

Maya Conceptions of War

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preferred the latter possibility in their translation of the deity name in the Books of Chilam Balam as “the feet [made out of] wood”.

A deity of war and conflict

What reasons let us suspect that B’olon Yokte’ K’uh was a deity of war and conflict? The inscriptions from Palenque offer us a first glimpse. K’inich Janaab’ Pakal, the famous Palenque ruler, devoted much of his energy to avenge the devastating attacks of Calakmul against Palenque during the sixth century A.D. (Martin and Grube 2000: 164–165). The Hieroglyphic Stairway recounts an attack by a Calakmul sublord in A.D. 599, just a few years before Janaab’ Pakal was born. The rest of the inscriptions narrates several events that took place in A.D. 659 (9.11.6.16.11 7 Chuwen 4 Ch’en or August 7, A.D. 659). The text ends with the capture of six lords by K’inich Janaab’ Pakal whose name phrase is introduced with B’olon K’uhul ’Okte’ (Fig. 2; glyph H10). K’inich Janaab’ Pakal wears the same title six days later on the West Tablet of the Temple of Inscriptions (glyph P1) when the contemporary ruler of Tikal, Nuun Ujol Chaak, sought refuge in Palenque.

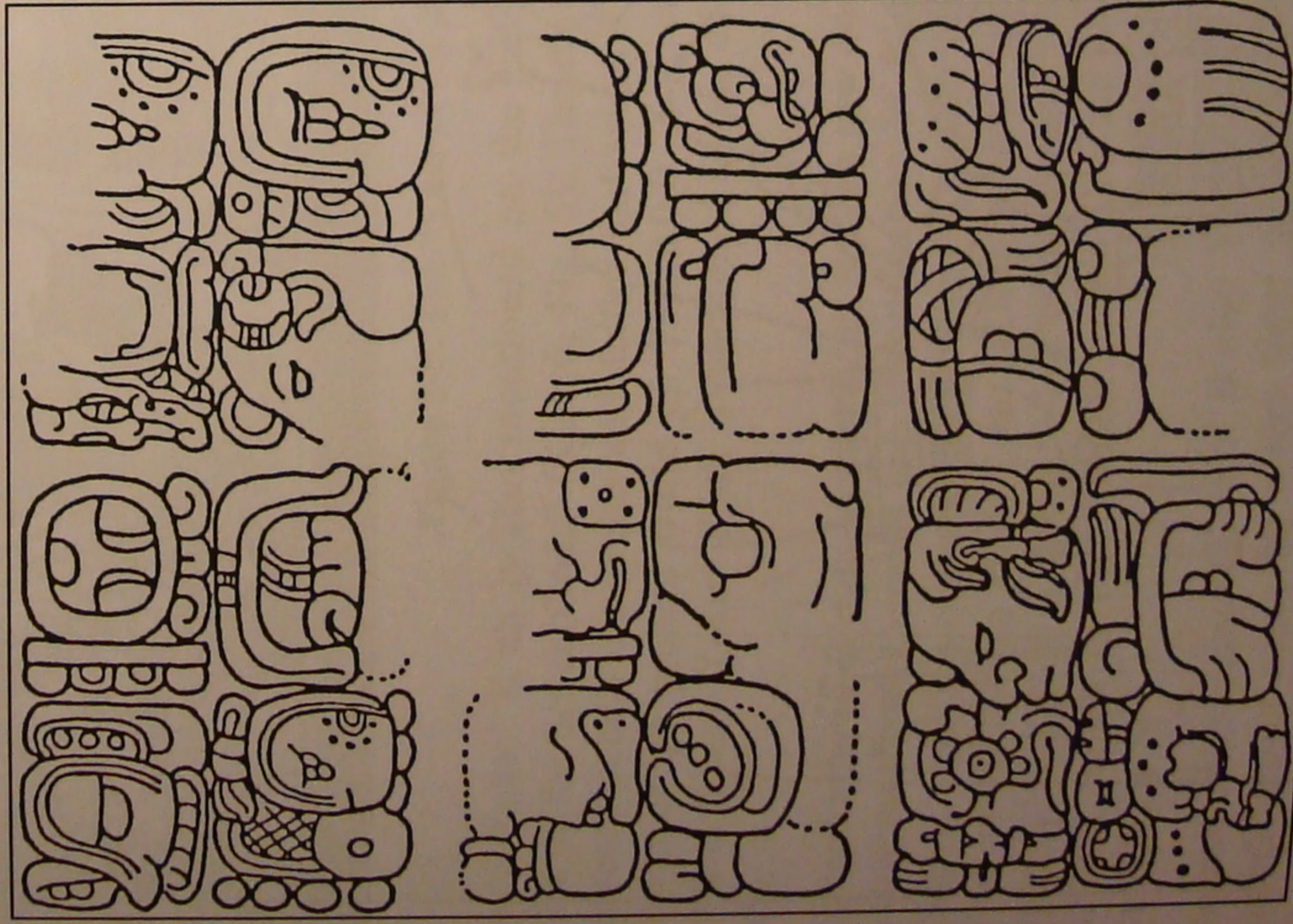


Figure 2-2: Detail of Palenque’s Hieroglyphic Stairway (glyphs E7 to H12; drawing by L. Schele in Mayer 1995 [VII]: plate 36).

Iconographic identification of B’olon Yokte’ K’uh

An unprovenance stela from the Usumacinta region (Fig. 3) allows us to go beyond the pure textual occurrences of B’olon Yokte’ K’uh and to identify the deity in the iconography.

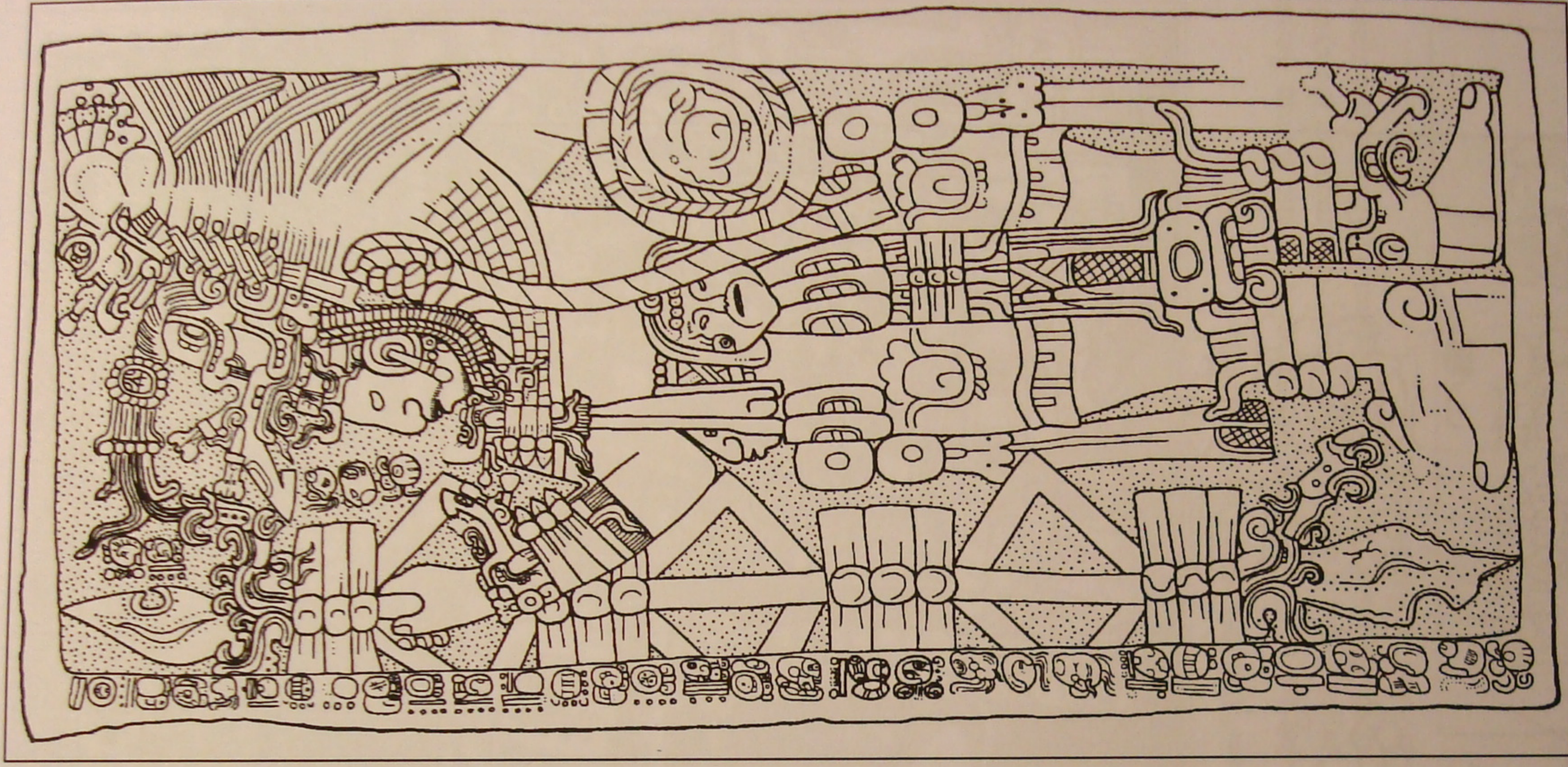


Figure 2-3: The unprovenanced stela from the Usumacinta region (drawing by Ch. Prager in Mayer 1995 [VIII]: plate 104).

The stela shows a Maya noble in the warrior costume that includes a ceremonial lance and a round shield. The lengthy text along the left margin of the stela provides details of the life of the Sajal Niil. Of interest to us are here the glyphs that are incised in front Niil’s face. The text states that Niil represents here B’olon Yokte’ K’uh. This corroborates the association of B’olon ’Okte with war and conflict. We can furthermore identify the typical attributes of B’olon ’Okte:

- a rope is bound around his neck and one end dangles down;
- the headdress includes a large-fanged monster face that is delimited by a mat design.

The rope is especially interesting since it normally signals a subjugated captive who is ready to be led away by his captor. The rope epitomizes the taking of captives as the ultimate goal of Maya warfare and is as such the symbol of war. The Maya perceived war from a different perspective than we do. The bloodshed on the battlefield – likely the perspective that we would take – is replaced by the expected outcome, the taking of a captive. This differing perspective is not necessarily less cruel, since most captives were eventually destined for sacrifice.

This latter aspect shines through the representation of B'olon Yokte' K'uh on Stela 1 from La Mar (Fig. 4). The upper register depicts the lord of La Mar again with the dangling rope that we are now able to identify as attribute of B'olon Yokte' K'uh. The text mentions the accession of this lord and the subsequent period ending rites that he conducted "in the company of his gods" including B'olon Yokte' K'uh. The lord holds an incense-filled bag. The rope and the bag allude to sacrifice and offering that were the principal components of every period ending.

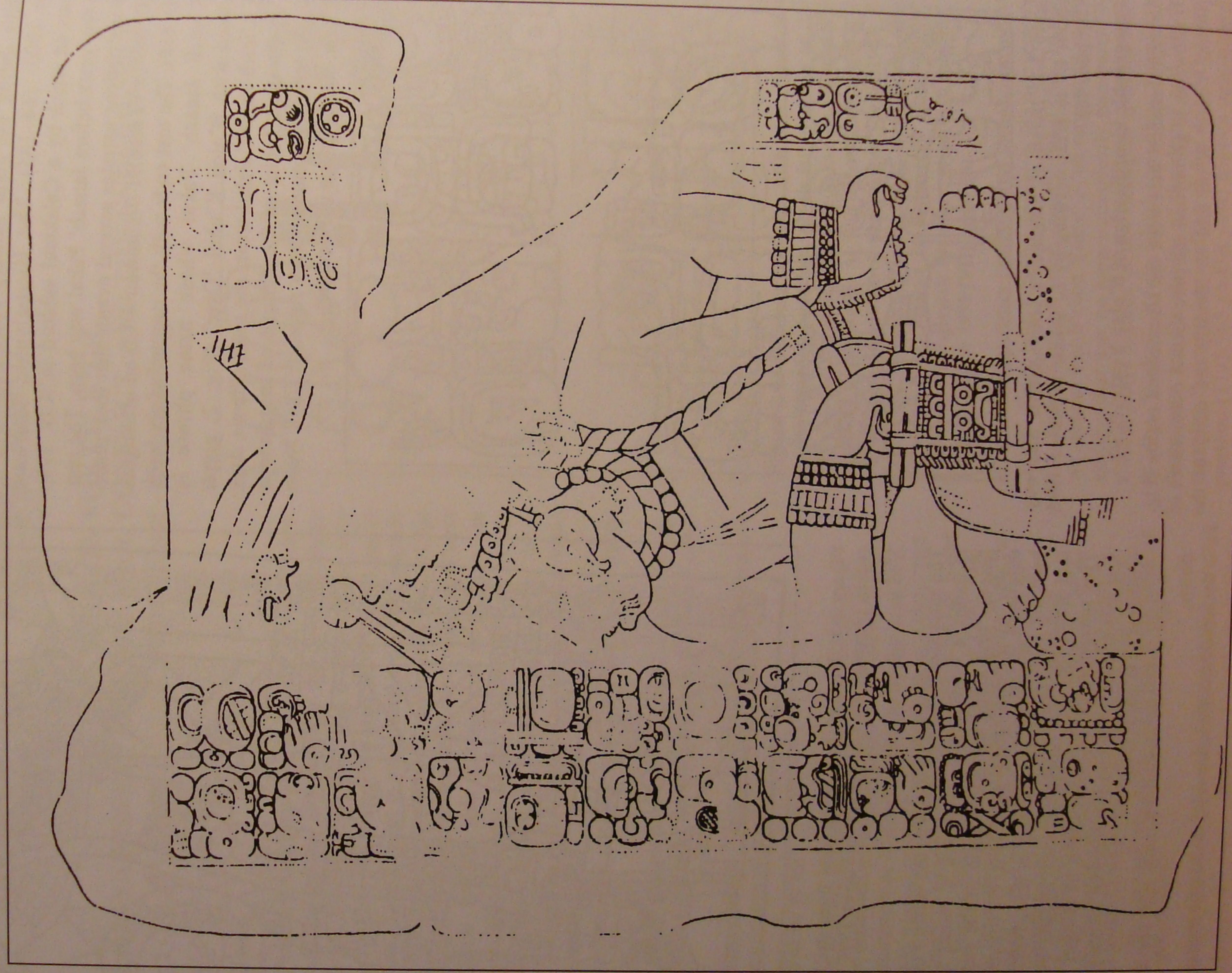


Figure 2-4: Upper register of Stela 1 from La Mar (unpublished drawing by J. Montgomery).



Figure 2-5: The “Vase of the Seven Gods” (K2796; after Coe 1973: 109).

B’olon Yokte’ K’uh is also mentioned on the famous “Vase of the Seven Gods” (K2796; Fig. 5). The text of this vessel details the events and deities that assisted the creation of the present world on 13.0.0.0.0 4 Ajaw 8 Kumk’u. B’olon Yokte’ K’uh is mentioned as one of the gods.

The headdress of B’olon Yokte’ K’uh that we saw on the Usumacinta stela permits the identification of B’olon Yokte’ K’uh as the center god in the lower register of the “Vase of the Seven Gods.” He is also present on the upper right of Side d of the “Vase of the Eleven Gods” (K7775), which is very similar to the “Vessel of the Seven Gods.”

The two latter occurrences of B’olon Yokte’ K’uh add another aspect since he wears there the attributes of Chaak (especially the shell earflare). Michael Coe (1973:108) and Marvin Cohodas (1991:272, 274–275) identified this deity as GI (now known to be one appearance of Chaak) and it remains to be seen how B’olon Yokte’ K’uh relates to Chaak.

A deity of transition

The Vase of the Seven and of the Eleven Gods strengthen the association of B’olon Yokte’ K’uh with period endings and the 13.0.0.0.0 *Baktun* ending in particular. Several more examples help us to elaborate on this theme. B’olon Yokte’ K’uh appears in addition to the

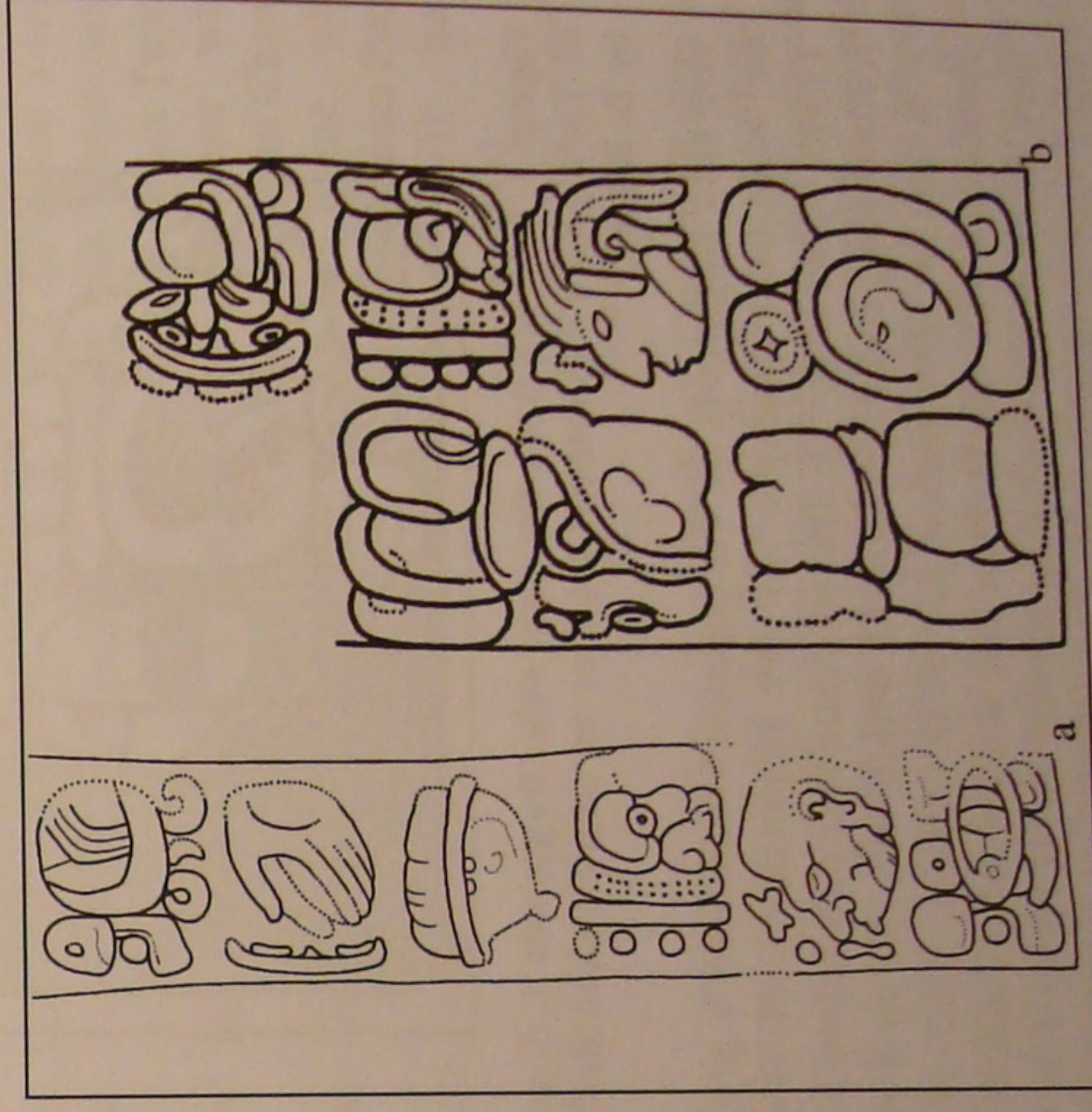


Figure 2-6: (a) Detail from Altar de Sacrificios Stela 8 (drawing by A. Voß after Graham 1972: Figs. 19–21); (b) detail from the left side of Altar de Sacrificios Stela 9 (drawing by A. Voß after Graham 1972:36).

period ending on La Mar Stela 1 in the Katun Series pages 7 and 8 of the Codex Paris (that recount the cycle of 13 *Katunob*; Love 1994; Treiber 1987) and two times in Altar de Sacrificios.

Stela 8 (Fig. 6a) mentions B'olon Yokte' K'uh as part of the deities invoked during the period ending of 9.9.15.0.0. He appears again five years later on Stela 9 during the important period ending rites of 9.10.0.0.0 (Fig. 6b).

The importance of period endings resides in their ambivalent nature. They symbolize the destruction of the old and the beginning of the new. The associated rites provide the transition between old and new. The destruction of the old era on 13.0.0.0.0 4 Ajaw 8 Kumk'u and the subsequent creation of the present world expresses this even more clearly. We saw already that B'olon Yokte' K'uh was not only invoked during period ending rites but was also seen as one of the deities that were present during the 13.0.0.0.0 date.

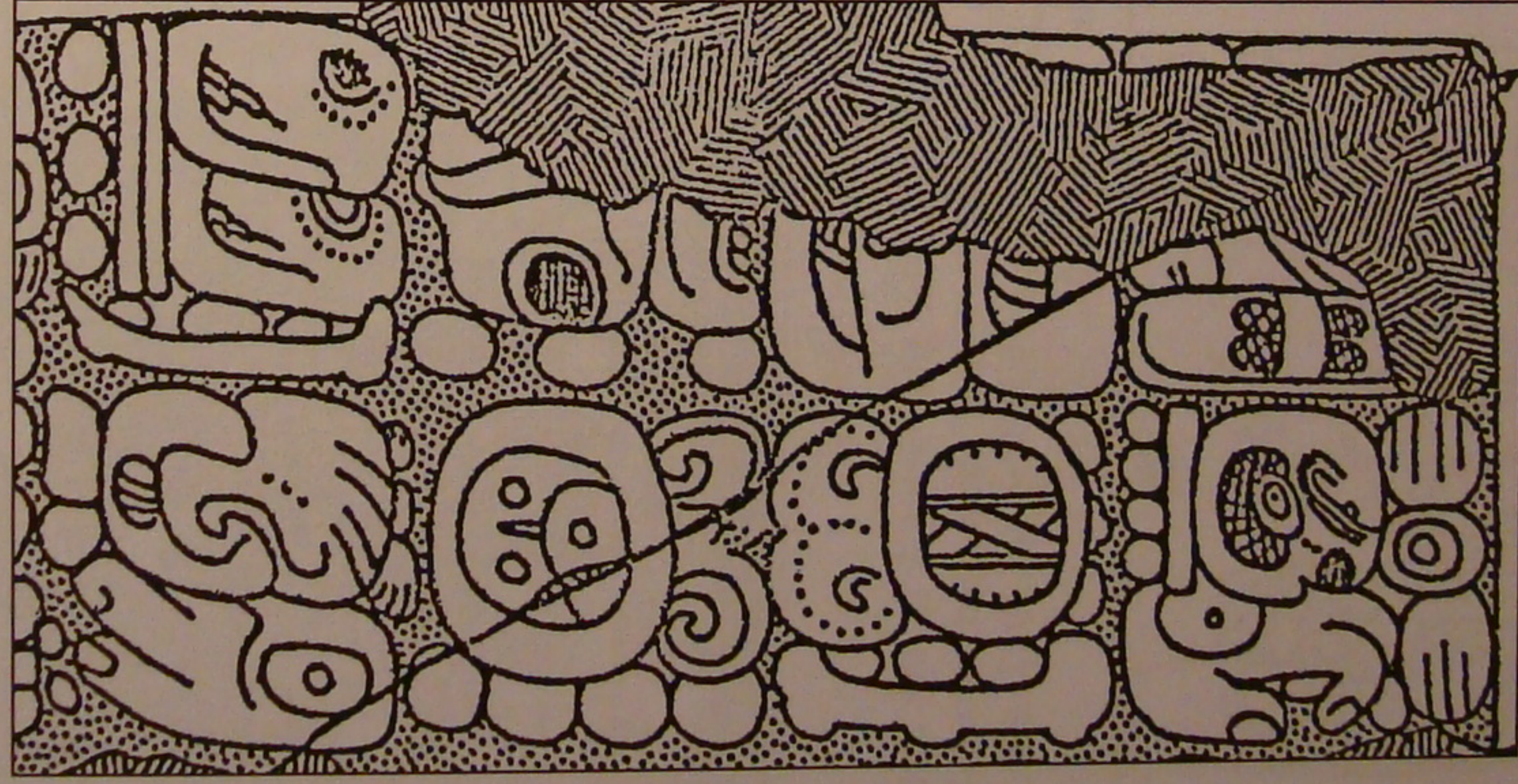


Figure 2-7: Detail from the right side (fragments 4, 5, and 6) of Tortuguero Monument 6 (after an unpublished drawing by B. Riese).

The side fragments of Tortuguero Monument 6 provide an additional example for the importance of B'olon Yokte' K'uh (Fig. 7). The relevant text part refers to the forthcoming end of Baktun 13 which will fall on 4 Ajaw 3 K'ank'in (December 23, A.D. 2012). The events associated with this Baktun end are partially eroded; yet, they involve the "coming down" of B'olon 'Ok. The same verb is used as part of dedication events and seems to have had not a destructive – as might be expected from B'olon Yokte' K'uh – but a positive connotation. The verb also appears in glyph pB2 on the Liendo Stuardo Panel (Liendo Stuardo 1995) and in glyph O15 on the

Tablet of the Sun Tablet, both monuments from Palenque.

The account of the involvement of B'olon Yokte' K'uh in mythological events would be incomplete without a discussion of the Panel from Temple XIV of Palenque (Fig. 8). B'olon Yokte' K'uh is mentioned both in the inset glyph text and in the main text. Both phrases refer to the same event that took place almost one million years ago (–14.2.5.6.4.11.10 13 Ok 18 Wo, or July 29, 931,449 B.C.). The event itself is not quite transparent. It involved the Sak Baak Na' Chapat, a vision serpent and the way of the deity K'awiil. The inset text goes on and explains that the event was overseen by B'olon Yokte' K'uh.

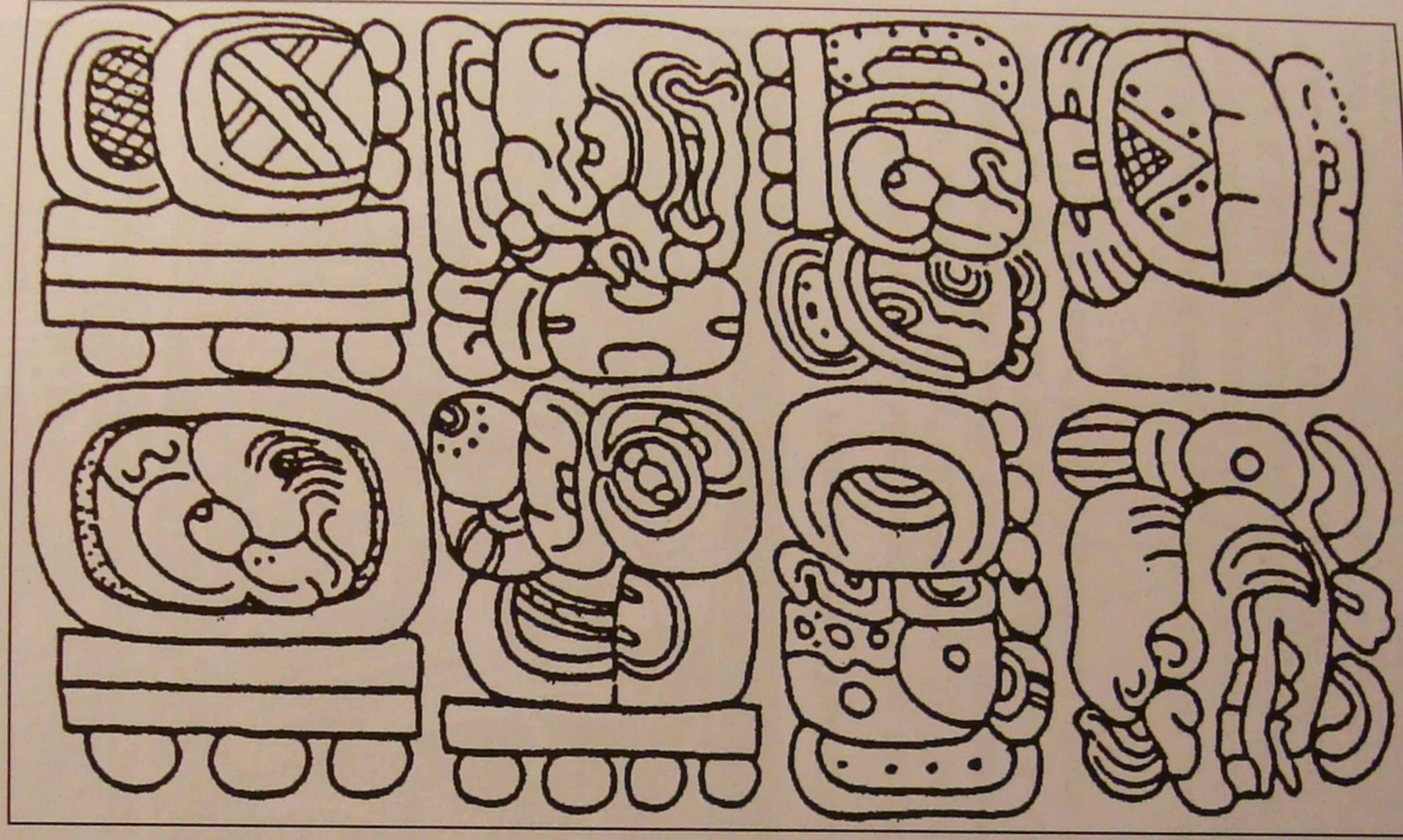


Figure 2-8: The inset text of the Temple XIV Tablet from Palenque (after Schele and Miller 1986:272).

B'olon Yokte' K'uh in the Postclassic Codices

B'olon Yokte' K'uh appears several times in the Postclassic codices. We mentioned already the two occurrences in the Katun Series of the Paris Codex (Love 1994; Treiber 1987). Page 60 in the Dresden Codex corroborates the role of B'olon Yokte' K'uh at war and conflicts. The upper register shows two warriors who attack Pawahtun or God N – easily identified by the turtle carapace that he carries – with spear thrower darts. The event in the text above the image is partially eroded. It cannot help us to confirm the specific military action depicted below. The text identifies, however, Pawahtun, a

Chaak deity (?), and B'olon Yokte' K'uh as the main actors.

The lower register of the same page repeats the warfare theme by showing a warrior to the right who has taken a captive (Fig. 9). The text above the image may refer directly to warfare (*k'atun*) in the first phrase. Even more interesting is the second phrase which reads *yukla[j] kab ch'een* "it is shaken the earth, the well." David Stuart (2001) suggested that this phrase refers to earthquakes. B'olon Yokte' K'uh is introduced in the following phrase whose meaning is opaque. The general context suggests, however, that the Maya perceived B'olon Yokte' K'uh in a wider context that included warfare but that also encompassed transitional time periods (that were seen as dangerous)², social unrest and natural disasters like earthquakes.

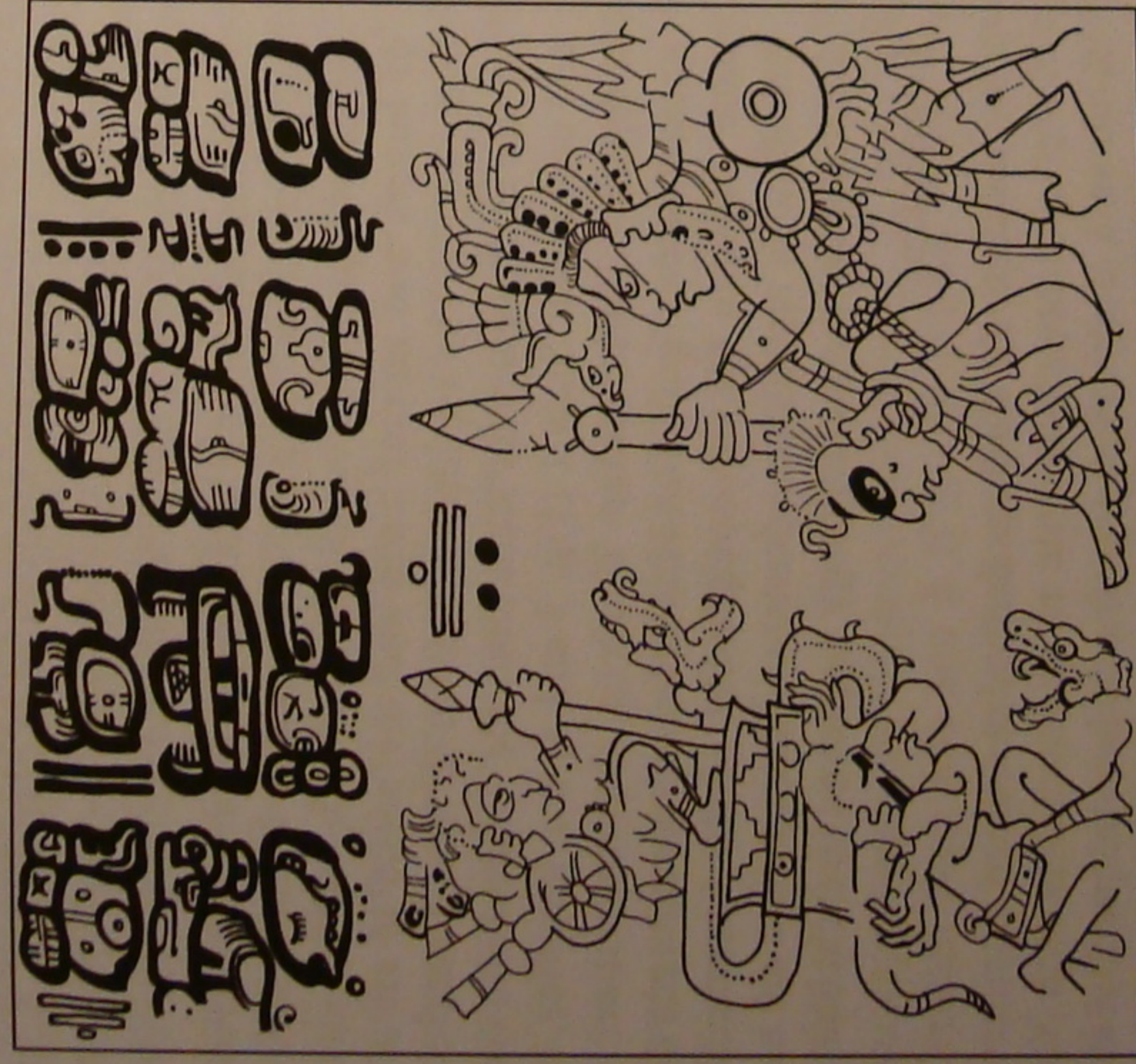


Figure 2-9: The Lower register of Codex Dresden page 60 (drawing by M. Eberl after Codex Dresden 1998).

Page 68 in the Dresden Codex adds another aspect to these themes. The generic God C is shown in the third picture seated under a sky band from which eclipse signs hang. The text above the picture is heavily eroded, yet, it begins likely with the eclipse signs followed by B'olon Yokte' K'uh. Eclipses are well-known to have been feared by the ancient Maya (Closs 1989) and B'olon Yokte' K'uh seems to have been seen as a deity fitting this context.

Evidence from the Colonial period

The B'olon Yokte' K'uh can be also traced to the Colonial period. Several of the Books of Chilam Balam and *Ritual de los Bacabes* refer to Ah Bolon Yocte. We suspect that Ah Bolon Yocte corresponds to B'olon Yokte' K'uh since *K'uh* is equally absent in several of the glyphic examples³. The single occurrence in the *Ritual de los Bacabes* (III.23.41; Arzápalo Marín 1987:282) places the Ah Bolon Yocte in the context of contracting illnesses.

The Ah Bolon Yocte are mentioned eight times in the Books of Chilam Balam (Table 1). Five of these occurrences are closely related (group 1 in Table 1).

Table 1: Ah Bolon Yocte in the Books of Chilam Balam (compilation of the authors).

First group	Book of Chilam Balam	Corresponding Katun
bolon yoc te	Chumayel 73.3	11 Ahau
bolon yocte	Kaua 169.19	[11 Ahau]
bolon yoctei	Pérez 75.22	11 Ahau
bolon yoctei	Pérez 157.14	11 Ahau
bolon yocteil	Tizimin 25.25	11 Ahau
Second group		
bolon yocteob	Pérez 85.22	? Ahau
bolon yocteob	Pérez 156.27	[2 Ahau]
Third group		
bolon yocte	Pérez 101.26	? Ahau

The Katun 11 Ahau prophecy in the Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel includes the following passage (transcription of lines 1-5 on folio 73 after Miram 1988, vol. 1:96; translation by the authors after Bricker and Miram 2002:314 and Roys 1967:133):

Buluc Ahau: u hedz katun: ichcaansihoo: yaaxhaal [chac] u uich: emom canal ual: emom canal udzubThe heavenly fragrance will have descended His drum will have sounded His rattle will have sounded It is Ah Bolon Yocte At the time when there is Green Turkey At the time when there is Sulun Chan, At the time when there is Chakan Putun Wood will have become food Stone will have become food

The prophecy from the Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel provides the forecast for Katun 11 Ahau. J. Eric S. Thompson (1950: 56) noted that this coincides with the 11 Ajaw statement in the lower register of page 60 in the Dresden Codex (Fig. 9, glyph A1). The forecast for Katun 11 Ahau is fire: The green turkey, Sulun Chan and Chakan Putun are – as Ralph Roys notes (Roys 1967: 77 note 7) – “symbols of other times when the people were driven from their homes into the forest, as they were again in Katun 11 Ahau by the Spanish conquerors.” The Katun 11 Ahau ran in the back-reckoned twenty-four year Katun count from A.D. 1512 to 1536 (Bricker and Miram

2002: 73–74; Miram 1994). The arrival of Spaniards in Yucatan in A.D. 1519 fell according to this calculation into the seventh year of Katun 11 Ahau. Famines were expected, that is, times, when wood and stone become food (Bricker and Miram 2002: 311 note 1817). The drum and the rattle of Ah Bolon Yocte will sound – do they announce war? The text provides no answer to this hypothesis. Yet, the prophecy paints the overall picture of a society that is doomed by famine, social unrest, usurpation of power, and profound changes in general.

Discussion: deities among the Maya

We designated B'olon Yokte' K'uh as “deity.” We arrived at this conclusion, however, by taking a different approach than previous scholars. Transcendental beings with superhuman attributes are worshipped in many cultures and they are commonly designated as deities. Polytheistic religions like the religion of the Classic Maya recognize a multitude of divine beings which are either treated as equals or which are hierarchically ordered. Deities of polytheistic denominations are personified and take on – or even combine – human, animal, and faunal attributes. The specific attributes mirror the environment but also the preferences, and beliefs of the religious community.

The physical representation of deities in polytheistic religions allowed Paul Schellhas (1897) at the end of the nineteenth century to identify and distinguish the deities of the pre-Columbian Maya. He observed that most beings in the Maya codices combine human, animal, and faunal attributes. This combination of attributes is characteristic for divine beings. Schellhas recognized fifteen different deities. By comparing the glyphic texts that accompanied the images of the deities, Schellhas was further able to identify (but not yet read) the personal names of these deities. Scholars like Günter Zimmermann (1956), and Karl Taube (1992) modified and complemented Schellhas' pantheon of Maya deities during the twentieth century. The physical attributes remained, however, the primary means to identify and classify deities.

Advancements in the decipherment of the glyphic writing system opened up a new perspective. Scholars were able to investigate how the Classic Maya conceived the supernatural world. They showed that the boundary between human and supernatural being was fluent for the divine rulers (Houston and Stuart 1996, 1998). The glyphic texts further allowed identifying the emic categories of supernatural beings, including their specific characteristics, and related concepts. Supernatural beings can now be identified by their textual reference even in the absence of an image. Among the best-known categories is the *way* or “companion or dream spirit” (Houston and Stuart 1989). A large number of these companion spirits has been cataloged (Grube and Nahm 1994). Another category of supernatural beings involves names with a suffixed *k'uh*. *K'uh* translates in the Yucatecan Mayan languages as “god, deity” and it was used by the Spanish friars to refer to the Christian god.

Several deities whose names end in *K'uh* appear in the glyphic inscriptions.

- KABAL - K'UH "Earth god"
- CHANAL - K'UH "Sky god"
- IK' - K'UH "Wind god"
- OLIS or O[H]L SIH - K'UH "? god"
- T1002 - K'UH "Old Goddess"
- BOLON YOKTE' K'UH "Numerous strides of the god"

All of the above names conform to the same syntactic structure. A complete list of these gods is not yet available. Our preliminary list includes an earth, sky, wind god, and several others. B'olon Yokte' K'uh belongs into this category of deities as well. Previous scholars identified B'olon Yokte' K'uh only on the basis of his occurrence in the glyphic monuments and Colonial documents. Our investigation demonstrated that we can now use the textual references to B'olon Yokte' K'uh to identify him pictorially. We reversed, in other words, Schellhas' methodology and applied the text to the image.

The identification of B'olon Yokte' K'uh on the “Vase of the Seven Gods” (Fig. 5) corresponds to the traditional image of a god. The vessel shows a being with a mixture of human and animal traits and the scene is set in the underworld. The representations of B'olon Yokte' K'uh on the unprovenanced stela from the Usumacinta region and on La Mar Stela 1 (Fig. 3 and 4) are, however, more complex. Both stelae show a human ruler who impersonates a god. The latter two monuments provide a clear example for the complexity of the Classic Maya beliefs with regard to supernatural beings that are hardly detectable by the methodology employed by Schellhas.

Conclusions

To summarize the findings that we presented:

- We were hopefully able to show that B'olon Yokte' K'uh is a deity that appears rather frequently in the monumental glyphic inscriptions of the Classic period, but also in the Postclassic codices and even in Yucatec documents (especially the Books of Chilam Balam) that were composed during the Colonial period.
- The deity can be identified iconographically by several attributes of which the rope that is slung around the neck is probably the most characteristic.

B'olon Yokte' K'uh appears throughout this time period in association with war. Our examples show, however, that B'olon Yokte' K'uh was not a pure war deity but that he was associated with unrest in a more general way: he is linked to natural disasters and period endings. Especially telling is his appearance at the end of Baktuns and his association with the Katun 11 Ajaw when the Spaniards arrived. It is thus quite clear that B'olon Yokte' K'uh represents a multifaceted deity and that he cannot be categorized simply and exclusively as war deity. The Maya may have conceived of war in a similar way and seen it as a sign of turbulent times when social and political unrest prevails.

Several questions remain at this point open to further investigation:

- Are the different variations of the name of B'olon Yokte' K'uh simply variations or are we dealing with different aspects?
- How does B'olon Yokte' K'uh fit into the landscape of supernatural beings: we have some hints that he was an aspect of Chaak.
- We would like to complete our listing of the deities with a suffixed K'uh. Do these deities have something in common that distinguishes them from all other supernatural beings?
- Are we able to detect finer changes in the character of the deity over time?

Notes

¹ The reading of T765 as 'OK is based on several substitutions. David Stuart (1987: 40) contrasted Codex Dresden page 33b, glyph A2 (T115.765:103, yo-'OK:ki) with Copán Temple 11, east doorway, south panel, glyph A2 (T115:110, yo:ko; for the resulting conflict between the synharmonic and disharmonic spelling see Houston, Stuart, and Robertson 1998:285). A similar substitution set exists at Palenque: compare glyph pA1 on the Temple XIX Alforda Panel (T115.765, yo.'OK) with glyph Y1 on the Temple XIX Platform (T115:110, yo.ko). T765 is a phonetic complement on Copán's Harvard Bench (from Structure 9M-27) where glyph G spells **CH'OK:'OK-ch'a:hi**.

² See for example glyph D2 in the upper register of page 60 that consists of T267:544.116?. Werner Nahm (see Schele and Grube 1997:82) read T267 as XUL "end of" but the reading remains unsubstantiated.

³ The K'uh is absent on Tortuguero Monument 6 (Fig. 7), the unprovenanced Usumacinta stela (Fig. 3), and Codex Dresden page 60a and b (Fig. 9). B'olon Yokte' was seemingly sufficiently distinctive for the name of the god that this didn't have to be expressed explicitly by adding k'uh. The Vases of the Seven and Eleven Gods (K2796 and K7775, side b) may provide an explanation for this since the name of six and five gods, respectively, are introduced by k'uh/ul "god/divine".

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B'OLON YOKTE' K'UH MAYA CONCEPTIONS OF WAR, CONFLICT, AND THE UNDERWORLD

Markus Eberl - Christian Prager

Introduction

The following paper explores the deity B'olon Yokte' K'uh in Maya culture. The name of the deity translates probably as "numerous strides" and is as such not very helpful to define this deity. We will show in this paper that B'olon Yokte' K'uh is associated with war, periods of transition, and the underworld. Especially helpful for our investigation is the widespread occurrence of B'olon Yokte' K'uh. We are able to trace this deity from the monumental inscriptions of the Classic period to the Books of Chilam Balam, or in other words from circa A.D. 250 to 1800. This allows us to approach our topic from several angles:

- Can we perceive changes over the course of roughly 1500 years?
- What tell us the glyphic inscriptions, the iconography and the ethnohistorical documents about B'olon Yokte' K'uh?
- How does B'olon Yokte' K'uh help us to understand Maya conceptions of conflict?

B'olon Yokte' K'uh

We begin with the discussion of the name of the deity. The basic elements of the name are straightforward (Fig. 1). The number 9 or *b'olon* is followed by the head of a dog (T765) that reads 'OK¹ and the glyph *te'* (T87). T87 *te'* is unlikely to have been a numeral classifier (cf. Stuart 1987: 40; Prager 2003) since it is suffixed to T765 'OK and not to the number itself. The examples from Altar de Sacrificios (Stelae 8 and 9; Fig. 6a and 6b) lack the *te'* suffix suggesting that it is an optional element. Eric Thompson (1950:56) translated B'olon 'Okte' as "nine strides" or "numerous strides." This translation must be treated as tentative since some elements and the overall meaning – perhaps not surprising since this is the name of a deity – are obscure.

An important variant of the name of B'olon Yokte' K'uh is the addition of *k'uh* "deity" or *k'uhul* "divine" (the glyphic readings are based on the work of Ringle [1988] and Stuart [1987]).

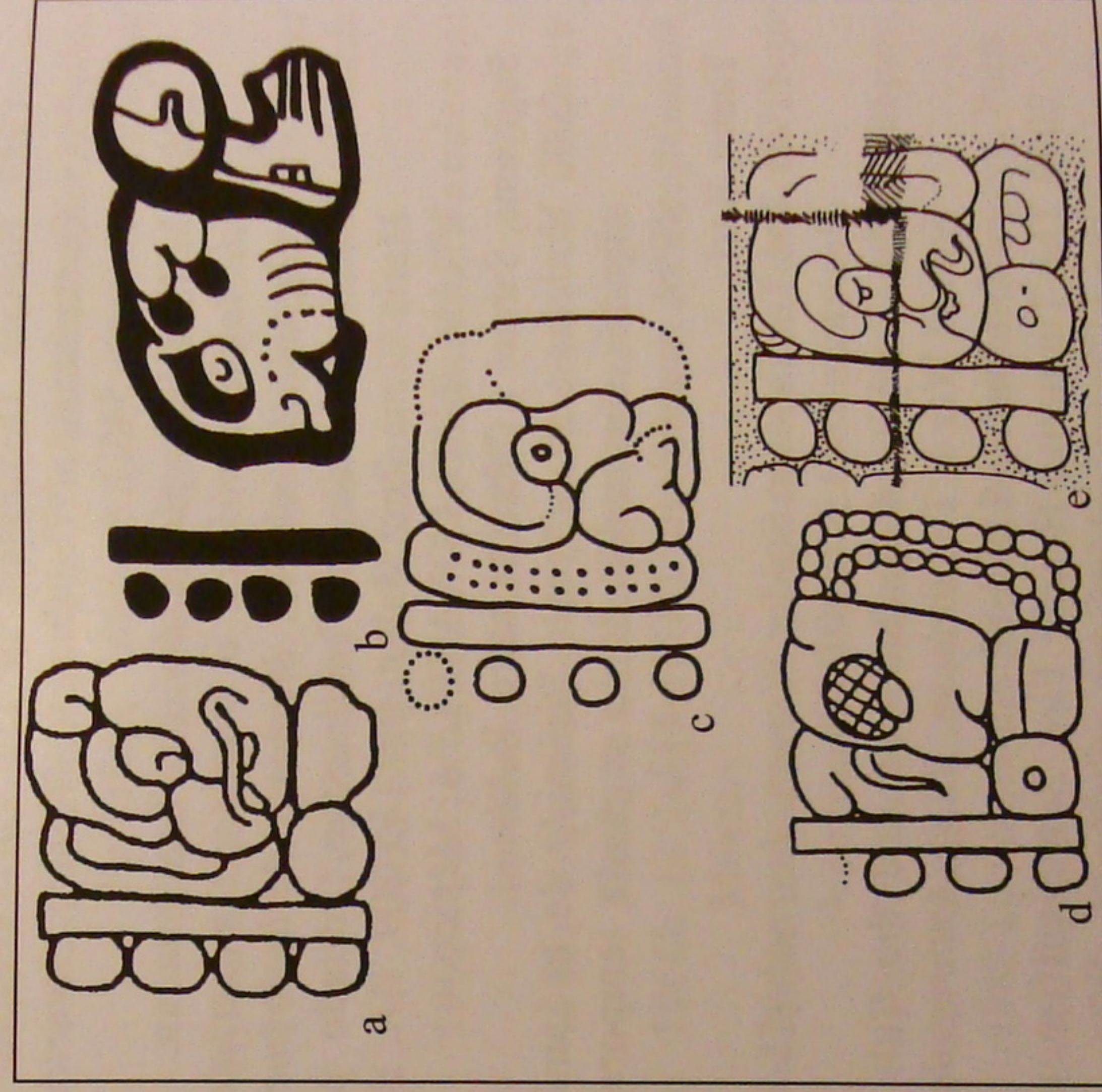


Figure 2-1: Different spellings of B'olon Yokte' K'uh. (a) Codex Dresden page 60b, glyph D1 (drawing by M. Eberl after Codex Dresden 1998); (b) Altar de Sacrificios Stela 9, glyph E6 (drawing by A. Voß after Graham 1972: 36); (c) Detail of an unpublished plate (after Stuart 1987: 40); (d) Palenque, Temple of Inscriptions, West Tablet, glyph P1 (drawing by L. Schele in Robertson 1983: Fig. 97); (e) Palenque, Hieroglyphic Stairway, glyph H10 (drawing by L. Schele in Mayer 1995 [VII]: plate 36).

It appears sometimes prefixed and sometimes suffixed to 'Okte'. Since both versions appear in the title sequence of the Palenque ruler K'inich Janaab' Pakal (Fig. 1d and 1e), we suspect that B'olon Yokte' K'uh represents an ancient spelling that was no longer completely transparent to the Classic Maya scribes. A few examples spell the name as B'olon Y-okte' K'uh which possibly translates as "numerous are the strides of the deity" and which we regard as the complete spelling of this deity. The ergative pronoun (T115.765 **yo.OK y-ok**) appears only when *k'uh* "deity" is suffixed. This suggests that the pronoun refers to *k'uh* (resulting in "the feet of the deity") and not to *te'*. Alfredo Barrera Vásquez and Silvia Rendón (1948: 49)