# A Note on the Inscription of Ixtutz Stela 4

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Introduction

Although Ixtutz was first discovered by Colonel Modesto Méndez and Eusebio Lara in 1852, the explorers only published a brief and largely inaccurate description along with two fanciful drawings of its stelae, and so the site soon descended again into obscurity and was lost for over a century (Ritter 1853; Blom 1940). The first reliable description had to await three visits by Merle Greene Robertson in 1970-1971 and the publication by her of a site map and photographs and rubbings of its monuments (Robertson 1972). Later years saw the publication of a synthesis of what was then known of the site (Mayer 1976) and the visits of Eric Von Euw and Ian Graham in 1972 (Graham 1980: 171-2). Von Euw and Graham discovered the inscription on Ixtutz Stela 4, and they also published a site map, as well as photographs and drawings of all the Ixtutz monuments then known (Stelae 1-4 and eleven fragments of Panel 1) (Graham 1980: 171-184). Since then some further fragments of Ixtutz Panel 1 have surfaced, and eleven fragments of Ixtutz Panel 2 were discovered by Juan Pedro Laporte and Carlos Rolando Torres during their important regional survey of the Dolores Valley, Guatemala (Laporte and Torres 1987: 11-12, fig. 9; see also Escobedo 1991). In this note, I build on these previous studies with a consideration of the inscription on Ixtutz Stela 4. This unique, all-glyphic monument presents an interesting characterization of the Late Classic political landscape
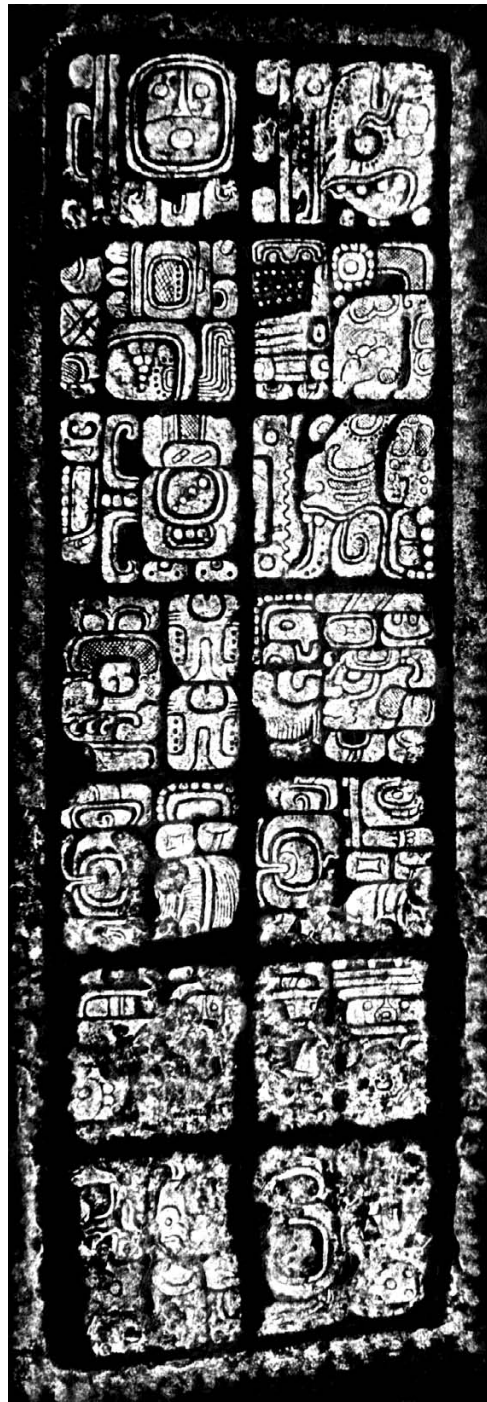
Stela 4. Rubbing by Merle Greene Robertson.

of the Southeast Petén from the point of view of one particular Ixtutz monarch.

Ixtutz Stela 4 once stood in Group A at the base of the platform of Structures 9, 10 and 11. According to Graham (1980: 181), the stela was carved on its front side only, and this seems to be borne out by its glyphic text, which shows every sign of being complete and makes no mention of any accompanying figure. The inscription on the stela's face is 14 glyph-blocks long—incorporating some 85 individual signs—and arranged in typical double-column format. On the whole, the inscription is excellently preserved, owing no doubt to its having fallen face-down in antiquity. That said, the lower half of the monument has been substantially eroded due to water- and root-action, causing the porous limestone to spall, and this has greatly reduced the legibility of the final four glyph-blocks.

Comments on the Inscription

In Table 1, on the following page, I present a full transcription, transliteration and translation of the inscription, keyed to Graham's (1980: 181) numeration of the text. Some comments and clarifications seem in order, however, and so are added here.

There seems little doubt that the opening date, 12 Ahau 8 Pax (at A1-B1), refers to the 'lahuntun'-ending of 9.17.10.0.0, or November 28th, A.D. 780 (Escobedo 1991; Grube and Schele 1995: 145). As we will see below, the following verbs confirm this as a period-ending date and one that is also restated as the probable dedication

Table 1: Analysis of the Text		
LOC.:	TRANSCRIPTION	TRANSLITERATION
A1:	XII-**'AJAW**	*lajchan-'ajaw*
B1:	VIII-**TE'-PAX**-xi-la	*waxak-te'-pax-iil*
A2:	**'U-tz'a-pa-wa-TUUN**-ni	*'u-tz'ap-aw-Ø tuun*
B2:	**'U-CHOK-ko-wa-ch'a**-ji	*'u-chok-ow-Ø ch'aaj*
A3:	**'a-ya-YAX-ja**-la	*'a[j]-(ya)yax-j-al*
B3:	**B'AAK**-GOD	*b'aak*-GOD
A4:	**'U-CHAN-na-b'o-b'o**	*'u-chan b'o[h]b'*
B4:	**K'UH(UL)**-lu-V-**KAB'-'AJAW**-wa	*k'uhul ho'-kab' ajaw*
A5:	yi-**'ILA-'a-K'UH(UL)-MUT**-la-**'AJAW**	*y-ila'-Ø k'uhul mutuul 'ajaw*
B5:	yi-**'ILA-'a**-VIII-**WINIK**-ki-**'AJAW-TAAK**	*y-ila'-Ø waxak-winik-'ajaw-taak*
A6:	*IV-**HAAB'**-*ji-*ya-*u-*ti-*ya-II-**'AJAW**-?-?	**chan-haab'-j-iiy 'u[h]t-iiy-Ø cha'-'ajaw *waxak-*k'anasi*
B6:	**'i**-*u-ti-XII-**'AJAW**-VIII-**PAX**-xi	*'i-u[h]t-i-Ø lajchan-'ajaw waxak-[te']-pax-[iil]*
A7:	?-?-?-?-?-**'a**?	*?*
B8:	***OCH-K'IN**-ni-?-?-**b'i**	*'och-i-k'in? ?-*nib'?*

TRANSLITERATION AND FREE TRANSLATION:

lajchan-'ajaw waxak-te'-pax-iil 'u-tz'ap-aw-Ø tuun 'u-chok-ow-Ø ch'aaj 'a[j]-(ya)yax-j-al b'aak-GOD *'u-chan b'o[h]b' k'uhul ho'-kab' ajaw y-ila'-Ø k'uhul mutuul 'ajaw y-ila'-Ø waxak-winik-'ajaw-taak *chan-haab'-j-iiy 'u[h]t-iiy-Ø cha'-'ajaw *waxak-*k'anasi 'i-u[h]t-i-Ø lajchan-'ajaw waxak-[te']-pax-[iil] ? 'och-i-k'in? ?-*nib'?*

"It is 12 Ahau 8 Pax (9.17.10.0.0, November 28th, A.D. 780). Aj Yaxhal B'aak, the Master of Coyote, the Holy Lord of Ixtutz, drives the stone into the ground and throws incense. The Holy Lord of Mutuul witnesses it. Twenty-eight lords witness it also. It had been four years since 2 Ahau 8 Kayab (9.17.6.0.0, December 23rd, A.D. 776) when it came to pass on 12 Ahau 8 Pax at the West ?-Place that ... ? ..."

date of the monument (at B6b). An interesting feature of this restatement is the variable representation of the **TE'** numeral classifier for counts of months. While the sign appears in the first occurrence of the date (at B1), it does not reappear in that date's restatement (at B6b). By all accounts, however, the numerical classifier is an obligatory feature of the language, and so it seems most likely that spatial considerations were the motivating factor behind its variable presence in the script. That is, while there was plenty of room to include the **TE'** sign in block B1— where '8 Pax' fills an entire glyph-block—there is far less room at B6b, where essentially the same notation is squeezed into only one quarter of the space. In such instances, we have the testimony of the surviving languages that *-te'* would have been pronounced in the reading of the passage, regardless of whether it was recorded or not (Thompson 1950: 55-57; Macri 2000: 13-15). The two main verbs of the monument follow next (at A2-B2) and are very typical active transitive declarative constructions (see Wald 1994). The first can be analyzed as follows:

'U-tz'a-pa-wa-TUUN-ni
'u-tz'ap-aw-Ø tuun
3sE-DRIVE.INTO.GROUND-tv.-3sA STONE
"he drives the stone into the ground"

Note that while the direct object, *tuun* "stone," is both explicitly mentioned and referenced by the *-Ø* third-person singular absolutive pronoun (3sA), the grammatical subject is only referenced via the *'u-* third-person singular ergative prefix (3sE). This is in fact a typical pattern of verbal couplets in the script, and fuller mention of the grammatical subject is deferred until after the next transitive verb:

'U-CHOK-ko-wa-ch'a-ji
'u-chok-ow-Ø ch'aaj
3sE-THROW-tv.-3sA INCENSE
"he throws incense"

Here the active transitive declarative suffix (tv.)—canonically of the form $-V_1w$ which, as we have seen, was expressed as *-aw* in the inflection of the *tz'ap* verb above (at A2)—is now expressed as *-ow*, reflecting the important consideration that the vowel of this suffix always echoes the vowel of the verb-root, in this

case the medial *-o-* in the verb *chok* "to throw" (at B2) (Wald 1994). The names and titles of the grammatical subject of both verbs (*tz'ap* and *chok*) follow immediately on the heels of this second verb, and take up the next four glyph-blocks (A3-B4):

'a-ya-YAX-ja-la B'AAK-GOD 'U-CHAN-na-b'o-b'o K'UH(UL)-lu-V-KAB'-'AJAW-wa
'a[j]-yax-j-al-b'aak-GOD *'u-chan b'o[h]b' k'uhul-ho'-kab'-'ajaw*
ag.-GREEN/BLUE-inch.-nom.-BONE-GOD 3sE-MASTER COYOTE HOLY-FIVE-EARTH-LORD
"Aj Yaxjal B'aak GOD, the Master of Coyote, Holy Lord of Ho' Kab' (Ixtutz)"

Blocks A3-B3 record the proper name of the text's protagonist, which incorporates the *aj-* agentive prefix (ag.), the colour *yax* "green/blue", the *-(a)j* inchoative suffix (inch.) and the *-al* nominalizing suffix (nom.), all of which are followed by the noun *b'aak* "bone" and the portrait glyph of a poorly-known deity, which I have simply transcribed as GOD. Taken as a whole, then, the sense of the full name is "He, Bone-Becoming-Green/Blue GOD".[1] While somewhat uncanny, the name recalls similar glyphic epithets for Chaahk, the Classic rain deity, underscoring the supernatural nature of the entity in question. Because the final glyph of his name remains undeciphered, however, I will hereafter refer to him simply as Aj Yaxjal B'aak.[2]

To move on to Aj Yaxjal B'aak's titles, block A4 provides the well-known and much-discussed "captor" compound. We now know that the possessed noun *cha'an* (here seen in its somewhat later form *chan*) meant "master" or "guardian", and that it was often employed as a lordly title, making specific reference to individuals captured on the field of battle (Alfonso Lacadena,

personal communication 2000). Here, Aj Yaxjal B'aak takes the title "Master of B'ohb'," and thereby claims to have captured an individual of unknown affiliation who was probably named B'ohb' or "coyote."[3] Interestingly, this portion of Aj Yaxjal B'aak's title-string also appears on one of the fragments of Ixtutz Panel 1 (Graham 1980: 183, fragment XI: 1-2), which was found by Merle Greene Robertson amidst the rubble on the south side of Structure 1 (Robertson 1972: 94). This conspicuous mention of Aj Yaxjal B'aak, then, may suggest that he was responsible for commissioning much of the surviving monumental art of the main plaza.[4]

At B4, of course, is the so-called Ixtutz 'emblem glyph' (Escobedo 1991; Stone 1995: 179, figs. 7-28, f-h). Syntactically, this is really only a title identifying Aj Yaxjal B'aak as the reigning lord of his city, which seems to have been named *ho'-kab'* in ancient times.[5] To date, unfortunately, only five certain examples of this rare 'emblem glyph' are known. Three are from Ixtutz itself (IXZ St.4: B4, IXZ Panel 1: frag. II: 3 and IXZ Panel 2: frag. 5: 2), all clearly couched in local references, while two others appear in the Late Classic painted texts of Naj Tunich, a large cave complex located just 35 kilometers southeast of the city (Stone 1995: 222, drawings 68-69). It is admittedly odd that no clear mention of Ixtutz is made in any of the surviving inscriptions from Ixkun and Sacul, neighbouring sites just 10 and 20 kilometers away, respectively. That said, many of the inscriptions of these sites are badly eroded, and so may well have once made mention of Ixtutz. Indeed, Ixkun St. 12 also makes reference to the 9.17.10.0.0 'lahuntun'-ending, and this may suggest some connection between the two closely spaced sites (Grube and Schele 1995: 145; Stanley

Guenter, personal communication 2001). Unfortunately, the text breaks off almost immediately after this passage, and it is therefore impossible to confirm whether its mention of the same date is truly significant.

The next passage (A5-B5) contains a very interesting verbal couplet. Typically involving transitive roots, these 'secondary verbs' are always of dependant status, referring back to the action of a previous verb. As Barbara MacLeod (personal communication 2001) has demonstrated, such constructions are most often employed in Mayan monumental rhetoric to introduce new agents, individuals who are thereby understood to have been involved in "overseeing", in some manner, the events of the previous clause:

yi-'ILA-'a-K'UH(UL)-MUT-la-'AJAW yi-'ILA-'a-*VIII*-*XX*-ki-'AJAW-TAAK
y-ila'-Ø k'uhul mutuul 'ajaw y-ila'-Ø waxak-winik-'ajaw-taak[6]
3sE-SEE-3sA HOLY-MUTUUL-LORD 3plE-SEE-3sA TWENTY=EIGHT-LORD-pl
"The Holy Lord of Mutuul witnesses it. The twenty-eight lords witness it [also]."

This passage is a fairly clear acknowledgement of the political subordination of Ixtutz to a higher-order center named Mutuul. This is without doubt one of the Petexbatun hegemons, and most likely either Seibal/La Amelia or

Aguateca.[7] Indeed, this passage is very much akin to sublord-overlord texts known from the Petexbatun region proper, especially those from Dos Pilas itself (e.g. DPL Panel 19: F-G in Houston 1993: 115). Like those texts, an important foreign lord is present at the Ixtutz period-ending events, and he brings with him twenty-eight other prominent nobles. Whether these conspicuous nobles are from the foreign lord's polity, from territories surrounding Ixtutz, or lords allied to both polities is unfortunately unsaid, though the latter possibility seems the most likely. Most interesting, however, is the consideration that the Mutuul king is here unnamed, being referred to only by his emblematic title. This may well have something to do with the political fragmentation of the Petexbatun region at this time, with no less than four kings from four different sites laying claim to the Mutuul emblem glyph and the legacy of Dos Pilas (Martin and Grube 2000: 64-5). Perhaps the Ixtutz king considered it unwise to tip his hand by naming any one of the competing Mutuul kings outright.

Sadly, four badly eroded glyph-blocks follow. While both verb and subject (at A7-B7) are too damaged to be confidently read, the surviving portions of the distance number (I, II, III, or IV-**HAAB'** at A6a) and calendar round (II-'**AJAW** III or VIII-? at A6b) allow us to confidently reconstruct the calendric portion of the passage as follows:

Map Courtesy of Mesoweb.

9.17.10.0.0 12 Ahau 8 Pax (Nov. 28, A.D. 780)
- _____*4.0.0_ [DN]
9.17. 6.0.0 2 Ahau 8 *Kayab (Dec. 23, A.D. 776)

Thus, the text seems to refer back to the events of a date some four years prior to the period-ending discussed above. Without mentioning the events or actors of that earlier date, the text then returns to the 9.17.10.0.0 12 Ahau 8 Pax opening date. Given the lack of information regarding the 9.17.6.0.0 2 Ahau 8 Kayab date, we can probably assume that it referred in some manner to Aj Yaxjal B'aak, and that he was in power at this time.[8] As regards the latter date, it is most likely to have been the actual dedication date of the stela in question, and I would hazard a guess that the missing glyphs (A7-B7) provided some further information about the location and purpose of the dedicatory rites conducted on that day.[9]

Concluding Remarks

To the extent that we can rely on the testimony of local records, Aj Yaxjal B'aak seems to have been a ruler of some prominence. Most of the surviving texts make reference to his success in warfare, and there can be little doubt that he commissioned much of the monumental art of the Group A Plaza. He seems in any event to have erected Stela 4 alongside a number of other carved and uncarved monuments at the very end of the rainy season in A.D. 780. Comparison with the royal histories of other centers demonstrates that this was a time of great regional political instability (Escobedo 1991),

no doubt exacerbated by the fall of the Petexbatun hegemony of Dos Pilas less than two decades earlier (Martin and Grube 2000: 63-7). In seeming defiance of the increasingly volatile political climate, Aj Yaxjal B'aak celebrated the period-ending at his own center of Ixtutz, in the Great Plaza of Group A, where he erected his stela and scattered incense before the watchful eyes of a new overlord whose name he did not even deign to record. By all accounts, the foreigner was one of a number of petty kings striving for the rapidly diminishing glory of the crown of the Petexbatun.

Twenty-eight other lords—both local and foreign to the Dolores Valley—attended the festivities and watched the sacred calendar rites. Some of them were almost certainly the heads of local city-states like Ixkun and Sacul, who probably watched Aj Yaxjal B'aak of Ixtutz with envious eyes. Why had the new Petexbatun ruler chosen to attend the festivities at Ixtutz and not at their centers? What was Aj Yaxjal B'aak planning? Other visitors were almost certainly allies of the Ixtutz king, who watched the Mutuul lord, his Petexbatun retinue and the lords of the local city-states warily. How many men had each of these visiting lords brought? Were all of them present and accounted for?

Keeping watch on the participants and all of their machinations and intrigues was the seemingly mute slab of stone now known as Ixtutz Stela 4. Little did any of the guests suspect that it would still bear witness to the political climate of the Late Classic Southeast Petén some twelve hundred years later.
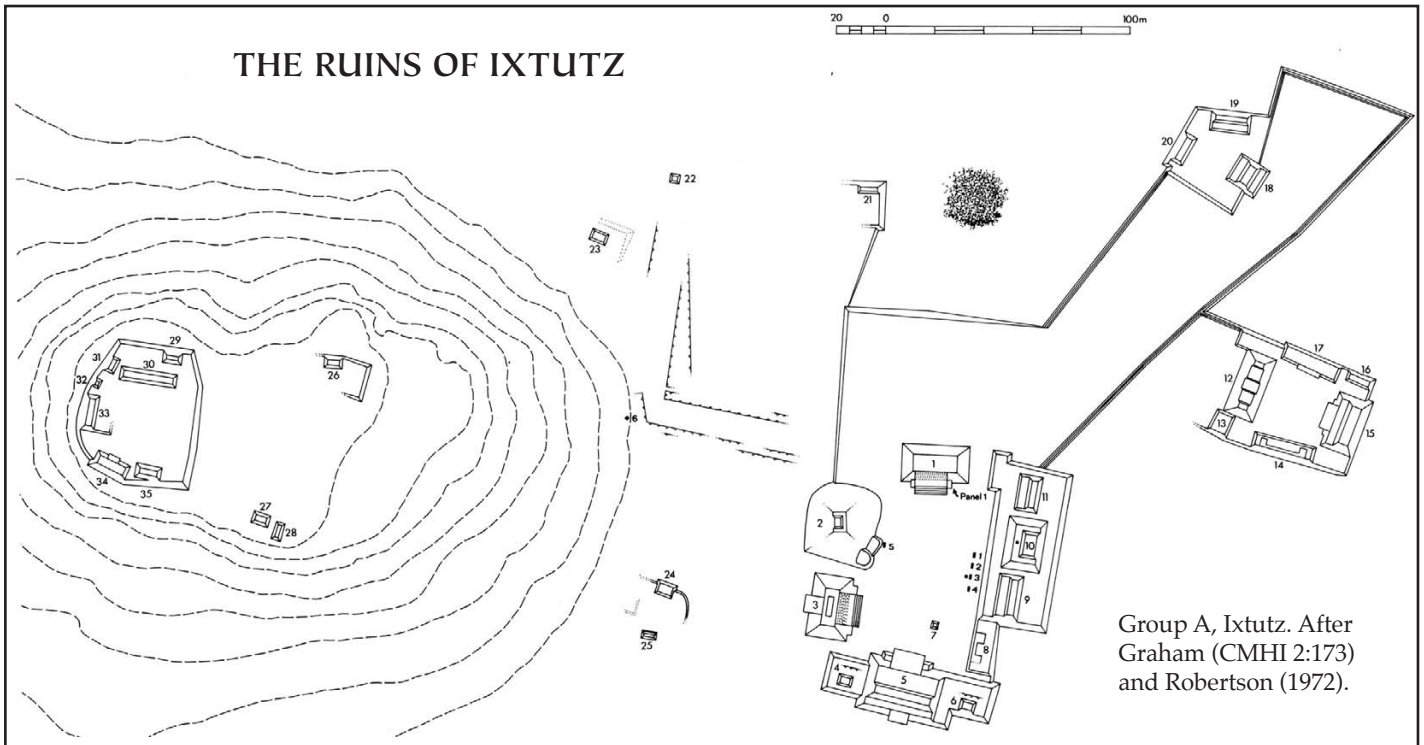
THE RUINS OF IXTUTZ

Group A, Ixtutz. After Graham (CMHI 2:173) and Robertson (1972).

Transliteration and free translation:

lajchan-'ajaw waxak-te'-pax-iil 'u-tz'ap-aw-Ø tuun 'u-chok-ow-Ø ch'aaj 'a[j]-yax-j-al b'aak-GOD 'u-chan b'o[h] b' k'uhul ho'-kab' 'ajaw y-ila' k'uhul mutuul 'ajaw y-ila' waxak-winik 'ajaw-taak chan-haab'-j-iiy 'u[h]t-iiy-Ø cha' 'ajaw waxak-k'anasi 'i-u[h]t-i-Ø lajchan-'ajaw waxak-te'-pax-iil ? och-i-k'in?-?-nib'?
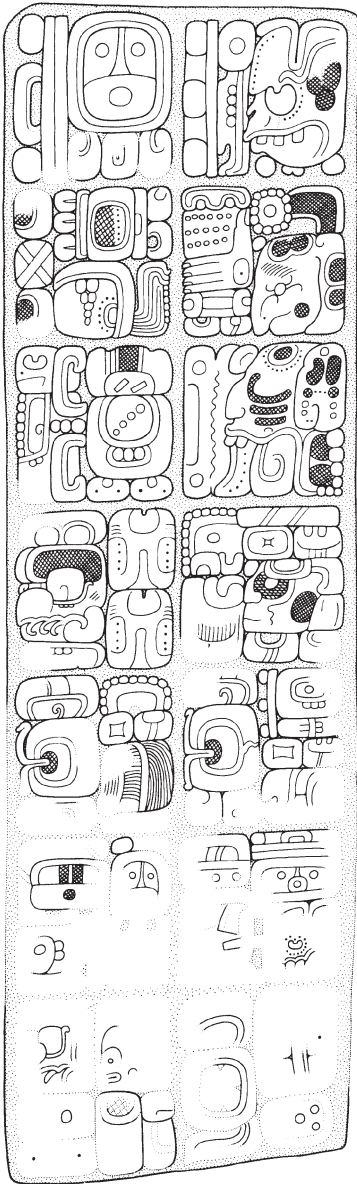
Stela 4. Drawing by Ian Graham, Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions (Graham 1980:181).

"It is 12 Ahau 8 Pax (9.17.10.0.0, November 28th, A.D. 780). Aj Yaxjal B'aak, the Master of Coyote, the Holy Lord of Ixtutz, drives the stone into the ground and throws incense. The Holy Lord of Mutuul witnesses it. Twenty-eight lords witness it also. It had been four years since 2 Ahau 8 Kayab (9.17.6.0.0, December 23rd, A.D. 776) when it came to pass on 12 Ahau 8 Pax at the West ?-Place that ... ? ... "

Acknowledgments

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Endnotes

[1] It is possible that the **ya-** prefix, which I have taken as a redundant phonetic complement to **YAX** "green/blue," might be morphologically productive, cueing *yayax*, a partially reduplicated form meaning "rather green/blue." Reduplication of syllable onsets marks the augmentative in many Lowland Mayan languages. If this is the correct analysis, the individual's name may actually have been Aj Yayaxjal B'aak GOD or "He, Bone-Becoming-Rather-Green/Blue GOD." I mention this because it is a valid possibility that may yet prove correct. For the purposes of this paper, however, I follow the former analysis.

[2] The glyph in question—T1058a in Thompson's (1962) numeration—is the portrait head of an agnathic deity with conspicuous blood scrolls issuing from its mouth, a jaguar ear and aqueous markings in lieu of an eye. This portrait glyph is most common, perhaps, in the title-string of 'Bird-Jaguar' IV of Yaxchilan, and has been observed to alternate with an as-yet-undeciphered 'axe-earth' compound in the names of Lady K'ab'al Xook of Yaxchilan (cf. YAX L.24 with the front edge of YAX L.25) and K'an Joy Chitam II of Palenque (cf. especially PAL PT: D8 and O8). Phonetic clues from these and other contexts suggest that the sign is of the form CVn or CVCVn, though little more can be determined at present.

[3] The semantic identification is due to Alfonso Lacadena and Soeren Wichmann (personal communications, 2000-2001), and is based in part on Ch'orti' *b'ohb'* "coyote" (Pérez Martínez et al. 1996: 26), Itzaj *b'oo'* "lion-like beast" (Hofling and Tesucún 1997: 187) and Yukatek <bob> "a mythological animal" (Barrera Vásquez 1980: 58).

[4] I strongly suspect that Stelae 1, 2 or 3 (if not all of them) once depicted Aj Yaxjal B'aak and his poor captive B'ohb'. Sadly, the monuments are now too eroded to confirm this suspicion. In any event, their relative contemporaneity with Stela 4 is indicated both by sculptural style (Proskouriakoff 1950) and in that they form a cohesive constellation on the eastern end of the main plaza. Moreover, all four stelae are seemingly served by a single uncarved altar at the base of Stela 3, suggesting that they were all put up within a few years of one another, and probably all during the reign of Aj Yaxjal B'aak. As David Stuart (personal communication 2001) reminds me, however, the name of quite a different king appears on Ixtutz Panel 2 (Laporte and Torres 1987: fig. 9) and we must therefore be cautious in ascribing to Aj Yaxjal B'aak all of the credit for Ixtutz Group A.

[5] Literally, *ho'-kab'* translates as "five-earth/land" or "five milpas" (cf, Chontal *kab'* "tierra", Ch'olti' <cab> "tierra", Tzotzil *chob'* ~ *chab'* "milpa" and Proto-Ch'olan **kab'* "earth, land; town," Kaufman and Norman 1984: 122). One wonders whether this might not have been a reference to the orchards and milpa-gardens arguably present in the site center (Robertson 1972: 101-4; Chase and Chase 1983).

[6] David Stuart (Stuart et al. 1999: II-25) deciphered the T559[544] sign as **TAAK**.

[7] Stanley Guenter (personal communication 2001)—citing foreign mentions of Aguateca at both La Amelia and Seibal during this same period—suggests that Tan Te' K'ihnich of Aguateca is the best candidate for the Mutuul lord here mentioned.

[8] Indeed, the 9.17.6.0.0 date may well have been Aj Yaxjal B'aak's first period-ending in office, or a date of similar importance that would likely have been recorded in more detail on one of the other nearby stelae.

[9] As Stanley Guenter (personal communication 2001) points out to me, the penultimate glyph-block (B7a) may well record the **OCH-K'IN-ni** > *och-i-k'in* "west" collocation, an identification which I find quite probable. Indeed, I wonder whether the final **b'i** sign (at B7b) may not be the surviving portion of one of the uncommon *-nib'* locative instrumental suffixes attested on some contemporaneous monuments of the region (e.g. NAR St.13: F16, NAR St.21: B13, PUS St. D: C13, E14 and TAM H.S.3: Step VII, D1). If this latter interpretation is correct, then the final glyph-block may well have recorded a toponym of Ixtutz (*och-i-k'in ?-nib'* "west ?-place") as the location of the period-ending ceremonies described.