

COMPLETE COMPILATION OF ALL PRINTED REFERENCES TO THE IMAGE DEPICTED ON THE VASE KERR 1485 MS 1117

Kerr, Justin, *The Maya Vase Book: A Corpus of Rollout Photographs of Maya Vases* (Maya Vase Book) Vol 1, (New York: Kerr Associates, 1989)

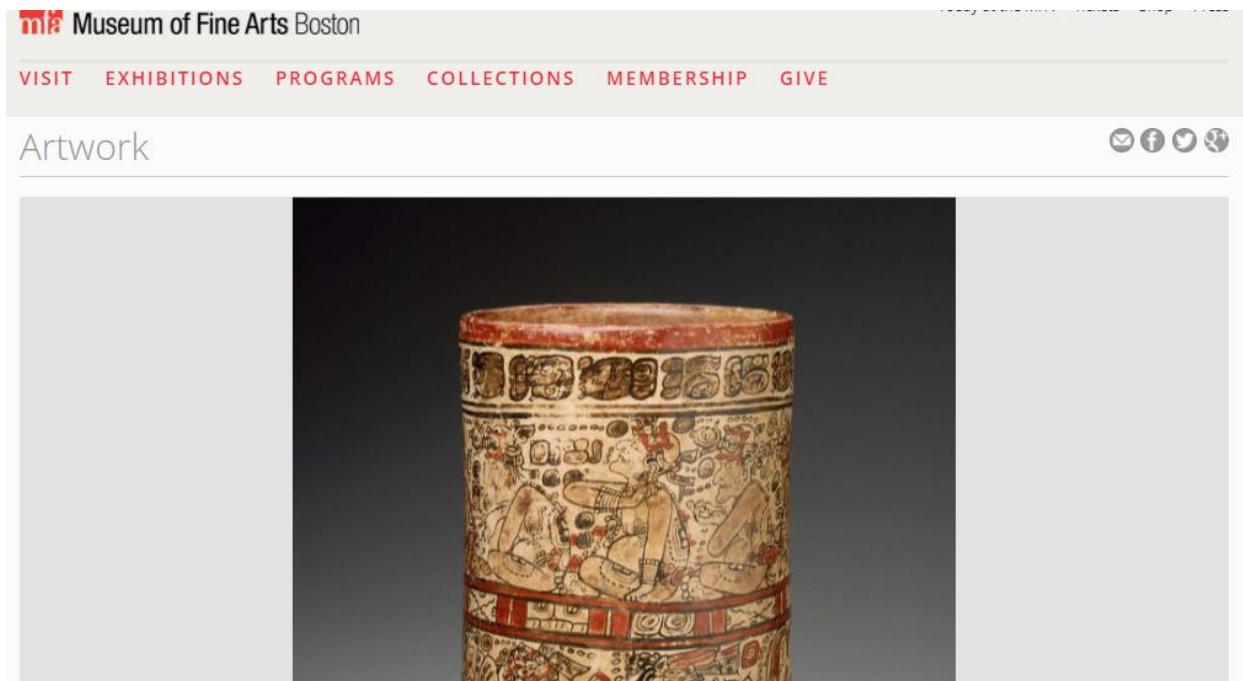
THE MAYA VASE BOOK



© Kerr 1981
Ht. 25 Dia. 11.5 Cir. 40 cm

File No. 1485

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, < <http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/cylinder-vase-36438>>



Cylinder vase

Maya
Late Classic Period
A.D. 600–800

Object Place: El Petén, Guatemala, Lake Petén-Itzá area

CATALOGUE RAISONNÉ
MS1117; Kerr 1485

DIMENSIONS
25 x 11.5 cm (9 13/16 x 4 1/2 in.)

ACCESSION NUMBER
1988.1174

MEDIUM OR TECHNIQUE
Earthenware: orange, red, dark pink, and black on cream slip paint

ON VIEW
Ancient Central America Gallery (Gallery LG32)

COLLECTIONS
Americas

CLASSIFICATIONS
Earthenware

The scene features a gathering of the deity Its'amnaj and other aged supernaturals who hand women from an upper world to a lower realm, the two locales separated by a horizontal band of celestial signs indicating the supernatural and perhaps primordial nature of this event. The hieroglyphic texts include the Dedicatory Phrase (formerly called the Primary Standard Sequence), and shorter texts next to some of the figures provide their names or titles. Those of the vase's painter are found at the end of the Dedicatory Phrase and again in the T-shaped text behind Its'amnaj.

The hieroglyphic text on this vase reads: "u-ts'ib" (his/her painting); "ni-lk?" (name); "its'at" (artist).

Inscription

Primary Standard Sequence, nominal texts within the scene.

Provenance

Between about 1974 and 1981, probably purchased in Guatemala by John B. Fulling (b. 1924 – d. 2005), The Art Collectors of November, Inc., Pompano Beach, FL; May 20, 1987, sold by John B. Fulling to Landon T. Clay, Boston; 1988, year-end gift of Landon Clay to the MFA. (Accession Date: January 25, 1989)

NOTE: This is one in a group of Maya artifacts (MFA accession nos. 1988.1169 – 1988.1299) known as the "November Collection" after John Fulling's company, the Art Collectors of November, Inc. John Fulling sold this group of objects to MFA donor Landon Clay in 1987, and they were given to the Museum the following year. Evidence suggests that John Fulling built the November Collection from sources in Guatemala between 1974 and 1981. Only a portion of what he acquired during this time came to the MFA in 1988. It is not possible to determine precisely which objects were acquired when or from whom.

Credit Line

Gift of Landon T. Clay

Robicsek, Francis, and Donald M. Hales, *Maya Ceramic Vases from the Late Classic Period: The November Collection of Maya Ceramics*, (Charlottesville: University Museum of Virginia, 1982)



1.

Polychrome Vase. Passage of Women Through the Underworld Sky.

Provenance: possibly Colico, the Northern Petén, Guatemala

Date: Late Classic Period (c. 700-800 A.D.)

Height: 25 cm Diameter: 11.5 cm

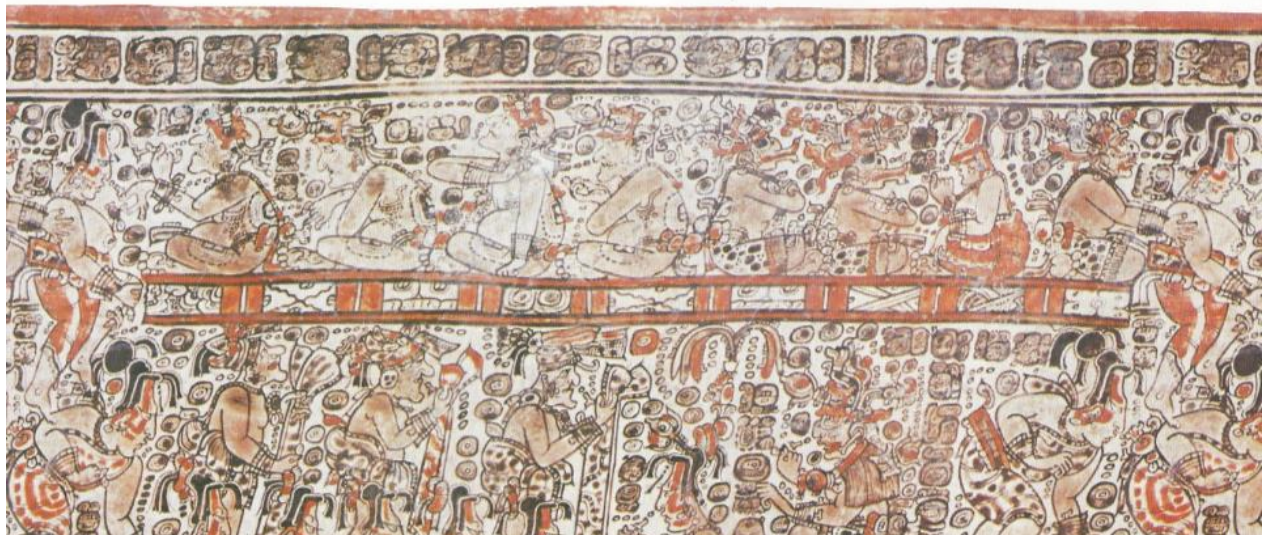
Text: Primary Standard Sequence, Secondary Nonrepeat

This tall cylinder presents the transit of women from one realm to another. While it is presently not possible to determine exactly what takes place in this busy scene, it appears that at least half of the participants are connected with cosmological events.

There are two groups of figures in the upper register of the composition. In the group on the viewer's left, an old deity is seen lowering a partially clad woman through a break in a sky-band which symbolizes the underworld sky. He is faced by four

Bacabs (Sky Bearers) seated in single file, whose bodies bear T528, *cauac* markings. The group on the viewer's right consists of an unidentified woman and two long lipped deities bearing T 509, *Cimi* and T 503, *Ik* markings respectively. The lower register of the vase is dominated by the enthroned figure of the omnipotent Maya god, Itzam Ná, seated with the Moon Goddess at the foot of his throne. She is named in the short hieroglyphic text adjacent to her forehead. They face three standing old lords carrying bolts of cloth, who by their net-bag (*pauah*) headdresses

are recognized by "*Pauhtuns*," dieties whose task it was to support the earth. Further evidence for this identification is seen on the old lord in the middle, whose ear has been replaced by the raised poison glands of the toad, an animal the Yucatec Maya believes makes the sound *tun* — hence *Pauah-tun*. Behind the *Pauhtuns* are five seated women about to be joined by three additional ladies, including the one being lowered through the celestial band. They appear to be listening attentively to the Moon Goddess and are likely part of Itzam Ná's entourage.



Carlson, John R., 'Skyband Representations in Classic Maya Vase Painting', in *Maya Iconography*, ed. by Elizabeth P. Benson and Gillett G. Griffin, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988)

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CARLSON

9.13 Maya cylindrical polychrome vase with three gods enthroned, two on a skyband bench. (Roll-out photograph copyright Justin Kerr, 1981. See M. D. Coe 1978:no. 7; Robicsek and Hales 1981:fig. 40B.)

Coe calls the Rain Beast, which he tentatively identifies with God B, or Chac, and with the figures engaged in fishing on the Tikal bones (Trik 1963; Stuart, this volume). There is little connection, however, between the Rain Beast on Princeton 11 and the old deity with solar characteristics.

In figure 9.15, the region above the skyband contains additional God N figures, young females, and three deity figures that resemble somewhat the one enthroned below. Two of these—those on the right—are quite different: they have long upper and lower lip extensions; one has *cimi* god markings, and the other has *ik* god markings. The third god, on the left, is virtually identical to the one below; he is shown caught in the act of lowering one of the females through the skyband into the lower scene. From the stance of the two "floating" female figures below and the direction of their gaze, it is clear that they are joining those in front of the presiding deity. It is quite evident, then, that the third female figure is being lowered through the band rather than being pulled up from below. Presumably, the male figures are also being lowered to join the congregation.

The skyband divider on this vase has the function of separating the upper (celestial?) world from the Underworld. If we follow clues from the arguments presented with figures 9.7 and 9.8, the lower register may depict a tomb scene with individuals passing, at least symbolically, from the Upperworld through the skyband capstone of the corbel vault into the crypt below for the Underworld Lord's enema ritual. The female figure caught in the moment of this rite of passage carries our attention from the Upperworld register into the tomb scene below.

CONCLUSIONS

In the Maya iconographic repertory, the skyband—the abbreviated ophidian body of the Bicephalic Sky Dragon—is a device used to indicate celestial context. Skyband representations on plates, bowls, and vases are found in the same contexts as those on murals and various monuments.

Ceramic plates and bowls are often found as parts of Maya mortuary furniture. Uprturned bowls with "kill holes" are typically placed over the faces of the deceased. When such bowls are decorated with skyband borders, they can be interpreted iconographically as representing the celestial realm viewed from the Underworld by the individual in his afterlife.

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THE SKYBAND IN CLASSIC
MAYA VASE PAINTING

9.14 Maya cylindrical polychrome vase with an aged deity seated on a bicephalic skyband throne. The entire scene rests on a skyband base. (Roll-out photograph copyright Justin Kerr, 1981. See Robicsek and Hales 1981:fig. 41A.)

9.15 Maya cylindrical polychrome base with skyband dividing upper and lower scenes. (Roll-out photograph copyright Justin Kerr, 1981. See Robicsek and Hales 1982:no. 1.)



The vase scenes with a skyband above—and, in some cases, a *caban* (earth) band below—would technically be placed somewhere between the heavens and the surface of the earth. However, some examples presented here (e.g., figs. 9.10, 9.11) would argue convincingly that the scene is underground in the Underworld, indeed, perhaps in a vaulted tomb crypt. The fine example shown in figure 9.7, with the death-eye fringe below the skyband, would also suggest the tomb context, the realm of the Underworld Lords.

Representations of skyband thrones and benches, such as those in figures 9.13, 9.13, and 9.14, may have only a celestial context. In other nonceramic contexts, such depictions indicate that the seated individual is in the sky or occupies a position in the Upperworld realm. All of the various celestial and planetary deities, however, must

take their daily sojourn in the Underworld, so their presence in these scenes—for example, the enthroned Lunar Goddess in figure 9.13—does not convincingly argue against the potential Underworld character of the scene as a whole.

Finally, the unique example from the polychrome vase in figure 9.15 shows an individual passing from the Upperworld above the skyband into the Underworld scene below. We can be reasonably certain of the Underworld character of the scene in the lower register because it depicts a phase of the Maya enema ritual. Numerous other examples show this rite to be associated with the general themes of Maya mortuary ritual and the province of Xibalba, the realm of the Lords of the Underworld. We further suggest that the scene beneath the skyband may depict supernatural events taking place in the crypt itself, with the skyband serving as the capstone of the vault.

From the evidence presented, it is not clear whether all the scenes painted on Maya funerary ceramics take place in the Underworld. The skyband frames, borders, and thrones provide a celestial context, and, when all such cases are considered, the scenes represented may still be best interpreted as episodes in that final Maya journey to Xibalba, with the promise of triumph over the Underworld Lords and an eventual resting place in the realm of the Celestial Dragon.

Taylor, Dicey, 'Painted Ladies: Costumes for Women on Tepeu Ceramics', in *The Maya Vase Book: A Corpus of Rollout Photographs of Maya Vases (Maya Vase Book) Vol 3*, (New York: Kerr Associates, 1992)

codical texts with the Postclassic moon goddess, and in two Tepeu inscriptions concerning the Classic moon lady.²⁷ Postclassic myths associate the moon with deer as well as rabbits.²⁸ This study focuses upon a discreet corpus of vessels in order to avoid assumptions of the past that every young woman with an aged deity represented the moon goddess.

Eric Thompson (1939, 1972a and 1972b) assembled a great deal of research on the moon goddess, based upon the codices of the Postclassic and ethnographic information. He recognized (1939) that Schellhas' Goddesses I and O were not separate deities, but young and old aspects of the moon goddess. His research concluded (1972a) that the moon goddess of the Postclassic Maya was a female deity of procreation, and by association, one of lust and carnal sin, a goddess of disease and medicine, the patroness of weaving, the personification of the moon, and a goddess of water, who in her aged form was a malevolent destructor who flooded the earth. Some of these Postclassic concepts can be verified in the Tepeu ceramic sequence of the Late Classic.

27. Robiscek and Hales 1981: Fig. 40b. Clarkson 1979: Fig. 5.

28. Schele and Miller 1983: 46. Thompson 1972a: 243, 357-373.

The moon goddess is glyphically identified by the T683 lunar *kal* sign, and the T1000 title used to introduce female names in Classic texts.³¹ This nominal phrase is quite different from codical references to the moon goddess based upon T1026 (Thompson 1972b: 47). Most frequently portrayed as a youthful goddess, the Classic "moon lady" has the same coiffure of the Postclassic Goddess I, long hair divided into front and rear sections by a part or shaven area from ear to ear over the top of the head (Kerr 1989: 20 and 90).³² However, similar hair appears on other Classic females.³³ In her aged aspect, moon lady's hair is cut into a ruff on the crown of the head (Kerr 1989: 20), as is that of other mature women on vases.³⁴ Nonetheless, she has the serpent bow headgear of the Postclassic Goddess O (Clarkson 1979: Fig. 5; Kerr 1989: 20).³⁵

The moon lady also wears a variety of garments, including skirts, huipils, and sarongs, like other women on Classic vases. Postclassic codices depict the moon goddess more consistently dressed; she wears

31. Kerr 1989: 90. Coe 1978: No. 7. Robiscek and Hales 1981: Fig. 9b.

32. Dresden Codex: 14c, 15b, 16b,c. Madrid Codex: 11a, 72a, 89a, 91-92d.

33. Coe 1973: Nos. 27, 32. Robiscek and Hales 1981: Vessels 12a, 79. Kerr 1990: 293.

34. Kerr 1989: 33, 45; 1990: 245. Schele and Miller 1986: Pl. 48.

35. Dresden Codex: 61a, 74a. Madrid Codex: 30b, 69b, 89d.

Classic ceramics and other small products reveal that the ancient Maya believed in male and female lunar deities. The Classic moon god and goddess have lunar crescents hooked under their arms or attached to their backs, and rabbits often appear with them (Schele and Miller 1986: Pl. 121; Kerr 1989: 20). Linguistic evidence from Classic Maya texts suggests that the rabbit represented the face of the moon, and was also associated with young children (Schele and Miller 1983: 46). In one instance, the moon goddess is shown with a shell on her back, which she sometimes has in the Dresden Codex (Kerr 1989: 10; Thompson 1972b: 53). Eric Thompson (1972b) related this shell to Postclassic Mexican concepts of the moon goddess, but more examples from the Maya area are needed before drawing any conclusions.

The male lunar deity of the Classic Maya is identified glyphically²⁹ by the *kal* moon sign (T683), combined with the Ahau lord glyph. This nominal phrase is sometimes followed by the *Imix* sign, which further names the "moon lord" as a water god (Kerr 1989: 10 and 90). The moon lord is one of several incised figures on an Early Classic conch shell where he wears a

29. Robiscek and Hales 1981: Fig. 9b and Vessel 140. Schele and Miller 1986: Pl. 121. Kerr 1990: 252.

a textile skirt in her youthful guise and a longer skirt reaching to the ankles in her aged aspect. Thus, there is little correspondence in dress, physical appearance, or nominal phrasing, among Classic and Postclassic depictions of the moon goddess. Moon lady is dressed, coiffed and referred to in accordance with Classic conventions for the female sex. Her importance is better discerned by examining the contexts in which she appears.

The lunar couple appear together on a polychrome vase, with lunar crescents hooked under their arms, and short texts that identify each figure (Robiscek and Hales 1981: Fig. 9B). On this vessel, the moon lord wears a white hipcloth, and a distinctive cloth turban. The moon goddess has a white huipil with designs in the lower portion of the weave. On another vessel, the moon god has the same white hipcloth and turban, and he fondles the breast of the moon goddess, who wears a sarong (Robiscek and Hales 1981: Vessel 140). The rest of the scene suggests a continued story in which the moon lord is transformed into a deer for the full disrobing and seduction of the moon goddess, all of which probably has less to do with sex than with phases of the moon.

The Dresden Codex of the Postclassic has similar presentations of the moon goddess

beaded hipcloth, as he does again on a Late Classic vessel (Schele and Miller 1986: Pl. 120 and 121).³⁰ Although some vases portray the moon lord as a youthful deity he is more typically shown as an aged god (Kerr 1989: 90; Robiscek and Hales 1981: Fig. 9b and Vessel 140).

The moon goddess is shown in a beaded skirt on a polychrome vase (Robiscek and Hales 1981: Fig. 48). She is not named, but has the lunar crescent of her male counterpart tucked under her arm. The profile view shows her breast, and the skirt covers the knees, like the skirts worn by women on monuments. The moon goddess is additionally marked by a lunar crescent around her eye. Other women on vases have horizontal bands across the eye or vertical lines that cut through the eye; only the moon goddess has an eye marked by a circular crescent (Kerr 1990: 272; Robiscek and Hales 1981: Figs. 48 and 68). The motif is so exclusive to this female supernatural that a historical woman is marked with it because her name includes the moon goddess title (Kerr 1990: 245).

30. Karl Taube (1988) has discussed this figure as a dually sexed entity on the basis of the beaded skirt, which is normally worn by women in the monumental sequence. It is not, however, a skirt. In the Classic Period, male figures wore hip cloths which fell at or above the knee.

with male deities, especially aged gods, in what seem to scenes of sexual intercourse; but Eric Thompson (1972b: 60) suggested that such unions referred to conjunctions of the moon with constellations represented by the male supernaturals. Furthermore, sexual intercourse is not possible in the seated, face to face position of the Dresden moon goddess and her male companions. Eric Thompson seems to have been correct in his conclusion that these couplings are personifications of astronomical phenomena.

Correspondingly, what appear to be seduction scenes on Late Classic vases are probably similar presentations of astronomical events, as on a polychrome vessel where the moon goddess, marked by her eye crescent, is fondled by an aged god (Robiscek and Hales 1981: Fig. 68). The two figures are joined face to face, as in the Dresden Codex, and the moon goddess has extended her leg to touch her companion. Although they appear to be engaged in foreplay prior to intercourse, the sexual connotations of this presentation were probably intended as a pun upon the procreative power of the moon goddess.

Another vase depicts a seemingly seductive scene involving three women with rabbits (Kerr 1989: 20). The female on the right is the young moon goddess, dressed

bound hank of hair (Fig. 4.10g). Here she wears the traditional netted skirt, and the lunar rabbit is her companion. God L's headdress with the number thirteen is placed before her throne. This is one of a number of scenes that suggest that she or her lunar rabbit has taken God L's regalia (Taube 1992b:85). She holds out beads, seeming to hand them to an aged god (God D?), evoking a connection with Colonial period glosses that say the word for moon (*u*) also means "necklace of glass beads" (Lamb 1981:246).

Ceramic paintings of the Moon Goddess most typically depict a lunar eye crescent, an underarm crescent, and a rabbit (Taylor 1992:519–521). However, Dacey Taylor points out that many lunar figures do not conform to these features. Sometimes the Moon Goddess is named with a female portrait head (T1000) bearing a hair knot above the brow and a T683 lunar crescent (Pl. 5).

A polychrome vase first published by Francis Robicsek and Donald Hales (1982, no. 1) shows a narrative sequence that represents different aspects of the moon (Pl. 5). Taylor (1992:521) interprets this as multiple views of the Moon Goddess, showing her descent into the underworld at dawn, where she joins the aged Moon lord. An interesting detail, not discussed by Taylor, is the ball-game belt she wears as she descends through the sky band. This makes her a female lunar ballplayer, apparently a counterpart for the female aspect of Xbalanque known in one version of the Popol Vuh. Subsequently, she is transformed into a lunar queen overseeing her court. Here the Moon Goddess has a water-lily headdress and a lunar name (T1000 above T683). The sequence may represent the transformation of the moon from a ballplayer to a water-lily goddess, perhaps an image of seasonal change or phase changes. Male companions in the scene include God N figures and an aged Moon Lord with a lunar title, who is seated on a jaguar-skin throne bearing what may be stylized *po* (moon) glyphs. He may be the full moon, sometimes represented as male in contemporary Maya accounts. The sky band represents the place where the ecliptic crosses the Milky Way (Chapter 7).

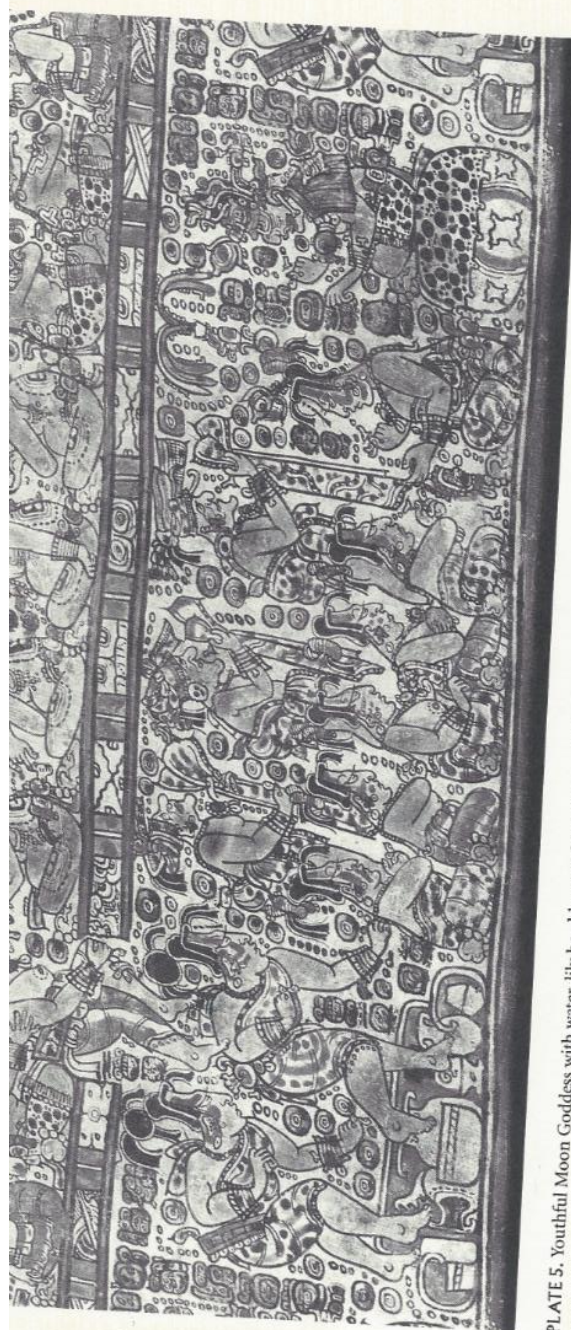


PLATE 5. Youthful Moon Goddess with water-lily headdress and lunar name (T1000 and T683) seated before enthroned God D to right; to left she appears as ballplayer passing through sky band symbolizing place where ecliptic crosses Milky Way; sequence represents Moon's transformation over course of seasons or lunar month (Late Classic polychrome vase, photo © Justin Kerr 1981, K1485).

Stuart, David, 'The Gods of Heaven and Earth: Evidence of Ancient Maya Categories of Deities'
To appear in *Homenaje a Alfredo López Austin*, 2013 ms.

The Gods of Heaven and Earth: Evidence of Ancient Maya Categories of Deities

David Stuart
The University of Texas at Austin

To appear in
Homenaje a Alfredo López Austin

into multiple directional aspects or identities (Figure 1a). In the Classic and Postclassic periods these were named according to their associated colors: Chak Xib Chahk ("Red Man Chahk") in the east, Sak Xib Chahk ("White Man Chahk") in the north, Ik' Xib Chahk ("Black Man Chahk") in the west, and K'an Xib Chahk ("Yellow Man Chahk") in the south.¹ Other gods and entities were distributed in similar fashion in the cardinal directions, including the well-known *Pawahtuns* and *Bacabs* of Postclassic Yucatan, who were supporters of the earth and the sky (Figure 1b). In much earlier sources such as the

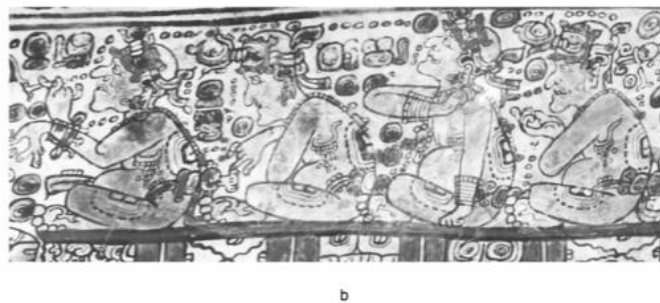
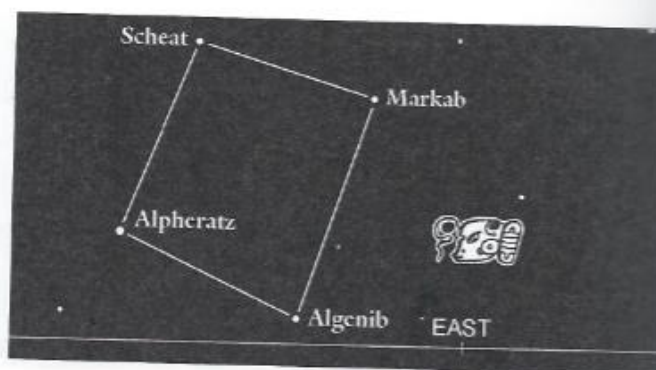
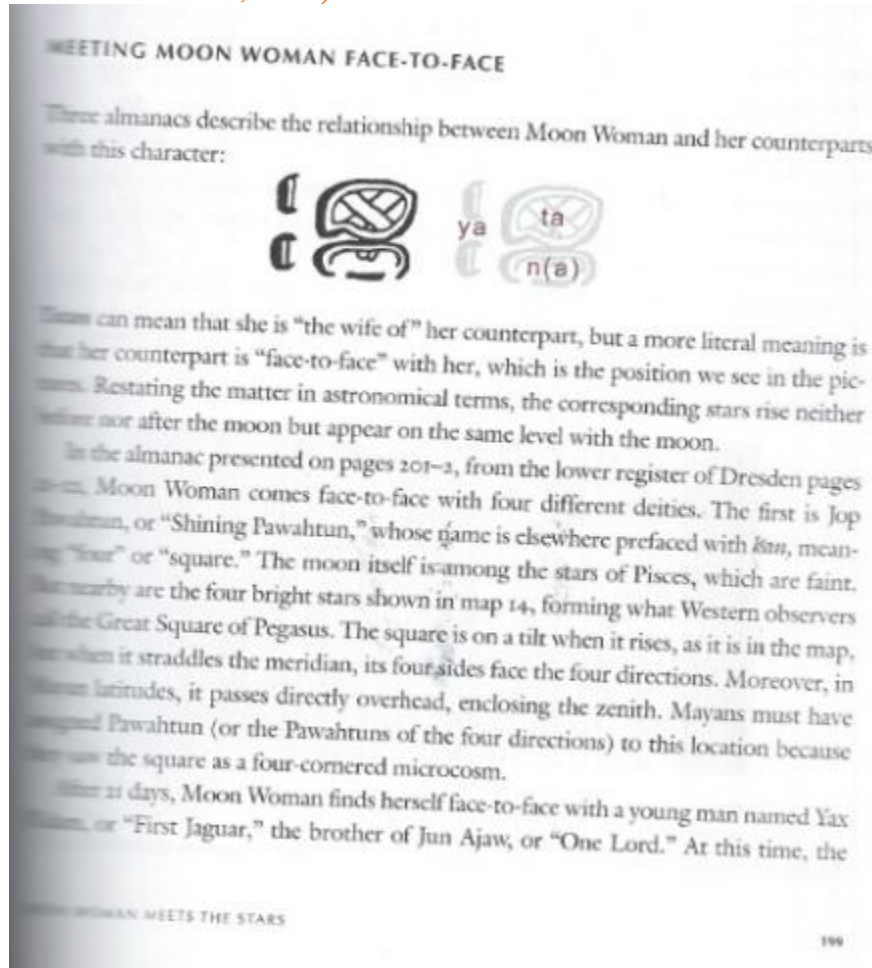


Figure 1. (a) A group of Chahk deities depicted on a Maya vase (Drawing by Lucia Henderson).
(B) four old gods depicted on K1483, probably related to the Pauatuns of Postclassic Yucatan
(Detail of photograph by Justin Kerr)

Tedlock, Dennis, *2000 Years of Mayan Literature*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2010)



Map 14. The moon rising with the stars of the Great Square of Pegasus (marked with lines), the home of Pawahtun (or the four Pawahtuns).

moon is in a position where the brightest rising stars close to her level are *Nunki* (in Sagittarius) and *Altair* (in Aquila), as shown in map 15. The zodiacal almanac in the Paris Codex assigns a jaguar to this same general area of the sky.

Moon Woman's

Kerr, Justin, Maya Vase Database,

<http://research.mayavase.com/kermaya_list.php?_allSearch=&hold_search=&x=32&y=4&vase_number=1485&date_added=&ms_number=&site=>



AN ARCHIVE OF ROLLOUT
PHOTOGRAPHS CREATED
BY JUSTIN KERR

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Results 1 - 1 of 1

Kerr Number: 1485

Vase Type: Polychrome

Figure Count: 20

Height:

Diameter:

Circumference:

MS Number: 1117

Owner: Museum of Fine Arts Boston MA

School:

Publications:

Calendar Round:

Site:

Comments: Descending women [CLICK HERE for comments by Karen Bassie](#)

Iconographic Elements: Female, Cloth, God D, Itzamnah, God N, Inscription - other text, Moon Goddess, Ruler, king, cacique, governor, potentate, Sky band with star glyphs, Primary Standard Sequence, Throne



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Comments on K1485 by Karen Bassie



This is just a minor observation about the wind gods found on K1485 and the Yaxchilan hieroglyphic stairs.

In slash and burn agriculture, you have to have a good burn in order to produce a successful crop. To produce a good burn, there has to be a steady moderate wind when the field is fired. Once the fire gets going, it creates small whirlwinds that dance across the field as they pick up ash, smoke and flashing sparks. In Yucatan, they are called *kakal mozon ikob* "fiery whirlwinds", and they are thought to create a good burn. In some prayers, they are called red wind, white wind which may be related to the red cinders and white smoke/ash.

The farmer whistles while firing his field so that these winds will come. The belief that whistling will cause the wind to come is found across the Maya highlands as well. Although the lips on the wind gods do look similar to Ehecatl's duck bill, I think it is a good possibility that these wind gods have pursed lips because they are whistling. See also K7821