Chapter 6.

A New Look at Palenque's Mythology



It is difficult to overstate the importance of the religious and cosmological information gleaned from the inscriptions of Temple XIX. The platform text in particular relates mythic episodes not found in other inscriptions from Palenque or elsewhere in the Maya world. Even the mentions of familiar gods and creation events contain new bits of information and force revisions of what we long thought we knew about Palenque's mythology and Maya cosmogony in general. This chapter touches on many of these new strands of evidence, although it must be said that many aspects of these new discoveries will be expanded and revisited by others for many years to come.

The opening statement of GI's accession to rulership is perhaps the most important new portion of the mythic narrative as now reconstructed, for it considerably predates the "deep time" history related in the three temples of the Cross Group, each devoted to one of the members of the Palenque Triad. In order to place this new event in some meaningful context, let us first review the story of the Triad as it gradually emerged over the last few decades through the pioneering works of Berlin, Kelley, Lounsbury, Schele, and others.

The study of Palenque's creation texts (I think a good way to characterize them as a whole) began in earnest with Berlin's (1963) identification of the three gods of the so-called Palenque Triad (Figure 123), whom he labeled simply as "GI," "GII," and "GIII" (their hieroglyphic names having been impossible to read at the time). Kelley (1965) soon thereafter discussed the births of these deities as recorded in the three temples of the Group of the Cross and helped to establish that each member of the Triad was associated with one of these temples. The Temple of the Cross and its tablet featured the god GI, the Temple of the Foliated Cross and its tablet the god GII, and the Temple of the Sun and its tablet the god GIII. Their respective birth dates, also recorded on the Temple XIX platform, are of course:

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1. 18. 5. 3. 2 9 Ik' 15 Keh GI birth
1. 18. 5. 3. 6 13 Kimi 19 Keh GIII birth
1. 18. 5. 4. 0 1 Ajaw 13 Mak GII birth
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Kelley also noted that these birth dates pointed to likely connections between the members of the Triad and other mythical figures recorded in narratives from Central Mexico and Oaxaca. The most conspicuous of these is of course "9 Ik" or Nine Wind, a calendar name attested in Postclassic central Mexico for the Venus deity Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl. These connections to other Mesoamerican traditions are difficult to confirm, but they nonetheless deserve







Figure 123. The Palenque Triad, from the Temple XIX platform, P5-P6.

far more attention than they have received in the past, and they will be briefly revisited throughout this chapter.

In a series of important papers, Lounsbury (1974, 1976, 1980, 1985) built on these works and began to reconstruct a narrative concerning these gods. He noted that the three birth events, spaced only days apart, indicated a probable sibling relationship among the threesome, and the prominent name of a long-lived woman in the texts of the Cross Group, "Lady Beastie" or "Lady Methuselah," was interpreted as their mother-creator (this deity is called the "Triad Progenitor" in the present study). Mentions of an earlier birth of a "GI" led Lounsbury to also propose the existence of two "GI" gods, indistinguishable by name, with the first perhaps being the father of the supernatural triplets. Lounsbury (1985) also posited that the gods GI and GIII were Classic Maya counterparts to the Hero Twins of the Popol Vuh, Hunahpu and Xbalanque. Schele (1979) expanded on Lounsbury's work by connecting the individual Triad gods to wider iconographic patterns in Maya art at Palenque and elsewhere. She viewed the Palenque Triad as fundamental players in Classic religion throughout the lowlands, an interpretation that came to be highly influential in many of her later works (e.g., Schele and Freidel 1988, 1990). In these reconstructions, GI and GIII—whom Lounsbury had associated with the Hero Twins—were seen as Classic Maya aspects of Venus and the Sun, respectively, and major components of royal symbolism from Preclassic times.

The Venus identification of GI stems mainly from his birth date 9 Ik' (Nine Wind), mentioned already as the calendar name of Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl, a major Venus god in Central Mexican mythology (Kelley 1965). This station of the 260-day cycle was of great symbolic importance and is used repeatedly in the Temple XIX platform inscription to draw historical parallels between GI, the Triad Progenitor, and the ruler K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb. Lounsbury's view that GI was also a Classic counterpart of Hunahpu, with his own strong associations with Venus, would seem in keeping with this interpretation. However, it should be said that other conflicting evidence surrounds the astronomical identities of the Hero Twins, who are at times named as counterparts of the Sun and the Moon, rather than Venus and the Sun (M. Coe 1989; Milbrath 1999). GIII, as we shall see, is clearly an aspect of K'inich Ajaw, the sun god.

Despite its significant influence in Maya religious studies during the last two decades (e.g., Tedlock 1985, 1996), the interpretation of GI and GIII as simple counterparts of Hunahpu and Xbalanque today is difficult to sustain. Michael Coe (1989) made a simple yet definitive argument against Lounsbury's assertion by pointing out that Hunahpu and Xbalanque are commonly and explicitly depicted on Classic period vases as the so-called "Headband Twins," young mythical characters who have no iconographic associations or overlaps with GI or GIII. The complex astronomical associations of both the Hero Twins and the Triad Gods may well allow us to draw some general structural parallels between these sets of siblings, but in my view the ambiguities involved in such interpretations prevent any direct

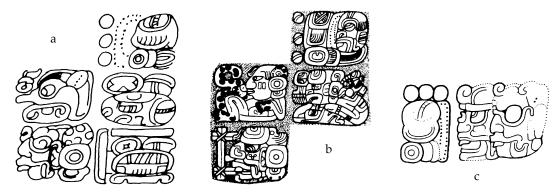


Figure 124. Triadic deities at Caracol, Tikal, and Naranjo: (a) Caracol, Stela 16 (drawing by Linda Schele), (b) Tikal, Stela 26 (from Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:Fig. 44a), (c) Naranjo, Hieroglyhic Stairway 1, Step II, C2b-D2 (drawing by Ian Graham from Graham 1978:108).

correlation between the *Popol Vuh* and the mythological narrative as presented in Palenque's inscriptions.

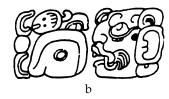
One simple and insurmountable difficulty in efforts to link the Palenque Triad to the *Popol Vuh* stems from their near-exclusive focus on Palenque. This is understandable given the amount of sources at hand and the importance of Palenque in the epigraphic breakthroughs of the 1970s and 80s. Nonetheless, we cannot forget that other Maya sites had their own triadic groupings of deities whose identities seem very different from those at Palenque (Figure 124). At Caracol, for example, a set of three gods is mentioned on at least three different stelae, and Tikal mentions yet another set of three deities. All presumably held similar roles as supernatural "patrons" of the local dynasties, but none allow for connections to later narratives of Maya mythology. To a large degree, narratives from Classic Maya mythology were fairly localized constructs, and Palenque was no different in this respect.

Of the three Triad gods, GI seems the most important, and he is clearly the deity featured most prominently in the texts of Temple XIX. Beyond the simple fact that GI is named a great many times in these inscriptions, perhaps the clearest indication of GI's importance to Temple XIX is the dedication date of the building itself (9.15.2.7.16 9 Kib 19 K'ayab), recorded on the alfarda, the stone pier tablet, and on the platform. In the platform's inscription the same date is cited as the dedication day for GI's particular house or structure (chak ..?.. naah), with his siblings' temples dedicated a short time later. By implication, then, we can posit that Temple XIX was principally a temple oriented toward GI and the rituals that surrounded him—a fitting association given the way Temple XIX faces onto the Temple of the Cross, a far more imposing GI temple constructed by K'inich Kan Bahlam over forty years earlier. The other two Triad gods, GII and GIII, had their own new temple (or temples) dedicated together two years later, on 9.15.4.15.17 6 Kaban 5 Yaxk'in. There is now good reason to believe that this may be Temple XXI, Temple XIX's "twin" recently excavated in full by Arnoldo González and his colleagues from INAH. At least the 6 Kaban date is featured in that temple, in the text of the platform that is so similar in design to that of Temple XIX.

The Temple XIX platform's explicit message of a shared identity between K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb and GI stands as one of the most compelling presentations of divine rulership ever encountered in Classic Maya art. On the day of his seating in office the ruler is shown wearing elements of GI's diagnostic headdress, and the history recorded in the accompanying inscription establishes the connection between creator deity and ruler. Most striking is

Figure 125. Names of GI at Palenque: (a) simple portrait version from the Tablet of the Foliated Cross, O9, (b) extended version from the Tablet of the Cross, C8-D8 (drawings by Linda Schele).





how both of them took office on the important day 9 Ik', as had the "Triad Progenitor" in the intervening time. The emphasis on GI therefore becomes more understandable if we realize that K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb relied on the story of that god to construct his own program of religious legitimation, probably after a time of considerable uneasiness in Palenque's dynastic history. GI was very much K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb's own god.

Who Was GI?

The inscription on the Temple XIX platform makes constant reference to the deity GI, and arguably he is the protagonist of the monument's narrative. GI is "impersonated" by the Palenque ruler in the main scene, his accession opens the main text on the south side, and the dedication of his "house" is a featured event in the west side's supplementary text. Clearly, then, a deep understanding of the Temple XIX inscriptions will rely in large part on knowing GI's general role in Classic Maya cosmology and religion. Yet GI remains a highly enigmatic character in Maya iconography. One reason behind this mystery is GI's apparent disappearance at the end of the Classic period, for he cannot be connected to any of the major Postclassic gods identified by Schellhas (1904) and later discussed by Taube (1992). It therefore seems very doubtful that GI can ever be understood in the context of ethnographic survivals or counterparts, in the way we are able to gain knowledge of K'inich Ajaw, Chaak, or K'awil (God K). What we can say about GI comes mainly from scattered iconographic depictions and occasional textual references.

GI's hieroglyphic name has two main variants (Figure 125) but they remain undeciphered. The portrait head is the more simple of the two, and this is commonly elaborated with a preceding glyph carrying the numerical coefficient "one." Curiously, the second of these forms—presumably the full name—occurs only at Palenque, evidently as a specialized, local aspect of the deity. Elsewhere GI has a more complex name with different surrounding elements, including a curious combination of a hand, **NAAH** (T4), and the "ajaw" face (see Figure 90). This distinct category or type of GI is cited most often in the Early Classic texts of Tikal and environs and remains very poorly understood.

Freidel, Schele, and Parker (1993) link the fuller name of GI as it appears at Palenque to the Classic maize god discussed by Taube (1985), both of whom they called "Hun-Nal-Ye," which they translate as "One Maize Revealed." However, this reading is based on a flawed understanding of the constituent signs. Their "maize" element does resemble the young-maize superfix read **NAL**, but it is different in its internal details and presumably has a different value. ⁴⁹ Likewise, the reading of the main sign with its central dot as **ye** is very un-

⁴⁹ The relationship between this sign (T84) and **NAL** is visually very close, and the two signs are easily confused (Schele, Mathews, and Lounsbury 1990b). However, they are in mutually exclusive settings and to my knowledge were carefully kept separate by Maya scribes (Thompson [1962] indeed gave them separate numbers in his catalog). Another notable context for the particular variant found in GI's name is the God K or K'awil designation found in records of the 819-day count (see for example block C3 on the south face of the platform).

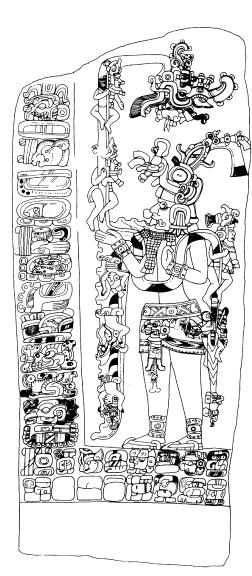


Figure 126. The Hauberg Stela (drawing by Linda Schele from Schele 1985).

likely, since this is a syllabic value only and here the sign is almost surely logographic. Moreover, the common **ye** sign in the Classic script is the downward-pointing hand (a variant of T220 or T710) that never appears in the GI name glyph. For the present, I feel the two signs following the "one" coefficient cannot be read confidently. "Hun Nal Ye" is therefore probably a misnomer.

The opening passage of the south tablet on the platform records the distant accession of GI to "the rulership" (ti ajawlel), but what or where did he rule? It is difficult to know for certain. The principal actor here is Itzamnaaj, or more specifically Yax Naah Itzamnaaj, a name that perhaps indicates that this is some sort of "new" or "first" aspect of the deity during the era of Maya creation. Itzamnaaj in some way oversees the accession itself as if he were a "high ruler," or at least of much higher standing than GI. This agrees well with a great many iconographic representations of the Classic Itzamnaaj or God D, who is routinely portrayed on polychrome ceramics as seated atop a sky-band throne. This is the visual indicator of Itzamnaaj's place in the heavens, perhaps even in the capacity of a celestial ruler. The statement in Passage S-1 that the event occurred "in the (center of?) the sky" (ta wut(?)chan) would seemingly be a textual reference to the same sky location for Itzamnaaj. Unfortunately, I know of no scene where Itzamnaaj appears together with GI, despite the close connection between these gods recorded on the Palenque platform.

Classic inscriptions from beyond Palenque indicate that Itzamnaaj was a major player in the establishment of the new era a bit later on 13.0.0.0. The famous description of the "three stones" on Quirigua Stela C, for example, includes a mention of Itzamnaaj as the deity who completes the binding of the three stones of creation.

For many years GI has been understood as a Venus god, an interpretation that is part of a larger view that identifies the Palenque Triad as astronomical entities (Kelley 1965; Lounsbury 1985; Schlak 1996; Milbrath 1999). Several points

of evidence have been used to support this Venus connection, perhaps the first and most influential being the "Nine Wind" birth date of the god with its suggestive connections to Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl, a Venus deity in central Mexico. Also related to this planetary interpretation for GI is the commonly held view that GI and GIII form a pair of deities who correspond to Hunahpu and Xbalanque of the *Popol Vuh*, who in turn are often seen as mythical representations of Venus and the Sun, respectively (Lounsbury 1985; Schele and Miller 1986:48-51).

As noted earlier, GI is named on the Tablet of the Cross and in the Temple XIX platform text as a key player in Palenque's mythological history long before he was "born" as a member of the Triad. Lounsbury considered the existence of a "pre-Triad GI" as evidence for the existence of two separate gods, one a father and presumed spouse of "Lady Egret" (the Triad Progenitor) and the other the Triad member. Perhaps for this reason Dennis Tedlock (1992:252) is explicit in giving the name Hun Hunahpu to this "pre-Triad" GI, whom Lounsbury considered to be the father of the Triad namesake. The initial "one" sign on GI's name seems to have been influential in choosing this parallel, although it must be said that this particular name glyph is widely applied also to the standard Triad member.

Despite having been first recognized in Palenque's texts, subsequent studies revealed that GI is by no means a local Palenque character. He is depicted and mentioned in numerous inscriptions and iconography throughout the Maya region from the beginnings of the Classic period, and he seems to have been a figure of major cosmological importance. Perhaps the earliest known portrait appears on the so-called "Hauberg Stela," dating stylistically to the Early Classic (Figure 126). His visage is a frequent decoration on Early Classic cache vessels from the central lowlands (Hellmuth 1987) (Figure 127), and a notable full-length portrait



Figure 127. GI portrait on an Early Classic cache vessel (from Hellmuth 1987:Fig. 71).

⁵⁰ This monument is said to be a Late Preclassic stela (Schele 1985; Schele, Mathews, and Lounsbury 1990), but I feel on stylistic grounds that it was carved much later and dates no earlier than 8.15.0.0.0. in the Long Count. Lacadena (1995) has presented a similar opinion based on the orthographic conventions apparent in its inscription.

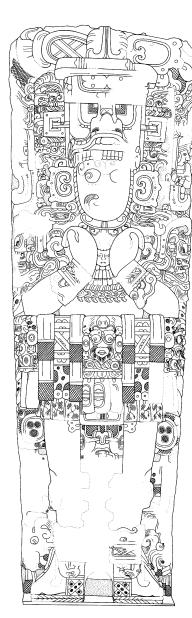
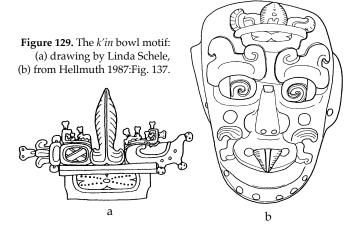


Figure 128. Copan, Stela I, front (drawing by Anne Dowd from Baudez 1994:Fig.2).



appears on Stela I of Copan (Figure 128).

In these and other representations, GI's main features include a Roman nose (his profile superficially resembles that of the solar god, K'inich Ajaw), a prominent round eye with (usually) an upper curl, a large fish fin or "barbel" on the cheek, and a large "shell" ear or ear ornament (Schele 1976).⁵¹ Frequently more elaborate representations of the god show a helmet or emblematic headdress consisting of the "k'in bowl" topped by a three-part grouping of a central stingray spine flanked by a spondylus shell and a crossed-bands floral motif (Figure 129). This is the important iconographic motif named the "Quadripartite Badge" by Robertson (1974), and in many instances it stands alone as a depiction of a type of burner or sacrificial bowl (Taube 1998; D. Stuart 1998), as well as the point of emergence for the "world tree," as depicted in the center of the Tablet of the Cross (not coincidentally, this is the tablet of GI's principal temple).

GI apparently played a significant role in the "era event" on 13.0.0.0.0 4 Ajaw 8 Kumk'u, as related in one of the many important passages in the Tablet of the Cross (Figure 130). Here we find the standard "era phrase" in connection with the Bak'tun ending, beginning with a

⁵¹ Schele (1976) offered an extensive discussion of the iconography of GI at Palenque and other sites, suggesting that GI had a "zoomorphic" form with reptilian features. This zoomorphic GI was later recognized as the Classic-period representation of God B, or Chaak (Schele and Miller 1986:49, 60; Taube 1992:17-26), although it was still considered a variant form of GI according to Schele and others. Presently I doubt there was any common identity between GI and Chaak, for they appear in very different iconographic contexts. They should best be considered separate deities.



possible descent from the sky

and the subsequent dedication

of a temple "in the north"

(drawing by Linda Schele).

Figure 132. Passages from the middle tablet of the Temple of the Inscriptions, describing the presentation of headgear and jewels to GI (left: C5-D7, right: I4-L2) (drawing by Linda Schele).

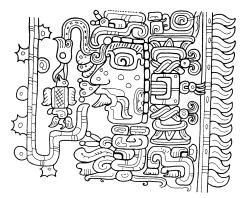


Figure 133. The Solar identity of GI, from an Early Classic cache vessel, provenance unknown. Note the *k'in* element on the deity's cheek. (From Hellmuth 1987:Abb.635.)

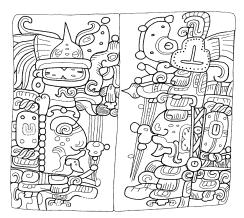


Figure 134. GI and K'inich Ajaw on an Early Classic cache vessel (K773) (from Hellmuth 1987:Abb.636).



Figure 135. Jade earspool with Starry Deer Crocodile, perhaps from Río Azul, Guatemala (drawing by David Stuart after Townsend 1983:No. 56).

verb displaying a sign with an X-like form and perhaps reading **JEL**, "to change-over." The location, as is customary in such records, is *ti'* chan *Yax* ..?.. *Nal*, "(at) the sky's edge, the First Hearth Place." An important glyph then follows, possibly reading **EM-TA-CHAN-na**, for "descends from the sky," and then the name of GI. The passage goes on to record the dedication of a GI temple "in the north" on the day 13.0.1.9.2 13 Ik' End of Mol, just over a year after the day of creation itself.

Another association between GI and creation mythology comes from the Vase of the Seven Gods (Kerr no. 2796; Coe 1973:109), which depicts GI among several other deities who are "aligned" (tz'ahk-aj) on this origin date. His involvement is also recorded in an important early inscription on the back of a greenstone mask (Figure 131), where his portrait name glyph appears in direct connection with the creation day 4 Ajaw and an event occurring once more at the "sky's edge, the First Hearth Place." The verb glyph in this text is quite unusual, but its single appearance otherwise as Glyph D in the Lunar Series leads me to think that the occasion is GI's "arrival" (hul) at this mythic location.

Some important symbolic associations of GI are indicated in the text on the central tablet of the Temple of the Inscriptions (Figure 132). In a lengthy section describing the rituals surrounding the K'atun endings in the reign of K'inich Janab Pakal, we read of the presentation of jewels and clothing to effigies of GI and the other Triad gods (Macri 1988:117-120, 1997:91-92). The gifts to the gods are sometimes simply written **U-PIK**, which I take to be *u-pik*, "its skirt, dressings." For the Period Ending 9.11.0.0.0, the inscription (C5-D7) states that the king "gives the 'k'in bowl;' it is his

⁵² The main logogram has been read as *pi(h)*, "bundle," by Schele and Grube (1992), but I prefer **PIK** in all of the contexts they mention. The variants used in this Palenque inscription are identical to signs for the Bak'tun period, which are in turn replaced by the signs **pi-ki** in spellings at Caracol and Copan. I therefore take the Bak'tun sign to be logographic **PIK** or syllabic **pi**. *Pik* is the widespread Mayan term for counting units of 8,000, and on bundles it serves just this role. A glyphic label **3-PIK**, for example, records the total of 24,000 cacao beans held within the bundle.

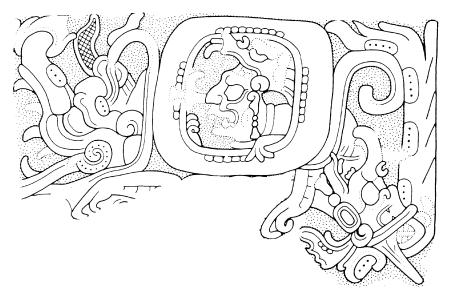


Figure 136. The sun within the womb or stomach of the Starry Deer Crocodile, on Yaxchilan HS3, Step III (drawing by Ian Graham from Graham 1982:169).

helmet; many are the dressings of GI." For the following K'atun (I4-J9), Pakal "gives the??; many are the wrappings of his white paper necklace; the Green Fire? are his earspools; the Green 'k'in bowl' is the helmet of GI." All of the Triad gods' adornments here have similar specific names or designations, providing what amounts to descriptions of the proper iconographic program for each. Here the accoutrements of GI appear the same as those found especially in his Early Classic portraits.

GI's *k'in* bowl helmet indicates his important solar connections, but we can cite certain other associations he has with K'inich Ajaw. Significantly, the facial profile of GI bears a strong resemblence to the standard sun god, as many writers have noticed. Details of the eye and other facial features mark GI as a separate entity in some fundamental way, yet he must have had some conceptual link to the sun, for he is portrayed on an Early Classic cache vessel with a small *k'in* sign on his cheek (Figure 133), as Hellmuth (1987:284) points out. Another cache vessel shows a pairing of GI and K'inich Ajaw in a composition clearly designed to suggest some intimate connection between them (Figure 134).

The *k'in* bowl motif is of course found also as the back end of the Starry Deer Crocodile and other representations of the "Cosmic Serpent" (see Figure 45). From its inverted form spills divine liquid, incorporating symbols of blood and water that sustain the cosmos. In these representations the *k'in* bowl often has a skull beneath it, precisely as we see shown *en face* on the Tablet of the Cross and the Sarcophagus lid at Palenque. This does not form a second rear head for the creature, but rather "attaches" to the backside of the crocodile as some sort of emblematic device. In one revealing example (Figure 135), the *k'in* bowl represents the anus or vagina of the Starry Deer Crocodile, and thus seems to serve as a symbol for the rear orifice of the creature.

How GI is connected to this iconographic pattern is unclear, yet some hieroglyphic evidence may help unravel part of the mystery. The k'in bowl is a common hieroglyphic sign for

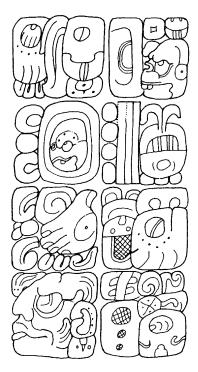


Figure 137. Passage from the west tablet of the Temple of the Inscriptions, O9-P12 (drawing by Linda Schele).

EL, used in the spelling of the "east" glyph, **EL-K'IN**. The word el means "rise, come out." One can naturally wonder, therefore, if perhaps the k'in bowl itself was somehow considered a "vessel" for the rising sun in the east. As Tate (1992:66) notes, representations of the crocodile regularly orient the rear end with the k'in bowl toward the east. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the Starry Deer Crocodile likely served as a symbol for the night or underworld sky, and I believe an argument can be made that the k'in bowl was its "anus," whence the sun would daily rise in the east. Representations of the solar cartouche within the crocodile's body (Figure 136) strongly suggest that the sun was "consumed" by the crocodile during its nightly course beneath the earth and defecated or reborn each morning.

GI is also clearly a deity of the water. Visually his face seems to be strongly related to fish, and perhaps the so-called "xok" fish in particular. The fin-like protrusions from his cheeks and the round eye with its upper curl seem to have visual parallels with the "xok" entity, which itself remains highly enigmatic as a sort of stylized shark or mythical fish.⁵³ Kelly's original recognition of GI's birth on the day "Nine Wind" and the connection this suggests to Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl (Kelley 1965) may offer additional support for GI's associations with an aquatic environment. Among the Mexica Aztec, Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl was a wind deity with strong visual associations with ducks and perhaps other waterfowl (O'Mack 1991). GI was also a water bird—a cormorant, perhaps—in at least one of his important visual aspects, and this stands as the deity's defining characteristic in the impersonation headdress worn by the king on the south face of the platform. Such parallels, while intriguing, hold little explanatory power by themselves. As we have seen, it is difficult to draw close parallels between specific deities or supernatural characters in the Maya and Central Mexican religions, yet it seems entirely possible that GI and Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl could both be reflections of an old idea or character from Preclassic mythology, and thereby share a common cultural origin.

The water associations of GI are cited also in a fascinating passage from the west tablet of the Temple of the Inscriptions (Figure 137) that records an early event

⁵³ For more in-depth, so to speak, discussions of the *xok* fish, see the studies by Jones (1985, 1991) and especially the important paper on resurrection iconography by Quenon and Le Fort (1997).

largely ignored before now in the study of Palenque's mythology. The date of the passage is 13.4.12.3.6 1 Kimi 19 Pax, falling some nine decades after the "era" event on 4 Ajaw 8 Kumk'u. The inscription first cites a date in historical time, 9.12.3.3.6 7 Kimi 19 Keh, associated with some sort of "arrival" (hul), and quickly shifts the narrative back in time with a Distance Number of 9.7.11.3.0, or approximately 3,700 years. (The juxtaposition of "1 Kimi" and "7 Kimi" suggests the related calendar names of the two important Underworld gods of the Popol Vuh, "One Death" and "Seven Death.") The early event concerns the death god, and the verb is ?-ji-ya yo-OHL-la, ..?..-(a)j-iiy y-ohl, "'x'-ed is his heart." The same text earlier cites several events readable as tim-ohl, "to satisfy," and it is possible that this event concerning the death god employs a logographic form of TIM, "to swell, inflate" (cf. Yucatec tem-ol). At any rate, the most interesting and readable passage states ya-YAL-ji-ya tu-U-k'a-ba "GI" TA-?-K'AHK'-NAHB, yahl-(a)j-iiy t-u-k'ab "GI" ta-?-k'ahk'nahb, "he/it was thrown from the hand of GI into the center(?) of the sea." The nature of the event is difficult to understand beyond this evocative description, but it again points to the intimate connection of GI with primordial waters and the ocean.

Even the mythological place of Matwil, the stated locale of the GI's supernatural birth, seems to have close associations with water and the sea in particular. The etymology of the name is probably derived ultimately from the noun *mat*, meaning "cormorant," merganser, or some other type of water bird. In the iconography of the Temple of the Foliated Cross, the Matwil place glyph can be seen to adorn at least three images of large conch shells (Figure 138), arguably serving as explicit toponymic labels for the shells, which seem to serve as places of divine origin and emergence. The seashell would be a fitting place for the birth of GI and his divine siblings.

There also seem to be important connections between GI and women in the art of the Classic period, although the nature of these associations is difficult to understand. Women's portraits often show a prominent "Quadripartite Badge" in the headgear, much as GI wears in several of his representations. Many writers have also remarked on the prominence of

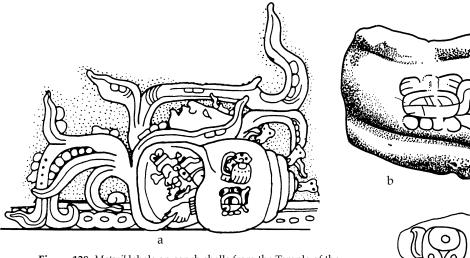


Figure 138. *Matwil* labels on conch shells from the Temple of the Foliated Cross: (a) main tablet (drawing by Linda Schele), (b-c) stucco ornaments from the façade (drawings by David Stuart, after Schele and Mathews 1979:Nos.305-306).

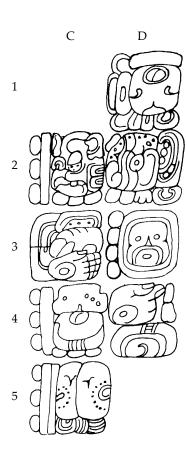


Figure 139. Tablet of the Cross, D1-C5 (drawing by Linda Schele).

xok creatures in the decorations of female ritual costumes (e.g., J. Miller 1974). These, in turn, have strong associations with xok symbolism found on some representations of the tonsured maize god (Taube 1985), but again it is hard to know in what way GI relates to those entities. Perhaps the appearance of the k'in bowl in women's costume derives from its importance in the iconography of the "Starry Deer Crocodile" and its relatives, described above, where the k'in bowl may symbolize in some way the point of solar rebirth and emergence.

Given GI's connections to the sun and his apparent associations with the eastern point of solar rebirth (the *k'in* bowl), we might speculate that he was considered a watery aspect of the sun before its emergence from the underworld. As a protagonist in creation mythology, it is possible that GI was a kind of "proto-sun" that existed before the ordering of the world and the appearance of K'inich Ajaw in a more current cosmological order. I offer this interpretation only very tentatively, however.

Are There One or Two GIs?

The chronology of the Cross Tablet has long presented problems for epigraphers. The interpretations have been discussed in several venues for over a century, but new evidence from the Temple XIX texts offers some indirect evidence that might move us toward a final resolution of the long posed and much debated questions.

The discussions by Lounsbury (1980) and others have centered on one particularly troubling passage near the beginning of the tablet (Figure 139). A Distance Number at D1 and C2 records the interval 8.5.0 and precedes a "birth" event at D2 marked in the past tense (*sih-aj-iiy*). The tense marker on the birth verb would suggest it is the earlier of two linked events, or the beginning point of the temporal reckoning. A second verb or event comes at C3, apparently a version of an event found in other Palenque inscriptions showing a deer hoof sign—probably read MAY—above a human hand. This in turn precedes a notation of the date 4 Ajaw 8 Kumk'u, or 13.0.0.0.0, which Lounsbury and others have taken to be the end-point of the calculation.

The question surrounding this passage centers on the Distance Number. The Cross Tablet opens in the immediately preceding glyphs with a record of the birth of the mythical figure I call the "Triad Progenitor," and it seems natural to see the birth at D2 to be a repetition of this event

("it was so much time from the birth"). However, if we add the Distance Number to the established birth date, we do not reach 4 Ajaw 8 Kumk'u. Instead, the calculation gives:

The resulting date is not recorded in the Cross text. Lounsbury, however, followed earlier analysts (e.g., Goodman 1897) in stressing that 4 Ajaw 8 Kumk'u was the end point of the calculation, resulting in an unexpressed earlier date:

This scheme necessitates the existence of two birth episodes, begging the question asked by Lounsbury (1980:103), "Whose birth?" Because the next cited protagonist on the Cross inscription is GI (at C8 and D8), Lounsbury surmised that the implied birth event pertained to an earlier GI, or "GI'," who shared the name of the more familiar Triad member. He suggested that the first GI, seemingly born on 12.19.11.13.0, was the spouse of "Lady Beastie," whom I here call the Triad Progenitor. It seemed natural to propose that this couple were the mythic parents of the Palenque Triad. As Schele and Freidel (1990:244-245) summarize this widely accepted interpretation,

The First Mother was Lady Beastie [who was] the mother of the gods and the Creatrix in the Maya version of the cosmos. ...[T]he Palencanos saw her operate in their lives through her spirit counterpart, the moon. Her husband and the father of her children is called GI' (G-one-prime) by modern scholars. He established the order of time and space just after the fourth version of the cosmos was created on 4 Ahau 8 Cumku. Both the Creatrix and her husband were born during the previous manifestation of creation, but their children were born 754 years into this one.

Despite standing today as the standard version of Palenque mythology, this story is beset with questionable readings. We must look more carefully at the Tablet of the Cross inscription and its troubling passage to begin to see where the problematic issues lie.

Lounsbury's suggestion that we have two separate birth events—and therefore two deities named GI—seems an excessively complex reading of the passage. The date 4 Ajaw 8 Kumk'u, at D3 and C4, need not be linked with the "deer hoof" event, as Lounsbury and others long assumed must be the case. It is equally plausible that the date for the deer hoof episode was left unexpressed, and that the Distance Number is in fact reckoned from the opening birth event of the inscription. This, after all, seems the natural way to approach the birth glyph at D2 if one were unaware of the supposed ambiguities soon to come. The first calculation given above, leading to an unexpressed date 13.0.1.9.0 11 Ajaw 18 Mol, may well be the correct date for the deer hoof event. The "era" date has its own verbal statement at D4 and C5, "13 Bak'tuns are finished."

Support for this revision comes from other citations of the deer hoof (*k'al mayij*) event in Palenque's inscriptions (see Figures 30 and 119). In the text of the Palace Tablet, we find it cited as an early ritual event associated with the seven-year-old K'inich K'an Joy Chitam.

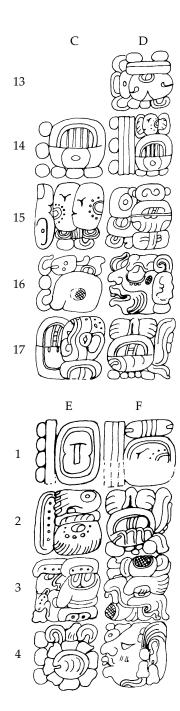


Figure 140. The record of GI's birth on the Tablet of the Cross, D13-F4 (drawing by Linda Schele).

On the jambs of Temple XVIII, as we have seen, it is also a youth event involving the young K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb, who was about six years old at the time. In each instance these events are reckoned from a birth event, precisely as we find in the Tablet of the Cross. The natural conclusion is that the Tablet of the Cross records a similar deer hoof event for the eight-year-old Triad Progenitor. Logically, then, GI, or a predecessor with the same name, need not be a participant in this event.

No matter how we interpret this passage from the Tablet of the Cross, we are still faced with the conundrum that GI existed centuries before his stated birth. So much is clear from reading the south face of the Temple XIX platform, which states that the god's accession to rulership occurred roughly two centuries before his supposed birth. Let us review the major events involving him, as they are recorded at Palenque:

- GI assumed rulership "in the heavens" on 12.10.1.13.2 9 Ik' 5 Mol under the auspices of Yax Naah Itzamnaaj. Any previous birth event of this GI remains unknown.
- GI seems to be a major participant in a sacrificial beheading or "axing" of the cosmological entity called the "Starry Deer Crocodile," or two aspects of this creature, on 12.10.12.14.18 1 Etz'nab 6 Yaxk'in.
- The Triad Progenitor ("Lady Beastie") was born significantly later, on 12.19.13.4.0 8 Ajaw 18 Tzek, and then participated in a "deer hoof" ceremony when eight years old.
- GI is cited as a participant in a house dedication event in the "north" on 13.0.1.9.2 13 Ik' End of Mol.
- GI is the protagonist of an event described on the west tablet of the Temple of the Inscriptions, where the death god "was thrown into the center of the sea from the hand of GI." This occurred on 13.4.12.3.6 1 Kimi 19 Pax.
- GI, now as a member of the Palenque Triad, is "born" on 1.18.5.3.2 9 Ik' 15 Keh, apparently as a "creation" of the Triad Progenitor.

That GI's birth closes this chain of events would seem to support Lounsbury's contention that there existed two GIs. But there is no reason why we must consider the "ruling" GI cited in the opening passage of the platform and the first-born

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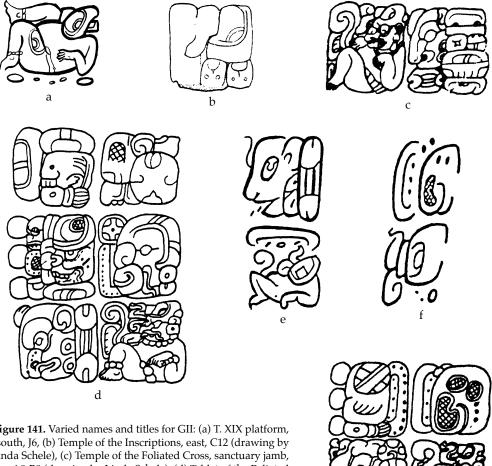


Figure 141. Varied names and titles for GII: (a) T. XIX platform, south, J6, (b) Temple of the Inscriptions, east, C12 (drawing by Linda Schele), (c) Temple of the Foliated Cross, sanctuary jamb, A9-B9 (drawing by Linda Schele), (d) Tablet of the Foliated Cross, A17-D2 (drawing by Linda Schele), (e) Comalcalco, shell pendant 8B (drawing by Marc Zender), (f) Comalcalco, Urn 26, Spine 2, 13-14 (drawing by Marc Zender), (g) Tablet of the Foliated Cross, L3-M4 (drawing by Linda Schele).

of the Triad to be separate entities. The identical forms of the name and shared importance of the day 9 Ik' suggest that they are the same character, or in some way "aspects" of a single deity. The essential sameness of the two is perhaps best seen in a passage from the Tablet of the Cross, where GI's birth is recorded at C17 through F4 (Figure 140). There, we read (starting at the bottom of columns C and D) "he arrives at Matwil (on) 9 Ik' 15 Keh. He touches(?) the earth at Matwil..." But throughout this passage we do not find GI's name. As is customary in Classic Mayan syntax—especially in this inscription—the subject's name has been omitted because is it understood from a citation of the previous episode, where GI is named at C16-D16. The subject of that earlier event is the "pre-born" GI, yet this god is equated syntactically with the deity who is born eight centuries later.

I suggest, therefore, that the creation of the Triad gods entailed a "rebirth" of a previously existing GI into a new, more localized order of existence. The GI who took office under Itzamnaaj "in the sky" seems a deity of wide cosmological significance, whereas the GI of the Palenque Triad seems a far more limited aspect of the god, intimately tied to the Palenque

dynasty. "Lady Beastie" or the Triad Progenitor, it will be remembered, is the first character of the narrative to carry a local Palenque Emblem Glyph. Yet it is interesting that the underlying message of the Temple XIX platform is that the new Palenque ruler is a re-embodiment of GI in his earliest phase, before the Triad existed.

Notes on GII and GIII

GII is clearly a youthful aspect of K'awil, or God K. The iconic name glyph (Figure 141) is nearly always given in the distinctive full-figure pose reserved for infants in Maya art, and the sense it conveys is simply "the baby K'awil." This indeed is the direct translation of his name, as revealed by an important spelling from nearby Comalcalco (Figure 141f), where we find mention of a god called **u-'ne K'AWIL**, *Unen K'awil*, "Baby K'awil" (Marc Zender, personal communication 2000; Martin 2002). On some occasions his name is accompanied by the **ch'o-ko** glyph, for *ch'ok*, "child, youth" (Figure 141c-e). His extended name phrase from the Tablet of the Foliated Cross (Figure 141d) provides a few interesting descriptive statements about GII, including the enigmatic phrase ?-YAX-MUT-ti k'a-wi-NAL?, "the ..?.. new bird K'awil place(?)," possibly a toponym associated with his birth. A more personal description comes next with 3-a-ha-li K'UH, for *Ux Ahil K'uh*, "the third created god," properly marking his place in the sequence of Triad births.

Portraits of GII adorn the four middle piers of the Temple of the Inscriptions, where he is depicted as an infant deity cradled in the arms of standing figures. These are probably four early rulers of Palenque—ancestors of K'inich Janab Pakal—as strongly suggested by the clear Kan Bahlam headdress worn by one of them (Robertson 1979, 1983:46).

In a passage from the sanctuary jamb of the Temple of the Foliated Cross (Figure 141c) his title is **ch'o-ko NAAH-5-CHAN-na-AJAW**, or *ch'ok Naahho'chan ajaw*, the "young lord of Naahho'chan." Naahho'chan is an important supernatural location, often associated with the "Paddler" gods, among other deities. It is also cited as an important location in the 13.0.0.0.0 creation event, as recorded on Stela C at Quirigua (Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:67). I believe it is probably the specific name of an important supernatural mountain from Classic Maya mythology, since we find on one important vessel (K688) a mention of *Naahho'chan Witz xaman*, "Naahho'chan Mountain, in the north," seemingly a place of rebirth. This generative aspect of the location is in all likelihood related to GII being the infant aspect of K'awil.

Also in this god's temple, the Temple of the Foliated Cross, we find a very important yet puzzling reference to GII as an infant aspect of the Jaguar God of the Underworld (Figure 141g). Blocks L3-M4 of the tablet's main inscription hold a slightly elaborated name phrase for GII, introduced by the Triad title. Following this we again find **u-**2**ne** (*unen*) and, curiously, the portrait head of the Jaguar God, or "the infant 'Jaguar God'." GII's portrait name then closes the passage. I take the combination to indicate that GII was in some way an aspect also of the Jaguar God of the Underworld, who may have been the Classic Maya deity of fire (D. Stuart 1998). There is also considerable evidence to suggest that this jaguar god was

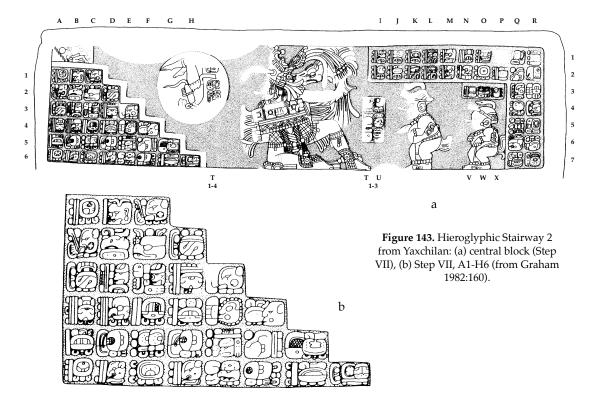
⁵⁴ Stela 9 from Lamanai (Reents-Budet 1988) (Figure 48) clearly alludes to the same "infant Jaguar God." A small portrait of the jaguar deity emerges from the serpent bar held by the ruler; above the god's head is a "name medallion" bearing the glyph **u-ne**, for *unen*. Both of these are no doubt related also to the sacrificed jaguar baby depicted on codex style vessels and discussed earlier in relation to the crocodile's "hole" mentioned in Passage S-2. Martin (2002) has a recent important discussion of the jaguar baby character in the script and iconography.



an important manifestation of the moon (Milbrath 1999:120-138). It is tempting to relate the "infant Jaguar God" cited at Palenque to certain jaguar baby images in Early Classic texts and iconography at Tikal (Martin 2002), although I am at a loss to explain what their precise connections might be.

The name of GIII, the slightly older sibling of GII, takes a more consistent form. It always displays the title **K'INICH**, indicating that, like many Palenque rulers, he was considered some aspect of the sun (Schele and Miller 1986:50) (Figure 142). This basic identity of the god is revealed by a single reference from the Temple of the Inscriptions, where his customary name is replaced simply by the generic-sounding moniker K'inich Ajaw, "the Sun Lord" (Figure 142b). Otherwise his standard name has three components after the honorific solar prefix: a profile face in a cartouche, a "checkerboard" sign, and -wa. Lounsbury (1985) considered that these signs served to spell the widespread name of the Underworld, *Xibalba*, but this seems unlikely, since the readings of the head and the checkerboard—both very rare signs—are far from secure. In fact the name glyph of GIII remains undeciphered.

The iconographic identity of GIII has been extended to include various jaguar deities, including the Jaguar God of the Underworld (Schele and Miller 1986:50-51), but in point of fact we have no deity portrait connecting directly to the hieroglyphic name. The supposed connections of GIII to jaguars derived from several indirect lines of evidence, including the



presumed connection between GIII and the central "jaguar-shield" image of the Tablet of the Sun, as well as occasional juxtapositions of GI and the Jaguar God of the Underworld in pairings once thought to be associated with the Hero Twins. In one reference from the Temple of the Inscriptions (Figure 142c), GIII bears the now-familiar title *yajaw k'ahk'*, "Lord of Fire," which seems relevant given the close association of the Jaguar God of the Underworld with fire-related iconography and ritual burning (see D. Stuart 1998a).

Probably the clearest association of jaguar symbolism with GIII comes from a part of his extended name phrase on the Tablet of the Sun (Figure 142d), where the god is named with the "Sun Bellied" jaguar of sacrifice that is depicted as a way, or animal spirit, on a few codex style ceramics from the Calakmul and Nakbe regions (Grube and Nahm 1994). But this striding jaguar is probably not simply an "aspect" or "manifestation" of GIII. His name seems a part of the larger descriptive terms for GIII that include several sun-related references. The location of the birth of the Triad god is *K'inich Taj Wayib*, the "Great Sun Torch Shrine" (at D1), and one name is based on the Xiuhcoatl-like square-nosed serpent prefixed by *K'ahk' ti'*, "Fire is its mouth." GIII thus is a solar deity, but beyond this general identity it is hard to pin him down as a specific iconographic figure. Perhaps GIII was a special localized form of the sun god, K'inich Ajaw, with a name that somehow reflected Palenque's own understanding of the deity.

The "Axe" Event

One key to understanding the larger narrative story concerning creation and the births of the Triad is the second episode of the platform's main inscription (see Figure 39), where we read of the decapitation of two crocodiles (or perhaps two aspects of one crocodile). GI is named

at the end of the passage and seems to be a principal agent in the event, if not the one who conducted the actual sacrifice. This event occurs, not coincidentally, on the day 1 Etz'nab, or what the Mesoamericans of highland Mexico would have called "One Flint-Knife." I suggest that the sacrificial event reflects a Classic Maya understanding of a familiar episode known from later sources of Mesoamerican creation mythology, involving the sacrifice of a large reptile, sometimes called Cipactli in the Central Mexican sources. If true, this one passage from the platform inscription stands as a remarkable indicator of the persistence and antiquity of pan-Mesoamerican myths and religious narratives.

The main verb of the passage in question is based on the root ch'ak-baah, "head chop," and in other settings this has been interpreted as little more than a reference to warfare and conquest. At times this word can indeed refer to the ritual decapitation of war captives (Orejel 1990), as in the case of the sacrifice of the Copan ruler Waxaklajun Ubaah K'awil (also known as 18 Rabbit) by the king of neighboring Quirigua. But even there ch'ak-baah is an event with decidedly mythological connotations, best understood as a matter of underworld reenactment.⁵⁵ In texts from Yaxchilan and elsewhere, ch'ak-baah plays a key role in the narrative of creation mythology, much like we find in Temple XIX. The important text accompanying the ballgame scene on the central block of Hieroglyphic Stairway 2 at Yaxchilan (Figure 143) recounts three such events, all using chak-baah verb glyphs identical to that from Passage S-2, that fall well within mythological time. The three sacrifices recorded in this text are separated by extremely long time periods, yet the precise placement of each date in the "preera" Long Count is difficult to know. 56 The three sacrifices are presented as a clear sequence, each accompanied by an ordinal number ("first, second, third") before a sequence spelling a-ha-li, for ah-al or ah-il. This term has been interpreted as meaning "conquest," based on an attested Ch'olti' term, but Schele and Freidel (1991) offer "creation" as an alternative. The latter interpretation could hold more merit, based as it is on a widespread root aj for "awaken." As Schele and Freidel (1991:302) note, this ah-al or ah-il glyph has strong associations with ritual ballcourts, which were themselves locales for the sacrifice and possible decapitation of prisoners (see Miller and Houston 1987). The Yaxchilan step is an important example of this association between war, sacrifice, and the ballgame, yet the mythological context underlying these themes could not be more explicit. Captive sacrifices in such "courts of creation" were clear reenactments of cosmological "awakenings."

As we have just seen, the birth of GII of the Palenque Triad is described as *ux ahil*, the "third awakening," and appropriately he is the third-born of the Triad. Birth, creation, and "awakenings" all therefore seem to be interrelated concepts in these narratives. The first, second, and third "awakenings" (*ahil*) at Yaxchilan, each brought on by the sacrifice of a different individual, thus probably refer in some way to distinct phases of world creation, or separate creations in their own right. Certainly the idea of previous creations ending through cycles of destruction is a widespread one in Mesoamerica (see Gossen 1986).

Such patterns of usage involving *ch'ak-baah* events help us to frame the larger significance of the crocodile sacrifice (or sacrifices) recorded in Temple XIX. This too was an act involving world creation, and GI was the principal actor involved. It seems to be a Classic

⁵⁵ The Copan king's sacrifice is recorded in one Quirigua text as having taken place in an underworld place, the so-called "Black Hole," suggesting a macabre role-playing by the old ruler at the time of his death (D. Stuart 1992:176).

 $^{^{56}}$ The three Calendar Round dates on the step, with their intervals, are: 13 Manik' 5 Pax + 5.19.0.17 = 9 Kan 12 Xul + 3.8.10.14.*16 = 1 Ajaw 13 Xul.

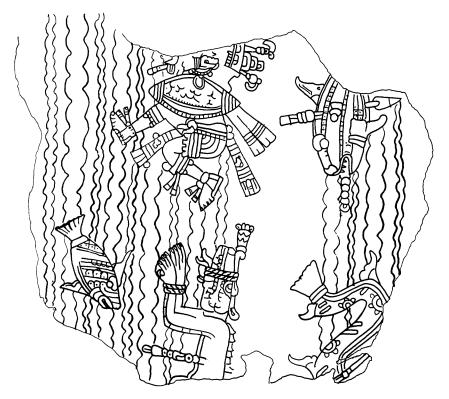


Figure 144. Painting from Mayapan depicting the sacrifice of Itzam Cab Ain (drawing by Karl Taube).

Maya variation on a widespread and surely old story, where a primordial watery creature is killed in order to create the surface of the world.⁵⁷ One such narrative is related in the Books of Chilam Balam from Yucatan, where we read of the great reptilian Itzam Cab Ain:

[Ah Mesencab] turned the sky and the Peten upside down, and Bolon ti Ku raised up Itzam Cab Ain; there was a great cataclysm, and the ages ended with a flood. The 18 Bak Katun was being counted and in its seventeenth part. Bolon ti Ku refused to permit Itzam Cab Ain to take the Peten and to destroy the things of the world, so he cut the throat of Itzam Cab Ain and with his body formed the surface of the Peten. (Craine and Reindorp 1979:117-118)⁵⁸

Itzam Cab Ain is, as Taube (1989) has shown, the Yucatec name for the crocodile so widely depicted in Classic art, including its Starry Deer-Crocodile aspect mentioned at Palenque. This story is of course a variation on a similar narrative well known from Central Mexican mythology, wherein Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca kill the Earth Monster (a

⁵⁷ I would like to acknowledge the fine work of Erik Velásquez García (2002, personal communication 2003) in bringing many of these mythological sources together and independently relating them to the sacrifice event in the Temple XIX narrative.

⁵⁸ The passage from the *Tizimin* which describes the sacrifice (Edmonson 1982:41) reads *ca ix xot i u cal Ytzam Kab Ain ca u ch'aah u petenil u pach*, which Edmonson translates as "and then will be cut the throat of Itzam Kab Ain, who bears the country on his back." In Yucatec, *xot* is "cut, slice," and *cal (kal)* is "throat, neck" (Bricker, Po'ot Yah, and Dzul de Po'ot 1998). The *Tizimin* passage could therefore just as easily describe a complete beheading as a throat cutting.

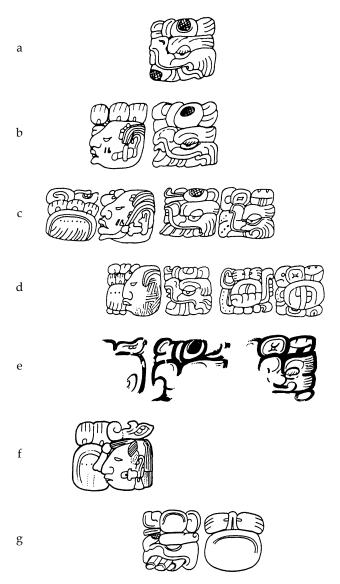


Figure 145. Name variants of the Triad Progenitor: (a) Tablet of the Cross, F8, (b) Tablet of the Cross, B17-C1, (c) Tablet of the Sun, C12-D13, (d) Tablet of the Foliated Cross, C10-D11, (e) Palace, House E paintings, (f) Palace, House D, Pier E, (g) Palace, House A façade (drawings a-d by Linda Schele).

zoomorphic aspect of Tlaltecuhtli) and create the earth from his dismembered body parts (Taube 1993:69-70). Karl Taube (personal communication 2003) has recently pointed out to me a clear representation of this event in a Late Postclassic mural excavated at Mayapan in Structure Q. 95 (Barrera Rubio and Peraza Lupe 2001) (Figure 144). The crocodile has been speared rather than decapitated, and the human figure above the reptile displays the distinctive shell pectoral of Quetzalcoatl. If we assume GI is indeed the actor behind the crocodile sacrifice recorded in Temple XIX, we can point to another strong parallel between these two deities so removed from one another in time and space.

Several glyphs from the Temple XIX passage add important information to this story, but as we have seen in Chapter 3 they are difficult to decipher in many respects. The possible

mention of *u ch'ich'el*, "its blood" (presumably that of the crocodile) gives emphasis to the sacrificial nature of the event, as does the use of a verb possibly signifying something like "thrice flowed" (at F4). Possibly in this ancient version of the story it was the blood spilled from the sacrifice, rather than the body, that was the special creative substance from the reptile. The emphasis on "three" with this blood event also reminds us of the triadic structure of the decapitation events recorded at Yaxchilan. I would think it very likely that here it serves to anticipate if not directly cause the birth and "creation" (*ch'ab*) of the Triad by the Triad Progenitor, as in the next passage of the text.

The Name and Identity of the Triad Progenitor

A key figure in the mythical narrative is, of course, the Triad Progenitor, born before the current era and apparently the creator of the Palenque Triad. The various forms of the name of the Triad Progenitor were first treated together by Lounsbury (1976:218), who referred to this figure variously as "Lady Beast-with-the-Upturned-Snout," "Lady Methuselah," or simply as the "mythological ancestress." In later writings, as we have seen, Schele opted for the amusing label "Lady Beastie." I use here the more neutral and functional term "Triad Progenitor," for as comments to come will clarify there is strong evidence suggesting that this deity is not a female character, but rather an aspect of the maize god. Some time has passed since the last significant discussion of this all-important character, and a review of its identity and role in Palenque's mythology seems necessary.

As we see in Figure 145, the form of the name varies in some details, yet its second part regularly shows the "bird-with-the-upturned-snout" beneath a regular superfix. In six of the nine examples of the name, the bird collocation follows a human profile that, in turn, comes after a grouping that includes the superfix depicting young maize, read **NAL**. It is difficult to know why this first portion of the name, before the bird, was optional, but there is no question that these all refer to the same individual.

The initial portion of the full name has as its main element (beneath the **NAL**) a rare sign known from only a few other contexts in Maya inscriptions. It can be graphically abbreviated simply by showing its upper three-part section in combination with other signs, usually a head sign that follows it. Schele and Grube (1990) entertain a reading of **HEM** (cf. Yuk. hem, "valley") for this sign, presumably based on the similarity of the abbreviated form to the attested syllable **je**, but they are in fact quite different signs. The value of this logogram remains unknown, but the appearance of the suffix **-na** in several examples suggests its eventual value will be CV**N**. We can be reasonably confident, however, that the word corresponding to this logogram must stand for some type of location or environment, for in the Dresden Codex we find it given as one of the many possible places for the storm god Chaak. The locational function of the sign is known also from its appearance in a mythical toponym cited at Palenque and Copan, written **5-NICH-TE'-?**, or "Five Flower ..?..," as well as some images in the Dresden Codex (for example, page 69b).⁵⁹

⁵⁹ I have very tentatively entertained a value of **AK** or **AKAN**, "grass, grassland, bajo," for this sign, with admittedly scanty evidence. The initial vowel seems to be indicated by a possessed form (ya-AK?-na) found on an Early Classic shell trumpet in the Perlman collection (Coe 1982). More compelling, perhaps, is the visual form of this logograph with its row of vertical stripes, suggesting a spread of grass as seen from the side. The Dresden representations of Chaak standing knee-high in an identical material also are suggestive of "grassiness." The -NAL may be combined with this to produce **AK-na-NAL**, for *ak(a)n-al*, "grassy" (the spelling would then be structurally similar to **CHAN-na-NAL**, *chan-al*, "heavenly, of the sky").

The human head that follows has long been cited as evidence that this is a female deity, likening it to the IX- prefix ubiquitous on female names—hence the labels "Lady Methuselah" or "Lady Beastie." But this gender identification is now less obvious than it first seemed. One problem comes from the final position of the sign within the first portion of the name, whereas all female names show IX as an initial element. Moreover, there is perhaps an important visual distinction between the profile of the Palenque name and the female head IX or IXIK: while similar in many respects, it bears a distinctive forehead tassel that has more resemblance to the Classic form of the young tonsured maize god identified by Taube (1985). The comparison of the two signs can perhaps be best seen in the text on the sarcophagus of K'inich Janab Pakal (Figure 146), where the profiles of the maize deity and the feminine heads appear to be very different, with the IX- signs displaying hair strands in place of the tassels seen on the corn deity. In a stucco text from House D at Palenque (Figure 147) we see an important version of the Progenitor's name, where the head is without question Taube's "tonsured" maize god with the forehead tassel. The visual clues are clear enough to suggest that previous identifications of the Progenitor as a "mother goddess" are incorrect, and that the name in fact incorporates the word or name for the Classic Maya maize deity.⁶⁰

60 The stucco text from Pier 6 of House D carries only three glyphs, from an original inscription consisting of eighteen (see Robertson 1985:Fig. 239). The initial portion of the Triad Progenitor's name is at A3, and I assume that B3 was the second component, with the bird main sign. The initial glyph of the inscription seems to be a "birth" glyph that combines with K'AHK' and is therefore reminiscent of the name of an important character in early Tikal history, Siyaj K'ahk' (also known as "Smoking Frog") (S. Martin, personal communication 1998; see D. Stuart 2000a). The text on Pier 6 was presumably designed to accompany the sculpted piers of House D on the west face of the Palace and perhaps served as an orienting text for the mythical narrative depicted in those figural scenes. Interestingly, the young maize god is depicted on nearly all of the piers, often holding a hafted axe. It seems conceivable that these are portraits of the Triad Progenitor, shown taking part in segments of Palenque's mythical history that thus far lack any textual explanation. The common image of the wielded axe, and a decapitation scene on Pier F, does seem thematically related to the "axe event" we read of in Episode S-2 of the platform text.





Figure 146. Comparison of the female head sign (IXIK) with the tonsured maize god sign, on the Sarcophagus of Pakal (drawings by Merle Greene Robertson).

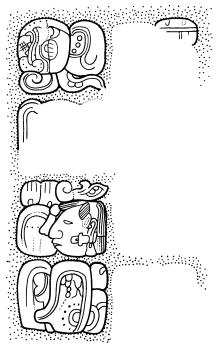


Figure 147. Stucco inscription from Palenque, House D, Pier E.

As for the value of this maize deity head, NAL has been proposed in a few studies (Schele, Mathews, and Lounsbury 1990b; Houston, Stuart, and Taube 1992), but this is now highly doubtful in my view. Perhaps the best counter-evidence is that we already have a NAL "young maize" sign, T87, for which the head never substitutes. Rather, I suggest that we consider the reading IXIM, "maize," for this head, based on a few lines of evidence from other texts. The maize god is clearly a part of selected Primary Standard Sequence (PSS) texts on pottery, where it appears as part of the modifying terms before *kakaw*, "cacao drink." There, it is known to take the prefix i-, seemingly as a phonetic complement to IXIM. In the PSS, the head sign may therefore be used to spell a certain type of cacao drink called IXIM-TE'-le ka-ka-wa, or *iximte'-el kakaw*. *Iximte'* or *iximche'* is a widespread floral name in Mayan languages, usually used to refer to a fruit-bearing medicinal plant known as *Casearia nitida* (see Roys 1931:249).

The remaining portion of the deity's name is its ever-present "core," consisting of an unusual bird with a superfix. The upper element remains elusive to decipherment and little can be said about it, except to mention that it is a very rare sign overall. The birds are, however, far more interesting. We recognize very clearly here the cormorant (MAT) of the Palenque Emblem Glyph, but with the important difference of having feathers stuck in its mouth. On the Temple XIX platform, the names of the Triad Progenitor exhibit a bit more telling detail, showing a bird's foot among the feathers in the mouth. The image seems to be one of a bird eating another smaller bird, the feet and tail feathers of which are visible within the beak. Although a strange image, perhaps, it is nonetheless familiar from the glyph for the month Muwan, where the tail and one rear leg of a bird are clearly visible within the open beak of the larger bird, probably that of a screech owl or hawk. Given the visual connection to MUWAAN, I believe we can confidently posit that the bird of this name is a conflation of the MAT cormorant and the MUWAAN bird. Most importantly, the Temple XIX text displays a never-before-seen sign on the Triad Progenitor's name: the suffix -ni. This provides a key piece of evidence in support of the conflation, for we routinely find the form MUWAAN-ni in the spelling of the fifteenth month. If confirmation were needed, we can turn to the two pairs of stucco glyphs from the roof of Palenque's Palace recorded by Maudslay (Figure 145g). This seems to be a variant of the same deity's name, showing the separate spellings of MUWAAN and ma-ta, the latter of course being a syllabic replacement of the cormorant MAT logogram. Here, then, we have the correct reading order of the two bird names: Muwaan Mat. We are therefore not too far from a more complete understanding of the Triad Progenitor's name. Of the constituent signs, two lack secure readings as yet. If we analyze the complete name, we have the sequence ?-na-NAL-IXIM? ?-MUWAAN-MAT.

The Triad Progenitor is named in the Cross Tablets and on the Temple XIX platform as a creator being, as we know from the use of the important term *ch'ab* to express his or her relationship to the Triad deities. **CH'AB** is now the established reading of the "lancet" element found in some bloodletting expressions and in parentage statements (Schele, Mathews, and Lounsbury 1977). The word is often glossed as "penance" in Mayan languages, and in Yucatec as "to create something out of nothing." In parentage statements such as the one in Passage S-5, the phrase *u-baah u-ch'ab* would seem to indicate that the offspring is the *ch'ab* of the parent. In the *Ritual of the Bacabs*, this term is closely linked to the language of birth and creation (Schele 1993), and given its range of meanings I prefer to translate the term simply as "creation," with the understanding that it is a type of creation specifically concerned with sacrifice in some way, as well as concepts surrounding rites of "penance," at least as so

described in the colonial and modern dictionaries.

The Triad Progenitor appears to be a male creator deity strongly associated with the Classic maize god, although we should understand that gender was a pliable concept among some Mesoamerican supernatural beings. The beaded skirt worn by the maize god is of course also a key element in portraits of women in Classic Maya art (Taube 1998; Quenon and Lefort 1998), as well as male rulers who impersonate the maize deity, as shown on Stela H at Copan. The rites of bloodletting and sacrifice, and their conceptual overlaps with supernatural birth, have long been identified as a running theme in such representations (D. Stuart 1984, 1988), and although some of the evidence remains indirect, I believe the mythical narrative at Palenque suggests that the appearance of the Palenque Triad gods was not a literal "birth," but perhaps rather a creative act performed by the ritual bloodletting of the Progenitor god himself. In the case of GI, this act was a rebirth, a re-creation of an established cosmological deity into a new form and within the three-part structure seemingly necessary for community patrons in the Classic lowlands.

Having the Emblem Glyph title (*K'uhul Matwil Ajaw*), the Triad Progenitor takes on the appearance of a high king, and as the Temple XIX inscriptions seem to indicate, this ancestral god was considered a mythological founder—the "first" dynast, as explicitly stated in Passage S-6. Yet this deity was probably not the initial member in a mythological or semi-historical line of Palenque kings, given the vast period of time between the Triad Progenitor and the stated inauguration of Uk'ix Chan, the first vaguely historical figure of the dynasty, who is recorded in the Tablet of the Cross. Although many historical Palenque rulers are called "Holy Lords of Matwil," the Triad Progenitor seems to have had an intimate association with this watery place of origin and divine birth.

The emphasis on the "first" accession suggests that the Triad Progenitor's ritual act of birth established a ritual charter that was to be followed by later Palenque rulers, who acted as "caretakers" of the Triad. The individual gods of the Triad are repeatedly called the *huntan*, roughly "precious being," of K'inich Kan Bahlam in the texts of the Cross Group temples, using the same term otherwise reserved for the children of mothers. He and other Palenque rulers thus continued to fulfill the role established by this primordial god, a role that no doubt involved concepts of reciprocity and the continuance of a social and political order.

Palenque and the Day "Nine Wind"

Throughout the inscriptions of Temple XIX we have come across a number of mythical and historical dates intentionally related through their common use of the day 9 Ik' in the 260-day calendar. To review the pattern from Temple XIX alone, we have:

9 Ik' 5 Mol seating as ruler of GI

9 Ik' 15 Keh birth of GI

9 Ik' Seating of Sak accession of the Triad Progenitor 9 Ik' 5 K'ayab accession of K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb

These four events were related to one another in order to produce a series of "like-in-kind" analogies. The parallels are made explicit on Temple XIX's platform as well as on other Palenque monuments, particularly with regard to K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb and his evident desire to link his accession with that of the Triad Progenitor.

We find the 9 lk' date associated with two other important events in Palenque's mythology

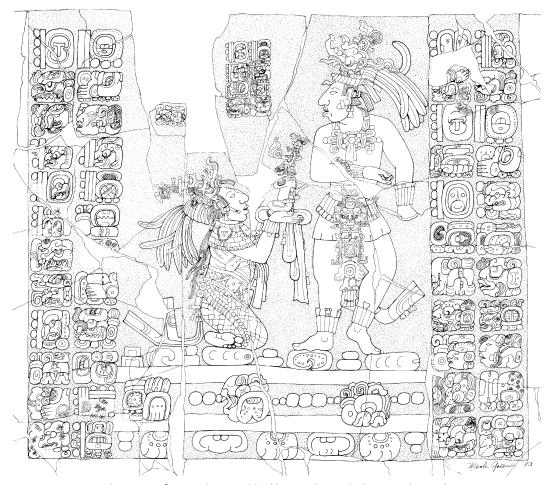


Figure 148. The Temple XIV Tablet (drawing by Merle Greene Roberston).

and history. On the tablet of Temple XIV (Figure 148) the main text opens with the calendar round 9 Ik' 10 Mol, which corresponds to a date in the vast "deep time" of Maya cosmology. A Distance Number of some 946,000 years⁶¹ reckons forward from an event on this 9 Ik' date to a historical date 9.13.13.15.0 9 Ajaw 3 K'ank'in (see Schele 1988:308). The nature of this intriguing event—far earlier in time than the seating of GI—is simply described as the "first K'awil-taking," and it obviously stands as a primordial episode of divine origin.

Another 9 Ik' comes from the tablet of Temple XVII (Figure 149), with its rare scene (for Palenque) of a warrior and a captive. Here the opening date is again retrospective though still historical, falling in the Early Classic on 9.2.15.9.2 9 Ik' End of Yaxk'in. The episode appears to be the establishment of Lakamha', the ritual center of Palenque as constructed around the Río Otolum.⁶² The associated protagonist is the Palenque ruler Butz'aj Sak Chiik

⁶¹ Schele (1988:305) noted that Lounsbury reconstructed the somewhat damaged Distance Number as 5.18.4.7.8.13.18, which I follow here.

 $^{^{62}}$ I say "establishment" because the verb glyph on the Temple XVII tablet, though undeciphered, seems to carry this general sense in other settings. For example, on the Palace Tablet it serves as the verb within the 819-day count record, replacing the more customary wa', "stand-up," event. For now "establish" seems a reasonable reading.



Figure 149. The Temple XVII Tablet (rubbing by Merle Greene Roberston).

(called "Manik" in the earlier literature), and after his name we find a reference to Ahkal Mo' Nahb, the Early Classic ruler who would soon assume the throne. Later in the same text (on fragments discovered redeposited in antiquity in Temple XXI) there is mention of a date 260 days later, on 9.2.16.4.2 9 Ik' 15 Wo, although the verb is missing (the accession of K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb would come exactly 11.14.0.0 later). On the Temple XVII tablet we once more see how 9 Ik' occupies a key role as an elemental date of history and of origin, although now in a real historical context. Evidently the local history of the site, indeed its very founding, was geared or manipulated to reflect important temporal symmetries and patterns. In a very real way ancient Palenque was a city whose religious and political identity hinged on "Nine Wind" and the symbolism it conveyed.