

# Maya Creator Gods

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The primary purpose of world view is to give a sense of order and control to life. At its most basic level, world view explains the creation of life and provides a means for maintaining and renewing it. The Maya were corn farmers living in a tropical environment with a distinct wet and dry season that dictated the timing of the corn cycle. This shaped their world view. The stories concerning the creation of the earth and the first human beings focus on the establishment of the rain and corn cycle and on the creator deities who brought about these cycles.

The Classic Maya had a standardized set of creator gods, the evidence for which is embedded in their calendar system. The Maya believed that each of the intervals within such units of time as the day, the night, the solar year, the k'atun, the lunar cycle and the greater Venus cycle was ruled by a different deity or set of deities. Their calendar system was not merely a method for tracking the various celestial cycles, but a complex system used to ascertain which of the many deities were ruling a particular moment. As Thompson (1950) and Kelley (1976) have demonstrated, the gods of the time periods were standardized across the Classic Maya realm and venerated. These calendar-related deities were worshipped for more than just their roles in divination; they also played a key part in creating, ordering and renewing the world and all the beings within it.

The most complete description of the beginning of human life is given in the *Popol Vuh* of the Postclassic Quiché Maya. This narrative relates the deeds of three generations of deities. The creator grandparents of the sea and the lightning bolt gods of the sky were the first generation of gods. The second generation consisted of the creator grandparents' sons Hun Hunahpu and Vucub Hunahpu. Hun Hunahpu had two wives and two sets of sons. Hunahpu and Xbalanque were the youngest sons by the goddess Blood Woman. Most of these deities have Classic Period parallels (Coe 1973, 1977, 1989; Taube 1985, 1992, D. Tedlock 1985, Bassie-Sweet 1996, 1999). Although it primarily focuses on the deeds of Hunahpu and Xbalanque and the establishment of the celestial cycles, the *Popol Vuh* briefly describes or alludes to many core myths. By comparing Classic Period imagery and contemporary beliefs with the *Popol Vuh* story line, these basic myths and their associated deities can be fleshed out and expanded. Several new interpretations will be presented here. One is that the *Popol Vuh* god called Feathered Serpent was identified with sheet lightning and was parallel to the Waterlily Bird Serpent found in Maya art. It will also be demonstrated that Vak' (the laughing falcon of the *Popol Vuh*) was parallel to the Principal Bird Deity of the Classic Period, who was the bird manifestation of the creator grandfather. A third new interpretation is that the lightning bolt gods of the sky called Juraqan, Ch'ipi Lightning Bolt and Raxa Lightning Bolt were parallel to the Palenque Triad of gods referred to as GI, GII and GIII, respectively. This research is a condensed form of a larger study of Maya agricultural gods which is in preparation. Before presenting these arguments, an overview of Maya deities and world view is in order.

## The Nature of Deities

In mythological times, the deities underwent birth, stages of growth, rites of passage, transformations, death and re-birth. They created cornfields, planted and harvested corn, performed divinations, conducted business, fought, formed alliances and intermarried. From all of these actions and interactions a hierarchy was formed in which members had overlapping duties and responsibilities. The behavior of the deities was a model for appropriate human conduct and provided justifications and rationalization for elite activities, social hierarchy and political structure. Maya elites are frequently illustrated wearing the costumes of certain deities, including face masks in the likeness of the god. When humans donned the costume of a deity, they assumed the traits of the deity or were temporarily transformed into the deity (Houston and Stuart (1996).

Deities could be manifested in a variety of forms that reflected their spheres of control and responsibilities. These manifestations could take the form of plants, animals, natural formations and phenomena such as wind, lightning, thunder and fire. The Maya divided animals into four major categories based on means of locomotion: crawlers (lizards, turtles, snakes, etc.), walkers (mammals), flyers (insects, birds and bats) and swimmers (fish) (N. Hopkins 1997, personal communication). I believe that each of the major deities had at least one manifestation from each of these categories.

The notion that a Maya deity could have multiple aspects or manifestations is a well-established fact. For example, many of the major gods had four different aspects, one for each direction. On K530<sup>1</sup>, two sets of such gods are illustrated. In this scene, four Chaak deities and four God N deities are shown interacting. Each of these four deities embodied the central concept associated with the god but each aspect had a slightly different responsibility or trait associated with his particular direction. Ethnohistorical evidence suggests that the four directional aspects of a god were viewed as siblings who were ranked into a hierarchy just as siblings were in Maya society (Tozzer 1941:135).

The natural phenomena and animal manifestations of a god are more difficult to understand. Some researchers believe that a god transformed into his manifestations at various points in time while others believe that these manifestations occurred together simultaneously. Evidence exists for both interpretations and they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Humans and deities transforming from one being into another is a well-attested belief in Maya culture (Houston and Stuart 1999). On the other hand, in the world view of some contemporary Maya communities, the human soul simultaneously exists in the body of the individual and in the body of several supernatural co-essences who live within a sacred mountain cave. An individual can have as many as 13 different co-essences, and they can have the form of animals or natural phenomena such as lightning bolts, meteors and whirlwinds. While ordinary people have little control, the spiritually strong can direct their co-essences to perform certain functions such as protecting the community from supernatural forces. An individual and his many co-essences exist simultaneously.

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<sup>1</sup> K-numbers refer to rollout photographs of Maya ceramics in Justin Kerr's Maya Vase Archive at [www.famsi.org](http://www.famsi.org).

In Maya art, there is a supernatural bird of prey with the attributes of God D (Itzamnaah), which will be discussed below. Hellmuth (1987a, 1987b) has argued that this Itzamnaah bird represents God D transforming into a bird of prey. However, it is just as likely that this bird was the bird manifestation of God D that existed simultaneously with him and that the God D traits worn by this bird simply indicate he is God D.

Evidence that different manifestations of a god could interact with each other is found in the pottery scene on K7226. This image shows God D and God N sitting side by side and gesturing to one another. David Stuart has demonstrated that God D and God N are manifestations of the same god (see below). The ability of the deity manifestations to interact with each other is an important point that is relevant for understanding the sea gods that are named in the *Popol Vuh*. This narrative begins by giving a long list of paired male and female god names:

Framer and Shaper

She Who Has Borne Children and He Who Has Engendered Sons

Hunahpu Possum and Hunahpu Coyote

Great White Peccary and Coati

Sovereign and Quetzal Serpent

Heart of the Lake and Heart of the Sea

Creator of the Blue-Green Plate and Creator of the Blue-Green Bowl

Midwife and Patriarch

Xpiyacoc and Xmucane

Embracer and Shelterer

Twice Midwife and Twice Patriarch

Later in the text, the pairs Hunahpu Possum/Hunahpu Coyote, White Great Peccary/Coati, and Creator of the Blue-Green Plate/Creator of the Blue-Green Bowl are specifically said to be names for the creator grandparents called Xpiyacoc and Xmucane. Tedlock (1996) views the pairs Framer/Shaper, She Who Has Borne Children/He Who Has Engendered Sons, and Sovereign/Quetzal Serpent as a set of deities who are distinct from Xpiyacoc and Xmucane. Christenson (2000) also views Framer/Shaper and Sovereign/Quetzal Serpent as distinct gods but sees She Who Has Borne Children/He Who Has Engendered Sons as manifestations of Xpiyacoc and Xmucane. The principal reason for dividing these deities into separate groups is that Framer/Shaper and Sovereign/Quetzal Serpent speak with the creator grandparents. Given the evidence for interaction between various manifestations of a deity, it seems to me that the simplest explanation of the *Popol Vuh* list is that it names the different manifestations of the creator grandparents.

## In the Beginning

The *Popol Vuh* begins by describing the universe before the appearance of the earth and before the creation of human beings. In this primordial age, there was a vast sea of fresh water with a sunless and starless sky above it. This sea was the source of all water, and within it lived Xpiyacoc and Xmucane, the creator grandparents. In Maya culture, grandparents were valued and consulted for their knowledge, wisdom and experience. Although physically weaker, they were considered spiritually stronger than younger members of the society. The creator grand-

parents were the original priests, diviners, healers and craftsmen. The story says very little about the nature of the sky but indicates that the sky gods were lightning bolts. It begins by referring to an entity called the Heart of the Sky and saying that his name was Juraqan. Then it rather cryptically states that Lightning Bolt Juraqan was first, Ch'ipi (youngest child) Lightning Bolt was second, Raxa (sudden or green/blue) Lightning Bolt was third and that together they were the Heart of the Sky.

The sea and sky were not the only places in the Maya universe. Below the sea was a region called Xibalba “place of fright” that was ruled by two gods called One Death and Seven Death. Life in Xibalba was similar to life on earth. Like humans, the death gods had wives and children, they feasted, played ball and conducted business. In their council house, One Death and Seven Death presided over a host of death gods whose names reflected the manner in which they killed people. Adjacent to the council house were a number of buildings known as Darkness House, Shivering House, Jaguar House, Bat House, Blade House and Fire House that no average person could enter without dying. A good portion of the *Popol Vuh* story involves the subordination of the Underworld lords by the hero twins, and this epic battle was a paradigm for territorial warfare.

After the creation of the earth, the *Popol Vuh* describes one of the routes from the surface of the earth to the Xibalba council house via a cave passageway located at the eastern horizon. This underground route passed through steep canyons and rivers of birds, scorpions, blood and pus. The Maya region is primarily a limestone shelf that is honeycombed with underground rivers and impressive cave systems. The cave was the transition zone from the safe human space on the surface of the earth to the dangerous supernatural space of the gods, and the Maya performed important rituals at these sacred access points (Bassie-Sweet 1991, 1996). Although many researchers refer to any supernatural location below the surface of the earth as the underworld, the *Popol Vuh* clearly indicates that the sea and the underworld were thought to be distinct locations and that they were inhabited and ruled by very different kinds of deities. Many researchers also equate a cave with the underworld but, in my opinion these portals to supernatural space were first and foremost access points to the creator grandparents of the sea and to the essential resources that those deities controlled. In this paper, I reserve the term underworld for the domain of the death lords.

### The Appearance of the Earth

In council with each other, the *Popol Vuh* deities of the sky and sea decided to create beings that would honor and respect them. Their first act was to make a place for these beings to live. They called forth the surface of the earth from the primordial sea and covered its surface with vegetation:

Then was created therefore  
The earth  
By them  
Merely their word  
Caused to be its  
Creation.  
That it be created

Earth,  
“Earth,” they said.  
Immediately then it was created.  
Like merely cloud,  
Merely mist,  
Its creation then,  
Its formation.  
Then was asked to come from water  
The mountains.  
Straightaway great mountains  
Came to be. (Christenson 2000)<sup>2</sup>

This act irrevocably established the sea and its deities as the initial source of life and its water as a fundamental element in the life process. This is a concept shared by many cultures, based on the role that water plays in the annual renewal of life.

The *Popol Vuh* refers to the measuring out of the earth’s surface into a quadrilateral space (D. Tedlock 1985:244). The earth visually appears to be a flat disk, but the Maya believed that on this flat disk was a quadrilateral space (Bassie-Sweet 1996). The points where the solstice sun rises and sets defined the corners of this quadrilateral world, while the sides were demarcated by four mythological mountains. The sides were also envisioned to be a rope or path that formed a protective perimeter preventing supernatural forces from entering and harming humans.

The idea of a quadrilateral human world originated in the action of making a cornfield, for it was during this annual process dictated by the sun’s cycle that wild space was first turned into human space. The Maya believed that the deities created and destroyed the quadrilateral world several times and would eventually destroy and re-create it again. This destruction and re-creation cycle was also rooted in the corn cycle, for each year the wild space is destroyed by cutting and burning, and then it is transformed into cultivated human space. The notion that the perimeter of the quadrilateral world was a protective rope or path was also related to the corn field, for the field was often measured out using a rope, and it frequently had a fire path cut around it.

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<sup>2</sup> Edmonson and Tedlock translations:

So then this the earth was created by them,  
Only their word was the creation of it.  
To create the earth, “Earth,” they said.  
Immediately it was created,  
It was just like a cloud,  
Like a mist then,  
The whirlwind,  
Then the mountain was asked to come from the water.  
Straightaway there were great mountains. (Edmonson 1971:12)

And then the earth arose because of them [the sky deities], it was simply their word that brought it forth. For the forming of earth they said “Earth”. It arose suddenly, just like a cloud, like a mist, now forming and unfolding. Then the mountains were separated from the water, all at once the great mountains came forth (D. Tedlock 1985:73).

The Maya use paired words to describe many things. The earth is often called mountain/valley.<sup>3</sup> Although mountain/valley appears to be a simple description of the hills and valleys that make up the majority of the earth's surface, it is used in contexts where the contrast is between mountain as a wild, dangerous, supernatural space and valley as cultivated, safe, human space. In virtually every culture there is a need to create territorial boundaries to demarcate a safe human space from the wild. The inhospitable nature of mountains made them a logical choice for wild, supernatural space.

At first glance, the idea of mountain versus valley seems to be a highland concept because the distinction between valley and mountain is so pronounced in this region. However, in the lowlands the traditional agricultural practice is to leave the vegetation on the hilltops (Altran 1993). When the field is returned to fallow, these small mountains of wild vegetation regenerate the lower slopes and fields. The distinction between wild and human space, and between mountain and valley, is maintained.

### The Mountains

Each of the four mythological mountains was inhabited by a grandfather deity (God N) who was thought to be the embodiment of the mountain. When the great mountains were asked to come from the sea, it was these mountain deities who were, in effect, being asked to come forth (their identification will be discussed below). Access to the mountain homes of these deities was through a cave opening located at the cardinal directions. These four cave openings created breaks in the perimeter of the quadrilateral world through which both destructive forces and essential elements could enter. For example, the Maya believed that diseases were brought by harmful winds that originated from these caves. On the other hand, the highly beneficial wind that fanned the fires of the milpa also came from these locations. It was thought that all the water of the world originated in the great sea on which the world floated, and that it came to the surface of the earth through these caves as well as those locations in the local landscape that represented the caves. In northern Yucatan, there is still a common belief that all cenote water (the water found at the base of a sinkhole) originates from a great pool of water beneath the earth.

The view that mountains, caves and the deities that inhabit them were the source of wind, lightning and water was based on visual observations. The numerous springs and streams which percolate up from the interior of a mountain, either through a cave opening or the ground itself, visually demonstrate that mountains are a primary source of water. Rising warm air forms clouds on the tops and slopes of mountains, leading to the conclusion that clouds and rain come from there. Mist invariably forms at the mouths of caves, reinforcing this belief. The cool breezes that blow from the mouths of caves help explain the belief that wind originates from there as well. During thunderstorms, the tops of mountains flash with lightning, leaving the impression that lightning comes from these sacred summits. Lightning is a natural source of fire. The concept that the water found in caves originated from the mythological sea was also based on observation. Many modern Maya when asked why they think there is a sea beneath

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<sup>3</sup> Hopkins (1996) identified such terms as metonyms in which the two best examples of a domain are used to represent it.

them respond that if one digs a hole deep enough there is water.

In order to create a safe human space, the Maya replicated the quadrilateral world model. For example, in Postclassic Yucatan the town was a quadrilateral space with four ritual entrances located on the sides of the town. These entrances were marked by piles of stone that represented the mountains of the grandfather deities. Idols representing these gods were found on top of these symbolic mountains. In addition to man-made locations, the Maya believed that the mountains and caves in the vicinity of the community also represented the four mythological mountains. These mountains and their deities defined the safe space of the community. By replicating the mountains of the horizon in their towns and designating sites in the natural landscape, the Maya created locations where offerings could be made to the deities to ensure the safe continuation of life. This ritual activity was not only structured according to the cosmological model but constantly validated that model (Sosa 1985).

### The Celestial Cycles

After the appearance of the surface of the earth, the next task of the creator deities was to prepare it for corn cultivation. The first step in this process was to establish the annual cycle of the sun and to synchronize it with that of the moon and Venus. The children and grandchildren of the creator grandparents took up residence on the surface of the earth and set forth to accomplish this task.

As noted, the children were called Hun Hunahpu and Vucub Hunahpu. Hun Hunahpu was married to Bone Woman, whose origins are not stated in the text. She bore Hun Hunahpu two children called One Batz and One Chuen. After the death of Bone Woman, Hun Hunahpu and Vucub Hunahpu journey to the underworld where they are defeated by the lords of death and sacrificed. Hun Hunahpu's head was placed in a tree which magically produced fruit in the form of Hun Hunahpu's gourd-like head.<sup>4</sup> Blood Woman (the daughter of an underworld lord) approached the tree, and Hun Hunahpu's gourd head spit in her hand and impregnated her. Blood Woman left the underworld and journeyed to Hun Hunahpu's household on the surface of the earth. A short time later, she gave birth to the hero twins called Hunahpu and Xbalanque. After subordinating their elder brothers and defeating a number of dangerous supernaturals living on the surface of the earth, the hero twins traveled to the Underworld and defeated the lords of death. They accomplished these deeds with the help of both their grandparents and the Heart of the Sky. Finally, the hero twins were able to rise up as the sun and full moon and begin the first cycles of these celestial bodies.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This is how the calabash or gourd tree came into being (Allen Christenson, personal communication 2001). In Classic Period imagery, the parallel god to Hun Hunahpu is the Corn God. He is illustrated with a bald, gourd-like head. In Tzotzil, the term for a bald person is gourd head (Robert Laughlin, personal communication 2001, 1975:398).

<sup>5</sup> The text only indicates that Xbalanque was identified with the moon, but the only phase of the moon that is identified as male in the Maya region is the full moon (Tedlock 1985:46), and the relationship between Hunahpu and Xbalanque echoes that of sun and full moon (Bassie-Sweet 1991:190).

## The Creation of Humans

The task of creating humans was also not a simple endeavor. While their children were trying to establish the celestial order, the creator deities were struggling to find a suitable material to transform into humans. Their first creations were not successful and they had to be destroyed. When the hero twins were in the underworld battling the Xibalba lords, four wild animals brought news of corn hidden within the great eastern mountain. These corn seeds were the buried remains of Bone Woman, Hun Hunahpu's first wife (Bassie-Sweet 1999, 2001). This goddess and her Classic Period counterpart, the Corn Goddess, represented the ear of corn and its seed. The discovery of corn within a mountain is widespread in the Maya area, and in many of these stories the corn was hidden under an immovable rock that had to be split open by a deity using a lightning bolt (Edmonson 1971:146; Thompson 1970).<sup>6</sup> Another consistent element is that this seed was originally white. When the lightning struck the stone, it singed and burnt some of the white corn, and this resulted in the creation of the other three colors of corn: yellow, red and black. The Maya still categorize corn according to these four colors. Bone Woman thus took on four manifestations representing the four kinds of corn.

After Xmucane ground some of this corn/bone into a dough and mixed it with water, the creator grandparents modeled it into the first human beings. These humans reproduced and populated the world, but they did so in darkness, for Hunahpu and Xbalanque were still in the underworld. The first four Quiché lineage heads journeyed to a city and received patron gods to guard their communities. After choosing a location and setting up their patron guardians in the surrounding landscape, the sun finally rose in the east and the annual rhythm of life began.

## The Eastern Mountain

In addition to being the direction of the rising sun, east is the direction of the prevailing winds in the lowlands, and the first heavy rains of the season originate from there. In contemporary Yucatan, there is a hierarchy of lightning and rain gods called Chaaks who live in caves and cenotes, and who bring the various kinds of lightning and rains. Anciently, the Classic Maya referred to the lightning bolt as *chahuk*, a term that has survived to modern times in the form of Ch'ol *chajk* and the more recognized Yucatec *chaak*. The Chaaks are categorized according to the kind of rain and lightning which they dispensed as well as their color and directional associations. The highest ranking Chaak resides at the eastern horizon, which is called the seat or trunk of the sky. All the important rain gods are said to gather at this location before going out to water the world at the beginning of the rainy season (Villa Rojas 1945). One way that the Chaaks dispensed rain was to fill a water jar or gourd with water from the cave. They would then fly across the sky, and as they emptied their container the rain would fall. The Virgin Mary, who is also associated with the moon, is thought to ride with the Chaaks as they travel across the sky bringing rain. The pouring of water from a container to dispense rain is also found in highland Guatemala as well as other parts of Mesoamerica (Rands 1955).

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<sup>6</sup> The Quiché still believe that a lightning bolt splits open the seed at germination (Allen Christenson, personal communication 2001).





Fig. 1

Lightning bolt deities called Chaaks have long been identified in Classic and Postclassic Period art (Coe 1978:76). In the Classic Period, a Chaak was a zoomorphic deity who wore a spiny oyster shell earring and often had serpents hanging out of his mouth (fig. 1; also K530). His portrait was employed to represent the word *chaak* “lightning bolt” (Stuart 1987) (fig. 2). Lightning bolts were used by various gods as weapons; in particular the lightning bolt was viewed as an axe. Maya axes usually consisted of a wooden handle with a stone blade. In some examples of the lightning axe, the handle takes the form of a serpent, which is consistent with the Maya belief that lightning can take the shape of a ser-



Fig. 2

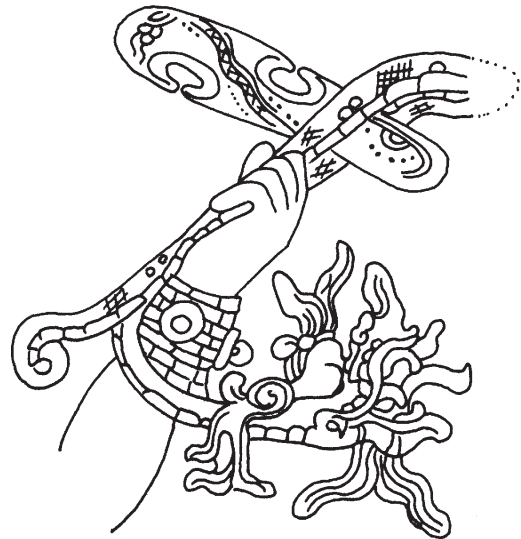


Fig. 3

pent (fig. 3). Chaak is frequently seen in Maya art swinging his axe, and in many of these scenes he wears an upside-down water jug around his neck, such as on K1003, K1653 and K2772 (see also fig. 1). These objects refer to his role in dispensing both the rains and the lightning bolts.



Fig. 4

In the Dresden Codex, Ix Chel (the creator grandmother/waning moon) is shown emptying water from her jar, which results in the flooding of the world (fig. 4). On Madrid Codex page 30a, Ix Chel and

Chaak pour water from their jars and dispense rain together (fig. 5). This is similar to the contemporary belief in which the Virgin Mary/moon goddess accompanies the Chaaks as they distribute the first rains of the season.

Given that the eastern mountain was the direction of the rising sun and the source of the first rains of the season, it is not surprising that the eastern mountain was identified with the discovery of corn.

The *Popol Vuh* does not specifically

state how the creator deities obtained the corn to make humans, but the name of the mountain was Paxil. In Quiché, *pax* means “break into pieces,” suggesting that the name Paxil is a reference to the breaking open of the corn stone by lightning (Edmonson 1965:87, 1971:146).<sup>7</sup> In the *Popol Vuh*, there was a supernatural called Earthquake (the second son of Seven Macaw) who lived on the surface of the earth during the era of the wooden people (Edmonson 1971:54-57, D. Tedlock 1985:99-101). This era preceded the act of breaking open the corn stone in Paxil Mountain and the creation of humans from corn. Earthquake claimed to be the creator of the earth, and he spent his days forming various mountains and then destroying them by stamping his foot on the ground. The text specifically says that Earthquake had to be stopped or human beings would not come into existence (D. Tedlock 1985:101, 1996:87). The task of defending Paxil and defeating Earthquake was given to Hunahpu and Xbalanque. To defeat Earthquake, the hero twins told him that they had seen a great mountain at the eastern horizon (“rising above all the other mountains”), and they challenged him to destroy it. On their journey to this mountain, they fed Earthquake a bird coated in earth, and this took away his power. By the time they reached the mountain, Earthquake was helpless. The creation of the first humans, which followed this event, was also said to have occurred at the eastern horizon,

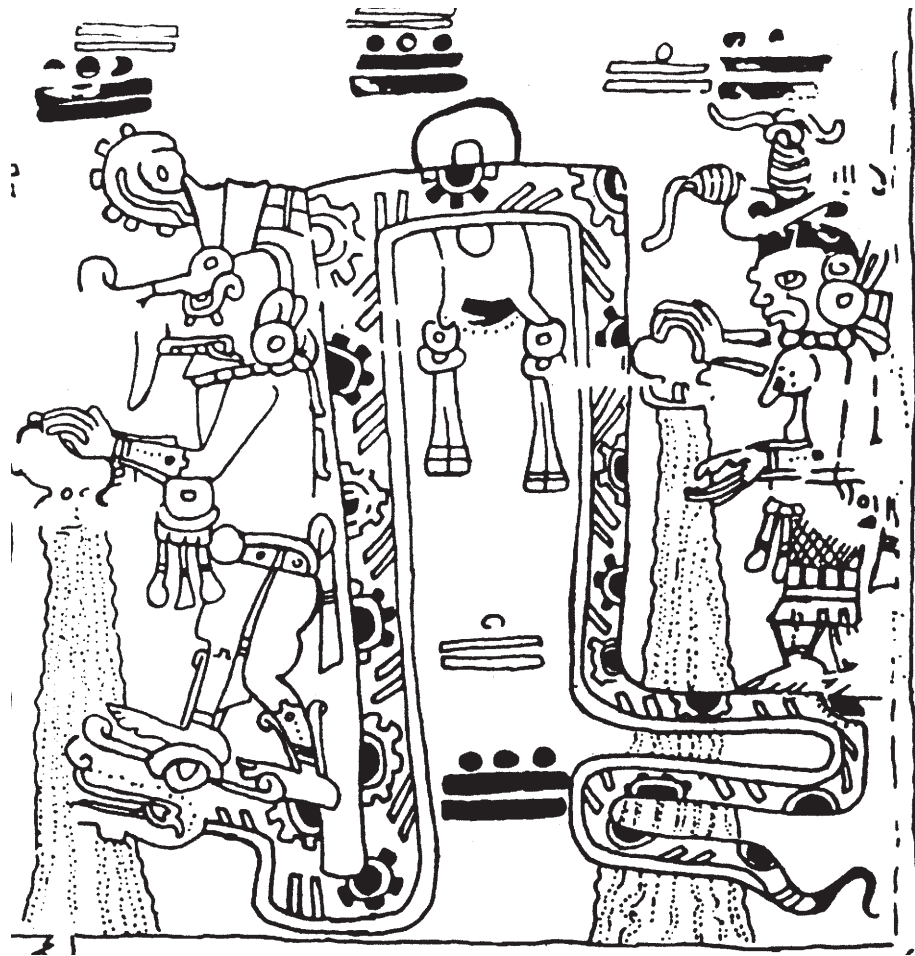


Fig. 5

<sup>7</sup> *Paxil* is translated as “Cleft” by Edmonson (1971:146). In his first translation, D. Tedlock (1985:328, 1996:288, 357) translated it as “Broken Place”, but in his later edition he adopted the Mam meaning of *pax* “split”.

that is, “at the rising of the sun” (Edmonson 1971:155). This strongly suggests that Paxil and the great eastern mountain were one in the same. The great eastern mountain may not have been referred to as Paxil in this section of the text because at the time of the Earthquake episode the rock within Paxil had not yet been broken open.

In the contemporary Mam region, the first corn obtained by humans is thought to have come from a specific mountain which is located just west of the Pan American Highway. It is known by several names including Paxa, Xepaxa and Paxil (Wagley 1941:20, Oakes 1951:244, 74; Miles 1981). In some stories, humans gathered the wild corn growing on the mountain, or obtained it from a cave or crevice. This mountain cave is also said to have a spring that is used for divinations related to the success of the corn cycle. It is also the place where rain ceremonies and petitions for the welfare of the corn are performed (Miles 1981:433-34). *Pax* means split in Mam. Oakes noted the similarity of this name to Paxil Mountain of the *Popol Vuh*, and Miles (1981) suggested they are one and the same place. Oakes (1951:244) noted that there is another mountain associated with the birth of corn near Nebaj. Other areas have their own version of the corn mountain (Thompson 1970:353), which suggests that many areas had a replication of this mythological location.

### Cave and Mountain Symbols

The symbols used in Classic period imagery to represent mountains and caves incorporate references to the eastern corn mountain. One of these symbols was nicknamed a Kawak Monster because it is decorated with elements found on the T528 sign that represents the day name Kawak (fig. 6). *Kawak*, a term popularized by Diego de Landa’s sixteenth-century account of

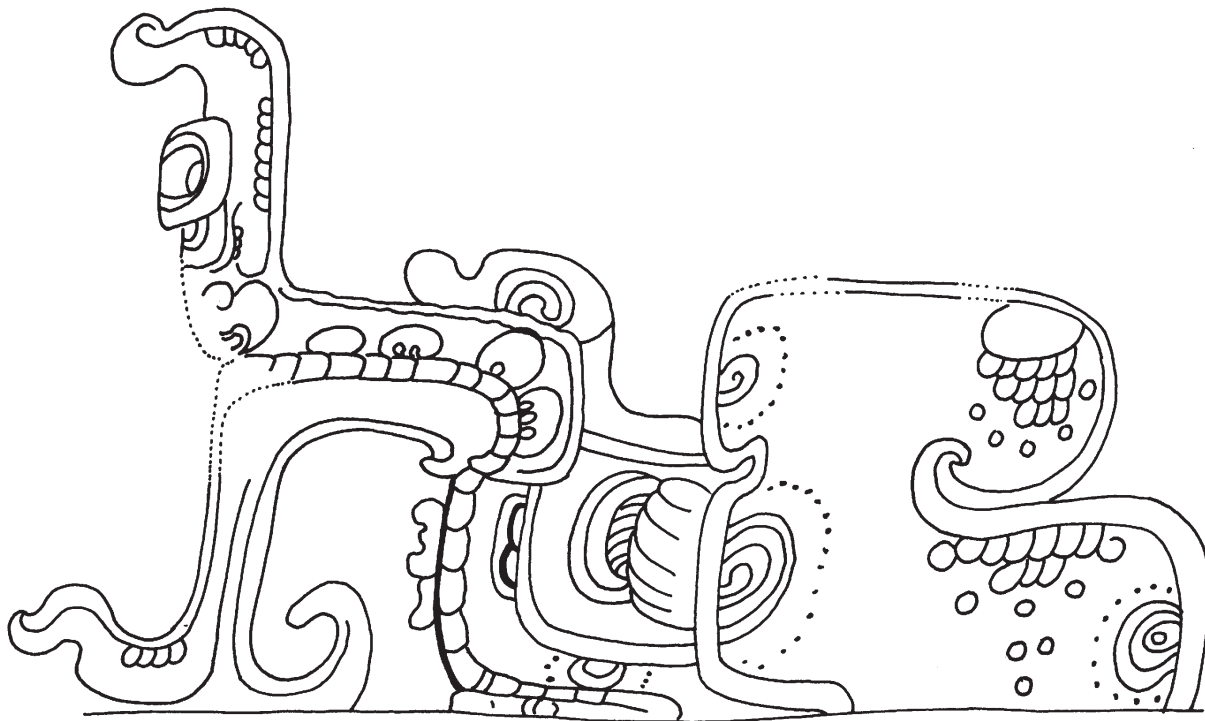


Fig. 6

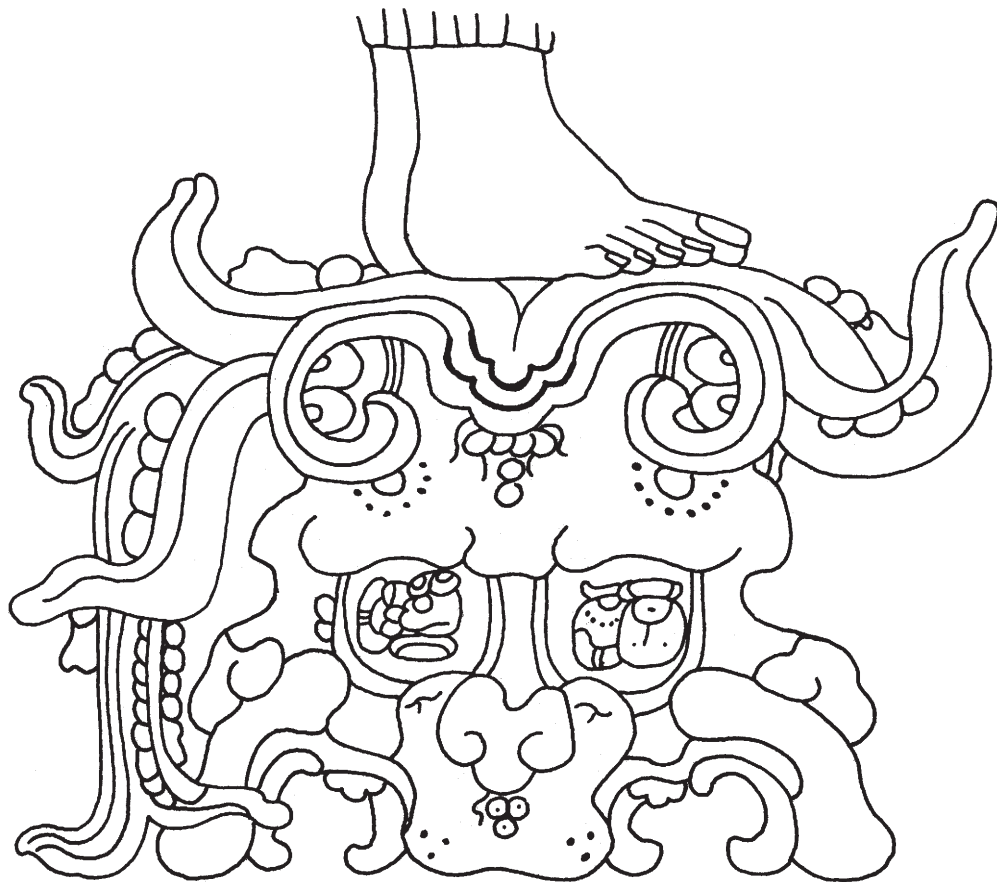


Fig. 7

the Maya calendar, is the Yucatecan cognate of Ch'olan *chahuk* "lightning bolt". Humans and gods are frequently enclosed by the Kawak Monster, which led to the conclusion that it likely represented a cave (Coe 1978, Taylor 1978). Epigraphers have identified the glyphs that represent the word *witz* "mountain," and the Kawak Monster illustrated on the Palenque Tablet of the Foliated Cross is labeled using one of these glyphs (Stuart 1987) (fig. 7). The head on this

symbolic mountain is split open creating a cave mouth, and corn foliage emerges from the split. This icon represents the mountain in which corn was found. In the hieroglyphic text, other signs that represent *witz* "mountain" incorporate the split and the *kawak* elements (fig. 8).

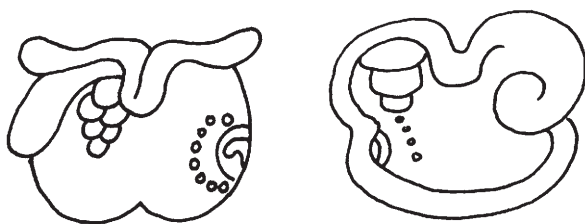


Fig. 8

The split on the Tablet of the Foliated Cross takes the form of a partial quatrefoil shape. This form is frequently used to represent the mouth of the

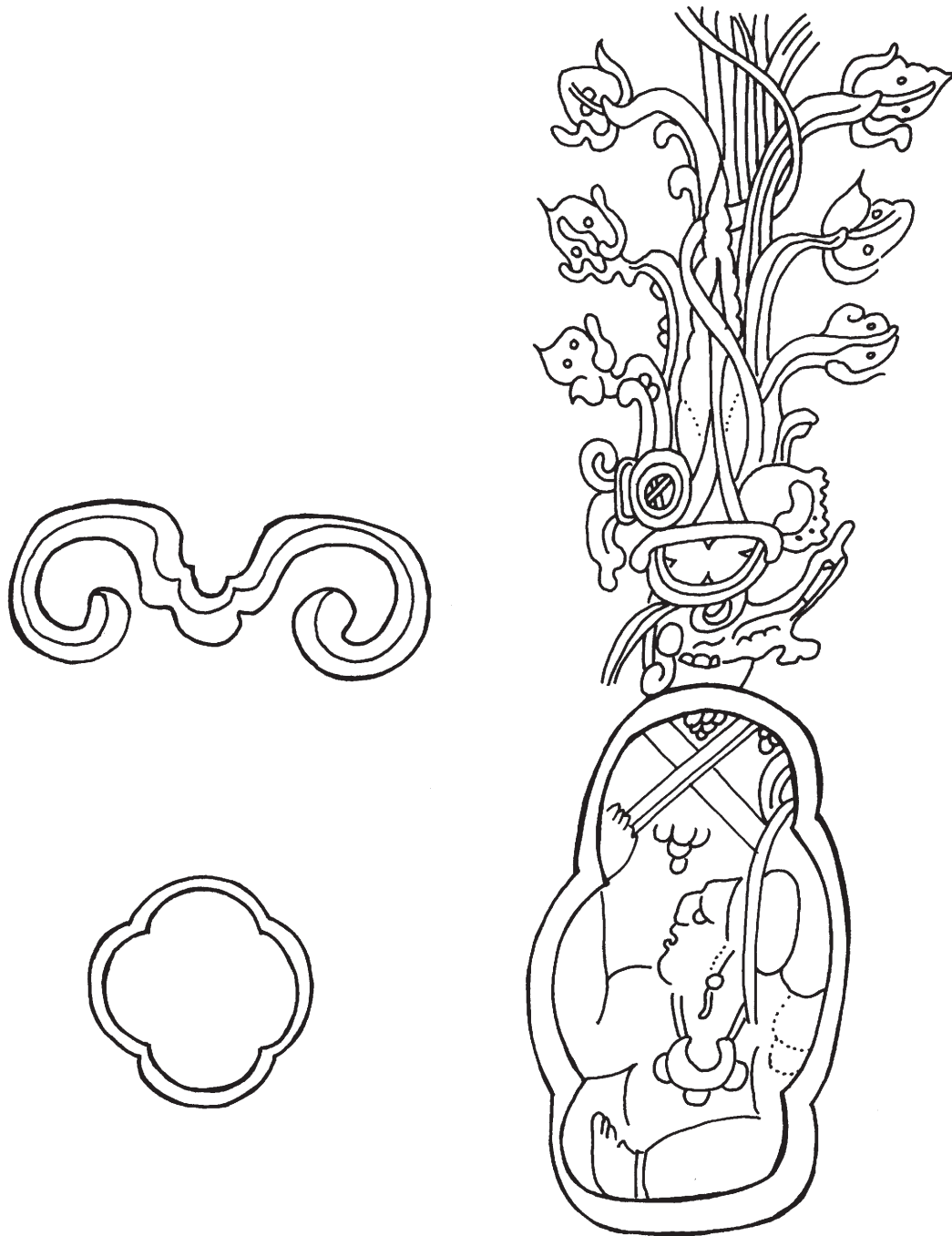


Fig. 9

cave (Coe 1978, Taylor 1978, Bassie-Sweet 1991) (fig. 9). It can be shown as a full frontal view or a partial side view with figures emerging from it or enclosed by it. The Maya also refer to the planting hole as a cave. In the planting process, a man drives a planting stick into the ground and tilts it back and forth and side to side to form the hole in which the corn seeds will be place. This motion creates a quatrefoil shape. I believe the quatrefoil shape is a reference to this fundamental act.

The *witz* “mountain” signs are paired with other words to specify particular mountains whether they be natural mountains or man-made pyramids (Stuart 1987, Stuart and Houston 1994). For

example, at Copan there is a Macaw Mountain, and at Palenque there is a Descending Quetzal Banner Mountain. I believe that the reason these *kawak* variants were used to represent the word mountain was that the great eastern mountain in which corn was first found was the quintessential mountain.

Caves are represented in Maya art in a number of ways. A cutaway side view of a cave is illustrated on Dresden Codex page 30 (Thompson 1972) (fig. 10). This enclosure shape is also found in the T528 Kawak sign (Bassie-Sweet 1991) (fig. 11). The element hanging from the roof of the T528 cave represents a stalactite formation. Some examples of this sign also show the more common icicle-like shape of stalactites (fig. 12). Early researchers nicknamed this element the “grape cluster” because of its visual similarity. This is also

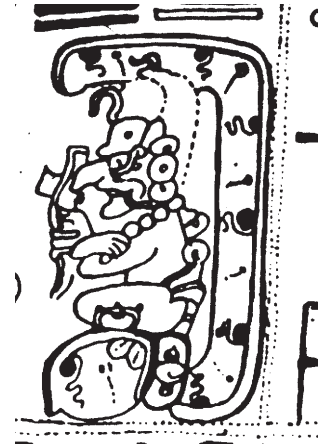


Fig. 10

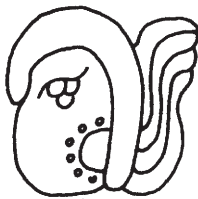


Fig. 11

the modern nickname used by spelunkers for such cave formations (Mohr and Poulson 1966). The contemporary Ch’ol Maya believe that stalactites and stalagmites have the power to produce rain, and they are the focus of their rain ceremonies (Bassie-Sweet 1991:83, Jolja’ Cave Project field notes).

Below the stalactite element is a hooked element that is also found on illustrations of corn ears (fig. 13). This hooked element represents the corn bud located on the upper stalk of the corn plant. It is from this corn bud that the ear of corn will eventually grow. In the context of the T528 sign, it represents the corn hidden within the immovable rock of the cave, in other words, a stalagmite.

With *ni* phonetic complement, the T528 sign is used in some contexts to represent the word *tuun* “stone”. *Kawak* elements are found on axe heads, spears and lancets. Although some researchers believe that these elements merely label these objects as being made of stone, I believe there is a deeper meaning. These blades were frequently made from obsidian and flint, and there is a pan-Mesoamerican belief that lightning creates these kinds of stone. Because of these facts, Spero (1987) sug-

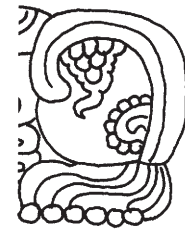


Fig. 12



Fig. 13

gested that the *kawak* “lightning” elements expressed the idea that these weapons contained the power of lighting. I also argued that the *kawak* elements appear on these objects because they are related to lightning (Bassie-Sweet 1996). The use of the T528 sign to represent the word *tuun* “stone” is understandable given that the quintessential stone was the lightning-struck stone under which corn was found. Temples are decorated with T528 elements, not because they are made of stone, but because they

represent the quintessential mountain abode of the gods, and the quintessential mountain was the great eastern mountain that was split open with a lightning bolt.

The sign nicknamed the “impinged bone” sign (T571, T598, T599) appears as a place name in many Maya texts, and it has been interpreted logographically to represent the word *ch’e’en*

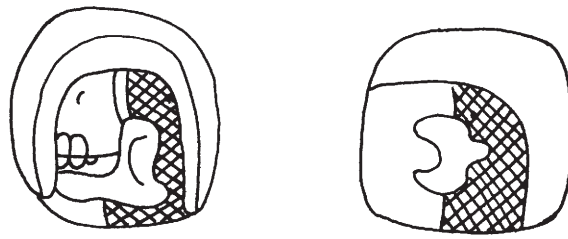


Fig. 14

“cave” (Stuart in Stuart, Houston and Robertson 1999) (fig. 14). This sign is composed of the cave enclosure shape with the interior of the enclosure divided into two (Bassie-Sweet 1996). The back half is covered in cross-hatching which is used in Maya art to represent black. The front of a cave has a light and dark zone, and in this context the cross hatching is used to represent the dark zone of the cave. Some examples of the *ch'e'en* sign also contain a sun sign. This is consistent with Maya world view because they believe that the sun rises from a cave. It is likely that the bone element in this sign represents the bones of the Corn Goddess.

The Corn Goddess was the first supernatural to die and be buried, and as such her burial rites were a model for humans. The pyramid tombs within which high status elite were frequently buried replicate her mountain burial, and the sign for tomb occasionally has the profile cave element. When the Maya placed their dead in caves or placed ancestral bones there, they were, in effect, returning them to their place of origin because human beings were made from the remains of this goddess.

### Illustrations of Water

Water can be divided into broad categories based on its physical location (sky, earth, subterranean), form (rain, mist, dew, spring, river, pooled water), saline content, and potability. The water within God N's cave was *yax* “fresh” and *suhuy* “virgin, uncontaminated” by virtue of the fact that it came directly from the sea on which the earth floats. Rain, dew and spring water also had these properties because they came from this source. The Maya collected dew and virgin water for certain purification and divination ceremonies from locations that were considered wild, supernatural space. In addition to water collected at springs, there is ample evidence that caves were primary collection sites (Thompson 1975). The water was specifically collected from dripwater formations and from pools of water within the cave. Those caves that were thought to replicate the caves of the God N deities would have contained the purest and most potent water.

While serpents were and still are used by the Maya to represent water, water was also depicted in more natural forms. In the codices, both rain and standing bodies of water were depicted as wavy black lines on a blue background. On sculpture and pottery, water was often depicted as rows of lines, dots and beads with shells and water plants floating in the rows. In some examples, water is shown with a scroll shape such as the rain flooding the world on Dresden Codex



Fig. 15

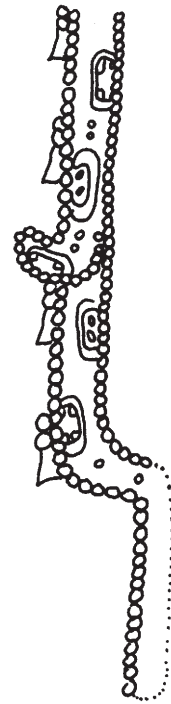


Fig. 16

page 74 (fig. 15). These water scrolls also have a beaded edge.

Similar falling liquid is depicted on several Yaxchilan stelae where it pours from the hands of a ruler performing a Period Ending renewal ceremony (fig. 16). Beaded liquid also occurs in the



prefix on the emblem glyph title (fig. 17). The emblem glyph title, which occurs in the name phrases of certain elite members, is composed of three parts: the beaded liquid prefix, a place name and the title *ajaw* “lord”. Most of the early researchers concluded that the Yaxchilan liquid and the emblem glyph prefix represented water. Thompson (1950) nicknamed the latter “the water group”. Based on its visual similarity to scrolls of blood found on other monuments, Stuart (1984, 1988) and Schele (Schele and Miller 1986) identified this liquid as blood. In the Yaxchilan contexts, they believed that the ruler was letting blood from his genitals and collecting it in a container. They concluded that all beaded liquid was blood. Based on a phonetic decipherment for the T683 sign as *mu'yal* “cloud” (fig. 18), Stuart later revised his interpretation and concluded that the beaded scrolls which appear to float in the air refer to clouds (Stuart and Houston 1994:44).

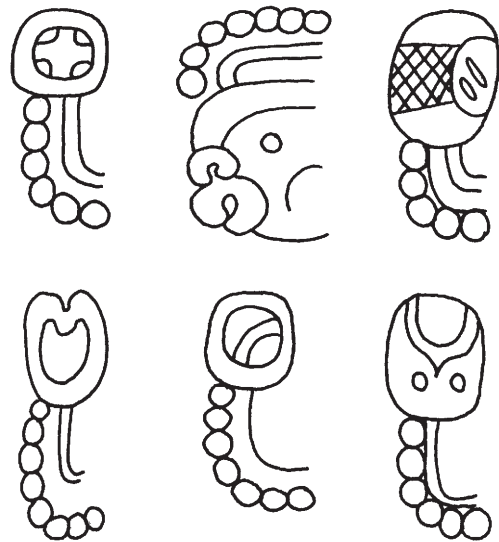


Fig. 17

The liquid and water group prefix contains several signs which qualify the nature of this stream of beaded fluid. Two of these glyphs are the *k'an* “yellow, precious” sign and the God C *k'uh* “deity, divinity”/*k'uhul* “sacred, divine” sign. As the God C head replaces the water group in numerous examples, the water group has been interpreted to mean “sacred, holy”. Observations made regarding the modern concept of god and sacredness and the use of the Spanish word *santo* to describe this quality provide insight into the pre-Columbian usage. Although the term *santo* means “saint”, Sosa (1985:239) noted that it is also used “(1) as an adjective or substitute for the subject of reference, (2) in reference to the Christian cross, and (3) in reference to a deity”. For the first category, he gives the examples of sacred water (rain), sacred sun, sacred corn and sacred farmer. Sosa noted that these things are sacred because of their life-giving function. These things are also described without this adjective when the intent is to express their mere existence. *Santo* is also employed to describe a being or thing which has divine origin. Sosa noted that rain was considered to be the most sacred of all. The Maya term *k'uh(ul)* was employed in the same fashion (Ringle 1988, Houston and Stuart 1996:291-94). Like *santo*, *k'uh* was used to describe gods and things that were necessary for human life and to emphasize their divine origin.

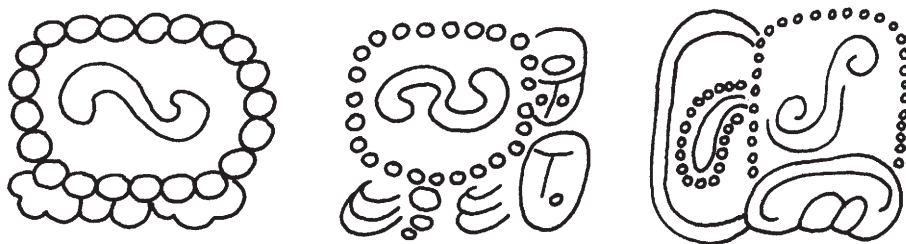


Fig. 18

The other glyphs found in the liquid and water group prefix include a *yax* “blue/green, fresh” sign, shell sign, waterlily sign and T24 mirror sign, all of which are directly related to water. An upside-down flower sign is also found here, and the liquid that falls from the bowl of a flower is dew. The early researchers were right — this is water, but not just any water, it is pure water from the sea. Clouds are illustrated with the same beaded edge because they are full of rainwater.

### The Creator Grandparents of the Sea

The *Popol Vuh* discusses a number of deities, but gives the most detailed description of the creator grandparents Xpiyacoc and Xmucane. The story lists over twenty titles and manifestations for this couple. The titles *Tzakol* (framer or maker) and *Bitol* (shaper or modeler) are the most frequently used names, and they refer to the creator grandparents’ role in ordering and shaping the earth and the first human beings. They are also called *Q’aholom* “he who has engendered sons, begetter” and *Alom* “she who has borne children, bearer” (Tedlock 1985:327, Christenson 2000). These are fitting titles for the creator grandparents, given that they were the parents of Hun Hunahpu and Vucub Hunahpu.

The concept of powerful creator grandparents is not restricted to the Quiché region. Colonial period documents from the Tzeltal and Tzotzil area refer to a creator couple with similar names (*Patol* “maker” and *Alaghom* “bearer, goddess with children”) (Calnek 1988:45, Laughlin

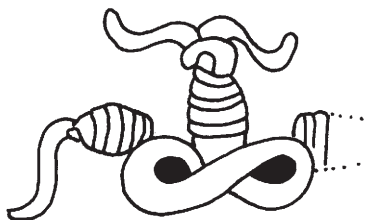


Fig. 19

1988:153). This god and goddess were said to be the creators of the earth, the sky and mankind, and they were said to be the head and beginning of the other gods that each town had. Alaghom is paired with the title *naom* which means to spin, and the creator grandmother was the first goddess to spin cotton (Laughlin, personal communication). Ix Chel (the lowland creator grandmother) is even illustrated in the codices wearing the cotton spindle and skein in her headdress (Ciaramella 1994) (fig. 19).

As noted above, the *Popol Vuh* lists a number of animal manifestation of the creator grandparents. Xpiyacoc was called Hunahpu Possum and Great Peccary, while his wife Xmucane was called Hunahpu Coyote and Great Coati. In their peccary and coati manifestations, the creator grandparents were healers who specialized in setting bones and curing toothaches. In one of the *Popol Vuh* episodes that occurred after the creation of the earth, a grandfather possum was asked to darken the sky and delay the dawn. Although the *Popol Vuh* text does not directly identify him as such, it is highly likely that this grandfather possum was Xpiyacoc in his Hunahpu Possum manifestation<sup>8</sup>. This role for the possum is still found in contemporary world view. In the Tzotzil area, a grandfather possum is said to rule the darkness of the night that occurs just before the dawn, and the red light that appears in the east at this time is said to be

<sup>8</sup> The first sunrise occurred on the date 1 Ajaw. Hunahpu is the Quiché equivalent of this date. The name Hunahpu Possum suggests he was the possum who ruled the dawn before the first sunrise.

one of his manifestations (Guiteras Holmes 1961).

In Mesoamerica, there was a belief that the soul or essence of a being was centered in its heart. The creator grandparents were referred to as the Heart of the Lake and the Heart of the Sea, and this likely refers to their role as the spirit or essence of water. Xpiyacoc and Xmucane were also called Sovereign and Feathered Serpent.<sup>9</sup> Before reviewing the role of Feathered Serpent, a discussion of divination practices and their relationship to sheet lightning is necessary.

### Divination and the Waters of the Sea

The creator grandparents were the first diviners, and during the creation of humans and the earth they were called upon to perform a number of divination. The Maya consulted diviners prior to all significant activities. A common divination method was scrying (Taube 1992b). This technique involved interpreting the light seen on reflective surfaces such as natural bodies of pooled water, crystals, the liquid in a bowl, and a circular mirror which was often placed in the bottom of a bowl. In addition, the lots used in divination casting were sometimes placed in a bowl of liquid. As the reflective surfaces of these circular divination tools represented the pooled water of the sea, the implication is that divination knowledge was linked to the waters of the sea and, by extension, to the creator grandparents who lived there.

The belief that water plays a fundamental role in divination is found in the world view, initiation rituals and divination methods of the modern Quiché. The Quiché have four sacred lakes, one for each direction, and they associate these lakes with the sea (B. Tedlock 1982:64, 139, 157). The directional nature and locations at the edges or beyond the limits of the Quiché region strongly suggest that each lake represents one quadrant of the sea (Bassie-Sweet 1996:20). Momostecans believe that the “clear light” of divinatory knowledge is transferred from the four lakes via chilly, moist air. They describe this air as the breath, the chilly wind, the cloud and the mist from the four directions.

Certain illnesses and dreams are viewed by the Maya as an indication that the person is being called upon by the gods to become a diviner (B. Tedlock 1982:54). The belief that water is associated with divination knowledge is evident in the dreams that a diviner has before he begins his career. Dreaming of a lake is one indication that the ritual specialist is ready to receive divination knowledge; the lake is described as a mirror (B. Tedlock 1982:54, 139). Snakes also play a role in these dreams. In an Ixil dream, the dreamer thought he was walking on the waters of Lake Atitlan when a snake then entered his left foot, traveled up his body, through his head, down his right side and out his right foot (Lincoln 1942:121). This was a clear sign that he must become a diviner. Snake illness, which is characterized as sudden body cramps, is one of the main illnesses that overcome people destined to be diviners.

There are also Quiché ceremonies that indicate that water contains divination knowledge. The ritual specialists bring back water from the four lakes and place it in their local springs. This water both purifies the spring and adds divination information to it (B. Tedlock 1982:139).

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<sup>9</sup> Tedlock (1985) interprets Sovereign as an honorific title of Feathered Serpent.

During the initiation ceremony of a diviner, water from the spring is sprinkled on his bundle, which contains his divining tools. (B. Tedlock 1982:65). This act adds divination knowledge to these objects.

Sheet lightning also plays a key role in divinations. Sheet lightning is the bright flash of light seen in the sky when the lightning bolt occurs inside or behind a cloud and cannot be directly seen. It can also be observed as a reflection on the surface of water. Sheet lightning is usually called heat lightning when it occurs so far away that no thunder is directly associated with it. (The Maya viewed thunder as a closely associated, but separate phenomenon from lightning bolts and sheet lightning.) The bright flash of sheet/heat lightning is called *coyopa* in a number of highland Maya languages (B. Tedlock 1982:138) and *sak tzeul* in Tzotzil (Laughlin 1975:302). Quiché diviners believe that they have a kind of soul in their blood that has the form of sheet lightning. When a diviner experiences tingling or twitching in his muscles, it is thought to be the movement of the sheet lightning in his blood, and these movements provide him with the answer to whatever question he has posited (B. Tedlock 1982:53, 110, 138).

This lightning in the blood is related to the sea for it is equated with the sheet lightning that occurs over the sacred lakes (B. Tedlock 1982:138). The diviners describe the sensation of the lightning in the blood “as if air were rapidly moving through their flesh in a flickering or undulating manner, similar to the pattern of exterior sheet lightning as it moves at night over the lakes” (B. Tedlock 1982:53). The undulating manner of the sheet lightning is reminiscent of the movement of snakes.

In addition, when the diviner casts his divination lots he specifically says that he is receiving his divination knowledge not only from the moist air, but also from the sheet lightning from the sacred lakes (B. Tedlock 1982:155). The crystals used in the divination process are also associated with lightning. They are thought to draw the lightning from the four directions (B. Tedlock 1982:160). During their divinations, Quiché diviners study the refracted light in their crystals and refer to this light as lightning (Allen Christenson, personal communication).

Sheet lightning is also used by the Momostecan diviners to predict rain. When it is seen at night coming from the direction of the north or east sacred lakes then the rain will stop, but if it comes from the west or south sacred lakes the rain will come (B. Tedlock 1982:139). The association of sheet lightning with the sea is also found in the Tzotzil and Tzeltal region. In the Tzotzil area, heat lightning is thought to be sea foam cast into the sky by the ocean (Laughlin 1975:302). The Tzeltal say that heat lightning is the older brother of the lightning bolt who fell into the sea (Hermitte 1964:43).

The *Popol Vuh* describes the creator grandparents in the waters of the sea as luminous beings covered in quetzal and cotinga feathers:

All alone are the Framer and the Shaper, Sovereign and Quetzal Serpent, They Who have Borne Children and They Who Have Begotten Sons. Luminous they are in the water, wrapped in quetzal feathers and cotinga feathers. Thus they are called Quetzal Serpent. In their essence, they are great sages, great possessors of knowledge. (Christenson 2000).

The term used to describe this light is glossed in a colonial dictionary as “the brightness that enters through cracks” (D. Tedlock 1996:222). Given the Quiché beliefs about divination, sheet

lightning, snakes and the sacred lakes, it seems reasonable to conclude that this brightness in the waters of the sea was sheet lightning and that Feathered Serpent was the creator grandfather in his manifestation as sheet lightning. The serpent portion of this name is directly related to his role as a water and lightning deity because there was a prevalent Maya belief that the spirit of both water and lightning could take the form of a serpent. There was also a Classic Period feathered serpent associated with the creator grandfather, and he will be discussed below.

The next passage in the *Popol Vuh* introduces the lightning bolt gods of the sky and relates them meeting with Sovereign and Feathered Serpent. It was during this meeting that they decided to create humans and the earth. It is interesting that it is the Feathered Serpent manifestation of the creator grandparents that interacts with the Heart of the Sky. It was a meeting between sheet lightning and lightning bolts.

The contemporary Chorti have water, wind and thunder deities with attributes similar to Feathered Serpent that enhance our understanding of this being (Wisdom 1940:392-397, Fought 1972). They are called Chicchans which is also the term used to refer to the boa constrictor. Boas are the largest snakes in the Maya area and they frequent watery environments (Campbell 1998:183). Although the Maya have a general fear of snakes, the boa is viewed in some areas as beneficial because it kills the rodents that attack corn. It is also thought to give protection from other snake bites (Hunn 1977:238). The ability to cure snake bites was one of the fundamental characteristics of the creator grandfather in his role as a healer.

All Chicchans are primarily thought of as giant snakes. Male Chicchans can also be manifested as half man and half feathered snake. Female Chicchans are said to be women with the body of a fish. There is an earth Chicchan inside all bodies of water, and this serpent represents the spirit or essence of the water. It is believed that streams have reduced flow in the dry season because the Chicchans have swum upstream to the spring source and retreated inside. During the rainy season, the earth Chicchans churn up water, and this makes it rise into the sky as clouds. The four Working Men who are the assistants to the sky Chicchans use their axes to beat the water out of the clouds and cause rain.

Although there are variations, the Chorti believe there are four Chicchans associated with the sky; the north one is said to be the chief. Each Chicchan lives in the bottom of a large lake. Like the four sacred lakes of the Quiché, these lakes are located in the four directions. Given that the Chorti also believe that the world floats on a great sea divided into quadrants, it is likely that each lake represents one of the quadrants (Fought 1972). Although there is no documentation that the Chicchans are directly associated with sheet lightning, they are known as *ah kirik n ar* “he of thunder” (Wisdom 1940:394). Thunder is said to be the sound of the Chicchans calling to one other from one side of the horizon to the other.

The Postclassic Tzotzil also had a water serpent that made thunder. In a sixteenth century Tzotzil dictionary under the word for thunder are the terms *jjun Ha'al chon* “one water snake” and *j'ox-lajun Ha'al chon* “thirteen water snake” (Laughlin 1988:216). They were said to be men who walked in the clouds. One Water Snake was a youth who made thunder by day, and Thirteen Water Snake was an old man who made thunder by night. The thunder aspect of the creator grandfather will be discussed below.

## The Creator Grandparents of the Classic Period

Itzamnaah and Ix Chel were the lowland parallels of Xpiyacoc and Xmucane (Bassie-Sweet 1996:53). Like the *Popol Vuh* grandparents, Itzamnaah and Ix Chel were the deities of medicine, and the priests and healers invoked them in their prayers (Tozzer 1941:153-55, Taube 1992). Ix Chel was the first woman to spin cotton, weave, bear children and be a midwife. Itzamnaah was considered to have been the first priest and rainmaker. In the Postclassic Period, he was the principal deity to whom petitions were made to avert agricultural disasters. During the New Year ceremonies of Kan, Muluc and Ix years, offerings were made to him to prevent scarcity of water, locust infestations and famine (Tozzer 1941:144-47). In the Madrid Codex, Itzamnaah is illustrated dispensing dew from a hyssop that was decorated with rattlesnake tails (Taube 1992a:34). Dew was an essential element in the germination of the corn seed. To plant corn, the Maya create a hole in the ground with a stick and place a handful of corn seed in it. They frequently leave the hole uncovered in order to trap dew. Without dew and the prompt arrival of the rains, the seed will not sprout.

Itzamnaah and Ix Chel were involved with the creation and ordering of the world. A Postclassic example of their participation in these events is found in the Dresden Codex. As noted, Ix Chel is illustrated flooding the world in preparation for its final ordering (fig. 4). Following this action, Itzamnaah and three other deities are shown ordering the new world (Thompson 1972, Taube 1988). Reminiscent of his role in the Dresden Codex, Itzamnaah was active in the Classic ordering of the world as well. On Quirigua Stela C, Itzamnaah is one of three deities involved with activities at the beginning of the new era.

A particular aspect of a deity could be manifested as a set of four, each associated with a color and direction (Thompson 1934, Tozzer 1941). The incantations in the *Rituals of the Bakabs* indicate that Itzamnaah and Ix Chel each had four manifestations, one for each direction. Three manifestations of Ix Chel are illustrated on a Classic Period vessel (Taube 1994).

### Itzamnaah

The omnipotent nature of Itzamnaah is indicated by a number of colonial documents. The Yucatec *Relacion Valladolid* says “they worshipped one god alone who had the name Hunab and Itzamnaah which means only one god (Tozzer 1941:146). An entry in the Yucatec Vienna dictionary states:

Principal idol (god), which these Indians of this land had, from which they said all things proceeded and who was incorporeal; hence they made no image of him: *Colop-u-uich-kin*. Idol said to be of the preceding: *Hun Itzamnaah, Yax-cocah-mut*.

Another idol, who was a man and whom they worshipped for having discovered the art of the letters (writing) of this land: *Itzamnaah, Kinch ahau*. (Roys 1933:100).

God D was first identified as Itzamnaah because he appears in the Dresden Codex new year ceremonies performing the functions that Landa indicated were performed by Itzamnaah (see



Fig. 20

Taube 1992 for a history of this identification) (fig. 20). Itzamnaah is illustrated as an old man with receding gums and wrinkles around his mouth; in other words, he is portrayed as a wise and spiritually powerful grandfather. He has a large round or squarish eye, and he most often wears a *yax* shell ornament on his head and/or an “*akbal*” flower head-dress (fig. 21).

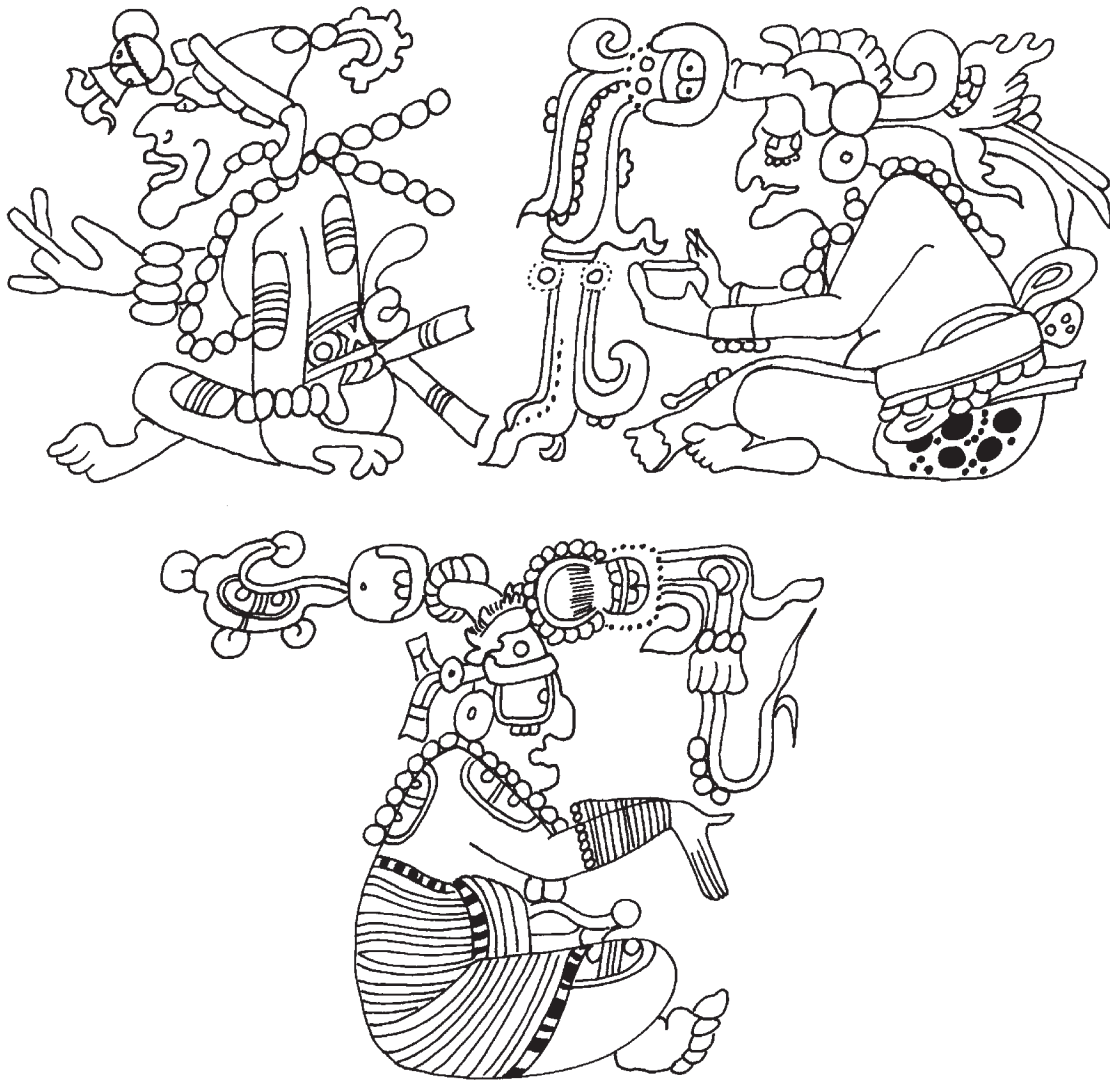


Fig. 21

The *yax* sign is a pictograph of a shell and the word *yax* represents the range of color from green to blue. In the *Popol Vuh*, the feathers of Feathered Serpent are composed of quetzal and cotinga feathers. What is interesting about this pairing of bird feathers is that quetzal feathers are iridescent green and cotinga feathers are iridescent blue. The feathers of these birds represent the color range of *yax*. Because of the sediments found in the waters of the Maya area, pure, fresh water can range in color from emerald green to sky blue. It is highly appropriate then that a shell from the ultimate source of such water would represent the *yax* color range, and that the creator grandfather of the sea would be identified with it.

A bird form of Itzamnaah is illustrated in the Paris Codex in the series of pages relating to the k'atun ceremonies (Bardawil 1976:195) (fig. 22). In each scene, a bird representing the omen for the k'atun hovers over the participants. On page 4, which represents the K'atun 11 Ajaw, the bird of omen has the face of Itzamnaah. Bardawil grouped together several different kinds of supernatural birds and referred to them all as the Principal Bird Deity. These birds appear in a number of contexts where they perch on trees, serpents, skybands or the Bicephalic Monster. One of these supernatural birds wears the *yax* shell and *akbal* flower of Itzamnaah, and he has been identified as a bird manifestation of Itzamnaah based on these diagnostic traits (Bardawil 1976; Hellmuth 1987a, 1987b; and Taube cited in Houston and Stuart 1989:14, 1992:36) (fig. 23).



Fig. 22

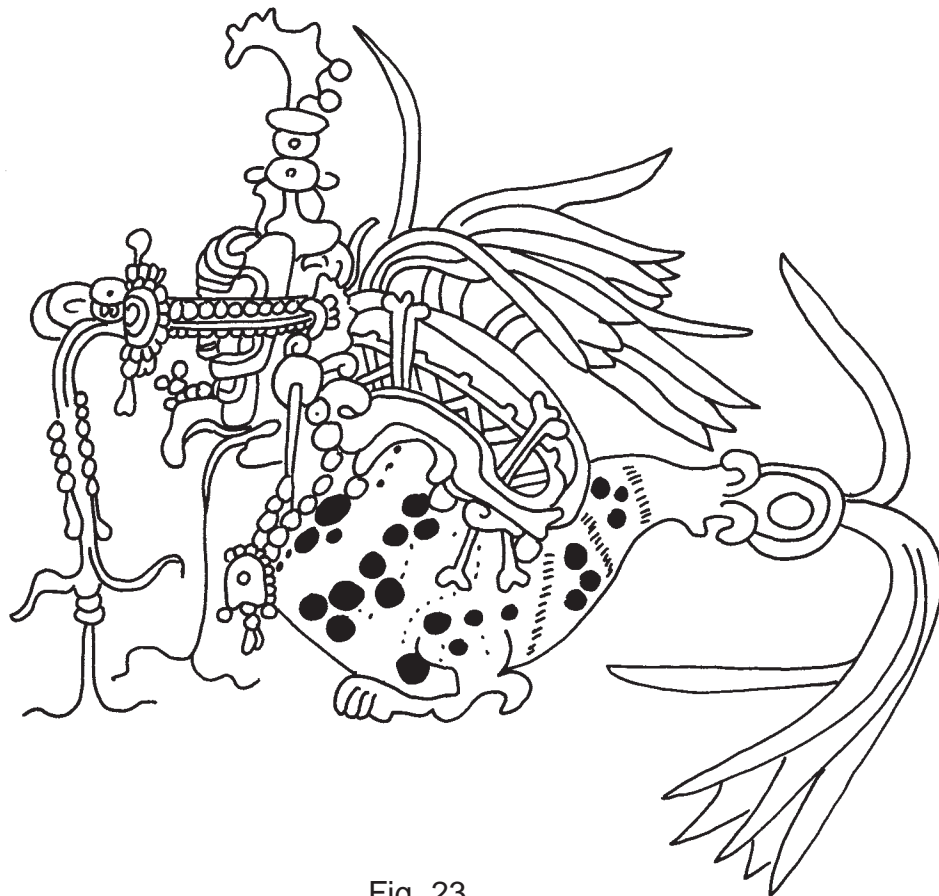


Fig. 23





Fig. 24a



Fig. 24b

(fig. 24a, fig. 24b). Both the bird and his portrait have the same large eye decorated with a curl. In most examples, Itzamnaah's name has a T23 *na* suffix, and this sign has been interpreted to be a phonetic complement indicating the name Itzamnaah (Lounsbury 1984:177).

God N is the designation given to the old god who is frequently shown wearing a net bag headdress. There is evidence to indicate that Itzamnaah and God N were manifestations of the same god. Before discussing this evidence, a brief description of the various manifestations of God N is required.



Fig. 25

There were four God N deities, one for each direction.

When God N is illustrated in the codices, he has an eye like a human (almond-shaped) and he lacks the eye curl found with Itzamnaah. In Classic Period images, he also has almond-shaped eyes in contrast to Itzamnaah's large square eye. His portrait is the T1014 sign (fig. 25). There are many examples where the full form of a glyph is reduced to one element. The T1014 God N portrait can be represented by just the net bag (Stuart cited in Schele 1994). This net bag sign is designated as T64.

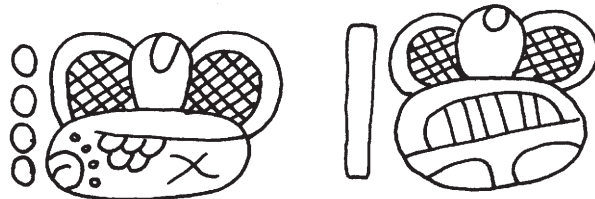


Fig. 26

In the codices, God N's name is usually composed of a number (3, 4 or 5), the T64 net sign, and either a T528 sign or T548 sign with the value *tuun* (fig. 26). The



Fig. 27

T548 sign is a pictograph of a

wooden drum that was used throughout Mesoamerica. It makes a deep sound like "tuun, tuun" and hence it was called *tuun kul* in Yucatan. Scribes often took two signs representing two separate words and merged them into one glyph block. On Dresden page 56, God N's portrait is conflated with the T528 sign (fig. 27). This manifestation of God N appears in a number of Classic Period scenes such as K1485 and Copan Structure 22. His diagnostic traits are a waterlily headdress and T528 *kawak* elements on his body.

K1485 illustrates all four of these waterlily headdress deities (three God N deities in their net bag manifestation are pictured in the lower level of the scene). God N in his waterlily headdress manifestation also appears as the Number 5 Deity, and in this context he wears a T548 drum

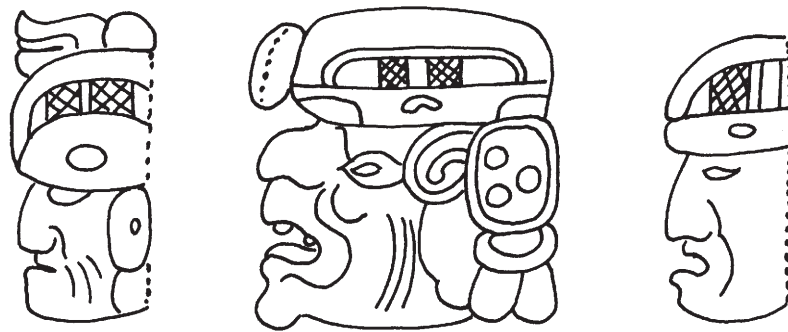


Fig. 28



Fig. 29

sign on top of his waterlily headdress (fig. 28; the function of the drum will be discussed below).

On a Pomona panel, two young lords are dressed as the waterlily headdress aspect of God N. Their name phrases include the title “4 God N”. Although these titles do not include a T548 or T528 *tuun* sign, the God N portrait has a *ni* phonetic complement that may indicate this word. On the Palenque House E bench, a young lord also imitates this manifestation of God N. He wears God N’s net bag, he holds up the waterlily and he sits on the T528 sign.

On Dresden pages 56 and 60, the T64 net sign is prefixed to a portrait of a possum, another one of the manifestations of God N (Taube 1992, see below) (fig. 29). This God N possum compound also appears in Classic texts (Stuart 1998:404). God N was also manifested as a turtle (Taube 1992). On Dresden page 37, he wears the turtle shell with a *k’an* “yellow, precious” infix (fig. 30). Numerous Classic Period



Fig. 30

elite members were named after deities, and the name “God N Yellow Turtle” is found at a variety of sites (Stuart cited in Schele 1994, personal communication). The manner in which this name is presented contributes to our understanding of this god. On Copan Stela C, the God N Yellow Turtle name phrase is composed of God N’s portrait followed by phonetic signs representing the word *ak* turtle (fig. 31). The *k’an* sign appears in God N’s earring. In other examples of the God N Yellow Turtle name, the T64 net sign and a turtle shell with a *k’an* “yellow, precious” infix are employed (fig. 32). In other cases, the word *ak* is represented by a turtle wearing a *k’an* earring, while other examples show the turtle actually wearing the net bag headdress (fig. 33). And finally, some examples show the conflation of God N and the turtle (fig. 34). In these examples, God N is represented by the net bag, nose and “old mouth” elements while the turtle is represented by the “waterlily” eye, mouth curl and *k’an* earring.

On a Xcalumkin panel and Late Classic vessel, Itzamnaah’s name phrase is composed of a God N portrait followed by the

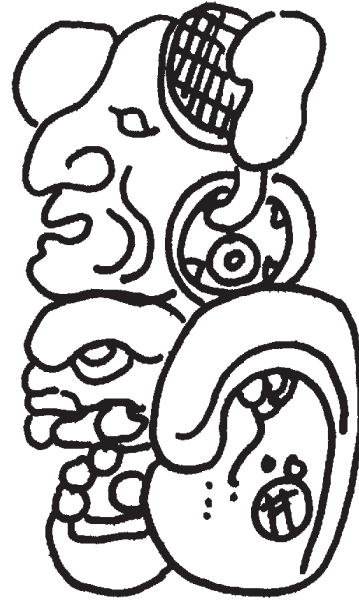


Fig. 31

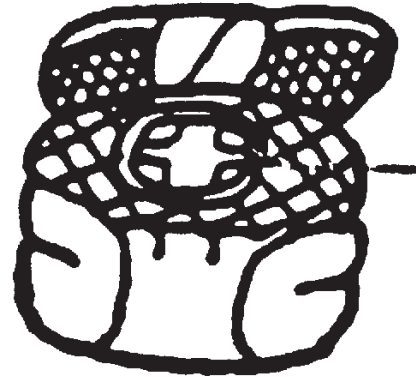


Fig. 32



Fig. 33



Fig. 34

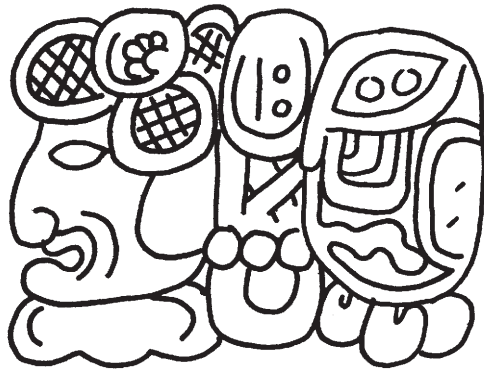


Fig. 35a



Fig. 35b

*akbal* flower and bird head (fig. 35a, 35b). On Quirigua Stela C, the T64 net bag appears as a superfix above the *akbal* flower and bird (fig. 36). In this example, the God N portrait is represented by the T64 sign. The appearance of God N's name in the name phrase of Itzamnaah has raised the possibility that God N and Itzamnaah were manifestations of the same deity (Stuart, personal communication). Several examples of Itzamnaah in the Madrid Codex also suggest that these two gods are the same. Madrid Codex page 94a and 106b illustrate Itzamnaah, but the associated caption text refers to God N. On Madrid page 96, Itzamnaah is illustrated wearing a headdress with the cross-hatching of God N's net bag. Itzamnaah is also shown on a Classic Period vessel wearing the God N net bag headdress (Taube 1992a:36) (fig. 37)

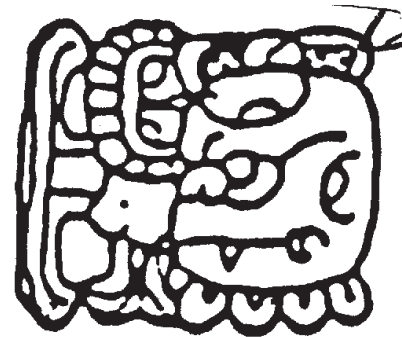


Fig. 36

On the Palenque Temple 19 platform, Itzamnaah is named

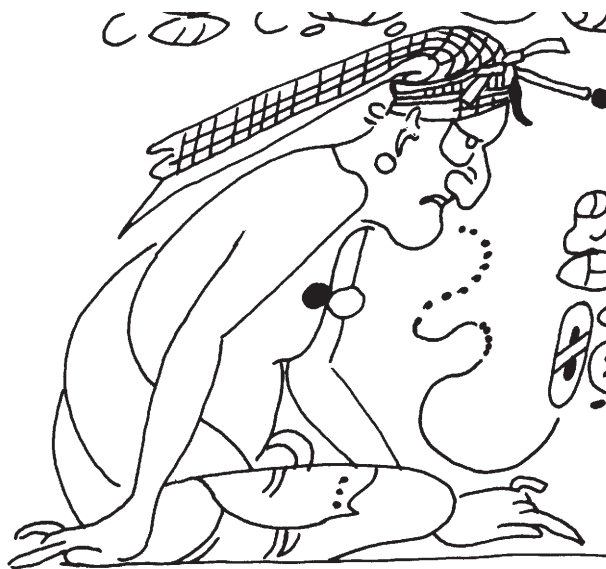


Fig. 37



Fig. 38

with a portrait of the square-eyed Itzamnaah and the *akbal* flower (fig. 38). No God N sign seems to appear in this name. However, I believe that this sign is a conflation of the almond-eyed God N with the square-eyed bird head in the same manner that the God N portrait is conflated with his turtle manifestation. God N is represented by the nose and mouth of the old man, and the bird is represented by the square eye, forehead mirror and flower headdress. In other words, the square eye and *akbal* flower belong to the bird manifestation of Itzamnaah.

When the old man God N wears the flower headdress he becomes this square-eyed bird or takes on the traits of this bird. A recently discovered Classic Period carving at Tonina illustrates this point (fig. 39). It shows the Itzamnaah bird with the head of the almond-eyed God N.

The manner in which the name of an Early Classic ruler at Yaxchilan is presented also suggests that the *akbal* flower is specifically identified with the bird. On the hieroglyphic staircase, the ruler's name is composed of the *akbal* flower and a jaguar head, but on Lintel 47 (B7), the



Fig. 39

*akbal* flower has been replaced with just the bird head (fig. 40).

There are two ways to interpret the appearance of God N's name in the name phrase of Itzamnaah. The first way is to assume that the God N portrait and the Itzamnaah bird represent the full form of the word Itzamnaah and that when they are presented either together or separately they represent the name Itzamnaah. In such an interpretation, the combination of the God N portrait and yellow turtle signs would read *Itzamnaah K'an Ak*. Although such a name is reminiscent of the Postclassic site called Itzamkanak, there is little precedent for this kind of sign combination (Stuart, personal communication). The most logical interpretation is that God N with his net bag headdress and the Itzamnaah bird with its *akbal* flower headdress represent two separate words. The use of the bird with its *akbal* flower headdress in the Dresden Codex New Year pages to refer to Itzamnaah indicates that this sign likely represents the name Itzamnaah.<sup>10</sup>

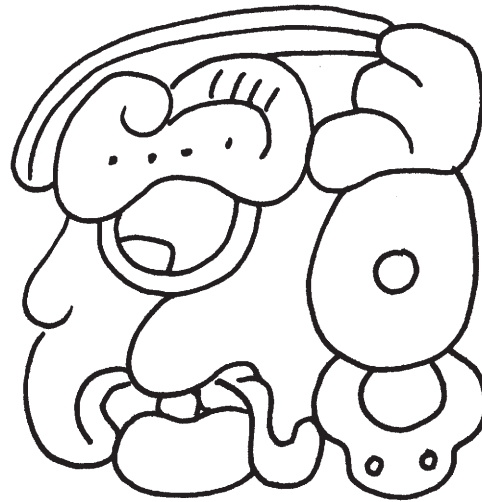


Fig. 40

The question is – what word or words do the God N portrait and its T64 net bag represent? Coe (1973) argued that God N was a Pauah Tun god. The name Pauah Tun is given by Landa as an alternate name for the Bakabs, and it appears in the *Ritual of the Bakabs*. In the hieroglyphic text, a number of cross-hatched signs represent the sound *pa*. The Motul dictionary gives the word *pauo* for a net bag. Because of the close sound between *pauah* and *pauo* and because the net bag has cross-hatching, Coe suggested that the T64 net bag represented the word *pauah* and that the cross-hatched *pa* signs actually derived from the net bag. God N was a Bakab, but as David Stuart has noted neither T1014 nor T64 ever substitutes with any of the numerous examples of the *pa* signs. *Pauo* does not appear in Cholan languages as a term for net bag. While the combination *pawah* and *tuun* seems to work for the name phrase of the waterlily headdress characters who are named as 4-T64-*tuun*, it does not generate any known deity names when combined with Itzamnaah, *k'an ak* or possum.

Stuart (personal communication) has noted that there is a name found in several inscriptions that is composed of the number four, *xi*, *wa* and the T548 *tuun* sign, and based on the parallel context, he has suggested that *xiw* might be a viable reading for the T64 net bag sign. He noted that in Quiché *xiv* is shell and *xiuac* is “shell played as a drum”. He suggests that the 4-‘net bag’-*tuun* name phrase might read 4 (shell) drums. This is an appealing reading, for Edmonson (1965) defines Quiché *xiv* as a large snail shell or a turtle shell drum. In addition to being illustrated wearing a turtle shell, God N is also manifested wearing a spiral shell or emerging from it. However, this reading does not produce meaningful names when combined with Itzamnaah or possum.

<sup>10</sup> A *hi* sign appears as a suffix on most examples of Itzamnaah's name. On K1226, Itzamnaah's name is followed by a T511 sign with a *hi* phonetic complement. The T511 sign also appears in the forehead of the Itzamnaah bird in some examples. It is unclear what word this sign represents.

The manner in which the grandfather possum is addressed in the *Popol Vuh* suggests that the reading of the God N portrait may simply be “old man”. The possum is called *mam* “grandfather”, but he is also addressed as *ama* “old man”. This is also the term used for males in general. There is a similar term in Tzotzil; the term *mool* is glossed in a colonial period dictionary as “old man” (Laughlin 1988:260, personal communication). When used as an adjective, the contemporary Tzotzil term *mol* means old or large, but when used as a noun it means elder, husband or man (Laughlin 1975:239). It is the term used for old men in general and for the highest ranking elders in the religious hierarchy (Vogt 1976:254). The Lacandon use the title *t’o’ohil* “great, venerable” to describe an old community leader who is spiritually powerful, has divination skills, cures diseases and guards the order of things. Although I have not found a specific term in the modern Cholan languages that functions in the same manner as these titles, such a value for the God N portrait would produce the names Old Man Itzamnaah, Old Man Yellow Turtle, Old Man Possum, Old Man “Snail Shell” and 4 Old Man *Tuun*. If this is the case then this honorific title need not have been written out by the scribe every time he wrote the words Itzamnaah or Yellow Turtle. When the scribe did incorporate the title in the spelling of the name, it would have added emphasis and importance to the name.

### The Itzamnaah Bird

As a primary manifestation of the creator grandfather, the Itzamnaah bird should exhibit some of the key traits of this paramount god. In several pottery scenes such as K4546 and K1226, the Headband Gods shoot at the Itzamnaah bird with their blowguns. Numerous authors have equated these scenes with the shooting of Seven Macaw in the *Popol Vuh* (Cortez 1986, Taube 1987, Robicsek and Hales 1981, Freidel, Schele and Parker 1993, D. Tedlock 1996:78). This is a highly unlikely identification. Seven Macaw was a supernatural bird who lived during the era of the wooden people. The hero twins, who are parallel to the Classic Period Headband Gods, climbed up into Seven Macaw’s nance tree and hid in its leaves. When he arrived to eat the fruit, Hunahpu (one of the hero twins) shot Seven Macaw with his blowgun and broke his jaw. This loosened his teeth and caused him great jaw pain. The bark from the nance tree is used as a remedy for loose teeth (Breedlove and Laughlin 1993:151). If Seven Macaw had healing skills, he would have known that and cured himself. Instead, he had to employ Great White Peccary and Great White Coati (animal manifestations of the creator grandparents) to perform a healing and was thus tricked into giving away his insignia without which he became powerless. This action eventually resulted in his defeat and death. Although both stories involve shooting an avian deity, the similarity ends there for Seven Macaw was not a manifestation of the creator grandfather.

Illustrations of macaws are common in Maya art, but Hellmuth (1987a:166, 196; 1987b:365) has observed that the features of the Itzamnaah bird are those of a bird of prey not a macaw. Although some examples of the Itzamnaah bird have a mat motif hanging out of the mouth in place of a lower jaw, Hellmuth noted that the Itzamnaah bird is most frequently illustrated with a serpent clutched in its beak. Given that macaws do not eat snakes, he suggested that this bird is parallel to Vak’ of the *Popol Vuh* who was a snake-eating bird and who was also shot by the hero twins (Edmonson 1971:102-08, D. Tedlock 1996:113-16). A slight digression is in order to discuss this episode of the *Popol Vuh*.

The territorial intrusion by the hero twins when they played ball at the eastern ball court on the road of the Underworld annoyed the Underworld rulers. They sent their owl messengers to the household of the hero twins to demand that the twins come to the Underworld. When the owls arrived, only the grandmother Xmucane was at home so they gave her the message. She, in turn, sent a louse from her head to give the message to her grandsons. On the road to the ball court, the slow-moving louse met a toad who volunteered to carry him. The toad ate the louse and continued the journey. The toad then met a snake who volunteered to take him at a faster rate of speed. The snake swallowed the toad and again the journey continued. Then the snake encountered a bird called Vak' who swallowed him. When Vak' arrived at the ball court he perched on the rim and called out. The twins grabbed their blowguns and shot the bird in the eye. Vak' whirled around and fell to the ground where the twins seized him. Vak' promised to give them their message on the condition that the twins first restore his eyesight. This they did by rubbing his eye with black rubber resin from their ball. Vak' then vomited up the snake who vomited up the toad. In the teeth of the toad, the twins found the louse and then the louse finally delivered the message. Although he did not identify what kind of bird of prey Vak' was, Hellmuth correctly concluded that this bird was parallel to the Itzamnaah bird. There are, however, more reasons for identifying the Itzamnaah bird with Vak' than just these visual parallels.

When Vak' arrived at the ballcourt he called out "vac co, vac co". As noted by D. Tedlock (1985:132, 282, 336; 1996:270, 346) this is the call of *Herpetotheres cachinnans* also known as the *waco* or laughing falcon. This bird is so named because it makes two kinds of calls: a "wa co" sound and a "ha-ha-ha" sound like laughter. The laughing falcon is most often found in open areas rather than in deep forest. Unlike other falcons and hawks, it is frequently seen conspicuously perched on the top of trees for long periods of time (Janzen 1984:583, personal observation). Another name for this bird of prey is snake hawk because it feeds almost exclusively on snakes that it kills and takes up into trees to eat. One of the hazards of living in a tropical environment especially during the field-clearing season is the presence of deadly snakes. The laughing falcon often eats venomous snakes, and his presence in a corn field is of great benefit.

Tedlock noted that Vak' was a messenger bird and that the laughing falcon is viewed as a bird of omen from Central Mexico to Brazil. However, in many parts of Mexico and Central America, the call of the laughing falcon is specifically an indication of the coming of the rains. The migratory hawks are said to bring the rains and take them away, but the laughing falcon is "the local forecaster, and when he becomes especially vociferous rain is not far away" (Dickey and Van Rossem 1938:131). In Veracruz, it is said that if a laughing falcon calls from a dead tree it will not rain, but if he calls from a green tree it will (Lowery and Dalquest 1951:555). The Chorti believe the call of the laughing falcon brings the rain:

And when we hear the waco singing, we say, "The waco is calling. It is going to rain."  
Because that waco is calling for rain. Because it is said that the waco is a padrino, or a rain-maker. (Fought 1972:388)

In the Chorti area, the padrino is the prayer-maker in the village who conducts the ceremonies for rain. The Maya word for water and rain is *ha'* and *ha'al*, respectively, and the laugh of the laughing falcon makes this sound ("ha, ha, ha"). When the waco is calling for rain, he is literally saying "water, water, water" (Alonso Mendez, personal communication).



The laughing falcon episode in the *Popol Vuh* occurred just after the hero twins had cleared their *milpa* and prepared it for burning. This event coincided with the dry season because that is when fields are cleared and prepared. After Vak' delivered the message, the hero twins went and bid their grandmother farewell, and then journeyed to the Underworld by way of the eastern cave. It can be concluded that their departure happened just prior to the rainy season because that is what the call of the laughing falcon announces.

Several contemporary Maya groups view the laughing falcon as a healer, which was one of the principal functions of the creator grandfather. The Tzotzil associate the laughing falcon with curing. It is believed that if a person can return the call of this bird without tiring, he will become a bonesetter (Laughlin 1975:362). The Ch'ol of Joloniel believe that the laughing falcon can kill poisonous snakes because he knows how to cure himself if he gets bitten (Jolja' Cave Project field notes, Domingo Perez Moreno 2001, Felipe Perez Montejo 2001). This contrasts with Seven Macaw who was powerless as a curer. It is said that the first woman to spin cotton (the moon goddess) was bitten by a poisonous snake, but a laughing falcon came and cured her (Jolja' Cave Project field notes, Felipe Perez Montejo 2001). This may also be related to the role of the laughing falcon as a rainmaker, for there is a common belief that the spinning of cotton creates rain clouds.

In summary, the attributes of the laughing falcon match those of Itzamnaah and his bird manifestation. Both birds are snake-eating birds of prey as well as birds of omen. The ability of the laughing falcon to kill poisonous snakes must have been viewed by the Maya as an indication of enormous spiritual power. He is thus an appropriate manifestation for the powerful Itzamnaah. The laughing falcon is viewed as a healer with the ability to cure snake bites. Itzamnaah was the first curer. Healers begin their careers by first healing their family members. In the Joloniel myth, the laughing falcon heals the first woman to spin cotton, and Ix Chel, who was the wife of Itzamnaah, was the first woman to spin cotton. The favorite perch of the laughing falcon is sitting in the open on tops of trees. The Itzamnaah bird is illustrated conspicuously perched at the tops of trees and various other motifs. From his treetop location, the laughing falcon calls for rain. Itzamnaah was the first priest, and one of the primary functions of these ritual specialists was rain petitions. This circumstantial evidence strongly suggests that the Itzamnaah bird was based on the laughing falcon.

The prominent role played by Seven Macaw has overshadowed the role of macaws in Maya culture, and researchers tend to identify any macaw with the *Popol Vuh* bird. Although their feathers were not as highly prized as the long tail feathers of the quetzal, macaws were bred for their plumage (particularly the bright red feathers of the scarlet macaw), and macaw remains have been found in caches and burials. Several members of the elite incorporated the word macaw (*mo'*) in their names, such as the founding ancestor of the Copan dynasty Yax K'uk' Mo' "blue/green, quetzal, macaw" and the father of the Palenque ruler Pakal whose name was K'an Mo' Hix "yellow/precious, macaw, jaguar". As noted, there is a Macaw Mountain in the texts at Copan, and the headdress of the ruler on Copan Stela B contains two large macaw heads. Copan Ballcourt I and Ballcourt II have macaws decorating their eastern buildings (Fash and Fash 1996:131-32). These birds are shown in a spread-eagle fashion. Eight of the wing feathers terminate in small macaw heads, while the claws are shown as a conflation of a serpent and a macaw. A feathered serpent similar to those found on the Teotihuacan Temple of Quetzalcoatl appears to emerge from the cloaca opening of the bird. In the mouth of this serpent is a right arm and hand with a dot on it. Because dots are used to represent "one", it has

been suggested that this arm is the same as the arm of Hunahpu or One Ahaw (Fash and Fash 1996:131-32). Later renovations to this ballcourt building also included macaw birds, but these lack the feathered serpent and its arm. These macaws wear an *akbal* element and maize foliage in their headdress (Fash and Fash 1996:fig. 3). A review of these birds requires a separate treatment, but it is sufficient to say for the moment that the two sets of birds are not the same as the Itzamnaah bird despite the fact that the latter set wears an *akbal* element in their headdresses.

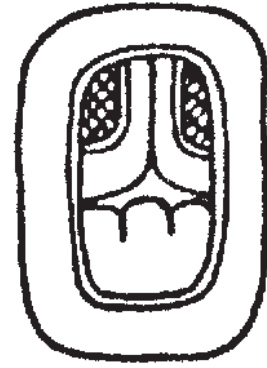


Fig. 41

#### The Nature of the *Akbal* Flower

Two of the diagnostic traits of the Itzamnaah bird are the *yax* headdress element and the *akbal* flower. Sometimes the bowl of Itzamnaah's flower is shown in a side view, but most often the flower is turned so that the viewer looks directly into the bowl. The bowl is marked with a T504 sign that is also employed to represent the day name Akbal "night, darkness" (fig. 41). In almost all Mayan languages, the word *akbal* or its cognates means night (the time period from sunset to sunrise), but it was also used for the concept of darkness. In some examples, the *akbal* flower looks more like a fringed pendant. Various deities and humans wear similar circular pendants attached to their belts, and Taube (1992a:33, 1992b) has identified these objects as circu-

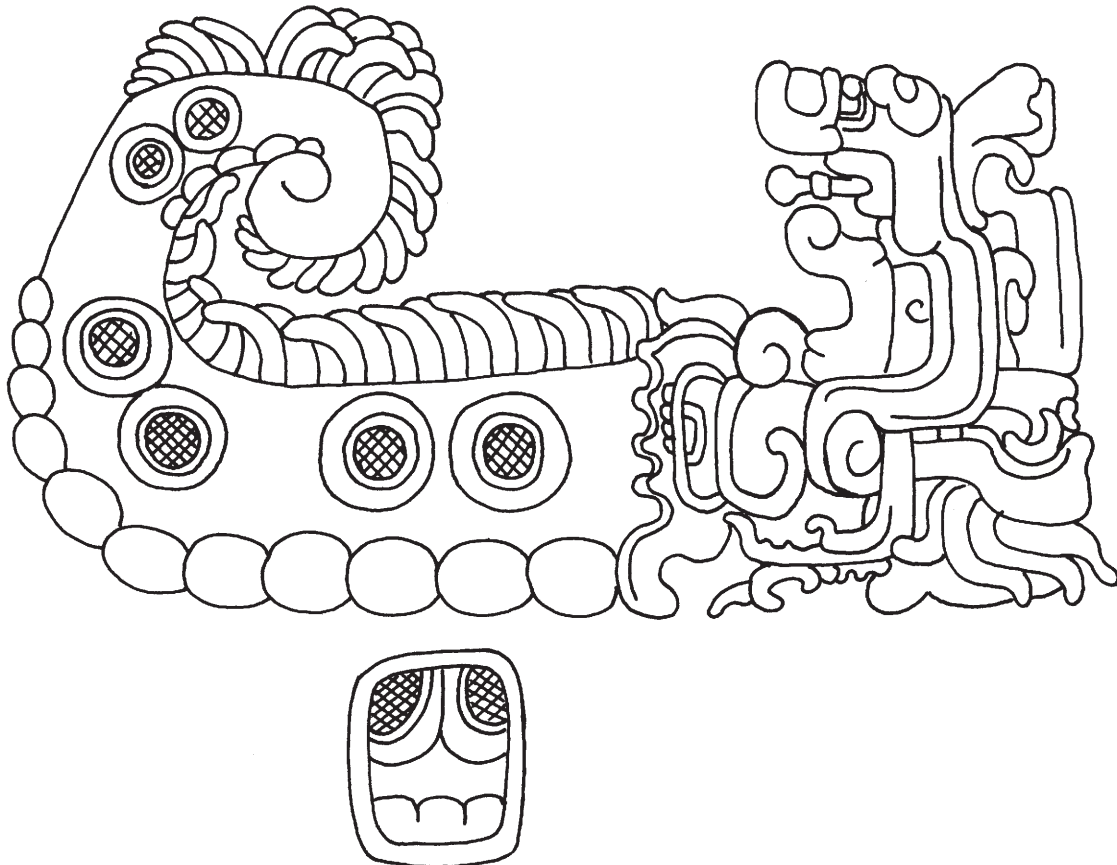


Fig. 42



Fig. 43

lar mirrors. Although he identified Itzamnaah's flower as a mirror and interpreted the *akbal* sign as a reference to a dark, obsidian mirror, Taube also noted that the rim of Mesoamerican mirrors are frequently depicted as petals and that the mirror itself is depicted as representing the center of the flower (Taube 1992a:33, 1992b:184). In other words, looking into these mirrors is like looking into the bowl of a flower.

Herman Beyer (1928) identified the T504 *akbal* sign as a pictograph representing the body of a feathered serpent. The feathered serpent on Copan Altar O illustrates this observation (fig. 42). In several examples of the feathered serpent, its body is replaced with water symbols that demonstrate that it was a water serpent (Hellmuth 1987a, 1987b; see below under Waterlily Bird Serpent). Further evidence for this association with water is found in a Tikal pottery scene where a deity is pictured gathering water (fig. 43). His jar takes the form of a serpent, and the T504 *akbal* sign represents the water contained in it. The *akbal* sign is also found on Chaak's

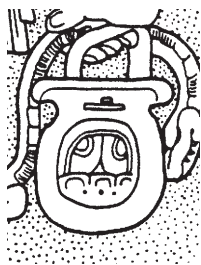


Fig. 44

water jar (fig. 44). This line of evidence suggests that Itzamnaah's flower is marked with the *akbal* sign to indicate that it is filled with water. The bowl of Itzamnaah's *akbal* flower is framed by a circle of beads which in other contexts represents water, and this reinforces the interpretation that this flower bowl contains water. The water that pools in the bowl of a flower is dew. Although the proto-Cholan word for dew is *tij* (Kaufman and Norman 1984:151), the Tzotzil use the phrase '*ik' ak'abal*' "the black of the night" or "the dark of the night" to describe dew (Laughlin 1988:144, personal communication). Dew is only created at night.

As discussed above, dew is virgin water that comes directly from the sea. A bowl of dew would therefore represent the pooled waters of the sea, just as the liquid in a divination bowl would. The identification of the *akbal* sign as a serpent representing the waters of the sea does not invalidate Taube's identification of the *akbal* flower as a mirror because the *akbal* sign is a pictograph of a feathered water serpent that represents the reflective waters of the sea, and this water was characterized as a mirror. Furthermore, the circles on the serpent's body are mirror signs (Taube 1992b). Both dew and mirrors shimmer with light. By looking into the bowl of Itzamnaah's flower, we see not just dew or a mirror but the reflective waters of the mythological sea. When the diviner looked into his mirror or the liquid of his divination bowl he saw this

same water.

I would further argue that there was a visual relationship between sheet lightning and the glimmering, reflected light seen in mirrors and dew. The association of mirrors and lightning is seen in the term *lem* which means brilliant, shiny and flashing in many Mayan languages, but it is also used to refer to mirrors, lightning and sheet lightning (Schele and Miller 1983:13). B. Tedlock (1982:54) noted that people who are destined to become diviners experience dreams symbolizing that the *Mundo* (earth lord) wants them to begin. As noted above, to dream of a lake indicates that the lightning in their blood is ready to move and give them answers to their divination questions. Tedlock's informant described the relationship like this: "A lake is like a mirror, not moving until one's day comes, and then it begins to move with the lightning". Furthermore, divination knowledge which takes the form of sheet lightning is said to come from the sacred lakes on air that is described as breath, chilly wind, cloud and mist. These are the moist conditions associated with dew.

In summary, Itzamnaah was the first rainmaker and diviner. His laughing falcon manifestation with its dew-filled flower reflected these duties. This bird announced the rains and brought the moisture necessary for the germination of the corn crop.<sup>11</sup>

#### God N as the Earth and Mountain God

In his *k'an* turtle form, God N represented the earth. The metaphor that the turtle god invokes is that the rising of the earth's surface from the sea was like a turtle surfacing in a pool of water. The four old men marked with the *kawak* elements were the manifestations of God N as the four great mythological mountains of the directions (Taube 1992:92-99).

According to Landa, the Bakabs were "four brothers whom God placed, when he created the world, at the four points of it, holding up the sky so that it should not fall" (Tozzer 1941:136). This is an appropriate description of the four mythological mountains at the horizon. The turtle, spiral shell and mountain manifestations of God N are all shown as bearers holding up serpent/sky bands. The mountain deities were also manifested as possums and they were the Bakab possums who ruled the darkness before the dawn.

The identification of God N as the four great mountains of the world provides important insights into the creation of the world as described in the *Popol Vuh*. The passage "the mountains were asked to come from the water, straightaway there were great mountains" is followed by "it was merely their spirit essence (*nawal*), their miraculous power, that brought about the creation of the mountains and the valleys" (Christenson 2000). So when the great mountains were asked to come forth, it was, in effect, the mountain manifestations of the creator grandfather who were asked to come forth.

Furthermore, the appearance of the earth is described as the work of the Heart of the Sky and the Heart of the Earth:

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<sup>11</sup> The Itzamnaah bird was also associated with a celestial body, but this identification must be deferred until a future article.

First the earth was created, the mountains and the valleys. The waterways were divided, their branches coursing among the mountains. Thus the waters were divided, revealing the great mountains. For thus was the creation of the earth, created then by Heart of Sky and Heart of Earth, as they are called. They were the first to conceive it. The sky was set in place. The earth also was firmly set in place in the midst of the waters. Thus was conceived the successful completion of the work as they thought and as they pondered (Christenson 2000).

Although the Heart of the Earth has been interpreted to be a second epithet of the Heart of the Sky (Tedlock 1996:343), I think it is more likely that that it refers to the creator grandfather, and that the phrase the Heart of the Sky and the Heart of the Earth is a paired reference to this set of principal creator gods.

### God N as Thunder

Although he was not the only deity associated with thunder, God N's role as a thunder deity is well documented (Taube 1992a). A review of lightning bolts graphically demonstrates this. Although the Chaaks dispensed the lightning bolts by throwing their axes, the deities who were identified with the lightning bolt axe itself are designated God K (also see GII of the Palenque Triad below).

God K's name is usually represented by a portrait of the deity. This portrait has phonetic complements and substitutions that indicate it represents the word K'awil (Stuart 1987). Although there are variations, God K has the same type of zoomorphic face as the Chaaks, but he has a mirror in his forehead and an axe blade protrudes through his head. Some God K deities also have cigars or torches in their foreheads. In the axe versions of God K, the body forms the handle of the axe and one of his legs has the form of a serpent (fig. 45). Many illustrations of God K show smoke emanating from the axe blade in reference to the fire and burning caused by a lightning strike. On K5164, God K is illustrated as a smoking lightning bolt. His left leg is a long serpent representing the lightning flash. God N emerges out of the serpent's mouth. In this scene, God N is the thunder that occurs immediately after

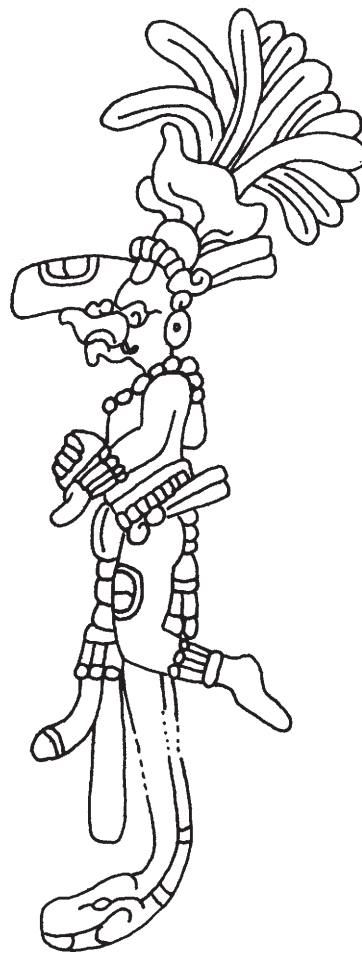


Fig. 45

a lightning bolt strikes.<sup>12</sup>

As noted, God N appears in a number of contexts wearing a T548 drum sign atop his waterlily headdress (fig. 28). On Copan Hieroglyphic Stairs Step K, the k'atun glyph which is normally only illustrated with the T548 sign in the central position also includes the portrait of God N, which indicates this deity's close association with the T548 drum sign (fig. 46). The wooden *tuun* drum mimics the sound of thunder, and like thunder it can be heard at great distances (Tozzer 1941:104, Thompson 1970:266, Bassie-Sweet 1991:118). As noted, there is a belief that thunder is the voice of the thunder gods shouting to each other. In other words, thunder was the shout of God N. The juxtaposition of God N and the T548 drum suggests that the T548 drum not only belonged to God N but was a manifestation of his thunder voice.

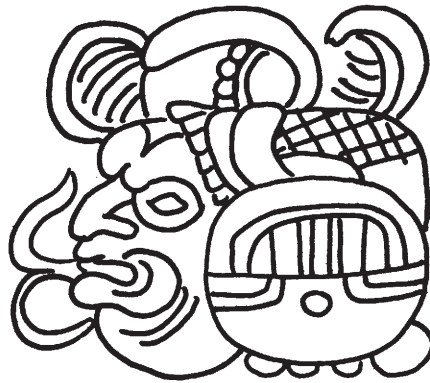


Fig. 46

### The Waterlily Bird Serpent

There is a bird/serpent associated with God N and his drum (fig. 47). He is the Number 13 Deity and he is also employed to represent the 360 day period in the Long Count. Although he has been nicknamed the Waterlily Serpent, the Waterlily Monster and the Lily Pad Headdress Monster, I prefer the name Waterlily Bird Serpent because his head has the same hooked beak as the Itzamnaah bird. In contrast to the Itzamnaah bird, the Waterlily Bird Serpent wears a waterlily flower and pad tied to his forehead instead of the *akbal* headdress and shell ornament. The other difference is that the body of this bird is a water serpent with feathers (Hellmuth 1987a:142). The watery nature of the serpent body is evident in the numerous illustrations of

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<sup>12</sup> The theme of God N emerging before a young voluptuous goddess appears on a number of pottery scenes that refer to birth (Taube 1994). In the Tzotuhil region, the Mam (grandfather) is summoned during birth to ease the pain and duration of the delivery, and Taube has suggested that the God N in these scenes has been summoned to assist in the birth. In his role as a healer, God N and his midwife spouse were in charge of the birth process. In some of these scenes, God N touches or stares at the breast of this goddess and places the focus of the action on this act. Although it has frequently been characterized as sexual fondling, I believe it may be related to the production of breast milk. One of the critical duties of the mother immediately after the birth is to produce milk. When this ability is lacking, healers immediately provide potions and rituals to stimulate lactation. On K2067, God N extends a cup to the goddess.

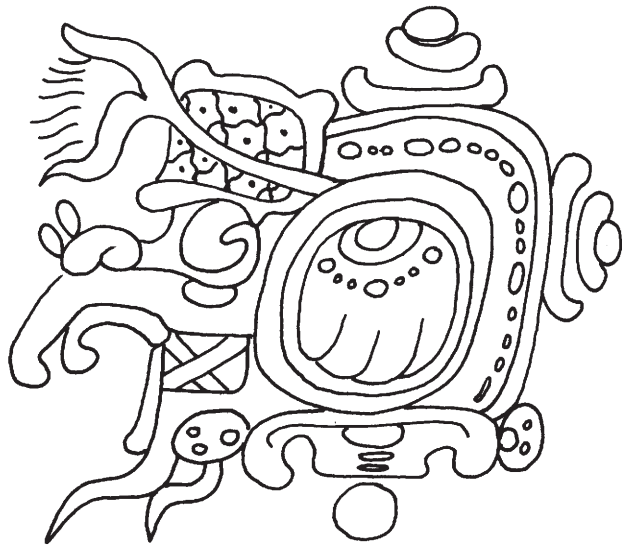
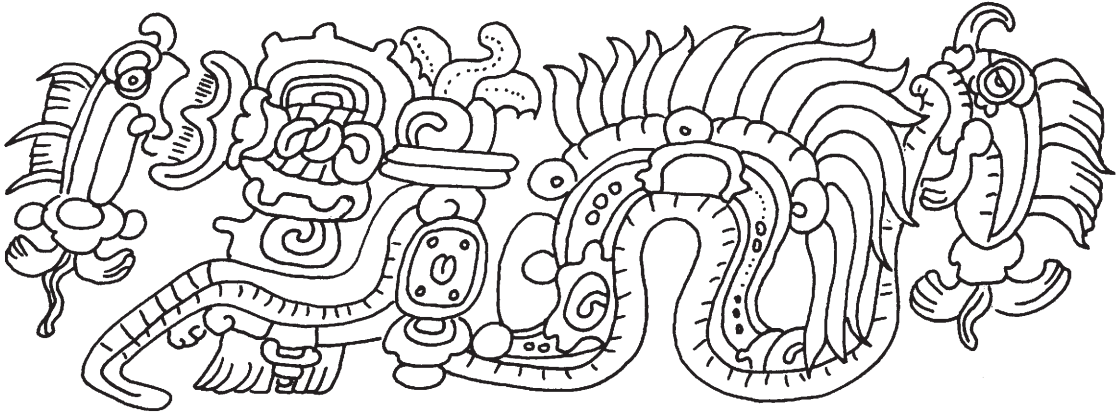


Fig. 47

this supernatural animal where the body is decorated with water symbols and fish nibble at its feathers and waterlilies.

In the context of the 360 day period, the headdress of the Waterlily Bird Serpent frequently includes a T548 drum sign. In some examples, the Waterlily Bird Serpent wearing the drum sign is also used as the headdress for God N in his manifestation as the Number 5

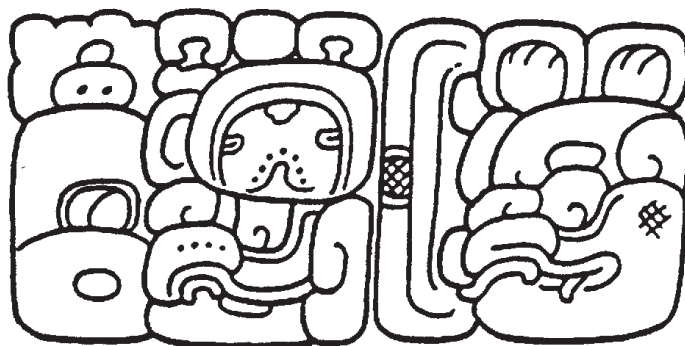


Fig. 48

Deity. The role of the Waterlily Bird Serpent as the Number 13 Deity and his association with the thunder drum is reminiscent of the Tzotzil god called Thirteen Water Snake (Laughlin 1988:216). He was thought to be an old man who walked through the clouds and made thunder.

The name phrase of the Waterlily Bird Serpent is composed of three parts (Houston and Stuart 1996:299, Stuart, Houston and Robertson 1999:55, 56) (fig. 48). The first is Yax Chit. The second is a portrait of the bird head prefixed with the number one. The last part of his name is the glyph for *kan* “snake” prefixed with a sign that has been tentatively read as both *nah* “house” and *noh* “great” (Stuart, Houston and Robertson 1999:55, 56, Marc Zender personal communication). The bird head is infixed with a *naahb*’ “sea” sign infixed in its forehead. The Waterlily Bird Serpent is thus a feathered water serpent associated with the sea and with the creator grandfather. The most obvious parallel from the *Popol Vuh* is Feathered Serpent, the sheet lightning manifestation of the creator grandfather. Evidence to support this association is found in the numerous depictions of the Waterlily Bird Serpent that are decorated with mirror signs (fig. 49). If this identification is correct, then the juxtaposition of the T548 thunder drum and the Waterlily Bird Serpent is the pairing of the sheet lightning and thunder of the creator grandfather.

Stuart’s recognition that Itzamnaah and God N were manifestations of the same deity enhances our understanding of the diverse roles played by the creator grandfather. The combined traits of



Fig. 49



God N and God D (Itzamnaah) parallel those of Xpiyacoc. The creator grandfather also had whirlpool and wind attributes, but a discussion of these must await a future article that focuses on the traits of the creator grandmother.

### The Classic Period Lightning Bolt Gods

The Palenque Cross Group texts discuss a triad of gods known by the nicknames GI, GII and GIII. The Cross Group consists of three temples facing a quadrilateral plaza. Each temple replicates a mountain cave, and the hieroglyphic texts within each temple refer to the birth of a deity who was thought to have been born from that particular cave. The Temple of the Cross is situated on the north side and relates the birth of GI; the western Temple of the Sun relates the birth of GIII, while the eastern Temple of the Foliated Cross relates that of GII. In the Cross Group narrative, there is an event which occurred on 9.12.18.5.16 2 Cib 14 Mol (23 July, 690 A.D). In the months preceding and following this date, Jupiter, Mars and Saturn appeared in the same area of the night sky and their paths interwove as they came in and out of conjunction. Because of these alignments, it has been argued that these heavenly bodies were manifestations of the Palenque Triad gods.<sup>13</sup> In addition to their planetary associations, I believe that the Palenque Triad are directly parallel with the *Popol Vuh* lightning bolt gods known as Juraqan Lightning Bolt, Ch'ipi Lightning Bolt and Raxa Lighting Bolt. The evidence is as follows.

### GI

The Tablet of the Cross gives the birth date of a god called Muwan Mat in 3121 B.C. (Stuart 2000, Martin and Grube 2000). It is not clear from the text whether this god was male or female, but it is stated that Muwan Mat was the parent of GI, GII and GIII. The text on the Tablet of Cross also refers to the birth of a GI deity the year before that of Muwan Mat and indicates that he performed important events at the new era. Because of the earlier birth date and events, Lounsbury (1985) argued that there were two GI deities, a father and a son. He identified Muwan Mat as the wife of GI Senior and the mother of GI Junior. The new Temple 19 texts refer to the accession of a GI deity prior to the birth of both GI Senior and Muwan Mat (Stuart 1999). This has brought up the possibility that there is but one GI deity and that these birth dates are merely the reappearance of this god at certain points in time.<sup>14</sup> Although I favor the father/son interpretation, the issue can not be resolved at the present time.

What can be said is that GI is a roman-nosed deity with a shark's tooth and fish barbels protruding from his mouth (fig. 50). Hellmuth (1987a) has noted that portraits of GI on Early Classic incensarios are often surrounded by symbols for standing water. GI frequently wears a headdress composed of the Quadripartite Badge Monster (QBM) (fig. 51). The QBM is a zoomorphic creature with a bowl on top of his head. In

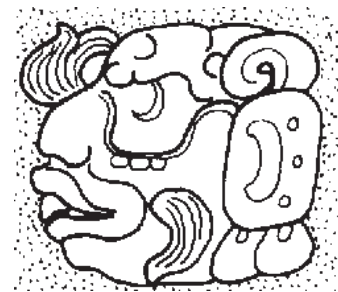


Fig. 50

<sup>13</sup> See Lounsbury (1989) for an overview of this interpretation.

<sup>14</sup> Such an interpretation still does not resolve the gender of Muwan Mat.



Fig. 51

the bowl are a stingray spine, a shell and a variable element. The Temple of the Inscriptions text states that the headdress of GI is the QBM, and the Tablet of the Cross features this motif at the base of its central icon (fig. 52). It is also held by the young Kan B'alam in the figural relief. There are a number of lords who are dressed as GI. For example, on Copan Stela I, the ruler wears a GI mask and the QBM headdress.

In many of the Early Classic depictions of GI, the QBM headdress includes a fish-eating water bird with a long neck and a sharp, pointed beak (Hellmuth 1987a). This bird has been identified as a manifestation of GI. GI impersonators wear this bird as part of their headdresses on the Palenque Creation Tablet, Aguateca Stela 7 and Seibal Stela 6. On the Palenque Temple 19 platform, the ruler Akhal Mo' Naab reenacts the accession of GI as part of his own accession ritual (Stuart 1999). The caption text states that he is the image of GI. Although most of Akhal Mo' Naab's headdress was destroyed by the collapse of the building, the fish-eating water bird was not damaged and is juxtaposed immediately in front of GI's name (fig. 53).

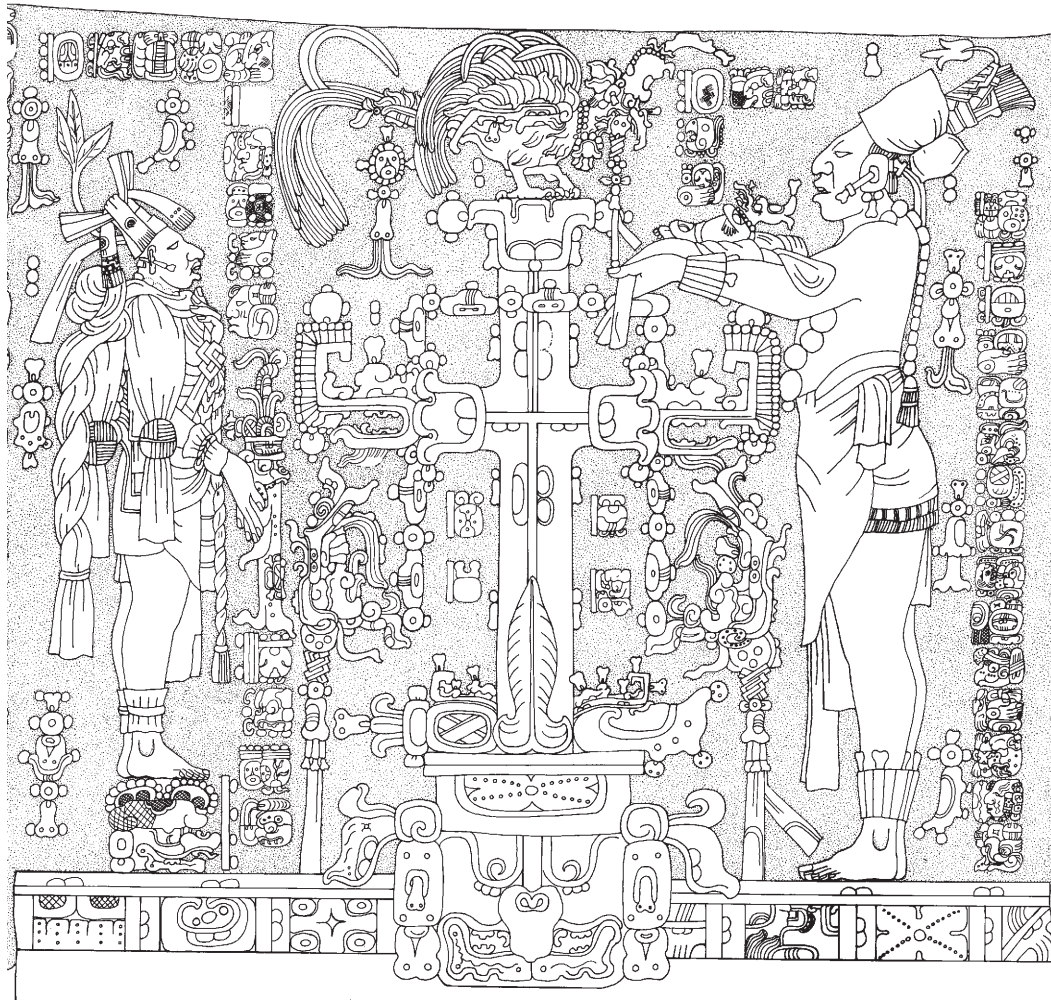


Fig. 52

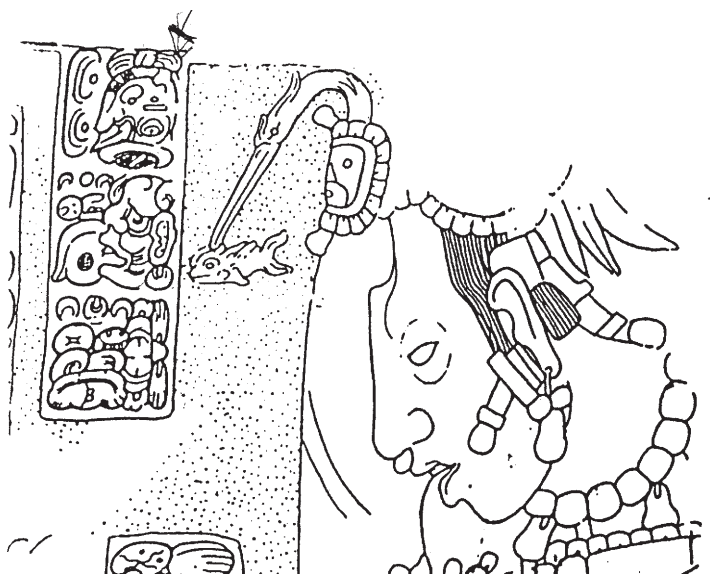


Fig. 53

On many incensarios that bear the image of GI, he is illustrated wearing a simple jade earring (Hellmuth 1987a). Other portraits and his name glyphs, however, frequently show him wearing



Fig. 54

Chaak's shell earring, and he has thus been associated with these lightning bolt deities (Coe 1973) (fig. 54). This earring is one of the keys to GI's identification. As noted, Maya scribes fre-

quently combined two signs representing two separate words into one sign that nevertheless still represented two words. The names of numerous Classic Period lords include the name Chaak “lightning bolt” (Martin and Grube 2000:70, 74, 80, 178, 180). When the scribes combined the two parts of the ruler’s name into one sign, they merely took the

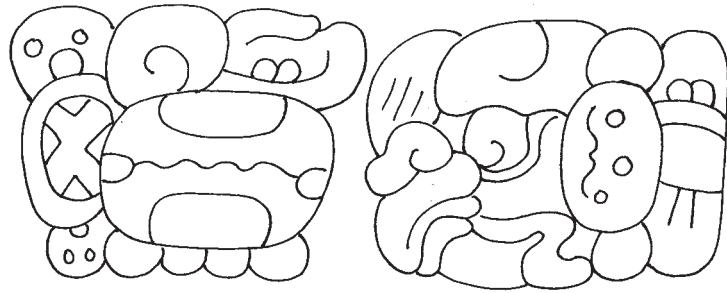


Fig. 55

shell earring of Chaak and placed it on the other sign. For example, the name of the Tonina Ruler B’aaknal Chaak is composed of the signs for B’aaknal followed by a Chaak portrait

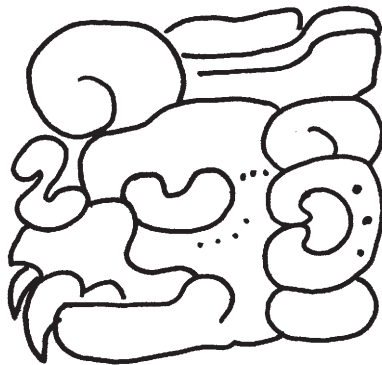


Fig. 56

glyph (fig. 55). However, on Monument 29, his name is represented by a skull (*b’aak*) wearing the shell earring of Chaak (fig. 56). I suggest that this is the same convention used with GI’s name. Evidence for this interpretation is found on the Creation Stone, where the name phrase of GI is composed of his portrait followed by the full form of the Chaak sign (fig. 57). Whatever name GI’s portrait represented, it was followed by the word *chaak* “lightning bolt”, hence GI was a lightning bolt deity.

Parker 1993). Wichmann (2000) has demonstrated that this reading is incorrect and that the reading order of these signs should be *hun ye nal*. A possible meaning of this title will be discussed below.

GI’s name is frequently preceded by a title that has been read as Hun Nal Ye “one maize revealed,” and GI has been interpreted to be an aspect of the Corn God (Freidel, Schele and



Fig. 57

## GII

GII was the third born of the Palenque Triad brothers, but whenever the Triad is named as a group he is named in the second position, hence his nickname GII. GII is one of the God K



Fig. 58

deities. As discussed above, these deities can take the form of the lightning bolt axe and their portrait represents the word *k’awil*. GII’s portrait glyph is composed of a God K with phonetic *u* and *ne* prefixes. The body of GII is in a reclining position and has the proportions of a baby (fig. 58). The reclining pose, baby proportions and phonetic complements occur in other contexts where they have the meaning of *unen* “baby, child” (Martin 1999). As Martin has demonstrated, GII’s name is a conflation of *unen* “baby, child” and God K “*K’awil*”. Baby *K’awil* is an appropriate designation for GII, who was the youngest of the Palenque

Triad of brothers.

The Tablet of the Foliated Cross also states that GII was a *chak ch'at* “red dwarf” (Houston 1992, Houston cited in Schele 1992:161). The tablet illustrates the cave of GII’s birth as the great eastern mountain where corn was found. His association with the east is reflected in his *chak* “red” title, for in Maya color directionalism red is the color of the east. The association of dwarfs with lightning is found on the Yaxchilan hieroglyphic stairs in front of Structure 33 (fig. 59). In this scene, the ruler Bird Jaguar is illustrated playing ball, and he is accompanied by two dwarfs with star signs under their arms. The first dwarf wears the shell earring of Chaak, indicating he is a lightning bolt god. Dwarfs are found in a number of Period Ending scenes in the eastern lowlands. These human dwarfs may have been viewed as the living embodiment of GII.

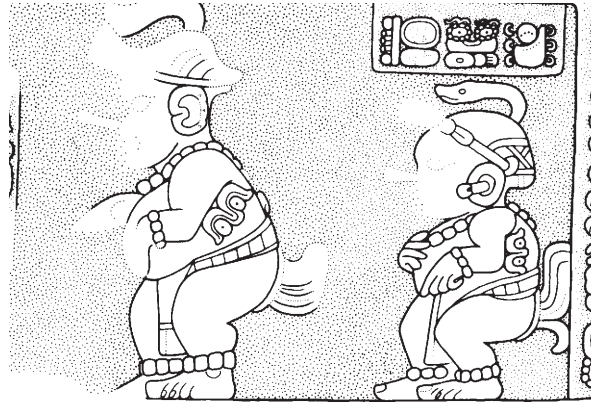


Fig. 59

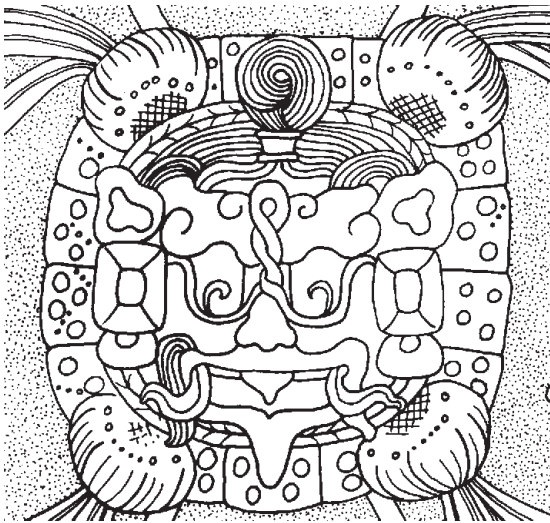


Fig. 60

### GIII

GIII appears in a number of contexts outside of the triad. He is the Number 7 Deity, a regent of the moon (Glyph C of the Lunar Series), the patron of Wo, the Day Regent of Kib and one of the Paddler Gods. In this latter role, he played an important part in the events at the beginning of the new era. The central icon on the Tablet of the Sun illustrates a portrait of GIII emblazoned on a war shield with two crossed spears behind it (fig. 60).

The Number 4 Deity is a square-eyed deity with *k'in* “sun” signs infixed on his face. He appears in a variety of contexts which indicate he represents the sun. GIII has the same face and *k'in* infixes as the Sun God, but he has jaguar features and a looped cord over the bridge of his nose. In some examples, this cord has the form of a serpent or is marked with water signs. In the texts at Palenque, GIII’s name is composed of three parts: a *k'in* title; a T1008 sign within a day sign cartouche and a T594 shield sign (fig. 61). Although GIII’s *k'in* title has been interpreted to represent the word *k'inich* “sun-faced”, Wichmann (2000) has argued that it represents the word *k'ihnich* “the hot one”. The T1008 sign appears in other contexts where it has the meaning of youth. The phonetic value of the T594 shield sign has not been deciphered. It is likely that GIII’s three-part

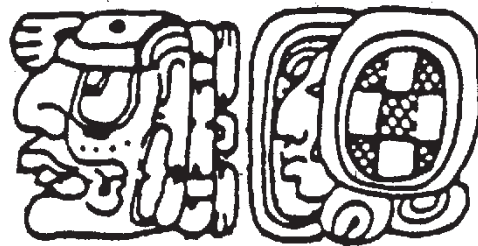


Fig. 61

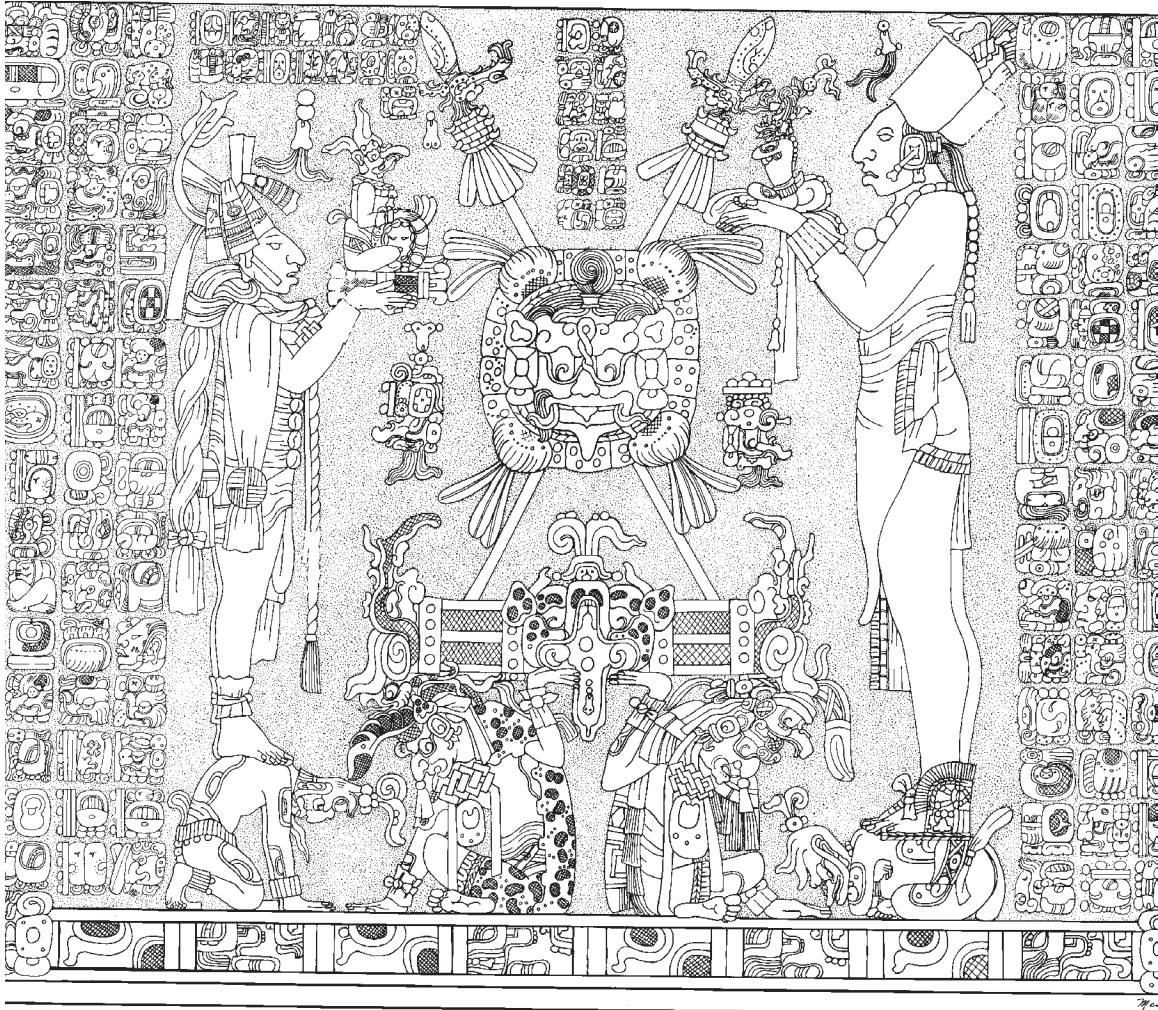


Fig. 62

name is also the name of the shield that bears his likeness.

On the Tablet of the Sun, the young Kan B'alam is pictured holding up a personified flint (*tok*) and shield (*pakal*) (fig. 62). In addition to creating fire, flint was used for spearheads, arrowheads and axe heads. This *tok pakal* emblem has been identified as an important war-related object (Houston 1983) and one that is directly related to GIII (Bassie-Sweet 1991, 1996).

The word *pakal* also appears in the name phrase of the Palenque ruler Pakal. The full version of the ruler's name is K'inich Janaab' Pakal. Although the meaning of the word *janaab'* is unknown, it is represented by a propeller-like design in a cartouche or by an owl with the propeller element infixed in its eye. On the Tablet of the Slaves, the ruler Ahkal Mo' Naab is pictured receiving a headdress and the *tok pakal*. He clutches a bag in his hand decorated with the *janaab'* owl. The warlike nature of GIII is found in the numerous depictions of Maya rulers holding both a spear and a GIII shield. These rulers also wear "Tlaloc" motifs which are associated with warfare, fire serpents and meteors (Taube 1992, 2000). On Dos Pilas Stela 2 and Aguateca Stela 2, Ruler 3 is so decked out, and he also wears an owl as a necklace. Another kind of owl is associated with GIII on K758. In this scene, GIII emerges from the mouth of the owl, who also wears GIII's twisted cord over his nose. Owls are frequently viewed as omens of

death in Maya culture.

Thompson (1950:11-12, 134) identified both the Waterlily Jaguar and GIII as the sun during its nightly journey through the Underworld. GIII has been given the nickname “the Jaguar God of the Underworld” and has been identified as the night sun (Coe 1973:15, 83, 107). There is, however, no direct evidence that the Maya believed that the sun was transformed into a jaguar at night. Most of GIII’s titles are not securely deciphered, but he is called a *yahaw k’ak’* “lord of fire,” and he has been identified as a fire god (Stuart 1998:408). One of his names also refers to a torch (Schele 1992:158). Taube (2000) has provided compelling evidence that GIII’s looped cord is a twisted cord used in fire drilling.

Although the sun is naturally associated with fire, Taube has shown that in Mesoamerican culture the fire sparks given off by meteors were associated with the drilling of fire and that meteors were viewed as arrows, darts and spears. In Mesoamerica, there was also a common belief that the sky was a stratified environment composed of either nine or thirteen layers. Although the *Codex Vaticanus A* illustrates the sixth layer of the sky as the realm of the fire serpents who sent out meteors, Taube noted that *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus Pinturas* associates this place with the fifth level. Stuart (cited in Taube 2000) noted that this is parallel to GIII who is said to be a lord of Na Ho Chan (the House of Five Sky). Another parallel is that the bird associated with the fire serpent level in Central Mexico was the owl (Nicolson 1971:table 2), and GIII is closely associated with such a bird. Taube also demonstrated the pan-Mesoamerican association of meteors with warfare and as omens of death. As Stuart observed, the so-called “star war” glyphs are likely meteors (cited in Taube 2000). The initial event which begins the narrative on both Dos Pilas Stela 2 and Aguateca Stela 2 is a “star war” action.

In brief, GIII was a fire god with war and meteor associations. He was specifically associated with particular kinds of shields. Unlike the Chaaks who threw lightning bolt axes, GIII’s weapon of choice appears to have been the flint spear. Given that flint produces sparks when struck, it is likely that this spear was a metaphor for the flaming meteor. In Tzotzil, *ch’ob* means both torch and falling star, suggesting that GIII’s torch title may have been another metaphor for a meteor (Laughlin 1975:137). Given that meteors can range from brief flashes of light to flaming fireballs, it is not surprising that there would be different metaphors associated with them.

It can be assumed that GIII was viewed as some kind of thunderbolt given that his older and younger brothers were manifested as such. He is always named in the third position, which may indicate that he was a less powerful flash of light than his brothers. The flashes of light that come from the sky, possessing less physical power than thunderbolts, are meteors. The association of lightning with meteors is found in the Tojolabal area where the *tzantzewal* are thought to be either lightning, falling stars or lights that appear at night in the hills (Spero 1987:172). In addition to being flashes of light, big meteors share other characteristics with lightning bolts. Both can be accompanied by a tremendous boom, and both are associated with fire (Taube 2000:325). Meteors are considered to be omens of death, and lightning bolts usually kill any living being they hit. Both lightning bolts and meteors are associated with obsidian and flint, and both are considered to be weapons of the lightning bolt gods.

## The Parallels

The *Popol Vuh* sky gods were Juraqan Thunderbolt, Ch'ipi ("youngest child") Lightning Bolt and Raxa ("sudden" or "green/blue") Lightning Bolt. As discussed above, the *Popol Vuh* text says that Lightning Bolt Juraqan was first, Ch'ipi ("youngest child") Lightning Bolt was second, Raxa Lightning Bolt was third and that together they were the Heart of the Sky. Although he was the youngest, Ch'ipi is always named in the second position when the three Heart of the Sky deities are listed together. This odd listing parallels the Palenque Triad where GII, who was the youngest brother, is always named in the second position whenever the Triad is named together. In Tzeltal Pinola, there is a triad of gods known as Whirlwind (*Sutu 'iki'*), Thunderbolt (*Chaguk*) and Meteor (*Paslam*) who have traits similar to the Heart of the Sky deities and to the Palenque Triad. These traits and the naming pattern of the Heart of the Sky deities and the Palenque Triad led me to investigate the notion that these three sets of gods were parallel. I will begin with the parallels between GII, Ch'ipi Thunderbolt and the youthful lightning bolt gods of the contemporary Maya.

## The Young Lightning Bolt Gods

Ch'ipi Lightning Bolt is the second named Heart of the Sky deity, but Ch'ipi is used to refer to the youngest member of a family or the smallest member of a group (Christenson 2000). *Ruch'ipil kaqolajay* is glossed in a Cakchiquel dictionary as "the tiny child of the thunderbolt" (Tedlock 1996:224). Red lightning bolts in the form of small children or dwarfs are found across highland Guatemala. Saki C'oxol is described in colonial dictionaries as a dwarf who moves like lightning (B. Tedlock 1986:134). He is also briefly mentioned in the *Popol Vuh* and in the *Annals of the Cakchiquel*, where he is characterized as the keeper of animals and the spirit of volcanic mountains. In the latter account, he has the appearance of a small boy dressed in red. After the conquest, Spanish priests wrote dance dramas to use in the conversion of the natives and to replace the well-established pre-Columbian dance dramas that were important components of every festival. Similar dances are still performed in some highland towns. One of the main characters in the drama called the Dance of the Conquest is a character called Ajitz who is a native diviner (Bode 1961:213). He is also called C'oxol, Saki ("white") C'oxol, Quiakacoxol ("red") C'oxol and Tzitzimit. Ajitz is dressed all in red and he carries an axe. A smaller version of Ajitz also appears in the drama and is characterized as his younger brother. In contemporary Momostenango, the C'oxol is a red dwarf lightning bolt god who appears in creation stories. It is said that he struck the first Quiché elders (father-mothers) with his axe and awakened the sheet lightning in their blood, and he whipped knowledge into them (B. Tedlock 1982:147, 1986; D. Tedlock 1985:305). This latter act is also associated with lightning because lightning bolts are characterized as whips in contemporary beliefs. Given their similar form and lightning bolt associations, it is highly likely that the red dwarf C'oxol was one of the manifestations of Ch'ipi Lightningbolt.

In the *Popol Vuh*, Ch'ipi Lightning Bolt and Raxa Lightning Bolt are referred to as Ch'ipi Nanahuac and Raxa Nanahuac (Edmonson 1971:159, D. Tedlock 1985:170). Nanahuac is a cognate of Nanahuatl who was the deity who split open the corn mountain in central Mexican lore (L. Schultze-Jena cited in Edmonson 1971:159). Some of the contemporary Maya tales that recount this core event indicate that a series of lightning bolt gods tried but failed to break open the stone enclosing the corn. In Tzeltal Bachajon, it is said that the red lightning bolt god broke



open the rock after two other lightning bolt gods failed (Slocum 1965:5). In the Pokomchi area, the smallest or youngest lightning bolt was the one who was finally able to do it (Montejo and Campbell 1993). This suggests that Ch'ipi Lightning Bolt rather than Raxa ("green/blue") Lightning Bolt was the deity responsible for the ultimate success. In the hierarchy of lightning gods found in the Chol and Tojolabal areas, the green/blue lightning bolt is invariably the weaker one (Spero 1987, Jolja Cave Project field notes). Further support for this interpretation is found in a Quiché myth from Quetzaltenango in which the original corn was owned by a spirit living in the volcano of Siete Orejas (Thompson 1971:353). As noted above the red dwarf C'oxol was the spirit of the volcano.

The appearance of a young, red lightning bolt god associated with corn is not restricted to highland Guatemala. In Tzeltal Pinola, the lightning bolt god has red, black and white forms (Hermitte 1964). Thunderbolt is characterized as a young, very small boy, and he is identified with St. Michael, the patron saint of the town who has a sword-like a lightning bolt with which he protects the community. He is the leader of the ancestors (mother-fathers), and the most powerful *naguals* (animal souls) of the ancestors, as well as the current mother-fathers, take his form. The close association between Thunderbolt and the ancestral mother-fathers is echoed in the relationship between the C'oxol and the ancestral father-mothers of the Momostenango Quiché. Thunderbolt is also the owner of corn. It is said that he had the spirit of maize hidden under his foot, but the mother-fathers from the neighboring town of Amatenago stole part of it when he raised his foot, and this explains why Amatenago is more prosperous. The Ch'ol of Joloniel have two kinds of lightning bolt gods: red and green/blue. Red Lightning Bolt is the most powerful, and he also has the form of a small boy (Jolja' Cave Project field notes, Felipe Perez Montejo, Domingo Perez Morenos, personal communication 2001). In Yucatan, X Thup Chaak is said to be the smallest but most important of the lightning bolt gods (Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934:114-15, 137). *Thup* means smallest in a series and youngest of a number of brothers and sister. He dwells in the east and is the guardian of the species of corn called *x thup nal* which matures early. The smallest of the *balam* guardian deities who protect the village and the corn field is also called Thup. He also dwells in the east and stands ready to assist the other *balams* should they not be strong enough to overcome a harmful animal or evil wind.

The parallel nature of the red dwarf C'oxol and the red dwarf GII has been noted (Freidel cited in Schele 1992:161, Freidel, Schele and Parker 1993:201). An important aspect of C'oxol is that he is the spirit of the great eastern mountain (B. Tedlock 1982), and this is also the mountain associated with GII. The Tablet of the Foliated Cross illustrates GII's cave of birth as the great eastern mountain in which corn was found. His intimate association with this location, and his parallel traits with Ch'ipi Lightning Bolt and the contemporary red/east lightning bolt deities, suggests that he was the Classic Period lightning bolt god who broke open the corn stone.

### The Meteor Gods of Fire

As discussed above, GIII was a fire and meteor god with jaguar characteristics. When the Palenque Triad brothers are named together, GIII is ranked after GII despite the fact that GIII was older. A parallel to this is found in the Tzeltal meteor god called Paslam, who is said to live in the same locations as Thunderbolt but is second in rank to him (Hermitte 1964). Sixteenth century Tzeltal and Tzotzil dictionaries also refer to a meteor deity called Pazlam, Pozlom or

Poxlon. Nunez de la Vega describes him as a ball of fire and says that he travels in the sky in the form of a star with a tail like a comet (in other words, a meteor). In Tzotzil Zinacantan, Poslom is still considered a meteor (a falling star seen at dusk) or a ball of fire (Vogt 1969:305, Laughlin 1975:284, 513). In Tzotzil Chenalho, he is called Poslob (Guiteras Holmes 1961:292-93). His animal manifestation is the jaguar, and this is reminiscent of GIII who has jaguar traits. As discussed above, GIII is associated with an owl. The barn owl, screech owl and the other night prowlers are classified with the Poslob (Guiteras Holmes 1961:249).

During the Late Classic Period, idols were frequently composed of a tall, clay cylinder decorated with a deity image. A brazier for burning incense was placed on top of the cylinder. The most common god found on these cylinders is GIII. In the Tojolabal area, there is an animal counterpart called *k'ak chob* (literally “fire jaguar”) who is described as having either a fireball on his forehead or a brazier tied to his forehead (Ruz 1982:57). The fireball relates him to GIII’s meteor identification, and the brazier is parallel to GIII’s role on incensario idols.

Meteors can appear as white streaks across the sky or flame in red, yellow, blue or green hues. In Tzeltal Pinola, Paslam has green/blue, red and white forms, while in Tzeltal Oxchuc, he has green/blue, red and yellow forms (Hermitte 1964, Villa Rojas 1947). In Tzotzil San Andres, the diseases that are sent on the wind by witches are called *poslom*. They take green/blue, red, yellow, white and black forms, and are described as *yash tsanam ik'* which can be translated as “green/blue burning wind” (Holland 1961:189-96, 207; Laughlin personal communication). They have a close association with whirlwinds.

The consistent association of Poslom with green/blue is reminiscent of Rax Lightning Bolt, the third member of the Heart of the Sky triad. Rax is the Quiché cognate of yax “blue/green”. D. Tedlock has suggested that Rax Lightning Bolt is the same as the lowland Yaxal Chaak who occurs not only in colonial sources, but in the hieroglyphic texts (Tedlock 1996:225). Lacadena (2000) has, however, demonstrated that Yaxal Chaak is actually read Yax Ha'al Chaak “yax, rain, lightning bolt” with the meaning of “Chaak is the yax rain”. There is also a similar deity named Chak Ha'al Chaak “chak rain lightning bolt”. Yax also means fresh and chak means red or great, thus, these names could also carry the meaning of the “fresh rain” (first rain of the season) and the “great rain,” respectively.

Father Thomas Coto’s 1651 vocabulary lists *raxa cakulha* as the flash of the lightning. The term *rax* also means sudden and this is how Tedlock (1996) and Christenson (2000) have translated Rax Lightning Bolt’s name. These meanings are consistent with meteors. Although the major meteor showers occur regularly from May to December, meteors appear in the night sky with little warning. They are sudden flashes of light in the sky. As noted, the green/blue lightning bolt is frequently the weakest. It is not inconceivable then that a meteor might have been classified by the Maya as a kind of sudden lightning with a weaker nature than a lightning bolt.

### The Hurricane Thunderbolts

Winds (*ik'*) are an important subject for the Maya, and different types of winds were thought to be manifestations of different gods. The winds help burn the *milpa* and bring the rain, but they can also be destructive. Wind damage to the corn crop is common. The most powerful of the wind storms are the hurricanes which originate in the eastern Caribbean Sea. Although they are

most frequent from August to October, the hurricane season extends from June to November. Accompanied by thunderbolts and torrential rains, they usually sweep across the Maya lowlands from the east and northeast. The hurricanes that bypass Yucatan still produce heavy rains that descend on the peninsula from the north. North is also the direction of storms during the dry season. In addition to the immediate devastation and deaths caused by wind, rain and flooding, hurricanes flatten large tracts of forest, and the entire area becomes a fire hazard during the dry season when this uprooted vegetation dries out (Konrad 1985). Either through lightning strikes or careless human activity, uncontrolled fires then sweep across the landscape. These conditions imitate on a massive scale the annual burning of the corn field.

The first member of the Heart of the Sky triad was Lightning Bolt Juraqan, and he is referred to as the sage in the sky who provided the brains for Hunahpu's replacement head (Edmonson 1971:124). When the creator deities decided to destroy the wooden men, Juraqan flooded the world with a darkened rain, and this indicates that he was associated with storms of great magnitude. *Juraqan* means "one his leg" in Quiché (Hunt 1977:242, D. Tedlock 1985:343). One-legged beings are visually associated with both whirling winds and lightning bolts because these phenomena generally have the form of a single leg (Hunt 1977). The Spanish word *huracan* is believed to be a loan word from Taino, and in the cultures of the Caribbean and north coast of South America many of the words for hurricane are homonymous with this term. It has been suggested that people of the Caribbean likely had contact with the Maya and that *huracan* and *Juraqan* are cognates (Foster 1945:195, Hunt 1977:242, Tedlock 1985:343, 1996:223). Although some researchers doubt there is a semantic connection between these words, lame or one-legged gods are associated with hurricanes in Mesoamerica, and *Juraqan* has been identified as such (Foster 1977, Hunt 1977:242; D. Tedlock 1985:343, 1996:224, 344, Christenson 2000). A hurricane identification for the most senior of the *Popol Vuh* lightning bolts is appropriate because hurricanes are the most powerful storms. The name Lightning Bolt *Juraqan* conjures up the image of a deity who could destroy the entire world, and that is exactly what *Juraqan* did.

Whirlwinds are closely associated with hurricanes by the Maya. Both Yucatec *keh ik'* and *mozon ik'* refer to a fleeting hurricane and a strong whirlwind (Barrera Vasquez 1980:309, 490). Whirlwinds are frequently created during the burning of the corn field. These swirling winds take on dark form when they move across the field, picking up ash, smoke and fire (Perera and Bruce 1982:31), and this is not unlike the dark conditions associated with hurricanes. In Yucatan, these whirlwinds are called *k'ak'al mozon 'ik'* "fiery whirlwind", and they are viewed in a positive way as they are thought to fan the fire of the *milpa* and create a good burn (Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934:119). In contemporary Tzeltal Pinola, the whirlwind is also closely associated with fire. A man with Whirlwind for a *nagual* can create a whirlwind by blowing on fire, and he can eat live coals (Hermitte 1964).

In the colonial-period documents of the Tzeltal, it is noted that a person could have thirteen animal counterparts or *naguals*, and that whirlwinds and lightning bolts were the most powerful (Calnek 1988:56). In Tzeltal Pinola, Whirlwind is thought to be less powerful than either Thunderbolt or Meteor (Hermitte 1964). However, in the adjacent Tojolabal area, Whirlwind is considered to be equally powerful but evil. The Tojolabal believe there are three evil deities who can take the lives of people and animals: Bitus ("tornado" or "whirlwind"), Chakaxib ("hurricane") and Takin Chawuk ("dry lightning") (Spero 1987). In the Chorti area, Whirlwind is seen as the head of all the evil beings and he is identified with the Devil (Wisdom 1940:397).

The most important Lacandon deity is called Nohotsakyum or Hachacyum “our true lord”. Nohotsakyum has an assistant called Ah K’uklel who is manifested as a fiery whirlwind and who is thought to bring him the ashes from the burning milpa and from the firing of the clay god idols (Perera and Bruce 1982:31). Nohotsakyum is also called Yurika’an (Davis 1978:78). The close sound of this name to hurricane is reinforced by the nature of Nohotsakyum. This deity makes the wind that brings the lightning, thunder and rain. It is also said that at the end of the world, Nohotsakyum will wear a snake as a belt and that this snake will suck people to it with its breath and then kill them (Tozzer 1907:94). The image of a wind serpent wrapped around the body of Nohotsakyum is reminiscent of the whirling hurricane. In another destruction myth recorded by Bruce and interpreted by McGee (1989), Nohotsakyum destroys the world with a hurricane flood.

The southern Lacandon refer to Nohotsakyum as U Yolika’an “the heart of the sky”. Other names recorded for him are Humbrikam (Cline 1944:109), Yumbirihka’an (Davis 1978:78) and Yumbilika’an (Bruce 1977:191). Bruce translates this latter term as “lord of heaven (sky)” or “lord heart of heaven (sky)”. Bruce identified Nohotsakyum with Juraqan of the *Popol Vuh* based on these heart of sky names, and the fact that both deities were powerful sky gods involved in the creation of the earth. Nohotsakyum directs the water gods to bring the rain, thunder and lightning, and as noted above he is associated with whirlwinds and hurricanes. The Central Mexican god Tezcatlipoca had his foot bitten off by a crocodile deity. Because of his one-footed nature, he has been associated with Juraqan, and both Juraqan and Tezcatlipoca have been identified with God K based on this common feature (see Taube 1992:69-79 for an overview of these identifications). While God K is frequently shown with one of his legs in the form of serpent which might be construed as one-legged, the portrait glyphs of GII show him with two legs. On the other hand, as the oldest of the triad brothers and as the one who was always named first, GI represented the most senior of the thunderbolts, and his association with powerful hurricanes would be natural.

Some of GI’s traits are associated with winds, storms and hurricanes. Hurricanes blow in from the sea and GI’s fish barbel, shark’s tooth, stingray spine and shell are all marine elements. The standing water traits of GI may be related to hurricanes, for these storms bring the most intensive rains followed by widespread flooding. His water bird form is also related to flooded environments. As noted, the orientation of the Temple of the Cross indicates that GI was associated with the north, and this is the direction of heavy rainstorms in the lowlands. GII’s title composed of the signs *hun ye nal* is similar to the Yucatek phrase *hunyecil* used by Diego Lopez Cogolludo in 1688. He referred to “an inundation or hurricane which they (the Yucatec Maya) call *hunyecil* or submersion of the forest” (Tozzer 1941:41).

A place name associated with GI is also related to wind. It is composed of a number six, two phonetic *ah* signs and a sky sign. The juxtaposition of the six (*wak*) and *ah* signs has been read as the word *wakah* “stand up or erect” and the whole place name has been read as “the raised up sky place” (Hopkins cited in Schele 1992:129, Freidel Schele and Parker 1993:53). The reading and its meaning is debatable, and I will simply refer to it as the “Six Sky” place. In the Alfardas texts of the Cross Group, the small interior sanctuary in each temple replicates the mythological sweatbath/cave where its respective deity was born, and each sweatbath is given an individual name (Stuart 1987:38, Bassie-Sweet 1991:257, Houston 1996). The sanctuary of GI is called Six Sky. In the Temple of the Inscriptions text, the Six Sky place is referred to as

GI's seat (Schele 1992:186). On the Tablet of the Cross, there is a mythological event (5 February, 3112 B.C.) in which GI "enters" the sky and the Six Sky place is "dedicated" (Schele 1992:129, Freidel, Schele and Parker 1993:69-71). GI is also associated with Six Sky on the Hauberg Stela. This monument illustrates GI, or a lord dressed as GI, with a serpent undulating around him. The glyph Six Sky is attached to the serpent's head. On Quirigua Stela C, the text says that a god called Six Sky Lord oversaw events at the beginning of the current era.

Schele et al (1993) believe that each Cross Group sanctuary name refers to the central icon found on its respective tablet. The central icon of the Tablet of the Cross is a stylized tree in the form of a cross, hence, their identification of this tree as "*wak ah chan*" (what I call Six Sky place). They have further argued that this tree is the Milky Way (Freidel, Schele and Parker 1993:76). While I question the specifics of their argument, I believe that the identification of the Tablet of the Cross imagery with constellations on or adjacent to the path of the Milky Way is valid and that GI was associated with this celestial pathway.

The Milky Way visually appears to be a band of mist or cloud with various stars along its path. It is a continuous band, but only a section of it is visible at any given time and the Maya refer to different sections by different names and different metaphors. The Milky Way was viewed as a pathway or river associated with lightning, rain and wind. Given its mist/cloud-like appearance this is not surprising. The sections of the Milky Way that are overhead during the rainy season are referred to by the Tzotzil as the *be vo'* "road of water or rain" while those sections overhead during the dry season are called *be taiv* "road of frost" (Laughlin 1975:469). It is also called *be 'ik'* "road of wind" (Vogt 1997:113). The Jacaltec refer to the Milky Way as the road of dew (*s-be lente'y'u*) (La Farge and Byers 1931:130). The Quiché believe the Milky Way is the ultimate source of mist and fog (B. Tedlock 1985:81). The modern Chorti believe the Milky Way brings the rain, and they use it to anticipate the change of seasons (Fought 1972:267, 431, 435). Like many contemporary Maya, they associate the Milky Way with Santiago who they view as a lightning deity. The Lacandon call the Milky Way the road of Hachakyum (Nohotsakyum) (Duby and Blom 1969:295) who, as noted above, was associated with storms. The Milky Way was also associated with winds and rain in Central Mexican belief. Quetzalcoatl-Ehecatl was a wind god who brought the rain clouds, and the Milky Way was thought to be his path. Although they were not the same deity, Quetzalcoatl-Ehecatl shares the same birth date as GI (9 Wind).

The association of GI with a numbered sky location is reminiscent of his younger brother GIII who was called a lord of Na Ho Chan (First Five Sky). This suggests that the Six Sky/Milky Way may have been in the sixth layer of the sky. In the Central Mexican *Historia de los Mexicanos por Sus Pinturas*, the sixth layer of the sky was a place of winds and storms (Coe 1975:8). In the mythology of the early twentieth century, Tozzer (1907:93, 155) recorded a Yucatec belief that the sky was composed of seven layers and that in the sixth layer lived the Nukutsyumtsakob (Great Father Lightning Bolts) or Yumtsakob (Father Lightning Bolts) which indicates that this zone was associated with lightning bolts. Tozzer also noted that the name Nukutsyumtsakob is similar to the Lacandon deity Nohotsakyum. As discussed above, Nohotsakyum was associated with winds and hurricanes.

In summary, GI was a lightning bolt god with wind and Milky Way associations. As the oldest and most senior of the triad of lightning bolt brothers, his identification with powerful storms and with hurricanes in particular is logical. Some of the contemporary deities associated with

whirlwinds, storms and lightning bolts are similar to both GI and Juraqan of the *Popol Vuh*, and this supports the argument that these two deities were parallel.

The striking parallels between the Palenque Triad and the Heart of the Sky triad suggests that these deities represented fundamental, core beliefs about storm, lightning and fire gods and their role in creation. The identification of the Palenque triad of brothers with hurricanes, lightning bolts and meteors does not negate their association with Jupiter, Mars and Saturn, but enhances the beliefs associated with these planets.

### The Relationship

One final comment is in order regarding the kinship relations between the creator grandfather and the lightning bolt gods of the sky. Hun Hunahpu was the son of the creator grandfather, and his Classic Period parallel was the Corn God. The first wife of Hun Hunahpu was Bone Woman, and I have argued that she was parallel to the Corn Goddess (the wife of the Corn God). The parentage of Bone Woman is not recorded in the *Popol Vuh*, but in some contemporary communities the corn goddess is the daughter of the lightning bolt deity or mountain god. For example, in a Tzotzil myth the lightning bolt god called 'Anhel rewards a man for helping him by giving the man his virgin daughter X'ob (the soul of corn) for a wife (Guiteras-Holmes 1961:191-92, 218). My identification of GI as the supreme lightning bolt deity, coupled with the contemporary beliefs, suggests the possibility that GI was the father of the Corn Goddess. This has implications for the identification of Muwan Mat which will be addressed in a future paper.

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