

In Search of Kawil and Chaac: Blood and Maize in Maya Epigraphy*

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The preoccupation of the Classic Maya of Mexico and Guatemala with blood and maize is apparent in many iconographic details of the scenes sculpted on monuments and painted on ceramic vessels. The king spent his blood to fertilize the seed in the earth, to guarantee the growth of the maize plants as well as the continuation of his lineage by the birth of noble offspring. The blood shed in self-mutilation of tongue or penis might have been thought to evoke magically not only the sprouting of maize but also the birth of human offspring.

La Pasadita Lintel 2 (Fig. 1a) illustrates the bloodletting obligations of a Maya king during a period ending ceremony. To the left we see the richly adorned Yaxchilán king Bird-Jaguar IV. His »genitals are covered by an inverted Perforator God (a personified bloodletter), identifying the material he scatters as blood and the place from which he takes it as his penis. He leans forward, dropping a stream of blood into a large container shrouded in bloodletting knots« (Schele and Miller 1986: 196). He is assisted by a local chief named Tilot (see below).



Fig. 1a