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The Embodied Chocolate Pot: An Exploration of the Metaphysical Function of Cylinder
Tripod Vessels from the Early Classic Maya

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

in

Art History, Theory, and Criticism

by

Brianne Daryl Itaya

Committee in charge:

Elizabeth Newsome, Chair
Norman Bryson
Ross Frank
William Tronzo
Alena Williams

2019

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Chair

University of California San Diego

2019

DEDICATION

For Goma Taro Ishii

EPIGRAPH

This is all I will bother you with in the name of
the flowers. Keep my animal alive for many years in the
pages of the Book, in its letters, its paintings, on the whole
surface of the Earth.

From *Magic for a Long Life*
-Manwela Kokoroch

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I would also like to extend a special thanks to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Detroit Institute of Arts, and Justin Kerr for graciously allowing me to include their images in this text.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Embodied Chocolate Pot: An Exploration of the Metaphysical Function of Cylinder Tripod Vessels from the Early Classic Maya

by

Brianne Daryl Itaya

Master of Arts in Art History, Theory, and Criticism

University of California San Diego, 2019

Professor Elizabeth Newsome, Chair

This thesis examines an unprovenienced Early Classic tripod cylinder vessel from the Maya region, exploring concepts of embodiment, personhood, and materiality. Through an examination of the metaphysical aspects of ceramics, I attempt to reconstruct their role within the ancient Maya civilization. Employing an interdisciplinary framework combining approaches from material culture studies, ethnography, and anthropology with art historical methodologies of visual analysis I consider the following questions: 1) How does this vessel

function as an extension of its owner? 2) In what ways may materiality and references to corporeality inform notions of animacy? And finally, 3) by creating a multisensory experience, how does this vessel engage the viewer, enacting its agency on its human subjects? Through such a close interdisciplinary analysis of the tripod cylinder vessel, I aim to formulate a method in which we can better understand unprovenanced ceramics lacking in scientific data that have been largely excluded from mainstream discourse. My objective, in both this paper and my research more broadly, is to contribute to the Mesoamerican field a fresh approach expanding the ways in which we perceive and understand ancient pottery.

I. Introduction

A disjunction in scholarship on the ancient Maya concerns the study of Classic period polychrome ceramics. Research tends to follow one of two routes. In the first, scholars only consider pottery in relation to its archaeological context. This means that, from this perspective, the focus is exclusively on ceramics that have been recovered in controlled archaeological excavations. Alternatively, in the second case, scholars tend to focus solely on the exterior surface decoration of ceramics, analyzing the vessels' hieroglyphic inscriptions and/or paintings. In this approach, researchers are not limited to ceramics with sound archaeological data, but rather, they are able to broaden the scope of their research in order to study the polychrome surfaces of unprovenienced pottery as well. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the disjointed nature of scholarship on Classic Maya ceramics is largely the result of a history of looting that has imprinted a stigma on vessels that make their way onto the art market and into private and museum collections through nefarious dealings. This fracturing and fragmentation within scholarship on ceramics, however, is problematic and detrimental to the comprehensive study of the ancient Maya civilization.

It is essential to point out that looting is simply one aspect, one moment, of an object's *itinerary*. In 2012, the School for Advanced Research in Santa Fe, New Mexico, hosted a two-day seminar titled *Things in Motion: Object Histories, Biographies, and Itineraries* (the results of which were subsequently published in 2015 as an edited compilation under the title *Things in Motion: Object Itineraries in Anthropological Practice*). The participants in this workshop advanced the concept of object itinerary as a complement to or expansion of the notion of object biography. They found the term

biography to be problematic as it equates object lives with human lives, and therefore, it does not account for recognizing, in full, the movement of objects across time and space. According to Rosemary A. Joyce and Susan D. Gillespie, the notion of itinerary, moving beyond those limitations, is construed as a method that can be used to:

[trace] the strings of places where objects come to rest or are active, the routes through which things circulate, and the means by which they are moved (Joyce 2012a, 2012b; see also Hahn and Weiss 2013a). Itineraries are spatial and temporal, and they converge with sites and routes singular, multiple, virtual, and real. They have no real beginning other than where we enter them and no end since things and their extensions continue to move. Itineraries may include stoppages, knots, or nodes (Küchler 2003). Our understanding of an itinerary may be fragmented, filled with gaps.¹

In response to the current state of research on Maya ceramics, I invoke the term *itinerary* as a way to acknowledge but also move beyond or around the ceramics' lack of archaeological dirt data. Lacking provenience may, therefore, simply be understood as a *stoppage*, to use Joyce and Gillespie's terminology. Ceramics, after all, are portable objects; they can travel, and indeed they did move around and change hands, both in the remote past (as social currency or diplomatic gifts) as well as the present (within the art market). The location in which a vessel was made is not necessarily the same location in which it was used, nor is this the same place it might have been deposited. So, archaeological excavations may inform us of where the pot was recovered—in a tomb, for instance, or a cache offering or a midden—but beyond this, the archaeological context does not necessarily tell us where this pot was produced or where the clay from which it is made was mined, nor how many times it changed hands as social currency. Recognizing Maya ceramics in terms of this notion of

¹ Rosemary A. Joyce and Susan D. Gillespie, "Making Things out of Objects That Move," in *Things in Motion: Object Itineraries in Anthropological Practice*, eds. Rosemary A. Joyce and Susan D. Gillespie (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2015), 3.

itinerary allows us to look beyond its looted status, as this is just a singular, albeit problematic, moment in its overall existence.

Additionally, such a separation and fracturing of knowledge, perhaps sufficient in the past, is no longer productive in the present. The study of ceramics is crucial to understanding the ancient Maya. Our knowledge remains incomplete if we isolate and study only one aspect of ceramics at a time. The continued fragmentation of the study of ceramics will only perpetuate a fragmented knowledge of the ancient Maya. Only when we study the vessels as a whole, unifying the surface decoration with the ceramic vessel, can we fully understand their cultural significance. With this in mind, in this thesis, I set out to examine ceramics from a holistic standpoint, reuniting and expanding the previous disparate, binary scholarship in order to consider ceramics themselves in conjunction with the paintings that cover their exterior surface. Over the course of this paper, I will consider the following questions: (1) Through a consideration of the relationship between surface decoration (glyphic inscriptions, painted surface, and sculptural elaboration) and vessel, how can we understand polychrome ceramics in terms of animacy as objects that are alive and *ensouled*? (2) In what ways do ceramics function as extensions as well as embodiments of their owners? And finally, (3) as extensions of the body and personhood, what role do ceramics play in concepts of rebirth and regeneration? Addressing such questions allow for a deeper and more complex understanding of Maya ontological views and the metaphysical characteristics of ceramics.

Addressing these questions and the larger issue of reunification necessitates the adoption of an interdisciplinary methodology. The analysis of ceramics from a purely art

historical perspective considers the stylistic or formal developments in terms of an evolutionary scale. From the archaeological standpoint, excavated ceramics are used to develop chronological dates for a particular site. Such unidirectional approaches were useful in the past to develop fundamental research and establish data. However, in the present and going forward, approaching the problem previously identified from a single direction is no longer sufficient as it reproduces the idea that ceramics, both with provenience and lacking in provenience, are only important in so far as they can aid scholarship on other aspects of ancient Maya socio-political history and culture. It is crucial to acknowledge that ceramics must be studied as objects/artifacts in and of themselves, meaning, to reiterate once again, the paintings and sculptural decoration covering the exterior surface need to be considered in conjunction with the clay vessel itself in order to fully understand how these vessels functioned and their role within ancient Maya ideology.

While this thesis is positioned within art history, I engage with theories borrowed from material culture studies, an interdisciplinary field that has applications in and draws inspiration from disciplines across the humanities, social sciences, hard sciences, and beyond. It encompasses the various material culture from all of these disciplines, including ceramics, food, and clothing, to name just a few which are relevant to this project. Even more pertinent, the study of material culture is relevant to my research objectives as it recognizes the intrinsic and intertwined relationship between persons and things, emphasizing the understanding that both persons and things, or subjects and objects, are implicated in the formation of one another.² Simultaneously, material culture studies also

² “Introduction,” in *Handbook of Material Culture*, ed. Chris Tilley (London: Sage, 2006), 1.

acknowledges the independent nature of things which are not dependent on human intervention.³ This relates to the previously discussed advocacy for the concept of *itinerary* over that of *biography*. While objects do parallel human lives, they also exist beyond the life of their owner, maker, or user, and therefore, *itinerary* is a more accurate term to describe the various functions, uses, and contexts—pathways—of any particular object. By considering these relations, material culture studies places emphasis on inquiries into the objects themselves (what they are made of, how they are made, and who makes them) as well as their function (who uses them and how they are used). It is also concerned with the value, movement, and circulation of objects. Scholars working in this field approach the study of objects from diverse standpoints and perspectives, including materiality, embodiment, notions of containment, the distribution of personhood and cognition, sensory perception, and object agency, all of which are valuable approaches for considering ancient Maya ceramics.

In addition to material culture studies, ethnographic research conducted on contemporary Maya communities is an invaluable resource for exploring the questions and problems I have introduced above. Contemporary Maya populations have defied and subverted centuries of colonialist endeavors to a certain extent by maintaining beliefs, practices, and rituals which have correlations in the archaeological remains of their ancient predecessors. I draw largely on the ethnographic works of Pedro Pitarch and Brian Stross to consider Maya conceptions of corporeality and animacy, respectively, in relation to the previously listed approaches borrowed from material culture studies. Pitarch, whose

³ Ibid., 2

ethnographic research focuses on Maya conceptions of corporeality, identifies two types of human bodies: *bak'etal*, or the “flesh-body,” which is shared with animals, and *winkilel*, or the “presence body,” which pertains specifically to humans and is defined by the ways in which the human body is modified and presented to other humans.⁴ In his ethnographic work on the Tzeltal Maya community of Tenejapa, in the highland region of Chiapas, Mexico, Stross notes that the dedication and termination rituals conducted for humans as well as manmade objects are nearly identical, indicating an ontological equivalence between humans and things. Stross describes at length the seven components of animating persons and objects, which include: (1) cleansing and purification, (2) measuring, (3) naming, (4) assigning guardianship, (5) ensouling, (6) clothing, and (7) sustenance.⁵ A combination, but not necessarily all, of the rituals are conducted with the objective of fixing a soul to its human or non-human body. The research of these two ethnographers is useful in examining ceramics and their relationship to the human body.

For the ancient Maya, everything was understood to be alive—from features of the natural environment, such as mountains and cenotes, to elements of the constructed landscape, like temple pyramids and stelae. According to the findings of his own ethnographic fieldwork and confirmed by the research of other scholars, such as Evon Vogt, John Monaghan, and R. Jon McGee among others working with various Maya groups, Stross states, “Native Mesoamericans...attributed a soul to all living things and considered all of

⁴ Pedro Pitarch, “The Two Maya Bodies: An Elementary Model of Tzeltal Personhood,” *Ethnos* 77:1 (2012), 93.

⁵ Brian Stross, “Seven Ingredients in Mesoamerican Ensoulment: Dedication and Termination in Tenejapa,” in *The Sowing and the Dawning: Termination, Dedication, and Transformation in the Archaeological and Ethnographic Record of Mesoamerica*, ed. Shirley Boteler Mock (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 32-33.

nature to be alive.”⁶ Things that occur naturally in the world, including caves,⁷ trees, and animals, for instance, were ensouled and animate in part through their protection or *guardianship* by supernatural deities or ancestors.⁸ Objects made through the human manipulation of raw materials obtained from the natural realm, such as houses, altars, and sculptures, were imbued with a soul and animated through the various rituals outlined above.⁹ Both types of things—naturally occurring and manmade—required sustenance, like humans, as well as respect, and therefore, they have agency; they are capable of influencing their human counterparts. Such a notion of animacy extends the conventional understanding of personhood to encapsulate not only the human individual but everything, both living and nonliving, that has agency—everything that has subjectivity and the ability to exact influence on other subjects.

Personhood is not neatly bound into a single entity as was postulated by Rene Descartes, but rather, it is divisible and distributed. In her research on Melanesia, anthropologist Marilyn Strathern describes the dividuality of individuals, noting that persons, composed of the various “relationships that produced them”¹⁰ can be “regarded as...derivative[s] of multiple identities.”¹¹ Strathern describes persons as “social microcosms,”¹² observing that “a group of men or a group of women will conceive of their

⁶ Stross, “Seven Ingredients,” 31.

⁷ To this day, people living in the Yucatan believe caves and cenotes can cause illness. These are liminal spaces where spirits, or aluxes, reside and the places where the winds come from that cause sickness and disease.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 13.

¹¹ Strathern, *Gender of the Gift*, 15.

¹² *Ibid.*, 13.

individual members as replicating in singular form ('one man', 'one woman') what they have created in collective form ('one men's house', 'one matrilineage')"¹³ The individual, therefore, is equivalent to and interchangeable with the collective. Zoë Crossland builds on this concept to argue that personhood is not only divisible, but it is also distributed. Personhood extends beyond the physical confines of the biological body to encompass bodily secretions and the material objects which bodies use and with which they interact. Such an understanding of the distributed person, as Crossland argues, "allows an extension of the concept of embodiment so that it does not rest upon a bounded and naturalized physicality, or indeed assume a unified and bounded sense of self, but can be expressed through materials that are distributed and circulated away from the body."¹⁴ Such concepts of personhood, I believe, allow the opportunity to reconsider the role of ceramics in the ancient Maya civilization. Through a close consideration of polychrome ceramics, examining notions of materiality (what the vessel is made of and the significance of those materials), containment (what the vessel contains and the symbolism of its contents), and corporeality (the vessel, its decoration, and its contents in relation to aspects of the human body), I will be able to examine ceramics in relation to the previously mentioned concepts of personhood, embodiment, and animacy. I examine the relationship linking the pot with the human body, as an extension of the body as well as an embodiment of its owner in order to explore the metaphysical aspects of ceramics in an attempt to reconstruct their role within the ancient Maya civilization.

¹³ Ibid., 14.

¹⁴ Zoë Crossland, "Materiality and Embodiment," in *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies*, eds. Dan Hicks and Mary C. Beaudry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 392.



Figure 1: *Lidded Tripod Cylinder Vessel with Head of Cacao Deity (K8042),* Early 5th Century. Slip-painted ceramic with post-fire stucco and pigment. 11 1/2 x 5 1/4 in. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Purchased with funds provided by Camilla Chandler Frost, M.2010.115.22a-b. Photo © Museum Associates/LACMA.

This thesis is centered around a primary case study—an Early Classic vessel in the permanent collection at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) located in Los Angeles, California, USA. The museum refers to this vessel as *Lidded Tripod Cylinder Vessel with Head of Cacao Deity*, however, we will refer to it simply as *Lidded Tripod Cylinder* or K8042¹⁵ (Figure 1). Through a close reading of this ceramic vessel, I intend to address the question of function. With the handful of vessels that have been recovered through controlled archaeological excavations, scholars have determined that polychrome ceramics functioned as utilitarian objects used in ritual and daily activities, as funerary offerings for deceased elite individuals, and as social currency, exchanged between polities as gifts, reinforcing and establishing diplomatic relations and alliances. I want to expand this further by exploring how these ceramics may have functioned in relation to the previously discussed concepts of personhood, embodiment, and animacy.

The *Lidded Tripod Cylinder* was looted, lacking provenience, and as a result, existing literature on this vessel is relatively scant. Scholars have utilized this pot predominantly to analyze its glyphic inscriptions or conduct brief, superficial iconographic analysis. Luís Lopes, for example, references the glyphs on the vessel's lid, which read *Naatz Chan Ahk sak chuwen*, in order to identify and corroborate the name of an early ruler, whose name also appears on stela 15 from the kingdom of Naranjo, located in the Peten region of Guatemala.¹⁶ Alexandre Tokovinine and Vilma Fialko similarly examine the lid's glyphs, but they focus their discussion more on the last glyph, *sak chuwen*, in order to argue the seat of the Sa'aal

¹⁵ K refers to the Kerr number, a searchable identification number for Justin Kerr's Maya Vase database (<http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya.html>).

¹⁶ Luís Lopes, "A Probable Reference to Na-'Gourd' Chan Ahk on Naranjo Stela 15," *Mesoweb Publications* (2005), <http://www.mesoweb.com/articles/lopes/ProbableReference.pdf>.

dynasty was located at Naranjo during the fifth century C.E.¹⁷ In his article on orthographic practices among the Maya, David Mora-Marín points, as an example, to a glyph that appears on the body of this vessel, in the position preceding the cacao glyph, in order to examine formal convergence, a process that occurs when two distinct glyphs with the same phonetic value merge and are read as a single sound.¹⁸ On the *Lidded Tripod Cylinder*, the glyphic components translate as *ta-tzi-tzi*, however, they are read, instead, as *ta tzih*.¹⁹ While Mora-Marín translates *ta tzih kakaw* as “for fresh chocolate,”²⁰ Dmitri Beliaev, Albert Davletshin, and Alexandre Tokovinine argue that the placement of *tzi* at the end of the glyphic unit suggests an alternative reading as *suutz*, which translates to black/capulin cherry in Ch’orti’.²¹ *Ta suutz kakaw*, would therefore translate as “for cherry chocolate.”²² Regardless of how it is read, this glyph, either *tzih* or *suutz*, is an adjective that describes the chocolate held within the *Lidded Tripod Cylinder*. Considering another aspect of this vessel, Steven Houston, David Stuart, and Karl Taube, in discussing the relationship between the human body and trees in Maya iconography, refer to the *Lidded Tripod Cylinder* as an example that demonstrates the anthropomorphization of the cacao tree; however, their discussion barely scratches the surface as it does not delve further into an exploration of the significance of

¹⁷ Alexandre Tokovinine and Vilma Fialko, “Stela 45 of Naranjo and the Early Classic Lords of Sa’aal,” *The PARI Journal* 7 no. 4 (Spring 2007): 1-14.

¹⁸ David Mora-Marín, “The Origin of Maya Syllabograms and Orthographic Conventions,” *Written Language and Literacy* 6:2 (2003): 193-238.

¹⁹ Mora-Marín, “Origin of Maya,” 223-224.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Dmitri Beliaev, Albert Davletshin, and Alexandre Tokovinine, “Sweet Cacao and Sour Atole: Mixed Drinks on Classic Maya Ceramic Vases,” in *Pre-Columbian Foodways: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Food, Culture, and Markets in Ancient Mesoamerica*, eds. John Edward Staller and Michael Carrasco (New York: Springer, 2010), 261-262.

²² *Ibid.*

corporeal metaphors in ceramics.²³ As we can see from this summary, aside from the last reference, the majority of scholarship on this vessel pertains mainly to glyphic analysis and—what those glyphs tell us about a political history or lineage, culture, etc.

While the aforementioned scholars have contributed significantly to epigraphic and iconographic scholarship by examining isolated parts of this vessel, their research is typical of most studies of ancient Maya ceramics in general—because this is an unprovenienced vessel, the focus remains on its exterior surface decoration. My objective in this paper is to reunite the surface decoration with the pot itself in order to, from a holistic standpoint, (1) examine the ways in which this vessel can be understood as ensouled and animate, (2) consider how this vessel functioned as an extension and embodiment of its owner, and (3) analyze the relationship between person and pot in terms of regeneration. I will begin by providing the historical context for the *Lidded Tripod Cylinder*. Following this, I will explore how this vessel can be read not only as the anthropomorphization of the cacao tree, as Houston, Stuart, and Taube claim, but also as an embodiment of the Cacao Deity. After this, I will consider this vessel as an extension and embodiment of its owner, *Naatz Chan Ahk*, and I will explore the implications and significance of double embodiment. Finally, I will conclude with an analysis of the vessel's agency, as it is manifested through a multi-sensory experience.

II. Lidded Tripod Cylinder: A Veracruz-Teotihuacan-Maya Synthesis

²³ Stephen Houston, David Stuart, and Karl Taube, *The Memory of Bones: Body, Being, and Experience Among the Classic Maya* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 36.

Before jumping into my main discussion, I want to begin by providing background information in order to situate this vessel within its historical context. The form of the *Lidded Tripod Cylinder*, dated approximately to the 5th century C.E., has precedents elsewhere in Mexico. While it is believed to have originated within the vicinity of the site of El Tajín, Veracruz, located on the Gulf Coast of Mexico, the form of the vessel—cylinder tripod—has become closely associated with the central Mexican city of Teotihuacan. The body of Veracruz-style “lustrous ware” vessels is typically decorated with stylized spirals carved in plano-relief, and the feet are often incised with intricate, lacework designs.²⁴ This style appears at Teotihuacan around 250-300 CE, during the late Tlamimilolpa ceramic phase.²⁵ While some vessels maintain the Veracruz-style plano-relief decoration technique, others are embellished with painted imagery on a stuccoed exterior surface. Nonetheless, both techniques are labor intensive, and Cynthia Conides notes that such elaborate decoration classifies these vessels as luxury items owned by individuals of high status, functioning in a variety of ways from utilitarian use in ritual and daily activities to funerary furnishings.²⁶

The *Lidded Tripod Cylinder*, therefore, is an amalgamation of international influences. While the form, cylinder vessel with three slab feet and a lid, is a combination of Veracruz and Teotihuacan influences, the decorative motif featuring a band of glyphs is specifically Maya. The *Lidded Tripod Cylinder* (and similar vessels) is a byproduct of an interesting time period during the late 4th century C.E. of intense interaction between the

²⁴ Dicey Taylor, “A Chocolate Cup for Eternity in the Road of Awe: The Detroit Cylinder Tripod,” *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 74, no. 1/2 (2000), 8.

²⁵ Taylor, “A Chocolate Cup, 8; Cynthia A. Conides, “Social Relations Among Potters in Teotihuacan, Mexico,” *Museum Anthropology* 21, no. 2 (2008), 45.

²⁶ Conides, “Social Relations,” 41.

Maya region and Teotihuacan, as it is recorded on a no longer extant blackware vessel from Tikal, Guatemala (Figure 2).

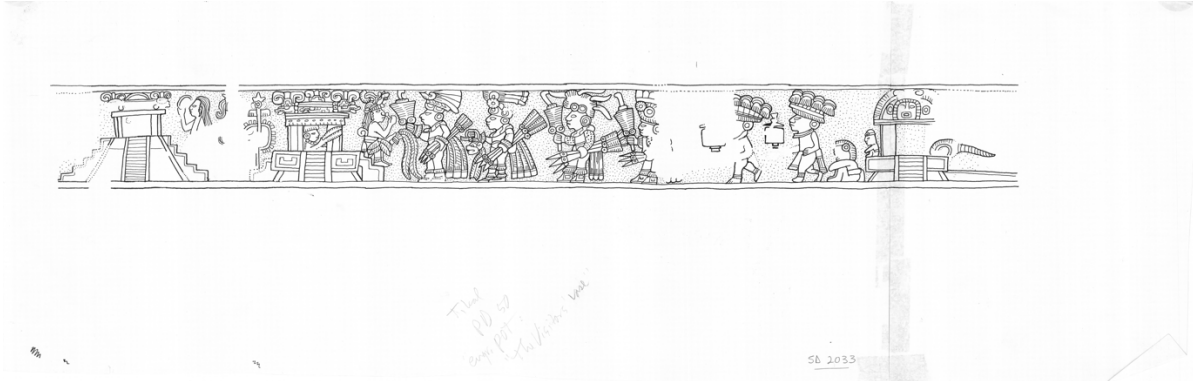


Figure 2: SD-2033. Tikal. Maya. Engraved blackware, tripod vessel from problematic deposit 50. Drawing by Linda Schele © David Schele. Photo © Museum Associates/LACMA.

Inscribed on this vessel is a scene depicting the encounter of two groups of people, identified by their garb and proximal architecture. On the far right of the rollout drawing is a talud-tablero-style temple, characteristic of Teotihuacan architecture. Talud-tablero refers to a central Mexican architectural style of temple platforms and pyramids, characterized by distinct layers alternating between talud, or “sloped,” and tablero, which refers to a rectilinear table or panel. From the structure, we observe a line of stylized figures dressed in Teotihuacan-style clothing and accoutrements—feathered headdresses and atlatls—walking toward another location with both a talud-tablero pyramid and a stepped pyramid, characteristic of Maya architecture. Such a site containing both styles of architecture has been found at Tikal and the highland Guatemala site of Kaminaljuyu. The Teotihuacan figures carry with them gifts—two lidded cylinder tripod pots, suggesting they introduced this style to the Maya region. This is further supported in T. Patrick Culbert’s archaeological

report on Tikal ceramics²⁷ and Clemency Coggins's archaeological study of ceramic development at Tikal, Guatemala. She notes that the appearance of lidded cylinder tripod vessels at Tikal coincides with La Entrada, the invasion and conquest of Tikal by Teotihuacan in 378 C.E.²⁸ Previous to this time, ceramic forms were dominated by basal flange bowls and anthropomorphic vessels, and for approximately a century following the late 4th century invasion, the Maya production of lidded cylinder tripod vessels persisted.



Figure 3: *Tripod Vessel with Goggle-Eyed figure, 450-550.* Ceramic with post-fire stucco and pigments. 5 5/8 x 5 7/8 in. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Gift of Constance McCormick Fearing, AC1993.217.16. Photo © Museum Associates/LACMA.

²⁷ T. Patrick Culbert, *The Ceramics of Tikal: Vessels from the Burials, Caches and Problematical Deposits* (Philadelphia: University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, 1993).

²⁸ Clemency Coggins, "Painting and Drawing Styles at Tikal: An Historical and Iconographic Reconstruction," PhD diss., Harvard University, 1988.

While the overall form of the vessel translated across cultures, the technique of production and function did not. According to Dacey Taylor, Teotihuacan cylinder tripods, like the Veracruz-style, were made using molds—flat slabs of clay were “shaped uniformly in molds and wrapped around circular moldmade bases; rectangular slab feet with openwork designs were also moldmade and attached to the bases before firing”²⁹ (Figure 3). Mold-made ceramics suggest a level of mechanical mass production that removes the object from its maker.³⁰ The bodies of Maya cylinder tripods, on the other hand, were made using the coiling technique—the clay was evenly rolled into coils of the same length; the ends of each coil were connected, forming a ring, and the rings were stacked on top of each other and smoothed to form a cylinder vessel with walls even and consistent in thickness.³¹ Whereas mold-made vessels suggest a certain level of alienation from their makers, coiling a vessel necessitates material interaction on a much more personal level. Rolling each coil by hand and measuring its thickness and length are tactile embodied actions. Such personal interaction is suggestive of a deeper relationship between potter and pot. The pot becomes a corporeal metaphor for the potter.³² Based on the symmetrical quality of the three legs supporting the *Lidded Tripod Cylinder*, these were likely also made using a mold. Vents were cut into the interior surface of each leg likely to facilitate the firing process and reduce the overall weight of the vessel.

²⁹ Taylor, “A Chocolate Cup,” 7.

³⁰ Elizabeth Newsome, Personal conversation, February 4, 2019.

³¹ Megan O’Neil, “Revealing Creation: The Science and Art of Ancient Maya Ceramics” (Presentation, LACMA/Getty Consortium Seminar, February 24, 2017).

³² Newsome, Personal Conversation.

Similarly, the effigy knob was possibly made in part using a mold with details added by hand. The ears, adorned with circular ear flares, appear to be modeled by hand, as they are slightly uneven and project unnaturally perpendicular to the side of the head. The Cacao deity, with mouth parted to reveal four neatly squared teeth, appears as though he is about to speak or even sing. Markings, parallel lines incised into both cheeks, suggest scarification. Like the feet, the knob is also hollowed with two rectangular vents cut into the backside of the head. Again, this was likely for practical reasons, facilitating firing and reducing the overall weight of the vessel. Many of the Teotihuacan-style vessels on display in museums today do not have lids; however, it is possible that they were originally covered by lids made from clay or other perishable materials that were lost or destroyed over time.

The overall forms of both the Teotihuacan and Maya cylinder tripod vessels resemble or make reference to architectural structures. The slab feet on Teotihuacan-style vessels often mimic the talud-tablero profile of central Mexican architecture, transforming the body of the vessel into something akin to a temple which would be superimposed over the talud-tablero pyramid or platform base. Though the feet on the Maya cylinder tripod vessels are not as clearly linked iconographically to architectural elements, the three feet may reference another element found in Maya structures: the *k'óob'en*, or hearth, composed of three stones.³³ If this is the case, then the incorporation of the three-stone hearth made present through the tripod feet of the vessel identifies the vessel itself as an architectural structure, a domestic space separate and distinct from nature. The sloping lids on both Teotihuacan and

³³ Dorie Reents-Budet, "Elite Maya Pottery and Artisans as Social Indicators," *Archaeological Paper of the American Anthropological Association* vol. 6 no. 1 (January 1998): 78.

Maya vessels resemble the thatch-roof on houses in their respective regions.³⁴ I will return to this relationship between architecture and clay pot later in this paper.

Teotihuacan and Maya tripod cylinder vessels are both coated with a layer of stucco applied post-fire and painted. Both cultures had traditions of mural painting, in which paint was applied to stucco-primed walls. This is perhaps the origin of the use of stucco on ceramic surfaces. The stucco painting technique on Teotihuacan vessels has been thoroughly examined by both Conides and Jessica M. Fletcher. Conides notes that as decoration techniques shifted from plano-relief to painting, the surfaces of the vessels were adapted to better accommodate the separate methods. Plano-relief vessels were burnished and subsequently carved or incised, leaving the uncarved areas with a glossy finish.³⁵ The clay surface of stuccoed vessels, on the other hand, was intentionally roughened with fingerprints or scrape marks in order to better receive the stucco.³⁶ Fletcher also describes the method employed for painting on the stuccoed base as one of layering different colors. For example, on top of the base layer of white or cream-colored stucco, the artist would paint a design in red, and then the design's negative areas (not red) would be filled in with a second layer of white or cream-colored stucco to create a level surface.³⁷ This was repeated until the painting was complete, and then surface was burnished, compacting the various layers and making the painting more durable.³⁸ Technical analysis of stucco painting on Maya cylinder tripod

³⁴ Conides, "Social Relations," 39.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 47

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 47-48; Jessica M. Fletcher, "Stuccoed Tripod Vessels from Teotihuacan: An Examination of Materials and Manufacture," *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 41, no. 2 (2002), 142.

³⁷ Fletcher, "Stuccoed Tripod Vessels," 143.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

vessels has yet to be conducted in order to clearly understand the extent to which it relates or compares to Teotihuacan methods or Maya mural painting techniques.

One final point of comparison to note pertains to the contents contained in the vessels. For the Maya, cylinder tripods specifically functioned to hold liquid beverages like chocolate and atole. Teotihuacan vessels had ceremonial uses, perhaps in containing similar beverages, incense, or other offerings, and in burials, these vessels contained the ashes of the deceased.³⁹ Considering production techniques and function, the Maya-produced cylinder tripod pots signify the adaptation of foreign traditions and a blending of multiple cultures.

III. Corporeal Metaphors: The Pot is the Cacao Deity

The *Lidded Tripod Cylinder* stands 11 ½ inches tall and measures 5 ¼ inches in diameter. As Bryan R. Just points out in his discussion of Late Classic cylinder vessels, this pot is also “about twice as tall as it is wide,” mimicking the proportions of human form.⁴⁰ It is classified as blackware, which refers to the post-fired, black-colored pottery created during the reduction firing process by preventing oxygen from reaching the pot’s surface.⁴¹ The vessel itself reads as a body with certain articulated body parts. Like a biological body, the vessel is a container. This equation of body and pot is further supported by the Late and Terminal Classic *entierros infantiles* recovered from the Mexican states of Campeche and Tabasco.⁴² Ollas, or water pots, were used to contain fetal or infant remains. Babies, in Maya

³⁹ Taylor, “A Chocolate Cup,” 7.

⁴⁰ Bryan R. Just, *Dancing into Dreams: Maya Vase Painting of the Ik' Kingdom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 59.

⁴¹ Robert Snedden, *Aztec, Inca, and Maya* (Collingwood, ON: Saunders Book Co, 2009), 22.

⁴² Albertina Ortega Palma and Jorge Cervantes Martínez, “Cuerpos Inhumanos en Vasijas del Estado de Campeche,” *Estudios de Cultural Maya* vol. 36 (2010).

conceptions of individuals, were not considered fully developed. By carefully placing these bodies inside the ollas, they were metaphorically returned to the womb, known to be a dark and watery place.

Moreover, the vessel is also legible as a human body because it stands on legs/feet, and it is surmounted by a human-like head of the Cacao deity, identified by the loop-like partitions of hair and the aquiline shape of the nose.⁴³ This corporeality, however, is further manifested through metaphor. A layer of stucco, applied post-fire, wrapped around the body of the vessel and lid, can be perceived, I hope to demonstrate, as clothing and, by extension, a second skin. A red, iron-based pigment was painted onto the stucco-treated surface. The flared skirt trim at the base of the cylinder, the trim of the lid, the flat surface of the lid at the base of the knob, and the eight medallion-shaped circles were left unpainted with the red pigment, making visible the stucco undercoat. The medallions are bisected diagonally; the left half was painted with a malachite pigment, producing a light blue hue, while the right half maintains the primary layer of white stucco. This appears to be used to create the visual illusion of shimmering as the vessel is rotated, which I will return to later. Within each medallion is an incised glyph made using a stylus-type tool to scratch ink into the stucco. Interestingly, the feet and knob of the vessel remain un-stuccoed, suggesting the stucco, like clothing, was meant to cover just the body.

This design of medallions on the stuccoed surface recalls a figure from a mural uncovered on the Chiik Nahb Structure Sub1-4 at Calakmul in Campeche, Mexico who wears a diaphanous blue huipil embellished with orange cartouches containing abstract

⁴³ O'Neil, "Revealing Creation."

animal forms, which appear to mimic glyphs, and a row of hieroglyphic text bordering the bottom edge of the garment. The glyphs lining the garment are in the style of a Primary Standard Sequence (PSS) text, which if legible would indicate the name of the owner of the huipil.⁴⁴ Simon Martin identified one glyph as *k'e*, but he similarly agrees that the glyphs “are so cursive as to probably constitute pseudo-glyphs designed only to give the appearance of writing.”⁴⁵ Similar instances of clothing decorated with glyphs can be seen on a Late Classic ceramic vessel and in the murals in Room One at Bonampak, Chiapas. On the Late Classic polychrome cylinder vessel (K1599), two figures pay their respects to an enthroned lord of Dos Pilas. The standing figure who holds a bouquet of fragrant orange flowers to his nose, inhaling its sweet scent, wears a hip cloth which covers his thighs. This cloth, similar to the huipil worn by a female figure in the previously discussed mural at Calakmul, is also decorated with medallions that are filled with abstract forms and a band of repeating glyphs (possibly pseudoglyphs) bordering the edge of the fabric. In the murals in Room One at the site of Bonampak, a figure (identified as Human Figure 74), who holds a circular feathered standard, also wears a hip cloth decorated with glyphic inscriptions bordering the edge of the garment. These supplementary examples indicate that it was not necessarily unusual for glyphic inscriptions to appear on fabric and clothing, lending support for the interpretation of the painted stucco on the *Lidded Tripod Cylinder* as clothing.

⁴⁴ David Stuart, “Historical Background,” *Glyphs on Pots: Decoding Classic Maya Ceramics*, (Sourcebook for the 29th Maya Meetings at Texas, The University of Texas at Austin, 2005), 5.

⁴⁵ Simon Martin, “Hieroglyphs from the Painted Pyramid: The Epigraphy of Chiik Nahb Structure Sub 1-4, Calakmul, Mexico,” in *Maya Archaeology 2*, eds. Charles Golden, Stephen Houston, and Joel Skidmore (San Francisco: Precolumbia Mesoweb Press, 2012), 63.

Like the previous examples, the stuccoed “clothing” wrapped around the *Lidded Tripod Cylinder* similarly carries the PSS, but, unlike the huipil and hip cloths, is legible. The glyphs on the body of the vessel read, *y-uch'ib ta tzihsuutz kakaw ajaw*, or *his cup for fresh/cherry⁴⁶ chocolate lord* (Figure 4). The owner of the “clothing” is the Cacao deity, who also happens to be portrayed as the knob of the vessel. Such statements of ownership appear on a multitude of items such as pots, precious jade implements, shells, and bones,⁴⁷ and they can be understood in terms of the theory of distributed personhood. They are the “material extensions of the body,”⁴⁸ which people use in the ultimate formation and projection of identity, becoming integral to personhood.



Figure 4: Rollout photograph of K8042. Photo © Justin Kerr.

Brian Stross discusses clothing as one of the seven components for animating inanimate things—both human as well as non-human things. Clothing, according to Stross,

⁴⁶ Beliaev, Davletshin, and Tokovinine, “Sweet Cacao and Sour Atole,” 262.

⁴⁷ Stuart, “Historical Background,” 5.

⁴⁸ Crossland, “Materiality and Embodiment,” 392.

functions as “a covering or shield,” providing protection for the body.⁴⁹ While clothing embellishes the body parts that it covers, Stross emphasizes the protective quality of clothing and the boundary it establishes which demarcates the thing under the clothing from the outside, external world. By wearing clothes, the thing—human or object—is separated from the natural world and identified within the social world. While Stross only identifies clothing as being able to carry out the function of animating inanimate things, I would argue to expand this to encompass any and all external objects of ornamentation; objects that both decorate and socialize the body—jewelry, scarification/tattoos, and other forms of body modification.

In addition to clothing, the Cacao deity also wears earflares, and his hair is wrapped in paper or cloth and adorned with beads—material objects that socialize the body, transforming it into a person. The cheeks of the Cacao deity have incised marks that may reference scarification (see Figure 1). Stephen Houston, David Stuart, and Karl Taube expand on Marcel Mauss’ “technique of the body,” which focuses on movement and interaction between the body and objects, to include another “technique of the body,” one that considers “its ornamentation, whether by dress, paint, tattooing, or physical deformation.”⁵⁰ They argue that “Such surface modifications are focal because they involve the ‘social skin,’ the ‘frontier of the social self’ that serves as a ‘symbolic stage upon which the drama of socialization is enacted.”⁵¹

Hans Belting, arguing for the agency of images and the relationship between body and image, similarly considers body decoration. The natural body, according to Belting, is a

⁴⁹ Stross, “Seven Ingredients,” 32-33.

⁵⁰ Houston, Stuart, and Taube, *The Memory of Bones*, 6.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

medium that can carry images in the same way that a canvas can carry paintings. Images can appear as external forms of decoration—scarification, face/body paint, piercings, hair ornaments, clothing, etc.—that not only function to socialize the natural body, but they also transform the body from a mere medium which carries an image to an actual image itself. Belting argues that the unification of body and image is disrupted when an artificial medium is substituted for the living body, stating:

Artifacts that represent a person rupture this somatic unity, substituting an artificial medium for a living body. What in the one case is displayed on the body itself, in the other is transferred to an artificial body that we call a medium. This transfer has the well-known drawback of rendering the body mute. Artifacts, such as sculptures, forfeit the life that a living body displays, and as a result they require animation.⁵²

While the *Lidded Tripod Cylinder* appears as an artificial body replicating the identifying markers of a body—human head, body/container, and legs—the presence of scarification, ear flares, hair ornaments, and stucco clothing transforms this artificial body into a socialized body just as human (biological) bodies would be perceived if they too carried these external ornaments of decoration. Through its external adornment, the pot, then, understood as a body through the magical process of metaphor, is also perceived as a human body. In its external decoration, it is transformed into a “Social” body. Moreover, through this external decoration, the pot is understood to be a specific body; it is perceived to be the body of the Cacao deity, and therefore, the Cacao deity himself.

Other corporeal metaphors deal with related concepts of vitality, life, and blood. The color red, for example, signifies such notions. Red symbolizes solar vitality, as Andrew K.

⁵² Hans Belting, “An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body,” in *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), 22.

Scherer describes; it is the color of sunrise, the cyclical and daily birth of the sun that gives rise to life on this planet, and heat, created through the regenerative qualities of fire.⁵³ For the Lacandon Maya, according to R. Jon McGee, red dye made from the seeds of the annatto tree symbolizes human blood.⁵⁴ This dye was used to paint houses, implements, and the bodies of the Lacandon involved in rituals.⁵⁵ McGee notes that god pots, or *incensarios*, when painted with the annatto dye, were activated; they were understood to be replicas, embodiments of the gods to whom they were dedicated.⁵⁶ On the other hand, burning the paint off deactivated the god pot.⁵⁷ Often times, the corpses of kings were painted in red cinnabar, imbuing the bodily remains “with solar heat, combating the cold earthiness of decay”⁵⁸ and ensuring rebirth. Red pigments and stucco were also used to cover structures, such as temple pyramids in Classic Maya cities, imbuing them with life, animating them. The red pigment on the *Lidded Tripod Cylinder* surely carries the same significance. The red pigment carries even more significance, if we consider the location from which it was obtained. Minerals such as cinnabar, hematite, or the malachite mentioned earlier are mined from under the earth’s surface, so they originate from the feminine realm. I want to turn, briefly, to the *Florentine Codex* to consider the importance of materials.

⁵³ Andrew K. Scherer, “Dead Bodies,” in *Mortuary Landscapes of the Classic Maya: Rituals of the Body and Soul* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), 76-77.

⁵⁴ R. John McGee, “The Lacandon Incense Burner Renewal Ceremony: Termination and Dedication Ritual among the Contemporary Maya,” in *The Sowing and the Dawning: Termination, Dedication, and Transformation in the Archaeological and Ethnographic Record of Mesoamerica*, ed. Shirley Boteler Mock (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 42.

⁵⁵ McGee, “Lacandon Renewal Ceremony,” 42.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁵⁸ Scherer, “Dead Bodies,” 78.

Diana Magaloni Kerpel's research on the *Florentine Codex* highlights the importance of materials, and through the assessment of her arguments, I will be able to approach the notion of embodiment through a consideration of gendered materiality. Discussing the concept of *ixiptlah*, Magaloni Kerpel examines the function and use of paints within the codex. *Ixiptlah*, a Nahuatl term, signifies "...a complex concept that refers to objects and people, both of which can serve as representatives of or substitutes for someone, even a god."⁵⁹ For example, on the feast days for the Aztec deity *Xipe Totec*, or "the flayed one," who wears the skin of flayed victims, priests would also don the flayed skin of sacrificial victims, not only representing, but also personifying the deity himself. These priests were understood to be manifestations of *Xipe Totec*. According to Magaloni Kerpel, *ixiptlah*, are activated through the mechanism of "covering," such as, in this example, the covering with skin,⁶⁰ and she uses this concept to examine the function of materials found in the *Florentine Codex*.

Upon studying the images in the *Florentine Codex*, Magaloni Kerpel observes that the artists used different types of paints to achieve the same tone. The author states:

A key finding of the research on color in the painting is that the artists used colorants made from plants and mineral pigments to produce the same color. In other words, the purpose of the organic colorants was not to obtain colors different from what could be obtained from minerals. Thus it is apparent that their use in images was related not directly to their tone but rather to their materiality and provenance, implying that colors had a specific significance based on their raw material and their natural state.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Diana Magaloni Kerpel, *The Colors of the New World: Artists, Materials, and the Creation of the Florentine Codex* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2014), 10.

⁶⁰ Magaloni Kerpel, *Colors of the New World*, 12.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

Magaloni Kerpel points as an example to the image of the goddess *Coatlicue* in book 1, folio 18v of the *Florentine Codex*. *Coatlicue* is painted a red brick color, which is produced by *achiotl*, a light-red colorant made from the annatto seeds of the *achiote* tree, blended with hematite, a mineral based iron oxide.⁶² Magaloni Kerpel observes that "...the addition of a mineral pigment to the colorant did not modify the red chromatic value,"⁶³ implying that the colorant and pigment produce the same hue, and therefore, their significance is not based on tonality, but rather, materiality. Colorants, which are derived from organic plant sources, "...grow on the earth's surface thanks to sunlight, and in the Nahua vision of the world they pertain to another cosmic sphere: the hot, luminous, lightweight, and masculine solar world above."⁶⁴ Pigments, on the other hand, are made from minerals extracted from under the earth's surface such as caves or lakes. Such locations "...are places of access to the underworld, an alternate space governed by another sort of time, the dwelling place of the ancestors that connects to the wet, heavy, feminine, dark matter from the time of creation."⁶⁵ *Coatlicue* is painted with both colorants and pigments, composed of both masculine and feminine materials, and therefore, the earth goddess is understood to be "...a complete, powerful being."⁶⁶ The combination of masculine and feminine paints cover the drawing of *Coatlicue* in the same way that priests transformed into *Xipe Totec* by covering themselves with human skin. The painting of *Coatlicue*, therefore, is understood not simply as an

⁶² Ibid., 35-36.

⁶³ Ibid., 37.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 38.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

illustration, but rather, it is an active embodiment of the goddess; the painting is an *ixiptlah* of *Coatlicue*.

Clay, based on the observations and arguments posed by Magaloni Kerpel, is therefore a material associated with femininity. Like some pigments, clay also originates from lakebeds, watery places that serve as access points to the feminine underworld. According to Carolyn Tate⁶⁷ and Dorie Reents-Budet,⁶⁸ the majority, if not all, of the artists and scribes, whose paintings cover the surface of the ceramic pots, were men, suggesting that painting belonged to the masculine domain. The feminine clay body and pigments combine with the masculine surface decoration, as with the pigments and colorants on *Coatlicue*, to form a “complete” and whole being. As a fully realized “being,” in this sense, the pot, therefore, is not just a representation of the Cacao deity, but it is conceived as the Cacao deity himself, embodied and animate.

The concept of *ixiptlah*, a covering or mask, can also be applied to the previously discussed external objects of ornamentation. These decorations—clothing, earflares, hair wrap, scarification—similarly function to cover the natural human body and transform it into the social body, the body that is perceived as an individual by other individuals. Pedro Pitarch, in his ethnographic research, demonstrates that the contemporary Tzeltal Maya identify two types of human bodies, “a carnal body shared with animals, and a specifically human phenomenological body.”⁶⁹ The carnal body is the “flesh-body,” the *bak’etal*; it is

⁶⁷ Carolyn E. Tate, “Writing on the Face of the Moon: Women as Potters, Men as Painters in Classic Maya Civilization,” in *The Maya Vase Book Vol. 6*, ed. Justin Kerr (New York, N.Y.: Kerr Associates, 1989).

⁶⁸ Dorie Reents-Budet and Joseph W. Ball, *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1994), 173.

⁶⁹ Pitarch, “The Two Maya Bodies, 93.

“the union of flesh and bodily fluids making up a whole that is divisible into parts, an object that is sentient, though *lacking the capacity to relate socially to other beings*, and that represents the substantial homogeneity between humans and animals” (italics mine).⁷⁰ The *bak’etal* is the natural body in which blood circulates.

The glyphs on the body of the vessel refer not only to the Cacao deity, but they also identify its contents, *ta tzih/suutz kakaw*, or *fresh/cherry chocolate*, and its function as a chocolate cup, supported further by the scientific analysis confirming the presence of theobromine,⁷¹ a unique chemical found in chocolate. It is unclear, however, whether the chocolate contained in this vessel was in bean or liquid form. However, if Beliaev et al.⁷² are correct in their translation of the second glyph, *suutz*, as cherry-flavored, referring to black capulin cherries, then it is likely that the chocolate was in liquid form.

The significance of chocolate is two-fold. Chocolate is a form of sustenance, and as such, it is a necessary component in the process of animation. According to Stross, “[t]o feed something is equivalent to maintaining its animatedness.”⁷³ Anything that is alive, in order to stay alive, must eat. The food itself varies from thing to thing. For humans, food is literally food—vegetables, tortillas, meat, etc. For other classes of animate beings, like deities, food is more abstract. The Zinacanteco Tzotzil Maya, according to Stross, interpret the smoke from white candles to be tortillas, and the smoke from copal incense is conceived of as cigarettes—both of which provide nourishment for the gods.⁷⁴ Besides sustenance, liquid

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Megan O’Neil, Personal conversation, February 24, 2017.

⁷² Beliaev, Davletshin, and Tokovinine, “Sweet Cacao and Sour Atole,” 262.

⁷³ Stross, “Seven Ingredients,” 33.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

chocolate, like the color red, was also equated with blood.⁷⁵ Cacao pods for the Aztecs, and likely their southern predecessors as well, symbolized the human heart.⁷⁶ In containing chocolate, therefore, the vessel, like the human body, was imbued with the life essence of blood. The pot, itself, can be understood as the *bak'etal*, the natural body through which blood pulsates.

According to Pitarch, the phenomenological body, on the other hand, is known as *winkilel*; it is “a ‘presence body’, an active subject capable of perception, feeling and cognition, committed to an inter-subjective relationship with bodies of the same species.”⁷⁷ The *winkilel* is “the figure, the body shape, the face, the way of speaking, of walking, of dressing.”⁷⁸ The *winkilel* is the socialized body that has identity, individuality, and is meant to be perceived by others. The *bak'etal*, in its natural state, is undifferentiated from animals. But when it masks itself, like an *ixiptlah*, through external decoration, the *bak'etal* transforms into the *winkilel*. *Win*, the root of *Winkilel*, according to Pitarch, is “associated with power (the capacity to do things), the face, the eye, the body, surface, oneself, (the reflexive form of the personal pronoun), façade, wrapping and also mask.”⁷⁹ If the basic pot is understood as the *bak'etal*, then the pot as the Cacao Deity, identified by his external accoutrements, which mask the *bak'etal*, is simultaneously the *winkilel*.

IV. An Extension of its Owner: The Pot is also Naatz Chan Ahk?

⁷⁵ Michael Coe, “Chocolate and Cacao,” in *Archaeology of Ancient Mexico and Central America: An Encyclopedia 2001*, eds. Susan Toby Evans and David L. Webster (New York: Garland Pub, 2001), 138.

⁷⁶ Coe, “Chocolate and Cacao,” 138.

⁷⁷ Pitarch, “Two Maya Bodies,” 93.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

While the initial section of the PSS identified the Cacao deity, the second part, which continues on the lid with glyphs much smaller in comparison to the glyphs featured on the body, identifies the owner of the vessel itself, *Naatz Chan Ahk*, followed by his title, *sak chuwen*, a title specific to kings of the Naranjo kingdom (Figure 4). *Naatz Chan Ahk* has also been identified as the first king of the *Sa'aal* dynasty whose capital was located at Naranjo during this period.⁸⁰ This statement, like the naming of the Cacao deity discussed earlier in this paper, functions as a claim of ownership and a projection of identity. David Stuart, in discussing statements of ownership that appear on stelae, states, “we are compelled to view the named ‘owners’ of stelae not as those that simply commissioned monuments and oversaw their dedication, but more precisely as specifying the identity of the portrait subjects.”⁸¹ Portraiture refers not only to mimetic but also metonymic representation. Stela were often non-figural, blank, vertical stones, which, though lacking in mimetic portraiture, were still understood to be representations and embodiments of the king, its owner.⁸² Considering Stuart’s argument, the statements of ownership indicate that the *Lidded Tripod Cylinder* embodies the Cacao Deity and, simultaneously, *Naatz Chan Ahk*. In order to explore this double embodiment, I need to first examine the possible function of this vessel within the funerary context.

The *Lidded Tripod Cylinder* was looted and, therefore, lacks provenience. However, there are clues that may suggest its function as a funerary offering. First, the stucco layer on

⁸⁰ Tokovinine and Fialko, “Stela 45 of Naranjo,” 9.

⁸¹ David Stuart, “Kings of Stone: A Consideration of Stelae in Ancient Maya Ritual and Representation,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 29/30, President and Fellows of Harvard College, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology (1996): 158-159.

⁸² Elizabeth A. Newsome, “The Ontology of Being and Spiritual Power in the Stone Monument Cults of the Lowland Maya,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 33 (1998): 115-36.

the exterior of the pot, what I have been referring to as “clothing,” is extremely fragile but has been relatively well maintained. Utilitarian objects used regularly necessitate washing and handling. Stucco, unlike the fired clay body, is permeable to liquids and impossible to maintain during washing. Therefore, this pot was likely not used regularly after the stucco was applied. Second, the vessel itself is in pristine condition—there are no visible cracks which, if present, would suggest modern repair. The Maya were known to break and discard their cups after ritual use, based on the countless number of potsherds in middens near or around the palace structures at various sites. The impeccable condition of the vessel suggests it was carefully placed into a royal tomb, perhaps the tomb of *Naatz Chan Ahk* after his death. During the Tikal excavations, several vessels of similar form (lidded cylinder tripods), decoration (stucco and pigment), and condition were recovered from three Early Classic tombs (Burials 10, 22, and 48),⁸³ so it is not improbable to postulate the function of the *Lidded Tripod Cylinder* as a funerary furnishing. This, of course, does not mean that the vessel did not function in a utilitarian manner as serviceware in daily life prior to being decorated with stucco.

Additionally, the color palette is suggestive of a funerary context. Red, as I discussed earlier, signifies life, vitality, and blood (both life-sustaining and sacrificial). It is the color of both life and death. Blue, on the other hand, is the color of water, therefore symbolizing the watery underworld, the realm of the ancestors, but it is also connected to the sky, vegetation, and therefore, fertility and life. Both colors reflect the dualistic ideologies that structured the Maya and, more broadly, Mesoamerican universe. Dualities are

⁸³ Culbert, T. Patrick. *The Ceramics of Tikal: Vessels from the Burials, Caches and Problematical Deposits*. (Philadelphia: University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, 1993).

complementary and essential opposites—life cannot exist without death; there cannot be light without the dark, nor males without females. These pairs create harmony as well as equilibrium in the Maya world. An exquisite and also looted cylinder tripod vessel in the Ancient Americas collection at the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) is similarly decorated with the same red and blue color palette (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Maya, Precolumbian, *Tripod Vessel with Slab-legs* (K1446), 300-600, earthenware with stucco and polychrome pigments. Detroit Institute of Arts, Founders Society Purchase, Arthur H. Nixon Fund, 1984.12.

The composition on the surface of this vessel and its lid is divided into two diagonal halves. One half is a field of blue filled with white, quatrefoil flowers of the ceiba tree. This particular tree was understood to be the axis mundi, connecting the underworld, earth, and celestial realms together, and the white flowers signified the soul. The blue region, painted

with Maya blue, a paint produced by heating indigo with attapulgitite or palygorskite clay (recall Magaloni Kerpel's arguments on the materiality of color-pigment combinations, and which go through the transformative process of heating), refers to the underworld. So, according to Taylor, "[w]hat one sees on the Detroit tripod is the white-flower-soul of the deceased young lord in the blue-green water of the otherworld," and with the glyphs inscribed inside the flowers at various angles, so that there is an "illusion that the flowers are floating and turning in [the water]"⁸⁴ as they travel through the realm of the ancestors.

Stylized scrollwork, carved in plano-relief, covers the other half of the vessel's surface. Scrolls, like everything else in Maya iconography, are multivalent. They represent, simultaneously, the heads of celestial serpents symbolic of the sky as well as water glyphs: as I have mentioned multiple times throughout this paper, sky is intrinsically tied to the watery underworld. The scrollwork is painted in a layer of toxic red cinnabar, a mineral mined from the earth's surface, originating "from the land of the dead."⁸⁵ The overt connotations of death visible in the choice of materials and symbolism suggest this pot, though lacking provenience, functioned as a funerary offering. The composition, according to Taylor, of "red scrollwork and blue spiral represent, thus, an equation of Mexican and Maya cosmology, with colors symbolizing the dualism of life and death as related opposites that harmonize the eternal cycles of the universe."⁸⁶

The *Lidded Tripod Cylinder*, though less elaborate in comparison, may arguably reflect the same conceptions and symbolisms if we are to consider the significance and

⁸⁴ Taylor, "A Chocolate Cup," 17.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

choice of the color palette. Like the DIA *Tripod Vessel*, LACMA's *Lidded Tripod Cylinder* employs red, blue, and white as well, and they surely symbolize the same dualistic concepts of death and life. Considering this in addition to its pristine condition, it is likely that the *Lidded Tripod Cylinder* functioned as a funerary offering.

As a funerary offering, the *Lidded Tripod Cylinder*, becomes an external, material manifestation of its owner, *Naatz Chan Ahk*, an extension of his body and personhood. As an object, a thing that belongs to a person, through its ownership and use, the cup becomes an extension of the body. The glyph, *y-uch'ib*, or "his cup," signifying ownership, identifies the cup as an extension of the body. In 1979, Peter Mathews first identified "name-tagging," or statements of ownership and possession on a pair of jade earspools from Altun Ha, Belize.⁸⁷ The glyphs read "u-tu-pa," or *utup*, with the prefix *u-* being a personal pronoun meaning "his, hers, its, theirs," and *tup* translates to earrings.⁸⁸ This discovery has led to many identifications of name-tagging from material objects like *u-bak*, "his, her, its bone,"⁸⁹ to intangible notions such as *u-bah*, "his, her, its self."⁹⁰ On cylinder vases the name-tag *y-uch'ib* (occasionally *y-uch'naab* or *y-uch'ab*) appears in the PSS and translates to "his, her, its cup."⁹¹ David Stuart states that "Declarations of material ownership seems a pervasive

⁸⁷ Stephen D. Houston, Oswaldo Fernando Chinchilla Mazariegos, and David Stuart, "Objects," in *The Decipherment of Ancient Maya Writing*, eds. Stephen D. Houston, Oswaldo Fernando Chinchilla Mazariegos, and David Stuart (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 463.

⁸⁸ Peter Mathews, "The Glyphs from the Ear Ornaments from Tomb A-1/1," in *The Decipherment of Ancient Maya Writing*, eds. Stephen D. Houston, Oswaldo Fernando Chinchilla Mazariegos, and David Stuart, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 471.

⁸⁹ Stuart, "Kings of Stone," 151.

⁹⁰ Houston and Stuart, "The Ancient Maya Self: Personhood and Portraiture in the Classic Period," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 33, President and Fellows of Harvard College, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology (1998): 75.

⁹¹ Reents-Budet and Ball, *Painting the Maya Universe*, 173.

trait of the Maya nobility,”⁹² but its ubiquity poses the following question: what is the significance of name-tagging? The statement *y-uch’ib* is simultaneously a claim of ownership and a statement of self-identification, alternating between object and subject.

Rosemary Joyce wrote about the history and origins of residential subfloor burials at Puerto Escondido, Honduras. In tracing the history of this practice, Joyce determines that around 1400-1100 B.C.E. subfloor burials began not with human remains, but rather with body ornaments, “...removable items of costume, badges of status or group affiliation, [which] were tightly connected to and, indeed, constitutive of the identities of the persons who wore them.”⁹³ Similarly, the clothing and jewelry we wear, the electronics we use, the cars we drive, and the houses we live in, these objects precede us as human beings. They create and define our identity, and they become extensions of us, of who we are. Moreover, these extensions have permanence. At Puerto Escondido, while such objects as pendant figurines and earspools were placed in subfloor burials and caches, their deceased human owners were disposed of in mountain caves.⁹⁴ The permanent, enduring objects were more significant than the impermanent human body that is subject to decay. It was not until 900 B.C.E. that subfloor burials of ceramic pots, costume elements, and jade pendants began to include human remains. Joyce’s study makes it apparent that permanent objects can stand in for the person who wore or used them. Ceramics, like the *Lidded Tripod Cylinder*, similarly,

⁹² David Stuart, “Hieroglyphs on Maya Vases,” in *The Decipherment of Ancient Maya Writing*, eds. Stephen D. Houston, Oswaldo Fernando Chinchilla Mazariegos, and David Stuart, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 482.

⁹³ Rosemary Joyce, “In the Beginning: The Experience of Residential Burial in Prehispanic Honduras,” *Archeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association*, 20 (1). American Anthropological Association (2010): 36.

⁹⁴ Joyce, “Residential Burial,” 36-39.

become extensions of their owners. In discussing stone stelae, Houston and Stuart state, “By reproduction in stone, such images achieved an enduring permanence that would be impossible in the physical body. Such representation operated not only as memorials of matters of record and of participants in them but as embodiments or individual presences of the ruler.”⁹⁵ Similarly, ceramics have permanence, outlasting and indexing the lives of their human owners.



Figure 6: Rollout photograph of K6547, also known as the “Berlin Vase.” Photo © Justin Kerr.

The presence of these material objects in burials, therefore, underlines them not only as extensions of the body and of personhood, but also as embodiments of their owners. The *Lidded Tripod Cylinder*, then, is understood as a double embodiment of the Cacao deity and *Naatz Chan Ahk*. Interestingly, the Cacao deity among other fruit trees in Maya mythology is born from the deceased body of the Maize god.⁹⁶ The “Berlin Vase” (K6547) offers a visual depiction of this myth (Figure 6). In the first part, the deceased Maize deity rendered bounded with knotted cloth and laid out on a funerary platform is surrounded by mourners

⁹⁵ Houston and Stuart, “The Ancient Maya Self,” 90.

⁹⁶ Simon Martin, “Cacao in Ancient Maya Religion: First Fruit from the Maize Tree and Other Tales from the Underworld,” in *Chocolate in Mesoamerica: A Cultural History of Cacao*, ed. Cameron L. McNeil (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006).

grieving. In the second scene, some time has passed as the skeletal remains of the Maize deity are shown entombed within a pyramid. From his remains sprout three anthropomorphic fruit trees. The Maize deity, through sacrifice, provides sustenance for humans, who were understood to be made from corn dough. It is not implausible to assume that humans, made of maize, similarly had a regenerative potential in death. This, perhaps, is the connection between *Naatz Chan Ahk*, a king in life, and his embodiment as the Cacao deity in death. I will further explore this interpretation and function of double embodiment in the next section.

V. Ensuring Rebirth: Architecture, K'ex, and the Power of a Name

As I have examined thus far in this paper, the *Lidded Tripod Cylinder* is multivalent with layers that operate simultaneously. On one layer, the pot can be understood, I have argued, as an embodiment of the Cacao Deity. On another layer, the pot, as an extension of the body and personhood, is concurrently an embodiment of the king, *Naatz Chan Ahk*. A third layer involves the relationship between pot and architecture, which I briefly mentioned earlier in this thesis and which I will elaborate on here in this section in order to further explore the significance of this double embodiment.

Referring to Teotihuacan-style vessels, Conides, to reiterate, observed that the sloped lid of cylinder tripod vessels mimics the thatch roof of houses—an observation that is relevant to the *Lidded Tripod Cylinder*, as this pot's lid similarly has a sloped roof that mimics traditional thatched roof houses in the Maya region. Earlier in this paper, I noted that the feet on Teotihuacan-style cylinder tripod vessels appeared to reference central Mexican

talud-tablero-style architecture.⁹⁷ The feet on the *Lidded Tripod Cylinder*, however, are unelaborated square slabs with vents cut into the inside surface of each foot. The question of quantity arises: why use three feet? The obvious answer is stability; a vessel with three feet is more secure than a vessel with only two feet. But why three feet and not four? The Maya did produce composite anthropomorphic tetrapod vessels, combining, for example, the legs of a peccary with a turtle's carapace as the body. The number of legs, therefore, seems to be not only practical but also intentional.

If the *Lidded Tripod Cylinder* can be seen as akin to an architectural structure with a lid that is comparable to the thatch roof of a house, then the three legs/feet may reference a *k'óob'en*. Nowadays, the *k'óob'en* refers, in general, to the kitchen space in a home, but in the past, it specified a three stone hearth found in Maya structures. When establishing a place, a community, building a house or a new structure, the first thing that one does is drill a fire in order to domesticate that space, delineating it as separate from nature and creating a link, a relationship between the gods and place. The three legs of the *Lidded Tripod Cylinder* may therefore reference this three stone hearth, and as such, a direct line is forged connecting the Cacao deity to *Naatz Chan Ahk*.

In order to clearly and fully consider the relationship between ceramics, architecture, and double embodiment, the significance of architectural structures must be further explored. While Rosemary Joyce discussed the entombment of material possessions rather than human remains in early sub-floor burials, Susan Gillespie addresses the meaning of

⁹⁷ Some Maya-style cylinder tripod vessels have the talud-tablero feet. This may be a Teotihuacan design incorporated into Maya iconography, or it could be a reference to the glyph *ik'*, which translates to "wind" or "breath".

these burials as well as their function. According to Gillespie, through the interment of deceased family members under the floors of houses, domestic spaces are thought of not as places of death (in the Western sense and view of cemeteries) but rather, they are conceived as “place[s] of curation, transformation, and regeneration of enduring social personae.”⁹⁸ When a family member died, his or her material possessions—the things used in everyday life that were not entombed with the bodily remains—were broken or burned,⁹⁹ and the house in which the deceased lived in during life and was buried beneath in death was razed, creating the foundation for a new house to be constructed by the surviving family members.¹⁰⁰ Any remnants of the deceased’s soul, that may have been imbued into material objects through contact, use, ownership, or association, is released through the destruction of those possessions. Simultaneously, the corpse of the deceased becomes a part of the new construction, literally providing the foundation on which future generations will live.¹⁰¹

Additionally, by burying deceased family members under the floor of a residential space, the surviving family members strengthened their rights to and control over the material as well as immaterial possessions of their ancestors.¹⁰² Intangible property among the Maya seems to be even more valuable than physical property. There are two types of intangible property: individual and collective. Individual intangible property is specific to each person, while collective intangible property is collectively owned by family, or

⁹⁸ Susan D. Gillespie, “Body and Soul Among the Maya: Keeping Spirits in Place,” *Archaeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association* 11 (2002): 67.

⁹⁹ Lisa J. Lucero and Andrew Kinkella, “A Place for Pilgrimage: The Ancient Maya Sacred Landscape of Cara Blanca, Belize,” in *Of Rocks and Water: Towards an Archaeology of Place*, ed. Ömür Harmansah (Oxford and Philadelphia: Oxbow Books, 2014), 16-17.

¹⁰⁰ Gillespie, “Body and Soul,” 70.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 67-68.

corporate, groups to borrow Gillespie's terminology.¹⁰³ Individual intangible property encompasses aspects of an individual's personal characteristics and traits such as personality, morality, and destiny, while collective intangible property comprises things like names, official titles, rights, and souls.¹⁰⁴ Such intangible property is "enduring, outliving the human being who appropriates them."¹⁰⁵ Sub-floor burials created a direct link, connecting surviving relatives to their ancestors, further legitimating notions of ownership, rights, and status.

Names, specifically, which were "thought to outlive even bone,"¹⁰⁶ played a critical role in the concepts of *k'ex* and regeneration. *K'ex* or *k'exel* translates, across several Mayan languages, as exchange, substitute, replacement, representative, and namesake.¹⁰⁷ Karl Taube in discussing birth imagery considers the concept of *k'ex* sacrifice, an offering that is made in exchange for something else. Taube points, as an example, to the *Popol Vuh*,¹⁰⁸ the

¹⁰³ Ibid., 68.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 67-68.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 68.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 71-72; Victoria Reifler Bricker, Eleuterio Po'ot Yah, and Ofelia Dzul de Po'ot, *A Dictionary of the Maya Language as Spoken in Hocabá, Yucatán* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1998), 151; Martin Prechtel and Robert S. Carlsen, "Weaving and Cosmos Amongst the Tzutujil Maya of Guatemala," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 15 (1998): 130; Karl Taube, "The Birth Vase: Natal Imagery in Ancient Maya Myth and Ritual," *The Maya Vase Book Vol. 4*, ed. Justin Kerr (New York, N.Y.: Kerr Associates, 1989), 669.

¹⁰⁸ The *Popol Vuh* chronicles the story of the Hero Twins, Hunahpu and Xbalanque. It begins with the story of two brothers, One Hunaphu and Seven Hunahpu. We witness their birth as well as the birth of One Hunahpu's first two sons—One Monkey and One Artisan. We also follow One and Seven Hunahpu on their journey to and their failed trials in Xibalba. Ultimately, the two men are sacrificed by the Lords of the Underworld. The decapitated head of One Hunahpu is placed in a calabash tree, which immediately begins to bloom and bear fruit. The Lords forbade everyone from going near the tree. However, as with many stories that contain such restrictions, there is always at least one person to disobey. And, of course, in this story, it was a woman who broke the rules. Blood Moon, the daughter of Blood Gatherer, one of the Lords of the Xibalba, visited the tree. She spoke to the head of One Hunahpu, and he spat on the palm of her hand, effectively impregnating her with the Hero Twins. She escapes sacrifice in the underworld, and seeking refuge on the

creation myth of the K'iche' Maya. In this story, Blood Gatherer, a Lord of *Xibalba*, or the Underworld, upon realizing his daughter, Blood Moon, is pregnant with the Hero Twins—*Hunahpu* and *Xbalanque*—orders the owl messengers to sacrifice her and remove her heart. Blood Moon, instead, outwits her father and the other Lords of *Xibalba* sending copal incense as a substitute, or *k'ex*, for her heart. Taube uses this example to demonstrate a parallel in contemporary Maya birth ceremonies, in which a *k'ex* offering is made to the denizens of the underworld to ensure a healthy birth, noting, “[j]ust as the new child is brought into the world, something must be given in return to the gods of death and the underworld, to maintain equilibrium.”¹⁰⁹

In his chapter on the ingredients for animating things, Stross discusses the ways in which the Maya imbue objects with souls. He states, “[t]o transfer to the manufactured item the quality of ‘animatedness’ from a human, animal, or other living entity is equivalent to

surface of the earth, she goes to the home of One and Seven Hunahpu. After being born, the Hero Twins were mistreated and neglected by their older brothers, One Monkey and One Artisan, and as we saw in the previous part of the story, when these boys do not like how another person acts, they seek revenge and aim to defeat that person. Tricking One Monkey and One Artisan into climbing up a large tree, they transformed their older brothers into monkeys. With their older brothers gone, Hunahpu and Xbalanque now had to provide for their grandmother by farming; however, these boys were not good farmers, and they discover their true calling as ballplayers. Like their fathers, One and Seven Hunahpu, the twins are summoned to *Xibalba* to play ball with the Lords of the Underworld. Unlike their fathers, Hunahpu and Xbalanque do not fall into the traps and trickery of the Lords. However, being outwitted, the Lords of the Underworld became enraged, and they sacrifice the twins, grinding their bones up and discarding their remains in a river. The twins, of course, came back to life. They disguised themselves with masks and wore rags, and they returned to the court of the Lords to perform magic tricks for entertainment. For these tricks, they would sacrifice and reanimate one another. The Lords excitedly volunteered themselves to be sacrificed and reanimated, and the Twins obliged—they decapitated them but never brought them back to life. And so, the twins defeated the Lords of the Underworld. Following their triumph, they resurrect their dead father who becomes the Maize god, and the twins ascend into the sky becoming the true sun and moon. (*Popol Vuh: The Definitive Edition of the Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life and the Glories of Gods and Kings*, trans. by Dennis Tedlock (New York: Touchstone, 1996.)).

¹⁰⁹ Taube, “Birth Vase,” 671.

bringing an artifact to life—in other words, giving it a soul.”¹¹⁰ Ensouling can be achieved simply through use—using an object, like a ceramic vessel, or even just touching an object can transfer some of the life essence from a human or other living entity to the object.¹¹¹ Painting an object, as McGee discusses in relation to the Lacandon god pots, is another manner in which objects can be activated, imbued with life. The more relevant method Stross discusses to the current discussion for ensouling an object is through transfer and sacrifice. Stross points as an example to the *Volador* ceremony held in various communities throughout Mesoamerica.¹¹² In this ceremony, a pole, which symbolizes a world tree, or axis mundi, is erected, linking the three realms of the universe—underworld, earth/middle world, and upper world. In order to erect the pole, a hole is dug, and a chicken is placed into the hole. As the pole is placed into the hole, the chicken is smashed to death, sacrificed, and its life essence is transferred to the pole, animating and activating it as the world tree, making it appropriate for the ceremony. This process of sacrifice that Stross describes can be understood in terms of *k'ex*, as an exchange of life that occurs in this rite.

Gillespie interprets another type of *k'ex*, one that deals less with equilibrium and more with regeneration. Maya groups believe that when a person dies, his or her soul reenters a pool of souls and will later come back into this world as a newborn baby. As there are a limited number of souls and because souls are collectively owned intangible property, families will do certain things to encourage the return or rebirth of the souls of their deceased family members. One way is through the use of sub-floor burials, which allow surviving

¹¹⁰ Stross, “Seven Ingredients,” 32.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

relatives to maintain control over such intangible property, therefore identifying architecture-specific burial practices as an important element in the regeneration of souls.

Gillespie elaborates on this by stating:

It was believed that if this practice were followed, the souls of the dead buried there would eventually enter the bodies of children subsequently born in that house or a neighboring house, indicating a mystical link between body and soul involving the place of burial. These beliefs and practices concerning the conservation and control of souls are ultimately associated with the ties the living envision and enact with the dead in order to maintain the continuity of proprietary rights within kin-based corporate groups.¹¹³

Another way to encourage soul regeneration is through the reuse of first (Christian/given) names. As *k'ex* is “associated with the transfer and thus continuity of human life,”¹¹⁴ children among the Maya are seen as the *k'ex*, or replacement, of their grandparents, and they are identified as such through names. Children are often given the same name as their grandparents. Grandparents can be understood in terms of Taube’s interpretation as well—upon death, the body of a grandparent is offered as a *k'ex* sacrifice, in order for a child to be born safely into this world—and therefore, this form of *k'ex* also deals with equilibrium.

Stross identifies two other ingredients for animating humans and objects—naming and assigning guardianship. As with clothing or other external objects of ornamentation, which mark the body or thing as a social entity, giving it a space within the social realm, the act of naming similarly gives that object or person a space in the mental realm. By naming something, that thing—object or person—is made real, bestowed with an identity, allowing it to interact with other things that also have identities. Naming in the *Lidded Tripod Cylinder* is conflated with ownership, or guardianship. According to Stross, “[t]o assign guardianship

¹¹³ Gillespie, “Body and Soul,” 71.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

of a thing means to give it an owner and a protector—a deity, parent, or owner.”¹¹⁵ For children, their parents take on this role, providing shelter, food, and love, and sometimes deities or ancestors may also be called on to offer guidance and protection.

Two names appear on the *Lidded Tripod Cylinder*—*Cacao Ajaw* (lord) and *Naatz Chan Ahk*. The significance of the appearance of names is multi-fold. Gillespie notes that through “the transfer of a name and accompanying soul from one body to another, or as the exchange of one body for another—the Maya have achieved a form of immortality.”¹¹⁶ If names have the ability to outlive their corporeal counterparts, then the appearance of the name *Naatz Chan Ahk* on this vessel is significant in that the vessel itself functions in preserving this name. Words written on permanent materials, either painted on ceramics or carved into stone, are, as a general observation, capable of outliving the human body. The appearance of both names, however, seems to be equally if not more important. The two names identify this vessel, in a certain sense, as a microcosm, a compact version or recreation of the process of rebirth and regeneration. Moreover, the appearance of *Naatz Chan Ahk* on a vessel that mimics a house, and in doing so, references the function of sub-floor burials, as well as the body of the *Cacao* deity, performs the process of transferring the soul from *Naatz Chan Ahk*, who survives or is present in the name itself to the *Cacao* deity. The deity thus assumes, in Stross’s terms, the role of guardian and protector, ensuring that *Naatz Chan Ahk* continues to live even after death. *Naatz Chan Ahk* becomes immortal twice over—first through the preservation of his name on a permanent material and second through his rebirth as the *Cacao* deity.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Gillespie, “Body and Soul,” 72.

Fire may play a significant role in this vessel's metaphysical function. Not only is fire referenced by the three feet/legs and their relationship to the *k'óob'en*, but also, ceramics more generally go through a transformative process in the kiln. Clay, as I mentioned earlier, is sourced from lakebeds, access points to the underworld, or the feminine realm. Clay originates in a place that is cold, and coldness, according to Andrew Scherer, is related to disease and death.¹¹⁷ But when clay is exposed to fire, it transforms into a durable object, a container, like the human body, that can hold other things, such as liquids, foods, or perhaps even souls. Scherer points out that fire, like the color red discussed earlier in this paper, is related, through heat, to life and power, as "warmth is associated with vitality, the heart, and blood."¹¹⁸ Fire, Scherer states, "not only purifies space but vivifies it, as burned places are imbued with animate spirit."¹¹⁹ Perhaps, the firing of clay is one of several ways in which ceramics can be activated, making them appropriate containers in the preservation and regeneration of souls.

The representation of rebirth and regeneration is also conveyed in the simple observation of the *Lidded Tripod Cylinder* as a whole vessel. As I mentioned earlier, objects, such as sculptures, ceramics, everyday objects, and houses, were ritually deactivated and terminated through breakage, kill holes, or burning. This vessel, however, was not deactivated, suggesting its wholeness was intentional. As a complete and whole vessel, it plays a critical role in this process of rebirth.

VI. Engaging the Senses: The Agency of the Embodied Pot

¹¹⁷ Andrew K. Scherer, "Ritual, Liminality, and the Mortuary Space," in *Mortuary Landscapes of the Classic Maya: Rituals of the Body and Soul* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), 128.

¹¹⁸ Scherer, "Ritual, Liminality, and the Mortuary Space," 128.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

To be understood in terms of personhood, as an activated and animate object, we also need to consider the agency of the pot. As I previously mentioned, *y-uch'ib* not only functions as a claim of ownership, but it is also a statement of self-identification. Not only does this cup belong to *Naatz Chan Ahk*, but the cup itself acknowledges that ownership, suggesting it has subjectivity, agency. The vessel exhibits this agency by appealing to the senses, prompting its owner to respond to the sensorial signals, guiding its owner's actions. The PSS text wraps around the vessel, making it impossible to see all of the glyphs at once. Rather, in order to read the glyphs, the person holding the vessel has to turn it once to read the glyphs on the body and a second time to read the text on the lid.

This wraparound composition engages the viewer on a personal, intimate level, as he or she would have to hold and turn the vase in order to see and read the entire hieroglyphic texts. This compositional format impedes a complete, holistic, and instantaneous visual perception, instead allowing the vessel to reveal its painted surface. The medallions, within which the glyphs are incised, are bisected diagonally—the left half is a faint blue, while the right half maintains the white color of the stucco undercoat. This use of color produces the visual illusion of shimmering as the vessel is rotated. This illusion, like the wraparound text, provides visual cues, engaging the viewer, prompting him or her to hold, handle, and turn the pot.

More importantly, however, the act of rotating the vessel and the direction of reading the glyphs suggests ritual connotations. While observing Zinacantan ceremonies in the Highlands of Chiapas, Evon Vogt noted that “when the ritualists face ‘sacred space’ and set out to ‘enclose’ it, they start by moving off to the right, thus creating the counterclockwise

circuit” that follows the path of the sun.¹²⁰ William Hanks also notes spatial-moral conceptions in Yucatec Maya as similarly favoring the right. In front of (*taánil*), to the right of (*šnó’oh*), and above (*yoók’ol*) the speaker are directions that are associated with being morally positive.¹²¹ Behind (*paàčil*), to the left of (*šts’iik*), and below (*yàanal*) the speaker are understood as morally negative directions.¹²² With this in mind, the combined composition of the vessel in which the glyphs are read from left to right and the vessel is subsequently rotated a full 360 degrees may indicate that this vessel is a sacred, active object appropriate for rituals.

Additionally, the texts on this vessel were likely read aloud, engaging the auditory senses. According to Houston and Taube, “...the occasional appearance of first- or second-person references and quotative particles in Classic Maya script” lends support to the claim that Maya glyphs were vocalized.¹²³ Moreover, Mayan languages are tonal, characterized by high and low accents as well as glottal stops. They have a musical quality, suggesting these glyphs were intended to be heard, rather than read silently. Houston and Taube further elaborate, stating “...Mesoamerican writing was not so much an inert or passive record, but a device thought to ‘speak’ or ‘sing’ through vocal readings or performance.”¹²⁴ The human, then, becomes the instrument and voice through which the glyphs are vocalized. Boundaries

¹²⁰ Evon Zartman Vogt, *Tortillas for the Gods: A Symbolic Analysis of Zinacanteco Rituals* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 2-4.

¹²¹ William F. Hanks, *Referential Practice: Language and Lived Space Among the Maya* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 86.

¹²² Hanks, *Referential Practice*, 86.

¹²³ Stephen Houston and Karl Taube, “An Archaeology of the Senses: Perception and Cultural Expression in Ancient Mesoamerica,” *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 10 (2) (2000): 263.

¹²⁴ Houston and Taube, “Archaeology of the Senses,” 263.

disappear as human and vessel merge into a single entity, and the Cacao deity, whose lips are parted, begins to sing.

As I have previously discussed, the *Lidded Tripod Cylinder* held chocolate, possibly *suutz kakaw*, or cherry-flavored chocolate. The fragrant scent appeals to the olfactory senses, impelling the drinker to inhale its odor, first, and then, drink it, activating the gustatory senses. The agency of the vessel manifests through the sensorial experience that it creates. The vessel prompts its viewers to feel, look, speak, smell, and taste, appealing to the tactile, visual, auditory, olfactory, and gustatory senses, becoming an all-encompassing sensorial experience. The vessel prompts us to interact with it in a way that moves beyond the objectifying relationship between owner and object. This agency, however, is impeded when the pot is placed into a sterilized vitrine. The passage from the original context into a museum context deactivates the vessel. Museums emphasize the visual, disregarding the haptic: look, do not touch. Viewers, museum-goers, do not perceive the agency of this vessel in the way that it was originally meant to be perceived, so, within the museum display, the pot is lifeless. It becomes a mere representation of history, an index of a past culture and its ideologies. The question, to which I have no solution, arises: is there a way to present these ceramics within the museum context, which makes evident their effect on the sensorial experience of viewers, broadening the ways in which we present these objects to the public?

VII. Conclusion

To conclude, the intention of this thesis is to consider how ceramic vessels may have functioned in their original context, beyond their already established uses as utility vessels, grave goods, and social currency. Notions of embodiment, personhood, and materiality

allow the opportunity to explore the metaphysical aspects of ceramics in an attempt to reconstruct their role within the ancient Maya civilization.

Throughout this paper, I examined the *Lidded Tripod Cylinder* as an embodiment of the Cacao deity and, simultaneously, *Naatz Chan Ahk*, an earthly king. This double embodiment, I have argued, is a representation of the rebirth of *Naatz Chan Ahk* as the Cacao deity. “Representation,” however, may not be the best term to describe what precisely is happening. Instead, performance may be a more suitable word. The *Lidded Tripod Cylinder* is actively performing the rebirth of *Naatz Chan Ahk*. The vessel is embodied and animate, activated through a combination of its materials, making, decoration, iconography, and through the contents it held (and still holds in trace amounts). While its agency is muted in the museum context, the vessel itself remains an active subject. The epigraph to this thesis, which I will repeat here, comes from a spell titled “Magic for a Long Life” by the Tzotzil poet Manwela Kokoroch. She calls on *Kajval*, a name that identifies all of the protectors—the sun, moon, and god—requesting: “This is all I will bother you with. In the name of the flowers keep my animal alive for many years in the pages of the book, in its letters, its paintings, on the whole surface of the earth.”¹²⁵ People live on, beyond their corporeal body, in the material objects they make, the permanent things they leave in this world. While, the *Lidded Tripod Cylinder* may be unable to exert its agency on us, its viewers, after over fifteen hundred years, in its text, its image, it continues to keep *Naatz Chan Ahk* alive.

¹²⁵ Manwela Kokoroch, “Magic for a Long Life,” in *Portable Mayan Altar: Pocket Books of Mayan Spells*, trans. Ámbar Past (San Cristobal de Las Casas, Mexico: Taller Leñateros, 2007).

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