



Fig. 2: Glyph of the Maya moon goddess.

tress of the ruling dynasties in several Maya cities, and her power was symbolically given to the ruler in the form of a "bundle of power."

3. Résumé: The Character of Maya Deities

He is both male and female, and it is the union of this pair which brings about the birth, or sprouting, of the cultivated plants, which are said to be their offspring. . . . Ihp'en, as the passive spirit of maize, is said to be a single being and of male sex only. In this role he is the male consort of the female spirit of the beans, ixq'anán.

(Wisdom 1940: 402; Dütting 1981: 205)

The concept of a fantastic mythical being that in itself unites the opposites earth-sky, life-death, male-female, etc., is characteristic for the variety of religions, and there is no reason to consider the Maya as an exception. This uniting was sometimes expressed in the idea of a dual ancestor deity (like the Central Mexican Omēteotl), or the pair of creator gods (Mixtec 1 Flower and 13 Flower); and the trails of this relatively late concept are still kept in the notion of "mother-fathers" in contemporary Quiché communities (cf. Tedlock 1982: 52-53). The fantastic mythological being is also considered as a "supporter" of the universe, and, in Maya studies, is designated as Itzamná.

Although some of his statements are no longer valid (like the one that "Itzam Na was primarily god of the hierarchy" [Thompson 1970: 210]), Eric Thompson, in his excellent study of this deity, has pointed (1970: 209-233) at its many different aspects. The famous representations from Copán (Altar D), Palenque (House E), and Piedras Negras (Stela 25) were also designated as Terrestrial, Bicephalic, and Celestial Monster, respectively⁹, and these manifestations were summed

up by Clemency Coggins (1985: 53-54): "As the reptilian structure of the universe, Itzamná encompasses phenomena that transcended and are antithetical to the sun. It does, however, have distinct celestial and Underworld components like the sun. . . . Supernatural beings often emerge from the open jaws of the celestial serpent and its body may consist of a Sky Band, a sequence of celestial signs. This serpent is also commonly represented as the 'serpent bar' carried by many Maya lords in their official portraiture, showing that the lord and his lineage worship and many descend from Itzamná. Beneath the human realm, Itzamná symbolized the structure of the earth, and in the waters of the earth and Underworld, where death reigns, it takes the skeletal forms of such aquatic reptiles as crocodiles. These are usually portrayed as Long Nose Heads, either skeletal or with no lower jaw (which means the same thing)." But it is not only Itzamná that is involved with the different aspects; many Maya deities are found in pairs (Maize Twins, hero-twins, the Paddlers from the Underworld, Hun Chuen and Hun Batz, etc.), a thing not very common for non-American traditions.



Fig. 3: Bicephalic Monster. Altar D, Copán.

On the more abstract level, there is *ch'ab* (in Yucatec: creation) and *akab* (darkness, night). The first is connected with sky and male; the other with earth and female. In the "Ritual of the Bacabs" their union is designated with the word *al* (birth). At this point it would be very interesting to point at the symbolism of the day *Akbal* (in other dialects also: *Akabal*, Uotan, Watan) – whose Yucatec equivalent is *akab*. It is associated with night, interior of the earth, caves (Thompson 1950: 73-75), and also a jaguar (God L according to Schellhas' classification) as Lord of the Night. According to Tzeltal Maya belief, the same day (*Uotan*) represents the name of their ancestor, that came probably from the east, distributed land among the people, and introduced the art of hieroglyphic writing – the same thing attributed to Itzamná. Moreover, earlier authorities (Brinton, Selser) supposed that Uotan is a deity analogous to the "Heart of the Sky" from the "Popol Vuh" (cf. Thompson *ibid.*). This complex is derived mostly

⁹ Although Baudez et Becquelin (1984: 394-396) take into account only the first two, and treat them as separate deities.