The Lord of Yellow Tree: A New Reference To a Minor Polity on Sacul Stela 9

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Stela 9 at the site of Sacul 1, Guatemala (9.18.0.0.0, October 12, AD 790) depicts a local ruler, K’iyel Janab, standing above a bound captive. Ian Graham took photographs and made field sketches of the monument in 1970 (Mayer 1990:1). Graham’s photographs (Figure 3) show an emblem glyph in the hieroglyphic caption beside the prisoner. A number of internal details of signs in the emblem glyph are visible in the photographs, and recent examination of the monument at night under raking light confirmed their survival. However, some of those details were not included in Graham’s unpublished field sketch, and as a result do not appear in published line drawings made from it (e.g., Houston 1984:Fig. 6; Laporte et al. 2006:Fig. 12). With the missing details restored, the emblem glyph in question can be read as k’ante’ ajaw, “Lord of Yellow Tree,” a title not previously attested in the hieroglyphic corpus. The reading adds to the epigraphic evidence for warfare and an increase in the number of royal titles among the polities of the western Maya Mountains at the end of the eighth century.

Background

During the eighth century AD, the site of Sacul 1 (“Sacul”) was the capital of the Juluup kingdom, one of several Late Classic polities in the region of present-day Dolores, Peten, Guatemala (Figures 1 and 2). Although decades of work by the Atlas Arqueológico de Guatemala have produced extensive survey data and stratigraphic and ceramic chronologies for the western Maya Mountains, the paucity of local hieroglyphic texts before the late seventh century means that the early political history of the Juluup dynasty remains obscure. The earliest hieroglyphic text at Sacul 1, on Stela 1, dates to AD 761. It describes its patron, K’iyel Janab, as “fourth in the lordship,” perhaps placing the foundation of the Juluup line around 700 (Carter 2016:242). Such a foundational date would substantially postdate the earliest formal plaza floors at Sacul 1, which belong to the Early Classic period, and also a sixth-century ritual deposit of hundreds of ceramic vessels and incense burners in Plaza D (Laporte and Mejía 2006:25, 102, 122-123, 325), but it would be consistent with the Late Classic date of the bulk of the monumental architecture at the site (Laporte et al. 1992).

Mid-eighth-century predecessors or contemporaries of K’iyel Janab are named in painted texts at the cave of Naj Tunich, which they visited in the company of lords from polities including Calakmul, Caracol, Ixctutz, and the unlocated site of Baax Tuun (Garrison and Stuart 2004; MacLeod and Stone 1990; Tokovinine 2013). Recently recognized by Barbara MacLeod (n.d.), lords from Huacutal and Ucanal also made pilgrimages to the cave. K’iyel Janab himself may have taken office in 760, when, according to Sacul Stela 4, he received a ritual palanquin from the Ucanal king Itzamnaaj Bahlam II. The gift highlights the Juluup lord’s subordinate status, which persisted to as late as 779. In that year, K’iyel Janab sponsored a vassal of his own, transforming the minor site of Ixkun into a capital suitable for the new subject king—a move which evidently provoked a raid on Sacul by Ucanal (Carter 2016:244-247). In the war that
Figure 1. The western Maya Mountains in the Maya region. Map courtesy of Precolumbia Mesoweb Press.

Figure 2. Site plan of Sacul 1 (drawing by Nicholas Carter after Ramos 1999:Fig. 2).

followed, K'iyel Janab first attacked a subject town of Ucanal, then Ucanal itself, emerging as the victor after a raid on that site on February 11, 780. Both K'iyel Janab and his vassal Yuklaj Chan Ahk of Ixkun were still in power in 790, when Ixkun Stela 1 and probably its companion piece, the eroded Stela 2 at Sacul, were commissioned. Ixkun Stela 1 shows the two rulers standing above a pair of captives, one of whom bears the title *k'ahk' ajaw* (“Fire Lord”), which served as a secondary emblem glyph or alternative royal title for the kings of Ixtutzu.

Sacul Stela 9

Sacul Stela 9 (Figure 4a) is a limestone monument, originally 3.6 m tall by 95 cm wide and 45 cm thick, carved in relief on its front surface (Mayer 1990:4). The stela fell forward or was broken in antiquity, fracturing the lower panel into two large pieces (Fragments 4 and 5, per Mayer 1990:4) and knocking off two additional pieces (Fragments 2 and 3) from the left side of the fragments from the upper panel. The glyphics and details on Fragments 2 and 4 are badly eroded, but the rest of the monument (Fragment 1) is relatively good condition. At present, Fragment 1 lies in Plaza A under a thatched ramada, roughly where it fell, with the remaining pieces collected under another ramada some meters away.

Approximately the upper four-fifths of the monument (Fragments 1, 2, and 3) show K'iyel Janab holding a ritual fire-drilling staff and a small shield, adorned with feathers, and with a ritual dance belt and apron of drilling staff and a small shield, wearing a jaguar-head headdress (Fragments 1, 2, and 3) show K'iyel Janab holding a ritual fire-dancing, a “man from K'ante'el” (*aj k'ante'el*; Figure 5a). Presumably this K'ante'el, a “place of yellow trees,” as in *k'ante'el*, a title mentioned at Copan and Tikal Stela 31 (*k'ante'el* Chan Ch'e’n; Figures 3 and 4b). It was a term for the allspice tree, *Pimenta dioica* (b) detail of the caption on Figure 4. (a) Sacul Stela 9, front (drawing by Nicholas Carter after photographs and field sketches by himself and Ian Graham); (b) detail of the caption on Stela 9; Fragment 5, reading U-CHAN nu K'AN-TE'-AJAW

The Lord of Yellow Tree

*C'ekte'*, “the captor of the K'ante' lord” (Figures 3 and 4b).

Botanical identifications of *k'ante'*

*K'ante'*, “a yellow tree” denotes a cultural category of trees whose species reference varies across languages. It joins other trees named in the hieroglyphic corpus after the basic colors of the ancient Maya palette: *sak te'*, “white tree,” as in *sak te’ ajaw* (a title mentioned at Copan and La Corona; Callaway 2011:102; Groneveld 2016:90), *chak te’* (“red tree,” on page 33 of the Dresden Codex), *ibik te’* (“black tree,” on page 34 of the Dresden Codex), perhaps a kind of oak; see Ch’orti’ *it’ar te’* (Wisdom 1950) and Ch’ol *it’xe’* [Aulie and Aulie 1998:45], and ya’ te’ (“blue/green tree” or “first tree,” the cola, on page 15 of the Paris Codex). A similar but probably unrelated Yucatec word, *k'anche’,* refers to bunches of any kind of wood (Batres Varela 1990:376).

In Ch’orti’, *k'ante’* (“yellow tree”) names *Glicidium sepium*, commonly known as madre cacao (Pérez Martínez 1994:50). The tree is shared with highland Mayan languages including K’iche’ and Q’eqchi’, where *k'anche’* and *k'ante’* refer to places whose names include K’antel or K’ante’. Besides Sacul Stela 9, at least three Classic monuments refer to places whose names include *k'ante’,* none of them firmly identified with a known site. The earliest, Tikal Stela 31 (so 445), records that the Tikal ruler Chak Tik’al erected the monument, as opposed to the Tikal ruler Chak Tik’al (Tozzer 1941:141) and a kind of tree from whose roots a yellow dye was made (Ciudad Real 2001:526). The latter is probably the coral tree, *Erythrina berteroana*, which is called *k'ante’* in modern Lacandon and used to the same use (Cook 2016:178). Estella Weiss-Krejci (2012) raised the possibility that *k'ante’* was a term for the albizzia tree (*Pimenta dioica*) in Classic Mayan, based in part on the resemblance between cut sections of that tree’s trunk and the Maya logogram K’AN, “yellow,” “precious,” “rare.” The few scattered references to *k'ante’* in the hieroglyphic corpus do not clarify the species of tree indicated, while a Postclassic depiction of a *k'ante’,* on page 31 of the Dresden Codex, lacks details that might aid in species identification.

*K'ante’* in the Hieroglyphic Record

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show their sites’ respective kings standing above bound prisoners (virtually destroyed on the Sacul monument), holding spears or staves and carrying shields with the face of the Jaguar God of the Underworld. Their facial ornaments make further reference to the Jaguar God of the Underworld: a twisted rope worn over the bridge of the nose; trailing cheek barbels or whiskers; and a tasseled bead hung from the septa of the kings on all three monuments, and from the nose of the Jaguar God shield on Naranjo Stela 11. In all three cases, long, feathered robes and tall, plumed headdresses with trilobate ornaments complete the costume.

Both Sacul Stela 9 and Naranjo Stela 33 were erected for period endings in the Long Count. By contrast, short texts on the three other stelae describe military conquests not tied to such calendrical stations. Naranjo Stela 21 commemorates K’ahk’ Tililiw Chan Chahk “in the act of entering the cave of Yootz” (ubaah ti ochch’e’n yootz), marking his invasion of that site on 8 Ik seating of Zip (9.13.14.4.2, March 29, 1706; see Martin and Grube 2008:76). Sacul Stela 6 tells us that someone “arrived” (huli) on 1 Muluc 17 Uo (9.17.9.4.9, March 7, 780). The verb refers either to K’iyel Janab’s invasion of another site or even the one referenced how- ever, we cannot identify their dynastic seat, nor even say who the “K’ante’ lord” referenced on the monument was. Two possibilities present themselves. One is that since the name of the prisoner is written on his body, it may not be duplicated in the relief hieroglyphs beside him. In other words, “the captor of the K’ante’ lord” could be K’iyel Janab or an ally of his, in which case the K’ante’ lord himself should be either the captive on the stela or some previous victim. Alternatively, a chan k’ante’ ajaw might be a title belonging to the prisoner, in which case the single glyph block on his leg would record his personal name or an abbreviated form of his name phrase. Precedent for that possibility would come, for instance, from Step III of Hieroglyphic Stairway 3 from Yaxchilan. There, the main inscription records the capture of a warrior described as a ubah hik ti aj’?mook ha’uk chupalt meer in the main inscription, apparently a reference to his impersonation of the Sun God, but called simply aj’?mook ha’uk (“Aj’?Mook, the captive”) in a caption on his loincloth (Graham 1982:169; the reading ?MOOK for T533 comes from work by Barbara MacLeod and Luis Lopes, cited in Vail and Macri 2012:47, buttressed by Yuriy Polyakhnovych 2015).
town, or to the arrival at Sacul of a prisoner brought back for ransom or sacrifice. The date of the event falls less than a month after Bel TEM’s raid on Ucanal, and an enroded emblem glyph in the lower panel whose surviving details resemble those of the Ho’ob title used at Ixcatl could indicate a successful attack on that site as part of the same conflict. Finally, Naranjo Stela 11 records a “land-burning” (yalpak) inflicted on some rival center 6 Ben 6 Kankan (9.18.13.13, October 17, 803). Taken together, these two sets of stelae point to a shared set of ideas about martial and calendrical ritual common to Naranjo and Sacul in the eighth century. For both types of monuments, Naranjo appears as the innovator, with K’iyl Janab either commissioning his own sculptures to imitate works at Naranjo, or, in another intriguing possibility, receiving aid in kind from Naranjo’s court. In either case, it is evident that, following the last decades of archaeological survey in the western Maya Mountains.

Discussion

Extensive agriculture, growing populations, and decades of archaeological survey in the western Maya Mountains and adjoining areas of the Atlas Arqueológico de Guatemala mean that the home of the K’anté lords is more likely than known to archaeology—but not by its ancient name. Its identification, if it ever comes, will have to await the discovery of some new inscription. At present, we can say little more than that K’anté takes its place among a number of minor political entities of varying scale acknowledged in the Late Classic inscriptions of the Maya Mountains. Among these are a Yaxa’ (“Blue/Green Water” or “First Rain”) dynasty, involved with Caracol and distinct from the ruling family of the Chakaj Ak’ family.

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The secondary modification of walls and architectural spaces by the incision of small designs and figurative elements—collectively referred to as graffiti—is a well known and widespread practice of the ancient Maya. The motivations behind these etched markings and the subject matter of these depictions are rarely clear, since there are a multitude of impetuses, conditioned in large measure by the aptitude of the individual to render a visually intelligible message when that was the intent. Well-preserved and intelligible figurative graffiti can provide a wealth of information on ancient Maya society, whereas abstracted forms and combinations of lines defy interpretation. Often overlooked and poorly documented, graffiti are rarely given the treatment that they deserve, with the exception of a few landmark studies (e.g., Trik and Kampen 1983; Vidal Lorenzo and Muñoz Cosme 2009; Źrałka 2014). The recent discovery of a graffiti depicting a royal palanquin at the site of Tulix Mul in northwestern Belize is a significant find, and we will describe the site and the circumstances of discovery before turning to a review of palanquins in Classic Maya society and their depictions in ancient imagery. Other examples of the same palanquin are introduced, including another depicted in graffiti and one painted on a polychrome bowl. Together these allow us to identify the particular palanquin, which has considerable implications for the historic event commemorated in this graffiti and the place of Tulix Mul in the networks that connected powerful neighbors to the north and south.

Sighting a Royal Vehicle: Observations on the Graffiti of Tulix Mul, Belize

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Background

The archaeological site of Tulix Mul was once the seat of an ancient Maya community on the eastern edge of the Alacranes Bajo in northwestern Belize. Geographically it is located in the Three Rivers Region, an area known for its numerous archaeological sites (Figure 1). Settlements within the Three Rivers Region varied greatly in size and configuration ranging from large urban centers (such as La Milpa, Dos Hombres, and Blue Creek) to small secondary centers focused on agricultural production (Akab Muclil and the Medicinal Trail Site). The site of Tulix Mul is one of the latter, the opulent and well-built homestead of an affluent group that controlled agricultural production on the margins of the imposing Alacranes Bajo that spans the borderlands between Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico. Tulix Mul was in proximity to the larger sites of Xnoha and Grey Fox, and forms part of the greater settlement area focused on the site of Nojol Nah.

This region saw complex interaction among polities, especially in the Early Classic period. The larger site of Nojol Nah is located about a kilometer to the northeast of Tulix Mul and exhibits a large pyramid-plaza complex, built in the Early Classic (Tzakol 1/2). The termination of this structure in the latter part of the Early Classic (Tzakol 2/3) and the cessation of large public architecture indicates a rupture in power at the site and in the region (Guderjan et al. 2016). Also at Nojol...
Nah, a large chultun was excavated containing Tzakol 1/2 ceramics that are stylistically linked to Naranjo. This contained a wide range of special finds such as a purse, figurines, bone needles and awls, carved shell objects, and many broken polychrome vessels (Brown et al. 2013). This chultun was then sealed by a small but complex masonry residence built atop its opening. The residence continued to be occupied well into the Late Classic period and yielded numerous human burials, of individuals in very good dietary health (Plummer 2017). As such, whereas the political aspirations of Nojol Nah may have been curtailed by the middle of the Early Classic, occupation of the site continued for several centuries.

At the same time we see the rise of Xnoha, only a few kilometers to the east, as a minor regional power that probably controlled territory in an arc of about 7 km, including both Nojol Nah and Tulix Mul. While bringing them under its sphere of influence, Xnoha built grand pyramids, an acropolis, and imposing range structures. Both of the pyramids were adorned with Early Classic masks on both sides of the central stairway. Significantly, all the sites on the east side of the Alacranes Bajo are very small when compared to the large sites overlooking the west side (Sprague 2008). Despite the withdrawal of power from these nodes at the end of the Early Classic, as manifested in the termination and cessation of monumental architecture, the economic value of the agricultural resources of the eastern side of the Bajo were important enough to continue and expand occupation and agricultural activities into the Late Classic.

**Tulix Mul**

The existence of Tulix Mul was noted in 2010 by members of the Maya Research Program while mapping an area that had recently been burnt by local farmers (Hammond 2012). Following the site was excavated during the 2012, 2013, and 2014 field seasons (Greaves and Guderjan 2012, 2013, and 2014). Tulix Mul was situated in a favorable position to exploit the resources of the Alacranes Bajo and was also along the waterway defined by the Río Azul, one of the major tributaries of the Río Hondo. Connected to these waterways the inhabitants of Tulix Mul had access to the Bay of Chetumal to the north-west and east and goods from the Caribbean, whereas the Río Azul provided an armed river route to the hot valley to the southwest. In addition to these waterways were overland roadways that together formed a north-bound corridor between the sites of the eastern eastern lowlands (to the south) and sites in southern Campeche (to the north), including El Palmar and Dzibanche (see Helmke, Hammond, Guderjan, Greaves, and Hanratty Sighting a Royal Vehicle). At the same time we see the rise of Xnoha, only a few kilometers to the east, as a minor regional power that may have been curtailed by the middle of the Early Classic, occupation of the site continued for several centuries. As such, whereas the political aspirations of Nojol Nah may have been curtailed by the middle of the Early Classic, occupation of the site continued for several centuries.

**Figure 2.** The Tulix Mul group (plan by Christopher Helmke, based on surveys by Gail Hammond and Mark Wolf).
behind it, below the polychromatic mural. This wall showed evidence of multiple episodes of plastering and sequential painting events (Figure 5a).

Testing of the bench also revealed that it was built in several construction phases (Figure 5b). Below the penultimate phase a dedicatory cache was found in the core of the substructural platform that was sealed by more than 1200 flakes of lithic debitage (Hammond 2016:415). The main cache included organic materials that were once wrapped in a cloth bundle—the impression of the cloth being preserved on the masonry binder (Greaves and Guderjan 2015) (Figure 6a). The terminal phase of the bench—which was raised by 6 cm in relation to the foregoing, penultimate, phase—contained a sherd of a Zacatel Cream-polychrome vase (Figure 6b). The beautiful mountain depicted on this sherd is highly reminiscent of the manner in which royal Codex Style ceramics were painted at the court of Calakmul in the Late Classic (see Boucher 2014; García Barrios 2011). The inclusion of this sherd in the construction core of the terminal bench not only provides evidence of interactions with the powerful Snake dynasty to the north, but also a relatively secure dating for the latter phase of architectural refurbishments in the second half of the seventh century.

Conservator Pieta Greaves examined the painted wall in 2014 and discovered multiple instances of incised graffiti (Greaves and Guderjan 2015). These graffiti were documented by a combination of methods including tracing on transparent acetate (Figure 7a) and by securing a series of photos with differential artificial raking light to emphasize the faintly incised details (Figure 7b). There were burnt patches on the wall and on the central portion of the bench in front of it, but not in the rest of the room, which may indicate that the room may also have witnessed religious observations involving fire rituals. The vaulted room and its entry chamber were eventually filled in with large rubble indicating that the room was purposefully decommissioned. The aforementioned burning may have been part of the associated termination rituals. Despite the room of Structure 2 being filled, the outer structure was refurbished and the rest of the Tulix Mul courtyard continued to be used and populated until the Terminal Classic (Hammond 2016).
The Graffiti and Mural of Tulix Mul

The graffiti of Structure TM-2 are found exclusively on the walls, predominantly at standing height and especially on the western wall, facing the central axial doorway. Based on the distribution of the graffiti it is clear that these were preferentially disposed so as to be closest to the entrance, providing the most natural lighting during daytime hours. In all, 11 separate groupings of graffiti have been identified in the room. Based on careful examination of the graffiti during the conservation of the murals, Pieta Greaves was able to determine that they were likely made with a hard and sharp tool, such as a pointed lithic. Whether they were all made by the same individual(s) during the same event is unknown, but certainly some of the graffiti span over two exposed sections of superimposed plastering. This suggests that the later graffiti were incised when parts of the plastering had already fallen into decay and the room may not have been utilized for its intended primary purpose (Hammond 2016:407). Alternatively, they could also represent two distinct phases of graffiti, each associated with the respective phases of plastering.

As is the case with graffiti anywhere in the Maya world, many of the elements represented are highly schematic, stylized, and often indistinct, and at times it is not readily apparent what they are supposed to represent. Whether the partiality and schematic nature is owed to the manner of execution, poor preservation, inadequate modern documentation, or abortive graphic renditions is equally unclear. Nonetheless, the apparent degree of abstraction that these schematic graffiti bespeak has prompted some researchers to view them as the pure product of boredom, whereas others have pointed to ritual life, intoxication, and entoptic phenomena associated with altered states as the impetus (see Źrałka 2014:119-222). In the present case, at Tulix Mul we have a combination of abstract and schematic elements as well as clearly figurative graffiti, the two happily coexisting the same wall.

The groupings are restricted to the west wall of Room 1 and are briefly described in turn (see Hammond 2016:595-600). Group 1 is one of these abstract forms and can be described as an elongated section extending to the left, curving onto itself to form two circular forms, above and below, whereas the right portion terminates in a large rounded shape that is defined by a jagged line on one side. A series of smaller crisscrossed lines occur above this principal form and faint, rectangular shapes extend below. Group 2, which is just to the north of Group 1, has suffered extensively from the spalled and damaged plaster surface. As such, only the extremities of the central form remain on either side of the spalled area. Based on what remains this graffiti has been interpreted as representing a stylized fish (Hammond 2016:599). Groups 3 and 4, just to the south of Group 1, together once formed a complex scene, but only traces of it remain today. At the top, a squared form with circular depressions in each corner and an elongated element in the middle constitutes an important feature of Group 3. Below and to the left a large squared form may delineate a space or render the schematic outline of a structure (Figure 8a). Further down along the right edge of the group is an elongated and rounded form that may have once depicted a human head in profile. More to the left is Group 4, which is dominated by a rather crude face rendered simply as two circular depressions for eyes and a longer horizontal slit for a mouth. In its execution it is most similar to petroglyphs found throughout the Maya area that depict simple faces. These may date predominantly to the Late Classic, based on the contexts in which they occur and associated artefacts (Helms et al. 2003:119-121). At Tulix Mul this simple petroglyphic face is enclosed in a wavy line that provides an approximation of a human, albeit nearly ghostly form. In Group 5 a sinuous line that resembles a serpentine form is juxtaposed to an elongated and nearly rectangular one (Figure 8b).

Group 6 is the one that breaks the pattern of the other graffiti at Tulix Mul since it is the clearest figurative scene at the site and one rendered near the center of the wall, along the primary axis of the room. It represents a relatively small palanquin, replete with a large anthropomorphic effigy placed across the top (Figure 8c). Careful examination has also revealed faint traces of human figures that once populated the scene around the palanquin. On account of the importance of this graffiti, we will return to it and focus the remainder of the paper on its interpretation and the resulting implications. Group 7 is a sequence of circular elements in a row, leading to a pair of larger circles at the top, with a woven element below resembling an item of regal regalia and the glyph for pohp “mat,” usually taken to serve as a symbol for royal authority (Figure 8d) (Thompson 1950:107). Below the mat sign is a complex cluster of intersecting lines creating another unidentified form. Group 8 is a set of near-parallel, intersecting lines that together form what may be two overlapping bands, forming an X-shaped figure. In Maya iconography this type of sign occurs as part of sky bands and may represent the ecliptic, although in this context it is unclear whether it has the same meaning. Much of Group 9 has been affected by spalled plaster and as a result very little can be said about it with certainty. But from what remains it appears to represent a standing human form, with arms bent and bound, and the same rope connected to the side of the loincloth and reaching down to the ankles. Group 10 is disposed over a square field or area and includes the outlines of what may have been a structure and/or an individual, but these are rendered in faint lines and therefore cannot be commented upon further. The final group is Group 11 is a very fine set of diagonally intersecting lines, without clear meaning.

Figure 8. A selection of photographs of the graffiti at Tulix Mul: (a) Group 3 quadrangular form; (b) Group 5 serpentine form; (c) Group 6 palanquin; (d) Group 7 string of circles and plaited motif (photographs by Pieta Greaves).
In addition to the engraved graffiti, there are a series of painted elements, preserved in nine different areas of the west wall (Figure 4), including parts of a poorly preserved procession scene in red, pink, light brown, yellow, and black. Only parts of the flesh-colored faces (Area 7) as well as the legs and segments of the loincloths of two individuals (Area 4) are preserved today, but the detail suggests that this was once a much larger and accomplished scene (Figure 8) [Hammond 2016:460, Fig. 251]. The scarcity of murals in northern Belize is due to the fact that superstructural buildings were usually destroyed in preparation for new construction phases, such as at Str. 9 at Blue Creek (Guderjan 2004). The preservation of the Tikal Mul mural was due to the careful destruction in preparation for new construction phases, to the fact that superstructural buildings were usually accomplished scene (Figure 9) (Hammond 2016:403, but the detail suggests that this was once a much larger preserved processional scene in red, pink, light brown, vessels of wood and gourd, woven baskets, a large protective bag (jaguar yoke), the funerary bier that held the corpse, a small throne with glyphic medallions, and the panels of a carved box (see Moboly- Nagy and Coe 2008:Figs. 226-235). It is this throne and the latter planking that we suggest may have been part of a small palanquin.

Based on extant depictions of palanquins in Classic Maya imagery, we can describe these vehicles as being subsumed under two categories. The smaller versions were designed to carry a single individual and are not considerably larger than a seat or chair to be carried by a limited number of individuals (Houston 1998:Fig. 5a-b; Zralka 2014:125) (Figure 10a-b). In the Maya area, depictions reveal that a variant of these smaller litters were essentially hammocks or slings mounted on longitudinal poles borne between porters (Figure 10a). In stratified societies the world over, these smaller litter types are typically carried by no more than two to four porters, yet smaller groups of porters may travel along, to relieve each other in turn. The most ancient still-extant examples are the well-preserved sedan chairs of ancient Egypt, and these continue to be used to a limited extent in parts of India today (Anonymous 2002). Bridal litters (known as jīū yà), in auspicious shades of red, usually carried by four porters, were also a common feature of imperial China. The patricioal transveral was accompanied by the “Bridal Litter Song” (xīnliàng jīū yà) wherein porters jostled and swayed the litter to assure the bride, while singing a song that was meant to provide sympathetic advice (Zhang 1986). Until the introduction of the bulletproof Popemobile in 1973, popes were traditionally carried on a special ceremonial litter known as the sedes gestatoria (“carrying chair”), conveyed by as many as twelve bearers, six on each lateral carrying pole (Hebermann 1913:679).

In addition to carrying people, palanquins were also used to transport deity effigies, for instance as part of celebrations in ancient Egypt (e.g., the Beautiful Feast of Opet, India (e.g., the final day of the Ganesh Chaturthi), and served by the Catholic Church (especially the Holy Week processions). In Japan, such palanquins are known as mokita “portable shrine” or (reverentially as shō-mokita), where they are a common feature of Shinto rituals and serve to transport deities as part of regional celebrations. Tied to such regionalism are differing traditions, including the highly associated and or shouldering these portable shrines, as well as riotous waving and jostling to amuse the spirit that is being borne (Ono and Woodard 1992:26-28). Often braced at the front on vertical supporting poles, thereby forming an open construction to frame the regal seat, with the king literally leaning onto the effigy for support. In symbolic terms, the standing deity would be seen to guard over and embrace the seated ruler, as though providing both divine protection and backing. The existence of these effigy palanquins has been known for some time (see Jones 1987:108), but it was not until the work of Simon Martin (1996) and Stephen Houston (1998:338-339) that we can see that there are extant examples are the well-preserved sedan chairs of ancient Egypt, and these continue to be used to a limited extent in parts of India today (Anonymous 2002). Bridal litters (known as jīū yà), in auspicious shades of red, usually carried by four porters, were also a common feature of imperial China. The patricioal transveral was accompanied by the “Bridal Litter Song” (xīnliàng jīū yà) wherein porters jostled and swayed the litter to assure the bride, while singing a song that was meant to provide sympathetic advice (Zhang 1986). Until the introduction of the bulletproof Popemobile in 1973, popes were traditionally carried on a special ceremonial litter known as the sedes gestatoria (“carrying chair”), conveyed by as many as twelve bearers, six on each lateral carrying pole (Hebermann 1913:679).

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as a warrior with the trappings of war, replete with shield and atlatl darts, making effusive reference to Teotihuacan as the ancient and paramount urban center (Taube 1992a:68-74).

In another scene, rendered on Lintel 3 of Temple 1, the Tikal king is seated below the outstretched paws of a large Waterlily Feline. The accompanying text makes it clear that this depiction is tied to a decisive warfare event in which the troops of Calakmul’s king, Yich’aak K’ak’ (r. AD 696-696+) were summarily defeated. The Tikal king is thereby represented triumphantly on the captured palanquin, and this close association with war makes it clear that rulers were borne onto the battlefield with their protective deities (Martin 1996; Stone and Zender 2011:99).

Defeat, at times therefore entailed not only the seizure of a foreign adversary, brought to the capital of the victorious, but also of the adversary’s palanquin. This is made evident in the depictions and texts of Temple 4 at Tikal, where the victorious Yik’in Chan K’awiil (r. AD 734-746+) is shown seated on the palanquin of a lord of El Peru, seized in battle in AD 743 (Martin 1996). The text makes it clear that the king was borne triumphantly through Tikal on this palanquin at a later date, making the analogy to the Roman triumphal processions that followed the return of victorious armies to Rome all the more significant (e.g., Versnel 1970).

Another revealing example shows Yik’in Chan K’awiil, the following year in AD 744, once more seated on the captured palanquin of an adversary, in this case that of the Naranjo king, captured in a surprise attack, on Maya New Year’s day (Helmke in press; Zender 2005a:14) (Figure 11). With this defeat, the dynasty of Naranjo was thrown into disarray and Yax Mayuy Chan Chahk, the Naranjo king, is eventually depicted, bound and prostrate at the feet of his adversary, on Stela 5 at Tikal (Martin 1996:231). The depiction of this palanquin, on Lintel 2 of Temple 4 at Tikal, is particularly interesting since it portrays the patron deity of Naranjo as a melding of several creatures, including an anthropomorphic male entity exhibiting features of the so-called Jaguar God of the Underworld—a nocturnal aspect of the sun connected to fire (Schele and Miller 1986:50-51). These features include the ears of the spotted feline, the triangular clusters of dots on his body, the twisted cruller above the nasal arch, and a broad and pointed shell beard marked with signs for lab “earth.” On his cheek he bears the numeral seven, probably cueing part of his name, and he wears the woven headdress of the youthful wind deity, known as God H (Helmke and Awe 2016:12-13; Taube 1992b:57-58, 2004:73-74), topped by a royal diadem. Although not well preserved, a long and pointed beak, or better said a bill, once extended from the nose and perforated a small flower. This is the characteristic manner of representing hummingbirds in Maya art (Stone and Zender 2011:208-209) and as such indicates that the anthropomorphic feline creature also exhibited features of the bellicose Trochilidae. These identifications are confirmed by the associated glyphic text that mentions the defeat of Naranjo by the forces of Tikal and provides a lengthy epithet for this palanquin. As understood at present, this name can be transcribed as ka’sin un pitt ... saak pilip k’in his ilik haan, or “hummingbird palanquin ... seed ..., sun feline, black headdress.” Interestingly, this text specifically refers to this litter as a “hummingbird palanquin,” making it clear that this was one of the primary identifiers, although as preserved today this is less visible in the associated iconography. This is of course rather paradoxical, and to some extent even amusing, given the great stature of the deity effigy and considering the rather diminutive size of hummingbirds. Following the lengthy name of the palanquin, the text supplies the segment tz’unuun piit yax mayuy chan chahk, or “it is the god of Yax Mayuy Chan Chahk.” Thus, the deity effigy was somehow deemed to be the god itself, and one that was personally owned by the king of Naranjo. To capture the palanquin of an adversary was thus to seize the protective and personal deity of an opposing king. To be borne triumphantly on such a palanquin would thereby signal that the deities of the adversary smiled on the victor and may therefore have been integrated into the local pantheon of deities (Helmke and Awe 2016:2-3).

In addition to the use of these large palanquins in times of war, we can also see that kings made use of them at their own capitals as part of ceremonial processions and as part of highly ritualized meetings between different courts. At Piedras Negras for instance we see Ruler 4 (r. AD 729–757) enthroned on his palanquin in AD 741 (Martin and Grube 2008:145), with a large Waterlily Feline closely guarding the king, the basalt platform marked with a skyband that defines this as a celestial object (Stuart and Graham 2003:53-54) (Figure 12). In the text of Stela 8 at Dos Pilas, the enthronement of King Shield K’awiil in AD 698 may be recorded as having taken place “on the back of a palanquin” (Andres et al. 2014:59). On the Dallas Altar, now known to stem from the site of La Corona in Guatemala (and currently designated as La Corona Panel 1020).
6), we can see two female individuals interacting with one another, across the space between their respective palanquins (Martin 2008; Stuart 2013) (Figure 13). The one on the left is the queen of La Corona, originally hail-ing from Calakmul and daughter to the ruling monarch, Yukno’m ... Took’ K’awiil (r. AD c. 702–731), standing on her palanquin at the commemoration of the Period Ending of AD 731. The base of her palanquin is marked with aquatic elements, the structure formed by lanky and aged Atlantean figures, whose knees are bent by the weight of the celestial roof that they bear (Houston 1996:354, Fig. 18; Martin 2015:190, Fig. 6). The roof is embellished with the stylized features of a Teotihuacano butterfly—which wears the mask of the Storm God at the small of the back (see Wrem Anderson and Helmke 2013). Together these once more suggest that the protective deity is a Maya emulation of an earlier Teotihuacan entity.

Palanquins in Maya Writing

In the glyphic texts, references to “palanquin” are made by the use of a logogram that is a stylized depiction of a small throne, topped by a cushion and the sign AJAW, which although unread in this context, serves to indicate that this is a royal litter (Stone and Zender 2011:98-99). The reading proposed for this sign as pit was suggested by Dimitri Belayev (in Stone and Zender 2011:234 n. 35), based on Yukatek sources that provide a cognate form as well as the phonetic complement -ta found in several instances (Figure 14a-c). The same logogram is also found in syntactical constructions that have been understood as “palanquin events,” presumably specific journeys made by kings to other kingdoms, by means of palanquins, to foster alliances and diplomatic ties between different courts. For instance, on Altar 12 at Caracol, the text relates one such event in AD 819, wherein Tum Yohi’ K’inich of Caracol journeyed to Ucánal (27.5 km distant to the northwest) to hold a meeting, possibly the one depicted in the imagery of the altar, involving the warlord Papamall (Grube 1994:95-96). Just 103 days later, the king of Naranjo, Wáxakaljuín Ubah K’awil is likewise said to have traveled by palanquin to Ucánal (33 km distant to the south-southwest), to meet the same Papamall, and on his impressive Stela 32, the king of Naranjo is represented on the very palanquin that he journeyed on. The importance of these meetings is made clear by their being referred to in these Terminal Classic texts and is symptomatic of the times, since alliances were one of the means by which the remaining figures of power were able to negotiate and sue for continued stability. As a lexeme, in addition to naming particular palanquins as we have seen instances (Figure 14a-c), the same logogram is also found in syntactical constructions that have been understood as “palanquin events,” presumably specific journeys made by kings to other kingdoms, by means of palanquins, to foster alliances and diplomatic ties between different courts. For instance, on Altar 12 at Caracol, the text relates one such event in AD 819, wherein Tum Yohi’ K’inich of Caracol journeyed to Ucánal (27.5 km distant to the northwest) to hold a meeting, possibly the one depicted in the imagery of the altar, involving the warlord Papamall (Grube 1994:95-96). Just 103 days later, the king of Naranjo, Wáxakaljuín Ubah K’awil is likewise said to have traveled by palanquin to Ucánal (33 km distant to the south-southwest), to meet the same Papamall, and on his impressive Stela 32, the king of Naranjo is represented on the very palanquin that he journeyed on. 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Numbers represented by palanquin titles: (d) Drawing 6, Naj Tunich; (e) Stela 1, Sacul; (f) Drawing 9, Naj Tunich (drawings by Christophe Helmke).

This also raises the question of where these large and imposing vehicles were stored when not in use. One intriguing depiction of a palanquin, formed as the gaping maw of a serpentine creature, is shown on one vase as part of a palatial scene (K8326). The monarch holds court while seated on his palanquin, which has been set in front of a structure adorned with the head of the great celestial bird. What may be the same palanquin is depicted on another vase (K1377) as though stored away within the superstructure of a temple, adored by the great feline bird on its facade. In this context, the palanquin may have functioned as the focal point of ritual devotion, tended to by human figures and small animals assuming a human gait (Figure 15). As palanquins relate to the built environment, an intriguing text adorning the sides of the large Monument 1 at Tipan Chen Uitz in central Belize may label this slab as an emulation, skeuomorph, or stone simulacrum of a palanquin (Andres et al. 2014:58-60). Alternatively, it may have been designed as a b c d e f a ~

Figure 14. The logogram PIT – pit, “palanquin” in Classic Maya writing: (a) Monument 1, Tipan Chen Uitz; (b) Altar 12, Caracol; (c) Lintel 2, Temple 4, Tikal. Numbered palanquin titles: (d) Drawing 6, Naj Tunich; (e) Stela 1, Sacul; (f) Drawing 9, Naj Tunich (drawings by Christophe Helmke).

Sighting a Royal Vehicle

Figure 15. Detail of polychrome vase K1377 showing what may be a palanquin stored within a temple, being tended to by anthropomorphic figures and small animals (drawing by Christophe Helmke).
The Tulix Mul Palanquin in Context

With this review of palanquins in Classic Maya imagery and writing, we can return to that represented in the graffiti of Tulix Mul to search for its identity. Recognizing the importance of the figurative graffiti at Tulix Mul we decided to collate all the photos of Group 6 together into a photogrammetric model, generated by Agisoft PhotoScan, with the assistance of the Digital Humanities Laboratory at the University of Copenhagen. This was then exported for visual analysis and to produce basic templates upon which the drawings were produced (Figure 16a), whereas a 3D artificial texture model was processed in Sketchfab to more clearly segregate the templates upon which the drawings were produced (model by Lars Kjær and Christophe Helmke); (b) drawing of the palanquin represented in graffiti Group 6 at Tulix Mul (drawing by Christophe Helmke).

Figure 16. (a) The photogrammetric template used as a basis for drawing the Tulix Mul palanquin (model by Lars Kjær and Christophe Helmke); (b) drawing of the palanquin represented in graffiti Group 6 at Tulix Mul (drawing by Christophe Helmke).

Figure 17. Analogous depictions to the Tulix Mul palanquin: (a) graffiti on the east wall of Room 6 of Structure Q at Nakum (drawing by Katarzyna Radnińska); (b) polychrome bowl K7716 of Nakum, dated to the early seventh century; (c) rollout photograph of the same bowl (photographs © Justin Kerr).

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the place to station a palanquin within a royal palace in such a way that the ruler could preside over events while peering down from the palatial complex.

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With this review of palanquins in Classic Maya imagery and writing, we can return to that represented in the graffiti of Tulix Mul to search for its identity. Recognizing the importance of the figurative graffiti at Tulix Mul we decided to collate all the photos of Group 6 together into a photogrammetric model, generated by Agisoft PhotoScan, with the assistance of the Digital Humanities Laboratory at the University of Copenhagen. This was then exported for visual analysis and to produce basic templates upon which the drawings were produced (Figure 16a), whereas a 3D artificial texture model was processed in Sketchfab to more clearly segregate the templates upon which the drawings were produced (model by Lars Kjær and Christophe Helmke); (b) drawing of the palanquin represented in graffiti Group 6 at Tulix Mul (drawing by Christophe Helmke).

Figure 16. (a) The photogrammetric template used as a basis for drawing the Tulix Mul palanquin (model by Lars Kjær and Christophe Helmke); (b) drawing of the palanquin represented in graffiti Group 6 at Tulix Mul (drawing by Christophe Helmke).

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Room 6 within Structure Q, a long and imposing range of buildings at Naranjo that is adjacent to the acropoline palace at Nakum (Calderón et al. 2006:182; Zrała et al. 2014:126; Zrała and Hermes 2009). The Nakum graffiti likewise depicts a single palanquin, with two images, a king and a captive, and a visible carrying pole. The lower image is similarly decorated with the same fringe of small strips and what seems to be a cloth drapery that is folded rather carefully on the right side panel. The most remarkable element of all, however, is the large effigy that decorates the roof, representing the same anthropomorphic figure. Depicted in the same prone position, head and shoulders raised, wearing a large feathered headdress and with the same prominent spray of feathers springing from the lower back. The posture and curvature of the back is also characteristic, forming a very pronounced and curved arch. Based on all of these similarities, both depictions may represent the same palanquin. Whereas these two graffiti show the palanquins at rest, the particulars of the scenes differ in the details, since the Nakum example also depicts a small couching figure who seems to be in the process of administering himself an enema. Whether this was part of the festive occasion that accounted for the presence of the palanquin in the first place, emulative enthusiasm for, or even derogatory emulation of, the effigy depicted on the nakun (note the similar poses) remains an open question. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that both graffiti, despite the large distance that separates the two depictions, represent the same palanquin.

The identity of the particular palanquin is resolved by its depiction on a polychrome bowl, photographed by Marc Zender (2005b) and illustrated in Figure 17b.

The shape and decorations of the bowl are characteristic of ceramics produced in royal workshops of Naranjo and are assigned to the reign of Ajasaaj Chan K'inich (c. 546-661) (see Martin and Grube 2008:71-72; Reents-Budet et al. 1994). This assignment is confirmed by the glyphic text along the rim that assigns this kingship ownership of the bowl. In this particular example, the seventh-century king is called "four-k'atun king," indicating that he must have been over 60 years of age, and thereby dating the bowl to the seventh century. The slightly raised composite spray of feathers on the edge of the side panel of the bowl is an example of the contemporary field throne as it were (Figure 17c). Seated on the throne is a figure painted in black who faces a group of individuals, as part of the royal audience. The tightly packed row at the back appear to be warriors. The seated figures in front of them have been interpreted as captives that are being presented to the king (Justin Kerr, personal communication 2000), yet these could be courtiers who belong to the same group as the warriors. The figure is wearing a loose garment with the seated king, holding fans and insignia of rank, as well as gesticulating and holding a hand up as if in conversation. The posture of the seated king is difficult to ascertain, but may represent the king of Naranjo interacting with warriors and courtiers of a foreign court. As such, we may be witnessing the types of negotiations that long-distance travel by palanquin would have entailed, since roadways intersected many different polities along the way.

The palanquin of Ajasaaj Chan K'inich as represented on the bowl shares striking similarities to the graf-}

Figure 18. Dos Pilas Panel 6 (photograph by Merle Greene Robertson).

Putting It All Together

What are the implications or these observations? There are several, not the least of which is that we are able to track paths of travel and politics visited by Ajasaaj Chan K’inich during his long and influential reign. The depiction at Nakum may be less significant, since the small feature next to the king is a neighboring polity of Naranjo. On the other hand, the Nakum example may represent a more complete form of the real palanquins, comprising the same small structure with decorated awnings and a large anthropomorphic effigy that resembles closely the same pose, lying ventrally, head and abdomen aloft, with a similar headdress and the same character-istics spray of feathers at the back. The Nakum example shows a figure on the bowl with black body paint, bracing a circular shield and a large spear. These mark the figure as a uniquely marital one, with the triangular pattern of dots repeated over and over as one of its more characteristic feline features. Most stunning of all are the elongated lips that protrude to form a proboscis resembling the bill of hummingbirds in Maya iconography. Based on comparisons between the various examples, it is thus evident that this is a recurring motif, probably representing the face of the effigy in the Tulum graffiti is also meant to represent the same stylized proboscis or bill.
pausing of the royal progress at the site, sometime in the mid-sixth to early seventh century. As this event greatly defied the quotidien, it prompted response and commemoration, albeit humble, in the graffiti of Tikal Mul. This greatly helps to flesh out the particulars of the history connecting these courts, as well as the lives and times of great kings. The connection between Naranjo and sites such as Tikal Mul and Nohoj Noh Bec is so powerful that Belize is made all the more palpable when considering the ceramics that have been found at the sites. Thus, many Naranjo-style ceramics begin to appear during the Tepeu 1 ceramic complex, and ties to northern sites affiliated with the Snake kings are also attested by the appearance of Zacatel Cream-polychrome ceramics as part of the Tepeu 2 complex. Together, the material evidence indicates that the sites of northwestern Belize were an integral part of the regional node of trade and communication that connected the Snake kings in the north with communities of the eastern central lowlands.

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Throne leg from House E of the Palace, Palenque (rubbing by Merle Greene Robertson).