

# Rewriting History at Yaxchilán: Inaugural Art of Bird Jaguar IV

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The sculptural legacy of the Maya is political art, commissioned by elite patrons as a means of documenting dynastic history and securing continued prestige. However, Mayan art was not merely commemorative; in some sculptural programs the art was designed to rewrite history and to redirect public opinion. The inaugural monuments of Bird Jaguar IV, late eighth-century ruler of Yaxchilán, illustrate this particular form of propaganda. The ways in which iconographic images and hieroglyphic texts were manipulated to validate Bird Jaguar's tenuous claims of legitimate status is the subject of this paper. The discussion focuses on Stela 11, central of the three monuments commemorating Bird Jaguar's accession at 9.16.1.0.0 (A.D. 752).

Studies of Yaxchilán's sculpture by Cohodas (1976b), Graham (1979, 1982), Mathews (1988), Proskouriakoff (1963b, 1964), Schele (1982), Schele and Miller (1986), and Tate (1986) contributed greatly to our knowledge of the calendars and the dynastic history of the site, although the interrelationship of the text and the images of individual sculptures is an ongoing puzzle still requiring much attention. Compositions must be continually reevaluated so that iconography is reviewed in terms of new decipherments for the accompanying hieroglyphic texts. It is the purpose of this paper to determine how artists meshed the two parallel systems of communication, text and

image, to create an extraordinary declaration of rightful privilege for Bird Jaguar IV.

It is known that Bird Jaguar IV succeeded Shield Jaguar I, who acceded in A.D. 681, died in 742 at around age ninety-five, and who ruled Yaxchilán for sixty-one years. However, there are several peculiarities in the documentation of Bird Jaguar's parentage and accession.

The first indication of a problem in dynastic succession is the ten-year interregnum between the death of Shield Jaguar I and the inauguration of Bird Jaguar IV. At the death of his predecessor, Bird Jaguar was already thirty-three years old, mature enough to rule, yet he did not take the throne until ten years later. The unprecedented decade of interregnum suggests that Bird Jaguar did not have an undisputed claim to the throne.

There is also a genealogical problem. Bird Jaguar's inaugural monument, Stela 11, claims that he is the child of the previous ruler, Shield Jaguar I, and the high-ranking Lady Ik Skull of Site Q. However, the only royal lady represented in art commissioned by Shield Jaguar was Lady Xoc, and though Bird Jaguar was then about seventeen years old, none of Shield Jaguar's known monuments mentions either Bird Jaguar or Lady Ik Skull. Thus, even if Bird Jaguar was the child of Shield Jaguar and Lady Ik Skull, Shield Jaguar's lack of acknowledgment for this woman



Fig. 1. Stela 11, flapstaff rite, river side.



Fig. 2. Stela 11, barbel god rite, temple side.

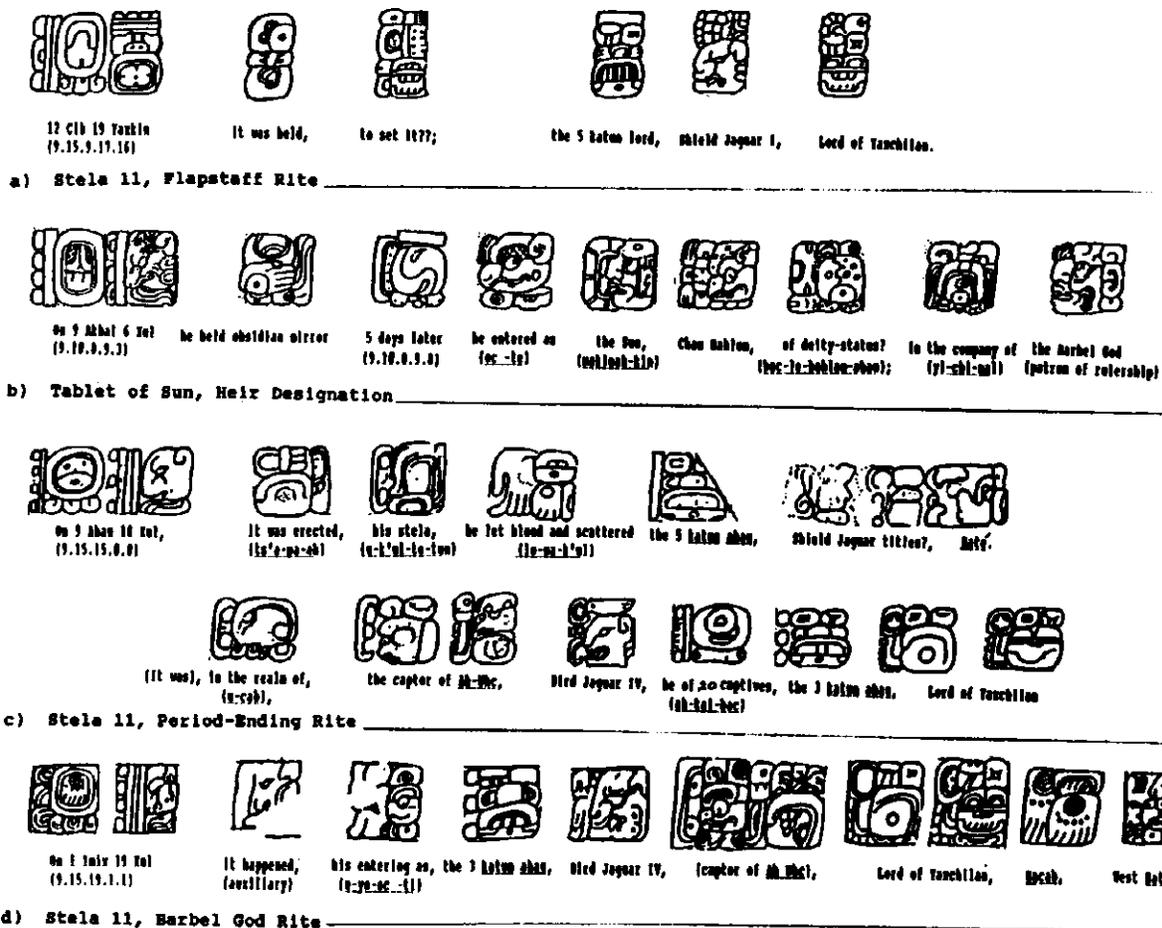


Fig. 3. Pre-inaugural rites, Yachilán and Palenque: a) Stela 11, flapstaff rite; b) Temple of the Sun, heir designation; c) Stela 11, period-ending rite; d) Stela 11, barbel god rite.

still suggests that Bird Jaguar was not the dynastic heir, as he was not the son of the official consort, Lady Xoc.<sup>1</sup>

These irregularities imply dynastic instability and strongly suggest that Bird Jaguar did not hold clear title to the throne. In conventional rules of patrilineal descent, status as the royal heir would later lead to the power of rulership. In contrast, it is apparent that Bird Jaguar's status derived primarily from his power as ruler. The fact of Bird Jaguar's accession and the proliferation of sculpture produced during his reign confirm his political power, but his highly questionable status as the legitimate heir suggests that Bird Jaguar's power was acquired by unconventional means.<sup>2</sup>

Since Maya monuments served both as public records and as divine sanctions of legitimate royal descent, Bird Jaguar and his artists were left with the dilemma of how to reconstruct real history in

order to create for Bird Jaguar the heritage and sense of legitimacy required for Maya conventions of dynastic documentation. Analysis of the texts and images of Bird Jaguar's inaugural Stela 11 show that, in order to compensate for the imperfections of his lineage claim, artists fabricated a series of ritual events that established Bird Jaguar's status as the rightful successor.

### Stela 11

The figural imagery and hieroglyphic texts of this sculpture are each unique documentary expressions (figs. 1-3). Chronological comparison of monuments at Yachilán shows that until the reign of Bird Jaguar IV, only two sculptural themes were traditional for stelae: militaristic scenes of prisoner arraignment and commemorative scenes wherein the ruler scattered liquid as part of a period-ending ritual. Later, during the

reign of Bird Jaguar, artists did continue to carve these traditional images, but Bird Jaguar's Stela 11 represents a completely innovative program of political publicity.

While stelae of most rulers documented ceremonial occasions during their reigns as evidence of their power, Stela 11 focuses instead on a series of pre-inaugural rituals encompassing the ten year interval when the rulership of Yaxchilán was uncertain. Five dates and events are included, culminating with the date of Bird Jaguar's accession. It is curious that, although the accession rite is repeated three times and is the hieroglyphic focus of the monument, that event is not illustrated. It is clear, though, that the two ceremonies which are pictured are central to the propaganda of the inaugural complex and were intended as the essential validation of Bird Jaguar's royal status, which in turn justified his accession.

One of the exceptional features of Stela 11 is that in addition to the two new thematic images, artists also included subtle references to more conventional ceremonies. Thus, each figural scene was designed to represent two separate events, clarified in individual texts. The flapstaff scene (Tate 1986:130) on the river side of the stela refers both to Shield Jaguar's supposed selection of Bird Jaguar as lineage successor and to Bird Jaguar's later performance of a period-ending rite as surrogate for the deceased Shield Jaguar. The barbel god scene<sup>3</sup> on the temple side of the stela refers both to a military conquest associated with Bird Jaguar's eventual placement as ruler-elect and to the forthcoming inauguration which concludes Yaxchilán's extended interregnum.

### **The Flapstaff Ritual**

In the flapstaff scene the two elite males who stand facing each other are individually identified as Shield Jaguar I (on the left) and Bird Jaguar IV. Although the flapstaff motif occurred occasionally at other sites, this scene on Stela 11 constitutes its first appearance at Yaxchilán.

The date of the flapstaff event, 9.15.9.17.16 (June 22, 741) (fig. 3a), occurs nearly a year before the death of Shield Jaguar I on June 15, 742. Tate (1986) provided a possible explanation of this flapstaff ritual, based on the correspondence between the carved scene and ethnographic

accounts of summer solstice rituals. Solstitial ceremonies presently performed by the Chorti Maya replicate the annual passage of the sun as it slows down before changing directions. These solstitial rites function as the points of exit from, and entry into, positions of religious leadership. Specifically, summer solstice marks the day that the current leader terminates his duties (Tate 1986:133ff). The summer solstice ceremony recorded on Stela 11, which was oriented toward the summer solstice sunrise, may then have constituted a type of successor-appointment ritual depicted by Bird Jaguar as a validation of the passage of power from his father to himself.<sup>4</sup>

In view of the interregnum discrepancies noted above, it is likely that the recorded flapstaff rite was entirely fabricated, but because Bird Jaguar's choice of solar symbolism had a strong cultural basis, the propaganda of the solar paradigm would have been entirely appropriate for the Stela 11 inaugural commemorative. Mesoamerican political leaders identified themselves with the sun, and, as first synthesized by Cohodas (1976a:162ff), Mayan art often includes metaphorical references to the cyclic changes of death/transformation/rebirth that are common to the sun and to dynastic succession. In this way, the death of a predecessor is analogous to the descent of the sun, while the inauguration of a successor corresponds to the subsequent sunrise.<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that the annual transformation of the sun is perceived to occur at the summer solstice. Thus, by choosing to associate himself and his predecessor with the transformational point of the sun's metamorphosis, Bird Jaguar was able to capitalize on its allegorical references to dynastic succession. Bird Jaguar was claiming that his succession was as inevitable and important as the solar succession at summer solstice, but it appears that Chan-Bahlum II of Palenque should be credited with the specific linking of summer solstice to dynastic rites of passage.

Chan-Bahlum II's heir designation occurred on the summer solstice of June 21, 641 (fig. 3b). The intended parallels of dynastic and solar transition are clarified in the passage which states that on the solstice, Chan-Bahlum "became the sun" or "entered (the lineage) as the sun" (Schele 1987: 95ff). That Bird Jaguar was replicating Chan-

Bahlum's connection of successor designation and summer solstice is suggested by Bird Jaguar's choice for this fabrication of June 22, 741, precisely one hundred solar years after the similar event at Palenque.

Even by itself this solstitial anniversary would have held great significance, but since the date also coincided with a phenomenal cosmological circumstance, its symbolic potential was greatly magnified. Within a period of five days from the Stela 11 flapstaff ritual, there was an extraordinary coincidence involving arithmetical and symbolic halfway positions of three different cycles (fig. 4):

- summer solstice of the 365-day solar cycle (9.15.9.17.16)
- inferior conjunction of 584-day Venus cycle (9.15.9.17.17)
- *lahuntun* of the 7200-day cycle of *katuns* (9.15.10.0.0)

Each of these dates are midpoint pivots, or turn-arounds, and each is therefore associated with transformation and succession. The simultaneous occurrence of these three cyclic bifurcations is extremely rare and would have held propaganda potential for the Maya whose political and religious foundations focused on concepts of parallel cyclic transition and renewal. The convergence of

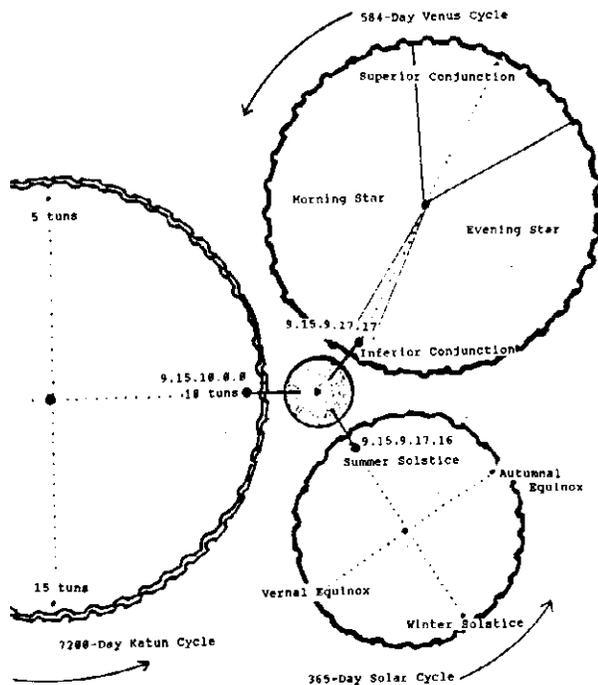


Fig. 4. Convergence of cyclic midpoints.

these phenomena was exploited a decade later by Bird Jaguar and his artists.

Though Period Endings had commonly been celebrated at Yaxchilán, Bird Jaguar's monuments never mention the important *lahuntun* of 9.15.10.0.0. Instead, the flapstaff ritual on Stela 11 (9.15.9.17.16) precedes the Period Ending by four days. At Palenque, the Cross Group texts specify that Chan-Bahlum II's heir designation rites culminated on the fifth day after they were initiated. Similarly, at Yaxchilán the fifth day is commemorated by three monuments dated 9.15.10.0.1 (Stela 34, Lintel 39, Lintel 14). In addition to replicating Chan-Bahlum's "fifth day" celebration, this date also signalled the emergence of a new *lahuntun* and the initial appearance of Morning Star, each symbolically analogous to a summer solstice sunrise. To illustrate associations of dawning or rebirth, the three monuments commemorating 9.15.10.0.1 appropriately employ a double-headed serpent symbolizing emergence, renewal, and portal communication with the supernatural world (figs. 5-7).

Of these memorials, Stela 34 is the most significant. While Stela 11 commemorates the role of Bird Jaguar's father in the termination rite with flapstaff imagery on 9.15.19.17.16, Stela 34 commemorates the role of Bird Jaguar's mother in the renewal rites with serpent imagery on 9.15.10.0.1. The stela portraying a sole female on both sides was unique for the Maya and infers a superior status for Lady Ik Skull. I suspect that the primary reason for proclaiming great prestige for his mother was because it thereby elevated Bird Jaguar's own position in society, as descended from an eminent father and mother. Stela 34 reflects both the partially skeletal serpent and the bloodletting rites of Lintel 25 where the connection between serpent imagery and renewal rites are clearly established and alludes to Bird Jaguar's supposed emergence as lineage successor on 9.15.10.0.1. In both sculptures (figs. 5, 8) the half-fleshed, half-skeletal serpent, suggestive of transformation, is a visual allusion to the "underworld journey" travelled prior to divine rebirth at accession or successor appointment.

Whereas on Stela 34 Bird Jaguar's mother and two deities perform bloodletting to validate the appointment rites,<sup>6</sup> Lintel 39 records that on



Fig. 7. Lintel 39 (9.15.10.0.1).

the same date, Bird Jaguar was himself involved with bloodletting rites. Again, a partially skeletal serpent illustrates the event and the action is again consecrated by supernaturals (fig. 7).



Fig. 5. Stela 34 (9.15.10.0.1).

That the bloodletting and emergence rites of 9.15.10.0.1 were perceived as a fundamental proof of Bird Jaguar's status may be confirmed by Lintel 14, erected in the reign of Bird Jaguar's son, Shield Jaguar II (fig. 6). For Temple 20, Shield Jaguar II chose duplicate images to document both his own birth (Lintel 13) and the fifth-day rites for his father (Lintel 14) thereby providing evidence that Bird Jaguar's emergence rites, supposedly performed on 9.15.10.0.1, continued to hold significance for Shield Jaguar's own claims of status. As implied on Stela 34, and Lintels 39 and 14, Lintel 13 clearly euphemizes "birth" as an emergence from the underworld via the front head of a serpent<sup>7</sup> (fig. 9).

Thus, while known inscriptions from Yaxchilán do not arithmetically connect the dates 9.15.9.17.16 and 9.15.10.0.1, their five-day interval echoes the fifth-day culmination of the heir designation rites at Palenque. The cosmological aspects of renewal associated with 9.15.10.0.1 echo similar concepts at Palenque, where Chan-Bahlum emerged as "the (new) sun."<sup>8</sup>

A second inscription in the flapstaff scene records a period-ending event on 9.15.15.0.0 (fig.

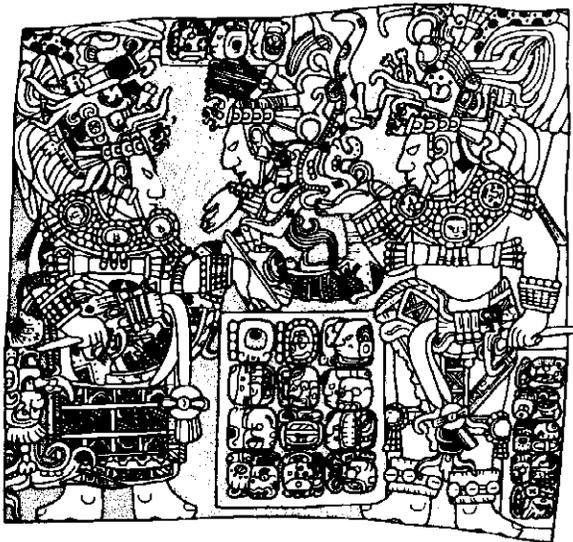


Fig. 6. Lintel 14 (9.15.10.0.1).



Fig. 8. Lintel 25. Inaugural of Shield Jaguar 1.

3c). Verbal and nominal glyphs of this passage indicate that Shield Jaguar I erected a stela and conducted the usual scattering rite in celebration of that Period Ending, yet the date is nearly four years after his death!<sup>9</sup> However, the *u-cab* compound at N2 connects the names of Shield Jaguar and Bird Jaguar and implies Bird Jaguar's political command of the period-ending rites. Though Bird Jaguar was not enthroned for another six *tuns*, he claims to have officiated, for and with, the deceased Shield Jaguar.

Certain costume elements associated with such period-ending rites (shell diadem, pointed hipcloth, reptilian mask) are worn in this scene by both males, paralleling the textual record of their shared participation in the scattering ceremony. The figural scene thus simultaneously represents the symbolic dual participation of Shield Jaguar and Bird Jaguar in both a flapstaff ritual on 9.15.19.17.16 and a period-ending ritual on 9.15.15.0.0.

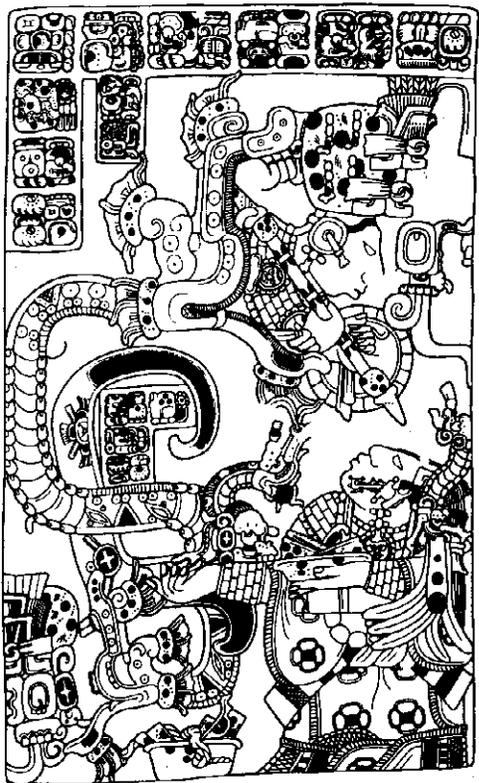


Fig. 9. Lintel 13. Birth of Shield Jaguar 11.

## The Barbel God Ritual

In contrast to the flapstaff ritual wherein Bird Jaguar claims to have been designated as heir by the former ruler of Yaxchilán, the temple side of the stela displays a later, yet complementary, ritual wherein Bird Jaguar may have been validated as ruler-elect by both the Yaxchilán nobility and the supernatural patron of rulership (fig. 2).

The upper zone includes portraits and glyphic identification of Bird Jaguar's parents, again accentuating dynastic position. The lower register is distinguished by the dramatic portrayal of Bird Jaguar as an impersonator of the barbel god (Chac Xib Chac, GI of the Palenque Triad), who looms over a group of three kneeling captives. Even though he is masked as the supernatural barbel god, the associated inscription identifies the subject as Bird Jaguar. While masks are devices used universally for the transformation of humans, they are rarely depicted in Mayan art. This one seems included to ensure the viewer's understanding that actions of the royal Bird Jaguar were mediated by the supernatural barbel god. At Palenque the barbel god was associated with rulers' inaugurations and apotheoses, and it is especially notable that the barbel god's role as patron of dynastic rulership is implicit in the Palenque texts describing heir designations (Temple of the Sun, Palace Tablet, Temple XVIII) where these events are repeatedly performed *yichnal* 'in the company of the barbel god/GI (Stuart 1989).

While these examples define the barbel god as a creator or transformer, his role is often that of a destructive sacrificer. On Stela 11, the bound captives suggest involvement by Bird Jaguar and the barbel god as sacrificers of captive victims, and the perforator held by the composite ruler/deity corroborates this interpretation.

Calendric data for this event carries potent connotations correlating with the martial aspects of the image. As determined by Lounsbury (1982: 143ff), initial appearances of Venus as Evening Star frequently coincided with records of intersite war and capture. The date 9.15.19.1.1 of the barbel god ritual did occur near the first appearance of Evening Star and thus is symbolically associated with war and sacrifice. Because the other side of the stela features Bird Jaguar's designation as successor, it is relevant that several Maya sites also

record events of war and capture as augmentation for the designation of heirs (Palenque, Naranjo, Bonampak).

In addition to its importance as a significant Venus station, the date of this event was also chosen for its cosmic symmetry. The episode on 9.15.19.1.1 is strongly linked to the previous Period Ending of 9.15.15.0.0, since the dates are separated by precisely four solar years (4.1.1). In Mesoamerica the number four is often associated with ritual completions, so it appears that the barbel god ritual was meant to be understood as a culmination of a previously initiated situation. The interval of four solar years may imply that the ritual responsibilities "shared" by Bird Jaguar and Shield Jaguar on the 9.15.15.0.0 Period Ending were finally being granted solely to Bird Jaguar on 9.15.19.1.1. Examination of the inscription supports this contention.

The three verbal glyphs are eroded (fig. 3d), but the third is definitely recognizable as the animal head representing the phoneme *oc*, suffixed with the preposition *ti*. Laughlin (1975:65, 412) documented Tzotzil usage of *oc* in several phrases expressing incompleting passage from one state to another ("to be put into," "going to become," "to begin to"), and the glyphic *oc* is used frequently at Palenque in contexts associated generally with movement into a higher position in the dynastic hierarchy. Configuration clues suggest the initial glyph is an auxiliary verb and the second glyph represents a kneeling sacrificial victim, having the phonetic value *u*, and functioning verbally as transitive inflection. Though erosion makes interpretation speculative, the inscription may be read as, "On 9.15.19.1.1...it happened...his placement as/his entrance as...the three *katun ahaw*, Bird Jaguar..." In my opinion the combination of a clearly readable *oc* glyph, triplet captives, a patriarch of rulership, and an initial sighting of Evening Star, strongly supports the proposal that the barbel god scene is commemorating a ritual performed to sanction Bird Jaguar as suitable for "becoming" the ruler. Thus, 9.15.19.1.1 (May 31, 750) may have been the day when, after a successful military campaign, Bird Jaguar was finally accepted and elected as Yaxchilán's next ruler.

Whereas the integration of two ceremonial occasions in the flapstaff scene is clarified by the

inclusion of a text for each of the two associated rituals, only a single text appears with the equally dualistic barbel god scene. There is the possibility that the commanding and climactic inaugural text at the base of the flapstaff scene was understood to function as an explanation for the second ritual implement of the barbel god scene. The inclusion of the God K scepter, associated with dynastic rulership, may refer directly to the inaugural event.

## Conclusions

Stela 11 and its associated sculptures are special forms of propaganda whose primary purpose was the justification of atypical political realities. The conventions of Mayan interactive narrative involve two parallel systems of textual and pictorial communication which were each manipulated to complement the other (Reents-Budet 1989). On Stela 11, even though the featured event of the hieroglyphic text is his eventual accession, the figural images depict the ruler in two pre-inaugural events, that is, two innovatively illustrated ritual procedures which would verify Bird Jaguar's status as entitled successor. While the flapstaff scene depicts royal persons as sanctioning the event and involves solar symbolism, the barbel god scene involves Venus symbolism and declares supernatural sanctioning of Bird Jaguar's right to rule.

These images alone probably sufficed to convey concepts of dynastic succession, but only the literate elite would have been able to fully comprehend and appreciate the highly sophisticated intermeshing of calendric and iconographic symbolism that characterizes Stela 11 at Yaxchilán. Only the election of 9.15.19.1.1 and the inauguration of 9.16.1.0.0 are historical probabilities. In my judgment, the alleged successor-appointment of 9.15.9.17.16. its ritual completion on 9.15.10.0.1, and the joint Period Ending of 9.15.15.0.0 were each fabricated in order to promote Bird Jaguar as the legitimate heir, when in reality, his lineage claim was controversial.

Mayan monuments are assumed to be objective historical accounts, but records of actual or fictitious events would equally fit the propaganda function of all dynastic memorials. Too rarely is there the consideration that the records may not be entirely accurate. Analysis of Stela 11 shows that public inscriptions may document history as

the ruler wished it to have occurred in order to account for peculiar or unpredicted political situations. We should be aware that other recorded events may also have been fabricated to support claims of legitimate status and power.

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## Notes

1. Bird Jaguar's mother, Lady Ik Skull may also be referred to as "Lady Evening Star" (Linda Schele, pers. com. 1989). This reading is based on the interpretation of a similar glyphic compound as representing Venus's phase as Evening Star on Palenque's Temple of Inscriptions, Middle Panel, A5.

2. While it is not within the workable scope of this paper to discuss the foundations of Bird Jaguar's political power, there is mounting evidence that the Skull lineage was responsible for the eventual placement of Bird Jaguar as ruler of Yaxchilán (Bardsley 1987:99ff). A recent epigraphic discovery by Stuart (1989) serves to confirm the widely held belief that one of Bird Jaguar's main *sahals* (Great Skull Zero) was the brother of Bird Jaguar's consort, Lady Great Skull Zero. Furthermore, in the contexts of Lintels 9(C2) and 58(C1), Stuart's reading of *ichan* as "maternal uncle" carries with it the implication of a special rank for the Skull family, particularly Lady Great Skull. Nicholas Hopkins (pers. com. 1989) comments that "...the use of this titular reference within a patrilineal system is most unusual, suggesting that it is more than an ordinary kinship term and that it probably identifies Lady Great Skull as a source of political power."

Though the status of Bird Jaguar's parents afforded him some measure of prestige, it appears that Bird Jaguar's claim as successor was met with a decade of opposition from Lady Xoc and/or any of her descendants with stronger and more legitimate lineage claims to rulership. With the deaths of Shield Jaguar and Lady Xoc, the Skull line could then have employed their military power, promoting Bird Jaguar beyond his rightful position.

3. The barbel god is named for the fish barbels usually depicted on his cheeks. The barbel god is also referred to as GI (god #1) because of its context at Palenque (Berlin 1963). For Palenque at least, GI/the barbel god represents the deified patriarch of rulership. Schele and Miller (1986:312) suggested another name for this god: Chac Xib Chac.

4. Decipherment of the verbal expressions associated with Yaxchilán's flapstaff scenes is uncertain. The first part of the verb, suffixed with the completive *ah* (T515b:103:683) likely refers to the holding of the staff, while the second part of the collocation should refer to the particular type of staff or staff-holding ritual (Schele 1987: 39). A possible interpretation of the verbal-noun construction (T59:683.130:563:561/*ti-wa-ka-ah-chaan*) may relate to the annual setting in place of the new sun and a new solar year or to a summer solstice reenactment of the mythical "setting in place of the sky"/*wac-ah-chaan* discussed by Schele (1987:71). Tate (1986:138) suggested that the compound may refer to the lingering motion of the sun at summer solstice.

5. The flapstaff ritual represented on Yaxchilán Stela 11, the Palenque *alfardas*, and El Perú stelae may have been employed as compensation for deviations from the usual solar paradigm for patterns of descent. That is, acceding rulers who are impersonating the reborn sun normally acquire divinity from their dying fathers who impersonate the setting sun. If those fathers are long since deceased when their sons are approaching inauguration, then perhaps the supernatural powers of the fathers must be reactivated in order for the acceding son to ritually inherit his required divinity. The flapstaff ritual, and its possible associations with the resetting of the cosmos, may accomplish this purpose. See Bardsley (1987:59-66) for discussion of the meaning and function of the flap staff symbol.

6. In my judgement the glyphic *u-cab* on Stela 34 (A3) introduces two supernaturals in whose realm the bloodletting occurred. An auxiliary verb (B4) begins a second phrase, communicating that Lady Ik Skull also performed a self-sacrifice, sanctioned by the deities.

7. A possible decipherment for secondary glyphs A1 to C1 of Lintel 14 may refer to the figure in the serpent maw as Bird Jaguar. That is, on 9.15.10.0.1: (A1) auxiliary verb/"it was done"/the serpent-emergence rite (?); (B1) Lady of Yaxchilán/Lady Ik Skull (?); (C1) *u-yax-ah-l* 'her first-born child' Bird Jaguar (?). Stuart's recent decipherment (Linda Schele. pers. com. 1989) of glyphs F3 to D4, show that bloodletting on this day involved a named serpent, which may have been the "underworld lord"/*balan ahaw* of Lady

Great Skull.

8. In contrast to Palenque where a summer solstice marked the culmination of Chan-Bahlum II's heir designation rites, Bird Jaguar chose to exploit the multiple associations of ca. 9.15.10.0.0 by claiming that his heir designation began with the solstice and culminated on 9.15.10.0.1, since the latter date symbolized renewal in not one, but three, separate cycles.

9. Erosion again makes decipherment uncertain but configuration of the first two verbal glyphs (L1, M1) suggests the compounds referring to stelae erection as follows: *ts'a-pa-ah* 'to stick something in the ground'; *u-te-tun-ni-k'ul* 'his sacred stone tree'. These are followed at N1 with the logographic "scattering-hand" and a phonetic compound referring to self-sacrificial rites: *lo-ma-ʔ* 'to pierce' or 'to lance'.