

Embodied Persons and Heroic Kings in Late Classic Maya Imagery

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Current perspectives in social theories of the body come into play in interpreting anthropomorphic images created by the Maya civilisation, spanning southern Mexico, Guatemala and Belize. In the Classic Period (ca. AD 250–900) Maya artists put great emphasis on the human body in monumental and portable media, depicting both idealised and historical persons. Their artworks have long been considered the most ‘naturalistic’ within the Mesoamerican culture area, whereas styles of neighboring peoples are characterised as abstract or schematic (Pasztory 1990–91). Despite the appearance of verisimilitude, however, Maya artists eschewed portraiture and adhered to certain visual conventions, especially in monumental imagery (Houston 2001: 207; Schele and Miller 1986: 66). For example, basic body and facial types are sexually neutral (Joyce 1996: 169), and rulers known to have lived well into old age are never shown as elderly (Grube 2004: 248).

These anthropomorphic images should therefore not be taken as faithful depictions of reality, even where accompanying inscriptions may name the pictured persons as unique individuals. Nevertheless, we can consider how their production and display ‘actively constituted theories of the body’ (Joyce 1998:147). Because most of the depictions in stone sculpture are of rulers, we can use them to explore Maya theories about the body of the king. Images of kings and other courtly figures present stereotypes of, and insights into, those ‘aspects of ancient Maya personhood [that] were most highly charged, the subjects of greatest interest and, potentially, of most contestation’ (Meskell and Joyce 2003: 23).

Among the insights gained in recent studies of the bodies of Maya kings, as discussed below, is the totalising quality referenced by their regalia. Certain symbols worn or held by the king indicated his singular ability to unite social and cosmic differentiation within his person (Houston *et al.* 2006:6). I suggest that this symbolic use of the body – as a framework for inscribed messages – was paralleled by a growing artistic emphasis on embodiment – practices and experiences that had physical consequences for the body. I further argue that these bodily consequences were incorporated into the artistic repertoire as part of a well-recognised stylistic change in figural representations in the Late Classic period starting in the seventh century.

These two analytical perspectives conform to distinguishable traditions in contemporary theorising about the body. One is the ‘semiotic use of the body’ to serve ‘as representations of the identity of the social person’ (Turner 1995: 146). In post-structuralism the body is treated as a system of meaning and conceptual object of discourse – ‘a kind of readable text upon which social reality is “inscribed”’ (Csordas 1994: 12; Turner 1994: 28). An alternative view emphasises bodiliness, lived experience, and processes of self-productive activity (Csordas 1990, 1994; Meskell 1996; Turner 1994; Turner 2003). This contrast in perspectives has been characterized by Csordas (1994) as the distinction between body and embodiment, representation and being-in-the-world, and more generally, semiotics and phenomenology.

Treating these perspectives as complementary (following Csordas 1994), and recognizing an analytical separation of ‘body’ and ‘person’ (e.g., Douglas’s [1970] ‘two bodies’; see also Kantorowicz 1957) instead of merely substituting the former for the latter (e.g.,

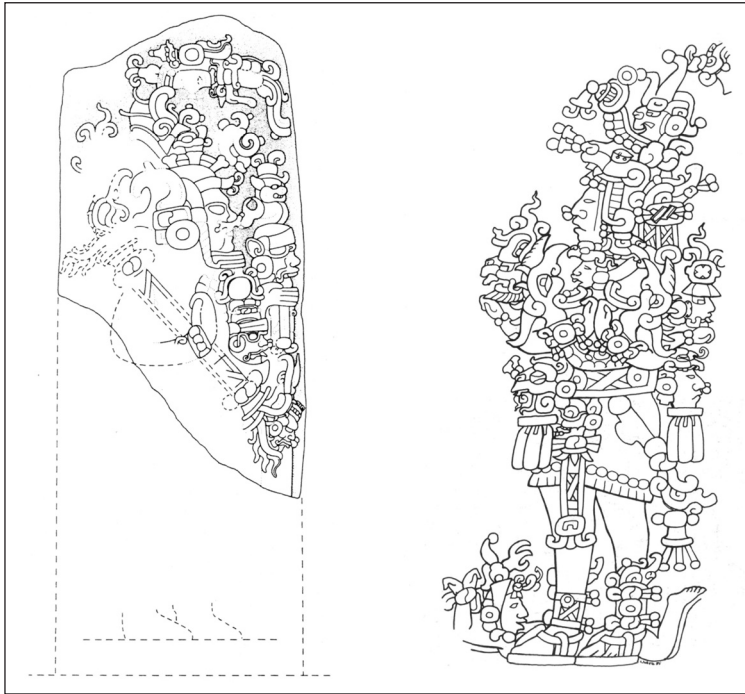


Figure 13.1. Early Classic images of kings. Left: Tikal St. 29 (AD 292), front side, top portion only. Limestone. Fragment length approximately 1.4 m. (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982: Fig. 29a; reprinted with permission of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia) Right: Image of a ruler on the Leiden Plaque (AD 320). Although not a monumental portrayal, the depiction of the ruler matches those on stelae of this time period. Incised jade. Length 21.7 cm. Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden, Holland. (Drawing by Linda Schele, © David Schele, courtesy Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc., www.famsi.org, Linda Schele Archive #2007)

Strathern 1994: 43), raises an investigative question: To what extent and in what contexts do semiotic and phenomenological aspects (body and embodiment) coincide or cohere within a society? More specifically, how can we understand the construction of an ‘embodied person’? In the case of Classic Maya kings, the quality of totality claimed by royal persons and referenced via the symbols on their bodies should have been realized in appropriate bodily practices that may also have been signaled in imagery. I endeavor to show how the greater degree of ‘naturalism’ attributed to Late Classic figural representations is a clue to the importance of the embodiment of kings as an index of their totalising agency and their capacity for action.

Symbolic and Indexical Signs of Totality

In a seminal art historical study Proskouriakoff (1950) detailed important changes in Maya sculptural traditions from the Late Preclassic through the Classic periods. The most important sculptural type was the free-standing limestone stela with bas-relief carving on one or both of its broad faces, usually depicting a single standing human figure now recognizable as a paramount lord, the ruler of a polity. Accompanying

inscriptions typically name the ruler and provide a date for the event(s) commemorated on the stela in the Long Count calendar. In the Late Preclassic (early centuries BC–ca. AD 250) through the Early Classic (250–600), the king was most often shown in stiff profile with frontal shoulders, rather comparable to Egyptian dynastic art (Kubler 1984: 248), or alternatively in a pure profile posture.

The rulers are garbed in costume elements and carry regalia iconographically identifiable as ‘supernatural insignia and deity representations’ (Pasztory 1978: 125). In the Late Preclassic and Early Classic periods these power-charged objects were often visually overwhelming (Figure 13.1). On the fragmentary Tikal St. 29 (AD 292), for example, the ruler ‘stands in profile, obscured by a veritable thicket of ornament, including feathers, scrolls, and masks’ (Pasztory 1978: 116). The king’s body was a framework upon which to hang valued and sacred objects – heirlooms of the royal house and other signs of rank or title. Only facial features and glimpses of appendages serve as minimal reference points to his bodily presence.

Among the items on the king’s body were objects and signs that represented the totality of the cosmos, indicating the king’s positioning at the cosmic center. They include icons of the ‘world tree’ as axis mundi

(Baudez 2000; Schele and Miller 1986). Baudez (2000: 135) thus suggested that 'the king's costume presents his body as a metaphor for the universe.' This quality Baudez deemed fitting for the king, 'not only because he stands above all men, but because he is the man *par excellence*, the representative and quintessence of his community and of all the men that compose it' (2000: 135).

In this manner the Maya king's body referenced the 'body politic', incorporating all other members of his state (following Kantorowicz 1957). Tarlow (this volume) makes a similar use of Kantorowicz's study of the king's 'two bodies' in medieval Europe to argue that the effigy of Oliver Cromwell represented the body politic. The effigial body in European royal funerary practice wore the symbols of state while the literal body, subjected to natural processes of decay in contradistinction to the uncorrupted effigy, was kept out of sight.

In Baudez's (2000: 143) interpretation, important women (usually mother or spouse of the king) associated with some of the same regalia as depicted on the stone carvings would have functioned as the ruler's alter ego. However, a reading of royal totality was also indicated via gendered *difference*. Joyce (1996, 2000a) has shown that on Maya sculptures 'male' and 'female' were treated as complementary qualities, divorced from sexual reproduction and signaled principally by costume and titles that together formed a unity. These images 'simultaneously convey gender difference and encompass it' (1996: 182). In the Late Classic it became more common to couple male and female depictions, putting them individually on paired stelae or together in a single scene (1996: 172ff). In the typical depictions on these monumental images, royal women's costume references the earth's surface and sea – the totality of horizontal space. Royal male dress includes the world tree symbol, such that their bodies formed a vertical axis that, paired with the female, formed a spatial cosmic totality: the horizontal and vertical extent of the universe, the periphery and the center (Joyce 1996: 172, 2000a: 76–77).

Significantly, a few Late Classic male rulers were occasionally shown wearing items of female costume (e.g., Palenque's Tablet of the Temple of the Foliated Cross, Copan's Stela H). Joyce interpreted the wearing of an item of female dress by the male ruler as 'a symbolic assertion of totalizing ability' (Joyce 1996: 187) via an innovated 'encompassing gender that ... transcended and unified bodily differences of all kinds' (Joyce 2000a: 79). These depictions evidenced 'the common claim of Classic Maya rulers to unite in themselves all the social differences that divided their people' (2000a: 81).

Concern for social difference was also referenced by the affective aspects of bodily experience. Houston (2001; see also Houston *et al.* 2006: 189–190) noted that another Late Classic innovation in monumental imagery was the depiction of certain emotions by secondary figures, often shown in more active, even contorted poses compared to passive primary figures. In Classic figural art as a whole, rulers and their queens are usually depicted as 'expressionless', no matter what their personal situation might be (Houston *et al.* 2006: 189). However, in Late Classic scenes of rulers with defeated enemies taken in battle (elite personages themselves), the victorious paramount remains impassive but now the captives lose control of themselves and thereby 'accentuate their humiliation and drastically reduced status' (2001: 211). Houston (2001: 215) suggested this contrast in depictions of emotional expression in the Late Classic 'may reflect a growing concern with social differentiation' in the more complex and competitive political arenas of that time period, while adhering to the ideal of 'unexpressed emotion and rigid self-control' of lords and other members of the royal court (Houston *et al.* 2006: 198).

Thus, Late Classic representations especially were concerned with expressing, in stereotypical ways, sociocosmic differences and their encompassment by the ruler in terms of signs on the body and the presence/absence of emotion, a bodily affect. Furthermore, emotions and other physical aspects of the body differed depending on the immediate experience; for example, whether the lord was victor or humiliated captive. Increasing social distance in the Late Classic and the resort to both symbolic and affective aspects of the body to simultaneously indicate difference and its abrogation thus became incorporated into Maya sculptural styles.

The Emergence of the Body of Late Classic Maya Kings

It was also in the Late Classic that images of kings on stelae began to be depicted with full frontal view of the body, although the face was more often still in profile (Proskouriakoff 1950: 112) (Figure 13.2a). This pose persisted until the end of this sculptural tradition at about AD 900 (Kubler 1984: 248). Concomitant with this modification in body posture from profile to frontal were significant changes in composition and greater use of figural imagery on other sculptural media (lintels and wall panels) as well as portable objects. Principal figures were often shown engaged in restrained action, sometimes with secondary persons,

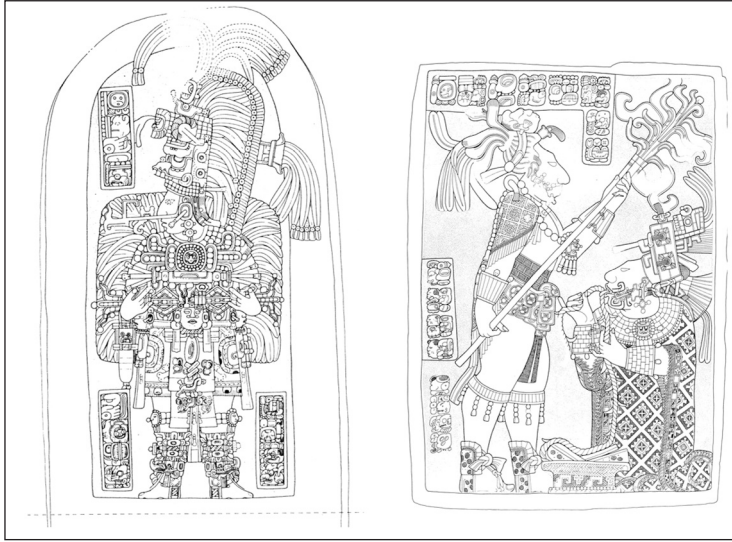


Figure 13.2: Late Classic images of kings. Left: Tikal St. 16 (AD 711), front. Limestone. Height above ground level approximately 2.23 m. (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:Fig. 22; reprinted with permission of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia) Right: Yaxchilan Lintel 24 (AD 725). Limestone. Height 1.1 m. British Museum. (Graham and von Euw 1977:53; Drawing, YAZ: Lnt. 24 from Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions, Vol. 3, Part 1, Yaxchilan, reproduced courtesy of the President and Fellows of Harvard College)

such that these artworks are considered narrative rather than merely hierarchic (Pasztory 1978: 127).

Pasztory (1978) related the change in the depiction of king's bodies described by Proskouriakoff to the influence of historical contacts with Teotihuacan, the great capital in central Mexico. In Teotihuacan painted murals, artists maintained a sharp distinction between figures of humans and deities: humans were shown in profile and deities in frontal view, and humans were noticeably smaller when shown together with deities (Pasztory 1978: 117). In Paszatory's view, this divine/mortal separation effected via body size and position made the shift to the frontal depictions of rulers on Late Classic Maya stelae signally important. It indicated 'a conscious attempt to associate the ruler with the supernatural rather than the human world' (1978: 117), i.e., 'an equation of the ruler with the gods' (1978: 125).

Nevertheless, Maya kings were sacred long before the Late Classic period. From the beginning of the dynastic era (the Late or Terminal Preclassic), images of their bodies, as noted above, were loaded down with power-filled objects, and rulers were shown manipulating small deity images themselves, including the sun deity. References to their persons included the name of the sun (deity) *k'in* (Colas 2003). The ruler also assumed the epithet *k'uhul ajaw*, meaning 'sacred' or 'holy' lord. This titular reference to qualities shared with the divine served to differentiate the paramount lord from the other *ajawob* (lords) in his and rival courts. Although this title has been traced back to the Late Preclassic, it became common only after about AD 500 (Houston and Stuart 1996: 295–296).

Pasztory's (1978) thesis was that the change in posture on stelae was a different means for linking divine and mortal qualities in the bodies of Maya kings than that used previously, when he was covered with sacred objects. However, there is more to the seventh-century change in representational conventions than the adoption of frontality, and its simple explanation as a foreign-derived sign of divinity appears unlikely. Greater attention to the human body was also being accomplished by other stylistic innovations. As Paszatory (1978: 121) noted, beginning in the Late Classic 'the corporeal quality of human figures was indicated by an emphasis on the rendering of unbroken body outlines and on the revival of three-dimensional sculpture.' Natural body curves are quite discernable even where clothing covers the body (Figure 13.2b). On Palenque's bas-relief stone and stucco tablets, male figures wear little clothing, showing increased artistic emphasis on 'elegant body outlines' and musculature (1978: 121). Within Late Classic sculpture more generally flat relief gave way to rounded, and deep relief as well as three-dimensional techniques were developed, in some cases appearing rather suddenly (1978: 122).

In sum, in these artworks 'the ruler has a physical presence, due either to high relief, carving in the round, or the unobstructed outlines of the body, and the supernatural insignia and deity figures surround him without impinging on his person' (Paszatory 1978: 125). This is an inversion of the Early Classic scalar relationship between body and regalia, the inner essence and its outer covering. In the seventh century the body as a unified entity emerged out from behind the trappings of regalia that previously

had almost obliterated it or had made it appear to be composed of discrete anatomical parts strung together with costume items. With some exceptions, the monumental representations still tended to give prominence to costume elements, but those objects were arranged on a unified and noticeably corporeal body, giving the impression that they are actually being held or worn. Thus, it is the Late Classic images that achieved what Westerners appreciate as a greater sense of 'naturalism', both in depictions of human figures and in their settings and narrative compositions. Such naturalism of the body may have concealed the exercise of power (Joyce 1998: 157); indeed, these media 'were part of the material apparatus' through which such concepts of embodiment were naturalised (Joyce 2005: 147).

Greater attention to the physical body (including emotions as described above) implies that the embodied individual was important to representational conventions, despite the general impression—stated explicitly by Baudez (2000: 135) – that the focus on costume 'contrasts with the neglect of the royal person's anatomy.' As already noted, depictions of persons were still generic rather than individualised, and even gender was indicated in monumental images by costume and naming conventions rather than by physical differences. Nevertheless, the body became important in the Late Classic as more than just a framework for the right assortment of symbols.

These artworks seemingly take into account what current social theorists have come to realise: the body is not a naturally prior, blank surface for inscription; instead, bodies are produced out of intersubjective performances and practices in interactions with the material world and other social persons (Grosz 1994: x; Turner 1994). Given the semiotic use of the king's body as a carrier of royal regalia referencing unity and encompassment of difference, it is worth investigating whether the production of the king's body would have included life experiences appropriate for a totalising person. Were the Maya king's 'two bodies' treated as contrasts of one another – the immortal symbol of the political collective versus the individual 'mortal coil' subject to decrepitude and death – or did their qualities coincide? Were both aspects revealed in the imagery, or only the 'body politic'?

The evidence indicates that in the Late Classic period the semiotic and phenomenological aspects were entwined in the production and representation of the royal body.¹ The setting for the production of the king's body was the royal court, and protocols of body management were an important aspect of Maya courtly life (Inomata and Houston 2001; Miller and Martin 2004). The palace was notably a place of

consumption – of food and drink, music, dance, ritual and other performances, and cloth along with finely crafted objects (Webster 2001: 147–148). These latter objects – especially painted pottery vessels intended for serving food and beverages – form a significant additional medium for depicting court personnel and courtly life. Made by and for aristocrats, they were exchanged among noble families and deposited in elite tombs. In the Late Classic, hieroglyphic inscriptions in addition to figural images were painted on vessels destined for aristocratic consumption. Many of the texts state the vessels' intended contents – especially maize or chocolate drinks (Houston *et al.* 2006: 108; Reents-Budet 2001: 75) – indicating the important roles played by individual food items in courtly cuisine.

As Tarlow (this volume) observes, the movement of substances into or out of the body constitutes an exchange between the body and the world. Feasting is characteristic of royalty in many premodern societies, indicative of 'the prodigious appetites expected of the royal body, which summons foodstuffs that no mortal could consume at one sitting' (Houston *et al.* 2006: 7). Whatever the pragmatic function of courtly banquets in terms of allocating resources and loyalties between a ruler and his subjects, Classic Maya imagery is notable in appearing 'to have stressed royal needs and royal satiety, not what others received from royalty' (2006: 130). In other words, 'ingestion by the ruler' is the principal event depicted in images of courtly consumption (2006: 130).

The most frequently portrayed individual on this corpus of elite painted pottery is the *k'uhul ajaw*, who 'occupies the greatest amount of pictorial space' (Reents-Budet 2001: 213). His body is often painted in a different color than those of other figures in the same scene (2001: 213). Significantly, within these non-monumental images some rulers' bodies show what look like the effects of over-consumption of food and drink. They are so depicted on the vessels that held their comestibles, especially cylindrical pots for serving chocolate beverage (cocoa beans were a major tribute item owed to the lords [Houston *et al.* 2006: 108]). An extreme example is a Late Classic ruler of Motul de San José, nicknamed the 'Fat Cacique' (chief) by art historians because of his corpulence (Figure 13.3). He is so consistently depicted on various vessels as to suggest a rare attempt at portraiture (Reents-Budet 1994: 173).²

Consumptive practices, which would have been essential to the lived experiences of kings, could have been considered a performative indication of the totality of the king's being – his literal bodily encompassment of difference at the cosmic center (the court) – but these practices had specific consequences as a result of bodily

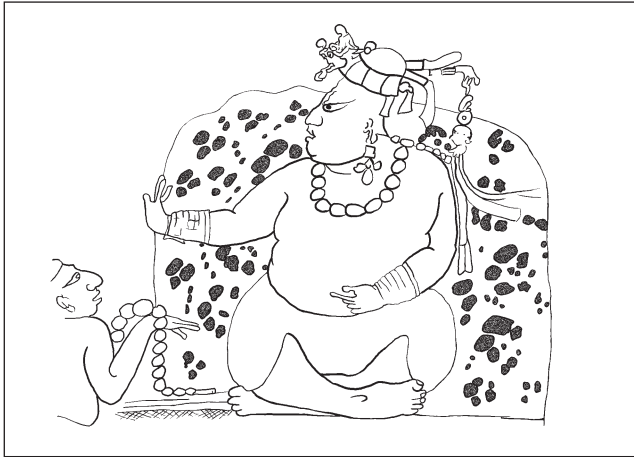


Figure 13.3: Image of the “Fat Cacique” from a polychrome painting on a cylindrical ceramic vessel, Late Classic (AD 600-800). The king is seated on a bench throne with a jaguar pelt-covered cushion behind him. Height of vessel 22.3 cm. Kimbell Art Museum, Ft. Worth, Texas. (Drawn by the author from a photograph by Justin Kerr, K1452)

processes. Increasing girth is a physiological index of such processes over time, and it was an outcome of acts of social agency (following Gell 1998: 15).³ It was thus subject to the vicissitudes of political life, not an immutable characteristic of the king’s body, in contrast with the semiotic qualities invoking the body politic. War captives shown in imagery – most of them lords or nobles – appear emaciated in Late Classic imagery, the presumed outcome of the withholding of food (Houston *et al.* 2006: 131). This is the same difference in bodily representation between victor and loser that was marked by the absence or presence of emotion, noted earlier.⁴

In sum, the lived experience of (over) ingestion and its physical effects on the king’s body was shown in Late Classic depictions—primarily on portable objects utilised in aristocratic contexts – together with the inscriptive marking of the king’s body through attached insignia – primarily on monumental imagery in courtly settings—despite the otherwise generalized and emotionless portrayals of bodies and faces.

Encompassing Persons and Heroic Kings

Another indication of totality is the extension of the ruler’s body in various forms—both as his physical body and his ‘distributed’ personhood (following Gell 1998). This aspect is complex and cannot be covered here in the detail it deserves, especially in

terms of how the human body served as a node in a production cycle that transformed substances. Suffice it to say that the boundaries of Maya persons were relatively permeable – ‘stench, scent, breath, speech, song, and noise’ are shown emanating from human bodies in Classic Maya artworks (Meskell and Joyce 2003: 26; see also Houston *et al.* 2006). Various souls or animating spirits also inhabited, if only temporarily, human bodies (Gillespie 2002; Houston and Stuart 1989). Tangible and intangible aspects of personhood painstakingly constructed during life, including elements contributed by the mother’s and father’s families to an individual, were deconstructed after death concomitant with the physical decomposition of the corpse (Gillespie 2001).

Rulers also were able to extend their personhood through material references to themselves in monumental imagery and texts, which became another kind of index of their actions (Looper 2003: 28). This aspect of their being, recorded as *baah* and interpreted as ‘self’, was shared with images of the king and also of gods, and included representations of rulers in deity costumes, merging mortal and divine qualities thereby (Houston and Stuart 1998: 81; see also Houston *et al.* 2006: 72–74). Houston and Stuart (1998: 86) suggest there was ‘an extendable essence shared between images and that which is portrayed’ and that ‘portraits contained part of the royal essence, in ways that multiplied his presence’ (1998: 95). These images allowed the king to be in multiple places at the same time and to continue to exert influence even after death (1998: 90).

These images and texts also served to integrate ‘a physical person with a history,’ another important aspect of Classic Maya royal personhood (Meskell and Joyce 2003: 28). Significantly, history written on stone monuments was monopolised by the paramount lords, and frequently it was used in conjunction with depictions of their bodies or statements of their names/titles. An important function of the stelae was to present ‘images whose specific historical identity is precisely delimited by texts with dates in the Maya “Long Count” calendar’ (Bachand *et al.* 2003: 242); both the stelae and their Long Count dates are hallmarks of the Classic period. Indeed, time (as a phenomenon) and royal bodies ‘were processed by similar rituals,’ including tying and wrapping with cloth (Houston *et al.* 2006: 81). Even on painted vessels secondary texts recording an event are often rendered in an architectonic way that frames or supports the body of the king: ‘This enframing solidifies the royal body within the recorded event, immortalizing both’ (Reents-Budet 2001: 214).

The totalising quality and consumptive actions of

the king's body, together with the ability to extend his selfhood outward – all of which enabled him to unify difference through performance – were integral to the king's person and would therefore have implicated his agency and historical effectiveness. As a living exemplar of totality (of society, history, the cosmos), indicated by both the symbolic and experiential connotations of his body, the Classic Maya ruler was comparable to the 'heroic kings' of Polynesia described by Sahlins (1985, 1991) whose 'heroic capacities and actions summarize, unify, encompass and thus expansively *internalize* the relations of society's members as a *whole*' (Mosko 1992: 698). Although Classic Maya society and culture are dissimilar in many ways from historic period Fiji and Hawaii, aspects of chiefly personhood in such societies may have analogues among the Classic Maya.

According to Sahlins, the political power of the Fijian chief or Hawaiian king derived from the 'symbolic magnification of the person. People so endowed with the power to embody a larger social order become *social-historical individuals*. ... persons whose own acts unfold a collective history ... because they personify the clan or the land and because their acts, universalized through the acquiescence of the historic group, then signify its dispositions' (Sahlins 1991: 63). Following from a concept of hierarchy based on 'the encompassing of the contrary' (Dumont 1980: 239), the heroic king's hierarchical position derives from his ontology as a totality that encompasses the rest of society, incorporating into himself all its social divisions (Sahlins 1985: 35). Furthermore, 'to include the existence of others in one's own person' is a concept of hierarchy reminiscent of *mana* in Polynesia, often construed as sacredness, 'implying a life-power of the chief that extends to and activates others, whether people or objects' (Sahlins 1991: 64).

Sahlins's reference to 'the symbolic magnification' of the heroic king recalls Kantorowicz's notion of the king's body as signifying the body politic, although in the Maya case the king's 'two bodies' are not so easily distinguished. Furthermore, the lived indexes and the inscribed symbols of Maya royal encompassment are not merely assertions of political legitimacy – of why the king is the king. They derive from a theory of embodied personhood and thus of agency, of how the king constructs himself – and is constructed by – his relationships with other persons, and therefore, how he is able to act. The ethno-logic of this theory can be characterised by a relational approach to personhood, agency, and the body, one that is different from Strathern's (1988) Melanesian 'dividual', which has become rather popular in archaeological interpretations (e.g., Borić and Robb this volume; Fowler 2004; Jones 2005).

Strathern modeled two modes of plural personhood. In the case of the 'dividual,' plurality is eliminated in social interactions via the detachment of elements, while in the other, plurality or difference is 'encompassed or eclipsed' (Strathern 1988: 15). It is the latter mode that better matches Sahlins's 'heroic king' (and also Wagner's [1994] 'fractal person'). As Mosko (1992: 699–700) explained, with Strathern's 'dividual',

social practice is portrayed as a fundamentally 'subtractive' process ... and it is with incompleteness rather than completeness that agency is effected, [whereas] in Sahlins's conception, practice is rendered as essentially 'additive' or 'expansive' ... [and] it is in the very presumption that certain persons *do* incorporate other persons and relations *completely*, even to the extent of embodying or encompassing the entire society or cosmos, that the capacity and realization of agency lie. Persons of lesser order, as incomplete or less complete by comparison, are to that degree of lesser historical efficacy.

Relational constructions of plural personhood therefore vary in terms of what is being related and how, and how intersubjectivities thereby come into being (e.g., Busby 1997; Fowler 2004).⁵ Modes of relational personhood are also expected to differ between more egalitarian and hierarchical societies, and the Classic Maya clearly exemplified the latter (Jones 2005: 197).

Sahlins was more concerned with history and historicities than with personhood *per se*, but the comparison is still apt for the Classic Maya. In his description of Fijian 'heroic history' that follows from these conceptions of hierarchy and the encompassing nature of the chief, 'the chief lives the life of the group. He is the principle of the group's existence, a kind of living ancestor, and accordingly its history is his own' (Sahlins 1991: 64). While historiography in these societies seems superficially to resemble the 'great man' history characteristic of modern Western societies, there is an important difference: 'This really is a history of kings and battles, but only because it is a cultural order that, multiplying the action of the king by the system of society, gives him a disproportionate historical effect' (Sahlins 1985: 41).

As noted above, the Maya employed a calendar and writing system beginning in the Late Preclassic – coincident with the development of depictions of rulers on stelae and dynastic kingship – to extol the events in kings' lives. By the Late Classic, there was an explosion of texts and images relating the paramounts' accessions, battles, and rituals associated with important buildings (e.g., Stuart 1998), along with cosmic events and creation myths seemingly localized to each capital. This monumental attention to the lives and exploits of Maya kings has typically been explained as the result of strategic intentions of

an increasing number of rival aggrandizers seeking self-magnification and operating within a 'network' strategy of political-economic ties (e.g., Blanton *et al.* 1996). These ties are presumed to have been based on kinship or alliance relationships linking royal and subroyal noble houses, separated thereby from concepts of incorporation with the mass of commoners.

However, from the viewpoint of embodied kings as heroic figures, the life of the king (and all the other paramounds with whom he is enchained) *is* the history of his capital. He incorporates all of his polity and the multidimensional social differences it entails within himself – his person and his consumptive body.⁶ Using images and inscriptions Late Classic Maya aristocracy emphasised how the encompassing capacity and agency of the *k'uhul ajaw* made history. It was at this time, starting in the seventh century, that they developed monumental images with a narrative quality that focused visual attention on the wholeness and integrity of the king's body as a naturalised index of his totalising person.

Conclusion

The encompassing capacity of the Maya paramount lord was a source of his sacredness and key to his hierarchical standing and that of his royal house. Stylistic shifts in the portrayal of the king in Late Classic sculpture—with increasing emphasis on the unity and corporeality of the body – can be correlated with the semiotic overlay on the king's body indicating his status as a totalising figure whose agency and historical effectiveness were predicated on actions of encompassment of sociocosmic divisions. These depictions of the body in both monumental and portable artworks demonstrate its indexical sign status, a reference to natural bodily processes and lived experiences, and not just to the inscription of symbols onto the body as framework. The imagery and the textual references to the actions of kings in history further suggest the notion that Maya kings were comparable in their intersubjective relationships with both nobles and commoners to Sahlins's 'heroic' kings.

These developments, evident in Maya imagery and inscriptions, implicate significant changes between Early and Late Classic political ideologies despite a superficial appearance of cultural continuity. They may also provide clues to the Classic to Postclassic transition (the Maya 'collapse' beginning in the ninth century), when this 'heroic' quality of embodied encompassment was modified, if not lost altogether. The erection of figural stelae with inscriptions and Long Count

calendrics ceased, replaced by new architectural and sculptural media of political representations marked by the absence of the king's body.

Notes

- 1 See Joyce (2000a, 2000b, 2003) on the production of gendered bodies through performance in Classic Maya art.
- 2 Portraiture is also noted among some of the monumental depictions of paramounds at Palenque (Schele and Miller 1986: 66), one of the Late Classic centers whose artworks greatly emphasised the corporeality of the ruler and which were the focus of attention in Pasztory's (1978) analysis.
- 3 Noble women's girth was also depicted on some painted pots and Late Classic figurines (Miller and Martin 2004: 25), as consumption characterised all of the court as an extension of the king's person. Obesity can signal other meanings and functions besides over-eating or sloth, but it is a known index of consumption of rich foods, and royal eating was a principal event as shown in the imagery. Ingestion through the rectum and the ritual and social use of enemas (e.g., Houston *et al.* 2006: 117) are related activities that cannot be addressed here.
- 4 As Tanner (2001) has observed, such 'naturalism' in figural imagery is not merely a stylistic choice but a means to engage the senses. The viewers' bodies as well as the body of the figure depicted come into play. By combining cultural codes with bodily experiences, these artworks may elicit 'affective projections on the part of viewers grounded in their sense of their own bodies' (Tanner 2001: 271). Kus (1992: 172) argued that such 'an appeal to "sensuousness" (or some combination of the physical and emotional as well as the mental character of human existence)' should not be ignored in the dominant semiotic approaches to the body favored by archaeologists.
- 5 The encompassment of different attributes of personhood was displayed in a variety of ways among the Late Classic Maya rulers, as I (Gillespie, in press) have suggested utilising an analytical dichotomy employed by Strathern (1994). Among the western Maya (Usumacinta River area), including Palenque and Yaxchilan, there was greater emphasis on shared substantive and 'horizontal' linkages of a person to other living embodied individuals, such as kinsmen, and the artworks more often name or depict the king's parents or spouse. At Copan and Tikal, further east in the Maya lowlands, the totality of the king was more often referenced according to Strathern's (1994) 'vertical perspective', emphasising the enchainment (*sensu* Wagner 1994 – a mechanism of fractality) between the living king and his predecessors back to the founding of a specific ruling line.
- 6 According to Mosko's development of Sahlins's heroic kings, their 'hierarchical supercomposition' is constructed out of additive or expansive practices (Mosko 1992: 697, 699). Such kings or chiefs should thereby have extraordinary qualities of detachability or decomposition compared to ordinary people (1992: 701). Joyce (1998: 152) has argued that acts of mutilation, decapitation, or sacrifice of kings and other noble war captives shown in Late Classic imagery are aspects of such detachability –practices that make the depictions of kings with unified bodies all the

more meaningful. Elaborate secondary funerary rituals were involved in the social decomposition of Maya kings (Gillespie 2001). In addition, Houston and Stuart (1998: 95) discussed the risk of extending 'royal essence' to monumental images or texts given that these objects were subject to mutilation and destruction as well as to reuse in innovated settings. Further development of this converse aspect of the Maya king's totalising being is beyond the scope of this paper.

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