

# Beyond Rainstorms: The Kawak as an Ancestor, Warrior, and Patron of Witchcraft

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In Classic and Post-Classic Maya iconography, the representation of the Earth Lord, who is also the God of Storms and Lightning in Maya cosmology, is a zoomorph known in contemporary literature as the "Cauac Monster." Its name is derived from its diagnostic markings, which consist of what resemble clustered grapes and the half-circlets or swirls framed by a line of "water" dots that characterize the glyph for Cauac (fig. 1), glyph T528 in J. E. S. Thompson's *A Catalog of Maya Hieroglyphs* (1962:452). Kawak (Cauac) is the nineteenth day name in the sacred round of days in the Tzolkin of Mayan calendrics, and is related to thunderstorms and rain (Thompson 1971:87).

Cognates of the Yucatec word *kawak* as "lightning, thunder" and/or "19th day name" are found in at least twenty-one of the extant Mayan languages. According to Kaufman and Norman (1984:117) the Proto-Mayan word for "lightning" and "thunder" can be reconstructed as *kahōq*. Mayan speakers in the Highlands of Guatemala use the forms *kahōq* (Cakchiquel, Pokomchi), *kawoq* (Ixil, Quiché), *kʻyooq* (Mam), or *kaa*q (Kekchi). Among the Cholan and Tzeltalan languages, where Proto-Mayan initial /k/ evolved into an initial /ch/, we find the Tzeltal form *chahwuk* [cha'uk] for "thunder, lightning"; *chauk* in Tzotzil; *chawuk* in Tojolabal and Chuj; *chahk* in Chol; cháwAk in Chontal; and *chaak* in Yucatec, Mopan, and Itzá. Yucatec also retains the archaic pronunciation *kawak* for the nineteenth day name, in addition to the borrowed form *chaak*, the Yucatec word for "rain," and the name of their Rain God.

**Fig. 1.** Glyph for Kawak — T528 and variants (redrawn by Joanne Spero from Thompson 1962:452).

**Fig. 2.** Bonampak Stela 1, detail of the Kawak zoomorph at the base of the stela (drawing by Linda Schele; Schele and Miller 1986:45).



**Fig. 3.** Palenque, Temple of the Foliated Cross, detail of the Kawak zoomorph on which Chan Bahlum stands (drawing by Linda Schele 1974:54).

1991 Beyond Rainstorms: The Kawak as an Ancestor, Warrior, and Patron of Witchcraft. Originally published in *Sixth Palenque Round Table*, 1986, edited by Virginia M. Fields. Electronic version. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

### The "Cauac Monster" as a Locale

In 1978, at the Tercera Mesa Redonda de Palenque, Dacey Taylor identified the Cauac Monster as an indicator of a "supernatural locale, such as a cave on the surface of the earth" (Taylor 1978:83), thus dispelling J. Eric Thompson's notion that the Kawak was a celestial dragon associated with the Itzamnas, gods of rain (Thompson 1971:87). Taylor observed that in Classic Maya art, the Kawak zoomorph often functioned as

a pedestal or bench that formed a platform on which rulers or deities stood or sat, and that these creatures or personified bases were always found at ground level, indicating the connection of the Kawak zoomorph with the earth (1978:80).

Some beautifully executed examples of Kawak zoomorphs on which Classic Maya rulers are standing are found at Bonampak on Stela 1 (fig. 2), and on the Temple of the Foliated Cross at Palenque (fig. 3). On codex-style pottery from



Fig. 4. Rollout photograph of Vase 1377 (photograph copyright Justin Kerr 1980).



Fig. 5. Vase of the Seven Gods (drawing by Michael D. Coe; Coe 1973:107-109).

the Late Classic, deities and rulers sit on Kawak-marked thrones or benches (Taylor 1978: figs. 3, 4, and 5; Robicsek and Hales 1981: fig. 28a). In the Post-Classic Maya codices, God B is occasionally found sitting on Kawak heads (Codex Dresden 34c, 41a, and 66b); and various deities — Gods A, B, C, and E — sit on benches or slabs with Kawak markings (Codex Dresden 29b; Codex Madrid 58a, 59a, 99a, and 100a). Temples in the codices sometimes bear the T528 Kawak markings (Codex Dresden 38c; Codex Madrid 11c, 84c, and 96a).

Another context in which Kawak creatures were employed by Classic Maya artisans (Taylor 1978:80-81) was their portrayal as enclosures or niches that framed rulers, seemingly indicating that the scene takes place in a cave, as at Seibal Stela 3, and Piedras Negras Throne 1. On the vase in figure 4, two royal personages sit inside niches or thrones marked with Kawak, as they watch a ritual sacrifice taking place on a Kawak altar. On the Vase of the Seven Gods (fig. 5), God L, a deity associated with the underworld, sits on a jaguar throne inside a frame of multiple Kawak heads (Coe 1973b:107-109). The message conveyed in



**Fig. 6.** Chalcatzingo Relief I. The Olmec Earth Lord/Rain God is shown sitting inside of a cave (redrawn by Joanne Spero after Joralemon 1971: fig. 142; original drawing by Michael D. Coe).

these contexts is that the protagonists are linked to the powers that lurk in the bowels of the earth.

### The Evolution of the Kawak Zoomorph

Carolyn Tate (1980) examined the evolution of the Kawak zoomorph in Mayan art and its connection to vegetation, the earth, God K, and the ancestors and concluded that the Kawak "was a place, the earth or ancestral abode, for the transformation of matter into energy" (Tate 1980:111).

The history of the use of the Kawak as a symbol of the earth, or the Earth Lord, can be traced back to the Olmecs (Taylor 1978:81-83; Tate 1980: 21-23). Relief I at Chalcatzingo (fig. 6) shows a figure sitting inside a cave or niche. There are clouds dripping rain above the cave, and volutes that symbolize wind, clouds, or mist issue from the mouth of the cave. The cave itself is marked by foliation and crowned by a crossed-bands motif. Of particular importance to this study is the quatrefoil shape of the enclosure or cave, interpreted by Joralemon (1971:49) as the mouth of a jaguar. When compared to Chalcatzingo Relief IX (Joralemon 1971: fig. 141), which shows the open mouth of a beast with a jaguar nose and fangs, it can be seen that the cave is personified as God I of the Olmec pantheon, a jaguar Lord of the Fiery Earth (Joralemon 1971:49, 90).

Classic Maya artisans, like their Olmec forebears, used the quatrefoil niche to represent "an opening between cosmic realms," a yawning chasm in the earth's crust that leads to the underworld (Tate 1980:47). In Maya iconography, one of the earliest appearances of a quatrefoil niche in combination with a Kawak head is found on a peccary skull, dated 8.17.0.0.0, from a Copán tomb (Robicsek and Hales 1981:190). At the top of the skull, two rulers sit on jaguar thrones inside of a quatrefoil cartouche (fig. 7). At their feet is a very early representation of a Kawak head out of which rises the symbol for *pop*, a word meaning "woven mat" in the Mayan languages, and a connotation of royalty. Inside the *pop* symbol and on the Kawak head are T528 clustered circlets. The figures surrounding the cartouche are frequently found in underworld scenes on pottery vessels: a jaguar, a long-lipped humanoid holding a scepter, a monkey, a bird, a skeletal figure, a deer, and a pack of peccaries.

Both Carolyn Tate and Walter F. Morris, Jr., note that in Classic Maya weaving, as in iconography, the quatrefoil shape represents the maw of the Earth Lord. Combined with the *pop* motif, it symbolizes the emergence of ancestors from the underworld. In Classic Maya scenes that accompany accession rites, as on Lintel 25 at Yaxchilán, clothing woven with the "quatrefoil-*pop*" motif was worn to show that the royal ancestors were symbolically present to legitimize the new ruler's ascent to the throne (Morris 1985:75, citing Tate 1980). The association of Kawak with the ancestors was particularly strong, as the "Cauac Monsters regularly occurred in the accession scenes of rulers, especially when mention was made of the parentage of the ruler" (Tate 1980: 109).

The Kawak zoomorph achieved Early Classic sophistication on the Tzakol tripod (fig. 8), ca. 9.2.0.0.0 (Tate 1980:36). The top of its head is composed of a partial quatrefoil depression that contains the crossed-bands motif and vegetation, all symbols used by the Olmec to depict the Earth Lord of their era. To this, the Maya added their own visual information, constructing a zoomorphic face whose forehead, nose, and teeth are clearly marked with the T528 (Kawak) clustered grapes and dotted swirls.

The theme of Kawak as Earth Lord was perpetuated at Tikal. On the periphery of Tikal's Altar 4, ca. 9.4.0.0.0, an old god or ancestor reaches out from the underworld through a quatrefoil niche with a bowl of offerings or bloodletting implements in his outstretched hand. The niches alternate with long-nosed zoomorphs marked with the Kawak circlets (Tate 1980:40).

According to Carolyn Tate's investigation, throughout the Early and Middle Classic the Maya portrayed the Cauac Monster with variations from site to site, but in each case its function was the same: "it indicated a place below the acceding ruler where his ancestors dwelt and from where they conferred their power and legitimacy" (Tate 1980:52). The use of the Kawak zoomorph on Mayan monuments underwent a hiatus from ca. 9.8.0.0.0 to 9.13.0.0.0, when Chan Bahlum began commemorating his ancestral bloodline in stone on the monuments of the Cross Group at Palenque (Tate 1980:52-55). At the same time (9.13.0.0.0),

**Fig. 7.** Carved peccary skull from Copán Tomb 1 (reprinted with permission from Robicsek 1972:143; copyright Francis Robicsek 1972).



**Fig. 8.** Tzakol Tripod (drawing courtesy Carolyn Tate, 1980:36).



**Fig. 9.** (a) Palenque Creation Tablet (left side), portrait of a ruler; (b) Palenque Creation Tablet (right side), GI of the Palenque Triad (drawings by Linda Schele).

**Fig. 10.** Classic Maya weapons with Kawak markings at Palenque: (a) Tablet from Dumbarton Oaks, detail, Kawak axe (after Schele 1974:52, fig. 13b); (b) Temple of the Cross, detail, Kawak spear (after Schele 1974:52, fig. 13a); (c) Tablet of the Slaves, detail, shield and eccentric flint personified with Kawak markings (after Schele 1974:52, fig. 12b; drawings courtesy Linda Schele).



Stela 1 was erected at Bonampak (Tate 1980: 57). The Kawak head on which the ruler stands (cf. fig. 2) has an ancestral figure, or perhaps the Maize God (Schele and Miller 1986:45), looking up from the cleft in its forehead, and two similar profiles emanating from the upper corners of its ear assemblages.

Other depictions of the Kawak zoomorph on monumental art in the Late Classic include Machaquilá Stela 13, 9.14.0.0.0, Copán Stela B, 9.15.0.0.0, and Altar M at Copán. From the terminal Classic is Seibal Stela 3, 9.19.0.0.0. (For a comprehensive chronology of the Cauac Monster in Maya iconography, see Tate 1980.)

Possibly the last use of the Kawak visual complex carved in stone at Palenque, dated 9.16.0.0.0, according to Tate (1980:67) was the Creation Tablet (fig. 9). The figure on the left side, probably a ruler, is marked with *ahaw* on his belt and pectoral, with Venus on his cheek, and is holding a serpent-hafted axe. The figure on the right wears a GI headdress (the shell diadem with crossed bands) and is marked with half-quatrefoils. Both sit on glyphoid Kawak heads inside quatrefoil cartouches. The figure with the GI headdress seated within a quatrefoil, with volutes curling outward from his mouth, is visually reminiscent of the Olmec depiction of the Earth Lord/Rain God on Chalcatzingo Relief I (cf. fig. 6).

### **The Modern Kawak: Cave Dweller, Ancestor, Patron of Warfare and Witchcraft**

Far from being an idea of the past, the Kawak still has a place in contemporary Maya cosmology. Known as *chawk* ['*anhel*] among the Tzotzil, he is the Earth Lord and Lord of Lightning. In some communities, *chawk*, as Lord of Lightning, is subservient to *yahval balamil*, the Earth Lord, while in others no distinction is made between the two deities, and their names are interchangeable (Laughlin 1969:177). As Earth Lord, the *chawk* lives in mountain caves, from which he controls the rain clouds and discharges thunder and lightning bolts. His underworld quarters can be approached through openings in the earth's crust called *ch'enetik* — caves, waterholes, and limestone sinks — which are considered to be both sacred and dangerous (Vogt 1969:302, 387). He is the guardian of the animal spirits of the people, called *naguales* in Spanish, and *chanul* or *wayhel* in Tzotzil. These animal spirits are kept by the Earth Lord *chawk* in inner-mountain corrals, and among them the jaguar is the most powerful. The ancestors (*totilme'iletik*) are another faction that lives in caves inside the mountains (Walter F. Morris, Jr., personal communication, 1986).

Accordingly, in contemporary Tzeltal cosmology, the ancestors (*me'tik tatik*), the *naguales*, and the *tatik cha'uk* (the Lord of Lightning, or *rayo*) live together in sacred caves that overlook the communities. The *rayo* lives in the deepest parts of these caves, in places where common men dare not approach because they would run the risk of having their soul captured and of losing their life (Hermitte 1970:34, 38-39).

In contemporary Mayan languages, the Kawak is referred to as the collective father or grandfather. For example, in Chol, the *chahk* is called *lak mam*, "our grandfather" (Hopkins and Josserand 1985). The Tzeltal of Amatenango (Tzo'ontahal) call him *tatik cha'uk*, "our father lightning" (Nash 1970:141). In Jacaltec he is *komam k'uh*, "our grandfather lightning" (Day 1971).

These current beliefs reflect what studies of Classic Maya iconography (Taylor 1978; Tate 1980) tell us of the Precolumbian Kawak: it lived in caves in the underworld that could be approached through openings in the earth's crust

(the quarrefoil niche) and it was associated with the ancestral bloodline and with the ancestors (who also lived in the underworld).

Iconography, linguistics, and folklore show that there is a historical connection between the Kawak and warfare. On Classic Maya monuments, axes, spears, and eccentric flints are sometimes marked with T528 at Palenque, as shown in figure 10, and at Naranjo (Stela 30) and Yaxchilán (Lintel 45). Axes and spears marked with Kawak are also found on pottery vessels (cf. Robicsek and Hales 1981:116 and Coe 1978:67-68).

Among the Mayan languages having linguistic associations between Kawak and weapons, we find that in Yucatec the term for "flint" is *bat chaak*, the axe of the Rain God *chaak* (Barrera Vásquez 1980:39). In Lacandón, *u ya'ax baat hahanak'uh* is "lightning, the axe of the Rain God" (Bruce 1979:334). Quiché has the word *ch'ab*, which means "thunderbolt, ray, shaft, arrow, blade, glass, and lance" (Edmonson 1965: 19). The Kekchi have *xmaal kaaq*, meaning "the axe of the ancestors" (Sedat 1955:104). These are the axe-shaped celts believed to be thrown to the earth by lightning (Robicsek 1978:61, citing Sedat, personal communication). In Chol, "obsidian" is called *hacha lak mam*, "axe of our grandfather," since it is thought to be produced by lightning (Aulie and Aulie 1978:61).

The belief that lightning is the protector of the community and the crops is found among the Tzeltal (Hermitte 1970:90-91), the Tzotzil (Guiteras-Holmes 1961:290-291), the Chol (Aulie and Aulie 1978:46), the Tojolabal (Ruz 1982:196-197), and the Jacaltec (Montejo 1984). In historical records, accounts of lightning used in battle date back to the colonial documents, the *Annals of the Cakchiquels* (Recinos and Goetz 1953: 102), and the *Título de Totonicapán* (Carmack and Mondloch 1983:222, 253).

In modern folklore, there are many tales that narrate the use of lightning in battle. One story that names lightning as the patron of warfare is the epic Jacaltec folktale entitled *El Kanil, Man of Lightning*, published in 1984 by Victor Montejo, a native Jacaltecan (brief versions of this story are also published in La Farge and Beyers 1931). According to legend, Kanil was one of the "first

fathers" of Jacaltecs, the chief of the four year-bearers, and the patron of the *k'uh winaj*, or "lightning men." When the Jacaltecs were pressed into battle to fight a foreign enemy, the sorcerers of the town volunteered to be the army, because they were *naguales* who could become serpents, jaguars, biting toads, poisonous flies, shrewd foxes, and rabid dogs. They chose two young boys as their porters. One of the porters, a lad named Xuwan, had little confidence in the effectiveness of sorcerers and feared for their lives. So one night, he went to the mountain homes of the various *k'uh*s, the "lightning man/gods" who were the guardians of Xajla' (Jacaltenango). Finally, the *k'uh* Kanil agreed to give Xuwan the power of lightning, and made him a *k'uh winaj*. In turn, Xuwan converted the other porter, Juan, into a lightning man. When the band of sorcerers met the enemy, it was Xuwan, Juan, and a third lightning man from Chiapas who won the battle by striking at the enemy with their lightning (Montejo 1984: 23-61).

Beliefs concerning *naguales* have some antiquity in the Maya region. In the Popol Vuh of the Quiché Maya (Edmonson 1971:233), the cacique Q'uq' Kumatz was a *nawal ahaw* (*naval ahav*, a "nagual lord"), who traveled between the sky and the underworld and transformed himself into a serpent, a jaguar, an eagle, and a pool of blood. He used his sorcery to fight his enemies. Another Quiché document, the *Título de Totonicapán* (ca. 1554), records the magical powers (or *naguales*) used in pre-Conquest battles by the Quichés. The supernatural powers they summoned were *ch'abi*

*q'aq'*, "flaming arrow or fireball"; *kaq tikax*, "red flint"; *kaq'ulja*, "lightning"; *uk'ux kaj*, "heart of heaven"; and *kaj eqam*, "the four year-bearers" (Carmack and Mondloch 1983:12, 149, 253). In the Chiapas area, the existence of *naguales* was mentioned by Fray Núñez de la Vega, bishop of Chiapas at the turn of the eighteenth century, who wrote of the "poder de ciertos individuos de transformarse en tigres, leones, bolas de fuego, y rayos" (Hermitte 1970:87).

In the Tzeltal community of Pinola (Villa las Rosas), everyone has at least three *naguales*, but the most powerful members of the community, the *me'iltatil* (mothers-fathers) may have up to thirteen. Common people have *naguales* that are not very strong, such as hens, coyotes, or hawks. *Brujos* (*ak'chameletik*) might be jaguars, monkeys, deer, or bulls. But the most powerful of all *naguales*, those of the *me'iltatil*, are lightning, meteors (balls of fire or comets), and whirlwinds (Hermitte 1970:7, 45-49).

Today in Pinola, individuals whose top *nagual* is lightning are called *hombres rayos*. They are warriors extraordinaire because they can fly so high that they are practically immune from harm. It is their job to protect the community and the crops from the attacks of evil winds or malicious *brujos* (*ak'chameletik*), and to punish those who deviate from the norms of society (Hermitte 1970:140). Their power is derived from the *chahwuk*, who among the Tzeltal of Tzo'ontahal (Amatenango del Valle) is called *tatik cha'uk* (our father lightning), and is the patron of curing and witchcraft (Hermitte 1970:90-91; Nash 1970: 141).



Fig. 11. The Metropolitan Museum Pot. Rollout photograph, #521 (copyright Justin Kerr 1979).



Fig. 12. Vase #1003. Rollout photograph (copyright Justin Kerr 1979).



Fig. 13. Vase #1152. Rollout photograph (copyright Justin Kerr 1980).



Fig. 14. Vase #1370. Rollout photograph (copyright Justin Kerr 1984).

Ethnographic evidence shows that among the Maya today there is a strong relationship among curing, witchcraft, and the Kawak cult of the caves. Traditionally, *tatik cha'uk* was the prototype of the old curers in Tzo'ontahal. From his caves he controlled the rains and sent destructive lightning bolts. The curers were his intermediaries. Today

the syncretic counterpart of *tatik cha'uk* is a saint called Tatik Martil, whose symbol is a cross. It is said that only those who know how to cast spells can speak with him. He is the one people go to when they want to make illness. (The Tzeltal word for *brujo*, "evil sorcerer," is *ak'chamel*; *ak'*, "to cast," and *chamel*, "illness or death.") Conversely,





Fig. 15. Vase #1644. Rollout photograph (copyright Justin Kerr 1984).



Fig. 16. Vase #1815. Rollout photograph (copyright Justin Kerr 1980).

Tatik Martil is also petitioned for protection from evil (Nash 1970:13, 16, 141, 205).

Among the Tzotzil of Zinacantan, the *h'iloletik*, "seers," and the *totilme'iletik*, "mothers-fathers" (the political-religious leaders of the community), pray to the *chawk*/Earth Lord at shrines marked with crosses at the entrances to caves or at waterholes. The *chawk* and the ancestors are asked to send rain and to protect the crops and the community. If a person should become ill, the cause is thought to be supernatural. Perhaps his animal spirit has been let out of the corral as a type of punishment, or lightning could have knocked out a part of his soul. Possibly the person has fallen and lost his soul. If this has happened, it is thought that the soul has stayed in the earth, in the custody of the *chawk*; if it is not released, the victim will die. The *h'iloletik* go to the special caves or other sacred openings in the earth's crust where they can petition the *chawk*/Earth Lord to release the soul (Vogt 1966:360, 365, 1969:301).

Similar beliefs exist among the Chol, except that their Lord of Earth and Water is the *ahaw* who lives in caves. During curing ceremonies, the spirit of a *xwuht* (*curandero*) enters a cave to talk to the *ahaw* in order to convince him to release the victim's soul (Whittaker and Warkentin 1965:



Fig. 17. Vase #1815, detail of the Yax Naab Chak title for GI, T16:556, 1011 (copyright Justin Kerr 1986).



Fig. 18. Vase #1644, detail of the Yax Naab Chak title for GI, T16:556, 1011:102 (copyright Justin Kerr 1986).

135-138). The *ahaw* is said to be the companion of the devil, whose name is *xiba*. *Xiba* is also a Chol word for the type of *brujo* that casts evil spells (Aulie and Aulie 1978:28-92, 136).

According to Mexican anthropologist Mario Ruz, Tojolabal *hombres rayos*, "lightning men," receive their power from the *chawuk* of the caves, as do the *hombres rayo* of the Tzeltal. However, among the Tojolabal, there are two types of lightning men: the *yaxal chawuk*, "green lightning," who guards the community and the crops, practices curing, and converts himself into lightning to attract rain; and the *takin chawuk*, "dry lightning," who is an evil sorcerer or *pukuh*, *brujo*, in league with the *niwan pukuh*, "great *brujo* or devil," the lord of the underworld, who is also a cave dweller (Ruz 1982:56, 63-65).

There are several codex-style vessels photographed by Justin Kerr and published in *The Maya Book of the Dead* (Robicsek and Hales 1981:22-24) that show an underworld scene in which it appears that a jaguar/child is being sacrificed by GI. The scene in the Metropolitan Museum Pot (fig. 11) has been interpreted as an illustration of the passage in the Popol Vuh in which the Hero Twins sacrifice one another in front of the Lords of Xibalba (Edmonson 1971:137). GI, who is said to be Hunahpu of the Popol Vuh in the act of sacrificing his brother Xbalanque, is shown holding a disk marked with God C, and wielding an axe. The "baby jaguar" has been identified as GIII of the Palenque Triad, or Xbalanque of the Popol Vuh. The Kawak zoomorph is the sacrificial altar (Robicsek and Hales 1981:40-41; Schele and Miller 1986:271, 274).

In the light of ethnohistoric data and contemporary ethnography, I propose a somewhat different interpretation of the scenes in this series of pots. Clearly, the scene takes place in the underworld, or Xibalba, as indicated by the presence of the Kawak zoomorph altar. GI and the Death Lord face each other from opposite sides of the Kawak, and appear to be fighting for possession of the baby jaguar. The baby jaguar is portrayed as either falling onto or entrapped in the curved appendages of the Kawak, and he is in a state of transformation between a human and a jaguar. This recalls another passage in the Popol Vuh, when Q'uj' Kumatz, the *nawal ahaw*, transformed

himself into a jaguar (among other forms) and, in so doing, stayed for a week in Xibalba (Edmonson 1971:233).

The scenes in the vessels shown in figures 11-16 are suggestive of sorcery. It may be that the baby jaguar is the animal soul of the ruler for whom the pot was commissioned. In life, the ruler may have been the embodiment of GIII, so in death his soul appears as an aspect of GIII, the baby jaguar, which has fallen into the underworld and is now at the mercy of GI and the Death Lord, who are the sorcerers. These scenes may depict an after-death ritual in which the outcome of the battle between GI and the Death Lord determines the fate of the soul.

GI, who holds weapons marked with Kawak and takes the pose of a warrior, seems to be affiliated with the Kawak. The personified flint disk-blade that he carries is the God C head that is part of the muzzle of the Kawak zoomorph. Often the disk is marked with the T528 Kawak markings, as though it might be a conflation of God C and the Kawak. Since God C is found in other contexts on the "world tree" (cf. Palenque TFC) and on the loincloths of rulers (Naranjo Stela 28 is one example) and is associated with blood sacrifice, the God C disk would appear to be a symbol of the sacred essence of life, the regenerative fluid of the universe, the "cosmic sap" — blood, water, semen, and the sap of vegetation. It is also a sacrificial blade; the blood of sacrifice is a regenerative liquid. GI, by virtue of his stance as an opponent of the Death Lord, and by the emblems that he carries, fulfills the dual office of sacrificer and regenerator.

His glyphic name in three of these scenes is T16:556, or *yax naab* (figs. 13, 17, 18). This reading is derived from the combination of T16, *yax*, and the T556, an *imix* with a darkened circle that represents a water lily, and is read as *naab*. *Naab* (or *nahg*) also means "lake or ocean" in the Tzeltalan languages, and "rain" in Jacalteco, Chuj, and Kanjobal (Schele 1979:14, 16). Twice (figs. 17-18), the *yax naab* epithet is followed by the head variant for GI of the Palenque Triad, which, because it is sometimes appended with the glyph for the phoneme /ki/ (T102), is read as *chak* (Linda Schele, personal communication, 1986), giving GI the title of *Yax Naab Chak*: "Green Water Chak,"

or "Green Rain Chak."

In the present era, there are lightning men or *naguales* of *rayos* in the Tzeltal area who are called *yaxal chahwuk* (Basauri 1931:115; Slocum and Gerdel 1976:93). As mentioned earlier, the Tojolabal *yaxal chahwuk* is a lightning man whose office is to protect the community by fighting the forces of evil. In the Chilam Balam of Chumayel, a "Yaxal Chak" is mentioned three times (Roys 1967:77, 133, 151). His name is written both as Yaxal Chak and as Yax Haal Chak, which translates as "Green Rain Chak." The word *yaxal* may be an ellipsis of the two words *yax* and *haal*. The word for "water" in most Mayan languages is *ha'*. In the Yucatecan and Greater Tzeltalan languages, the word for "rain" is usually *ha'* or *ha'al*. In the Mayan languages of Guatemala, the word for "rain" is *nab'*, *hub' al*, or *hub'* (Schele 1979:14).

Because the word for "rain" is *ha'al* in some Mayan languages, and *nahb'* in others, it may be that the Yax Naab Chak title for GI found particularly on these Classic Maya vases is essentially the same epithet that is given to the *yaxal chahwuk* of the contemporary Maya, and that GI in this guise is the prototype of the *hombre rayo*, the lightning man still found today among the Maya of Chiapas and Guatemala.

In figures 11-16, Yax Naab Chak (GI) is shown in cosmic battle with the Death Lord. It is my opinion that these scenes depict a ritual that is repeated in current practices: when a person becomes ill, it is because his animal soul or *nagual* has become separated from him and has fallen (or has been sent by sorcery) to the underworld, where it is kept in the custody of the Kawak who lives in caves. The family of the victim petitions a *curandero* who is capable of magically entering the cave and fighting the evil *brujo* who has cast a curse on the victim. Unless the soul is released, the one whose soul is trapped in the underworld will die. In these scenes, Yax Naab Chak (GI) is the prototype of the Tojolabal and Tzeltal *yaxal chahwuk* and the Chol *xwuht*. The Death Lord is the prototype of the evil sorcerers: the Tojolabal *takin chawuk*, or *pukuh*, the Tzeltal *ak'chamel*, and the Chol *xiba*. The baby jaguar represent the ruler whose soul has gone to the underworld. In life the ruler may have been a *nagual* jaguar and

the embodiment of GIII; in death his soul has become the Jaguar Sun of the underworld.

## Conclusion

It can be seen that the Kawak was a multi-dimensional concept. Kawak was (and still is) conceived of as a spirit of underworld caverns, the Lord of Earth and Water, and the guardian of the ancestors. He is considered to be an ancestor himself, since he is called *lak main* (Chol), "our grandfather," *tatik chawuk* (Tzeltal), "our father lightning," and *komam k'uh* (Jacaltec), "our grandfather lightning." Because men petition for his powers in battle, and Kawak symbols adorn their weapons, he is the patron of warriors. Lightning men, whose prototype was the axe-wielding GI (Yax Naab Chak) on codex-style pottery, derive their supernatural powers of good and evil from the kawak; as such he is the patron of witchcraft and curing.

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