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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Maya jade T-shape pendants within Mesoamerican wind-jewel tradition

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Master of Arts

in

Anthropology

by

Mayya Azarova

Committee in charge:

Professor Geoffrey E. Braswell, Chair
Professor Paul Goldstein
Professor Thomas E. Levy

2016

The Thesis of Mayya Azarova is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

University of California, San Diego

2016

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SIGNATURE PAGE	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	viii
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS	ix
INTRODUCTION	1
1. JADE AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN ANCIENT MESOAMERICA.....	7
1.1. Jade as a Mineral: Jade, Jadeite, Nephrite and Greenstone	7
1.2. Jade in China and Mesoamerica: History and Production Technology	13
1.3. Patterns of Jade Use in Mesoamerica and Cancuen Jade Workshop.....	21
2. A SEMIOTIC APPROACH TO MAYA WIND SYMBOLISM	27
2.1. Previous Research on Mesoamerican Wind Symbolism	27
2.2. Analysis of Maya T-shape Pattern	29
3. WIND SYMBOLISM AT THE SITE LEVEL	32
3.1. Summary of Structure 7 Excavations at Nim li Punit.....	32
3.2. Tomb 5 and a T-shape Pendant from Nim li Punit	49
3.3. T-shape Pectorals on the Stone Monuments at Nim li Punit	50

4.	WIND JEWELS, SPOONS AND SHELLS ACROSS MESOAMERICA.....	56
4.1	The Olmec Jades.....	56
4.2	The Costa-Rican Jades	58
4.3	Formative Jade Spoon from Belize	63
4.4	Formative Jade Pendant from Cuello	66
4.5	Formative Jade Axes and Spoons from Ceibal.....	68
4.7	Chichen Itza Jade Pendants from the Sacred Cenote.....	72
4.8	<i>Ik'</i> Symbolism in Ceramics, Stucco and Stone	76
	CONCLUSION.....	89
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	92

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1 Front side of the T-shape jade pendant with an inscribed <i>Ik'</i> glyph from Nim li Punit	4
Figure 1.2 (a) Chinese jade <i>Gui</i> tablet (left) and <i>Bi</i> disk (right) (Yu 2011:57)	15
Figure 1.2 (b) The six sacrificial jade objects recorded in The Rites of Zhou (Yu 2011:57)	16
Figure 3.1 Nim li Punit site plan (Braswell and Fauvelle 2011:10; after Leventhal 1990: Map 8.2)	34
Figure 3.2. Nim li Punit, Palace Group (Braswell et al. 2012:10, after Leventhal 1990: Map 8.2)	35
Figure 3.3 Plan of consolidated Structure 7 with Tomb 4 and Tomb 5 capstones in place. By C. Fisher, G. Braswell, M. Azarova and M. Borrero	40
Figure 3.4 “Wind-God Vase” from Tomb 5, Str. 7 at Nim li Punit. Drawing by M. Azarova	43
Figure 3.5 Classic Maya duck-head pendants. (a) Uaxactun; (b) Kaminaljuyu; (c) Kaminaljuyu Stela 17; (d) Uaxactun Structure H-Sub 10; (e) Detail of an Early Classic censer lid; (f) Detail of Early Classic mural from Uaxactun Structure B-XIII; (g) Tikal Stela 7 (Taube 2004:170).....	44
Figure 3.6 Duck figures in ancient Maya art (a) Detail of a Late Classic Maya vase (after Reents-Budet 1994: fig. 2.3); (b) Detail of a Late Classic vessel (after Robicsek and Hales 1981b: no. 1); (c) Seibal Stela 3. Detail of drawing courtesy of James Porter (Taube 2004:172)	45
Figure 3.7 Plan of the main offerings from Tomb 5, Str. 7. At Nim li Punit. Drawing by M. Azarova	47
Figure 3.8 Chert eccentric found underneath the T-shape jade pendant in Tomb 5, Str.7 at Nim li Punit. Drawing by M. Azarova	50
Figure 4.1 Jade “Olmec” shell from Principal Tomb at Talamanca de Tibás site in San José Province, Costa Rica (Graham 1998:31)	60
Figure 4.2 Jade axe-god pendants from Dumbarton Oaks collection. Catalog numbers: PC.B.225, PC.B.229, PC.B.230, PC.B.231, PC.B.239, and PC.B.293. Photo © http://museum.doaks.org/	61

Figure 4.3. Costa Rican “winged pendant” from the Atlantic watershed (left), and the Olmec spoon from Guanacaste with Maya hieroglyphic inscription (Graham 1998:52, 90)	62
Figure 4.4 Middle Formative Period (900-400 B.C.) Olmec altar known as the Shook Panel (Graham 1998:47).....	62
Figure 4.5 The Uxbenka jade spoon (Healy and Awe 2001:63).....	64
Figure 4.6 Blue jade concave pendant of mirror-skeuomorph form from Cuello Burial 166 (Hammond 1999:53)	67
Figure 4.7 Nakum jade shell pendant (Žralka 2007:39–40)	72
Figure 4.8 Looted stucco bust from Tabasco (left) and a reconstruction of a jade necklace with a Ik’ pendant from the Sacred Cenote at Chichen Itza (right) (Finamore and Houston 2010:123)	74
Figure 4.9 The Chichen Itza jades with <i>Ik’</i> glyph. Plate 50, Plate 65, Plate 66 (Proskouriakoff 1974:121, 151, 163).....	75
Figure 4.10 Simian figure holding a rattle, Copan Reviewing Stand. Drawing by Eliud Guerra. (Looper 2010:159).....	77
Figure 4.11 The Altun Ha jade head of the Sun God <i>K’inich Ajaw</i> . Photo © http://www.belize.com/belize-maya-jade-head	80
Figure 4.12 Ceramic figurines from Waká (El Peru). Photo © http://archive.archaeology.org/1009/etc/maya.html	83
Figure 4.13 Unprovenanced ceramic vessels K7183 (above) and K5850 (below). Photo © Kerr Database http://research.mayavase.com/kermaya.html	86
Figure 4.14 Reconstructed jade masks from Tak’alik Ab’aj (Schieber and de Lavarreda 2015:64)	87

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Maya jade T-shape pendants within Mesoamerican wind-jewel tradition

by

Mayya Azarova

Master of Arts in Anthropology

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Professor Geoffrey E. Braswell, Chair

Jade is a general term for two distinct minerals – jadeite and nephrite. There is no evidence yet of nephrite exploitation by the ancient Maya, so in this work “jade” is used interchangeably with “jadeite.” Previous research provided evidence about the use and significance of jade for the ancient Maya, both in elite and non-elite contexts. New discovery of an exquisitely carved T-shape jade pendant, with

an inscribed wind glyph on the front side and hieroglyphic text on the back at the site of Nim li Punit in Belize, has demonstrated that almost no attention has been paid to this type of artifact in the literature. Therefore, this study has two major purposes: (1) to investigate the meanings of T-shape jade pendants and ornaments in the Maya area, (2) to demonstrate that a T-shaped *Ik'* wind glyph, one of the key symbols appearing from the Preclassic to Postclassic narrative in the Maya region, attests to an "international" pan-Mesoamerican tradition. I approach this problematic employing the semiotic analysis and a theory of inalienable possessions in order to talk about the wind sign production, communication, and meaning. I state that the jade pendant from Nim li Punit is an example of a pan-Mesoamerican tradition of the wind symbolism that originated in a form of jade spoons and wind god veneration from the Gulf Coast; Costa Rican jade clam pendants and avian imagery; and is analogous to Highland Mexican shell pendants, semantically linked to the wind deity Quetzalcoatl.

INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on an understudied, yet a significant research question: What were the meanings of T-shape jade pendants and ornaments in the Maya area, and do this data attest to an “international” pan-Mesoamerican ideology? To answer this question, a semiotic analysis is used to interpret the meaning of a T-shape *Ik'* wind glyph, one of the key symbols appearing from the Preclassic to Postclassic narrative in the Maya region.

I view the understanding of jade visual symbolism as an important step towards broadening the knowledge of social interactions across Mesoamerica. Methodologically this work combines a semiotic approach and a theory of inalienable possessions. A semiotic analysis was previously used for the interpretation of the two major Maya international symbols of the sun disk and the Venus sign (Meissner 2006). A semiotic method and theory allows us to focus on the act of sign production, communication, and meaning. By observing the variable evolutions of symbolic meaning through time it is possible to see both shared long-distance elements of culture, and a local adoption or rejection of ideas (Meissner 2006:4). A theory of inalienable possessions, on the other hand, can be a useful tool to understand jade artifacts through a prism of a Mesoamerican prestige goods exchange. Jade exchange most probably took the form of gifting and served to create social ties, reinforcing the ideological power of the elite, becoming a symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1977:171–183). Therefore, jade artifacts can be viewed as inalienable possessions, made of exotic raw material, transported over long

distances, and inscribed with esoteric and ritual symbols or texts. The hieroglyphic texts on jade objects would often state the ownership, sometimes even commemorate important historical and cosmological events. Such information would make the possession of those artifacts inalienable, because of an exclusive and cumulative identity with its previous owners through time (Weiner 1992:33).

It was suggested in recent studies that the rights of ownership of some objects are never actually transferred or lost, even if they are kept out of circulation, for example being buried as a part of a dedicatory cache, or given to others in a form of exchange or as a gift (Kovacevich 2013:270). The possession is still linked to the social and political identity of the original owner, relating the temporary owner to the original one, creating continuity and tradition (*ibid.*). Hence the receiver of inalienable possessions is linked to the past and can utilize them to legitimate his own authority in the present. In other words, it is a wide-spread phenomenon in ancient societies that prestigious origins and successions connecting to the gods, divine right, legendary events, great ancestors, or high status, make some particular possessions different from other things even of the same kind (Weiner 1992:37). This notion will be demonstrated for different types of jade objects, some of which were restricted for elites, while the others were available for mass-consumption.

The fascination with jade has always inspired scholars, entrepreneurs, and artists, which holds true till today. A novel on rediscovery of jade deposits in

Guatemala Stone of Kings: In Search of the Lost Jade of the Maya (Helferich 2012) is a good example of such public interest in the subject. Accompanied with a surprisingly precise and detailed description of the chemical difference between jadeite and serpentine, this book draws attention to the most important discoveries of jade artifacts in the Maya area in the 20th century. It talks about the first diving into the Sacred Cenote at Chichen Itza, the discovery of the Tomb of Pakal the Great and the Tomb of the Red Queen at Palenque, the burial of the Jade Jaguar in Tikal, and the resting place of Yax K'uk Mo, the founder of the royal dynasty at Copan (Helferich 2012:62, 74–76). Despite the popularity of the topic, there are still mysteries surrounding Mesoamerican jade, its properties, and chances to re-discover other ancient jadeite sources for Mesoamerica and Central America, apart from the Motagua Valley in Guatemala.

A large number of Mesoamerican jade objects, including those on display in many museums, were procured outside of controlled archaeological excavations, and stay without an exact provenance. As a result, due to the loss of archaeological context, some types of jade artifacts are still poorly understood. On a more positive side, the government policies nowadays are designed to preserve and protect cultural heritage, and each year there are more and more archaeological finds coming from professional excavations. My research problem herein is the semantics and functionality of one particular type of jade artifacts – T-shape jade pectorals. One of them was recently found at Structure 7 at the archaeological site of Nim li Punit in Toldeo District in southern Belize (Figure 1.1; W: 18.8 cm, L: 10.4 cm, THK: 0.8 cm).



Figure 1.1 Front side of the T-shape jade pendant with an inscribed *Ik'* glyph from Nim li Punit

The data for the case study of the Late Classic T-shape pendant with a *Ik'* glyph incised on the front side, and hieroglyphic inscription of the back, comes from the 2015 spring/summer fieldwork of Toledo Regional Interaction Project (TRIP) at Nim li Punit, directed by Dr. Braswell from University of California, San Diego.

I raise a hypothesis that a T-shape of the pendant itself coupled with and an inscribed *Ik'* day sign, which is a Maya glyph for *wind*, and resembles the English letter “T,” are intentional and significant indicators of the meaning embodied in the objects in question. I suggest that those markers are semantically linked to the function of the object, based on the cosmological relation of the wind, life, and breath for the ancient Maya. Second, my goal is to demonstrate the continuity and ties of the Olmec and Costa-Rican jade spoons and axes, ornaments containing an *Ik'* glyph, bivalve clam shell and conch necklaces in the Maya area, and wind jewels of Quetzalcoatl in Central Mexico. I perceive those types of artifacts to be local and temporal variations of the same, larger Mesoamerican tradition.

I start the discussion with a history of jade studies in Mesoamerica, jade physical properties, known production technology of carving different artifacts from this material, and a comparison with a jade technology in China. It is important to state from the very beginning that the modern version of the name “jade” was first used in 1727, and probably was a result of a printing error. A Spanish term *pedra de hijada* (lumbar stone) was translated into *Pierre le jade*, rather than *Pierre de l' ejade*, the correct literal translation from Spanish. Thus, the term *Pierre le jade* appeared in Chambers's Encyclopedia, one of the most important encyclopedias of the 19th and 20th centuries, and has since been used by generations of scholars (Rusek 2014:136). Colloquially *jade* means both jadeite and nephrite, and the two of them occur in Mesoamerica, yet there is so far no evidence that nephrite was exploited by ancient populations of Mesoamerica (Kovacevich 2013:258). Therefore, in the artifact description and comparison section of this paper I am going to apply the terms *jade* and *jadeite* interchangeably.

Next I provide a summary of excavations of Structure 7 at Nim li Punit with a description of Tomb 5, where the T-shape pendant was discovered. The terms *pendant* and *pectoral* are used as synonyms throughout the paper. I propose a comparison with similar artifacts found not only in the Maya area, but throughout Mesoamerica from Preclassic to Terminal Classic contexts. The selected examples of jade workmanship include Olmec and Costa Rican jades, Preclassic jade pendant from Cuello, a greenstone spoon from Cache 145 at Ceibal, an exquisite inscribed Nakum jade bivalve shell, Chichen Itza jades from the Sacred

Cenote, the representations of wind-jewels in Central Mexico. I will also consider the *Ik'* wind sign in Maya art, both in sculpture, stone monuments, and painted on ceramic vessels.

1. JADE AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN ANCIENT MESOAMERICA

1.1. Jade as a Mineral: Jade, Jadeite, Nephrite and Greenstone

Ethnohistoric sources often call greenstones in Mesoamerica *chalchihuites*, referring to an Aztec word *xalxihuitl*, meaning “herb-colored jewel” in nahuatl (Foshag 1957:7). The other terms used to describe different green-colored minerals were the following (Kovacevich 2013:259):

- 1) *quetzalitzli* “Quetzal obsidian,” which referred to bright, emerald-green stones that resembled the Chinese “imperial” jade;
- 2) *quetzalachihuitl* “Quetzal greenstone” or high-quality, transparent stones without imperfections;
- 3) *chalchihuites* that were green stones of good quality, but opaque.

Jade is a term generally employed to describe a number of minerals of tough, compact texture. It varies from white, green, grayish-blue, white-with-green to very dark green color. The two minerals, which are commonly called “jade,” and used to be highly valued among the cultures in the Pan-Pacific region, such as China (East Asia), the Maori (New Zealand), and the Maya (Central America), are either nephrite or jadeite (Shu-p’ing et al. 2012:3). They might look strikingly alike and have similar properties, for instance, both are relatively hard, have fibrous texture, can be carved in delicate forms and highly polished. Nonetheless they are chemically quite different substances. The hardness, or the degree to which a substance resists abrasion, is one of the practical ways of distinguishing between

jadeite, which is 6.5 to 7, and nephrite is 6 to 6.5. It is measured from soft (1 - talc) to hard (10 - diamond) on the Mohs scale of mineral hardness.

Nephrite belongs to the amphibole group, generally dark-colored inosilicate minerals that form prism or needlelike crystals, and exists as a tremolite-actinolite solid solution, mainly of calcium magnesium silicate (Shu-p'ing et al. 2012:4). There are over 120 primary deposits worldwide in more than 20 countries, and a few secondary deposits, where the conditions are met for nephrite to form (Shu-p'ing et al. 2012:11–12). The metasomatism of ultrabasic rocks creates nephrite in uneven shades of green with ferrous oxide being the main colorant, and small black impurities of chromite or graphite. The other way nephrite can form is from the joint metamorphism of magnesium-calcium carbonate rocks. It is generally white, bluish, or white with a greenish tint, and features fine, waxy texture (*ibid.*). Permeation by graphite turns nephrite gray or dark black, while ferric oxide brings up brownish red in different shades, resembling brown sugar. It is known in literature as “sugar jade” (Shu-p'ing et al. 2012:4–6).

Jadeite is a metamorphic mineral of sodium aluminum silicate ($\text{NaAlSi}_2\text{O}_6$), part of the pyroxene group, which is formed under high pressure and low temperature (Shu-p'ing et al. 2012:10). There are only seven or eight locations currently known where jadeite is found, with major outcrops at San Benito County (California, USA), the Motagua River (Guatemala), Myitkyina (Myanmar), and Niigata (Japan) (Shu-p'ing et al. 2012:12). Jadeite is often found near serpentine, glaucophane schist (blueschist), and albite rocks deposits (Kunz and Bushell

1906:206). This was first noticed at Tammaw source in Upper Burma, and became extremely important in the search for New World jadeite sources.

Pure jadeite should be white, “without a tinge of color,” and pure nephrite containing only lime and magnesium should be colorless (Kunz and Bushell 1906:6). The highly diversified colors and hues that do exist are due to admixtures of other substances, of which the most common colorific agents are the compounds of iron, manganese, and chromium (Kunz and Bushell 1906:7). In addition to the chemical composition and possible anomalies in colors, there could always be a change caused after the jade formation by either weathering, absorption of color from the environment and other materials, the action of fire or burning, and of course lapidary work itself.

The degree of jade diaphaneity, which is a technical term for transparency, varies considerably among specimens of different color and structure (Kunz and Bushell 1906:11). If the light enters and exits the surface of the substance in relatively undisturbed fashion, then the substance is referred to as transparent. When the light can enter and exit the surface of the substance, but in a disturbed and distorted fashion, then the substance is translucent. Finally, when no light is transmitted, as the light can not even penetrate the surface of the substance, then the substance is called opaque (Dana 1884:161).

Natural, unpolished jade specimens of all colors are rarely translucent, except the very thin splinters, and more commonly would be quite opaque. The removal of surface irregularities by polishing greatly increases the translucency.

The way light interacts with the surface of both jadeite and nephrite on fresh fractures is dull and waxy with very few reflecting surfaces. The polished jadeite, on the other hand, has a vitreous (glassy) luster, and nephrite frequently exhibits an oily luster (Kunz and Bushell 1906:12). As a rule polished surfaces of parallel-fibrous structures have “a peculiar lustre, comparable to the sheen of raw silk,” often associated with the cat’s eye effect, also known as chatoyancy (Kunz and Bushell 1906:13). Nonetheless, sometimes opalescence, which is described as “lacking the play of color,” can be observed on polished specimens of both jadeite and nephrite (*ibid.*).

The tenacity of jade, the way it behaves when deformed or broken, is one of its well-known properties. The resistance of jade to blows and pressure has been proved in numerous direct experiments and impact tests (Kunz and Bushell 1906:60). According to a standard impact test adopted in the engineering laboratory of Harvard University, jade appears to belong to “the class of brittle substances which permit no plastic deformation, and which consequently fracture when stressed to the elastic limit” (Kunz and Bushell 1906:63). Jadeite also has a higher density than nephrite (Kunz and Bushell 1906:111).

Jade possesses the property of emitting a very clear tone, when struck, and maintaining the tone for a comparatively long time. The resonant character of jade has long been known in China, where it was used to prove the authenticity of the material. Jade was admired and called a “musical-stone” in Chinese literature and

poetry (Kunz and Bushell 1906:116). The distinct lasting tones were described as “bell tones,” “as clear as silver,” or “silvery tones” (Kunz and Bushell 1906:120).

Several other materials are usually mistaken for nephrite and jadeite. These include natural minerals that resemble jade in color, toughness, or luster. There are minerals stained or colored to look like jades, and completely artificial imitations such as glass mixtures (Kunz and Bushell 1906:265). Since the publication of *Localities and geological occurrence of jade* (Washington 1906) with listed locations in situ in Burma, India, Turkistan, parts of Siberia, China, New Zealand, Europe and North America, scholars were interested in the remaining categories of jade occurrence: “in transported blocks, worked objects, and jade localities of uncertain character” (Washington 1906:213–214). One of the fundamental issues was the amount of material known as worked objects with unknown exact provenance, especially in Central and South America (Washington 1906:253). The major complication in jade sourcing, comparing to other materials, became self-evident since the first results of the microscopical study of jade. Without the knowledge of the localities from which specimens were collected, they seemed to be from one mass of rock, even though they came from China, Burma, and Mexico (Kunz and Bushell 1906:37).

The variability of green-colored minerals in Mesoamerica led to the arguments against “the current paradigm of labelling artifacts with “jade” and “greenstone” in Mesoamerica” (Tremain 2014:137). It was suggested to use portable techniques, for example XRF, for elemental analysis to overcome

difficulties and biases of visual identification (Tremain 2014:147). Separating jadeite from the other minerals should refine the understanding of the trade routes, interaction with neighbors, ideology, and procurement strategies (Tremain 2014:143–144, 146–147). Therefore recently scholars attempted to demonstrate that jadeite and other green-colored materials had different functions and use in Formative Period sites in Olman, Olmec heartland (Tremain 2014:143). Unfortunately, the main problem with this approach remains. It can not be done without an established comparable source material database.

To complicate things even more, various minerals are found in association with jadeite. Some occur in small patches embedded in jade, sharply defined in color, and visible to naked eye. Others are intermixed, so they become recognizable as foreign material only by chemical or microscopic analysis (Kunz and Bushell 1906:197). It is important that such included minerals affect color of the jade, giving a tint, a mottled appearance, and are likely to affect the hardness, often “rendering the mass more susceptible to the attack of weathering agencies” (*ibid.*).

In 1988 the flooding, caused by the Hurricane Mitch, exposed large amounts of jadeite alluvial cobbles in tributaries both to the north and south of the Motagua river (Taube et al. 2011:144). It appeared to match the blue-green variety comparable to “Olmec blue” jadeite. Despite the fact that large bodies of jadeite were discovered in the Rio Blanco drainage of the Sierra de las Minas north of the Motagua, and in the Rio El Tambor in the south, it did not end speculation about

additional sources of jadeite in Costa Rica (Tremain 2014:139). A geologist, George Harlow, suggested that all the compositional and color variations of jade in Mexico and Central America could be found in the Motagua River valley in Guatemala (Taube et al. 2011:143). His single-source model of jadeite for all Pre-Columbian lapidaries was challenged by X-ray diffraction analysis, X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy, scanning electron microscopy, and visible near-infrared reflectance. The new chemical analysis, using recent technologies, suggested multiple sources. This competing model tended to tie Costa Rican jadeite artifacts to an unknown source of jadeite in Central America (Snarskis 2003:162; Tremain 2014:139). It is possible that different jades could have been attributed to specific dissimilar statuses (Kovacevich 2013:259).

1.2. Jade in China and Mesoamerica: History and Production Technology

I consider New and Old World comparison in jade studies to be extremely useful, as one can approach Mesoamerican jade having in mind the research methods employed in other regions. Knowledge of Chinese jades is comprehensive, not only because of the abundant material available for study, but also as a result of the surviving Medieval accounts about jade, found in Chinese works as early as 12th century. They contain descriptions of how to make jade objects, and details of the mysticism associated with this material. Since the *Ku yu t'u p'u*, "Illustrated Description of Ancient Jades," was published in 1176 and *Ku yu t'u*, "Ancient Jades Illustrated," in 1341, a prominent bibliography about jade included not only archeological, ethnological, and art studies, but also research in

mineralogy, petrology, and geology of jade (Foshag 1957:2). A current exhibition *Art in Quest of Heaven and Truth – Chinese jades through the Ages* at the National Palace Museum at Taipei (Taiwan) provides a description of jade studies. It is roughly divided in three traditional sections: the mineralogical description of jade, location of jade deposits, the craft and technology of jade carving. They are, in my view, useful in discussion of New World jade too. In China at least four phases of jade craftsmanship are distinguished, called the Spirit of Jade, the Virtue of Jade, the Blossoms of Jade, and the Ingenuity of Jade Carving (Shu-p'ing et al. 2012:1). In Mesoamerica, apart from the Olmec and Maya style shift in jade production, the phases are not fully articulated yet.

There are two interesting similarities between the perception of jade in China and Mesoamerica. In both places jade was used both in rituals and as an ornament. Jade earrings, hair ornaments, necklaces, bracelets, anklets, pendant sets, belt plaques, and masks manifested beauty and status. The Chinese jade *gui* tablets and *bi* disks were used for performing important spiritual and secular functions (Figure 1.2 a). *Gui* tablets are a type of symbolic jades, usually elongated with a flat or pointed head. They were associated with four directions, and people from different social ranks used *gui* tablets of different sizes and materials on various occasions (Childs-Johnson 1995:64). The *Bi* disks have the shape of a plate, with a round hole in the center, resembling the ancient Maya earflare. The administrative government document *The Rites of Zhou* described sacrificial activities, which involved six ritual objects (*bi*, *cong*, *gui*, *zhang*, *huang*, and *hu*) to be offered to Heaven, Earth, and the four directions (Figure 1.2b). According to

The Rites of Zhou, the blue *bi* was for heaven, the yellow *cong* for earth, the black *gui* for the eastern world etc. (Yu 2011:58). Thus in China, ritual jade objects of different colors were closely linked to the hierarchy within a society and appeared as offerings in tombs of rulers and the elite to accompany the deceased upon transition to the other world (Yu 2011:57).



Figure 1.2 (a) Chinese jade *Gui* tablet (left) and *Bi* disk (right) (Yu 2011:57)

Another key role of jade was to mediate between human and divine spheres. It allowed to channel between heaven and earth through ritual ceremonies, and jade was often seen as a necessary sacrifice (Shu-p'ing et al. 2012:113). In Mesoamerica the symbolic significance of shiny, reflective objects, suggested that they embodied a shamanic worldview. Translucent jades have depth, which resembles “looking inside, below the surface, at the reflection similar to a still pool of water” (Snarskis 2003:161). Water and transition from human to the divine is traditionally associated with agriculture and the basic vital force, responsible for sustenance and survival (*ibid.*).

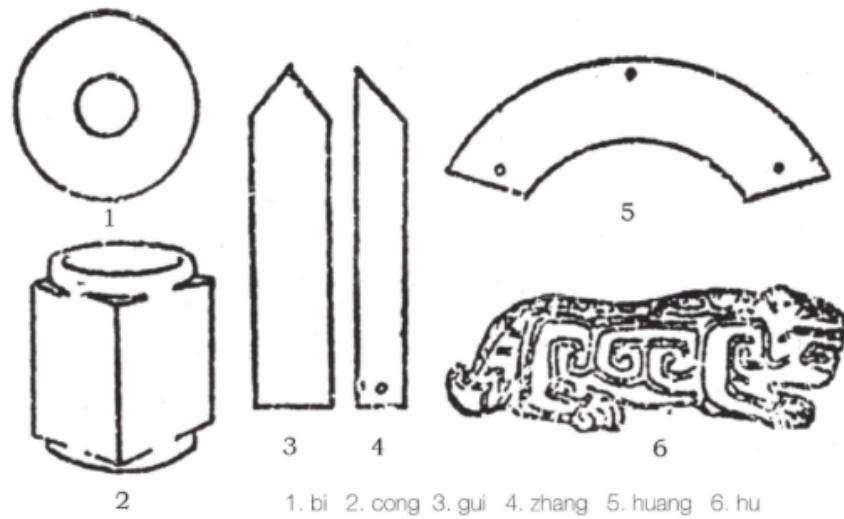


Figure 1.2 (b) The six sacrificial jade objects recorded in The Rites of Zhou (Yu 2011:57)

In other words, there seems to be an evident similarity in relation of jade to eternity, as it was believed for centuries to be high in *jingqi* (vital force or energy) in China, and to be representing the breath of life for the ancient Maya. Jade enabled with power to talk to ancestors and deities, and was associated with encoded symbols (Shu-p'ing et al. 2012:1–2). Another interesting detail is that the oldest Chinese definition of *yu* (jade) from *Shuowen Jiezi* dictionary (100 C.E) suggested five major characteristics of jade: “gentle and subtle sheen; consistency in and out; clear, melodious, and far reaching sound when struck; hardness, breakable, but never bendable; and polished squareness without sharp edges” (Shu-p'ing et al. 2012:3). These are almost identical to the main modern physical markers of jadeite, which were discussed above.

The traditional procedure of Chinese jade carving has been developing over many thousands of years, and was well documented on the color plates by Li

Chengyuan in the late 19th century, and published in *The Bishop Collection. Investigations and Studies in Jade* (Kunz and Bushell 1906:372–378). It included the description of the 13 necessary steps, starting from making the abrasives by grinding and pounding stones, shells, sand, and gravel, to cutting, chipping off, shaping, piercing holes, and polishing the jade (Kunz and Bushell 1906:373). The key principle has always been the use of tools with the help of stone sand or so called “tool-operated sand abrading” (Shu-p’ing et al. 2012:23). Hence understanding the standard process and method of making jade artifacts, scholars could infer from manufacturing marks which different tools were used, depending on the method of cutting and shaping the raw material (Figure 1.3). For example, string cutting would leave curves of various diameters going in parallel, whereas slicing would result in straight lines (Shu-p’ing et al. 2012:24). Piercing holes, for suspension for example, involved two basic kinds of drills – solid and later developed tube drills in China, while the most widely employed four techniques of drilling the jade were the following: the bare-hand method, the hammer-and-chisel method, the bow method, and the two-side twist-and-push method (Shu-p’ing et al. 2012:26).

The hammer-and-chisel method often resulted in holes of irregular form, while the feature of the two-side twist-and-push method was a distinctive broad, beveled band along the hole’s rim, often left with marks of rotation (Shu-p’ing et al. 2012:27). Different sizes of drills were used to create “tunneled” or connected holes, which ensured integrity of motifs on the front surface (Shu-p’ing et al. 2012:28), which we can also observe in the Maya art. Moreover, what used to be

the utilitarian axe heads with marks of use, became a privilege as the society grew more stratified, and jade axes were often without marks of actual use, drifting in the realm of worship and warfare, as they became the symbol of power and status (Shu-p'ing et al. 2012:44). This valuable record of Chinese carving techniques, and the association of jade with the energy and vitality of life, is interesting to compare with the production marks and evidence from the artifacts present in Mesoamerica.

Mesoamerican ethnohistorical sources also discussed in general lapidary techniques, including jadedwork at the time of the Spanish conquest. Sahagún narrated the process of jade production, although he was criticized for being “unduly vague,” as he described only the final shaping and polishing, “grinding one stone against another, scraping or possibly incising tools, the use of sand or emery as abrasives, and a final polishing with hard wood such as bamboo” (Lothrop 1955:47–48).

The preform artifacts received final shape and polish using four different techniques – grinding, sanding, reaming, especially for earspools and hair adornments, and polishing. To finish some artifacts the artisans also used such special intricate final techniques as carving, engraving, grooving, incising, and drilling (Garza-Valdes 1991:323). The latter final stages of production were, supposedly, carried out by elites, who could alienate the primary producers through a monopoly on the esoteric knowledge, such as knowledge of hieroglyphic writing, the calendar, and the rituals – not available for everyone (Kovacevich 2011:314) .

Percussion was the first step in the manufacturing sequence to obtain desired size and shape through either shattering or pecking. Archaeological evidence of the workmanship described by Sahagún was found at Cancuen in the form of hammerstones of jade, chert, and quartz, as well as jade debitage, a byproduct of percussion (Kovacevich 2011:304). The technique of pecking with a round or blunt stone tool was commonly used in the elaboration of round beads and celts. Pecking, or a free-hand percussion, was used to shape objects, yet it also normally left undesirable visible marks on the object (Foshag 1957:51). According to Foshag, pecking was observed in lesser quality jades, so that many celts and beads showed the percussion scars on the poll and sides, and so called "light percussion ghosts" below the polish of the face (*ibid.*).

Grinding was another means of pre-forming an object in jade to achieve a slight modification, for example to square off the stem and to smooth the edges of the earflares. This technique Forshag described as "tedious and laborious process," and presumably it was not as widely used as pecking and sawing. Sawing technique was often used when larger pieces of jade were cut into "slabs or thin wafers for further elaboration," and included hard stone or hard wood saws with abrasives (Kovacevich 2011:305). Traditionally, string sawing consisted of coating string with an abrasive and rubbing it back and forth across the place to be cut (Lothrop 1955:48). The disadvantage of the string sawing was the difficulty to keep the jade in place. This problem was solved by using a wet abrasive: "the ancient Chinese used a substance called toad grease, which was thought to have magical properties that softened the jade," which was, according to scholars, most

probably, animal fat, which held the abrasive in place and made it easier and faster to cut jade (Kovacevich 2011:306–307).

Lothrop pointed out that there were five advantages of string sawing over other methods:

1. With a flat saw, all initial cuts must start on an exterior surface. With a string saw, a small hole may be drilled and the cutting started anywhere.

2. By string sawing it is possible to cut curved interior lines which could not be made with a flat saw.

3. Conversely, as is the case with a narrow jigsaw, it is not easy to cut straight lines.

4. It is characteristic of sawing away from a drilled hole that the cut is narrower than the hole, because the string, when pulled tight, becomes narrower.

5. To obtain enough pressure, the string must be bent across the surface to be cut. The end of the cut, therefore, will not be flat but rounded (Lothrop 1955:48).

A wide variety of drills were used in Mesoamerica. Small or thin objects were usually single-drilled from one side only to yield a small conical hole, while larger objects were double-drilled first from one side, then the other, to yield a biconical hole (Foshag 1957:53). In drilling there were two basic techniques: the solid drill, and the tubular drill (Garza-Valdes 1991:323). Drilling, especially with a tubular drill, was employed to create circular or semi-circular design elements, so drills were often pointed and were leaving conical holes: small objects were drilled

from one side only, while larger objects were drilled from both sides to meet in the middle (Kovacevich 2011:311).

Incising left characteristic fine or thick lines in jade artifacts, and was probably accomplished with a stone at least as hard as jade, such as quartz or quartzite, chert, and jade itself. Chert was the most common incising tool, because it was most easily shaped by flaking to create the desired thickness (Kovacevich 2011:309). Polishing was the final step in the process of creating of a jade artifact, and probably, based on microscopic evidence, hard polishers were used in conjunction with fine abrasives (Foshag 1957:55–57).

The range of lithic reduction techniques divided into the quarrying of raw jade, the preparation of macroflakes into blanks, the bifacial reduction into preforms, followed by pecking and shaping of axe preforms was observed in the field in the upper Rio Tambor study area (Taube et al. 2011:147). The survey carried out in 2004 in Jalapa and Zacapa in Guatemala discovered primary jade workshops in the Rio El Tambor region, and found out that the exploitation of the blue-green jadeite occurred only in the Middle Preclassic, but primarily during the late Classic (Taube et al. 2011:149). The main product of the jadeite-rich region was preforms of jade celts, which raised a question of who was consuming the jade-axe preforms, and how they were used.

1.3. Patterns of Jade Use in Mesoamerica and Cancuen Jade Workshop

Since the first discovery of jadeite sources near Manzanotal in Guatemala, we have known about the existence of jade workshops nearby in the Middle

Motagua Valley, where the ancient jade working was performed (Foshag and Leslie 1955:81). It was noted that there was "jade-worker's material" from Guaytán, one of the major sites in the Middle Motagua region, although the investigators were not aware of natural jadeite in the region (Smith and Kidder 1943:165). In terms of jadeite sources in Mesoamerica, the area of Quebrada El Silencio, Quebrada del Mico and Quebrada Seca is of special importance as it contains major natural outcrops of translucent blue jadeite, the type favored by the Formative Olmecs. No major archaeological reconnaissance had been performed in the jade bearing regions in the upper Río El Tambor before 2004 (Taube et al. 2005:18). As a part of a larger *Programa de Arqueología de Motagua Medio*, the *Proyecto Arqueológico del Jade* was initiated in February of 2004 to document archaeological sites and jadeite sources in the upper Río El Tambor drainage system (Taube et al. 2011:145).

Cherished not only for its beauty, jade in Mesoamerica was a symbol of maize, water, fertility, and on a broader scale was associated with cosmological beliefs and life's essence (Taube 2005:23). It attracted scholars' attention from the early excavations and several greatest finds of jade caches in the early 1940s (Stirling 1941) until more recent discussions in Maya studies, focusing on non-elite jade production and consumption (Rochette 2009; Kovacevich 2013). It was demonstrated archaeologically that there was a variety of ways in which jade could have been used by individuals and social groups of differing status, and its meaning was changing through time (Rochette 2009:207).

The chemical sourcing analysis was employed to test jades from Cancuen, a site located between the Maya highlands and lowlands at a strategic point along the Pasión and Usumacinta river system. Those studies added to a previously mentioned research of jade sourcing. It was demonstrated how chemical sourcing could shed light on the organization of jade production and exchange. In 2001, twenty-seven pieces of greenstone debitage recovered from production contexts at Cancuen were subjected to laser ablation inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (LA-ICP-MS), which is a nondestructive technique in chemical characterization analysis (Kovacevich 2013:268). This method was chosen to identify a source for the procurement of the raw materials, and to look for compositional matches with finished products from other centers. The results led to an assumption that the jade of the upper Motagua Valley is distinct from the Middle Motagua Valley samples collected by the Maya Jade and Ceramic Research Project. The analysis also brought to light an interesting fact about the ties of Cancuen workshop with the other Maya sites (Kovacevich 2013:268–269). It demonstrated that the jade from Cancuen compositionally matched three tesserae of the funerary mask of K'inich Janahb' Pakal I, a Classic period ruler of a powerful lowland Maya center of Palenque, thus linking Cancuen production to the elites at Palenque.

The study of production and exchange of jade objects in the Maya region during the Classic period (A.D. 600–900) based on the example of the Maya site of Cancuen supported the assumptions of “an economic system entangled in ritual and ideology with multiple interacting spheres” (Kovacevich 2013:258). In total

3538 pieces of greenstone debitage were collected from an excavation of a non-elite structure group at Cancuen, most of which included evidence of string-sawing, unfinished boulders, polishing tools, drills, string-saw anchors, and jade microdebitage as important indicators that there was a lithic production (Kovacevich 2013:262). Of these 3380 jade pieces represented the early stages of production and were recovered from simple earthen mounds (Kovacevich 2011:151). Despite a high percentage of debitage with marks of percussion and string-sawing, there was little evidence of the final stages of production of jade artifacts, or of the finished products themselves (Kovacevich 2013:263). The presence of an earflare polisher in the royal context is often used as additional proof of the elite engagement in production, because polishers as a type of burial good have been previously found in palatial contexts at other Maya sites, such as Kaminaljuyu. The documented elite craft participation at Aguateca and Copan supported the concept of elite involvement in the production (Kovacevich 2013:265). Kovacevich claims that jade production visible in the archaeological record includes not only consumption of the finished jade products by the royal and non-royal elites, but also elite artisans who carried out the final stages of jade production, and intermediate producers who made caches of raw jade (Kovacevich 2011:161–162).

The data from Cancuen jade workshop excavations provided the archaeological evidence of segmented production and the use of distinct technologies by certain groups. This reflected the social structure of the site, where there were two manufacturing sequences, conducted by elites and non-elites

(Kovacevich 2011:300). The non-elite manufacturing included the initial shaping of the artifact by percussion, sawing, and drilling, while blanks or preforms were finished by elite crafters using incising and polishing, which could have been defining the social status and hierarchy (Kovacevich 2011:300–301). Thus, scholars think that the segmentation of production and restriction of certain technologies may have served as a tool of social control, because it was not the access to raw material, but the knowledge and skills needed to produce finished objects, which allowed the elites to receive special training, learn the “craft secrets” in order to produce elaborately carved jade plaques, earflares, and pendants (Kovacevich 2011:301).

At Cancuen, commoners did have access to jade, but it was mostly of low quality, or “social jade” (imitation), and it appeared in a limited number of forms. Although jade beads were present in non-elite structures, the jades were often of poor quality or of a related inferior green mineral, for example “a mineral or rock softer than jadeite, with physical imperfections and/or a brownish or muddy green color” (Kovacevich 2013:266).

The two categories of jade goods, utilitarian and prestige, used to be often dichotomized in relation to craft production and exchange. Previously the specialization was seen as dual model with either full-time specialization or part-time, wealth or utilitarian items production and distribution, elite or non-elite involvement, which were separately characterized and analyzed (Kovacevich 2013:255–257). However, recent studies in the Maya region revealed that simple

dichotomized categories could not explain the organization of Maya economic systems, as jade production was entangled in ritual process. If the ritual may have been the original stimulus for craft production, the economic functions could not be examined independently of ritual and ideological concerns (Kovacevich 2013:257). In other words, many jade objects could have been ritually charged, but at the same time the others could become items of wealth as well available for non-elites. According to the data from the Middle Motagua Valley, elaborate, highly crafted and unique jadeite artifacts with diverse iconographic imagery were certainly items restricted in distribution to elites, and may even have been crafted as part of sponsored production arrangements by elites (Rochette 2009:218). Nonetheless, some types of jadeite artifacts, particularly beads, produced in the region, appeared to have predominantly been simple, low-value artifacts that were used in bulk by elites to signify their status, but were also recovered in non-elite contexts in the Maya lowlands (Rochette 2009:218). Therefore, not all jadeite artifact were produced by or for elites, but rather their contexts of production could have varied in the same manner as their value and design complexity.

In other words, jade caching and production highlights status and identity, referring to complex social patterns and processes of self-identification in the society. Through the diachronic and contextualized semiotic analysis I propose to look at T-shape pendants as a particular type of finished jade objects reserved for the Maya elites.

2. A SEMIOTIC APPROACH TO MAYA WIND SYMBOLISM

Visual symbols either consciously or unconsciously communicate ideas to an observer, and a semiotic method and theory were employed in archaeology to discuss symbols and images as a form of text (Meissner 2006:49–50). Modern semiotics relies on the synthesis of semiotic theory proposed by American pragmatist Charles S. Peirce and Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, and focuses on the act of sign production, communication, and meaning. While iconography can be understood as a declaration of meaning, semiotics attempts to understand the process in which sign signification occurs, emphasizing a diachronic perspective, not aiming to recover the authoritative intent of an image, but highlighting the evolution of signs and the roots of various signifying orders (Meissner 2006:51, 53)

2.1. Previous Research on Mesoamerican Wind Symbolism

Cosmological principles are often key symbols, which help to form models of and for reality that shape a person's understanding of their culture and their cosmos (Geertz 1973:93). The research of religious concepts in Mesoamerica traditionally focused on agricultural fertility and rainfall. Karl Taube was among the first to emphasize the symbolism of wind, which constituted the ultimate source of rain, life-giving maize, and human life itself (Taube 2001:102). For the Aztecs the force of wind could have been embodied in a duck-billed deity Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl, who played a central role in the creation myth of Postclassic highland Mexico. To the Postclassic Mixtec people of Oaxaca, he was Nine Wind, both the

creator god, and the source of rain, yet he had a negative side too, bringing strong gales, and the evil winds that cause death and disease (Taube 2001:102–103).

Scholars have noticed that in Mesoamerica there has always been a contradiction that the wind god belongs to the underworld, lives in caves, both bringing and creating rain-bearing clouds, because the source of water is terrestrial and underworld, but falls from the sky (Taube 2001:104). It is based on observation that caves with multiple openings could create a “wind pattern,” known as seasonal “chimney effect,” when the lower entrance would “inhale” in winter, and “exhale” during the summer, thus creating detectable “breath” in nearly all caves (Taube 2001:105). A great Olmec example of similar beliefs of the moisture and rain coming out of the mountain, bringing fertility, could be Middle Formative rock carvings from Chalcatzingo in Mexican state of Morelos. It depicts both a zoomorphic and floral quatrefoil cave breathing out scrolls of rain with growing maize, which could also be a representation of movement and wind, with volutes regarded as a form of rain clouds (Taube 2001:107). In Central Mexico during the Early Classic Period (AD 250-600) the dominant figure of the plumed serpent in the iconography is a bringer of wind and rain, which continues to the Aztec Quetzalcoatl tradition. This creature of wind and water, the plumed serpent, is often identified with the conch, a spiral shell that resembles both a coiled snake and whirlwinds, which could convert blown air into a thunderous sound, and becomes a “wind-jewel” of the Late Postclassic wind god, Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl (Taube 2001:111). Therefore, the Late Postclassic wind god would wear a wind jewel, which is a conch trumpet, often substituted by a cut-shell pectoral, worn

together with a necklace of spiral shells, shell ear pendants, and most importantly the duck-billed buccal mask, which might have derived from a hooded merganser, called *ecatototl* or “wind bird” by the Aztecs, or a duck *atapalcatl*, a “harbinger of rain” (Taube 2001:112). In Aztec myths the wind is always closely related to the music, dance, and musical instruments, such as rattles, drums, and motifs of birds, butterflies, and flowers (Taube 2001:114). Finally, in Postclassic Mesoamerica temples of the wind god were always circular in plan, referring back to spiraling and whirling wind, conch trumpets, and coiled serpents (Taube 2001:112–113).

2.2. Analysis of Maya T-shape Pattern

Jade “Jester God” diadems, necklaces, belt celts, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic pendants, ear flares, and beaded skirts are traditionally linked to images of Maya rulers. In fact, a common way to depict “the abject and pathetic state of captive elites” was to portray them “stripped of their jade finery” (Taube 2005:23). In Maya studies, jade is often related to a wide range of interrelated concepts of kingship and authority, wealth and prestige, water and maize, cosmological centrality and immortality (Taube 2005:25).

The ancient Maya identified jade with the essence or the “breath of life,” so by putting a jade bead in the mouth of the dead as a burial practice, the jade was becoming a “breath spirit essence of the deceased” (Benson and Griffin 1988:225). Scholars argue that it could be viewed as a replacement for a human heart as an essential element in burials, because of the jade’s life-giving properties, it could

be substituting the heart in giving vitality to the dead (Fitzsimmons and Shimada 2011:216).

Jade pectorals shaped or including the *Ik'* wind sign, which looks like English letter "T," appear both in Maya art – for instance, on stelae and stucco (Finamore and Houston 2010:122), and as actual objects, including a pectoral from Calakmul (Taube 2005:33), and perforated plaques from Chichen Itza (Proskouriakoff 1974:150–151, 159). According to Taube, four earspool wind signs placed around a floral form, a motif found on Naranjo Altar 1, carved bone from Tikal Burial 116, and Late Classic vessel from Museo Popol Vuh, could refer to the winds of the four directions, bringing necessary moisture and life. Hence caches featuring four jades placed around a central element may concern not only the cardinal world directions and the center, but also directional winds (Taube 2005:32–34). The *Ik'* sign may also refer to wind essential in performing music, thus it might appear on rattles, drums, and other musical instruments (Looper 2010:159). The jade belt celts, which typically hang as tinklers in sets of three, could also display the *Ik'* sign and possibly refer to a clinging sound they make upon movement, or "jade acoustical qualities" (Taube 2005:32).

The current interpretation of meaning of jade pendants as wind-jewels relies on their appearance as "pendant bar-and-bead assemblages," which probably depicted the drops falling from cloud-making wind (Taube 2005:34). This hypothesis unites two most powerful concepts of wind and water, which correspond with the general understanding of a divine relation between the ancient

Maya rulers and their gods. Nonetheless, T-shaped pendants are not found as often as jade earflares, beads, or for example jester god that is a “primary icon of power” in Classic period Maya art (Fields 1986:1). After a summary of excavations at Str.7 at Nim li Punit, and the exact context of the find, I propose to compare a T-shape pendant from Nim li Punit to shell-shaped and T-shape pendants known from a variety of contexts, starting from Olmec offerings on the Gulf Coast during the Formative period in Maya Lowlands to the early avian axe pendants at Costa Rica.

3. WIND SYMBOLISM AT THE SITE LEVEL

3.1. Summary of Structure 7 Excavations at Nim li Punit

Belize is located on the Caribbean coast of Central America. The Hondo river and Chetumal Bay form the frontier with Mexico on the north and north-west, on the west the forest defines the border with the Guatemalan Department of El Peten, while the southern frontier with Guatemala is Sarstoon river (Hammond 1982:349). Southern Belize is an interesting region in the Maya area, where five centers thrived on a relatively small territory during the Late Classic period (Braswell et al. 2012:1). Uxbenka was the first of these communities to be settled at the end of the Late Preclassic. Nim li Punit was occupied sometime in the Early Classic period. During the 6th century A.D. the Maya city of Pusilha was founded by settlers with strong ties to the southwestern Peten. In the 8th century A.D. the sites of Lubaantun and Xnaheb were occupied. During the Late Classic period, the rulers of all five polities commissioned carved monuments containing hieroglyphic texts glorifying their actions (*ibid.*). In 2009, the Toledo Regional Interaction Project (TRIP) grew out of the previous Pusilha Archaeological Project in order to understand better how the sites and their polities functioned together as a region (Braswell 2010; Braswell et al. 2011a, 2011b; Fauvelle et al. 2012).

In March 1976 an oil-exploration company ran a seismic line into the foothills of the Maya Mountains, and a bulldozer cut into a stone-faced substructure on the flat hill north of the plaza (Hammond and Howarth 1999:1–2). The ruins were reported to Joseph O. Palacio, an Archaeological Commissioner of Belize,

who inspected the site and discovered the main plaza with stela. He named the site Ni li Punit, “large hat” in Kekchi, referring to an impressive feathered headdress worn by the ruler depicted on Stela 14 (Hammond and Howarth 1999:2). The preliminary archaeological exploration of Nim li Punit was started by Normann Hammond in April 1976 in order to map the main plaza, and to make drawings and casts of the carved stelae (*ibid.*).

The site is built on the Toledo Beds, a complex series of Oligocene siltstones, sandstones, shales, and grits, and Cretaceous or later limestones (Hammond and Howarth 1999:2). The available material, sandstone and limestone, was used as a building stone, as a rubble during construction, and to carve out monuments. Maya archaeological site of Nim li Punit consists of three separate hilltop habitation groups linked by public space containing a ballcourt (Braswell and Fauvelle 2011:3) In all there are 60 mapped structures, and at the south end of the site, adjacent to the royal residential group, there is a stela plaza that includes two range structures that may have served public or administrative functions. Eight hieroglyphic monuments of Nim li Punit have dedicatory dates of A.D. 721-831, carved and erected in two short bursts of monumental activity, separated by a long interregnum (Braswell et al. 2012:3). Four early monuments have dedicatory dates spanning A.D. 721-741. Second carving period took place during the early Terminal Classic period, A.D. 790-831, so there is a period of 50 years when no carved monuments were erected. The “Ek Xukpi” or “Black Leafnosed Bat” title can be found at the early set of Nim li Punit monuments. The

last appearance of the Ek Xukpi title at Nim li Punit was written in A.D. 738, the same year that the Copan king was killed by his rival at Quirigua.

Neither a large and formal acropolis containing multiple temples, nor complex palace structure, similar to those in nearby Pusilha or Lubaantun, can be found at Nim li Punit. The latter is a rural dynastic manor with some public architecture, but it is not an urbanized site (Braswell and Fauvelle 2011:3–4). In 2011 seventeen test pits were placed in three groups: in and just off of the Stela Plaza of the South Group, in the West Group, an isolated residential group containing the largest structure at the site, and in or near the North Group, the smallest of the three residential groups at Nim li Punit (Figure 3.1).

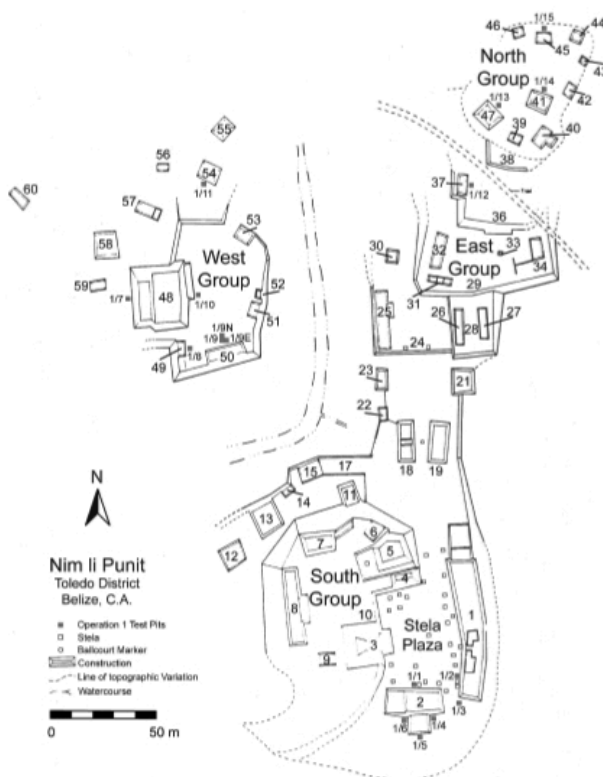


Figure 3.1 Nim li Punit site plan (Braswell and Fauvelle 2011:10; after Leventhal 1990: Map 8.2)

Nim li Punit has a habitation group-style palace in the South Group called the Plaza of the Royal Tombs (Figure 3.2). Three collapsed burials were discovered there in the 1980s and 1990s. The most elaborate of them, Tomb I, contained the bodies of four to five individuals, around 39 ceramic vessels, jade diadems, stingray spine fragments, and other precious objects associated with prestige of the local rulers (Leventhal 1990). Tomb I was located in front of Structure 5, a small eastern shrine, which follows a common household pattern associated with ancestor worship often found in Belize and the eastern Peten (Braswell et al. 2012:3). Tombs 2 and 3 were found partially under the steps of Structure 8, a 37.5 m long by 7.6 m wide structure, which had no analogues on the other plazas of the site (Fauvelle et al. 2013:243).

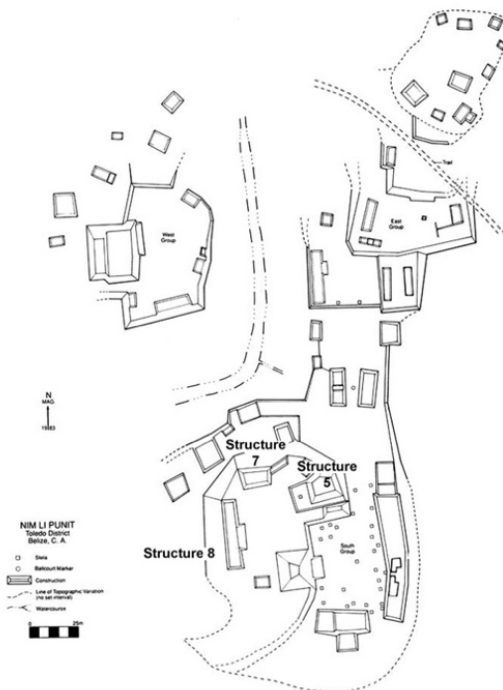


Figure 3.2. Nim li Punit, Palace Group (Braswell et al. 2012:10, after Leventhal 1990: Map 8.2)

Structure 8 stretches the entire length of the west side of the Palace Group and includes at least four stages of construction. It served most probably as a council house (Braswell et al. 2012:4). Structure 7 functioned as a platform that supported the royal residence of Nim li Punit, based on the architectural form and elaboration of the platform, its articulation with two outbuildings, and the number and kind of caches found within it (Fauvelle et al. 2013:247–248). Having in mind the importance of the South Group, the goals of the 2012 field season were to excavate Structure 7, a large platform that was first assumed to be roughly square in plan, located at the north end of the courtyard and associated with two small outbuildings, and Structure 8 first associated with the found tombs, in order to determine their functions within the habitation group-style palace of Nim li Punit (Braswell et al. 2012:5–6).

In 2012, just east of the centerline of Structure 7 and beneath the flagstone floor, a simple, roofless crypt measuring about 2 m to a side was found (Figure 3.3). Within that crypt were “three imported Belize Red vessels in Late to Terminal Classic forms, scattered re-deposited human remains (including teeth with jade inlays, mandible fragments, and part of a leg), a vessel containing numerous stingray spines, other bloodletters made of both *El Chayal* and *Ixtepeque* obsidian, a red-slipped bowl on top of a plate, a flute made of bone, a ceramic flute, a broken jade bead, a fragment of *Spondylus* worked to make beads, a bone needle and other carved bone tools that were possibly associated with women, a broken stone biface made of imported chert, slate fragments, and a variety of animal bones suggesting either feasting or the deposition of food in the crypt” (Fauvelle et al.

2013:249). Outside of the crypt proper the team found “two clear tooth caches in partial vessels, a third concentration of teeth, a single phalanx in a partial bowl or plate, a second bowl with phalanges, a fragment of a gadrooned Belize Red vase, a near complete red-slipped plate, and at least two small strings of shell beads painted green” (*ibid.*).

After the comparison of the offerings from Nim li Punit Tomb 4 with similar finds at other southern Belizean sites, such as Pusilha, Lubantuun, and Uxbenka, it was suggested that the concentrations of human teeth both inside and outside the crypt, within vessels or without them, was related to ancestor veneration and strongly indicated that Structure 7 was a house (Braswell and Pitcavage 2009:25–26). Moreover, the fact of the opening, resealing and re-consecration of the Tomb 4 as well as the re-deposition of materials found in it, supported the notion of ancestor worship and that it was the house of the leader of Nim li Punit during the Early, Late, and early Terminal Classic periods (Fauvelle et al. 2013:249–250).

The investigation of Structure 7 was continued in 2015 to finish the work started in 2012 for a better understanding of the major construction phases, and to gain more evidence about the life history of this building. The second season of the study of the Plaza of the Royal Tombs at Nim li Punit in 2015 generated new interesting data, regarding the history of the palace complex, when 4 to 6 m east of the primary north-south axis of Structure 7, a Terminal Classic Tomb 5 was found, which would be discussed below (Figure 3.3).

Structure 7 is believed to be a royal residence constructed in two major phases, first in the Early Classic and later modified during the Terminal Classic (Braswell et al. 2015). The construction of a rectangular building called Structure 7 substructure, with plaster floor and a bench that ran the length of the north side of the building, took place somewhere between A.D. 150-400, based on ceramic evidence. It is suggested that the building in this phase was facing the south and possibly had a stair block in the south leading to the plaza floor that was likely mimicked by the later stair block, seen today on the southern face of the final form of Structure 7. The next modification was started around A.D. 400, when the plaster floor on top of the structure was cut into to place a burial crypt. After the crypt was constructed the interior of Structure 7 substructure was re-plastered with a new floor, the bench in the north of the structure maintained its importance, as archaeologists noticed the lipping of the plaster floors up onto the bench. A large area of burning demonstrated that some activity involving fire took place on the platform sometime between the initial construction and the modification described above. The proposed explanations associate the burning area with either a ritual cleansing of the perishable superstructure that was burnt down and replaced or, alternatively, it happened prior to a much bigger modification, so fire was used to remove the perishable superstructure, ritually clean the building and prepare for a significant reconstruction of Structure 7, which occurred around A.D. 830, again according to the ceramic evidence (Braswell et al. 2016).

It is advocated that Terminal Classic brought a major overall symbolic change for Structure 7, when the perishable superstructure was removed and the

stair block in the south leading to the plaza was completely taken apart and the original rectangular platform of Structure 7 substructure was enclosed within a T-shape platform, by creating a larger frame of walls to the east west and south of the original platform (Figure 3.3).

That means the exterior of this Terminal Classic structure was a new construction that completely enclosed the earlier Structure 7 substructure, which was assumed based on the fact that at no location the new construction abuts or comes into contact with the older structure. On the west side of the structure, at the vertex of the T-shape, a small staircase was placed to allow access to the top of the platform from the west. At the southern end of the platform a wide stair block with two side outsets was placed to provide access to the platform from the plaza, abutting to the southern face of the T-shape platform of Structure 7. The eastern side of the new platform mimics in symmetry the T-shape of the platform, but does not include a small staircase on this side. Instead, at the north end of the eastern façade a wall was constructed to join both the Structure 7 platform and another wall heading west from Structure 7a. The combination of these two walls, between Str. 7 and 7a, limited the access to the central plaza from the north. These adjoining walls had at least two steps leading up to the platform summit from Structure 7a, thus providing a direct access to the Tomb 5 located in the north-eastern corner of Structure 7.

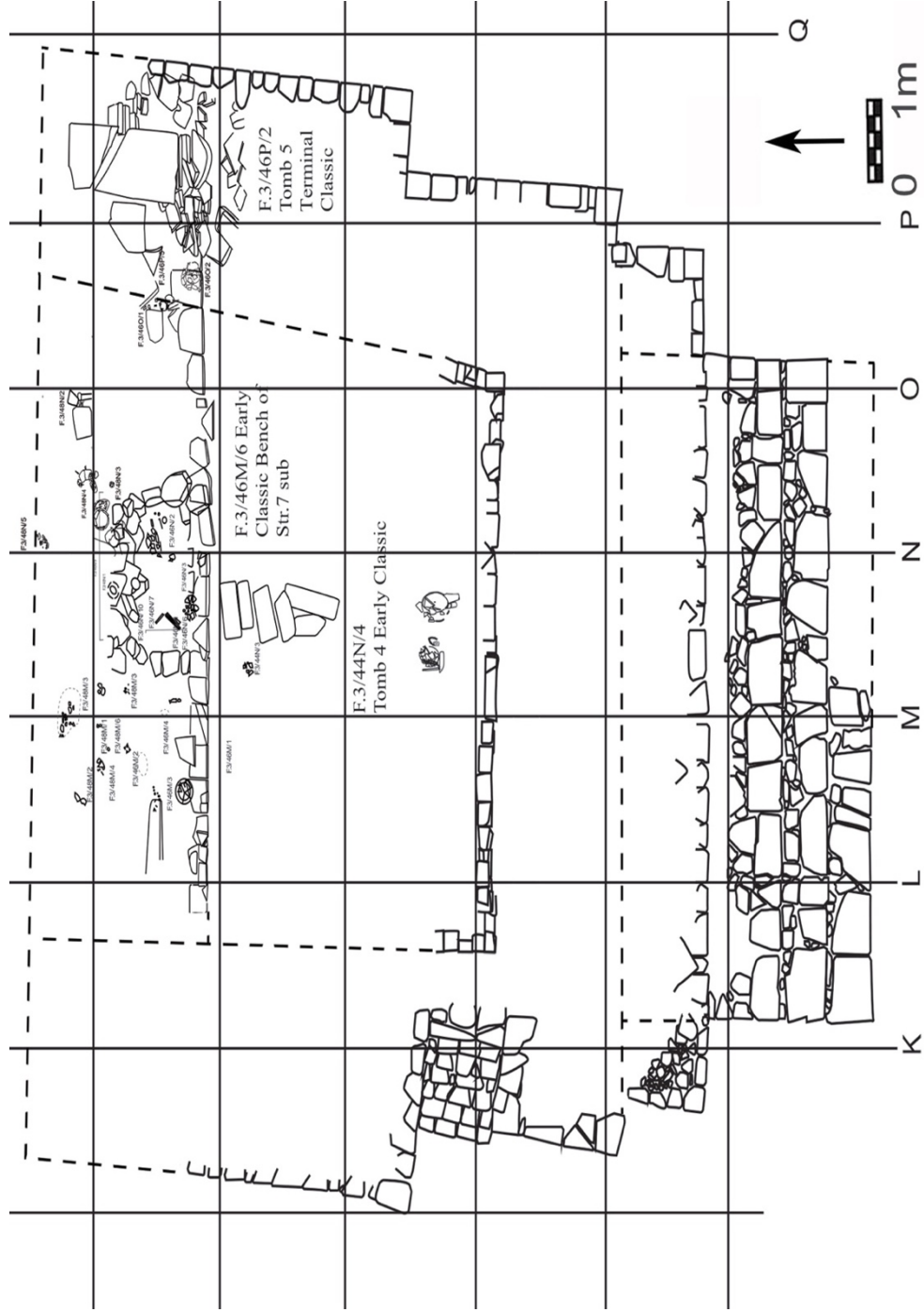


Figure 3.3 Plan of consolidated Structure 7 with Tomb 4 and Tomb 5 capstones in place. By C. Fisher, G. Braswell, M. Azarova and M. Borrero

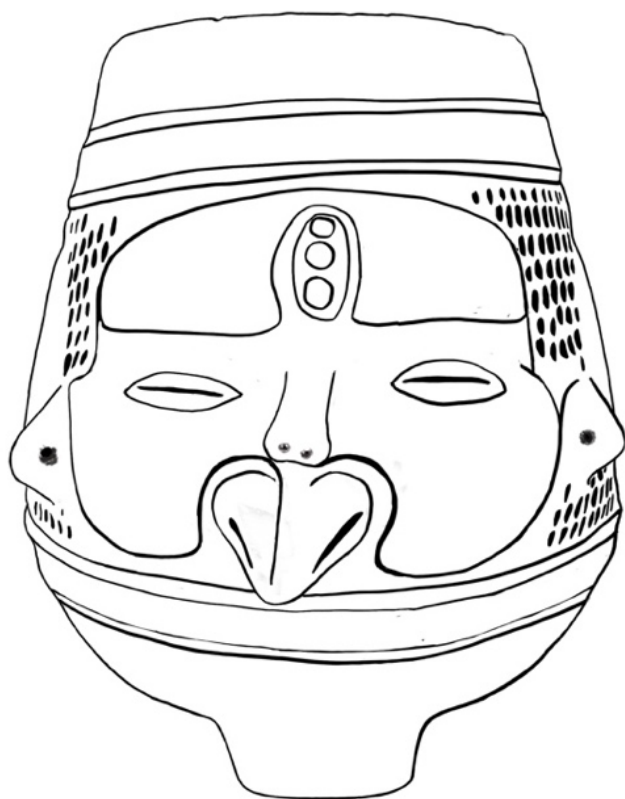
To summarize, Structure 7 at Nim li Punit experienced two major construction phases, but the change of the overall shape of the platform is not considered to represent a change in function as the residence for the royal elite of Nim Li Punit. Instead there was a shift in its symbolic meaning. The new meaning is suggested by the relation of the T-shape *Ik'* (*wind*) glyph, the evidence discovered in Tomb 5, and the idea that the T-shape of the platform expansion around A.D. 830 of Structure 7 (Braswell et al. 2015).

Unfortunately, we do not have any strong examples of the same T-shape platform and wind cult association, whereas in the Late Postclassic Mesoamerica circular plan buildings distinguished the temple of wind god (Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl), for example in Caracol and Chichen Itza in the Maya area (Taube 2001:112–113). At the same time, architects often adopted the Maya *Ik'* sign – a reference to wind or the movement of air – “in either normal or inverted orientation to mark the space around temple doors, courtyard entrances, and windows as portals for the passage of a sacred life-force or breath,” in places of ritual worship and significance (Spencer 2015:23).

A discovery of an intact “Wind-God Vase” 22.5 cm in height (Figure 3.4), dated to the Terminal Classic, marked the location of a potential offering place. The ceramic vessel was found resting directly on the edge of the eastern extreme of the Early Classic bench. This pear-shaped Terminal Classic vessel of the Pabellon Model-Carved supersystem was named a “Wind-God Vase”, because it depicts the god of the winds that bring the seasonal monsoon. In Preclassic times,

this deity is depicted as having a duckbill, similar to the one on Tuxtla Statuette, but the bill gradually changed into a sharp beak (Washington 1888; Taube 2004:171). Precious stone pendants with broad duck bills were popular and widespread in ancient Mesoamerica (Taube 2004:170). Pendants in the form of duck heads are known from a number of Classic period Maya sites, including Kaminaljuyu, Uaxactun, Nebaj, Altun Ha, and Dzibilchaltún, where they have generally been misidentified as “alligator” heads (Taube 2004:171, Figure 3.5). Rather than simply representing a duck, the “Wind-God Vase” from Nim li Punit depicts a human face with a duck bill.

Taube suggested that Maya duck-billed masked deity shares attributes with Late Postclassic highland Mexico wind deity – Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl, who often has a similar duck-bill mask and traditionally wears a “wind jewel,” which is a spoked shell, as a pectoral (Taube 2004:173). There is more and more evidence discovered of a duck wind deity among the Classic Maya (Figure 3.5). In one Late Classic vessel scene (Reents-Budet and Ball 1994:fig. 2.3), the Maya god wears a shell pectoral very much like the cut conch “wind jewel” of the Aztec wind god (Figure 3.6b). On a carved step from Yaxchilan Structure 33 for example, a duck-billed character is epigraphically labeled *ik' k'u*, or “wind god” (Taube 2004:173). Seibal Stela 3 portrays the duck deity as a musician shaking a rattle, and in Late Postclassic central Mexico, the wind god is also a maker and bringer of music (Figure 3.6c). In other words, it appears that like the later people of Late Postclassic highland Mexico, the Classic Maya as well considered an anthropomorphized duck-billed being as a god of wind.



5 cm

Figure 3.4 "Wind-God Vase" from Tomb 5, Str. 7 at Nim li Punit. Drawing by M. Azarova



Figure 3.5 Classic Maya duck-head pendants. (a) Uaxactun; (b) Kaminaljuyu; (c) Kaminaljuyu Stela 17; (d) Uaxactun Structure H-Sub 10; (e) Detail of an Early Classic censer lid; (f) Detail of Early Classic mural from Uaxactun Structure B-XIII; (g) Tikal Stela 7 (Taube 2004:170)

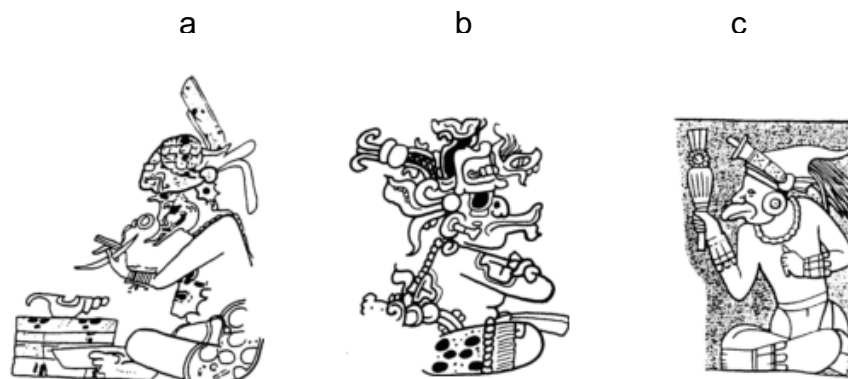


Figure 3.6 Duck figures in ancient Maya art (a) Detail of a Late Classic Maya vase (after Reents-Budet 1994: fig. 2.3); (b) Detail of a Late Classic vessel (after Robicsek and Hales 1981b: no. 1); (c) Seibal Stela 3. Detail of drawing courtesy of James Porter (Taube 2004:172)

Upon clearing the earth overburden above the “Wind-God Vase,” two collapsed walls and capstones were exposed, indicating the presence of Tomb 5. Outside the tomb proper archaeologists recovered 574 ceramic sherds, one piece of obsidian, 13 pieces of chert, one smooth whole *jute* shell, two jade bead fragments, 10 stone bars, three stone bar fragments, and five figurine fragments, and what we primarily thought to be a separate offering - a small chert eccentric, an incised jade fragment, and a stone bar (Braswell et al. 2015). During excavation a very large capstone about 3 m in length by 1 m wide, broken in two pieces, was identified. The north wall of the tomb collapsed northward, yet a significant part of it was found intact in situ. The south wall collapsed and slumped to the north, preserving the stone block rows. It became evident that the recovered intact beautiful “Wind-God Vase” was located directly underneath and protected by the south fallen wall and the large capstone. The tomb was an adjustment to the eastern limit of the Early Classic bench. There was no clear western wall between

the Tomb 5 and the “bench” found. A small west-facing wall or, to be more precise, at least two little steps at the east extreme of the Tomb 5 were discovered, which perhaps served to provide an entrance into the tomb when it was built in Terminal Classic period.

From the Tomb 5 proper archaeologists recovered 893 ceramic sherds, 30 pieces of obsidian, two pieces of chert, one whole spiky *jute* shell, one whole smooth *jute* shell, 10 smooth *jute* shell fragments, one whole *Strombus pugilis* shell, 20 faunal fragments, one coral fragment, one stone bead, one obsidian core, one package of figure fragments, and one *S. pugilis* fragment. It was noted that the wide range of dedicatory artifacts from inside the tomb were damaged and moved northward, when the south wall collapsed. In total 25 vessels in different state of preservation were unearthed, which concentrated in two clusters north of the centerline of the Tomb 5, and underneath the collapsed south wall of the tomb (Figure 3.7).

Ceramic vessels included numerous, but highly eroded polychromes and Terminal Classic Belize Red vases and plates. Among the polychromes there were two matching cream-slipped plates, one of which possibly depicting a lord sitting on a throne facing a secondary individual. Each vessel was bagged and tagged separately for a later close analysis by a ceramicist, except the complete “Wind-God Vase,” which was stored at the Nim li Punit site museum straight after it was found. Unfortunately, there were no offerings identified inside the “Wind-God Vase.”

Toledo Regional Interaction Project 2015
Nim li Punit
Structure 7
Plan detail, Excavation Unit 3/46P, 3/48P
Inside the tomb F3/46P/4

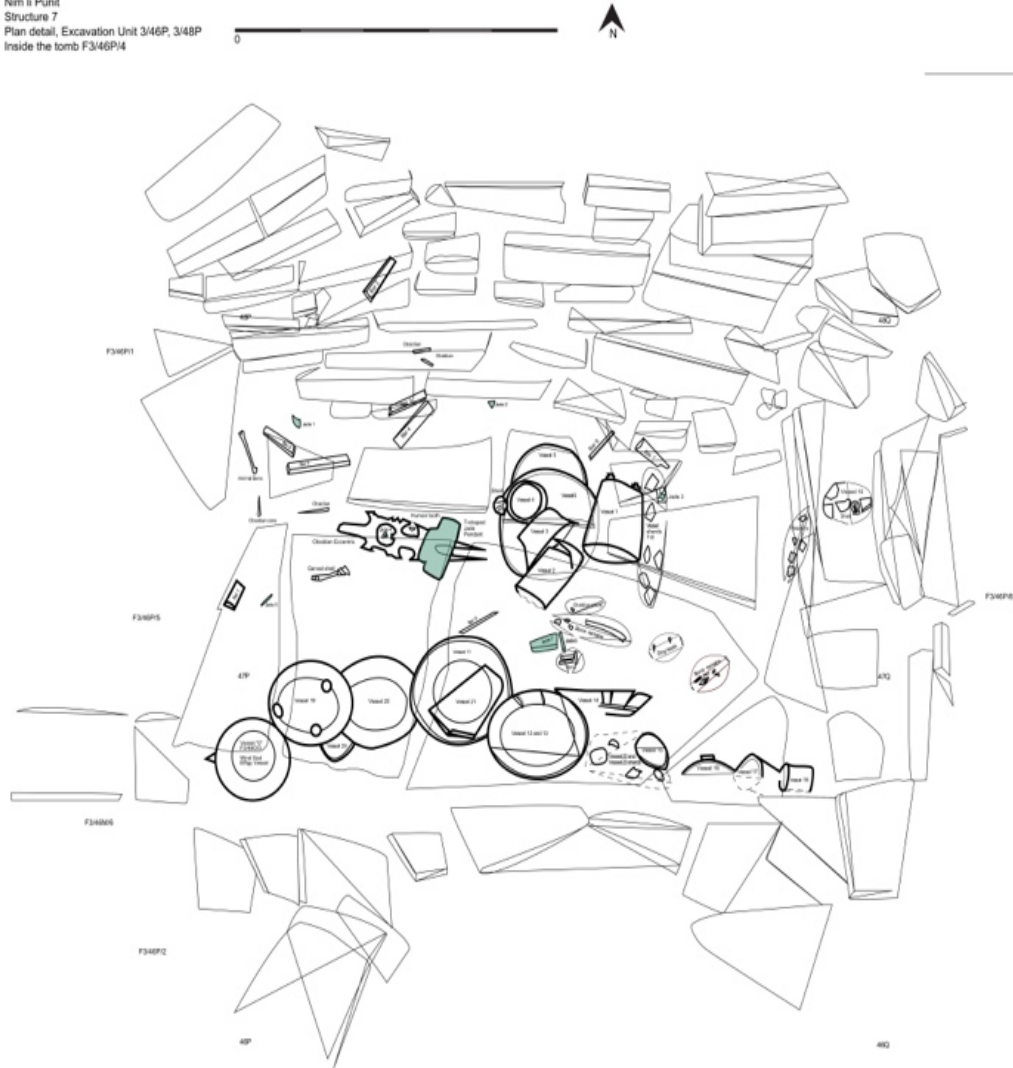


Figure 3.7 Plan of the main offerings from Tomb 5, Str. 7. At Nim li Punit. Drawing by M. Azarova

In addition to the ten whole and three fragmented stone bars found above and in close proximity to the capstones, nine whole stone bars of the same kind were found below capstones inside the Tomb 5. This type of offering is often found in relatively large quantities (from 10 to 30 pieces per offering) in association with interments and sometimes caches, constituting a more unusual data class, first encountered and documented during the 2007 field-season at Caracol in northwestern Belize (Chase et al. 2008:133). At Caracol the rectangular limestone bars, ranged from 6.7 to 16.0 cm in length and from 1.6 to 3.9 cm in width, were distributed both at the site's epicenter and the southern part of the site (Chase et al. 2008:138). Archaeologists proposed that the two kinds of limestone bars could have been used at the site for multiple purposes, as some of them were crude, but the others were finely made, coated with red pigment on their ends or tapered at one end, and had striations on their surfaces (Chase et al. 2008:133, 137). Their meaning is still debated. They were once compared to the ethnographically known items of similar shape, which were used in Peru by fishermen to make fishing nets, thus different sizes determined spacing in the production of netting or cordage, or alternatively used as anchors in the production of textile belts (Chase et al. 2008:133).

Tomb 5 also revealed one exhausted obsidian core, three obsidian fragments, a small chert eccentric, probably a nose ornament, two tubular jade beads, two small jade ear ornaments in the floral shape of the *k'in* glyph, a jade axe, and a fragment of an eroded carved conch. The human remains recovered from the tomb, even given the state of preservation characteristic for bone remains

in southern Belize, are not enough to account for a complete individual. Therefore, Tomb 5 was perhaps a secondary re-interment, and it was suggested that some elements could have been removed from Tomb 4, located just 6 meters from Tomb 5 (Braswell et al. 2015). Immediately below the flagstone floor of the tomb a few small items including 43 ceramic sherds, two obsidian pieces, two chert pieces, two snail or *S. pugilis* shells, and one package of faunal remains were retrieved, that might have filtered downward over time. The collapsed south wall of Tomb 5 was consolidated, then the flagstones were put back, and the Tomb 5 was backfilled, prepared for future re-opening if necessary.

3.2. Tomb 5 and a T-shape Pendant from Nim li Punit

One of the most significant offerings from Tomb 5 was an intact jade T-shape pendant (18.4 by 10.2 cm) with a Maya hieroglyphic inscription on one side, and the *Ik'* glyph, which resembles letter *T* and means “wind” for the ancient Maya, on the other side. The text consisted of 30 blocks, and it was noted that, although the text side should be the back of the pendant, based on representations of this ornament in art, nonetheless it was discovered lying with the text facing up, and *T* facing down. The “wind-jewel” rested on a large sharp eccentric (L: 44 cm, W: 12 cm.) that cracked underneath the jade pendant (Figure 3.8).

A human tooth was found besides the chert eccentric, yet no traces of other human remains were discovered underneath this offering assemblage. Two tubular jade beads and one jade axe mentioned above, two dog teeth were found with heavily eroded bones to the south-east from the jade pendant and eccentric.

Such secondary burial could have been a part of a dedication ritual, a Terminal Classic cache with some of the most valuable heirlooms of the Nim li Punit dynasty (Braswell et al. 2015).

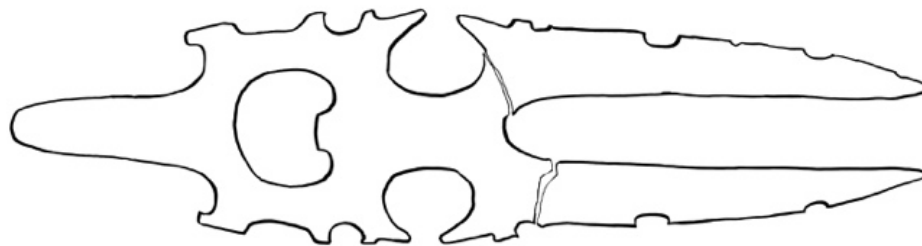


Figure 3.8 Chert eccentric found underneath the T-shape jade pendant in Tomb 5, Str.7 at Nim li Punit. Drawing by M. Azarova

3.3. T-shape Pectorals on the Stone Monuments at Nim li Punit

Eight carved stelae are known from Nim Li Punit and the average size of most monuments is approximately 3.5 meters (Wanyerka 2003:75). At Nim li Punit there are at least two well preserved images of the similar, or one could argue the very same T-shape plaque found in Tomb 5, carved on the stelae found at the site. First example comes from Stela 2 that was originally located in the Stelae Plaza at the northeastern corner of Structure 2, just north of the central stairway, mirroring Stela 1 (Hammond and Howarth 1999:6–7). Stela 2 was reported by the Corozal Project in 1976 and moved to the Visitor Center created at Nim li Punit by the Maya Archaeological Sites Development Program Project (M.A.S.D.P.) as part of their comprehensive restoration and consolidation project in 1998 (Wanyerka 2003:46).

The monument was found broken in eight pieces, two of which are still missing, and its base can be seen in front of Structure 2 (Hammond and Howarth 1999:6). The monument was carved in deep relief and had excellent preservation, however it was targeted and heavily damaged during repeated acts of vandalism, aimed at intentional defacing and stealing parts of it. In 1981 the portrait of the central standing figure: the ruler's face, headdress, and upper torso in particular were chopped into pieces by a machete (Jackson and McKillop 1985:36–39).

Stela 2 was carved only on the front, included four text registers and a figural scene involving a scattering ritual, depicted above or atop of a “Witz’ Monster Pedestal” that incorporated a Waterlily Jaguar and a snake coming out of the jaws or being part of the earth monster (Wanyerka 2003:42). According to Wanyerka, the monument had a Late Classic period dedication date of *9.14.15.4.14? 1 *Ix* 12 *Pax* (13, September 726), and the text was critical for understanding the role of Nim li Punit within a larger political scheme and relationship with its neighbors, as the monument described a series of events taking place under the “supervision” of two foreign lords: one from the so-called “Water-Scroll” site, probably a reference to Altun Há, and one from either Quirigua or Copan (Wanyerka 2003:48). It is interesting to note that although the figure of the lord is shown turned to one side, the jade T-shape pendant on his neck is carved so that it is clearly visible.

The lower text on the stela starts with an “accession” of the king of Nim Li Punit that took place *y-ichnal* (with, before, or in the company of) a lord from the “Water-Scroll” site, the emblem attributed to the site of Altun Ha, located some 120

km northeast of Nim Li Punit. Based on multiple lines of archaeological and epigraphic evidence, Wanyerka claimed that Altun Ha was involved in the Late Classic politics of southern Belize (*ibid.*). However, “the loyalties and hegemonies” seemed to switch at sites in southern Belize at the start of the Late Classic Period, given the political turbulence and unrest of the central Petén during the 8th century, there was a major shift in the political interactions and many peripheral sites like Nim Li Punit, Lubaantún, and Xnaheb consolidated their powers and established active exchange networks in the southern Maya Mountains (Wanyerka 2003:48–49).

The hieroglyphic text continues with a distance number to mark the “planting of a stone” in commemoration of that date “with” or “in the company of the *Ek’ Xukpi Ajaw*, “Black Copan Lord,” the local regent or lord of the 6th *Tzuk* or “province” (Wanyerka 2003:48). The “partition” (*Tzuk*) title appears most frequently in the inscriptions of southern Belize and adjacent Guatemala, it is present on the T-shape pendant from Tomb 5 at Nim Li Punit as well. However, the numerical coefficient is not well understood, it was suggested it could be site specific, as “a formal means of identifying or describing the political and geographic boundaries of sites located within a common hegemonic political sphere or perhaps as a formal means of identifying tributary provinces” (*ibid.*). Following the “stone planting” the text restated the Initial Series Date (9.14.15.4.14 1 Ix 12 Pax, 16, December 726) from which a distance number led to the 9.15.0.0.0, an important period ending (18, August 731), probably the dedicatory date, observed in presence of the “Water-Scroll” lord and presumably the Nim Li Punit lord. However, the text

explicitly stated that the event was in the 6th “Province” and was “supervised” by the Ek’ Xukpi person (Wanyerka 2003:50).

The final column of text was too eroded to ascertain any further details except for the final glyph, which involved a *TOOK’ PAKAL* a metaphor for “war” or notion of an “army” (Houston et al. 2001:285–290), thus it could have been a reference to warfare in the inscriptions of Nim li Punit. The text concluded with a relatively rare, short scribal signature (Wanyerka 2003:49).

The second representation of the T-shape pendant on the chest of the ruler, while he is sacrificing blood, is on Stela 15 from Nim li Punit (Grube et al. 1999:19). The monument was found intact, facing down, approximately five meters to the east of Stela 14, along the eastern side of the Stelae Plaza near the center of Structure 4 (Wanyerka 2003:73). It was also first reported by the Corozal Project in 1976 and moved by the M.A.S.D.P. during the consolidation project in 1998 to the Visitor Center. The text of Stela 15 mentions the kingdoms of Quirigua or Copan, refers to the unidentified *B’alam* site, and also commemorates a unique astronomical event involving a partial lunar eclipse that was visible at Nim li Punit on the evening of October 9th, 721 (Wanyerka 2003:74).

According to epigraphists, the text begins with an unusual Initial Series date (October 721) that included a reference to a “fire-scattering” ritual that presumably occurred “in front of” or “before” this monument on the day of its dedication (*ibid.*). The text then continues with a reference of a Teotihuacan War Serpent, whose image was “created” or “conjured” through a bloodletting rite done by a royal

woman named *Ixik K'an K'uhul*, who appears to be a *B'a Ajaw* or “Head or First Lord,” portrayed on the monument as the figure on the left of the scene (Wanyerka 2003:71). The *B'a* or *B'aah Ajaw* epithet was a title used to refer to the head of the non-royal nobility in the Maya court hierarchy (Inomata and Houston 2001:62).

The text continued at the bottom of the monument with a partially eroded Calendar Round date, followed by a scattering rite performed by a “vassal lord,” the *Ek' Xukpi (Ajaw)*, who carried the rare “First Shield” title (Wanyerka 2003:74–75). The text further stated that this individual was the “guardian of the “White Earth, he the youth of the Divine House,” then the text was eroded, but the narrative contained a “Divine Lord from the *B'alam* site” (*ibid.*) The first secondary text, located just to the right of the left figure, referenced some sort of “fire” ritual and the individual responsible may have had a title of a *sajal* (Wanyerka 2003:72). The middle secondary text appeared to include the quotative particle (*che'en*) indicating that what follows is in first person, yet the text was broken there and ended with the Nim Li Punit emblem glyph (*ibid.*). The last and the longest of the secondary texts begins with a Calendar Round date of 12 *Ajaw*, perhaps indicating the Long Count date of 9.4.10.0.0 12 *Ajaw* 8 *Mol* (24, August 524) which would be exactly 10 *k'atuns* before the Initial Series date of the monument, when “stone was planted” and that it was the 6th “accumulated grand stone that was planted ” by a “Sun-Eyed or Sun-Faced Scatterer, the Youthful Lord, the Tree Lord of Nim li Punit, who carried the 28 Winik title, in this case written as a “divine 28 Lord” (Wanyerka 2003:75).

In other words, despite partially eroded texts, there is strong evidence that Nim li Punit was much more involved in the politics of the southeastern Maya Lowlands than previously believed or recognized by scholars (Wanyerka 2003:75). Based on iconography of the monuments that were uncovered at the site, one of the key rituals was bloodletting, represented on Stela 1, Stela 2, Stela 14, Stela 15, and probably Stela 21, where balls of copal are falling down from the ruler's hand. This rite often happened in presence of other rulers and involved special headdress and costume, which perhaps in the 8th century included a dynastic heirloom, that T-shape plaque, vividly depicted on Stela 2 and 15.

To contextualize the appearance of the jade T-shape pendant at Nim li Punit during the Late Classic period, I suggest to look at the reverence for jade and its potent symbolism, starting from the Mesoamerican Early Preclassic (1200–900 B.C., including both the Olmec style jades and Costa Rican jades. I argue that the early “winged” and shell form pendants communicate similar symbolism of an avian, watery, wind deity, which is later articulated through the Maya T-shape pendants with inscribed *Ik'* (wind) sign.

4. WIND JEWELS, SPOONS AND SHELLS ACROSS MESOAMERICA

4.1 The Olmec Jades

The term *Olmec* here refers to a distinctive art style recognized in many parts of Mesoamerica during the Early and Middle Preclassic periods (Taube 2004:2). In 1984 local men from a village of Chacsinkin on a Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico found a collection of carved Formative period jades in a large mound that lied about 4.5 km west-northwest of the central plaza of the site, around 300 m west of the road leading north from Chacsinkin to a larger town of Tixmeuac (Andrews 1987:78). According to Andrews, jades 1-30 were found about a meter below the surface near the central axis of a large rubble platform that contained Late Classic pottery, but the exact context was lost, while jades 31-39 were found loose nearby, and probably belonged to the original offering (Andrews 1987:79). It consisted of an interesting assemblage of eleven shell pendants, three of which are engraved; seven spoons of varying sizes and shapes, including three engraved pieces; four celt or axe-god pendants; three small tab pendants; a rectangular palette surrounded by carved heads of a human, a serpent or fish, and a turtle; a human head with buccal mask flanked by panels; a tiny bird with a long beak; a beak bird pendant; a crescent pendant; two small rectangular plaques; one miniature bar shaped ornament; four beads; and a small perforated disk (Andrews 1987:79). All of the jades were associated with Formative period shapes, except three apple-green beads and the perforated disk (Jades 36-39) found later in loose rubble, whose shapes and color suggested they could be dated to the Classic

period, and did not belong to the same cache (*ibid.*). Primarily the jades were related to the Olmec Gulf Coast, yet the assessment of the diversity of the collection, possible ties and the same motives, for example avian axe pendants, like those in Costa Rica, and the absence of many jade counterparts from the recorded Olmec heartland, led scholars to believe that the offerings reflected the diversity of regional styles and was not solely from the Olmecs (Andrews 1987:79–80).

Eleven jades were carved in a form of shell pendants, which Andrews suggested could be symbolic representations of mirrors, were tentatively related to seven jade spoons that were understood as three-dimensional carvings of the "knuckle dusters" depicted in relief carvings (Andrews 1987:80). All of the jades, with one exception, were perforated for suspension, so they could be worn as ornaments, and the cache did not include any non-adornment items such as figurines. Archaeologists proposed that perhaps the pieces were not carved in the same place and may well have been gathered and treasured over the course of many years, therefore "the ability to amass and dispose of such a collection" surely signaled the growing social and economic stratification within Formative Maya society in central Yucatan, which did not appear before 400 B.C. (*ibid.*).

The recurring elements of many of those Olmec jades are shell form, avian features, bird pendants, and bird-like handles of the spoons, the latter were widely dispersed through El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico, resembling Olmec duck head pendants and Costa Rican axe-gods, which hints the extent of the contact,

at least indirect one, that existed among Mesoamerican and Central American societies (Andrews 1987:84). I suggest that that the avian features and shell pendants in particular resemble the attributes of a wind deity, seen during much later period in the Maya area and highland Mexico.

4.2 The Costa-Rican Jades

In Costa Rica fine lapidary work in jade first appeared in the last centuries B.C. and was already fading by A.D. 500, having virtually disappeared by A.D. 700 (Snarskis 2003:161). Apart from the “true jade,” geologically known as jadeitite rock or jadeite, there were many polished stone artifacts found in Costa Rica made of so called “cultural jade,” which includes a much wider variety of rocks and minerals (Snarskis 2003:162).

Before the discussion of possible ties and similarity of worked objects from Costa Rica, which is located between Mesoamerica and the Andes, it is important to mention the time of a principal shift in elite material culture from jade to gold as a preeminent valuable material in Costa Rica. Scholars conceptualize that Costa Rica consisted of three or four cultural spheres with two major subregions – Guanacaste, part of a larger region of Greater Nicoya, that included neighboring southeastern Nicaragua, distinctive for its relatively low rainfall and dry tropical forests, and in the southeast – Diquís subregion with high rainfall, which extended into current western Panama (Snarskis 2003:159). Both Guanacaste and Diquís are considered two distinct subregions, but shared some features in common, and were involved with distant cultural regions over a long period of time from about

1500 B.C., yet while the Diquís was always more “southern-oriented” in character, Guanacaste seemed to be culturally focused on relations with Mesoamerica (Snarskis 2003:159–160). Nonetheless, both subregions had evidence of varied “cultural overlays,” in such a manner greenstone lapidary work and red-on-buff bichrome pottery from the north was found in Diquís, attributed to the jade-carving period (ca. 300 B.C. – A.D. 500/700) in the rest of Costa Rica, and the following southern traits as metallurgy and circular house foundations appeared in Guanacaste ca. 800-1000 A.D. (Snarskis 2003:160).

The main difficulty for analysis and comparison of Olmec and Coast Rican jades is that most Olmec jades that have been reported and published as found in Costa Rica, either in museum or private collections around the world, do not have reliable scientific excavation data (Snarskis 2003:164). Only since the late 1970s the number of jades from archaeological salvage works increased, providing context from approximately sixty Precolumbian sites, with distinct amount of jade found in Guanacaste, the central piedmont and the plains of the Caribbean (Graham 1998:29). According to Mark Graham, 99% of the jade artifacts necklaces, pendants, ear ornaments, and spoons are found in relation to cemeteries or funerary remains, and very rarely in domestic contexts, because of the jade value and social not mundane nature (Graham 1998:30).

A good example of “Olmec” jade shell-form pendant (9.9 cm by 31.5 cm) from controlled excavations from a cemetery, discovered by Museo Nacional de Costa Rica in 1977 at the site of Talamanca de Tibás, located about 7 km outside

San José in the Central Valley in Costa Rica (Graham 1998:31). It was found in The Principal Tomb, which contained three metates, on which the interred individual was placed, two ceremonial mace heads, a tripod ceramic vessel missing its legs, and two jades in total, one of them was referred to as “a Mexican Olmec piece in shape of a shell,” and the other was a Costa Rican bird pendant (*ibid.*). The remarkable jade shell has a low-relief carving of a human hand with knotted bow at the wrist, which is grasping a mythic creature that is half baby-jaguar, half insect; it also features the so called “classic Olmec perforation,” two double-drilled connecting perforations located on the back of the pendant and invisible from the front (Figure 4.1). Scholars presume that a jade shell of that size and realism needed the knowledge and experience of the Olmec artisans at their zenith, and the piece was solely Olmec workmanship, except maybe two small perforations front to back added later (Snarskis 2003:164).



Figure 4.1 Jade “Olmec” shell from Principal Tomb at Talamanca de Tibás site in San José Province, Costa Rica (Graham 1998:31)

Jadeite pendants with an avian heads belong to “axe-god” category, found in jade caches at Cerro de las Mesas in Veracruz (Drucker 1955:68) and



Figure 4.2 Jade axe-god pendants from Dumbarton Oaks collection. Catalog numbers: PC.B.225, PC.B.229, PC.B.230, PC.B.231, PC.B.239, and PC.B.293. Photo © <http://museum.doaks.org/>

Chacsinkin in Yucatan (Andrews 1987:82). Avian imagery includes beaks, cleft crests and sometimes tail feathers, and incised wings or feathers. There are a couple of fine examples at the Dumbarton Oaks collection (Figure 4.2).

The avian-head jades often have the same transverse perforations spaced 3 to 5 centimeters apart for separate strings of beads, similar crests, beaks, and engraved eyeforms, which look very un-Costa Rican, but Olmec (Snarskis 2003:165). Such stylized images of birds with angular beaks, also called “beak-birds,” appeared in stone, pottery, jade, and were always compared to Marajó in the Amazon Delta, being linked to the creation and fertility (Balser 1953:215).

To sum up, archaeologists assume that similar bird pendants and an Olmec jade spoon suggest that the Maya inherited, appropriated, or looted some older Olmec jades and modified them, and the Early Classic Maya belt plaques found in Costa Rica may have also been modified by Maya or by indigenous Costa Ricans who received them (*ibid.*). I propose that the so called “Olmec spoons” have much in common with another motif associated with Costa Rican jades, which is the “winged pendants” (Figure 4.3). They appear at Costa Rican as a local variation of northern South American (Panama) concept, a conventionalized bat with spread

wings (Balsler 1953:216–217). It is noteworthy that a pattern of the “winged pendants” was found in the Antilles, where it was also seen in shell representations (Balsler 1953:217). Despite local differences, I see those jade pendants, representing wings, shells, and later Maya *Ik'* glyph, as a powerful ideological claims relating to the wind symbolism, evoking the celestial dimensions of the ruler’s ability to secure fertility and prosperity (Figure 4.4).



Figure 4.3. Costa Rican “winged pendant” from the Atlantic watershed (left), and the Olmec spoon from Guanacaste with Maya hieroglyphic inscription (Graham 1998:52, 90)



Figure 4.4 Middle Formative Period (900-400 B.C.) Olmec altar known as the Shook Panel (Graham 1998:47)

4.3 Formative Jade Spoon from Belize

Olmec spoons similar to the famous examples mentioned above of the Tibás jade, which is more clam-shaped than spoon-shaped, and a jade in a shape of a “bird-monster,” a god of sun and sky, which are thought to be later imports as heirlooms to Costa Rica from Mesoamerica, are found in the Maya area as well (Andrews 1987:80). “Spoon” is a metaphorical name usually given to a type of jade artifact, which has a concavity on the part of the form that protrudes from the horizontal, not resembling in function, but in shape to a spoon (Graham 1998:46). A finely carved Middle Preclassic (900-350 B.C.) jade spoon of unknown exact archaeological context was found on the surface of the main plaza at the site of Uxbenka in the Toledo District, Belize near a looted Classic period tomb (Healy and Awe 2001:61). This finely carved, polished to a low luster, bluish-green jade with tiny whitish flecks is stored at the government archaeological vault (Cat. #27/179-6:21) and measures 18.5 cm long, 6.8 cm wide with maximum thickness of 1.5 cm (Figure 4.5).

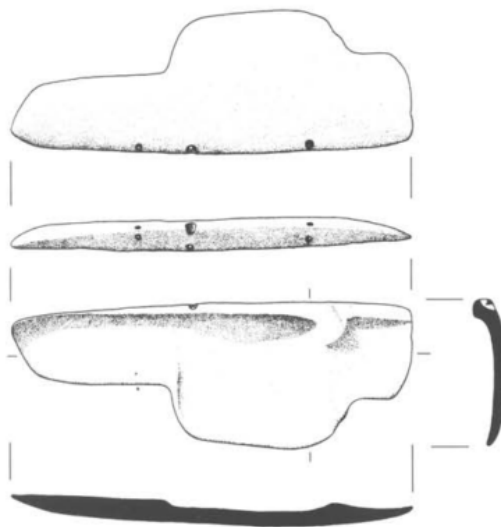


Figure 4.5 The Uxbenka jade spoon (Healy and Awe 2001:63)

Healy and Awe describe the form of the jade as “a right-facing spoon, with three concave depressions on the front, separated by rounded ridges, while a reverse side is slightly rounded, with three evenly spaced biconical drill holes (only middle one is visible from the front) running from the back to the upper edge” (Healy and Awe 2001:61,63). Similar greenstone artifacts were found at Chacsinkin on Yucatan, those jades were possibly produced, gathered from different regions through a long span of time from Middle to Late Formative periods, and re-deposited together (Healy and Awe 2001:61–62). A couple of other examples include a jade spoon from the Maya lowlands at Chichen Itza, taken out of the Cenote of Sacrifice, first described by Proskouriakoff as typically Olmec “concave face-pendants;” then Preclassic jade spoons were reported from Pacific and Gulf Coast zones of Mexico (states of Guerrero and Tabasco), and all of them were usually associated with the Middle Preclassic Olmec culture (Healy and Awe 2001:62).

There are a few different points of view, mostly speculative, concerning the use and function of such spoons. It was suggested that the spoons could have been used to inhale psychotropic snuff or in bloodletting rituals (Graham 1998:51–52). Their function as receptacles for the ingestion of a hallucinogenic snuff was based on a supposed connection between avian imagery and shamanic trance, and flight, yet there is so far no iconographic evidence to prove or disprove it (Graham 1998:46). Neither is the second explanation clearly registered in iconography of jade spoons as an allusion to blood offerings or a part of bloodletting ritual, which was a significant power validation and recognition tradition in Mesoamerica (*ibid.*). Another interpretation offered was that Olmec jade “spoons” represent tadpoles and watery realm surrounding the earth, referring to reproduction associated with water (Pohorilenko 1996:129). Some authors argued that “spoons” were used as weaving battens, depicting not tadpoles, but human embryos on the third week, whose images were often incised on spoons, linking growth of gestative being with spinning, weaving, in other words, the process of textile production (Tate 2012:43).

These hypotheses, though, are not widely accepted as an appropriate reading for all variations of jade spoons (Graham 1998:48). The presence of multiple drills suggests they could have been suspended and worn as pendants or attached to clothes. Based on representations in art, for example of Preclassic “Olmec altar” known as the Shook Panel from the south coast of Guatemala, archaeologists think those spoons could have been worn as pectorals as part of royal insignia (Graham 1998:47). An example of Olmec spoon from Guanacaste

Province in Costa Rica looks exactly like the one from the Shook Panel, and it also contains Maya hieroglyphic text added later to the original back side of the pectoral (Graham 1998:47–48,52).

It seems plausible that such imported and often reworked carved jade items like “spoons” and shells were used to enhance status of local elites and aggrandize their owners, providing more evidence of Gulf Coast Olmec and lowland Maya in Middle Preclassic connections, expanded later south to Costa Rica and across Central Mexico (Healy and Awe 2001:63).

4.4 Formative Jade Pendant from Cuello

A small site of Cuello in northern Belize provided some important information on Preclassic Maya ceremonial behavior, including the identification of major food resources, and “funerary offertory behavior within a slowly aggrandizing architectural matrix” with a gradual establishment of a local elite (Hammond 1999:49). The site included a minor ceremonial precinct of two plazas, with pyramids approximately 9 m high, and a number of long structures, around and south of which was a zone of dispersed settlement for about 1.6 sq km (Hammond 1999:50). The vast majority of jade objects from Cuello, or jade-like objects, called “social jade” that were considered “jades,” and therefore valuable, by their owners, were mostly beads (Hammond 1991:199). Hammond noted that jade was associated with male, female, juveniles burials, and that there were some “irregular forms,” for instance, a claw-shaped jade pendant, fragmentary pendant with duck-billed head, and particularly two jade objects, discovered with adult female Burial

114 and child Burial 166 (Hammond 1999:52). In Burial 166 apart from one blue jade spangle pendant, a blue jade mirror-skeuomorph or a “shell ” pendant was discovered. It was both T-shaped and concave like a shell (Figure 4.6).

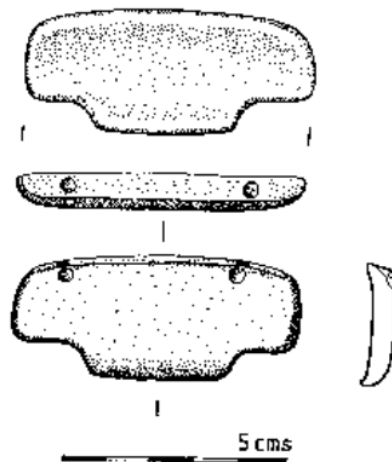


Figure 4.6 Blue jade concave pendant of mirror-skeuomorph form from Cuello Burial 166 (Hammond 1999:53)

The patterns of jadeite inclusion in burials at Cuello demonstrated that the Maya could distinguish between jadeite and other greenstones, as men were usually buried with jadeite artifacts, whereas women and children were accompanied with “social jade” (Hammond 1999:58). The inclusion of nonjadeite greenstones, as well as ceramic beads painted blue or green in royal tombs, the same way it was done at the Early Classic crypt (Tomb 4) at Nim li Punit, suggests that the color and the idea of jade were so significant that known fakes could still convey elevated status and ritual importance, in fact, some scholars suggested that highly valued artifacts often had similar counterparts that circulated more widely and contributed to the value of the original (Kovacevich 2013:258–259).

According to Hammond, “blue jade spangle” or “T-shaped” pendants resembled those from La Venta, possibly originating in the Gulf Coast/Isthmus of Tehuantepec region, about 600 km west of Cuello, while the “shell” was similar to jades from Chacsinkin, Yucatan, which Andrews at first called “Olmec” (Hammond 1999:52–53). The use of Instrumental Neutron Activation Analysis (INAA), a destructive method, to examine the Cuello jades demonstrated that they fall in the same groups as jades from Altun Ha, Cerros, Holmul, and Santa Rita Corozal, suggesting the same pattern of jade procurement over time, yet it did not solve the problem of sourcing, because only two jades fell in the group with known deposits in the Motagua valley, three were characteristic of the Terzuola workshop site there, twenty-five remained ungrouped, and six items were in the Costa Rican Light group, while early blue-green jades were not even tested, because of their size and irregular shape (Hammond 1991:203). Nonetheless, the investigation in Cuello defined a curious pattern that from Preclassic to Late Classic jade included much albite and “social jade,” likely answering the demand by substituting and exploiting other varieties of greenstone (Hammond 1991:244). Moreover, Cuello demonstrates first instances of the T-shape Ik’ symbolism used along the jade axes, and jade shell form pendants in the Maya area.

4.5 Formative Jade Axes and Spoons from Ceibal

Fifteen Middle Preclassic caches were recently found during the Ceibal-Petexbatun Project that contained greenstone axes, greenstone spoons and ceramic vessels (Triadan 2015:79). The Maya lowland site of Ceibal in Guatemala

played an important role in the Preclassic period (Triadan 2015:59). Recent finds include *Cache 118*, which is dated to the beginning of the Real 1 phase (c. 1000 BC) and includes 12 greenstone axes: ten of them were placed in two parallel lines and the most finely polished piece, was laid in front of them (Triadan 2015:62). The orientation of the axes does not match the east-west axis of the E-Group assemblage, but their direction, 20 degrees south of the E-Group axis or 115 degrees east of the true north, may have pointed to the sunrise at the winter solstice (*ibid.*). The authors propose that *Cache 145* dates to the Real 2 phase and represents the earliest known ritual deposit placed in a ceremonial structure at Ceibal (Triadan 2015:79). It also contained a dark green jade “Olmec tadpole spoon” with two perforations close to “a probable river-clam shell carved in a tadpole-like spoon shape” (Triadan 2015:79–80). The close placement of jade and shell spoons to the vessel suggests that these objects may have been wrapped in a bundle before they were deposited in the pit (Triadan 2015:80). This find is comparable to greenstone tadpole spoons found at various sites, including Cuello, Ka’kabish, Chacsinkin, Uxbenka and Chichen Itza (*ibid.*) The authors attribute the greenstone spoons to the Gulf Coast Olmec, and mention similar pectoral depictions on Monument 3 of Ojo de Agua and on the Shook Panel, pointing out that shell spoons are less common, but there is a similar ceramic pendant, reported from Puerto (Triadan 2015:80).

4.6 Early-Classic Nakum Jade Bivalve Shell.

The Nakum Archaeological Project, directed by Jarosław Zrałka and Wiesław Koszkul from Jagiellonian University (Krakow, Poland), which began in 2006, discovered a major undisturbed tomb - Burial 1, in Structure 15 at the archeological site of Nakum in northeastern Guatemala. The Acropolis of the site consists of a large platform, 180×150 m at its base, which is topped primarily by “palace-like” structures grouped around 12 courtyards or patios (Żrałka et al. 2011:891). Structure 15 is a 13 m high mound on the eastern flank of the largest courtyard of the Acropolis, called Patio 1. The rich Burial 1 at Nakum was built on the central north-south axis of the structure and was 4.55 m long, 1.50 m wide and 2.20 m high (Żrałka et al. 2011:893). The remains of a human skeleton with its head oriented to the north were found inside, alas the bones were almost entirely destroyed by rats, whose skeletons were found at several places inside the tomb, still the analysis of the surviving remains revealed that “the individual was most likely to have been between 35 and 45 years old (medium adult) at the time of death” (Żrałka et al. 2011:894).

The tomb contained traces of red pigment that originally covered the body, and a large quantity of high status goods, especially in the area of the upper part of the body, which was covered with nearly 500 jade and shell beads, and also had a pair of ear spools and a jade shell pectoral with a hieroglyphic inscription (Żrałka et al. 2011:894–895). The pectoral measured 10.6 cm long and 4.9 cm wide, on the upper edge of the convex side there were two suspension holes, so archaeologists think that this piece was once part of a larger necklace formed by circular and tubular jade beads and was laid on the buried person’s chest in a

horizontal orientation (Żrałka et al. 2011:897). The concave side of the pectoral was incised with the upper portion of an anthropomorphic figure floating in scrolls representing smoke or flames, wearing an elaborate headdress, while the convex side had a column of hieroglyphs, and, according to Żrałka, the figure was most likely to represent an ancestor (Figure 4.7).

This theme of showing ancestral deified figures is repeated on a number of carved monuments as they are depicted above their living descendants, gazing down on them as witnesses to their ritual actions (Rusek 2014:152). This type of artefact was typical of the Olmec culture and supposedly reached the Maya territory by means of trade or ritual exchange (Żrałka et al. 2011:897). The function of these objects is recognized as elements of jewelry of an emblematic character, worn by people from the highest social classes, and often kept by the royal families as an heirloom and deposited in the burial of a much later dynast (Żrałka et al. 2011:899).

This was supported by radiocarbon dating and the evidence of the ceramics found in Burial 1, which demonstrated that the internment took place in the 7th or early 8th century AD, while stylistically, the text on the jade shell could be ascribed to the Early Classic period, somewhere between the 3rd and 5th centuries AD (Żrałka et al. 2011:898). Such long life span of an artifact might be explicated if the plaque of Nakum expressed the essence of the ancestor owner with the “breath/essence” of the inheritor, an idea utilized in discussion of some other jade masks, especially composite mosaic ones, where different often reworked pieces

were incorporated to symbolize the same ideology — the “comingling of life’s vital essence with those that previously owned and/or wore the artifacts” (Kovacevich 2013:269).

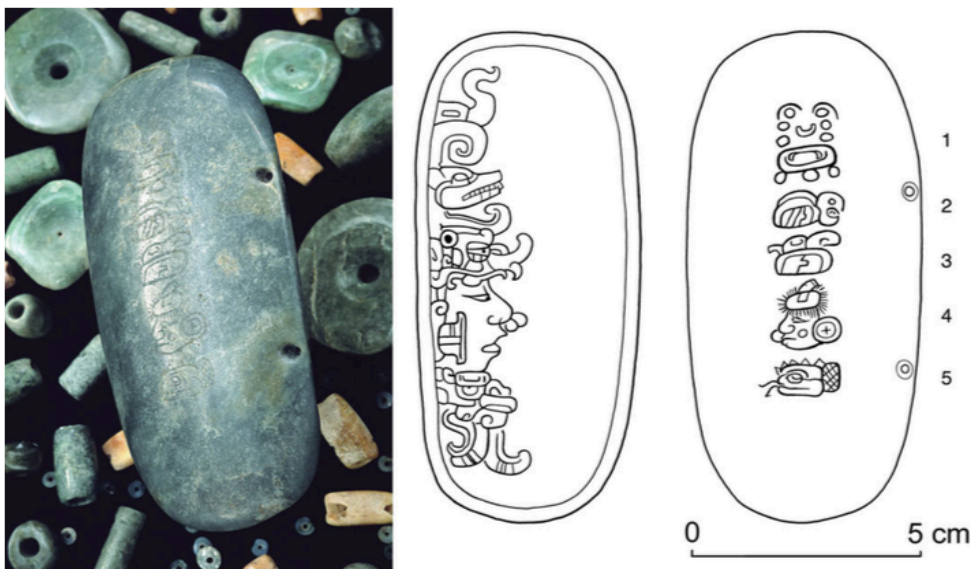


Figure 4.7 Nakum jade shell pendant (Žralík 2007:39–40)

It was also noticed that one could easily see the difference in the color of jade used for the pectoral and for the beads, so that the pectoral obviously resembled the material used in the Olmec culture, its famous “Olmec-Blue” jade, while all the other artefacts discovered at Nakum were mostly of a dark green color (Rusek 2014:154).

4.7 Chichen Itza Jade Pendants from the Sacred Cenote.

Chichen Itza is an impressive Maya site in the northern lowlands of the Yucatan Peninsula. In 1974 the Peabody Museum published *Jades from the Cenote of Sacrifice* by Tatiana Proskouriakoff (Proskouriakoff 1974), which

described the retrieved jade artifacts from a large natural well that served as a focus of ritual worship at Chichen Itza, being linked by a *sacbe* to the largest North Terrace of the city. The Cenote had a reputation as a place where human sacrifice happened and extraordinary precious goods were deposited as offerings, for instance jade, gold, copper, ceramics, and many hardly preserved, perishable materials, for example textiles and woodwork (Finamore and Houston 2010:122). Scholars define two phases of Cenote ritual, approximately around A.D. 800-1150 and A.D. 1250-1539. During the earlier period the offerings included valuable imports, many of them were ritually “killed,” so artifacts were intentionally broken, crushed or burnt before they were thrown in the Cenote. The later period had poorer and often Christian church-related paraphernalia (Coggins et al. 1984:29,31).

One interesting example of a carved jade plaque from the Cenote of Sacrifice has a series of biconical holes along its edges to allow for suspension as a pectoral, reconstructed as a part of an assemblage with beads and pendants (Finamore and Houston 2010:123). It is perforated with a T-shape *Ik'* symbol for wind, likely to express life-sustaining substance and a “breath of life,” which is related to life, death, and ancestor veneration (Figure 4.8).



Figure 4.8 Looted stucco bust from Tabasco (left) and a reconstruction of a jade necklace with a lk' pendant from the Sacred Cenote at Chichen Itza (right) (Finamore and Houston 2010:123)

Scholars believe that the incised cartouche around the *Ik'* sign supports the polyvalent meaning encoded in this object, thus oblong form and “trilobal elements” at the top might be mimicking the interior of a bivalve shell such as *Spondylus* (Finamore and Houston 2010:122). I suggest that the above mentioned examples demonstrate a continuity of symbolic meanings of the wind in the Maya area. While the early depictions show a strong connection to water, marine resources using mostly the shell and spoon hape, the later examples can be understood as an

evolution of the sign into the actual *Ik'* glyph and T-shape objects for example like those from the Sacred Cenote at Chichen Itza (Figure 4.9).



Figure 4.9 The Chichen Itza jades with *Ik'* glyph. Plate 50, Plate 65, Plate 66 (Proskouriakoff 1974:121, 151, 163)

There is more evidence about the T-shape symbolism manifested in other contexts, as such on stone monuments, polychrome vessels, ceramic figurines and stucco decorations. I suggest that those representations through different media refer to a multiplicity, and at the same time a marked codification of macrosignified meanings by the Late Classic period in the Maya area.

4.8 *Ik'* Symbolism in Ceramics, Stucco and Stone

First example of a great deal of variation in broader signified meanings of the wind sign are Copan *Ik'* torches. In the West Court of the Copan Acropolis there is a terrace on the south side of Structure 10L-11, which is called a Reviewing Stand (Structure 10L-12) (Looper 2010:159). The stairway, which fronts this terrace, contains a dedication text recording the date March 23, 769, three monolithic conchs, and a bust of a deity, perhaps aquatic deity GI from the Palenque triad (Looper 2010:158). Two half-man half-monkey figures, so called "torchbearers" are framing the upper step, kneeling and each holding a rattle (Figure 4.10). They have human bodies, yet with wrinkled simian face and a snake coming out of the mouth, which led scholars to interpret them in association with supernatural companions - *ways* or spirits, wind and storms, or dance, because of their musical instruments with *Ik'* glyph and active poses (Looper 2010:159).

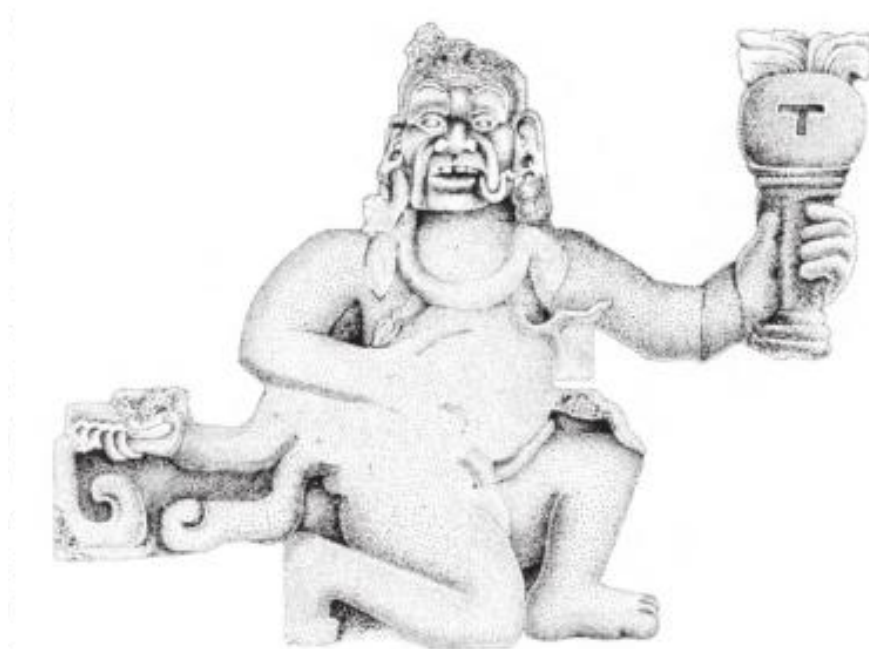


Figure 4.10 Simian figure holding a rattle, Copan Reviewing Stand. Drawing by Eliud Guerra. (Looper 2010:159)

Based on the fact that there was an *Ik'* day sign on the object raised by the simian figure on the left (the one on the right was destroyed), Miller suggested that they could be related to wind and storms, but at the same time it could simply indicate the noise, as the sound of the wind could be rattlelike (Miller 1988:160). Compared to similar contexts, like *way jaguar* on peccary skull from Copan Tomb 1, holding a rattle and enema funnel, the monkey-figures at Reviewing Stand could represent supernatural ways, musicians, accompanying ritual activities, happening on the steps, which most likely were related to ancestor veneration, feasting, drinking, dance, and sacrifice (Looper 2010:160).

Therefore, the wind sign can be classified as an index, directly referencing to the sound of wind, as well as signifying gust of wind or, as mentioned before –

the act of breathing, and breath as the essence of life. An interesting example, where *Ik'* is possibly referring to the divine breath or life itself is a jade head from Altun Ha. The ancient coastal Maya center of Altun Ha is located about 48 km north of the capital of Belize, Belize City, and was first given a name of the modern Creole village developed nearby, Rockstone Pond, as it attracted attention in 1963 when local villagers recovered a large and elaborately carved jade pendant, while quarrying. However, the English place name was soon changed during the first archaeological season by David M. Pendergast into its Maya equivalent – “Altun Ha” (Pendergast 1979:1–2). In 1964, the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) began an extended program of excavations at Altun Ha because from the very beginning it was obvious that despite its comparatively small size, the site included a large number of structures and surprisingly rich tombs in the central ceremonial precinct (Pendergast 1969:1–2).

Structure B-4 was one of the principal construction efforts in the Central Precinct at Altun Ha and the tallest ceremonial structure, which lacked surface clues to the nature of the building and looked like a mass of humus and collapse debris, until the protruding tomb-roof slabs were discovered in 1965 (Pendergast 1982:43). The excavation revealed Tomb B-4/1, caches, several stair blocks, and another tomb immediately below it, called Tomb B-4/2, which led to a subsequent discovery of other tombs, in particular Tomb B-4/7 (Pendergast 1982:45). The latter was placed in core of Stair Block 2 with the east wall of the crypt constructed atop of demolished upper steps of Stair 1 of the earliest building encountered, the floor of the crypt consisted of a layer of white lime soil around 10 cm thick laid over

boulders, the north wall almost totally collapsed, and in the east side of the south wall there was a 9 cm high by 17 cm wide hole, which may have served as a beam socket; the roof was composed of nine flint and crystalline limestone slabs ranging in length from 149 to 210 cm, with width between 43 to 73 cm, and thickness from 11 to 22 cm (Pendergast 1982:54). At the time of discovery, two of the roof slabs had slipped and fallen into the crypt, which measured 427 cm in length, 143 cm in width, and around 149 to 159 cm in height, thus the accumulated debris and decay product within the crypt concealed all the artifacts from view (Pendergast 1982:56). The tomb was oriented 5° east of magnetic north, or approximately 11° east of true north, with head of burial at south-southwest, fully extended dorsal, lower left arm beneath the pelvis, the right arm extended at the side, the feet turned to the right, and in general the remains were in relatively good condition, sufficient for extensive analysis of this middle-aged male burial (Pendergast 1982:56–57).

One of the most famous non-perishable objects within the crypt was a large (14.9 cm in height), full-round, unique, elaborately carved jade head of a deity, which was associated with the Sun God *K'inich Ajaw* (Pendergast 1982:57). The rear part of the head is highly polished, but undecorated, while slightly convex, mostly flat base is unpolished and has pecking marks (Pendergast 1982:59). The front, top and sides of the artifact contain a convoluted design, and most importantly for our discussion, there are trefoil pendant elements at the base of each eye, covering the greater part of the cheek area (Figure 4.11). The fact that eyes have square pupils could represent the so called “eyes of an Old God,” known in the Maya iconography. The mentioned trefoil motifs are T-shape *Ik'* elements

(*ibid.*). It is worth mentioning that the nose looks different if looking at it from the side, en face, and from above, and it resembles a mask with a nose, cheeks, a mouth, and a chin. Moreover, the complex symbolism of the ear assemblage with central circular concave area, a lobed pendant at the base, and spiral, curved pendant elements on the sides, most probably represent clam shells and cut *Spondylus* shells.



Figure 4.11 The Altun Ha jade head of the Sun God *K'inich Ajaw*. Photo © <http://www.belize.com/belize-maya-jade-head>

The Sun God is traditionally identified with jaguars, decapitation, fire, rulership, and dynastic descent (Taube 1992:52). He also serves as head variant for the number four as well as the patron of the month Yaxkin, and is closely associated with the jaguar and God D (*ibid.*). The glyph for sun, *k'in*, is often found in his brow or other parts of the body, in Postclassic representations he has a beard, and the frontal face shows him cross-eyed, with T-shape filed incisors with curling elements coming out of his mouth, and similarly to God D, he traditionally has large square eyes and a big nose (Ishihara 2009:17). The jade head lacks both the shaped upper incisors and the *k'in* glyph, while having complex shell

shaped ear ornaments, the unusual motifs within the mouth, and the decoration below the jaw line, which makes me believe it could be a composite deity representation.

Based on the archaeological evidence the Sun God's Tomb can be placed between A.D. 600 and 650 at the beginning of the Late Classic at Altun Ha, and resembles in form to the other tombs at the site, yet has no parallels in Maya area (Pendergast 1969:40). The presence of the jade head of *K'inich Ajaw*, resting on the skeleton's forearm led to an assumption that it could have been a priest associated with this deity prior to his death, most probably the principal priest of the sun god (Pendergast 1969:41). Therefore, the structure B-4, where the tomb was found, called the Temple of the Masonary Altars, was perhaps the Temple of the Sun, and this assumption was related to the general similarity between the jade head and masks at the sides and center of the lower stairway of the building (*ibid.*).

Being by far the largest jade recovered at Altun Ha, the head is a part of an extensive collection of jade objects numbering more than 800 pieces, including more than 50 large carved pendants and several dozen smaller carved pieces in different carving styles and colors, highly likely showing temporal and spatial variation, posing a question of where it was manufactured (Pendergast 1969:41–42). Among numerous other interesting offerings there were also five *Spondylus* shells, one unmodified 14.75 cm in length, all the others smoothed on interior and exterior (9.95-15.1 cm). One of them, a 364/23 has a complex geometric design carved on the exterior, including an *Ik'* motif and two perforation in the upper body

(Pendergast 1982:60). Finally, Tomb B-4/7 had an elaborately carved antler pin, 14.3 cm in length, 0.45 cm in diameter with a height of carved head of 1.45 cm in the form of a bird with *Ik'* symbols at its base, and four glyph text on shaft, referring to the owner of the pin (Pendergast 1982:63).

In other words, at Altun Ha the *Ik'* glyph adorns the mask of the Sun God, and appears on funerary inventory. The wind symbolism therefore might have been just a decorative element, yet in my view it could also stand for an exclusive elite association with the “divine breath,” continuous life force, and a token for a successful transition to the Underworld. This role is supported by the following example from the burial offering from an archaeological site of Waká (El Peru).

At the National Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology of Guatemala there are some extremely interesting Late Classic period ceramic figurines from Waká (El Peru), located in Guatemala’s Petén rainforest. One ceramic scene recovered from El Peru includes two figurines: one of a man, standing on his knees with hands crossed on his chest, accompanied by a deer standing on his hind legs next to him (Figure 4.12).

Measured 14.5 cm in height, 8.1 cm in width, 4.9 cm in depth, this object was found in 2006 in a royal tomb at the acropolis, arranged in a circle set along with another 22 ceramic figurines, all wearing elaborate costumes and jewelry of the Maya royal court. Those figurines were displayed in an exhibition *The Heavenly Jade of the Maya* in 2012-2013 in Washington D.C. One hand, or better said, deer’s hoof, is on the person’s shoulder, and another hoof is touching his own chin.



Figure 4.12 Ceramic figurines from Waká (El Peru). Photo © <http://archive.archaeology.org/1009/etc/maya.html>

The man is almost naked, wearing only a loincloth with a blue-green tip, yet he has a corn-cob headdress, so his hair is styled similar to a Maize God, which may be an allusion to the resurrection and the beginning of a new life. He has jade earflares, necklace, and bracelets as well, made of clay, but painted blue-green, and all that jewelry helps to identify him as a nobleman.

The deer wears a T-shape pendant with a clearly incised *Ik'* on its front side. The protagonist's eyes are closed, which means he might be dead or in trance state, while the deer's lips are open as if he was whistling or making a "shhh" noise. It was suggested that the scene shows a deceased person and a praying deer, most probably his spirit companion, which are called *way* creatures (Anon 2012:31). According to David Freidel, Michelle Rich, and F. Kent Reilly III the scene shows members of the royal court standing in a circle performing a ceremony with a king, who is the protagonist, wearing a loincloth, with his arms crossed over his chest, a typical pose of a penitent or shaman's patient in modern

Maya cultures, kneeling beside a deer spirit who prays over him (Freidel et al. 2010:42). They think this pose meant that the deer was preparing to cure the king of “the final affliction,” death. The deer and the dead king are fixed to a ceramic tablet that was painted yellow, the color of maize, with a border in red, the color of the dawn and life (Freidel et al. 2010:43). The presiding king and his queen stand to the left of the deer spirit and deceased king. In all likelihood, based on the circular arrangement, the presiding king was either the successor to the throne of Waká or an important overlord. In this funeral ritual, he and his queen were responsible for the fate of the deceased king and his well-being in the afterlife (Freidel et al. 2010:45).

The dynamic of the gestures in this scene is quite significant. In Maya art, arm and hand gesture operated as a codified system to convey narrative cues and information about the relations and status of those depicted (Spencer 2015:248). It is believed that the gestures of submission include crossing the arms over the chest, placing one hand on the opposite shoulder, arm, or side, and putting the hand in or near the mouth, which, in most situations, are characteristic to the secondary participants rather than the dominant figure or figures (Miller 1983:17–19). Here we have a spirit companion wearing an *Ik'* plaque, wind and the “breath of life” on his chest, who is superior to the deceased. Therefore, this illuminates another significant use of such a T-shape adornment in the Late Classic period. We have seen that the *Ik'* pendant is worn during the bloodletting self-sacrifice rituals at Nim li Punit by the rulers, while at Waká it belonged to the dynastic patron and was used during the resurrection or transition to the other world ritual.

A similar *Ik'* pendant appeared in the context of prisoner's sacrifice by the ruler on a looted Classic cylinder vase with watercolor effect, measured 23 cm in height and 8.4 cm in diameter from a private collection, Kerr 5850/MS1688 (Reents-Budet 2000:249). The Classic ceramic painters developed an extended palette with numerous shades of light and dark within a mineral paint range of black, brown, red, and yellow colors, using a difficult unusual pink tone for the hieroglyphic text that accompanied the scene (Reents-Budet 2000:248–249). Apart from a T-shape jade pendant, a headband, and a rich loincloth, the king does not have many adornments. He has dark paint on his face and does not look very content, sitting on a throne, observing the sacrifice, glazing at a person who is standing with an axe in subordination pose behind the prisoner. Interestingly, the naked prisoner on his knees is facing a man with an axe, and does not look frightened, but is devilishly smiling, as the spurts of blood are coming from his head (Figure 4.13).



Figure 4.13 Unprovenanced ceramic vessels K7183 (above) and K5850 (below). Photo © Kerr Database <http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya.html>

Another example is a fragmented bust from lime stucco, which depicts the upper torso of a figure wearing a pectoral, similar to its jade counterparts. It has holes drilled to be suspended and features a perforated *Ik'* symbol on its front side, and at the bottom of the pendant there are oblong celts attached (Figure 4.8).

Although the precise location and context of the find are unknown, it was suggested it could have been uncovered at the island site of El Bellote off the coast of Tabasco in Mexico, where shell was burnt to create stucco, employed as one of the important materials for architectural sculpture (Finamore and Houston 2010:122–123). It could have been a stucco representation of a scene mentioned above from a polychrome vase.

I find it interesting how T-shape pendants were incorporated in three jade composite mosaic masks from *Tak'alik Ab'aj*, which have recently been disassembled and conserved based on new understandings of Maya funerary masks at National Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology of Guatemala (Anon 2012:32). In my view, those jade *Ik'* plaques of different colors have holes for suspension and by placing them directly under the chins of the masks we obscure them from a view as separate pieces with their significant meaning (Figure 4.14).



Figure 4.14 Reconstructed jade masks from Tak'alik Ab'aj (Schieber and de Lavarreda 2015:64)

These examples of T-shape jade pendants were gathered in this paper to understand better the nature of the *Ik'* plaque symbolism and the multiplicity of meaning behind them. It is too early to draw any final conclusions, but I suppose that the glyph *Ik'* is intentional, not purely decorative element that refers to the symbolism of wind and the prestige of the elite. T-shape pendants and their representations in art demonstrate the unity of ideas, and a variety of physical manifestation of those concepts of life, wind, and jade, going through time in Mesoamerican history.

CONCLUSION

A work related to jade cannot be written without a returning to jade's larger symbolism. The green and blue color of jade and its physical properties contributed to its value and embodiment as a symbol of water, maize, nobility, and "life's breath" or essence. Not so long ago, the new data from jade workshops and household archaeology led to a revision of jade's exclusive association with elites. Commoners also had access to some jade items, although of lesser quality, imitations, raw material, and participated in some production stages, such as percussion, sawing, and drilling. This allowed us to look at social and economic situation in the society through a different lens, where jade could have influenced non-elite people who were involved in the early-stage jade production to reach a type of achieved status, becoming "intermediate elites" (Kovacevich 2011:162–163). Thus, based on the evidence of jade production from the discovered workshops in Motagua Valley and at Cancuen, elites and commoners were involved in the production and distribution of jade artifacts on a different quantity and quality scale. Hence "jade as an item of wealth" circulated both in the institutional and domestic economies on a state and household levels (Kovacevich 2013:261).

At Cancuen jade beads were often recovered in non-elite households from floor and midden contexts, instead of burials, where one would expect to find valued symbolic possession (Kovacevich 2013:271). The majority of those beads were associated with residences that participated in craft production and had more

access to imported ceramics than the other households at the site, but the beads were significantly smaller, and obviously of inferior quality in hardness and color, than those found in elite contexts such as burials and middens. Nonetheless, finished items and the exquisite high quality carvings are found in royal burials, and depicted in courtly art, staying in the realm of elite jades. This roughly summons up what is known today about jade and how we, as scholars, perceive jadeite and its role in Mesoamerican social, political, economic, and ritual life.

To reiterate, while jade is often recovered from non-elite site epicenter, the so called “commoner contexts” and relatively poor households, in domestic spheres it is not found in some specific forms, characteristic to institutional sphere, for example the jester god pendants and *Ik'* symbolism, which seem to have been reserved for elites and restricted in use for all the other members of the society (Kovacevich 2013:260). The jadeite per se was not necessarily restricted to the elite of Maya society, as raw unpolished material was available for broader amount of people, so jades of simpler forms and lower quality may have circulated as currency in market or barter exchanges. Yet the type of jade adornment, which was in the center of this study, an incised *Ik'* plaque, is a part of a high status elite ritual regalia, a commemoration, and often a dynastic heirloom. The author has not encountered direct ethnohistorical accounts to suggest that the *Ik'* glyph and wind symbolism was used outside the high-status social strata. The archaeological record supports the strong elite association, although a further research might provide some insight on the post-contact meaning of T-shape wind symbols, and their use in neither elite nor sacred contexts.

For the ancient Maya, the symbolic meaning of highly polished and intricately carved jade artifacts, especially when they were reworked and passed through generations, might have reincorporated the “breath of life.” It means the objects obtained even more value as they could have been gifts from powerful allies, or filled with a vital essence of ancestors. Jade was inalienable possession, which succeeded its owners through time, and had an advantage of transferability and great preservation, which could be another reason for comparison with fertility, water, wind, and life. Debates in the anthropology of value have led to critique of Weiner’s perspective for establishing a static typology of alienable and inalienable possessions (Ferry 2005:16). In a discussion of ancient Maya jade artifacts, even when there is no way to “focus on how people characterize objects rather than on the characterizations themselves” (Ferry 2005:17), I nonetheless agree with Kovacevich that certain jade objects were endowed with properties of inalienability, elements of personhood and memory of their owners (Kovacevich 2014:95).

Having in mind the discussed semiotics behind the “text” of the *Ik’* glyph, I propose that the jade pendant from Nim li Punit was an example of a pan-Mesoamerican tradition of the wind symbolism that originated in a form of the Formative jade spoons and wind god veneration from the Gulf Coast, Costa Rican jade clam pendants and avian imagery. Highland Mexican shell pendants were also alluded to in this paper as semantically linked to the wind deity Quetzalcoatl, which in the Classic and late Classic periods in the Maya area was represented in T-shape or T-incised plaques.

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