

## THE NAME OF GOD L: *B'OLON YOKTE' K'UH?*

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### Introduction

Paul Schellhas (1904) labeled the various Maya deities with letters because the Mayan names of these deities were unknown to him. Some of the names have been identified in the intervening years, while others have remained untranslated. The aged God L is a prominent figure in the iconography of the Classic period, with and his jaguar markings and cape, his characteristic cigar, and his broad-brimmed owl feather hat, often labeled '13-Sky', '12-Sky' or '9-Sky'. He has been identified as the Merchant Lord of the Underworld (Taube 1992:90–92), but his original name has thus far remained elusive. However, several ceramic texts, coupled with iconographic representations from Palenque and Cacaxtla, suggest that he is associated with the deity B'olon Yokte' K'uh, known both from Postclassic Yucatecan sources as well as the inscriptions from the Classic period.

### The Rabbit Vase Text

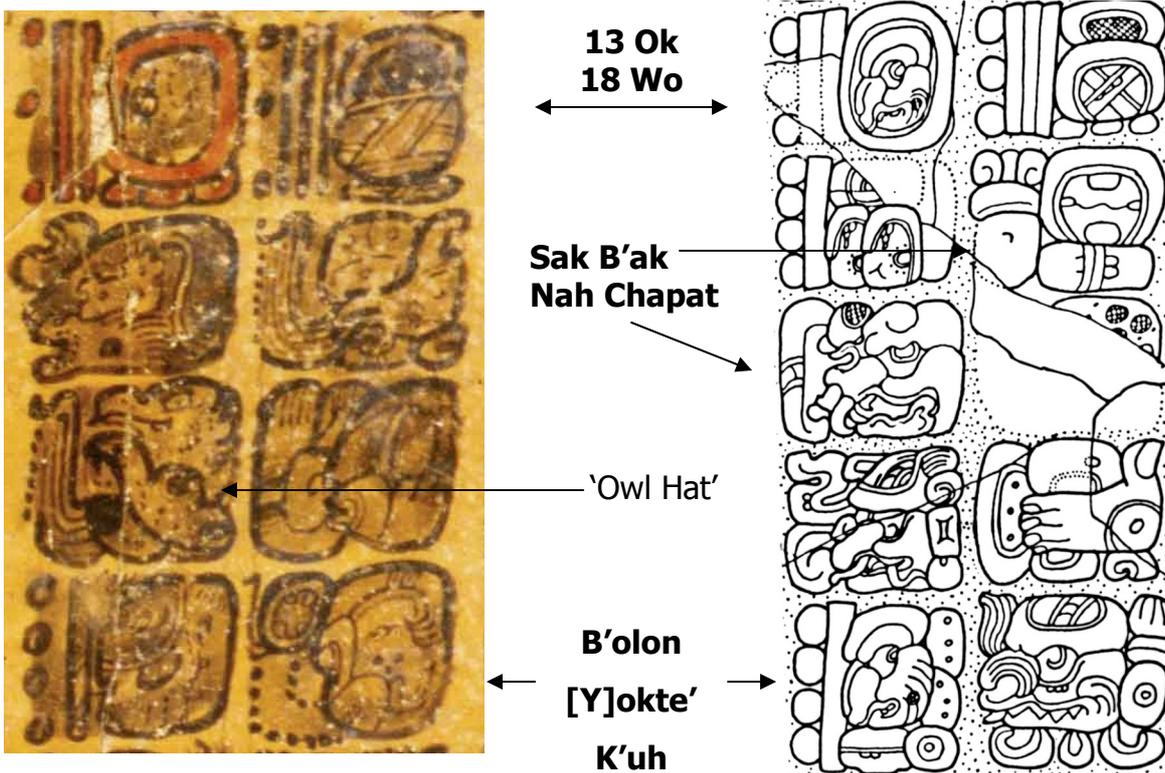
On vase K1398 from Naranja (**Fig. 1**), God L is depicted in two scenes involving a rabbit who steals his clothes, his hat and his staff. The corresponding inscription is nearly complete, and it begins with a calendar round date of 13 Ok 18 Wo, followed by an interesting text written in the first person. Several authors have noted that this text closely corresponds to an inscription from Temple XIV in Palenque (**Fig. 1b**), which recounts mythological events over 900,000 years prior to the dedication of the monument (Wald and Carrasco 2004; Stuart 2006). Both texts name B'olon Yokte' K'uh, either involving an owl hat on the Rabbit Vase, or a centipede in Palenque. The relevant text from K1398 reads as follows (**Fig. 1a**):

13 Ok  
he[-wa]?

ni-[OWL HAT]  
9-OK

18 Wo  
ni-CH'AM-wa  
yi-ta  
K'UH

*13 Ok 18 Wo  
day? I receive it  
my owl hat, the companion of  
B'olon (Y)okte K'uh*



**Figure 1: a)** The Rabbit Vase (above) with magnified central text (below left) following the date 13 Ok 18 Wo (K1398). © 1998 Kerr; **b)** Parallel text from Temple XIV, Palenque, involving the skeletal centipede named *Sak B'ak Nah Chapat* (below right). Drawing by Linda Schele © 2009 FAMSI.

The curious thing about this statement is that the owl hat appears to be named as the companion of B'olon Yokte' K'uh. Clearly, we know that the owl hat belongs to God L, and it is God L who is the subject of the scene. Therefore, it appears that it is God L who would be here identified as B'olon Yokte' K'uh. Furthermore, as noted by Marc Zender and Stanley Guenter (2003: 111), it seems that the rabbit is speaking here in the first person, having stolen God L's hat and taken it for himself. Indeed, in the next scene, God L complains to the Sun God that the rabbit has taken his things. Zender and Guenter read the first glyph following 18 Wo as **T'U'UL** 'rabbit', with which it shares some facial similarities. However, the glyph in question, with its possible antler and jawbone-eye, appears more like the deer-head glyph (T756d), which substitutes for **he-wa** (T574:130). These substituting collocations commonly replace **K'IN** as a count of 'days' in distance numbers, while its appearance here would be somewhat unusual. Conversely, Dimitri Beliaev and Albert Davletshin (2006:24, 29) suggest that it is God L who makes the above statement about 'my owl hat', and that B'olon Yokte' K'uh is therefore a separate deity. While the reading here is somewhat ambiguous, I suggest that one implication is that the



**Figure 2:** Sajal Niil impersonating B'olon Yokte' K'uh on Usumacinta stela. Drawing by Christian Prager, published in Eberl and Prager (2005).

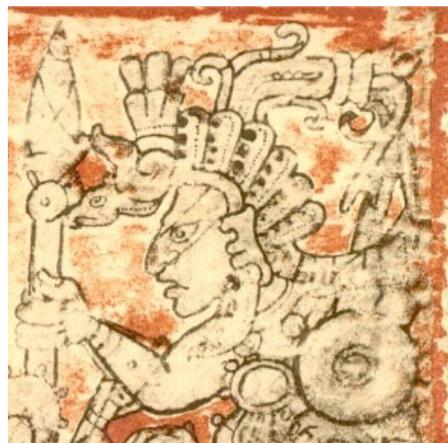
name of God L may be B'olon Yokte' K'uh, particularly given the additional evidence provided in this paper.

Comparing the headdress of the Sun God on the Rabbit Vase with that worn by Kan B'ahlam II in Temple XIV, and by a king impersonating B'olon Yokte' K'uh on an unprovenienced Usumacinta stela (**Fig. 2**), Zender and Guenter (2003:111) conversely suggest that it is the rabbit who says he is the companion of B'olon Yokte' K'uh. They conclude that B'olon Yokte' K'uh is therefore the name of the "Night Sun", behind whom the rabbit hides. However, the above reading suggests that it is instead the owl hat that is the companion of God L, and it is rather God L who is here named as B'olon Yokte' K'uh. Here, "the companion of" is a gloss for **yi-ta**, a derived transitive verb combining the third person pronoun *y-* with the verb *it*, meaning 'to accompany', though it is unclear if the final vowel is pronounced, giving the more common passive construction *yita(j)* 'he is accompanied'.

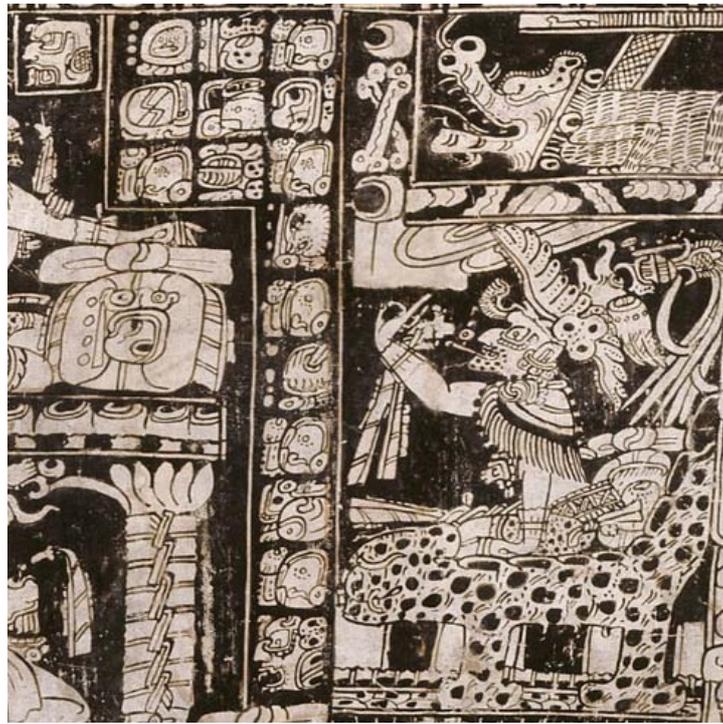
Zender and Guenter (2003:104) note that God L has a unique name in the Postclassic Dresden Codex, composed of his black portrait preceded by a water sign and falling rain (**Fig. 3a**). Furthermore, the Classic God L appears to relate both to God L and to the Merchant God M in the Dresden (Taube 1992:90-92). Therefore, it is necessary for us to take a diachronic approach to deity names among the Maya, and to recognize that these names may have varied significantly across time and place, perhaps even during the Classic Period. It is curious that, while images of God L are common on Classic Period ceramics and in the iconography at the site of Palenque, he is never clearly named. However, the remainder of this paper provides further evidence for the association between God L and the deity named B'olon Yokte' K'uh. This is not an association that is immediately clear within the Dresden Codex, where God L appears with his own portrait name, and B'olon Yokte' K'uh is likewise named on page 60, along with an image of a warrior with a shield and spear (Eberl and Prager 2005). Perhaps significantly, this warrior appears with a bird headdress that may be related to God L and his owl hat (**Fig.4**). Similarly, God L is often depicted in the Dresden Codex with a shield and a spear as a Venus deity (**Fig. 3b**).



**Figure 3: a)** (left)The portrait name of God L. **b)** (right) God L as Venus spearer, with atl-atl and shield. Both from the Dresden Codex Venus Almanac, pg. 46. (FAMSI).



**Figure 4: a)** (left) The name B'olon-[Y]okte' [K'uh]. **b)** (right) deity beneath the above name, with bird headdress, spear and shield. Both from the Dresden Codex, pg. 60. (FAMSI).



**Figure 5:** Text from the Vase of the Seven Gods (K2796), with God L to the right, on his jaguar throne. **9-Okte' K'uh** is named in C4-5. © 2001 Kerr

### The Vase of the Seven Gods

In yet another mythological scene from the vase of the Seven Gods, K2796, we find God L conducting events associated with the inauguration of the Long Count on the Era Base 4 Ajaw 8 K'umku (**Fig. 5**). According to David Freidel, Linda Schele and Joy Parker (1993:62), the corresponding text first reads *tz'akaj*, 'are placed in order', *EK'-u-Tan*, a place known as 'Black-is-its-Center'. Zender and Guenter (2003:107) read this collocation as *Ik'-(Y)ak'ab'-Ta[h]n*, 'Black His Dark Heart', and they see this as the name of God L. However, I read this as possibly 'Black Dark Center' and the name of the dark Underworld depicted on the vase, particularly given that this name is followed by the names of the sky and the earth, together comprising the three levels of the Maya cosmos. I believe that the *K'uh* that follows the above named Underworld indicates the collective Underworld deities depicted. Barbara MacLeod (personal communication) notes that the repeated use of *K'uh* here semantically requires that it follow each name or title, rather than precede them. The text then names *Chanal K'uh*, *Kab'al K'uh*, the sky deities and earth deities, followed by *B'olon (Y)okte K'uh*. David Stuart suggests that these names are not names of individual gods, but groups of gods, such as the title of the Palenque Triad, which appears next in the text (Stuart 2006b). But as the main protagonist in this scene, God L may be named here first as *B'olon Yokte' K'uh*. The subsequent title of the Palenque Triad, followed by three other named deities, would then give a total of seven named deities, which may correspond to the seven deities depicted on the vase.

Eberl and Prager (2005) identify *B'olon Yokte' K'uh* as the center deity in the lower register of the Vase of the Seven Gods (**Fig. 7**), based upon the appearance of his headdress. A similar headdress appears in the aforementioned unprovenienced stela from the Usumacinta region, worn by the ruler Sajal Niil who is said to be impersonating *B'olon Yokte' K'uh* (**Fig. 2**). However, the headdress of the central lower deity in the Vase of the Seven Gods also includes a large stingray spine and cut shell, both characteristics of GI

from the Palenque Triad, whose title is also mentioned in the accompanying text. Furthermore, the presence of a shell ear, fish barbels and shark tooth additionally point to the identity of this deity as GI (Coe 1973:108; Cohodas 1991:272, 274–275). Therefore, it is possible that the headdress in the Usumacinta stela is not specifically diagnostic of B'olon Yokte' K'uh, and the additional presence of Itzam Nah's characteristic flower diadem on Sajal Niil's headdress suggests that he may be a composite of several deities. Similarly, Zender and Guenter (2003:111) compare Sajal Niil's headdress with that worn by the Night Sun on the Rabbit Vase, who they believe to be B'olon Yokte' K'uh. But does this skeletal headdress necessarily identify only one deity?



**Figure 6:** Uhuk-Chapat-Tz'ikin K'inich Ajaw. From CPN Stela A. Drawing by Linda Schele © 2009 FAMSI

Erik Boot (2005:250–56) has identified a skeletal centipede headdress with a deity known as Uhuk-[or 'U-7']-Chapat Tzik'in K'inich Ajaw (**Fig. 6**), which he suggests is an aspect of the Sun God, and likely the same Night Sun depicted on the Rabbit Vase. Elsewhere, Boot (2008:6–7) notes that, in one unique example from the Late Classic God D Court Vessel, an image of a solar deity with a centipede headdress is named Uhuk-Chapat Tz'ikin K'inich-Ajaw B'olon Yokte' K'uh. These combined deity names might suggest that they are names for a singular deity as an Underworld aspect of the sun, thereby confirming Zender and Guenter's proposal that the Night Sun is indeed the same as B'olon Yokte' K'uh. However, it is

possible that the centipede headdress, as perhaps indicative of the Underworld, is understood to be separate from the deity who wears it, such as the Sun. Similarly, God L's owl hat may be seen separately from God L, and it is taken by the rabbit in the Rabbit Vase text. Indeed, in the Temple XIV text that parallels the Rabbit Vase, the deity B'olon Yokte' K'uh is named separately from another skeletal centipede deity here named Sak Bak Nah-Chapat, said to be the *way* of K'awiil (**Fig. 1b**), which is received here instead of the owl hat on the very same date as that mentioned on the Rabbit Vase. Here, the ordinal relationship of Nah-Chapat as 'First Centipede' and Uhuk-Chapat as 'Seventh Centipede' is notable, but in need of further explanation. Certainly, the numbers 'one' and 'seven' have repeating significance in the *Popol Vuh* within the names for pairs of twin deities.

Boot identifies the leftmost deity in the lower register of the Vase of the Seven Gods as Uhuk-Chapat Tz'ikin K'inich Ajaw, the solar deity wearing a centipede headdress, though the **K'IN** sign on his forehead was destroyed by restoration (**Fig. 7**). However, this exact skeletal centipede headdress is also worn by the skeletal animal deity two figures to the right. It appears that the skeletal centipede headdress, as well as the name B'olon Yokte' K'uh, is found in combination with multiple deities, and Simon Martin has described this deity combination as "theosynthesis", while Boot (2008) sees this same phenomenon as "theopolymorphosis", a single deity in many possible forms. Given the level of apparent deity combination surrounding the name B'olon Yokte' K'uh, it is possible, as Stuart (2006b) suggests, that B'olon Yokte' K'uh may refer to a group of deities, perhaps as a title for the combined Lords of the Underworld. Nevertheless, the name may have been understood to signify a specific deity in certain places and times.

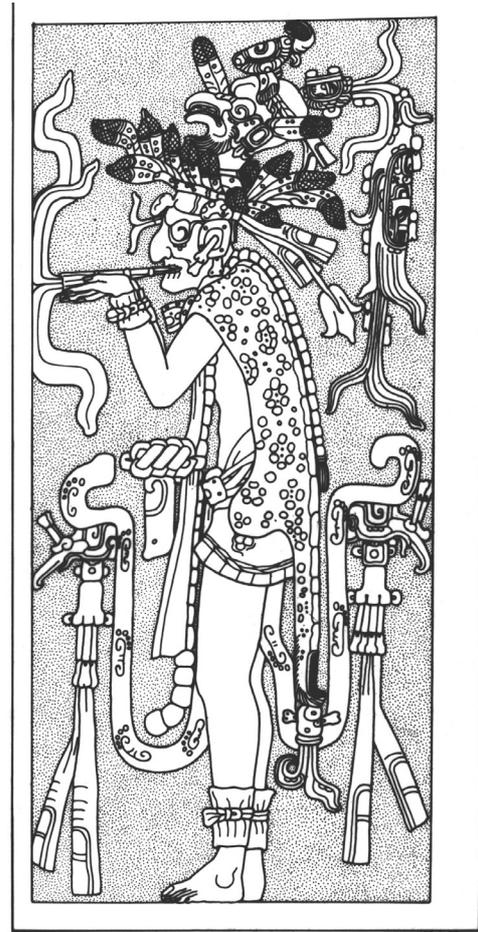


**Figure 7:** Three deities in the lower register from the Vase of the Seven Gods (K2796). © 2001 Kerr. The central deity appears to be GI from the Palenque Triad, while the other two wear a skeletal centipede headdress.

Eberl and Prager (2005) note that the two rare images of rulers said to impersonate B'olon Yokte' K'uh appear dressed for battle with lances and shields, wearing a diagnostic noose around their neck (**Fig. 2**). They conclude that these elements are characteristic of a singular deity named B'olon Yokte' K'uh who is associated with the Underworld, warfare and sacrifice in Postclassic and colonial literature. Curiously, neither of these images appear to contain any overtly recognizable iconography related to God L. However, the shield held by Sajal Niil, along with his skirt (**Fig. 2**), displays the characteristic 'God-eye' often associated with both the Postclassic Merchant God M, as well as in the image of God L from the Vase of the Seven Gods. In the Dresden Codex (pp. 46, 69, 74), as well as in the Madrid Codex (pp. 32–33), God L is depicted in his warlike aspect as a black deity with a shield and/or a spear. Furthermore, the bird atop Sajal Niil's headdress may relate to God L's owl. It is thus possible that, if he was a singular deity, B'olon Yokte' K'uh was imagined in multiple ways, depending on his ability to transform, or on his differing roles in warfare or in mercantile trade.



**Figure 8: a)** (right) God L from the Temple of the Cross, Palenque. Note exactly nine footprints. Drawing by Linda Schele © 2009 FAMSI. **b)** (above) God L from the Madrid Codex, pg. 33b (FAMSI). Note the scorpion claws emerging from his waist, similar to the skeletal pathway from God L at right.

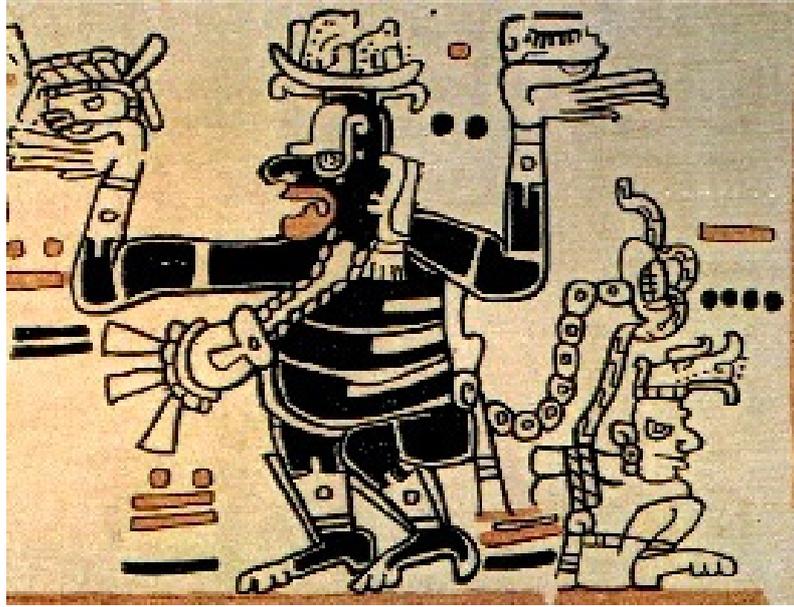


### The Temple of the Cross

From the right sanctuary panel from the Temple of the Cross in Palenque, an image of God L reveals an important detail that ties him to the name B'olon Yokte' K'uh (**Fig. 8a**). He is clearly identified here by his feathered owl hat (here curiously labeled '12-Sky'), his large cigar, and jaguar ear and cape. While there is no corresponding text with his name, from beneath his loincloth emerges a personified, serpent-like pathway with a total of nine footprints on it. The name B'olon y-Ok can be translated as 'Nine [are] his Steps' or 'Nine [are] his Feet', and these nine footprints may refer to the name of God L as B'olon Yokte' K'uh. Additionally, the jawless faces on either end of this personified pathway appear to be very similar to the skeletal centipede headdress, as discussed by Eberl and Prager (2005) and Boot (2008). Compare these jawless faces with the headdress worn by Sajal Niil with its hooked jaw and two bones protruding from its nose (**Fig. 2**).

Susan Milbrath (1999: 249, 264-266) believes that the skeletal centipede represents the constellation of Scorpius in the Milky Way. Here, the footprints on God L's skeletal serpent-like pathway are certainly evocative of the Milky Way, known to also represent a celestial road. Milbrath adds that, in the Yucatan, Scorpius was also seen as a scorpion. Given the attested relationship between B'olon Yokte' K'uh and the skeletal centipede, it is interesting to note that, in the Madrid Codex (79-84), a conflation of the Merchant God M and God L appears as a black deity with a scorpion tail and claw-like upraised arms (**Fig. 9**). Known as Ek' Chuuah, the 'Black Scorpion', this deity is mentioned in the Books of Chilam Balam as the patron of cacao growers and merchants. Curiously, another name for

this deity in this same source is Ah Uuk Chuuah or 'Sir-7-Scorpion' (Barrera Vásquez and Rendón 1948:104, 159), with '7-Chuuah' remarkably similar to the name of the centipede '7-Chapat'. One compelling image from the Madrid Codex (pg. 33 b), shows God L with scorpion claws emerging from his waist, dispensing water (**Fig. 8b**), much like the way in which the centipede pathway emerges from God L's waist in the image from the Temple of the Cross in Palenque, forming two upraised claw-like shapes (**Fig. 8a**).



**Figure 9:** God L/M as Ek' Chuuah, the 'Black Scorpion'. Note scorpion tail, and hands raised like scorpion claws. Madrid Codex, pg. 80. (FAMSI).

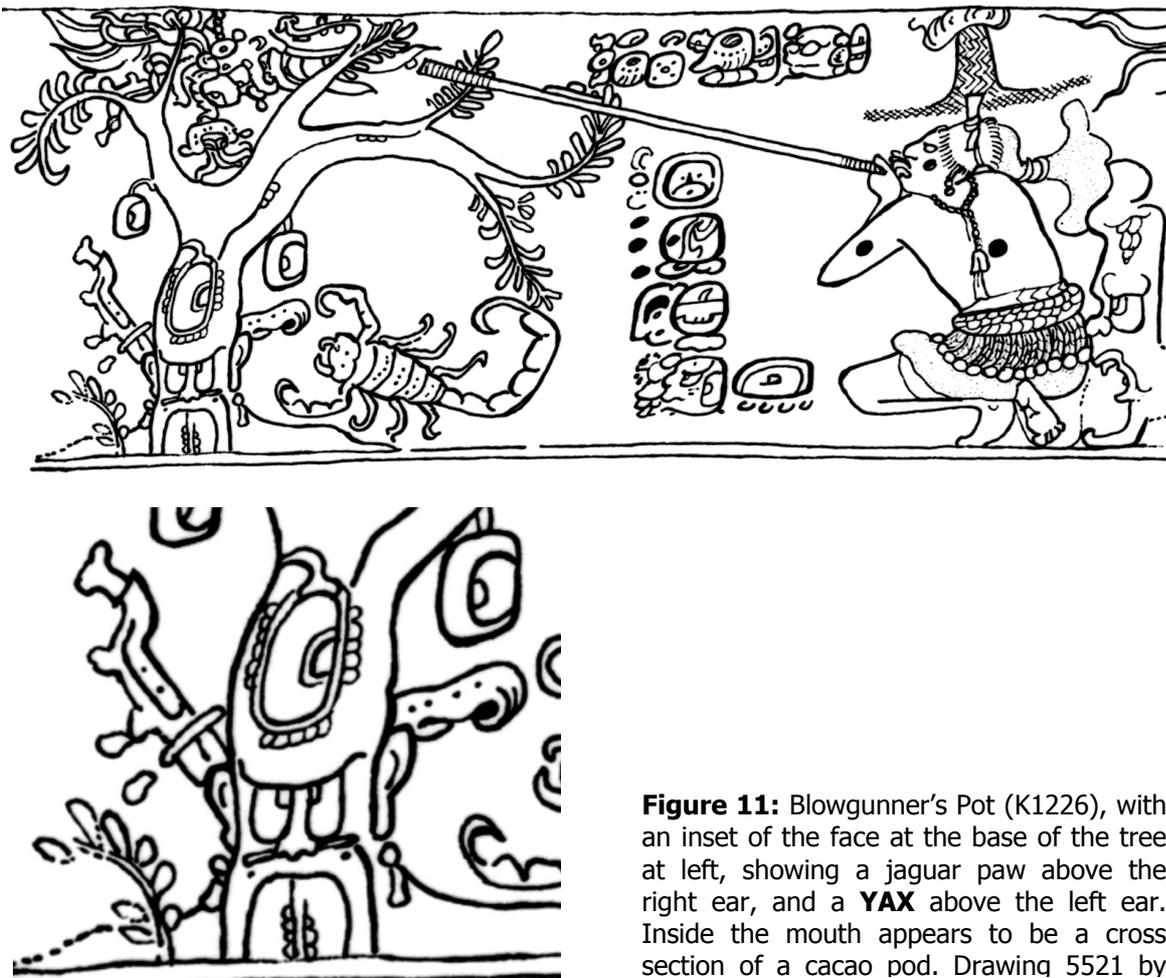


**Figure 10:** God L from Cacaxtla mural. After drawing by Tracy Wellman in Coe and Coe (1996:57)

### The Cacaxtla Mural: Jaguar Feet

From an unusual Central Mexican mural in Cacaxtla, God L is depicted wearing the full skin of a jaguar, including the jaguar's feet, which he wears as gloves and shoes (**Fig. 10**). Behind him rests his backpack, full of feathers from the Maya lowlands, a turtle carapace, and his owl hat. Here, God L is given a name in recognizable Central Mexican script as 4-Itzcuintli '4-Dog'. Itzcuintli corresponds to the Maya day name of Ok, also often read as 'dog'. Central Mexican numbering does not make use of the bar, equivalent to 'five', but in this Cacaxtla image, God L is placing an unusual bar next to the number 'four', which may then read '9-Dog' or B'olon Ok in Mayan, again suggesting the name B'olon Yokte'. Perhaps God L symbolically imports this thin, misplaced numerical bar from the Maya lowlands, along with his cacao, which here resembles a maize plant.

Furthermore, the fact that God L is wearing the feet of a jaguar in the Cacaxtla mural appears to be a direct pun on the name B'olon Yokte', in that the Maya observed a known pun between the words for 'nine' as b'olon and 'jaguar' as b'ahlam. This is apparent in the use of the Hero Twin Yax B'ahlam as the head variant for the number 'nine' used throughout the inscriptions. The name B'ahlam y-Ok can thus also be read as 'Jaguar are his Feet', and this is precisely what the Cacaxtla image depicts.



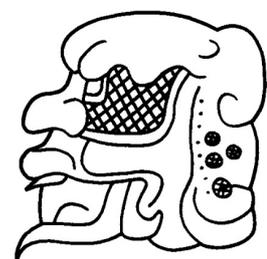
**Figure 11:** Blowgunner's Pot (K1226), with an inset of the face at the base of the tree at left, showing a jaguar paw above the right ear, and a **YAX** above the left ear. Inside the mouth appears to be a cross section of a cacao pod. Drawing 5521 by

## The Blowgunner's Pot and the Princeton Vase

John Major Jenkins (2006) similarly noticed the presence of a jaguar foot at the base of some personified iconographic trees, as on the Blowgunner's Pot (**Fig. 11**), suggesting a possible reference to B'olon Yokte', with the final *te'* referring to 'tree'. However, the particular gourd tree on the Blowgunner's Pot also has a recognizable **YAX** emerging from it, suggesting the jaguar twin Yax B'ahlam, who would thus relate to the other twin Hun Ajaw, depicted with his blowgun in the same scene. Nevertheless, it is quite possible that Yax B'ahlam is closely related to B'olon Yokte' K'uh as his grandson, if God L indeed corresponds to the merchant deity in the *Popol Vuh* (Tedlock 1996). Beliaev and Davletshin (2006:25–26) note that on the Rabbit Vase, God L and the Night Sun refer to one another as **ni-MAM**, terms for both 'my Grandfather' and 'my Grandson'. Thus, it is possible that Yax B'ahlam may be related to the Night Sun who wears the centipede headdress. Floyd Lounsbury (1985) originally proposed that GI and GIII of the Palenque Triad parallel Hun Ajaw and Yax B'ahlam from the *Popol Vuh*. Indeed, in the Temple of the Sun in Palenque, GIII is both identified as the Night Sun and the warlike Jaguar God of the Underworld (JGU), and his long title contains the name of the Sak B'ak Nah Chapat (Stuart 2006: 161–65), the same skeletal centipede named in Temple XIV (**Fig. 1b**). In multiple folkloric accounts, Hunahpu is associated with both the planet Venus and the sun (Thompson 1970:368). Similarly, GI is thought to be associated with the planet Venus (Kelley 1965; Lounsbury 1985), and he frequently wears a solar offering plate, the symbol of the east and solar emergence (Stuart 2005). If GI represents solar emergence, it may follow that GIII represents the Underworld sun swallowed by the jaws of the centipede in the west. Perhaps this is why we see GI paired with Uhuk-Chapat-Tzikin in both the Vase of the Seven Gods (**fig. 7**), as well as in the God-D Court Vessel, as discussed by Boot (2008). Additionally, the head variant for the number 'seven' is, in fact, the JGU, recalling Uhuk-Chapat-Tzikin. However, Yax B'ahlam conversely represents the number 'nine', and it is curious that the JGU appears as a separate deity in the Vase of the Seven Gods.

The presence of the scorpion at the base of the tree in the Blowgunner's Pot is also interesting, considering the aforementioned relationship between the scorpion, the centipede, and both the Night Sun and God L. The Itzam Nah bird in this tree, mentioned in the accompanying text, suggests a source for the unusual **TZ'IKIN** component of the name Uhuk-Chapat Tz'ikin K'inich Ajaw (**Fig. 6**). As Boot (2008:32) suggests, **TZ'IKIN** is identical to the avian component in the name of Itzam Nah, whose diadem we find on Sajal Niil's skeletal headdress.

It is perhaps worth mentioning that, on the Blowgunner's Pot, the face on the base of the tree represents the full glyphic form of **TE'** (**Fig. 12**), a jawless deity with scrolls emerging from its mouth and a jaguar paw ear, often identified as part of the patron of the month of Pax (Schele 1989; Grube 1994). Curiously, this deity also appears distinctly on the Vase of the Seven Gods. Elsewhere, this jawless figure is frequently depicted at the base of iconic cacao trees (McNeil et al. 2006:246), and it is the cacao tree that is specifically associated with the Merchant God L. Indeed, while the tree in the Blowgunner's Pot appears to be an unusual gourd tree with shining fruits, the image inside the mouth of the face on the tree appears to be a cross-section of a cacao pod (**Fig. 11**), demonstrated in the iconography of Copán (McNeil et al. *ibid*:249).



**Figure 12:** Glyph for **TE'** (ST4) and patron of Pax. Showing jawless mouth with scrolls and Jaguar Paw ear. Drawing by Matthew Looer in Macri and Looer (2003:175).

Yet another possible reference to the name of B'olon Yokte' can be found in the Cacaxtla mural, in that God L stands before a stylized cacao tree that sits at the base of a stairway with exactly nine steps leading upward, and, as in the image of God L in Palenque, B'olon y-Ok can also be read as 'Nine [are] his Steps'. The number nine is closely associated with the levels of the Underworld, and as the primary ruler of the Underworld, God L is shown here as the wealthy owner of cacao. Here, the cacao tree itself may correspond to the word *te'* as 'tree' in the name B'olon Yokte', and there is a clear association between cacao and the jawless Pax patron with a jaguar paw in his ear, representing **TE'**.



**Figure 13:** God L with his harem in his house on the Princeton Vase (K511).  
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On the Princeton Vase (K511), God L is depicted with his harem, seated on a throne inside a structure, on top of which are two jawless jaguars with upraised feet (**Fig. 13**). The scrolls emerging from the upper jaws of the jaguars again seem to correspond to the jawless, glyphic form that reads **TE'**. Taken together, these jaguars once again suggest the name B'olon Yokte' as the name of God L, who sits beneath them.

As nocturnal predators, the jaguar and the owl are both clearly associated with darkness and the Underworld. Additionally, God L's wide brimmed owl hat seems to be a symbol of darkness and shade, perhaps a darkness that extends to the highest level of the heavens, as '13 sky'. Likewise, Eberl and Prager (2005) have demonstrated that, in Postclassic and colonial literature, B'olon Yokte' K'uh is a deity commonly associated with the Underworld, warfare and sacrifice.

Mary Miller and Simon Martin (2004:62) suggest that God L, and the Maize God who defeats him, both preside over different times of the year, with God L ruling over the darker half of the year dedicated to long-distance trade, warfare, and the winter cacao harvest. God L initially defeats the Maize God, but the Maize God's resurrection in the spring hails the defeat of God L and the maize growing season.

In their translation of the Rabbit Vase, Beliaev and Davletshin (2006) have discussed the theme of the rabbit as a trickster found throughout the Maya area. Yet, there may also be an astronomical component to this scene. Elsewhere (Grofe 2009), I have demonstrated that the back-calculated ancient dates found in both the Rabbit Vase and the related text from Temple XIV in Palenque specifically represent precise lunar calculations. The theft of God L's hat by the rabbit in K1398 suggests the removal of his powers of darkness, and the triumph of the light over the dark. The stripped God L then pleads with the Night Sun, behind whom the rabbit hides. Martha Macri has suggested that the lunar rabbit is directly associated with the full moon on the vernal equinox (Grofe 2007:134), and this is the time of year when the length of the day becomes longer than the length of the night. Thus, symbolically, the vernal equinox, as well as the full moon, may explain the loss of power for God L as the lord of darkness and the Underworld, B'olon Yokte' K'uh. This scene of the rabbit theft of the owl hat suggests that the lunar rabbit collaborates with or functions like the Maize god, who is shown to repeatedly strip God L of his clothing and power in multiple scenes from Classic period ceramic vases (Miller and Martin 2004; Martin 2006). Similarly, the text from Temple XIV in Palenque seems to describe how B'olon Yokte' K'uh received and strengthened the skeletal centipede on this date, following his earlier K'awil taking ceremony, overseen by the Moon Goddess. It is still unclear how these two different interpretations of this deep-time mythic event are to be understood. Perhaps, through receiving the centipede headdress as an investiture of power, the youthful Night Sun takes the title B'olon Yokte' K'uh away from the aged God L, thereby becoming the new Jaguar God of the Underworld. This may explain the combined names on the God D Court Vessel.

### **Yacatecutli, the Aztec Merchant God**

Among the Aztec, the counterpart of God L, or Ek' Chuuah in the Postclassic, was the black patron God of Merchants, Yacatecutli, the 'Nose Lord', so named because of his prominent nose (Kelley 1976:70, 85). According to Eric Thompson (1966:160):

*Yacatecutli is generally taken to mean 'Lord of the vanguard', that is lord of those who lead the way. He is also known as Yacapitzauc, 'he with the pointed nose', compare to the English expression a sharp nose for business.*

The Aztec Pochteca merchants served both as long distance traders, as well as spies who would first enter, or lead the way, into other territories in preparation for the later arrival of armies who would then force those territories to pay tribute to the empire. Therefore, there appears to be a logical association between warfare, mercantile trade, and systems of tribute throughout Mesoamerica (Miller and Taube 1993:112).

From the evidence in Cacaxtla, it is apparent that God L, the Maya Merchant deity, was known in Central Mexico. We might also make note of God L's prominent nose. But what is even more remarkable is that there is a distinct similarity between the Nahuatl name Yacatecutli and the unusual Maya name Yokte' K'uh. Is it possible that the later Aztec deity name could have derived from the Maya name Yokte' K'uh? Is it conversely possible

that the obscure Maya name derived from an earlier Nahua deity? Karl Taube (1992:88) recognizes that the Postclassic Merchant God, God M, shares many attributes with Yacatecuhtli, and he suggests that God M may have derived from this Nahuatl deity, in combination with God L. Regardless, I suggest that the similarities between these two names are directly related, and this provides further evidence that B'olon Yokte' K'uh is indeed associated with the Merchant deity, God L.

### Tortuguero Monument 6 and the Prophecy of 13 B'aktuns

God L presides over the events that take place in the darkness of the Underworld on the Era Base date 4 Ajaw 8 Kumk'u, as depicted on the Vase of the Seven Gods (**Fig. 5**). Likewise, the ambiguous prophetic text on Tortuguero Monument 6 (**Fig. 14**) names B'olon Yokte' K'uh as 'descending' or perhaps 'falling' at the conclusion of the current era of 13 B'aktuns and the beginning of the next cycle on 4 Ajaw 3 K'ank'in, soon to occur in 2012 CE (Stuart 2006b). This is the only text known to deal with this much-anticipated and debated future date, but it is significant that it singularly names B'olon Yokte' K'uh as 'descending' to what may be a 'black' place, drawn and noted by Gronemeyer (2004:Vol.2:86) as **IK'**. Perhaps this is the same Underworld place of creation mentioned on the Vase of the Seven Gods as 'Black Dark Center'. Thus, just as he presided over the last days of darkness prior to the inauguration of the current era, the aging B'olon Yokte' K'uh may have been expected to assume his role and perhaps fall out of power in a larger cycle that recreates the yearly alternation between the powers of darkness and the powers of light on a grand scale. Taking into account the context of five hundred years of colonial experience and rapid cultural change, it is nonetheless poignant that the late Lacandon spiritual leader, Chan K'in Viejo, claimed that it is in fact the god of commerce and foreigners, Akyanthó, who is currently in power, having taken over the sun from his brother, the principal deity Hachakyum. It is Akanthyó, with his hat and pistol, who will bring on the *xu'tan*, the end of this world (Perera and Bruce 1982: 290; Perera and Chauche 1993:314–15). Like so many other Lacandon beliefs, is this eschatological



**Tzuhtz-(a)j-oom u(y)-  
uxlajuun pik**

'The Thirteenth Bak'tun will be finished'

**Chan Ajaw ux(-te') Uniiw**

'Four Ajaw, the Third of Uniiw (K'ank'in)'

**Uht-oom Ik'-?**

[black ?] will occur

**Y-em(al)?? Bolon Yookte'  
K'uh ta ?.**

'(It will be) the descent(?) of B'olon Yokte' K'uh to the ?'

perspective a new twist on a very old idea about the ebb and flow of cyclical creation, destruction and renewal? Perhaps it is significant that the image of God L on the right sanctuary panel of the Temple of the Cross stands opposite an image of Kan B'ahlam II on the left panel, holding a GI blood-letter and impersonating a founding ancestor of Palenque. Perhaps these two figures are symbolic as representations of the beginning and the end of a larger cycle.

**Figure 14:** Text from Tortuguero Monument 6. After Gronemeyer (2004). Translation after Gronemeyer (2004) and Stuart (2006b).

### **Conclusion: B'olon Yokte' K'uh as Maximon and Mam**

From the evidence presented in this paper, it appears that God L, the Jaguar Merchant God of the Underworld, may be the deity known as B'olon Yokte' K'uh, an Underworld god of wealth, warfare, conflict and sacrifice. Certainly, as a god of cacao and the riches of the Underworld, God L's power invokes warfare and conflict, as well as mercantile trade and the wealth of kings. Allen Christenson (2001:186–89) demonstrates that the contemporary counterpart of God L in the highlands of Guatemala is Maximon, or simply Mam 'Grandfather', the revered cigar-smoking Lord of Merchants with his broad-brimmed hat, and now often sporting sunglasses to block out the light. Christenson (ibid:62) notes:

*Among other attributes, this divinity is characterized by hypersexuality, witchcraft, madness, and the sterility of the dry season. During Easter observances, Atitecos carry Maximon in triumph to a small chapel near the church. There he presides over the death of Christ while receiving offerings of incense, money, and copious amounts of liquor.*

In the Postclassic Yucatan, the five days of Wayeb' prior to the New Year were celebrated as the feast of the Mam, during which a wooden idol of the Mam was ritually fed and celebrated. This period of the Mam's reign was fraught with danger, and at the end of the five days, the wooden idol was thrown to the ground and ritually killed, dismembered and bound to make way for the New Year (Christenson 2001:190). This yearly event directly parallels the larger re-creation of the current era in 3114 BCE, and perhaps also the similar events expected to take place in 2012 CE.

In Santiago Atitlán, Maximon's body or face is carved from the diviner's coral bean tree, much like the wooden people of the last world mentioned in the *Popol Vuh*. Interestingly, the name Maximon means "He Who is Bound," and his ritual dismemberment is reflected in myth, in which his wooden limbs are bound to keep him from wandering and being disobedient (Christenson ibid:181). Perhaps a reference to Maximon's wooden hands and feet can also be found in the name Yokt'e, which can be translated as "the feet [made out of] wood" (Barrera Vásquez and Rendón 1948:49 in Eberl and Prager 2005).

When asked properly with colored candles and paid with gifts of alcohol, tobacco and money, Maximon grants wishes of protection from harm, and particular favors, including both benevolent and malevolent requests. He is seen as a necessary and vital presence, and he now fulfills the role of Judas, who betrays Christ (here equated with the sun) and is himself ritually hung on Easter, closely linked to the time of the vernal equinox and the return of the light. Curiously, Eberl and Prager have noted the iconographic association of a noose around the neck with impersonators of B'olon Yokte' K'uh, and perhaps this was also an antecedent to the contemporary practice of hanging Maximon, which would facilitate his identity with the hanged Judas. Regardless, it is possible that Maximon continues the ancient tradition of B'olon Yokte' K'uh as the Grandfather lord of the Underworld. Christenson (2001:187–89) concludes:

*Yet the Mam is not an evil being, as are Western god-enemies like Judas Iscariot. He is essential to the proper regeneration of the earth because he provides the means whereby gods like Martín [patron of Maize] ...may pass through sacrificial death to be reborn to new life.*

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