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Hand gestures in courtly scenes depicted on Maya vases

Monika Ciura

Abstract

Images created on Maya ceramics represent an interesting source for the research on Maya royal court. Many scenes shows life of the Maya nobles, their activities in the court and intimate rituals of the rulers. In this work I focused on one aspect of the interactions between king and his courtiers and subjects, that is on gestures they perform. I studied all the gestures that appears on the vases to understand the patterns of their usage and their possible meaning. I tried to discover their importance in communication, their significance in iconography and analyze a body language hidden behind them. I also compared twenty classified gestures to ones depicted on monumental sculpture, figurines and epigraphy. My research revealed the great complexity of the subject but it also helped to shed some light on the relations prevailing at the royal court.

Key words: Maya vases, ceramics, royal court, courtly culture, gestures, language of gestures, iconography, epigraphy.

Resumen

GESTOS DE LAS MANOS EN ESCENAS CORTESANAS REPRESENTADAS EN LOS VASOS MAYAS

Las imágenes creadas en la cerámica maya representan una fuente interesante para la investigación sobre la corte real maya. Muchas escenas muestran la vida de los nobles mayas, sus actividades en la corte y rituales íntimos de los gobernantes. En este trabajo me he centrado en un aspecto de las interacciones entre el rey y sus cortesanos y los sujetos, que se encuentra en los gestos que realizan. Estudié todos los gestos que aparecen en los vasos para comprender los patrones de su uso y su posible significado. Traté de descubrir su importancia en la comunicación, su significado en la iconografía y analizar un lenguaje corporal escondido detrás de ellos. También comparé veinte gestos a los representados en la escultura monumental, figuras y la epigrafía. Mi investigación reveló la gran complejidad del tema, pero también ayudó a arrojar alguna luz sobre las relaciones que prevalecen en la corte real.

Palabras claves: Vasos mayas, cerámica, corte real, cultura cortesana, gestos, lenguaje de gestos, iconografía, epigrafía.

1. Introduction to the subject of the study

The Maya royal court depicted on ceramics seems to be rather static. The ruler is sitting on the throne, directed towards the standing, sitting or kneeling courtiers and guests. Positions occupied by the characters are still, only gestures bring a noticeable element of movement. Therefore, gestures caught my attention and I hope to understand the court and its main actors better by examining the arrangement of their hands. The imagery shown on ceramics, visually modest and also carrying high educational value, is an ideal source for this kind of research.

The aim of this research is the classification of gestures and their interpretation in the context of courtly culture. The royal court, as an environment of highly conventional behavior, creates a suitable background for such an interpretation. The most important source were the depictions of the king in interaction with attendants preferably in a concrete context like submission of a tribute. For comparison, I also examined depictions of deities and supernaturals because the gods were portrayed forming a court as well. The distinction of gestures that were specific to the gods and, conversely, using the same gestures by both mortals and supernaturals can tell us more about the relations between these two realms. It would seem that gestures carry the largest meaning in communication, but the characters depicted alone perform the same vivid gestures, although they do not have any addressee. It may be a result of an adaptation of these gestures to the situation, a particular activity and the fact that their importance goes beyond the system of non-verbal communication and they were not only performed to distinguish a person's status within a group of other characters.

Hands can adopt a variety of positions, or be involved in various activities. I focused on those which could imply some meaning. I omitted gestures caused by accidental movements, such as the arrangement of hands while playing ball or fighting. Ways of holding items have been treated generally as in most cases they derived from practical reasons. Dancing gestures were useful in comparisons, but their detailed study in the context of the whole ritual would have required broadening of the subject of the study, moreover, such analysis has already been carried out by Matthew Looper (Looper 2009). The most legible scenes, characters and gestures are those painted on ceramics. On the incised and carved vases details such as the arrangement of fingers are often not clear.

I examined 580 vessels with representations of people during courtly interactions: group depictions and images of the gods in contexts that could be compared with real ones, thus scenes of receiving gifts, homage, court scenes, as well as individual depictions. For analogies to the gestures depicted on ceramics I studied monumental sculpture, figurines and epigraphy. I put five research questions, assuming that careful analysis of the context of the occurrence of gestures allows for satisfactory answers.

- Can we talk about special language or system of gestures in case of Maya culture?
- Were gestures/systems of gestures due to certain patterns of behavior suitable for people of a certain social, political or religious status, or were they specific to the situation in which they found themselves?
- Could depictions of gestures be a part of the canon of the depiction of specific characters?
- Are there gestures that express emotions, feelings, states of mind?
- What was the role of gestures in the context of courtly culture?

2. What is a gesture?

A gesture is a movement in time and space, a movement which carries a meaning, most often given intentionally but sometimes involuntarily. The word «gesture» originates from «*medieval Latin “gestura”, from Latin “gerere” which mean “bear, wield, perform”*». The original sense was “bearing, deportment”, hence ‘the use of posture and bodily movements for effect in oratory’¹. The modern meaning of gesture is «*a movement of part of the body, especially a hand or the head, then express an idea or meaning, an action performed to convey a feeling or intention or an action performed for the show in the knowledge that it will have no effect*»². Gesture as part of nonverbal communication was studied by psychologists and identified as the action limited to one or more parts of the body (Lamb 1965), or actions of the body – easily noticeable movements, executed by one or more parts of the body as opposed to the posture known as continuous action comprising a coherent tune of each body part in the process of change (Ekman and Friesen 1969). On the other hand, gesticulation was identified as one or more movements of the body, interacting with the verbal statement (Kendon 1985). We have learned, that gestures may differ from each other, some are culturally determined and to understand them we need to know the specific cultural code and there are gestures deriving from our emotions. Gestures can be studied as codes, arbitrary code – if gestures are not related to any imitation, iconic code – when gestures are carrying the guidelines for the meaning of speech, and the inner code – when gestures arise from motives independent from our consciousness. Another division among gestures distinguishes emblems, illustrators, indicators of emotions, regulators of conversation and adaptors. Emblems are body signals, which have verbal equivalents of a specific meaning, emblems can be formed into sign language, that is, a system that can successfully replace verbal communication. Illustrators are used consciously and intentionally to emphasize what is being said, to stress the word or phrase, for example pointing to something or drawing a shape in the air. Indicators of emotion are more related to the face and mimics, because face is the place where emotions are mainly expressed, they rarely show up in gesticulation. Regulators of conversations are displayed with a low level

of awareness, there are behaviors that help in the organization and modification of conversation. Adaptors result from involuntary psychological communication, these are poses and gestures indicating level of comfort, stress or confidence.

Gestures can be short, single, can also be arranged in long sequences. They replace a word, phrase or certain mental attitude and they can also express more complex concepts, like the gestures used in prayer and rituals. Their meaning can change over time and be culturally reinterpreted. Gestures performed unconsciously, tell us a lot about a person, while conscious gestures informs us about the culture and its characteristic behavior, therefore these ones belong to the area which I will explore here. «*Gesturing, like speech, is influenced by cultural values and historical tradition, and its usage is adjusted according to the setting, social circumstance and micro-organization of any given occasion of interaction*» (Kendon 1997: 117). Particularly vulnerable to cultural differences are the emblems, which may be as different as languages are. Conventionalization of gestures depends on the circumstances, behavior and gestures are handled differently in official situations and daily interactions. The *Book of the Courtier* (Italian: *Il Cortegiano*) released in 1528, was a handbook for courtiers, advising as one should speak and behave, which was associated with an appropriate posture and gestures. Another reference guide concerning gestures as forms of learned behavior which affects the presence and reception of the person who executes them, was *Chironomia, or a Treatise on rhetorical prescription* written by Gilbert Austin in 1806. Gestures were treated there as a part of effective rhetoric.

The gesture captured in a work of art is already the subject of iconography. These gestures may be a reflection of real ones performed by the real people, but also can be part of the canon in which certain characters should be depicted. Through art we can explore the gestures used in the past so far, as far into history goes back to tradition of figural representation. The largest field of research is given by the images on which we can be quite sure that nothing was shown accidentally, that is official and religious art. These are gestures which signify strength, power and various transcendental concepts.

3. History of research on Maya gestures

A lot of researchers perceived the presence of various gestures, hand and body positions, that did not seem to be entirely natural and free. The ones who studied Maya iconography, first turned their attention to the monumental sculpture, in which characters were shown in a canonical and static pose. One of the first ever studies of Maya art, *A Study of Classic Maya Sculpture*, by Tatiana Proskouriakoff (1950), raises the problem of poses and gestures, arranging them in chronological sequences. Although attention is focused on the overall presentation of the characters and their poses.

Elizabeth Benson's article «*Gestures and Offerings*» attempted a systematic interpretation of the two gestures, hand-towards-mouth and hand-raised-in-front-of-chest, on the basis of their depictions, both in sculpture and on ceramics. The first of these gestures was by the author described as similar to the bloodletting activity performed by women, who dragged the rope with thorns through their tongue. Therefore, placing hand near the face and mouth, would be the gesture deprived of its object and its meaning would include the worship and sacrifice. The gesture of hand raised in front of chest was also associated with offerings, performed by the central character (Benson 1974). The author also emphasized that what was presented in Maya art certainly was meaningful and important and assumed that Maya elites used a special sign language (Benson 1974: 110). Another researcher who took up the topic of gestures was Virginia Miller, who compared those presented in the art to those described in post colonial sources. She analyzed so-called «gestures of submission», the crossing of hands on the chest, putting one hand on the opposite shoulder, putting hand to mouth and suggested that all of these gestures could be a greeting, combined with presenting offerings (Miller 1983).

The most comprehensive article concerning gestures «*Some Observations on hand gestures in Maya art*», was published in the *Maya Vase Book*, Volume sixth. Authors, Patricia Acona-Ha, Jorge Pérez de Lara (2004) and Mark van Stone assume that gestures generally reflect the hierarchy and studied them in terms of performance by a central or secondary character. They distinguish sixteen different gestures, some of which are the distinctive arrangement of the hand only, some requiring special positioning of the arm and even torso. From this study, came out a few interesting observations. Even though the different styles and regional differences, gestures exhibit a high degree of uniformity and their usage seems to closely connected with the hierarchy. It is also noted that the central figure is usually presented in a freer position and further from the center, the more stiff and bound the pose is (Acona-Ha *et al.* 2000).

Still, gestures and their meaning resist the satisfactory. The contextual analysis has a limited scope but it certainly is the first step, the basis for further research.

4. Contextual analysis of gestures depicted on the ceramics

As the source, I used Justin Kerr's online database. I distinguished gestures mainly on morphological basis while trying to capture the differences in the context of occurrence. I studied the twenty gestures that appeared more than three times. The characteristic arrangement of both hands I called poses. I believe that they carried broader meaning than just the sum of meanings of two gestures. The exception is the pose 1, which is characteristic sitting pose, where character is shown from the front and it is specific and frequent pattern of depicting rulers and sometimes also deities. Also gestures performed in this pose may have a slightly different meaning, or expression.

4.1. Gesture 1

In this gesture arm is outstretched forward, often bent at the elbow, palm is facing the addressee and fingers are pointing down. Person might be standing or sitting. Gesture is performed with only one hand, usually left one in the depictions in profile, visible when figure is sitting turned to the right (Fig.1). Right hand is used by the characters sitting in pose 1. The response to this gesture are gestures 6 and 2.

This gesture is performed by people and by gods, both in the group scenes and individual representations. The group scenes are especially the scenes of sacrifice, as on K1183 or K1555, conversation, K114, K679, and the various types of audiences. Very often appears in scenes depicting deities or rulers alone, in which there is no addressee. This indicates that gesture 1 might be regarded as canonical for this kind of depictions, recalling the significant moment of presenting or reception of the offerings. Gesture 1 is not always performed by the central character, or ruler, but it seems to be attributed to important figures only, in most cases it is adopted by the one person. Presentation of an open hand can indicate the openness, the attitude seems to be friendly, in the same time, the open hand is a kind of weakness and exposure. This gesture performed by the ruler could indicate that he is not afraid and trusts his subjects. It is also a gesture appropriate for dedication of offerings. On the vase K4617, ruler outstretches his left hand, which is touched by a man kneeling before the throne, maybe it is an element of greeting, as in our culture, kissing the royal hand as a sign of reverence and respect. An interesting case of using this gesture is provided on the vase K4356. A pair of standing characters, man and woman, is depicted on two separate panels. Their arms are straight and extended, their hands that perform gesture 1, are almost touching each other, while the second hands perform gesture 2. This intimate representation of the relationship between two people may present a marriage and perhaps the moment of establishing a relationship, which additionally is confirmed by a flower held by a woman. In this case, the use of gesture 1 could mean a commitment, and trust for the other person.

This gesture becomes part of a pose 1, in which the character is presented frontally, and both hands are visible. In this form the gesture is performed by a central figure, usually a ruler, most often with the right hand outstretched to the audience, when the left hand is performing this gesture, the arm is bent so as the hand is also presented to the right. This variation appears in similar contexts as the version shown in profile, but this time exclusively in the scenes involving the ruler. High raised hand adopting this gesture may occur with a hand adopting gesture 2, forming a pose 2 in which both hands are presented towards the recipient and that seems to be very sophisticated arrangement of the hand. Relationship with the gesture 2 is shown as well on depictions in two aspects on which character performs a gesture 1 in first aspect and gesture 2 on the second one, as if performed pose 2, spread over time (K1734, K3411).



Figure 1. Gesture 1
(K 114, drawing by Monika Ciura).



Figure 1. Gesture 2
(K 2732 drawing by Monika Ciura).

Another pose in which this gesture appears is pose 3, in which both hands are spread out on both sides of the body. This is a pose characteristic for the Maize God.

Gesture 1 is also an essential gesture of dance, dancing pose usually consists of two straight arms, at least one hand is facing downward like in a gesture 1.

4.2. Gesture 2

Arm is extended, may be bent at elbow, palm is facing the addressee, fingers are pointing up, like in common salutation (Fig.2). Usually adopted by one hand only. This is a gesture similar to the gesture 1 and closely associated with it, which is confirmed by the fact, that they are implemented at the same time in the pose 2 and performed by the same person in consecutive scenes like on K2756, K3411. Similarly to gesture 1, it is adopted by frontally presented ruler on the throne on K3462, K1452 and K1670 and supernatural characters like on K2782. Just as a gesture 1, it is characteristic to rulers in group scenes, often at a time when important events like a dance, ritual or bloodletting are displayed before the throne. Ruler is also performing it in front of a single kneeling figure. If not adopted by the ruler, this gesture is eligible for characters standing or sitting directly in front of the throne, also appears in the more intimate scenes of conversation between two characters. On the vase K2699, there is an interaction between gestures 1 and 2, performed by characters sitting in front of each other. Similar close interaction seems to exist between the ruler on the throne and the figure seated before him on the K1303, the ruler adopts gesture 2 and figure before him gesture 1 and his hand is in just a few centimeters from the hand of the ruler. On the vase K3054 two dressed up lords are depicted, greeting or talking to each other by adopting gesture 2 by their left hands.

This gesture is also an element of posture that is depicted on the individual scenes, so also may be considered canonical and popular gesture that did not need a direct recipient and not necessarily needed to be associated with the interaction.

This gesture also is characteristic for dance poses, when the arms are drawn on the two sides and when both hands gesticulate in one direction.

The answer to the gesture 2 is a gesture 6 and 1, but is often left without a specific answer. In contrast to the openness of gesture 1, this gesture may create a barrier and appears to be an appropriate gesture of expressing power. Due to its popularity and repeating patterns of responses can be considered as a greeting.

4.3. Gesture 3

This gesture is only a specific hand shape in which forefinger is straight, rest of fingers bent and arm may be in different positions (Fig. 3). It is executed by one or both hands.

Most frequently hand is positioned horizontally and the finger points straight ahead, it also happens that the gesture is part of the pose 2, as on the vessel K1219, where Maize God is shown with one forefinger pointing up a second one is pointing down. In most cases, more than one character performs this gesture. The context of its occurrence is diverse, but the gesture with raised hand is presented in the scenes that not always picture a friendly interaction, as on the K1219 and K1365. It is performed primarily by supernaturals and adopted by both secondary and main characters. In the case of a single portraits hands carrying out this gesture are raised, like on K6071, arrangement of arms could also be important. Gesture 3 is often adopted as hand shape, even if the position of the arm is free and hands are based on the ground.

4.4. Gesture 3a

This is variant of the gesture, in which the hand is lowered but vertically positioned, the index finger is slightly bent and points down, the rest of fingers are bent (Fig.4). The gesture is performed by a central characters, rulers, figures that are directly before the throne, but also servants. It is performed by a hand which is not involved into most important movement of the body. In two cases, K1790 and K1454 is performed by the rulers looking into the mirror.

4.5. Gesture 3b

It is a gesture characteristic for the pose 1, in which the central figure is shown frontally. The right arm is bent in the elbow and the hand raised to the chest, near the heart. The index finger is straight and pointing upwards (Fig.5). The second hand usually lays on the leg and also adopts gesture 3.



Figure 3. Gesture 3
(K1196 drawing by
Monika Ciura)



Figure 4. Gesture 3a
(K796 drawing by
Monika Ciura).



Figure 5. Gesture 3b
(K868 drawing by
Monika Ciura).



Figure 6. Gesture 3c
(K1196 drawing by
Monika Ciura).



Figure 7. Gesture 4
(K1227 drawing by
Monika Ciura).

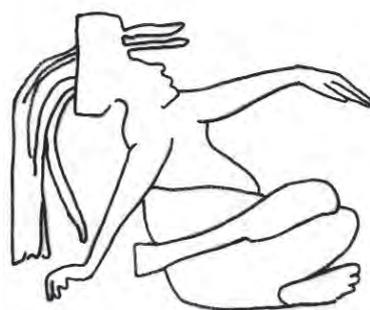


Figure 8. Gesture 5
(K1790 drawing by
Monika Ciura).

4.6. Gesture 3c

In this variant, the arm is positioned as in gesture 1, but all the fingers except forefinger are bent and pointing down (Fig.6). It is displayed in similar contexts as a gesture 1, mostly in a scenes of offerings performed by an important, central figure.

One of possible interpretations is that this hand position is considered elegant and appropriate for courtly behavior. Accordingly it is not related with status and hierarchy. There is no specific answer for this gesture.

4.7. Gesture 4

Hand is set horizontally, palm facing up, fingers may be straight or slightly bent, arm is usually bent at elbow. The arm can be lowered or raised high (Fig.7). This gesture is performed with one or both hands, by humans and supernaturals.

It is adopted by a woman, in a scene of dressing the Maize God on K1566, and in the mythological scene with Moon Goddess - K559. It appears as the gesture of rulers towards his courtiers and guests, as a part of pose 1, in which the hand is close to the heart, also in a scenes of conversation as K278, K3469, in individual representations of deities and as the gesture of Maize God in scenes of confrontation. Perhaps this is just a version of the gesture 1 in which the hand is not bent at wrist. At similarly open and outstretched hands are kept the items and the offerings, perhaps this gesture is an invocation of this activity but without an object. Therefore the meaning would be associated with giving.

There is no typical response to this gesture, it depends more on the context, if the ruler is performing it, the recipient usually adopts gesture 6.

4.8. Gesture 5

It is a position of the hand facing upwards with fingers outstretched. More often, palm is facing down, rarely is laid flat, or facing up. This gesture is performed with one hand, rarely with both. The arm can be lowered or raised high (Fig. 8). It is typical for humans and supernaturals but performed by only one person in the scene.

On the vases K3063 and K1790 is used in the same way – in conversation, in the first case, the answer is a gesture 6, in another, gesture 2. Rulers often extend their arms toward the characters, or animals sitting or kneeling before the throne as on the K4030, K4999, K8004, which resembles the modern gesture of blessing, and could have a meaning of acceptance. This gesture is performed by the characters sitting and leaning over the item that is interpreted as a codex (K1787, K1220) thus it may be interpreted as a gesture of reading, or some other symbolic gesture connected with writing or painting (Fig. 9). The elegant version in which the hand is positioned perfectly vertical is used in dance. The response for this gesture depends more on the context and the performer.

4.9. Gesture 6

In this gesture one or both arms are crossed on the chest, the arms can be based on the chest, or slightly raised. Different variants of this gesture refer to the arrangement of the hands relatively to the arms. In case when the exact position of hands and arms is not visible gesture is assigned generally to group 6, but not to any variant.

4.10. Gesture 6a

Arms are crossed and the left hand is visible over the right shoulder (Fig.10). If a second, invisible hand was placed in a similar manner, the arms would form the shape of X on the chest. This position is the most tight and preventing any movement. This variant is performed by people kneeling, standing and sitting, often localized far from the central action, like on the K1180 or K512, but it can be also adopted by the only person standing before the throne as on the K3056. It is typical both for people and supernaturals. Image on the K558 is representing the captive, probably of high rank with the torso presented frontally and both hands crossed over the chest, kneeling before the king on the throne. Hand based on the arm could have been arranged in a gesture in which two fingers were straightened as on the K5353. In one case, this gesture in the form «d» is repeated by the recipient, in other cases the recipient is most often the ruler or the deity on the throne, performing other gestures.

4.11. Gesture 6b

Left hand is located under the right arm, adopting various shapes, such as a gesture 3, on K625 (Fig. 11). This gesture also hinders any movement. It is used in the scenes of a war processions, or as the gesture of people concentrated around the ruler, who adopts pose 1. It is performed by characters sitting close to the ruler and also appears on individual depictions, performed by the ruler, like on K8001.

4.12. Gesture 6c

In this gesture, left hand is shown based on the right shoulder, just over the elbow. Hand could embrace the arm or fingers could be slightly bent or straightened (Fig. 12). In the most dignified version, arms are raised and form a right angle with the chest. It is performed by humans and supernaturals. This gesture is adopted by the people who are in a proximity to the ruler or god, who perform pose 1 with right hand raised close to the heart, or perform a gesture 1. There are also cases where the characters performing it are the ones of the high rank, like lord on K54, as well as individually shown ones, sitting in front of the offering most often a drinking vessel.

4.13. Gesture 6d

One hand, usually left is placed on the opposite shoulder, the other arm, usually the right one is free and can perform other actions and activities (Fig. 13). In one case this gesture is displayed by the god towards the attendant (K3056) in all the other cases this gesture is performed by secondary characters standing or kneeling in front of the ruler. An important feature of this arrangement is the opportunity to engage hand into other activities, it is mostly holding something, but it happens that the free hand was used to kill the captive while the rest of body was remaining in the position with gesture 6 (K5850).

4.14. Gesture 6e

A visible, usually right arm is crossed over the chest, above the arm at the height of the waist, free hand is sticking out, which logically should be the left hand, but it is sometimes portrayed as right (Fig. 14). The free hand can perform various gestures, and often is holding something. This variant is performed by humans and supernaturals. This gesture was often combined with gestures relating to high status, as a gesture 1, 4, rarely gesture 2, or 15. This variant is often performed by the characters presented individually, perhaps presenting the offering, the visible hand performed gesture 4 or 1, which appear to be characteristic for this activity, often on the outstretched hands laid vessels or bundles. This variant could also be performed by a central and high rank figure.

4.15. Gesture 6f

One arm, usually the left is straight and based on the floor, while the opposite one is bent and the hand embraces the elbow or upper part of arm (Fig. 15). This is the most noble of gestures in group 6, and is performed by the lords or kings or supernaturals.

Response to this gesture depends on the context, but usually the ruler answer with gesture 1 or 2 and characters who seem to be of the same rank, honored each other, both performing gesture 6 in different variations.

Gesture 6 is probably a respectful pose adopted in front of important and powerful people. It is not reserved only for servants, courtiers, and warriors, also rulers and deities are performing it. A characteristic feature is that, in a row of people in front of the ruler almost every one of them performs gesture 6, but each in a different variant, trying not to repeat the exact same gesture. Perhaps for each participant there is assigned a version relating to his status, achievements or origin or it is an artist's idea to avoid repetition. It seems that variants in which hands are not able to move freely, are those whose meaning in the context of respect and sub-



Figure 9. Gesture 5
(K1220 drawing by
Monika Ciura).



Figure 10. Gesture 6a
(K512 drawing by
Monika Ciura).



Figure 11. Gesture 6b
(K625 drawing by
Monika Ciura).



Figure 12. Gesture 6c
(K532 drawing by
Monika Ciura).



Figure 13. Gesture 6d
(K593 drawing by
Monika Ciura).



Figure 14. Gesture 6e
(K1186 drawing by
Monika Ciura).



Figure 15. Gesture 6f
(K1205 drawing by
Monika Ciura).



Figure 16. Gesture 7
(K558 drawing by
Monika Ciura).



Figure 17. Gesture 8
(K1524 drawing by
Monika Ciura).

mission is the strongest one. In any case, it is a gesture strongly associated with the hierarchy, but cannot be equated only with low status.

4.16. Gesture 7

Forefinger and thumb are close or touching each other, rest of fingers are straight or slightly bent. This is one of the characteristic gestures to pose 1, where the right arm is bent at the elbow and the hand is placed near the heart (Fig. 16). Gesture 7 is performed by the humans and mythological figures. When it was performed by the ruler sitting in pose 1, the attendants usually adopted gesture 6. Perhaps the most significant feature of this gesture is that the hand is bent at the elbow mimicking gesture 6, or the fact of placing hand near to the heart, the seat of emotions. Raising hand to the heart was a gesture typical only for the ruler, for example, on a vase K558, person standing in a row before the throne performs gesture 7, but is placing the hand much lower, while the arm of ruler is raised and hand is arranged in the same gesture 7 in both cases. This gesture is used regardless of the pose 1 in the conversation, as on the K4500 and K7727.

4.17. Gesture 8

Hand is set vertically, forefinger and thumb are close, rest of fingers are bent. The gesture is executed with one hand, often in a sitting position (Fig. 17). In many respects it could be regarded as a variant of the gesture 3, but has a very distinctive characteristic element, the thumb and forefinger are arranged as in the modern gesture reflecting the small size. Often, this gesture is combined with a gesture 1, such as on the K679 and K3008. It is often performed by more than one character in a scene. This is a gesture apparently very important in a conversation and closely related to speech and interaction between characters. It is performed by the rulers and high rank characters sitting in front of the ruler. On the K2784 lord performs this gesture to the four characters sitting in front of him, two of which repeated the gesture, imitating the monarch, or responding to it.

4.18. Gesture 9

Forefinger and little finger are straight and pointing up, rest of fingers are bent (Fig. 18). The gesture can be performed with one hand or both. It is adopted primarily by supernatural beings. When the palm is presented to the recipient, this gesture reminds gesture 2, it may be its variant but with unique otherworldly connotations. It seems that particularly Lords of Underworld were fond of this position of hands. This gesture can be executed without any interaction, if it is performed by the most important figure as on the K2796, rest of characters typically perform gesture 6.



Figure 18. Gesture 9 (K512 drawing by Monika Ciura).



Figure 19. Gesture 9a (K512 drawing by Monika Ciura).



Figure 20. Gesture 10 (K1210 drawing by Monika Ciura).

4.19. Gesture 9a

Hand is set horizontally. Fingers usually are pointing forward or down, sometimes placed in another position (Fig. 19). This gesture seems to be particularly characteristic for the Maize God, as he adopted it twice in the scene of confrontation with the G1 on the K2096 and K2710.

4.20. Gesture 10

This gesture should rather be called a feature, as hand position is similar like in the other gestures, but little finger is separated and bent (Fig. 20). Such bending appears with gesture 1, 2, 4 and 5. It can also be performed by both hands. It is performed by the rulers, attendants and supernaturals, so it is not directly associated with the hierarchy. On the K2697 arm of one of the characters is drawn straight away and a little finger touches the back of person sitting before. On K1210 person sitting before the king is bending his little fingers, he is accompanied by musicians, therefore this gesture may be connected with dance moves.

These contexts suggest that this is an elegant gesture, associated with the etiquette. In cases where the deviation is a feature of another gesture, it would be the most sophisticated and courtesy form of it.

4.21. Gesture 11

Forefinger and thumb are close, rest of fingers are straight and pointing up. Hand is raised (Fig. 21). This gesture is used in many different contexts and it is difficult to determine what exactly it could be referred to. It can also be confused with

the gesture 22, especially when fingers are not depicted in great detail. On the K751, gesture 11 is performed by two attendants towards the ruler. It is also adopted by the rulers towards characters gathered in front of the throne. On K1227 it is performed by the woman, her raised hand is decorated with bracelet, by God L. It is also adopted by Maize God in a scenes of confrontation with G1. Both hands of ruler shown on the K1563 perform this gesture, which could be related to dance, because in the same scene are also musicians. This gesture is also specific for dance moves of Maize God or impersonator.

4.22. Gesture 11a

In this variant, hand is positioned like in gesture 1, presenting palm to addressee (Fig. 22). It appears in context of offerings and individual depictions as on the K7008 and K5377 and in the context of conversation as on the K4339.

This is a very interesting gesture, because of the specific hand position, which could not happen accidentally and diverse context of appearance. Sometimes it is performed by more than one character. It seems that it was associated with the interaction and carried a specific message not necessarily related to hierarchy.

4.23. Gesture 12

Forefinger and thumb are close and pointing down. This its the opposite of gesture 7. It is performed by only one hand, almost always right one (Fig. 23).

It appears in the context of real and supernatural palace in group and individual scenes. In some contexts it may simply be a gesture of grasping something, like on K2707. There is also a gesture of the person sitting in the pose 1 and hand is raised to the chest. There is no specific response to this gesture and it is displayed by one person only.

4.24. Gesture 13

It is a position with palm facing up. All the fingers are bent apart from the forefinger, which resembles gesture 3, but in this case forefinger is slightly bent and pointing up (Fig. 24). This gesture is performed by only one hand, the left one. It appears very rarely, performed by a secondary characters, watching the main action from the side.

4.25. Gesture 14

In this gesture the most important feature is hand clenched in a fist, while the position of the arms is very diverse, although most frequently they are raised

(Fig. 25). Gesture is performed most often by the right hand or both hands. Fist is not complete, because the thumb is usually straight. It was performed by the characters in real and mythological context. Could be adopted by a ruler, in the pose 1 as on the K4542 and K5737. Hand could be positioned in a way in which all bent fingers were visible. On the K5002 fists of two characters seem to clash in battle, in this case aggressive meaning of fist may resemble the one known from our culture. Other depictions however imply other meanings, image on K5416 indicates that this gesture imitate the gesture of holding something, the ruler holds a cigarette in his clenched right hand, while his wife seated behind him also clenches her right hand but without any object. Other meaning is probably implied by this gesture when it is performed by the captives as on the K1606. It is also commonly adopted by the ruler, maybe as a symbol of force and power.

4.26. Gesture 15

Hand is clenched in a fist and placed close to the mouth, sometimes touching the lips, mouth can be opened as if in a gesture of eating (Fig. 26). Gesture is performed most often by one hand, could be the right and the left one as well. This gesture has been interpreted so far as eating dirt, on ceramics it appears very rarely. It is never performed by a central, important character. It appears twice in the supernatural context. We don't have enough amount of depictions to draw any radical conclusions, but it seems that it might be a gesture of worship and humility.

4.27. Gesture 16

It is very rare gesture, but performed in specific arrangement in which the hand is set vertically, the thumb is straight and also part of a straightened middle finger is visible (Fig. 27). This gesture is represented by the right hands of two characters, who in their left hands are holding the mask. It is possible that gesture 16 in this context is associated with painting and creating. In addition, it is performed by several mythological characters in the scene on K1485 used by deities in conversation, or by Itzamnaaj seated on a throne. This gesture is quite enigmatic, but it seems that its meaning is associated with the supernatural world.

4.28. Gesture 17

In this group, I included a rare gesture in which the flat hand is close to the face, or under the chin (Fig. 28). On the K1180 it is performed by a kneeling man behind the throne, supporting his chin on a hand with fingers slightly bent. It appears to be courteous gesture, just like the one depicted on the K1648, performed by an elaborately dressed woman kneeling before the king, her left hand is opened



Figure 21. Gesture 11
(K751 drawing by
Monika Ciura).

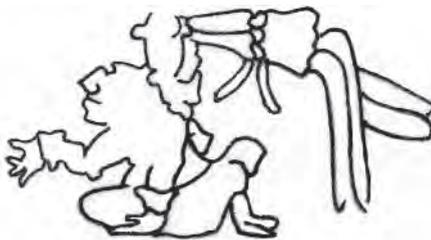


Figure 22. Gesture 11a
(K7008 drawing
by Monika Ciura).



Figure 23. Gesture 12
(K2707 drawing by
Monika Ciura).



Figure 24. Gesture 13
(K764 drawing by
Monika Ciura).



Figure 25. Gesture 14
(K1606 drawing by
Monika Ciura).



Figure 26. Gesture 15
(K1790 drawing by
Monika Ciura).



Figure 27. Gesture 16
(K1485 drawing by
Monika Ciura).



Figure 28. Gesture 17
(K2573 drawing by
Monika Ciura).

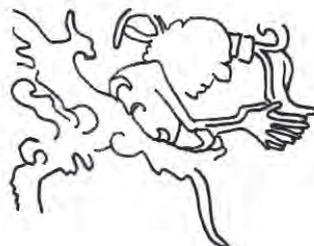


Figure 29. Gesture 18
(K6754 drawing by
Monika Ciura).