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Between Copan and the Isthmus: the Ceramic Codex of Yojoa, Honduras

The very word Maya first entered western vocabularies and consciousness via the eastern approaches to that linguistic domain. It was noted on Columbus's fourth and last voyage in 1502, when he was sailing along the north or Caribbean coast of Honduras and the isthmus. At that time Columbus also intercepted a trading canoe off one of the bay islands (Sauer 1966:130). His account of its freight indicated the network of trading and tribute conventions which would later be recognized as specific to Mesoamerica. His list of items includes cotton cloth and clothing, copper hatchets, maize and, not least, cacao, a currency unit and an element incorporated into the toponym of the great Maya metropolis Copan, which lies in westernmost Honduras (Stuart and Houston 1994:23). Even the sequence in which these and other items appear recalls the lists of the tribute that the Mexica or Aztec capital far to the west, Tenochtitlan, was extracting from its subjects. These are recorded in the native script tlacuilolli in the *Matrícula de tributos* and the *Mendoza Codex* (Berdan and Anawalt 1992), both from Tenochtitlan. In this way, the Mesoamerican world integrated languages and cultures through common understandings of economic value, calendrics and iconography, as foreshadowing New Spain it extended from Michoacan in the west to Guatemala in the east, with offshoots running into Honduras, Cuzcatlan (El Salvador), and Nicaragua.

At this point Columbus was on the very eastern edge of both the Maya domain and Mesoamerica, at the interface with the immensely complex mosaic of cultures and languages which comprises the isthmus as it stretches further east into South America. At the most rudimentary level he was at the interface between two food systems, one based on Mesoamerican maize, the other on eastern Central and South American cassava (Roys 1979:118). In pre-Columbian times, life here was found to be so good that the Spaniard Gonzalo Guerrero having grown accustomed to local ways as a captive, chose to die there in 1511, defending a local fort on the Ulua river against his countrymen rather than going back to join them.

Concerted resistance to the invasion involving a league of 200 towns in the Ulua and adjoining areas, was orchestrated by the Lenca ruler Lempira, whose name serves today to name the currency of Honduras. Scion of a legendary line (according to Torquemada) and murdered by the Spanish in 1536-7, Lempira's influence appears to have been felt most in the area of his Lenca speech, South American in

affinity, and long current in Ulua and western Honduras. When in Honduras in 1909, Walter Lehmann was able to interview Lenca-speakers, as he says in *Zentral-Amerika*, and the huge erudition of that work makes it easier in turn to sense the history common to the ‘Lenca-Reich’ and the polychrome ceramics characteristic of the Ulua and the Comagua valleys and Lake Yojoa, which lies between (15°N 88°W).

Known formerly as ‘Babilonia’ and today as ‘Ulua’, the coherence of the Ulua-Yojoa-Comagua polychrome tradition has been increasingly confirmed over the past century by archaeology. The consequence has been the emergence of a statement from pre-invasion Honduras, comparable with what, further east, has been called the ceramic codex of the Maya, where concepts and their interconnection may be apprehended first of all visually. In the larger history of the continent, such possible insight is of the greatest value, given the cultural complexity of the isthmus and its core location between Meso- and South America.

Of the collections of Ulua ceramics which have found a home in institutions in Honduras (Tegucigalpa), Central America, the United States, and Europe, one from Lake Yojoa currently in Manchester, stands out. Consisting of some forty polychrome pieces, it succinctly represents the tradition as a whole from a place intermediary between Ulua and Comagua, and it does so over four centuries of the post-Hiatus Classic period (seventh to tenth centuries AD). In these terms, a most useful overall assessment was offered by Kennedy in a work (1987), incisively commented on by Joyce (1987), which illustrates all the pots, drawing on the classifications set up by Viel (1977).

Following on Lehmann’s research in the Lenca area in 1909, at Yojoa archaeological excavations were undertaken in the 1930s (Strong, Kidder & Paul 1938; Yde 1938) and again in the 1960s (Baudez and Becquelin 1973). These last revealed pyramids and ball-courts of impressive proportions, stucco floors, along with sure indications of a closeness to Copan and the Maya which the pottery epitomizes in the 8th-century ‘Nebla’ class. For their part, Henderson and Beaudry-Corbett (1993) look more in the other direction in cross-referencing Yojoa locally in the isthmus.

Valuable insights into the world of Yojoa were shared in the late 1990s, when the Instituto de Cultura Popular in Tegucigalpa organized a campaign of taped interviews of the people who live and work on and around the lake. A notable result was the novel *Azul maligno* (2000) by César Rodríguez Indiano, which grew directly from what the author had learned while interviewing Yojoa’s population of compatriot ‘pescadores y mineros’. Aware of a recurrent legend, the work plays heavily with the idea of Yojoa (restored phonetically to Yoxoa) as a literally submerged world, which somehow exists on two

time levels, an everyday present and a substrate profoundly shaped by its pre-Columbian past, especially through contact with Copan, trading routes which passed from Cholula to South America through the isthmus, the local pyramids, and ‘Taulabé’ or Lenca ‘jaguar house’ known for caves found just south of the lake and traditionally synonymous with Yojoa itself.

By date and according to theme, the images represented in the Yojoa ceramic source may conveniently be considered in relation to Copan and the impact of the Maya, most obvious in the Nebula class (720-950 AD). Beginning with the seventh century, there is a prior appeal to the Olmec predecessors of the Maya and to the head-pieces that these last elaborated to unlikely extremes; these are contemporary with the highly stylized ‘monkey diamond’ (six pots, the largest single grouping). At the same time, the pots of this period develop motifs more readily assignable to South America, signally the steps and breaking wave (or greca escalonada) and the growth of the humanoid head and body from a bean, commonplace among the Moche of the northern Peruvian coast. A further class (which ‘had a fairly narrowly based but chronologically extended currency’. Kennedy 1987:49), focuses on the armadillo, again more conspicuously acknowledged in South America, particularly Amazonia, together with sundry manifestations of birds and feathers, long a principal trade item in Honduras itself. In short, the potential of this Yojoa ceramic codex is enhanced from the start by the intricate parallels it suggests with the cultures of Mesoamerica on the one hand and those of the isthmus and South America on the other.

Echoing both each other and other examples of the Ulua tradition, these Yojoa designs open the way to comparison with textually richer cultures to either side, Mesoamerica to the west and north, South America to the east and south. In this context, the Yojoa pages of the Ulua ceramic codex come to complement the literary classics of the isthmus and adjoining regions which between them recount the cosmogony of the continent as a whole and may serve as the best native guides.

For present purposes, principal among these guides is the *Popol vuh* (or ‘American Bible’), the creation story of the Quiché Maya of neighbouring Guatemala, written by them in their language in the mid sixteenth century. This text offers a detailed account of how humans, among them the Quiché ancestors, emerged in a process that begins with the beginnings of time itself. Notable metamorphoses come to distinguish our species from other vertebrates, first fish and finally monkeys. In detail and above all in its concept of successive world-ages, of which ours is the fifth, the *Popol vuh* constantly dovetails with the corresponding *Leyenda de los soles* of the Mexica.

Inscribed towards the end of the fifteenth century on the huge stone disk known as the Piedra del

sol or Sunstone of Tenochtitlan, the Mexica text was transcribed into Nahuatl (the lingua franca of Mesoamerica) in the annals of Cuauhtitlan, where world ages or suns end in successive catastrophes, of flood, eclipse, volcanic rain of fire, and hurricane.

This Mesoamerican world-age scheme, which found echoes throughout the continent, plentifully informs the pre-Columbian books of the region, the screenfold codices of deerskin or paper written in the hieroglyphic script phonetically specific to lowland Maya speech, or in the script known as tlacuilolli in Nahuatl, which served as a graphia franca for the region as a whole and which relates readily to many of the designs found on the Yojoa pots. A deerskin screenfold representative of the hugely influential metropolis of Cholula (the ‘Rome’ of New Spain) and now in the Vatican (the Borgia Codex), includes a magnificent tlacuilolli version of the world-age creation story in its central chapter (pp.29-46).

Complementing these Mesoamerican classics come texts like the Cuna *Tatkan Ikala*, the Carib *Watunna*, and the Manaus-based *Lenda de Jurupary* from the isthmus and South America, all the way east to the lower Amazon (Brotherston 1992). The Yojoa images may the more readily be explained by reference to these authoritative native sources, and in some cases enrich the logic of the arguments they propose.

Eight of the Yojoa pots (i.e. about a fifth of their number) have the distinctive form of the tripod, present at both the earliest and the later Maya-influenced phases, and this is the form chosen predominantly to represent the fully human form. Moreover, in their anatomy and their adornment these figures intimate human involvement with fellow vertebrate species, and explore the notion of crafts specific to the human hand.

Like their dynastic Maya and Mexica counterparts, such persons may have their status marked at a primary level by elaborate head-dresses of the feathers for which Honduras was renowned and which like the quetzal had specific value as currency in the Mesoamerican system. What has been identified as a Maya dignitary stands on a fine tripod cylinder bowl in the Santana class (largely coincident with Nebia) as the most arresting of these human figures (Figure 1). His status is indicated by the small dias he stands on, an elaborate head-dress, a gold necklace, and an impressive deep red lioncloth (itself a possible local token of gender and rank, as Roys noted 1972:154) which he holds up in his right hand. Above all, he is qualified by the motif which frames and guards him above and to either side. This surround consists of the unmistakable ‘woven mat’ motif, the screen synonymous with authority which gives the *Popol vuh* its very name and which identifies the hinge feast of the Maya year, Pop.

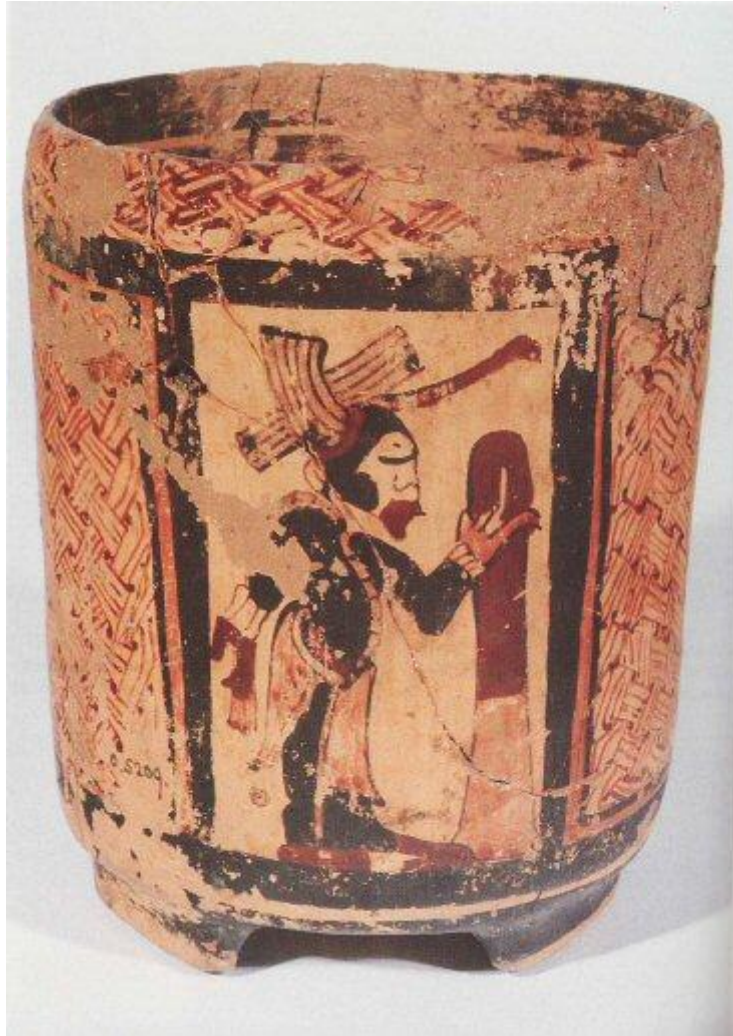


Figure 1. Maya dignitary, Yojoa. Courtesy of Manchester Museum.

This standing figure is complemented by three others likewise seen on tripod bowls, crowned by elaborate head-dresses and kneeling, and in particular by one also on a Nebla tripod who has identical face-markings, wears a similar hat and is seated (Figure 2). This last holds a sceptre topped by a round fan, as would a courtier enlisted to freshen the air, or adulate. The fan emits dark volutes of the kind that signify breath or speech.



Figure 2

In the Fejérváry Codex, round fans like this one are carried by emissaries and tribute collectors known in Nahuatl as *pochteca*. The *pochteca* system is alluded to in Nahuatl in the Twenty Sacred Hymns (no.XIV), which assign it to the no less ancient city of Cholula (whence the name of the Central American Chorotega), the Maya cities having their own parallel economy. The volutes of the fan strikingly match others that emerge from a round device at the base of the spine, which in its turn is accompanied by clusters of red dots whose totals augment in the three successive images of the figure placed around the circumference (7, 9, and 2×7 plus one orange dot, the image seen here). In Mesoamerica, the numbers seven and nine correlate with the moons of human gestation and the orifices of head and body; in the Supplementary Series of the Maya hieroglyphic texts they determine the cycles of the Nine Night Lords and the Seven Nights (Montgomery 2003:89-101).

Again, the dark volutes emerging from the base of the spine curl up so as to look like a monkey tail, and in this they corroborate the fur that covers the shoulders as a rough outer skin. A *pochteca* traveller who has an unmistakable simian look features on a slightly earlier pot, being further linked to it by occurring in the triple image around the circumference characteristic of the tripods, and by the fact that

the hint of a monkey tail and the furry skin are now translated into a full monkey guise (Figure 3).



Figure 3

Walking with stout legs and wearing a monkey mask, blond wig and elaborate ear spool, this simian pochteca sets off on the road bearing a load of cloth. Worn locally, ear spools of this kind led Columbus to name after them a subsequent stretch of the Caribbean coast ('Costa de las Orejas'. Sauer 1966:124. Also, Columbus's notes on the black and red body paint used by the people he saw in this area conforms to that seen on these human figures on the Yojoa pots).

Most important, in his left hand this monkey traveller holds a feather-covered baton made to resemble a parrot-like bird. Batons like these complement the round fan noted above in designating the pochteca, while birds and their feathers are listed by Herrera as the first trade item in pre-Columbian Honduras (Roys 1979:121). The pochteca loads depicted in Fejérváry (pp.31, 32, 37, 40) suggest that parrot and quetzal feathers ranked among the most precious pochteca loads. Feathers used in the art well-developed in Mesoamerica have been identified in their own right as a theme of the Yojoa pots. These

feature myriads of feathers which art will set into ordered design; in this, they are notable in respecting an arithmetic of threes ($3 \times 3 \times 3$ and $3 \times 3 \times 3 \times 3 \times 3$), which the codices habitually applies to the phases of the sidereal moon.

In a parallel design on a Yojoa pot now in Copenhagen and illustrated by Yde (1938:77), the monkey traveller raises his hand in characteristic pochteca greeting. The pochteca of the isthmus, whose routes took them great distances from home, were popularly known in Nahuatl as ‘huehucence’, who as ‘older brothers’ would regale listeners with tall tales of their experiences abroad. This figure is commemorated in one of the livelier examples of pre-Columbian theatre, the Güegüence of Nicaragua (Brinton 1883) and through Darío and other writers came to seem diagnostic of the isthmian highway. In both the Manchester and the Copenhagen image of the pochteca, a notable feature is the traveller’s cuffs, whose neatness contrasts with the rough skin and unkempt nails of his right hand. In the former example, the cuff is marked by the motif of two bars and a dot, which numerically equals eleven. This is the number of Monkey in the fundamental set of Twenty Signs, in its Maya and Mexica versions, and it also configures the device of Olmec power at Cholula termed ‘palatial’ (‘tlacateopan’. *Historia tolteca chichimeca* f.41. Kirchhoff 1989:213-4). In other words, though technically beyond Mesoamerica’s eastern frontier, the monkey traveller from Yojoa testifies in multiple detail to familiarity with the tribute and calendrical conventions characteristic of that area.

Of all the recognizable motifs seen on the Yojoa pots at Manchester, the Monkey is in fact by far the most frequent (5209/4, 5209/17, 5209/33, 5209/37, plus half a dozen others in the stylized ‘diamond’ version). This creature is the subject of more pots than any other motif, in a variety of poses, squatting, dancing, making offerings on open palms. In fact, as Yde noted already in 1938 the monkey is presumed to be so familiar a life form as to warrant being stylized into the geometric design, opaque in meaning unless its derivation is known. Squatting with knees apart, his legs come to form the base of a diamond for which the top is provided by arms and elbows that rest on the knees. Widely repeated, the four sides of the design are integrated into what appear to be complex arithmetical statements, which as in the case of the feathers recall Mesoamerican conventions, starting with the fact that the Monkey is the eleventh of the Twenty Signs (the four sides of the diamond may be parsed as 3, 2, 3, 3, and multiplied by six to yield 66, that is, the total of all numbers up to and including eleven).

We see the monkey most strikingly in profile when dancing, pot-bellied and in a posture which intimates the splits (the tail doubles as a leg —Figure 4— 5209/37). Rendered ridiculous, this monkey

cannot help but recall the dance performed by Spider and Howler Monkey in the *Popol vuh*. Encouraging them to dance in this way secures a key advantage for their younger brothers, the Hero Twins who have been suppressed and abused by them, and who upon recovering their birthright go on to perform their own repertoire of dances. In the creation story told in the *Popol vuh* this victory over the monkey pair of elder brothers amounts to an evolutionary threshold, a metamorphosis from simian to definitively human form. As antecedents the monkeys are nonetheless honoured for their dexterity and their achievements as painters and sculptors, pipers and singers. In the Maya tradition they are even depicted as scribes. A statue of the Monkey scribe features in the Scribe's Palace at Copan (Coe 1992:193).

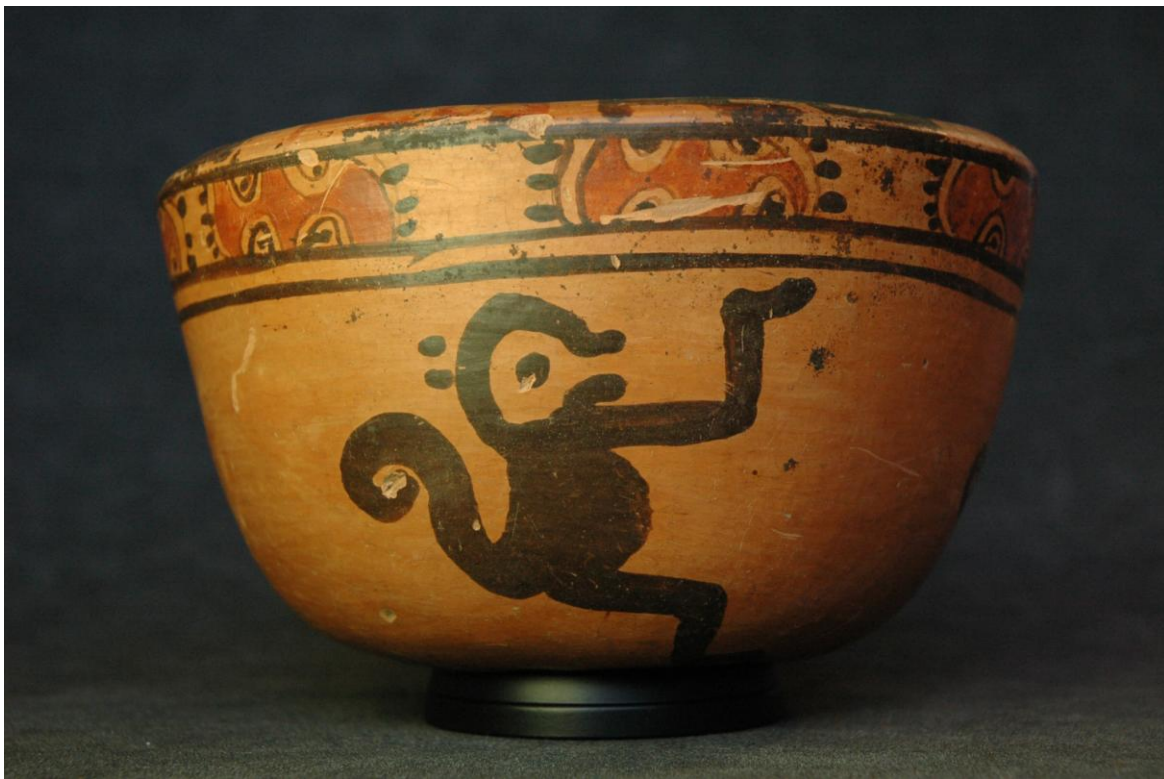


Figure 4

At an earlier stage in the evolutionary process narrated in the *Popol vuh*, metamorphosis and catastrophe are the result of the first domestic contract being breached, a theme prominent in cosmogony throughout the continent. As a result of being mistreated by those they had accepted to serve, at the end of the second world age domesticated dogs and turkeys (in the Andes it is herds of llamas) turn on their masters in violent reproach, exposing them to terror from the night sky, jaguars which descend to

excoriate. The aggression latent in the otherwise helpful and compliant turkey is depicted in Mexican and Maya codices (e.g. Madrid p.87, along with the dog), and as far north as the shell gorgets of Mississippian Mounds. At Yojoa the rebellion is reflected in the three images of the bird placed around the circumference of a Nebla tripod (Figure 5). Reading right to left, at first the turkey appears submissive, then raises its beak, to appear in the third position (seen here) upstanding with a full array of feathers, red eyed and with reinforced red thighs, intercalated with extra large eggs, all in reverse against a strong black surround.

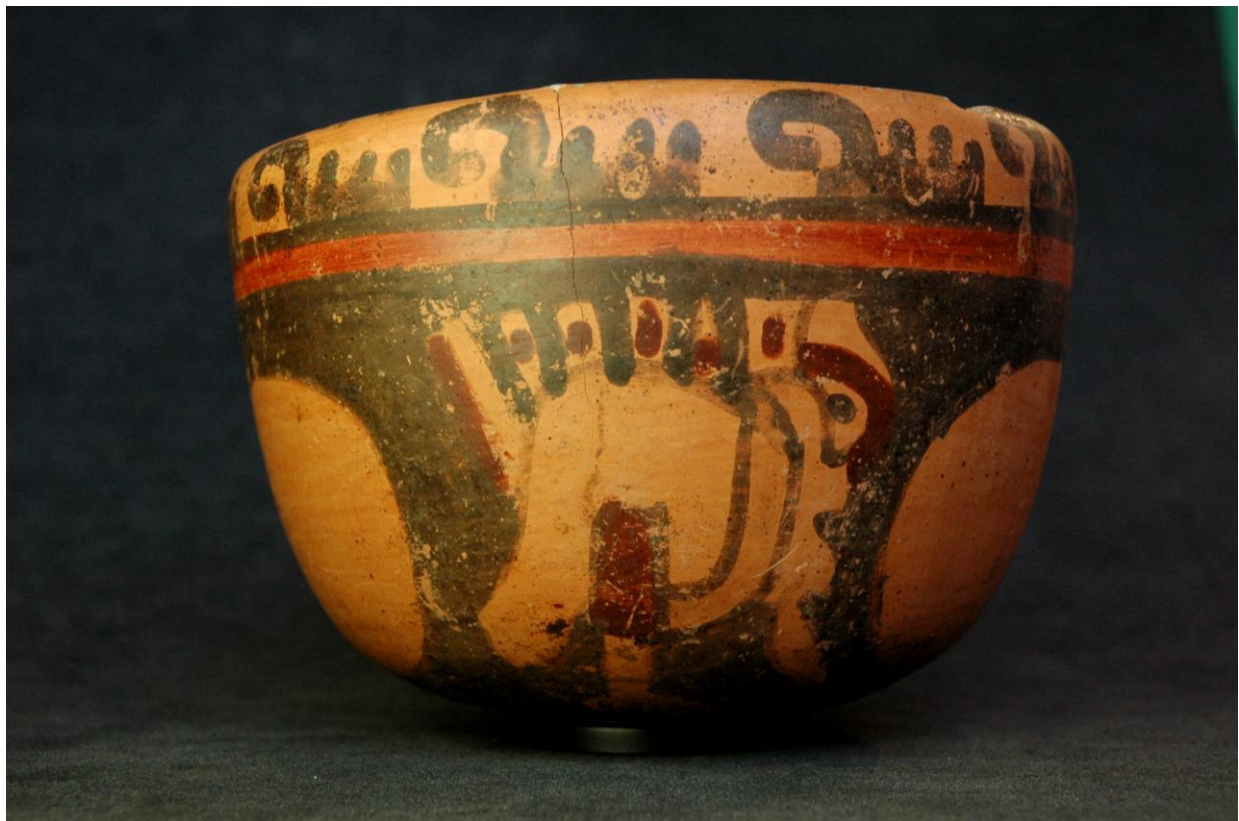


Figure 5

When they finally emerge in the cosmogonical narrative, the first four humans recognized by the Maya are assigned names that confirm long-standing fascination with the largest American feline, the jaguar. Founders of Mesoamerica's 'mother culture' and predecessors of the Maya, the Olmec were known and depicted themselves as 'jaguar people'. Distinguished by seven night-sky markings, the

jaguar's face was consecrated as a Maya glyph (T751. Kelley 1976:117). In Yucatan, the whole corpus of books which in fundamental respects matches the *Popol vuh* of the highland Maya takes its name from the prophet-historian named after this beast: the Books of Chilam Balam. In the *Popol vuh* account, the jaguar is a quality of the Quiché themselves and of Night (Balam Kitze, Balam Aqab), of the Nought indispensable to Olmec and Maya arithmetic and of Wind (Mahuq'utah, Iq'i Balam).



Figure 6

This jaguar provides the subject for perhaps the most arresting of the Yojoa pots, with a design found both on the Manchester tripod (Figure 6) and at Harvard (Henderson and Beaudry-Corbett 1993: B16). Around the bowl, the design alternates the growling feline, teeth bared and claws unsheathed, with a dark cluster of four centrifugal volutes legible as the wind or breath of night. Like those seen in Olmec sculpture for example at Chalcatzingo (Grove 1984:32), these jaguars boast assertively upright tails, calibrated by spots, one of them white amongst others that are dark, whose position is pointed out with precision by the tip of the beast's tongue. In the Harvard example, the teeth and claws are less prominent

yet the notion of power and authority is the more rigorously expressed through the calibrated tail which emits its own volute of speech or command and is reinforced by an alternating motif that is a raised palm of the hand. In the isthmus (in the Cuna *Tatkan Ikala*) as in Amazonia (*Watunna*) the jaguar is recognized as an uncompromising defender of its wild domain, who at night licks better wounds inflicted by the axe on the forest by day: this is just the image seen in the Fejérváry Codex p.28 and corresponds to the story of the Twins in the *Popol vuh*.

Besides the fact that individual features of these jaguar pots appear to echo qualities attributed to themselves by the Maya Quiché, the very posture and position of the beast defending itself by tooth and claw to fore and rear appropriately reflects the geo-political predicament of the Classic Maya, between Mexico to the west and the isthmus to the east. This power concept is reinforced by, and indeed helps explain, a closely-related Nebla tripod (Figure 7). At first sight, the design here appears to represent flower stamens, possibly of the water lily, which the Maya honoured as the first Sign in their version of the Twenty Signs (Imix). On the basis of years of archaeological experience in Honduras, Rosemary Joyce (1987) sees it rather as a ‘rare variant of the jaguar paw with claws’, citing Nebla examples where the stamens are also the same hooked talons. The name given to a Copan ruler in the sixth century fuses water-lily and jaguar into a single glyph (Coe & Van Stone 2005:82).



Figure 7

In the three images of the flower-claw placed around the tripod circumference, the total of stamen-talons add up to ten (3, 3, 4) and equal the digits of two human hands. Each hand is conventionally represented as a bar in Olmec and Maya arithmetic, like the red vertical bars placed here to either side of the flower-claw.

Noted clearly enough in the Mesoamerican domain and recognized for specific qualities, the jaguar retains his pre-eminence throughout the isthmus, in the Andes in the stone frieze of the Circular Plaza at Chavin, and as far as Amazonia, where among the Bororo his night-sky skin comes to embody the principle of script itself as *adugo biri* (Brotherston 2006). Recently acknowledged to be one and the same species that walks from Argentina to Mexico (and swims across the Panama Canal), this superb feline now has territory dedicated to it in the form of the Paseo del Jaguar (White 2009). The Yojoa jaguar claw pot itself has an inner frame in the form of the Andean cross found from Chavin and to Nicaragua (Belt 1911:129) and an upper rim decorated with the Step-and-breaking wave motif, likewise commonplace in Peru



Figure 8

A carnivore yet mightier and dreaded over comparable stretches of tropical America, the caiman toothed and tusked with gaping maw, is the subject of one of the earlier tripods (Figure 8). Like the *Popol vuh* account of how Cipacna was dealt with by the Twins, this design highlights the anatomy peculiar to the caiman, which enables it to devour by opening its upper rather than its lower jaw. The prototypical caiman Cipacna, scaly and oviparous, was returned to the earth itself, to become the seed-bed of agriculture, a motif present alike among the Carib at the mouth of the Amazon, in Andean Chavin and in Mesoamerica at Cholula (Borgia Codex), all of which speaks strongly for the coherence of tropical America.

Examples of the tropical American bestiary to be seen on the Ulua ceramics at Yojoa, each with its own precise story and characteristics, could be multiplied. Like the jaguar and the caiman, the monkey finds a ready counterpart in Amazonian cosmogony, and enjoys a similar status as elder brother, his tail distinguishing him as pre-human in the timehri script of Guyana.

In this company, a creature depicted on no less than four of the two-handled jars at Yojoa which demands especial attention is the armadillo, since its fame in South America is generally greater, as the ‘tatu’ of Tupi Guarani lore. In fact, in the designs that survive, the armadillo designates not just a repeated motif but a whole class of Honduran pottery (The syllables of its Maya name *ibak* are shown in Coe & Van Stone 2005:131).

On the pots, this animal is preferably shown performing a supple, sinuous dance, seven dots attaching to his head, back and legs as if to mark a rhythm, and an affix on the mouth that could denote song or music (Figure 9). Chamá-style Maya pottery shows a dancer-musician wearing an armadillo mask while playing a flute, a cameo chosen by Dennis Tedlock (1985:150) to illustrate his translation of the *Popol vuh*. The Maya image illustrates quite specifically the turn in the Twins’ repertoire known as the ‘armadillo dance’, which they perform having triumphed over the murderous lords of underworld Xibalba.

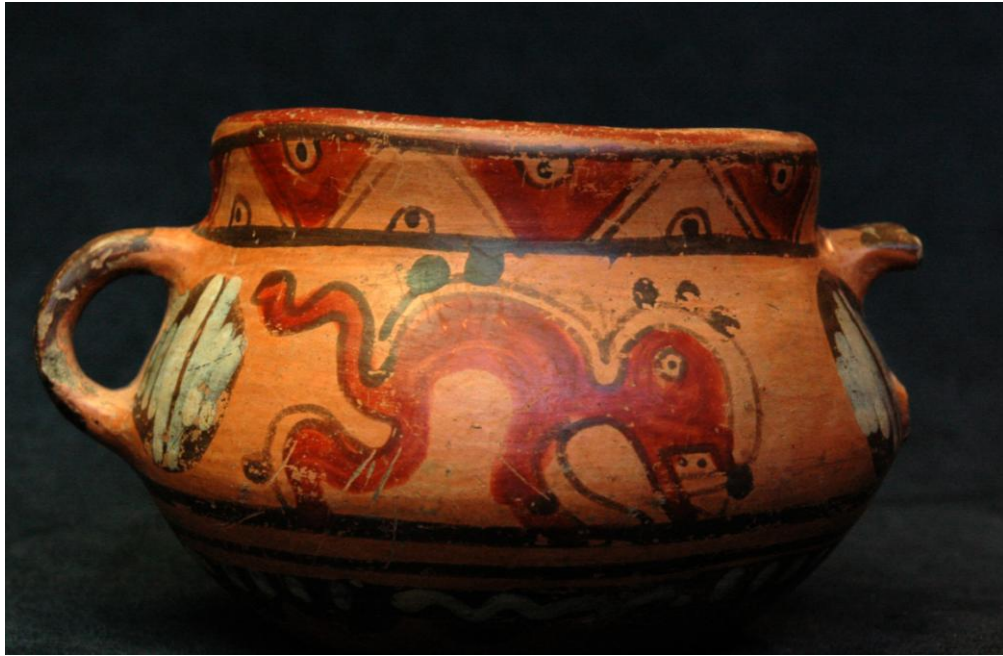


Figure 9

Arcane in Mesoamerica, the armadillo dance has clear and fundamental significance in Amazonian cosmogony, as the force which enabled the first midwives of the river, whose rites around their 'mirror lake' (Yacy Uaruá) were scheduled by the moon (full and new), to escape through the night to safety in the heart of the forest. The armadillo has this role in the Tupi-Guarani legend centered on the mirror lake, and the accompanying cantiga or makuru (cradle song in Tupi-Guarani), recorded in the late 19th century by João Barbosa Rodrigues (1890:287), invokes the huge and magical tatu-açu (*dasypus gigas*) who waits in the depth of the forest to ensure safe passage to the next life. Further, as the 'Tatuturema', at this period the armadillo's song and dance became a major source for the Brazilian poet Soussândrade in his continental epic *O Guesa* (Campos 2002:285-338).

In this regard, a feature common to all the Yojoa pots that feature the armadillo is their appeal to the night sky through their numeracy, comparable with that seen in the feathers and in the monkey diamond. For featured on each side of the two-handled bowls, each of the dancing creatures is positioned at head and tail by black disks, four in all, on which are drawn smaller white disks or stripes. Where still legible, their dominant totals of 7 and 13 makes them evocative of the night sky, seven indicating the nights of each lunar quarter, thirteen the sidereal moons of the year.

In enabling these far-reaching comparisons between Maya and Mexican on the one hand and Amazonia on the other, Yojoa ceramics imply further conceptual possibilities, which historically doubtless result from the early phases of coherence in American culture. They encourage further enquiry into the possibly isthmian origins of script among the Olmec, Mesoamerica's 'mother culture'.

This is signally true of the pot which represents a craftsman, whose brow and skull suggest bone deformation typical of the Maya, as does his capacious hat (Figure 10). Seated, he wears a gold ear plug, and leans forward over his task in hand, which effectively smooths and orders florid swirls or vegetal looking volutes. Behind him, the head of a fish looks back from the base of his spine, emitting matching volutes, here recognizably those of breath. The balance of volutes before and behind the figure recalls that of the seated fan-holder (Figure 3) and of itself posits some sort of link between underwater oxygen and human talent.



Figure 10

Held in a neat cuff, the craftsman's hand works skilfully despite the fact that it is still covered by animal fur, his thumb is split and his fingers protude excessively. This last detail - extra long digits - interestingly corresponds to those seen in the glycer of craftsmen who plait and weave, paint and sculpt, in Maya hieroglyphic texts, as the hands illustrated by Kelley make clear (1976:145, 156)

In the evolutionary story told in Mesoamerica, the denizens of the first world age end up as the oldest vertebrates, when metamorphosing into fish, tlacamichin in Nahuatl, and this is a phase that the Twins recapitulate in their own lives. In the river-drenched culture of Amazonia, the relation between fish and humans as vertebrates is developed in a myriad of stories, notably of fish brides, and in the particular skills of fish keeping taught by the culture hero Jurupari. According to the *Popol vuh*, as the first settlers of Mesoamerica arriving from the east, the Olmec were known as the 'fish-keepers', and the heart-like fish held in a human hand is a recurrent Maya hieroglyph, related to the fish-in-hand ritual (Kelley 1976:278). The juxtaposition here on the Yojoa pot of fish and craftsman, the volutes of the one echoed in those of the other, at the least leaves open the notion of vertebrate connection between the two.

The great strength of the Yojoa Codex, which can be no more than glimpsed in these briefly discussed examples, is that it can effectively offer to link the culturally diverse worlds of Meso- and South America. While relying on the more thoroughly studied cultures of these areas for the identification and interpretation of specific motifs, for example the pochteca fan or the dancing armadillo, at the same time it can enrich and refine our understanding of those motifs, both their scope and their detail. In these cases, we note the role of the monkey pochteca as huehence or elder, like the elder brothers of the Twins; and the lunar logic in the armadillo dance that led the midwives to safety.

In these and a host of further details, many decisively arithmetical, the designs on the ceramics interred in mounds on the shores of Lake Yojoa during the Classic Period, when taken as whole, offer insight into the often arcane logic of Mesoamerican ritual, above all in matters of tribute practice, and in the much-researched world of Classic Maya courtly life. At the same time, ever loyal to the evolutionary argument of the *Popol vuh* they reach out to the far east of the tropical domain, sharing definitions of jaguar ancestors, cults of Amazonian fish-keepers, and armadillo dancers.

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