The Search for Five-Flower Mountain: Re-Evaluating the Cancuen Panel

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The Cancuen Panel,[1] a looted glyphic monument that first came to the widespread attention of Maya scholars in the 1990s, is generally believed to have come from the Classic Maya site of Cancuen, located on the Río Pasión in southeastern Petén, though its exact provenance remains unknown. In light of new information about the panel collected during the summer of 2003 in Cobán, Guatemala, this paper explores this important monument from an archaeological, epigraphic, and ethnographic perspective. A new reading for *u-mulaj*, the glyph located at N9 of the monument, raises intriguing questions about the original location of the Cancuen Panel. Considering new ideas about this monument will allow us to understand the history of the Pasíon region more comprehensively and explore connections between the Pasíon region and other regions during the Late Classic period (AD 600-900).

An Overview of the Cancuen Panel

Though Nicholas Hellmuth received two small photographs of the Cancuen Panel in 1981 (Mayer 1995a:41), the panel itself did not surface until 1994 when it was offered for sale in Guatemala City and on the international art market. Today, it is part of a private collection and has been publicly displayed in the Museo El Príncipe Maya in Cobán, Guatemala, since 2000. This museum is recognized as a national museum by the Guatemalan government and is open to the public. During fieldwork in Cobán, I had the opportunity to photograph and measure the panel as well as collect new information about it with the help of various sources.

The panel is made from dense limestone and is composed of 160 glyphs organized into 16 columns and 10 rows (Fig. 1). It measures 138 cm long by 94 cm wide. A more detailed description of the measurements will be presented later in this paper. The panel dates to the late eighth century AD and was commissioned by Cancuen's great king, Tajal Chan Ahk (Guenter 2002:1). It records the site's history from 9.10.18.5.14 (AD 651) until the late eighth century, listing the names of many rulers. It also provides great insight into the rituals performed by Maya kings, since the panel records ritual events associated with accession as well as with building dedication. The panel itself is complete, although its inscription begins in the middle of a sentence. Scholars have suggested that this inscription was originally preceded by another section of text, carved on another monument (Fahsen and Jackson 2003; Guenter 2002).

This monument serves as the primary source for the site's Late Classic history since it is the best-preserved and most complete text,

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[1] Although the origin of this monument is unknown and I suggest herein that it may have originally been used as the back of a hieroglyphic throne rather than a wall panel, I will refer to it as the "Cancuen Panel" throughout this piece in order to remain consistent with other literature published on this important monument (Schele and Grube 1994a and 1994b; Mayer 1995a and 1995b; Guenter 2002; Fahsen and Jackson 2003).

Figure 1. The Cancuen Panel.

though Cancuen has three known stelae and two ballcourt markers (Morley 1938a:237-246; www.cancuenproject.org). A hieroglyphic stairway found in the southern part of Cancuen's palace may have been commissioned by Tajal Chan Ahk and provides birth and accession dates for this great king (Fahsen et al. 2002:712). Another hieroglyphic wall panel found at Cancuen during the 2002 field season appears to have been Tajal Chan Ahk's accession monument and confirms the important dates up until that point in his life (Fahsen et al. 2003:712). These monuments, however, provide little information about the history of Cancuen outside of the reign of Tajal Chan Ahk.

In addition to recording ritual activity, the text on this monument reveals a partial dynastic history for Cancuen from 9.10.18.5.14 (AD 651) to 9.18.8.6.14 (AD 799), skipping over the 85-year period between 9.12.10.0.0 (AD 682) and 9.16.16.4.16 (AD 767) that Stanley Guenter (2002:16) refers to as Cancuen's "Dark Age". Guenter (personal communication, 2003) suggests that at least two kings are missing from this dynastic history. The list begins with the death of a man tentatively known as K'inich K'ap K'ayal Ahk, who, according to Guenter (2002:4), appears to have been an early king of Cancuen, and ends in AD 799 during the reign of Tajal Chan Ahk. The dynastic history shown on the panel is summarized in Table 1 using the information presented in Guenter (2002) and Fahsen and Jackson (2003).

Scholars have suggested that in the Early Classic period (AD 300-900), Cancuen and the nearby site of Machaquila were united as part of another kingdom, Tres Islas, located north of Cancuen on the Río Pasión. Three monuments found at Tres Islas, which date to around AD 475, bear the Cancuen and Machaquila emblem glyphs (Fahsen and Demarest 2001:1000; Fahsen and Jackson 2003:902). Fahsen and Demarest (2001: 1000) state that during the Early Classic, Tres Islas served as the place of residence for what would later become the Cancuen dynasty. Little is known about the dynastic history of this kingdom for almost two centuries between AD 475 and AD 651.

The text of the panel reveals significant information about Cancuen's Late Classic history. Though Cancuen and Machaquila split from Tres Islas at the end of the Early Classic, Cancuen's late history is tied to two other prominent Classic Maya polities: Calakmul and Dos Pilas (Schele and Grube 1994a). Demarest (2003) argues that Cancuen may have been moved from Tres Islas and refounded by Calakmul sometime after AD 650 in order to establish an outpost that could compete with Tikal's powerful outpost, Dos Pilas. The text on the panel supports this idea. The inscription begins with a *yichnal* phrase[3], indicating that some event occurs under the supervision of Yuhknoom Ch'een, king of Calakmul and apparent benefactor of the Cancuen dynasty (Guenter 2002: 2). K'inich K'ap K'ayal Ahk, the first king mentioned on the panel, dies at Calakmul. His suc-

Table 1: Cancuen's Late Classic Kings		
Name	Date of Accession	Date of Death
K'inich K'ap K'ayal Ahk	Unknown	9.11.0.11.1 (AD 653)
K'iib' Ajaw	9.11. 4. 4. 0 (AD 656)	Unknown
Chan Ahk Wi' Taak Chay	9.12. 4. 11. 1 (AD 677)	Unknown
Tajal Chan Ahk	9.16. 6. 9.18 (AD 757)[2]	Unknown

[2] Tajal Chan Ahk's accession date is not included on the panel, but rather comes from Cancuen's hieroglyphic stairway, and is confirmed by a new inscription found at Cancuen in 2002 (Fahsen et. al 2003:711-712).

[3] The first glyph of the panel is missing, though it does appear in early photos of the monument published in Mayer (1995). During my investigations, my sources told me that this glyph was intentionally cut from the panel by a potential buyer in order to conduct Carbon-14 dating of the inscription itself. This story is somewhat questionable since it is impossible to date limestone.

cessor, K'iib' Ajaw, accedes at Calakmul in the company of Yajaw Man, a deity associated with Calakmul (Schele and Grube 1994), and once again under the supervision of Yuhknoom Ch'een (Guenter 2002:8). K'iib' Ajaw travels eastward from Calakmul to a location known as Makan Witz and presumably founds the site of Cancuen in late AD 657.

Cancuen's intimate relationship with Calakmul continues with the accession of its next king, Chan Ahk Wi', also under the supervision of Calakmul's Yuhknoom Ch'een in 9.12.4.11.1 (AD 677). Guenter (2002:12) suggests that although the site of Cancuen had been established by this time, Chan Ahk Wi' most likely traveled to Calakmul to celebrate his accession. The strong connection between Cancuen and Calakmul is further elucidated by the text's mention of Cancuen's celebration of the half *k'atun*-ending that occurs on 9.12.10.0.0 (AD 672). As Guenter (2002: 14) points out, this period-ending was the first calendric festival following the defeat of Tikal by Calakmul and Dos Pilas in AD 679, and for this reason was a time of great celebration for Calakmul and its allies. Celebrations of this period were also highlighted by the city of Dos Pilas, located northwest of Cancuen in the center of the Pasión region. Dos Pilas was freed from Tikal at this time and rose to power as the dominant city in the Pasión region (Guenter 2002:14).

The nature of the relationship between Dos Pilas and Cancuen is also implied in this inscription. The 85-year jump in time between 9.12.10.0.0 (AD 682) and 9.16.16.4.16 (AD 767) corresponds to the period during which Dos Pilas dominated the Pasión region. During this period, Lady GI-K'awiil of Cancuen married Dos Pilas Ruler 3 (Martin and Grube 2000:61). Fahsen and Demarest (2001:1002) suggest that the marriage alliance between Cancuen and Dos Pilas was a necessary step in Dos Pilas's domination of the Pasión valley. Since Cancuen was a vassal polity to Dos Pilas during this period, scribes ignored this era when later recording Cancuen's history (Guenter 2002:16). When K'awiil Chan K'inich of Dos Pilas was defeated in AD 761, this kingdom's dominance of the Pasión region ended and Cancuen experienced a florescence, marked by the implementation of new building programs and

the re-establishment of the Cancuen dynasty.

New Information on the Cancuen Panel

The first study of the Cancuen Panel was published by Schele and Grube (1994a and 1994b) along with Schele's initial sketch of the panel. Schele and Grube were the first to call this monument the "Cancuen Panel". Since this initial analysis, the panel has been the subject of additional studies, including Mayer (1995a), Fahsen and Jackson (2003) and Guenter (2002). Though it is clearly a looted monument, as it was found in the possession of looters, exact dates, locations, and information about the looting of this piece remained unclear in previous analyses of the monument.

My investigations while in Cobán reveal many interesting new possibilities for the history of this monument and also clarify how and when the panel was looted. According to various sources that have asked to remain anonymous, the panel was looted over 35 years ago by members of the Guatemalan military during the civil war. It remained hidden in the looters' possession until it was offered for sale in 1994, at the end of the war era. This idea is quite plausible because many pre-Columbian artifacts were taken from sites in Guatemala by both military and guerilla forces during the war, since they had uninhibited access to remote archaeological sites during this time

The monument was first identified as a panel by Schele and Grube (1994a) and has been referred to as a panel inscription since. It is roughly rectangular, which is the typical shape of panel texts found throughout the Maya lowlands. The inscription on the monument clearly begins in the middle of a sentence, since the verb and subject of the clause are missing. For this reason, it is assumed that the monument is the latter part of a two-part panel series. Scholars have suggested that this inscription is the continuation of another inscription that began on a preceding panel of similar dimensions (Fahsen and Jackson 2003:899; Guenter 2002:1). Fahsen and Jackson (2003:899) posit that the initial panel may contain Cancuen's Early Classic history, since this inscription begins with Cancuen's history in the Late Classic period. It has been suggested that the other panel may be in a private collection somewhere in Guatemala or

may still be at the site of Cancuen, though another idea is that the first panel may have fallen into the Río Pasión during a dispute between looters.

Information collected during fieldwork in Cobán, Guatemala, however, contradicts many existing ideas about the Cancuen Panel. I recognize that this information, which was provided by sources that have asked to remain anonymous, cannot be verified. For this reason, I consider the information that they have provided not as fact, but rather as lines of inquiry to be explored in this paper. According to my sources, this monument is not a panel as scholars have suggested, but rather the back of a hieroglyphic throne. Allegedly, this monument was found with another monument of roughly the same size. The other monument, however, is described as having been much thicker with a hieroglyphic inscription carved around its edge. My sources suggest that the second monument appears to have been the seat to the hieroglyphic throne. The looters lost this seat as they were removing the pieces from the site. According to these sources, a canoe containing both pieces capsized and the monument believed to be the seat of the throne sank to the bottom of a river. They state that the seat was impossible to save because of its thickness and weight.

The owners of the Museo El Príncipe Maya in Cobán graciously allowed me to measure the panel for the first time. No exact measurements of the monument were previously known. The panel is 138 cm long by 94 cm high and is 14 cm thick. The area of the inscription itself is smaller, 127 cm by 68 cm, since the inscription of the panel is sur-

rounded on all four sides by a frame of uncarved limestone. Each glyph measures 8.5 cm by 5.5 cm across. There is 1.5 cm between each glyph, and 1.5 cm between the frame and the inscription itself. The frame varies slightly in size from 4.4 to 6 cm on the top of the panel to approximately 5 cm on each side. The section of the frame on the bottom of the panel, however, extends 26 cm. It is curious that the bottom section of the frame is over three times as large as that of the sides and top, since most Maya monuments exhibit impeccable symmetry. This phenomenon may indicate that perhaps the panel was not used as a wall panel as many scholars have suggested, but rather had some other use, such as the back of a hieroglyphic throne.

Comparison of the measurements of this monument with other panel texts and hieroglyphic thrones from the region proves interesting for exploring its possible use during the Classic period (Table 2). Panel texts have been found at sites throughout the Petén, including Piedras Negras, Site Q, and Dos Pilas. Several of the best-known panel texts come from Piedras Negras. Though there are several panel texts from Piedras Negras, only one, Panel 3, is contemporaneous with the Cancuen Panel. Panel 12 dates to the early occupation of Piedras Negras, around AD 514 (Schele and Miller 1986:149), while Panel 2 dates to AD 667 (Schele and Miller 1986:148). Martin and Grube (2000:149) state that although Panel 3 celebrates an event that occurred in AD 749, the panel was created during the reign of Ruler 7, and may date to as late as AD 795. The center

Table 2: Measurements from Selected Monuments

Monument	Length	Width	Thickness	Date	Source
Cancuen Panel[4]	127 cm	68 cm	14 cm	AD 799	Field Observations
Piedras Negras Panel 2	113 cm	49.5 cm	15 cm	AD 667	Morley 1938b:93
Piedras Negras Panel 3	126 cm	62 cm	14 cm	AD 795	Morley 1938b:221
Piedras Negras Panel 12	120 cm	55 cm	23 cm	AD 514	Morley 1938b:29
Dos Pilas Panel 8	121 cm	80 cm	21 cm	Late 700s	Houston 1993:85
Dos Pilas Panel 9	118 cm	82 cm	20 cm	Late 700s	Houston 1993:85
Piedras Negras Throne 1	185 cm	60 cm	14 cm	Late 700s	Morley 1938b:255

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[4] The measurements recorded here correspond to the area of the inscription on the Cancuen Panel.

of the panel depicts a part of a celebration held for the one *k'atun* anniversary of Piedras Negras Ruler 4. A hieroglyphic inscription accompanies the image, framing it on the left and right sides as well as the top of the panel. According to Morley (1938b:221), this monument measures 126 cm long by 62 cm high and is 14 cm thick. These dimensions are very close to those of the area of inscription on the Cancuen Panel, which is 127 cm long by 68 cm high and exhibits the same thickness as this monument. The other panel texts from Piedras Negras share dimensions similar to Panel 3 (Morley 1938b). Although their dimensions are similar, stylistically the Piedras Negras panels are quite different from the Cancuen monument since they are not purely glyphic monuments.

A closer comparison may be made between the Cancuen Panel and the purely glyphic panels of Dos Pilas and Site Q. The glyphic panels from Dos Pilas are contemporaneous with the Cancuen Panel, since they date to the Late Classic period. The dimensions of Dos Pilas Panel 8 and 9 are similar to those of the Cancuen monument, though they are slightly thicker and wider. The panels from Site Q, however, are slightly smaller than the Cancuen monument (Coe 1973:29).

Hieroglyphic thrones are also present at sites throughout the Maya lowlands, including Palenque, Piedras Negras, and Copan. The thrones from Palenque, however, are better classified as hieroglyphic benches since they do not have a back panel, as we see at Piedras Negras. Though the fragments of several thrones have been found from Piedras Negras, the only complete throne is Piedras Negras Throne 1. The throne, found in Structure J6 of the Acropolis of the West Group at Piedras Negras (Morley 1938b:254), is rather different in appearance from the Cancuen Panel in that it is not a purely glyphic monument since the back part depicts the upper bodies of two human figures facing each other, surrounded by three glyph panels (Morley 1938b:254). The back of the throne measures 185 cm across by 60 cm high and is 14 cm thick (Morley 1938b:254), dimensions that correspond to the area of inscription of the Cancuen Panel. Although the Piedras Negras throne back is approximately 58 cm wider than the Cancuen monument, it is very similar in height and in thickness. Both monuments are 14 cm thick. Like the Cancuen Panel, this throne dates to

the late eighth century (Morley 1938b:259).

It is difficult to use measurements alone to determine the nature of the Cancuen monument, since it shares dimensions similar to both the panels and throne back from the Petén region. It is interesting, however, to comment on the uncarved frame that surrounds the area of inscription on the Cancuen Panel. Plain, uncarved frames are seen on some of the Piedras Negras panels, including Panel 2. Morley (1938b:93) states that on Piedras Negras Panel 2, the frame is approximately 8 cm wide on each end. Though exact measurements are not given for the plain area on the top and bottom of this monument, they appear equal to one another, making the monument parallel and roughly symmetrical. The uncarved frame area of the Cancuen monument ranges from 4.4 to 6 cm on the ends of the monument and the top, but is approximately 26 cm long on the bottom.

This tremendous difference in size is unusual since symmetry is a characteristic that was highly valued in Maya art. For this reason, it seems unlikely that this monument would have been displayed as a wall panel. If it were the back of a hieroglyphic throne as my sources suggest, the bottom section of the frame may have been extended in order to accommodate the throne's seat. The seat may have backed up to this section, thereby visually connecting the two parts of the monument. This idea is consistent with my sources' suggestion that the missing piece of the panel was a much thicker monument with a hieroglyphic inscription carved around the edge, similar to the seat of Piedras Negras Throne 1. If this panel is in fact a throne back, the inscription itself may have begun on edge of the seat, as is the case with Piedras Negras Throne 1, thereby explaining the text's missing initial section.

A New Reading for *u-mulaj*

Since this panel records Cancuen's history and bears the Cancuen emblem glyph as part of each king's titles, it has been generally assumed to have come from the site of Cancuen. This presumption is based on epigraphic data alone, since no archaeological evidence suggesting the original location of the panel has been found at Cancuen or in the area surrounding the site. Mayer (1995b:3) states that the panel may have come from a location near the hieroglyphic stairway at Cancuen. Federico

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Fahsen (personal communication, 2003) suggests that the panel and a companion with the beginning of the inscription may have originally been hung on the wall, framing a doorway in Cancuen's royal palace.

The Cancuen Panel dates to the late eighth century AD, during the era in which Cancuen was at its most powerful, as indicated by a substantial royal palace dating to this period as well as a large marketplace that may have attracted thousands of merchants from throughout the region (Barrientos et al. 2002:384; Weissert 2000). Cancuen's sphere of influence at this time was far-reaching (Fahsen et al. 2003:713) and it may have controlled Machaquila and other sites in the Pasión region until its decline in the early ninth century. The tremendous power of Cancuen during the reign of Tajal Chan Ahk at the end of the eighth century raises the possibility that perhaps the panel was not originally from Cancuen, but rather another site in the region, since Cancuen may have dominated neighboring polities at this time. This idea is supported by information provided by my sources, stating that the original location of the panel was not Cancuen.[5]

A proposed new reading for the glyph at N9, as well as a re-interpretation of the inscription's penultimate passage, also provide tentative support for the idea that the original location of the Cancuen Panel may have been somewhere other than Cancuen itself (Fig. 2). This passage refers to the encircling of a pyramid at a three-stone

place. Guenter (2002:16) reads this passage as *petaj u-mulwaj* or "was encircled; was piled up?; pyramid; altar." According to personal observations and photographs of the panel that I obtained during my fieldwork, this word is not spelled as *u-mulwaj*, but rather *u-mulaj*. This new reading significantly changes the meaning of the word as well as the passage.

In his analysis, Guenter reads *u-mulaj* as a passive, transitive verb. N9 is spelled syllabically as **u-mu-lu-la-ja**[6]**,** and Guenter (2002:16) interprets the prefix *u-* as the third-person pronoun used for verbs and the *-ja* suffix as the *-aj* passive marker (Fig. 3). Although the root of the verb, *mul,* appears as a regular, root transitive verb in some Cholan languages, this glyph is not grammatically correct as a root transitive verb. In passive formations, the *u-* pronoun is absent since the agent of the verb is hidden. For this reason, N9 could not possess both the *u-* prefix and *-aj* passive marker if it were a regular, transitive verb. I argue, based on the insight of Robert Wald[7], that in this context, the *mul* root is a derived noun, formed through the use of the *aj* suffix, which acts as a nominalizer that converts root transitive verbs into nouns.

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[5] These sources state that the true origin of this monument is not Cancuen, but rather a site in the Usumacinta region, and more specifically, Piedras Negras, an idea of which I am highly skeptical. Though Cancuen experienced its florescence in the Late Classic and its sphere of influence extended throughout the region, there is no documented relationship between these two sites. The decline of Piedras Negras began in the late eighth century. Its final decline occurred around AD 810, when its dynasty met a violent end (Martin and Grube 2000:153). The site appears to have been burned at this time and was quickly abandoned. The last date on the Cancuen Panel is AD 799, and the monument was probably carved shortly after. For this reason, it seems nearly impossible that the panel would have been made or placed at the site of Piedras Negras itself.

To explore this idea further, one must look at the panel's last passage, which refers to a ritual that occurred on 9.18.8.6.14 (AD 799). On this date, Tajal Chan Ahk performed rituals of an unknown nature at a place named in the text as Ho' Janaab' Witz, or "Five-Flowered Mountain", the burial place of his predecessor, Chan Ahk Wi' (Guenter 2002:18). This name also appears on Piedras Negras Panel 3 in reference to the memorial temple of Piedras Negras Ruler 4, who was buried in AD 757 (Martin and Grube 2000:150). The use of this toponym on both Piedras Negras Panel 3 and the Cancuen monument is very interesting in light of the suggestions made by my sources. Nevertheless, since Martin and Grube (2000:150) state that this name normally refers to some mythological locale, one should not assume that there is a connection between the tomb of Cancuen's Chan Ahk Wi' and Piedras Negras Ruler 4.

[6] One might expect this word to be spelled **u-mu-la-ja** instead of **u-mu-lu-la-ja.** I suggest that in this context, the extra syllable **lu** functions synharmonically to demonstrate that the *u* in **mu** is a short vowel.

[7] I began this project with the assistance of Robert Wald at the Maya Meetings at Austin. Bob suggested to me that *u-mulaj* may be a derived noun instead of a transitive verb.

Lacadena (2003) first proposed the use of -*aj* as a nominalizing suffix for transitive verbs. In this example, I suggest that the -*aj* suffix nominalizes the *mul* root, taking it from a root transitive verb into a derived noun.

In order to explore the meaning of *u-mulaj* as a derived noun, I used the dictionaries of several Cholan languages to find the meaning of the *mul* root. In colonial Cholti and modern Chontal and Ch'orti[8], the *mul* root means, "to pile up" or "to stack up," (Wisdom 1950:529; Knowles 1984; Morán 1935). Based on this information, I suggest that in nominal contexts, *mul* refers to a mound, or pile. *U-mulaj* should be read as "its mound" or "its base." This reading is supported by Kaufman and Norman's (1984:335) reconstruction of the proto-Mayan word for mound as *muhl*. Since it is followed by the pyramid glyph, *u-mulaj* refers to the platform, base, or mound of a pyramid on the Cancuen Panel. The entire phrase (M9-N10) should be read "it was encircled, the base of the pyramid at the three-stone place (or altar)." This statement is curious, since there are no pyramids or large mounds at the site of Cancuen itself and for this reason may indicate that the original location of the monument itself was in fact some location other than Cancuen.

Cancuen: The Exploration of Origin

The panel's penultimate passage, which begins at L9, discusses a building program and ritual dedication that appears to be implemented

Figure 3.

immediately following Cancuen's freedom from Dos Pilas in 9.16.16.4.16 (AD 767). Tajal Chan Ahk oversees this program and a sequence of rituals associated with it, having acceded as king of Cancuen in 9.16.6.9.18 (AD 757) under the control of Dos Pilas (Fahsen et al. 2003:712). Tajal Chan Ahk first conjures K'awiil (M9-N9), the god associated with kingship and with ancestor veneration. Though this ritual is usually associated with accession, in this passage it may refer to the symbolic reaccession of Tajal Chan Ahk and refounding of Cancuen and of the Cancuen ruling lineage after the 85-year period of Dos Pilas's control. This argument is supported by the fact that in an earlier passage, I9-K9, Chan Ahk Wi' enacts a similar series of events on the first period-ending following the termination of Cancuen's relationship with Calakmul.

After Tajal Chan Ahk conjures K'awiil, the text mentions the building of a place identified as an "earth place". One can speculate that this "earth place" is a building, temple, mound, or some other structure. At M6-M7, the text refers to the *chumlaj*, or seating, of two gods, Chan Pawahtuun and Chan Xiiw Tuun. These gods are often portrayed holding up the earth. In this inscription, the seating of these gods appears to relate to the construction of the earth place itself and may correspond to the building or dedication of new structures. Following the seating of these two gods, the text states that a man arrives at a stone-star place, indicating that he may be making a ritual journey or pilgrimage to some location. One can assume that the man making this journey is Tajal Chan Ahk, and that he may be arriving either at the site of the newly constructed building or at another sacred site, in order to offer sacrifices in conjunction with the dedication of the new construction. The text moves forward to the passage which I have already discussed in great detail, *petaj umulaj* [pyramid] [three stones or altar], or the encircling of the mound or pyramid at the three stone place or altar.

Analysis of the panel's final passage reveals that the pyramid built and encircled in M9-N10 is most likely the burial monument of Tajal Chan

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Ahk's predecessor, Chan Ahk Wi', since it appears that Tajal Chan Ahk returns to this same location on 9.18.8.6.14 (AD 799), more than thirty years later to pay his respects to the tomb of this king. Tajal Chan Ahk acceded in AD 757, and it is logical to assume that Chan Ahk Wi' died before this date, during the era in which Dos Pilas dominated the region. Since Cancuen was a vassal to Dos Pilas at this time, it may not have been able to build a proper burial monument for its deceased king. Freedom from Dos Pilas and involvement in new construction projects in the 760s would have allowed Cancuen to finish his tomb at this time. Stanley Guenter (personal communication, 2003) states that Tajal Chan Ahk's pilgrimage and performance of rituals at the tomb of Chan Ahk Wi' in AD 799 may have celebrated the dedication of this monument itself as part of the refurbishment of the tomb. For this reason, it seems that the tomb of Chan Ahk Wi' may have been the original location of the monument.

One must ask, however, where the mound or pyramid is located, given that the site of Cancuen itself has no substantial pyramids or mounds (Barrientos et al. 2001:572). It appears that this building event may have occurred at some other locale, since the encircling of the mound occurs following a journey or pilgrimage, indicating that Tajal Chan Ahk may have traveled away from Cancuen to perform the dedication ritual at the newly constructed building. For this reason, it seems possible that this monument may have come from another site in the Pasión region, where Cancuen was clearly the dominant force in the Late Classic period.

In the panel's last passage, Tajal Chan Ahk takes the Machaquila emblem glyph as part of his titles, declaring himself to be the *k'uhul ajaw*, or holy lord, of Machaquila (P10) when he performs a dedication ceremony at the tomb of Chan Ahk Wi' in 9.18.8.11.4 (AD 799). Fahsen and Jackson (2002:902) suggest that Tajal Chan Ahk's use of this title demonstrates his desire to appear more powerful by relating himself to the Early Classic kings of Tres Islas, who took both emblem glyphs as part of their titles. Though Fahsen (1984) posits that Machaquila Ruler IV may have been in power during this time, there is a 25-year gap between 9.17.5.1.0 and 9.18.9.15.0 in Machaquila's inscriptions (Fahsen et al. 2003:712). The absence

of inscriptions dating to this period has created a gap in Machaquila's dynastic history, allowing us to question who was in power at Machaquila at this time. Since it is during this period that Tajal Chan Ahk performs the ceremony at the tomb of Chan Ahk Wi' and proclaims himself king of Machaquila, I suggest that Tajal Chan Ahk himself may have been acting as Machaquila's sovereign during this period, or may have dominated Machaquila through his position as king of Cancuen.

Analysis of the hieroglyphic stairway at Cancuen shows that a ceremony, described as a fire ritual performed by Tajal Chan Ahk in 9.17.15.4.14 (AD 786), may have taken place at Machaquila (Fahsen et al. 2003:712). This suggestion is based on the fact that a glyph resembling the Machaquila emblem glyph is used on the hieroglyphic stairway in conjunction with the ritual. Based on this precedent, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the pyramid encircling and tomb dedication rituals on this monument may also have taken place at Machaquila or another nearby site. Graham (1967) states that there are several mounds and pyramid-like structures at Machaquila, including Structures 20 and 22, making it possible that the pyramid dedicated in M10 could be located within the site of Machaquila. Stanley Guenter (personal communication, 2003) suggests that the dedication ritual in M9-N10 may be referring not to the dedication of the pyramid but rather to the placing of an altar in front of a pyramid, based on the use of the three-stone glyph at N10, which he believes may represent the pedestal altars found throughout the southern part of the Southern Maya Lowlands. These altars include Caracol Altars 23 and 12 and El Cayo Altar 4 (Martin and Grube 2000:97-98). Though no altars of this type have been found at Cancuen, at least one altar of this type has been found at Machaquila (Graham 1967:93). Altar A of Machaquila stands on four cylindrical supports and is located near Structure 20. The inscription on this altar is quite extensive, containing more than 200 glyphs; however, it is badly eroded and unreadable, and for this reason the dedication date of the monument is unknown (Graham 1967:92). All of the monuments at Machaquila date to the Late Classic period. If N10 does refer to a pedestal altar, the absence of this type of monument at Cancuen supports the argument that the original

location of the panel is not Cancuen, but rather Machaquila or another site in the Pasión Valley.

This evidence, combined with the information provided by my sources, presents a tentative, yet plausible, argument that the original location of this monument may not have been Cancuen. Though my study is not conclusive, it seems possible that this panel may have originally been placed at Machaquila or another site in the Pasión region in AD 799. If this were true, it would also indicate that the tomb of Chan Ahk Wi' was not located in Cancuen, but rather elsewhere in the region. This idea, though speculative, has interesting implications not only for the Late Classic history of Cancuen, but also for understanding the interaction between Cancuen and other Classic Maya polities. Further explorations of the Pasión and Usumacinta regions, and specifically of the sites of Cancuen and Machaquila, may provide more extensive evidence for the probable location of this monument during the Classic period.

Summary and Conclusions

The Cancuen Panel provides indispensable information about the history of Cancuen and its dynasty in the Late Classic period. New information about the panel collected during fieldwork in Cobán, Guatemala, during the summer of 2003 raises new possibilities about the history of the monument. A re-evaluation of the Cancuen Panel raises new questions about its function during the Classic period, suggesting that it may have been used not as a wall panel, but instead as the back of a hieroglyphic throne. A proposed new reading of *u-mulaj*, glyph N9 of the panel's inscription, suggests that it should be read as "the mound" or "the base," and that it refers to the base or mound of a pyramid that was encircled by Cancuen's Tajal Chan Ahk as part of a dedication ritual.

Based on the text, it appears that the original location of the panel was a place known as Ho Janaab Witz, or "Five-Flower Mountain," the burial place of Tajal Chan Ahk's predecessor, Chan Ahk Wi'. Though the pyramid containing his tomb was constructed and dedicated in AD 767, the panel was carved and dedicated as part of the refurbishment of his tomb in AD 799. The new reading of the *u-mulaj* glyph raises the intriguing possibility that Chan Ahk Wi' was not buried within the site of Cancuen, since Cancuen has no significant pyramids or mounds. Instead, it seems conceivable that the tomb of Chan Ahk Wi' may be located at another site in the Pasión region. If the exact location of his tomb can be determined, then we will have found the place of origin of the Cancuen Panel. Future archaeological, epigraphic, and ethnographic investigations in the Pasión valley are needed to answer the questions raised about the panel and to present a complete understanding of this region in the Late Classic period.

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