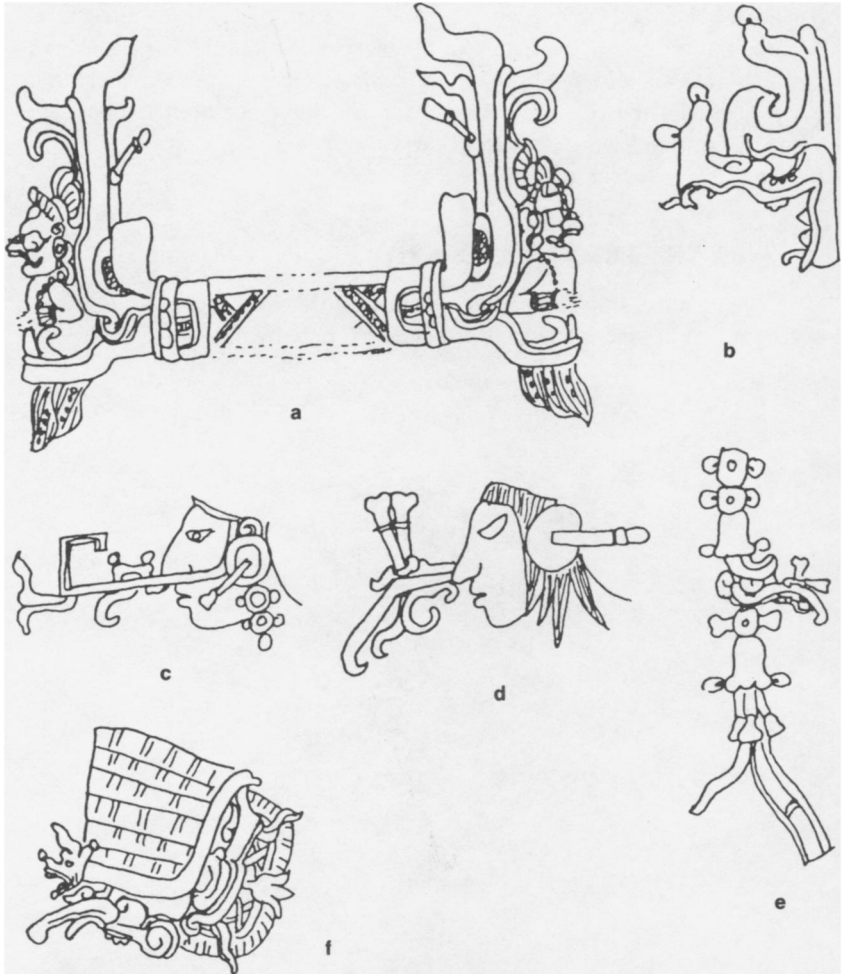


Headdress (La Pasadita lintel 2, after Simpson 1976: fig. 4).

*Legend:* a. main saurian head; b. braided mat; c. downturned serpents with pendants; d. sun face; e. serpent wing element with crossed bands and water lily motifs.

<sup>1</sup> For the sake of clarity, the term "two-headed" will be reserved for the serpent with two identical ophidian heads. The term "bicephalic" will refer to the monster with an ophidian front head and an appended saurian rear head.

FIGURE 4

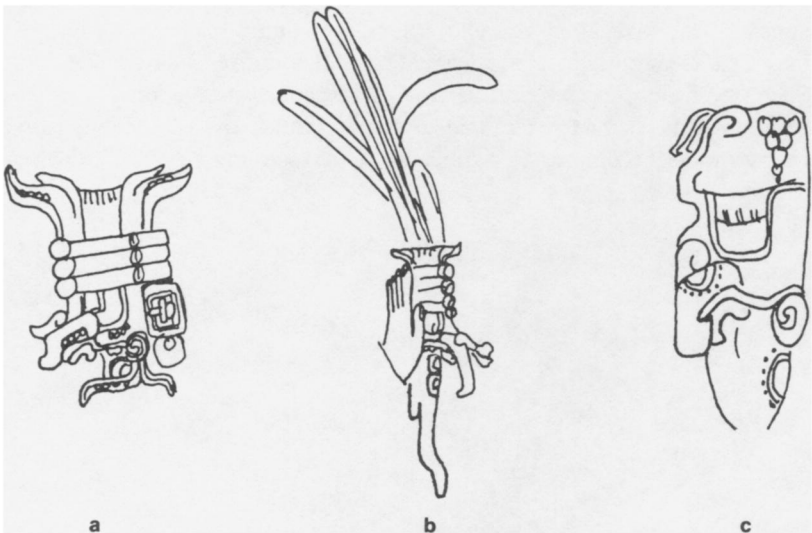


#### Ophidian types

- a. Two headed serpent, ceremonial bar (Copan stela N, after Spinden 1913: fig. 46).
- b. Jester god, headdress decoration (Palenque, Slaves tablet, after Schele 1974: fig. 10).
- c. Fret-snouted serpent mask (Tikal stela 16, after Jones 1977: fig. 7).
- d. Downturned serpent mask (Machaquila stela 4, after Graham 1969: fig. 51).
- e. Downturned serpent loincloth (Foliated Cross Panel, after Schele 1976: fig. 10).
- f. Downturned serpent as main headdress element, with jester and serpent-wing attachments (Yaxchilan lintel 2, after Graham and von Euw 1977: 15).

of crossed bands in the eyes,<sup>2</sup> ear coverings, and venus or star glyphs behind the head. In both contexts, serpents heads are characterized by the emergence of deities or rulers from the open jaws, suggesting an association with birth-giving. The standard depiction<sup>3</sup> of the ruler holding the two-headed serpent with emerging deities (the ceremonial bar, fig. 4a) may refer to his symbolic transformation and rebirth, by which divine authority he rules. The association with rebirth is supported by the depictions of the sun god head on the serpent's snout (e.g. Copan altar O) and of maize foliage, and of

FIGURE 5



#### Jawless saurians with blade-tongue

- a. Perforator god as anklet (Tikal stela 21, after Jones 1977: fig. 2).
- b. Perforator god blood-letting implement (inverted) (Foliated Cross Panel, after Schele 1976: fig. 10).
- c. Cauac monster (Sun jamb, after Schele 1976: fig. 12).

<sup>2</sup> The eyes will then be shown with lids, possibly related to avian or amphibian imagery.

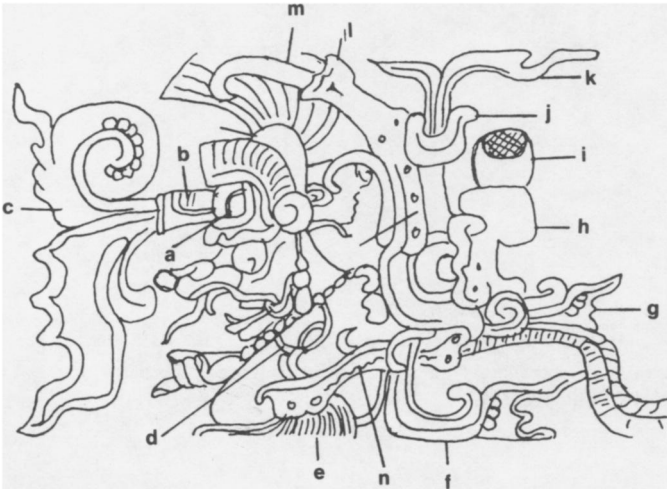
<sup>3</sup> At Tikal and Copan, death images will also frequently emerge from serpent bars.

<sup>4</sup> Innovative Usumacinta artists combined the disembodied serpent form of the jester with the anthropomorphic-saurian flare god, placing it in the headdress or providing it with a human body (fig. 10d).

or streams of water emerging from bicephalic monster heads, shown as stylized serpents (Spinden 1913: 43, 84; Kubler 1969: fig. 59). The image of the open-mouthed serpent becomes a frequent head ornament (fig. 4b). Dubbed the “jester god” by Schele (1974: 50), its U-shaped supraorbital plate is elongated to a query-mark shape and decorated with bone baubles.

A more problematic form of the serpent head is distinguished by a long, angular, downturned snout and absent lower jaw. Like the fret-snouted serpent (fig. 4c), it may be worn as a mask (fig. 4d) or appear as a costume decoration. As a loincloth ornament (fig. 4e), shells, braided mats, and jades are pendant from its mouth. In the headdress (fig. 3c), pairs of downturned serpent heads, each joined by a braided mat, flank the ruler’s face or saurian head. Unlike most serpent forms, the downturned type may appear as the main headdress element (fig. 4f), and it may be transformed into a quasi-saurian image by the addition of descriptive forehead elements. Such transformed heads occur as wristlet and anklet decorations. With the addition of the characteristic triple knotted headband and protruding blade-tongue, these become (fig. 5a) images of the perforator god (Joralemon

FIGURE 6



Flare God emerging from Skeletal Serpent (Yaxchilan lintel 39, after Graham 1979: 87).

*Legend:* a. cavity; b. tube; c. flare; d. “god-marking”; e. beard; f. curl from corner of mouth; g. foliage element; h. supraorbital plate; i. gouged eye; j. skeletal nose; k. nasal extrusion; l. bony sockets; m. stubby fangs; n. skeletal jaws.



1974), more commonly shown as a hand-held instrument of blood-letting (fig. 5b) and closely related to the more saurian *cauac* monster (fig. 5c). The downturned snout, absence of lower jaw, and frequent appearance as the deified blood-letting suggest that the downturned serpent type may carry associations of sacrifice and death, in contrast to the birth-giving association of the open-jawed ophidian. At Copan, the standard stela form seems to depict the ruler wearing the perforator god anklets and wristlets, and holding the two-headed serpent bar with emerging deities (e.g. stela N), suggesting that this contrast of death and rebirth imagery is designed to demonstrate the ruler's supernatural transformation.

### 3. EMERGING DEITIES: THE FLARE GOD AND RELATED IMAGES

The flare god, analyzed by Robertson (1979: 129-30) and Robiscek (1978: 73-82) is most commonly shown emerging from the ophidian head of the bicephalic monster and the two heads of the ceremonial bar (fig. 4a). It is shown with a human body, with a ruff of hair and longer strands of protruding from a skull cap (fig. 6). The image of the flare god emerging from the serpent maw appears to have been abstracted for the purposes of ceremonial regalia in the form of the manikin sceptre (fig. 7a), in which one of its legs is transformed into a snake to function as a handle.<sup>5</sup> The ruler holds this sceptre in his right hand, while wearing a shield on the left wrist. The shield is almost invariably decorated with the face of the jaguar god, who carries the opposite meanings of war, sacrifice, and death. Together these two attributes encapsulate the death-rebirth inaugural transformation (Cohodas 1979: 222). The flare god head is also characterized by the forehead cavity. Frequently an axe blade is hafted through the cavity (fig. 7a) or a tube protrudes from the hollow, from which in turn emerges a bifurcated scroll (fig. 6) that gives the flare god its name. The bifurcated scroll distinguishes the name glyph of the codical god K (fig. 7b),<sup>6</sup> suggesting that the Classic flare god may be ancestral to this Postclassic deity.<sup>7</sup>

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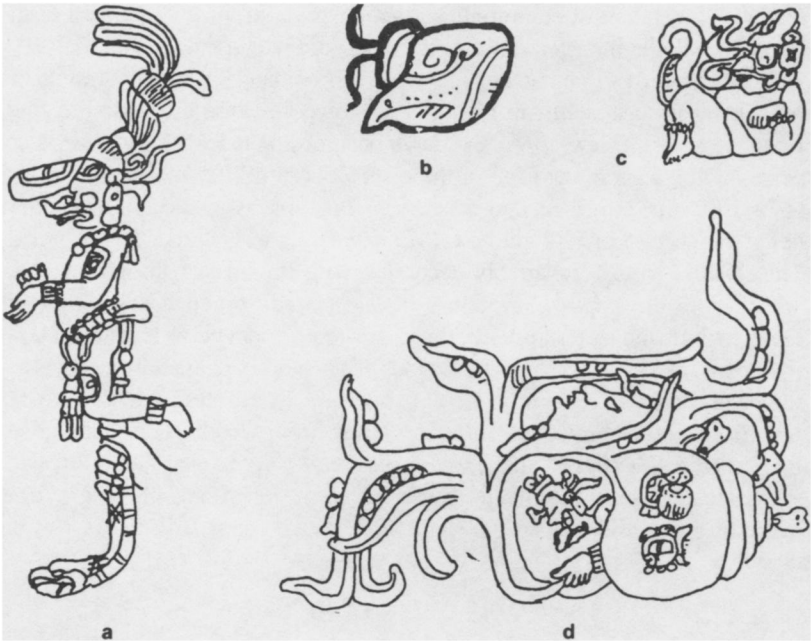
<sup>5</sup> At Palenque, the manikin may be shown as a bodiless sceptre, or as a complete antropomorphic deity held in the hands or lap.

<sup>6</sup> The disjunction in form and meaning of images which seems to occur between the Classic and Postclassic periods is less evident in the codical name glyphs, which retain the archaic meanings of the associated deities.

<sup>7</sup> On the basis of Landa's description of the year-bearer ceremonies, Seler, Thompson, and others have identified god K as *Bolon Dz'acab*, and this appellation has been applied to the Classic flare god as well.

Coe (1973: 116) interprets the bifurcated scroll as smoke, and the cavity as a mirror, thus equating the flare god with the Aztec jaguar deity *Tezcatlipoca*, or Smoking Mirror. In his treatise on tobacco and smoking among the Maya, Robiscek (1978: 60) identifies the tube from which the flare emerges as a lit cigar. This identification is not supported by representations of *Tezcatlipoca* at Chichen Itza, which are closer to the Classic Maya in time and space than is Aztec art. There, *Tezcatlipoca* is a human-faced warrior with his leg severed above the knee, and with the

FIGURE 7



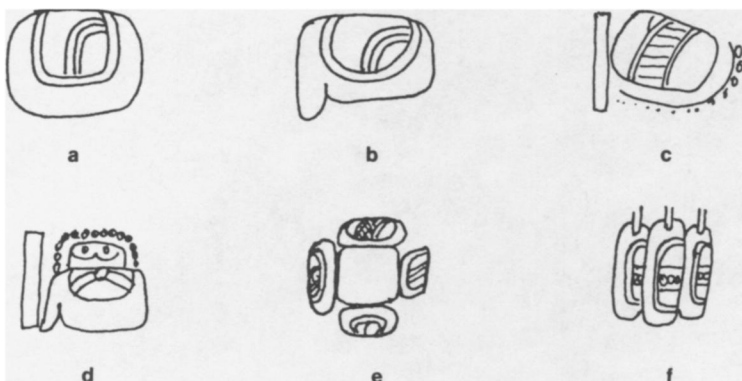
#### Flare God imagery

- a. Manikin sceptre (Yaxchilan lintel 3, after Graham and von Euw 1977: 17).
- b. Glyph of codical God K (Dresden Codex).
- c. G II of the Palenque Triad (after Schele 1979: fig. 13).
- d. Flare God emerging from shell (Foliated Cross Panel, after Schele 1976: fig. 10).

circular smoking mirror in his headdress (fig. 9a).<sup>8</sup> In contrast, Maya dignitaries are shown in the same Chichen Itza temples wearing a saurian mask, with the shield on the left wrist and a snake-handled, axe-like sceptre in the right hand (fig. 9b), a direct parallel to the Classic motif of the Maya ruler with wrist shield and manikin sceptre.

Thompson (1970: 226) interprets the scroll of the flare god as vegetation, and the cavity as the seed or soil from which it emerges. Kelley (1976: 98) identifies the flare god with G II of the Palenque triad (fig. 7c) who is associated with the Foliated Cross Panel. There (fig. 7d) the flare god holds a ripened maize plant as he emerges from a shell, suggesting an analogy to the representations of his emergence from a serpent maw, and supporting Thompson's association with vegetation.

FIGURE 8



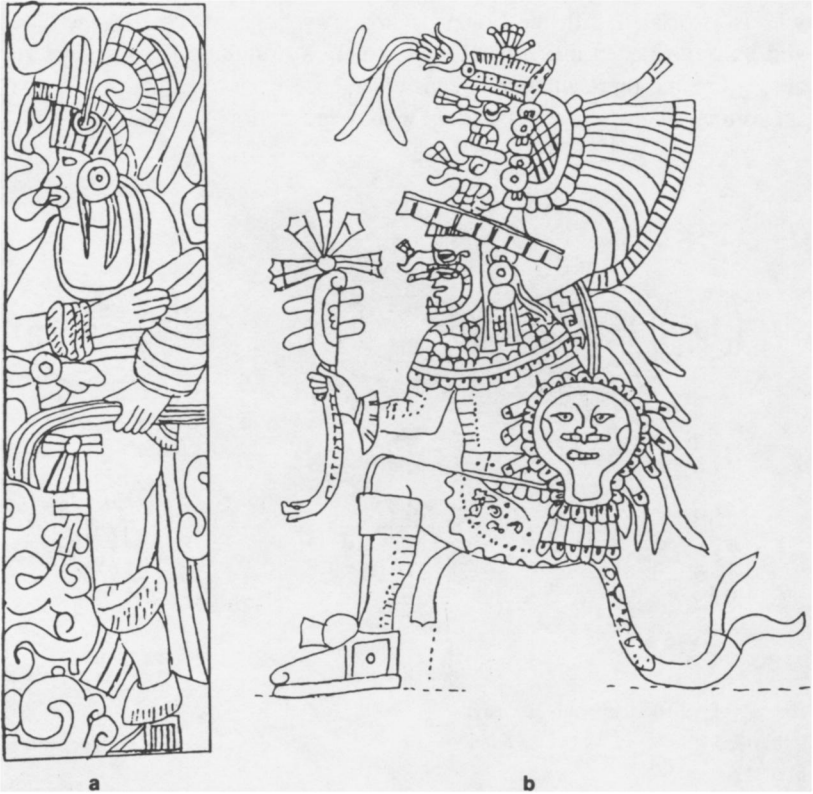
Hieroglyphs associated with the cavity

- a. T617a.
- b. T712.
- c. Fifth of Night (After Thompson 1960: fig. 34, 25).
- d. Fifth Lord of Night (After Thompson 1960: fig. 34, 30).
- e. T24.
- f. Shell tinklers, after Spinden 1913: fig. 111).

<sup>8</sup> *Tezcatlipoca's* mirror is round with a raised rim, as also appears in Classic Maya funerary ceramics, and distinct from the T617a glyph.

Thompson's interpretation of the flare is supported by analysis of the T617a glyph (fig. 8a) that forms the cavity and which appears to be an aquatic symbol rather than a mirror. For example, it (fig. 21d) replaces the fish head (fig. 21e) as the main sign of the month *Mac*. Another alternate main sign for *Mac* is *imix* (T501), known to carry aquatic associations.<sup>9</sup>

FIGURE 9

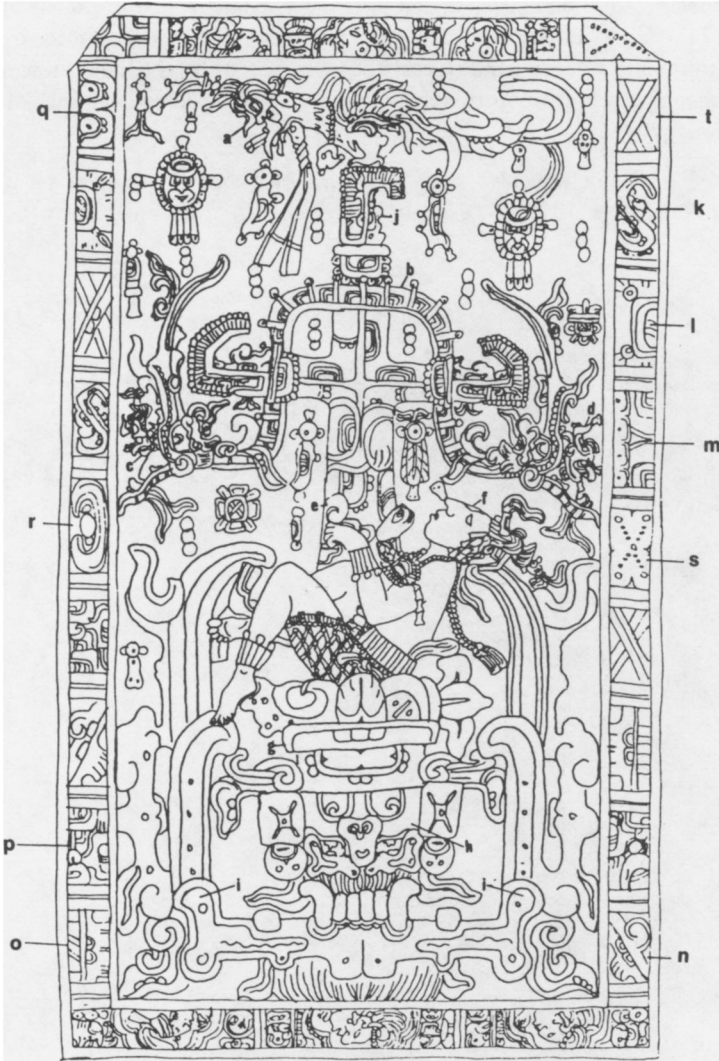


Temple of the Chac Mool, Chichen Itza

a. "Tezcatlipoca" (Colum 3s, after Morris *et al.* 1932, vol. 2, pl. 31).

b. "Dignitary" (South bench, after Morris *et al.* 1932, vol. 1, fig. 305).

<sup>9</sup> Although Thompson (1960: 72) identified the *imix* glyph as a water lily bud, it is closer to representations of fish fins in art and hieroglyphics.



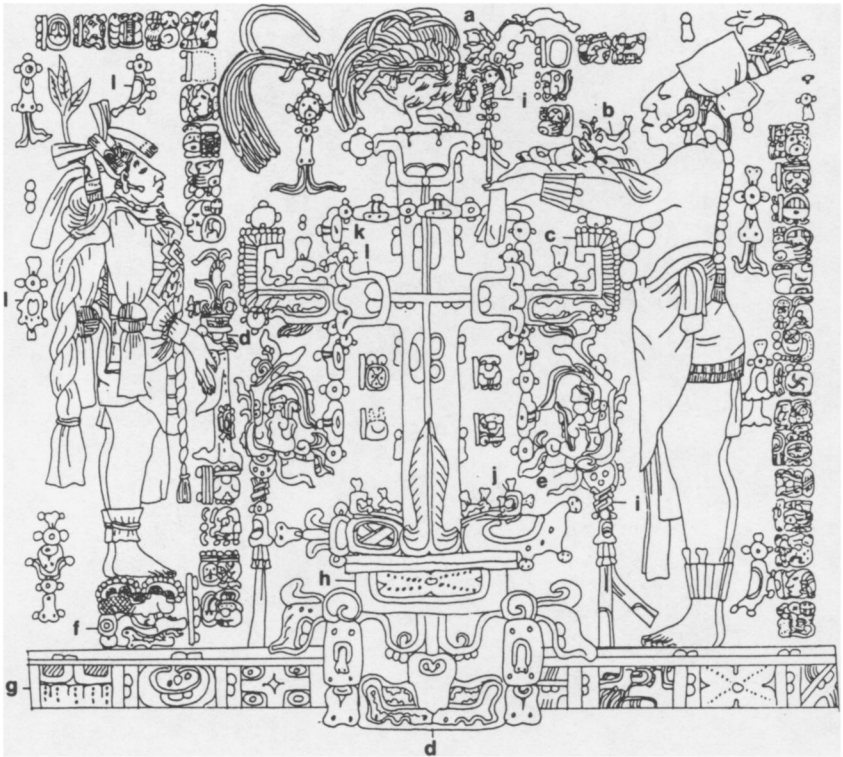
Palenque Sarcophagus lid (after Robiscek 1978: fig. 74).

*Legend:* a. serpent-winged bird; b. skeletal-fleshed serpent composite; c. flare god; d. flare god with jester attributes; e. sun god; f. Pacal as maize god with flare god attributes; g. quadripartite badge; h. rear head; i. skeletal serpent heads; j. beaded serpent; k. fret-snouted serpent; l. shield; m. *akbal*; n. *caan* (diagonal); o. *caan* (horizontal); p. sun god; q. venus; r. moon; s. *kin*; t. crossed bands.

Similar substitutions occur in the primary standard ceramic text, in which T617a occurs in the introductory glyph, but may be replaced by an anthropomorphic fish head (Coe 1978: No. 12), or by the lunar crescent, a vessel-shape which in turn replaces shell signs in representations of the number 20.

The T617a sign also takes the form of a shallow dish, as on Tikal altar 7 (Schele 1979: 49), or in more stylized, rectilinear form as the

FIGURE 11



Cross Panel (after Schele 1976: fig. 6).

*Legend:* a. serpent-winged bird with downturned serpent attributes; b. flare god with jester attributes; c. beaded serpent; d. rear head; e. two-headed serpent with skeletal and downturned serpent attributes; f. rear head emblem; g. sky band; h. quadripartite badge; i. loincloth type pendants; j. fret-snouted serpent; k. yax (shell); l. other shell motifs.

termination of ceremonial bars (Naranjo stela 22) and headdress constructions of jade beads (Tikal, Temple IV, lintel 3). On crossshaped trees at Palenque, this vessel (fig. 10) replaces bivalve shells (fig. 11), while on lintel 3 of Tikal Temple I, it appears as the ruler's wristlet instead of the fish-head wristlet worn by the Jaguar, revealing similar aquatic substitutions.

A hand-form of this sign, T712 (fig. 8d) replaces T617a in the glyph of the fifth lord of the night (fig. 8c-d), associated with the month *Mac*. As a glyph for sacrificial blood-letting (Proskouriakoff 1973) T712 may replace the hand-grasping-fish glyph (fig. 21b), or another glyph (T672) that combines hand and shell elements.

An alternate form employed for the month *Mac* is similar to the T24 affix (fig. 8e) which Kelley (1976: 133-35) identifies as a shell tinkler from a ruler's costume. The same glyph forms the flare god's blade and frequently the tube, which like the costume pendant are just as likely to have been made of jade (e.g. Ruz 1973: 169), a material whose liquid green surface would also be associated with vegetation and moisture. The T617a glyph is thus repeatedly associated with aquatic symbols; it forms a vessel; and it may replace shells, which combine the concepts of water and vessel in a single form. Similarly, the month *Mac* with which it is most closely associated has a fish patron and may be translated as "to enclose" (Thompson 1960: 113) or a "flat shell" (Victoria Bricker: p.c.). If the flare emerges from an aquatic vessel as these associations indicate, then the concepts of fire and smoking are not likely to be involved.

The maize god, a youthful male deity with high-piled cornsilk hair (fig. 12a) is closely related to the flare god in the associations of water, vegetation, and renewal. The glyph of the corresponding codical god E (fig. 12b) shows the youthful face superimposed on an emarginated, fish-like body, with the T24 affix mentioned above. The maize god is further characterized by the gesture of extending the forearms, raising one hand and lowering the other with both palms facing outward (e.g. Copan Temple 22).<sup>10</sup> The flare god shares the same gesture (fig. 7a), while the maize god may instead emerge from the ophidian head (fig. 1). Another example of their similarity is the sarcophagus lid (fig. 10) where Pacal appears as the maize god, but with the tube and flare of the flare god.

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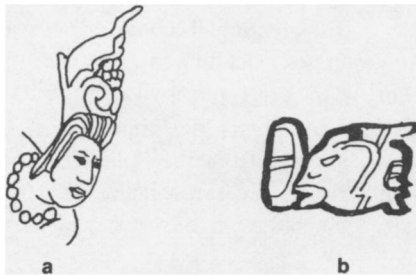
<sup>10</sup> In funerary arts, the maize god often uses the gestures of raising one hand, with the sharply bent wrist held to the face, shared by other passengers as well on the boat scenes from the Tikal bones.

However, while the flare god is more closely associated with Maya ruling authority and is more restricted to contexts of rebirth, the less commonly shown maize god is more passive and may appear in all stages of the transformation cycle.

The image of the reborn sun (fig. 13a) is related in form and meaning to both the flare and maize gods. Like the flare god, the sun face is usually shown with the forehead cavity, but lacking the snout. The cavity design may be shown with or replaced by fin-like elements emerging from the cheek and forehead (fig. 10p), which also appear in the humanized version (fig. 13b). The sun god face is also distinguished by the square, squinting pupils (another form of the T617a vessel glyph?), a ruff of close-cropped hair, T-shaped filed upper incisors, a wide, continuous lip band creating a round or (sometimes abbreviated) quatrefoil mouth, and flanking mustache-like elements identified as fish barbels (Schele 1979: 58). The fins and barbels suggest a piscine association which relates the sun and maize deities.

The zoomorphic counterpart of the sun god image, sharing the barbels and ruff but distinguished by the more naturalistic small, round eyes and larger, toothless mouth, is the Classic form of God C (fig. 14a), the deity associated with the north, water, and the nadir of the underworld (Cohodas 1974). God C has been conventionally identified as a monkey, although its head bears no relationship to the monkey deities identified by Coe (1977). Instead, the barbels and general facial type are most similar to hieroglyphic representations of fish (fig. 14b-c), and shell and fish symbols may substitute for God C in various contexts. The codical glyph of god C

FIGURE 12



#### Maize god comparison

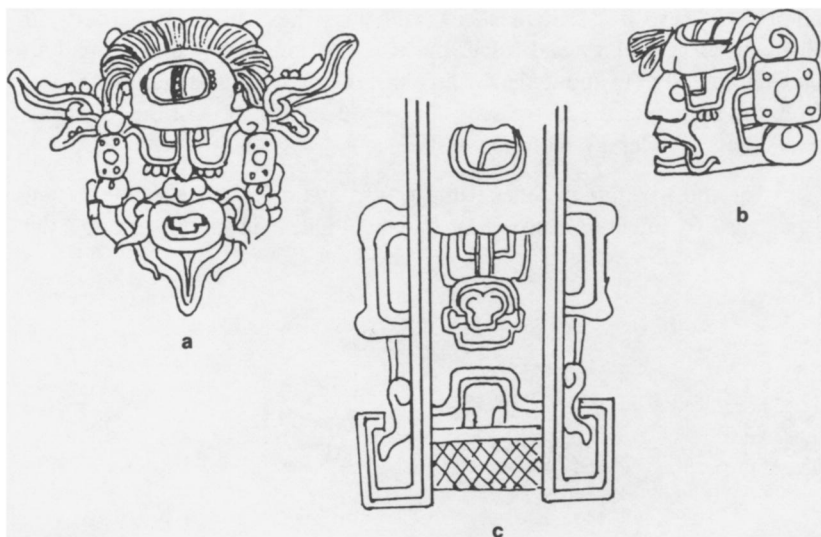
- a. Maize god (Copan stela H, after Spinden 1913: fig. 123).
- b. Glyph of codical god E, (Dresden Codex).



(fig. 14d) shares with the god E glyph the band along the cranium which, if the glyph is a simultaneous image of the face and complete body, would represent the fish's lateral nerve line. While the sun god, like the flare god, is most closely associated with imagery of the ruler's rebirth (as in the loincloth, fig. 13c), God C like the maize god appears to be more versatile in his much rarer appearances. All four of these interrelated deities are nevertheless primarily associated with emergence, maize, water, and fish imagery, recalling the Popol Vuh story in which the hero twins are first reborn out of water as fish-men.

Finally, the serpent-winged bird may be related to this group of deities through the similar saurian face with forehead cavity (fig. 15a), but is distinguished by the avian body and the serpent heads (fig. 15b) from which wing feathers emerge. Although Bardawil (1976) follows previous authors in identifying it as an owl, the derivation from anthropomorphic images (in

FIGURE 13



#### Sun god imagery

- a. Sun God (Foliated Cross panel, after Schele 1976: fig. 10).
- b. Roman-nosed type of sun god head (Sun panel, after Schele 1976: fig. 10).
- c. Loincloth with sun god and fret-snouted serpents (Naranjo stela 6, after Graham and von Euv 1975: 23).

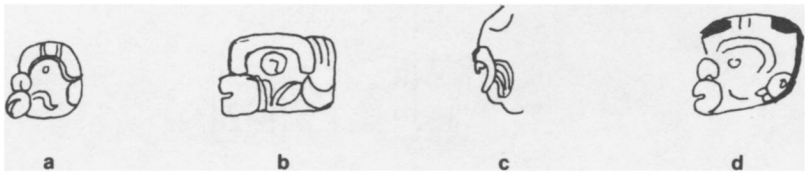
the Pre- and Early Classic phases) and the virtual absence of bird heads (Tikal Temple IV, lintel 3 is the single example) makes species identification impossible. Nor is there any evidence that it is to be equated with the stylized raptorial bird heads which decorate planetary bands (fig. 16a) or the naturalistic form (probably a Harpy eagle) which appears in the headdress of god L (fig. 16b). Instead, the serpent-winged bird appears to be a composite of stylized supernatural images grafted onto a generalized avian body, just as the bicephalic monster (on which it perches) is a composite of similar images grafted onto a reptilian body.

#### 4. THE REAR HEAD AND SKELETAL IMAGERY

The rear head is of the saurian type with forehead infix, further distinguished by the fleshless lower jaw. Furst (1978: 318) has shown that skeletal imagery may not always be associated with death, but also with germination. Skeletal imagery actually suggests the point of transformation, the liminal phase after the old state of being has been destroyed by stripping off the old flesh, and before the new state of being has been created by adding on new flesh. Such skeletal imagery has clear counterparts in shamanistic mythology and ritual, but it is relevant to any transformation, and particularly (in monumental art) the ruler's inaugural transformation from the human to the divine state. The frequent inversion of the rear head may likewise refer to the animal state.

The most common skeletal image in Maya art is the skeletal serpent head (fig. 6), identified not only by the fleshless jaws but also by the

FIGURE 14



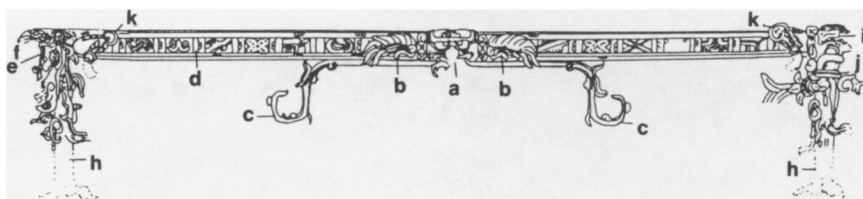
God C imagery

- a. Classic inscriptional version of God C.
- b. Fish glyph (after Kelley 1976: fig. 45).
- c. Fish glyph (Palenque, Temple IV tablet).
- d. Codical glyph of God C (Dresden Codex).

attached baubles (bones and gouged eyes), the hollow nose emitting some kind of extrusion, and the two short, stubby fangs which emerge from bony sockets at the tip of the snout. The two-headed skeletal serpent appears in contexts of death and rebirth as well as the liminal phase, suggesting relevance to the entire transformation cycle. As a death image, spear blades emerge from its jaws, while in contexts of rebirth it is associated with the bicephalic monster: four skeletal serpent heads emerge from medallions framing the rear head in Tikal ruler's capes, two skeletal serpent heads frame the rear head on the sarcophagus (fig. 10), and two skeletal serpent heads frame the figures who hold bicephalic monster emblems on the Palenque style onyx vase from Jaina (Cohodas 1976: fig. 6).

A standardized variant of the skeletal serpent is further characterized by circlets or sequins along its facial bones, and finned ornaments on the brow, nose, snout, and lower jaw (fig. 17). Like the more common skeletal serpent, this finned serpent may be associated with all phases of the transformation cycle. It is a death image when worn by warrior-rulers with prisoners, as on stelae at Naranjo, Bonampak, and Piedras Negras. It appears as a rebirth image on lintel 2 of Tikal Temple I, while its circlets are superimposed on the skeletal saurian and fret-snouted serpent heads worn by the ruler on lintel 3 of Tikal Temple IV. The association of the finned skeletal serpent with liminality as well as rebirth is shown on Yaxchilan lintel 25 (fig. 17), where the ruler emerges from the two-headed finned serpent, wearing a skeletal (sun god?) mask, while his consort both wears and holds skeletal versions of the bicephalic monster. The emphasis on skeletal imagery combines with the reversal of the inscription to create a powerful image of the liminal state.

FIGURE 15



Bicephalic Monster over doorway (House E, after Schele 1976: fig. 9).

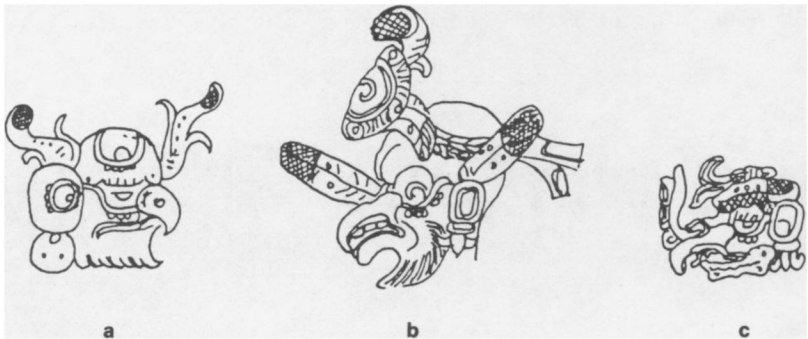
*Legend:* a. Head of serpent-winged bird with forehead cavity; b. serpent wing element; c. fret-snouted serpent; d. sky band; e. front head; f. venus sign; g. lidded eye with crossed bands; h. water stream; i. rear head; j. quadripartite badge; k. shell joint.

Skeletal images of the saurian-anthropomorphic category are less common. The skeletal saurian appears in basal panels (Palenque), on altars (Copan), in headdresses, and as a pectoral. The skeletal form of the raptorial bird (fig. 16c), with forehead infix, downcurving beak (similar to the downturned serpent snout), hollow nose, and comb-like device attached to the nasal extrusion, is particularly associated with the rear head of the bicephalic monster, as on the Cross jamb. Although the context of skeletal serpent and saurian images is clearly related to transformation and the liminal state, the nasal extrusion which they share remains unexplained.

### 5. GLYPHIC INFIXES OF THE REAR HEAD

The most complex of these glyphic devices, studied primarily by Kubler (1969), and termed the quadripartite badge by Robertson (1974), appears to represent a sacrificial dish containing blood-letting paraphernalia (fig. 18a). In monumental art, women frequently hold these dishes, which contain blood-spattered bark paper with the cord, stingray spine, and blade-tongued perforator sceptre use for blood-letting (fig. 17). In two examples (Yaxchilan lintels 13-14) the T712 glyph for blood-letting (fig. 8b) also appears in the vessel. The lowest section of the quadripartite badge is the stylized sacrificial dish, elsewhere decorated with the T617a vessel glyph,

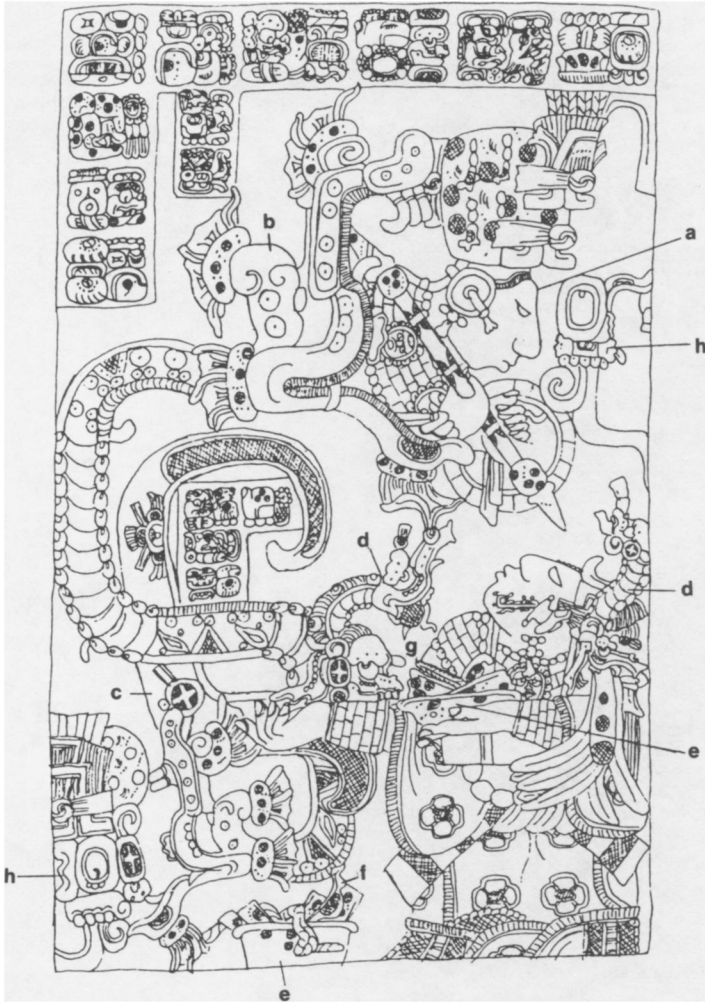
FIGURE 16



#### Raptorial bird heads

- a. Stylized type (Naranjo stela 32, after Graham 1978: 86).
- b. Naturalistic type (Cross jamb, after Schele 1976: fig. 6).
- c. Skeletal type (Cross jamb, after Schele 1976: fig. 6).

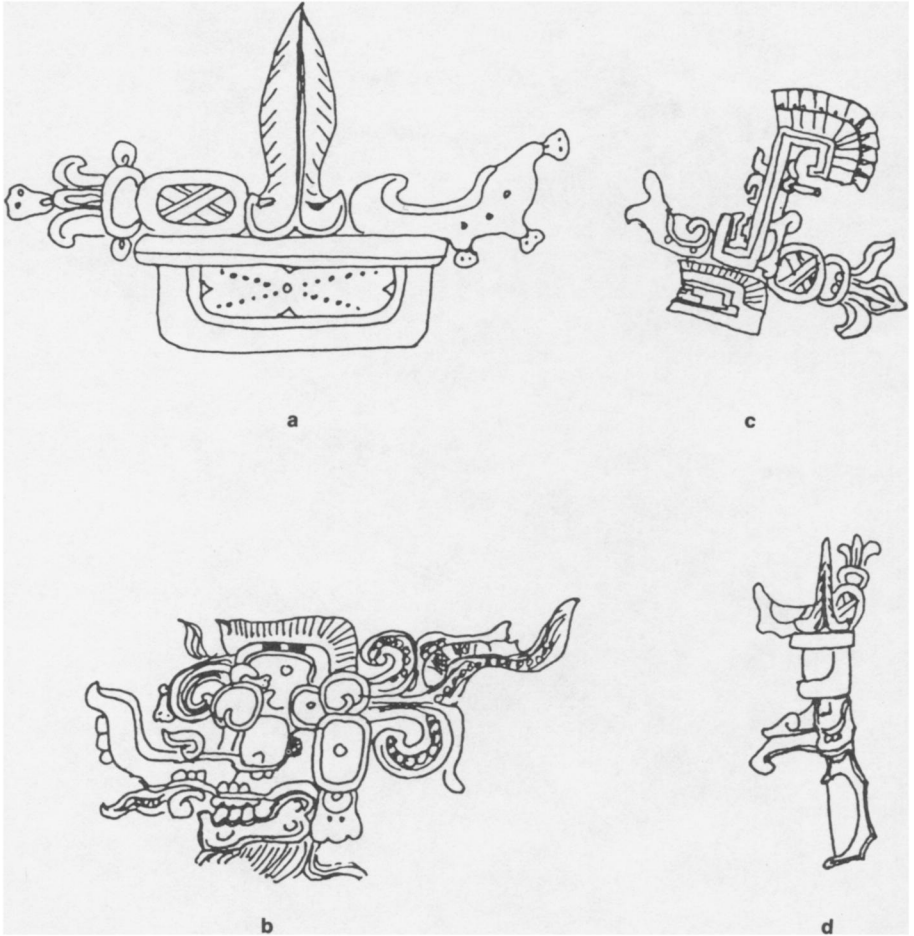
FIGURE 17



Yaxchilan lintel 25 (after Graham and von Euw 1977: 55).

*Legend:* a. Shield Jaguar emerging; b. finned serpent; c. water scrool; d. skeletal bicephalic monster; e. sacrificial plate with bark paper; f. perforator blade; g. stingray spine; h. skeletal sun god?

FIGURE 18



#### Rear Head infixes

- a. Quadripartite badge (Cross panel, after Robertson 1974: fig. 1).
- b. Rear head with God C infix (Tikal Temple IV, lintel 3, after Jones 1977: fig. 11).
- c. Modified badge with beaded serpent for woman's headdress (Cleveland stela, after Miller 1974: fig. 2).
- d. Composite Rear head with quadripartite badge and perforator, in woman's headdress (Piedras Negras stela 3, after Maler 1901: pl. 13).

but in this context inscribed with the *kin* or sun sign. The central vertical element in this dish was identified by Joralemon (Schele 1976: 18) as the perforator made from the barbed weapon of the aquatic stingray. The flanking elements also have sacrificial connotations.

The cartouche with crossed bands and *fleur-de-lis* device which flanks the stingray spine is a costume ornament, generally worn as a pectoral by Maya rulers and deities, and associated with sacrificial imagery (Yaxchilan stela 5, Naranjo stelae 8, 19) as well as with water-scattering (Piedras Negras stela 13, most Yaxchilan stelae). The third object, a shell, will be shown subsequently to carry similar associations with water and sacrifice. The shell may take the form of a halved univalve conch shell, or the more circular form of a bivalve. At Tikal and Yaxchilan, the head of god C replaces the quadripartite badge as the forehead infix (fig. 18b). God C is related to the rear head not only through associations with water and the north, but also as a sacrificial emblem, since it is interchangeable with the hand-grasping-fish and T712 (figs. 21b, 8b) glyphs of blood-letting.<sup>11</sup>

When the rear head with quadripartite badge is worn in the headdress or on the back, with one exception by women, the stingray spine is usually replaced by a beaded form of the fret-snouted serpent (fig. 18c). While the standard fret-snouted serpent or *zip* monster<sup>12</sup> is a rebirth image in Maya art, appearing with the sun god in sky bands and loin-cloths and calendrically related to the rainy season, the beaded form may carry the opposite connotations of fire and devouring. For example, on the Jaina onyx vessel (Cohodas 1976: fig. 6) the beaded serpent head is opposed to the two bicephalic monster emblems, one of which appears with the standard fret-snouted serpent. On a Jaina figurine (Princeton 1975: 61-66) the jaguar god sits astride a monstrous saurian form of this beast<sup>13</sup> whose upturned beaded snout seems ancestral to the Aztec image of the fire serpent, *Xiuhcoatl*. At Palenque, the beaded serpent becomes a cross-shaped tree which grows from the quadripartite badge and rear head, as on pier c of House D, where it is associated with prisoner sacrifice, and on the Cross tablet and sarcophagus (figs. 10-11). Despite the association of the beaded serpent with trees at Palenque, the context of the rear head with

<sup>11</sup> The god C head appears to function as the blood-letting glyph on Naranjo stela 24, while on Piedras Negras 36 (Thompson 1960: fig. 34, 2) the hand-grasping-fish substitutes for the god C head in the glyph of the first lord of the night.

<sup>12</sup> Kelley's (1976: 120) identification of the *zip* monster as a "sky peccary" is based on Postclassic codical representations. In the Classic period it is never shown with a body.

<sup>13</sup> Th *xi* signs on the monster's tail are also associated with warriors at Naranjo.

quadripartite badge in the woman's headdress appears to be sacrificial, as in the composite rear head-perforator sceptre on Piedras Negras stela 3 (fig. 18d).

Investigation of the shell symbols found in the quadripartite badge clarifies the contexts and meaning of the rear head in monumental art. First, shells may be considered aquatic symbols which also carry the association of vessel or container. The concepts of water and vessel suggest the watery underworld, the womb of the earth goddess within which the sun-maize deity and ruler are conceived and from which they are reborn. Pacal was actually interred in a cavity suggesting the shape of a bivalve shell as well as pottery jar. The crescent glyph of the moon goddess (fig. 10r) is a vessel which may substitute for shell signs, supporting the association of shells as containers with the water-filled womb of the moon-earth goddess.

Since the symbolism of water and vessel is associated with transformation in the underworld, shell designs carry liminal connotations which equate them with bone imagery. For example bivalve shells may substitute for lower jaws (Foliated Cross panel). More significantly, the Cross panels is distinguished from the Sun and Foliated Cross panels by the dispersal of all forms of shell (and bone) ornaments throughout the field, thus representing not only the watery underworld environment but also vessels, bones, and transformation. On the Palace tablet, the composite serpent-fish support of the central figure (fig. 20c) associated with the north, contrasts with the jaguar head support of the western figure, and the serpent head support of the eastern figure. Like the skeletal imagery on Yaxchilan lintel 25, the shell motifs on the Cross panel and fish heads on the Palace tablet place these central elements of three-part sculptural programs in the context of the north, underworld, and the liminal point of transformation.

Shells are also sacrificial symbols in Maya art. They are worn by kneeling figures on Yaxchilan water-scatterer stelae and warrior-rulers and Piedras Negras and Jaina. Bivalve shells, substitute for two trophy heads in the ruler's costume on Yaxchilan lintel 9 (Graham and von Euw 1977: 29), while on Narango stela 21 the ruler wears the same bivalve shells as well as a shell pectoral. This ruler (fig. 19a) impersonates the jaguar god, with the nose pendants, cruller, jaguar ear, and beard shown with a crenellated shell-like outline. A similar univalve shell which tops his headdress<sup>14</sup> may be

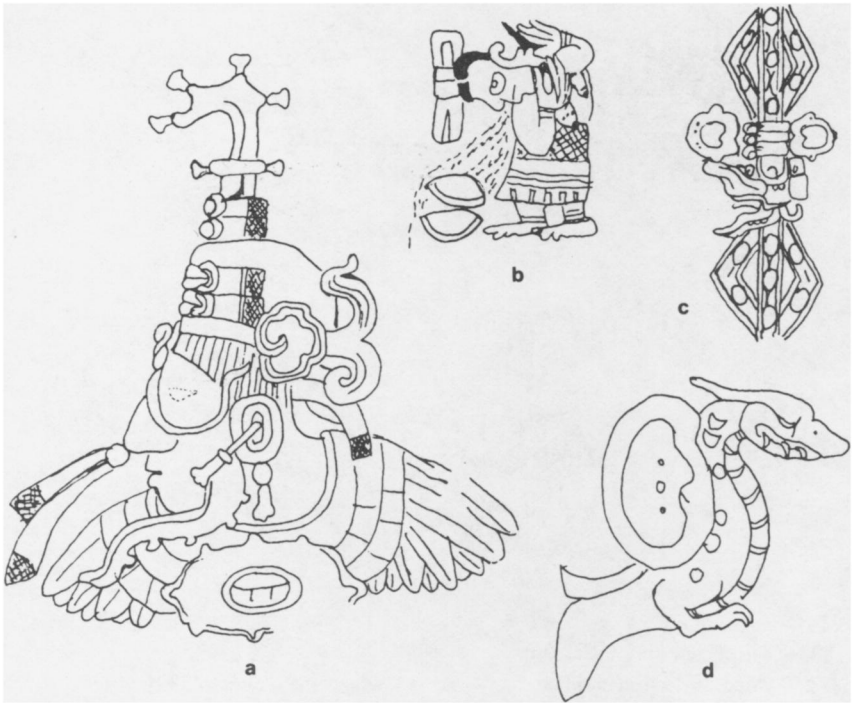
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<sup>14</sup> A hand, also a sacrificial emblem, substitutes for the shell in the headdress of Pacal on the Oval tablet. In funerary art, the blade-like shell headdress ornament is diagnostic of the deity Coe (1978: 46) names god N<sup>1</sup>, a common variant of the aged shell god N.



associated with the blade-tongue of the perforator. Bivalve shells appear with scenes of blood-letting in the Madrid Codex (fig. 19b). Pairs of bivalves flank the heads of perforator gods on Tikal diamond staffs (fig. 19c), recalling the shell-winged avian (fig. 19d) (Schele 1979: 59), associated with death imagery, and appearing with the cartouche and *fleur-de-lis* in the relief of House B.

FIGURE 19

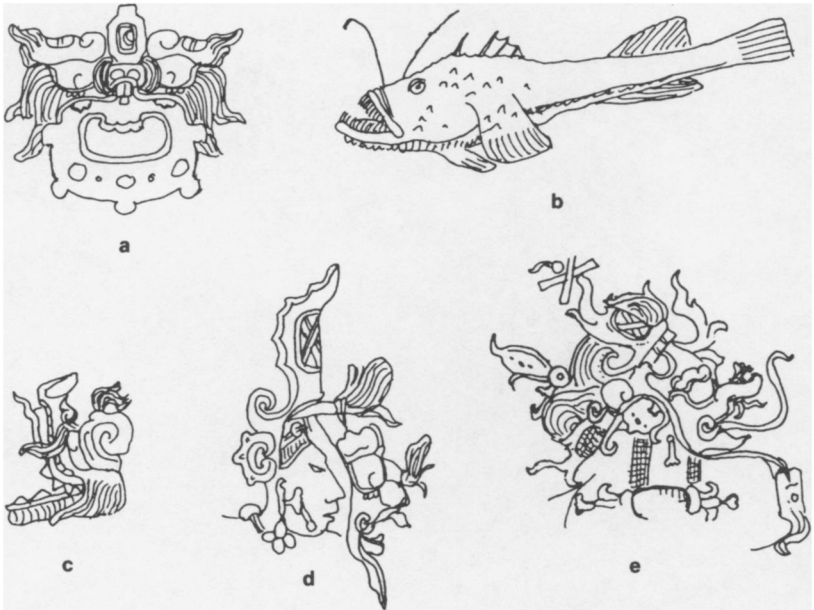


#### Sacrificial associations of shells

- a. Ruler impersonating Jaguar god (Naranjo stela 21, after Graham and von Euw 1975: 53).
- b. Ear-piercing with blood falling on shells (Madrid Codex 95a, after Villacorta and Villacorta 1976: 414).
- c. Diamond staff with perforator god heads, detail (Tikal stela 16, after Jones 1977: fig. 7).
- d. Shell-winged dragon (Slave tablet, after Schele 1979: fig. 17).

The sacrificial connotations of shells center on the monstrous fish, the patron of the month *Mac* previously related to the T617a glyph. Maya women wear this fish head at the front of their belt (fig. 20a), with a bivalve shell substituting for its extended tongue, and the same fish is worn as a wristlet by the giant jaguar of Tikal.<sup>15</sup> It is identified by fins emerging from the side of its face, the fins-with-cavities which form its brow, and the

FIGURE 20



#### The Barbel god and angler fish

- a. Stylized angler fish from woman's belt (Cleveland stela, after Miller 1974: fig. 2).
- b. Angler fish (Goosefish, family *Lophiidae*, after Migdalski and Fichter 1976: 171).
- c. Serpent-fish composite (Palace tablet, after Schele 1979: fig. 10).
- d. Ruler wearing ear-covering, symbolic lure, and mask of Barbel god (Yaxchilan stela 11, after Thompson 1966: fig. 21).
- e. Barbel god (Creation tablet, after Thompson 1966: fig. 22).

<sup>15</sup> Kelley (1976: 123) suggests that two aquatic predators are involved, the *ca* or fish, patron of the month *Mac*, and the *xoc* or shark.

protruberance which rises vertically from its upper lip. On the basis of this protruberance, it may be tentatively identified as the goosefish angler (family *Lophiidae*), a large predatory fish found along the Atlantic coast, which uses as its lure the first, widely separated spine of the dorsal fin, rising from the upper lip, and tipped with a ragged piece of flesh. The angler lies hidden on the bottom, in both deep and shallow waters, and sucks in the fish it attracts by opening its cavernous<sup>16</sup> mouth. It is also distinguished by the broad pectoral fins on which it crawls<sup>17</sup> (Migdalski and Fichter 1976: 171; Wheeler 1975: 236-37).

The prey of the supernatural angler fish monster would be more vulnerable piscine deities, the sun god (appearing as G I of the Palenque triad with a shell ear-covering), the maize god and god C. As representations of the sun – maize deity, these must be devoured by the monstrous fish in order to be transformed in the watery underworld and reborn. The relationship of the angler fish to his prey thus parallels the relationship of the eagle and jaguar to the deer, as a representation of the earth monster devouring the descending sun.

The angler fish appears in deified form as the barbel god (also called the rain beast by Coe (1978: 76) and the executioner by Hellmuth). The name glyph of the codical god A' may be associated with this deity, since it consists of a jawless version of the "fish-head" type used for gods C and E (fig. 21a). The barbel god (fig. 20e) is recognized by the heavy folds of facial skin, the barbels flanking its mouth, and the stylized lure in the headdress, formed of a halved conch shell with bands infixed. In some examples (Quirigua altar O) this stingray spine replaces the lure motif (both are represented with the same diverging curls at the base). The barbel god may also have "god-markings" in the form of shell designs, and wears a bivalve shell as his ear (in this case gill) covering.<sup>18</sup> As a predatory fisherman, the barbel god is an important sacrificial deity, and is thus

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<sup>16</sup> The meaning of *mac* as "to enclose" may relate to the angler fish engulfing its prey in this manner as well as to the descent of the sun into the underworld.

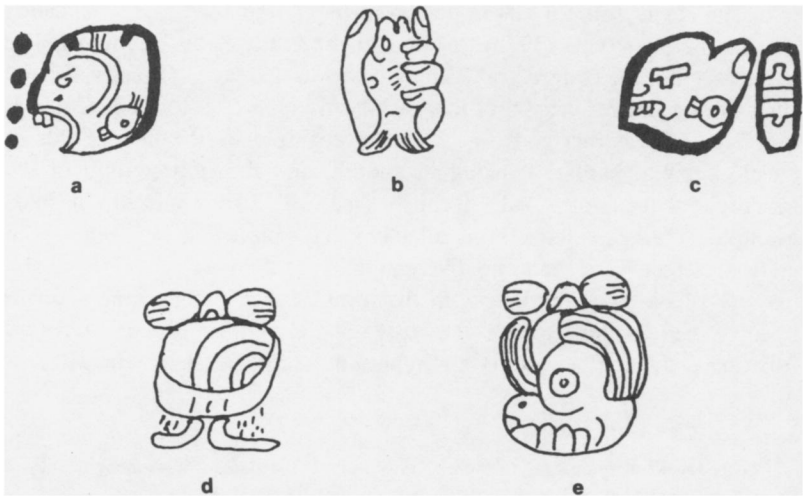
<sup>17</sup> The "*ma*" prefix which appears in the glyph of *Mac* may represent an abbreviated frontal view of the angler fish shown only by its lure flanked by the enlarged pectoral fins. The same prefix occurs with the conch shells as the glyph for south, paralleling the god C head as codical glyph for north in its aquatic association, recalling the importance of south as associated with the night sky in which the underworld or watery realm is reflected.

<sup>18</sup> It may be that Yucatec fishermen recalled the angler fish as their supernatural patron. According to Landa (Tozzer 1941: 156), instead of piercing their ears to draw blood, they cut them around the edges. The result must have resembled a gill covering as much as the bivalve shell worn by the barbel god.

associated with imagery of the jaguar and perforator gods (Quirigua altar O, Naranjo stela 21). The representation of the barbel god fishing as a sacrificial act occurs on the Tikal bone engravings (Kubler 1969: fig. 91) and in the blood-letting glyph of the hand grasping a fish (fig. 21b). The barbel god is also associated with the *ik* (tau) sign (Quirigua altars O and P) which appears in the introductory glyph of the month *Mac*, and forms the eye of the name glyph of the codical god B, apparently a Postclassic descendant of the barbel god (fig. 21b).

In funerary arts, the barbel god is shown as the dancing executioner (Coe 1978: numbers 4, 6, 7, 11, 12) carrying a sacrificial axe and shell blade (carved with the sun god face), wearing the *akbal* (darkness) vessel and death-eye collar, and about to sacrifice the jaguar god, fish-snake, or aged god N, all representations of the descending sun, a metaphor for the deceased who must also enter the underworld. In monumental arts, the

FIGURE 21



#### Other fish associations

- a. Codical glyph of God A' (Dresden Codex).
- b. Hand-grasping-fish glyph.
- c. Codical glyph of God B (Dresden Codex).
- d. Glyph of month *Mac* (After Thompson 1960: fig. 18, 2).
- e. Glyph of month *Mac* (After Thompson 1960: fig. 18, 3).

dancing barbel god is usually juxtaposed to imagery of water and the bicephalic monster (Quirigua stelae A and C, and zoomorph-altar pairs O and P) to show the inaugural transformation from death to rebirth. Maya rulers often wear the stylized shell-like lure and the bivalve ear covering, in one example (fig. 20d) apparently shown with a mask of the deity. In both contexts, the barbel god is a death image, the monster who devours the descending sun-ruler.

The barbel god may also be related to the rear head and quadripartite badge: the stingray spine may substitute for the barbel god's lure since both are aquatic weapons; the shell forms his ear covering; and the cartouche with *fleur-de-lis* is his pectoral.<sup>19</sup> The barbel god actually substitutes for the rear head on Quirigua Zoomorph P.<sup>20</sup> However, in contrast to the representations of the barbel god in relation to male sacrifice and death imagery, the rear head with quadripartite badge and the fish monster belt are both specific to female costume (the Foliated Cross panel being the sole exception). The sacrificial dish and perforating implement which are associated with male sacrifice in funerary art, are likewise held specifically by women in monumental art. These sacrificial implements may be combined with the image or emblem (see following section) of the rear head, as in the dish held by the woman on Naranjo stela 24 and the rear head-perforator (fig. 18d) in the woman's headdress on Piedras Negras stela 3.

Depictions of females with the emblems and implements of self-sacrifice constitute a major form of rebirth imagery in Maya art, since they refer to the mythological death of the earth-moon goddess which allows the emergence of the reborn sun. On the inaugural stela 14 at Piedras Negras, the ruler is shown emerging as the reborn sun, while the female (consort or mother) holds the perforating implement as the dying earth-moon goddess. On Piedras Negras stela 40, the ruler scatters water (a rebirth image) over the torso of the earth goddess herself, shown rising from a platform below which is inscribed an emblem of the rear head (Kubler 1977: fig. 8j). She holds the perforating implement, while the tongue-piercing cord marked with the knotted headband designs of the perforator god rises above her. After passing through the sky band body of the

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<sup>19</sup> The cartouche and *fleur-de-lis* pectoral worn by the barbel god does not always have the crossed bands infix, but may instead have the braided mat, knotted yarn, or other motifs.

<sup>20</sup> The image of the ruler as barbel god wearing the rear head in his headdress on Copan stela I derives from a separate tradition of ceramic incense burners and cache vessels.

bicephalic monster (see below), the cord terminates in the head of the fret-snouted serpent. Like the beaded form worn in the modified quadripartite badge of the woman's headdress, the fret-snouted serpent appears to constitute an image of rebirth through representation of female sacrifice.<sup>21</sup>

The image of the self-sacrificing female is almost always paired with the image of the ruler as warrior, as on the lintels of Yaxchilan structures 20, 21, and 23,<sup>22</sup> and the paired stelae of Naranjo. The ruler-warrior represents and often impersonates the jaguar or barbel gods who devour the descending sun. The self-sacrificing women who hold the perforator or sacrificial plate and wear the fish monster belt, often also wear the rear head of the bicephalic monster with the quadripartite badge, suggesting that the birth-giving and dying earth mother whom they impersonate is the bicephalic monster. The human contrast of the warrior-ruler and the self-sacrificing female is thus analogous to the deity contrast of the jaguar or barbel god and bicephalic monster (Cross group, Quirigua altar-zoomorphs O and P, Tikal Temple IV) as a representation of the ruler's inaugural transformation from death to rebirth.

## 6. PAIRED DISEMBODIED HEADS

The bicephalic monster may be represented by emblematic heads, distinguished by the number prefixes seven and nine, often shown with plant forms growing from them. Both heads are shown in most cases, either on the same or a pair of related sculptures.

The rear head emblem takes the number nine prefix (fig. 22a). In most examples the forehead infix is a bivalve shell, surmounted by ovals outlined with dots, with the quadripartite badge occurring only on Naranjo stela 3. In three historically related examples (Cross panel, Jaina vase, Copan stela D) the shell infix is half darkened or crosshatched, suggesting the point of transformation between the dry (light) and rainy (dark) seasons that accords with the association of the rear head with the point of transformation in the underworld. In the later Dresden and Madrid codices, the half-darkened symbol is associated with the sky band body of the bicephalic monster, and rain falls from it (fig. 23a), as from the rear head vessels on the

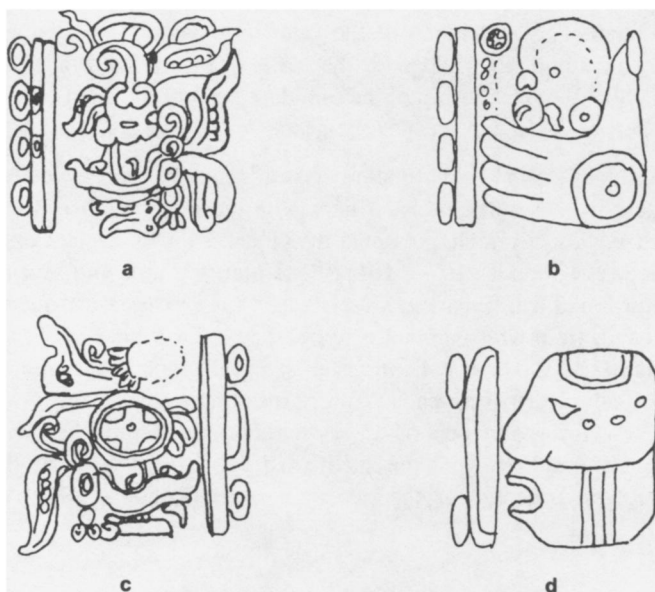
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<sup>21</sup> Like the beaded form, the standard fret-snouted serpent appears to relate to both male and female sacrifice, as on the paired stelae in Cleveland and Fort Worth (Miller 1974).

<sup>22</sup> On the lintels of Yaxchilan structures 20 and 21, as well as the Foliated Cross jamba, simultaneous male *and* female sacrifice is employed as an image of rebirth.

panel and jamb of the Cross (fig. 11).<sup>23</sup> The number nine prefix, symbolic of the underworld, occurs with the head of god C as the glyph of the first lord of the night (fig. 22b), also associated with the north and the point of transformation (Cohodas 1974).

FIGURE 22



#### Emblematic Bicephalic monster heads

- a. Rear head emblem (Copan stela D, after Kubler 1977: fig. 8).
- b. First Lord of Night (after Thompson 1960: fig. 34, 1).
- c. Front head emblem (Copan stela D, after Kubler 1977: fig. 8).
- d. Fourth Lord of Night (after Thompson 1960: fig. 34, 22).

<sup>23</sup> Since the half-darkened glyph occurs in the lunar eclipse tables of the Dresden Codex, it is assumed to represent an eclipse. However, Thompson (1972: 73) shows that these tables also represent a strictly lunar count organized according to groups of six lunations. These constitute lunar half-years which, according to the monument glyphs for the lunar series, would divide conceptually at the solstices (Cohodas 1974), with the young moon goddess as patron of the dry season (winter to summer solstice) and the old moon goddess as the water-bringing patron of the rainy season (summer to winter solstice). The light-dark glyph would then be associated with the summer solstice transformation of the moon goddess from young to old form, which occurs when she mates with the sun.

The front head emblem also takes the saurian form (fig. 22c) due to its function as an independent image. It is differentiated from the rear head emblem not only by the number seven prefix, but also by the *kan* cross forehead infix, a water symbol which is sometimes prefixed by another water sign, the glyph of the month *Mol*. The number seven is associated with the surface of the earth, and it appears in the glyph of the fourth lord of the night (fig. 22d) associated with the month *Zip*. On the Jaina vessel, the fret-snouted serpent or zip monster is actually appended to the front head emblem. The association of the front head with water symbols, the rainy season month *Zip*, and with the maize plant on the Foliated Cross panel, parallel the relationship of the ophidian form of the front head to the eastern horizon as the place of emergence.

As Kubler (1977) shows, these two heads may be represented by their infixed glyphic elements or related signs with the same numbers seven and nine prefixed. One example not noted by Kubler is found on the Copan ball court markers (Cohodas 1974: 101).<sup>24</sup> The numbers nine and seven occur on the north and south markers, respectively, prefixed to a cartouche with crossed bands from which a plant emerges. The crossed bands motif appears here to represent the bicephalic monster, as in the glyphs of the months *Uo* and *Zip*. The quadripartite badge (minus the stingray spine) is shown four times below the groundline on these markers, associating the bicephalic monster and world tree with the quadripartite surface of the earth through which the sun is reborn at the eastern horizon (Cohodas 1979: 223).

## 7. BODY TYPES

The body of the bicephalic monster is usually that of a four-legged saurian,<sup>25</sup> often with shell symbols at the joints, and *cauac* signs or *cauac* monsters on the back, sides, or limbs (fig. 1). The *cauac* monster is a sacrificial, blade-tongued devouring deity of lightning (fig. 5c), so that its association with the bicephalic monster parallels that of the barbel and perforator gods as a representation of the female sacrifice which attends rebirth. The earliest bicephalic monster representation, on the Chiapa de

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<sup>24</sup> Earlier confusion as to the dual meaning of the number seven, related to both the eastern and western horizons and thus to both rebirth and death, led to misinterpretations of the south marker design (Cohodas 1975; 1974: 102).

<sup>25</sup> The feathered serpent body of the bicephalic monster on lintel 3 of Tikal Temple IV is extremely rare, paralleled only in the Teotihuacan stylization of this Maya deity on the so-called Temple of Quetzalcoatl.

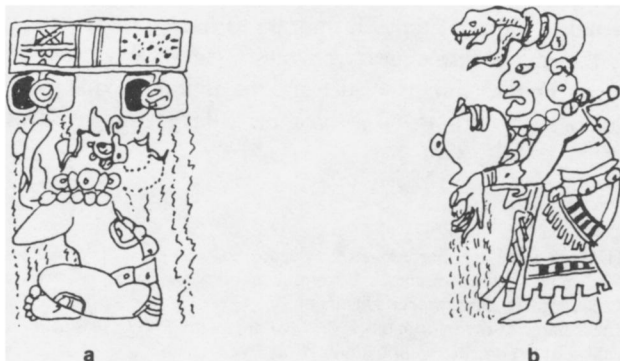


Corzo bones, shows it as a swimming creature, recalling the Mesoamerican concept of the earth's surface as the back of a giant, floating crocodile.

The monster's body may also be abstracted into a thin band divided into segments, within which are shown symbols of the sun, moon, venus, as well as the *akbal* (darkness-underworld), *caan* (sky), and crossed bands signs, the heads of the sun god and the *zip* monster, and a shield-like device (figs. 15, 11, 10). These are all rebirth-associated motifs, and most are symbols of celestial objects visible in the night sky, the dark mirror on which are reflected the beings and events of the underworld. This sky band body, shown with the serpent-winged bird perched upon it, occurs primarily in the Usumancinta region.

The crossed bands sign is the most prevalent sky band symbol, and may stand for the body as a whole. In the codices, it is a verb signifying copulation (Kelley 1976: 152)<sup>26</sup> and it has also been related to celestial conjunctions. M. Coe (personal communication) suggested that it might refer specifically to the crossing of the ecliptic and the milky way, the two

FIGURE 23



Codical Rain scenes

- a. God B in rain falling from sky band and light-dark signs (Dresden Codex 39c, after Villacorta and Villacorta 1976: 88).
- b. Old Goddess pouring water (Dresden Codex, after Villacorta and Villacorta 1976: 88).

<sup>26</sup> The phonetic equivalent of the crossed bands is translated both as the crossing of two objects in the middle and as desire (Kelley 1976: 152).

major bands that cross the night sky. The ecliptic is the plane of the solar system, manifested as the roughly east-west path travelled by the sun, moon, and planets, and marked by the zodiacal constellations. The milky way is instead the plane of our galaxy, and along with other fixed stars it appears to rotate around the pole star every twenty-four hours. The milky way intersects the ecliptic at a  $60^\circ$  angle (Olesen n.d.), but on the summer solstice the northernmost orientation of the setting sun ( $25^\circ$  north of west) is perpendicular to the northernmost orientation of the milky way at midnight ( $25^\circ$  east of north).<sup>27</sup> This symbolic crossing of the ecliptic and milky way at the zenith would then reflect the mating of the sun god and moon-earth goddess at the nadir of the underworld, at midnight on the summer solstice, thus unifying the two meanings of the crossed bands symbol: conjunction and mating. The sky band body would then be a reflection of the earth goddess in the underworld, while the images which occupy its segments would represent the bodies in the solar system which travel the ecliptic,<sup>28</sup> and are transformed as they pass through the milky way in their nocturnal underworld journey.

In this light, it is unlikely that two further parallels between the milky way and the bicephalic monster would have escaped notice. First, the milky way bifurcates south of the zenith, due to intervening dust clouds (Olesen n.d.) so that at times it appears to have an open serpent mouth. Second, the milky way appears brightest, widest, and densest during the period between the summer solstice and the autumnal equinox, since at this time we look towards the center of the galaxy at night. This coincides

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<sup>27</sup> The long axis of the northern cross (Cygnus) lies along the milky way, with the short axis perpendicular, so that at summer solstice midnight it would reflect both components of the crossed bands sign in their proper alignments.

<sup>28</sup> The Temple of the Inscriptions is oriented approximately  $25^\circ$  east of north, parallel to the midnight solstitial orientation of the milky way. Although the sarcophagus deviates slightly, the sky bands which line the east and west sides of the lid may have been intended to parallel the milky way orientation. The placement of the sun and moon glyphs at the center of the east and west sides creates a bisecting cross-axis which is then roughly parallel to the orientation of the setting sun on the summer solstice. This bisection is enhanced by the differentiation of symbols occupying the north and south halves of the sky bands. While the crossed bands occurs throughout, since it represents the sky band in general, the *akbal*, shield, venus, and *zip* monster appear only on the north, while the sun god heads and *caan* sign appear only on the south. The opposition of the *akbal* (darkness, underworld) sign on the north and the *caan* (sky) sign on the south may represent the parallel between these two directions when the south or night sky is seen as a reflection of the north or underworld. The configuration changes slightly on the Cross panel, where the sun god face and *caan* occur with the sun glyph on the east, while the venus and *akbal* occur with the moon glyph on the west.

precisely with the conceptual period of agricultural renewal between the conception and the emergence of the reborn maize-sun, the first half of the rainy season during which the bicephalic monster functions as the pregnant earth mother and rain-bringer, and demarcated by its rear (north, summer solstice) and front (east, autumnal equinox) heads.

## 8. THE COMPLETE IMAGE: FORM AND CONTEXTS

The most complex and earliest standardized bicephalic monster configuration occurs on the Piedras Negras accession stela (Kubler 1969: figs. 58-60). The monster surrounds a niche, with its sky band body surmounted by the serpent-winged bird, and with water pouring from its two heads. A cloth-covered ladder ascends to the niche occupied by the newly-inaugurated ruler, who holds a decorated bag and wears as his headdress the open-jawed ophidian front head of the bicephalic monster. The inauguration of the ruler is thus shown to be a symbolic rebirth-ascent in which the representation of the bicephalic monster is associated with themes of falling water and of the ruler's emergence through its body, both of which may be explored further.

In Classic Maya art, the ruler is often responsible for pouring water, perhaps since as a representation of the reborn sun he is responsible for agricultural fertility. Rulers are shown scattering water on stela at Piedras Negras, Yaxchilan, and Quirigua, all paired with death imagery in the form of the warrior-ruler. At Tikal the two events are combined in a single image, as the ruler holds the perforator god staff in his left hand while scattering water with his right (Jones 1977: 31), a parallel to the death-rebirth opposition of the wrist shield and manikin sceptre.<sup>29</sup> Women are usually shown with sacrificial implements, although they do pour water on the historically related lintel 25 at Yaxchilan (fig. 17) and Cross temple (fig. 11: Pacal impersonates the earth goddess), in both cases associated with bicephalic monster implements. These examples, and the representations of deities pouring water on the bicephalic monster body of Quirigua zoomorph P, complement the streams of water falling from bicephalic monster heads on the Piedras Negras accession stela. Parallel representations in the codices include water falling from the sky band and/or light-dark signs, as well as images of the aged goddess pouring water from a pottery jar (fig. 24a-b),

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<sup>29</sup> Stela with this configuration were actually placed in a special northern enclosure, symbolic of the underworld as a vessel of transformation, in the Twin Pyramid complexes (Cohodas 1979: 219).

suggesting that as a pregnant earth mother, the bicephalic monster was the primary rain-bringing deity.

The configuration of the passageway created by the body of the bicephalic monster, as on the Piedras Negras accession stelae, is repeated in other monuments, many of which are also inaugural. The arched body forms a similar passage on lintel 3 of Tikal Temple IV, and surrounds actual doorways in House E (fig. 15) and Copan Temple 22. On the piers of House A and the Temple of the Inscriptions, planetary band forms a frame for the reborn ruler, while on the sarcophagus (fig. 10) a unique transposition of monumental imagery to a funerary context, the sky bands which outline the lid symbolically frame the womb- or shell-shaped cavity in which Pacal was interred.

This use of its body to delineate the passage through which the reborn sun-ruler emerges highlights the dual spatial configuration of the bicephalic monster. First, the rear and front heads may be associated respectively with the north and east, calendrically associated with the summer solstice and autumnal equinox. This spatial configuration dominates representations of the bicephalic monster at Palenque, where isolated heads or the complete monster are associated with the directions north and east, as in the Cross (N) and Foliated Cross (E) panels, House A piers (E), Inscriptions piers (N), sarcophagus (N), and the House E doorway (N-E). This configuration coincides with the representation of the Flare god emerging from the front head, representing the ascent through the surface of the earth at the eastern horizon.

In the second configuration, the bicephalic monster (Copan altars M, O'; Quirigua zoomorphs O, P) or its emblems (Sun panel; Yaxha stelae 2, 4; Copan markers) are placed along a north-south axis, with the front head usually in the south. The place of emergence in the east is then the passage at the center of or through the monster's body, as in the Tikal lintel and Piedras Negras stelae. The north-south alignment may have been designed to reflect the midnight solstice orientation of the milky way, or it may simply show that the sun-ruler must emerge through its body towards the east. The actual doorways framed by bicephalic monster bodies are associated with the movement of the sun from the underworld (north) to the upperworld (south) by passing through the surface of the earth in the east. This explains the symbolism of the seven scrolls and deities which compose the monster's body in the Copan Temple 22 doorway.

The representations of the *cauac* monster or *cauac* signs on the bodies of bicephalic monsters at Copan (fig. 1) and Quirigua also appear to

highlight the center of the monster's body as the place of emergence. Since the *cauac* monster's blade-tongue opens the passageway through the surface of the earth, thereby, destroying the female earth mother in order to allow the reborn sun to rise, this passageway may be represented by the *cauac* monster itself, or it may be delineated by a ring of *cauac* heads, as on the sides and back (symbolically underneath as well) of the bicephalic monster altar M at Copan. The radial configuration of *cauac* heads also occurs on the Foliated Cross panel: while Pacal impersonates the dying earth goddess with perforator but stands on the image of the sun's rebirth (fig. 7d), Chan Bahlum who impersonates the reborn sun god stands on the multi-headed *cauac* associated with the goddess' sacrifice. On the jambs of the Cross and Foliated Cross shrines, Pacal wears a belt from which dangles the barbel god, his arm thrust through the opening of a quatrefoil *cauac* glyph, paralleling the configuration of the passageway through a ring of *cauac* heads. The image occurs in both temples associated with the bicephalic monster, and is worn only by the dead ruler who impersonates the earth mother-bicephalic monster.

### CONCLUSION

The bicephalic monster is a major image of rebirth in Maya sculpture, synthesized from many elements that carried mutual connotations of the earth, underworld, female, water, rebirth, and fertility. By the Late Classic period, it had become a primary symbol of the authority and divinity of the Maya ruler, associated specifically with his inaugural transformation into a divine king.

The bicephalic monster appears to represent the aged earth mother during the first half of the rainy season, between the conception and the emergence of the sun or ruler.<sup>30</sup> The female associations derive from the representations of birth-giving from the front head as well as through the body, from representations of women pouring water as does the monster, and from the representations of women wearing the sacrificial attributes of the rear head. The parallel earth goddess image of Teotihuacan (Pasztory 1973) also appears as a torso rising from a platform, scatters water with her outstretched hands, and is shown with a tree growing behind her. The

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<sup>30</sup> Despite the fact that *na* means mother as well as house, it is unlikely that the bicephalic monster was called *Itzamna* in the Classic period, since it is more related to crocodilian than iguana (*itzam*) imagery. By the Postclassic or Colonial periods, disjunction may have resulted in its transformation from a female, earth-mother crocodile to the male iguana deity *Itzamna*.

glyphic representation of this female deity (Ixtapaluca plaque, Xochicalco stela) as “seven reptile-eye” parallels the emblem of the bicephalic monster front head with the number seven and water or fertility glyphs.

The bicephalic monster occupies a distinct position in Maya monumental art, which appears to be designed to convey the authority of the ruler by illustrating the symbols of this transformation from mortal to divinity through identification with the sun god in his yearly renewal. On most stela sculptures, the ruler's transformation is depicted through oppositions of death and rebirth imagery in his costume and attributes, such as the oppositions of the perforator god wristlets and anklets, with flare gods emerging from the serpent bar; of the jaguar wrist shield with the flare god sceptre; or of the perforator god staff and the water scattering (at Tikal). In these more complex and standardized designs, the dominant image of rebirth is the flare god and serpent head.

On some sculptures the themes of death and rebirth are separated into two or three complete scenes, allowing the interpretation of these images through their opposition. Death imagery is then represented by the theme of male sacrifice, with the ruler depicted as a warrior, often with prisoners, and wearing attributes of the jaguar, barbel, or perforator gods. Rebirth imagery is then represented by the bicephalic monster, shown in two ways. The ruler, flare god, or sun god may be shown emerging from the front head of the monster or through the passage created by its body.<sup>31</sup> Male rebirth may also be shown through depictions of female sacrifice, with consorts or mothers impersonating the earth goddess and holding or wearing symbols of self sacrifice associated with the rear head, including the fish monster belt, rear head with modified quadripartite badge headdress, perforator, and sacrificial dish with bark paper and blood-letting paraphernalia.

This Maya symbolic structure may be associated with a widespread dichotomy of sexual archetypes. For example, the terracotta effigy pairs created for funerary offerings in Jalisco and Nayarit often show males with weapons paired with females holding bowls, simultaneously expressing the opposition between the male as penetrator and the female as vessel, and the opposition between the male as destroyer and the female as nurturer. The same opposition between the male warrior and female with vessel underlies

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<sup>31</sup> The sculptural representation of a dynastic series, as on the sides of the sarcophagus and on the Hieroglyphic Stair, Temple 11, and altar Q at Copan, is a rarer example of the rebirth theme.

this Maya symbolic structure, except that the nurturing bowl has been transformed into an instrument of self-torture. Sacrificial symbols abound in both the naturalistic representations of women and the abstracted representations of the bicephalic monster. For the Maya, the concept of rebirth appears to have been inseparable from the concept of the sacrifice and destruction of the mother.

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