



Celestial Bodies and Ancient Maya Women: Shedding (Moon)light on Divine Power

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Introduction

The ancient Maya flourished from roughly 2000 BCE through 1500 CE. During the height of the occupation of these tremendously populous and diverse polities, the Maya inhabited approximately 324,000 square kilometers in modern day southern Mexico and northern Central America. In the ancient Americas, the lunar cycle determined the daily activities of numerous cultural groups. The moon was most frequently linked with women, who relied upon it as a source of power and bodily autonomy. Scholars, and general society, for that matter, often interpret power to be hierarchical, public, and large-scale. I am interested in examining different forms of power that have traditionally been labeled as feminine, and not causally important. That is, power that manifests in birth magic, collaboration in the form of the complementarity principle, and negotiation (particularly in the shape of marriage alliances). I utilize iconographic methods, historical documents, and ethnographic research to draw a connection between bodies and people, people and the moon.

Theory

Indigenous Ontologies

- Living bodies of thought/theory created by Indigenous folks demonstrating that the pursuit of knowledge is deeply embedded in multiple layers of colonial practices
- In this study: the gender complementarity model
 - Feminine and masculine roles/power pathways as mutually essential for universal balance and harmony
 - Gender fluidity as a supplement

Feminist Theory

- The concept that ancient women and men were equally innovative and intelligent, thus their contributions to the archaeological record are equally important

Data & Analysis

Figure 1: Lady K'abel the *Ix Kaloomte'*, queen of Waka'

- Active player in the *kaan* dynasty, the Late Classic political hegemon seated at Calakmul
- Impersonating the Moon Goddess: wearing her quadripartite monster headdress, net skirt, and *xok* belt
- Commemorates a celebration in which Lady K'abel would have played a central role through ritual bloodletting (connected with maize and menstruation) and divination

- Conflation between the regalia of the Moon Goddess and Maize God suggests a compound, androgynous divine identity that opens the possibility of gender fluidity

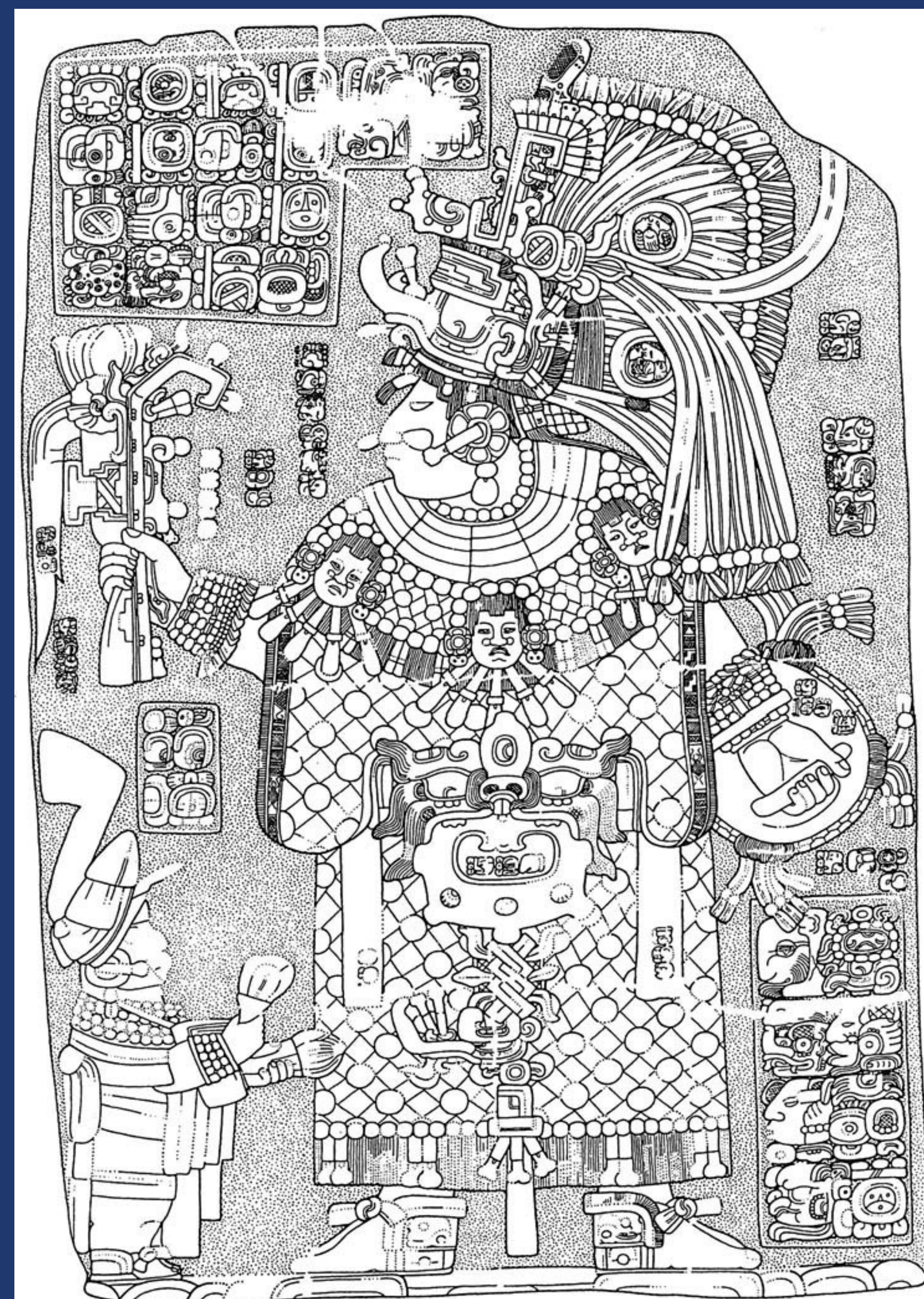


Figure 1. Stela 34, 692 CE, El Perú-Waka'



Figures 2 & 3. The Birth Vase, Sides 1 & 2, Classic Period

Conclusions

- Maya women established means of empowerment within their own lives by mobilizing the power of the moon and the blood derived from it
- A dynamic relationship existed between quotidian symbolism and elite power
- Childbirth and midwifery are intimately linked with access to the divine plane
- The likelihood of gender fluidity in ritual performances affirms the complementarity of feminine and masculine power