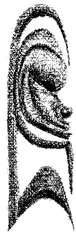

ANTHROPOS

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Pluvial Aspects of the Mesoamerican Culture Hero

The "Kumix Angel" of the Ch'orti' Mayas and Other Rain-Bringing Heroes

Edwin Braakhuis and Kerry Hull

Abstract. – The protagonist of a core myth of the Ch'orti' Mayas, Kumix, has been called a deity of the sun, the maize, and the rain. Here it is argued that the myth is primarily to be understood from the perspective of Mayan rainmaking tales and rituals. Kumix is shown to belong to a heterogeneous group of Mesoamerican rain-bringing heroes that includes ancestral kings as well as deities of maize and rain. Kumix's identity is not reducible to that of a particular deity, although of all Mayan myths, his comes closest to the myth of the Gulf Coast maize hero. *[Mesoamerica, Maya, Ch'orti', myth, ritual, hero, rainmaking]*

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A core myth of the easternmost Mayas, the Ch'orti', relates of the feats of the "Kumix Angel" (Junior Angel), a boy who created the maize, made the rain fall, and finally transformed into the sun. The tale of Kumix has been treated as the Ch'orti' version of the "Twin Myth" of the Popol Vuh (Girard 1995); as a narrative complement to the Ch'orti' "Dance of the Giants" (Hull 2009); and, lastly, as a blend of Mesoamerican maize hero and sun hero myth (Chinchilla Mazariegos 2011). Kumix himself has been called a maize deity, a rain deity, and a sun deity. The purpose of this essay is to bring more clarity to these discussions and to determine with greater precision the type of myth represented by the Ch'orti' tale and the nature of its protagonist. The focus will be on Kumix's connection to rain, since the boy searches for the rainmaking implements of his father, acts as a rainmaker himself, and is counted amongst the "Angels," or rain deities. It is from this same perspective that Kumix's place among Mesoamerican culture heroes will be examined.

Rainmakers: Human and Divine

Rainmaking has always been a vital Mesoamerican function variously ascribed to deities, heroes, kings, and exceptional human beings cooperating and sometimes identified with the rain deities. The proximity of the divine hero Huitzilopochtli and Tlaloc on the temple mountain of the Aztec capital, for example, suggests a form of cooperation. Moreover, López Austin (1980: 78) calls attention to the fact that the protective deity of an Aztec localized social group (*calpulli*) often went to live in a nearby mountain, where he "acted as the rain deity that provided his people with the waters." As the case of Nezahualcoyotl can show, a deceased king could function as such a protective deity. This Central Mexican ruler is stated, in the "Annals of Cuauhtitlan," to have fallen as a child into the water of a lake and thence to have been transported to Mount Tlaloc to be anointed a king (Lorente y Fernández 2011: 188 f.). In oral tradition, he fig-

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ures as a "King of the Sea" living inside Mount Tlaloc, from where he directs the work of the "water masters" (*ahuaque*), human beings converted into bringers of water and rain (Lorente y Fernández 2011: 121–123; 2012: 73–76). To make it rain, local weathermen (*tesifteros*) interact with these lesser rain deities (Lorente y Fernández 2011: 149–151).

Recent Mexican scholarship concerning contemporary weathermen and indigenous meteorological concepts (Albores y Broda 1997; Lammel, Goloubinoff, y Katz 2008) has shown that from early days, Mesoamerican communities have employed their own rainmakers, specialists believed to be able to influence the weather and sometimes organized into corporations. In the relative ethnographic accounts, several modalities of rainmaking come to the fore: ritual intercession with the rain deities (prayers and offerings); ritual manipulation (imitative magic); and direct participation in the work of the rain deities (playing their roles in the sky). Among the Mixtecs, for example, powerful men (*tenuvi*) – initiated by an aquatic serpent and able to change into lightning – used to climb four mountains with rain shrines on top and call out for rain (Monaghan 1995: 348 f.), all the while smoking cigars in an apparent act of imitative magic. The *ahuizote* rainmakers from the valley of Toluca moved through the skies to cut hostile rain serpents into pieces (González Montes 1997: 333) and "carry the clouds on their shoulders" towards their communities (González Montes 1997: 342). In various ways, rainmakers can thus protect the maize fields, dispell hail and thunderstorms, draw the rain clouds to their own ethnoterritory, and make it rain.[1] Their actions presuppose a close cooperation with the rain deities (angels), to such an extent that, in some cases, deceased rainmakers are absorbed by, and transformed into rain deities (e.g., González Montes 1997: 356; Lorente y Fernández 2008: 439, 450).

Mayan rainmakers, in the more direct sense of the word, have been described for, amongst others, the Tojolab'al and Tz'utujil, and the corporate model mentioned above also applies in these cases. Among the Tojolab'al (Ruz 1981: 196 f.; Gómez Hernández et al. 1999: 181–192), certain individuals are believed to be born with the power to change into lightnings (*chawuk*) and to bring the rains; they have their supernatural homes in the "Houses of the Lightnings," or caves of the local community, in which the "hearts" of the maize and other crops are stored, and which should be defended against raids by the lightnings of other communities.[2] Among the Tz'utujil, the cult of the rainmakers centers on an equestrian saint (Martín), his twelve "angels," and his bundle, consisting of garments that appear to function as rain capes.[3] Amongst the "angels" are many deceased priests (Mendelson 1965: 161, 177), whose status can approach that of a culture hero (Mendelson 1965: 92). The more powerful Tz'utujil priests perform dances amidst smoke that represent clouds (Christenson 2001: 153, 164), and, moreover, are believed to be able actually to ascend into the clouds and there to make the rain fall (Christenson 2001: 98, 209). Whatever the modality of rainmaking, however, divine "Working Men" are paralleled by human "Working Men."

Turning to the Ch'orti', their *padrinos de invierno* (patrons of the wet season) or rain priests, are rainmakers in that they address the celestial rain deities – the *ajpatnar winikob*, i.e., "Working Men" or "Angels" – in long invocations, bring them elaborate food offerings and sacrifices, and perform acts of imitative rain magic within a liturgical context. Some of these Ch'orti' rain priests, however, had a more direct access to the rain deities; for example, for having been born together with a toad, considered a representative of the rain deities (Fought 1972: 417–420). The influence of *padrinos* on rainfall may even have extended beyond death, as among the Tz'utujil.[4]

Rainmaking has its own narratives, which, more often than not, turn on what could be called the "Sorcerer Apprentice." This widespread Mesoamerican tale type describes a first initiation into the work of the rainmakers, while focusing on the rainmaking implements that also play a key role in the myth of Kumix. Usually, the apprentice is a human

1 A useful summary of relevant studies is given by Robichaux (2008: 412–425) and Lorente y Fernández (2011: 47–62).

2 Meteorological wars are also part of the Tzeltal worldview and involve thoroughly organized, antagonistic groups of lightning and rainstorm *nahuales* (*lab*; Pitarch Ramón 1998: 216–219). A Tzeltal tale (Maldonado Méndez 1998) vividly describes such a war. In Tzotzil and Tzeltal ethnography, stories of individual conflict between meteorological *wayhel* and *lab* tend to obscure the latter's collective rainmaking roles.

3 Mendelson (1965: 90) explicitly states that when rain rituals are to be held, priests dress in Martín's green "rain capes." Moreover, one of Martín's garments once flew into the clouds, changed into a deer, and then caused a thunderstorm (Christenson 2001: 164).

4 In Quezaltepeque, in the Ch'orti' area, offerings to the rain deities at the beginning of the wet season were spiritually attended by forty-six former *padrinos* represented by a long row of foliated crosses running west-east, with the most ancient *padrinos* in the west (Dary Fuentes et al. 1998: 258 f.; cf. Girard 1995: 103, and Wisdom 1940: 440, n. 12 for an earlier form of the ritual). Many of the *padrinos* thus represented were probably no longer alive. Comparative data from Mexico suggest the crosses to belong to rainmakers (see Broda 2001: 220).

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Fig. 1 (to the right): Classic Mayan rainmaker with a serpentine lightning leg and sitting on a seat shaped like the head of a small aquatic mammal (K3367; copyright Justin Kerr).

Fig. 2: Leaping Classic Mayan rainmaker with a lightning leg and holding a lightning serpent; the supervising lightning deity is to the right (K9205; copyright Justin Kerr).

being – most often a boy – although at times, he can also be a deity related to rain.[5] The protagonist happens to come upon a human rainmaker – who may be his older brother – spies upon him (Sexton 1992: 52–58), or is found and adopted by him (Villa Rojas et al. 1975: 227–229). Alternatively, he comes upon a rain deity (Mendelson 1965: 175, n. 5), or is adopted by one (Terán Contreras y Rasmussen 2008: 281 f.). He commits various errors, particularly affecting the frogs and toads of his patron, and takes away the latter's accoutrements (calabashes, swords, whips, capes), especially the most potent rain cape. Then he ascends into the sky (sometimes seated on a horse), and, acting as a lightning and rainmaker, creates havoc there. The tale is malleable, with the disastrous ride through the skies sometimes becoming a regular lesson (Dary Fuentes 1988: 188–191), and the outcome running from severe punishment (Mendelson 1965: 175, n. 5; Sexton 1992: 57 f.) to definitive incorporation by the rainmakers and rain deities.[6] Significantly – in view of the role of the rainmakers in defending the interests of their communities – in a Tz'utujil tale from Santiago Atitlan (Sexton 1992: 52–58) the punishment affects the ethnic group as a whole. Starting from an initial situation of small rainmaking corporations made up of "angels born in the flesh," the Tz'utujil tale blames the loss of human rainmaking powers on the "Sorcerer Apprentice." In such a way, it also seems to disclose an important *raison d'être* for this sort of tales: A strong warning against interfering with the vital, and often secretive work of the human rainmakers.[7]

In view of the above, it comes as no surprise that the rainmaker also appears to be present in Classical Mayan culture, to judge by representations of young men having one of their legs transformed into the serpentine leg of the lightning deity (Figs. 1 and 2; cf. Doyle and Houston 2012). As to this undulating leg, it seems relevant that the Tz'utujil believe a rainmaker to be born crippled (Shaw 1971: 238), while the Chuj hold the day lord "Rainstorm" (Chawok) to be similarly affected (Piedrasanta Herrera 2009: 50). Mythologically, lameness is sometimes

5 A case of a divine sorcerer's apprentice is the Totonac Old Thunder God (San Juan), adopted as a boy by twelve rain deities (Lammel 2008: 214).

6 *Relatos huastecos* (2002: 9–11); Münch (1983: 170); Terán Contreras y Rasmussen (2008: 288).

7 Vogt (1969: 473) notes for Zinacantan that "the specialists in the rain-making ritual have been extraordinarily difficult to approach"; among the Tojolab'al (Furbee 1986: 105), it is a very delicate matter to reveal someone's identity as a Lightning rainmaker.

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ascribed to an accident during a rainmaking lesson (Alcorn 1984: 59; Gómez Hernández et al. 1999: 190). In one case (Fig. 2), the young man with the lightning leg not only holds a lightning serpent but also seems to be leaping, while being supervised by the lightning deity. This rather strongly recalls a dance of certain Nahua rainmakers (*ahuizotes*), during which "they were kicking and leaping while they took off with one foot and then with the other," the explanation being that, "we do so with the leg, as if the lightning were striking" (González Montes 1997: 328).

Reviewing the preceding descriptions and tales, and anticipating a more detailed discussion in the paragraphs that are to follow, some parallels between the Ch'orti' myth of Kumix and the work of the rainmakers may already be pointed out.

(a) Kumix is like a born rainmaker, since he needs no apprenticeship, and makes no mistakes. The secret about his being the son of a rainmaker and the whereabouts of the lost rainmaking implements are revealed to him once he has grown up; in a comparable way, the born rainmakers of the Tz'utujil tale mentioned above learn about their destiny, receive instruction, and go for their rain capes and swords once they have become young adults.
(b) Kumix is like a human rainmaker, but is simultaneously considered a rain deity. As the "Sorcerer Apprentice" tales already show, the line separating human rainmakers and rain deities is thin. This is further confirmed by ethnographic reports. Among the Zapotecs, "Lightning may take the form of a human being; in one tale he becomes a Mixe, in another a man of Yalálag" (Parsons 1936: 213). Concerning Mixtec rainmakers, "many say that there is no difference between the *ñu'un savi* [rain deities] and the tenuvi [rainmakers]"; indeed, "[c]ertain tenuvi are … miraculous figures, and with them, any distinction between the human and the divine is meaningless" (Monaghan 1995: 350).
(c) Kumix is a rainmaking hero. The heroic dimension of powerful rainmakers noticed above can also be seen in the development of certain "Sorcerer Apprentice" tales. In a Mopan tale (Shaw 1971: 173), for example, a Sorcerer Apprentice rids mankind of an eagle demon, just as Kumix opposes demonic eagles descending from the sky.[8]
(d) Kumix multiplies the maize. The rain deities have command over its growth – they have maize fields of uncommon productivity, and reward visiting Sorcerer Apprentices with miraculous maize cobs (Dary Fuentes et al. 1998: 251) – whereas the rainmakers, for their part, guard the "hearts of the maize" in their "Houses of the Lightnings" (Tojolab'al).
(e) Both rain deities and rainmakers have to fight the evil authors of drought,[9] like Kumix (see the section on "Kumix and the Rain"); they also have to confront the hostile lightnings of other communities who try to kidnap the maize spirits. Especially in the latter case, there seems to be a significant analogy with the theft of the rainmaking implements of Kumix's father.
(f) Finally, the Ch'orti' hero is called a "Kumix Angel" (Junior Angel)[10] and "Younger Brother." In the same way, a human Sorcerer Apprentice in a Kakchiquel tale (Dary Fuentes 1988: 188–191) is called "Chip Angel" (Junior Angel); whereas in related tales (Sexton 1992: 54 f.; *Relatos chontales* 1994: 25–27), the Sorcerer Apprentice is treated as a "younger brother" respective of an older and experienced rainmaker. A Tojolab'al variant (Gómez Hernández et al. 1999: 181–192) identifies the latter as a lightning (*chawuk*), the younger brother as a sheet lightning (*tzantewal*).

The junior rainmaker aspect of Kumix has more explicitly found expression in the maize hero mythology of the Gulf Coast. A Totonac tale (Ichon 1973: 85) – substituting a rainmaking contest for the usual trials inflicted by the thunder deities – describes how the youthful maize god mocks his opponents' efforts to make it rain. He steals their green cloths and sword, and, flying through the skies, causes a terrible tempest; when he is finally caught and asked about his secret (a lightning instrument made from the tongue of a crocodile), he reveals it, and delegates his superior rain-making powers to the initially weak rain deities. Though playing the stereotypical role of a "Junior Angel," the hero here turns out to be the most "Senior Angel" of all. Another version (Hernández Bautista et al. 2004: 375), however, has him end up as a true "Junior Angel," still able to produce lightning, but only a feeble one.

The Myth of Kumix Angel

Mesoamerican hero myths, such as the tales of the Gulf Coast maize hero and the Ch'orti' hero Kumix,

8 In a Yucatec tale (Terán Contreras y Rasmussen 2008: 263–279), another Sorcerer Apprentice takes off with the horse of the rain deity finally to become a king; in a Zoque tale (Villa Rojas et al. 1975: 227–229), he builds the community's church.

9 Ruz (1981: 197) ("Dry Lightning"); Burns (1983: 110–121); Parsons (1936: 334).

10 The term *kumix* in Ch'orti' means "small, smallest, minor."

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tend to be assemblages of more or less fixed episodes, some of which already occur in what must have been one of the most popular of Aztec hero tales, the myth of Quetzalcoatl.[11] Thus, in the sources, one finds episodes such as Quetzalcoatl's aquatic origin (in Michatlauhco, "Fish Gorge"); his orphanage; adoption by an aged cannibal woman (Cihuacoatl); struggle with his older brothers or father's brothers; quest for the grave of his father; defeat of the father's murderers (here fused with the older brothers); descent into the underworld; opening of the Maize Mountain; and wars of conquest.[12] The adoption by an aged cannibal woman (who sometimes is treated as a real mother) by itself already characterizes the tale as a hero myth. The old woman of the Kumix myth, for example, entirely coincides with the old woman of a Chontal myth concerning the ancestral king Fane Kantsini, including the episode with the biting in the pestle of a grinding-stone (Barabas y Bartolomé 2000: 231), and recurs in various of the myths to be discussed below.[13]

Besides adding new episodes, the myth of Kumix has adapted several of the episodes mentioned above to the prevalent theme of rainmaking. A cursory comparison with the 16th-century K'iche' version of the Mesoamerican hero myth already shows this by itself: The dead father's hidden ball game equipment has, in the Ch'orti' tale, given way to his stolen rainmaking equipment,[14] and the older brothers' monkey transformation to one into frogs. The following exposition of the Ch'orti' myth will follow Hull's summary of it, based on a considerable number of variants (2009: 134–139); only specific texts collected by Hull and additions from other authors will be referenced separately.[15]

(1) The father of the hero (the "Father of the Angels") is dead and the mother is in the heavens. The hero lives together with his older brothers (Girard 1995: 402). In some versions, he is hunting in the forest and brought to the river by his older brothers in order to be killed.

(2) The orphan Kumix is bathing in a river because of a cut on his shin; fishes start feeding on his blood and flesh.

(3) The four older brothers try to kill junior. The boy is grated over a stone repeatedly and his blood and small pieces of his body fall into the water and foam up, as does the *serekchij* vine, or *matapescado*, when it is ground up and put into the water – a common means of killing fish among the Ch'orti'. Later, the older brothers are disgusted that the fish they ate had his blood and body parts in them. Alternatively (Girard 1995: 402), Kumix is thrown into the water and changes into a fish. Pieces of the bark of the *xaway* tree are thrown into the water and beaten up into a foam[16] to kill the fishes.

(4) When the brothers have left, Kumix revives himself and lies crying on the bank of the river. His relentless sobbing is heard by the K'ech'uj, an aged cannibal woman who becomes his adoptive mother.[17] Alternatively (Pérez Martínez 1996: 46), the woman mistakes the frothy blood in the water for her own aborted child, and adopts the baby.

(5) Kumix continues his activities as a bird hunter and a deer hunter, but the meat is tricked away from him by his aged adoptive mother and handed to her lover. Kumix discovers that the two are not his real parents and kills both (cf. Fought 1989: 464).

(6) Kumix's mother is in heaven,[18] and Kumix reaches her place hidden in a guitar, carried up by a hummingbird.[19] The mother is destitute, since the Bronze King seized all her properties (Fought 1989: 465). Kumix multiplies the few beans and maize kernels left to her by censing her bean and corncribs, creates fowl, and, according to one variant (Hull n. d.: Text 47, line 258), has his uncle San Lorenzo build (or perhaps rebuild) his house, which is also that of his mother.

(7) Kumix institutes the ritual of feeding his father's brothers, that is, the four directional wind gods (Oakley, in Girard 1995: 406, n. 5; cf. Hull

11 Nicholson (2001: esp. 8–23); Lehmann (1974: 330–340, 365–371); Garibay (1973: 112–114). – For an overview and evaluation of all the extant sources, one may consult Nicholson's comprehensive 2001 study.

12 For a contemporary, Totonac version of this myth, with Nine-Wind for a hero, see Stresser-Péan (2005: 372–374).

13 Beyond the group discussed here, the aged cannibal adoptive mother also occurs in the myths of the Popoloca hero Xigu; the Tzotzil Jaguar Slayer, Ohoroxtotil; and the Q'eqchi' Sun hero (cf. Braakhuis 2010: 41–93).

14 In a Mazatec Sun and Moon myth, too, the father's ball game equipment had been stolen and had to be retrieved by the heroes, with the father's murderer (an evil sorcerer) being killed in a ball game match (Benítez 1973: 112–116).

15 For variants besides those of Hull, see Dary Fuentes (1986: 263–269, 299–303); Fought (1972); Girard (1995: 401–406 [Orig. 1966: 275–277]); López García (2010: 21–43, 56–60); Metz (2006: 105 f.); Pérez Martínez (1996: 46–48).

16 Cf. Girard (1966: 275), where the older brothers are "aporeando el agua."

17 The role of the K'ech'uj in the Kumix tale is that of a mother figure who kindly adopts an injured child to raise it as her own; however, secretly, she intends to consume him at some future point. This pseudo-nurturing aspect she projects is directly reflected in the way she is said to deceive the Ch'orti' today (cf. López García 2003: 306).

18 It is unclear whether "heaven" should be understood as the heaven of the Virgin and female saints; as the sky of the "Angels"; or as both.

19 Another hummingbird takes the Totonac hero Nine-Wind to his mother (Stresser-Péan 2009: 436).

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n. d.: Text 49); he summons the wind of his uncle, San Lorenzo, with his drum (Fought 1989: 465).

(8) Kumix departs into the forest to find the murderers of his father (who also robbed his mother) and to retrieve his father's rainmaking implements from them (sword, drum, flute, ring, cloth). Acting like a trickster figure, he takes the implements away from certain animal helpers of the "Bronze King" (usually monkey, armadillo, and crocodile).

(9) He overcomes and kills the Bronze King (or his hairy, animal-like avatar) in some versions by using a lightning bolt.[20]

(10) He starts to make a milpa by sounding his drum and striking his sword, i.e., causing thunder and lightning to appear and creating the rain necessary for the plants to grow.

(11) The four older brothers also try to get to heaven to see their mother by building a mountain. Eagles start to descend by way of the mountain and threaten to extinguish the human race. Kumix destroys the mountain with his lightning bolts.

(12) The older brother s are told to hide their heads, but disobediently stick them out and are thus blinded in punishment. "Their tears now bring the November drizzle to the region" (Fought 1989: 465).[21] Kumix changes them into frog "rainmakers" and "rain priests" (*padrinos*) and assigns them to mountains in the four corners of the world. "They went thrown into the mountains. Thus it rains in the time of December, January, and they rise up in the mountains" (Hull n. d.: Text 47, line 450).

(13) The hero finds the burial place of his father, but when he is about to resurrect his father from the grave, a swarm of quails distracts him, and undoes his work (one variant only, López García 2010: 42).[22]

(14) Kumix rises to the sky and transforms into the sun (one variant only, Girard 1995: 404).

Kumix and the Rain

In the myth of Kumix, aquatic and pluvial motifs play a conspicuous role. The older brothers' fish catching connects them to their later role as rain deities. Fish and maize stand in a metaphorical relationship (Girard 1995: 116; Braakhuis 1990: 128, n. 10), and the episode seems to illustrate this by contrasting harvesting fish from terrestrial waters and harvesting maize from celestial waters that have penetrated the earth. To acquire fish from terrestrial waters, the Senior Angels defeat and instrumentalize the Junior Angel; to acquire maize from celestial waters, the Junior Angel defeats and instrumentalizes the older brothers. As will soon become apparent, this inversion can also be understood as a seasonal change.

As a baby, Kumix is thrown into the water, a fate not unlike that of infant rainmakers put in the water of a pond (Monaghan 1995: 348), or of apprentice rainmakers descending into its depths (Lorente y Fernández 2008: 450; 2011: 132–136); but instead of subsequently being licked by a rain serpent, or of receiving instruction from the water's inhabitants, Kumix's initiation is mediated by sacrificial images. The child's blood, streaming from his leg, and attracting the fishes; the sanguinary grating of the child on a stone; his death in the water together with the fishes; and his relentless sobbing, can all be connected to the Mesoamerican custom of sacrificing young children to the rain deities. The child's sobbing suggests the tears of Aztec sacrificial children that were thought to invite the rains. In addition, the whirl in the river from which the old woman catches her "aborted child" (Pérez Martínez 1996: 46) recalls stereotypical Ch'orti' stories according to which children, sacrificed in a lagoon, reach their destiny, an aquatic serpent and giver of rain, through "the inevitable swirl" (Girard 1949/II: 588). These sacrificial children should possibly be related to the "forty thousand children" who, together with the rain deities, are invoked by Ch'orti' rain priests (e.g., López García 2010: 101 f.)[23] – although, as will be discussed further on, there are still other, less dramatic ways in which young children could become rain bringers.

The older brothers are changed into frogs and become *padrinos*, or rain priests. Frogs are themselves *padrinos* with a special charge to petition for rain: "They say that frogs know ahead of time what day the rain will fall,"[24] their croaking being their petitioning. In this, frogs are not different from toads; therefore, a *padrino* with a toad *nahual* has special powers and is able to summon directly the angels of thunder and rain (Fought 1972: 417–420). The four

20 Fought (1972: 465); Hull (n. d.: Text 47, line 355); López García (2010: 41).

21 The defeated Older Brother's tears giving origin to rain is a narrative topic: In Q'eqchi' Hummingbird myth (Braakhuis 2010: 291), the flowing tears of the hero's Older Brother become a river and the waters of the river become clouds, thus making the Older Brother into Chocl (cloud), the Rain Deity.

22 The same mytheme is used in the episode of the hero Quetzalcoatl's descent into the world of the dead (Lehmann 1974: 333).

23 These forty thousand children are suggestive of the celestial "rain-bringing children" (*ahuiaquicoconetl*), recognized by the Nahuas of the Sierra de Texcoco.

24 *Academia de Lenguas Mayas* (2001: 23); cf. Girard (1949/II: 605); Hull (2003: 300).

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frog "rainmakers" of the myth are like the four old men acting as toads while sitting under a table with ritual food offerings (Girard 1949/II: 606). Frogs are not just very effective rain priests, however; they are called "Angels," the very word used for the rain deities themselves (Girard 1995: 137). Accordingly, the four frog rain priests in the Kumix tale are images for important rain deities located at the four corner mountains of the world.[25] For ritual's sake, the Ch'orti' have localized these "Older Brothers" – usually including at least some of the archangels – in particular mountains within their territory. Both individual farmers and *padrinos* would go to pray to these mountains using candles and copal as "payments" for rain.[26] The question as to which rain deities were sent to which corner is not always consistently answered.[27]

The following statement (Hull 2003: 223) is particularly relevant here: "The actors in this legend, the *sakumb'irob'*, or 'older brothers,' and Gabriel (*Kumix*), are also the principal figures in rain production for the Ch'orti'. Kumix is not only 'younger angel,' but has a group of helpers who assume the same name." Amongst these "younger angels" (*e kumix anxerob'*), the names of the senior angels San Gabriel and San Miguel recur as aliases of Kumix.[28] As can be seen in Table 1, the months of November, December, and January are usually stated to be the time of action of the "Junior Angels." Wisdom (1940: 396) has the dry season run from November to May, during which time "a different group of four deities, the Younger Working Men, are addressed in the ceremonies" – though not necessarily, as it would appear, for the whole length of the period. From Tunuco it is reported (López García 2010: 84) that the "little angels" were thought to work from November till February, and the "great angels" from February until the feast of San Miguel (September 29). Girard (1949/III: 858) adds that "in the mountainous zone where the rains continue until January, another, unofficial ceremony takes place, outside the Tzolkin [that is, after October, 24]. Then the so-called 'Junior Angels' (ángeles menores, *Ah cumiš-winikop'*) take over who produce finer rains than the angels who 'work' during the official season." According to Hull (2003: 223 f.), however, the Junior Angel Kumix/Gabriel and the other junior angels are the "Working Men" from September to December, and the older brothers are the "Working Men" from January to August.[29] In one of the Kumix tales (Hull n. d.: Text 47 line 450), the older brothers, or senior angels, are stated to "rise up in the mountains" (*a'chpo'b' makwe' montanya*) in the months of December and January, apparently following the retreat of the junior angels.

It appears, in any case, as though the hero – a child and junior brother as in some other types of hero myth – has been assigned a place within a dual division of pluvial periods, according to which the heavy rains of the rainy season are classified as "Senior" and assigned to senior angels and old-

Table 1: Working Period of the Junior Angels.

	Wisdom (1940) (Tunuco)	Girard (1949) (mountains)	López García (2010) (Tunuco)	Hull (2003)
January	×	×	×	
February	× [?]			
March	× [?]			
April	× [?]			
May				
June				
July				
August				
September				×
October				×
November	×	×	×	×
December	×	×	×	

25 A representation of four rainmaking directional frogs is already found in the Madrid Codex (31a). Furthermore, the assignment of the older brothers to their mountains recalls that of the Bacab brothers (also referred to as the Bacab-Pauahtun-Chacs) to the four directions. The Classic deity corresponding to the Bacab (God N) is intimately associated with toads (cf. Braakhuis 1990: 132 f. and fig. 3 [K1892]).

26 López García (2010: 20 f., 60, 94, 97, 108) has suggested an opposition of Kumix Angel plus Rain Priests (*Padrinos de Invierno*) versus Older Brothers / Animal Uncles plus Drought Priests (*Padrinos de Verano*). In the case of the Older Brothers, however, this would seem to conflict with their ultimately positive rainmaking role.

27 According to one of Hull's elderly consultants, San Miguel Archangel was assigned to the east, San Rafael to the north, San Gabriel to the west, and San Andres to the south. Fought (1972: 412) alternately gives the names of Angel Santo Miguel Archangel, Angel San Tomas, Angel San Gabriel, and Angel Santo Tomas Veronico Parramador as the names of the four rain deities, but does not provide the directions associated with each.

28 Hull; Dary Fuentes (1986: 299–303); cf. Fought (1972: 422). – The mythological number of four older brothers could in principle symbolize a larger number of rain deities. In the same way, one wonders if the "forty thousand *niños*" mentioned in petitioning for rain (López García 2010: 100–107) should not be counted amongst the junior angels.

29 In September, preceding the second planting of the lowland area, the rainmaking ritual for the junior angels was held in the Jocotán area (Wisdom 1940: 440).

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er brothers, and the finer rains of the following period as "Junior" and assigned to junior angels and younger brothers. Moreover, the junior angels, or "Junior Working Men," who make the finer rains, "are said to resemble the Working Men but are subservient to them and are far less powerful" (Wisdom 1940: 396).[30] The junior angels are thus analogous to their namesakes, the candidate angels of the Sorcerer Apprentice tales: human beings who receive their rainmaking implements without yet having been able to try them, who often fail to use them properly, but who may also, as we have seen, develop into true rain deities. As a "Presidente de los ángeles," Kumix is heading this celestial corporation; his background as a heroic rainmaker transpires in his aliases Gabriel and Miguel, archangels who are also senior angels, and in his association with the strongest lightning of the final months of the year (Hull 2009: 138). It seems significant that the November drizzle, that symbolizes the tearful defeat of the older brothers, falls within the latter period.

Following this analysis of Kumix's relationship to his older brothers, some of the other mythical characters relevant to the rainmaking process may now be considered. One of these is the crocodile. Among the Ch'orti', Kumix's interaction with this aquatic reptile and his recovery of a lightning sword from its mouth – a mytheme found in various Mesoamerican regions – may have been grafted upon a specific rainmaking procedure. As described by a *padrino* from Cayur (Girard 1949/II: 580), it involves a giant crocodile dwelling in the middle of the sky. Through invocation, this reptile is to be induced to open its mouth and produce rain, with the extent of the aperture determining the amount of rainfall.[31]

Kumix's pluvial functions also include his relationship with the wind gods that play such a vital role in the transport of the rain clouds. First among them is San Lorenzo, or San Lorenzo de Ángel, described as a "Working Man" residing in the south, where the rainy season is started (López García 2010: 89). He is probably identical with the San Lorenzo "who orders the general mobilization of the celestial cavalry […] to lift up the clouds towards the 'royal basin'," whence the rain water is to be distributed (Girard 1949/III: 825; cf. Dary Fuentes et al. 1998: 249).[32] San Lorenzo also seems to recruit human "Working Men," for in one story (Fought n. d.), he blows men looking for "work" high into the clouds, so as to enable them to make rain; instead, they create the usual havoc, and are killed for giving away the rainmaking secrets. Against this background of recruitment and mobilization of "Working Men," the following interactions of Kumix and the chief wind god should probably be understood.

While the Oakley version (Girard 1995: 406, n. 5) mentions the hero's ritual feeding of four wind god uncles, who then "go to work," other versions more particularly focus on San Lorenzo, or Lencho. In a tale collected by Hull (n. d.: Text 49), the hero's creation of the maize through censing is motivated as much by his and his mother's hunger as by the need to feed his uncle Lencho, the wind god, and pay him with a maize gruel (*pozole*) for sweeping away trees and brushes and clearing the field; then Kumix is ready to use his drum and sword to make it rain, or, in the context of the myth: to become a "Working Man" himself, a bringer of rain and maize. In another tale collected by Hull (n. d.: Text 47), the powerful wind god recurs as San Lorenzo de Ángel Espíritu Santo, or, again, "Lencho,"[33] who now constructs a wooden house for the hero and his mother (Hull n. d.: lines 252 ff.), and to whom Kumix reports once he has retrieved his father's drum and other rainmaking implements (lines 333 ff.). The wooden "house" may be the father's granary,[34] but one could also think of a symbolic representation of the "House of the Angels," a ritual structure for the great Supplication of the rain deities.[35] Finally, still another version (Fought 1989: 465) has Kumix beat the drum, "summoning with it the wind of his uncle, *San Lorenzo Barba de Oro* [Golden Beard],[36] who lives at the edge of the

30 Similarly, among the Tzotziles, the older brother-younger brother division (*bankilal-itsinal*) functions as a general classificatory principle. The idea of the junior angels, or "Working Men," being subservient to the senior angels agrees with the subservience traditionally due to older brothers.

31 This celestial crocodile is reminiscent of the water-spitting celestial dragons of the pre-Hispanic era.

32 The relationship between San Lorenzo and the rain deities parallels that between Quetzalcoatl Ehecatl and Tlaloc (together with the Tlaloqueh) among the Aztecs.

33 It is here assumed that additions like "de Ángel," "Espíritu Santo," or "Barba de Oro" are meant to distinguish aspects of one and the same character, rather than denoting different characters.

34 In a variant (Hull n. d.: Text 49), the granary is stated to be "just about to fall down," but its reconstruction is not mentioned.

35 In Chiquimula, an arbor with the size of a house is built for the *padrino* to stay in during his ritual Supplication (Fought 1972: 410). Its function is the same as that of the *padrino*'s oratory in Tunuco (Jocotán), called "House of the Angels" (López García 2010: 80, 86). It may be noted that in the myth Kumix's mother, for whom the house is built, is a "Mother of Angels."

36 In Ladino folklore, San Lorenzo is invoked to bring wind and rain with a couplet running, "San Lorenzo / barbas de oro / ruega a Dios / que llueve a chorros" (Espinosa 1990: 125). In

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world. Then the *Kumix* strikes at the clouds with his flashing sword, making the rain."

In its various renderings, this episode appears to reflect important elements of the *padrino*'s Supplication (*rogación*) that concludes the dry season and mobilizes the rain and wind deities. Thus, following the *padrino*'s invocation of the angels, "he calls San Lorenzo. He says, 'San Lorenzo! Golden Beard, Silver Beard!' and San Lorenzo, when he *hears that – the drum is beaten by the angels*. Then they rise up and come to look. That is why the padrino says, 'San Lorenzo, you are the *uncle of the angels*. Rise now and come here; look at us. Where we live we are *dying from hunger*. Where we live we are – we are suffering'" (Fought 1972: 412; emphasis added). In the myth, Kumix, hungry, and beating his drum, represents San Lorenzo's rain deity nephews as much as a suffering humanity headed by its human rain makers.

In his recent treatment of Kumix, López García (2010: 18) considers drought the basic factor triggering the tale's development, and views the hostile behavior of the hero's animal "uncles" accordingly as that of sorcerers causing drought (the so-called "*padrinos del verano*"; López García 2010: 94, 108). Clearly, this interpretation would be equally valid for the hero's chief antagonist, whom some narrators call the "Bronze King." Given the fact that this character causes Kumix's mother to starve and that the animals who confiscated the rainmaking implements of Kumix's father are his cronies, he may indeed be viewed as the chief personification of drought and famine, even when some Ch'orti' describe him today more generally as a personification of all evil. In undoing this unwholesome figure with his thunderbolt, Kumix Angel (who at times is called Michael and Gabriel) could appear to act upon the exhortation which the *padrino*, already quoted above, directed at the archangels Michael and Gabriel during his Supplication for rain (Fought 1972: 413 f.): "If there is somewhere an evil spirit at work, today, conjure your sword; conjure your thunderbolt. Do not let them rule." The final defeat of the Bronze King, together with the successive recovery of the rainmaker's implements that precedes it, appears to provide the *padrinos* with a model for a step-by-step initiation into the rainmaking profession.

Quezaltepeque, the wind god San Lorenzo Barbas de Oro, considered to be dangerous, was ritually imprisoned in jugs between early February and October, 25 (Girard 1995: 41). In various other Mayan regions, too, Lorenzo is considered a deity provoking strong winds (e.g., Bunzel 1952: 268; Sexton and Bizarro Ujpán 1999: 108–113).

Kumix and Other Rain-Bringing Heroes

In making its hero a rainmaker and rain deity, the Ch'orti' Kumix Angel myth is not entirely exceptional within Mesoamerica. In various other narratives, the natural forces of lightning, thunder, and rain are marshaled by the hero to serve the maize crop and, indirectly, mankind. The identities of the heroes involved are quite diverse. Some of them, being maize or rain deities, have a homogeneous identity, while others – amongst whom are ancestral kings – have a more heterogeneous one. The Mixe hero Kondoy and the Chontal hero Fane Kantsini discussed below are of the latter type; in their tales, Kumix's struggle with the Bronze King assumes the form of a struggle with "the two bad kings," as well as with other foreign kings (Barabas y Bartolomé 2000: 227–233).[37] As will soon become apparent, the mode and strength of the hero's association with the rain deities vary from a situation of negotiation with these powers to one of complete identification.

Chalucas

When the Zoques were in need of rain, it was their trickster hero Chalucas, who "talked to the *moyó* [lightning dwarfs] and the rain fell. He was also a friend of the *wayucú* [earth deities], the Owners of the cave of Mactumatzá," where the maize and the fruits were guarded (Cordry y Cordry 1988: 95).

Kondoy

The Mixe hero, King Kondoy ("[Good] Leader"; also Condoy, Cong Hoy), was found in the cave where the maize was stored, floating in a pond in the shape of a big egg. The boy born from the egg was subsequently adopted (Miller 1956: 105); a similar egg birth and adoption is related of the Chontal hero, Fane Kantsini. Significantly, Kondoy's egg is found together with another one from which a serpent is born, his "brother" (Miller 1956: 105). Kondoy "goes everywhere with his nahual the serpent, which lives in the caves of Zempoaltepetl Mountain, from where it produces the lightning and thunder" (Barabas 2006: 99); in Oaxaca, such meteorological serpents living in mountains are objects of worship (Barabas 2006: 83 f.). It is not entirely surprising, therefore, that at a local level, this heroic

37 In the Oaxacan tales, these conflicts are historicized by adding geographical referents; they are thus not unlike the wars of conquest that are part of Quetzalcoatl's hero myth.

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maize bringer is "assimilated to Kong Ënaää 'Lord of Thunder,' provider of life and abundance,[38] and the cult that is given to one is the same cult that is given to the other" (Barabas y Bartolomé 2000: 217).[39] – The eggs in the cave may refer to rainmaking rituals, witness the following Mazatec tale about the boyish rainmaker Kohu (Boege 1988: 106): During a terrible drought long ago, the ancestors carried a basket with eggs into a cave to placate the rain goddess Shumajé. Now, the terrible drought turned into a terrible aquatic catastrophe, and a balance was only created when the ancestors found a boy who "accepted to go up into the sky and who split with his lightnings the clouds."

Gulf Coast Maize Hero

The initial situation of the Kondoy tale recurs in tales that are still being told among the peoples of the Gulf Coast. Their hero (Chicomexochitl, Homshuk, Thipaak) is not just associated but completely identified with the maize (for the maize hero myth, see López Austin 1992 and Braakhuis 1990, 2009). Like Kondoy and Fane Kantsini, the child is born from the water, sometimes from an egg floating in a lagoon or a river. Again like Kondoy, he may also have had his own snake nahual. The Totonac maize hero, for example, is closely associated with "Kitsis-luwa" (Five-Serpent), a lightning serpent painted with the colors of the maize, and considered "an intermediary in giving the required worship to the great maize deity" (Ichon 1973: 140); whereas the Popoluca maize hero is stated to be guarded by the lightning of the "angel" San Miguel (Foster 1945: 180).

In aquatic rebirth episodes of the maize hero, some of the more specific elements of the corresponding Kumix episode recur (see Table 2). Just as Kumix was ground and thrown into the water as fish poison, the maize child was first ground and then thrown into the water because of its perceived bitterness, a quality that could suggest a poisonous root. As a matter of fact, in one variant (Ichon 1973: 82) the bitter flour landed in a stream where, at that very moment, women were catching shrimps while using fish poison. Thus, the interweaving of the ground fish poison root and maize ear similes serves to assimilate as well as subtly differentiate

Note to Table 2: The bibliographical references for the Kumix and Nahualtectli episodes, as well as references for some of the maize hero episodes, will be found in the main text. Nearly all of the above maize hero episodes are also part of Ichon's (1973: 73–93) presentation of the Totonac maize hero myth. For overviews of maize hero mythology and additional references to sources, one may turn to Braakhuis (1990, 2009), Chinchilla Mazariegos (2011: 43–59, 72–84), and López Austin (1992).

the two heroes. Also the bloody foam holding a fetus that had seemingly been aborted, recurs: The maize hero is sometimes cast into the water, or buried near its border, because the mother had delivered a clot of blood (Stresser-Péan 2009: 438), or had had an abortion (Williams García 1972: 87). According to a widespread Mesoamerican belief, especially reported from Nahua groups (cf. Robichaux 2008: 412–419), the spirits of children born dead or aborted were adopted by the rain deities, and were consequently invoked to bring the rain. Finally, Kumix's wound on the shin seems to have become the maize hero's wound on the leg: When the boy fetches water, fishes are hurting this wound (Elson 1947: 196).[40]

In creating a lightning instrument from the tongue of a crocodile and causing thunderstorms with it, and in creating clouds from the foam of the sea, the maize hero acts as a rainmaker. He is transported to the realm of the rain deities on a turtle, beats his drum to summon them, measures his strength against them, negotiates with them, and finally empowers them with the implements invented by him. By some, he is even counted amongst the rain deities (Braakhuis 2009: 13). As we have seen, the rainmaking activity of this hero can also be cast in the mold of a Sorcerer Apprentice tale.

Nahualtectli

The basic structure of the Kumix and maize hero myths equally characterizes a Guerrero-Nahua tale from Xicomulco (municipality of Cuilapan; Díaz Vázquez 2008: 115–120). In a brief introduction to the tale (Díaz Vázquez 2008: 33), its protagonist,

38 Among the Zoque of Rayón, the spirits of hills and lightning are thought of as elderly men who can transform into horned serpents (Thomas 1974: 219–235).

39 King Kondoy's intimate connection to lightning serpent and rain deity resembles King Nezahualcoyotl's role in contemporary folklore as a "King of the Sea" and head of the lesser rain deities.

40 One is also reminded of the Mazatec rainmaking hero, Kohu: "Upon scratching his leg, something like scabs came off and these fell into the water. Therefore we see nowadays some fishes that are called *pepescas*" (Boege 1988: 106).

41 Maize hero, eagles, and mountain, see Alcorn (1984: 82) and Alcorn et al. (2006: 603 f.).

42 Kumix and fruit trees, see López García (2003: 218).

43 Maize hero and fruit trees, see Braakhuis (2009: 15 f.).

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Table 2: Correspondences between Three Rain-Bringing Heroes.

Kumix (K)	**Maize Hero** (MH)	**Nahualtectli** (NT)
father killed; mother in heaven	father killed; mother in unknown place	father killed
likeness of father (musician); hides in guitar	likeness of father (musician); hides in flute	
grated like root to poison the river and catch fish	pulverized like flour and cast in the water, where shrimps are being caught with fish poison; the flour is bitter	
old cannibal woman catches baby K “fish”	old cannibal woman catches baby MH “fish” and adopts it turtle “nurse” catches bitter flour MH; MH leaves turtle	old cannibal woman mother of NT
the clotted blood of K is old cannibal woman’s “abortion”	clot of blood delivered by mother and buried at the water’s edge	
bathes in river because of cut in shin and is harassed by fishes	stands in river with sore on leg and is harassed by fishes	
miraculous deer hunter	hunter for birds, iguanas and fishes	
makes maize field	makes maize field	
old cannibal woman burnt on field and ashes handed to frog	old cannibal woman burnt on field and ashes handed to frog	
destroys with lightning the mountain along which eagles descend to earth	on MH’s instigation, the Mam destroys a mountain along which eagles descend to earth[41]	
assigns his 4 brothers to 4 mountains as rain deities (frogs)	gives the 4 rainmaking Mams or Lightnings their tasks	assigns 4 rain boys to 4 directions
multiplies maize by censing mother’s corn crib	institutes agricultural ritual	
feeds destitute mother with maize, cacao (*chilate*) and fowl	feeds destitute mother with maize	
gives fruit trees[42]	gives fruit trees[43]	
	voyage into the sea	voyage into the sea
struggle with father’s murderer (Bronze King)	struggle with father’s murderers (Lightnings)	struggle with father’s murderers
retrieves rain instruments from animals including armadillo		takes rain instruments from animals including armadillo
retrieves lightning sword from crocodile’s beak	removes lightning tongue from crocodile’s beak	removes lightning tongue from crocodile’s beak
tries to resurrect father; an incident interrupts the resurrection	tries to resurrect father; an incident interrupts the resurrection (father becomes deer)	resurrects father and transforms him (father becomes donkey)
becomes rainmaker	becomes rainmaker	
beats rain drum to summon wind deity; strikes rain from clouds with lightning sword	beats the turtle drum to summon Hurricane; provokes lightning and thunder by striking a serpent	
rearranges everything to make it rain	admonishes the Whirlwind; empowers and instructs the Lightnings	arranges everything to make it rain
world becomes light	it becomes light everywhere	

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Nahualtectli (Miraculous Lord), is labeled a "rain deity";[44] yet it is clear from the tale that he is not identified with the rain as such, and should, therefore, rather be called a rainmaking hero. As in the Kumix and maize hero tales, crucial structural elements of the Mesoamerican hero myth – the figure of the "Old Adoptive Mother" and the avenging of the father, including the quest for his grave – reappear; the "Old Adoptive Mother" (Tlantepoxlama) has here become the hero's mother. The tale shares vital features with the maize hero myth (expedition into the sea, installment of the rain mechanism, providing rain deities with their instruments) as well as with the myth of Kumix (animals that have the rain in their power). In comparison to the Kumix myth, there is also one noteworthy difference: Whereas the rain implements originally belonged to Kumix's father and were only recuperated by his son, the Nahua hero is the first to invent them. So, by way of a thought experiment, one could try to think of him as being Kumix's father, rather than being on a par with Kumix himself.

Although the identity of the father's murderers is not revealed, it is probably relevant that the Nahua hero, once he has vanquished his enemies by causing an earthquake, is offered all sorts of food by them; the maize hero and his father, too, were offered food by their enemies (hostile lightning deities and representatives of drought). Nahualtectli next treads in the footsteps of his father by going into the sea to find the "Flor de Mar."[45] The father is resurrected and changed into a donkey (*burro*); the father's father is also resurrected, and changed into a turkey. Accompanied by his father's and grandfather's animal transformations, the hero sets out on his rainmaking expedition.

First, Nahualtectli comes upon the future rainmakers: four naked little boys that are watering the maize. Then he finds "those who have the water in their power": The armadillo with the mist stored in his hide-out, the crocodile with the lightning-tongue in his beak, and the turkey with the thunder in his crop or, possibly, stomach (*buche*).[46] The hero tricks them out of their possessions and changes the turkey into the songbird *acuaupipitz* (cf. Siméon 1963: 120, *pipitztli* "aquatic bird"). Then he ascended into the sky and "began to arrange everything for the rains to start," handing the little boys the capes he had woven as well as their rain-making implements (the thunder-crop/stomach to play with and the lightning-tongue). Once the rains thus initiated have finally stopped, the hero opens a container (*bule*) and lets out the armadillo's mist. – In the Kumix myth, the armadillo is similarly associated with an all-pervading humidity: He carries a package with the cloud cloths of the rain deities on his head, and where he walks, a fine rain is falling (López García 2010: 39).[47] As for the turkey, its use as a sacrificial animal in Mesoamerican rainmaking rites needs no comment; more specifically, along the Gulf Coast, a giant turkey is believed to live at the bottom of the sea and make noises sounding like thunder, thus also announcing the arrival of the rainy season (Stresser-Péan 2009: 534 f.).[48]

Pipil Rain Heroes

Nahualtectli's mother, Tlantepoxlama, recurs in the hero myth of the Pipil of Izalco, El Salvador (Schultze Jena 1935: 22–34, cf. 60 ff.; Campbell 1985: 895–910), as the hero's adoptive mother Tantepuslamat, whereas the little boys whom Nahualtectli instructed in the work of the rain deities are now promoted to the role of her adoptive children, called *tepehua* "sprinklers."[49] Just like the "angels"

44 The name Nahualtectli is similar to what appears to be one of the rain deity's names in the Sahaguntine song of Tlaloc (Garibay Kintana 1958: 57), viz. Nahualpilli (Miraculous Prince). Aguirre Beltrán (1992: 97 f., 98, n. 4) assumes Nahualpilli to have been a prince and patron of the rainmaker *nahualli*'s.

45 This "Flor de Mar" is possibly a motif adopted from Ladino folklore. It could also, however, suggest the blue flower that serves as the guardian of the source of all terrestrial waters in the Pipil hero myth to be discussed next (Schultze Jena 1935: 61).

46 Spanish *buche* can mean the crop of a bird or – most often in the case of mammals – the stomach. In another Guerrero-Nahua tale (Neff Nuixa 2008: 328), such *buches* are suspended in a tree to amuse a young rain deity: "When it rains they swell up and the drops make them sound like small drums." Neff identifies these *buches* as turkey stomachs. The Sorcerer's Apprentice of a Yucatec tale (Terán Contreras y Rasmussen 2008: 285), devoured by the rain god's turkeys, is recovered from their *buches*.

47 The armadillo has important aquatic associations: It is known for its habit of crossing streams by walking over the bottom of the water, and to grub in the earth during rainstorms (cf. Fought 1972: 163–166).

48 A role similar to that of Nahualtectli may have been played by the Mixtec the hero Nine-Wind, who, in the Vienna Codex, can be seen to carry the celestial waters. Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2007: 78 f. and fig. 3.5) read the pictographic passage concerned as follows: "The Great Lord 'Plumed Serpent' took charge of the heavenly waters / and so caused the rain to fall, the seasons to come, / for all the mountains, all the rocks, all the rivers, all the plains, / all the towns and nations that form Ñuu Dzaui [Nation of the Rain God, i.e., the Mixtec nation] / … / for both oceans, with waves covered with foam."

49 This view of rainmaking deities as "sprinklers" is widespread in Mesoamerica. For example, the Chaakob rain gods of the Yucatan are called Ah Hoyaob (*aj jooya'o'ob*), mean-

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of the Kumix myth, these "Sprinkler Boys" are divided into Junior – who is the tale's true hero – and his older brothers; in view of the geographical proximity of Pipil and Ch'orti', this parallel division may not be coincidental. The rivalry between the Ch'orti' hero and his brothers also recurs. Initially the "Sprinkler Boys" act in unison, confronting Tantepuslamat and her lover, but then they get opposed. Junior splits the Maize Mountain with his lightning, but gets stuck, and his older brothers rob him of the largest maize ears; again, when "Junior" becomes a successful maize cultivator, his older brothers try to rob him of his harvest. Junior outwits them, however, and finally shares his sowing seeds with his brothers.[50] – Schultze Jena (1935: 20) already pointed out the parallel with the Aztec myth about Nanahuatl, the god who split the Maize Mountain and then was robbed of the maize by the rain deities (Lehmann 1974: 339 f.); and in one variant, the Pipil boy is indeed called Nanahuatzin (Campbell 1985: 894–910). Thus, Ch'orti' Kumix is comparable to Pipil Nanahuatzin.

Kumix and the Gulf Coast Maize Hero

It has been shown that the identity of the Mesoamerican heroes that bring the rain is not homogeneous: Among the protagonists of the tales above are ancestral human beings as well as characters that are consubstantial with the elements of maize and rain. There can be but little doubt, however, that the mythological complex that comes closest to the Kumix myth is that of the Gulf Coast maize hero, a resemblance including very specific incidents and details (see Table 1). If the Kumix that multiplies the maize were to be viewed as another maize deity, then his action as a rain bringer would make him directly comparable to the maize heroes of the Gulf Coast. This is apparently the position taken by Chinchilla Mazariegos (2011: 48–51), who, in an important iconographic study of Mayan hero myths, speaks of "Kumix and other Mesoamerican maize heroes," while emphasizing the structural similarities between the Ch'orti' hero myth and the Gulf Coast maize hero myth, including Kumix's function as a rainmaker. Although Kumix's father is not explicitly stated to have been changed into a deer, like the father of the maize hero – and thus to represent the hunting stage preceding agriculture – the episode of his failed resurrection does recur, and is suggested to have carried the same message (Chinchilla Mazariegos 2011: 162 f.). Yet, it should also be noted that the Guatemalan scholar refrains from entirely reducing Kumix to the role of a maize hero.[51]

A view of Kumix as the Ch'orti' maize hero would indeed present difficulties. Whereas the maize hero repeatedly changes into the maize he personifies, Kumix never does so. Unlike the maize hero myth, the Kumix myth insists on its hero's role as a blowgunner and deer hunter. Kumix's older brothers are usually absent from the Gulf Coast myth; instead, they are characteristic of the "Twins" of the Popol Vuh and of the Sun "Juniors" of Tzotzil-Tzeltal, Ch'ol, and Mam-Kanjob'al hero myth.[52] The sea that plays such a dominant role in the maize hero myth, is, like the turtles, virtually absent from the Ch'orti' myth; the hero's enemies are not identifiable as rain and lightning deities but are rather associated with drought; and instead of delegating his rainmaking powers to the rain deities, while remaining a maize deity himself, Kumix has become incorporated with the rain deities as another rain deity.

Admittedly, it would, notwithstanding these objections, still be possible to hypothesize that the Ch'orti' hero myth developed out of a Mayan maize hero myth. But there is another, more fundamental point to consider as well. It has been shown that narratives about rain bringers such as Nahualtectli and Nanahuatzin show strong resemblances to the maize hero myth without their protagonists being identical with the maize deity. Despite the similarity of the Kumix and maize hero myths, the *bricolage* (montage technique) at work in the construction of hero myths – to which Chinchilla Mazariegos has rightly called attention – makes it hard to reliably draw inferences concerning the identity of the hero from structural similarities and episodical correspondences alone.

Kumix and the Spirit of the Seeds

Even though Kumix cannot directly be equated with the Gulf Coast maize hero, his connection to the maize is obvious from his myth, and may have also been expressed by certain ritual customs (Hull

ing "sprinklers," since they are said to sprinkle the water of the sky from their gourds (Villa Rojas 1945: 102).

50 The rivalry episode concerning the treatment of the maize kernels has equally been incorporated into the maize hero myth (Maize Hero versus Lightning; García de León 1968: 351–352) and is told as a separate story concerning Thunderbolt and Hurricane (Foster 1945: 196).

51 Instead, Chinchilla Mazariegos (2011: 30, 146) appears to conceive of Kumix as a blend of sun and maize hero, in line with a K'iche' kenning for creation, viz. "dawning and sowing."

52 All these older brothers are finally changed into animals, whether frogs, monkeys, or other animals of the woods.

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2009: 134 f.). Moreover, Kumix makes his appearance in an important myth about the "Spirit of the Seeds" and the origin of agricultural ritual. This is one of three Ch'orti' narratives, including the tale of Kumix itself and the "Dance of the Giants," that treat of a hero avenging the murder of his father, a parallelism that appears to have facilitated crossovers from one mythological complex to the other. Thus, one finds Kumix assimilated to the hero of the "Dance of the Giants" (see next section), but also connected, and arguably assimilated to the son of the "Spirit of the Seeds." This "Spirit of the Seeds," or Ikb'en, described by Wisdom (1940: 439) as the Earth God – the "personification of fertilization" – is more commonly viewed as referring to the seeds of all cultivated plants in the maize field, first of all the maize itself. According to explanations offered by the *padrinos* (Girard 1995: 398 f.), Ikb'en was killed by his enemies, so that his blood, equated with rain, fertilized the earth at the foot of the cross,[53] and gave birth to the maize: "From him was born the Child."[54] This "Son of the Lord" killed all of his father's enemies, save one, who "went about disturbing the people." At this point of the story, Kumix is explicitly mentioned: "The angel Cume sent snakes to bite the evil man and did not let him drink water." Although the passage is not unambiguous, Kumix Angel might conceivably be another name for the "Son of the Lord"; and it has been argued elsewhere (Hull 2009: 132 f., 136 f.) that Kumix Angel effectively became equated with the son of Ikb'en.[55] Additionally, it is only after Kumix magically creates corn for his mother that she tells him that he has turned out to be "just like his father" (cf. Hull 2009: 136). In the myth that is proper of Kumix, however, the father does not regenerate and his son's effort to resuscitate him fails.

Kumix and the Sun

Kumix's heterogeneous, heroic nature can also explain without contradiction why he should be compared, or even assimilated, to the sun. Kumix's status as a solar deity has been argued departing from a comparison with the famous Ch'orti' "Dance of the Giants" mentioned above, a syncretic adaptation of the struggle between David and Goliath that has the peculiarity of splitting up the hero character in two distinct "Gavites," or "Davids." Girard (1979: 287, 298–300) argues that one of the two Gavites evinces a solar nature; that the solar nature of this Gavite results from his assimilation to Kumix (Girard 1995: 401–404); and that Kumix is consequently the solar deity himself.[56] In support, he adduces an important version of the myth written down by the *padrino* Anastasio de León for the missionary linguist Helen Oakley, in which Kumix is twice called "Gavite," and is stated finally to change into the sun (Girard 1995: 403 f.).

To put Kumix's solar status in its proper perspective, two things may be noted. The Gavite appellation first of all appears to arise from a convergence of plots, since it crops up when Kumix is confronting the "Bronze King," conceivably a transformation of Goliath in his bronze armour. There are other cases as well in which Kumix's name is exchanged for another.[57] Furthermore, Kumix's solar aspect – absent from other versions – comes to the fore only in the concluding part of the Oakley tale, as rendered by Girard (1995: 404): "The Angel Cume rises to the sky together with the good boys. The Angel Cume becomes a solar god. After that the face of the earth is illuminated; before, people lived in darkness."[58] In this, the Kumix version concurs with the Popol Vuh, where the Twins' solar and lunar transformations are only mentioned in the last lines, without the author(s) even taking the trouble of assigning the roles properly. No solar symbolism and no symbolic sun-moon contrasts lead up

53 In the relevant texts, the reference to Christ's sacrifice and its benefits is unmistakable. For other syncretic Ch'orti' accounts of Christ's Passion, see López García (2010: 64). These accounts are similar to Nahua prayers from the Sierra Norte de Puebla (Segre 1987: 67 f.), in which the rain is equated with the blood of Christ and the maize with his body.

54 "The Child" (*El Niño*) usually denotes the maize god, represented in the sanctuaries by the sculpture of a child with long hair (Girard 1995: 197, 213, 237, and 229 Figs. 106–107).

55 It deserves mentioning that Girard (e.g., 1995: 197, 401, 404) considers Kumix to be a maize god on a par with Hunahpu.

56 "The life and miracles of the Angel Cume, civilizing hero, *solar god* and god of Maize … is dramatized, as seen, in the Dance of the Giants, in the rites of the agrarian worship and those of the *solar worship*" (emphasis added). The Gavite-Kumix identification represents a later insight of Girard; it is not part of his original, extensive presentation and analysis of the dance drama (Girard 1949/I: 351–384).

57 Examples of such substitutions are "Gabriel" (Hull 2003: 222 f.), "Miguel" (Dary Fuentes (1986: 299), "Jesus" (Hull n. d.: Text 47, line 438), and – strikingly, in view of the deep poverty of the Ch'orti' area – "Job" (López García 2010: 56). For the specific convergence with Gavite, there is a parallel in the mythology of the Hummingbird hero, who in some versions is called "Oyew Achi" (Fierce Warrior), the protagonist of a different set of warrior tales (Braakhuis 2010: 93 ff.).

58 In Girard's summary of the Oakley tale, the "good boys" were not mentioned previously. They seem to refer to the four hundred boys, mentioned in the Popol Vuh Twin myth, who became the Pleyades, and who have a Ch'orti' counterpart in the "Angels who lift up the Lord" on the day of the sun's first passage through the zenith, an event marking the beginning of the rainy season (Girard 1979: 77; 1995: 100 f.).

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to these final transformations. Therefore, the solar identifications may have the prime purpose of symbolizing the ascendancy finally gained by the hero; the incidental solar identifications of the Mixe hero, Kondoy, and of the Popoloca hero, Xigu, are other cases in point (Barabas 2006: 99; Jäcklein 1974: 276). The Q'eqchi' Sun and Moon myth offers a particularly instructive case. It has many versions among other Mayan groups, but only in a very restricted set, in which the hero gains ascendancy over the mountain deity whose daughter he had abducted, does he finally change into the Sun (Braakhuis 2010: 263, 304). In such a way, the triumphant hero is suggested to have the power to initiate a new "Sun," or historical period.

Summary and Conclusions

The Ch'orti'-Mayan Kumix myth belongs to a group of Mesoamerican hero myths characterized by a focus on rain and maize. As a "Junior Angel" associated with the finer rains, the Ch'orti' hero is comparable to the Kakchiquel "Junior Angel," a novice rainmaker not yet entitled to produce the heavier rains. Kumix's function as a junior rain deity appears to result from his having been assigned a position within an already existing temporal classification of rain deities. Such an assignment is in its turn made possible by a Mesoamerican concept according to which human rainmakers can become assimilated to rain deities and get included in the latter's celestial cohorts. A possible implication of this is that human rainmakers and rain-bringing children may also be assigned places within the two Ch'orti' classes of senior and junior "Angels."

The hero Kumix Angel does not appear to be a primary personification of the maize and the rain and thus to be a "maize deity" or a "rain deity." As a bringer of rain, Kumix is to be situated somewhere between the Guerrero-Nahua hero Nahualtectli, maize heroes of the Gulf Coast such as Dhipaak, Chicomexochitl, and Homshuk, and the "Junior Angel" of the Pipil, Nanahuatzin. The Guerrero-Nahua and the Pipil-Nahua hero also share the Tlentepusilama as a maternal figure, corresponding to the K'ech'uj, the "old woman" (or, with a Nahua loan word, *ilama*) who adopts Kumix. Whereas Nahualtectli installs the pluvial mechanism without clearly being a rain deity himself, the maize hero is sometimes considered to belong with the rain deities; and the Pipil hero Nanahuatzin is a rain deity by essence. Maize and rain being complementary, the maize hero facilitates rainmaking and makes rain, while the rain hero opens the Maize Mountain and cultivates the maize. Hero myths perhaps could be measured by their distance to the maize hero myth or the rain hero myth and by the degree to which their antagonists have been assimilated to these personified forces of nature.

Among the Ch'orti', the broad parallelism between the sets of Kumix's father and Kumix; Ikb'en (the "Spirit of the Seeds") and the maize child; and Gavite's father (called the "White Giant") and Gavite,[59] as well as the interconnections between their respective tales, seems to have led to secondary assimilations of the figures involved. It would be methodologically wrong to take such incidental assimilations as tokens of an essential identity. Considering everything, it would not seem an unlikely hypothesis that Kumix represents (or in the past represented) the type of the indigenous savior, whose sanctuary may have been visited to pray and sacrifice not just for rain and a good harvest but also for health and other benefits.[60]

Within the Mayan area, the Kumix Angel myth represents the clearest instance of the myth of the rain-bringing hero. As such, it also seems to be the only Mayan myth that comes close to the maize hero myth of the Gulf Coast, the relevance of which for pre-Hispanic Mayan religion has been argued elsewhere (Braakhuis 2009; Chinchilla Mazariegos 2011). This situation is somewhat surprising, since one would expect rain and rainmaking to come to the fore in other Mayan hero myths as well. The rain deity complex of the Yucatec Maya, for example, is no less developed than that of the Ch'orti'; and just as the Ch'orti' have the myth of Kumix, the Yucatec Mayas have their own hero myth in the tale of Ez (better known as the "Dwarf of Uxmal"). But although Ez "Magician" carries a name that is near-identical to that of Nahualtectli "Miraculous Lord," who is a bringer of rain, the myth of Ez focuses almost exclusively on the struggle with a foreign king.[61] Geography and regional history could thus seem to have colluded to almost efface one of the most important Mayan rainmaker myths.

59 Girard argues that the White Giant and the Gavites correspond to Vucub-Hunahpu and the Twin heroes (Girard 1949/I: 380; 1995: 395, 397).

60 Examples of such localized heroes are Juan K'anil on K'anil Mountain (Borgstede 2010: 387 f.), Oyew Achi on Huyl Mountain (Paz Pérez 1994: 17), Kong Hoy in a cave of Malinche Mountain (Barabas 2006: 99–101), and Fane Kantsini in another cave near Jilotepequillo (Barabas 2006: 99–101).

61 For a discussion of the connection between Yucatec, Ch'orti', and Gulf Coast hero myths from a diffusionist perspective, see Boot (2011).

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