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The Litany of Runaway Kings: Another Look at Stela 12 of Naranjo, Guatemala

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According to the hieroglyphic sources, the eighteen months separating February AD 799 from August of the following year were particularly eventful, especially in the greater Naranjo region of the eastern central lowlands. Until recently the events that transpired were only known from the lengthy text on the back of Stela 12 at Naranjo. Despite its relative length the text has suffered a fair degree of erosion and in recent decades has succumbed to the depredations of looters. As a result, much of the text is only partially discernible, making many of the details difficult to grasp. With the discovery of the Komkom Vase at the site of Baking Pot in western Belize (some 25 km east of Naranjo), we are able to appreciate another account of many of the same events, as related by the court of the Komkom, allies of Naranjo (see Helmke et al. 2018). These events embroiled Naranjo against bordering polities, particularly its larger neighbor Yaxha (located some 19 km to the southwest). The hand of Tikal in its allegiance with Yaxha is also perceptible and resulted in reprisals by Naranjo. The martial repercussions greatly affected the smaller settlements of the region, given the many places that are said to have fallen under the axe or burned, perhaps as plundering efforts that followed more formal military engagements.

The remarkable duplication of dates and places between the text of the Komkom Vase and monuments at

Naranjo has allowed more in-depth comparisons to be made and has greatly elucidated details of heretofore faint sections of the text of Stela 12 (see Helmke et al. 2017:236-237, 2018:82-86). Spurred on by these promising leads, coupled with new photography of the extant fragments, we have produced a new drawing of the glyphic text of Stela 12. Here we provide background information on this monument and describe the process by which we were able to produce a new drawing, before turning to a more detailed clause-by-clause presentation of the text, providing a thorough exploration of the historical narrative.

The Monument

Stela 12 was first reported by Teobert Maler in 1908 (Tozzer 1908:80-122), following his exploration of Naranjo just three years earlier (Figure 1). When found, Stela 12 stood about 2 m tall and about 88 cm wide. It was located at the southern base of Structure B19, which defines the northern side of the central plaza (Graham and von Euw 1975:7; Quintana and Wurster 2001:Figs. 10 and 11, 158-161). This stela forms part of a set of three monuments, designated Stelae 12 through 14 (from west to east). Not surprisingly, the earliest of the three is the central Stela 13, raised along the primary axis of the structure. This monument was dedicated in AD 780 on the occasion of the 9.17.10.0.0 lahuntun



Figure 1. The front of Stela 12 (photograph by Teobert Maler, after Maler 1910:Pl. 31.2).

Period Ending, by king K'ahk' Kalom Chan Chaahk (r. AD 755–780+),¹ providing the last known mention of this monarch. Thereafter, Stela 14 was raised in AD 790 as part of the 9.18.0.0.0 PE, recording the accession of his son, “Itzamnaaj” K'awil² in 784 and marking that king's inaugural monument. This was followed a decade later by the dedication of Stela 12 itself, on the 9.18.10.0.0 lahuntun PE. This stela was dedicated concurrently with Stela 35, which we will also touch upon below since some segments provide parallels with the text of Stela 12. The triad of monuments at the base of Str. B19 thus forms a neat sequence, each separated by a decade (or half-katun), with the stela of the father respectfully flanked by two stelae of his spirited son.

The calendrics of the relatively long text on the back of the same stela were worked out early on by Sylvanus Morley (1909:546-547). Morley did an impeccable job in this regard and we have no amendments to make to his chronological overview, reproducing it here in its entirety (Table 1). Despite such a promising start, with Maler's flawless photographs and the calendrical resolution of the text, this stela, as so many more, had to wait until the decipherment of Maya hieroglyphic writing before it would gain the renewed attention of researchers.

Yet, while the monument lay dormant the site of Naranjo greatly suffered from the depredations of looters, resulting in the illicit excavation of all the major structures and the indiscriminate splintering of monuments for sale on the illicit antiquities market. In response to the looting, the Instituto de Antropología e Historia undertook a salvage operation between 1972 and 1973, resorting to the removal of 19 stelae from the site to safe locations (Fialko 2008:4). As such, some of the monuments are now housed in the storerooms of the Parque Nacional Tikal and in the Departamento de Monumentos Prehispánicos in Melchor de Mencos, whereas Stela 24 was repatriated to Guatemala and is now on exhibit in the Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología (see Mayer 2003; Barrios

¹ The name of this king is traditionally read as K'ahk' Ukalaw Chan Chaahk (Martin and Grube 2008:80) as its usual form represents the head variant of the **KALOMTE'** sign, which was considered to be a shortened version of the spelling **K'AK'-u-[BROKEN.FLINT]-wa** that appears on a scepter from Naranjo. However, after the discovery of Naranjo Stela 46 it is now clear that **K'AK'-u-BROKEN.FLINT-wa CHAN-na CHAK** was the name of the seventh century king of Naranjo who was the father of K'ahk' Tiliw Chan Chaahk (Martin et al. 2017:673-674). We suggest transliterating this royal name as **K'AK'-KAL-CHAN-na-CHAK** or **K'AK'-KAL-CHAN-na-cha-ki**.

² For some time this king has been known as Itzamnaaj K'awil (Martin and Grube 2008:82). Whereas the last portion of the name is clear in its reference to K'awil (God K), the initial segment is rather more ambiguous. Reexamination of this name (Boot 2008; Martin 2015:197-199) showed that it may plausibly cue *Itzam Kokaaj K'awil* (see Martin 2015:197-199) or more simply *Kokaaj K'awil*. To err on the side of caution until the name of the great celestial deity has been resolved, we provide the initial segment in quotation marks.

	Coordinates	Calendar Round	Long Count / DN	Gregorian
Clause 2	B1-C1: C4-B6:	13 Eb 5 Sip	9.17.0.2.12 <u>+ 1.8.8.0</u>	17 Mar. 771
Clause 3	B7: C8b:	8 Eb 5 Woh	9.18.8.8.12 <u>+ 4</u>	18 Feb. 799
Clause 4	B9: C14a:	12 Kib 9 Woh	9.18.8.8.16 <u>+ 2</u>	22 Feb. 799
Clause 5	C14b-B15a: D4b-E4:	1 Etz'nab 11 Woh	9.18.8.8.18 <u>+ 2.13</u>	24 Feb. 799
Clause 6	D5: D7b-E7:	2 Chuwen 4 Sek	9.18.8.11.11 <u>+ 4.11</u>	18 Apr. 799
Clause 7	D8: E10b-D11:	2 Ik' 15 Ch'en	9.18.8.16.2 <u>+ 2.11</u>	18 Jul. 799
Clause 8	E11: E14-D15a:	1 Ben 6 Kej	9.18.9.0.13 <u>+ 8.15</u>	07 Sep. 799
Clause 9	D15b-E15a: F3-G3a:	7 Lamat 16 Woh	9.18.9.9.8 <u>+ 4.7</u>	29 Feb. 800
Clause 10	G3b-F4a: F11b-G11:	3 Men 3 Yaxk'in	9.18.9.13.15 <u>+ 4.5</u>	26 May 800
Clause 11:	F12:	10 Ajaw 8 Sak	9.18.10.0.0	19 Aug. 800

Table 1. Chronological overview of the historical narrative recorded on Stela 12. Note that Clause 1 refers to the caption describing the portrait of the king on the front of the stela, whereas the basal text (H1–M1) is designated as Clause 12.

2009:30-45).³ The looting of monuments started in earnest in 1964 and lasted for about a decade (Graham and von Euw 1975:8). This was followed by looting in search of polychrome ceramics from tombs, which continued unabated until 2001 when the Guatemalan authorities gradually regained control of the site, building a camp and initiating a large-scale research operation (Fialko 2008:5-6).

In the words of Ian Graham (Graham and von Euw 1975:8), who has conducted the most intensive epigraphic documentation of monuments from the site:

A tragic amount of sculpture was destroyed forever by looters completely devoid of expertise trying to “thin” stelae for easy removal.

Whereas many sections of monuments have disappeared in this manner, some have reappeared on the international art market. The fate of Stela 12 was no different from the other monuments of the site (Mayer 2003:17). In 1964, the front of the stela was splintered

from the back. The front was then sawn, more or less neatly, into sections and exported, only to reappear on exhibit in Geneva, when it was said to be owned by a Belgian art collector (Mayer 1993:6). During the curation of the monument, the fragments were joined and the lowest portion of the base, which probably splintered during the looting, was rather crudely restored.

The front of the stela represents the king in splendor amidst a swirl of feathers and billowing smoke, grasping a large bicephalic ceremonial bar from which deities emerge through open serpentine maws at either end (Figure 1). The king stands triumphantly above a naked and crouching captive, the mark of a ruler's military prowess. Surprisingly, the captive appears to be a woman, her arms tied behind her back and her copious bosom awkwardly forced onto the ground, a pose that “may allude to a sensuality verging on sublimated eroticism” (Burdick 2016:36). What may have been a glyphic tag along her ribs, naming her or providing her title, has since eroded. A vertical column of four glyphs (A1–A4) is the first clause of the text as a whole and serves as a caption to the king.

At some later juncture the back of the stela, which had been left at Naranjo, attracted the attention of another group of looters. Rather than sawing they resorted to the use of a pneumatic hammer, perforating

³ At present, parts of Stelae 1, 5, 7, 23, 25, 29, and 32 are stored in Melchor and at Tikal. Monuments at the Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología include Naranjo Stelae 2, 8, 22, 24, and 33 (as well as Stelae 6 and 9 and fragments of Stelae 13 and 14, which are housed in the museum's storerooms).

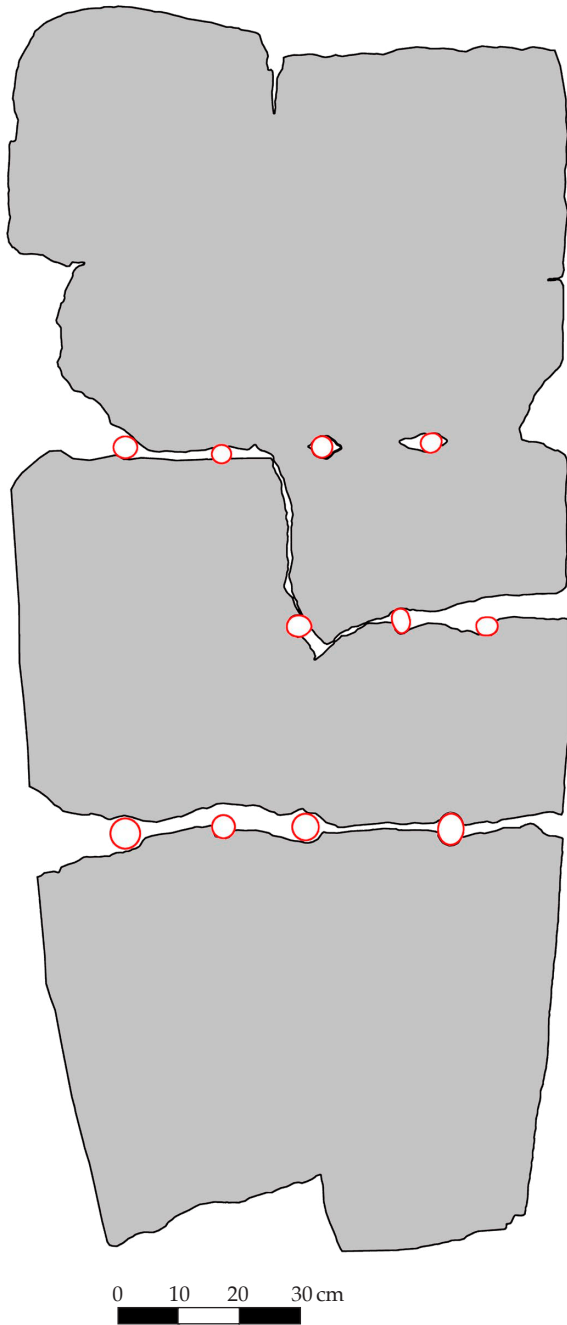


Figure 2. The constituent fragments of the back of Stela 12 highlighting the holes drilled into the monument as part of the looting efforts (graphic by Christophe Helmke).



Figure 3. The lower fragments of Stela 12 documented by Ian Graham as part of the CMHI (Gifts of Ian Graham, 2004 © President and Fellows of Harvard College, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, PM2004.15.1.1784.2 and PM2004.15.1.1785.1).



Figure 4. Conjoined upper fragments of the upper portion of Stela 12 (composite by Christophe Helmke based on photographs by the Atlas Epigráfico de Petén).

the extensive glyphic text at regular intervals to spall the carved surface into blocks (Figure 2). The glyphic text that once covered the back of the stela was thereby splintered into a series of irregular fragments. These were later impounded at the Belizean border during an attempt to spirit them out of the country (Graham and von Euw 1975:35). The photographic archives of the Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions reveal that Graham was able to document seven of the basal fragments (Figure 3), although their current location is unknown. The four fragments that together constitute the upper half of the text are stored in the basement of the Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Ethnología. These were noted by Karl Herbert Mayer (1993:6, Fig. 1) and were the subject of more intensive documentation in 2015 by the Atlas Epigráfico de Petén, under the direction of Dmitri Beliaev and Mónica de León (2016:104-113) (Figure 4). At the time of writing, several of the fragments of Stela 12 remain to be relocated, and those that have been recovered are scattered in three locations, spread over two continents.

A New Drawing

The historical narrative on the back of Stela 12 is the longest such text from the reign of “Itzamnaaj” K’awil and therefore is rather different from the accounts preserved on other monuments that focus on PE celebrations and pedigrees with few

historical events (Grube 1986:83-84; Martin and Grube 2000:82). For all the restraint of the caption on the front of Stela 12, the historical text on the back is composed of 166 discrete glyphic collocations disposed over 90 glyph blocks, arranged in three double columns and over fifteen rows. Yet despite its length it has not attracted much academic attention, as many of the finer details of the text have eroded, thereby making large portions illegible. Also, without recourse to the original monument, details of the text could not be scrutinized or clarified, even with the excellent glass plate photographs secured by Maler.

All of this changed in 2016 with the discovery of the Komkom Vase in an expansive peribandonment deposit at the site of Baking Pot (Helmke et al. 2017:227-229). This deposit was excavated by the Belize Valley Archaeological Reconnaissance Project, directed by Jaime Awe and Julie Hoggarth. The excavations of the deposit spanned over two field seasons and lasted until August 2017, at which point the entirety of the deposit had been cleared and documented (Hoggarth et al. 2020). The highly fragmented vase was recovered as 82 sherds, which together represent as much as 62% of the original vessel (Helmke et al. 2018:15-17). This vase is unique for the extensive glyphic text that adorns its exterior. It is rendered in codical style and may actually convey selected excerpts of original historical annals. Based on the regular disposition of the glyph blocks, the original text decorating the vase has been reconstructed at 202 glyphs, making it not only the longest text documented on a vase to date, but also one of the ten longest texts in the Maya area as a whole (Helmke et al. 2018:17-21). Yet another distinguishing feature is the content of the text, since it provides a fast-paced historical narrative bursting with events involving numerous actors and a wealth of named places. Despite its length the text only covers events from February through September of 799. This makes for a highly detailed text with very small temporal intervals between each major clause. This format is at odds with what is known for other monumental texts of the same region and period, and probably replicates features of the original codical annals upon which it is based. In scrutinizing the text it was found that several of the same dates and events are mentioned on both the Komkom Vase and the text on the back of Stela 12. Armed with the Komkom Vase several details could be clarified, thereby essentially unlocking parts of the text of Stela 12 that had remained obscure

until that point.

In 2017, Christophe Helmke and Harri Kettunen offered a workshop on the Komkom Vase as part of the sixth Cracow Maya Conference, hosted by the Jagiellonian University in Cracow. As part of this workshop, several important correspondences between the two texts could be confirmed by Sergei Vepretskii on the basis of the *Atlas Epigráfico de Petén* photographs that had been secured just two years previously. These efforts were followed up in January 2019 as part of another workshop, this time conducted by Christophe Helmke and Dmitri Beliaev, which was imparted as part of the XXI Sergeev Readings at the Lomonosov State University in Moscow. As part of this workshop, Helmke and Beliaev were able to review the entire text in detail, comparing the texts to one another and making use of all the photographs at their disposal, ranging from Maler's glass negative to the photos secured by Ian Graham, which were compared to those of the *Atlas Epigráfico de Petén*. Availing ourselves of the opportunity to go through the entirety of the text over the course of three days, we were able to concur on our observations and thereby present a more coherent reading of the text than has heretofore appeared in the literature.

Motivated by these findings we decided to produce a new drawing of the entirety of the text. The text as exposed and documented by Maler more than a century ago was rather well preserved, although it had suffered from uniform weathering that resulted in the loss of most of the finer incised details (Graham and von Euw 1975:35). Nevertheless, the outlines of most glyphs and some key details that were more deeply recessed have survived. These could be discerned by collating the original Maler image against the photos secured by the *Atlas Epigráfico de Petén*, which showed the extant fragments of the upper portions in sequential shots with alternate raking light. In addition, we examined Graham's project photographs of the lower fragments, taken sometime in the late 1960s or early 1970s. Together these allowed us to identify much of the original detail, especially in the upper half and the lowest portions of the stela. Coupled with the parallel clauses found on the Komkom Vase and sections of Naranjo Stela 35 that repeat names of places and agents, we are now on a much more secure footing to discern the details of the overall narrative presented on Stela 12.

Offsetting the weathering—and the breakage brought about by the more recent looting—we have opted to render the text as a restitution drawing, reconstructing some of the individual glyphs

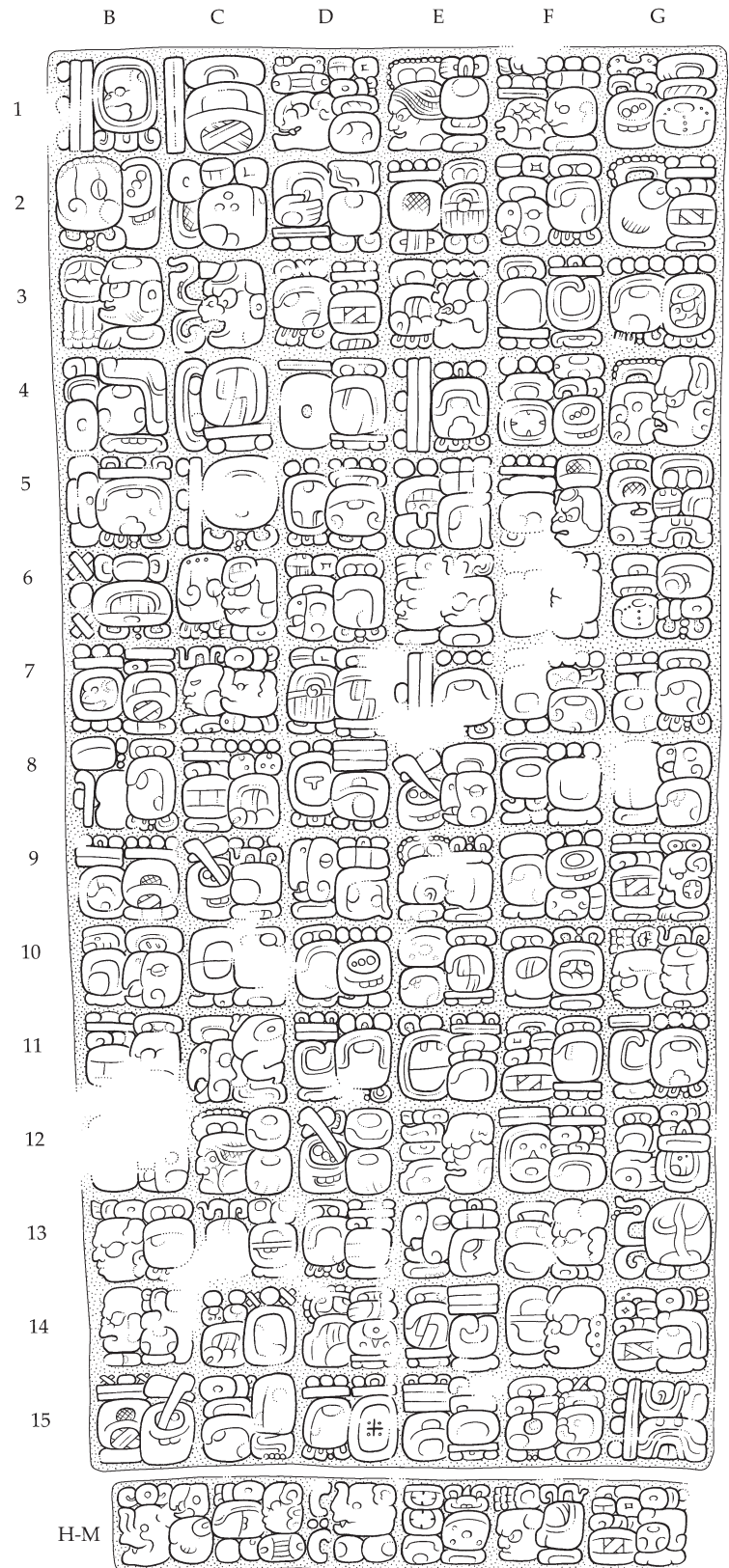


Figure 5. Revised drawing of the text on the reverse of Stela 12 of Naranjo (drawing by Christophe Helmke).

Monument	Dedication	Gregorian	Earliest	Temporal Depth	Text Length
Stela 14	9.18.0.0.0	790	771	19.7 years	63
Altar 2	9.18.0.0.0	790	558	232.4 years	41
Stela 8	9.18.10.0.0	800	800	77 days	53
Stela 12	9.18.10.0.0	800	771	29.4 years	100
Stela 35	9.18.10.0.0	800	mythic?	c. 347 days ⁴	56
Stela 7	9.19.0.3.0	810	810	60 days	18
Stela 10	9.19.0.3.0	810	771	39.5 years	22

Table 2. The monuments raised during the reign of “Itzamnaaj” K’awil, presented in chronological order of their dedication. The temporal depth of a given text is provided as the total timespan that separates the earliest from the latest date of a monument. Text length is given according to number of glyph blocks.

and details where these are unproblematic in order to enhance the legibility of the text. In sections where glyphs had spalled off entirely or were already eroded to mere outlines by Maler’s time, we have represented these as such. We thereby acknowledge that the revised drawing presented here is a heuristic device that diverges in some details from the standards set out by the Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions. This is made clear by the drawing published by Ian Graham (Graham and von Euw 1975:36), which perfectly adheres to the conventions of the CMHI and of necessity resorts to cautious stippling, owing to the eroded condition of the text and the reliance placed on older photographs in the production of the drawing without recourse to inspection of the original sculpture (Graham and von Euw 1975:35). With these cautionary comments we can direct our readers to the new drawing (Figure 5) and begin with our review of the historical narrative recorded in the text.

Textual Time-Depth

The glyphic texts that embellish Stela 12 can be broadly divided into three categories. First, a caption (Clause 1: A1–A4) on the front of the stela that names “Itzamnaaj” K’awil, the triumphant king depicted there. Second, a lengthy historical narrative on the back of the stela, divided into ten sentences (Clauses 2 through 11: B1–G15). Third, a separate scribal signature (Clause 12: H1–M1) that is horizontally disposed as the basal register, below the historical narrative.

The glyphic text of Stela 12 can be compared to other inscriptions on the monuments raised by “Itzamnaaj” K’awil. Based on present evidence there are seven such monuments, including six stelae and one altar (Table 2). These were raised in a relatively short period, between AD 790, commemorating his accession, and AD 810—the last mention of this energetic king.

Comparison to the other monuments makes it clear that these were raised as part of three major efforts,

coinciding with the major Period Endings of katun 18 and 19, as well as the intervening 9.18.10.0.0 lahuntun. Examination of the narratives recorded on these monuments reveals that they have quite variable temporal

⁴ It is entirely possible that the initial clause of the text of Stela 35 refers to a mythological event in deep time (see Schele and Mathews 1998:148-149). In fact, there are at least two known depictions of this event on Codex-style ceramics, which represent the subjugation of a feline deity at the hands of a young lord. The Calendar Round dates provided for these events are respectively 11 Hix 7 Kumk’u (K1299) and 7 Hix 3 Kumk’u (K4118). The disparity of the dates is a typical feature of mythical episodes rendered on Codex-style ceramics, perhaps to mark their temporal dissonance with historical ones. Yet it is equally possible and perhaps slightly more likely in this instance that the first clause on Stela 35 refers to a historical event that was timed to coincide, partly or wholly, with these mythic Calendar Rounds. The same principle is at play in the texts of Temple XIX at Palenque (Stuart 2005), where the historical accession of the king is scheduled to coincide with the same Tzolk’in date as the mythic event it is meant to emulate (a similar pattern is also noted for the text of Caracol Stela 22). Assuming that this is correct, we can try to reconstruct the date by searching for all Calendar Round dates involving Hix and Kumk’u during both katun 17 and 18 of baktun 9. Such a search results in 20 possible dates for each katun, which is to say that there are 40 possibilities in all for the full 40-year span. However, the event would have transpired after the birth of “Itzamnaaj” K’awil in AD 771, and given the parameters of the text of Stela 35, it probably preceded AD 800 (9.18.10.0.0). This reduces the number of possibilities to 29. Considering the historical circumstances related in the texts, we believe it most probable that the events unfolded between AD 799 and 800, thereby reducing the possible dates to just two, with the latter being slightly more probable, given that it follows the attack on Yaxha dated to September 3, AD 799 (9.18.9.0.13).

9.18.8.6.14 9 Hix 12 Kumk’u January 11, 799

9.18.9.6.14 5 Hix 7 Kumk’u January 6, 800

If these assumptions are correct, this would have been the Calendar Round date provided on the front of the stela, labelling the historical event portrayed: the deity impersonation involving the king of Naranjo, brandishing a torch, dressed as the young lord, subjugating the Yaxha king, seated, bound, and attired as a feline deity (Schele and Mathews 1998:148-149; Martin and Grube 2000:82).

spans, ranging from as little as 60 days and extending back in time over 232 years to AD 558, during the reign of the prestigious ruler “Aj Wosal”⁵ (see Grube 2004:197). In this case, the text of Altar 2 records like-in-kind events conducted by a succession of different rulers, who each appear to have dedicated architectural refurbishments of the playing alley of the ballcourt, first in 558, then again in 644, and finally in 790 (9.17.19.9.1), in a pre-accession event by “Itzamnaaj” K’awil (Grube 2004:207-209). In another instance (Stela 35), a historical event appears to be an emulation of a mythic battle pitting two supernatural entities against one another, a young anthropomorphic lord who subdues a feline deity by casting stones, tying him up, and menacing him with a large torch (Schele and Mathews 1998:148-149; Martin and Grube 2000:82). In that instance the date in deep time is recorded on the back of the stela to provide the mythic precedent, whereas the front shows the victorious king of Naranjo towering above the defeated king of Yaxha, each dressed as apposite deities, in an event that may have been timed to coincide with an analogous Calendar Round date (see note 4).

Aside from these two instances, one monument of each major effort goes back to the birth of the king on March 13, 771 (Stelae 10, 12, and 14). In these three cases, the birth of the king serves as the prelude to the historical events recounted on the monuments, with the birth in essence introducing the primary agent and protagonist of these texts. These *quid ego adsum* expressions in some ways echo the birth statements that were made at regular intervals in the monuments of K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Chaahk, the grandfather of “Itzamnaaj” K’awil, and also foreshadow the same type of expression that would be seen on Stela 32, raised by Waxaklajun Ubah K’awil, the son, successor, and last known king of Naranjo (see Savchenko 2015). Passing over the birth statements and focusing solely on the historical data, the temporal breadth of these three monuments is remarkably shallow, spanning just six years (Stela 14), one year (Stela 12), and 60 days (Stela 10).

As such, it is apparent that most of the monuments raised by “Itzamnaaj” K’awil exhibit relatively narrow temporal breadths. From this vantage, it becomes apparent that the text of Stela 12 really stands out in comparison to the others raised by “Itzamnaaj” K’awil, not

least on account of its length (being twice as long as the other texts), which amounts to more than a third of the total textual output of his reign. It is equally distinctive for the relative shallowness of its temporal framework, which aside from the very first clause spans precisely one year-and-a-half (i.e., 548 days from February 28, 799 to August 19, 800); this is a very shallow time depth, especially considering that the majority of Late Classic texts from Naranjo (i.e., dated to between 750 and 820) cover an average span of 25.8 years. This sets the historical narrative of Stela 12 apart from the other monuments raised at Naranjo. The culmination of the text is in many ways the “even” lahuntun PE that closes the whole narrative, the instance that motivated the erection of the stela and the culmination of the historical circumstance preceding this ritual event.

The Narrative

Aside from passing mentions pertaining to the discovery and documentation of the monument, its breakage and displacement over the past eleven decades, the stela has only occasionally received comments in the academic literature concerning its glyphic text. Following the outstanding work of Sylvanus Morley wherein he correctly worked out the chronology of the historical text on the back of the stela (1909:546–547), the next mention made of this text appears in the seminal work of Tatiana Proskouriakoff (1960), who established that the texts referred to historical individuals and their deeds, judging from the biological life spans recorded in them. Building on these observations, she recognized the birth date recorded on Stelae 10 and 12 and tentatively identified the accession date on Stela 14 (Proskouriakoff 1960:465, Fig. 7). These key dates were later confirmed in the work of Heinrich Berlin (1973) and Nikolai Grube (1986), who attributed these to the ruler they named IIIb. Grube (1986:83-84) was the first to identify the extensive references to warfare (marked by axes) in this text and note that the possible outcome of these wars was the exaction of *pat(an)*, which is to say “tribute,” identified later in the narrative (see Stuart 1995:354-357). Further fleshing out the details of the dynastic history of Naranjo, it was Michael Closs (1989:246) who touched once more upon Stela 12 and the monuments of “Shield God K” as he was then labelled.

Just a few years later, David Stuart in preparing his doctoral dissertation noted that the warfare events cited in the text were followed in four instances by the so-called ‘Step’ verb, and its allograph the ‘God N’ verb, now read as *t’abaay* (Stuart 1998:409-417; see also MacLeod 1990:128-166). The direct, almost causal relations between the primary axe events, now read as *ch’ahkaj* “was axed” (see Orejel 1990) and the secondary verbs, suggested to Stuart that the latter could be related to the presentation of tribute (wherein these verbs were

⁵ The reading of the name of this admired king has been superseded in recent years but remains a matter of some debate. The form presented here in quotation marks presents a now-outdated and partial reading of his name (see Martin and Grube 2000:71-72). Building on these earlier identifications, the senior author has proposed that a complete reading of this regnal name should be Ajasaj Chan K’inch (Helmke et al. 2015:20, n. 9) whereas an alternative reading as Ajnumsaaj Chan K’inch has been proposed by Martin et al. (2017). Given these differences we present the earlier reading although we are cognizant that a complete reading is imminent.

understood as “to raise, present”), the result of the martial events that embroiled Naranjo and her antagonists. The defeated king would then, in a reversal of fortune, find himself subservient to the victor and thereby be coerced into an obligate tributary relation to his superior (Stuart 1995:359-361). This interpretation of these important segments of Stela 12 was bolstered by the appearance in the text of **9-pa-ta**, *bolon pat* (E2a), as well as **yi-ka-tzi**, *yikaatz* (at both G1b and G6a), then understood as “nine tribute” and “his cargo,” respectively.

Whereas this interpretation has much merit and has pushed us to reflect on the establishment of interpolity tribute obligations as well as the economic repercussions of warfare, a more nuanced understanding of the ‘Step’ verb offers alternate explanations. Research by several scholars on verbs of motion finally made it clear that the *t’abaay* verb (written with both the ‘Step’ sign and its ‘God N’ allograph) refers to the travels of human actors across the landscape (e.g., Guenter 2003; Zender 2005; Beliaev 2006). The verb describes “going up” to particular localities, which are either prominent elevations such as hills and escarpments or were deemed to be elevated in the spatial reference register of Classic Ch’olan (for comparison see Bohnemeyer and Stolz 2006; Brown 2006). The repetition of these verbs constitutes a fundamental aspect of the prose recorded on Stela 12, woven into the dramatic narrative structure, something that we will examine in greater detail below.

Clause 2 (B1–C6)

The first clause of the narrative starts with large glyphic collocations that fill the entirety of the glyph block (Figure 6). Although these do not record an Initial Series and a prominent Long Count date as is otherwise typical, the large size of the glyphs preserves the format and practice of using larger glyphs at the onset of the text. For some unknown reason, two of the glyphs in the final sentence (Clause 11: G13 and G15) are also represented at the same scale, as if to underline some type of symmetry between the start and end of the text. Aside from these thirteen large glyphs, all other collocations in the text are paired, compressed one against the other within the same glyph block.

The calendrical information that initiates the text is the Calendar Round 13 Eb 5 Sip (B1–C1), corresponding to March 17, 771. As already touched upon above, the event that transpired on this date is the **SIH-ya-ja**, *sihyaj* “birth” (B2) of the Naranjo king. He is further provided with the titular form

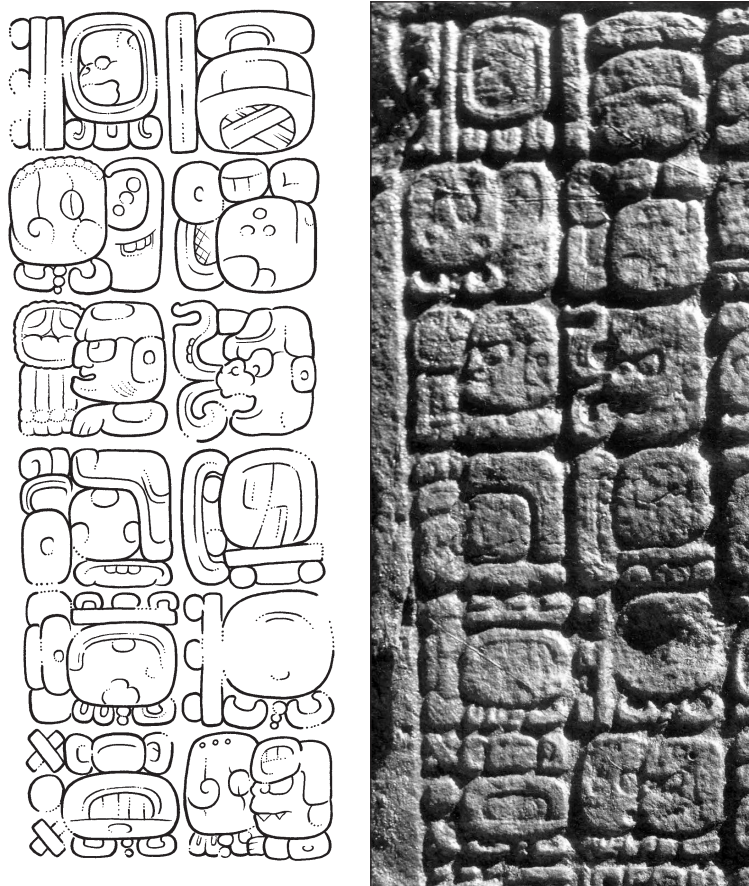


Figure 6. Clause 2, comparing the drawing to the photograph by Teobert Maler.

of address **ch’a-jo**/**JOM-AJAW** (C2) for *ch’ajom ajaw*, “royal pontifex,” much as he is styled on Stela 10 (B3). His name is written in the following two glyph blocks as **GOD.D-ji** (B3) and **K’AWIL** (C3). Despite the final phonetic complement **-ji**, it remains unclear precisely how to read the name of God D in this context, although it may plausibly cue *Itzam Kokaaj* or more simply *Kokaaj* (see Martin 2015:197-199; Beliaev and de León 2016:104-113). The use of this name on both Stela 10 and Stela 12 in the context of birth statements makes us wonder if this was not his birth name, with other royal names acquired later in life. As to titles, he is simply styled with the Naranjo dynastic title Sak Chuwen “pure artisan” (see Closs 1984:80, Fig. 2:E10; Reents 1986:155).

Following this terse introduction to the text’s protagonist, a Distance Number is introduced by the predicate **u-TZ’AK-a**, *utz’aka*, “the count is” (C4) specifying the time that separates the king’s birth from the following event. The amount of time is recorded as 0 days, 8 months, (B5), 8 years (C5), and 1 katun (B6), amounting to 28 years, “since the birth,” precisely as is specified in the following predicate **SIH-[ji]ya**, *sihjiy* (C6a). With this we see the start of the following clause linked through a temporal expression [**i**]u-ti, *i-uhti* “and then it happened” (C6b).

Clause 3 (B7–C8)

With the protagonist introduced, the following clause relates the first historical event of the narrative (Figure 7). Given that this is the first such event mentioned of a longer sequence, we surmise that the action that transpired on this date was to see corollaries, which are recorded in due course. The clause is headed by the Calendar Round date 8 Eb 5 Woh (B7) that echoes in part the CR of the birthday in the preceding clause. This date corresponds to February 18, 799 and records the text's first martial action, written **PUL-yi** (C7a) **SAK-SUTZ'-a** (C7b), for *puluuy Saksutz'a'*, "Saksutz'a' got burned." Precisely the same event is recorded on the Komkom Vase and it was thanks to that later example that the segment on Stela 12 could be read, as it is otherwise partly eroded and unclear in its details (see Helmke et al. 2018:57). The exposition is thereby clearly followed by consequent action, in much the same way that the opening statement is followed by what could be thought of as the introduction to the plot's quandary. As with many of the toponyms that are introduced on the Komkom Vase and those that appear in the narrative of Stela 12, their precise locations are unknown, as these name smaller localities and settlements in the greater Naranjo region, presumably within a radius of about 30 km.

What appears to specify a particular locality within Saksutz'a' is named thereafter although it is only partially legible as **TI'-?** (B8a), perhaps naming a riverine or lacustrine location since *ti'* literally is "mouth" but also "edge, embankment, shore" (Zender 1999:75; Kaufman 2003:262-264). Credit for the attack is given to the **a-SA'-li**, the *aj-sa'uul* (or *aj-sa'il*)⁶ "those of Naranjo," who are introduced in a relative clause by an agency expression, written **u-CHAB-[ji]ya**, *uchabjiiy* "it is the doing

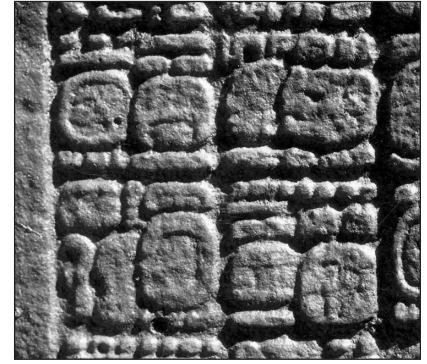
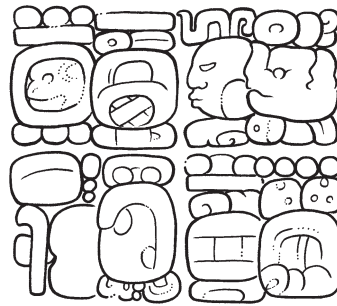


Figure 7. Clause 3, comparing the drawing to the photograph by Teobert Maler.

of" or "under the aegis of" (B8b). As such, credit is evidently given to the Naranjeños, presumably raiding parties of that polity.

Leading to the next clause is a short distance number written **4-la-ta** for *chan lat* "four days later" (C8b) using a numeral classifier for low units of days below nineteen but preferentially used for units below nine (Thompson 1950:169-170).

Clause 4 (B9–C14a)

The short distance number leads to the Calendar Round date 12 Kib 9 Woh (B9) corresponding to February 22, 799 (Figure 8). This clause records the first of the text's sundry "axing" events, written **[CH'AK]ja** for *ch'ahkaj* "it was axed" (C9a). This is a typical warfare expression seen in lowland Maya texts, referring to destruction wrought by these implements. Typically a location is named after the verb, but in this instance the patient is cited through a more extensive phrase. The first segment is written **3-K'AWIL-li**, *ux k'awil* (C9b), either "three (deity) effigies" or naming a statue that was chopped on this date. More information is provided as to where this transpired in the following glyph block: **TAN-CH'EN-na** (B10a) **YAX-a** (B10b) for *tahn ch'een yaxa'*, or "in the middle of the settlement of Yaxa," here providing the ancient name of the city of Yaxha (Stuart 1985). As a result, we conclude that this attack was focused on a sacred effigy that constituted a cult item in one of the sacred precincts, right in the heart of Yaxha. Fascinatingly, precisely the same event is also cited on the Komkom Vase, yet in that instance the two segments of the phrase are reversed as *ch'ahkaj tahn ch'een yaxa' ux k'awil* (Helmke et al. 2018:68-69). So close is the phrasing in these two sources that they refer not only to the same event but must also have been drawn from the same written source.

The following glyph block is somewhat worse for wear and not altogether legible (C10). Yet the appearance of **a-SA'-(li)**, "Naranjeños" at B11a suggests that it was preceded by an agency expression at C10b, in keeping with the previous clause and the other examples found in the text. The next collocation is also only partly preserved due to spalling of the text but starts another subclause as **u-#** (B11b), which is then followed by **YAX-a**, *yaxa'*, providing the ancient toponym of Yaxha (C11a). Although not too clear, this may have provided a parenthetical statement as a

⁶ Common toponymic suffixes *-VI / -VVI / -V'I* with the meaning "place where something abounds" in Classic Maya inscriptions can be analyzed in different ways (Lacadena and Wichmann n.d.; Helmke 2012:95; Tokovinine 2013:8). Many examples indicate that the suffix could be spelled *-u'l* or *-ul* (**KAN-la** / **ka-nu-la**, Kanu'l for the ancient name of Dzibanche) and **u-su-la-a**, *Usula'*, seen later in the text of Stela 12. At the same time examples from the Usumacinta area such as **YAX-ni-la**, **pa-ni-la**, and **ma-ta-wi-la** can be connected to the Ch'ol suffix *-il* (in place names such as Jocajil, Jo'xil, Yaxlumil, and Joljamil [see Warkentin and Scott 1980:118-119]).

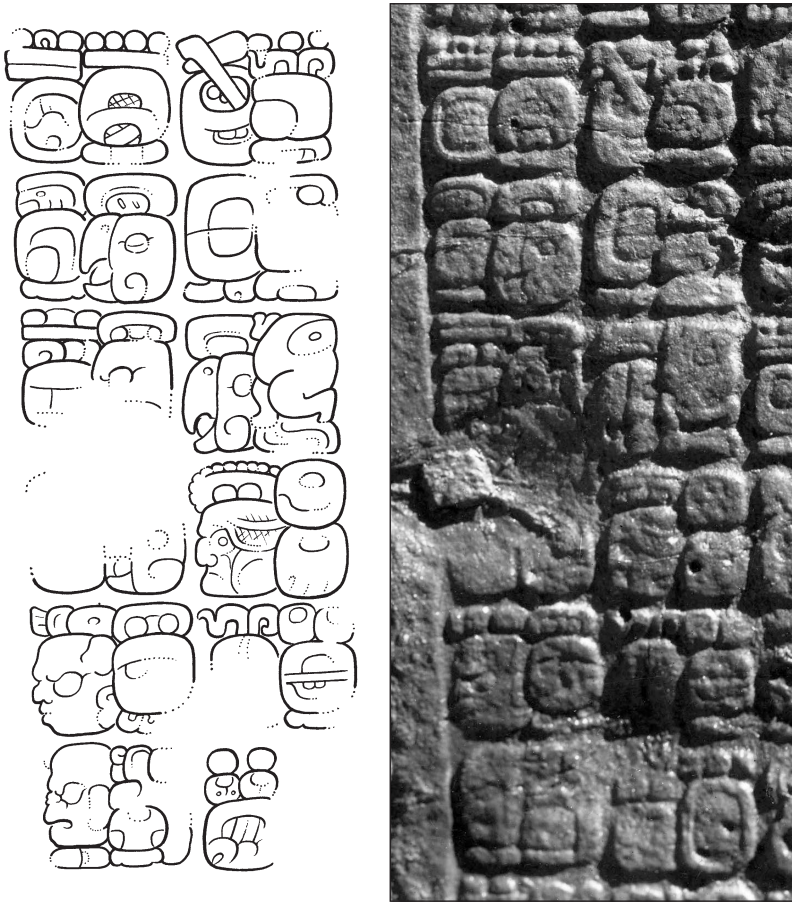


Figure 8. Clause 4, comparing the drawing to the photograph by Teobert Maler.

so-called “place name formula” (Stuart and Houston 1994:7-18) read *uhtiiy Yaxa'*, “it happened at Yaxha.” The reiteration at this juncture seems superfluous, as does the introduction of so many consecutive subclauses, yet there are three more to follow.

With the attack on Yaxha, we see a resulting action, written with a little pudgy abdomen with stout running legs for the verb **AN-ni**, *ahni*, “he ran” (C11b).⁷ Accordingly, as a direct result of the attack someone is said to run away from Yaxha and is named in the following glyph block (B12). Although that particular segment has spalled off almost entirely, from what remains we can almost make out #-a using the head of the parakeet for the vocalic sign **a** (B12b), used in the spelling of *Yaxa'*. Given the many mentions to come of K'inich Lakamtun (“radiant stela”), the king of Yaxha, we suspect that this too once recorded his name and title. In regard to his running away, they go to great lengths to specify where he fled to in the following subclause. The verb that initiates this subclause is none other than the ‘God N’ verb for *t'abaay* (C12a), here in the sense of “to go up” or “ascend” with the locality named thereafter (C12b). Unfortunately the details of the place name are unclear but appear

to involve two signs, one that resembles T506 above another that is reminiscent of T501 (see Thompson 1962:87-96, 101-104). Further specifying where the king of Yaxha fled to is the prepositional construction **ti-CHUWAJ**? for “at the feline deity” or “to the Jaguar God of the Underworld” (B13b), perhaps involving the toponym related to *Chuwaaajniib* that is attested at Naranjo (see Helmke 2019a:438-443). Adding insult to injury, the flight of the Yaxha king is credited to the king of Naranjo through one more *uchabjiiy* agency expression (B13b). Interestingly, in this instance the king of Naranjo is not named by his birth name “Itzamnaaj” K'awil but by another regnal name written **K'AK'-HOP-la-CHAN-na** (C13) **CHAK-ki** (B14a) for K'ahk' Hopla Chan Chaahk (Beliaev et al. 2019:357-360). This particular regnal name is one of the three names of the king of Naranjo and is perhaps that which he obtained upon his accession. His title is then provided as Sak Chuwen (B14b) before closing off this rather lengthy clause with a distance number read *cha' lat*, “two days later” (C14a).

Clause 5 (C14b–E4)

The short DN leads to the Calendar Round date 1 Etz'nab 11 Woh (C14b–B15a), which corresponds to February 24, 799 (Figure 9). Now well underway in a bellicose narrative, the verb of this clause is once more an “axing” event (B15b) this time affecting a place named **SAK-ka-KAB**, for Sak Kab (C15a). Once more the reading of this segment was clarified by the Komkom Vase, as the same locality is also recorded in that text, although in that instance it is written **SAK-KAB-ni-li**, Sak Kabnil, perhaps providing a toponymic suffix for places named after particular animals (Helmke et al. 2018:53-54). As such, rather than “white earth” this toponym may be named “white bee,” given cognate forms such as *säk kab* “abeja blanca, abeja real,” attested for Mopan (Hofling 2011:105).

Much as in the preceding clause where the axing event (C9a) resulted in the flight of the king of Yaxha (C11b-B12) and his ascent to another place (C12-B13a), in this instance the attack on Sak Kabnil equally brought about the flight of her king. Thus the first subclause is headed by **{a}-ni**, *ahni* “he ran” (C15b) followed by his name and title, written **cho-ko-BALAM** (D1a) and **SAK-ka-KAB-AJAW** (D1b), read Chok Bahlam

⁷ The reading of the headless human in a running pose as **AN** ~ *ahn* was suggested by Alfonso Lacadena (Lacadena 2010).

and Sak Kabnil Ajaw. In keeping with the same phraseology wherein flight is followed by ascent, we then read T'AB[yi], *t'abaay* "he ascended" (E1a) to a place named **ma-ka-li?** (or **ma-ka-na?**) (E1b).⁸ The toponym is none too clear but may well spell Makaal and provide a well-known place name of the region, remembering that the Macal River courses northward from the Maya Mountains towards its embranchment with the Belize River just 17 km to the east of Naranjo. A few decades later, a captive called Makalte' is depicted at Caracol—on the monuments of a Terminal Classic king, K'inich Yukbil Yopaat⁹ (r. AD <810–830+)—quite possibly named after his place of origin, a location to the north of Caracol (see Martin and Grube 2000:98).

The subclause then goes on to provide additional information on the state of the Sak Kabnil king, specifying that his flight was **mi-a** (D2a) **yo-OL-la** (D2b) **9-pa-ta** (E2a), read *miha yohl bolon pat* possibly "enlivened was the heart of Bolon Pat." Whereas *mih* typically functions in numerical and adjectival contexts as "none," our understanding of this phrase comes from the cognates *mij* and its reduplicative derivation *mijmij* found in Ch'orti' and Tzeltal *mih* where these function verbally as "to enliven" and "to abound, increase" (Hull 2003:463-465; Tokovinine 2013:39). Comparable phrases at Copan record the names of deities as

⁸ If the toponym was written as **ma-ka-na?** this would prompt the toponym Makan, which could be a place name related to the Ch'olti' <macan> "fruta verde" ("green fruit") (Morán [1695]1935:30) or to the more widely distributed Lowland Mayan *makan* "tapanco" ("attic," "storage area"). For the latter, see Chontal *macān* "tapanco (para cuidar milpa)" (Keller and Luciano 1997:153), as well as Itza *makan* "attic, storage place, storage for corn cob" (Hofling and Tesucun 1997:429).

⁹ The regnal name of this Caracol monarch deserves some comment. Originally based on the work of Nikolai Grube the name was identified as **K'INICH-to-bi-li YOPAT-ti** (Grube 1994:93-94; see also Martin and Grube 2000:98). As part of more recent epigraphic research conducted by the senior author in the capacity of epigrapher of the Caracol project, it has become apparent that the superfix that had been identified as **to** in the medial portion of the name in fact involves the stone sign as the central element, flanked by two curvilinear elements. Based on a fragment of Stela 19 the name appeared to be preserved as **K'INICH** (H8) **TIL-bi-li** (G9), involving the T233 sign as the superfix above (see Helmke 2019b:51). Upon closer scrutiny by the authors of the present work, we now prefer to see the sign as the bow sign **yu** with the stone sign **ku** infixed within as **yu[ku]**, which is rather clear on Altar 12 at Caracol. Together this would record the name as K'inich Yukbil Yopaat, following the onomastic precedent seen on a Chochola bowl where its owner is named as Yukbiil K'awiil (see Zender 2010:Fig. 9).

the entities that are pleased by a variety of actions (Tokovinine 2013:39, Fig. 23c-e). In this case, we conclude that Bolon Pat names a deity of Tikal, given the demonym at the end of this subclause, which involves that toponym (E2b). If this is the case, the defeat and flight of the king of Sak Kabnil induced an emotive response in an entity of Tikal (see also Grube 1986:85). It is undoubtedly because of this response that we see the intervention of Tikal in the very next event of the narrative.

This is followed by another subclause introduced by yet another *uchabjiiy* (D3a) agency expression. The agents who are given credit for the attack on Sak Kabnil, causing her king to escape and to seek refuge at Makaal (or Makan) are none other than the aforementioned Naranjeños (D3b). Yet in this instance another agent is also credited and this individual is appended through the relationship expression *yitaaj* "companion" (E3a) (see Stuart 1997:5, Fig. 6d). His name is written as **4-[e]k'e** for *Chan Ek'* possibly "Snake Star" (E3b), a precursor to the better known Itza' regnal name <Canek> ~ Kanek' that figures prominently in the ethnohistoric literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (e.g. Jones 1988; Boot 2005:164-183). Classic-period antecedents of the name have been noted before,

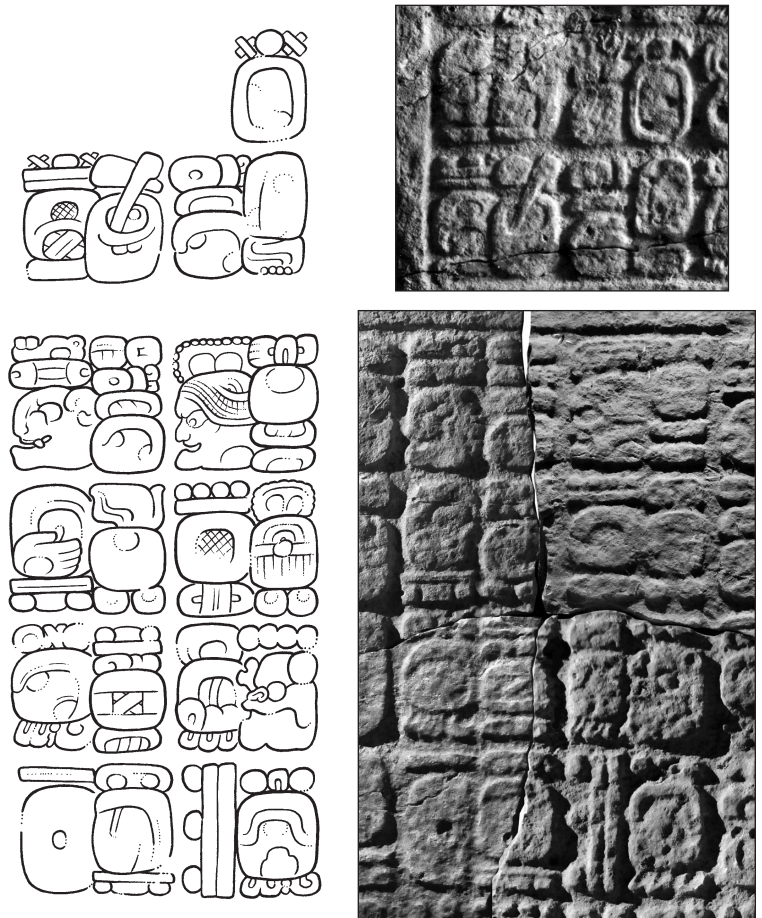


Figure 9. Clause 5, comparing the drawing to photographs by Ian Graham (above) and composite photographs by the Atlas Epigráfico de Petén (below).

both in the central lowlands and in the Yucatan (Boot 2005:39-49, 140-142), attesting to the longevity of this name. On Stela 12, this particular individual is styled by the title 5-PET, *ho' pet*, "five regions/islands." The combination of this name and title is otherwise recorded on Stela 11 at Seibal where it names the ruler of Ucanal in connection with events in AD 829 (Schele and Mathews 1998:179-183) (Figure 10). Given the temporal proximity of that monument with Stela 12 at Naranjo it seems likely that this is one and the same individual. Thus the text credits not only the armed men of Naranjo, but also the contemporary lord of Ucanal, as ally in their attack on Sak Kabnil, in February of 799.

These tumultuous events are separated by a relatively short-lived respite from hostilities. The distance number that leads to the next clause is initiated by *utz'aka* (D4a) "the count is," followed by a tally of 13 days and 2 months (E4).

Clause 6 (D5-E7)

The distance number leads to the Calendar Round date 2 Chuwen 4 Sek (D5) that corresponds to April 18, 799 (Figure 11). Rather than war, this clause relates another type of action, which is written with the change of state verb **KAJ-yi**, *kajaay* translated as "he established himself," "he settled" (Beliaev and Davletshin 2014b). In many contexts it refers to the foundation of royal capitals (e.g. Palenque-Lakamha in AD 490; Palenque Temple 17 Panel), but also describes situations wherein kings return to their cities (Bonampak Sculptured Stones 4 and 5; Copan Ante Step, etc.). In this instance the verb is prefixed by 2, indicating that this is the second time the protagonist returned to his city (Lacadena 1997:2-3), and the subject of the verb is provided in the following segment as K'inich Lakamtun (E5b), Yaxa' Ajaw (D6a). As such, despite all the ill-fortune and humiliation that befell that king we see that he is formally re-invested as part of a second foundational event. The agent behind this significant reversal is presented through an *uchabiiy* agency expression (D6b). He is first named in a somewhat eroded segment (E6) but his title is clearly the emblem glyph of Tikal (D7a). This means that the kings of Tikal as allies of Yaxha enacted their allegiance and endorsed the local king to sponsor the dynastic re-founding as it were, in the wake of the martial turmoil inflicted by Naranjo. The presence of the highly distinctive Twin Pyramid group at Yaxha (dedicated in

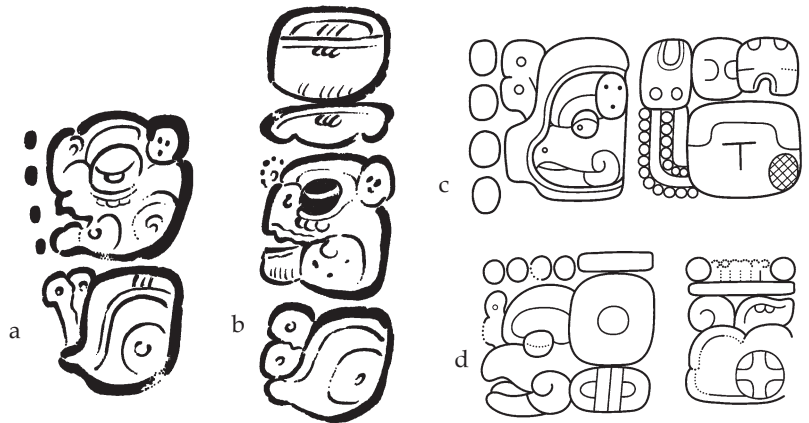


Figure 10. Examples of the name Chan Ek' in Classic Maya texts: (a) Black-on-white bowl (K4387); (b) Black-on-white vase (K4909) (drawings by Christophe Helmke). References at Seibal: (c) Stela 10 (A10-B10); (d) Stela 11 (D1-C2a) (drawings by Sergei Vepretskii).

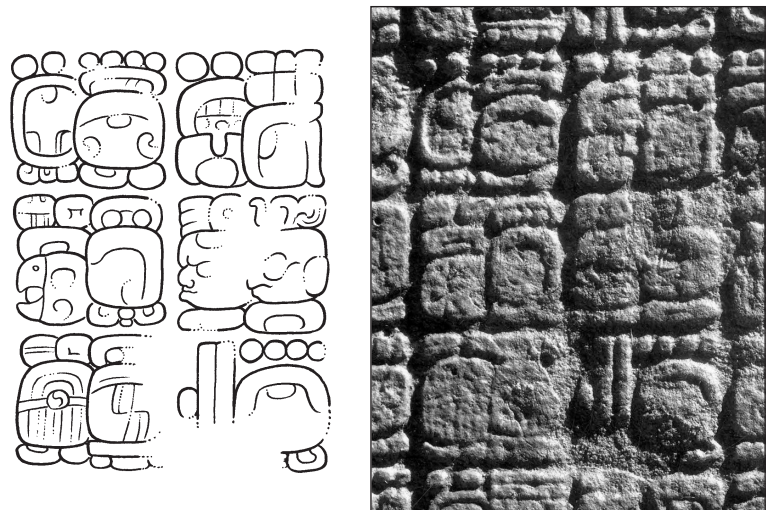


Figure 11. Clause 6, comparing the drawing to the photograph by Teobert Maler.

AD 793) is a clear architectural marker of the alliance with Tikal, since nine such pyramidal groups are known for that capital (Jones 1969). Yet alliance to peripheral and neighboring sites is likewise signaled by the presence of such Twin Pyramid groups at Ixlu and Zacpeten, in addition to the aforementioned example at Yaxha (Martin and Grube 2000:51; Pugh and Rice 2009:97-98). The direction of influence and the pattern of pre-eminence is therefore not in doubt.

In our first efforts to parse the text of Stela 12 we found that the name of the Tikal king in large measure resembles the birth name of the Naranjo king, also given the flames in the forehead of the second head-variant and the -li that suffixes it (E6b), suggesting that this is another K'awil name. The first portion of the name escapes us but does resemble the aged God D profile and the dark diadem that he characteristically wears on his brow. As such, we wonder if this is not a namesake, and the identity of this

monarch is all the more intriguing when we consider that at precisely this historical juncture in 799 there are no records at Tikal that attest to the name of the local monarch. Indeed, Yax Nuun Ahiin II, the predecessor, reigned from 768 until sometime after 794 whereas a Nuun Ujol K'inich was already in power around 800 (Martin and Grube 2008:48, 58). This leaves a very short period during which this individual could rule, and yet the intercessions on the part of allies such as Yaxha attest to the continued political influence of Tikal, even at this relatively late date.

Another possibility is that this lord ruled not at Tikal but at some subsidiary center to the east or southeast of Tikal. It is well known that the cadet lineages of the main Tikal dynasty were ruling in the Central Peten Lakes region in the Terminal Classic. This was considered to be the result of the fragmentation of the royal line by the end of the Classic period (e.g. Schele and Freidel 1990:389). However, it has recently become clear that the origins of this situation are much earlier. The inscription on the small bone found in Burial 190 from Structure 7F-30, an outlying compound at Tikal and stylistically dated to the end of the Late Classic, names an otherwise unknown Tikal "holy king" Bahlam K'awiil (Martin and Grube 2008:51). He bears the additional title **SAK-TE'-AJAW**, *Sakte' ajaw* or *Sakte'[el] ajaw*. The place name *Sakte'* or *Sakte'el* ("White Tree" or "White Woods") is also featured in the artisan's signature in the final segment of Stela 12, as the possible origin of one of the royal sculptors (see below). If it is the same place name, Bahlam K'awiil should be ruling at some local site in the eastern part of the Tikal realm. The evidence from Zacpeten, a small site situated on the lake of the same name, is even more convincing. The inscription on Zacpeten Altar 1, found in 1996 and analyzed by David Stuart (2009), demonstrates that its ruling line was already established by the end of the eighth century. The local lineage consisted of Malel ... Chan K'awiil and his father Bajlaj Chan K'awiil, who claimed the Tikal emblem glyph between AD 809 and 849 (Stuart 2009). Since Bajlaj Chan K'awiil is called "4-katun lord," he was probably born in the mid-eighth century. Taking into account the proximity of Yaxha and Zacpeten, it is tempting to think that the Tikal lord who supported K'inich Lakamtun was the ruler of the latter site, acting on behalf of his superordinate relative.

Following this is another DN introduced by *utz'aka* (D7a) and providing a temporal span of 11 days and 4 months (D7b).

Clause 7 (D8–D11)

This in turn leads to the Calendar Round of 2 Ik' 15 Ch'en (D8) that is correlated to July 18, 799 (Figure 12). Once more the hostilities resume, and in this case, based on the juxtaposition to the foregoing clause, we

can presume that these are a direct response to the re-foundation event that took place just two months earlier. In all, the lull in hostilities did not last even five months, as the resumption of dynastic activities at Yaxha provoked what appears to be a retaliatory attack by Naranjo. The verb in this instance is once more *ch'ahkaj* "was axed" (E8a) and the patient is specified as *Yaxa'* (E8b). This attack once again resulted in the flight of her king, phrased precisely as *ahni K'inich Lakamtun* "he ran, K'inich Lakamtun" (D9).

In keeping with the phrasing seen in previous subclauses, this is once more followed by a *t'abaay* "he ascended/went up" verb (E9a), with the locality specified in the following collocation (E9b). This is only partly preserved but can be transliterated as **ya-na?#-li**, where the intervening main sign may represent the logogram **TI'**, here rendered as a profile with exaggerated lips. Together this may thereby refer to a place known as Yanti'il (perhaps "place between the shores," compare Cho'l'ti' <*yan*> "entre" [Morán [1695]1935:26], the location of which remains unknown at present. Interestingly, what may be the same toponym is named on the Komkom Vase, where it occurs as part of a short clause, again after a verb of motion: **pa-ka-xi** (M6) **ya-#** (N6) **7-si?-ni** (M7), *pakaax ~ pakxi ya... huk si[h]n?*, "he returned/went about Ya... [in/at] Huk Sih" (see Helmke et al. 2018:76-77). This event is said to take place on August 7, 799, which is to say twenty days after the clause on Stela 12. The final segment, prefixed by the numeral seven, may provide a territorial designation, specifying the location of the particular place, or alternatively providing a type of title of origin for the subject of the clause (Helmke et al. 2018:54; see also Tokovinine 2013:111).

Returning to the stela, the end of the phrase is supplied with a relative clause headed by the agency expression *uchabjiiny* (D10a). The following two collocations are written **4-ja-wa** (D10b) **bi-TUN** (E10a), for *Chan Jaw Bitun*. Much uncertainty has surrounded the use of *bihtuun ~ bitun* (lit. "road/path-stone") in the texts of Naranjo, some preferring to interpret this as a substantive that refers to paved playing alleys of ballcourts (Grube 2004:208-209), whereas others have suggested that this is more related to the construction of roadways (Stuart 2007). Furthermore, the same combination is found on the Komkom Vase in a clause that reads *pakaax ~ pakxi sakwitznal ajwalte' chan jaw bitun ajbolonchab* (E7–F9), which can be translated as "he returned to Sakwitznal, he of *walte'*, Chan Jaw Bitun, he of nine lands" (see Helmke et al. 2018:60-62). The precise location of Sakwitznal (probably "Seed-Mountain-Place") is not known, but a similar name is found on Stela 22 at Tikal, where it appears to name the Twin Pyramid Group Q as a material emulation of a mythic precedent (Helmke et al. 2018:60). With all the discussions pertaining to the *bihtuun ~ bitun* and considerations as to the function of *jaw* as a numeral

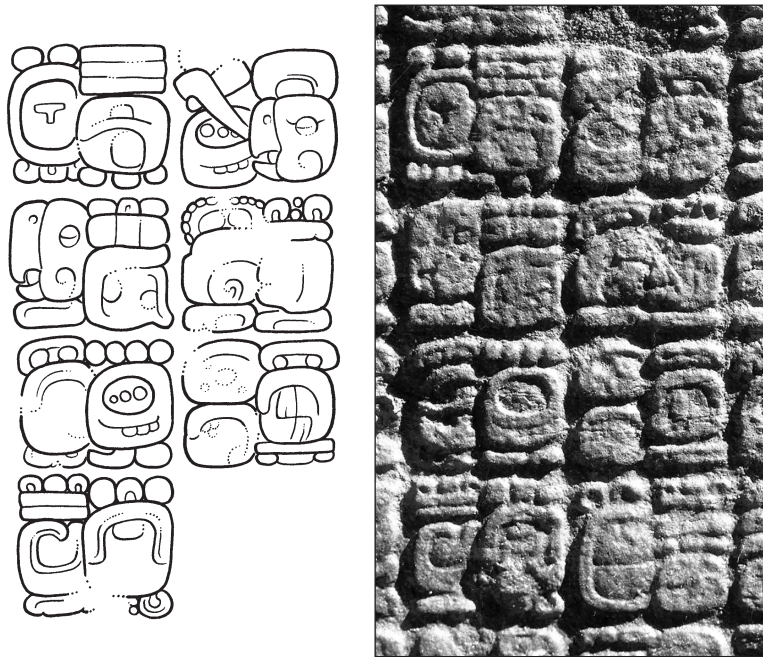


Figure 12. Clause 7, comparing the drawing to the photograph by Teobert Maler.

classifier (Helmke et al. 2018:61-62), the fact that this provides an anthroponym has been for the most part overlooked. Onomastically, this is an unusual name since it may literally translate as “four-length roadway,” yet the use of the *Chan Jaw Bitun* sequence after the agency expression on Stela 12 makes it clear that this is the name of a human agent, a historical actor. Precisely the same historical figure is thereby named on the Komkom Vase, although in that instance he is also qualified by a title of origin specifying that he is from a locality named Bolonchab (“Nine Lands”).

What may be a warrior title precedes his name, which can be compared to an analogous construction recorded on Stela 24 at Naranjo where the king of Dos Pilas—and the father of Lady Six Sky—is designated as **a-WAL-*la*** (D12) **CH’AK-*ka*** (E12). This can be read as *ajwal ch’ahk*, “he the raised axe,” in much the same way as *ajwalte’* ought to be understood as “he the raised spear,” which based on context ought to function as a martial aptitude (much as *bah-te’*, *bah-took’*, and comparable titles; see Houston 2008; Boot 2010:256-263, 274-276).

The ensuing DN is initiated by *utz’aka* (E10b), followed by a tally of two months and eleven days, the latter here written with the dialectal form **he-na**, for *he’n*.

Clause 8 (E11–D15a)

The resulting CR is 1 Ben 6 Kej (E11), which corresponds to September 7, 799 (Figure 13). The main event that took place on this date is yet another *ch’ahkaj* axing event (D12a), completing the set of aggressive acts and repeating the previous actions. The patient of the verb is expressed in the following three collocations. The first (D12b) may duplicate the same T506-501-like sequence that we have already seen in Clause 4, which was said to be the place where the king of Yaxha fled to, and the juxtaposition of these locations in near contiguous glyph blocks is noteworthy (C12b vs. D12b). The remainder specifies the locality in question, written as **ti-yo-OTOT** (E12a) **CHUWAJ** (E12b), *ti yotoot chuwaaj*, “at the house of the feline deity” (naming a particular aspect of the so-called Jaguar God of the Underworld). This undoubtedly names a temple dedicated to this important feline deity that had been built at that location and was stricken by the axing event.

The same event is also recorded in the text on the back of Stela 35 at Naranjo. There the same date (D8–C9) equally records the axing of

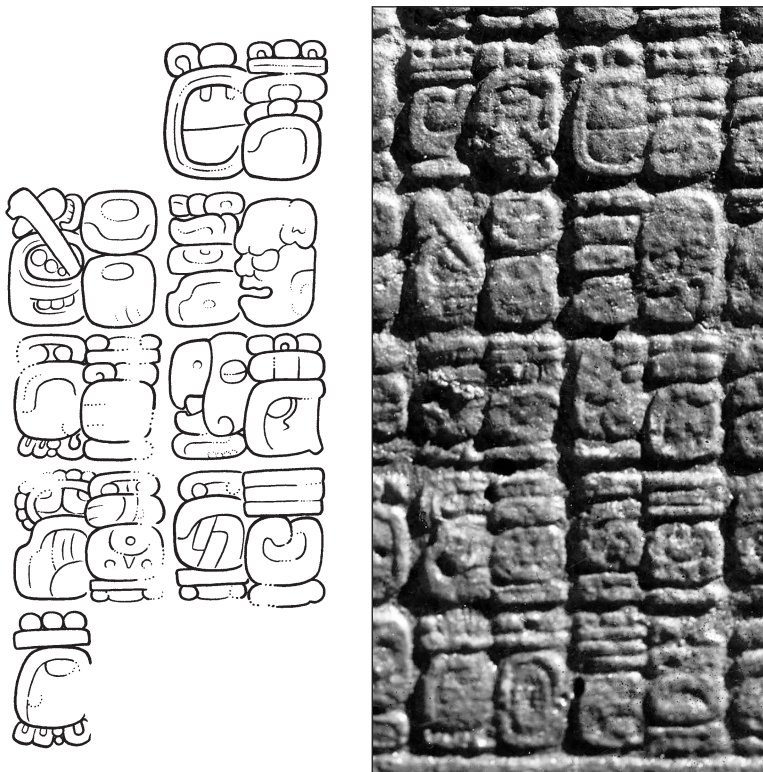


Figure 13. Clause 8, comparing the drawing to the photograph by Teobert Maler.



Figure 14. Conjoining sherds of the Komkom Vase relating the flight of the king of Yaxha in July AD 799 (photograph by Julie Hoggarth, after Helmke et al. 2018:Fig. 51).

the same locality (D9) as that named on Stela 12 and similarly records that it is “at the house of the feline deity” (C10–D10) (Schele and Mathews 1998:148–149). However, on Stela 35 a segment is added that reads *uk’uuhuul ma’ ch’ahb ma’ ahk’abaaal k’inich lakamtun, yaxa’ ajaw* (C11–F1), or “this is the god of the powerless/defeated K’inich Lakamtun, king of Yaxha.” This specifies that the feline deity that was specifically targeted by the axing was a tutelary deity of K’inich Lakamtun. In addition, the defeated king is qualified by the *difrasismo*, or metaphoric expression, *ma’ ch’ahb ma’ ahk’abaaal* (lit. “without sacrifice, without night”) to underline the powerlessness of the vanquished monarch (see Zender 1999:125–127; Helmke et al. 2018:36–39). Whereas on Stela 35 credit for this action is given specifically to the king of Naranjo—amply identified with his three successive names (E3–F5) (see Beliaev et al. 2019:358)—on

Stela 12 agency is attributed more broadly to the *aj-sa’uul* (or *aj-sa’il*), “Naranjeños” (D13b), quite probably the men-at-arms of the polity. Much as in foregoing sentences, this resulted in the king of Yaxha being forced to flee (E13) and again he “ascends, goes up” (D14a) to another locality, here named *u-su?-la-a* (D14b), *Usula’*, quite possibly “where flies abound,” or even more literally “water of abounding flies” (see Helmke et al. 2018:71). The same place name is referred to on the Komkom Vase in a near identical sequence (Figure 14):

*i-lok’-ooy, ma’ ch’ahb ma’ ahk’abaaal k’inich lakamnun,
t’ab-aay usula’, yaxa’ ajaw*

“and he fled, the powerless K’inich Lakamnun,
he went up to Usula’, the Yaxha king”

In this iteration of events we can see that the verb *lok’* “to flee” directly substitutes for the verb *ahn* “to run,” which is preferred on Stela 12. The substitution makes it clear that the flight of the king of Yaxha was undignified and dishonorable. If such a flight to a mosquito-infested redoubt were not humiliation enough, the scribes of the Komkom Vase further reiterated the debility of the defeated by adding the couplet *ma’ ch’ahb ma’ ahk’abaaal*.

The rendering of the name is also of interest since on the vase it is clearly written as **la-LAKAM** (I9) **nu-nu** (J9), which was initially taken as an innocent misspelling (Helmke et al. 2018:70–71). Instead of an error it may well be a very deliberate way of belittling the poor king further, by replacing the *tun* segment of his name with the near-homophonous *nun*. This heterographic rhyme may be comparable to the graphic pejoratives that are known for eastern Asian scripts, especially Chinese (Fiskejö 2011). The word *nun* is not altogether clear in its meaning but refers to speech and one’s ability to speak, coupled with glosses such as “mute,” “speak brokenly, barbarously,” and “speak like a parrot” (see Zender 1999:68–69, 76). As such, rather than K’inich Lakam-tun “radiant great-stone ~ stela,” he would be the “radiant great-mute,” defeated, ousted from his capital, made to flee and deprived of even the propriety of his regnal name.

This in many ways builds to the climax of the narrative, although the commensurate nadir for the king of Yaxha is just about to follow. The next event is linked to by a DN that is introduced by *utz’aka* (E14a), which heralds 15 days (E14b) and 8 months (D15a).

Clause 9 (D15b–G3a)

The DN leads to the CR 7 Lamat 16 Woh (D15b–E15a) that precedes the main verb of the clause (E15b) (Figure 15). Unfortunately this verb is rather eroded and only the outlines can be made out as **ya-#-#-a**, possibly involving a third-person singular pronoun *y-* and the vocalic sign that serves to render the suffix *-a*. This small piece of evidence suggests that this is the active voice of a non-CVC transitive verb. Although the precise event remains unknown

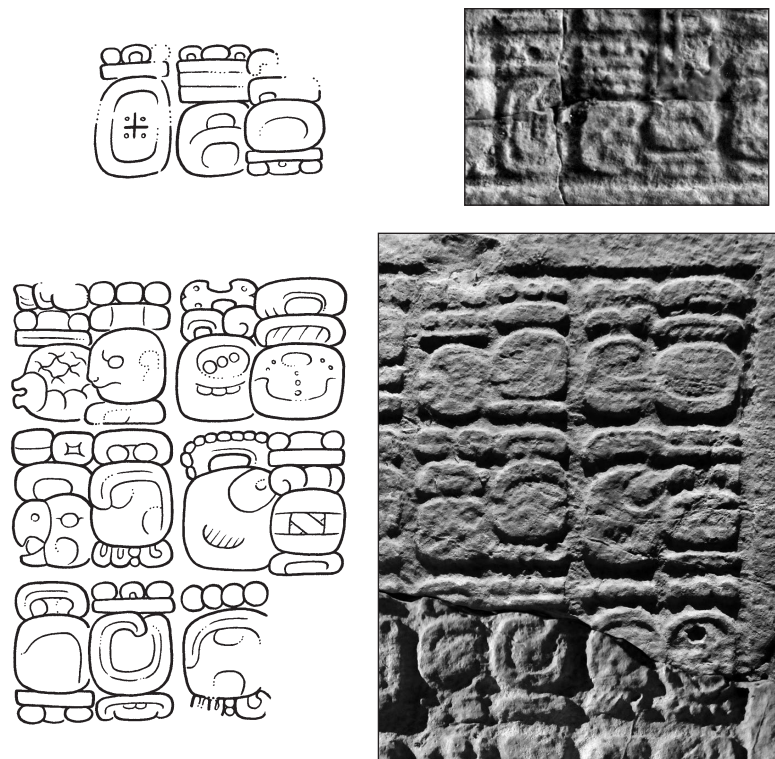


Figure 15. Clause 9, comparing the drawing to photographs by Ian Graham (above) and composite photographs by the Atlas Epigráfico de Petén (below).

it is followed by a prepositional subclause written **ti-a-AK** for *ti a[h]k* “with the turtle” (F1a), with the subject of the verb specified thereafter (F1b) as **3-ko-?-li**, wherein the main sign involves an eroded glyph representing the head of some sort of animal.

A subclause follows, which is initiated by **BAK-wa-ja** (G1a), spelling the rarer non-CVC passive /*baak-w-aj*/ “was made captive” (Lacadena 2004:179, 185). The item that was captured on this date is the **yi-ka-tzi** (G1b) **YAX-a-AJAW** (F2a), which is to say the *y-ikaatz yaxa’ ajaw* or “the jewels of the Yaxha king.” From depictions in the iconography and occasional mentions in the glyphic texts we can conclude that *ikaatz* are usually represented as a wrapped bundle, which most often contain some of the most exquisite and valued jewels and regalia of the royal court (Stuart 2006). The seizure of these regalia may have been enabled by the king’s abandonment of the court and must have constituted an irreversible setback for the king of Yaxha. A similar example of the handling of the royal jewels can be found in the inscription on the Throne 1 (A’1–B’2) from Piedras Negras. Although it was previously considered to be a description of tribute payment, expressed as the “transport and delivery of a ‘bundle’” (Stuart 1998:390) (based on the reading *kuch* “to carry” and *ikits* as “cargo” followed by the ‘Step verb’), we now believe that it describes the movement of the capital of the Yokib kingdom from Muk’ijtuun (Piedras Negras itself) to Lamnaah (an unknown site) by the ruler Ha K’in Xook who in AD 780 “abandoned the kingship at Piedras Negras” (*y-aktaaj ajawlel Muk’ijtuun*), at which juncture he seized

the symbols of royal power, taking them with his retinue. In a year, in 781, the would-be-king Ajjun Bak’ Nak ordered the return of the jewels (Beliaev et al. 2016:158-159). So, *ikaatz* were not just jewels and regalia, but the potent symbols of royal power together with the palanquin and deity effigies.

Those responsible for the capture of the *ikaatz* of Yaxha are credited in an agency statement (F2b) and breaking with precedent are named **K’UH-lu-a-SA’-li**, for *k’uhul aj-sa’uul* (*aj-sa’il*), “godly Naranjeños” (G2). The acquisition of the regalia of the kings of Yaxha may thereby have been the act that somehow brought about this ascribed divinity.

With this the clause comes to a close and is followed by *utz’aka* (F3a) and a DN of 7 days and 4 months (F3b–G3a).

Clause 10 (G3b–G11)

The following sentence starts with the CR 3 Men 3 Yaxk’in (G3b–F4a) correlated to May 26, 800 (Figure 16). This date precedes yet another **BAK-wa-ja**, *baakwaj* event (F4b). This time the item seized bears a proper name, which in part can be transliterated as **K’UH-CHUWAJ** (G4) **9-?-#-#** (F4a) **IK’-HUN** (F4b), *k’uhul chuwaj bolon ... ik’ huun*, for “godly feline deity, nine ..., black headdress.” Together this names a tutelary deity, the effigy of which was an integral part of a palanquin, or portable throne. This is made clear by the *difrasismo* that follows, which is written **u-pa-chi** (G5a) **u-PIT** (G5b) *u-paach u-piit*, “the baldachin, the palanquin,” which together refer to the totality of the portable throne, encompassing its canopy or awning (referred to literally as a *paach* or “skin”) and the throne itself (the *piit*) “palanquin” (Beliaev and Davletshin 2014). From depictions of palanquins captured as part of armed conflicts, portrayed on the lintels of Temples I and IV at Tikal, we can see that these portable thrones were each embellished with a large statue of a tutelary deity that gave the vehicle its name (Martin 1996).

The original owner of the palanquin, who had enjoyed the divine backing of this tutelary deity, is not known, as the following glyphs (F6a and F6b) are now completely effaced. The phrase, however, ends with another reference to *yikaatz* or regalia in G6a. Given that the king of Yaxha is portrayed as the villain and is the laughingstock of the narrative, we surmise that he could be named there, much as in the previous clause as the *yaxa’ ajaw*. However, there is

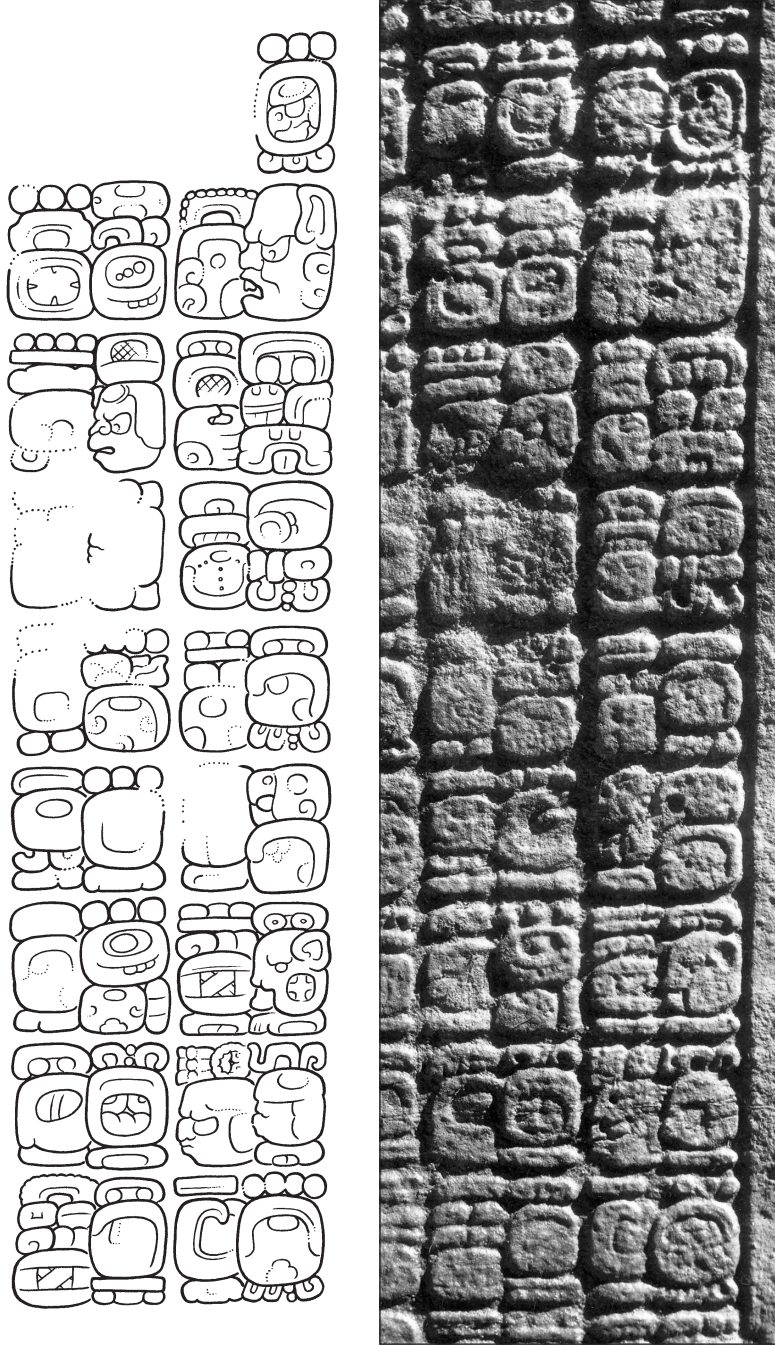


Figure 16. Clause 10, comparing the drawing to the photograph by Teobert Maler.

another possibility. If we consider that the text consists of two parallel clauses that describe two categories of royal regalia—which is to say the palanquin and jewels—block F6 could contain the name of the royal jewel(s). In this case the *baakwaj* verb would refer to the capture of both objects (with the syntax conforming to “it was captured, his palanquin [F4b–G5] and his jewels [F6b–G6a],” possibly involving an intervening copular expression).

The place where the palanquin was seized is then specified in

another subclause that conforms to a place name formula (Stuart and Houston 1994:7-18). This is initiated by the intransitive *uht-iiy* (G6b), and the toponym is then provided in the following glyph block, written #-?-*la* (F7a) 4-NAB (F7b) a?-#-? (G7a), which together can be translated as “it happened at ... *chan naahb*” The location of Chan Naahb is not known but is also recorded on the Komkom Vase (J6), where it refers to a settlement that was set ablaze on July 22, 799, as part of a concerted attack on Yaxha (Helmke et al. 2018:70). This suggests that this is a place in proximity to Yaxha, perhaps slightly to the east, on the way from Naranjo. Credit for the capture of the palanquin is then provided through another agency expression (G7b) that precedes a nominal segment (F8), which remains unclear owing to erosion.

A further subclause is then initiated by an eroded verb (G8a), which despite its overall illegibility may have recorded *a-ni*, or *ahni*, “he ran,” given the larger structure of the narrative and the prominence of this expression in the text. The subject of the verb follows, naming the individual who ran (G8b). The name is not altogether clear but may have been something along the lines of Mo’ Tuun “Macaw Stone.” The ones that induced the flight of this individual are presented through another agency expression (F9a) and are named 3-K’AL-WINAK-ki¹⁰ (F9b) a-SA’-li (G9a), *ux-k’al winaak, ajša’uul*, “the twenty-three men, they of Naranjo.” This is a surprising statement, since it specifies the number of men involved in the raiding party. As we do not have comparable records we are ignorant whether the number specifies an unusually high, or on the contrary a paltry number, thereby accentuating the bravery of their exploits (for a discussion of comparable features see Helmke 2020). Yet it is not just the raiding party that is credited, but also the king of Naranjo who takes pride of place in the text (G10–F11a). The monarch is introduced through the honorific *u-BAH-ji* (G9b) *u-CH’AB* (F10a) *ya-AK’AB-li* (F10b), *u-baah u-ch’ahb y-ahk’ab-aal*, “it is his image, his sacrifice, his night.” This provides the antithetical qualifier to that borne by the king of Yaxha, overcome and stripped of his power. In this sense, the king of Naranjo is addressed as “the powerful/victorious,”

¹⁰ This hieroglyphic block is only preserved in Maler’s photos, where the side dots in number 3 could also be interpreted as crossed fillers of number 1 as we see in B6, C14, and B15. In this case the total number of Naranjeños in this phrase would be 21.

with the initial *u-baah* serving as a type of emphatic or exocentric augmentative device, which introduces the *difrasismo* (Helmke et al. 2018:30-31, 36). Alternatively, this may provide a cross-reference to the portrayal of the king on the front of the stela. If the latter, this would imply that the king is depicted trampling a rival, after the definitive defeat of his adversary, in May of 800.

A DN of 5 days and 4 months follows an *utz'aka* expression (F11b) that closes this sentence.

Clause 11 (F12–G15)

The final clause of the historical narrative is headed by the CR 10 Ajaw 8 Sak (F12), which corresponds to the lahuntun PE of 9.18.10.0.0 or August 19, 800 (Figure 17). The event that is celebrated on this date is a ritual recorded as **u-K'AL[TUN-ni]** (G12a) **ti-[TAN]LAM** (G12b), *u-k'al-tuun ti tahn lamaw*, “it is his stone-presentation at the half-elapsed” (see Stuart 1996:154-158; Wichmann 2004). The presentation of the stone may well refer to the unveiling of the stela itself, and the prepositional construction specifies that this is a lahuntun celebration, a decade, or half-way through the katun period. The agent of the ritual who stood for the presentation of the monument is none other than the king of Naranjo, who is referred to by his two regnal names. The first can be transliterated as **NAH-KUM-CHAN-YOPAT-ti** (F13), Nah Ku'm Chan Yopaat (involving a rare logogram substituted for **ku-ma** on Stela 89 of Calakmul, see Martin et al. 2015; Beliaev et al. 2019:358-360). The second can now be transliterated as **²K'AK'-HOP-la** (G13) **CHAN-na-CHAK** (F14), K'ahk' Hopla Chan Chahk (involving the logogram **HOP**; see Beliaev et al. 2019:357-358). So whereas the birth name of this king resists complete reading, the two regnal names can now be read in full. In terms of titles, the king is styled with a complete emblem glyph (F14a) and the dynastic title Sak Chuwen (F14b).

Yet the king is not alone in the celebration of the PE since he is accompanied by another subject that is introduced by the relational *yichnal* (F15a), which serves to introduce another subject in an appended subclause. Initially the relational term was understood as “within sight” or “together with” (Houston and Taube 2000:281-287) or “in front of” based on the Yukatek cognate *yiknal* (Bastarrachea

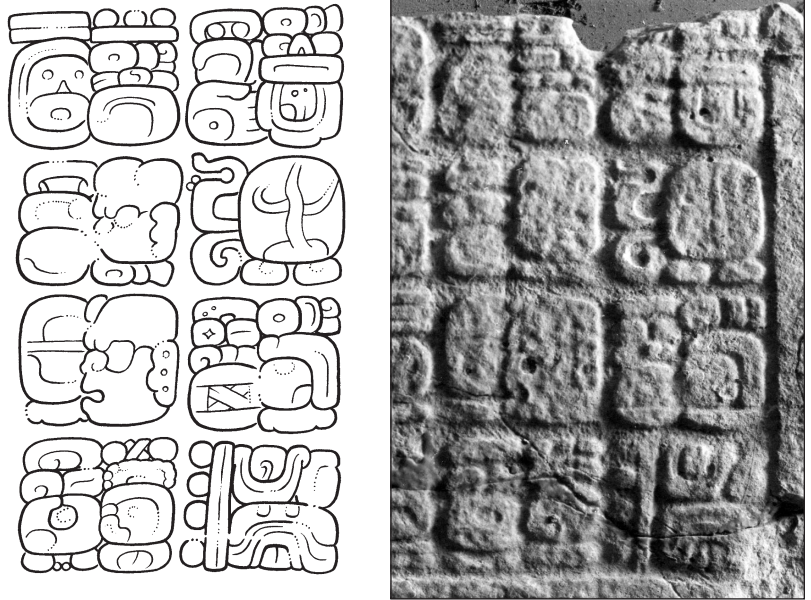


Figure 17. Clause 11, comparing the drawing to the photograph by Ian Graham.

et al. 1992:89). Yet, with further examples and added contexts it is now better understood as a means of specifying “who sanctioned, oversaw, or attended to the ritual concerned” (Stuart 2005:40-42). In this instance the subject that oversaw the ritual is a deity, as is made clear by the possessive statement **u-K'UH-li** (F15b) **9-PIT[CHUWAJ]** (G15), *u-k'uh-uul Bolon Piit Chuwaaj*, “it is his deity, the Nine Palanquin Feline Deity.” Although this supernatural entity is essentially a different aspect of the same “Jaguar God of the Underworld” who served as a tutelary deity of Yaxha, we believe that it was a patron deity of Naranjo. Ample evidence is found in the texts of Naranjo, where, for instance, on Stela 19 the previous Naranjo king K'ahk' Kalom Chan Chaahk (also named Ajtok' Ti', “He of the Flint Speech”) scattered incense and celebrated the end of lahuntun in 9.17.10.0.0 *yichnal* Bolon Piit Chuwaaj (Figure 18a). On Stela 32, the following Naranjo ruler Waxaklajun Ubaah K'awil performed a pre-accession event *yichnal* Bolon Piit Chuwaaj (Figure 18b). This divine name appears in Naranjo even earlier, during the reign of K'ahk' Tiliw Chan Chaahk, who performed his rituals *yichnal* Bolon Piit Chuwaaj several times as recorded on Stela 2 (B12–C12) and Stela 30 (C9–C10) (Figure 18c–d). Thus, Naranjo and Yaxha were not only neighbors but also venerated similar deities. Probably this fact implies some common cultural heritage, undoubtedly going back to Preclassic times.

Basal Register (H1–M1)

The text as whole is closed by what is in essence a large sculptor's signature (Figure 19). This follows the precedent seen in a comparable clause on Stela 14, raised earlier during the reign of “Itzamnaaj” K'awil, which names a sculptor through a title of origin as Ajti'pa', or “he of Ti'pa'” (written **a-TI'[pa]-a**). On Stela 12, the signature is headed by the typical **yu-xu** for *y-uxul* (H1a), “it

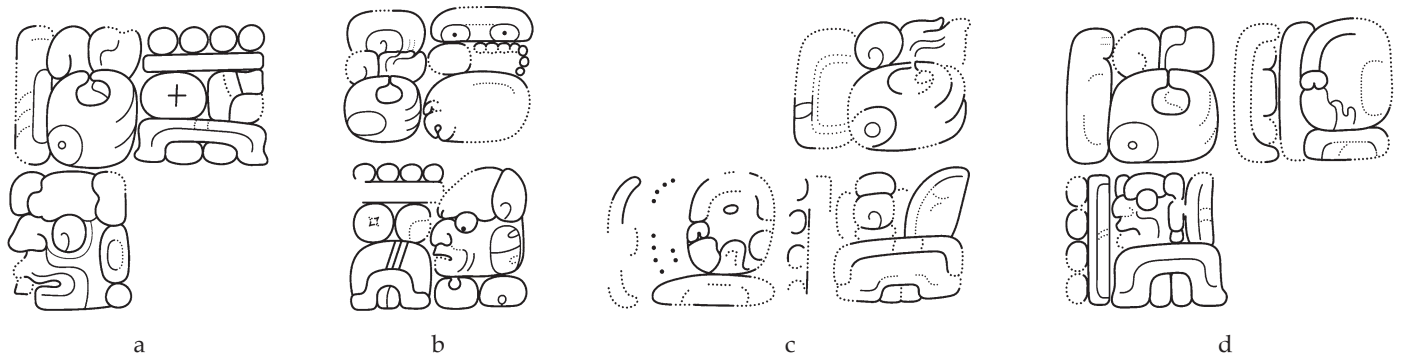


Figure 18. Events sanctioned by the Naranjo tutelary deity Bolon Piit Chuwaaj: (a) Stela 19 (A3-A4); (b) Stela 32 (S1-Q2); (c) Stela 2 (C11-C12); (d) Stela 30 (C9-C10) (drawings by Sergei Vepretskii).

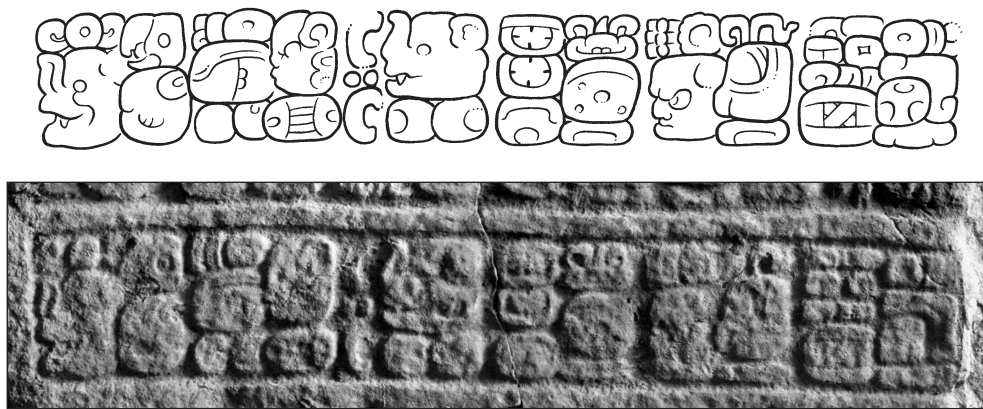


Figure 19. Basal register, comparing the drawing to the photograph by Ian Graham.

is his carving" (see Stuart 2001:480-481).¹¹ The name of the first sculptor then follows (H1b), written **MO'?-lu**, who is also said to be a **SAK-TE'-la** (I1a) **ch'o-ko** (I1b), or "youth from Sakte'el." The toponym Sakte'el ("white woods") is little known, although what may be namesakes are known at other sites in the lowlands such as Cancuen and Copan. As we have already touched upon above, the title Sakte' Ajaw is recorded on an incised bone from Tikal (see Martin and Grube 2000:51), and assuming that this names the same locality as at Naranjo it may therefore be located to the west, between the two centers. The second sculptor is then named as **ya-xu-nu** (J1) **EL-K'IN-?** (K1a), for *yaxun elk'in ...* "cotinga eastern ...," for which unfortunately the last element is unclear. Both are said to be the **ya-na-bi-li** (K1b) or "sculptors of" (Houston 2019:403), expressed in a possessive statement with their patron, the Naranjo king, named using his birth name (L1) and styled with the emblem glyph (M1a) and the local dynastic title (M1b).

¹¹ Stephen Houston (2016:393) has expressed his doubts concerning the **yu-xu-lu** reading.

Observations on the Prose and Syntax

Having pored over the narrative of Stela 12 in such detail, it becomes apparent that the text is highly crafted and was made to reflect certain underlying poetic structures and elements of prose. For one, we can see that most sentences are multi-verbal and thereby relate a wealth of information concerning the events that transpired on each date. For another, we can see that there are definite patterns relating to the verbs employed. As such, it becomes evident that most sentences are built up according to paired subclauses, often as two sequential verbs, or alternatively as a main clause followed by a relative clause headed by an agency expression. These larger constructions typically involve one agency expression in each sentence.

In this regard, the penultimate sentence of the text breaks with the predominant pattern, since it is closed not by one but by two such constructions involving agency expressions. Yet the second of the two is written not as **u-CHAB-[ji]ya** > *uchabjiyy* as in the other instances, but as **u-CHAB-ji** > *uchabij*. Assuming that the affixation in these expressions relates to temporal deixis (see Wald 2004), this orthographic break may

signal a shift in narrative time, with all the prior expressions relating to narrative past and also to events that are in the completive aspect. In contrast then, the final *uchabij* may serve to bridge the narrative completive with the narrative present, as a means of introducing the historical actor that is featured in the text and who is also responsible not only for bringing the events to a close on the PE that closes the narrative as a whole, but also the erection of the monument on which the text itself is recorded. In much the same way, the very first and last clauses of the historical narrative involve just one verb and feature the king of Naranjo as sole subject. These sentences thereby bookmark the whole narrative, evoking a *reditio* structure of prose poetry, wherein the starting element of a text is repeated at the close (see Lacadena and Hull 2012:8).

These general features of the composition of the text and the repeated internal syntactic parameters of the clauses make it clear that this is a text of structured verse. This is made all the more patent when the structural regularities of four clauses are compared with one another. These are Clauses 4, 5, 7, and 8, which each exhibit the same syntactic structure (Figure 20). These clauses are all headed by an initial primary clause, contain two intervening coordinated subclauses, and are closed for the most part by agency expressions in relative clauses. The verbs of the primary clause and the coordinated subclauses are all identical, although the subjects, patients, and agents are tailored to each phrase.

Thus, the primary predicate in each case is *ch'ahkaj* “was axed” (C9a, B15b, E8a, D12a), with differing patients listed in each instance although these preferentially refer to localities. In the first case (Clause 4) it appears to be a deity effigy within Yaxha that is the target in much the same way as the particular place or item within the house of the feline deity is axed in the last iteration (Clause 8). The two intervening clauses express the patient solely as toponyms, Sak Kabnil (Clause 5) and Yaxa’ (Clause 7), respectively. These attacks bring about the flight of the rulers of these particular localities. Once this is the king of Sak Kabnil (Clause 5), but in all other instances this is K’inich Lakamtun, the king of Yaxha (Clauses 4, 7, and 8). On the run, the defeated are said to retreat to particular named places, expressed in each case by the verb *t’abaay* “went up, ascended,” with the localities specified afterwards. In most cases these are rather unremarkable, with the exception of the last place to which K’inich Lakamtun flees—named Usula’—which may well be translated as “where mosquitoes abound,” a rather unfortunate place to end a shameful escape. Invariably the primary agent and hero of the text of Stela 12 is the king of Naranjo, but the agency expressions provide a more nuanced view, since these introduce not only the king as victor, but also the more indefinite “Naranjeños,” as well as naming Chan Ek’, a high-standing figure associated with Ucanal, and Chan Jaw Bitun, who was associated with Naranjo. We see much of the same underlying structure in the fifth

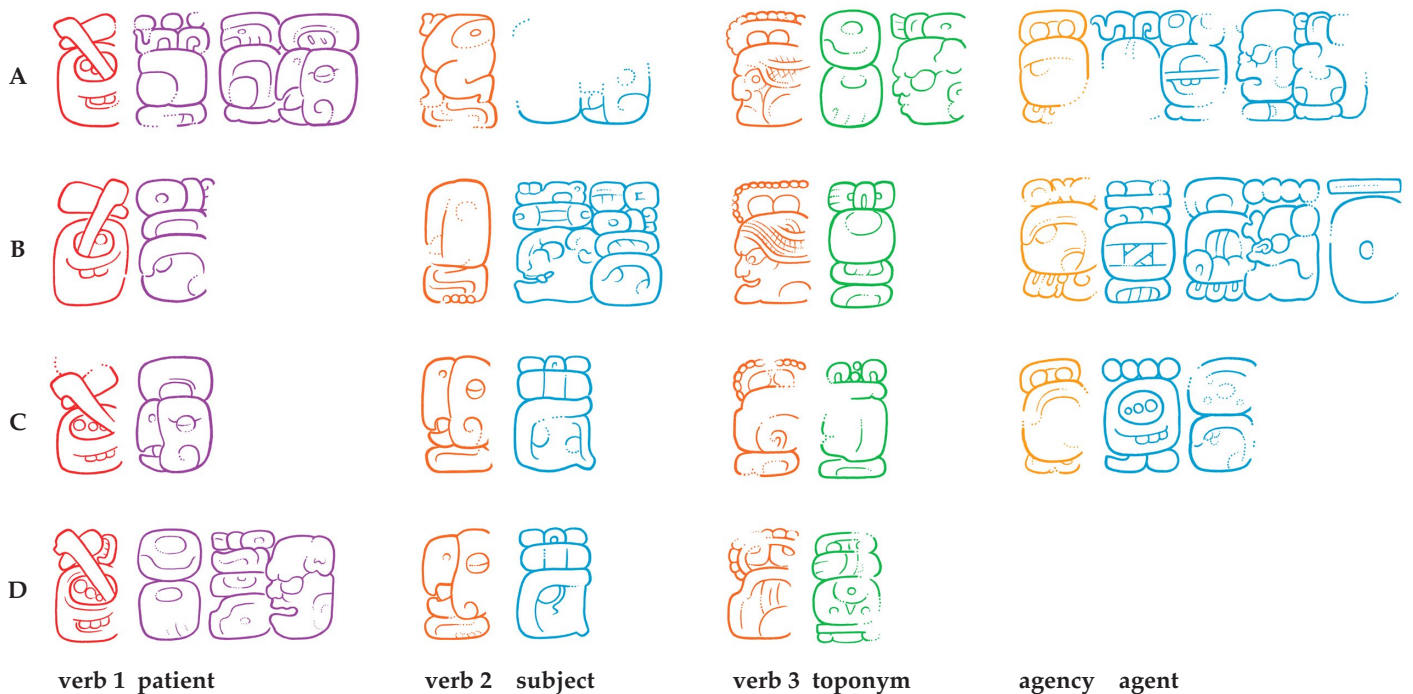


Figure 20. Structural analysis of four of the clauses that reveal some of the most regular patterns of prose (graphics by Christophe Helmke).

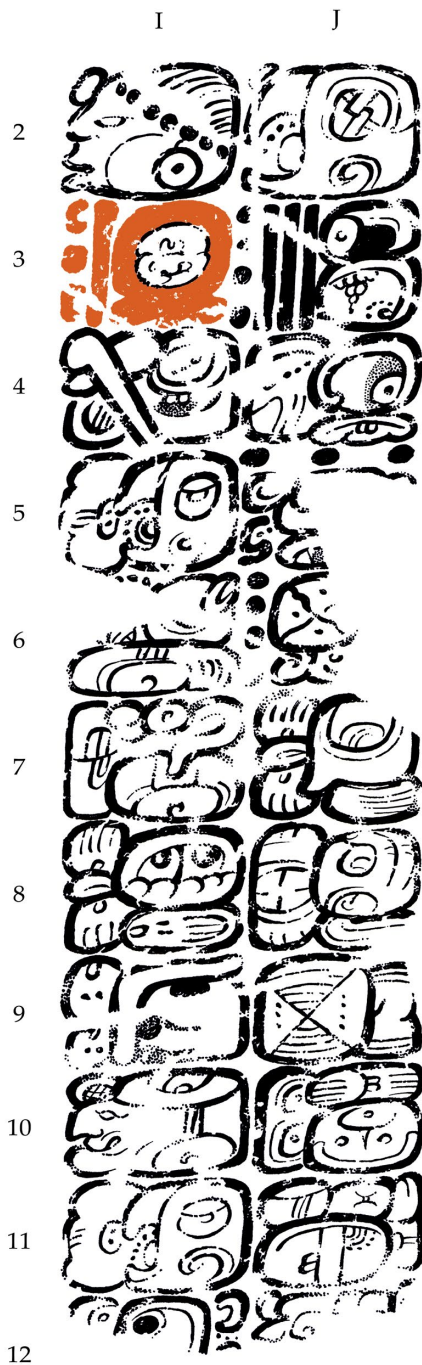


Figure 21. The fifth clause of the Komkom Vase, which exhibits remarkable similarities to the prose of Stela 12 (drawing by Christophe Helmke, after Helmke et al. 2018:Fig. 49).

clause on the Komkom Vase (Figure 21), where the king of Yaxha is said to “flee” in response to an axing event, and again he is said to “ascend” to one and the same mosquito-infested locality mentioned on Stela 12.

In sum, the regularity of these clauses on both Stela 12 and on the Komkom Vase is an intentional feature, which singles out K’inich Lakamtun as the antagonist of Naranjo. The regularity of these clauses introduces cadence and even comic irony, almost satirical humor, given that these martial events are each followed by *ahn-i k’inich lakamtun*, “he ran, K’inich Lakamtun.” The repetition of this narrative motif serves to humiliate the king of Yaxha, dishonouring him and marking him as the target of all jokes, since he is said to have fled from each encounter. Thus, clearly, the two historical sources provide two very different accounts of the same events, one presented in nearly raw and minute detail, whereas the other was the subject of considerable emendation to make it suitable to record on a public monument.

Some Perspective

The lengthy text of Stela 12 provides a unique and detailed description of the events in the Naranjo-Yaxha area at the beginning of the Terminal Classic. Naranjo and Yaxha had a long history of antagonisms that had already started in the early eighth century (Schele and Freidel 1990; Grube 2000:257-261). However, by the second half of the eighth century the two polities seem to maintain good relations. According to the inscriptions of “Itzamnaaj” K’awil (Stelae 8 and 14), his father was married to a Yaxha princess whose name is also recorded on vase K635. As such, two royal protagonists of Stela 12 were at least cousins, if not first cousins. The birth of the heir to the Naranjo throne took place in AD 771, so the marriage must have been arranged sometime before AD 770.

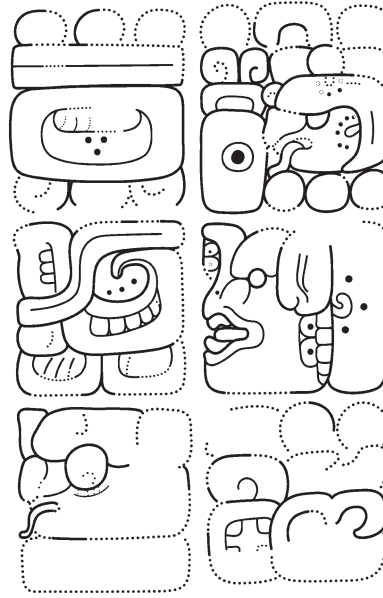
We do not know who ruled at Yaxha at this time. He must have been related somehow to K’ahk’ We’nel Chan Chaahk who was buried in Burial 49 at Topoxte, the rich royal tomb excavated in Chultun 6B-1 to the north of Structure A (Hermes 2000:127-144). The carved bone found in the funerary context is said to belong to K’ahk’ We’nel Chan Chaahk, who bears an unusual emblem glyph that consists of the K’UH logograph and the AJAW sign conflated with the head variant of the number “nine” (Teufel 2000:149-158). Teufel (2000:150-151) considered this to be a variant of the Tikal emblem glyph, but this seems to be a misinterpretation. First of all, the photos taken in the storage of the Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología in 2016 show that the element that looks like a jaguar tail running parallel to the rear side of the human head does not have black dots. This is just a part of the royal headband, streaming down at the back. Second, the use of the title *ochk’in Huk Tzuk* (“[from] western 7 Tzuk”) by a Tikal dynast is highly unlikely. As Beliaev has demonstrated, *tzuk* titles in the Late Classic identified regional groups of royal elites, and “western Huk Tzuk” was a common designation of the royal elites from the western part of the eastern Peten (in particular for Yaxha and Naranjo), whereas the Tikal royal line was considered to belong to the “13 Tzuk” division (Beliaev 2000). These identities seem to be transferred through kinship ties and there is evidence that these were never mixed. So K’ahk’ We’nel Chan Chaahk could not be a Tikal king but should proceed from the eastern Peten. Unfortunately the bone does not bear any date, but the ceramics of Burial 49 are attributed to the Ixbach complex, corresponding to the late facet of the Late Classic. The calendrical notation 13 Ajaw painted on plate TPMC 107 from the burial (Hermes 2000:139, Fig. 100) probably refers to the katun ending of 13 Ajaw 18 Kumk’u (9.17.0.0.0, January 24, 771).

The importance of the figure of K’ahk’ We’nel Chan Chaahk is underlined by his parentage statement. He is said to be the son of Ixtal? Muut, Lady from

Tikal. Thus, in the second half of the eighth century, a Yaxha lord buried at Topoxte was the son of a Tikal princess. We already know about the Tikal princess who married the Yaxha king Joyjal Chaahk around AD 710, but it is clear that this tradition continued well into the eighth century. As a result, a Naranjo-Yaxha marriage alliance possibly took place when both polities were dominated by Tikal. The first evidence of an independent action on the part of Naranjo is dated to 775 when K'ahk' Kalom Chan Chaahk attacked and burned Bitol, a city of unknown location, although it is likely to have lain somewhere between Naranjo and Caracol.

At this time Yaxha also extended its dominion under the reign of K'inich Lakamtuun. We do not know when this king acceded as many of his monuments were destroyed in antiquity, but he was active by the early 790s. In 793 he remodeled and dedicated the Twin Pyramid complex (Plaza A). He also erected Stela 13 and probably moved the Early Classic Stela 6 from its original location in that group to Plaza C. According to the inscription of Stela 31 in 797 he also dedicated *hix bihtuun* ("jaguar *bihtuun*"). As we have touched upon above, the exact translation of *bihtuun* is still under discussion. Given the proximity of Stela 31 to the North Ballcourt, the Hix Bihtuun may well refer to this complex. Clearly, K'inich Lakamtuun was one of the most prolific builders and was responsible for the larger part of construction works that took place in the Yaxha epicenter at the end of the Late Classic.

The inscription on Stela 31 records a capture in 796 (Grube 2000:262-263). For some time the identity of this captive has remained elusive, but it is now apparent that this captive was named Xub Chaahk (or perhaps Xuxub Chaahk, "whispering Chaahk"), the king of Ucanal (Stuart 2019) (Figure 22a).¹² By that time this important center of the middle Mopan River Valley probably controlled a large territory in the southeastern Peten. The rise of the Ucanal hegemony was related to the defeat of Naranjo by Tikal in AD 744-748 and the decline, or "hiatus," of Caracol, which lasted from about 680 to 793. In 760 the Ucanal ruler "Itzamnaaj" Bahlam II authorized the accession of the new king of Ixkun or Sacul (**JUL-pi**), while he oversaw the ceremonies by the ruler of El Chal in 761 and 765 (see Carter 2016). Nicholas Carter suggests that Ucanal exercised authority over the San Juan and Sacul Rivers and thus dominated "two major transit routes connecting the northern Mopan River basin with areas to the south and west. Control of those corridors was likely key to Ucanal's independence: "Tikal and the new Naranjo



a

Figure 22. Mentions made of the capture of Xub ~ Xuxub Chaahk of Ucanal: (a) in the text of Yaxha Stela 31 (drawing by Sergei Vepretskii); (b) as depicted on Caracol Altar 23 and named as the captive of Tum Yohl K'inich (photograph by Christophe Helmke).



b

¹² The name of the Ucanal king who was captured and presented on Stela 31 at Yaxha is written **xu-bu-CHAK-ki K'AN-WITZ-NAL-'AJAW**. David Stuart (2019) independently arrived at the same conclusions concerning the identity of the captive.

regime were well-placed to block access from Ucanal to the Peten Lakes chain, a partially lacustrine route towards the Petexbatun Basin, and the Belize River, a natural route to the Caribbean coast" (Carter 2016:244). These routes were important for Ucanal in order to participate in long-distance exchange with the Guatemalan Highlands and farther regions. The war between Ucanal and her vassals began during the reign of the new king, Huk Chapaht, in 779 and resulted in the burning of K'an Witznal in 780, which would lead to the disintegration of the Ucanal hegemony. It seems that Yaxha used this opportunity to attack Ucanal in 796. The new king Xub Chaahk was captured by the victorious K'inich Lakamtun, but surprisingly he later reappears as a captive on Altar 23 at Caracol (Chase et al. 1991:10) (Figure 22b). The date of his capture is not recorded but the altar was dedicated in 800 to commemorate the lahuntun in 9.18.10.0.0. Therefore, the capture record on Yaxha Stela 31 may be a reference to the defeat of the Ucanal army and not the actual capture of the Ucanal king. Alternatively, as has been suggested by David Stuart, this may be an instance where Xub Chaahk was initially captured by Yaxha in 796, only to be released and then captured once more by Caracol just a few years later. Given this background on the geopolitics of the time, it helps to explain why the Naranjo attack against Yaxha was accompanied by Chan Ek' Ho Pet, whom we have identified as an Ucanal lord. As he does not bear a regal title at this juncture, we surmise that he had not yet acceded to the throne. It is quite possible that Xub Chaahk had already been captured by that time, so that Chan Ek' substituted for the defeated king. The alliance between Naranjo and Ucanal probably continued well into the Terminal Classic when the Naranjo king Waxaklajun Ubaah K'awil traveled to Ucanal and there "was raised in the palanquin of Papamalil, western overlord" (see Grube 1994:95-96; Helmke et al. 2019:23).

While Naranjo was allied with Ucanal, Yaxha was supported by Tikal. This is mentioned twice in the text of Stela 12. First, on February 23, 799, "it was enlivened the heart of Bolon Pat," the supernatural entity tied to Tikal. It is interesting to note that the text of the Komkom Vase relates that the members of the Naranjo party ran and later the gods of Yaxha are mentioned. Perhaps this formed part of the same type of construction, stating that the gods of the king of Yaxha were pleased by the flight of the warriors of the Naranjo faction. This is followed, 53 days later, when K'inich Lakamtun "for the second time settled himself" under the auspices of an unknown Tikal lord. As we have already suggested, this lord could be a member of the Tikal dynasty who ruled in the lake region and controlled the Tikal dominion in this area. Thus, the Naranjo-Yaxha conflict of 799–800 was

not just a conflict between two neighboring cities and between two royal cousins, but also a part of the system of macropolitical interaction in the southern Maya lowlands. Although it is frequently believed that Tikal had already entered a profound crisis by the late eighth and early ninth century (Martin and Grube 2008:52), the inscription of Stela 12 shows that the Tikal dynasty was still very active and at least exerted control over Yaxha.

The importance of Stela 12 is not limited to its macropolitical implications. It is also a unique source for the reconstruction of the local geography and internal composition of the Yaxha polity. Many previously unknown place names are mentioned in the inscription, including Sak Kabnil and Usula' (both also mentioned on the Komkom Vase), Makal ~ Makan, Yanti'il, and some others. They all refer to secondary centers within the larger Yaxha realm (see Fialko 2013:267, Fig. 2) situated less than a day from the capital, since Yaxha lords arrived at these places the same day as they fled from the attacked towns. In this context it is not surprising that the war events following the initial capture of Yaxha are attributed, not to the Naranjo king but to different groups of warriors—"Naranjeños" (*aj-Sa'uul* ~ *aj-Sa'il*) and Chan Jaw Bitun (see Helmke et al. 2018 for a discussion of these titles). This looks like a separation of the army and a battue of the runaway king of Yaxha and his vassals.

Some of these place names were not specified and were just described as places of refuge, yet others received more attention. Sak Kabnil is said to have its own lord named Chok Bahlam who possibly belonged to the Yaxha royal house. One of the most important places that was mentioned twice and served as a refuge for K'inich Lakamtun after the first Naranjo attack and later was destroyed by Naranjeños is described as "at Chuwaj's [place]" or "at the House of Chuwaj," thus referring to the temple of the Jaguar God of the Underworld, a patron deity of Yaxha.

Unfortunately, our current geographic knowledge of the area is insufficient to locate all these secondary centers and identify them with known secondary sites. It is tempting to relate Makal ~ Makan to either the eponymous river or the well-known place name Macanche, the small lake to the east of Lake Peten Itza that, according to the information recorded by Juan de Villagutierre in AD 1696, was one of five towns under the rule of the Kowoj king <*Cincantek*> (Villagutierre 1985:403; see also Jones 1998:95). Nonetheless, we believe that we can at least outline a general area where these centers could be placed. Since K'inich Lakamtun returned with the backing of Tikal, it is logical to assume that he crossed the lake and fled to the southwest, to the Tikal domain based in Sacpeten. This zone is full of secondary sites like Ixtinto, La Naya, and San Clemente that have their

own monuments with hieroglyphic inscriptions. San Clemente even has a possible version of a Twin Pyramid complex (Quintana and Wurster 2001:150), which further implies connections to Tikal.

However, if we compare the Naranjo-Yaxha wars of AD 799–800 and 710–711 we see a surprisingly different landscape. The earlier campaign was described in one of the most famous Late Classic inscriptions from the eastern central lowlands—Stela 23 of Naranjo. In 710 K'ahk' Tiliw Chan Chaahk attacked Yaxha and burned the city. The recently inaugurated king Joyjal Chaahk was forced to flee. By that time Yaxha was already under Tikal dominance, and the new king was married to a Tikal princess who fled together with him. This was followed by the well-known description of the exhumation of the bones of the previous Yaxha king Yax Bolon K'awiil, which were then “scattered on the island” (presumably a reference to Topoxte) (Grube 2000:259). Later Naranjo campaigns in the lake region involved war against the otherwise unknown site of Sakha'. In April of 711 an unknown event happened with “he from Sakha” or “people from Sakha” (*ajsakha'*), and the site was burned (NAR: St. 23, G9–H10). It seems to be some kind of a battle or other military confrontation since in a secondary clause it is said that at Sakha' “the armaments of the Naranjeños were fed” with war and blood (NAR: St. 23, H13–H15; see Lacadena 2002:45, Fig. 6). But despite these triumphal statements, Naranjo's power over conquered territories was not stable. As the inscription on Tikal Altar 5 states, in October of 711 the Mahsul lord Chan Sak Wayis exhumed the bones of his female relative (possibly a sister) who was buried at Topoxte and brought them to Tikal for reburial (Grube 2000:260–261; Beliaev et al. 2013:120–123). This travel could only have been undertaken if Naranjo did not control the southern shore of Lake Yaxha. In 714 Sakha' was again attacked and burned (NAR: St. 30, H9).

Sakha' seems to be a secondary center subordinated to Yaxha because its ruler does not bear the *ajaw* title and was referred to simply as *ajsakha'* (“he of Sakha'”). Since the 1990s it has been identified with the area close to modern Lake Sacnab (Schele and Freidel 1990:102; Martin and Grube 2008:76). Nevertheless, the area of Lake Sacnab would be the first point that a Naranjo army would reach on its way to the west, so it is not likely that it was conquered after Yaxha. The place name Sakha' better corresponds to the seventeenth-century town of <*Saca*> mentioned by Juan de Villagutierre as one of the settlements subordinated to the Kowoj ruler: “and that the towns which constituted the domain of the king were five and their names were Chaltuna, Sacpeten, Maconche, Saca, and Coba, and their locations were a league apart” (Villagutierre 1985:403). Since Chaltuna is identified

as a site on the eastern shore of Lake Peten Itza, and Sacpeten and <*Maconche*> ~ Macanche with the sites on the lakes of the same names, this list goes from west to east. So, <*Saca*> ~ Sakha' should be located one league (5.5 km) to the east or northeast of Lake Macanche, quite close to the drainage of Lake Yaxha.

But by the end of the Late Classic Sakha' disappeared from the written record and was replaced by other local centers mentioned on Stela 12, probably because of continuous Naranjo attacks. Thus we observe a dynamic situation with the rise and fall of secondary centers. Thanks to Naranjo Stela 12 and our new reading of the text that it bears, we can appreciate that warfare in the Late Classic had a great and lasting impact on the internal structure of the Maya polities, contributing either to the growth or the decline of the local communities. All this gives us a picture of a densely populated area with numerous small towns surrounding the metropoli of Yaxha and Naranjo, connected to the courts of these capitals by patronage and mutual obligations, in the ebb and flow of their ascendancy and fall.

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