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CHAPTER 4

Ritual Humor in Classic Maya Religion

Our understanding of Classic Maya society and religion has changed radically over the last several decades. Due to the epigraphic insights of Tatiana Proskouriakoff and others, it is now known that the individuals depicted on Maya monuments are not calendar priests, but kings. It is becoming increasingly evident that the monumental texts record dynastic history, the achievements of particular rulers, and the structure and organization of regional polities. In this extremely exciting and fruitful time of glyphic and iconographic research, there has been a primary orientation toward the monuments and their accompanying texts. However, this has given a somewhat limited view of Classic Maya religion and society. The scenes provided by this public art are highly idealized portrayals of rulership. Almost invariably kings are presented in the prime of youth, despite the fact that they are frequently mentioned in the texts as being of advanced years. Were all Maya kings handsome, young and trim? Probably not. Important figures captured from *other* sites are depicted with wrinkles, lumpy noses, withered limbs, and sagging bellies (e.g., Piedras Negras Stelae 8 and 12). The recurrent themes in Classic monumental scenes appear to be warfare and the humiliation of captives, ancestor worship, and blood sacrifice. However, there was surely more to Classic ceremonial life than this. Scenes portrayed on portable objects, notably ceramic vessels and figurines, reveal a complex array of festival events and characters, many of which can be related to ceremonial performances of the Colonial and contemporary periods.

In an important work, Victoria Bricker (1973) discussed ritual humor of the post-Conquest Maya. Although focusing principally upon the Tzotzil Maya of highland Chiapas, Bricker discussed highland Guatemala and Yucatan, as well as ceremonial clowning of highland Mexico, the Gulf Coast, and the American Southwest (1973:166-218). More recently, René Acuña (1978) has summarized the ethnohistorical material pertaining to ritual jesting and dances of protohistorical Yucatan. Despite the extensive background provided by these and other works, there has been no detailed study of ceremonial clowns and jesting in pre-Hispanic Maya art. In view of the abundant imagery of death, mutilation, and sacrifice, humor may seem quite out of place in the art not only of the Maya but also ancient

Mesoamerica as a whole.¹ However, ritual clowns, spoofs, and excessive drinking were also an important part of ancient Maya ceremonialism. Although festival humor seems to have frequently satirized established authority, it had a decidedly sacred role. Ritual clowning seems to have marked key periods of transition in the succession of calendrical periods, such as that of the vague year, the katun, and the agricultural year.

Evidence of pre-Hispanic Maya clowning is widespread and takes many forms. One of the most compelling examples occurs in the New Year pages of the Dresden Codex. Here, a specific clown character, the opossum *mam*, can be compared to data in dictionaries, the Chilam Balam books, and other early Colonial accounts. The same character may be found in the Classic Maya period, along with a host of other festival entertainers. One particular Maya deity, known as God N or Pauhtun, is a central figure in the pre-Hispanic clowning complex. This deity appears to be generally equivalent to the Mam of contemporary Maya groups, an aged thunder god of the earth and the Underworld. For the Classic period, figurines are an especially rich source of information on ritual humor. Due to the presence of dancing fans and rattles, many figures previously identified as gods or animals can now be identified as festival performers. One particular Classic clown appears on Classic figurines, two-part effigy vessels, painted vessel scenes, and as a particular glyph in Maya script, the personified *pa* (T1023). Along with the Pauhtun Mam, this simian entity appears in two related Classic performances either coupled with a woman or in a dance featuring serpents as well as a pretty woman. Both themes are found in ritual humor of the contemporary Maya, which appears to differ little from that of the pre-Hispanic past.

The Yucatec New Year Festival

The Uayeb New Year festival of Postclassic Yucatan is an excellent example of the seasonal rites of passage described by Arnold van Gennep (1960:178-182). According to Gennep, there are three distinct phases in ceremonies marking the transition from one state to another: separation, transition, and incorporation. In terms of this general schema, the period of separation would correspond to the death of the year—that is, the end of Cumku, the last 20-day Maya month. The time of transition is the 5-day Uayeb period, and the period of incorporation, the first of Pop, or the beginning of the year. Of most interest is the time of transition, or the liminal period. It has been noted in a number of studies (e.g., Turner 1969; Ortiz 1972; Vogt 1976) that there is frequently a repudiation or even mocking of established authority during the liminal period. Forms of symbolic inversion are especially common; chaos and flux pervade. Turner (1969) noted that this “antistructure” often results in a negation of social differentiation, creating—at least temporarily—an experience of solidarity within the community.

In the Colonial Yucatec *Cantares de Dzitbalché* (Barrera Vásquez 1965), there are two remarkable songs that provide explicit Maya conceptions of the New Year festival. In one, the Uayeb period is mentioned as a time of danger and chaos:

¹ An important exception is the smiling figure complex of Classic Veracruz. Many of the Nopiloa style smiling figures are probably entertainers, for they hold rattles and appear to be dancing. It is recognized that Nopiloa figurines have close affinities to Classic figurines of the western Maya region, especially Jaina (cf. McBride 1971:28-29). One of the striking shared features is the “world-bearer” dancing position, with the elbows out and upward from the sides and the hands either at or above head level.

chakaab cizin
heekaab mitnal

Cisin is unbound
the underworld is open. (1965:34)²

The text then mentions that the sins (*keban*) of everyone, young and old, rich and poor, are accounted for at this time, and that eventually, the Uayeb will constitute the destruction of the world. In a lighter tone, Song 12 describes a night ceremony concerning the end of Uayeb. At dusk, the ceremonial performers convene in the central square:

dzu kuchul h'pax kayoob
h'paal dzamoob h'okotoob
h'ualak zut ziihoob
bey ppuz
yetel nac yaob

Arrived are the musicians
comedians, dancers,
contortionists, jumpers,
hunchback
and spectators. (1965:71)

It is uncertain on what day this night celebration occurred, but an account in the *Relación de la Villa de Valladolid* suggests that it was the night preceding 1 Pop, the day of the New Year bearer; “the first day of the year before dawn, everyone and the *Alquin* watch and wait for the sun, making a grand festival that day” (de la Garza ed. 1983:2:237, my translation).

The comedians, or *ah paal dzamoob*, mentioned in the installation of Pop are probably much like those described by Fray Cogolludo:

They are clever in their mottoes and jokes, that they say to their mayors and judges: if they are too rigorous, ambitious, or greedy, they portray the events that occurred and even what concerns the official's own duties, these are said in front of him, and at times with a single word. ... They call these buffoons *Balzam*. (López de Cogolludo [1688]1954:339, my translation)

The jokes of the *baldzam* were often burlesque, and in the Motul dictionary there are the expressions *baldzam ach* and *baldzam pel*, referring to the male and female genitalia, respectively (Acuña 1978:32). In fact, a general Yucatec term for comedy or farce was *tah* or *taah*, with *ta* being the term for excrement (Barrera Vásquez 1980:748, 752-753). In the Pío Pérez dictionary, *ta'ah* is glossed as ‘*regir el vientre, evacuar en algo, ensuciarlo con excremento*’ (Barrera Vásquez 1980:752). This same term is used in the Motul dictionary to describe the events of a year, *u ta'ah ha'ab*: “*lo que sucede, trabajos, hambres, muertes, pestilencias, dentro de un año*” (Barrera Vásquez 1980:753). As social commentators, or “muckrakers,” the *baldzam* exposed scandals and misdeeds through their dramas. The end of the year seems to have been a particular time for this ceremonial jesting.

The Pre-Hispanic New Year Pages

For over a hundred years, it has been known that the sixteenth-century Yucatec New Year ceremonies described by Fray Diego de Landa appear in the pre-Hispanic Maya codices. Cyrus Thomas (1882) first noted the New Year themes on the Madrid Codex pages 34 to 37 and the Dresden Codex pages 25 to 28, and it was subsequently pointed out that the

² In the English transcriptions of the *Cantares de Dzitbalché*, I am relying heavily on the Spanish translation by Barrera Vásquez (1965), although at times my choice of words differs slightly.

Save for phonetic values and terms cited for contemporary Yucatec, I will use Colonial Yucatec orthography. Terminology and transcriptions from other Maya languages will retain the original orthography of the authors cited.

Paris Codex pages 19 and 20 also concern the installation of the year. Bruce Love (1986) has recently suggested that the Madrid New Year pages describe the ceremonies on or following the first of Pop, and not the Uayeb period. Although possessing only New Year “year bearer” dates, Paris pages 19 and 20 may concern the Uayeb period as well.³ In the page 20 scene corresponding to the year bearer Akbal, there is a jaguar and another clawed mammal; and on page 19, a jaguar attacks a human figure. Cogolludo mentions that one of the primary fears experienced during the Uayeb period was that of being bitten by snakes or wild beasts (*animales fieros*) (López de Cogolludo [1688]1954:336-337). It is clear the Dresden pages concern both the Uayeb and the first of Pop, since each year bearer is provided with its preceding day. Thus, whereas the four year bearers are repeated thirteen times at the lower left of each page, the upper left contains a repetitive series of the previous day. The sequence runs as follows: Eb/Ben, Caban/Etz’nab, Ik/Akbal, and Manik/Lamat. The previous days, Eb, Caban, Ik, and Manik correspond to 0 Pop, the last day of the Old Year. Although not a year bearer, this last day corresponds closely to the Old Year, since it is oriented to the same direction as the Old Year bearer. For example, the day sign Eb, occurring just before Ben, is situated to the south, the same direction as its year bearer Lamat. It may be that this last day is a concentrated embodiment of the associations and events of the Old Year, the climax of the Uayeb.

On each of the four Dresden New Year pages, directly to the right of the last days of the Old Year, there is a curious anthropomorphic animal (see Figure 5d). Due to its black eye markings, whiskers, conical teeth, and especially the long hairless tail, this creature has long been identified as an opossum. In every case, he carries an image in a sack or bag slung across his back. Although Thompson (1934:227) initially suggested that the opossums carry the gods of the “dying year,” he later stated that they are bringing in the gods of the New Year (1970a:483, 1972:90); his original interpretation appears to be correct. Peter Mathews (1976) has noted that, in each of the four accompanying texts directly above, the hieroglyphic sign corresponding to the opossum is marked with a particular color. Although the glyphs are effaced on pages 25 and 27, it can be seen on page 28 that the color is red and on 29, black. These colors do not relate to the day sign and direction of the New Year bearer below, but to the first and last day of the Old Year. David Kelley (1962a:286) noted that the following compound on all four pages can be phonetically read *u mam*. Both Cogolludo (López de Cogolludo [1688]1954:343) and Pío Pérez (Tozzer 1941:139) mention that the god of the Uayeb period was termed Mam, meaning ‘maternal grandfather.’ Kelley identified the opossum with the aged Mam. Noting that *uch* is a common Mayan word for opossum, Kelley (1962a:286) pointed out that the equivalents of the Cakchiquel month Nabei Mam and Rucab Mam are known as Alauch and Mucuch in Tzeltal. In support of Kelley, it may be noted that in Chamula Tzotzil, the Tzeltal Mucuch is known as *h’uč*, or *mol h’uč*, the latter term meaning ‘old man opossum.’ In addition, the previous month is occasionally called *me’el uč* ‘old woman opossum’ (Gossen

³ The Maya calendar was composed of two combined cycles, a 260-day divinatory calendar and a vague year of 365 days. The 260-day calendar was formed of twenty day names counted through a thirteen-day permutating cycle. The twenty day names partially overlap the 365-day cycle, since the vague year was formed of eighteen twenty-day months and a five-day remaining period, the Uayeb. Thus, the New Year and each of the twenty-day months began on the same day. Because of the Uayeb, the day names count forward five days each year, creating a succession of four day names over a period of four years. These four day names, the “year bearers,” were Ben, Etz’nab, Akbal, and Lamat throughout much of the Classic and Postclassic periods, although in the region of the Puuc, the year bearers shifted one day ahead, to Ix, Cauac, Kan, and Muluc.

1974a:237). In Yucatan, the opossum may have been also identified with the quality of age; whereas the word for opossum in Yucatec is *och*, the term for old is *uch*.

Aside from its general attribute of age, little is known of Maya conceptions of the opossum.⁴ The Yucatec were well aware of the creature’s tendency of “playing possum,” for according to the Pío Pérez dictionary a hypocrite or crafty fellow was referred to as a *cimen och*, or “dead opossum” (Barrera Vásquez 1980:318). The Yucatec identification of opossums with buffoons or entertainers has been often cited. In the Tizimin tun prophesies, the *tolil och* appears in the years 11 Cauac, 2 Cauac, and 5 Ix (cf. Edmonson 1982:90, 99, 104). In the Motul dictionary, *ix tol* is glossed as ‘*truan, moharrache*,’ meaning buffoon or jokester. The Motul also describes the *tah ix tolil* as an ‘*entremes*,’ or one-act farce. In the aforementioned Tizimin passages of 11 and 2 Cauac, the *tolil och* is mentioned in relation to Ah Can Tzicnal. For 11 Cauac, Ah Can Tzicnal is described as the ‘masked Bacab,’ *ah koh bacab* (cf. Roys 1949:172, 181). As noted by Thompson (1970a:471) and others, the Motul dictionary glosses *bacab* as ‘*representante*’ or actor. The white Bacab of the north, Ah Can Tzicnal, plays an important part in the New Year account of Landa.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was a special dance performed during Carnival in northern Yucatan. Termed the Xtol, it has been suggested that this burlesque festival performance may derive from the pre-Hispanic *ix tol* dance (cf. Makemson 1951:101; Acuña 1978:53, n. 57). In 1901, Starr (1902:80-82) witnessed a Xtol dance in Merida and mentioned that it consisted of fourteen individuals, presumedly all males, with seven dressed as women with exaggerated breasts. Starr noted that during the dance there was “a good deal of indecent suggestion” and that the songs were sung in Mayan. Although Starr did not record the words, one version may be found in a romanticized description of the Xtol by Rejón García (1905:97-98). The final lines concern the payment of taxes or tribute:

A Kateexan bool patan	Do you all also want to pay tribute?
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The chorus answers:

Matan, Matan, Matan, tat	No way, no way, no way, sir.
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The refusal to pay tribute, an open denial of civic responsibility, recalls the socially charged humor of the seventeenth-century *baldzam*.

Although Thompson provided ethnohistorical evidence that the opossums on Dresden pages 25 to 28 are mummer entertainers, little attention has been paid to their dress and accouterments. The opossums on pages 26 and 27 both have belts with pendant conical shells. In the art of Postclassic Mexico, these shells frequently fringe the costume of dancers and other entertainers (cf. Codex Vaticanus B, p. 52; Codex Borgia, p. 64; Codex Nuttall, p. 38). Each of the Dresden opossums carries a fan and a strange staff topped with a human hand. Virtually identical staffs occur in Central Mexican codices, where they have been interpreted as *chicahuaztli* rattle staffs. According to Seler (1963:2:106) the *chicahuaztli* was associated with gods of the earth and fertility. Ichon (1973:427) noted that because the Postclassic staff

⁴ Among the Pedrano Tzotzil, the opossum is believed to be the owner of fire (Guiteras Holmes 1961:196-197). A similar belief is recorded for the Nahuatl of Huitzilán in the northern Sierra de Puebla. In one Huitzilán tale, the opossum steals fire to warm Christ, and in so doing burns the hair off his tail (Taggart 1983:103-104).



Figure 1. Procession of three opossum entertainers with gourd rasps; rollout scene from Late Classic polychrome (drawing by Diane Griffiths Peck, reproduced courtesy of Dr. Michael D. Coe).

frequently ends with a serpent—a widespread symbol of lightning—the instrument probably represents thunder.⁵ The fans carried by the Dresden opossums may also have been important articles of spoofs and dances. In Classic Maya vessel scenes, dancers and animal impersonators are frequently found with fans (cf. Robiscek and Hales 1981:Fig. 23a; Schele and M. E. Miller 1986:Pl. 71). Ciudad Real mentioned that during a dance at Kantunil in 1588, one performer held rattles in one hand and a feather fan in the other (Noyes 1932:327). Writing on the early seventeenth-century Pokoman Maya, Thomas Gage (Thompson 1958:244) noted that the *toncontin* dancers wielded feather fans. During the 1901 Xtol dance in Merida, certain of the comedians carried feathered fans as well as rattles (Starr 1902:81-82). Both accounts mention that the fans were flourished with particular movements and gestures.

Representations of opossum entertainers are not limited to the Postclassic Dresden Codex. In one Late Classic Maya vessel scene, a procession of three seedy opossums dance in file (Figure 1). Although they are anthropomorphic and lack tails, all three have the long snout, conical teeth, and whiskers characteristic of opossums. In addition, they seem to be old; one has a wrinkled face as well as the sagging belly. Each carries a large instrument, apparently a gourd rasp, stroked by a stick in the right hand.⁶ The same opossum figure, complete with musical instrument, appears on a Late Classic pottery mold from Guatemala (Figure 2).

⁵ The contemporary masked clown of the Huichol rain ceremony holds a rattle staff composed of a rattan stick to which a dried gut rattle is tied (Zingg 1938:200). Zingg (1938:200, 324) states that this object represents the staff of Grandmother Growth, fashioned from “the point of a cloud.”

According to Ichon (1973:423) in the Pastores dance of the Sierra Totonac there are two dance staffs known as *bastones-truenos*, or “thunder staffs.”

⁶ This particular instrument—a rasp attached to a hollow sounding chamber—appears to be of great antiquity in Mesoamerica. Parsons (1980:No. 14) illustrates an Early Formative example possibly from Las Bocas, Puebla. Modeled in clay, the piece represents a rasp attached to a sounding chamber of gourd and armadillo shell.

Pauahtuns, Bacabs, and the Opossum Mam

There has been a great deal of discussion, and confusion, over the identity of God N, one of the major deities of the pre-Hispanic Maya pantheon. Since the early work of Förstemann (1901:189-192) and Schellhas (1904:37, 38), it has been widely thought that God N was the god of the 5-day Uayeb period. In a discussion of the Classic personification of the number five, Thompson (1950:133-134) stated that this aged face represents God N as the Mam, the god of the Uayeb, and that the contemporary Kekchi and Pokomchi regard the Mam as an aged and powerful earth deity. Thompson (1950:133-134) also mentioned that like the Yucatec worship of the Uayeb Mam, in contemporary Kekchi Easter ceremonies, an image of Mam is buried during an “unlucky” five-day period. Thompson (1970a:473) later recanted this view and stated that God N was not the feared god of the Old Year, but rather the quadripartite Bacab that supports the heavens: “it is abundantly clear that Mam, the dressed up piece of wood with his five day rule and contemptuous end, had nothing in common with the four Bacabs.” Disregarding the *u mam* reading proposed by Kelley, Thompson viewed the Dresden opossums as Bacab entertainers. Thompson was a staunch skeptic of phoneticism in the Maya script, and had previously discounted the *mam* reading (Thompson 1963:125).



Figure 2. Late Classic mold with modern cast representing opossum musician with drum or rasp (photograph by William Sacco, reproduced with permission of Peabody Museum of Natural History, Yale University).

However, in the light of more recent epigraphic work, there is every reason to regard the *mam* reading as correct (e.g., Lounsbury 1985:48).

Michael Coe (1973:15) was the first to note that the conventional nominal glyph of God N can be phonetically read as *pawahtun*. The Pauahtuns mentioned in Landa's description of the New Year ceremonies are equated with the Bacabs and the Xib Chacs, all of these being oriented to the four directions with their appropriate color (cf. Tozzer 1941:137). Landa may actually be correct; the terms Bacab and Mam are probably aspects or simply epithets of Pauahtun. According to Landa (Tozzer 1941:135), the Bacabs support the sky. However, the only pre-Hispanic deity which holds such a position is God N, named phonetically as Pauahtun. Whereas Thompson viewed God N as the Bacab sky bearer, Coe (1973, 1978) has considered him as the supporter of the earth, not the heavens. However, I know of no explicit example of God N sustaining the earth, and in a number of instances, he appears to hold up the sky. Thus, the two Pauahtuns flanking the doorway of Copan Structure 22 have been interpreted as sky bearers (Schele and M. E. Miller 1986:122). According to these authors (1986:122), the Bacabs are young aspects of the Pauahtuns. In another case, a pair of aged God N figures serve as supports of a sky-band throne (cf. Robicsek and Hales 1981:Fig. 9a). Among the Zinacanteco Tzotzil, there are the *vašak men*, who as the gods of the four corners hold up the earth and apparently the sky as well (cf. Vogt 1976:15-16). Similarly, the Chamula earth bearers are supporters of the "universe" (Gossen 1974b:22). Rather than making a sharp distinction between earth and sky bearers, it may be more appropriate to consider the Pauahtuns as sustainers of the world.

The four Dresden opossums are labeled as Mams, who seem to be the same as the Pauahtun—the aged god of the Old Year. Although the close relation between the opossum and God N has not been previously documented, there is direct evidence for the Pauahtun identity of the opossum Mam in Classic Maya iconography. On one remarkable Early Classic effigy vessel, God N is modeled within his conch (cf. Coe 1982:No. 33). The tip of the spiraling shell is covered with a single glyph. On close inspection, it is found to be the head of an opossum, complete with short round ears, bearded cheek, and conical teeth (Figure 3a). An Akbal marking, a symbol of darkness, is placed over the eye to represent the black facial marking of the opossum. A crosshatched or netted element caps the head, probably referring to the characteristic cloth headdress of God N. In a Late Classic vessel scene, God N holds his netted cloth headdress before him (Figure 3d). Although generally human, he has the black eye marking, conical teeth, and snout whiskers of the Dresden opossums. There are also Late Classic anthropomorphic opossums wearing the God N headdress (Figure 3c). In the illustrated example, the upper eye region is again marked with the Akbal sign. Although the opossums on Dresden pages 25 to 28 do not wear the God N headdress, opossum glyphs frequently appear with this headdress in Dresden texts (Figure 3b). The Dresden opossum Mams are almost surely an aspect of God N.

The Pauahtun Mam: Aged God of Thunder

Many of the overt characteristics of God N have been widely noted, such as his aged bearing, costume, and frequent appearance in conch or tortoise shells, but there has been little interest in the relation of this deity to the natural world. It is becoming increasingly evident that the agricultural cycle was of great importance in Classic Maya religion, and deities of maize, rain, and lightning are commonplace. In particular, one deity, known either as the Rain Beast

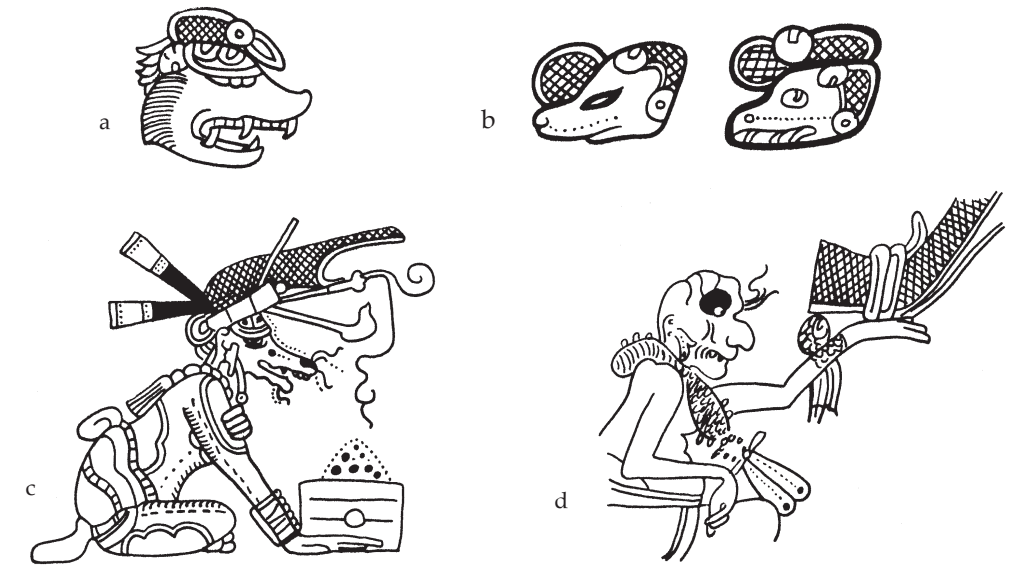


Figure 3. The opossum God N in Classic and Postclassic Maya art: (a) opossum glyph on Early Classic God N effigy vessel, crosshatched element on forehead probably headdress (after Coe 1982:No. 33); (b) Postclassic examples of opossum heads with God N headdress, Dresden Codex, pp. 55b, 56a; (c) Late Classic opossum with God N headdress, compare Akbal eye marking with *a* (after Coe 1975a:No. 9); (d) God N with opossum attributes, note black eye, nose whiskers, and conical teeth; detail from Late Classic vessel (after Robicsek and Hales 1981:Vessel 7).

or as the bestial form of G 1, is now known to be a Classic form of Chac, the Postclassic Yucatec god of rain and lightning (cf. Coe 1978:76-77; David Stuart, cited in Schele and M. E. Miller 1986:60, n. 55). God N is frequently found with Chac in Classic Maya scenes. The Early Classic vessel naming God N as the opossum Mam has on its opposite side a complex rendering of Chac within his Cauac-marked cave (see Figure 15b). The figure is very much like a series of Early Postclassic Chacs at Chichen Itza, where in each case they wield a similar burning serpent-footed lightning axe (see Figure 15c). One Late Classic vessel represents a veritable orgy of music and drink, with four God N's being accompanied with young women and four Chacs within a cave (Coe 1978:Vase 11). The identification of God N with Chac continues in the Postclassic period. On page 41b of the Dresden Codex, there are two separate scenes of God N and Chac, each deity surrounded by beads of water, probably rain. In the texts immediately above, both are described as *pawahtun chac*.

The association of God N with Chac is entirely consistent with contemporary Maya conceptions of the Mam. Thompson (1930:57) noted that in the village of San Antonio, Belize, the Mams are merged with the Chacs and the gods of wind. Four in number, their domain is the mountains and the Underworld: "The Mams are gods of the mountains, of the plains, of the underground, of thunder and lightning, and, by extension, of the rain" (Thompson 1930:57). The contemporary Chol also consider the aged *lak mam* as lightning, or *chajk* (Cruz Guzmán et al. 1986). However, the sons of *lak mam* are stronger, and whereas these youths frequently throw lightning, *lak mam* is best known for his thunder (Cruz Guzmán et al. 1986:42). Both the San Antonio Maya and the Chiapas Chol consider the principal Mam to be extremely old, and this belief is also found with the Kekchi, in the intermediate region of Alta Verapaz. Dieseldorff (1926a) posited that the Kekchi have two distinct sets of gods in

complementary opposition, one being the Tzultacaj, the young gods of lightning, and the other, the aged Mam. The Kekchi Mam is essentially malevolent and dangerous, and the thundering at the onset of the rains is thought to be Mam trying to escape his bonds in the Underworld. Mendelson (1959) has made a similar case for the Tzutuhil of Santiago Atitlan. There, the young benevolent god of rain and lightning is San Martín, and the aged god is known as Mam or Maximon. As with the Kekchi, the Maximon Mam idol is worshipped for five days of Holy Week. This widespread concept of young and old gods of lightning and thunder may be pre-Hispanic. Whereas Chac is the young axe-wielding god of lightning, the Pauhtun Mam is an aged thunder deity. But although the Chacs and Pauhtuns may thematically overlap, there is no evidence that they are simply young and old aspects of the same god. The Pauhtuns, rather than the Chacs, are inevitably depicted as the world bearers.

It has been noted that the Huastec Maya of Veracruz also have a widespread belief in the Mamlab, aged and malevolent gods of thunder. Stresser-Péan (1952) stated that there are actually two forms of Mamlab, young and robust forms and old, degenerate types known as Oçel. Alcorn (1984:58-59) mentioned that in the Huastec community of Teenek Tsabal, the principal Mam is Muxi', who undergoes a process of aging over the solar year:

Muxi' miraculously becomes a newborn baby at the beginning of the year when the sun once again "moves" away from the South. During the year he ages and by year's end he is an old man as the sun reaches the winter solstice.

According to Stresser-Péan (1952), the Mamlab greatly love dance, drink, and music and have great parties in mountain caves with their female frog consorts.⁷ Even when floating down rivers as spent Oçel, they drum upon the bloated stomachs of drowned beasts. Stresser-Péan recorded that the Mamlab are the souls of ancestors drowned in the last creation. This is interesting in light of the description by Alcorn (1984:57) of four drowned men who support the earth; as they age and break, they are replaced by another four at the New Year. These drowned men eventually go to the eastern realm of Muxi' (Alcorn 1984:57). Among the neighboring Sierra Totonac, there is a similar aged thunder god known as San Juan, or Aktsini'. As with the Huastec Mam, he is an aged god associated with mountains, thunder, and drowned humans. Moreover, he is the most important of the four thunder gods who support the world (Ichon 1973:45, 123, 130, 137).⁸

The cited ethnographic material from Veracruz is strikingly similar to contemporary and ancient lore of the Maya region. In both regions, there is an old and often malevolent mountain god, a quadripartite supporter of the world identified with thunder, music,

⁷ The contemporary Chol similarly believe that the wife of Lak Mam is a large toad (Cruz Guzmán et al. 1986:42).

⁸ A similar concept is recorded for the contemporary Chorti Maya of Guatemala. There, it is believed that four *'an'hel*, beings of rain and lightning, hold the corner posts sustaining the world. These same *'an'hel* were credited with destroying the last world by causing their burden to shake and fall into the sea (cf. Fought 1972:377-379). This event is almost identical to the famous Bacab episode of page 43 of the Chumayel: "There would be a sudden rush of water when the theft of the insignia of Oxlahun-ti-ku occurred. Then the sky would fall, it would fall down upon the earth, when the four gods, the four Bacabs, were set up, who brought about the destruction of the world" (Roys 1933:99-100).

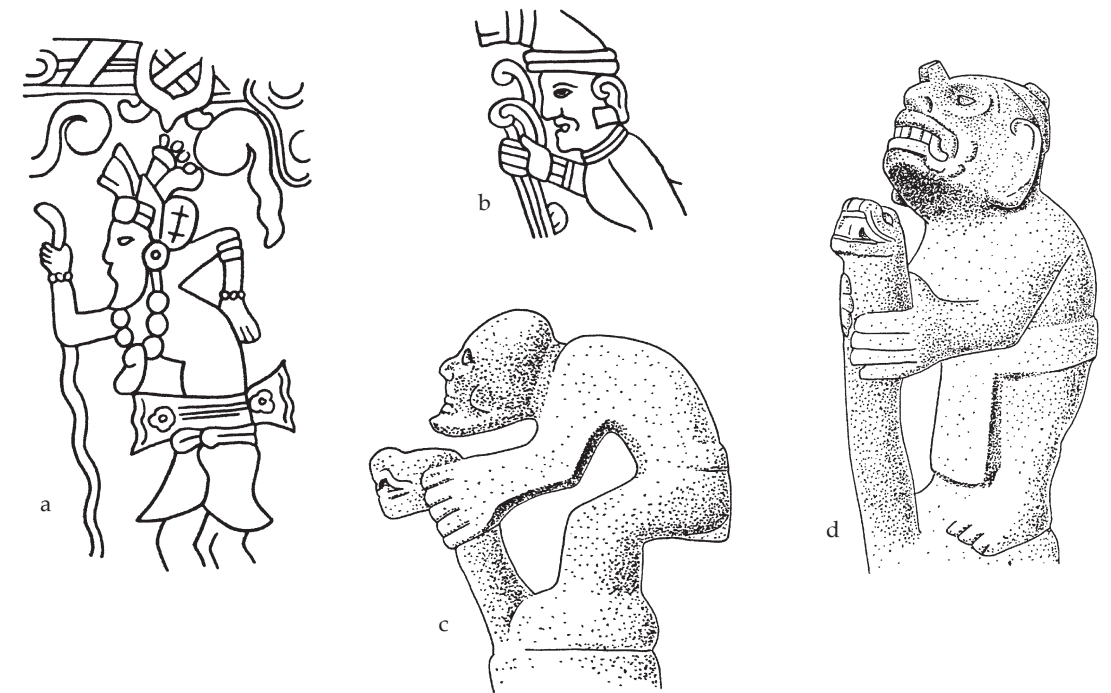


Figure 4. The aged Mam, comparison of stone sculpture from Guatemala and the Gulf Coast: (a) Stela 17, Kaminaljuyu, a Late Preclassic representation of God N, note bound cloth headdress and undulating staff in right hand; (b) detail of Late Classic scene from mound of the Building Columns, El Tajín, aged figure with staff and rolled cloth headdress of Maya God N (after Kampen 1972:Fig. 34c); (c) Postclassic Huastec sculpture of Mam bent over serpent lightning staff (after de la Fuente and Gutiérrez Solana 1980:Pl. 237); (d) version of Huastec Mam figure with serpent lightning staff; face of Mam replaced with that of Tlaloc, the Central Mexican god of rain and lightning (after Anton 1969:Pl. 182).

drunkenness, and the Old Year.⁹ The Huastec even call him Mam, the same name used for the deity in Guatemala, Belize, and Yucatan. This god appears to be of considerable antiquity. Michael Coe (personal communication, 1984) has noted that Kaminaljuyu Stela 17 appears to be a Late Preclassic rendering of God N (Figure 4a). An old bearded man bent over his serpentine walking stick, the figure wears the diagnostic rolled cloth headdress of God N. In addition, the rear part of the headdress contains a bulbous netted element resembling the "spangled turban" frequently found at the base of Classic God N headdresses (e.g., Coe 1973:Nos. 17, 70). Although I know of no example of God N carrying a staff in Classic Maya art, there is an interesting Late Classic relief from El Tajín, Veracruz. A detail from a cylindrical bas-relief column, the scene represents an aged male holding a staff. With his wrapped cloth headdress, he is almost identical to Classic Maya representations of God N (Figure 4b).

The El Tajín figure seems to be an early form of an important genre of Postclassic Huastec sculpture—an aged male leaning over his walking stick (Figure 4c). Stresser-Péan (1971:596) identified this common sculptural type as the Mam, "the old god of the earth and

⁹ Klein (1980) has argued that the Bacabs, Pauhtuns, and Mams are functionally related to Tlaloc, the Central Mexican god of rain, lightning, and thunder. Moreover, Klein posited that lightning had an important symbolic role in period-ending ceremonies, such as the end of the 365-day year and also the 52-year cycle.



Figure 5. Comparison of Early Postclassic representations of God N at Chichen Itza with depictions of entertainers in pre-Hispanic codices: (a) God N atlantean figure wearing *oyohualli* pendant, from the Castillo, Chichen Itza (after Selser 1902-1923:5:292); (b) dancer accompanying Huehueoteotl, Vaticanus B, page 52 (detail), compare arm positioning to God N figure and pre-Hispanic depictions of spider monkeys (cf. Figure 6); (c) representation of God N on painted column from the Temple of the Chac Mool, Chichen Itza, figure holds *chichahuaztli* staff and fan (after Morris et al. 1931:2:Pl. 37); (d) opossum Mam from New Year pages of Dresden Codex holding fan and *chichahuaztli* staff, compare conical shell tinklers on belt with examples on necklace of *b* and wrists of *c*; Dresden Codex, p. 27.

of thunder, lord of the year, ancestor of the Huastec." In direct support of this interpretation, one example has the wrinkled face of Tlaloc, the Central Mexican god of rain and lightning (Figure 4d). A recent account of the chief Huastec Mam could serve as a vivid description of the pre-Hispanic sculptures: "Muxi is generally thought of as a dangerous, powerful old man bent over his walking stick of *ak'*" (Alcorn 1984:59). The stick held by the pre-Hispanic Mam figures can either be a simple shaft or a serpent. The latter variety probably alludes to a thunderbolt, the snake being a widespread symbol of lightning in Mesoamerica and even the American Southwest. Although somewhat eroded, it is quite possible that the undulating staff carried by the Kaminaljuyu figure is also a serpent. The opossum Mam of the Dresden New Year pages may also be wielding *chichahuaztli* thunder staffs.

The Social Environment of God N

In order to understand God N and his role in Classic Maya religion, it is necessary to examine how he is socially defined in the ancient art. He is frequently found in palace scenes, and although God N may be seated upon a throne or dais, he is also often placed in a subservient

position to a principal lord (cf. Coggins 1975:Fig. 127b). Although the crosshatched rolled cloth headdress is an important attribute of God N, it appears to be also a general article of court dress. Rolled cloth headdresses, whether crosshatched or plain, are frequently worn by individuals in what appear to be actual palace scenes (Coggins 1975:Figs. 122-126, 140-142). The cloth headdress is often affixed by the "Jester God" plaque, identified by Schele as a Classic Maya symbol of rulership (Schele 1979; Schele and M. E. Miller 1986). God N may also occasionally be found wearing the Jester God (cf. Haberland 1971:197). But in contrast to the panoply of Classic ceremonial dress, God N wears the casual garb of daily court life. It is noteworthy that he is almost the antithesis of a proper Maya ruler. Whereas Maya lords are usually depicted in war or engaged in penitential sacrifice, in Classic scenes God N is never found wielding weapons or participating in penitential bloodletting. Instead, his favorite pastimes appear to be drinking, the taking of intoxicating enemas, and dallying with nubile women.¹⁰ Perhaps due to his excesses, he is aged and physically puny, quite unlike the youthful rulers found on Classic monuments. This is a striking contradiction; although extremely powerful—a god of thunder and bearer of the world—there is little about this deity which could command respect. He appears to be almost the embodiment of the vanities and corruption which accrue with excessive power and wealth.

In Classic and Postclassic scenes, God N is a god not only of drinking and debauchery but also of dance as well. One Late Classic vessel depicts God N holding a rectangular fan as he dances with a young woman (see Figure 12a). On an Early Postclassic column from the Temple of the Warriors at Chichen Itza, God N is found carrying the same dance articles as the Dresden opossum Mam, a fan and the *chichahuaztli* staff (Figure 5c). In addition, the figure wears the same conical shell tinklers, in this case as bracelets. On the basis of costume elements, Selser (1902-1923:5:284-285, Illus. 131) identified the God N atlantean figures of Chichen Itza as dance gods. He noted that they often wear loincloths with knobbed ends and the *oyohualli* symbol of cut shell, costume elements almost identical to the dancing figure on page 52 of the Vaticanus B (Figure 5b). This scene is presided over by Huehuecoyotl, the aged coyote god of dance. A Postclassic symbol of sensuality and pleasure, the *oyohualli* shell pendant is frequently worn by spider monkeys, widely considered as droll entertainers in ancient and contemporary Mesoamerica. In fact, the Vaticanus B dancer has the large round eye markings and forward-sweeping hair commonly found with depictions of spider monkeys. His stance is also striking, as the raised arms and outward-turned hands duplicate the world-bearer position of God N. Running spider monkeys hold their arms similarly, and are thus depicted in many regions of ancient Mesoamerica (Figure 6). In one Late Classic vessel scene, a dancing God N in quadruped stance bears the facial markings of the spider monkey (Figure 6e). The ambivalent nature of God N does resemble that of the monkey, a creature associated with drunkenness and sexual transgression as well as dance, fertility, and pleasure (cf. Selser 1902-1923:4:456-464).

The Personified *pa* Glyph: A Classic Maya Clown

The personified *pa* glyph (T1023) frequently appears in Classic Maya texts. Although of varying form, the sign is usually composed of a crosshatched anthropomorphic face. Michael

¹⁰ For discussions of enema use and intoxication in Classic Maya art, see Furst and Coe (1977), de Smet (1985), Barrera Rubio and Taube (1987).



Figure 6. Representations of spider monkeys and God N: (a) spider monkey in "world bearer" posture, detail of Copador style vessel, Copan (after Longyear 1952:Fig. 14b); (b) one of four spider monkeys on Copador style bowl, Late Classic period (after Bray 1970:Pl. 24); (c) ceramic *sello* representing spider monkey, Late Postclassic Central Mexico (after Field 1974:Fig. 28); (d) anthropomorphic spider monkey wearing headdress of God N, from Late Classic polychrome bowl (after Andre Emmerich and Perls Galleries 1984a:No. 21); (e) dancing God N with facial markings of spider monkey (after Coe 1981b:Fig. 2).

Coe (cited in Mathews and Schele 1974:64) first suggested that the head is an aspect of God N. At Palenque, the glyph is often identical to the aged face of God N, save for the curious crosshatching (Figure 7a). In Classic script, this marking is infixed in the simple cartouches of T586 and T602, both signs providing the phonetic value of *pa*. The crosshatching in T1023 could be simply interpreted as a device to provide the *pa* reading save for the careful fashion with which it is delineated. Rather than covering the entire face, the crosshatching ends at lines arching widely around the eye and mouth. The general effect suggests a coarse cloth mask cut around the mouth and eyes. The facial patterning duplicates that of the spider monkey, with the fabric corresponding to areas of hair. A number of full-figure forms of the personified *pa* appear at Copan (Figure 7j, k). Although lacking masks, they are covered in crosshatched or knotted suits, apparently of coarse cloth or grass. Eduard Seler (1902-1923:4:459) mentioned that in Postclassic Central Mexico, monkeys are depicted wearing suits of *malinalli* grass:

It is a very peculiar characteristic that frequently green *malinalli* grass takes the place of the hair coat of the monkey. ... The *malinalli* grass was to the Mexicans the symbol and mark of transitoriness and revival, and is, therefore, represented in the list of the regents of the day signs by the pulque gods. The twofold nature of the pulque gods ... who are the producers of vegetation and the representations of the blessing of the harvest but at the same time are also the embodiment of intoxication, drinking-bouts and sexual excesses, is expressed I think, in this disguise. (Translation in Seler 1939:4:2)

The Classic Maya suit had many of the same associations; however, the personified *pa* character is not simply a monkey, but a ceremonial buffoon with its own specific attributes and symbolic domain.

Although commonly misinterpreted as monkeys, full-figure representations of the personified *pa* occur on a number of two-part effigy vessels. During the La Finca Esperanza

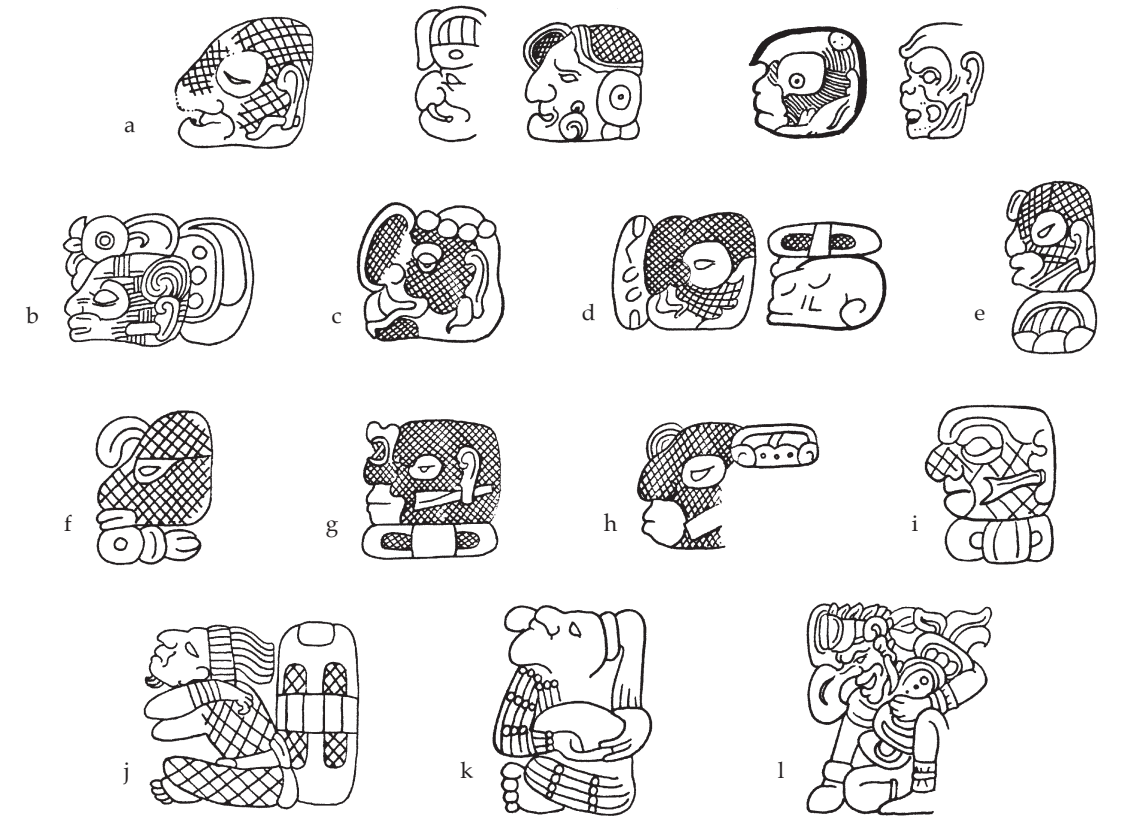


Figure 7. Examples of the personified *pa* in Classic Maya epigraphy: (a) comparison of personified *pa* with glyphs of God N and spider monkey, all examples from Palenque; (b) personified *pa* in "tupah" period ending expression, Tikal Stela 12, D2; (c) *pa* head with large nose and curving tooth, forming part of phonetic spelling of *pacal*, Palace Tablet, G7, Palenque; (d) personified *pa* head in compound read *chac patan* (S. Houston, personal communication, 1982) from incised conch (after Robicsek 1978:Fig. 155); (e) personified *pa* in *pat* period ending expression, Yaxchilan Lintel 44, A4; (f) *pat* period ending expression, Stela 1, Ojos de Agua, A9; (g) *pat* period ending expression, Machaquila, carved stone from Structure 4; (h) *pat* period ending expression, Bonampak Stela 1, N1; (i) *pat* expression occurring in hieroglyphic cornice of Structure 1, Quirigua; (j) full-figure *pat* period ending expression, Oblong Altar, Copan; (k) full-figure *pa* forming part of name glyph of Madrugada, carved hieroglyphic bench, Copan; (l) form of personified *pa* with long sicklelike nose, forming part of "tupah" period ending expression, Copan Stela D, B5.

excavations at Kaminaljuyu, a remarkable two-part effigy vessel was discovered in Tomb A-II (Figure 8a). Kidder, Jennings, and Shook (1946:188-190) noted that this figure, modeled in "sardonically rendered ugliness," is largely covered with the impressions of "a harsh checkboard weave fabric." It should be noted that this cloth marking ends sharply at the wrists and mouth. The hands and huge bulging lips are smoothly finished, thus giving the distinct impression of actual skin protruding from a coarse cloth suit. Whereas the Kaminaljuyu piece was described as a "human effigy" (Kidder et al. 1946:188), Smith (1955:85-86, Fig. 11j, k) interpreted a similar jar excavated at Uaxactun as a "monkey." This figure also has a large "Roman nose" and bulging lips as well as probable cuffs on the wrists. As with the Kaminaljuyu example, there is no sign of any tail. The Uaxactun effigy is a uniform brownish black and bears no evidence of textile patterning, but there are two other examples from Uaxactun that clearly wear the coarsely woven suit (Smith 1955:Fig. 5e, h, i, j). Here, the



Figure 8. Representations of the personified *pa* character on effigy vessels: (a) left: two-part effigy vessel from Kaminaljuyu, Esperanza phase, Early Classic period, figure dressed in coarse cloth suit; note exposed skin of hands and lips (from Kidder et al. 1946:Fig. 190d); (b) right: upper half of two-piece effigy vessel, figure wears coarse cloth suit and mask; note Ahau headband, disk on chest possibly of cut shell; compare with pendants of Figures 11a and 11b (from Nicholson and Cordy-Collins 1979:No. 130).

figures are clearly human, not monkeys.

Similar but unprovenanced two-piece effigy vessels are also in private collections. In the Barbachano Collection of Merida, Yucatan, there is a standing two-piece vessel having the facial characteristics of the Kaminaljuyu example (cf. Cantú and Carballo 1969:No. 1). The fibrous suit is represented by a checkered pattern of broad crosshatched lines, a convention found with certain of the personified *pa* glyphs as well as one of the aforementioned vessels from Uaxactun (Smith 1955:Fig. 5h, k). In the Land Collection, there is the upper half of a two-piece jar (Figure 8b). The figure wears a coarsely woven suit and mask as well as an Ahau headband, conventionally appearing on T1000, the personified form of the day sign Ahau. Nicholson (Nicholson and Cordy-Collins 1979:No. 130) has compared this example to the black effigy described by Smith (1955:85-86), noting that neither appears to depict a monkey, but rather a figure with monkey attributes.

The vessels that have been discussed date largely to the later part of the Early Classic period, at approximately AD 500 to 600. The roughly contemporaneous incised peccary skull from Tomb 1 of Copan contains an excellent example of the suited character (Figure 9c). He has been generally interpreted as a monkey, although once again the sleeve cuffs are quite visible. Moreover, as in all of the discussed examples, the simian tail is lacking. Although not an actual spider monkey, the figure exhibits many monkey attributes. Projecting above the top of the Ahau headband is a forward-sweeping crest of hair, a common attribute of the spider monkey in ancient Mesoamerican art. The suited figure and its epigraphic counterpart,

T1023, tend to have hanks of cloth or unspun cotton pulled through the ears. Spider monkeys are not only found with similar earpieces in Classic art of the Maya, but also Veracruz (cf. Hammer 1971:No. 56). In Classic Veracruz, the pendant ear elements also occur with the smiling figurines of Nopiloa and Remojadas, generally interpreted as dancers or entertainers (e.g., McBride 1971).

The Copan peccary-skull figure is paired with a jaguar, and whereas the personified *pa* shakes a rattle, the feline holds a gourd enema in his outstretched paw. This same thematic scene is frequently found on Late Classic Maya polychromes, where the *pa* character appears with jaguars and other characters (Figure 9). These scenes give every impression of being festival performances. The figures frequently hold rattles and are placed in a position



Figure 9. Classic Maya scenes of personified *pa* clown: (a) personified *pa* wearing suit of rags and mask in act of vomiting (after Robicsek 1978:Fig. 146); (b) *pa* character with mask, knotted suit, and God N headdress, compare suit with that of Figure 7k (after Robicsek 1978:Figs. 146, 147); (c) *pa* clown paired with jaguar character, *pa* figure with Ahau headband and rattle; jaguar holds gourd enema, accompanying text reads *k'an pa*; from carved peccary skull, Copan Tomb 1 (after Graham 1971:No. 10); (d) smoking *pa* clown with Ahau headband and jaguar impersonator facing vessel, possibly containing *balche* (after Hellmuth 1978b:210); (e) dancing *pa* clown with rattle and object in mouth, jaguar holds two urns, both probably containing alcohol, detail of Late Classic Tepeu 1 vessel (drawn from photograph courtesy of Justin Kerr, photo no. 505); (f) rollout scene on Tepeu 1 vase; at far left, God N wearing knotted *pa* suit, accompanied by two jaguars, one drinking, and hairy-suited figure wielding a knife; all may be interpreted as demon clowns (drawn from slides in F.L.A.A.R. Maya Ceramic Archive, Dumbarton Oaks, cat. # LC cb2 237).



Figure 10. Detail of Chama Vase, *pa* character wearing black paint in place of suit. Compare nominal text with figure on Copan peccary skull (Fig. 9c) (after Coe 1978:No. 9).

of dance. In many regions of ancient and contemporary Mesoamerica, the rattle is an extremely important instrument in dances and spoofs. Moreover, there is widespread evidence of alcohol, which can be seen in large urns, either to be consumed orally with cups or via the cut-gourd enema. Rather than being purely supernatural scenes, it is probable these vases portray actual ceremonies in which people impersonate particular gods and demons. As Stone (1986) has recently pointed out, during the ritual event, the impersonator became the mythical being. Thus, in the vessel scenes, the artisan was not restricted by the physical realities of the actual festival performance; demons and beasts commonly replace the human actors. However, it is also true that the costumes are often indicated, with human hands, feet, and even faces emerging out of the suits and masks.

In Late Classic Maya art, the suited *pa* figure is occasionally replaced by the supernatural entity. Here, he appears as a fantastically ugly, aged, and wrinkled were-monkey, an organic blending of simian and human physiognomy (see Figures 11b, 12c, 13c). The kneeling figures upon the Western Court Reviewing Stand at Copan are probable examples of the mythical being (see Figure 16c). Old and simian, they wear the pendant ear cloth and hold rattles, an instrument commonly found with the personified *pa*. In the Late Classic ceremonial dump excavated by Susanna Ekholm at Lagartero, there are a number of ceramic pendants and figurine fragments that represent the *pa* character either masked by rough cloth or in its supernatural simian form (cf. Ekholm 1979:Fig. 10-5). The Jaina-style figurines of Campeche represent the *pa* figure both as a festival performer and as a mythical being. Thus, in one instance, he wears a coarse woven suit with a mask pinched together in the region of the nose and chin. The pocked brow region and the crosshatching upon the nose reveal that the mask is woven either of coarse cloth or even wicker (see Figure 11a). The greatly exaggerated nose-bridge and pointed chin, also found with examples of T1023, are perfectly suited to a cloth medium, since they could be simply made by either folding or sewing together the rough material.¹¹ The Regional Museum of Campeche contains a similar figure with the sharply pointed chin, although there the wrinkled face is not woven but fleshed (see Figure 11b). A slightly more simian figurine is in the National Museum of New Delhi (cf. Morley 1968:21). Like the Campeche Museum piece, this example is heavily wrinkled and holds a rattle. Moreover, in the published photograph it appears that there has been some breakage at the tip of the chin, suggesting that this figurine also had the sharply pointed chin element, probably a goatee.

¹¹ During the Merida Xtol performance witnessed by Starr (1902:81), the performers appear to have worn masks similar to the *pa* figure: "All were masked, mostly with old bits of brown cloth, with eye perforations and with nose and chin pinched up and developed by tying."

The phonetic element *pa* or *pat* seems to be an important part of the Classic Maya character. On the Copan peccary skull, the *pa* figure is accompanied by a hieroglyphic text that can be read as *k'an pa* (Figure 9c). A similar text may be found on the Chama Vase, which depicts six males with features exaggerated to the point of caricature (cf. Coe 1978:Vase 9). One of the principal protagonists is the personified *pa*. Instead of wearing the rag or woven suit, he is painted entirely black save for around the mouth and eyes (Figure 10). In his accompanying nominal phrase, the crosshatched personified *pa* glyph mirrors the painted facial pattern. Like the Copan peccary-skull text, the *pa* glyph is preceded by a Kan Cross compound probably read *k'an*. The main sign T281 is prefixed by the T116 *ne* sign, but in other of the nominal texts, it follows a *k'a* or *k'an*. It is likely that the T245 *ta* preceding the T1023 is also in reversed order, since the personified *pa* appears frequently in compounds read *pat* (Figure 7). The entire compound can be read as *k'an pat*.

Although T1023 clearly has the value *pa* in Classic Maya script, the term *pat* seems to more closely correspond to the suited performer. For one, in the katun 5 Ahau passage on Chumayel page 91 (Roys 1933) there is an entity termed *ah xaclam pat*, who is paired both with the comedian opossum (*tolil och*) as well as an opossum Batab.¹² Like the *tolil och*, *ah xaclam pat* may be a specific character of Yucatec festival performances. In a number of Mayan languages the phonetic value *pat* can signify 'to imitate or jeer,' 'cover in cloth,' and 'end or terminate.' The coarse cloth suit of the *pa* character recalls one meaning of *pat* in many Mayan languages. In Chol, Cholti, and Tzeltal, *pat* signifies 'bark' or 'covering' (Schele and J. H. Miller 1983:Table 5). Moreover, the root *pat* can also refer to 'woven cloth.' Thus, in Yucatec, there was a special type of tribute cloth called *patis*; and in Chol, *we pat* can refer to a 'cloth, towel, veil,' or 'rebozo' (Schele and J. H. Miller 1983:85). The term *pat* is frequently found as a Classic period ending expression, usually referring to a completion of a katun. Schele (1982:148) has noted that this may mean

¹² Although it is beyond the scope of the present study, a case could be made that many of the creatures identified either as "military orders" or *uay* form changers by Roys (1933:Appendix F, 1954:14) are actually clown characters. In the Tizimin account of katun 7 Ahau there is the description of people dressed and masked as the jaguar, deer, and rabbit in a clear context of humor: "They shall be masked representatives; they shall put on the skin of another, a jaguar, the mask of a deer. The rabbit is their genius. Laughing shall be their faces in the town, in the district" (Roys 1954:38).

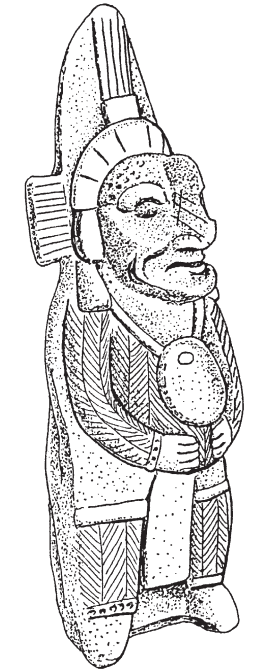


Figure 11. Representations of *pa* character on Jaina-style figurines: (a) personified *pa* wearing suit and mask, compare face with Figure 6d (drawn from photograph courtesy of David Joralemon); (b) *pa* clown with rattle and shell pendant, figurine on display in the Museo Regional de Campeche.

'the end of something.' Thus, in Tzotzil, *ta patil* signifies 'at the end,' and *patebal*, the 'moment before finishing being made' (Laughlin 1975:268). Not only does the personified *pa* appear in *pat* period ending expressions but the character is also found in scenes with period-ending Ahau dates. Thus in the center of the carved Copan peccary skull, there is the date 1 Ahau, 8 Sac, probably corresponding to the Tun ending of 9.7.8.0.0 (cf. Graham 1971:No. 10). In Yucatec, *pat* signifies 'to make up, pretend' or 'to insult,' and a number of Yucatec dictionaries gloss *ah pat t'an* as 'trovador,' with connotations of liar or gossip (Barrera Vásquez 1980:632-634).¹³ The early Colonial Vienna dictionary contains the curious phrase *pat-hal ti ahaulil*, meaning 'to make oneself king, pretending to be one.'¹⁴ It will be recalled that both T1023 and the full-figure character frequently wear the Ahau headband. Stephen Houston (personal communication, 1983) called my attention to an extremely strange full-figure form of the personified *pa* at B5 on Copan Stela D (Figure 71). In this case, the nose turns out in a huge, sharply curving sicklelike form. The same character occurs on a Late Classic vase where he wears the Jester God plaque, another sign of rulership (see Figure 13a).

The Old Man and Young Woman Theme

A common theme of Classic Maya figurines is the coupling of a young and attractive woman with a usually aged and ugly male. The pairs are definitely amorous, for the man frequently either touches the woman's breast or is in the act of lifting her skirt. Figurines of this type are widely distributed in the Maya region. Although best known for Jaina, other examples have been reported for Tonina (Becquelin and Baudez 1979-1982:3:Fig. 258c) and the Rio Chixoy (cf. Wilkerson 1985:539). The paired figures have been interpreted as depictions of the moon deity, Goddess I, with her many paramours (e.g., Miller 1975; Benson 1979). Both authors note that Goddess I appears in a comparable context in the Dresden Codex, there paired with a whole series of deities (cf. Dresden pp. 21c-23c). However, aside from being sexually active females, the Classic women bear no specific attributes of Goddess I or the moon, although at times the companion of the woman is a rabbit, a well-known moon symbol (e.g., Miller 1975:Fig. 9; Anton 1970:Pl. 211). However, not every rabbit in Maya art can be interpreted as the moon. In some vessel scenes, the rabbit is found with other animals playing music and dancing (e.g., Clarkson 1978:Fig. 13; Coe 1978:No. 17). Although the paired figures may well have a mythical analogue, they allude as much to festival performers as to specific deities.

In a number of instances, the figurine pairs wield fans (cf. Figures 12b-c, 13b). As with rattles, these fans provide an important thematic message, for they tell us we are watching *performances*, not just the mythical deeds of demons and gods. Rather than being special attributes of particular deities, these articles were basic accessories for dancers, actors, and buffoons. Gestures provide yet another clue to dramatic performance since many seem to allude to the dance. An especially common dancing position is one hand up against the chest with palm outward (cf. Anton 1970:Pl. 190). The same gesture occurs with a woman coupled with the simian *pa* figure; the pair are clearly dancing (Figure 13c).

¹³ In Yucatec, the word for nickname is *pat k'aba'*, *k'aba'* being the term for name. These nicknames are generally not complimentary, and individuals are commonly called by the name of a particular creature they are believed to resemble. Examples I am familiar with are *ch'o* 'rat,' and *much* 'toad.'

¹⁴ This phrase recalls a similar expression *ma'ax ahaw*, which Barrera Vásquez (1980:511) glosses as 'mono sustituto del señor o rey.'

The ugly old man and young woman theme is not limited to figurines. Virtually identical scenes may be found on Late Classic vessels. Thus, the aforementioned depiction of God N dancing with a young woman is thematically identical to many figurine groups, where the aged male seems to be God N (Figure 12). In one remarkable vessel scene, a male with an obscenely extended nose dances with a young woman (Figure 14). Lines running diagonally across the nose reveal it to be false—probably wrapped cloth over a stiff armature—and it is likely that the entire face is a mask. Not only does the figure wield a fan and rattle but he is also accompanied by two other musicians, one with a gourd rasp and the other, a small ceramic drum. This scene is clearly a detailed rendering of a dance or spoof accompanied by music.

In the vessel scenes and figurine groups, the companions of the woman are of three basic types: an old man, usually God N, anthropomorphic animals, and forms of the personified *pa*. In many cases, the male appears to be the aged God N wearing a rolled turban headdress as well as sporting a small goatee. The long-nosed vessel figure wears the cloth headdress, and he may be either a form of God N or the personified *pa*. One recently exhibited Jaina-style figurine depicts the simian form of the personified *pa* with a young and beautiful woman (Figure 13c). The contrast is striking: one face wrinkled and hideous; the other, serene with full, rounded cheeks. In the aforementioned vessel scene depicting the sickle-nosed personified *pa* with the Jester God plaque, the figure caresses the breast of a full-bodied young woman (Figure 13a). Far from resisting this repulsive figure's advances, the woman holds one hand up against his chin. At times, animal characters are paired with the woman; along with the rabbit, the spider monkey occasionally appears.

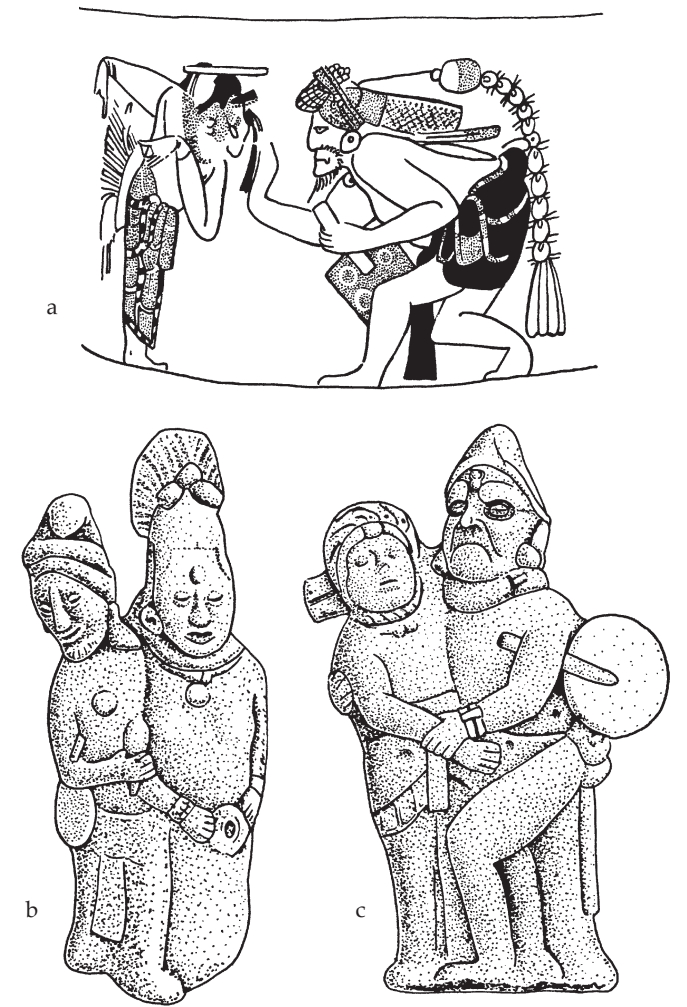


Figure 12. Old man and young woman couples dancing with fans: (a) God N dancing with young woman, detail of Late Classic polychrome vessel (after Bolz 1975a:Pl. 59); (b) figurine representing God N with young woman, note fan and probable rattle held in arm of God N (after photograph in Robicsek and Hales 1981:Fig. 67); (c) form of personified *pa* character dancing with young woman, figurine reportedly discovered near banks of Rio Chixoy (drawn from photograph courtesy of Dr. George Stuart).

where a monkey fondles the breast of the semi-reclining woman (cf. Anton 1970:Pl. 70). The two cited rabbit figures and the monkey all wear a prominent circular chest pendant, evidently of cut shell. A great many of the discussed Classic clowns wear a similar device (e.g., Figures 8b, 11a, 14). This device is perhaps analogous to the *oyohualli* pleasure sign (Figure 5a) of Central Mexico, and it may mark the office of entertainers, such as musicians, dancers, and buffoons.

The significance of the young woman and old man theme remains largely unknown. It is quite possible that the woman is the moon goddess, although at present, the evidence is weak. However, mythological meaning aside, it is clear that these scenes refer to actual performances involving the courtship and perhaps even simulated copulation of the woman with extremely unlikely mates. It will be seen that the coupling of lecherous old men or animals with young women is a favorite theme of contemporary Maya humor. However, ethnographic lore aside, it is difficult to conceive how an amorous dance featuring an old, very ugly, and probably drunk man and a pretty young woman could *not* be presented in a humorous light.

The Classic Maya Snake Dance

In contemporary highland Guatemala, there are a number of humorous dances that feature the association of aged and ugly men with a pretty young woman, all in the context of rain and fertility. According to Edmonson (1965:86), the term *patz-kar* in Quiche means 'masked,' with *patz-karin* signifying 'a comic dance.' This performance is probably a version of the modern Patzca described by Mace (1970). Performed in Rabinal with the music of a Tun drum, the dance consists of a group of males wearing rags and masks of aged men afflicted with goiter. Carrying rattles and twisted canes carved with lightning serpents, they dance and moan around a single male dressed and masked as a pretty woman. This humorous dance is a petition for rain performed during the spring celebrations of Corpus Christi. Mace (1970) has noted the similarity of the dance to the Quichean Patzaj, commonly referred to as the *Baile de Culebra*, or *Baile de los Gracejos*. The Patzaj is a popular dance in the Quiche



Figure 13. Versions of personified *pa* figures with young women: (a) sickle-nosed form of personified *pa* touching woman's breast, note Ahau headband and Jester God plaque, detail of Late Classic Maya polychrome (after Robicsek and Hales 1981:Fig. 68); (b) simian personified *pa* and young woman holding fan (from Anton 1970:Pl. 214); (c) simian *pa* dancing with woman, pointed chin element probably a goatee (from Krichman and Grudin 1981:Pl. 73).



Figure 14. Dancing scene on Late Classic Maya polychrome. At center, man with absurdly long nose dances with woman; note rattle and fan held in hands of male. Dancing couple flanked by musicians; one plays small pottery drum, the other holds either gourd rasp or drum (drawn from photograph by Justin Kerr published in Coe et al. 1986:138-139).

region and varies according to each community; nonetheless, it tends to feature a group of performers dressed as aged men in old, worn-out clothes and one man costumed as a woman (cf. Lothrop 1929; Termer 1930; Schultze Jena 1946). Gourd rattles are again an important accessory of the comical performance, although the most striking feature is the presence of live serpents, kept in jars until the dance. The snakes may be flourished, hung around the neck, and passed through the clothes until they fall to the floor. In some communities, there is a simulated copulation in which the woman lies with each of the males in turn. After the performance, the snakes are released.

The Quichean Patzaj has been compared to the contemporary snake dance of the American Southwest, and the swallowing of snakes during the Aztec festival of Atamalculiztli (Lothrop 1929; Termer 1930). In the Hopi snake dance, the serpents are explicitly identified with lightning and on their release are supplicated to bring rain (cf. Stephen 1936:704, 715, 747). The Aztec ceremony also concerned rain and lightning, with the snakes in a pool directly in front of Tlaloc (Sahagún 1950-1982:Book 2:177-178). There is strong evidence for a Classic Maya snake dance, in this case also involving lightning. In the two previously described Classic representations of Chac, the lightning god has snakes emerging from the mouth and holds a serpent lightning axe (Figure 15). The dancing ruler on the Dumbarton Oaks panel is portrayed as a Chac impersonator, and wields a burning serpent lightning axe. In his other hand, he holds a jar and a single serpent. But although the figure is dancing, this scene is clearly in the genre of Classic historical monuments. Two important Palencano rulers, Pacal and Kan-Xul, are mentioned in the text, and there is nothing even remotely suggestive of clowning or humor. However, there are a number of unusual monuments from the northern Yucatan Peninsula that seem to describe a serpent dance far more like the Patzaj. A complex silhouette carving at the site of Telantunich, near Peto, contains one figure with a serpent wrapped around the neck, the head and tail held aloft in either hand (Figure 16b). Andrews (1939:74) noted that there originally were five figures around this

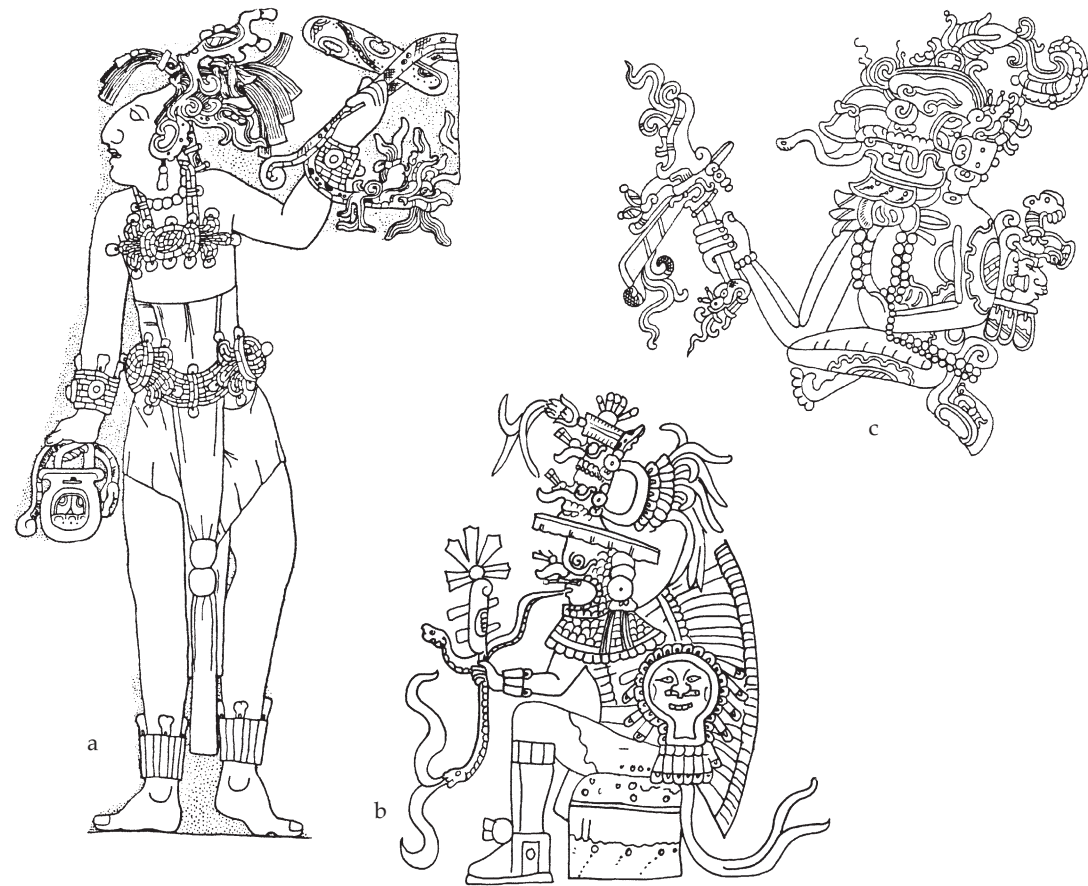


Figure 15. Classic and Early Postclassic Chac figures with serpent lightning axes: (a) Palencano ruler, either Pacal or Kan-Xul, impersonating Chac; with one foot raised in dancing position, figure holds a serpent and Akbal jar in one hand and a burning lightning axe in the other; limestone panel in collection of Dumbarton Oaks (detail from Schele and Miller 1986:Fig. 7.3); (b) back side of Early Classic effigy vessel of God N, Chac holds burning serpent lightning axe in right hand, smoke or flames emanate from blade and serpent mouth; note snake emerging from mouth of Chac (from Robicsek 1978:Fig. 181); (c) Early Postclassic form of Chac impersonator from Temple of the Warriors, Chichen Itza, figure wears Chac mask with serpent rising out of mouth and wields flaming, multi-bladed serpent axe in right hand (after Morris et al. 1931:2:Pl. 133).

individual. Although one of the lower figures is missing and the other fragmentary, the two immediately above have their hands on their enlarged phalluses. The description of the facial features of the six individuals is especially interesting:

They bear no slightest resemblance to what we know as Maya sculpture, either in subject matter or in execution. The faces have large bulging foreheads, flat noses with excavated alae, and thick, highly everted lips. (Andrews 1939:74)

Andrews (1939:74) compared this sculpture to a stone figure at Kabah which has identical features and holds a serpent draped around the neck (Figure 16a). Of course, the facial characteristics are simian, and recall the illustrated dancer figurines of Campeche and, especially, the two flanking figures of the Copan Reviewing Stand (Figure 16c). The Copan figures not

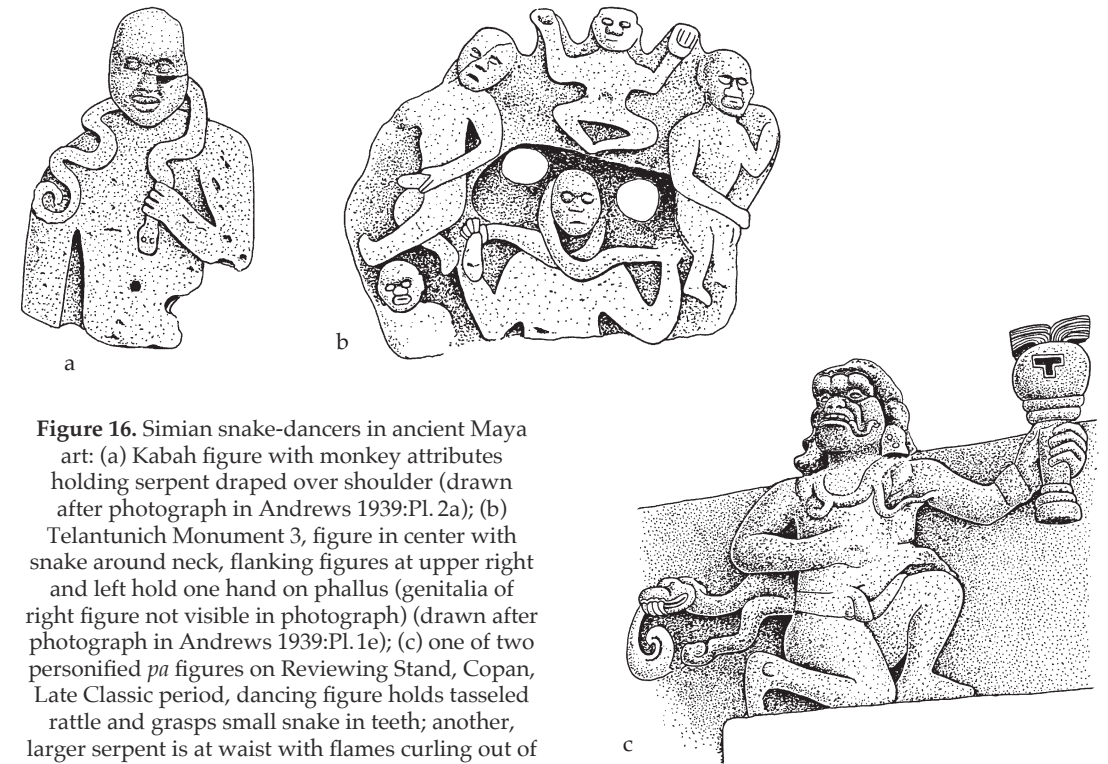


Figure 16. Simian snake-dancers in ancient Maya art: (a) Kabah figure with monkey attributes holding serpent draped over shoulder (drawn after photograph in Andrews 1939:Pl. 2a); (b) Telantunich Monument 3, figure in center with snake around neck, flanking figures at upper right and left hold one hand on phallus (genitalia of right figure not visible in photograph) (drawn after photograph in Andrews 1939:Pl. 1e); (c) one of two personified *pa* figures on Reviewing Stand, Copan, Late Classic period, dancing figure holds tasseled rattle and grasps small snake in teeth; another, larger serpent is at waist with flames curling out of mouth (after photograph in Anton 1970:Pl. 33).



Figure 17. A possible symbolic correlate of the snake dance/copulation performance. God N rises out of Bearded Dragon serpent wrapped around upper torso of young woman. With one hand on her breast, he duplicates the position frequently adopted by the old man and young woman couples. The end of the serpent's tail is capped by God K, thus converting the Bearded Dragon into a Manikin Scepter lightning axe; note beaded sparks on serpent's body (after Robicsek and Hales 1981:Vessel 12a).

only hold rattles but also have snakes in their mouths. Moreover, each has a snake with fiery breath at the waist, almost surely an allusion to a burning lightning serpent.¹⁵

In the account by Schultze-Jena (1946), the earth lord (*juyup-tik'aj*) is supplicated before and after the snake dance since serpents are his special charge. Among the Kekchi, snakes are the servants of the Tzultacaj, or "*trueno*" (Thompson 1970b:274).¹⁶ According to the Tzotzil Chamula, certain snakes are considered as transformations of the earth lord, the god of thunder and lightning (Gossen 1974b:86). A number of Late Classic vessel scenes depict God N emerging out of the mouth of a large serpent commonly referred to as the Bearded Dragon (Robicsek and Hales 1981:Vessels 6, 7, 8, 12).¹⁷ In two of the cited examples, God N is confronting a young and beautiful woman wrapped in the serpent's coils. One of the scenes actually shows God N leaning over and touching the breast of the lady (Figure 17), thematically almost identical to the Jaina-style figurines of God N fondling young ladies. Just as the old man and young woman figurines have a direct analogue in ritual dance, the God N serpent and woman may represent the snake dance and its mimed copulation.

Demon Characters in Classic and Contemporary Maya Festivals

There is fairly extensive evidence that the pre-Hispanic God N is an antecedent of the aged thunder god known under such epithets as Angel, Mam, Yahval Balamil, Tzultacaj, and Trueno in the contemporary Maya region. Rather than entirely benevolent, this powerful being can kill with lightning, or be the source of sickness and famine as well as prosperity. His behavior could hardly be called responsible, and both the Chamula and Zinacanteco Tzotzil consider him as an unpleasant, greedy, and wealthy Hispanic (cf. Gossen 1974b:86-87; Vogt 1969:302). The Kekchi believe that floods are the sign of great feasts in the Underworld regions of the Tzultacaj (Thompson 1970b:274). Throughout the Maya area, caves are anomalous places, filled with riches but also the regions of demons and disease.

The Classic period identification of God N with the spider monkey is in accord with contemporary conceptions of the Earth Lord. The licentious character of the Mam is most clearly seen in the Tzutuhil Maximon. Dually sexed, he may copulate with both men and women, and lives in an underground sweat bath with a harem of women (Mendelson 1965:132; Tarn and Prechtel 1981). Tarn and Prechtel mentioned that he is occasionally

¹⁵ Just behind the two serpent dancers, there is a series of three large conch. During the preparation of one form of the Quichean serpent dance, trumpets and conches are blown to announce the dancers (Mace 1970:107). Along with the tortoise shell and tun drum, this instrument may have served as an imitation of thunder, an entity personified as God N.

¹⁶ Thompson (1930:60) disagreed with the Mam/Tzultacaj dichotomy proposed by Dieseldorff (1926a). According to Thompson, the contrast was overstated, and the Mam and Tzultacaj were one and the same.

¹⁷ Michael Coe (1978:28), who first coined the term "Bearded Dragon," has compared this serpentine entity to the similar-appearing Xiuhcoatl fire serpent of Central Mexico. The Xiuhcoatl serpent has often been interpreted as lightning (cf. Seler 1963:2:34; Krickeberg 1949:1:193-194; Taube 1986). The serpent axe wielded by the Palencano Chac impersonator is actually the Bearded Dragon (Figure 15a). Moreover, in the cited vessel scene, the serpent's tail is capped by God K, in effect turning the entire snake into a God K scepter. Coggins (1979:259) has interpreted the God K "Manikin Scepter" as a lightning symbol. The illustrated Chac figures on the Early Classic vessel and the Chichen Itza mural painting both wield forms of the serpent-footed Manikin Scepter lightning axe (Figure 15b, c). In short, I believe that there are excellent grounds for identifying the Bearded Dragon with lightning.

associated with spider monkeys. Moreover, whereas the exterior of the Maximon idol is of rags and cornhusks, the core is reputed to be of *pito* wood (Mendelson 1959:57). In the Popol Vuh, this is the same material (*Erythrina flabelliformis*) from which the race of wooden men was made, those turned into monkeys by the flood (Recinos 1950:88). And then there is the name Maximon. During Holy Week in the Pokomam community of Chinautla, there is a similar effigy that until recently was fed a liqueur and forced to dance. Made of banana leaves with a monkey mask, it is termed Mash Simon, *mash* meaning "spider monkey" (Reina 1966:161). In the Colonial Yucatec Motul dictionary, *maax katun* or *maax kin* are glossed as '*refino bellaco*,' meaning 'clever rogue' (Martínez Hernández ed. 1929:621). Gossen (1974a:241) has noted that the last month of the Tzotzil Chamula calendar is *muš*, an adjective meaning 'bad' or 'evil,' possibly alluding to the monkey: "*Muš* may also be an archaic form of *maš*, meaning 'monkey.'" It will be recalled that among the Huastec, the principal Mam is termed Muxi'.

The Colonial *Cantares de Dzitbalché* describes the Yucatec Uayeb as a dangerous, threatening period that eventually will mark the end of the world. The account by Cogolludo mentions wild beasts, and the pre-Hispanic Paris Codex Year Bearer pages are filled with jaguars and other creatures.¹⁸ Several researchers have compared the Uayeb period to contemporary Tzotzil Carnival, during which demon entertainers come from the peripheries of the social world to take control for a period of five days (Bricker 1973; Gossen 1979; Ochiai 1984). In Chamula, the similarity is especially close; the calendrical equivalent of the Yucatec Uayeb, the five day *č'ay k'in*, is believed to fall either on or close to the actual days of Carnival (Bricker 1973:8; Gossen 1979:229-230). The theme of Chamula carnival is also world destruction, in that the demon characters represented as Monkeys (*mašetik*), enact the Passion, the killing of the solar-identified Christ:

The opposite of order is symbolized by the cold darkness in which the demons, jews, and monkeys lived before the forced ascension of the sun into the sky. (Gossen 1974b:37)

At San Pedro Chenalho, the many demon entertainers are believed to come out of the earth at Carnival (Bricker 1973:9). The coming of the Chenalho demons is ritually announced the month before:

... The Monkeys are coming;
The Turks are coming;
The fiesta is coming;
Everything will come.
Animals, jaguars.
Don't sin too much!
Danger will come;
Evil will come;

(Bricker 1973:127-128)

As in the *Cantares de Dzitbalché* description of the Uayeb, the coming of the demons out of the Underworld is tantamount to world destruction. Again, antisocial behavior, the "sins" of the

¹⁸ On page 20 of the Paris Codex, the scene corresponding to the year bearer Etz'nab contains a figure holding a staff of some sort, possibly either a spear or digging stick. The entity is covered by thin parallel lines transected by thick black bands. The thin lines strongly resemble grass or reeds, and it is quite possible that this figure represents a Postclassic form of the personified *pa*.

community, is a dominant theme of the festival event.

Bricker (1973:9) has summarized the nature and tone of contemporary Tzotzil Carnival in Chamula, Chenalho, and Zinacantan:

This period is characterized by drunkenness, license, and obscenity. For five days any man in the community can assume the identity of a Monkey, Blackman, or woman, ignore the normative code which usually guides his behavior, and release his inhibitions in an orgy of drinking and obscene behavior.

Bricker (1973:9) noted that in Zinacantan, the primary ceremony of this type is not Carnival, but the January Festival of Saint Sebastian. Here the demon impersonators enact not the death of Christ, but the execution of Saint Sebastian. Two sets of entertainers are involved, one being a pair of Spanish Gentlemen with their wives and special attendants, the other, a series of strange spooks, Lacandon (*kaʼbenal*), Jaguars (*bolom*), Plumed Serpents (*kʼukʼul čon*), Spanish Moss Wearers (*čon teʼ*), and the aforementioned Blackmen (*hʼikʼal*). An evil cave-inhabiting demon, the Blackman is frequently mentioned in Tzotzil lore. In Zinacantan, Larrainzar, and Chamula the Blackman merges with the monkey (Bricker 1973:93; Blaffer 1972:77). In the Festival of Saint Sebastian, the *hʼikʼal* may be either black or wear a cloth mask cut widely around the mouth and eyes (cf. Bricker 1973:Pl. 9). This mask not only resembles the facial features of spider monkeys but also the personified *pa* mask found at nearby Palenque and other Classic Maya sites. Moreover, during the Festival of Saint Sebastian, the Blackmen are paired with the jaguar impersonators, vividly recalling the frequent scenes of jaguars and personified *pa* performers in Classic Maya art. The drunken processions of jaguars, *pa* characters, and other demons described on Late Classic Maya vessels could be quite at home in the cited festivals of contemporary highland Chiapas.

The old lecherous man and young woman theme in Late Classic Maya art has been compared to the Patzca and Patzaj dances of the contemporary Quiche. Among the principal subjects of Tzotzil ritual humor is the courtship or mock copulation of demon characters with men dressed as women. Thus, during Chamula Carnival, a Monkey tries to court and take the individual impersonating Nana Maria Cocorina, a character of loose reputation overly fond of candies and other luxuries (Bricker 1973:118-120). The Blackmen and Jaguars of the Festival of Saint Sebastian call attention to particular cargo-holders accused of ignoring their duties. The misdeeds are blamed on excessive sexual desire for their wives, causing them to spend money on jewelry and ribbons rather than on their civic duties (Bricker 1973:50). This theme is reiterated with the Spanish Gentlemen, who although described as old and pockmarked, have an inordinate interest in their young wives; “the rings, necklaces, and mirrors worn by the Spanish Lady symbolize her vanity, the wealth of her husband, and her preference for wealth over love in marriage” (Bricker 1973:64). Similarly, the Late Classic old man and young woman pairs may also allude to the more unpleasant, antisocial aspects of human sexuality—selfish greed as well as excessive lust.

It has been noted that both God N and the personified *pa* are often depicted in the context of political offices, the latter frequently found with the Ahau headband of rulership. The identification of respected offices with disreputable characters is in harmony with contemporary Maya humor, which frequently mocks political positions as well as individuals. This clowning is especially important during change-of-office ceremonies—that is, rites of passage into a new social status. During the New Year change of office at Santiago Chimaltenango, Guatemala, a pair of clowns whip and jeer the incumbent officials (Wagley

1949:90). At Chenalho Carnival, there are masked clowns named after particular offices, such as “*regidor*” and “*capitan*” (Bricker 1973:130, 135-136). During actual change-of-office ceremonies performed at Carnival, the masked clowns engage in mock copulation and other absurd acts. The Zinacanteco Festival of Saint Sebastian has a decidedly political message since it concerns the transfer of Zinacanteco cargo positions. Whereas the new incumbent officials are portrayed as young, serious, and responsible, the important officials of the past year are those that impersonate the demon clowns (Vogt 1976).¹⁹ Like the young and old gods of lightning and thunder, youth is again contrasted with corrupt and malevolent old age.

Conclusions

With careful attention to dance positions, costume, and paraphernalia, especially fans, rattles, and staffs, it is possible to isolate specific characters of Classic Maya ritual dramas. However, to identify certain of these characters as clowns is quite another matter. Humor is a subtle thing, all the more when one interprets the ancient art of a foreign culture. The Classic characters may be interpreted through the direct historical approach—that is, comparing them to known festival clowns and performances of the protohistorical, Colonial, and contemporary periods. The correspondence between these later spoofs and Classic scenes is striking; examples are the snake dance and the old ugly man and pretty woman theme. The identification of certain of the Classic characters with spider monkeys also provides evidence of clowning, for these droll creatures are widely identified with humor in ancient and contemporary Mesoamerica. The Classic Maya were no exception, in that spider monkeys are frequently found wildly dancing, drinking, and even copulating in Late Classic vessel scenes (cf. Hellmuth 1978b:183; Robicsek 1978:Pl. 137).

The case for Classic ritual humor is far stronger when one views the suggested clowns in the broader context of Classic Maya art—most notably, monumental carving. The criteria for identifying Classic clowns are many. Among the most important are ugliness, old age, drunkenness, wanton sexuality, animal impersonation, and shabbiness. These traits provide a striking contrast to Classic Maya representations of rulership. Although anthropomorphic, Classic clowns are often grotesquely ugly, at times almost diametrically opposed to the canons of Classic Maya beauty. The characters are also frequently old and wrinkled, in contrast to the rulers portrayed on Classic monuments. In many instances, the buffoons are depicted with alcohol, either vomiting on themselves or taking draughts by cup or enema. Although this could perhaps be interpreted as a general practice of elite Maya life, depictions of drinking are extremely rare in Classic monumental art. The same could be said of sexuality; the old man and young woman couples represented as figurines and on vases are among the most explicit sexual scenes known in Classic Maya art. Classic Maya clowns frequently impersonate particular animals; usually this is not simply donning an animal headdress, but wearing a mask and suit—in effect, becoming the beast. In terms of shabbiness, the suit and mask of the personified *pa* is especially coarse, and seems to be usually made of simple

¹⁹ Bricker (1973:206) noted that among the contemporary Tarascan of Michoacan, change-of-office ceremonies are often ridiculed by clowns portrayed as old men. In the town of Ihuatzio, the clowning is especially similar to the Zinacanteco festival. A particular cargo-holder of the past year, the Ureti becomes an old decrepit man. He goes through the community ringing a bell and stamping a staff loudly on the ground (van Zantwijk 1967:150-151).

grass, rough cloth, or tied rags. Aside from the masks and body suits, the dress of Classic clowns is very simple, quite unlike the elaborate feathers, beads, and complex iconographic assemblages of elite ritual dress.

The ritual buffoons of Mesoamerica have been frequently compared to the Pueblo clowns of the contemporary American Southwest (cf. Steward 1931; Parsons and Beals 1934; Bricker 1973). Ortiz (1972:147) has noted that the Pueblo clowns are especially important during rites of passage, either seasonal or of social states. According to Ortiz (1972:147), the absurd nature of Pueblo clowns provides vivid insights into native social perceptions and cosmology:

Of burlesque and caricature generally, it can be said that they best permit insights into Pueblo modes of conception since they reveal what the Pueblos find serious or absurd, baffling or wrong, fearful or comical about life and about other people.

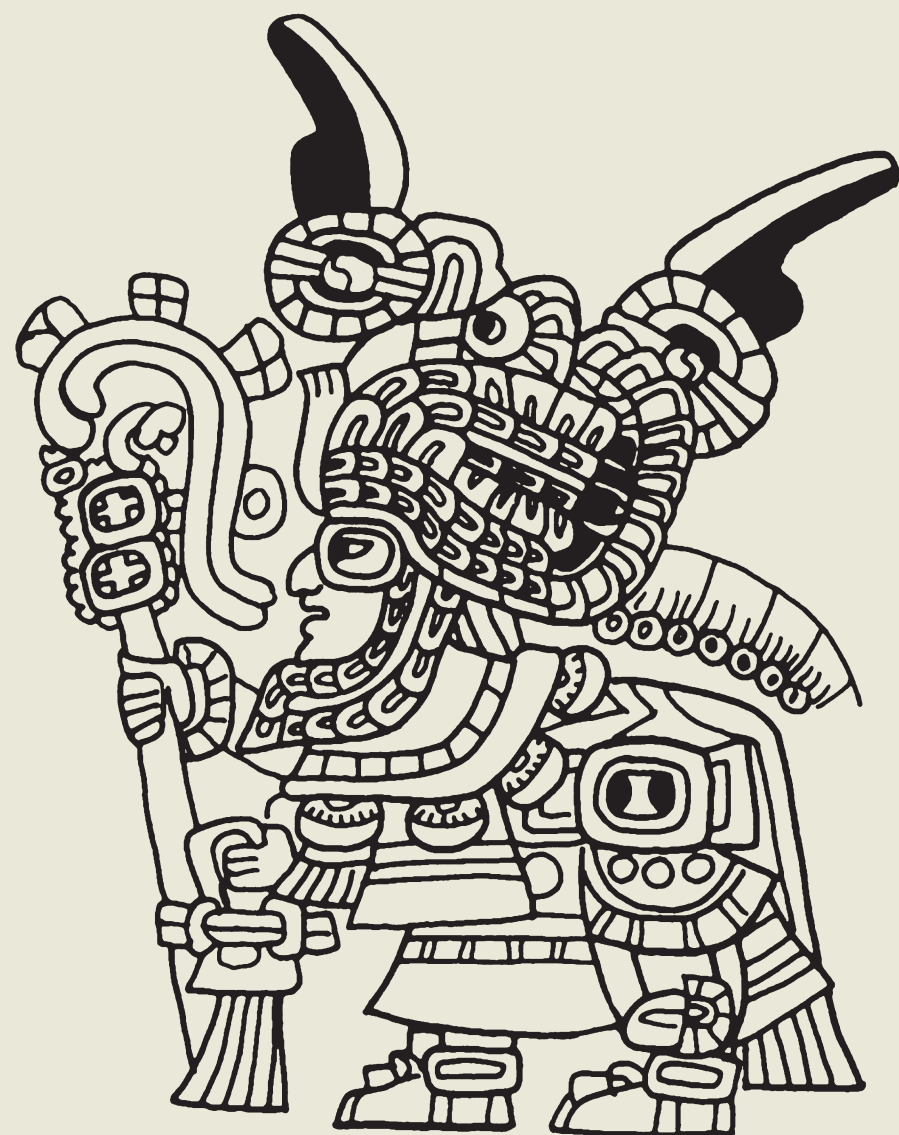
The same could be said of Classic Maya clowns; through inversion and antisocial behavior, these characters sharply define what is correct and what is not. Like the contrast of light and shadow, the clowns provide definition and depth to important social values and behavior. Together with the monumental portrayals of rulers, they serve as a foil for understanding Classic Maya conceptions of rulership and authority. Simply put, whereas the monuments illustrate how a public figure should behave, the clowns demonstrate how one should not. This contrast is only in the sense of the ideal, not the real. Like the early Colonial Baldzam and the characters of contemporary Tzotzil festivals, the ancient clowns may have called attention to actual vices found with positions of authority.

It has been noted that the ancient Maya clowns were identified with calendrical period endings, and seem to correlate with the cross-cultural phenomena of clowning during rites of passage. Festival humor may have defined structural categories and also served as social commentary, perhaps even as a sort of cathartic “ritual rebellion” (cf. Gluckman 1954). However, to the ancient Maya, the presence of these sacred clowns may have had a powerful rejuvenating effect. In many cases, the Maya clowns seem to come from and embody the chaotic time, or timelessness, of creation. The Quichean Patzca clowns emerged out of the Underworld just before the first dawning; and similarly, the characters of Tzotzil Carnival are frequently identified with the primordial period before the sun. The Tzutuhil Maximon effigy is believed to have been created “in the beginning of the world” (Mendelson 1959:58). According to Mendelson (1959:59) sterile women traditionally drank the water used in washing the clothes of Maximon. The Chic, or *pisote* clown of contemporary Yucatan, has a prominent role in the setting up of the *yaš che' ceiba*, the sacred *axis mundi* within the town plaza (Redfield 1936). In Colonial Yucatan, the Bacab actors credited with supporting the sky are believed to have escaped the flood ending the last creation. The pre-Hispanic God N, the Classic period world bearer, had a particularly important role with festival clowns and period endings. His copulation with a young woman, the suggested underlying theme of the serpent dance, may have had an intensely fertile significance. It is this god, more than any other, that seems to embody the sacred, liminal time of ending and renewal.

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