

MERCHANTS, MARKETS, AND EXCHANGE  
IN THE PRE-COLUMBIAN WORLD

KENNETH G. HIRTH AND JOANNE PILLSBURY

*Editors*

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## CONTENTS

- Preface and Acknowledgments | vii  
*Joanne Pillsbury*
- 1 Merchants, Markets, and Exchange in the Pre-Columbian World | 1  
*Kenneth G. Hirth and Joanne Pillsbury*
- 2 Cooperation and the Moral Economy of the Marketplace | 23  
*Richard E. Blanton*
- 3 Merchants and Merchandise: The Archaeology of Aztec Commerce at Otumba, Mexico | 49  
*Deborah L. Nichols*
- 4 The Merchant's World: Commercial Diversity and the Economics of Interregional Exchange in Highland Mesoamerica | 85  
*Kenneth G. Hirth*
- 5 The Social Organization of Craft Production and Interregional Exchange at Teotihuacan | 113  
*David M. Carballo*
- 6 Negotiating Aztec Tributary Demands in the *Tribute Record of Tlapa* | 141  
*Gerardo Gutiérrez*
- 7 People of the Road: Traders and Travelers in Ancient Maya Words and Images | 169  
*Alexandre Tokovinine and Dmitri Beliaev*
- 8 Wide Open Spaces: A Long View of the Importance of Maya Market Exchange | 201  
*Marilyn A. Masson and David A. Freidel*
- 9 Artisans, *Ikatz*, and Statecraft: Provisioning Classic Maya Royal Courts | 229  
*Patricia A. McAnany*
- 10 Craft Production and Distribution in the Maya Lowlands: A Jade Case Study | 255  
*Brigitte Kovacevich*
- 11 Economic Mobility, Exchange, and Order in the Andes | 283  
*Tom D. Dillehay*

<b>12</b>	In the Realm of the Incas		309
	<i>Enrique Mayer</i>		
<b>13</b>	In the Realm of the Incas: An Archaeological Reconsideration of Household Exchange, Long-Distance Trade, and Marketplaces in the Pre-Hispanic Central Andes		319
	<i>Richard L. Burger</i>		
<b>14</b>	Exchange on the Equatorial Frontier: A Comparison of Ecuador and Northern Peru		335
	<i>John R. Topic</i>		
<b>15</b>	Embedded Andean Economic Systems and the Expansive Tiwanaku State: A Case for a State without Market Exchange		361
	<i>Paul S. Goldstein</i>		
<b>16</b>	Circulating Objects and the Constitution of South Andean Society (500 BC–AD 1550)		389
	<i>Axel E. Nielsen</i>		
<b>17</b>	Barter Markets in the Pre-Hispanic Andes		419
	<i>Charles Stanish and Lawrence S. Coben</i>		
<b>18</b>	Discussion		435
	<i>Barry L. Isaac</i>		
	Contributors		449
	Index		455



## People of the Road

### Traders and Travelers in Ancient Maya Words and Images

ALEXANDRE TOKOVININE AND DMITRI BELIAEV

The occupation to which they had the greatest inclination was trade . . . and at their markets they traded in everything which there was in that country.

DIEGO DE LANDA  
*Relación de las cosas de Yucatan*  
(Tozzer 1941 [ca. 1566]:94–96)

ACCORDING TO DIEGO DE LANDA'S (TOZZER 1941 [ca. 1566]) influential sixteenth-century account on the customs of the Maya shortly after the Conquest, no other occupation appealed to the hearts and minds of the indigenous population of Yucatan more than trade. Canoes and caravans with salt, cloth, and slaves would leave the peninsula and return with cacao and precious stones. Everything could be bought and sold in the markets with cacao beans and certain shells as currency, paid on the spot or on credit. The *Relaciones histórico-geográficas* of the Yucatan province (Garza 1983) paint a similar picture of widespread

trading activity, though acknowledging that most things were produced and consumed locally.

This paper explores representations of trade and traders in ancient Maya texts and images. It begins by looking at the available ethnohistorical sources, which reflect the importance of trade and merchants in the social and economic fabric of the Late Postclassic–early colonial Maya world. The discussion then shifts to much less documented merchants of the Classic period and their divine patrons.

#### Ethnohistorical Sources on Trade and Traders

The relative complexity of the Maya market economy shortly before and after the Spanish conquest is evidenced in early colonial dictionaries from northern Yucatan and highland Chiapas. These sources identify different kinds of transactions, including wholesale operations. A clear distinction

is made between local, itinerant, and professional long-distance traders. Traveling and business are often semantically related. Several glosses attest to the presence of marketplaces.

In northern Yucatan, *Calepino de Motul* (Ciudad Real 1995 [ca. 1590]:11, 19, 28, 42, 43, 45, 60, 91, 251, 269, 325, 427, 472, 536, 585, 588, 663) and *Diccionario de San Francisco* (Pérez 1976 [1866–1877]:178, 179) record a variety of terms for different business activities. They include buying and selling on credit (*atcabtah*, *boolman*) and on behalf of a third person (*lukzahmantah*, *luksah conol*). Dictionaries mention transactions involving small amounts (*ppeppel conol*, *ppeppel con*), groups of twenty, or items in bulk (*hukmantah*, *mux contah*, *mux mantah*, *otzman-tah*). The sources also distinguish between various kinds of merchants and trade: long-distance merchants (*chuy contah*), sometimes classified by their place of origin as a “trader who goes or comes from Campeche” (*ah campech yoc*), professional and itinerant traders who may or may not have to travel (*ah zut* “rescatador que compra y vende por los pueblos,” *ah kakayah* “rescatador, que vende y compra por los pueblos,” *ah ppolom* “mercader, que compra y vende,” *ah ppolom yok* “mercader así que anda de una parte a otra”) as well as intermediaries (*ah tatachii man*, *ah tatachii conol*, *chumuccabal*). Traveling and business are not just associated; “traveling” means “business” with the same gloss for *camino* and *negocio* (*ocil*). A special term refers to “tianguis, fair, market, square for selling and buying” (*kiuic*) and “trading in a market or fair” (*kiuicyah*).

A colonial Tzeltal dictionary from highland Chiapas (Ara 1986 [1571]:250, 269, 270, 283, 296, 305, 312, 332, 362, 364–365, 367, 379, 386, 388, 406) also references various commercial activities. “To retail” is *chughun ta batel* as well as *mebachonon* and *tuculchon*. A number of terms and expressions highlight specific market transactions: “to lower a price” (*yamagh ztohol* and *uetz*), “to buy in small amounts” (*tuculmanoghon*), “very high in price” (*toyol*), “to buy or sell trade goods” (*polmaghon*), “to gain in trading” (*elaghpolmal*), and “to pass a debt or rulership or duty” (*yoquin*). The same dictionary lists different terms for merchants and travelers (*beyon*, *ghbeel*, *ueyom*), those who “sell in exchange”

(*ghchonpolmalil*), and “negotiants” (*ghpolmalon*). As in Yukatek, “road” also means “business.” The glosses for “market” (*chiuich*) and “marketplace” (*chihuichighibal*) are attested along with derived terms like “to organize a market” (*chihuichighibal*) and “occupation of buying and selling” (*chiuichighel*). Of great interest are counting words: *picuy* “to count by *xiquipiles* or units of eight thousand,” *picbul* “counted this way,” *piz* “weight, *libra*,” *olil piz*, *paot piz* “half of a *libra*,” and *teel* “a half of *hanega*.”

Colonial Tzotzil also reflects the importance of indigenous trade and merchants shortly after the Conquest. Valuable information on this issue is provided in the *Diccionario grande del siglo XVI*. According to this document (Calnek 1988:22–23), colonial Tzotzil speakers distinguished between long-distance “walking traders” (*xanbil*) and local merchants “who don’t walk but stay in their shops,” literally “exchangers” and “sellers” (*quexoghel*, *chonoghel*).

These rich linguistic data suggest a somewhat similar picture of extended trading activities compared to the better-documented area of the Guatemala Highlands. In his study of the region’s early colonial economy, Lawrence Feldman (1985:15–21) notes the presence of professional long-distance merchants alongside itinerant, petty traders. He also highlights the significant role of regular markets associated with distinct exchange regions as well as fairs that acted as ports of trade for long-distance operations. According to Feldman, early colonial Maya professional merchants were less organized and less independent when compared to their Aztec counterparts, whereas elites were more directly involved in the patronage of markets and traders and even participated in the long-distance exchange themselves. Feldman (1985:21–23, 84–94) argues that most high-value objects, such as precious feathers, stones, and cacao beans, circulated in a highly restricted and controlled manner. On the other hand, he reports market-based distribution for common food, pottery, cotton, salt, and various nonelite items (Feldman 1985:56–72, 76–80). Even when resources such as maize were initially obtained as tribute, they were redistributed through sale in the market (Feldman 1985:30).

To the north and west of the Guatemala Highlands, commerce sometimes appeared to be the primary occupation of entire communities. Friar Tomás de la Torre—who accompanied Bartolomé de las Casas during his visit to the Chiapas province in 1545–1546—described the principal Tzotzil town of Sinacantlan (known today as Zinacantan) as inhabited mostly by merchants: “Being itself so infertile, this town abounds in all things because others come here to buy what they need and to sell what they bring. They are very haughty and they boast of not planting or doing crafts, because they say they are merchants” (Ximénez 1929:360). According to Tomás de la Torre, Zinacantecos were “by their nature more noble than the rest of their nation” and “all or the most part of them” were merchants. The high social status of traders was also something peculiar to the Zinacantan community: “they from this town in all this land are like principal people in every other town and only by being from Sinacantlan they make themselves proud by saying that they are merchants.”

In the Chontal-speaking area of Acalan, one of the four divisions of the city of Itz'amk'anak seemed to have been named after Tachabte, “a place of honey/bee wax trees” (cf. *chabi' te'* “any wax producing tree” in Ch'orti' [Wisdom 1950:695]). Honey and wax were the most important local tradable products. Consequently, it is significant that the divine patron of the said city division was the god of merchants: Ik' Chawa (Scholes and Roys 1968:395; Smailus 1975:82–85). Colonial sources also indicate that even members of the most powerful and noble families of Yucatan engaged in long-distance trade. Landa mentions that some Kokom lords organized trading expeditions to Honduras (Tozzer 1941 [ca. 1566]:39). Trading and traders appeared to be prominent enough for a *k'atun* to be remembered as the one when “merchants were dispersed” in the *Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel* (Roys 1967 [1782]:141).

Despite this apparent importance of trade and traders, there is a remarkable lack of detail about actual trading routes and operations, as well as about merchants themselves. The latter, owing probably to the inherent secrecy of commercial operations, left us with no written testimonies of their

own—nor were their specific activities reported in early colonial documents. It seems that merchants provided Spanish expeditions with some firsthand knowledge about territory and ways to get to certain places by land or water, and even served as guides (Avendaño y Loyola 1987 [1696]:5; Marjil de Jesús et al. 1984:10; Scholes and Adams 1991:19–20). Some traders clearly operated across political boundaries, and the accounts of Cano (1984 [1696]:10) and Avendaño y Loyola (1987 [1696]:47) on the encounters with the Itza testify to that. Details of actual trade operations, however, were harder to extract from these merchants. Moreover, such details would probably not have been of much interest to the Spaniards, whose notion of “business” with the indigenous population often amounted to little more than the expropriation of goods and labor (Scholes and Adams 1991:33).

### Trade and Merchants in Classic Maya Texts and Imagery

This situation of limited data does not improve as we move back in time: Classic Maya visual and written narratives are even more reluctant to mention merchants and commerce. Out of thousands of known Classic Maya historical individuals (Colas 2004), nobody takes the titles and epithets of merchants attested in the colonial sources. One dubious candidate is the owner of the unprovenanced drinking cup (K633) painted in the style of the Naranja workshop (see Reents-Budet 1994:62–63, fig. 2.31). His name includes a title spelled as /a-k'i-wi/ni-ki/ (Figure 7.1). If the reading of the third letter in it is /wi/, then the whole word may be read as *aj-k'iwik*, or “man of/from *k'iwik*,” potentially involving the term *k'iwik* for “plaza” and “market” known from colonial Yukatek dictionaries (e.g., Ciudad Real 1995 [ca. 1590]:427, 500, 703). However, given that the potential /wi/ looks rather like other /ni/ signs in the same inscription, it is more likely that the title should be read as *aj-k'inik* and, therefore, does have any connection to trade or markets.

Available linguistic evidence (Table 7.1) points to some form of exchange as far back as the time



figure 7.1

Detail of the dedicatory text on a Late Classic vessel. (Drawing by Alexandre Tokovinine, after a photograph in the Dumbarton Oaks Pre-Columbian Photography and Fieldwork Archive, LC.CB2.408.2).

of the Proto-Mayan language (around the second millennium BC). Kaufman (2002:792) reconstructs a Proto-Mayan gloss *\*k'aay* as “to sell.” In Ch’olan and Tzeltalan languages, however, the only comparable gloss is *\*k'ay*, meaning “song” (Kaufman 1972:106; Kaufman and Norman 1984:123). The use of *k'aay* as “to sell” is attested only in Eastern Mayan and Yukatekan languages. The most plausible explanation is that it is the same gloss that either lost or obtained additional meanings. In Yukatek (Barrera Vásquez et al. 1995:391; Ciudad Real 1995 [ca. 1590]:27), the primary meaning of *k'aay* is still “to sing,” but the same word is also used to describe all kinds of activities when shouting (*voceando*) is involved: begging, auctioning, and selling in the streets. This is a perfect term for the most basic and, presumably, the earliest kinds of informal trading activities with itinerant merchants and no dedicated markets.

Greater Tzeltalan and Yukatekan languages share glosses for buying (*\*man*), selling (*\*kon*), trading for profit (*\*p'ol*), and market (*\*k'iwik*). The emergence of these new terms must postdate the breakdown of the Proto-Mayan and predate the separation of Yukatekan and Western Mayan languages in the first millennium BC (Campbell 1984; Kaufman 1972:13–14, 1976:107). On the other hand, the Q'anjobalan gloss for selling and its derivations appear to have been loaned from Ch’olan languages (Kaufman 2002:795–796). Therefore, linguistic data suggest that key market-related activities in the Maya Lowlands emerged in the Preclassic period. Borrowing of Ch’olan terms into other Mayan languages implicates the extent of the trading operations by Classic Maya Ch’olan-speaking merchants.

As comparative linguistic data indicate, market exchange played a significant role in Classic Maya society, with all the essential terms for trade-related activities already in place by the first millennium AD. Therefore, the scarcity of visual and written evidence may be due to the status of Classic-period merchants and representational conventions in the surviving media of painted vessels and stone monuments. Most of the imagery on these objects deals with the life of royal courts (Houston and Inomata 2009). Classic Maya merchants may have not held a place prominent enough to be portrayed in the presence of rulers. In fact, courtly officials of all ranks often remained unmentioned and unrepresented, particularly at the courts of powerful royal dynasties like those of Tikal and Calakmul. One would look in vain for a court scene with Yihk'in Chan K'awiil, the greatest Late Classic lord of Tikal. The only vase with a text that mentions him as its owner (K8008; Culbert 1993:fig. 83c, 84) shows, appropriately, the celestial court of God D. On the other hand, there seems to be no problem with depicting a roughly contemporaneous court of K'awiil Chan K'inich from the offshoot of the Tikal dynasty that established itself at Dos Pilas and Aguateca (K1599, K2697). Yet even these scenes represent a limited selection of people and objects. There is a preference to display exquisite possessions like inscribed vessels, jewelry, and mirrors.

This lack of explicit references to merchants in Classic Maya imagery and texts has contributed to the widely held view that market exchange played a minor role in the palace economies, which centered on the tightly controlled circulation of

table 7. 1

Trade-related terms in greater lowland Maya languages

language/source	buy	sell	barter	trade/ profit	pay	loan	price	market
PM (Kaufman 2002)		*k'aay	*k'ex		*toj	*majaan		
GLL (Kaufman 2002)	*man		*k'ex	*p'ol	*toj			k'iwik
PCh (Kaufman and Norman 1984)	*män	*chon	*k'ex	*p'ol	*toj	*majnä		
YUK (Bricker et al. 1998)	man	kon	k'eš		b'ó'ol	mahàan	tohol	k'íiwik
						páay		
YUK (Cuidad Real 1995 [ca. 1590])	man	con	kex	ppolmal	bool	mahan	tohol	kiuic
		kaayah				pay	tulul	
ITZ(A?) (Hofling and Tesucún 1997)	män	kon	k'exik	naal	b'ó'ol	majan	tool	
						pay		
TZO (Laughlin and Haviland 1988)	man	chon	k'ex	p'olmal	toj	ch'amol	tojol	ch'ivit
TZE (Ara 1986 [1571])	man	chon		polmal	toghol	maghan	toghol	chiuich
				eçomagh				
CHT (Robertson et al. 2010)	man	chon	quex	polom / polon	toho			
CHR (Wisdom 1950)	man	chon		b'or	tohoma'ar	mahan	toy	
					toy		choher	
CHR (Tuyuc Sucuc 2001)							tujr	
CHN (Keller and Luciano 1997)	man	chon	q'uex		toje'	majan	toj / tojquiba	
						q'uex	choj / cho'an	
CHL (Aulie and Aulie 1978)	mΛn	chon	q'uex	p'olmΛj	tojolan	majan	tojol	

Abbreviations: PM—Proto-Mayan; GLL—Greater Lowland Languages; PCh—Proto-Ch'olan; YUK—Yukatek; ITZ— Itzaj; TZO—Tzotzil; TZE—Tzeltal; CHT—Ch'olti'; CHR—Ch'orti'; CHN—Chontal; CHL—Ch'ol

high-valued items (see Blanton, this volume; Hirth and Pillsbury, this volume). There is a tendency to interpret as tribute scenes all contexts in which such items as jade jewelry, mantles, cacao beans, painted vessels, and feathers are displayed in Classic-period elite households (see McAnany, this volume).

According to David Stuart (1998:409–417, 2006:128–137), *ikaatz* or *ikitz* (spelled /i-ka-tzi/ or /i-ki-tzi/) is a key term for objects in elite transactions. It is used to label jade artifacts (Stuart 2006:figs. 4–5), so its primary meaning seems to be fine jade jewelry, not the raw material. This semantic distinction fits well with the archaeological data on the production and distribution of jade (see Kovacevich, this volume). Bundles labeled as *ikaatz* appear in a variety of narratives and depictions of courtly settings. Stuart’s initial interpretation of *ikaatz* was that it referred to gifts and tribute (1998:409–416). The tribute part was largely based on an otherwise unique inscription on Naranjo Stela 12 (see also McAnany, this volume) that described the presentation of the *ikaatz* of the defeated Yaxha lord ordered by the victorious Naranjo ruler (*na[h]waj yikaatz yaxa’ ajaw ukabjiy k’uhul ajsa’aal*).

But Stuart’s (2006) later interpretation of *ikaatz* transactions emphasizes gift exchange. Once again, it is based on a text from Naranjo. An inscription on the steps of a palanquin depicted on Naranjo Stela 32 reports how a certain K’uk’ Bahlam “gave” (*yak’aw*) two unknown units (*k’aw*) and later five “scores” (*k’al*) of *ikaatz* (Stuart 2006:133, fig. 6). Stuart (2006:129–130) notes that *ikaatz* bundles appear in a host of contexts: they are held by royal consorts during public dances depicted on Yaxchilan monuments (Stuart 2006:fig. 2), carried by Hero Twins in the watery underworld (Stuart 2006:fig. 3a), and displayed behind the thrones of God L (Stuart 2006:fig. 3b) and God D (Boot 2008:15, figs. 1a, 8). *Ikaatz* may be precious objects that leave with the exiled king and return under the supervision of the new ruler, as in the text on Piedras Negras Throne 1 (Stuart 2006:133–135, fig. 7). Other textual references—such as “celestial *ikaatz*, terrestrial *ikaatz*” (*chanal ikaatz kabal ikaatz*) on the middle panel in the Temple of the Inscriptions at Palenque—are, as Stuart points out (2006:136–137,

fig. 8), even cosmological in nature. The bundle in the celestial court of God D is labeled as *chanal ikaatz* (Boot 2008:15, fig. 1a), so it is tempting to suggest that its terrestrial counterpart is the *ikaatz* bundle in the mountain/cave palace of God L.

The variety of contexts and meanings attached to the *ikaatz* bundles in Classic Maya texts and images suggests that we have to be very cautious in approaching the topic of Classic Maya palace economic transactions. The same care should be taken in dealing with other kinds of objects that may be interpreted as part of the institutionalized political economy. According to Stuart (2006:137–141, figs. 9, 11–12), bundles with units of eight thousand (*pik*) depicted in Classic Maya art contain cacao beans, and the quantities sometimes correspond to ethnohistorically known standard loads of cacao beans. Nevertheless, there is no Classic Maya textual reference to cacao offered as tribute. Depictions of cacao bundles in courtly settings are somewhat ambiguous. In the case of the scenes with emissaries on Bonampak murals (see McAnany, this volume) and one Late Classic vessel (K5453, see below), the bundles are placed directly below the seated ruler and not in front, within the ruler’s sight (*ichnal*) (Houston et al. 2006:173–175; Stone and Zender 2011:14–15), as might be expected of tribute. It seems as if the bundles were there for the visitors and for those who view the image. Consequently, these cacao bundles might have been gifts of tribute, but they also might have constituted a display of wealth in its most universal and countable form.

We should also be careful in interpreting the significance of documented elite transactions. The largest amount of fine ceramic vessels, apparently given away as gifts by Naranjo rulers, corresponds to the reign of K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Chahk (AD 693–ca. 728) (Tokovinine 2006). The greatest volume and spatial distribution of exclusive pottery gifts of Motul de San José rulers date back to the reign of Tayel Chan K’inich (ca. AD 712–734) (Tokovinine and Zender 2012). In both cases, these were periods of prosperity and increased geopolitical prominence for Naranjo and Motul de San José. Consequently, giving precious gifts to clients, allies,

and neighbors seems to be part of an assertive geopolitical stance and not a sign of subordinate status or weakness. The nature of the gifts—drinking vessels—is probably important because it may be assumed that such gifts were exchanged during feasts, when new alliances were made and old ones reinforced. Scenes of feasting, such as on Piedras Negras Panel 3 (Houston et al. 2006:128–129, fig. 3.26), show drinking vessels changing hands and beverages likely shared between participants. Such events were potentially even more politically significant and religiously charged than the gift itself.

That said, some images on Classic Maya pottery do show transactions described as “tribute” and “payment.” One such scene on a vessel from the court of Ik’a lords of Motul de San José (K4996) deals with presentation of tribute by ward or district governors known as *lakam* (Houston and Stuart 2001; Lacadena 2008; Stuart 2006:127–128, fig. 1). The tribute is called *patan* (Figure 7.2a), the most common term for tribute in the form of goods or labor (Stuart 2006:127–128). The tribute is “piled up” (*tz’ahpaj*), and at least one bundle is visible between the *lakam* officials and the high throne of the ruler. Unfortunately, the rest of this section of the vessel is eroded. “Piling up” is clearly not the same action as the still untranslated “presenting” verb (spelled /na-wa-ja/) reserved for the *ikaatz* objects, captives, and brides—the implication being that different settings and acts are involved.

Another scene on the vessel from the same polity (K1728) shows a seated lord who appears to be receiving four individuals (Houston et al. 2006:243, fig. 7.23). The caption (Figure 7.2b) remains partially undeciphered, but it more or less states that the image deals with the presentation of “tribute mantles” (*yubte*) as a “payment” (*tojool*) from an individual holding the office of *sajal*, most likely a provincial ruler. It seems that the white-mantled man seated before the king and named Chij Lam in the accompanying caption was responsible for delivering this “payment” to the ruler on behalf of the *sajal*. Even though in colonial Yukatek the term *yubte* refers to “tribute mantles” (“*mantas de tributo*” [Barrera Vásquez et al. 1995:981]), no cotton mantles are depicted here. Visitors brought

two large bundles topped with *Spondylus* shells; these objects are watched over by a man holding what looks like a staff and litters (Figure 7.2c). The glyphic caption identifies him as “he of mantles, young man” (*aj-[y]ubte’ ch’ok*).

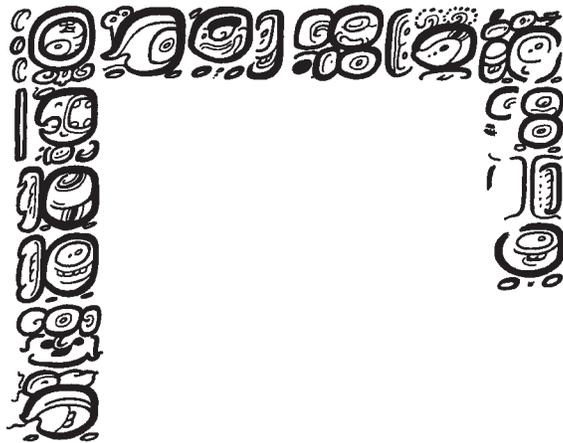
*Tojool*—“payment,” “cost (of work),” and “price”—is a term attested in many Mayan languages (see Table 7.1), including colonial Yukatek (Ciudad Real 1995 [ca. 1590]:723) and colonial Tzeltal (Ara 1986 [1571]:385–386). Another example of *tojool* in Classic Maya inscriptions appears on a panel fragment that likely came from Jonuta (Figure 7.2d). One of the protagonists—he carries the title of “head youth” (*baah ch’ok*)—is possibly adorned or presented (the verb remains undeciphered) “with *ikitz*.” The final sentence of the text begins with the undeciphered verb that likely connects it to the preceding clause because of its *-ij/ji* suffix. The subject is “his payment” (*u-tojool*). Therefore, the inscription likely deals with a presentation of precious objects as a “payment.”

The use of two terms, *patan* and *tojool*, potentially implies different types of transactions. It is probably significant that *patan* may also designate labor (but not in the context where it is mentioned on the vase discussed above), whereas *tojool* may involve *yubte* tribute mantles as well as precious *ikitz/ikaatz* jade or other extremely high-value items. Consequently, *tojool* might have been a more generic term encompassing tribute proper and more exclusive gifts of *ikaatz*. Unfortunately, there is simply not enough evidence to advance the interpretation of these passages any further.

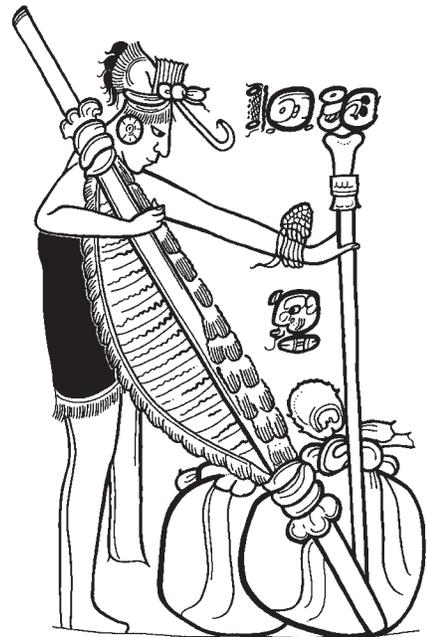
The other subset of scenes in various media involves messengers or emissaries known as *ebeet* (for the decipherment and original interpretation of this term, see Houston et al. 2006:241–249). In one depiction (Figure 7.3; K5453/MS0071), K’ahk’ Hiix Muut, a messenger of the “holy Kaanu’l lord” Yuhkno’m Yich’aak K’ahk’ (Martin and Grube 2008), kneels before an otherwise unknown Dos Pilas or Tikal lord Ch’ok Wayis. The glyphic commentary locates the event in Topoxte and dates it to AD 691. The event predates Yuhkno’m Yich’aak K’ahk’s defeat in AD 695, so the visiting messenger represents the most powerful Classic Maya ruler of



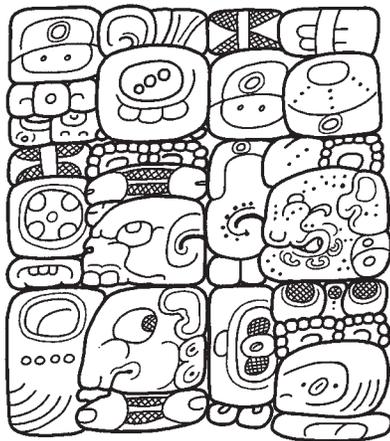
a



b



c



d

figure 7.2

Classic Maya tribute and payment references: a) detail of the caption on a Late Classic vase (κ4996) (/tz'a-pa-ja u-pa-ta-na 3-LAKAM-ma yi-chi-NAL ta-ye-le CHAN-na-K'INICH K'UH-IK'-AJAW/, tz'a[h]paj upatan hux lakam yichnal tayel chan k'inich k'uh[ul] ik'[a'] ajaw); b) detail of the caption on a Late Classic vase (κ1728) (/na-tzi na-ja yu-bu TE' k'e be-la-ja mu-ti u-to-jo-li ti-ki-?-ja mu-ti sa ja-la', naatznaj yubte' k'eblij muut utojool . . . muut sajal); c) detail of the scene on a Late Classic vase (κ1728); and d) detail of the Jonuta panel fragment (/i-yu-wa-la ?-ja ta-i-ki-tzi ta-K'AN-na-to-ko-JOL ?-TI'-?BAHLAM ba-ch'o-ko ?-ji-u-to-jo-li, iyuwal . . . ta ikitz ta k'an jol . . . ti' bahlam ba[ah] ch'ok . . . utojool) (after Proskouriakoff 1950:fig. 69b). (Drawings by Alexandre Tokovinine.)

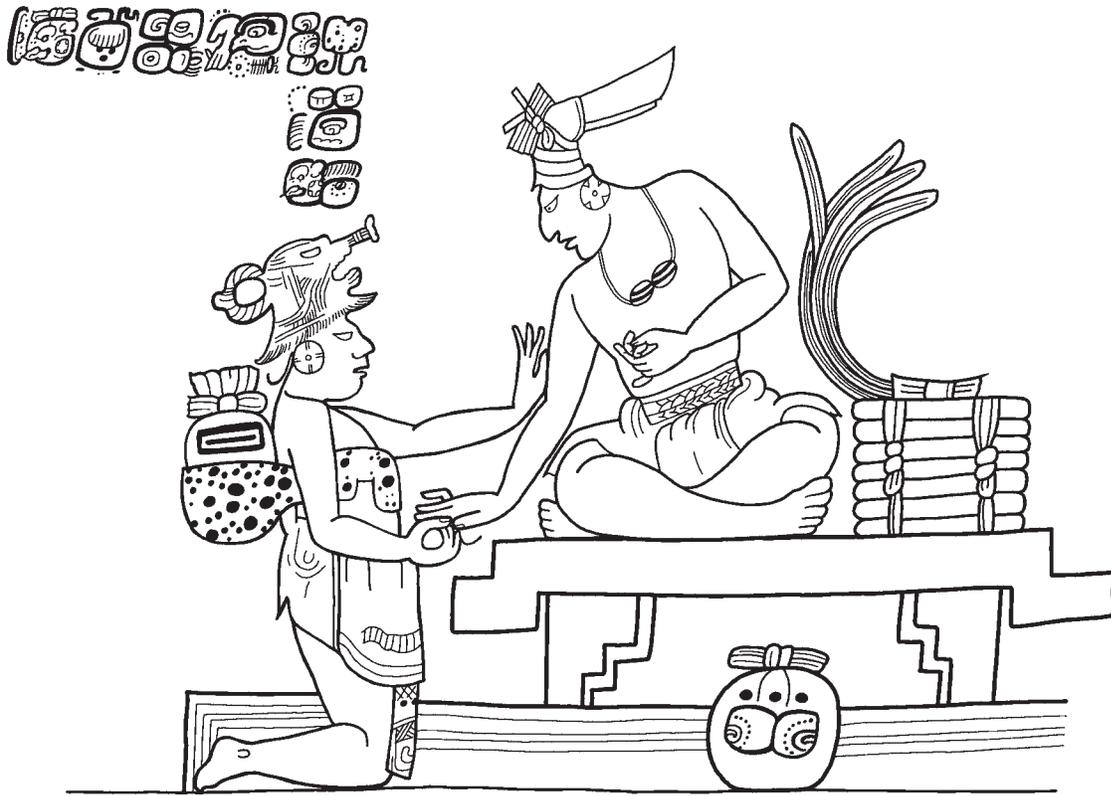


figure 7.3  
Detail of a Late Classic vessel (K5453) (*k'ahk' hix muut yebeet yuhkno'm yich'aak k'ahk' k'uh[ul] kaanu'l ajaw baah kab*). (Drawing by Alexandre Tokovinine.)

the time. What is of particular interest to us is that the messenger seems to be passing something to the seated lord and also carries a bundle marked by a bar in a rectangle—possibly a reference to quantity (five or fifteen). Ch'ok Wayis's seat displays a bundle of plain square mantles, a bunch of feathers, and possibly a bag of cacao beans marked with the quantity of *huux pik*, or  $3 \times 8,000$ ; according to early colonial sources, cacao and mantles were the two most common forms of currency. A much larger scene in the upper register of Room 1 of Structure 1 at Bonampak depicts as many as fourteen emissaries, in characteristic capes with shells, facing an enthroned ruler and possibly a designated heir (Houston et al. 2006:248, fig. 7.25a). The only objects next to the throne are several large sacks of cacao beans marked with quantities like  $5 \times 8,000$  (Stuart 2006:fig. 11). The third known scene with messengers appears on a painted

stucco vase from Tikal (Culbert 1993:fig. 68A). It shows caped dignitaries watching a plate with gifts presented to the seated ruler. The captions to most figures are too eroded to identify the ruler and the location, but the *waxak winik* ("28") title of one of the emissaries suggests that the vase is from Petexbatun or the area farther east (Tokovinine 2008).

*Ebeet* are rarely cited in monumental inscriptions. Fragments of a Terminal Classic-period stucco text from the royal palace of Caracol refer to the *ebeet* of Papamalil (Grube 1994:fig. 9.18; Houston et al. 2006:244, fig. 7.24). The context of the reference is lost, although Papamalil seems to be an important individual associated with the site of Ucanal. He is depicted and mentioned on Caracol Altars 12 and 13 and plays a prominent role in the narrative on Naranjo Stela 32 (Grube 1994:95). Grube has further suggested that Caracol

figure 7.4

Reference to canoes:

a) Piedras Negras Panel 2

(/CHAN-NAL-la CHAK-

chi-wo ?jo AJ-pa-ya-li-?

ju-ku-bi xu/tz'i-ka-la-

NAAH-AJAW/); and

b) Bonampak Miscellaneous

Sculptured Stone 5 (/tu-ta-ja

?NAB-hu-k'a u-KAB-

ji-ya AJ-SAK-la-ka-la

AJ-?JUKUUB/). (Drawings

by Alexandre Tokovinine.)



a



b

Altar 12 and Naranjo Stela 32 might have celebrated the same event that took place at Ucanal, according to the inscription on Stela 32.

The combination of precious objects and bags of cacao beans in the scenes with visiting *ebeet* dignitaries is intriguing. Of all members of the courtly elite known from Classic Maya imagery and inscriptions, *ebeet* are the only ones whose task was essentially to travel, sometimes long distances (e.g., at least 120 kilometers between Calakmul and Topoxte), and pass messages and gifts from one ruler to another. Their dress is consistently a white cape and a necklace of *Spondylus* shells. This uniform suggests that there was some kind of international dress code for emissaries, possibly evoking mantles and shells offered as gifts and tribute (Houston et al. 2006:247). The garments also make one's identification easier in case messengers had to move across otherwise hostile areas. *Ebeet* officials do not carry additional titles; the role of emissaries seems to be their only connection to the court. We do not find the king's own emissaries among the officials present at any internal court event depicted on painted vessels.

It is unclear whether being one's *ebeet* was a singular task or a long-term occupation, but it clearly involved some knowledge of how to get from

one place to another. Of all Classic Maya court dignitaries, *ebeet* are the likeliest to have been involved not only in diplomacy but also in long-distance exchange of valuable objects, just like their later Central Mexican counterparts. The display of cacao beans in scenes with *ebeet* seems to support this assertion.

People associated with canoes constitute another likely group who might have been involved in trade. While canoes abound in Classic Maya imagery, the contexts of such scenes tend to be mostly religious or mythological, such as the depictions of the death of the maize god or rain deities fishing (e.g., Moholy-Nagy and Coe 2008:figs. 189–192). Titles like “he of canoe” (*aj-jukuub*) are attested in the Usumacinta River basin, but it is not clear if these are references to trading activities or to military offices. One of the subordinate warriors kneeling before a Piedras Negras ruler on Panel 2 from that site carries the title of *aj-payal-jukuub* (/AJ-pa-ya-li-? ju-ku-bi/) and is identified as a member of the Bonampak-area royal family (/xu/tz'i-ka-la-NAAH-AJAW/; Figure 7.4a). Another *aj-jukuub* person is mentioned on the Miscellaneous Sculptured Stone 5 from Bonampak (Figure 7.4b) as a protagonist of an attack against a small polity somewhere between Bonampak and Yaxchilan (see

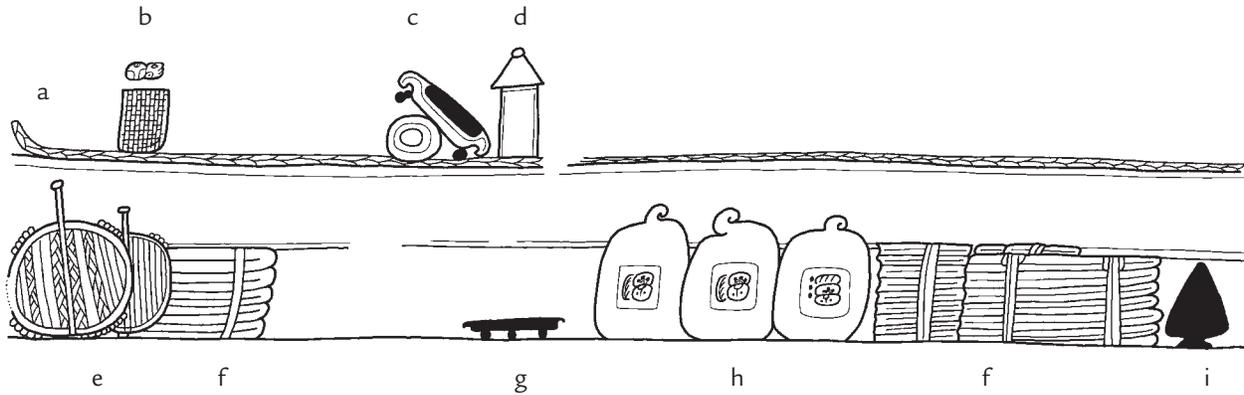


figure 7.5  
Objects depicted in the scene on a Late Classic vase (κ2914): a) mat; b) *chaach* basket; c) mirror; d) lidded vessel; e) fans; f) mantles; g) plate; h) bean bags; and i) unidentified object. (Drawing by Alexandre Tokovinine.)



figure 7.6  
Traveling scene on a Chama-style vase (κ594). (Drawing by Alexandre Tokovinine.)

Beliaev and Safronov n.d.). The third example of this title is cited in the text on the unprovenienced “Berman panel” (Mayer 1989:pl. 76).

Classic Maya portrayals of subroyal households are rare. An unprovenienced vase (κ2914) that belonged to a district governor or *lakam* (Lacadena 2008) from the Río Azul area, however, offers a rare glimpse of a middle-class household with an unusual emphasis on the quantity of tradable commodities (Figure 7.5). The dwelling (*otoot*, as specified in the caption) of this dignitary features a few exquisite items, such as a mirror and a fine drinking vase, but also several bundles of tribute mantles, fans, and even three large sacks of beans

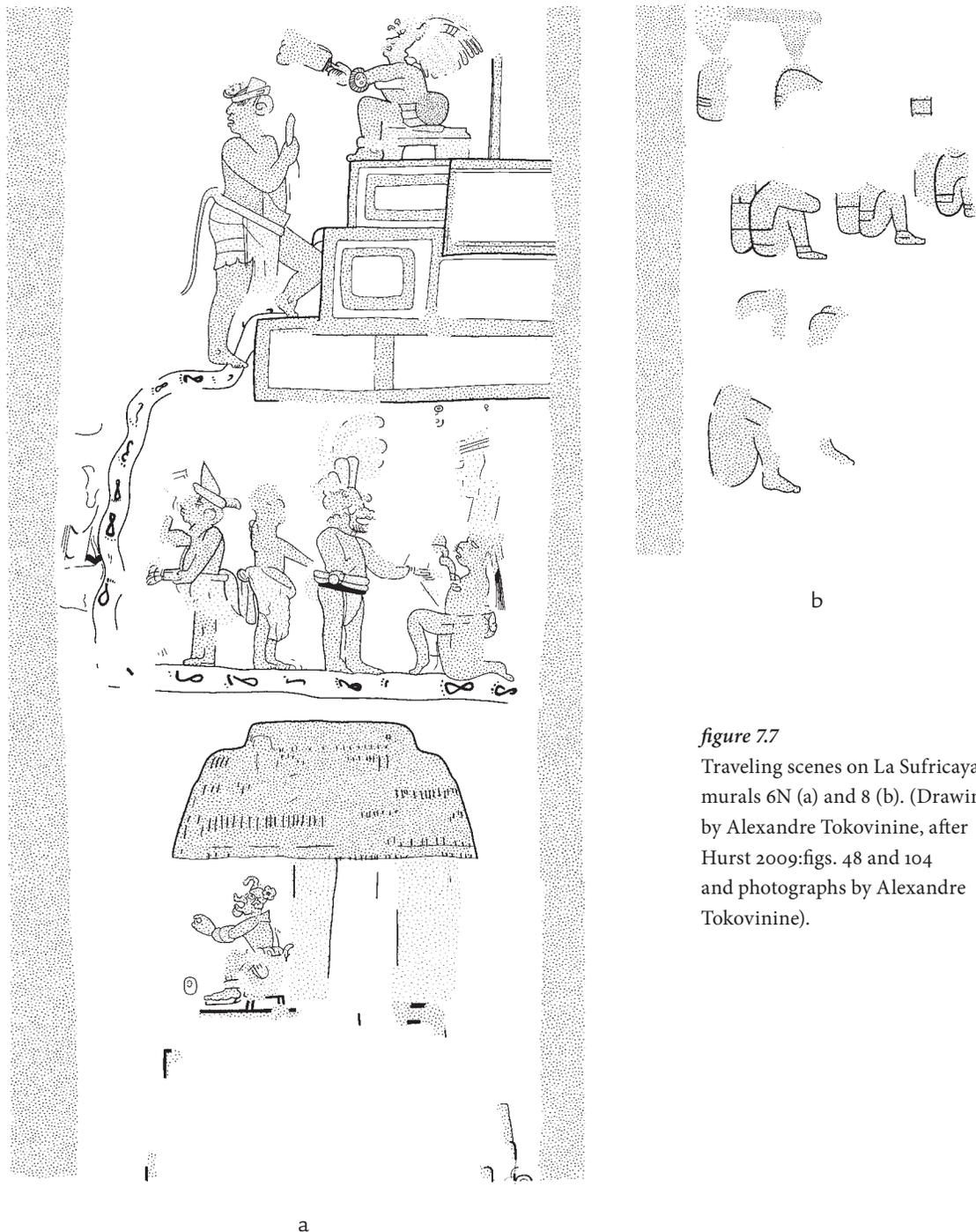
(labeled as “our beans, our beans, three [bags of] our beans”). Unfortunately, such scenes accompanied by hieroglyphic captions are extremely rare, but they point to different values and economic practices among the elites just below the level of Classic Maya royalty.

Traveling itself is almost never depicted on Classic Maya pottery, although two Chama-style vessels (κ594 and κ5534) show what looks like a procession of travelers (Figure 7.6). The nature of this procession is unclear (Houston et al. 2006:260–261; Kerr 2001). Is it a rendering of actual travelers or a metaphor of the underworld journey? Both scenes feature a lord carried in a litter, a porter with

a tumpline backpack, and trumpeters and other retainers, all wearing travelers' hats.

Our knowledge of Classic Maya travelers and traders can be expanded by looking at other media and genres. One of the earliest of such windows into the world of trade and travel are murals at

the archaeological site of La Sufricaya, which were painted around AD 379 in the context of the brief period of Teotihuacan intervention in the political life of the Southern Maya Lowlands (Estrada Belli et al. 2009; Hurst 2009; Stuart 2000; Tokovinine 2008). Mural 1 in Room 1 of Structure 1 at the



*figure 7.7*  
Traveling scenes on La Sufricaya murals 6N (a) and 8 (b). (Drawings by Alexandre Tokovinine, after Hurst 2009:figs. 48 and 104 and photographs by Alexandre Tokovinine).

site shows what looks like Maya nobles standing and offering various objects in front of rows of Teotihuacan warriors. Mural 6N presents a maplike landscape with a road connecting two places shown as temples above and below, a group of travelers conducting a ritual in the middle of the road, and a larger figure ascending to the upper temple (Figure 7.7a). The vertical arrangement of these features possibly evokes the west-to-east movement. The road connects this scene with another large processional representation, at left, that shows more Maya-looking characters and Teotihuacan warriors. The adjacent scene, at right, reveals rows of large bundles and unadorned, seated individuals, possibly with backpacks (Figure 7.7b). The three scenes, therefore, seem to link political events, travel, and trade and/or tribute. The all-glyphic Mural 7, painted in the nearby building, states that the whole complex was dedicated on the one-year anniversary of the arrival of Sihyaj K'ahk' to Tikal, the pivotal event in the Teotihuacan intrusion (Estrada Belli et al. 2009). A similar set of murals with depictions of traveling possibly decorated Hunal, the residence of Copan's founder, who also had a connection to Teotihuacan. But these murals were almost completely obliterated in antiquity (Bell 2007:figs. 5.13–5.14; Hurst 2009:218).

Perhaps the most important set of images related to Classic Maya trade and traders comes from the recently discovered murals adorning the facade of Structure Sub 1-4 in the North Acropolis at Calakmul in Campeche, Mexico (Boucher and Quiñones 2007; Carrasco Vargas and Colón González 2005; Carrasco Vargas et al. 2009). Calakmul Structure 1, a three-terraced platform, is the tallest structure inside the North Acropolis—a large walled compound characterized by a number of low and long platforms that could have easily been part of a large permanent market with stalls and galleries. One wall around the complex was also painted, and the surviving captions (Carrasco Vargas and Colón González 2005:45) seem to label it as *chiik nahb kot*, “the Chiik Nahb wall” (Yurii Polyukhovych, personal communication 2006), linking the complex with one of the two place names associated with Calakmul and its surrounding area (Martin 1997, 2005a; Tokovinine 2007). The layout of the North Acropolis is remarkably similar to some depictions of markets in early colonial sources and also resembles other suspected market areas, such as East Plaza at Tikal (see Masson and Freidel, this volume).

While their significance is open to interpretation, the murals of Structure Sub 1-4 are the closest we come to a depiction of market scenes in Classic

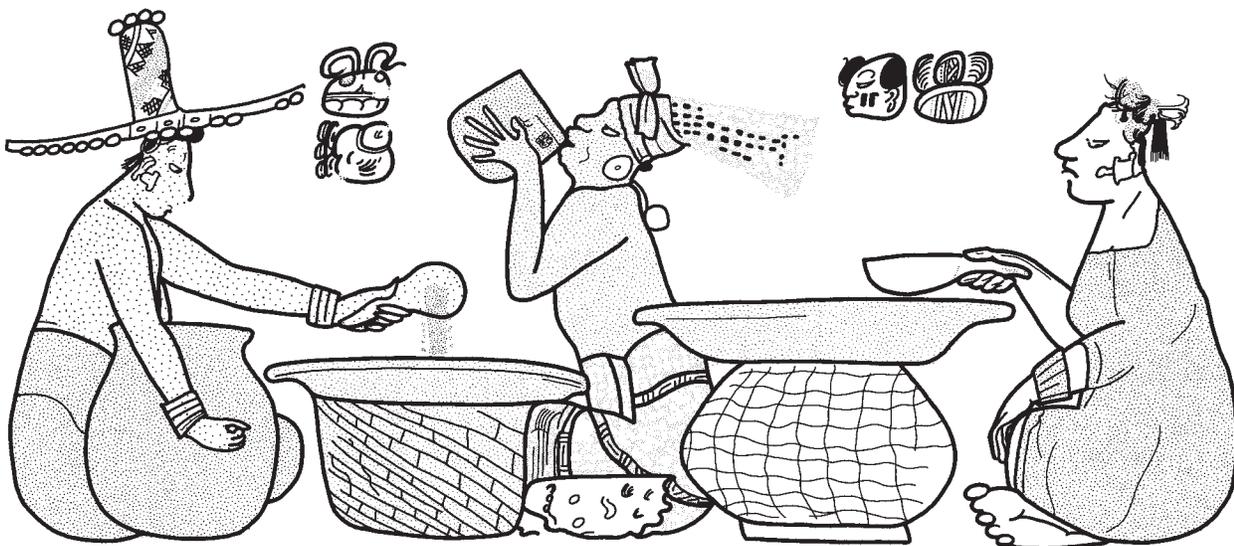
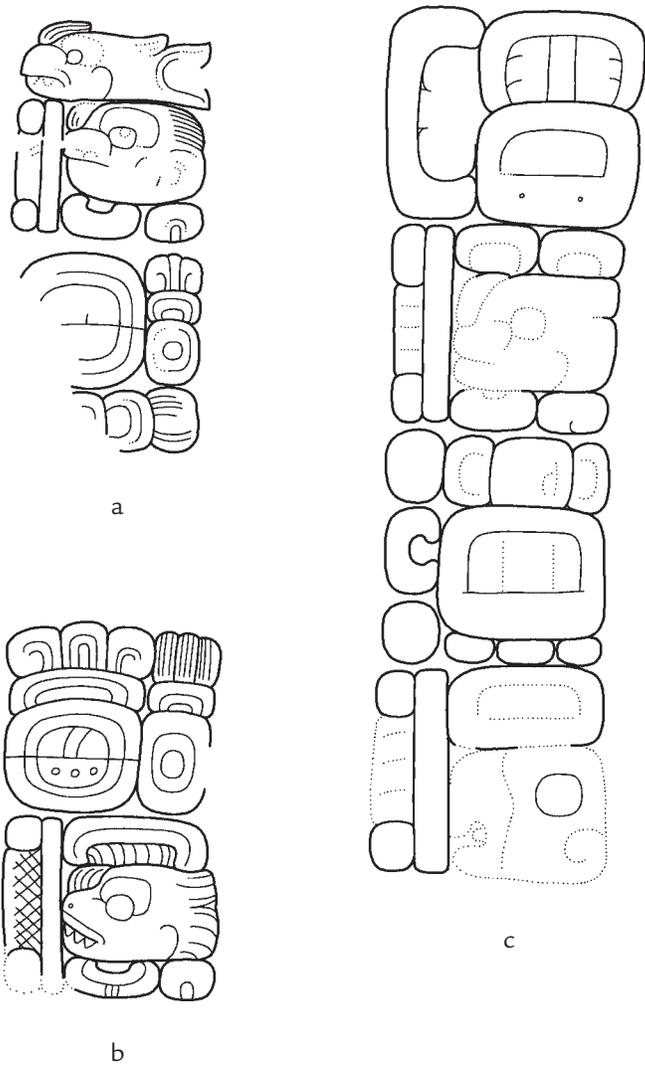


figure 7.8  
Detail of the mural on Structure 1 of the Calakmul North Acropolis. (Drawing by Alexandre Tokovinine.)

figure 7.9  
 The *aj-kakaw* title in Classic  
 Maya inscriptions: a) Itzimte  
 altar fragment; b) Itzimte  
 Stela 7; and c) Tonina  
 Monument 89. (Drawings  
 by Alexandre Tokovinine.)



Maya art (Boucher and Quiñones 2007:48). The images mostly show pairs of individuals. One figure presents (or sells) a particular item; the other examines or tastes it (Figure 7.8). Presenters/sellers sit in front of their products, which are placed in various ceramic or basket containers. Most sellers are women wearing wide-brimmed hats as if to protect their faces from sunlight. Every seller is marked by a caption that identifies her or him with the respective product as “person of such-and-such.” The list of goods, sold or presented, includes *atole* (*ul*), tamales (*waaj*), tobacco (*may*), maize grains (*ixiim*), salt (*atz’aam*), and serving vessels (*jaay*). These captions are clearly not personal names and suggest a classification of people based on their associated

products. The choice of generic terms over specific (e.g., *jaay*, “thin-walled vessels,” but not functional *yuk’ib*, “drinking utensil”) also indicates a broader classification. In addition, there are individuals with stretched pieces of cloth, cords, and some kind of pins. The murals feature images of porters or traders with tumplines.

Scenes on the Calakmul murals differ from depictions of courtly life on vessels and monuments in a number of ways. The setting seems to be some kind of open space with no architectural elements, and the protagonists are dressed for long exposure to the sun. The range of products is significant, as some of them are almost never mentioned or portrayed in courtly settings. The baskets stacked with

clay vessels and other large containers—present in the murals—are absent in the Classic Maya depictions of palace environments. As Simon Martin (n.d.) points out, if North Acropolis was a market, then Structure 1 could be something like a market shrine, and that would explain the unusual theme of its murals.

While the Calakmul murals really stand out in terms of the nature of the depicted activities and the protagonists, individuals with similar titles suggesting a connection to production or distribution of goods are attested at two other Classic Maya sites. It is potentially significant that both examples involve cacao (*kakaw*), one of the most precious commodities, yet in the names of people of nonroyal rank. Carver's signatures on the altar fragment

and Stela 7 from Itzimte (Figure 7.9a–b) identify him as “he of cacao” and “wise man” (/AJ-ka-ka-wa i-tz'a-ti/) (Mejía and García Campillo 2004:822–824). Another example of the same title comes from an inscribed sculpture of a hairless dog (Monument 89) found on the floor of the residential Late Classic Structure F4-6, possibly in association with the nearby Burial III-1, at Tonina (Bequelin and Baudez 1979:105, 134–136, figs. 106–107; Graham 1996:118; see also Stuart 1987:8–10). According to the text on the back of the dog (Figure 7.9c), its owner was *aj-kakaw* (/AJ-ka-ka-wa/). His name continues with a “two *k'atun*” (/2-WINIK. HAAB/) collocation that is usually part of titles like “two *k'atun* lord.” Unfortunately, the middle sign in the following block is eroded, so only

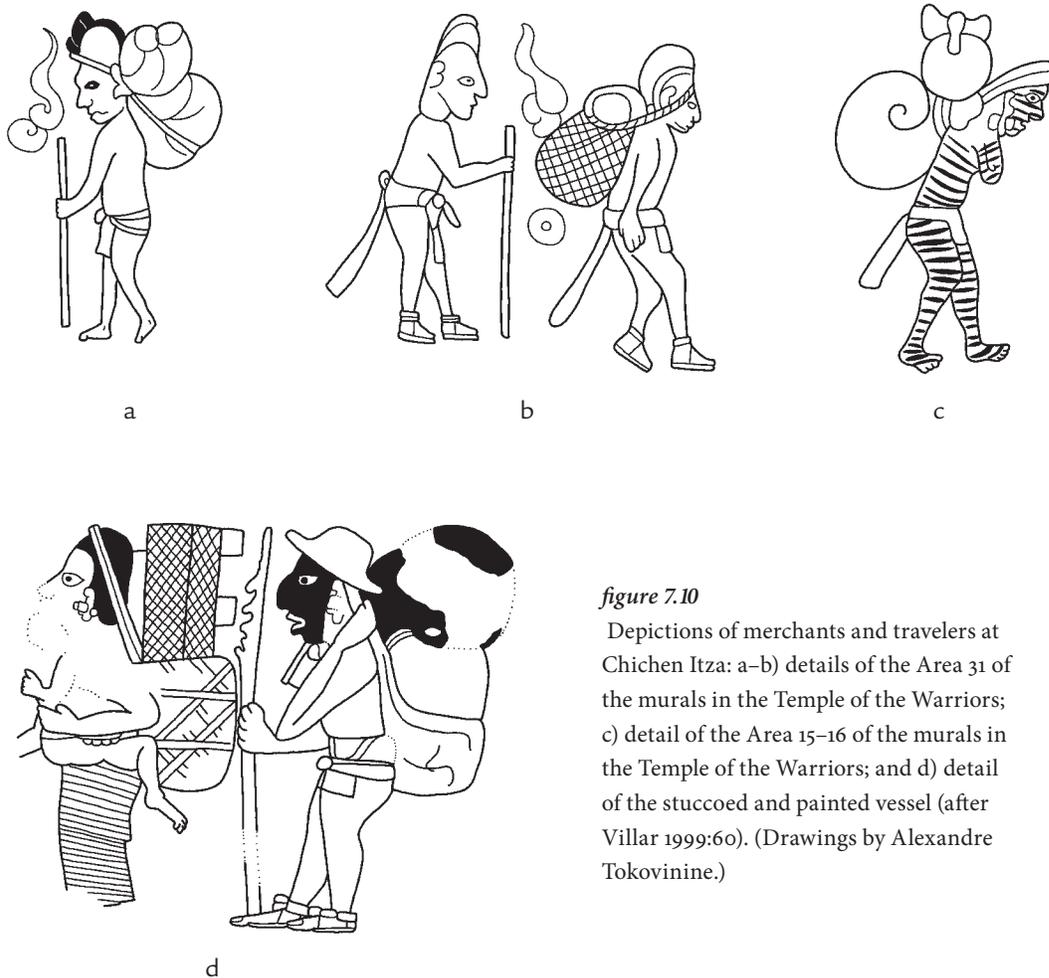


figure 7.10

Depictions of merchants and travelers at Chichen Itza: a–b) details of the Area 31 of the murals in the Temple of the Warriors; c) detail of the Area 15–16 of the murals in the Temple of the Warriors; and d) detail of the stuccoed and painted vessel (after Villar 1999:60). (Drawings by Alexandre Tokovinine.)

the first and the last glyphs may be read: /AJ-?-a/. The *aj-* prefix and the *-a* ending suggest a toponym, but the two *k'atun* title seems to contradict such identification. The archaeologists described Structure F4-6 as a dwelling of those “who were not very poor,” although it did not match fancier structures linked to Tonina royalty (Bequelin and Baudez 1979:105, 134–136).

Murals in the Temple of the Warriors Areas 15-16 and 31 at Chichen Itza (Figure 7.10) (Morris et al. 1931:1:386–395, 418–426, 2:pls. 139, 140b, 159, 160b; see also Finamore and Houston 2010:198–199) are the last known representations of merchants in ancient Maya monumental art. Dated to the Late Terminal Classic–Early Postclassic period, these scenes, not unlike La Sufricaya murals, incorporate figures with walking sticks and tumplines. They are shown in larger landscapes, this time those of coastal communities. The scene in Area 15–16 appears to depict a coastal village of people with striped body paint—a potential clue to their specific ethnic identity. They are under attack by “Toltec” warriors. The latter approach the village, fight, and take captives. Locals are portrayed in the foreground: they scream and flee their dwellings, with bundles on their backs. In the background, daily activities continue uninterrupted: a probable merchant walks along the seashore (Figure 7.10c).

The narrative in the Area 31 Mural is more peaceful. Warriors sail in canoes past a “Maya” coastal community with a “Toltec” temple, and there is no apparent confrontation. Two groups of merchants with speech scrolls are visible in the background—a single figure with a tumpline (Figure 7.10a) and a pair of figures of which only one is the bearer (Figure 7.10b). Although both murals feature canoes, they are empty of merchants and goods. If we assume that these two landscapes follow common Mesoamerican map conventions, the warriors in the foreground come from the west, whereas the merchants walk north and south—an implication that trading and warfare do not happen between the same communities. In addition to murals, at least one stuccoed and painted vessel found at Chichen Itza (Villar 1999:60) shows two travelers with tumpline backpacks: a male and a

female who also carries a baby (Figure 7.10d). As in the case of the earlier La Sufricaya Room 1 murals, traders are depicted as a background to military engagement and travel, this time by land and by sea.

### Divine Patrons of Merchants

Although, as we have made clear, Classic Maya merchants are not particularly visible in courtly settings, a number of visual and written narratives reveal the supernatural and mythical side of trade. One of the most prominent protagonists of these narratives is God L. This deity is distinguished by his aged look and a wide-brimmed feather hat adorned with an owl-like bird (Figure 7.11) (Taube 1992:79–81). He is commonly portrayed with large square eyes and jaguar ears, attributes he shares with the Jaguar God of the Underworld (JGU). Smoking a cigar seems to be another of God L’s traits. His body is often painted black (Figure 7.12). As pointed out by Taube (1992:81, fig. 40), God L may be shown with a walking staff and a merchant’s tumpline, sometimes with a bird on top (Figure 7.12).

Most representations of God L are on Chochola-style vessels and on monuments from the area of Campeche and southern Yucatan (Coe 1973; Mayer 1987:pls. 133, 157, 159, 160, 1989:pl. 39; Robicsek 1978:fig. 41; Tate 1985; Taube 1992). The abundance of God L imagery in this region possibly suggests his greater importance in the local pantheon and, consequently, increased prominence of trade and traders in the social and political fabric. By contrast, God L is not depicted on monuments in most of the Peten, and his representations on pottery are restricted to vases from the workshops in the vicinity of Naranjo (e.g., K7750; see below) and to codex-style vessels possibly from the area of Nakbe (Reents-Budet 1994), although the latter are also found at Calakmul in Campeche (García Barrios and Carrasco Vargas 2006).

Sometimes God L appears to be trying to catch the bird on a stick, possibly with glue (Figure 7.12b), a way of catching birds without killing them or damaging their precious feathers (Feldman 1985:90;



a



b

*figure 7.11*

Early and Late Classic representations of God L: a) detail of the Early Classic ceramic box (after a photograph in the Dumbarton Oaks Pre-Columbian Photography and Fieldwork Archive, PC.M.EC. CB4.56.10); and b) detail of the sanctuary of the Temple of the Sun at Palenque (after Miller and Martin 2004:fig.20). (Drawings by Alexandre Tokovinine.)



a



b

*figure 7.12*

God L as a merchant catching birds for their feathers: a) detail of the Cacaxtla murals (after Martin 2006a:fig. 8.12); and b) detail of the Late Classic plate (after Robicsek 1978:fig. 159). (Drawings by Alexandre Tokovinine.)

Houston et al. 2009:49). He also may be accompanied by human merchants (Taube 1992:fig. 40b). Moreover, some depictions of God L are complete with an idealized representation of the road, which is attached to his belt. Such portrayals include an Early Classic image of the deity on the unprovenanced ceramic box (Figure 7.11a) and the famous Late Classic representation in the sanctuary of the Temple of the Sun at Palenque (Figure 7.11b). God L walks with two kinds of staffs—with and without a pointed end (Figures 7.11a and 7.14).

The Epiclassic murals at Cacaxtla in Puebla, which were painted in a distinctively Maya style (Robertson 1985), also present a revealing image of God L. He has jaguar ears, a jaguar-skinned chin, and jaguar paws, and he presides over maize and cacao plants with a large merchant's backpack propped behind him (Figure 7.12a). As we have mentioned, he seems to be hunting birds. He holds a stick, possibly covered with glue, while a quetzal descends on the cacao tree before him. The contents of God L's backpack underlines his lowland origin: a turtle carapace, a strange gourdlike object, a bundle of cotton mantles, a bunch of long blue-green (evidently quetzal) feathers, and a tied bundle

(possibly with cacao beans). It is worth noting that this bundle is identical to the one of the Calakmul *ebet* messengers on the vase κ5453 (Figure 7.3). The backpack is propped against God L's staff, which is pointed on one edge like the merchant's staff from the Chichen Itza stuccoed and painted vessel discussed earlier (Figure 7.10d). Apparently, the staff could serve as a walking stick, a weapon, and a support for the backpack (Santana Sandoval et al. 1990:333).

God L's name (Figure 7.13) and his relation to other deities are not well understood. One of his names seems to begin with the logogram /ITZAM/, identifying him as a manifestation of the old creator deity along with the celestial God D—Itzam “Principal Bird Deity”—and terrestrial/aquatic God N—Itzam K'an Ahk, Itzam “Snail” (Martin 2006b; Stuart 2007 [1994]). The second part of God L's name is the /AAT/ logogram, so his full name may be Itzam Aat (Figure 7.13a). That said, God L's name in the codices (e.g., Dresden Codex, pages 14b, 14c, 23c) is written with a single distinct logogram (Figure 7.13b) and what look like additional appellatives that possibly indicate overlap or fusion with other gods.

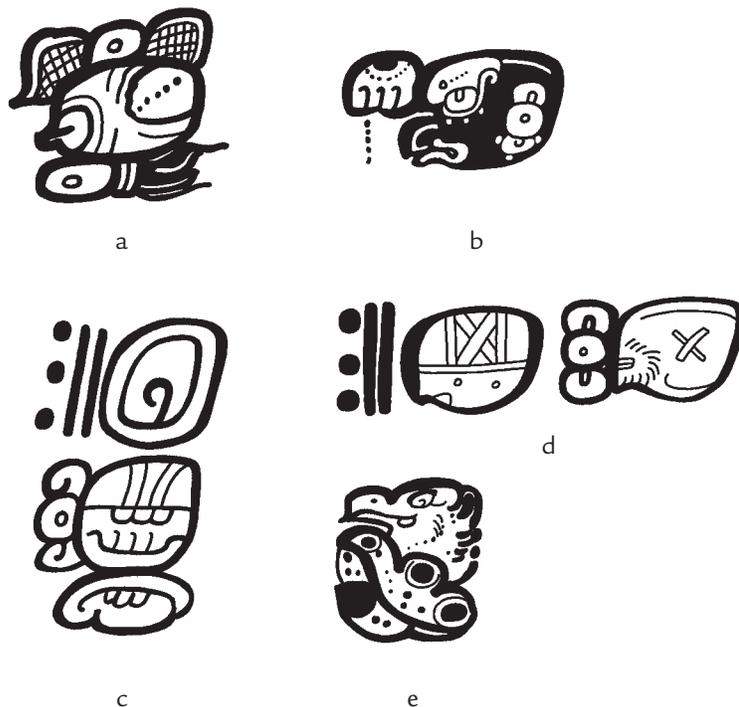


figure 7.13

Names of God L and his owl hat: a) detail of the caption on a Late Classic vase (κ1398); b) detail of page 14 of the Dresden Codex; c) detail of the caption on a Late Classic vase (κ5359); d) detail of page 7 of the Dresden Codex; and e) detail of the caption on a Late Classic vase (κ1398). (Drawings by Alexandre Tokovinine.)

God L's specific headdress depicts an owl widely (but erroneously) known as a "Moan Bird." Some representations of God L feature a /13-CHAN-NAL/ collocation on top of the owl head, referring to *huuxlajuun chan(nal) kuy* ("13 Sky Place Owl") who appears in the codices as a separate entity (Dresden Codex, pages 7c, 10a; Figure 7.13d). A caption on the unprovenienced vase in the Kerr database (κ5359) identifies God L as /13-? yu-CHAN-na/ (Figure 7.13c) (Miller and Martin 2004:58–63). God L's statement on another unprovenienced vessel mentioned previously (κ1398; Beliaev and Davletshin 2007:24, fig. 2) refers to the headdress as "my owl" (*ni-kuy*) (Figure 7.13e), confirming the identification of the headdress as Huxlajuun Chanal Kuy. Consequently, there is probably no connection between God L's name, his headdress, and Tamoachan, contrary to some earlier suggestions (Taube 1992:85).

God L and the sun god refer to each other as "my *mam*" (grandfather/grandson) (Beliaev and Davletshin 2007:25, figs. 4–5). The sixth-century Stela 43 at Naranjo (photographs on file in the Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions archive, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University) shows its ruler, "Aj Wosaj" Chan K'inich, and his predecessor (and father) Pik Chan Ahk as diurnal and nocturnal solar deities, with God L hovering above as one of their ancestors. When God L is not traveling, he is represented as a lord seated in a palace that seems to be inside a mountain complete with water bands, crossed bones, disembodied eyes, and other underworld indicia (Miller and Martin 2004:58–63; Velásquez García 2009). Two such scenes, also on vases from the vicinity of Naranjo (K2796 and K7750), feature God L seated on a throne and gesturing toward six deities before him. A caption to the image describes the "ordering" (*tz'akaj*) of six groups of deities on the creation day of 4 Ajaw 8 Kumk'u. God L's prosperity is indicated by the *ikaatz* bundle—a convention that usually refers to prized jade jewelry, the ultimate expression of wealth (Stuart 2006). In another palatial scene ("Princeton vase," or κ511), four young wives attend to God L; two of them make chocolate.

At least three Classic Maya narratives deal with what may be described as the humiliation of God L, and it remains unclear whether these are interconnected stories or regional variants. In all of them, God L loses his possessions or even his life. In some versions, he recovers his wealth, but only after submitting himself to the authority of other deities. The most widespread myth evokes the theme of the resurrection of the maize god. According to Martin, who has discussed this narrative in a number of publications (Martin 2006a, 2010; Miller and Martin 2004:58–63), the story involves the maize god's death and descent into the underworld, where he apparently becomes a cacao/maize tree, the source of God L's wealth. The lightning god K'awiil descends into the underworld and retrieves cacao and maize seeds.

The earliest evidence of this narrative can be traced to the aforementioned Early Classic ceramic box that shows God L (Figure 7.11a) and K'awiil with the seeds. Late Classic allusions to the narrative, particularly in Campeche, also abound. The story is clearly important during the Terminal Classic–Early Postclassic period, as revealed in the decorations of the Temple of the Owls at Chichen Itza (Martin 2006a:174–175, figs. 8.14–8.15). As pointed out by Martin (2006a), the legend likely evokes the agricultural cycle, and although God L and K'awiil appear as adversaries, their roles are complementary to the point that the imagery overlaps. For example, a column from Bakna, Campeche, shows God L carrying K'awiil in a backpack (Figure 7.14). A set of columns possibly looted from the same structure features God L and K'awiil next to a merchant's bundle (Mayer 1987:pls. 157, 159–160). Some scenes on Chochola-style vessels present God L with K'awiil's head in his hand or on his back (Robicsek 1978:pls. 154, 205–206, 215–217, figs. 137, 188–189).

Another myth also discussed by Martin (2006a) features the Hero Twins and the maize god as the main actors in God L's downfall. The Hero Twins' involvement is hinted at in the scene on the Princeton vase and made very clear on an unprovenienced Late Classic vessel (κ5359), where they strip God L of his clothes and jewels and disembowel his underworld companion (see also Miller

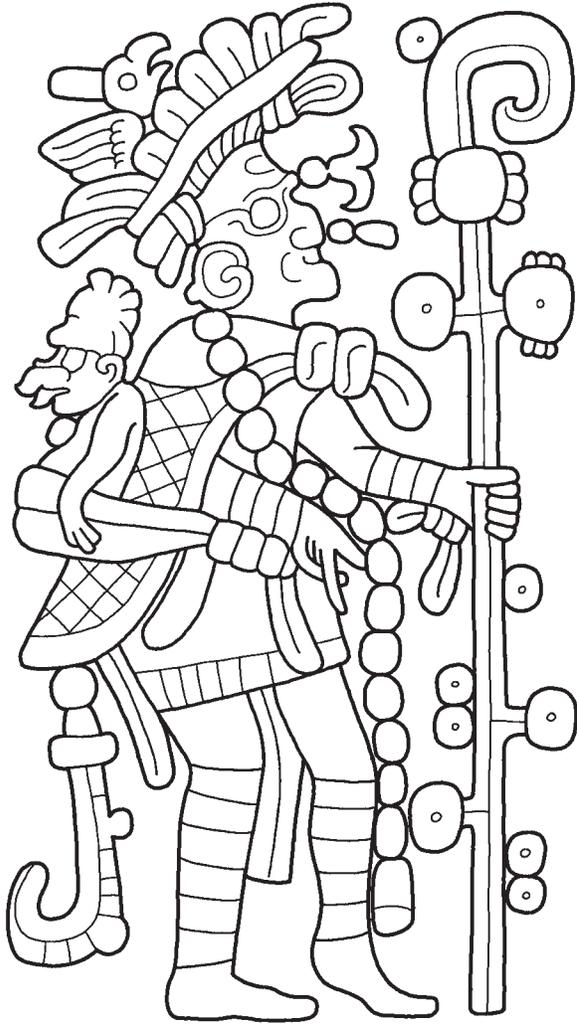


figure 7.14  
Detail of the column from Bakna, Campeche.  
(Drawing by Alexandre Tokovinine, after Taube  
1992:fig. 41a and Villar 2003:53).

and Martin 2004:58–63; Velásquez García 2009). The maize god version is presented on another unprovenienced vase ( $\kappa 1560$ ; Miller and Martin 2004:fig. 22) that seems to show maize god’s triumph over three aged deities, including God L, who are forced to part with their jewelry and clothing. Unfortunately, the captions to the scenes still evade secure translation.

In the third version or third part of the story, God L falls to some kind of mischief orchestrated by the rabbit and the Moon Goddess, and loses his

clothes, jewelry, hat, and “tribute” (*patan*). Two scenes on an unprovenienced vase from the Naranjo area ( $\kappa 1398$ ; Beliaev and Davletshin 2007:fig. 1; Miller and Martin 2004:fig. 23; Stuart 1993) apparently show a rather rude dialogue between the rabbit and a naked God L, followed by God L’s unsuccessful attempt to seek help at the court of his grandson, the sun deity (Beliaev and Davletshin 2007:22–29). In this instance, the story seemingly ends at the court of the Moon Goddess’s husband, God D, whom God L, with the help of other underworld deities, successfully petitions for the return of his possessions (Figure 7.15) (Tokovinine 2006). Feasting is evoked, and some scenes show tribute mantles or bundles, possibly those stolen from God L (Taube 1992:fig.43c–d).

There are probably more versions of the narrative about God L’s destruction. For instance, Martin (2010) argues that scenes in the Dresden Codex (page 46c) may be interpreted as God L falling victim to the flood, his possessions recovered by Chahk in a canoe (see Figure 7.20b). What is important for the present discussion, however, is the relationship between God L, as a wealthy merchant god, and deities who essentially represent royal authority and the very idea of kingship—K’awiil, Hero Twins, maize god, sun god, and God D. These myths seemingly reveal, according to Martin (2010), a rather ambivalent attitude toward merchants and a clear emphasis on who has authority. In the end, God L has to plead for help at the courts of the sun god and God D. God L’s subordination or even servility to the solar deity is also suggested by the imagery of the central panel in the sanctuary of the Temple of the Sun at Palenque, where he and another jaguar-eared underworld deity support the insignia of the sun god—the flint-pointed spear and the shield (Schele and Freidel 1990:259).

The rabbit narrative is particularly interesting given that a large portion of these objects come from the area of Naranjo. One of the 4 Ajaw 8 Kumk’u vases mentioned above ( $\kappa 7750$ ) identifies the location of God L’s court as K’inchil—one of the places previously conquered by the rulers of Naranjo according to the inscription on Stela 22 at the site (Graham 1975:56; Martin and Grube

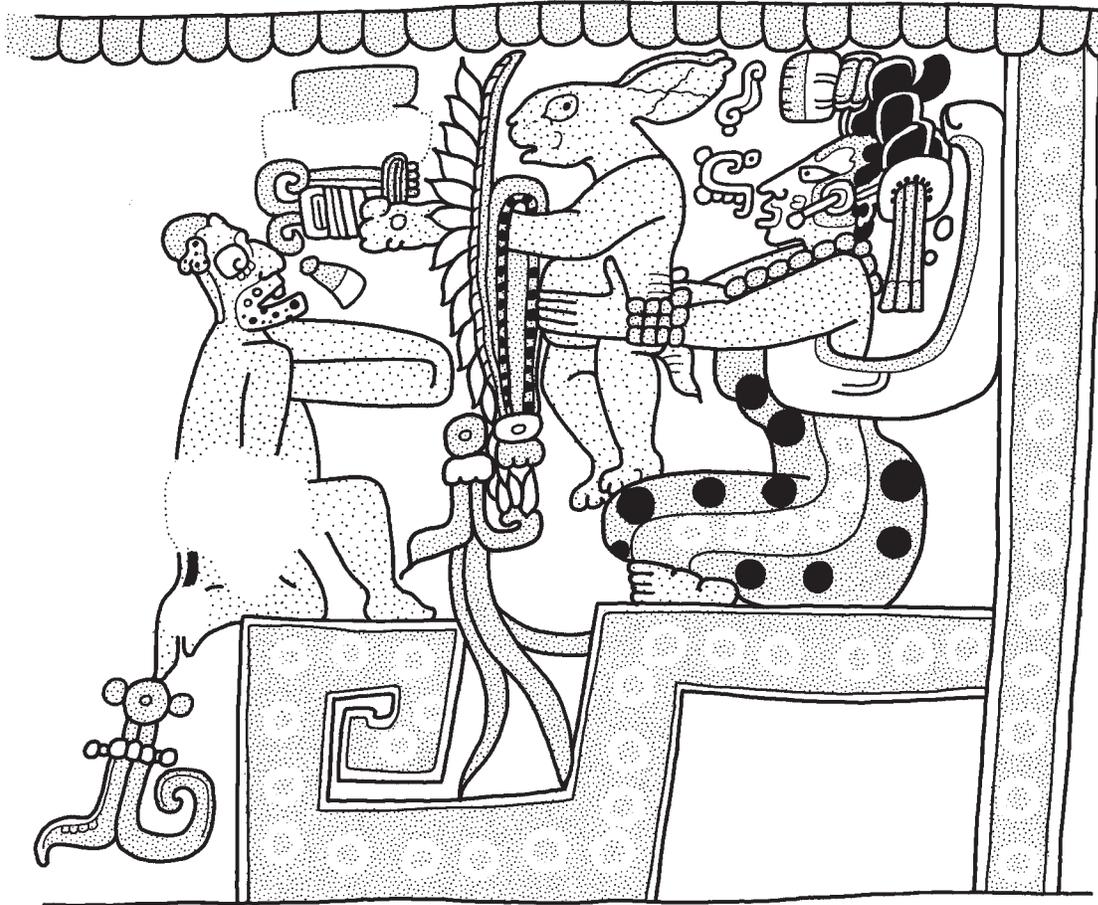


figure 7.15  
Detail of the Late Classic vessel (K5166). (Drawing by Alexandre Tokovinine.)

2008). One may only wonder whether God L was the K'inchil's patron deity. The emphasis on God L's downfall in the rhetoric of Naranjo inscriptions would have been directly linked to the region's military conquests, not unlike the narrative imagery, which celebrated Naranjo's victories in campaigns against the Yaxha lords (Grube 2000b:363–365; Martin and Grube 2008).

God L was not the only protagonist of Classic Maya myths involving merchants. One of these narratives is revealed on a Late Classic vase of unknown provenience (K7727; Tunesi 2008:fig. 3). The protagonists are a toad-like creature with a merchant's tumpline (Figure 7.16), a Hero Twin (Juun Ajaw), and God D. In one section of this vase, Juun Ajaw appears to confront the creature with a tumpline

topped by a hat and with a gourd and a jar attached (Figure 7.16b). A hat attached to the tumpline is a common iconographic motif related to trade. It can be found at Cacaxtla in the scene discussed previously and in the murals of North Acropolis at Calakmul (Carrasco Vargas et al. 2009:fig. 4). An accompanying commentary informs that “his *ikaatz* is eight thousand,” probably referring to the contents of the unusual merchant's backpack. The second image on the same vase shows God D appraising a macaw and a quetzal, which are presented by a dwarf. This particular episode is known from at least two more vessels (Tunesi 2008:figs. 1, 7). The captions to all three scenes are very similar and seem to record God D's speech as he rejoices in the arrival of “good (things).” Tunesi (2008:23, fig. 8)



a



b

*figure 7.16*

Toad merchant narrative on  
 a) Late Classic panel in the Museo de la Escultura Maya in Campeche (after Tunesi 2008:fig. 8); and b) Late Classic vase (after photographs in the Dumbarton Oaks Pre-Columbian Photography and Fieldwork Archive, LC.CB2.364.03-04). (Drawings by Alexandre Tokovinine.)

also identified a scene on the unprovenienced Late Classic panel in the Museo de la Escultura Maya in Campeche that may represent an earlier episode of the same narrative. In this scene (Figure 7.16a), the toad-like merchant is tying a backpack with the help of God L, who places a bird on its top. The contents of this backpack appear to differ from those shown on  $\kappa 7727$ . The bird might well have been the same bird that would be subsequently appraised by God D. It is tempting to speculate that the attack

on the toad merchant depicted on the vase  $\kappa 7727$  corresponds to his return journey from God D's to God L's court. Yet another part of the same myth may be shown on the unprovenienced Late Classic incised vessel photographed by Justin Kerr ( $\kappa 732$ ). It shows the same merchant toad (who appears to be in distress) behind the Hero Twins, who taste pulque before the seated God D.

Finally, a somewhat more sinister aspect of travel is revealed in the depictions of demons or



figure 7.17  
Detail of a Late Classic  
vessel (K791). (Drawing by  
Alexandre Tokovinine.)

*wahy* (Grube and Nahm 1994; Houston and Stuart 1989) on the unprovenienced Ik'a' vase in the Princeton University Art Museum (Figure 7.17). The demon of the lords of Hux Witznal—Caracol or an unidentified Peten site with the same name—is called “dead man on the road” (*tahn bihil chamiiy*). He is depicted accordingly: a skeleton with blades in his joints (an indication of joint pain). The presumed ability of this particular royal dynasty to make one’s trip over land very unpleasant and potentially lethal perhaps suggests its real-world control over land transportation.

As we have noted already, God L was an important deity in Campeche and Yucatan, and continued to be so in the later part of the Terminal Classic and Early Postclassic period. He appears in the Dresden Codex (pages 14b, 14c, 23c), where his omens are usually “good” (*utzil*). The exception occurs on page 49, where God L’s form of Venus spears K’awiil. Nevertheless, the Postclassic period sees the introduction of a new deity associated with trade—God M, who is distinguished by his black body paint and grotesque long nose. God M appears on a gilt copper disc found in the Great

Cenote at Chichen Itza, in the Santa Rita murals, and on Mayapan incense burners. Most information about this deity, however, comes from the codices, particularly the later Madrid Codex, where he is depicted in a variety of contexts (Taube 1992:88–92). Most commonly, he is shown with a spear or a pointed staff and a tumpline backpack (Figure 7.18a–b). He also often appears on the road, where he drills fire (Figure 7.18c) and is attacked by various enemies, including God Q (Figure 7.18d; Madrid Codex, pages 51a, 52a, 53ab–55ab, 83a–84a, 91a). These contexts led Paul Schellhas (1904) and, later, Karl Taube (1992:89–92) to conclude that God M should correspond to the Postclassic divine patron of merchants and cacao groves, Ek’ Chuwah, whose unusual facial features possibly stem from a partial conflation with a foreign merchant deity, such as the Aztec merchant god Yacatecutli who likewise has a long pointed nose.

God M’s name, however, consists of just one logogram that looks identical to the appellative of the Classic Maya Jaguar God of the Underworld (Figure 7.19) (Grube 2000a:98–99; Thompson 1960:283). The latter is spelled with two logograms

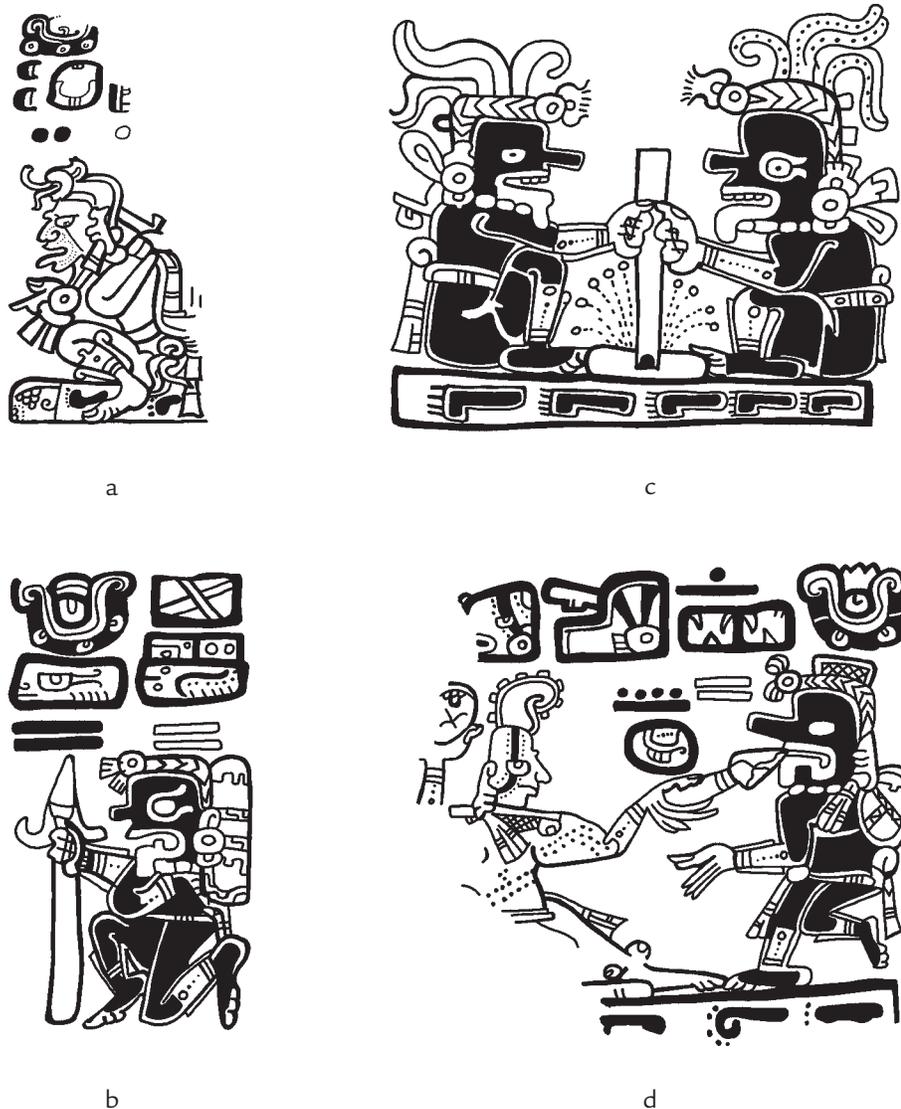


figure 7.18

God M in the codices: a) Dresden Codex, page 46; b) Madrid Codex, page 52; c) Madrid Codex, page 51; and d) Madrid Codex, page 54. (Drawings by Alexandre Tokovinine.)

(Figure 7.19a–b), the second of which is the same as in the name of God M (Figure 7.19c). Moreover, the earliest images of God M, such as the Chichen Itza disc, show attributes of God L or JGU: an aged look, long canines, spots around the mouth, and jaguar ears (Taube 1992:fig. 44b–e, 45a). Later God M images also display signs of advanced age, such as a nearly toothless mouth. God M’s association with weapons is another potential link to JGU. God M’s representation in the Dresden Codex (Figure 7.18a) appears to be somewhat out of the

canon because he is shown just as an aged character, walking on a road, with a tumpline and without any grotesque facial features. JGU’s name is not deciphered, although it may be complemented by the /ji/ syllable. Consequently, God M’s name in the codices could be \**chuwaj*, but then it would also be JGU’s name (Lopes 2002). Since JGU is not attested in the Postclassic imagery, God M may as well be his full substitute (see Martin 2005b, 2006b). One scene with God M includes a full phonetic spelling /si/ti-o K’UH/ (Figure 7.19d), but it may be an

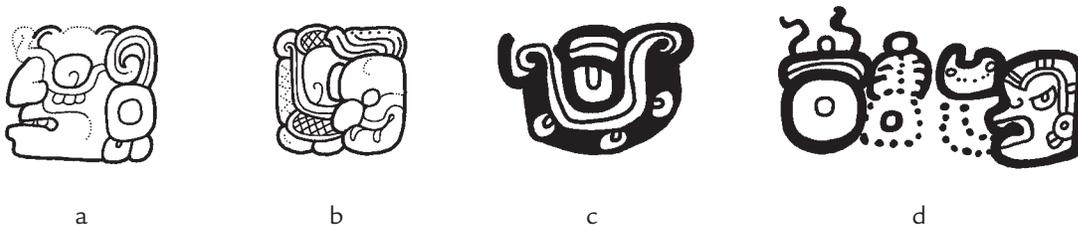


figure 7.19  
Names of Jaguar God of the Underworld and God M: a) Naranjo Stela 30:A7; b) Naranjo Stela 21:B13; c) Madrid Codex, page 52; and d) Madrid Codex, page 109. (Drawings by Alexandre Tokovinine.)

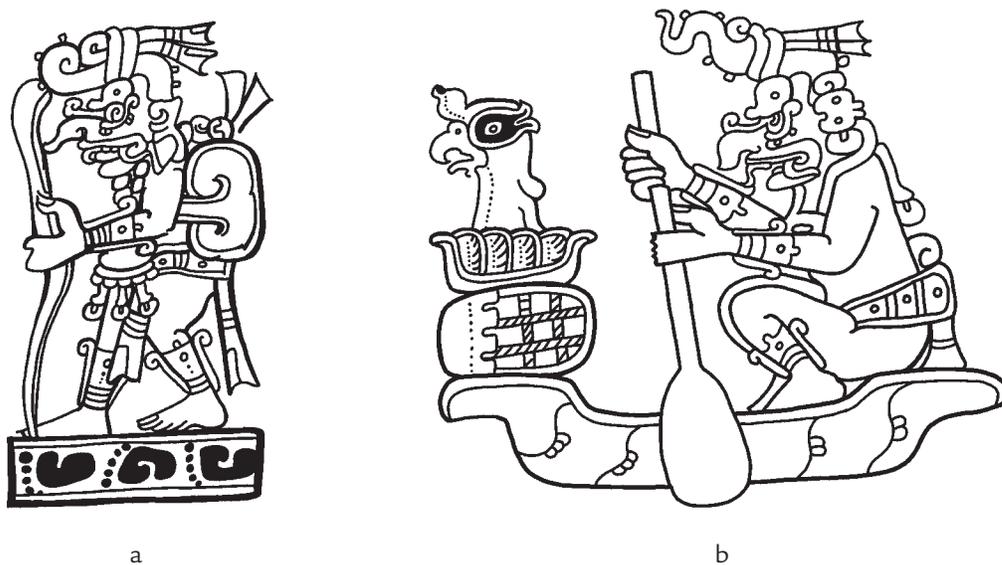


figure 7.20  
Chahk as a merchant in the Dresden Codex: a) page 69; and b) page 46. (Drawings by Alexandre Tokovinine.)

additional title and not a substitution for the JGU name logogram. In any case, there is no one-to-one correspondence between God M's name and the Postclassic merchant deity known from the early colonial sources. The situation is complicated by the fact that the etymology of the word *chuwaj* is unclear. Ralph Roys reports it in the name of a kind of black scorpion (in Barrera Vásquez et al. 1995:151), and the Motul dictionary cites it as part of the name of a kind of wild bee (Ciudad Real 1995 [ca. 1590]:21). Either example makes sense because God M may appear with a scorpion tail (M82a–83a), and he is one of the deities mentioned in the beekeeping section of the Madrid Codex. But these contexts of the *chuwaj* gloss seem to be secondary to the deity's name and do not explain its significance. There is

no such gloss for scorpion or bee in any other Maya language. Given that JGU's name is attested since the Early Classic period, the gloss in his name should be more widespread. According to colonial authors, the Chontal version of the deity's name seems to be Ik' Chawa (see above) and the Chol-speaking Lacandon's version is Chua (Marjil de Jesús et al. 1984 [1695]:12).

Taube suggested another parallel between God M and God L, noting that, according to Landa, the cacao ceremony in honor of Ek Chuah was organized in the month Muan (Taube 1992:92). But as shown above, "Moan Bird" associations for God L should be discarded. Except for the overlapping of functions as trade patrons and merchants, there is no evidence that some attributes

of God M were derived from those of God L of the Classic period.

God M is not the only Postclassic deity linked to travel. The Dresden Codex shows Chahk as a traveler walking down the road with a tumpline backpack (Figure 7.20a). Chahk is also shown in a canoe loaded with God L's possessions (Figure 7.20b). The latter scene, as we have discussed, may be interpreted as a kind of postapocalyptic recovery of God L's things, but it may also be seen as a link between Chahk and trade. It is also the only image that establishes some association between traveling in canoe and trading. Despite the prominence of maritime trade in the Postclassic period, there is no clear sign of it when it comes to trade-related deities in the codices. They all seem to be walking. It is potentially significant that Landa's account of pretravel rituals also seems to deal exclusively with land travel (Tozzer 1941 [ca. 1566]:107).

### Concluding Remarks

As we have made clear, the main obstacle in exploring the lives of merchants in ancient Maya society is the social and political context of the surviving written and visual narratives, which do not appear to be particularly concerned with trade and traders. On the other hand, linguistic data suggest the emergence of key trade-related activities during the Preclassic period and the subsequent prominence of Ch'olan-speaking merchants in the Late Classic period. Rare glimpses into the world of trade and traveling provided by murals at Calakmul, La Sufricaya, and Chichen Itza indicate that trade and traders were part of the social, political, and economic fabric of the Classic Maya world. Classic Maya merchants, nevertheless, were clearly not as prominent politically and socially as their Postclassic counterparts. There is no evidence that Classic Maya rulers and their families were directly involved in trade. Among various courtly officials, *ebeet* messengers are the likeliest candidates for individuals who could have taken the role of long-distance traders. *Aj-kakaw* titles of some carvers and other subroyal individuals also suggest possible engagement in trade.

The world of Classic Maya deities and lesser supernatural creatures offers another perspective on traders and travelers that hints at greater importance of these activities in certain regions and communities, such as parts of Campeche and areas near Palenque and Naranjo. God L's interactions with the divine patrons of royalty—including the sun god, the maize god, the Moon Goddess, and the Hero Twins—reflect some ambivalence in the Classic Maya attitude toward trade and traders. God L is apparently rich and powerful, and yet he and his associates are constantly humiliated and stripped of their possessions by various divine patrons of Classic Maya rulers, forced to present gifts or tribute and to seek patronage at their courts.

Visual and written narratives also imply a gradual shift in emphasis from the Classic pantheon to the deities known from early colonial sources, although there is no one-to-one match between the early colonial Ek' Chuwaaj and his potential representation, known as God M, in the codices. It is tempting to link this change in the pantheon to the increased role of merchants in Postclassic social and political life.

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