

# The Great Ball Court Stone from Chichén Itzá

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The Great Ball Court at Chichén Itzá is located in the northwest corner of the North Terrace, the largest ceremonial plaza at the site. Four temples—the Lower Temple of the Jaguars, the Upper Temple of the Jaguars, the North Temple, and the South Temple—are associated with the Great Ball Court. The surfaces of these structures and of the benches of the Great Ball Court are lavishly decorated with sculptures and paintings that illustrate hundreds of human figures in a complex iconographic program. An additional sculptured monument from the Great Ball Court has recently been identified and warrants careful study.

In the summer of 1983, Peter Schmidt and I located a hemispherical stone (catalog number CRY 61) in the bodega of the Museo Regional de Antropología in Mérida. Although the stone was unprovenienced, Schmidt also found a reference in a museum catalog of the 1940s to a large carved stone discovered in the Great Ball Court at Chichén Itzá (personal communication). The catalog entry appears to correspond to the hemispherically shaped stone, which I call the Great Ball Court stone.

The Great Ball Court stone (fig. 1) is 52 cm in height,

99 cm in diameter, and 311 at its outer circumference. Around its base is a rim 16 cm in height and 11 cm in width. Now broken into several pieces, the stone was originally monolithic. Its surface is badly eroded. However, three panels of figural relief can be recognized on the curved surfaces of the Great Ball Court stone, and a band of twenty-four glyphs can be seen on the upper surface of the rim (fig. 2).

The Great Ball Court stone can be identified as the subject of several incomplete and substantially inaccurate reports of a sculpture discovered during the excavation and repair of the Great Ball Court conducted by the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) between 1923 and 1940. An undated memo written by Edward Thompson at Chichén Itzá has been located by Clemency Coggins in the Edward H. Thompson archives at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Eth-



Fig. 1 Great Ball Court Stone (photo by David Wren).

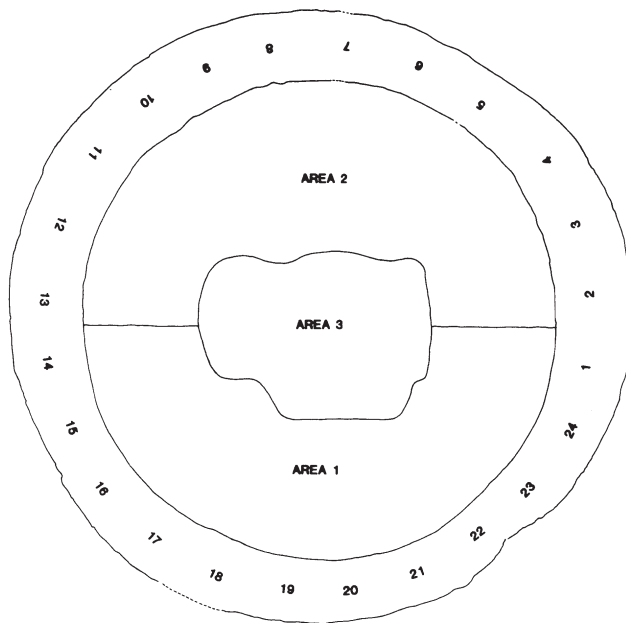


Fig. 2 Great Ball Court Stone (schematic drawing by Linnea Wren).

nology at Harvard University. In it, Thompson recounted the discovery of a "peculiarly shaped stone fragment" that resembles "a stiff round hat." Its unusual shape led Thompson to speculate that the stone was originally a fragment of a "much conventionalized stelae [sic] or a capstone to a pillar . . . or perhaps the stone cover to an urn." Thompson credited his own "systematic search" with the recovery of the missing fragments of the monument. He reported that he had photographed the stone and had made paper molds of its surfaces. Thompson's photographs and molds of the Great Ball Court stone are now lost, but Charles Lincoln has located a set of photographs of molds taken from the inscription of the Great Ball Court stone. The photographs, stored in the photographic archives of the Carnegie Institution of Washington now at the Peabody Museum at Harvard University, reveal that the inscription was badly eroded at the time of the discovery of the Great Ball Court stone and that little appreciable deterioration of the carving has occurred since then. The utility of these photographs is severely limited since the molds were divided into individual glyph blocks before the photographs were taken and no record of the original order of the glyphs was kept.

Two short accounts concerning the Great Ball Court stone were published by Cesar Lizardi Ramos (1936, 1937). According to Lizardi Ramos, the stone had been discovered in 1923 in the southern part of the Great Ball Court by Miguel Angel Fernández. Lizardi Ramos described the stone as being "shaped as a large ring for a ball to pass through" (1937:12). Although this description gave rise to later misinterpretations about the form and function of the monument, it may have been originally intended to suggest a resemblance between the shape of the stone and the appearance of a large rubber ball being struck through one of the rings that were tenoned into the eastern and western walls of the Great Ball Court.

A different location for the discovery of the Great Ball Court stone was recorded by Morley in his checklist of inscribed monuments from Chichén Itzá (1948:53). According to Morley, a "round roughly spherical altar" was found several hundred meters west of the south end of the west wall of the Great Ball Court. While Morley was undoubtedly referring to the Great Ball Court stone, his placement of the monument outside the ball court is contradicted by Lizardi Ramos's earlier statement and appears to be inaccurate.

More recently, Karl H. Mayer (1984) published a brief entry, accompanied by two photographs, describing the Great Ball Court stone. He recognized the presence of one complex scene depicting a ball game and noted that a hieroglyphic text was inscribed on the base of the stone. No provenience for the stone was listed in the labels or the then-current catalog of the Museo Regional de Antropología, but Mayer correctly identified the Maya-Toltec style of figural relief and suggested that the monument originated from a source in eastern Yucatán, presumably in the region of Chichén Itzá.

Lizardi Ramos (1937:12) briefly noted that Enrique Palacios believed an Eleventh Cycle date was inscribed on the Great Ball Court stone. A more extended discussion of this supposed date and its significance was provided by J. Eric Thompson (1937:189). Although he did not publish any illustrations of the stone, Thompson had evidently received a drawing of the inscription prepared by Fernández. This unlabeled drawing (fig. 3) has been located by Ian Graham among material deposited at the Peabody Museum by the Carnegie Institution. Accompanying the drawing when it was received by Thompson was a manuscript, now lost, by Enrique Palacios, describing the recently discovered stone. Thompson reported that Palacios had identified an Initial Series date and a Calendar Round date in the inscription. The Initial Series date was read by Palacios as 11.7.5.3.0 6 Ahau 13 Pax (GMT 1367 A.D.), with the cycle glyph and its coefficient being suppressed. The Calendar Round date was read by Palacios as 2 Ahau 3 Uayeb and was presumed to date to 11.9.16.0.0 (GMT 1417). The authenticity of these dates was apparently confirmed for Thompson by the presence of what he termed "the indubitable Mexican figures" (1937:189) also represented on the stone. In his outline of history at Chichén Itzá, Thompson, therefore, placed the stone late in the Post-Classic Period.

An alternative dating of the Great Ball Court stone was proposed by Marvin Cohodas (1978a:110). Apparently misled by the description provided by Lizardi Ramos, Cohodas identified the Great Ball Court stone as one of an earlier pair of rings used in the Great Ball Court. He acknowledged that he had been unable to locate the stone or any illustrations of its inscription or reliefs. Nonetheless, he tentatively suggested that the

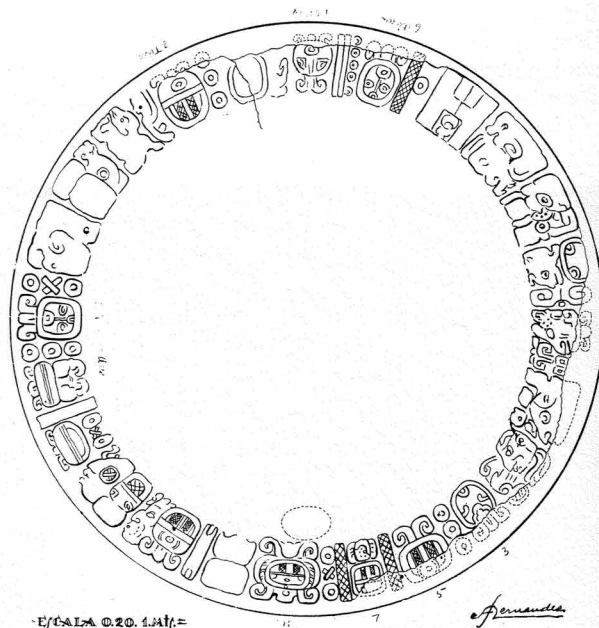


Fig. 3 Great Ball Court Stone: Inscription (drawing by Miguel Angel Fernández; photo by Ian Graham).

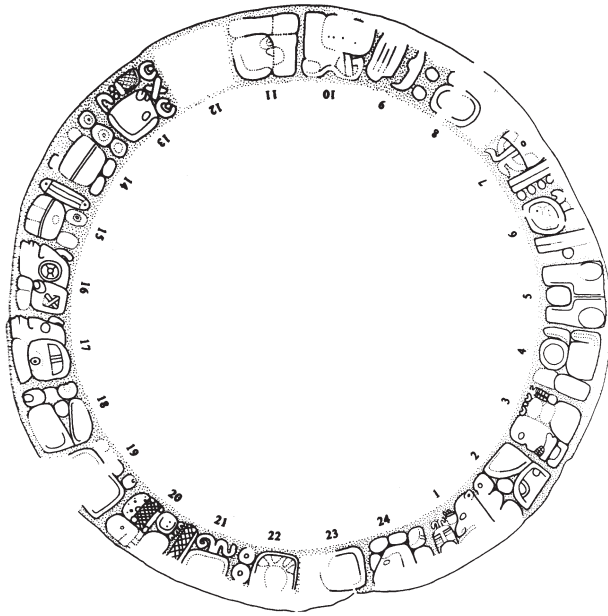


Fig. 4 Great Ball Court Stone: Inscription (drawing by Ruth Krochock).

partial Initial Series date reportedly inscribed on the Great Ball Court stone might actually record the date 9.10.5.3.0 (GMT 638) and that the Calendar Round date might correspond to 9.10.6.16.0 (GMT 639). Thus, on the basis of this and other evidence, Cohodas placed the Great Ball Court complex at Chichén Itzá in the Middle Classic Period.

My study indicates that no Initial Series date and only one Calendar Round date can be recognized in the inscription on the Great Ball Court stone. Nor is a katun-Ahau date evident. The inscription was redrawn in 1984 (fig. 4) by Ruth Krochock, who is presently undertaking an analysis of the corpus of inscriptions at Chichén Itzá. A comparison between the drawings prepared by Fernández and Krochock indicates that the earlier drawing owed much to the imagination. The single Calendar Round date inscribed on the stone in glyphs 6–7 (my numbering) appears to record the date 11 Cimi 14 Pax.

During the more than sixty years since its discovery, the Great Ball Court stone has remained poorly documented and inaccurately described. Nonetheless, this monument is of considerable importance both in understanding the significance of the ball game at Chichén Itzá and in reconstructing the history of the site.

Recent studies have stressed the secular, as well as the sacred, significance of the Mesoamerican ball game. Among its other purposes, it appears to have served as a mechanism to train soldiers and maintain elite ideology (Kowalewski et al. 1985), to unify competing warrior lineages within a polity (Fox 1985), and to mediate conflicts along interregional boundaries (Kowalewski et al. 1985; Molloy 1985; Scarborough 1985). Ball courts, or other playing fields designated for ball games, may have

functioned as dance plazas on which military encounters waged at distant places were reenacted and on which capture of prestigious prisoners by victorious rulers was celebrated before the gaze of the local populace (Molloy 1985; Schele and Miller 1986:248–253).

The ball game at Chichén Itzá evidently served a similar set of militaristic purposes, which may explain why the ball game was more important at Chichén Itzá, apparently the center of an aggressive and expansive state, than at any other site in the northern Maya Lowlands. Of the twenty-one ball courts known in this region, thirteen are located at Chichén Itzá (Robertson et al. 1985).

There is considerable evidence at Chichén Itzá to support the interpretation of the ball game as an extension of political and military activities as well as an expression of sacred ideologies. The Great Ball Court and the Tzompantli are built in close proximity to each other. Moreover, the living victors of the Great Ball Court benches and the underworld warriors on the eastern extension of the Tzompantli (Salazar 1952:40) both display the severed heads of their victims. The processional reliefs in the Lower Temple of the Jaguars, located at the southern entrance to the Great Ball Court, depict five registers of warriors converging toward the figure of a ball player (Maudslay 1889–1902:III, pl. 44–51). The jamb sculptures of the Upper Temple of the Jaguars celebrate individual warriors while the murals of the same structure depict large-scale military encounters (Coggins and Shane 1984: figs. 17–20).

The relationship between the ball game and the militaristic concerns of the polity at Chichén Itzá is further underscored by two features of the Great Ball Court stone: its function and the subjects of its figural reliefs.

The size and hemispherical shape of the Great Ball Court stone permit its identification as a sacrificial stone. At the time of the Spanish conquest, human sacrifice was a widespread practice not only in Central Mexico but also in northern Yucatán. Diego de Landa (Tozzer 1941:118–119) described the heart excision sacrifices that were practiced by the Post-Classic Maya of the region:

If the heart of the victim was to be taken out . . . , they brought him up to the round altar, which was the place of sacrifice. . . . The *Chacs* seized the poor victim, and placed him very quickly on his back upon that stone, and all four held him by the legs and arms, so that they divided him in the middle. At this came the executioner, the *Nacom*, with the knife of stone, and struck him with great skill and cruelty a blow between the ribs of his left side under the nipple, and he at once plunged his hand in there and seized the heart like a raging tiger and snatched it out alive.

At Chichén Itzá, the use of a hemispherical stone in heart excision sacrifices is clearly illustrated in a number of works of art. Two scenes from the Upper Temple of the Jaguars, one painted above the west entrance to the inner chamber (Coggins and Shane 1984: fig. 19) and



the other on the south vault (Morris et al. 1931:I, 398) depict sacrificial victims splayed over hemispherical stones. A heart excision sacrifice is also illustrated on a fresco fragment found in the outer chamber of the Temple of the Warriors (Morris et al. 1931:I, pl. 145). In this example, the victim is shown stretched across the up-raised coil of the body of a feathered serpent, which substitutes for the sacrificial stone. Disk H (Lothrop 1952: fig. 1) illustrates the sacrificer in an eagle headdress grasping the heart of his captive while a second victim waits his turn. Finally, a fragment of a scene, possibly representing the torso of sacrificial victim stretched over a stone with an assistant to his right, has been identified on a *tecali* vessel from the Sacred Cenote (Coggins and Shane 1984: pl. 31). The majority of these illustrations of heart excision rites occur in contexts that include battle scenes or involve warriors as the principal participants.

The association of a heart excision stone with the Great Ball Court at Chichén Itzá indicates a conver-

gence of the sacrificial rituals associated with military raids and conquests and those resulting from ball game contests. The figural reliefs incised on the Great Ball Court stone further suggest the overlay in the political and religious meanings of the ball game. On the Great Ball Court stone, two scenes depicting ball-game sacrifices, designated Area I (fig. 5) and Area II (fig. 6), are combined with a third scene, designated Area III (fig. 7), which represents elite military chiefs of Chichén Itzá. Crossed spears, similar to those that once ornamented the roof of the Upper Temple of the Jaguars, mark the divisions between Areas I and II.

The sacrificial decapitation of ball-game players is prominently displayed on the six panels of relief carved on the Great Ball Court benches, as well as on the benches of the Casa Colorada and the Monjas ball courts (Bolles 1977: figs. 221–222, 227–229). Areas I and II, carved on the lower curved surface of the Great Ball Court stone, repeat the salient characteristics of ball-

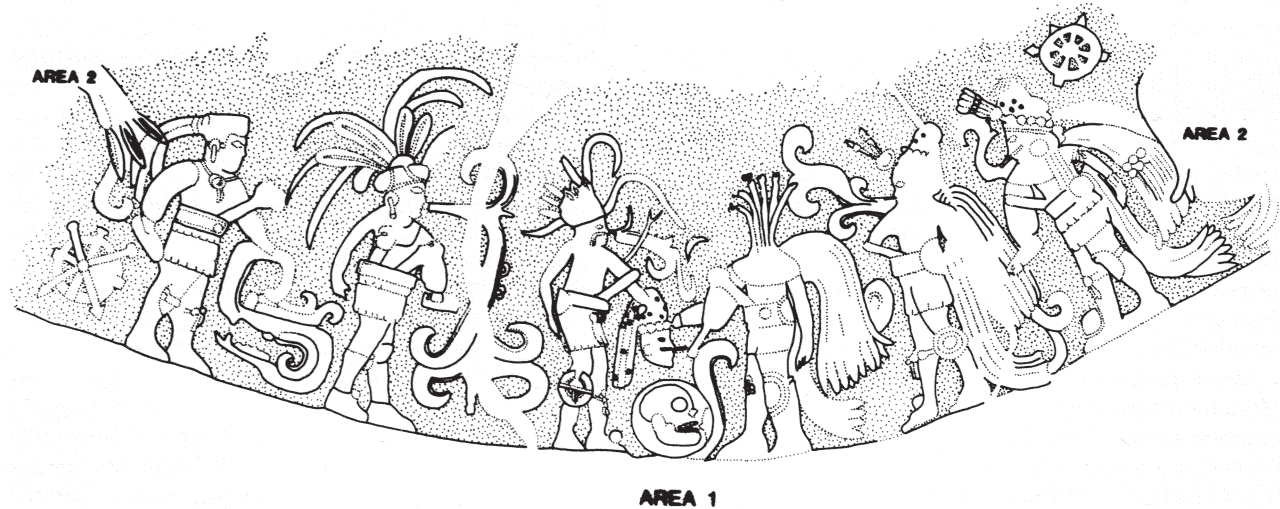


Fig. 5 Great Ball Court Stone: Area 1 (drawing by Peggy Diggs and Ruth Krochock).



Fig. 6 Great Ball Court Stone: Area 2 (drawing by Peggy Diggs and Ruth Krochock).

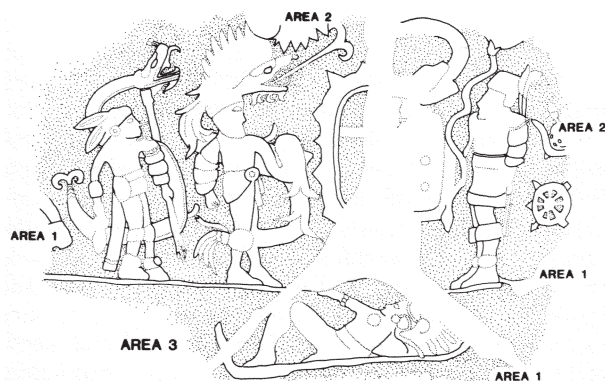


Fig. 7 Great Ball Court Stone: Area 3 (drawing by Peggy Diggs and Ruth Krochock).

game sacrificial scenes displayed elsewhere at Chichén Itzá. The relief in Area I is more fully preserved. In the center is a ball inscribed with a skull. To the left is shown a figure holding a severed head: to the right is shown the sacrificial victim, from whose neck spurt six streams of blood stylized as serpents. All six figures in the scene can be identified as ball players by their specialized ball-game paraphernalia consisting of yokes, palmas, handstones, knee pads, and slippers. The figures are divided into two teams that can be distinguished by differences in their costumes. The three players on the right wear beaded capes and back shields from which feathers sweep both upward and downward to the ground. The three figures on the left wear pectorals of roped necklaces and headdresses with large, round-ended feathers.

The range of costume attributes represented in Areas I and II is more restricted than, but nonetheless in conformity with, those depicted on the Great Ball Court bench reliefs. Tozzer (1957:I, 1939) identified members of the two teams as being Maya and Toltecs and regarded the ball-game contests as conflicts between the Maya and Toltec inhabitants of Chichén Itzá. The Great Ball Court benches were restudied by Merle Greene Robertson, who agreed that each team is characterized by a distinctive set of costume elements but argued that almost all of these attributes can be considered Maya in origin (Robertson et al. 1985).

The surface of most of the central portion of Area II has flaked away, but six serpents emerging from the neck of a decapitated victim are visible. Four ball players are also preserved. Their costumes repeat those of the two groups represented in Area I, while the identities of the teams that provide the sacrificer and the victim are reversed.

Area III covers the upper portion of the Great Ball Court stone. A reclining Bacab figure is shown in the basal zone, while above the ground line a procession of three warriors facing a fourth warrior is represented. Each of the advancing warriors is associated with serpent imagery. The figure on the left, who carries an atlatl and spears, is outlined against a cloud serpent, known in

central Mexican sources as Mixcoatl. The figure in the center is superimposed on a feathered serpent, known in central Mexico as Quetzalcoatl and in Yucatán as Kukulcan. Only the facial profile and tubular nose bead of the figure on the right are still visible, but he appears to be encircled by a precious turquoise serpent, known in central Mexican sources as Xiuhcoatl. The fourth, stationary figure holds spears and a serpent staff.

The use of serpent iconography to identify important military chiefs is also seen in the murals of the inner chamber of the Upper Temple of the Jaguars. These murals appear to represent military campaigns undertaken by the chiefs of Chichén Itzá in two distinct geographical regions (Miller 1977). Additional battles were originally represented on the walls of the outer chamber of the Upper Temple of the Jaguars (Breton 1907). Arthur Miller (1977:212–213) identified the three murals on the north end of the Upper Temple of the Jaguars (Miller 1977: figs. 4, 5, 7) as illustrations of a series of events in which a military leader from Chichén Itzá directs an attack against a settlement in southern Oaxaca, an interpretation with which David Kelley was in basic accord (1984:12–13). More recently, however, Fernando Robles and Anthony Andrews (1986:84) proposed that the “red hills” in the battle scene of mural 3 (Miller 1977: fig. 5) depict the terrain and soil of the Puuc hills. The three murals at the south end of the Upper Temple of the Jaguars (Miller 1977: figs. 8, 3, 9) appear to illustrate the conquest and subjugation of a village in the tropical Southern Lowlands, and possibly in the Petén, again by warriors from Chichén Itzá (Miller 1977:217–218; Kelley 1984:12–13).

Miller's hypothesis that foreign invasions in the Southern Maya Lowlands during the Terminal Classic Period may have originated from Chichén Itzá is supported by data from numerous sites. At Becan, the appearance of northern ceramic types and forms suggests a northern intrusion at the beginning of the ninth century (Ball 1974). At Altar de Sacrificios, a violent end to the late Boca ceramic phase seems to be indicated. It is replaced by an intrusive Fine Paste complex with Mexican and Classic Maya traits (Adams 1973). Iconographic parallels between early Tenth Cycle sculpture at Seibal and at sites in Northern Yucatán, as well as architectural similarities, suggest an intrusion from the Northern Maya Lowlands (Sabloff 1973). At Colha, the discovery of a pit containing twenty-eight human skulls, together with the occurrence of northern slate ware, argues for northern military activity (Adams n.d.). Ceramic evidence from Río Azul, as well as the stylistic similarities between Stela 4 and sculpture at Chichén Itzá, also point to an intrusion from the Northern Lowlands.

However, Miller (1977) also noted that the date of the construction of the Upper Temple of the Jaguars has been an issue of considerable debate. Samuel Lothrop (1952:69–71) argued that the Great Ball Court complex was constructed over a period of approximately 150 years. However, the architectural unity of the Great Ball



Court complex as a whole and the iconographic and thematic unity of the reliefs and murals indicate that the structures of the complex are contemporaneous. In addition, the close relationship between the plan of the Upper Temple of the Jaguars, as well as the absence of earlier layers of paint, is evidence that the paintings date to the same period as the construction of the building. Tozzer (1957:34) dated the Great Ball Court to his Chichén II phase (ca. A.D. 948–1145). Kubler (1961:63, 1976:196–197) dated the architectural complex to the twelfth century, while Parsons (1969:172–184, table 7) and Cohodas (1978a, 1978b:102–106) posited a much earlier, seventh century date for its construction. Recently Coggins (Coggins and Shane 1984) assigned the murals of the Upper Temple of the Jaguars to the Terminal Classic Period with a date of approximately A.D. 850.

The Great Ball Court stone offers evidence that the murals of the Upper Temple of the Jaguars are Terminal Classic in date. The close similarities in style, motif, and composition between the sacrificial scenes depicted on the Great Ball Court stone and the Great Ball Court benches indicate that the stone is contemporaneous with its architectural context. Although the inscription does not include an Initial Series or a katun-Ahau date, it may be possible to posit a Long Count equivalent of 10.1.15.3.6 (GMT 864) for the Calendar Round date, 11 Cimi 14 Pax, recorded in glyphs 6–7. Evidence for this date is based on several parallels between the inscription on the Great Ball Court stone and the inscriptions of the Temple of the Four Lintels, Structure 6E1, and Yula.

First, ball-game events are recorded four times in the inscriptions from the Great Ball Court stone, the Temple of the Four Lintels, and Yula. Kelley (1982:5) identified glyph C8 in Lintel 1 of the Temple of the Four Lintels as a ball-game glyph, and Michel Davoust (1986) suggested that glyph C3 of Lintel 4 of the same structure records a verb meaning “to strike the ball.” Krochock (personal communication) also identified glyph D3 of Lintel 1 at Yula and glyph 5 of the Great Ball Court stone as ball-game glyphs. No other ball-game glyphs have yet been identified in the inscriptions at Chichén Itzá. The presence of a ball-game glyph in the inscription of the Great Ball Court stone clearly links the contents of its text with the subjects of its reliefs.

Second, a phrase identified by Beyer as Group 9 (Beyer 1937: figs. 43–46), also occurs only at the Temple of the Four Lintels, (Lintel 1, D1–C2, E8–F8; Lintel 3a, D1–C2), Yula (Lintel 1, H3–G4), and in the Great Ball Court stone inscription (glyphs 10–11). Glyph 11 of the Great Ball Court stone inscription may be tentatively identified as the head of God C prefixed by the blood group element, interpreted by David Stuart (1988) as a type of “blood personification.” The association between the appearance of the ball-game glyph and Group 9 at Chichén Itzá suggests that the verbal compound may refer to ball-game sacrifices.

Third, the inscriptions of the Great Ball Court stone

and Structure 6E1 appear to share an identical nominal phrase. Kelley (1968) convincingly demonstrated that the name of a military captain Kakupacal is rendered phonetically fourteen times in the inscriptions of Chichén Itzá and identified this name with that of the Itzá military captain whose deeds are described in the Chilam Balam of Chumayel and other Maya historical documents (for an alternative interpretation of the significance of this compound, cf. Coggins 1986). Krochock (personal communication) pointed out that Kakupacal appears to be closely associated with ball-game events recorded in the inscriptions of Chichén Itzá. An ideographic variant of Kakupacal appears in the inscription on a column of Structure 6E1 at Chichén Itzá (Kelley 1982:10). Kelley identified the first glyphic element in the name inscribed on the column as the “fire” glyph, *kak*, and the second element as a shield glyph, *pacal*. Kelley’s reading of the first glyphic element was questioned by David Stuart (personal communication), who argued for the phonetic value of *butz’a*, a value Kelley earlier considered and rejected. Kelley’s reading of the second element as *pacal* is based upon the resemblance between it and the shield depicted in the Dresden Codex (Thompson 1972: Facsimile of Codex, p. 67) rather than the shields normally represented in Maya inscriptions of the Classic Period. Glyphs 21 and 22 of the Great Ball Court stone inscription may tentatively be identified as an ideographic variant of the name Kakupacal.

Two glyphs, the second of which can be read as Ah-po Ahau, frequently follow the name of Kakupacal in the inscriptions at Chichén Itzá. They are also inscribed following the name of Kakupacal on the Great Ball Court stone (glyphs 23–24). Kelley initially proposed that this glyph might represent the emblem glyph of Chichén Itzá (1976:218) but more recently read this glyph as a title such as “ruler of lords” or “king of kings” (1982:8). Fox (1984:13–18) argued that Ah-po Ahau is the second glyph in a two-glyph compound that functions as the Chichén Itzá emblem glyph.

Preceding the name of Kakupacal in the inscription of the Great Ball Court stone is a glyph (glyph 20) that is similar to a glyph recently identified by David Stuart (1986) as a verbal phrase referring to the sacrificial dedication of a monument by a patron. Although this verbal phrase is frequent at Chichén Itzá, this is the only example in which it is directly associated with the name of Kakupacal and therefore may indicate that the Great Ball Court was the only complex at Chichén Itzá actually dedicated by Kakupacal.

Virtually all the dated inscriptions at Chichén Itzá fall within a forty-year period between 10.1.17.5.13 (GMT 866), recorded on the Water Trough lintel (Thompson 1937:186; for an alternative reading, cf. Kelley 1982: 13–14) and 10.3.8.14.4 (GMT 906), recorded on the Caracol Stela (Kelley 1982: table 1; for an alternative reading, cf. Thompson 1937:186). The only date, 10.8.10.11.0 (GMT 998) that falls outside this period is recorded on the High Priest’s Grave, a structure that is

generally accepted as late in the architectural sequence at Chichén Itzá (Tozzer 1957:43; Proskouriakoff 1970:459). The earliest inscription containing the phonetic rendering of the name Kakupacal is in the band of the Casa Colorada that is dated to 10.2.0.1.9 (GMT 869) by Kelley (1982:14, 1983:171; for an alternative reading, cf. Thompson 1937:186) and the latest inscription is Lintel 4a of the Temple of the Four Lintels, dated 10.2.12.2.4 (GMT 881; Thompson 1937:186; Kelley 1982: table 1).

Although no date is recorded in this inscription, Proskouriakoff (1970:465) implicitly placed the text and its accompanying relief at approximately 10.1.0.0.0. She did so on the basis of similarities between the inscriptions at 6E1 and at Yula and on the basis of iconographic similarities between the figures on 6E1 and those in Puuc sites such as Oxkintok, Halal, Kabah, and Uxmal and at the site of Seibal.

It can therefore be argued that the Calendar Round date 11 Cimi 14 Pax recorded on the inscription on the Great Ball Court stone can be placed at 10.1.15.3.6 (GMT 864). This date is only two years earlier than the Water Trough lintel and less than six years earlier than the Casa Colorada band. It can further be argued that the inscription recorded the staging of a ball game, or a cycle of ball games, as part of the ceremonial rituals that were part of the dedication of the Great Ball Court complex. It can also be argued that Great Ball Court, the most important and the most prominently located ball court at Chichén Itzá, was the setting for the ball-game events recorded in the inscriptions of the Temple of the Four Lintels and Yula. Lintel 1 at Yula is dated 10.2.4.8.4 (GMT 874) and Lintels 1 and 4 of the Temple of the Four Lintels are dated 10.2.12.1.8 (GMT 881), approximately seven years later (Thompson 1937; Kelley 1982). The relationship between the Temple of the Four Lintels and Yula is underscored not only by their shared inclusion of ball-game glyphs, but also by their shared depiction of a pair of distinctive iconographic motifs, "Knife-Wing" on Lintel 1a, Yula, and Lintel 1a of the Temple of the Four Lintels (Kelley 1982: fig. 4) and "Rattlesnake" on Lintel 4a of the Temple of the Four Lintels (Beyer 1937: pl. 10) and Lintel 2a at Yula (Beyer 1937: pl. 12).

If the Great Ball Court can be dated to the Terminal Classic Period, it supports the model proposed by Peter Schmidt (personal communication) and by Charles Lincoln (1985) for the chronological overlap between buildings constructed in the two styles of architecture, Chichén-Maya and Chichén-Toltec, which are characteristic of Chichén Itzá. Chichén-Maya architecture closely resembles Pure Florescent architecture of the Puuc region in its use of decorative elements, such as Chac masks and mosaic panels of geometric design, and in its use of structural principles, such as the corbeled vault.

Chichén-Toltec architecture integrates elements typical of northern Maya Lowland architecture with non-

Maya architectural features found in Central Mexico, Oaxaca, and Vera Cruz. These features include the use of feathered serpent columns and balustrades, Atlantean columns and Chacmool figures similar to those at Tula, terrace profiles similar to those at Monte Albán, and the depiction of ball game paraphernalia similar to that from El Tajín (Kubler 1961, 1962).

Nonetheless, despite the apparent eclecticism, Chichén-Toltec architecture is more than a pastiche of features drawn from contemporary Mesoamerican traditions. Rather, Chichén-Toltec architecture should be regarded as an original architectural style. Its distinctive character is evidenced by the development at Chichén Itzá of an innovative engineering technique that combined the use of wooden lintels and corbeled vaults. The architects at Chichén Itzá were the first builders in Mesoamerica to exploit a particular characteristic of wood in stone vaulted architecture—the fact that wood is strong in tension. While wooden lintels were commonly used to span openings in both Northern and Southern Lowland Maya architecture, they functioned as substitutes for stone lintels. In contrast to wood, stone is weak in tension. Such a use involved no major change in architectural forms. The builders at Chichén Itzá, however, evidently realized that, because of its tensile strength, wood could be used structurally in ways that were dramatically different from stone. Wooden beams could do what stone lintels could not—span wide spaces while still supporting heavy loads. In structures such as the Temple of the Warriors and, even more dramatically, the Northwest Colonnade, the Chichén-Toltec architects substituted rows of piers spanned by wooden beams for the solid load bearing walls that, in traditional Maya architecture, were necessary to support the heavy vaulted superstructure. They increased the distances spanned by wooden beams by two, or even three, times the distances traditionally spanned by stone lintels in the Northern and Southern Lowlands. As a result, they were able to suspend parallel rows of corbeled vaults over widely spaced supports and to create interior vaulted spaces that dwarfed the interior spaces permitted by traditional architectural techniques. Not only did this technique allow Chichén-Toltec structures to be greatly expanded in their dimensions, but it permitted them to be more varied in their plans. Thus, Chichén-Toltec architecture represents an innovative architectural style that was developed, it appears, to serve the physical requirements, expressive needs, and aesthetic desires of the distinctive polity that flourished at Chichén Itzá.

The Great Ball Court stone is inscribed with the only Maya inscription known from the North Terrace of Chichén Itzá. It is one of the few inscriptions at Chichén Itzá that is associated with figural relief. The reliefs of the North Terrace depict warrior figures who are individualized in appearance (Maudslay 1889–1902; Morris et al. 1931; Tozzer 1957). Some of these figures are associated with attributes of costume and weaponry also found in the sculpture of the Central Mexican site of Tula and

are identified by pictographic signs that appear to be Central Mexican in origin. Other figures are associated with attributes found in the sculpture of the Northern Maya Lowlands, and a few are associated with attributes found in the Southern Maya Lowlands. Proskouriakoff (1970) argued that this diversity could be explained by the presence at Chichén Itzá of an alliance of groups of people drawn from several states. Thus, at Chichén Itzá, it would appear that a dynamic new society was formed by the interaction of Maya and non-Maya peoples. The

result was that forms of architecture traditional to the Northern Maya Lowlands continued to be constructed to meet traditional needs, while, simultaneously, the newly emergent polity introduced different decorative motifs and developed innovative engineering techniques to serve its particular needs. This polity, it appears, was able to capitalize upon the growing weakness of the states of the Southern Maya Lowlands and to achieve stunning military successes that forever altered the Maya realm.



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