Highland Maya Effigy Funerary Urns: A Study of Genre, Iconography, and Function

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HIGHLAND MAYA EFFIGY FUNERARY URNS

A STUDY OF GENRE, ICONOGRAPHY, AND FUNCTION

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the effigy funerary urn as an important genre of Highland Maya art. Effigy funerary urns like the fifty-five examples that are the focus of this project date to the Terminal Classic to Early Postclassic Period and were produced within the northern areas of the Departments of Quiché and Huehuetenango in the Guatemalan Highlands, most likely in the area surrounding Nebaj. I examine the urns by addressing the interrelated issues of genre, iconography, and function to provide a holistic study of these objects. The iconographic and formal variations between the urns are explored and as a result, I identify three standard urn shapes and seven distinct iconographic categories. The urns boast a pervasive iconographic complex that features the Jaguar God of the Underworld, the Trefoil Jaguar, the old god of the hearth, and the Maize God. The true significance of these objects lies in the connection between this iconography and the urns’ funerary function.

I argue that this iconography makes explicit the analogy that exists between eschatology, the life cycle of maize, and the rebirth of the Maize God. I reveal how the iconographic complex informs and even directs the sacred cycle believed to take place within the urns, one shared by maize, the Maize God, and humans. The imagery effectively marks the urns as a location for sprouting or rebirth by providing the symbolic heat, water, and darkness necessary for this process. Effigy funerary urns, although they belong to a different class of objects, are conceptually linked to temples (mortuary structures), houses, and incensarios. These urns condense architectural tombs into a single ceramic vessel while preserving tomb symbolism and represent a distinct departure from other contemporaneous Highland funerary urns.
INTRODUCTION

The art history of the Maya has been an area of study for over a century. In that time, the majority of research has focused on the art from the Classic period (250-900 CE) Lowland cities of southern Mexico, Belize, Honduras, and northern Guatemala. In contrast, the art of the Highland Maya, from the mountainous regions of southern Mexico and southern and central Guatemala, has received considerably less attention or is often understood through Lowland iconography (Fig. 1). In addition, ceramic objects are commonly overlooked in favor of stone sculpture and architecture. This thesis in part rectifies this disparity by examining the effigy funerary urn as an important genre of Highland Maya art (Fig. 2). Although these objects are spectacular examples of Late Classic to Early Post Classic period (800-1200 CE) Highland art, they have yet to be the focus of detailed study.

Based on a sample of fifty-five urns from a number of Guatemalan and U.S. museums, this paper examines effigy funerary urns by addressing the interrelated issues of genre, iconography, and function, to provide a holistic approach for the study of these objects. I explore the iconographic and formal variations between these urns, defining three standard urn shapes and seven distinct iconographic categories. This study will approach Highland effigy funerary urns both as a class of objects functionally distinct from vessels that present similar iconography and as a rich iconographic source for understanding Highland Maya symbolism.

This thesis argues that effigy funerary urns condense architectural tombs into a single ceramic vessel while preserving tomb symbolism. Urns continue to reference the larger system of ideas embodied by these tombs and mortuary structures, along with houses and incensarios, through their iconography. This particular iconographic complex makes explicit the analogy made between the lifecycles of humans and maize, and informs the sacred transformation believed to take place within these objects. These urns represent a unique interpretation of the Mask Flange Iconographic Complex (Carrasco 2005) on a new genre and open discussion on how objects with seemingly different functions may be conceptually linked. This thesis also

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1 These fifty-five examples have been chosen based on their formal and iconographic similarities as well as their accessibility. Other examples are known to the author, but have been excluded only to limit the scope of this thesis.
emphasizes the need for further research on the various deities represented in this complex, particularly with regard to the variation and substitution of certain figures such as that of the jaguar god. This study is in part meant to organize this prolific Highland genre for future study, but also raises larger questions about the relationship between object classes and the role of objects in mortuary ritual.

**Effigy Funerary Urns**

Effigy funerary urns date to the Late Classic to Early Post Classic period and were produced within the Guatemalan Highlands, most likely in the northern regions of the Departments of Quiche and Huehuetenango in the area surrounding Nebaj (Fig. 3) (Museo Popol Vuh 2003; Ciudad Ruiz 2005; Ponce de Léon 2005). The bundled bodies of elite were placed in the urns in a flexed position, and buried in temple structures or other ceremonially important locations (Ruiz 2005, Ponce de Leon 2005) (Fig. 4). Although the urns from the Museo Popol Vuh, the museum that houses the majority of the vessels examined in this study, were looted, and therefore without provenance, stylistically and iconographically similar examples have been recovered in situ from sites such as Nebaj, in the Department of Quiché (Butler Lewis n.d.).

Highland funerary urns are typically cylindrical in form, however square and rectangular examples have been recovered. As will be discussed in Chapter One, most urns belong to one of three categories, those with small tapered bases whose shape is reminiscent of a vase, those with larger, squat bases, whose shape echoes that of an incense burner stand, and the rare square and rectangular urns previously mentioned. Many of the urns retain traces of their original red, white, yellow, black and blue paint, evidence of their interment in an enclosed, protected space. Each ceramic urn is composed of two basic elements: a large decorated urn body and accompanying lid. Surviving lids are conical in form and regularly feature a jaguar figure. These jaguars sit or sprawl across the top of lids, and in some cases, the lid forms the jaguar’s body.

Modeled clay sculptural elements and painted imagery are the primary means of decoration. Many urns possess flanges on either side of the body, offering an extended space for such painting. The body is dominated by a central figure, typically a naturalistic jaguar deity, the Jaguar God of the Underworld (JGU) (Fig. 5), and an old god known as Huehuetotl in Central Mexico, identifiable by his wrinkles and missing teeth (Fig. 6). This group of gods is known
Lowland Maya and Central Mexican art to personify fire, the domestic hearth, the nighttime sun (JGU) and other various phenomena related to heat. One type of naturalistic jaguar deity found on effigy funerary urns is often depicted with a trefoil element on its forehead (Fig. 7). This may initially recall the figure of the so-called Waterlily Jaguar who wears a waterlily or other vegetal element on his head (Fig. 8) (Miller and Taube 1993: 104). The jaguar represented on the urns cannot clearly be identified as such, although it may represent a different manifestation of this deity, or a Highland interpretation of this concept. This figure will hereafter be referred to as the Trefoil Jaguar, an arbitrary name used only for the purposes of identifying this figure in the present study.

It is important to understand the variation in representations of deities on effigy funerary urns as this offers clues about the very nature of these figures. In this thesis I demonstrate that the Trefoil Jaguar, the JGU, the naturalistic jaguar deity, and Huehuetotl are different manifestations of the same larger concept of heat, fire, and the hearth by virtue of their substitution patterns within this iconographic complex. The Maize God also figures prominently in urn iconography and is identifiable by the presence of maize ears, foliation, and a maize-shaped cranium. The presence of the Maize God in the context of the heat symbolized by the various jaguar figures and Huehuetotl further underscores the idea that heat is necessary not only for the regeneration of maize and the Maize God, but for that of humans, whose remains are interred within these objects. The various deities depicted on the urns stand alone or are seen emerging from the maw of a monster. Thus, funerary urns share a limited, but complex range of iconography, which frequently includes the deities mentioned above, as well as skulls, spikes, and personifications of the earth.

The iconography of the urns is strikingly similar to that found on Classic period incensarios, or “incense burners,” from both the Lowlands and Highlands. This similarity suggests that the two classes of objects possibly reference similar concepts, despite differing in function and region. This thesis explores funerary urn iconography to explicate these concepts and examine how urn symbolism is related to funerary function. I address questions such as: Why was it necessary to place bodies in urns, effectively surrounding them with this imagery? What is the connection between these urns and iconographically similar objects? Through

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2 Incensarios are composed of two parts: a basal stand and bowl for burning incense. Stands may be both sculptured or undecorated. For the purposes of this project, the term incensario refers to the stand component.
investigating the effigy funerary urn as an important artistic genre, this project adds to our
growing understanding of how Maya cosmology informed the artistic tradition and clarifies the
complex relationship between burial rituals, censers, and urns.

**Organization**

Objects classified as urns frequently vary in shape and size. Funerary urns and incensario
stands would often be indistinguishable without archaeological context. Imprecision in the
labeling of urns has also lent to the confusion. The same objects have been identified as both
incensarios and funerary urns in different exhibitions and publications. Therefore, what is an
urn? The first chapter addresses this deceivingly simple question. I first define what constitutes a
funerary urn, differentiating the genre from other kinds of funerary containers. To do so I briefly
discuss burial types and classifications to provide a basis for comparison with the effigy funerary
urn. After a basic understanding of ancient Maya burial practice is established, urns are grouped
in three subcategories according to shape and size. Classifying the urns in this way facilitates
further their discussion and categorization in the second chapter. Systematic categorization of the
urns is a necessary first step to the discussion of whether differences between groups reflect
regional workshops or stylistic change over the long period of their production. Additionally, it
allows for a comparison of funerary urns to other classes of objects, particularly those of
incensarios from both the Highlands and Lowlands.

The second chapter focuses on the iconographic complex presented by the urns, which is
composed of the various deities and elements previously mentioned. To limit the focus of this
study, the complex is discussed as a whole, although the individual components could certainly
be the subjects of independent study. Understanding this iconography as a distinct system, of
which these individual components are only a part, is essential to unraveling the relationship
between vessel imagery, function, and context. I am primarily interested in this system rather
than the significance or evolution of individual motifs. The iconography of effigy funerary urns
is always represented in one of two patterns of organization, one that represents solely the faces
of deities, typically one emerging from the open maw of another, or solitary full-figured
representations. I have identified seven distinct iconographic groups, which are determined by
the primary deity depicted on the urn body. These seven groups are further separated into
subcategories, which reflect the numerous variations in iconographic detail. I refer to a number of objects that share iconography with urns such as architectural decoration, stone sculpture, and other ceramics including painted vases and cache vessels, and most notably, incensarios from both the Lowland and Highland artistic traditions. These comparisons will demonstrate the extensive presence of this particular complex and stress its obvious importance in the ancient Maya world.

**Literature**

While no comprehensive examination of effigy funerary urns exists that considers all aspects of function and meaning, this class of objects has been the subject of anthropological study. Ma. Josefa Iglesias Ponce de León (2005) has conducted an archaeological survey of funerary urns excavated from Highland Maya sites, including that of Nebaj. Ponce de León defines an urn as a ceramic object that contains some kind of human remains, whether in the form of a complete corpse in a primary burial, disarticulated bones in a secondary burial, or cremated remains. She believes that funerary urns were meant to contain not only the physical remains of the deceased, but also their souls. She contends that the dead continued to play an important role in the lives of the living and that funerary urns allowed the deceased to continue to thrive (in the afterlife) alongside their descendants. Ponce de León makes no distinction between the various categories of funerary urns and provides no discussion of the imagery associated with them.

Andrés Ciudad Ruiz’s similar study (2005), reviews regional differences in mortuary practices of the Maya Highlands. Ruiz briefly discusses funerary urns, describing how remains were placed inside and where examples have been found, including the Nebaj region. The *Guidebook for the Museo Popol Vuh* (2003) briefly describes its substantial collection of effigy funerary urns, mentioning the urns’ conjectured date and place of production. The *Guidebook* names only a few of the major figures depicted on the urns, including the Maize God and the Jaguar God of the Underworld, although it makes no attempt to explain the significance of their appearance or their relationship in this context. Each of the studies mentioned above is valuable, however they have yet to question the relationship between funerary urn function and iconography.
To understand the funerary urn as object, archaeological excavation reports like those of Mary Butler Lewis’s from the site of Nebaj are used to determine the typical context of urns. Butler Lewis excavated two extensive urn burials from the site in 1941 (“Notes and News” 1941; Butler Lewis n.d.). This essential contextual information is lacking for the looted urns now in the collection of the Museo Popol Vuh. Augustus L. Smith and Alfred V. Kidder (1951) also excavated at Nebaj where they possibly recovered urns misidentified as cache vessels and incensarios. Further discussion on the Smith and Kidder excavation and the objects recovered demonstrates the difficulties faced in defining the funerary urn genre.

Alberto Ruz Lhuillier (1968) and W. Bruce M. Welsh’s (1988) seminal works on ancient Maya burial practice are essential to any discussion of funerary customs. While they often focused on Lowland examples, Ruz Lhuillier and Welsh explicated many basic mortuary practices common throughout the Maya area. James L. Fitzsimmons’s study (2009) attempts to reconstruct Classic Maya funerary ritual by synthesizing information collected in the archaeological, anthropological, artistic, and epigraphic records. His interdisciplinary approach is incredibly useful to this study and provides valuable information concerning ritual practice.

While the iconography of the urns is complicated, some individual components are already well understood in their own right and discussed in the literature. For example, the spikes frequently found on urns represent the ceiba tree (*ceiba pentandra*), often used by the Maya to manifest the conduit between cosmic realms or the axis mundi (Freidel et al. 1993; Rice 1999). Important mythological figures like the Maize God and the jaguar have received considerable attention. As previously stated, I focus on how individual elements combine to form the iconographic complex presented by these funerary urns. However, given the frequent appearance of the Maize God and the jaguar, a brief exploration of these individual components will be necessary.

Interpreting Maize God iconography entails the investigation of Maize God mythology, his related iconography, and the analogy between the life cycle of maize and humans. Important works by Rafael Girard (1952; 1995), Karl A. Taube (1985, 1996, 1998), Michael D. Carrasco (2005, 2009), David Stuart (2005), Edwin Braakhuis (1990), Karen Bassie-Sweet (2000), and David Freidel, Linda Schele, and Joy Parker (1993), will be referred to among others, to explore the myth of the life of the Maize God. These works assert that the Maize God’s birth from the earth, represented by a turtle or saurian creature, required heat and darkness, a concept I believe
to be significant in the consideration of effigy funerary urns. Earth monsters and skulls appear repeatedly on the urns, and are themselves important elements in the depiction of the narrative of the life of the Maize God. Fully understanding this important figure is essential to comprehending the significance of his appearance in effigy funerary urn imagery.

To fully comprehend the importance of maize and maize mythology, and consequently the relationship between maize and people, I turn to the *Popol Vuh* (Tedlock 1996; Christenson 2003). The *Popol Vuh* is a Post-Classic K’iche document that records valuable mythology, as well as the history and regal genealogy of the K’iche Maya. The document was recovered in Chichicastenango, a Highland town neighboring the Nebaj region. As an indigenous document, the *Popol Vuh* provides an important glimpse into the mythology and worldview of its creators. It introduces a number of key mythological figures and themes that were pervasive in the art and culture of the ancient Maya. The book describes the Maize God’s birth and the adventures of his sons, the Hero Twins. The *Popol Vuh* also makes clear the associations between humans and maize, an idea that I explore further using ethnographic reports from the region. Studies like that of the Atitecos of Lago Atitlan by Robert S. Carlsen and Martin Prechtel (1991) reveal the continued belief in the connection between Maya and maize.

Like the Maize God, the jaguar in its various manifestations was a symbol widely used by the Maya. However, the full significance of the naturalistic jaguar deity and the Jaguar God of the Underworld has yet to be understood. Scholars such as Nicholas J. Saunders (1992, 1994, 1998) and Elizabeth P. Benson (1998) have conducted studies of the jaguar in its various manifestations. It is the Jaguar God of the Underworld who is often depicted on both funerary urns and incensarios. He has been described as the sun in its night aspect, as a god of warfare, and as the personification of a celestial body (Chinchilla Mazariegos 2003; Thompson 1970). David Stuart’s (1998) assertion that the Jaguar God of the Underworld could be the patron god of fire due to his frequent appearance in the context of fire-drilling ceremonies is a compelling argument that I attempt to further explore in the context of funerary urns.

Given the striking similarities between funerary urns and incensarios, my project incorporates scholarship on this class of objects. Marilyn Goldstein (1977), Prudence Rice (1999), Martha Cuevas García (2004, 2005), and Michael D. Carrasco (1998, 2005), have written on the function, evolution, and symbolism of incensarios. The ritual burning of incense was an important means of opening communication between the earthly and supernatural realms (Rice
1999). Questioning how that communication was facilitated is useful in formulating questions about effigy funerary urns.

**Highland Effigy Funerary Urns**

The final chapter of my thesis combines the two previously described chapters, to examine the relationship between the urns’ function and iconography. In this chapter, I explain why this imagery appears on effigy funerary urns and how it informs their ritual use. The true significance of these objects lies in the connection between function and iconography and ultimately, in whatever larger system of ideas the urns are referencing. As I have noted, other objects, like incensarios, share the imagery presented by the urns. Why would objects with seemingly different functions reference the same concept? What do these relationships say about the perceived function of objects?

This project fills the void that currently exists in the study of the art of the Maya. Ceramic objects played an integral role in ancient Maya society. While Maya pottery has received scholarly attention, discussion is often focused on the imagery found on painted vases. Even then, a complete understanding of the significance of these objects cannot be fully attained without considering context and ritual function. This study investigates a pervasive iconographic complex found on effigy funerary urns that features the Maize God, the old god of the hearth, the Trefoil Jaguar, and the JGU. Instead of focusing solely on function or iconography, this project combines the two avenues for a more comprehensive study of these objects, providing new ways to think about the relationship between function and iconography.

In this thesis I demonstrate that by analyzing the substitution patterns found within the urns’ iconographic complex we may begin to understand the multifaceted nature of deities as demonstrated by the relationship between the JGU (GIII), the Trefoil Jaguar, the naturalistic jaguar deity, and Huehuetotl. As fire and hearth related entities, they provide the heat necessary for the regeneration of the body, an idea I will expand upon in the proceeding chapters. These figures, along with depictions of the Maize God and representations of skulls, spikes, and personifications of the earth relate effigy funerary urns to architectural tombs, domestic structures, and incensarios by virtue of their iconography and related conceptual significance. These urns condense the ideas embodied by these structures and objects, those of sprouting and
re-birth, into a single ceramic vessel. This sprouting process is understood through an analogy made between humans and maize and is facilitated by heat, water, and darkness. This process is aided not only by the imagery on the exterior of the urns, but also by ritual activity performed in the vicinity of the burial area, which is itself informed by the urns’ iconography. An analysis of this Highland genre of objects will thus initiate discussion on not only the correlation between object iconography and function, but also on the complex nature of deities and the conceptual relationship that exists between objects and spaces with seemingly different functions.
CHAPTER ONE
THE EFFIGY FUNERARY URN GENRE

This chapter examines Maya mortuary practice specifically as it relates to the modes of burial. Interment was achieved through a variety of methods and processes often distinctive to particular areas or time periods. One distinctive method of burial was that performed in effigy funerary urns. Burial in effigy funerary urns was prolific during the Terminal Classic and Early Post Classic periods in the Highland Maya region and represents a unique departure from earlier customs. A fundamental problem arises with an examination of the funerary urn genre. What is an urn? Objects classified as urns frequently vary in size, shape, material, and context. In addition to lacking classification within its own genre, urns frequently resemble other types of objects from which they would often be indistinguishable without archaeological context. This study will analyze a sample of fifty-five stylistically and iconographically similar effigy funerary urns from the Nebaj area of highland Guatemala.

Effigy funerary urns are lidded ceramic vessels made specifically for the purpose of containing human remains for burial. These objects are often buried in large groups, perhaps in designated areas meant to be reused. To clarify and differentiate this type of burial from other modes, in this chapter I review the various categories of ancient Maya burial. This discussion both clarifies the term “burial” and offers comparisons with effigy funerary urn mortuary use in the third chapter. After a basic understanding of burial practice is achieved I establish the parameters of the word “urn” in this study by identifying effigy funerary urns by material, shape, and size. To better understand what is an urn, it is useful to establish what is not an urn. Therefore, other methods of container burial in the Highland region will also be considered. Lastly, the context in which urns are typically found is discussed to further refine the definition of this distinctive class of objects.

Ancient Maya Burial Practices

Effigy funerary urns participate in a larger system of burial practices that often involves the censing or burning of tombs. These urns represent a unique departure from other burial practices employed at this time in the Highlands. Effigy funerary urns preserve the tomb
symbolism found throughout the Maya area even as the mortuary space is compressed into a single, ceramic object. Thus, although these urns are formally dissimilar from other grave types, they are similarly conceptualized and are subject to the same mortuary rituals as larger grave types. An overview of the various kinds of burial practices found in the Maya world is a useful backdrop against which to study urn use. A brief summary of the evolution of Highland burial practice is also necessitated to situate the effigy funerary urn genre within the history of Highland burial. Additionally, an initial understanding of how effigy funerary urns figure into the larger realm of burial practice facilitates later discussion of the ritual function of these objects.

As expected, the primary requirement for a deposit to be classified as a “burial” is the presence of human remains. Marshall J. Becker, in his study on burials and caches in the Lowland area, defines a burial as, “the original interment of one or more individuals in a prepared repository, however simple, together with any furniture or associate material, which may be absent” (Becker 1992: 187). This idea of “original interment” limits the definition of burial, although the concept is often referenced when distinguishing burials from caches, an issue that will be discussed later in this chapter. The organization of burials into two distinct types assuages the challenge of defining “burial,” at least partially.

The term burial will presently depart from Becker’s definition to denote only human skeletal material and does not include any associated grave goods. Primary burials are those of one or more persons interred in a single act, with no intention or indication of later disturbance (Andrews and Bello 2006: 17-18). Archaeological evidence supporting primary burial typically reveals skeletal material that, although it may be incomplete, is devoid of any excessive disorder or disarticulation (Andrews and Bello 2006: 17-18). Secondary burial involves the reburial or rearrangement of human remains performed during an intentional or socially sanctioned process (Andrews and Bello 2006: 17; Metcalfe and Huntington 1991). This implies that the interment of the body may only be considered an initial stage in the funerary process and not the primary objective (Weiss-Krejci 2005: 370-373).

Secondary burial should be distinguished from a disturbed burial, which shows evidence of the movement of human remains as a result of later activity, intentional or unintentional, not directly connected with the remains in question (Andrews and Bello 2006: 17). Disturbance from secondary burial is a product of human activity and is conducted at a specific stage in the burial or mortuary process. Disturbed burials can occur at any time and can be caused by a number of means including animal movement, natural erosion of the soil, etc.
Secondary burials may be categorized further into two distinct practices: movement and delay. The first component involves the movement of some or all parts of the body from its original location, be that a primary burial or other kind of temporary burial space (Andrews and Bello 2006: 17). This may entail the removal of the entire body or specific parts, such as the cranium, and may result in the loss of skeletal elements (Andrews and Bello 2006: 17). The delay component signifies a period of waiting time between death and final interment (Andrews and Bello 2006: 17). As noted in the definition, delay may involve the exhumation or the relocation of remains that had been kept enshrined or otherwise stored. This delay occurred for the ancient Maya both during the period between initial interment and primary burial, when the processing of the body or other mortuary rituals would take place, and in the period before secondary burial when a different set of rituals occurred. (Fitzsimmons 2009: 61-64, 142-145).

This passage of time suggests that the cycle of death is considered to be gradual or ongoing, and that death itself has more than one stage (Fitzsimmons 2009; McAnany 1995). The delay period as it pertains to effigy funerary urns will be further explored in proceeding chapters as a crucial phase for the performance of funerary ritual.

Burial may be further classified by grave type. The identification of grave type considers all aspects of burial, including human skeletal remains and any existent grave goods. It should be noted that the ancient Maya did not conceptually classify their burials according to these categories, which modern scholars have developed to facilitate the analysis of mortuary practice. Following James Fitzsimmons I will rely on Augustus Smith’s classifications of burial (Fitzsimmons 2009: 64, Smith 1951: 88). These grave types include the simple burial, the cist, and the more sophisticated crypt. The fourth construction is a tomb, defined by Fitzsimmons as a “large stone-lined or rock-cut chamber, specially constructed for mortuary purposes, which is

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4 The ancient Maya used the term *muknal*, “burial place,” to refer to burials (Carrasco 2010, personal communication). Some terms used to refer to tombs seem to reference mythological locations, such as Five Flower Mountain or other terms that include the mention of a *witz*, “mountain” (Carrasco 2005, 2010).

5 A simple burial is an “unlined hole in the ground or inclusion of a body in fill during construction,” and the cist, which is a “grave with definite outlines, usually the sides of an exaction into structural fill; occasionally with walls; [and] no capstones” (Smith 1951: 88).

6 A cist is a grave with “definite outlines, usually the sides of an exaction into structural fill; occasionally with walls; [and] no capstones” (Smith 1951: 88).

7 A crypt is defined as a “more carefully walled grave with capstones, sometimes with [a] plastered floor, [and which] may or may not have been filled with earth” (Smith 1951: 88).
capped by either a flat roof or a vault” (Fitzsimmons 2009: 65). Alberto Ruz Lhuillier (1968) and W. Bruce M. Welsh (1988) have also investigated the mortuary practice of the Lowland Maya. In addition to burial and grave type, classifications for the treatment of the body before burial or during the funerary process also merit a brief explanation. There are four basic categories of cadaver processing: burial, or the decomposition of the body in the ground or other container, immersion, the decay of the body in water, cremation, the process of transforming the body to ash through fire, and exposure, or the decomposition of the body through exposure to the elements (Ponce de León 2005: 210).

Like the artistic traditions of Highland Maya culture, burial practice also has received less scholarly attention. While a number of excavations have been carried out at sites such as Zaculeu, Iximche, K’umarcaaj, Nebaj, etc., the areas surrounding these sites as well as smaller satellite sites have yet to be the subject of any serious investigation. Many of these sites have yielded significant amounts of funerary data, however this information has not generally been compiled and analyzed like that from the Lowlands. Andrés Ciudad Ruiz (2005) has taken steps to remedy this situation by compiling data from various archaeological sites in Highland Guatemala in an attempt to reconstruct burial trends and patterns.

The burial practices of the Preclassic period seem to have closely paralleled those observed in the Lowlands. Burials dating to the Middle Pre-Classic are often comprised of bodies deposited in crypts below domestic structures, or in the platforms of larger ceremonial structures (Ciudad Ruiz 2005). Bodies are typically situated in the extended position with the head aligned to one of the cardinal directions. Ceramic pots or bowls are often found covering the deceased’s face, or placed directly above and in close proximity to the cranium (Ciudad Ruiz 2005). Known burials tend to be modest with offerings typically composed of only a few ceramic vessels. The site of Los Mangales represents a departure from this trend. A single male burial dating to around 400 B.C. was found accompanied by twelve sacrificial victims (whose bones had been processed considerably), objects of jade and shell, and a multitude of ceramic vessels (Ciudad Ruiz 2005: 80-81). After the individual’s interment, a new platform was constructed atop of the chamber.8

8 This is Burial Six from Structure D6-1 at Los Mangales. Ciudad Ruiz deduces that the individual must have been a ruler or person of considerable status from the valley of Salamá. The new platform is identified as D6-1-3 and is evidence that this building was designated as an important funerary location.
The Late Preclassic, as is expected, demonstrates an increased sophistication in both societal organization and burial practice. Early burials from the period reveal bodies situated in a seated position in bell-shaped wells and narrow cylindrical chambers (Ciudad Ruiz 2005: 81-83). Spaces identified as centralized funerary areas began to grow in popularity during this period in the upper Salamá region (Ciudad Ruiz 2005: 83). This type of burial, that containing a significant amount of individuals interred either in a single phase or over a period of time, does not appear frequently in the archaeological record of the Maya (Ciudad Ruiz 2005: 83; Ruz 1968: 156-157; Welsh 1988: 25). These “cemetery” burials fade in popularity towards the end of the period, surfacing again during the Terminal Classic period. In the central Highlands, burials made in large, rectangular tombs within in structures of soil and stone appeared with increasing frequency, particularly at sites like Kaminaljuyu (Ciudad Ruiz 2005: 84-85). Tombs excavated in San Andrés Sajcabajá and La Lagunita in the Department of Quiché revealed bodies interred in stone sarcophagi. An object identified as a stone sarcophagus in Quetzaltenango may be an example of the containers used in such burials (Fig. 9). It is possible that objects such as these were the precursors to later ceramic effigy funerary urns. Burials in this period were continually accompanied with increasing numbers of ceramic and stone materials and have been recovered in greater quantities.

The dramatic increase in population witnessed during the Late Pre-Classic period of highland Guatemala appears to have abated by the Early Classic (Ciudad Ruiz 2005: 88). Tombs and crypts similar to those discovered at Pre-Classic sites continued to be utilized at centers with larger populations, while what may be “cemeteries” have been discovered at smaller, more rural locations. The final grave type identified in the Highlands is the funerary urn, which made its first appearance in the northern region of the Highlands in the Classic period (Ciudad-Ruiz 2005: 92-95; Butler Lewis n.d.; Ponce de León 2005; Smith and Kidder 1951). Urn burials have been recorded from the sites of Zaculeu (Woodbury and Trik 1953:78), Chipal (Thompson 1939: 285), and Chama (Butler 1940: 258). These urns were interred within structural foundations and contained both flexed and disarticulated skeletons. They were often accompanied by offerings of

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9 This type of burial has been discovered in the Las Victorias area.
10 The following cases are all examples of Early Classic period burial. Burials in organized tombs have been uncovered at Camalamapa, Santa Rosa, San Juan Las Vegas, Chirramos and Chitomax (Ciudad Ruiz 2005: 92). A vaulted tomb, similar to those popular in the Lowland area, was discovered in Structure A-1 at Los Encuentros (Ciudad Ruiz 2005: 92). A large cemetery containing the remains of sixteen individuals interred in simple burial was recorded at Agua Tibia (Ciudad Ruiz 2005: 90).
jade, shell, and ceramic objects. Post Classic urns commonly held secondary and cremation burials as the size of the urn vessel decreased significantly (Ciudad Ruiz 2005). It is important to remember that although these urns are contemporaneous with the examples discussed by Ciudad Ruiz, the Nebaj area resists this shift and popularizes the large effigy funerary urn.

With this brief background on burial types and methods, I turn to the task of defining the effigy funerary urn. The previous discussion has been offered to both clarify the definition of burial itself and to provide a basis for comparison with the funerary urn genre. The context, content, and function of funerary urns will be addressed after a concrete definition of the genre has been established through a discussion on form.

The Classification of Funerary Urns

Funerary urns at their most basic level may be understood as belonging to a broad class of objects that function as containers for the human body. Urns are one class of such objects. Within the “urn” class are a multitude of what we might call subclasses of urns, one of which I have identified as the effigy funerary urn. My discussion of the effigy funerary urns from the Nebaj region presents these vessels as a distinct subclass of urns specific to a particular geographic area and time period. A key problem in identifying these objects is that the various subclasses of urns are not formally defined or recognized in museum galleries or publications. The generalization of these vessels under the generic term “urn” does not allow for the possibility that the various subclasses of urns may have served very different purposes for the ancient Maya.

In her study of funerary urns found throughout the Maya region, Maria Josefa Iglesias Ponce de León defines an urn as a ceramic vessel used to contain human remains (Ponce de León 2005: 211). This ceramic vessel does not have to have been created for this specific purpose and may have been used in some other capacity prior to its final use as an “urn,” although there is no evidence to suggest this.¹¹ (Ponce de León 2005: 211). Ponce de León makes no discrimination between the types of human burial made in urns. She includes in her definition of urn burial primary burials with intact skeletons, secondary burials with disarticulated bones, and cremated

¹¹ As I have stated, without archaeological context urns would often be indistinguishable from other iconographically and formally similar objects, such as incensarios and cache vessels.
remains (Ponce de León 2005: 211-212). Ciudad Ruiz believes that the urns of the Nebaj area are a regional variant on the urn genre and like Ponce de León, states that they may have been used for other purposes, like storage, before they served in their final role as funerary urns. While reflection on Ponce de León’s and Ciudad Ruiz’s definitions of “urn” is valuable, it should be noted that they fail to consider the variety of ceramic objects that are currently identified as urns and make no attempt to distinguish them. To define what constitutes an effigy funerary urn I will discuss the form and context specifically associated with this genre, establishing that effigy funerary urns are lidded ceramic objects intended to function as receptacles for human remains within the context of burial.

Form

The definition of effigy funerary urn will be initially refined by a formal discussion of the urn genre. As previously stated, objects classified as urns often vary in material, shape, and size. I will first identify the three funerary urn shapes distinctive to the Nebaj area. Effigy funerary urns are typically cylindrical vessels composed of two basic elements: a decorated urn body and an accompanying lid. Surviving lids are consistently conical in form and will be discussed further in the next chapter with regard to their specific iconographic pattern. It should be recalled that this chapter discusses the urn as object and any imagery mentioned will be further explored in the proceeding chapters.

The majority of the fifty-five urns in this study belong to the first two urn categories: those that are vase shaped with tapered bases (Fig. 10) and those that are more cylindrical with large, squat bases (Fig. 11). Twenty urns are classified as Vase Type urns. These urns are typically elongated with bodies measuring up to one meter in height. Twelve Vase Type urns retain their lids (Fig. 12). As previously stated, lids are typically conical in form. This shape echoes that of the urn body and serves to increase the interior size of the urn, thus providing more space for a body.

The second dominant urn category is the Cylinder Type (Fig. 13). This type of funerary urn bears a striking resemblance to incensarios from both the Lowlands (Fig. 14) and Highlands (Fig. 15). Cylinder Type urns typically include two flanges on each side of the urn body. These flanges extend for the entire length of the body and measure from approximately three to eight
centimeters in width. Twenty-seven urns are identified as belonging to the Cylinder Type group. Of the twenty seven Cylinder Type urns, seventeen include the aforementioned flanges. These urns can reach heights of up to one meter and, like their vase shaped counterparts, would have been accompanied by conical lids, although only one example of this type included in the study retains its lid.

A third and comparatively rare urn category is the Square Type (Fig. 16). These urns are generally smaller square or rectangular vessels. Of the Square Type urns, one example includes flanges identical to those found on Cylinder Type urns (Fig. 16), while breakage on a second urn suggests the previous existence of now lost flanges (Fig. 17). The Square Type urns are a distinct departure from the previous two categories both in body and lid shape. The only surviving Square Type urn lid is a low, squared top with beveled edges (Fig. 18). This lid curiously does not allow an ample amount of additional space for the body to be placed inside, although it is plausible that the remains interred within it were relatively small or had been disarticulated. All three effigy funerary urn shapes will be further examined in Chapter Two. Suffice it to say at the moment that the shape of the vessel, with the Square Type being an exception, appears to determine the organization and type of each urn’s iconography. All of the aforementioned urns are fairly consistent in size, ranging from two to three feet in height (without a lid). As previously stated, the effigy funerary urn is but one subclass of urn. Although this project will not discuss these other subclasses of the urn genre in any detail, a brief overview of these objects is necessary to show the inherent difficulties encountered when assigning the term “urn” to an object.

Augustus Smith and Alfred Kidder, in their 1947-1949 excavation of the site of Nebaj uncovered what they referred to as three “stone boxes” from the remains of Late Classic Structures E and F (Smith and Kidder 1951: 19). These large, rectangular objects carved from a single block of sarro had little to no decoration and bore no traces of plaster or paint. Smith and Kidder’s description of the boxes recall the stone sarcophagi discussed in the previous section (Fig. 9). The identification of these boxes as funerary containers was deemed problematic by Smith and Kidder. The boxes were typically set in the center of a covered stairway, or positioned within the fill of a structure with little material remaining inside by the time of excavation (Smith and Kidder 1951: 19). Portions of a human jaw bone and teeth were found within one box, while
another contained a black bowl and human head (Smith and Kidder 1951: 19). Given the strong preference for ceramic funerary containers in the Nebaj area these boxes are unusual. Are the objects sarcophagi, stone urns, or cache vessels? The following section on context will demonstrate that Nebaj effigy funerary urns were typically buried in groups. These boxes were solitary deposits and no evidence was recovered to suggest that any additional burials or goods accompanied them. Given the trends in Highland burial practice previously discussed and the elaborate attention given to funerals at Nebaj at this time, these boxes are perhaps more properly labeled as caches. Furthermore, the boxes’ stone composition inhibits the elaborate decoration typical of funerary vessels from this area, an issue that will be explored in the chapter on iconography.

Other stone objects such as small boxes from the area around Chichicastenango have been labeled as urns (Fig. 19). Although objects like these could have contained cremated human remains, they too are excluded from the present definition of urn. This kind of box and the stone boxes from Nebaj are stylistically similar to the sarcophagus burials mentioned in the previous section. Both sarcophagi and funerary urns are meant to accommodate human remains, but their vastly different iconography and context does not permit them to be situated in the same category with the effigy funerary urns. Square Type urns recall the shape of the stone boxes and sarcophagi, and could possibly be evidence of an appropriation and subsequent evolution of this earlier shape. Another type of small, lidded square vessel is also infrequently labeled as either an urn or other type of container. Ceramic rectangular vessels from the South Pacific Coast that are purported to date to the Early Classic period could have held cremated human remains, which was a trend in mortuary practice that would become widespread during the Terminal Classic period in the Highlands (Fig. 20).

As cremation rose in popularity among the elite during the Post Classic period, the shapes of objects identified as urns began to evolve (Ciudad Ruiz 2005: 100-101). Post Classic urns like those recovered from Chimaltenango (Fig. 21) and K’umarcaaj (Fig. 22) reduced the Vase Shape, eliminating the base support and adding a pair of handles at the bottom of an elongated, tapered neck. These vessels are considerably smaller than the effigy funerary urns and could not

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12 Smith and Kidder believe that the contents of the boxes were anciently robbed and the majority of the skeletal remains removed during the construction of Structure F, although they give no evidence to support this hypothesis. They do not address the possibility that these boxes could have been cache vessels.
have held any intact human remains, spare for a relic or some other small bone fragment. Unlike the Nebaj effigy funerary urns, these objects are not elaborately ornamented. Decoration typically consists of bichromal paint, commonly a red and cream pairing, or a solid orange/red glaze. If molded clay sculptural elements are present, they are found in the form of simplistic human facial elements affixed to the neck of the vase or on the handles (Fig. 21). Kill holes are also commonly present and are primarily located on the middle of the vase body. These punctuations consist of either one solitary hole or three holes in the shape of a triangle, or arguably, an abstracted human face (Fig. 22). The shape and decorative style of these small jars are similar to that of a large Late Classic vessel labeled as an urn and recovered from San Pedro on Lago Atitlán (Fig. 23).

The identification of these vessels as urns, like that of the stone boxes, is problematic. The Chimaltenango jar referenced above is labeled simply as a polychrome ceramic jar in the Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología de Guatemala, and as a burial urn in the museum’s own publication (Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología de Guatemala 1996: 183, 185). Ciudad Ruiz also identifies this object as a funerary urn (2005: 100). A second ceramic object from K’umarcaaj further complicates this matter. Although it is nearly identical in shape, size, and decoration as the above mentioned urns, it remains labeled as a jar (Fig. 24).

A complete examination and reclassification of all objects classified as urns is beyond the scope of this thesis. These examples are discussed only to demonstrate how the identification of objects as urns is a complicated process hindered by a multitude of problems. Jar urns like these have not been found at the site of Nebaj or the area immediately surrounding it, although they seem to have been quite prevalent throughout the early Post Classic Highlands. This could be easily explained if the shift to cremation did not have the same impact on this area as it did in the surrounding Highlands. A second type of object classified as an urn could account for this difference.

The miniature urn may have been Nebaj’s answer to the modification of the funerary urn and the transformation from large cylindrical vessel to small vase or jar. Miniature urns such as those found in the collection of the Museo Popol Vuh are iconographically similar to their larger counterparts (Fig. 25). The designation “miniature urn” implies that these objects served similar functions as their larger counterparts. They are found in the bases or interiors of elite structures at sites such as Chisalín, Pueblo Viejo-Chicha, Cauinal, and Zaculeu (Ciudad Ruiz 2005: 100-101).
purposes as the larger effigy funerary urns. These objects, which range in height from approximately ten to twenty centimeters (without lids) could never have held intact human remains. It has been suggested that these urns held cremated remains similar to the jar urns that rose in popularity during the Post Classic period. However, these objects are so stylistically similar to the larger effigy funerary urns that this evolution must have been seamless, or these objects are contemporaries of the larger urns. It is also possible that these miniature urns held offerings and were buried in tombs or other designated areas alongside effigy funerary urns. This would strip them of the title “urn,” miniature or not, and place them in a class with cache vessels or other funerary objects. The issue of objects that are formally similar to effigy funerary urns merits further discussion.

It has been established that one of the dominant categories of effigy funerary urns is the Cylinder Type urn. Cylinder Type urns and incensarios would often be indistinguishable without archaeological context. Both are typically cylindrical ceramic objects that may or may not have flanges, and share strikingly similar iconography. Objects recovered from the previously mentioned excavation of Nebaj by Smith and Kidder are but one example of the difficulties inherent in classifying an object as either a Cylinder Type urn or incensario (Smith and Kidder 1951). The conspicuous similarity between the iconography of urns and incensario stands will be further explored in the proceeding chapters, establishing a connection deeper than one formed by size and shape alone.

Smith and Kidder recovered four Post Classic ceramic objects from Mound 2 at Nebaj that they identified as incense burners (Smith and Kidder 1951: Fig. 80). Two of these were squat, cylindrical vessels supported by tripod bases composed of three feet in the shape of human faces (Figs. 26-27). Each is brilliantly decorated in alternating stripes of red and blue paint and features similar molded elements on the vessel body. Both objects were found in the lower level of Tomb VIII, Mound 2 at Nebaj and were purported to contain bird bones and charcoal (Smith and Kidder 1951: 26). One of the objects (Fig. 26) continues to be identified as an incense burner (Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología de Guatemala 1996: 181). Although the second tripod vessel was recovered from the same tomb in association with the (so-called) incense burner, it is now identified as a Nebaj urn in the Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología in Guatemala City (Fig. 27).
Several possibilities arise from the problem presented by the objects recovered from the Smith and Kidder excavation. They have may have been mislabeled by the museum, were not properly recorded and identified by Smith and Kidder, or they were funerary urns whose additional contents (human remains) have since decayed or been relocated. The idea that bodies did not have to be placed inside of urns in order for the vessels to fulfill their purpose should also be considered. Perhaps placing urns in proximity to bodies buried in tombs or other grave types was considered sufficient. The practice of including incensarios in burials was widespread from perhaps as early as the middle Preclassic through the Classic period in the Maya Lowlands. This theory could provide an additional explanation for the miniature urns described above. These miniature urns may have been small replicas of their larger counterparts never intended to function as anything other than models. Perhaps over time the effigy funerary urn itself became significant as an object separate from its function as a container for human remains. An exploration of the context in which effigy funerary urns are typically found will aid in the identification of objects belonging to the funerary urn genre and elucidate the mortuary function of these vessels.

Context

The majority of effigy funerary urns analyzed in this study were looted and thus without provenance. However, stylistically and iconographically similar urns have been recovered in situ from the site of Nebaj in the department of Quiché. Therefore, Mary Butler Lewis’s unpublished 1941 excavation of the site provides an excellent basis for comparison with the urns included in the present study. An extensive collection of her notes and reports are kept in the archives of the Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Philadelphia. Butler Lewis traveled to Guatemala at the behest of J. Steward Lincoln, an anthropologist working in the area who had chanced upon a piece of exposed pottery in the streets of the Ixil town of Nebaj (Butler Lewis n.d. : Letter dated 23 May 1941; “Notes and News” 1941: 186). Prior to Butler Lewis’s excavation no known archaeological work had been conducted in Nebaj. Butler Lewis excavated

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14 Lincoln, believing the pottery to be a sherd, kicked it and discovered that it was actually the rim of an intact vessel. He then proceeded to dig in the area and uncovered a funerary urn along with several other small ceramic objects. Butler began her excavation in the street beside Lincoln’s hole.
two large urn burials, which she described as cemeteries due to the sheer number and proximity of the burials. The exact locations of the burials are unknown. Butler Lewis describes finding Nebaj Burial 1 (N1) running north to south in the street in front of the house of a Nicholas Bernal, where Lincoln had discovered a large burial urn (Butler Lewis n.d.). The second burial (N2) was said to have been located in the yard of a local woman by the name of Dona Lucia Lopez (Butler Lewis n.d.).

A total of fourteen burials in ceramic objects were recovered from N1 (Fig. 28). These burials were found surrounded by approximately one hundred and forty-five ceramic vessels of various shapes and sizes. Additionally, two extended fragmentary child burials were found in association with these burials and may have been interred in cists like those described in the section on grave type (Butler Lewis n.d.). Eleven burials in ceramic objects were found in N2 (Fig. 29). These were also surrounded by other offerings. Approximately sixty-six vessels along with obsidian blades, solid ceramic figurines, and ceramic whistles were found in the N2 deposit (Butler Lewis n.d.). N2 appears to have been documented more meticulously than N1, although it yielded fewer objects. Butler Lewis does give the dimensions of the N2 excavation, reporting that she investigated an area 2.5m x 3.5m with a depth of 1.1m (Butler Lewis n.d.). She mentions in her field notes that the streets were constructed over a mound, which was obviously the remains of an earlier structure. She also describes finding eight of the N2 burials within the remains of a stone cobble structure, but she does not elaborate on its size or location (Butler Lewis n.d.). Additionally, plaster floor fragments were reported in the vicinity of N2 burial 31 (Butler Lewis n.d.). The possibility exists that the two burials, N1 and N2, were both originally interred in the same structure or area, but Butler Lewis gives no indication of their proximity to each other.

Butler Lewis dated the two large burials to the early Terminal Classic period, noting the stratigraphy of the soil and the proximity of the vessels to the surface level (Butler Lewis n.d.). She believed the “cemeteries” to be areas that were reused for burial over a considerable period of time. She cites the sometimes erratic placement of vessels superimposed on one another or those broken in a seemingly haphazard manner, in addition to the marked soil disturbance throughout both areas as evidence of this claim. Butler Lewis also believed that the vessels themselves were reused for multiple burials based on the existence of what seem to be additional bones in vessels such as N1 burial 4 (Fig. 28), wherein an adult skeletal was accompanied by a
“few bones” (Butler Lewis n.d.). N2 burial 2c (Fig. 29) contained two upper jaw bones and although no other skeletal material remains, Butler Lewis believes this to have been a primary burial (Butler Lewis n.d.). She also cites the existence of layers of burnt bone in two N1 burials, 17 and 48 (Fig. 28). This is a very interesting feature that will be expanded upon in Chapter Three during a discussion on mortuary ritual.

Smith and Kidder mentioned the Butler Lewis excavations in their publication ten years later, asserting that these two burial areas were used by non-elites given their relative lack of elaborate burial goods such as jade and shell objects (Smith and Kidder 1951: 28). Although these urns do seem to be less elaborately decorated than the effigy funeral urns like those in the collection of the Museo Popol Vuh, the apparent paucity of these burials does not justify a hasty distinction between common and elite urn burial. Additionally, Butler Lewis’s excavation in the modern town of Nebaj seems to have located very near to the mounds that were excavated by Smith and Kidder ten years later. This suggests that the two locations were part of the same larger ceremonial center and would not support the idea that the Butler Lewis burials were those of non-elite. Given Butler Lewis’s observation that these grounds were reused multiple times, it is highly likely that burial goods had since been removed or relocated. Urn lids are found almost exclusively in N2, while the vessels in N1 apparently had inverted bowls placed over their openings (Butler Lewis n.d.). This could indicate that the N1 area witnessed a longer period of use than N2 and that lids were lost or damaged when the area was exposed for additional burials.

Recalling the earlier discussion on burial type necessitates further reflection on the process of differentiating funerary urn burials from other kinds of deposits. Ponce de León’s inclusion of disarticulated or incomplete skeletons in her definition of the funerary urn prompts the first debate required for the further refinement of the funerary urn genre. How do we distinguish urn burials from cache offerings? Marshall J. Becker (1992) has considered the question of burial versus cache in his examination of deposits at the lowland site of Tikal. Diane Chase (1988) has also performed a study of cache wares in her investigation of ceramic cache

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15 Butler Lewis did not include many photographs in her reports and provided no detailed drawings of urn decoration. Many of the urns were described as having modeled tiger heads attached to them, which would have of course been representations of the jaguar. Butler Lewis sporadically and briefly describes the painted decoration on urns, indicating that they were often painted red and black. She also describes yellow and black mottled painted decoration, which is likely representative of the jaguar pelt.

16 It should be recalled that Smith and Kidder’s excavation uncovered elaborate burials accompanied by a variety of lavish grave goods.
vessels and incense burners. Both of these scholars refer to William Coe’s (1959: 77) definition of “cache,” which states that a cache is “one or more objects found together, but apart from burials, whose grouping and situation point to intentional interment as an offering”. Becker and Chase both feel that single objects recovered without a container also qualify as caches. When bones are found in the context of caches, they are typically identified as victims of human sacrifice (Becker 1992: 186), but there is also the possibility of second interment.

The distinction between cache and burial appears to be determined by the intention of the burier. Tradition contends that burial is meant to dispose of the dead, while depositing a cache is an offertory or dedicatory action (Becker 1992: 187). If intent cannot be determined by archaeological evidence, perhaps the ancient Maya made no distinction between the two processes (Becker 1992: 197). The act of burial may have been what was of the highest importance, and not content, quantity, or location. The problem at Nebaj is that human remains do not appear to be the principal features of the two burials, N1 and N2 (Becker 1992: 191). However, caches combined with burials are well known throughout the Maya area (Becker 1992: 190). Although distinctive containers are often indicative of a cache offering, the consistency of the size and shape of the Butler Lewis funerary urns compared to that of the effigy funerary urns in the Museo Popol Vuh further reinforces the identification of these objects as burial urns (Chase 1988: 84).

The use of an incensario as a container for the infant remains in N1 burial 10 also complicates the question of what constitutes an urn. Does an incensario automatically convert to an urn when used in this manner? In view of the fact that incensarios frequently share iconography and form with effigy funerary urns, it is possible that the two classes of objects were not conceived as being conceptually distinct. A further analysis of the iconography and ritual function of effigy funerary urns will explicate these conceptual relationships.

**Defining the Genre**

Effigy funerary urns are lidded ceramic vessels made exclusively as receptacles for the interment of human remains. This subclass of urn is distinguished from other types of urns by

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17 As the remains in the vessel were those of an infant, the possibility also exists that the deceased was a victim of sacrifice, thus associating it with cache deposits.
form, size, material, and iconography. Effigy funerary urns may be identified as belonging to one of three categories: Vase Type, Cylinder Type, and Square Type urns. The following chapter on iconography will demonstrate that urn type frequently dictates the location and style of imagery. Urn lids and flanges provide space for additional decoration and will be discussed in detail together with their respective urns.

The remains of elite were placed inside the urns in a flexed position, often accompanied by a variety of goods including obsidian knives and additional ceramic objects. Remains were often dusted with red ochre and were occasionally superimposed over layers of burnt or disarticulated bone. Effigy funerary urns were typically buried in groups within the walls or fill of ceremonial structures. It is also possible that these “cemetery” areas were reused on multiple occasions over a considerable amount of time. Unfortunately, Butler Lewis did not analyze the formal or stylistic qualities of the urns she excavated in any great detail, thus preventing a discussion of the artistic evolution of these particular examples. The repeated disturbance of the soil around the urn burials suggests that these areas were locations of frequent ritual activity. The issue of the type of burial placed in effigy funerary urns will be readdressed in a discussion on mortuary activity in chapter three.

This adaptation of the funerary urn grave type is unique to the Late Classic – Early Post Classic period in the Nebaj region of the department of Quiché, Guatemala. Nebaj appears to have resisted the gradual shift in urn type to the smaller jar or vase urns found throughout the rest of the Highlands. The following chapters will account for this distinction with an investigation of the effigy funerary urns’ elaborate iconographic complex and role in funerary ritual. The information presented in the brief summary of burial and grave type will be revisited in chapter three during a discussion on the effigy funerary urn’s physical and conceptual role in mortuary ritual at Nebaj.
CHAPTER TWO
ICONOGRAPHIC PATTERNS

The iconography of effigy funerary urns, although extremely complex, may be divided into two distinct arrangements. Urns typically depict either the faces of deities, one usually emerging from the mouth of another, or solitary full-figured representations. These central figures dominate the urn body and are complemented by decorated side flanges, or smaller modeled pieces attached where flanges would normally be located. In this chapter, I categorize the urns according to their individual iconographic complexes. By doing so, specific patterns and the relationship between individual elements will become evident. This study does not attempt to fully dissect the elaborate imagery presented by the urns, as this is beyond the scope of this project. As was stated in the introduction, I am primarily concerned with the general classification of the various major compositional and iconographic motifs of effigy funerary urns, as opposed to the in-depth examination of individual motifs and symbols, although this is one of the next logical steps in the study of this material.

In the preceding chapter, urns were divided by shape and size. This chapter turns to urn iconography to further organize the urns (fifty-five samples) by placing them into seven distinct groups. Each group represents a particular iconographic complex employed on the urns. Groups are defined by the identity of the central deity depicted on the urn body, be that the face emerging from the mouth of an earth creature, or those deities who are represented as full figures. The seven groups can be further divided into a range of subcategories, which are differentiated by either details important to the central figure or extended decoration found on flanges or the sides of the urn body flanking the central figure. These subgroups may seem superfluous, but are a necessary step in laying the foundations for further analysis of these elaborate objects. Only deviations deemed crucial to categorization or those that have more than one example are given subgroups. Comprehensive descriptions of each of the seven groups are provided, elaborating on particular urns when appropriate. Attention first focuses on the deity deemed primary in the group. Description will then expand from the remainder of the urn body culminating in the flange or side areas. The iconography of urn lids, when they survive, varies greatly from urn to urn with no apparent pattern. These will be discussed when available. The pairing of particular groups with certain urn shapes will also be noted.
The composition of the various elements included in this iconographic complex follows in the tradition of a particular type of iconic form for the representation of deities identified by Michael Carrasco as the Mask Flange Iconographic Complex (Carrasco 2005). This complex is, “characterized by a central mask, face, or figure surmounted by an ornate headress that rests on a personification of the earth. Ornamented symmetrical side flanges flank this central composition” (Carrasco 2005: viii). Carrasco has demonstrated that the Mask Flange Iconographic Complex effectively maps mythology onto the built environment and certain classes of objects, such as incensarios, often marking them as locations for sprouting or rebirth (Carrasco 2005). Although the organization of the elements in the effigy funerary urn iconographic complex differs slightly from that of the Mask Flange Iconographic Complex, it is clearly following a similar tradition.

The study of this genre is certainly not without its problems. Although the deities and motifs represented on the urns are incredibly consistent, suggesting series of motifs that are symbolically equivalent or synecdoche. This complexity makes precise categorization of the urns difficult. For this reason, subcategories are formed when the bulk of imagery corresponds to a larger system, but minor details have a high degree of variability. Grouping the urns in this way will elucidate the larger iconographic complex, of which these individual details and deities are only a part. Even in situations where particular elements are not present, it is likely that the system was well understood and meaning would have been inferred regardless. Sub-groups will also lay the foundation for future study. As more examples of this complex genre are included, this system will allow for a sophisticated level of organization. Analysis is also inhibited by the fact that some of the samples may have been reconstructed or “restored” after they were looted. Signs of heavy reconstruction are often recognizable in urns that were recovered in fragments.

The identification of some elements of the iconographic complex is also problematic. The urns are frequently decorated by images of deities who are either not well understood or in need of a complete re-evaluation. The deity previously dubbed the Trefoil jaguar is one such figure. Given the frequent substitution of the Trefoil Jaguar with the JGU, Huehuteotl, and a naturalistic jaguar deity, it is likely that these deities are manifestations of the same larger idea. Figures such as the JGU and the Trefoil Jaguar will not be reinterpreted in this project, as this is beyond the scope of the current study. For the purposes of this project, figures such as the JGU will continue to be identified by their traditional, albeit arbitrary names, although it is the hope of
the author that these will be revisited in a future study.

**Iconographic Groups**

*Group 1*

Group 1 effigy funerary urns depict and are characterized by the Jaguar God of the Underworld (JGU) emerging from the gaping mouth of a saurian creature (Fig. 30).¹⁸ Ten urns feature this motif on the center of the urn body. The Group 1 complex appears almost exclusively on Cylinder Type urns, with only two exceptions. Group 1 may appear on a Vase Type urn if there is no additional decoration, such as spikes or flanges. The JGU is identifiable on the urns by the two large teeth or mouth elements that curl out onto his cheeks. The JGU appears human, with a prominent nose and modeled ears featuring large earpools, but has the swirled eyes of a deity. The JGU is more typically represented with jaguar ears, yellow and black spots, and the so-called cruller element between his eyes (Fig. 5).

In Group 1 the JGU has no distinctive jaguar characteristics, but is often accompanied by a jaguar pelt motif painted on the surface of the urn body. This figure could also be identified as GIII of the Palenque Triad. Given that the two are considered to be different manifestations of the same god and the overwhelming jaguar iconography in the complex, figures such as those in Group 1 will be identified as the JGU. The face of the JGU is shown emerging from the jaws of a creature with an upturned snout. The roof of the creature’s mouth is clearly visible and is incised with a series of curved, horizontal lines on a painted red background. Front teeth and incisors line the top of the jaw, while four to six molars are affixed to what should be understood as the back of the mouth. Group 1 creatures are sometimes missing their lower jaws. Their large swirly eyes are identical to those of the JGU who emerges from the mouth. The creature typically has large, blue eyebrows, although there are a few exceptions. Modeled sinuous lines painted red and blue often extend away from the creature’s face out toward the side of the urn body. Two of these, almost always including small, circular elements, often extend outward from the eye area.

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¹⁸ The JGU, the Waterlily Jaguar, and GIII, the second born of the Palenque Triad, are often being described as 1 in the same, or as different manifestations of the same deity (Bassie-Sweet 2008: 115-117; Thompson 1950: 11-12, 134). This project does not dwell on the technical differences of these two figures, as they likely reference the same concept.
while another pair extends from the bottom of the upper jaw. Similar lines may undulate from beneath the face of the JGU (Fig. 30). This saurian creature is a caiman or crocodile, here understood as a representation of the earth itself. Alternately, this creature could symbolize the celestial serpent from whose mouth the sun emerges (Carrasco, personal communication 2010).

Subgroup 1-A, of which there are four examples, follows the basic Group 1 pattern, but has flanges with painted feather decoration and a white-knotted cloth strip below the face of the JGU (Fig. 31). Flanges are painted white and then accented with red crescent and horizontal lines to denote feathers. These feathers are likely marking the saurian as a plumed creature, akin to the famous feathered serpent. This suggests that the creature may be a version of the serpent from whose mouth the sun emerges. When these flanges are present, the modeled sinuous elements that extend from the creature are affixed to these extensions. Large, blue volutes are attached to the side of the urn, in front of the flanges. This element is commonly found on both Group 1 and Group 2 urns. This may be a physical representation of the vitality of the creature or even the object, emphasizing that it and they are animate. The knotted band may be an abstracted cape, scarf, or chin strap belonging to the JGU. Like most of the urns in this study, small, uniform indentions are made along the rim and base of the body. The impressive lid of this urn is formed entirely by the body of a seated jaguar cub. The jaguar’s front legs are held in front of his body, claws bared, and rest on the knees of his folded legs. This is a naturalistic representation of the animal, except for the beaded collar worn around its neck. This lid is one of the most impressive of the study given its size and state of preservation.

1-A urns may also have modeled human skulls affixed to the feathered flanges (Fig. 32). This second 1-A urn shows the alternate eyebrow for the saurian creature. These tri-lobed eyebrows project forward into space from the urn body, but are painted blue like their crescent counterparts and sometimes accented with red or white. This particular urn has another interesting detail. A small, rectangular element appears to hang from the back of the creature’s throat. This detail is erratically included with the various representations of this creature. The base of this urn has two twin knotted bands, although I do not believe that this is the original base. The indentions lining the base of the urn do not match those along the rim in size. The coloring of the base is different from that of the body and the line where the two parts were

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19 The earth was also conceived of as being the back of a turtle floating in primordial waters (Carrasco 2010; Coe 1999; Fitzsimmons 2009; Freidel et al. 1993; Joralemon 1976; Miller and Taube 1993; Taube 1998.
assembled is clearly visible. However, given the similarity in composition to the other 1-A urn, it is highly probable that the original base would have had a knotted band. The final two examples are worth mentioning because of the markedly different style of representation (Fig. 33). All of the previously described elements (upturned snout, JGU face, feathered flange, and knotted band) are present, but are executed in style that is drastically different when compared with the other examples. Details of the face are represented in a sharp, angular style that departs from the rounded modeling of the seemingly favored style or representation. The knotted band is much more elaborate and features additional knots or beading, but is still present.

Group 1-B has three examples. 1-B also boasts feathered flanges, but lacks the knotted white cloth band of 1-A. Stylistically, this category has two distinct styles represented. Two impressive lids survive from 1-B and will be described with their matching urn bodies. The first style is the same as the other Group 1 urns previously discussed (Fig. 34). Like the second example from 1-A (Fig. 32), the saurian creature has overhanging eyebrows as opposed to the more common flat crescent eyebrows. It also has the additional rectangular throat element. In place of the knotted band is an element similar to the sinuous molded lines previously described as projecting from the saurian creature’s eye and mouth area. This may be a more stylized representation of the creature’s lower mandible, as it appears to connect to the corner of the upper jaw.

While the overall iconography of the urn body is the same as the others in 1-B, the second style is easily recognizable (Fig. 35). The mouth of the saurian appears more angular and is considerably larger. The upturned snout is also much smaller than the other creatures and the roof of the mouth is deemphasized. A pair of blue volutes are identical to those found on the urn from 1-A, but are much further removed from the monster’s open mouth. The JGU’s nose and eyebrows are sharper, although the later may be the result of the addition of an unusual yellow and red rectangular headdress. The round detail in the center may be a mirror, and would relate this headdress to the one worn by Huehuateotl in Group 6.

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20 As previously stated, one of the difficulties of this study is assessing which elements are original to a particular urn. Most urn bodies, when they appear to be reconstructed, tend to be reassembled fairly accurately. Bases are the more troublesome component and are often mismatched. These reconstructions and refurbishments were performed by looters or dealers before the urns entered the Museo Popol Vuh’s collection in the 1970s.
The urn’s lid features a cross-legged young Maize God seated on the top. He wears jade jewelry and an elaborate feathered headdress. He is easily identifiable as the Maize God given that he cradles an ear of corn in each of his arms. This figure is almost identical to the fragment of an urn lid rendered in a different style (Fig. 36). On this fragment the JGU sits cross-legged holding two ears of corn in his arms. He also wears the beard sometimes worn by GIII or the JGU. Each has the same V-Shaped detail on the chests, although the intact lid’s is rendered in white, while the detail is rendered in red on the fragment. The Maize God is seated above the face of a JGU/Saurian composite creature. This face has both the curved mouth elements and jaguar ears of the JGU. An opening forms the mouth of the creature while the familiar upturned snout is depicted above. This is only one of three examples of the holed lid. Subgroup 1-C shares the attributes of 1-A, but replaces the feathered flanges with ceiba spikes affixed to the side of the urn where flanges would typically be located (Fig. 37).

**Group 2**

The second iconographic class once again features the JGU emerging from the open mouth of a saurian creature. Group 2 differs from Group 1, because here the emerging JGU possesses his more characteristic jaguar ears. This group is depicted exclusively on Cylinder Type urns and each of the seven examples has feathered flanges (Fig. 38). The white, knotted band element is normally represented only when the lower jaw is missing, although this first example retains both. Each of the four Group 2 urns features the same “bell shaped” upturned snout, a detail included only in this particular iconographic class.

Group 2-A includes only one example, but it has a very interesting detail. A squat Cylinder Type urn has the characteristic Group 2 feather flange and knotted band, but also has ceiba spikes running in vertical lines up the side of the vessel and continuing on the lid (Fig. 39). The creature from which the JGU emerges is extremely abstracted or may be partially eroded. In either case, the nose and eyes of the creature are clearly visible above the head of the snarling JGU. Hanging down over each eyelid are three elements that could represent abstracted eyelashes. This detail may also be present on the eyebrow elements from a 1-B urn (Fig. 34) and a 1-A urn (Fig. 32) that are not as well preserved. They appear to be the same shape as those on the 2-A urn and may have simply been rotated outward. This tri-lobed shape was also seen on a
1-B urn lid, although it cannot be known whether or not these are related by the photograph alone (Fig. 35). The lid of the 2-A urn includes a miniature JGU face without jaguar ears, and who does not appear to be emerging from anything. This JGU wears a small blue headdress with flaps that fly out to either side.

The final sub-group, 2-B, is identified only by the absence of the knotted white band. The remaining two Group 2 urns belong to this category. A squat Cylinder Type urn depicts the regularized face of the JGU within the jaws of a stylized creature (Fig. 40). Although no eyes, eyebrows, or snout are represented, I believe that the molded pieces framing the JGU would have been understood as a mouth \textit{pars pro toto}. This abstraction suggests that the complex would have been widely understood. The lid of the vessel includes a seated JGU figure with the characteristic cruller (Fig. 41). The remainder of the headdress looks strikingly similar to the lower component of the headdress worn by the JGU holding corn in his arms on the Museo Popol Vuh urn lid fragment (Fig. 36). Only one side of the cloth strip that would have hung from the headdress survives. The seated JGU wears large jade earrspools, a jade necklace, and a white loincloth. This depiction of the JGU is particularly memorable because he has one human hand (right), one jaguar paw (left), human foot (left) and a jaguar paw/foot (right). This may designate this figure as a person in the guise of the JGU, a transformative figure, or as a symbol of duality. An Early Classic Tripod Vessel also depicts the seated JGU perched on the top of ceramic vessel lids (Fig. 42). Although this JGU does not have the same hand/paw feature, it is a representation of duality. As will be demonstrated later, the JGU has strong connections with fire and the primordial hearth and is here surrounded by watery bands.

Group 2 urns display a striking similarity to incensario stands from the Northern Lowlands, particularly those examples with the bell-shaped curled snout of the saurian creature (Fig. 38). The face of the JGU emerges from a monster with a similar snout on a censer from Palenque, in Chiapas, Mexico (Fig. 14). The highly modeled faces and sculptural quality of both the censers and the effigy funerary urns clearly demonstrate the Nebaj area’s knowledge of or contact with this sculptural tradition. Incense burner stands like those found by Smith and Kidder in their 1951 excavation are much less similar to the urns in style and iconography than those from Palenque (Fig. 26).
Group 3

Group 3 is characterized by the appearance of the Trefoil Jaguar emerging from the mouth of the creature with the upturned snout (Fig. 43). Eleven of the urns in this study belong to this group, making it second largest complexes in this study. The Group 3 complex is unique in that this particular combination of elements seems to be able to move between urn shapes freely. Six of the Group 3 urns are Cylinder Type urns, while the remaining five are Vase Type. Other groups do appear on shapes atypical of that particular complex, but n1 possess the apparent fluidity of Group 3.

The Trefoil Jaguar always appears in the form of a jaguar cub within the context of effigy funerary urns. The Trefoil Jaguar is never anthropomorphized, an important distinction made between this figure and the JGU. This figure is always seen emerging from the maws of the earth creature when it appears on an urn body. The cub is only depicted independently from this creature when it is perched on the top of an urn lid. The Trefoil Jaguar is recognizable by the tripartite element that marks the cubs’ forehead (Fig. 44). I have referred to this figure as the Trefoil Jaguar and not the so-called Waterlily Jaguar not only because this is itself an arbitrary name, but because the protrusion on the forehead cannot concretely be identified as a waterlily element (Oswaldo Chinchilla, personal communication 2010). A clearly delineated floral element is absent from this tripartite detail, something that is more clearly articulated in other known depictions of the so-called Waterlily (Fig. 8). Water-lily elements usually include the white water-lily flower, sometimes tinged with red either in a bulbous form or as a flowering bud (Bassie-Sweet 2008: 304). This detail is most likely representing some form of plant-like element, as the forehead is often an important location for the sprouting of vegetation.21 This so-called Waterlily Jaguar has been identified by Thompson (1950: 11-12, 134) as another manifestation of the night sun along with the JGU. Connections with the underworld are made given that this realm is often described as a watery place (Freidel et al. 1993). This figure also often appears with figures known as way, or spirit companions, or in scenes depicting the

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21 I am certainly not dismissing the idea that this cub may be the Waterlily Jaguar. Rather, I suggest that this figure be left open to interpretation until it is better understood. Indeed, the tripartite element on the forehead may be a more stylized version of the waterlily flower particular to this place and time, but this cannot be determined until more examples are known. Even if this is the Waterlily Jaguar, its presence in this context may have different consequences than in those from the Lowland area.
consumption of alcohol (Oswaldo Chinchilla, personal communication 2010). The Trefoil Jaguar may represent a different manifestation of this same idea, a separate deity, or a Highland interpretation of the image of the so-called Waterlily Jaguar.

As previously stated, Group 3 urns all share one major diagnostic feature, the emergence of a Trefoil Jaguar cub from the open maw of a saurian creature (Fig. 45). This creature is identical to the creature described in Group 1 with the exposed roof of the mouth. The cub is always depicted emerging head first with its two front legs extended down towards or reaching over the lower jaw of the saurian creature. Two small curvilinear lines illustrate the jaguar’s trademark furrowed brow formed by the folds of slack skin on the top of the skull (Coe 1972: 2). Large, round eyes, exposed fangs, and bared claws are all trademarks of the Trefoil Jaguar cub. Three to five claws are typically represented either in a horizontal line across the top of the paw or organized in a circular pattern around a curled paw. Claws are very prominent and are differentiated with white paint. The head and legs are always highly modeled, with the head typically being the most prominent element affixed to the urn body. As is expected, the cub is painted yellow/orange with mottled black spots. White paint is added to the head to denote the muzzle area and is also often used to denote the cub’s exposed underbelly.

The most basic Group 3 composition displays on the Trefoil Jaguar cub emerging from the saurian mouth. Only four of the eleven urns in this group are this simplistic. Subgroup 3-A, of which there are three examples, is characterized by the addition of horizontal rows of modeled human skulls lining the emergence scene. Skulls are affixed directly to the urn body in the case of Vase Type urns (Fig. 2) or are attached to the flanges of Cylinder Type urns (Fig. 46). Both Cylinder Type urns have flanges with two skulls attached to each and painted feather decoration identical to Group 1-A. The lid that accompanies this example (Fig. 46) follows very closely the description of lids given by Mary Butler Lewis in her excavation of Nebaj (Butler Lewis, n.d.). Butler Lewis described urns topped with inverted bowls sometimes featuring modeled “tiger or lion” heads, which are surely jaguars. Two parallel rows of five skulls each frame each side of the Vase urn (Fig. 2), for a total of twenty skulls total on the urn body. Six additional skulls are attached to the accompanying lid in two pairs of three. The lid of the Vase Shape urn (Fig. 47) is almost identical to that of an urn in Group 1-B (Fig. 35). Each lids features the same curious jaguar/monster hybrid with a large hole representing its open mouth. Subgroup 3-B is identical to
3-A with the exception of the modeled skulls. Each of the two urns in 3-B are Cylinder Type urns with painted feather flanges.

Subgroup 3-C describes only one urn, but it boasts a fascinating addition. Group 3-C features the typical Group 3 motif on the center of the urn body with identical full-figured representations of GIII on each side (Fig. 48). GIII is identifiable by the same god eyes and curling teeth seen in Group 1. This standing version wears a loincloth tied in two large side knots, a large headdress, and a peculiar element that seems to attach to his waist (Fig. 49). This belt or other item extends away from his body and has four rounded elements attached to the end. GIII holds this detail in his right hand on one side (Fig. 49) and his left on the other (Fig. 48). His other arm is bent with the hand positioned in the middle of the chest, so that the two GIIIs are mirror images of each other. Subgroup 3-D again features the emerging Trefoil Jaguar, but from a version of the creature usually only depicted on lids. The creature in this subgroup appears to have jaguar ears (Fig. 50), a detail previously seen on lids from 1-B (Fig. 35) and 3-A (Fig. 47). The cub’s appearance in this particular example is slightly different from the other Group 3 urns and the tripartite element is not clearly visible, although this may be a result of erosion or amateur refurbishing.

Although not from the immediate Nebaj area, the sole urn in Group 3-E reveals an interesting connection with this region (Fig. 51). This large, bulbous Vase Type urn from Chama shows a simplistic jaguar head and lightly modeled extended arms. At the crown of the jaguar’s head is a strange element that may be an interpretation of the trefoil or other type of vegetal element (Fig. 52). The fact that the front legs of the Trefoil Jaguar are always included when the figure is depicted on the urn body further supports this idea. Vertical lines of ceiba spikes flank the figure on each side. Although not from the immediate Nebaj area, this urn is a contemporaneous example and demonstrates how widespread this iconographic complex was in the northern Highlands.

**Group 4**

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22 Others have identified this as a bat, citing the unusual nose and wing-like arms.
The fourth classification group is the smallest in this survey with only two examples. Group 4 is characterized by the solitary face of the JGU face attached to the central portion of a Cylinder Type urn. The first is an anthropomorphized JGU (Fig. 53). In this urn, the JGU cruller is prominently on display, running from the ears, under the eyes, and culminating in the twisted element between the eyes. Although poorly preserved, the eyes probably once contained the swirling element particular to deities. This JGU has an “egg tooth” and a prominent beard. His headdress consists of a strip of white fabric similar to the knotted white bands of Groups 1 and 2 that weaves in between two U-shaped elements and a sprout. This sprout could be a waterlily, as it matches the description much more closely than the tripartite growth from the forehead of the Trefoil Jaguar. The sides of the white band headdress extend to the side much like that of the miniature JGU head on the lid of a Group 2-A urn (Fig. 39). Two vertical rows of ceiba spikes flank the face of the JGU in the absence of flanges.

The second Group 4 urn features a more human JGU face (Fig. 54). There is no beard, no curling mouth elements, and no jaguar ears. The only diagnostic element the figure has is the twisted cord between his eyes. The white headband with a series of vertical lines is once again very similar to the headdresses worn by the JGU on the lid of a 2-B urn (Fig. 41) and that of the JGU clutching ears of corn on a lid fragment (Fig. 36). Stylized hair denoted by incised vertical lines is seen coming from beneath the headband and resting on the forehead. A twisted cord or necklace can be seen hanging below the neck of the JGU. Feathered flanges line the sides of the urn. This is unusual considering that these flanges only appear when a figure is shown emerging from another on the urn body. It is difficult to determine whether or not a second figure with an open mouth was originally included.

Group 5

Group 5 urns are any urns that feature portrayals of jaguars. That is, a jaguar without a trefoil or any other attributes immediately associated with deities such as god eyes or anthropomorphic forms. These jaguars may be full-figured representations or solitary heads. Seven urns depict these “naturalistic” jaguars. Naturalistic is used hesitantly as these jaguar figures do sometimes wear clothing or seem to be performing animated gestures. These jaguars appear exclusively on Vase Shape urns, with the exception of one Square Shape.
5-A urns feature full-figured jaguars typically set against a background painted with the black and yellow spots of the jaguar. The illustrated example is missing its modeled jaguar figure, but is a beautiful example of the additional painted decoration applied directly to the urn body (Fig. 55). It is obvious that the full-figured jaguar once dominated the urn body and was either wearing a loincloth or had a large phallus. This motif of the solitary full-figured jaguar with arms either hanging down by its side or extended out and upward is found on five other urns. Three of these urns are of the Squat Bulbous Vase Type and have identical imagery to the larger 5-A Vase Type urns. All three have a style that is either not from the Nebaj region, a result of a different workshop, or that is not contemporaneous (Fig. 56). The motif of the standing jaguar is frequently seen on incensario stands from the Highland region. An example from the area surrounding Chichicastenango is strikingly similar to this class of Nebaj urns (Fig. 15). It too features a full-figured jaguar with either a loincloth or phallus falling between its legs. Spikes line the side of the censer in much the same way as effigy funerary urns.

A second way to portray the full-figured jaguar is seen on a 5-B urn with particularly well-preserved paint (Fig. 57). A jaguar wearing a red “sacrificial” scarf is seen dancing in front of a jaguar pelt background. This scarf may also be worn by the Trefoil Jaguar and the so-called Waterlily Jaguar (Miller and Taube 1993: 105). On this urn it appears that he is wearing a red loincloth, but other examples may indeed include a phallus. The dancing jaguar motif appears again on a Square Type urn (Fig. 58). Two loincloth-wearing jaguars dance together against an undecorated background. One of the modeled paws of the jaguars even extends over the edge of the urn surface where the artist may have run out of room on the body. On top of the low, beveled lid sits a jaguar cub. There is no noticeable tripartite mark on his forehead and he is unclothed.

Sub-group 5-C urns depict a standing jaguar wearing a red loincloth and/ a red shawl, who is flanked by human skulls. This combination may appear on both a Vase Type (Fig. 59) and Cylinder Type urn (Fig. 60). The Vase Type urn features a large, solitary jaguar on an urn body painted entirely in the yellow and black jaguar pelt motif. On either side of the jaguar are human skulls affixed to vertical lines. These expanses of paint and the skulls seem to reference the flanges of Cylinder Type urns. The lid of the Vase Type urn features a large jaguar cub

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23 Dancing is communicated by the gesture of holding the arms in opposite directions.
sprawled across the top. The Cylinder Type urn appears to have even more complex imagery. In the center of the body a jaguar stands in between four skulls. On either side of this scene are two black figures wearing white loincloths and unusual headdresses. Perhaps these figures were conceived of as some type of triad even when they are not identical. Behind these figures are once again, vertical lines of ceiba spikes. This pairing of three figures of central scenes happens only three other times, most notably with the Old God, Huehueteotl.

*Group 6*

The old Aztec god of the hearth, Huehueteotl, defines the sixth group of iconographic complexes. Huehueteotl has a sagging, wrinkled face, missing teeth, and is often a hunchback (Miller and Taube 1993: 189). An incensario from Oaxaca shows him with all of these features (Fig. 6). There are four examples of urns with his image belonging to Group 6. Two urns feature full-figured, standing Huehueteotls. The first urn, a Square Type urn, shows the old god clutching a staff in his right hand (Fig. 61). His missing teeth, sagging cheeks, and wrinkled forehead clearly identify him as an aged deity.²⁴ Huehueteotl wears an elaborate beaded necklace, a loincloth tied at his sides, and a scarf or band of cloth draped over his left arm. The second urn with a full-figured Huehueteotl features not one, but three depictions of the god (Fig. 62). All three are identical black figures with sagging mouths and eye areas. Cheekbones are highlighted in white to accentuate the area and emphasize his recessed mouth area. Huehueteotl wears a high red and white loincloth that wraps all the way up to the middle of his torso. He wears white beaded jewelry and a white, yellow, and red headdress. This triad of Huehueteotls is especially significant. As the old god of the hearth, Huehueteotl here embodies the three individual primordial hearth-stones (Fig. 63).

The second group of Huehueteotls (6-A) emerge from the mouths of either a jaguar or saurian creature. A large Cylinder Type urn depicts the face of Huehueteotl in modeled high relief (Fig. 64). His wrinkled face and missing teeth are clearly visible. Two of the knotted bands discussed in the earlier groups are visible below his pointed chin. Two lines come from his mouth and appear to drape over his chin. This could indicate breath, smoke, saliva, or any

²⁴ Huehueteotl is traditionally shown in human form, without god eyes. This does not mean that this deity is misidentified; rather this might be a different or unknown manifestation version or manifestation of Huehueteotl.
number of things. Only one other figure is represented with similar elements coming from the mouth. The Trefoil Jaguar cub that sits on a solitary lid has two lines spilling from his mouth and connecting to the flower or know element on his chest (Fig. 65). Perhaps the elements coming from Huehueteotl’s mouth connect to the knotted bands depicted below his chin. The thickness of the lines emanating from his mouth appears to match that of the lines forming the elaborate knots.

Above Huehueteotl’s face is a projecting element that recalls the lobed eyebrows or tentacle eyelids from earlier groups. Small circles are fixed to the bottom of this element, but it is not clear exactly what it represents. Positioned over this element is the toothy upper jaw of a jaguar. One of the jaguar’s abstracted eyes is visible above the edge of the modeled projection in the form of single circle within an arched line. On each side of the emerging old god are two standing human figures wearing some sort of feathered or foliated headdress (Fig. 66). Like all other full figured representations, the figures wear a form of beaded jewelry and a loincloth. They stand with their arms extended out to the side with pursed lips and closed eyes. It is unclear who these figures are, as they lack any sort of typical godly characteristics. Their closed eyes may identify them as dead, perhaps even ancestral figures. Simple trefoil shapes decorate the badly eroded flanges. The second example shows Huehueteotl emerging from the standard saurian creature with the upturned snout (Fig. 67). However, this version of the saurian includes a pair of human ears with earspools. There are only three instances where this creature may possibly be some sort of composite. I have previously described the composite saurian-jaguar creatures depicted on a Group 3-D urn (Fig. 50) and on lids with openings, as in a Group 3-A example (Fig. 47) and in Group 1-B (Fig. 35). I make no attempt to analyze these composite creatures at this time, as there are too few samples to make a significant impact on our understanding of this genre.

*Group 7*

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25 This Waterlily Jaguar is seated above a depiction of the JGU complete with jaguar ears and the cruller element. The cub also appears to wear some sort of cloth over his head, the ends of which extend down behind his ears to rest on the shoulders. This could be the same red scarf that the jaguars often wear around their necks.
The seventh and final group is distinguished by the appearance of the ubiquitous Maya Maize God. A total of eight urns are labeled as Group 7 examples. Full-figured representations of the Maize God are almost always found on Vase Type urns, while scenes of emergence on illustrated on both Cylinder and Square Type urns. The most basic depiction of the deity is found on two Cylinder Type urns. The Maize God’s face is shown on the center of the urn body, unaccompanied by any extended decoration (Fig. 68). In each case, three small maize cobs sprout from his head and the Maize God wears heavy jewelry, which we may assume to be worked from jade or other green stone, and a simplistic, undecorated white headband.

Sub-group 7-A urns, of which there are two examples, also represent a solitary Maize God, although in this grouping they are full-figured depictions (Fig. 69). The Maize God is represented with a black body, similar to that of Huehuetotl, but his face has been painted entirely in orange. Like the bust portraits, he wears a large jade necklace and earrings, along with jade bracelets and anklets. He also wears a more elaborate headdress, complete with jade beading and two bands of feathers or paper that protrude at right angles from his head. Both 7-A urns retain their lids. The example illustrated here includes a second portrait of the Maize God identical to that found on the urn lid, now with ceiba spikes taking the place of his body. The second example features a jaguar cub sprawled across the top.

Sub-group 7-B also boasts a full-figured representation of the young Maize God. One example is on a Cylinder Type urn (Fig. 70), an unusual shape/imagery combination. The Maize God stands wearing all of his usual accoutrements along with a short, feathered cape and a long loincloth. In each of his hands he clutches what may be rattles or deer antlers for making music, or some type of vegetation. Four molded Trefoil Jaguar heads flank the god in pairs of two, a position normally reserved for human skulls. The second 7-B urn is Vase Type is almost identical to this example. It lacks only the feathered cape and four Trefoil Jaguar heads.

The third sub-group, 7-C features the face of the Maize God emerging from the mouth of a raptorial bird, perhaps an eagle or representation of the Principle Bird Deity (Fig. 71). The background of this urn is painted in bright red, accentuating the blue and white feathers of the bird. Broken flanges probably once had painted feathers similar to the examples discussed earlier in this chapter. A curious fragment of a white rope or other twisted element is visible to the left of the Maize God’s face. It is unclear whether this element extended down below the two faces, as the remainder may have broken off long ago.
Sub-group 7-D also displays the face of the Maize God in a state of emergence. The head of the Maize God, marked with two white circles on his forehead, is shown coming from the mouth of the JGU (Fig. 72). The JGU has his characteristic swirled deity eyes and jaguar ears. Much of the JGU’s mouth has been destroyed. A strange three-pronged element is clearly visible between his eyes. This may have some connection to the tripartite element on the forehead of the Trefoil Jaguar (Fig. 44), but why it would be depicted with the JGU is unclear. Two additional JGU faces were once present on the now fragmented flanges. The fragments of these faces clearly show the curling mouth element previously seen on all JGU examples. A second figure emerges from or rests on the top of the head of the central JGU. Although the head has been broken, the figure wears a loincloth clearly related to that of the full-figured Maize God from 7-A. Both have thick red expanses of cloth covering their mid-sections and large knots tied above the hips. The broken figure wears a thick collar necklace that was likely painted white to match his bracelets and anklet. Two ambiguous vegetative stalks are connected to the eyebrows of the JGU below, framing the kneeling figure. The jaguar has long been associated with maize and vegetation in this area of the Maya world, as is evidence by a Late Pre-Classic stone sculpture of a seated jaguar with maize growing from its head from the Southern Coast of Guatemala (Fig. 73). A small Early Classic urn from La Lagunita in the Department of Quiche presents a familiar sight (Fig. 74). A snarling jaguar dominates the lid of the ceramic funerary urn. A maize cob or other vegetal element sprouts from between his ears.

Style

Two distinct styles are easily discernable in this corpus of effigy funerary urns. Dominating the majority of urn samples is the highly modeled emergence scene frequently depicted on Cylinder Type urns (Fig. 38). The sculptural quality of these vessels is almost surely a result of contact with the Northern Lowlands, perhaps even a specific communication with the Palenque region in Chiapas, Mexico. The second dominant style is characterized by a more simplistic representation of full-figured deities or animals on Vase Type urns (Fig. 57). These urns rely heavily on extended painted decoration on the urn body, as opposed to the “busier” scenes of sculptural emergence. Other stylistic variations such as the flatter style of two Group 1-
A urns may have been produced at a site neighboring Nebaj, but are not in line with the style of this area over any period of time (Fig. 33).

I propose that rather than being the result of different workshops or aesthetic preferences of different sites, these two primary styles: the Sculptural Censer Style fond on Cylinder Type urns and the Minimal Vase Style typically found on Vase Type urns, are separated temporally. The Sculptural Censer Style’s relationship with the style of Late Classic Palenque incensarios would place this type of urn in the Late Classic period. Effigy funerary urns produced in this style share not only form and iconographic organization with incensarios from this region, but often share almost identical features. This type of representation was eventually abandoned for the Minimal Vase Style in the Terminal Classic to early Post Classic period. As was described in the first chapter, the ceramic urns of the Highlands became more simplistic and abstract as the region progressed into the Post-Classic period. The appearance of the incensarios excavated by Smith and Kidder in 1951 support this claim (Fig. 26-27). These Post-Classic period ceramics are neither as detailed, nor as sophisticated as the Sculptural Censer Style urns. Additionally, the descriptions that Mary Butler Lewis (n.d.) provided for the early Post-Classic urns she excavated in Nebaj seem correspond to the Minimal Vase Style. She described small, modeled “lion” heads accentuated with “yellow and black mottled paint” (Butler Lewis n.d.). This is surely describing urns decorated in the Minimal Vase Style, which as previously stated, leaves much of the surface of the urn body open for additional painted decoration (Fig. 55).

Although complex, the iconography represented on effigy funerary urns is extremely consistent. It has been demonstrated that although the organization of the various iconographic elements varies, distinct patterns can be detected. Three figures frequently emerge from the mouth of a saurian creature: the JGU represented without distinct jaguar features (Group 1), the JGU with jaguar ears (Group 2), and the Trefoil Jaguar cub (Group 3). This pattern occurs with the most frequency on Cylinder Type urns and is rendered in the Sculptural Censer Style. The creatures from which these deities emerge is highly stylized or even abstracted to the point where it becomes a framing device and is not the focus of this imagery. These three jaguar figures appear to be interchangeable, suggesting that they are manifestations of the same larger idea. All are often accompanied by additional decoration in the form of skulls, knotted white bands, spikes, and feathered flanges. These additional elements may also be added to representations of animal jaguars (Group 5), suggesting that the animal form is closely related to the deified
figures. Conversely, Huehueteotl and the Maize God are never accompanied by skulls or feathers. These elements are only appropriate with the JGU or Trefoil Jaguar. If the Maize God is represented alongside one of these figures, he is separated and placed on the lid (Fig. 35). Or for example, if the Maize God appears on the urn body, skulls would be replaced with jaguar heads as in Group 7-B (Fig. 70).

In this chapter, I have organized the urns iconographically into seven complexes and have further refined these categories with the addition of sub-groups. The organization of the various deities and other elements of the effigy funerary urn iconographic complex may represent an evolved version of the Mask Flange Iconographic Complex (Carrasco 2005) tailored to meet the needs of this particular genre. The frequent depiction of deities emerging from the mouth of a monster or other deity often flanked by flanges or side decoration emulating flanges echoes the basic composition found in the Mask Flange Iconographic Complex. In Chapter Three, this complex iconography will be used in conjunction with the reports of Butler Lewis and Highland Maya mythology to reconstruct the ritual and conceptual function of effigy funerary urns. This chapter will explicate why this particular iconographic complex is appropriate in this context and how it informs the sacred cycle of transformation believed to transpire within the effigy funerary urns themselves.
CHAPTER THREE
RITUAL FUNCTION

The previous two chapters have focused on defining and categorizing the effigy funerary urn genre. They have provided the foundation for this chapter, which explores the relationship between urn iconography and function. A clearer understanding of effigy funerary urns lies in this intersection. This chapter explores the system of ideas that the urns reference and explicates how they are expressed in this particular genre. I demonstrate that urn iconography makes explicit the analogy that exists between eschatology, the life cycle of maize, and the rebirth of the Maize God.

I reveal how the iconographic complex discussed in the previous chapter reflects the cycle believed to take place within the urn, one shared by maize, the Maize God, and humans. The imagery effectively marks the urns as a location for sprouting or rebirth in much the same way that architectural sculpture marks mortuary structures. Effigy funerary urns, although they belong to a different class of objects, are conceptually linked to temples (mortuary structures), houses, and incensarios. Effigy funerary urns condense architectural tombs into a single ceramic vessel while preserving tomb symbolism.

I first review the life cycle of the Maize God and the iconography of his birth as this is the larger narrative that informs the imagery of effigy funerary urns and iconographically similar objects. In discussing this deity, I clarify how the life cycle of humans is understood to be parallel to that of maize, thus establishing the connection between the deceased inside of the urns and the myth of the Maize God. I refer the Popol Vuh to emphasize the perceived relationship between humans and maize. I then address the urns’ pervasive jaguar imagery to stress the Jaguar God of the Underworld’s relationship with fire and explore why his image is appropriate in this context. As was demonstrated, the figure of the jaguar is by far the most dominant element of the effigy funerary urn iconographic complex and requires a more extensive discussion. I conclude by explaining how all of the individual elements of the complex work together to inform the ritual use and function of the effigy funerary urn genre.

“Mere food was their flesh.”
Scholars often use the *Popol Vuh*, the celebrated sixteenth-century K’iche’ creation narrative, to explain imagery dating to early as the Preclassic period. While this early imagery does support the idea that the mythological narrative recorded in the book has ancient roots, it is nevertheless problematic to apply a sixteenth-century text to monuments and objects that predate it by a millennium and are from a different area of the Maya world. Conversely, the effigy funerary urns are much closer in time and location to the *Popol Vuh*. Chichicastenango, the Highland town from which the manuscript was recovered, is located little over twenty miles from present day Nebaj.

The *Popol Vuh* records the birth of Maize and the creation of people to illustrate the perceived parallel between the life cycles of maize and humans. The story of the Hero Twins, Hunahpu and Xbalanque, is a clear metaphor for this cycle, as they themselves are the embodiment of maize (Braakhuis 2009; Carrasco 2005, 2010; Taube 1985). Frequent references to maize are made throughout their tale and will be explicated below. A refined comprehension of the connection between maize and humans is essential to fully understanding the relationship between effigy funerary urn iconography and function.

The *Popol Vuh* tells us that humans and maize are essentially one and the same. In the third and final attempt to create people, maize found by animals in Paxil/Cayala Mountain is used to form human flesh and bone.

The yellow ears of maize and the white ears of maize were then ground fine with nine grindings by Xmucane. Food entered their flesh, along with water to give them strength. Thus was created the fatness of their arms. The yellowness of humanity came to be when they were made by they who are called She Who Has Borne Children and He Who Has Begotten Sons, by Sovereign and Quetzal Serpent.

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26 The *Popol Vuh*, literally “Council Book,” was recorded by anonymous K’iche’ Maya in the middle of the sixteenth-century. Sometime between 1701 and 1703 a Spanish friar name Francisco Ximénez made the only surviving copy of the K’iche’ manuscript and translated it into Spanish. In addition to recording the gods’ creation of people and the adventures of the Hero twins discussed in this chapter, the book includes the founding and history of the K’iche’ kingdom.

27 A fox, coyote, parakeet, and raven came to the creators, who were searching for the ingredients to make human bodies, and told them of the yellow and white corn that they had found growing at Paxil, “broken, split, or cleft” and Cayala, “bitter or stagnant water.” Animals often act as messengers in Mesoamerican myth. The two failed prior creatures were of mud people and wood people.

28 Xmucane is the female half of the primordial creator couple in the *Popol Vuh*, and grandmother of the Hero Twins.
Thus their frame and shape were given expression by our first Mother and our first Father. Their flesh was merely yellow ears of maize and white ears of maize. Mere food were the legs and arms of humanity, of our first fathers. And so there were four who were made, and mere food was their flesh (Christenson 2003: 195).

This passage clearly states that people, and thus the bones interred in funerary urns, are composed of maize or are equivalent to maize. Maize dough, thickened by the water used to rinse Xmucane’s hands for the formation of grease, was used to model the human form, which was then enlivened by utterance from the creators. Allen Christenson points out that maize is typically ground only two to four times, and that the nine grindings may be equitable to the nine months of gestation, emphasizing the associations between fertility, birth, and maize processes so that humans were truly born of maize (Christenson 2003: 195), or to the importance of the number nine in Maya culture.

Karen Bassie-Sweet has addressed the problem that, although the Popol Vuh recounts the creation of humanity, it does not account for the origin of the maize from which humans were themselves formed (2002). Bassie-Sweet interprets Paxil or “Split Place,” as a cave within a mountain (2002: 6-7). In a later publication she equates Paxil mountain with an actual location, Peña Blanca, a limestone mountain located near the Grijalva River in the northwestern Guatemalan Highlands (Bassie-Sweet 2008: 262).29 She proposes that the maize collected by the animals in the Popol Vuh sprouted from the remains of Bone Woman, the wife of Hun Hunahpu once again equating bones to maize.30 Bassie-Sweet’s identification of the actual of the Paxil along with other locations and personifications supports the idea that much of the mythology recounted in the Popol Vuh was mapped out over Highland geography. Nebaj is centrally located within this mythologically imbued landscape.

The observations of Robert Carlsen and Martin Prechtel make clear the associations between bones and maize. Carlsen and Prechtel recount how the Atitecos of Santiago Atitlan on

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29 Bassie-Sweet mentions that the Mam also believe that the first corn came from Peña Blanca (2008: 262).
30 Nothing is recorded about the life of Bone Woman, only that she died before her husband and his brother, Seven Hunahpu, descended to Xibalba to play the ballgame with the lords of the underworld. Bassie-Sweet links her death to this ballgame and suggests that Bone Woman’s remains were buried in a cave in proximity to the ball court (2002: 6-7). Bone Woman is later referred to by Bassie-Sweet as Lady Bone Water/Ixik (2008). She is called Xbaquiyalo, “Lady Bone Water,” by Allen Christenson (2003) and Egret Woman by Dennis Tedlock (1996). Hun Hunahpu was the son of Xmucane, and the father of One Batz and One Chouen, and the Hero Twins, Hunahpu and Xbalanque.
Lago Atitlan in Highland Guatemala refer to maize seeds as *muk*, “interred ones,” or *jolooma*, “little skulls” (1991: 28). These “little skulls” are planted in the darkness of earthen mounds to be reborn as maize plants. In a similar manner, Allen Christenson notes that the K’iche’ word used for a single ear of corn in the *Popol Vuh* is *wi’,* “head,” and that the Maya think of ears of maize as equivalent to heads (2003: 137). The death terminology used to refer to maize seeds indicates that for the Atitecos, the first step of life (agricultural or otherwise) is death, when the seed is essentially interred in the ground. When maize germinates and sprouts it is then referred to as *tak ai’,* or “little children” (Carlsen and Prechtel 1991: 28). These “little children” are thought to be returning in the form of their ancestors, the maize plant that produced the seed used for planting (Carlsen and Prechtel 1991: 28). This process is understood as a manifestation of the larger concept of *Jaloj-K’exoj*, which is defined by Carlsen and Prechtel as “… a process of transformation, renewal in an ancestral form, and that is founded on an observational understanding of the vegetational cycle” (1991: 30). *Jaloj-K’exoj* is not a replication or reincarnation of the ancestor (maize seed), but is a rebirth inspired by the core ideas of the original.

The lives of Hunahpu and Xbalanque are analogous to that of the ears of maize that plant in the center of the home of their grandmother, Xmucane. Although not explicitly stated, the maize is planted where the hearth would traditionally be located. Xmucane’s house, like all Maya houses, is essentially a microcosm of the universe, with the four corners representing the points of the cardinal directions and the hearth being the world center (Carrasco and Hull 2002). The dead are also often buried beneath the floor of the house, revealing yet another connection between humans and maize. The Twins plant the maize before they descend to Xibalba as a means of indicating their fate to the Xmucane. The Twins state:

“Surely we must go, our grandmother. But first we will advise you. This is the sign of our word that we will leave behind. Each of us shall first plan an ear of unripe maize in the

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31 The term “Atitecos” in this article refers to *Costumbristas*, or “followers of the old customs.” “Atiteco” is another name for the residents of Santiago Atitlan, Guatemala. Carlsen and Prechtel studied the Tzutujil Maya Atitecos and the terms referenced in this article are all from the Tzutujil language.

32 Likewise, when infants are born it is sometimes said that, “he/she sprouted,” or “he returned.” This is analogous to maize, whose sprouting is referred to as *xlexa*, “his face came out.” As is believed with maize, a person’s spiritual essence is revitalized in their ancestors, most specially grandchildren (Carlsen and Prechtel 1991: 28-29).

33 For an in-depth discussion of *Jaloj K’exoj* and lineage, please refer to p28-30 of the same article.
center of the house. If they dry up, this is a sign of our death. ‘They have died,’ you will say when they dry up. If then they sprout again, ‘They are alive,’ you will say, our grandmother and our mother. This is the sign of our word that is left with you,” they said (Christenson 2003: 160).

The Twins travel to Xibalba, where they excel in a number of trials set forth by the Xibalbans. Knowing that they will eventually be killed, the twins jump willingly into a *chomib'al*, or “pit oven.” Before doing so, they leave instructions that their bones are to be ground, “upon the face of a stone like finely ground maize flour” (Christenson 2003: 176). When they died in the hearth of Xibalba, the corn they left in their grandmother’s house dried up and she knew they were dead. In two separate scenes of the story, water is referenced as an important requirement for the regeneration or growth of maize.

After their bones have been ground the twins’ remains are thrown into a river, from which they emerge five days later as fish people. A second reference to the generative power of water is found when the twins’ grandmother weeps over the dead maize left by her grandsons. Christenson and Rafael Girard note that the K’iche’ may have associated the tears of Xmucane with revitalizing rain (Christenson 2003: 188; Girard 1995: 162-163). This idea of tears as analogous to life-giving rain may be seen on an Early Classic period tripod vessel (Fig. 75). On Kerr Vessel 6547, commonly referred to as the “Berlin Tripod,” mourners weep and cry at the funeral of a ruler or other elite, who on the other side of the cylindrical vessel is seen sprouting into a tree along with two other ancestors.³⁴ The bones of the deceased are buried at the base of a pyramidal structure and are the location from which the ruler is reborn as vegetation, once again emphasizing the idea of bones as seeds. His body is upturned as his torso and legs form a tree and his fingers grow into sinuous roots. The imagery on this vessel is a literal depiction of the metaphor made between humans and plants. The relationship between the Hero Twins, humans, and maize continues to be expressed within highland Maya communities. A traditional planting story told by a Tz’utujil Maya from Santiago Atitlan describes how a special type of

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³⁴ Kerr vessels and their corresponding identification numbers refer to objects photographed by Justin Kerr for the Maya Vase Database. Titles will be abbreviated in this paper, e.g. Kerr vessel 1184 is also referred to as K1184. Go to http://www.famsi.org/research/kerr/ to view the database. Also, see Patricia Mcanany (2005) for a discussion of the rebirth of ancestors as vegetation.
maize seed called yo’x, “twins,” is planted in the center of a maize field in a hole that is referred to as the rumuxux, “navel” (Christenson 2001: 117). The maize cobs are first burned and then buried so that they may be reborn and used to make more maize (Christenson 2001: 117). This is analogous to when the Hero Twins are burned in the pit oven of Xibalba.

In Mesoamerican myth, birth and transformation often take place in dark, heated spaces, the most notable of which is the birth of the Maize God, whose life and death are understood through a comparison with that of maize (Carrasco 2005, 2010). Ceramic vase painting provides one of the best sources for understanding the requirements and iconographic of this mythical rebirth. Carrasco has noted the significance of the black background seen on vases such as K1184 (Fig. 76) and K688 (Fig. 77) (Carrasco 2005: 146-147; Carrasco 2010: 617-618). Both vases show the Maize God, here depicted with jaguar attributes, at the moment of his birth from the earth. Carrasco has noted that the texts of each vessel records the location of the birth as being in or on top of a mountain and suggests that the point of emergence was from a cave (Carrasco 2010: 618, 620). K1184 illustrates this birth in darkness as the young Maize God rests on an offering plate within the jaws of the portal monster, symbolic of a cave or other entrance to the earth (Carrasco 2005: 146-147; Carrasco 2010: 618-619). The offering plate itself rests on its own foliated skull, enforcing the analogy made between maize seed and bone. On K1892, the “Resurrection Plate,” the darkness associated with birth here is indicated not with a black background, but by placing the skull from which the Maize God is born within the body of a turtle (Fig. 78). The flaming skull’s eye is formed by the ak’bal, or “darkness” sign, emphasizing the dark location of the sprouting of maize (Carrasco 2010: 620). The turtle is known to be symbolic of the world, once again emphasizing the Maize God’s birth from the earth (Carrasco 2010: 621; Taube 1998: 441). The world turtle floats in the waters of the primordial sea here suggested by the waterlilies that grow at the bottom of the plate. Water is once again shown as a life-giving force as the figure on the Maize God’s right (possibly a representation of one of the Hero Twins) pours water into the cleft in the turtle’s back.

The text of K688 gives a very specific location for this birth at the “Naah Jo’ Chaan,” or “First Five Sky” (Carrasco 2010: 618). This the same name mentioned in Quirigua Stela C as the site of one of the three cosmic hearth stones and that which provided a model for the Temple of

the Cross at Palenque (Carrasco 2010: 618; Freidel et al. 1993). These examples show that the basic structure of the myth of the Maize God was well understood over a large area during the Late Classic and Colonial periods and would have been very familiar to the Terminal Classic Ixil populations of the Nebaj region.

Maize and humans, now understood to lead parallel lives, require heat, darkness, and water during their birth/rebirth. Heat is supplied for Hunahpu and Xbalanque when they jump into the hearth of Xibalba and for their maize planted in the hearth’s traditional location in the center of Xmucane’s house. Heat is supplied for maize seed when it receives the heat of the sun for the Maize God in the form of censers (K688) or torches (K1892). Darkness envelops the Hero Twins as they descend into Xibalba and when they bury the ears of maize in their grandmother’s floor. Maize seeds or “little skulls,” are buried in the darkness of earth during planting, just as the Maize God before he sprouts. The bones of the deceased on the Berlin Tripod (Fig. 75) are shown buried beneath a pyramidal structure before they sprout out of the darkness of the tomb. The water of the river helps to regenerate the ground bones of Hunahpu and Xbalanque when the tears of Xmucane may be said to assist in the re-growth of the Hero Twin’s ears of maize. Those same tears are provided by the mourners on the Berlin Tripod. It is common sense that water is needed in the form of rain or irrigation in order for maize plants to germinate and sprout. Water is explicitly depicted in the form of water lilies on both K1184 and the Resurrection Plate and additionally as being poured from a water jar from one of the attendants on the Resurrection Plate.

Heat, darkness, and water, are also required for the regeneration of the human body, whose lifecycle is parallel to that of maize. Girard has noted that pyramidal structures, planting mounds, and funeral mounds are all referred to by the same term in the Ch’orti’ language, stating that each of these locations is conceptually linked given that the corpse is likened to maize seed (1995: 1992). Carrasco has shown that mountains and the structures that mimic them are often marked as places of emergence or locations for sprouting by the Mask Flange Iconographic Complex (2005; See also Linda Schele 1998). This same iconography is repeated on incensarios, leading Carrasco to conclude that these too are conceptually linked. Carrasco and Kerry M. Hull (2002) have elsewhere demonstrated that tombs and houses also belong to this larger ideological category. Thus, houses, tombs, funeral mounds, planting mounds, and incensarios all operate within a larger conceptual class separate from their actual physical functions. Effigy funerary
urns also participate within this larger system of representation. The iconography and organization of the various elements included in the complex suggest that, like the place and objects discussed above, effigy funerary urns are marked as locations for sprouting or regeneration.

We may now begin to understand the bodies inside of urns within the context of the life-cycle of maize. They have died and their bones, or seeds, have been buried, or planted, in the darkness of the urn, just as maize seeds are planted in a field. Urns may also be compared to the cooking pots placed over the heat of the three-stone hearth in the homes of the Maya. If the dead require all of the factors previously discussed in order to fully complete their life cycle, how do urns meet these requirements? In the following section I will show that effigy funerary urns condense the multitude of ideas and concepts often expressed through the combination of burial structure, architectural decoration, and funerary goods into a single ceramic vessel. To do so, I demonstrate how the iconographic complex discussed in the previous chapter informs and facilitates the urns’ conceptual and physical function. The bodies placed inside of the urns are the “little seeds” and are themselves composed of maize. They have been interred in the darkness of the vessel and now require heat and water for germination, acting alongside the Maize God in the mythical cycle of death and re-birth.

**Aiding the Dead: Heat and Water**

The effigy funerary urn is not simply a receptacle for the remains of the deceased. If simple burial was the primary concern, urns would not boast the elaborate decoration discussed in Chapter Two. I have previously noted the effigy funerary urn’s iconographic and formal similarity to incensario stands from both the Lowland and Highland regions. The perceived relationship between censer, tomb, and urn is critical to understanding the function of the urns and their role in mortuary ritual. Group 7 urns, those with representations of the Maize God, explicitly depict the primary concept embodied by the urns. As was previously discussed, this group portrays the Maize God re-born, after his emergence from the hearth (7, 7-C, and 7-D) and at the very moment of his sprouting from the cleft, represented by the gaping maws of a second deity (Groups 7-A and 7-B). But, Group 7 is just one of seven expressions of the iconographic complex. How then are the ideas of heat, water, and darkness represented?
Darkness, one of the requirements needed for the mythical cycle of transformation is supplied not only by the actual darkness created by joining urn vessel and lid, but by suggesting that the deceased is inside of the saurian creature so often depicted on the face of the urn body. I have shown that one of the primary modes of representation on effigy funerary urns is the emergence of one deity from the mouth of another. This is evident in Groups 1-3, Group 6-A, Group 7-A, and Group 7-B. Scenes of emergence, whether from the mouth of the saurian or a jaguar, are represented on sixty percent of the fifty-five urns included in the present study. These emergence scenes may mark the entire urn body as an extension of the open-mouthed deity. This is not to say that the body is literally the belly of the beast, but that the bones inside occupy the same space as the emerging deity. I have previously stated that the saurian creature is a representation of the earth crocodile, or possibly the plumed serpent from whose mouth the sun emerges. Karl Taube has made a compelling argument demonstrating that architectural representations of the maw of the earth monster held, or were understood to hold, the three stones of the primordial hearth (Taube 1998: 437-440). He states that the turtle, also understood as a representation of the earth, is identified with the hearth, noting that both the turtle and the hearth embody the same concept of centrality (Taube 1998: 441). Therefore, by being placed on the inside of this object marked as a location of centrality, the deceased is situated at the center of a microcosm created by the vessel itself.

Fire: Heated Jaguars

One of the most striking features of the iconographic complex of effigy funerary urns is the figure of the jaguar, here represented in the form of an animal, the Jaguar God of the Underworld (JGU), and the Trefoil Jaguar. These three types of jaguar entities may well be considered one and the same or at least different manifestations of the same idea, as they seem to be readily substituted for one another. The JGU has been described as the sun in its night aspect,

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36 Although not addressed in this paper, jaguar imagery was pervasive in the art of Pre-Columbian America. The jaguar has long been a popular subject in the art of Pre-Columbian cultures. Its manifestation as a deity stems from the Maya’s observation of the animal’s ability to move between the realms: the earth, sky, water, and underworld (caves). Jaguar imagery was commonly used in association with royalty and shamanism. See Elizabeth P. Benson (1998) for more information. For more on jaguar and feline symbolism in the Americas see Nicholas J. Saunders (1998).
as a god of warfare, and as the personification of a celestial body and is understood as one of the manifestations of GII of the Palenque Triad (Bassie-Sweet 2008; Chinchilla Mazariegos 2003; Coe 1973; Thompson 1970). David Stuart first suggested that the JGU is associated with fire, citing the god’s frequent association with fire-drilling rituals and appearance on ritual incense burners as evidence of this relationship (Stuart 1998: 408). Additionally, Michael Carrasco has argued that San Antonio, the Ch’orti God of Fire and the Hearth, is a manifestation of GIII/JGU further connecting this deity with heat and fire related ritual (Carrasco 2005: 262-263). Prudence Rice also discusses the Jaguar God’s association with fire, observing that the image of the Jaguar God of the Underworld is among the most consistent on Late Classic Maya censers (Fig. 14) (Rice 1999: 36). As the embodiment of fire, the JGU’s presence on effigy funerary urns symbolically surrounds the deceased with heat.

To better understand the JGU’s association with fire, we must first become familiar with fire and its ritual use. Stuart’s discussion of the och k’ahk’ tumukil, the “fire entered his/her tomb” ritual, is understood in relation to the och k’ahk’, or “fire entering” ritual, a ceremony frequently mentioned in architectural dedication inscriptions (Stuart 1998: 384-393). On one level, “fire-entering” rituals were meant to dedicate newly constructed structures, giving life to the space and re-enforcing its cosmological symbolism (Stuart 1998: 395). Like the house or temple entering ritual, the tomb entering ritual was a dedicatory rite, although the inscriptions recording tomb entering rituals suggest that they were also performed after the individual’s interment (Stuart 1998: 407-408). If the original, “fire entered his house,” ceremonies were meant to dedicate and energize new structures, then the tomb rituals may have been understood as somehow renewing or reinvigorating the tombs and the dead therein. These actions would replenish or revitalize power that had been originally conferred during burial. Och k’ahk’ tumukil rituals may have also been performed to create the heat necessary for the re-birth or regeneration of the deceased interred within the tomb, rather than just dedicating the space. It is not surprising that fire is the element called upon to give life or restore power; after all, it is fire that provides

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37 Rice notes in her article that Early Classic incense burners typically depicted GI, another member of the Palenque Triad. Late Classic Censers depicting jaguar imagery have been found at a number of sites including Tikal, Palenque, Caracol, Seibal and Piedras Negras.

38 Refer to Stuart’s essay for a full description of the examples of “fire enters his house.” This phrase may also be applied to other locations such as way-ib, “dormitory,” and pibnah, “sweat bath” (Stuart 1998: 399-402).
the heat necessary to ignite the vital three-stone hearth used for cooking and to germinate maize seed. For this reason, it is the JGU’s relationship with fire that must be considered.

Stuart (1998) emphasizes that in Maya art, it is the JGU, or a ruler impersonating the god, who is portrayed participating in or overseeing *och’ k’ahk’*, or “fire-drilling.”39 Karl Taube has noted that the headdress of the ruler impersonating the JGU on Naranjo Stela 30 (Fig. 79) includes the three-hearthstones (Taube 1998: 440).40 Additionally, the fire-drilling staffs held in the hands of the rulers on both Sacul Stela 9 (Fig. 80) and Naranjo Stela 30 (Fig. 79) have three sets of three-knotted strips of paper tied to them. This, along with the inclusion of the hearthstones, suggests that the JGU may be associated with a very specific fire, that of the three-stone hearth of creation.

Tikal Altar 5 (Fig. 81) portrays two JGU impersonators actively “opening” a tomb, as is described in the inscription below, which identifies the bones as those of a woman who died eight years earlier (Stuart 1998: 407).41 It is also important to remember that this activity is occurring after the woman has already been buried, reinforcing the idea that these ceremonies were meant to renew or restore something that has diminished over time, specifically heat. It is this ritual fire, the heat and flames brought to the tomb by the JGU, and not necessarily the activity of drilling fire, which allows the deceased’s soul or essence to be renewed and reinvigorated (in much the same way that *Jaloj-K’exoj* operates). This monument offers clues about the types of ritual activity that may have occurred at Nebaj. Ritual tomb burning is well documented at sites like Piedras Negras (Coe 1959: 127), Copan (Fash et al. 2001), and Yaxchilan (Daneil Juárez Cossio and Mario Pérez Campa 1990). In some instances (Tikal and Copan), copal or some other offering was burned directly over the capstones of the tomb (Fitzsimmons 2009: 101; Refer to Carrasco and Hull 2002 for a discussion on the symbolic importance of capstones). At Río Azul, burning took place within the mortuary space directly on

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39 Stuart cites Sacul Stela 9 and Naranjo Stela 30 as two of the many instances wherein a ruler impersonates the JGU, donning jaguar ears in their headdresses, jaguar pelts, and large knotted fire-drilling staffs.

40 Taube also calls attention to Tonina Monument 74, which features a ruler with the three hearthstones in his headdress and a staff and costume similar to that on Naranjo Stela 30.

41 Both figures have the distinctive facial markings associated with the JGU. The figure on the left holds in his left hand the trident flint used in fire-drilling ritual. This same flint was also held in the left hand of the figure from Naranjo Stela 30 and the figure from Sacul Stela 9 also held an object in his left hand, although it is not immediately identifiable as a traditional trident flint. The drilling stick is held in the right hand of each figure from all three monuments.
the tomb floor and was also detected on other objects in the tomb, as well as on the walls of the enclosure (Fitzsimmons 2009: 101). James Fitzsimmons notes that these instances of tomb firing occur at the initial dedication or “sealing” of the tomb, and like Stuart believes that the och k’ahk’ tumukil is a recreation of this first dedication that makes the house/tomb habitable (Fitzsimmons 2009: 101-102). Other scholars such as Martha Cuevas García believe that such firing ceremonies may have been understood as feeding the deceased through the smoke of incense or other offerings (Cuevas García 2003). Although each of these ideas are credible and surely describe many of the different aspects of firing ceremonies, I propose that rituals such as the och k’ahk’ tumukil were performed to provide the heat necessary for the regeneration of the deceased. The presence of the JGU on effigy funerary urns in combination with maize, earth, and hearth imagery supports this idea.

The figure of the Trefoil Jaguar is likely also associated with heat and fire. As I have demonstrated the JGU is easily substituted by the Trefoil Jaguar (Group 3). This suggests that these figures were conceptualized in a similar manner. Nikolai Grube and Werner Nahm (1994) have demonstrated that number of jaguar way characters are related to fire or heat. These figures are often identified as sharing characteristics with the so-called Waterlily Jaguar, a figure likely related to the Trefoil Jaguar. As was previously mentioned, figures identified as the so-called Waterlily Jaguar also have an element attached to their heads, although such elements cannot always be clearly identified as a waterlily in all instances. It is more likely that this so-called Waterlily Jaguar and the Trefoil Jaguar belong to a larger group of naturalistic jaguar deities with vegetal elements on their heads. The way characters identified by Grube and Nahm include the k’ak’ hix “fire jaguar” who is depicted engulfed by flames (Grube and Nahm 1994: 687). The k’ak’ hix wears the same scarf seen on the shoulders of the Trefoil Jaguar and the naturalistic jaguar deity. The way of the site of Seibal is jaguar figure identified as the ha hix “water jaguar.” (Grube and Nahm 1994: 690; Taube 1998: 443). This figure is the way of the ahua of the three-stone place (Grube and Nahm 1994: 690; Taube 1998: 443). The three-stone place refers to Seibal, whose toponym is a representation of the three-stone hearth. By associating this

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42 This figure is found on K2942, K3924, and K5367.

43 See K771 and K791.
particular jaguar figure with this site, it can be inferred that the *ha hix*, like the *k’ak’ hix*, is a fire-related character.\(^4^4\)

A third jaguar figure, the *k’intan bolay* “sun center jaguar” has a *k’in* “sun” sign affixed to its stomach and also wears a scarf and waterlily (Robicsek and Hales 1981: Fig. 33). This jaguar is listed in the text describing the birth of GIII in the Temple of the Sun at Palenque (Grube and Nahm 1994: 687; Carrasco 2005: 128, 260-261). Carrasco has demonstrated that the numerous names included in this text indicate that the Sun/Fire God was a multifaceted deity and that various aspects of this god were embodied by a number of different manifestations (Carrasco 2005: 260-261). If the *k’intan bolay* is a manifestation of GIII, then it is by default also a different manifestation of the JGU. In Chapter Two I demonstrated that the JGU and the Trefoil Jaguar are frequently substituted for one another, further supporting this idea. Huehueteotl and a naturalistic jaguar deity are also components of this system. Thus, the JGU, the Trefoil Jaguar, naturalistic jaguar deities, and Huehueteotl are all interchangeable because they are different aspects of the same larger idea. Their presence on effigy funerary urns suggests that mortuary rituals such as the previously discussed *och k’ahk’ tumukil* were likely performed in the vicinity of effigy funerary urn burials. This imagery would complement this ritual activity in much the same way that the iconography of incensarios complements their function and presence in ritual.

Evidence of burning is not easily discernable on the effigy funerary urns in this study. With future testing it may be possible to detect carbon on the vessels. In her unpublished excavation notes, Mary Butler Lewis (n.d.) describes evidence of burning in the layers above the funerary urn deposits. It should be remembered that Lewis uncovered two large funerary urn burials in the town of Nebaj in 1941, recovering twenty-five burials made in ceramic vessels (urns). Although Butler Lewis’s notes are brief, it is possible to attempt a reconstruction of the ritual activity surrounding the two burial areas. Butler Lewis frequently mentions that she believes the two deposits to be “cemeteries” that are reused multiple times, as opposed to a single entry burial. She cites evidence of repeated soil disturbance, broken pottery in layers above primary burials, and the superimposition of urns as evidence of this claim. These observations lend clues about the ritual activity that took place around the urns. Tomb areas in Nebaj were obviously re-entered. This re-entering was likely performed to allow ritual activity to

\(^{44}\) Also see 1609, the “Cosmic Plate,” for an additional representation of the jaguar figure in association with the three hearthstones.
be conducted in the immediate presence of the urns, much like the scene depicted on Tikal Altar 5. It cannot presently be determined whether or not the stacking of urns was a result of secondary burial after urns have been removed from the space, or a ritual wherein the stacking of urns is significant, or some other unknown cause.

As architectural remains were detected in Nebaj Burial 2, I believe that this deposit should be classified as either a cist or a crypt. Evidence of a floor was also found, suggesting that these (at least N2) were crypt burials, as this type of burial sometimes includes a plastered floor (Chapter One). Burial N1 was recovered from the streets of the modern town and did not show evidence suggesting that it may be classified as a crypt. It will here be classified as a cist burial. Evidence of architectural remains was not detected, although this may be a result of the construction of a street over the burial or the limited survey performed by Butler Lewis.

A large number of extraneous ceramics and “extra” bones were found deposited with the urns in varying stratigraphies, suggesting that offerings were made over a long period of time. Nebaj Burial 1 urn 17 was found surrounded by a number of such ceramics, including two large jars and an incense burner that contained infant remains (Figs. 28 and 82). N1 urn 17 contained a flexed adolescent skeleton set over a layer of burnt bone. The remains of an adolescent interred in N1 urn 48 were also accompanied by a basal layer of burnt bone. This could indicate that it was included at the time of the adolescents’ initial interment in the urn either as a result or partial cremation or other type of offering.\(^\text{45}\) It is also possible that the burning could have taken place during tomb re-entry. Perhaps bodies were partially cremated during this process and afterwards reburied in urns as a form of second burial. Interestingly, Butler Lewis notes patches of burnt clay five centimeters thick and thirty centimeters below the surface in proximity to N1 urn burial 57 (Fig. 28). It is highly likely that evidence of burning once existed elsewhere in the deposit, but N1’s location in the middle of the street inevitably led to the destruction of much of the burial. Fire was an obvious presence in the Nebaj burials, although we currently cannot know to what extent. Evidence of fire does not have to be found on the urns in a laboratory. Effigy funerary urns are literally enveloped by fire iconography through the representation of the JGU.

It has been previously noted that the presence of the JGU reveals a connection between effigy funerary urns and Late Classic incensarios. These censers were used to burn incense or

\(^{45}\) In Diego de Landa’s *Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán* the priest recounts how that for “nobles and persons of high esteem, they burned their bodies and placed their ashes in great urns, and they built temples over them, as those which are found at Izamal show was done in old times” (Tozzer 1941: 130-131).
other offerings, providing a more literal explanation for the JGU’s presence than the urns do. Formally speaking, the urns and Late Classic censers are similar. Both are usually ceramic and are typically adorned with images of jaguar gods and other deities often shown emerging from the mouth of another. As was discussed in Chapter One, one type of urn echoes the shape of incense burners, complete with side flanges. Many effigy funerary urns also include representations of the earth (Groups 1-3 and Group 7-A), another typical censer characteristic (Goldstein 1977: 417-418). Given their iconographic similarity, I believe that both the urns and censers invoke the same concepts of regeneration and renewal (Carrasco 2005; Cuevas García 2004, 2005). The urns are invoking this concept for a specific purpose, to resume this mythical life cycle of maize.

Keeping in mind that censers are lit during tomb renewal ceremonies, it is interesting to note that Rice, in reference to the effigies found on censers, refers to deities as “patrons of vital forces” (Rice 1999: 25). If deities are understood as having the ability to encompass, or invoke powers that are otherwise unattainable, then their effigies provide a means through which earthly beings may borrow or evoke that power. This means that the censers themselves, by serving as the place on which the effigies are physically located, can be understood as literal hosts (or patrons) of some type of spiritual or heavenly force. In this way, effigy funerary urns are provided heat by the presence of the JGU. Incensarios were recovered in close proximity to funerary urns in both Nebej burials. The presence of these along with the large quantities of ceramic offerings suggests that effigy funerary urn burials were locations of extensive ritual activity. Incensarios were also found by Smith and Kidder in the later Tomb VIII, Mound 2 at Nebaj (1951: 26). These were positioned in close proximity to the extended burials found within. Heat was obviously important to the mortuary space at Nebaj over a long period of time.

In some instances, the form of the object itself may offer clues about its own ritual use. Urn lids are sometimes made with large holes in the middle of them. This suggests that the living continued to interact with the deceased long after their death. The fact that these holes are often represented as the open mouth of a figure insinuates that the urns may have been ritually fed. Objects could be deposited into the urns at will, most likely during secondary burial or other types of re-dedication processes. Urns sometimes contained offerings such as obsidian and a variety of ceramics that could have been ritually deposited during tomb re-entry (Figs. 28-29). Holes could easily be an additional reference to incensarios, which sometimes include such
features to add a theatrical component to the burning of offerings. These lids with holes allow for not only the continual access to the dead by the living, but also for the deceased’s continual access to the terrestrial world. Holes are also found on jar urns from the Post Classic period, although these were not created during the objects’ production (Figs. 21-22). Such holes may be comparable to the psychoduct found in Pakal’s tomb in the Temple of Inscriptions at Palenque (Carrasco, personal communication 2010). The psychoduct, the holes on jar urns, and holed lids of effigy funerary urns may offer clues about the ancient Maya concept of the soul and death.

It has been previously noted that both the urns and censers often include images of an earth deity. It has also been established that the saurian creature so often depicted on effigy funerary urns is representative of the earth itself and a symbol of centrality. Karl Taube argues that architectural representations of the maw of the earth monster held, or were understood to hold, the three stones of the primordial hearth (Taube 1998: 337-430). We may now understand the JGU represented on effigy funerary urns to be symbolic of fire. The JGU, as fire, depicted emerging from the mouth of the earth is thus taking the place of the three-hearthstones. In this way, the JGU is not only the patron god of fire and fire-drilling, but also of the fire of the three-stone hearth of creation as seen on Group1 (Fig. 35) and Group 2 (Fig. 38). When the Group 1 urn (Fig. 35) is compared to K1892, the “Resurrection Plate,” (Fig. 78), the iconographic similarities are clear. Both are depicting the birth of the Maize God. The JGU emerging from the mouth of the saurian monster may be compared to the idea of the earth monster holding the hearth-stones in its mouth and to the flaming skull in the center of the turtle on the Resurrection Plate. On the Resurrection Plate the Maize God emerges from a cleft in the turtle’s back and similarly, on a Group 1-B urn (Fig. 35) he sits above the monster in a similar location. Flames are not the only thing to emerge from the jaws of the earth monster/hearth. It should be recalled that Group 7-D urns (Fig. 72) depict the Maize God emerging from the mouth of the JGU himself. The placement of the JGU’s face where the saurian creatures would typically be located further supports the idea that the JGU is associated with the specific fire of the three-stone hearth. The appearance of the old god of the hearth, Huehuetotl on Group 6 urns further strengthens this identification (Fig. 62). On Group 6-A urns (Fig. 64) he is even shown emerging from the mouth of a jaguar.

The iconography found on both the urns and censers allows direct communication or interaction between man and heavenly forces. In addition to the deities, the “patrons of vital
forces,” as Rice referred to them, another type of image opens a connection to other worlds. Urns in Groups 1-A, 2-A, 5-A, and 5-C are all represented with spikes running down their sides. These spikes allude to the thorny ceiba tree (*ceiba pentandra*). The ceiba was often used by the Maya to represent the axis mundi, or World Tree, acting as a conduit between realms and is also frequently represented on incensarios (Deal 1982). The World Tree was alternately depicted as a maize plant, sometimes even in the personified form of the Maize God himself (Freidel et. al. 1993: 53; For more on the World Tree in Mesoamerica see Linda Schele 1995). Placing these spikes on an urn or censer would further ensure direct communication with the gods. As Taube noted, an emphasis on centrality once again draws comparison to the hearth, further connecting the urns with the primordial three-stone hearth (Taube 1998: 433).

I believe that the urns were understood to have functioned conceptually in the same manner as the censers, attracting those “vital forces” to participate in what was symbolically happening inside the vessels. The censers sought to initiate contact with deities in order to invoke their divine essence, or presence and participation in whatever ritual activity was taking place. In the same way the urns sought to open the connection between the body inside and the deities. Represented on the outside; thus, collapsing time and allowing the deceased to participate in a mythical event of rebirth alongside the gods. It is the primordial essence that rests in the bones that is the key “ingredient.” The body does not require any ceremonial decoration or preparation; everything needed has been in the bones since they were molded by Xmucane from maize dough. If a tomb renewal ceremony took place at the burial site, censers would not be physically necessary. The imagery on the urns eliminates the need for literal heat, which the censers would have provided, simultaneously reinforcing this idea and referencing ritual censing. By placing bodies in a vessel symbolically consumed by fire the dead reference the birth of the Maize God out of the primordial hearth or hearthstones.
CONCLUSION

I have shown that effigy funerary urns are lidded ceramic vessels made specifically for the purpose of containing human remains for burial. Effigy funerary urns are buried in large groups in areas that are repeatedly disturbed during tomb re-entry or second burial and possibly fire-drilling rituals, as evidenced by the repeated soil disturbance and traces of burning found in the two Nebaj urn deposits. These urns were buried in cists or crypts, most likely cached in the walls or floors of pre-existing structures and not in specially prepared tombs. Effigy funerary urns from the Nebaj area and display an intricate iconography that represents a unique departure from the other types of funerary vessels produced at this time in the Guatemalan Highlands. The early form of the Cylinder Type urn and subsequent Sculptural Censer Style were most likely a result of direct contact with sites such as Palenque in the Northern Lowlands during the Late and Terminal Classic periods. Over the long period of their production, effigy funerary urns turned to a form infrequently used alongside the Cylinder Type, a simpler form known as the Vase Type urn. In the late Terminal and early Postclassic period, the Vase Shape became the dominant form with imagery more commonly being represented in the Minimal Vase Style. This stylistic transition from ornate to more simplified objects may be observed throughout the Terminal and Postclassic Highlands.

I have organized the fifty-five urns examined in this study into seven distinct iconographic groups. These groups were determined by the main deity figure depicted emerging from the jaws of another creature or standing alone in a full-figured representation. Successive subgroups were also created to refine the iconographic categories and lay a solid foundation for the future study of other effigy funerary urn examples. By grouping the urns in this way, I have shown that a number of elements within the iconographic complex may be substituted for each other, such as the Trefoil Jaguar for the JGU, the JGU for the saurian creature, and spikes and jaguar heads for skulls on the side of vessels. These substitutions suggest that these figures are manifestations of the same idea. Although not discussed in this thesis, the so-called Waterlily Jaguar also has connections with fire and the hearth.

Iconographic groups are also cross-referenced on different urn shapes. That is, imagery more typical of a Cylinder Type urn is sometimes found on the body of a Vase Type urn. The
iconography of urn lids is also essential to fully understanding the iconographic complex. Trefoil Jaguars or representations of the animal cub frequently sit or sprawl across the tops of lids, marking the urn as a watery space. Images of Maize Gods clutching maize cobs also often sit on the tops of lids, effectively sprouting from the imagery depicted on the urn body below. The inclusion of holes on some lids suggests that the deceased interred in effigy funerary urns and the living continued to interact after death.

The depictions of the JGU, the Trefoil Jaguar, earth monsters, and the Maize God on the exterior of effigy funerary urns allow us to better understand what was believed to be taking place in the interior. I have recounted how birth and transformation occur in dark, heated spaces. These urns, with bodies placed inside and literally surrounded by depictions of fire and water, would certainly qualify as such a space. If images of the birth of the Maize God from that same fire are depicted on the outside, such as in Groups 7-A and 7-B, then a symbolic recreation of the event may have been understood to have been happening on the inside. Just as with censers, the images of the JGU, the Trefoil Jaguar, Huehuetotl, and the earth monster, and the Maize God, call upon the gods to invoke their presence or essence and assist in ceremony or other ritual activity. The fundamental essence of maize, which has been present in the bones of humans since their creation, would be simultaneously invoked.

As humans are formed of maize, it is natural that their life cycle would emulate maize just as the Hero Twins and the Maize God did. The bones are the maize kernels, the muk, “interred ones,” or jolooma, “little skulls,” described by Carlsen and Prechtel (1991). The kernels/bodies will germinate and grow aided by the heat provided by the JGU to be reborn in the same manner as the Maize God, a process understood through the concept of Jaloj-K’exoj. Time and space are collapsed to allow a literal reenactment of events. The bodies, now understood as symbolic maize kernels, are participants in the mythical life cycle of the Maize God. These urns, functioning as places of literal burial and metaphorical rebirth, were presided over by the jaguar represented as the JGU, the Trefoil Jaguar, and the animal. It is the JGU who links the vessels to the ideas provoked by ceremonial censers and opens a portal to the spiritual world with fire. It is highly probably that firing activities took place in or near the urn burials at the time of their interment and likely afterward in ritual accompanying second burial.

The portable nature of effigy funerary urns suggests that these objects were intended to be transported and perhaps even displayed, analogous to the many different types of sacred
bundles encountered in the Maya world. This would indicate that these objects were used in delay rituals, as urns could be enshrined in temple or other ceremonially important locations until they were buried, or reburied in the case of second burial. Portability would also allow for the urn to be easily manipulated during funerary ritual. Jaguar imagery permits the urns to be symbolically heated and watered forever, allowing the transformation of the body to take place and the life cycle of maize and the Maize God to be repeated in perpetuity. Effigy funerary urns follow in the tradition of the Mask Flange Iconographic Complex (Carrasco 2005), marking these objects as locations for sprouting and rebirth. In the Highlands, architectural tombs and all of the ideas embodied by mortuary structures are condensed into a single, ceramic object: the effigy funerary urn.
Figure 1. Map of the Maya area.
(Source: http://designbymartha.com/seventh_grade/Maya%20Map.gif).
Figure 2. Effigy Funerary Urn (Vase Type). Guatemala City. Museo Popol Vuh (Photograph by author).
Figure 3. Map Showing Location of Nebaj, Guatemala (Source: http://adventures.worldnomads.com/lpmaps/Guat_MayaThenNow.jpg).
Figure 4. Diagram of a Burial Urn. Guatemala City. Museo Popol Vuh (Photograph by author).
Figure 5. Urn Lid Fragment of the Jaguar God of the Underworld with Two Cubs. Guatemala City. Museo Popol Vuh (Photograph by Author).
Figure 6. Huehuetotl Figure from Veracruz. Kerr Image 3555A (Photograph by Justin Kerr, courtesy of FAMS).

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Figure. 7. Trefoil Jaguar. Guatemala City. Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología. (Photograph by author).
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Figure 9. Object Identified as a Stone Sarcophagus. Classic Period. Quetzaltenango. Museo de Historia Natural, Quetzaltenango (Photograph by author).
Figure 10. Effigy Funerary Urn (Vase Type). Guatemala City. Museo Popol Vuh (Photograph by author).
Figure 11. Effigy Funerary Urn (Cylinder Type). Guatemala City. Museo Popol Vuh. (Photograph by author).
Figure 12. Effigy Funerary Urn (Vase Type). Guatemala City. Museo Popol Vuh. (Photograph by author).
Figure 13. Effigy Funerary Urn (Cylinder Type). Guatemala City. Museo Popol Vuh. (Photograph by author).
Figure 14. Palenque *Incensario* Stand. Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico. Site Museum. (Photograph by Linda Schele, courtesy of FAMSI).
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Figure 16. Effigy Funerary Urn (Square Type). Guatemala City. Museo Popol Vuh (Photograph by author).
Figure 17. Effigy Funerary Urn (Square Type). Guatemala City. Museo Popol Vuh. (Photograph by author).
Figure 18. Effigy Funerary Urn (Square Type). Guatemala City. Museo Popol Vuh. (Photograph by author).
Figure 20. Rectangular Urn With Lid. Southern Coast of Guatemala. Early Classic Period. Antigua. Santo Doming Museo Arqueologico. (Photograph by author).
Figure 22. Funerary Urn. K’umarcaaj, Quiché, Guatemala, Post Classic Period. Guatemala City. Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología. (Photograph by author).
Figure 23. Funerary Urn. San Pedro, Sololá, Guatemala, Classic Period. Panajachel. Museo Lacustre Atitlán. (Photograph by author).
Figure 27. Funerary Urn. Nebaj, Quiché, Guatemala. Post Classic Period. Guatemala City. Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología. (Photograph by author).
Nebaj Burial 1 (N1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vessel # and Type</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Contents/Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2: Tripod Vessel With Flanges</td>
<td>Adult?</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Skull</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Funerary Urn</td>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Adult burial + a few bones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10: Incensario</td>
<td>Infant</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Infant burial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15: Funerary Urn</td>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female burial + obsidian knife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17: Funerary Urn</td>
<td>Adolescent</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Flexed adolescent burial over layer of burnt bone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43: Funerary Urn</td>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Adult burial + ceramic fragments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46: Funerary Urn</td>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Adult flexed burial + 4-5 fine ceramic vessels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48: Funerary Urn</td>
<td>Adolescent?</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Adolescent flexed burial over layer of burnt bone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55: Urn</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Bone Fragments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57: Funerary Urn</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>No burial recorded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58: Urn</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>No burial recorded, set on top of, or “jammed into” Urn 65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64: Funerary Urn</td>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Small urn, red ochre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65: Funerary Urn</td>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Adult burial + obsidian knife, red ochre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66: Funerary Urn</td>
<td>Adult?</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Large urn, Adult? Burial + ceramic dish and jar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 28. Chart showing N1 burials in ceramic vessels. (Compiled by author from information in Butler Lewis n.d.).
Nebaj Burial 2 (N2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vessel # and Type</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Contents/Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Olla?</td>
<td>Adolescent?</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Rotten bones and teeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2c: Ollita</td>
<td>Adolescent?</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2 upper jaws, badly worn teeth, red ochre in bottom – Butler Lewis thinks primary burial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2d: Broken Ollita</td>
<td>Adult?</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Adult burial (head first)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Funerary Urn</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Very rotten bones + fluted black bowl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7: Fluted Funerary Urn</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2 rotten bones + olla?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10: Funerary Urn</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Rotten teeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11: Urn? (2 Inverted Ollas)</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Rotten bones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21: Funerary Urn</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Several Bones + Olla, ollita, and fluted black bowl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26: Funerary Urn</td>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Adult teeth and bones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27: Urn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No burial recorded. Held 1 obsidian knife.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31: Remains of urn rim and base</td>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Adult burial with teeth (head first) in what is assumed to be remains of urn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 29. Chart showing N2 burials in ceramic vessels. (Compiled by author from information in Butler Lewis n.d.).
Figure 30. Group 1 Urn. Guatemala City. Museo Popol Vuh (Photograph by Author).
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Figure 34. Group 1-B Urn. Guatemala City. Museo Popol Vuh (Photograph by Author).
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(Source: http://72.5.117.144/fpx/sc2/SC24117.fpx&obj=iip,1.0&wid=400&cvt=jpeg).
Figure 36. Urn Lid Fragment from the Northern Highlands. Guatemala City. Museo Popol Vuh (Source: http://www.popolvuh.ufm.edu/eng/urnasfunerarias.htm).
Figure 37. Group 1-C Urn. Guatemala City. Museo Popol Vu (Photograph by Author).
Figure 38. Group 2 Urn. Antigua. Museo de Arte Precolombino y Vidrio Moderno (Photograph by Author).
Figure 39. Group 2-A Urn. Guatemala City. Museo Popol Vuh (Photograph by Author).
Figure 40. Group 2-B Urn. Guatemala City. Museo Popol Vuh (Photograph by Author).
Figure 41. Detail of 2-B Urn Lid.
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Fig. 44. Detail of Vegetative Element on the Forehead of the Trefoil Jaguar. (Photograph by Author).
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Figure 48. Side of Group 3-C Urn Showing Full-Figured GIII. Guatemala City. Museo Popol Vuh (Photograph by Author).
Figure 49. Side of Group 3-C Urn Showing Full-Figured GIII. Guatemala City. Museo Popol Vuh (Photograph by Author).
Figure 50. Group 3-D Urn. Guatemala City. Museo Popol Vuh (Photograph by Author).
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Figure 54. Group 4 Urn. Guatemala City. Museo Popol Vuh (Photograph by Author).
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Figure 57. Group 5-B Urn. Guatemala City. Museo Popol Vuh (Photograph by Author).
Figure 58. Group 5-B Urn. Guatemala City. Museo Popol Vuh (Photograph by Author).
Figure 59. Group 5-C Urn. Guatemala City. Museo Popol Vuh (Photograph by Author).
Figure 60. Group 5-C Urn (L2309). Looted, unprovenanced. (Photo by Justin Kerr, courtesy of FAMSI).
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Figure 62. Group 6 Urn. Guatemala City. Museo Popol Vuh (Photograph by Author).
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Figure 73. Jaguar with Maize. Southern Guatemalan Coast. Late Pre-Classic Period. Guatemala City. Museo Popol Vuh (Photograph by Author).
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Figure 75. The Berlin Tripod (K6547). Early Classic Period (Photograph by Justin Kerr, courtesy of FAMSI).
Figure 76. K1184. Late Classic Period (Photograph by Justin Kerr, courtesy of FAMSI).
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Figure 81. Tikal Altar 5 (From Stuart 1998: 407, Fig. 24).
Figure 82. Sketch of Burial N1 showing Urn N1-17 (Drawing by Mary Butler Lewis, n.d.).
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Kathleen McCampbell was born on October 13, 1985 to Ralph and Gail McCampbell of Fincastle, Virginia. She received a Bachelor of Arts in Art History from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2008, where she graduated magna cum laude. During her time at VCU, Kathleen developed an interest in the art of Pre-Columbian America. In the fall of 2008 Kathleen began her graduate studies at Florida State University. While at FSU, Kathleen served as a research assistant to Michael D. Carrasco, who encouraged her to investigate the art of the Highland Maya and under whom this thesis was written. During the summer of 2009 she conducted research for this thesis in Guatemala after receiving a Penelope E. Mason Grant from the Department of Art History at FSU. In that same summer she participated in the UNC-Duke Yucatec Maya Summer Institute with support from a Foreign Language Area Studies (FLAS) grant. Kathleen will enter the second level of this program in the summer of 2010. After graduating with a Master of Arts in the spring of 2010, she will continue to study the art of the Highland Maya of Guatemala under the direction of Michael D. Carrasco. In 2010 Kathleen was awarded the Patricia Rose Teaching Fellowship.