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Death Becomes Her: An Analysis of Panel 3, Xunantunich, Belize

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The hieroglyphic stair discovered at Naranjo remains one of the most important and most discussed monuments in Maya studies. In part this has to do with its unique context as well as its evocative narrative. It was in 1905 that the Austrian explorer Teobert Maler documented and photographed the carved monuments at the archaeological site of Naranjo in what is now Guatemala. Among these is the hieroglyphic stair, composed of twelve panels and three sculptures representing human crania (Maler 1908:Pl. 24) (Figure 1). During subsequent visits in the succeeding years, early epigraphers such as Sylvanus G. Morley (1909) studied the calendrical data preserved in the glyphic corpus. In the early 1970s, Ian Graham thoroughly documented the hieroglyphic stair as a basis for producing detailed and accurate drawings of each of the panels as part of the Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions project (Graham 1978:107-110, 1980:152, 154). Graham's documentation

remains the pivotal record of this hieroglyphic stair, since the monument has succumbed to the predation of looters, two panels having disappeared altogether, whereas others have been displaced to a variety of locations, including the collections of the British Museum in London and those of the Museum of Natural History in New York and the bodega of the Parque Nacional Tikal in Guatemala (Graham 1978:107).

With the advent of decipherment, Tatiana Proskouriakoff (1993:40-41) and Michael Closs (1984:78, Table 1) defined the range of dates of the hieroglyphic stair as spanning the two decades between AD 623 and 642. The latter undoubtedly represents the date of the stair's dedication (Morley 1909:550-554), during the reign of K'an II (r. AD 618-658), king of Caracol, located 42 km to the southeast in what is now Belize (Figure 2). Oddly, the main themes of the hieroglyphic stair are tied to the martial successes of Caracol and the



Figure 1. The hieroglyphic stair as found at Naranjo by Teobert Maler (after Maler 1908:Pl. 24; photograph by Teobert Maler © President and Fellows of Harvard College, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, PM# 2004.24.3432).

defeat of Naranjo in both AD 626 and 631,¹ and there is a decided focus on Caracol actors, such as K'an II and his allies, to the detriment of Naranjo (see Martin and Grube 2000:73; Tokovinine 2007:15-16). Accounting for the context in which the hieroglyphic stair was found, Linda Schele and David Freidel (1990), in an ambitious early synthesis of Maya history, proposed that this monument must have been raised at Naranjo by victorious Caracol dynasts, during a period of subservience, in order to herald the foreign victors to the local population on a prominent public monument. As Schele and Freidel stated: "Lord Kan II recorded the history of his wars [...] on the Hieroglyphic Stairs erected in the capital of his defeated enemy, Naranjo," going on to remark, "Adding insult to injury, he recorded [such] rites not at his home city but at Naranjo on its subjugation monument, the Hieroglyphic Stairs" (Schele and Freidel 1990:174, 178).

However, the story appears to be more complicated than this. For one, the panels of the hieroglyphic stair at Naranjo were set in a jumbled and unintelligible order, with some panels even mounted on their sides, an apparent attempt to render the narrative illegible for the most part. For another, a panel of the same hieroglyphic stair has been found in the middle of the playing alley of the ballcourt at the site of Ucanal, approximately midway between Caracol and Naranjo (see Graham 1980:152, 154) (Figure 3a). Considering the decidedly Caracol-centric vantage of the narrative presented on the hieroglyphic stair, Simon Martin (2000:57-58, Fig.12) has proposed that this monument was most likely raised at Caracol. Indeed, as part of the extensive program of excavations at Caracol, Arlen and Diane Chase uncovered—in the collapsed architecture at the foot of Str. B5 in the monumental epicenter—a fragment of a carved panel that is identical in terms of size, format and stone that Martin suggests comprised part of the same hieroglyphic stair (see Grube 1994:113, Fig. 9.14a) (Figure 3b). The idea is that this monument was subsequently dismantled and transported to Naranjo (via Ucanal?) as a type of trophy or war booty, an event that could have taken place in the latter part of the seventh century, following the defeat of Caracol at the hands of K'ahk' Xiiw Chan Chaahk of Naranjo in AD 680—as attested in the stucco text of Str. B16 at Caracol (see Martin and Grube 2000:73; Helmke and

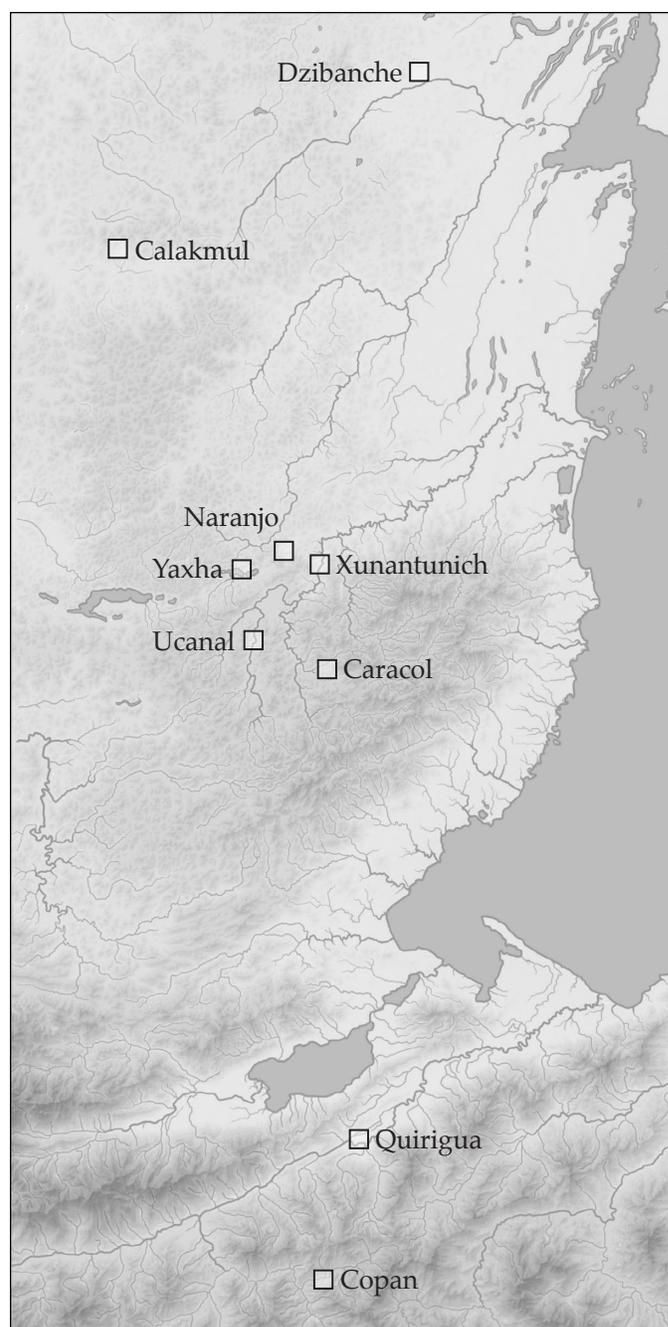


Figure 2. Location of archaeological sites mentioned in the text (Precolumbia Mesoweb Maps).

¹ The segments recording these defeats are interesting for the manner in which they refer to Naranjo as the patient of martial actions. The first of these is the downfall of AD 626 that is recorded on Stela 3 of Caracol, which reads *jubuuy ajsa'u'l*, or "they of Naranjo were toppled"—using the toponym *Sa'u'l* ("where *atole* [maize gruel] abounds"), written SA'-Ia prefixed by the general agentive *aj-*. The second is that of AD 631 and is recorded on both Step 6 of the hieroglyphic stair found at Naranjo, but also on the front caption of Caracol Stela 3. On both of these monuments, the defeat involves the "star war" verb, which is paired off with the same toponym, although these are spelled SA'-Ii for *Sa'uul*, suggesting an *u' > uu* shift sometime around AD 630 (and presumably earlier in spoken forms).

Kettunen 2011:17; Krempel and Davletshin 2011:27-30). As such, the monument appears to have been raised in AD 642 by K'an II and would have remained at Caracol, perhaps forming part of the axial stair of Str. B5, until a few decades later when it was moved to Naranjo and integrated into the architecture of Str. B18 (see Morales 2009). The fragment found at Ucanal may have been left there unintentionally as part of the triumphal return march or could alternatively represent a local trophy, signaling their participation in this conflict on the side

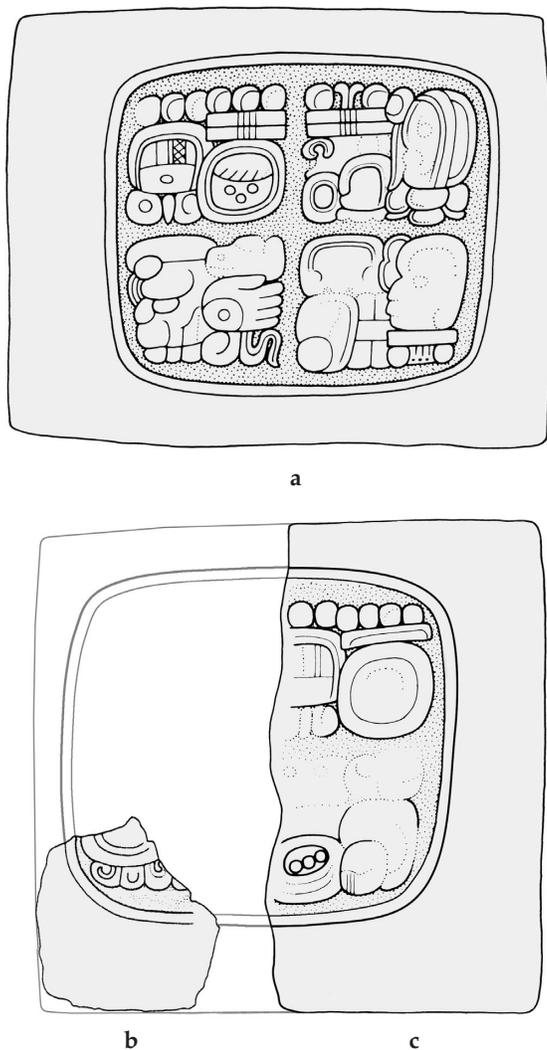


Figure 3. A selection of miscellaneous panels of the hieroglyphic stair: (a) Step 13 as found at Ucanal (Misc. 1) (after Graham 1978:110; drawing by Ian Graham © President and Fellows of Harvard College, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, PM# 2004.15.6.3.37); (b) fragmentary panel found in the collapse of Str. B5 at Caracol (Misc. Frag. 10) (adapted from Grube 1994:Fig.9.14a); (c) fragmentary Step 8 found at Naranjo (after Graham 1978:109; drawing by Ian Graham © President and Fellows of Harvard College, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, PM# 2004.15.6.3.32).

of Naranjo—not least since Ucanal is known to have been an ally of Naranjo from at least AD 711 onwards (Martin and Grube 2000:77; Grube and Martin 2004:134-135; Helmke and Kettunen 2011:55). This scenario is credible on several levels: first, it would explain why the panels found at Naranjo are set in an aberrant order, and, second, it would explain

why, despite our best attempts to reconstruct the narrative, there are evident gaps (Table 1), indicating that not all of the panels that originally constituted the hieroglyphic stair have found their way to Naranjo.

Integrating these panels into a nonsensical order as a public monument at Naranjo thereby essentially nullified all pretenses of Caracol power and supremacy that the monument originally conveyed in its original setting. What still plagues us are these gaps, since there are evident lacunae in AD 626, between 627 and 630, between 633 and 636 and, most troubling, the relatively lengthy gap between 637 and 642. As such, whereas it has always been hoped that additional segments of the hieroglyphic stair would be uncovered that would shed light on the original historical discourse, it was not something that could realistically be expected. The discovery on June 3, 2016, of precisely such a segment at the archaeological site Xunantunich in Belize thus came as a pleasant surprise to one and all. Here we will describe the context and circumstance of the discovery of the panel in question and will anchor its dates to the chronology of the hieroglyphic stair, which helps to fill the final gap of AD 637–642, leading up to the dedicatory date that closes the narrative of the monument.

Context and Circumstances of Discovery

Prior to the discovery of this monument, three carved stelae (Stelae 1, 8, and 9), one carved altar (Altar 1), and two carved panels (Panels 1 and 2) had been discovered at Xunantunich (Helmke et al. 2010). The panels constitute the most recent finds, Panel 1 having been discovered by Jason Yaeger as part of the Xunantunich Archaeological Project in 1997, in a fragmentary state in association with Str. A11 of the northern palace complex (Yaeger 1997:35-36); whereas Panel 2 is also fragmentary and was discovered in 2003 by Jaime Awe, in association with Str. A32, the large *audiencia* of the Castillo, the southern palatial complex of the site (Awe 2008:164; Helmke et al. 2010:101-103). Panel 3 is the most recent discovery at the site and was unearthed at the base of Str. A9 as part of on-going excavations by the Belize Valley Archaeological Reconnaissance (BVAR) project, under the direction of Jaime Awe, which has been operating at the site since 2015 (Figure 4).

Prior to the BVAR project, both Thomas Gann (1925) and Richard Leventhal conducted limited investigations on Str. A9. Gann's work focused primarily on the summit of the 12-meter high pyramidal building which he designated as Mound E (Gann 1925:61). Gann's (1925:62) investigations in 1924 uncovered a simple burial containing the remains of an adult individual "[t]wo feet beneath the surface" of the summit platform. Accompanying the human remains were a fragment of a chert projectile point, an obsidian blade, two jade earspools, and a "saucer-shaped" ceramic vessel that had been placed over the head of the individual (Gann 1925:62). The vessel is also described rather vaguely as yellow and red, painted with geometric designs (Gann 1925:54, 62). Gann eventually discontinued his excavations approximately "six feet" below the summit of the structure. Leventhal's investigation were conducted in the first half of the 1990s as part of the Xunantunich Archaeological Project (XAP) and consisted solely of a one meter-wide trench on the southern flank of the pyramid

Long Count / DN	Day	Month	Gregorian Date	Monument
9.9.10.0.0	2 Ajaw	13 Pop	22 March 623	Step ?
+ 3.4.4				Step 8
9.9.13.4.4	9 K'an	2 Sek	29 May 626	Step 8
+ 4.0				Step ?
9.9.13.8.4	11 K'an	2 Ch'en	17 August 626	Step ?
+ 13.1				Step 7
9.9.14.3.5	12 Chikchan	18 Sip	5 May 627	Step 7
9.9.?.?.?				Step ?
+ 3.?.?				Step 13
9.9.17.11.14	13 Hix	12 Sak	5 October 630	Step 13
+ 1.4.9				Step 6
9.9.18.16.3	7 Ak'bal	16 Muwan	28 December 631	Step 6
+ 1.1.17				Step 6
9.10.0.0.0	1 Ajaw	8 K'ayab	28 January 633	Step 6 & ?
9.10.3.2.12	2 Eb	0 Pop	5 March 636	Step 1
+ 1.13.10				Step 10
9.10.4.16.2	8 Ik'	5 K'ank'in	25 November 637	Step 10
+ 14.2				Step 10 & ?
9.10.5.12.4	4 K'an	2 Yax	3 September 638	Step ?
9.10.10.0.0	13 Ajaw	18 K'ank'in	7 December 642	Step 5

Table 1. Chronological summary of the narrative preserved in the panels that together comprise the hieroglyphic stair discovered at Naranjo (using the 584286 GMT+1 correlation coefficient). Portions in gray have not been recovered and are conjectural.



Figure 4. Archaeologist Jorge Can exposing the glyptic medallions of Panel 3 (photograph by Kelsey Sullivan).

(Jamison 2010:132-133). Besides the basal terrace of the structure, no other cultural feature was identified by the XAP investigations.

The 2016 BVAR investigations had two major goals: (1) to horizontally expose the terminal phase of architecture on the eastern façade of the pyramid (and subsequently conserve it), and (2) to trench the mound to determine whether the structure was erected in a single construction phase or multiple. Erected at the eastern base of Str. A9, along the primary axis of the central outset stairway, is Stela A4 (following the designation of Sylvanus Morley), and excavations below and just behind this monument uncovered two sub-floor caches. One of these contained nine obsidian eccentrics. The other cache contained more than twenty chert eccentrics and large chert flakes (Figure 5). Panel 3 was subsequently discovered during excavations of the stair-side outset to the south of the central stairway. The collapse debris that engulfed, and thereby fortuitously preserved, the monument also damaged the panel somewhat, yet only as negligible chips



Figure 5. The cache of nine eccentric flints in situ (photograph by Kelsey Sullivan).

and spall along what is now the upper edge (i.e., the original side of the panel that would have been concealed by architecture in its original context). The monument had actually been placed on its side, resting at an angle against the southern stair-side outset. The context suggests that the monument had been placed against the stair side sometime after the final construction of the structure had been executed. At some later date the plaza floor was resurfaced and lipped up to the lowest portion of Panel 3, suggesting that it had not been moved in antiquity since its secondary redeposition at the base of Str. A9. No notable artifactual concentrations nor features have been found in association with the panel. With continued excavations and analyses we hope to obtain materials that can help us to establish the date of the monument's redeposition at the base of Str. A9, since this would go a long way to clarifying the process(es) by which this monument found its way to Xunantunich.

Xunantunich Panel 3

Panel 3 is the most recent and significant addition to the monumental corpus of Xunantunich (Figure 7). As recovered the panel measures 87 cm wide, 141 cm high, and 22 cm thick (all maximal measures). Nearly half of the text is in a pristine state of preservation or only moderately weathered, with only one exception where one initial segment has spalled off in antiquity, removing the entirety of one glyph and part of another. The glyphic text is arranged in two superimposed medallions, measuring on average 41 cm wide by 38.5 cm high. It is noteworthy that the upper one is missing its superior frame. The straight edge of the upper section of the panel, coupled with this missing superior frame, suggests that yet another adjoining section was initially set atop, but one that has not been recovered as yet. The relief separating the foreground from the background ranges between 5 and 6 mm, whereas the smaller incisions delineating the features of the glyphs average at around 1 mm.

The color and nature of the fine-grained crystalline limestone,

coupled with the use of medallions and the style of the glyphs all suggest that this panel finds its origin at Caracol and was a monument raised during the reign of K'an II. In addition, there are some paleographic features that betray that this panel is an integral part of the original hieroglyphic stair, since we find the same use and form of fillers on day signs, including that of 1 Kaban on Panel 3 (Figure 6a), 1 Ajaw on Step 6 at Naranjo (Figure 6b), and the same date on Altar 19 at Caracol (Figure 6c). In addition, the head variant of the *haab* with its "digit" coefficient and the placement of the phonetic signs **bi** and **ya** below, are nearly identical, when one compares Panel 3 (Figure 6d) with Panel 6 at Naranjo (Figure 6e). These features all indicate

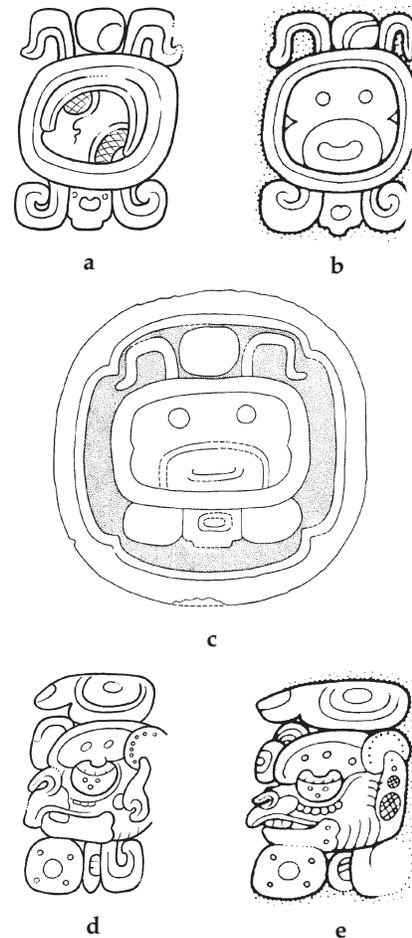


Figure 6. Shared paleographic features in the monuments of K'an II. The almost flame-like fillers found with day signs: (a) Xunantunich, Panel 3 (pZ2b); (b) Naranjo, Step 6 (N3a); (c) Caracol, Altar 19. The spelling of the *haab* in Distance Numbers, with the same head variants, and placement of the **bi** and **ya** syllabograms below the main sign: (d) Xunantunich, Panel 3 (pZ2a); (e) Naranjo, Step 6 (M3b).

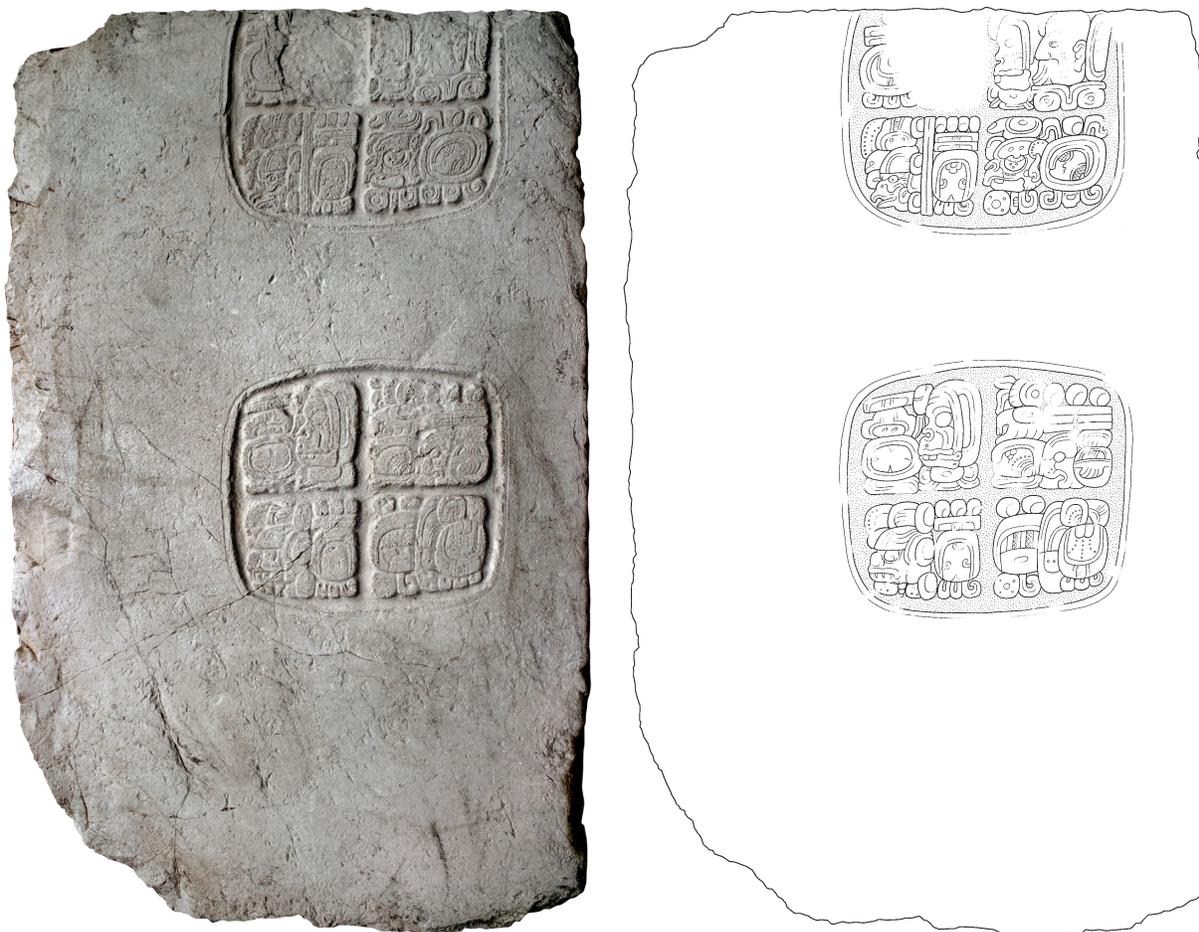


Figure 7. Photograph and drawing of Xunantunich Panel 3 (both by Christophe Helmke).

that these monuments may well be the product of the same scribes and/or sculptor, yet there are also differences in shared signs between the medallions of Panel 3, such as **YAX** (pY2a vs. pY3a), **WINIK** (pY2b vs. pY4b), **mi** (pZ1a vs. pY3b), and **ya** (pZ2a vs. pZ4a). These latter differences suggest that the medallions were carved by different sculptors and reveal that the hieroglyphic stair was carved by multiple “hands,” although ones that may have been following a painted template produced in a single hand, or alternatively a variety of sculptors exhibiting the same degree of variance that characterizes any single workshop. It will be interesting to follow up on this very preliminary paleographic assessment in the future and to expand it to all the monuments raised during the reign of K’an II.

Calendrics

The text preserved on the panel can be divided into three clauses, with intervening calendrical information between each. The first two clauses are headed by complete Calendar Round statements, with complete

Distance Numbers between the first and the second clause, specifying the amount of time between each of these events. Whereas there are some parts that are now illegible, the entirety of the chronological information can be reconstructed (Table 2). The first Calendar Round is mostly obliterated since it was recorded in the section that is now heavily spalled. Nevertheless, the edge of the day sign K’an and parts of a dot and two superimposed bars for the coefficient can be discerned. The Calendar Round of the second clause is split between the medallions and can be read without difficulty as 1 Kaban 5 Yaxk’in. The Distance Number linking the first and second clauses consists of 8 days, 14 “months” (winal) of twenty days, and 1 “vague year” of 360 days. The numerals are all expressed in bars and dots, with the exception of the coefficient for the year that represents a finger and as such functions metonymically as a digit for “one.” Together this Distance Number accounts for a little less than two years and allows us to reconstruct the initial Calendar Round date as 11 K’an 2 Sak. This date matches the remaining outlines of the day sign and its coefficient.

Long Count / DN	Day	Month	Gregorian Date	Monument
9.10.4.16.2 + 14.2	8 Ik'	5 K'ank'in	25 November 637	NAR Step 10
9.10.5.12.4 + 1.0	4 K'an	2 Yax	3 September 638	—
9.10.5.13.4 + 1.14.13	11 K'an	2 Sak	23 September 638	XUN Panel 3
9.10.7.9.17 + 2.8.3	1 Kaban	5 Yaxk'in	7 July 640	XUN Panel 3
9.10.10.0.0	13 Ajaw	18 K'ank'in	7 December 642	NAR Step 5

Table 2. The chronology of Xunantunich Panel 3 and its integration in the overall chronology of the hieroglyphic stair discovered at Naranjo (using the 584286 GMT+1 correlation coefficient). The section is gray has not yet been recovered and is conjectural.

The Distance Number leading from the second clause to the third consists of 3 days, 8 “months,” and 2 “years,” amounting to approximately two-and-a-half years. Based on these parameters, the Calendar Round date of the third clause should be 13 Ajaw 18 K'ank'in, although this information has been suppressed on Panel 3. This Calendar Round occurs seven times in baktun 9, yet as a date involving 13 Ajaw this may refer to a period-ending event and precisely such an anchor is provided by the 9.10.10.0.0 Long Count date, which corresponds to December 7, 642. As such, this is the most promising anchor for the chronological data provided on the monument. An anchor to such a prominent lahuntun period ending may also explain its suppression in the text, since it would have been well known and implicit to the reader.

This interpretation of the chronological information is significant since it fits into the missing AD 637 to 642 sequence towards the end of the historical narrative recorded on the hieroglyphic stair discovered at Naranjo. In addition, the latest date recorded in the panels of this hieroglyphic stair is precisely this 9.10.10.0.0 period ending (Step 5), which strongly suggests that this is the dedicatory date of the entire monument. The very last date recorded on the extant panels of the hieroglyphic stair at Naranjo records an event in November 637 (Step 10)—the jubilee celebrating the completion of the first k'atun in rulership of K'an II—and goes on to record another Distance Number leading to another event (Figure 8). What remains of the Distance Number comprises 2 days and 14 “months,” or a little more than nine months later. Whereas this Distance Number does not link directly to the Calendar Round that starts the text of Panel 3, the missing gap amounts to precisely one twenty-day “month” or winal. This is important as the temporal interval is significant in emic terms and also implies that there is another, as yet undiscovered panel that related an event that transpired in September 638. Considering the format of the narrative in these medallions, such an intervening clause could easily be accommodated in

such a medallion.

Another interesting feature is that all the other panels represent only a single medallion, whereas Panel 3 clearly differs in this regard, since it bears two superimposed medallions. The best explanation would be to identify Panel 3 as the facing of a stair-side outset, flanking the right side of the stair. This also makes sense in terms of the narrative since the events recorded on Panel 3 constitute the very end of an account that would have spanned the width of the stair and presumably been read from the viewer's left to right. These interpretations thereby also imply that the very beginning of the narrative, presumably that recording the previous lahuntun period ending of 9.9.10.0.0 (corresponding to March 22, 623), twenty years before, would also have been equally rendered on such a large stair-side panel with two superimposed medallions. From the historical record preserved at Caracol, especially that recorded on Stela 3, it is clear that the first significant event after the

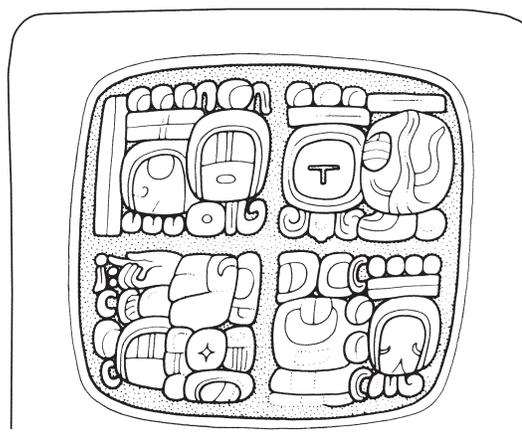


Figure 8. Step 10 of the hieroglyphic stair found at Naranjo (after Graham 1978:110; drawing by Ian Graham © President and Fellows of Harvard College, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, PM# 2004.15.6.3.34).

accession of K'an II to the throne in 618 (on 9.9.4.16.2), was the lahuntun period ending of 9.9.10.0.0. This may help to explain why this period ending is given such prominence on the monuments of K'an II and serves as the starting point of the hieroglyphic stair's narrative.

Historical Events: Clause 1

The event of the first clause is recorded succinctly as the intransitive verb *kam* or *cham*, "die," suffixed by the root intransitive suffix *-i* (pZ1a) (Figure 9). Precisely the same type of event and spelling is seen on Step 13 of the hieroglyphic stair found at Naranjo, which records the death of the Snake-head king Tajo'm Uk'ab K'ahk' in AD 630 (Figure 3a) (Table 1). The tradition of recording the death of overlords of the Snake-head dynasty is a practice that K'an II may have inherited from Yajawte' K'inich II, his father, since the death of Sky Witness in 572 appears to be dutifully recorded on Stela 3 of Caracol (Martin and Grube 2000:104). On Panel 3, the patient of this verb, the individual who is said to die on this day, is named in the following glyph (pZ1b). This subject is the so-called Lady Batz' Ek', a nickname ascribed to this nominal segment on account of the apparent prognathism of the portrait glyph (see Stone et al. 1985; in comparison, Carl P. Beetz [1980] had nicknamed her "God C Star"). Lady Batz' Ek' was the mother of K'an II, and as such, this was clearly a significant turning point in his life to warrant commemoration on this monument. Since we now know that Lady Batz' Ek' died in September 638, it explains why her passing was not mentioned on Stela 3, which was dedicated just the year before in November 637 (the latest date on the stela is 9.10.4.15.18, an event that was explicitly said to have been witnessed by Lady Batz' Ek'). In addition to the references to Lady Batz' Ek' in the monuments of Caracol, she is also named as part of the parentage statement of K'an II on so-called Lintel 1 (Grube and Martin 2004:56-57) and Step 3 of the hieroglyphic stair discovered at Naranjo (Simon Martin in Grube 1994:107, Fig. 9.13). As the son of a junior wife of Yajawte' K'inich II, K'an II was at pains to promote the status of his mother, not least since he succeeded the reign of his half brother, Knot Ajaw (see Martin and Grube 2000:90-91). This helps to explain why Lady Batz' Ek' figures so prominently in the monuments of K'an II, which cite her birth, her arrival at Caracol, the many events that she sanctioned and witnessed, and ultimately her death, as recorded on Xunantunich Panel 3. Her name has not been adequately deciphered at present, since it includes a series of different logograms that are resisting coherent decipherment. We will comment on her name before addressing some of the implications of her death statement.

Apparently the portrait head of her name glyph melds the female profile that stands as the logogram IX(IX), functioning here as the female agentive prefix

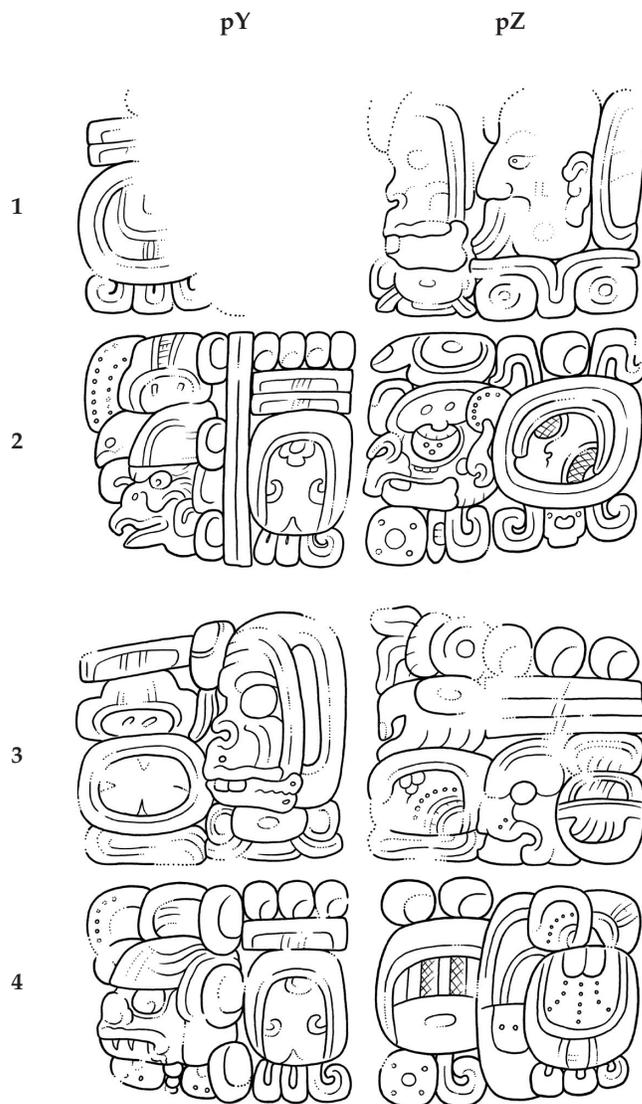


Figure 9. The glyphic text of Panel 3 (drawing by Christophe Helmke).

ix-, with the profile of another portrait glyph with large lips. These large and elongated lips are a characteristic of her name that are also found in the name of the father of Ahku'l Mo' Naahb III, ruler of Palenque in the first part of the eighth century (see Martin and Grube 2000:172-173; Stuart 2005a), and an individual at Copan (Bíró 2010:24). The almost duck-billed and elongated lips are a feature of a particular wind deity that may have been named *tiwool* (Stuart 2005a:25, n.3).² These readings are based on the substitution set written on Palenque's Tablet of the Slaves as **ti-wo-CHAN-na**, as well as the spellings recorded on the sculptured pier

² Alternatively, this part of the name could have been read as *tiwo'* (Alexandre Tokovinine, personal communication 2013).

of Temple XIX at Palenque, where the name is written with a *-la* phonetic complement, a spelling that is also seen in the name of the individual at Copan (see Stuart 2005a:23-26; Bíró 2010:24). As such, in more complete form the individual at Palenque appears to have been named Tiwool Chan Mat, revealing a type of “celestial” name wherein the middle segment involves *chan* or “sky.” The same may also be the case with the name of Lady Batz’ Ek’, especially since her name also includes the logogram EK’ “star” as a suffix below the portrait head. Based on onomastic patterns, names that include *ek’* tend to record the fuller sequence ... *chan ek’*, as seen in the well-known examples of the name Chan Ek’ in the Lowlands during the Classic and the cognate Kan Ek’ of the Itza’ during the early Colonial period (Boot 2005:39-49, Map 2.2). What may be the final part of her name is written with a polished celt sign T24, for which David Stuart (2010:291-292) has proposed the value LEM. Assuming that all of these elements have been correctly identified, the complete name of the mother of K’an II may actually have been closer to Ixtiwool Chan Ek’ Lem.

Her name is also followed by a title, recorded in the following glyph (pY2a), duplicating the one that she bears in the text of Stela 3 of Caracol (see Beetz and Satterthwaite 1981:Fig. 4, B10b). This title is written K’UH-YAX-a-AJAW, which allows for two possible readings (Grube and Martin 2004:50-52). It might provide the title *k’uhul yax ajaw*, wherein the *a* vocalic sign merely functions as an initial phonetic complement for the *ajaw* “lord, king” part of the title. If this is the case then her title could be translated as “godly Yax lord,” wherein the medial segment would name an as-yet-unknown locality. Alternatively, her title can be transcribed as *k’uhul yaxa’ ajaw*, wherein the *a* vocalic sign serves to mark the toponymic suffix *-a’* (Zender 2005), which here would provide the toponym Yaxa’, the Classic period equivalent of the large archaeological site known as Yaxha, in adjoining Guatemala (Stuart 1985). We prefer the latter option and as such her title would designate her as a royal princess hailing from Yaxha.

Panel 3 also provides us with a clear death statement for Lady Batz’ Ek’, which is here said to have occurred on September 23, 638. This date is significant because a large and well-furnished tomb, unearthed within Structure B19-2nd at Caracol, has long been thought to be her possible resting place (Grube 1994:108; Martin and Grube 2000:91-92). This is bolstered by the analyses of the skeletal remains that suggest that the individual interred was an adult female (Chase and Chase 1987:26). Structure B-19 is the central building of the triadic temples at the summit of the majestic Caana palatial complex and as such the individual interred in this tomb must have been of paramount importance, particularly given that this is one of the most elaborate and well-furnished interments discovered at Caracol (Chase and

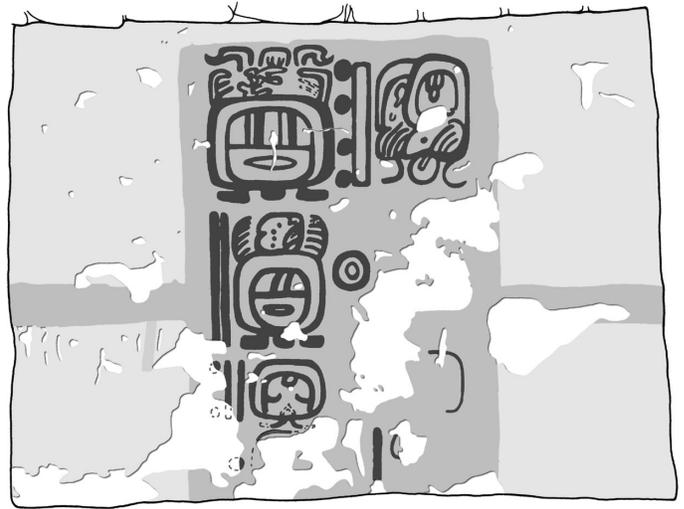


Figure 10. The painted text on the rear wall of the Str. B19-2nd tomb at Caracol (adapted from Chase and Chase 1987:Fig. 23).

Chase 1987:27). The rear wall of the tomb was embellished with a glyphic text, wherein a Long Count date is partially preserved, undoubtedly recording either the date of the occupant’s death, or alternatively the date of the tomb’s dedication, the inhumation proper, or closing of the tomb (see Chase and Chase 1987:27) (Figure 10). As preserved, the Long Count is 9.10.1.12.#, and whereas the final coefficient is eroded the date clearly corresponds to AD 634. This event transpired a full four years before the death date recorded on Panel 3 at Xunantunich, which implies that it is no longer tenable to assume that the B19-2nd tomb is the final resting place of Lady Batz’ Ek’.

Clause 2

As we have already seen, the second clause records an event that transpired a little under two years later, on July 7, 640. In keeping with the theme of the first clause, the second also provides a death statement, using precisely the same root intransitive verb *kam-i* or *cham-i* (pY3b), although here it can be translated as “he died,” since the patient of the verb is a male. The name of the subject is provided in the following two glyphs (pZ3a-pZ3b) and his title closes the clause (pY4a). As we will see this clause does not pertain to a Caracol dynast, but instead refers to the fate of one of the rulers of the Snake-head dynasty to which Caracol owed fealty.

The first part is not entirely clear since it has suffered some erosion, especially in the upper part, and involves a sign that remains unknown in its identification—although it bears some resemblance to the syllabogram **ti**. This first sign is followed by a *ye* syllabogram representing a human hand. Together this may yield an intransitive verbal root, followed by an archaic change

of state suffix *-ey*. Below this segment is **TUN-ni** or *tuun* “stone,” providing the subject of this verb. Thus, this segment may provide a complete, albeit short, intransitive clause, which we initially assumed to record a pre-accession name, or youth name of the royal figure that is said to die. If so, the second part of the name would record the regnal name received upon accession (Eberl and Graña-Behrens 2004; Colas 2014). A similar practice is seen in the case of several rulers who keep their youth names even after assuming the throne, usually preceding the accession name. Thus, for example, K’an II of Caracol was named Sak Baah Witzil (or Sak Witzil Baah) in his youth (Grube 1994:104; Martin and Grube 2000:91; Marc Zender, personal communication 2014), whereas Yaxuun Bahlam III of Yaxchilan was named Ajwak Tuun (Martin and Grube 2000:104), “Itzamnaaj” Bahlam IV was Chelew Chan K’inich (Marc Zender, personal communication 2015), and Yo’nal Ahk III of Piedras Negras was named in part Ik’ Naah Chak (Martin and Grube 2000:151). These examples establish the onomastic pattern wherein some rulers maintained their youth names even after their accessions.

Nevertheless, an alternative explanation for this segment can be found in parallel clauses inscribed on panels originally from the site of La Corona in Guatemala. One of these, now in the private collection of Thomas Ford, in Massachusetts, has been designated as Element 9 (originally designated as Panel A by Peter Mathews; see Stuart et al. 2015:Fig. 1a, 9); it provides a death statement of the king of the site of Santa Elena in Tabasco (also known as the “wa-Bird” site; see Martin 2003). Interestingly, his death is recorded as **CHAM-mi** (pB1), followed once more by **ti-ye-TUN** (pA2), providing a very close parallel construction to that seen on Panel 3 at Xunantunich.³ Similarly, on Panel 2 of La Corona, the accession of one K’uk’ Ajaw is closely followed by his death recorded as *i-cham* (C6) *ti y-eh-tuun* (D6). As such, these prepositional subclauses may all somehow specify the manner of their deaths, by means of, or with, an *eh-tuun* (lit. “tooth-stone” or “sharp-stone”; see Grube et al. 2002:85).

Returning to Panel 3 of Xunantunich and following this prepositional sub-clause, we see the regnal name (pZ3b), which includes three bars and three dots for the numeral “18,” and below we find the sequence **BAH-ka-KAN**. Together this name can be read as Waxaklajuun Ubaah Kan, which is immediately reminiscent of the well-known Copan ruler known as Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil, who lost his head at the hands of the Quirigua king K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Yopaat (r. AD 724-785), in AD 738.

³ A similar construction is seen on the finely engraved travertine bowl (K4692), where the same expression **ti-ye-TUN-ni** is also seen, rendered twice, and once significantly after *cham-i*, forming yet another parallel construction (Marc Zender, personal communication 2016).

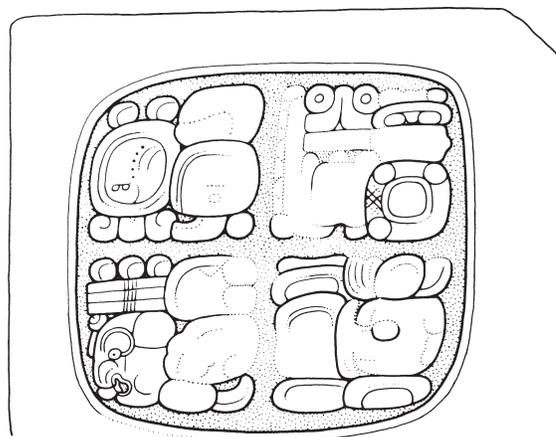


Figure 11. Step 1 of the hieroglyphic stair found at Naranjo (after Graham 1978:107; drawing by Ian Graham © President and Fellows of Harvard College, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, PM# 2004.15.6.3.25).

The individual named on Panel 3 is, however, another, as is made clear by the differing endings of the names, as well as the chronology, since the Copan ruler reigned several decades later, from AD 695 until his untimely death (see Schele and Freidel 1990:315-319; Martin and Grube 2000:203-205; Loooper 2003:76; Stuart 2005b). The name Waxaklajuun Ubaah Kan can be translated as “eighteen are the heads/images of the snake” (see Taube 1992:59-68; Zender 2004:200, 201-203) and refers to the manifold aspects or incarnations of the supernatural entity known as the War Serpent (Helmke 2012:76, 78-79). That this serpentine deity frequently adorns military regalia of prominent warriors, both at Teotihuacan and in the Maya area, makes clear its martial attributes and associations (Taube 1992:59-68). Although this name is best known for its use as a theonym, here it is used as an anthroponym of the individual that passed away in AD 640. Interestingly, the same individual is mentioned in an earlier passage of the hieroglyphic stair at Naranjo (Step 1), four years before his passing, on the date 2 Eb 0 Pop, or AD 636 (see Table 1), at which juncture he is said to have been defeated (Figure 11). This setback is recorded with a “star war” verb followed by a poetic couplet or difrasismo, *u-took’ u-pakal*, literally “his flint and his shield” (see Hull 2003:422-425; Lacadena 2009; Helmke et al. 2010:104). Although metaphorical, this records the toppling of his army in a crushing defeat, an action that is apparently credited to the king of the Snake-head dynasty known as Yukno’*m* Head (see Martin and Grube 2000:92, 106). What is really significant here is that we know that Yukno’*m* Head eventually established his court at Calakmul (Martin 2005) and bore the emblem glyph of the Snake-head dynasty, read *k’uhul kanu’l ajaw* (see Helmke and Kupprat in press).

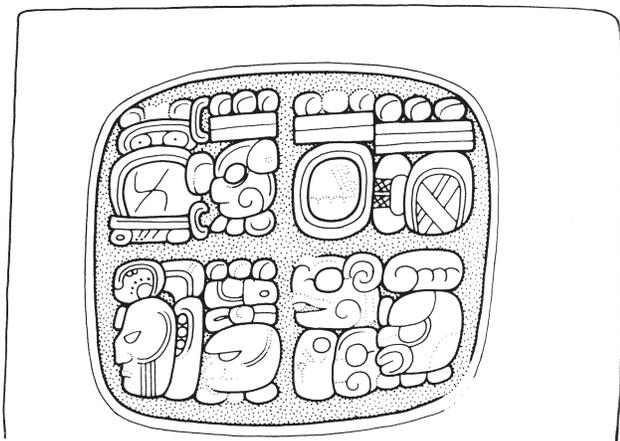


Figure 12. Step 7 of the hieroglyphic stair found at Naranjo (after Graham 1978:109; drawing by Ian Graham © President and Fellows of Harvard College, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, PM# 2004.15.6.3.31).

This makes the title of Waxaklajuun Ubaah Kan all the more remarkable. Whereas on Step 1 at Naranjo the title is mostly eroded, on Panel 3 at Xunantunich (pY4a) there can be little doubt that he carried the same Snake-head emblem glyph, complete with initial *ka-* phonetic complement for *kan* “snake,” and the final *-la* syllabogram for the locative suffix *-u’l* (see Lacadena and Wichmann n.d.:21-28). As such, the conflicts that pitted Yukno’*m* Head and Waxaklajuun Ubaah Kan may well represent differing contenders to the throne, each bearing the same Snake-head emblem glyph. Based on analogous circumstances in the Maya area—and here we can think of Tikal and Dos Pilas (Houston 1993; Martin and Grube 2000:39-43, 56-58)—we are probably witnessing a bout of sibling rivalry, wherein half-brothers leading opposing factions eventually incited a civil war, with a splinter dynasty ultimately relocating to an alternate location, all the while asserting legitimacy and maintaining their claims to the throne. It may thus be these conflicts that are the lynchpin behind these events and the ultimate relocation of the Snake-head dynasty to Calakmul. If this is correctly deduced, then Waxaklajuun Ubaah Kan may have been the last of the Snake-head kings to rule at Dzibanche—apparently the seat of the dynasty in the Early Classic (Velásquez García 2004, 2008a, 2008b; Martin 2005).

Clause 3

The third and final clause is only partially preserved and apparently would have continued on another panel. The Calendar Round of this date is not recorded on Panel 3, but as we have seen can be reconstructed as an important *lahuntun* period ending. All that is recorded on Panel

3 is the verb of the action that transpired on this day (pZ4b). Here it is written *i-pi-tzi-ji* for *i-pitz-ij*, involving the substantive *pitz* “ballgame,” here denominalized by the verbalizing suffix *-ij* (Lacadena 2003), the whole preceded by the conjunctive *i-* “and.” As such the narrative recorded on Panel 3 relates that the period ending involved the celebration of a ballgame, although who was involved is not specified here. There are two other references to the ballgame in the panels of the hieroglyphic stair found at Naranjo (Step 7 and 11), one of which took place in AD 627 (see Table 1) (Figure 12). That ballgame is said to have been captured by the Snake-head king Tajo’*m* Uk’*ab* K’*ahk’* (r. AD 622–630)—the predecessor of Yuhkno’*m* Head—and was played in a ballcourt named Ux Ahal Ehbul or the “three conquest stair” (see Martin and Grube 2000:130; Bíró 2013:18-19). This name is that of a legendary ballcourt where the Maize God was decapitated in the distant past, but was also a name attributed to historical ballcourts at a series of different sites across the lowlands, all as material emulations of the mythic precedent (Freidel et al. 1993:353-355). As such, any ballgames played within such courts were in essence replications of mythic events that transpired in the time before creation. Unfortunately we do not know more about the ballgame recorded on Panel 3, since the remainder of the clause would have been rendered on another panel that has yet to be recovered. The other references made to the ballgame, on the hieroglyphic stair found at Naranjo, are mentioned in conjunction with Snake-head kings as their primary agents. As such we can see that there is an intimate relation between the ballgame and the hegemony of the Snake-head overlords (see Helmke et al. 2015).

Concluding Comments

The discovery of Panel 3 at Xunantunich is a significant find on several fronts. Not only does it provide a heretofore unknown glyphic text, but it also helps to flesh out several important historical events during the reign of K’*an* II at Caracol. It also provides ample support to the hypothesis that the hieroglyphic stair is a monument commissioned by K’*an* II and that it was raised at Caracol. The secondary contexts and the multiple sites at which the panels of this monument have been recovered are evidence of the power and extent of ancient Maya political alliances and the destructive effects of warfare, especially when wrought by vengeful kings. The death date recorded on Panel 3 also makes it clear precisely when Lady Batz’ Ek’ died and eliminates the B19-2nd tomb as a candidate for her final resting place. The mention of Waxaklajuun Ubaah Kan and his attribution of a Snake-head emblem glyph may help to reconstruct what undoubtedly was a period of instability for the dynasty, eventually resulting in the wholesale relocation of the splinter dynasty to Calakmul. It

was this splinter dynasty that would rise to greatness and extend its sphere of influence and ties of vassalage, dominating most of the politics of the Late Classic period. With Panel 3 we have now been able to close an important gap in the lengthy historical narrative that once graced the hieroglyphic stair of K'an II and, however improbable, we can only hope that additional fragments will come to light in the future. The discovery of Panel 3 confirms the ties that bound Xunantunich to Naranjo in the late seventh century, an alliance that would endure well into the Terminal Classic (Helmke et al. 2010). That the hieroglyphic stair of Caracol was dismantled and scattered among the allies of Naranjo is a testament to the might and forceful impact of ancient Maya politics. Whereas the intention of Naranjo kings may have been to silence a glorious part of Caracol's history, we are incredibly fortunate to be able to pick up the pieces and reconstruct much of this once forgotten history.

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Figure 13. Nighttime photography of Panel 3, with Jorge Can holding the lights (photograph by Christophe Helmke).

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The Ocellated Turkey in Maya Thought

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The ancient Maya conceived of nature as a numinous realm where human beings sought to harmonize by means of appropriate religious formulas. Understanding the special and specific nature of the supernatural inhabitants of this realm takes us deeper into Maya beliefs and their expression in daily life. One of these supernaturals, little studied by investigators, is the ocellated turkey of Yucatan, *Meleagris ocellata*, an animal whose striking image accords it complex religious qualities that distinguish it from the common domestic turkey (Figure 1).

In this article we will focus on the role of *Meleagris ocellata* in Precolumbian Maya religion, since it was

conceived of as a being with dynamic religious attributes and multiple functions like the jaguar, the serpent, and the quetzal, although the iconography of *Meleagris ocellata* is limited in comparison. Additionally, as regards the generic identification of turkeys in the codices and elsewhere in Maya iconography, we will show that these pertain in the majority of cases to the variant *Meleagris ocellata*, particularly the strikingly colorful male of the species.

Understanding the religious role played by *Meleagris ocellata* in Precolumbian Maya belief is possible through the study of archaeological, epigraphic, and historical sources, since these all make reference to turkeys in

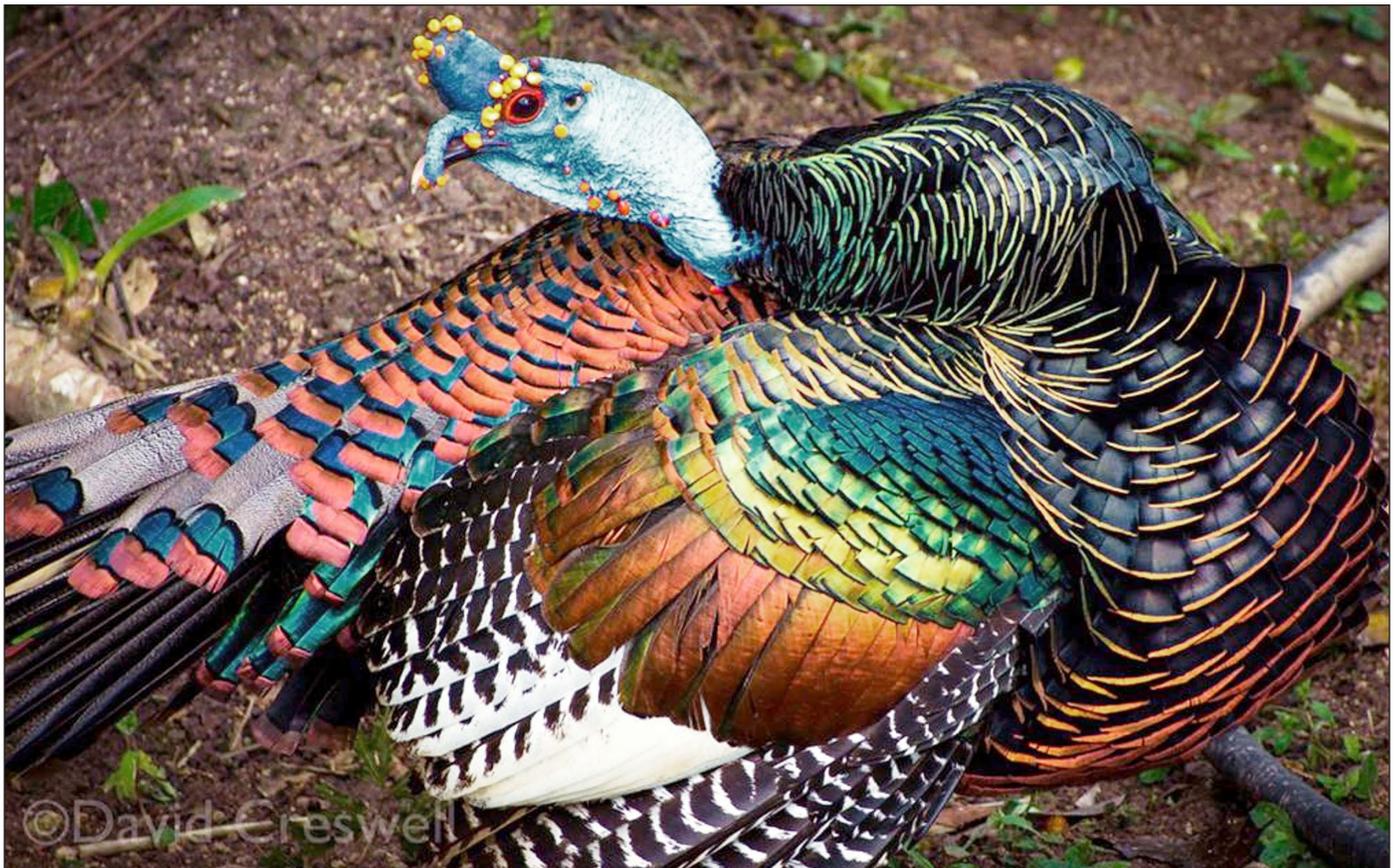


Figure 1. *Meleagris ocellata*. Photograph by David Creswell, collection number K5A02200 (www.flickr.com/photos/cresny/7156138518/in/photostream).

events that illustrate divine forces and rituals, as well as hunting activities of the Maya of yesterday and today. We base this article principally on Precolumbian hieroglyphic texts, but confirming and expanding upon what they say, connecting it with information provided by other sources.

Various documentary sources reveal an important role for the wild turkey, above all in relation to certain personages—possibly rulers—and the rituals of the New Year that can be studied in Postclassic documents such as the Dresden and Madrid codices (Lee 1985), Colonial chronicles such as those of Diego de Landa ([1566]1941), Diego López Cogolludo ([1688]1971), and Juan de Villagutierrez Soto-Mayor ([1701]1933), as well as contemporary testimonies.

The Ocellated Turkey: Biological Description

A bird with large eyes but a small head in relation to its body, the ocellated turkey's unattractive head is naked and bright blue, with wart-like caruncles around the beak and on the crown. The wild turkey attracts attention by its bright red feet with long and sharp spurs. Its body, about one meter in length, is covered in different rows of feathers, some black, others grey, with the most attractive being iridescent blue and green combined with some in bronze color, while those of the tail are referred to as ocellated, which is to say with spots that look like eyes. The foregoing is true of the male bird, while the female lacks all of these features of the head as well as the spurs but has a border of white feathers around the neck. Another characteristic of the male is that when it is excited the fleshy protuberance between the eyes becomes inflamed (Rocha et al. 2009:10).

Archaeological evidence indicates that the ocellated turkey seems never to have been domesticated (Flannery 2001), although some birds may have been captured and raised for ritual purposes (Hamblin 1984:91-96). It lives in constant danger of being hunted by felines, raptors, and serpents (Rocha et al. 2009:11), although its survival is fostered by the ability to fly, albeit to a height of only a few meters. It lives on the move and can cover an area of up to 12 kilometers. It feeds on seeds, leaves, bulbs, and invertebrates, but also grain, beans, and squash (Rocha Gutiérrez et al. 2009:11), which indicates a proximity in ancient and modern times to milpas and garden plots, where it was subject to being captured.

In Precolumbian times, the ocellated turkey occupied forested areas of the Maya lowlands with the exception of the coastline, up to an altitude of approximately 500 m above sea level, for which reason it did not have much presence in the highlands.

It is precisely because of its striking physical characteristics, such as the caruncles indicating a high level of testosterone, the intense and iridescent color of its plumage, its difficulty in living in captivity, the wide

range that it covers, as well as its taste for maize, that caused the Maya to consider that the ocellated turkey belonged to a realm other than the human, pertaining to nature, to one of those sacred spaces where divine forces surround and have guardianship over human existence: the forest zone beyond human habitation, moved by occult forces and sacred energies—a world surrounded by gods and creatures. The wild turkey was an animal of liminal space, for while it lived in the forest it came to the edges to be near human settlement in order to obtain sustenance from cultivated fields and plots. Thus it lived in a world where the ecumene ended and the zone beyond human habitation began (López Austin 2008:56).

Of the ocellated turkey's physical characteristics, the most striking is its plumage, which covers a wide range of colors, all with symbolic power to convey its energy. As mentioned, the feathers of the tail have spots like eyes, and when they expand they seem to look about vigilantly, for which reason the bird was thought capable of understanding everything around it. All of which allows us to associate the wild turkey with another being of sacred and nocturnal character: the jaguar. Thus it partook of extra-human forces, dark aspects of the sphere of life, the space of mystery, disorder, and irrationality, and therefore a complement to the cosmic equilibrium (Garza 1998:131). But its symbolic richness does not end here, since symbolism prevails in its plumage: there we find blue-green, *yax* in the language of the hieroglyphs, while the ocellated turkey's caruncles are colored orange and yellow, thus *k'an* "yellow," associated with ripe grains of maize—the frequent pairing of the glyphs for **K'AN** and **YAX** suggesting the complementary opposition ripe/unripe (Stone and Zender 2011:123, 127) and therefore possibly symbolizing a center of fertility. The terms *ya'ax/ya'x* and *k'an* could comprise the difrasismo *k'an-ya'x/ya'ax* that we find written in the codices, associated with auguries or prognostications, *uya'ax* [*u*] *k'an*, "the green, the yellow," and in certain Colonial texts in Latin characters (see Morán and fray Tomás de Coto [c. 1647–1654]). This difrasismo may possibly be translated as "prosperity" (Escalante Gonzalbo and Velázquez García in press); it relates to a ritual context that we will examine below.

Yukatek Maya has three terms referring to turkeys: *úulum* <*ulum*>, *tzo'* <*dzo*>, and *kuutz* <*cutz*>. In modern times, the first two are used for the domestic turkey, with *tzo'* referring to the male, while *kuutz* refers to the wild or ocellated turkey. Thus, for example, in the Chilam Balam of Chumayel, in the Ceremonial of the *May*, the ruler Hunac Ceel demanded a turkey <*yax ulum*> (Edmonson 1986:81), i.e., one raised domestically, while in the section relating to the arrival of the Spaniards in Merida, the term employed is <*utz*> (Edmonson 1986:108), probably a corruption of the word *kuutz* <*cutz*>.

The Ocellated Turkey in Maya Archaeology

Various archaeological explorations have recovered the remains of turkeys in ceremonial and ritual contexts beginning in the Late Preclassic (400 BC – AD 292) at the site of El Mirador. These skeletal remains pertain to *Meleagris gallopavo*, the domestic turkey, possibly originating from Central Mexico, where it is native.¹ Additionally, remains have been found in the urban cores of Trinidad de Nosotros, Cancuen, Aguateca, Colha, Copan, Dos Pilas, Dzibilchaltun, Motul de San José, Labaantun, and Tipu, all in deposits pertaining to the Late Classic (600–909) and Postclassic (900–1540) (Kennedy 2006:1-34). In this last period, skeletal remains of the turkey were found in Mayapan (Manson and Peraza 2008:173), where Pollock and Ray, in 1937, discovered remains of *Meleagris* that they identified as ocellated, although in light of new biochemical analysis this determination has been questioned (see Flannery 1982:301).

On the island of Cozumel, however, remains of *Meleagris ocellata* have been found in a location that is not its natural habitat. The deposits contain young specimens, which leads Nancy L. Hamblin, who has studied the faunal remains on the island, to suggest that the islanders captured them on the mainland and raised them for ritual purposes (Hamblin 1984:91-96).

On the other hand, zooarchaeological studies at numerous Maya sites have identified the vertebrates forming the carnivorous portion of the ancient diet; in these studies we observe that the turkey scarcely appears, which indicates that its consumption was very sporadic (Götz 2014:172,175, 179) and perhaps limited to ritual uses.²

The Ocellated Turkey in Epigraphy and Iconography

The glyphic complex designating the wild turkey has been known since 1880, when Leon de Rosny read the noun “wild turkey” in the Madrid Codex through the identification in that manuscript of Landa’s syllable **ku**, associated with scenes of hunting where the prey was a bird with protuberances on its beak and head. While de Rosny read the name of this animal as *kutzo*, later Cyrus Thomas corrected the reading to *kutz*.

Yuri V. Knorozov, in his 1952 decipherment of Maya hieroglyphic writing (Knorozov 1952, cited in Coe 1995:157-163; Kettunen and Helmke 2010, 16-17), availed himself of the “alphabet” compiled by Landa in the sixteenth century. Knorozov recognized the syllabogram transcribed by the friar as <cu>, appearing repeatedly in clauses in the Madrid Codex. Since this sign was associated with the image of a turkey, tied up or with its throat slit, Knorozov noted that the glyph (comprised of two signs) must be read <cutz>, “turkey,” in Yukatek Maya (Álvarez 1980:301; Arzápalo Marín 1995:149; Grube 2003:9-10; Kettunen and Helmke 2010:18-19;

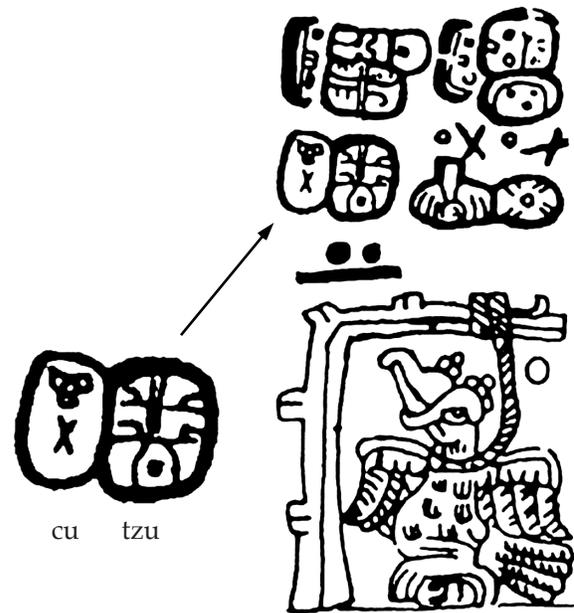


Figure 2. Identification of the glyphic compound <cutz> by Yuri Knorozov in 1952 (from Kettunen and Helmke 2010).

Swadesh et al. 1991:17) (Figure 2). In the Classic period, the Maya had a different designation for the male bird, *ak'ach*³ (cf. Stone and Zender 2011:94) (Figure 3), and the Classic and Postclassic iconographic depictions are very distinct.

The iconographic representations most clearly associated with *Meleagris ocellata* are found on painted

¹ The zooarchaeological team directed by Erin Kennedy Thornton has studied a number of faunal remains uncovered at various sites in the Maya Lowlands, identifying remains of the domestic turkey during excavations at El Mirador, specifically in the Jaguar Paw Temple, in the plaza fronting the Tigre pyramid, and in the Tigre pyramid itself, in Late Preclassic deposits. They also discovered the bones of various birds that, after a series of osteological, morphological, and radiocarbon analyses, turned out to be turkeys. Moreover, it was determined that they showed few signs of flying activity, such that they must have grown up in captivity having been raised domestically. It was additionally postulated that they came to the Maya area from Central Mexico, either transported live or as dried meat (Kennedy et al. 2012:4-5).

² The remains found in domestic contexts, where it is presumed that they were consumed on an everyday basis, were whitetail deer and, to a lesser degree, tortoise, peccary, and brocket deer. At a much smaller scale we find armadillo, tepescuintle, and rabbit—animals that lurk around the milpa and adjacent gardens (Götz 2014:172-181).

³ Although Andrea Stone and Marc Zender (2011:94) transliterate the glyph as *ak'aach*, there are Classic-period inscriptions such as Nim Li Punit Stela 15 where it is written with the syllables **a-k'a-cha**, forming the word *ak'ach*, with short vowel (Erik Velásquez García, personal communication 2014).

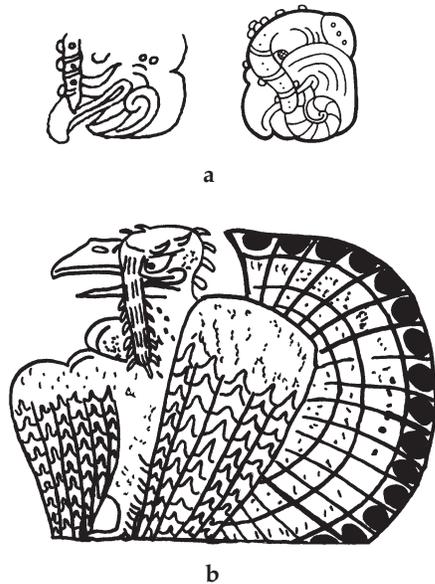


Figure 3. (a) Logographs for AK'ACH, *ak'ach*, "male turkey (from Stone and Zender 2001); (b) example of a wild turkey as a *wahyis* being (from K1001, www.famsi.org).

vessels of the Classic period (Figure 3b).⁴ In these we observe the male bird with its feathers spread out, with a fleshy appendage over part of the head, and with a fierce expression and attitude of attack. In some scenes we observe the male turkey facing baskets or vessels that contain organic remains, such as eyeballs and bones (Figure 4). These scenes indicate a clear nagualistic context for the wild turkey, as well as a dream state. In them it is common to find the name tag *ak'ach uwahy*, "the wild turkey is his nagual."

As determined by various studies (López Austin 2008:101-109; Pitarch Ramón 1996:32-84, 107-168; Velásquez García 2009:460-633), the Maya conceived—and continue to conceive—of the human body as a heterogenous compound of solid substances—comprised by the bones and flesh—and gaseous substances,

which is to say, mental essences and forces that were vital breath, independent consciousness, spiritual beings, and gods wrapped in solid matter (López Austin 2008:101; Velásquez García 2011:235). The substances, solid and gaseous, together formed the body, and the Maya differentiated between them as between those over which they exercised control and those over which they did not. In the first category we have the spirit entity *wahyis*, "auxiliary spirit,"⁵ a part of the body subject to willpower, which in its unpossessed state carries the suffix *-is*, discovered by Marc Zender (2004:195-209), a particle that marks the intimate possession of body parts whose habitual condition is to be possessed.⁶

Although for a long time *wahyis* (commonly written *wahy*), "nagual," has been described as co-essence, alter ego, or *tona* (Houston and Stuart 1989), we now know that this definition is not satisfactory (Stuart 2005:160-165), since co-essences, among other characteristics, live outside of the human body and die at the same time as their possessor. Given the glyphic evidence from the Classic period, it is clear that the *wahy* was conceived of as an intimate part of the human body, which is to say an entity that lives within the body of its possessor, who retains absolute control over his *wahy*. The *wahyis* of a person is associated with *nagualismo*, which is to say the

⁴ Certain polychrome vessels display naturalistic depictions of the wild turkey as an offering or sacrifice. On K2026 at MayaVase.com, we see the supreme god Itzamnaah in his anthropomorphic aspect seated on a throne and looking at himself in a mirror while he receives Ju'n Ajaw, who is in front of him and offers him eight rabbits and an enormous turkey that lacks the wart-like protuberances on the head. Given its passive attitude, without a fierce expression or spread plumage, it is probably a domesticated turkey.

⁵ For the translation of *wahyis* as "auxiliary spirit," see Moreno Zaragoza 2013.

⁶ Other spirit entities that carry the suffix *-is* are *baahis* and *o'hlis*, both treated in an exceptional manner by Erik Velásquez García (2009:460-522, 523-569), as well perhaps as *ch'ahb'is-ahk'ab'is* and *k'ahk'is*.



Figure 4. *Meleagris ocellata* as a *wahy* entity. Before it is a basket with human remains. Photograph K2010 © Justin Kerr.

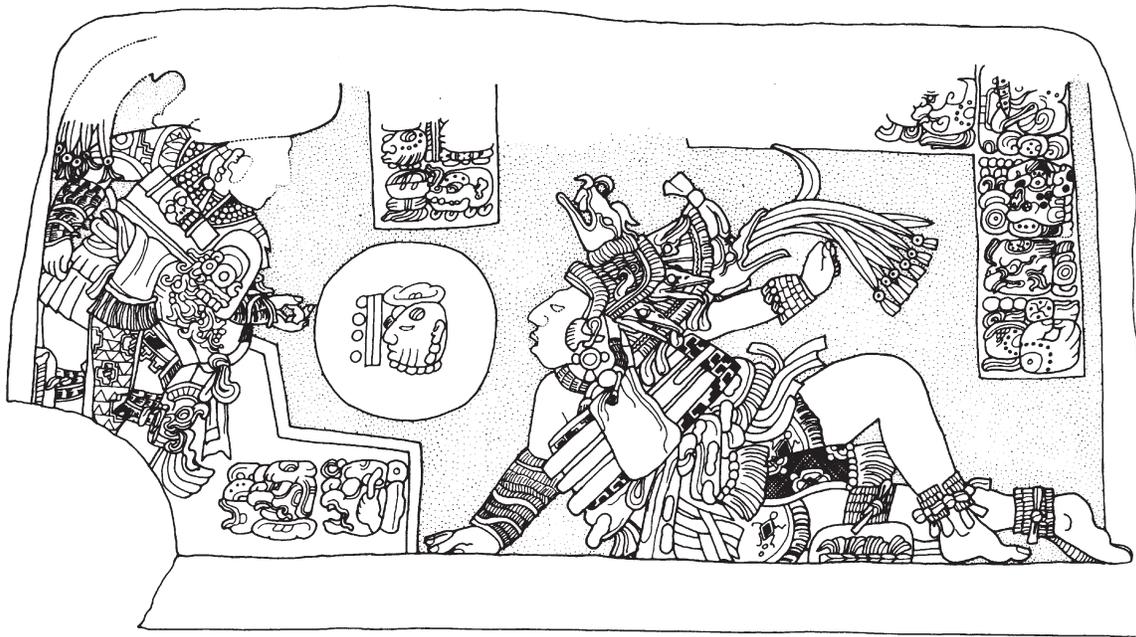


Figure 5. Panel of unknown provenance that shows, on the right, the La Corona ruler Chak Ak'ach Yuhk (from Stone and Zender 2011:108).

capacity of some human beings to transform themselves magically into an animal or a natural phenomenon. There is also the power to project outside the body, at will, one of its mental entities and insert it into the body of another. Given the strange and dark iconographic contexts of the *wahyis* entities, invariably related to animals of fearsome and fantastic aspect, David Stuart (2005:160-165) holds that these must be associated with practices of witchcraft and *brujería*, malicious acts in which Maya rulers took part.

The *wahyis* was a particular mental entity that could be acquired from birth or through special petitions throughout life. The possessors of this entity, during deep sleep, expelled their *wahyis* through the mouth so as to keep watch on their enemies and cause them damage with sicknesses during the night, when the recipients were least protected (Velásquez García 2009:570-634). Glyphic texts and ethnographic data suggest that only certain beings were possessors of *wahyis*, indicative of their power, such as the *k'uhul ajawtaak*. This entity could serve as an ally to its possessor, who could have more than one *wahyis*, some more powerful than others, with the intention of attacking enemies, because if the *wahyis* entity of a person was wounded the person suffered the same effects and would die.

Due to the secrecy that existed regarding the use of *wahyis* entities, the possessor of the wild turkey as a *wahyis* entity on K2010 is not identified by his proper name, but without doubt he is a ruler. Velásquez García (2011:248-249) opines that the scenes where *wahyis* entities appear with vessels containing human remains

represent triumphs over enemies, where the organic remains are symbolic of the vanquished human "soul," since these entities feasted on the "spirit" of their enemies. In other words, the scenes represent dream feasts that the Classic rulers caused to be painted in order to celebrate in the company of their allies:

[W]hile the *wahyis* savored the "souls" of the enemies in the dream world, the rulers tasted them while they slept in their houses. (Velásquez García 2011:248-249, authors' translation)

The fact that the wild turkey was a *wahyis* entity tells us that it was conceived of by the Classic Maya as a being gifted with exceptional powers, which could be harmful to humans from the nocturnal and dream space. Moreover, we know of at least one Maya ruler, from the site of La Corona, Guatemala, whose royal epithet included the wild turkey: Chak Ak'ach Yuhk (Figure 5), perhaps an abbreviated form of Chak Ak'ach Yuhk[no'm Ch'é'n], "Great Male Turkey, Shaker of Cities" (Velásquez García and Esparza Olguín 2013).

The Ocellated Turkey in Postclassic and Colonial Documents

The wild turkey embodied calamitous forces that sprang forth in nocturnal spaces, as we have emphasized based on the depictions of the turkey as a *wahyis* entity. And this interpretation is confirmed by texts from the Colonial era.

In the Books of Chilam Balam the turkey *kuutz* is mentioned in the context of auguries unfavorable to

human beings that seem to be warning of the arrival of times of war and famine:

At that time there was Yax Cutz [Green Turkey]; at that time there was Zulim Chan; at that time there was the lord of Champoton. Starved trees, starved rocks, which came to befall in *katun* 11 Ahau, being sent out from heaven (Edmonson 1982:43, authors' gloss)

López Cogolludo, in his *Historia de Yucatán* ([1688]1971:508), in describing the Franciscan friar Bartolomé Fuensalida's delegation to the Maya rebels of Bacalar, relates that a cacique named Don Pedro Noh showed what appeared to be amicable intentions by offering food in the form of cock or hen in a pie. But Fuensalida's Indian companions took this as a bad sign meaning war, not peace. It is very probable that the food served to the Spaniards was made from the meat of a wild rather than domestic turkey, the wild bird being associated with drought and war.

In modern times the ocellated turkey retains this bad connotation,⁷ as seen in a ceremony celebrated in Calkini called *Kóol Kaal Tzo'*, "pull the neck of the turkey," wherein they hang up a turkey and the participants pass underneath the rope where the turkey is swinging and, rather than strike it with a stick like a piñata, they try to reach it with their hands in order to yank the head and pull it down (Jorge Cocom, personal communication 2013), this being associated with the way that hitting and breaking a piñata signifies putting an end to the seven deadly sins of the Catholic faith.⁸

The Ocellated Turkey in the Dresden and Madrid Codices

The malign aspects of the wild turkey in the Classic and Postclassic, as well as in the Colonial period and our own times, contrast with what we find in the Dresden and Madrid codices. There, the depictions of *Meleagris ocellata*, clearly identified by the protuberance between the eyes and the large and colored caruncles, appear in ritual contexts associated directly with the gods, to be sacrificed by the dieties in order to nourish the natural world and make it fertile.

The importance of the wild turkey in the Dresden and Madrid codices is owing, among other reasons, to the religious conception of the Maya regarding birds. Given that the word *muut* means "omen" as well as "bird," birds were identified as messengers of the gods,

⁷ This is also reflected in culinary contexts, given that there are turkeys that are filled with a black "message" (sauce), although in serving them they are stuffed with a sauce of tomato and achiote, which has a contrary symbolism.

⁸ Eduardo Baeza García, when he was presidente municipal of Calkini from 1956 to 1958, prohibited this ceremony as it was considered cruel, for which reason it has ceased to be performed.



Figure 6. Page 16c of the Dresden Codex, where various birds serve as messengers of the moon goddess (drawing by Carlos A. Villacorta).

as we see in the text of page 16c of the Dresden Codex (Figure 6):

Uhxlaju'n Muwaan is the omen of Uuw Ixik, her sign.
The quetzal is the sign of Uuw Ixik, much food.
The macaw is the omen of Sak Ixik, her sign.

In this text divination is evidenced through the observation of the birds and their song. On page 95c of the Madrid Codex (Figure 7) we find the turkey endowed with this characteristic, since the text, an augury or prognostication that involves the moon goddess, is transmitted to humans through the bird. This augury is very good, since it consists of "abundant sustenance"

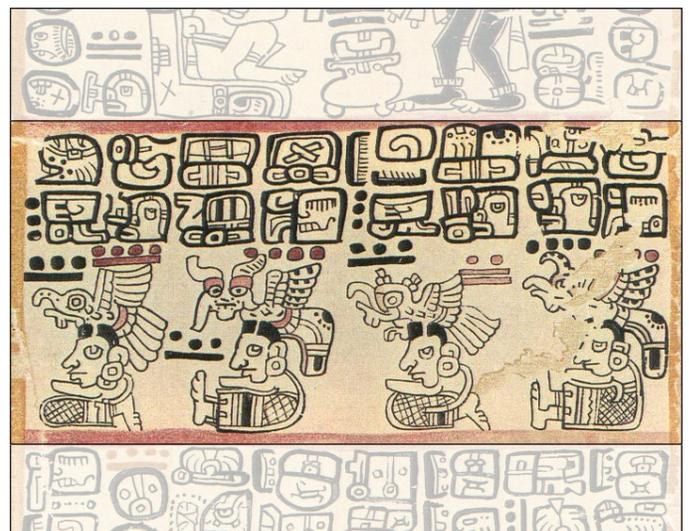


Figure 7. Page 95c of the Madrid Codex. The third image from the left shows the moon goddess with a turkey on her head serving as a messenger of her will (from Lee 1985).

(*ox wi'il*).⁹

The turkey, therefore, was conceived of as a messenger of divine will. It is shown also in association with Chaahk, the rain god, as we see on page 29c of the Dresden Codex (Figure 8). The glyphic text links it to one of the four directions, the north, as well as the color white. In front of the god's face we find the depiction of the head of a wild turkey, very probably associated with the augury of that almanac, either as a gift of the god himself or as a portent of food (*waaj*) for human beings.

On pages 25c and 26c of the same codex, the supreme deity Itzamnaah and K'awiil, the god of abundant food and royal lineage, are each holding the body of a wild turkey with its throat slit. In the first (Figure 9) we have the head of the god Chaahk atop a pole, to which Itzamnaah incenses and sacrifices a turkey as part of rite of the celebration of the New Year (García Barrios 2008:392). These offerings were carried out in the east. In the second page, 26c (Figure 10), we have the deity K'awiil scattering grains of maize over an incensario and holding the body of the turkey with its throat slit. This rite was enacted as part of the New Year ritual complex wherein the Green Tree or New Tree was planted in the south. In front of this tree we have a



Figure 8. Detail of page 29c of the Dresden Codex showing Chaahk with the head of a turkey (drawing by Carlos A. Villacorta).

turkey positioned on top of an offering vessel and, just above it, a glyphic complex reading *yaax waaj*, "first/new food."¹⁰

These pages indicate that the sacrifice of the wild turkey was fundamental in the New Year ceremonies, a time of beginning, when through its sacrifice a process of fertilization was unleashed that assured the sustenance of human beings at the start of the year. It is not by chance that the gods Itzamnaah and K'awiil are the enactors of these rites, since the first, as the supreme god and patron deity of birds, is in charge of guaranteeing, in this almanac, the profusion of birds that make nature generous in order to assure human sustenance. The second, K'awiil, whose name has been translated as "abundant food," fertilizes the earth through grains of maize and the sacrifice of birds, both rites with the intention of producing food in abundance for human beings.

Landa, for his part, relates that the sacrifice for the beginning of the year was a turkey, which was always by slitting its throat. Landa relates that in the year beginning with the day Muluk a stone figure was ordered to be made:

On arriving there, the priest perfumed it with fifty-three grains of ground maize and with their incense, which they call *sacah*. The priest also gave to the nobles more incense of the kind we call *chahalte*, to put in the brazier; and then they cut off the head of a hen, as before, and taking the image on

⁹ If the word "three" were in Mopan/Itza, it would be transliterated as *ox*. If, on the other hand, the text is in glyphic Maya, it would be transliterated *uhx*.

¹⁰ We transliterate *yaax waaj* since it is highly probable that the text is written in Mopan-Itza. If in Yukatek, it would be transliterated *yáax waaj*.



Figure 9. Page 25c of the Dresden Codex (drawing by Carlos A. Villacorta).



Figure 10. Page 26c of the Dresden Codex (drawing by Carlos A. Villacorta).

a standard called *chacte*, they bore it off all accompanying it with devotion and dancing some war-dances, which they call *Holcan okit*, *Batel okot*. (Landa [1566]1941:144)

This account is fused with the New Year ceremonies in the codices; therefore we suggest that it was the head of a male wild turkey that was consecrated, as well as its blood, which, by means of the ritual, was transformed to sustain the regeneration of nature.¹¹

Conclusions

The study presented here of the turkey of the variety *Meleagris ocellata*, despite limited interest on the part of investigators, indicates that the ocellated or wild turkey was conceived of by the Maya of the Classic to be one of the *wahyis* spirit entities, or “auxiliary spirits,” that were an important part of the political and religious apparatus of Maya kings. In its biological characteristics as well as its habitat, the wild turkey was accorded a series of complex qualities that permitted it to move in a dream state and especially an ambit alien from the human, outside the ecumene. As we have shown, the malign and harmful force that the wild turkey embodied in Classic conceptions continued into the Colonial era, and it is possible to find it to this day in some Maya regions.

Our proposal is that its energy was ambivalent: on painted vessels of the Late Classic its dark or malignant side seems to predominate. On the other hand, and by contrast, in the codices it is tied to fertilizing forces that impel the regeneration of nature. The function of the codex explains why information concerning the beneficent aspect of the animal is found there. These were religious texts to illustrate for priests the ritual steps that humans need to take, because they are the same actions that the gods undertake.

Here the wild turkey, *kuutz*, appears without the harmful characteristics belonging to the Classic period and inserted into ritual contexts where the gods participate. In such rituals, the wild turkey acts, like other birds, as the messenger of divine will, principally that of the moon goddess. Also, its sacrifice and immolation in the rites of the New Year give rise to times of abundant food and well-being for human beings.

In synthesis, *Meleagris ocellata* was the origin and augury of illnesses and the provoker of beneficences in Maya religion.

¹¹ Alfred Tozzer, in a note on Landa’s text referring to hunting rituals, transcribes a document on idolatry where it is related that Juan Uc “killed a turkey hen and its blood he placed on the noses of the idols, the face and forehead and all the rest and this he anointed in behalf of the God of the chase...” (Tozzer in Landa [1566]1941:144). This is the first mention we find referring to the sacrifice of a female turkey, since all other cases make reference to the male.

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The Further Adventures of Merle (continued)

MERLE GREENE ROBERTSON

Chinkultic and San Cristobal

In August, 1972, Linda, Robert and Linda Moore, and I went to Chinkultic with Mario Leon, keeper of the ruins, in Linda's jeep by way of Tuxtla. Everyone was told to bring his own towel and water canteen. Who did? Nobody but me. So everyone was drinking out of my canteen and using my towel. Not a very good idea. As the road at that time was over gushing streams and full of potholes and makeshift bridges and in some places was not even exactly there, we had to spend the first night in Ocosingo. We climbed over mountains where we were high above the clouds. The cattlemen's association was having a convention in Ocosingo—so no hotels. We finally stayed in an empty house owned by one of Mario's cousins. Houses changed from the lower country wattle-and-daub huts, to wattle-daub huts with mud between the poles, to high-in-the-mountains wood huts. These last gave a checkerboard effect with the red mud against the white lime. Some high up even had tile roofs. We arrived in Tuxtla about 4:00 pm and checked into a hotel with five beds in one room—cost 140 pesos. Alejandro Martínez joined our group at this time. We finally arrived at Stephan Borhegyi's place, where arrangements had been made for us to stay. It was just great staying at his place, but we were sorry our friend was not there at the time. The next morning we started out for Chinkultic. Linda was not feeling well, so she didn't get to see the site at all. But it is a spectacular site, so high up with a grand view of the entire valley. I even managed to get a rubbing done of one of the stelae, yes, in the rain. Does it rain all the time? It sure looked like it. In the small town of Comitán that looks over the beautiful Comitán Valley, Linda and I were parked in a narrow street where our wheels were right up on the narrow sidewalk. An Indian was standing there with a little puppy poking its head out of a bag tied around the man's head. I patted the little puppy's head and the man said, "Want buy?" I said, "Quantos?" He replied, "Diez pesos." I suddenly had a puppy—so cute; he snuggled right under my jacket as if he had always been there. I named him Chinkultic right then. Linda was sick all the



Figure 1. Cenote Azul, Chinkultic. Photo: Merle Greene Robertson.

way and could eat nothing, but I bought a 14-inch ear of corn from another Indian on the street who was grilling these immense ears of corn over a large oil drum.

In San Cristobal we stayed at Trudy Blom's. The first night we were seated at her dining table, with Trudy, at the head, dressed as if for a ball and flanked on both sides by her two massive dogs, me sitting next to her, and Linda sitting next to me. When the maid was clearing the table, Trudy saw that Linda had only eaten a small piece of her bread. With that, Trudy rose to full height and practically shouted, "I was brought up to eat everything on my plate." Poor Linda was sinking lower and lower into her seat. I spoke up and told Trudy that Linda had been sick our entire trip and this was the first thing she had eaten. Well, things changed immediately. Nothing she wouldn't do for Linda. And my puppy had to have real meat, roast beef like we were having, certainly not scraps. It turned out that Linda had hepatitis, so we all had to have gamma globulin shots. No one else got sick, luckily, even though we had all been drinking out of the same canteen. After that we said that if you are staying at Trudy Blom's, it's best to either be sick or have a puppy—having a puppy being by far the best.