One of the more intriguing and important topics to emerge in Maya studies of recent years has been the history of the “Snake” dynasty. Research over the past two decades has identified mentions of its kings across the length and breadth of the lowlands and produced evidence that they were potent political players for almost two centuries, spanning the Early Classic to Late Classic periods. Yet this data has implications that go beyond a single case study and can be used to address issues of general relevance to Classic Maya politics. In this brief paper we use them to further explore the meaning of emblem glyphs and their connection to polities and places.

The significance of emblem glyphs—whether they are indicative of cities, deities, domains, polities, or dynasties—has been debated since their discovery (Berlin 1958). The recognition of their role as the personal epithets of kings based on the title ajaw “lord, ruler” (Lounsbury 1973) was the essential first step to comprehension (Mathews and Justeson 1984; Mathews 1991), while the reading of their introductory sign as the adjective k’uhul “holy” brought the sacral nature of Classic Maya kingship into plain sight (Ringle 1988). But this left open the question of what the variable main signs at their core represented. Insight here came with the discovery of glyphic toponyms, which demonstrated that a good number of emblems were based on local place names (Stuart and Houston 1994). Yet in other cases place names and emblem main signs differed, and in some instances identical emblems appear at different centers, whether employed sequentially or simultaneously. In still other instances, centers changed their emblems or used more than one at the same time. It is clear, therefore, that although emblems are associated with distinct political entities they could not refer to territories or polities in any direct sense (Houston 1993; Velásquez 2004b, 2008; Martin 2005, 2014; Bíró 2007, 2012; Tokovinine 2008, 2013).²

Over time we have come to realize that it is better to understand emblem main signs as the names of dynastic houses derived from genuine or claimed places of origin. They can be divided between autochthonous examples of dynasties that remained in situ, and allochthonous ones that had at some point transferred their capitals or splintered, each faction laying claim to the same title. The landscape of the Classic Maya proves to have been a volatile one, not simply in the dynamic interactions and imbalances of power between polities, but in the way the polities themselves were shaped by historical forces through time.

Placing Calakmul

The distinctive Snake emblem glyph is expressed in full as K’UHK-ka-KAAN-la-AJAW or k’uhul kaanul ajaw (Figure 1).³ It first came to scholarly notice as one of the “four capitals” listed on Copan Stela A, a set of cardinally affiliated emblems that was believed to be a cosmogonic model of political authority (Barthel 1968a, 1968b). Initially lacking a site provenance, it was first linked to Calakmul due to that center’s immense size and the resulting inference of political importance.


² From what we know of the Late Postclassic polities of Yucatan, Maya notions of territoriality were somewhat looser than those familiar from a Western perspective (see Quezada 1993:38-44). In place of fixed boundaries there was an emphasis on people and their connections to ruling lords, where domains could be discontinuous and interpenetrating. It was only with the coming of the Spanish that fixed municipal boundaries were established for administrative purposes.

⁴ There is still uncertainty regarding the vowel of the –V suffix (see main text p. 27). Here –ul is favored due to the limited possibility of some parallel to the name of the Late Postclassic polity <Ah Canul> in northeastern Yucatan (Roys 1957:11). Yet, it is also possible that a vowel harmonic principle was at work, making –al an equally viable option.
Interestingly, these titles have a long history at Calakmul and are first associated with its rulers during the Early Classic Period, an era in which a different emblem glyph is attested at the site (Martin 2005:10-11, Fig. 8, 2008). There are also differences in the ways the two names are denoted. Since Díaz Uribe is identical to what Díaz Uribe (personal communication 2014, 2016) suggests a very different notion of scale, hypothesizing that the two toponyms refer to different portions of Calakmul itself.

This takes us to the thorny issue of the type and scale of each toponym. Calakmul is not a single place, but a pair, yet any assumption that their order encodes a hierarchy of size or importance is thoroughly undermined by other toponymic pairings, which we know can be reversed at will. Tokovinine (2013) notes that the meaning of the term—a decennary drawing on contextual, iconographic, and phonetic clues, through careful translation—therefore must be fully confirmed (Mathews 2005:157-163). Although it literally means "cave, well, canyon, hole, rock outcrop," the term's meaning is independent of its particular context, hovering between two metaphorical complex that defines places in some specific and culturally defined sense, elaborated in the form of "earth (and) cave," "sky (and) cave," and "chan kab ch'e'en" ("sky (and) earth (and) cave") (Stuart and Houston 1994:11-13, 2000:11-12; García 2009) can be translated as "in the delightful cave/city of the Itzas," Ch’olan < cabal ki’ /kabal / is used independently of its unions with kab and ch’en, yet its many isolated appearances—seen in both historical and supernatural contexts—suggests that some particular sense of its own. Some instances are very likely contractions of kab ch’en or chan ch’en, yet its many isolated appearances—seen in both historical and supernatural contexts—suggests that some particular sense of its own. Some instances are very likely contractions of "kab ch’en or chan ch’en, yet its many isolated appearances—seen in both historical and supernatural contexts—suggests that some particular sense of its own. Some instances are very likely contractions of kab ch’en or chan ch’en, yet its many isolated appearances—seen in both historical and supernatural contexts. 

Two tests of the paradigm can be seen in the Tikal Mural, a very similar scene with a single metaphor: the "star war" scene, which is usually applied to the possessed form of the ch'en (and) kab ch’en as its subject instead. Maya documents. The most exhaustive study on this subject is the one undertaken by Mercedes Montes de Oca Vega (2000). Tokovinine (2011:147) notes that "kab ch'en" in the specific landscape of the northern lowlands, with its peppering of sinkholes associated with human settlements. Yet for each title, we see no reason why the kabal/kabi ch'e'en do not predominate in certain contexts, especially in episodes of warfare, often in ways that are suggestive of urban tensions (Martin 2009) (Figure 5a). We should keep in mind, however, that other toponymic pairings recorded on monuments elsewhere at the site are given this same location.

The first edifice to this "theological" scene in indigenous texts. From Central Mexico and to the term “diasframiento” was Angélica María Garibay Kantí (1940:121), while Muno S. Edmonson (1973:2017) was apparently the first to identify this feature in one case but solely by its iconography (Martin 2004:106-109; Bíró 2007:96-111; Hull 2003:429, Fig. 45b). We see in Classic-era ch’en and chan ch’en ch’een must carry a metaphorical association separate, if related, to its role in the juxtopositions of kab ch’en and chan ch’en. It is interesting in this light that the kabal ch’en predominates in certain contexts, especially in episodes of warfare, often in ways that are suggestive of urban tensions (Martin 2009) (Figure 5a). We should keep in mind, however, that other toponymic pairings recorded on monuments elsewhere at the site are given this same location.

The first edifice to this "theological" scene in indigenous texts. From Central Mexico and to the term “diasframiento” was Angélica María Garibay Kantí (1940:121), while Muno S. Edmonson (1973:2017) was apparently the first to identify this feature in one case but solely by its iconography (Martin 2004:106-109; Bíró 2007:96-111; Hull 2003:429, Fig. 45b). We see in Classic-era ch’en and chan ch’en ch’een must carry a metaphorical association separate, if related, to its role in the juxtopositions of kab ch’en and chan ch’en. It is interesting in this light that the kabal ch’en predominates in certain contexts, especially in episodes of warfare, often in ways that are suggestive of urban tensions (Martin 2009) (Figure 5a). We should keep in mind, however, that other toponymic pairings recorded on monuments elsewhere at the site are given this same location.

The first edifice to this "theological" scene in indigenous texts. From Central Mexico and to the term “diasframiento” was Angélica María Garibay Kantí (1940:121), while Muno S. Edmonson (1973:2017) was apparently the first to identify this feature in one case but solely by its iconography (Martin 2004:106-109; Bíró 2007:96-111; Hull 2003:429, Fig. 45b). We see in Classic-era ch’en and chan ch’en ch’een must carry a metaphorical association separate, if related, to its role in the juxtopositions of kab ch’en and chan ch’en. It is interesting in this light that the kabal ch’en predominates in certain contexts, especially in episodes of warfare, often in ways that are suggestive of urban tensions (Martin 2009) (Figure 5a). We should keep in mind, however, that other toponymic pairings recorded on monuments elsewhere at the site are given this same location.

The first edifice to this "theological" scene in indigenous texts. From Central Mexico and to the term “diasframiento” was Angélica María Garibay Kantí (1940:121), while Muno S. Edmonson (1973:2017) was apparently the first to identify this feature in one case but solely by its iconography (Martin 2004:106-109; Bíró 2007:96-111; Hull 2003:429, Fig. 45b). We see in Classic-era ch’en and chan ch’en ch’een must carry a metaphorical association separate, if related, to its role in the juxtopositions of kab ch’en and chan ch’en. It is interesting in this light that the kabal ch’en predominates in certain contexts, especially in episodes of warfare, often in ways that are suggestive of urban tensions (Martin 2009) (Figure 5a). We should keep in mind, however, that other toponymic pairings recorded on monuments elsewhere at the site are given this same location.

The first edifice to this "theological" scene in indigenous texts. From Central Mexico and to the term “diasframiento” was Angélica María Garibay Kantí (1940:121), while Muno S. Edmonson (1973:2017) was apparently the first to identify this feature in one case but solely by its iconography (Martin 2004:106-109; Bíró 2007:96-111; Hull 2003:429, Fig. 45b). We see in Classic-era ch’en and chan ch’en ch’een must carry a metaphorical association separate, if related, to its role in the juxtopositions of kab ch’en and chan ch’en. It is interesting in this light that the kabal ch’en predominates in certain contexts, especially in episodes of warfare, often in ways that are suggestive of urban tensions (Martin 2009) (Figure 5a). We should keep in mind, however, that other toponymic pairings recorded on monuments elsewhere at the site are given this same location.

The first edifice to this "theological" scene in indigenous texts. From Central Mexico and to the term “diasframiento” was Angélica María Garibay Kantí (1940:121), while Muno S. Edmonson (1973:2017) was apparently the first to identify this feature in one case but solely by its iconography (Martin 2004:106-109; Bíró 2007:96-111; Hull 2003:429, Fig. 45b). We see in Classic-era ch’en and chan ch’en ch’een must carry a metaphorical association separate, if related, to its role in the juxtopositions of kab ch’en and chan ch’en. It is interesting in this light that the kabal ch’en predominates in certain contexts, especially in episodes of warfare, often in ways that are suggestive of urban tensions (Martin 2009) (Figure 5a). We should keep in mind, however, that other toponymic pairings recorded on monuments elsewhere at the site are given this same location.
the Popol Vuh in the pairing siwan tinamit “canyon-citadel.” Another diphrastic kenning, this refers to constructed areas that are home to both lords and local gods, as well as to the cultivated lands and populations subject to them (Christenson 2003:264 n. 729, 2004: 237). Siwan tinamit is clearly analogous to the altepētl “water-mountain” of Nahua-speaking Central Mexico.16 An altepētl similarly consists of a central place hosting the residence of its ruling lord and the temple(s) with its patron deities, from which settlement diffuses to a scattered rural occupation beyond. In this way the altepētl does not conceptually divide town and country; there was a center and a periphery but no hard division between them. The breadth of meaning ascribed to altepētl—which depending on context could refer to a political institution, the territory it controlled, or the population occupying it—reflects a socio-spatial consciousness shared by much of Postclassic Mesoamerica, and potentially in earlier times as well. A parallel between kab ch’een and the altepētl has already been suggested and still could serve as a general model for us (Houston and Escobedo 1997:471-472).

Caves and canyons in ethnographic and indigenous literary sources are often characterized as the abodes of the gods. To give one instance, on reaching their destination the bearers of the K’iche’ patron deities in the Popol Vuh deposit their god-eggs into canyons (Christenson 2004:182-183). Many of the shrines and temples found in Maya cities serve the same fundamental role, even if the analogy is not an overt one. By extension, it appears, the concentrations of constructed space at the heart of the polity could make it a symbolic siwan or ch’een and inspire what would otherwise seem an elliptical metaphor.

Two Snake Capitals

The firm association of the Snake dynasty withCalakmul was barely established before new information complicated the picture. In 1994 the Proyecto Arqueológico de Dzibanche, directed by the late Enrique Nalda, uncovered a series of carved blocks featuring Snake emblem glyphs (Nalda 2004; Velásquez 2004a, 2005) (Figure 6). Each carving showed a bound captive with an accompanying ceremony performed by Yuknoom Took’ K’awiil in 71, with the statement tahn ch’een uxte’teun “in the midst of Three Stones ch’een.” The effect of these contrasting passages is to establish that Scroll Serpent’s performance occurred at some place other than Calakmul. This is broadly consistent with the foreign references to uxte’teun and chiiknahb, which are linked to kaanul kings only from 631 onwards. Perhaps the Dzibanche brought a recognition that they were “home” references, and that this large center in Quintana Roo was a Snake capital in its own right (Velásquez 2004b, 2006). By now there were mounting signs that the tenure of the Snake dynasties at Calakmul was one that set the famed Yuknoom Ch’een II as “first in order” despite the many Snake kings that had preceded him (Martin 2005:7-8). The hypothesis advanced was that theSnake dynasty shifted its seat of power to Calakmul during, or shortly before, the reign of Yuknoom Ch’een—whether directly from Dzibanche or via some intervening center (Martin 2005:11, 2014:337-339).

Support for this idea was to emerge from a passage on Step 6 of the Naranjo Hieroglyphic Stairway, dated to 631, where “Yuknoom Head, Snake Lord,” is followed by ta uxte’teun aj chiiknahb “at Three Stones, Chiiknahb Person.” The event to which this statement is attached plainly took place at Naranjo, so the prepositional “at Three Stones” seems contradictory here. Yet it becomes understandable if there was a need to disambiguate Calakmul from some other, more familiar, home for the kaanul dynasty (Tokovinine 2007:19-21). The Place of Snakes, or secondary foundation, of dynamic groups is already well-attested in the epigraphic record, with the clearest example being the joint use of the mutul emblem glyph by Tikal and Mexico-Stones during the seventh and eighth centuries (Houston 1993:97-102; Guenter 2003; Martin and Grube 2008:66-57). Antagonists in a protracted civil war—almost certainly based on a fraternal dispute—Tikal had a deep history and uses mutul as its local toponym, while Los Pilas, a breakaway kingdom based some 112 km to the southwest, employs an entirely different one. Similar developments can be recognized elsewhere, an example being the joint use of the kaanul emblem glyph by Palenque is never employed as a toponym at that site, its dynasty instead describing two other centers that used the toponym Chalcatzingo from 431 and Jakamal from 490 (Stuart 2004a:3; Tokovinine 2013:70-71). The bukal place name is mentioned once at Tortuguero—the seat of a separate royal house of that name—among contemporary events, and this could well suggest that it was local and connected to a place of origin. The process of dynamic expansion and / or transfer is even more tellingly on view at Comalcalco. This most westerly Maya center was conquered by Tortuguero in 649, an event that saw Comalcalco’s incumbent jojan dynasty replaced by that of bukal (Zender 2001; Martin 2014:329-330).

The Place of Snakes

The shared emblem glyph of Dzibanche and Calakmul leaves us with several unresolved questions, including the exact origin of the “Snake” name and the precise manner in which it signified a political entity. In full spellings it carries a –a suffix that is commonly seen with emblem main signs and indicative of a class of place names ending –v. Similar –i endings in Ch’ol (Warkentin and Scott 1978:118-119) and Itzáj (Hoffing and Tesucin 1997:23) convert common nouns into toponyms with the sense of “-place.” Alfonso Lacadena and Tunure Wicchawaka (n.d.:16-28) suggest that the –a suffix generates a terminal –V1 in the texts and offer the gloss “where x abounds” for the resulting form. Under this interpretation the “Snake” locale would be read kana’ul and signify “the place where snakes abound.” It seems very clear that Calakmul, supplied with a pair of distinctive toponyms, is not this location—which is entirely to be expected in the case of a dynasty that had migrated from elsewhere.

Firstly, can we be sure that kaanul denotes a place in the real world, rather than one only to be found in the realm of myth? This distinction touches on deeper questions about dynastic origins and the authority embodied in emblem glyphs—whether they are derived from historical acts of foundation (Bíró 2012:59-60; Tokovinine 2013:71-79) or instead drawn from supernatural charters (Grube 2004; Tokovinine 2013:72; Helmke and Kupprat 2016). Yet this dichotomy is rather anachronistic, since the two categories were hardly mutually exclusive in Maya thought. We have evidence, for example, that the names of certain historical places replicate those of supernatural ones, and equally that toponyms inspired by a natural landscape were supplied with divine back-stories that embedded them in local mythologies. In a Maya worldview it seems that the physical and metaphysical worlds were entwined and in some sense

14 Allen Christenson’s comment is worth quoting at length: “Those two terms together refer to the fortifi
cated hill center as well as the surrounding population living in the canyons and valleys where crops were cultivated. Many contemporary Chiqui town
ers are still referred to as siwan-tinamit when referring to the urban center plus its surrounding dependent fixed residence areas. Researchers have used to refer to the town of Chichcatacan in ritual contexts” (Christenson 2003:264 n. 729).

15 Although we generally find this written calepet’, it is in fact a classic diphrasisem, as forms such as cik’at’ in tep’teun (Zender 2008:333.4, n. 9; Lacadena 2009:40; León-Portilla 2011:213)20, where the separate components cik and tep’teun fulfill the semantic function of a parallelized phrase.

16 It is also important to note that early Snake emblem glyphs form a cluster around Dzibanche and sites to its north, with examples seen at El Rosablan (Carrasco and Boucher 1987), Yojolok (Martin 1997), and Pel Bos (Espiara and Pérez-Opazo 1996). The component is composed of three signs, of which two, ajl and ku, are relatively certain. In this context it would appear to be aj-ba’al (Pilas) and Aj-K’ak’ (Tikal) during the seventh and eighth centuries (Houston 1993:97-102; Guenter 2003; Martin and Grube 2008:66-57). Antagonists in a protracted civil war—almost certainly based on a fraternal dispute—Tikal had a deep

13 This toponym is composed of three signs, of which two, ajl and ku, are relatively certain. In this context it would appear to be aj-ba’al (Pilas) and Aj-K’ak’ (Tikal) during the seventh and eighth centuries (Houston 1993:97-102; Guenter 2003; Martin and Grube 2008:66-57). Antagonists in a protracted civil war—almost certainly based on a fraternal dispute—Tikal had a deep

12 A breakdown kingdom based some 112 km to the southwest, employs an entirely different one. Similar developments can be recognized in countries whose dynasties were connected in some way by marriage or alliance. An example is the likely kaanul presence at the Comalcalco (ojux) emblem glyph, which is drawn into one of the bricks found at the site. This suggests a kAAN rather than CHAN reading for “sky” in this context, which, as an establishment of the kaanul dynasty, is evidently unaffected by the k- > sh shift going on in Western Ch’olan at that time.

11 The only proviso here is that the full Tikal toponym is k’aa mutul, which might mean “New Mutul” and indicate a still earlier forebear for that name elsewhere.

10 Christophe Helmke (personal communication 2016) pointed to the likely kaanul prefix to the Comalcalco (ojux) emblem glyph, which is drawn into one of the bricks found at the site. This suggests a kAAN rather than CHAN reading for “sky” in this context, which, as an establishment of the kaanul dynasty, is evidently unaffected by the k- > sh shift going on in Western Ch’olan at that time.
mutually constitutive. Since connectedness to the divine can be taken for granted, the only question that need concern us is whether kaanul was ever an actual place. This text illustrates the issues and difficulties as we seek to resolve that question.

In a caption to the scene on Dos Pilas Panel 19 that identifies the guardian of a local prince, we find the title AJ-KKAAN-la aj kaanul "Snake-[Place] Person" (Houston 1993:115) (Figure 8a). Although that Dos Pilas was a client of Calakmul, this visitor is not necessarily a reference to a point of origin. It creates associations of several different kinds and might have the looser sense "of the Snake dynasty." A third instance comes from La Corona Element 33, which shows kaanul as the subject of a "foundation" event, in the form ?I-ka-KKAAN-la (Stuart 2012: Figure 8c). Sadly, the glyph immediately after this has completely spilled away and the following one is damaged, so we cannot appreciate its full context.18 The verb in question carries a -?I suffix, which is characteristic of a set of roots that describe changes in a particular place, in which its subjects almost always consist of a toponym or a possessed ch'een term (Stuart 2004a:3; Tokovinine 2013:79-81; Martin 2014:103-106). The historical context becomes important at this point since, transpining in 635, a little over a year before the accession of Yuknoom Ch'een, this (re-)establishment seems to be intimately connected to the emergence of Calakmul as a Snake capital. Thanks to the discovery of Xunantunich Panel 3, we now know that this closely coincided with a "civil war" that set two bearers of the Snake title against one another (Helmke and Ave 2015a:10-11). Together with Step 1 of the Naranjo Hieroglyphic Stairway, we now understand that Waxaklajuun Ubah Kaan, a bearer of the kingy title E?itul kaanul ajaw, was defeated in 636 by Yuknoom Head, a lesser kaanul ajaw based at Calakmul.19 This implies that the impetus for the shift was an acrimonious split. With this in mind it would be logical to suppose that the kaanul name on La Corona Element 33 has a dynastic significance and refers to the initiation of the new regime at Calakmul. However, since all the known subjects of these verbs are locations (except for one physical object) a strong case can be made that it is a toponym here. In this scenario, the statement refers to an event relevant to the break-up and civil war rather than to the establishment of power at Calakmul.20

Since all of these examples remain equivocal to some degree, we are still in need of a context with an unambiguous locative sense. In 2007 three additional inscribed stones were unearthed at Dzibanche, of which two were carved with roundels containing groups of four glyph-blocks, originally parts of a continuous text. One of these, Dzibanche Fragment 1, is somewhat eroded but examinations with raking light reveal the sequence TOOK-PAKAL-la ta-na-CHEFEN-na ka-KAAAN "u-KAB "ji-ya took pakal took ch'een kaanul(?) yax ajaw ... flint and shield in the midst of the Snake[Place] ch'een, it was supervised by ..." (Figure 9). Despite missing both its opening verb and its associated agent, this is a typi
cal historical passage describing a war or war-related ritual. Furthermore, toon ch'een never occurs in super

natural contexts, strengthening the case that this kaanul is of an earthly character. Given the small corpus of texts we have at the site, and its direct association with early Snake kings, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that this is the toponym for Dzibanche—although all that implies about the origin of the Snake dynasty and Calakmul’s rival in the civil war. The newly discovered Xunantunich Panel 4, present and analyzed by Christophe Helmke and Jaime Awe (2016b; see pp. 1-22 in this issue), makes a remarkable contribution to the debate. An explicit account of dynas
tic ascendency passing from Dzibanche to Calakmul, it describes the first negation and then the formation of E?itul—an abstraction of power or authority—that is set in the contrasting locations of kaanul and uchtu'un. A
more deliberate and telling statement of Calakmul’s Late Classic rise to prominence may scarcely be imagined.25 This constitutes the underlying theme of the monumental series of buildings that were, with little serious question, raised at Caracol in 642 (Martin 2000:57-58, Fig. 12) and are known from estranged portions distributed among the sites of Naranjo, Uxpana, Calakmul, and Balamku (Lamb 1985-91-93; Graham 1978:107, 110; Helmke and Awe 2016a).26 Still left uncertain is the type and scale of the kaanul place. This is to expect, for the presence of an isolated ch’een becomes key. If it is indeed a metaphor for a more mundane setting, then tafn ch’een kaanul—the form we find on Xunantunich Panel 4 as well as on Dzibanche Fragment L—speaks of the central core of Dzibanche as a city. However, if ch’een remains an abbreviation implying a larger domain, then kaanul would name an area within which buildings would be placed on its “middle” and in that manner its urban core. At this juncture we might note the presence, just 10 km or so to the east of Dzibanche, of the Precise center of Caracol. Very large, it is the model for parallel platforms, rivaling the size of those at El Mirador, which are here packed on a small “island” in the midst of a low-lying or seasonal swamp. This great ruin would have been a looming presence for the Classic-era population of Dzibanche, suggesting that the local dynasty continued to call itself Calakmul as a snake capital, and it was not far distant from Dzibanche.

25 We should note that Enrique Nalda Hernández and Sandra Balanzario Granados (2014:199-200) have uncovered evidence at Dzibanche suggesting that the local dynasty continued to call itself kaanul after the split and survived into the Late Classic period. Two items found in the Plaza Pom (one relevant here, the other an emblem gourd modelled in stucco (Nalda and Balanzario 2014:198, Fig.18)) and another incised on a ceramic vessel, both likely to be dated to the seventh or eighth century by its style. The latter mentions a character called xuk’ alik’ ch’e, “the kaanul snake.”

26 For another, a less deliberate statement of Calakmul’s Late Classic rise to prominence may scarcely be imagined. This constitutes the underlying theme of the monumental series of buildings that were, with little serious question, raised at Caracol in 642 (Martin 2000:57-58, Fig. 12) and are known from estranged portions distributed among the sites of Naranjo, Uxpana, Calakmul, and Balamku (Lamb 1985-91-93; Graham 1978:107, 110; Helmke and Awe 2016a). Still left uncertain is the type and scale of the kaanul place. This is to expect, for the presence of an isolated ch’een becomes key. If it is indeed a metaphor for a more mundane setting, then tafn ch’een kaanul—the form we find on Xunantunich Panel 4 as well as on Dzibanche Fragment L—speaks of the central core of Dzibanche as a city. However, if ch’een remains an abbreviation implying a larger domain, then kaanul would name an area within which buildings would be placed on its “middle” and in that manner its urban core. At this juncture we might note the presence, just 10 km or so to the east of Dzibanche, of the Precise center of Caracol. Very large, it is the model for parallel platforms, rivaling the size of those at El Mirador, which are here packed on a small “island” in the midst of a low-lying or seasonal swamp. This great ruin would have been a looming presence for the Classic-era population of Dzibanche, suggesting that the local dynasty continued to call itself Calakmul as a snake capital, and it was not far distant from Dzibanche.

25 We should note that Enrique Nalda Hernández and Sandra Balanzario Granados (2014:199-200) have uncovered evidence at Dzibanche suggesting that the local dynasty continued to call itself kaanul after the split and survived into the Late Classic period. Two items found in the Plaza Pom (one relevant here, the other an emblem gourd modelled in stucco (Nalda and Balanzario 2014:198, Fig.18)) and another incised on a ceramic vessel, both likely to be dated to the seventh or eighth century by its style. The latter mentions a character called xuk’ alik’ ch’e, “the kaanul snake.”

26 For another, a less deliberate statement of Calakmul’s Late Classic rise to prominence may scarcely be imagined. This constitutes the underlying theme of the monumental series of buildings that were, with little serious question, raised at Caracol in 642 (Martin 2000:57-58, Fig. 12) and are known from estranged portions distributed among the sites of Naranjo, Uxpana, Calakmul, and Balamku (Lamb 1985-91-93; Graham 1978:107, 110; Helmke and Awe 2016a). Still left uncertain is the type and scale of the kaanul place. This is to expect, for the presence of an isolated ch’een becomes key. If it is indeed a metaphor for a more mundane setting, then tafn ch’een kaanul—the form we find on Xunantunich Panel 4 as well as on Dzibanche Fragment L—speaks of the central core of Dzibanche as a city. However, if ch’een remains an abbreviation implying a larger domain, then kaanul would name an area within which buildings would be placed on its “middle” and in that manner its urban core. At this juncture we might note the presence, just 10 km or so to the east of Dzibanche, of the Precise center of Caracol. Very large, it is the model for parallel platforms, rivaling the size of those at El Mirador, which are here packed on a small “island” in the midst of a low-lying or seasonal swamp. This great ruin would have been a looming presence for the Classic-era population of Dzibanche, suggesting that the local dynasty continued to call itself Calakmul as a snake capital, and it was not far distant from Dzibanche.

25 We should note that Enrique Nalda Hernández and Sandra Balanzario Granados (2014:199-200) have uncovered evidence at Dzibanche suggesting that the local dynasty continued to call itself kaanul after the split and survived into the Late Classic period. Two items found in the Plaza Pom (one relevant here, the other an emblem gourd modelled in stucco (Nalda and Balanzario 2014:198, Fig.18)) and another incised on a ceramic vessel, both likely to be dated to the seventh or eighth century by its style. The latter mentions a character called xuk’ alik’ ch’e, “the kaanul snake.”

26 For another, a less deliberate statement of Calakmul’s Late Classic rise to prominence may scarcely be imagined. This constitutes the underlying theme of the monumental series of buildings that were, with little serious question, raised at Caracol in 642 (Martin 2000:57-58, Fig. 12) and are known from estranged portions distributed among the sites of Naranjo, Uxpana, Calakmul, and Balamku (Lamb 1985-91-93; Graham 1978:107, 110; Helmke and Awe 2016a). Still left uncertain is the type and scale of the kaanul place. This is to expect, for the presence of an isolated ch’een becomes key. If it is indeed a metaphor for a more mundane setting, then tafn ch’een kaanul—the form we find on Xunantunich Panel 4 as well as on Dzibanche Fragment L—speaks of the central core of Dzibanche as a city. However, if ch’een remains an abbreviation implying a larger domain, then kaanul would name an area within which buildings would be placed on its “middle” and in that manner its urban core. At this juncture we might note the presence, just 10 km or so to the east of Dzibanche, of the Precise center of Caracol. Very large, it is the model for parallel platforms, rivaling the size of those at El Mirador, which are here packed on a small “island” in the midst of a low-lying or seasonal swamp. This great ruin would have been a looming presence for the Classic-era population of Dzibanche, suggesting that the local dynasty continued to call itself Calakmul as a snake capital, and it was not far distant from Dzibanche.