



Figure 1: Detail of the Palace Tablet. Photo: Jorge Pérez de Lara.

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

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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 Palace Tablet in Context

Excavations overseen by Alberto Ruz Lhuillier unearthed the Palace Tablet in 1949, during his investigations of the collapsed masonry of House A-D, on the north side of the Palace complex (Mellanes Castellanos 1951; Ruz Lhuillier 1952). The large panel had slumped forward, having been originally set into the center of the rear wall of this long, hall-like space, perhaps serving as a massive backdrop for some throne or bench, as indicated by the rectangular blank space at the lower center area of the stone (Robertson 1985:54). House A-D was a relatively late construction within the Palace complex, dedicated by the ruler K'inich K'an Joy Chitam as an addition to the ambitious program of galleries and courtyards begun by his father, K'inich Janab Pakal, several decades earlier. The noticeable setting of House A-D and the Palace Tablet amidst the father's older buildings goes far toward explaining why K'inich Janab Pakal is featured prominently in the narrative of the Palace Tablet's inscription. House A-D's construction and masonry seem to have been of quality inferior to what was used in Pakal's earlier Palace buildings, such as the adjacent Houses A and D, both of which still stand in remarkable condition to the east and west of House A-D's modest remains.

The long text of the Palace Tablet recounts several events in the personal history of K'inich K'an Joy Chitam, opening

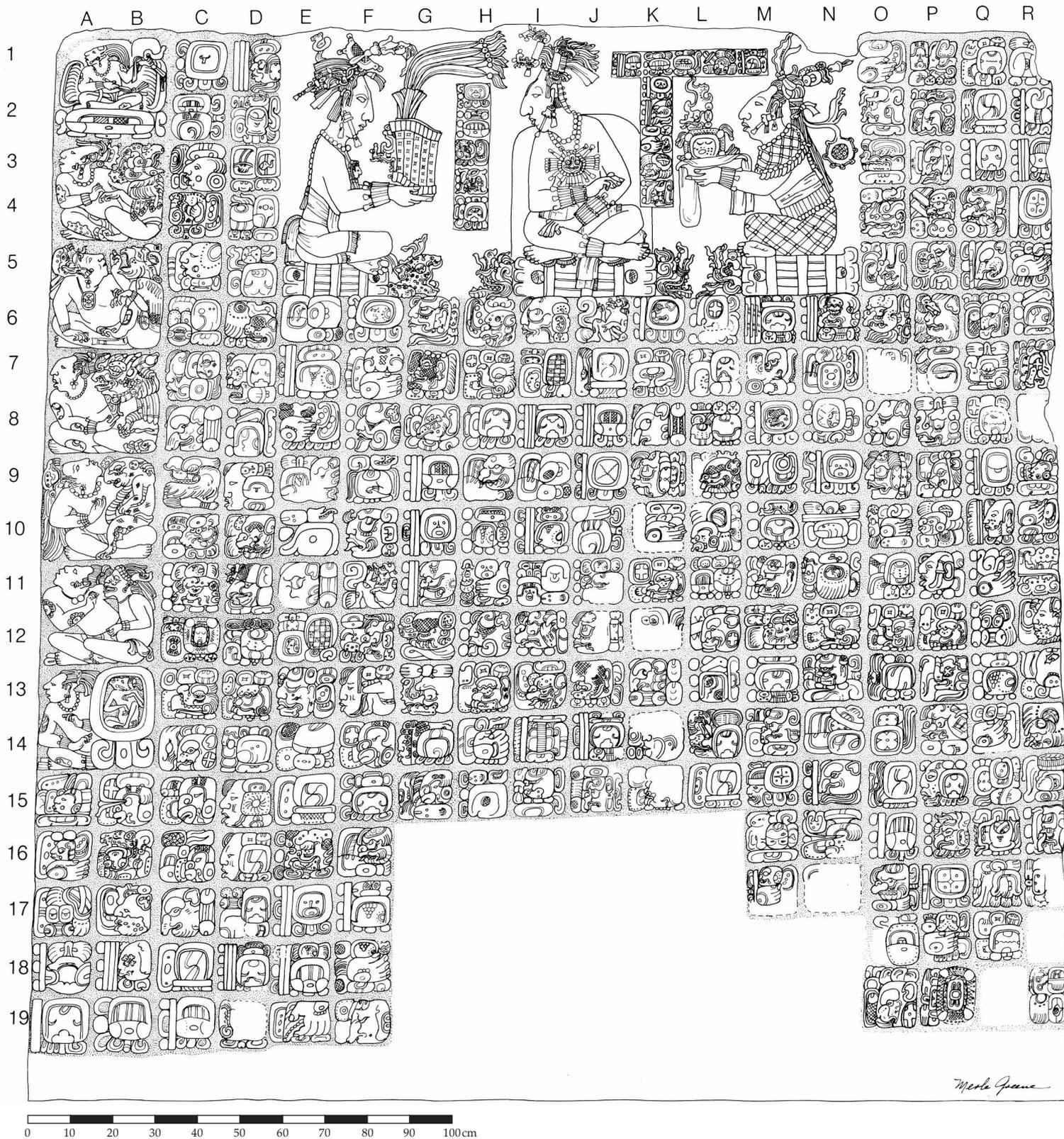


Figure 2. The Palace Tablet. Drawing: Merle Greene Robertson.

| Passage (Blocks) | Date | Event Description |
|------------------|--|---|
| Ia | 9.10.11.17.0 11 Ajaw 8 Mak | Birth of K'inich K'an Joy Chitam |
| Ib | 9.10.10.11.2 1 Ik' 15 Yaxk'in | 819-day count station for birth |
| II | 9.10.18.17.19 2 Kawak 12 *Keh (*written in error as Yax) | Childhood blood ritual of K'inich K'an Joy Chitam |
| III | 9.11.0.0.0 12 Ajaw 8 Keh | Period Ending by K'inich Janab Pakal |
| IV | 9.11.13.0.0 12 Ajaw 3 Ch'en | Calendar rite of young K'inich K'an Joy Chitam |
| V | 9.12.11.5.18 6 Etz'nab 11 Yax | Death of K'inich Janab Pakal |
| VI | 9.12.11.12.10 8 Ok 3 K'ayab | Accession of K'inich Kan Bahlam |
| VII | 9.13.10.1.5 6 Chikchan 3 Pop | Death of K'inich Kan Bahlam |
| VIIIa | 9.13.10.6.8 5 Lamat 6 Xul | Accession of K'inich K'an Joy Chitam |
| VIIIb | 9.9.2.4.8 5 Lamat 1 Mol | Retrospective mention of accession of K'inich Janab Pakal |
| IX | 9.14.8.14.15 9 Men 3 Yax | Dedication of House A-D |

Figure 3. Summary of dates and episodes in the main text of the Palace Tablet.

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 K'an Joy Chitam, by then middle-aged, was installed as *baah ch'ok* ("main youth" or "prince"). The written narrative then turns to what is clearly the rhetorical focus of the tablet, the accession of K'inich K'an 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 *huun* or *sakhuun* (Figure 4).¹ The presence of this term in the Palace Tablet's three different accession records is not surprising, given that the *sakhuun* headband was the "crown" of Classic Maya kings, presented in standard rituals of royal investiture known as *k'al huun* or *k'al sakhuun*, "headband-fastening." The extended passage describing the inauguration of K'inich K'an Joy Chitam, the highlight of the tablet's entire narrative, includes a lengthy descriptive section on the headband itself, in blocks O1-O6 (Figure 4d). 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 *sakhuun* 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?-li-**

ya), and earlier proposals that it is based on the transitive verb root **jam*, "to open" (e.g., Schele et al. 1990) seem unlikely.² 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 K'an Joy Chitam's father and older brother.

¹ Some have preferred to read the term for the headband as *hunal* or *sak hunal* (e.g., Schele and Mathews 1998:115, 412), but this is incorrect. *Huunal* (as I prefer to transcribe the root, with a long vowel) would be the adjectival derivation of *huun*, and it is found only in the spelling **hu-na-la UUH**, *huunal uuh*, probably meaning "papery jewel." This refers to the jade bead adorning a bark paper headband. Various examples appear in the text of the middle panel of the Temple of the Inscriptions.

Given the two different spellings of the word for "paper" in the preceding paragraph (*hun* and *huun*), and anticipating similarly variable spellings of the word for "one" (*jun*, *ju'n*, *juun*), a brief aside here on the orthographies and histories of these two roots might be in order. The words *huun* and *juun* are semantically distinct, with the meanings of "paper" and "one," respectively. In other sources these might be represented somewhat differently than they are here—as *hu'n* and *ju'n* versus *huun* and *juun*—the orthographic distinction conveying a difference in the internal vowels of the roots. Such differences reflect minor yet ongoing debates within the epigraphic and linguistic communities about the historical correlates of hieroglyphic spellings, and these remain far from resolved (Lacadena and Wichmann 2004; Robertson 2004; Wichmann 2006). Here I opt for the forms of the roots attested in Tzeltalan and Ch'olan languages, where the internal glottal stop of proto-Mayan antecedents was lost and became a long vowel (proto-Mayan **hu'n* > proto-Ch'olan-Tzeltalan **huun*).

² The spelling may be indicating a root **ham*, yet **jam* is phonologically different (see Grube 2004b). I have no counterproposal to offer for the glyph's decipherment, and I wonder if the "knot-skull" element may have an undetermined logographic value, in addition to its reading as syllabic **ha**.



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'aluun Naah*, "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 polity (Stuart and Stuart 2008:218). Its prominent position high above the north stairway of the Palace was perfectly suited for public ceremonies of investiture.

Stepping back a moment from Palenque and the Palace Tablet, it is important to emphasize how the *sakhuun* royal headband served as a direct symbolic evocation of Juun Ajaw, the key mythological figure who played a prominent role in the foundational mythology of the Classic Maya and later cultures. Juun Ajaw consistently wears the very same paper headband in his Classic-era portraits (Figure 5), and it is probably best seen as his most distinctive visual marker. As Coe (1989) demonstrated, he is the so-called "Headband Twin" or "Hero Twin" who corresponds to Junajpu of the *Popol Vuh*, the young hunter famous for using his blowgun in defeating Seven Macaw. The hunter's personal name, Juun Ajaw ("One Ajaw"), was a day name first and foremost (Figure 5b), derived from the timing of

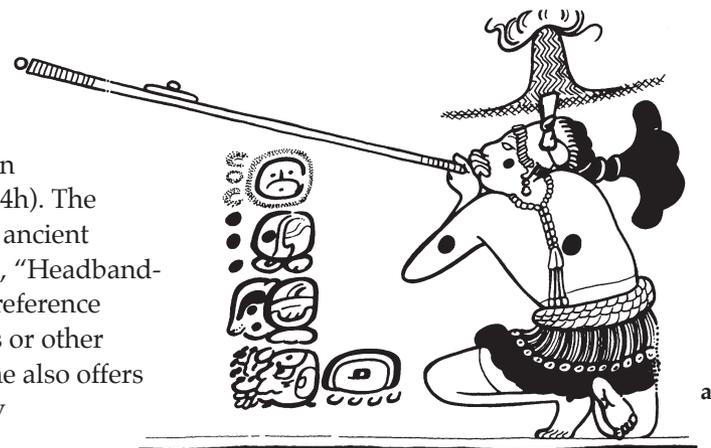


Figure 5. Images of Juun Ajaw ("One Ajaw"): (a) scene of Juun Ajaw as blowgunner, from K1226 at www.mayavase.com (drawing: Marc Zender); (b) head variant hieroglyphs of the day sign AJAW (drawings: David Stuart and Linda Schele); (c) portrait from a codex-style plate, K2282 in the Kerr database at www.mayavase.com (drawing: David Stuart).

Figure 4. Passages referring to the ritual use of paper (*huun*) in the text of the Palace Tablet: (a) glyph coordinates I15 - J15; (b) K9 - L10; (c) N13 - M14; (d) O1 - O6; (e) O9 - P10; (f) O17 - R1; (g) R4 - Q8; (h) R13 - Q18. Drawings: Merle Greene Robertson.



Figure 6. Palenque tri-figure compositions: (a) the figural scene from the Palace Tablet; (b) the Tablet of the Slaves. Drawings: Merle Greene Robertson.

the archaic and widely referenced blowgun episode, as shown on the famous vessel now in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (vessel number K1226 in the Kerr database at www.mayavase.com). There we see the celebrated image of Juun Ajaw shooting the bird, with a caption that opens with the Calendar Round 1 Ajaw 3 K'ank'in (Figure 5a). This same calendar name for the twentieth day survived well into the post-conquest period as Jun Ajpu (One Ajpu), using an equivalent highland day name, *Ajpu* or *Aj Puuh* ("Blowgunner"), in place of lowland *Ajaw* (see Thompson 1950:68). Somewhat confusingly, the melded form Junajpu apparently came to be generalized in K'iche'an as the generic name of the day. Over time, as layers of the Popol Vuh's story accrued and evolved, the name was recycled again as Jun Junajpu ("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 reveals, if nothing else, the essential importance of "One Ajaw" as the animate patron of the twentieth day—an ancient equivalence visually conveyed by the use of Juun Ajaw's portrait as the head variant of the day glyph in Classic times.

Revealingly, in the mechanisms of the hieroglyphic script Juun Ajaw's paper headband sign can be used alone in animated confluences 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 Juun Ajaw himself, in much the same way. The act of "fastening of the *sakhuun*"—a basic descriptive phrase for royal crowning in Maya inscriptions at Palenque and beyond (see Schele and Mathews 1998:382, n. 38)—thus carried considerable mythological import. Through their crowning with the paper *sakhuun* headband,

rulers and nobles took on a symbol of office that derived its meaning from the specific marker of Juun 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 with the name of the bejeweled maize god Juun Ixiim, "One Maize," Juun 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. It is to that text that we will now turn our attention.

An Obscure Protagonist

The three seated individuals shown at the top of the Palace 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, Tiwohl Chan Mat, holds a military headdress while the mother, Ix Kinuw Mat, offers up the image of the *took'-pakal*, the "knife-shield" symbol of sacred ancestral warfare. On

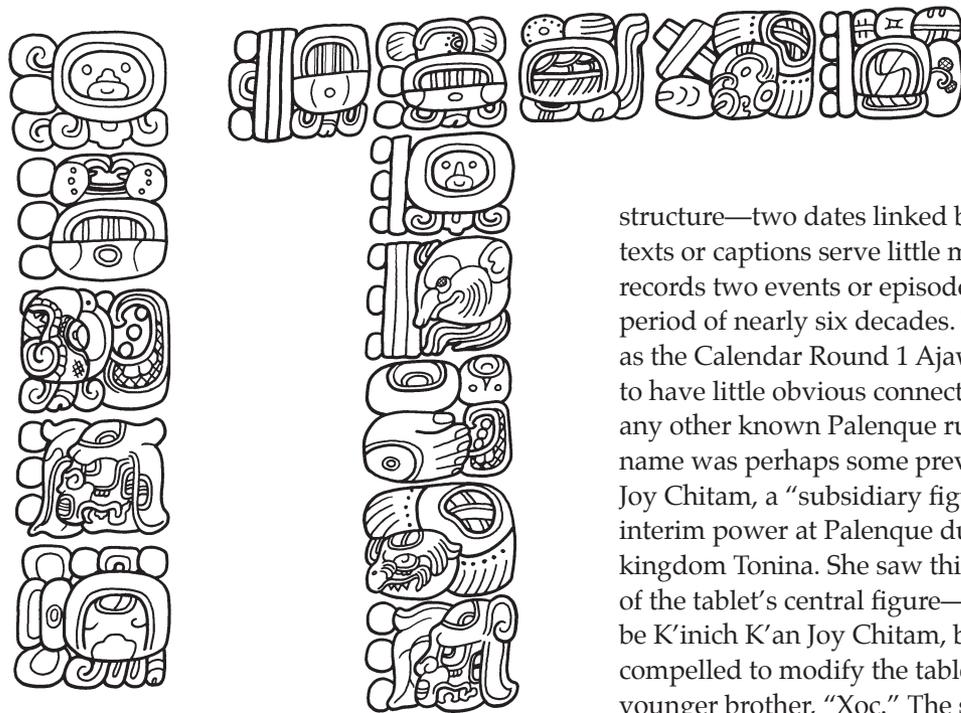


Figure 7. The caption from the Palace Tablet.
Drawing: Marc Zender.

the Palace Tablet we see much the same thing, though 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'inich Janab Pakal and his mother Ix Tz'akbu 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 K'an Joy Chitam. The text of fifteen glyphs is also somewhat unusual in having a narrative

structure—two dates linked by a Distance Number—whereas most secondary texts or captions serve little more than to identify people and participants. It records two events or episodes, each with a precise date spanned by a lengthy period of nearly six decades. The first record is of a birth, falling on a date written as the Calendar Round 1 Ajaw 3 Wayeb. As noted, the name of the subject appears to have little obvious connection to the three historical people depicted, nor to any other known Palenque ruler. Schele (1979:53, 1992) reasoned that this mystery name was perhaps some previously unknown younger brother of K'inich K'an Joy Chitam, a “subsidiary figure” (“Xoc,” as she referred to him) who assumed interim power at Palenque during the time of K'an Joy Chitam's capture by rival kingdom Tonina. She saw this as indicating considerable ambiguity in the identity of the tablet's central figure—perhaps, she believed, the portrait was intended to be 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 “Xoc's” 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 K'an 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 K'an Joy Chitam himself? In fact, this problem vexes a number of epigraphers and art historians to this day. Who is the mystery protagonist?

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 caption opens with 1 Ajaw 3 Wayeb and later reckons forward to a second date written as 8 Ajaw 18 Xul. The span between them is correctly recorded as the Distance Number 2.17.2.0 (about fifty-seven years). Significantly, though, we see no chronological anchor or frame of reference to place either of these in the Long Count—an ambiguity that has presented yet another stumbling block in attempts to explain the contradictions between scene and text. Most writers

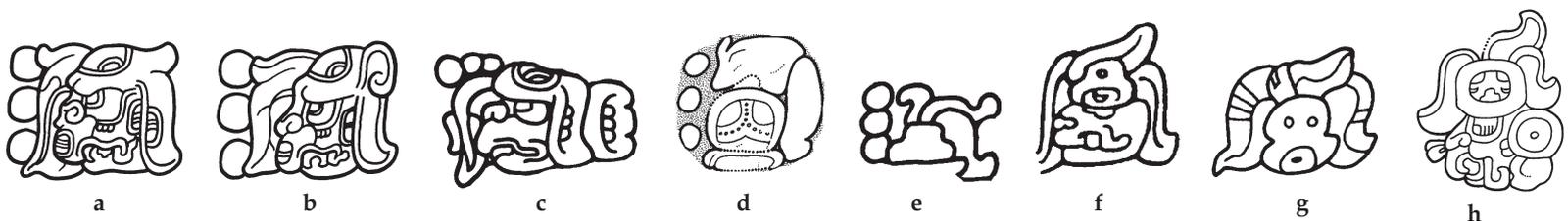


Figure 8. The *Ux Yop Huun* glyph and related forms: (a–b) Palenque, Palace Tablet caption text (drawings: Marc Zender); (c) Copan Stela J (drawing: David Stuart); (d) Tortuguero Monument 6 (drawing: Sven Gronemeyer); (e) Tikal Stela 4 (drawing: Linda Schele); (f) Costa Rican celt (drawing: Peter Mathews); (g) Copan Tomb 1 peccary skull (drawing: Barbara Fash); (h) carved bone, provenance unknown (drawing: Marc Zender).

have chosen to position the dates within the same general time frame as the chronology of the main text. For example, in his initial analysis Thompson (1952) opted to place them at 9.5.11.16.0 1 Ajaw 3 Wayeb (AD 546) and 9.8.9.0.0 8 Ajaw 18 Xul (AD 602), apparently for no other reason than the latter date was a Tun Ending. Later, Schele (1979:52, 1992:97) posited that these should be 9.10.17.6.0 1 Ajaw 3 Wayeb (AD 650) and 9.13.14.8.0 8 Ajaw 18 Xul (AD 706). Most recently Bassie-Sweet (1996:228) has suggested yet a different placement, in between Thompson's and Schele's proposals, with the final date at 9.11.1.13.0 8 Ajaw 18 Xul (AD 654), interpreted as a childhood ritual for the nine-year-old king-to-be. We will return to this problem, but suffice it to say for now that I doubt we can put much faith in any of these posited historical placements of the two dates.

The name glyph following the birth verb has three signs, readable as **3-YOP-HUUN** (Figure 8a-b). The leaf-like middle sign is widely familiar as the syllable **yo** (Stuart 1987), a value surely derived from the Ch'olan noun *yop*, "leaf" (Hopkins et al. 2011:289). In fact, some glyphic settings point strongly to **YOP** as an alternative or original logographic value. For example, on Yaxchilan Lintel 18, where we find it combined with **TE'** in what cannot be a syllabic context, it can only be **YOP-TE'**, for *yopte'*, a fuller term for "leaf" (see Graham 1977:45, C1). 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 **hu-na** in various contexts, including Glyph F of the Supplementary Series and in spellings of the term for the royal headband (*huun* or *sakhuun*). All of these textual references convey the related meanings for *huun* as "paper," "book," or "headband." Significantly, it is worth remembering that *huun* also exists as a specific term for the *amate* or fig tree (*Ficus* sp.) from which paper is traditionally made in Mesoamerica (derived from proto-Mayan **hu'n*, "papel, libro" [Kaufman 2003:1107]). Usually we find **HUUN** as a logogram representing a simple knotted paper strip, but the Jester God is the standard and common head variant, found frequently, for example, 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 animate frontal jewel on many images of *sakhuun* royal headbands, often in alternation with small "ajaw" faces (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 three elements used in spelling the name recorded on the Palace Tablet provide the solid reading of *Ux Yop Huun* for the glyph, meaning "Three-Leaf-Paper" or "Three-Leaf-Headband." However, given the somewhat imprecise range of meanings for *huun* and its cognate forms—as "fig tree," "paper," or "paper headband"—I prefer not to come down on one particular sense of the word, at least for now.

The final passage of the Palace Tablet's main inscription (Figure 4h) includes

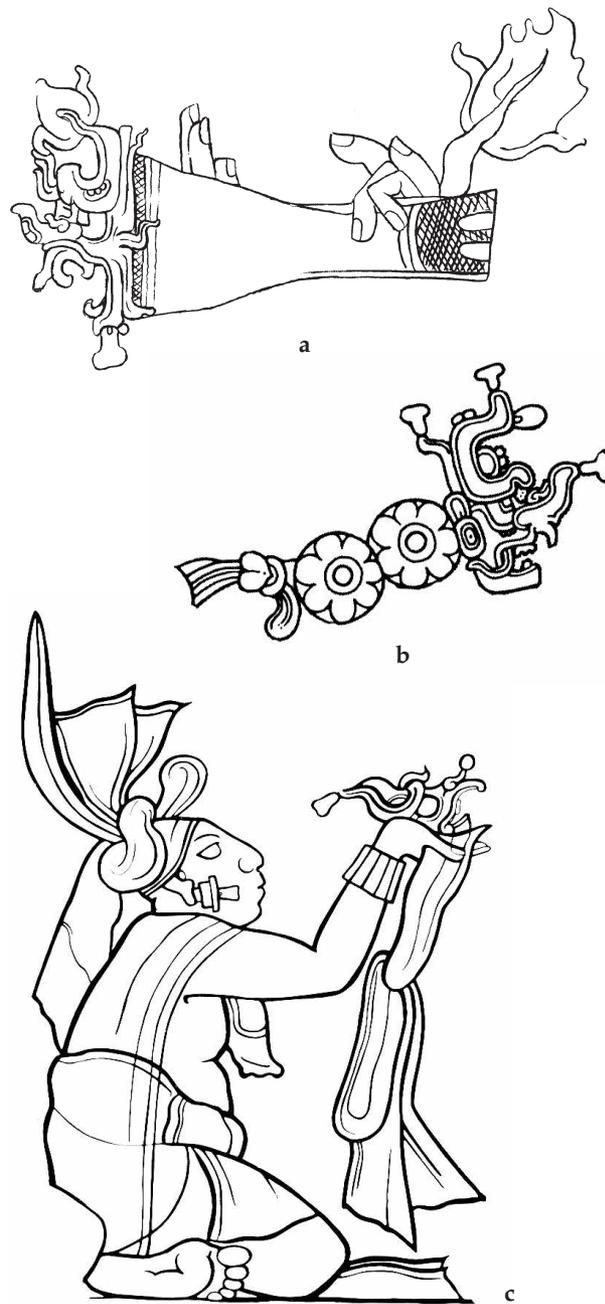


Figure 9. Royal *huun* headbands with frontal Jester Gods: (a) headband from presentation scene on south face of Temple XIX platform at Palenque (drawing: David Stuart); (b) floral paper headband from Yaxchilan Lintel 24 (drawing: Ian Graham); (c) courtier presenting headband crown to seated ruler, from Bonampak Panel 1 (drawing: Peter Mathews).

a prominent mention of Ux Yop Huun and provides a key context for interpreting the significance of the upper caption text. This culmination of the lengthy main text relates the dedicatory date and ritual for House A-D, the building that originally housed the Palace Tablet. The ceremonial occasion is *och k'ahk'*, “fire-entering,” at what is named the *K'alhuun Naah*, the “Headband-Binding House,” said to be “the house of” (*y-otoot*) Ux Yop Huun.³ This is a key statement, for it leaves little doubt that Ux Yop Huun must serve as a personal name. “Houses” can only be owned by people or gods, living or deceased; I know of no instance anywhere of the term *y-otoot* (“the dwelling of”) appearing before the name of a ritual object that may have been contained or stored within.

Returning to the final passage of the lengthy inscription, the full sequence of glyphs can be transcribed as follows:

**o-chi-ya-K'AHK' / K'AL-HUUN-[na]-NAAH / U-K'ABA' /
3-K'IN-ni-ja-a-ta / yo-OTOOT-ti / ?-? / 3-YOP-HUUN / ye-TE?-je /
K'INICH-[K'AN-JOY-CHITAM-ma] / K'UHUL-BAAK-la-AJAW**

Och-i-y k'ahk' K'alhuunnaah u k'aba'.

Ux K'in Ja't(?) y-otoot ? Ux Yop Huun.

Y-eh-tej(?) K'inich K'an Joy Chitam K'uhul Baakal Ajaw.

The fire entered (into) the Headband-Binding House (which) is its name. Three Days ?..., is the dwelling of ?, Ux Yop Huun. It is the work(?) of K'an Joy Chitam, the Holy Baakal Lord.

Another perhaps obvious point we take away from this final dedicatory passage is that the “house” is not the king’s dwelling. As already mentioned, the presence of an unfamiliar non-royal name became a major source of confusion for Schele, Lounsbury, and others (myself included) who initially posited that “Xoc” (or Ux Yop Huun) must have been an obscure king or nobleman of Palenque, reigning in the wake of K'inich K'an Joy Chitam’s capture and supposed sacrifice by Tonina. Today we know that K'inich K'an Joy Chitam did not die as early as once supposed, for he was still reigning as Palenque’s “Holy Lord” at the time of House A-D’s completion (Stuart 2003). In fact, the final passage is explicit in stating that K'inich K'an Joy Chitam in some manner oversaw the ceremonies of dedication for this “dwelling of ... Ux Yop Huun.”

The second passage of the caption tells of another important episode in the story of Ux Yop Huun, taking place some fifty-six years after the birth. The event is written **K'AL-la-ja U-K'ABA' 3-YOP-HUUN**, or *k'ahlaj u k'aba' Ux Yop Huun*, “The name of Ux Yop Huun is ‘fastened.’” The verb root *k'al* is commonly translated by its literal sense “to fasten,” although the semantics may well include a broader idea of “to make, create, do,” meanings of *k'al* attested in both Ch'ol and Ch'olti'. If we entertain the more literal concept of “fastening a name,” we are immediately reminded of the standard phrase for royal accession featured throughout the Palace Tablet’s main text.

But the rhetorical connection between names and headbands is even

³ The name is preceded by an undeciphered glyph that is either an extension of the name phrase or a second, separate personal name.

more intimate. The caption’s mention of “fastening a name” also clearly resonates with a distinctive feature of the tablet’s main inscription, where several crowning episodes are described in terms of the adoption of new royal names. For example, the names assumed by two rulers mentioned in the Palace Tablet’s main text, K'inich Kan Bahlam and K'inich K'an Joy Chitam, are each said to be *k'alhuunil k'aba'*, “the headband-fastening name” (Figure 4b, e). These names were only adopted upon accession and crowning (Eberl and Graña-Behrens 2004) and obviously suggest a close linkage between one’s royal name and one’s physical headband (*huun* or *sakhuun*). 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 caption, the final three glyphs, arranged horizontally, offer more information about the significance of this strange “naming” event. We first encounter the verb *patwan* (**PAT-wa-ni**), based on the positional root meaning “to shape, make, fashion, build.” In ancient texts, *patwan* and its close relative *patlaj* are most often used to refer to the construction of certain kinds of architectural monuments (altars for instance), or to the manufacture of various small material objects, including ceramic effigies, stone celts, or wooden boxes. Here the usage seems quite different, since the subject of the verb is given in the next block as **JEL?-le-K'ABA'**, possibly *jel k'aba'*, the “change-name.” The **JEL** reading for the crossed elements remains somewhat tentative but is based partially on the presence of the **-le** sign here, as well as the glyph’s use as a verb root in passages describing the “creation” episode of 13.0.0.0.4 Ajaw 8 Kumk'u. In earlier works Schele proposed its value as **JAL**, but I and others have independently arrived at **JEL** as a more likely reading (see Freidel and MacLeod 2000).

Jel conveys a complex array of ideas that we often strive to translate as “change” or “replace,” but the sense of the term seems more complex than these direct translations would suggest. Kaufman and Norman (1984:121) translate the verb root in proto-Ch'olan as **jel* “to take turn,” which seems more accurate in conveying a sense of a recurrence of something, or of different subjects “taking turn” in some quality, position, or office. Interestingly, we find that the root is also important in terms related

to names. In Tzeltal we find *jel-ol*, “*tocayo*, namesake” (Slocum et al. 1999:54), and the same meaning is given for the cognate form *jaluub* in distant Wastek (Kaufman 2003:779). I suspect that the sense of *jel k’aba’* in the caption of the Palace Tablet is similar, referring to a recurring “*tocayo*” or name, perhaps applicable to many individuals over time.

The text closes with the familiar *Bolon Tz’akabil Ajaw*, often said to be a title accompanying certain royal names. As I have argued in another essay (Stuart 2011), I see this not as some simple royal honorific, but rather as a collective and abstracted designation for sequential rulers—that is, a Classic Maya term for “dynasty.” Obviously it is also related if not equivalent to the well-known colonial Yucatec name or term *Bolon Tz’akab*, “Nine (or Many) Generations,” which was at one time erroneously seen as a name for Schellhas’s “God K,” who we now call K’awil or K’awiil. As Thompson noted years ago, in addition to being a proper name in the Books of Chilam Balam, *Bolon Tz’akab* appears in the Motul Dictionary of Colonial Yucatec meaning “*cosa perpetua*,” or “something eternal.” Its uses in many Early Classic inscriptions, especially at Tikal, strongly suggest that *Bolon Tz’akabil Ajaw* was a non-numerical yet specific expression for a royal ancestral collective, perhaps “The Many In-Sequence Lords” or “The Perpetual Lords.” It is a complex and nuanced expression in some respects, and if the ancient Maya had a word meaning something like “dynasty,” I suspect this is it. Here in the Palace Tablet caption, it seems to take a prepositional prefix TA-, written in miniature at the upper left of 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 being “formed” with respect to a series or group of dynasts.

We can now present a detailed reading and initial translation of the Palace Tablet’s caption text:

**1-AJAW / 3-WAY?-HAAB / SIH-ya-ja / 3-YOP-HUUN /
0-2-WINIK-ji-ya / 17-HAAB-ya / 2-WINIKHAAB?-ya /
8-AJAW / 18-TZIKIN?-ni / K’AL-la-ja / U-K’ABA’ /
3-YOP-HUUN / PAT-wa-ni / JEL?-le-K’ABA’ /
TA-9-TZ’AK-ka-bu-li-AJAW**

*Juun Ajaw Ux Wayhaab(?) sihyaj Ux Yop Huun.
Mih cha’ winikjiy wuklajuun haabiyy cha’ winikhaabiyy
Waxak Ajaw Waxaklajuun Tzikin k’ahlaj u k’aba’ Ux Yop Huun.
Patwan jelk’aba’ ta bolon tz’akabil ajaw.*

On 1 Ajaw 3 Wayeb Ux Yop Huun is born.
Two score days, seventeen years, and two-score years later,
on 8 Ajaw 18 Xul, the name of Ux Yop Huun is fastened.
The take-turn(?) name for the dynasty is formed.

The basic text structure leaves little doubt that Ux Yop Huun is a personal name of great importance, referring to someone born and later named in some capacity and in terms that suggest some

importance to dynastic ancestry. Rather than seek some understanding of the name in the local history of Palenque, as others have attempted, I think we can best approach its significance through a number of references found outside Palenque but seldom if ever mentioned as relevant to the interpretation of the Palace Tablet. As we will soon see, these external records show that Ux Yop Huun 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 clues centering on the mysterious Ux Yop Huun, his actions, and his associations. As we begin reassessing the Palace Tablet’s very purpose as a royal monument, it is worth revisiting the old question that Lounsbury, Schele, and others had pondered some years ago: just who is he? A few facts now seem safely in hand to lead us toward an answer:

(1) Ux Yop Huun was in some capacity directly affiliated with the imposing House A-D gallery, where the Palace Tablet was found.

(2) He was born on 1 Ajaw 3 Wayeb, although the Long Count placement of the two dates in the caption has been debated.

(3) Some sixty years after his birth, Ux Yop Huun’s “name was fastened,” as highlighted in the second part of the tablet’s caption. The short text goes on to explain that this apparently had some connection to the making or creation of names as they relate to dynasties and royal succession.

We can safely dismiss Schele’s original notion that Ux Yop Huun (her “Xoc”) was some important elite figure in the royal court of Palenque. The name bears no courtly title that would specify his role, and within Palenque his mentions are restricted to this one monument. Moreover, as the “owner” of this important building in the Palace, his standing must have been of the highest importance. After all, every other “owned” structure in the Palace is a “house of” K’inich Janab Pakal; dedication texts from Houses C and D are explicit in this connection. House A-D is one of the largest of all galleries within the Palace, and it would be exceedingly unlikely to suppose this building was attributed to some non-ruling nobleman of K’inich K’an Joy Chitam’s royal court. And it is important to reiterate that Ux Yop Huun was not a ruler: K’inich K’an Joy Chitam was Palenque’s

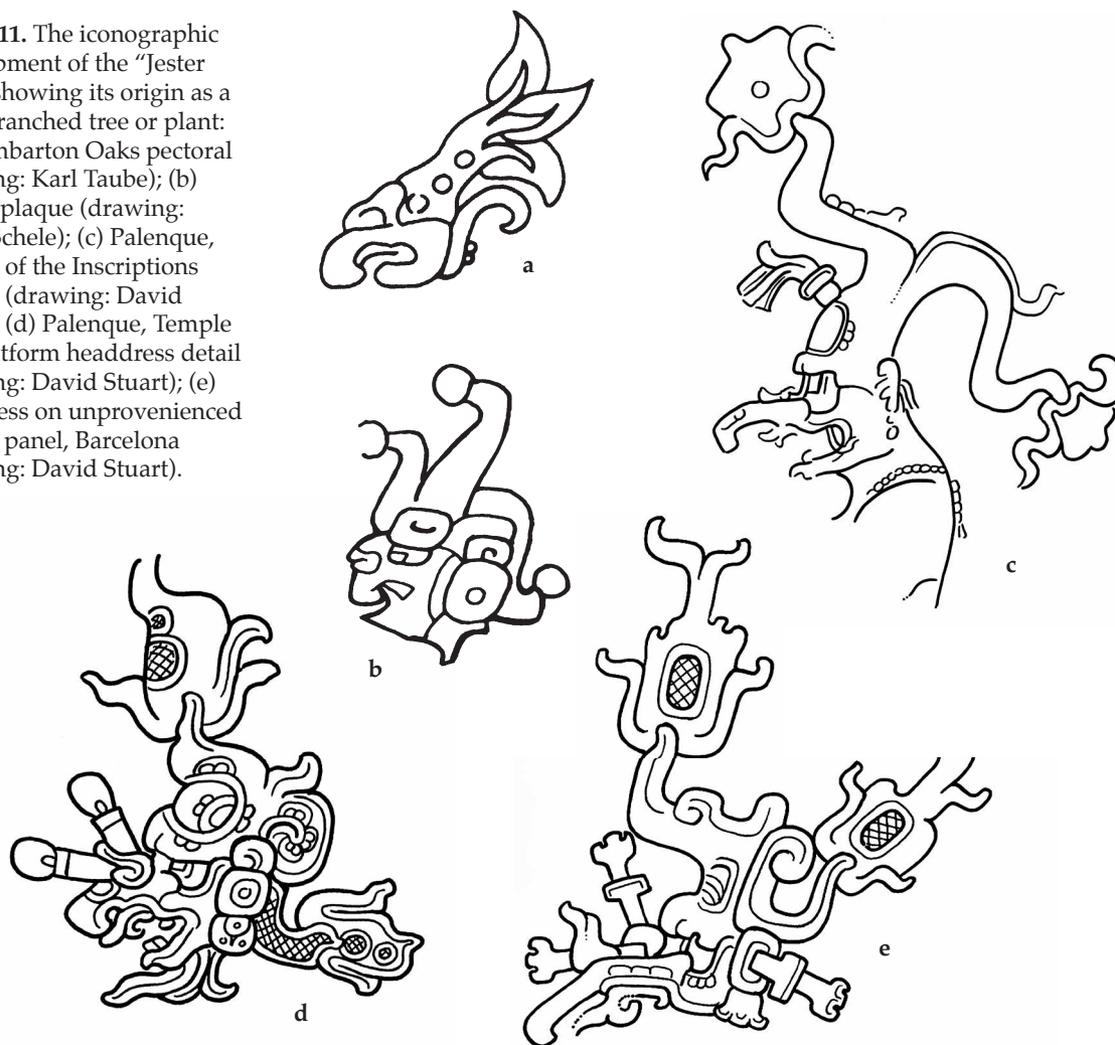


Figure 10. Mention of Ux Yop Huun (second glyph from top) in a passage from Copan Stela J pertaining to the accession of Ruler 13 (Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil). Inking by Mark Van Stone of original drawing by David Stuart.

king in AD 720, and he oversaw the dedication of House A-D. 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 caption and its meaning. Josserand, Hopkins, and Bassie-Sweet posit a very different scenario, proposing that Ux Yop Huun is instead a term for the large ceremonial “drum major” headdress depicted in the accompanying scene on the Palace Tablet, held by K'inich Janab Pakal toward his newly crowned son. This is based in large part on the meaning of *huun* as “headband” and on the supposed presence of a Jester God image on the front of the headdress itself (Bassie-Sweet et al. 2008; see also Bassie-Sweet 1996:228). They see the birth passage of the caption as a historical record, but not of a human birth; rather it is seen as a reference

Figure 11. 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) Leiden plaque (drawing: Linda Schele); (c) Palenque, Temple of the Inscriptions graffito (drawing: David Stuart); (d) Palenque, Temple XIX Platform headdress detail (drawing: David Stuart); (e) headdress on unprovenienced stela or panel, Barcelona (drawing: David Stuart).



to the creation or fashioning of a sacred ceremonial headdress, retained as a dynastic heirloom throughout the history of Late Classic Palenque.

I see several problems in this interpretation, in addition to the one mentioned above, where structures are never said to be “owned” by inanimate objects. For example, the word *huun* is attested as a term for “headband” and more generally “paper,” but I doubt that its meaning was ever extended to include the sort of headdress held by Pakal in the scene. The mosaic drum major headdress shown on the tablet, probably associated with Teotihuacan warrior symbolism, is instead the visual origin of a glyph read *ko'haw*, “helmet.” This is precisely the value it seems to have in the texts of the nearby Temple of the Inscriptions, for example, spelled **KO'HAW-wa**.⁴ The specific name Ux Yop

⁴ On Panel 2 from Piedras Negras it alternates with the fully syllabic form **ko-o-ha-wa**.

Huun, based on the word for *amate* bark paper, has no direct visual connection to the helmet. In addition, the presentation of the drum major headdress is a repeating component of other tri-figure presentation scenes at Palenque, as Schele pointed out long ago. Yet none of these other panels with this figural arrangement make any reference to the Ux Yop Huun name. Therefore, the posited association between the glyph and the helmet on the Palace Tablet, while suggestive, is not likely to be so direct. Yet another counterpoint to the view that Ux Yop Huun is the helmet or headdress is a simple one: no Maya inscription elsewhere is known to refer to the “birth” of an object or costume element, ceremonial or otherwise. To interpret the text in such a way would require especially strong evidence derived from at least a few different settings. Even so, Josserand, Hopkins, and Bassie-Sweet have advanced a valid and very important point, simply in connecting the Ux Yop Huun name with ceremonial headgear and to the theme of headband-fastening emphasized so much on the Palace Tablet. The specific interpretation I will offer may differ greatly from theirs, but it hinges on this same fundamental insight.

Ux Yop Huun Beyond Palenque

The name featured in the Palace Tablet also appears in the inscriptions of numerous other sites. The clearest instance is on Copan’s Stela J, in a passage associated with the accession of the thirteenth local king Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil (Figures 8c, 10). Throughout much of this monument’s text, notoriously 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 to the Palenque cases (note the natural plant-like appearance of the **YOP** logogram), and it appears after a verbal expression based on the root *k’am*, “to take, receive,” seen in the initial block. The verb phrase is elaborated with the name of Copan’s founder, K’inich Yax K’uk’ Mo’, placed inside the hand logogram (**K’AM**). After the Ux Yop Huun glyph comes a secondary clause beginning with *y-ichnal*, “in the presence of,” and then references to two or more classes of gods. The name of the new ruler comes later in the text, after a record of the date (9.13.3.6.8 7 Lamat 1 Mol) and a re-statement of his “seating.” Some ambiguity lingers in the analysis of the passage, but the name of the dynastic founder appears to be the direct object of the *k’am* verb, conveying something like “he takes (K’inich) Yax K’uk’ Mo’,” apparently in reference to assuming the role of a successor. But who is the agent? One possibility would be “Ux Yop Huun takes (K’inich) Yax K’uk’ Mo’,” where the

new king, Ruler 13, is equated with the name Ux Yop Huun. Alternatively, the agent may be unmentioned yet understood (being named later), with the founder’s name in some manner modifying Ux Yop Huun, as in “he takes the (K’inich) Yax Kuk’ 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 analysis, Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil in some way assumed the identity of Ux Yop Huun as well as that of the dynastic founder upon the day of his accession.

Another example of the name 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** logogram appears not 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 **WINIK** logogram). This we know elsewhere to be an alternate form of **HUUN**. Above and along its back we see two leaves in place of the single **YOP** found at Palenque and Copan. At first glance this may seem too different a visual arrangement to equate to the Ux Yop Huun name, but all of the necessary elements are here—the numeral prefix, the **HUUN-na**, and the intervening leaf elements. Unfortunately, the vague 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 descriptive label for this particular form of 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 abbreviated Jester God form known as the “foliated ajaw” emblem (Figure 8e-h). Just as in spellings of **K’AWIIL**, the Jester God can be written as a full head variant or with a simpler graphic form that is its diagnostic forehead.⁵

One important example of this glyph appears on the Copan peccary skull, as part of a short inscription that records a *k’altuun* (stone-binding) ritual on the date “1 Ajaw 8 Ch’en,” possibly

⁵ See Figure 8f for the “foliated ajaw” on the Jester God’s forehead and compare Figure 8g where the “foliated ajaw” stands alone. Figure 8h further indicates the visual origin of the “dotted winal” **HUUN** variant in another aspect of the Jester God’s forehead.



Figure 12. A possible mythical stela ritual depicted in the central cartouche from the Copan peccary skull (note the 1 Ajaw date and the Jester God name 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 headdress. 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 scene. 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 2005:28), and I suspect they are essentially equivalent forms to the Ux Yop Huun glyphs featured at Palenque.

Stela 4 of Tikal may hold a very important reference to Ux Yop Huun in its inscription, where the glyph seems integral to a verbal expression for royal accession (Figure 13). This phrase is an elaboration on the standard *k'al huun* accession phrase—perhaps the earliest one known, in fact—and is used to record the crowning of the important Tikal ruler Nuun Yax 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 Ux Yop Huun name, and the context establishes the key fact that this name refers directly to the headband or headdress that is "fastened" upon the new king. Ux Yop Huun here appears to serve as a label of a ritual paper crown.

So again we seem to face our old conundrum: is Ux Yop Huun a person or a thing? What seemed so clearly to be a personal name of a "born" figure on the Palace Tablet can take on a more impersonal role in other inscriptions, apparently referring in some instances to a bark paper headband or crown. However, I believe there is no troubling contradiction in these diverse roles of the Ux Yop Huun name. As I hope to show in the rest of this essay, Ux Yop Huun was very likely the specific personal name for the Jester God (one form of it at least), which in turn was the basic animate symbol for *huun*, the *amate* tree and the ritual paper materials manufactured from it. There are indications as well that the Jester God, or a specific variation of him, may have assumed a further complex role as a historicized "proto-ruler," 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 generally as a symbol of kingship and 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 point to a certain vagueness that remains in our 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 I see as at least three different forms in Classic Maya iconography (Figure 14). In the discussions thus far I have emphasized the form that appears as

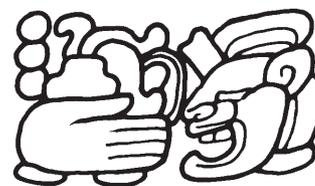


Figure 13. Accession verb from Tikal Stela 4. Drawing: Linda Schele.

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 “*xok* fish” 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 labeled as a “Jester God” is an anthropomorphized flower blossom with three points or lobes, visually related to the thirteenth Maya day sign (Yukatek *Ben*) (Figure 14c). Its trident-like appearance has no doubt been the source of confusion with the more standard Jester God, yet the differences are clear.⁶ Sometimes this can take the form of the floral blossom alone, or it can be animated through the attachment of a human profile, very likely a form of the Maize God. One wonders if this is perhaps meant to represent a maize flower, which would find agreement with the maize interpretation of some early Jester God-related forms discussed by Fields (1991). When attached to headgear, as these floral elements often are, the bands tend to be jeweled and quite elaborate, and not the simple *huun* paper headband. For the sake of discussions here and in future, therefore, I feel that these three entities—the “true” *huun* Jester God, the *Xok* Adornment, and the Trident Blossom—ought to be considered distinct, even if their visual environments do overlap from time to time.

With this hopefully clarified, we can now consider our

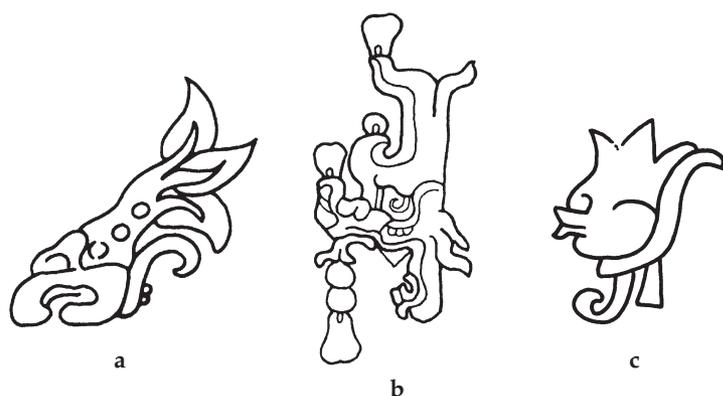


Figure 14. The three “Jester Gods” of Maya iconography: (a) the form from the *huun* glyph, a beaked avian character, usually with large square eye and three leaves around head (drawing: Karl Taube); (b) the *Xok* Adornment (drawing: Linda Schele, courtesy of David Schele); (c) the Trident Blossom (drawing: Karl Taube). For another example of the Trident Blossom see the headdress on page 101 of this volume.

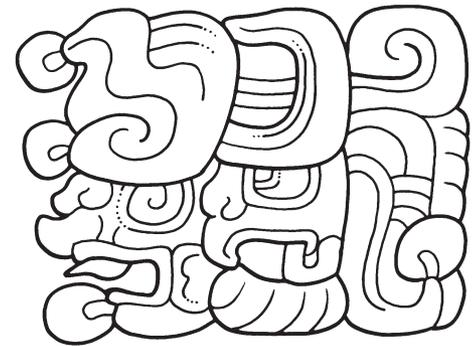


Figure 15. The visual distinction of two Jester Gods in a hieroglyph from Caracol Stela 6. Drawing by Marc Zender after photograph by Ian Graham.

standard Jester God that stands as a hieroglyph for *huun*, meaning “*amate*, bark paper,” and extending to include certain important ritual objects made from such material, such as “page, 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 papery 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 cotinifolia*. In several Mayan languages, cognate forms of Classic Mayan *huun* refer generally to any of these species. Yukatek today commonly employs the word *kóopo’* 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, *jun* is “papel, libro, carta” but also “amate (árbol),” as in the phrase *wen colem mi’ colem jini jun*, “el amate crece muy grande” (Aulie and Aulie 1978:69). The word *amate* is from Nahuatl *ama(tl)* (Karttunen 1992:10), 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 so often depicted on the front of the *huun* or *sakhuun* headband is often considered to be a representation of a sewn 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 1973:262), Chichen Itza (Proskouriakoff 1974:146-147), Aguateca (Inomata et al. 2002:315), and supposedly from Cerros (Freidel 1990).⁷ These small adornments crafted of jade are often assumed

⁶ 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).

⁷ I say “supposedly” here for I remain unconvinced of Freidel’s argument that the small jade heads discovered in Cache 1 at Cerros are headband jewels, or even crude representations of a Jester God variety. They have very little in the way of distinguishing markings or iconographic elements.



Figure 16. Contrast of Jester God and jewels. Photograph K5824 © Justin Kerr.

to be attached to headbands and headdresses. However, none of them represent the same god I have focused on here. Rather than being the *amate* or *huun* 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 *huun* 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, K5824). 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 *huun*, 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.

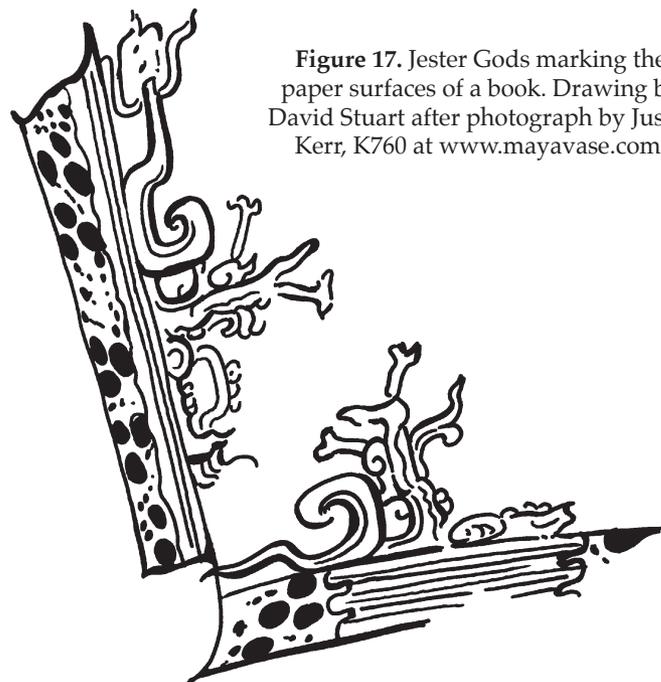


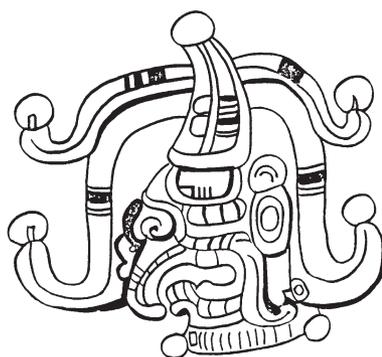
Figure 17. Jester Gods marking the paper surfaces of a book. Drawing by David Stuart after photograph by Justin Kerr, K760 at www.mayavase.com.

On headbands Jester Gods may serve much the same purpose, as markers of papery substance, not unlike similar sorts of visual cues in Maya iconography for materials and textures of things made of stone, wood, and cotton.⁸

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 *huun* 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

⁸ Simon Martin (n.d.a) and Stephen Houston independently reached the same general interpretation of the papery *huun* Jester God as I offer here.

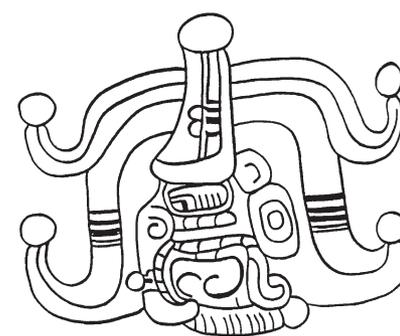
Figure 18. Representations of the Jester God as a tree or plant (TE’) from Rio Azul Tomb 19 (from Adams 1986:90).



North



East



South

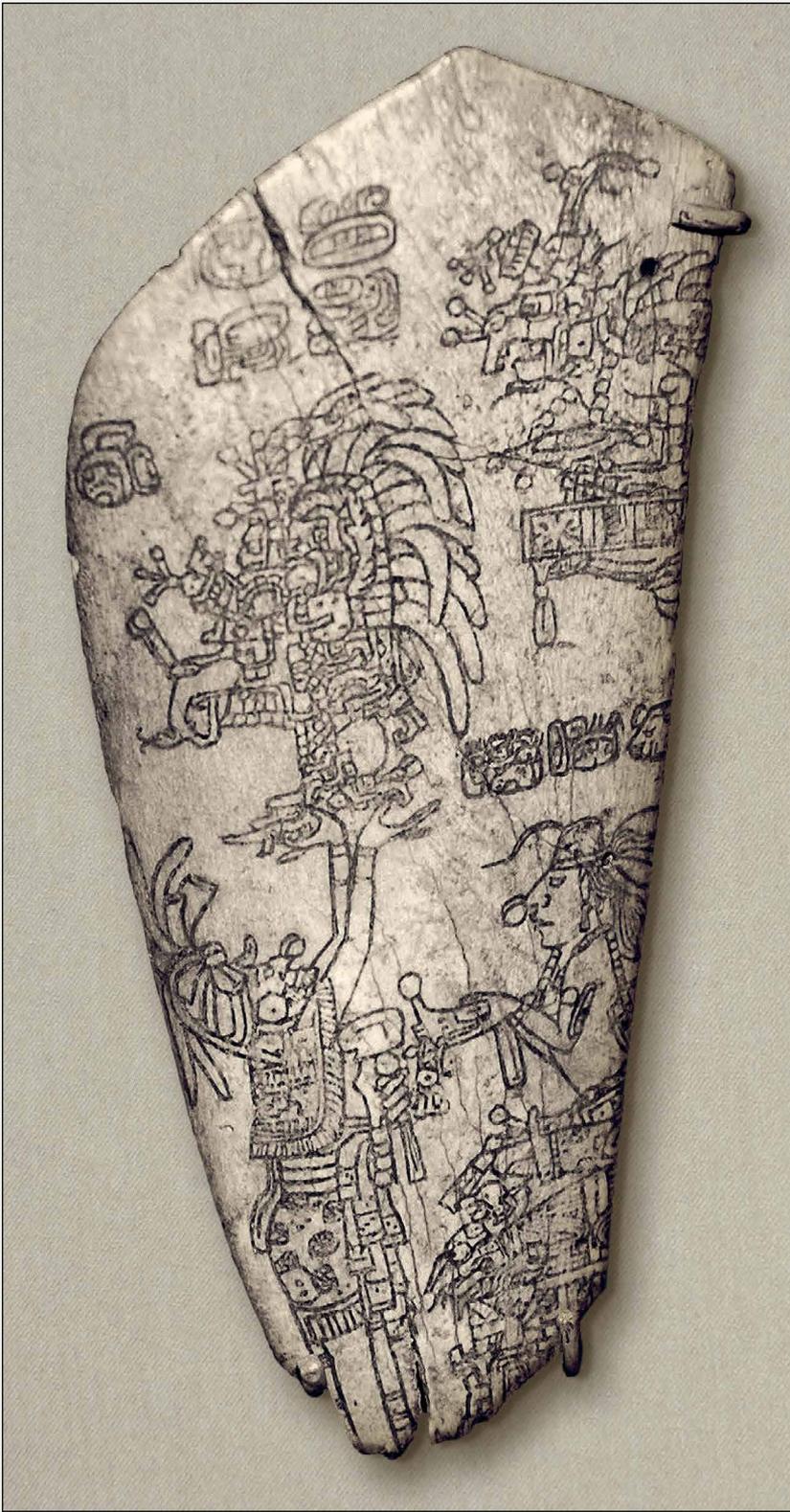


Figure 19. Incised bone, Dallas Museum of Art.
Photo: David Stuart.

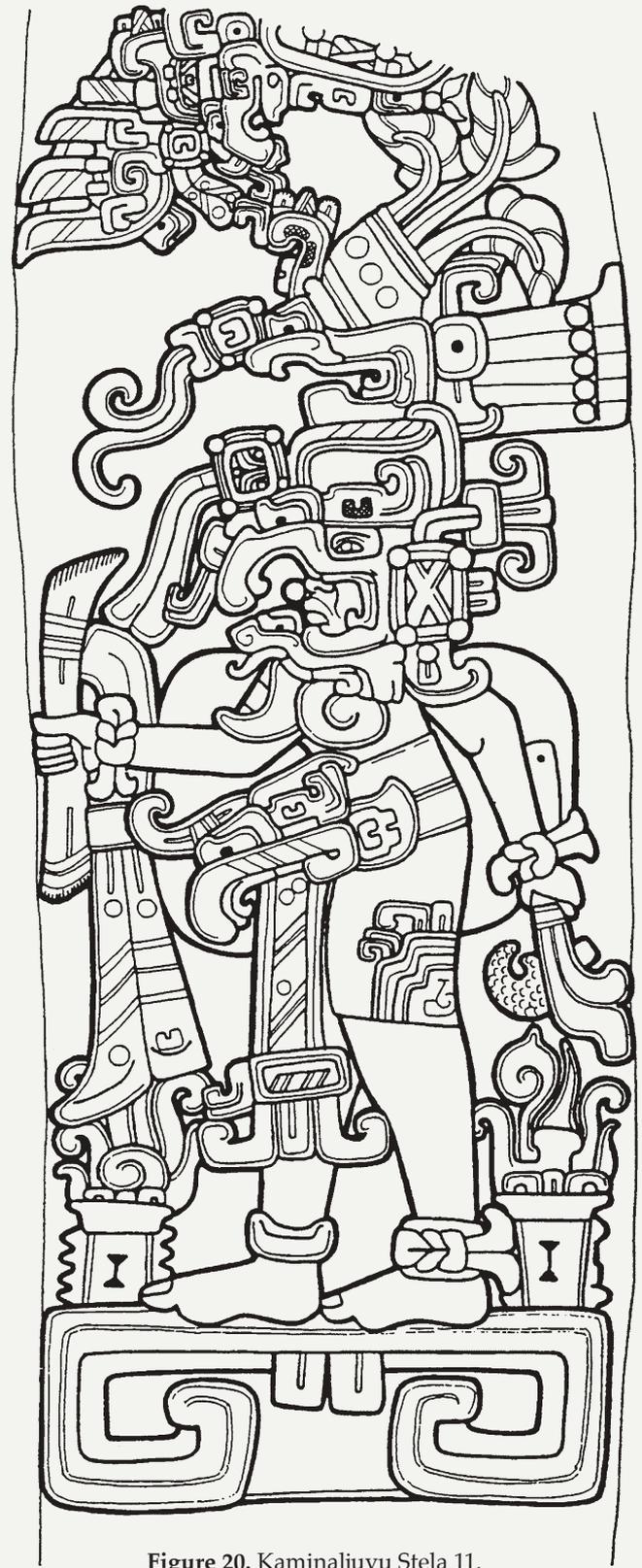


Figure 20. Kaminaljuyu Stela 11.
Drawing: Ayax Moreno, courtesy of the New
World Archaeology Foundation.

bands seen on all three “branches” of the heads, is simply the TE’ or “tree, plant” glyph, found on tree images throughout Maya iconography.⁹ 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.¹⁰

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 this headdress as *huun* and make use of the standard *k’al-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*.



Figure 21. Seated figure from an early Maya pectoral in the Dumbarton Oaks collection. Drawing: Karl Taube.

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).¹¹ We see many examples of the very same pattern in the art of the Early and Late Classic. On the sarcophagus of

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.



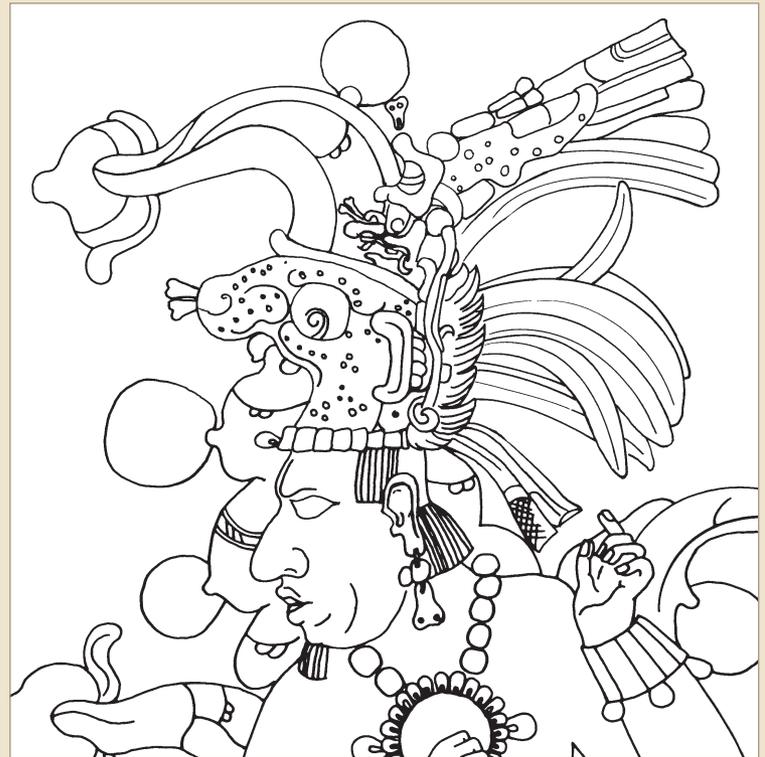
a



b



c



d

Figure 22. Figures on the sides of Pakal's sarcophagus: (a) North Figure 1, Lady Sak K'uk'; (b) North Figure 2, K'an Mo' Hix; (c) West Figure 3, K'an Joy Chitam I; (d) East Figure 2, Kan Bahlam I. Drawings: Merle Greene Robertson.

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 where the Jester God or Ux Yop Huun 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 Huun, 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 Huun. 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 Huun, 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-

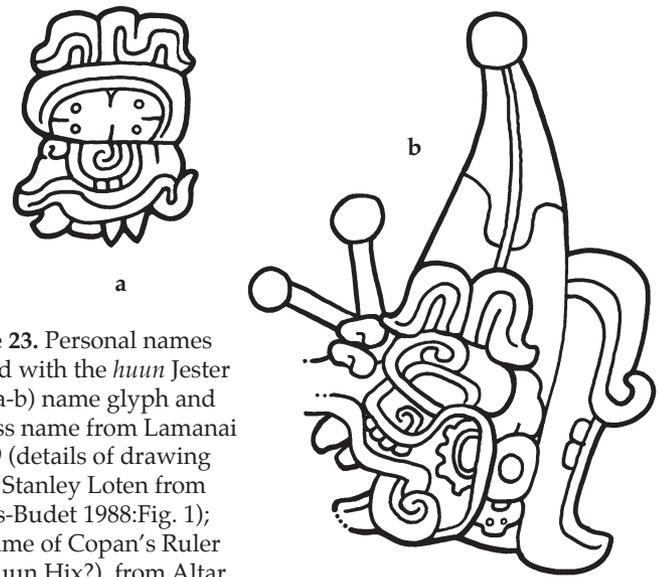
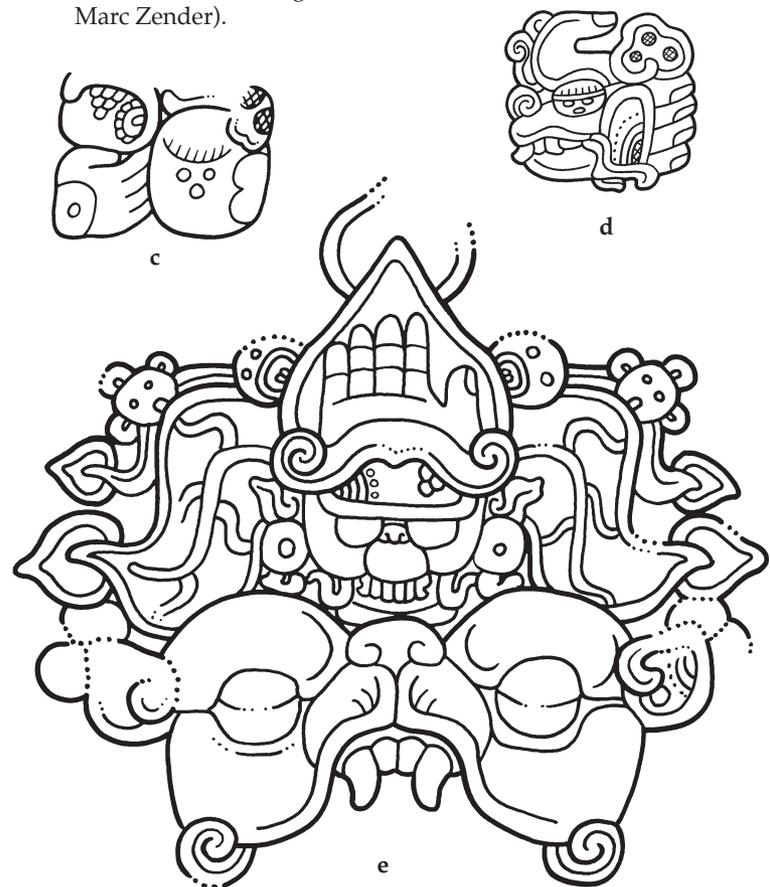


Figure 23. Personal names conflated with the *huun* Jester God: (a-b) name glyph and headdress name from Lamanai Stela 9 (details of drawing by H. Stanley Loten from Reents-Budet 1988:Fig. 1); (c-e) name of Copan’s Ruler 4 (K’altuun Hix?), from Altar Q, the Papagayo altar, and the headdress of Stela 2 (drawing: Marc Zender).



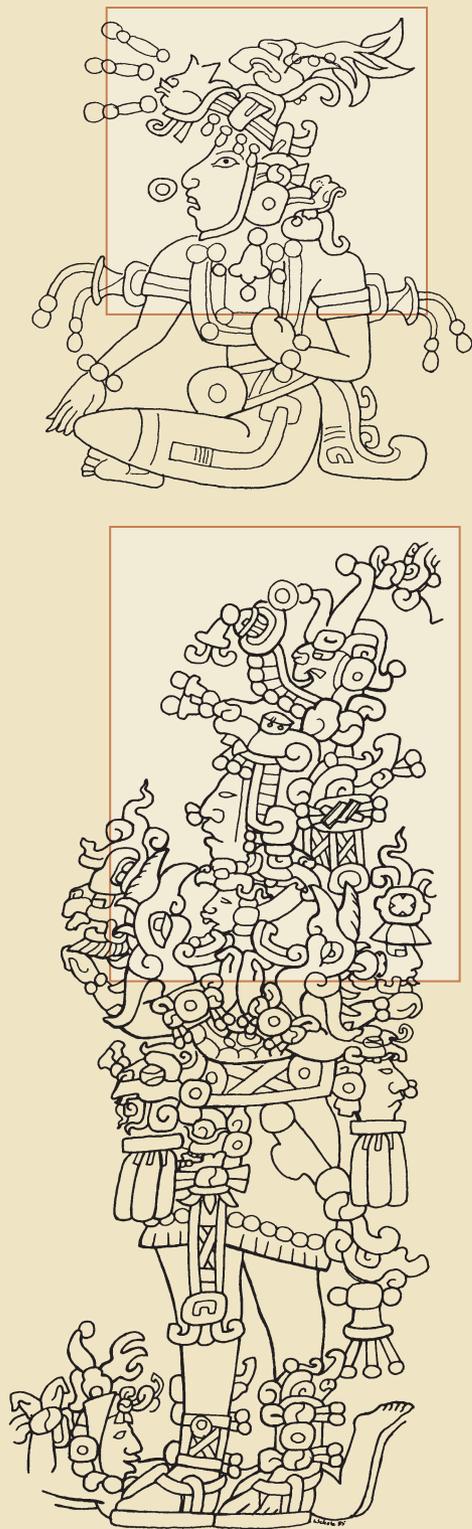


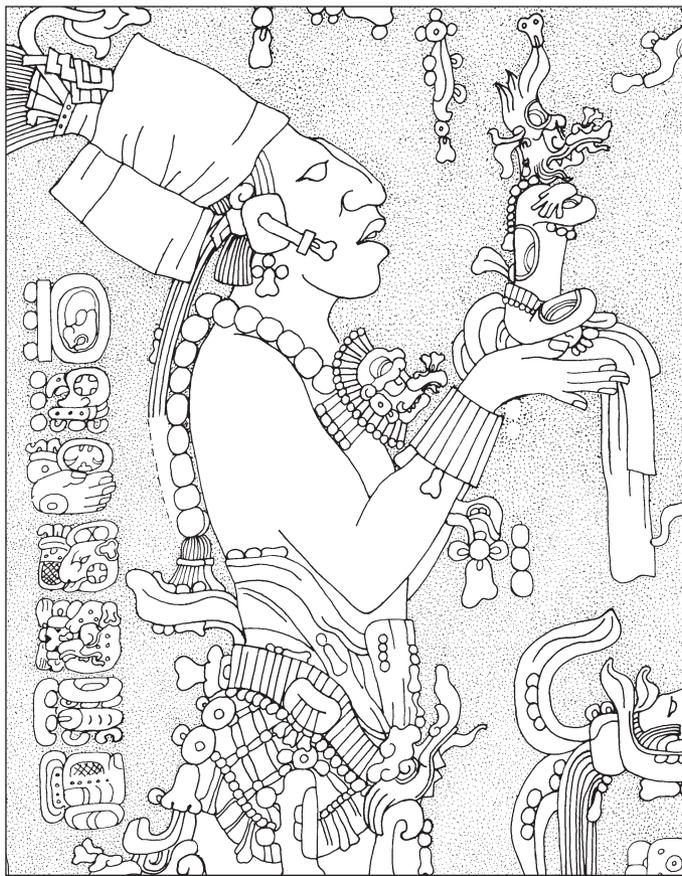
Figure 24. Jester Gods appearing atop heads of portrayed individuals: (top) detail of the Dumbarton Oaks pectoral; (bottom) the Leiden Plaque. Drawings: Linda Schele.

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 papery 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 K’an 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.

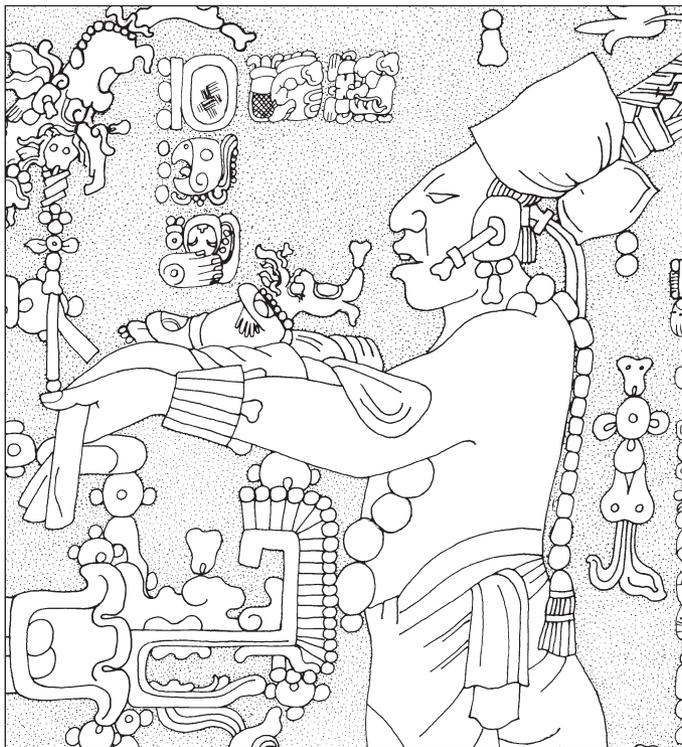
The small K’awiil and Jester God figures on the Dumbarton Oaks panel may well be depicted as infants. Unen K’awiil or “Baby K’awiil” is, after all, the name of one of the Palenque Triad gods (Berlin’s GII), and its image graces the piers of the Temple of the Inscriptions, cradled in the arms of four Palenque dynasts. It seems natural to see the small god in the mother’s lap as the very same entity, here 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 *amate* 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’awiil, or Unen K’awiil 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 *amate*.

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 same being served,



a



c

Figure 25. Small Jester God effigies depicted at Palenque: (a) Tablet of the Foliated Cross; (b) Tablet of the Cross (the glyph at the bottom of the column above the miniature figure reads *k'ahlaj sakhuun*); (c) Dumbarton Oaks panel, with K'awiil effigy in lap at left, Jester God effigy in lap at right. Drawings *a-b*: Merle Greene Robertson, drawing *c*: Linda Schele, courtesy of David Schele.

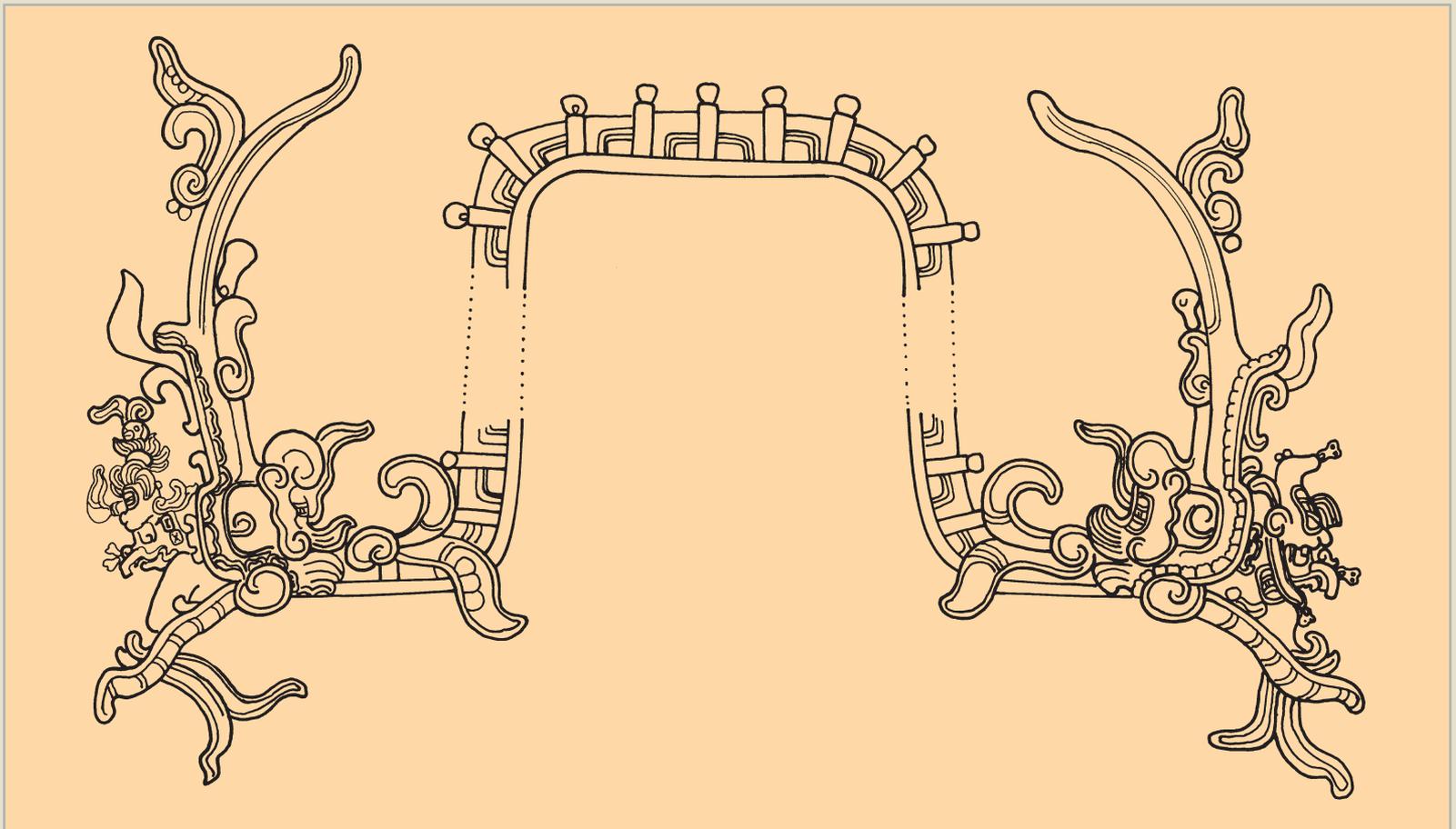


Figure 26. Juxtaposition of K'awiil and Ux Yop Huun in the resurrection iconography of Pakal's sarcophagus. Drawing: Merle Greene Robertson.

in turn, as an embodiment or animate essence of ritual *amate* paper, which would explain a number of its appearances in Maya iconography.

Why, then, would the Palace Tablet's caption emphasize a "birth" event of the Jester God as well as its connection with proper names? I believe that the wording in the final phrase of the caption text provides the answer, if in somewhat obscure language: "the name of Ux Yop Huun is fastened; the take-turn(?) name for the dynasty is formed." This statement resonates once we realize that Ux Yop Huun is at once a symbol and a mythical actor, the active personification of the substance of royal headbands used in accession rituals to embody one's newly acquired royal name, or what the Classic Maya literally called "the white-paper-name" (*sakhuunil k'aba'*). This convergence of Ux Yop Huun and royal names is precisely what we have just seen visually communicated by the iconography of Lamanai Stela 9 and Copan Stela 2. There can be little doubt that paper headbands, the royal crowns of Mesoamerica, were the physical material by which kingly names were bestowed upon new rulers. This is, I believe, the crux of the message behind the Palace

Tablet's caption, if not the monument as a whole. By referencing the birth on 1 Ajaw 3 Wayeb and the subsequent "fastening" in association with royal names, Ux Yop Huun is rhetorically treated much like a royal persona, a figure who himself is born and assumes a sort of office well into adulthood—a poetic device, I would argue, that has led to long-standing problems in understanding his true identity. The final passage of the caption resolves much of the confusion by telling us that the fastening of the name of Ux Yop Huun was the foundational event that established the pattern of dynastic naming, wherein kings would "take turns" donning the headband and its persona in the name of Ux Yop Huun. Rather than see Ux Yop Huun as some obscure royal figure from Palenque's dynasty or as the name of the large helmet depicted in the scene, Ux Yop Huun is best interpreted as the animate basis for bark paper and all its charged meanings in the all-important rituals associated with royal crowning.

The intimate connection between headdresses and names is a familiar feature of Maya and Mesoamerican iconography. As Kelly (1982) has pointed out, a person's name often appears as headgear in the Mixtec codices, as well as in examples from the

Maya area. In fact, since Kelly's observations it has become clear that headdress names are quite common in some of the very earliest depictions of historical individuals in Maya art (Stuart 2008a). In the Late Classic perhaps the best representation of this comes from Palenque's Temple XXI, where K'inich Janab Pakal wears in his hair the name glyphs of two ancient ancestors, the so-called U K'ix Chan and the "Ch'a" Ruler, each of whom were apparently viewed, by the Late Classic, as semi-mythical ruling figures (Figure 27). Using this visual device, the designers of Temple XXI's panel fused Pakal's identity with those of two other great deceased lords of Palenque. On the related sculpted relief from Temple XIX, the contemporary king K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb wears in his headband the iconic name of the deity GI, in reference to his own role as a re-embodiment of the all-important patron god of Palenque's dynasty (Stuart 2005:119-123). Perhaps it would not be rash to suggest that a similar message about ancestral or mythical identity is key in interpreting the questioned identity of the central figure of the Palace Tablet. Although there is every reason to believe the seated lord is K'inich K'an Joy Chitam, the king has intentionally fused his own identity, understood but never explicit in the caption, with a mythological character of great importance. Viewing the Palace Tablet's scene and caption in the light of Temple XIX and other Palenque monuments that emphasize "like-in-kind" connections between myth and history, we see that no contradiction exists 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, kingship, and elite status. Ux Yop Huun seems to have had an abstract role as the "spirit" of *amate* bark paper but also possessed a specific narrative identity as a mythical figure intimately tied to rulership and royal nomenclature throughout the Maya area.

Several of these layered meanings come into play in the Palace Tablet, where Ux Yop Huun takes on the role of a narrative figure evoked on the occasion of a Palenque king's inauguration and crowning. To summarize some of my more speculative thoughts, I suggest that Ux Yop Huun is cited in the scene of the Palace Tablet because he was a key symbolic actor who came to be embodied by and identified with the ruler K'inich K'an Joy Chitam on the day of his own accession, upon taking the paper headband. In the caption text, Ux Yop Huun's status undergoes an important change when he is 56 years old, when his name becomes "fastened," perhaps in reference to the

beginning of kingly "headband-tying names" as a formal aspect of rulership. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the new Palenque ruler was 58 years old when he took office in AD 702. This similarity in age may have motivated the like-in-kind parallel between Ux Yop Huun and K'inich K'an Joy Chitam. In this way, through the remarkable Palace Tablet, the historical king at once evokes and links his own identity with Ux Yop Huun, the underlying essence and substance of kingship's simplest material emblem, the white headband.

It must be significant that the birth date for Ux Yop Huun on the Palace Tablet is written as 1 Ajaw 3 Wayeb and that the single K'atun ending mentioned in connection with the same name on the Copan peccary skull is 1 Ajaw 8 Ch'en (Figure 12). I doubt this is coincidental, for both dates may link the story of Ux Yop Huun with that of the mythic Juun Ajaw (1 Ajaw), the so-called Headband Twin who was, in important ways, the very template of a Maya king. The name Juun Ajaw evokes the sense of "First King" and might also involve a play between the words *juun* "one" and *huun* "headband" (glyphs for the two words are sometimes interchangeable in the script). Juun Ajaw was a hunter and sacrificer, always recognizable by the *sakhuun* headband

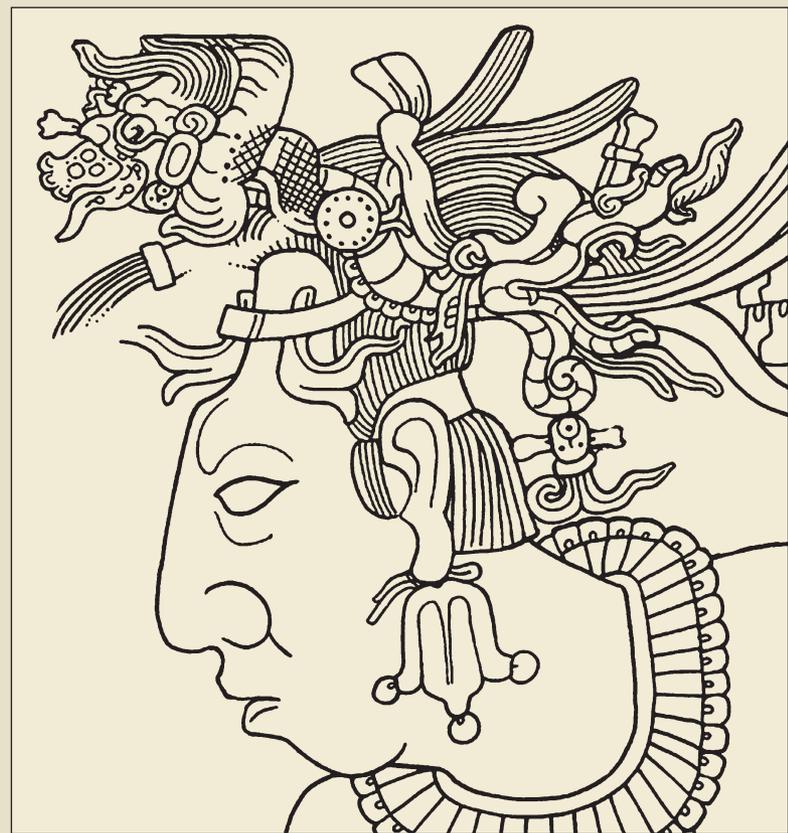


Figure 27. K'inich Janab Pakal's headdress from Temple XXI, Palenque. Drawing: David Stuart.

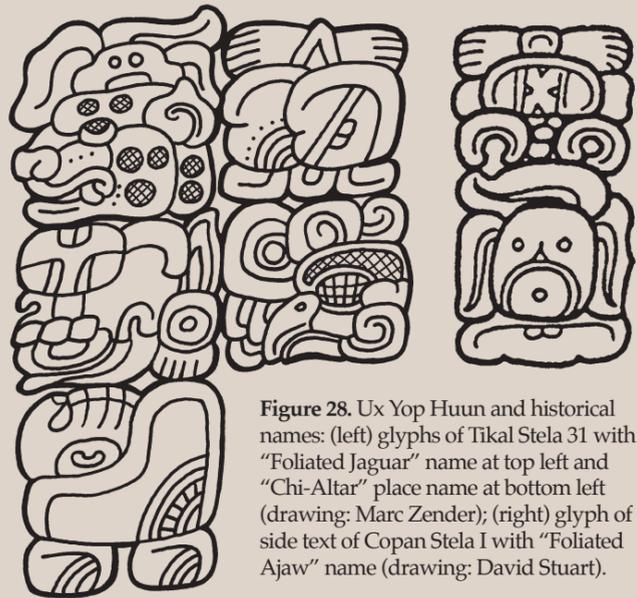


Figure 28. Ux Yop Huun and historical names: (left) glyphs of Tikal Stela 31 with “Foliated Jaguar” name at top left and “Chi-Altar” place name at bottom left (drawing: Marc Zender); (right) glyph of side text of Copan Stela I with “Foliated Ajaw” name (drawing: David Stuart).

that also served as the basic crown of nobility. The suggestive 1 Ajaw birth date might also point to Ux Yop Huun, explicit in its reference to a headband, being some alternative name for Juun Ajaw in his capacity as “proto-ruler” par excellence. The famous image of his shooting the Principal Bird Deity from the heavens also takes place on

the day 1 Ajaw, according to scenes of the event depicted on Late Classic ceramics (Stuart 2008b; Zender 2005b) (Figure 5a). We have already seen that there is some visual parallel between Ux Yop Huun (animated as the *huun* entity) and the Principal Bird Deity, a connection that is still poorly understood. I suspect that this fundamental story of the great bird’s descent was symbolically replicated in crowning ceremonies, wherein the headdress represented the inverted bird perched upon the head of a ruler. In this way a new king came to represent both actors of the myth, the hunter and the fallen bird. The headdress 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 imprecise 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 times (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 Pusilha in connection with the early K’atun ending 8.6.0.0.0 (AD 159) (Figure 28). Both of these figures from remote history are associated with a place known as the “Chi-Altar” (or erroneously as “Chi Witz” in some sources). Both took *Huun* 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-king” who fastened his royal name through an *amate* crown and thereby established the “take-turn name” for his dynasty, just as described in the Palace Tablet caption text. Given



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

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 *sakhuun* crown almost assumes the role of a parallel character, having specific roles described in connection with the accessions and deaths of the ruler’s father and older brother. In the final passage of the main text we read that House A-D, where the tablet was housed, was the “Headband-Fastening House, the dwelling of Ux Yop Huun.” This seems a fitting description for what may have amounted to

a vast public stage for the ritual crowning of lesser elites within Palenque’s court and polity, where bark paper in both its material and mythic form would have often been on display.

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Figure 30. The Palace Tablet. Photo: Jorge Pérez de Lara.

Maya Archaeology

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