

Iconography is the language of images and signs rather than the specific symbols that make up a written language. Icons surround us in our every day life, some of which may or may not be easily discernable outside of our society. For example, when we travel to another country, we may not recognize the icons for the opening of doors or in which direction traffic moves. It takes some time to become acquainted with these strange symbols and to have them bring understanding of what these icons mean.

We could say that icons are designed for an illiterate population, that is, unknowledgeable of what we call the written word, but if we think of icons as a different type of written language, then the pictures and signs that people left us become a translatable set of significant expressions. In the course of this talk, we will look at many icons and try to discern the message or messages they impart and to whom the icons refer to.

The supernatural Hero Twins of the Maya are a case in point. They are named as Hunaph★ and Xbalanqu■ in a 16th century Quiche document, the Popol Vuh, but their iconic images and their names, written in hieroglyphs were known for centuries earlier.

SLIDE 1(K1183)

The painting on this vase is an example of where the artist used portraits as well as the writing system to tell the story. There are four characters shown in this scene. A deity, Itzamná with a skull resting in front of him as he sits on a serpent throne, The Hero Twins are illustrated as two handsome young ballplayers. What are the icons that define these supernaturals?

SLIDE 2 (521)

The identification of the Hero Twins is based on a number of criteria. The decisive factor is the headband (Michael Coe writing in the *Maya Scribe*

and his World called them the headband twins). Other symbols as well are found in their headdresses as well as other facial and body marks that identify them.

We will find that examining Maya iconography is not a straight line but a devious path filled with twists and turns and signs that say, “Stop, Look Again”. We have quickly reached one of those stop signs as an icon in the headdress worn by Chac Cib Chac, deity of rain, lightning and thunder, is very similar to the same icon in the Hero twins Headdress. Chac Cib Chac is a major player in the tale of the sacrifice of the child called the Baby Jaguar

SLIDE 3 same

The components that appear in this scene are repeated on a number of vases and have been interpreted in a number of different ways. There seems to be a connection between Hunahpú and Chac Cib Chac, who holds ax and handstone. He was originally identified as a deity named G1 (God 1) based on his shell ear-piece and fish barbells, the same iconography that identifies G1 of Palenque. Based on the Popol Vuh, a number of scholars read this scene as the story of the Hero Twins in the court of Xibalba, cutting themselves up (Hunahpú [Chac Cib Chac] cuts up Xbalanqué, [Baby Jaguar]) and they put themselves back together to the astonishment of the Lords of Xibalba..

SLIDE 4 same

After G1's name was read from the glyphs, as Chac Cib Chac, the original interpretation of the scene was abandoned and the focus of the story became the sacrifice of the Baby Jaguar. Karl Taube points out that this scene may be interpreted as a K'EX offering, a way of maintaining the balance between birth and death. However, other scholars still feel there is some sort of a relationship, or another aspect, of the Hero Twins to the characters in the episode depicted in the portrayal of Chac Cib Chac, the Baby Jaguar, and the Death God.

SLIDE 5 still on 1183

To return to the Hero Twins, they both wear yokes presenting them as ballplayers. Their role as ballplayers figures largely in the story of their adventures with the Lords of the Xibalba. Hunahpú wears the “hun” “one” marking on his cheek as well as on his body while his brother wears a long lipped deity on his headdress, attached to his headband. This deity mask is interchangeable and may be worn by either of the twins. The ties of the headband behind the head are distinctly shown. Glyphs record the names of the Twins as well as one of their father's names. in this case, "White Skull." To my knowledge there are no other supernaturals that wear the headband who are not related in some way to the Hero Twins

SLIDE 6 (555) (Use drawing of Ahaw vulture)

with the exception of the Ahaw vulture.

Itzamná, one of the major gods is identified by icon he wears in front of his headdress that consists of a ring of circles surrounding what might be a dark mirror. Some scholars have described the icon as a flower, but I think that it may be a sun emblem and there are stories that connect him to the sun.

SLIDE 7 (1339)

J.E.S Thompson records a Mopan Maya tale. The Sun and the Moon are the first people to be married. Unfortunately, she does not have the proper attributes and so exposes herself to the deer who kicks her. Now fully equipped with the proper body parts, the marriage is consummated. However, some time later, she runs off with the vulture god.

SLIDE 8 (2794)

In order to bring her back, he makes believe he is ill, he asks the deer if could borrow its skin bring her back. The ancient Maya delighted in this tale as there are numerous images of the lady riding on the deer's back. His headdress icon hangs on the wall above his bed identifying him as Itzamná while he lays feigning sickness.

SLIDE 9 (1607)

Itzamná often interacts with the Hero Twins who make offerings to him. The Popol Vuh relates the story of the Hero Twins part in the doing away with one of the sons of Vucub Caquix, Zipacná by name.

Zippacna's head is placed in a cache vessel and offered to Itzamná by Hunahpú.

SLIDE 10 (1991)

The peccary has cosmological significance in that this animal may be seen as a heavenly body. Itzamná rides the beast while the Hero Twins have weapons in their hands. Hunahpú and Xbalanqué are using atl atl's and the glyphic text tells us that, "they capture the peccary"

SLIDE 11 (out)

This peccary was a pet of the Copán project and disappeared one day. It was assumed that he wound as peccary chops at someone's table.

SLIDE 12(512)

No line can be drawn that divides the Maya conscience of the real world with the otherworld. A ruler is seen accompanied by his consort making an offering to the Maize God, who is in turn accompanied by his sons, Hunahpú and Xbalanqué. The offering, implied by a gesture of his hand, is described as "holy". The concept of humans interacting with supernaturals is rather common in vase paintings..

SLIDE 13 (1892)

The resurrection of the Maize God after his ordeal in Xibalba is an oft used theme in Maya ceramic paintings. A plate identifies the Twins with their Classic period names as Hun Ahaw 1st lord and Yax Balam as first jaguar. Hun Ahaw with his *hun* marking on cheek, his headband, and yoke. Yax Balam with headband, the long lipped deity on his headband and jaguar patches on his face and body. These patches on cheek and body identify Xbalanqué closely with the supernatural jaguar. The overall message of this scene is the resurrection of the father of the Hero Twins, in this painting, named Hun Nal Ye. He rises from a split

turtle carapace, which many believe to be a representation of the earth, but it floats in a watery environment as attested to by the presence of the water lily and so-called “water stacks” which in reality are slices of conch shell. Another icon to be dealt with is the inverted triangle of three dots that appear on their cheeks.

SLIDE 14

The icon of the inverted triangle of three dots appears not only on the cheeks of full figure representations, but in some cases, in portraits of the individuals such as a portrait of Hun Ahaw on a pendant made from a pottery shard.

SLIDE 15 (5088)

This icon of three dots becomes extremely useful in identifying a series of vases with nothing more on the walls of the vessels but paintings of catfish.

SLIDE 16 same

In the Popol Vuh, the Hero Twins having been defeated by the lords of the otherworld, trick these lords into grinding up their bones and casting the pulverized bone into the river. The bones regenerate and the twins survive. I quote---

"This is a good death for them, and it would also be good to grind their bones on a stone, just as corn is refined to flour, and refine them separately, and then:

Spill them into the river, sprinkle them on the water's way among the mountains, small and great, you will say, and then you will have carried out the instructions we've named for you," said Hunahpú and Xbalanqué. When they gave these instructions they already knew they would die.

...After that they summoned Xulu and Pacan, who kept their word: the bones went just where the boys had wanted them. Once the Xibalbans had

done the divination, the bones were ground and spilled In the river, but they didn't go far ... they just sank to the bottom of the water."

...AND ON THE FIFTH DAY THEY REAPPEARED. They were seen in the water by the people. The two of them looked like channel catfish when their faces were seen by Xibalba."

On these vessels there are two symbols in the rim band. One of these is the kimi glyph, which means death, and the other is the triangle of three dots identifying the Hero Twins. To my knowledge there are at least seven examples of this scene, painted by a number of different artists, but all following the same subject. The concept of trickery seems to be a pervasive theme in the Americas and we can find parallel stories among the peoples of North America as well.

SLIDE 17

The inverted triangle identifies a head of the twin as Sun from the lowest levels of the building named Rosalila at Copan, Honduras. I was asked to stand by and record as the excavator removed the dirt surrounding this mask. I had recently discovered the meaning of the inverted triangle and as the overlying debris came away from the cheek and as I spied the first circle and then the second, I knew I could identify the mask that was being uncovered.

SLIDE 18

One of The Hero Twins most popular exploits can be identified easily. In the guise of hunter, for example, there are costume details that add to the roster of items that can be used to point out attributes of hunters and specifically Hunahpú A slate ax describes itself as a dance baton and is probably the object that is seen in the hands of rulers dancing in palace scenes. Hunahpú is shown as hunter with hunter's hat surmounted by three leaves suggesting his status as Ahaw. He carries his blowgun and wears skirt or kilt made of twisted and knotted rope. The ax shows Hunahpú blowing thorough a short tube. It has been

suggested that he is using on a short blowgun, but because of other images, I believe that the small tube is a bird-call. The twins seem to be primarily hunters of birds.

SLIDE 19

On this early classic double vase an artist turns from the flat painting we have been seeing to three-dimensional sculpture. Hunahpú is again seen with knotted skirt and blowgun. If we look carefully we can see the sight at the end of his weapon. He aims at Vucub Caquix also known as Itzam Ye. This bird is their major antagonist, he is vain, he believes himself to be the sun and moon. He wishes to rule the world and the Hero Twins decide that he must be killed for the sake of the people still to come.

SLIDE 20

On other versions of this scene we can see the same costume. Hunahpú as hunter. He wears a broad brimmed hat, in this case it seems to be woven of straw or grass as so many modern sombreros are, and also wears the knotted skirt, another indicator of hunter. In this case both his headband and his hunt marking are shown. One of the more interesting aspects of Maya scenes is that often they can be read on many levels. This scene for example has been read as the announcement of the arrival of Halley's comet. Also described as an image of the position of the constellations in the sky at the moment of this supernatural event.

There is a scorpion near the tree that Vucub Caquix is resting in and a jaguar paw poking out from behind it. When I first studied this vase I speculated that there were two individuals missing from the scene, one was the brother Xbalanqué and the other their father the maize god.

SLIDE 21

A Maya play on words helps to solve the puzzle. One of the names for scorpion is ekchuah and there is also a Maya deity, the merchant

god, whose name is also Ekchuah. But how does all this relate to the Maize god? A Maya painter presents us with a comic dance.

SLIDE 22

Musicians playing a ceramic drum and a gourd *rasca* accompany a pair dancing. One dancer is dressed in the costume of Ekchuah and the other dressed in woman's costume.

SLIDE 23

She holds her hand to his rather phallic looking nose during the dance. The Popol Vuh has told us that after his defeat in Xibalba, the maize god is decapitated and his head hung in a tree where it becomes a skull, (we saw that early on) A daughter of one of the Lords of the underworld whose name is Xquic, approaches the skull and it tells her to put her hand out. The skull spits in her hand and she becomes pregnant. I believe the Maya are telling this story through the device of Ekchuah playing the maize god and impregnating Xquic who becomes the mother of the Hero Twins. If this is true, there exists a relationship between the maize god and scorpion though the double meaning of the word ekchuah.

SLIDE 24

A Maya plate with the image of the maize god, his arms and legs through a star glyph with the scorpion tail below merging the Maize god and scorpion.

SLIDE 25

Another version of the shooting of Vucub Caquix without the scorpion but showing all the principals in the story, Hunahpū, Xbalanqué and I believe although badly eroded that the third character is the Maize god. In this version of the scene, the artist did not find it necessary to hide the participants but included them physically together. A sidelight to this picture of the slaying of Vucub Caquix is that the artist shows Hun Ahpu's blowgun split at the moment the pellet leaves the barrel of the weapon. The story tells us that Hun Ahpu did not kill the

bird with his first shot but missed and merely wounded him in the jaw. The artist may have been trying to explain his lack of marksmanship and shows the blowgun unable to perform correctly, taking the blame away from the Hero Twin. However, we still have to deal with the jaguar paw emerging from behind the tree from the previous image.

On the Princeton vase, an important event is taking place in the court of God L in Xibalba.

SLIDE 26

Two magicians have appeared and have gone through a series of tricks. They have cut up a dog and put him back together. They have dismembered themselves and put themselves back together. These tricks have enticed the Lords of the Otherworld to demand that the magicians cut one of them up and do the same putting back together. It is at this point in the story that the curtains open.

The palace of the otherworld looks remarkably similar to the palace scenes at Tikal or Naranjo or any other site. God L on his throne surrounded by lovely young ladies. He is tying her wrists while another young woman tries to get her attention focused on another performance. Other ladies go about their duties, which include pouring liquid from one vessel to another. Lets look at the performance taking place.

SLIDE 27

Sometimes as in the fish sequence, the twins appear in disguise. Using the tools we have just gleaned from other images, we can identify these two individuals. The first of the ax men is wearing a number of the icons we have discussed previously. Foremost, he wears the headband with the long lipped deity attached, a number of hun marks appear on his body, and behind his ear, the icon of scribe (the twins are often portrayed as scribes).

SLIDE 28

The second of the two ax men also wears the headband and on the front of this mask is a jaguar paw, telling the viewer in no uncertain terms, we

are seeing Xbalanqué behind the mask. This is the jaguar paw that we have seen on the blow gunner vase. It is as if the artist wanted to make sure we the viewers understood what was taking place that although the Lords of the Otherworld were seeing magicians, we the viewer know that they are Hunahpú and Xbalanqué.

Turning to God L, we can describe certain characteristics of this old gentleman.

SLIDE 29

He is an old god with a large nose, generally described as Roman. He wears a broad brimmed hat decorated with feathers and bird or bird's head that sits in the center. He is very often associated with woman and tobacco. He wears a diagnostic cape, sometimes as in this case a jaguar skin, sometimes fringed but more often, a black and white patterned cape, which probably hints at his animal counterpart, the armadillo.

SLIDE 30

The scene on this vase is strongly reminiscent of the palace scene on the Princeton vase where the old God L is tying the wrists of the young lady.. On this vase the armadillo form of God L is also tying the wrists of a beautiful young lady while two supernaturals look on. I would like to think of them a Hero Twins but the identification would be tenuous. However, we do have a trefoil element and the possibility of a headband.

SLIDE 31

More about God L. Deities have ways or alter egos as well as humans. God L's way is the armadillo as he appears in this guise a number of times. Here as the drummer in this parade of animal spirits as musicians.

SLIDE 32

A mold made pedestal vase excavated at Copán by Steve Whittington speaks to the popularity of God L. There are, to my knowledge, 4 examples of this vase, an other from Seibal and two in private collections.

SLIDE 33

The Vase of the Seven Gods. God L seemingly the most important of the gods at the beginning of time for the Maya. In this version with fringed cape and smoking.

SLIDE 34

The Vase of the Eleven Gods. The scene repeats, only this time God L leads 10 other deities rather than 6.

SLIDE 35

God L, who was all powerful in his palace, along with God N and others, suffers humiliation at the hands of the Maize god after his resurrection.

SLIDE 36

His hat, cape and staff are in the hands of a dwarf, with the text suggesting "Old god wants his hat".

SLIDE 37

A single example of a small flask of which there are a number pulled from the same mold. To my knowledge, the glyphs on this flask and others are not as yet readable. Although Mike Coe told me that David Stuart has read the word for snuff on one example. The second deity is God K also known as Kawil.

SLIDE 38

God L and Kawil interact in a number of scenes. From Chama in the highlands of Guatemala this vase shows God L with his feather hat and jaguar cape. God K or Kawil, with his head thrown back holds a torch as does God L.

SLIDE 39

Kawil as we see here is also known as the way, the alter ego, of Och Chan, the great serpent, who may represent the body of Xibalba, the other world. In this instance his body runs thorough what I believe is the magical blowgun of the twins. Here it is in the arms of the maize god the father of the Hero twins.

SLIDE 40

Och Chan the serpent wraps his body around a lady who is a version of the Moon Goddess while a deity emanates from his mouth. Kawil is present as the way. The text has a number of possibilities, one of which suggests that she dreams (wayob) of the old god. Another possibility is that she grabs the serpent. (David Stuart)

SLIDE 41

Kawil is most often seen as the scepter that is held by rulers on stele as this flint version.

SLIDE 42

A great cache of obsidian kawils were found wrapped in cloth directly behind this wall in the structure known as Rosalila at Copán. The fellow in the background is Nicolai Grube and the lady whose back is to us is Linda Schele.

SLIDE 43

This magnificent example of Maya artistry presents Kawil as cover of a jade mosaic vase. Similar vessels have been excavated in Tikal.

SLIDE 44

Stela 31 from Tikal shows the ruler Stormy Sky wearing all most the same version of Kawil in his headdress.

SLIDE 45

For reasons unknown to us, the artists of the Guatemalan highlands chose God N as the deity that the Hero twins would overcome. Another old god, he lives in a shell.

SLIDE 46

With flint knife in hand the twin pulls god N from shell in order to cut him up. Another supernatural we should examine is God A.

SLIDE 47

A skeletal deity whose visage shrieks of death. He is described as full of stinks and body odors. He sometimes wears a death's eye collar, which is composed of human eyes that have been torn from victims

heads .He seems to exist in a number of varieties. A plain vanilla type and two or more deities who have specific duties.

SLIDE 48

One of these is God A of hunting, specifically deer hunting. Although skeletal, he adds specific items to his costume. First the hunter's hat. Sometimes looking like a derby, but probably an adaptation of the broad brimmed sombrero. He often wears deer antlers attached to his head and carries a conch shell trumpet. On his back he carries a basket or a net bag, in which we sometimes see the head of a slain deer . Another version of this deity is the God of Decapitation. (All of the skeletons that Steve Whittington excavated at Iximche were decapitated and trophy heads are quite common hanging from warrior's belts).

SLIDE 49

Two God A appear in this scene. One is the God of Hunting carrying his basket and conch shell trumpet. The other, the God of Decapitation holds a severed head in his hand.

SLIDE 50

Again in this mélange of otherworld characters, the God A of decapitation appears, holding aloft the decapitated head of a victim.

SLIDE 51

This small jade pendant with the trefoil eyelids and cluster of shells identifies this head as the God of Decapitation

SLIDE 52.

. A three dimensional figure excavated at Tikal, carries a decapitated head in the palms of his hands. The trefoil eyebrows and shell cluster help identify him.

SLIDE 53

A mask of jade, probably depicting a victim of torture and sacrifice.

SLIDE 54

Another aspect of God A is known as God Aprime and exists as a fully fleshed figure who wears the Kimi glyph as wounds on his body. No

doubt that the kimi glyph is a representation of a cut in the flesh. God Aprime has a terrible habit of practicing self-decapitation. In most cases merely shown in the act with ax or knife, but in this instance we see that he has totally severed his head and placed it on a rock so that we can see the blood sprouting from his neck.

SLIDE 55

God Aprime dances in a bloody costume, reminiscent of the twirling dance of victory at Bonampak. Here, his self decapitation takes place with a stone knife.

SLIDE 56

Please come with me now to a vision of the Maya otherworld. We are in the supernatural pond. Still water, dark and covered with lily pads and fronds, It is inhabited by creatures not of this earth, but conceived of by the minds of the Ancient Maya. Composite serpents, birds and jauars.

SLIDE 57

Come with me to the surface of the water. As we look across the water with sky above we see the fronds bending in a gentle breeze. As our line of sight changes to under the surface, we see the creatures of the otherworld, locked in time, carved in clay to be with us always.