Inscriptions on Maya monuments often express genealogical ties between elite actors, establishing claims to legitimacy and, at times, connections to foreign polities. A number of different hieroglyphic terms are employed, reflecting the rich variety of kinship terms found in Mayan languages. The most common appear in statements of parentage, which were first examined in a systematic way in an unpublished study by Linda Schele, Peter Mathews, and Floyd Lounsbury (1977). This influential work has been expanded and refined in the years since as additional data have come to light (e.g. Stuart 1985, 1997; Hopkins 1991). The present paper examines the relationships seen on a single monument, the Dallas Altar, and suggests that a rare and hitherto unnoticed blood tie aids its interpretation.

Figure 1. The Dallas Altar (drawing by Linda Schele).


1 Parts of this project were anticipated in the work of other scholars, see especially Jones (1977:41-42).
The Dallas Altar

An unprovenanced carving now in the Dallas Museum of Art—the top of a small altar or wall panel—shows two figures within contrasting types of enclosure set on tiered platforms, each surrounded by blocks of hieroglyphic writing (Berjonneau and Sonnery 1985:258; Mayer 1989:18-19, Pl.104) (Figure 1).\(^2\) The text is long, consisting of some 105 glyphs in all, and while its condition is generally good, surface erosion has affected some sections, especially where the signs were only lightly incised. In 1997, I was fortunate enough to take a large number of close-up photographs of this stone with a variety of lighting angles, a record that has proved central to this study.\(^3\)

New information can be gleaned from the eroded sections of the text, casting new light on its meaning and significance.

The epigraphic content of the Dallas Altar has received attention in several publications (Tate in Mayer 1989:18-19; Jones and Spetzler 1992; Freidel and Guenter 2003), each of which has contributed to our current understanding of its narrative. It celebrates the 9.15.0.0.0 Period Ending date of AD 731, but includes retrospective references to events taking place in 721, 679, and 520. All three of these prior episodes are described as “arrivals” and involve high-ranking women from the Snake kingdom—usually associated with the great center of Calakmul. Each comes to a place called Sak Nikte’ “White Flower,” understood today to be the ancient name of La Corona, Guatemala.

Parallel Sequences

The traditional reading order begins with the Initial Series date (Figure 1, Columns A-E), proceeds to the left block (F), before going to a central one (G-H), and thence to others at right and below. Joanne Baron (personal communication 2008) has proposed an alternative that instead treats the F column as an independent caption, and so has the E column followed directly by G. There are major attractions to this scheme. Indeed, if we adopt it much of the inscription consists of three parallel sequences, with only relatively minor differences and additions (Table 1, Appendices A-C).

Their order is not chronological, but begins with the latest episode (9.14.9.14, AD 721), goes back to the earliest (9.4.5.6.16, AD 520), and then forward to an intervening one (9.12.6.16.17, AD 679). I will refer to them per their order on the monument as “first,” “second,” and “third” respectively. The invariable structure of each is: (1) Verb; (2) Female A; (3) Toponym; (4) Relationship; (5) Male A; (6) Relationship; (7) Male B; (8) Relationship; (9) Female B. These number designations will be used to track the various components across the three sequences.

Figures 2a-c

1. In each case the verbal root is hul “to arrive (here)” (Kaufman and Norman 1984:120; MacLeod 1990:339-341). The first example is badly damaged, but it can be reconstructed on contextual grounds (Freidel and Guenter 2003, with additional factors described below).

2. This is followed by the name of an individual woman, Female A. The first of them is called ix ti’ kanal ajaw—a form that it is difficult to translate elegantly but literally reads “Lady Mouth(?) Snake Lord.” She carries a female form of the Snake emblem glyph (which is easily confused with her name), while in a later appearance in this text she is given the lofty title ix kaloomte’ “Lady ‘Emperor’” (C’1b-B’2). The second woman in order and earliest of the three is named ix cha utz’akbuil “second in the count” (at Q2) and ix utz’akbuil “third in the count” (at Y1) (the latter set outside the parallel structure, as discussed below) (Figure 2a-c). The name of the third woman to be

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\(^2\) This stone also goes by the name of Site Q Altar 1 in the list of unprovenanced monuments compiled by Peter Mathews (1979), who first worked out the chronology. It has recently been dubbed La Corona Altar 5 (David Stuart, personal communication 2008).

\(^3\) My thanks go to Carol Robbins of the Dallas Museum of Art, who kindly gave permission for this photography, and to Dorie Reents-Budet for her collaboration in taking the images.
Table 1. Parallel structures in the Dallas Altar text: (a) The arrival of 9.14.9.14, AD 721 (D5-H7) (drawing by Simon Martin); (b) The arrival of 9.4.5.6.16, AD 520 (J2b-M1) (drawing by Kim Leaman); (c) The arrival of 9.12.6.16.17, AD 679 (Q1-T2) (drawing by Kim Leaman and Simon Martin):
(a): (1) *hu-*li (2) IX TI’-ka-KAN-AJAW IX-ka-KAN-AJAW (3) TAHN-na “CH’EEN-na SAK-NIK-TE’ (4) ya-AT-na (5) ya-*AJAW-TE’ K’INICH SAK-WAY-si (6) ? (7) TI’-?i*K’AWIL? (8) ya-AL-la (9) IX-x-x
(b): (1) hu-li-ya (2) IX-x-x NAFTA-K’UH-KAN-AJAW (3) SAK-NIK-TE’ (4) ya-AT-na (5) ? (6) ? (7) K’AB?TUUN?ni-”HIX K’UH-ka-KAN-AJAW (8) ya-AL (9) IX x-x-x
(c): (1) HUL-li-ya (2) IX-x-x U-2-*TZ’AK-bu-li IX-KAN-AJAW (3) SAK-NIK-TE’ (4) ya-AT-na (5) K’INICH-?yu?-OOK (6) ? (7) yul”ku?-no-ma-“CH’EEN (8) ya-AL (9) IX x-x-BAHLAM?
However, the issue has yet to be fully resolved.

K’altuun Hix (Stuart 2004:231; Martin and Grube 2008:104). Copan Ruler 4, a character with the self-same name, as royal name phrase, probably that of Yuknoom Ch’een II. The same form predecessors (although one cannot fully exclude the possibility that this is actually a different person). The same form fragments with a full Snake emblem glyph. The use of the “Scroll-Head God K” name is difficult to explain, although it may have been employed in certain texts outside Calakmul to distinguish him from similarly-named predecessors (although one cannot fully exclude the possibility that this is actually a different person). The same form appears on K1457 (Robicsek and Hales 1981:100) as part of a royal name phrase, probably that of Yuknoom Ch’een II.

In a recent update I follow David Stuart’s reading of Copan Ruler 4, a character with the self-same name, as K’altuun Hix (Stuart 2004:231; Martin and Grube 2008:104). However, the issue has yet to be fully resolved.

4 The half-closed eye and mouth-scroll on the Dallas Altar are characteristic of AHK “turtle,” and this may be the second sign involved. The example on the stela may be fused in the same fashion, or represent the first part of a separated-out spelling (David Stuart’s sketch of this monument shows the next glyph to be missing). In any case, it is quite likely that both texts refer to the same person.

5 Using the Yuknoom “Head” name seen at Calakmul, this king appears on at least two other La Corona text fragments with a full Snake emblem glyph. The use of the contemporaneous “Scroll-head God K” name is difficult to explain, although it may have been employed in certain texts outside Calakmul to distinguish him from similarly-named predecessors (although one cannot fully exclude the possibility that this is actually a different person). The same form appears on K1457 (Robicsek and Hales 1981:100) as part of a royal name phrase, probably that of Yuknoom Ch’een II.

6 The second is called Tuun K’ab Hix or K’altuun Hix, a Snake ruler also named at Yaxchilan and Naranjo in this same sixth-century timeframe (Martin and Grube 2000:108). The third can be recognized as the long-lived seventh-century monarch Yuknoom Ch’een II. (8) is filled by yal, the possessed form of al “child” (Stuart 1985:7-8, 1997:2-3; Bricker 1986:68). This term can appear as syllabic ya-la, but commonly it features a logographic root in the combination ya-AL, sometimes complemented to give ya-AL-la. It is exclusively used in the inscriptions to link children to their mothers and is followed at (9), as we would expect, by a woman’s name in the form of Female B.
Wives and Daughters

Since the mystery glyph at (6) divides the name of a La Corona lord from that of a Snake ruler it cannot be a nominal component, but must in some way introduce the latter. Such connecting terms, whether possessed nouns or secondary verbs, habitually begin with a pronoun. The only candidate for this here would be the central head, which is consistent with one version of the vowel u (see Stuart 1990:Fig.1i). Unfortunately, none of the examples available are sufficiently preserved to see the “paper-through-earlobe” that acts as the diagnostic motif of this sign (although faint traces of it might be seen in some photographs of K1a). Conceivably, the irregular outline of the mystery glyph made a central infix for the pronoun particularly attractive, but without a clear example the identification remains conjectural.

Even if it does have an active pronoun, can we be sure that it is a familial tie and not some other kind of relationship, or even a different grammatical form, such as a verb or a participle? The main argument against these alternatives is the coherence of the nine-part structure, which goes on, as we have seen, to (8) with yal “child of (mother).” If (6) were to be a verb that introduces a supplementary clause, then the Snake king at (7) would be its subject and therefore the child of the woman named at (9). Such an isolated statement of female descent would be strange indeed in this context. A non-kin tie (such as hierarchical connection) faces much the same difficulty, since this would also break the syntax of a relational string and again identify the Snake ruler as the child of Female B.

To recap so far, the nine-part structure on the Dallas altar is consistent with a relational chain in which each connecting term refers back to the arriving woman named at (2). The function of (6) looks very much like that of (4) yatan “the wife of” or (8) yal “the child of (mother)” in establishing the subject’s identity by reference to her adopted and actual kin. What kind of tie, then, does (6) specify? Thanks to a newly emerged text from La Corona we have a key fact about the wife of K’inich Yook and her relationship to the Snake king Yuknoom Ch’een. This panel describes the birth of a character called Janaab and tells us not only that he was the son of a royal woman from the Snake kingdom and of K’inich Yook, but also that he was the grandson of Yuknoom Ch’een (Figure 5). Since we already know that K’inich Yook’s father was a local ruler (Ringle 1985:152), we can be sure that his wife was a daughter of Yuknoom Ch’een. Is (6) therefore another term for “the child of” or, more specifically, “the daughter of”?

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Figure 5. The Birth of Janaab: (A1) “Glyph X”; (B1) “Glyph A9”; (A2) 4-MUWAAN; (B2) SIH-ya-ja; (A3) ja-’na-bi; (B3) U-MAM; (C1) “yu’ k'uj-no-ma-’ CH’EEN; (D1) ya-’AL; (C2) K’UH-[K’IN]-la-IXIK. (D2) IX-KAN-AJAW; (C3) U-YAX-CHIT-MIJIIN-?li; (D3) K’INICH-?yo?-OOK. Unprovenanced panel (photo by Justin Kerr, K9126).

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7 This is not to say that rulers are not, on occasion, identified with their maternal pedigree—most often where paternal legitimacy seems to have been absent. The oddity here would be to have this attached to a secondary clause.

8 See www.mayavase.com/corona/La_Corona.html.
Wives and Daughters

The Mystery Sign and T831

The extreme rarity of the mystery sign hampers the search for meaningful comparisons. The closest example appears on a section of Piedras Negras Panel 7 (Figure 6). The subject of this much-damaged monument is a royal lady of Hix Witz “Feline Hill,” and the text probably deals with the circumstances surrounding her marriage into the Piedras Negras dynasty. As re-assembled by Stephen Houston, this fragment comes after the Initial Series date and immediately follows a gap where we would expect to find the opening verb. In this position the semblant glyph looks like a personal name, especially since it is followed by the royal title ix hix witz ajaw. It is true that from time to time the scribes chose to pass over the name of the subject at hand, referring to him or her as the child of someone else, but that has to be counted as unlikely in this case.

The leafy appearance of the encircling motifs on Panel 7—which initially seems to distance this example from those on the Dallas Altar—is reflected in the stylistic range of its closest analog in Thompson’s glyph catalog, T831 (1962:389). The tiny sample there (to which we can add a few more today) shows both leafy and tadpole-like versions, although this time surrounding a T188 sign—elsewhere read as the syllabogram le (Figure 7a-d). The latter could be an infixed phonetic complement, but seems more likely to be part of a single compound sign. In either case, we must wonder if our mystery sign is no more than a version of T831 with a pronoun infixed or superimposed over its center.

The role of T831 is obscure, but it often appears in a formula in which it carries a number and introduces the name of a deity (variously the Principal Bird Deity, Maize God, or Jaguar God of the Underworld) (see Boot 2004:5-6). Thus, for example, the 3-ya-T831 on the Tablet of the Cross at Palenque (Figure 7d) is followed by IXI’M—which as a whole could be read as “Three are the of the Maize God.” It is interesting that this directly follows the name of the Triad Progenitor—the head of Palenque’s divine pantheon—in a passage that concerns the birth of his son, GI. Since the eponymous Triad Progenitor is cited repeatedly at Palenque as the parent of three gods and includes the name of the Maize God within his nominal sequence (Stuart 2005:182), it is possible that this statement alludes to his divine progeny (Marc Zender, personal communication 2008).

This reading takes the ya sign as a possessive pronoun in the form y-a, which differs from the u-possessive—based on an infixed u sign—that we have reconstructed for the mystery sign on the Dallas Altar. Either: (a) T831 is not the true basis of the mystery sign (the former having a different value beginning with vowel a); (b) the deity formula using T831 includes the agentive prefix aj—a feature that requires ya if it

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Note that there is a strong argument against a verbal role for the sign in question here, even if the missing position were filled by a demonstrative, since secondary verbs of the kind appropriate to (6) on the Dallas Altar seldom if ever take a primary position.

Another candidate appears in a battered section of Piedras Negras Panel 15, within a mother’s name following yal “child of (mother)” (Stephen Houston, personal communication 2008; see Houston et al. 2000:Fig.5 [A13]). A series of “tadpoles” surround an unclear core, joined to a head that more resembles that of the Maize God IXI’M than the female agentive IX. It is hard to know what is going on here, but we could be seeing a separated version of the same name on Panel 7 (this type of name will be discussed shortly).

A conclusion also reached by Erik Boot (2004:6). Figure 7b is interesting because it includes a vegetal motif on its left side normally only seen when T188 appears in iconography as the stylized tuba (or such like) of the water lily. This sits well with the idea that the T831 motif is, at heart, watery in nature (Marc Zender, personal communication 2008).

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Figure 6. A semblant of the mystery sign on a fragment of Piedras Negras Panel 7 (inking by Simon Martin after a sketch by David Stuart).

Figure 7. The hieroglyph T831: (a) Quirigua Stela E (D20) (drawing by Mathew Looper); (b) K555 (drawing by Simon Martin); (c) unprovenanced vessel (drawing by Marc Zender); (d) Palenque Tablet of the Cross (E4) (drawing by Merle Greene Robertson); (e) Topoxte mirror-back (N) (drawing by Stefanie Teufel); (f) K5855 (drawing by Marc Zender).
Wives and Daughters

is to be possessed (a phenomenon we see in spellings such as ya-BAAK-ki ya(j) baak “the captive-holder/taker of”); or (c) ya is not a pronoun in this case but a phonetic complement to T831 (in which case u- would be the appropriate possessive pronoun). Christian Prager (in Boot 2004:6) has previously posited a YATIK value for T831. Having noted an example with an infixed ki phonetic complement in the form 5-ya-T831[ki] (Figure 7e), he suggests that a compound on an unprovenanced codex-style vessel of 5-ya-ti-ki might be a fully syllabic rendering (Figure 7f). Yatik is not readily identifiable in existing Mayan lexicons, but is likely to be a complex form beginning with a y- pronoun. The link to T831 would be stronger if it were followed by a recognizable deity name, which unfortunately it is not.

In truth, this excursion through the varieties of T831 has not greatly illuminated things, but neither has it produced a serious challenge to the role projected for the mystery sign on the Dallas Altar. The most likely solution remains that the glyph at (6) works as a literal or de facto term for “(she is) the daughter of (father)” (a conclusion also reached by David Stuart, personal communication 2008). Since he was the son of Female A from the third episode, and the stone was carved a generation after her arrival, U2 might yet extend the series of relational terms by adding “the mother of,” or the like. It is tempting to see V1b as the Yajawte’ K’inich name of the contemporary La Corona ruler, joined to a child-name of Janaab. While the surviving details of V1b are not fully consistent with that interpretation, there may be some variation in the spelling that makes it feasible. The role of the woman at V2 remains unclear.

The next section begins at W2, with a now unreadable group of glyphs. We can be confident, however, that they mark a shift forward in time and restate the arrival that took place on 9.14.9.9.14, AD 721. The appropriate day for this position, 8 Ix, appears at A’1b (not illustrated) and is linked by a Distance Number to the Period Ending 9.15.0.0.0. Although barely legible today, the name of ix ti’ kanal ajaw is provided at X1. Her identity is confirmed by the pairing at Y1-X2, which describes her as the ux utz’ikbal ix kanal ajaw, the “Third Lady of the Snake [Polity].” The appearance of the Sak Nikte’ toponym at Y2a further emphasizes that her arrival at La Corona is the topic under discussion.

Conclusions

This re-examination of the Dallas Altar offers new data on a fascinating and in many ways unique inscription. Principally, it argues that all three of its major female subjects were the wives of La Corona lords and the daughters of Snake kings. This would clarify the narrative purpose of the monument, as a record of exogamous marriage ties between a dominant pol-
ity and its subordinate spanning two centuries. In line with earlier judgments, it stresses the importance that the Snake dynasty placed on the otherwise modest site of La Corona. In the process, it has been possible to identify the name of an Early Classic ruler of La Corona. Since his bride is called the “First” Snake lady we can take it that marital relations began with her arrival in 520, perhaps solidifying a new-found Snake political influence in the region. This is the earliest evidence we have for the Snake kings’ political engagement in the central Peten, coming well before Tuun K’ab Hix/K’altuun Hix installed the king of Naranjo in 546. We might ask if this marriage represents some small part of the wider strategic shift that would see the Serpent State rise as the leading power of the sixth century.

Appendix A: First sequence

(D5) *hu-*li-IX; (E5) TI’-ka-KAN-AJAW; (G1-H1) IX-ka-KAN-AJAW; (G2) TAHN-na; (H2) *CH’EEN-na; (G3) SAK-NIK-TE’; (H3) ya-AT-na; (G4) ya-*AJAW-TE’-K’INICH; (H4) SAK-WAY-si; (G5) ?; (H5) TI’-[?]K’AWIIL?; (G6) ya-AL-la; (H6) IX; (G7) x; (H7) x
*huli ix ti’ kanal ajaw ix kanal ajaw tahin ch’een sak nikte’ yatan yajawte’ k’inich sak wayis ?? ti’ k’awiil yal ix ??

Appendix B: Second sequence

(J2b) hu-li-ya; (I3) IX-x-x; (J3) NAAH-EK’; (I4) U-NAAH-TAL-la; (J4) IX-ka-KAN-AJAW; (I5) SAK-NIK-TE’ ya-AT-na; (J5) ?; (K1) ? K’AB?[TUUN]-ni-?HIX; (L1) K’UH-ka-KAN-AJAW; (M1) ya-AL IX x-x
huliiy ix ? naah ek’ unaatil ix kanal ajaw sak nikte’ yatan ? ?…hix k’uuhl kanal ajaw yal ix bakab

Appendix C: Third sequence

(Q1) HUL-li-ya; (P2) IX-x-x; (Q2) U-2-*TZ’AK-bu-li; (R1) IX-KAN-AJAW; (R2) SAK-NIK-TE’; (S1) ya-AT-na K’INICH-?-yo?-OOK; (T1) ? yul*[kul-no-ma-CH’EEN](U1) ya-AL-IX; (T2) x-x-BAHLAM?
*huliiy ix…cha utz’akbuil ix kanal ajaw sak nikte’ yatan k’inich… …yuunoom ch’een yal ix…

Appendix D: Addenda to the third sequence

(U2) x-ka?-cha?-x; (V1) JANAAB-x-x-K’INICH?; (W1) SAK-WAY-si x-x; (V2) IX-x-x-xa; (W2) x-x-x-x; (X1) IX-TI’-*[ka-]*KAN-’AJAW; (Y1) U-3-T’AZ’AK-’bu-’li; (X2) IX-*ka-*KAN-’AJAW; (Y2) SAK-NIK-*TE’
…janaab ? ? k’inich sak wayis… ix ti’ kanal ajaw ux utz’akbuil ix kanal ajaw sak nikte’

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