

A New Carved Panel from the Palenque Area

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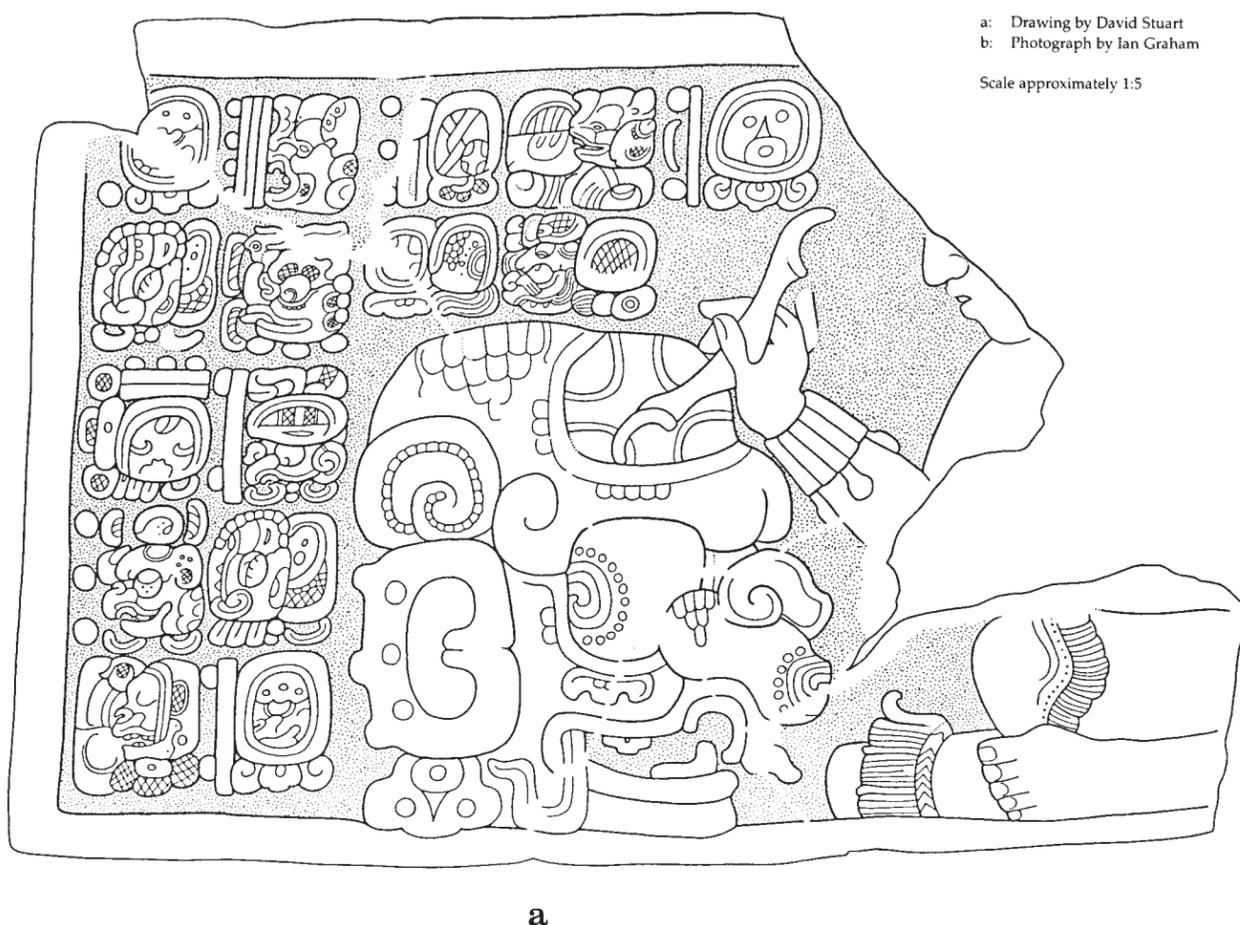
IN THE SPRING OF 1988, Ian Graham of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University brought to my attention an extraordinary limestone relief, the style of which affiliates it with Palenque or some site in the immediate surroundings (Fig. 1). I am indebted to Mr. Graham for his kind permission to study his photographs and to draw the sculpture. At this writing, the panel is in the municipal museum of Emiliano Zapata, Tabasco. It survives in a number of fragments, and an indeterminable portion of its right section, with part of the seated human figure, is missing. The hieroglyphic text on the left side, however, is complete and in excellent condition.

The inscription consists of 15 glyph blocks arranged in an inverted-L shape. It begins, at positions A1-B1 with the Calendar Round date 2 Cimi 19 Zotz, followed by the “upended-frog” birth verb (A2) followed (at B2) by the name glyph of the well-known Palenque ruler “Chan Bahlum.” We know from the inscriptions at Palenque that this birth date corresponds to the Long Count position 9.12.2.6.6 (Mathews & Schele 1974:66 & Table 4). A Distance Number of 3 *katuns*, 7 *tuns*, 13 *uinals*, and 0 *k’ins* appears at positions A3-B4 and, as usual, is in reverse order, and with the *k’in* suppressed. This interval of 3.7.13.0, or 24,380 days, added to the previous date (of the birth), reaches the day 7 Cimi 4 Pop, expressed here as 7 Cimi 3 Pop (B5-C1). The latter date is accompanied by the verbal statement “then he died” at position A5, clearly referring again to Chan Bahlum. The Long Count position of this later date is 9.13.10.1.6, as can be verified by calendrical passages on the Palace Tablet at Palenque.

The final passage of the text begins with the “*lu-bat*” glyph (at D1), and its grammatical position reveals it as the verb of the sentence. The T679 *i* prefix to the “*lu-bat*” suggests that the chronological placement of this event was on or very near the time of Chan Bahlum’s death, in that it is paired with the death statement as the record of a second event on or around 7 Cimi 3 Pop. The following block (C2) is clearly meant to be read *k’an tun*, or “yellow stone” or perhaps “precious stone.” The text ends with a glyphic compound (D2) that may be read phonetically as **tu-u-pa-ti**, or *tu pat*, literally translatable as “on the back of,” in the sense of “behind,” followed by 7 Ahau in the final position (E1), surely corresponding to the Period Ending 9.13.10.0.0 7 Ahau 3 Cumku. A similar linkage involving [9.13.10.1.5] 6 Cimi 3 Pop and that *lahuntun*-ending appears on the Palenque Palace Tablet at positions M8-N10. In brief, the event represented by the *lu-bat* combination took place *after* the 7 Ahau of the text.

In the case of the first date on the Emiliano Zapata panel, then, the Calendar Round at A1-B1 corresponds to the birth date of Chan Bahlum. The second date on the panel, at B5 and C1, likewise matches Chan Bahlum’s death date. It, however, possesses an intrinsic irregularity-

FIGURE 1. THE EMILIANO ZAPATA PANEL



ty: The arithmetic of the orthodox Calendar Round “meshing” demands the combination “6 Chicchan 3 Pop,” and not the “7 Cimi 3 Pop” that is present at B5-C1.¹ The anomaly can only be due either to an intentional, and thus permissible, shift on the part of the scribe, or to error.

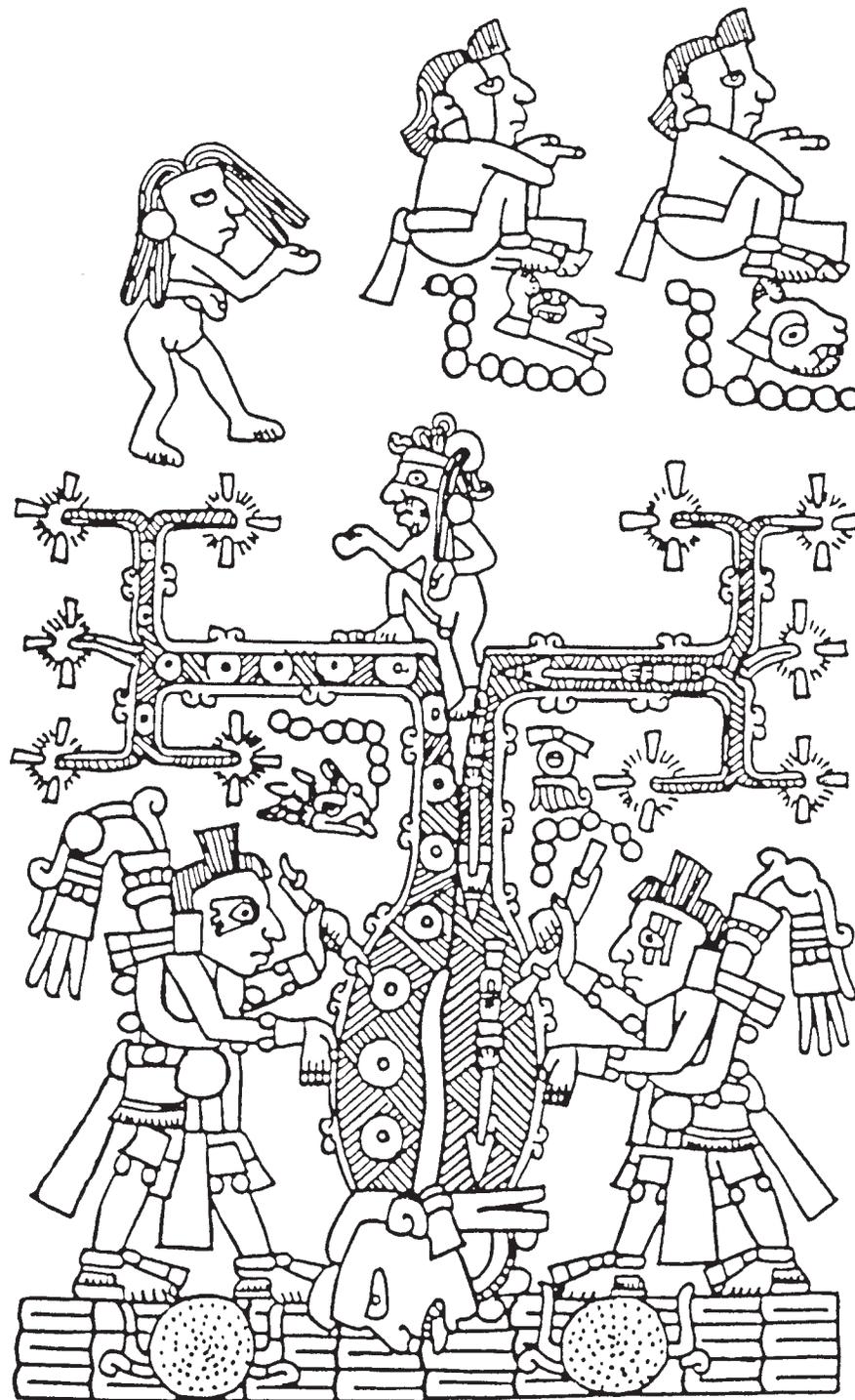
The situation recalls the types of shifted dates discussed by Proskouriakoff and Thompson (1947), and noted by Mathews (1977) on Dos Pilas Stela 8. In the latter instance, a date at positions H13-I13 records 3 Kan 1 Kankin instead of the expected 2 Akbal 1 Kankin. In other words, the one-day-forward shift of the Sacred Round date, matches in kind the shift on the Emiliano Zapata panel. Mathews, rightly hesitant to ascribe the discrepancy to scribal error, speculates on the possibility that the change-overs of the Sacred Round designation and the Vague Year designation took place at different times on the natural day in question. He argues convincingly that the Calendar Round date on Dos Pilas Stela 8 was thus meant to mark an event—in that particular case, burial—that took place at some point in time between the two change-overs, perhaps at night.

Discounting scribal error in the case of the Emiliano Zapata panel as the weaker argument for the shifted date, and citing the presence of such shifts, however rare, on other monuments, it would seem that the second date on the panel refers to an event on 6 Chicchan 3 Pop, but one

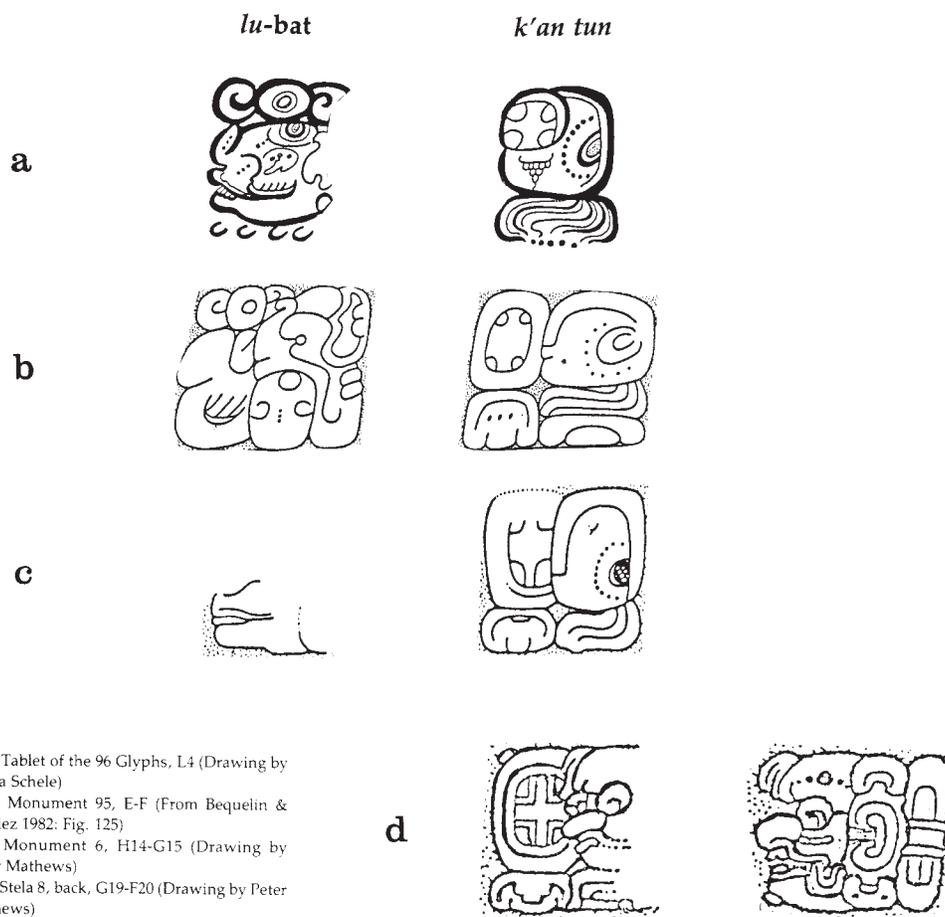
that happened *after* the the change-over of the Sacred Round label from 6 Chicchan to 7 Cimi, but *before* the change-over from 3 Pop to 4 Pop.

As for the other event that took place on or near that day of the ruler’s death, it is depicted below, in the scene of the panel. There, a man sits beside a large grotesque head, touching it with an object held daintily in his right hand. The large head resembles an elaborate glyph: The forehead bears a *k’an* sign, and the “grapes” motif identifies the countenance as that of the so-called “*cauac* monster” of Maya iconography as described by Taylor (1979:79-89), which functions as a personification of *tun*, or “stone.” This combination is surely a direct correspondence to the *k’an tun* glyph at position D2 of the inscription. It follows the *lu-bat* verb at D1. We may therefore conclude that the latter refers in some manner to the act being performed on the huge *k’an tun* portrayed in the scene. Given the suggestive pattern of the *lu-bat* glyph in pottery texts which conform to the Primary Standard Sequence as first defined by Coe (1973), and the apparent correspondence of the *lu-bat* verb to the act of carving as I have argued (Stuart 1986), it is reasonable to suggest that the present *lu-bat* verb at D1 also refers to the act of “carving” or something within the general semantic realm of sculpting, hewing, or incising. The Emiliano Zapata panel, then, provides a critical visual reinforcement of that hypothesis.

FIGURE 2. THE FIGURES ON PAGE 37 OF CODEX VINDOBOBENSIS MEXICANUS I



Page 37 detail from Marten Jansen, "The Search for History in Mixtec Codices" in *Ancient Mesoamerica*, edited by William R. Fowler, Jr., and Stephen D. Houston, vol. 1, no. 1, page 103 (Cambridge University Press, 1990)

FIGURE 3. OTHER EXAMPLES OF THE *K'AN TUN* GLYPH

- a: PAL Tablet of the 96 Glyphs, L4 (Drawing by Linda Schele)
 b: TNA Monument 95, E-F (From Bequelin & Baudez 1982: Fig. 125)
 c: TRT Monument 6, H14-G15 (Drawing by Peter Mathews)
 d: DPL Stela 8, back, G19-F20 (Drawing by Peter Mathews)

The tool that is held by the seated noble is difficult to recognize. It appears to have a sharp point at each end, but I cannot identify the materials used for the curved “blades” or the central section. However, Karl Taube has kindly shown me a similar tool that appears on page 37 of the Codex Vindobonensis I, or Vienna Codex, a late Mixtec manuscript (Fig. 2). In that codex, two figures are apparently engaged in carving the trunk of a large tree. One holds an instrument identified by Caso (1979: Pl. 11g) as made of two copper chisels, while his partner, opposite, holds a tool with two curved points that immediately recalls the device shown on the present panel. Caso (1979: Pl. 11f) believes that the points shown in the Vienna Codex are jaguar claws, but I cannot be certain if this identification can be extended to the implement displayed on the Emiliano Zapata panel.

Inscriptions at Palenque and two other nearby sites mention the carving of objects called *k'an tun*, or “yellow stone” (Fig. 3). I feel that in all of these examples the term *k'an tun* refers to the stone monument upon which it is inscribed. This seems a reasonable conclusion, given the natural yellow color of all these sculptures. This pattern is followed in the text of recently discovered Hieroglyphic Stairway 4 at Dos Pilas, Guatemala, which is carved from yellow limestone and named the “yellow stone steps”.

To summarize, the Emiliano Zapata panel notes the birth and death of the Palenque ruler Chan Bahlum. The principal event commemorated on the panel is the “carving of the *k’an tun*,” and the event is depicted in the accompanying scene. Whatever the deeper meaning of this action, whether ritual or metaphorical, or the meaning or meanings of the *k’an tun* itself, we can only speculate at this point that it is connected in some manner with the ruler’s death. Answers to these important questions remain for future investigation.

SUBMITTED DECEMBER 1989

REVISED AUGUST 1990

NOTE

The mechanism of the Calendar Round is the result of the intermeshing of two calendrical cycles—the Sacred Round of 260 days, and the 365-day Vague Year. The first is itself an intermeshing of 13 numbers (1-13) and 20 day names, most familiar to Mayanists in the Yucatec forms (*Imix, Ik, Akbal*, etc., through *Ahau*), resulting in a progression of combinations (i.e., 4 Ahau, 5 Imix, 6 Ik, 7 Akbal, 8 Kan, 9 Chicchan, 10 Cimi, 11 Manik, 12 Lamat, 13 Muluc, 1 Oc, 2 Chuen, etc.), no single one of which repeats until 260 days have passed.

The second major calendrical component of the Calendar Round, the Vague Year, consists of 18 months of 20 days each, plus a 5-day period, the total being exactly 365 days. Again using the Yucatec names that appear most commonly in the literature, these months run from *Pop* (with its 20 days customarily numbered 0 [or “seating”] through 19) to *Cumku*, plus the five-days of *Uayeb* (numbered 0-4).

It is clear at this point, given the mathematical immutability of the system, that once *any* single day of the Sacred Round is linked to a single day of the Vague Year, *all other linkages* are

knowable and predictable. Thus the Calendar Round date 4 Ahau 8 Cumku, recorded by the Maya as the beginning date of the Long Count, literally forces all other dates into mathematical conformity: the day after any 4 Ahau 8 Cumku *must be* 5 Imix 9 Cumku, just as the following day automatically becomes 6 Ik 10 Cumku. And only when 18,980 days—the length of a Calendar Round—has passed, will the designation of any single day in terms of both cycles repeat.

It is equally apparent that in the orthodox system as defined above, *only four* Vague Year day numbers will match up with a single Sacred Round day name. In the cases of Ahau (which by Maya definition is linked to 8 Cumku), Chicchan, Oc, or Men, these day numbers are 3, 8, 13, or 18. For Imix, Cimi, Chuen, or Cib, the possibilities become 4, 9, 14, and 18, and so on.

When a Calendar Round date that does not correspond to these rules appears—and the date at B1-C5 on the Emiliano Zapata panel is such a case—it is probable that the scribe recorded the shift for some valid Maya reason.

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EDITOR’S ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my deep appreciation to Archaeologist Roberto García Moll, Director General of Mexico’s National Institute of Anthropology and History, for his approval to publish the Emiliano Zapata Panel.