

# Collectiong in Corazal: Late Postclassic Maya Effigy Censers from Belize in the Danish National Museum (1860-1865)

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## ABSTRACT

Seventeen fragments of Late Postclassic effigy censers from Belize have recently been rediscovered at the National Museum of Copenhagen, Denmark. The censers was collected by Dr. Matthias Levy, consul for Denmark, as early as the 1860's. The majority of censers are from Santa Rita Corozal and have close resemblances to the Postclassic censers of Mayapán. It has been possible to identify a number of gods – Mayan as well as Mexican – including Chaak, K'awiil, Itzamnaaj, Xipe Totec and Quetzalcoatl. Unfortunately, the lack of contextual information does not allow us to draw any conclusions about the ritual function of the censers. However, a general survey of effigy censers from Santa Rita Corozal suggests that the site may have been home to a specialized cult to Itzamnaaj, perhaps constituting a parallel to the cult of the female creator deity Ix Chel at Cozumel further north on the Carribean coast of the Yucatan peninsula.

**Key words:** Late Postclassic Maya, effigy censers, Santa Rita Corozal, «Information Network», Itzamnaaj.

## RESUMEN

En este artículo se examinan diecisiete fragmentos de incensarios antropomorfos del periodo Posclásico Tardío procedentes Belice, que se encuentran actualmente en el Museo Nacional de Dinamarca, Copenhague. Los incensarios proceden de la colección de Matthias Levy, que fue cónsul de Dinamarca en Belice, y fueron recogidos en fecha tan temprana como el año 1860. La mayoría de los incensarios son de Santa Rita Corozal y tienen muchas semejanzas con los famosos incensarios posclásicos de Mayapán. Ha sido po-

sible identificar varios dioses, incluyendo dioses mayas como *Chaak*, *K'awiil* e *Itzamnaaj*, y dioses de México central como *Xipe Totec* y *Quetzalcoatl*. Desafortunadamente, la falta de información contextual no nos permite hacer ninguna conclusión al respecto de la función ritual de los incensarios. Aun así, un examen general de los incensarios antropomorfos de Santa Rita Corozal sugiere que esta ciudad fue centro de un culto dedicado a *Itzamnaaj*, pudiendo quizás establecerse un paralelo con el culto a *Ix Chel*—la diosa maya de creación— en Cozumel, más norte en la costa este de Yucatán.

**Palabras clave:** Periodo Posclásico Tardío, incensarios antropomorfos, Santa Rita Corozal, «Redes de Información», *Itzamnaaj*.

## INTRODUCTION

New excavations are not always necessary to retrieve new information about archaeological sites. This article is the result of the surprising find of 17 fragments of Late Postclassic effigy censers and a single effigy vessel from northern Belize in the storing facilities of the National Museum in Brede, north of Copenhagen, Denmark. Most of the censers are from Santa Rita Corozal, one of the main cities of the period, while a few are from Indian Church (Lamanai). The censers stand out because they were collected more than 30 years before Thomas Gann began his work at Santa Rita Corozal. In this article we give a short introduction to the site and to the use of effigy censers in general, followed by an analysis of the rediscovered censers. In spite of the limited size of the collection several gods can be identified, including *Chaak*, *K'awiil*, *Itzamnaaj*, *Xipe Totec* and *Quetzalcoatl*. Most significantly the collection indicates that *Itzam-*

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*naaj* held special importance in Santa Rita Corozal and testifies that Mexican gods like *Xipe Totec* were also worshipped in this region in the Late Postclassic. To begin with, however, we will try to unravel how the censers made their way to the Danish National Museum.

#### DR. MATTHIAS LEVY AND HIS «COLLECTION OF AZTEC IDOLS»

We know from the archives and protocols of the Danish National Museum that the effigy censers were a gift from Dr. Matthias Levy, who served as a consul for Denmark and thus represented the Danish king in Belize (formerly British Honduras) during the early 1860's. By the time Matthias Levy was appointed consul, he had already been in Belize for «a longer period of time» and was one of the partners in the trade and shipping company of A. and M. Levy<sup>3</sup>. We do not know exactly what type of business the company was involved in, but logwood—especially mahogany—was the main attraction of the region, and the primary reason why the Englishmen settled there in the first place. In the 1830's and 1840's there was a major rise in the European demand for mahogany which was used for building rail roads (Bollard 1977: 120), and it is tempting to suggest that Matthias Levy somehow gained financially from the increased export.

In northern Belize, this was a time of unrest. The Caste War had been ravaging the bordering provinces of Mexico since 1848, causing a large number of refugees and deserters to cross the Río Hondo. During the year of 1857, more than 2.000 refugees arrived to Corozal, a small ramshackle town at the time. The inhabitants of Belize tried to remain neutral in the conflict, but were at the same time selling supplies to the rebel *Cruzo'ob Maya*. Contraband trade between Belize and Yucatan was an everyday occurrence, and several incidents of fighting and warlike battles took place along the Río Hondo and further south (Reed 1964: 114-119, 170-173). Agriculture played a minor role in Belize at this time, but small-scale cultivation of sugar cane was attempted in the 1850's in the Northern District, including the surroundings of Corozal, where the crop had been introduced by the refugees from the Caste War (Bollard 1977: 140; Grant 1976: 17-18). The picturesque ruins of a sugar mill from 1868 located

close to the ruins of Lamanai is evidence of similar attempts further south, and the fact that Levy's collection includes censer fragments from «Indian Church» may also suggest that the sugar industry was of some interest to Levy.

Clearly, Corozal was far from being a safe place, but Matthias Levy must have spent considerable time here, since the censer fragments now in the museum are all dated to the years between 1860 to 1865. When Levy resigned in 1869 he sent the effigy censers, which he refers to as «my little collection of Aztec idols», to the Ethnographic Collection of the Danish National Museum. The Ethnographic Collection of this museum was unique to its time. It had its roots in private and royal collections that went back as far as the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and we know that from the 1830's onwards the collection of objects gradually became more systematized. People with ties to the museum were working hard to improve the ethnographic section and sometimes asked official representatives and merchants to collect ethnographic objects from other parts of the world. The impressive advance at the museum was undoubtedly due to the efforts of Christian Jürgensen Thomsen, who was also the first to use the Three Age System and divide his collections in objects belonging to the Stone—Bronze— and Iron Ages respectively. Another pioneer was C.C. Rafn, secretary of «Det Kongelige Nordiske Oldskriftselskab» (the Royal Nordic Society of Old Writings), who recruited new members for the society and created contacts throughout the world (Jensen 1992: 177-86). The Ethnographic Collection, including the American Cabinet, was opened to the public in 1841 and is one of the oldest in Europe, only outdone by the museums in Leiden from 1837 and in St. Petersburg from 1836 (Jensen 1992: 194-95).

It remains uncertain if the collection came in Matthias Levy's possession on his own initiative. In that case, he must have had an interest in the prehistory of the region that was unusually strong for his time. None of the preserved letters between Levy and the Danish authorities deal with the matter, but it seems more likely that he was encouraged by Rafn or others to collect and ship the artifacts. Levy also had diplomatic ties to Belgium, and he sent a similar collection of artifacts to the National Museum in Brussels where they may still be, though we have not been able to confirm this.

<sup>3</sup> Matthias Levy in a letter to the Danish king, Frederik VII, dated November 15<sup>th</sup>, 1860 (now in Rigsarkivet, the record office of the Danish state).

### SANTA RITA COROZAL IN THE LATE POSTCLASSIC PERIOD

When the Spanish invaders first arrived in Yucatan, the peninsula was divided into a number of Maya provinces. By studying written accounts from the colonial era, Chase and Chase (1988: 65-68) have reached the conclusion that Santa Rita Corozal is probably identical to the town of Chetumal, capital of the Chetumal province that stretched out along the Yucatecan east coast. The descriptions of the location of the town of Chetumal are not consistent, but the fact that Chetumal is said to have had 2000 houses (*ibid*: 65), rules out the minor sites of the region and makes Santa Rita Corozal a likely candidate. At their initial attempt to subjugate the province, the Spaniards formed a village called Villa Real in the vicinity of Chetumal town, but the intruders and the Maya never achieved a good neighbourliness. The Maya withdrew from Chetumal town in 1531 to fight the Spanish in a guerrilla war, the Spaniards on their part used Villa Real as a military base, but eventually gave up the fight, and they abandoned Villa Real in 1532.

Today the ruins of Santa Rita Corozal are partly buried beneath the modern town of Corozal, but a number of archaeological excavations and surveys have made it possible to make an outline of the Precolumbian history of the site. Santa Rita Corozal has been occupied since Preclassic times, but the settlement did not reach its population peak until the Late Postclassic, and it is the findings of this period—including the famous and now lost murals of Structure 1—that are best known today. The murals are painted in a style now referred to as the Postclassic international style, and besides their clear affiliation to the Maya area they contain a variety of stylistic elements that were used in many parts of Mesoamerica during this period (Boone and Smith 2003; Masson 2003: 194). The settlement of Santa Rita Corozal follows a non-nuclear pattern with elite buildings and ordinary houses located close to each other with no clear distinctions or neighbourhoods, and the Postclassic population is estimated to have counted more than 8000 individuals (Chase and Chase 1988: 67-70). Santa Rita Corozal probably benefitted from the collapse of Mayapan around A.D. 1450 and became one of a series of new centers of administration, ritual, and long distance trade. Objects of foreign origin such as grey obsidian, jade, turquoise, copper and gold are evidence of contacts with northern Yucatan, the highlands of Guatemala, central Mexico, and perhaps even South America. Ethnohis-

toric sources suggest that Santa Rita Corozal may have exported cacao, honey, wax, and marine products in return for the prestigious status wares (Vail 1988: 103,128).

The earliest recorded archaeological work at the site was carried out by Thomas Gann, «a doctor of medicine by profession and an archaeological explorer by avocation» (Wauchope 1965: 266), who stayed in Corozal in 1893. During his stay, the ruins were discovered by one of the local landowners, and Gann did a preliminary investigation. Gann managed to draw most of the intact murals in Structure 1 before their subsequent destruction. 20 years later Gann returned to Santa Rita and did additional work (Vail 1988: 5), and he brought to light several archaeological artifacts, including a number of censers, that are now in the Liverpool Museum, Great Britain. For several decades the ruins received little attention from archaeologists, and only in the 1970's was archaeological work at the site resumed (see Chase and Chase 1988: 7). From 1979 through 1985 Diane and Arlen Chase directed the Corozal Postclassic Project, the results of which form the base of our current understanding of the site and its population (e.g., Chase and Chase 1988).

The site of Lamanai (also referred to as Indian Church) is located where the New River meets the New River Lagoon, approximately 80 km south of Santa Rita Corozal, and a few of the censers located in Copenhagen have Lamanai as their provenance. Like Santa Rita Corozal, Lamanai has been continuously occupied from around 600 B.C. and into colonial times. The ceramics in the Postclassic burials from Lamanai show similarities with that of Tulum and Mayapan (Loten 1985: 87), but large effigy censers are generally lacking (Chase and Chase 1988: 78-80).

### POSTCLASSIC MAYA EFFIGY CENSERS

Different types of censers have been used in Mesoamerica since Preclassic times and were used for burning a variety of offerings, incense being just one of them. The smoke, rising from the censer, was considered a media that made it possible to communicate with the ancestors and the gods (Rice 1999: 25-27). In the Maya region, the effigy censers that were in use during the Post-classic are spread over large parts of the Yucatan peninsula, with Mayapan often being mentioned as a likely center of production. Late Postclassic effigy censers have been recorded at the follo-

wing sites in northern Belize: Santa Rita Corozal, Saltillo, Cerros, Sarteneja, San Andrés, Consejo, Carolina, Marco González and Basil Jones (Vail 1988: 127). Compared to earlier times, the number of censers increase in the Postclassic period (Masson 2000: 195), and this was previously interpreted as reflecting a shift towards a less centralized religion with many rituals taking place in private homes. However, recent investigations at Santa Rita Corozal and elsewhere seem to show that censers were indeed also found in ceremonial buildings as well as in ritual caches.

Two different types of censers are present at Santa Rita Corozal: *Kol Modeled* (effigy censers) and *Pum Modeled* (bowl or basin shaped censers with ring bases) (Chase and Chase 1988). The censer fragments in the Levy collection clearly belong to the *Kol Modeled* type. Made of coarse, unslipped pottery the censers were originally composed of human effigies attached to the front of vase-like containers standing on a pedestal base. Often a pair of flanges were added to each side of the effigy (see Thompson 1957: 599-600 for a detailed description of this type of censers). *Kol* effigy censers share several traits with the contemporary and relatively numerous effigy censer fragments of the *Chen Mul Modeled* type from Mayapan (e.g., Thompson 1957). The effigy censers excavated by the Chases and their team at Santa Rita Corozal had all been broken and appeared in two different contexts: They may be broken and spread over a large area or in refuse deposits, or they may be broken in situ at the location where they are found—usually atop or within structures (Chase and Chase 1988: 72-74; Chase 1985: 115). In the last case the censers can sometimes be reconstructed, and we suspect that most of the censers now in Copenhagen belong to this group based on the size of the fragments. Censers from within buildings in Santa Rita Corozal are usually found in pairs (Chase and Chase 1988: 72-74)<sup>4</sup>. At Santa Rita Corozal paired effigy censers were thus found in Structures 2, 5, 6, 17, and 81 (Chase 1985: 121).

Chase and Chase suggest that the paired effigy censers are connected to rituals associated either with *wayeb* (the five-day period at the end of the year) or the 20 year long *katun* periods. Bishop Diego de Landa describes a rotating system where new images of deities, usually two at a time, were being made as part of the annual *wayeb* rites and were moved around to different locations in the town (Tozzer 1941: 136-147).

The broken effigy censers from Santa Rita Corozal could indicate that these images were broken as part of termination rites carried out as the old year came to an end (Chase 1985: 119-121). Other finds, including figurines in the act of letting blood (Chase 1991: 93-95) as well as offerings placed between two plates, also seem to fit Landa's descriptions of the offerings carried out as part of the *wayeb* rituals (Chase 1985: 121; Chase and Chase 1988: 72-74). Diane Chase also considers it possible that the deities on the censers represent what she calls the lords of the *katuns* (Chase 1985: 119-121). Each lord rules for 20 years or one *katun*, but according to Landa there was an overlap of ten years where the «idol» representing the next *katun* was gradually taking over the duties from the lord of the current *katun*. Thus, half of the time there were not one, but two deities or lords associated with any given *katun* period (Tozzer 1941: 168-169).

Clearly, ethnohistorical sources are of great value when interpreting archaeological remains from the Postclassic, including censers. On the other hand we must keep in mind that ethnographic data from the time of the conquest are rather limited for the Maya region, at least when compared to central Mexico, and many rituals involving the use of effigy censers may well never have been recorded. Landa mentions incense as being part of several rituals, including the Maya version of baptism (Tozzer 1941: 104, 128, 155, 165). Burning of copal is also said to have taken place in abandoned temples (Tozzer 1941: 110), an observation that is supported archaeologically by finds of Postclassic censer fragments on structures from earlier periods, as in the case of Cerros (Vail 1988: 17, 23). Of particular relevance to the present study are ethnohistorical sources that document how effigy censers were regarded as representations of the gods they depicted, not merely as containers for burning incense. Thus, Thompson quotes the *Relación de Valladolid* for the following information: «They worshipped some idols made of clay, like small jars or the flower pots used for sweet basil, with different faces on the outsides. Inside, they burnt a strong-smelling resin called copal. This they offered to those idols» (Thompson 1957: 601). According to Landa, most of the Maya's «idols» were made of clay and these were renewed every year, and he states that «it was the custom that each idol should have its little brazier in which they should burn their incense to it»

<sup>4</sup> A similar pattern is documented from other Postclassic sites (e.g., Pugh 1998), and Classic period paired effigy censers are also known. In Cacacol one pair was discovered close to a so-called *katun* altar (Chase and Chase 1988: 85).

(Tozzer 1941: 111, 161). It is most likely that Landa refers to a combination of «idol» or godly image and a container for incense, that is effigy censers<sup>5</sup>. It has been suggested that the representations on the censers that are not immediately recognizable as gods may be private ancestral gods (see Masson 2000: 224, 239, 247), and as we shall see, one of the censers in the Levy collection may represent a local, apotheosized lord.

Due to the lack of information about their archaeological context, it is impossible to determine the original location of the censers in the Levy collection. Equally little can be said about the circumstances under which they were used and destroyed. However, the fragments themselves can contribute significantly to our knowledge about the gods that were worshipped in this part of the Maya region. As we shall show in the following several deities are represented despite the small number of fragments in total.

#### INTERPRETING THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE CENSERS

As pointed out earlier, a main objective of this brief study is an attempt to identify the deities represented by the censor figures. This is possible due to a number of characteristic iconographic features on several of the fragments. As we shall see there are several corresponding features between the famous Santa Rita murals and the iconography of censers from the site, a fact first noted by the discoverer of the murals, Thomas Gann (Gann 1900: 673-674; see also Chase and Chase 1988: 82). Sadly, there is no paint remaining on any of the censers, and only the collection's single example of a *Cao* type effigy retains much of its vivid coloration (see below). Although the lack of colours and painted attributes make any certain identification of deities more difficult, the collection still offer valuable information on the religious life of the Late Postclassic period. We will focus on six fragments from Santa Rita Corozal and three of unknown origin, but clearly of the same type as the other pieces collected by Levy and presumably from Belize and the vicinity of Santa Rita Corozal or Lamanai. In the following we will treat the incense burners according to their possible deity representations, and we begin with

the god that is most frequently represented, the long-nosed raingod *Chaak*.

#### Chaak

One of the identifying features of *Chaak* (God B), the Maya god of rain and lightning is the «long pendulous 'trunk' extending downward from the nose over the upper lip» as well as the prominent fangs at the corners of the mouth (Thompson 1957: 606-608; see also 1970: 251-262; Taube 1992: 17-27, 131-136). We find *Chaak* portrayed in the Late Postclassic Maya codices in this manner (e.g., Codex Dresden, pp. 29-33) and we recognize the same features on three fragments in the Levy collection (ODI-f.39; ODI-f.42 and ODI-f.46) (Figure 1a-c). Karl Taube has argued that *Chaak* and the central Mexican raingod *Tlaloc* merged in Yucatan in the Postclassic period, and the long canine-like fangs indeed seem to be a trait of *Tlaloc* (Taube 1992: 133-136, Fig. 73). Another well-known feature of *Tlaloc*, the «goggles» worn around the eyes, do not appear on the Copenhagen censers, but may originally have been painted around the eyes as they were on several examples from Mayapan (Thompson 1957: 606).

The three identified *Chaak* incense burners can be compared to a number of very similar examples from Santa Rita Corozal, Mayapan and Lamanai, (Chase and Chase 1988: Fig. 11; Smith 1971: Fig. 63; Taube 1992: Fig. 73). Although we are able to identify the deity portrayed on the three censers as *Chaak*, we also note that the headdresses preserved on ODI-f.39 and ODI-f.46 are very different from each other. The elaborate headdress of ODI-f.46 is composed of a serpent's head and upper jaw combined with a large, cone-like component including a V-shaped element that may represent sprouting maize or perhaps feathers. Both serpentine traits and maize sprouts are attributes that occur with *Chaak*: The serpent referring to thunder and lightning (Taube 1992: 19-22) whereas the sprouting vegetation is an obvious reference to the fertility and growth caused by the rains. The headdress of ODI-f.39 is much simpler and consists of an oblong, undecorated cylinder topped by a row of small triangles. The fact that we find two different *Chaaks* or different aspects of *Chaak* is of little surprise. Thus, we

<sup>5</sup> From ethnographic studies among the Lacandon Maya of Chiapas we have good evidence for the use and conception of clay incense burners with the face of a god modeled on it and called «god pots» by the Lacandon. As noted by McGee Postclassic effigy censers may have been thought of and used in a very similar manner (McGee 1990: 49-52; see also Freidel *et al.* 1993: 247-251).

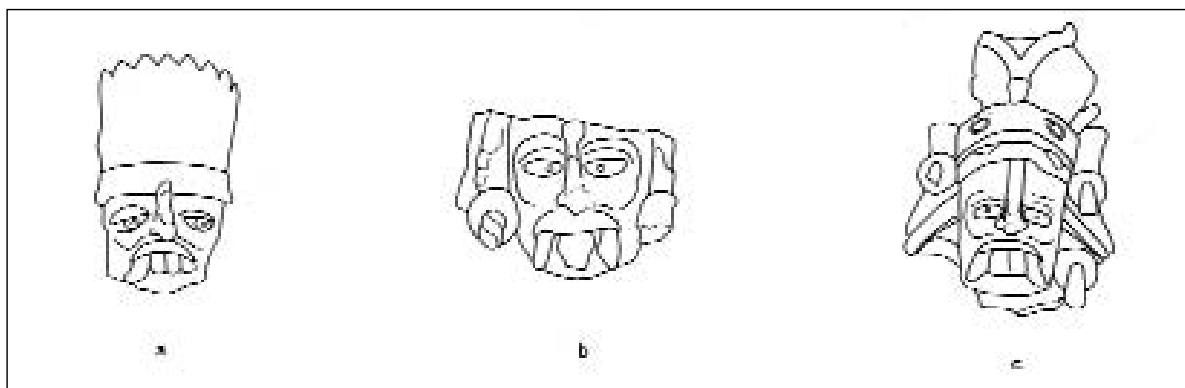


Figure 1. Chaak effigy censers: (a) Fragment of *Kol Modeled* type effigy censer from Santa Rita Corozal (ODI-f.39); height 16 cm, length 12 cm. (b) Fragment of *Kol Modeled* type effigy censer from Santa Rita Corozal (ODI-f.42); height: 10 cm, length 13 cm. (c) Fragment of *Kol Modeled* type effigy censer of unknown provenance (ODI-f.46); height 21 cm, length 14 cm (drawings by Jesper Nielsen).

have ample evidence, from Precolumbian as well as Colonial and ethnographic sources, that the Yucatec Maya worshipped a rich variety of *Chaaks*, each associated with different world directions, clouds, winds, and types of rain (e.g., Thompson 1970; Villa Rojas 1945: 102).

### K'awiil

A censer fragment from Santa Rita Corozal (ODI-f.45) (Figure 2a) represents an individual wearing a headdress that can be identified as portraying *K'awiil* (God K). The serpent-footed *K'awiil* was an important Maya deity associated with a broad range of concepts including lightning, agriculture (and hence overlapping some of the associations of *Chaak*) and, at least in Classic times, royal lineages and rulership (Taube 1992: 69-79). It is the long upturned snout that is the principal identifying feature of *K'awiil*, and while the top part of the snout is broken off, it is still possible to recognize the base and the lower part of the upturned nose in a profile view. The representation can be compared to depictions of *K'awiil* in the murals of Santa Rita Corozal and Tulum (e.g., Taube 1992: Fig. 32f; Miller 1982: Pl. 28) and in the surviving Maya codices (e.g., Madrid, p. 21; Dresden p. 12 and the Grolier, p. 4) (Figure 2b-c). Few other known incense burner effigies represent *K'awiil*, but a censer from

Mayapan, described as a «bat god» by Thompson (1957: 619; Fig. 2i), as well as another incense burner from Santa Rita Corozal (Chase and Chase 1988: Fig. 8e) may also represent *K'awiil*<sup>6</sup>.

### Itzamnaaj

The best preserved piece from Santa Rita Corozal in the Levy collection is an effigy vessel of a creature with an old man emerging from a snail shell within the creature's mouth (ODI-f.48) (Figure 3a). As noted earlier, the effigy retains much of its original colours: blue, white and red. The vessel is broken at the edge of the rim of the vessel's mouth, and thus we cannot determine whether it originally was bicephalic. The old man is toothless, except for a molar in each corner of the mouth, he has a prominent, hooked nose and is wearing a beaded headband with a flower-like element attached in the center. These features identify him as the aged deity *Itzamnaaj* (God D), who is associated with wisdom and esoteric knowledge, but at the same time linked with the earth, the World Tree and hence the *Axis Mundi* and creative forces (Schele and Mathews 1998: 46, 265; Taube 1992: 31-41; Thompson 1957: 604-606). *Itzamnaaj*, who figures prominently in the Santa Rita murals, is also known as *Itzam Kab' Ayiin* or «*Itzam* Earth Caiman» (Taube 1992: 34-37). As Taube points out, this name also refers to

<sup>6</sup> Note that the line with three dots running below the eye is not a feature that is common only to *K'awiil*. Thus, the same element appears with a number of other deities in the codices as well as in Late Postclassic murals and sculptural art.

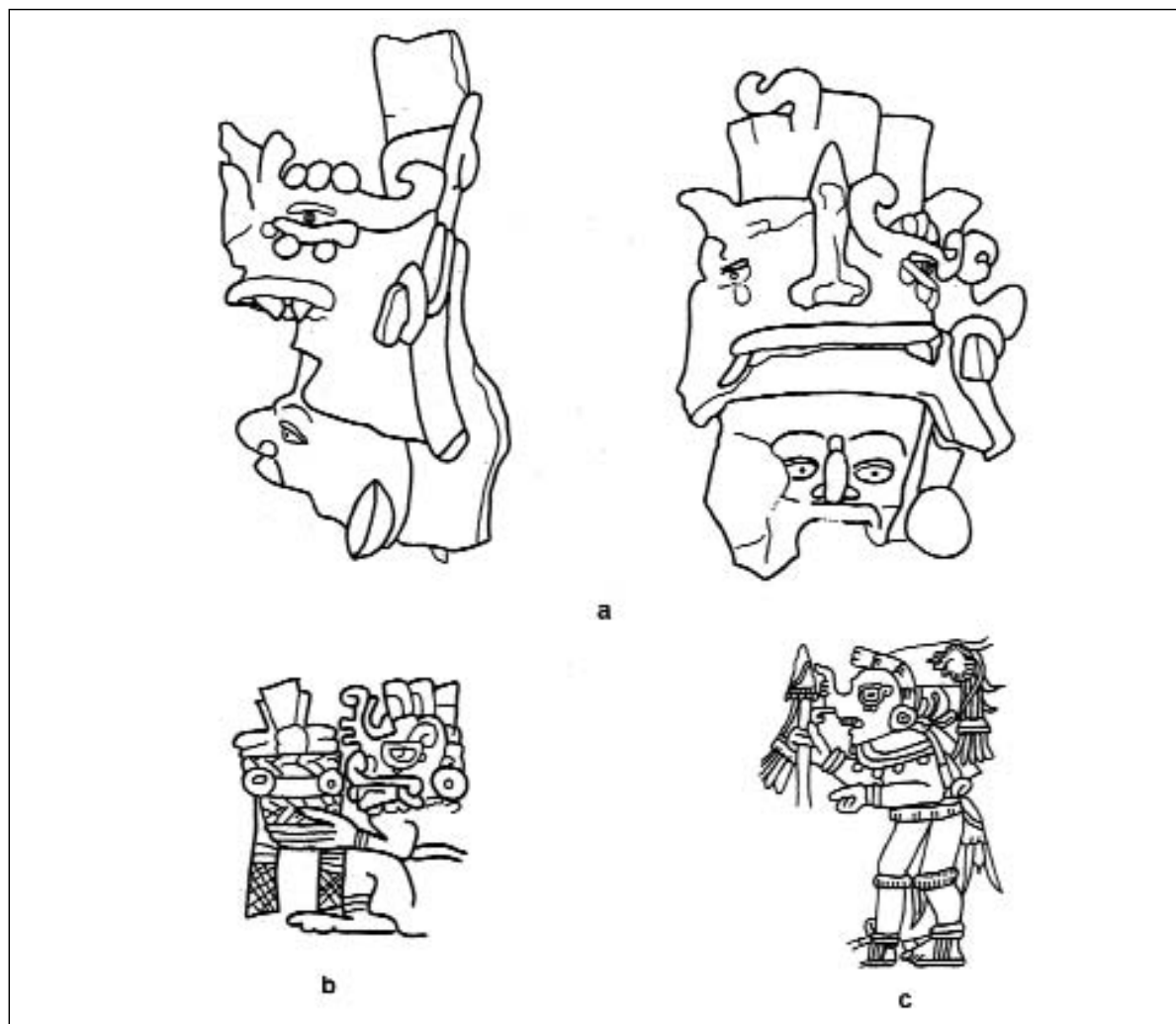


Figure 2. (a) Fragment of *Kol Modeled* type effigy censer from Santa Rita Corozal showing person wearing a *K'awiil*-headdress (ODI-f.45); height: 18 cm, length 15 cm (drawing by Jesper Nielsen). (b) Seated *K'awiil* holding headdress, Madrid Codex (p. 21c). (c) *K'awiil* impersonator from Codex Grolier (p. 4) (redrawn from Taube 1992: Figs. 32d, 33d).

whales and large fish and thus seems to be a term used to designate various types of sea-creatures. What appears to have mattered to the Maya in this specific context was the association between the creator deity *Itzamnaaj* and large creatures of the ocean on the backs of which the earth was thought to be located<sup>7</sup>.

Representations of *Itzamnaaj* emerging from the

mouth of caimans, shark-like fish or turtles are known from various sources and sites, e.g., the Dresden Codex (pp. 4-5), Mayapan (Gallenkamp and Johnson 1985: Cat. No. 177), Santa Rita Corozal (e.g. Gann 1900: Pl. XXXIII, Figs. 1, 5; Chase and Chase 1988: Figs. 5a, 8c, 15a), Chacchoben (Romero and Riqué 1995) and Lamanai (Gallenkamp and Johnson 1985:

<sup>7</sup> According to Schele and Mathews *Itzamnaaj* set up the Shark or Water Throne, one of the three cosmic Hearth Stones, put up at the time of creation (1998: 411-412). This would seem to establish another firm link between *Itzamnaaj* and the ocean.

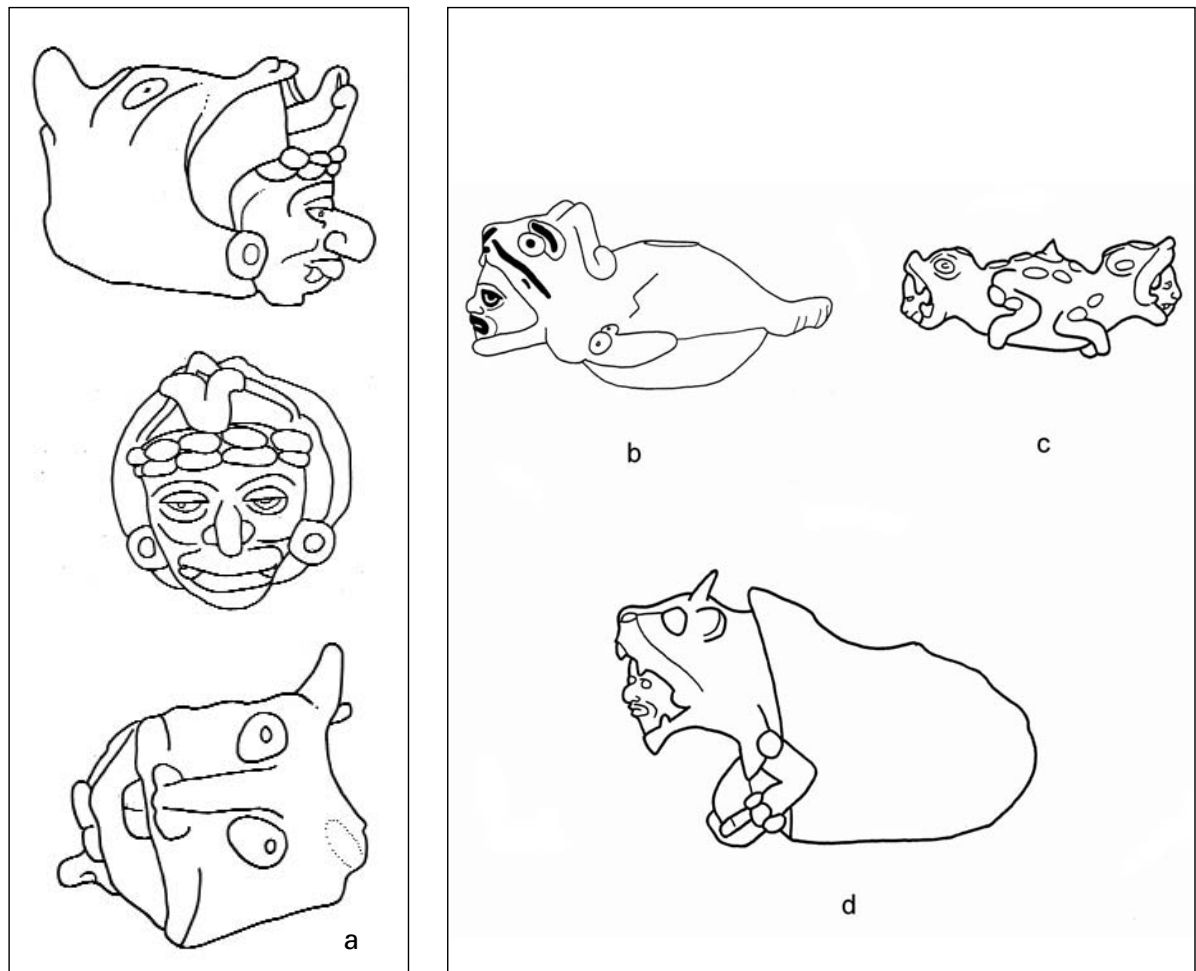


Figure 3. (a) Broken *Cao Modeled* type effigy vessel from Santa Rita Corozal representing Itzamnaaj emerging from a snail shell placed in the open jaws of a hybrid sea-creature (ODI-f.48); height 9 cm, length 12 cm, diameter of vessel rim 10,5 cm (drawings by Jesper Nielsen). (b) Deity emerging from so-called «horned» jaguar combining jaguar and seal characteristics. *Cao Modeled* type effigy vessel from Santa Rita Corozal (drawing based on Gann 1900: Pl. XXXV, Fig. 1). (c) Two aged deities appearing in the mouths of bicephalic caiman. *Cao Modeled* type effigy vessel from Santa Rita Corozal (redrawn from Taube 1992: Fig. 15b). (d) *Itzamnaaj* emerging from «horned» jaguar with snail shell body. *Cao Modeled* type effigy vessel from Santa Rita Corozal (redrawn from Chase and Chase 1988: Fig. 15a).

Cat. No. 205) (Figure 3b-d)<sup>8</sup>. The example from Copenhagen differs, however, in that the creature from which *Itzamnaaj* emerges resembles a seal<sup>9</sup>, a trait we will return to shortly. The unusual effigy vessels

showing *Itzamnaaj* appearing in the jaws of underwater creatures appears to be more frequent in Santa Rita Corozal (at least eight examples are known) than at any other Late Postclassic site, and we see *Itzam-*

<sup>8</sup> Another aged deity, God N, is also frequently depicted as emerging from a shell or wearing a turtle carapace. God N differs from *Itzamnaaj*, however, in that he has a distinct headdress and is not shown in association with sharks, caimans or fish-like beings.

<sup>9</sup> Seals do in fact live in the Caribbean. The West Indian seal (*Pinnipedia Monachus*) is encountered as far south as the Gulf of Honduras (Stuart 1964: 320).



*naaj* emerging from caimans, shells and hybrid beings called «horned jaguars». Often these creatures overlap or share attributes. Thus, Chase and Chase describe one of the effigies from Santa Rita Corozal as a «jaguar with a snail shell body» (1988: 38, Fig. 15a)<sup>10</sup>. Gann illustrates an effigy that suggest a blend of «horned» jaguar and seal features (1900: Pl. XXXV, Fig.1) and the «seal» effigy from Copenhagen may represent a similar hybrid.

A highly complex effigy vessel, also from Santa Rita Corozal, can be compared to the example from the Levy collection. The vessel is illustrated in an exhibition catalogue (Gallenkamp and Johnson 1985: Cat. No. 189) and is described by Coggins as representing the «head of a mythological animal that seems to combine characteristics of a seal with the eyes, fangs and flexible snout of Postclassic serpentine form» (Gallenkamp and Johnson 1985: 218). Within the open jaws of its hollow head there is a lidded effigy vessel in the shape of a conch shell. A modeled horned jaguar emerges from this shell, and the head of an old man emerges in turn from the jaguar's open jaws» (Coggins 1985: 218). Thus, we do seem to have another representation of *Itzamnaaj* emerging from a snail shell in the mouth of a seal, and we notice a conglomeration of several of the traits that can be seen on individual effigies. It is difficult to determine exactly what animal is represented on the Copenhagen effigy vessel, but there is little doubt that it is a sea-creature, and it is probably a composite being including seal features. The important point here is that the association between large sea-creatures such as caimans, turtles, sharks, whales and seals and *Itzamnaaj* is constant. Furthermore, it should be noted that the *Itzamnaaj*/sea-creature effigy vessels occur prominently in Santa Rita Corozal. It is thus tempting to interpret this emphasis on *Itzamnaaj*'s association with the sea as an expression of a regional, specialized cult devoted to his association with the earth's emergence from the primordial sea - a cult that we may even speculate to have been centered at Santa Rita Corozal. The possible existence of a Santa Rita Corozal-based cult to *Itzamnaaj* form an interesting parallel to the well-known pilgrimage shrines to the Maya goddess *Ix Chel* on the islands of Cozumel and Isla Mujeres, some 250 km north of the Bay of Chetumal. Among

other things, *Ix Chel* was the all important female creator deity and she is sometimes mentioned as the consort of *Itzamnaaj*, the two of them constituting the original creator couple (Taube 1992: 99; Vail and Stone 2002: 211). We admit that the available evidence is highly tentative but we would still like to put forth the hypothesis that the east coast of the Yucatan peninsula housed two cult centers dedicated to the ancient creator couple in Maya mythology. The recognition of two aged, complementary creator deities worshipped at shrines located in the east, the direction of the rising sun, the ocean and the primordial creation, may eventually broaden our understanding of sacred landscape and geopolitics among the Late Postclassic Maya (see also Nielsen and Brady n.d.).

### Xipe Totec

As have been noted in previous studies of the Late Postclassic in the Maya area, a cultural influence from central Mexico can be observed in this period (Thompson 1957: 623-624; Taube 1992; Smith 2003). The influence is also reflected in the censer production where we find representations of Mexican deities such as *Xipe Totec*, the flayed god associated with renewal and sacrifice (Thompson 1957: 612-613; Figs. 2a-b, 4g; 1970: 329; Taube 1992: 121-123). Indeed, one fragment from the Levy collection (consisting of the head only) seems to portray *Xipe* (ODI-f.85) (Figure 4a). The face displays a distorted and slack mouth baring the upper row of teeth, a feature we recognize from other representations of *Xipe*. Furthermore, the hair of the forehead has a cleft just above the nose ridge, as if having been parted, a trait that also appears on a *Xipe* effigy censer from Mayapan (Taube 1992: Fig. 64a) (Figure 4b). Thus, although the example in the National Museum has open eyes (in contrast to most *Xipe* representations), ODI-f.85 most likely represents *Xipe Totec*.

### Quetzalcoatl

Another influence from central Mexico is the possible representation of a Quetzalcoatl headdress worn

<sup>10</sup> Taube (1992: 128) discusses the representations of the «Two-Horned God» in Postclassic Maya iconography and compares it to the Aztec Two-Horned God which has been identified with *Tonacatecuhtli* (the Aztec counterpart of *Itzamnaaj*), *Tepeyolotl*, *Huehueteotl* and *Xiuhcuhtli*. Taube favors an identification of this two-horned deity with *Tepeyolotl*, the Aztec jaguar god of the earth's interior.

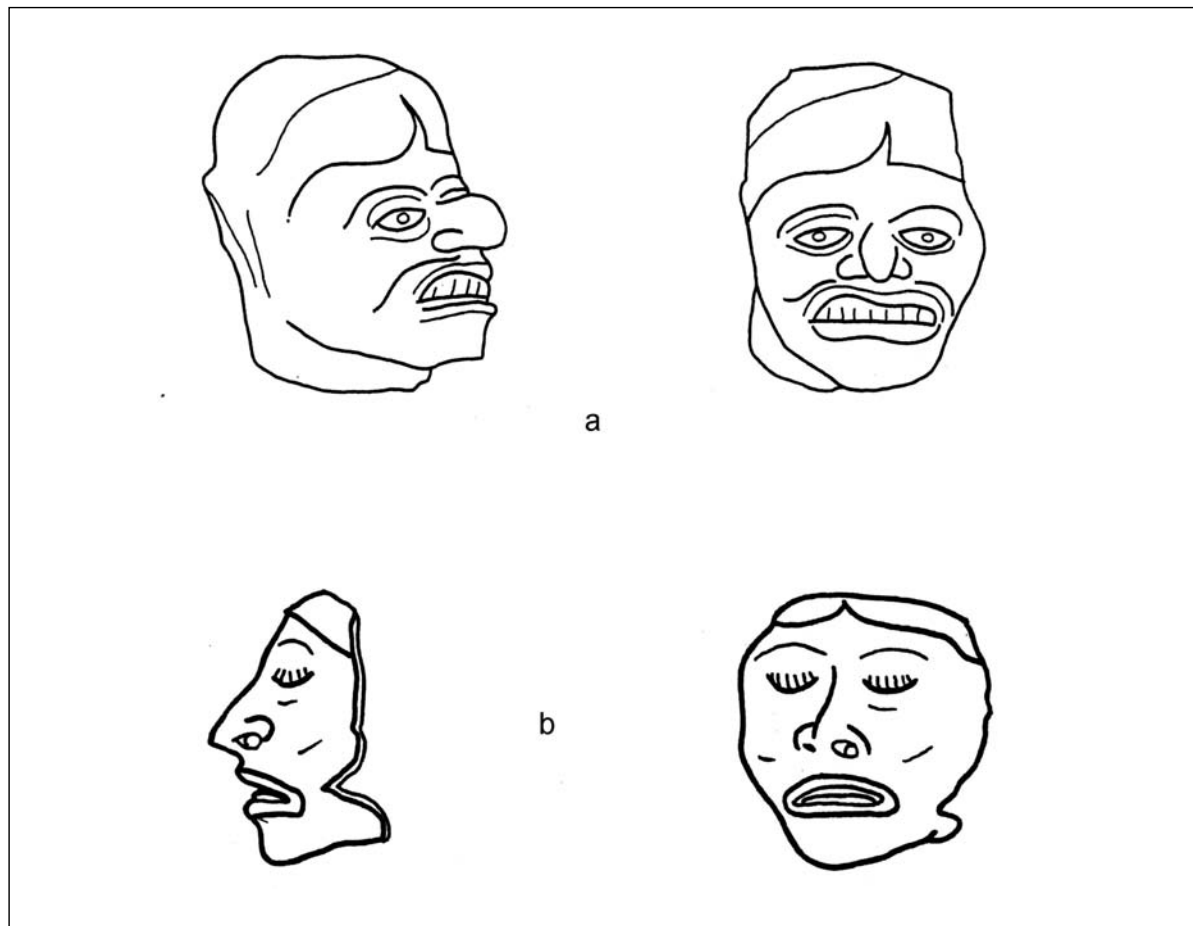


Figure 4. (a) Fragment of *Kol Modeled* type effigy censer possibly portraying Xipe Totec. Unknown provenance (ODI.f.85); height: 10 cm, length 9 cm (drawing by Jesper Nielsen). (b) *Xipe Totec* face from *Chen Mul* Modeled type effigy censer from Mayapan (redrawn from Taube 1992: Fig. 64a).

by an old-looking individual with a knotted headband (ODI.f.38) (Figure 5a). The Feathered Serpent deity complex of *Quetzalcoatl/K'uk'ulkan* has a long history in Mesoamerican religion (e.g., Miller and Taube 1993: 141-142; Ringle *et al.* 1998; Nicholson 2000; Sugiyama 2000). Known as *K'uk'ulkan* to the Yucatec Maya this being played a highly significant role to the Postclassic cultures of northern Yucatan (Thompson 1957: 617; Taube 1992: 136-140; Fig. 76), where its zoo-morphic appearance seems to have been associated with agriculture and fertility. However, Miller and Taube point out that *Quetzalcoatl* was also considered a god of merchants in Late Postclassic central Mexico (1993: 142). Possibly this aspect of the deity that was consi-

dered of major importance to coastal sites such as Santa Rita Corozal, where international trade obviously played a major role. Sadly, the headdress of the censer is badly broken, and the features that most strongly indicate that this is *Quetzalcoatl* are the feather crest on the brow and the oblong serpentine-like forehead (compare with Taube 1992: Fig. 76b-d) (Figure 5b-c).

#### Unidentified deities

Among the censer fragments which at this point resist any firm identification only two will be discussed



Figure 5. (a) Individual wearing a possible *Quetzalcoatl*-headdress. Fragment of *Kol Modeled* type effigy censer from Santa Rita Corozal (ODI-f.38); height 18 cm, length 15 cm (drawing by Jesper Nielsen). (b) *Chaak* emerging from the mouth of *Quetzalcoatl*. Sculpture from the West Structure of the Nunnery Quadrangle at Uxmal. (c) Graffito from Chich'en Itza showing serpent with feathered crest on the brow (redrawn from Taube 1992: Fig. 76b, 76d).

here. The first is a fragment from Santa Rita Corozal consisting of the head only (ODI-f.40) (Figure 6). The individual wears a characteristic chimney-like helmet. Related types of headdresses are known from other Late Postclassic effigy censers, where it is worn by *Xipe Totec* (Peraza 1999: 51), the Maize God (Thompson 1957: Fig. 2d) and other yet unidentified deities (Gann 1900: Pl. XXXII, Fig. 2). Thus, it seems that this

kind of headdress cannot readily be linked with any specific deity, and it may signal a certain aspect or quality that was shared by several deities.

The second fragment to be dealt with here (ODI-f.84) (Figure 7) is remarkable because of its large size and unique features<sup>11</sup>. It represents the upper torso and head of an individual wearing an elaborate headdress. The headdress displays many unidentified elements,

<sup>11</sup> This censer has been assembled from several smaller fragments and is heavily restored in some places, especially so on the right flange.



Figure 6. *Kol Modeled* type effigy censer fragment showing individual with chimney-like helmet. Unknown provenance (ODI-f.40); height: 23 cm, length 15 cm (drawing by Jesper Nielsen).



Figure 7. Fragment of *Kol Modeled* type effigy censer from Santa Rita Corozal, perhaps representing an important ancestor (ODI-f.84); height 34 cm, length 28 cm (drawing by Jesper Nielsen).

some of which may represent sprouting vegetation or feathers. The face has strongly marked features, such as the eyebrows and the protruding upper jaw. The right arm is broken off at the shoulder joint, whereas the upper part of the left arm still remains. On the chest the figure wears what may represent a pectoral suspended by a thin rope, and below the pectoral a breast plate or shirt (the sleeve of which is visible on the left arm) adorned with two small round objects and a fringe of feathers can be seen. Large pectorals are commonly associated with rulership, and the censer may be compared to a series of effigy censers from Santa Rita Corozal showing individuals with mat-symbols on their chest, the mat being another well-

known symbol of authority and rulership (e.g., Gann 1900: Pl. XXXII, Fig. 2)<sup>12</sup>. We may speculate whether the censer portrays a historical person, belonging to a ruling lineage, perhaps apotheosized as *K'inich Ajaw* (God G), the Maya Sun God of the Sun whom we know was strongly associated with rulership and the cult of dead *ajaws* in the Classic period<sup>13</sup>.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

To conclude our discussion of the importance and implications of the rediscovered Levy collection, it is clear that the collection increases the corpus of

<sup>12</sup> Additional examples of censer figures from Santa Rita Corozal with mat symbols on their chests were collected by Gann and are now housed in the Liverpool Museum, Great Britain.

<sup>13</sup> From the iconography of Classic period we know that dead Maya rulers were sometimes depicted as reborn in heaven in the likeness of the Sun God or *K'inich Ajaw* (see Taube 1992: 54-55).

known Late Postclassic effigy censers from northern Belize considerably, as well as it provides important evidence about the religious beliefs of this region. In our view, it is impossible to determine whether the censer fragments now in Copenhagen were originally related to *wayeb* and *katun* rites. It is entirely possible, however, that the censers served first in rites related to the specific deities they portrayed, and then were destroyed after ended use during termination and renewal ceremonies at the beginning of the new year. It has been noted that *Chaak* is the most frequently encountered deity in our small sample, a fact that is not surprising since the raingod was of such great importance to the Postclassic societies of Yucatan. However, we do not share Thompson's view that *Chaak* was a «peasant god», while *Itzamna* was an «elite god'» (1957: 622), a hypothesis based on the larger number of *Itzamnaaj* censers from Mayapan. First of all, we choose to refrain from such class-oriented distinction between the two; secondly, we find it difficult to assess the social affiliation and importance of one deity over another on the basis of such restricted data. In fact, our sample from northern Belize could be used to reach a conclusion contradicting that proposed by Thompson. We want to emphasize, however, that the sole *Itzamnaaj* representation in the Levy collection was clearly part of a larger group and tradition of vessels and effigies showing *Itzamnaaj* emerging from the jaws of sea-creatures. This have led us to suggest that a specialized cult devoted to this as-

pect of *Itzamnaaj* may have been centered at Santa Rita Corozal in Late Postclassic times.

The similarity between the censers from Santa Rita Corozal, Lamanai and Mayapan is suggestive of close contacts between these sites in the Late Postclassic, as have already been suggested by the Chases (Chase and Chase 1988: 78-79). In terms of the foreign influence we have noted in the censer iconography, it is most likely linked to the town's participation in the international «information network» of the Late Postclassic (Smith 2003; Boone and Smith 2003). Previously, Santa Rita Corozal's involvement in the intensifying «internationalism» of the period has mainly been witnessed by the murals of Structure 1 (Masson 2003). However, as we have shown, the foreign traits are also present on the effigy censers, and the suggested representations of *Xipe Totec* and *Quetzalcoatl* may well pertain to a desire from the local lords to emphasize their «cosmopolitan ties» (Masson 2003: 195). Thus, although both murals and censers are predominantly expressing Maya ideas and symbols they also reflect the city's link to the rest of the Postclassic Mesoamerican world.

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