



Figure 1. El Palmar in its regional setting. Inset map shows distance of journey from El Palmar to Copan referenced in the article.

Maya Archaeology Reports

Ajpach' Waal: The Hieroglyphic Stairway of the Guzmán Group of El Palmar, Campeche, Mexico

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A recently discovered hieroglyphic stairway in the Guzmán Group at El Palmar, Campeche provides us with rich information on both Classic Maya officials and diplomatic events in Classic Maya society. Epigraphic research has demonstrated that officials played significant roles in courtly activities during the Late Classic period (AD 600–800) (Houston 1993:127-136; Houston and Stuart 2001; Inomata 2001; Jackson 2005). In hieroglyphic texts they often carry titles that reference specific statuses and duties (Bernal Romero 2009; Houston and Inomata 2009:163-192; Jackson and Stuart 2001; Lacadena 2008; Schele 1991, 1993; Stuart 1993b). Archaeological research has identified their residences outside the civic-ceremonial core (Webster 1989). Moreover, both archaeological and epigraphic data suggest that they were incorporated into interregional dynastic interactions that crosscut the political landscape of Late Classic Maya society (Chinchilla and Houston 1992; Golden et al. 2008; Martin and Grube 2008:150; Zender 2004a).

The inscriptions from the Guzmán Group as well as other texts from El Palmar exemplify the political activities of officials in southern Campeche, Mexico, where the Kaan dynasty exercised hegemonic power until around AD 736 (Grube 2005, 2008; Martin and Grube 2000).¹ The hegemonic relationship between the El Palmar polity and the Kaan dynasty remains

elusive, but our recent epigraphic studies suggest the presence of a diplomatic connection (Esparza and Tsukamoto 2011), and the texts of the Guzmán Group provide an additional line of evidence. Furthermore the texts suggest that El Palmar's political connections were not limited to southern Campeche, but extended some considerable distance across the Maya Lowlands.

This article centers on a detailed description of the epigraphy while we briefly contextualize the hieroglyphic stairway in the archaeological record. We will publish a comprehensive archaeological treatment in the light of anthropological theory in future publications. After our present review of the hieroglyphic texts, we will compare the new information with data recovered from other Maya centers in order to discuss the dynastic networks and internal political composition of El Palmar.

Setting

El Palmar is located near the modern pueblo of Kiché Las Pailas in southeastern Campeche about 30 km from the borders of Guatemala and Belize (Figure 1). El Palmar was first discovered in 1936 by J. Eric S. Thompson (1936, 1963). About half a century

¹ The Kaan (Serpent) dynasty is also known as Kaanal or Kanu'l.



Figure 3. Structure GZ1, Hieroglyphic Stairway at Guzmán Group. Photo: Kenichiro Tsukamoto.

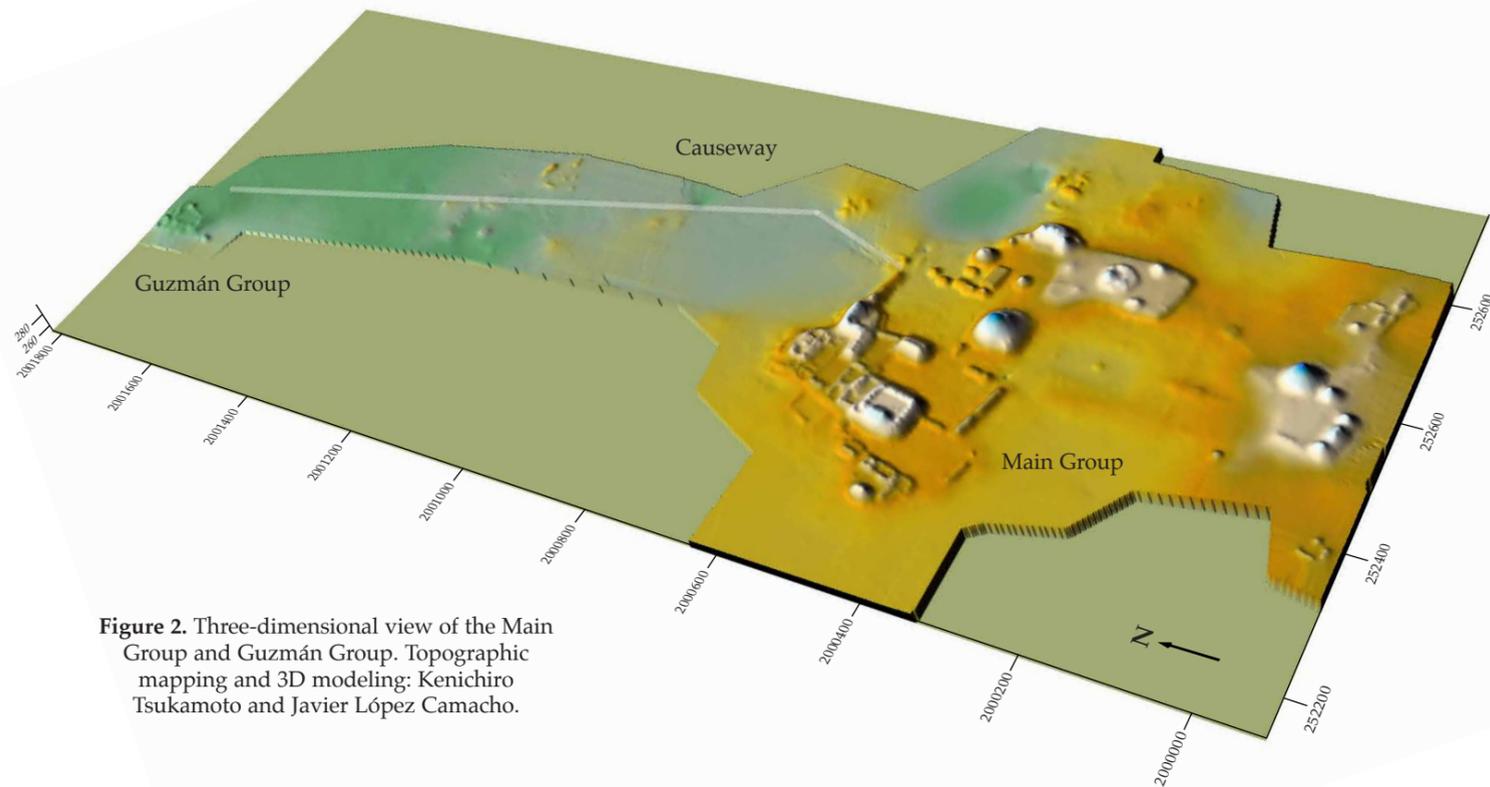


Figure 2. Three-dimensional view of the Main Group and Guzmán Group. Topographic mapping and 3D modeling: Kenichiro Tsukamoto and Javier López Camacho.

later the site was explored by Carlos Brokmann (1996, 1997) for three months during the years 1996 and 1997. Since 2007 Kenichiro Tsukamoto and Javier López Camacho have directed the El Palmar Archaeological Project.

Surface survey and topographic mapping have shown that the site consists of a main group and several peripheral groups. The Main Group is composed of monumental architecture and large ceremonial spaces in which at least 36 stelae and 15 altars were erected (Figure 2). The central aguada, an artificial reservoir, is located at the heart of the Main Group, and two pyramids, Temples I and II, stand on the north and south sides of the central aguada. A large royal palace occupies the western area of the Main Group (Tsukamoto et al. 2010). Nine test excavations at the Main Group during the 2009 field season and subsequent ceramic and radiocarbon analyses suggest that the Main Group was occupied from the Late Preclassic (ca. 300 BC–AD 250) to the Terminal Classic periods (ca. AD 850–1000) (Tsukamoto et al. 2012).

In a 2009 survey of outlying areas, we detected a hieroglyphic stairway at the Guzmán Group, located 1.3 km north of the Main Group (Figure 3). In contrast to the monumental architecture of the Main Group, the Guzmán Group consists of a small temple adorned with the hieroglyphic stairway (GZ1), as well as six lower structures (GZ2–GZ6 and GZ9) surrounding a plaza (Figure 4). Extensive excavations were conducted from December 2010 to February 2011 at GZ1, GZ6, and Plaza A, with trench excavations at GZ5 and GZ9. The results show that the Guzmán Group was first paved with a plaster floor around AD 600, though some Middle and Late Preclassic sherds were mixed with Late Classic materials in construction fills. The excavations exposed GZ1 in its entirety. With the stairway, GZ1 measures 10.5 x 10.5 m at its base, and is 3 m high. The hieroglyphic stairway provides access to its west facade, and leads to a small summit shrine with a single doorway. Wall-facing stones are thin squares of limestone veneer, finished with thin plaster and red paint. Architectural remains suggest that the upper shrine of GZ1 was originally decorated by finely cut cornices and a vaulted roof. The shrine interior contains two benches and two ceramic cord holders mounted on the wall. The stair is composed of six steps with 109 facing stones, forming a text that we estimate to have encompassed 164 glyph blocks.² While local limestone in southeastern Campeche is friable and

² This number includes eroded and missing blocks which would have contained glyphs.

easily eroded, the stair blocks are relatively durable, particularly in comparison with other limestone veneers more typically used for walls at El Palmar. It is possible that raw materials were imported from other sources, but this has yet to be rigorously investigated. Most carved blocks were in place or slightly moved when found. The average stone measures 40 cm (+/- 10.40) in length, 25 cm (+/- 3.44) in width, and 17 cm (+/- 3.71) in depth.

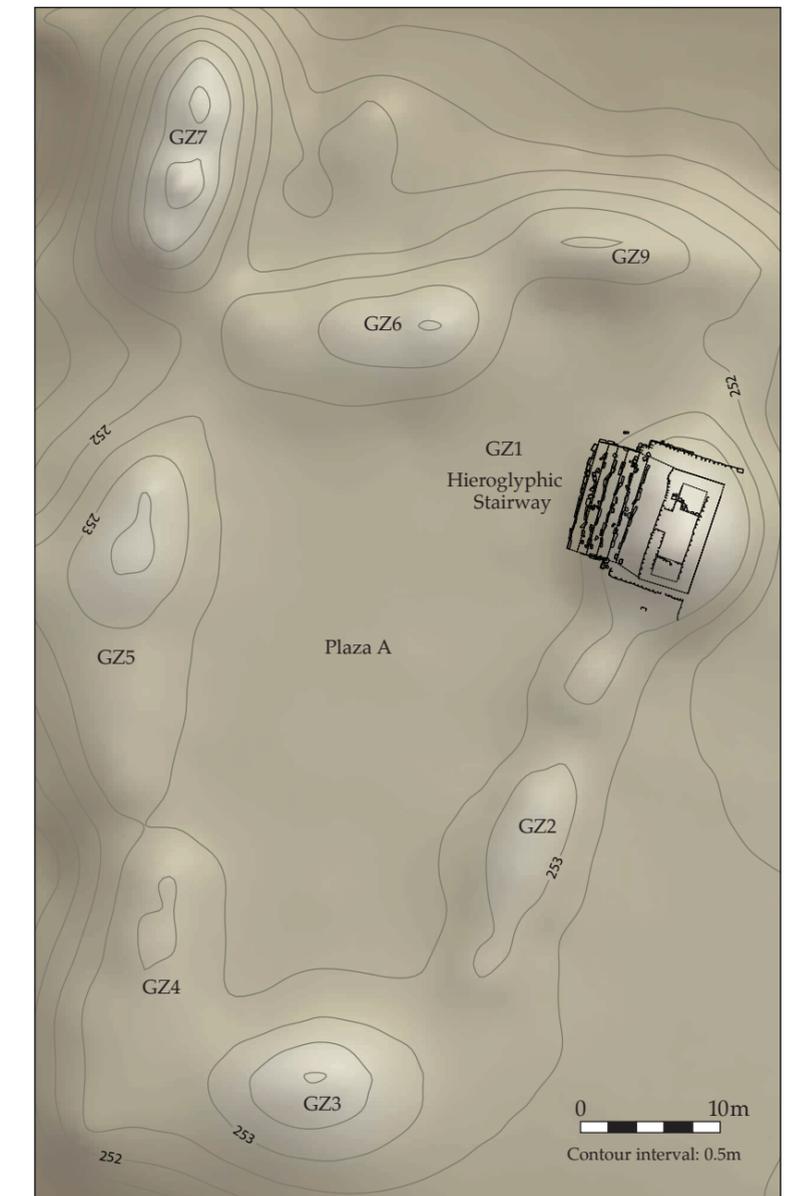


Figure 4. Map of the Guzmán Group. Mapping and cartography: Kenichiro Tsukamoto.



Figure 5. Alphanumeric designations. Photo: Kenichiro Tsukamoto

Epigraphic Procedure

Documentation of the hieroglyphic stairway at the Guzmán Group follows the alphanumeric designation established by Ian Graham (1975). One important deviation from this well-developed method is in the labeling of the steps. While hieroglyphic stairways at other centers such as Copan (Stuart 2005a), Dos Pilas (Houston 1993), Ceibal (Graham 1990), and Yaxchilan (Graham 1982) are read from the top step to the bottom step, the hieroglyphic stairway of the Guzmán Group is read from bottom to top. Therefore the six steps were labeled I to VI from the bottom to the top, and the first glyph located at the left corner of the bottom step is labeled glyph A1 of Step I (Figure 5). Since the majority of the blocks contain only one row of glyph blocks, most were designated by a letter of the alphabet and the number 1 (e.g., A1, B1, C1). Some missing glyph blocks were also labeled, in the hope that additional fragments might be recovered in future research at surrounding structures. Indeed, we found a fragmentary glyphic block on the surface of Structure GZ6. Judging from its size, we suggest that it originated as glyph block A1 of Step IV.

In the field, Esparza drew the glyph blocks and provided

preliminary readings while Tsukamoto photographed the entire stairway. After the details of the drawings were refined by both authors in the laboratory, we read the texts independently and compared our results. We then compared the Guzmán Group texts with other inscriptions recovered from the Main Group, as well as those from other sites.

Hieroglyphic Stairway Step I

The opening Initial Series provides the Long Count date *9.14.*14.*13.19 in glyph blocks A1–F1, corresponding to June 24, AD 726 (Figure 6). The glyph blocks at A1, B1, D1, and E1 are fragmentary but can be reconstructed based on the legible numbers and syntactic order. The corresponding Calendar Round should be 8 Kawak 17 Yaxk'in. While the haab component in R1 is plausibly 17 Yaxk'in, the tzolk'in in Q1 clearly features the day sign Ajaw. The resulting Calendar Round—*9 Ajaw 17 Yaxk'in—has the appearance of a so-called Puuc date, where the numerical coefficient of the haab is one less than expected (Proskouriakoff and Thompson 1947). Peter Mathews ([1977]2001) has shown that a date of this type at Dos Pilas can be explained by supposing that the tzolk'in advances ahead of the haab—presumably

turning during the previous night—while the haab advances at sunrise the next day. Puuc-style dates of this kind would be used to record nighttime events (also see Stuart 2004b). In our case, it seems that the tzolk'in of 8 Kawak had changed to 9 Ajaw during the night, while the haab day 17 Yaxk'in remained unchanged. At sunrise, the Calendar Round would reach the next “normal” date 9 Ajaw 18 Yaxk'in, corresponding to the Long Count date 9.14.14.14.0 (June 25, AD 726). 9 Ajaw 17 Yaxk'in was carved instead of the “normal” Calendar Round to indicate that the associated event happened at night.

Our next problem is the implication of the two glyph blocks immediately preceding the Calendar Round. O1 tentatively reads **a-LAY?-ya**, *alay(?)*, “here” or, perhaps, “this (one)” (MacLeod and Polyukhovich 2005). This sign occasionally precedes a date in monumental inscriptions (Stuart 1989:152–153), but still another glyph intervenes on block P1 before the Calendar Round. The glyph at P1 is too fragmented to fully identify, but Simon Martin (personal communication 2012) suggests that it could serve to indicate a nighttime event in the same manner that **(ta)-yi-IHK'K'IN?-ni** does at Yaxchilan, Piedras Negras, and Dos Pilas. The outline of a probable **yi** sign can just be made out at the top left of the P1 block. If the glyph block at O1 works as a preposition in this context, the glyph block at P1 might be reconstructed as ***yi-IHK'K'IN?-ni**, being congruent with the nighttime associations of the Puuc-style date.

The Supplementary Series for the date includes glyph G9 (although the date 9.14.14.14.0 calls for G1) and glyph F (G1 and H1 respectively); glyphs E and D (I1) or the moon age **13-ji-ya**, **HUL-li-ya**, *uxlajuunjiyy huliyy*, “thirteen days have passed” (I1 and J1), following glyphs C (K1), X (L1), B (M1), or **u-ch'o-ko** **K'ABA'**, *uch'ok k'aba'*, “his youth name,” and A (N1) or “30 days.”

Glyph blocks S1–Y1 record a historical event and a foreign ruler, along with his titles. Glyph S1 is an intransitive verb of motion which reads **T'AB[-yi]**, *t'abayi*, “to ascend, or to go up” (Houston et al. 2000:330; Kaufman and Norman 1984; Stuart 1998). The left side of the glyph block at T1 is eroded, but together with the glyph block at U1 it can be read as ***3-wi-ti-ki** **CHAN-na** **CH'E'N**, *ux witik chan ch'e'n*, “Ux Witik sky-cave.” Such “sky-cave” glyphs are associated with locations, and it is very common for toponyms to immediately follow verbs of motion in the script (Marc Zender, personal communication 2013). Ux Witik is known to be the Copan toponym (Stuart and Houston 1994:12, 23), and this combination of *ux witik* and *chan ch'e'n* can be seen on the Temple 21 bench at the site (Stuart et al. 1999:Fig. 170).

Glyph blocks V1 and W1 read **ti-BAT³-ku-pi? a-AJAW**, *ti-BAT-kuup(?) ajaw*, “the lord of Copan,” which likely represents

the Copan emblem glyph (see Stross 1989). A similar BAT emblem glyph appears on the monuments of Calakmul and Oxpepul in southeastern Campeche during the Classic period, but Martin (2005a:5 n. 11) points out that it lacks the suffixes **pi** (and/or **pu?**) seen in the Copan emblem. When **K'UHUL** appears as prefix to the **AJAW** sign, the resultant emblem glyph serves as the exclusive title of principal lords (Stuart and Houston 1994:3–7). In this case, the **K'UHUL** sign is absent, but the **AJAW** sign (followed by the preposition **ti**) precedes the name of the ruler **18-u-BAAH-K'AWIIL**, *waxaklajuun ubaah k'awiil* (glyphs X1 and Y1). It is well known that Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil (also known as 18 Rabbit) is the thirteenth lord of the Copan dynasty (Martin and Grube 2008:203). We surmise that the lack of the **K'UHUL** sign in this example of the Copan emblem glyph may be due to the hegemonic influence of the nearby Kaan dynasty, an important point to which we will return. Additionally, the syntax of this statement is noteworthy because the intransitive verb of motion and toponym are followed by paired prepositional sub-clauses (i.e., **ti...ti...**). A few similar examples can be seen on Hieroglyphic Stairway 2 of Dos Pilas and Stela F of Copan; the former case in particular resembles the Guzmán passage. Here, the preposition **ti** before the name of Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil emphasizes that this king did not go up to Copan, but rather that an individual or group from El Palmar did so in order to see him. In summary, on June 24, AD 726 an El Palmar party “went up to Copan, to the Copan king, to Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil” at night.

The glyphic clause at Z1–FF1 records the name of Copan's local deities after a possible verbal expression and a relational glyph. These read **che-ka-ja yi-chi-NAL? CHAN-na-TE' a-AJAW-wa 9-K'AWIIL-la k'u-yu-NIK?⁴-AJAW?**, *chekhaj yichnal chan te' ajaw baluun k'awiil k'uy nik(?) ajaw...*, “It is visible in the company of the four lords, Baluun K'awiil, K'uy Nik(?) Ajaw...” The expression *chekhaj* is very rare, appearing only here and on Caracol Stela 6, where it is a personal name (Grube 1994; Grube and Martin 2004:65–67; Houston 1989). While allowing for the possibility that **che-ka-ja** in this context is not a verb, David Stuart (personal communication 2011) suggests passive *chekhaj* “to be visible” or “to be presented.” In Ch'orti, the noun *chek* means “image, reflection, image used by sorcerer” and the derived passive verb *chektah* means “to be seen, visible, come into view, appear” (Wisdom 1950:698). This is followed by the relational *yichnal* “before, in front of” which introduces a list of Copan's local deities—Chante' Ajaw, Baluun K'awiil, and K'uy

³ The phonetic reading of the BAT sign has been proposed as **tz'i** by Stuart (1987a) and as **xu** by Grube (1992:211 n. 5), but it remains uncertain.

⁴ David Stuart (personal communication 2011) has recently proposed the alternative reading **SAAK** “seed.”



Figure 6. Step I of the hieroglyphic stairway. Photos: Kenichiro Tsukamoto. Drawings: Octavio Q. Esparza Olguín.

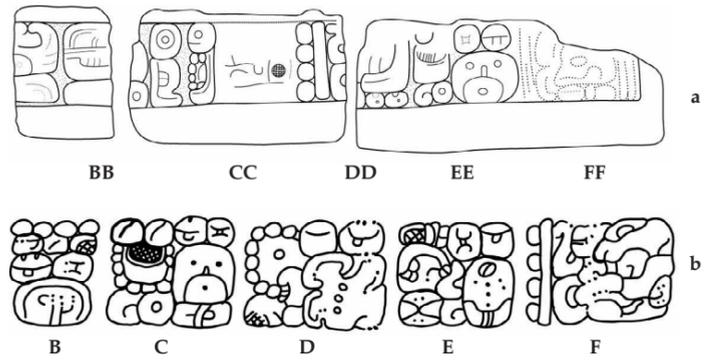


Figure 7. Copan local deities: (a) Step I of the hieroglyphic stairway at the Guzmán Group: Chan Te' Ajaw (BB1 and CC1), Baluun K'awiil (DD1), K'uy Nik? Ajaw (EE1), and undeciphered glyph block (FF1) (drawing: Octavio Q. Esparza Olguín); (b) bench in Copan Temple 21: Chan Te' Ajaw (B), K'uy Nik? Ajaw (C), Mo' Witz' Ajaw (D), Tukun Witz' Ajaw (E), and Baluun K'awiil (F) (after Stuart et al. 1999:190, Fig. 170).

Nik(?) Ajaw—who frequently appear on carved monuments at Copan (Newsome 2001; Stuart et al. 1999:190-192) (Figure 7). To judge from Copan's inscriptions, glyph blocks FF1 of Step I and A1–C1 of Step II could well provide the names of two additional gods frequently associated with the aforementioned (i.e., Mo' Witz Ajaw and/or Tukun Witz Ajaw) but the blocks are too eroded to allow certainty.

Hieroglyphic Stairway Step II

Apart from the aforementioned possibility that the opening blocks of Step II contain the names of additional Copan gods, it is equally possible that they now at last provide the name of the subject of the *t'abayi* verb from glyph block S1, or that they provide a relational glyph or additional titles of that subject (Figure 8). Unfortunately, a block corresponding to glyph block A1 of Step II is missing, and the glyph blocks at B1 and C1 are heavily weathered and broken. The readable portions of glyph block C1 are #-**yu?**-**wi**,⁵ but without more context the meaning is elusive. After the undeciphered glyph block at D1 **?-na**, the glyph blocks at E1–F1 read **AJ-pa-ch'a wa-li**, *ajpach' waal*, “Ajpach' Waal,” likely referring to an individual.⁶ Because the name Ajpach' Wal appears elsewhere in the hieroglyphic stairway, we suggest that this is the name (or at least part of the name) of the subject of the *t'abayi* event from Step 1, Glyph S1. The following three glyph blocks at G1–I1 read **AJ-ti-xa-ha CHAN-na so?-ni xa-MAN-na #-CH'E'N**, *ajtixah chan soon xaman ...ch'e'n*, “he of Tixah, four soon, north...place.” By comparison with glyph blocks R1–U1 or Z1–CC1 of Step IV, we can reconstruct a broken syllable **xa** on glyph block G1 and a reading of *soon* on H1. Tokovinine (2008:263-265) has identified the regional distribution of so-called ‘numbered titles’ consisting

of NUMBER-T501[544]-**ni**, within which set the title Four-T501[544]-**ni** is found in connection with Bonampak ruler Yajaw Chan Muwaan and an individual from Motul de San José, among others. Likewise, Helmke et al. (this volume) provide a review of the numbered titles, one of which is identified on the Cuychen vase. Recently, Zender (2011) tentatively proposed reading glyph T501[544] as **so** in the context of a recently-discovered inscription at Cahal Pech, Belize. Based on these decipherments, we suggest that the phrase *ajtixah' chan soon xaman ...ch'e'n* indicates a string of titles preceded by a title of origin, within which we consider that *xaman ...ch'e'n* might be related to the northern location of the Guzmán Group, or perhaps of El Palmar, as seen from Copan. Although the term *ch'e'n* literally refers to “caves and cavernous features,” the term might have been used to refer more generally to a physical place such as a village, town, or center, as may be the case here (Bíró 2011; Helmke 2009; Martin 2004:108; Tokovinine 2008; Velásquez García 2004:83-84; Vogt and Stuart 2005).

The following glyph blocks from J1 of Step II to B1 of Step III record parentage statements of Ajpach' Waal. The seven blocks at J1–L1 and at O1–R1 of Step II refer to the mother of Ajpach' Waal. The blocks at J1–L1 read **ya-YAL *K'UH-T182-la-IX IX-WINIK-AJAW-wa**, *yaal k'uhul(?)...ix ixwinik ajaw*, “the child of mother, Lady Winik Ajaw.” Between her name and titles, an iconographic scene represents two ballplayers facing off on either side of a large ball. A small caption (the glyphs M1 and M2), located on the upper left corner of the left player, possibly refers to one of their names, but these are too eroded to read. Continuously the glyphs N1–P1 record **ba-AJAW-wa IX-to-k'a a-AJAW-WINIK-ki**, *baah ajaw ixtook' ajaw winik*, “the head lord, Lady Flint Ajaw Winik.” Stephen Houston (personal communication 2012) suggests that by complementing **IX** signs the glyph blocks from K1 to P1 represent a form of chiasmus such as Lady Winik Ajaw, *Lady Baah Ajaw, Lady Took', *Lady Ajaw Winik. The title *baah ajaw* is reported at other sites, in which it serves to designate heirs or the first among many (Bernal Romero 2009; Fash and Stuart 1991; Houston 1993), suggesting that Ajpach' Waal's mother possessed high social status. Likewise, the glyph blocks at Q1–W1 record the names and titles of the father of Ajpach' Waal. They read **yu-ne AJ-lu-#-chi-hi⁸ AJ-ti-xa-ha u-LAKAM u-pa-ka-la # ? ?** (glyphs W–Y are missing), *yumen ajlu...chih ajtixah*

⁵ The “#” symbol represents a sign which is too eroded to be legible.

⁶ In Ch'orti, *pach'* means “crushing, pressing, trapping” (Wisdom 1950:561).

⁷ Dmitri Beliaev (personal communication 2012) suggests that *xah* or *tixah* means “lowlands” or “plains.” As he notes, Ch'olti' *xahlum* means “flat, plains” (Morán 1965:135) and Ch'orti' *xahi* means “plain, grassy area, open country, meadow, lowlands” (Wisdom 1950:647). We reserve his valuable argument for future discussion.

⁸ Alternatively, this could be read as **hi-chi**.

ulakam, upakal... “the son of Ajlu...Chih, he of Tixah, he is a *lakam* of Upakal...” Interestingly, the title Ajtixah of Ajlu...Chih is shared with his son Ajpach' Waal. The glyph block at V1 is heavily eroded, but it is likely a **LAKAM** logogram based on a comparison with the glyph block at H1 of Step III. We discuss this title below.

Despite the fact that part of the name is fragmented and missing, we suggest that Upakal and the missing glyph blocks at W1–Y1 of Step II and the block at A1 of Step III are a ruler's name because the following block B1 of Step III, **SAK-o-ka**, *sakho'ok(?)*, “White Valley(?),” is a common royal title for El Palmar rulers which, for instance, can be identified on Altar 10 of the Main Group.⁹ **SAK-o-ka** is transliterated and translated as *sak[h]o'ok*, “White Valley,” by Lacadena and Wichmann (2004:152). Alternatively, in Ch'olti' <*hoc*> is a noun meaning “mud” (Morán 1965:134).

Hieroglyphic Stairway Step III

The glyph block at A1 of Step III is missing, and as we mentioned above, the glyph block at B1 reads **SAK-o-ka**, *sakho'ok(?)*, “White Valley(?)” (Figure 9). The rest of Step III provides a list of Ajpach' Waal's successive ancestors and the rulers to whom they were subordinate. The list begins with the glyph block at C1, reading **u-TZ'AK-bu-li**, *utz'akbuul*. The glyph block at D1 is heavily eroded, but we can probably reconstruct it as **u-KAB-ji**, *ukabjiy*, because these two verbs (the glyph blocks at C1 and/or D1) repeat in the following sentences. This paired pattern **u-TZ'AK-bu-li**¹⁰ **u-KAB-ji** appears in many other texts, including Tikal Stela 31, and it can be translated as “he fulfills or completes the work of...,” presumably expressing the fulfillment of ritual acts during the period ending (Stuart 2011:3-4). Because this paired expression is reiterated, the same rituals or journey to Copan might have been followed over generations by rulers along with their *lakam* officials. In addition, the phrases **TZ'AK-bu** and **TZ'AK-bu-li** are “a verb root known from the successor-in-office expression” (Lacadena and Wichmann 2004:105). The glyph blocks at E1–K1 provide the first official's name and his possible ruler, reading **MAM-K'AWIIL-la to-k'a u-LAKAM AHK ? SAK-o-ka**, *maam k'awiil took' ulakam ahk... sakho'ok(?)*. Stuart ([2000]2007) identified the **MAM** logogram as “grandfather/grandson” and “ancestor,” suggesting that that it could serve as an honorific when it appears at or near the beginning of a personal name phrase. The same is true of the glyph block at E1. We do not know the reading of the glyph block at J1, but this is the “Quadripartite Badge,” an important iconographic motif showing a type of censer-burner or sacrificial bowl as well as the world tree (Kubler 1969; Robertson 1974; Stone and Zender 2011; Stuart 1988; Taube 2009:154-155). In sum, including the phrase

utz'akbuul ukabjiy the full statement could be: “It fulfills the work of grandfather K'awiil Took', (who was) the *lakam* of Ahk ..., White Valley(?).” Thus, the order of ancestors may go back in history (i.e., from Ajpach' Waal's father to grandfather).

The *lakam* title provides crucial insight into understanding Classic Maya officials. Stuart ([1992]2010) originally identified the ‘banner’ glyph as **LAKAM** in an informal note. He also suggested that those bearing the title were a kind of ambassador (Stephen Houston, personal communication 2012). Certainly in Tzeltal the term *lakam* refers to “standard, banner” (Humberto Ruz 1968:75). Lacadena (2008) later expanded on the role of the *lakam* title through the analysis of Late Classic (AD 600–800) polychrome vessels from the Peten region (see also Houston and Stuart 2001:69-70). Based on iconographic evidence, he suggests that the *lakam* glyph is associated with tributary and military organizations (Figure 10). In fact, a vessel from the Ik' site (probably Motul de San José) depicts a courtly scene where three *lakam* officials dedicate tribute to a ruler (Houston and Stuart 2001:69-70). Moreover, prior to the discovery of the hieroglyphic stairway at the Guzmán Group, Lacadena (2008) rightly remarked that the title is not carved on stone monuments. He concluded that *lakam* groups may have held lower social ranks and lived in districts or architectural groups surrounding the civic-ceremonial core. We will discuss the role of *lakam* officials in more detail below.

Glyph blocks L1–P1 refer to another *lakam* official, reading **u-TZ'AK-bu-ji u-KAB-ji-ya i-si-ja-ta¹¹ u-LAKAM-ma # ?**, *utz'akbuuj ukabjiy isjat(?) ulakam...*, “It fulfilled the work of Isjat(?), he is a *lakam* of...” Thus Isjat(?) is a *lakam* official, but the following phrase is eroded and missing.

The meaning of the following statements is unclear. The glyph block at R1 (**ha-i**, *haa'*) provides either an independent pronoun in the third-person singular meaning “he/she/it here,” or a demonstrative pronoun meaning “this one / that one” (Helmke et al. 2006; Hull et al. 2009; Stuart et al. 1999:52-53). However, the following glyph blocks, **la-ka-#-ta-ja**, *laka...taj(?)*, are damaged, and the meaning in conjunction with *haa'* is opaque. Glyph block T1, reading **K'AN-na** could be read either *k'an* “yellow, ripe” or *k'ahn* “bench, base, stool, chair, stair” (Lacadena 2004b:176-177). It is difficult to determine which meaning was intended, given that we cannot identify the exact significance of the following glyphs, T594-**wa wi-tzi**, T594-*wa witz*, “...mountain”

⁹ Altar 10 is documented as Altar 1 by Mayer (1991:Pl. 38), but Thompson's unpublished map labels another monument as Altar 1. For that reason we designated this as Altar 10 during fieldwork in 2007.

¹⁰ Or **u-TZ'AK-bu-ji**.

¹¹ The transcription of **i-si-ja-ta** might be **si-i-ja-ta**, but here we propose the former following the transparent order of the glyph block.

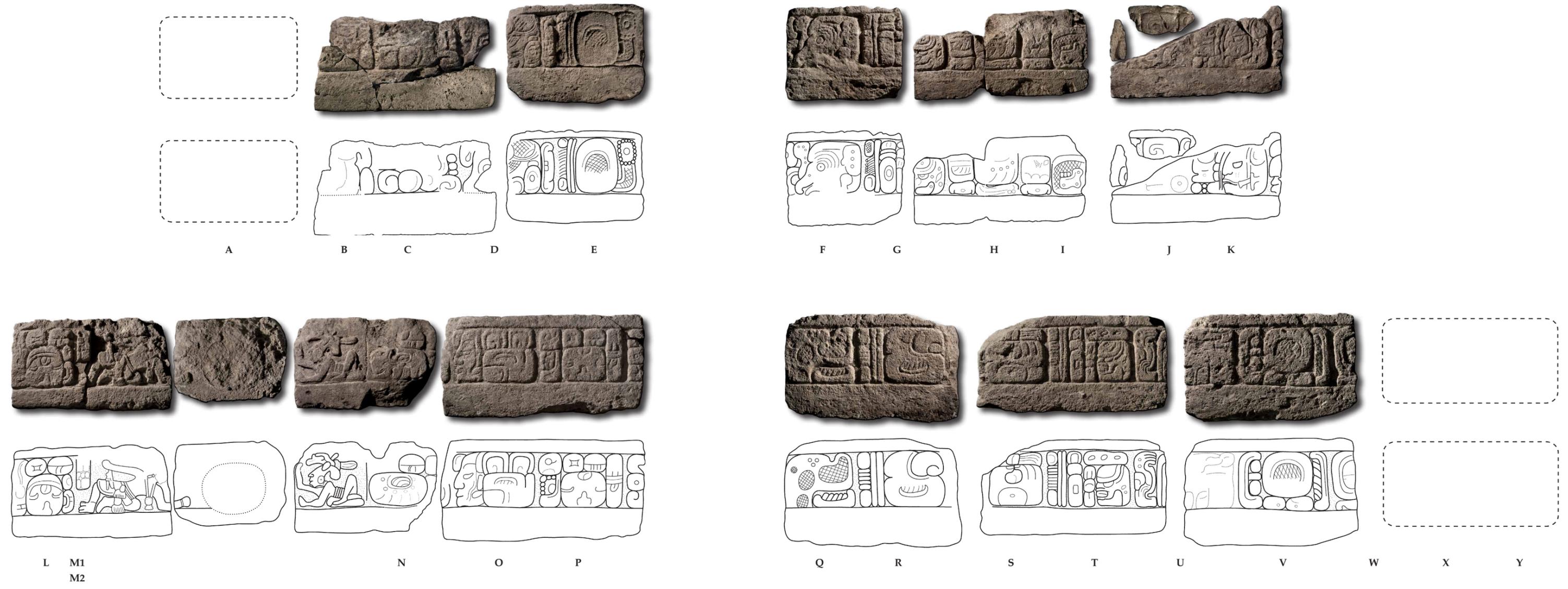


Figure 8. Step II of the hieroglyphic stairway. Photos: Kenichiro Tsukamoto. Drawings: Octavio Q. Esparza Olguín.

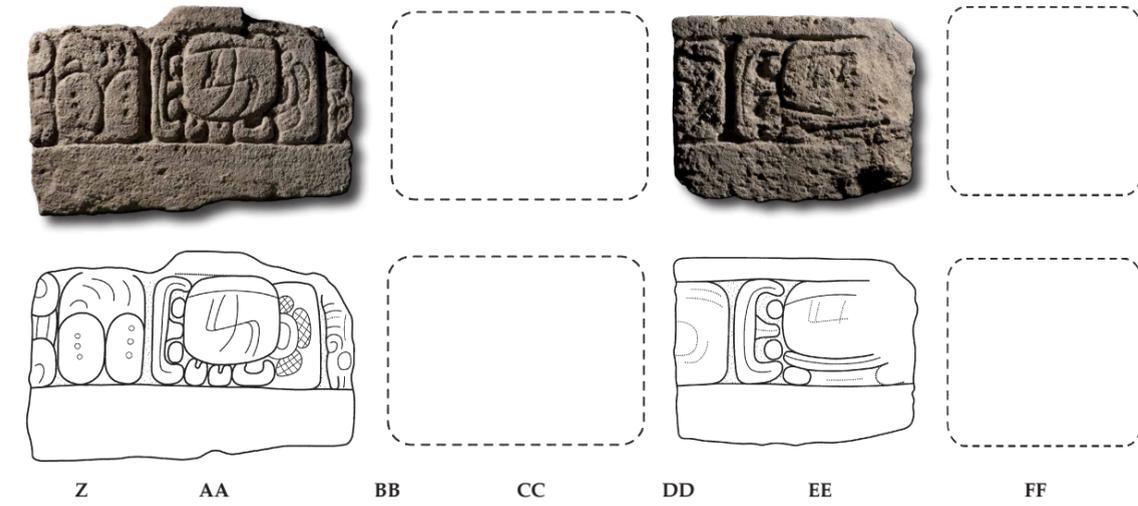
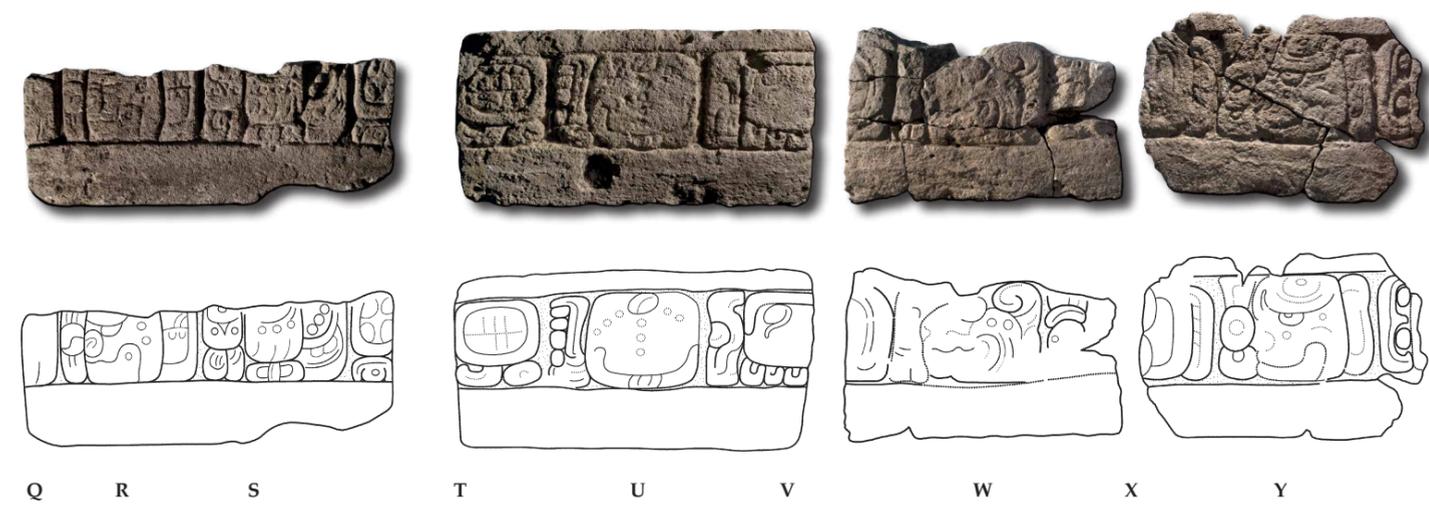
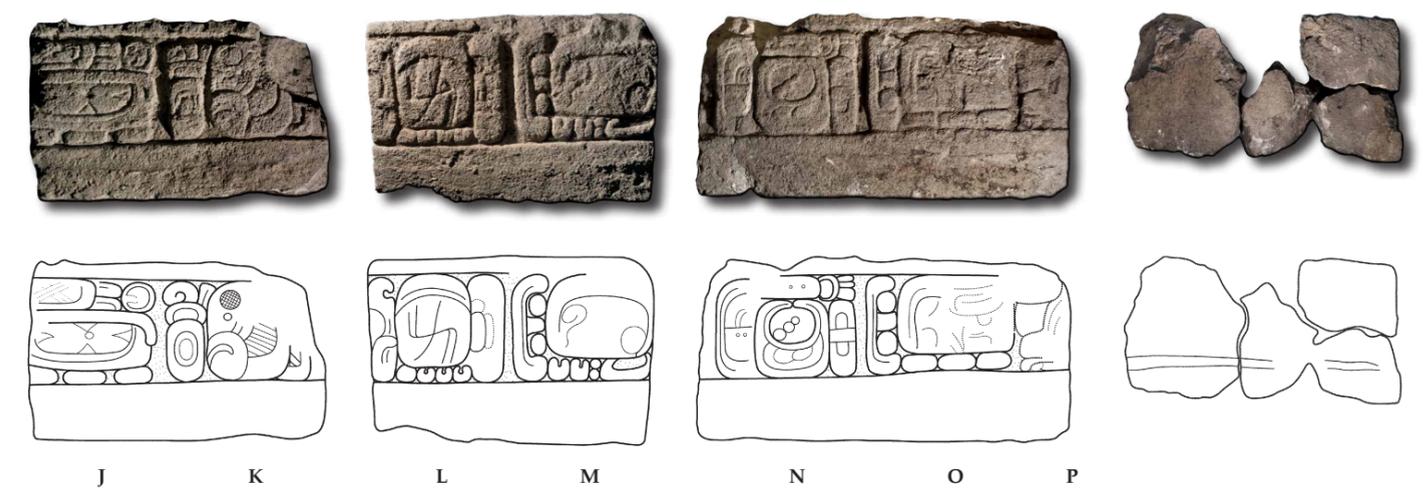
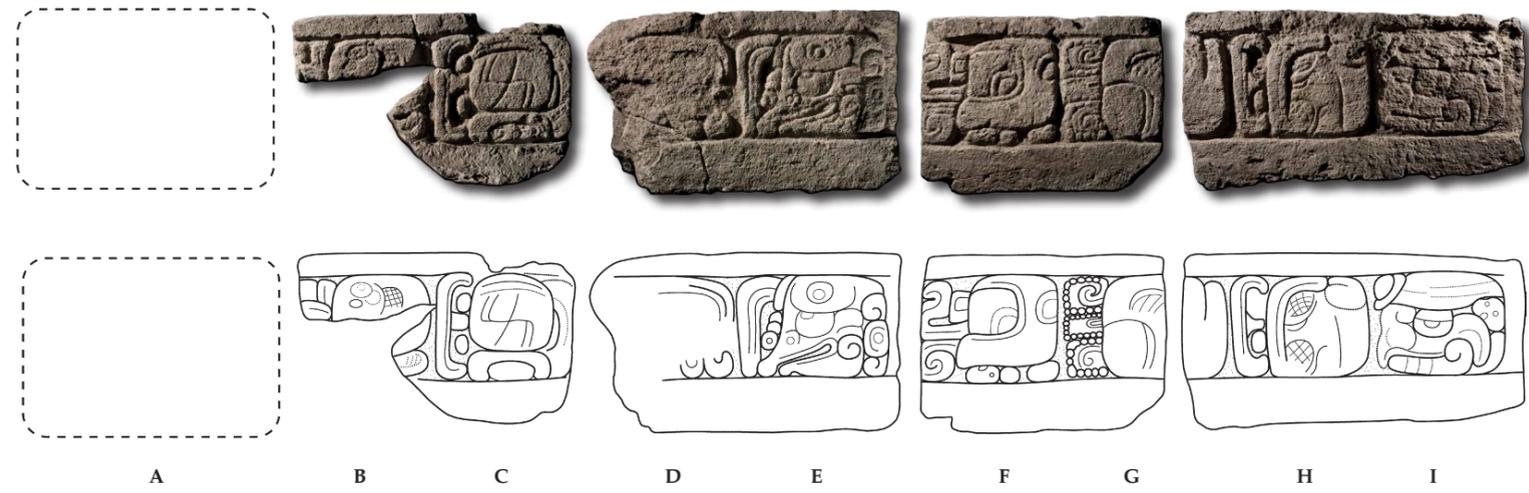


Figure 9. Step III of the hieroglyphic stairway. Photos: Kenichiro Tsukamoto. Drawings: Octavio Q. Esparza Olguín.



Figure 10. Procession of Lakam officials from an unprovenanced vase. Photograph K5763 © Justin Kerr.

(though Zender 2011 has pointed out a potentially parallel **K'AN-na-T594-wa** construction at Cahal Pech). In addition, there is a damaged stone block with graffiti between the glyph blocks at P1 and Q1, but its implication remains obscure. The glyph blocks at V1–Z1 concern an El Palmar ruler. V1–X1 read **u-KAB-ji-ya ?-BAHLAM SAK-o-ka**, *u kabjiy ...bahlam sakho'ok(?)*, “it was the work of Bahlam, White Valley(?)”. The glyph blocks at Y1 and Z1, reading **ha-i u-ko-bo**, *haa' ukob*, appear on other monuments such as Ballcourt Marker 3 at Caracol, Stela 35 at Naranjo, and the Tablet of 96 Glyphs and the doorjamb texts of Temple 18 at Palenque (Helmke et al. 2006). According to Helmke et al. (2006), the phrase *haa' ukob* might mean “that one is engendered,” but the sense here remains elusive.

Glyph blocks AA1–DD1 possibly represent another official, but most of the glyphs are missing. We can only read AA1–BB1 as **u-TZ'AK-bu-ji-ya u-#** and EE1 as **u-TZ'AK-AJ**, *utz'akaj*, “it is set in order.” There is probably a following glyph block at FF1 which connects to *utz'akaj*, but we did not recover any fragment of the block during excavations.

Hieroglyphic Stairway Step IV

The first sentence of the fourth step is difficult to understand because of missing glyph blocks (Figure 11). A possible fragment of glyph block A1 was recovered from another structure, GZ6, located to the northwest of GZ1. However, the location

of this block remains tentative. Glyph blocks A1 and B1 read **#-K'INICH SAK-o-ka**, *...k'inich sakho'ok(?)*, “... K'inich, White Valley(?)”. Judging by the royal title *sakho'ok(?)*, A1 would be part of an El Palmar ruler's name. Glyph blocks C1–H1 read **pa-ya-*AJ u-k'a[ba] 3-MUWAAN-CHAHK-ki SAK-o-ka ba-ka-ba**, *pahyaj uk'ab, ux muwaan chahk sakho'ok(?) baah kab*, “it is guided by Ux Muwaan Chahk, White Valley(?), first of the earth.” In Ch'olti' *paya* meant “to call” (Morán 1695:134), while in Colonial Yucatec <pay> refers to a “guide” (Swadesh et al. 1970:73; see also Boot 2009c:18). There are some parallel glyphic constructions, including a potential agentive form on Yaxchilan Stela 18, **AJ-pa-ya-la**, *ajpayal* (Mathews 1997:Figs. 5-16).

The next sentence refers to a historical event. Glyph blocks I1–L1 read **u-TZ'AK-AJ i-u-ti 11 AJAW 18 SAK-SIHOM-ma**, *utz'akaj iuhti buluk ajaw waxaklajuun saksihoom*, “it is the setting in order, and then it happens on the day 11 Ajaw 18 Saksihoom.” Based on the previous Long Count, this Calendar Round date most likely corresponds to September 13, AD 726 (9.14.15.0.0). Then the glyph block at M1 reads **u-BAT¹²-lu-ja**, *u...l-aj(?)*, “it is carved.” As we noted above, the phonetic reading of the bat

¹² David Stuart (1989:154-155) long ago associated the **lu-BAT** glyph with carving. For recent discussions concerning the **BAT** sign, see Boot (2009b). While we recognize that the phonetic reading of the **lu-BAT** compound is an important topic, its resolution is beyond the scope of this presentation.

sign remains uncertain (Boot 2009b; MacLeod 2004:294), but this would refer to the carving of the hieroglyphic stairway of Structure GZ1. The following glyph block at N1 would have provided the name of the structure, but it is damaged. The sentence finishes with the glyph block at O1, **NAAH-hi**, *naah*, “structure,” and the subsequent clauses refer to the owner of the same structure. Thus, the glyph blocks at P–U read **u-K'ABA' yo-OTOOT-ti AJ-pa-ch'a wa-li AJ-ti-xa-ha CHAN-na so?-ni**, *uk'aba' yotoot ajpach' waal ajtixah chan soon(?)*, “It is its name, the house of Ajpach' Waal, he of Tixah, four soon.” As discussed above, we resolved the names and titles Ajpach' Waal on Step II based on this sentence. Here, Ajpach' Waal is accompanied by his spouse. The glyph blocks at V1–DD1 read **yi-ta-ji IX-hi-HIX mu-tu-lu? ya-ta-na AJ-pa-ch'a wa-li AJ-ti-xa-ha xa-MAN-#-*CH'E'N ? ?**, *yitaaj ix hix mutul(?) yatan ajpach' waal ajtixaj xaman...ch'e'n...*, “in the company of the Lady Hix Mutul, the spouse of Ajpach' Waal, he of Tixaj, north...place...” These clauses suggest that Ajpach' Waal possessed Structure GZ1 of the Guzmán Group, and that the hieroglyphic stairway was owned by him.

Hieroglyphic Stairway Step V

The first three or four glyphs of Step V continue the previous sentence (Figure 12). Subsequently the same carving event is commemorated in the company of two foreign rulers and an El Palmar ruler. Unfortunately only the glyph block at B1 recording **TAHN-#**, *tahn...*, survives within the first three or four glyph blocks at A1–C1. **TAHN**, *tahn*, “within,” is a possible locative (Stuart and Houston 1994:26), and more recently Robertson et al. (2007:45) translate it as “chest, front.” There is no way to reconstruct the missing glyphs, but we suggest that these refer to the original place name of the Guzmán Group where Structure GZ1 and its hieroglyphic stairway are located.

The next sentence begins at D1, where we read **18-SAK-SIHOOM-ma**, *waxaklajuun saksihoom*. Since the sentence repeats the same carving event recorded on Step IV, this most likely refers to the same date recorded at K1 and L1 of Step IV, or 9.14.15.0.0 (September 13, AD 726). The glyph blocks at E1–H1 of Step V read **i-u-ti yu-BAT-lu-li AJ-pa-ch'a *wa-li**, *iuti yu...lil(?) ajpach' waal*, “and then it happens, it is his carving, Ajpach' Waal.” The glyph blocks at I1–M1 read ***u-CHA'N-nu 18-u-BAAH K'AWIIL BAT-ku-pi? a-AJAW**, *ucha'n waxaklajuun ubaah k'awiil BAT-kuup(?) ajaw*, “He is a guardian of Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil, the lord of Copan.” Despite the damage, the affix of the glyph block at I1 could be reconstructed as **u-**, given that the phrase **u-CHA'N-nu** appears on other monuments, including Dos Pilas Panel 9 (Houston 1993:Fig. 4.19), Yaxchilan HS 3 (Graham 1982:169-171), and Yaxchilan Lintel 25 (Graham 1977:55-56). The likely meaning is “guardian” or “master”

(Houston 1993:118, Fig. 4.22; Lacadena and Wichmann 2004:140-141). Thus Ajpach' Waal might have been the guardian/master of Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil, the thirteenth king of Copan, though their relationship remains uncertain. The important point here is that Ajpach' Waal claims a political relationship with a foreign ruler rather than one of El Palmar. The following glyph blocks at N1 and O1 are heavily eroded, but the syntax order suggests that they contained either a relational glyph or a secondary verb. Glyph block P1 is partially eroded, but the spelling is similar to H1 of Dos Pilas Stela 8 (Graham 1971; see also Mathews [1977]2001:Fig. 40.2), referring to the Calakmul lord Yuknoom Took' K'awiil, who ruled from AD 702 to 731 (Martin and Grube 2000:112). This is supported by the subsequent glyph block at Q1, which reads **K'UHUL-ka-KAN-AJAW-wa**, *k'uhul kaan ajaw*, “the holy lord of Kaan.” The Kaan dynasty was seated in Calakmul during this period.

The final clause provides insights into the identification of the El Palmar toponym. Glyph blocks S1–X1 read **yi-ta-ji yu-ne-SAK-o-ka 6-PIIT? AJAW**, *yitaaj yunen...sakho'ok(?) wakpiit(?) ajaw*, “in the company of Yunen, White Valley(?), the lord of Six Litters.” The reading of the glyph **PIIT?** is uncertain, but the meaning could be “litter” or “palanquin” (Dmitri Beliaev, in Stone and Zender 2011:99). The person named is most likely a contemporaneous El Palmar ruler because of the royal title *sakho'ok(?)* and the El Palmar toponymic title of *wakpiit(?) ajaw*, both of which are also carved on Altar 10 of the Main Group. The glyph blocks at Y1 to BB1 are too eroded to read. Glyph block CC1 reading **BAT-ku-pi? AJAW**, *BAT-kuup(?) ajaw*, “the lord of Copan” was moved from its original position; therefore, the location should be regarded as tentative.

Hieroglyphic Stairway Step VI

This final step, Step VI, shows a series of **AJAW** signs attached to numbers from 13 to 1 (Figure 13). During the analysis of this step, Takeshi Inomata (personal communication 2011) pointed out that this seems to comprise a calendrical sequence. The reduction of the coefficients from 13 to 1 would correspond to the 10 Baktun or 10 Tun cycle. In this case, this probably refers to the 10 Tun (half-K'atun) cycle. Moreover, he suggests that the last glyph block at N1 refers to a 130-year cycle. This is consistent with the fact that every 10 Tun or 10 Baktun cycle the same tzolk'in day repeats, but with a coefficient of one less. For example, the Long Count 9.0.0.0.0 corresponds to the tzolk'in day 8 Ajaw. Then 10 Tuns later, 9.0.10.0.0 falls on 7 Ajaw. In the next 10 Tun cycle on 9.1.0.0.0, the tzolk'in day becomes 6 Ajaw. We have not found a calendrical representation with the Tun cycle like this elsewhere. The Dresden Codex and the Grolier display 13 different numbers with each tzolk'in sign lined up

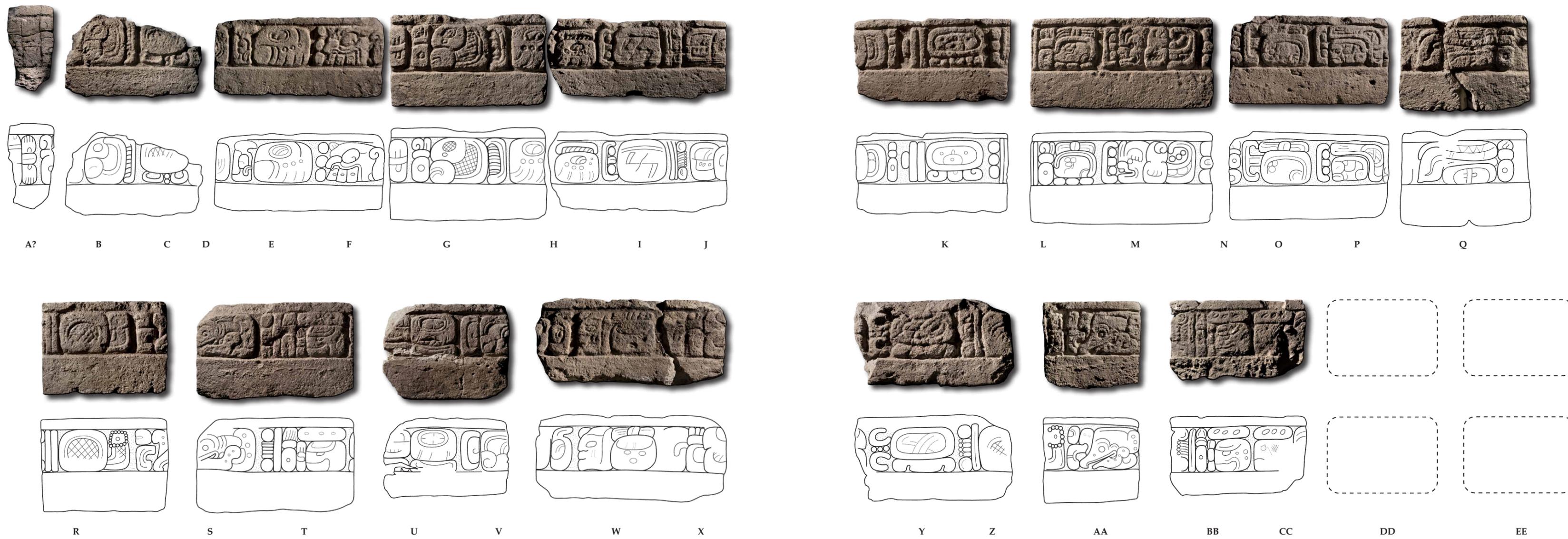
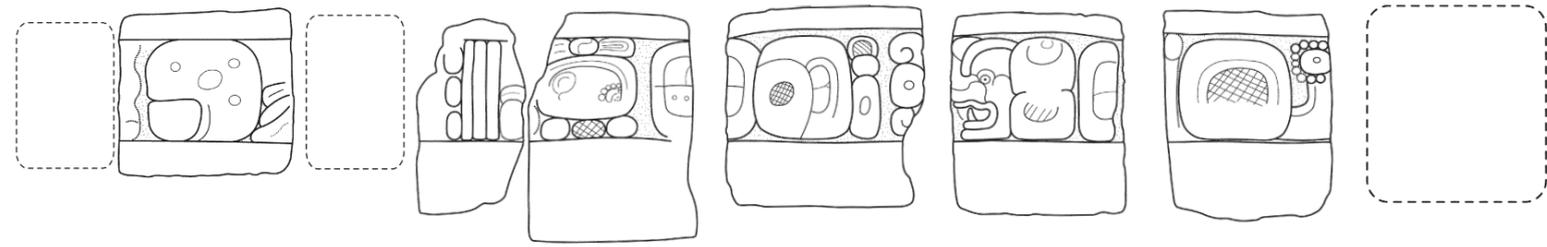
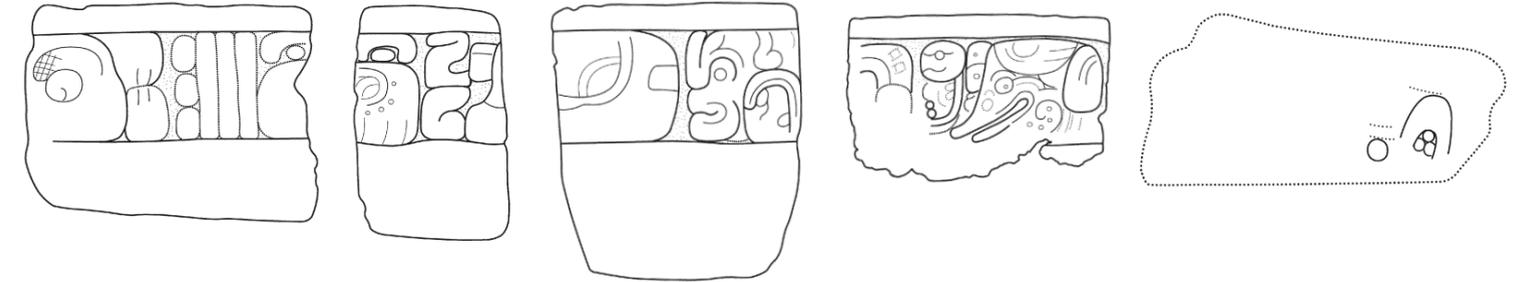


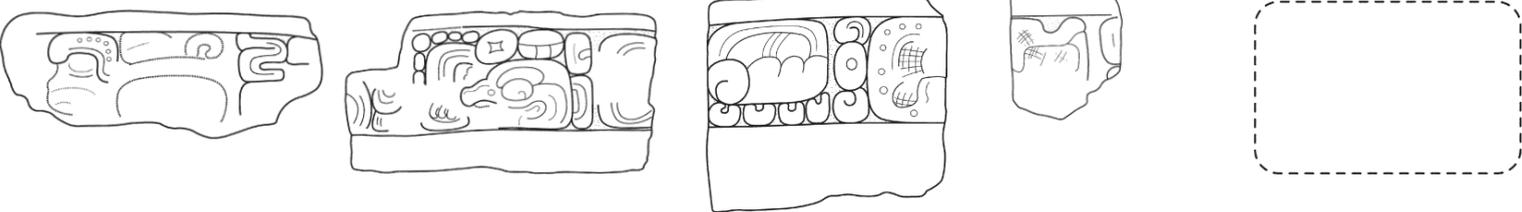
Figure 11. Step IV of the hieroglyphic stairway. Photos: Kenichiro Tsukamoto. Drawings: Octavio Q. Esparza Olguín.



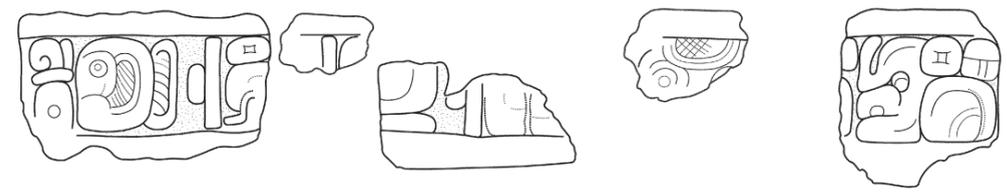
A B C D E F G H



I J K L M N O



P Q R S T U V



W X Y Z AA BB CC?

Figure 12. Step V of the hieroglyphic stairway. Photo: Kenichiro Tsukamoto. Drawing: Octavio Q. Esparza Olguín.

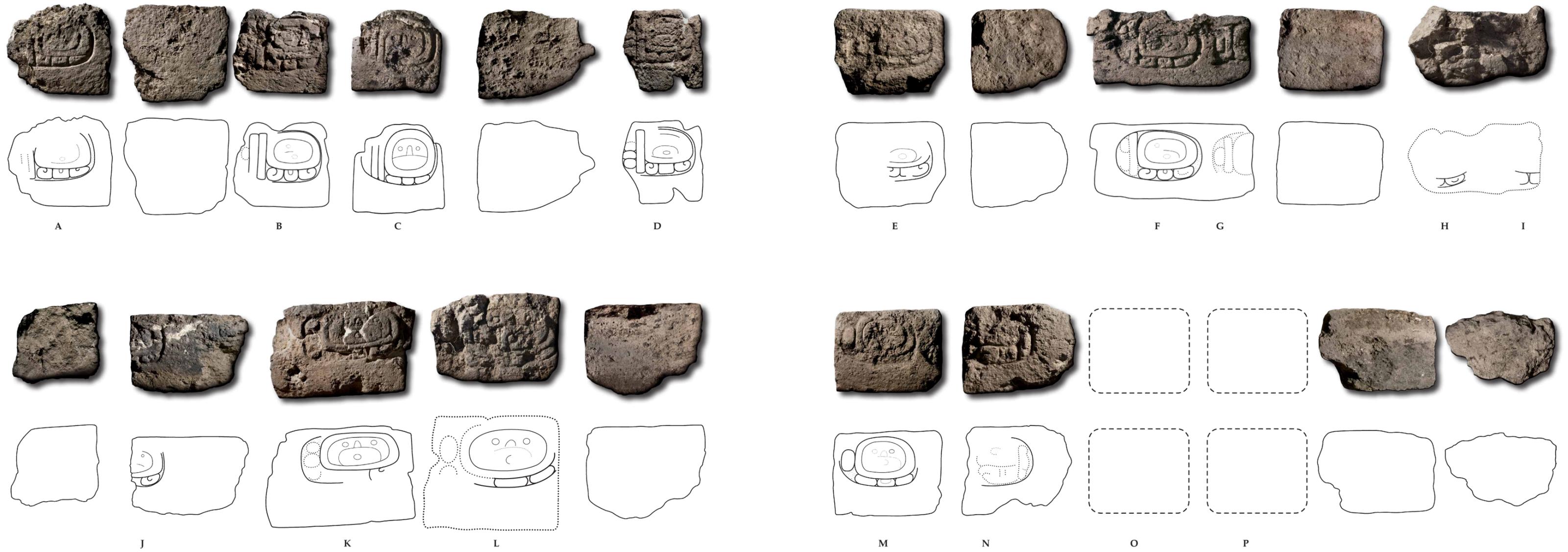


Figure 13. Step VI of the hieroglyphic stairway. Photo: Kenichiro Tsukamoto. Drawings: Octavio Q. Esparza Olguín.



Figure 14. Royal title *Sak[h]o'ok* and El Palmar toponym *Wak Piit? Ajaw* found in Classic Maya texts: (a) a ruler's name, Upakal K'inich, with the royal title and toponym from Naj Tunich cave, Drawing 29 (after MacLeod and Stone 1995:166, Fig. 7); (b) royal title and toponym recorded on the Señor del Peten vessel (drawing: Kenichiro Tsukamoto based on photograph by Octavio Q. Esparza Olguín); (c) royal title and toponym carved on Step VI of the hieroglyphic stairway, Guzmán Group, glyphs W1–X1 (drawing: Octavio Q. Esparza Olguín).

vertically, their order indicating the Venus cycle, but this does not seem to fit our case.

Another important characteristic of this step is its carving style. When comparing the **AJAW** logogram of this step to that of glyph K of Step IV, the stylistic difference is notable. The carving style of the final step resembles Hieroglyphic Stairway 1 of Edzna, which is located about 190 km to the northwest of El Palmar (Mayer 2004).

There are several hypotheses regarding this step. For example, it might have been attached during a later period. If so, it may have nothing to do with Ajpach' Waal. Alternatively, this symbolic representation may be related to Ajpach' Waal, his title Ajtixaj, or his ancestor's title of *lakam*. If so, then Ajpach' Waal and/or other *lakam* officials may have played priestly or quasi-priestly roles in charge of the calendrical system or related rituals in the period endings. It is also possible that time keepers lived in the Guzmán Group and officiated in calendrical ceremonies.

However, in the texts of other steps there is no phrase that indicates a priestly role.

Internal Organization and Dynastic Networks of El Palmar

In summary, the major protagonist of the hieroglyphic stairway is Ajpach' Waal. The hieroglyphic records suggest that he was not a ruler, but a *lakam* official, and likely the descendent of other *lakam* officials. This is evident in the texts that describe a successor to the *lakam* officials—including the father of Ajpach' Waal—who were subordinate to El Palmar's rulers. These *lakam* title-holders may have repeated the same activities undertaken by Ajpach' Waal, including processions to Copan and other practices. Epigraphic studies suggest that on June 24, AD 726 (9.14.14.13.19), Ajpach' Waal and possibly an El Palmar ruler went up to Copan to see the thirteenth ruler of the Copan dynasty, Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil. About three months later, on September 13, AD 726 (9.14.15.0.0), Ajpach' Waal celebrated the completion of the hieroglyphic stairway in the company of an El Palmar ruler and presumably Calakmul's ruler Yuknoom Took' K'awiil, although the engagement of the latter with the event remains obscure.

The content analysis of the texts sheds light on what Ajpach' Waal attempted to claim through glyphic discourse. First, we should consider the frequency of individual appearances in the texts. With the exception of Ajpach' Waal as protagonist, Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil is the only person who appears twice in the texts, while the El Palmar ruler contemporaneous with Ajpach' Waal appears once at the end. Secondly, the texts refer to Ajpach' Waal as a guardian of Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil instead of being the guardian of the El Palmar ruler. This is evidence that Ajpach' Waal insists more on his political ties with Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil than with the El Palmar ruler. Thus the textual discourse emphasizes an unusual master-subordinate relationship between the foreign ruler Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil and Ajpach' Waal as a local official of El Palmar.

What did Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil achieve during his reign? Textual records show that he oversaw several architectural projects at Copan, including Temple 26 with the lower steps of the Hieroglyphic Stairway (Stuart 2005a), Structure 10L-22 (Fash 1991), the main ballcourt with its markers (Martin and Grube 2008:203-205), the erection of several stelae (Morley 1920; see also Newsome 2001), and possibly the North Group (Ashmore 1991). Notably, the same period-ending recorded by the Guzmán Group hieroglyphic stairway (9.14.15.0.0) was celebrated with the erection of Copan Stela 4, in which Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil impersonated the local deity of K'uy Nik(?) Ajaw (Stuart 1986). Furthermore, it is interesting that he is related textually to the construction of ceremonial architecture at the north group of both

Copan and El Palmar.

The absence of the **K'UHUL** sign in the royal title of Copan and in the El Palmar toponymic title in the Guzmán Group hieroglyphic stairway may highlight the political hierarchy of southern Campeche. Grube (2005, 2008) has studied the political implications of the lack of full emblem glyphs at sites in southern Campeche. His analysis of toponymic titles at Uxul, Champerico, Los Alacranes, and Oxpemul suggests that the lack of **K'UHUL** signs at these sites expresses Calakmul's hegemonic power over them. Judging from the spatial proximity between the two centers, El Palmar's ruler could have been under the hegemonic power of Calakmul, while the political relationship between Calakmul and Copan remains underexplored.

Beyond the southern Campeche region, the distribution of the El Palmar toponymic title in other places denotes the dynastic network of El Palmar. Beliaev (personal communication 2012) points out that a possible El Palmar ruler, Upakal K'inich, with the title *sakho'ok(?) wak piit(?) ajaw* is named in Drawing 29 of Naj Tunich cave (MacLeod and Stone 1995:166, Figs. 7, 8) (Figure 14). This ruler might be the one shown in glyph blocks W1–Z1 of Step II through A1–B1 of Step III. We agree with Beliaev that the ruler named in Naj Tunich cave is likely the ruler to whom Ajpach' Waal's father was subordinate, but the dating of Drawing 29 proposed by MacLeod and Stone (1995:163) is not consistent with his reign. In comparison with other texts, they suggest that the Calendar Round is May 27, AD 771. Since the stairway commemorated a subsequent El Palmar ruler in 726, the El Palmar ruler Upakal ... must have lived much earlier than 771. However, there is an alternative dating for the Calendar Round of Drawing 29. Indeed, MacLeod and Stone (1995:163) mention that it could be placed at 9.14.7.11.3 (June 9, 719). If the latter is the case, the rulers are most likely the same person. At any rate, the evidence from Naj Tunich cave suggests that El Palmar's rulers made a pilgrimage as far south as Naj Tunich during the Late Classic period. If the *lakam* groups played the role of banner-bearers or ambassadors, as Stuart suggests, they might have accompanied El Palmar rulers during the journey. The same royal title with an El Palmar toponym can be seen on a vessel from El Señor del Peten,¹³ which was recovered by Cortés de Brasdefer (1996:6, Fig. 6) in the *ejido* of Nuevo Veracruz, Quintana Roo, about 18 km to the east of El Palmar.

In particular, the texts of the vessel from El Señor del Peten are of paramount importance for perceiving the internal political organization at El Palmar. Jackson and Stuart (2001:217-218, Fig. 2) discussed the *ajk'uhuun* titles on this same vessel. *Ajk'uhuun* is

¹³ A similar iconographic style can be seen in other vessels with numbers K6294 and K9144 in Justin Kerr's ceramic database at www.mayavase.com.

one of the subsidiary titles recorded in numerous hieroglyphic texts throughout the Maya Lowlands during the Late Classic period (e.g., Coe and Kerr 1998:91; Houston 1993:130-134; Jackson 2005:130-175; Schele and Miller 1986:155). In the courtly scene on the vessel from El Señor del Peten, a seated ruler holds El Palmar's royal title of **SAK-o-*ka 6 PIIT AJAW**, *sakho'ok(?) wak piit(?) ajaw*, "White Valley(?), the lord of six litters" (Figure 14b). Likewise, another person who sits in front of the ruler possesses the *sakho'ok* title. Surrounding them, *ajk'uhuun* nobles sit or stand. Thus the vessel suggests an El Palmar courtly scene showing that *ajk'uhuun* nobles existed at El Palmar.

Were *ajk'uhuun* nobles contemporaneous with *lakam* officials at El Palmar? Residences of *ajk'uhuuns* have yet to be identified at El Palmar, but studies at other sites offer evidence for their social position in a given period. Jackson (2005:166-168) and Zender (2004a) examined the temporal distributions of *ajk'uhuun* titles across the Maya Lowlands, and their studies suggest the title was reasonably common during the Late Classic period (AD 600–800). This temporal framework is roughly congruent with that of *lakam* officials at the Guzmán Group (AD 650–850).

A prominent example of the archaeological evidence is Group 9N-8, known as Las Sepulturas, a group located outside the civic-ceremonial core of Copan. Extensive excavations and detailed material analyses carefully examined the status of social groups who occupied Structure 9N-82, or the "House of Bacabs," the largest complex of buildings in the architectural group (Hendon 1991; Webster 1989; Webster and Abrams 1983). A hieroglyphic bench-throne is located in the central room of the structure. Jackson and Stuart (2001) and Zender (2004a) fully deciphered the long inscription, suggesting that the protagonist of the bench text and the owner/commissioner of the building was named Mak'an Chanal, a holder of the *ajk'uhuun* title.

In sharp contrast to the elaborate residences of *ajk'uhuun* nobles at Copan, the magnitude and elaboration of the Guzmán Group is much more modest. If the social status of El Palmar's *ajk'uhuun* nobles was reflected in architecture similar to that of Copan, the *lakam* officials at the Guzmán Group would have occupied a social station relatively lower than *ajk'uhuun*. Indeed, there are much larger groups with monumental architecture surrounding the Main Group at El Palmar. Conversely, proximity to rulers suggesting high social status is shown by the list of *lakam* ancestors along with El Palmar rulers in the hieroglyphic stairway and some courtly scenes (e.g., Kerr 1994:640 [K4996]). Political relations of subordinate nobles with rulers vary over time and space in Classic Maya society (Golden et al. 2008; Jackson 2005), and we should consider regional and diachronic variability. The detailed analysis of archaeological remains will help clarify the dynamic nature of their social situations.

Conclusion

In this article, we have presented an epigraphic study of the hieroglyphic stairway recovered from the Guzmán Group at El Palmar and a brief comparison with texts from other Maya sites. Broader comparative analyses in future will help us to better understand the dynamic network between El Palmar and other centers. Moreover, we believe that archaeological perspectives on the Guzmán Group will provide further insights into the material culture of the *lakam* officials and changes in that material over time. Finally, comparative studies between the Guzmán Group and other architectural groups, including the Main Group, will open a new window into understanding the dynamic nature of internal political organization in Classic Maya society. We hope that the epigraphic data presented here provides additional insights into understanding Classic Maya political dynamics.

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Figure 15. Operations at Structure GZ1 of the Guzmán Group in 2010-2011: (clockwise from top left) documentation of inscriptions in situ; emblem glyph of the Kaan dynasty (R1); excavation of the hieroglyphic stairway. Photos: Kenichiro Tsukamoto.





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