

# Please, Lets Stop Bashing the Baby

A letter written to Linda Schele  
with a few recent revisions.



March 28, 1992

Dear Linda,

I was going to write this as a formal essay with footnotes and all, but I think I would rather formulate this idea as a letter to you. It is entitled "A New Look at Some Old Friends" or "Is the little fellow really getting bashed?"

I am concerned with the interpretation of the scenes which appear on a group of Codex style vessels, with the Metropolitan vase as the prototype, which have been called "the sacrifice of the Baby Jaguar" or "the sacrifice of the Jaguar God of the Underworld". These scenes have been related to the cutting up and reassembling of the Hero Twins in Xibalba. For many years, I have felt that this interpretation was not correct and that another way of looking at this scene was necessary. As you know, three main characters are involved; a small figure, often with jaguar tail, sometimes with jaguar paws or mittens; Chac Xib Chac, armed with handstone and ax; and God A, with hands outstretched, farting his stench of death. On a few of the vases there are other characters, namely a dog, a firefly?, a harpy eagle and a jaguar and some miscellaneous characters. The thoughts about this scene jelled during the sessions on Origins as some of the other vases and images were being presented.

There are now twelve codex style in the corpus which show this scene and a few polychromes, and even "the" sarcophagus cover. The codex vases are nos. 0521, 1003, 1152, 1199, 1370, 1644, 1815, 2207, 2213, 2208, 3201, and 4056. A number of different artists and schools are represented, which suggests that this motif was well known and used often. The polychromes are vases nos. 688, 1184, and 3422.

On none of the codex style vessels do we actually see the little fellow being killed or dismembered by either of the two otherworld beings. On the contrary, in some of the scenes God A is holding the little fellow in his arms, and on vases nos. 2208 and 1370 there is a tsaak glyph suggesting holding or manifesting; on others there are statements of birth, which appear on the polychrome vases nos. 688 and 1184, as well.

I believe that the scenes on these codex style vases are not of sacrifice or dismembering, but rather scenes of rebirth into the otherworld with Chac Xib Chac and God A as the welcoming committee.

What is my basic premise? The infant with jaguar attributes has died in the real world. The scene presents this infant, now a deity being welcomed into the otherworld.

On the Palenque sarcophagus cover, and vases nos. 688, 1184, and 3422, we see Pacal and other lords falling into the maw of Xibalba. On the sarcophagus cover Pacal has changed from his mortal state into the maize god with the god K flare, whereas on the vases the lord changes into the jaguar god of the underworld. (G3 ?). (Taube showed a connecting line from God K to Chac Xib Chac to the Young Corn God; there seems to be a lot of overlapping amongst the gods). In a direct comparison of vase no. 688 and the codex scenes, we see that one of the gods who is flanking the lord being reborn into the otherworld is wearing the identical knotted belt as Chac Xib Chac of the codex vases, the other deity is possibly God L. The particular hank of hair that God L wears is also similar to that of Chac Xib Chac. The guardians on vase no. 3422 also sport a jaguar ear and the same type of hairdo and the knot. Are the gods on vases nos. 688 and 3422 parallel versions of Chac Xib Chac and god A? Just some thoughts to kick around.

All the best,

Justin