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The Lost Field Notebook Restored

MERLE GREENE ROBERTSON

Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute

The Merle Greene Robertson Archives are housed on the third floor of the Latin American Library at Tulane University and were spared by the catastrophic flood caused by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. However, a single volume of field notes was to be in an exhibit in the Newcomb Gallery on the ground floor of another building. Bound in black hardcover and devoted to Yaxchilan, Altar de Sacrificios, and Dos Pilas, this volume was destroyed by the floodwaters.

By a stroke of good fortune, some of the pages of the lost volume were photographed before the collection was sent to Tulane. The way that came about was that a television crew was interviewing me and photographs were taken of about fifteen pages of my field notebooks, including the lost one. These have been scanned, cleaned up, and put into the computer. Hours have been spent going through the 69 letters I wrote to my mother while I was working in the jungle and all of the journals written by both my husband Bob and myself, clearing up details and dates. Although this doesn't take the place of the field book, we believe that it helps capture some of the events referred to in it. The first part, dated July 1, 1965, is word for word what I wrote to my mother on a long narrow piece of torn rice paper.

Thursday, July 1, 1965

Dear Mother: Although I have been to Yaxchilan several times already, today is something special—6 days working there, up the Usumacinta River, Piedras Negras and Bonampak with the Lacondons. The four of us, Richard Chayel, our guide,

Pancho and I flew over the mountains to Agua Azul this a.m. early. The four of us were all crammed into a two-seater along with all of our luggage so we were practically on top of each other. It was thrilling flying over the water and dense jungle, huge folded mountains, and jungle so dense that if a plane ever fell, you'd never find it, even from the air. Part of the time we were in Guatemala and part of the time in Mexico. To land at Agua Azul, you pull up right to the Guatemala side, straighten out and land exactly on the bank of the Mexican side on a grass field. You really have to be an experienced pilot in these parts to do it.

Agua Azul is a delightful place on the river, palm trees and one large Maya hut where the caretaker lives. As soon as we landed we were given hot coffee. Pancho got the fellows to load the gas and our equipment in a dugout canoe to go down the river. They had 20 or more guacamayas (beautiful red, yellow and blue parrots) that were very tame. We took many pictures. By the time we were ready to start it was already raining. We sat on boxes in the bottom of the dugout. It would pour for an hour and then the sun would come out for 20 minutes, then rain again. It was fascinating, even if we were soaked. We saw alligators, dozens of guacamayas, a huge bushmaster, the only one we saw not in dense jungle. Once we got into a whirlpool in the middle of the river and were whirled around a couple of times. We came to Bethel in one hour, then Balam Kanan 10 minutes later on the Guatemala side, then Yaxchilan.

We arrived at Yaxchilan just as it quit

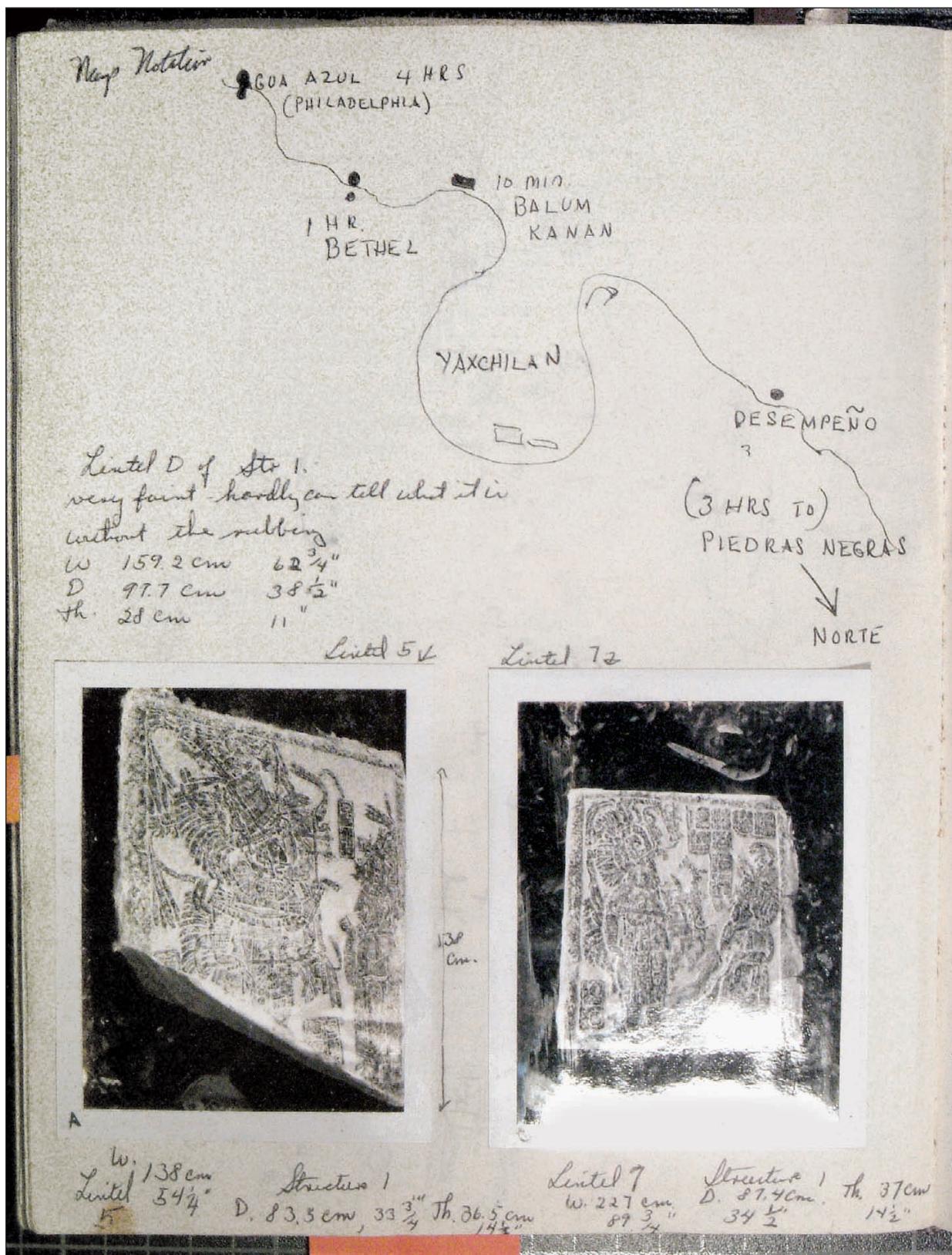


Figure 1. Page of the lost field book showing my sketch map of Yaxchilan and the Usumacinta (north is down) and photographs of the rubbings of Yaxchilan Lintels 5 and 7. The rubbings themselves are in the archive at Tulane.

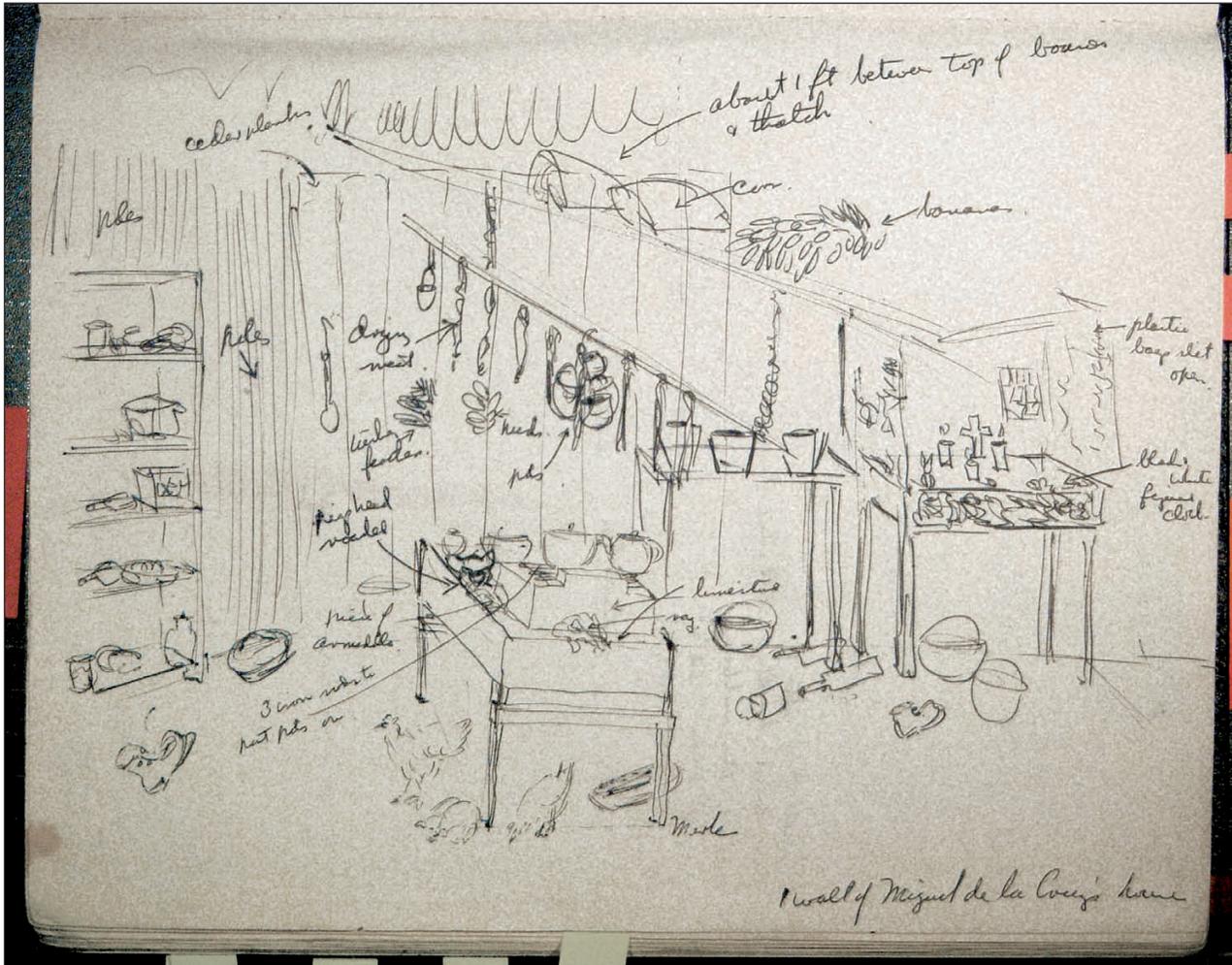


Figure 2. My sketch of the house of the Miguel De La Cruz family.

raining. It is quite a place, only one family living here, the De La Cruz family. They and their 10 children, quite delightful, living off here all by themselves, miles from anyone. They live in a thatch Maya house, and have pigs, chickens, a turkey, and a dozen dogs that all live in the dirt-floor hut with them. We thought we were to be camping under trees, but we have a thatch-roof hut with a fence-like enclosure around it about 3 1/2 ft. high. In here we sling our hammocks. Our hosts brought us hot coffee (made by boiling the muddy river water), then cooked eggs and frijoles for us. We had bread and cheese. After getting our gear slung up, we started out to see the ruins, climbing all afternoon to one temple after another.

July 2, 1965

Well, we didn't get much sleep as it poured rain all night. The bathroom is just any old place in the jungle. We were brought water for coffee and eggs, beans

and tortillas. Went on another exploration trip through the ruins. Had plenty of water to drink from the lanai vines, good clear water. We also munched on sugar cane which is delicious to chew. The family gets almost all of their food right there in the jungle—pineapple, mangos, zapote fruit, berries, everything except beans, rice, and salt. The whole extended family lives in one big Maya hut with high thatched roof, no door that opens, no windows, dirt floor, and sides of split poles. They killed a pig while we were there, skinned it out in front of their place, boiled and salted it down, a process that took all day. We munched on fried grits, the roasted rind. They grind this with sugarcane by pushing a pole around and around and around by hand.

I did the most difficult rubbing I have ever done so far today—Lintel 1 of Structure 33. It is over one's head, and you have to lie down on your back and look up in order to see what it is. But getting the wet fragile paper to stay on that overhead location is very frustrating. Over and over again until finally I made it. Then I

did Stela 11, down nearer the river, again very difficult to work on because of the wet mossy surface that had to be contended with first.

Tonight, after a hard day, we had coffee, beans, fried pig and fried bananas—so very good, and then to bed in our hammocks in our wet muddy clothes. My pants were so wet I slept without them on and about froze. You wouldn't believe how cold it gets in the jungle at night.

July 3, 1965

Up at 5:30 and off to the ruins where I did three more rubbings. I needed water from the lanai vines to finish. On the way up I saw (what I thought was) a wild boar. Knowing how dangerous they are, I waited and waited, but as the "boar" didn't move I made a wide circle around it. Coming back late in the day my "wild boar" had just given birth to a litter of baby pigs. My wild boar was one of Miguel's pigs.

July 7, 1965

Working every day. We've been drinking this muddy river water (that is supposedly boiled), but none of us have been sick. Little kids run around with no clothes on and when it rains they get a bath. Chayel didn't want to stay any longer so we left for Agua Azul by dugout canoe. It took about 5 hours in the blazing sun so we are all red but had nothing to put on except ST37 that is for mosquitoes. Saw lots of alligators, iguanas, guacamayas, bushmasters, and a boa constrictor. Ran the rapids—quite exciting, and a little frightening also. What a beautiful day. Got to Agua Azul and slung our hammocks in what has been an old Maya trading port for 60 years for chicleros who bring in alligators, jaguars, panthers and other animals to trade or sell. We had a delicious supper of fish from the river with a super sauce and tortillas. We went swimming in the dirty river and got washed in our "birthday suits." To bed early, but lay in our hammocks and watched the magnificent golden sunset as it slowly hid itself behind the jungle.

July 8, 1965

Went down to the river early and fished. I actually caught a big one, enough for all of us. Saw some deadly snakes along the river edge. Stayed clear. Visited a family along the river who were SO nice. They had the nicest Maya hut and so clean. Also a great grinding stone. She was making some very special tortillas that were as thin as paper and 16" in diameter—absolutely delicious. She also cooked my fish for us. She washed my trousers and I am going around with a towel draped around my middle.

Two chicleros came in from the Lacandon area where they have been for one and a half months hunting alligators and jaguars. They looked really beat. There are several Lacondon here who are married to outsiders. All I've met are very, very nice. A river family we met invited us over this morning. They have the nicest Maya pole house with thatched roof, clean as a whistle—no dirt or anything inside. They had two little girls 1½ and 2, and two boys about 8 and 11. The construction of the house is of poles about 1½" in diameter with spaces between for the breeze to blow through. There wasn't a fly in the place, nor a speck of dirt. A very industrious family. Close by they had a smaller similar thatched roof place where the men chopped wood and prepared it, another for their chickens and another for an outhouse. Most families don't have one.

April 9, 1968

Dear Mother: Left early this morning for Dos Pilas—Francisco, a native guide and his son and me. We had a hard time finding the trail even if my men had worked in there before. In the jungle when a trail isn't used for a month, you can't even find where it existed, so thick is the underbrush, and so fast things grow, decay, drop, and start all over again. We got a fellow from a sugar plantation along the river to show us the way for about 2 km. Fourteen km of climbing to Dos Pilas—what a trek. In the jungle hiking can be most difficult—climbing over and under trees, roots, huge ferns, and decayed stuff. I used to think that you should never go off the trail in the jungle or you were in danger of being bit by a snake. Now I know that if you are going into a place like this with no so-called trails, just be alert and be sure you have a native with you who knows what to do when a snake is encountered.

Yes, I did step on a serpent's head as I was climbing over the trunk of a tree. Francisco made fast work of it with his machete before I even knew what I had stepped on. It happened to be a deadly chapulte, a snake that can whip its body around instantly and strike your leg or body as much as 1½ ft above. Luckily, I had stepped on its head. It is a fairly short snake, about 15" long, fat and has a diamond-shaped head, fangs 2½" long, and a rotten-leaf color. No more excitement until we got to Dos Pilas where we were so exhausted that we flopped on our stomachs and drank from the clear spring water. It is a beautiful spot, named for the two water holes that are there. Spent the rest of the day surveying the site and getting our bearings.

April 10, 1968

Found several of the Hieroglyphic Stairs and the Pro-

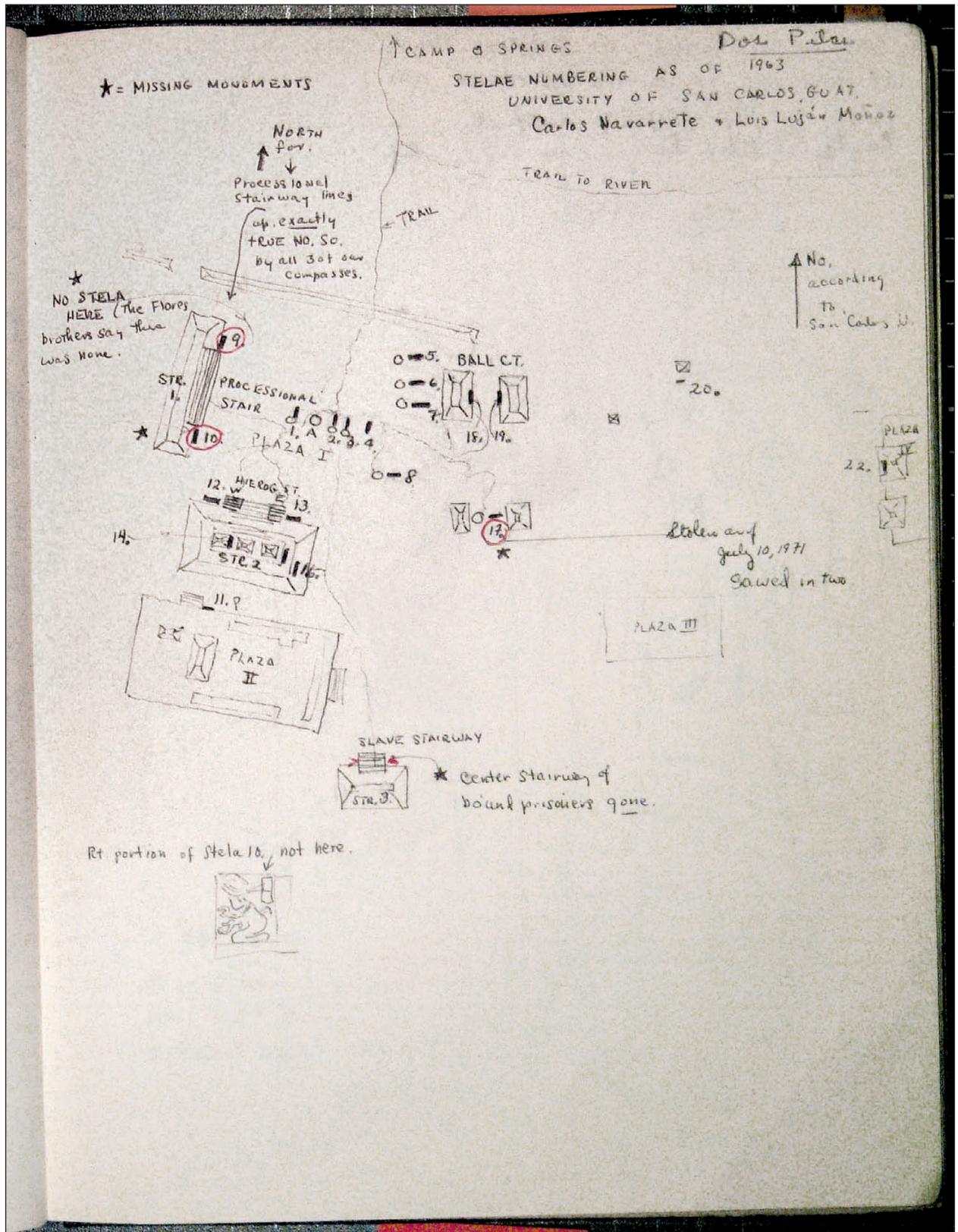


Figure 3. My map of Dos Pilas.

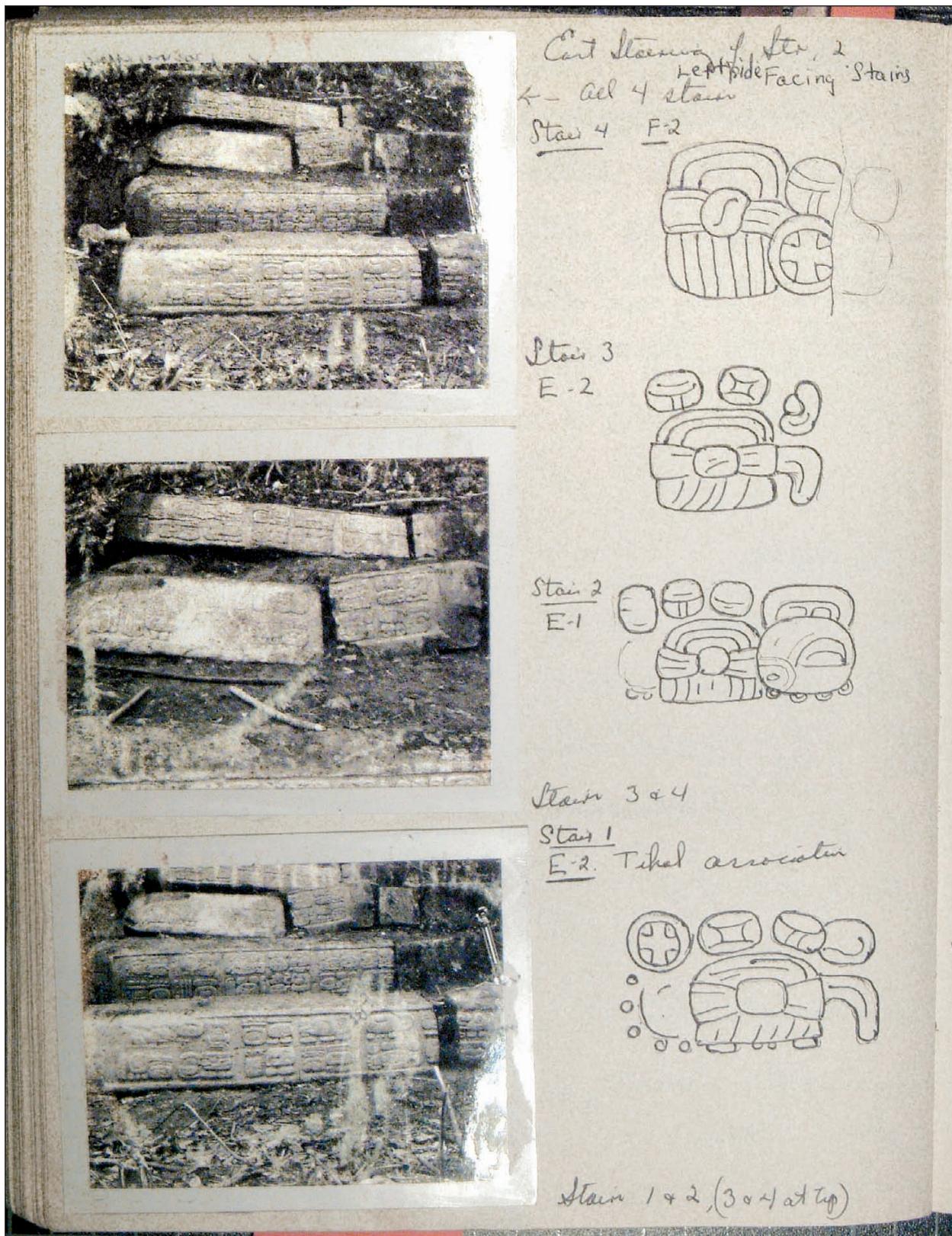


Figure 4. Photographs of the Dos Pilas Hieroglyphic Stairway and my sketches of the Dos Pilas/Tikal emblem glyph. By another stroke of good luck, many of these photographs had been scanned for presentation on the Web at www.mesoweb.com/monuments/DPL_HS2E.html.

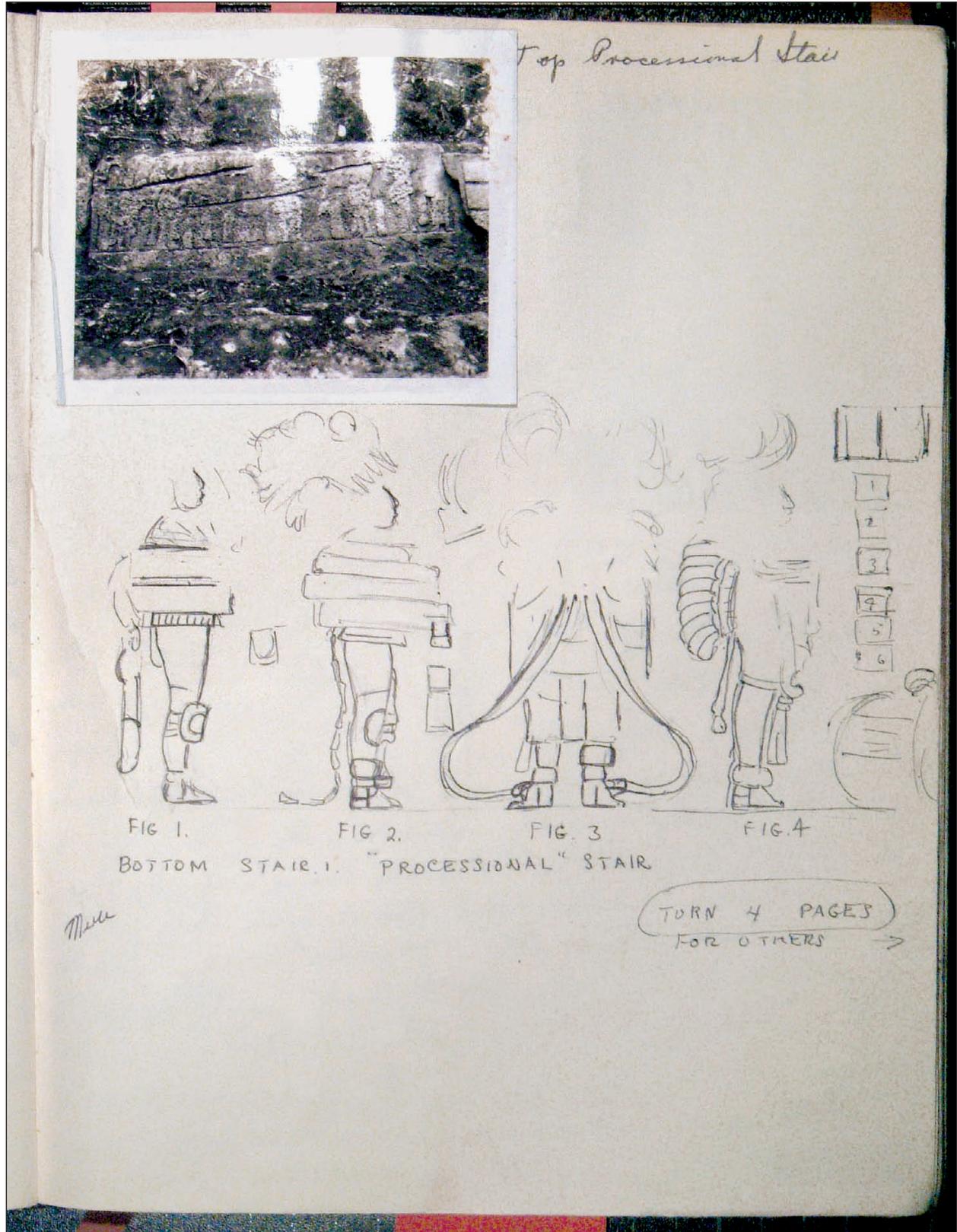


Figure 5. Photograph and sketch of figures from the Dos Pilas Processional Stairs (Hieroglyphic Stairway 1). For a photograph of these figures see www.mesoweb.com/monuments/DPL_HS1.html.

cessional Stairs today. So beautiful—amazing. A lot of time was spent clearing trees in order for the sun to reach the stairs and also to be able to take photographs. Cleaning them was slow work as we had to be sure that the stone was not scratched or chipped, as when wet, the stone is very fragile. The figures in their long flowing gowns were in almost pristine condition. How lucky can we get? One set of seven figures that stood 12" tall especially intrigued me.

April 11, 1968

All day on the Hieroglyphic Stairs, doing rubbings and taking notes and making sketches in my field book of all the details. I am in my tent right now going over some of my drawings.

April 12, 1968

Worked all day on the gorgeous 432 cm high Stela 2, my favorite at Dos Pilas. As it is broken, it had to be done in sections, but what a beauty with the lord wearing a huge eagle-down headdress with the Mexican Year Sign in it. Hanging from the lord's neck is a large skull, and below it is a perky little 13" high owl who wears a bow tie. This "Bow-Tie Owl" is what intrigues me most about this enormous stela. I did a special detail of it on cloth with oil, I liked it so much. The darn mosquitoes are terrible. I had to work on this stela all day while those critters chewed me up all over. I am miserable.

April 13, 1968

What a storm last night. The champa blew down on top of me. Francisco and his son had moved out, they were getting so wet. I was under the champa alone when it came crashing to the ground, huge support pole and all. The main pole 5" in diameter crashed across my hammock about half way up my legs, so the only part that wasn't flattened was the part where my head was. All this at 3:30 in the morning. Francisco dashed over immediately and the three of them got the champa poles off me so I could get out. No, I wasn't hurt. Then a new champa had to be built in the dark in the rain. No fun.

April 14, 1968

Still raining when we got up this morning, but oh how good the coffee tasted, us being all in wet clothes. Actually worked all day in the pouring rain doing rubbings under cover of plastic tents, and of course contending with the darn mosquitoes. Kept Francisco and the boys

busy building fires of termite nests and supplying me with coffee.

April 15, 1968

Broke camp this morning and left this beautiful spot. Back in Sayaxche tonight at Julio Gadoy's. Off to Guatemala City tomorrow.

July 2, 1969

Dear Mother: Heard on the news that Governor Rockefeller seems to be messing everything up in Latin America with relationships between our two countries, especially with his three hour, one day stays in countries, so it was rather heartwarming to Bob and me that we should be so welcomed by everyone we know here, many only casually. First coming into Guatemala migration, the head man spotted us, shook our hands and welcomed us, then right through customs with handshakes, not even a glance at our eight pieces of luggage with all of our equipment. The taxi driver, hotel doorman, the bellhops, dining room manager, waitresses, everyone was so glad to see us. It is this that makes us so endeared to Guatemala. At Tikal and Sayaxche it was the same, so I guess they don't think gringos are all so bad. After five days in Guatemala City getting supplies, food, papers, waiting for the shipment of paper from San Francisco, appointments with Lujan at the Instituto, and with Louis Samayoa at FYDEP, we finally took off on Aviateca for Flores, El Peten. Our friend Mertons was the pilot, so of course we spent an hour with him over coffee at the Flores airport before we took off. Had a brief 20 minutes at Tikal where we visited with Tono Ortiz and the two older boys.

The bus trip to Sayaxche was again remarkable. This time we went on the small bus, would seat eight plus the driver, but can squeeze in fifteen. This time there was only the Flores family, Papa, his 14 year old daughter, a cousin, a younger son and a daughter-in-law, all on the bus, plus Bob and me. It is a miracle how the bus gets anywhere—just an engine surrounded by the barest of framework rattling all the way. In fact, one fellow had to hold on to the gear shift all the time to keep it from jumping into another gear. I'm sure the tires must have been some old kind that didn't need air, it was so rough. This relic didn't have much inside, the interior long ago having been ripped out with some new parts just wired in. For a ceiling light a flashlight was wired up with a cord going to the front of the bus. I suppose the driver did something to turn it on.

We didn't stop as many times in Flores or San Benito as usual to wait for passengers to pack, collect kids,

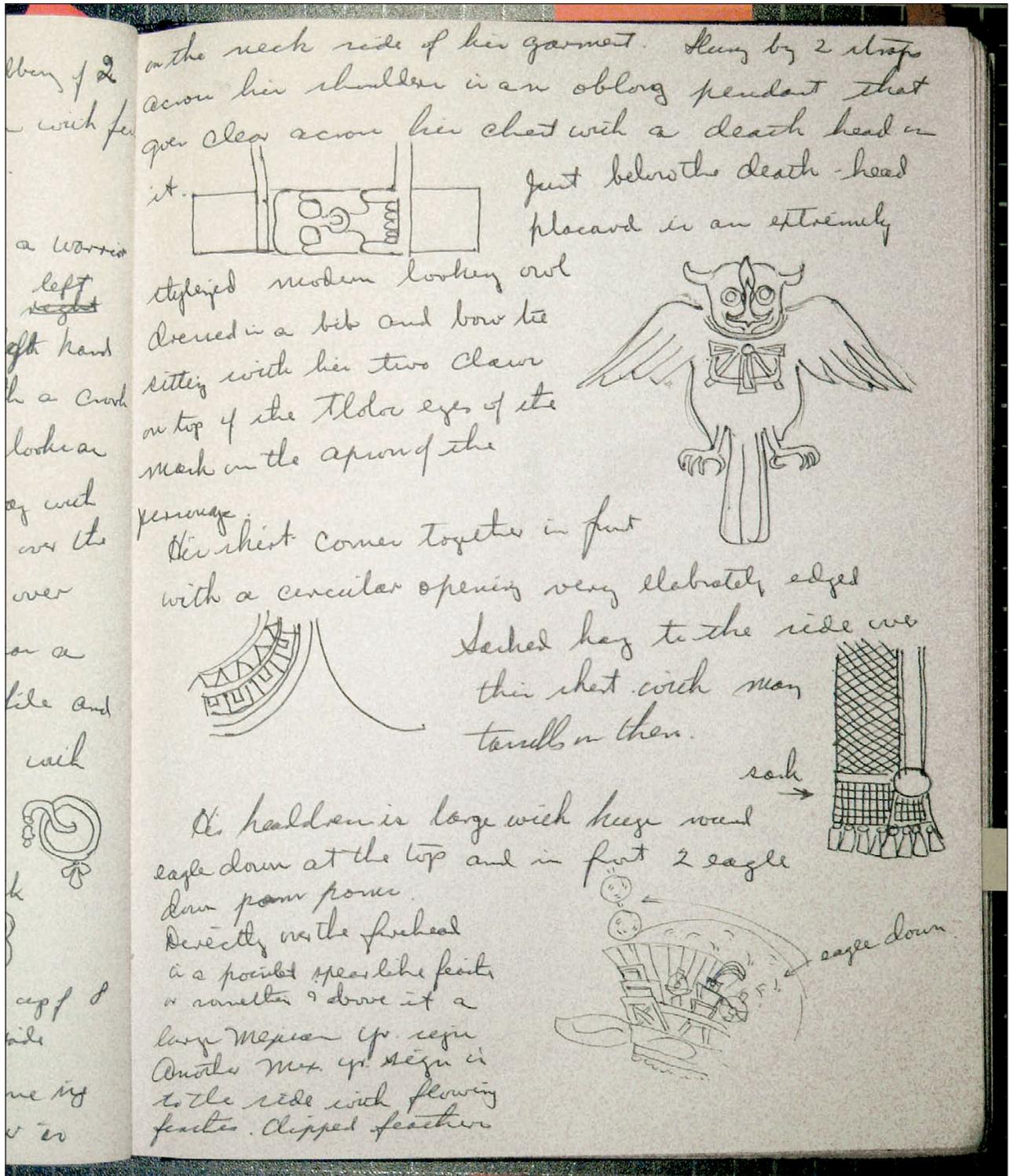


Figure 6. The owl from Dos Pilas Stela 16 and other details.

etc., etc. We only stopped to let everyone get buns, then a cigarette or two, take some gunny sacks into a house, goodbyes to a grandmother, collect some sacks to deliver, etc. The countryside was beautiful after the

recent rain. It looked like the water had been over the road recently also. When we came to a slightly steep grade, we had to wait for a lumber truck ahead to get clear up and over the grade so we could make a mad

dash down and up without stopping.

July 5, 1969

Up early today as we heard that FYDEP wanted to take us to Altar de Sacrificios today, so had to hurry and get all of our gear ready, buy more supplies from Don Julio, and re-pack, plus filing off the lock on our duffle bag of gear we had stored here. Harvard and John Graham of U.C. Berkeley are sending me in to record the monuments by means of rubbings. The FYDEP boat picked us up at 9:00 a.m. The river was beautiful, as only the Pasion can be. It was high, much higher than last time, so many trees looked like they were growing right out of the water. The motor was so noisy, no one said anything. I know Bob and I just soaked the beauty in, it was so great being on the Pasion again. We saw a few tortugas (turtles), but not many with the river so high. We arrived at Altar four hours later. The FYDEP caretaker Mechel was there who knew we were expected. After signing all the usual papers, we were deposited in the old "Peabody House"—thatched roof, pole and plaster construction with cement floor and screens. The beds were comfortable army cots, luxury, as most of the time we are sleeping in hammocks. Took a quick scout around the ruins. Then the Mechels, Bob and I and Tranquil had a drink of rum and a good time conversing in meager Spanish and English. He speaks very little English, but his wife is much better. We get along great. We even had electricity from a generator for about two hours in the evening. For supper Mina cooked frijoles, rice and shrimp (my concoction), and we had tortillas and some chutney and canned fruit from our rations.

Altar was so overgrown in the five years since Harvard had worked here that, even with John's map, it was very difficult to find things. I did a few rubbings on this first trip, but the darned mosquitoes were so bad that Tranquil had a termite nest burning constantly in front of me, but it did no good. They had eaten over my entire body, even through the double layers of my jeans pocket right on top of their previous bites. I was a bloody mess and miserable, could hardly see through the smoke and flying critters. Bob fared even worse than I did. At night we played poker with young Mechel and his wife sharing rum and goodies like our oysters and sardines in our screened-in "heaven."

July 6, 1969

Tranquil and Bob cleaned Altar 1 today, the most important piece, while I scouted around the site trying to locate things. Later I did a rubbing of the altar amidst throngs of mosquitos. We had to leave for a few days

but will soon be back.

July 9, 1969

Back to Altar for a week. The first night here the senior Sr. Mechel arrived while Bob, Tranquil and I were having our rum and snacks with the young Mechels. Without even waiting to be introduced, he demanded to know who I was. I showed him one of the rubbings I had done and also my permiso papers. His reply was that he didn't take orders from anyone and I had better be out of there by morning or he was going to radio the police and have me put in jail tomorrow. Of course he couldn't do that as his boss Sr. Samayoa is the one who is providing us with our river transportation and had sent a message to him by radio that we would be there. Bob gave him a few stiff drinks of rum and he finally mellowed, but when questioned as to the whereabouts of Stela 5 that was supposed to be by the river, he insisted it was there, but would not show it to us. I did not trust him then and I still don't. We have located Stelae 4, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 18. Rain came early today. Tranquil went down river to a cooperativo to get more men as the monuments are so big it will take more men to turn them. It will take at least eight men to turn Stela 4. It weighs at least three tons, maybe more. The men worked all afternoon until 6:00 turning the stela. Mosquitoes continue to be unbearable. Our clothes are always soaked and muddy, and it's most miserable. All this for science.

The msquitoes here must be the worst anyplace. We had a smudge fire burning continually that we kept feeding green leaves, a kind that excrete a sap that makes a lot of smoke. And we literally took a bath in ST37 and OFF! to no avail. Bob continues to get the biggest mosquito bites. Altar was constantly having bursts of torrential downpours where everyone had to rush to erect plastic over the monument that I was working on. My boots were so full of mud that they were next to impossible to lift. But I could not stop until finished or the whole thing would be ruined. So it went all day long, water, mud, and the dammed mosquitoes. Bob's bites swell up like blisters, then finally pop. Mine are small and don't form blisters, but they make my legs swell up like a balloon and itch like hell. I have to take a sleeping pill at night in order to get some rest.

On top of everything else we couldn't get the paper to dry in all that wet weather until we resorted to fanning the finished rubbings with burning palm fronds. Consequently the Altar rubbings have plenty of burned places plus gory spots of blood from where the critters would bite me on the face until they were so full of my blood that they could no longer move. Down they would plop onto the paper, souvenir of Altar. I usually

would be working on one stela all day, couldn't leave to eat or all would be ruined. This kept Bob and Tranquil busy bringing me coffee and water all day, making smudge fires, changing plastic coverings, etc. Oh for the life at Altar—mosquitoes, mosquitoes, mosquitoes.

The Minas, who are caretakers of the ruins live nearby with their two children, a girl about nine and a boy eleven. Sr. Mina had lived in Belize so knew some English. He had found a Berlitz English-Spanish book that was almost all ripped apart, but was using it to teach himself and the children English. They have no other book of any kind. Neither he or his wife or the children have ever been to school, but were so eager to learn. Seems such a shame. Tranquil and Bob helped them with their English every day. They so appreciated that. Mrs. Mina cooked dinner for us one evening along with our addition of canned franks and beans. Suddenly while sitting there in the simplest of huts with these people who had no schooling at all, I realized how much I was enjoying just being a part of it, the laughter, the mixed conversation of meager Spanish and English. It was quite heartwarming. I am sure they enjoyed the camaraderie as much as we did.

Their hut was immaculate. Two fairly large dogs roamed in and out, plus a variety of chickens. The turkeys seemed to stay outside. Inside, a hammock, a small table, two stools, and two logs, plus a bench for holding things, and the stove completed the furnishings. The stove was in one corner, made of cement blocks so that the cooking part was on top. A bent iron rod held pots over the coals where fagots were pushed in to increase the heat. A mother hen with her baby chicks slept under the stove. Other little chicks scampered around the room. The floor was packed dirt—clean as a whistle. The roof was thatch and the walls of bamboo poles placed vertically and held together with vines. No window, just one door.

The lanterns were most ingenious—an 8" medicine bottle with a hole punched in the tin top through which was thrust a rag (for a wick). The bottle was filled with kerosene. Lo, they had perfect lamps. Two pans, one inside the door and one outside held burning termite nests to keep the mosquitoes away. Those miserable creatures made life miserable for everyone. Ten days at Altar de Sacrificios came to an end and then... The SUN came out, no rain. We couldn't believe it. Just beautiful.

April 17, 1969

Dear Mother: Set out for Dos Pilas at 7:30 a.m.—Tranquil, his brothers Jesus, Juan and Pancho, and me. Took 1½ hours up the Petexbatun River from Sayaxche to

the starting point to Dos Pilas. Again I don't know how in the world the boatman knew where to put into shore for Dos Pilas because the river is so high it is impossible to detect any change, and absolutely no place one could pull up to shore. Matter of fact we poled the boat in under the trees and bushes for about the distance of a block before we came to the place where we were to start out. It took about 15 minutes to get the boys' gear all distributed so they could carry it on tump lines on their heads.

The tump lines are made by stripping the green bark from a tree about 2½" in diameter and pulling with all their force to "skin" it. This is then tied to a rubberized gunny sack that contains our gear. The tump line then goes around their heads. Each one was carrying about 80 lbs. I carried my raincoat, my camera, and the rice paper. I believe the lead man Juan smelled the trail all the way. It was 14 km into Dos Pilas, one heck of a long way, climbing over tree trunks 2½ feet in diameter every third and fourth step.

We finally arrived, caked with mud and wet with perspiration after five hours of walking. Five hours of hiking, completely worn out. For the next three hours, none of us stopped a minute as a storm seemed to be brewing. We had to hurry up and get champas built, one for our kitchen, and a large one for the hammocks. I got my tent up that we bought in Switzerland. Never having looked at it since we bought it, it was quite something putting it up, but it turned out to be the best thing we ever bought.

April 18, 1969

We awoke to a very wet soggy morning. Coffee never tasted better. When we started looking for monuments we discovered that looters had been just recently, probably yesterday, sawing glyphs off the sides of Stela 17 that I had done a rubbing of last year. There were fresh cigarette cartons, new oil cans, a broken but not rusted saw blade, and other things indicating a very recent presence. We sent one of our men immediately down to Sayaxche to report it to the police. The Petexbatun, the Pasion and even the Usumacinta rivers were all being searched, but the looters were not found. Our arrival probably scared them off. I thought the mosquitoes at Altar de Sacrificios were the world's worst, but here at Dos Pilas they hadn't tasted any juicy flesh for a long time, and so I am absolutely eaten alive. Repellant does no good at all, smudge fires that worked somewhat at Altar just don't faze these miserable guys. My only salvation is my little pup tent—about 4½ feet high, inside eight feet by seven feet, with a rubberized floor, double roof, and zips closed.

April 19, 1969

It is now 10 minutes to 7:00 and I am still in my tent. It is pouring rain and none of the boys are up so I'm not getting out in the rain from this dry spot in my tent. I looked at my filthy clothes on the floor. My light blue jeans are completely mud color, and the shirt I wore looks like I must have walked in dirt for a year in it. But I guess I will put them back on although I do have a change, since as soon as I get outside I'll be soaking wet anyway, so I might as well be dirty too. I hear some noise, so I guess the men are up and hopefully building a fire for coffee. Just as I was about to get out of my hammock, I saw a coral snake directly above my head. Tranquil made fast work of it with his machete. I get my dirty clothes on. I feel like I have the mumps, my face is so swollen. It is a good thing Bob didn't come this time or he would have been very sick. He was so terribly bitten at Altar and this is ten times worse. I worked all day on Stela 16, perched on a mountain-side of 45 degrees (actually a temple overgrown with trees and brush). The sun was out when I first started and stayed out until I had the rice paper all pounded in, waiting for it to dry so I could do the rubbing. We had to dig a deep pit at the bottom of the stela as it was in the ground so deep. The the rain came pouring down. A plastic tent was erected over the stela and me, but the deep hole soon filled with water, so I had to do the entire rubbing standing in knee-deep water. And the mosquitoes. I do believe they came for shelter on me. They devoured me all over. It kept Tranquil and the boys busy bailing water out, keeping termite nests burning and occasionally bringing me coffee. I couldn't stop for a minute or the whole rubbing would have been ruined. What a day.

April 20, 1969

Clear this morning. We did rubbings of the two Prisoner Stairs, so much like those at Tamarindito. I love this place so much. As the fellows were fanning the rubbings with burning palm fronds I was standing there watching them, thinking right here on this spot would be a great place for me to build a little retreat where I could come whenever I wanted to... CRASH, thunder, lightning—Tranquil and Juan grabbed me fast and yanked me over. At that exact moment lightning had struck the tree behind the stairs and it came crashing over, right where I had been standing. So much for my little retreat.

I think that archaeologists and the like must have a guardian angel protecting them while they work in this inhospitable overgrown, wet, dense jungle, constantly climbing over huge fallen trees, wading in mud, fighting unsuccessfully the abominable mosquitoes, always on the lookout for deadly snakes. But I love it just the same, and wouldn't change a thing except the mosqui-

toes. On the way up the first day, Juan came across a 14" barba amarilla (a fer-de-lance), then Jesus killed a three-meter deadly green snake climbing up a fallen tree we were just about to climb over. Today Tranquil shot a huge barba amarilla that was five inches in diameter that was going into a cave right by the spring where we get our water. Then a little later Juan and Jesus killed two chapultes, two more barba amarillas and a coral snake. Snake day I would say.

On the way down from Dos Pilas we saw many wild boar and lots of wild turkeys, spider monkeys by the dozens, and howler monkeys that we did not see but sure heard their screaming at us. Most interesting however, we came upon a cayuco (dugout canoe) being made, the kind that is used on the rivers here. First they find a large cedar or mahogany tree. The cayuco being made that we saw was 34-36" across, meaning that the tree had to have been at least 45" in diameter. This dugout was 30 ft long, but they are known to be large enough to hold 1½ tons. After selecting the tree, it is felled, then a pit is dug under it about five feet below the bottom of the log, with the ends still on the ground. The hull is then fashioned standing in the pit. The top and inside of the dugout is hollowed out from above. These are very strong, hardy boats that last for years. We were told that it takes 20 men 20 days from the time they find the tree, fell it, and haul it out on their backs to the river. A boat of cedar like we use costs \$400.

April 21, 1969

Juan and Jesus were going to go hunting the wild boar, but they couldn't go because the noise of the pouring rain. They would not have been able to hear where the boar were, so too dangerous. Oh, that bot fly that got in my head at Altar has now grown and is jabbing into me like a knife. Tranquil put adhesive tape on to smother it, but that didn't work. Looks like I am going to have to live with that worm in my head forever.

Flores, El Peten

Dear Mother: After we left Dos Pilas, I spent a while at Tikal and we are now in Flores just resting up from the tedious work at Dos Pilas, still my favorite place. Bob is with me now and we have a room overlooking the lake. We are sitting on the balcony where a nice warm breeze is gently blowing, no humidity to speak of, palm trees swaying, and almost a full moon. The swaying palms cast sheets of highlighted ripples across the lake that create a mood so peaceful. It sure is good with no bugs swarming over us, just a soothing breeze. A little boy is trying to knock coconuts out of a tree in front, and finally succeeded by knocking four to the ground by swinging on one of the 40 foot long palm branches that hung down. I feel rested now and ready to tackle the next trip into the jungle I love so much.

A New Monument Mentioning Wamaaw K'awiil of Calakmul

RAPHAEL TUNESI

Introduction

Recently a small monument in a private collection came to my attention, and upon examination and decipherment it was found to name a little-known king of Calakmul (Figure 1). Due to its shape it must have been an element of a step from a monumental stairway. Given other examples (such as the panels from La Corona), it is possible that it was accompanied by further blocks with more texts and iconography. The carving shows a scene during a ballgame, with two facing opponents. Between them we see a stepped structure and the big rubber ball, as well as two L-shaped glyphic captions for the players.

The object's conservation is acceptable, even if large scars of erosion pass through the middle of the scene. Some parts, like the two final glyphic collocations and the headdress of the individual on the right, have suffered considerable erosion. The monument measures 50

x 42 cm at its maximum width and height. Originally the block was deeper, but it was sawn for transportation when removed from its original context. The exact place of origin is unknown.

The Iconography

The ballgame is often represented in Maya art. We have many vessels, stone monuments, and figurines that provide us with pictures of players and of the game itself. The painted vases of the Late Classic (Figure 2) are very informative, as they show scenes related to the iconography of this monument. Both players wear heavy yokes, probably of leather and/or wood. Their knees are also protected with special pads. The element that differentiates them from one another is the headdress. In all Mesoamerican cultures, the headdress is where the most iconographic information can be found.

Here the two headdresses divide the players into

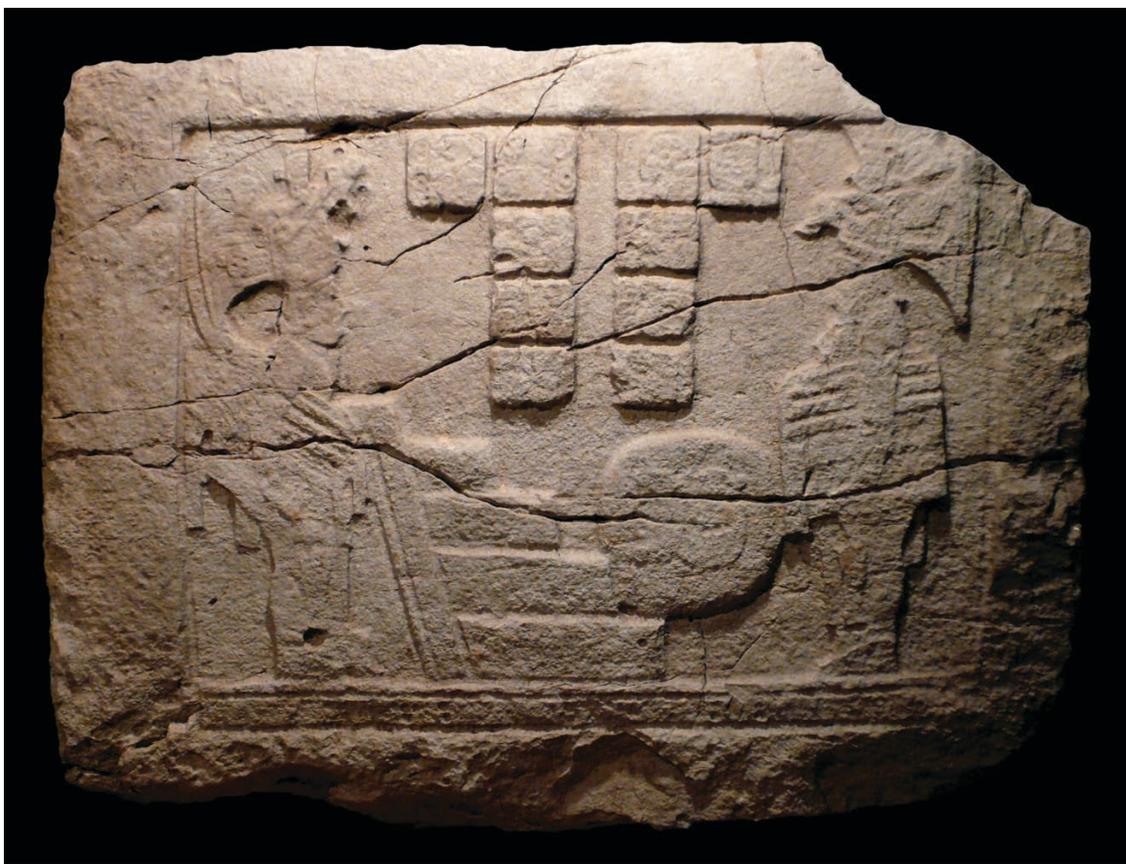


Figure 1. The ballplayer panel (photograph by Raphael Tunesi).

two different teams. The left opponent wears headgear similar to helmets seen in Maya iconography. A stylized *chapaht* (centipede) appears above a large *ajaw* sign. Three more *ajaw* signs can be found between the quetzal feathers. This element evokes one of the patron gods of the Maya ballgame; the player seems to be impersonating the sun god Huk Chapaht Tzik'in K'inich Ajaw. This deity is also mentioned in a ballgame context on Step VIII of Yaxchilan's Temple 33.

The figure on the right wears the head of a deer as his main headdress element. We can also discern a small *ajaw* sign with flames. This iconography may relate him to the patron of deers and the other animals of the forest called Huk Te' Ajaw. The division into separate teams on the basis of these gods seems very telling, since Huk Chapaht Tzik'in K'inich Ajaw, being the sun god, is naturally associated with the heavens, while Huk Te' Ajaw is an earthly god. Clearly this game must have been a reenactment of great mythological import.¹

Despite the richness of material dealing with the ballgame and its patron gods, it remains difficult to interpret this crucial part of Maya public life and to attribute a

clear value to the choice of each player's costume. It is hard to tell if there was some significant difference between the two gods or if this can tell us something about the outcome of the match. What is evident is that this ballgame elevated the two kings into divine context and that it was meaningful for political and religious purposes.

The Text

To start with the glyph on the rubber ball (Figure 3), this

¹ It is well known from other texts, especially on ceramics, that kings personified gods in public rituals such as dances and the ballgame. The glyphic expression for this ritual personification was *u baahil aan* which may be translated as "it is the image of his disguise." On one ceramic vessel (K1383 in Justin Kerr's database at www.famsi.org) we read:

u baahil aan Huk Te' Ajaw ti lajcha' nahb Tzakaj K'awiil
 "it is the image of his disguise as Huk Te' Ajaw at the twelve
 handspan [ball] of Tzakaj K'awiil"

This text probably describes a ballplayer's costume not dissimilar to our monument.

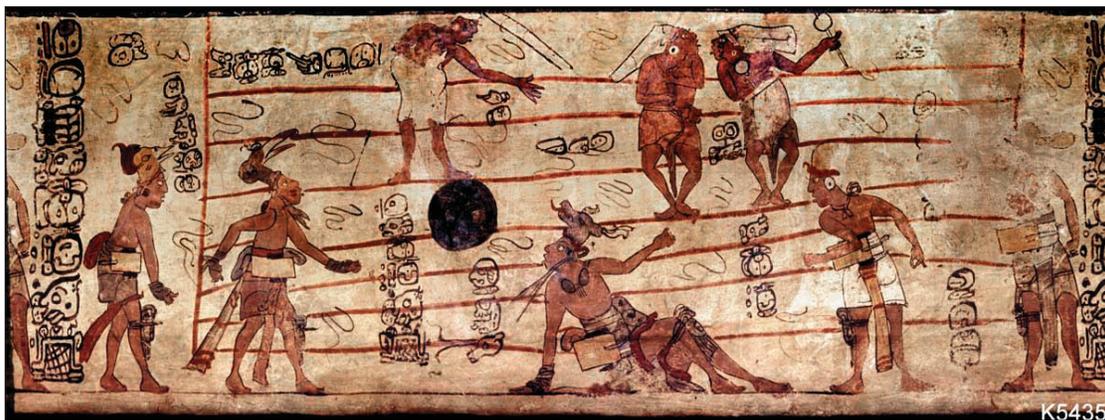
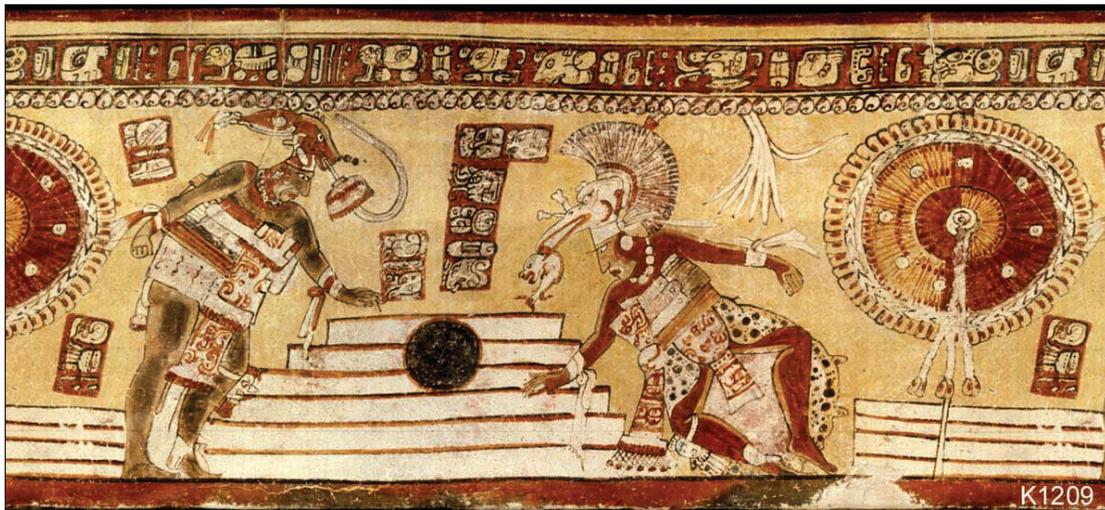


Figure 2. The ceramic vessels designated K1209 and K5435 in Justin Kerr's MayaVase database at www.famsi.org.

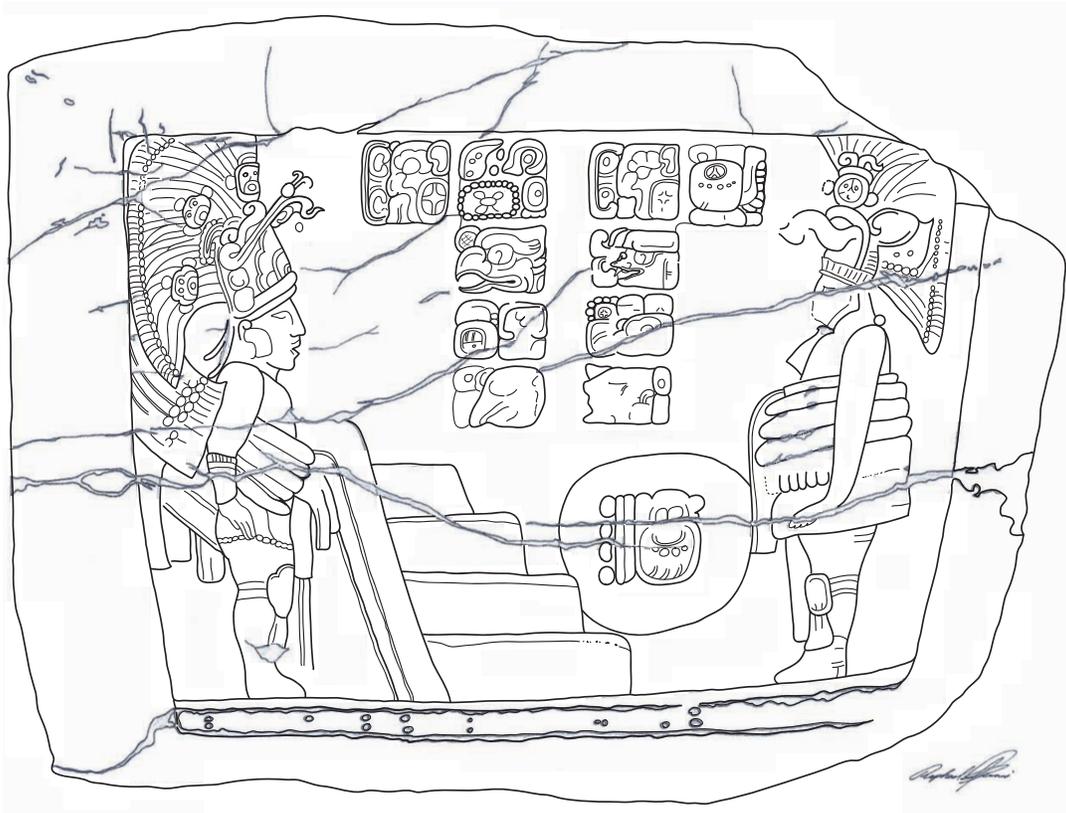


Figure 3. The ballplayer panel (drawing by Raphael Tunesi).

carries the expression:

14 na-ba
chanlajuun nahb
 "fourteen handspans"

This unit of measurement is still used in modern Ch'ol. *Ho'pe' nahb*, for example, means five handspans, or more or less 1.2 meters. Here this measurement indicates the size of the ball. Marc Zender (2004) has presented a calculation of the circumference and diameter of *ulama* balls using a measurement for the handspan of 21.53 cm. In this case the 14 *nahb* ball would have a circumference of 302.3 cm and a diameter of 96.2 cm.

Now let's have a look at the two short but telling texts that function as captions to the two players. We will first examine the caption of the player on the right since he will prove to be the most important individual in the scene.

The first text starts at C1, moving to the left to D1 and then down to C2, C3, and C4 (Figure 4):

U-BAAH wa-ma-wi K'AWIIL K'UHUL KANAL AJAW KALOOMTE'
u-baah Wamaaw K'awiil, K'uhul Kanal Ajaw, Kaloomte'
 "It is the image of Wamaaw K'awiil, the Holy Lord of Calakmul; he is the Kaloomte'."

When I first deciphered this name and then recog-

nized the emblem glyph of Calakmul, I must say that I was very surprised. The only previously known reference to this king is from distant Quirigua, as first noticed by MatthewLooper (1999) on Quirigua Stela I. And there, in the context of a ritual offering to the gods of Copan, the individual named as Wamaaw K'awiil carries, not the emblem glyph of Calakmul, but the title *Chiiknahb K'uhul Ajaw*. As *Chiiknahb* is a place name clearly associated with Calakmul (Stuart and Houston 1994; Martin

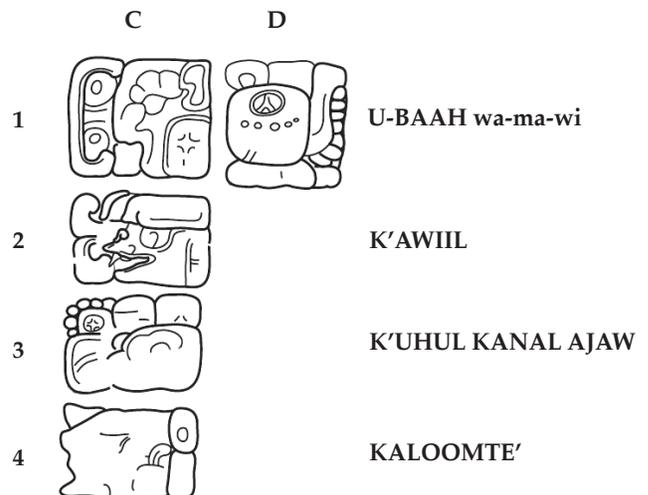


Figure 4. Caption text of the ballplayer on the right.

2005), this Wamaaw K'awiil was deemed to be a Calakmul ruler, who for some unexplained reason did not carry the emblem glyph of his kingdom. Due to the late style of our ballplayer monument, it is reasonable to assume that we are dealing with the same Calakmul ruler and not with a namesake.

At this point it is important to refer to the recent paper by Simon Martin entitled "Of Snakes and Bats: Shifting Identities at Calakmul" (Martin 2005). In this study he shows that Calakmul presents a complicated sequence of emblem glyphs unattested at other sites. Martin suggests that the dynasty represented by the Snake emblem glyph installed itself at Calakmul at the time of Yuhknoom the Great or his immediate predecessor. The few monuments at Calakmul that predate this king present a different emblem glyph, the Bat Head, and the lords of the Snake emblem glyph seem to acknowledge their recent arrival at Calakmul by using a special dynastic count based on Yuhknoom the Great. The last mention of the Snake emblem glyph at Calakmul can be found on the stelae of Wamaaw K'awiil's predecessor Yuhknoom Took' K'awiil; the next emblem glyph is a Bat Head in AD 751. Martin's analysis seems to show a "shifting" of the Snake emblem glyph from a first residence apparently at Dzibanche in the Early Classic (Velásquez 2004), first to Calakmul, and then exiled from Calakmul to some other region in the wake of Tikal's late seventh and early eighth century military victories.

It may be worthwhile to meditate on what caused the Quirigua scribes to use the Chiiknahb emblem glyph in their text and not, as in the present monument, the Snake. Quirigua Stela I was dedicated in 800, over sixty years after the event involving Wamaaw K'awiil. Perhaps by that time the Snake lineage was residing somewhere else, in a location unknown to us at the moment, and the use of the Snake glyph would have been ambiguous to contemporary readers. To avoid misunderstanding, the scribes used the Chiiknahb emblem glyph to refer directly to the Calakmul region where Wamaaw K'awiil was from. From this point of view, the title would

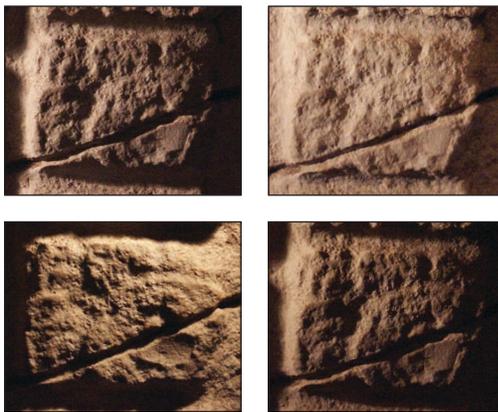


Figure 5. Emblem glyph of the ballplayer on the right (photographs by Joel Skidmore).

seem to be an ad hoc creation by Quirigua's artists: the toponym Chiiknahb was melded with the words *k'uhul ajaw* "holy lord," transforming it into an emblem glyph.² Use of this emblem glyph might have been intended to make the current political situation more explicit to the reader.

There is one last thing to mention about the Snake emblem glyph on our ballgame panel: the **K'UHUL** logograph (Figure 5). Normally only one part of it is visible and the other is "obscured" by the **ka** syllable. Here the watery element (dots) and the *k'an* cross of the **K'UHUL** glyph are conflated into one unique version.

The appearance of the *kaloonte'* title is interesting, but not really telling. Originally this title was the utmost for a Maya ruler and directly linked to the military power he represented, but during the course of the Classic Period it lost the exclusivity it once had. In any case, the fact that Wamaaw K'awiil is described as a *kaloonte'* may give us a sense of the importance attributed to him by at least one scribe.

The player on the left is probably the ruler of the site where the monument originally was located. His caption's reading order, which mirrors the shape and syntax of the first one, is A1, B1, B2, B3, B4 (Figure 6).

U-BAAH JANAAB TI' O' K'UHUL? ? ? a-AJAW

u-baah Janaab Ti' O', K'uhul? ? Ajaw

"It is his image, Janaab' Ti' O', (Holy) Lord of ?."

The first collocation of this short text is *u-baah* "it is his image." This expression is often found in captions describing the protagonist of a monument. Its root is the word *baah* "face," and its derived meaning is "image." The name of the lord is a conflation of the logogram for mouth, **TI'**, and the **JANAAB** flower. *Janaab* is also part of the name of the well known ruler of Palenque K'inich Janaab Pakal. A secure reading for the root *jan* or the complete lexeme *janaab* is still missing.

The second part of the name is a bird head. The absence of plumage in its mouth excludes the value **MU-WAAN**, while the feather markings lead to the reading of this glyph as **O'**, a mythical bird. What follows is the king's emblem glyph (Figure 7). Unfortunately its preservation precludes a clear identification of the different signs that compose it. We will discuss them one by one in the internal reading order of this single collocation. On the left side is a very eroded sign. Almost no details survive of its interior, but the remains of two dots can still be recognized on the right side. This may lead us to

² It should be noted that there are two instances of Chiiknahb Ajaw (without *k'uhul*) attested at Calakmul (Martin 2005:10-11). One is on the Early Classic Stela 114, where the ruler depicted on the monument carries a Bat emblem glyph and acts as overlord to a Chiiknahb Ajaw (ibid.). The other, dating to the period when the Snake emblem glyph is no longer attested at Calakmul, appears on a hieroglyphic block from Structure 13 which accords Bolon K'awiil the Chiiknahb Ajaw title (Martin and Grube 2000:114).

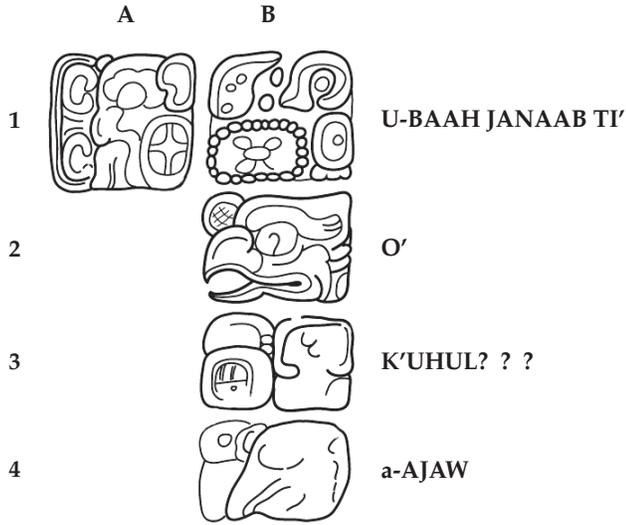


Figure 6. Caption text of the ballplayer on the left.

identify it tentatively as **K'UHUL** “holy.” The emblem glyph’s main signs are a round glyph strongly resembling a cartouche for Maya day signs followed by what might be the logogram **WITZ** “mountain.” The critical issue is that the details surviving in the inner part of the cartouche seem to correspond to the logogram for **HIX** “feline/jaguar.” There is indeed a polity with an emblem glyph that contains the sequence *hix witz*, but as we will see there is one problem with this identification.

Following the emblem glyph is the vulture head variant of the glyph **AJAW** “lord, king.” Together the text’s last two collocations seem to read [*K’uhul?*] *Hix Witz Ajaw*, “[Holy] Jaguar Hill Lord.” The problem mentioned above is that the Hix Witz emblem glyph never appears with the attachment *k’uhul*. The reasons for this are still unclear and may deal with mythology unknown

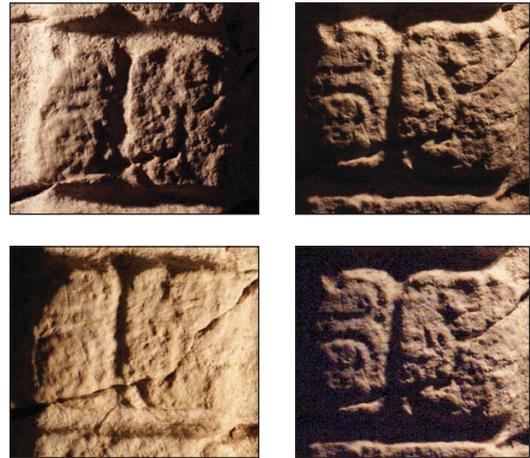


Figure 7. First half of the emblem glyph of the ballplayer on the left (photographs by Joel Skidmore).

to us, but some sites had a “full” emblem glyph, while others did not.

More or less contemporaneous with Wamaaw K'awiil a ruler of Hix Witz called Janaab Ti' O' appears in the corpus of Maya ceramics. Of the many examples, K1387 and K8665 (Figure 9) are the most impressive. The site of Hix Witz was located in western Peten, south of El Peru (Figure 8). The capital of this kingdom was probably El Pajara and/or Zapote Bobal, as recently proposed by David Stuart (2003).

If we assume for the moment that the Janaab Ti' O' on the new monument and the one of the ceramics are the same, we can approximate the period of his rulership between 736 and 744. We know that he was involved in the ballgame with Wamaaw K'awiil, who was in power for a short time around the year 736. The vase K8665 (Fig-



Figure 8. Hix Witz and the other Calakmul clients—La Corona, El Peru, and Dos Pilas—that confronted Tikal in a menacing half moon to the west. Precolumbia Mesoweb Maps.



Figure 9. The ceramic vessels designated K1387 and K8665 in Justin Kerr's MayaVase database at www.famsi.org.

ure 8) gives us the other date, the only known Calendar Round date of Janaab Ti' O' (Luis Lopes, personal communication 2006). This date is 13 Ajaw 8 Keh, which corresponds to 9.15.13.5.0 (September 22, 744).

The text that follows this Calendar Round deals with the painting of the vase and forms an appendix to its Primary Standard Sequence: "it is decorated/painted its surface." A mythological interpretation of this caption in association with the scene cannot be completely ruled out, but seems less probable. If we examine the iconography, we can see in the central part a plate with a mask. On the right side a deity impersonator dressed like God D holds a cut shell in one hand and in the other an aspergillum-like object for ritual cleansing. On his right we see a seated ruler who is probably the Hix Witz lord Janaab Ti' O' himself.

As expected he never carries the word *k'uhul* in his emblem glyph in all the ceramics attributed to him. Nevertheless, the fact that the names and the time period are exactly matching suggests more than simple coincidence.

There is, however, a cautionary precedent where a namesake of a Tikal ruler from Santa Elena appearing in the inscriptions of Palenque was misinterpreted as a reference to the Tikal king and almost changed the reconstruction of history (Schele and Mathews 1998; Martin 2003, citing personal communication with David Stuart). One explanation of the unorthodox usage of *k'uhul* could be that (as in the example of the Chiiknab K'uhul Ajaw emblem glyph seen above) this monument is retrospective, and/or it was carved in Calakmul or a third location. Perhaps by adding *k'uhul* to the Hix Witz emblem glyph the scribe wanted to accord its ruler more importance, just as importance was taken away by eliminating *k'uhul* from individuals taken captive.

Whatever emblem glyph we see on this monument, it seems clear that its original home city managed to survive Tikal's war against Calakmul's former clients. This would explain the survival of this small monument depicting Wamaaw K'awiil, which probably would have been destroyed in the case of Tikal's conquest.

Wamaaw K'awiil: A revised perspective

If the political evolution of the Classic period was in large measure the struggle between two great powers, Tikal and the Snake dynasty, the dynamic trajectory of the latter was the era's salient feature (Martin and Grube 1995, 2000). For almost two hundred years the Snake kings were in the ascendant, lording over subordinates and conquering or sacking major kingdoms like Naranjo, Palenque, and Tikal itself (*ibid.*). Meanwhile the latter polity was subjected to a "dark age" lasting more than a century. The tables were finally turned by Jasaw Chan K'awiil's defeat of Snake king Yich'aak K'ahk' in 695, a reversal marked by an abrupt diminishment in foreign references to the Snake dynasty (Martin 1996). But Yich'aak K'ahk's successor, Yuknoom Took' K'awiil, still managed to hold sway over El Peru, Dos Pilas, and La Corona (Martin and Grube 2000:111; Martin 2005:12) (Figure 8).

Then came a second defeat for the Snake lords shortly before 736, after which there are but two foreign references to the Snake emblem, the one on this ballplayer panel and another at Seibal in 849 in the twilight of the Classic era (Martin 2005:12). The absence of Snake emblem glyphs at Calakmul itself after this second Tikal victory leads, as we have seen, to Martin's hypothesis that the Snake dynasty was exiled or effectively terminated (*ibid.*). In this context, what does it mean that Wamaaw K'awiil appears as an overlord on a monument from some point after 736 and that he carries a Snake emblem glyph? We already knew that he had involved himself in the affairs of distant Quirigua and even, judging by the date, had played some part in the Quirigua rebellion against Copan (Looper 1999; Martin and Grube 2000:114). And now we know that he was acknowledged as overlord by at least one other polity.

In the wake of the 695 defeat, the Snake lords had held on to at least three of the sites which, together with Hix Witz, had formed a great "axis" or half-moon menacing Tikal from the west (Martin and Grube 2000:111; Martin 2005:12) (Figure 8). While the apparent disappearance of the Snake emblem from Calakmul following the second defeat had suggested the possibility that such overlords were at an end, it is now clear that there was at least one polity still subject to the Snake dynasty, perhaps even one of the "axis."

Conclusion

Games like the one we see here were opportunities for building and strengthening alliances between Maya kingdoms. The monuments were of great political value to classical Maya dynasts. In this case we see a vassal lord playing with Calakmul's kaloomte'. We have similar and beautiful examples from La Corona from an earlier period that show local lords during ball games with rulers from Calakmul.

The scant data seem to lead to a new image of Wamaaw K'awiil's area of influence. Even if this picture is still vague and difficult to understand in its details, we

can argue that the defeat of Wamaaw K'awiil's predecessor, Yuknoom Took' K'awiil, was not quite so final as previously thought.

The impression we have at the moment is one characterized by two opposite factors: on the one hand Wamaaw K'awiil is involved in large-scale politics, while on the other we have reason to suspect that those were the very last ones undertaken by a Snake king.

Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank the collector of this very important monument for his permission to study and publish it. I also won't forget Luis Lopes whose comments about the article and insights about the corpus of Maya vases were of great importance. And finally a grateful thought goes to Simon Martin, Joel Skidmore, and Marc Zender for useful suggestions. Of course any mistakes are mine.

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On the Emblem Glyph of El Peru

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The emblem glyph of the site of El Peru, Peten (Figure 1), was first examined by Simon Martin (2000). Earlier, scholars had considered El Peru a candidate for being the capital of the “Snake Head Emblem” site, as this glyph was prominently mentioned on a pair of looted stelae that Ian Graham identified as coming from El Peru (see map on page 17). However, further study by David Stuart and Stephen Houston, among others, demonstrated that another emblem glyph appeared on the El Peru stelae and better qualified as the local emblem of the site (see Schele and Freidel 1990:456-457, note 21 for a discussion of the history of thought about the Snake emblem glyph).

The El Peru emblem glyph, as described by Simon Martin (2000), consists of two separate hieroglyphs. The first glyph is made up of three separate signs. The first is the T35/36/38 K’UH sign, the common prefix to emblem glyphs signifying *k’uhul*, the adjective “divine.” The next is a young male head, probably the maize god (note the curl at the back of the head [Taube 1985]), with a darkened spot on the cheek and a T544 K’IN sign over the ear. This head sign greatly resembles the main sign of the emblem glyph of Edzna but differs in that the latter has a T552 crossed-bands sign in the place of the T544 sign in the El Peru version. The head sign of the El Peru emblem glyph is surmounted by a T84 sign, which through substitutions in a name at Uxmal has been read by David Stuart and Stephen Houston as NAL¹ (Stuart and Houston 1994:21).

The second hieroglyph that constitutes the El Peru emblem glyph consists of three separate signs. The normal T168 AJAW superfix to emblem glyphs is one of these (occasionally replaced by a T1000 head variant of AJAW) and below it is either T738 or T25, syllabic *ka*. A regular prefix to this group of signs in this emblem glyph is T130/131 *wa* syllable. These hieroglyphic clues led Martin to propose that the second part of the El Peru emblem glyph read *Wak Ajaw*. Martin also identified the ancient toponym of El Peru as *Waka’* (Figure 2), where the final *-a’* reflected the toponymic use of the Maya word for water (*ha’/’a’*) to transform the main sign of an emblem glyph into a toponym.² *Waka’*,

¹ It must be noted, however, that in a recent work Stuart has claimed that while T86, visually very similar to T84, reads NAL, the two signs “are in mutually exclusive settings” (Stuart 2005:161, note 49) and does not now read T84 as NAL. This is most curious as the substitution at Uxmal is specifically with T84 and strongly suggests that while in the Classic period inscriptions T84 and T86 have separate distribution patterns, both read NAL. A possible resolution of this conundrum is that while T84 and T86 have the same phonetic reading they have different semantic values. It may not be coincidence that T84 is found overwhelmingly in nominal or titular hieroglyphs while T86 seems to be restricted to locative expressions. Further research on this matter is clearly needed.

² The *Waka’* toponym is also found on Calakmul Stela 52 and Zapote Bobal Stela 15, both dating to the mid-eighth century. Unfortunately both monuments are damaged and the context of these references is unknown.

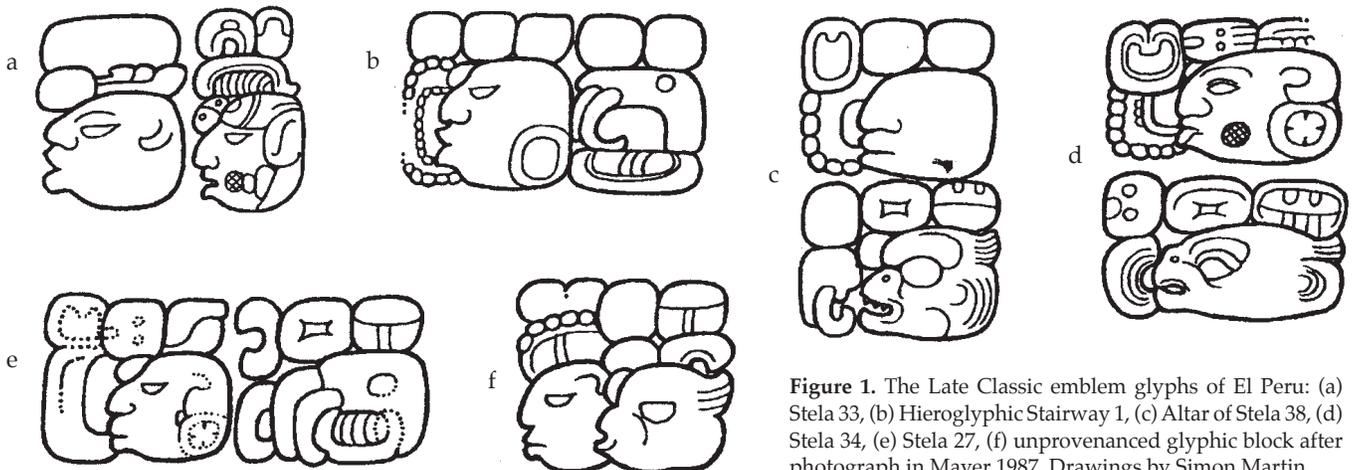


Figure 1. The Late Classic emblem glyphs of El Peru: (a) Stela 33, (b) Hieroglyphic Stairway 1, (c) Altar of Stela 38, (d) Stela 34, (e) Stela 27, (f) unprovenanced glyphic block after photograph in Mayer 1987. Drawings by Simon Martin.

then, means “Wak-water” or “Wak-place.”

What, then, does *wak* mean? From what Maya word did the ancient name for El Peru derive? While there has been a lot of discussion amongst epigraphers over what this term may have meant, little consensus was ever achieved and the term remained undeciphered. Suggested possibilities included the number six, as this was pronounced *wak* in ancient Mayan. However, despite the many examples of the El Peru emblem glyph that are known, none incorporates the bar-and-dot of the number six nor any form of the head variant of this number. Another suggestion was that *wak* referred to the site’s location atop a dramatic escarpment, as *wak* was thought to be a word describing things that were “stood up.” However, as Marc Zender has pointed out (personal communication 2002), the actual ancient word for “to stand up” was *wa’*, not *wak*. It appeared that investigation into the ancient name of El Peru had run into a wall. Recent research at the site conducted under the direction of David Freidel of Southern Methodist University and Hector Escobedo of Del Valle University, however, has provided the opportunity to re-examine these questions.

It is important to note that Martin’s list of El Peru emblem glyphs is taken only from the Late Classic stelae at the site. However, El Peru also has a number of Early Classic stelae (from the fifth and early sixth centuries). These earlier monuments, unfortunately, have suffered badly from ancient destruction and extensive erosion over the last thousand years. To add insult to injury, the best preserved carvings at El Peru were targeted by looters, and what remains at the site are the more poorly preserved sections of these monuments. Despite all this damage to these early texts, however, a number of the Early Classic stelae at El Peru have provided at least partially legible glyphs and short passages of text. On at least two of these early stelae are preserved emblem glyphs of local kings, although these earlier versions of the El Peru emblem glyph bear little resemblance to the Late Classic versions examined above (Figure 3). These examples come from Stelae 15 and 16, dating to 415 and 470 respectively. The El Peru emblem glyph also appears on two unprovenienced artifacts, an Early Classic slate mirror back (dating to the late fourth century AD) found in Costa Rica (Figure 4a) and a beautiful, unprovenienced polychrome ceramic vase dating to the sixth century (Figure 4b).

These Early Classic versions of the El Peru emblem glyph are interesting in that they all lack the first sign of the Late Classic El Peru emblem glyph as identified above. This first sign, then, must be considered a Late Classic innovation or adoption. This is important to note as this sign appears in the texts of a number of monuments at Zapote Bobal, El Peru’s southern neighbor and Late Classic capital of the Hix Witz kingdom,

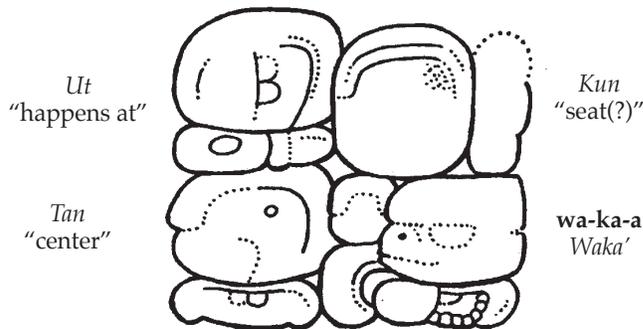


Figure 2. The ancient toponym of El Peru, read by Simon Martin as *Waka'*. Drawing by Simon Martin.

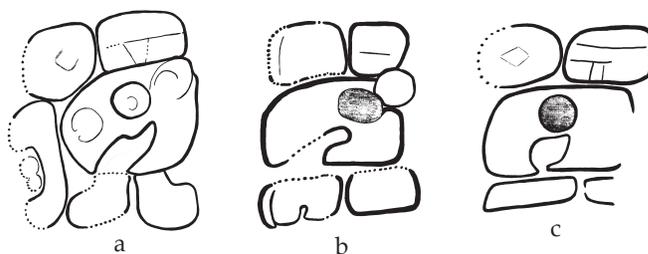


Figure 3. The Early Classic emblem glyphs of El Peru: (a) El Peru Stela 15, (b) El Peru Stela 16, (c) El Peru Stela 16. Drawings by the author.



Figure 4. (a) El Peru emblem glyph from Early Classic slate mirror-back found in Costa Rica; (b) El Peru emblem glyph from a sixth century polychrome vase, K8777 in Justin Kerr’s database at www.famsi.org. Drawings by the author.

as well as on a couple of Codex-style ceramics from the Mirador Basin region, to the northeast of El Peru (Figure 5). While these foreign references have previously been interpreted as pertaining to El Peru, it is crucial to recognize that all of these examples date to the Late Classic and none of them include the second and fundamental part of the El Peru emblem glyph, *Wak Ajaw*. This evidence suggests that these may not be references to El Peru and that this may be a previously unrecognized elite title that was held concurrently by lords in the kingdoms of El Peru and Hix Witz, as well as by the nobility of the Late Classic Mirador Basin. In fact, the title could be regional in nature as these three territories are contiguous. In addition, the nobility of all three areas maintained close connections in



Figure 5. K1457, a Codex-style vase from the Mirador Basin and bearing the first part of the Late Classic El Peru emblem glyph (bottom row, fifth glyph from the right) but lacking the second half. Photograph by Justin Kerr, MayaVase database, www.famsi.org.

the Late Classic period with Calakmul,³ the great power in southern Campeche, and so it is likely that they had sociopolitical connections as well as geographical ones. In any event, the first part of the Late Classic emblem glyph of El Peru is not part of the original emblem glyph and specifically designates the Late Classic lords of the kingdom.

It can also be noted that in the Late Classic examples of the emblem glyph of El Peru the second sign, the part read *Wak Ajaw*, is predominantly spelled with syllables for *wa-* and *-ka*. This is not the case in the Early Classic examples, where only the slate mirror back from Costa Rica has a phonetic spelling of the emblem glyph, *wa-ka-AJAW*. The rest of the Early Classic examples of the El Peru emblem glyph do not contain phonetic syllables but rather consist of the T138 *AJAW* glyph (or, in the case of the example from vase K8777, a T1000d youth's

face that also reads *AJAW*) attached to a zoomorphic head. This head appears to be all but identical with the *CHAPA(H)T* logogram (see Boot 1999) that has been identified as representing a centipede (see also Grube and Nahm 1994; Taube 2003).⁴ Comparison with other Early Classic representations of centipedes confirms that the El Peru emblem glyph portrays this same creature (Figure 6). The main sign of this emblem glyph, however, does not read *CHAPA(H)T*. The substitution of the main sign with the syllables *wa-* and *-ka* suggests that the main sign reads *WAK*. This suggestion appears to be confirmed by the fact that on the K8777 example a T25 *ka-* syllable can be found as a phonetic complement to the centipede-like head, below its open maw to be exact (Figure 4b). Even more telling, on the altar of Stela 38 the main sign of the emblem glyph, pared down to little more than the gigantic front teeth of this creature,

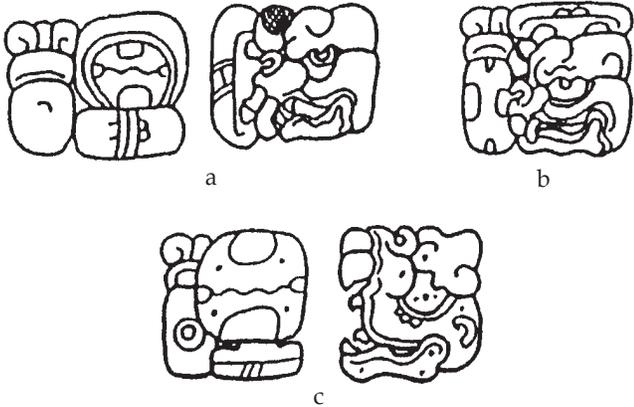


Figure 6. The CHAPAT hieroglyph in the collocation Sak Baak Naah Chapat: (a) Palenque Temple XIV, (b) Palenque Temple XIV, (c) Palenque Temple of the Sun tablet. Drawings after Taube (2003:Figure 2).

³ The Calakmul affiliation of the Late Classic nobility of the Mirador Basin is well known, and references to the Snake Kingdom, whose capital in the Late Preclassic period appears to have been in El Mirador itself and during the Late Classic was located in Calakmul, are prominent in this region's distinctive Codex-style pottery. Codex-style pottery has been found in large numbers at Calakmul as well. El Peru's Late Classic monuments document the close relationship between the kings of El Peru and Calakmul, with the former being vassals of the latter. El Peru also received at least one Calakmul princess as a bride for its king, and the most impressive surviving stela from the site, Stela 34, commemorates this queen. The Hix Witz kingdom was also closely tied to that of Calakmul during at least the reign of the Late Classic king Janaab Ti' O'o (see Tunesi, this issue). Looted ceramics bearing his name and titles include a number of examples in a style that copies Codex-style pottery (black design on cream background with red borders), including one example bearing human-headed birds that is almost a direct copy of a vessel found in Burial 4 of Temple II at Calakmul (see Tunesi, this issue, Fig. 9).

⁴ This hieroglyph was not assigned a number by Thompson, but Macri andLooper (1999:59-60) label it ACK in their cataloguing system.

is again suffixed with T25 **-ka** but here is also prefixed by T131 **wa-** (Figure 1c).

The centipede or a similar creature, or perhaps its head or jaw, appears to be the referent of the El Peru emblem glyph, and the site may well have been named after one of the members of the Scolopendridae family (for a discussion of this animal family and its appearance in Classic Maya iconography see Taube 2003:406). Scolopendra species include *Scolopendra gigantea*, examples of which have been known to reach more than a foot in length, and whose venom is toxic to the point of occasionally being fatal to humans (Hickman 1967:442, as cited in Kettunen and Davis 2004:14). Unfortunately, *wak* as a word for centipede or a similar creature, or parts thereof, has not been found in any historically known Mayan language. Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that at one time in the Preclassic or Early Classic period *wak* was a word for a centipede-like creature. In addition to the El Peru emblem glyph evidence discussed above there is a rare **wa-** syllable in Maya epigraphy that employs the front teeth of a centipede or similar animal (Figure 7). Many if not most Maya syllables appear to have been formed through acrophonic processes by deletion of the final sound of a CVC syllable (Zender 1999:37-41). A *wak* word for centipede or centipede-jaws would neatly explain the origins of this centipede-toothed **wa-** syllable.

In conclusion, iconographic and epigraphic evidence together suggest that El Peru, the ancient Maya city of Wak, was named after a centipede or similar animal, or the jaws or teeth of such a creature. This word likely disappeared from the lexicon (or was in the process of disappearing) already in the Classic period, as the Late Classic kings of El Peru seem to have found it necessary to spell out the name of the site rather than just provide an iconographic logogram as they had in the Early Classic period. The Late Classic kings of El Peru also added a second part to their emblem glyph that seems to signal the new regime and perhaps its alliance with Calakmul and its other vassals in the region of north-west Peten. Ultimately, after the site was abandoned its original name was completely lost to history, as was the case with the majority of ancient Maya toponyms. Sadly, due to extensive damage to El Peru's monuments, both through human and natural means, we cannot offer more than these observations and suggestions, and the last word on this subject has yet to be written.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all of the colleagues with whom I have had many profitable conversations on this subject over the years: Hector Escobedo, Nikolai Grube, Stephen Houston, Alfonso Lacadena, Simon Martin, Joel Skidmore, David Stuart, Karl Taube, Marc Zender and any others whose names unconsciously escape me at the moment.



Figure 7. The T335 **wa** syllable, from Copan Altar 41. Drawing by Linda Schele.

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

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 25 - Monday

There were to be 19 people going out all told and our baggage and a single layer of blocks of chicle on the floor of the truck to make it ride easier. There are seven of us, the chauffeur, supercargo, and 2 ayudantes; 4 more making 11, and the 7 Tuxpeños and Demetrio, who is going all the way to Campeche with us. He is a native of Oxkutzcab, a willing worker, but not overly bright, just escapes being a nit-wit. He, Demetrio, is carrying with him a spider monkey, 2 months old which he has named Simonetta.

The loading of all our baggage and leaving an even only fairly comfortable place for us at the front of the truck was no light job.

The moon was up about an hour by midnight and Gustav with his valuable knowledge of lashing, cables, knots, etc. undertook to see that this was done properly, i.e. did it himself. Experience had shown us on the way in that what was not lashed to the sides of the truck slid all over it and how.

The truck hands had already laid down one layer of chicle blocks in the bottom of the truck and on top of this at the rear our kayaks and gasoline boxes were placed. Forward the jute bags containing the saddles and the chairs were lashed to the right side, and with pillows, bags of blankets, etc., against the south side as a brace, we lay on the layer or stratum of chicle.

Frances was forward, then myself, then Karl, then John,

and Gustav last facing in the opposite direction. Behind Gustav jammed together on the boxes sat the 7 Tuxpeños and Demetrio, holding the simian infant, Simonetta.

Although we had been up at one, breakfasted and finished packing hammocks, etc., it was 4:15 by my watch when we finally snorted out of the area enclosed by the principal houses, sheds, etc. at Central Buenfils.

Goodbyes were said to Don Manuel Osorno and to Don Ambrosio Aguilar; Karl had been helped out to the car and up into his own particular place in the box of sardines, because he is our largest fish. We had all wiggled ourselves into more or less comfortable positions, as comfortable as we might under the circumstances, before we finally lurched forward on our long trek.

It became apparent at once that we were going to ride much more comfortably on the return trip than we had in coming out. This was due I believe to several different causes. First because with the extra stratum of chicle in the bottom of the truck and the eight extra people we were much more heavily loaded and the car rode correspondingly more easily. Second because our chauffeur was obviously a much more careful driver than the one we had coming in. He did not rush at the hills and he certainly eased us over the rocks and other rough places with greater skill. Finally the road itself having had no rain to speak of since we had passed over it more than a fortnight before was in better condition. All combined made the riding much easier for which I was very glad for Karl's sake. Don Manuel estimated that it would take us 7 hours to make the trip to Rio Desempeño, but I saw that at the rate we were leaving the kilometers behind us, it was going to take more than eight hours. At Kilometer 35 we passed the broken down truck and only paused long enough for the chauffeur to get some things out of its tool box and we pressed forward.

We had several minor mishaps; the magneto itself worked loose once. It was only put on with wire, and had to be tightened several times, but the old White was really making the grade, leaving kilometer and kilometer of this terrible road behind us.

Several times we stopped at water holes for water—the engine was going on low most of the time to get over this road at all.

About 11:30 when we were about Kilometer 8, i.e. just 5 more miles to go, the steering rod broke and there we were.

Fortunately for us the accident happened in a patch of high forest and not in one of the blazing hot akalches, otherwise we would have suffered from the heat much more.

Our chauffeurs were in no doubt as to what the accident meant, abandonment of the truck and hoofing it into Rio Desempeño. I told the Tuxpeños to leave their baggage but that they also should walk.

I wrote a letter to the local manager at Rio Desempeño—Don Miguel Olivera asking him to send out 3 arias of pack animals and 7 riding animals just as soon as he could that I had a sick man with me and wanted to get him out of the bush at once, etc. etc. The supercargo took this letter with him setting out with the rest of the auto crew and the Tuxpeños at 11:45.