Fire Symbolism in Ritual Practices and in Ritual Speech: Continuity and Change in Yucatec Maya (Con-)Texts

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Abstract: This article focuses on ritual practices and ritual speech connected with fire that can be traced back in a long-term perspective and have had a lasting impact on Yucatec Maya life. Early Colonial sources, such as Yucatec Maya texts and ethnohistoric sources, provide us with a vehicle to chart the use of fire in these (con-)texts. Yucatec Maya religious ritual dialogue is explored through time and in texts and speech that include fire either as part of ritual practice or as expressed in ritual discourse. Fire, smoke and ashes may function as a vehicle that not only transforms ritual into action, but also creates symbolic messages that link ritual participants to ancestor spirits and gods. Modern ethnographic research that reiterates practices narrated in the Books of Chilam Balam highlights (con-)texts that suggest the continuity of ritual practices. Ritual Studies and the theoretical perspectives of Comparative Religion are employed in this study. The various sources illustrate persistence in ritual practices and speech performances that contain intricate fire and similar symbolism. This is also seen in the vivid spirituality found in contemporary Yucatec Maya religious landscapes.

Resumen: Este artículo se enfoca en las prácticas rituales y en el discurso religioso que se relacionan con el fuego, los cuales se pueden describir a lo largo de los siglos, ya que han tenido un fuerte y duradero impacto en la vida maya yucateca. Las fuentes históricas del periodo Colonial temprano, así como aquellas escritas en maya yucateco y fuentes etno-historicas, proporcionan evidencias para reconstruir el uso del fuego en varios (con)textos rituales. Se analiza el diálogo religioso maya yucateco a lo largo del tiempo, partiendo de los textos y alocuciones que abarcan el fuego como parte de la práctica o como tema discursivo. Fuego, humo o ceniza parecen funcionar no sólo como medios que transforman el ritual en acción, sino también para crear un mensaje simbólico que vincula a los participantes con los espíritus de los antepasados y con las deidades. La investigación etnográfica moderna, que reitera prácticas narradas en los libros de Chilam Balam, enfatiza (con)textos que sugieren una continuidad ritual. En este estudio se emplean los marcos teóricos de los estudios de la ritualidad y del estudio comparativo de las religiones. Las distintas fuentes muestran una clara persistencia en las prácticas rituales y en la representación del discurso que contiene un complejo simbolismo de fuego y de elementos similares. Esto, asimismo, se ve en la espiritualidad hallada en los paisajes religiosos mayas yucatecos contemporáneos.

This article is dedicated with warmth to Alfonso Lacadena, a dear friend and colleague, whom I got to know through the work we carried out together within the Administrative Council of Wayeb, The European Association of Mayanists. We first met at the Euro-
pean Maya Conference in Copenhagen in 1999 and often talked with each other, not only about Wayeb-related things and ongoing Maya research, but also on a more personal level about our children who are about the same age. Alfonso was a wonderful person and a great teacher, colleague and scholar. I will always remember Alfonso with warmth and joy! Thank you for our friendship, Alfonso.

This study focuses on ritual practices and ritual speech connected with fire that can be traced back in a long-term perspective and have had a lasting impact among the Yucatec Maya. The main purpose in this study is to grasp various examples of rituals and ritual speech found in Yucatec Maya Religion over time that include fire as part of the ritual practice, or as expressed in ritual speech discourses. Questions that I have asked myself when embarking on this journey of exploring ritual practices of fire among the Yucatec Maya in the long term are, for instance: Is it possible to map various rituals, as calendar rituals and agrarian rituals, from the ethnographical sources and from the Books of Chilam Balam? May we find (con-)texts that can be analysed as continuities of ritual practices? These are some questions that will be highlighted in this study.

Many ritual practices are often connected to certain natural and cultural places in Yucatec Maya (con-)texts and in this study the main goal is to focus on rituals where representations of fire somehow are seen as an important part. Also, fire symbolism will be commented on, as well as possible references to examples of fire symbolism in religions from other parts of the world. Hopefully, a comparative perspective will inspire or enhance our understanding of spirituality in Yucatec Maya (con-)texts over the long-term.

**Aim and methods**

The aim of this article is to explore the relation between cosmology and rituals through some examples of rituals that contain fire, or various forms of fire, in Yucatec Maya religious discourse and found in various (con-)texts. This will be based on a close reading of the Books of Chilam Balam and other Early Colonial texts, as they are constructed and created out of the impact of Colonialism, Christianity and the Western world since the time of the Conquest (Tozzer 1941; Jakeman 1952; de la Garza and Izquierdo 1980; Jiménez
Villalba 1988). The method of using analogy as a method will also be employed as an example of contextualization where ethnographic and anthropological information and data will be related to archaeological results (Brady and Colas 2005: 165). Thus, aided by a contextual approach and a close reading with theoretical perspectives from Post-Colonialism the striving is to let the Yucatec Maya voice speak through these texts (Hall 1992; Pratt 1992; Loomba 2005). Also, I use the term (con-)texts as a special term that encompasses both contextualization, implying to synthesise information and research results from various disciplines and textual studies, meaning that both a close reading and text analysis, such as critical discourse analysis, is employed as a method to arrive at new understanding and new interpretations of Maya religion found in various kinds of texts and manuscripts.

Sources

The Books of Chilam Balam are a group of manuscripts that have been named after Chilam Balam, the Jaguar prophet, who lived in Yucatan during the first half of the 16th century and the manuscripts also had the name of the town or village where they were found added to the title, such as The Book of Chilam Balam from Chumayel. This means that we have manuscripts ascribed to the Yucatecan towns of Chumayel, Mani/Codice Perez, Tizimin, Kaua, Nah, Tuzik, Tekax, Chan Cah, and Ixil, and today we find copies of these in libraries both in Mexico and in the USA (see for instance Roys 1967; Craine and Reindorp 1979; Edmonson 1981; Miram 1988; Gubler and Bolles 2000; Bricker and Miram 2002). These manuscripts are extremely heterogeneous in their content and we find texts telling the reader of myths, rituals, historical events, astrological information, medicinal information as well as finding texts that are clearly influenced by Christianity, Biblical allusions and other texts of European origin. They date from early colonial times onwards and are commonly considered to be valuable sources to Yucatec Maya religion and history, although they are very enigmatic to understand with their sometimes esoteric language and content. Even in present day ceremonies in the Yucatan peninsula, the Books of Chilam Balam are still read aloud by the h-menooob, religious specialists/shamans, literally “the doers”, found in many of the villages in Yucatan (Hanks 1986;
Gubler and Hostettler 1994). Today copies of nine manuscripts are known and kept in archives in both the Americas and Europe (Gibson and Glass 1975; Edmonson and Bricker 1985; Gubler and Bolles 2000).

These texts are used in order to try to give the Yucatec Maya a voice from the Early Colonial times. And when we read them and compare them with other sources from the same time period we may reach new insights into the Yucatec Maya religion from a more emic point of view. This is further strengthened by Post-Colonial theory building that allows the Maya to speak for themselves when there is opportunity to do so. Thus, using the Books of Chilam Balam enable the Yucatec Maya, or some Yucatec Maya people, from Early Colonial times to speak through these sources. Also, some examples of Classic Maya iconography will be analysed to grasp the intricate patterns of cosmology and ritual in Maya Religion. Diego de Landa’s Relación de las cosas de Yucatán will be used as an ethnographically important source from Early Colonial times (Tozzer 1941).

The manuscript Ritual of the Bacabs (Roys 1965; Arzápalo 1987) that contains medical remedies and rituals for healing from the Early Colonial times and onwards will be referred to occasionally in this article. Nature is central in Yucatec Maya religiosity as seen in Yucatec Maya texts, in iconography as well as in ritual practices where not least herbal curing is an essential part still today. We can read many texts about the importance of using herbs and parts of insects, flowers and fauna in medical treatises. These medical, or healing, rituals are performed by a hmen, or xmen, who recite or chant a text that has been transmitted orally, but some of them are encapsuled in time in, e.g., the Book of Chilam Balam from Kaua (Bricker and Miram 2002) or in Ritual of the Bacabs (Roys 1965). This manuscript contains numerous medicinal texts used by hmenoob in traditional medicine practices all over Yucatan still today (see for instance Roys 1965; Arzápalo 1987; Hultkrantz 1995; Gubler 1985, 2000; Bricker and Miram 2002).

**Yucatec Maya cosmology—being at the centre of the world...**

The Yucatec Maya situated themselves at the heart of the universe just as many other people in historical cultures as well as in contemporary religions have done. The ways in which they have tried to
make place use of space by cultivating the landscape were, and are, nearly universal in strategy. Seen in a comparative perspective, strong similarities with this pattern are found in many of the historical world religions throughout the world, i.e., in Mesopotamia, Ancient Greece, and in the Old Norse religion. We see the quadripartite pattern mirrored in settlements, in caves, in pyramids, as well as in texts, as for instance in the Myth of Creation or in the Ritual of the four world quarters in the Book of Chilam Balam from Chumayel (Roys 1967: 98–113 and 63–66, respectively). If we then focus specifically on fire in the rituals we may compare with for instance the old Fire rituals of Agni and Homa in Vedic religion and in Hindu sacrifice rituals, in which the fire symbolizes various things, such as destruction and death but also resurrection, cleansing, and just purity (Nielsen 1993).

In Yucatec Maya (con-)texts rituals of place are strongly connected to their cosmological pattern where the four so-called cardinal directions are the most important. At the centre of this we find a fifth central axis. In several of the texts of the Books of Chilam Balam we find parts that describe how the east is the first and central direction and the place were everything begins. We find this pattern in the Myth of Creation in CB-Chumayel and in CB-Tizimin, and also, for example, in the text called The creation of the Uinal, the time, in CB-from Chumayel and Mani. Both these examples of texts will be presented in a little more detail below. In this pattern with the emphasis on the ritual place, in this case the east, we also find texts that narrate events connected to the encounter with the Spaniards, and when the dzuloob, the Conquistadors/Spaniards, arrive—they also arrive from the east. It is very clear that the east is the place from where everything starts. In the Popol Vuh, the Quiché Maya Myth of Creation from Guatemala, we find that the east is central. It is from the east that the first light is seen, and this is found also in the CB-Chumayel where we are told in the Myth of Creation that the first dawn is visible from the east—and this emphasis of the ritual place in the east marks the beginning of the present creation (Turner 1967: 50; Gossen 1999: 90; Liljefors Persson 1999, 2000, 2009, 2011b, 2012, 2013; Christenson 2004; Williams-Beck et al. 2012). Thus, these cardinal directions are strongly connected to the process of ritualisation, of creating a ritual place as distinct from other space
that is not considered as ritual or associated with special meaning or power.

Also, in the Books of Chilam Balam from Chumayel, Ixil, and Kaua we find examples of katun wheels with this quadripartite pattern and according to which the various katunoob are ascribed to, or seated in, the cardinal directions (Roys 1967: 132; Taube 1988; Bricker and Miram 2002: 77, 103). We also find other narratives focusing on special places that are rooted in rituals, such as in the text called “the building of the mounds”, and several shorter narratives about migrations and pilgrimages from, i.e., the Book of Chilam Balam from Chumayel, Mani, and Tizimin (Roys 1967: 79–80; Craine and Reindorp 1979; Edmonson 1981).

... and some comparative examples with other historical religions in the world

In these examples of texts from the Books of Chilam Balam we find that it seems important to “make place out of space”, to create a microcosmos within the larger macrocosmos. This is a theme, or pattern, which is found important in many of the ancient historical religions as well as among the contemporary indigenous religions of the world. This we can compare with, for instance, the Temple of Apollo in Delphi where the prophetess Pythia is sitting on a tripod over the crack in the rock floor, being the centre of the world, beside the omphalos the navel of the world, in the Classic Greek Religion. Pythia is then performing her ritual speech acts, her prophecies, being under heavy influence of the smoke that rises from the underworld through the inside of the mountain and then affecting her to give her these visions. Her ritual performance takes place while she is in a religious trance, be it caused by hallucinogenic drugs, or by wild rhythmic dancing, or just being in a religious trance. We can also compare this microcosmos, as being a place of power, with the Sumerian Ziqqurat, the temple with the stairway that reaches to the top of the temple pyramid, as being at the centre of the world, called Etemenanki, the stairway to heaven and the gods. A third example is found in the Old Norse worldview according to which the great ash tree, the Yggdrasil, being the Axis Mundi, forms the pillar or centre of the world (Nielsen et al. 1993). We find this same striving among
the Yucatec Maya, both according to the Early colonial traditions as we find them for instance in the Books of Chilam Balam and in agricultural rituals in present time—a desire to create the centre of the universe, the microcosmos, right here on earth where the ritual is performed. We see this in their representations of the quincunx pattern in myths as well as rituals and in structuring their sacred landscape according to this cosmovision (Liljefors Persson 2011b, 2013).

In this myth of creation, from the Book of Chilam Balam from Chumayel, we understand that the world has four directions each associated with a special colour, red in the east, white in the north, black in the west, yellow in the south and green in the centre of the world. This is a pattern that we see in several of the Books of Chilam Balam and also in connection to other rituals as well.

The Yucatec Maya cosmovision, as presented in this myth of creation, is composed by the so-called quincunx layout of the cosmos in combination with a three-layered horizontal division of the world, where we find Bolontiku, the nine gods of the underworld and the earth, often described in the Books of Chilam Balam, as Itzam-cab-ain, a crocodile, or a turtle sometimes, and the third, upper layer called Oxlahuntiku, the thirteen gods of the sky (Roys 1967: 98–113).

The myth of creation as it is described in the Book of Chilam Balam from Chumayel has been analysed as being a model for the agrarian rituals performed by the Yucatec Maya and still carried out today. Without going into too much detail, we might say that the myth of creation describes the world as being created at least three times according to this text and each time it has been destroyed because of some natural disaster, such as flooding, earthquake, fire, and hurricanes. Also, we are told that during the creations a number of plates of food are prepared and bowls of drinks are set up in a special order. The sequence of these various creations can be analysed as being parts of preparation for certain rituals still performed in Yucatan, in which a table is prepared and encircled with branches in each cardinal direction and set with drinking vessels and plates of food, such as tamales with herbs, in order to use them as offerings to the gods and also groups of candles are lit during the ceremonies. Following the description from Redfield and
Villa Rojas from 1934 and later descriptions from Chan Kom, we find that the number of plates prepared in a Cha Chaac ceremony is still the same when preparing these altars (Redfield and Villa Rojas 1962; Love 1986; Liljefors Persson 2000, 2011a, 2011b; Gubler 2008). Furthermore, for instance, Diego de Landa describes the food offerings at the Wayeb rituals and they are described in similar terms as in, i.e. the Myth of Creation from Chumayel and Mani (Tozzer 1941: 141–142). The Wayeb rituals were celebrated in connection with the New Year’s ritual and Landa describes both rituals and Allen Christenson stresses that these rituals are undoubtedly a reenactment of the Maya concept of the creation and that new fire is the symbol of the three heartstones that symbolise the initiation of life itself (Christenson 2016: 51).

So, the Myth of Creation may well be analysed as a model myth and as a written model for how to prepare and perform Yucatec Maya agrarian rituals such as Tup kak and Cha chaak.

In part three, chapter five in Popol Vuh we can also read about the importance of fire and of how Balam Quitzé and Balam Acab found the fire already burning when they needed it. The god Tohil gave them the necessary fire in order to keep wild animals away but foremost to give them warmth against the cold. The people got the fire but with the agreement that they in turn shall make offerings to Tohil. They shall give him their “waist and their armpits” and also that they should let Tohil embrace them and that they shall embrace Tohil. This can be interpreted as if Tohil gave them fire if they in return initiated the cultural life with ritual offerings to Tohil (such as bloodletting and the heart sacrifice) (Recinos et al 1950).

This might well be compared with the old Greek myth about Prometheus who gave the people fire as a gift. So, there is a difference in the principles for getting the fire. In Popol Vuh and Maya tradition there was an agreement between Tohil, the god, and the leaders of the people. This differs from the Greek tradition where the people got the fire just as a gift. But, on the other hand, later on they should conduct and perform their religion. Prometheus is described in comparative religion and in terms of the phenomenology of religion so that Prometheus is a culture hero, but in Maya religious discourse the people only get the fire if they in return promise to make ritual offerings to Tohil. We cannot say that Tohil is a simple
culture hero, because he demands something in return for his gift. He does not only give the people the fire. In this (con-)text fire may be seen as the prime motor of establishing a culture and a society. Thus, in the Maya tradition, or religious discourse, the point is that there is a mutual dependence at stake between the god Tohil and the human beings, the Maya people.

In the ritual enactment of agricultural rituals, the ritual specialists, the hmenoob, or the village shamans, are actually ritually creating a microcosm and also creating a ritual place out of space when they perform rituals. Even today these ritual performances may be in the fields or in the forest—or in a cave or close to a well, but they are ritually encircled by branches with leaves to mirror the cardinal directions, the quincunx with the four directions surrounding the centre (Liljefors Persson 2005). The whole process might be seen as a process of ritualization. It is an active process of making the ritual as a symbolic centre for being in the world.

**Yucatec Maya Rituals with Fire symbolism according to Landa**

In Early colonial texts, such as in Landa’s Relación de las cosas de Yucatán, we find many references to Maya cosmology and ritual practices connected with both the creation and with the striving to re-enact the balance between the Maya people and the transcendental world with the multitude of gods. One quote in Landa that illustrates this and sort of confirms the text called the Myth of Creation found in the Book of Chilam Balam from Chumayel, mentions the four Bacabs who are described as the gods that at the time of the creation escaped when the world was destroyed by a flood. Thereafter they were connected with the four world directions that hold up the sky, as described by Landa:

> Among the multitudes of gods which these nations worshipped they worshipped four, each of them called Bacab. They said they were four brothers whom God placed, when he created the world, at the four points of it, holding up the sky so that it should not fall. They also said of these Bacabs that they escaped when the world was destroyed by the deluge. (Tozzer 1941: 135–136)

This is exactly what we are told in the already mentioned Myth of Creation from The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel. Despite the fact if this manuscript from Chumayel is dated to the latter part
of the seventeenth century, here we find a striking parallel with Landa’s descriptions written no later than 1566 indicating that the tradition of describing the creation of the world like this, has been in existence since at least the middle of the 16th century.

For instance, the Yucatec New Year ceremonies were celebrated by everyone. They renewed everything they used in the house, such as plates, tools, bowls, mats and old clothing. They swept out their houses. They fasted and abstained from relations with their wives, they did not eat salt and pepper. They prepared a large number of balls of fresh incense and then they burned the incense in front of their idols/gods. They all assembled bearing gifts, lots of food and drink. Then they wanted to drive out the devil and evil spirits from the courtyard and began to pray and the so-called assistants, the chacs, kindled the new fire and the priest lit the brazier. Then they burned incense to the devil again (the devil according to Landa) they burned incense to their god(s)) and they continued throwing incense into the brazier and waited until it all had been burnt.

In this ritual (con-)text the new fire is really in focus, just as in many other New Year rituals in Mesoamerica. The New Fire symbolises purity and power to heal and burn the old, and bad things that should be destructed—and then they burned the incense and the New Fire was lit which symbolizes the new and clean and somehow resurrected new life that should govern and rule for the coming year. In the Madrid Codex on page 51a we find two gods sitting together and the one to the right is lighting the fire.

Also, there is a strong connection between the ritual practices and the natural and cultural landscape in Maya religion. Mountains, water/cenotes, and caves for instance are seen as the embodiment of the power of the earth and caves are associated with the centre so that the four cardinal directions actually emanate from these places, or centres. Thus, caves are use for centring, which results in caves as symbols connoting power, prestige, fertility, sacredness and validity (Prufer and Brady 2005). Caves, or stone houses, are also used for sweatbaths and connected with the earth and thus fertility, sexuality and creation. Caves are also seen as “hot” in the system of cold and hot in Yucatan. This also builds a reference for attributing heat and warmth with fire, as there often are ashes of charcoal or black, burned walls within the caves indicating that a lot of copal has been
burnt most likely during ritual performances. This is clearly visible in caves, as evidence indicating that fire rituals have been performed over the long-term in caves (Martin and Grube 2000; Brady and Colas 2005; Moreheart 2005; Prufer and Brady 2005). This is also confirmed by the description by the Swedish Prince Wilhelm when he visited temples in Tulum in 1920 (Prins Wilhelm 1920b; Peissel 1964).

Quote from Prince Wilhelm:

At the bottom of the south stairs (in the castillo) we find a small but well kept adoratorio, a simple building of stone, containing only one room with an altar. Here we found carbon and ashes on the burnt stones, which clearly had very recently been in use. This indicates that the indians in these days still use this place to make mysterious offerings to the spirits of their ancestors, something
This indicates that burning copal (pom) and lighting candles during rituals in caves as well as in temples, as witnessed here by Prince Wilhelm from the temple in Tulum in 1920. This therefore strengthened the pattern that fire in the form of burning copal and lightening candles was used in rituals as found throughout Yucatan and most probably this is a long-term tradition. There are also similarities with cargo-rituals as they are performed in, e.g. San Bernardo where I in March 2005 observed a cuch-ritual. This is also strengthened by descriptions of the cuch ritual and other cargo rituals (as described, e.g. by Dapuez 2011 and Pohl 1981).

Ritual speech as part of ritual practices

In Early colonial time we see in the various Books of Chilam Balam that there is a special rhetoric and almost ritualized formal speech, also in the katun prophecies. Accordingly, in the various katun prophecies we often read that in the beginning of each katun the katun is seated at a certain place, and that there the drum and rattle of the katun shall resound. Maybe this is a symbolism where the sound of the katun, and the words from the chilam maybe, seem visible as if rising up to the sky to the gods, and they communicate with the words that can seem like smoke rising up to the sky. Smoke could be symbolizing words in this particular katun ritual, and thus one example of ritual speech.

Buluc Ahau u hedz katun Ichcaanzihoo. Yax-haal Chac u uich. Emom canal ual, emom canal udzub. Pecnom u pax, pecnom u zoot. Ah Bolon-yocte. Tu kin yan yax cutz; Tu kin yan Zulim Chan; tu kin Chakanputun. Uilnom che; uilnom tunich; ah zati uil ichil Ah Buluc Katun lae. (CB-Chumayel, ms page 73)

Katun 11 Ahau is established at Ichcaanzihoo. Yax-haal Chac is its face. The heavenly fan, the heavenly bouquet shall descend. The drum and rattle of Ah Bolon-yocte shall resound. At that time there shall be the green turkey; at that time there shall be Zulim Chan; at that time there shall be Chakanputun. They shall find their food among the trees; they shall find their food among the rocks, those who have lost their crops in Katun 11 Ahau. (Roys 1967: 133)
This may be interpreted as in each *katun* a special place will hold the political power and there the official ceremonies will be held during this particular *katun 11 ahau*.

So, the various so-called katun prophecies, that I view as ritual practices, were performed as rituals in the beginning of a new katun, and with certain ritual speech acts performed with a similar rhetoric and in a repetitive pattern. These text sequences inform the reader, e.g. about when fire is needed for the burning of the field and other text sequences where it seems apparent that the fire symbolism is connected to fertility and about giving new life. We also find parts in these katun prophecies that use a special rhetoric when delivering the prophecies about the new God, the father, that speaks as below in the katun 11 ahau:

It shall burn on earth, there shall be a white circle in the sky, in that katun in time to come. It is the true word from the mouth of God the Father. Alas, very heavy is the burden of the katun that shall be established in Christianity. (Roys 1967: 149)
So, words from the new Gods shall burn—and here the symbolism of fire may also be related to power, and that the word of God is mighty and powerful when he wants to introduce Christianity. In another katun 10 ahau from the Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel we find that the *katun* prophecy contains many sentences and expressions that suggest that many things shall burn—and here the reader may associate the burning again to things that will be destroyed because this is a *katun* with a lot of struggles and problems or so it seems from reading the text (Roys 1967: 144–163).

**From Maya medicine to Maya eco-wellness and healing in Yucatan**

Maya medicine is based on cosmovision and spirituality—and during the latest two decades or so concepts that includes a holistic view of the body, with balance between mind and body, energy meridians and bio-dynamic therapies, have increased. The natural medicinal traditions have gained more confidence and are now promoted for tourists as well as for local visitors, according to the homepages of some of the Spa-institutions in certain places in Yucatan today.

The view that is promoted is that nature is within human beings and that it determines people’s health and the processes of illness. Local medicinal knowledge considers human beings as an integral and interactive part of the cosmos and society. Changes in climate and nature may affect people and cause health or illness. So that if health is the result of living according to the laws of nature and society, then illness is the result of a transgression of those laws.

**Concluding remarks**

To conclude, we might begin with the question asked in the beginning of this study and that have been directing this chapter: Which processes of change and patterns of continuity are negotiated in the Yucatec Maya (con-)text of fire symbolism found in ritual practices and ritual speech? As has been shown here we find, e.g. agrarian rituals and historical power rituals such as the “seating of the katun” ceremonies found in the so called katun prophecies, and as well in the rituals of the *hmen* and *xmen* such as the medicinal and healing practices.
To summarize this presentation, we find that fire symbolism is really present in Yucatec Maya (con-)texts over the long term. I have found the following seven results of this attempt to obtain an overview of these kinds of rituals:

1. The Myth of Creation has been analysed as a model for all agrarian rituals, e.g., *Tup kak* and *Cha chaac*. And we find that fire is more prevalent in certain rituals, but that fire symbolism is found in the preparing of food, cooking over an open fire, or in a *pib na*, e.g. baked/cooked in an earth oven in the ground.

2. Also, that candles are always in use and lit during ritual practice.

3. This might also be compared with *Popol Vuh* where the Maya people get the fire for the first time through a deal with the god Tohil and according to which he gives them the fire and they promise to make offerings in return.

4. We find that some of the agrarian rituals are still performed in a similar way as they used to be as described in Early Colonial sources, such as The Books of Chilam Balam and Diego de Landa’s ethnographic description. As examples we have the rituals labelled *Tup kak* and *Cha chaac*.

5. The New Year ceremonies were intimately connected with fire rituals in many ways. In Mesoamerica, e.g. among the Aztec we find that the fire symbolism focuses on power and renewal but also that is has the power to drive away evil spirits and fire also cleans things. The Wayeb rituals also have similar purposes and similar symbolism.

6. The hydrasystem with “hot” and “cold” food on Yucatan—were fire is related to the heat that also connects to the earth and the female and caves is another example. In cave rituals we find many indications of fire rituals in connection with a great variety of rituals.

7. Today in Yucatan we find many examples of new rituals, especially in connection with wellness, health, and eco-tourism. Fire is seen as one of the four elements that needs to be in balance. Here the fire symbolism is part of several rituals and the healers and shamans speak in a language that connects the present Maya eco-tourism not only with the erlier times, but also to the global scene of today with new religious movements and New Age.

Today we find more emphasis on creating ecological balance, with the focus on harmony and life quality—but maybe it was not so different in earlier times. People were looking for a life in balance with the natural forces, cosmos and everyday life—and now—the goal is the same, by connecting the new rituals, the spa-rituals, to
rituals performed as far back as to Precolombian time—legitimizes the authenticity and the long tradition of these rituals. This knowledge draws on local epistemologies and knowledge traditions found in places where everyday life is lived close to the biophysical world. And this knowledge of the local Maya epistemology is found also in the Early Colonial documents and Maya manuscripts as I hope has been illustrated in this presentation.

There are many similarities with worldviews found in other religions in the world that are intimately connected to kinship, spiritual places and sites in the sacred and natural landscape—as shown here also from Yucatec Maya sources (Basso 1988, 1996; Crumley 1994; Landis Barnhill and Gottlieb 2001: 39).

In this study the ambition has been to employ a close reading of the texts and a contextual approach in order to highlight (con-)texts where we find representations of fire symbolism in rituals and in ritual speech acts. We can see that Yucatec Maya Cosmovision, Spirituality and Ritual Practices are excellent examples of how we find threads of meaning from past traditions that still carry meaning and that also might be given new meaning today. Yucatec Maya Spirituality and ritual practices are indeed dynamic and even if we find patterns of strong continuity, we also find changes in the practices that clearly show the ability to be creative and innovative in these processes of change.

Some of these sacred places are bearers of meaning that communicate spirituality and ritual power still today, but with a twist that turns Classic Maya religion and Early Colonial Maya religion into the global scene of New Age spirituality—but, to speak in line with perspectives from Post-Colonial Theories, who are we as researchers to be the ones that construct the headlines and categories of a religious practice? For the Maya men and women who carry out these contemporary rituals—they express that they are practicing old traditions and that this is their way of practicing their old traditions today—and thus this forms a natural continuity of a Yucatec Maya religious discourse viewed over the long-term.

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