

MAYA SCRIBES WHO WOULD BE KINGS: SHAMANISM, THE UNDERWORLD,  
AND ARTISTIC PRODUCTION IN THE LATE CLASSIC PERIOD

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The Maya culture produced a diverse corpus of ideologically charged art. A recurring theme within this artistic corpus is the shamanic powers of the king: the ruler is a conduit between planes of existence and has the power to traverse cosmic realms in order to ensure balance as well as to propitiate needs of the gods (Freidel 1992; Freidel et al. 1993). Within Mesoamerican cosmology any opening in the earth, such as a cave or *cenote*, also functions as a physical manifestation of a conduit through which those in a state of shamanic trance may enter divine realms. In this study, I will focus on the ritual use of caves by the lowland Maya during the Late Classic period (AD 600-900). Cave iconography occupies a position within iconography and epigraphic studies central to the component of Late Classic Maya kingship. The same shamanic tenets that supported Maya kingship also support the position of secondary elites, such as scribes. Unfortunately, these secondary elites along with their iconographic and ideological validation have received much less attention than the specific validation of Maya kingship.

More specifically, since there is no evidence of a kingly involvement in the formulation of “propagandistic Maya monumental art” (Demarest 1992:146), it is important to glean some understanding of the scribal agents involved in their creation. Therefore, one of the purposes of this thesis is to present hypotheses that illustrate the

visualization and validation of the divine sanction of Maya scribes and their art. Since the names of artists have been revealed through hieroglyphic decipherment, the agency of secondary scribal elites can be directly linked to the political ideology of the Late Classic period. Using a corpus mostly derived from Late Classic Codex-style ceramic vessels, I will present a hypothesis that links scribes to caves, both in their symbolic and physical forms. I will further demonstrate that scribal functions, caves, and trance states were all aspects of scribal elite validation.

In order to place this study within a historical context, my second chapter will take an epistemological approach by briefly summarizing the current paradigm of scribal and chthonic iconography. This recapitulation will explain the role of caves in Maya iconography and ritual, as well as the prestige and esoterica associated with the ideology of elite scribes.

Cave iconography has been discussed in great detail by art historians and epigraphers such as Andrea Stone, Karen Bassie-Sweet, and Barbara MacLeod, and cave rituals have been archaeologically analyzed by James Brady, Holley Moyes, and Keith Prufer. However, the majority of my description and methodology that analyzes scribal iconography is derived from the work of Michael D. Coe, Dorie Reents-Budet, and Andrea Stone. Furthermore, I will recapitulate the major tenets of Maya cosmology, with an emphasis on the role of caves. For this section of chapter two I will rely heavily on the research of David Freidel, Linda Schele, and Kent Reilly as well as ethnographic analogy. Essentially this chapter is a historical discussion that reveals the specific importance of shamanic powers, cave rituals, and the scribal office within the broader context of Late Classic Maya religion, politics, and economy.

In chapter three I will lay out the specifics of my research as well as my methodology and theoretical position explaining the ritual use of caves by elite Maya scribes. To ascertain the cognitive construct underlying cave scenes from Late Classic ceramic vessels, I will employ structural analysis as defined by Erwin Panofsky. Certainly, Panofsky's methodological approach of semiotics allows the researcher to peel away the layers of an artistic work, while providing anthropologists and art historians a way to gain insight into a culture's ideology and sociopolitical function. In short, structural analysis used in conjunction with ethnographic and epigraphic data will reveal why the elite Maya scribe adopted the cave and its Underworld associations as their defining symbol. The theoretical model presented in chapter three further demonstrates how critical caves, cave ideology, and scribes were to the overall position of validating ideology within Maya culture. Central to these arguments will be the role of agency and ideology in the dual-processual theory presented by Blanton, Feinman, Kowaleski, and Peregrine (1996). Another component of my theoretical position discussed in chapter three will be the introduction of complex iconography and epigraphy via finely made pictorial ceramic vessels into Late Classic culture (Reents-Budet 1998). Reents-Budet suggests that the complex iconography as well as individual titles of the Late Classic were painted on vessels to reaffirm the scribe's elite status through artistic propaganda. In other words, these fine vessels became billboards that advertise the personal prestige for the scribe and his lineage during this period of cultural and political upheaval. Finally, I will present evidence that the elite Maya scribe adopted the cave as a metaphor and ritual stage to become a dominant symbol.

In my fourth chapter I will present my data set and give a brief explanation of the reasons for choosing this data set. In order to test my hypothesis that scribes depict themselves in caves engaged in shamanic ritual, I have compiled a corpus of Late Classic, finely-made, polychrome ceramic vessels that visually recount crucial aspects of scribal culture and ritual. The majority of my corpus is attributed to the Codex-style or Black and White style because there has been significant iconographic analyses compiled on these vessels and both styles are represented in the cave art of Naj Tunich Cave. Additionally, I will recount hallmark characteristics of the style groups and discuss recent breakthroughs in identifying loci of production. Reconstructing some geographical boundaries of these style groups is essential to ascertain the spatial breadth of the scribe-in-cave motif.

In my fifth chapter, I present a detailed interpretation of my pictorial ceramic corpus. In all of my arguments I first recapitulate research that has already been presented about the visual narratives (and textual when present) of the pictorial vessels in order to place my interpretation in some epistemological context. First, I demonstrate that elite Maya scribes in the area around Nakbé and Xultun iconographically and epigraphically represented their workshop as a metaphorical cave. One particular vase displays iconographic evidence that suggests Maya scribes underwent shamanic trance states during the ritual of craft production. Next, I show that the cave functioned as a ritual stage during scribal rites of passage into their exalted office. During this initiation, the ability to contact Otherworld denizens and amalgamate the profane and sacred realms of existence through shamanic ritual is an essential precursor for entry into the scribal office. Finally, in one tableau elite scribes depict themselves transforming into their

supernatural co-essences (the Monkey-man Gods) framed by the stage of the primordial waters of the Underworld. By integrating themselves into mythology and traveling back in time to epochs before the creation of man, the elite scribes that painted these Codex-style tableaux are again using visual rhetoric to validate their preternatural essence, divine artistic capabilities, and sociopolitical position. Ultimately, I am proposing that the elite Maya scribe adopted the multivocal symbol of the cave as his icon of elite and supernatural validation during a time of ubiquitous political conflict and social turbulence.

Finally, in chapter six I will make my concluding statements where I will show my argument has demonstrated that scribes used an ideological format to convey their shamanic abilities through the dominant symbol of the cave and its Underworld associations. I will also present avenues of future research on this topic in hopes that this thesis will inspire students and subsequent studies of scribal culture among the Late Classic Maya. Finally, I opine how this thesis will further the study of Maya iconography specifically surrounding the scribe and his ideological alignment with the chthonic realm. Hopefully, this thesis will serve as a sounding board for other iconographers to further understand the multifarious relationship between craft production, ideology, and the sociopolitical landscape of the Late Classic period in the Maya lowlands.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Over the past 30 years the collaboration of archaeologists, linguists, and art historians has brought our understanding of the Classic Maya culture into a much clearer picture. Once thought to be peaceful astronomer-priests, the Maya are now known to codify war victories through ideological propaganda. Kings' ascensions, conquests, and lineages are immortalized on stelae, lintels, and architecture throughout Mesoamerica. The iconography and inscriptions of the Maya constantly reminded the masses that the king was god on earth; he would feed the gods with his blood and contact ancestors to ensure the well-being of his polity. An integral component of legitimizing Maya elite power rests in the theatrical display of shamanic trance states. While bloodletting was a theatrical public event, sometimes kings and royalty used caves as an arena for autosacrifice and ancestral contact. In effect, bloodletting rituals re-created the world and strengthened the bond between the participant and the supernatural. Thus, Maya iconography is rife with depictions of trance rituals, some of which occur in caves.

The Maya kings were also reliant on an elite bureaucratic class to maintain social cohesion. These elite courtly persons, such as scribes, would have also been educated in mathematics, calendrics, mythology, sacred rituals (Reents-Budet 1994:43) and would have carried out various duties while ideologically reinforcing their status through the art they produced. However, compared to the iconographic research analyzing kingly ritual

little work has been done to reconstruct the rituals of the scribal class that artistically codified Maya ideology. Since the Maya artists believe the creation of art to be analogous to creation of the world, I believe Classic Maya artists also used caves to contact ancestors and creator deities as part of ritual acts of supplication and rites of passage.

In order to place this study within a historical context, this chapter will take an epistemological approach by briefly summarizing the current paradigm of scribal and chthonic iconography. This recapitulation will help explain the role of caves in Maya iconography, the prestige and esoterica associated with elite scribes, as well as the power of ideology and agency among the Maya and their culture during the Late Classic period. Furthermore, I will recapitulate the major tenets of Maya cosmology, with an emphasis on the role of caves. I will do so in order to gain insight into the ideology codified in art by the Maya scribe. Then, I will describe how iconography and epigraphy associate the scribal office with acts of divine creation, political prestige, and shamanic ritual. Finally, with a historical, cultural, and cosmological framework established, I will show how scribes manipulated ideological beliefs to reveal their shamanic nature and thus, develop the ability to help balance the cosmos during a time of cultural strife.

### Scribal Culture and Iconography

#### **Who Were the Scribes?**

The elite Maya scribe was a highly educated member of a noble and bureaucratic class that occupied various sociopolitical roles. Typically, the scribal office was inherited through consanguinity in which the scribe was part of the collateral line of the ruling house that was not in direct line of the throne (Coe and Kerr 1997; Reents-Budet 1994).

Hieroglyphic inscriptions from a ceramic vessel show scribes recounted their lineages with hieroglyphic texts in order to validate their ascribed role as a sacred artist (Closs 1992). Even in ethnohistorical accounts only the elite Maya could become a scribe (Roys 1965; Tozzer 1941). Inculcated in mathematics, calendrics, mythology, cosmology and religious and social ritual and history (Reents-Budet 1994:65), the Maya scribe functioned as a priest, historian, and artist in the daily courtly affairs of the king. As such, the scribe was considered a master of ceremonies whose duties included marriage negotiations, genealogical compilations, and tribute recording (Coe and Kerr 1997:94-95). The ability to manifest political propaganda, record history and esoteric knowledge, and produce exquisite works of art afforded the scribe high levels of prestige (Coe and Kerr 1997:97). These levels of prestige are recorded in epigraphic titles. These titles are also borne by supernatural deities that highlighted the preternatural abilities and wisdom of both gods and scribes (Reents-Budet 1994:49). This linkage of gods and scribes through titles gave scribes supernatural patrons (Coe and Kerr 1997) and made them prime targets of captive-seekers during warfare (Johnston 2001).

Scribal affiliation was an ascribed designation and was fulfilled with years of rigorous intellectual and artistic schooling. The elite Maya scribe went through years of training under a master in which he learned all aspects of his specialized craft and amalgamated the arts and sciences. As Diego de Landa recounts of sixteenth century Yucatekan priest/scribes, they taught

“...the computations of the years, months and days, the festivals and ceremonies, the administration of the sacraments, the fateful days and seasons, their methods of divination and their prophecies...and their antiquities and how to read and write with the letters and characters” (in Reents-Budet 1994:56).

This statement explicitly links the scribal class with fields of ancient science and art as well as shamanic divination. Images from Classic Maya art reaffirm this ethnohistoric claim. A Late Classic ceramic vessel, on which the deity Pauahtun (God N) is depicted teaching scribal students math, affirms de Landa's claims and highlights the divinatory abilities of the scribal office (Figure 2.1). According to David Freidel (2008), counting is analogous to divining; therefore, this ceramic scene also equates scribal schooling with shamanic abilities as discussed in de Landa's quote above. Additionally, Aztec scribes, called *tlacuilos*, were also educated in a school of higher learning called the *calmécac*. According to Fray Bernadino de Sahagun (in Coe 1977:327) in this *calmécac* the good scribe became "...honest, circumspect, far-sighted, pensive; a judge of colors, an applier of the colors, who makes shadows, forms feet, face, hair. He paints, applies colors, makes shadows, draws gardens, paints flowers, creates works of art". Thus, the master scribe conveyed the harmony of nature and a shared ideology through his/her works—as a side note, there is epigraphic evidence (see Closs 1992) that scribes could also be females. Once the scribe graduated from these master workshops, he/she would be imbued with additional prestige afforded from his artistic and scientific mastery.

Hieroglyphic and archaeological data also suggest some kings were explicitly associated with the scribal office. At the site of Copán, which is home to a powerful Late Classic scribal lineage (Fash 1991), the 5-k'atun lord Smoke Imix was interred with various scribal paraphernalia including ten paintpots and one codex (Martin and Grube 2000:202). Under the reign of Smoke Imix's predecessor, Waxaklajuun Ub'aah K'auil, Copan experiences the height of its florescence. During this reign, the lineage of scribes occupying Compound 9N-8 builds a family temple (Structure 9N-82) under the auspices

of the king. Additionally, the tomb of Hasaw Ch'an K'auil discovered beneath Tikal's Temple I contained a ceramic inkpot just north of his head, suggesting his familiarity with artistic production (Coe and Kerr 1997:98). Although this direct association is a rarity, it is not surprising that kings would be skilled in the artistic means needed to convey their ideological and sociopolitical propaganda.

Finally, there is evidence that the scribal class underwent shamanic rituals in order to imbue their artistic creation with a sacredness that could only be evoked by divine intervention. In many traditional societies the act of artistic creation would have been hedged about by both rituals and taboos in order to ensure that the creator does not taint the artistic process (Arnold in Inomata 2001:324). This bodily purification often culminates with the expulsion of bodily fluid (e.g., vomiting, bleeding, fasting, etc.) to ensure the pure, controlled state of the individual is transferred to the artistic piece. Indeed, this theory is manifested in ethnographic accounts as well as the archaeological record of rituals surrounding artistic production amongst the Maya. Bishop Landa tells of sacred artists in the Yucatan undergoing penitential bloodletting and fasting as to purify themselves before making wooden idols for the month of *Woh* (Tozzer 1941). Scenes from Classic period pictorial vessels depict scribes engaged in rituals of autosacrificial bloodletting (Figure 2.2) and hallucinogenic enemas (Figure 2.3) as well as imbibing hallucinogenic liquids (Figure 2.4). This ritual intoxication presumably reinforces their ability to contact other planes of existence. Archaeological evidence from Copán, a site with a well established elite scribal lineage, further bolsters this idea. Microwear data from obsidian blades thought to be used for a bloodletting ritual suggests scribes of Copán may have manufactured artistic products in a ritual setting (Aoyama 2001:334).

These data indicate for the Maya scribe a crucial aspect of sanctifying artistic endeavors centered on the amalgamation of the sacred and the profane through shamanism.

### **Iconographic and Epigraphic Markers of the Scribal Office**

In order to iconographically ascertain how the elite Maya scribe metaphorically and ritually utilized the Underworld and its inhabitants, it is of the utmost importance to catalogue the motifs associated directly with the scribal uniform and by extension, the scribal office. To do so, I will present the uniform and toolkit, hieroglyphic titles, and supernatural patrons linked with the elite Maya scribe. The ground-breaking works of Michael D. Coe (1973, 1977, 1978; Coe and Kerr 1997), Dorie Reents-Budet (1994, 1998), and Andrea Stone (1995, 2005) in the field of scribal iconography and culture prove to be an invaluable tool in reconstructing the ideology and sociopolitical status surrounding the master scribe.

The elite Maya scribe is often portrayed either as a mortal man or as a mythic supernatural entity, each with its own uniform and defining iconography. The mortal representation of the scribe (Figure 2.5), typically takes the form of an *ah k'u hun*, (a title to which I will speak in great detail shortly). The regalia of an *ah k'u hun* is described as follows: short hair wrapped in/long hair protruding from a headcloth; a “stick bundle” attached to the forehead with a large knot; a writing instrument or waterlily thrust into a headdress; and a wrap-around sarong hitched at the waist (Coe and Kerr 1997:92). On the other hand, the insignia of the divine scribe (Figure 2.6) include the “Spangled Turban” headdress, “Deer’s Ears”, and the “Number Tree” (Coe and Kerr 1997:105; Reents-Budet 1994). As will be seen, each of the components of the divine uniform are ideologically associated with the scribe’s ability to divine and traverse cosmic realms in a

state of shamanic trance. The dexterity of these artists was nothing less than an extension of the preternatural realm and as such, divine guidance was a key facet in producing precious art that validated elite hegemony.

The Spangled Turban, an iconographic motif that originates in Teotihuacán and embodies kingship at Copán, is a padded headdress element covered with shell disks that terminates with the head of the Jester God or a water lily blossom (Figure 2.1 and 2.7). The Spangled Turban is not worn only by scribes; therefore, one should use other contextual clues to establish if the character wearing this headdress is indeed a scribe. Additionally, the Spangled Turban may also indicate the shamanic nature of the scribal office. Coe (in Robicsek and Hales 1981) believes this beehive-like element may also serve as a bib during ritual vomiting (Figure 2.4). For the Maya, ritual vomiting played a crucial role in artistic production; Landa's account of the Yucatek Maya states priests would purify themselves through vomiting as to not taint the process of carving idols meant to represent the ancestors (Tozzer 1941). In the scribal drinking scene in Figure 2.4(a) a scribe stands in a somewhat contorted posture and wears a Spangled Turban around his neck functioning as a bib. In Mesoamerican art, depicting a character in an acrobatic or contorted pose is a metaphor for shamanic flight (Furst 1995; Tate 1995). The depiction of scribes drinking excessively and administering ritual hallucinogenic enemas is well-known in Late Classic Maya art; therefore, this headdress probably serves an ideological linkage between the scribal office and shamanism.

The "Deer's Ear" motif (Figure 2.6) emanating from the supernatural scribe further suggests ritual acts of trance and divination were an integral component of the scribal duties. Among several indigenous groups throughout Mesoamerica, the deer, an

inhabitant of the Underworld, was a metaphor for intoxication, hallucinations, and acute shamanic abilities (Helms 2000:152-153). The Huicol of northern Mexico envision the deer as the literal embodiment of peyote; his large dilated pupils and erect ears are thought to be a result of the heightened faculties brought upon by the use of peyote. Peter Furst (1974:193) believes the deer was a shamanic avatar and was probably seen “as the magical progenitor of the vision-producing mushroom”. For the Quiche Maya the deer was a cosmological metaphor for the “night” sun, which would enter a cave and travel through the Underworld and emerge in the east as dawn (Bassie-Sweet 1996). Deer petroglyphs also appear in several caves in the Yucatan and were thought to play an important part in cave rituals (Stone 1995:237). Finally, an inscription on a stalagmite from Naj Tunich cave led Stone to propose that the ancient Maya viewed the stalagmite as a deer-related spirit (Stone 2005a:265). I believe this ideological link between deer, shamanism, and caves was well known by the scribe and served as an avenue to reinforce their supernatural abilities and elevated status.

The deer as a vision-bearer is also present in Classic Maya iconography. For the Classic Maya, vision serpents, which are thought to be evoked through altered states of consciousness to converse with ancestors, are sometimes depicted wearing the ears and antlers of a deer infixed with Landa’s second U (Figure 2.8). Landa’s second U is a motif associated the shamanic howling or singing brought upon by enemas and alcoholic/hallucinogenic concoctions (Stross and Kerr 1989). However, according to iconographic studies (Robicsek and Hales 1981) deer ears of the scribal person are infixed either with the sign for “darkness” (*akbal* in Maya)—which Bassie-Sweet (1991; 1996) associates with the chthonic realm—or the sign for “mirror” (*nen* in Maya)—a

motif associated with divination and shamanic abilities (Freidel et al. 1993).

Furthermore, Linda Schele and Mary Miller (1986:43) believe this duality to represent cosmic opposition; while *nen* is associated with brightness and the day sun, *akbal* is associated with the Underworld and the path of the night sun through a cave. Thus, it seems reasonable to infer that the scribal office was ideologically associated with cave rituals and the Otherworld and guided by the practice of shamanic trance and divination.

Finally, the “Number Tree” (Figure 2.4 and 2.6b) or computer print-out motif iconographically reinforces the scribe’s intimate relationship with the esoteric knowledge of mathematics, calendrics, and astronomy. The ability to count and predict the movement of the celestial realm again stresses the prophetic nature of the scribal office. For the Maya, time was cyclical and to understand cosmic patterns meant one can anticipate, through shamanic divination, the manifestation of this cycle in the terrestrial, human realm. Additionally, Coe (1977:327) believes the “Number Tree” represents the *amatl* tree, which was used to make the codices depicted on ceramic wares from the Classic period. The production of paper closely mimics the formation of the first humans by the primordial gods and was thought to bolster the scribe’s connection with acts of creation. As I will show in later chapters, I believe this motif may also serve as latent reference to the scribal ability to conjure the world tree and open an aperture to the ancestors in order to fulfill acts of supplication.

The Late Classic Maya scribe carried several titles presumably used to illustrate his various ideological and bureaucratic responsibilities and physically codify the prestige conveyed by each of these rankings. For the Maya, much like the ancient Chinese, writing and painting were not linguistically distinguished; therefore, an *ah tz’ib* (“he of

the writing” or “scribe”) (Figure 2.9) would produce the written texts as well as the pictorial images that today emphasize the artistic sophistication of the Maya. One title, *itz'at* (Figure 2.10) literally translated as “wise-man or sage”, embodies cosmological implications and bestows high status upon the title-bearer. Interestingly, *itz* is the divine substance manifested through ritual and is visualized as secretions (e.g., dew, blood, semen, sap, and rust) from both animate and inanimate objects. As such, it is closely related to magic, the occult, and the esoteric, while projecting a sense of metaphysical constructs unto a physical manifestation (Freidel et al. 1993:411). Therefore, when the scribe bears the title *itz'at*, he is ideologically claiming that his ability to paint and write is analogous to imbuing artistic media with life by the conjuring of esoteric knowledge through shamanic ritual. Finally, this title is also carried by the Paddler Gods (Freidel et al. 1993; Reents-Budet 1994) who represent the dualistic nature of the sun as it traverses the heavens and the underworld. In a scene carved into bones from Burial 116 at Tikal, these gods ferry the souls of kings across the White Road (the Milky Way) in a canoe (Figure 2.11), thereby ideologically linking the scribal class to the primordial creator deities because they both bear iconographic markers of this solar dualistic opposition (Reents-Budet 1994, 1998).

Another title *ah k'u hun* (Figure 2.12), already briefly discussed above, is translated as “he of the holy books” and as such, would hold one of the highest ranking offices in the scribal hierarchy (Coe and Kerr 1997:91-93). As keeper of the royal library, the *ah k'u hun* would logically be an extremely skilled artist and probably serve as a headmaster in scribal schools. Moreover, like Eratosthenes of Cyrene, the third librarian at Alexandria, this Maya royal librarian would regulate, protect, compile, and

instruct knowledge from one generation to the next. Coe (2005:223) also believes this scribal position probably oversaw all ritual activities, calculated the movements of the cosmos, tallied economic transactions, and negotiated royal marriages and diplomatic treaties. As such, this official would hold an ideal position to exert his agency over Maya history through the written and visual arts. Again looking at Figure 2.1 in which Pauahtun is instructing scribal neophytes, his uniform closely parallels that of an *ah k'u hun* further suggesting this title was held only by the highest ranking members of the scribal class.

Finally the title *ah nab* (Figure 2.13), whose implications remained ambiguous until recently, provides hieroglyphic evidence for an intimate relationship between scribes and the Underworld during the Late Classic period. The word *nab* has several translations (e.g., plaza, large still bodies of still water, waterlily) that ideologically aligns this linguistic construct with the chthonic realm. For the Maya, reflective surfaces (e.g., cenotes and swamps from which waterlilies protrude as well as polished obsidian or pyrite mirrors) and architectural structures (e.g., plazas, ballcourts, and temples) are thought to be portals to the Otherworld through which offerings of reciprocity could be sent between the realms of the sacred and the profane (Freidel et al. 1993; Reilly 1994; Schele and Freidel 1990). Specifically, the *ah nab* was a producer of sacred activity that invoked chthonic denizens through acts of supplication that unfolded on the cavernous stage (Sheseña 2008:5-9). Therefore, it is not surprising that Alejandro Sheseña (2008) recently interpreted the responsibilities of the *ah nab* to include shamanic and artistic acts centered on the unbridled, chaotic power of the Otherworld and its points of entry.

The *ah nab* used his intimate association with the Underworld to assuage earthly hardships and to bless and purify both himself and artifacts used in artistic production. For example, in addition to creating written and/or painted art objects, the *ah nab* also harvested virgin water (i.e., *zuhuy ha*) from caves to ritually bless codices. This was witnessed by Bishop de Landa during the Pokam ceremony that occurred in the month of Woh (Coe and Kerr 1997:169-170; Tozzer 1941). This scribal title-bearer also served a shamanic role centered on rituals of the Underworld. Inscriptions on a speleothem erected as a stela from Yaxchilan (Stela 33) detail a bloodletting ritual in which an *ah nab* contacts the Paddler Gods for divine inspirations and auguries (Sheseña 2008:Figure 9). The date of this ritual aligns with a period ending ceremony, which marked the birth of a new cycle of a twenty year period—these period ending rituals are often performed for an elite audience at the mouth of caves (Bassie-Sweet 1991, 1996).

Finally, this scribal title-bearer also possessed the ability to invoke the rain deities that resided in caves (Sheseña 2008). In a recent article (Moyes et al. 2009) about the Late Classic lowland Maya, high concentrations of whole and broken ceramic vessels found in the dark zones of caves suggests the presence of a drought cult. This cult offered large water receptacles, or *ollas*, to the rain god *Chac* in hopes of persuading him to evoke rain. As a bureaucrat, it is likely that the *ah nab* presided over these acts of supplication. Thus, *ah nab* serves as an Underworld locative and will undoubtedly help reconstruct the artistic depiction of the scribal class. In light of this recent decipherment, I believe expounding upon these ideas will bring further clarity to the various cultural, sociopolitical, and religious duties of the Late Classic Maya scribe.

### Patrons and Deities of the Scribal Office

Artistic production not only served to codify history and eternally lionize elite individuals, it was also an avenue for mortal man to transform mundane, terrestrial resources into powerful objects of preciousness. This artistic creation literally brought the internal *chul'el* of an object to an external manifestation. In many cultures the artist's ability to envision the masterpiece hidden in an ordinary object and to bring this vision to life is precipitated by divine intervention (Helms 1993; Layton 1993). The Maya were no exception and over the past 30 years of research, a pantheon of deities associated with the scribal office has been reconstructed.

According to ethnohistorical sources (Roys 1965; Tozzer 1941), *Itzamná* (God D), the supreme divinity of the Maya pantheon, was the inventor of writing as well as the patron of shamanism. In Classic iconography as well as the Post-Classic Dresden Codex, *Itzamná*, an aged deity with large square eyes and a Roman nose (Figure 2.14), is typically depicted seated on a celestial throne (Schele and Mathews 1999; Schele and Miller 1986). Additionally, he is portrayed wearing a headdress displaying the glyph *itz*, thereby linguistically linking him with the scribal office (Coe and Kerr 1997:102). On page 23 of the Madrid Codex, *Itzamná* sits in front of temples holding a paint pot and brush (Figure 2.15). Additionally, an incised bone from the burial of the Tikalese ruler Hasaw Chan K'awil depicts a hand with a brush emerging from the maw of the bearded dragon, the avatar of *Itzamná* (Figure 2.16) (Coe and Kerr 1997:102). *Itzamná's* hand emerging from the maw, a stylized reference to the mouth of a cave, again reinforces the notion that writing and the Otherworld were ideologically closely related. Similarly, in the beautiful frescos from Bonampak, *Itzamná* flicks gold paint from his brush and the

cosmos and time commence (Figure 2.17). In both of these representations of Itzamná, the act of writing functions to imbue the dark primordial world with the order and life needed for humans to properly supplicate the gods.

The ideological implications of depicting the creator god, Itzamná as a scribal patron is also present with the Paddler Gods; it equates the act of creating sublime art with the act of creating humans. These old gods are named for their depiction on several incised bones from Burial 116 at Tikal. In a tableaux form, these bones depict the Paddlers as they ferry the soul of a departed king through the waters of the Underworld to the place of celestial respite, the Milky Way (Figure 2.11). This seems like a fitting task, as they are also thought to have placed the first stone of the Three-Throne-Stones-of-Creation that birthed time and the cosmos (Freidel et al. 1993:69). Additionally, these deities are associated with period-ending rites and are evoked through the act of penitential bloodletting (Schele and Freidel 1990; Schele and Miller 1986:52). One stela carved from a speleothem at Yaxchilan even recounts a scribal title-bearer evoking the Paddler Gods through a bloodletting ritual in conjunction with a period-ending ritual (Sheseña 2008:7-8). Thus, these dual gods appear during times of liminality, whether it is death or the birth of a new era, at the behest of shamanic persons in order to intervene and ensure safe passage.

Iconographically, the Paddler Gods also share many similarities with the elite scribe. They represent the dual opposition of day and night; one is defined by the presence of the bright, mirror god markings (i.e., *nen*), while the other is defined by the presence of dark markings (i.e., *akbal*) (Schele and Miller 1986:52). Interestingly, the glyphic infixes of the deer's ears worn by the supernatural scribe are either *nen* or *akbal*

markings. Additionally, (Freidel et al. 1993:94-95; Reents-Budet 1994:49; 1998:77) several researchers have astutely pointed out that both scribes and the Paddler Gods both carry the title *itz'at*. The presence of dual opposition and twins is commonplace in Classic Maya iconography (e.g., the Headband Twins; Hunahpu and Xbalanque; the Paddlers) because it is a fundamental characteristic of Mayan languages and metaphors (Schele and Freidel 1990:416-417). The royal scribe appears to be drawing upon this linguistic phenomenon and his expansive mythological knowledge for ideological validation when he depicts himself with both day and night markings. Ultimately, the scribe is again trying to equate his artistic virtuosity with preternatural abilities, the act of creation, and naturalistic harmony through shamanic deities.

Pauahtun (God N) is another aged deity that is often depicted in Maya art engaged in scribal acts (Coe and Kerr 1997:104). This idea is best captured on a Codex-style ceramic where Pauahtun is instructing scribal apprentices in the art of counting and divining (Figure 2.1). At Copán a Monkey-man scribe holding an inkpot and paintbrush bears iconography that define him as Pauahtun (Fash 1991). Iconographically, he is depicted as an old toothless man either emerging from a shell or wearing a shell pectoral and a netted headdress (Figure 2.18) (Schele and Miller 1986:54). As mentioned earlier, many of his iconographic identifiers, such as the netted headdress, are also worn by the divine scribe. In the Primary Standard Sequence, a series of glyphs imbuing a ceramic vessel with prestige, the image of God N's head is read as "was blessed" (Macleod in Reents-Budet 1994). This reading suggests evoking Pauahtun sanctified this prestige item and validated its authenticity as a piece of fine art. Finally, he is a fourfold god that is associated with the four directions (Coe and Kerr 1997) and a principal god of the

Lords of Xibalba. God N is viewed as a lecherous old man that resides in caves and like the Post-classic Bacabs, bears the weight of the earthly realm on his shoulders (Stone 1995:143-144). Again, the royal scribe aligns himself with a deity from primordial time that bears great responsibility and can be accessed through a cave. This recurring theme surrounds the scribal office because this bureaucrat must forge the art and codify the knowledge that legitimizes kingly claims to the throne during a time of economic degradation and political uncertainty.

Unlike the fourfold imagery that is so prominent in God N, the dualistic Monkey-man Gods have an obvious relationship to the sun as well as the Underworld. The Monkey-man Gods, Hun Batz and Hun Chouen, are the quintessential icon of artists, musicians, and dancers in Classic Maya iconography (Figure 2.19). As such, their relationship replicates the hierarchical relationship between the divine king and the supranatural scribe. Michael D. Coe (1977) successfully pinpoints the origin of this scribal deity in the only book of codified Maya mythology, the *Popol Vuh*. In this sixteenth century Quiche' text, the older, malicious brothers of the Hero Twins, Hun Batz and Hun Chouen, were highly skilled in the fine arts and the craft of divination. Within the text, the first pair of twins attempted several times to kill their younger, "chosen" brothers. Since Hun Batz and Hun Chouen were diviners, they foresaw the birth and grandeur of their younger brothers. Privy to their older brothers' machinations, the Hero Twins decided to induce Hun Batz and Hun Chouen to accompany them on a hunting expedition. After killing several parrots with their blowguns, the Hero Twins, using Machiavellian intellect, said they were too weak to retrieve the fowl stuck high in the tree and needed the help of their stronger, older brothers. Hun Batz and Hun Chouen

acquiesced and proceeded to climb the tall tree in order to fulfill their boastful pride and retrieve the bodies of the parrots. Upon ascending the tree, the Hero Twins raised it to great heights in the celestial realm, leaving their older brothers in the same predicament as the dead fowl. Immediately, Hun Batz and Hun Chouen were terrified and pleaded for their brothers to save them. Keenly, the Hero Twins told their older brothers to use their loincloths to repel down the tree to safety. Upon wrapping their loincloths around the branches, the Hero Twins transformed their brothers into hideous monkeys, symbolically making them subordinate to humans and the kingly class manifested in the Hero Twins themselves. Furthermore, by performing this act of transformation, the Hero Twins (i.e., kings) also isolated their brothers, and by extension scribes, to a previous world dominated by the intellectual subordinate hominid, the monkey. This portion of the Popol Vuh metaphorically suggests the king forever established hegemony over his collateral bloodline by condemning them to an elite position that can never claim legitimacy to the throne (Benson 1989).

The Monkey-man scribe is also ideologically aligned to the Underworld, again reinforcing their subordination to the kingly Hero Twins. Ultimately, the Hero Twins will defeat the Lords of the Underworld themselves in an episode from the Popol Vuh. On the other hand, Hun Batz and Hun Chouen are transformed into monkeys and mocked by their mother upon their return home. According to current myths of the highland Maya, the monkey is also a chthonic denizen created when the gods first attempted to create men (Vogt 1976:13-16). As a result, Elizabeth Benson (1989:142) suggests monkeys, like deer, belong to a previous realm of ancestors and by extension, the Underworld. Since scribes codify lineages in sacred almanacs and compile ancient knowledge, it makes

sense that they would be ideologically associated with monkeys and epochs of mythological time.

In Maya myths, the monkey is also related to the sun (Benson 1989:140). In a full figure variant in Long Count inscriptions from Copán and Yaxchilan (Figure 2.20), the k'in position is a Monkey-man scribe whose appendages end with a centipede-like motif, a recurring theme to which I will return shortly. I believe the Monkey-man scribe in this position coupled with the centipede represents the Underworld Sun that passes through a cave at night and emerges in the east at dawn. Ethnohistorical accounts (Tozzer 1941; Roys 1965) from the Yucatan recount scribes consulting calendars for divinatory purposes. Undoubtedly, the scribe's ability to codify time in conjunction with his association of the primordial monkey reinforced his duty to guide the sun from its nightly Underworld travels. This intimate scribal relationship with the Otherworld is well defined by the rites of passage (Stone 1995, 2005b) and manipulation of time (Barbara Macleod, personal communication 2008) codified on the walls of Naj Tunich cave and in the *ah nab* title translated by Sheseña (2008).

While the Monkey-man Gods typically depict the scribe in a state of supernatural transformation, the humanistic aspect of the scribe is typically depicted as the Young Maize God (*Hun Nal Yeh*). The scribe in his the Young Maize God uniform is often showed coupled (Kerr and Coe 1997:107) and writing in jaguar skin-covered books on Codex-style ceramics (Figure 2.21). As recognized by Karl Taube (1985) this god has an elongated, tonsured head that mimics an ear of maize terminating with cornsilk. Additionally, his Jester God head and other jeweled markers of preciousness, ideologically reinforce his verdant nature. Coe (Coe and Kerr 1997:107) believes the

scribes chose this deity as a patron because the process for making paper from *amate* bark is similar to the process of making maize dough. Many of the Late Classic representations of scribes as *Hun Nal Yeh* writing in their codices appear exclusively on ceramics. As I will show, the scribe is either depicted in juxtaposition with cave formations or traversing the watery realm through shamanic flight in order to receive esoteric information from ancestral sources.

To complete the trinity of mythological characters, Hunahpu, the son of Hun Nal Yeh and younger brother of the Monkey-man Gods, is also an important patron of the scribal arts (Coe and Kerr 1997:108). This god is distinguished by the large black dots on his body and face, while his brother, Xbalanque, bears patches of jaguar skin. For example, on a Codex style vase from the Nakbé area, Hunahpu and his father the Young Maize God (whom Hunahpu resurrects in an episode from the Popol Vuh) both write in open screenfold books (Figure 2.22). Additionally, Coe (Coe and Kerr 1997:108) asserts that Hunahpu is closely associated with the institution of Maya kingship and carried both the title *itz'at* and *ah k'u hun*. The Princeton Vase (Figure 2.23) also shows Hunahpu dressed as a scribe and sacrificing a victim to the delight of the Lords of Xibalba. I believe by illustrating themselves as several generations of mythical characters, the scribes are again ideologically tying themselves to mythological time and creation. With the patrons and gods of the scribal office fully cataloged, I will now turn to animals that are associated with the elite Maya scribe.

Some animals, possibly representing mythological time when humans and animals could communicate, are also ideologically associated with the high-ranking Maya scribe. As Mary Helms (2000:2) asserts about animals in pre-Columbian art:

“Animals refer to absolute first principles of cosmic creativity, of the formation of life itself, and to the basic doctrines that underlie the establishment of existential order out of primordial chaos and determine the great cycles of life and death that still mark the continued operation of the universe.”

When the Maya scribe illustrates himself in conjunction with or as an animal, he is ideologically asserting that he still has the power to communicate with ancestors of a previous realm. As I will prove later in this thesis, the Maya scribe shows himself either transforming into or conjuring an animal counterpart. This control of otherworldly powers occurs in order to reify his elite position and validate his lineage during a time of unprecedented cultural, economic, and political tumult.

Recently, some skeletalized snakelike creatures in Maya art have been interpreted as centipedes (Boot 1999; Grube and Nahm 1994). According to work by Taube (2005) the white bone snake *sak bak nah*, prominent in architecture from Palenque and Copan, is a misnomer; rather, this iconographic creature represents a centipede (*sak bak nah chapat* or White Bone House Centipede). Rather there is a dualistic opposition of serpent-like creatures: the serpent is an inhabitant of the celestial realm of life, while the centipede is a denizen of the chthonic realm and a metaphor for death. The Maya also envision the sun traveling through these opposing realms through the course of a day: during the day the sun travels through the belly of the celestial serpent, while at night it travels through the innards of the “skeletalized bearded dragon” (i.e., the centipede) (Bassie Sweet 1991; Schele and Miller 1986). The centipede is a metaphor for the cavernous west-east route that the sun traverses at night. Upon completion of this journey, the sun will emerge from the horizon cave in the east and usher in a new day (Bassie-Sweet 1991).

The same metaphor holds for the path of a dead soul on its track towards apotheosis into the celestial realm. Thus, in Classic Maya ideology, the entrance to the underworld was also the skeletalized maw of a devouring, insidious centipede (Taube 2005:416). Additionally, as seen on the Sarcophagus lid of Pakal II, this passage from Xibalba to the celestial realm of the ancestors mimics the trek of the Underworld Sun and marks the initial stage of that ruler's apotheosis. Interestingly, the elite scribe is often depicted conjuring up and/or transforming into a centipede in many scenes from Codex-style vessels. Undoubtedly this transformation is emphasized because "with written texts, scribes were able to speak the words of ancient heroes, kings, and scholars, thereby opening the threshold between the living and the dead" (Taube 2005:413). Structure 9N-82 at Copan depicts a scribe emerging from the maw of a centipede (Figure 2.24). This emergence metaphorically identifies this elite lineage house of the scribe as both a cave as well as a repository for ancestors. As I will show, I believe the intimate relationship between the scribe and the centipede suggests high-ranking scribes played a crucial role in guiding the elite soul through the arduous and perilous journey through Xibalba by codifying their names in sacred almanacs and creating necessary grave goods.

Other minor scribal zoomorphs, to which I will allocate less attention, include the vulture, fox, and rabbit (Coe and Kerr 1997; Robicsek and Hales 1981). On one Codex-style ceramic vessel with a black background—possibly serving as a cave locative—a vulture wearing a Spangled Turban carves a mask while an *ah k'u hun* with a personified bloodletter in his hat supervises the zoomorphic artisan (Figure 2.25). The famous Princeton Vase (Figure 2.23) mirrors an episode from the Popol Vuh in which the Hero Twins engaged in a sacrificial/resurrection scene in Xibalba, while a rabbit-scribe

codifies the events in an open jaguar skin-covered codex. In both of the aforementioned scenes the zoomorphic scribe is depicted as an Underworld denizen from mythological time.

With such a diverse and detailed list of scribal titles, uniforms, and patrons compiled, it is only logical to present a similar list of attributes and deities focused on cave iconography in order to ascertain the correlation between scribes and otherworldly inspirations and rituals. However, before proceeding I would like to make a brief statement concerning the importance of context when performing iconographic analysis. Surely not every depiction of Pauhtun, Itzamná, or a monkey automatically warrants the interpretation that a scribe is involved in the scene. Rather it is imperative to systemically analyze iconographic scenes to ensure the highest level of veracity in interpretation. Equally important when a human dons the regalia of a supernatural scribe or deity in ritual, he becomes that character and is imbued with the supernatural powers and elevated status of that character (Reents-Budet 1994:236). That being said, I believe expounding upon cave iconography outlined by Bassie-Sweet, Stone, and Barbara Macleod in conjunction with archaeological evidence from Brady and Prufer will elucidate the chthonic pathways scribes used in order to bolster their prestige and reinforce their power in the overarching superstructure of Late Classic period sociopolitics, economy, and ideology.

#### Caves in Maya Ideology, Iconography, and Ritual

The cave in Maya ideology was a multivocal and dynamic symbol whose use and meaning ebbed and flowed across time. Its sometimes contradictory and polysemic nature led Stone (1995:34) to classify it as a prime of example of Victor Turner's notion

of a dominant symbol. As a result, the Late Classic Maya iconography of the cave is a complex and often interchangeable symbol system. For example, in Classic Maya ideology the cave was also intimately associated with sacred mountains (*witz*), natural springs, cenotes, and houses; it was locus of unbridled wealth and fertility but also a place of disease and death (Brady 1989; Freidel et al. 1993; Schele and Miller 1986; Stone 1995; Stuart and Vogt 2005). However, cataloguing a quick reference of chthonic symbols and beliefs is a crucial component of tying the elite scribe and his shamanic rituals into this Underworld theme.

For the ancient Maya, ideology was heavily influenced by their intimate relationship with the harmonious mechanisms of nature. In order to ensure stability in the terrestrial realm, it was of the utmost importance to mimic the ordered stability of nature and the cosmos through ritual. According to Freidel (1992:116), Maya ideology of both elite and non-elite peoples is unified by shamanism and serves as “a guide to ritual practice, in which people participated in...causal relationships between phenomena---people, things, spiritual forces, natural forces—to achieve certain ends”. For this portion of this chapter I will focus on the relationship between ideology and ritual practice of a truly sacred symbol, the cave. I will do so in order to determine both the stage and ritual placement of the scribe in this ritual theater.

For the Maya and many Mesoamerican cultures, partitioning sacred space was dictated by whether or not the location had an ideologically salient natural phenomenon. This pan-Mesoamerican practice of establishing “sacred geography”, defined by Evon Vogt (1981), incorporates prominent topographic features into ritual practices, ideology, and location of prominent architectural features. Sometimes the Maya would even

construct artificial caves beneath temples to partition sacred space (Bower 2002:314). As a result, the Maya view awe-inspiring caves, mountains, springs, rocks, and trees as areas of concentrated sacredness and ideal stages for ritual performances and the construction of sacred space. Moreover, caves and other topographic features had the inherent ability to precipitate spiritual communication with spirits and ancestors (Stone 1995, 2005b; Vogt and Stuart 2005) “to achieve certain ends” for earthly supplicants. The cave pilgrimage was a ubiquitous ritual in both historic and prehistoric times for the Maya people and served as the stage for rites of passage (Adams and Brady 2005; Stone 1995, 2005b; Turner 1974), fertility and agricultural offerings (Brady 1989; Moyes 2009; Vogt and Stuart 2005), and altered states of divination (Colas et al. 2000; Grube 2006; Macleod and Puleston 1978). To place the cave and its associated sacred topographic features into Late Classic Maya ideology, I will first use ethnographic analogies to upstream from the known to the unknown.

### **The Use of Caves in Ethnographic Literature**

The use of ethnographic analogy as an accurate barometer to interpret Maya archaeology and iconography has been debated for over 30 years. In *The Iconology of Middle American Sculpture* (1973) George Kubler argues ethnographic analogy is unreliable because nuances in belief within Maya communities are present and symbols undergo disjunction over time. This principle of disjunction states the inherent meaning of symbols (e.g., the swastika) changes over time, therefore ethnographic analogy will provide erroneous interpretations of archaeological remains. On the other hand, Gordon Willey (1973) asserts constructing ethnographic models is an extremely useful tool in archaeological and iconographic interpretations because Mesoamerican beliefs are

fundamentally conservative and continuity of beliefs over time is highly probable. I concur with Willey's position on the application of ethnographic analogy and believe it will build a strong model for placing scribal rituals within the cave.

As previously mentioned, rites of passage were a key component of cave pilgrimages because the cave is viewed as an entity with supernatural and transformative powers. Rites of passage can take place at various stages of life (e.g., puberty, newly acquired social positions, a new year or season) but two are certain, life and death. As defined by Van Gennep (1960) the rite of passage has three major stages of development: separation, transition, and incorporation. According to several studies (Lewis-Williams and Pearce 2005; Macleod and Puleston 1978) cave rituals beget a psychological separation from the profane world because the mind enters a liminal place between the conscious and the unconscious. Turner (1974:196) argues in historic and prehistoric times the physical geographic separation from the home to the place of pilgrimage made the cave an ideal stage for a rite of passage; furthermore its peripheral location makes the cave a place "in and out of time". Stone (1995:15) reinforces Turner's assertion saying the Maya believe with "greater distance or movement toward the unfamiliar domain...[one] enters deeper into the mythological past." After the neophyte completes certain rituals and emerges from the transitory setting of the cave, he is reborn into a new role and incorporated back into society; thus, the cave is ultimately a place of creation and rebirth. Ethnographic evidence supports these claims and shall be recounted to show continuity from the historic to the prehistoric Maya.

The emergence from the cave and its place as a rite of passage plays an important role in Mesoamerican mythology and ritual. The Tzotzil Maya believe that the god

*Manohel-Tohil* led mankind out of caves after forming them from earth (Thompson 1970:202). In several ethnographic accounts (Brady 1989:60-62) many heroic figures begin as an egg in a cave and emerge fully grown with supernatural powers because they are the “chosen” one. In a story from the highland Chontal, a person is born to a woman in a cave; however, to survive the machinations of his godfather, he must pass several feats of strength. Finally, the Popol Vuh even recounts stories of emergence from a cave. According to Bassie-Sweet (1991:88), after the Hero Twins defeat death they emerge as the sun and the moon from the western ballcourt; in fact “the western ballcourt” is a metaphor for a cave from which the Hero Twins resurrect as celestial bodies. The idea that celestial bodies were birthed from caves is recounted from Central Mexico (Brady 1989; Heyden 2005) to the lowland Maya (Bassie-Sweet 1991:86; Roys 1965:23; Thompson 1970). Naturally, this birth and death of the celestial is viewed to occur daily as the sun and moon rise and set. As will be seen, the Maya scribes, being well-versed in mythology and esoteric rituals, undoubtedly used caves as a stage for rites of passage because of its association with creation and unbridled supernatural spirits that inhabit it.

The rite of passage in ritual is also a key component surrounding shamanism in ethnographic literature. For the Chol Maya caves are the residences of *xibaj* (evil spirits) as well as of *witz chen* (good spirits); as such, they serve as the stage for trials that encompass a rite of passage for a person wishing to become a *xjut* (shaman) (Vogt and Stuart 2005:175). This neophyte must also show his courage in front of the Underworld spirits in order to receive his jaguar spirit companion and become a successful healer (Vogt and Stuart 2005:176). Notes on a ritual from Balankanche, a cave in the Yucatan, recount a man training to be a shaman; after prolonged sensory deprivation, he can hear

the jaguar, a ubiquitous spirit companion in Maya shamanism (Macleod and Puleston 1978).

The cave was also believed to house supernatural spirits and the souls of ancestors because it was conceived of as a gateway to the realm of the dead and an extension of sacred mountains. The modern Maya go to caves in order to give offerings and burn copal to petition the gods as well as the ancestors believed to reside there (Macleod and Puleston 1978: 73; Thompson 1970:268; Vogt 1968:387; Vogt and Stuart 2005). Almost all mountains or hills near Tzotzil settlements house *Totil-me'iletik* (literally, “Fathers-Mothers), or ancestral deities (Vogt and Stuart 2005:164). In an account from Utatlan told by Linda Schele (Freidel et al. 1993:185-187), modern shamans recite ancient prayers and burn copal incense to petition the ancestors and ensure adequate rain and successful hunts. The shaman presiding over the ritual, Manuel, also explained that people bury the afterbirth in the cave because of the immense power of the ancestors there. In another first-hand account of modern cave rituals, the Lacandon of Chiapas set out on pilgrimages to worship the gods *Mensabok*, *Tsibaná*, and *K'ak'*. The Lacandon broke censers (which were viewed as living gods) portraying *K'ak'* and burnt copal incense in censers bearing the likeness of *Tsibaná* as offerings to the powerful spirits within the cave (Petryshyn 2005:330-331). As I will show, this modern belief that ancestors and spirits reside in caves extends back into prehistoric times. Since the Maya scribe physically produced the artistic media (e.g., stelae, sacred almanacs, and polychrome vessels) that ideologically connect lineages to the past realm of ancestors, it is very likely that they played a key role in cave rituals surrounding ancestor veneration.

Finally, caves served as a ritual stage for divinatory rituals that were sometimes accompanied by altered states of consciousness (ASC). According to a neuropsychological model developed by David Lewis-Williams and David Pearce (2005:46), ASC are precipitated by the following (Note, this list is not a complete listing but only the ones recounted in Maya art and ethnographic analogy): ingestion of psychotropic substances, sensory deprivation, hunger, extreme pain (i.e., penitential bloodletting), intense dancing, hypnagogia, and auditory-driving (e.g., chanting, clapping, and drumming). In a pioneering article, MacLeod and Puleston (1978) suggests the Maya practice of bloodletting coupled with sensory deprivation induced by complete darkness would make the cave an ideal stage for visionary and shamanic activities. MacLeod underwent a series of sensory deprivation experiments during 1972 and 1973. After spending only several hours in complete darkness she reported seeing “many-hued geometric patterns, mixed with a salad of memories from years ago” and concluded “...the Maya could not have overlooked this resource” (MacLeod and Puleston 1978:75-76).

The article also says there is one modern ethnographic parallel that suggests the modern Maya underwent ASC in caves. In a cave ritual at Balankanche in 1959, the presiding shaman, called an *h-men*, ordered one of his attendants to remain in total darkness for several hours. When the *h-men* returned to his attendant and asked what he heard, the attendant said he felt cold and noises were coming from the water. The *h-men* responded, “You were listening to the Balames” (Barrera-Vasquez in MacLeod and Puleston 1978:76) meaning the animal spirits that inhabit the cave. Moreover, biological experiments show that the pineal gland controls the release of melatonin and serotonin

based on the body's natural circadian rhythm that is queued by external light; at night the production of melatonin and serotonin increases to promote dreaming and adequate sleep (Miller 1985). Prolonged sensory deprivation causes the pineal gland to promote the release of melatonin and serotonin thereby producing a dream-like state while conscious. The importance of dreams in Maya shamanism and the fact that the *way* glyph translates as dreams or co-essences, suggests the ancient Maya had some knowledge of sensory deprivation.

With ethnographic data compiled about the use and cosmovision of caves, I will now turn to archaeological evidence of cave use in the lowland Maya area. The interpretation of archaeological and iconographic data surrounding cave rituals suggests current Maya beliefs are directly influenced by ancient traditions. As I will show, a central tenet of these ancient traditions rests in the belief that shamanism can persuade metaphysical forces to intervene in the physical plane of existence to achieve specific goals. Since scribes were inculcated in the ways of calendrics, divination, and other esoteric knowledge a strong argument can be presented that they too engaged in cave rituals.

### **Archaeological Evidence of Cave Rituals**

Over the last twenty years the self-conscious discipline of cave archaeology has grown significantly and added poignant information to the archaeological record. Since I am trying to understand the nature of the scribe's role in cave rituals, I will only focus on a few avenues of cave archaeology. These roles, for example, include those of the *ah nab* mentioned in the previous section outlining scribal titles and other scribal rituals represented in cave art and iconography depicting cave rituals. These rituals include, but

are not limited to, the practice of shamanic rituals through ASC, offerings of supplication, and scribal pilgrimages. Outlining the interpretation of cave rituals in the archaeological record will serve as sounding board from which to interpret iconographic scenes depicted on polychrome ceramic vessels. This conjunction of archaeological and iconographic interpretation will better control contextualization of an event and provide for a more accurate assessment.

As seen in the ethnographic data, the Maya believe ancestors and deities reside in caves and can have a causal effect on the natural world. As Freidel (1992:116-117) firmly asserts "...Maya royal ritual was indeed shamanic...[and] included scribes and artisans." Since caves are a portal to the Otherworld and its denizens, the archaeological record should contain remains that are produced from these shamanic rituals. For the Maya autosacrificial bloodletting was used as a shamanic vehicle to evoke a vision serpent and speak with ancestors in order to achieve earthly goals (Schele and Miller 1986). Obsidian prismatic blades are found in countless cave assemblages in the Maya Lowlands; for example, Guatemala [Naj Tunich (Brady 1989)]; Belize [Actun Tunichil Muknal (Awe et al. 2005); Chechem Ha (Moyes2006:450); Ch'en P'ix (Colas et al. 2000)]. Generally, archaeologists interpret these finds as ritual bloodletters used to precipitate altered states of consciousness. Use-wear on several obsidian blades from various caves substantiates these assertions (Brady and Peterson n.d.:14). Other evidence such as stalagmites carved as sting-ray spines (Awe et al. 2005) and painted walls in caves (Stone 1995, 2005b) suggests penitential bloodletting played a major role in cave rituals. Since sting-ray spines were an implement used in autosacrificial bloodletting and

cave art depicts people engaged in these blood rites, evidence suggests the cave also served as an arena for theatrical bloodletting ceremonies.

Additionally, archaeology and iconography suggests the Maya used other methods to achieve shamanic trance in cave rituals. During the Classic period the Maya would consume large amounts of *chi*, a beverage made of fermented agave, to the point of vomiting to induce shamanic visions (Figure 2.4). According to Nikolai Grube (2006:294) these drinking bouts would transpire in caves because “as places of eternal darkness, they were not only timeless, but were also beyond the rules of social living that held sway in the daytime world.” Grube (2006) states several large-bellied vessels recovered from caves are recognized from vase paintings as containers of *chi*. Another much more immediate form of intoxication is the Maya practice of ritual enemas. Brian Stross and Justin Kerr (1990) argue the practice of ritual enemas is confined to the Classic period and was used in conjunction with autosacrificial bloodletting. These enema cocktails possibly included the use of alcohol and hallucinogenic alkaloids (e.g., *Datura*) and produced visions of snakes and guttural howls (Stross and Kerr 1990). According to Coe (1978:76-82), a scene from a polychrome vase (Figure 2.26) depicts masked individuals at the entrance of a cave participating in an enema ritual. For the Maya achieving these trance states was not a release from the mundane world but rather a deeply religious ceremony that must be undertaken in order for the ancestors and Underworld denizens to imbue the prosaic world with divine power and order.

In addition to a theater for shamanic rituals, the cave was also a place to petition the gods for rain. According to various core samples and pollen and soil studies, a prolonged drought, precipitated by the practice of clear-cutting trees, hit the Maya

Lowlands during the Late Classic Period (Pringle 2009). Based on several years of cave research throughout Belize, Holley Moyes et al. (2009) believe the high concentration of Late Classic ceramic sherds and whole vessels found in caves suggests a drought cult was fully functioning during this time. Thus, as the times grew more dire, the cave offerings grew more extravagant in hopes of persuading Chac to intervene in earthly affairs and produce rain. Since the scribal title *ah nab* is interpreted to contact Underworld deities in order to petition the gods for rain (Sheseña 2008), it is highly likely that scribes played an active role in these cave cults. I believe archaeological evidence reinforces this belief; in the dark zones of Actun Tunichil Muknal and Chechem Ha in Belize, large *ollas* portray zoomorphic images interpreted to be Monkey-man scribes (Figure 2.27). These vessels are placed before altars that were thought to be used in bloodletting rituals.

Invaluable cave art from Naj Tunich gives the archaeologist a glimpse into the nature of scribal ritual in this sacred space. A systematic analysis of images and hieroglyphic inscriptions from Naj Tunich by Andrea Stone (1995) recounts Late Classic cave pilgrimages involving secondary elite such as scribes and artists. Images include characters engaged in autosacrificial bloodletting, acts of supplication, illicit sex, and ritual procession. This elaborate cave art was painted by as many as ten professional artists that probably also painted the scenes of highly prestigious polychrome ceramics (Stone 1995:111-112). The linear black-on-white style of the cave art found in Naj Tunich is closely related to two style groups: Codex and Black and White (Stone 1995:112). This interpretation is especially salient to my study because the majority of my data set originates from these style groups.

The idea that caves are a liminal place “both in and out of time” that was used in scribal rites of passage is reinforced by the images in Naj Tunich as well as Maya iconography. In Naj Tunich cave images depict scribes with only loin cloth and headdresses leading Stone to interpret these images as scribes in the transitional, or liminal, stage of a rite of passage (Stone 2005b). Furthermore, hieroglyphic evidence shows scribes signed their names, returned to this site of pilgrimage in set yearly intervals, and carried titles (*k'in kun*) that identify them as “diviners” (MacLeod and Stone 2005). Finally, MacLeod posits some of the aberrant dates found in the 260 calendar are deliberately illustrated to show the effects of “cave time”. By showing these “aberrant” dates, MacLeod (personal communication 2008) believes the scribe is exerting his ability to suspend the ritual calendar, thereby indicating his ascent into the sacred world of primordial time via sensory deprivation. While this interpretation remains tenuous, it suggests scribes were trying to legitimize their elite status through shamanic ritual.

To further tests whether or not scribes are in fact engaged in chthonic acts of shamanism, it is essential to catalogue cave motifs in Classic Maya iconography. Since I have already discussed scribal culture and iconography as well as archaeological and ethnographic data surrounding cave rituals, this is the next logical step needed to systemically analyze a corpus of art.

### **Cave Motifs in Classic Maya Iconography**

In Mesoamerican cosmology, the universe is divided into three vertical layers (i.e., sky, earth, and the underworld) with the four horizontal directions partitioning the terrestrial realm. The three-tiered universe is connected by an axis mundi (Freidel et al.

1993; Reilly 1994) and mountain-cave complexes partition the cardinal directions (Bassie-Sweet 1991, 1996). Certain iconographic elements place the action in one of the levels of the three-tiered Maya cosmos. Since the cave is a portal to the Underworld, one can use cave and Underworld motifs rather interchangeably. Across Mesoamerica, it is believed that the middle realm of the three-tiered cosmos floats on the primordial sea of the Underworld. Thus, primordial sea motifs can also be equated with caves. Already one can see, a variety of motifs in Maya iconography perform the function of cave locatives. Nevertheless, by cataloguing these motifs one could use this as an iconographic dictionary to determine what actions are in fact transpiring in the chthonic realm. What follows is a construction of well-known cave motifs. Due to the polysemic nature of Maya iconography, it is virtually impossible to account for all depictions of caves; however, the following paragraphs will help categorize cave symbols in order to identify those symbols as locatives, or locators, to determine specific theaters of scribal ritual.

Thankfully the Maya had a formal writing system that allows the researcher to use epigraphy and iconography to further analyze the ideological motivations behind Maya art. For example, the Maya had specific hieroglyphs and glyphic constructions to represent caves and other places ideologically associated with caves. A recent article by Vogt and Stuart (2005) brings new light to the epigraphy and iconography associated with caves. They translate cave as *ch'en* or *ch'een* (Vogt and Stuart 2005:157). The logogram that carries this phonetic value is a half-darkened field with a detached eye motif in the middle (Figure 2.28). Based on their research, they constructed the assumptions that the logogram refers to a space into which one can “enter”, “sit”, or “be

buried,” and visually the sign is intimately associated with death, especially the Underworld, bats, and bones (Vogt and Stuart 2005:160). Furthermore, they find strong evidence in Classic inscriptions to suggest emblem glyphs and polity names originally named specific caves and the lineages heads that occupied that cave (Vogt and Stuart 2005:162). As I will show, this is particularly important because on several polychrome ceramics scribes use the same logogram to name their station or workshop and are attempting to reinforce their claims to a lineage.

Another important epigraphic and iconographic aspect of the cave resides in how the Maya label something as being constructed of stone. For the Maya labeling an entity as “stone” is achieved by depicting it with *cauac* marks. In Maya iconography *cauac* also carries the meaning of lightning, thunder, and storms—all of which originate in caves (Bassie-Sweet 1996:66). This belief remains conservative over thousands of years and is catalogued in many ethnographic examples: the Tzotzil Maya of San Pedro believe the rain god Chac lives in a cave and produces lightning (Thompson 1970:268); the Tzeltal Maya of Oxchuch believe caves issue lightning to punish natural element (Vogt and Stuart 2005:170-171); the Chol Maya erect crosses at Jolja Cave at the onset of the rainy season (Bassie et al. 2002:8-10); and so on. These *cauac* markings (e.g., T528 and T529 in Thompson’s catalogue of Maya glyphs) consist of grape-like clusters and a semi-circle inscribing a hook with small circles surrounding the semi-circle image (Figure 2.29). This is best exemplified in the glyph (Figure 2.29a) that carries the phonetic value *tun*, meaning stone, drum, or year. Bassie-Sweet (1991, 1996) identifies the grape-like clusters as speleothems and the hook as maize sprouts being nurtured by the cave’s drip water; therefore, these *cauac* signs are pictographs of mountains and their caves. As a

result, a scene rife with *cauac* marks would suggest the physical as well as the ideological action occurring in a cave.

As previously mentioned, sacred geography had a profound impact on the Maya psyche. As a result, the physical manifestation of this salient ethos was codified in both Maya writing and iconography. The quintessential example of this manifestation in Maya symbols is the *witz* (Figure 2.29b). In Maya as well as Aztec ideology, a sacred water-filled mountain (in Mayan *witz*; in Nahuatl *altepetl*) marked the intersection of the center of the quadripartite directions and the axis mundi that connected the three-tiered vertical universe (Aquilar et al. 2005:70; Freidel et al. 1993; Schele and Freidel 1990:67). According to Mircea Eliade (1958:379-382), this central intersection, the holiest of holies, was a place of immense prestige and inexhaustible resources; it was the locus of creation for both the world and humanity. Thus in the *witz* complex, the mountain represented the sky, while a water-filled cave represented the underworld. According to epigraphic and iconographic evidence, it is suggested that the ancient Maya also believed ancestors and animal-spirit companions (*ways*) resided in this mountain-cave (Vogt and Stuart 2005:157). Thus, the *witz* complex in Maya ideology can be used as a cave locative (Bassie-Sweet 1991, 1996; Stone 1995) as long as other contextual clues place the action in the chthonic realm.

The *witz* is mimicked in Maya architecture in order to ideologically imbue and animate the building with the same unprecedented power. The Witz Monster (Figure 2.30), a ubiquitous icon in Maya architecture, marks the entrances to temples and is conceived of as a portal to the Underworld (Freidel et al. 1993:149-151). Many times, this entity is depicted in a personified form with eyelids and a stepped cleft in the center

of its forehead (Schele and Freidel 1990:418). To reinforce this idea, the Witz Monster is depicted with cauc marks thereby identifying this symbol as sacred stone. The Maya ideologically view the Witz Monster as a metaphorical cave; thus, when someone breaks the threshold of the temple door he is entering the Underworld.

A similar belief is held for the maw of various iconographic symbols and animals. Among the modern Maya, the maws of snakes, frogs, jaguars, and centipedes are viewed to be portals to the Underworld (Kennedy 1982; Sosa 1985; Stone 1995:23; Taube 2005). The Maw of Xibalba (Figure 2.31), seen on the Sarcophagus of Pakal the Great and on Structure 9N-82 in Copan (Figure 2.24), is portrayed as the open mouth of a skeletalized zoomorph and represents the transition between the natural world and the Otherworld of Xibalba (Schele and Freidel 1990:412). Scenes on polychrome pottery reinforce the idea that the maw indicates a transitional boundary between this world and the Otherworld. However, I believe the maw of Xibalba, whether the media is of stone or paint, represents a stylized centipede. Since Taube (2005) presents a convincing argument that scribes and centipedes are intimately related, it is essential to understand how the Maw of Xibalba functions in Maya ideology and iconography. For example, images of scribes sitting in cenotes or emerging from the skeletalized maw of the centipede (Stone 2005b:Figure 7.3) imply an intimate ideological link between scribes emerging from caves.

The quatrefoil is also a conventional sign for the opening of a cave that dates well into the Middle Preclassic period (Grove 1984; Stone 1995:22). Once thought to originate in Olmec iconography (Grove 1984; Reilly 1994), recent evidence dating to 1000 B.C. from the site Cahal Pech (James Garber, personal communication 2008) in Belize suggests this symbol developed independently in the Maya lowlands. The

quatrefoil can be depicted from a frontal perspective (Figure 2.32) or in profile (Figure 2.33). The four corners of the quatrefoil sometimes sprout maize reaffirming the idea that was thought to have originated in caves (Brady 1989:54). Scenes of figures emerging from quatrefoils in both Olmec and Maya art have been interpreted as kings and divine ancestors (Freidel et al. 1993:215; Grove 1984:130; Reilly 1994). Since kings were thought to be the literal embodiment of maize and all things precious, this parallel is not surprising. Above all the quatrefoil represents an aperture through which sacredness could pass: for humans it was the divine intervention of the gods and for gods it was the human blood required to keep them alive.

The Maya could also create a quatrefoil portal through shamanic rituals and dedicatory offerings. The Classic period god-pot, or *Ol*, was used by both kings and nobility alike in vision rites to open a quatrefoil portal to the Otherworld (Freidel et al. 1993:216). By burning paper covered with blood from autosacrificial rituals, the membrane between the sacred and the profane would be temporarily lifted and gods would intervene in response to earthly petitions. Stone also believe these quatrefoils may be represented by pottery cached in a sacred hole, thereby metaphorically creating a cave (1995:37). From these encounters with the Otherworld via the quatrefoil portal, the ancient Maya elites would receive *itz*, or magic (Freidel et al. 1993:224). During the calamity of the Late Classic period, this practice of shamanic ritual would undoubtedly increase from all players in the Maya elite. In response to these offerings, Underworld deities or ancestors would bless the people with rain to promote the growth of struggling crops, stave off enemies during wartimes, or a number of other petitions in which the metaphysical has a causal effect on the physical realm. Since the Maya scribe artistically

depicted himself in rituals of supplication in conjunction with *Ol* portals, it is crucial to understand the power inherent in opening a quatrefoil portal.

As mentioned earlier, the Maya believe that the earthly realm of the three-tiered cosmos floats above the primordial sea of the Underworld. This beneath world realm held the souls of kings before they resurrected in the celestial domain and was filled with bloody waters teeming with fish, crocodiles, water lilies, and other aquatic inhabitants (Schele and Miller 1986). Therefore, in Maya art entities associated with water are viewed as extensions of the primordial sea and function as Underworld locatives. For example, water lilies are associated with the Underworld because of their natural location (Freidel et al. 1993:239). Water lilies grow in swampy environments; thus, the Maya viewed these plants as emerging from the waters of the beneath world. The water lily is iconographically depicted in various forms. In profile, the water lily appears as a bulbous flower with radiating petals (Figure 2.34). From a vertical perspective the water lily motif depictions sometimes resembles a sunflower (Figure 2.35). Both Figures 2.34 and 2.35 illustrate representations of the Water Lily Monster, a personification of swamps, lakes, and rivers and their associated fecundity. Interestingly, the water lily motif is also associated with scribes and royalty (Coe and Kerr 1997; Schele and Freidel 1990). The fact that water lilies are incorporated into scribal imagery helps to confirm the hypothesis that scribes ritually contacted Underworld deities for divine inspiration and the reception of *itz*.

### Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have recounted the titles and deities associated with the scribal office. I have also presented various examples of cave beliefs, rituals, and iconography,

and summarized current research that proves the elite scribe engaged in Underworld rituals. These rituals, both in the ethnographic literature and archaeological record, suggest the cave was used as a stage for rites of passage as well as ancestral and spiritual contact through shamanic acts and offerings of supplication. By cataloguing scribal and chthonic ideology and iconography, I have created a dictionary with which I can analyze scribal scenes found on the highly prestigious polychrome ceramic wares of the Late Classic period.

As I have shown, in Maya ideology the cave was viewed as a paradoxical force with the ability to both create and destroy. Due to this concentrated power, the cave served physically and metaphorically as a stage for intimate rituals in which man could pass through a portal and summon divine intervention in hopes of satiating earthly concerns. With the environmental degradation, super-saturated elite class, and cultural unrest that plague the Late Classic period, the need to petition Underworld deities for intervention in terrestrial matters would have reached unprecedented heights. Moreover, in light of this horizontal growth amongst the elite class, the Late Classic scribe would have to take drastic measures to reify his elevated status. As Stone (1995, 2005b) has convincingly argued, the elite scribe validated his elite status through the cave pilgrimage and his ability to physically manifest ideology. Following these ideas, I believe a systematic analysis of scenes depicted on polychrome ceramics of the Late Classic period will show the scribe readily places himself in the Underworld engaged in shamanic rituals. Thus, in the following chapter I will construct a theoretical model to prove scribes used their agency, afforded from their ability to produce ideology, to overtly

integrate themselves on portable art in order to bolster their prestige during a time of cultural, political, and economic pandemonium.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **THEORY AND METHODS**

In this current chapter I will lay out my research design in order to ascertain the cognitive construct underlying cave scenes from Late Classic ceramic vessels. Thus, I will present a theoretical model that demonstrates the power of the elite scribe to ideologically validate the scribal office through a dominant symbol, the cave. In order to make this illustration, I will rely heavily on the model of dual-processual theory (Blanton et al. 1996). Dual-processual theory posits the ideology and agency of political actors (i.e. elite scribes) become part of strategies that utilize certain sources of power to reinforce and validate their specialized sociopolitical position. Then, I will illustrate that the Late Classic period was a time of cultural and political chaos. Indeed, the Late Classic period of dynamic sociopolitical and economic structures marks the prime opportunity for the scribal agent to reify the ideology, or “structural transformations” as David Freidel (1992) calls them, surrounding the scribal office. Hieroglyphic evidence suggests that warfare was a ubiquitous event as a result of a top heavy elite class vying for power and lineage continuity (Martin and Grube 2000; Schele and Freidel 1990). Additionally, the introduction of pseudoglyphs and imitation ceramic vessels also undermine the claims of elite scribal prestige (Reents-Budet 1994). This time of rivalry and instability caused dynamic power-shifts among the plethora of polities that comprised Late Classic sociopolitical organization (Demarest 1992; Martin and Grube

2000; Reents-Budet 1998:71). This period of structural transformation caused the introduction of ideologically loaded and finely crafted painted ceramic vessels.

Another component of my theoretical position will build on Reents-Budet's (1998) theory of the introduction of fine wares into this Late Classic cultural milieu. Reents-Budet suggests that complex iconography as well as the use of individual scribal titles by the Late Classic elites were painted on vessels as an intentional way for the artist to reformulate ideology and validate his preternatural status. In other words, these fine vessels became billboards that advertise personal prestige for the scribe and his lineage during this cultural and political upheaval. Building on these theories of agency and shifting ideology in times of cultural and political upheaval, I will show that the elite Maya scribe adopted the cave and its Underworld associations as a metaphor and ritual stage to become a dominant symbol of the scribal office.

Chapter three continues with a methodology intended for iconographic analysis of the relationship between scribal ideology, ritual, and the physical and metaphorical use of caves. I will employ structural analysis, as defined by Erwin Panofsky, in his seminal work *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (1972). Panofsky's methodological approach peels away the layers of an artistic work and allows anthropologists and art historians to gain insight into a culture's ideology and sociopolitical status. His method consists of analyzing the form, iconography, and iconology of an artistic scene in order to place the work in a cultural context. In the first level, form, the analyst simply catalogues the color schemes, pure forms, and characters present. This is an important qualitative step used to isolate common motifs in order to find patterns. The next level of interpretation, called iconography, attempts to define common motifs and characters within a specific theme or

concept. Ethnographies, epigraphy, and archaeological data all help reconstruct iconographic understanding. Finally, iconology, which explores the intrinsic content of a work, attempts to understand the artist's intention behind the arrangement of characters and themes.

### Theoretical Perspective

#### **Ideology, Agency, and the Dual-Processual Theory**

As seen in the previous chapter, the elite Maya scribe embodied the physical manifestation of the act of creation and attempted to eternally codify the Maya's ideology on stelae, codices, buildings, wood, and ceramic vessels. As Itzamna painted the cosmos, the scribes also animated the Maya worldview through turkey feather brushes, chert pestles, and fibrous styluses. The esoterica surrounding craft production is heavily loaded with ideology and elevated the prestige of the elite Maya scribe to divine proportions (Inomata 2001, 2007; Reents-Budet 1994, 1998). Since the scribe had a direct influence over Maya ideology, it becomes a necessity to construct an understanding of this ideological system and ascertain how the elite scribe fit into this system.

According to Freidel, Maya ideology was a collective enterprise composed of the entire sociopolitical continuum in which shamanism was the unifying force (1992:116). Debates of the ambiguity and imprecision of the term "shamanism" in art history (Klein et al. 2002) and archaeology (see Prufer 2005) warrant attention; therefore, it is crucial to give a definition of shamanism that is applicable to the interpretation of Maya ideology.

Borrowing from Brian Stross (2007):

"Shamanism will here be considered as pertaining to a worldview in which the cosmos and all within it is assumed to be animate, and animated by a spiritual essence and life force that is shared, and that underlies the potential

for magical transformation, and further that individual body and soul are functionally separable entities under certain conditions, and capable of rejoining (c.f. Markman and Markman 1989:102). Also at the core of shamanism as considered here is the assumption that the spiritual essences (or souls) of individuals that we can call shamans are capable in certain circumstances of leaving their body and visiting an alternative reality that can be called the Otherworld in ways that would strike us in the western world as magical (Markman and Markman 1989:102).”

This worldview was animated through shamanic rituals in which an actor, typically a character exuding a powerful aura of charisma, would access the supernatural world while in a state of ecstatic trance. Although the apex of shamanism rested in the king, during the Classic period the literate elite (i.e., scribes and artisans) would also participate in shamanic rituals in order to amalgamate the sacred with the profane (Freidel 1992:117). As a result, the physical and the metaphysical were unified parallels in which myth and history, economy and spirituality were one; for the Maya, ideology was an all-encompassing singularity in which all entities housed sacredness.

Finally, Freidel believes Maya ideology was sometimes reified in periods, called structural transformations, in order to cope with periods of pervasive and debilitating social crises (1992:118). Given this comprehension of Maya ideology and shamanism, it is my belief that during one period of “structural transformation” (i.e., the Late Classic period) the elite Maya scribe was a key agent in this process of ideological reification. In agency theory, the individual’s (i.e., the elite Maya scribe) ability to act precipitates a change in the overarching structure (i.e., ideology and the scribal office) in the face of heightened dialectical stress. To understand the agency of the elite Maya scribe and the ensuing change in ideology, an explanation of agency theory is presented.

The ambiguous application and definition of agency within the subdiscipline of archaeology is a topic of recent debate. Since elite Maya scribes codify political and

cosmological ideologies, thus making this aspect of the structure eternal, it is of the utmost importance to understand the full potential of agency during the Late Classic Period. Therefore, I will present a brief recapitulation of agency theory in archaeology in order to place my thoughts in an historical context and articulate the best model available to describe scribal agents and their sociopolitical function.

At some level all the definitions and applications of agency theory have similarities. For example, most theories describe the dialectical relationship between an actor, bound by cultural, behavioral, and psychological structures. Agency, or the ability to act, is a socially significant quality of this actor's action surrounding social reproduction in the face of this stress between the individual or group and the overarching structure (Robb 2001). However, theories often differ in the nature of the actor's intention upon the ideological structure. While the long-term consequences of one's actions can never be fully envisioned, the immediate response to structural pressures and boundaries can either be a conscious or unconscious decision-making processes. In other words, do actors unconsciously perform actions ingrained by cultural and psychological structures, and in turn, their actions reproduce a new structure? Or, do actors consciously perform actions influenced by the ideological structure that in turn alter this structure? To answer this philosophical debate, a brief history of agency theory is necessary.

The idea of agency theory was introduced into the archaeological lexicon during the late 1970s and early 1980s by Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens. Building on theories from Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, Bourdieu's practice theory and Giddens' theory of structuration both outline the dialectical relationship between the "agent", an ideologically bounded actor that can change structures through practice, and the

“structure”, the collective consciousness and ideology that results from engrained relationships between individuals (Dornan 2002:305). However, Bourdieu and Giddens differ on the intention of the decision-making processes behind individual action.

Bourdieu’s practice theory believes human actions are conducted at a un/preconscious level thereby blurring the notion of intentionality. A major component of this theory is the notion of doxa, which refers to social factors that underline discourse and social interactions and is analogous to Durkheim’s notion of social laws. As doxa, ‘the established cosmological and political order is perceived . . .as . . . a self-evident and natural order which goes without saying and therefore goes unquestioned’ (Bourdieu 1977:166). While some doxic practices exist outside the world of intentionality, others lie with the realm of intentionality because actors share motivations and life stories. Therefore, it is crucial to analyze doxa through “genres of action [in order to] specify situations and arenas of social performance, their boundaries, rules and strategies, and what kinds of people can be involved and how they have to behave” (Robb 2001:3). As I will show, the Maya scribe used the cave as an arena for performance to ensure these doxa over time instill unconsciously internalized dispositions, or “habitus”. Thus, habitus determines how people perceive and act in the world and are structured and structuring these external forces of doxa. More frequently, the creation and dissolution of doxa is a political process, linking it to aspects of ideology (e.g. Burke, 1999:11–36). Agency, as defined in this theory, is the ability of the actor to realize the limits of doxa and break out of these limits.

Giddens theory of structuration believes individuals are not determined by unconsciously internalized structures, but rather know how to act through “practical

consciousness.” This practical consciousness is defined as conscious knowledge of social institutions that allows individuals to reflexively monitor their habituated actions (Giddens in Dornan 2002:307). As a result, structures arise and are reinforced only through the reproduced conduct of situated actors with definite interests and motivations. Therefore, theoretically, Giddens theory of structuration gives more power to the individual as change in structure is precipitated by the alteration of individual practices. Overtime this alteration of individual practices becomes part of a new structure which dictates a new “practical consciousness.” However, Giddens paradoxically asserts that structuration refers “not to the intentions people have in doing things but their capacity of doing things” (Giddens 1984:9). In other words, someone with a high sociopolitical status or direct access to symbols of ideology has a higher “capacity to do things” because of their station in life.

Although archaeologists using some version of agency theory draw on the same theoretical assertions of Giddens and Bourdieu, archaeological concepts of agency have since been expanded and tend to segregate into different types. In one incarnation, social agents are assumed to act strategically and intentionally to advance their own interests (e.g., Blanton et al. 1996; Hodder 2000; Robb 1994). I believe this model most applicable for the scribal agent during the Late Classic Period because selling ideology for goods or services through interaction spheres was common practice for the Maya (Demarest 1992). Surely, the elite scribe was not fully conscious of all the influences of and their impact on the structure; however, I believe he was cognizant enough to realize the starring role he had on the stage of life and his ability to reformulate his art to impact this ideological commodity. His ability to manipulate this drama through artistic

propaganda and political ideology had a direct impact on the scribal structure and Maya ideology. While scribes were bound by these social systems and cultural beliefs, their starring role in Maya politics afforded them power and prestige and allowed them to rework ideology for personal benefits during times of cultural, political, and economic turmoil.

The dual-processual theory assumes political actors strategically and intentionally advance personal motives within the structure through the manipulation of ideology and the exertion of power for economic and sociopolitical gains. Political actors capable of influencing/changing the structure are often persons already occupying positions of power or wealth (Blanton et al. 1996:2). As a purveyor of knowledge (literally *it's at or wise-man*) with the ability to codify history and ideology, the elite Maya scribe's political position ranks only second to the king as a powerful political actor. Naturally these political actors have access to various sources of power, especially the control of knowledge through written history. These sources of power, which are exercised in a culture-laden social situation, are divided into objective and symbolic mediums of power. The latter source, which I find more applicable to the scribal agent, harnesses elements of a "cognitive code, including religion and ritual" such as knowledge, ritual, and magic (Blanton et al. 1996:3). Since scribes were inculcated in mathematics, calendrics, cosmology, elite rituals, and other forms of esoterica (Reents-Budet 1994), they would embody symbolic power and disseminate this symbolic power through their artistic virtuosity and esoteric rituals. As Justin Kerr (n.d.) asserts about elite Maya scribes, "The ability to use words and to be able to keep records, create documents, to sum, is almost magical and would raise such a person to shamanic levels." As I will show, scribes

portrayed themselves with the ability to contact the Underworld through shamanic rituals, thereby actively reformulating Maya ideology to validate the status of the scribal office.

Furthermore, these sources of power are manifested through an exclusionary power strategy or a corporate political strategy. In the exclusionary strategy political actors develop a political system that ensures their monopolistic control of power in which local art styles function to legitimize elite hierarchy (Blanton et al. 1996:2). The corporate political strategy shares power across different group and sectors in society; this allocation of power is often manifested through the prevailing corporate cognitive code. In ancient Mesoamerica, the myriad of competing and trading galactic polities and political actors used both corporate and exclusionary strategies to further political-economic systems in a dual process of exchanging wealth and knowledge (Blanton et al. 1996:3).

Finally, the dual-processual theory places wealth-based and knowledge-based political economies in a spatial scale of political action. In knowledge-based systems, which I believe is the best model for scribal agency, political action takes place within the local group and seeks to structure social relations through the “manipulation of ideational systems” (Blanton et al. 1996:3). Most of the pictorial ceramics vessels that will be analyzed in this study are stylistically and chemically attributed to sites in southern Campeche and the northern Petén (e.g., Nakbe, El Mirador, and El Zotz) and share stylistic similarities with other nearby style groups. Most of these vessels were found in burial contexts sometimes very distant from their production loci; therefore, the prestige afforded to the scribe would be magnified in his home site as well as other sites that had been exposed to his exquisite artistic abilities.

As will be seen in Reents-Budet's hypothesis, scribal agents of the Late Classic period used a highly localized style that would be economically and politically valuable to the local patron and by extension to themselves. These scribes also portray themselves as the embodiment of creator deities and shamanic symbols such as the *axis mundi* (Reents-Budet 1994, 1998). In other words, the scribe's artistic action, whether a conscious decision or not, changed the structure of Maya ideology to include the act of writing or painting as a shamanic craft. Furthermore, I will show epigraphic evidence from some finely painted Black and White style ceramic vessels (see Kerr 1990:189) that suggests some elite scribes ideologically envisioned their workshop as a cave and by extension, a locus of creation and cosmological power. These finely painted Black and White as well as Codex-style wares, which were rife with complex and rigorous ideology and cosmology, were highly valued prestige items and were disseminated throughout the northwestern Maya lowlands through the sociopolitical function of elaborate feasts and funerary items. Thus, the scribe's knowledge-based economy (i.e., the ideology, cosmology, and shamanic ritual codified on the ceramic vessel) afforded the recipient wealth-based political economy (i.e., a prestigious ceramic vessel); this dual-processual action led to the near deification of scribal elites during the Late Classic period. An articulate example of how scribal agents manipulate ideational systems during the Late Classic sociopolitical upheaval presented by Reents-Budet.

### **Pictorial Vessels as a Result of Late Classic Period Stress**

The Late Classic period was a time of social, political, and economic competition as a result of an ever-growing elite class. Rivalry and instability was ubiquitous as warfare and the shifting alliances of numerous polities (Figure 3.1) comprised the

sociopolitical order of the Late Classic period (Chase and Chase 1987; Martin and Grube 2000; Schele and Freidel 1990). Coupled with increased population and environmental degradation, the political structure of the Late Classic period was constantly on the brink of collapse. In response the ideology of art worked to validate lineage continuity, to promote the divinity of the elite, and to reinforce the political and cosmological power of the elite shaman (Freidel et al. 1993; Schele and Freidel 1990; Schele and Mathews 1999; Schele and Miller 1986). Interestingly, it is during this time of heightened elite competition that we see the introduction of highly specialized pictorial pottery production (i.e., Freidel's notion of a structural transformation in ideology). In fact several scholars (Bishop 1994; Demarest 1992; Freidel 1992; Schele and Miller 1986) believe the primary societal condition underlying the introduction and complex distribution of these finely painted wares is the myriad of competing and interconnected polities and their respective elites. This is surely precipitated by the increased need of elaborate feasting reciprocity seen during this phase as well as the acquisition of grave goods required to strengthen political alliances and validate lineage continuity. Epigraphic, pictorial, and ethnohistorical data state politically important events of public and private feasting and gift-giving rituals were heightened during this period. These finely painted ceramic vessels therefore functioned as social currency through ritual feasting and grave goods. Additionally, they functioned as billboards promoting the shamanic ability and supernatural nature of the scribal office. To elucidate how the Maya scribe as an agent fit into this complex and evolving social process, it is important to examine the function of ceramics and the ideological information they convey.

Reents-Budet's (1998) publication "Elite Maya Pottery and Artisans as Social Indicators" describes pictorial painted pottery emerging during the Late Classic period. Because its production, imagery, and use arose to assuage the unstable web of shifting alliances and competition between sites, pictorial pottery became a major tool of the scribal office. In order for these vessels to carry the necessary social prestige they must be imbued with three "additives of prestige": technical sophistication, distinctive painting styles, and nominal hieroglyphs/pictures of the artist and/or patron (Reents-Budet 1998:73-76). The scribe's technical sophistication requires that he have a keen sense of design as text and image are arranged in a meaningful and aesthetically pleasing manner. The distinctive style used by the scribe conveys social cohesion and localized relationships between both artist and political institution. Finally, the nominal hieroglyphs/pictures of the artist and/or patron serve to immortalize both "creators" and to bolster the artist's oeuvre. Interestingly, scribes would "name-tag" themselves by signing the toponym (place-name) of their residence and/or listing their genealogy (Closs 1992; Reents-Budet 1994; Stuart 1987). Thus, a scribe most successful at fulfilling these three fields would afford prestige not only to the individual patron but also to himself, his lineage and his site.

Additionally, the complex iconography and epigraphy of Late Classic period painted vessels (i.e., symbolic power) constructed by the scribe attributes divine qualities to the artists. The symbolic act of artistic creation is seen as an analog to the primordial act of cosmic creation; during this process the vessel is imbued with *ch'ulel* (preciousness and life source) through the medium of the shamanic scribe. Artists' signature phrases include *miyats* and *its'at* (sage) and *chehen* (maker, creator, and doer) rehashes ideas

from the *Popol Vuh* in which the Maker and Modeler create the four-fold world and four-fold sky (Grube in Reents-Budet 1998; Macleod and Reents-Budet 1994). This makes perfect sense because as we see in the *Popol Vuh* scribes are represented by the Hero Twin's older brothers who exist before the sky and earth are separated and death is defeated. This primordial association, as we will see, is heightened by the scribal use of caves, the ability to manipulate time, and the power to evoke a specific category of deities.

Finally, Reents-Budet (1998:81) believes these artistic works can be made in tableaux groups. This is done in order to convey cosmological information and esoteric knowledge (see also Reilly 1989; Robicsek and Hales 1981). Like modern wedding gifts, these ceramic sets would be presented to elite authorities at gifting ceremonies or feasting occasions. I agree with this interpretation; however, following the work of Kent Reilly (1989), I also believe groups of ceramics were produced to commemorate elite rituals such as shamanic trance. Since scribes were associated with primordial times, I believe that they also underwent shamanic rituals in caves, that function as proverbial time machines (Stone 1995), to contact ancestors for penitential reasons and to mark rites of passage. By painting a flip-book series of ceramics the story would be seen and understood by all viewers. The ability for a piece of art to extend the prestige and ideology of an individual beyond his physical body suggests art also possesses the ability of a causal agent.

### **Art and Agency**

While scribes possessed the ability to present a breadth of esoteric knowledge to elite constituents, their artistic productions were their main medium of sociopolitical

capital. The actual painted pictorial vessels imbued with *chul'el* produced by these artists acted as extensions of the scribal and artistic agency. Since art can carry ideological information in social relationships, a work of art can act as an extension of the maker's agency by furthering his sociopolitical motives (Gell 1998; Layton 2003:451). As discussed above, these painted pictorial vessels were loaded with iconographic and epigraphic messages (including the name of the artist), thus they acted as billboards promoting scribal prestige. Furthermore, the oeuvre of an artist, formed by his artistic virtuosity and elevated sociopolitical position, dictates the power of the piece to extend the agency of the maker. This is because, as Alfred Gell (1998) argues, a ritual object not only functions as a causal agent, it also promotes a chain of actions amongst other ritual actors. Therefore, the agency of art has an ability to act as dictated by the use-life of the artistic object within a nest of cultural relations. The more people that see an art object through which the scribe is contacting Otherworld denizens, the more people will believe in the preternatural power of the scribal office. Since many of the Codex-style ceramic vessels contained use-wear (thus they were not solely funerary objects) yet were found in burial contexts (Reents-Budet 1994:75), their "ability to act" would presumably start with ritual feasting and endure sometime until their interment with a royal patron. Given that these vessels convey names of creator and possessors, and that they convey a high sense of aesthetics, they had the ability to interact with elite people for a rather large temporal span. Thus, their symbolic message would be read by many, again further bolstering the prestige of their elite Maya scribal creator.

As we will see, many of these Codex-style ceramic vessels and hieroglyphic inscriptions from caves portray the elite Maya scribe in a chthonic setting interacting with

Underworld deities and through this interaction manipulate time. By showing this ability, the Maya scribe is exerting his symbolic power through exclusionary and corporate strategies to compensate for the competition of lesser scribes. For the Maya, the ability to control time and bring the realm of the sacred into the realm of the mundane marked the apex of shamanic power.

### **Caves as a Dominant Symbol in Maya Belief**

To further understand the relationship between scribes and caves it is crucial to discuss Victor Turner's ideas of the dominant symbol and liminality. According to Turner (1967) a dominant symbol has three aspects: condensation, unification of disparate significata, and polarization of meaning. As an iconographic motif, the cave is the quintessential dominant symbol throughout Mesoamerica and fulfills these three characteristics (Stone 1995). Scribes depict themselves in a chthonic context through this dominant symbol to show their role in the creation process and also to highlight their shamanic abilities.

For the Maya, caves function as the prosimian arch that defines the ritual stage on which the thin veil that separates the natural from the supernatural is visualized and pierced. In Maya cosmology caves are a locus of immense, paradoxical power and as such, are sacred stages used in elite ritual and shamanic divination. Caves are paradoxical in the sense of Turner's dominant symbol; they themselves are a ritually salient stage that represents many and disparate phenomena in a single unifying symbol. For example, while caves are cosmologically viewed as a locus of fertility, they are also an aperture to the underworld, a place of rotting flesh and bloody waters. Caves are also the birth canal of the sacred mountains, or *witz*, from which the primordial sustenance

and mother-father lineages were birthed (Brady 1989; Stone 1995; Tedlock 1996). As a result, many political centers were often constructed and named after caves in order to mark specific surface site as the place where the world began (Bower 2002; Brady 1997; Stuart and Vogt 2005). Conversely, caves are also readily associated with death and often mark the beginning of the arduous trek through the Underworld to a final resting place in the heavens (Freidel et al. 1993; Schele and Miller 1986). As a locus of power able to transcend life and death, caves also reinforced class unity through the act of pilgrimages.

From iconographic and epigraphic evidence, I believe the scribe's stage was one of, if not the, most important aspects of Maya religion and cosmology: the cave. The elite scribe knew he was not, and never would be, the ruling *ahau*; rather he was an artistic demigod, akin to a prehistoric Michelangelo, da Vinci, or Botticelli. Since the celestial realm was typically associated with the king, the scribe, knowing his sociopolitical rank, willingly embraced the subordinate realm of the Underworld. Macleod and Reents-Budet (1994:Figure 4.13, Figure 4.27) identifies one glyph, which I will prove is the exact same pictograph used for cave (*ch'en*), as his "workshop" or "station". This ideological nexus between cave and the scribe's workshop undoubtedly serves to further bolster the scribe's association with the act of creation. As seen in the previous chapter, caves were the inspiration for the toponyms "sky-caves". These name of these "sky-caves" are thought to be the origin for emblem glyphs (Vogt and Stuart 2005:162), and represent a conduit between planes of existence, a birth canal of lineage heads, and a volatile concentration of power.

As a locus of sacerdotal energy typically located beyond the bounds of a site, caves were the ideal stage for shamanic rituals and rites of passage. Comparing Maya ritual to a theatrical event filled with elaborate pomp intended to show power is nothing new (see Demarest 1992). Turner (1974) even suggests cave pilgrimages throughout history were the ultimate drama of Mesoamerican culture; a play that ends in a rite of passage through which the initiate is born into a new political or cultural status. Recent evidence (Stone 2005b) convincingly shows a key component of initiation into the scribal office was a pilgrimage to a sacred cave. Additionally, I posit the scribal agent and his associated knowledge of cosmology and shamanic ritual afforded from said rite of passage were forever codified on Codex-style ceramics. As Stone (1995:112) suggests, “It is also tempting to view the cream background of Codex-style vases, which have mostly mythological subject matter, as an allusion to the cave-underworld with its limestone walls.”

The cave and its associated bodies of water (i.e. cenotes and wells) are considered liminal areas, sacred physical landforms on the fringes of the known encampment that mark the first step towards resurrection into a new stage of life. Certain rituals, such as rites of passage (e.g., death or initiation into office), involving moving from the known into the unknown; thus, liminality is an important concept to understand the relation between scribes and caves. During these rites of passage one passes through three stages: separation, margin (limen), and reaggregation (Van Gennep 1960). As Turner states, this seclusion period of initiation rites are “a moment in and out of time” in which the cave is an ideal stage (1974:238). After passing through this liminality, the initiate is reborn into a new station of life with a new higher sociopolitical status (Turner 1974). Becoming a

scribe involves inculcation from a master, as in an artistic workshop or guild. In the quest for scribal initiation one would logically have to endure rites of passage which naturally take place in a cave (Stone 2005b). Scribes also presided over other “liminal” rituals, which occur in caves, such as period ending rituals, year bearer rites, and elite funerals (Bassie-Sweet 1991, 1996; Sheseña 2008; Stone 1995).

Thus, the cave’s multivocality and cultural salience allowed the scribe to validate and bolster his office through many ideological avenues. By ideologically embedding himself in the matrix of chthonic motifs, the scribe literally becomes a medium of Underworld powers. He assumes some control over time, the process of creation, and the codification and validation of elite lineages during a period of cultural chaos. Thus, in order to validate his elite office, the scribe depicts his workshop as a metaphorical cave, shows himself undergoing chthonic rites of passage and centering the world as the *axis mundi*, and transforming into his supernatural co-essence the Monkey-man Gods.

#### Methodology

The study of iconography requires the analyst to place the orientation and meaning of symbols in a cultural and historical context (Geertz 2000; Panofsky 1972). Moreover, this is a key step in understanding ideology and its reformulation conveyed in a culture’s cognitive code. Thankfully, Maya art pieces contain both iconographic and epigraphic data that allow the anthropologist and art historian to more accurately contextualize cognitive codes through structural analysis.

Erwin Panofsky’s (1972) methodology of structural analysis outlined in the first chapter of *Meaning in the Visual Arts* is directly applicable to deciphering Maya iconography. This methodology was originally designed to interpret Renaissance art;

however, this heuristic model can be applied cross-culturally. Panofsky outlines a three-pronged method for delving further into the meaning of a work of art. Like Geertz's "thick description," the model explains the cultural phenomena on various levels and strives to contextualize cognitive symbol systems. A key component to fully understanding art is placing the work in a culturally significant context. Therefore, understanding religious beliefs and rituals will guide the anthropologist to a more correct interpretation of artifacts. Using Panofsky's methodology will show how scribal transformation and cave rituals are depicted in Late Classic Maya art.

Panofsky's methodology consists of analyzing form, iconography, and iconology (Figure 3.2). In the first level, form, the analyst simply catalogues the visual motifs and characters present. At this point inference does not enter into the equation. The next level of interpretation, iconography, attempt to define the motifs and characters present in a cultural context. Ethnographies, mythologies, and archaeological data all supplement iconographic understanding. Thus, inference is made based on the aforementioned data of a given culture. Finally, iconology attempts to understand the artist's design behind the work of art. Since the point of this thesis is to understand scribes in transformation ritual, this level of interpretation is particularly salient. Thus, Panofsky's method of structural analysis will be an invaluable tool in interpreting a ceramic corpus of scribal transformation and cave rituals.

## CHAPTER IV

### DATA

In the beginning of the 1970's Michael Coe, working in conjunction with private collectors and various museums, helped initiate the iconographic and epigraphic study of finely-made polychrome pictorial vessels of the Classic period. His vision was instrumentally supplemented by Justin Kerr's invention of the roll-out method of photography and his multi-volume publication of thousands of pictorial vessels. Based on initial iconographic and textual analyses, Coe believed Maya pictorial ceramics of the Classic period functioned solely as grave goods interred with the individual to assist them on their arduous trek through Xibalba, the Place of Fright (Coe 1978:11). His identification of the Primary Standard Sequence (PSS), the repeating text found on the rim of many these pictorial vessels, was thought to be a codified prayer or chant uttered to bless the individual in the afterlife (Coe 1973). Today we know the PSS serves a much more rhetorical purpose (e.g., naming the form of the vessel, its contents, patron, artist, etc.), however Coe's initial research rightfully associates the elite scribe with the powers of the Underworld. As Coe (1978:11) sagaciously wrote more than thirty years ago, "It is the Underworld and its dramatis personae that largely claimed the attention of the ancient artists and scribes who made these vessels." Building on this idea, I will prove the Maya scribe depicted himself in shamanic contact with Underworld, often using the cave as a

metaphorical and physical stage, in order to validate his self-ascribed supernatural abilities and sacred pedigree.

In order to test my hypothesis that scribes depict themselves in caves engaged in elite ritual, I have compiled a corpus of Late Classic, finely-made, polychrome ceramic vessels that visually recount crucial aspects of scribal culture and ritual. While the majority of my corpus comes from the Codex-style, ceramic vessels from outside this style group (e.g., Black and White style) will be used to supplement my argument. Because of their fine craftsmanship and intriguing subject, the unfortunate practice of looting has left many Codex-style ceramics unprovenienced and in the possession of private collectors. However, recent analyses from archaeologists and art historians have refined the temporal and spatial span of this magnificent ceramic style, no doubt a key issue in reconstructing political and ideological interaction spheres. In this chapter I will outline various reasons for choosing my data set as well as a brief recapitulation of characteristics of the Codex-style group.

My reason for heavy use of Codex-style vessels to probe the connection between scribes, caves, and shamanism is threefold. First, many of the vessels produced in these style groups bear the “additives of prestige” that Reents-Budet (1998) suggests is evidence of scribes responding to the social pressures that beleaguer Late Classic life. This style group also has intricate scenes of mythological and cosmological subject matter some of which center around a scribal theme (Robicsek and Hales 1981). With monumental architecture and large stelae no longer being erected in the Maya Lowlands around the turn of the ninth century (Sabloff 1994:144), finely-made pictorial ceramic became the ideal prestige good to serve elite agendas in the absence of these more public

displays of power. Moreover, these vessels were thought to be produced in sets for the purpose of carrying a narrative discourse through imagery, a tableau that can carry a message even to the less literate members of society (Robicsek and Hales 1981). This technologically advanced style was produced for a wide array of Maya society and served mainly a funerary purpose (Reents-Budet 1994:153-155). The presence of use-wear (Reents-Budet 1994:75), however, suggests some of these wares would have also been used in ritual feasts or other public settings. The Codex-style, being designated as a necessary grave good in the greater Nakbé-El Mirador area, would inherently be an ideal avenue for the Maya scribe to exert his agency across various demographics and reaffirm his association with creation deities thought to reside in caves.

Additionally, this data set is salient to my hypothesis because the scribes that produced the Codex-style (as well as the Black and White style which will be analyzed) are also thought to have produced the images and hieroglyphic texts found in Naj Tunich cave (Stone 1995:112). Indeed, the idea that the scribal pilgrimages and rites of passage chronicled on the walls of Naj Tunich (see Stone 1995, 2005b) would also be manifested in Codex-style ceramics has some merit. In fact Stone (1995:112) even posits, “It is also tempting to view the cream background of Codex-style vases, which have mostly mythological subject matter, as an allusion to the cave-underworld with its limestone walls.” In light of this interpretation, I believe the Maya scribe undoubtedly recounted these elite pilgrimages and other shamanic rituals on the images of Codex-style vessels. Since these pilgrimages were shown on portable art objects in addition to the stationary cave art, the Maya scribe could influence a diverse audience over a larger geographic distance and further exert his personal agenda throughout the public arena.

Finally, Codex-style ceramic vessels are instrumental in analyzing the association between scribe and caves because there is a large body of research geared towards the iconography and epigraphy of this style group. Moreover, within the Codex-style researchers (Kerr and Kerr 1988) have been able to identify painters (e.g., the Princeton Painter, the Metropolitan Painter, and the Fantastic Painter) of specific vessels. By tying scribes to specific pieces of art, it will be easier to trace their influence of ideology as seen on said vessels. Additionally, numerous publications (see García 2009:4 for a detailed list) provide an adequate basis of interpretation; however, most of the discussion of the images dealing with the theme of scribes is by and large merely descriptive (e.g., Robicsek and Hales 1981:125-136; Schele and Miller 1986:150-151). I believe my analysis and interpretation of the scribal theme will show an intimate connection with the chthonic realm and make a needed contribution to the iconographic research of the Codex-style. Ultimately, whether or not the scribes that painted these Codex-style images underwent shamanic transformation in the cave is a moot point. All they need is for their consumers to *believe* that scribes can contact ancestors and gods and ideology has become a marketable commodity. With the reasons for choosing my data set explained, I will now present a brief description of the characteristics as well as the temporal and spatial span of Codex-style ceramics.

Beginning in the early 1970's a particular style of unprovenienced, highly pictorial ceramic vessels became aware to members of the academic community. This ceramic style was characterized by a thick red line at the top and bottom of the vessel that framed well-executed mythological scenes on a cream-colored background. The images and texts are typically rendered in black or dark brown calligraphic lines that are

executed with great skill, clarity, and firmness. The style's resemblance to codices from the Postclassic period led Coe (1973:91) to dub this the "codex style" and to suggest that scribes painted ceramics in addition to compiling images and texts in codices.

With recent breakthroughs in sourcing ceramics (e.g., neutron activation analysis) coupled with efforts from art historians and linguists, the loci of production and range of distribution of the Codex-style has slowly been reconstructed. According to chemical analyses (Hansen et al. 1991; Reents-Budet 1994) and style patterns deciphered by art historians (Kerr and Kerr 1988; Robicsek and Hales 1981:236), the majority of Codex-style wares are now thought to be produced by many artists in or around the Nakbé-El Mirador area between AD 672-731 (Reents-Budet et al. in García 2009:1)—interestingly, this time period also marks the commencement of the 200 year collapse of the Maya, suggesting this was an experimental method of promoting elite agendas. Technically assigned to the type group known as Zacatal Cream-polychrome (Hansen et al. 1991:225), the hue of the background color has also been used to indicate distribution and/or production ranges that extend from southern Campeche to the majority of the Petén. For example, vessels and sherds with a cream or yellow background have been recovered from Calakmul; on the other hand, only vessels and sherds of cream backgrounds have been recovered from the Petén at sites such as El Mirador, Nakbé, Tintal, El Zotz, and several others (García 2009:1-2; Hansen et al. 1991). Archaeological work in this area reveals Codex-style ceramics were recovered from house mounds of various wealth and status (Hansen et al. 1991:240). This wide range of geographic and demographic distribution would allow these portable billboards to send a message to a large group of Maya society thereby exercising the artist's agency quite effectively.

In addition to a large area of distribution, the mass produced Codex-style is also a high quality and technologically advanced product that is constructed by several specialists. The Codex-style is also characterized by its high quality clay and highly advanced firing process (Hansen et al. 1991:232). The most common forms (Hansen et al. 1991:225; Robicsek and Hales 1981:3-4) are shallow plates (*lak*), deep plates or tripods (*jawanté*), various bowls with flared rims, and cylindrical vases (*uch'ib* or *uk'ib*). Undoubtedly, the mass production of this technologically advanced item in its various forms and its distribution would require extreme specialization and government oversight. However, when the chemical profiles of the clay from a scribal vessel found at Nakbé are compared to other scribal themed Codex-style ceramics, the sources of clay do not match. Hansen et al. (1994:239) posit this compositional diversity suggests no implications of “highly restricted” or “workshop” organization of production; nevertheless, this interpretation has nothing to do with the painting of vessels because it is generally believed different people painted Codex-style ceramics than those that formed them (Reents-Budet 1994:219-222). Therefore it is likely that scribes painted these images in the confines of elite space as seen in other archaeological work surrounding painting loci (see Inomata 2007, 2001; Reents-Budet 1994:294-309). As noted by Takeshi Inomata (2007, 2001), in this process the painter would receive greater status for his production of art and ideology compared to his potter counterpart. Thus, the spatial span of distribution in addition to the high quality technological innovation of this portable art medium makes it a perfect prestige item to convey the individual agency of the Maya scribe.

Let us look at one specific example of a scribal theme Codex-style vessel recovered from the periphery of Nakbé. This vessel (Figure 4.1), named Nakbé Codex Scribe Vessel 1, is an incomplete cylinder vessel and is stylistically attributed to the artist that completed Vessel 62 and 63 in *The Maya Book of the Dead* (Hansen et al. 1991:230). The scribe, bearing all the markers of a scribe in his supernatural form, is depicted with seven toes, which is interpreted to be a passing reference to G-III, the Jaguar God of the Underworld (Hansen et al. 1991:230). As Stone notes (1995:43-44) the number seven is also intimately associated with caves in Mesoamerican ideology; therefore, this depiction of the scribe with seven toes in conjunction with water iconography undoubtedly places the action in the Otherworld. The rhetoric displayed in the Primary Standard Sequence (PSS)—here the scribe names himself an *itz'at* and *pi-tzi* “ball player” and describes his pedigree as “royal blood” or “sacred” (Hansen et al. 1991:230-232)—surely functions to promote this individual scribe’s personal agenda amongst all the scribes involved in the mass production of Codex-style ceramics.

Although the manufacture and artistic decoration of the Codex-style varies, it certainly contained a unifying ideology and style, conveyed through image and text, that could be understood across demographic boundaries. A key component of this ideological message is that scribal validation and their abilities were rooted in supernatural patrons and sacred lineages that originate from the Otherworld. As I will show, ceramic vessels from outside the Codex-style group carry similar rhetoric that ultimately serves to reify the Late Classic Maya scribes status and validity as a preternatural entity himself. While the levels of epigraphic and iconographic complexity vary across my data set, thereby appealing to a variety of Maya society, the message

remains clear: scribes have a personal relationship with the Underworld and its denizens, and they can contact certain categories of gods through ritual much like the kingly class.

## CHAPTER V

### ICONOGRAPHIC INTERPRETATION OF SCRIBE-IN-CAVE THEME

The fall of Classic Maya civilization is a multivariate problem that remains, and will remain, a vehemently argued topic of Mesoamerican archaeology. While natural degradation, unprecedented population expansion, and shifting climatic conditions undoubtedly influenced the fall of the Maya, the human response constructed to mitigate these natural problems also played a key role in the this process. For the Maya, the ideological charter dictated by divine kingship and his shamanic control over supernatural forces was a cohesive element that united Maya society (Freidel 1992; Freidel et al. 1993; Freidel and Schele 1988) and served to ensure elite status through elite and non-elite reciprocal relationships; however, the multidimensional instability of the Late Classic period undermined this ideological charter, and by the late ninth century the Maya people became disillusioned with the king and ultimately abandoned cities throughout the lowlands (Demarest 1992; Demarest et al. 2004:546; Webster 2002:329, 343-347). In the incipient stages of the 200 year collapse, Late Classic period pottery adopted ideologically loaded pictorial and hieroglyphic narrative phenomenon that served to elevate the status of the elite Maya scribe and his patron as a direct response to the period's sociopolitical development (Reents-Budet 1998). Surely the elite scribe played a crucial role in this human response to a shifting social environment in hopes of validating his elite position within this ideological charter.

Like the shaman-king, albeit to a much less extent, the elite scribe was a central actor in the physical manifestation of this ideological charter and had a perceived connection with creator deities. The king relied on his courtly artisans to produce the art and monuments that validated his heavenly mandate. Therefore, if the producer of the objects that validated the kingly institution was ideologically perceived to have an intimate relationship with creator deities, the king that had the power to accumulate the resources needed for artistic expression undoubtedly possessed a direct relationship with the creator deities that ordered the cosmos and ensured stability. By equating himself with the embodiment of stability and fecundity seen in creator deities, the elite scribe actively manipulated ideology in the midst of sociopolitical and environmental chaos in order to validate not only his elite status, but that of his lineage. Since shamanism served to petition gods from other realms of existence to intercede in a causal response to earthly agendas (Freidel 1992), the elite scribe used his knowledge of cosmology, mythology, and ritual to show he had access to a certain category of gods. The scribes achieved this divine access through shamanic abilities and performances that transpired on the stage of life in a dramatic fashion.

Based on iconographic and epigraphic analyses from Late Classic pictorial ceramics, I believe the scribe intentionally depicts himself with shamanic abilities through production of ideologically loaded art on the chthonic stage. According to John Robb (2001:5), "Intention [in terms of agency] is inherent to drama..." therefore it is crucial to understand the arenas, rules, and strategies of social performance as well as the actors involved in the ritual reproduction of ideology. Since the cave was ideologically viewed as a locus of a infinite abundance and fertility (Bassie-Sweet 1991, 1996; Brady

1989), an entrance to Xibalba and a pathway to primordial time (Macleod and Puleston 1978; Stone 1995), and the dwelling of ancestors and supernatural deities (Freidel et al. 1993; Schele and Miller 1986; Vogt and Stuart 2005), it become the perfect stage for the elite Maya scribe to adopt in order to reinforce his claims of supernatural ability and elite status.

As I will demonstrate the Maya scribe depicted himself undergoing shamanic rituals on an Underworld stage in three ways. First, epigraphic and iconographic evidence from Black and White style as well as Codex- style vessels prove the elite scribe envisioned his artistic workshop as a metaphorical cave. Some of these vessels meld history and myth to recount the shamanic rituals involved during artistic production presumably as a latent reference to the power of the scribe to initiate creation and cosmological balance through the act of craft manufacturing. Next, a complex tableau from an unprovenienced vessel depicts a scribal neophyte opening a portal and raising the world tree through shamanic acts that transpire in a cave. Again, the scribe is attempting to show his ability to order the world and recreate cosmological harmony through the divine relationship required to enter the ranks of the elite artisan. Finally, a set of Codex-style vessels created as a tableau reinforces the shamanic powers of the scribe by recounting a visual narrative in which the elite scribe transforms into this supernatural co-essence, the Monkey-man Gods. By traversing the cave passageway, the scribe enters primordial time in which his intelligence remains unobstructed by the jealousy of the gods. By actively choosing the cave as a ritual stage, the elite scribe embodies the symbol associated with creation and a time when all is harmonious in order to assist the elite class in maintaining their social position.

### Scribal Workshop as a Metaphorical Cave

During the Late Classic period, high-status scribes produced ideologically charged objects that legitimized elites' claim to power. Undoubtedly, this process is dictated by conformity to a certain style and breadth of esoteric knowledge and skill that can send cognitive messages across and/or within various classes (e.g., Wobst 1977). For this ideological message and the aesthetic appeal of Maya art to transcend many ranks of Maya society and function as a valuable commodity, one must comprehend the esoteric knowledge of the artists and their ability to convey this message. Moreover, a crucial component of understanding the political implications of knowledge behind production rests in the context of artistic production (Inomata 2001, 2007). As shown by archaeological research (Ball 1993; Inomata 2001, 2007) and iconographic analyses (Coe and Kerr 1997; Reents-Budet 1994, 1998), elite Maya scribes were craft specialists that produced their ideologically charged goods in a courtly context. Since some elite structures were viewed as metaphorical mountain-caves (i.e., *witz*) by the Maya, I believe the elite scribe also viewed his workshop as a manifestation of this sacred entity. This makes sense because caves were thought to be a locus of creation (Bassie-Sweet 1991, 1996; Stone 1995) and the act of artistic creation equates Maya scribes with the embodiment of various creator deities (Freidel et al. 1993:142, 217; Reents-Budet 1994:49, 1998:76-77).

### **Evidence from Black and White Style Vessels**

Hieroglyphic data from Black and White style vessels suggest scribes visualized their workshop as a cave, presumably to incorporate themselves into an extremely sacred symbol and validate their supernatural status. According to Justin Kerr (1990:189) this

style group consists of some of the most finely made vessels in the Maya ceramic corpus and themes of resurrection as well as creation are ubiquitous. Additionally, the length and visual and linguistic complexity of the dedicatory PSS of these vessels are the hallmarks of a commissioned work from a prestigious workshop (Macleod and Reents-Budet 1994:123). Three exquisite Black and White style vessels (Figure 5.1, 5.2, 5.3) made for a ruler of Xultun not only name the patron but also the workshop from which they originate. The texts on these stylistically similar vessels include the phrase *u-yul, u-kun* meaning “his craft, his station” or workshop (Macleod and Reents-Budet 1994:133). The pictograph that carries the phonetic *kun* and refers to the workshop is the same as the pictograph for the Late Classic glyph for cave (see insert in Figure 5.1). As Bassie-Sweet (1996:6) asserts, “Pictographic hieroglyphs do more than represent words: they evoke images and concepts in the mind of the reader.” Therefore, the elite scribe(s) that painted these prestigious vessels identified his workshop as a cave to other elite members of Maya society in order to reinforce the ideological associate with creation deities and tremendous power surrounding craft production. Moreover, by adopting this chthonic toponym, the scribe(s) is stating his workshop is a conduit of all things precious as well as an entrance to the Otherworld and its denizens.

### **Evidence from a Scribe Named Wakil Yax Winik**

There is also evidence from three finely made pictorial ceramics attributed to the greater Nakbé area that reinforce my interpretation that elite scribes in the northern Petén and southern Campeche viewed their workshop as a cave and produced ideologically charged art in a ritual setting. According to Erik Boot (2006) all three of these vessels depict the same characters undergoing the same action on the same day and in the same

ritual location. One complete unprovenienced cylinder provides the most room for iconographic interpretation and surely locates artistic production in a cavernous setting. This vase (Figure 5.4), with a height of 21.5 cm and diameter of 13.2 cm, has a unique style therefore it evades typological characterization (Fields in Reents-Budet 1994:315). The uniqueness of this piece, masterful control of color scheme, and the complex visual narrative implies this vessel was painted by a highly prestigious artist. The visual narrative is bifurcated by a vertical text, and the rim contains a repetitive text of one glyphic collocation. One interpretation of this collocation is *lakam tun* “stela” (Reents-Budet 1994:Figure 4.31a), however other readings are hypothesized. For example, this collocation, identified as *ji-chi* by Boot (2006:3); this constructed and particular substitution is common to ceramics that are executed in a style close to the Codex-style, suggesting the greater Nakbé area as a locus of production for this vessel (Boot 2006:3). The presence of a Calendar Round date, 7 Manik’ 5 Woh, has also sparked interesting debate. While Virginia Fields (in Reents-Budet 1994:315) believes this event occurred in either A.D. 694 or A.D. 746, Erik Boot (2006:15-16) suggests this date transpired in mythological time around the date of Maya creation, 4 Ahau 8 Cumku. As I will show, since this event transpired in a metaphorical cave, this Calendar Round date serves to combine history with mythology and to visually manifest the ideological charter surrounding scribes and creation deities.

The complex visual narrative of Kerr No. 0717 (Figure 5.4) focuses on three supernatural scribes engaged in artistic production. The black background and architectural detail (e.g., the three glyphic elements *ah-cauac-wa* on the columns) implies the action occurs in an Underworld or nightly palace setting (Boot 2006:4; Coe and Kerr

1997:Plate 34; Fields in Reents-Budet 1994:315). On the right, an anthropomorphic individual seated on a dais wears a headdress that consists of a bundle of pens that terminates with a large water lily blossom. This headdress identifies the individual as an *ah k'u hun* (Coe and Kerr 1997:Plate 34) and as such, a scribal headmaster that supervises the other two figures engaged in artistic production. Also in his headdress is a personified perforator; this motif is identified by the three knot signs and the quetzal-like feathers emanating from a wrapped blade (Schele and Freidel 1990:415). At his feet rests a bloodletting bowl. His red body paint takes the form of “god-markings”, thereby implying the supernatural status of this individual, while the black spots on his cheek may constitute a reference to the Underworld (Fields in Reents-Budet 1994:315). Like the other two individuals, he wears the jeweled skirt common to the Maize God (Boot 2006:3) again reinforcing the elite status of Maya scribes. The *olla* below this *ah k'u hun* contains the alcoholic drink *pulque* as noted by the syllabic sign *chi* on the body of the vessel (Boot 2006:3). Coupled with the transformative depiction of the other individuals, the presence of this libation suggests artistic production may be precipitated by altered states of conscious and shamanic rituals. The 8 Ahau cartouche next to the *olla* may reference the end of a *k'atun* period; however, this interpretation is tentative without other calendric information (Boot 2006:3).

On the left side of the vertical hieroglyphic text, two supernatural scribes are engaged in the artistic production of a codex and a mask. The scribe seated on the ground wears the Spangled Turban headdress and mask/head of a vulture, identifying him as a scribe and artisan. Above his head is a curvilinear motif that may be a stylized version of Landa's second U. This motif is often associated with intoxicated states

(Stross and Kerr 1990) and may serve to identify the vulture head is a reference to this individual's transformative condition. Scribes are often shown engaged in ritual drinking bouts (Figure 2.4), and the presence of *chi* in this scene bolsters my hypothesis of scribal transformation. He holds a writing instrument while a conch-shell inkpot and jaguar skin-covered codex rest at his feet. To the left of the codex, a sacred bundle is marked with the numeral 1 and possibly a hieroglyphic inscription that refers to a "turtle stone", a metaphor for a cave (Boot 2006:4). The other anthropomorphic individual seated on a dais also wears the Spangled Turban of the elite scribe and carves an anthropomorphic mask with delicate precision. He bears the same red body markings and white face paint as the *ah k'u hun*. The small cushion behind his back contains the syllabic sign *po* possibly hinting to the word *pop* "mat," a sign for authority and elevated status (Boot 2006:5).

The vertical hieroglyphic text of Kerr No. 0717 provides compelling evidence that suggests artistic production, like in the previous Black and White style, occurred at a place named as a cave. As already discussed, the inscription begins with the Calendar Round date 7 Manik' 5 Woh and possibly served to meld history and myth. This rhetorical tool of depicting myth and history as a synonymous entity is common in Maya art (Reents-Budet 1994:236) and ultimately serves to show Maya elites are actors in the continuing play of creation stories. The third hieroglyph down records the verbal expression *upak'aw* meaning "he shapes/shaped (it)" (Boot 2006:9). Obviously this text served to reinforce the visual narrative in which an elite scribe carves an anthropomorphic mask. The next inscription names the artist carving the mask as *Wakil Yax Winik* (Boot 2006:10). In two other vessels (Kerr Nos. 7447 and 8457; Figure 5.5,

5.6) with similar visual narratives as well as nearly identical vertical texts and Calendar Round dates, this same scribe is also named after the verbal expression *upak'aw* (Boot 2006). In the Dresden and Paris Codices the nominal phrase *Wakil Yax Winik* identifies a supernatural entity associated with Venus (Boot 2006:11); therefore, this name-tagging serves to elevate this scribe to supernatural status and ensure his products are a highly valued prestige item. The final hieroglyphic text on Kerr No. 0717 ends with the phrase *uhtiy* “(it) happened (at)” however the location of the event is not provided on this vessel (Boot 2006:11). Nevertheless, one vessel (Kerr No. 8457) that names *Wakil Yax Winik* doing the same action, on the same day, does mention the location of where the verb phrase *upak'aw* occurred: Five Flower Place Cave (Boot 2006:14). Therefore, in addition to bearing names of supernatural deities, the Maya scribes depicted in Kerr Nos. 0717, 7447, and 8457 are producing ideologically charged art in a metaphoric cave where history and myth are one and time and space are a singular entity.

Looking back on Kerr No. 0717, the black background in conjunction with the *cauac* markings on the columns undoubtedly serves as a cave locative. As has already been demonstrated, scribes near the Xultun area envisioned their workshop as a cave; therefore, it is only logical that other elite scribes from a close geographic area would use this rhetoric to mark the prestigious context of their artistic production. This metaphorical cavernous stage not only served as an artistic workshop but also as an arena for shamanic rituals associated with craft production. As seen by the *chi*-marked vessel in the cave scene from Kerr No. 0717, it is likely shamanic trance fueled by intoxication precipitated artistic production in order to ensure ritual purity. Moreover, the *ah k'u hun* presiding over the artistic endeavors wears a personified perforator in his headdress while

a bloodletting bowl rests at his feet. This visual syntax implies for artistic production to be sanctified it was necessary to evoke spirits from the supernatural realm through penitential bloodletting. As Bishop Landa noted during the month of Woh—the same month referenced in all three vessels—before artists would make wooden idols used in ancestral rites they would undergo prolonged fasts as well as autosacrificial penile bloodletting (Tozzer 1941). Perhaps this scene serves as Classic period antecedent to this ethnohistoric account. The fact that artistic production was hedged about by bloodletting rituals is also implied by use-wear analysis from obsidian blades at Copán (Aoyama 2001:334). Thus, in the area around Nakbé and Xultun it is highly likely that scribes reinforced their elite claims and royal pedigree by ideologically locating artistic production within one the most sacred motifs in May art and religion, the witz mountain.

The close proximity between Nakbé and Xultun (approximately 50 kilometers; see Figure 5.7) would allow for a seamless diffusion of this ideological belief to be physically displayed through art via a similar style. Moreover, the similarity in iconological style between these two (Stone (1995) attributed the inscriptions from Naj Tunich cave to either or both of these style groups) suggests the physical manifestation of beliefs surrounding craft production was highly probable. According to James Sackett (1982:80-81), *iconological style* is a conscious artistic decision and reinforces three objectives: formal variations are purposefully invested with symbolic content reflecting self-conscious social groups; norms of craft production are socially transmitted and people involved with this transmission become symbolically identified with this style; and the amount of interaction between this style and another group ought to be directly reflected by the degree to which they share stylistic similarities. Therefore, the

purposefully arranged symbolic content of some Black and White and Codex-style vessels bolsters the supernatural claims of elite scribes by placing the action of craft of production within a cave. At this location elite scribes embody divine artistic patrons, harness their associated unobstructed knowledge, and meld history and myth in order to ensure their scribal status within the ever-growing noble class. This perceived power of the elite scribe in turn made their products a highly valued commodity not only for its “divine” master craftsmanship but also because of their shamanic ability to transcend time and space in order to contact a pantheon of gods solely under their command.

#### Scribal Pilgrimages to Caves and a Shamanic Rite of Passage

While the position of elite scribe was normally an ascribed position, the elite Maya artisan would also undergo years of schooling in order to understand the foundations of cosmology and mythology as well as mathematics and form crucial to producing exquisite works of art (Reents-Budet 1994:65). The numerous scribal titles and their frequency of depiction in Maya art suggest a hierarchal order within the scribal class. For example, the title *ah nab* is depicted rather frequently and held by many individuals thereby implying a lower status compared to other scribal titles (Schele and Miller 1986:138). Thus, ascending the ranks of or initiation into the scribal class would indubitably be marked by a highly dramatic rite of passage. The apex of this ritual is marked by the liminal period in which the participant is betwixt and between social roles and therefore is temporarily removed from society completely before his reintegration into society in a new role. For the Maya, these periods of liminality were a time of immense anxiety, a time that required the cosmological balance afforded by the intervention of supernatural entities through shamanic ritual. In current and undoubtedly

ancient Mesoamerica, the quintessential liminal phenomenon is the practice of pilgrimages to caves because their peripheral location reinforces the spatial isolation of liminality (Turner 1974:196). During this ritual drama “masked figures as gods, ancestors, or chthonic powers appear to members in grotesque, monstrous forms; chants and stories function as mnemonics for cosmologies, values, and cultural axioms” in order to reinforce the rebirth of a completed rite of passage (Turner 1974:239). Thus, for the elite Maya scribe the rite of passage would a highly theatrical cave performance that was hedged about by shamanic ritual in order ensure cosmological order and balance upon reintegration into the scribe’s newly acquired social status and bureaucratic ranking.

One unique vessel (Figure 5.8), first analyzed in Coe’s *Lords of the Underworld* (1978), plays a crucial role in reconstructing scribal rites of passage through shamanic ritual. This unprovenienced vessel (henceforth LOU 16) displays a highly complex tableau of the Underworld in well executed colors of yellow, orange, black, and white on a deep red background. Near the bottom and just above the thick red line framing the bottom of the scene, the red background slowly grades to a yellow stone-like color. Framing the top of the scene is a series of three red glyphs repeated on a yellow background. The fine lines used to project the characters, landscape, and other detail are extremely well executed. Stylistically, this vessel is attributed to the ambiguous geographical area of northern Petén or southern Campeche (Coe 1978). The overall composition of the vessel and breadth of esoteric knowledge manifested in this scene suggests the artist was a highly skilled member of the scribal class. In order to show this tableau recounts shamanic rituals unfolding on the chthonic stage, I will first recount other interpretations of LOU 16.

As first noted by Coe (1978:106) this multifaceted Underworld scene contains little room for epigraphic decipherment yet remains a “treasure trove for Maya iconographers.” The focal point of this tableau is the “young deity” with a straw hat and the world tree rising from the head of the Quadripartite Badge God. The unidentified young deity emerges through a quatrefoil cartouche and reaches for an object reminiscent of the “pot for facial painting” offered by God N (Coe 1978:106). God N, identifiable by his netted headdress, emits speech scrolls reminding Coe of the Aztec metaphor for poetry *xochicuicatl* (flower-song). The female figure outside the quatrefoil cartouche is identified as the youthful Moon Goddess (Goddess O). Her face painting is identical to that of the four God Ns from Princeton Vase 11 (LOU 11)—interestingly, this vase recounts an enema ritual that occurs at the mouth of a cave. The fish to the left of the cartouche serves as an underwater locative.

Scribal patrons and sacred geographic locations, perhaps serving the function of partitioning the four cardinal directions, frame this underwater scene. The Monkey-man Gods are identified by their “computer print-out,” conch-shell paint pot, and open codex. Based on the bar-and-dot motif on the “print-out,” Coe identifies this figure as the patron of mathematics or mathematicians (Coe 1978:106). A Moan bird rendered with dark spots, perhaps a metaphor for obsidian or pyrite mirrors, sits in front of the open codex. These figures are all sitting on top of a stylized Cauac Monster. The Cauac Monster is shown in dual form and frames the focal point of this tableau. Both of these Cauac Monsters are marked with a Kan Cross (meaning “yellow” and “sacred”), leading Coe (1978:106) to posit there are really four Cauac Monsters that partition the quadripartite terrestrial realm. The figure sitting on the other Cauac Monster is identified as the Jaguar

God of the Underworld. Ultimately, Coe conservatively suggests the action of this tableau is the primordial sea of the Underworld and the esoteric ceremony remains unexplained.

Recent interpretation of LOU 16 builds upon Coe's idea but places the action specifically in a cave (Bassie-Sweet 1991:124; Houston 2001; Stone 2005b). In light of this research, the Cauac Monsters are now identified as Witz Monsters, a personification of the sacred mountain-cave complex. These Witz Monsters are conflated with lunar motifs and maize kernels (Stone 2005b). The lunar motif is associated with caves and cenotes while maize (in this case the personified heads emitting speech scrolls) refers to fecundity; therefore this *witz* could be identified as the place of creation, or Five Flower Mountain. As Coe (1978:106) has suggested, this scene rendered three-dimensionally would make each Witz Monster one of the four directional markers. The belief that a sacred mountain-cave on the horizon partitioned the cardinal directions is a belief that has continuity from the ancient Maya to their current day relatives (Bassie-Sweet 1991, 1996). Therefore, the focal point of this tableau would be the center, or *axis mundi*, of this quincunx pattern, a belief, no doubt, substantiated by the world tree emerging from the quatrefoil portal.

According to Stone's (2005b) convincing research, the "young deity" that enters the cave through the quatrefoil is a scribal neophyte engaged in a rite of passage that culminates with a pilgrimage. She bases this conclusion on the head cloth and wide-brimmed traveler's hat of the pilgrim as well as God N handing the scribe a shell inkpot, the quintessential badge of the scribal office (Stone 2005b:138-139). On the other hand, Stephen Houston (2001:337) believes this tableau conveys four possible visual narratives:

the emergence of humanity from a cave, the direct sponsorship of this event by a creator couple, the offering of writing to men and childbirth to women, and the presence of scribal gods witnessing and recording said events. While both people present interesting options, I concur with Stone's interpretation and believe cave pilgrimages were an integral component of scribal initiation. Her closing argument (Stone 2005b:139) connecting the scribal office with rites of passage that occur on a cavernous stage is particularly poignant to my hypothesis:

“I argue that LOU 16 provides evidence that a divine right system for scribes was in place during the Classic period; that is, scribal status and legitimacy, like those of Maya kings, rested on an intimate affiliation with the supernatural.”

So, then what is the nature of this “intimate affiliation with the supernatural”?

Ultimately, I believe Stone's insight is quite accurate; however, I believe a closer look at the iconological interpretation of this tableau reveals the scribal neophyte engaged in a shamanic ritual. Undoubtedly, for many Mesoamerica cultures shamanism was *the* medium for direct supernatural contact and a necessary practice to ensure cosmological balance and order. Since shamanism is the unifying ideological factor throughout Maya society and ideology is manifested in ritual (Freidel 1992), it is of the utmost importance to consider shamanic ritual in order to present an accurate iconological interpretation.

Let us return to the focal point of LOU 16, the scribal neophyte, with this in mind.

The juxtaposition of the scribe, the quatrefoil portal, and world tree emanating from the Quadripartite Badge god marks the most salient message of this tableau: through shamanic ritual this scribe is raising the world tree and creating the world. The Quadripartite Badge, associated with bloodletting rituals and a metaphorical cosmogram, placed on top of the quatrefoil forms an *Ol* portal. The *Ol* portal, literally meaning the

“heart (as in essence) of something,” was opened through vision rites such as bloodletting rituals and was key component of the shamanic toolkit (Freidel et al. 1993:215).

Moreover, the *Ol* portal removed the thin membrane between the gods and man and allowed for divine magic, or *itz*, to enter the prosaic world. Surely this portal is opened by burning incense or blood spattered paper as seen in the smoke of the censer (here a stylized Quadripartite Badge god) forming the world tree. Thus, in this tableau the scribal neophyte (i.e., a member of the profane human realm) enters the sacred realm (i.e., the scribal office as represented by scribal patrons) when this membrane between planes of existence is temporarily lifted. Only through shamanic ritual, as dictated by a unified ideology, can an elite person truly enter the ranks of the scribal class.

As has been adequately demonstrated (Inomata 2001, 2007; Reents-Budet 1994; Stone 2005b) the amazing artistic abilities of Maya scribes ideologically equates them with creator gods. Again, through shamanic ritual, this belief is validated through iconography. Upon initiation into the scribal office, the pilgrim emerging from the *Ol* portal raises the central world tree thereby metaphorically creating time and the cosmos. The World Tree of the Center, functioning as the *axis mundi*, is a central icon of shamanism (Freidel 1992:119) and is used by this artist to convey the scribe’s power to facilitate communication between the sacred and the profane. Thus, in LOU 16 upon becoming a scribe one literally embodies a realm of inexhaustible resources that can help sustain the reciprocal relationship between god and man. On the cavernous stage via shamanic ritual, the elite Maya scribe validates his status and legitimacy by forging an intimate relationship with the Otherworld and embodying the world tree.

For the Maya partitioning the quadripartite world was the defining moment of creation that ensures the stability and order of the cosmos. In this quadripartite model, the central point represents the apex of power and embodies the essence of sacredness. As Jennifer Mathews and James Garber (2004) have shown, the Maya symbolically recreate this model through ritual at various levels (e.g., in caches, architecture, and site layout) in manner that mimics the fractal nature of mathematics. The center point, or axis mundi, was often reserved for the king (Freidel et al. 1993; Reilly 1994,1996) because he was the heart of sacredness that promoted the reciprocal blood relationship between the gods as well as the physical manifestation and creator of preciousness or *itz*. Using his breadth of mythological knowledge and ability to physically codify ideology, the scribe in this tableau paces himself at the center of this cosmogram in order to convey the idea that initiation into the scribal office was analogous to the creation of the world. By continuing to produce *itz* through finely made works of art, the elite scribe actively participates in the ongoing struggle of balancing the cosmos and satiating the needs of deities.

In doing so, the scribe imbues all of his works with a sacerdotal *chul'el* that make his product an extension of divinity. Thus, his manipulation of ideology through shamanism and art infuses his creation with immense symbolic power and strives to reinforce his claims of control of certain supernatural forces. In turn, this ideological commodity and aesthetic masterpiece affords the scribe, and presumably his lineage, great power and elite status validation in the midst of heightened political and economic turmoil. Like the king, albeit to a much less extent, the scribe depicted as the axis mundi

serves as rhetoric to equate artistic production and its associated responsibilities and knowledge to the divine act of creation.

#### A Tableau of Scribal Transformation

The interface between the natural and the supernatural is a recurring theme in artistic visualization as well as elite validation. This ideological message was conveyed in many ways; however, art typically remained the epicenter for promoting elite agendas to the public masses as well as highly competitive elites. Sometimes for the message to reach all members of society, especially the illiterate or less literate, art pieces would be made in a set in order to convey a universally understood societal belief. Ultimately, the use of tableau in Mesoamerican art served to provide culturally salient metaphors and allusions to the masses in hopes of reinforcing social classes and roles as well as validating the unquestionable power of the ruling house. Tableaux themes in Mesoamerican art recount the transformative power of the shaman-king (Reilly 1989), cosmological narratives (Reents-Budet 1998), and esoteric myths (Robicsek and Hales 1981). By constructing a story board from pieces of the tableau, some crucial component of society lost in the transgressions of time can be retrieved. Moreover, by identifying the hand of a specific artist, one can attempt to understand the individual motivation or intrinsic content of the symbolic values. One such tableau recounts an episode from the Popol Vuh in which Hun Batz and Hun Chouen transform into the ugly simian Monkey-man Gods. A reappraisal of the Monkey Gods from Codex Fragment 2 (Vessels 59-64 in *The Maya Book of the Dead*) provides a perfect opportunity to move past the merely descriptive and towards an iconological interpretation of a tableau from the Codex-style.

Before stepping out on the limb of interpretation, it is important to briefly recapitulate the descriptive accounts of the Monkey Gods depicted in the Codex-style. Nearly all of the vessels from the Monkey Gods portion of Codex Fragment 2 are classified as vases and painted in a stylistically similar manner, suggesting a common workshop or artist as well as a unified comprehension of mythology and cosmology. As defined by Robicsek and Hales (1981:3) vases in the Codex-style have a height-to-diameter ratio in excess of 1:1 and are painted with mythological subjects rendered in superior craftsmanship. In fact, stylistic analyses suggest the same painter created the images of Vessel 59 and 61-64 (Robicsek and Hales 1981:248) as well as the Nakbé Codex Scribe Vessel 1 (Hansen et al. 1991:230). In all scenes of this tableau, the scribes are depicted paired in realistic proportions with water lilies growing from their headdresses.

Vessel 59 (Figure 5.9), which has a height of 14.0 cm and a diameter of 11.5 cm, portrays two “young lords” seated on small carpets with large water lilies emanating from their bodies (Robicsek and Hales 1981:61). The two figures are depicted in a completely human state and background as well as border decoration is completely absent. The figures appear to be following lines in a codex with their hands, as if reading some esoteric knowledge. Nothing else has been published beyond this short description. Therefore, it is assumed this scene marks the initial stage of Hun Batz and Hun Chouen’s transformation into the scribal patron, the Monkey-man Gods.

Vessel 60 (Figure 5.10), which has a height of 16.7 cm and a diameter of 16.0 cm, depicts “two lords” seated under a sky band (Robicsek and Hales 1981:61-62). One scribe looks skyward in anticipation of something. Again both wear the Spangled Turban

and sprout water lilies; however, one scribe sports a Dear's Ear infixed with double-dot *akbal* symbols. The presence of the Dear's Ear marks the commencement of this transformation sequence (Robicsek and Hales 1981:125). Little *ahau* faces emerge from the codex-like element before the scribe. Perhaps these faces emerge as a result of the scribes' recitation of ancient prayers and chants. Stylistic analysis by Robicsek and Hales (1981:248) determined this vessel was painted by a different artist compared to the other vessels in the transformation sequence. This suggests many scribes painted these transformation tableaux in order to place themselves within the ideological charter of myths.

Vessel 61 (Figure 5.11), which has a height of 16.7 cm and a diameter of 16.0 cm, shows two lords, perhaps the very same as Vessel 60, seated under a sky band (Robicsek and Hales 1981:62). As the transformation progresses, the scribes supplant their Dear's Ears with exaggerated Number Tree motifs infixed with *akbal* symbols. Once interpreted as "large wing-like racks...with straps of jaguar skin" (Robicsek and Hales 1981:62), it is now clear this motif emerging from the scribe's armpit is the Number Tree. The Number Trees on both scribes take the form of wings and terminate with three water lily blossoms. Also at this stage the scribes use fine-tipped styluses to write in the open jaguar skin codices. The head of a bearded dragon or centipede emerges from the pages of the codices as if the strokes of the writing instruments animate the pages. Interestingly, this same bearded dragon/centipede protrudes from the headdress of the scribes. According to earlier assessments (Coe and Kerr 1997:107; Robicsek and Hales 1981:62), these motifs were thought to be a variant of the Jester God diadems; therefore in this stage the scribes are iconographically depicted as the Young Maize God perhaps

metaphorically speaking with ancestors and ancient knowledge that reside in these sacred almanacs.

Vessel 62 (Figure 5.12), which has a height of 13.5 cm and a diameter of 13.0 cm, shows the same figures in much the same attire and position as the previous vessel, however they now wear Dear Ear's and have body markings infixed with double-dot akbal elements (Robicsek and Hales 1981:62). These akbal elements on the appendages of the scribes are also known in the iconographic lexicon as "god-markings"; therefore in this scene the scribes have assumed the regalia and power of the supernatural. Moreover, little ahau faces attached to water lily blossoms emerge from the top of the scribes' heads. At this stage in the transformation sequence the scribes' faces are still fully human, but now the motifs emanating from the Number Tree and headdress have become much more intense as if to indicate the apogee of this transformative and shamanic experience. Indeed, for this vessel the "composition becomes restless; large feathers swirl, monster heads...appear, and bones seemingly float in the air" (Robicsek and Hales 1981:125). This juxtaposition of human and supernatural features implies at this stage the scribe is both mortal and divine. He is an all encompassing liminal state on the threshold of become fully deified, yet he is not fully human or fully god.

Almost identical to Vessel 62 is Nakbé Codex Scribe Vessel 1 (Figure 4.1) suggesting this Nabké vessel represents the same stage of this transformation sequence. This incomplete cylinder vase measures 21.8 cm high and has a diameter of 15.4 cm and was thought to be made by the same artist that produced the images of Vessel 62 (Hansen et al. 1991:227). As seen in Vessel 62, the scribe is portrayed with the akbal god-markings, exaggerated Number Tree, Dear's Ears, and a variant of the Jester God

diadem. However, the presence of the PSS is a major difference from all the other scribal themed vessels from the *Maya Book of the Dead*. In this text the scribe names the vessel's function (cup for cacao) and identified himself as an itz'at, *pi-tzi* "ball player", and member of a holy or sacred lineage (Hansen et al. 1991:230-232). Therefore, it seems this artist is using various rhetorical approaches in order to appeal to various classes of Maya society. In one scene (Figure 5.12) the artist relies purely on tableau to convey his ideological message; however, the presence of the PSS and its propaganda suggests Nakbé Codex Scribe Vessel 1 was intended for a more educated and exalted member of Maya society.

Vessel 63 (Figure 5.13), which has a height of 11.0 cm and a diameter of 12.2 cm, depicts two anthropomorphic monkeys wearing regalia similar to the two characters in the previous four vessels (Robicsek and Hales 1981:62). As noted by Coe (1977:337), these characters are undoubtedly the Monkey-man Gods from the Popol Vuh. They both wear Spangled Turbans with water lilies growing out of the back of the headdress. The first scribe wears a version of the Jester God diadem attached to his headdress (Robicsek and Hales 1981:62). As a side note, I do not believe the Jester God diadem serves as a metaphor for kingship; rather I believe it marks this character as an *ah k'u hun*. Recent epigraphic decipherment from Codex-style bowls posits the reading *a[j]k'uh[ul]hu'un* is "he of the god-like headband" (Boot 2003). Surely this "god-like headband" is a metaphor for the Jester God crown and marks this Monkey-man God as a scribal librarian or headmaster of sorts. Now in their fully supernatural state, the scribes again point to key passages in the open jaguar skin codices as if their recitation of esoteric knowledge has made them gods.

Vessel 64 (Figure 2.19), which has a height of 13.5 cm and a diameter of 13.0 cm, portrays the two monkeys with their books open in a scene framed by *caban* “earth” markings (Robicsek and Hales 1981:62). These *caban* markings serve as locative indicating the actions is occurring under the earth and in the Underworld. As in Vessels 59, 60, and 63, the scribes wear the Spangled Turban of God N. According to Robicsek and Hales (1981:62), profile images of the Jester God and Ancestral Tree Deity emerge from the pages of the sacred books. The placement of the hand over the open codex implies a movement as if the Monkey-man Gods are coaxing these personified heads from the pages. In this final stage of the mythological transformation of Hun Batz and Hun Chouen, the scribes are fully supernatural and inhabitant the cryptic and powerful realm of the Otherworld.

Overall, this tableau can be seen as a scribal transformation from the profane world of humanity to the mythological realm of the supernatural. I believe, as shown by Underworld locatives (e.g., water lilies, bones, and *caban* markings), that this transformation occurs in a metaphorical, primordial time that can be accessed only through the power of a metaphorical or physical cave. As noted by Stone (1995:15) upon entering a cave or traveling through the peripheral forest, one passes into the realm of the Otherworld where space and time converge and myth and reality become an indistinguishable singularity. According to myth, in this primordial time sea, sky, and earth have not been separated and man can communicate with animals. Ultimately the scribe is again validating his claim to have supernatural abilities analogous to those of creator deities (e.g., the Paddler Gods and Itzamná) as well as the ability to evoke specific categories of scribal deities (e.g., Monkey-man Gods) through shamanic rituals. Since

some scribes envisioned their workshop as a cave, this action may refer to artistic production in a ritual context.

In the first stage of transformation (Figure 5.9) the scribes are depicted in a completely human form. The presence of water lilies suggests the action is occurring underwater or in the primordial sea that is often associated with the Underworld (Schele and Miller 1986) and watery springs originating in caves (Bassie-Sweet 1991, 1996; Stone 1995). Compared to the other “pages” in this mythic narrative, the feeling conveyed is very tranquil.

As the transformation progresses (Figure 5.10) sky bands appear over the scribes who now have the Dear’s Ears growing from their heads. The presence of the sky band raises a pertinent question: if the action is occurring in the watery beneath world why is there a sky band? This juxtaposition of Underworld and sky may represent primordial time before earth and sky were separated (Kent Reilly, personal communication 2009). Bassie-Sweet (1996:88) suggests the presence of a sky band in an otherwise Underworld setting represents the cave passageway to the dark zone, a metaphor for the trek of the Underworld sun and other celestial bodies. This passageway is thought to be carved by serpents (Bassie-Sweet 1996:84); therefore this sky band may also be a metaphor for the body of a serpent-centipede that the scribal class is shown evoking. Moreover, epigraphic data suggests the concept of “sky-caves” (*chan ch’een*) were an extremely important component of elite ideology. These sky-caves were named for the founding lineage thought to have emerged from this sacred place (Vogt and Stuart 2005:162) and were the heart of elite validation. Therefore, I believe the sky-band serves as a locative and reinforces that the action is occurring in a metaphorical cave. It seems as the scribes

enter the cave passageway and embark on this arduous journey one of the scribes looks nervously towards the sky. Therefore, this scene marks the initial descent into the dark zone and by extension, the transition to the realm of the ancestors and access to arcane knowledge.

The third “page” of this story (Figure 5.11) illustrates the scribes in a liminal state; as they open the sacred codex bundle the scribes are both man and deity and sprout wing-like appendages. As the transformation continues the scribes are still passing through the cave passage towards the dark zone; however, they now are portrayed with open codices and Number Tree motifs that take the form of wings. I believe these exaggerated Number Tree motifs are a metaphor for flight. In Mesoamerican art, wings and the implication of flying is a common metaphor for shamanic travel between planes of existence (Freidel et al. 1993; Furst 1995; Reilly 1994). As Justin Kerr (n.d.) asserts about elite Maya scribes, “The ability to use words and to be able to keep records, create documents, to sum, is almost magical and would raise such a person to shamanic levels.” Upon opening and writing in these sacred almanacs ancient deities emerge from the pages and the scribes become the Young Maize God and an ah k’u hun.

At this point the ideological power of sacred bundles, in this case the codex, in Mesoamerican ritual requires attention. The jaguar skin codices were undoubtedly a source of divine power and esoteric knowledge because they kept and validated lineages, tracked the movement of celestial bodies used in divination (e.g., Paris Codex), and dictated movements of sacred rituals during times of liminality like the *Wayeb* (e.g., Dresden and Grolier Codices). The very act of opening a bundle like a codex “appears to have been metaphorically equivalent to opening a portal between cosmic realms”

(Guernsey and Reilly 2006:v). Ritual specialists with the esoteric prerequisite to open these bundles also “demonstrated access to cosmological structures and control of the forces holding the cosmos in balance, included that of time” (Guernsey and Reilly 2006:v). Bundles act as a portable *axis mundi*, a beacon of liminality both in and out of this realm that allows the supplicants of earth to communicate with the gods of another primordial dimension. Thus, I believe the opening of the codex in this scene, which occurs on a chthonic stage, metaphorically acts as a shamanic catalyst. As a result, the scribes initiate the evocation of their supernatural co-essences through their vast knowledge of esoteric ritual in order to show their ability to hold the cosmos in balance during a time of political, environmental, and sociopolitical tumult.

With the sacred codex open, the scribes have fully entered the Otherworld (Figure 5.12). A frantic mixture of bones and water lilies comprise the background and the overall design conveys a feeling of chaos (Robicsek and Hales 1981:125). With the sky-band gone, I believe the scribes have entered the dark zone of the cave, a place thought to be Xibalba in Maya ideology (Bassie-Sweet 1991; Macleod and Puleston 1978). The conflation of water, bones, and death is common in cave iconography (Stone 2005b) because of the multivocality of the cave as a symbol. As indicated by the *akbal* god markings on their appendages, the scribes have entered the realm of the supernatural and primordial time.

In the last two scenes (Figure 5.13, 2.19) the scribes have completely transformed into their co-essences, the Monkey-man Gods. First the Monkey-man Gods follow ancient texts with their fingers while speech-scroll motifs near their noses and mouth imply some recitation. Apparently, this recitation animates the pages because in the final

scene motifs associated with ancestors (e.g. Ancestral Tree Deity) and esoteric knowledge are revealed to the supernatural scribe. By integrating themselves into primordial time and the creation myth, the scribes are ideologically exerting their power to evoke certain categories of deities for personal means and manifesting their breadth of knowledge. Moreover, by entering mythological time the scribes enter a realm of unobstructed intelligence, a time before the gods were jealous of their perfect creation of man. The creation of man from the Popol Vuh (Tedlock 1996:147) reads as follows, “Perfectly they saw, perfectly they knew everything under the sky, whenever they looked. The moment they turned around and looked around in the sky, on the earth, everything was seen without any obstruction.” But the gods became nervous humanity would rise to defeat them (Tedlock 1996:148), “Now we’ll take them apart just a little...Their deeds would become equal to ours, just because their knowledge reaches so far. They see everything.” As self-described sages (itz’at), the ability to survive the arduous trek through planes of existence and enter primordial eras in which man was ideologically equivalent to gods undoubtedly conveyed the supernatural abilities of the scribe and their unprecedented intellect to Maya society.

In Maya art myth and history are often synonymous entities (Reents-Budet 1994:236); therefore it is highly likely that this tableau functioned to recount some shamanic travels, perhaps recounting the ritual process of artistic production on the chthonic stage. As propagandistic art, this tableau also acts to reify the scribe’s elite status and divine claims in the wake of heightened elite competition seen in the Late Classic period. While this transformation sequence undoubtedly recounts episodes of the creation myth, I also believe this tableau served as a visualized metaphor for the elite

scribe's shamanic ability to contact epochs of primordial time in order to conjure and become his co-essence the Monkey-man Gods. The presence of co-essences in Maya art reinforce the idea that part of the elite power was directly manifested in the ability to control the supernatural portion of oneself through shamanism (Freidel et al. 1993). As noted by epigraphers David Stuart and Stephen Houston (1989:13) the decipherment of the *way* glyph and its influence on Maya ideology suggests "many of the supernatural figures, once described as 'gods,' 'underworld denizens,' or 'deities,' are instead co-essences of supernaturals or humans". The Monkey-man God's image also serves as logographic substitute for *itz'at* (see Figure 2.10). In light of this evidence, I believe in this tableau rendered in the Codex-style the Monkey-man God is the scribe taking the form of his co-essence.

The presence and absence of the PSS on these vessels further bolsters the idea that this tableau and its associated ideology was understood universally; however, nuances in style (i.e., the presence/absence of the PSS) suggests various messages surrounding scribal validation were required in order for ideology to be a valued commodity across demographic boundaries. One function of style, more specifically emblematic style, in material culture serves to transmit a message about conscious group affiliation in order to mark and maintain the boundaries of a group (Wiessner 1983). For the elite Maya scribe, this message was loud and clear: I have supernatural abilities to create breath-taking works of art and I am learned in the ways of ancient wisdom. Thus, this transformation sequence as rendered in the Codex-style would validate their ideological association with creator deities, reinforce their claims of preternatural intelligence, and strength their ties to "sacred" ancestral bloodlines to all members of Maya society in the northern Petén and southern Campeche.

### Concluding Remarks

In the midst of shifting political alliances and economic instability, Maya kings and other high-ranking elites commissioned exquisite works of art in order to demonstrate their power and ability to fulfill an elite agenda. In doing so, the elite Maya scribes that carried out these sublime works of ideologically loaded art embodied a social role of supernatural status. Finely-made pictorial pottery became the major medium for scribes to validate their supernatural status and noble pedigree because these works of art were displayed to various elite and non-elite persons during elaborate feasts and funerary rituals (Reents-Budet 1998). These elite scribes depicted themselves as supernatural deities via shamanic trance in order to place themselves in a mythological context and reinforce their presence during the act of creation. By adopting the cave and its Underworld motifs as a stage for craft production and rites of passage, the Maya scribes align themselves with a dominant symbol that acts as a cosmic portal and locus of unbridled power.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

Art of the Late Classic Maya contained complex visual and textual narratives that conveyed ideological beliefs of the ruling class to other elites (and to some extent non-elites) ostensibly in order to legitimize their elevated sociopolitical, economic, and cultural status. As such, ideologies can be viewed as a system of discursive knowledge, ethos, and values which bolster societal norms through traditional and cosmological tenets (see Demarest 1992; Pauketat and Emerson 1991:920; Rappaport 1979:117). For the Classic period Maya, shamanism was the central facet of ideology; therefore, royal ritual of kings, as well as secondary nobles, inherently acted to ensure the harmonious balance between the natural and supernatural realms of the Maya world (Freidel 1992:116-117). Since Maya scribes visualized and manifested elite ideology in their artistic products, their position to exert their individual agendas through art is unquestionable. Based on iconographic and epigraphic analyses from Late Classic pictorial ceramics, I believe the scribe intentionally depicts himself with shamanic abilities through production of ideologically loaded art on the chthonic stage.

In the preceding chapters, I have thoroughly demonstrated that artistic evidence, more specifically pictorial ceramics, places elite Maya scribes on a chthonic stage undergoing shamanic rituals in order to validate supernatural claims and noble status during the tumultuous era of the Late Classic period. By consistently incorporating

themselves into cave imagery, elite Maya scribes are showing their ability to manipulate time by placing themselves in the act of creating the cosmos as a metaphor for their ability to produce exquisite works of art. Furthermore, the repeated use of cave imagery shows these individuals were actively choosing an Underworld theme in order to feature shamanic ideology and ritual activity as forms of political validation and economic viability. Thus, the scribe's encyclopedic knowledge of mathematics, cosmology, linguistics, and esoteric ritual culminated in the production of Late Classic pictorial ceramics that functioned as ideological billboard promoting the divine nature of the scribe and his access to certain Underworld deities.

As I have stated earlier, the elite Maya scribe was a conscious actor in the interface of scribal/shamanic iconography and chthonic themes. The horizontal saturation of the ever-growing noble class inherently produced an environment in which elites would vie for power and status with other local elites; thus, to overcome this sociopolitical stress, elite members would have to strategically act to ensure their elevated quality of life. The dual-processual theory constructed by Blanton et al. (1996) assumes political actors strategically and intentionally advance personal motives within the overarching structure of daily existence through the manipulation of ideology and the exertion of power for economic and sociopolitical gains. Moreover, the most influential political actors typically occupy positions of power or wealth and "...may, variously, reproduce society and culture, reject it, or modify it as a way of achieving desired outcomes" (Blanton et al. 1996:2). The sagacious Maya scribe surely occupied an exalted position in Maya society; he codified dynastic histories, recorded the mechanisms of the cosmos, and tallied economic transactions in addition to acting as a ceremonial

headmaster. By incorporating pictorial ceramics with “additives of prestige” such as technical sophistication, distinctive painting styles, and the naming of patron and/or artist, the elite Maya scribe acted to achieve the desired outcomes of constructing a supernatural identity and by extension, imbuing his artistic product with a divine essence (Reents-Budet 1998). To achieve this agenda, the Maya scribe incorporated himself into a quintessential dominant symbol of Maya religion and cosmology that served as a portal to the Otherworld: the cave.

As I have shown from several pictorial ceramics (Figures 5.1-5.6), elite Maya scribes in the area around Nakbé and Xultun iconographically and epigraphically represented their workshop as a metaphorical cave. Since the cave was a locus of creation, the residence of powerful ancestors and deities, and a source of infinite wealth, this motif served as the perfect stage to ensure the act of artistic production was integrated with the boundless powers of the Otherworld. Moreover, the presence of iconographic motifs such as the personified perforator, bloodletting bowls, *pulque*, and scribal actors in transformative states suggests craft production was encompassed by shamanic rituals that amalgamated the prosaic world with the sacerdotal essence of divine magic, or *itz*. This shamanic act functions to ensure cosmic continuity and order, no doubt a salient topic during the unstable sociopolitical landscape of the time. Finally, the close proximity of Nakbé and Xultun and the similar styles of their pictorial ceramics imply the cave as a stage for scribal ritual was a cognitive construct that was shared by both of these areas and function to demarcate social boundaries and elite status of the scribal class.

Additionally, the cave also served as a stage for scribal rites of passage. Based on work from Andrea Stone (1995, 2005b) it becomes evident that Maya scribes embarked on cave pilgrimages to bolster their claims of divine status and ensure their prestigious social and political rank. One pictorial ceramic vessel (Figure 5.8) depicts a complex tableau in which a neophyte is initiated into the scribal office by entering the Underworld through a quatrefoil *Ol* portal. As I have demonstrated, the scribe's juxtaposition with the world tree emanating from the censer smoke of the *Ol* portal ideologically equates the initiation into the scribal office with the act of creation. The scribe's ability to conjure the world tree and open a cosmic portal undoubtedly highlights his shamanic ability as a necessary precursor for entrance into his new elevated social position and bureaucratic office. By continuing to channel *itz* through finely made works of art via supernatural patrons, the elite scribe actively participates in the ongoing struggle of balancing the cosmos and satiating the needs of deities.

Finally, scribes painting the Codex-style pictorial ceramics used tableaux to exert their divine status and shamanic ability to a wide range of Maya society. In one tableau elite scribes depict themselves transforming into their supernatural co-essences (the Monkey-man Gods) framed by the stage of the primordial waters of the Underworld. As the scribes slowly transform from humans to supernaturals, the iconography framing the scene recounts the ascent into the Underworld and primordial time via a cave passageway. Interestingly, within this tableau the hand of individual artists has been identified (Hansen et al. 1991; Robicsek and Hales 1981). One artist presents this visual narrative both with and without the PSS suggesting this theme of scribal transformation would be understood by various demographics of Maya society in the northwest Petén

and southeast Campeche. By integrating themselves into mythology and traveling back in time to epochs before the creation of man, the elite scribes that painted these Codex-style tableaux are again using visual rhetoric to validate their preternatural essence, divine artistic capabilities, and sociopolitical position.

Ultimately, I am proposing that the elite Maya scribe adopted the multivocal symbol of the cave as his icon of elite and supernatural validation during a time of ubiquitous political conflict and social turbulence. The elite scribe portrays himself acting in various dramatic rituals (e.g., craft production, rites of passage, or shamanic transformation) in order to validate his lofty supernatural claims and reify his product's sociopolitical and economic value. Oft times these rituals highlight his supernatural power by portraying his shamanic ability to conjure or transform into a certain category of deities under his control. This artistic propaganda is very similar to the methods used by the king to control his subjects. Since shamanisms was a unifying ethos and practice of the Classic period Maya (Freidel 1992; Freidel et al. 1993) and the institution of kingship was greatly undermined by the sociopolitical environment of the Late Classic period, the elite scribe would have a perfect window to exert his agency to advance personal motives through the portable "billboards" of finely-made pictorial ceramics.

Since the majority of the pictorial ceramics of the Late Classic period were made for Maya elites (Reents-Budet 1994:32), the ideological messages on these vessels would be intended for an elite audience. The Late Classic period was a time of social, political, and economic competition as a result of an ever-growing elite class. Coupled with increased population and environmental degradation, the political structure of the Late Classic period was constantly on the brink of collapse. This instability is surely

precipitated by the increased need of elaborate feasting reciprocity seen during this phase to strengthen political alliances and validate lineage continuity. Hieroglyphic, iconographic, and archaeological data state politically important events of public and private feasting and gift-giving rituals were heightened during this period (Bishop 1994; LeCount 1999, 2001; Sabloff 1986; Stuart 1993). Since some of the vessels exhibit hieroglyphic inscriptions that define their function as a serving vessel for alcoholic beverages, this new iconological style was a technological innovation spurred by the need to promote elite power at ritual feasts or gifting ceremonies. Therefore, these finely painted ceramic vessels functioned as political currency and ideological billboards through ritual feasting or gifting in which each distinct style helped delineate cultural groups and assert their respective social status and prestige. As the numbers of elites grow, the amount of raw resources and ideological propaganda inherently mirrors this compound growth because without the public display of amassed material culture, the elites lose their source of political legitimization.

This thesis supplements the corpus of Maya iconographic research in several ways. First, by focusing on Maya scribes and their personal motivation behind their artistic license, Mayanist can better understand the power of secondary elites within the hierarchal scheme of royalty. Undoubtedly, the king depended on his nobles' bureaucratic tasks of producing and distributing prestige goods as well as their diplomatic responsibilities in forging political alliances. As a master of ceremonies and producer of exquisite, prestigious art pieces, the Maya scribe embodied a crucial position in the kingly machine of Maya politics. As the "Dean" of modern Maya archaeology Gordon Willey (2004:16) once said, "A king, to be properly appreciated, must be viewed in a

context that also includes his subjects”. Additionally, this thesis also introduces ideological tenets surrounding craft production during the Late Classic period. The Maya artist literally viewed his workshop as portal to the realm of the supernatural, a place that could produce objects that would channel cosmic energy and order to the political landscape in the face of cultural and political deterioration. Again, this notion suggests secondary elites played a central role in preserving the ideological charter that validated kingly rule through supernatural acts. Finally, this thesis demonstrates that shamanic abilities were used by secondary elites in order to contact a pantheon of deities solely under their subjugation. As Freidel (1992:117) posited nearly twenty years ago, literate secondary elite also participated in shamanic rituals in order to integrate the sacred with the profane. As I have shown, this is surely true for the Maya scribe. In order to bless his artistic product and ensure his own ritual purity, the Maya scribe contacted Otherworld deities to intercede on his behalf and animate his creation with a holy life force. Hopefully, this thesis will serve as a sounding board for other iconographers to further understand the multifarious relationship between craft production, ideology, and the sociopolitical landscape of the Late Classic period in the Maya lowlands.

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APPENDIX



Figure 2.1 Pauhaatun (God N) inculcates scribal neophytes in mathematics. K1196 from Mayavase.com.



Figure 2.2 Maya scribes with blood-soaked loincloths. Maya scribes sit with shell inkpots on top of a codex after undergoing penitential bloodletting, as seen by blood-soaked loincloths. K5352 from Mayavase.com.

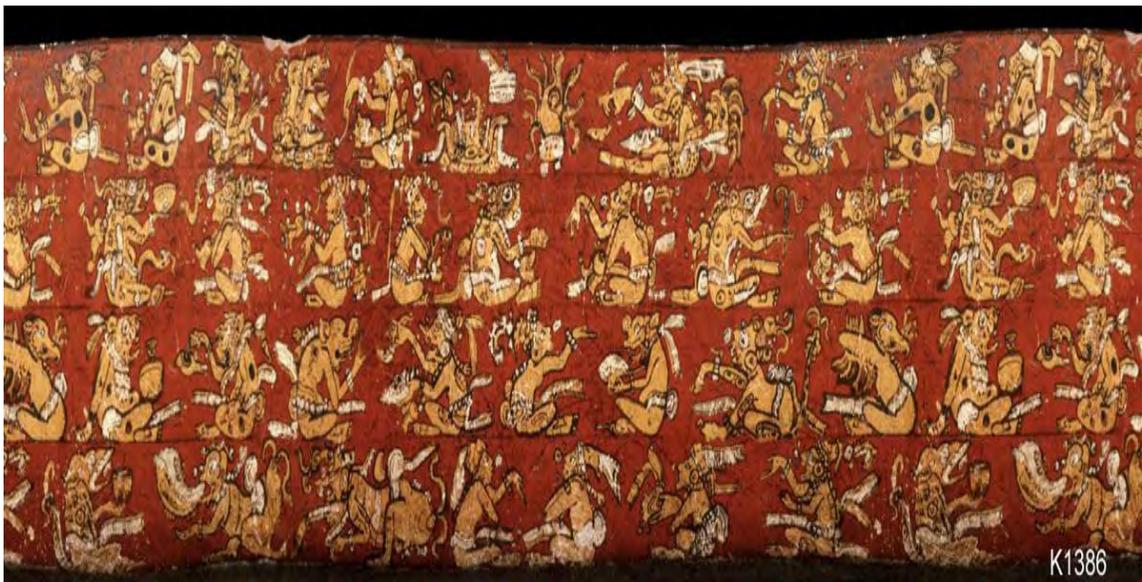


Figure 2.3 Vase of the 31 Gods. This vase, dubbed the Vase of the 31 Gods, depicts various coupled deities, some of which are scribes, engaged in ritual enemas and other rites of intoxication. K1386 from Mayavase.com.

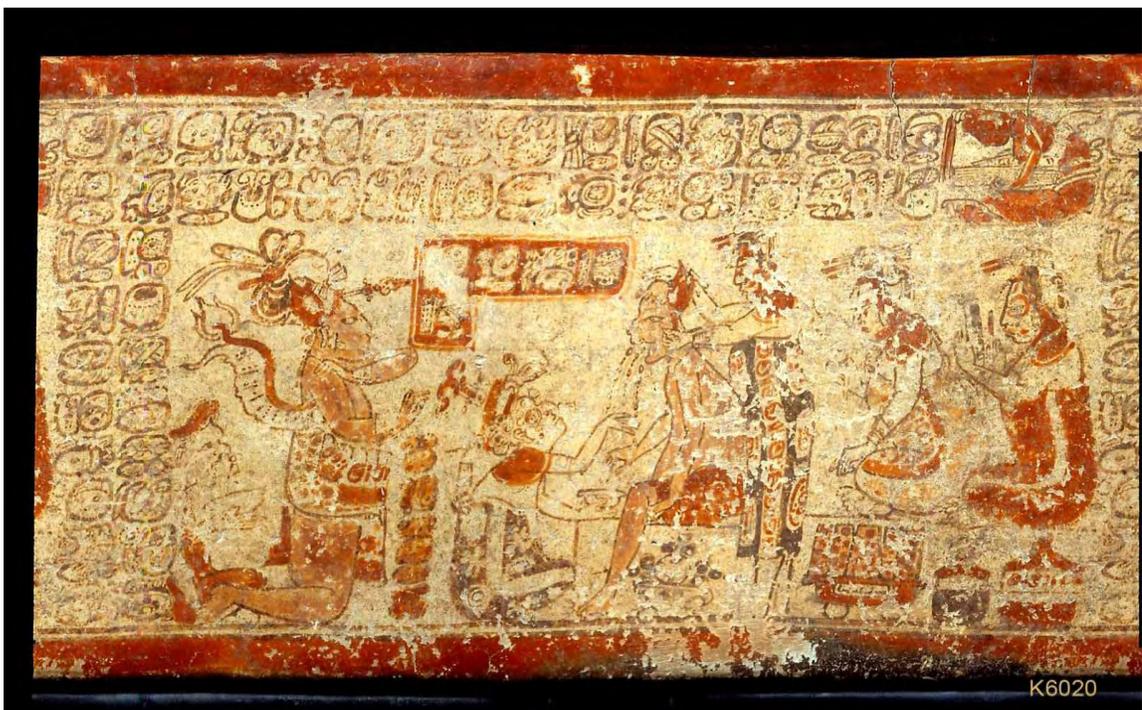
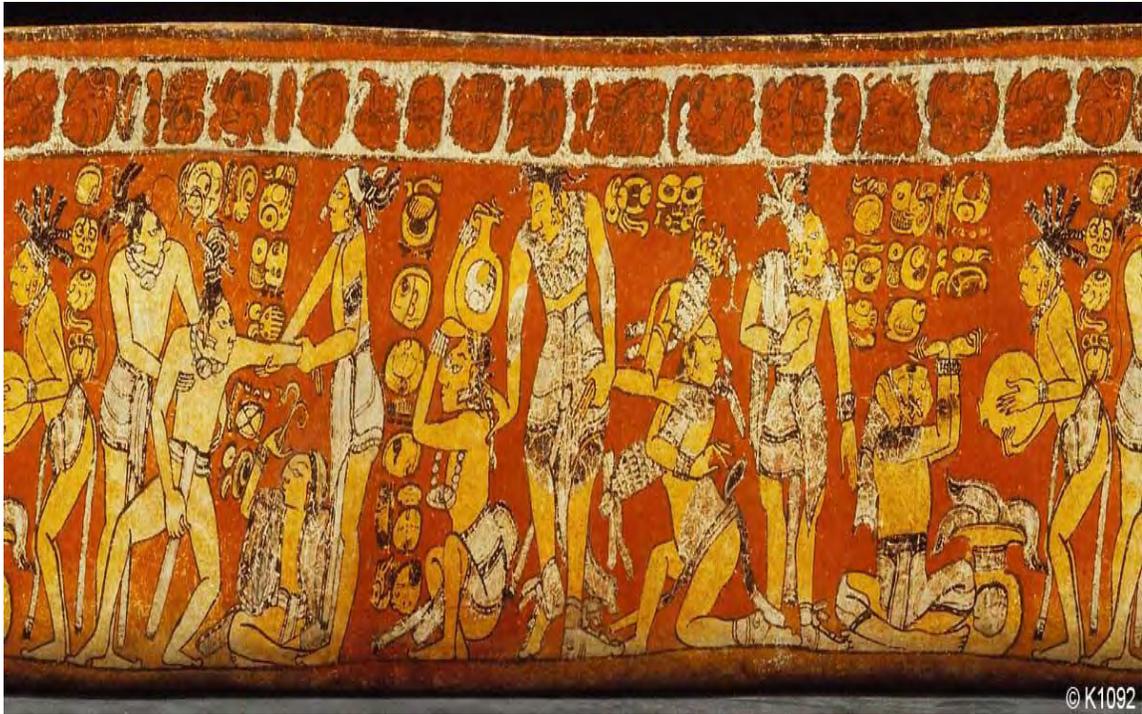


Figure 2.4 Scribes engaged in ritual drinking. (a) One scribe in an acrobatic position has a Spangled Turban around his neck, perhaps functioning as a bib during ritual vomiting, while another scribe holds a vessel on his head with a glyph reading *chi*, a libation of fermented agave. K1092 from Mayavase.com.; (b) A scribe, marked by the Deer's Ear motif, vomits while maidens from the Underworld assist him. K6020 from Mayavase.com.



Figure 2.5 The uniform of the *ah h'u kun*. (a) Scribe with wrapped headdress, writing instrument, and wrapped sarong (Figure 56 from Coe and Kerr 1997); (b) Scribe and dwarf with "stick bundle" attached to forehead with large knot. Figure 47 from Coe and Kerr 1997.



Figure 2.6 Uniform of the supernatural scribe. (a) wearing Spangled Turban and Deer's Ears infixed with T504 "Akbal" sign (Figure 72 from Coe and Kerr 1997); (b) scribe writing in a jaguar skin covered codex. The Number Tree emanates from below his left arm, and he wears Deer's Ears infixed with the T617 "Nen" sign. Figure 78 from Coe and Kerr 1997.



Figure 2.7 Scribes with jaguar-skin bundles and Spangled Turban headdress. The scribe on the left wears the Spangled Turban headdress and holds a mask. K1185 from Mayavase.com.

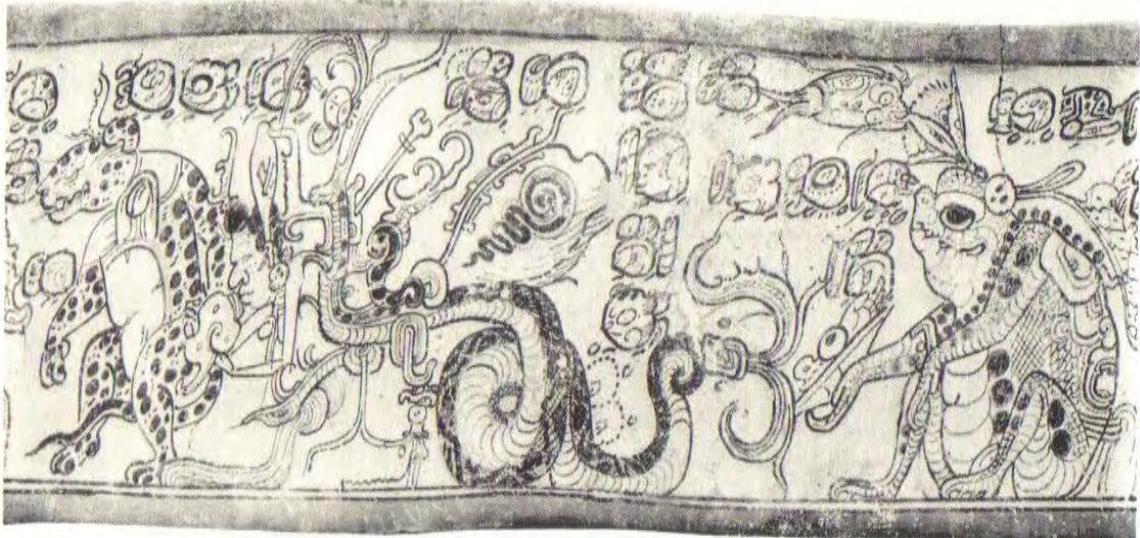


Figure 2.8 Vision serpents with Deer's Ears. Both are infixed with Landa's second U as well as antlers: (a) A man wearing Deer's Ears blows a conch trumpet and emerges from a vision serpent. Animal co-essences, or *ways*, are also in the scene (Vessel 33 from Robicsek and Hales 1981); (b) Similar to the previous figure although done with less craftsmanship (Vessel 37 from Robicsek and Hales 1981).

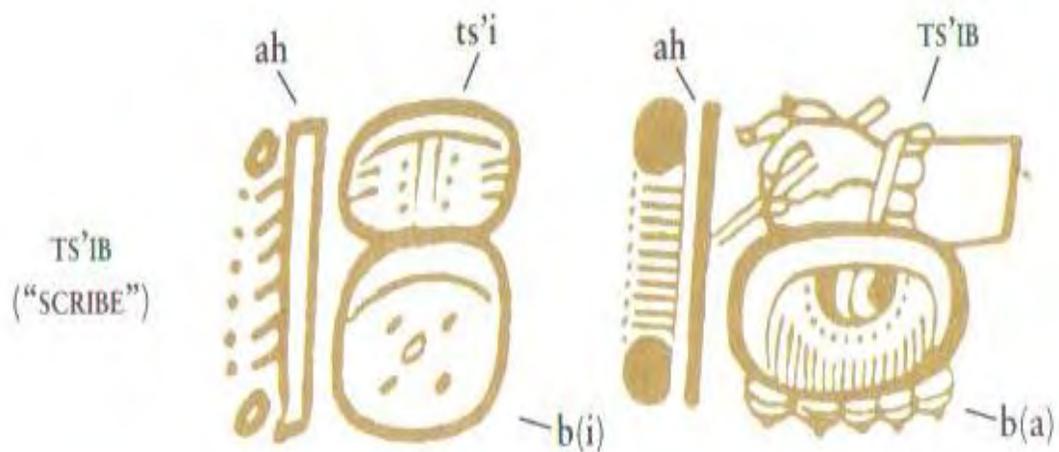


Figure 2.9 Syllabic and logosyllabic writing of *tz'ib*. From Figure 45 in Coe and Kerr 1997.

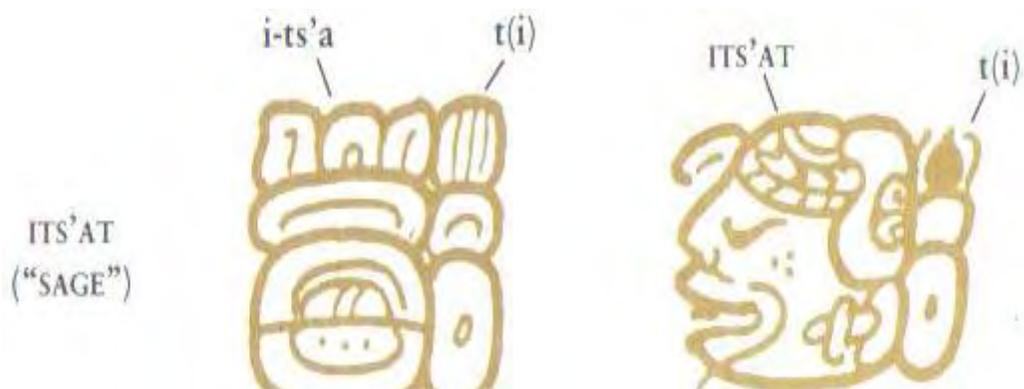


Figure 2.10 Syllabic and logosyllabic writing of *itz'at*. From Figure 45 in Coe and Kerr 1997.

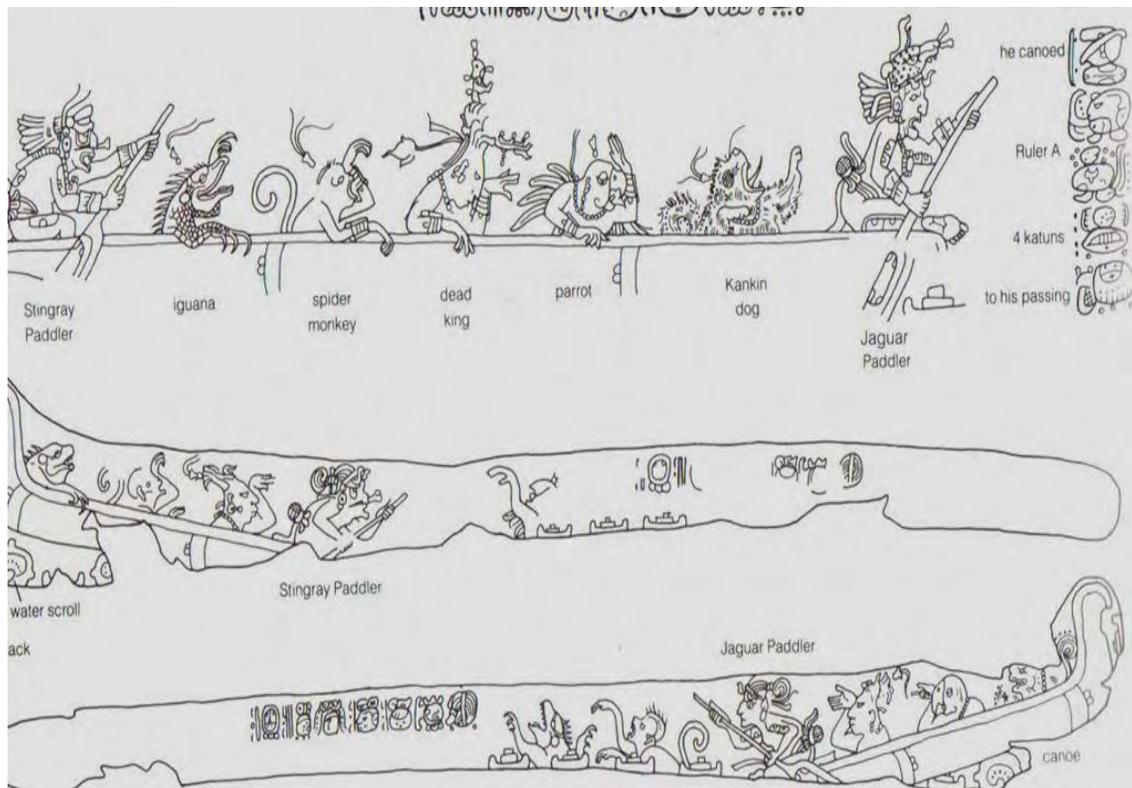


Figure 2.11 A tableau of carved bones from Burial 116 at Tikal. These carved bones show the Paddler Gods ferrying the soul of King Hasaw Ch'an K'auil through the waters of the Underworld in a canoe. (Figure VII.1 from Schele and Miller 1986).

**'A K'UHUUN**

"he of books" or  
"courtier" or  
"one who keeps,  
guards or  
venerates"



'a K'UH-na  
"he of books"



'a K'UH hu-na  
"he of books"



IXIL K'UH-hu-na  
"Lady of books"

Figure 2.12 The scribal title *ah k'u hun*. Figure from Maya Hieroglyphics Study Guide from famsi.org.

**A NAAB**

"he of  
the lakes"



a-na-bi



ja-na-bi



ja-na-bi

Figure 2.13 The scribal title *ah nab*. Figure from Maya Hieroglyphics Study Guide from famsi.org.

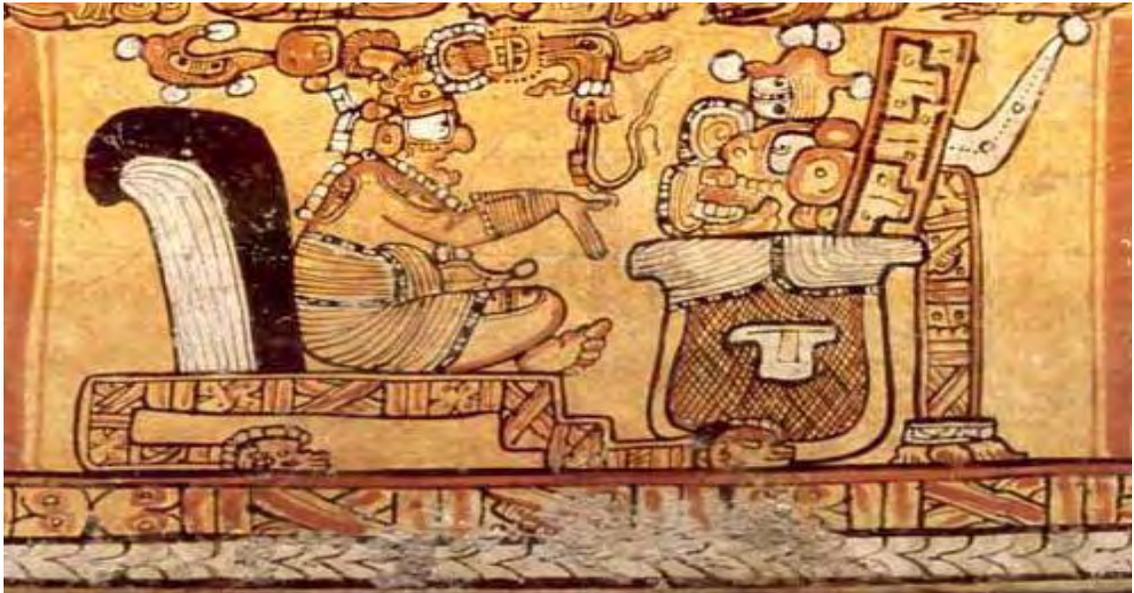


Figure 2.14 Images of *Itzamná* (God D): (a) Seated on a celestial throne (K1183 from Mayavase.com); (b) conjuring a world tree (K1607 from Mayavase.com); (c) seated on a jaguar cushion (K7727 from Mayavase.com).



Figure 2.15 *Itzamná* paints before a sacred temple in Madrid Codex . On page 23 of the Madrid Codex, *Itzamná* paints before a sacred temple, which is viewed ideological as a *witz* complex (Figure 8 from Sheseña 2008)

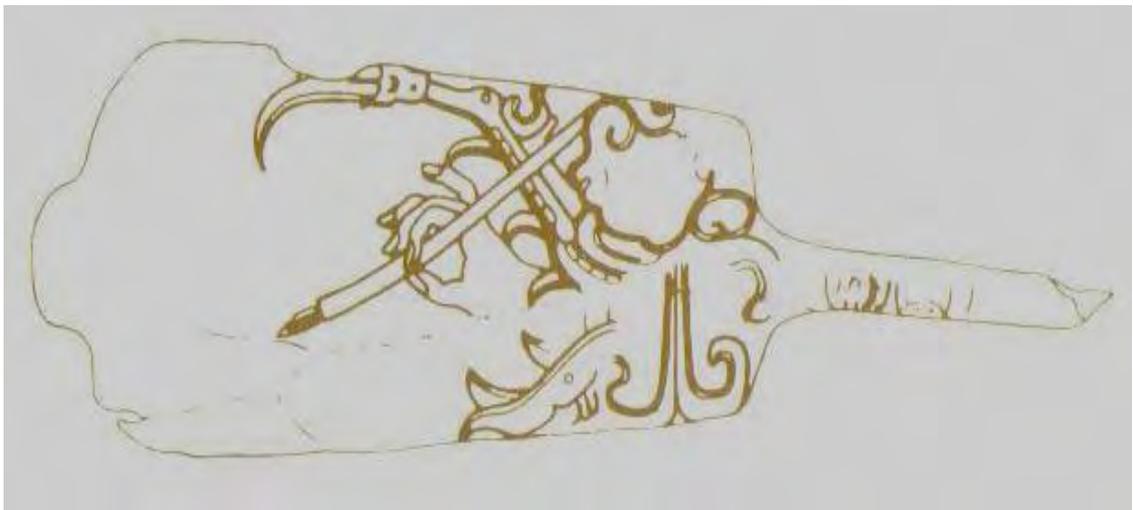


Figure 2.16 Hand holding a brush emerges from the maw of a serpent/centipede. This centipede maw is viewed as a cave and the avatar of *Itzamná* (From Figure 65 in Coe and Kerr 1997).



Figure 2.17 Mural from Bonampak. In this mural from Bonampak a ruler in jaguar skins looks over his captives; in the upper register *Itzamná* paints constellations into existence.



Figure 2.18 Pauhahtun (God N). (a) Wearing a netted headdress and emerging from shell (K114 from Mayavase.com); (b) Wearing shell pectoral and acting as a medium for a vision serpent (K1382 from Mayavase.com).



Figure 2.19 Vessel 64 from *The Maya Book of the Dead*. In this scene from a Codex-style vase the Monkey-man Gods, Hun Batz and Hun Chouen, furiously write in codices while water lilies grow from their netted headdresses (K760 from Mayavase.com).

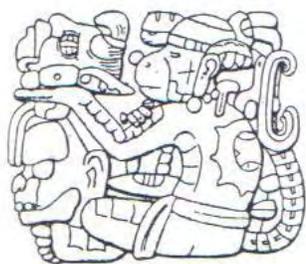


Fig. 14. Full figure variant for Kin on Lintel 48, Yaxchilan. After Thompson 1950, Fig. 29, 10.



Fig. 15. O Kins, full figure variant on Stela D, Copan.

Figure 2.20 Full figure variants with Monkey-man God in k'in position. (a) from Lintel 48 at Yaxchilan (Figure 14 from Coe 1977); (b) from Stela D at Copán (Figure 15 from Coe 1977).



Figure 2.21 Scribe dressed as the Young Maize God. This scribe writes in an open codex and sits on a water stack motif. (K5824 from Mayavase.com).

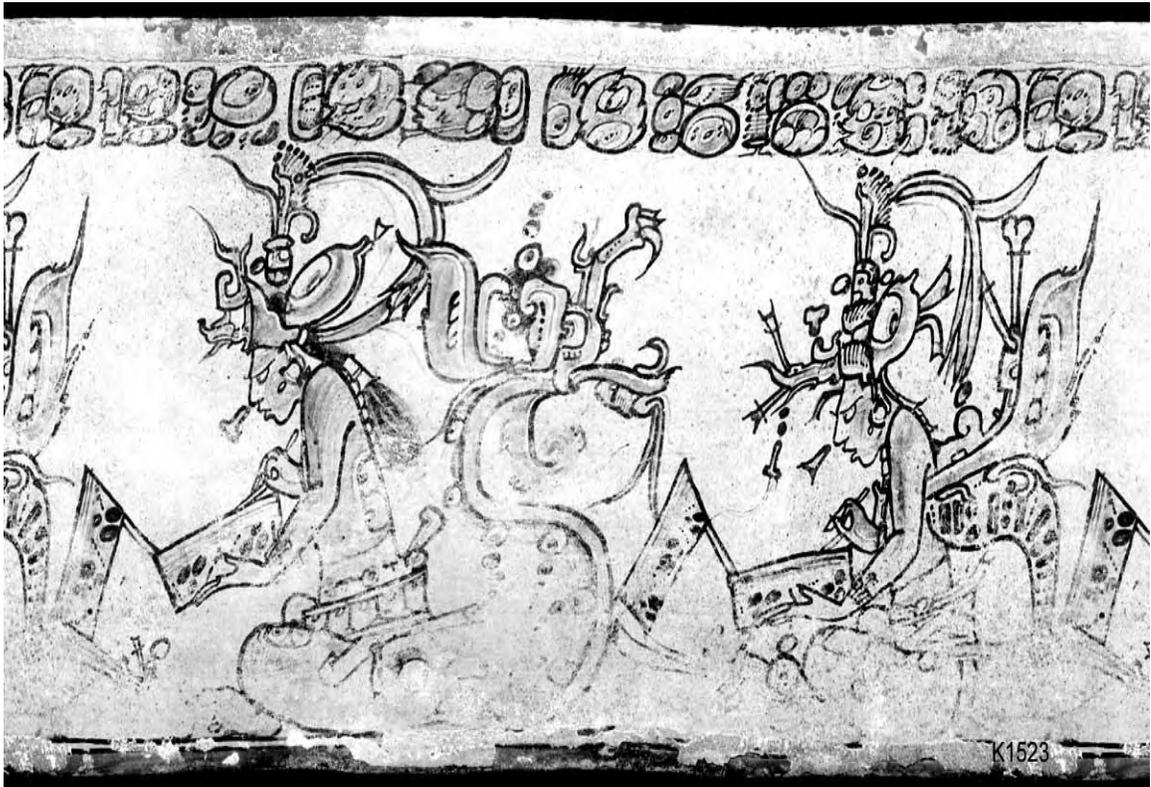


Figure 2.22 Hunahpu and the Young Maize God writing in codices with pens. A centipede emerges from Hunahpu while a Number Tree emanates from the arm pit of the Young Maize God (K1523 from Mayavase.com).



Figure 2.23 Princeton Vase. In this scene from Xibalba Hunahpu, dressed as a scribe, kills a captive and reanimates him for the delight of God L (K0511 from Mayavase.com).

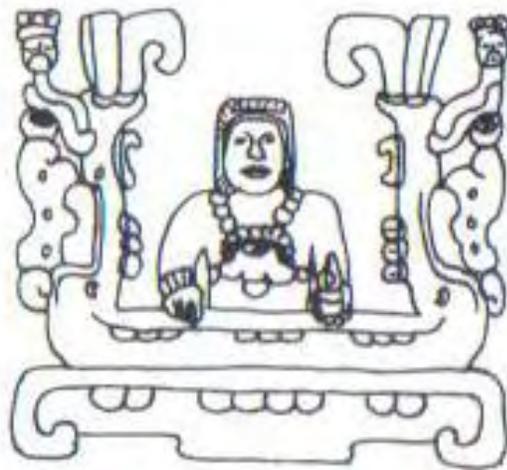


Figure 2.24 Scribe emerging from the maw of a centipede. Detail from the façade of Structure 9N-82 at Copan depicts a scribe emerging from a metaphorical cave (From Figure III.8 from Schele and Miller 1986).



Figure 2.25 Vessel with a black background and an *ah k'u hun*. This Codex-style vessel with a black background, possibly serving as a cave locative, depicts a vulture deity holding a pestle while an *ah k'u hun* with a personified bloodletter in his headdresses supervises the artistic process (K717 from Mayavase.com).



Figure 2.26 Four God Ns engage in an enema ritual at the mouth of a cave. (K530 from Mayavase.com).



Figure 2.27 *Olla* with zoomorphic image thought to be a Monkey-man God. This large olla found in the main chamber of Actun Tunichil Muknal portrays a zoomorphic image interpreted to be a Monkey-man God. A similar pot was also recovered from Chechem Ha.



Figure 2.28 The cave hieroglyph in its Late and Early Classic form. (Figure from Maya Hieroglyphics Study Guide from famsi.org).

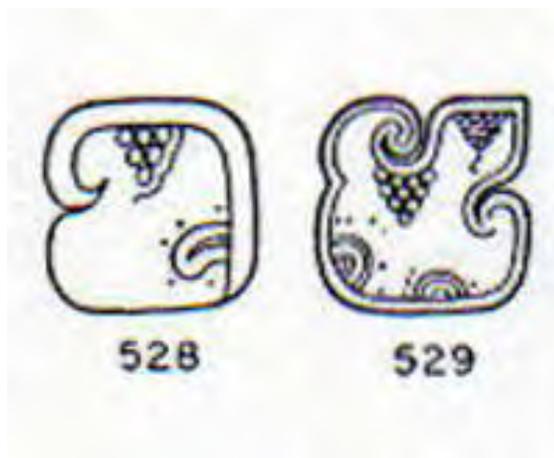


Figure 2.29 Cauac markings. (a) T528 the glyph for *tun*; (b) T529 the glyph for *witz*.

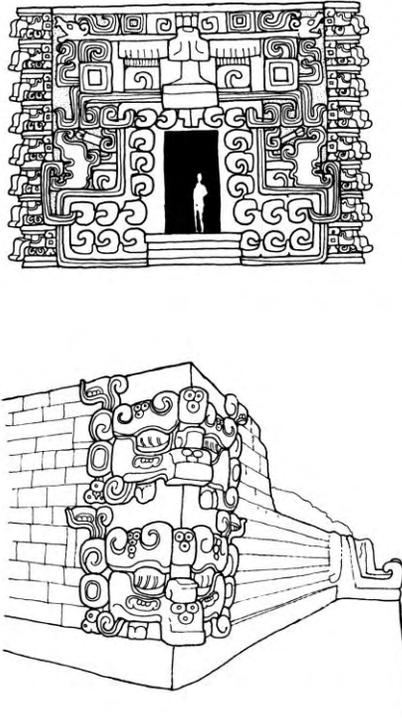


Figure 2.30 Images of the Witz Monster from architecture. (a) Doorway sculpture from Temple 1 at Tabasqueña, Campeche (From Figure 2.6 in Schele and Freidel 1990); (b) Southwest corner of Temple 22 at Copan (From Figure 2.7 in Schele and Freidel 1990).

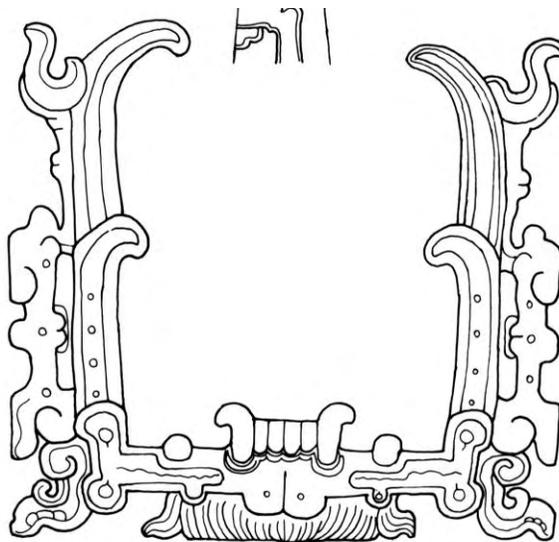


Figure 2.31 The Maw of Xibalba from Sarcophagus of Pakal. (Taken from Linda Schele's Drawings on famsi.org).

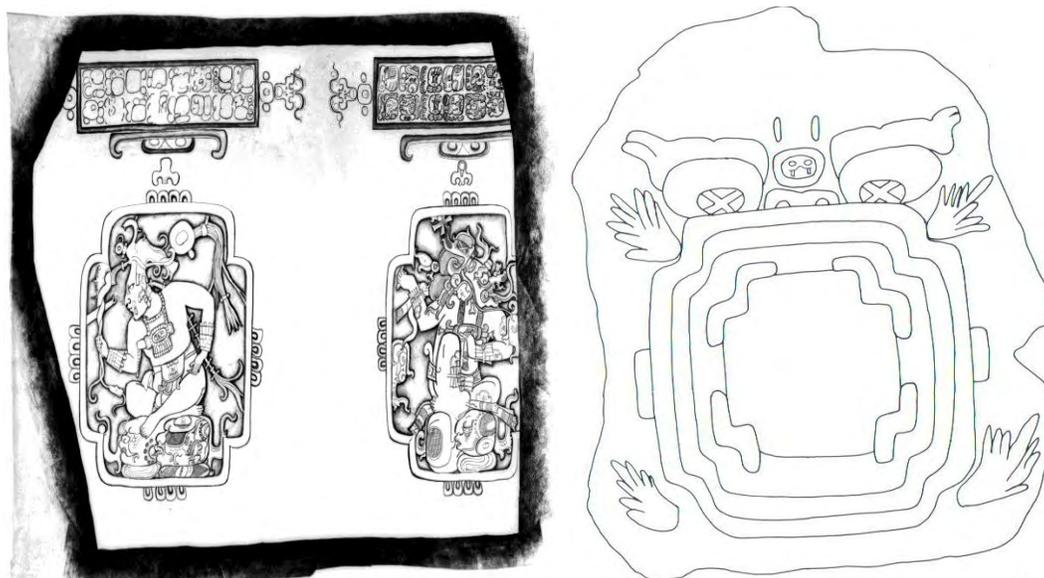


Figure 2.32 Frontal view of quatrefoil portal. (a) Creation Panel from Palenque (From Linda Schele's Drawings on famsi.org); (b) Monument 9 from Chalcatzingo (From Figure 3-9 in Stone 1995).



Chalcatzingo  
Monument 1



Cahal Pech  
Shell pendant

Figure 2.33 Profile view of quatrefoil portal. (a) Monument 1 (El Rey) from Chalcatzingo (Adapted from Grove 1987); (b) Shell pendant that dates to the Cunil phase (1100-900 BC) found below Structure B4 (Photo by James Garber).

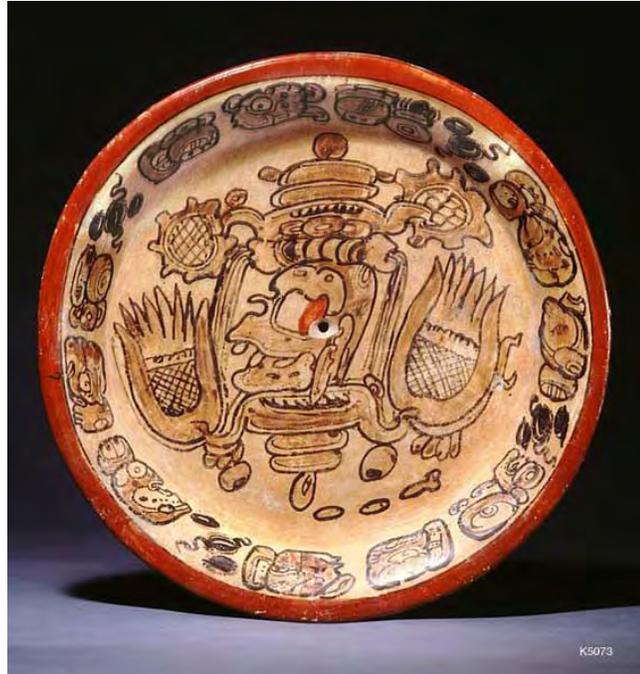


Figure 2.34 Water lilies in a profile perspective. A Codex-style plate portrays water lilies in a profile perspective growing from the skull of the Water Lily Monster (K5073 from Mayavase.com).



Figure 2.35 Water lilies drawn from a vertical perspective. On this ceramic vessel water lilies grow from the skull of the Water Lily Monster (K8252 from Mayavase.com).

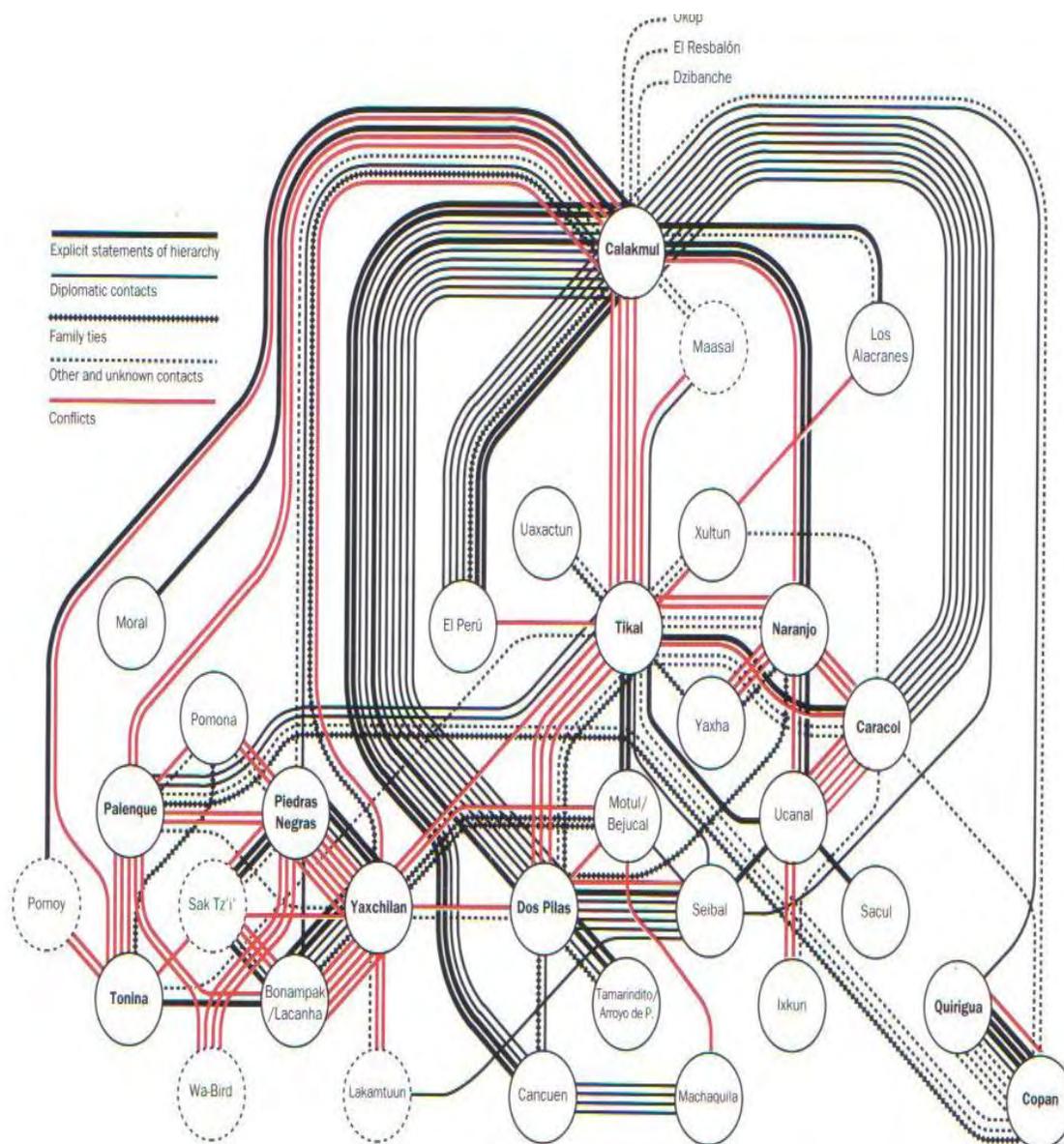


Figure 3.1 Schematic representation of Classic Maya Politics. (Taken from Martin and Grube 2000).

OBJECT OF INTERPRETATION	ACT OF INTERPRETATION
I <i>Primary or natural</i> subject matter—(A) factual, (B) expressional—constituting the world of artistic motifs.	<i>Pre-iconographical description</i> (and pseudo-formal analysis).
II <i>Secondary or conventional</i> subject matter, constituting the world of <i>images, stories</i> and <i>allegories</i> .	<i>Iconographical analysis.</i>
III <i>Intrinsic meaning or content</i> , constituting the world of “ <i>symbolical</i> ” values.	<i>Iconological interpretation.</i>

Figure 3.2 Table of Panofsky's method of structural analysis.

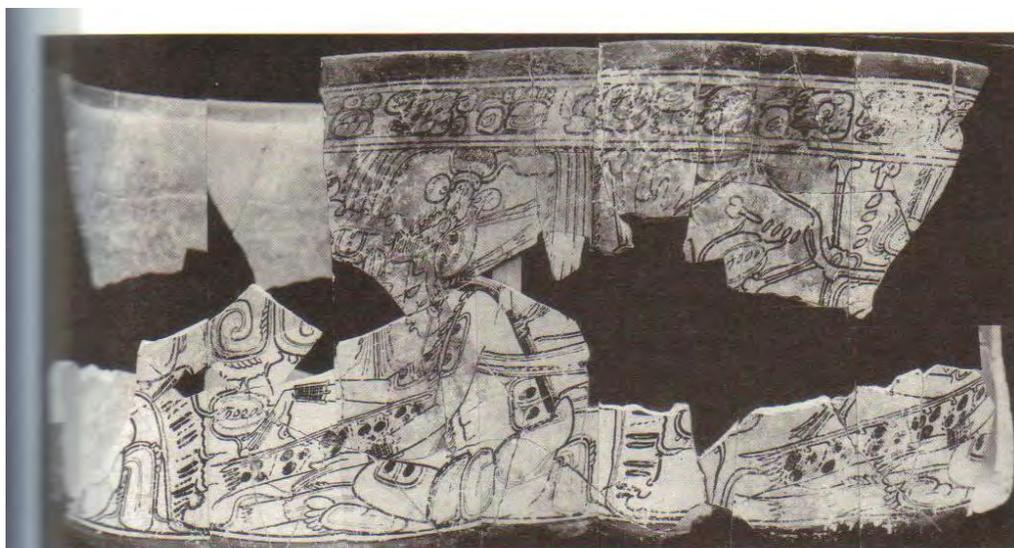


Figure 5. Nakbe Scribe Vessel 1. (Photo by R. D. Hansen.)

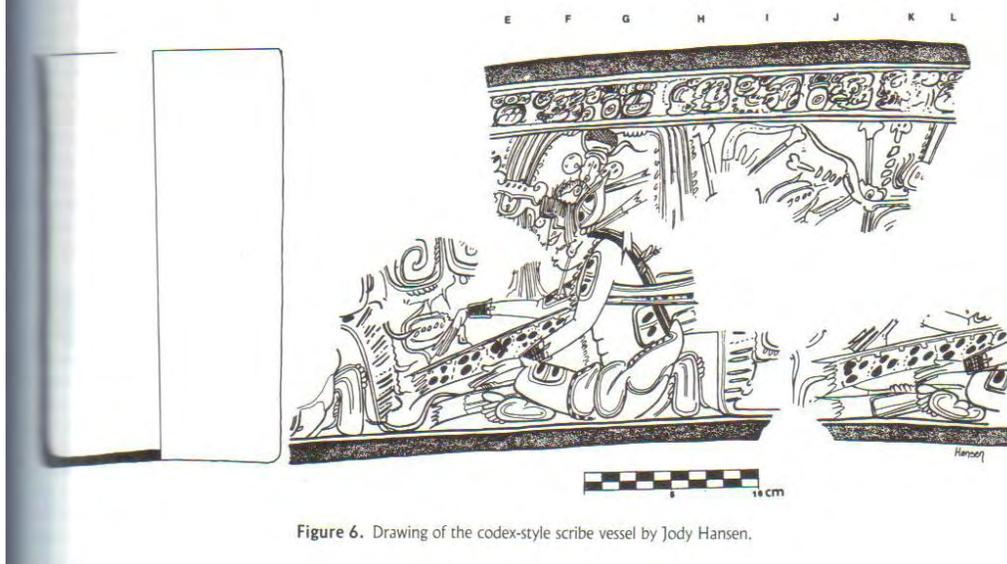


Figure 6. Drawing of the codex-style scribe vessel by Jody Hansen.

Figure 4.1 Nakhé Codex Scribe Vessel 1. (a) Photograph of partially reconstructed vessel (From Figure 5 of Hansen et al. 1991); (b) Drawing of the vessel (From Figure 6 of Hansen et al. 1991).

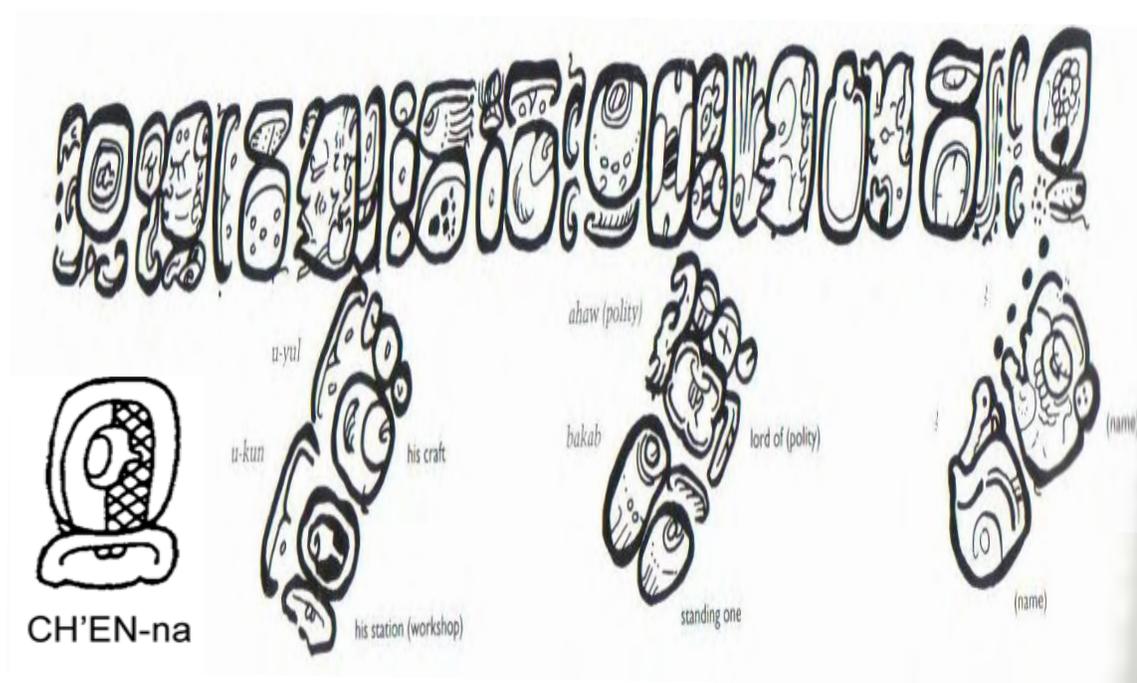


Figure 5.1 Black and White style vessel 1. On this Black and White style vase from Xultun the diagonal texts read *u-yul*, *u-kun* (name), or his craft, this station (name), perhaps naming the scribe's workshop; the same pictographic hieroglyph used for cave is used to name the workshop (From Figure 4.26 in Reents-Budet 1994).

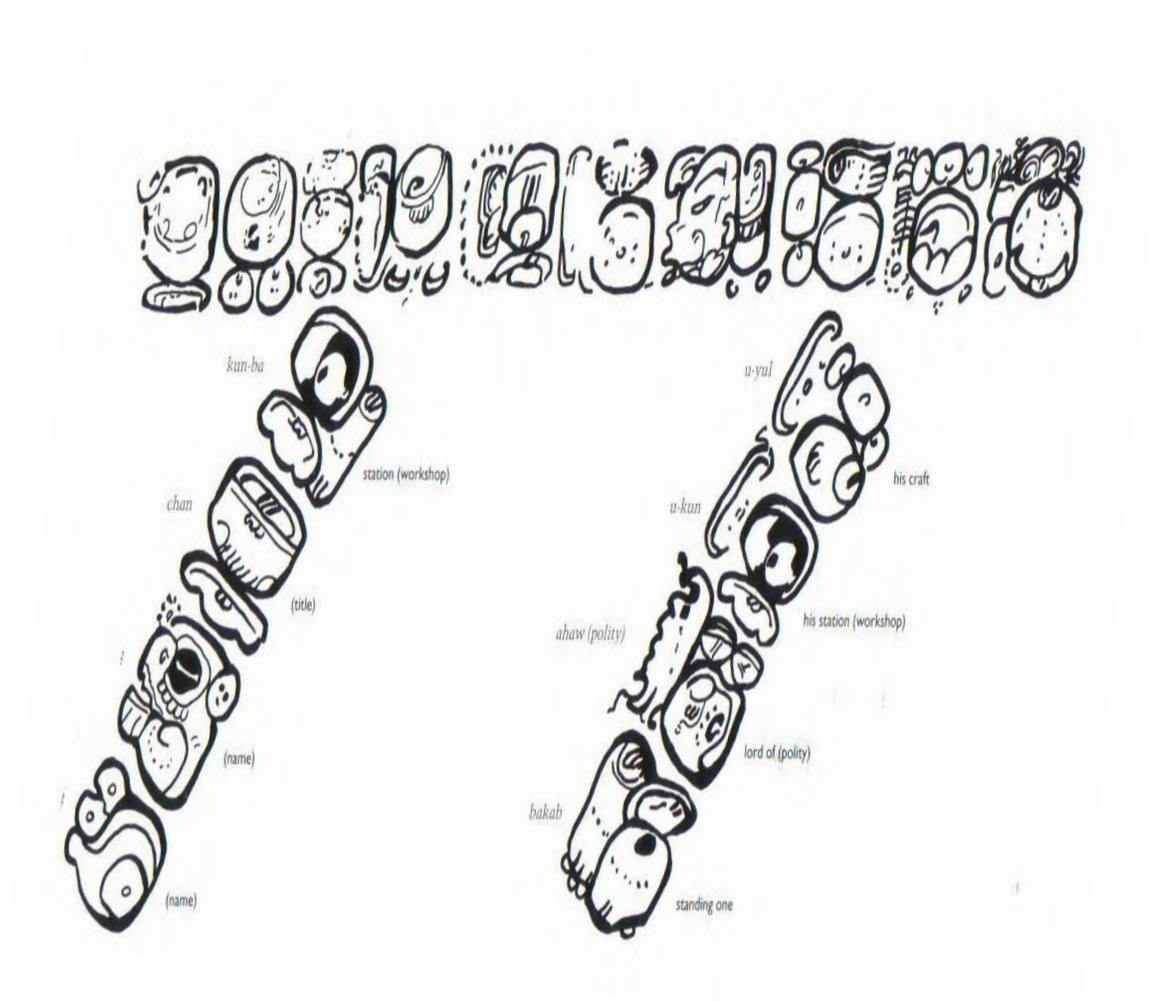


Figure 5.2 Black and White style vessel 2. On this Black and White style vase from Xultun the diagonal texts uses the same pictogram twice to name the scribal workshop (From Figure 4.27 in Reents-Budet 1994).



Figure 5.3 Black and White style vessel 3. This Black and White style vessel's PSS names the scribal workshop and the artist's name; additionally it refers the artists as *chehen* "maker" implying associations with creation and bears the emblem glyph of Xultun (From Figure 4.13 in Reents-Budet 1994).



Figure 5.4 Kerr Vessel Number 0717. Scribes, wearing regalia of the supernatural, produce artistic pieces under the supervision of an *ah k'u hun*. The black background and epigraphic evidence suggests this production transpires in a cave in a ritual context (K0717 from mayavase.com).



Figure 5.5 Kerr Vessel Number 8457. This Codex-style vessel, which names the same artist in K0717 and K7447, depicts supernatural scribes engaged in artistic production. The mythological Calendar Round and textual evidence suggests this action takes place in a cave (K8457 from Mayavase.com).



Figure 5.6 Kerr Vessel Number 7447. This vessel names and depicts the same scribe as K8457 and K0717; based on other vessels naming the same scribe with the same Calendar Round, it is suggested artistic production occurs in a metaphorical cave (K7447 from mayavase.com).

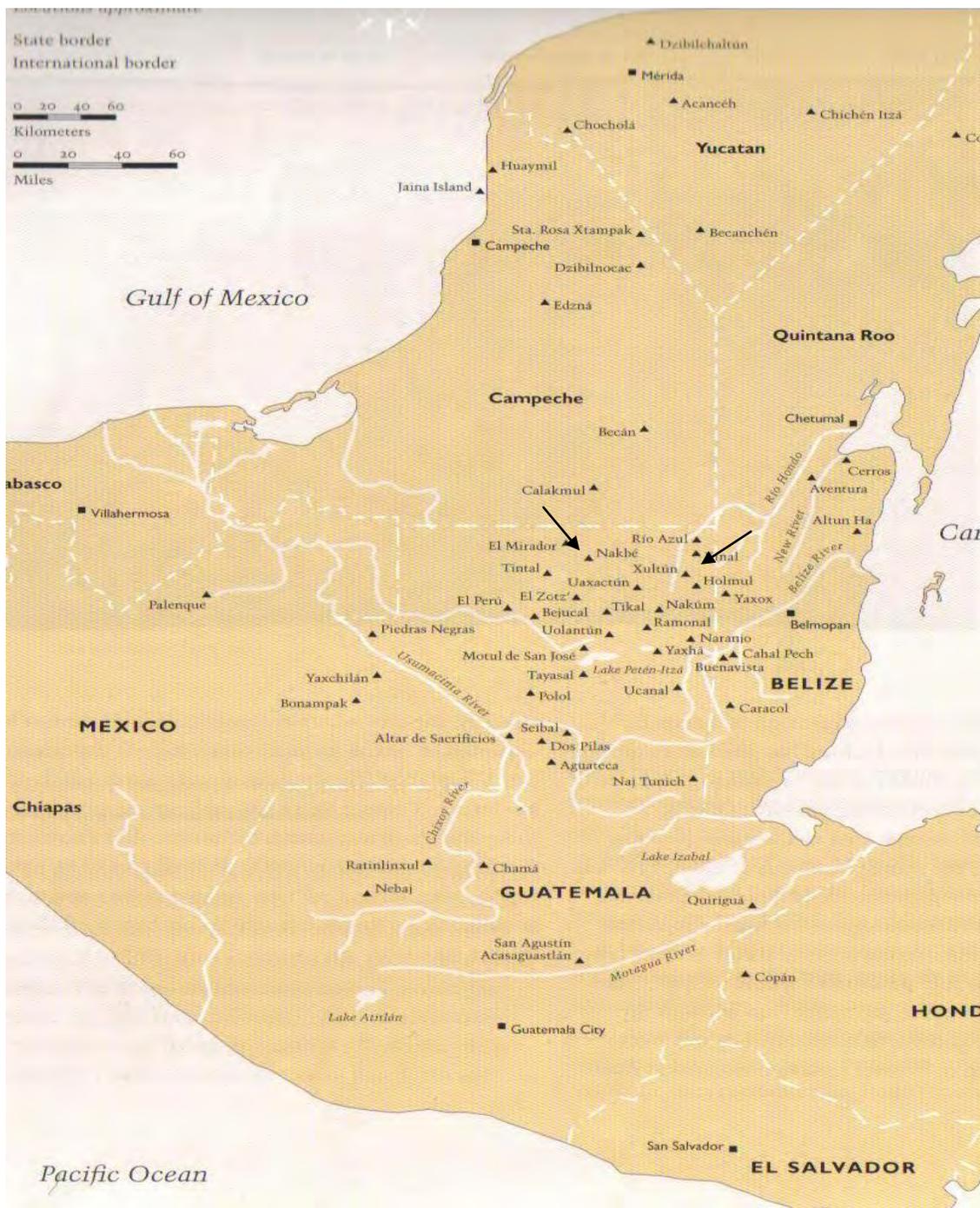


Figure 5.7 A map of the Maya area from the Late Classic period. The production area of the vessels naming scribal workshops as caves are only ~50 km away from one another (From Figure 5.1 in Reents-Budet 1994).

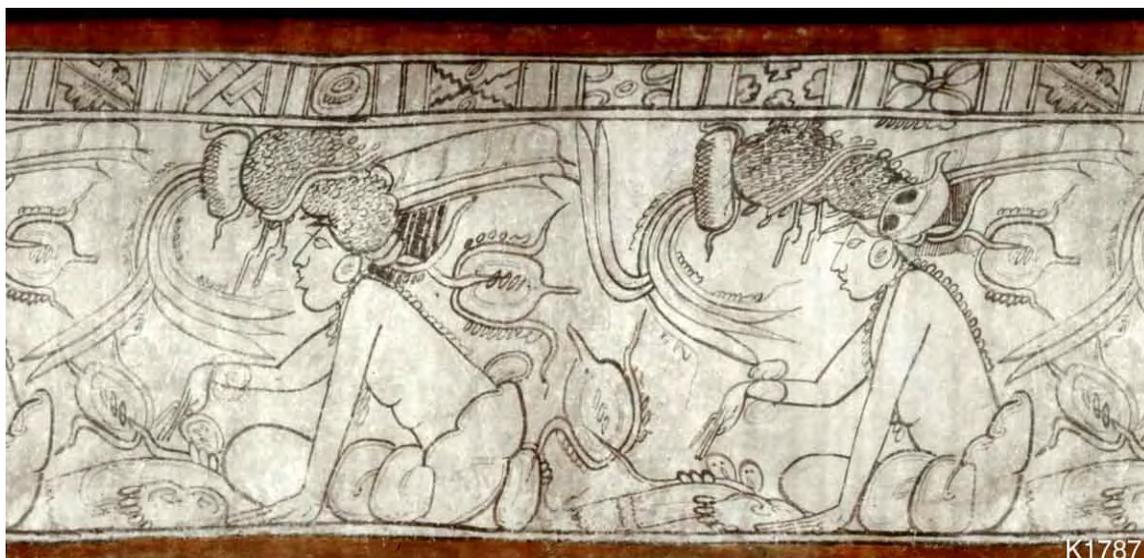


Figure 5.8 Lords of the Underworld Vessel 16. This complex tableau from a pictorial ceramic recounts a scribal rite of passage that culminates with a pilgrimage to a cave (K501 from Mayavase.com).



Vessel 59

Figure 5.9 Vessel 59 from *The Maya Book of the Dead*. In this scene scribes wear Spangled Turbans that terminate with water lilies and read from codices.



K1787

Figure 5.10 Vessel 60 from *The Maya Book of the Dead*. In this scene scribes are depicted with the Spangled Turban of God N and Dear's Ears infixed with the sign for darkness (*akbal*); they sit below a sky band while one scribe raises his eyes upward.

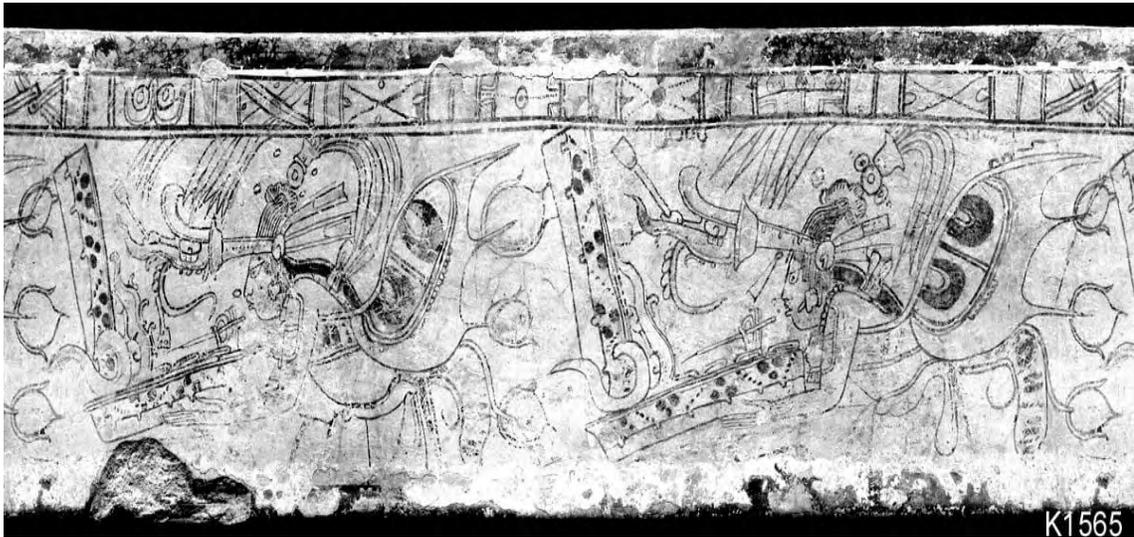


Figure 5.11 Vessel 61 from *The Maya Book of the Dead*. In this scene the scribes write in jaguar skin codices while an exaggerated Number Tree motif forms a wing-like object; sky bands line the upper register.



Figure 5.12 Vessel 62 in *The Maya Book of the Dead*. In this scene the scribes, still in their human form, wear Deer's Ears and write in jaguar-skin codices while the Number Tree motif emanates from their armpit; bone-like elements and water lilies form the background.



Figure 5.13 Vessel 63 in *The Maya Book of the Dead*. In this scene the scribes have taken their Monkey-man God forms and point to a passage in an open jaguar-skin codex.

## VITA

Barry Bruno Kidder was born in Lafayette, Louisiana, on November 17, 1982, the son of Nannette Robertson Kidder and Chris Barry Kidder. After completing his work at St. Thomas More Catholic High School, Lafayette, Louisiana, in 2001, he attended Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi. During the summer of 2002 he attended the University of Mississippi in Oxford. He received the degree of Bachelor of Science in Sociology and Anthropology from Millsaps College in May 2005. During the following years he was employed as a teacher with Premier High School in Austin, Texas, where he taught algebra and chemistry. In the fall of 2007, he entered the Graduate College of Texas State University-San Marcos to pursue an advanced degree in archaeology.

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