



THE TONSURED MAIZE GOD AND CHICOME-XOCHITL AS MAIZE BRINGERS AND CULTURE HEROES: A GULF COAST PERSPECTIVE

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"He [the Maize Hero] spoke words like water being scattered" (Alcorn et al. 2006: 601)

It is now slightly more than twenty-five years ago that Taube identified the 'Tonsured Maize God', a youthful deity whose emergence from a turtle shell has since become an icon of Classic Maya culture. The presence of the Twin heroes of the Popol Vuh, Hunahpu and Xbalanque, at the maize deity's emergence contributed much to this status. Taube's conclusion that the episode represents the bringing back to life of the Twins' father, who had died in the Underworld, has been widely accepted.¹ M. D. Coe (1989: 167) was one of the first to adopt this interpretation, and it has slowly become the orthodox view. It has also become common practice to refer to the Twins' father, Hun-Hunahpu, as 'the Maize God', notwithstanding the fact that a maize god is not mentioned in the Popol Vuh. Schele and Freidel (1993: 59-116, 272-286), in particular, have helped to popularize Taube's viewpoint. They developed it into an astral maize mythology of their own, a critical evaluation of which, though much needed, lies beyond the scope of this essay. When, fourteen years after Taube's initial study, Quenon and Le Fort (1997) presented an overview of the then available iconographic material, in which they distinguish five broad 'episodes', their focus remained on the interaction of the Twins with Hun-Hunahpu. They concluded that "the details of the story can no longer be verified by written or oral accounts" (1997: 898) and that, particularly for the scenes with a maize deity floating in the waters or emerging from an aquatic serpent's maw, "explicit accounts are lacking" (1997: 891). Martin's recent treatment of the Tonsured Maize God - focused on a familiar Frazerian topic, viz. the "sacrificial death of the Maize God at harvest-time" (Martin 2006: 178), and on the god's arboreal transformations - does not basically alter this state of affairs. The essay goes far beyond the Quichean Twin myth, yet continues to draw its inspiration from the "miraculous tree of the Underworld engendered by the Maize God" (Martin 2006: 164), that is, by Hun-Hunahpu.

Whereas the general tendency has thus been to approach the Tonsured Maize God through the detour of the Popol Vuh Twin myth, rather than through the *via recta* of maize mythology, this essay takes the direct approach. I first pointed out certain

¹ The Hun-Hunahpu identification is absent from the conclusion of Taube's 1985 article.

weaknesses in the Hun-Hunahpu theory in a presentation for the 1988 International Americanist Congress (Braakhuis 1990), while arguing in detail the pertinence of the Maize Hero mythology of the Gulf Coast for an explanation of the Maya turtle shell emergence, as well as for other scenes connected to it. In publications chiefly devoted to Olmec iconography, Taube (1996: 62; 2004b: 91) returned to narrative motives from this same mythology, particularly the maize deity sprouting from, and travelling on a turtle. Such a change of focus gives new relevance to the parallelism of Tonsured Maize God and Xochipilli originally signaled by Taube (1985: 175), since the Maize Hero is known among the Gulf Coast Nahuas as Chicome-Xochitl, which is another name for Xochipilli. Even when one moves away from Hun-Hunahpu to consider other narrative traditions, however, the unmistakable attractiveness of the Hun-Hunahpu hypothesis continues to exercise, with its archetypal power, a strong pressure to think about the Tonsured Maize God within the event structures of the Popol Vuh. Before exploring the Gulf Coast maize myths for their interpretive possibilities, therefore, I show that Taube's original identification of the Tonsured Maize God as Hun-Hunahpu is questionable.

The Maize and the Twins

Taube clearly recognized the functional correspondence between Tonsured Maize God and Xochipilli, but the calendrical correspondence between 1 and 7 Xochitl - feast days of Xochipilli - and 1 and 7 Hunahpu seems to have led him to connect the Tonsured Maize God to the father and father's brother of the Twins, called 1-Hunahpu and 7-Hunahpu, and - since 1 Xochitl is also known as a birth-day of the maize - to identify him with 1-Hunahpu in particular. Note, however, that the Popol Vuh nowhere mentions the Twins' father as a maize deity, or suggests his rebirth or resurrection; the focus is rather on the commemoration of the ancestors. In this respect, the Quichean Twin myth is like other Mesoamerican hero myths: Neither in the Tarascan myth of Siratatapeci (Chronicles of Michoacan), the Toltec myth of Quetzalcoatl (Codex Chimalpopoca), or in the Maize Hero myth that is the focus of this article, is the son able to resurrect his father and bring him back among the living.

Critique of the Hun-Hunahpu Theory. After these preliminary remarks, Taube's arguments (1985: 175-176) should now be considered in more detail. The calendric correspondence just mentioned would be ineffectual as an argument without the premise that Mexican dates generally carry the same associations as Maya ones and - taken as proper names - denote the same deities. Such an assumption is, in fact, unjustified. In our specific case, the day Xochitl is associated with life-giving activities such as feasting, music, games, and the arts, whereas the Quichean day Hunahpu has predominant associations with ancestors, death, and burial (Tedlock 1992: 124-125). Furthermore, whereas 7-Xochitl is a well-known name for a deity representing the just-mentioned vital activities, 7-Hunahpu is one of the most shadowy and ill-defined figures of the entire Quichean Twin myth, whose apparent fate is to remain dead and buried at Puqubal Chaah forever. Therefore, identifying the Tonsured Maize God, viewed as the Maya equivalent of Xochipilli, with 1-Hunahpu, is taking a considerable risk, and Taube's additional arguments should be strong enough to carry the full burden of proof.

Immediately connected to the calendrical argument is another one (Taube 1985: 175), the coherence of which is unfortunately not entirely clear. As I understand it, it should run as follows. The Tonsured Maize God is like Xochipilli, and just as Xochipilli is a patron of the arts, the Tonsured Maize God is shown as a scribe and an artisan. Xochipilli was also the patron of the day Ozomatli, a day corresponding to the Quichean day Batz 'Howler Monkey'. The fact that Hun-Hunahpu has howler monkey artisan sons shows him

to be a patron of the arts presiding over the day Batz and its deities, and thus to be like Xochipilli. The argument really derives from the one discussed before, which rests on the unproven equivalence of Hun-Hunahpu and Xochipilli. As an argument in itself, it requires the assumption that a father having artisan sons, should necessarily be an artisan himself, which does not follow. Moreover, Hun-Hunahpu's true son – the one belonging to his own day sign - is not described as an artisan at all. It needs furthermore to be stressed that, apart from the argument analyzed here, there is nothing in the Quiché text to suggest that Hun-Hunahpu (or Vucub-Hunahpu) was a patron of the arts.

Several additional arguments are brought into play. The first of these is based on a pun, and assumes a connection between the calabash tree (*tzimah*) of Hun-Hunahpu and the silky hair (*tzimiy/tzamiy*) of a maize cob. The presumed word-play is difficult to spot at all, since it spans an interval of various episodes; in an oral performance, it would go unnoticed. Since there is no way to know if the word-play (if it can be counted one) is intentional, any argument based on it is bound to be unconvincing. The maize stalk concerned is in no other way intimated to be an equivalent of the calabash tree of Hun-Hunahpu, or to have a particularly meaningful connection to it. Instead of being a shape, or token, of Hun-Hunahpu, it is the miraculous possession of his sons, the deities of writing and the arts, Hun-Batz and Hun-Choven, while it is guarded by female deities of the maize and cacao. The maize association of the two howler monkey brothers is thus implicitly transferred to their father.

The second ancillary argument equating the Tonsured Maize God and Hun-Hunahpu is connected to the preceding one through the mythical image of the calabash tree with the trophy head of Hun-Hunahpu suspended in it as one of its fruits. Taube suggests that the tree is meant to be a cacao tree, but that the name was changed to facilitate the word-play discussed above. The vase in question (K5615) shows two cacao trees, with the head of the Tonsured Maize God substituting for one of the lower pods. The most obvious explanation is that the deity of the maize is also the deity of the cacao tree, and can therefore assume an arboreal shape, as is shown in a comparable way by the cartouches of the Dumbarton Oaks stone bowl (K4331; cf. Braakhuis 1990: 139 note 3, Martin 2006: 154-155).²

This leaves the indistinct human head suspended in the upper part of one of the two cacao trees, and looking like a trophy head, to be accounted for. It should be noted that the tree grows behind the throne of a king who is not recognizable as a denizen of Xibalba, but rather looks like the Tonsured Maize God himself. For the trophy head in the tree – if it is one³ - there is thus no need to invoke the Xibalba episode; other analogies are much more relevant. Nicaraos (southernmost Nahua) chiefs used to suspend trophy heads in trees representing conquered lands which were specially grown for the purpose (Fowler 1989: 245). The Nicaraos were also credited with the introduction of cacao cultivation (id.: 274), and the trophy tree of a paramount chief may well have been a cacao tree. Moreover, the precious trophy heads and the valuable cacao pods were apparently felt to be equivalent: In the art of the Cotzumalhuapa culture, trophy heads are repeatedly fused with cacao pods (see especially Chinchilla n.d.), which grow directly from the stem, like a head from the body.

In contrast to alternative explanations such as the one above, the explanation in terms of *Hun-Hunahpu's* head suspended in a *calabash* tree, and transformed into a

² Maize and cacao constitute a complementary pair, as is also suggested by ritual food prescriptions (cf. Kufer and Heinrich 2006: 402-403).

³ The identification as a trophy head is apparently not shared by Martin (2006: 164), who only refers to an "immature head (...) its eyes closed as if in a fetal sleep," that is, an unripe cacao pod.

calabash fruit seems overly specific. The same objection of unwarranted specificity can be made regarding the argument of the so-called 'disembodied', or severed, heads of the Tonsured Maize God. If these heads should indeed be viewed as cobs severed from the stalk,⁴ and the severed cobs as the equivalents of trophy heads, this would still not justify their equation with the calabash head of Hun-Hunahpu.

The various nonsequiturs in Taube's argumentation raise serious doubts about the validity of the current interpretive model. The Popol Vuh text in particular does not seem to allow the conclusion that Hun-Hunahpu was in any sense considered to be a maize and artisan deity, or destined to be transformed into one, or that he may legitimately be equated with the Tonsured Maize God. If one should nonetheless wish to maintain the hypothesis that the Tonsured Maize God is the transfigured Hun-Hunahpu, there is little more to stand on than the single fact of the iconographical co-occurrence of the Tonsured Maize God and the Twins. One plate in particular (K1892) - which, not coincidentally, is also the one most often reproduced - conveys by its triangular arrangement of Tonsured Maize God and Twins the suggestion of a hierarchical relationship which, should one so desire, would allow for an interpretation in generational terms. Most other versions of this resurrection scene, however, put the three figures on the same plane, thereby removing the spatial suggestion of generational difference.

The Deified Maize and the Twins. Whereas the Popol Vuh thus does not suggest Hun-Hunahpu (or Vucub-Hunahpu) to be a maize deity, or even to have an intimate connection to the maize, it does establish most emphatically, in three interconnected episodes, the maize as a co-essence of the Twins. Although left undiscussed by Taube in his 1985 essay, the paragraphs concerned are highly relevant, not only because they play a vital role in connecting the Twins (rather than Hun-Hunahpu) to the first ancestors made from maize - maize which had been taken from the mythological maize granary, Paxil Mountain - but also for determining the role of the Twins viz-a-viz the Tonsured Maize God. Upon the Twins' descent into the Underworld, two maize plants were left in the house of their grandmother as a token. Their condition would reflect the vicissitudes of the Twins' destiny. Thus, when the Twins' bones had been ground "the way fresh corn is ground" (Edmonson 1971: line 4183), and were strewn into the water of a river to be transformed, "for a second time the corn tasseled again. Then it was worshipped [or deified, *kabavilax*] by their Grandmother. And then she caused it to be named the Center of the House, The Center of the Court; Living Corn, Flat Earth its name became" (Edmonson 1971: lines 4627-4632).⁵ These ritual names of the deified maize were apparently considered important enough for a detailed exegesis to be immediately provided. The emphatical and intimate relationship between the Twins and the living maize is by itself sufficient to explain the co-occurrence of Twins and Tonsured Maize God, with the Twins sometimes carrying a sack with sowing-seeds, or a bowl with the god's jade attributes.

⁴ The idea of a 'severed' head already entails an interpretation. Note that the maize god is not alone in being represented without a body.

⁵ Instead of 'Court[yard]', Tedlock (1996: 139) has 'Harvest'. The dry 'Flat Earth' might refer to the dead buried under the floor of a house, in line with the mantic associations of the day Hunahpu. A parallel in a Nahua Maize Hero myth is the 'cane of seven colours' planted in the middle of a palace, which is about to flower once the Maize Hero has overcome his enemies, and won the hand of a princess (Law 1957: 359-360).

Maize Bringer and Agricultural Hero

Taube's initial recognition of the correspondence between the Tonsured Maize God and Xochipilli, one of whose feasts was celebrated on 7 (*chicome*) Xochitl, is strongly supported by the fact that Chicome-Xochitl is also the Nahuatl name for a Maize Hero in contemporary tales from the Gulf Coast, a god who, like the Tonsured Maize God, was reborn from a turtle cave.⁶ The Gulf Coast may seem far away from the ancient cities of the Petén, but the two major rivers of the Maya area debouch into the Gulf, and the lagoons and the sea which constitute the ecological background of the Maize Hero tales have an archaeological counterpart in the countless remains of marine life stored in Classic Maya caches and burials. The ethnic groups living in the mountains and plains of the vast Gulf Coast area (see Sandstrom and García 2005), from the Huastec Mayas (or Teenek), Totonacs, and Tepehuas in the North down to the Popolucas in the South, as well as the Nahuas living in between, all participate in a rich and, with all variation, coherent mythology of the maize,⁷ which may once have extended along the Maya Gulf Coast (the Chontal wetlands), and into the river valleys of the interior.⁸ This maize mythology – arguably the most important living Mesoamerican narrative tradition – has deep roots: As noted above, core images of it have been traced back to Olmec times. It seems also to have interacted with Twin mythology, as illustrated by the analogy of the rebirth of the Maize Hero with the fate of the Twins (cf. Braakhuis 1990: 128). In versions from the Totonacs and Tepehuas (Ichon 1969: 64, Williams 1972: 87), the buried maize child regenerates as a young maize stalk; from this stalk, a fresh corn cob is plucked, ground into flour, and thrown into the water, where the child is reborn among the fishes. This is likely to have been the model for the deified maize stalks of the Twins and the treatment given to the latter's bones, pulverized as they were "the way fresh corn is ground."⁹ In the following exposition, separate motifs and scenes from Tonsured Maize God iconography will be compared with similar ones in Maize Hero mythology, without making prejudgements concerning Classic Period narrative sequence.

Aquatic Rebirths. In Maize Hero mythology, aquatic environments and their denizens (such as fishes, shrimps, lobsters, turtles, and crocodiles) predominate, while the hero's decisive interactions are with the deities of rain and lightning.¹⁰ A perusal of Tonsured Maize God iconography (Quenon and Le Fort 1997) shows that the Maya deity occurs within the same aquatic environment. He appears lying down at the bottom of the water, floating on it, or stuck between aquatic plants. He also emerges from aquatic snakes, moves through the waters in a canoe, is surrounded by crocodiles and tadpoles (symbols of life generated by the rains) at his aquatic emergence (Robicsek and Hales 1981: vessel 116, rim, and fig. 60, crocodile dancer to the left), and by waders when dancing with his back rack ('Holmul Dancer' type). Moreover, the Tonsured Maize God interacts with the meteorological deities of thunder (god N), lightning (god K), and rain

⁶ Other names for this hero are Homshuk (Zoque-Popoluca) and Thipaak (Teenek Maya).

⁷ Overviews are given by Braakhuis (1990: 125-147), López Austin (1992: 261-283), and Báez-Jorge (2002 [1992]). Olguín (1993: 115-139) provides a useful comparative discussion of mythological motifs. A comparison of Huastec Maya and Nahuatl Maize Hero myths can be found in Hooft and Cerda (2003: 23-33). The classic analysis of a Maize Hero myth is still that of Ichon (1969: 63-81).

⁸ It may be noted in passing that in the case of god N, Taube (1989) already had recourse to Gulf Coast mythology in order to explain Maya iconography.

⁹ In Chorti hero myth and in Oaxacan Twin myth, the theme of the protagonists' aquatic rebirth equally appears to have been modelled after that of the maize (Braakhuis 1990: 126-127).

¹⁰ An excellent introduction to the role of the aquatic environment and its deities in the oral tradition of the Huasteca Nahuas will be found in Van 't Hooft's 'The ways of the water' (Hooft 2007).

(ophidian god B),¹¹ who also inhabit the turtle. Thus, even without as yet having a precise interpretation for the various scenes, there is a pervading suggestion that one is indeed dealing with what is basically the same mythology.

The 'rebirth' scenes (so termed by Quenon and Le Fort) with the Tonsured (or, sometimes, 'Bald-headed') Maize God floating on or in the waters (**Fig. 1**) reflect a persistent rebirth motive of Maize Hero mythology.¹² According to Nahua traditions, Chicome-Xochitl was born in a lagoon (Reyes 1976: 128), or in a lake on top of a mountain (Sandstrom 2004: 345 n. 4).¹³ Other narratives start with the embryonic maize shaped like an egg and floating on the water of a lake (Elson 1947: 195) or well (Blanco 2006: 69).¹⁴ At a later moment, the child, or its processed remains, is thrown into the water, now to drift ashore, and change into a maize field (CM 151, CM 162, Alcorn et al. 2006: 602). This sort of event can occur until the tale's very end (Barón 1978: 452): Harassed by his enemies, Chicome-Xochitl finally drowns in a river, is transported by the water, drifts ashore, and is once more transformed into a maize field.¹⁵



Figure 1. Floating: Aquatic rebirth (K2723) © 2009 Justin Kerr

That the floating egg is a token of rebirth, appears from the following scenario. A dead maize baby is buried and a maize stalk grows from its burial hill. One of its cobs is reduced to flour (Ichon 1969: 64, Münch 1983: 163, Williams 1972:88), or atole (Olguín 1993: 121-122), and thrown into the water. There, the child is reconstituted by the fishes of the river (Olguín), a rebirth paralleled in other tales by the flour being converted into an egg: "God collected the child's remains, made an egg, and left it between the plants that originate under the water of the river" (Münch; cf. Chevalier and Bain 2003: 182).¹⁶

¹¹ In the most famous of all resurrection scenes (K1892), the carapace denizen to the right is a humanized variant of the 'Lily Pad Headdress' serpent (see Hellmuth 1987: 160-166), which, in the Dresden Codex (35b2), is the ophidian shape of the rain deity, god B.

¹² The deity's backward position has been taken as indicative of birth (Schele, Freidel, Parker 1993: 92). The vase found in a burial of structure 2, Calakmul (in Grube and Martin 2000: 114), is nearly identical to the one illustrated here, save for the fact that, together with the Tonsured Maize God, the aquatic deity head has been lifted out of its aquatic band. In both cases, one notes a tadpole below the floating maize child.

¹³ Such mountain lakes are sometimes assumed to connect to the sea, and to contain large sea creatures (Broda 1988: 121-122).

¹⁴ In various Zoque-Popoluca versions, the floating egg is only a mirage: It is actually stuck in a tree, carried there (as one tale explains) by ants, and held in place by a spider's web (Blanco 2006: 68).

¹⁵ This aquatic transport may relate to the process whereby dead kings were imagined finally to change into fruit trees (see also Martin 2006).

¹⁶ Cf. also Elson (1947: 204 n. 16) about the flour changed into an egg: "Dios lo hizo así". Another version

Several Classic Maya scenes appear to illustrate these moments: A child-like Tonsured Maize God, lying for dead on the bottom of the water, and seemingly being kissed by a fish (**Fig. 2**); or a Tonsured Maize God, alive, and stuck between aquatic plants (stucco over a subterranean vault of the Palenque Palace).¹⁷ At the end of the episode, the reborn child is caught by a turtle, whereas the egg is caught with a fishing-net, thus restoring the maize to the earth. The first of three scenes from the maize deity's life depicted on San Bartolo's west wall (Saturno 2006: 75) seems to illustrate a moment immediately subsequent to the catching of the maize baby from the waters.

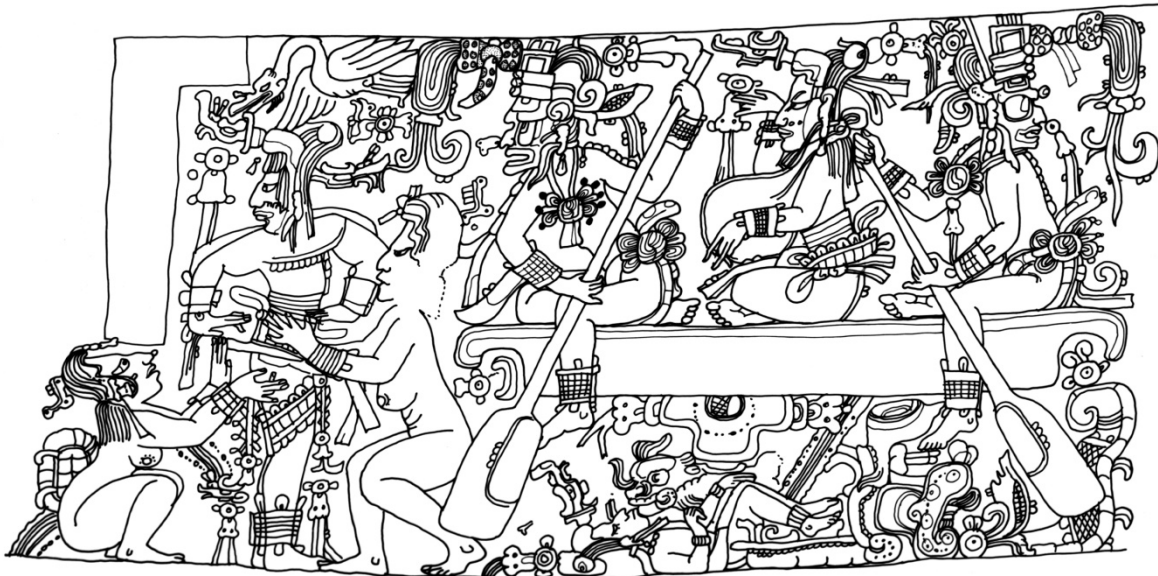


Figure 2. Left, woman with turtle shell on hip; bottom right, TMG within maw of aquatic serpent and "kissed" by a fish (K3033, Museo del Popol Vuh, Schele drawing)

The various scenes of submersion and rebirth should probably be understood from the perspective that several ethnic groups believe young children to have a privileged relation with the aquatic and pluvial deities (Teenek, Hernández 2004: 217; Huasteca Nahuas, Gómez 2004: 202ff), and, upon their premature deaths, to become the assistants of the Old Thunder God, called Muxi' in Teenek (Hernández 2004: 227). As will become more apparent further on, the Maize Hero exemplifies this in his own way. Thus, when the baby is sometimes stated (Münch 1983: 135, Elson 1947: 204 n. 16, cf. Blanco 2006: 68) to be killed, ground, and thrown into the water because of its incessant crying, the tears are likely to manifest the child's destiny to become a bringer of rain. By the same token, his killing amounts to a sacrificial act (cf. Braakhuis 1990: 135).

The 'rebirth' scenes which show the maize deity within the maws of an aquatic serpent or dragon-like fish (Quenon and Le Fort 1997: figs. 4-7, 9), sometimes accompanied by chimerical water fowl, recall those versions (Sammons 1992: 383; Robles, in Ochoa 2000: M1) where the child, thrown into a river or the sea, remains in the water, playing with the fishes there, until it is grown. Speaking generally, the waters of a well or a river often have an aquatic snake for a guardian. Everywhere in Mesoamerica, such aquatic snakes are also believed to fulfill a vital role in the circulation of the waters

(Law 1957: 345-347) has the new-born baby somehow converted into a ball, perhaps in allusion to a tamale. The ball is thrown into a lake, and changes into an egg which at first evades the fishing-net.

¹⁷ Palenque Palace, House E, western subterranean vault (Robertson 1985: pls. 118ff).

through underworld, earth, and sky, for which reason they are implicated in the maize cult (e.g., Spero 1987: 25). The Nohchihchan of the Chortis, crucial in rain production, is a prime Maya example of such snakes. It is considered to be the originator of the maize (Girard 1949: 580, 1966: 78-79 and 84).¹⁸

Turtle Carapace Emergence. The Maize Hero tales could well be called 'turtle tales'. There is a remarkably strong solidarity between the hero and the turtle, with the armoured reptiles playing varying roles, carrying the hero to and fro, and, on occasion, also saving his life.¹⁹ The 'resurrection' scene with the Tonsured Maize God emerging from the crack of a turtle shell constitutes a Maya contribution to the abundant turtle imagery of Gulf Coast Maize Hero mythology; and, as I will presently show, it can also find its explanation there.

The Maya turtle scenes have been explained by Taube (1986: 57-58) as the opening of the Maize Mountain by the Lightning Deities. In one scene in particular (*ibid.*, fig. 4), flanking rain deities are seen to carry lightning instruments which could have been responsible for the cleft in the carapace. This is an attractive interpretation, especially because the curvature of the carapace could indeed suggest a mountain. It would also fit in with Gulf Coast Maize Hero mythology. In some versions (e.g., Alcorn 1984: 62-63, Segre 1990: 327), the hero, assisted by birds and small mammals, works his field, sows and harvests the maize, and stores it in the *Cuescomatepec* 'Maize Granary Mountain' (Segre 1990: 327), or in seven maize granaries previously constructed by him (Rodríguez López 2003: 251).²⁰ In other versions (Alcorn et al. 2006: 603, Sandstrom 2004: 346), however, the hero himself enters a mountain to hide from his enemies, and has to be brought back into the daylight by the Lightnings.²¹

Nevertheless, some problems remain. In the episodes just referred to, the maize mountain is not associated with a turtle, and the iconographic argument fails to address several points. The lightning stone held up by one of the rain gods is a fixed attribute which can be held in a variety of contexts, and the deity's kneeling attitude seems to suggest that in holding it up, he is paying homage to the Maize Hero by showing his readiness to make it rain, which is a crucial motif of Maize Hero myth. Paying homage is precisely what his partner, holding a lightning axe, is doing in extending a flowery gift. As to the fissure, it also characterizes various of the skulls which appear to be on a par with the turtle shell and occasionally are substituted for it (Robicsek and Hales 1981: 89-91). There is no suggestion of these skulls having been cleft. Similar fissures are rather common in Maya art, and could represent the effect of interior pressure as well as that of exterior violence.²² Moreover, if the carapace is intended to represent the Maize Mountain,

¹⁸ The dragon fish may have played a similar role. One is reminded of the large and glittering lightning fish which the Q'eqchi's believe to live in the sea, and whose interaction with the aged thunder god causes violent rains (Gordon 1915: 108).

¹⁹ Turtle replacing canoe (CM 198-199); turtles forming bridge (Gréco 1989: 183, CM 183, CM 198-199); turtle riding contest (Muench 1983: 168); turtles saving child from steambath (Segre 1990: 325); turtle saving child from water (Olguín 1993: 122, Ichon 1969: 72, Williams 1972: 88, Ochoa 2000: M1); turtle drum (Barón 1978: 449, Blanco 2006: 74, cf. Foster 1945: 192).

²⁰ According to Rodríguez López (2003: 251), he fills the seventh maize granary with flowers, and disappears into it himself. In this way, he seems to convert the maize granary into his own symbol ('Seven-Flower').

²¹ I will use the word Lightnings to refer to the deities variously called 'Truenos' and 'Rayos', or Thunders and Lightnings.

²² Other examples of fissures: Pakal's sarcophagus (cracks in the earth from which ancestral trees emerge), Quirigua altar P' (rock fissure within T-shaped opening with emerging rain deity), Palenque Palace intaglios (in forehead of rain deity with emerging T528:116 'year' sign), K2068 (in roof of wooden structure, with

one wonders why the very deities (the gods K and N) who would naturally have the task to open it violently from the outside, are on various occasions shown to be living within.

In view of these restrictions, another episode of Maize Hero myth which, unlike the previous one, does include the turtle, deserves to be taken into account (cf. Braakhuis 1990: 129-134). In a Nahua version (Olguín 1993: 122), Chicome-Xochitl is converted into atole, but judged to be 'bitter' by the representative of a previous age, and therefore discarded into the water. Reassembled by the fishes, the child is finally caught by a turtle, which restores it to the earth. In a Totonac rendition (Ichon 1969: 72, cf. Tepehua, Williams 1972: 88), the atole is replaced by flour, and instead of the fishes, it is now the turtle itself which reassembles the child:²³ It "collects all the particles of *xambe* [flour of green maize] and brings them to her cave. After four days, she comes to look at the heap of particles thus formed, and notices that it has given birth to a small child. She carries it on her back and has it walk there," until the time has come to give it back to the earth.²⁴ In the quotation, the notion of the turtle's cave is important, since it can be connected to certain scenes – to begin with in San Bartolo (Saturno 2006: 75) – in which the turtle's cave-like interior has been rendered visible.²⁵

In a Teenek version of this same episode (Robles, in Ochoa 2000: M1), the turtle which sets the child ashore is at the orders of Muxi', the Old Thunder God.²⁶ From his oceanic realm, this powerful 'Grandfather' (*Maam*) sends the maize child – which had been gathered up by the ocean – back to earth to fulfill its mission there. Muxi' is the Teenek representative of an aged deity corresponding – as Taube (1989: 356-358, 1992: 96-99) has shown – to god N of the Classic Mayas, one of whose manifestations inhabits the turtle shell. In other words, the Carapace Emergence may represent the moment an aquatic and reconstituted Tonsured Maize God is restored to the earth by the turtle. At this re-emergence, the Tonsured Maize God can be welcomed by the Twins, by two of the nude women surrounding him (K6298; Robicsek and Hales 1981: vessel 118), or by the flanking rain deities discussed above.

The Turtle's Shoulder Cape. Maya kings and queens posing as Tonsured Maize Gods are dressed with shoulder capes,²⁷ skirts, and robes evincing a netted pattern similar to that of a turtle carapace. Quenon and Le Fort (1997: 897-898) interpreted these vestments as symbolic of the "earth floating on the sustaining sea", and more specifically, of the precious green earth from which the maize deity emerges. From a mythological perspective, the turtle dress manifests the strong communion of interests tying together the turtle and the Maize Hero. One scene from Maize Hero myth in particular (Ichon 1969:

emerging T528 'rain storm' or 'rain' sign), K2772 (in roof of wooden structure, with serpentine lightning leg of Rain Deity running through).

²³ As has been noted, the reconstitution of the body by fishes or a turtle can equally be expressed by 'God' molding the discarded flour into an egg (Münch).

²⁴ Taube seems to have this same interpretation in mind when, considering an Olmec jade turtle with the maize god depicted on its underside, he writes (2004: 91): "Among the Classic Maya and in the contemporary lore of Veracruz, the god of corn emerges out of a turtle shell".

²⁵ Elsewhere (Braakhuis 1990: 132-134), I have interpreted this interior space geographically, as a subterranean 'Tlalocan'. The contemporary Nahuas of Chicontepec also assign a cosmographical role to the turtle: Like the crocodile, it can serve as a foundation for the earth-carriers (Báez and Gómez 2000: 84).

²⁶ This is the deity also known under such generic names as Great Thunder, Mam, Mamlab, Lak Mam, Bacab, and specifically as Aktsini' (Totonac), Nanawatsin (Nahua), and Saint John the Baptist.

²⁷ See for example the shoulder capes worn by the TMG queen on El Zapote 5 (Quenon and Le Fort 1997: fig. 2a) and on Caracol 1 and 3; and by the TMG woman inaugurating the king on the Palace Tablet, and, on stucco reliefs of the Palenque Palace, accompanying him.

65) is illustrative of this, while explicitly referring to a turtle dress: The hero, moved by the turtle's solidarity, gives the carapace its characteristic pattern by weaving the turtle's shoulder cape (*quechquemiti*). This is probably a metaphor for providing the earth with its vegetal cover. A Gulf Coast Nahua prayer said before sowing the maize (Reyes 1976: 51) mentions the sowers "adorning" the earth with sowing-seeds called "Chicome-Xochitl". In this way the earth – here conceived as female - is given a new skirt (*cueiti*) and shoulder mantle (*quechquemiti*).²⁸ Apparently, the Maize Hero can both be viewed as the 'weaver' and 'dresser' of the earth, and as the very garment adorning her.



Figure 3. Emergence from the realm of the dead (see also Robicsek and Hales 1981: fig. 60) (K3640)

Emergence from the Realm of the Dead. The substitution of a skull for the turtle carapace (**Fig. 3**) characterizes the aquatic realm as a place of the dead,²⁹ and this is reflected by the iconographic references to death found with various participants in the Tonsured Maize God scenes.³⁰ In Maize Hero myth, this particular quality of the aquatic realm comes to the fore in various ways: (a) The hero travels to Tlalocan - conceived as a general storage place of ancestral bones (Anguiano 1984: 207) - in order to retrieve the bones of his father; (b) He confronts the cannibalistic spirits of the dead (*Youaleijkamej*) living in their "realm of darkness" (CM 198-199, cf. CM 183-184); (c) He confronts the death god (one version only, Muench 1983: 167);³¹ and (d)

He destines the shell of the turtle who transported him over the ocean for use as a drum on the Day of the Dead (Barón 1978: 449), when two rain deities temporarily bring back the ancestors from their oceanic realm (Williams 1963: 226-227).³²

Interactions with the Lightnings. Certain Classic Maya scenes can be connected to the Maize Hero's interaction with the Lightnings (implying the deities of Lightning as well as Thunder), and thus, to his voyage to Tlalocan. Briefly, once the hero has left his turtle

²⁸ In an analogous way, the crocodile – for the Aztecs representing the earth - could be called "She of the female garment" (Ruíz de Alarcón, in Coe and Whittaker 1982: 158-159).

²⁹ Inversely, the skeletal death god can be shown with a turtle shell harness (K7287, K8962) or with turtle shell sandals (Tonina stucco walls).

³⁰ E.g., rain deity with 'death collar' (K731); Xbalanque with 'death collar' (K6979); nude women with death god markings (K6979) and infixes meaning 'black' (K626). Hunahpu is already by himself a reference to the underworld and the dead.

³¹ This addition of the death god to the lightning deities would seem to reflect the compartmentalisation of the subterranean 'Tlalocan' into four distinct spheres including 'Mictan' (Knab 2004: 106ff); the prisons of the death god are otherwise of the same sort as those of the Lightnings.

³² On this same day, among the Teenek, the Maize Hero visits the houses of those who did not make offerings, and takes away their food (Alcorn et al. 2006: 605).



Figure 4. Arrival in 'Tlalocan' (K1609, Schele drawing)



Figure 5. In the House of Thunder (K2068) © 2009 Justin Kerr

mentions black water places. A waterlily-jaguar roars high in the air, while a vulture-like bird hovers above the central tree sprouting from the Rain Deity's head.³⁵ For the Totonacs, the roaring of a jaguar is a metaphor for the violent onset of the rainy season (Ichon 1969: 113), whereas the vulture is viewed as an emissary of the Lightnings, summoning the Maize Hero into their presence (ibid.: 68, 73).³⁶

³³ The principal representative of this 'prehistoric' period is his aged adoptive mother; it is largely through his antagonistic interactions with this demonic figure that the hero's powers of regeneration become manifest.

³⁴ The bald-headed type (probably referring to the young ear of corn) recurs on the Rio Hondo bowl (floating; Quenon and Le Fort 1997: fig. 17), K1202 (investiture by women), and K1572 (holding ceremonial bar with hunting-deity in dragon maws).

³⁵ The prominent 'jester god' branching from the tree suggests the tree to be an emblem for rulership over the aquatic realm.

³⁶ Another vase (K1742, cf. K595), discussed by Quenon and Le Fort (1997: 887, fig. 8b), seems to refer to

nurse, or liberated himself from the female representative of a previous, cannibalistic period,³³ he reveals himself to his mother, and learns that his father was killed by the Lightnings. With the help of turtles, he crosses the ocean, and intrudes into the Lightnings' watery realm. The antagonism with the deities of thunder and lightning is often expressed through a series of trials within prisons and of contests, the outcome of which is that the hero's opponents are made subservient to the interests of the maize crop, and thus also, of mankind's; to that end, he gives them their lightning instruments. Henceforth, they should act towards the maize as if they were its parents.

The arrival in the realm of the Lightnings seems to be reflected by a Bald-headed Maize God³⁴ - the "spirit of maize", as Looper (2003: 69) calls him - emerging from the waters into the presence of a frightening rain deity holding his lightning axe (Fig. 4). More particularly, this may be his arrival in the 'Place of Darkness' (*Yoajlaam*) where the ancestors live (Anguiano 1984: 219ff), as is suggested by the fact that the hieroglyphic text

Another representation (**Fig. 5**) suggestive of the hero's presence in Tlalocan's heartland shows the Tonsured Maize Deity without his ornaments, but significantly marked by a fish barbel at the corner of his mouth. He stands within an open structure, surrounded by a large lightning snake with an Old Thunder God (god N) emerging, and by a rain deity swaying his lightning axe. The roof of the structure shows a crevice in which a head seems to hover (escaping from the interior, or, inversely, entering it). When used as a hieroglyph (T528), this head can have the meanings of 'stone' and 'thunderstorm'. A meaning of 'stone' could imply that the stone head was thrown by the Rain deity to split the structure's roof; a meaning of 'thunderstorm' could suggest that the structure belongs to the Old Thunder God. Maize Hero myth (Teenek, Alcorn et al. 2006: 604; Zoque-Popoluca, Münch 1983: 169) mentions a house, constructed in the midst of the Ocean, which could account for both ideas: The Old Thunder God living in it destroyed his previous houses with lightning, for which reason the new one is made of tar (Alcorn). From his ocean house, he is to announce the onset of the rainy season (Münch).³⁷ A related vase scene (K2772) supports this way of viewing things, since there, another lightning serpent with the Old Thunder God in its maws crawls through the cracked roof of a similar open structure. The fettered maize god sitting at the hero's feet is perhaps meant to convey the idea of imprisonment in the realm of the Lightnings.³⁸ The hero himself is shown in the attitude of supporting an inclined ceremonial bar, and thus, of taking power; the missing bar might be represented by the very snake from which the Old Thunder God emerges. Encounters like the ones above recall the San Bartolo west wall depiction of a dancing and music-making precursor of the Tonsured Maize God in between two enthroned, subterranean, and presumably aquatic deities (Saturno 2006: 75). As will be discussed in a later section, it was also with music that the Maize Hero challenged the Lightnings (e.g., Elson 1947: 209).³⁹



Figure 6. Confronting the lightning deity (K1219) © 2009 Justin Kerr

a foray of the Tonsured Maize God into a subterranean, aquatic realm.

³⁷ The Old Thunder God is here called 'Rayo Viejo del Sur'. Among the Zoque-Popolucas (Foster), he can also be called 'Hurricane', i.e., (Ma)sawa (cf. Báez 2002: 83 n. 122, Blanco 2006: 73-74). These names, all referring to deities of uncommon violence, are to a certain extent interchangeable.

³⁸ Compare with K6036, Foliated Maize God captive.

³⁹ An important Early-Classic flanged bowl (Sotheby's New York, November 11, 2004 Sale, no. 257) has a comparable scene of a maize deity standing in between rain deities, one of the latter being seated on a throne.

The hero finally dictating his law to the Lightnings may further correspond to a scene (**Fig. 6**) which has the Tonsured Maize God seated on a pedestal opposite an impressive Lightning deity (god K) seated at a lower level, directly on the floor. A comparable scene on a vase from Sacul (Mayer 2003: 143-144) appears to reflect a situation in which the pact with the subdued antagonistic powers is already in force: The Tonsured Maize God is sitting enthroned on a dais, while the diminished figure of one of the four earth-carrying thunder gods (the Turtle Bacab) is attending on the ground below.⁴⁰ In a Totonac version (Ichon 1969: 68), the number of the antagonistic Thunder gods (*Tonnerres*) is given as four; four Great Thunder Gods also carry the earth (id., 120). The Huastec Mayas have a similar group of four 'Grandfathers', of which Muxi', the 'Old Thunder God', is the most important (Alcorn 1984: 58, 62); as a rain-bringing deity, he took orders from the Maize Hero, Thipaak (Alcorn 1984: 208; 2006: 603-604).

Two Views of the Lightning Deities. A series of trials and contests, concluded by the hero assigning the Lightnings their tasks, is not always part of Maize Hero myth. It does not seem to have been reported from the Teenek, although their Maize Hero once had to confront the principal Maam, Muxi' (Alcorn et al. 2006: 603 n. 9). This antagonism is not, however, what is usually emphasized. Instead, there is a tendency to present the Old Thunder God, Muxi', as the creator of the maize and mankind. Among the Gulf Coast peoples generally, the antagonistic conception of the Lightnings coexists with the profound conviction that the rain and lightning deities are the true parents of the maize. Among Nahuas of Puebla and Veracruz (Reyes García 1976: 127-128), the lightning deities - living in a great lagoon pictured as a paradise - are called the "carriers of the germs" and "creators of the human body", with the Old Thunder God being the one who confers life upon the maize, Chicome-Xochitl, and makes it sprout.

This idea can also be given a specific mythological turn. According to a Teenek narrator, it was the Old Thunder God, Muxi', who sent off the blackbird which was to bring the maize seed to mankind, and which instead impregnated a woman with it, the future mother of the Maize Hero (Robles, in Ochoa 2000: M1). Therefore, in an apparent reference to Muxi's maize kernel, an informant of Alcorn (2006: 599) called the avian inseminator - or rather, as it would seem, its gift - "the medicine of the Maamlab [Grandfather]." When the Nahuatl Maize Hero finally leaves the scene, he declares: "I will go to the depths of the sea" (*en medio del fondo del mar*, Segre 1990: 173), which I take to mean: back to the realm of the Old Thunder God. In a different way, this concept of the Maize Hero as a child of the Lightning deities recurs far to the south-east, among the Popolucas of Soteapan, where a narrator declared: "Homshuk is the son of the Lightnings on the other side of the ocean" (Blanco 2006: 76), and where the hero's father consequently ranks among the lightning deities (Blanco 2006: 68; Chevalier and Bain 2003: 228, 234).⁴¹ It is to be expected that among the Classic Mayas, too, a twofold conception of the rain and lightning deities existed, both as antagonists, and as kinsmen.

⁴⁰ A Conch Bacab may also have been present. The enthroned deity wears a netted skirt probably referring to the turtle (or equivalent forms, such as the fishing-net), and holds what would appear to be a paca (rather than a rabbit). Since there is no crescent, the figure is unlikely to be a conflation of Tonsured Maize God and moon goddess.

⁴¹ The father had gone to the realm of the lightnings in order to obtain the maize, but was killed there (Elson 1947: 204); he died in a war (Blanco 2006: 68). He can be referred to as the "old lightning who comes from heaven" and "the lightning who shed his blood over the maize"; when the father's bones are reassembled and lifted up, "there the first lightning started to resound" (Blanco 2006: 68, 75).



Figure 7. The TMG as another lightning deity and rain maker (K5126) © 2009 Justin Kerr

The Maize Hero as a Rainmaker. Repeatedly, the Tonsured Maize God is depicted with a lightning blade or torch stuck in his forehead (cf. Taube 1985: 180-181, 1992: 48-50) (**Fig. 7**). For this combination, Taube (1992: 48-49) used the broad interpretive concept of 'idealized ancestor', and although this may well be a meaningful epitheton, more direct explanations are suggested by Maize Hero mythology. As just stated, the hero is sometimes believed to descend from the Lightnings, and the lightning blade is a perfect way to make this clear.⁴² In an analogous manner, the present-day Tzotzil maize goddess, X'ob, is invoked as "Señora X'ob, Señora 'Anhel", since she has the rain and lightning deity (the 'Angel') for a father (Guiteras 1961: 218). The Maize Hero can also, more specifically, be described as an active lightning maker himself. According to many sources,⁴³ he came upon a crocodile when trying to cross the ocean, and cut the lightning tongue from its throat.⁴⁴ He continually played with this lightning toy (Barón 1982: 44, Gréco 1989: 183), until finally, he provided the Lightning deities with the superior lightning instruments made from it (Ichon 1969: 65, 70, Williams 1972: 92). As noted above (see 'Aquatic Rebirths'), crocodiles surround the Tonsured Maize God at his re-emergence from the realm of the dead. The crocodile epithet once bestowed upon him at his turtle emergence (hieroglyphic caption on K1892, see Taube 2005: 25 and fig. 4e) may even allude to his appropriation of the crocodile's primordial lightning power.⁴⁵

⁴² The same filiation could explain the similar tufts of hair of the two deities.

⁴³ E.g., CM 177, CM 183-184, García de León 1969: 302, Williams 1972: 91.

⁴⁴ According to one narrator (García de León 1969: 302, cf. Ichon 1969: 65), he killed the crocodile from within by using a knife, a version with a wide spread as an independent story.

⁴⁵ The name of the Huastec hero, Thipaak, has been suggested to be cognate with *cipactli* (Ochoa 2003: 76-77). An alternative interpretation of the crocodile epithet turns on the crocodile tree (Taube 2005: 25). The theme of the lightning tongue's acquisition is equally present in Tlapanec mythology (Loo 1987: 160-162); the notion of a 'lightning tongue' is also found in Q'eqchi' (*rak' caak*, see Haeserijn 1979: 32, s.v. *ak*).

The first of the Lightnings produced by the Maize Hero were called "Lightning-Thunder" and "Lightning-Man" (Ichon 1969: 72), the latter probably referring to a human rainmaker. Indeed, a variant of the Totonac myth (id., 74) includes the well-known theme of the 'sorcerer's apprentice', with the Maize Hero playing the rain god; the motif of the hero transporting water in a carrying-net conveys an identical message.⁴⁶ In this same context, the Tepehua Maize Hero is stated (Williams 1972: 92) to slap a serpent fettered with a chain, causing it to produce thunder and lightning, and thereby making the thunder gods descend. When the Huastec Maize Hero "is occasionally seen floating in the air" (Fernández Acosta, in Vásquez and Hipólito 1994: 152), this is again suggestive of rain-making activities. The precursor of the Tonsured Maize God on San Bartolo's west wall (Saturno 2006: 75), flying and diving in the air while crossing a vertical current of water together with an ascending water snake,⁴⁷ appears to depict the Maize Hero as a rain maker.⁴⁸ Whereas the maize deity thus behaves like one of the rain-bringing Lightnings – indeed the most effective of them all – the Lightnings should now, inversely, adopt him as their kin, and tend to his needs.⁴⁹ Within the framework of this pact, however, the hero continues to hold powers over the natural forces necessary for the growth of the maize, for which reason he can also mete out punishment by withholding the rains (Zoque-Popoluca, Langill 2000: 26).

The Tonsured Maize God could be argued to connect to lightning in still another way. The stucco relief of Pier D, House D, Palenque Palace shows the king – with a turtle shell dangling from a long chain – swaying an axe and holding a coiling snake, much like Tlaloc in the Laud Codex (10). The snake is simultaneously held by a female Tonsured Maize God impersonator, perhaps representing the king's sister. The fact that this lightning snake is what has been called a 'centipede snake', and is thus associated with death and the underworld, recalls the Tojolabal 'dry lightning' associated with black sorcery (cf. Spero 1987: 165).⁵⁰

Sowing Fruit Trees. The Tonsured Maize God is equally the personification of cacao trees, whereas the famed Berlin pot shows his Early-Classic precursor to be accompanied by a similar personification of the soursop (*Annona muricata*) (Grube and Gaida 2006: 128).⁵¹ The Maize Hero, too, is intimately connected to trees,⁵² and to fruit trees in

⁴⁶ Carrying-net holding water: Alcorn et al. 2006: 602, Anguiano 1984: 213, CM 184, Olguín 1993: 124. The Totonac Thunder Gods carry nets filled with clouds (Ichon 1969: 74), the Pipil rain deities nets filled with water (Schultze Jena 1935: 31).

⁴⁷ Compare Takalik Abaj 4 (a serpent vertically rising up from a basin) and depictions of flying Olmec maize gods (Taube 1996: figs. 17a, 27a). The San Bartolo snake, with fins set on the body, evokes the snakes which, according to the Zoques (Báez-Jorge 1979: 4), ascend from trees into the sky, where they change into thunder and lightning, and produce the rain.

⁴⁸ The next San Bartolo mural scene with the installation of a king seated on a scaffold prefigures the later Classic Maya installation scaffold covered with a tied crocodile; not inconceivably, this could be the crocodile defeated by the Maize Hero.

⁴⁹ Certain other details of the tale merit attention. One of the contests consists in throwing stones over the ocean, stones which might correspond to the lightning stones held as an attribute by the Maya rain deity. In the course of the last contest, the main Lightning's foot gets stuck in a hole in the ground, and his leg remains impaired – which could be an explanatory story for the unsteady, undulating serpentine leg of Lightning, and thus also, of god K. Suggestively, one of the main Teenek Maam's is stated to be lame due to an accident while taking lessons in rainmaking (Alcorn 1984: 59).

⁵⁰ The general idea involved in the relief's iconography seems to be that of drought (with possible iconographical allusions to the glyphs for *yaxk'in* 'drought' and *k'ahk'* 'fire').

⁵¹ The occurrence of the Tonsured Maize God's portrait glyph in the introductory statement of the inscription on the sides of Pakal's sarcophagus suggests a connection to the ancestral fruit trees depicted immediately

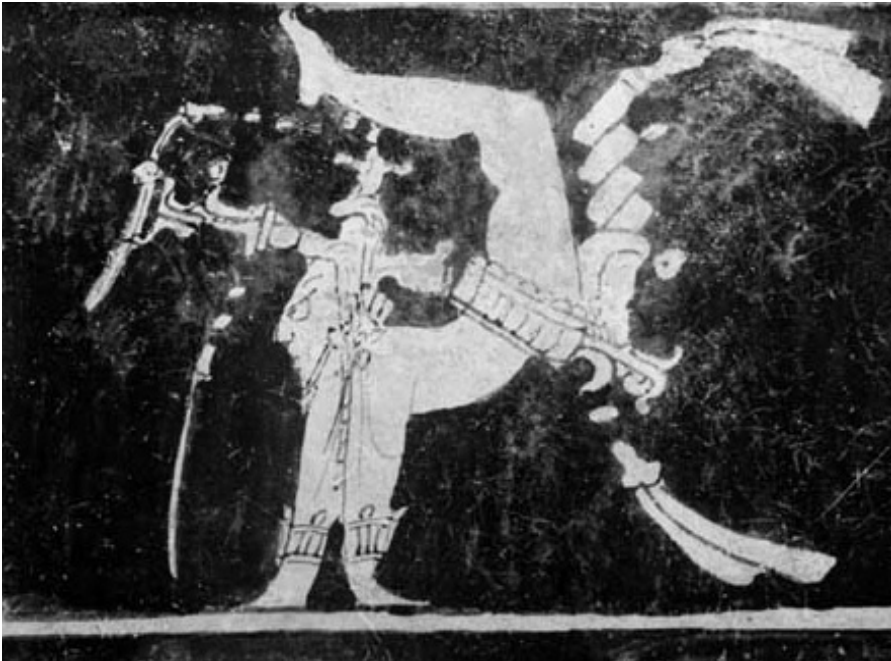


Figure 8. TMG as an acrobat (K4386) © 2009 Justin Kerr

particular. He started to climb fruit trees as soon as the turtle put him ashore (Olguín 1993: 123), fruit trees sprung up behind him when he fled his cannibal stepmother (Alcorn et al. 2006: 603), and on his way to his mother, he “sowed many fruits, as many as we can see today” (Anguiano 1984: 217). Related motifs are those of the hero making himself known to his mother by throwing mature fruits (nantse, orange, chicozapote) onto her head while being

seated in a tree, and of the hero defeating the deity of the breadnut (*Brosimum alicastrum*) by throwing himself from a tree as if he were a mature fruit, without harming himself (CM 151-152, also in Ochoa 2000: M2). This last motif in particular, found in Huastec Maya tradition and symbolizing the triumphant advent of the maize as man’s true food, recalls the Tonsured Maize God as an acrobat (**Fig. 8**), often assuming a posture which, in the Dresden Codex (15a-b), is proper of ‘diving’ deities bringing food plants (cf. Grube and Gaida 2006: 129-130), although it has also been suggested to imitate a rising stalk or tree.⁵³

Canoe Voyage with the Seeds. Whereas various Classic Maya scenes, both episodic and emblematic, can thus be connected to episodes of the Gulf Coast maize myth, other narrative scenes remain more difficult to explain. Such is the case with the Tonsured Maize God transported in a canoe steered by two aged paddlers, sometimes in the company of animals (Tikal burial 116 bones). The fact that the destination of the journey, the intention of the Old Paddlers, and the role of the animals remains unclear, renders all explanations provisional. Nonetheless, the continued insistence on the aquatic realm is of obvious importance, as is the sack of sowing-seeds carried on the Tonsured Maize God’s breast (**Fig. 2**). The Maize Hero’s role as a sower has already been mentioned (see the Turtle Carapace Emergence section, above). The foundation for this role, however, is established in other episodes. The sack with seeds specifically recalls the Maize Hero’s formula of self-revelation (Münch 1983: 167), pronounced in the house of his mother

below (Stuart and Stuart 2008: 177-179).

⁵² In some Popoluca versions, his first appearance is as an egg stuck in a tree, and mirrored in the water below (e.g., Elson 1947: 195).

⁵³ The posture has more specifically been argued (Taube 2005: 25-27, Martin 2006: 165-168) to imitate a fruit tree, or even the world tree of the center. An acrobat would first throw head and arms downward, then sway his legs upward. The (possibly consecutive) variations in the god’s acrobatic stance, particularly as regards the position of the limbs, might produce slightly different meanings. The doubling (*doblar*), or bending-over of the drying maize stalk to protect the ear against the rains, is another interpretive possibility worth considering.

upon giving origin to the maize seeds: "I am the one who germinates, I am the new seeds, I am rebirth". This proclamation immediately precedes his heroic voyage to the land of the Lightnings, and is echoed in similar proclamations enunciated on the shores of the ocean (Foster 1945: 192; cf. Elson 1947: 209, Blanco 2006: 75), when the hero reveals himself to the emissaries of the Lightnings intent on capturing him.

It is not entirely impossible that the canoe scenes relate to the latter episode, with the canoe taking the place of the usual turtle carrier. The Old Paddlers seem to have been antagonists, and could thus have played a role similar to that of the emissaries of the Lightnings. In the same scene (K1560) in which the dancing Tonsured Maize God (together with his dwarf and his hunchback) assists in the (un)dressing of God L, he is also putting his foot on the chest of what would appear to be the Stingray Spine Paddler, while he grasps the arm of a jaguar deity who could be the Jaguar Paddler.⁵⁴ In a related scene (K1524), the Stingray Spine Paddler kneels in submission before the enthroned Tonsured Maize God. The gesture of sorrow stereotypically made by the maize deity in the canoe (cf. Grube and Gaida 2006: 123) could thus be motivated by his departure to the land of the Lightnings, where his father had died, and where his own death seems to be imminent.

Nude Women. The group of nude women surrounding and adorning the Tonsured Maize God (see Quenon and Le Fort 1997: 892-893)⁵⁵ may have a functional parallel in the groups of young women ritually clothing and adorning the paper images of Chicome-Xochitl (Sandstrom 1998: 66), but there is no immediately obvious connection with the known female roles of Maize Hero mythology (the hero's sister, his mother, the mother's companions, the turtle nurse, and the aged cannibal woman). While the women's nakedness is suggestive of the eroticism proper of the sphere of Xochipilli,⁵⁶ the shown activities are of a ritual nature. According to Taube, Saturno, and Stuart (2005: 34-37), these women should be considered the maize god's wives, on a par with one of the four women surrounding the maize god in the Preclassic San Bartolo wall painting, but the iconographic evidence for this is disputable. Although the alliance of a female maize deity with a (human) husband constitutes a well-known theme (e.g., Guiteras 1961: 191-193), the inverse does not seem to be ethnographically supported. Instead, one finds Chicome-Xochitl to be accompanied by his sister, Macuil-Xochitl (Sandstrom 1991: 245), a female 'corn spirit' who might correspond to the just-mentioned woman in the San Bartolo mural.⁵⁷ Lean and almost nude, this woman shows some of the features of maize deities (Saturno, Taube, Stuart 2005: 34-35).⁵⁸

⁵⁴ I leave out of discussion here the difficult subject of the Tonsured Maize God's relation to god L, which also involves god K, the lightning deity (see K702). A connection of god L with the fertile Gulf Coast regions has been suggested (Taube 1992: 84-85). In view of God L's association with black sorcery, it is worth mentioning that the Teenek Maize Hero once had to compete with a sorcerer (Ochoa 2003: 79), and "destroyed the old god Maam who reigned in the underworld" (Alcorn 1984: 62), a deity distinct from the three rain-bringing Maamlab (including Muxi'). For a discussion of god L in connection with the Tonsured Cacao God, see Martin (2006: 169-172).

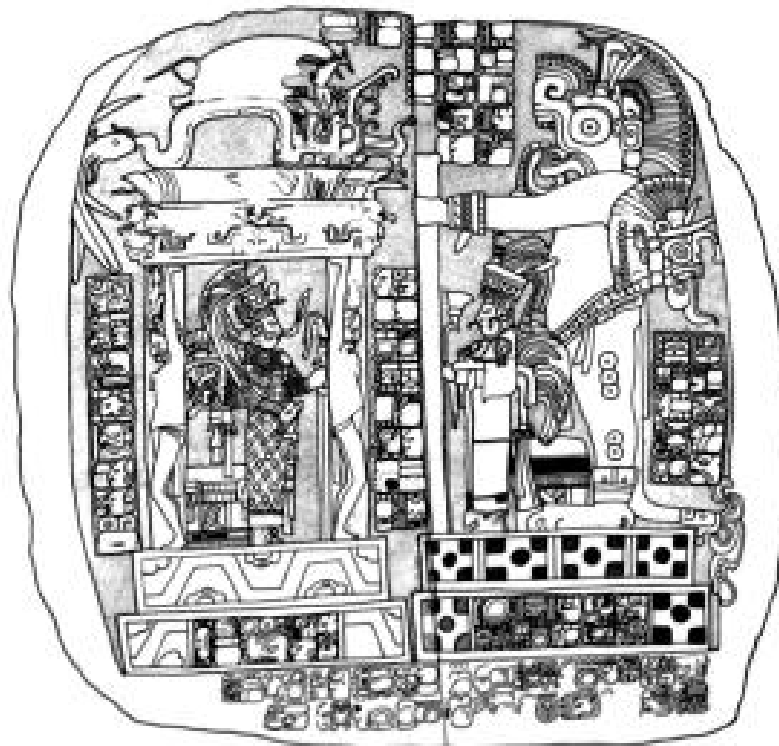
⁵⁵ For this 'dressing scene', see the following vases: K626, K1004, K1202, K3033, K4479, K4358, K6298, K6979, and K7268.

⁵⁶ Nakedness need not always have an erotic connotation, however; it can, for instance, serve to characterize Chalchiuhtlicue (e.g., Borgia 28).

⁵⁷ Substituting incest for marriage, one variant (Sandstrom and Gómez 2004: 346) states that Chicome-Xochitl "desires to mate with his sister, Five-Flower."

⁵⁸ Among these features is a shell covering her shame. In 16th-century Yucatan, such a shell was worn by girls not yet eligible for marriage (Landa, in Tozzer 1941: 102, 106).

Figure 9. TMG Queen within a house supported by Old Thunder Gods and crowned by a rain serpent (Dallas Tablet, Schele drawing)



The three remaining San Bartolo women have been interpreted as ancestresses (Saturno, Taube and Stuart 2005: 50), and the nude women surrounding the Classic maize god could be viewed in the same way. These latter, possibly ancestral women have been iconographically differentiated. The women evincing death-related features (face painting of death god

A', 'percentage sign', bony lower jaws on the head⁵⁹) should perhaps be identified with those women who died in birth-giving, and, at least in Aztec lore, were transformed into demons intent on seducing the other sex.⁶⁰ The turtle shell hip ornament visible on one of these women (**Fig. 2**) is equally suggestive of a maternal role. It can occur with Xochiquetzal (Spranz 1964: 261 Fig. 1087), another seductress, and a mother of the maize god. It may also point to the birth-goddess Ayopechtli 'Turtle Bed', in whose house, according to the Aztec song dedicated to her (Garibay 1958: 132), "the shrimps are revived" (*chacayoliva*).⁶¹ Shrimps, which have mortuary associations, are part of Maize Hero myth, since in a Tepehua rendering (Williams 1972: 87-88), the remains of the dead maize child land in a river among shrimps, which are being caught by the hero's mother and her female companions.⁶² Finally, focusing on the activity, rather than the features of the nude women, one notices an unmistakable analogy with the mothers – sometimes wearing water-lilies and aquatic creatures on their heads – who ritually present their sons with the attributes of kingship (Schele and Freidel 1993: 279-281, cf. 307).

⁵⁹ Perhaps the lower jaw is to be related to the T598 sign read as 'cave, well', and representing a disembodied eye or lower jaw.

⁶⁰ One may recall that in the Borgia Codex (47-48), the *ciuateteouh* are paralleled by the *macuilli*-deities (including Macuil-Xochitl) and by aspects of Tlazolteotl, three groups variously connected to sexuality. The *ciuateteouh* and the *macuilli*-deities hold implements of self-sacrifice, implements which recur with several of the nude women in the vase scenes (Robicsek and Hales 1981: vessel 80, p. 67; K 626). In one of the ritual texts of Ruíz de Alarcón (Coe and Whittaker 1982: 138), female *macuilli*-deities are stated to dress Chicome-Xochitl (in this case, the hero's father converted into a deer).

⁶¹ In this connection, a Totonac group of female deities called 'the Mothers' (Natsi'itni) may also be relevant. They live in the East with the Old Thunder God (see Ichon 1969: 105-107, 110).

⁶² The river had previously been poisoned with *barbasco* (Ichon 1969: 64, 71). Among the Tajín Totonacs, a river shrimp is customarily given with the deceased in his coffin (Kelly 1952: 181). In Tepehua ritual (Williams 1962: 226-227), a load of shrimps symbolizes the dead temporarily returning to their descendants. Shrimp ornaments carved from shell have been found in a royal tomb of Calakmul (see picture on www.mayas.uady.mx/articulos/pixan2.html).

Figure 10. TMG Queen controlling a lightning serpent (San Francisco Fine Arts Museums)



Maize Hero and Kingship. The incursions of the Maize Hero into the aquatic realm have a direct relevance for the ideology of kingship. The Maize Hero is pictured as both the most human, and the most powerful of all beings, the “master of our flesh” (Ichon 1969: 71), “true creator of the world” (id.), and “king of all those who are here [in this life]” (Chevalier and Bain 2003: 109), that is: The “Lord of Tlalocan” (Rodríguez López 2003: 251). The early scenes from the maize deity’s life on the San Bartolo west wall are framed by royal inauguration scenes. The Classic Tonsured Maize God can be provided with the royal headband (K5824), on a par with Hunahpu, and be depicted as a king seated on a throne (as on the Sacul vase discussed above, see also K5720), or holding the

ceremonial bar (as on a pot from Tikal cache 198, see K8009), whereas inversely, the monuments often show the king or queen dressed as a Tonsured Maize God. The myth draws up a compelling picture of the king as a heroic maize bringer, rainmaker, and pacifier of a riverine realm, who safeguards his maize fields by challenging and subduing the deities of thunder and lightning.⁶³ The representation of the Sak Nikte’ queen standing on the left palanquin of the Dallas Tablet discussed by Freidel and Guenter (2003) (**Fig. 9**) testifies to such a conception: While she has been dressed as a Tonsured Maize Goddess, the roof of her house – crowned by a rain-bringing ‘water-lily headdress’ serpent⁶⁴ – is supported by aged thunder gods forced into submission. The same basic idea is more dramatically expressed by the San Francisco Fine Arts Museums stela, which again shows the queen as a Tonsured Maize Goddess, now controlling a giant lightning serpent (cf. Miller and Martin 2004: 102-103) (**Fig. 10**).⁶⁵ In this, the queen follows in the footsteps of the Tepehua Maize Hero who (as noted in the section on the hero as a rainmaker) made the deities of thunder and lightning descend by activating a lightning serpent.

As a female maize bringer, the queen occupies a special position. Within a Mesoamerican framework, she could be compared both to Xochiquetzal, the mother of the maize (see further on), and to Macuil-Xochitl, the ‘twin’ sister of the Maize hero –

⁶³ It is consistent with this view that the Teenek consider themselves to live in the “fallowed fields of Thipaak” (Alcorn 1984: 76).

⁶⁴ This serpent serves as a logogram for the 360-day period *haab*, a word which also means ‘rain’; in the Dresden Codex (35b2), the same serpent is a shape of the rain deity. In the short caption, there is a reference to god H, whom I believe to represent the Tonsured Maize God.

⁶⁵ The type of the lightning snake held by the queen is most clearly represented on K2061. Similar depictions on vases (K5744, K7000) combine the Tonsured Maize God with still other snakes.

Xochiquetzal being a female Xochipilli, and Macuil-Xochitl a female Chicome-Xochitl.⁶⁶ The concept of a female maize deity (or rather, 'Maize Heroine')⁶⁷ has obvious implications for the marital alliances between kingdoms: Being a woman, the maize can be married off to subordinate kingdoms to occupy the throne there, whether as the reigning queen, or as a queen-consort.⁶⁸

Patron of Feasting, Games, and the Arts

A basic characteristic of Chicome-Xochitl and the Maize Hero generally – often thought of as a boy – is his boundless vitality and gaiety.⁶⁹ He is described as continually dancing, singing, and feasting, while overcoming all sorts of trials (e.g., Alcorn et al. 2006: 602, Barón 1978: 443). The first act of the Popoluca Maize Hero on arriving in the realm of the lightnings, for example, is to construct a bower, prepare maize beer for the lightnings and their emissaries,⁷⁰ and play the turtle drum (Blanco 2006: 74; cf. Elson 1947: 205, 209, Foster 1945: 192, Münch 1983: 167). First of all, the hero is a musician like his father (Ichon 1969: 63). The myth specifically describes Chicome-Xochitl's invention of the rattle (Barón 1978: 448), the turtle carapace drum (Barón 1978: 449), and the flute (Barón 1978: 443, cf. Ichon 1969: 78); it is also with a flute that he resurrects his father (Stresser-Péan, in Ichon 1969: 78). Rather than hiding from his enemies in a blowgun, the hero hides in his flute (Ichon 1969: 68,78), and instead of the thumping noise of the ball game, it is his turtle drum music and singing which attracts the attention of his adversaries. Moreover, he is described as painting (Foster 1945: 193, Williams 1972: 88, Olguín 1993: 123)⁷¹ and incising (Barón 1978: 446, Ichon 1969: 65) the carapace of a turtle, artistic activities equated with embroidery (Elson 1947: 207, Barón 1978: 449) and the weaving of a shawl, or shoulder cape (*quechquemitl*, Ichon 1969: 65).⁷² Being a painter, Chicome-Xochitl is also a writer, since he manifests himself to his mother through his writing, inscribed on the leaf of a fruit tree (Hooft and Cerda 2003: 49; cf. Blanco 2006: 74, Elson 1947: 203). Finally, the hero defeats his opponents in a series of games, rather than through violence, games which include a ball game match against the Old Thunder God, Muxi' (Alcorn et al. 2006: 603), and the other thunder gods (Ichon 1969: 68, Williams 1972: 90-91).⁷³

⁶⁶ Sahagún (1979: 40-41, L.1 Cap.14) already considered Macuil-Xochitl another name for Xochipilli. Generally, the Maize Hero (like the earth itself) can ritually be referred to as male and female together (e.g., Alcorn et al. 2006: 605). Matthew Looper (2002) explored the possible implications of the Tonsured Maize God's double gender.

⁶⁷ Various Maya tales mention protective maize goddesses in active, heroic roles, slaying flood serpents and earthquake demons (Braakhuis 1990: 136, cf. Hooft 2007: 184).

⁶⁸ Viewed from the same perspective, the image of the maize deity carried away by a river and coming into flower on another shore could also be taken to symbolize the arrival of a foreign king, or queen.

⁶⁹ This gaiety also makes him and his sister Macuil-Xochitl the likely models for the male and female 'smiling faces' of the Gulf Coast (cf. Nicholson 1971b: 16). A child-like Tonsured Maize God lying on his belly (K5210) bears comparison to similar Veracruz smiling child representations.

⁷⁰ The motif of drunkenness involved in this episode finds its explanation in the drunken orgies which various Gulf Coast populations traditionally ascribe to the Old Thunder God and the Lightnings (cf. Taube 1992: 97), and which are believed to accompany the rain storms produced by the latter in the sky (Stresser-Péan 1952: 86-87).

⁷¹ In a similar way, the hero showed his gratitude by 'painting' the wasps, snakes, and jaguars who spared his life (CM 184-185, 195).

⁷² These last activities would rather belong to the female sphere of Chicome-Xochitl's sister, Macuil-Xochitl.

⁷³ This ball game recalls that of king Huemac against the Rain Deities, with the maize at stake (Codex Chimalpopoca, Lehmann 1974: 375ff); Huemac finally receded into Cincalco 'Place of the Corn House'.



Figure 11. TMG as a patron of writing (K1185) © 2009 Justin Kerr

Commenting on the Totonac Maize Hero, the French ethnographer, Alain Ichon, wrote (1969: 80): "It is difficult to compare the Master of the Maize to the maize god Centeotl, a divinity of second order, or to the other Nahuatl agricultural deities. One could only put him on a par with Quetzalcoatl himself, discoverer of the maize, or with Xochipilli, patron of music and

dance" (1969: 80). Ichon's observation fits in with that of Nicholson, who, in his overview of Central-Mexican religion (1971a: 417-418), noted that the maize deity Centeotl "was merged with an important group of youthful solar-fertility deities who, aside from the generative power in the abstract – and sexual lust which promoted it – presided over flowers, feasting, painting, dancing, and gaming."⁷⁴ Nicholson lists as most important within this group the deities Piltzintecuhtli, Xochipilli, Chicome-Xochitl, the five Macuiltonalleque (with Macuil-Xochitl predominating), Ixtlilton, and Ahuateotl.

Painting, writing, sculpting. Of the pre-Spanish 'solar-fertility deities' merged with the maize, Xochipilli and Chicome-Xochitl in particular show the same associations as the Tonsured Maize God. As Taube has noted (1985: 175), the Tonsured Maize God is a patron of the high-status arts of sculpting and writing, on a par with the Howler Monkey personifying the 11th day, Chuen or Batz (**Fig. 11**). This connection between the maize spirit and the arts of sculpting and writing has found expression in various ways. When discussing the Hun-Hunahpu theory, the miraculous maize stalk of the artisan deities, Hun-Batz and Hun-Choven, was already mentioned. Iconographically, the head which is being carved or polished repeatedly shows the features of the Foliated or Tonsured Maize God (Robicsek and Hales 1981: 127 fig. 28A, 130 fig. 32A).⁷⁵ In one case (id.: 57 vessel 67), such a head has been shaped like a bifurcated corn cob, which the Teenek believe to be inhabited by their Maize Hero, Dhipak, and to ward off famine (Hernández 2004: 226). There are still other instances of artistic activity immediately connected to the maize.⁷⁶

Although as a sculptor and writer, the Tonsured Maize God corresponds to Xochipilli, the more specific association is again with Chicome-Xochitl. Generally, everyone born under the sign of Xochitl was destined to become "hábil para todas las artes mecánicas" (Sahagún 1979: 225, Bk. 4 Ch. 2), but it was on 7 Xochitl that the painters

⁷⁴ The solar aspect refers to iconographical features, and also, perhaps, to the fact that in the Mixtec Vienna Codex (cf. Furst 1978: 216-220), the date 1 Flower occurs within a solar disk.

⁷⁵ Previously (Braakhuis 1987) I have argued that taken together, sculpting the head and writing in the book can symbolize the creation of a human being (the 'man made of maize') and his birth-sign.

⁷⁶ Examples are: The Tonsured Maize God descending amidst howler monkeys occupied with sculpting heads and reading books (K344, Robicsek and Hales 1981: 127 fig. 28A); the howler monkey's back of the head shaped like that of the Tonsured Maize God (id., 128: fig. 29B); the head of a writer infixed with the Tonsured Maize God's characteristic *wa*-sign (K8425); a carver's 'arm-pit shoot' holding a corn cob (K2873, Copan vase).

honoured their patron deity, Chicome-xochitl, whereas the female weavers and needleworkers honoured Xochiquetzal (Sahagún 1979: id.; 94, Bk. 2 Ch.19). Serna affirms that Chicome-Xochitl was the god of painters, while adding that he was also the “inventor of the paint brush” (*pinceles*, in Caso 1967: 199). In the Mixtec Vienna Codex, Seven-Flower - a youthful deity with solar associations and connected to the ballgame - is depicted with precious objects, particularly paper-making instruments and the paint brush (Furst 1978: 164, 241-242). The emphasis on writing appears to be reflected by the fact that the Tonsured Maize God is more often represented as a writer, than as a sculptor.⁷⁷

Under his alternative name Xochipilli, the Aztec deity was also the patron of the 11th day, ‘Spider Monkey’: “And he who was then born they regarded favourably [...] And he would be, perchance, a singer, dancer, or scribe; he would produce some work of art” (Sahagún 1957: 82). One concludes that, in the same way, the Tonsured Maize God shared his patronage with the deity of the 11th day, ‘Howler Monkey’. Apparently, the simian dexterity of the day god, whether howler monkey or spider monkey, was at the root of the association with either Xochipilli or the Tonsured Maize God. Hun-Hunahpu has no role to play in this. In short, as an agricultural fertility god who is also the patron of painting and writing, the ancient Chicome-Xochitl is like the Tonsured Maize God among the Mayas. In regard to the present-day Chicome-Xochitl, narrators often emphasize the skill and wisdom of “the wise maize god” (*Itamatiosinti*). His occasional acts of painting and writing underscore these qualities (cf. Chevalier and Bain 2003: 173-174, and Hooft and Cerda 2003: 28).

As a prefiguration of the king, the Tonsured Maize God is pictured as a young version of the upper god embodying celestial rule (god D). This upper god, Itzamna, was considered to be the inventor of writing (Landa), and is repeatedly depicted as a writer. In fact, the two deities are so often found together that it is hard not to view the younger one as the upper god’s son (or rather, perhaps, his ‘replacement’ and grandson).⁷⁸ In the codices, a comparable relationship prevails between the young god H and god D (Taube 1992: 56), and a good case could be made for identifying god H as a late form of the Tonsured Maize God.⁷⁹ Among the Aztecs, the relationship between the two Maya deities parallels that between Tonacatecuhtli ‘Lord of Our Food’ and Xochipilli (Chicome-Xochitl).⁸⁰ As Ichon (1969: 80) observed, the Totonac title given to the Maize Hero, ‘Master of Our Flesh’, could be rendered into Nahuatl by ‘Tonacatecuhtli’ (with a focus on *nacatl* ‘flesh’).

⁷⁷ Tonsured Maize God as a sculptor: Variant form with foliation holding a head (K8457); young lord with Tonsured Maize God forehead ornament seated immediately behind a carver (Copan vase, K2873).

⁷⁸ K4545 is a good example, since it shows five Tonsured Maize Gods accompanying god D, with all six figures clearly representing the same basic type. Especially K7727 (right half) is suggestive of filiation. It presents the maize family at god D’s court, including an informally-clad, adolescent Tonsured Maize God.

⁷⁹ God H’s portrait glyph is very similar to certain forms of the Tonsured Maize God’s portrait glyph (beaded jewel prefix and seed or ovarium-like infix), as well as to the head of the Tonsured Maize God itself. God H’s depictions show a considerable overlap with those of the Foliated Maize God (god E). Moreover, on DC11a2, god H’s portrait glyph includes the prefix ‘Six’, which is also found included in the Tonsured Maize God’s name on the carved bones from Tikal. The very frequency of god H’s occurrence in the codices constitutes an additional argument for identifying him as the Tonsured Maize God, rather than as the deity of the number Three (*contra* Taube 2004a: 73).

⁸⁰ Chicome-Xochitl as a name for Tonacatecuhtli: Vatican A codex fo. 12v (in Caso 1967: 199). Xochipilli substituting for Tonacatecuhtli as patron of the day Cipactli: Spranz 1964: 314 (Vat. B). Xochipilli and Xochiquetzal substituting for Tonacatecuhtli and Tonacacihuahatl: Nicholson 1971: 411, Spranz 1964: 314, 331.

Dancing, games, music. Apart from painting, writing, and sculpting, the Tonsured Maize God is equally associated with dancing, games, and music. He is typically shown dancing in rich attire, and the fact that the pots depicting a dancing Tonsured Maize God (and often containing maize and cacao) were once presented as royal gifts during the feasts of the lords (Reents-Budet 1994: 88-96) is in line with Xochipilli's general patronage over feasting. Indeed, the dance feasts of the Tonsured Maize God are directly comparable to Xochipilli's 'Flower Feasts' (*Xochilhuitl*) on 1 and 7 Xochitl, when the lords and grandees "took out their richest feather attires with which they adorned themselves for song and dance" (Sahagún 1979: 95, Bk. 2 Ch. 19), and when the king distributed gifts to singers, courtiers, and warriors alike.⁸¹ The aquatic surroundings of the dancing Tonsured Maize God - signaled by the presence of water fowl resembling cormorants and herons, and of dancing 'rain dwarfs' and hunchbacks with head extensions in the shape of these birds (e.g., K4989, K8533)⁸² - are mirrored in many poems sung on the dancing-feasts of the Aztec nobility (Garibay 1964-1968), with their frequent allusions to the mythical land of origins, Tamoanchan, and to the rain deities' paradise, Tlalocan, both being places which could be situated in the eastern Gulf Coast region (cf. López Austin 1997: 55-57, 214-215). In line with this, Chicome-Xochitl's female counterpart, Xochiquetzal, was believed to have been surrounded by dwarfs and hunchbacks "who entertained her with exquisite music, dancing, and dance performances" (Muñoz Camargo, in López Austin 1997: 84-85), while she was residing in Tamoanchan.

The Tonsured Maize God further plays the role of an acrobat (**Fig. 8**) – in a posture symbolic of vegetative renewal - and thereby demonstrates the agility which is equally characteristic of the Maize Hero. There is a fair possibility that he is also involved in the ball game.⁸³ As to his role as a musician, the precursor of the Tonsured Maize God on the San Bartolo west mural (Saturno 2006: 75, Houston, Stuart, and Taube 2006: fig. 7.29b) is shown dancing, while holding what is probably a rattle in one hand, and an antler for playing the turtle carapace drum, suspended over his belly, in the other. As has been noted above, Maize Hero myth describes the hero's invention and first use of both the rattle and the turtle shell drum. The dead king Pakal - assimilated to a floating Tonsured Maize God child (cf. Stuart and Stuart 2008: 175, also 155), and possibly returning to the realm (lagoon or ocean island) of his Lightning relatives - wears such a turtle drum.⁸⁴ The flute is played by what would appear to be a late form of the Tonsured Maize God in the Dresden Codex (33a), in a depiction of a maize ritual.

⁸¹ According to Sahagún (1979: 40, L.1 C.14), Macuil-Xochitl and Xochipilli were the deities of those living in the palaces and great houses. Both were worshipped on the moveable Flower Feasts. The quote more specifically refers to the Flower Feast of 1 Xochitl.

⁸² These dwarfs may be identical with the rain-making dwarfs who assist the Old Thunder God (Hooft 2007: 198), This would make their apparent subordination to the maize deity all the more significant.

⁸³ One of the dancing Tonsured Maize Gods (Miller 2001: 87, fig. 94) is suggestive of a ball player, although, as M. Looper pointed out to me, various identifying attributes are missing. On the most famous of the Copan ball court markers, one player wears a bird-headed 'rain dwarf' as a frontal adornment, while the text includes a possible reference to 'VI.God H'; the La Esperanza marker appears to show the Tonsured Maize God's portrait glyph infixed in the ball (cf. Miller and Martin 2004: 89); the hairpiece of a La Corona ball player (see Freidel and Schele 1993: fig. 8:6) could suggest the upper tuft of the Tonsured Maize God.

⁸⁴ The lightning axe in Pakal's forehead probably relates to the display of a Lightning baby on the piers of his burial temple. It may be noted that the 'dressing-scene' on the famed codex-style vase K1004 includes the 'centipede-snake' maw, here perhaps representing an exit into a realm of renaissance (rather than an entrance into a subterranean passageway).



Figure 12. TMG as a hummingbird (K4950) © 2009 Justin Kerr

Regions of Dance and Music. In an important Early-Classic Maya scene first analyzed by Hellmuth (1988: fig. 4.2, and pp. 152-174), a mythological region has been depicted whose floating 'bone flowers' and 'bone neck' wading bird could suggest a land of the dead. At the same time, it is a 'region of flowers' redolent of Tamoanchan-Tlalocan. Here, within the maws of a large snake, the Tonsured Maize God appears as an acrobat, only resting on his lower arms,⁸⁵ and accompanied by the emblem of two rattles and what would appear to be a drum - another indication that, like Xochipilli and the Maize Hero, the Tonsured Maize God is a patron of music. A second pair of rattles is actually handled by an officiant (a wind god, according to Taube, 2004a: 73) seated in front of him.



Figure 13. TMG as a hummingbird and "Flower Lord" (K1507, left) © 2009 Justin Kerr

This flowery realm – further inhabited by birds, chimerical denizens of the otherworldly waters, and rain and lightning deities - is suggestive of the transoceanic world of the Old Thunder God, Muxi', described as a paradise lying in the East. Full of singing birds, and considered to be home to the souls of dancers and musicians (Alcorn 1984: 85, cf. Ichon 1969: 337, 350), it can be reached on the back of a giant turtle (Alcorn 1984: 83). The ancestors once boarded such a turtle to visit Muxi' and implore him to come and open the Maize Mountain for them (Valle 2003: 176-178). As has been noted, the restored Maize Hero himself was carried back by a turtle from Muxi's ocean realm, where he had been living for some time after his

drowning (Ochoa 2000: M1). Alternatively, the Maize Hero used a bridge formed by turtles to get to the realm of the Lightnings and ancestors (CM 183, CM 198-199), and back to this world again (Gréco 1989: 183).⁸⁶ According to an Aztec tradition (cf. López Austin

⁸⁵ Such a serpent, with the 'diving' maize deity in its maws, can also be held by the ruler (as on K7019).

⁸⁶ The paradise of the Old Thunder God can be located in the midst of the ocean, but also in a lagoon like

1996: 137-139), it was by walking over a similar bridge, consisting of a turtle, a mermaid, and a whale, that an emissary of Tezcatlipoca once reached a transoceanic realm in the East, from where he brought musical instruments to mankind.⁸⁷ A prayer directed by a sower to the Popoloca Maize Hero, Homshuk, seems to refer to this region (Chevalier and Bain 2003: 204): "You come from another people, you are not from here, you whose house lies on the other side of the pond (where the sea falls), where the sun goes up, (where) the dead rise."

Alternatively, according to the Huastec Mayas, one can reach the eastern paradise on the other side of the water through one of the cave 'doorways' in the western mountains, following a tortuous and dangerous path underground (Alcorn 1984: 83). Abstracting from the geographical coordinates of the Huasteca, it is not at all inconceivable that the 'Flower Mountain' cave portals present in various Tonsured Maize God scenes should be understood in a similar way.

Among the inhabitants of the Early-Classic flower region described above is a long-billed bird - probably a hummingbird - whose pointed beak pierces a flower, while its head is turned towards the descending maize deity and his musical instruments. The fact that the Tonsured Maize God can at times assume the disguise of this same bird (**Figs. 12 and 13**; also Robicsek and Hales 1981: vessels 169, 170; cf. Tikal vase, K8008) again points to Xochipilli as a deity of song and music. In describing the erotical charge of katum 11 Ahau, a famous passage in the Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel (pp.45C-46C, Roys 1967: 104-105) uses the images of flowers, honey, and a hummingbird (emblematic of love magic) while connecting these to specific deities of song and music. Among the flowers is one called Ix Macuil Xuchit 'Five-Flower', a name closely resembling the *ix ho-yal nicté* 'Five-leaved (or five-petaled) Flower' with which it is on a par;⁸⁸ the hummingbird descending to mate with this flower goddess is first called *nicté ahau* 'Flower Lord' - apparently a Yucatec rendering of Xochipilli - and then Ppizlimtec. Ppizlimtec (like the Ah Kin Xocbiltun also mentioned) is defined by Cogolludo (in Roys 1967: 105 n.4) as a deity of music, song, and poetry.⁸⁹

Lord of Our Flesh: Maize and Deer

As a deity of human food, Chicome-Xochitl is not only associated with the origin of maize and agriculture, but also with that of fish and fish-catching,⁹⁰ and of venison and the deer hunt. In particular the association with the deer hunt can be traced back to early-colonial times, and is also demonstrable for the Tonsured Maize God. Mythologically, the hero's

that of Tamiahua (Reyes 1976: 127-128). The Gulf Coast paradises of Tamoanchan and Tlalocan have already been mentioned.

⁸⁷ The emissary (Wind) crosses the ocean to arrive in the 'House of the Sun', and his song makes the musicians draw near. The myth is relevant for Taube's discussion (2004a) of the role of breath, wind, and solar paradises in Mesoamerica.

⁸⁸ There might be a connection with one of the women in an aquatic investiture scene (K1202), whose name includes the numeral 'five', and also with the 'Five-Flower Place' mentioned on the plate with the emerging 'Bald-headed' Maize God (K1609), a toponym conceivably referring to a flowery paradise (cf. Looper 2003: 67-72).

⁸⁹ Additionally, Cogolludo (ibid.) gives 'Ah Kin Xooc' as another name for Pizlimtec (cf. Thompson 1970: 313). If Pizlimtec (actually Ppizlimtec) is to be taken as a Nahuatl name, it could correspond to Pilsintektli, another name for the Maize Hero, or to Piltzintecuhtli, the name of his father among the ancient Nahuas.

⁹⁰ The relevant episode recurs in many versions (e.g., Elson 1947: 197-198). In the Borgia (13) and Vatican B (32) codices, Xochipilli as the patron of the day Ozomaztli is accompanied by the emblem of a man catching fishes in a net. Maize and fish are metaphorically related (cf. Taube 1986: 58; Braakhuis 1990: 126-128).



Figure 14. TMG in the cave of the Owner of the Deer (section) © 2009 Justin Kerr

mother (whose names relate to earth, health, and fertility)⁹¹ has an important role to play in this. Usually, she becomes pregnant through the intervention of a bird, a flea, or a magical object. Rather than invoking these stereotypes, however, a Nahuatl version (Sandstrom 2005: 47) has her fall in love with a deer. She “meets a young man on the trail back from the spring and as they are parting, he promises to see her again. When she turns to look at him, she sees a beautiful deer bounding away.” The mutual sexual attraction between human beings

and the deer, which is at the heart of the Mesoamerican hunt (Braakhuis 2001), already announces the myth’s outcome (Sandstrom 2004: 346): Although Chicome-Xochitl - accompanied by his sister, Macuil-Xochitl – finally succeeds in localizing his father’s bones, this is only to find a deer rising and running away.

In other versions, the story is more intricate. The father leaves his pregnant wife to disappear into the world of the Lightnings in search of the maize - where he is killed. The mother gives birth to her maize child. After the defeat of the Lightnings, the son can only resurrect his father for a brief and uncertain interval; his mother expectantly awaits her husband’s arrival, but due to a misunderstanding, he either dies a second time and falls apart into bones again, or is transformed into a deer.⁹² The Maize Hero destines the deer father to be hunted forever, and thus time and again to be reduced to bones.

Aztec sources identify the mother as Xochiquetzal and the father as Piltzintecuhtli, who, together with his son, is among Nicholson’s ‘solar-fertility deities’ merged with the maize.⁹³ According to early-colonial sources, Piltzintecuhtli, together with Xochiquetzal, engendered the maize. The maize child is both Xochipilli and Cinteotl, just as Sahagún’s Song of Xochipilli is really about Cinteotl. When, in a passage of the *Histoyre du Mechique*, the child is called Cinteotl (Garibay 1965: 110, cf.33), the latter’s subterranean transformation into all sorts of edible plants and fruits would seem to justify a denomination as Xochipilli (id.: 109), which, in another place (109), is indeed the name

⁹¹ Tonantsi ‘Our Mother’, a general fertility goddess (Sandstrom); Tlali ‘Earth’ or ‘Tlatepaktli’ (CM 196); grandmother of all living creatures and patroness of curing (Ichon); ‘Santa Rosa’, the cannabis plant (Williams); Blanca Flor (Münch, Blanco).

⁹² Bones: Blanco 2006: 76, Elson 1947: 214, Segre 1990: 327. Deer: CM 186, CM 201, García de León 1969: 302, Münch 1983: 167, Sandstrom 2004: 346, Williams 1973: 91.

⁹³ Piltzintecuhtli’s iconographical associations are with the sun and the maize, and with Xochipilli (Spranz 1964: 262-263).

given to the child.⁹⁴ The burial of Xochiquetzal's child recurs in the Maize Hero myth when the mother buries her dead child, and finds that on its grave mound, a maize stalk has appeared. In two cultic songs of the Aztecs, the maize family is placed within aquatic surroundings (those of Tamoanchan) similar to those which characterize the rebirth episodes of Maize Hero myth, and to scenes with the Tonsured Maize God.⁹⁵

Piltzintecuhtli also occurs as a name for the deer in ritual texts for the deer hunt collected by Ruíz de Alarcón in 17th-century Morelos and Guerrero, texts which thus appear to refer back to the mythological episode of the hero's father's final transformation into a deer. This connection is especially plausible, since the episode is an ancient one: It is already present in the Siratatapeci myth mentioned above, part of the Chronicles of Michoacan (Craine and Reindorp 1970: 63-64), and clearly predates the conquest period. In one of Ruíz's texts in particular (1982: 145, II-9), the hunter appears to identify with the son of Xochiquetzal, while referring to the quarry thus: "At last I shall carry my father Chicome-Xochitl Piltzintecuhtli; I have come to seize him. I shall carry him. Already she awaits him expectantly, my mother Xochiquetzal (1982: 145, II-9)."

The fact that the father has the same calendrical birth-name as the son is in accord with the fact that Maize Hero myth emphasizes the great likeness of father and son, save for their different fates.⁹⁶ Both being deities of human sustenance, the name 7-Xochitl can refer to seven maize cobs in the case of the son (Sandstrom 1991: 245), and to seven antlers in that of the father (Coe and Whittaker 1982: 132 and 132 n. 7). Rejoining the two with their mother and wife, some contemporary Nahuatl narrators stated (CM 186, 201) that in the end, both deities are destined to come together on the altar table of 'Our Mother' (*Tonantsi*): The son as a pile of tortillas, the father as a dish of venison ("un buen plato").

The role of Chicome-Xochitl as the son of a deer and the institutor of the deer hunt appears to be reflected in the iconography of the Tonsured Maize God. A vase in a Munich private collection shows an antlered Tonsured Maize God in the cave of the Owner of the Deer (**Fig. 14**),⁹⁷ probably – as I have argued elsewhere (Braakhuis 2001: 403-405) – in the act of sexually regenerating the latter's deer children, and thus freeing the way for maize cultivation. According to Mesoamerican belief, the Owner of the Deer regenerates his children from their collected bones, or – as appears to be the case here – has the hunter regenerate their bones sexually. The Tonsured Maize God's role once more confirms his identity with Xochipilli Chicome-Xochitl, especially so since Xochipilli – being in one group with Ahuateotl ('Pleasure God') – was also a deity of eroticism, in this case: the erotical attraction which informs the hunt.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ In this same passage, Xochiquetzal is replaced by a female Xochipilli (Garibay 1965: 110).

⁹⁵ The Song of Xochiquetzal is set in the "region of mist and rain", while evoking Xochiquetzal on her way to the Gulf Coast region of Tamoanchan, and Piltzintecuhtli weepingly searching for her (Garibay 1958: 108-109ff). The Atamalqualiztli-song (id.: 150-153) evokes the birth of Cinteotl in Tamoanchan on 1 Xochitl: "Centeotl was born in the region of rain and mist: Where the children of man are made, where the owners of the emerald fishes live!". In a later couplet, it mentions Piltzintecuhtli playing ball "in the house of night [*yoaichan*]", perhaps in allusion to his death in the underworld

⁹⁶ The Maize Hero Chicome-Xochitl is sometimes called *Pilsintektli* (CM 182, CM 191); in principle, the */sin/* element could represent *sintli*, the maize, but also the reverential suffix *-tsin*.

⁹⁷ For a drawing of the representation as a whole (including a young woman riding on a deer), see Braakhuis 2001: fig. 8.

⁹⁸ It may be noted that a possible hieroglyphic reference to Chicome-Xochitl occurs in the Madrid Codex (41b1) with the picture of a hunter carrying a deer quarry. In a section of the Fejérváry-Mayer Codex (9), a young deity forming part of a group including Macuil-Xochitl, Xochipilli, Xochiquetzal, and Xilonen (Anders et al. 1994) wears an antler in his headdress, and may thus represent Chicome-Xochitl (father or son) as a deity of venison.



Figure 15. Twins discovering the maize (K7268) © 2009 Justin Kerr

The Maize Hero and the Twin Heroes

A final point concerns the relation between the ancient narratives of the Twin Heroes and of the Maize Hero. As has been argued, there is no reason not to consider the Twins (whose fates reflect that of the maize in important respects) as being on a par with the Tonsured Maize God, and as belonging to the same generation, with the Twins primarily representing hunting and war, and the Tonsured Maize God agriculture. Iconographically, the two hero myths intersect at the re-emergence and 'investiture' of the maize deity. The Twins alternate with the nude women as figures flanking the resurrected maize deity, and are also found in between them while they approach the maize deity standing in the water. In both contexts, the Twins initially seem to keep distance, as if they had just arrived on the scene to witness the ongoing events (**Fig. 15**).⁹⁹ This rather suggests that the Twins, as true culture heroes, had been searching for the place of emergence of the maize, analogously to that other Mesoamerican culture hero, Quetzalcoatl, who once – like the Twins - descended into the Underworld, and then, in another episode, discovered the Maize Mountain and the seeds stored there. Indeed, by assisting the Tonsured Maize God in preparing the earth for cultivation, the Twins appear to have exceeded the Toltec hero: While the War Twin, Xbalanque, carries a bowl with the god's jade attributes, Hunahpu consistently carries the sack with sowing seeds, and appears to step out of the meeting-place of the Tonsured Maize God and the nude women to start doing the sower's work; and while the Tonsured Maize God carries a sack with sowing-seeds in his canoe, the Twins hold paddles which could as well be digging-sticks, or hoes.¹⁰⁰ Whether the Classic Twins - unlike their late successors in the Popol Vuh (Edmonson 1971: 94ff, cf. Tedlock 1996: 109ff) - got the chance to do more than just manifest their readiness, must remain an open question. However, the explanation for the Quichean Twins' assimilation to the maize may well reside in their original role as discoverers and first sowers of the maize.

⁹⁹ Twins amongst nude women: K1202, K6979; as observers standing aside: Taube 1986: fig. 4 (emergence), K6298 (emergence), K7268 (TMG and two women).

¹⁰⁰ Xbalanque with bowl, K1004; Hunahpu with sowing-seeds, K1004, K1202, K4479, K6979; Hunahpu stepping out, K4479; Twins with paddles / digging-sticks, K5608.

Summary and Conclusion

This article presents an alternative to the current Hun-Hunahpu theory for interpreting Tonsured Maize God iconography. The following conclusions give an outline of the position defended here: (1) Taube's basic arguments for an equation of Tonsured Maize God and Hun-Hunahpu deserve reconsideration, whether taken alone, or in conjunction; (2) For an explanation of Tonsured Maize God iconography, Hun-Hunahpu is irrelevant; (3) There is little or no iconographical evidence for a view of the Tonsured Maize God as a father of the Twins; (4) The Tonsured Maize God and the Twins should in principle be considered on a par; (5) The myth of the Tonsured Maize God is in all likelihood an ancient Maya version of the contemporary Gulf Coast Maize Hero myth; and (6) The interaction of the Twins with the Tonsured Maize God is likely to represent the heroic theme of the discovery of corn. In this essay's argument, a crucial role falls to the Maize Hero of the contemporary Nahuas, Chicome-Xochitl. In the person of this deity, two defining features of the Tonsured Maize God, writing and turtle-birth, come together. In the Aztec period, Chicome-Xochitl - an aspect of Xochipilli - was considered to be the inventor of the paint-brush and the art of writing; among contemporary Nahua-speaking populations of the Gulf Coast, he is a culture bringer comparable to Xochipilli, and intimately associated with a turtle at his rebirth. The main correspondences discussed in this essay between Tonsured Maize God and Gulf Coast Maize Hero, including the present-day Nahua and the ancient Aztec Chicome-Xochitl, are listed in the two tables below. Since the amount of coherence of the Classic Maya maize god scenes is unclear, and also because of the possibility that scenes may have been conflated, no attempt has been made to reconstruct an overall narrative sequence for the Classic Maya maize myth.

Taken together, the correspondences reviewed in tables 1 and 2 leave little doubt that the Gulf Coast Maize Hero is next of kin to the Tonsured Maize God, both being characters actively interacting with other deities and powers of nature. In their conjunction, the present-day narrative traditions of the Gulf Coast regarding the Maize Hero possess an unrivalled comprehensiveness, including male and female maize heroes, hunt and agriculture, burial and aquatic regeneration, turtle and Maize Mountain, ancestors and the various deities of wind, rain, thunder, and lightning, a realm of darkness and a paradise in the sea. These narratives allow one to think in native terms about the spirit of the maize as a creative principle actively involved in reshaping its environment, rather than as a mere personification of the maize stalk in its various stages of development. In the considerable, and still expanding, ethnographical material related to the Maize Hero - including agricultural rituals and cosmographical concepts - one may expect to find solutions to some of the questions Tonsured Maize God iconography continues to pose. One cannot tell beforehand how far this adventure will lead us, and to what extent ancient Maya maize mythology will turn out to be homologous, or even identical, with contemporary versions of Gulf Coast mythology. But the undertaking is at least a meaningful, and, moreover, a necessary one.

Table 1

Shared characteristics	
<i>Tonsured Maize God</i>	<i>Gulf Coast Maize Hero</i>
maize deity associated with fruit trees	maize deity associated with fruit trees
youthful creator god (young form of Itzamna)	youthful creator god (Xochipilli as Tonacatecuhtli)
lightning axe in forehead	inventor of lightning / son of lightning
dancing	dancing
music (rattles, drum, carapace drum)	music (rattles and carapace drum)
games (acrobat, possibly ball player)	general playfulness (including ballgame)
writing	writing (Chicome-Xochitl)
aquatic habitat of flowers, herons/cormorants, and music	lagoon paradise, aquatic paradise of the Old Thunder God, Tlalocan-Tamoanchan
attributes of kingship (headband, throne, ceremonial bar)	'Lord of Tlalocan'

Table 2

Scenes with narrative parallels	
<i>Tonsured Maize God</i>	<i>Gulf Coast Maize Hero</i>
floating on or in water	floating on or in water (baby, egg, flour, atole)
emerging from crack in turtle	reborn from turtle cave
wearing turtle-patterned clothes, incl. shoulder cape	weaving turtle shoulder cape
emerging from aquatic skull and dancing on top of it	returning from the aquatic realm of the dead
surrounded by crocodiles at skull emergence and bearing crocodile epithet at turtle emergence	encounter with crocodile while crossing the ocean; assumption of crocodile's lightning power
flying in the air together with an ascending water snake (San Bartolo)	floating in the air as a rain maker
descending headlong (acrobatic stance): advent of food plants	throwing himself from a tree: advent of maize food
carrying antler; mating with deer woman in cave of Owner of the Deer	son of a deer; regenerating paternal bones as deer quarry
dancing and music-making amidst turtle-associated deities (San Bartolo); facing Lightning (god K) as an equal	challenging Lightnings with music and revealing himself to them
seated on a throne with aged Turtle Bacab (God N) at his feet	dictating law to Old Thunder God and to Lightnings

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CM = Cuerpos de maíz (see below)

K = Kerr Maya Vase Archives (www.mayavase.com)

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