

# Maya Gods of War

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This study focuses on the Classic period deities of the Maya region that were associated with weapons of war and sacrifice, as well as the flint and obsidian from which those implements were made. The Classic period terms for flint and obsidian were *tok'* and *taj* (Proto-Mayan *\*tyooq'* and *\*tyaab*), respectively (Kaufman 2003:442).<sup>1</sup> These two types of stones were the most common material used to make axes, hammers, lancets, knives, spears, darts, and arrows as well as utilitarian tools. Flint and obsidian were also knapped into exotic shapes nicknamed “eccentrics” that had ritual purposes. The use of flint and obsidian debitage in caches and elite burial contexts was common, and this speaks to the sacred nature of these stones (Ricketson and Ricketson 1937; Coe 1959; Moholy-Nagy 2008). The Maya area has four broad geographic zones: the Pacific coastal region, the highlands, the Maya Mountains of Belize, and the lowlands. The highlands consist of a volcanic southern region and a metamorphic northern region. A karst platform dominated by limestone bedrock forms the lowlands. Flint (a sedimentary cryptocrystalline form of quartz) is found in limestone formations, while obsidian (volcanic glass) only occurs in the volcanic regions of the highlands of Guatemala and Mexico. During the Classic period (AD 250–900), the three primary obsidian sources of Guatemala in descending order of importance were El Chayal, Ixtepeque, and San Martín Jilotepeque. Obsidian from these sites has been recovered across the Maya lowlands and attests

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## *Introduction*

to the importance of this highland trade commodity. Though in small quantities, Central Mexican obsidian, particularly the superior green obsidian from the Pachuca sources that were controlled by Teotihuacán in the Early Classic period, was also present in the Maya lowlands and even appeared at highland Guatemalan sites that had easy access to local sources.

Teotihuacán cultural traits appeared across the Maya region beginning in the Early Classic period and continued well beyond the demise of that great metropolis. The assimilation of Teotihuacán gods and symbols into Maya culture has been extensively documented (Coggins 1975; Hellmuth 1975; Berlo 1983, 1984; Schele and Miller 1986; Stone 1989; Schele and Freidel 1990; Taube 1992b, 2000; Proskouriakoff 1993; Laporte and Fialko 1990; Spence 1996; Stuart 1998a, 2000a; Braswell 2003; Nielsen 2003, 2006). In the Early Classic period, the major city of the central Maya region was Tikal. A momentous event in the history of this city and the region under its influence was the death of its king Chak Tok Ich'aaik I in AD 378, apparently at the hands of a lord called Sihyaj K'ahk' who arrived at Tikal from the west. The narratives referring to Sihyaj K'ahk' indicate that he held the title of Kaloomte' and that he brought with him an effigy of a Teotihuacán deity. While phonetic substitutions for the term indicate that it is read *kaloomte'*, the etymology of the word is uncertain. Various texts refer to certain kings as the vassals of a Kaloomte'. In light of these ranked statements, it has been suggested that the office of Kaloomte' refers to an overlord of conquered territories who had the supreme status within a political hierarchy, and it has been translated as "high king" or "emperor" (Stuart 2000a; Martin 2003; Martin and Grube 2008).

The following year a new king named Yax Nuun Ahiiin I was placed on the Tikal throne under the authority of Sihyaj K'ahk'. Yax Nuun Ahiiin I's father was another Kaloomte' lord named Spearthrower Owl. The weapons and military accoutrements of both Spearthrower Owl and Yax Nuun Ahiiin I depicted in Tikal art are in the style of Teotihuacán, and this has led to the reasonable conclusion that the political coup at Tikal was orchestrated by Teotihuacán. A primary goal of this study is to analyze the attributes and nature of the Teotihuacán deities found in the Maya region and to explore how these gods were introduced into the Maya region and then incorporated into Maya worldview.

The most prominent of these Teotihuacán deities is depicted as a skeletal being with goggle-like eyes. In a few scenes, he is seen wielding a snake-like spear that is thought to represent a thunderbolt (see the Tetitla murals). He is visually similar to the Postclassic Aztec storm and thunderbolt god named Tlaloc whose main characteristic was also goggle-like eyes (Sahagún

1959–1963:1:2; Durán 1971:154). It is unknown what language was spoken at Teotihuacán, much less what they called their goggled-eye god. I retain the name Tlaloc for this Teotihuacán deity for lack of a better alternative. Like many of the primary Maya deities, Tlaloc had a variety of manifestations including feline, owl, moth, and caterpillar-serpent forms.

In contrast to the Central Mexican thunderbolt god Tlaloc, the Maya identified lightning and thunderbolts with a category of deities called Chahks, and they believed thunderbolts were the flint axes thrown by these gods. As Carlos Trenary (1987–1988) has noted, the classification of meteors as a type of lightning is found throughout the world, and this classification was based on the natural observation that both phenomena flash across the sky and can create fire and a booming sound. Mayan terms used for both lightning and meteors reflect this close association. For example, the Tzotzil, Tzeltal, and Tojolabal terms used for meteors (*sanselaw*, *chamtzelaw*, *k'antzewelaw*, *k'antzewal*, *sansewal*, *tzantzewal*) are also employed to describe lightning flashes and sheet lightning as well as lights that appear in the mountains at night (Lenkersdorf 1979; Slocum and Gerdel 1965:193; Pitarch 2010:44). In Ch'ol, the borrowed term *tzantzewal* means lightning flash (Stoll 1938:67). Across Mesoamerica, meteors were thought to be the obsidian weapons of the gods (Taube 2000). It is my contention that the Teotihuacán Tlaloc was incorporated into the Maya pantheon as a type of “lightning” deity that was specifically identified with obsidian and meteors (Bassie-Sweet 2011, 2019; Bassie-Sweet et al. 2015). As such, he was one of the primary gods of war for the Maya. I also argue that a principal duty of the Kaloomte' lords and ladies was to act as high priests and priestess for Tlaloc and to initiate others into the cult.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

Some of the monuments and pottery scenes discussed in this volume are not illustrated due to limited space and funding. Excellent online access to all these works of art can be found at the Harvard Corpus Project website (<https://www.peabody.harvard.edu/cmhi/about.php>) and the former Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc. website now maintained by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, which provides access to the drawings of Linda Schele (<http://research.famsi.org/schele.html>) and John Montgomery (<http://www.famsi.org/research/montgomery/index.html>). Justin Kerr's remarkable database of photographs can be accessed at <http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya.html>. Images of the codices are available at <http://www.famsi.org/mayawriting/codices/marhenke.html>.

## THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

The first chapter of this study discusses the various depictions of lightning and thunderbolts in Maya art and examines the semantic markers used to distinguish flint from other types of stone. It presents an overview of the various types of Chahk thunderbolt deities and their relationship to flint weapons. It explores how lightning was believed to be not only controlled by the ruling elite but an intrinsic part of their person. Other deities associated with flint were the fire deity known as GIII and the Sun God. The second chapter reviews these fiery deities and their roles in Maya warfare. The next four chapters examine the nature of Tlaloc and his various manifestations, his identification with meteors and obsidian weapons, and the spread of the Tlaloc cult after the so-called Tikal entrada. The discussion focuses on the regalia of the Tlaloc cult and the religious duties of the various Tlaloc-related offices. The final chapter addresses the characteristics of the deity God L who was the maternal grandfather of the Hero Twins and the patron god for long-distance traders. It details his role as an obsidian merchant god and his close identification with the ancient land route between the highland Guatemalan obsidian sources and the lowlands. Before beginning these discussions, a brief overview of the calendars, deities, war themes, and nomenclature is necessary.

### THE MAYA CALENDARS

The Maya used a vigesimal system of counting, and they divided the solar calendar (the *haab*) into eighteen “months” of twenty days each plus a five-day period called the Wayeb. Certain gods were thought to control various time cycles. Each of the eighteen months and the Wayeb period was thought to be under the control of a specific god. The Maya had a religious calendar called the *tzolk'in* that was composed of two interconnected cycles of thirteen days and twenty days. Each day in the thirteen-day cycle was ruled by a particular god (the number gods), as was each day in the twenty-day cycle (the day lords). The *tzolk'in* and *haab* ran concurrently and had the same synchronization throughout the Classic period. Simply because of the mathematics, the same combination of *tzolk'in* date and *haab* date would not recur for fifty-two years. This greater cycle was called the calendar round.

The *tzolk'in* date of an individual's birth was thought to dictate their fate in life. The same was true for time periods. The *tzolk'in* day that began a solar year dictated the nature of that year. Again, simply because of the mathematical relationship between 20 and 365, only four *tzolk'in* day names could begin the year, and they were referred to as the Yearbearers. It is my opinion

that the Classic period Yearbearers were Ak'bal-Lamat-Ben-Etz'nab (Bassie-Sweet DC).

Most narratives on Classic period monumental art include a calendar notation that has been nicknamed the Long Count. In essence, the Long Count records the number of days (*k'ins*) since a zero base date, and it places the calendar round date in linear time. This base date is often referred to as the “era event,” and it occurred on the calendar round date of 4 Ajaw 8 Kumk'u. The era event corresponds to the Gregorian date of August 13, 3114 BC according to the Thompson correlation of 584,285 (the Julian Day number corresponding to the Maya date 13.0.0.0.0). A typical Long Count date is arranged in units of 400 *tuns* (one *bak'tun*), 20 *tuns* (one *k'atun*), 360 days (one *tun*), 20 days (one *winal*), and single days (*k'in*).

The Maya performed ceremonies at the end of each *tun* period, but the end of the *k'atun* was a particularly important ritual occasion in which the patron of the ending *k'atun* period was replaced with the patron of the upcoming *k'atun*. The mathematics of the Long Count and the *tzolk'in* dictate that all *tun* endings occurred on Ajaw dates. It takes thirteen *k'atun* cycles before the same *tzolk'in* day number and day name recur on a *k'atun* ending.

## MAYA DEITIES

It has long been recognized that the colonial period K'iche' document known as the Popol Vuh contains a core creation myth with Classic period antecedents (Coe 1973, 1977, 1989; Taube 1985, 1992a; Bassie-Sweet 1996, 2002, 2008; Zender 2004b). This narrative explains how a family of primordial deities and a trio of thunderbolt gods created the world, established its structure and order, and created humans to inhabit it and worship them. The Popol Vuh relates the deeds of three generations of deities: the creator grandparents called Xpiyacoc and Xmucane; their sons, One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu; and One Hunahpu's sons, named One Chouen, One Batz, Hunahpu, and Xbalanque. Classic period lowland parallels for all of these gods, their spouses, and their in-laws have been identified (figure 0.1).

The Maya as well as other Mesoamerican cultures often categorize, organize, and structure their world using complementary oppositions, such as male/female, right/left, and senior/junior (see Bassie-Sweet 2008:3–4 for an overview). This concept was a fundamental principle in ancient Maya worldview, and it was reflected in all aspects of life. The creator deities were the embodiment of complementary opposition and represented the ideal state for humans to achieve. The creator deities were role models for humans, in particular, for

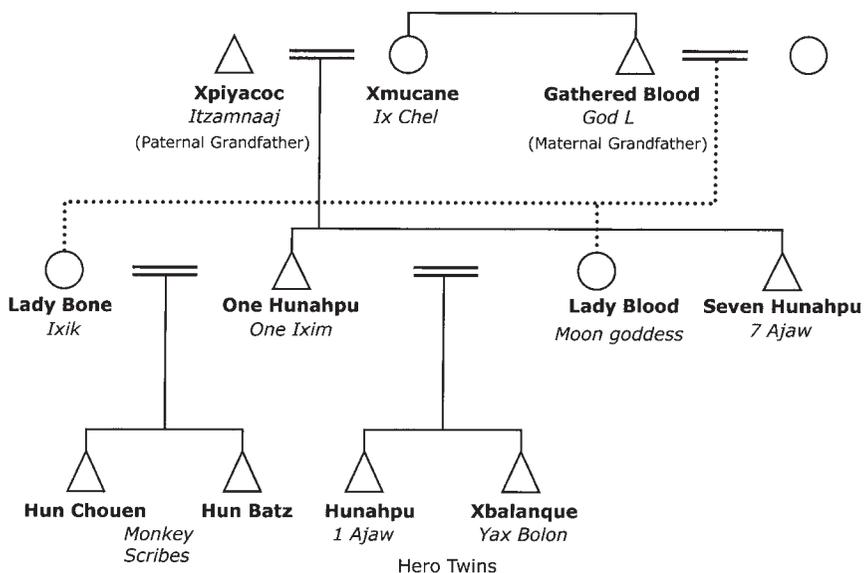


FIGURE 0.1. *Genealogy chart*

the ruling elite. Hunahpu and Xbalanque (the Hero Twins) inherited the most exemplary qualities of their father and paternal grandfather and became the quintessential role models for young lords.

#### PATRON GODS

While there was a shared core mythology among the lowland Maya, evidence from art, hieroglyphic inscriptions, and architecture indicates that the ruling elite of each community had specific patron gods, and a number of war inscriptions refer to the destruction of patron gods and icons. For example, the Palenque narratives indicate that the three deities nicknamed GI, GII, and GIII were considered to be the primary patron gods of its ruling elite. In AD 599, the Kaanul dynasty “axed” Palenque and “threw down” its three gods. Various Classic period images illustrate a ruler seated on a palanquin with an image of a god towering over him. As Simon Martin (1996) has demonstrated, Tikal Temple IV Lintel 2 illustrates the Tikal king on such a palanquin, but the deity behind him is the patron god of the Naranjo king, his recently conquered adversary. The palanquin scene represents the victor’s capture of his rival’s patron god. Whether this was a Naranjo effigy brought to the battlefield or an effigy that had resided in a Naranjo temple is not known. The capture of

a patron deity effigy prevented the enemy lineage from accessing the supernatural power and protection of its deities. The ability to acquire or destroy a foe's patron effigy was a powerful symbol of conquest.

The Popol Vuh provides critical information about the nature of the patron gods of the first four lineage heads of the K'iche'. After acknowledging the primacy of the creator deities in the supernatural hierarchy and demonstrating their obedience to them, each of the first K'iche' lineage heads obtained a patron god. These patrons were thought to be the *k'exwach* "replacement" and *natab'al* "remembrance" for the creator deities (Christenson 2007:215). In other words, patron deities were thought to be not separate gods but alternative manifestations of the creator deities. The patron god became inextricably linked to the elite of the lineage, and the lineage head took on the role of high priest of the patron god. The Popol Vuh narrative focuses on how the K'iche' protected their patron god effigies and forced defeated foes to make offerings to these gods.

#### SACRED BUNDLES

ACROSS Mesoamerica, deities and ancestors were represented not only by effigies of stone, ceramic, and wood but also by sacred bundles. Both types of objects were thought to embody the essence of the deity or ancestor. In Central Mexico mythology, various deities underwent an auto-sacrificial death or were killed; and their remains, costumes, and objects related to their divinity were placed in sacred bundles. A prime example is the goddess Itzpapalotl whose burned body produced five colored flints. Mixcoatl chose the white flint representing the spirit power of Itzpapalotl and carried this sacred bundle on his back during his successful war events. Sacred bundles representing deities were housed within temples, protected, and worshipped. The outer skin of the bundle was often composed of deer or jaguar skin (both more durable and moisture-proof than cloth), and the bundle was frequently kept in a wooden box in the temple. Wooden boxes found by Spanish soldiers at Cabo Catoche may have been such sacred bundle boxes (see below). As will be discussed in later chapters, the deity Tlaloc is depicted in Maya art as either a deerskin or a jaguar-skin bundle.

The Popol Vuh narrative describes a deerskin bundle representing one of their patron deities (Christenson 2006:228, 2007:234–235). The first four K'iche' lineage heads each received patron gods at the citadel of Tulan. On their journey to a new homeland and beginning, they each carried their respective patron god on their back. At the first rising of the morning star and sun, these

patron gods were transformed into stone effigies to which the K'iche' made offerings. The deities instructed the K'iche' to also create deerskin bundles that would represent them. Although the deities still appeared at times in the landscape as living beings, it was to these stone effigies and deerskin bundles that the K'iche' and other groups subservient to them made offerings. After the deaths of the first lineage heads, they were represented by a sacred bundle. The veneration of ancestral remains, whether in the form of cremated ashes or bones, was a common Mesoamerican tradition (McAnany 1995). Relic bundles, in essence, are portable representations of the sacred remains of a deity or ancestor.

#### THE TITLES AND OFFICES OF AJAW, KALOOMTE', AND BAKAB

The status of being an Ajaw “lord” was hereditary. The nominal phrases of many lords and ladies include a phrase referring to their age in *k'atuns*. A *k'atun* was a period of time composed of 20 units of 360 days known as *tuns*. A *k'atun* was thus equal to 19 solar years plus 265 days. As an example, the Palenque lord K'inich Janaab Pakal I was born on March 26, AD 603, and died on August 31, 683, at age eighty. In retrospective texts, he is referred to as a five *k'atun* Ajaw because he had moved into the fifth *k'atun* of his life. These titles can also refer to the length of time a lord was ruler. In some examples such as the Palace Tablet, K'inich Janaab Pakal I is retrospectively named as a four *k'atun* Ajaw and four *k'atun* Kaloomte', indicating that he attained this latter office when he became king. When females are named in hieroglyphic texts, their names and titles are most often prefixed with the term *ixik* “lady.” For instance, the mother of the Yaxchilán ruler Bird Jaguar IV is called a five *k'atun ixik ajaw* “five *k'atun* Lady Ajaw” on Dos Caobas Stela 2. The tradition of counting age in units of *k'atuns* rather than solar years reflects the importance of the ruling elite in performing the *tun* Period Ending ceremonies that were the primary focus of most public monuments.

The Maya practiced a patrilineal descent system (Hopkins 1988, 1991).<sup>2</sup> When an *ajaw* became the supreme Ajaw (king) of his community, he acquired a *sak huun* “white headband” as the symbol of his office that was tied onto his head with a large knot in the back (*k'ablaj* “fasten, enclose, bind, or tie”; *sak huun* “white headband”) (Grube cited in Schele 1992:39–40; Schele 1992:22–24; Stuart 1996:155). The Ajaw headdress was constructed of bark paper, and it replicated the headdress of the Hero Twin known by the calendar name One Ajaw. One Ajaw was the son of the deity One Ixim and the grandson of the creator grandparents Itzamnaaj and Ix Chel. By taking on the guise

of One Ajaw, the ruler became identified with this family of primary deities. One Ajaw's Popol Vuh counterpart was Hunahpu whose final destiny was to become the sun. Rulers often incorporated the title *K'inich* in their regal name. Researchers have translated *K'inich* as "hot," "essence of the sun," "radiant," "great," or "sun-like" (Wichmann 2004; Houston et al. 2006:169; Stuart 2005b:105, 2006; Martin and Grube 2008; Stone and Zender 2011:153). I prefer the latter term, sun-like.

Some kings attained the office of Kaloomte'. The headdress representing the office of Kaloomte' is discussed in chapter 5. The majority of Kaloomte' titles are either without directional affiliation or preceded by the direction West. There are, however, East, North, and South Kaloomte' mentioned in the hieroglyphic texts (Tokovinine 2008). It has been proposed that the West Kaloomte' title refers to lords and ladies who were specifically associated with Teotihuacán (1,000 km west of Tikal as the bird flies). While the vassal contexts of the Kaloomte' title may indicate its conquest nature, this study focuses on the religious aspects of the office. There is evidence that Kaloomte' lords and ladies were high priests and priestesses of Tlaloc who functioned as oracles for Tlaloc.

A widely distributed Classic period title called Bakab occurs in the nominal phrases of many kings and some of their queens. It is often paired with the Kaloomte' office. A number of Classic period titles are prefaced with term *b'aah* "head" to indicate that the title holder is the principal or first member of a particular category of person, like the B'aah Ch'ok and B'aah Sajal titles (Schele 1992:45–46; Houston and Stuart 1998:79). It has been suggested that the etymology of the term *Bakab* is *b'aah kab* "head earth" and that it might signify that the ruler had some kind of control or authority over agricultural terrain (Houston et al. 2006:63). The distribution of the term indicates that its function had a direct relationship to the role of rulers and their wives as the head officiants of Period Ending ceremonies. Period Ending ceremonies were acts of reverence to the calendar gods that maintained the order and stability of the community and the world as a whole. The honored deities also included the patron gods of a community. Major Period Endings were ultimately acts of renewal in which the calendar gods of the concluding *k'atun* period were venerated and a new set of gods were ushered into power.

#### OFFERINGS OF INCENSE AND THE CH'AJOM TITLE

Many colonial sources refer to the offering of incense and blood to the deities and ancestors (Tozzer 1941). The Popol Vuh describes the mourning of the

creator grandmother when her grandsons were killed in the underworld and her rejoicing when she was given a sign that they had been resurrected (Christenson 2007:188). She then burned incense as a memorial to her grandsons, which deified them. This episode demonstrates the divine origins of offering incense.

Incense bags were a pan-Mesoamerican insignia that reflected the priestly duty of offering incense to the deities and ancestors. Bernardino de Sahagún, the illustrious chronicler of Central Mexico, described a hierarchy of priests in Aztec culture who used incense bags called *copalxiqujpilli* “copal pouch” that were made from jaguar skin or decorated to look like jaguar skin (1959–1963, II:76n25, 79–81, 87). In addition to copal, these bags also contain powdered *Tagetes lucida* that was also burned with the copal. *Tagetes lucida* (Spanish *pericón*) is a type of marigold with tiny yellow flowers known as *yauhtli* in Nahuatl and *iyá* in K’iche’. In the Popol Vuh, the offerings burned for the patron god Tohil after the first rising of the sun consisted of pine resin incense and *Tagetes lucida* (Christenson 2007:233). This flower is still burned as offerings in modern K’iche’ ceremonies. Today, the flower plays a major role in the Day of the Dead and All Souls Day celebration in Mexico. As discussed in later chapters, *Tagetes lucida* flowers are part of Tlaloc’s headdress, and one has to wonder whether the Day of the Dead practice was rooted in the ancient association of this plant with the warrior cult of Tlaloc.

The remains of a Classic period incense bag recovered from a burial at Comalcalco indicate that the contents of Maya incense bags could also include bloodletters of obsidian, flint, and stingray spine and their bone handles as well as divination stones (Zender 2004b:253). The bag constitutes a toolkit for priestly activities. Small wooden boxes were also used to store bloodletting implements, in particular stingray spines used for personal bloodletting.

In the Maya region, the niche scenes on Piedras Negras Stela 6, Stela 11, Stela 14, and Stela 25 that illustrate the ruler during Period Ending ceremonies depict him holding an incense bag in his left hand and demonstrate the obligation of the king to provide incense and blood to the deities on these occasions (Bassie-Sweet 1991). In the art of Teotihuacán, warriors carrying incense bags are common. There are also many Classic period scenes in the Maya region in which a warrior carries a weapon and an incense bag, such as Ruler 3 of Dos Pilas-Aguateca Houston (1993:figs. 3.26, 4.20). Another example is seen on Piedras Negras Panel 15 where the ruler is flanked by five cowering captives and two attendants (Houston et al. 2000). He holds his spear in an upright position in his right hand and an incense bag in his left. On Yaxchilán Stela 18, the ruler Shield Jaguar III stands before his captive holding a spear in one hand and an incense bag in the other (Tate 1992:fig. 145).

The decorations on Maya incense bags vary. On Piedras Negras Stela 11, Ruler 4 holds an incense bag during his Period Ending ceremony that is inscribed with the *tzolk'in* date of the Period Ending (Bassie-Sweet 1991:50). On the other hand, a great many Maya incense bags are decorated with Tlaloc images and motifs. Tlaloc incense bags are seen on Tikal Stela 16, Tikal Stela 22, Dos Pilas Stela 2, and La Mar Stela 1. The incense bags on Pomoná Jamb 2 and Tzendales Stela 1 are topped with a Tlaloc face that is trimmed with a Lepidoptera wing. The Tikal Structure 10 lintel shows a lord carrying an incense bag decorated with a Waxaklajuun Ub'aah Kan (a caterpillar-serpent that was an avatar of Tlaloc). The Waxaklajuun Ub'aah Kan incense bag on Bonampak Stela 3 also features the rattlesnake tail of the beast as a tassel (see figure 5.7). Such rattlesnake tassels are also seen on Bonampak Stela 2, Tikal Stela 5, Yaxchilán Stela 18, El Cayo Altar 4, and Piedras Negras Stela 13 (Proskouriakoff 1950:96). An illustration of the priest Aj Pakal Tahn of Comalcalco is carved on two stingray spines found in his burial (Zender 2004b:fig. 71). In one depiction, he carries a jaguar-skin incense bag with a rattlesnake tail tassel. The rulers on Tikal Stela 5 and Naranjo Stela 2 and the banded-bird officials on the Palenque Temple XIX platform have bags decorated with Teotihuacán-style motifs (see below for discussion of the office of banded-bird). An obvious reason for such decoration is that the incense was intended for offerings to Tlaloc. It might also signal that the bag contained *Tagetes lucida*.

The title of Ch'ajom refers to a person who has been ordained to make *ch'aj* “incense” offerings to the gods and ancestors (Love 1987; Scherer and Houston 2015). An important incense used by the Maya was produced from the sap of the *Portium copal* tree known in Nahuatl as *copal* and in Mayan languages as *pom*. It is likely that one of the duties of the Ch'ajom was also to make and distribute the appropriate amount of incense offerings among the participants in a ceremony.

A number of references to the length of time a person had been a Ch'ajom indicate that they attained their status at an early age. For instance, the Yaxchilán king Shield Jaguar III is referred to in retrospective narratives as both a five *k'atun* Ajaw and a five *k'atun* Ch'ajom. This numbered Ch'ajom title indicates that Shield Jaguar III held this title for at least eighty years. Given that his reign spanned only sixty-one years, it is apparent that his Ch'ajom title was acquired before his accession. The same is true for his son Bird Jaguar IV who is said to have been a three *k'atun* Ajaw and a three *k'atun* Ch'ajom. The notion that the Ch'ajom office is an initial religious office has a parallel with modern K'iche' practices where the first station obtained in

the religious-political hierarchy is that of *poronel* “burner” (Tedlock 1992:59; Bassie-Sweet 2008:99). The novice *poronel* is taught to invoke the deities with prayers and the burning of incense offerings.

The act of making offerings is frequently depicted in Maya with a gesture nicknamed “hand-scattering.” In many examples, the individual’s hands are held in a downward position with liquid falling from them. In other instances, only one hand is held in this position with balls of incense falling from it, and often the other hand holds a small incense pouch. In Maya hieroglyphic writing, the logograph sign representing hand-scattering has been deciphered as *chok* “to scatter, throw, cast” (Grube cited in Schele and Grube 1995:40). Such gestures are also found in the art of Teotihuacán as seen in the Techinantitla compound murals (Berrin and Pasztory 1993:figs. 43–45). In these scenes, a figure dressed as Tlaloc is pictured holding an incense bag in one hand with liquid flowing from the other. A flowery speech scroll emits from the figure’s mouth, suggesting that the figure is reciting or singing the prayers that always accompany offerings.

Portrait glyphs of the Ch’ajom title on Yaxchilán Throne 2, the Copán Structure 9N-8-82 bench, and Quiriguá Stela J (D13) (T1073c) depict the costume elements of a Ch’ajom in detail (Scherer and Houston 2015) (figure 0.2a, 0.2b). The headdress of a Ch’ajom was composed of a simple scroll and curl element tied to the forehead. Most often, the scroll and curl motif resembles the fire sign, although in an inverted position so as to imitate the downward hand-scattering gesture. The hair of a Ch’ajom included short cropped hair and long tresses gathered into a ponytail. The ponytail was bound by a cloth or threaded through beads. The Ch’ajom wore a leafy cape that may have been made from the foliage of the *Portium copal* tree. In the full-figure rendering of the Ch’ajom title on the Copán Structure 9N-8-82 bench, the figure sits before an incensario with a sign for *pom* “copal incense” partially inside it. The left hand of the figure is juxtaposed in front of the incense in the hand-scattering gesture. Vessel K1440 illustrates a mythological scene of a Ch’ajom kneeling before two elderly gods (figure 0.02c) ([http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya\\_hires.php?vase=1440](http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya_hires.php?vase=1440)). The Ch’ajom has the bound ponytail and wears the leafy cape. The elderly gods hold a tasseled object over the head of the Ch’ajom.

Three very obvious examples of the Ch’ajom insignia are worn by K’inich Janaab Pakal I and his two descendants, K’inich Ahkal Mo’ Nahb III and Upakal K’inich, on the Palenque Temple XXI bench (figure 0.3). This extraordinary monument illustrates two separate but parallel actions that occurred on the 9.13.17.9.0 3 Ajaw 3 Yaxk’in Period Ending (AD 709) during the reign of K’inich K’an Joy Chitam II (see Bassie-Sweet and Hopkins 2017 for an

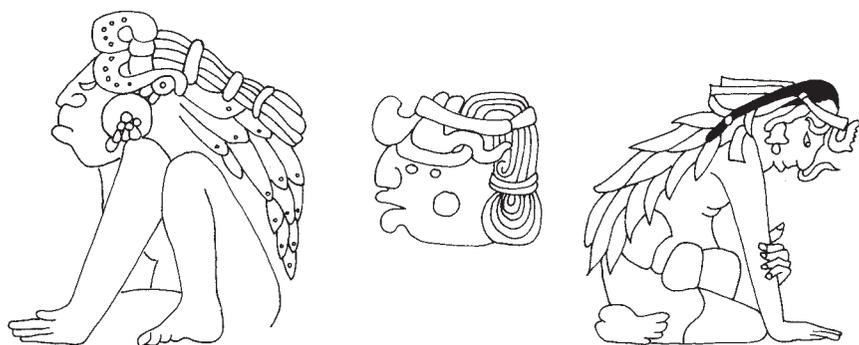


FIGURE 0.2. *Ch'ajom* titles: a. *Yaxchilán Throne 2*, b. *Quiriguá Stela J*, c. *K1440*

overview). Each figure in the scene is identified by an adjacent caption text. On the left side of the monument, a banded-bird official named *Xak'al Miht Tu-Muuy Ti-Ch'o* is pictured extending a tasseled object toward the young *K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb III* who reaches out and touches it. *K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb III* wears the *Ch'ajom* headdress. His grandfather *K'inich Janaab Pakal I* sits on a throne to his left extending a stingray spine bloodletter (see below for a discussion of this bloodletter as an heirloom). He wears the *Ch'ajom* headdress as well as another headdress that will be discussed below. On the right side of the scene, *Xak'al Miht Tu-Muuy Ti-Ch'o* is now pictured sitting before the young *Upakal K'inich* extending the tasseled object toward him. *Upakal K'inich* wears not only the *Ch'ajom* headdress but also the bound ponytail of a *Ch'ajom*.

The bloodletter offered by *K'inich Janaab Pakal I* indicates that personal bloodletting was an important part of this Period Ending ceremony. One of the bloodletter's feathers is separate from the other feathers and is highlighted with a circular motif. This feather is positioned over *K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb III*'s loincloth, emphasizing the purpose of this bloodletter as a penis perforator. The juxtaposing of bloodletting and incense burning is not mutually exclusive; rather, the two are intimately connected. There are numerous examples of blood and incense being offered together to the gods (Love 1987). On *Dos Pilas Panel 19*, Ruler 3, his wife, and other court members witness the first bloodletting of a *ch'ok mutal ajarw* "youth of *Dos Pilas*" (Houston 1993:115; Stuart 2005b:136; Martin and Grube 2008:60–61). His short stature indicates that he is not just a youth but a child. Blood pours from his penis while a banded-bird official named *Sakjal Hix* kneels before him holding the stingray spine that was used to perforate the child's penis. The child wears the leafy

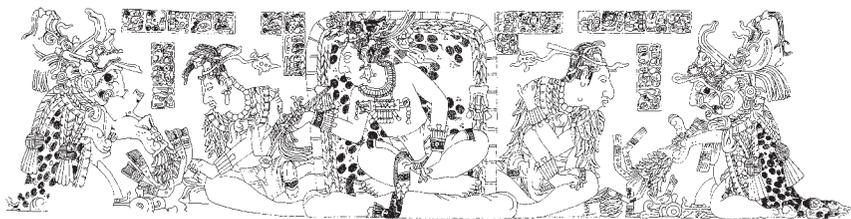


FIGURE 0.3. *Palenque Temple XXI bench (drawing after David Stuart)*

cape of a Ch’ajom. This Dos Pilas scene demonstrates that lords attained their status as Ch’ajom with their first bloodletting ceremony.

The main text of the Palenque Palace Tablet relates another example of a child undergoing a first bloodletting rite. The text begins with the birth of K’inich K’an Joy Chitam II in AD 644 and then describes his first bloodletting event and *k’al mayij* “binding of the sacrifice” at age seven (Carrasco 2004:452; Stuart 2005b:154). This ceremony was done in the presence of a series of deities, including the triad of thunderbolt gods GI, GII, and GIII, and it is likely that K’inich K’an Joy Chitam II made blood and incense offerings specifically to these gods. The narrative then links this first bloodletting to his father’s 9.11.0.0.0 Period Ending ceremony and his own minor Period Ending rite thirteen *tuns* later, again performed in the company of GI, GII, and GIII where he again would have made blood and incense offerings to the gods. The scene that accompanies this narrative illustrates K’inich Janaab Pakal I handing his nine-year-old son an *ux yop huun* (“three leaf headdress”) in AD 654 (Bassie-Sweet et al. 2012; Bassie-Sweet and Hopkins 2017). K’inich K’an Joy Chitam II wears the Ch’ajom ponytail. Although the reference to K’inich K’an Joy Chitam II’s first bloodletting at age seven in the main text does not specifically mention his attainment of the Ch’ajom office, he is depicted as a Ch’ajom two years later in the scene.

In numerous scenes, the Ch’ajom insignia is placed at the base of a more elaborate headdress, and only the curls are visible on the forehead of the individual. Such is the case on a stela from the Usumacinta region that depicts a lord wearing a headdress composed of the avian form of the creator grandfather Itzamnaaj (figure 0.4). Other examples are seen on La Corona Panel 1 and Yaxchilán Lintel 43, where the ruler’s elaborate headdress includes the Ch’ajom insignia (figure 0.5).

There are examples where the Ch’ajom attributes are subtle. El Cayo Altar 4 documents the 9.15.0.0.0 Period Ending ceremony of a Sajal lord named Aj Chak Wayib’ K’utiim (figure 0.6). Sajals were rulers of secondary sites

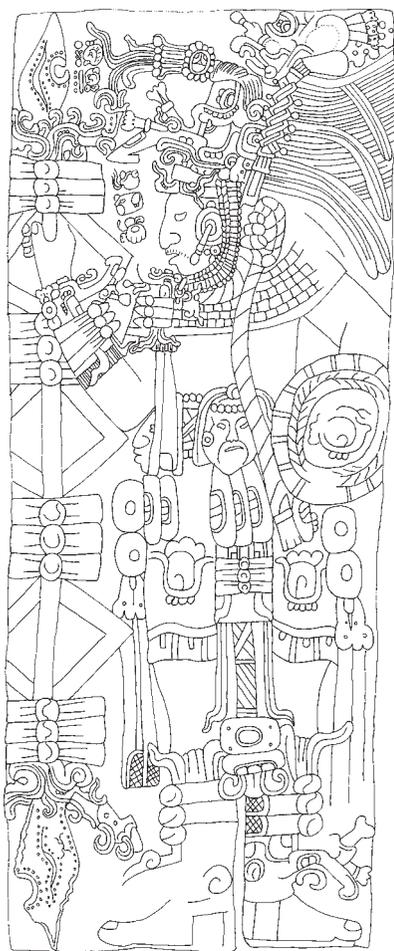


FIGURE 0.4. *Usumacinta stela (drawing after Christian Prager)*

Aj Sak Teles is illustrated wearing his hair in long tresses decorated with beads that are closely gathered together by a cloth, but he does not wear the Ch'ajom headdress (see figure 1.20). These examples demonstrate that Maya artists often chose to highlight certain office insignia while merely hinting at others.

The tomb of the Tikal king Jasaw Chan K'awiil (Burial 116) contained a cache of carved bones (Coe 1967). Bone MT-39 illustrates the grandson of a Kaanul king as a captive (Stuart et al. 2015a) (figure 0.9). He has been stripped down to a mere loincloth; and his wrists, upper arms, and knees are bound by

who had formed allegiances with rulers of primary sites. Aj Chak Wayib' K'utim's nominal phrase includes the statement that he was a four *k'atun* Sajal. He is depicted sitting in front of an altar with a deified incensario placed on it. His right hand is held in the hand-scattering gesture with incense falling from it while he grasps an incense bag in his left. He wears a headdress of short, cropped feathers and a miter-like folded cloth that Marc Zender (2004b) has associated with secondary lords with priestly functions. Although the Ch'ajom insignia does not appear on Aj Chak Wayib' K'utim's forehead, his bound ponytail hair emerges from his miter-like headdress.

Incense bags are also held by Ruler 3 on Dos Pilas Stela 2 and Aguateca Stela 2 (figures 0.7, 0.8). Ruler 3 does not wear the Ch'ajom insignia, but he does have the bound ponytail of the Ch'ajom. The same is true for the lords illustrated on the piers of Palenque House A (Robertson 1985:figs. 24, 38, 70, 87). These men all have the bound ponytail of the Ch'ajom office and hold incense bags in their hands. On Lacanhá Panel 1, the Ch'ajom named

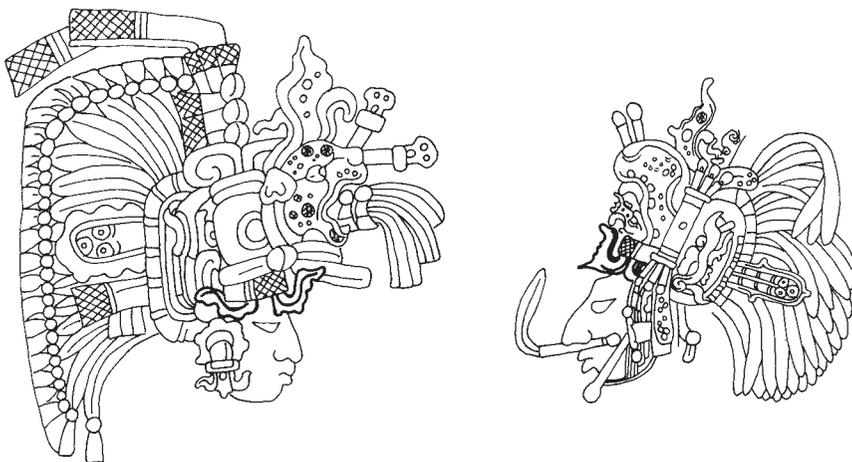


FIGURE 0.5. *Ch'ajom* headdress: a. *La Corona* Panel 1, b. *Yaxchilán Lintel 43*



FIGURE 0.6. *El Cayo Altar 4*  
(drawing after Peter Mathews)

rope. While some of his hair is cut in a short crop, he has three long tresses that are decorated with beads similar to the *Ch'ajom* hairdo on *Lacanhá* Panel 1. The tresses hang loose from his head. This young *Ch'ajom* has been robbed of not only his headdress and clothing but also his bound hairdo.

The *Ch'ajom* insignia is often worn in conjunction with *Tlaloc* headdresses. A few *Ch'ajoms* are designated as a *Wiinte'naah Ch'ajom*. The wives and

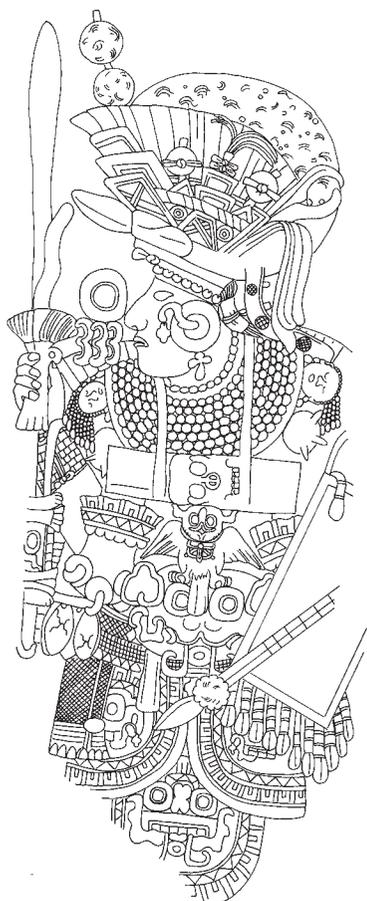


FIGURE 0.7. *Dos Pilas Stela 2*  
(drawing after Ian Graham)

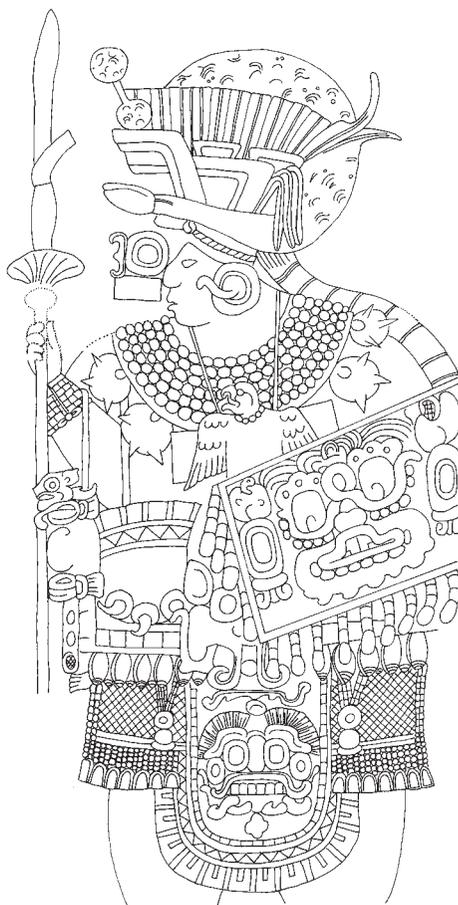


FIGURE 0.8. *Aguateca Stela 2* (drawing after  
Ian Graham)

mothers of various rulers also carry the Ch'ajom and Wiinte'naah Ch'ajom designations. As will be discussed in chapter 4, Wiinte'naah structures were Tlaloc temples, and the title refers to priests and priestesses of Tlaloc who made offerings specifically to this god.

#### THE BANDED-BIRD OFFICE OF SECONDARY LORDS

One of the offices of secondary lords is represented by a supernatural bird wearing a headband (Zender 2004b; Stuart 2005b:133–136).<sup>3</sup> The bird has the

hooked beak of a bird of prey and has a black patch over its eye. The title has been nicknamed the banded-bird office because it has yet to be deciphered. There is evidence that the holder of this office was in charge of the king's *sak huun* headdress of rulership. As an example, it is the banded-bird official Janaab Ajaw who hands this crown to the king K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb III on the Temple XIX platform (figure 0.11). The Tablet of the Cross caption text describes a banded-bird official who was responsible for tying the headband on K'inich Kan Bahlam II (Stuart 2006a). Banded-bird officials were also custodians of the king's stingray spines used for bloodletting.

The ritual use of stingray spines for bloodletting is well documented. Bishop Diego de Landa (Tozzer 1941: 191) described how the Postclassic Maya hunted for stingrays on the coast of Yucatán and noted that the spine of the stingray was used as a perforator in bloodletting ceremonies. He also commented that it was the duty of the priests to maintain these spines and that the priests kept large numbers of them. Stingray spine perforators are often depicted in Classic period art (Joralemon 1974). A feature of various bloodletting perforators made from stingray spines or obsidian is a handle represented by a zoomorph and a three-knot motif. The three-knot zoomorph motif is also frequently depicted on the loincloths of rulers and in this context appears to allude to a king's obligation to let blood from his penis.

Stingray spines are common artifacts found in Classic period caches and elite tombs. Effigy stingray spines are also well-known from burial contexts

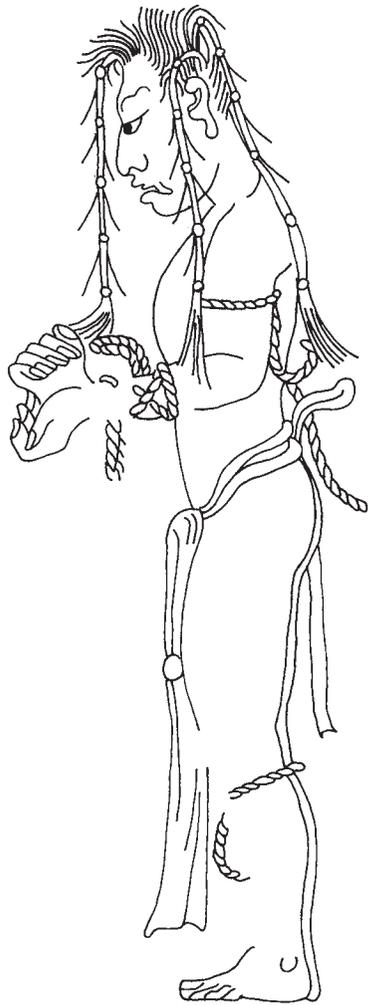


FIGURE 0.9. *Tikal Bone MT-39*  
(drawing after Andy Seuffert)

(Borhegyi 1961; Moholy-Nagy 1994, 2008; Stuart et al. 1999:137). Along with stingray spines, bone handles have been recovered from the Piedras Negras tombs of Ruler 3 (Burial 5) and a Piedras Negras prince (Burial 82) (Fitzsimmons et al. 2003:fig. 11). These two bones feature an avian head with a forehead feather, indicating it is likely an owl. Many tombs have concentrations of stingray spines and other bloodletting paraphernalia adjacent to the body that suggest that these objects were buried in some type of container, such as an incense bag, wooden box, or cloth bundle that decomposed over time. Such a grouping was found in Yaxchilán Structure 23 Tomb 2 that contained the remains of a Yaxchilán lord who has been identified as the ruler Shield Jaguar III (García Moll 2004:270). Near his feet was a cluster of bloodletting objects including five flint knives, three prismatic blades, eighteen bone awls, and an astonishing number of stingray spines (eighty-six in all).

Inscribed stingray spines have been found in a number of tombs. Tikal Burial 196 contained two such examples (Moholy-Nagy 2008). Several Piedras Negras tombs contained engraved stingray spines that identified their owner (Coe 1959; Houston et al. 2000). As noted above, two stingray spines from the burial of Aj Pakal Tahn of Comalcalco were carved with his image while six other spines were inscribed with events related to his accomplishments (Zender 2004b). These inscriptions indicate that bloodletters were identified with a specific person and events.

The Palenque Temple XXI bench illustrates a stingray spine bloodletter that was owned by the king K'inich Janaab Pakal I and demonstrates that not all of a lord's bloodletters were buried with him. The Temple XXI scene depicts the Period Ending rituals of the young lords K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb III and Upakal K'inich in AD 709 during the reign of K'inich K'an Joy Chitam II (figure 0.3). Although the focus of the action is the interaction between the banded-bird official Xak'al Miht Tu-Muuy Ti-Ch'o and these two young lords, great emphasis is placed on the action of K'inich Janaab Pakal I handing the bloodletter to his grandson K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb III. K'inich Janaab Pakal I not only occupies the central space of the scene, but both K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb III and Upakal K'inich are seated slightly behind his throne. Unlike the other caption texts on the monument that are a single row or column of text, K'inich Janaab Pakal I's nominal phrase is divided into two L-shaped blocks of text that frame his throne. This text states that he is in the guise of an early Palenque king. To read the first block of text, the viewer is brought directly to the headdress representing this Early Classic king that K'inich Janaab Pakal I is wearing and then down to the bloodletter in his

hand. What is strange is that K'inich Janaab Pakal I had been dead for almost twenty-six years at the time of this event. So what was the message the artist intended to convey by including K'inich Janaab Pakal I in the scene? The simplest and most obvious answer is that K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb III used his grandfather's stingray spine during this Period Ending ritual. Presumably, the bloodletting of K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb III would have been followed by Upakal K'inich's bloodletting. This is a powerful image of inherited status and prestige where the two descendants of this great king display their connection to him and his successful Period Ending events. They are depicted carrying on the obligation of lords to placate the gods with their blood. The fact that K'inich Janaab Pakal I has taken on the guise of an early Palenque king suggests that the bloodletter may have been an even older heirloom.

In the context of bloodletting rituals, some lords are illustrated holding small wooden boxes that likely held bloodletting implements (David Stuart, personal communication 2000). For example, Yaxchilán Lintel 6 depicts the ruler Bird Jaguar IV holding a GII scepter in his left hand and a jaguar bone perforator in his right (<https://www.peabody.harvard.edu/cmhi/detail.php?num=6&site=Yaxchilan&type=Lintel>). He is flanked by his B'aah Sajal named K'an Tok Wayib who holds a jaguar bone perforator in his left hand and a small wooden box in his right. The same date is recorded on Lintel 43, but in this scene it is Bird Jaguar who clutches the wooden box, and he is now flanked by his wife, who holds a sacrificial bowl and cord (<https://www.peabody.harvard.edu/cmhi/detail.php?num=43&site=Yaxchilan&type=Lintel#>). David Pendergast and Elizabeth Luther (1974) documented a similar wooden box (21.3 cm × 6.5 cm × 4.2 cm) found in the Actun Polbilche cave in Belize that contained a stingray spine and an obsidian blade. An inscribed wooden box in a private collection almost certainly functioned in the same way, given its similar size and construction (Zender and Bassie 2002). The text makes reference to the site of Tortuguero, and the box was likely looted from a dry cave in that vicinity. The narrative identifies the owner of the box as Aj K'ax Bahlam, a banded-bird official of the Tortuguero king Ik' Muyil Muwaan II. The inscription refers to the death of the Tortuguero ruler Bahlam Ajaw and the accession of his successor Ik' Muyil Muwaan II in AD 679 and the accession of Aj K'ax Bahlam into the office of the banded-bird the following year. The inscription ends with a statement that links Ik' Muyil Muwaan II's accession to the dedication of the box in AD 680. The implication of this narrative structure is that the ruler Ik' Muyil Muwaan II not only conferred the banded-bird office on Aj K'ax Bahlam but subsequently also presented him with this ritual toolbox.

Some evidence from the scenes that depict the interactions between royals and their banded-bird officials suggests that the stingray spines that were stored in these wooden boxes may have been those of the king and not his banded-bird official. The presence of banded-bird officials during the act of royal bloodletting is well attested. On Yaxchilán Stela 7, the king Shield Jaguar IV is depicted performing his Period Ending bloodletting duties while a secondary lord kneels before him. The lord holds his hands up in front of the king's groin. The nominal phrase in the caption text above his head specifically names him not just as a banded-bird official but as the banded-bird official of Shield Jaguar IV. Similar Yaxchilán scenes of secondary lords kneeling before the king while he lets blood are depicted on Stela 1 and Stela 4 (figure 0.10). Although these two monuments lack caption texts to name these lords, they wear the same costume as the banded-bird official on Stela 7. The kneeling pose is strikingly similar to the scene on Dos Pilas Panel 19 that shows the young prince performing his first penis bloodletting with a banded-bird official kneeling before him. The banded-bird official holds the prince's perforator. The implication is that the banded-bird officials not only played a recurring role in the physical act of royal penis perforation but were in charge of the bloodletter. It is reminiscent of Landa's statement that it was the duty of the priests to maintain the stingray spine perforators.

Evidence that there was a primary banded-bird official associated with the king is found on the Temple XIX platform and the Temple XVI Tablet. The right side of the Temple XIX platform depicts three secondary lords facing K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb III (figure 0.11). Each lord is named in the adjacent caption text as a banded-bird official, but Janaab Ajaw (the lord who hands the king his royal headdress) has the term *ajaw* added to his banded-bird title. This elevated status of a banded-bird official is also seen on the Palenque Temple XVI Tablet that relates the accessions of at least nine banded-bird officials under the auspices of various Palenque kings. The panel is badly damaged, but enough remains to show a pattern with the first accession happening during the reign of K'inich K'uk' Bahlam I (circa AD 431), followed by accessions under Casper, Lady Yohl Ik'nal, K'inich Janaab Pakal I, K'inich K'an Joy Chitam II, U K'inich Pakal, and K'inich K'uk' Bahlam II (Bernal Romero 2002; Stuart 2005b:134). The banded-bird official anointed during K'inich K'an Joy Chitam II's reign was Janaab Ajaw, and he was clearly still functioning in that role at the time of K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb III's accession. Given that the other two banded-bird officials on the Temple XIX platform are not part of the Temple XVI narrative, it can be inferred that there were a number of banded-bird officials at any given time, but only one was

in the elevated position of directly assisting royals.

As noted by David Stuart (2005b), the main text of the Palenque Temple XIX platform relates the mythological accession of the deity GI under the auspices of the creator grandfather Itzamnaaj. K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb III's accession is portrayed as a reenactment of that event with K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb III and Janaab Ajaw taking on guises of GI and Itzamnaaj, respectively. In addition to the headdress representing Itzamnaaj, Janaab Ajaw wears another type of headdress composed of flowered medallions. The Period Ending ceremony of K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb III and Upakal K'inich in AD 709, which is illustrated on the Temple XXI bench, predates Janaab Ajaw's accession into banded-bird office, so we should not expect his participation in this scene. The banded-bird official Xak'al Miht Tu-Muuy Ti-Ch'o, who does fulfill this role, wears the same flower medallion headdress elements, but in this case they take on human form. While Xak'al Miht Tu-Muuy Ti-Ch'o's banded-bird title does not include the *ajaw* element, his headdress suggests he held this position. It does not seem like a great leap of faith to conclude that Xak'al Miht Tu-Muuy Ti-Ch'o was the caretaker of K'inich Janaab Pakal I's

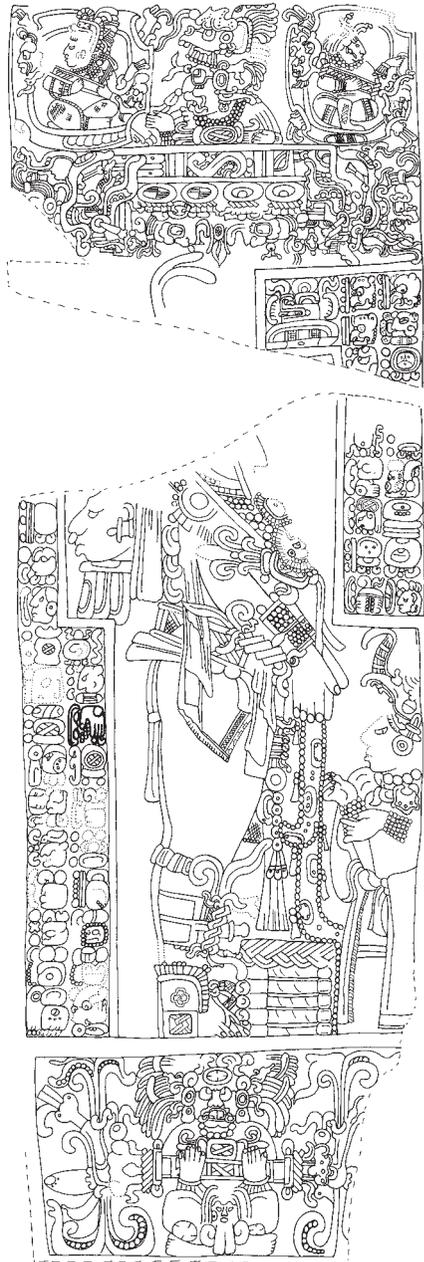


FIGURE 0.10. *Yaxchilán Stela 1 (drawing after Ian Graham)*

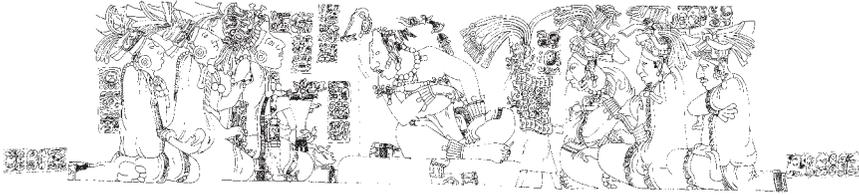


FIGURE 0.II. *Palenque Temple XIX platform (drawing after David Stuart)*

bloodletter that was used in this ceremony and that this bloodletter was likely stored in a wooden box.

#### OTHER SECONDARY OFFICES

The wives and mothers of kings carry titles related to secondary offices not held by their husbands. One such position is that of *Ajk'uhuun*. An examination of the royal ladies and secondary lords who carry this title suggests that they had a priestly function related to scribal arts, although their exact duties are still unclear (Coe and Kerr 1997; Jackson and Stuart 2001; Zender 2004b). Secondary lords also carried other non-regal titles related to the offices of *Sajal*, *Yajawk'ak'*, *Ti'sakhuun*, *Taaj*, and *Anaab* (Zender 2004b; Stuart 2005b:133–136; Rossi 2015; Rossi et al. 2015; Saturno et al. 2017). Secondary lords frequently carried more than one of these titles. Some of the offices are prefixed with *b'aah* “head” to indicate that the lord was the leading member of his class. Various attempts have been made to identify the duties and attributes of each type of office and their hierarchy, but their specific natures are still somewhat opaque. Many of the accoutrements of secondary lords echo those of the deities who populate the celestial palace of the creator grandfather *Itzamnaaj*, indicating that this supernatural court was the role model for humans (Boot 2008). Given that the deity *One Ajaw* was the grandson of *Itzamnaaj*, this should not come as a surprise.

The rank of *Ebeet* “messenger” was held by a number of secondary lords who acted on the behalf of their king at foreign courts (Houston et al. 2006:241). The regalia of an *Ebeet* consisted of a white floor-length cape decorated with *Spondylus* shells. Alexandre Tokovinine and Dmitri Beliaev (2013) noted that *Ebeet* lords traveled long distances to pass messages and gifts between royal courts, and their distinctive costume was likely an “international dress code for emissaries” that visually identified them as royal messengers when they were traveling through hostile territory. The long capes also speak to the need

for warm clothing when making long journeys requiring overnight stays in rural areas. It is reasonable to suggest that the *Ebeet* lords traveled the same routes used by merchants and that each would have benefited from the other's knowledge.

#### HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS OF WAR DURING THE SPANISH CONQUEST

In AD 1517, a Spanish expedition under Francisco Hernández de Córdoba sailed from Cuba ostensibly in search of new lands but also with the goal of obtaining slaves for use in Cuban plantations (Maudslay 1908). After enduring a violent storm, the expedition sighted the northeast coast of Yucatán, which they mistakenly believed was an island. They were surprised to find towns with stone buildings and large populations. Their first landing near Cabo Catoche began well, with an invitation from a local Maya lord to visit his town, but ended in an ambush by Maya warriors who showered the Spanish party with a hail of arrows, wounding fifteen men. The warriors then rushed the Spaniards, attacking them with lances. Due to the superior weaponry of their crossbows and muskets, the Spanish killed fifteen Maya and were able to make the others withdraw long enough for the Spanish to retreat with their wounded comrades. On their route back to their landing boats, the Spanish came across a plaza with three stone temples containing god effigies and wooden boxes containing more idols and religious artifacts. The Spanish noted that some of these objects were fashioned from gold, and they took the opportunity to loot them (the objects were likely made of *tumbaga*, a gold-copper alloy that had widespread distribution in Late Postclassic Mesoamerica).

From Cabo Catoche, the expedition sailed west and then south, following the coastline all the way to Campeche. Running low on fresh water and with no rivers in sight, the Spanish were forced to land to replenish their supply near a large town. A group of what appeared to be community leaders invited them into the town, where they were presented with an ultimatum to leave or be attacked. Backing up this challenge was an impressive display by two squadrons of warriors, each led by a captain. The warriors were outfitted with bows, arrows, lances, shields, slings, and stones. To enhance their menacing appearance, they whistled, beat on drums, and blew trumpets. The Spanish wisely beat a hasty retreat with their water.

The expedition continued south along the coast for another six days before encountering another storm that lasted four days. Again in desperate need of water, they attempted to find a source. They came ashore further south near the town of Potonchan. Before the landing party led by Córdoba was able to load

its water caskets and depart, the first contingents of Potonchan warriors, who were armed with shields, bows, lances, swords, slings, and stones, surrounded them. The Spanish waited through the night in anticipation of an attack. At dawn, more Potonchan warriors arrived with raised banners, feathered crests, and drums. They formed squadrons, surrounded the Spanish, and set forth a barrage of arrows, lances, and stones before engaging the Spanish in close-quarter combat. Diaz del Castillo noted that the warriors shouted to each other to kill the Spanish leader, and some directed their attack at Córdoba who suffered multiple arrow wounds. The Spanish, who were drastically outnumbered, struggled to retreat to their boats, which capsized in their haste to retreat. A vessel from the main ship finally rescued them, although they continued to be pursued by the Maya in canoes. Fifty Spanish soldiers died, including two who were initially taken captive, and all save one of the group were wounded multiple times. Five men later succumbed to their wounds, as did Córdoba.

Another description of Maya war traditions is found in a Spanish account regarding the pacification of the Itzaj of the central Petén circa AD 1695. The Itzaj had war gods and carried effigies of them into battle: “They had two other idols which they adored as gods of battle: one they called Pakoc, and the other Hexchunchán. They carried them when they went to fight the Chinamitas, their mortal frontier enemies, and when they were going into battle they burned copal, and when they performed some valiant action their idols, whom they consulted, gave them answers, and in the mitotes or dances they spoke to them and danced with them” (Villagutierre Soto-Mayor 1983:303).

What is apparent from these Spanish battle accounts is that the Postclassic Maya had a sophisticated strategy to attack their enemy, used multiple war weapons, targeted leaders, and took war captives. They also relied on the counsel and supernatural power of their deities in warfare. As will be discussed in later chapters, information gleaned from Classic period art and hieroglyphic writing indicates that these various traditions had a long history.

## THE CLASSIC PERIOD CONFLICTS

A great many depictions of Classic Maya rulers and secondary lords highlight the military nature of the king and his court while others merely allude to this role. The purpose of Classic period warfare to obtain sacrificial victims for commemorations of Period Endings and other important events of the royal court is well-known; but territorial domination, economic advantage, acquisition of slaves, shifting alliances, retribution, long-standing animosities,

and other typical human conflicts were also at play. The spoils of war are a universal motivation, and the payment of tribute is documented in the inscriptions (Stuart 1995).

In the mid-sixth century, the region to the north of Tikal was inhabited by the Kaanul polity that was first centered at the site of Dzibanché (180 km northeast of Tikal) but then moved to Calakmul (100 km north and slightly west of Tikal) in the early seventh century. Many of the military actions of the Classic period were the result of the rivalry between Tikal and the Kaanul kingdom to establish and retain control over the southern trade routes and the lesser polities of the region (Martin and Grube 1995, 2008). The Kaanul polity defeated Tikal by first attacking its more vulnerable allies and putting them under its dependency. In AD 562, Tikal suffered a direct loss at the hands of the Kaanul polity, and the son of the Kaanul king (K'inich Waw, also known as Animal Skull) was placed on the Tikal throne (Grube 2016). Subsequently, the prosperity of Tikal declined while that of Kaanul grew. In the mid-seventh century, Tikal under its king Nuun Ujol Chaak attempted to regain its prominence and came into military conflict with the powerful Kaanul king Yuknoom Ch'een and the Dos Pilas king Bajlaj Chan K'awiil, who was likely Nuun Ujol Chaak's half-brother. Ultimately, Nuun Ujol Chaak was defeated, but his son Jasaw Chan K'awiil I succeeded with a decisive victory over the Kaanul polity in AD 695. The political machinations and military conflicts of Tikal and Kaanul involved numerous other sites, such as Caracol and Naranjo in the east; Dos Pilas, Seibal, and Cancuén in the south; and Palenque, Toniná, Yaxchilán, and Piedras Negras in the west. The western conflicts involving the control of the Río Usumacinta and Río San Pedro corridors spawned additional struggles between the western sites and their subsidiaries. As will be discussed more fully in later chapters, what is pertinent to this study is the role the cult of Tlaloc played in these endeavors. As an example, Jasaw Chan K'awiil I is named in a number of texts as the holy king of Tikal. Yet the narrative relating his defeat of the Kaanul polity specifically refers to his accession as a *Kaloomte'*, which links the importance of this office to his successes. The stucco frieze of Structure 5D-57 depicts him holding a captured Kaanul lord by a rope, and he is dressed in a Tlaloc costume.

## THE WORDS OF WAR

Classic period narratives that refer to war and war-related acts are well-known. A wide range of verbs describe events of war and its aftermath, like *chuk* “to capture, to seize,” *chok* “chop,” *yaleb* “throw down,” and the infamous

“star wars” verbs. It was initially thought that there was a connection between war events and the planet Venus; consequently, Tlaloc imagery was dubbed the Tlaloc-Venus war complex or “star wars” (Schele and Miller 1986; Schele and Freidel 1990; Carlson 1993; Freidel et al. 1993; Schele and Grube 1994). Arguments were made that the Maya timed their war events according to important stations in the Venus cycle. While prognostications likely played a role in determining suitable dates for warfare, the connection with Venus has been disproven (Aldana 2005). The so-called star wars glyph is composed of a star sign with water falling from it. It has been suggested that it is a reference to a meteor or meteor shower (Stuart 1995:310–311, 2011:298) or that it refers to storms (Houston 2012:172).

The nominal phrases of protagonists invariably include references to their many offices and titles. In the case of secondary lords, there is often a statement indicating their relationship to the king and his court. Nominal phrases also include declarations that the protagonist was the captor of a particular individual or a generic reference that the protagonist was the captor of a multitude of war prisoners. The inference is that the king’s military prowess was important, not a surprising state of affairs. While most scenes of warfare feature the ruler, secondary lords are also well represented, particularly in the western sites vying for control of the Río Usumacinta and Río San Pedro corridors.

On public monuments, the protagonist of the narrative is often portrayed standing on a motif that represents a place name (Stuart and Houston 1994). In other cases, the person stands above a captive. Some captives are specifically named with caption texts or glyphs inscribed on their bodies (Proskouriakoff 1963). While some nominal phrases of captives are simply their personal names, many phrases include statements naming their office or their relationship to their overlord, suggesting that their value as a captive was linked to their status within the hierarchy of their home community. High-status captives are not named with their complete titles, and this seems to be a deliberate strategy to diminish them. As an example, the Palenque ruler K’inich K’an Joy Chitam II is displayed as a prisoner on Toniná Monument 122 (Mathews 2001; Stuart 2004b). Although he still wears a jade headband implying high status, his nominal phrase that is inscribed on his leg lacks his *K’inich* “sun-like” title, and he is named not as the holy lord of Palenque but just as a lord of Palenque.

As would be expected, the fate of captives varied. Many were sacrificed outright, while others were likely turned into slaves or ransomed. There are a number of cases where high-status captives, such as K’inich K’an Joy Chitam II, survived their captures and continued to function at their home

sites, although probably in a somewhat diminished capacity (Stuart 2004b). The Seibal ruler Yich'aak Bahlam was seized during an attack by Dos Pilas-Aguateca forces in AD 735 (Houston 1993). The narratives on Dos Pilas Stela 2 and Aguateca Stela 2 recount these events and their aftermath. Dos Pilas Stela 2 illustrates Yich'aak Bahlam at Dos Pilas seven days after the war event (Bassie-Sweet 1991:53–54). He is depicted as a bound captive at the feet of Dos Pilas-Aguateca Ruler 3. Aguateca Stela 2 depicts the 9.15.15.0.0 Period Ending ceremony that occurred seven months later at Aguateca, and Yich'aak Bahlam is again depicted under Ruler 3's feet. Later inscriptions at Seibal indicate that its king returned to the site, but as a vassal of Ruler 3 (Houston 1993). While Yich'aak Bahlam was not sacrificed by Ruler 3, it is still highly likely that other captives taken during this war were. Human sacrifices during commemorations of calendar cycles are well-documented.

### THE SCENES OF WAR

Scenes featuring war prisoners are common in Classic period Maya art, and with very few exceptions the captives are males. Prisoners are invariably positioned in the lower register of a scene kneeling in submission or sprawled under the feet of a lord. Often they are bloodied and bound by a rope. Some wear minimal clothing or are naked, with exposed genitals. In all cases, these depictions are intended to highlight their humiliation and subjugation.

Scenes of large-scale combat are rare. The best-known example is the Late Classic mural in Room 2 of Bonampak Structure 1 that illustrates dozens of warriors engaged in a heated, close-quarter battle (Ruppert et al. 1955; Miller and Brittenham 2013). Many warriors are armed with spears and shields as they attack their foes and grasp them by the hair. The visual focus of the battle is the Bonampak ruler Yajaw Chan Muwaan and the large adjacent caption text that identifies him and his captive (Houston 2012:160–163). Yajaw Chan Muwaan brandishes a spear while grabbing the hair of his hapless captive. Grasping the hair of a captive is a frequently depicted action in Maya art, and it is a visual representation of the verb *chuk* “to capture, to seize, to grab” (Proto-Mayan *\*chuq*) that often accompanies such scenes (Proskouriakoff 1963; Kaufman 2003:904). In contrast to the frenzied motion of the mural battle scene, each of the three lintels of Structure 1 focuses on a single lord seizing his foe on dates that differ from the mural battle (Mathews 1980; Houston 2012; Miller and Brittenham 2013).<sup>4</sup> Each lord holds his spear in his right hand and grasps the hair of his opponent in his left. An expanded version of this single capture theme is seen on Yaxchilán Lintel 8, which illustrates the ruler



FIGURE 0.12. *Yaxchilán Lintel 8 (drawing after Ian Graham)*

Bird Jaguar IV and the secondary lord K'an Tok Wayib each capturing a foe (figure 0.12). While Bird Jaguar IV pulls on the arm of his captive, K'an Tok Wayib grasps the hair of his foe. These two actions form a narrative couplet (Bassie-Sweet and Hopkins 2017). Pottery scenes also feature captives, like the one on Grolier 26 (Coe 1973:62–63). This composition begins with four warriors engaged in armed conflict. Behind the right figure, a warrior holds a captive in a neck lock while grasping his hair. Behind him are two more men presenting captives to a lord. They each hold their captive by the hair.

The Bonampak battle mural has an adjacent scene in which tortured, bleeding, and sacrificed captives are positioned on the steps below Yajaw Chan Muwaan, who stands with his spear in an upright position (Miller and Brittenham 2013:fig. 190). The captive seated before Yajaw Chan Muwaan reaches out with bleeding hands that touch the shaft of his spear. Overlapping the base of the spear is a dead prisoner sprawled across the steps. His head is

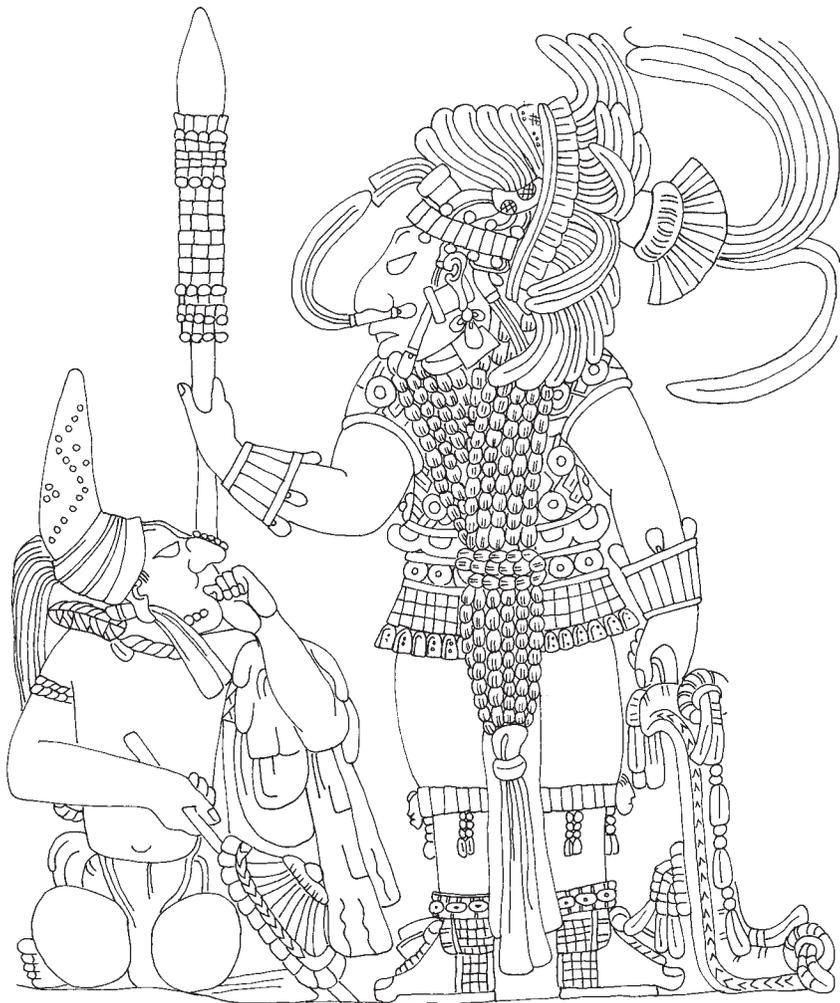


FIGURE 0.13. *Yaxchilán Lintel 16 (drawing after Ian Graham)*

tilted back as though looking up at the seated captive and his action, which places visual emphasis on the submission of the seated captive. The juxtaposing of Yajaw Chan Muwaan's spear and the dead prisoner's head is a powerful message of conquest. The juxtaposing of a victor's spear with a captive is also seen on Yaxchilán Lintel 16, which depicts a bloodied captive kneeling before the ruler Bird Jaguar IV (figure 0.13). The captive's head is tilted back and juxtaposed with the bottom of the king's spear. The juxtaposing of the king's spear



FIGURE 0.14. *Yaxchilán Lintel 12 (drawing after Ian Graham)*

with the head of a captive is also illustrated on Yaxchilán Lintel 12. In this scene, four bound captives crouch in submission at the feet of Shield Jaguar IV while one of his secondary lords stands guard. Shield Jaguar IV's spear is aligned with the head of the captive who kneels before him (figure 0.14). A similar composition is found on Stela 10 (figure 0.15). On this monument, Bird Jaguar IV stands in an identical pose with his spear again juxtaposed with his captive, but now he is joined by his wife on the left and another warrior on the right who also carries a spear and shield. The role of women in military endeavors will be discussed in later chapters.

The frontal pose of the dead prisoner sprawled at the feet of Yajaw Chan Muwaan places great emphasis on this figure. At the foot of his extended right leg is a decapitated head, a grim reference to the fate of many captives. Decapitation scenes are quite rare in public art, but Pier F of Palenque House D depicts such an action. Although the stucco of the pier is badly eroded in



FIGURE 0.15. *Yaxchilán Stela 10* (drawing after Ian Graham)

places, it depicts a lord standing in front of a victim perched on a dais. The lord grasps his victim's hair in his left hand while swinging an axe to decapitate him with his right (Robertson 1985:44). Decapitating with a stone axe was not an easy feat, even using two hands and a constrained victim. Maya art usually does not represent a snapshot of a moment in time but rather a stylized view.

A number of monuments illustrate lords presenting captives to a superior. As an example, a Laxtunich wall panel depicts the Yaxchilán ruler Shield Jaguar IV sitting on a bench with three prisoners positioned beneath him (Mayer 1980:28–30; Schele and Miller 1986:226; Martin and Grube 2008:135)

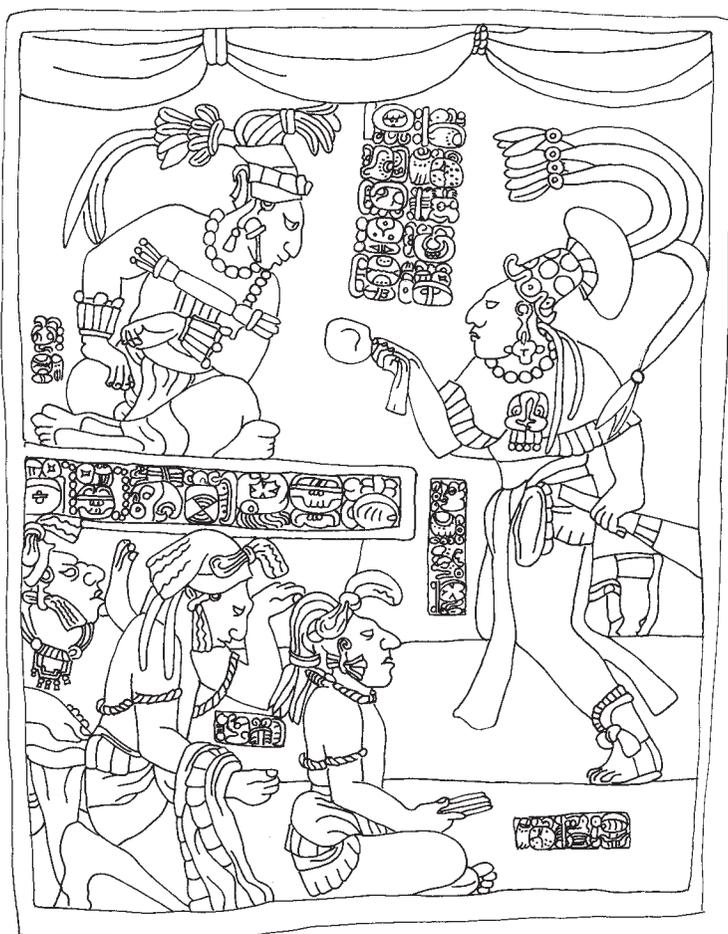


FIGURE 0.16. *Laxtunich wall panel (drawing after Linda Schele)*

(figure 0.16). The first two prisoners are bound with rope. A secondary lord named Aj Chak Maax kneels on the step adjacent to the throne and extends an object to his king. The adjacent caption text positioned between Shield Jaguar IV and Aj Chak Maax states that Aj Chak Maax was the captor of these prisoners and that three days after the capture they were “adorned.” This block of text ends with the statement that the captives of Aj Chak Maax were for Shield Jaguar IV (*u baak ti yajarw* “his captives for his lord”).

Another captive scene is seen on Piedras Negras Stela 12 and features the La Mar ruler Parrot Chahk and a cohort presenting their captives to Piedras

Negras Ruler 7 following a war with Pomoná (Schele 1984; Schele and Miller 1986:219; Schele and Grube 1994; Martin and Grube 2008:153) (figure 0.17). This monument, which is thematically parallel to the Bonampak murals, illustrates Ruler 7 seated on a bench above a flight of stairs. Only the body of Ruler 7 is pictured in a frontal pose, and this convention places emphasis on him (Schele 1984:20). He leans forward clutching his spear and gazing down at nine captives from Pomoná who are seated on the steps below him. The visually highest-ranking captive is positioned immediately below Ruler 7's spear and his right foot, and his caption text names him as a Sajal, a title held by secondary lords.<sup>5</sup> The captive wears jewelry and the headdress of a Yajawk'ak' lord. Many secondary lords had dual titles. Although seated in profile, the Sajal-Yajawk'ak' captive's torso is shown from the back, and his left hand holds his right shoulder. He is flanked on the left of the scene by a standing Parrot Chahk and another standing lord on the right. Regrettably, this right lord's caption text is eroded, so he cannot be securely identified.

The next tier of captives at the feet of Parrot Chahk is composed of two prisoners facing each other, and both are named as Sajals. The right Sajal has more status because he is pictured from the back, while the body of the left Sajal is in profile. The remaining six captives that form the lowest tier and baseline of the stela are bound together by rope. Although the monument is eroded, enough remains to show that the faces of the prisoners are bloodied. While the highest-ranking Sajal-Yajawk'ak' lord still wears his jewelry and



FIGURE 0.17. *Piedras Negras Stela 12*  
(drawing after David Stuart)

headdress, the hair of the other captives is gathered and tied into a configuration that mimics the way the hair of a captive is grasped to indicate capture. Monuments at La Mar indicate that the right prisoner in the second tier and the bearded prisoner in the lowest tier were personally captured by Parrot Chahk.

This brief overview of Classic period deities, offices, and war themes provides a framework for the discussions in the following chapters regarding the Chahk deities and Tlaloc.