



The PARI Journal

A quarterly publication of the Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute

Volume IV, No 3, Winter 2004

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The electronic version will remain available at:
www.mesoweb.com/
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ISSN 1531-5398

The Paw Stone: The Place Name of Piedras Negras, Guatemala

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The inscriptions of Piedras Negras, Guatemala and nearby El Cayo make occasional reference to a place name or toponym that has remained unidentified since its initial recognition over a decade ago (Stuart and Houston 1994:33). The glyph (Figure 1) assumes a regular appearance in the inscriptions and is composed of two basic units: a feline paw sign, as yet undeciphered, above **TUUN-(ni)**, *tuun*, "stone". The latter is a common term in Mayan place names today as well as in ancient times (for example, Lakamtuun). In this study I will offer a few observations about the "Paw Stone" glyph and its textual appearances, and then refer to a significant clue to its nature as a place glyph associated with the ceremonial center of Piedras Negras.

First a few words on the reading of the initial paw-like sign. This bears a close resemblance to the logogram **ICH'AAK**, "claw" (Stuart 1987), but its orientation and internal markings suggest it is a different sign. The **ICH'AAK** element appropriately emphasizes the animal's claws, whereas the upper sign of the toponym seems "de-clawed" by comparison, showing more the darkened pads underneath. The same inward-facing paw sign probably occurs at Tonina in a royal name read *K'inich Ich'aak*

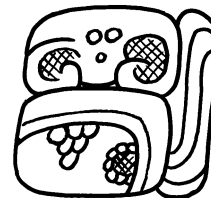


Figure 1. The Paw Stone glyph.

Chapat (Martin and Grube 2000:186), although we might entertain another decipherment if indeed this is a different paw. Perhaps these paws are simply stylistic variations of one another, but for the moment I will refer to the glyph and the place name simply as "Paw Stone", with the understanding that this is no literal translation.

I know of six examples of the Paw Stone glyph. Four appear on Throne 1 of Piedras Negras, and another from Panel 1 of El Cayo. (During a visit to Piedras Negras in April, 1998, I saw another possible example on Stela 18, though in a very weathered text.) Throne 1 dates to the reign of Ruler 7, the last documented king of Piedras Negras, and its text sheds some light on the years leading up to his accession. In this interesting time, Ruler 6 (*Ha' K'in Xook*) is said to "lose the rulership" on 9.17.9.5.11, over a year before the inauguration of his suc-

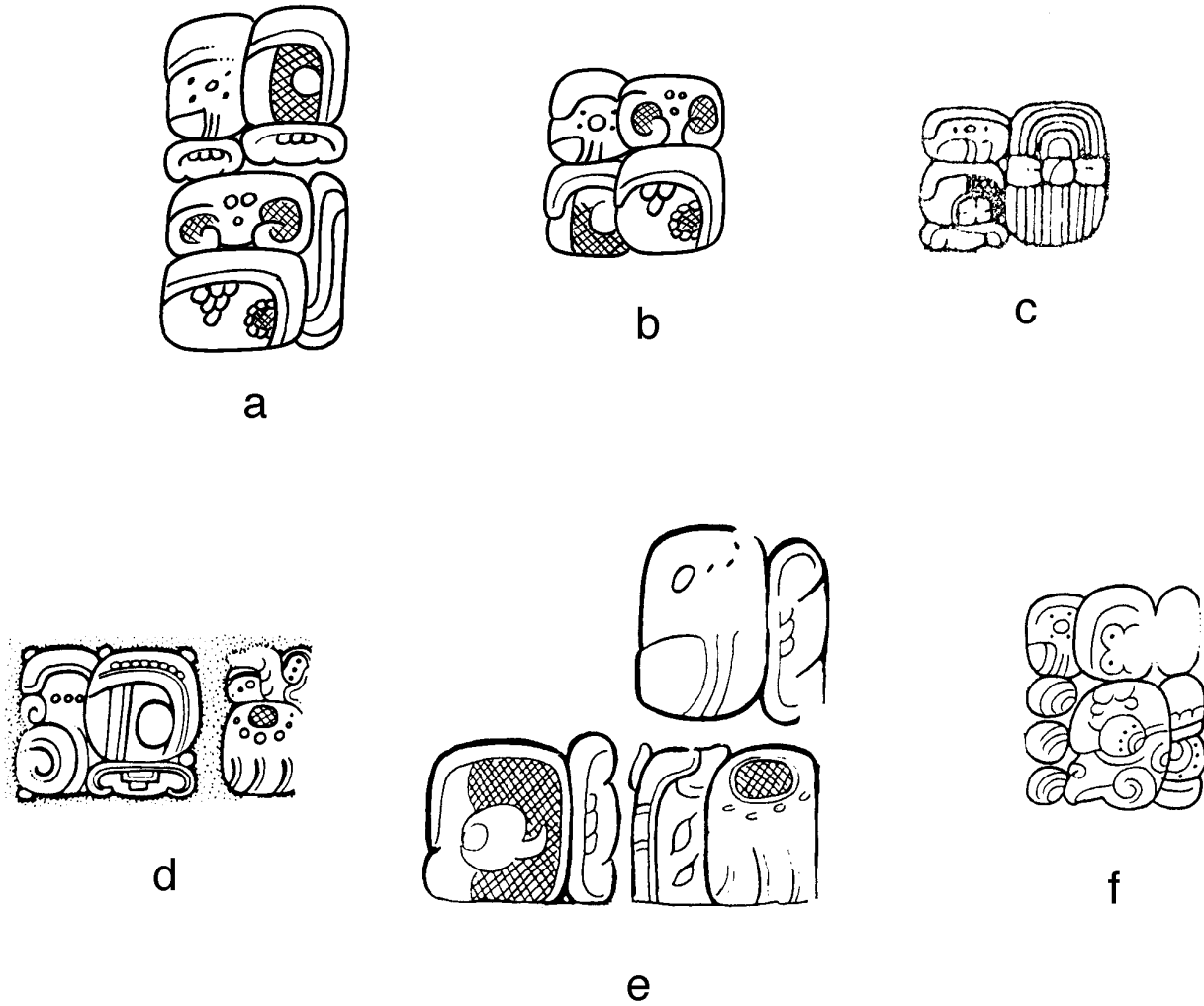


Figure 2. Parallel expressions of *tahn ch'een* before various toponyms. (a) Piedras Negras Throne 1, Support 1, (b) Piedras Negras Throne 1, Support 2, (c) Tikal Temple 1, Lintel 3, (d) Dos Pilas Stela 8, (e) Palenque Temple XIX Platform, South, (f) Caracol Stela 3.

cessor. Throughout these complex passages we see the Paw Stone glyph prefixed by the revealing combination of **TAHN-CH'EEN-** ("in front of the cave/spring..."), which regularly appears with toponyms in the inscriptions of several other sites (Stuart and Houston 1994) (Figure 2). At Tikal, for example, the standard emblem glyph main sign (**MUTUL?**) appears as part the very same expression, where it occupies the same position as the "Paw Stone" (Figure 2c). Dos Pilas Stela 8 displays its own local toponym (**?-HA'**) in a parallel example (Figure 2d), and at Palenque's Temple XIX we find *tahn ch'een Lakamha'* ("in front of the Lakamha' spring") probably in reference to the Otolum River (Stuart 2000) (Figure 2e). Stela 3 from Caracol mentions the local place name *Uxwitza'* ("Three Hill Water") in much the same way (Figure 2f). Yet another example from El

Peru Stela 31, reads *tahn ch'een Waka'* ("in front of the Waka' cave/spring") likewise specifying the location of an important ritual at El Peru, named *Waka'* in ancient times. The many parallel phrases leave little doubt that the Paw Stone glyph was an important place name associated with Piedras Negras.

In his recent and useful discussion of place glyphs from the Piedras Negras region, Zender (2002) does not mention the Paw Stone glyph and suggests instead that the local toponym was possibly **K'IN-a**, sometimes reduced simply as **K'IN**. This is indeed the base term of an important title found with Piedras Negras kings and nobility, usually spelled in full **K'IN-ni-AJAW** in addition to a modifier. Clearly, as Zender suggests, *K'in* or *K'ina'* (if they are indeed the same – I suspect a distinction) was some local term of significance, but I would

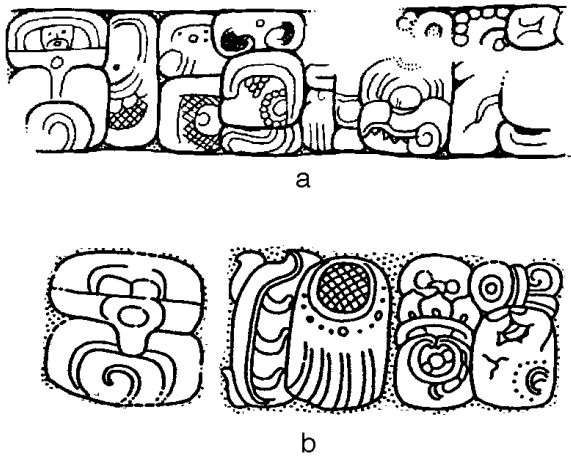


Figure 3. “Foundation” events with toponyms at Piedras Negras and Palenque. (a) Piedras Negras Throne 1, Seat, (b) Palenque Temple XVII.

caution that the exact scope of its reference is difficult to determine. Unlike the Paw Stone glyph, *K'in(a')* does not operate in local Piedras Negras inscriptions in obvious toponymic contexts.

One appearance of the Paw Stone glyph on Throne 1 comes at the beginning of the text, along the face of the seat (Figure 3a). The initial two or three glyphs are missing, but we soon clearly read **TAHN-CH'EEN-"PAW"-TUUN-ni**, after a verb that in other settings seems to mean "to set" or "to establish" (no firm phonetic reading has been suggested). Again we can point to a parallel from Palenque's inscriptions (Figure 3b), where the same verb appears directly before the local Lakamha' place name (the **TAHN-CH'EEN** phrase is absent). The Palenque event takes place in the Early Classic, and almost surely refers to the founding or establishment of Lakamha' as a political community (rulers before this time are usually associated with a Palenque locale called *Toktan*). The similarity between these texts is even more striking, for it is likely that the "establishment" event recorded on Piedras Negras Throne 1 is also from the Early Classic. A long distance number of 15 K'atuns and a missing number of haab's connect this initial event to the birth date of Ruler 7 (9.15.18.16.7), suggesting that the "foundation" took place near the very beginning of the B'ak'tun. The name associated with this early event looks like that of Ruler 7, but is more likely the name of an early king, perhaps the founder of the dynasty. (It is also the name of another important early ruler named on Panel 2, in connection with the date 9.3.16.0.5 — far too

late to be the same individual, suggesting that there were at least three kings with the same name.) I suggest that the initial glyphs of Throne 1 record the founding of the Paw Stone location, probably the ritual center at Piedras Negras.

Like Throne 1, El Cayo Panel 1 sheds some important light on the murky history before Ruler 7. One key passage (Figure 4) concerns the death and burial of an unnamed subject, probably a local El Cayo *sajal* who was the father of the panel's protagonist, named Chan Panak. The passage reads in part:

*T'ab'ay ?-tuun Chan Panak
Y-ichnal ?-Chak-? K'uhul Yokib' Ajaw K'in Ajaw*

(Then) Chan Panak went up to 'Paw Stone' in the presence of "Ruler 5," the Holy Lord of Yokib', The Sun Lord.

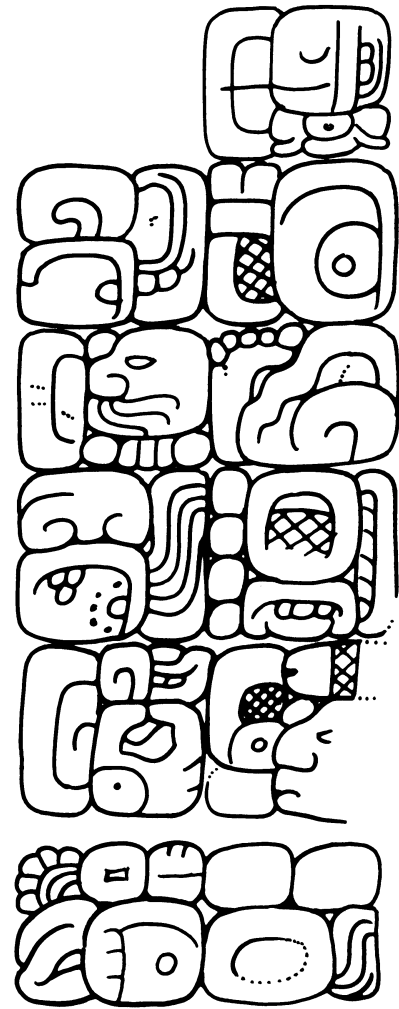


Figure 4. Passage from El Cayo Panel 1.



Figure 5. Two views of Piedras Negras Altar 4 (Photographs courtesy of the Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions archive).

I interpret this statement as the record of a visit of the young Chan Panak (12 years old at the time) to the regional capital downriver directly after his father's death. The trip was surely politically charged and may have occurred in order to confirm the boy's role as heir to the *sajal*-ship. Indeed, Chan Panak would assume the office some nine years later, according to a passage near the end of Panel 1's inscription. "Going up to 'Paw Stone'" may well refer to the steep and arduous climb to Piedras Negras's acropolis from the riverside. Alternatively, the sense may simply be that one traveled and arrived at a distant locale, rather like the English usage of "going up" to a visited place. This in fact seems likely, since we find in other inscriptions that the same *t'abay* ("ascend, go up") can appear in conjunction with *lok'oy*, "exit, leave" to describe journeys and the precise sequence of departure and arrival. For example, on Hieroglyphic Stairway 2 of Dos Pilas, we read that kings "go up" to distant communities after military defeats (Fahsen 2002). The

t'abay event at El Cayo seems to come also as a result of a politically disruptive event.

Although "Paw Stone" seems a plausible place name for Piedras Negras, it is likely to refer at times to a particular sculpted monument. Altar 4 is a large square table-like monument that once rested on four elaborately carved supports in the center of Piedras Negras's principal plaza (Figure 5a and b). It was found by Maler in fairly good condition, but the careless removal of the four elaborately carved and inscribed supports in the 1930s left the large upper slab to decay on the forest floor, where it today can be found broken in two fragments.¹

The four supporting heads are all recognizable as three-dimensional forms of the glyphic head variant for **TUUN**, "stone" (Figure 6). During a visit to Piedras Negras in 1998 I realized that the altar's table, long left discarded, was sculpted in the form of a three-dimensional jaguar paw (Figure 7). The two long edges of the slab show a paw much like the glyphic sign we have seen, and a third side, clearly visible in photographs from the 1930s, represents the four rounded toes (see Figure 5a). The fourth side of the stone (the "heel" of the paw) once bore a hieroglyphic text that is now completely eroded. The large stone paw atop four large **TUUN**-sign supports thus creates a remarkable three-dimensional and "interactive" form of the toponym. It seems appropriate that this "3-D glyph" was placed in an isolated setting in the very center of Piedras Negras's principal plaza, where it would have served various ritual purposes as a toponymic emblem. When Chan Panak of El Cayo "ascended the Paw Stone" in the presence of the Piedras Negras king, one wonders if Altar 4 was where he stood. A ruler or nobleman standing atop Altar 4 would reproduce a frequently seen composition in Maya art, where a toponymic glyph is shown beneath a portrait of a standing ruler.



Figure 6. The head variant of **TUUN-ni**, *tuun*, "stone."

Altar 4's situation recalls the probable design of a toponymic emblem in the floor of Machaquila's main plaza

¹ Three of the supports are displayed in the National Museum in Guatemala City; the fourth is at the University Museum in Philadelphia.

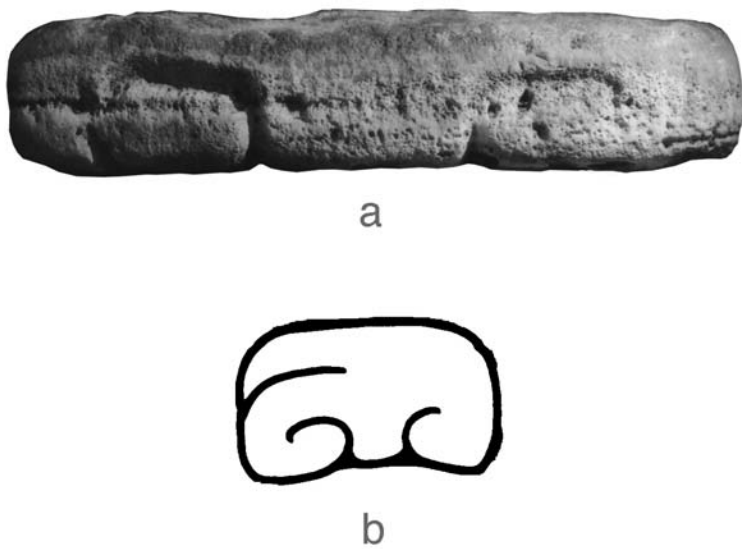


Figure 7. Comparison of Altar 4's slab to the "paw" sign (photograph by the author, courtesy of the Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions.)

(Figure 8). The faint quatrefoil-shaped outline of stones documented by Graham (1967) in the center of the plaza echoes the form of the Machaquila place glyph (Stuart and Houston 1994), suggesting that here a "glyph" forms the center of the local ceremonial landscape. Altar 4 is similarly placed in the center of Piedras Negras's principal plaza in order to explicitly label the surrounding ritual space as the "Paw Stone". Three-dimensional Maya glyphs like Altar 4 are far from common, but at least one other comes to mind. Altar M of Quirigua (Figure 9a) represents a fully sculpted dog's head with HA' ("water") elements over the eyes, which is perhaps a representation of a supernatural "water dog" place glyph cited in several inscriptions at Copan and Palenque (Figure 9b, c). The reading of this glyph is not secure, but the dog and water signs seem consistent enough to posit a connection.

The identification of a main toponym for Piedras Negras adds yet another to the growing list of

place names, and again raises the question about the Emblem Glyph of the kingdom (**yo-ki-b'i**) and what relationship it may have to the Paw Stone reference. Emblem glyphs and localized toponyms do overlap at some sites, but the presence of two different glyphs at Piedras Negras reflects a more normal pattern wherein the two locational terms have different scopes of reference. The **yo-ki-b'i** emblem seems an archaic and more generalized name, associated even with mythological dates on the fascinating inscription from Piedras Negras Altar 1. By contrast, the opening passage from Throne 1, discussed above, suggests that Paw Stone might be a true local toponym for the site "founded" in the Early Classic. These remain tentative ideas, however, given that early Piedras Negras inscriptions are so few and far between, leaving the beginnings of its history extremely opaque.

For me, the most interesting aspect of the Paw Stone is its "3-D" form as displayed by Altar 4 — a beautiful example of the intersection of Classic Maya art, writing, and notions of landscape. One cannot help but wonder if other similar examples of "topo-script" may have gone unrecognized at other Maya sites.

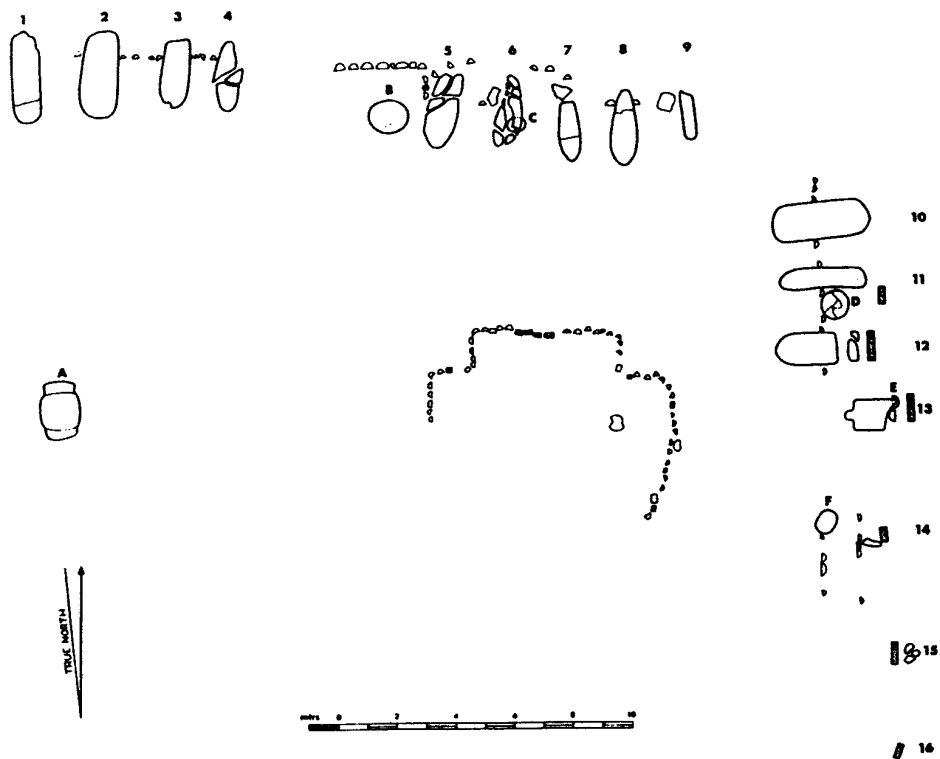


Figure 8. The plaza of Machaquila (from Graham 1967).

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a



b



c

Figure 9. Altar M of Quirigua (a) compared to examples of the "Water Dog" toponym glyph (b, c).

Return to the Great Forests

FRANS BLOM'S LETTERS FROM PALENQUE
December 1922 - March 1923

Translated and with an introduction and notes by Jesper Nielsen & Tore Leifer



Figure 1. The Temple of the Sun, Palenque, April 1922 (photograph by Frans Blom, in the Blom collection of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; courtesy of the Bancroft Library).

In 2002 the authors and Toke Sellner Reunert published a new, extensive biography on the Maya archaeologist and explorer Frans Blom (1893-1963), the first ever to appear in Blom's mother tongue – Danish (Leifer et al. 2002). Among the many forgotten documents that were rediscovered during the three-year period of research in Denmark, Mexico and the United States were two typescripts of Blom's letters from his stay in Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico; where, from December 14, 1922, to March 14, 1923, Blom carried out one of the first scientific investigations of this important Classic Maya site (see Blom 1982).

The fullest version of the Palenque typescripts is in the archives of the Middle American Research Institute (M.A.R.I.) of Tulane University, New Orleans (the version translated here), and a slightly abridged and re-arranged version is to be found in the Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley.¹ Both typescripts are in Danish and were compiled by Dora Blom, Frans Blom's mother, and originally sent to one or more publishers in Copenhagen.² Dora had already edited one volume of Frans'

letters, published as *I de store Skove – Breve fra Meksiko* ("In the Great Forests – Letters from Mexico") (Blom 1923)³, and she planned to have a sequel published, entitled *Atter i de store Skove* ("Return to the Great Forests"). Apart from some excerpts that appeared in a Danish newspaper, this idea never came off.

When Blom, still a young amateur, arrived at Palenque near the end of 1922 he already knew the site from firsthand experience. Earlier the same year, on April 25, Blom had visited the ruins for the first time. (See Figure 1.) He was immediately overwhelmed by the beauty of the place, and although he was officially an oil scout on an oil expedition (see Nielsen 2003 for a short biographical sketch), he spent page after page in his notebook on drawing, photographing and describing the site and its monuments. He carried quite a few archaeological books and maps with him, but he was convinced that many details on the existing maps and plans were wrong and consequently corrected them in accordance with what he saw. "These ruins are full of enigmas and wonders", he wrote in his diary⁴ – not knowing that he



Figure 2. Frans Blom's drawing of the Oval Palace Tablet, from the Palace, Palenque, 1922-23 (from the M.A.R.I. version of the Palenque typescript; courtesy of the Middle American Research Institute, Tulane University).

¹ The discovery of a major collection of documents in the Bancroft Library, including photo albums, diaries and letters not known to previous biographers of Blom (e.g., Brunhouse 1976) has contributed significantly to the new biography.

² The M.A.R.I. typescript contains four figures; two photographs of the Palace and two line drawings by Blom, one showing the Oval Tablet (see Figure 2) and one illustrating three examples of glyphs from the Palace.

³ Published in Spanish in 1990 as *En el lugar de los grandes bosques* by the Instituto Chiapaneco de Cultura, Chiapas, Mexico.

⁴ From Blom's expedition diary in Danish, March-June 1922. (Latin American Library, Tulane University, New Orleans).

would eight months later have the opportunity to return and examine them more carefully.

By then, the famous Mexican archaeologist Manuel Gamio of the Dirección de Antropología in Mexico City (whom Blom had been working for since August 1922) had become so convinced of Blom's talent and abilities that in early October 1922 he offered him a job as an archaeological attendant in Palenque. Frans was to spend three months there on his own in order to ascertain what could be done to preserve the ruins. For Frans, who had already been captivated by the haunting spirit of that beautiful place, this job was a dream come true – and the young amateur spent October and November studying the available literature on the subject: "The more I penetrate into the mysteries of the ancient Maya, the more it interests me. I have been reading very diligently lately, working like a little horse – though it's not really hard work when the subject interests you, it's rather a pleasure and a feast."⁵

"First I went through all that I could find that had been published and written about the ruins of Palenque. [...] Maudslay's work should serve as a model and an ideal for archaeologists", Blom wrote in his diary. But apart from the great Maudslay, Blom was certainly not very impressed with all that he read. Many of the available books he dismissed as "fanciful and crackbrained explanations of the history and origins of the Maya. A great part of these was crazy second-hand nonsense."⁶ Finally, on December 3, he had his things packed and was all set to leave for Palenque on the following day: "All has now been packed down, and the civilized part of my belongings has been stored in a warehouse. What remains is the camp-bed, a bolt of canvas with my bedclothes, a sack with clothes and boots, two crates of instruments and a large camera. My room is deserted and empty; the door opens – almost – directly into the forests. Tomorrow night begins the journey. [...] Though this city is wonderful, a voice inside me begins to sing of the forests, especially during these last few days."⁷

On December 14, 1922, Frans reached the ruins, and in his diary from that same day he described the horseback ride: "From Palenque cemetery the path leads to the ruins. Quite a good path, through dense scrub. Then you come into an open savannah, and from here you catch your first glimpse of the ruins. The Temple of the Cross shines white against the forest-clad hills. Again you plunge into

the forest, you cross several small creeks, then the Mixol river, a clear little mountain stream, and shortly thereafter the Otolum, the creek that comes from the ruins. Soon you reach the foot of the limestone hills. The path rises steeply, and when once again you reach a level path, you are on the plateau where the ruins lie. To the left of the path, the Otolum thunders away, hidden by the forest. By the old Maya bridge over this creek lie two palm-thatched huts, and this is where I've settled."⁸ He found the ruins in a sad condition, all covered by vegetation, trees and shrubs. The famous limestone tablets of the Cross Group were covered by humid slime and moss. "These tablets should really be taken to the Museum in Mexico [City], since it's impossible to protect them here. Day by day, year by year, the hieroglyphs and figures are erased. Now they are to be brushed clean, this is all I can do to prolong their life for a little while. Many men and much money could be used in the work to protect these art treasures."⁹

Frans soon launched himself into his job with great enthusiasm, only somewhat delayed by his great love for the profusion of wonderful flowers: "And what a terrible job I had been assigned. Truly, I walked around for days, and couldn't do a thing. Right and left were the old temples, settled in the world's most beautiful forest. Lianas and orchids and other tropical verdure was covering one and all of the buildings. AND, – dam[n] it, – It was my orders and my job to tear down all that floral beauty. [...] Alas, the day came for destruction. There were the temples, and the palaces, and every one of their rooves [roofs] were covered in a solid carpet of wild pink begonias. The butchery started, and with every machete slash my heart was bleeding."¹⁰

After the flower massacre, work proceeded at a calm and steady pace. In the very meticulous and well-grounded report which Blom later wrote for Gamio, he not only managed to comment on the condition of the ruins and make suggestions as to how and in what sequence the buildings should be excavated and restored, which was what Gamio had asked him to do, but he also provided exact descriptions of the ruins and was the first to describe and map a large part of the site – a map that was only replaced by a new and better one a couple of years ago (Barnhart 2001). Blom only did some minor excavations during his stay, and indeed this was not the official task assigned to him by Gamio (at this point Blom had not yet received any formal training in archaeology), but he was deeply concerned with the future of the ancient city: "I would love to excavate Palenque,

⁵ Letter to his parents in Danish, November 5, 1922. (Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley).

⁶ Diary in Danish, December 14, 1922. (Bancroft Library).

⁷ Letter to his parents in Danish, December 3, 1922 (Bancroft Library).

⁸ Diary in Danish, December 14, 1922. (Bancroft Library).

⁹ Diary in Danish, December 14, 1922. (Bancroft Library).

¹⁰ Notes from Palenque in English, ca. 1923. (Bancroft Library).

but how can I do a good and honest job of it? It's going to cost plenty of money. It's not just excavation that counts. One must not destroy; but all should be planned so that the excavation will mean preservation. Thus future generations can learn and benefit from the work. Frankly, – I would rather leave Palenque as a jungle covered pile of broken masonry – than rape it."¹¹

Many years later, in the 1950s, Blom told a Danish writer about his work in Palenque: "I traded my oil salary for a miserable salary as an archaeologist. I have never regretted that decision. I was sent to Palenque to measure up the ruins. [...] I made a report of my investigations but it was never printed, for those were the days of the revolution and lead was used for bullets, not for printing" (Ulrich 1956:183). Soon after his return to Mexico City in March 1923, Frans gave the manuscript to Gamio. It was an excellent and thorough work considering that Blom was a mere amateur, and whatever lingering doubts Gamio might have had as to Frans Blom's qualities and potential, they were now dispelled. Blom had passed his first test as a self-taught archaeologist. It was not, however, until 1982 that the report was finally published by INAH (Blom 1982) – a delay of 59 years which was probably due to factors others than the shortage of lead.¹²

Here finally – with a similar delay of more than 80 years – are the Palenque letters, giving us a glimpse of young Blom's daily life among the ruins of Palenque. Not only do we find impressions of Blom's relationship with the local population and his working methods, but we are also presented with interesting background information on early looting activity in Palenque, the first site "museum" and some of Blom's discoveries at Palenque, including that of a well-preserved red-painted and polished stucco floor in the Temple of the Sun (see also Blom 1982:62) and the uncarved stone column or stela known as "La Picota" (see also Blom 1982:112-113). Thus, in various respects, the Blom letters add new perspectives to the research history of this important Maya site.

The Palace, Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico, December 14, 1922.

It is with a proud feeling that I write the heading of this letter. I arrived at the ruins today at about 11 in the morning and got myself installed. At the foot of the main temple is a small Indian hut: this is where I live, and around me rise

the thousand year old pyramids and temples. My workmen had hardly finished the job of fitting out the house for me, before I sent them off to open up paths to the most important buildings. So, tomorrow the work can really begin.

And there is a lot to do here. The buildings are in a sad condition. Here and there the wonderful relief figures are flaking off, and trees and bushes are growing in all crevices and cracks. All this has to be cleaned out; supporting beams will have to be put up afterwards, and where the walls are about to collapse some bricklaying has to be done. Years and thousands of dollars could be spent in preventing these buildings from being completely destroyed, and it should be done.

It is wonderful to be back in the forests again. The food tastes of the smoke from the fireplace, and outside the cicadas are singing their evening song. My Indian workers sit outside the hut and tell each other lies and fairy stories, and a couple of small remarks reveal that *they* are not all that happy about having to spend the night here among the ruins.

By the way, I had quite a dramatic journey down here. The train was derailed twice; I was prepared for some kind of interruption, so I had brought with me a lunch basket. Just as we were moving well ahead I could feel that the train was running off the rails into soft ground and stopped. Soon after followed volleys from rifles and pistols from all sides. I did what every brave man should under such circumstances, I crouched down on the floor of the compartment, I had no intention of putting my head out the window to see what was up. Once the shooting was over I peeked out. The train crew had scared off the attackers, and outside my compartment a couple of them lay dead on the ground; they didn't look too good; one of them had his mouth open and in it shone a large gold tooth. One of the members of the train crew passed by, saw the gold tooth, the rifle butt into the mouth, crack! and the tooth went into the pocket of his waistcoat and he went on. We had to get out of the carriage, walk for a couple of kilometers and wait for a few hours; I enjoyed my lunch basket, great offers were given on the contents of it – but no, it was not for sale. At last another train picked us up. Something similar happened during the middle of the night, once more we had to get out and walk a long distance in pitch-darkness across a swampy terrain, carrying all the luggage, well, mine wasn't very big, but still. We were underway for 40 hours; normally this stretch can be done in 6 to 7.

¹¹ Notes from Palenque in English, ca. 1923. (Bancroft Library).

¹² A summary of Blom's findings at Palenque 1922-1923 later appeared in English in *Tribes and Temples* (Blom & La Farge 1926-27:169-189).

December 20, 1922.

This is a realm of peace and beauty. New things of interest appear piecemeal, as my Indians clear the forest surrounding the ruins and manage to weed the bushes and plants out of the cracks in the walls and on the roofs of the temples. The ruins are situated on a small, raised plateau, below us the lowlands of Tabasco stretch as far north as the eye can see; behind us, to the south, rise forested mountains.

The more I read about the Mayas, the more familiar I become with their buildings and their works of art, the more I am astonished of the abilities and the high culture of this people.

Already before Cortez arrived here in Mexico, Palenque was in ruins as were other of the great ruined cities which lie hidden in the forests of Chiapas and Guatemala. One after one these sites are visited, one after one they are explored and studied, and step by step our knowledge increases. This people had a fully developed writing system and a calendrical system that greatly surpassed the Gregorian calendar, and in some respects outdid our own.¹³ And these results were accomplished without the modern instruments of our time. They worked in stone with stone tools, and their renderings of human figures are only surpassed by the Greeks; the Assyrians and Egyptians stood far below the Mayas.

It is a continuous joy to me that I get so well along with the Indians. If you know how to win their friendship, they are hearty in their own shy way.

In the evening after nightfall they silently glide into my hut, they squat down along the wall, and there they sit completely still. If I work, they won't say a word; however, I often talk to them, and little by little I get them to tell me small stories about their legends and their different superstitious beliefs. This, too, is a part of my job and almost the most difficult.

To be continued in the next PARI Journal.

¹³ Blom seems to get things mixed up a bit. Our present calendar is, of course, the Gregorian calendar.

Acknowledgements:

Our warmest thanks to E. Wyllys Andrews V and Kathe Lawton (Middle American Research Institute, Tulane University, New Orleans), to Guillermo Nández Falcón and Paul Bary (Latin American Library, Tulane University, New Orleans), to Susan Snyder, Jack von Euw and David Kessler (Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley), and to Peter Mathews (La Trobe University, Melbourne).

In memory of Jaime Kibben (1947-2003)

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Morley's Diary, 1932

Editor's note

A leading archaeologist of his time, Sylvanus Griswold Morley was an Associate of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, the foremost organization excavating archaeological sites in Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras in the early part of the twentieth century. This diary continues his account of the Carnegie Institution's expedition to Calakmul begun on April 3, 1932. Morley's professional companions were his wife Frances, Karl Rupert, John Bolles and Gustav Stromsvic. Reference is made to biologist Cyrus L. Lundell, who conducted the first scientific investigations at Calakmul and brought the site to the attention of the Carnegie Institution.

April 15 – Friday (cont'd from *PARI Journal* 4:2)

After breakfast we went to our respective stations. Frances had her Jose Carmen, the water boy, who had to make two trips to the aguada for water first. Frances says we use 40 gallons of water a day, i.e. 4 trips with 2 five gallon tins. She also had a boy named Lino Paat, quite Mayan in appearance. With these two she continued work on her laja.

Gustav finally got the lower half of Stela 88 vertical and then we moved the entire cuadrilla including the two axmen, Isidro and Rafael over to Stelae 75, 76, 77, 78, and 79.

Only one of these monuments is fallen, Stela 76, the second in the line from the left facing the row of monuments.

Jesus began digging down the left side of this while some of the other boys made me an excellent pole and rope ladder. This was laid against the left side of Stela 75 and I climbed to its top bent on the decipherment of this date.

On our preliminary tour last Sunday I deciphered this provisionally as 9.12.?.?.? but this morning I was able to complete this reading as 9.12.0.0.0 10 Ahau 8 Yaxkin. As they had not finished digging out the fallen monument, Stela 76, I went on to Stela 77.

On our preliminary tour I had read this as 9.?.10.?.? but now I was able to find the terminal date 9 Ahau 18 Zotz which enabled me to fill in the missing katun coef. as 12, viz. 9.12.10.0.0 9 Ahau 18 Zotz.



Neg. No. 10313, Courtesy of the Museum of New Mexico.

In the meanwhile Gustav's men had finished digging out the left side of Stela 78 and to my delight this has an I. S. the 35th thus far at this site. The finding of the day of the I. S. terminal date as 3 Ahau, almost makes certain this reading as 9.12.5.0.0 3 Ahau 3 Xul.

The next monument, Stela 78, though standing is so far gone that I can only guess at its date. For reasons to follow I think this monument dates from 9.12.15.0.0 2 Ahau 13 Zip.

The last monument also has an I. S. Though this is far from clear I think the date here is 9.13.0.0.0 8 Ahau 8 Uo.

The intent here would seem to have been to erect each one of these five stelae 1 hotun after the one next preceding it to the left.

Thus the series read here I believe:

Stela 75	9.12. 0.0.0	10 Ahau 8 Yaxkin
" 76	9.12. 5.0.0	3 Ahau 3 Xul
" 77	9.12.10.0.0	7 Ahau 18 Zots
" 78	9.12.15.0.0	2 Ahau 13 Zip
" 79	9.13. 0.0.0	8 Ahau 8 Uo

In turning over Stela 76, Gustav hurt his foot; the stela settled down on it and crushed a toe. He took off his sock and the toe was suffused with blood.

This is the second foot accident we have had.

Yesterday Emilio one of John's best men hurt his foot by a blow from a falling tree. Frances dressed this in the morning before work, and by noon it was much better so he said.

Gustav said his did not hurt much and as he put back his shoe and went to work again I had take his word for it.

It was getting near 11:00 so I went over to the laja to see how Frances' work had been going on. She had uncovered two more heads, making a total of 6 and an arm and a leg that go under a still standing tree, which will have to come down in consequence tomorrow. It was just 11:00 as I got over there and we knocked off work, coming back on one of John's east and west lines which passes by Stelae 63, 64, and 65. We stopped off for a moment to see Stela 62 which is like her Stela 66 in the Ball Court in several respects.

From here we came into camp and hit his north and south line through the Main Plaza a little south of our own tent.

After luncheon I persuaded Frances not to go out to the laja but to rest here in camp instead. She had worked hard all morning on the laja and merited a rest.

I divided her gang, turning Jose Carmen over to Gustav after the former had brought the water for the afternoon, and sending Lino with Gustav and also one of the axmen, Isidro. The other, Rafael, I left chopping in the plaza of the eleven stelae.

I was to go first to Stelae 85, 86, and 87 and write them up. I took Genaro with me and Gustav was to go over to Stelae 75-79 with his enlarged cuadrilla and then calling through the bush to me was to come guided by my voice to Stelae 85-87. This plan nearly miscarried because I took a wrong trail and went too far south. When I got back to Stelae 85-87 and gave a call I was surprised to find Gustav and his cuadrilla very nearby.

Of these three monuments found by Karl only the middle one is standing. The I. S. is included in the total of 35 previously given. While the other boys were digging along the edges of the two fallen monuments, Nos. 85 and 87, Jesus and Demetrio built a platform against the left or east side of Stela 86. I had no difficulty in reading this as 9.12.0.0.0 10 Ahau 8 Yaxkin. It was rather crude.

Both Stelae 85 and 87 were in such bad condition that we did not even turn them. I could get dates from neither.

From here Gustav and I went over to Stela 46 on the east side of the trail, the first monument associated with Structure B, which is the largest construction in the city.

In our preliminary examination of the site and its monuments last Sunday, I had read this provisionally as 9.14.?.?.? and I could do little better with this I. S. this afternoon. This I. S. is also included as just mentioned in the 35 already given as our total to date, but now a number of I. S. suspects may be mentioned.

Stela 45 lying a little east of Stela 46 is the first of those. It was clasped, or rather its head, for it had fallen, in the roots of a great fig tree – the wild fig – which has such a penchant for growing on top of the monuments. Isidro began cutting these large roots with his axe while the other boys hacked away with their machetes on the smaller ones. I had them cut first on the left side, and saw a very suspicious looking which looked like a zero, the cutting away of the roots on the left side was not finished by five, so I will call Stela 45 Suspect No. 1.

It also looks to me as though Stelas 38, 40, and 41 are going to be Initial Series when we get them cleared, but for the present I will call them suspects Nos. 2, 3, and 4.

I came back to camp early – about 4 – as I was worn out and had a hot sponge bath, a boiling hot one too, which refreshed me greatly, and afterward wrote in this diary until dinner.

Three new monuments were discovered late this afternoon bringing the total up to 103, of which we have found 40 and Lundell 63. One of these, found by Karl, on the very summit of Structure A has an I. S. our 38th. It is hard to see how Lundell missed it though it is fallen forward on its face. Karl reports it as 9.15.0.0.9. The glyphs are beautiful he says. This will be given the number 89. Coming back to camp, John said he had found two new stelae both small in the Main Plaza. I could hardly believe it. One was hardly 60 feet from our dining-room and the other no more than 75. The first I have given the number 90, it is directly behind Stelae 7 and 8 and only the stump of a monument. It projects only a short

distance above the slope and I doubt that excavation will show a trace of carving on it.

The other is another stump still standing to which I have given the number 91, this is not more than 2 yards south of Stela 9. I do not think this has any carving but will have both of these monuments dug up before we leave.

Victor Audinette is going into Central Buenfils tomorrow or rather tonight returning tomorrow. I got \$10.00 from Karl and gave it to him, with instructions to buy all the eggs he could find and also a fowl. "Good Sir", said the Belizano.

We are beginning to get tired of camp fare. Tinned foods get awfully tiresome eventually and the time is arriving. We have another 9 days though so there is no use fretting about it.

Alberto, one of Gustav's best men came down with fever this afternoon. He felt it coming on this morning he said; his body ached etc., and he looked seedy. He did not come back after lunch and Jesus said he was down with calentura.

I sent down 6 quinine pills to him. Frances thinks by their size they are 7 or even 10 grain but I doubt if they are more than 5.

I wrote after dinner until 7:20 and then went over to the tent. Every time I go to bed as early as this I can only sleep 7 or 8 hours and then wake up. So it was this time. I must have fallen to sleep sometime between 7:20 and 7:45 but I woke up for an hour or perhaps an hour and a half about 3.

The moon is now about half full and is beginning to give us some real illumination under the trees.

April 16 – Saturday

This morning there was a little different distribution of the workmen. Frances had three men. Rafael the axman, Lino, and Jose Carmen, the water boy. I had Genaro, a youth from San Luis Potosi, with me over at Stelae 70 and 71, and Gustav took the rest of our joint gang over to Structure B to continue work there.

Stela 70 has an I. S. reported in our original inventory which reads 9.12.8.9.9 11 Muluc 17 Kankin. I had not attempted to read this Sunday other than to say it was a non tun I. S. It works out as given above. Next Genaro

built me my ladder of poles and rope on the left side. This records the I. S. 9.14.0.0.0 6 Ahau 13 Muan which however I had read last Sunday.

The bush had not been felled sufficiently to let in the light so that I could see the inscriptions on Stelae 72, 73, and 74, which were still in the shade, so I gave up trying to do them until this piece of felling had been done. I went over to see Frances and her work. This was getting near its end. The laja now has six figures on it, and is beginning to slope off in every direction so that it must be ending. Frances notices that a plaster level comes right up to the rock, which probably is the plaster floor level of this court.

I next went over to Stela 80 with Genaro and my rope ladder. John was over here with his gang and he told me he was working over toward the laja.

This monument has a good sized bee's nest in a hollow on the back. At first I thought I would have this burned out, but the boys assured me that the bees would be angry for some time afterward and I could not get near the monument so I gave it up.

Stela 80 in front (north) of Structure O is a late monument. Its I. S. reads 9.18.0.0.0 11 Ahau 18 Mac. The glyphs are small and beautifully executed. It was included in our original inventory of I. S.

After finishing with this I went back to see Frances' work once more and then went over to Structure B where Gustav had his gang at work.

Stela 4, which I suspected yesterday of having an I. S. proved to have one on its left side after Isidro had cleared away the roots of a wild fig which entirely hid the upper half of the left side.

This was not reported as an I. S. in our original tour of inspection, but it now becomes our 37th. Unfortunately the katun coef. is missing, the uinals and kins are surely 0, and the day-sign coef. probably 5 or 10. My decipherment 9.14.10.0.0 5 Ahau may be right, but I have questioned it with 2 interrogation points.

Stela 38 is fallen and I believe has an I. S. though I cannot decipher it. This was not reported in our original inventory and is therefore our 38th.

Stela 39 is in such terrible condition that I could do nothing with it.

Stela 40 has an I. S. on its left side, another new one, our 39th. It records the date 9.13.10.0.0 7 Ahau 3 Cumhu, which is also repeated as a Period Ending on the front in the upper left corner.

An interesting condition occurs here. I noticed yesterday that the upper left corner of this monument was missing. I noticed a piece buried in the ground directly in front and asked Gustav to dig it up today, which he did. This proved to be the missing upper left corner of the stela and records the date 7 Ahau and the upper dot of the corresponding month part 3 Cumhu.

The last of yesterday's suspects, Stela 41, proved to have an I. S. our 40th. This had a wild fig growing on top of it and hiding not only its front but also its left side. The decipherment is not too sure but I think this records the date 9.13.10.0.0 7 Ahau 3 Cumhu, the same as the nearby Stela 40.

At lunch time Victor Audinette had not yet shown up. Frances again did not work in the afternoon so her gang was absorbed in Gustav's again.

I spent most of my time taking notes on the monuments in front of Structure B. Gustav was digging himself in front of Stela 40 and unearthed a great quantity of potsherds of all kinds mixed with charcoal. It looks like a refuse heap and extended to the floor level of this plaza which was well plastered. It is about 15 inches from the present ground level to the floor level.

Most of his men were digging around and in front of Stela 43. In our original tour of inspection I had deciphered this I. S. as 9.4.0.0.0 13 Ahau 18 Yax and as the boys got deeper and deeper on the left side, this reading became verified, for presently they uncovered the "18 Yax".

A tremendous quantity of potsherds came up here, potsherds of all sorts, painted, coiled, black polished, and several little clay figurines, some bones, (deer) and a beautiful finely chipped blade about 5 inches long.

This stela is very fine and I am confident that its contemporaneous date must be much later than this.

Frances came out after lunch to see this monument and then went home to our tent to take a nap. It rained several times this afternoon, not hard, but several different times.

About 3:30 Gustav and I decided to go over to Structure A and climb it to see Karl's new stela, No. 89. We left his men digging in front of Stela 43 and fought our way through the thick bush just east of Structure B until we ran into a line running south past the southeast corner of Structure B when it ran into another bearing generally east. We followed this until it reached Structure A, which we began to climb.

This pyramid goes up very steeply and if it were not for the trees and saplings which grow on its sides would be extremely difficult to climb.

As we approached the top we seemed to come into a different ecological zone altogether. The big trees disappeared and wild hennequen, thorny bush, and even a chacté quite reminiscent of Chichen Itzá, were about us. This sparser growth is undoubtedly due to the fact that there is little water held in the steep upper part of this pyramid and the plant life is more characteristic of our Yucatan flora than it is of the heavier rain forest growth on the ground level here.

Near the top on the front (west) we saw Karl's stela fallen forward on its face, but we pushed on to the top a few meters higher.

Forest, trees, bush everywhere and not a clearing much less a habitation in sight. Depressing it was. A rain storm was in progress to the southwest, and in this direction one could see where the high forest broke and the big akalche everyone speaks of, lies.

John's line comes up the back and some of his boys had stuck a newspaper on a stick. We tried to pick up Shufeldt's ruins to the southwest which Gustav thought he saw from Structure B several days ago but we could not see it.

After looking around a little we came down to the stela which lies on its face. On the left side is an I. S. which apparently records the date 9.15.0.0.14 5 Ix 7 Zac. At the top of the right side is an inverted Ahau with 3 dots above it. On Stela C at Quirigua and on Lintels 2 and 3 at Piedras Negras the inverted Ahau is a substantive for the kin sign and if 3 kins is added to 5 Ix 7 Zac,

the date 8 Caban 10 Zac is reached. The monument has 7 Caban 10 Zac which is probably an error in the original for 8 Caban.

It will be quite delicado turning this over as it lies on the slope but Gustav says he can achieve it and if he says he can he will.

We descended Structure A and then passed Stelae 51 and 52, came back along John's lines to Structure B where the gang had made good headway clearing out in front of Stela 43. It was 4:30 so I came in and had a hot bath. While I was taking it, it poured.

Frances said Victor Audinette was back with a fowl and 24 eggs, for which we had paid at the rate of 6 per peso.

After supper the moon came out and the prospects for tomorrow are clear.

After supper I am writing this diary and getting caught up therein. Tarsisio is playing the phonograph and Frances and John are playing auction whist with Karl and Gustav.

It is very late for us Calakmulers, almost 8:30, and as soon as I close this entry we will all scatter to our respective tarps and to bed.

We now have a total of 40 Initial Series which makes Calakmul one of the most important of all Maya cities in this important respect.

The city must be ranked as Class 2, probably the largest northwestern center of the Old Empire.

April 17 – Sunday

All men reported for work this morning except Juan Andres, one of John's men and Demetric and Jose Carmen. Jesus did not show up during the forenoon though he came back before lunch having bought corn and other viveres for our two cuadrillas.

Rafael, one of the axman, told me this morning that he and Isidro had finished felling the bush up in the plaza where the two rows of standing monuments are, so I decided to work up there and finish Stelae 72, 73, and 74.

Karl was going to work on the Ball Court and went up John's round about north line. We had mislaid a

shovel somewhere and I took my boy, Genaro, with me and sent him into every place we had worked, but he did not find it.

When I got up to the laja Karl already had his man, Francisco Quinjana, at work looking for possible "base stones" such as we had found at Yachilan and Piedras Negras last year. I put Lino to work clearing the laja and went with Karl to see John's monument, the new Stela 92, just north of Mound L.

This is a small stela only 5 feet 4½ inches long over all and the sculptured panel only 3 feet 4 inches long. It is 1 foot 3 inches wide and 9½ inches thick. It is broken in two pieces and the butt is still in situ. In front of it (north) is a very small altar in keeping with the diminutive size of the stela. It is only 1 foot in diameter and 1 foot 2½ inches in thickness.

This stela is in every way similar to the almost identically sculptured Stela 84 in the Main Plaza. There are three glyphs on each side each separated from the other by a thick bar. I could detect no coefficients in any of these six glyphs. The little figure on the front faces the observer's left.

From here I went over to the plaza of the big standing stelae and tackled Stela 72. This has an I. S. noted in our preliminary tour of inspection. This I had not been able to decipher on my original hasty examination but this morning it came out satisfactorily to 9.14.0.0.0 6 Ahau 13 Muan, precisely the same date as Stela 71 north of it and Stela 73 just south of it. I transferred my portable ladder to Stela 73 next, and after Genaro had given its sides a good brushing with my scrubbing brush I verified its I. S. as 9.14.0.0.0 6 Ahau 13 Muan as first read on our preliminary tour of inspection last Sunday, a week ago today. These three monuments therefore, Stelae 71, 72, and 73, the three middle ones of this row of 5 all declare the same date, i.e. 9.14.0.0.0 8 Ahau 13 Muan.

I next transferred myself and my impediments to the last of these five monuments, Stela 74, but its I. S. was not so easy.

The variable central element of the Initial Series introducing glyph seems to be the Venus sign indicating

the month Yax, but I could not decipher this I. S. There is a troublesome Secondary Series at the beginning of the left side apparently consisting of 1.1.13.14 and perhaps leading to the day 6 Ahau. If this last identification is correct it probably is to be interpreted as indicating that Stela 74 was also dedicated in 9.14.0.0.0. In fact I think all five of these stelae were erected to commemorate this particular katun ending.

I was just finishing here when Frances came over. We went to see her laja and Lino, the faithful, had uncovered the figure in the lower left corner of the composition.

We left him working here by himself and went over to the Ball Court where Karl's man has found an excellent floor of hard plaster a good foot below the present ground level. He had not found any "base stones" but he had located the side platforms.

We next returned to camp where I left Frances and went over to Structure B. Here a curious reversal of conditions had come about which deprived me of one I. S. on Stela 38, which I reported first as a suspect and later as an I. S. which I cannot now definitely establish. Which leaves me minus one, and I reported Stela 39 as not having an I. S. or at least I could not find one yesterday and now I have one on it making me a plus one here, or considering the two together the same as before, i.e. a total of 40 I. S. up to now, but additional ones were just ahead.

I had reported Stelae 38 and 35 as without I. S. but this morning we found that both of these had I. S. Also I had reported an I. S. on the west side of Stela 35, but just before noon I found another on the east side. This is the second moment here (Stela 9 being the other) having two I. S. This now brings our total up to 45 I. S. for the site. I did not have time to decipher these granting that I can because they are very much gone – as the luncheon bell rang.

After luncheon I returned to Structure E and finished Stelae 32 and 33, Gustav found the upper part of the right side of Stela 32. This has on it part of the I. S. introducing glyph, 9 baktun and the top of a zero sign of the tun coefficient.

I cannot decipher this but it is almost surely 11 or 12 katuns. It works better as 12 but judging by the other dates around Structure E it would be better some time in Katun 11.

Stela 33 just next it also has an I. S. which seems to be in Katun 11, 12, or 13, again I think it would be better in Katun 11, but I cannot tell. There are some interesting calculations on the back of Stela 33, which I think I can work out but have no time now.

I believe this building has the oldest monuments associated with it of any structure at Calakmul.



Stelas 27 and 28 are the oldest having been dedicated in 9.9.10.0.0, Stelae 32 and 33 perhaps in Katun 11 and Stela 35 surely in 9.11.10.0.0.

Jesus came back after lunch and reported he was not feeling well and could not look for the still missing last Lundell stela, but that tomorrow he will go back out and find it.

John was on top of Structure A this afternoon and yelled over to me and I called back so vigorously that Gustav thought I was hurt and came charging over the top of Structure B to see what was wrong.

He had his gang on the north side of Structure E digging out in front of Stelae 27 and 38 so that we can photograph them.

I came in at four and had a bath and then wrote in this diary. When John came in he reported another stela near 47 between Structures A and B. Gustav, who carried all his tools over to Structure A where we are starting operations in the morning, did a little digging around it and tells me he thinks it was plain.

After supper John went upon Structure F and took an observation on Polaris for latitude. Something was rotten in the State of Denmark since according to him we are some 19 miles inside of Guatemala! He is going to try it again at 11:00.

Well and so to bed, 7:40 P. M.