This essay presents a new analysis of Palenque’s Palace Tablet, an inscribed relief panel famous for relating a number of important events in the city’s history, including royal accessions and rites of crowning (Figures 1 and 2). The tablet was dedicated in the year AD 720, late in the reign of K’inich K’an Joy Chitam, when it was built into the rear wall of House A-D of the Palace. Here I offer no extensive commentary on the tablet’s lengthy hieroglyphic text, but instead focus on the tablet’s figural scene and its text caption, with the aim of resolving important and long-standing problems in their interpretation. In doing so I hope to show that the Palace Tablet’s text and imagery work together to present a variation on a tried-and-true theme in Palenque’s art and inscriptions, in which Palenque’s rulers were likened to and even equated with very remote historical and mythical protagonists. The Palace Tablet is rooted in the personal history of its creator and protagonist K’inich K’an Joy Chitam, but it also weaves into its narrative an intriguing reference to a previously misunderstood character known as the “Jester God,” who was associated with primordial ancestry and rulership throughout the Maya area. This aspect of the Palace Tablet’s significance will involve a foray into the mythology and iconography of this important deity, whose significance can now, I think, be greatly clarified.

The Name of Paper: The Mythology of Crowning and Royal Nomenclature on Palenque’s Palace Tablet

David Stuart
with a record of his birth in AD 644. Roughly the first half of the inscription features two important childhood rituals, leading then to a record of his father’s death and the ensuing accession of his older brother K’inich Kan Bahlam in 684. On that same day, K’inich Kan Joy Chitam, by then middle-aged, was installed as bal clow (“main youth” or “prince”). The written narrative then turns to what is clearly the rhetorical focus of the tablet, the accession of K’inich Kan Joy Chitam himself in the year 702, before culminating in a record of House A-D’s dedication in 720. (A full summary of the main inscription’s content is offered in Figure 3).

It is curious that a number of these historical episodes—the royal accessions, the deaths of two kings, and even the building dedication—are described in terms that emphasize the role of the ceremonial bark paper headband worn by rulers, known as sakhuun or huun. Various examples appear in the middle of the Temple of the Inscriptions panel of the Temple of the Inscriptions. Various orthographic differences in the spelling of the word “paper” in the preceding paragraph (e.g., sakhuun and huun) are certainly significant, given that the sahhuun headband was the “crown” of Classic Maya kings, presented in standard rituals of royal investiture known as k’al huun or k’al sakhuun “ceremonial bark paper headband worn by rulers, known as sakhuun or huun.” The extended passage describing the inauguration of K’inich Kan Joy Chitam, the highlight of the tablet’s inscription, includes a lengthy descriptive section on the headband itself, in blocks CI-06 (Figure 4e). In two of the tablet’s accession records the placing of the headband is conceptually linked to the acquisition of a king’s new royal name—an important fact that we will explore later in this essay. Curiously, the sahhuun headband is also featured on the tablet in connection with historical events of royal death (Figure 4a, c). The associated verb is difficult to read (ha-ma-l3-li-ya), and earlier proposals that it is based on the transitive verb root *jam, “to open” (e.g., Schele et al. 1998) seem unlikely.1 But whatever the eventual interpretation of the phrase, there can be little doubt that this simple verb-noun statement indicates that something happened with the royal headband upon the demise of K’inich Kan Joy Chitam’s father and older brother.

1 Some have preferred to read the term for the headband as sakhuun or sakhuun (e.g., Schele and Mathews 1998:115, 412), but this is inaccurate.1 (as I prefer to transcribe the root, with a long vowel) would be the adjectival form for the headband, and it is found only in the spelling ha-ma-l3-yl, “headband-fastening.” The extended passage describing the inauguration of K’inich Kan Joy Chitam, the highlight of the tablet’s inscription, includes a lengthy descriptive section on the headband itself, in blocks CI-06 (Figure 4e). In two of the tablet’s accession records the placing of the headband is conceptually linked to the acquisition of a king’s new royal name—an important fact that we will explore later in this essay. Curiously, the sahhuun headband is also featured on the tablet in connection with historical events of royal death (Figure 4a, c). The associated verb is difficult to read (ha-ma-l3-li-ya), and earlier proposals that it is based on the transitive verb root *jam, “to open” (e.g., Schele et al. 1998) seem unlikely.1 But whatever the eventual interpretation of the phrase, there can be little doubt that this simple verb-noun statement indicates that something happened with the royal headband upon the demise of K’inich Kan Joy Chitam’s father and older brother.

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The spelling may be indicating a root *jam, “headband.” If so, yet something phonologically different (see Goede 2006). I have the counterproposal to refer to the glyph’s design, and I wonder if the “knot-skull” element may have an undetermined logographic value, in addition to its reading as syllable ha.2

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2. See Chandra and Weidner 2004; Robertson 2004; Weidner 2006). Here I opt for the forms of the root attested in Tzeltalan and Tzotzil languages, where the internal glottal stop of proto-Mayan ancestral was lost and became a long vowel (proto-Mayan *jah > proto-Cholan-Tzeltalan *yaah).
The dedication record for House A-D comes in the final section of the text, where we read yet another mention of royal headbands (Figure 4h). The building evidently bore the ancient proper name K‘iuhal Naal, “Headband-Fastening House,” in clear reference to the act of crowning kings or other officials. Such a proper name also offers obvious thematic continuity to earlier mentions of royal headbands in the inscription, and it probably reveals something about the function of House A-D itself as a place for crowning and elite investiture. Recently I have suggested that House A-D was intended for this very purpose, not necessarily just as a place for royal accession, but as a setting for various other political ceremonies and office-taking events involving junior nobles in Palenque’s court, and possibly Stuart and Stuart 2008:218). In Jun Ajpu (One Ajpu), using an equivalent highland day name, Ajpu or Aj Puul (“Blowgunner”), in place of lowland Ajaw (see Thompson 1950b). Somewhat confusingly, the melded form Jun Ajpu (One Junajpu), in reference to the father of the twins. While obscure in many ways, such a re-analysis and re-tooling of the same basic calendar name recovers, if nothing else, the essential importance of “One Ajaw” as the animate patron of the twenty-first day—an ancient equivalence visually conveyed by the use of Jun Ajaw’s portrait as the head variant of the day glyph in Classic times.

Remarkably, in the mechanisms of the hieroglyphic script Jun Ajaw’s paper headband sign can be used alone in animated conflations of glyphs to convey the word AJAW, in place of the fuller portrait of the mythical figure. One can easily imagine that a historical ruler donning the same paper headband upon his accession came to embody the essence of Ajaw; and of Jun Ajaw, in place of lowland Ajaw (see Schele and Mathews 1998:382, n. 3)—thus carried considerable mythological import. Through their crowning with the paper sashiu, rulers and nobles took on a symbol of office that derived its meaning from the specific marker of Jun Ajaw and his humble role of hunter, provider, and sacrificer (Stuart 2008a). In this context, too, the number prefix in the calendrical name “One Ajaw” takes on a certain significance. Just as such an approach of the bejeweled maize god Jun Isim, “One Maize,” Jun Ajaw or “One Lord” references a similar primordial quality, with an idea approaching the sense of “The One Lord” or “The First Lord.” Not coincidentally, then, we will find that the opening date of the text accompanying the Palace Tablet’s scene of crowning begins with the day 1 Ajaw, in connection with a curious and long-debated record of a birth. Is it to that text that we will now turn our attention.

An Obscure Protagonist

The three weated individuals shown at the top of the Tablet exemplify what Schele called a “tri-figure composition,” a distinctive figural arrangement repeated in several Palenque sculptures (Schele 1979) (Figure 6a). A very similar scene occurs on the Tablet of the Slaves, and an earlier truncated form on the Oval Palace Tablet. A more elaborate variation, somewhat different in detail, appears in the populated scene on the south face of the Temple XIX platform (Stuart 2005:113). As Schele demonstrated, these images are scenes of royal crowning, with the king centrally placed between close family members, usually the parents. On the Tablet of the Slaves, for example, K’inich Ahkal Mo’ Nahb appears flanked by his father and mother, who offer him two important symbols of his new duty as king (Figure 6b). The father, Tzolih Chan Mat, holds a military headdress while the mother, Ik Kimol Mat, offers up the image of the 1 Ajaw, the “knife-shield” symbol of sacred ancestral warfare. On
the Palenque Tablet we see much the same thing, this time with a different protagonist. As has been pointed out by many, there can be little doubt that the central portrait is K'inich Kan Joy Chitam, who is clearly the focus of the narrative in the tablet's main text. He is flanked on either side by his father K'inch Chan Pakal and his mother Itz'a Pakal Ajaw, both also named in the initial passage of the text in connection with the king's birth.

Earlier studies have pointed out a few problems in the interpretation of the caption text (Figure 7), especially the curious presence of a personal name that is not that of K'inich Kan Joy Chitam. The text of fifteen glyphs is a narrative begun by K'inich K'an Joy Chitam, yet the question that Schele and others raised long ago still remains: why would the caption feature events surrounding some name was perhaps some previously unknown younger brother of K'inich K'an Joy Chitam, but with his supposed capture in battle, artisans were compelled to modify the tablet, inserting a caption to identify the image as the younger brother, "Xoc." The same unusual name appears also near the end of the main text, in connection with the house dedication ceremony; Schele and others interpreted this in a similar way, with "Xocs" name inserted into an interrupted narrative begun by K'inich K'an Joy Chitam.

Today, however, there seems a general consensus that the portrait is indeed that of K'inich Kan Joy Chitam, yet the question that Schele and others raised long ago still remains: why would the caption feature events surrounding some other individual, not K'inich Kan Joy Chitam himself? In fact, this problem vexes a number of epigraphers and art historians to this day. Who is the mysterious person depicted?

This leads us not surprisingly to a new and detailed examination of the caption itself, beginning with a consideration of its two dates. As already noted, the name of the subject appears as the Calendar Round 1 Ajaw 3 Wayeb. As noted, the name glyph following the birth verb has three signs, readable as YOP-HUUN (Figure 8a-b). The leaf-like middle sign is widely familiar as the syllable ye (Stuart 1985a), a value surely derived from the Ch'ol cl noun ye. (Hopkins et al. 2011:289). In fact, some glyphic settings point strongly in YOP as an alternative or original logographic value. For example, on Yaxchilan Lintel 18, where we find it combined with the TE head variant, in what can only be a syllabic context, it can be interpreted as YOP, "leaf"; see Graham 1979:45, C3. In addition, its common pairing with the logogram AAT indicates that it must be a logogram in this context as well providing YOP-AAT, Yopaat, the name of an obscure aspect of the rain deity Chahk that is often found as a part of royal names (in the larger expression Chan Yopaat). The setting here before HUUN similarly points to its role as a logogram YOP.

The HUUN value for the head of the so-called "Jester God" (Schele 1976) has been well established since about 1990, based on its common substitution by the syllables ha in various contexts, including Glyph F of the Supplementary Series and in spellings of the term for the royal headband (huun or sahuun). All of these textual references convey the related meanings for huun as "paper," "book," or "headband." Significantly, it is worth remembering that ha is a common term for the art form of text that is often found in Glyph F of the Supplementary Series. It is widely assumed that the use of the Jester God standing for huun is based on the deity's role as the animistic frontal jewel on many images of the royal headbands, often in combination with the "ha" signs (Figure 9). I believe the explanation may not be so simple, however, as more in-depth discussion below will reveal. For now we need only establish that the headband is a common term for the royal headbands on the Palenque Tablet provide the solid reading of Yop Yop Huun for the glyph, meaning "Three-Leaf-Paper" or "Three-Leaf-Headband." However, the fact that the headband is a word that has a somewhat impressive range of meanings for huun and its cognate forms—as "fig tree," "paper," or "headband"—I prefer not to come down on one particular sense of the word, at least for now. The final passage of the Palenque Tablet's main inscription (Figure 4b) includes

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the "Headband-Binding House," said to be "the house of (y-otoot) Ux Yop A-D, the building that originally housed the Palace Tablet. The ceremonial interpreting the significance of the upper caption text. This culmination have been contained or stored within.

gods, living or deceased; I know of no instance anywhere of the term attested in both Ch'ol and Ch'olti'. If we entertain the more literal concept may well include a broader idea of "to make, create, do," meanings of k'al, "The name of Ux Yop Huun is 'fastened.'" The verb root k'al commonly translated by its literal sense "to fasten," although the semantics, "The name of Ux Yop Huun is 'fastened.'" The verb root k'al, "the headband-fastening name" (Figure 4b, e).

The event is written the story of Ux Yop Huun, taking place some fifty-six years after the birth. The epigraphic and visual evidence points to a royal name being a label that is in some way materialized or manifested through the headband.

Returning to the final passage of the lengthy inscription, the full sequence of glyphs is as follows: o-chi-yah-KAH' / K'AL-HUUN-nu-NA / A-UH-KAB' / 3-K'IN-ni-ja-a ya / -yoo-OTO-TO / 7 / 3-YOP-HUUN / yu-te-te / K'INICH / K'IN-JOY-CHTIMA-la / KUHUL-BAAK-la-AJAW

3-KIN-ni-ja-ta / 0-2-WINIK-ji-ya / 1-AJAW / K'AL-la-ja / 18-TZIKIN?-ni / 4-AJAW K'ak'. In earlier works Schele proposed its value as JEL, but others had independently recently arrived as the glyph block, adjacent to the AJAW superfix. The syntax of these last three glyphs suggests a reference to some type of name or names for a series of "fixed" or "manifested" in another essay (Stuart 2011), I see this not as some simple royal importance to dynastic ancestry. Rather than seek to names. In Tzeltal we find jel-ol tocayo, "something eternal." Its uses in many Early appear in the Motul Dictionary of Colonial Yucatec honorific, but rather as a collective and abstracted designation in another essay (Stuart 2011), I see this not as some simple royal

Perhaps now is a good time to take stock of what amounts to a very difficult series of interrelated texts and class centering on the mysterious Ux Yop Huin, his actions, and his relationship to the Palace Tablet. It is not necessary to go back to when Ux Yop Huin had a key role at many other Maya sites.

Perhaps now is a good time to take stock of what amounts to a very difficult series of interrelated texts and class centering on the mysterious Ux Yop Huin, his actions, and his relationship to the Palace Tablet. It is not necessary to go back to when Ux Yop Huin had a key role at many other Maya sites.
Since there is no record, but not of a human birth; rather it is seen as a reference to the creation or fashioning of a sacred ceremonial headdress, retained as a dynastic heirloom throughout the history of Late Classic Palenque. The evidence therefore points to Ux Yop Huun being a highly unconventional name, not attributable to any contemporaneous historical figure at Palenque.

Although I still cannot resist the old view that Ux Yop Huun on the Palace Tablet serves as a personal name (albeit a very odd one), this has not always been the prevailing interpretation of the glyph read as "headband" and more generally "paper," attested as a term for "headband" and more generally "paper," and more generally "paper," and more generally "paper," as "helmet." This is precisely the value it seems to have in large part in the meaning of "headband" and on the face of it to have in large part in the meaning of "headband" and on the face of it to the creation or fashioning of a sacred ceremonial headdress, retained as a dynastic heirloom throughout the history of Late Classic Palenque.

The name featured in the Palace Tablet also appears in the inscriptions of numerous other sites. The clearest instance is on Copán's Stela 5, in a passage associated with the accession of the thirteenth local king Waka'alajton Huwac K'awiil (Figures 8c, 10). Throughout much of this monument's text, noteworthy screen of the form of a mat, the theme of inauguration is woven in the form of a mat, the theme of inauguration is emphasized—it was Ruler 13's first stela—and therefore it offers an interesting parallel to what is emphasized on the Palace Tablet. The form of the Ux Yop Huun name is strikingly similar: it is a verb phrase with the name of Pakal in the initial block. The verb phrase is elaborated with the name K'am, "to take, receive," seen in the context of the Tortuguero reference prevents any further insight into its role in the overall inscription.

The Jester God that serves as the standard head variant for HUUN has a well established iconographic development, dating back to examples from the Early Classic and even Late Preclassic periods (Figure 11). Throughout these examples one easily sees that the deity's head is topped by three leaves or branches. In some profile representations, especially in the Late Classic, only the middle and side foliations are visible, but three are surely implied. The Ux Yop Huun name therefore appears to be a straightforward and descriptive term for the Jester God (see Stuart 2004a; Taube 1998:456). By slight extension, there can be little doubt that the Ux Yop Huun name is closely related, if not equivalent, to the abovementioned Ux Yop Huun name by virtue of being named later, with the founder's name in some manner modifying Ux Yop Huun, as in "he takes the (K'inich) Yax K'uk' Mo' Three-Leaf Amate." As at Palenque, we are left wondering whether Ux Yop Huun names a person or a thing. It may well be that in either and either case the same phenomenon is at work: somehow assuming the identity of Ux Yop Huun as well as that of the dynastic founder upon the day of his accession.

Another example of the same appears closer to Palenque, in a text from Tortuguero (Figure 8d). Here the context is far from clear, but the overall form of the glyph shows some revealing differences. The HUUN element of the Ux Yop Huun head variant is here as a "Jester God" head but as a more abstract sign sometimes (and erroneously) referred to as the "dotted winal" (it has little visual connection to the "winal" or WINKIN graphemes). This way we know that it is a more abstract form of HUUN. Above and along its back we see two leaves in place of the single YOP found at Palenque.

The specific name Ux Yop Huun, based on the word for "robe" or "cloak" in the text from Tortuguero, may differ greatly from theirs, but it hinges on this same fundamental insight.

Ux Yop Huun Beyond Palenque

The specific interpretation I will offer may differ greatly from theirs, but it hinges on this same fundamental insight.

Image 21.

The iconographic development of the "Jester God," showing its origin as a three-branched tree or plant: (a) Dumbarton Oaks pectoral (drawing: Karl Taube); (b) Palenque, Temple XIX Platform headdress detail (drawing: David Stuart); (c) Palenque, Temple V Leiden plaque (drawing: Karl Taube); (d) Palenque, Temple V Temple of the Inscriptions (drawing: David Stuart).

Image 10.

Figure 11. The specific name Ux Yop Huun, based on the word for "robe" or "cloak" in the text from Tortuguero, may differ greatly from theirs, but it hinges on this same fundamental insight.

Figure 12.

The specific name Ux Yop Huun, based on the word for "robe" or "cloak" in the text from Tortuguero, may differ greatly from theirs, but it hinges on this same fundamental insight.
verb glyph, “Curl Nose” of earlier literature). In the initial k’al huun accession phrase— a verbal expression for royal accession (Figure 13). This phrase Yop Huun in its inscription, where the glyph seems integral to their symmetrical three leaves, seems linked to the Jester God of the accompanying scene. No matter how we interpret it out to me that the right-hand figure may have an abbreviated name, and Marc Zender (personal communication 2010) points glyph in the final position has long been taken to be a personal Copan’s local history (see Stuart 2004b). The “foliated ajaw” be semi-mythical, or in reference to some episode outside of 8.17.0.0.0 (Figure 12). This pre-dynastic reference may in fact Jester God name in the initial and final glyphs). Drawing: Barbara Fash. Figure 12. A possible mystical stela ritual depicted in the central cartouche from the Copan pecary skull (note the 1 Ajaw date and the Jester God in the initial and final glyphs). Drawing: Barbara Fash.

8.17.0.0.0 (Figure 12). This pre-dynastic reference may in fact be semi-mythical, or in reference to some episode outside of Copan’s local history (see Stuart 2004b). The “foliated ajaw” glyph in the final position has long been taken to be a personal name, and Marc Zender (personal communication 2010) points out to me that the right-hand figure may have an abbreviated version of the same glyph atop his headress. This is quite possible, but it is also worth considering that the final glyph of the main text might serve a more generic role, referencing the paper wrappings visible around the stela in the center of the accompanying photo. No matter how we interpret it here, the form of this and related “foliated ajaw” glyphs, with their symmetrical three leaves, seems linked to the Jester God (see also Taube 2005:26), and I suspect they are essentially equivalent forms to the Us Yop Huun glyphs featured at Palenque.

Stela 4 of Tikal may hold a very important reference to Us Yop Huun in its inscription, where the glyph seems integral to a verb construction related to accession (Figure 13). This phrase is an elaboration on the standard k’al huun accessum phrase— perhaps the earliest one known, in fact—and is used to record the crowning of the important Tikal ruler Nohos Yo’x Ahiin (the “Curl Nose” of earlier literature). In the initial K’AL verb glyph, in place of the usual simple HUUN or SAK-HUUN above the K’AL hand, we instead find a “foliated ajaw” glyph preceded by three dots. The “three” prefix with the leaves strengthens the equivalence to the Us Yop Huun name, and the context establishes the key fact that this name refers directly to the headband or headdecor that is “fastened” upon the new king. Us Yop Huun here appears to serve as a label of a ritual paper crown.

So again we seem to face our old conundrum: Is Us Yop Huun a person or a thing? What seems clear is that the two variants overlap a good deal in their artistic settings, it nonetheless seems clear that they are visually distinct forms; in early representations this is especially apparent, and it is significant that the two are juxtaposed as different hieroglyphs in one inscription from Caracol, Belize (Figure 15). A third form routinely labelled as a “Jester God” is an anthropomorphized flower blossom, sometimes with two prominent lobed leaves or floral forms (Figure 14). Sometimes this can take the form of the floral blossom alone, or it can be animated through the attachment of a human profile, very much in the style of the Maize God. One wonders if this is as indications that well as the Jester God, or a specific variation of him, may have assumed a further complex role as a personified “proto-ruled” mentioned in both texts and iconography of several sites. The Jester God as the Essence of Paper

The so-called “Jester God” has long been a somewhat enigmatic character in Maya iconography. First named by Schele (1974), it has been interpreted as a symbolic representation of royal royalty (Freidel 1990; Miller and Martin 2004:68; Schele and Miller 1986:53). More specific treatments have emphasized its role as a maize symbol derived from older Middle Preclassic antecedents (Fields 1991; Fields and Reents-Budet 2005:256), or as an animate “world tree” associated with centrality and jade in addition to maize and rulership (Taube 2005); such wide-ranging views are of course not contradictory, but they nevertheless form a coherent category that remains key in an understanding of the Jester God’s meaning in Maya art. This stems in part, I believe, from a loose application of the “Jester God” label, widely applied to what we see at least three different forms in Classic Maya iconography (Figure 14). In the discussions thus far I have emphasized the form that appears as the huun glyph, showing a beaked, avian character with a large, usually square eye, and three leaves around its head (Figures 8, 14a). A vaguely similar form in Late Classic art derives from the representation of a so-called “tutish” and is often shown on rulers’ foreheads and on headdresses (see Hellmuth 1987; Miller and Taube 1993:104) (Figure 6a, 14b). Although these two variants overlap a good deal in their artistic settings, it nonetheless seems clear that they are visually distinct forms; in early representations this is especially apparent, and it is significant that the two are juxtaposed as different hieroglyphs in one inscription from Caracol, Belize (Figure 15). A third form routinely labelled as a “Jester God” is an anthropomorphized flower blossom, sometimes with two prominent lobed leaves or floral forms (Figure 14). Sometimes this can take the form of the floral blossom alone, or it can be animated through the attachment of a human profile, very much in the style of the Maize God. One wonders if this is as indications that well as the Jester God, or a specific variation of him, may have assumed a further complex role as a personified “proto-ruled” mentioned in both texts and iconography of several sites.

With this hopefully clarified, we can now consider our

standard Jester God that stands as a hieroglyph for huun, meaning “smite, bark paper,” and extending to include certain important manuscript or book material, such as “pages, book” or “headband.” Indeed, in Classic inscriptions we also see huun sometimes written as a codex (HUUN) or as a knotted “bow tie” binding of a headband or other paper attachment. Significantly huun carries an even more fundamental meaning beyond the material of bark paper, referring to the amate or fig tree (genus Ficus) from which bark paper was made. Numerous amate trees are native to Mesoamerica, perhaps the most significant in the Maya lowlands being the strangler fig, Ficus constricta. In several Maya and other Mesoamerican forms, the Classic Maya huun refers generally to any of these species. Yukatek today commonly employs the word ik’ip for this tree (Bricker et al. 1998:134), although huun is attested as well in some older sources (Barrera-Vásquez et al. 1980:246). In modern Ch’ol, jin is “papel, libro, carta” but also “amate (árbol),” as in the phrase yen amate cold jin (jin, “el amate crece muy grande”) (Aulie and Aulie 1978:69). The word amate is from Nahua amati (Karttunen 1988:10), which carries the very same range of meanings: the amate tree, the paper made from its bark, and things made of such paper.

The Jester God as depicted on the front of the huun or selfish headband is often considered to be a representation of a seven jewel, but I doubt this is always the case. This idea seems based on the existence of a number of similar jade heads in the archaeological record, recovered from Palenque (Ruz Lhuillier 1975:262), Chichén Itzá (Prszewalski 1974:146-147, Aguacat) (Inomata et al. 2002:315), and supposedly from Cerén (Miller and Taube 1993:104). These small adornments crafted of jade are often assumed 1

Figure 16. The visual distinction of two Jester Gods in a hieroglyph from Copan, Stela 6. Drawing by Marc Zender after photographs by Ian Graham.

It is this “trident” form that is most strongly related to maize symbolism in early Maya art, as well as in Olmec and Zapotec iconography (Fields 1991). I say “supposedly” here for I remain unconvinced of Fields’ argument that the small jade heads discussed above are representations of amate trees, or even crude representations of a Jester God variety. They have very little in the way of distinguishing markings or kinship elements.
to be attached to headbands and headdresses. However, none of them represent the same god I have focused on here. Rather than being the emir or lisse character with its leaves and avian face, these more greatly resemble the Xok Adornment, the fish-like character often called a “Jester God,” again in a rather loose way. This aquatic character is not always attached to simple headbands; rather it often appears directly on the forehead in portraits (as with the ruler depicted on Tikal Stela 31, for example) or is shown attached to jade headbands and large helmets, such as the drum major headdress on the Palace Tablet. In my view these jewel adornments are not the luan character. When we see true Jester Gods in large calligraphic form on paper headbands worn especially by mythological figures, it seems clear that they are more than just jewels and take on a significant symbolic meaning of their own. Note, for example, how the exaggerated size of the Jester God on K5824 contrasts with the realistic beaded jade jewels worn by the Juun Ajaw figure (Figure 16). Surely there is more to its representation than as a realistic jewel.

Jester gods in other settings may offer clues as to the meaning on headbands. Several vases in the so-called “codex style” show the monkey-scribe patron gods of the arts (Coe 1977) painting or writing in open books. In these we see Jester Gods not on headbands but instead emerging out of the pages of the books, almost as if facing and engaging with the scribe or artisan (Figure 17). In other representations of scribes the Jester Gods are nowhere to be seen on the books (e.g., K1225, K2095, K924). I take their presence as optional “adornments” on codices to be playful iconographic designs based on the Jester God’s role as the embodiment of luan, ritual amate paper. That is, the animated surfaces of the codices work almost as glyphic labels, emphasizing the “papery” material essence of the books and their pages. Similarly, on K8665 we see the face of the Jester God resting atop a basket with paper streamers; it is far too large to be a headdress or other adornment, and I suspect it is meant to provide a symbolic clue to the material contents of the basket.

This rather functional take on the Jester God finds support in its early visual history, where we find that the three leaves originated as three stems or branches of an animated tree or plant (Figure 11). In the Early Classic paintings of Tomb 11 of Rio Azul, for example, each of the three large luan entities shows a vertical line with two attached circles along the central vertical axis of the forehead (Figure 18). This feature, as well as the thickly clustered...
bands seen on all three “branches” of the heads, is simply the TE’ or “tree, plant” glyph, found on tree images throughout Maya iconography. In the Preclassic period, the same huun entity is more naturalistically represented with three branches and leaves, resembling a tree (Taube 1998) (Figure 11). In this way we can trace the visual evolution of the animate huun over a remarkably long period, from the Preclassic through to the Late Classic. The convergence of linguistic evidence (its role as the word huun or in the name Ux Yop Huun) with such direct visual clues now suggests that this specific form of the Jester God, representing the essence of paper, is an animated amate or ficus tree.

The animated face on early and late Jester Gods is indistinguishable from that of the all-important Principal Bird Deity (Taube 1998). What would account for such an intimate connection between the fig tree and the great mythical bird? It may be relevant that in the Preclassic murals of San Bartolo, the large tree upon which the descending Principal Bird Deity alights appears to be a strangler fig, with its intertwined trunks and round fruits. Perhaps the animate essence of the ficus tree relied on this old iconographic connection, a fusion of the bird and the amate tree as a single motif, derived from an ancient and elemental narrative of mythology. In this light, it is important to point out that the Principal Bird Deity served as the standard ceremonial headdress for Maya kings during the Preclassic and Early Classic periods. That is, the supernatural bird image, complete with wing and tail feathers, was itself a much elaborated “headband” given to rulers upon their accession to office. This more elaborate effigy headdress depicts a descending Principal Bird Deity, and it echoes the same key mythological event depicted at San Bartolo and in many related images, including the famous Late Classic “Blowgunner Vase” (K1226), to which we will return momentarily (Stuart 2008b).

One spectacular illustration of the descending bird headdress being placed upon a ruler appears on an incised bone now in the Dallas Museum of Art (Figure 19). The scene shows a young lord, perhaps a version of the Maize God, sitting on an elaborate cosmological scaffold-throne, with an elderly god holding aloft a Principal Bird Deity headdress—the quintessential royal headgear for the Classic Maya. A full image of the Principal Bird Deity appears perched on the skyband above the throne, and I suspect the overall composition emphasizes the headdress as the bird descending from the sky, thus transforming into the human king below. Significantly, the hieroglyphs in the scene explicitly mark the headdress as amate and make use of the standard F’il-huun “fastening” phrase we have seen featured so prominently in the Palace Tablet inscription. This visual juxtaposition of glyph and headdress reflects the basic connection between the Principal Bird Deity and the Jester God, the foliated huun entity of amate.

Were this not enough, we also see just on top of the avian headdress a small but recognizable example of the huun Jester God, clarifying the equivalence. Ux Yop Huun, the animate essence of paper, serves as an emblematic device in headdresses from Preclassic to Classic times, often in settings that suggest its role as a proper name or label more than a simple marker of papery substance. On Kaminaljuyu Stela 11 we see it atop the head of the costumed ruler who impersonates the Principal Bird Deity, almost surely as a label for the great bird (Figure 20). The famous portrait of an early Maya king incised on a stone pectoral at Dumbarton Oaks shows perched on top of the head the same element of a beaked visage with three natural-looking leaves emerging from its brow (Figure 21). We see many examples of the very same pattern in the art of the Early and Late Classic. On the sarcophages of

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9 Such TE’ elements never seem to appear as part of maize plant iconography.

10 The idea that the material of bark paper itself holds a spiritual character is reminiscent of present-day beliefs among some Otomi communities, where its traditional use in rituals and in the manufacture of sacred images persists (Galinier 1987:474-478).

11 It may be worth noting the presence of both the trident blossom and three-leaved Jester Gods on the figure, another indication of their non-equivalence.
Pakal, for example, the ancestors all wear their personal names as their headdresses (Kelley 1982; Schele and Mathews 1998:119-122), yet each of these is also topped with a small profile Jester God (Figure 22). Some of these show an “ajaw” face element in place of the god’s face (e.g., Figure 22c), but this is a variation often found in Jester God images over time and space, where the “ajaw” seems to be an elaborated forehead and a visual core for the surrounding three leaves. As I have suggested elsewhere (Stuart 2004a), I believe these are in some way name hieroglyphs, though perhaps a more generic sort of label or title incorporated into iconographic headgear that alludes to more specific historical individuals. This interpretation finds further support in cases were the Jester God or Ux Yop Haun visually fuses or conflates with the personal name, as we see on Stela 9 of Lamanai (Closs 1988; Reents-Budet 1988) and on Stela 2 of Copan (Figure 23). I take these visual overlaps to be intentional fusions of identity between historical rulers and Ux Yop Haun, who was at once a god, a legendary or mythical actor, and an embodiment of the spirit of ritual bark paper.

In these examples, I have pointed to two different functions of Jester God images in the iconography. One is as a simple marker of the material of sacred amate paper, when attached to headbands or the pages of books. Another role seems more specific, as a visual cue of a personal name or label when the same image appears atop the heads of portrayed individuals (rather than on headbands), as on the Dumbarton Oaks pectoral or the Leiden Plaque (Figure 24). It is important not to confuse the two settings. The second of these corresponds, I think, to the notion that Huun is a specific, almost personal identity as a ritual material associated with royal adornment. I suspect that this more narrow sense might be best thought of as the actual name of the Huun Jester God, Ux Yop Haun. This distinction is a subtle one and may not seem too necessary; but we see a similar idea at work with other Maya animations of materials and features of nature. The sun god, for example, is the essence of k’in, and his head is used regularly to spell the word. But he is also a specific mythological persona named K’inich Ajaw. Similarly, the substance of water (ha’) can be shown in glyphs and iconography as the water serpent, sometimes simply read Ha’, but in other cases the water serpent has a specific proper name as a mythical entity. I lean to the view that the Jester God discussed here was the essence of Huun but that it was also Ux Yop Haun, a specific character that embodied several layers of significance based on the meaning of ritual paper in royal imagery.

Several sculptures at Palenque depict small, full-bodied Jester Gods that look to be actual effigies or perhaps iconographic symbols. On the Tablets of the Cross and the Foliated Cross, K’inich Kan Bahlam supports such a miniature figure in paper.
cloth wrappings—perhaps a headband—in his extended arms (Figure 25a-b). The text caption immediately above the figure on the Tablet of the Cross records the king’s accession with the phrase k’ahlaj sakhuun tubaah K’inich Kan Bahlam, “the white paper-headband is fastened upon K’inich Kan Bahlam.” The full-figure image of the Jester God can perhaps be taken as an elaboration on the small head that usually adorns the front of the headband, both serving as animations of the precious essence of papyry material. A related image appears on the Dumbarton Oaks tablet from Palenque (Figure 25c), where we see a seated K’inich Janab Pakal holding the small effigy of the more standard Jester God (that is, lacking the fish characteristics we see on the Foliated Cross). Unlike the two scenes just described from the Cross Group, this is not an image of royal accession; rather, Pakal is here in the role of a parent, opposite his wife and at the side of his dancing son K’inich Kan Joy Chitam. The Jester God sits on Pakal’s lap without any cloth or paper material, and his wife cradles a small K’awiil figure in identical fashion. The relationship between these two entities is largely mysterious—the iconography of Pakal’s sarcophagus lid (discussed below) sets up the same opposition—but their juxtaposition does point to the Jester God’s role as an elemental symbol of kingship and dynasty, as Schele posited long ago.

The small K’awiil and Jester God figures on the Dumbarton Oaks panel may well be depicted as infants. Unen K’awiil or “Baby K’awiil” is, after all, the name of one of the Palenque Triad gods (Berlin’s GII), and its image graces the piers of the Temple of the Inscriptions, cradled in the arms of four Palenque dynasts. It seems natural to see the small god in the mother’s lap as the very same entity, bare visually equated in some way with an infant Jester God held by Pakal. If I am correct in seeing Ux Yop Huun as the proper name of a “true” Jester God of mythology, the embodiment of ritual novice paper, then it is no doubt significant that Unen K’awiil’s own mythical birth date is also 1 Ajaw, as recorded in the opening text of the Tablet of the Foliated Cross. Both infant gods on the Dumbarton Oaks tablet would thus share the same station in the 260-day cycle, reflecting a method of mythological linkage used throughout Palenque’s inscriptions (the best example being the repeating 9 Ik’ found throughout the Cross Group in connection with the principal Triad god, GI). Their common birth seems also to be featured in the design of Pakal’s sarcophagus lid, where they each are shown emerging from the serpent that arches over the central jeweled tree, a symbol of the glorious re-entry of the sun into the upper heavens (Figure 26). Ux Yop Huun, at least in these Palenque representations, thus takes on a mythical persona of great importance in the depiction of kingship and its underlying ideology. K’awlil, or Unen K’awlil more specifically, is a deity associated with maize and agriculture, as revealed most directly by the symbolism of his temple in the Cross Group. He and Ux Yop Huun seem to form an important pair of deities bearing strong associations with ancestry, fecundity, and the plant world, perhaps involving a juxtaposition of two of its elemental components: growing maize and

Proper Names and Paper Crowns

Two different but related strands of argument have now been put forward, building on observations and understandings gleaned over the years from Palenque’s history and religious iconography. One idea is that the Ux Yop Huun name cited on the Palace Tablet is in all likelihood the ancient proper name of the so-called Jester God, presented in the caption and main text as a mythical actor associated with the ceremonies of accession and investiture. The other line of reasoning has aimed to show that this name being served,
This is, I believe, the crux of the message behind the Palace material by which kingly names were bestowed upon new rulers. Stela 9 and Copan Stela 2. There can be little doubt that paper seen visually communicated by the iconography of Lamanai sakhuunil k'aba' acquired royal name, or what the Classic Maya literally called headbands used in accession rituals to embody one's newly once we realize that Ux Yop Huun is at once a symbol and a language: "the name of Ux Yop Huun is fastened; the take-turn(?) the caption text provides the answer, if in somewhat obscure proper names? I believe that the wording in the final phrase of iconography.

Why, then, would the Palace Tablet's caption emphasize a "birth" event in the Jester God as well as its connection with turns) donning the headband and its persona in the name of "First King" and might also involve a play between the words "one" and "headband" (glyphs for the two words are sometimes interchangeable in the script). Juun Ajaw was a hunter and sacrificer, always recognizable by the headdress. Perhaps it would not be rash to suggest that a similar message about ancestral or mythical identity is key in interpreting the similarity in age may have motivated the like-in-kind parallel between the caption and the image.

Conclusion

I tentatively suggest that the name Ux Yop Huun had more than one scope of reference in Maya history and mythology. On one hand Ux Yop Huun played a basic role as the name of a nearly ubiquitous character in Maya art, the so-called Jester God, with its clear association with headbands, k'inch, and elite status. Ux Yop Huun seems to have had an abstract role as the "spirit" of bark paper but also possessed a specific narrative identity as a mythical figure intimately tied to rulership and royal nomenclature throughout the Maya area.
in connection with the early K’atun ending 8.6.0.0.0 (date, as does a similar name (“Foliated Ajaw”) mentioned at Copan and Pusilha Jaguar” mentioned on Stela 31 of Tikal seems to be of Preclassic or Early Classic (Grube 2004a; Martin 2003; Stuart 2004a). A very early king known as “Foliated historical names mentioned in retrospective histories from Late Classic times himself. The tree-like appearance of some Preclassic examples of the name, showing three upward-reaching branches, certainly evokes the tree from which the bird descends. Such evidence is impervious and murky in places, to be sure, but I suspect that the Ux Yop Huun name may involve a fusion of the fundamental players of the creation story—the tree, the bird, and Juun Ajaw himself.

The name of Ux Yop Huun seems closely related to one or more early historical names mentioned in retrospective histories from Late Classic ceramics (Grube 2004a; Martin 2003; Stuart 2004a). A very early king known as “Foliated Jaguar” mentioned on Stela 31 of Tikal seems to be of Preclassic or Early Classic date, as does a similar name (“Foliated Ajaw”) mentioned at Copan and Puntilha in connection with the early K’atun ending 8.6.0.0.0 (see Figure 28). Both of these figures from remote history are associated with a place known as the “Chi-Ajaw” (or erroneously as “Chi Witz” in some sources). Both took House A-D as part of their “headband-fastening names,” spelled glyphically with the three leaves so closely related to Ux Yop Huun. It would not be too much of a stretch to imagine that these names from early Maya history incorporate a meaningful reference to an ancestor even more remote in time, an initial “proto-ruler” par excellence. The tree reference implicit in the name Ux Yop Huun, born on 1 Ajaw, may therefore evoke this same myth in some direct way. The tree-like appearance of some Preclassic examples of the name, showing three upward-reaching branches, certainly evokes the tree from which the bird descends. Such evidence is impervious and murky in places, to be sure, but I suspect that the Ux Yop Huun name may involve a fusion of the fundamental players of the creation story—the tree, the bird, and Juun Ajaw himself.

The emphasis on Ux Yop Huun in the caption of the Palace Tablet fits perfectly into the monument’s broader theme, weaving the narrative of K’inich K’an Joy Chitam’s personal story with a recurring motif of ritual headbands. The uli’kuu crown almost seems to distinguish “real history” from mythic form; how Maya royal symbols and iconographic entities seem to collapse and converge, it is difficult to know if a “true” Ux Yop Huun ever actually existed in early Maya history. Perhaps so, but as we know all too well from many ancient sources, the Late Classic Maya at Palenque and elsewhere seldom took pains to distinguish “real history” from mythic narrative.

The vexing question in the specific interpretation of Palenque’s Palace Tablet has long been: is the subject of the caption a personal name, or a headdress name referencing an object in the scene? By now it should be clear that such alternatives present a misleading opposition. Ux Yop Huun was both of these things, a personal name of a ruler and, in a symbolic capacity, a headdress marking ancestral identity and incorporating fundamental mythology. The emphasis on Ux Yop Huun in the caption of the Palace Tablet fits perfectly into the monument’s broader theme, weaving the narrative of K’inich K’an Joy Chitam’s personal story with a recurring motif of ritual headbands. The uli’kuu crown almost seems to distinguish “real history” from mythic form; how Maya royal symbols and iconographic entities seem to collapse and converge, it is difficult to know if a “true” Ux Yop Huun ever actually existed in early Maya history. Perhaps so, but as we know all too well from many ancient sources, the Late Classic Maya at Palenque and elsewhere seldom took pains to distinguish “real history” from mythic form.

Figure 28. Ux Yop Huun and historical names (left) glyph of Tikal Stela 31 with “Foliated Jaguar” name at top left and “Ahau” place name at bottom left (drawing: Marc Zender); (right) glyph of side text of Copan Stela 1 with “Foliated Ajaw” name (drawing: David Stuart).

Figure 29. The Palace Tablet scene. Photo: Jorge Pérez de Lara.
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