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## Archaeological and Epigraphic Studies in Pol Box, Quintana Roo

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### Introduction

Archaeological investigations in southern Quintana Roo have increased in recent years as the result of a number of projects carried out in the area. Explorations at centers like Dzibanche, Kohunlich, Oxtankah, Chacchoben, and Chakanbakan have been of vital importance in understanding the development of Maya settlement in the region. At the same time, these advances have led to the increased recording of sites with evidence of Prehispanic occupation still to be investigated. To remedy this situation, the Centro INAH Quintana Roo and the Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia (ENAH) are working jointly within the Proyecto Prácticas de Prospección Arqueológica en el Sur de Quintana Roo (PPASQRoo), directed by the archaeologist Javier López Camacho, the purpose of which is to create an inventory of sites through mapping.

It was as a part of this project that archaeological work was initiated at the site of Pol Box. Five field seasons of topographic survey, excavation, and epigraphic documentation have been carried out since 2001. The information obtained through these activities has permitted an understanding of the site's spatial organization and its period of occupation, as well as its interaction with other polities.

In the present article, we highlight some of the results of our investigations, complementing the information derived from archaeological work with a study of the texts and iconography of the site's carved monuments.

### Location and surroundings

Pol Box is located in the southern zone of the Mexican state of Quintana Roo on a strip of well-drained, high ground completely surrounded by *bajos*—seasonally inundated lowlands—a setting which provided multiple options for agricultural exploitation (Figure 1). In profile, this landform slopes gradually to the west from an escarpment on the eastern extreme. Two natural elevations stand out from the rugged surface, and on these are located the architectural groups of greatest monumentality at the site (Figure 2).

Although there are no available sources of surface water in proximity to the settlement, this was addressed by the storage of rainwater in ponds and *chultuns*, taking advantage of sloping ground to capture the runoff from rainfall.

In recent times the site's environment has been substantially altered by agriculture and cattle-raising. That said, some regrowth of forest has occurred in the monumental architectural groups.

### Description of the settlement

The site is made up of three architectural groups distributed on an east-west axis (Figures 2 and 3). The groups are separated by a distance of a little under one kilometer, and are connected by a network of *sacbes*. Associated with these components are a series of residential structures which form diverse arrangements and show great variation in their dimensions and orientations.

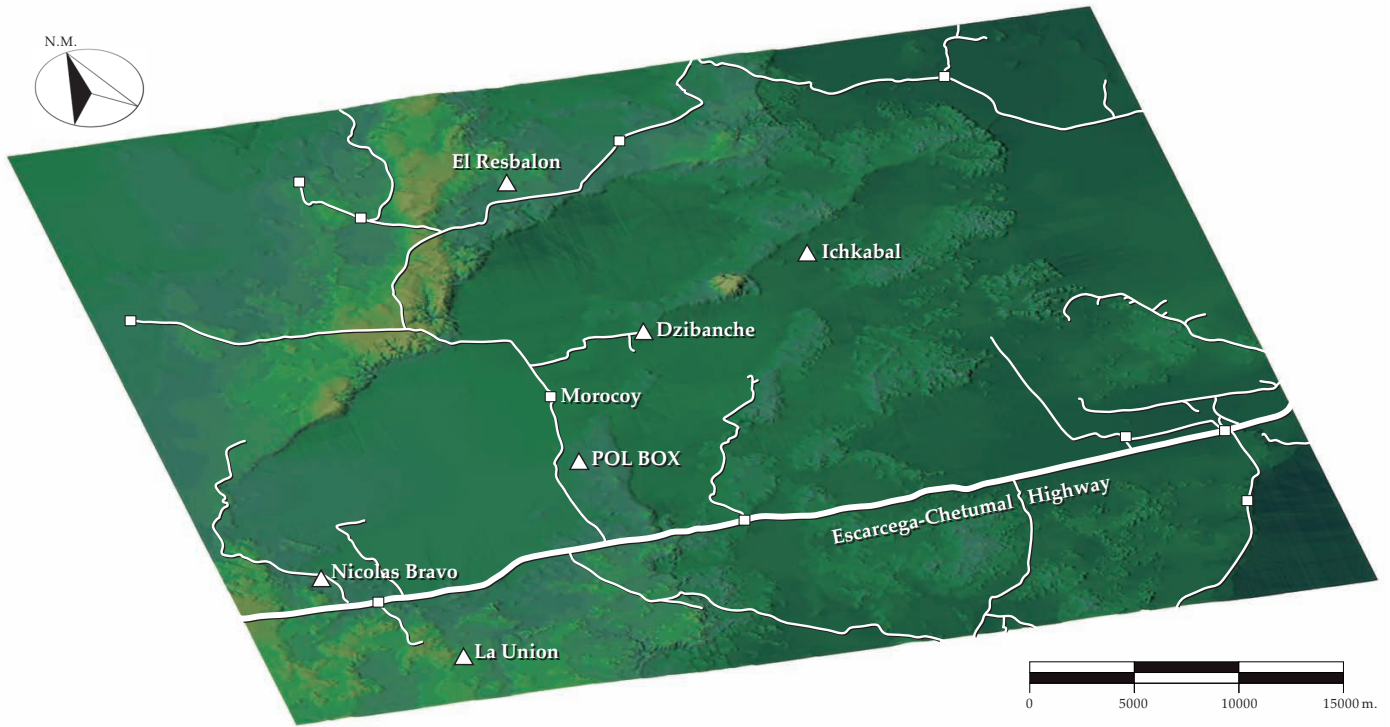


Figure 1. Three-dimensional model showing the location of Pol Box and neighboring sites (model by Vania E. Pérez Gutiérrez).

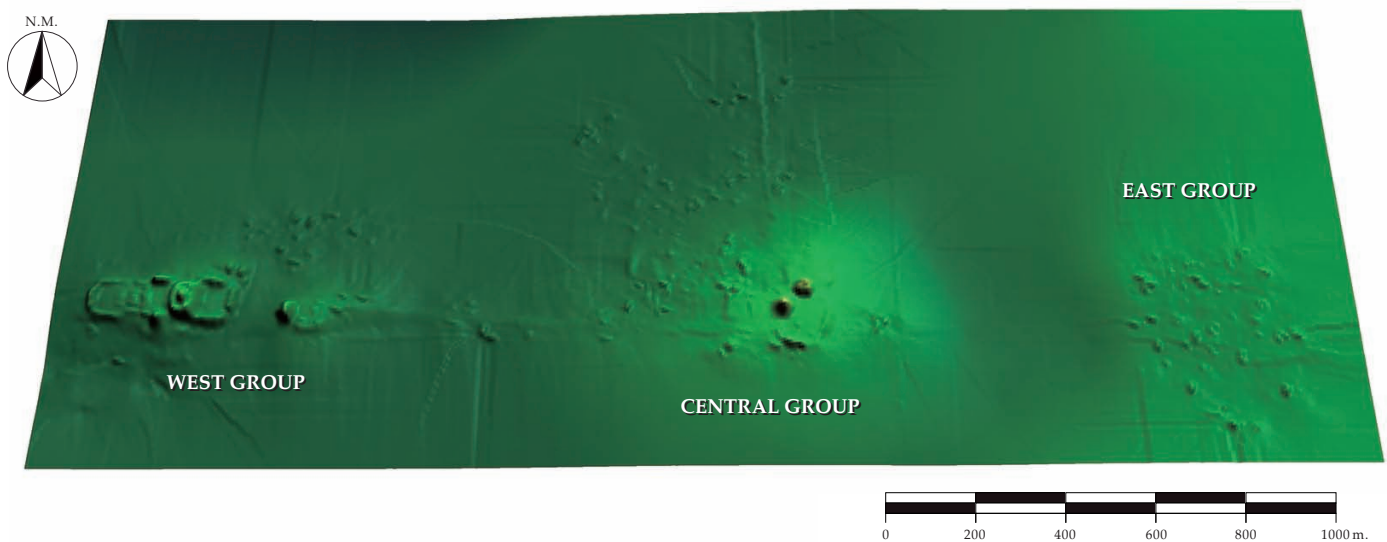


Figure 2. Three-dimensional model showing the spatial distribution of the architectural groups (model by Vania E. Pérez Gutiérrez).

### West Group

This group is seated on a natural elevation and arranged in four plazas aligned on an east-west axis, reaching a length of approximately 500 meters (Figure 4). The first of these is named the West Plaza and is delimited by range structures on its southern, western, and northern sides, with Structure 4 on the south and Structure 1 on the west and north. Free access is permitted on the

northeast and southeast corners. Two complexes of low platforms are located to the east, defining access passages to the Central Plaza; this is situated on a level area of the landform at a higher elevation than the West Plaza. The Central Plaza is demarcated by a pair of structures ten meters in height located on the north (Structure 8) and south (Structure 10), a small mound on the west (Structure 7), and a large architectural complex enclos-

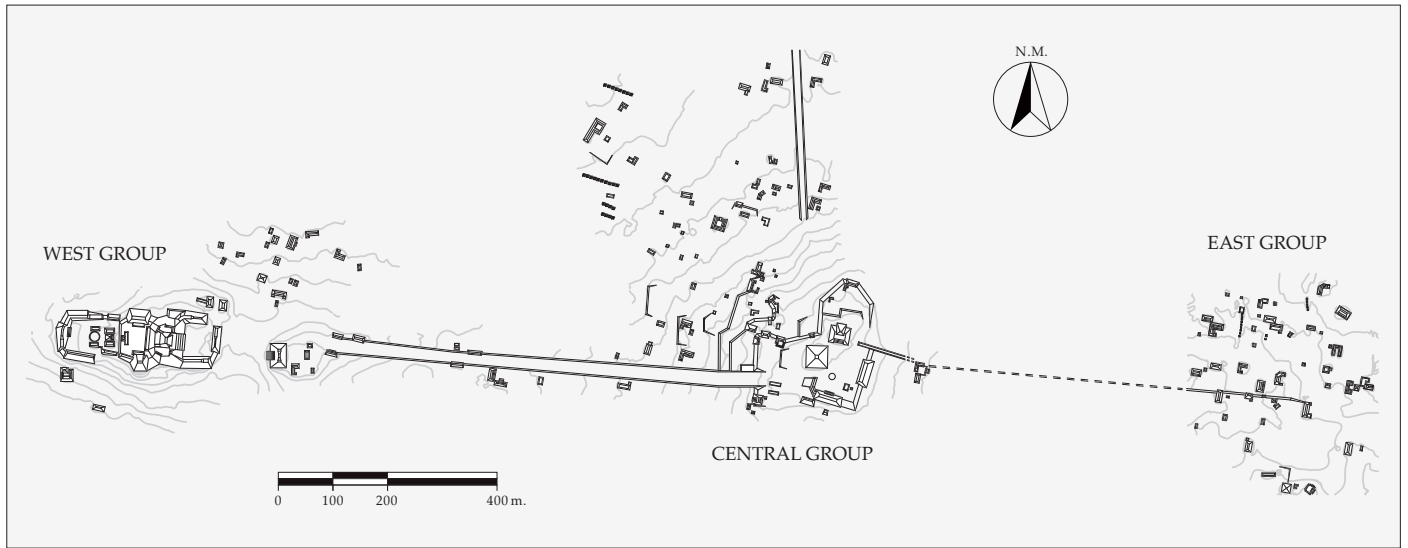


Figure 3. Spatial arrangement of the groups and the network of sacbes connecting them (drawing by Octavio Q. Esparza Olguín and Vania E. Pérez Gutiérrez).

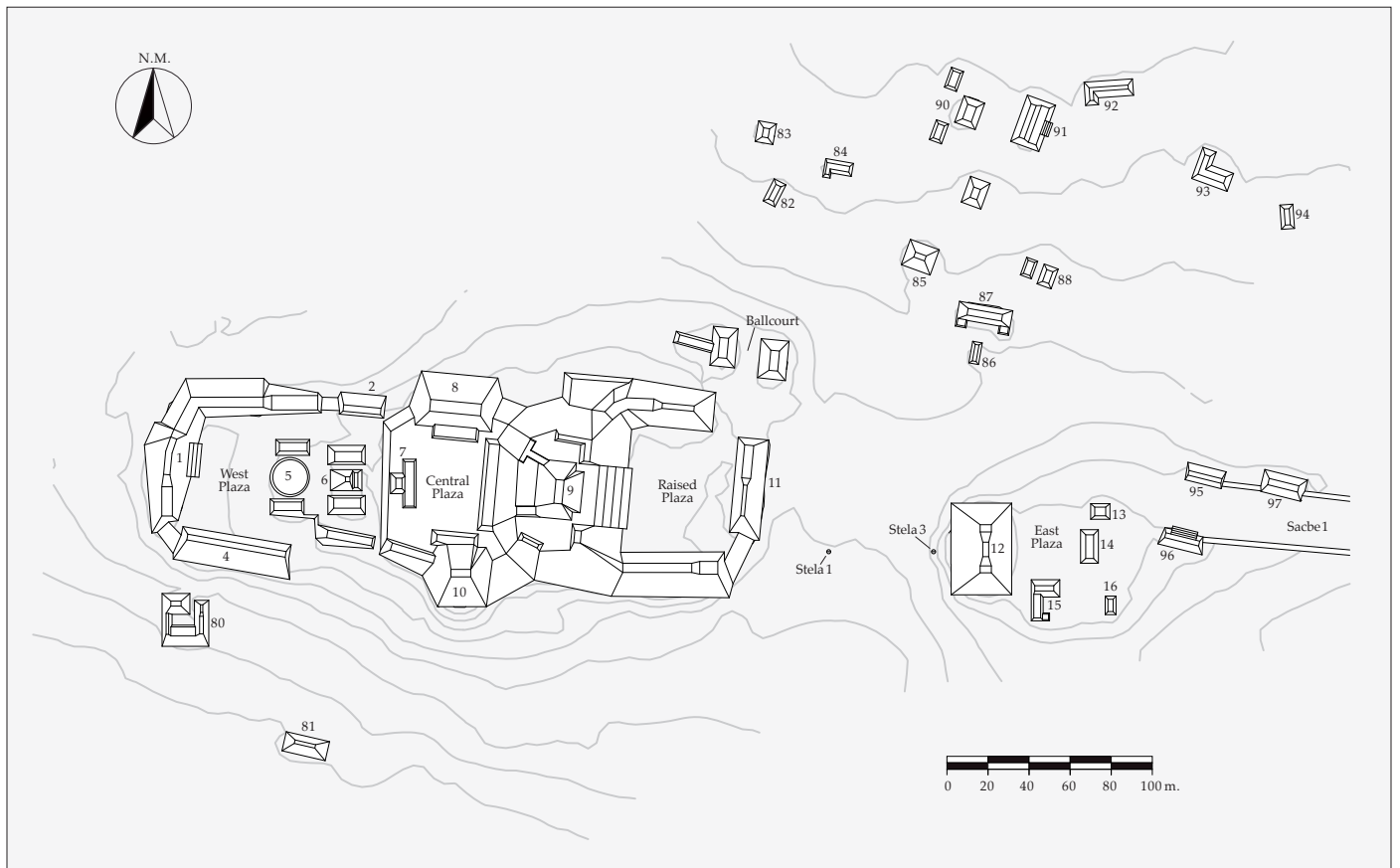


Figure 4. Map of the West Group (drawing by Octavio Q. Esparza Olguín and Vania E. Pérez Gutiérrez).



Figure 5. Map of the Central Group (drawing by Octavio Q. Esparza Olguín and Vania E. Pérez Gutiérrez).

ing the east. This complex, roughly C-shaped, also delimits the Raised Plaza in combination with a long platform (Structure 11) which formalizes access to the plaza on the northeast. It should be mentioned that a ballcourt is located a few meters to the north of Structure 11.

The arrangement of open spaces continues with the East Plaza, which is bordered on the west by Structure 12, on the south by Structure 15, and on the east by Structures 13 and 14. It is important to point out that a fragmentary stone monument (Stela 3) was found on the west side of Structure 12, just at the foot of the access stairs. The previously mentioned complex of plazas

and structures is augmented by a variety of habitational units showing a heterogeneous pattern in their orientations.

### Central Group

This group is located on a natural hillock at the site's highest elevation, a little less than a kilometer from the West Group (Figure 5). The center of this group has only two plazas: the Main Plaza and the Danta Plaza. The first of these is delimited on the north by a pyramidal substructure with an inset stairway (Structure 18) and on the east by a long platform of modest height (Struc-

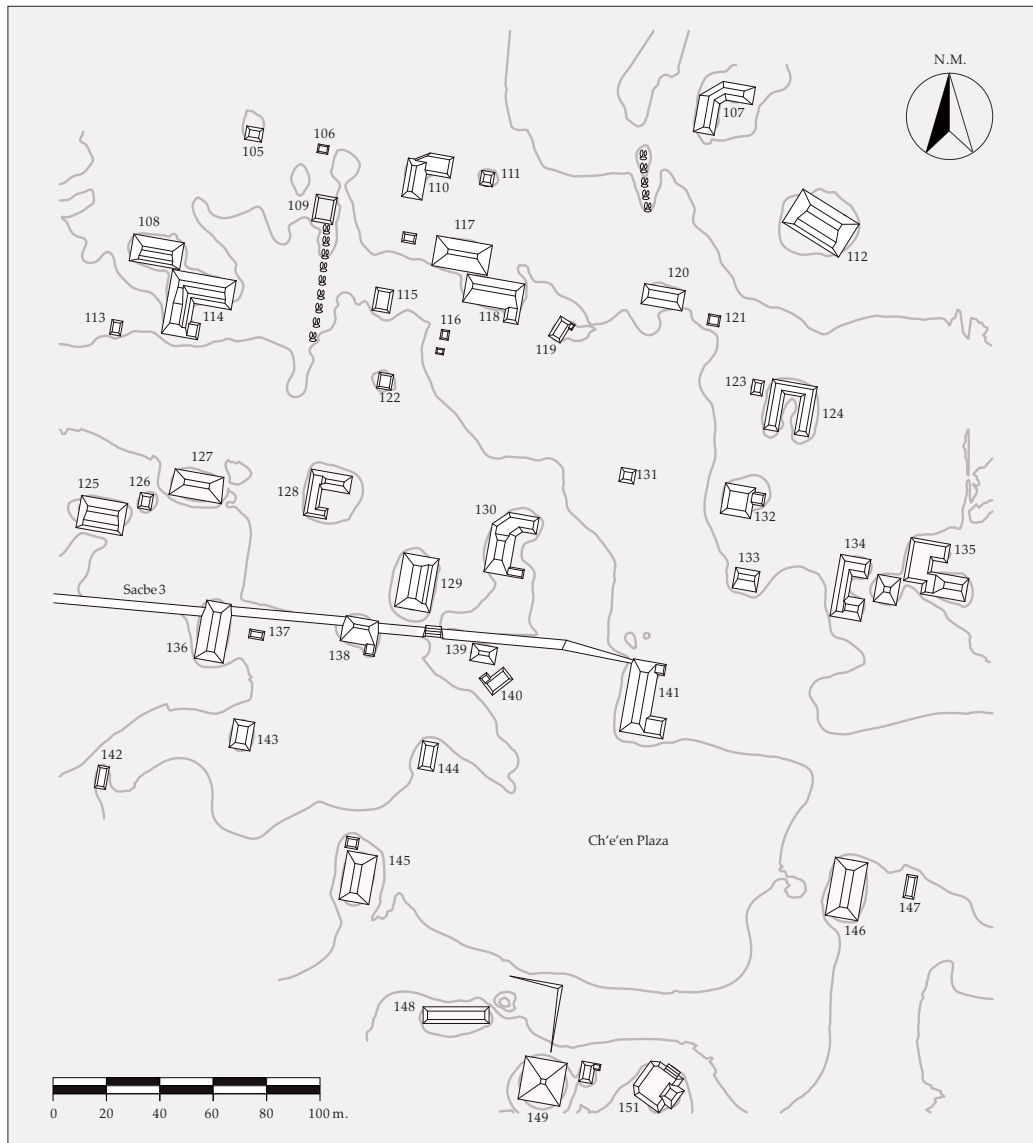


Figure 6. Map of the East Group (drawing by Octavio Q. Esparza Olguín and Vania E. Pérez Gutiérrez).

ture 19). On the southern end we observe an L-shaped platform with stairs that communicate with the plaza (Structure 20), and finally the complex is completed by a pyramidal substructure with the greatest dimensions of the group, which closes the plaza on the west (Structure 17). It is important to note that two stelae were associated with this substructure, located on its eastern and western sides. The location of these monuments turns out to be important since it indicates that Structure 17 was a building with two entrances. In the interior of the plaza there are three low platforms, two of which are rectangular in plan while the third is circular. The arrangement of the structures which surround the plaza, especially the substructures 17 and 19, cause us to think in terms of a possible E Group (Commemorative Astronomical Complex), a pattern amply attested at various sites in the Peten as well as being a consistent feature at

other sites in southern Quintana Roo, such as Nicolas Bravo, Akalak, Nachi Cocom, and El Resbalon.

With regard to the Danta Plaza, we can say that it involves an open space located to the west of Structure 17 that is delimited by complexes of small structures and terraces to the north, south, and west. This plaza must have served as the point of arrival and departure for people walking along Sacbe 1, which ties the West and Central Groups.

Around the previously mentioned plazas and structures are various terraces that provided level spaces on the slopes of the hill. Here were situated various residential buildings, which can also be observed at lower elevations. These structures display a heterogeneous pattern of orientation, and some are associated with *albarradas* (low stone walls), as is the case with Structure 58, which stands out as well for its large dimensions and

the disposition of its primary axis pointing toward the cluster of structures that surround the Main Plaza.

In view of its characteristics, we can say that the Central Group was the site's center of gravity in that, as mentioned earlier, it was located on the highest ground and served as the point of departure for a network of three *sabces* that are located on the western, northern, and eastern sides of the hill, connecting the group with other areas of the settlement.

### East Group

This group is found on a level surface about 800 m from the Central Group (Figure 6). It is made up of a complex of residential buildings three meters in height on average, forming various patio arrangements. This group also has a plaza, which is bordered on the west by Structure 145, on the north by Structures 139, 140, and 141, on the east by Structure 146, and on the south by a complex of substructures, most notably Structure 149, which stands out by virtue of its greatest size at seven meters in height. Associated with this last substructure is a pit nine meters in diameter and two in depth, which is delimited by a slight terrace in the form of a square and a low platform. To the north of the plaza is a drop in the level of the ground surface that constitutes part of the *sacbe* that connects to the Central Group. This road has an access to the south of Structure 129, which ties the plaza to a conglomeration of structures located in the northern zone.

### The roads

To date three roads have been located in Pol Box, all of which depart from the Central Group and tie it to different sectors of the settlement (Figures 3 and 5). Beginning with the western sector of the site, we have *Sacbe 1*, with dimensions of some 800 m in length and 24 in width on average; this connects the West and Central Groups. It should be noted that this road does not maintain a straight trajectory but is instead broken due to the irregular relief of the terrain. There are also variations in its level due to the elevation of the ground, causing it to be very superficial in its central portion and most noticeable in its extremes.

*Sacbe 2* is the longest, measuring about 6.5 km in length by ten meters in width. Its apparent function is to tie the Central Group with fields in the vicinity of the present-day village of Morcoy. In its north-south direction, the road runs along high ground for two kilometers before descending into the *bajo*, where it continues its trajectory a further 4.5 km to the north.

*Sacbe 3* is about 800 meters long by six wide. Although it could not be mapped in its totality, a detailed record was achieved by walking along the greater part of the trajectory. The *sacbe* starts on the east of Structure 18 in the Central Group and continues to the East Group.

In addition to the three *sabces* detected by means of survey, it was possible to identify another by analysis of aerial photographs. This one leaves the western zone of the Central Group and heads toward two small sectors of high ground. Although we have not verified the points reached by the roadway, it is possible that they consist of raised fields suggestive of intensive agricultural practices (López, in press).

### Chronological data

As a complement to the survey work, and with the intention of uncovering carved monuments and obtaining chronological data relative to the architectural groups, a program of excavations was undertaken during the 2002 and 2005 seasons.<sup>1</sup> This included test pitting and extensive excavations associated with Structures 12, 17, and 18 (López 2003, 2006).

In the course of excavations to uncover Stela 2 (located on the west side of Structure 17) diverse archaeological materials were collected. These proved useful in developing a relative chronological sequence. Thus, the provenance and classification of ceramic types permitted the establishment of a period of occupation beginning in the Middle Preclassic and extending through the Early Postclassic, with a possible apogee during the Early Classic.

Furthermore, the pit dug at the base of the access stairway of Structure 18 led to the discovery of an offering of 65 fragments of jade pieces, seeds, and pieces of ceramic. The study of these elements permitted the dating of this deposit to the Early Classic. The analysis of additional excavated materials supports an occupational sequence extending from the Middle Preclassic to the Early Postclassic.

The goal of the excavation associated with Structure 12 was the uncovering of Stela 3 and the discovery of additional ceramic material. The study of this material supports a period of occupation similar to that determined by the excavations previously mentioned, with a preponderance of ceramic types corresponding to the Late Preclassic and Early Classic.

### The carved monuments

In addition to helping us understand the spatial organization of the site, topographic survey and mapping have been vital in the detection of monuments with remains of hieroglyphic writing. To date, five stelae have been discovered in Pol Box. Of these, three showed indications of carving at the moment of their discovery, somewhat surprisingly given the scarcity of epigraphic records at sites in southern Quintana Roo.

<sup>1</sup> During the 2002 field season, the excavations were undertaken by students of ENAH who assisted in the activities of the project. The program entailed the liberation of Stela 2 and the test pit at the foot of the stairway of Structure 18.

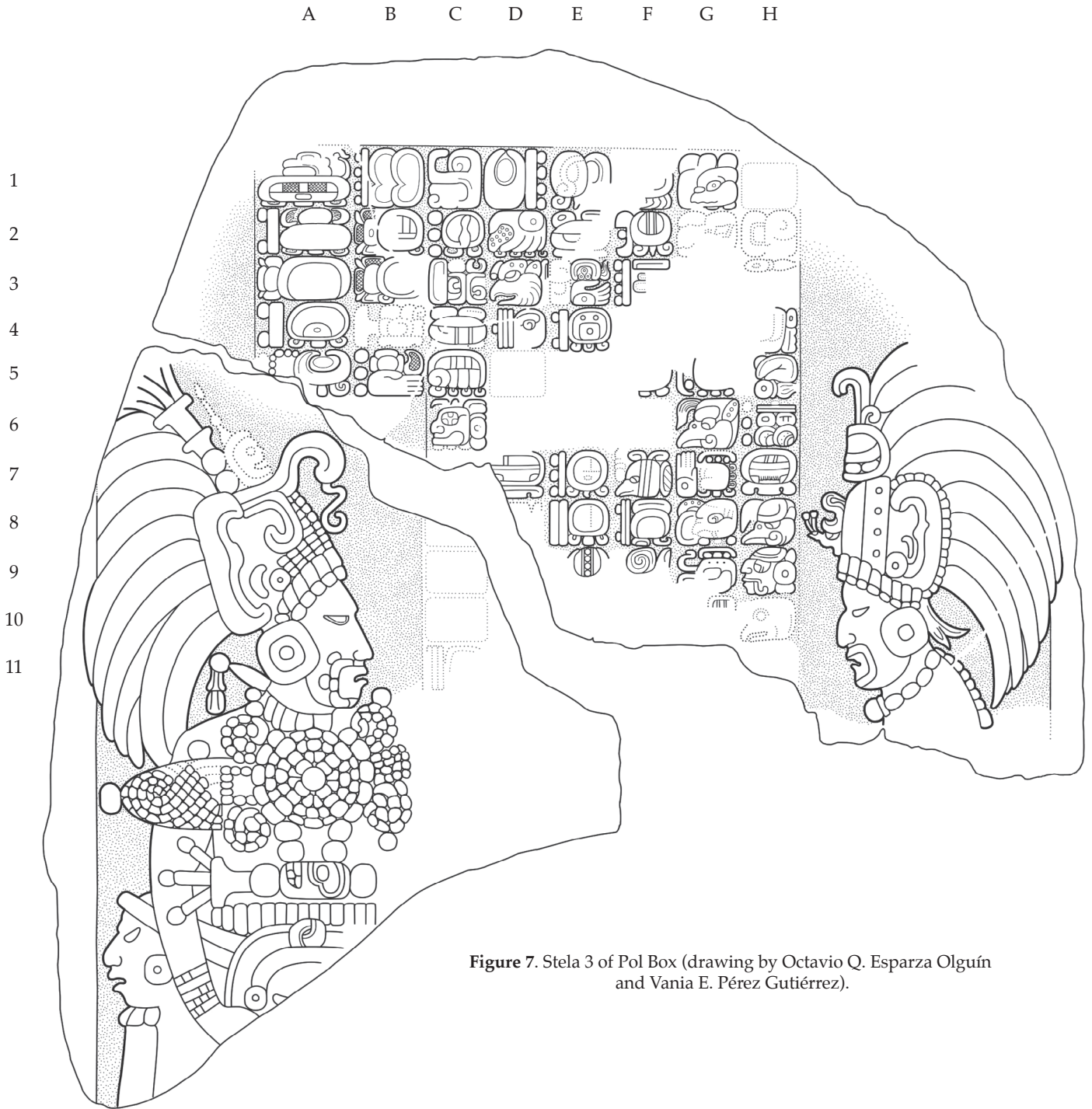


Figure 7. Stela 3 of Pol Box (drawing by Octavio Q. Esparza Olguín and Vanía E. Pérez Gutiérrez).

### Stela 3

This monument was found broken and half-buried on the western side of Structure 12, just at the foot of the access stairway (Figure 4). The various fragments were helpful in determining the stela's original dimensions before breakage: 3.65 m long by 2.10 wide and 0.4 in thickness, dimensions corresponding to the portion with iconography and glyphs (Figure 7).

The inscription begins with an Initial Series Introductory Glyph featuring the patron for K'ank'in, introducing the Long Count date 9.7.0.0.7 Ajaw 3 K'ank'in (December 5, AD 573), with a Supplementary Series comprising glyphs F (*uti'hu'n*, "on the edge of the page?"), D (*huliiy*, "since it arrived"), C (indicating the third lunar semester, governed by the Jaguar God of the Underworld), X (the name of the lunation), and A (conveying the 29-day duration of the present lunation).

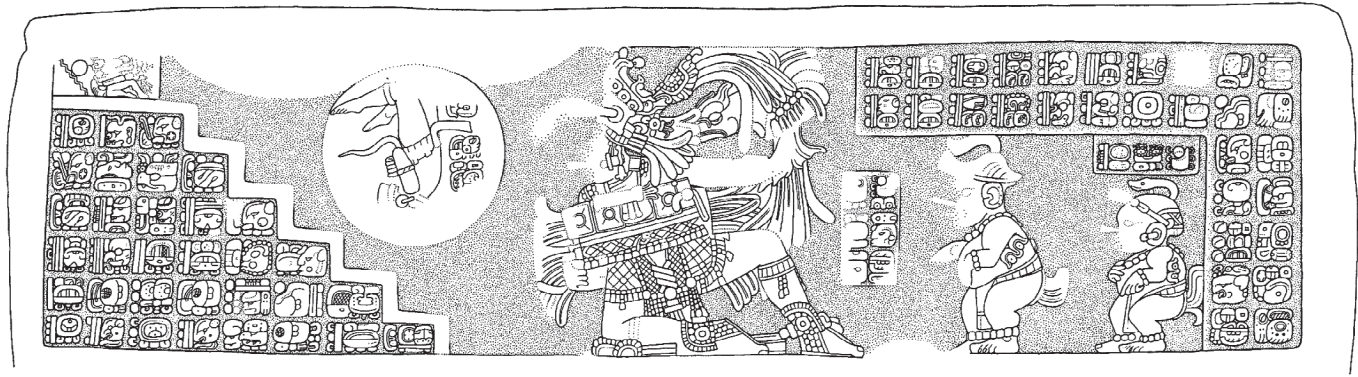


Figure 8. On Yaxchilan Hieroglyphic Stairway 2, Step VII, Bird Jaguar IV wears the outfit of a ballplayer. A bound captive descends in the form of a sphere (drawing by Ian Graham).

The verb associated with the opening date refers to an event of casting incense (*chokch'aa*). The nominal clause of the agent of this event follows in C3 and D3, not discounting the possibility that C3 names the location where the event took place. While we cannot read the components of the glyph at C3, D3 clearly represents a bird's head. Diagnostic elements are missing, so we propose the nickname Lord Muwaan for the individual named. In position C4 we have a glyph that, given its structure and position in the text, must correspond to a toponymic title<sup>2</sup> whose principle element is difficult to understand. After this we have block D4 (*waklaju'n ...*, "sixteen ..."), which could be some sort of title associated with Lord Muwaan.

At this point in the inscription comes the term *yitaa*, "he accompanied him," indicating that the rite of casting incense was carried out not by Lord Muwaan alone but in the company of someone else. The name of this individual begins at D5 and probably continues to D7. Unfortunately we can only read the last glyph (**CHAN-na**, *chan*, "sky").

Following glyph D7, the stela is severely eroded for the rest of columns C and D, and further details cannot be made out until position C11, a possible Distance Number.

The next legible part of the monument is found at position E1, where we observe the glyph for birth (**SIY-ja-[\*jil-ya**, *siyajiiy*, "since he was born") associated with the name of some person, probably Lord Muwaan, who carries the same toponymic title seen previously at C4. The next clause begins with the focusing particle *alay*, "here," which introduces the Period-Ending event of 'tying the stone' followed by a glyph of unknown significance<sup>3</sup> and a Tzolk'in date of 7 Ajaw. While this passage presents certain chronological difficulties, we suspect it refers to the lapse of time between the birth of Lord Muwaan and his celebration of the Period Ending.

After the 7 Ajaw date at E4, we encounter the loss of five glyph blocks until we regain the legible part of the inscription at E7, where we observe part of a Distance Number (*waxak haab*, "eight years") followed by the ex-

pression *joy[aj] ti ajawil*, "made his debut in lordship."

If we take into account that the Distance Number ties the Calendar Round which we find at E4 and probably F4 (7 Ajaw \*3 \*K'ank'in) with that located in E8 and F8 (10 Muluk 12 Sek) we can reconstruct the following chronology:

9.7.0.0.0 7 Ajaw 3 K'ank'in (December 5, 573)  
 - 8.10.11 Distance Number  
 9.6.11.7.9 10 Muluk 12 Sek (June 19, 565)

Thus 10 Muluk 12 Sek is related to an earlier date of 9.7.0.0.0 and could correspond to the debut in the throne event which implies the accession of a ruler. In the last glyphs visible in columns E and F, we see *alay*, "here," introducing the logogram **YAL**. This glyph regularly forms part of the expressions *yaljiy*, "he said it," *yal*, "her child," and *uyalaw*, "he threw it." The poor condition of this glyph and the ones that follow prohibits certainty in our reconstruction. However, if the third of these alternatives is entertained,<sup>4</sup> we suggest that the event might be related to the act of throwing down captives from the sloping walls of a ballcourt (Figure 8), showing thereby a similarity between the prisoner and the sphere of rubber that the ruler strikes during the course of gameplay (Colas and Voss 2000; Zender 2004).

The next legible part of the text occurs in block G1,

<sup>2</sup> According to Nikolai Grube:

Toponymic titles are clearly distinguished from emblem glyphs. Formally, they never include the adjective *k'uhul*: "divine, sacred," and their usage is obviously much more restricted. The principal sign (or in other cases syllabic signs) denominates the toponym as a site or a territory, and the title *ajaw* defines the associated individual as a ruler. The absence of the adjective *k'uhul* must express some state of lesser importance. (Grube 2008:187, editor's translation)

<sup>3</sup> The presence of the numeral 9 coupled with a possible 5 suggests that this may have been a Distance Number; however, what can be observed of the main sign bears no resemblance to any of the known glyphs for time periods such as *k'in* or *winal*.

<sup>4</sup> The chronological context of this passage suggests that, "hypothetically, this could be an event that preceded the Pol Box lord's rise to power, a youthful triumph of the kind celebrated at Yaxchilan and elsewhere" (Simon Martin, email of February 8, 2008).



where we find the emblem glyph of Kaan (**K'UHUL-ka-KAN-la-AJAW**, *K'uhul Kaan[V]l Ajaw*, "Divine Lord of Kaan[V]l").<sup>5</sup> This first reference on Stela 3 to the lords of Kaan remains enigmatic, since we lack previous information as to the name of the K'uhul Ajaw and the event associated with him. On the other hand, the existence of this type of reference is not unusual in monuments from sites located in the south of Quintana Roo and Campeche, given the great influence of the Kaan dynasty in this area (Martin and Grube 2002; Beliaev and Safronov 2002; Velásquez 2004; Grube 2004a).

Further along we have eight badly eroded glyph blocks from which we can barely observe any features until we arrive at H5, where we encounter the logogram **PAT**, *paat*, "back, behind." It should be made clear that one of the components of glyph H5 no longer exists but must have corresponded to a numeral. Thus we can reconstruct the expression as **NUMBER-paat**, which is attested in other inscriptions such as Caracol Stela 6 and Monument 159 of Tonina (Stuart 2005).

Next in the text comes the logogram **MAM**,<sup>6</sup> "grandfather, grandson" or "ancestor" (Figure 9), which repeats at H8 and probably also at H10. It should be noted that the head of the bird in G6 shows certain similarities to a glyph in the text of a vessel of unknown provenance which makes reference to Siyaj Chan K'awiil of Tikal (Figure 10). The inscription continues in H6 with the title 3-11 *pik ajaw* ('Lord of 3/11 bak'tuuns),<sup>7</sup> which is associated with the person referred to in blocks G7, H7, and G8, very probably Sky Witness (Figure 11), *K'uhul Kaan*

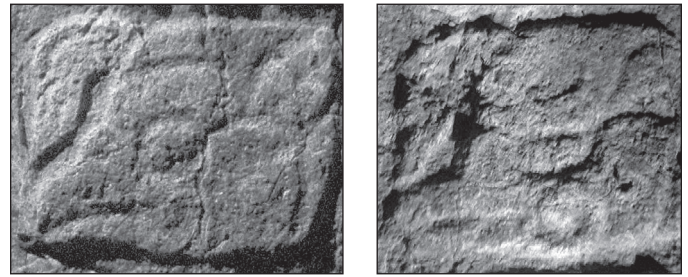


Figure 9. Glyphs of Pol Box Stela 3: left) **MAM** glyph (G6), associated with Sky Witness; right) **MAM** glyph (H8), associated with an individual named K'ahk' Ujol K'inich (photographs by Octavio Q. Esparza Olguín).

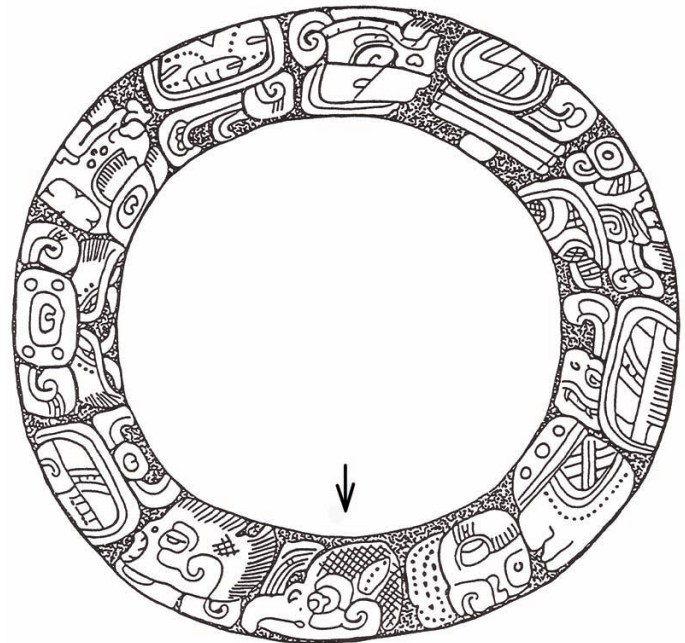


Figure 10. Glyphic text on a vase of unknown provenance in which the logogram **MAM** occurs in its bird-head allograph (after Grube and Martin 2000:II-31).

<sup>5</sup> On certain occasions the Snake emblem takes a **-la** phonetic complement. The identity of the preceding vowel is uncertain (**ka-KAN-la**, *Kaan[V]l*).

<sup>6</sup> At first we thought that the glyph at G6 might represent the syllable **-li**, thereby comprising the sequence **NUMBER-PAT-ti-li**, observed in the texts of other monuments such as Stela 6 of Caracol. However, Nikolai Grube and Simon Martin (personal communications, 2008) caused us to realize that it might instead involve the logogram **MAM**, the characteristic feature of which is a hank of hair that hangs in front of the head of an old man or a bird (Stuart 2000). Moreover, the context in which the logogram in question appears on Stela 3 (G6-G8) is similar to various passages of Tikal Stela 31, where the **MAM** logogram introduces titles and names of rulers. As to the meaning which the term *mam* must have in this context, David Stuart comments: "When the *mam* glyph appears at or near the beginning of a personal name phrase, it probably serves as an honorific like 'elder' or 'ancestor'" (Stuart 2000:12). Additionally, it is important to note that Pol Box Stela 3, like Tikal Stela 31, displays unpossessed forms of this logogram, which would seem to support the idea that it entails an introductory title rather than a relationship expression.

<sup>7</sup> This glyph appears infrequently in the corpus of Maya inscriptions, with the result that its significance is not at all clear. MatthewLooper (2002) has proposed that it involves a title associated with periods of 8,660 days that count from the Calendar Round 4 Ajaw 8 Kumk'u. Alternatively, he hypothesizes that it functions as a form similar to the count of K'atuuns used by certain rulers to denote their age; thus a person who carried the title 3-11 *pik ajaw* would be between 47 and 71 years of age. Taking into account this last consideration, we could think of Sky Witness as being a mature ruler.

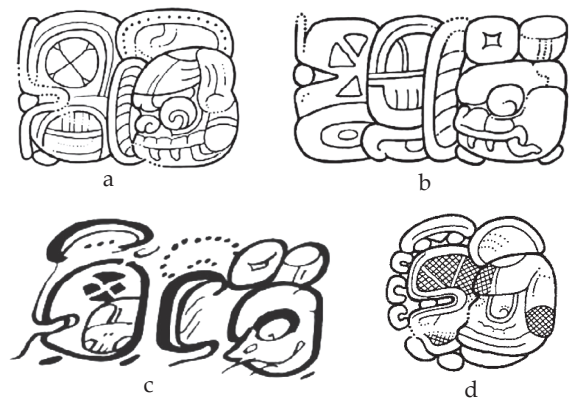
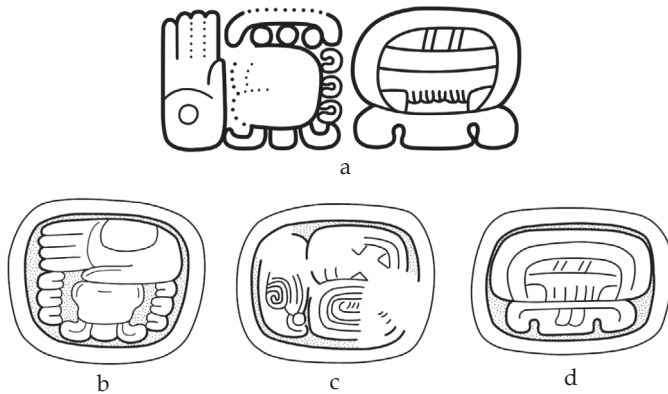


Figure 11. Nominal clauses of Sky Witness: a) Stela 3 of Caracol; b) House C Hieroglyphic Stairway of Palenque; c) codex-style vase of unknown provenance (K6751); d) Sculptured Stone 2 of Yo'okop (drawings by Simon Martin).

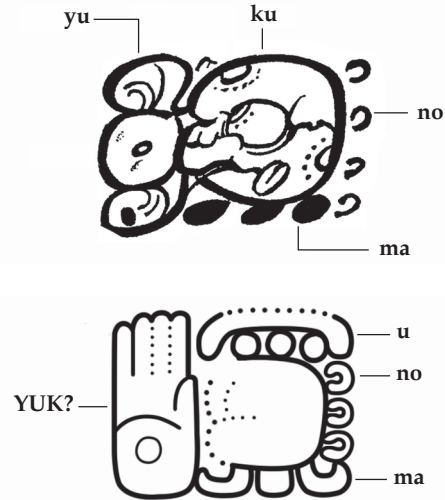
*Ajaw* ("Divine Lord of Kaan"), whose reign spanned from at least 561 to 572 and to whom was accorded the important victory over Tikal in 562 (Martin and Grube 2002; Martin 2005). Apart from Pol Box, there exist only a few references to this ruler coming from other sites located in the south of Quintana Roo and Campeche: Dzibanche, Yo'okop, El Resbalon, and Los Alacranes (Martin and Grube 2002; Grube 2004a, 2005).

The reference to Sky Witness in the text of Stela 3, particularly at G7, is all the more interesting given the structure of the components of his name. Among these is a glyph of uncertain significance in the form of a vertical extended hand followed by the vowel *u*, a possible T650 sign, and the syllabograms *no* and *ma*. While some of these signs appear in other instances of the name of Sky Witness, the hand-element stands out for its scarcity in the glyphs associated with the names of other Kaan rulers, as well as for the fact that it remains undeciphered. In this context it should be noted that the study of block G7 in combination with another example coming from the Hieroglyphic Stairway of El Resbalon has led us to discover certain patterns which could clarify the significance of the glyph in question (Figure 12).

In the case of the Hieroglyphic Stairway of El Resbalon, blocks CX15 and CX16 contain the name of a lord of the Kaan dynasty, very probably Sky Witness (Martin 1997:861; Grube 2004b). Preceding these in order we have step CX14, which contains the extended-hand sign together with the syllables *no* and *ma* (Walters 1978; Carrasco and Boucher 1987).<sup>8</sup> Both the position of this last block within the text and its components lead us to suspect that in CX14 mention is made of the word *Yuknoom*, which is strongly related to certain lords of Kaan, coming at the beginning of their nominal clauses.<sup>9</sup> This is most commonly written *yu-ku-no-ma* (*Yuknoom* or perhaps *Yuhkno'm*), but the expressions attested in Pol



**Figure 12.** Possible references to Sky Witness at sites in southern Quintana Roo: a) Stela 3 of Pol Box (G7-H7); b) Hieroglyphic Stairway of El Resbalon (steps CX14, CX15, and CX16) (drawings by Octavio Q. Esparza Olguín and Vania E. Pérez Gutiérrez [a], modified after Von Euw [b]).



**Figure 13.** Different variants of Yuknoom: top) *yu-ku-no-ma*, plate from Tomb 4 of Calakmul; bottom) *YUK?-no-ma-u-?*, Stela 3 of Pol Box (drawings by Simon Martin [a], Octavio Q. Esparza Olguín and Vania E. Pérez Gutiérrez [b]).

Box and El Resbalon lead us to believe that there existed a more restricted form in which the syllables *yu* and *ku*<sup>10</sup> were substituted for a logogram with the value *YUK*<sup>11</sup> represented by the glyph of the extended hand<sup>12</sup> (Figure 13).

Resuming the reading of the text, we continue in block H8 with *MAM*, followed by the anthroponym *K'ahk' Ujol K'inich*. It appears that this name is associated with an emblem (?-AJAW?), although this is speculative. Finally, the legible part of the inscription ends at H10 with a glyph block in which the head of a bird appears.

The combination of names associated with Kaan emblem glyphs and *mam* expressions leads us to think that the last two columns of the text provide a list of ances-

<sup>8</sup> We see the same pattern on Stela 3 of Pol Box, except that the glyphs on steps CX14 and CX15 are contained in the single glyph block G7.

<sup>9</sup> Such is the case with Yuknoom Ch'een I, Yuknoom Ch'een II, Yuknoom Yich'aak K'ahk', and Yuknoom Took' K'awiil. With regard to Sky Witness, on Sculptured Stone 2 of Yo'okop his name includes an otherwise unexplained *no* syllable and possibly the syllable *ma* (Figure 11d). It is conceivable that these contribute to an abbreviated spelling of Yuknoom.

<sup>10</sup> We propose that the syllables *yu* and *ku* signify *yu[h]k*, "move, shake, cause to tremble," a term also attested at Palenque in the expression *yuhklaj kab*, "the earth shakes" (Stuart 2001).

<sup>11</sup> This proposed reading was considerably enriched by means of a series of conversations with Erik Velásquez García, whom we wish to especially acknowledge for sharing with us his vast knowledge of the Kaan dynasty.

<sup>12</sup> Another substitution of this type appears in the name of the eleventh ruler in the Dynastic Vase list (see K6751 in Justin Kerr's ceramic database at [www.mayavase.com](http://www.mayavase.com)).

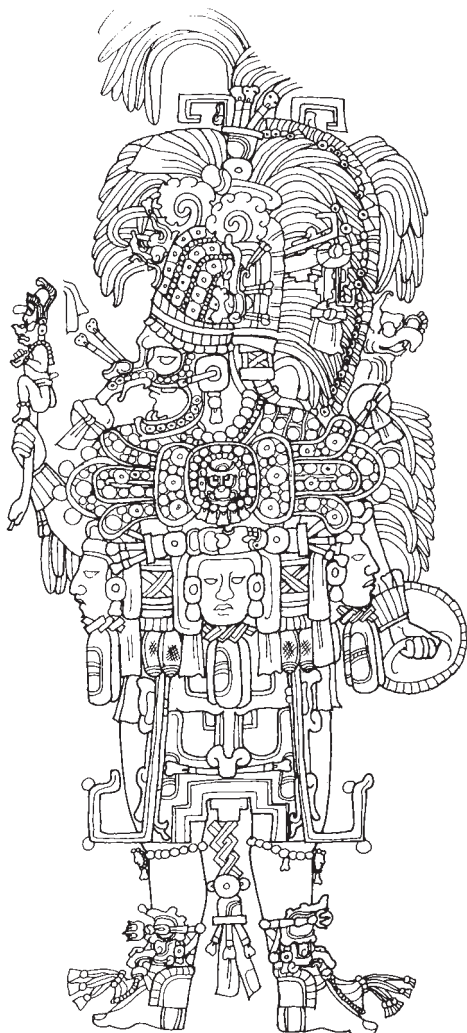


Figure 14. The ruler Itzamnaaj K'awiil, on Stela 1 of Dos Pilas (drawing by Linda Schele).

tors. As suggested by Nikolai Grube:

A very interesting aspect of this part of the text is the **MAM** glyphs which appear at least twice in the passage (G6 and H8). Apparently these final columns contain a list of three nominal phrases: the first obviously ends with the emblem glyph of Kaan in G1; the second probably extends from H1 to G8 and also includes the Kaan emblem glyph; the third begins with the **MAM** glyph at H8 and ends, perhaps, in H11. If the **MAM** glyph means “grandfather, grandson” or “ancestor,” I ask myself if what we have here is a list of deceased ancestors of the Kaan dynasty. The glyphic sequence **PAT-ti** in H5 always appears with numbers and must be a numerical classifier, in which case it could indicate that the different individuals are enumerated.<sup>13</sup> (Nikolai Grube, email of February 7, 2008, editor’s translation)

In addition to the glyphic text, Stela 3 displays a scene with a pair of richly attired figures facing one another.

The one on the left carries a collection of objects associated with the paraphernalia of Maya rulership, including earflares, necklaces, bracelets, and an intricate series of adornments that cover the area of the torso and hips. In this case what stands out is the pectoral that covers the chest of the figure,<sup>14</sup> since it is similar to that worn by other Maya leaders in the context of war or the scattering of blood. In some cases, it can be associated with the costume worn by certain rulers, like Itzamnaaj K'awiil of Dos Pilas (Figure 14), in their personification of the deities of lightning and rain (Schele and Miller 1986).

Another object that calls attention to itself is the sumptuous headdress similar to a *ko'haw*<sup>15</sup> adorned with feathers and other elements (Figure 15), as well as the ornament located around the mouth, which could be made up of tiny plaques of pyrite or other material.<sup>16</sup>

With regard to the other individual, we can only observe some of the objects which he wears in the area of the head and neck: earflares, necklace, feather headdress, and like the other figure an adornment around his mouth. Of the components that make up the headdress, there stands out the insignia of Huunal, better known as the “Jester God” (Figure 16), a deity intimately associated with Maya rulers.

The loss of the nominal clauses associated with the two figures, as well as the apparent lack of glyphic components in their headdresses, makes it impossible to identify them with certainty. However, we can suppose that the scene shows Lord Muwaan of Pol Box together with whoever accompanied him during the celebration of the K'atuun Ending.

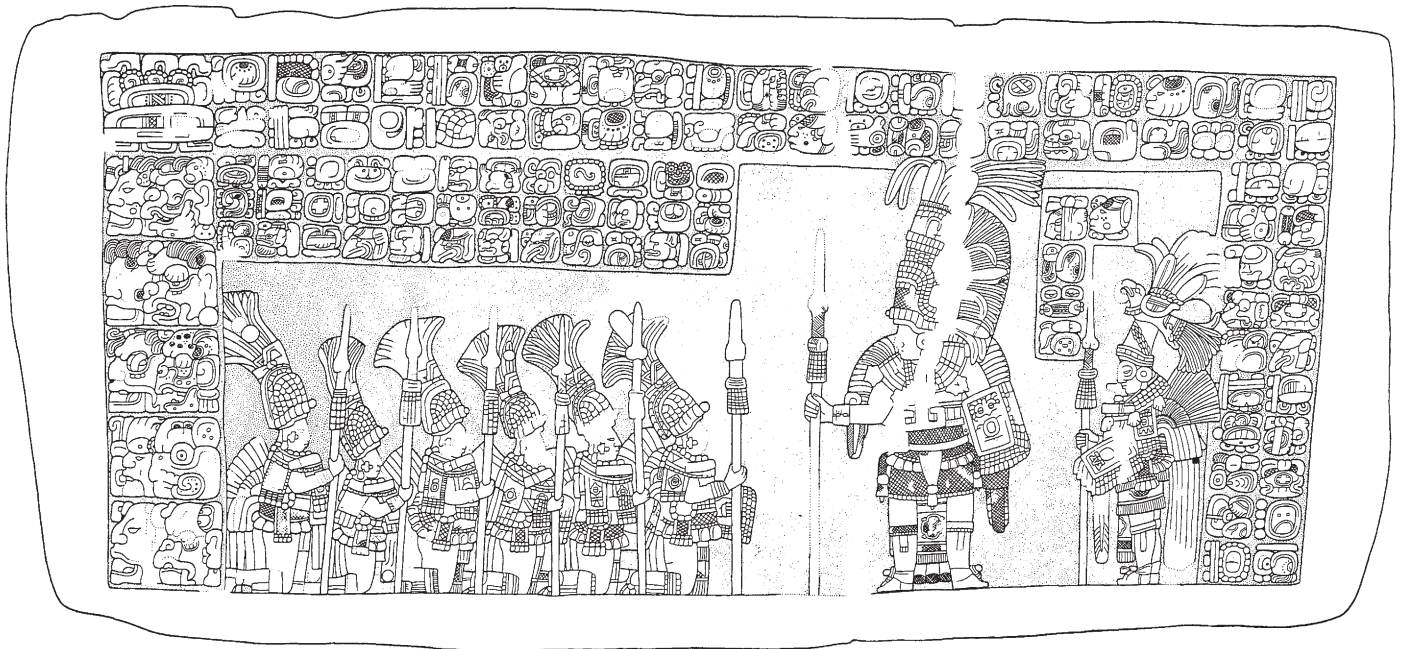
<sup>13</sup> Nikolai Grube (personal communication 2008) suggests that the name of K'ahk' Ujol K'inich in G9-H9 could correspond to a lord of the Kaan dynasty, although he is not aware of other contexts where the name occurs with the Snake emblem. With regard to the phrases recorded in the last two columns of the text, we only wish to mention that there might exist a fourth clause if the glyph at H10 represents the **MAM** logogram.

<sup>14</sup> In other examples, Schele and Miller (1986:76) define it in the following manner:

... a large round pectoral with triple loops decorating both ends covers the king's chest. [...] Below the knot pectoral, he wears a second one—a bar carved in the form of a skull, with three cylinders attached to each end. This skull pectoral is normally worn when the king is dressed as a warrior and plans to take captives.

<sup>15</sup> Type of warfare-related helmet of Teotihuacan influence, made up of small plaques of shell (Martin 2001; Martin and Grube 2002).

<sup>16</sup> We wish to thank Guillermo Bernal Romero for his help in the identification of this element, as well as pointing out the relationship with a similar object found in the tomb of K'inich Janaab Pakal at Palenque. In a report by Alberto Ruz referring to the excavations which he undertook in the Temple of the Inscriptions, he says: “The nine figures in the crypt wear a facial element that is either partly or completely visible. This entails a rectangular object located around the mouth, with tiny discs in the corners. An exactly identical object was found inside the sarcophagus, made of plaques of pyrite and discs of shell, and it must have been used by the individual interred” (Ruz 1973:183, editor’s translation).



**Figure 15.** Panel 2 of Piedras Negras depicts the subordination to Ruler 2 of various lords from Lacanha, Bonampak, and Yaxchilan. The kneeling figures wear the Teotihuacan war helmet known as *ko'haw* (drawing by David Stuart).

**Stela 2**

This monument was discovered on the west side of Structure 17 during survey work in 2001 (Figure 5). However, it was not until three years later that it was possible to uncover and record it. Its dimensions are 3.21 m by 1.53 m by 60 cm in thickness (Figure 17).

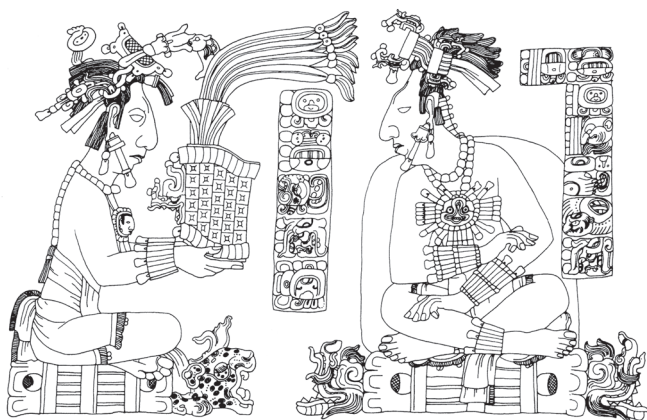
The inscription begins with an Initial Series date of 9.7.10.0.0 (October 14, 583). Regarding the associated Calendar Round, 6 Ajaw 13 Sak, only the Tzolk'in remains while the month must have been located further along, perhaps in B8. The Supplementary Series, although incomplete, includes at least F, E (indicating that

the moon's age was 22 days), C, and A. It is possible that the glyph for the appropriate position of the the nine-day cycle, the ninth 'Lord of the Night' (G9), was once indicated inside the knot motif of Glyph F at position A5.

The following portion of the text is the most deteriorated, with an almost total loss of the information registered in columns C and D. In this section, the event or events concerning the 9.7.10.0.0 date must have been recorded, as well as the actor or actors involved. In this respect, we can find an indication of a nominal clause in block D3, the reading of which is Yopaat. It should be noted that this is a term associated with the deity of lightning, whose name often forms part of nominal clauses of Maya rulers such as Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat of Copan or Yax Yopaat of Kaan.

Continuing with the inscription, the following visible glyphs correspond to a Distance Number, probably ten tuuns, and a glyph similar to "birth" (*siyaj*) in position D8. At E2 we find *ichokch'aaj*, "then he incense-casts," followed by the Calendar Round 6 Ajaw 13 Sak. At F3-F4 is a Distance Number we reconstruct as 2.10.11, which must have connected 6 Ajaw 13 Sak with the badly eroded Calendar Round at E6-F6.

The inscription continues with a badly eroded glyph in E5, followed by the expression *alay* ("here") and a Calendar Round we reconstruct as 1 Chuwen 9 Sip (9.7.12.10.11, May 2, 586). Although the glyph at E5 is difficult to interpret, it can be profitably compared to a



**Figure 16.** This detail of the Palace Tablet shows a figure holding a headdress from which the face of the deity Huunal protrudes (drawing by Linda Schele).

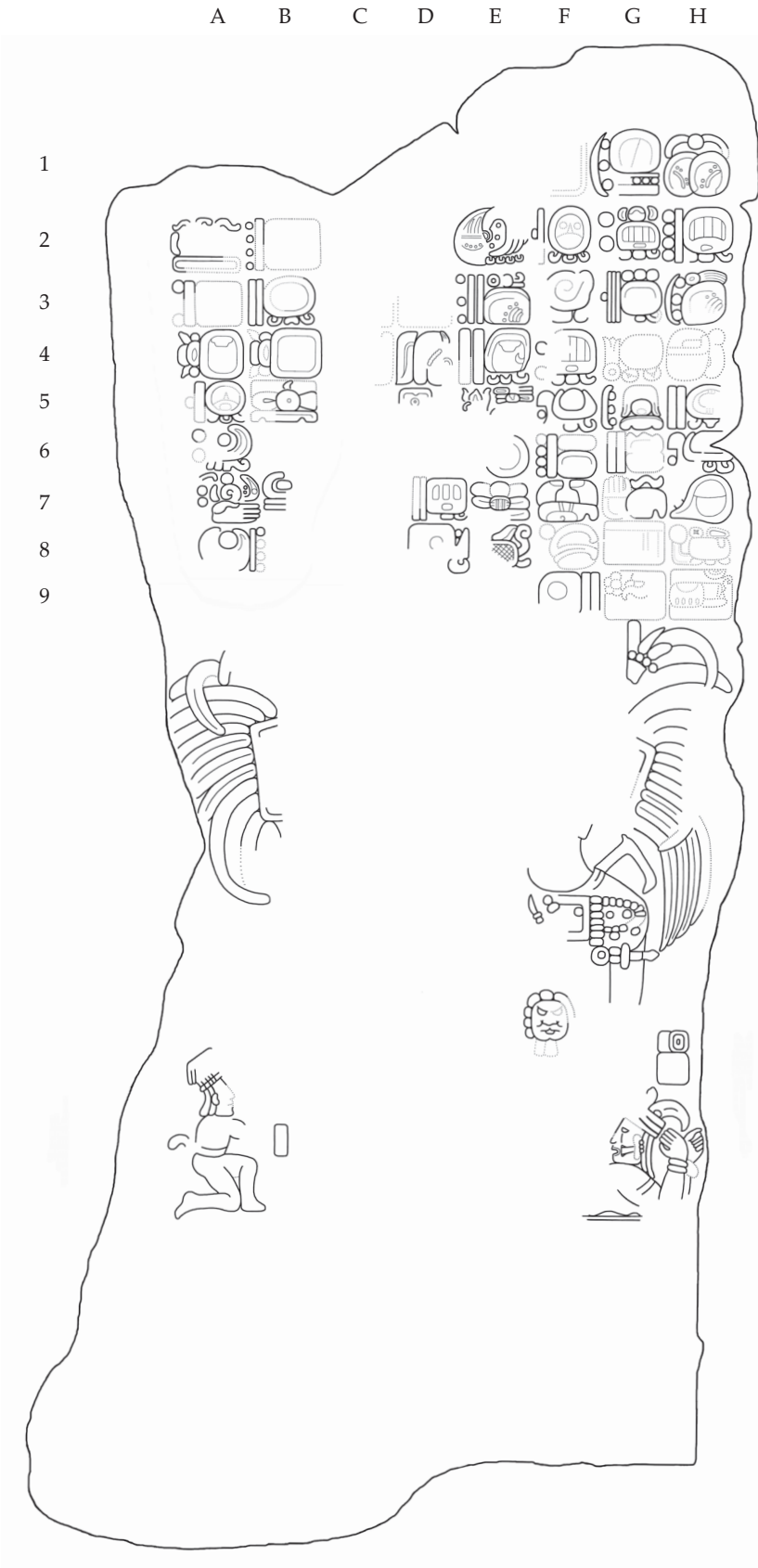


Figure 17. Stela 2 of Pol Box (drawing by Octavio Q. Esparza Olguín and Vania E. Pérez Gutiérrez).



Figure 18. Depiction of a bound captive on Pol Box Stela 2 (photograph by Octavio Q. Esparza Olguín).

passage on Tikal Stela 31 (D17-C20), where we find the sequence Distance Number / verb / *alay* / date / verb. A similar structure may be present on Stela 2 (F3-E7), where E5 occupies the position of a verbal expression. Following this same pattern, one might conclude that E7 also corresponds to a verb, probably followed by a nominal clause (F7, E8, F8).

The last pair of columns begins with the glyph *utz'akaj*, which introduces the reversed Distance Number 1.2.9.3.16, which must subtract back from the initial date of the monument in order to tie it to the Calendar Round in H5-G6, 10 K'an 12 Yax (8.5.0.14.4, January 11, 141).<sup>17</sup> Importantly, this date relates to a group of Long Counts clustering around 8.6.0.0.0, a date which is in turn associated with some of the earliest monument dedications in the Maya lowlands and the inception of royal dynasties (Grube 2004b; Stuart 2004).

After the Distance Number we have a glyph that can be read as *upattuun*, where *u* operates as a third-person singular ergative pronoun, with *pat* ("construct, fashion") as a verbal root, and *tuun* ("stone") as the object undergoing the action of the verb. One possibility is that the glyph can be analysed as active voice *upat[aw] tuun*, by virtue of the fact that it is the only voice of the root transitive verb which allows the presence of an ergative pro-

noun (Erik Velásquez García, personal communication 2005). Another possibility is that it involves a complex derived noun (marked by the union of a verbal root and a noun), as is the case with the expression *utz'aptuun*, "his stone-driving (into the earth)," where the result is grammatically a noun (Lacadena 2003). In the case of *upattuun* as a derived noun, the translation would be "his stone-fashioning." Thus, the expression in H3 would refer to the finishing of some stone monument.<sup>18</sup>

Taking into account the foregoing considerations, in the following glyphs we must have the name of the subject or the locality where the action took place. Glyphs G4 and H4 are eroded and difficult to transcribe, but the components of G5 bear similarities to the name of Foliated Ajaw, the culture hero who erected some of the earliest stone monuments, and whose name is comprised of an 'ajaw' face surrounded by leaves on three sides and suffixed by *na* (Grube 2004b; Stuart 2004).

At H6 we have the glyph *alay*, and as can be observed it does not precede the Calendar Round (as at F5) but follows it instead. In the Tablet of the Sun at Palenque (B16), *alay* also follows a Calendar Round, and there it precedes a verb. In the case of Stela 3, it could be repeating this pattern, although the erosion of block G7 makes certainty impossible.

The inscription concludes with a nominal clause and an associated title at H8, possibly *ch'ahoom ajaw*. The glyphs at G9 and H9 are very eroded but may perhaps have included additional titles.

Passing on to the iconography, the monument displays four figures. Two of them are standing and wear large feather headdresses. Of the individual on the left side, only the headdress survives, given that the erosion in this section is severe. Of the personage on the right, only portions of his attire can be seen, situated in the area of the chest and belt (similar to those worn by the individual depicted on Stela 3), and in the same fashion part of his arm and foot can be observed. The features which survive of this figure cause us to suppose that he was standing with his body facing frontwards and his face turned in profile towards his counterpart. The absence of glyphs related to these lords makes it impossible to elucidate their identities and connections.

The other two figures can be identified as captives, as

<sup>17</sup> Although the coefficient of G6 appears to be ten, one can observe the space that two additional circles must have occupied. Additionally, the day-sign K'an and the month-sign Yax are still visible.

<sup>18</sup> It may also be the case that this refers to the dedication of an associated building (Velásquez, in press).

suggested by their bindings and their smaller size with respect to the standing figures. In the case of the captive located on the left side, we see that he is tied with a cord passing around his waist and he wears a headdress. His pose and adornments are similar to those of the captives on Uaxactun Stela 20.

With regard to the other captive, we see that his hands are tied, with a cord encircling the wrists. On his face, we observe part of a tubular earflare, and he wears a headdress on the top part of his head (Figure 18). His pose is similar to that of the captive on the Leiden Plaque, who also sprawls at the feet of a ruler. A similar captive can be seen on Monument 3 of Dzibanche, this one with tangled hair. The presence of these figures is an indication that bellicose activities were undertaken by the lords of Pol Box against other localities for the obtaining of prisoners.

#### Stela 4

This monument is located on the east side of Structure 17 and was found fragmented into various severely eroded blocks. Even in this condition it is possible to observe a Long Count date on one of the fragments, apparently 9.8.0.0.0 5 Ajaw 3 Ch'en (August 22, 593). Of the Calendar Round, only the Tzolk'in survives, followed probably by glyphs F and G (in its variant of the ninth 'Lord of the Night' or G9). Further along we have a glyph block where there appears an event of *ch'amk'awiil*, "K'awiil-taking," which is related to the accession of a ruler or some anniversary rite during his reign. Unfortunately, we cannot tie this event to any date, location, or personage.

#### Final comments

By means of the work of topographic survey, excavation, and epigraphic recording, we have been able to obtain valuable information which has permitted us to recognize certain characteristics of the site. In this regard, the distance between the different architectural groups stands out, conforming to a very dispersed pattern which can be observed in other settlements in southern Quintana Roo, such as Dzibanche, El Resbalon, Nicolas Bravo, and La Union. Also, the groups are connected by a network of *sabes* which show certain notable characteristics.

The evidence from the archaeological materials collected during the excavations indicates a relative chronology of occupation from the Middle Preclassic to the Early Postclassic, with a span of greatest activity during

the Early Classic, the time period which corresponds to the three carved monuments with remains of hieroglyphic writing found to date. However, we need to undertake a more extensive program of excavations in order to corroborate these assessments.

With regard to the monuments discovered at the site, the study of their inscriptions has permitted us to gain some understanding of the different events enacted by local lords, as well as their enigmatic relationship with the influential political entity of Kaan. Apparently this polity had its seat at the nearby site of Dzibanche during much of the Early Classic. This fact renders it possible that Pol Box was part of the network of contacts of the lords of Kaan in the region, given the proximity of the two settlements. We may hope that future investigations will shed still further light on the various relationships which the rulers of Pol Box maintained with other Maya centers.

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