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The Monolithic Monuments of Nakum, Guatemala

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Introduction

Recent excavations conducted as part of the Nakum Archaeological Project of the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, Poland, and under direction of Jarosław Żrałka, Wiesław Koszkul, and Juan Luis Velásquez have brought about the discovery of two new carved monuments, one dated to the Late Preclassic (c. 300 BC–AD 250/300) and the other to the Terminal Classic (AD 800–900/950). We also conducted excavations around Stela D, parts of which had already been discovered at the beginning of the twentieth century. In so doing, we found fragments of another carved stela that for the most part had been thought to pertain to Stela D on account of contextual proximity. In addition, we have documented carving on one of the largest altars at the site and uncovered several fragments of at least two heretofore unknown plain stelae. Below we introduce the archaeological context of these recently discovered Nakum monuments, in light of the previously known monuments of the site. We also present the results of the iconographic and epigraphic analyses of the monolithic monuments of Nakum (Figure 1). This work is based on our photographic and 3D documentation of all carved monuments at Nakum, which was carried out between 2014 and 2017. In so doing we are able to flesh out some of the major events that these monuments commemorate in the early and late horizons of the site's occupation and to situate Nakum among its contemporaries in the eastern central lowlands.

The Corpus of Monolithic Monuments at Nakum

Based on the initial exploration of the archaeological site of Nakum in the first half of the twentieth century and especially the archaeological work that has been conducted at the site, initially as part of the Triángulo Project of the Guatemalan Institute of Anthropology and History under the direction of Oscar Quintana and later Vilma Fialko (1988–2008), and more recently the Nakum Archaeological Project (2006–present), we now have a good understanding of the corpus of monuments at the site. In order to better convey the results of these various projects we tabulate the corpus below, presenting first stelae and then altars, with our most recent nomenclature of each monument alongside that employed by earlier scholars. At present this tabulation focuses on freestanding monolithic monuments to the exclusion of glyphic texts that adorn structures or form part of architectural monuments, including panels, friezes, piers, and benches, which we hope to present in another study in the future. All monuments are made of local limestone, which is fairly fine-grained and of relatively soft, powdery, highly porous microcrystalline calcite (micrite), with friable inclusions that are liable to pitting and erosion. Due to the physical properties of the limestone, most stelae at Nakum are quite thick (i.e. 70 cm ± 11.6 cm), to offset the many pronounced, naturally occurring bedding planes in the stone. On the whole the locally available type of limestone is thereby

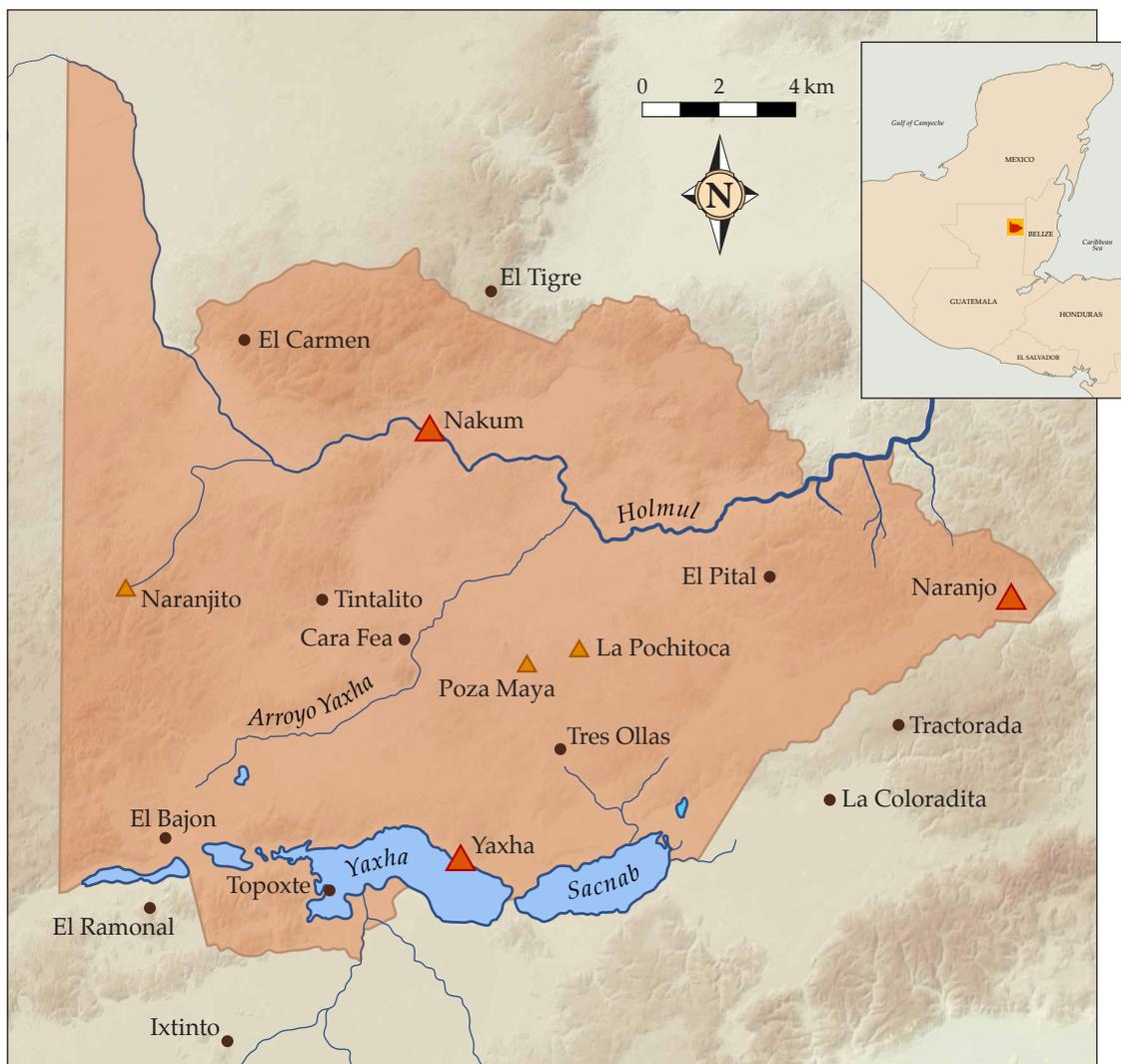


Figure 1. Map of the Parque Nacional Yaxhá-Nakum-Naranjo (Triangle Park) area with the location of Nakum indicated (map by Piotr Kołodziejczyk and Precolumbia Mesoweb Press).

comparable to that of other sites in the area, including Tikal. Excavations of the Nakum Archaeological Project conducted in 2014 east of the North Plaza brought about the discovery of a quarry from which limestone for at least some Nakum stelae might have been acquired. This assumption is based on the fact that we were able to identify one large elongated block that seems to be an unfinished stela (Figure 2).

Previous studies have failed to properly account for the altars of Nakum and no formal designations have been applied, although in certain instances pairings with other monuments, especially stelae, have been noted (see Tozzer 1913:162-163; Morley 1937-1938:2:9-18). Much as with stelae, the largest concentration of altars is found in the large Central Plaza of the Southern Sector of the site (Figure 3). Altars, following the pattern of the eastern central lowlands, are circular with flat or slightly convex tops, which most often are set in alignment with

discrete stelae, or occurring between a set of stelae. At present no isolated altars have been documented. In all, eleven altars are known, although they are now badly eroded. With the exception of one that shows traces of carving, all are plain.

Four groupings of altars can be distinguished, the largest forming pairs with the six known stelae erected at the base of Structure A (designated as Stelae A1–A6 by Morley, from north to south) (Figure 3a). Of these, the surface of that paired with Stela A4 was once carved with an elaborate scene, although only the faint outlines of a captive remain (Figure 4). This large altar measures 1.97 m in diameter and 63 cm in height, clearly an impressive monument to judge by size alone. Another grouping of two altars is found at the base of Structure D, the enormous range palace structure, or *audiencia*, that fronts the acropolis palace complex of the site, known as the Acropolis. There the altars were paired with the



Figure 2. Two views of a quarry located east of the North Plaza of Nakum found in 2014, with an unfinished monument in situ (photos by Jarosław Żrałka).

northern of the two stelae (one with the axial Stela 2 [originally Stela D]; the other with the plain Stela A8). At the foot of Structure B are two altars, each set between the three plain stelae at the base of that pyramidal structure (designated as Stelae A9–A11). Another altar was found in the Northern Sector of the site (Figure 5), in front of the plain Stela E1, which was raised axially in front of Structure X (Str. 104), the dominant pyramidal temple of the eastern platform of a tripartite complex, conforming to an E-Group. Oddly though, Stela E1 faces north and was set perpendicular to the primary axis of the structure, suggesting that the monument was re-set in antiquity (see Morley 1937-1938:2:18).

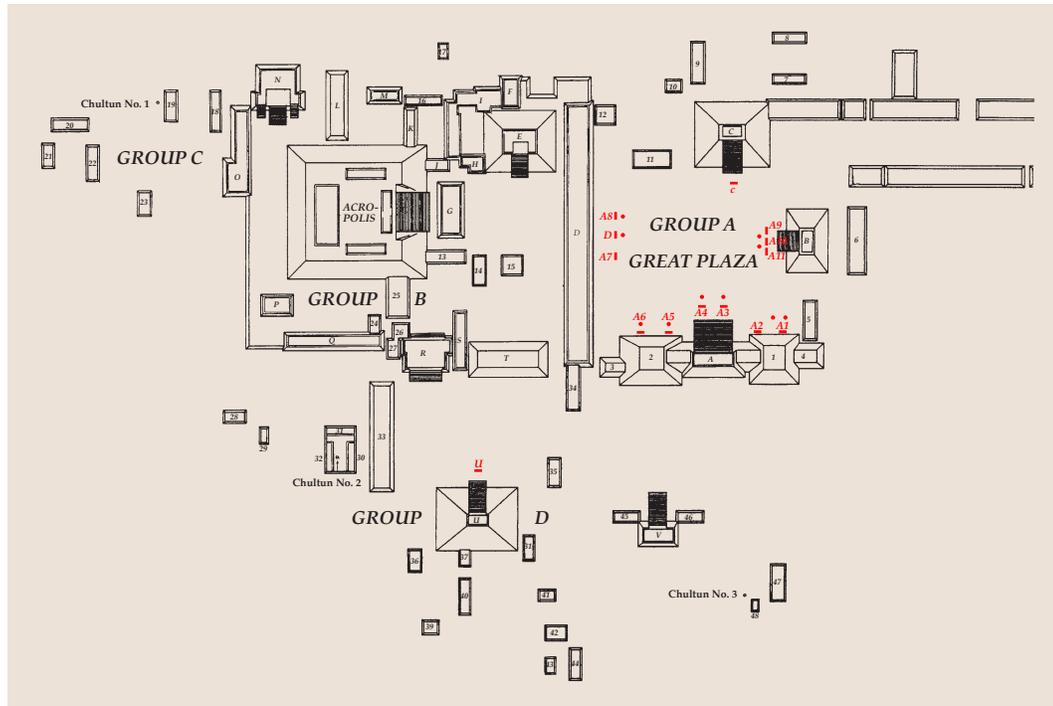
Nakum Monuments: History of Research

The first Nakum monuments were found at the very beginning of the twentieth century when the site was discovered by the French count Maurice de Périgny (1908, 1911a, 1911b). Périgny documented three stelae that now bear numbers 1, 2, and 3; one of them (Stela 1) was standing in front of what he named “Le Temple des Hiéroglyphes” (Structure C), another (Stela 3) was erected in front of a large pyramidal temple—Structure U (“Le Temple du Roi” according to Périgny’s nomenclature); the last monument reported by Périgny was Stela 2, which was found broken into many pieces in front of the large Acropolis complex of Nakum. As part of his work at the site Périgny also made a mold of Stela 1, which was subsequently transported to Paris and stored in the collections of the Musée de l’Homme (Taladoire 1996:243, 250).

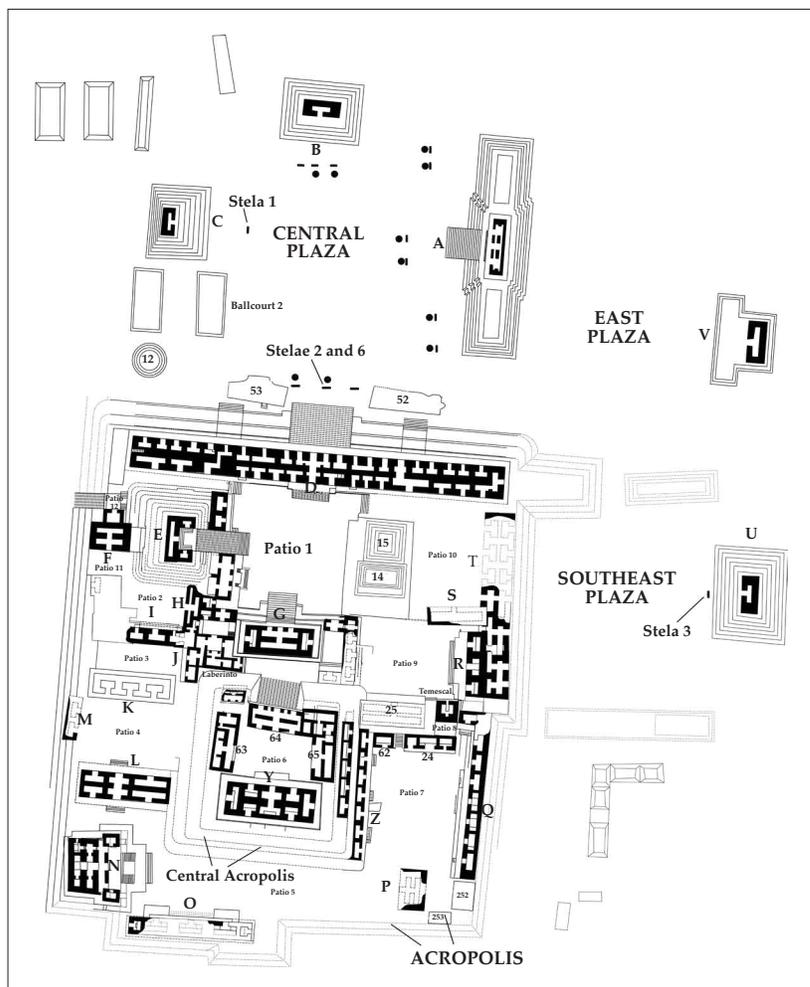
A few years later, in 1910, Nakum was the subject of

a survey and investigation as part of an expedition by the Peabody Museum of Harvard University, directed by Alfred Tozzer. During this research 15 stelae (three of them carved) and 11 altars were documented (Tozzer 1913:162, 163, Pls. 42, 43-1, 44-2, 52). In the second and third decades of the 1900s Nakum was visited by Sylvanus Morley of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, on account of his interest in the documentation of carved monuments of the central Maya lowlands. His famous and monumental work, entitled *The Inscriptions of Peten*, published between 1937 and 1938, contained detailed documentation and information on all Nakum monuments, especially on the three carved stelae that were known at that time (Morley 1937-1938:2:12-21, 5:Pls. 13b-f, 86d-e). In the 1970s an American researcher, Nicholas Hellmuth, visited Nakum twice; he attributed numbers to nearly all carved and plain monuments that had been previously reported by explorers and researchers. In addition, he discovered a sixteenth monument in the southwestern corner of the Northern Sector of Nakum, in front of Structure 82, which he designated Stela 14 (Hellmuth 1992:26).

In the 1990s Nakum became the subject of intensive investigations carried out by the Institute of Anthropology and History of Guatemala (IDAEH) as part of the Proyecto Triángulo (named after the Parque Nacional Yaxhá-Nakum-Naranjo where the project operates, also known as the Triángulo Cultural Yaxhá-Nakum-Naranjo). Although the major focus of this project was the excavation and restoration of the most deteriorated structures situated in the monumental epicenter of the site, the project also partly curated Stela 1 (formerly Stela C) and conducted excavations at the



a



b

Figure 3. The Southern Sector of Nakum: (a) plan published by Sylvanus Morley with location of all carved and plain monuments (north is to the right); (b) recent map of the Southern Sector, prepared by Piotr Kołodziejczyk based on the map from Quintana and Wurster 2002, with further corrections made by the Triángulo Project, IDAEH.

Current designation	Previous designation	Location	Dimensions	Date recorded	References
Stela 1	Stela C	Western side of Central Plaza, in front of Structure C	H: 3.07 m W: 1.23 m HALC: 2.92 m Th: 84 cm f-b: 16 mm det: 3.5 mm	29 May, 815 (9.19.5.0.0 2 Ajaw 13 Yaxkin)	Grube 2000:253, 265, 267, Fig. 196; Morley 1937-1938:2:13-15; Périgny 1911a:19-20, 1911b:12-13, Pl. 9,2; Quintana and Wurster 2002:262; Tozzer 1913:169, Pl. 52,1
Stela 2	Stela D2 (according to Tozzer); Stela D (according to Morley)	Southern side of Central Plaza, in front of Acropolis complex and Structure D	H: > 1.52 m W: 1.45 m Th: 43 cm f-b: 22 mm det: 3.5 mm	26 November, 849 (10.1.0.0.0 5 Ajaw 3 Kayab)	Grube 2000:266-267; Morley 1937-1938:2:16-17, 5:Pl. 86d; Quintana and Wurster 2002:262; Tozzer 1913:170, Pls. 42, 43.1
Stela 3	Stela U	Eastern side of Southeast Plaza, in front of Structure U	H: 4.17 m W: 1.51 m HALC: 3.62 m Th: 74 cm f-b: 22.5 mm det: 3.5 mm	20 January 771 (9.17.0.0.0 13 Ajaw 18 Kumku)	Grube 2000:265, 267, Fig. 209; Morley 1937-1938:2:12-13, 5:Pls. 13b-c, 86e; Périgny 1911a:18, 1911b:11; Quintana and Wurster 2002:261-261; Tozzer 1913:185, Pls. 44,2, 52,2
Stela 4	Monument 1	In the middle of the North Plaza	H: > 91 cm W: 1.35 m Th: 0.45 m f-b: 9 mm det: 2.5 mm	None, style and associated ceramics the monument date the monument to the final part of the Late Preclassic	Żrałka and Koszkuł 2010:31; Żrałka et al. 2011:Fig. 19, 2012:35, 38, Fig. 29
Stela 5	Stela 14	Southwestern corner of North Plaza, in front of Str. 82	H: > 2.00 m HALC: 1.92 m W: 1.19 m Th: c. 64 cm f-b: 60 mm det: 15 mm	Eroded, but possibly 24 June 810 (9.19.0.0.0 9 Ajaw 18 Mol) and/or 18 January 840 (10.0.10.0.0 6 Ajaw 8 Pop)	Hellmuth 1992:26; Quintana and Wurster 2002:262
Stela 6	Stela D2 (according to Tozzer); Stela D (according to Morley)	Southern side of Central Plaza, in front of Acropolis complex and Structure D	H: > 88 cm W: c. 96 cm Th: > 18 cm f-b: 21 mm det: 3.5 mm	Unknown (9th century, possibly 10.0.0.0.0)	Morley 1937-1938:2:16-17, 5:Pl. 86d; Tozzer 1913:Pl. 43.1

Table 1. A tabulation of the carved stelae of Nakum. Note that *HALC* stands for height above lowest carving, *Th* for thickness, *f-b* for relief distinguishing foreground from background, and *det* for smaller incised details of carving.

Current designation	Previous designation	Location	Dimensions	Associated monument	References
Stela A1	Stela A1	East side of the Central Plaza, in front of Structure 1 (its northern extreme)	H: 3.5 m W: 1.67 m Th: 71 cm	Plain altar (A1)	Tozzer 1913:164-165, Fig. 50; Morley 1937-1938:2:17-18
Stela A2	Stela A2	East side of the Central Plaza, in front of Structure 1 (its southern extreme)	H: 4.0 m W: 1.12 m Th: 76 cm	Plain altar (A2)	Tozzer 1913:164-165, Fig. 50; Morley 1937-1938:2:17-18
Stela A3	Stela A3	East side of the Central Plaza, in front of Structure A (its northern extreme)	Unclear due to extensive fragmentation	Plain altar (A3)	Tozzer 1913:164-165, Fig. 50; Morley 1937-1938:2:17-18
Stela A4	Stela A4	East side of the Central Plaza, in front of Structure A (its southern extreme)	H: 2.92 m W: 1.32 m Th: 78 cm	Altar (A4, might have been originally carved)	Tozzer 1913:164-165, Fig. 50; Morley 1937-1938:2:17-18
Stela A5	Stela A5	East side of the Central Plaza, in front of Structure 2 (its northern extreme)	Unclear due to extensive fragmentation	Plain altar (A5)	Tozzer 1913:164-165, Fig. 50; Morley 1937-1938:2:17-18
Stela A6	Stela A6	East side of the Central Plaza, in front of Structure 2 (its southern extreme)	H: 2.21 m W: 1.34 m Th: 76 cm	Plain altar (A6)	Tozzer 1913:164-165, Fig. 50; Morley 1937-1938:2:17-18
Stela A7	Stela A7 (according to Morley 1937-1938:2:16, 18) or Stela D1 (according to Tozzer 1913:170)	South side of the Central Plaza, in front of the Acropolis platform and Structure D (east of the main axis of Str. D and of Stela D)	H: 3.05 m W: 1.73 m Th: 61 cm	None	Tozzer 1913:170, Fig. 55; Morley 1937-1938:2:16-18

Table 2. Tabulation of the plain stelae of Nakum.

base of this stela as well as Stela 3 (formerly Stela U) (Calderón et al. 2004). Within the framework of the Triángulo Project, Nikolai Grube conducted new analyses of many of the monuments in the Triángulo Park

and published his important synthesis (Grube 2000). His work included the first modern drawings of such Nakum monuments as Stelae 1 and 3 among others (Grube 2000:Figs. 196, 209).

Current designation	Previous designation	Location	Dimensions	Associated monument	References
Stela A8	(according to Morley 1937-1938:2:16, 18) or Stela D3 (according to Tozzer 1913:170)	South side of the Central Plaza, in front of the Acropolis platform and Structure D (west of the main axis of Str. D and of Stela D)	H: 2.23 m	Plain altar (D3)	Tozzer 1913:170, Fig. 55; Morley 1937-1938:2:16-18
Stela A9	Stela B1 (according to Tozzer)	North side of the Central Plaza, in front of Str. B	Unclear due to extensive fragmentation	None	Tozzer 1913:169, Pl. 41-1; Morley 1937-1938:2:17-18
Stela A10	Stela B2 (according to Tozzer)	North side of the Central Plaza, in front of Str. B	Unclear due to extensive fragmentation	Plain altar	Tozzer 1913:169, Pl. 41-1; Morley 1937-1938:2:17-18
Stela A11	Stela B3 (according to Tozzer)	North side of the Central Plaza, in front of Str. B	Unclear due to extensive fragmentation	Plain altar	Tozzer 1913:169, Pl. 41-1; Morley 1937-1938:2:17-18
Stela E1	Stela E1	In front of Structure X	Unclear due to extensive fragmentation	Plain altar	Tozzer 1913:188, Pl. 33; Morley 1937-1938:2:17-18; Żrałka and Koszkuł 2007
Stela X1	—	Southwestern corner of Structure X	Fragmented but found in its original position		Żrałka et al. 2012:38, Fig. 30
Stela X2	—	Southwestern corner of Structure X	Unclear due to extensive fragmentation		Żrałka et al. 2012:38, Fig. 30
Stela X3	—	Core of Structure X	95 x 80 cm	None	

Table 2 (continued). Tabulation of the plain stelae of Nakum.

In 2006 a new Nakum Archaeological Project was initiated by the Jagiellonian University of Cracow, Poland. As part of this project, excavations were conducted in areas exhibiting several monuments (Stela 2, Stela 5 raised in front of Structure 82, and a plain stela erected in front of Structure X). Moreover, a new monument (Stela 4) was discovered and commingled fragments

of Stela 2 proved to include the remains of a discrete and heretofore undocumented Stela 6. Documentation involving 3D scanning and photographing of all carved monuments enabled the preparation of new, refined drawings of all Nakum monuments. Below we present the archaeological context, iconography, and epigraphy of all carved Nakum monuments. The monuments will

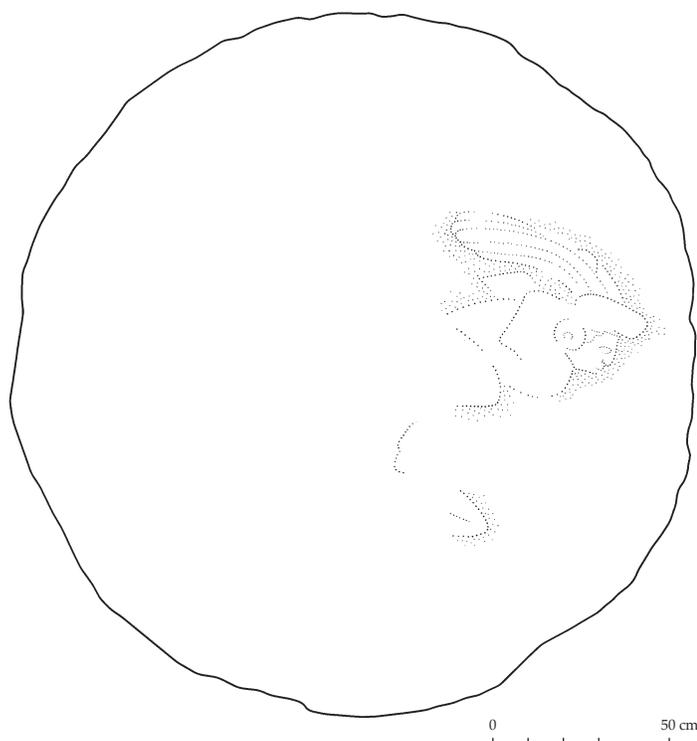


Figure 4. The large altar associated with Stela A4 at the base of Structure A showing signs of carving (drawing by Christophe Helmke).

be introduced in chronological order, starting with the oldest monument (Stela 4) and concluding with the last stelae erected in the first part of the ninth century (Stelae 2, 5, and 6).

Stela 4: A Preclassic Monument

In 2010, in the center of the North Plaza, a completely new carved monument was found by Jarosław Żrałka. Although a large fragment of the monument had protruded from the humus, no one had previously noted it since the monument was lying face down. We marked out an excavation unit measuring 4 x 3 m in the area of the stela. After we started excavations it turned out that its carved surface was facing downwards, thereby fortunately impeding weathering. The monument was found to rest on a layer that was composed of soil and stones and also partly resting on bedrock, which in this part of Nakum protrudes through the surface of the plaza. As our excavations showed, the stela was partly covering a circular cut made into the bedrock (Figure 6). The exact function of this cut is unknown; it may be the place where the stela was originally erected or it might have been a depression used for other purposes. The bedrock at this location was culturally modified and might have been used as a small quarry for architectural purposes. Apart from finding one major fragment of the lower part of the

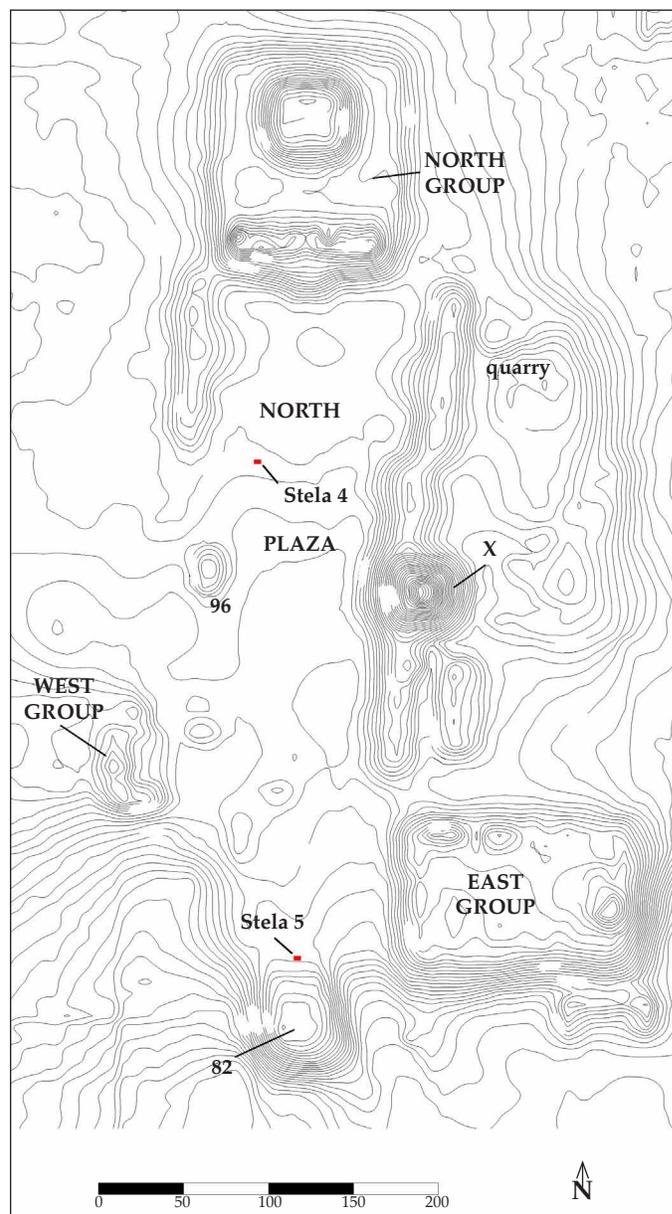


Figure 5. The Northern Sector of Nakum, indicating the location where Stela 4 was found (plan by Nakum Archaeological Project).

monument during excavations conducted in this area, we were also able to find three additional fragments of the stela which we were subsequently able to re-adhere to the major piece during restoration work that took place in 2014. Below the stela we have also discovered a fragment of a very small plate of Cambio Unslipped type (PANFC 018) and a jadeite bead (PANPV 012). Apart from what is described above, the excavation unit was practically devoid of ceramic material. The plate dates to the Terminal Classic and cannot represent an original association with Stela 4 (unless it was displaced from its original context in antiquity), although the jade bead might have originally been part of some sub-stela



Figure 6. Area of Stela 4 during excavations; note a circular cut made into the bedrock just beside the monument, which was found face down (photo by Jarosław Żrałka).

offering.

What has survived of Stela 4 is roughly triangular in shape and measures 1.45 m wide, 0.90 m high, and 0.45 m thick. Unfortunately the upper part of it is missing but more excavations in the North Plaza may yield further fragments. The preserved fragment represents the lower portion of a richly attired person, most probably a local lord shown in a dynamic striding pose (Figure 7). The very early style of the monument indicates that it most likely dates to the Late Preclassic period. The striding pose with legs apart and the manner of representing the feet, as well as the pointed adornments worn on the ankles, are highly comparable to such early Maya monuments as Kaminaljuyu Stela 11, Takalik Abaj Stela 5, Nakbe Stela 1, Cival Stela 2, and Actuncan Stela 1 (see Fahsen 2000:Fig. 145; Fahsen and Grube 2005:79; Estrada-Belli 2011:Fig. 5.1; Henderson 2013). Around the waist of the figure are three prominent bands that are rather evocative of ballplayer belts seen in the iconography of the Classic period, although this may be a misleading comparison. Carried on the back is what appears to be a bundle of reeds or a large unlit torch made of slats of pine, bound together with rope, as is typical in Mesoamerica. Attached to this bundle or torch are two smaller pointed ovoid elements with sinuous appendages, nested within smaller U-shaped frames, that together may comprise archaic features of the sign for “reed,” or *puh* in Classic Mayan, thereby directly qualifying the bundle borne by the figure. These vegetal

motifs are also very reminiscent of stylized maize cobs in iconography associated with cultures of the Olmec heartland (see Taube 2004:25-26, 35-36). In particular, they are very comparable to the early maize cobs represented on Altar 4 at La Venta and those found on an Olmec-style figurine (Taube 2004:Fig. 17c-d) (Figure 8). Although much of the archaeology of La Venta indicates that the site had its apogee in the Middle Preclassic between 800 and 300 BC (Inomata et al. 2013), we surmise that Nakum Stela 4 can be dated to the Late Preclassic on account of shared stylistic attributes and comparison to other analogous monuments in the area. Moreover, although Stela 4 is not completely preserved, its unusual shape evokes Preclassic monuments from both the Maya highlands and lowlands (e.g., the early stelae of Actuncan and La Sufricaya, which are also of irregular form). The importance of this discovery lies in the fact that this monument is one of the oldest in the region and may indicate that Nakum was already an important center or polity in the Late Preclassic, as demonstrated on the basis of archaeological data.

Stela 3 (Stela U)

Despite such an early start, the practice of erecting monuments appears to have undergone a rather lengthy hiatus at Nakum, since the next monument is one that can be dated squarely to the Late Classic. This is Stela 3, which stands at the base of a large pyramidal

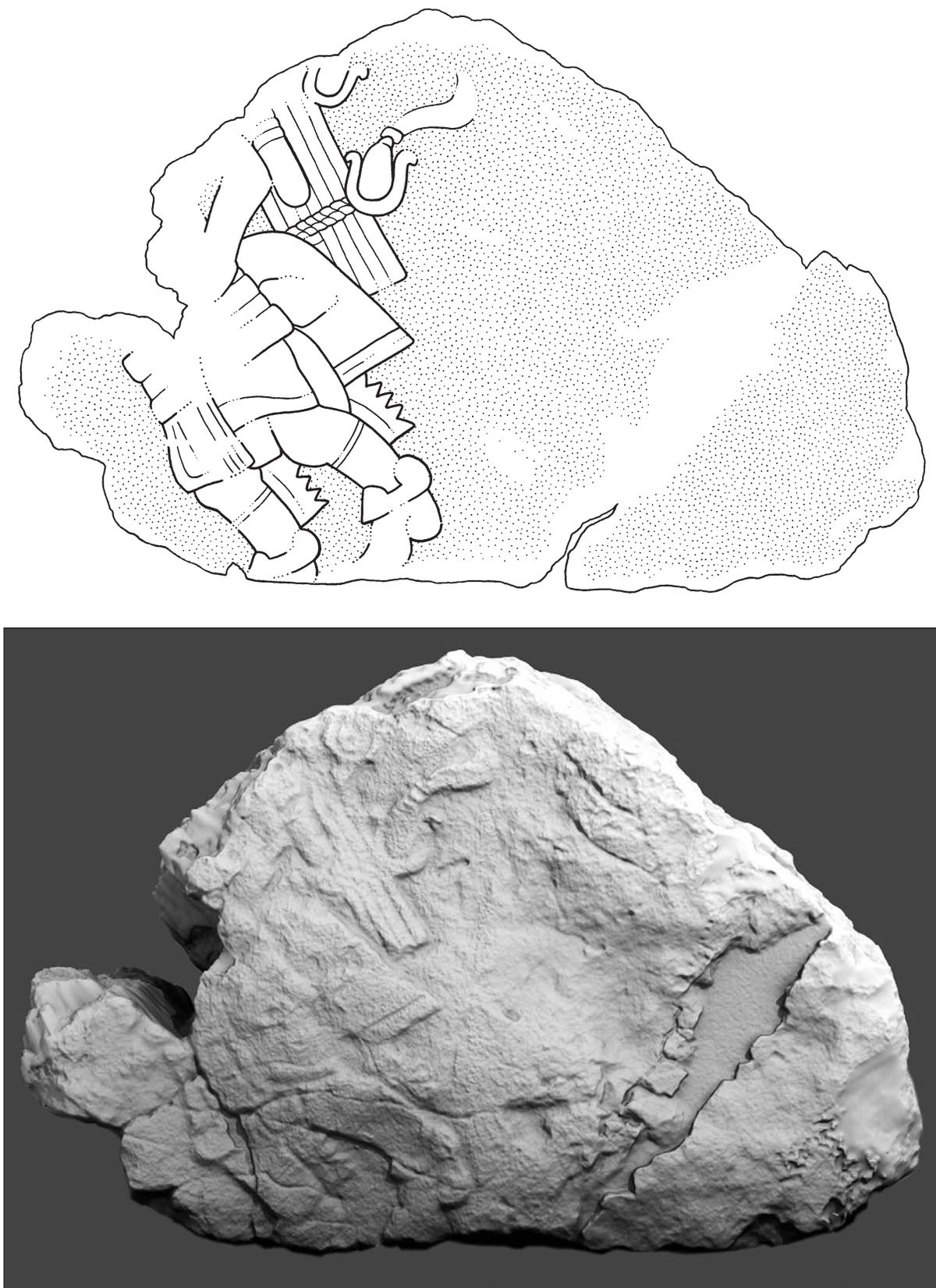


Figure 7. Drawing and scan of Stela 4 (drawing by Christophe Helmke; scan generated by Bogumił Pilarski and Bolesław Zych).

temple, designated as Structure U (Figures 9 and 10). This monument was first discovered by Périgny and was later examined by both Tozzer and Morley. In 2004, excavations supervised by Zoila Calderón and realized by Wiesław Koszkuł were carried out at the base of monument, both in front of it as well as behind the stela. This research showed that the bedrock found ca. 0.50 m below the surface was cut to set up the monument. One floor of Terminal Classic date was documented, which postdated the erection of the stela (Calderón et al. 2004: 21-22, Figs. 18 and 19).

While the stela still stands at the base of Structure U, it is highly eroded and only outlines of the iconography are still perceptible (Figure 12). Despite the weathering of the monument, it is clear that it once depicted a ruler standing atop a prominent basal register that may have provided a personified toponym (see Stuart and Houston 1994:57-68) and included part of a prone captive, as suggested by the schematic hand and what may be elements of bound rope. The long feathers of the ruler's headdress are remarkably preserved in some detail as are some of the features of the headdress itself. Dominating the headdress is the head of a jaguar, identified by the spots and the characteristic ear, with an open

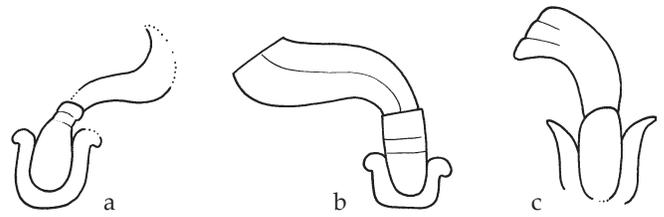


Figure 8. A selection of stylized maize cobs and vegetal motifs from Olmec art (b-c) in comparison to the element embellishing the bound bundle on Stela 4 (a) (drawings by Christophe Helmke).

maw, chewing on what may be a human long bone. Similar headdresses are known from the sites of Ucanal (Stela 6, dated to c. AD 698–712), Naranjo (Stela 33, dated to AD 780), and Sacul (Stela 9, dated to AD 790), showing some geographic as well as temporal continuity. The ruler's left hand is protected by a circular shield and in his right he grasps a circular element that may have represented a fan, based on examples seen at sites in the eastern lowlands (Graham 1978:75; Helmke et al. 2015:13, Fig. 12) and sites in the Usumacinta region (Houston et al. 2006:89-92, Fig. 5-6; Miller and Brittenham 2013).

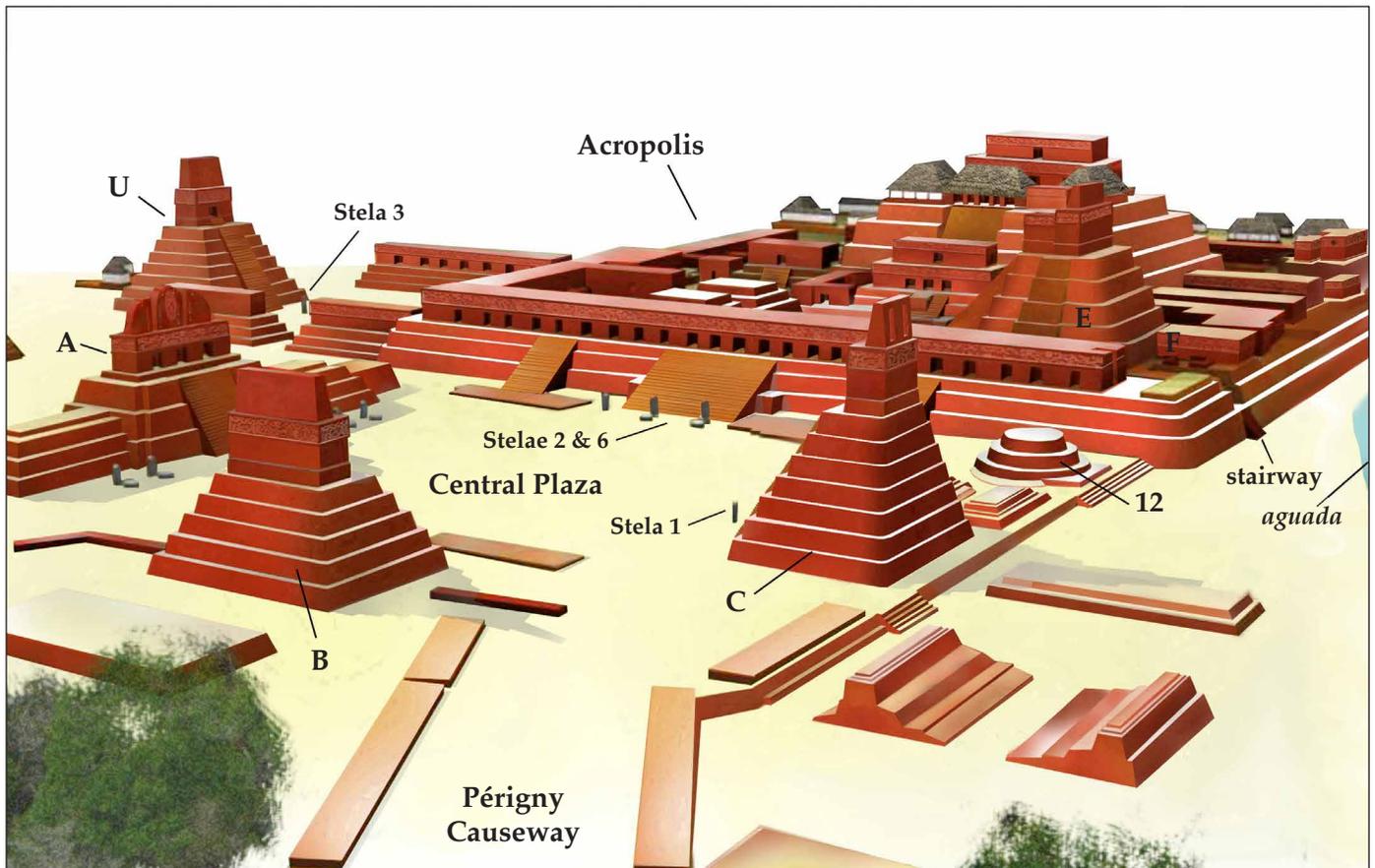


Figure 9. Reconstruction of the Southern Sector of Nakum showing location of Stelae 1, 2, 3, and 6 (reconstruction by Breitner González).



Figure 10. Structure U, with Stela 3 located at the foot of its northern face (photo by Robert Słaboński).

The very distinctive hourglass shape of the stela's base is the result of abortive attempts in antiquity to fell the stela (Grube 2000:265-266). Although the vandals desisted (or their attempts were halted) the very attempt at chopping down a stela depicting the ruler of the site is highly indicative of a period of social unrest and turmoil or perhaps even warfare (Żrałka 2008:222). The exact dating of this instability or attack is unknown but may well refer to the last phase of the site's occupation in the Terminal Classic, or if concomitant to war could represent an isolated event in the eighth century.

When Morley examined the monuments at Nakum during his first visit to the site, he noted that the upper left corner of Stela 3 was missing and therefore decided to excavate the area in front of the monument where he found the missing fragment (Figure 11). In so doing he found the very start of the glyphic caption, which opens with a Calendar Round date that can be reconstructed as 13 Ajaw 18 Kumk'u, although only the date of the Haab calendar remained at the time (Morley 1937-1938:2:12-13, 5:Pls. 13b-c, 86e). This initial Calendar Round is followed by **17-tu-WINAK-HAB**, or "on the 17th k'atun," indicating that the date is anchored to 9.17.0.0.0 in the Long Count and confirming the Calendar Round. Initially Morley identified the ritual event of this date as a 'completion hand,' now better read *tzutz*, "to complete" (Stuart 2001). Closer inspection instead suggests that the

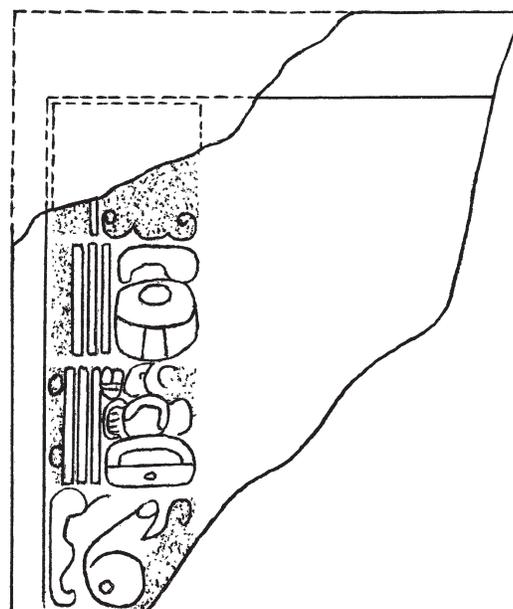


Figure 11. Field sketch of the upper left corner of Stela 3 as found by Sylvanus Morley (after Morley 1937-1938:5:Pl. 13c).

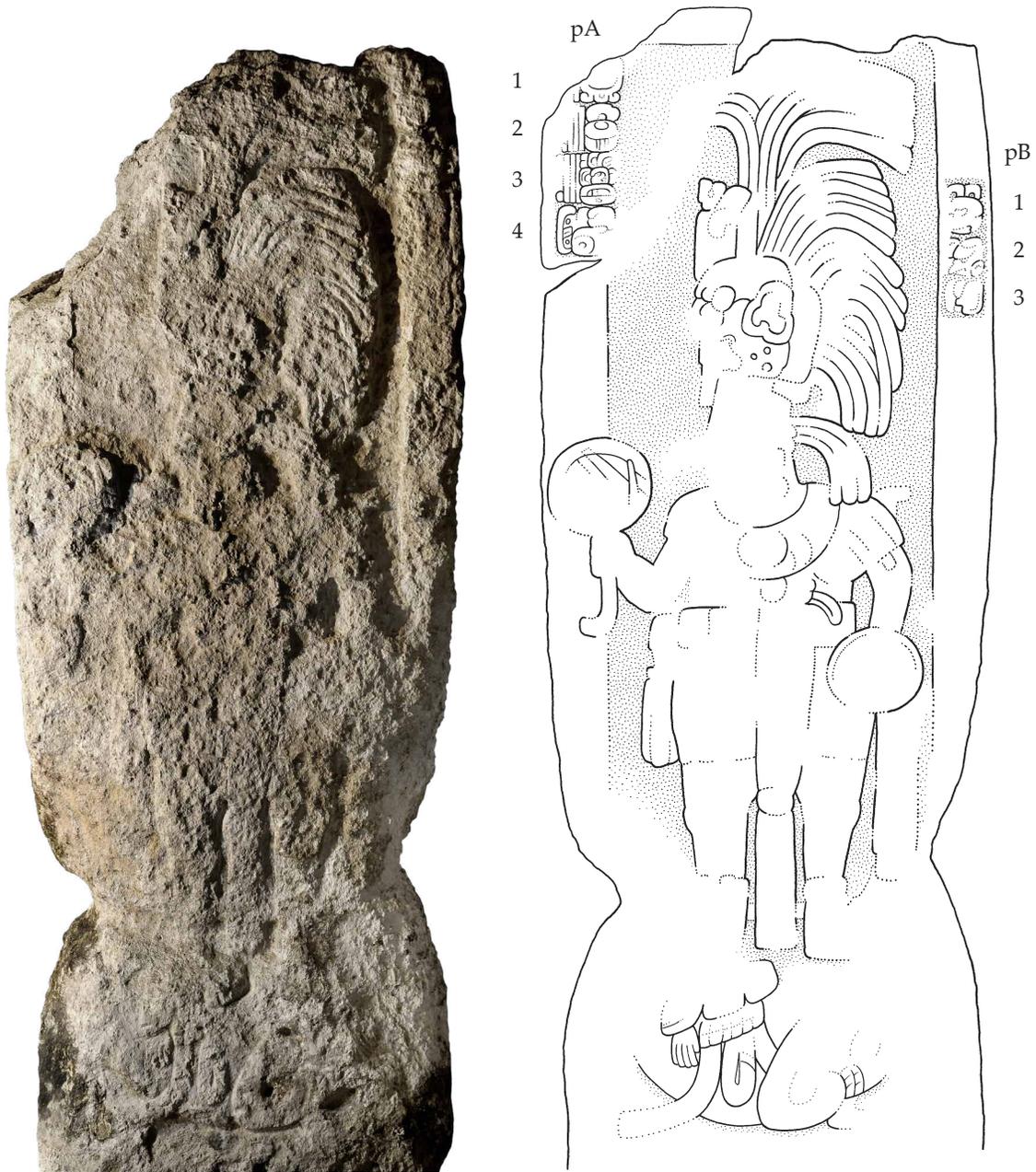


Figure 12. Stela 3 erected at the base of Structure U (photo by Robert Słaboński; drawing by Christophe Helmke).

verb that closes the extant caption may have recorded part of a *k'al-tuun* or “stone-binding” ritual, typical of such Period Endings (Stuart 1996:154-156). As such the text commemorated the Calendar Round on the completion of the 17th *k'atun*, corresponding to January 20, AD 771. Unfortunately, since the rediscovery of the fragment in 1915, it has now gone missing and has not been relocated by recent investigations at the site.

In the drawing made of Stela 3 by Grube (2000:Fig. 209), the upper left fragment that figures in Morley’s study (1937-1938:5:Pls. 13b-c, 86e) has not been

reproduced and the iconographic features are rendered rather schematically. A further oversight is the small panel of glyphs that is embedded in the right frame of the stela, which had gone undetected before but was made clear under raking light photography. Similar, low-relief panels are known from the later Stela 9 at Xunantunich (Helmke et al. 2010:110-113). At Nakum the inset glyphic panel is quite eroded and consists of three glyph blocks. Although only the weathered outlines remain, these are sufficient to suggest that they once formed part of an anthroponym or name, based

on the forms and head variants employed, and as such may have named the individual depicted on the stela (Figure 12).

Stela 5: A Late Monument of the North Plaza

During our field season at Nakum in 2011 we noticed a large concentration of fragments of a monument lying on the surface in the southwestern corner of the North Plaza, in front of a small mound designated Structure 82. We observed that some fragments bore traces of highly weathered glyph blocks, entirely covered by moss (Figure 13a). The monument in question was first discovered by Hellmuth who mentioned in his report submitted to the IDAEH that he found “remains of a once attractive stela” that he designated Stela 14 (Hellmuth 1992:26). Oscar Quintana and Wolfgang Wurster (2002) also mention it in their publication concerning the new map of Nakum. However, they describe the monument as being plain (Quintana and Wurster 2002:262) and they mark its location on the new map that they published the same year.

Relocating the area where the remains of the stela were scattered, we initiated an excavation unit in 2012 and continued work there until 2013. The excavation unit measured 5 m (N-S) by 4 m (E-W) and was subdivided into 6 smaller units (Figure 13b). Thanks to these excavations, we were able to collect most of the fragments of the stela, which were subsequently refitted during restoration work conducted by conservator Tomasz Skrzypiec (Figure 14). The restoration revealed that in many places traces of red and blue pigment survived on the relief carving of the monument. We were also able to find the base of the monument, which had been raised on a stairway leading from the southwestern corner of the North Plaza to the platform of Structure 82. The stairway consisted of three low steps (ca. 0.30 m high), each separated by 1.50 m deep treads.

Stela 5 features two standing figures wielding staffs, or possibly spears, facing one another. Based on canons of Maya art, the more prominent figure, presumably the king, would be the individual on the right, facing his subordinate on the left (Figure 15). A highly eroded hieroglyphic text, initially composed of ten glyph blocks, appears across the top in the upper register. Now little remains to support a cogent reading of the text, although the outlines of a Calendar Round can be made out in the first two glyph blocks (A1–B1). These provide a date wherein the Tzolk'in has a coefficient of 6, the Haab a coefficient of 8, and faint traces of the features of the month Pop can just be made out.

On an isolated fragment, another glyphic block is found, which is the best preserved of the original text. This fragment provides a clear spelling of the month Mol of the Haab calendar. The only plausible place to integrate this fragment is at position E1, suggesting

that D1 provided the counterpart Tzolk'in date of a second Calendar Round. As such the text was originally divided into two clauses, each headed by a Calendar Round. Whereas a single record of the month Mol cannot resolve the placement of the date, it bears remarking that the only K'atun Period Ending in the entirety of baktun 9 involving Mol as the month is 9.19.0.0.0. This Long Count date is tied to the Calendar Round 9 Ajaw 18 Mol, which corresponds to the date June 24, AD 810.

Assuming that this date is correct we can conclude that this is a Terminal Classic monument, which in turn also helps us to resolve the initial Calendar Round at the onset of the text. As preserved it can be transcribed as 6 ? 8 Pop, and interestingly the only plausible anchor for all of baktuns 9 and 10—assuming that this refers to a Period Ending date—would be for the lahuntun date 10.0.10.0.0 6 Ajaw 8 Pop, corresponding to January 18, AD 840. Whether both Period Ending dates are represented on the monument remains unclear on account of breakage and erosion, but both anchors to the Long Count speak convincingly of a Terminal Classic date. This late dating is also supported by some of the iconographic features including the hairstyles of the two depicted individuals. The hair of the ruler is shown as long and unbound, arranged in strands, whereas the subordinate has long hair flowing onto his shoulders. These are not characteristic features of Late Classic statuary but appear with some regularity on Terminal Classic monuments, suggesting to some the presence of foreign individuals with different dress and hairstyles (e.g., Graham 1973; Sabloff 1973).

Based on the iconography we surmise that Stela 5 depicts a type of staff dance, or perhaps even a type of spear dance on a par with that celebrated by Copan's king Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat at the close of the eighth century and immortalized on the piers of Structure 18 within the Acropolis (see Baudez 1992:189-197, Figs. 95-96). At Nakum, on Stela 5, the king and a subordinate appear to be jointly performing a public pageant, either to solidify close ties or as a type of martial dance, in anticipation or at the culmination of war. A close examination of the text indicates that the glyph block where we would expect the verb (A2) may involve the collocation **a-AK'-ta**, based on remaining outlines, which is consistent with dance rituals that were referred to as *ak'taj* in Classic Mayan (see Grube 1992; Lacadena 2003:848-849).

The depiction of two individuals on a public monument, rather than the exclusive focus on the king as supreme ruler, is part of typical iconographic programs of the Late-to-Terminal Classic in the region. Such motifs were referred to as “confrontation scenes” in the earlier literature on the assumption that these scenes represented opposing individuals (see Sabloff 1973; Chase et al. 1991:13). What is significant is that rulers were depicted as equal in scale to their subordinates, implying some sort of greater power sharing and a



a



b

Figure 13. The area of Stela 5: (a) before excavation and (b) during excavation (photos by Jarosław Żrałka).



Figure 14. Stela 5 undergoing restoration and curation (photo by Robert Słaboński).

charter deemphasizing royal status and prerogatives to the benefit of non-regal elites. Assuming that the reconstruction of the date is correct, this would make Stela 5 the first monument in the region to present such an iconographic program. Such scenes start to dominate Maya iconography towards the end of the Classic period on both carved monuments and some ceramics such as Fine Orange vessels (Smith 1958; Sabloff 1973; Rands et al. 1975).

In this respect we note that Stela 5 was erected in front of a very small architectural complex (Structure 82) that might have been the residence of the individual shown to the left of the king, someone of great importance in Terminal Classic Nakum. A similar tendency is seen at many other Maya centers during the eighth and ninth centuries AD, especially in the eastern central lowlands including Caracol (Chase et al. 1991), and sites of the Usumacinta region (Golden 2010), the Pasión (Graham 1973), and Copan (Fash 1991), where local lords are featured on public monuments with powerful nobles bearing important symbols of power.

Thus whereas Stela 5 testifies to a period wherein rulers negotiated power with their subordinates, the compromise was not to prolong the institution of royal kingship for considerably longer, especially when we take into account that the faces of both individuals were defaced in antiquity. Nothing around the faces remains and some cross-hatching is visible, implying deliberate human agency. The same type of defacement has also been attested at Xunantunich where the face, and especially the eyes, of every single monarch represented on the public monuments was defaced (see Helmke et al. 2010:99).

Stela 1 (Stela C)

Stela 1 was set up in front of a large pyramidal temple, Structure C, and was not paired with any altar. It was first discovered by Périgny (1911:19-20, Pl. 2.B) and later reported on by Tozzer and Morley (Tozzer 1913:169; Morley 1937-1938:2:13-15). In 2004 the monument was the subject of consolidation work by Antonio Contreras as part of Triangle Project research (Calderón and Contreras 2004). Moreover, at its base excavations were carried out. This work was supervised by Zoila Calderón and revealed that the stela had shifted from its original upright position with all subsequent replasterings of the plaza lipping up to the tilted stela (Calderón et al. 2004:107-110, Figs. 161-165). At present, Stela 1 leans as much as 6 degrees to the left (south), but oddly the column of glyphs that adorns its front face was inscribed perpendicular to the plaza floor, suggesting that the glyphs might have been carved after the monument was erected, an interpretation initially proposed by Tozzer. An examination of the monument reveals that the glyphs and the background are rougher than the remainder of the surface of the stela, again suggesting that the glyphic panel is a secondary addition. Interestingly, the frame of the stela is for the most part parallel to the sides, but the base is parallel to the plaza floor (Figure 16). What may have caused this odd combination of features, a leaning stela and a vertical text that is rendered in plumb, is fertile ground for speculation. Rather than invoking a stunning singular event, the most prosaic conclusion would see the stela leaning to one side on account of a faulty foundation with the text subsequently added to an already existing plain stela. This has been



Figure 15. Stela 5 erected at the base of Structure 82 (drawing by Christophe Helmke).

partially verified by means of excavations conducted by Zoila Calderón, since the foundation of the stela was only found to penetrate an underling floor to a depth of 64 cm below the surface; moreover the southern part of the base was supported on a block of mortar and stones, apparently to provide some stability for the monument, yet this shallow and faulty foundation resulted in its partial subsidence (Calderón et al. 2004:107-108, Figs. 161-165). Thus the addition of the text and the linear frame may greatly postdate the initial erection of the stela. Considering the relatively late date of the text this may thus represent a subsequent recycling of a monument that was not initially intended to bear a carved text.

The drawing that we have produced as part of our study is based predominantly on the earlier photographs, especially those by Tozzer (1913:Pl. 52-1),

combined with inspection of the monument. Since its discovery it has continued to weather such that some of the details visible in the early photographs are no longer evident on the actual monument (see Grube 2000:Fig. 196, which is based on the monument’s current appearance). In much the same way, the traces of red paint noted by Tozzer (1913:169) and much later by Calderón and Contreras (2004:109) are now no longer visible.

The text is composed of nine glyph blocks that are neatly stacked in a single vertical column. The text is initiated by a Calendar Round date that can be read as 2 Ajaw 14 Yaxk’in (A1–A2). The anchor of this date to the Long Count is not immediately obvious as there are details of the date that are not entirely orthodox. For instance, the coefficient of the Haab calendrical notation ought to be 13, since the only permissible coefficients with Ajaw are 3, 8, 13, and 18. Thus we surmise that the intended date ought to be 2 Ajaw 13 Yaxk’in, but the discrepancy in the adjacent coefficient is not that typically seen wherein the Haab coefficient is one day less (see Proskouriakoff and Thompson 1947; Mathews [1977]2001:402-403, 404-405; Stuart 2004; Martin and Skidmore 2012), as in this case it is one day more (see MacLeod and Stone 1995:158-161; Helmke 2009:167-168).

The event that transpired on this date is given in the following glyph block (A3) as **u-CHOK-wa-ch’a-ja**, for *uchoko’w ch’aj*, literally “he scattered the drops.” This is a ritual action that was commonplace at Period Endings, wherein kings emulated the agricultural act of sowing, with pellets of incense, beads, and other symbolically significant materials substituted for seeds (see Love 1987; Jobbová et al. in press). Interestingly, the term *ch’aj* is here written synharmonically as **ch’a-ja**, rather than the more familiar **ch’a-ji**, suggesting that the term at this juncture was pronounced with a short vowel, reflecting an *aa > a* shift (see Stuart et al. 1999; Lacadena and Wichmann 2002:293, 299-302, 2004:115-116; Grube 2004:63, 66, 80).

Further specifying how the Calendar Round anchors to the Long Count are the following two glyph blocks that provide two short prepositional sub-clauses, essentially structured in couplet construction. The first of these (A4) is written **ti-[TAN]LAM-wa**, whereas the second can be transliterated as **tu-10-HAB** (A5). Together these can be read and analyzed as:

	Preposition	Qualifier	Syntactic head
(A4)	<i>ti</i>	<i>tahn</i>	<i>lam[a]w</i>
(A5)	<i>tu</i>	<i>lajuun</i>	<i>haab</i>

In the first instance the phrase can be literally translated as “in the half elapsed,” an expression that usually refers to the mid-point of a k’atun that has half-elapsed, and as such refers to an even decade within the Long



Figure 16. Stela 1 erected at the base of Structure C (photograph by Alfred Tozzer, drawing by Christophe Helmke).

Count, providing the final three coefficients as 10.0.0 (see Thompson 1950:192-193, Fig. 32: 46-55; Wichmann 2004). On Stela 1, however, this is not the case since it refers to another unit of time that is half-elapsed, which is specified in the following phrase. That can be translated as “within the tenth year” and thereby specifies that it is this temporal unit that is half-elapsed, which is to say that it refers to a hotun, or period of five years. Traditionally it is the expression *nah ho’tuun* “it is the first hotun” that is recorded in the texts (see Thompson 1950:191-192, Fig. 32:36-40) and yet here at Nakum we see a distinctive neologism. Despite the idiosyncrasies of the expression these provide us with a secure anchor to the Long Count, as 9.19.5.0.0 2 Ajaw 13 Yaxk’in, or May 29, AD 815.

The subject of the scattering ritual, the individual

who is credited as the agent behind this action, is named in the following two glyph blocks (A6–A7). On account of erosion this nominal segment was not clear in earlier drawings, and whereas progress has been made some questions remain as to particulars. The first glyph block (A6) can be transcribed as **YAX-mu?-nu** and the second (A7) as **CHAK-#**—with the final eroded sign presumably providing a phonetic complement **ki**. This is a typical regal name of the eastern lowlands involving one of the aspects of the thunder deity Chaahk (see Martin and Grube 2000; Grube 2002; Colas 2004, 2014). The initial segment thereby specifies a particular aspect of this deity, with *yax* used adverbially as “first” and the intervening medial segment, possibly read *mun*, identifying a trait or feature of the particular divine aspect. Other more common aspects of Chaahk exhibiting the

same structure and initiated by Yax include: Yax Ha'al Chaahk "first rains Chaahk," Yax Mayuy Chan Chaahk "Chaahk is the first morning haze in the sky," as well as the rarer Yax Bul Chaahk "Chaahk is the first flood" and Yax Ohl Chaahk "Chaahk is the first heart" (see Grube et al. 2002:22; Colas 2004, 2014; García Barrios 2008). The aspect of Chaahk that serves as the regnal name on the Nakum stela is one of these rarer and less well known aspects. Based on comparison to the other comparable Chaahk names just cited, we can see that the medial segment ought to refer to either water of celestial origin or to a body part. At present, though, a clear translation eludes us, as cognate terms have differing semantic domains.¹

Following the name of the ruler that officiated the ritual are his titles, which close the clause as a whole. The first of these (A8) provides a complete emblem glyph, including the *k'uhul* "godly, divine" prefix and the *ajaw* "king, ruler" superfix. The main sign provides the name of the king's dynasty and represents a stylized and diminutive temple in elevation; accordingly, the king may have been styled as "godly temple king," and if this is a reference to the Acropolis he may have been named after that architectural complex (see Grube 2000:252-253; Martin and Grube 2000:19). Based on present evidence this appears to be the emblem glyph of Nakum or at least that devised and employed by the late kings of the site, although this is a single and solitary example and therefore caution must remain in attribution of this title.

The ruler's final title is equally interesting and particular since it can be read as *nah ho'chan winik*, or "person of Nah Ho'chan," wherein the latter is a toponym for a supernatural place that can be translated as "first five-skies" (see Stuart and Houston 1994:71). As a result, this monarch would appear to have considered himself to have an affinity for this supernatural location or to somehow stem from that place. Whereas Nahho'chan is typically associated with the Paddler Deities that are present at such Period Ending rituals and in myth are the ones to ferry the defunct maize god to the underworld (Schele and Miller 1986:52; Stone and Zender 2011:51,

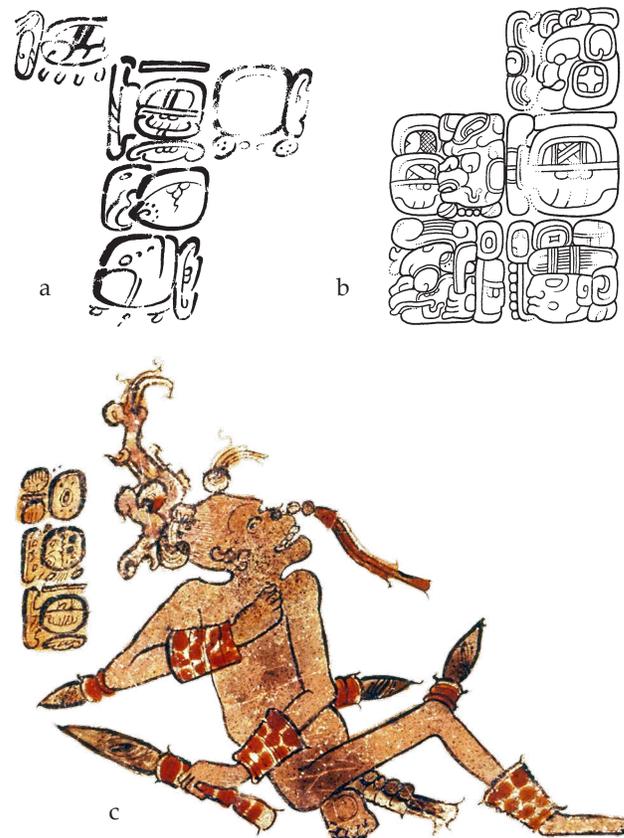


Figure 17. Examples of the Nahho'chan toponym used in titular sequences: (a) detail of Drawing 65 at Naj Tunich; (b) detail of Stela 5 at Tikal; (c) detail of the K0791 vase, illustrating a *wahy* creature accompanied by its glyphic caption (drawings by Christophe Helmke, photograph by Justin Kerr).

69), there are a few instances wherein historical individuals appear to have included this toponym in their titular string. Thus at Tikal the eighth-century king Yik'in Chan K'awiil bears the title Nahho'chan Kalo'mte' on Stela 5 (Figure 17b) and a pilgrim to the site of Naj Tunich in the southeastern Peten is also named in connection to this place (Figure 17a), while a *wahy* creature is equally related to it in lieu of one of the typical Emblem Glyphs or dynastic names to which these supernatural entities are usually connected (Figure 17c) (Helmke et al. 2015:18-19). The example found on Stela 1 is therefore not without precedent, although these cases are quite rare, and it may duplicate other instances such as the well-known cases from Yaxchilan and Quirigua where rulers tied themselves to underworld localities.

In sum, Stela 1 records a scattering ritual performed on the hotun Period Ending of 815, by an individual who may have been named Yax Mun Chaahk, bearing what may be the emblem glyph of Nakum and a title tying him to a supernatural locality.

¹ In Ch'olan languages *mun* occurs as an adjective, such as in Ch'orti' *mun* "espeso, doble," "thick, tightly interwoven" (Hull 2016:291), and as a noun, including in Ch'olti' *mun* "esclabo," as *munil* (adj.) "esclavitud" (Morán 1695:112), and also in the obsolete *mun-at* "esclavo" of Tzeltal (Kaufman 1972:111), leading to the Central Mayan reconstruction of **muun* as "slave" (Kaufman 2003:60). In Yukatekan languages, in contrast, *muun* is the adjective "tierno" (Barrera Vásquez et al. 1980:540-541), as in *muun bak* "cartilago" (Basterrachea et al. 1992:106). Interestingly, *muun* is also glossed as "fruta verde por madurar" (Barrera Vásquez et al. 1980:540) and (*ah*) *mun* as "nombre del joven dios del maíz, también significa fruta o cosecha tierna" (Barrera Vásquez et al. 1980:541). As such, possible translations of Yax Mun Chaahk include "Chaahk is the first servitude" or "Chaahk is the first harvest," but without additional examples and semantic constraints it is difficult to propose a coherent etymology.

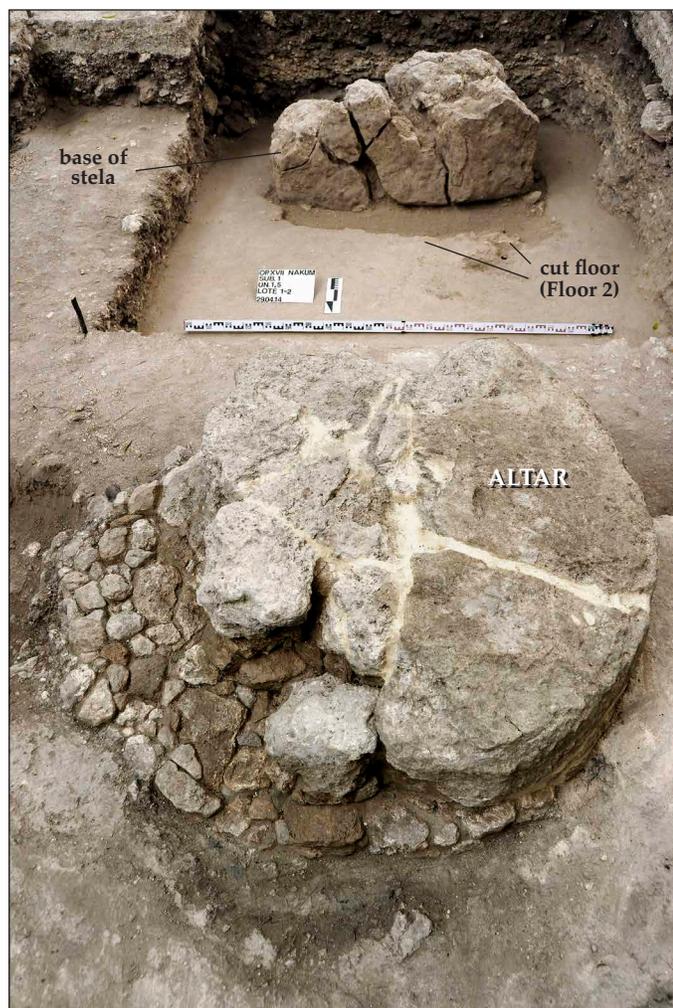


Figure 18. The area of Stelae 2 and 6 during excavations; note the base of the monument and a plain altar placed in front of Stela 2 (photo by Jarosław Żrałka).

In Search of New Fragments: Stela 2 (Stela D) and Stela 6 (Stela D2)

Stela 2 (formerly known as Stela D) is located in front of a huge Acropolis complex. It was erected with two other plain monuments (Stelae D1 and D3 according to Tozzer [1913:170] and Stelae A7 and A8 according to Morley [1937-1938:2:16-18]); two plain altars were associated with Stela 2 and with the plain stela just to the north (Stela D3/A8). Stela 2 was discovered by Périgny (1906) and later also examined by Tozzer and Morley who mention that it was found broken into many pieces (Tozzer 1913:170, Pls. 42, 43-1; Morley 1937-1938:2:16-17, 5:Pl. 86d). Morley made a successful attempt to assemble all the fragments from the upper part of the monument where the glyphic inscription was carved and thus was able to reconstruct the date on the monument.

Recent excavations of the area where Stela 2 was erected revealed additional fragments of this monument

which Tozzer (1913:Pl. 42.1) designated as Stela D2 and Morley (1937-1938:2:16) grouped together as Stela D (Figure 18). In poring over the old photographs of these monuments and matching them up with those recovered as part of excavations in 2014 we realized that another carved stela was represented among the fragments. As such this monument has been designated as Stela 6 (part of what Tozzer once had designated as Stela D2). It is on account of the erection of these monuments in contextual proximity that the fragments have been commingled in the past, thereby confusing designations. Thus whereas Stela 2 has a rounded top and glyphic text above the iconography, along with a relatively narrow plain frame along the edges, Stela 6 in contrast has a square top, no glyphic caption in the upper register, relatively deep relief, and broader plain frames along the edges (Figure 19). On this basis the two monuments can be distinguished from each other and the basal fragments representing a standing ruler wielding a spear and circular shield are now better seen as part of Stela 6 (although these were initially thought to pertain to Stela 2; Helmke and Żrałka 2013). Our drawings are based on the old photographs taken by Morley and Tozzer as well as an examination of the recently excavated pieces.

Extensive excavations at the base of the Acropolis platform covered nearly 22 m² and revealed both old and already known fragments as well as new pieces of the stela (Figure 20). Moreover, investigations in this area exposed the base of the axial stela. However, during the excavation we were unable to locate all the fragments of the stela that appear in the photos published by Tozzer and Morley. Thus we suppose that some of them must have been completely destroyed by exposure to the elements and possibly casual looting. The stratigraphy in the area where Stela 2 was found is somewhat complicated due to unreported excavations made here by previous investigators. Nevertheless, we were able to ascertain that Stela 2 and its accompanying altar were set up when the last (uppermost) floor of the Central Plaza was paved (Floor 1). Below this floor we found two older floors (nos. 2 and 3), of which Floor 3 seems to be of Late Preclassic date while Floors 1 and 2 are from the Classic period. In general, stratigraphy indicates that Stela 2 constitutes a very late addition to the plaza, as may be confirmed by the Calendar Round date that it bears. Archaeological materials associated with this stela are mostly Terminal Classic in date, which further confirms the very late date of the monument. In order to set up the stela the Maya cut through both Floors 1 and 2; in the cut made in Floor 2 the base of the stela was placed in a soil matrix combining earth, stones, and slacked lime. For the stability of the monument, small stones were wedged at its corners. Our impression is that the monument broke into pieces on account of a faulty base and cribbing. The base of the stela was found cracked, and we think that this was the primary cause for the monument's collapse. Just 2.10 m to the north of

the stela, an accompanying altar was set up at the level of the uppermost floor (Floor 1). The plain altar (Altar D2 according to Tozzer's [1913:170] nomenclature) measures ca. 1.75–1.85 m in diameter. Another monument (the plain Stela D3) and its accompanying altar must have been erected at the same time as Stela 2 (just to west). The excavations realized in the area around the altar of Stela D3 revealed that it too had been placed on the last and uppermost floor of the Central Plaza. We suppose that another plain monument erected nearby (Stela D1) may be of the same date.

Stela 6, which was found beside Stela 2, once bore, as we have already touched upon above, the portrait of a lord with a long spotted loincloth, dressed in warrior

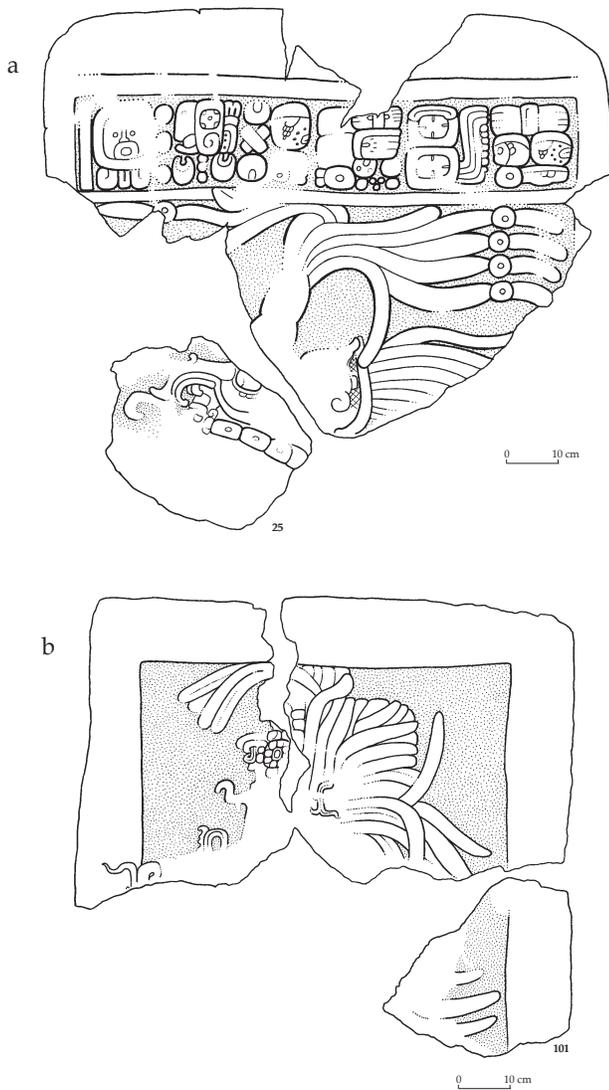


Figure 19. (a) The upper section of Stela 2 and (b) the upper section of Stela 6, found at the base of Structure D. The small numbers refer to field designations of the various fragments (drawings by Christophe Helmke).

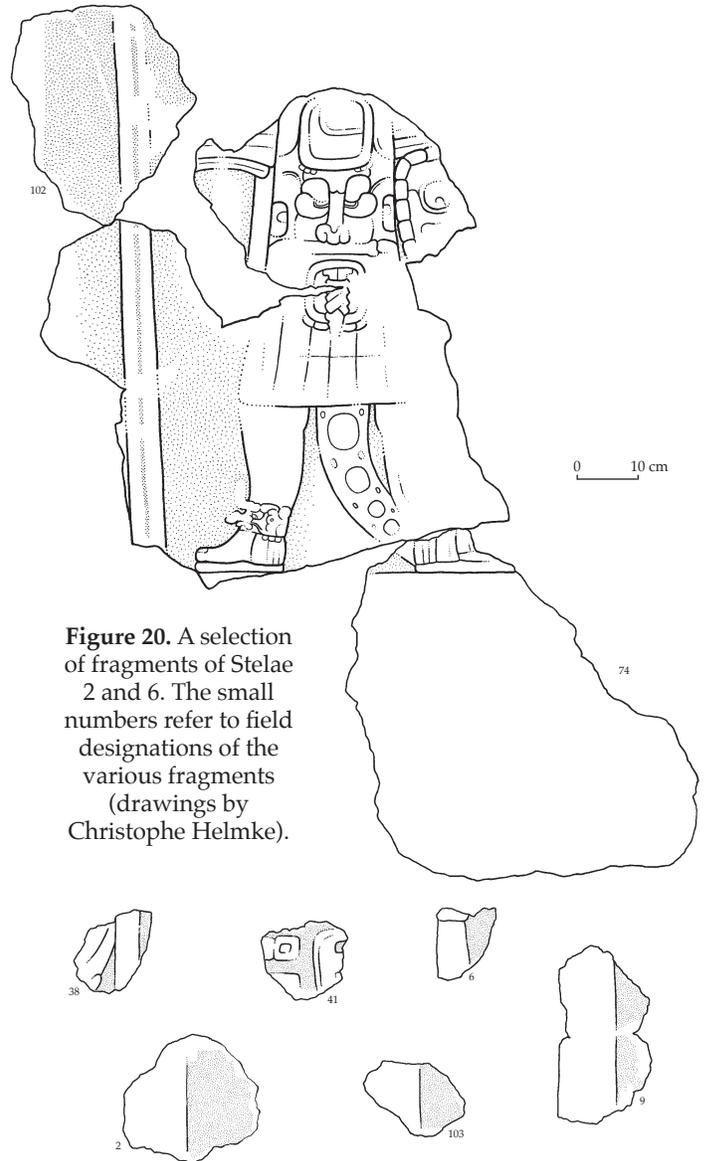


Figure 20. A selection of fragments of Stelae 2 and 6. The small numbers refer to field designations of the various fragments (drawings by Christophe Helmke).

garb, replete with spear and shield emblazoned with the face of the Jaguar God of the Underworld. The relatively elongated, tall and narrow, rectangular form of the stela, its prominent frame, and relatively deep relief make this monument closely comparable to Stela 1 at Xunantunich, which has been dated to precisely the same 10.1.0.0 Period Ending as Stela 2 at Nakum (Helmke et al. 2010:113-116, Table 5.1). Based on shared stylistic attributes and contextual association with Nakum Stela 2 we surmise that Stela 6 is also a Terminal Classic monument and that it is wholly contemporaneous and thereby also dates to the ninth century.

Our recent analysis of the fragments of Stela 2 and an examination of Morley's photograph of this monument (Morley 1937-1938:5:Pl. 13f) indicate that Stela 2 bears the date of AD 849 (10.1.0.0.) based on the 5 Ajaw 3 K'ayab Calendar Round date that initiates the text

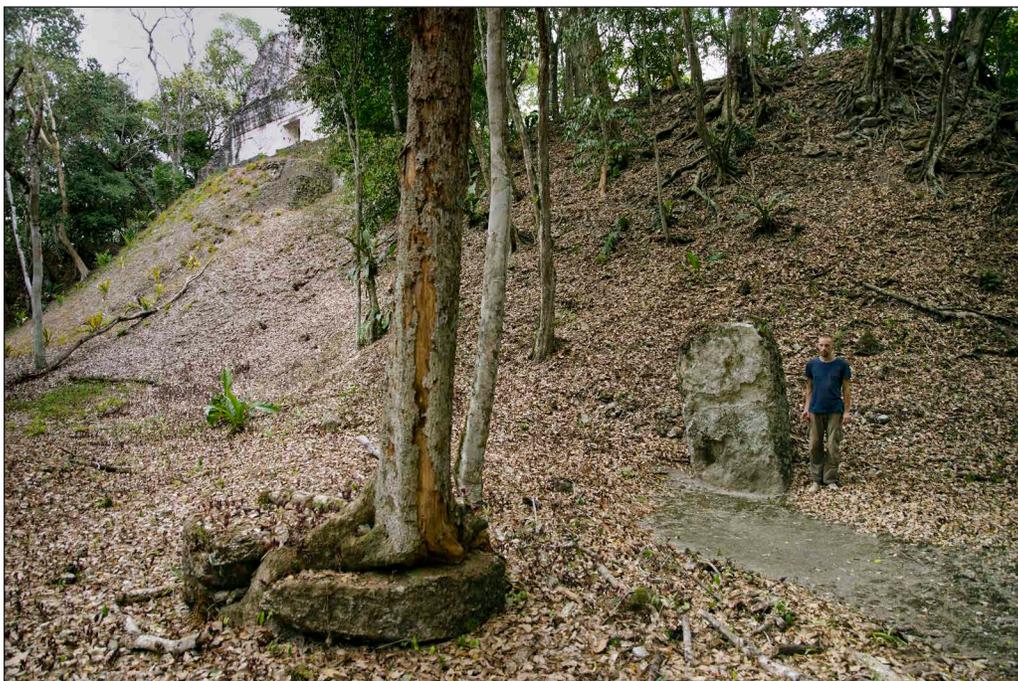


Figure 21. Stela A6 located in front of Structure 2 (the southern extension of Str. A)
(photo by Jarosław Żračka).

(A1–B1) (Figure 19a). The event that transpired on this day is partly eroded but given in the following glyph block (C1). What remains can be transcribed as **u-#-TUN** and presumably recorded *u-k'al-tuun*, “the *tuun* is presented/closed,” referring to the ritual surrounding the Period Ending (see Stuart 1996:154–156). The name of the lord that officiated the ritual is only partly legible (D1) but appears to involve a series of multiple phonograms. In this respect this nominal segment compares to that of the contemporary warlord cited in the texts of Seibal, whose name is presented as a series of six phonograms as **wa-t'u-lu-k'a-te-le**, presumably read as *Wat'ul K'atel* (Stuart 1993:339; Schele and Mathews 1998:175–196), or to that of the contemporary warlord **pa-pa-ma-li-li**, or *Papamalil*, who appears to have exerted influence from Ucanal (Grube 1994:95, Fig. 9.18ss-tt). The final two glyph blocks on Nakum Stela 2 provide the title of the king (E1–F1). Here he bears the prestigious title *elk'in kalo'mte'* or “eastern *kalo'mte'*,” a title that is still somewhat unclear as to its meaning but was commonly used by the most powerful Maya rulers during the Late Classic. In the Terminal Classic, however, the status associated with the title was enjoyed by a greater number of kings, some of them from quite minor sites, as the wider political structure dominated by major hegemony began to fade (Martin 2014:77). Assuming that Stela 2 depicts and refers to a local lord of Nakum, the use of this title thereby implies a newfound liberty and power on the part of the local royalty, not least since the title is qualified by *elk'in* or “eastern” implying some sort of dominion over the eastern reaches of the Maya lowlands.

Prior to Stela 2, the title *elk'in kalo'mte'* was only properly attested on Stela 9 at Lamanai in the seventh century (Closs 1988:14) and in the titular string of the mother of Yaxuun Bahlam IV at Yaxchilan in the eighth century (Mathews 1988:204). Accordingly, Stela 2 is a part of a small register of monuments wherein the “eastern *kalo'mte'*” title appears, which makes this record all the more remarkable at this late date. A similar mention can also be found on Jimbal Stela 1, dated to 815, where the local lord may be equally titled, serving as a possible precedent to Stela 2 at Nakum, which was erected 34 years later. Together Jimbal Stela 1 and Nakum Stela 2 imply that the Terminal Classic rulers in the eastern periphery of Tikal considered themselves as supreme rulers of the east, which has important implications concerning emic conceptions of political geography at the onset of the Collapse.

Plain Monuments at Nakum

Most monuments at Nakum are plain stelae and altars. Almost all of them are situated in the Central Plaza of Nakum, which forms the major and the most sacred locus of the monumental epicenter. The Central Plaza is surrounded by large pyramidal temples to the north, east, and west, and on the south it is enclosed by the enormous platform and range structure of the Acropolis complex. Besides Stelae 1 and 2 there are an additional 11 plain stelae and 10 plain altars in the Central Plaza of Nakum, though one of these altars may have originally been carved (see Figure 4, above).

Morley (1937-1938:2:18) gave all the plain stelae from the Central Plaza of Nakum numbers from A1 to A11. The largest concentration of plain monuments appears in front of Structure A and its adjacent constructions (with numbers 1–4) where six plain stelae, each of which is accompanied by a circular altar, are located (Figure 21). In front of Structure B (which is a large pyramid enclosing the Central Plaza from the north) there were three plain stelae and two plain altars. Finally, as it has already been mentioned, two plain stelae (one of which is accompanied by a plain altar) were erected on the southern limit of the Central Plaza, in front of the Acropolis (Stelae A7 and A8 according to Morley’s numeration or Stelae D1 and D3 according to Tozzer’s nomenclature).

All of the above-described monuments are located in the Southern Sector of Nakum. In the Northern Sector, researchers had previously documented only one plain stela (Stela E1) and an altar standing in front of a large pyramid (Structure X, also designated as Structure 104). Both monuments were first reported by Tozzer (1913:188) and subsequently by Morley (1937-1938:2:11, 17-18). Their descriptions indicate that when Tozzer and then Morley visited Nakum, the stela was still in its original place. It was standing south of the altar and faced north (not west) and was opposite to the main facade of the pyramid (as is the case at most Maya sites). In 2006 we found both monuments to be very eroded and fragmented. At the time of excavations the stela was found broken and almost completely covered with loose soil (Figure 22). During excavations at the base of the stela we realized that the whole area was heavily looted. Nevertheless, we were able to find nearly thirty eccentric flints, one stone bead, and fragments of human bones that most probably were parts of a burial or sub-stela cache. It is apparent that over the past five decades the monument was destroyed and its associated cache

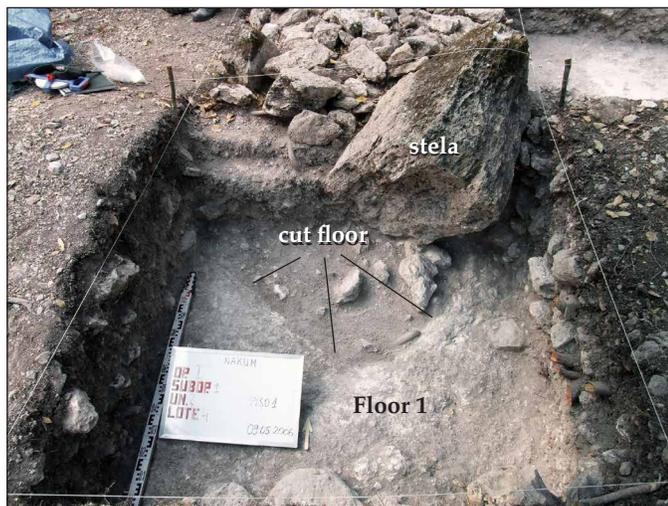


Figure 22. Fragment of Stela E1 during excavations (photo by Jarosław Żrałka).



Figure 23. Fragments of stelae found in southwestern corner of Structure X (photo by Jarosław Żrałka).

or problematical deposit partly looted. Most of the eccentric flints were found dispersed in loose soil, a clear sign that they were moved from their original position by looters. Nevertheless, we were able to document this beautiful collection of artifacts that represent various shapes, from zoomorphic (snakes and scorpions) to round discs, lunate artifacts, and, finally, trilobed eccentrics. In 2010, during excavations conducted at the southwestern corner of Structure X where we were seeking the southern limit of the last stage of the axial stairway, we also came across two fragments of what looks like a plain monument. It seems that these fragments were not part of Stela E1 but were part of one or two additional monuments standing in the corner of the pyramid (designated as Stelae X1 and X2). One of these two fragments was found in its original position, erected in the corner of the building and protruding into the surrounding plaza floor. Close to it, the second fragment of the monument was lying on the floor but we were not able to determine its original position (Figure 23).

A Bit of Perspective

The monolithic monuments testify to the significance of Nakum as an important settlement and later polity, until its eventual collapse. Even a quick perusal of these monuments provides an illustrative panorama of the site’s fortunes through the ages. The Late Preclassic Stela 4 demonstrates the antiquity of the ancient Maya settlement at this location and attests to the influence of the ancient rulers of the site. Whereas no Early Classic monuments are known, the rulers continued to expand the site and adopted the characteristic *talud-tablero* architecture of central Mexican origin (Koszkul et al. 2006). This and other traits suggest that Nakum was fully integrated into the sociopolitical system that prevailed at Tikal, its satellites and allies, although the nature of

the interactions continues to be debated. The absence of Early Classic monuments may also speak of a position of subservience since the erection of monuments may have been sanctioned by specific sumptuary laws and sociopolitical principles.

This ostensible stasis was broken by a singular event, with the construction of Temple U and the erection of Stela 3 at its base in AD 771. Stela 3 is a truly impressive monument, a tall and massive stela that depicts an eminent ruler, replete with all the trappings of power. This is the single largest monument at the site and reflects a radical shift, with the ascendancy of the local dynasty and markedly centralized royal power. Although the name of the ruler depicted on Stela 3 now eludes us, he was clearly a charismatic figure and contemporary of Yax Nuun Ahiin II of Tikal (r. AD 768-794+) and K'ahk' Ukalaw Chan Chaahk of Naranjo (r. AD 755-780+). Nakum's newfound ascendancy may be owed in part to family relations, not least when we consider that the mother of K'ahk' Ukalaw Chan Chaahk was none other than Lady Unen Bahlam. This lady hailed from Tubal, which may be the ancient toponym of Nakum (Beliaev 2000:64-65; Martin and Grube 2000:76). Lady Unen Bahlam was bonded in marriage to K'ahk' Tiliw Chan Chaahk, possibly as a means of cementing a peaceful alliance with Naranjo, after the attack and defeat of Tubal in September AD 693 (see Martin and Grube 2000:76; Helmke and Kettunen 2011:41, 71).

The ascendancy of the kings of Nakum was not as definite as might be presupposed, since the reign of the Stela 3 ruler was not punctuated by additional carved monuments, nor did his immediate successors mark their reigns and the passage of important calendrical stations with the erection of carved monuments. We may not need to speak of a downfall or a time of crisis as such, since we see continued construction throughout the site and in the Acropolis in particular. Nevertheless, during the final decades of the eighth century, we can see that the dynasty of Nakum may not have been able to maintain the same degree of autonomy as that heralded by the reign of the Stela 3 ruler. That his stela is battered and attempts were made to fell it may be clear indications of retaliations and possibly even incursions from superordinate polities to redress the original status quo.

This time of latency was superseded with the onset of the Terminal Classic. Whereas this period is usually characterized as the onset of the collapse and the beginning of the end, with the decentralization of royal power at the largest and most influential courts, particularly at Naranjo and Tikal, the kings of Nakum once more asserted themselves and erected monuments. Such are the number of monuments raised during the Terminal Classic at Nakum that one could speak of a period of revival, much like that seen at Caracol, which was initiated with the enthronement of K'inich Joy K'awil

in AD 799 (Chase et al. 1991; Helmke et al. 2006). Equally significant is the Terminal Classic at Xunantunich, with the erection of three carved stelae and an altar between AD 820 and 849 (Helmke et al. 2010). This dovetails with the late program of monuments at Nakum that can be dated to between AD 810–849. The coincidence of these spans at the two sites is far from coincidental and both are undoubtedly the product of comparable sociopolitical circumstances. In this respect epigraphic data from Nakum are consistent with archaeological investigations that indicate that Nakum experienced an architectural boom and demographic growth during the ninth and possibly beginning of tenth centuries AD (Žračka 2008; Žračka and Hermes 2012).

This is not to say that the rulers of Naranjo and Tikal had been eclipsed, since both of these dynasties endured until the ninth century. Based on present evidence the rulers of Tikal were able to maintain some prominence until AD 869, with the erection of Stela 11 to commemorate the Period Ending of 10.2.0.0.0 (Martin and Grube 2000:53; Valdés and Fahsen 2004). Naranjo on the other hand may have floundered a few decades earlier, since there is no known record of the last known ruler, Waxaklajun Ubah K'awil, beyond events in AD 830. Although eroded, a probable mention of this ruler on Stela 8 at Xunantunich suggests that he may have celebrated the Period Ending of 9.19.10.0.0 away from his capital, together with the king of Xunantunich (Helmke et al. 2010:109-110). A partial polychromatic ceramic vase discovered at Baking Pot also bears the name of this king and once more records his celebration of this Period Ending (Helmke et al. 2015). Additional segments on Stela 32 at Naranjo—the great monument of Waxaklajun Ubah K'awil—suggest that he travelled far and wide to curry favor with the remaining kingdoms and erstwhile allies. The Naranjo king is thereby also mentioned in connection with the warlord Papamalil, who seems to have operated from his base at Ucanal, and mention is also made to the bestowal of tribute, inscribed on the steps of the large and impressive palanquin upon which Waxaklajun Ubah K'awil was borne on his progresses through the realms (see Le Fort and Wald 1995). Despite these outwardly signs of vitality and the continued efforts to maintain the rituals and the order of old, this may have been short-lived and may not have lasted much beyond the reign of this ruler. In fact, the depiction of this ruler on Stela 32 is entirely defaced and destroyed, the remainder of the monument being remarkably well preserved, making this rescindment of royal power all the more patent.

What is remarkable is the direct consequence of this singular downfall for the satellites and erstwhile vassal states of Naranjo. With the disappearance of Waxaklajun Ubah K'awil we see the kings of Xunantunich and Nakum in earnest manifesting their autonomy with the erection of carved monuments, celebrating these local

kings and their deeds. On the basis of these texts, it is evident that focus at this time was on the orthodox celebration of rituals as a means of substantiating and ensuring the perpetuity of the pageantry of the great kings of the past. What these texts are entirely mute about are the salient sociopolitical upheavals of the time, and the many conflicts that marred the royal dynasties that remained. The assertion of local autonomy at the courts of the former vassal states of Naranjo was not without its difficulties and entailed the negotiation of power with lower elite segments of society. This is implied by the iconography of Stela 5 that shows a scene of power-sharing, even if within the context of a celebratory dance. The dilution of centralized power may have been the final undoing, with even these resilient courts not weathering the storm beyond the second half of the ninth century.

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