The Chahk thunderbolt deities obviously had rain and agricultural roles, but it is their war traits and their association with flint that are the focus of my study. This chapter is an overview of how stone, flint, lightning, and thunderbolts were represented in Maya art and how the Chahk deities were thought to be the embodiment of flint. Evidence will be presented to demonstrate that the T24/T1017 sign that has long been interpreted as a semantic marker for jade, shininess, or reflectiveness is, in fact, a reference to the intense flash of sheet lightning and thunderbolts. The chapter also explores the identification of Maya lords and their ancestors with lightning and thunderbolts and examines the tok’-pakal “flint-shield” war icon as a sacred bundle representing the supernatural power of the Chahk deities. It is my contention that lightning was a fundamental quality of the creator deities and held a primary position in the symbolism of Classic period rulership.

THE CHAHK DEITIES

Classic period Chahk deities are usually depicted as zoomorphic beings with serpents emanating from their mouths (Taube 1992a). The notion that thunderbolts can take the form of serpents is a pan-Mesoamerican concept that is likely based on the fact that both can kill with deadly speed. A beautiful example of this equivalency is found in a Tzotzil prayer for rain that describes a thunderbolt in a couplet as a holy thunderbolt (ch'ul chauk) and a holy snake (ch'ul chon) (Breedlove and Laughlin 1993:589).

A portrait of a zoomorphic Chahk deity wearing a Spondylus shell earring was used to represent the word chahk “thunderbolt” in hieroglyphic texts. In many examples, the Chahk portrait glyph includes a ki phonetic complement to indicate its pronunciation (Fox and Justeson 1984:29). Chahk’s shell earring was often employed as the pars pro toto representation of the word Chahk. A clear example of this substitution is found in the name of the thunderbolt deity nicknamed GI. GI is a Roman-nosed deity who is often pictured wearing a Chahk shell earring (figure 1.1). His headdress consists of the so-called Quadripartite Badge that can also include a heron (figure 1.1a, 1.1b). In most forms of GI’s nominal phrase, his name is represented by his portrait wearing the shell earring (figure 1.1c). However, in one example the scribe expanded this name and used a portrait of GI wearing his heron headdress followed by a portrait of Chahk (figure 1.1d). While it is not known what name the GI portrait represents, it can be irrefutably concluded from this example that it was followed by the word Chahk (Bassie-Sweet 2008:111).

Some of the Chahk deities were identified with the directions and their respective colors. In Maya worldview, the surface of the earth contained a quadrilateral space, with the rise and set points of the solstice sun defining its corners (for an overview, see Bassie-Sweet 1996:21–29, 195–199, 2008:58–78). The zenith passage of the sun directly overhead defined not only the center of the sky but also the center of the world beneath it. Each quadrant was identified with a specific color (red/east, white/north, black/west, and yellow/south), while the center was identified with the color yax “blue-green.” In the Postclassic codices, there are four thunderbolt deities (God B in the Schellhas system) that are identified with the four quadrants of the quadrilateral world and their associated colors (red/east, white/north, black/west, and yellow/south) (Thompson 1972). Bishop Diego de Landa noted that the Postclassic Wayeb rituals were in honor of these four colored, directional thunderbolt deities and that they were identified with the four Yearbearers (Tozzer 1941). He also recorded that each directional thunderbolt god had a personal name in addition to the titles Bakab, Xib Chahk, and Pauahtun. The Dresden Codex (pages 29a–30a) appears to illustrate a fifth Chahk that
was identified with the center of the quadrilateral world and the color **yax “blue-green.”**

The association of thunderbolt gods with the four quadrants of the world and their respective colors is also found in the Classic period. There is a type of thunderbolt god called K’awiil (also known by the nickname GII and as God K in the Schellhas system) (Stuart 1987). The 819 Day Count indicates that K’awiil had four manifestations, each associated with a color and quadrant of the world (Berlin and Kelley 1961). In addition, the nominal phrases of some Classic period Chahk deities also include colors, such as K’an Tun Chahk (yellow), Chak Xib Chahk, Chak Wayaab’ Chahk (red), Ik’ Wayaab’ Chahk (black), Yax Wayaab’ Chahk, and Yax Ha’al Chahk (blue-green or first) (see García Barrios 2008 for an overview of colored Chahks). Today, colored thunderbolt spirits (red, yellow, and **yax “blue-green”**) are

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**Figure 1.1. Portraits and nominal glyphs for the deity GII:** a. stone mask, b. Early Classic incensario, c. portrait glyph, d. nominal phrase
well-known in highland Chiapas among the Tzeltal, Tojolabal, and Ch’ol (Bassie-Sweet et al. 2015:144–148).

THE THREE THUNDERBOLT GODS

The Popol Vuh indicates that there were three primary thunderbolt deities known as Thunderbolt Huracan (Kaqulja’Juraqan), Youngest Thunderbolt (Ch’i’pi Kaqulja’), and Sudden [blue-green] Thunderbolt (Raxa Kaqulja’) (Christenson 2007:69–70). They are always named in this order, and they were collectively called Heart of Sky, indicating an association with the center of the sky. In conjunction with the creator grandparents, these sky gods played a central role in the creation of the earth and the first humans. The Heart of Sky thunderbolt gods also performed such deeds as flooding the world, destroying the wooden people, and dimming the eyesight of the first human lineage heads so they would not be as powerful as the creator deities. They also directed the two grandsons of the creator grandparents to defeat the deity Seven Macaw and his family and assisted the grandsons in various endeavors that established the dominance of the creator deities and their family over other gods.

Heinrich Berlin (1963) identified a triad of Classic period deities that he nicknamed GI, GII, and GIII. What is unusual about the three Palenque gods is that the Cross Group narrative indicates that their birth order was GI, GIII, GII; but when they are named together it is always in the order GI, GII, and GIII. Not only was GII the youngest-born of the triad, but he also carries the Ch’ok “youth” title. This is similar to Youngest Thunderbolt, who is also always named as the second thunderbolt in the Heart of Sky triad. While these three deities clearly functioned as patron gods at Palenque, all three also appear at other Maya sites, indicating that they were members of the primary pantheon of Maya deities. I have presented evidence that GI, GII, and GIII were the antecedents for the three Heart of Sky thunderbolt deities of the Popol Vuh (Bassie-Sweet 2008).

I have further argued that the three hearthstones that define the center of the quadrilateral world were thought to be manifestations of these three primary deities. As such, these three thunderbolts gods were identified with the center of the quadrilateral world. The Dumbarton Oaks Tablet contains a diphrastic expression (3–9-CHAHK-ki) that refers to three Chahk deities and nine Chahk deities (Zender 2015). This phrase indicates that the Chahk deities were categorized into a group of three and a group of nine. Given that nine is also used in Mayan languages to refer to the concept of many, the three
Chahk deities and nine Chahk deities may be a reference the three primary Chahk gods and the many other thunderbolt deities.

**THUNDERBOLT AXES**

The association of the Chahk thunderbolt gods with flint axes has long been known (Sapper 1897; Thompson 1930; Wisdom 1940). Chahk deities are portrayed thirty-five times in the Dresden Codex swinging their axes, and numerous Classic period depictions of Chahk deities also illustrate this action, such as the Chahk depicted on vessel K2068 who wields a flint axe (http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya_hires.php?vase=2068). Ethnographic sources indicate that the Maya believed the axes of the Chahk deities were thunderbolts. The linguists John Justeson, William Norman, Lyle Campbell, and Terrence Kaufman (1985:43) remarked that worked flint and obsidian were referred to as *piedra de rayo* “thunderbolts” in the communities where they have worked throughout the Maya area. While some modern ethnographic reports identify obsidian with thunderbolts, particularly in the highlands where obsidian is more abundant than flint (Redfield 1945; Woods 1968:129; Brown 2015), the predominant association of obsidian in Mesoamerica is with meteors (see chapter 3).

Daniel Brinton (1881, 1883) recorded a number of stories from northern Yucatán regarding the thunderbolt deities who were thought to guard the town and the milpas of the community. In one story, the thunderbolt deity strikes flint to light his cigar and in doing so, creates lightning and thunder. The intimate relationship between flint and lightning was noted by Robert Redfield (1945:216) during his fieldwork in the village of Agua Escondida on the eastern shore of Lake Atitlán. The ancient flint knives found by the villagers are thought to have fallen from the sky when lightning flashes. Carl Sapper (1897) recorded the Q’eqchi’ concept that the mountain/valley gods own lightning and that their stone axes are thunderbolts. They also believe the ancient stone axe heads they find in the ground are the remnants of these thunderbolt axes. The mountain/valley gods punish men for crimes by striking them dead with their thunderbolt axes. In S. Guillermo Sedat’s Q’eqchi’ dictionary (1955:104), he recorded the term *xmal cak*, which literally means axe of thunder (see also Wilson 1972:204). He noted the belief that axe heads were thought to have been thrown to earth by lightning (cited in Robicsek 1978:61). The Mopán refer to ancient stone celts as *baatchac* “the axes of Chahk” and believe them to be thunderbolts that were thrown to earth by the Chahks during storms (Thompson 1950:270, 1970:253). In Yucatec, a term for flint is *bat chaak* “the axe of the god Chahk” (Barrera Vásquez 1980:39). When a thunderbolt hits a tree,
it is said that a Chahk has struck it with his stone axe (Thompson 1930:61).

There are similar beliefs among the Ch’orti’. Charles Wisdom (1940:396) stated, “Wherever lightning strikes, a stone ax is believed to be buried in the ground, as the lightning was caused by the swift passage of the axe through the air.” Ancient axe heads the Ch’orti’ find in their fields are revered as the discarded lightning axes of their thunderbolt gods (Wisdom 1940:382). Wisdom also noted that the gods strike lightning from flint. Pieces of flint and old flint arrowheads are kept on their altars alongside the axe heads as sacred relics. The inference is that the Maya believed flint contained the spiritual power of the thunderbolt.

The Classic period Chahk deity named K’awiil (GII) takes the form of a thunderbolt axe (Coggins 1988; Taube 1989, 1992a; Stuart 1987) (figure 1.2). His forehead is often perforated with an axe head, and one of his legs takes the shape of a serpent. Some examples of ancient flint eccentrics recovered from Classic period caches take the form of K’awiil or a sinuous serpent (Fash 2001:102, 147; Miller and Martin 2004:150–151; Moholy-Nagy 2008; Agurcia et al. 2016), which supports the notion that flint embodied the power of the thunderbolt.

**Figure 1.2.** K’awiil in the form of thunderbolt axe

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**CATEGORIES OF LITHIC MATERIALS**

The generic term for stone is tun (Western Mayan *toonh*) (Kaufman 2003:436). Adjectives are used to designate certain kinds of stone. For example, the use of color as a type designation is seen in colonial Pokom terms for certain gems like jade (raxcual “blue-green precious stone”), jasper (kakcual “red precious stone”), and pearls (sakcual “white precious stone”) (Feldman 1973). In the *Annals of the Cakchiquels*, the Kaqchikel term raxa ab’aj “blue-green
“stone” refers to jade (Akkeren 2000:159). A Classic period caption text on a vessel from Tikal Burial 195 contains the term yax tun “blue-green stone” for jade (Stuart cited in Houston et al. 2009). The word for flint is tok’ (Proto-Mayan *tyooq’; Kaufman 2003:442). In contrast to stones that are named after their natural properties, a number of colonial sources, such as the Chilam Balam of Chumayel and the Ritual of the Bacabs, refer to four colored flints (red, white, black, and yellow) that are clearly identified with the world quadrants and the Chaahk deities who presided over these regions (Roys 1933:64, 1965). Kaqchikel sources refer to blue-green flint in addition to red and white (Feldman 1985:72), and, as noted above, blue-green was identified with the center of the quadrilateral world. Flint blades were a common component of Classic period cache offerings; in one such example, consisting of nine flint knives and projectile points, four of the flints were painted with a blue pigment (Zralka et al. 2010).

In Mesoamerica, flint knives were used for human sacrifice. The Madrid Codex (pages 75–76) illustrates a model of the quadrilateral world with pairs of deities performing actions on each side. On the north side, which is associated with the color white, the two deities flank a sacrificial altar with a victim draped over it. The victim’s abdomen is split open by a flint knife, with blood spurtng from the wound. It is a reference to the well-known act of heart sacrifice (Tozzer 1941:119, 221). In the Popol Vuh, the lords of the underworld instruct their owl messengers to sacrifice the goddess Lady Blood and bring them her heart (Christenson 2007:132). Although she persuaded them not to do so, their implement of heart sacrifice was the saqi toq’ (white flint) knife.

The saqi toq’ also played a central role in the acquisition of power by the Kaqchikel leader Q’aq’awitz, as described in the Annals of the Cakchiquels (Brinton 1885:99; Akkeren 2000:158–159; Maxwell and Hill 2006:84–89; Bassie-Sweet 2008:248–251). The volcano now known as Santa María was erupting and causing havoc. Q’aq’awitz and his assistant Zakitzunun climbed the volcano to capture its fire (extinguish it) and obtain the white flint of its crater that represented the “heart” of the volcano and its fire. While Q’aq’awitz entered the crater, Zakitzunun poured water on the fire from the rim. From the centipede that resided in the crater, Q’aq’awitz took the white flint knife (saqi toq’). Many Classic period images of flint blades illustrate them emerging from the mouth of a centipede. Flint is not naturally found on volcanoes. The association of flint with exploding volcanoes is surely based on the fact that such eruptions are frequently accompanied by dramatic displays of lightning. Q’aq’awitz was capturing not just the fire of the volcano but also its
thunderbolts in the form of flint. In doing so, Q’aq’awitz obtained a primary weapon and the supernatural force associated with that weapon.

Ruud van Akkeren (2000:158–159) insightfully compared this Kaqchikel story to the mythology regarding the Central Mexican goddess Itzpapalotl. In the Aztec Legends of the Sun, the burned body of Itzpapalotl produced five colored flint knives (white, blue, yellow, red, and black) (Bierhorst 1992:152). Mixcoatl took the white flint knife as his spirit power, wrapped it in a sacred bundle, and used its power to overcome his enemies. In the Codex Borgia and Codex Telleriano-Remensis, the body of Itzpapalotl is decorated with white flint knives covered in blood, indicating her identification with this type of sacrificial flint.

**REPRESENTATIONS OF LITHIC MATERIAL IN ART AND HIEROGLYPHIC WRITING**

A variety of signs and motifs represent stone, flint, and obsidian, as well as objects made from these materials. The word *tuun* “stone” is represented by the logographic T528 sign (Justeson and Mathews 1983; Stuart 1996) (figure 1.3a). A common feature of the karst topography that dominates the Maya lowlands is underground drainage that forms cenotes and caves with speleothems (cave formations like stalagmites, stalactite, flowstones, and others). The *tuun* sign is composed of a profile view of a limestone cave mouth with stylized stalactites hanging from the ceiling (Bassie-Sweet 1991:108–109). Given that limestone was the primary stone of the Maya lowland region, it is not surprising that the Maya would use a major feature of their karst landscape to represent the generic word for stone. A second element composed of a circle surrounded by dots appears on the cave wall of the *tuun* sign, but its meaning is uncertain. It may refer to a nodule of flint, a pool of water beneath the stalactite (the Maya were known to collect such water for religious ceremonies), or a cache of corn seeds the Maya believed was hidden in a primordial mountain cave and later used to create the first humans.

Chahk deities and lords appear in ritual combat scenes using round, hand-size stones as striking weapons, and the verb *jatz’* “to strike” is represented by a logograph of a hand holding such a stone marked with *tuun* elements (Zender 2004b; Taube and Zender 2009). Illustrations of stone objects such as altars and stelae are often marked with the *tuun* “stone” elements as well. For example, a scene on a carved peccary skull from Copán shows two lords flanking a stela and an altar that are both marked with *tuun* elements (Fash 2001:fig. 24). Such semantic markers are common in Maya art (Hopkins 1994; Mora Martin 2008; Stone and Zender 2011:13–15).
The word *witz* “mountain” is represented by a logograph or a zoomorph that incorporates the *tuun* “stone” elements and a split element (Stuart 1987) (figure 1.3b). The juxtaposing of *tuun* elements with the *witz* sign is expected, given that mountains are made of stone. The split is formed by a bilateral scroll, and it references the myth that a lightning god had to split open the primordial corn mountain with a thunderbolt to obtain its seeds. When this god broke open the mountain, his lightning bolt scorched the seeds and created the four colors of corn (white, yellow, red, and black). According to the Popol Vuh, the white and yellow seeds of this lightning-infused corn were used by the creator deities to form the flesh of the first humans.

The primordial corn mountain was the quintessential mountain, hence its use as the model for the generic *witz* sign. In Maya art and hieroglyphic writing, additional signs are often attached to the generic *witz* sign to specify a particular mountain. As an example, the Palenque Tablet of the Foliated Cross illustrates the ruler K’inch Kan Bahlam standing on a zoomorphic *witz* sign.
that functions to indicate his location (figure 1.3c). Glyphs representing the place name Yax Haal Witz are infixed over the eyes of the zoomorphic creature. In a similar fashion, there is a Mo’Witz “macaw mountain” documented at Copán and a Chan Mo’Witz “four macaw mountain” at Tres Isla (Stuart 1987; Bassie-Sweet and Hopkins 2017).

There is an intimate relationship between Chahk deities and stone that is seen in the head variant of the phonetic hi sign on Early Classic Copán Stela 63. The sign is part of the phonetic spelling of the term mih “zero” in the Long Count notation of the monument and is composed of a Chahk deity with its typical tied hair and shell earring (Grube and Nahm cited in Stuart et al. 1989) (figure 1.4a). However, tuun elements decorate the Chahk’s forehead. This same Chahk deity marked with stone elements is part of the logograph for the haab position of the date as well. Another example of this visual merging of Chahk with stone is seen on the Emilanio Zapata panel (figure 1.4b). The text on this monument refers to a k’an tuun “yellow stone,” and the scene illustrates a personified stone with a k’an sign infixed in its forehead and wearing the diagnostic shell earring of Chahk (Stuart 1990). Stephen Houston (2014:89) explains this merging of Chahk and stone in terms of Chahk’s thunderbolt axe. He suggests that when the axe hits the earth it “engenders, it seems, a dispersion of Chahk’s identity, a jolt of godly essence into solid rock.” To take this concept one step further, it is possible that the Maya thought the deposits of flint and metamorphic rock they used to make their own axes were created when Chahk’s thunderbolt axe hit the earth.

Figure 1.4. a. hi sign, b. k’an tuun motif
REPRESENTATIONS OF FLINT

Some types of flint can have banded lines, and knapped flint is textured with wavy lines. Illustrations of objects like axes, bifacial knives, and eccentric are often marked with such lines to indicate that they are made of flint (Houston 1983; Schele and Miller 1986:46) (figure 1.5a). As would be expected, the various
logographs that represent flint and flint objects (T112, T245b, T257, T786) also include *tuun* elements. In parallel texts at Machaquilá, one of the logographic signs representing a flint blade (T112) substitutes for the phonetic rendering of the word *tok’* “flint” (Houston 1983). Flint can also be represented by a skeletal, personified form that has the chipped outline of eccentric flints (figure 1.5b).

In Maya art, a wide range of weapons and implements of sacrifice are illustrated as flint objects (Follet 1932). As discussed above, the Madrid Codex (page 76) depicts a bloody sacrifice with a flint knife and spurting blood. The Madrid Codex (page 54b) portrays God M carrying a flint spear that is tipped with red, presumably to indicate blood. The Dresden Codex shows Chahk deities carrying flint spears and shields (pages 66a, 67a, 69a). Yaxchilán Lintel 45 depicts the ruler Shield Jaguar III grasping a flint spearhead and shield, while a flint spear and shield is held by K’ínic Kan Bahlam II on the Palenque Temple XVII Tablet (figures 1.6, 1.7). Many Classic period lords are portrayed holding ceremonial double-headed flint spears. Flint blades emerging from
the mouth of a centipede-serpent are well-known in Maya art (figure 1.5c). Given the stinging bite of centipedes and serpents, it is not surprising that these creatures would be associated with flint weapons.

Flint objects also appear in hieroglyphic texts. A *tuun* and flint marked eccentric (T297) is used to represent the word *b’ax* “quartz,” and it appears in a Xultun place name B’ax Witz “quartz mountain” (Prager et al. 2010). The verb *ch’ak* “to cut or to chop” is represented by a logograph of a flint axe (T190, T333) (Orejel 1990), while the verb *baj* “to hammer” is represented by a hammerstone marked with *tuun* and flint elements (Zender 2010). In the Madrid Codex (page 54c), God Q attacks God M with a stone held in one hand and a flint knife in the other. A similar dual action is illustrated in the Madrid Codex (page 50a), but in this case God M’s chest is gashed open by the knife, and blood spurts from it. God M holds his left hand to his forehead in a typical gesture of woe. As noted in the introduction, there are Classic period examples of sacrificial scenes where an axe is used to decapitate a victim. A Postclassic example is depicted in the Dresden Codex (page 42c) where a Chahk deity

**Figure 1.7. Palenque Temple XVII**
swings an axe over the head of a victim who cowers before him. The victim holds his left hand over his forehead in the woe gesture.

THE THUNDERBOLT AUTHORITY OF MAYA LORDS

The narrative on the Palenque Temple XIX platform relates the mythological template for the accession of the ruler K’inich Ahkal Mo’ Nahb III and indicates that he took on the guise of the thunderbolt deity GI on this occasion (Stuart 2005b:60–77). The main text begins in 3309 BC with the seating of GI in lordship under the authority of the creator grandfather Itzamnaaj. The timeline then moves forward eleven years to the sacrifice of a crocodile deity by GI. The verb used to describe this action is the ch’ak “to cut or to chop” logograph of a flint axe, suggesting that GI dispensed with this crocodile with a thunderbolt axe. David Stuart (2003a, 2005b:72) nicknamed the crocodile entity the Starry Deer Crocodile and suggested that it represented the Milky Way, an interpretation also held by others (Freidel et al. 1993:85; Milbrath 1999). I prefer the designation Milky Way Crocodile. Ethnographic evidence indicates that the Maya viewed the Milky Way as a misty, celestial river with a crocodile swimming in it, indicating that this crocodile did not represent the Milky Way per se but rather that it inhabited this river and represented a section of it (see Bassie-Sweet 2008:36–38 for an overview). It is highly likely that the mouth of the crocodile was identified with the black rift of the Milky Way, which looks remarkably like the open jaw of a crocodile. In Maya art, the Quadripartite Badge headdress of GI is most frequently illustrated on the tail or rear head of the crocodile. Images of the Milky Way Crocodile arching over a scene are well-known in Maya art, such as the stucco panel on the facade of the Copán Margarita Structure (figure 1.8). In this Early Classic example, the rear head of the Milky Way Crocodile includes a Chahk deity swinging a thunderbolt axe, surely a reflection of the intimate relationship of the thunderbolt gods with this celestial river.

After the ch’ak event of the Milky Way Crocodile, the next episode of the Palenque Temple XIX story restates GI’s accession and joins it to the birth of GI at Matwiil (1.18.5.3.2 9 Ik’15 Keh, October 21, 2360 BC). The fact that GI participated in events prior to this birth date means that his birth did not represent the concept of a human birth, which is a once-in-a-lifetime event, but appears to refer to a newly manifested form of GI at Matwiil (Stuart 2005b). The narrative then continues with the subsequent births of the Gods GIII (October 25) and GII (November 8) at Matwiil and indicates that these births were the creation of a lord of Matwiil named Muwaan Mat. The timeline again moves forward
to the accession of Muwaan Mat thirty-five years later. From this accession, the narrative passes into historical time and relates the accession of K’inch Ahkal Mo’ Nahb III in AD 722 and his subsequent 9.14.13.0.0 Period Ending event two years later in the company of GI, GII, and GIII. The scene of the Temple XIX platform illustrates K’inch Ahkal Mo’ Nahb III’s accession. He is dressed as the deity GI, and a banded-bird official dressed as Itzamnaaj hands him the sak buun headdress of rulership. What is relevant to this discussion is that K’inch Ahkal Mo’ Nahb III has taken on the guise of a thunderbolt deity as part of his accession ceremony. There are many other examples of Maya rulers and their queens wearing the headdress of GI on a variety of occasions, such as on Tikal Stela 6, Tikal Stela 25, Naachtún Stela 26, Caracol Stela 1, Yaxchilán Lintel 14, and Xultun Stela 24. On Copán Stela 1, the ruler not only wears GI’s headdress but also a mask in the likeness of GI complete with Spondylus shell earrings. The Maya believed that when humans dressed in the costume of a deity, they became the embodiment of that deity, and many scenes show lords dressed in the mask and/or costume of Chahk gods (Houston and Stuart 1996, 1998).
A commonly cited example of a Maya lord dressed as a Chahk deity is pictured on the looted Palenque wall panel known as the Dumbarton Oaks Tablet (figure 1.9). This scene illustrates the young lord K’inich K’an Joy Chitam II performing a dance in the guise of a Chahk deity. He wears the *Spondylus* shell earring of the Chahk gods as well as a cut shell headdress frequently worn by the Chahks (Schele and Miller 1986:275). K’inich K’an Joy Chitam II swings a thunderbolt axe. The axe head is marked with flint and *tuun* elements, while the handle takes the shape of a serpent. This lightning serpent has a lock of tied hair that is associated with the Chahk deities. When someone grasped the thunderbolt axe, they also became a Chahk. Rulers and secondary lords are frequently depicted holding a scepter in the form of the axe god K’awiil. They are, in effect, seizing a thunderbolt and the

**Figure 1.9. Dumbarton Oaks Tablet (drawing by Linda Schele)**
power the thunderbolt contains. The identification of leaders with lightning was recorded at the time of the Spanish conquest in the Postclassic Lacandón Ch’ol community of Sac Bahlán. The community leaders were said to transform into lightning during the Wayeb rituals (Tozzer 1912:504).

There is another aspect to supernatural power that involves the nature of the individual’s soul. Numerous sources indicate that there was an ancient pan-Mesoamerican belief that humans were thought to have co-essences (often referred to as companion spirits) (Foster 1944; López Austin 1988; Houston and Stuart 1989; Grube and Nahm 1994; Furst 1995). These co-essences could take the form of animals or natural phenomena like thunderbolts, whirlwinds, and meteors. A person’s co-essences gave them the strength to overcome opponents, and many accounts of Mesoamerican warfare indicate that the indigenous population believed the warrior’s spiritual strength dictated his success in battle. There are numerous stories of indigenous leaders who used their thunderbolt and meteor co-essences to protect their communities. As an example, it was widely believed that an earthquake-generated landslide that blocked the Spanish advance during the 1712 rebellion was created by certain Tzeltal military leaders using their thunderbolt co-essences (Gosner 1984:131).

Kevin Gosner noted that the alleged power of such leaders to mobilize natural forces like wind, rain, and lightning was especially valued during periods of war. It is highly likely that Classic period rulers and other elite members were thought to have thunderbolt co-essences, given that they are often named after various Chahk deities. Anyone could have used flint weapons, but I speculate that only those with thunderbolt co-essences were thought to be able to command the power of the thunderbolt that resided in flint.

THE BAKAB TITLE

As discussed in the introduction, the title Bakab is found in the nominal phrases of many Classic period kings and queens and alludes to their role as head officiants of Period Ending ceremonies. The nature of the Bakab title may be ascertained by examining its use as a title for directional thunderbolt deities during the Postclassic period. Simply because of the mathematics of the calendar, the first day of the year can only occur on four tzolk’in day names, and these are known as the Yearbearers. The tzolk’in calendar day on which a person was born established the person’s fate. In the same regard, the tzolk’in day on which the year began established that year’s fate. Landa described the Wayeb and New Year rituals conducted by the Yucatec Maya just prior to the Spanish conquest, and he noted that each of the four
different Yearbearers had specific omens, colors, and directions associated with it (Tozzer 1941:136–149). He also recorded that the annual Wayeb rituals that marked the transition from one Yearbearer to the next were in honor of a set of four directional gods, known by the names Hobnil (south), Can Sicnal (east), Sac Cimi (north), and Hozan Ek (west), who were specifically identified with their respective Yearbearer. These four gods were also known by the titles Bacab, Xib Chac, and Pauah Tun (Bakab, Xib Chahk, Pauahtun). Xib Chahk “youth Chahk” deities have been identified in the Classic period (Stuart 1987), and they are illustrated as typical Chahk deities wielding thunderbolt axes. The Dresden Codex illustrates mythological Wayeb rituals in which a Chahk deity is the focus of offerings, indicating that the four Wayeb deities were indeed thunderbolt gods. The inference is that the Classic period rulers and queens, who carry the Bakab title, were identified with thunderbolt gods.

**THE THUNDERBOLT AUTHORITY OF ANCESTORS**

There is ample evidence for ancestor veneration during the Classic period, and ancestral relics related to thunderbolts are documented in Classic Maya art and hieroglyphic texts (McAnany 1995; Stuart 2010; Bassie-Sweet et al. 2015). Historical and ethnographic sources indicate that the Maya believed that leaders (and their co-essences) lived on in the afterlife and continued their protective roles as guardians of the community. The relationship between the ancestors and the living community leaders was noted by Calixta Guiteras-Holmes (1961:78) in the highland Tzotzil region: “The authorities do not act in their own name: each one represents or is the personification of all those who preceded him back to the ‘beginning of the world’: they personify the gods, they are sacred. Their authority is supported by the belief in their supernatural power.”

The role of the ancestors in meting out punishment is seen in the Tzotzil community of Zinacantán, where it is thought that the ancestors direct thunderbolts at people who transgress social norms (Vogt 1969:301). The thunderbolt is thought to cause fright and soul loss in the individual, leading to illness.

The tomb of the Palenque ruler K’ínich Janaab Pakal I (circa AD 683) features his ancestors on the sides of his sarcophagus box and on the tomb walls. Although the nine portraits on the walls are badly damaged, enough remains to indicate that each ancestor is dressed as a warrior, holding a K’awiil axe and war shield (Robertson 1983; Schele and Mathews 1998). An Early Classic tomb in Temple XX also has similar ancestral figures carrying K’awiil axes.
and war shields (http://www.meso.web.com/palenque/dig/report/hilites_tomb.html). The belief in the supernatural power of lightning is a fundamental hallmark of Maya culture and was a central charter of Maya rulership.

LIGHTNING
LUMINOSITY AND THE T24/T1017 CELT SIGN

Discarded axe heads of both flint and polished stone are occasionally found in agricultural fields, and such axe heads are also well-known from archaeological excavations. For instance, twenty-two polished stone celts (twenty-one of metamorphic greenstone and one of jade), used for carving stone, were recovered from Aguateca Structure M8–8 (Aoyama 2011: 49). The T24 sign and its personified form T1017 represent an axe head (Stuart 2010) (figure 1.10). The surface of the T24 celt is marked with two parallel lines often enclosed by an oval element. Many axe blades in Maya art are not depicted as flint blades but as the T24 celt sign. As an example, numerous Chahk deities wield T24 celts, such as those on vessel K4013 or K8608 (figures 1.11, 1.12). While some examples of K’awiil’s axe are marked with flint or stone semantic markers, the majority are T24 celts. In addition to these axe head contexts, T24/T1017 also appears in sky bands and marking the bodies of a
Figure 1.11. K4013 (after Justin Kerr)

Figure 1.12. K8608 (after Justin Kerr)
variety of deities. The following discussion presents the evidence that the T24/T1017 sign is a semantic marker for a brilliant flash of lightning.

Many researchers incorrectly refer to the T24/T1017 glyph as a mirror sign because it was initially interpreted to be a mirror and to be a semantic marker for reflectiveness (Schele and Miller 1983; Schele and Miller 1986:43). However, round mirrors (nehn) made from pyrite are well-known from archaeological contexts, and such mirrors have been identified in Maya art and hieroglyphic writing (Taube 1988; Miller and Martin 2004:24, 45; Stone and Zender 2011:73). The difference between a mirror and the T24 celt is well demonstrated by the stucco and wood K’awiil effigies recovered from Tikal Burial 116 (Coe 1967:57). These full-figure portraits illustrate K’awiil with the lozenge-shaped T24 celt protruding from his head while holding a mirror in front of his chest. There are a number of scenes where attendants hold such round mirrors in front of their chests to allow the lord or deity to gaze into it (DC, K350, K453, K4338, K8220, K8926). None of these round mirrors are infixed with T24 signs, suggesting that the T24 sign does not refer to either a mirror or reflectiveness.

Some examples of effigy stone axes are much thinner versions of an actual stone celt, such as the famous Leiden plaque and two examples that were apparently looted from Rio Azul. Similar effigy celts are seen in Maya art as part of a motif nicknamed the “belt-head assemblage” or “mask-and-celt assemblage” that is frequently attached to the belt of a ruler (Proskouriakoff 1950:fig. 23; Schele and Miller 1983:15; Schele and Miller 1986:120; Mora Marin 2001; Martin and Grube 2008:120). Similar assemblages have been recovered from archaeological contexts as well. While many effigy celts are made of jade, there are some examples made from limestone, like those excavated from an Early Classic tomb in Palenque Temple XVIII-a (Cuous 2015; Delgado Robles et al. 2015). In its fullest form, the assemblage is composed of an ancestor image set upon a jal “braid” motif with three celts hanging from it. Given that they represent ancestors, I prefer the name “ancestral effigy assemblages.” As an aside, the jal sign represents two strips of material that have been braided together. It is a metaphorical reference for the descent line where the kings are like strands replacing each other over and over (Nicholas A. Hopkins, personal communication, 2015).

The ancestor can be represented by a portrait glyph, glyphs representing their name, or the skull of the ancestor. As an example, Tikal Stela 31 illustrates the ruler Sihyaj Chan K’awiil II, and the assemblage positioned on the front of his belt spells the name of his mother while the rear assemblage spells the name of another ancestor named Unen Bahlam (Martin 2002:60) (see figure 4.2). Another example of an ancestral effigy assemblage is seen on La
Pasadita Lintel 2, which illustrates the Yaxchilán ruler Bird Jaguar IV performing a Period Ending rite with his secondary lord from La Pasadita. On Bird Jaguar IV’s belt is a human head wearing a headdress that spells the name of his father, Shield Jaguar III (Schele and Miller 1986:196) (figure 1.13). In a similar manner, on Yaxchilán Stela 27 the ruler Knot-eye Jaguar II sports a belt head whose headdress spells the name of his father, Bird Jaguar II (Martin and Grube 2008:120).

Figure 1.13. La Pasadita Lintel 2 (drawing after Ian Graham)
In Maya art, ancestral effigy assemblages are not restricted to belts. They also appear in the so-called back racks worn by Maya lords on such monuments as Tikal Stela 21, Stela 22, and Stela 30. Such assemblages are also attached to thrones on Piedras Negras Stela 10, Piedras Negras Stela 33, Naranjo Stela 32, Tikal Temple I Lintel 3, Tikal Temple III Lintel 2, Ek’ Balam Capstone I, Palenque Museo De Sitio bodega number 211, and K3057, to name a few. The juxtaposing of the ancestor with a throne implies that a throne was identified not just with the current ruler but also with the previous rulers.

Piedras Negras Stela 40 portrays Ruler 4 kneeling over his mother’s tomb making an offering. He wears an ancestral effigy assemblage on his back that is tied in place above the belt (see figure 5.5). A similarly tied ancestral effigy assemblage is seen on El Cayo Altar 4 where the Sajal lord Aj Chak Wayib’ K’utiim is pictured with a cloth belt securing the assemblage (see figure 0.6). The knot is tied at chest level. Caracol Stela 5 illustrates a dwarf attendant standing beside the ruler while holding a K’awiil scepter in one hand and an ancestral effigy assemblage in the other. These images indicate that the ancestral effigy assemblages were not a permanent part of the belt. Many ancestral effigy assemblages feature a knotted cloth draped over the top of the ancestor, which suggests that ancestral effigy assemblages might have been stored in bundles when not being worn. The tradition of wrapping objects and effigies in tied bundles is widespread in Mesoamerica.

The belts from which ancestral effigy assemblages hang are frequently composed of sky signs. Given this context, Stuart (2010:293) suggested that the celts on ancestral effigy assemblages “may have been likened in some way to lightning flashes descending from the heavens.” In other words, these effigy celts represent thunderbolts. The fact that there are usually three celts in the assemblage suggests that these celts may specifically represent the primary triad of thunderbolt gods. Ancestral effigy assemblages are ubiquitous in Maya monumental art and speak to the universal belief in the importance of the ancestors. They specifically juxtapose an ancestor with thunderbolts and highlight the importance of lightning as the spiritual power of the ancestors.

Most axe heads recovered from archaeological contexts are not made from jade. However, because most of the effigy celts are made from jade, it has been assumed that all of the T24/T1017 celts that are illustrated in Maya art were also made of jade and that the oval element of the T24/T1017 sign is a semantic marker that references jade, the reflectiveness or shininess of jade, or the hardness of jade (Stuart 2006a, 2010; Houston et al. 2006; Stone and Zender 2011:71; Martin 2016). However, simply because an effigy is made from a precious material such as jade, it cannot automatically be concluded that
the original object was made from the same material. For example, Christ's crucifix is often rendered in gold, but his crucifixion cross was made of wood. The most famous ancestral effigy assemblages were found resting on the lid of K'inich Janaab Pakal's sarcophagus (Ruz 1973). While the ancestral portraits were executed in jade, the celts were constructed from slate. The inference is that it was the celt form that was important, not the material from which it was made. The primary context of the T24/T1017 celt axe in Maya art is as the thunderbolt axe of the Chaahk. This implies that the semantic value of the T24/T1017 sign rests in the lightning nature of this axe.

While early interpretations of the semantic value of the T24/T1017 sign focused on the mirror-like reflectiveness of a polished stone celt, information gleaned from the Popol Vuh narrative and ethnographic sources provides evidence that suggests its semantic value is directly related to the luminous quality of lightning rather than the shiny surface of polished stone or as a marker for jade. The Popol Vuh story begins with a description of the place of duality before the earth and human beings were created (Christenson 2007:67–69). It is described as a great pool of tranquil water existing in darkness. Within this water resided the creator grandparents Xpiyacoc and Xmucane who were great sages, great possessors of knowledge, and the embodiment of complementary opposition (duality). The creator grandparents were joined by the three thunderbolt gods from the sky known as Heart of Sky, and together they envisioned a world inhabited by human beings who would honor them with offerings. Following this collaborative consultation, they formed the earth and created the first human beings. The creator grandparents are described within the waters of the place of duality as luminous beings wrapped in iridescent quetzal (green) and cotinga (blue) feathers. The adjective used to describe their luminous quality is zaktetoh, which is defined as “the brightness that enters through cracks” (Christenson 2007:68). In the K’iche’ region, diviners are thought to have a soul that allows them to interpret messages from the gods (Tedlock 1992:53). This soul takes the form of sheet lightning in their blood. Sheet lighting refers to lightning reflected in clouds that appears as a silent flash of luminosity rather than a thunderous bolt. It is this luminous quality of sheet lightning that the creator grandparents possessed.

The generative power of lightning is reflected in the Tz’utujil belief that when thunderbolts strike the earth, they “charge the earth with life-giving powers so that whatever is buried within it can rise from the dead” (Christenson 2001:75). In the highland creation stories, the corn seed used to create the flesh of the first humans was struck by a thunderbolt hurled by a thunderbolt god (see Bassie-Sweet 2008:8 for an overview of these myths). In a K’iche’ origins myth,
a red dwarf thunderbolt god strikes lightning into the blood of the K’iche’ by hitting them on their bodies with his stone axe (Tedlock 1992:147–148). This lightning in the blood is what allows them to communicate with the gods. In light of these fundamental indigenous beliefs regarding lightning and given the primary context of the T24/T1017 sign as the thunderbolt axe of the Chahk deities, I suggest that the T24/T1017 sign was used as a semantic marker for the luminous quality of lightning. In addition, the sign also likely refers to the generative power of lightning and that of the creator deities. Dual portraits of the lowland creator grandparents known as Itzamnaaj and Ix Chel are rare, but on the vessel K501 they are both featured with T24 signs marking their bodies. The avian manifestation of Itzamnaaj also often has T24/T1017 signs on its body.

There are a few depictions of trees in Maya art in which the gourd-like fruit hanging from the trunk of the tree looks like the T24 sign (see K1226, K1247, K4546). The T24 sign also appears in a variety of hieroglyphic contexts that suggest it might represent the word *hut* “fruit, seed, face” or *win* “eye, face, surface” (Houston and Stuart 1998:82; Carrasco 2004; Stuart 2005b:67; Stone and Zender 2011; Mora Marin 2012). These readings fail to account for the fact that the T24/T1017 sign is a pictograph of an axe head and that its primary context is as the thunderbolt axe of the Chahk deities. David Stuart (2010) recently proposed a possible reading for the T24 sign as *lem*, which has the meaning of bright, shiny, flashing in Cholan languages (Kaufman and Norman 1984:124). A colonial Ch’olti’ dictionary defines *v lem chahac* as the flash of a thunderbolt (Robertson et al. 2010:344), while the contemporary Yucatec Maya refer to the thunderbolt machete of the Chahks (a modern version of a flint axe) as *le-lem* “flash” (Thompson 1970:254). Stephen Houston and Simon Martin (2012) presented a number of cases where the glyph used to represent a generic word is a mythical prototype. Given that the most intense flash of light in nature is a lightning flash, it is logical that the word *lem* “flash” would be represented by the Chahk deities’ axe.

A review of some of the contexts of the T24/T1017 sign suggests that Stuart’s *lem* “flash” reading is very appropriate and that it specifically refers to a lightning flash. As an example, the logographic T561 chan “sky” sign is typically composed of crossed bands and avian wing-like elements (Stone and Zender 2011:149). However, some variations of the T561 sign incorporate the T24 sign as an infix. On the pedestal of Copán Stela N, the sky glyph in the nominal phrase of the Copán ruler K‘ak Joplaj Chan K’awiil is represented by a head variant of the sky glyph with a T24 sign infixed on the cheek. The sky is not made of jade and it is not hard, reflective, or shiny; but it frequently flashes
with luminous thunderbolts. The Palenque Temple XIX platform states that the accession of the deity GI that was overseen by the creator grandfather Itzamnaaj occurred at a location composed of a T24 sign and a chan “sky” sign (Stuart 2005b:67). It seems highly appropriate that the accession of this thunderbolt deity would occur in the context of a lightning-filled sky. Furthermore, the T24/T1017 sign is one of the most common signs found in “sky bands,” which are bands of glyphs that represent celestial pathways across the sky or the horizon borders of the quadrilateral world (Carlson and Landis 1985). In addition to T24/T1017 signs and sky signs, the glyphs in sky bands often include complementary opposites found in other metaphorical expressions, such as sun and moon or sun and night or star and moon. The famous niche scenes on Piedras Negras Stela 6 and Stela 11 that frame the seated ruler are formed by sky bands that include the T24/T1017 sign. On Piedras Negras Stela 25, alternating sky signs and T1017 signs form the sky band of the niche, while the sides of the niche on Stela 14 are simply formed by oversized T1017 signs. The obvious conclusion is that T24/T1017 signs function as flashes of lightning in these celestial contexts.

A direct association of the T24/T1017 sign with Chahk deities is seen on a number of portrait glyphs of the thunderbolt deity GI where he is shown with a T24 sign over his ear rather than his typical shell earring. In a similar fashion, portrait glyphs representing the lightning deity Yopaat have T24 signs on his arm, while the thunderbolt K’awiil and other Chahk deities have signs on their arms and legs, indicating their luminous nature. The head of the thunderbolt serpent that emanates from K’awiil’s leg is also often marked with T24/T1017 signs. The forehead of K’awiil is often infixed with the T24 sign and the T122 k’ak’ “fire” sign (see below for a discussion of fire signs). The diagnostic trait of the Central Mexican god Tezcatlipoca (smoking mirror) is a circular black mirror with smoke emanating from it that is worn either in his headdress or replacing one of his feet. The initial interpretation that the T24/T1017 sign represented a mirror was based on Michael Coe’s (1973) contention that Tezcatlipoca and K’awiil were parallel deities. Given that T24/T1017 is not a mirror and that K’awiil is a thunderbolt axe and not a mirror, it seems rather obvious that K’awiil’s forehead and body are infixed with the T24/T1017 sign as a reference to his luminosity.

There is a specific Chahk deity named in a number of scenes as Yax Ha’al Chahk “first (or blue-green) rain Chahk,” who was likely identified with the first rains of the planting season and the dramatic thunderstorms at that time of year (Coe 1973:98, 1978:34; Robicsek and Hales 1981; Spero 1991:191–192; Taube 1992a:19; Martin 2002; Lacadena 2004:93). The anthropomorphic body
of Yax Ha’al Chahk is often marked with the T24 sign and serpent scales that emphasize his connection with lightning (see K2208, K2772, K3201, K4011, K4013, K8608) (figure 1.12). On K2772, Yax Ha’al Chahk’s left leg turns into a thunderbolt serpent in a manner similar to the thunderbolt leg of K’awiil, and the head of the serpent is marked with T24/T1017 signs (figure 1.14). Yax Ha’al Chahk most frequently carries an axe with a T24 celt head and a stone manoplas (Taube and Zender 2009). His arm is often depicted drawn back behind his body, ready to throw the axe or to strike something with it. In other cases, the axe is shown over his head in the forward motion of the throw or strike. The manoplas is held in his other hand and is always positioned in front of him. In Mesoamerica, manoplas were stone objects often used to deflect blows and were referred to as shields (Taube and Zender 2009:180). Yax Ha’al Chahk’s axe and manoplas represent offensive and defensive weapons, respectively. In some examples, Yax Ha’al Chahk’s manoplas is marked with the T1017 sign, the personified form of T24. The implication is that both his axe and his manoplas have the luminous quality of lightning and contain the power of lightning.

A series of Classic period vessels illustrate an episode from a mythological story in which a naked infant anthropomorphic deity with jaguar characteristics is flanked by Yax Ha’al Chahk and a skeletal god (K521, K1003, K1152, K1199, K1370, K1644, K1768, K1815, K1973, K3201, K4011, K4013, K4056, K4385). Some examples of this interaction specify the location by placing the baby jaguar deity on top of or above the snout of a zoomorphic motif representing a witz “mountain” that is surrounded by water. The snout of the zoomorphic witz is personified with a T1017 face, such as on K4013 (figure 1.11). Many of

![Figure 1.14. K2772 (after Justin Kerr)](image-url)
the zoomorphic \textit{witz} signs include the T24 sign as seen the walls of Río Azul Tomb 6 and Tomb 25 (Adams 1999:figs. 3.7, 3.39). Even the logographic \textit{witz} glyph is occasionally prefixed with a T24 sign. As noted above, the quintessential \textit{witz} mountain was struck by a thunderbolt, so it should not be surprising that mountain motifs incorporate this sign. Furthermore, the primary habitat of Chahk deities on the surface of the earth is mountains.

\section*{THE LIGHTNING LUMINOSITY OF MAYA LORDS}

The primary contexts of the T24/T1017 sign as the lightning axe of the Chahk deities and as an element of the sky demonstrate that it refers to lightning and specifically to the intense light of the lightning flash, whether in the form of a thunderbolt or sheet lightning. One of the most common occurrences of the T24/T1017 sign is on the loincloth apron of Maya lords (Proskouriakoff 1950:figs. 24–26). The vast majority of these loincloths illustrate the T1017 head variant with the face looking directly at the viewer. The sign is used in this context at virtually every site in the Maya realm and must reference some fundamental quality shared by all these Maya rulers. I suggest that this is a direct reference to the luminous nature of the king and his role as the embodiment of lightning.

In addition to this costume element, the \textit{sak huun} headdress of rulership also incorporates the T24/T1017 sign. As noted in the introduction, the \textit{sak huun} headdress of an Ajaw is a bark paper headdress that replicates the headdress of the deity One Ajaw. Accession statements frequently express the term \textit{sak huun} by using the personified form of paper for the word \textit{huun}. This personified paper is composed of an avian form with foliage growing from its head in reference to the fig tree from which paper was made (Stuart 2012).\footnote{Depictions of the \textit{sak huun} headdress are often simple bark headbands, but they frequently also include a jewel element in the form of the \textit{huun} god, such as the headdress on the Palenque Temple XIX platform (figure 0.12).\footnote{In addition, effigies of the \textit{huun} god are often held by various rulers and their family members, as seen on the Dumbarton Oaks Tablet, the Tablet of the Cross, and the Tablet of the Foliated Cross; these, too, are marked with T24/T1017 signs. It seems apparent that the luminosity of lightning was an essential feature of this headdress.}}

\section*{THE SPARK AND FIRE OF LIGHTNING}

In addition to intense light, thunderbolts are a natural source of fire. When a thunderbolt hits a tree or other combustible material, the electrical charge
often causes smoke, sparks, and fire. In Maya art, smoke (b’utz’) and fire (k’ak’) can be depicted in a realistic way or by a stylized scroll (T122) that has been characterized as a swirl of smoke and a tongue of flame (Stone and Zender 2011:157). The antiquity of depicting fire as both smoke and flame is seen in the Preclassic San Bartolo West Mural, where offering fires are illustrated as black and red swirls (Taube et al. 2010:color insert). In hieroglyphic writing, the full form of the smoke-flame scroll is T122:563 and its personified form is T1035 (figure 1.15a). The T122 smoke-flame scroll is merely the pars pro toto representation for these signs, and in most contexts, the T122 sign represents the word k’ak’ “fire” (Stuart 1998b).  

Some examples of Chahk’s axe emphasize its fiery nature. For instance, an Early Classic version of Chahk’s thunderbolt axe is featured on K1285 (figure 1.15b). The axe head has been personified as a long-lipped deity with the axe blade emerging from its mouth and fire scrolls emanating from its head. The end of the axe blade is also decorated with fire scrolls. The handle of the axe takes the form of a serpent that has fire scrolls discharging from its mouth. The names of some Classic period kings reflect Chahk’s association with fire,
such as the Naranjo rulers K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Chaak (Chahk who burns the sky with fire) and K’ak’ Yipiyyaj Chan Chaak (Chahk who fills the sky with fire) (Martin and Grube 2008).

As noted, when someone dons the costume or wears a headdress of a deity, they become that deity. In many instances, the headdress elements literally spell the name of the deity as opposed to being a portrait of a deity. Such is the case with the Chaḥk deity headdresses worn by Lady Tz’akbu Ajaw and Kinich Janaab Pakal I, who flank their son Kinich K’an Joy Chitam II on the Dumbarton Oaks Tablet (figure 1.9). The glyphic names for these two Chaḥk deities are positioned above their heads like headdresses. The name of Lady Tz’akbu Ajaw’s Chaḥk is 6 Tok K’ak’, while Kinich Janaab Pakal I’s deity is called 6 Yuh K’ak’. What is interesting about these two depictions is that the hair of each Chaḥk is tied into a lock that mimics the shape of the k’ak’ fire scroll in the nominal phrase adjacent to it. This appears to be a visual device used to place emphasis on the fiery nature of these two Chaḥk deities.

The T44 sign is composed of scrolls decorated with dots that represent the word tok “to burn.” Many serpents including the serpent leg of K’awiil are decorated with T44 tok signs. Andrea Stone and Marc Zender (2011:159) interpreted the sign as “a type of flashing or sparkling fire associated with lightning.” The T44 sign’s close association with Chaḥk deities is seen in the portraits of the Chaḥk deity named Yopaat, whose diagnostic trait is a tok sign on his head and a round stone or manoplas weapon held in a throwing or striking pose over his head (Taube and Zender 2009:195) (figure 1.16). This is in contrast to Yax Ha’al Chaḥk, who wields the thunderbolt axe over his head and holds the stone manoplas in front of him. The interpretation of the T44 sign as sparks suggests that Yopaat was specifically identified with the smoldering material of a fire started from a lightning strike. The T44 sign may also be an auditory reference to the crackle of a fire that is accompanied by sparks. The stone weapons of Yopaat and Yax Ha’al Chaḥk would make such a cracking sound when struck. In the context of serpents, the T44 tok sign would indicate these serpents’ identification with the fire of the thunderbolt.

THE TORCH OF THE CHAHK DEITIES

While the blade of Yax Ha’al Chaḥk’s axe is most often illustrated as a T24 celt, it is also depicted as flint with fire scrolls emanating from it. On vessels K2208 and K2772, the head of his axe takes the form of a burning torch (figure 1.14). This substitution between torches and stone axe heads indicates that the Maya thought thunderbolts could take the form of either object. The use of a
torch in the context of Chahk’s axe emphasizes his association with the fire of the thunderbolt.

The identification of the thunderbolt axe with a torch is most readily seen in illustrations of the K’awiil scepter, where the body of the deity K’awiil is presented as the personification of the axe handle. K’awiil’s forehead is occasionally perforated not with a T24 celt or a flint axe but with a flaming torch (for example, K719, K1081, K1198, K1813, K1882, K3716, K4114, K5230). Some illustrations of K’awiil show a fire scroll emanating from the axe blade or torch in reference to the smoke and flame caused by a lightning strike. Effigies of K’awiil also have torch and fire elements. On the Dumbarton Oaks Tablet from the Palenque region, Lady Tz’akbu Ajaw holds a K’awiil effigy whose forehead, arm, and leg are marked with the T24 sign and whose right foot is portrayed as a serpent. His forehead element is a torch, with the fire scroll representing its fire (figure 1.9).

CORN DEITIES AND THE TORCH OF K’AWIIL

Karl Taube (1985, 1992a) identified two types of corn gods he nicknamed the Tonsured Maize God and Foliated Maize God that represented different stages in the development of the corn plant. The torch form of K’awiil is linked to both of these deities.
The Maya metaphorically refer to corn seed as bone (see Bassie-Swee 2008 for an overview). It is thought that the seed must be ritually “heated” through a series of ceremonies before and after it is planted for it to germinate. When a corn plant approaches its maximum height, a tassel appears at the top of its stock, and shortly thereafter an ear emerges from a node on its side. The ear produces silk, and the pollen from the tassel falls on the silk, fertilizing the ear. When the kernels are fully formed but still tender, the ear is called ajan (Kaufman 2003:1159). This green corn is considered a delicacy, and the Maya harvest a small amount of ajan ears for immediate consumption. A common method of cooking ajan is to roast it, hence the term roasting corn. During the next stage of growth, the ear of corn undergoes internal ripening and hardening. This mature corn is called ixim (Kaufman 2003:1034). During the harvesting of ixim, the farmer selects and safely stores a number of large ears so the seeds can be used for planting the next year’s crop. These seed ixim are chosen from plants that have produced only one ear of corn because such plants produce better-quality seed.

The nominal phrase of the Tonsured Maize God appears in a number of pottery scenes. Although the second component of his name has not been deciphered, the first part is composed of the number one and a portrait glyph of the Tonsured Maize God. Phonetic complements indicate that the portrait glyph represents the term ixim (Stuart 2005b:182). As noted by Taube and others, One Ixim was identified with the male quetzal whose brilliant green tail feathers were equated with corn foliage. One of the diagnostic traits of One Ixim is a jade flower on his forehead that is a metaphorical representation of the tassel of the corn plant. He is frequently illustrated wearing a jade-decorated skirt that represents the surface of the world covered in cornfields. One Ixim represented not just a mature corn plant but the quintessential plant that produced the seed corn for future plantings.16

Despite the fact that the portrait of the male deity One Ixim was used to represent the word ixim, the vast majority of ethnographic documentation indicates that the Maya identify corn seed as female (Bassie-Sweet 2002, 2008). This discrepancy can be reconciled if the concept of complementary opposition is taken into account. In Maya thought, a human is both male and female. The right side is male while the left is female. However, to become a complete person, adults must be married. Husbands and wives complement each other, just as the right side complements the left. A mature corn plant is incomplete without its female ear of corn, just as a man is incomplete without his wife. One Ixim’s parallel in the Popol Vuh narrative is the deity One Hunahpu, whose first wife, Lady Bone Water, was likely a corn goddess (the
Maya metaphorically refer to corn seed as bone). I have argued that the goddess Ixik was parallel to Lady Bone Water and that she was the first wife of One Ixim. Ixik’s diagnostic trait is long, flowing hair that surely represents the darkened silk of the maturing ear. The portrait glyph of Ixik is prefixed to the names of royal women, and she was their role model.17

In addition to being identified with the mature corn plant, One Ixim–One Hunahpu was also associated with the gourds of the calabash tree (Crescentia cujete) that were hollowed out and used as containers for corn-based drinks and gruel. In Classic period imagery, One Ixim has a semi-bald, gourd-shaped head. The aftermath of One Hunahpu’s sacrificial death explains why One Ixim has a gourd-shaped head. When One Hunahpu and his brother were sacrificed by the underworld lords, One Hunahpu’s decapitated head was placed in a tree and it magically changed into a gourd, creating the first calabash tree:

The head of One Hunahpu was cut off, while the rest of his body was buried with his younger brother. “Place his head in the midst of the tree that is planted by the road,” said One Death and Seven Death. Now when they went to place his head in the midst of the tree, the tree bore fruit. The tree had never borne fruit until the head of One Hunahpu was placed in it. This was the tree that we now call the calabash. It is said to be the head of One Hunahpu. (Christenson 2007:125–126)

The diversity of One Ixim’s traits conforms to other Maya gods that had multiple qualities and identifications.

In contrast to the gourd-headed One Ixim, the Foliated Maize God has maize foliage growing from his head. He appears as the god of the number eight (waxak), and in other contexts his portrait glyph represents the word ajan (Zender 2014). In the codices, Ajan has the designation God E. While it is likely that Ajan was the youthful manifestation of One Ixim (Taube 1992b; Zender 2014), the Hero Twin sons of One Hunahpu were also identified with this young stage of corn, and there is considerable evidence that twin ears of corn were thought to be manifestations of them (Bassie-Sweet 2008:20–22, 115, 204–206, 222). The Popol Vuh narrative describes how the Hero Twins Hunahpu and Xbalanque were summoned to the underworld by the death lords, but before they left, they each planted an ear of ajan in the center of their house to act as omens of their fate:

“SURELY we must go, our grandmother. But first we will advise you. This is the sign of our word that we will leave behind. Each of us shall first plant an ear of unripe maize in the center of the house. If they dry up, this is a sign of
our death. ‘They have died,’ you will say when they dry up. If then they sprout again, ‘They are alive,’ you will say, our grandmother and our mother. This is the sign of our word that is left with you,” they said. Thus Hunahpu planted one, and Xbalanque planted another in the house. They did not plant them in the mountains or in fertile ground. It was merely in dry ground, in the middle of the interior of their home, that they planted them. Then they left, each with his blowgun, and descended to Xibalba. (Christenson 2007:160)

Xmucane, the grandmother of the Hero Twins, deified these twin ajan ears by burning incense and praying to them. A corn plant typically has one ear of corn, but, rarely, some plants produce twin ears. Twin ears are believed to be particularly powerful, and they are placed with stored corn and with seed corn to protect its spirit. Such corn is often stored in the rafters of the house. The twin ajan ears planted by the Hero Twins in their house were the role model for this custom.

The sanctuary wall panel in the Palenque Temple of the Foliated Cross illustrates a deified corn plant with twin ears of corn (figure 1.17). The tassel and the stalk are represented by the T1017 sign (the personified form of lighting luminosity). The two nodes on the sides of the stalk are also represented by T1017 signs, and the leaves that grow from these nodes enclose an ear of
corn. The twin ears of corn are represented by youthful male heads that surely represent the Hero Twins. This twin-ear corn plant is infused with the spirit of lightning.

In some rare examples, One Ixim is pictured with the torch of K’awil in his forehead, such as on vessels K5126 and K8714 and a vessel found at the Alta Verapaz site of Seacal (Smith 1952:fig. 25) (figure 1.18). In the latter example, the K’awil version of One Ixim is paired with the standard form of One Ixim, who is pictured in his typical dance pose. On the Temple of the Inscriptions sarcophagus lid, the deceased K’inich Janaab Pakal I is illustrated in the process of his apotheosis in the guise of One Ixim, and he has the torch of K’awil protruding from his forehead (figure 1.19). In a similar fashion, Copán Stela 11 depicts the ruler Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat dressed as One Ixim with K’awil’s torch jutting from his forehead.

The name Ajan K’awil appears in a number of limited contexts (Boot 2009:13; Tokovinine 2012). Alexandre Tokovinine and others equate this name with the portraits of K’inich Janaab Pakal I and Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat. Lacanhá Panel 1 provides information related to the identity of the deity Ajan K’awil and indicates that the name refers to the torch form of K’awil (figure 1.20). In this scene, a lord is portrayed conjuring K’awil deities from a double-headed ceremonial bar. A burning torch is embedded in the forehead of each K’awil, and corn foliage grows from their earring assemblages. The narrative begins on the left side with the 9.15.15.0.0 (AD 746) Period Ending ceremony conducted by a lord named Aj Sak Teles. His name phrase includes Anaab and Ch’ajom titles as well as the statement that he was the Sajal of a ruler Knot-eye Jaguar. Knot-eye Jaguar is named as a lord of Bonampak and Lacanhá, but his royal residence was the site nicknamed Tied-Hair. The location of Tied-Hair has not been identified, but possibilities are El Cedro, Nuevo Jalisco, or Plan de Ayutla to the north and northwest of Lacanhá-Bonampak (Biró 2005; Tokovinine 2012:66). The name phrase of Aj Sak Teles ends with a parentage statement that indicates that his father had also been an Anaab, Ch’ajom, and Sajal and that his mother, too, was a Sajal. The time frame of the story then backs up to AD 743 and recounts the accession of Aj Sak Teles into the office of Sajal. His nominal phrase repeats his Anaab and Ch’ajom titles and adds that he was from Lacanhá. The narrative thus provides key background information that explains why Aj Sak Teles was qualified to perform the Period Ending ceremony for Lacanhá.

The end of Aj Sak Teles’s nominal phrase in the Period Ending statement is strategically placed to frame the body of the lord holding the double-headed ceremonial bar (D6-J4). By reading this text, the viewer is drawn from the
Figure 1.18. Seacal vessel

Figure 1.19. Temple of Inscriptions sarcophagus lid (drawing after Merle Greene Robertson)
left side of the monument across the body of the lord to the right side. This common framing convention indicates that the scene represents the Period Ending and that the lord is Aj Sak Teles (Bassie-Sweet 1991:168–169). The conjuring of deities from a double-headed ceremonial bar or serpent is a very frequently depicted Period Ending action.

An incised text within a scene invariably provides some kind of background information. There is a small glyph block of incised text positioned in front of Aj Sak Teles’s face. It recounts the birth of Ajan K’awiil on 13 Men 18 Yaxk’in and indicates that this birth took place at a site known from other inscriptions to be a mythological location (Stuart and Houston 1994:72–77). It is not possible to unequivocally assign a Long Count position for this calendar round date because it likely refers to mythological time. The logical connection between the incised text and Aj Sak Teles conjuring the torch form of K’awiil on the Period Ending is that his action was the reenactment of the mythological birth of Ajan K’awiil. The corn foliage growing from the ear assemblage of the left K’awiil overlaps the incised glyph block, suggesting that the incised text does in fact relate to the K’awiil deities Aj Sak Teles is conjuring. I conclude from this juxtapositioning that the name Ajan K’awiil specifically refers to the torch form of K’awiil.

What can be concluded from this evidence is that when One Ixim is illustrated wearing the torch of K’awiil, he has taken on the identity of Ajan K’awiil, that is, the torch form of K’awiil. The depictions of the apotheosis of K’inich Janaab Pakal I and Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat where they are pictured in the guise of both One Ixim and Ajan K’awiil suggest that the heat of lightning played an important role in the regeneration of One Ixim. The
agricultural connection between corn and lightning is obvious. The first rains of the planting season are accompanied by intense thunderstorms. There is also a belief that the thunderbolts that hit the milpas infuse the earth with life and germinate the seed.

**ITZAMNAAJ K’AWIIL AND FIERY THUNDERBOLTS**

The creator grandfather (One Ixim’s father) was also identified with K’awiil. In the Postclassic period, the Maya made offerings to a deity named Itzamnaaj K’awiil (Tozzer 1941:143). This aspect of Itzamnaaj is also mentioned in the Chilam Balam of Chumayel (Roys 1933:153, 168) and by Andrés Avendaño y Loyola (1987) in his account of the Postclassic Petén Itzá Maya. Classic Maya rulers frequently incorporated the names of deities in their nominal phrases, and kings from Dos Pilas and Naranjo were named after Itzamnaaj K’awiil (Martin and Grube 2008). There are numerous examples in pottery scenes where K’awiil or Yax Ha’al Chahk is illustrated with his leg extending into a sinuous thunderbolt serpent with an open mouth, and some examples depict the creator grandfather Itzamnaaj emerging from the mouth (figure 1.14). On vessels K719, K1006, K1198, and K4013, Itzamnaaj materializes from the serpent wearing K’awiil’s burning torch in his forehead. These portraits, in effect, represent the name Itzamnaaj K’awiil. Itzamnaaj’s association with thunder is well-known, and it has been suggested that in these K’awiil contexts, Itzamnaaj represents the booming thunder of the lightning bolt strike (Bassie-Sweet 2002, 2008:146; Stone and Zender 2011:159). The torch attribute of Itzamnaaj K’awiil suggests that this aspect of the creator grandfather had a fire association as well.

The role of fire as a transformation agent is well-known. On the most fundamental level, fire is used to transform the weeds and debris of the cornfield into a fertile ground for planting corn, while grains of dried corn must be boiled over the household fire to be turned into food or drink. The Popol Vuh indicates that after the formation of the surface of the earth, the creator grandparents established a household for themselves at its center. This terrestrial place of duality was the principal role model for human households. The hearth fire with its three stones was the spiritual center of the house. Elderly creator deities identified with fire and with the household hearth are found across Mesoamerica (Miller and Taube 1993:87). Given the creator grandfather’s identification as the ultimate owner of the hearth fire, it is reasonable to suggest that Itzamnaaj was thought to be not only the thunder of the lightning bolt but the source of its fire (Bassie-Sweet 2008:65–67).
TORCHES AS WEAPONS OF DESTRUCTION

The Chahk deities and other supernaturals are illustrated in the codices holding burning torches that have been interpreted as metaphorical references to drought (Thompson 1972). There is also evidence for the use of torches as weapons. The word *taj* (Proto-Mayan *tyaj*) (Kaufman 2003:1090) refers to both torches and pine because the combustible material used in most ancient Maya torches was pine. The resin in pine burns well, even in moist conditions. In hieroglyphic writing, a flaming bundle of pine kindling was used to represent the word *taj* “torch.” Without a handle, such a torch was designed to be disposable. More permanent torches were created by placing pine splinters into a narrow ceramic cylinder closed on the bottom and open on top. Illustrations of torches and archaeologically recovered examples indicate that ceramic torch holders had a flared rim to contain the falling embers and protect the hand. Once the torch was lit, additional splinters could be added to the cylinder to keep the torch burning or increase its brightness. A ceramic torch could be handheld or inserted into a wall niche or placed in the ground. Such a torch also allowed for the safe transportation of fire from one location to another. In the Wayeb–New Year ceremonies performed by the Postclassic Lacandón Ch’ol, all the fires of the community were extinguished at the beginning of the Wayeb period, and new fire was provided by the community leaders from the temple fire at the end of the period (Tozzer 1912). One assumes that this new fire was transported to each household by torch. During the Postclassic period, the Maya performed fire ceremonies linked to agricultural success that were timed according to the 260-day tzolk’in calendar (Long 1923).

Fire was an important weapon in Mesoamerican warfare, and the burning of towns and crops is well documented. In the Maya region, the typical thatched-roof homes were easily destroyed by fire. In the Madrid Codex (page 86c), a warrior deity stands before a thatched house. In his right hand, he holds a flint spear that he thrusts in a downward motion toward the house while he sets the house on fire with a torch he holds in his left hand. In Maya art, two sequential actions are often illustrated in a stylized manner, with each hand of the protagonist representing a separate action. For example, one of the mythological Wayeb rituals illustrated in the Dresden Codex depicts the deity K’awiil making offerings to a tree effigy representing the Bakab god (figure 1.21). K’awiil scatters incense into a burning incensario with his left hand while holding up a headless turkey in his right hand. Bishop Diego de Landa’s description of Postclassic Wayeb rituals indicates that a priest took on the role of K’awiil and performed these same actions during historical reenactments (Tozzer 1941:140). Landa specifically stated that the priest burned incense in
the Bakab’s honor and then cut off the head of the turkey and made an offering of the head to the Bakab. The Dresden Codex scene is thus not a snapshot of one moment frozen in time but a stylized depiction of the two essential actions of the ceremony: the burning of incense and the beheading of the turkey (Bassie-Sweet and Hopkins 2017). Each hand action of K’awiil, in effect, functions like a separate verb. The action of the Madrid Codex warrior deity is a powerful visual metonym representing the actions of conquest (the spear) and destruction (the torch).

THE TOK’-PAKAL

While scenes of Maya warfare illustrate many types of offensive weapons, they also depicted defensive weapons in the form of shields. The pairing of a flint weapon and a shield is common in Maya monumental art. Numerous stelae illustrate a lord holding a GII axe scepter or other type of flint weapon in one hand and a shield in the other. In her seminal study of Maya sculpture, Tatiana Proskouriakoff (1950) cataloged a variety of shields of different shapes
and sizes that are decorated with various deity portraits and motifs. Some depictions of war shields indicate that they were held by straps across the back (K4651), but many shields are illustrated facing the viewer, which replicates what a foe would have seen during an attack. The generic term for shield is *pakal*, and the logograph representing this word is a depiction of a round shield with a stylized face. Regrettably, J. Eric S. Thompson (1962) did not assign one of his glyph catalog numbers to this logograph, but William Ringle and Thomas C. Smith-Stark (1996) assigned it the designation T932. Some elite incorporate the term *pakal* in their name phrases, such as the Yaxchilán queen Lady Pakal and the Palenque lords Janaab Pakal, K’ínich Janaab Pakal I, and U Pakal K’ínich.

In 1934, Jean Genet (2001) identified glyphs composed of a flint and shield in the three Postclassic Maya codices that he argued represented the concept of war, based on analogies with Central Mexican metonyms that contrast arrow and shield. A metonym is a term in which two typical members of a class are juxtaposed to stand for the whole domain (Hull 1993, 2003; Hopkins 1996; Knowlton 2012). They are often complementary or contrasting opposites. The phrase arrow/shield is a metonym that refers to all weapons. Classic period forms of the flint/shield metonym that are composed of *tok’* “flint” and *pakal* “shield” signs have been noted (Houston 1983). *Tok’-pakal* contrasts an offensive weapon (flint) with a defensive weapon (shield) and at the same time refers to all types of shields and weapons, including those made of obsidian and other types of stones.

There is also an actual object composed of a flint and shield that is illustrated in Maya art. Such objects were acquired by Palenque lords, such as K’ínich Kan Bahlam II as depicted on the Tablet of the Sun, K’ínich K’an Joy Chitam II on the Palace Tablet, and K’ínich Ahkal Mo’ Nahb III on the Tablet of the Slaves (see figures 2.13, 5.1, 5.9). K’ínich Kan Bahlam II and K’ínich K’an Joy Chitam II received a *tok’-pakal* during pre-accession ceremonies when they were ages six and nine, respectively, while the ruler K’ínich Ahkal Mo’ Nahb received one on the day of his accession at age forty-four (Bassie-Sweet 1991:207, 1996:228; Bassie-Sweet et al. 2012; Bassie-Sweet and Hopkins 2017). The depiction of K’ínich K’an Joy Chitam II’s *tok’-pakal* on the Palace Tablet includes a cloth the object was apparently wrapped in when not on display.

Some hieroglyphic narratives refer to war events that involved the “throwing down” of a lord’s *tok’-pakal*. There has been some discussion about whether this action was a metaphorical reference to the defeat of the lord and his troops or whether the *tok’-pakal* object was actually carried into battle and subject to capture or destruction by the opposition (Freidel et al.
The concepts are not necessarily mutually exclusive. What is pertinent to this discussion is the notion that success in Mesoamerican warfare was linked not only to the spiritual strength of the combatant but also to that of his weapons. In downing an enemy’s tok’-pakal, the winning forces were symbolically defeating the supernatural power of their opponents and their opponents’ weapons. The fact that the offensive weapon used in this metonymy was thought to contain the spirit and power of the thunderbolt gods implies that the victor was able to better harness this force than was his foe. It also suggests that thunderbolts were thought to be the ultimate weapon.

There is evidence that some tok’-pakal objects were heirloom objects associated with particular ancestors. At Yaxchilán, the narratives of Structure 44 recount the military exploits of Shield Jaguar III and an earlier Yaxchilán king Knot-eye Jaguar II (Tate 1992; Martin and Grube 2008). These texts indicate that Shield Jaguar III was in possession of Knot-eye Jaguar II’s tok’-pakal at the time of his conquest. Although significantly damaged, each of the three Structure 44 lintels illustrates Shield Jaguar III with a different captive. Lintel 46 records Shield Jaguar III’s capture of the lord Aj K’an Usja of Buktuun in AD 713 and the statement that Shield Jaguar III was the successor of the tok’-pakal of Knot-eye Jaguar II (Freidel et al. 1993:305; Stuart 1995:303; Martin and Grube 2008:123–126). Knot-eye Jaguar’s tok’-pakal would have been at least a hundred years old at this point. The inference is that living lords drew on the spiritual power of their ancestors through the acquisition of heirloom objects.

The Lintel 45 text parallels the Lintel 46 narrative but refers to Shield Jaguar III’s earlier capture in AD 681 of Aj Nik, who was a secondary lord of the La Florida king. This war event occurred eight months before Shield Jaguar III’s accession. The text repeats the successor of the tok’-pakal phrase, but the glyph blocks that would have registered Knot-eye Jaguar II’s name are regrettably eroded. Nevertheless, the parallel nature of the two caption texts makes it virtually certain that it was Knot-eye Jaguar II’s tok’-pakal that was referenced here.

The scene on Yaxchilán Lintel 45 provides some evidence about how an ancestral tok’-pakal was used. Shield Jaguar III wears an ancestral effigy belt assemblage composed of a skull. The skull is juxtaposed with the text referring to the tok’-pakal, suggesting that this skull represents Knot-eye Jaguar II. Although Shield Jaguar III’s hand is eroded, enough remains of it to indicate that he is holding his captive Aj Nik by the hair with his right hand. This is a typical gesture of capture. In his left hand, Shield Jaguar III holds a spearhead.
and a flexible shield. Aj Nik kneels in submission and holds a tassel of the shield in his right hand and the end of Shield Jaguar III’s garment in his left. The preferred weapon of war is a long spear, and numerous scenes depict warriors stabbing their victims with their weapons. Shield Jaguar III is not holding a spear but instead a spearhead, that is, a tok’. The obvious reason why the Lintel 45 narrative relates the information about Knot-eye Jaguar’s tok’-pakal is that the scene is the aftermath of the battle when Aj Nik is submitting to the tok’-pakal of Knot-eye II.

The notion that lords acquired heirloom objects may explain the appearance of the ancestor K’an Joy Chitam I in the Palenque Cross Group narrative. Unlike the narratives at Yaxchilán that are contained within a single building, the Palenque narrative is found within the three temples of the Cross Group. The story begins in the Temple of the Cross and then moves in a counterclockwise direction to the Temple of the Sun and Temple of the Foliated Cross (Bassie-Sweet 1991; Bassie-Sweet and Hopkins 2017). The main text of the Tablet of the Sun narrative focuses on the pre-accession events of the six-year-old K’inich Kan Bahlam II in AD 641. The left side of the scene illustrates K’inich Kan Bahlam II’s acquisition of a tok’-pakal on this date. The main text directly links this event to a similar pre-accession event performed by K’inich Kan Bahlam II’s ancestor K’an Joy Chitam I in AD 496 when that lord was five years old. There has never been a satisfactory explanation of why this particular ancestor of K’inich Kan Bahlam II was singled out in the Tablet of the Sun narrative. The reason may have been that K’inich Kan Bahlam II was acquiring K’inich K’an Joy Chitam I’s tok’-pakal. In a similar manner, K’inich Kan Bahlam II’s brother K’inich K’an Joy Chitam II is illustrated on the Palace Tablet acquiring a headdress and a tok’-pakal in AD 654 when he was nine years old. This narrative focuses on the headdress and indicates that it was an heirloom object (Bassie-Sweet et al. 2012; Bassie-Sweet and Hopkins 2017).

**SUMMARY**

In the Maya region, the annual change from the dry to the rainy season that heralds the start of the agricultural cycle is announced by distant thunder. As the wet season begins, powerful rainstorms blanket the region with dramatic displays of sheet lightning and thunderbolts. These thunderbolts, which are capable of splitting trees when they strike, are characterized by the Maya as the flint axes of their Chahk deities. The luminosity of lightning was an important quality of the creator deities, and the Maya incorporated a sign for
this property in their art in the form of the T24/T1017 sign. Rulers and other elite members not only took on the guise of a Chahk deity but also had co-essences that took the form of lightning. Thunderbolts are a natural source of fire, and various Chahk deities were specifically identified with torches.

Lightning was a powerful force that was thought to animate deities and humans. Highland stories regarding the first creation of humans indicate that their flesh and blood were created by corn seed and water that had been struck with a bolt of lightning. The belief in the engendering qualities of lightning survives to the present in highland Maya beliefs that the souls of powerful individuals can take the form of a thunderbolt. Classic Maya lords who wear the T24/T1017 sign on their person are declaring their affiliation with this force.

As an object representing the military power and authority of the lord, the tok'-pakal falls into the category of an inalienable object that has been cosmologically authenticated through its identification with the Chahk deities (Weiner 1992; Mills 2004; Kovacevich and Callaghan 2013). Such objects are well-known in Mesoamerica.

The tok'-pakal “flint-shield” metonym that refers to war pairs the flint of the Chahk deities with a generic sign for shield. Classic period war scenes frequently show warriors with a variety of different types of spears and shields. Although rarely seen in these battle depictions, the war shield most frequently held by rulers on public monuments is decorated with the face of the deity GIII, indicating GIII’s intimate relationship with warfare, in particular, royal warfare. It is my position that GIII was specifically identified with the flint blades used as weapons of war in contrast to the thunderbolt deity GII, who was identified with flint axes. Chapter 2 explores the nature of the deity GIII and his solar and fire qualities.