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RETHINKING CLASSIC LOWLAND MAYA POTTERY CENSERS

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Abstract

Classic lowland Maya censers can be described in terms of two general categories, image (or effigy) and non-image. The function and meaning of these *incensarios* is approached through consideration of their embellishment, symbolism, and contexts of use and recovery. It is suggested that in Peten and some adjacent areas, Classic image censers were part of the paraphernalia of divine kingship, associated with termination rituals and a royal funerary cult. Non-image and particularly spiked censers were more associated with birth/renewal, earth, rain, and calendrical rituals involving fire drilling. Their use became widespread in the lowlands during the Terminal Classic period, with the "collapse" of divine kingship and elite power.

Incense burners are a rich and distinctive, but surprisingly understudied, component of Maya ceremonialism. These artifacts are, as the name suggests, containers used to burn various kinds of naturally occurring aromatic resins and gums, although other materials and offerings may have been burned in them as well. Usually made of clay or stone, these vessels are referred to by English- and Spanish-speaking archaeologists as censers, *incensarios*, braziers or *braseros*, or sometimes *sahumadores* ("smokers"). Compared to other categories of Maya pottery and ceremonialism, relatively little research has been devoted to illuminating the ritual concepts and behaviors associated with *incensarios* or toward achieving a deeper understanding of the role of incense burners in the Maya area.[1] However, spatial and temporal variations in form, embellishment, and context of recovery of these vessels provide archaeologists with a virtually untapped resource for social, economic, and ceremonial inferences, over and above the more pedestrian operations of classification and chronology building.

This paper is an exploration of the use, function, and meaning of Classic lowland Maya *incensarios*, particularly in the central Peten area. The overview is informed by several sources of data: archaeological (i.e., spatial and architectural contexts of recovery); iconographic (embellishments on the censers themselves, plus occasional representations of censers on stelae and Postclassic codices, and, more rarely still, on painted pottery); and ethnographic/ethnohistoric. The objective is to develop a framework for interpreting regional and historical patterns of censer use in the Maya lowlands.

INCENSE AND INCENSE BURNERS

Incensarios were used in the intense and diversified ritual life of nearly all ancient Mesoamerican societies. Found not just among the Maya but also in Mexican cultures, and in highlands and lowlands, incense burners were made and used from the Preclassic period into the centuries of the Classic and Postclassic eras, through Spanish contact and into modern times.

> As a general homage to deities, incense was burned in front of their effigies. Incense offerings were also made in New Year rituals, in architectural renewal of temples and pyramids, and in offerings to sacred bodies of water. . . . [the smoke of burning incense] functioned as a link between mortals and their gods; a means of homage, a prayer [Berlo 1982:85].

In the Maya region, each prehistoric chronological subdivision and cultural subarea boasted its own stylistic variants of what is actually a comparatively limited repertoire of basic censer forms. The receptacle holding the incense or other substance is usually relatively simple—a shallow plate, an open dish or bowl, or a narrow vase or chalice—but these shapes were often elaborated by the addition of handles (e.g., the ladle censer), attached bases (often a pedestal to elevate the receptacle), or flanges, or through use of a separate support and/or cover, thereby creating compound or composite censer forms. Any and all of these components could be richly elaborated with modeled, stuccoed, and painted human and animal features, sometimes only their heads and limbs, but often full-figure effigies. Indeed, many effigies are representations of specific deities of the Maya, patrons of vital forces and beings in the natural and supernatural worlds. In displaying these representations, pottery *incensarios* are similar to several other categories of ceramics employed in Maya ceremonial activity over the millennia, for example vessels placed in dedicatory caches, accompanying burials, or used in household observance. At the same time, it must be remembered that not all incense burners were made of fired clay: documentary sources and archaeological excavations indicate that these ritual objects (and associated effigies) were also made of stone, plaster or stucco, wood, jade, and rubber (see Thompson 1970:189–191).

[1] Important exceptions to this generalization demand mention, however: e.g., Benyo (1979), Bishop et al. (1982), Ferree (1967, 1972), Gann (1934), Goldstein (1977), Rands and Rands (1959), and Rands et al. (1979).

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Just as archaeologists refer to incense and incense burners by a number of terms, so too did the Maya. Dictionaries and ethnographic accounts reveal Maya words for incense, *incensario*, and their use (*incensar*, "to cense"). Unfortunately, however, there is not always a clear correspondence between colonial or modern Mayan words for *incensarios* and their use, and objects recovered in archaeological excavations (see Houston et al. [1989] for discussion of Classic Maya pottery ethnotaxonomy; their discussion, however, excludes censers).

Maya incense is usually identified as *pom* or copal (Nahuatl *copalli*), typically the resin of the copal tree (L. *Protium copal*) of lowland forests. Among the contemporary Lacandon Maya, *pom* is made from resin of the pitch pine (*Pinus pseudostrobos*) (McGee 1990:44). Another Yucatec Maya term for incense is *jaak'*, defined as *incienso del país* (in contrast to *kastellan pom*, "Spanish incense"), made from a small tree identified as *Notoptera leptocephala* (*Diccionario maya, yucatec–español* [*Diccionario maya*] 1991:173). Other tropical hardwood and pine resins also were burned as incense by Maya past and present; e.g., resins from trees of the *Bursera* genus (Vogt 1976) and rubber (*Castilla elastica*; McGee 1990:91; Miller and Taube 1993:99, 144). Given so many alternatives, different types of saps, gums, and resins may have had distinct functions. In the *Popol Vuh*, the sacred history of the highland K'iche' Maya, for example, offerings of incense to lords of the Underworld, Xibalba, were limited to the sap of the croton (*Croton sanguifluus*), whereas the copal incense used today by the K'iche' is identified as a resin from the bark of the *palo jilote* tree (*Hymenaea verrucosa*) (Tedlock 1985:46, 332, 334).

Incense is represented in Maya hieroglyphic writing and images. Glyphs T687b, T141, and T93 (Figure 1a–c) have been read as referring to incense as **pom**, **po-m(o)**, or **ch'aj** (Bricker 1984:233; Lounsbury 1973:107). A variant of the **pom** glyph (see Figure 1b) is often shown in the mouths of smoking spiked cylindrical censers in the Postclassic Dresden Codex (Figure 1d). Glyph T93 (see Figure 1c) is composed of two parts: a rosette (which resembles nodules of copal molded by the contemporary Lacandon; Figure 1e) and a hachured basal portion. But Classic-period glyphic and pictographic references to incense do not always record their specific uses, shapes, or contents. Sometimes T93 **ch'aj** is shown along with T710 **chok**, the "hand-scattering" glyph (Figure 1f), referring to the scattering or sprinkling of incense (Bricker 1984:233–234, 1986:Figure 17). This may be a Classic-period analog of a much later practice of censing deity images (perhaps of wood?) with a mixture of specific numbers of kernels of maize and incense known as *ch'aj te* (Love 1987) or *ch'ajalte* (Tozzer [1941:140–141], who notes Roys's etymological derivation from *ch'ajal* ["drops"], referring to the appearance of drops of gum used as incense).

Mayan glyphs thought to designate censers and related pottery vessels have been glossed as plate forms (Table 1): **lak** ("clay plate") or **sak lak** ("white clay plate") (Freidel et al. [1993:214–215] refer to the vessel in question as a "bucket"; see also Houston et al. [1989]). White stone drum-like censers at Copan were called **sak lak tun** ("white plate stone"; Figure 1g) (Stuart 1986; also Freidel et al. 1993:450, Note 87). Similarly, contemporary Lacandon Maya refer to their clay incense burners as *lak-il k'uj* ("pot god" or "plate god"),[2] although another vessel, *pak*, is described as a "large clay pot with the face of the god *B'ol* on it" and is used to hold *b'alche* (McGee 1990:45, 49).

Yucatec Mayan dictionaries (e.g., *Diccionario maya* 1991) give several words for *incensario*, *incensar*, and *brasero*, and the distinctions have some potential for illuminating ancient usage of such vessels. For example, two words used by archaeologists as synonyms for censer are *brasero* (brazier) and *sahumador* (smoker). A strict translation of brazier/*brasero* is "an object holding hot coals (*brasas*) placed under the bed for heat" (Yucatec *moj*), but *brasero* also can mean coal burner or, more generally, *incensario*. *Incensario*, in turn, is referenced by various Mayan terms that could be glossed as "smoker." For example, *ch'uyub' chuk* refers to an *incensario*, but a literal translation would be "hanger [of] coal." This could refer to the type of smoking censer swung by Catholic priests; it might also refer to prehistoric ladle censers that could have held burning, smoking incense and been swept around a room. Another Mayan word for *incensario* is *p'ul* ("smoker," "vessel that smokes," and "smoking"). Variants of *p'ul* include *p'ultaj* (verb "to smoke") and *p'ulut* (verb "to smoke, to perfume by smoking" [*sahumar*], and "to cense"). Finally, *incensarios* are referred to in Yucatec Maya as *yum k'aak'* (or *yum k'ak'*, "señor/lord of fire")[3] and *yum pom* ("señor/lord of copal"). It is tempting to suggest that these latter terms may refer to the anthropomorphic or theomorphic *incensarios* so often seen in Classic and Postclassic Maya contexts (see Note 2). Curiously, none of these words referring to smoke and perfumed smoke incorporates the Maya noun and verb *butz'* ("smoke"), although in modern Itzaj Maya *ajmenb'utz'* refers to a person burning incense (Charles Andrew Hofling, personal communication 1998).

A final comment on terminology concerns a particular glyphic compound in the Postclassic *Dresden* and *Madrid* codices, T122:528:87 (Figure 1h). This is most commonly seen in association with God G (= the Sun god, aged Sun god [~Itzamna], Underworld/night sun, GIII), but also with bearded God D. Interpretations of the individual elements of this compound are known (T122—**k'ak'**, "smoke, fire"; T528—**tun**, "stone"; and T87—**te**, "tree, wood"), but Vail (1996:320–321, 357) states that "no one has yet proposed an accepted reading for this compound." She suggests it embodies the idea of "fire" or "fiery." I propose that this compound refers to pottery *incensarios*, specifically to spiked incense burners as representing the Maya world tree (see later).

In sum, ethnohistoric and linguistic evidence suggests that one important use of incense was to burn it in order to create an aromatic smoke that would perfume a space or an "idol." As an example, Landa (Tozzer 1941:140) records that as part of Wayeb' rites, the priests and men of a town went in procession to a statue of a god, where they burned a mix of maize and incense "in the

[2] A related Classic term is *kum k'u*, "pot (of) god" (Freidel et al. 1993:214, 450, Note 88), which recalls the Maya month of Kumk'u (but is translated by the *Diccionario maya* [1991:352] as "potters' kiln"). Another term is *ol*, which may translate as "god pot" but also "heart" or "portal" to the Underworld, or "central place of gods" (Taube 1994:656, 668; also Freidel et al. 1993:215). Other deity images or effigies can be identified by the terms *winb'a* or *k'oj*, and when on pottery vessels they may be considered "receptacles for divine force and the tangible medium through which gods consume offerings made to them" (Houston and Stuart 1996:302, 304). Houston and Stuart do not connect their discussion specifically to *incensarios*, however.

[3] K'ak' is the Lacandon god of fire, who is also a god of war (McGee 1990:62) and patron of roads who protects travelers against snakes and jaguars (*Diccionario maya* 1991:365). In this regard, it is interesting to note that Taube (1992:88–92) mentions Gods L, M, and Ek' Chuwaj, all of whom have fire associations. In the Postclassic, Ek' Chuwaj was a god of merchants and of travelers in general.

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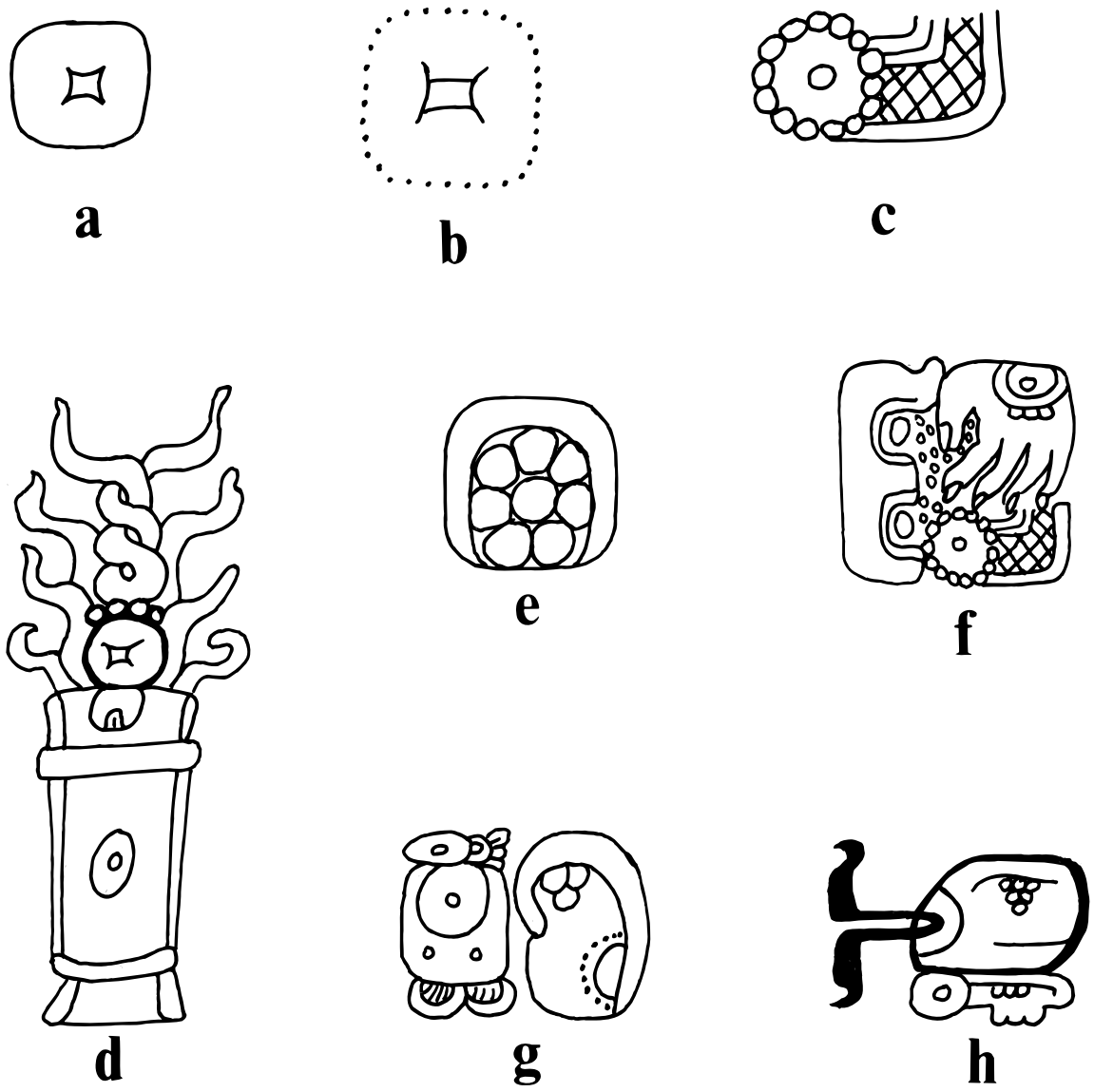


Figure 1. Glyphs for incense and incense burners: (a) Glyph T141, **ich** or **po**; (b) Glyph T687b, **mo** or **(o)m**; (c) Glyph T93, **ch'aj**; (d) Postclassic *Dresden Codex*, 28a, showing **pom** (copal incense) glyph topped with four nodules, in the mouth of a smoking spiked *incensario*; (e) Glyph T647, a ball of incense topped with eight nodules, reminiscent of nodules of copal laid out on a board in modern Lacandon ritual (McGee 1990:94–95); (f) glyphic compound T1:710:93, **u-ch'ok-ch'aj** ("he scattered incense"); (g) glyphic compound T58:534:25:528, **sak lak tun**, "white plate stone" (i.e., stone *incensario*?); (h) glyphic compound T122:528:87, **smoke stone tree** (i.e., a type of *incensario*, specifically spiked censers?).

brazier of the idol and perfumed him." At the same time, incense was also a Maya ritual offering, with or without burning:

> The offering of incense was considered an act of purification that linked the sacrificial object or person to the gods. . . . When burnt, copal yields abundant smoke, and in this smoke could be seen ancestors as well as the gods to whom an offering was being made [Miller and Taube 1993:99].

Indeed, the *Diccionario maya* makes reference to this usage as well: *tak' pom* ("offer incense by sticking it on to something") and *took pom* (or *tok pom*, offer incense to an idol by burning; cf. *Diccionario maya* 1991:805). This notion of copal or other incense as an offering is supported by archaeological evidence, as lumps or cakes of incense are sometimes recovered in archaeological contexts. For example, large lumps of unburned copal were found in Early Classic slipped (i.e., non-censer) dishes at Uaxactun (Smith 1955:Figure 84f, j); some of these may have been items of tribute, as suggested by the inscription *ikatz* on one of the vessels (Stephen D. Houston, personal communication 1996). Small "drops" of incense may have been "scattered" from a ruler's hand as suggested by some Late Classic iconography (Hammond 1982; Love 1987). In addition, cakes, balls, and modeled figures made of unburned copal and rubber were recovered from the cenote at Chichen Itza, some in pottery bowls; beads of jade and shell were often set into the tops of the balls (Coggins and Shane 1984:Figures 153–161). The Lacandon sometimes consider offerings of incense as payment to a god for future favors (McGee 1990).

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Table 1. Suggested Maya censer (and other related) terminology

Category/Maya Term	Meaning	Related Glyph(s)
Incense, incense burners, and their use		
pom	incense; copal resin	T141, T687b
ch'aj	incense, drops	T93
tak' pom	sticking incense on (spiked?) censers	
tok pom	burning incense (in *yum k'ak* or *yum pom*?)	
b'utz'	smoke	
ajmenb'utz'	"smoke maker"; person burning incense	
Non-image censers?		
lak	clay plate	
sak lak	white clay plate	
sak lak tun	"white plate stone" ("white plate of the stone"?)	
ch'uyub chuk	"coal hanger"; ladle censer?	
p'uul	smoker, censer	
k'ak' tun te	"fire stone tree"	T122:528:87
Image censers?		
kum k'u	god pot	
ol	god pot	
winb'a	effigy image censer	
yum k'ak'	lord of fire	
p*yum pom*	lord of incense	
Maya titles associated with fire ceremonies (*och k'ak'*)		
Yajaw K'ak'	Lord of Fire	
K'ul K'ak'	Holy Fire	
Ch'ajom K'ak'	Fire Scatterer	
Non-censer pottery[a]		
lak	plate or dish	
jawa(n)te	wide dish (*jawan* is "laid face-up")	
yuchib' (?)	drinking vessel	
kakaw	chocolate (tall vase for)	
ul sakja	*atole* (globular bowl for)	
p'uul	*cántaro*	
kum	olla	
xamach	*comal*	
moj	brazier for domestic use	

[a]See also Houston et al. (1989).

Maya incense burners and related ceremonial vessels have the potential to yield significant insights into diverse aspects of ancient Maya life, particularly ritual behavior, beliefs, and cosmological symbolism. It is generally agreed that the Maya drew a conceptual equivalence among a series of precious substances used in rituals of sacrifice to the gods: incense, water, maize, human blood, and perhaps *b'alche*. Incense is the resin or sap or, metaphorically, the "blood" of trees. In the Classic and Postclassic periods, incense was often formed into cakes or balls—perhaps symbolic of human hearts?—and coated with the blue-green pigment known as "Maya blue," which designated sacred or precious substances. At the same time, incense and maize seem to have been physically and symbolically merged in certain ritual contexts. In colonial Yucatan, for example, copal was often ground and mixed with maize in offerings to deities (Tozzer 1941:140). The modern Lacandon Maya believe that when incense is burning in a pottery censer, "the incense transforms into tortillas, which the gods consume" (McGee 1990:44; see also Vogt 1976). Similarly, Taube (1998:446) interpreted codex depictions of round objects in pottery vessels as tamales, drawing an analogy between Classic Maya *incensarios* and domestic hearths: "incense burners are the kitchen hearths of the gods and ancestors" in which "food" for the gods is ceremonially "cooked" for them (see Note 2).

At the most fundamental level, censers are obviously and physically linked to fire, but also symbolically with rain (and so, by a series of metaphorical extensions, with sun and life). For example, the billowing black smoke of the burning copal incense or rubber may be seen as symbolic representation of dark rain clouds, and it is said that incense was burned to attract the attention of the rain gods (Thompson 1975:xxiii; see also ceremonies to Chaks described by Landa [Tozzer 1941:162–165]). Censers used by twentieth-century Lacandon Maya had a domed cover to collect the soot from the burning copal: "it represents the dome of the sky, and the soot is symbolic of the black rain clouds" (Satterthwaite 1946:18). The Lacandon burn their incense with "virgin fire" (*suhuy k'ak'*) newly kindled in the "god house" before the ceremony (McGee 1990:53). All of these notions—incense, rain, fire—are interrelated: "As the vitalizing centers of temples, censers symbolized the . . . hearth of the Maya household. . . . [and] the house and seat of conjured gods" (Taube 1998:466). On a more abstract level, *incensarios* and the burning of incense define boundaries of ritual space and practice, mediate transitions between sacred and profane, and invite the presence of the ancestors/gods. The vessels and the rising perfumed smoke symbolize both a central place and a liminal portal of transformation and communication between the realm of the human or natural and that of the divine or supernat-

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ural (Freidel et al. 1993:214–218; Goldstein 1977:418; Taube 1994:668; 1998).

CENSERS IN THE SOUTHERN MAYA HIGHLANDS

Several synthetic articles published more than 30 years ago (e.g., Borhegyi 1956, 1965; Rands and Smith 1965; Smith and Gifford 1965) provide broad outlines of changing styles and uses of prehistoric censers in the Maya area. At that time, more was known about *incensarios* in the highlands, much of it due to the work of Borhegyi (1951a, 1951b, 1965; see also Rands and Smith 1965:109, 143–144), as compared to the lowlands, where censers were said to have been only "rarely and selectively used" prior to Terminal Classic times (Smith and Gifford 1965:523).

In several places in Mesoamerica, including the Gulf Coastal (Olmec) lowlands, Pacific coastal Guatemala, and Chalchuapa and Kaminaljuyu in the Maya highlands, three-pronged pottery censers (Figure 2a), often with tall cylindrical supports decorated with masks, flanges, or spikes, can be identified. Sometimes these occurred as composite forms with lids. They began to be used in the late Early Formative or Preclassic period (Borhegyi 1951a,

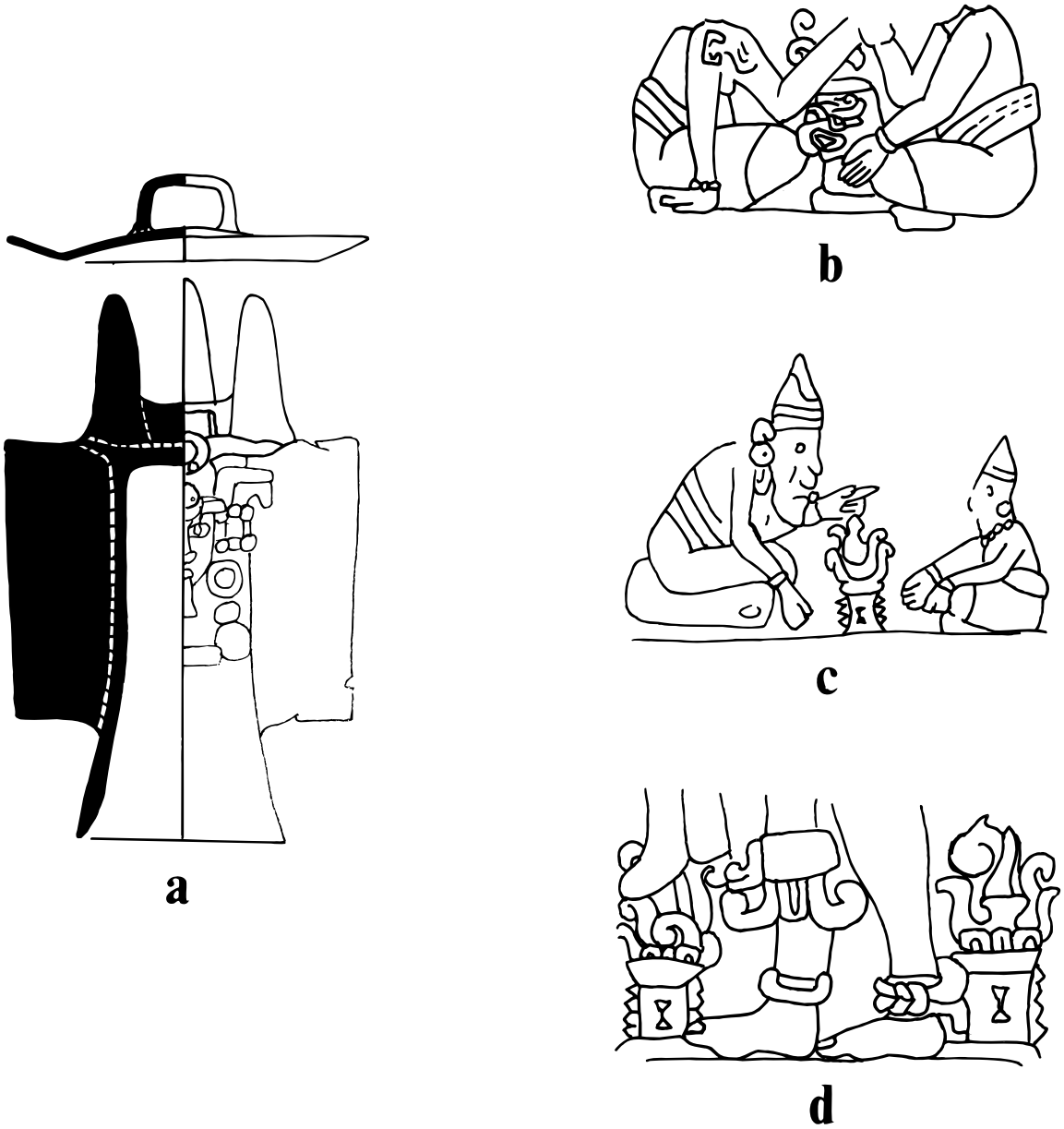


Figure 2. Preclassic *incensarios* in the southern Maya region (not drawn to same scale): (a) Late Preclassic three-pronged censer from Chalchuapa (after Sharer 1978:Figure 35); (b) Izapa Stela 18, showing long-nosed (bird?) image on *incensario* placed between two seated attendants (after Smith 1984:Figure 17a); (c) Izapa Stela 5, showing spiked *incensario* between two seated attendants; person on left may be Huehueteotl, old fire god? (after Smith 1984:Figure 17b); (d) Kaminaljuyu Stela 11, showing smoking composite censers (spiked support plus looped "handles") on either side of a standing figure (after Smith 1984:Figure 41b).

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1959; Goldstein 1977:407; Lowe et al. 1982:Figure 7, No. 12; Sharer 1978:Figures 34–36). The earliest effort at interpreting censer-related beliefs and practices came from Borhegyi (1956:345), who noted that the vessels often portray "aged and bearded individuals, many of them with 'tear streaks' . . . below the eyes." He concluded these were components of an early Mesoamerican farming village "folk cult" focused on rain gods. A major change in form occurred in the Middle and Late Preclassic period, as vessels became more conventionalized and censers with two receptacle chambers, upper and lower, began to be used. Many featured "representations of conventionalized grotesque . . . forms with thick upper lips and overhanging fangs, believed to represent feline (jaguar) or ophidian deities" (Borhegyi 1956:347, 1965:15; Goldstein 1977:409).

Censers seem to have become more prominent in the Late Preclassic period at sites on the Pacific slopes of Guatemala and Chiapas and in the highlands. This is the region where the earliest elaborations of material symbol systems of elite power in the Maya area are to be found, manifest as elite burials, monumental architecture, and the carving of stelae and altars. At Izapa and Kaminaljuyu, incense burners were depicted on Late Preclassic stelae, often positioned between two sitting or standing attendants. Some of these are effigy *incensarios* with long-nosed figures, as seen on Izapa Stela 18 (Figure 2b) (Smith 1984:Figures 17a, 37d, 51b) and perhaps also on Stela 23 and 67. Although Stuart and Houston (1994:60, 64, Figure 79) suggest these are "toponymic registers" that are part of "watery place names," they might also be representations of an earth monster/reptile deity. Other vessels are spiked censers (de González and Wetherington 1978; Lowe 1965; Rands and Smith 1965; Smith 1984:47, Figures 10b, 37, and 41b;). Izapa Stela 5, for example, shows an old man (the fire god, Huehueteotl; probably also represented on the early pronged vessels) gesturing before a spiked *incensario* (Figure 2c). Oddly, however, spiked censers do not seem to have been recovered in any quantity from excavations at Izapa (cf. Lowe et al. 1982:Figure 7.9a). At Kaminaljuyu, Stela 11 shows what may be composite censers: spiked stands with three-pronged censer receptacles resting on top (Figure 2d). Clearly the current idiom of interpretation of these *incensarios* has moved well beyond Borhegyi's (1956) early dichotomization of folk versus complex cultures. These elite/cosmic symbols and structures are seen to provide strategic linkages between the "temporal cycles of history [and] the policy of kingship" (Freidel and Schele 1988a:549) as well as apparent representations of mythic scenes and personages from what eventually came to be known as the *Popol Vuh* (Kerr 1992; Tedlock 1992). Ceramic censers constituted an important element of this elite material assemblage: The "Late Preclassic popularity of *incensarios* no doubt went hand-in-hand with the ubiquitous stela-and-altar practice" (Lowe et al. 1982:133).

A second major transformation in highland Maya censer shape, use, and manufacture occurred during the Early Classic period, with the appearance of new forms, techniques, and embellishments thought to have been introduced from Teotihuacan or Oaxaca in central Mexico (Berlo 1982, 1984; Borhegyi 1965:24; Rands and Smith 1965:144; Ruz Lhuillier 1969:231–232). Importantly, apart from some formal similarities these vessels vary considerably in their context of use from region to region. The central Mexican *incensarios* are compound anthropomorphic forms minimally consisting of three parts (Berlo 1982:85, 1984:27–28): a dish or biconical hourglass-shaped form used to hold the incense, a conical lid (sometimes with handles on the sides), and a tubular chimney attached to the back of the lid from which smoke can escape (Figure 3a). Usually the lid and chimney are further embellished with an armature or framework of slabs to which adornos and effigy figures were attached[4] (Figure 3b–c). Despite modeling in the round and layering of adornos, these censers are essentially two-dimensional objects designed for frontal viewing; some seem to be miniature temples or "theaters" (Berlo 1982, 1984:28–29). At Teotihuacan these censers were important objects of household ritual in both the urban center and in the rural valley, having been recovered from burials, subfloor caches or offerings, and on patio altars in residential compounds (Berlo 1984:136; Manzanilla and Carreón 1991). They were usually broken or disassembled before their final placement (Berlo 1982:90).

Highly similar vessels were produced in Oaxaca during Monte Albán III and IV times (especially Monte Albán IIIa, ca. A.D. 450–600/700), and they can be grouped into two distinct types. One is referred to as a *brasero*, a biconical, hourglass-shaped incense burner decorated with *adornos*, which replaced earlier flanged censers. The other is a figural urn, an elaborately modeled human or animal effigy form with a cylindrical vase attached to the back, showing clear stylistic borrowing from Teotihuacan (Berlo 1984: 203–206). These Oaxacan urns were funerary vessels, typically recovered from tombs rather than residential contexts. They sometimes feature symbolism (e.g., jaguar heads with a distinctive "cruller"-like feature around the eyes) also found in the Maya area (see Coggins 1983:57–61).

In the Maya highlands, similar "Teotihuacanoid" censers are known primarily from three places, Escuintla/Tiquisate, Lake Amatitlan, and Kaminaljuyu. At Escuintla, on the Pacific coastal plain of Guatemala, the new censer forms are highly similar to those from central Mexico and are believed to have been made by potters trained in Teotihuacan workshops. They date to what Berlo has called the "Standardization phase" of censer manufacture, ca. A.D. 375–450 (see Berlo 1984:74, 121–129; Hellmuth 1978:72–76; Medrano 1994). At Lake Amatitlan, which lies upslope, roughly midway between Escuintla and Kaminaljuyu, censers were recovered in diving operations in the 1950s (Borhegyi 1965; also Mata Amado and Rubio 1994). These display varied iconographic formats—including Teotihuacan styles and Teotihuacan-Maya styles, but not Escuintla styles—and are believed to date ca. A.D. 425–500 (Berlo 1984:147, 167–168). At Kaminaljuyu, modeled

[4] Berlo (1982:85, 92–93) notes that Teotihuacan *incensarios* were apparently manufactured and assembled in two distinct ways. In one the entire censer was preassembled, with selected *adornos* attached prior to firing; in the other, *adornos* were fired separately, acquired separately by the consumer, and arranged as desired. Either way, the artist or consumer could choose from an assortment of *adornos* and custom build "the incensario like a prayer, focusing on specific symbols for certain needs or occasions." The latter method was apparently the most common, as it allowed "ritual specialists rather than ceramic specialists to choose appropriate insignia for specific occasions." The lowland Classic Maya, by contrast, seem to have exerted much more control over *incensario* manufacture—at least in the manufacture of image censers—as the detailing, whether modeled or applique, was an integral part of the production process. The only room for license may have been in post-firing painting. These features suggest that production may have been closely monitored, perhaps carried out by so-called "attached specialists," rather than mass produced as in Teotihuacan. It is not clear at this point whether the same can be said of production of non-effigy censers. Interestingly, late Late Classic Tikal "Winged Candelero" censers appeared to be "more associated with censer manufacture than censer use"; perhaps these were used in rituals surrounding censer manufacture (Ferree 1972:104).

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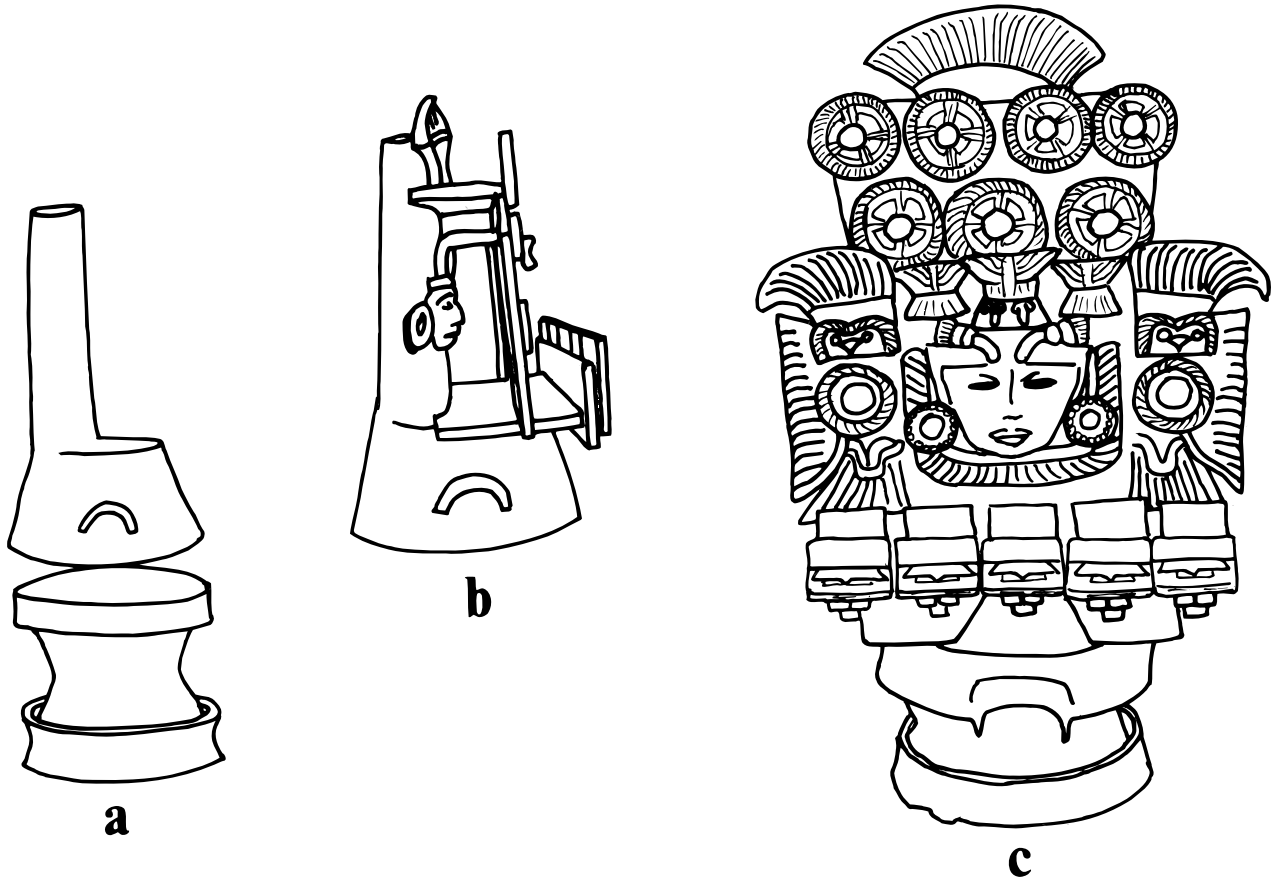


Figure 3. Steps in the construction of a Teotihuacan-style *incensario*: profile views of (a) an hourglass-shaped incense receptacle and conical lid with chimney and handles on the sides and (b) an armature of clay slabs to which *adornos* are added (after Berlo 1982:Figure 3a, c); (c) completed *incensario*, unprovenienced (after Berlo 1982:Figure 5).

censers in Teotihuacan style were found featuring images of Tlaloc; contexts of recovery suggest primarily public rather than private/residential use (Sanders 1978:39), although they also have been found in tombs (Berlo 1984:169–172). At the same time as these new censers were being made and used at Kaminaljuyu, the old material components of ritual—such as three-pronged *incensarios*, etc.—ceased to be made (Sanders 1974:106, 1978:39, citing Borhegyi 1965). Parsons (1991:209), in summarizing the confusing occurrence of these items on the Pacific slopes, notes a "nearly mutually exclusive distribution" of incense burners and ballcourts, depending in part on indigenous resistance to the foreign ideological elements introduced by Teotihuacan. Composite censers were more common on the lower coastal plain—becoming increasingly a "folk cult" (shades of Borhegyi)—while ballcourts (associated with merchants and warriors) were found at higher elevations in areas of desired economic resources and presumably stronger local resistance.

By the Late Classic period in the central Maya highlands the molded/modeled, flanged-cylindrical composite censer was widespread, but other forms also can be seen; for example, flat-bottomed, flaring-sided vases with four rows of spikes were "found by the hundreds . . . on the lake [Amatitlan]floor" (Borhegyi 1965:34; see also Goldstein 1977:409). Other Late Classic highland *incensario* forms were "stylized human effigy censers representing winged (or diving) individuals (or deities)" and ladle censers with solid or hollow handles (Borhegyi 1965:35). In the far northwestern highlands, at Quen Santo cave in Huehuetenango, effigy censers share imagery that is common in the Late Classic lowlands (e.g., the "cruller-eyed" Jaguar sun god of the Underworld, see below; Seler 1901).

CENSERS IN THE MAYA LOWLANDS

In the Preclassic Maya lowlands, as in the highlands, scattered finds of sherds of slipped and unslipped small dishes with spike appliques indicate that incense burners were made and used in the pre-Mamom early Middle Preclassic (Xe and early Eb) phase at Seibal (Sabloff 1975:60, Figure 70). Rare sherds of probable Middle Preclassic censers have been recovered around Lake Peten Itza (Rice 1996:Figure 4), and at Tikal some early Eb censer sherds bore traces of pigment (Laporte and Fialko 1993:65). Through time, the development of incense burners in the lowlands exhibited increasing specialization in shape, function, and iconography. At Tikal, where one of the most complete descriptive and chronological analyses of Preclassic and Classic period censer materials has been carried out, "The main trend in censer morphology over the 1300 year period . . . is from vessel-like to censer-specific shapes" (Ferree 1972:197). For example, in the Late Preclassic period spiked censers were made in the same shapes as utilitarian dishes, but in the Classic period several distinct censer forms and decorative modes evolved. This morphological specialization indicates that incense burners were of growing importance to Maya ritual and their uses

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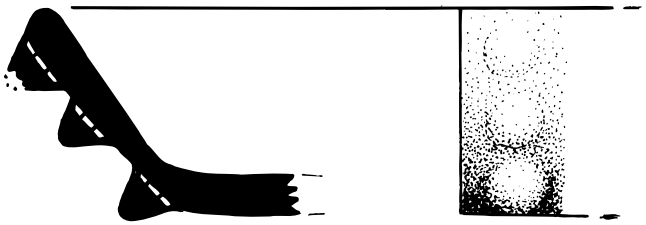


Figure 4. Possible Middle Preclassic spiked censer from Structure 602 at Zacpeten, Peten, Guatemala, with heavy fireclouding on exterior. Mouth diameter is 23 cm.

were increasingly narrowly defined; so too were their locations of use.

CENSER FORM: NON-IMAGE AND IMAGE

For purposes of the present review, Classic lowland Maya ceramic incense burners can be divided most expediently into two general categories, non-image and image (or non-effigy and effigy). Although this division is expedient, it is not necessarily clean, as there some overlapping attributes (e.g., spikes and "effigy" images may co-occur). Each of these two categories has several subdivisions, and there is considerable site-to-site and region-to-region variation in their distribution.

Non-image *incensario* forms are primarily open bowls (*lak*?) or basins and pedestal or hourglass (biconical) vase shapes. Ladle censers (*sahumadores*; *ch'uyub' chuk*?) are also found in the lowlands; these have open or hollow handles, the distal end often modeled into a reptile or feline head or claw. Any and all of these vessels may be elaborated with a variety of applique elements (particularly spikes and finger-impressed fillets) and modeling. Bowl and vase forms were sometimes slipped (though this was more common in the Preclassic period) or covered with a white stucco coating that may be painted, often with Maya blue pigment.

Spiked censers are of particular interest. These *incensarios* are cylindrical vases or biconical or hourglass shapes, decorated on the exterior with small conical spikes or protuberances (Figure 5). The spikes may occur in groups of two or four, or they may be more heavily applied, sometimes in elaborate patterns. This distinctive type of surface embellishment is found widely throughout Mesoamerica: in the southern Maya region and highlands (see above) and lowlands as well as in central Mexico (e.g., Matos Moctezuma 1988:Figure 109), and from Middle Preclassic times through the Postclassic.

In the southern Maya lowlands, pronged and especially spiked censers, and ladles less commonly, can be found beginning in Late Preclassic times, for example, in Peten at Altar de Sacrificios (Adams 1971:53, 161, Chart 3-3r), Tikal (Ferree 1972:24, 28–37, Figure 3), and Uaxactun (Smith 1955:Figure 16f13, 16g1, 3, 84a; Figure 17a8 may be an Early Classic pronged censer), and in Belize at Kaxob (Fry 1989:Figure 4) and Caracol (Arlen Chase, personal communication 1997). They are also found at "southeastern periphery" sites such as Quirigua (Benyo 1979) and Copan (Agurcia 1997:Figure 9; Willey et al. 1994:84–91; see also Urban and Schortman 1988). The situation in Peten and Belize presents a marked contrast with Palenque, where three-pronged, hourglass, and spiked *incensarios* were virtually unknown (Rands and Rands 1959:225–226; see Bishop et al. 1982:Figure 2).

In contrast to the non-image forms, image (or effigy) censers (Figures 6 and 7) are identified by modeled and/or molded (and usually also stuccoed or painted) elaborations either comprising the receptacle for burning the incense or attached to or supporting it. These embellishments include anthropomorphic and zoomorphic representations, full-figure or partial-figure effigies, and flanges, and they may be associated with bowl, jar, and vase receptacles. In the highlands, many similarly elaborately modeled vessels referred to as *incensarios* are thought to have been "used as stands or covers rather than as receptacles for the incense" (Rands and Smith 1965:109). The same seems to be true for certain categories of composite modeled image censers in the lowlands. Modeled effigy censers in the Pasión area (Figure 6a) probably were accompanied by separate receptacles to hold the burning incense (e.g., Sabloff 1973:114), and a conical censer receptacle dating to the Early Classic period is known from Uaxactun (Smith 1955:Figure 17b9; note that it is illustrated upside down). These receptacles could have been more bucket- or tub shaped, such as the straight-sided slipped dish holding copal at Uaxactun (Freidel et al. 1991:Figure 14; Ricketson and Ricketson 1937:Plate 85; Smith 1955:Figure 84f, j).

In addition, scenes on painted pottery suggest that both image and spiked censers sometimes may have held, or supported more elaborate vessels that held, offerings other than incense (e.g., Taube 1994:Figure 8a, g), such as blood-spattered paper. This may be shown on newly discovered El Cayo (Chiapas) Altar 4, which depicts a *sajal* (lesser lord) named Aj Chak Wayib' ("Great Dreamer") celebrating a *k'atun* ending in 9.15.0.0.0 (August 20, A.D. 731). Aj Chak Wayib' is shown seated, scattering, before an altar or bench on which rests an image censer. The censer, which appears to hold folded paper (perhaps bearing the lord's blood?), has a modeled face that—except for the jaguar ear—seems to be the head variant of the *k'atun* glyph. This scene may illustrate a comment by Schele and Grube (1995:130), who suggested "a close connection between fire burning and penis blood sacrifices because the fire that were [*sic*] drilled, were kept and maintained in incense burners. The blood that was sacrificed was then collected on paper and burned in these incense burners."

As a consequence of their formal and iconographic variability, the image category of censers actually comprises several subtypes. Ruz Lhuillier (1969:227–229, drawing heavily from Vaillant's [1927] doctoral dissertation), for example, identified four categories of anthropomorphic censers in Mesoamerica: (1) standing full or partial human effigy attached to a cylindrical receptacle (widespread); (2) hemispherical bowls with a seated figure on a lid covering the receptacle (said to be particularly characteristic of Tabasco, Mexico, but these are now known from Tikal, Copan, and elsewhere, and seem most closely similar to central Mexican forms); (3) "hollow idols," i.e., human effigy figures lacking a separate receptacle; and (4) bowls with an appliqued human or grotesque head on the rim (late "Lacandon-type" censers). This early typology is inadequate today, however, because numerous forms must be added to it: censer stands or cylindrical supports with modeled faces and vertical flanges; vase, jar, or bowl censers with modeled faces, rather than full figures; and also non-anthropomorphic (zoomorphic) representations. Because of complex variations in subject matter, patterns of use, method of manufacture, and style of portrayal on these vessels, it is probably better to refer to them as a general category of "image" (rather than "effigy") censers, with a series of subsets: attached figure censers, censer lids with figures, modeled censer

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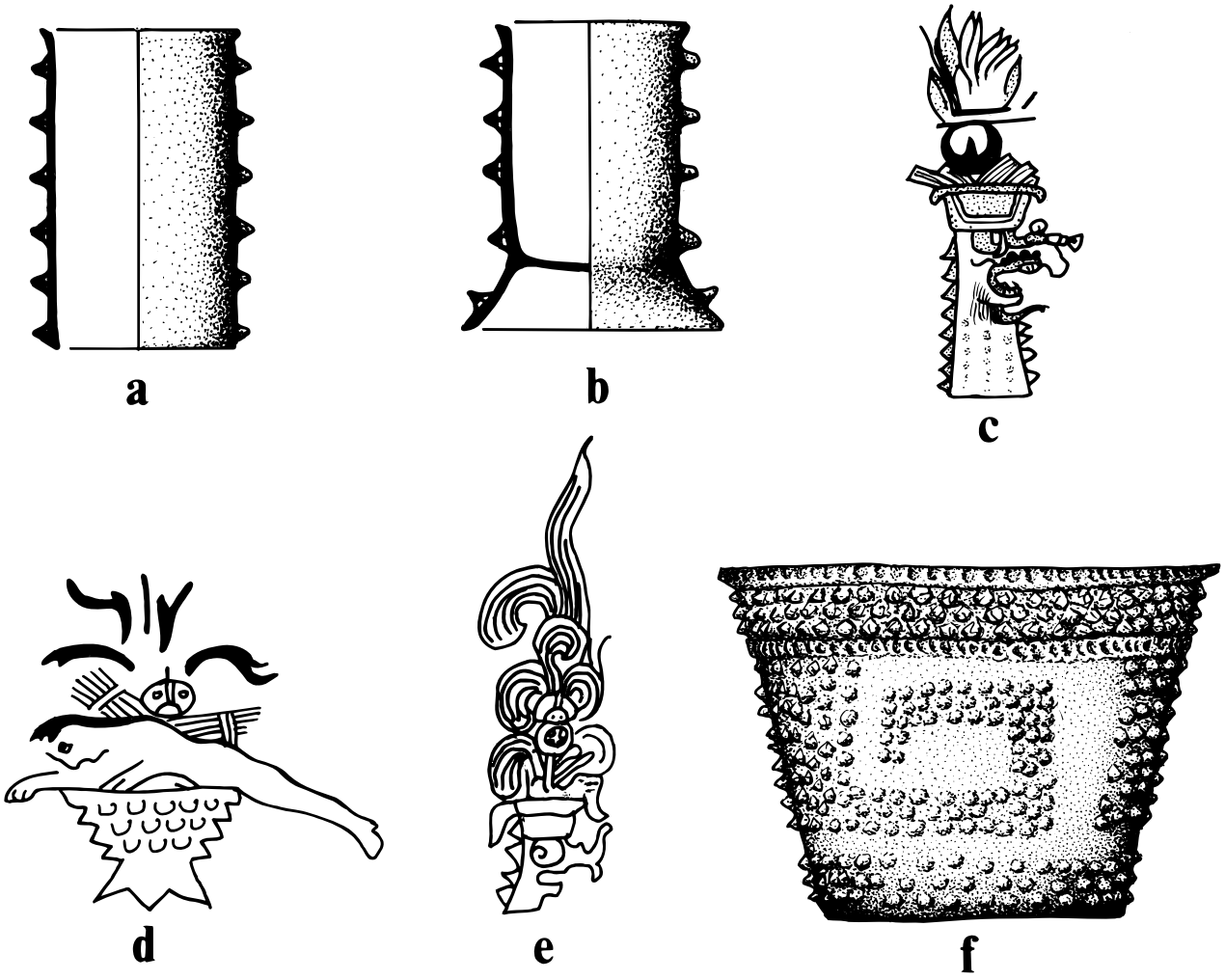


Figure 5. Late and Terminal Classic spiked censers (not drawn to same scale): (a, b) Late Classic spiked censer support (a) and cylinder censer (b) of the Tulix complex from Tikal (after Ferree 1972:Figure 30a, h); (c) spiked censer stand with long-nosed zoomorphic image (Chak?) from Side IV of the Late Classic "Birth Vase" (after Taube 1994:Figure 8a); the censer supports a bowl that Taube (1994:668–669) interprets as holding cut faggots and a heart offering (the rounded trebol) with a feathered sacrificial knife) (although I would suggest it could also represent a smoking ball of copal or rubber atop folded paper, because T87 [**te**, "wood"] is not present); (d) representation of a burning spiked hourglass censer holding the "*k'ex* infant sacrifice" and the T600 sign (detail from painted doorjamb at Tohcok, Campeche; after Taube 1994:Figure 10b); (e) probable jaguar baby in bowl atop spiked censer stand with long-nosed god mask, from scene on Classic vase (after Taube 1994:Figure 8h); (f) Terminal Classic (Xcocom phase) Pastelaria Composite: Pastelaria Variety spiked *incensario* with finger-impressed rim and applique fillet, recovered from a subfloor cache (70-7) in Room 3, Structure XX, at Chicanna (after Ball 1977:Figure 44).

stands, bowls with modeled or appliqued heads, and so forth (see, for example, the typology of Tikal censers in the Appendix [from Ferree 1972]). In the indigenous idiom, any or all of these image censers might have been referred to by Yucatecan-speaking Maya as *u-winb'a* ("effigy, image") or *k'oj* ("mask, image") (see Houston and Stuart 1996:302) or perhaps personified as *yum k'ak'* or *yum pom*.

Regardless of what they are called, these iconographically complex, modeled image censers and censer stands began to be manufactured and used in portions of the southern Maya lowlands during the Late Preclassic/Early Classic periods. It is not securely known where they appeared earliest in the lowlands. At Altar de Sacrificios they were found in the "Protoclassic" Salinas phase, beginning ca. A.D. 150 (Adams 1971:53–54, Chart 4, 1973:136), while at Cerros they were noted in the Late Preclassic (Freidel et al. 1991:178–179, Figure 11). By the Early Classic period, image censers and supports seem to have enjoyed widespread use. In central Peten, new forms similar to those at Belize and Altar de Sacrificios were found in Early Classic Uaxactun. Stela 5 at Uaxactun (8.16.1.0.12; A.D. 358) shows a "foreigner" standing with a long-nosed image censer (?) at his feet; the face on the censer is virtually identical to the scroll-eyed heads in the watery lower register of Izapa Stela 67. Elsewhere, these censers can be found in the late facet of the Early Classic period or Manik III at Tikal beginning ca. A.D. 500 (Ferree 1972:21, 23, 199; see also Smith and Gifford 1965:144); in Belize they are known from Early Classic Santa Rita and Cerros (Freidel et al. 1991:Figure 14).

By the Late Classic period in the Maya lowlands, these modeled censers and censer stands had evolved in distinctive ways for distinctive uses. At Copan, for example, Burial XXXVII-4 in Struc-

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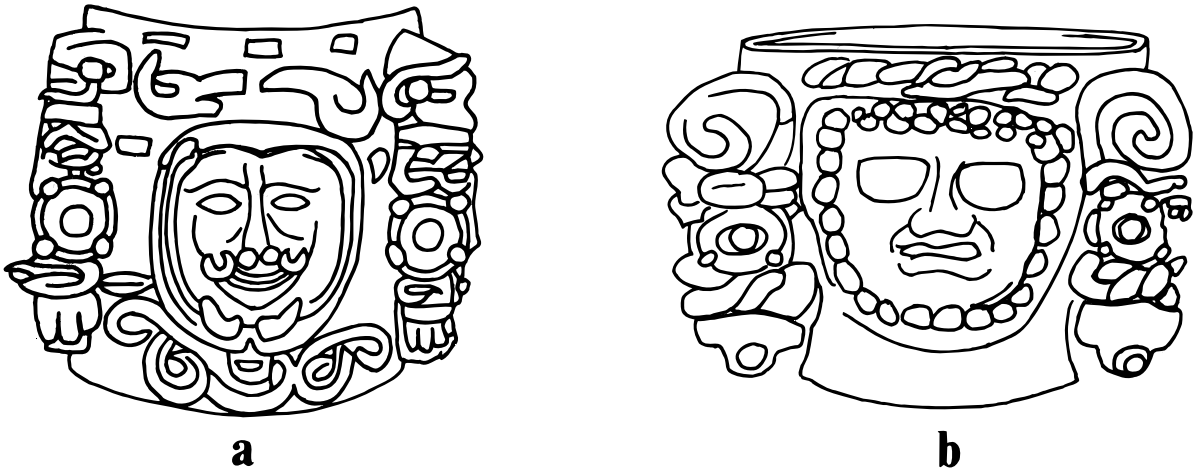


Figure 6. Early Classic flanged image censers or censer stands with representations (not drawn to same scale): (a) Misería Appliqué: Cuh variety from Altar de Sacrificios showing God GI (after Adams 1971:Chart 5e); (b) Early Classic flanged censer recovered in diving operations in Lake Peten Itza (after Adams 1971:Figure 99b; see also Borhegyi 1963).

ture 10L-26 (the Hieroglyphic Stairway) was a royal tomb believed to hold the remains of that site's twelfth ruler, Smoke Imix God K, who ruled from 628 to 695 (H. Beaubien, personal communication 1998). Outside the tomb were at least (to judge from published illustrations) 14 spiked, lidded censers plus 12 large, two-part image censers. These latter consisted of cylindrical vessels ornamented with exterior spikes and containing ash, plus lids supporting elaborately modeled, one-half life-size, seated full-figure effigies (Fash 1991:107, Fash et al. 1992:Figure 7; these would be classified as Ferree's "Seated Figure Cover type: Elaborated Variety" in Tikal's Tulix complex). On the basis of the effigies' dress, particularly their turban-like headdresses, and similarities to the figures on Copan's Altar Q, they are believed to be representations of earlier rulers in Copan's dynasty. At Tikal, similar "clay images . . . [were] found cached in all three of the front, or southern, North Acropolis structures in association with the breakage and interment of two (and perhaps three) stelae" (Coggins 1975:280; see also Coe and Broman 1958).

At Palenque, the beginning of use of flanged, modeled, cylindrical censer stands coincides with the ascent of the Late Classic ruler Chan-B'ajlum (Rands et al. 1979:22). These vessels show no signs of interior blackening from burning incense and were more likely used as supports for conical receptacles placed atop them (see Rands and Rands 1959:229–230; Rands et al. 1979:21; also Goldstein 1977; Reise 1988:84). Similar modeled, flanged censer stands with applique heads were also found at Seibal in the Late Classic Tepejilote phase (Sabloff 1975:114–116, Figures 217–225) and at Piedras Negras (Coe and Broman 1958:40; Satterthwaite 1946).

CENSER FUNCTION: SYMBOLISM

Relatively little attention has been paid to the function, as opposed to the use (i.e., to burn incense), of censers in Preclassic and Classic period Maya ritual. One approach to the function or ritual meaning of censers is to examine the complex iconography of their modeled and appliqued embellishments. This symbolism can be approached from several different directions. One begins with analysis of the two major types of Preclassic and Classic *incensarios*, non-image (spiked) and image; another places incense burners into broader contexts of Maya art and iconography. Unfortunately, despite many fruitful avenues for speculation, few definitive statements can be made until their iconography is more extensively analyzed.

Spiked censers (see Figure 5) have been the subject of extensive discussion. Early commentators suggested symbolic associations between the spikes and the sun's rays, as well as the possibility that the vessels might represent fruit with protuberances (see Ruz Lhuillier 1969:230). Given the added decoration sometimes found on spiked censers (or, the occasional presence of spikes on image censers) the spikes could be suggested to represent the spots on jaguars or the projections on the shell of the thorny oyster (*Spondylus*). At the same time, these applique nodes could have had more prosaic functions as devices to facilitate handling of these hot incense burners (Ferree [1972:169], citing personal communication from W. Coe). Perhaps the spikes were lumps of incense applied to the censer as an offering (*tak' pom* or *ch'ajalte*), in the same way as the Lacandon today arrange offerings of nodules of copal incense on a flat board or *xikal* (McGee 1990:Figure 8.4; Miller and Taube 1993:99).

Many Maya researchers have been inclined to see the spikes on censers as analogous to the spiky growths on young trees such as the ceiba or kapok tree (Benyo 1979; Ferree 1972:169; Kidder 1950:48–49; Taube 1994:668) or the cacao tree (*Theobroma cacao*; Willey et al. 1994:86). Thompson (1970:177), however, observed that spikes occur only on one species of ceiba, *Ceiba aesculifolia* (Yucatec *piim*), while the species sacred to the Maya, *C. pentandra*, has "nodular" projections but lacks thorns; furthermore, spikes seem to be present only on young ceiba trees as a defense against herbivory. Regardless of the particular species identification, this notion has supported an isomorphism between spiked censers and the Maya *ya'axche'* ("green tree"), the sacred "first" or "world tree" and *axis mundi* of the Maya cosmos.[5] This association adds support to my proposal that spiked pottery *incensar-*

[5] A similar central or axial relationship might be suggested by the Maya *ol*, which refers to a class of vessels—perhaps incorporating censers?—and a sacred place or portal (see Note 2).

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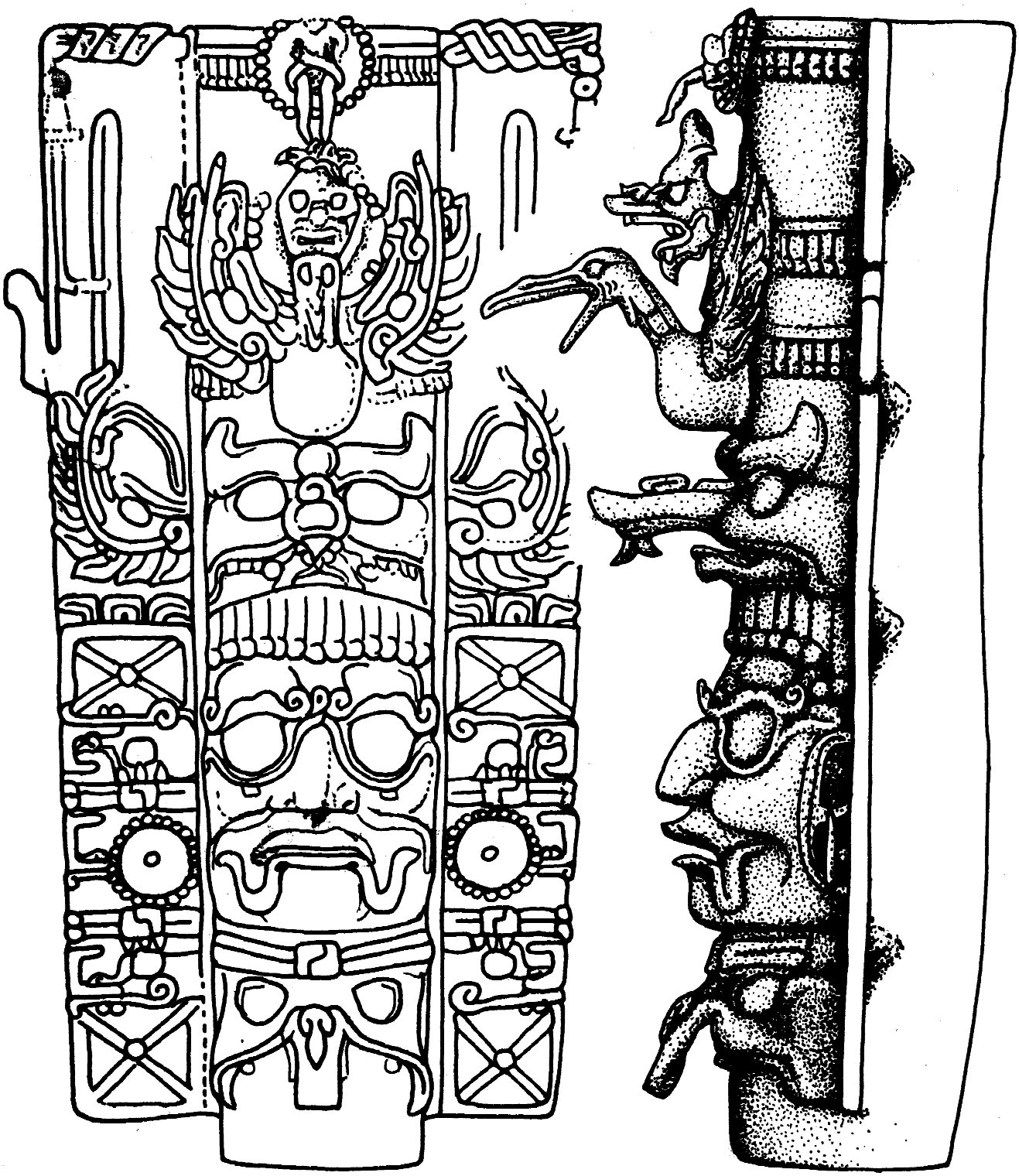


Figure 7. Flanged, cylindrical image censer stand, one of eight recovered in an "offering" in the Temple of the Foliated Cross at Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico (after Goldstein 1977:Figure 5). Height ranges from 70 to 110 cm; embellishments on these censers are typically organized, both on cylinders and on flanges, into a series of horizontal registers. As Goldstein (1977; see also Rands and Rands 1959) explains it, the principal image on the cylinder is the second from the bottom, and typically shows the cruller-eyed Jaguar god of the Underworld (night-sun god). The lowest image is a usually a deity representing earth; in this case, a long-nosed tapir is portrayed. The images in the upper tiers are a usually series of Underworld deities, there being three here. One is a mythological bird with the head of a feathered serpent in the wing. The uppermost depicts a "little anthropomorphic flying insect," perhaps a "personification of ancestral spirits." Motifs on the flanges include crossed mat bands at the top, earplugs for the JGU, sky bands, intertwining celestial serpents, serpent heads without lower jaws, and so forth.

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ios are the referent in the glyphic compound T122:528:87 (**k'ak' tun te**). Hunrath's (1992:513) unusual interpretation of **te** as an "activator" or agent of transmission or communication, is also of some interest here.

Interestingly, the world tree interpretation itself has several variants: Shook (1965:184), for example, notes the continued veneration of "giant kapok trees" as native shrines on the Pacific coast of Guatemala. Lowe et al. (1982:274) suggest that the original world tree for the Maya might have been the breadnut or ramon tree (*Brosimum alicastrum*) because of its food value, and that the ceiba-as-world tree might have been a later transference. Bassie-Sweet (1991:166) claims that ceibas are locations of accession rituals, quoting Thompson (1970:195 [Note: I have been unable to find the quoted passage on page 195]) as saying that under the branches of a ceiba tree the Maya today "elect their alcaldes and they cense them with braziers."

A related interpretation draws an analogy between spiked censers and iconographic representations of an earth monster/crocodile (Adams 1971:161) or "caiman-as-tree" common in Izapan art (e.g., Lowe et al. 1982:272–275, Figure 8.1; Smith 1984:Figure 38; see also Hellmuth 1988; Taube 1994:668). One provocative suggestion concerning the imagery on Izapa Stela 25 is that this caiman-tree is Zipacna, and the human figure is Hunahpu, one of the Hero Twins of the *Popol Vuh* (Kerr 1992:111). Similarly the "New Year's" pages (26–29) of the Postclassic *Dresden Codex* shows the *ya'axche'* (ceiba; world tree) identified with Itzamna/God D (Taube 1992:36), complete with spiky projections drawn on the side of the tree trunk.

Image incense burners prompt an entirely different series of speculations. Some Preclassic and especially Classic period censers were created with elaborately modeled anthropomorphic or zoomorphic[6] masks and vertical flanges. Early Classic images depicted the face of God GI in the Palenque Triad (Figure 5a; Schele and Miller 1986:60, Note 56), while in the Late Classic the most distinctive and consistently appearing image is that of the Jaguar Sun god of the Underworld (JGU or GIII) (see Figure 7, also Figure 8). This image is found in varying degrees of elaboration on flanged cylindrical censer stands at: Late Classic-period Tikal (Ferree 1972:Figures 14–18); Palenque (Rands and Rands 1959; Rands et al. 1979:21); Altar de Sacrificios, the Lake Peten Itza region, and Poptun (Adams 1971:99, Charts 4-5a and 5-4e–f, 1973:119); Caracol (Arlen Chase, personal communication 1996; Chase and Chase 1987:Figure 10f); Seibal (Sabloff 1975:115–116, Figures 217–225); and Piedras Negras (Proskouriakoff 1950:19). JGU represents the night sun traveling through the Underworld from west to east, sometimes on a caiman (note, however, that Bassie-Sweet [1991:192–194] associates JGU with the moon). It is readily identified by a series of traits: a shock of twisted hair over the forehead, twisted cruller-like element between the nose and under the eyes, beak-like nose, projecting lips, jaguar ears, and Tau-shaped incisors (Coggins 1975:280; Miller and Taube 1993:104; Schele and Miller 1986:50). In the Pasión area the human face of the Jaguar Sun god represented on the censer sometimes has two balls under the nose, loop noses, and an Ik' symbol in the eye (see Adams 1971:55, Figures 95 and 99; Sabloff 1975:Figure 223), and a few Early Classic censer lids at Altar de Sacrificios have modeled spider monkey heads on them, the monkey having a symbolic connection to the Sun god (Adams 1971:58–59, citing Thompson).

The night-sun jaguar or "cruller-nosed jaguar" is the most common creature on these image censers. Its frequent representation in the portraiture of Classic kings at Tikal suggests it may be the site's royal patron (Miller and Taube 1993:104); it is particularly associated with funerary iconography at the site (Coggins 1975: 280). On Tikal representations, a diving bird with hooked beak is often depicted above the Jaguar god of the Underworld. At Palenque, however, the range of tiered imagery is more varied (see Figure 7). Beneath the jaguar face, masks or figures of tapirs and *kawak* monsters may appear; above the face of the Sun god are a "variety of underworld deities [including] the Bat God, the Owl God, the Long-lipped God, the Jester God," and the mythological bird (Goldstein 1977:417–418), perhaps representing patrons of different levels of the Underworld. One censer variant features full deity/priest figures standing atop a turtle (Goldstein 1977:Figure 3a–b; for a Late Postclassic parallel see Chase [1988:Figure 7]).

The vertical flanges attached to each side of the cylinder also bear a rich iconographic load, mostly modeled and appliqued elements. At Palenque (see Figure 7), these include crossed sky bands, circular floral motifs, celestial serpents and serpent heads, monkeys, and "guardian figures" (Goldstein 1977:419). At Seibal the flanges were decorated with red, white, and blue paint, incising, and applique elements including squares with crosshatches, mat designs, feathers, buttons, and maize (Sabloff 1975:115). Flanges of effigy censers at Altar de Sacrificios were embellished with jaguar ears, earplugs, serpent heads, glyph-like elements, and scrolls (Adams 1971:54–55). Interestingly, the edges of these flanges are sometimes ornamented with the paired "loops" or nodes of glyph T87 (**te**, "wood, tree") (Figure 8a–b), suggesting that even image censers or censer stands might have embodied some aspects of the world tree/*axis mundi*.

The fact that the portions of these Late Classic *incensarios* bearing modeled faces were not used to burn incense or other offerings (to judge from the absence of smoke blackening) prompted Ferree to suggest that these vessels may have been deity images. She believed that not only were many incense burners not actually used for burning copal, they appear to have taken on the identity of the deities portrayed on them, becoming idols themselves to which the incense was offered (Ferree 1972:1, 21, 199–200). This in turn raises the question of Maya idolatry. "Idolatry" was an insult hurled at some Postclassic groups by their enemies, and contact-period lowland Maya were widely accused by the Spaniards of being "heathens" and "idolaters" because they worshipped "devils" or "idols," i.e., images of gods. In the absence of accurate information on the beliefs and practices associated with Classic *incensarios*,[7] it is dangerous to use this loaded term. Perhaps an analogy can be drawn to the modern Lacandon, who made (until 1970) and used "god pots" (*lak-il k'uj*) in their religious practice. According to McGee (1990:51), the Lacandon are not "idolaters . . . because they do not

[6] In discussing censer transformations through time at Altar de Sacrificios, Adams (1971:161, 1973:140) observed that the symbolism of effigy vessels changed from Late Preclassic/Early Classic (Ayn) to Late Classic (Boca) times, with a shift away from "abstract religious symbolism" toward more realistic anthropomorphism and zoomorphism. Adams offered no explanation as to why such a shift might have taken place then, however, and also, it is in the Early Classic that he thinks the spider monkey (*Ateles*) is represented.

[7] For example, if image censers were referred to as *yum k'ak* or *yum pom*, the use of these vessels in the Classic period would seem to constitute evidence for "idolatry." On the other hand, if these *incensarios* were known as *u-winb'a* or *k'oj*, the issue is ambiguous.

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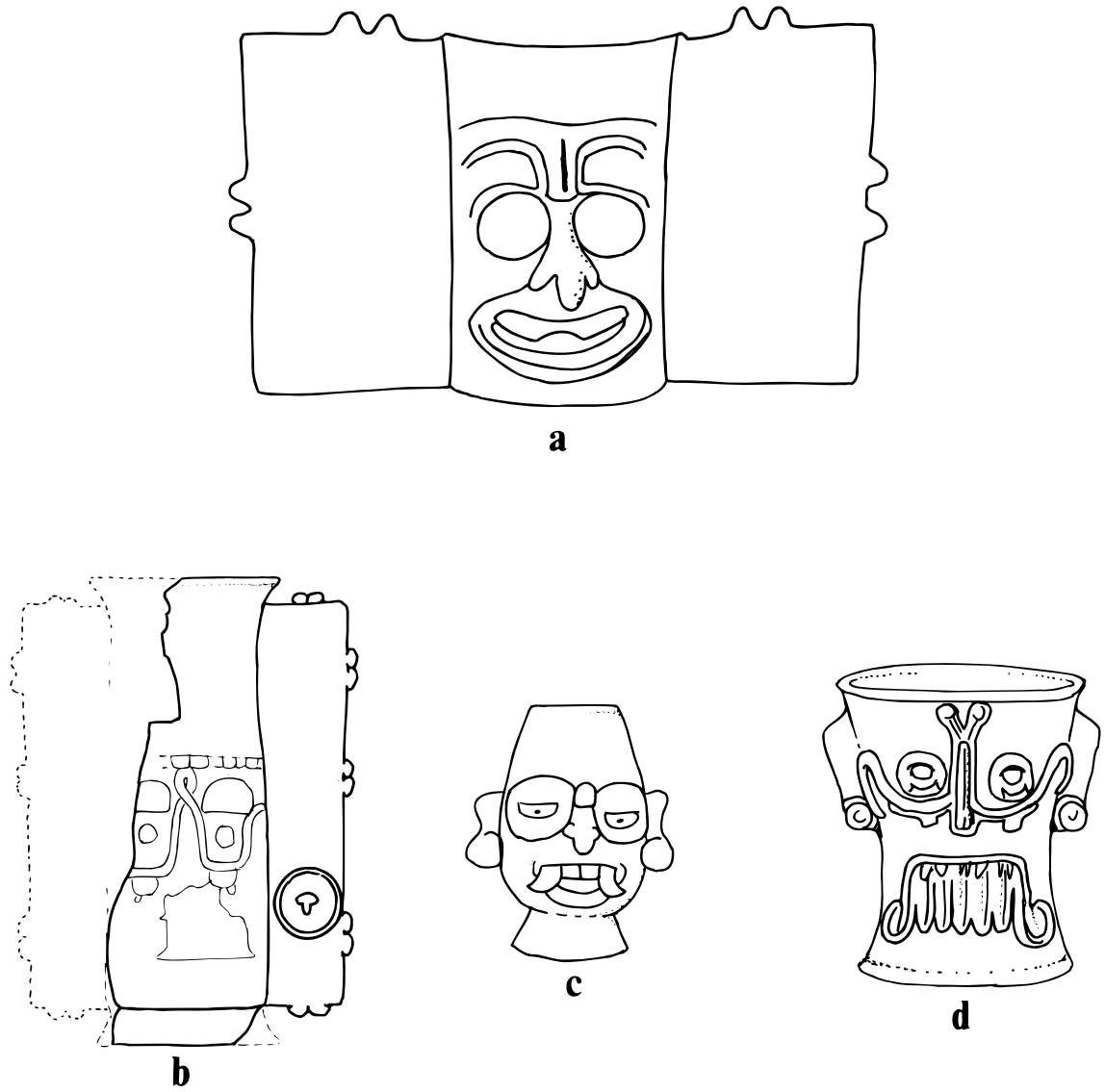


Figure 8. Late and Terminal Classic lowland Maya image censers (note the paired *te*-like projecting tabs on the edges of the flanges first two examples): (a) Late Classic (Boca complex) flanged image censer support from Altar de Sacrificios (after Adams 1971:Chart 10, Form 5a); (b) Late Classic flanged image censer stand showing the cruller-eyed Jaguar god of the Underworld from Structure B19 at Caracol, Belize (after Chase 1988:Figure 9); (c) Terminal Classic Tlaloc pyriform image censer from Balamkanche Cave, in Yucatan, Mexico (after Taube 1992:Figure 73b); (d) Terminal Classic pyriform Tlaloc image censer from Balamkanche cave, in Yucatan, Mexico (after Taube 1992:Figure 72d).

worship the incense burners. The god pots are neither believed to be actual gods nor considered accurate representations of the gods. Instead . . . they are an abstract model of a human being, and the medium through which an offering is transmitted to the god for its consumption."

The deities and related elements on image censers, censer supports, and flanges evince striking parallels in style and subject matter with other aspects of Maya art and iconography, and ritual practice. For example, similarities can be seen with stucco masks on the facades of Late Preclassic buildings and with Classic-period stelae and jades (Rands and Rands 1959:233; Taube 1998; Freidel et al. 1991; also Goldstein 1977:410). To pursue further the analogy between temples and composite censers, the censer stands can be considered to represent the substructural platform, and the incense receptacle it supports is the temple sanctuary where incense would have been burned. Censer imagery also can be compared to flanged headdresses, the dominant form of royal headgear, worn by Early Classic Maya rulers (Freidel and Schele 1988b:63) on stelae at Copan, Quirigua, Caracol, and Palenque. As on the headdresses, modeled faces on censers often occur in tiers (see Figure 7). These, plus archaeological finds of piled censers, have been said to exemplify a "stacking principle" fundamental in Maya art (Freidel et al. 1991): the stacked deity images symbolize broader cosmological dualities of Underworld and celestial realms (see also Joyce [1992] for discussion of the layering of precious and sacred materials in structural caches at Palenque

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that are "metonymically emblematic of layers of the universe"). The complexity of these representations is further underscored by the possibility that different images may appear in different media: clay image censer stands may depict gods (e.g., JGU) rather than humans, while effigy censer lids may be more likely to depict humans/ancestors (if Copan Burial XXXVII-4 is any indication). Stone censer stands, again judging from Copan, depict historical personages and were ritually killed (part of termination ritual?) (Freidel and Schele 1988b:83). In this light, it is no doubt significant that JGU images appear in the lower part of composite *incensarios* (i.e., on censer stands *supporting* the burning incense) while ancestor effigies, as at Copan, appear seated on lids *above* the spiked incense receptacle.

CENSER FUNCTION: STRUCTURAL CONTEXTS OF USE AND RECOVERY

Another approach to questions of the function of *incensarios* is to examine the archaeological (primarily structural) contexts from which censers and censer fragments are recovered. Most information on lowland Maya censer use comes from the Late Classic period but, unfortunately, observations on specific censer types or forms and their architectural locations of recovery are inconsistently reported. Consequently, it is difficult to draw reliable generalizations about patterns of use within sites, between sites, and through time on the basis of available data.

Contexts of use seem to be primarily, though by no means exclusively, ceremonial as opposed to domestic. At Tikal, Ferree (1972:13, 15) found that nontemple contexts were "seldom and sparsely productive of censer material;" such contexts included twin-pyramid complexes, range-type structures, small house mounds and their middens, and caches. The earliest (late Late Preclassic) context for censer recovery was in front of and at the base of temples at Tikal (Ferree 1972:13). Some of these temple locations may be in elite residential (rather than public, civic-ceremonial) contexts. For example, Group 7F-1, a "Plaza Plan 2" residential complex lying ca. 1.25 km southeast of the Tikal Great Plaza, has a tall, large, rectangular temple (Structure 7F-30) on the east side of the plaza. Haviland (1981:94) found that 64% of the artifacts recovered in excavations at this structure consisted of censer fragments (of unspecified type): "All in situ ceremonial deposits in Group 7F-1 are in, or in front of, this structure." A small, square temple structure (Structure 7F-31), attached to the south wall of Structure 7F-30), had no ceremonial deposits and few artifacts, but 100% of the artifacts recovered were censer fragments.

Similarly, at the site of Caracol in Belize, flanged, modeled censers with representations of JGU were part of the material assemblages associated with a "cult of the dead" in eastern shrine tombs.[8] These censers were "associated directly with the steps of eastern buildings either placed beneath a step or smashed on top of a step" (Chase and Chase 1994:57), the latter suggesting a termination rite. In addition, smashed censers—usually in pairs, and usually involving at least one flanged image vessel—were found on the floor of Late Classic Structure A3 and Structure B19 (Chase 1988:95). The latter, found beneath one of the "giant Ajaw altars" that mark *katuns* (this one dated 10.0.0.0.0, A.D. 830), included a censer featuring JGU (Figure 8b; Chase 1988:97, Figure 9).

Late Classic censers were apparently commonly used in termination rituals for the end of use of a temple and/or a stela. At Tikal, the ritual began by removing a stela from its place in front of a temple, and transporting it up to the temple rooms where it was "interred in a floor pit or altar, to the accompaniment of much burning. . . . censers are broken and scattered about in the vicinity of the stela and/or altar, some pieces being abandoned in situ, and others buried in floor pits" (Ferree 1972:14; see also Coggins 1975:280). One example of this is the smashed censer debris around broken Stela 31 in the North Acropolis at Tikal: debris included fragments or partially reconstructible vessels of the "Seated Figure Cover," "Flanged Hourglass," and "Flanged Cylinder" censer types (see Appendix; also Ferree 1972:6). It is not possible to determine whether the *incensarios* used in such rituals were part of the original "temple furniture" or were brought to the structures for the ceremony, although Ferree assumed the former.

Interestingly, Ferree (1972:15) found nothing to suggest that censers were used in termination rituals during the Early Classic period at Tikal. However, Early Classic termination deposits involving censers or stands have been noted at Structure 7-3rd at Santa Rita Corozal (Chase 1988:93–94) and on the summit of Structure 4B at Cerros (Freidel et al. 1991:180, 183). Similarly, incense burners were found at Copan in the buried late Early Classic temple structure known as "Rosalila" in the acropolis in the site center. The vessels were smashed on a bench in the back of the central room; among the censers was a spiked cylinder standing on a stone base carved in the form of a jaguar (Agurcia 1997:34–35). Another example of termination ritual comes from Piedras Negras, where the sherds of "two large, incomplete, open-base, vertical-flange censers" were found scattered around the column altar on the surface of Structure K5-2nd (Coe 1959:94; Proskouriakoff 1950:19). These censers are believed to have been deposited as part of a termination ritual at the time Structure K5-2nd was abandoned (9.8.0.0.0?, A.D. 593?) and before it was buried by the construction of a new temple, K5-1st.

At Palenque during the Late Classic period, quantities of censers recovered varied by temple structure. Only a small percentage of censer fragments came from behind the Temple of the Inscriptions (Rands and Rands 1959:233; Rands et al. 1979:22), the funerary monument to Pakal. But as noted earlier, modeled, flanged effigy stands seem to be particularly associated with a new ritual complex said to have been introduced by Chan-B'ajlum, Pakal's son (Rands et al. 1979:22), and particularly in the Cross Group of structures. Pairs of these image censer stands were positioned around the substructure of the Temple of the Foliated Cross[9] on the east side of the group, thereby demarcating "the boundaries of sacred space of the building" (Joyce 1992:501, citing Ruz Lhuillier 1958); fragments were also recovered in abundance from behind the structure. This temple commemorated the accession of king Chan-B'ajlum and the birth of God GII of the Palenque Triad (Freidel and Schele 1988b:66). At the northern Temple of the Cross, which commemorated the death of Chan-B'ajlum and may have held his tomb, recent excavations revealed 18 flanged image censer stands along a terrace in front of the temple, but these had a

[8] Chase and Chase (1994:60) argue that, in contrast to my thesis here that JGU censers were associated specifically with elite/kingly ritual, "all levels of Caracol society participated in this 'cult of the dead' and had access to the paraphernalia" such as *incensarios*.

[9] The "Foliated Cross" is a symbolic Maya world tree. God GII or God K (B'olon Tz'akab' in the Postclassic), was patron-protector of the blood lineages of royal families, and was also associated with fire (via a smoke/fire element in his forehead), rain, and maize.

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very different imagery as compared to the Jaguar Sun god (Robert L. Rands, personal communication 1996). In earlier work at Palenque, a pair of ceramic censer stands was found at the Temple of the Sun, south of the main stairs (Joyce 1992:501, citing Acosta 1975), and fragments of eight elaborately modeled censer stands were recovered from excavations around Temple XIV in the northwest corner of the Cross Group, a "terminal structure" that marked the end of active use of the complex (Joyce 1992:504). Two of these, found below a stucco floor at the base of the west (rear) side of the structure, were reconstructable; they showed the featureless face of a young male (not the JGU) with different bird headdresses (Acosta 1973:70).

Similar deployment of *incensarios* to protect sacred mortuary space can be seen in the case of Burial XXXVII-4 at Copan, believed to be that of Ruler 12, Smoke Imix God K. There, at least 26 censers were placed outside and above his tomb, in offerings oriented to the cardinal directions. The 12 *incensarios* bearing ancestral portrait effigies on the lid were positioned as follows (Fash 1991:Figure 66; Fash et al. 1992:112): Two were on the northeast along with four spiked censers; two others, one of which may represent Yax K'uk Mo', were on the northwest side, along with five spiked *incensarios*. Seven of the effigies were placed to the south with at least four spiked lidded censers. One effigy-lidded censer was on top of the tomb, while one spiked censer was on the north end. So positioned, Smoke Imix's ancestors looked down on his tomb from their place in the sky, guarding his remains from above. At the time of excavation, they were, not surprisingly, in fragments, but it is difficult to determine whether this was a consequence of the weight of overlying construction or ritual smashing/killing as part of the termination ritual associated with burial.

Interestingly, to judge from the limited information available about the *incensarios* in published descriptions and illustrations, the Burial XXXVII censers seem to be semi-paired, both in costuming and in positioning. With respect to locations, the east offering, as described above, has two effigy-figure censers and four spiked censers, whereas the western has two figure censers and three spiked censers; the effigy censer atop the tomb may be considered effectively paired with the spiked censer to the north of the tomb. In costuming, too, six of the seven published images of these censers appear to be pairs: two (from the south offering) have large, knotted mat headdresses and identical (but reversed) knotted pectorals; two others, also apparently in the south offering, are somewhat smaller and have identical turban headdresses with elaborate projecting *adornos* and beaded capes; still a third pair (perhaps from the southern offering?) have plain turbans and large beaded chest plates.

In contrast to the ritual/temple contexts of recovery of large, flanged and/or image censers, spiked cylinder censers and other types of non-image *incensarios* often are found in nontemple and residential locations. At Altun Ha, for example, unusual lidded, spiked censers dating to the late Early Classic were found in an elite tomb in Structure E-1, a low mortuary mound (Pendergast 1990). At Copan, ladle and spiked censers were recovered from rubbish deposits, burials, and substela caches (Longyear 1952:92, Figures 105, 108, 109, 112, and 114). More recent excavations at the site revealed a lidded spiked censer holding jade, stingray spines, and other objects in a cache beneath the altar forming the base of the Hieroglyphic Stairway (Fash and Stuart 1991:165–165). The CV-20 structure complex at Copan, a "Type 2" (relatively small) residential group in the "Sepulturas" area of the valley, revealed a distinctive pattern of Late Classic *incensario* (?) use (Willey and Leventhal 1979:97–100; Willey et al. 1994:84–91, Figures 116–132). Eight large, cylindrical, censer-like pottery vessels decorated with applique spikes, flanges, and incisions were found, seven of them embedded in the floor and fill of the upper platform and back basal terraces of an apparently residential structure, Structure A. It is not clear if these vessels, which are similar to some recovered by Longyear, were censers or if they had other "special burning functions," as the interiors and the soil around the mouths of the buried vessels showed signs of burning.[10] No censers were found around the temple structure in the CV-20 group, Structure B, and no image censers are reported as having been found in the Sepulturas residential area.

At Piedras Negras a small, spiked bowl-like *incensario* with ring base and lid was found in a cache in front of Stela 9 and associated with a small stone "portable" altar (Coe 1959:90, Figure 60e; Satterthwaite 1946:20). This stela dates 9.15.5.0.0 (A.D. 736), but because the censer cache was found in front of (rather than beneath) the monument, it is possible that it postdates the stela.

There are indications that the kinds and contexts of incense burner use changed through time in the lowlands, with a significant shift occurring in the Terminal Classic period. In the northern lowlands, the Terminal Classic shift in censer types has been linked to the spread of a Mexican-inspired Quetzalcoatl cult (Ringle et al. 1998), which featured the use of ladle, open-work, spiked hourglass, and Chak/Tlaloc censers (see censer descriptions and illustrations in Cobean [1990:399–430]). Spiked bucket or hourglass censer forms and ladles are particularly associated with the Cehpech sphere at Becan (Figure 6f; Ball 1977:Figures 43 and 44) and in the Puuc region (Smith 1971:Figure 3) as well as in late deposits on the coast of Campeche (e.g., Xicalango). These spiked censers are generally scarce along the northern and eastern Gulf coast and may represent a late reoccupation of sites abandoned earlier (Ruz Lhuillier 1969:229–230, 235, Figure XXVI, Nos. 16 and 17, Figure XXVII, No. 12; Sanders 1960:245–248).

In the southern lowlands, it is not clear whether such a cult can be identified, although patterns of censer use changed markedly. Non-image censers seemed to decline in frequency through the Classic period (although this could be an accident of excavation), but their popularity resumed in the Terminal Classic. Spiked hourglass and ladle censers appeared in the Terminal Classic period at Uaxactun (Smith 1955:Figures 13m, o, 31c2, 66b2, 3) and also at Tikal. At the latter site, Terminal Classic censers occurred in greater abundance and variety (in form and construction), though they seemed to be simply poor-quality replicas of Late Classic types, i.e., the "Modified Effigy Group" (Ferree 1972:16–17, Figure 35). Even so, their use in termination ritual may have continued. At a small architectural complex known as the "Stela 23 Group" located approximately 500 m south of Temple IV at Tikal (Coe and Broman 1958:39–40, 47–48, Figure 13; Satterthwaite 1958:107), two flanged effigy censers were found in Feature 1, a "crudely built platform" overlapping an abandoned small Classic temple structure. Within the platform was a tomb in which an elderly, crippled man was buried; the image censers were part of the fill. This construction was associated with the resetting of the top

[10] A similar occurrence of spiked censers embedded in structural floors was noted at Tula, Hidalgo, Mexico (Cobean 1990:426–430). The censers in question were Early Postclassic (Tollan complex) footed tripod dishes with exterior spikes of a type known as Abra Cafe Burdo: variety Soportes Mamiformes. These were found buried in the floor of a residential structure in the Canal locality as well as in Room 6 of the Palacio Quemado.

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part of the broken Stela 23[11], and the event is believed to date to late Tepeu 2 or Tepeu 3 times. The censer has been claimed to be similar to those that represent JGU, but only a jaguar ear seems to be present, and the apparent absence of other diagnostic features (cruller, tau-teeth, etc.) puts this interpretation in doubt. Additional censer fragments and part of a ladle censer were found on the surface.

Temporal shifts are also evident in censers in the Pasión region. At Altar de Sacrificios (Adams 1971:140), late Late Preclassic and Early Classic censers sometimes occurred around residential platforms but were found primarily (85%) near ceremonial structures. Late Classic censer fragments occurred in the same locations in smaller quantities but also, in contrast to earlier periods, near stelae (particularly the zoomorphic censer variety of Maculis Modeled type) and in locations lacking visible architecture and monuments. Spiked hourglass and ladle censers appeared in the Terminal Classic period (Adams 1971:53, Chart 10, No. 5d). At Seibal, the transition from the Late Classic to Terminal Classic periods revealed similar changes, not only in censer subcomplexes but in locations of usage. Late Classic censers were primarily flanged cylinders with modeled god heads. These were found primarily in one of the major structural groups at the site, Group D, especially on and around the front stairway of temple Structure D-32 (Sabloff 1973:118, 1975:116). Terminal Classic censers, however, were primarily spiked hourglass and ladle forms. These were found around stelae, altars, and causeways (e.g., Stela 23 and Altar Q at the end of Causeway Q), and around small structure units, especially in Group A, including the unusual four-stairwayed Structure A-3[12] (Sabloff 1973:118–119, 1975:174–179, Figures 331–340; note that Figure 336 is actually a Postclassic type).

Three striking changes are evident in patterns of *incensario* use in the Terminal Classic period in the southern lowlands. For one, elaborately modeled image censers and censer stands abruptly ceased to be used, and spiked hourglass and ladle censers were adopted. A second change can be seen in the location of censer ritual, as use declined in high, restricted-access temple structures but increased at or near ground level and on or around small platforms and low, temple-like structures. Finally, the new spiked and ladle censers were conspicuously incorporated into ritual practices apparently centered on stelae and altars, including plain stelae and stelae being reset.[13] Examples include the censers found with plain Stela P9 on the North Acropolis and the reset Stela 23 at Tikal, with Stela 23 and Altar Q at Seibal, and perhaps the cache with Stela 9 at Piedras Negras, among others.

Finally, another important context of censer use that bears discussion is caves. Caves were the home of the gods of the natural world, gods who were patrons of forces such as rain, wind, thunder, lightning, rainbows, clouds, and corn (Bassie-Sweet 1991:79; see also Pohl and Pohl 1983; Thompson 1959, 1975). Much of the pottery found in caves appears to be broken fragments of jars for collecting water, perhaps "virgin water" or *suhuy ja* (Thompson 1975:xv, xvii, xviii, xx). However *incensarios* and signs of burning copal incense also were commonly noted (Gann 1934; Thompson 1959:122–124, 1975:xix, xx, xxii, xxv, xxvii, xxxix). For example, around peripheral Palenque, effigy flanged censers were found in the western area:[14] a cylinder censer featuring the JGU was found at Zopo Cave near Salto de Agua in the northwestern tip of Chiapas, along with other image cylinders (Blom and La Farge 1992 [1926–1927]:162–164, Figures 122–124). In caves to the east of Palenque, a broader range of ceramic types and forms was found, and censers were uncommon (Robert L. Rands, personal communication 1996).

Images of the cruller-eyed jaguar night-sun god of the Underworld also appeared on large and small censers in the cave at Quen Santo, in northwestern Huehuetenango, Guatemala (Seler 1901: Abb. 215, 232, 244, 248). These censers show striking similarities to Misería Applique:Ixtanclá Variety and Pedregal Modeled type at Altar de Sacrificios (Adams 1971:54, 57, Figure 98), as well as to some of the Palenque material. Thompson (1975:xxvi) notes an association between caves and worship of jaguars, particularly as jaguars are deities of the Underworld and are believed to live in caves. In the many chambers of Balamkanche, a cave about 4 km west of Chichen Itza (Andrews 1970), dozens of incense burners were found, primarily of two types: spiked *incensarios* and censers portraying the faces of the Maya rain god Chak and the central Mexican rain/storm god Tlaloc (Figure 8c–d). Some of these show the twisted "cruller" nose ornament of JGU (see Figure 8d). Radiocarbon analyses indicate these deposits date to the middle ninth century (note that this is earlier than in central Mexico), and Thompson (1975:xxii–xxv) considered Balamkanche to be a clear example of a cave dedicated to a rain cult. Presumably these vessels were deposited as a part of rituals associated with the rains, thus indicating the symbolism of caves as the "home" (birthing place) of rain gods as well as kings.

IMAGE CENSERS: ORIGINS

Image censers represent a striking innovation in the lowland Maya *incensario* repertoire beginning in the Late Preclassic/Early Classic period, and their symbolism and spatial distribution raise particular questions concerning their role in Maya ceremonialism. The appearance of these censers accompanies a series of dramatic transformations in lowland Maya society in the late Late Preclassic and Early Classic periods: changes in the institution of kingship, in calendrics (including the completion of the ninth *b'ak'tun*), in iconographic programs (building facades vs. carved stelae; introduction of palace structures), in external contacts, and so forth. This co-occurrence prompts several questions: What was the origin of these new censers, or the stimulus for their manufacture, and in what kinds of rituals, new or old, were they used? It is not illogical

[11] Stela 23 itself is an Early Classic monument, dated 9.4.3.0.0 1 Ajaw 3 Yax, or A.D. 517. It is believed to depict "Woman of Tikal," who was buried in Burial 162 (Haviland 1981:107–110) with a tub-like pottery vessel bearing an appliqued face (Culbert 1993:Figure 36).

[12] Structure A-3 is an unusual four-stairwayed platform located in the center of an open plaza in the "A Group" at Seibal. The structure was built and/or dedicated in 10.1.0.0.0 (A.D. 849) by a new "foreign" ruler, Aj B'olon Tun, who also erected four stelae at the base of each stairway and one on top. Stela 10, on the north side of the structure, records the emblem glyphs believed to be associated with the sites of Motul de San José, Tikal, and Calakmul (?), apparently recording the visits of *ajaws* from these sites to the dedication ceremonies.

[13] This pattern of censer use calls to mind Bassie-Sweet's (1991:114) interpretation of *sak lak tun* as '"white plate of the stone" (rather than the original reading as "white stone [plate] *incensario*"). The reference would be to white stuccoed non-effigy censers used to burn incense near stelae and then left at their place of use. Bassie-Sweet's reading is doubtful, however, because it lacks the possessive *u-* prefix (Charles Andrew Hofling, personal communication 1998).

[14] The occurrence of these Sun god image censers in Palenque's western region may be further support for the association of these *incensarios* with death and termination ritual of divine kings.

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to expect that major sociopolitical transformations might be accompanied by corresponding transformations in political ritual—in the kind, frequency, location, and associated material culture (e.g., censers) of ceremonial practices. But did such parallel changes in ritual actually occur in the Maya lowlands at this time? If they did, which of the underlying social processes are particularly significant and when can they be detected archaeologically? If the rituals in which incense was burned did not change substantially, why not?, and what might this stability tell us about the role of incense burners in lowland Maya ritual? Addressing these questions about change through time is problematic, because relatively little is known about Preclassic ritual, censers, and contexts of their use.

The first major change that demands consideration here is the transformation in the institution of lowland Maya kingship. Two different scenarios have been advanced to describe this process. As outlined by Freidel and Schele (1988a), chiefly/kingly leadership (the institution of *ajaw*) began during the Late Preclassic period (first century B.C.) and was constituted to place less emphasis on charismatic/shaman roles and more emphasis on blood lineage, genealogy, and dynasty as well as supernatural inspiration. According to Houston and Stuart (1996:295, Note 3), the transition to divine kingship among the Maya, along with appropriation of related titles (e.g., *k'ul ajaw*), occurred considerably later, ca. A.D. 500, and represents adoption of an equivalent to the late central Mexican *tlatoani* ("speaker"). Freidel and Schele (1988a:549, author's emphasis) indicate that this transformation was accompanied by the "rapid elaboration of the material implements of power used by rulers and other elites," as well as differences in the kinds and media of iconographic programs. Among the latter might be mentioned the deemphasis of temple substructure masks as the carved stelae of the Classic period achieved prominence and, simultaneously, a shift to more public contexts in which writing, particularly dynastic propaganda, appeared. Houston and Stuart (1996:303) provide fewer clues as to the various ways in which expressions of divinity may have taken material form (beyond hieroglyphic texts and accompanying images on stelae and polychrome vessels), citing only "cult effigies . . . manufactured of wood and stucco."

I suggest that among these new "material implements of power" were the modeled image censers that came to be used by the Early Classic period. These vessels were instruments used by "kings"/*ajaws* as living representations of the ancestors and conduits of divine inspiration. By the early Late Classic period (sixth century), the institution of *ajaw* had been further transformed in some areas into divine kingship, the king being apotheosized as the Sun god—GIII—with the title *k'inich ajaw* (or *maj k'ina*), "great sun lord." Divine kingship was probably the "new complex" introduced to Palenque by Chan-B'ajlum, presumably from the Tikal/central Peten region. This transformation of kingship provides a context for interpreting the widespread Late Classic occurrence of modeled censers representing JGU in terms of a royal cult of divinity. The modeled censers bearing JGU images may be analogous to the "relics" of Buddha, which "became indissolubly associated with kingship in Buddhist polities, acting as part of the royal regalia and serving as objects of the royal cult and as symbols of legitimate kingship" (Tambiah 1976:44). Not surprisingly, when the institution of divine kingship collapsed in the Terminal Classic period these JGU censers correspondingly ceased to be made and used.

A second major transformation in kingship occurred in the late Early Classic period with the apparent arrival of non-Maya "foreigners" into the lowlands. The precise identity of these foreigners is debated; they are most commonly believed to be Mexican-related trader-ambassadors, sometimes more specifically identified as offspring of a marriage between Kaminaljuyu and Teotihuacan elites (see Bove 1991; Sanders 1974). Evidence for the arrivals comes from a series of stelae at Tikal and Uaxactun depicting individuals bedecked with Teotihuacan-related ceremonial paraphernalia, including Tlaloc headdresses and shields, incense bags, and atlatls. Stela 5 at Uaxactun, for example, shows an individual in Teotihuacan-style garb (apparently "Smoking Frog," the Tikal ruler who conquered Uaxactun) standing with a censer at his feet, an image vaguely reminiscent of the Izapa portrayals (see also Schele and Freidel 1990:Figure 4, No. 15). At Tikal, tombs of individuals identified as part of the foreign dynastic intrusion, Burial 10 ("Curl Nose") and Burial 48 ("Stormy Sky," now read as Siyaj Chan K'awil; Stephen D. Houston, personal communication 1996), included quantities of Kaminaljuyu- and Mexican-related burial furniture (Coggins 1975: 146–201, 1979, 1983). However, just as the cultural origins and identities of these newcomers are uncertain, so too are the motivations for their appearance in the lowlands. They are believed to have forged some kind of alliance with Tikal elites, perhaps by strategic intermarriage into the local Jaguar Paw dynasty. Their appearance in the lowlands is suggested to have been accompanied by the introduction of a warrior cult, a religious cult, new calendrical ceremonies, and/or some combination of all of the above.

The "warfare interpretation" of this foreign contact (see Berlo 1984, 1989; Demarest and Foias 1993; Mathews 1985; Pasztory 1993:138; Schele, cited in Demarest and Foias 1993:167; Schele and Freidel 1990:147; Taube, cited in Demarest and Foias 1993:168) links the manifestations of Teotihuacan "influence" in the highlands and lowlands alike to the presence of a military/merchant enclave and the introduction of ritual warfare associated with Venus and sacrifice. The widespread Tlaloc imagery is tied to the identity of that deity as rain, storm, or lightning god and also as patron of warfare, and is associated with the central Mexican Fire Serpent (Xiuhcoatl).

Another interpretation of the foreign intrusion focuses on dynastic/calendrical implications (Coggins 1975, 1979, 1983). The symbols and supernatural patrons of royal dynastic power are thought to have been transformed to incorporate Mexicanisms. Coggins (1983) believes that the Teotihuacan/Kaminaljuyu contacts changed the emphasis of astronomical and calendrical observations so as to emphasize formal celebrations of the ending of *k'atuns* (20-year cycles) as well as the 260-day calendar: "The erection of stelae to katun endings changed the focus of ritual from the dynasty to the calendar itself" (Coggins 1983:52). These changes, if indeed they occurred, were profound and of lasting significance through the Late Classic period.[15]

[15] In the Late Classic period Tikal's Jasaw Chan K'awil (formerly Aj Kakaw or "Ruler A"), perhaps a descendant of the Early Classic ruler "Stormy Sky," "inaugurated a new order" of calendrical ritual by (re-)imposing celebration of *k'atun* (20-year) cycles. *K'atun* celebrations continued thereafter in the lowlands in a pattern that "was at least theoretically unbroken until colonial times when Yucatecan cycles of *k'atuns* were found to trace back to 9.0.0.0.08 Ahau" or A.D. 435 (Coggins 1983:53, citing Barerra Vásquez and Morley 1949). It also bears mention that Jasaw Chan K'awil marked the two-hundred-sixtieth anniversary of Stormy Sky's death (ca. A.D. 456) by dedicating the temple known as 5D-33-1st, built over Stormy Sky's tomb. This dedication involved the ritual destruction of Stela 31, which depicted Stormy Sky flanked by his father, "Curl Nose," outfitted in Teotihuacan garb, as well as the smashing of numerous censers. These censers included Effigy Lids, Flanged Hourglass, and Flanged Cylinder forms (Ferree 1972:6).

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These competing (though not necessarily mutually exclusive; e.g., Mathews 1985:44) interpretations of the complex interrelationships between the Maya lowlands (Tikal and Uaxactun), Kaminaljuyu, and central Mexico can be evaluated for their relevance to the history of *incensario* manufacture and use. Ferree (1972:198–199) suggested that the new censer forms in the Maya lowlands could be traced to the Maya highlands, specifically to the hourglass censers with effigy covers that were in turn inspired by central Mexican vessels. Ruz Lhuillier (1969:231–232) suggested that Oaxaca, rather than Teotihuacan, may have had an important role in the development of lowland censers, both those with modeled human effigies (e.g., the funerary urns of Monte Albán III and IV with lateral "wings") and ladle censers (Monte Albán IV/Zapotec *sahumadores*). Here it also bears mention that even earlier, Late Preclassic (Monte Albán II) modeled funerary urns in Oaxaca displayed the cruller-nosed jaguar (known there as Old god 5F) found on Late Classic Maya effigy censers (Coggins 1983:57; Miller and Taube 1993:103–104).

A detailed comparison of Early Classic ceramic assemblages from the Maya lowlands and central Mexico, however, concluded that similarities are "noteworthily few" (Ball 1983:130–131; see also Hoopes 1985:152–156). Pottery imports or copies (Ball's ceramic "identities" and "homologies") include Thin Orange ware, cylinder tripods, and figurines. Significantly, neither Teotihuacan-style nor Oaxaca-style effigy *incensarios*, whether importations or imitations, have been found in the Maya lowlands. They apparently were not a significant component of the ceramics recovered from extensive excavations in the Teotihuacan-style Mundo Perdido architectural complex at Tikal (although a flanged censer was recovered from Structure 6C-50 in the nearby Group 6C-XV; Laporte Molina 1989:Figure 84). In addition, it should be remembered that modeled flanged image censers appeared earlier at Altar de Sacrificios than at Tikal, a hypothesized focus of highland-cum-Mexican intrusion. At Altar, they appeared in association with an incomplete and ill-defined (so-called "Protoclassic") ceramic complex, which may be intrusive . . . but not from central Mexico.

What this means is that: (1) censers were not directly imported into the lowlands from the Maya highlands or from central Mexico; (2) the Maya highlands' own variants of central Mexican censer forms and iconography were not accepted in the lowlands in any direct, recognizable fashion (see also Parsons's [1991:209] explanation discussed above); and (3) effigy incense burners apparently did not play an important role in either public or private (funerary, household) ritual associated with the "foreigners" in the Maya lowlands as it did in the highlands. It is tempting to conclude from this that image censers were not an important component of whatever introduced ceremonialism may have been associated with the "Tlaloc cult," *k'atun* celebrations, ritual warfare, or whatever ideology the foreign military/merchant elite brought with them, despite the prominence of so-called "incense bags" in the imagery.

In sum, the Early Classic ceramic religious/ritual involving image *incensarios* appears to be distinctively lowland Maya, not Mexican. These incense burners seem to be indigenous items of ritual paraphernalia closely tied to kingship, and as that institution evolved so did the specialized ritual vessels that were part of its constituent responsibilities in the Maya cosmos. It is not inconceivable that some effigy forms found in the Maya highlands could have been introduced from precursors in the lowlands, rather than the other way around, but this is not the place to explore such a possibility.[16]

INTERPRETATION OF CLASSIC LOWLAND MAYA POTTERY CENSERS

Given this context, it still remains to account for the persistence (from the Middle Preclassic period to the time of Spanish contact) of two kinds of censers, non-image (plain/spiked) and image, in the Maya lowlands. What is the meaning of their coexistence, and what were the uses, of these two categories of ritual ware? What is the significance of the fact that image censers varied appreciably through time, but non-image censers exhibited strong continuities with comparatively little change in form or embellishment? And how can we explain why, in the Classic and Postclassic periods, censers tend to be found archaeologically in pairs?

The contemporaneous existence of two very different kinds of ritual ware, which may occur together in pairs (e.g., an image plus a spiked censer, or pairs of either kind) or in very different spatial contexts (temples vs. residences or stela bases), suggests explanations couched in terms of complementary or structurally opposed categories of behavior. Among the Classic Maya, the possibilities are endless when it comes to hypothesizing dualities/dichotomies that could be embodied in these two categories of *incensarios*, image/non-image. These include: celestial versus terrestrial; sacred versus secular; youth versus aged; elite versus nonelite (Great Tradition vs. little tradition); night/Underworld/jaguar versus day/solar/rain; major center versus dependency; state/kingly religion versus household religion; celebration of 365-day versus 260-day calendars; and so forth. These multiple realms of dichotomization do not consist of independent and mutually exclusive variables, of course; rather, they are all systemically linked, which further complicates interpretations. For example, state/kingly cults are prerogatives of elites and rulers as official patrons of polity and royal dynasties, and are celebrated at major centers and temples rather than household or small structure contexts.

Late Classic censers of various types tend to be recovered from sometimes overlapping but largely distinct kinds of contexts. Image censers tended to be found in limited locations, primarily temples at a small number of major centers in the Late Classic period. Spiked censers were sometimes found in temples and burials, but (at least in the Terminal Classic) more commonly from around small structures and at the bases of stelae/altars at sites of a variety of sizes. These different contexts of use and recovery support the notion that the two categories of censers had different "meanings."

Existing analyses—albeit quite perfunctory—of the complex iconography of modeled image censers and stands recovered at Tikal, Altar de Sacrificios, Seibal, Palenque, and elsewhere in the southern lowlands, reveal a conflated imagery involving the Old god of fire, the Underworld, jaguars, and the aged sun/jaguar Sun god of the Underworld. I suggest that the image censers and censer stands displaying these representations are connected specifically to Classic-period (especially Late Classic divine) kingship, with state and/or dynastic cults and belief systems, and with rituals invoking the sanctity of the king (especially the king as manifestation of the Sun god) and supernatural patrons of the royal lineage.

[16] See Mathews (1985:54, Note 12) and Parsons (1988:43) for similar suggestions with respect to the diffusion of architectural facade masks from lowlands into highlands.

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These image censers or censer stands were recovered primarily from in and around Late Classic temple structures, suggesting that this is the primary location where these *incensarios* were used and perhaps maintained as temple furniture. They may have been deployed in pairs around the temple periphery to define the boundaries of sacred space, as at Palenque, or around a royal tomb as at Copan, to ensure the continued beneficence of the ancestors/gods. Temples, it will be remembered, were mortuary monuments to ancestors. The rituals carried out there, rituals employing ceramic incense burners, may have had a primary focus on the life cycle (death, rebirth) of the king, the dynasty, and the cosmos, and propitiation of patron deities overseeing such transitions. The presence of imagery of the Underworld jaguar/night Sun god supports this interpretation, as does the mortuary context: the death and rebirth of the king symbolizes the death and rebirth of the sun. Similarly, termination rituals involving the smashing of *incensarios* accompany the abandonment ("death") of temples and inaugurate their subsequent burial and construction of a new temple ("rebirth") in its place. The image or effigy censers and censer stands, then, are critical components of a royal funerary cult.[17]

The "stacking principle" (Freidel et al. 1991) is also evident here. The vertical stratification and implicit vertical motion of these arrangements—substructure and temple, effigy stand and incense receptacle, Underworld deity images below juxtaposed with celestial/ancestral deities above—represent physical and symbolic transformations from material into spiritual realms, as in the transformation (by burning) of a lump of copal resin into rising smoke, or symbolic rebirth as the rising movement of the night sun brings daylight. At the same time, such image "stacking" and temple contexts of use also represent the objectification of hierarchy—physical (architectural), social, and cosmological—as in the multiple layers of heavens and Underworld so widespread in Mesoamerican cosmovision. The ceramic expression of this principle can be traced back to the Middle/Late Preclassic development of modeled composite and double-chambered incense burners. As the rising smoke from the burning copal smoke symbolizes the rising of the new sun from its "death" in the Underworld, so too does it symbolize the (re)birth of the god-king and herald the corresponding future architectural transformation.[18]

By the Terminal Classic period in the southern lowlands, a time of crisis and "collapse" of political elites, the earlier elaborate image censers of the royal funerary cult became more simplified and disappeared. Rituals incorporating the burning of incense underwent some transformation and simpler spiked vases, with a long history of use in residential and/or nondynastic contexts, came to be more widely used, along with ladle censers.

Non-image (spiked and ladle) censers are, in some senses, virtually an antithesis of hierarchy, physically, metaphorically, and cosmologically. Although these vessels may have low pedestal bases, they are largely unelaborated in the vertical dimension. Similarly, they tend to be found (presumably as a consequence of original and intended use) on or in the ground, in public locations open to view, in association with stelae/altars and/or small structures, and away from intensely restricted (ritually dangerous) settings specifically identified with kingly ceremony, dynastic succession, and cosmological renewal. Parallels to such Classic and Terminal Classic period contexts of use can be identified in the Preclassic and Postclassic periods: Late Preclassic stelae at Izapa show spiked censers resting at ground level near standing or seated attendants, and Postclassic codices also depict spiked censers at floor or ground level.

As to function and meaning, these non-image—and particularly spiked—*incensarios* largely lack the iconographic embellishments found on image censers, which act as signatures of specific uses or deities and, by extension, meanings. There are suggestive associations to be made between spiked cylindrical incense burners and calendrical ritual. In the Postclassic *Dresden Codex* and *Madrid Codex*, spiked censers are illustrated in sections of the manuscript devoted to Wayeb' rites, New Year's day ceremonies celebrating the five unlucky days at the end of the old year in the 365-day solar/agricultural calendar. Similarly, the scene on Stela 5 at Izapa (see Figure 2c), which features a spiked censer, has been interpreted as an expression of a "creation myth," associated with the first day (Imix/Cipactli [alligator]) in the Mesoamerican 260-day year or "sacred almanac" (Lowe et al. 1982:298–305). Such explanations, if plausible, lend credence to the interpretations of the association of these spiked censers with birth (human birth, birth of a new year) and renewal (rainfall, calendrical cycling). It also supports interpretations of their symbolism along the lines of both a world tree and a "caiman as tree." Their usage at (more-or-less) ground level or in caves, as opposed to high in a temple, is appropriate for such earth symbols and suggests vertical ritual transformations: a sacred tree (or stela), "rooted" in the ground, with smoke from the burning incense reaching into the sky.

More specifically, of course, reference to burning incense and to incense burners invites attention to the Maya "Burner" gods (Aj Tok) and fire ceremonies. As known from the *Dresden Codex* (pp. 33c–39c), the Postclassic Maya 260-day almanac was divided into quarters or "burner periods," each associated with a cardinal direction and with specific "burner days": Chikchan (east, celestial snake), Ok (north, dog), Men (west, moon goddess), and Ajaw (south, sun). Each of the four burner periods was 65 days long, comprising intervals of 20, 20, 20, and 5 days. Thompson (1960:99–100) describes the activities of these intervals as beginning with *u ch'a k'ak' ajtok*, "the burner takes the fire"; 20 days later *u jop'ol u k'ak' ajtok*, "the fire of the burner begins/flares"; after another 20 days *yalkab' u k'ak' ajtok*, "the fire of the burner runs"; and then 5 days later *u tup k'ak' ajtok*, "the burner extinguishes the fire." Edmonson (1982:180, Note 4999; 1988) explains it more simply: the Burner gods "governed fire ceremonies . . . involving the announcement of the cycle forty days beforehand, a ceremonial fire twenty days before, and the extinguishing of the fire twenty days after each of the significant dates." According to Landa (e.g., Tozzer 1941:162–164), burner ceremonies (e.g., *tup' k'ak'* in the month of Mak: extinguishing the fire) were carried out to bring about adequate rainfall.

The Maya Burners are best known from Postclassic and colonial-period accounts and chronicles, when the dates can be correlated with eclipse cycles (Bricker and Bricker 1992:76–81; Edmonson 1982:180).[19] The existence of Burner gods, "burner periods," and fire ceremonies in the Classic period, and the possible usage of *incensarios* in their celebrations, have been given little attention by

[17] Coggins (1975:280–282) remarked about this same jaguar imagery being associated with funerary scenes in painted ceramics at Tikal in the Late Classic period, but she did not specifically address the role of *incensarios*. Similarly, Houston and Stuart (1996) mention jaguar and fire symbolism in connection with divinity and god effigies, but they also do not mention *incensarios*.

[18] For a modern highland example of Maya ritual incorporating metaphors of hierarchy—in this case the cargo system—see Rosaldo (1968).

[19] Bricker and Bricker (1992:78)

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Mayanists. Nonetheless, some evidence, albeit scanty, can be adduced in support of this possibility, and the notion of Classic-period Burner gods and fire ceremonies warrants more thorough analysis. Whether or not a full-blown Burner/fire ceremonial complex existed in the Classic period, it certainly seems clear that such a complex was strongly developing during the Terminal Classic in the northern Yucatan Peninsula.

For example, epigraphic evidence from Chichen Itza suggests that fire drilling and fire ceremonies were important features of the site's ceremonial life and may have had connections with ballcourts and the ballgame (Grube 1994:331; Krochok and Freidel 1994:369). This is supported in part by individual titles identified at Chichen Itza and other northern sites (Krochok and Freidel 1994:363–369). One title, Yajaw K'ak' ("Lord of the Fire"), was held by two individuals, Aj Muluk Tok and K'in Kimi. Another title was held by K'ak'upakal: K'ul K'ak', or "Holy Fire." A third title was Ch'ajom K'ak' ("Fire-scatterer"), perhaps used to refer to "one who scatters droplets of sacrificial blood or copal incense into flaming *incensarios*." Similarly, texts from the Casa Colorada at Chichen Itza refer to starting or drilling a fire (Krochok and Freidel 1994:367; Schele and Grube 1995:129–130). One, dated 10.2.0.1.9 6 Muluk 12 Mak (September 12, A.D. 869), refers to an event on 1 Ajaw "which ends the 10.3.0.0.0," and mentions K'ak'upakal. The other, dated 10.2.0.15.3 1 Ak'b'al 1 Ch'en (June 6, A.D. 870), mentions K'ul Kokom Ajaw. Although these dates are 268 (rather than 260) days apart, because they are not clearly period-ending dates one wonders if they might refer to Burner rituals.

Elsewhere, Kelley (1968), in discussing the occurrence of fire glyphs (T122:563a, T49:110, T669:669) in Classic texts, notes that they can be found on several lintels at Yaxchilan, in the Cross group at Palenque, on Copan Stela 1, as well as the Casa Colorada at Chichen Itza. Many of these fire glyphs occur in association with glyphs for dog (Ok), drilling fire, and blood-letting. More recently, Houston and Stuart (1996:299) have called attention to rulers impersonating fire gods and holding fire-drill staffs, noting that JGU is probably the Classic Maya fire god.[20] Since JGU is a considered to be a manifestation of GIII in the Palenque triad, it bears noting that a text on the Temple of the Inscriptions at Palenque holds a reference to "new fire" preceding mention of GIII (Kelley 1968:150). In fact, Kelley (1968:146) noted that many of the Classic-period occurrences of fire glyphs are accompanied by verbs meaning "emerge" or "to be born."

Connections among and between (new) fire, emergence, and birth/renewal can be pursued in several different directions. For one, the comparatively rare images of spiked censers on Late Classic Maya painted vases and elsewhere (Figure 5c, e; Kerr 1992:443; Taube 1994:668–669) suggest they may be associated with rituals associated with events in royal life cycles, particularly birth rites and sacrifices of infants, rather than deaths of kings. Some of these tall cylindrical vessels are characterized by appliqued spikes but may also have a long-nosed or beaked (avian?) image on the front. This creature may represent GI or Venus (Freidel and Schele 1988b:85–86), and is also said to be "identical to the Quadripartite God" at Palenque (Taube 1994:668). Alternatively, these vessels could represent a personified world tree or *axis mundi*, i.e., the king as world tree, and/or perhaps the earth reptile deity. This conceptualization may be traceable back to the Late Preclassic period on Izapa stelae, as well as into conquest times at Tayasal, although a connection with spiked incense burners is not explicit in either case.

Another connection of new fire with birth and renewal comes from Postclassic central Mexico. The Aztecs (Mexica) drilled new fires as part of ceremonies dedicating new temples, and their New Fire ceremony at the completion of 52-year cycles (see Carrasco 1987:138–140; Umberger 1987:437–444) is of particular interest. Conceivably the Classic Maya could have celebrated a similar event: completion of a 52-year calendar round would have also coincided with completion of a series of 260-day burner cycles (73 of them, to be precise). The Maya might have celebrated the end/beginning of these 52-year cycles—and the end of the corresponding five Wayeb' (or Nemontemi) days—by a New Fire ceremony similar to that of the Aztecs, which heralded the birth of a new 52-year cycle. All existing fires were extinguished, and a new fire was ritually ignited at a sacred location. According to the *Florentine Codex*, after the Aztec new fire was lighted, it "was carried to the pyramid temple of Huitzilopochtli in the center of the city of Tenochtitlan, where it was placed in the fire holder of the statue of the god" (Carrasco 1987:139).

Excavations at the dual temples of the Templo Mayor (see various papers in Boone [1987]) revealed striking patterns of use of paired censers.[21] Below the northern Tlaloc temple, on the northern edge of the lowest or "terrestrial" terrace of the substructure, rested a large carved stone serpent head flanked by two large, jar-like clay "braziers." Each of these censers bore a Tlaloc image on the front with "cloud"-scroll flanges on either side. The southern temple was dedicated to Huitzilopochtli, Mexica god of the sun and of war. In a similar position on the southern edge of the terrace was a large serpent head flanked by two large hourglass or biconical "braziers," each ornamented with a knot or bow on the lower front, which is a symbol of Huitzilopochtli, and

[20] The existence of a fire god is not commonly noted among the Classic Maya, although there were two fire gods in central Mexico. One, Xiutecuhtli, or turquoise serpent, was god of terrestrial fire and associated with rulership and warfare (he carries spears and a shield and wears a mosaic bird or serpent headdress) (Taube 1992:Figure 67; Miller and Taube 1993:189). The other, Huehueteotl, the "old god" of fire, was a domestic god venerated in household shrines rather than temples. Houston and Stuart (1996:299) suggest that JGU (and GIII) is the Maya parallel of Huehueteotl, and rulers impersonated JGU in fire-drilling ceremonies. I am more inclined, however, to see JGU—and Maya censers bearing the JGU image—as aligned with Xiuhtecuhtli, the war/fire serpent, and with rulership and temple ritual. Huehueteotl, the old fire god, might be more—and more continuously—associated with nonroyal and nonpublic fire contexts of the sort involving use of spiked censers (see, e.g., Izapa Stela 5).

Related to this, Stuart (1988:189) has suggested that JGU is one of the Paddler gods (ancestors) in cloud scrolls in Terminal Classic stelae. The other Paddler is an old individual with a stingray spine through his nose. If we take speculation to an extreme, we could draw a series of parallels as follows:

JGU	???
Underworld	sky
Young fire god (kingly)	Old fire god (domestic)
(Xiutecuhtli)	(Huehueteotl)
effigy censers	spike censers
GIII	GI
sun; night (moon?)	Vemis' rain
Jaguar Paddler (paddles in bow)	Stingray Paddler (paddles in stern)
Xbalanque?	Hunahpu?

[21] Broda (1987:103), in her essay on the "Templo Mayor as Ritual Space," cites an ethnographic parallel with the modern K'iche' of highland Guatemala as "highly illuminating to prove the depth of the common historical background of Mesoamerican cosmovision." It should also be mentioned that this common historical background extends into the Late Preclassic period as evidenced by the themes on stelae at Izapa.

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rows of spikes around the sides (see Matos Moctezuma 1987: Figures 5 and 6). Huitzilopochtli's weapon in war is a fire serpent (*xiuhcoatl*).

As a final speculative note, perhaps there might be a connection between the embellishments and common occurrence of pairs of these censer vessels—image plus spiked—and representations of the Classic Maya Paddler gods (Miller and Taube 1993:128–129). One of the Paddlers is the Old Jaguar god, symbol of night, darkness, fire, and the Underworld, while the other, the Old Stingray Paddler (GI?), represents day. Together, the Paddlers represent similar oppositions as the two types of censers, and one even shares the same deity image. They are said to be created or born when a Maya king lets blood, and they frequently appear in "cloud scrolls" in the upper register of Terminal Classic stelae showing rulers "scattering" (i.e., letting blood; Rice 1997). By extension, the two types of censers discussed above may symbolize the blood sacrifice at rites associated with kingly life crises, and the cloud scrolls in which the Paddler gods appear may be clouds of smoke from burning incense. The occurrence of paired censers may symbolize these metaphysical transformations as the canoe/containers holding the blood sacrifice. Such a symbolic relationship is of unknown origin and duration, but it could help explain the occasional recovery of paired censers in burials. Examples include an Early Classic burial at Tayasal with a spiked censer stand and a censer with a modeled face (Chase 1988:94–95; perhaps GI?), Burial XXXVII-4 at Copan with numerous effigy and spiked censers (Stuart 1989), and the two flanged censers in the "Stela 23 Group" burial at Tikal (Coe and Broman 1958).[22]

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this paper was to explore Classic-period lowland (especially Peten) Maya incense burner use and the ritual meaning of these vessels. This examination was aided by broadening the scope of the review to incorporate reference to non-lowland and non-Maya censers.

It seems clear that the various vessels archaeologists lump together under the rubric "incense burners" were not used solely for burning incense by the Classic lowland Maya. These vessels also may have been used to burn paper with blood offerings, to burn various noncopal resins and offerings, or to support other vessels used in such a way. In addition, they likely were used in various kinds of fire ceremonies—particularly "new-fire" ceremonies—attendant to calendrical events and temple dedication. Censers of both types, image and non-image, were important material and symbolic paraphernalia in rituals associated with cosmological, calendrical, and historical cycling, and with fire as the renewing force that accompanies and fuels such cyclical transformations.

Of particular interest are Classic-period modeled image censers and censer stands, which are commonly recovered in contexts suggesting termination rituals, especially mortuary rituals accompanying the death of divine kings. The burning of incense ritually activates the sacred space of the structure, opening communication with the gods; the subsequent smashing of the censers deactivates it. These contexts of recovery support associations of these *incensarios* with broad cosmological cycles of life/death and regeneration, most strikingly with the parallel life cycles of the sun and the divine lord of the polity. The development and elaboration of these censers accompanies the increasing power and authority of Classic-period kings, evidenced particularly in the cult-like manipulation and monopolization of sanctity-invoking symbols. Through these incense burners along with the rest of the richly symbol-laden paraphernalia of Maya kingship, rulers emphatically and redundantly asserted their connections to cosmological power as well as to "traditional" authority rooted in the past (for example, links to mythic histories of ancestral heros and gods as discussed in the *Popol Vuh*). Three mutually reinforcing processes were occurring in Maya rulership during the Classic period: consolidation and formalization of kingly power and authority over time; increasing "specialization" of material forms (such as censers) that declared and upheld that authority; and increasing specialization and restriction in the ritual practices and ritual locations in which these objects were used and/or displayed. During the Terminal Classic period, the collapse of divine kingship in the southern lowlands was accompanied by the disappearance of the JGU-based image-censer cult.

In contrast to the specialized developments in the forms, uses, and meanings of image censers, non-image and particularly spiked censers persisted from Preclassic times through the Classic. Their use seems to be associated more with earthly and temporal cycles, birth/fertility, and perhaps still more specifically with the world tree as *axis mundi* and with rainfall. The resurgence of spiked censers in the Terminal Classic and Postclassic periods reveals the remarkable continuity and the profound interrelations of form and function in this aspect of Maya ritual.

The interpretations offered here are sketchy and tentative rather than conclusive, as there is inadequate and inconsistent detail on types and architectural contexts of recovery to postulate uses and changes in functions through time. Nor has there been a sufficient body of iconographic analysis of these censers to fully understand their ritual "meaning." At the very least, however, this overview should point to some intriguing lacunae and possibilities for further research.

It is curious that *incensarios* have attracted so little interest among Mayanists as compared to other sources of iconographic detail and to other categories of ceramic remains. Perhaps this neglect is a legacy of Smith and Gifford's (1965:523) dismissive remark 30 years ago that censers were only "rarely and selectively used" in the Maya lowlands in the Preclassic and Classic periods. Their statement, if not flatly wrong, was clearly premature and perhaps reflects early lowland archaeologists' excavation/recovery strategies or analyses more heavily focused on polychrome pottery. On the other hand, more recent studies of Preclassic and Classic lowland Maya art, architecture, and iconography could be read to indicate that at some sites the course of development of ritual and elite authority may have briefly eclipsed the earlier role of censers and resulted in a refocusing of ritual away from widespread incense-burner use. Until more attention is devoted to the study of censers—their contexts of use and their iconography—these possibilities must remain open. At the same time the earlier studies of Rands and Rands (1959), Ferree (1972), and Goldstein (1977) should be lauded for their pathbreaking contributions. Clearly our understanding of Maya ritual practice would be greatly enhanced by more such systematic analyses of *incensarios* and their contexts of use.

[22] The occasional recovery of censers in burials also may relate to a suggestion by Stephen Houston (personal communication 1996) that some censers may have been "rather personalized devices" that "had a mortuary/commemorative function, tiny 'temples' for people or deities that didn't warrant more grandiose treatment."

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RESUMEN

Los mayas del período clásico utilizaron una gran variedad de contenedores llamados "incensarios" para quemar copal y otros tipos de incienso. Aunque estas vasijas son ricamente adornadas con decoración modelada, aplicada y pintada, han sido relativamente poco estudiadas (en comparación con las estelas talladas y la cerámica policromada, por ejemplo) para entender su uso y "significado." Este artículo se enfoca en el uso de incensarios en las tierras bajas mayas del período clásico, y comienza con un breve resumen de incensarios en el altiplano y la costa pacífica. Los incensarios de las tierras bajas mayas en el período clásico pueden ser descritos en términos más generales por dos tipos, imagen y no-imagen (o efigie y no-efigie) y ambos tienen numerosas subdivisiones. La función y el significado de las dos categorías se investigan por su decoración y simbolismo, y por los contextos estructurales de su uso y recuperación. Se sugiere que los incensarios "imágenes" del clásico tardío, que típicamente llevan la cara del dios jaguar del inframundo (JGU/GIII), se empezaron a hacer y utilizar como parte de los accesorios de los reyes divinos. Recuperados primariamente en contextos de templos en las tierras bajas del sur, se asocian con "rituales de terminación" y con la institución clásico tardío del "reinado divino," incluyendo un culto real funerario y sobre todo con el rey como manifestación del dios del sol. En contraste, los incensarios no-imágenes, sobre todo los cucharones ("ladles") y cilindros con espigas, se encuentran comunmente en estructuras pequeñas y con estelas y altares. Las vasijas con espigas pueden ser consideradas como representaciones del "árbol mundial" que son asociadas con ceremonias enfocadas en nacimiento/renovación, la tierra, la lluvia y rituales caléndricos como los de encender un nuevo fuego. Su uso parece ser más amplio en las tierras bajas durante el clásico terminal con el "colapso" de la institución de reinado divino y el poder de las élites.

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APPENDIX I. TIKAL CENSER COMPLEXES AND FORM TYPOLOGY (from Ferree 1972)

- Xinic complex: late Middle and early Late Preclassic (some Tzec but mostly Chuen)
  - Unslipped Censer Group
    - Flaring Dish on Vertical Pedestal Support (pronged)
  - Spiked Slipped Group (begins Late Zinic; through Holom)
    - Flaring Dish type: Slipped Base variety
    - Vertical Wall Dish: Slipped Base variety
- Holom complex: late Late Preclassic (Cauac and Cimi)
  - Unslipped Censer Group (also pronged plates, effigy mask snout)
    - Plain Flaring Bowl Type
    - Spiked Bowl Type
  - Slipped Censer Group
    - Slipped Dish on Pedestal Support
    - Slipped Effigy Mask
  - Spiked Slipped Censer Group
    - Flaring Dish Type: Plain Base variety
    - Restricted upper wall
    - Convex lower wall
    - Cover rim
    - Flaring upper wall
- Kataan complex: Early Classic
  - General (both Early and Late facets)
    - Loop-handle Bowl Type
    - Pronged Dish on Pedestal Support Type
    - Trough-handle Ladle Type: Flat Base variety
  - Early facet
    - Pronged Dish on Pedestal Support Type: Striated/reduced variety
  - Late facet
    - Pronged Dish on Pedestal Support: Plain variety
    - Trough-handle Ladle: Convex Base variety
    - Effigy Censer Group
      - Flanged Cylinder type: Anthropomorphic mask variety
    - Covered Hourglass Group
      - Hourglass Type: Stepped Rim, Exterior-fold Rim, Inner-flanged Rim, and Cupped Rim varieties
      - Composite Cover Type: Shoulderless and Angular Shoulder varieties
      - Conical Cover Type
    - Group Unclassified
      - Strap-handle Headdress
      - Headdress Mask
      - Feathered Headdress
- Tulix complex: Late Classic (Ix and Imix)
  - General (both Early and Late facets)
    - Effigy Group
      - Flanged Cylinder Type: Inset Mask variety
  - Early facet
    - Effigy Group
      - Flanged Cylinder Type: Applique Mask variety (grotesque)
      - Flanged Hourglass Type: Flaring Bowl and Curved Bowl varieties
      - Seated Figure Cover: Head/Torso and Leg Unit varieties
  - Late facet
    - ? (Unpainted?) Group
      - Plain Ladle Type: Straight-side Bowl and Round-side Bowl varieties
      - Winged Candelero Type
    - Effigy Group
      - Flanged Cylinder Type: Composite Mask (grotesque) and Double Mask varieties
      - Flanged Cylinder on Pedestal Support Type
      - Seated Figure Cover Type: Elaborated and Uolantun varieties
    - Spiked Group
      - Spiked Cylinder Type: Floorless and Perforated Floor varieties
      - Spiked Cylinder on Pedestal Support Type
- Pach complex: Terminal Classic (Eznab)
  - Group
    - Decorated Ladle Type (effigy paws)
    - Spiked Cone Type
  - Modified Effigy Group
    - Seated Figure on Base Type: Hollow Head and Face on Plaque varieties
    - Modified Flanged Cylinder Type
- Knuc complex: Early Postclassic (Caban)
  - Group
    - Decorated Chalice Type
    - Reptile Effigy Ladle Type

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