



A Tale of Two Star Myths

The Fall of Seven Macaw

-and-

The Lecherous Old God and the Moon Goddess



A Known Myth ~ The Fall of Seven Macaw



“While the face of the earth was only a little brightened, before there was a sun, there was one who puffed himself up named Seven Macaw... I am great [he said]. I dwell above the heads of the people...I am their sun... Now Seven Macaw was not truly the sun, but he puffed himself up in this way because of his plumage and his gold and silver.”

- *The Popol Vuh*



The Hero Twins
could not abide this.



Vase 1



This, then, is the blowgun shooting of Seven Macaw by the twins...Each day [Seven Macaw] would rise up to the top of the tree to knock down some fruit of the [Ceiba] tree, and it is there that he was seen by Hunahpu and Xbalanque. The twins watched for him beneath the tree, hidden in the leaves. At length Seven Macaw perched on the [Ceiba] tree to feed and was shot by them. Hunahpu directed a pellet straight from his blowgun into his jaw.

-The Popol Vuh

Tedlock's Interpretation: Hurricane Season



“[Seven Macaw] himself remains as the seven stars of the Big Dipper, and his wife Chimalmat corresponds to a circle of the northern stars that includes the arc of the Little Dipper.

In mid-July, when he is already falling from his tree as the night begins he opens the hurricane season, when he almost gets back up the tree before morning, he closes it.”

- Dennis Tedlock

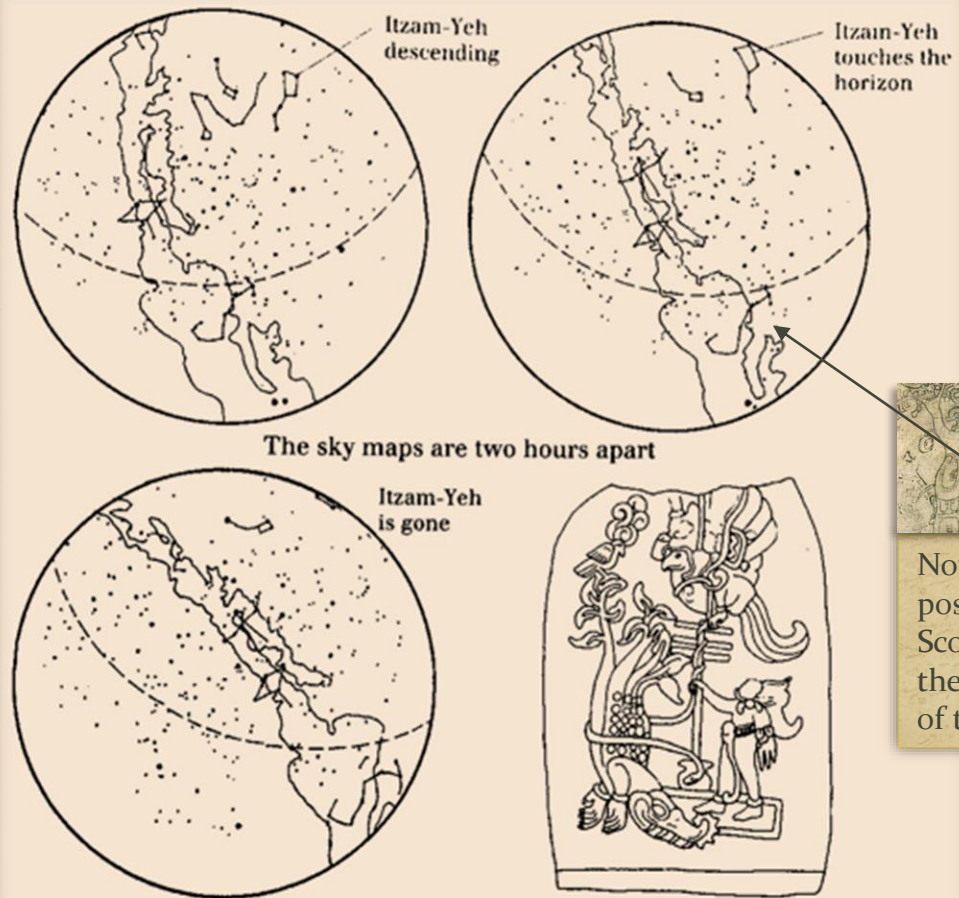
The Popol Vuh: The Definitive Edition

Schele's Interpretation: The Creation Story

“Before the sky could be raised and the real sun revealed in all its splendor, the Hero Twins had to put the false sun, Itzam-Yeh in his place...

“If Itzam-Yeh was symbolized by the Big Dipper in the Classic period, this picture also happens in the sky. When the ...Milkyway moves from it's erect north-south position and becomes the [Wakah-Chan (World)] Tree, the Big Dipper dives downward until it touches the horizon. It disappears as the [Wakah-Chan (World)] Tree changes to its east-west Cosmic Monster. I believe this movement may correspond to the defeat of Seven Macaw by the Hero Twins.”

-Linda Schele,
Maya Cosmos



An Unknown Myth ~
The Lecherous Old God and
the Moon Goddess



Vase 2

The principle actors...



K'awiil (God K)

"The Old God"/
Pawahtun (God N)

"The Snake Lady"/
The Moon Goddess ?

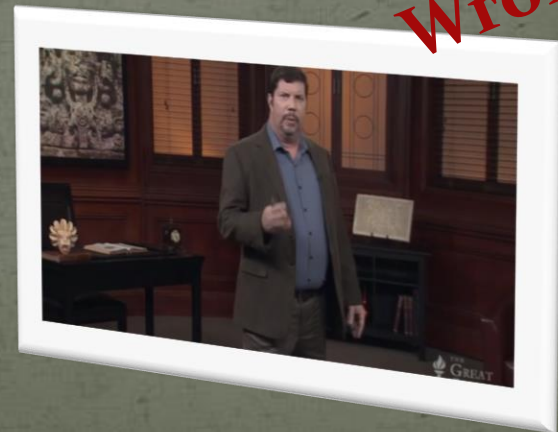
"The Bearded Dragon"/
Och Chan



“Another repeated theme in Maya ceramics is one in which an old man comes out of the vision serpent to tweak the naked breast of the Moon Goddess. This is a rare scene, because it’s kind of humorous. She herself is caught off guard, and she looks mad when he does it. And he looks cheeky, like he’s having fun doing it. It’s obviously some sort of forgotten story; but looking at the other pots, there’s even more to it. We know the Moon Goddess is connected to healing; sometimes we see her attending the sick or dying and in those scenes, strangely, there are deer. Sometimes she’s riding the deer.

It seems to be some sort of ritual for the dying that she’s performing and the old man seem to intrude on that important business of her. In one scene involving a deer but no sick people she’s got a hand up to say like “what are you doing to me?” I wish we knew the full story of this cause it’s an interesting and rarely amusing aspect of Maya art.”

Wrong



-Edwin Barnhart, Maya to Aztec: Ancient Mesoamerica Revealed,
The Great Courses



Goddess I ~ Ix Chel The Young Moon Goddess

“The Classic Period Moon Goddess often appears with a lunar crescent, and she sometimes has a rabbit companion. She often wears a net skirt, and she seems to be the counterpart of the youthful Goddess I of the codices.” -p.150

“The moon has multiple aspects in the Popol Vuh. The male ballplayer, Xbalanque, may take the role of the full moon; the youthful Blood Woman may be the waxing moon; and the aged Grandmother (Xmucane) is probably the waning moon.” -p.138

-Susan Milbrath, *Star Gods of the Maya*



Excerpt from *The Maya Book of the Dead-
The Bearded Dragon*

Vessel 6

The rather primitively painted vase again shows the now familiar scene of the Old God emerging out of the throat of the Dragon...his identity is revealed by his netted headdress as being God N.

- Robicsek and Hales, *The Maya Book of the Dead
: The Ceramic Codex*



God N~ The
Quadripartite Pawahtun



“In the almanac [of the Dresden Codex] Moon Woman comes face to face with ... ‘Shining Pawahtun’, whose name is elsewhere prefaced with *kan*, meaning ‘four’ or ‘square’. The Moon itself is among the stars of Pisces, which are faint. But nearby are the four bright stars ...forming what Western observers call the Great Square of Pegasus...when it straddles the meridian, its four sides face the four directions. Moreover in Mayan latitudes, it passes directly overhead, enclosing the zenith. Mayans must have assigned Pawahtun (or the Pawahtuns of the four directions) to this location because they saw the square as a four-cornered microcosm.”

-Dennis Tedlock, *2000 Years of Mayan Literature*

God K ~ K'awiil

“God K was an important god of Classic Maya lineage and ruler-ship.”

- Karl Taube, *The Major Gods of Ancient Yucatan*

“God K appears on many Maya ceramic vessels in various ways. For instance, he may be depicted as a full figure on the tail of a snake, known as the *och chan*, as a head wrapped in smoke scrolls, often in a pair, as a dancer or as an icon, either on the tail of a conjuring serpent or a way beast.”

-Helen Alexander, ‘God K on Maya Ceramic Vessels: Notes and Commentary’

“Late Classic monuments with God K images often bear dates that coincide with Jupiter’s retrograde motion...Jupiter events were apparently important in the lives of Classic Maya rulers, who often appear with the insignia of God K.”

- Susan Milbrath, *Star Gods of the Maya*

Or, conversely...

“In exploratory work it was found that when serpent-footed God K scepters or variant God K staffs were held, Mercury was often near maximum elongation and hence observable.”

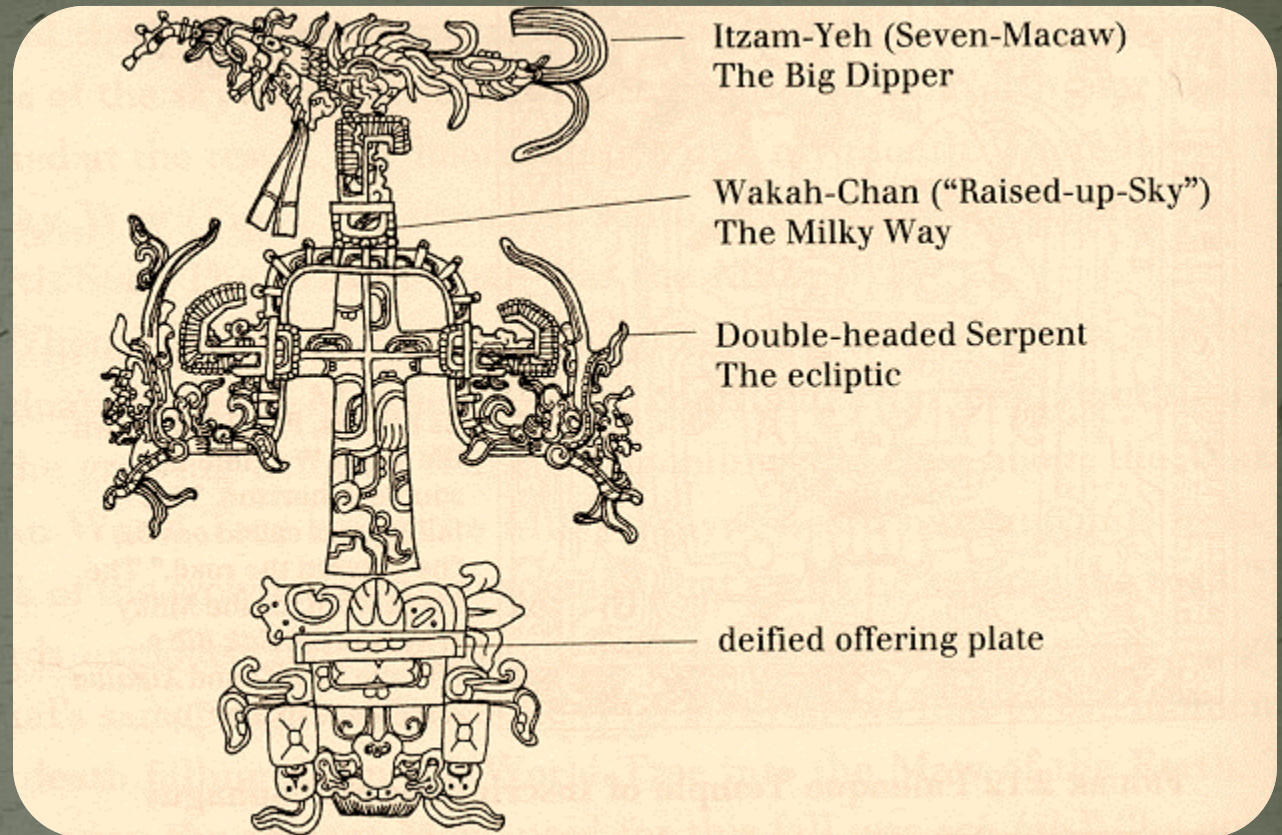
- Arthur Schlack, ‘Jaguar and Serpent Foot: Iconography as Astronomy’



Och Chan

The double-headed serpent bar is often called the K'awiil scepter on ancient Maya stele.

This image from *A Forest of Kings* not only illustrates iconography from the story of Seven Macaw, but also introduces the authors' opinion that the double headed serpent represents the ecliptic.



The Wakah-Chan (World)
Tree and the Ecliptic Snake
(from Schele & Freidel, *A Forest of Kings*)

Other Astronomical
Symbolism on
related Vessels
depicting the same
myth...

Venus Glyph
Ek'



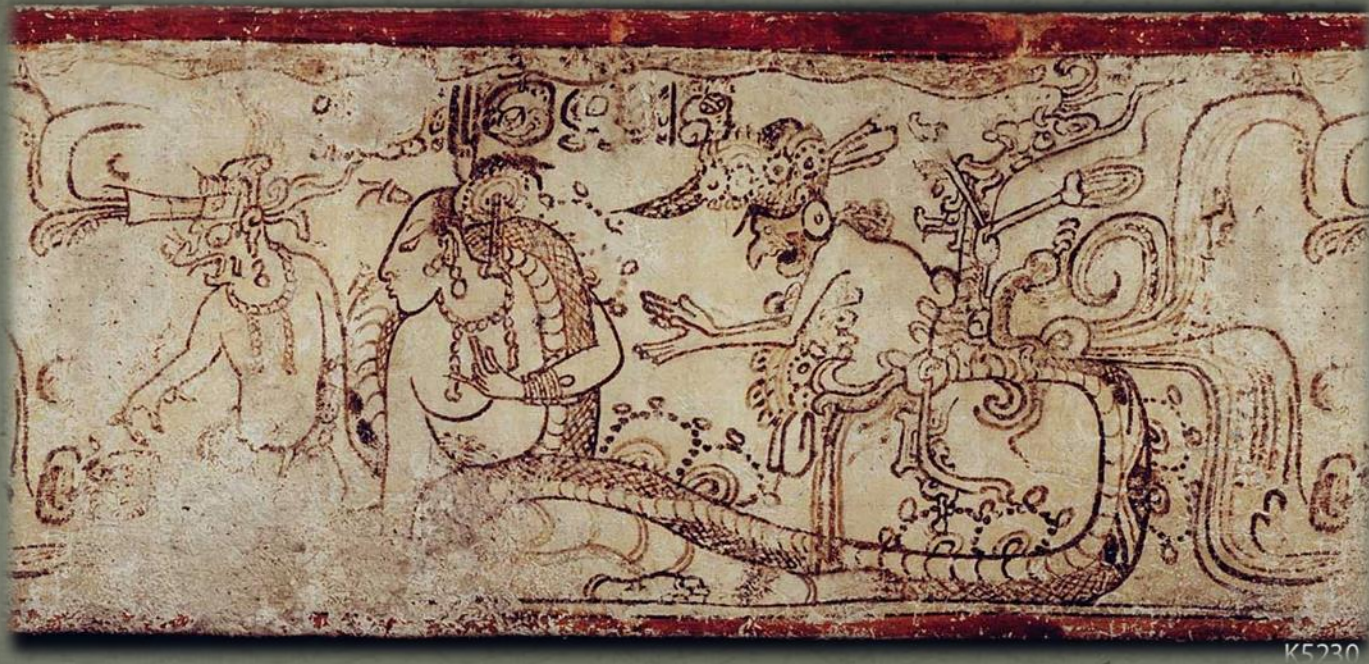
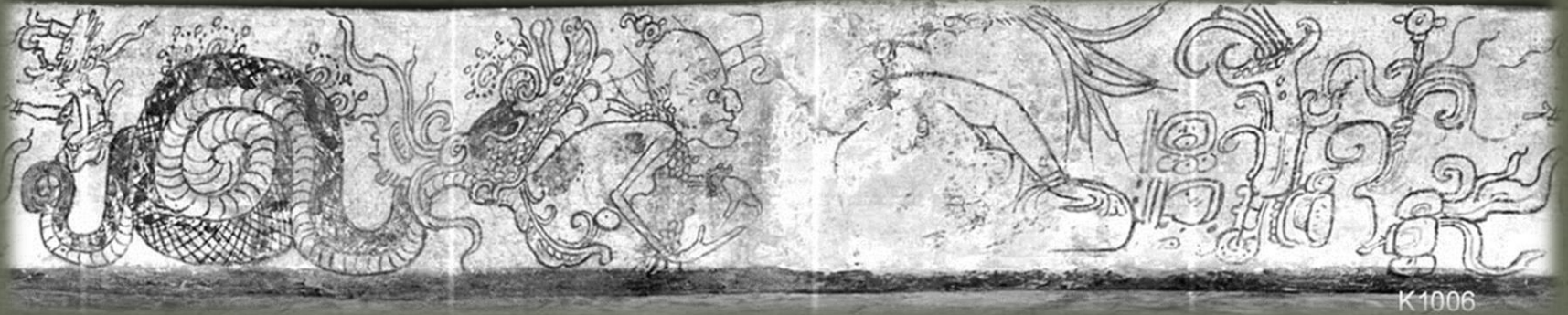
Sun Glyph
k'in

Double-headed
Serpent bar

Stars



The (not quite) complete corpus...





The myth represented in its simplest form





K1108



The introduction
of a "god" face



K3202







The introduction of a bundled throned deity and god-face gets a body





K1081

And now there are two “bundled” throned sky deities
(perhaps Mercury and Venus?)



K7838



With so many representations of the same myth using the same iconography, this must represent a scene of great importance to the ancient Maya. Unfortunately, with no textual correlate, much of the story is lost to us.

"One is left like a detective, to piece together hints and influences, disparate pieces of information and, yes, guess and conjecture, to understand what is now lost. Putting these pieces together to understand the relationship between culture and the heavens is the goal of the interdisciplinary field of ethnoastronomy."



- T.E. Nordgren, Stars Above, Earth Below

I suspect the sky event behind this myth would have looked something like the image below, yet more study is need to determine the exact long count 13 Muluk 17 Pax date of the event in order to guess, conjecture and understand whether this date produced such a planetary conjunction, and what this may have meant in context to ancient Maya culture.



Image borrowed without permission from "Astro Bob"

The scene, once understood, is as obvious in the night sky
as architectural orientations aligned to the rising sun,



yet the sky lore behind it and the cultural significance may never be
fully comprehended.

The End

maybe

Ah crap, there 's more....



Shining Pawahtun is face to face
With Moon Woman, Lords take
their thrones

? is face to face with her
Wedding feasts take
place. Flowers bloom



"Yatan can mean that she is "the wife of" her counterpart, but a more literal meaning is that her counterpart is "face-to-Face with her"

-Tedlock, 2000 Years of Maya Literature

...and then there's this.



K1485